



FINDING YOUR PURPOSE



A 10-Day Esther
Bible study



INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ESTHER

During the seventy years the Jews suffered their Babylonian exile, God raised up several people to faithfully guide and direct His fallen people back to Himself. Among these were Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and a young woman named Esther. The actions and examples of these four people are worthy to be included in the Hall of Faith of Hebrews 11, yet none of them were. In fact, the only one of these four even mentioned in the New Testament is Zerubbabel, who led the initial return of some of the Jews to their homeland. Ezra became the spiritual leader of the people, and he and Nehemiah led the reconstruction of the city and the temple, and the revival of their lives to once again be who God called them to be.

Yet none of this would have been possible apart from the courageous stand and intervention of the young woman Esther, who found herself in a unique place of influence with the King. The examples of Esther and her cousin Mordecai can teach us much, as can other principles we can draw from their experiences, and help us to make a difference for God in our world.



THE BOOK OF ESTHER

The Book of Esther is unique. It reads much like a novelette, and its story is as gripping as any novel one would read today. Unfortunately, some have wrongly concluded that Esther was just a piece of historical fiction. Yet archaeological and historical evidence demonstrates that this book is historical and accurate, and despite its literary form, it follows the same pattern as other Old Testament Books.

Esther is placed in the "Writings" section of the Hebrew Old Testament. The events of Esther took place under the reign of Xerxes 1 (Ahasuerus being a title, like Pharaoh), who reigned from 486 to about 465 BC. The story of Esther took place over about a ten-year span (483 to 473 BC), and would fit historically between Ezra 6 and 7.



WHAT ABOUT GOD?

The only books of the Old Testament that do not mention the name of God are Esther and the Song of Solomon, and neither of these books is mentioned in the New Testament. Yet God's hand of providence is more clearly evident in this book than in most others. We see in Esther that the attempt of Satan to destroy the line of the coming Messiah, begun in Genesis 3:15, is thwarted. This book teaches us much about the sovereignty of God despite mankind's evil intentions. We also can see parallels in the story of Esther to the relationship of Christ and His children. For instance, as Jesus did, Esther put herself in a place of potential death for the people, but was approved of by the King. Also, she worked as an intercessor and advocate for the people just as Christ ever lives now to intercede for us as His children. Yes, God is in the Book of Esther, as are His specific purposes for His own people, and we can learn much from examining it carefully.

DAY ONE: A PROVIDENTIAL DIVORCE

READ: Esther 1

Our story opens in Shushan, or Susa, one of the four capitol cities of the Median-Persian Empire (the others were Babylon, Ecbatana, and Persepolis), where Ahasuerus (Xerxes) had come for the winter months. Susa is unbearably hot in the summer time, but was enjoyable that time of year. The timing of the events was also strategically planned by Ahasuerus. In the third year of his reign (483 BC) his son Artaxerxes, under whom Nehemiah served, was born. Many believe that the main reason Ahasuerus held this six-month long celebration was to gain the favor of the powerful of the empire, seeking their support in planning his upcoming Greek campaign of 481-479 BC, which took place in the time period between Esther 1 and 2. Ahasuerus planned this campaign for revenge for his father's failed attempt to conquer the Greeks, but mostly for his own glory (his attempt failed miserably, by the way).

As we'll see, things didn't work out so nicely for Ahasuerus and his hopes for this celebration. We'll discover the events of this chapter all working together to prepare the way for God's raising a poor orphan Jewish girl to a place of prominence. Against all odds, she would be used to save His people and preserve the line of the Messiah. Let's dig into our story and learn about God's hand of providence at work.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of the facts describing the setting of this story (vv. 1, 2)?
2. What did Ahasuerus decide to do at this time, and for whom (v. 3)?
3. What types of things did he do during this six-month celebration (v. 4)?
4. Ahasuerus lived for his possessions, passions, and pride. How does 1 John 2:15-17 warn about the danger of living for this world and what it has to offer? What warning is also found about prideful people in Proverbs 16:18-19?
5. We need to ask ourselves whether we are living for the things of this world, or are we living for God's kingdom? What does Mark 8:36-37 and Luke 16:13 warn us about this? What should we be pursuing instead (Ephesians 1:18-20)?
6. Look at Esther 1:9-12. It is agreed by most commentators that Vashti was being commanded to come to them wearing only her crown, or being asked to do some lewd act publicly, or possibly she had just given birth to or was still pregnant with Artaxerxes, as mentioned already. For whatever reason, what was Vashti's response to this, and how did Ahasuerus react to it (v. 12)?
7. Vashti knew that her refusal might mean her own death. Yet in her courage she was able to stand against her husband's orders. It is clear from the phrase in order to show her beauty that Ahasuerus only wanted to make the people understand she was another one of his possessions, to show her as if she was a piece of property. Vashti lost her crown because of her refusal, but kept her dignity. There may come a time where we have to make a decision like Vashti did that may cost us if we

refuse. How did the apostles set the example of making such a decision (Acts 4:19–20; 5:29)?

DAY TWO: TRUE BEAUTY

READ: Esther 2

The translators of Esther were quite genteel in how they dealt the events of Esther 2, but it doesn't take much reading between the lines to know what was going on.

Estimates of how many women were taken from their families to satisfy the king's perverse lusts have ranged from 400 to 1,460; saddest of all is that these misused young women lived the rest of their lives in a state of widowhood more than marriage! Each one would only come back to see the king if he delighted in her ("unless he especially enjoyed her," NLT).

We cannot over-remind ourselves of how dangerous, enslaving, and destructive sexual sin is. Whether it is through real sexual encounters or by viewing pornography or other similar things, sexual sin can ultimately destroy our lives and has a damaging, victimizing effect on the others involved.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. Ahasuerus' anger and alcohol abuse led to foolish actions, and now, too late, he had regrets about this. Although he had concubines, he no longer had a wife to comfort and support him. His servants noticed his depressed mood and surmised what was wrong. What did they begin to propose, which obviously would catch his attention (v. 2)?

2. Read vv. 5-9. What are some things that we read of Mordecai's historical and family background (vv. 5, 6)?

3. Next we meet the amazing young woman that is the focus of this book, Esther. What was her original name, and what else do we learn about her in v. 7?

NOTE: Hadassah meant "myrtle," and her Persian name Esther meant "star." Both names reflected her beauty and character. Lovely and beautiful (lovely in form and features) means that Hadassah was truly beautiful from the human perspective, with beautiful form and body shape; she had a healthy, good looking appearance.

4. The young women of Susa knew this wasn't a beauty contest they had a choice to enter or not. They were being taken away from their families, by force, to have one chance to become the queen. Otherwise they would still be his concubine for life, never returning home. Yet God was going to work providentially through this in Hadassah's life. What happened to her, and how was God with her even in this difficult situation (vv. 8, 9)?

NOTE: It wasn't Hadassah's physical beauty alone that led to her having favor and being treated kindly and even being preferred by the steward Hegai. The phrase she obtained his favor literally meant "she lifted up grace before his face." It was the grace and light of God shining from her that truly made her attractive and gained her favor with "in the eyes of everyone who saw her" (v. 14).

5. God will be with us and go before us when we are in the midst of things we have no control over.

He will work all things for our best according to His perfect plan, as we read yesterday. Hadassah's experiences were similar to those of another young person, Joseph. Both were taken from their families and brought into slavery against their will. Like Joseph, she would be one day raised to the palace despite being in such a situation. What were Joseph's conclusions about the providence of God when he was able to look back on the things he had to face, and how can it help us face situations we don't understand (Genesis 45:5-8; 50:20)?

6. We again see God's hand of providence at work raising Mordecai to the position he was assigned. What did he overhear, and what was done about it (vv. 21, 22)?

7. Esther 2 has also reminded us of the providence of God in action, even on those "small days" where nothing seems to be happening. Think about these three truths we can glean from what we have seen in Esther about God's sovereign providence in our lives. Record how they impact how you view each day of your life.

- God's plans cannot be hindered by world events, whether they are spiritual or earthly in nature.
- God's purposes for us will still be accomplished despite our own human weakness and failure.
- We are not excluded from His purposes because of our background, hardships, or handicaps that could exclude us from worldly success.

DAY THREE: NO COMPROMISE

READ: Esther 3

After returning from defeat at the hands of the Greeks, Ahasuerus realized that he had cut off the one he would have wanted to comfort him, and probably sank into depression. Knowing Ahasuerus' lustful nature, his servants suggested they bring him the best virgins of the land, and the one he "enjoyed" the most would replace Vashti as queen. He quickly accepted their suggestion, and the gathering of these young women began. It so happened that Mordecai, one of the Jewish captives who had made his way into service for the king, had a beautiful young cousin named Esther (Hadassah). She was also taken, but those selecting her didn't know her heritage. Through this turn of events, Mordecai and Esther were placed into position to fulfill the purposes God had for them. A preparation period was set for these women to beautify them, but Esther brought all the beauty she would need with her. Not only was she physically attractive, but her relationship with God shone forth beautifully, leading her to find favor in the sight of all. Once Ahasuerus saw this lovely woman, the search was over, and he made her queen the next day. Esther 2 closes in an unusual way with Mordecai overhearing a plot against Ahasuerus. He reported this to Esther, and she to the King. Upon investigation of this, the two plotters were put to death. This obscure incident will play an important role in a future study at a pivotal point in the story.

Today we'll read of the great courage of Mordecai to stand against wrong and not compromise his faith despite tremendous pressure to do so. The repercussions of this stand would be significant, and clear action was required to counter it. Let's turn to the next phase of the story now and see what we can learn from it.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. One would think that Mordecai would have been honored for his actions, but instead what took place (v. 1)?
2. Mordecai refused to bow (humbly bend the knee to) let alone pay homage (to prostrate oneself before a superior) to this man. He knew there is a time to transgress, standing up for what is right without compromising his relationship with God. What are some examples of others who had made a similar decision while in that land (Daniel 1:8, 3:15–18, 6:6–10)? To whom alone should we bow (Philippians 2:9–11)?
3. We'll see many parallels in our studies between Haman and the long line of others who have sought to destroy the Jews, ultimately inspired by our greatest adversary, Satan. Haman's name meant "well disposed," and we'll see that he was very wealthy, but morally and in every other way that counts he was a small, evil man; Haman's name is still an evil one to the Jews. In fact, the Septuagint translates Agagite as "bully!" He was the fiery one allowed to have sway over the people. How does Satan, the ultimate fiery one, now have a similar authority (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2, 6:12; 1 John 5:19)?
4. It has been pointed out that not only had Haman sold himself out to destroy the Jews, but he actually embodied the very things God hates! What are the seven things especially hateful to God according to Proverbs 6:16-19?
5. Read vv. 10-12. The signet ring of Ahasuerus was like his platinum credit card, allowing Haman to order whatever he wanted to be done. By these actions, Haman made himself the enemy of the Jews; their oppressor, rival, adversary, one who harasses another. How does this make Haman another picture of our ultimate enemy, and how should we live in view of that enemy (1 Peter 5:8, 9)?

DAY FOUR: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

READ: Esther 4

Esther 3 brought us to the central crisis of this book. We saw that Haman, the second in command of the Persian Empire, had convinced Ahasuerus to order everyone to bow to Haman as he passed by. Of course, the people did so in fear for their lives. All except one: Mordecai, who alone stood up against compromise in doing homage to man rather than to God. Haman was furious as a result. Just getting back at Mordecai wouldn't be enough. Instead he wanted to destroy all the Jews and remove them from getting in the way of his self-seeking plans. Haman first cast lots (pur) to decide when the destruction was to take place. He craftily fooled Ahasuerus into authorizing the destruction of these people by playing on Ahasuerus' greed, superstition, and ego. Copies of this decree were distributed throughout the land via the Persian Pony Express. The chapter ended in an unusual way: "So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed" (Esther 3:15, NKJV).

So we come to Esther 4, in which the crisis begins to reach its peak. Being Jewish, Esther was in just

as much danger as her people, although she was now the queen. She and Mordecai will discover in this chapter the hand of God's sovereignty at work in arranging all of these things, and they would have vital decisions to make that would effect the survival of Judaism and the people of Israel.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. Jews throughout the Persian Empire received word that their day of destruction had been decreed under the wicked supervision of Haman. What was Mordecai's reaction to this edict? How did the other Jews throughout the Empire similarly react to this news (v. 3)?

Our Western culture has wrongly minimized and squelched the display of emotions. Even in times of grief we feel pressured to just "pull ourselves together," and "get over it." This was not so in the Jewish culture, nor elsewhere in the Eastern world. We need to understand that if we are grieving, there is no reason to "just snap out of it," but to express our grief and burdens and give them over to God. There is "a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:4, NKJV). God wants us to seek Him honestly, and to know that He loves us anyway. How will He bring healing in our lives as we take our burdens and cares to Him?

2. Through Hathach, Mordecai commanded that Esther should go to Ahasuerus, supplicating (to implore, seek mercy like a weaker person from a stronger one) and pleading that he would save their people. The shocked Esther sent a reply. What fearful thing did she relate to Mordecai, and why was this a particular concern at that time (v. 11)?

3. We too faced a fate we could not escape, for the Law said we are all doomed to die because our sin. Just as King Ahasuerus would have to extend the golden scepter of acceptance and forgiveness to repeal the death sentence, so God had to reach out His "golden scepter" of forgiveness to mankind, because nothing we could do in trying to cover our sin would make any difference, for there is "but one law: put all to death" otherwise. Read the following passages and record how God has offered us His "scepter" and made us His own. (Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21 Ephesians 1:3-9; 2:1-10)

4. In Esther 4:14 we see the principal theme of the book, which is that God takes care of and delivers His people, but He doesn't always show us how until the right time. All of the things that Esther had experienced up to that moment (including being taken away from her people), and all that seemed negative as well as positive happening to her, had worked together to place her in such a setting for such an appropriate time and season for her to make a difference.

5. What bold decision did Esther make (v. 16b)? How Mordecai respond to Esther's boldness (v. 17)?

6. We are struck by Esther's bold statement that she would go in to the King, although it was against his law, and "if I perish, I perish!" or "If I must die, I am willing to die" (v. 16, NLT). The potential salvation of her people and fulfilling God's will for her life far outweighed the cost to herself. Many have died for their faith because they were unwilling to deny God, and boldly accepted His will as supreme. What are some of the ways we see this attitude reflected by the beloved apostle Paul in the New Testament? Acts 20:22-24, 21:13; Philippians 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 2:8-10, 4:6-8

7. As God builds our lives to become more what He wants them to be, we will face difficulties, even mourning and grief, and seemingly negative situations that make it seem like maybe He isn't in control or has abandoned us. But we have seen that God is at work in our lives in even those things,

and He often uses difficult situations to move us into the place He wants us to be to fulfill His plans. God won't force you to make the right choice, as we saw today, but when the time comes, He will give us the ability by His grace and His Spirit to make the appropriate choices.

What are some of the difficult situations that you have faced in your walk with the Lord? What has He taught you through your circumstances and trials? How has He moved you into the place He has desired you to get to so you can accomplish His will? How have the things we learned today helped you through these times in your life?

DAY FIVE: AN UNEXPECTED BANQUET

READ: Esther 5

Today we will learn of Esther's fate as she sought to gain help for her people, and she does so in an unexpected way. The drama is building; the suspense and tension are rising, as the Book of Esther comes to its climax over these next three chapters. Interestingly, while some time had passed between the early chapters of Esther, chapters 5-7 actually are the account of less than two days' time.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. When Esther "put on her royal robes," the phrase literally meant, "put on her royalty." We too will have a meeting with our King one day. Amos 4:12 warned Israel to "Prepare to meet your God!" in a negative sense, in fear and trepidation. No doubt Esther had fears, but she allowed faith in God to be her best preparation to meet this human king. What are some ways we can prepare to meet our heavenly King, helping us to be ready on that day? (Read: John 15:4-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; Romans 10:17; Colossians 3:16, 17; 2 Timothy 2:15)
2. Esther found favor with Ahasuerus (was lifted up in his sight with grace) because of this bold step. What did he ask this brave woman (v. 3)? What was her unexpected request in view of the seriousness of what she had done (v. 4)?
3. After giving a feast in honor of the king and Haman, Esther requests them to come to another feast the next day. We don't know Ahasuerus' thoughts about this, but perhaps he pondered late into the night, which led to the events beginning our next chapter. How did Esther serve as a fulfillment of the principle behind what we read in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17?
4. What a shallow, selfish, sickening man Haman was! His joy turned to rage to bragging all within a brief period of time. He could see nothing but himself, and even one person refusing to stand before him put him into a fury to the point of wanting to commit genocide! If only Haman knew that this would be the last time he would gather with his friends, and that all these things he took pride in would shortly crumble away from him. How is this much like a story Jesus told in Luke 12:13-21?
5. What an example of boldness and stepping out by faith Esther is for us. Without faith it is impossible to please God, but we must also take steps of action to show that we believe He is

indeed a rewarder of those who do so. Yet Esther could have never done this by herself. Without the prayer support of others, these efforts would have failed. Also without the encouragement and exhortation of Mordecai, she wouldn't have been moved to courage to take this step of faith.

As you think about these things, what are some ways that you can be an encourager and supporter of another who is seeking to step out in faith, becoming a co-laborer with them in the things God has called them to do? How about you as well? Are you taking the steps by faith that you know God has been speaking to you about taking, or are you letting fear or human weakness hold you back? Record your thoughts here and discuss with your group how you can support one another in following and serving Christ.

DAY SIX: IRONIC HONOR

READ: Esther 6

Yesterday, we read that Haman left the banquet feeling like the king of the world, which no doubt was not far from the root of his wicked ambitions. Then Haman saw him: Mordecai, the one who dared not bow to him, the one standing in the way of his ambition. Haman burned with anger but controlled himself and hurried home. There he bragged to his wife and friends of his great wealth, his sons, his promotions, and the special banquet he had just attended. Suddenly his mood soured as he realized that all of this was meaningless as long as he had to see Mordecai sitting in his place of service to the king day after day. His wife came up with the wonderful idea of building a 75-foot high gallows and having Mordecai impaled on it in the morning, and then Haman could go on his merry way to Esther's banquet! Haman loved the idea, and no doubt spent a sleepless night supervising the construction of this deadly device. Yet there was another sleepless night going on that Haman had no idea of. The God of providence was at work to redeem His people from Haman's wicked intentions, bringing about his own destruction. Let's turn to that now as we reach the most pivotal chapter of the Book of Esther.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. When Ahasuerus called for a reading from the chronicles of the events of his twelve year reign to that point, what selection did the servant just happen to bring to him (v. 2)?
2. After hearing this, what did Ahasuerus ask, and what was the reply (v. 3)?

This event had taken place five years earlier (see Esther 2:21-23). To not even have been thanked for such a deed was very unusual. Persian kings and Ahasuerus in particular had been known to immediately reward those that they wished to thank, even lavishly. But God providentially allowed this oversight to accomplish His plans in His perfect timing.

3. We may feel that God has forgotten us, has ignored the things we have done for Him, or even promoted someone instead of us when we felt more deserving. What timeless truths do we need to remember when we go through times of doubt like this? (Read: Malachi 3:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 6:10-12; Revelation 3:8, 10-12)

4. Haman pictured himself as the one who would be honored, and concocted quite the narcissistic plan for honoring, well, himself! What was the first thing he suggested Ahasuerus do for such a person (v. 8a)?

5. God indeed takes care of those He has chosen to honor! As Warren Wiersbe well pointed out, if Haman was a man with a mirror only looking at himself, Mordecai was a man with a window he could look through to see others. Mordecai never sought revenge on Haman. In fact, he remained silent through this whole ordeal, and quietly and humbly went back to his job. How did Mordecai reflect the kind of attitude described in Romans 12:14-21 in dealing with those in opposition to him?

6. This chapter demonstrates the providence of God maybe better than anywhere else in the Bible. Everything started to come into place to fulfill the purpose which God wanted, and previously recorded facts now began to take on more meaning as these events unfolded. These events also remind us that during the times God seems to be absent, He has really been present and at work all the while!

As you think back over this story and the passages you examined this week, what are some things God spoke to you about faithfully waiting on His perfect timing and plans, and not giving in to discouragement? Is there an example of this that you experienced personally that you can record? How will you approach the times of trial about God's working and timing in the future because of these facts?

DAY SEVEN: REAPING WHAT IS SOWN

READ: Esther 7

Yesterday brought us to the beginning of the climax of the book of Esther. In it we saw the hand of God's providence displayed like nowhere else in the Bible. All of God's chess pieces were in place, and He began to unfold the moves that would lead to a divine pronouncement of "Checkmate!"

Today, we reach the climax of the story as we read of the ultimate downfall of Haman. Chapters 8-10 will record the resolution of the remaining details of the story, as well as giving us a glimpse of the Jewish holiday of Purim and its significance.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. We can easily imagine that Esther's heart was pounding, and that she quickly prayed that God would give her the exact right words to say. After probably taking a deep breath, how did she begin her two-fold request (v. 3)?

2. What explanation does she give of this strange and unexpected request (v. 4)?

3. Bible scholars describe verse 4 as one of the most difficult passages in the Book of Esther to translate, but that it most likely meant that the Jews were to be destroyed, which would have been

an economic loss for the king, so Esther had to speak up about it. Either way, Esther boldly identified with her people in this.

Of course to this point neither Ahasuerus nor Haman had a clue that Esther was Jewish, but now had come the time to stand up and proclaim that truth. We should never be ashamed to stand for Christ and say that we are His children. What strong words did Jesus have about this (Luke 9:26)?

4. Haman had demanded that Mordecai bow before him; now here Haman was bowing before the feet of Esther! In another ironic twist, what happens next? (vv. 8-10)

5. Think through your current station in life. How can you be a better example of Christ both in your words and actions to those around you? How can you make a difference in the areas of influence you have for godliness, and to reflect Christ in all you do? How can you start doing this even this week? Share your thoughts here and with your group so you all can encourage each other in this.

DAY EIGHT: A PETITION PLANNED

READ: Esther 8

Esther 7 recorded the demise of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. That day began with him having a pity party, then he was escorted to the palace for the second banquet with Ahasuerus and Esther. Before the day was over, Haman's body was on display some 75 feet above the ground for all to see how the king dealt with those who betray him! It started with Esther's response to the king's offer to do whatever she asked, in which she revealed her request was for her life and the lives of her people to be spared from the evil planned for them. Infuriated, Ahasuerus yelled, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?" Esther's shocking reply: "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" (From Esther 7:5-6, NKJV).

Ahasuerus was beside himself with anger and stormed from the room. Haman was out of his mind with fear, pleading at the feet of Esther to spare him, ending up collapsed on top of her on the couch. Ahasuerus returned to the room to this sight, thinking Haman was trying to rape Esther on top of everything else! He was arrested immediately, and thanks to the suggestion of one of the eunuchs, Haman was executed on the very device he had built to execute his enemy, Mordecai, with.

The enemy of the Jews was gone, but his evil plan still was in effect. Today we'll see how this serious problem would be dealt with, and how God continued to demonstrate His faithfulness in helping His people through Esther and Mordecai.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. What did Ahasuerus do after the death of Haman, and how was the link between Mordecai and Esther revealed to him (v. 1)?
2. This victory over their enemy was bittersweet, however. Esther couldn't stand the pain in her heart another minute. Why was this, and what did she do (v. 3)?
3. What did Ahasuerus suggest Esther and Mordecai do in view of the situation, and why (v. 8)?

4. Some readers of the Book of Esther are bothered by the Jews' being given permission to wipe out and plunder their enemies, seeing this as taking a non-Christian attitude toward non-believers. But a careful reading of this passage clarifies for us that they weren't given permission to attack others, but to only defend themselves from those who would assault them, thus being vessels of God's judgment on those who sought to touch the apple of His eye (see Zechariah 2:8, 9). What should the believer's attitude be toward those who are at enmity with us, misuse or persecute us?

5. How was this edict received throughout the Empire, and what unusual thing came as a result of all this (v. 17)?

6. Perhaps you are going through a dark period of your life. So did the Jewish people. All that they knew was taken away from them. They were transported to a land they didn't know under wicked rulers. Consider what they said of their captivity in Psalm 137. Yet they seemed to have held to a little glimmer of hope in remembering what God had done for them in the past. We saw that in God's perfect timing, He worked to deliver them, and under Esther and Mordecai they were returned to a place of joy, light, gladness, and feasting once again.

We today can have peace and joy in the midst of the darkness of our days. We don't have to wait for it; it is ours, a part of the fruit of the Spirit. As our memory verse states, it is sown into our lives! How can you find renewed joy in trusting in the Lord and His Word in the midst of your situation? Are you letting Him reign in you despite the circumstances you may be in?

DAY NINE: A RESOUNDING VICTORY

READ: Esther 9

Haman, the enemy of the Jews, was hung high upon the gallows he intended for his enemy Mordecai. But Esther 8 showed us that this was a bittersweet victory. Esther informed Ahasuerus of the relationship between herself and Mordecai, Ahasuerus promoted her, and she was placed over the house and position of Haman. In the midst of this, Esther became overcome with grief. Despite Haman's demise, his plans were still in effect to destroy the Jewish people. She once again pleaded with the king to do something about it, but his law couldn't be revoked. Instead, he suggested that Esther and Mordecai write another law in the king's name that would help the Jews, and so they did, authorizing the Jews to defend themselves against the attack of those who allied with Haman in his hatred of them. This all truly was a reversal of fortune, and Mordecai was lifted up in the sight of the people. There was joy, gladness, and celebration among the Jews for probably the first time since their Babylonian captivity. Even many Persians converted to Judaism, at least superficially, because of this.

So the author of Esther left us in suspense. Would this plan work out? Would the Jews survive the date chosen by lot, the thirteenth day of the month of Adar? The story quickly turns to the resolution of this problem in today's study of Esther 9:1—19. In our final lesson (Lesson Ten), we will see how the Feast of Purim was officially established and how things turned out for the heroes of our story.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. There is no question that in the Book of Esther we see God's hand of providence at work like nowhere else in the Bible. How does v. 1 all the more confirm this?

2. What capped the Jews' victory, and what did they not do although the King's edict allowed it (vv. 7-10, see Esther 8:11)?

NOTE: It is important to remember that those the Jews killed were enemies, allies with Haman to destroy them, thus by extension themselves enemies of God; they were not women and children either, for the Hebrew text makes clear these were men.

3. This victory brought rest at last for the Jews after such turmoil. We too have been given rest in Jesus Christ, freed from our enemy! Read Galatians 3:11—14 and record how the way was made for us to also enter into His rest.

4. God again proved Himself faithful to His Word, and the Jews faithfully reflected Him by how they responded to the threat of annihilation. Ahasuerus' order had allowed them to completely destroy all their enemies and to plunder their spoils, just like Haman had planned to do to them. Yet they chose to only kill the men responsible, and to not touch their "loot." In this, they gave witness to God and showed non-believers around them a picture of God's justice, holiness, and also His grace.

You may find you have the liberty to do some things under the law of the land, but should refrain from such activities to instead be a living witness of God to those around you. Some "plunder" may be attractive and legal, but lethal to your witness to others! What are some circumstances like this that you have run across in your walk with the Lord, in which your liberty was really put to the test? How did you respond to it? How did it impact others around you, or would impact your testimony to others if they saw you doing it? What are some ways you might need to focus less on what you can do and still walk with the Lord and instead on what you should or shouldn't do to draw others closer to God?

DAY TEN: THE IMPACT OF ONE LIFE

READ: Esther 9:20- Esther 10

In Lesson 9 we read of the resounding victory of the Jews over those who sought to destroy them. The tables were indeed turned on those allied with Haman, as all the men who sought to dominate and destroy the Jews were themselves destroyed. As part of the finishing touch of this victory, the bodies of Haman's sons were also hung up on their father's gallows to demonstrate to all the seriousness of rebelling against the king. The dead were tallied, and the Jews at last had rest from those who tormented them all of those years. The Jews celebrated with great feasting and joy, enjoying a holiday, or better, a good day in which they honored God and gave of themselves to others. Yet there was a potential problem brewing, because the Jews outside of Susa celebrated on one day, while those in Susa celebrated the next day.

This final lesson will show us how this possible conflict was logically solved, and how the Feast of Purim became memorialized officially. It will close with a glimpse at both Esther and Mordecai, and show us what impact a solitary life can have on their world.

GUIDED QUESTIONS:

1. What a great passage! That month was a time when everything was turned around and transformed for the Jews. Their seemingly incurable despair was turned into rejoicing and gladness; their prolonged mourning period was turned to a “good day,” a holiday, and they celebrated it with giving presents (portions of food) to each other and gifts to the poor. How will God accomplish this sort of transformation for all who come to Him by faith (Psalm 30:11; Isaiah 61:1—3)?
2. How will God take care of the poor who have nothing or no one else to help them? [Read: Psalm 16:5-11; Matthew 5:3]
3. Why was the feast of Purim named in such a way (v. 26)?
4. What did Esther and Mordecai do to further establish this feast (v. 29)?
5. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom, meaning welfare, health, security, good condition. It is a theologically significant word in the Old Testament, and is used 237 times in it. Truth meant firmness, stability, and faithfulness. How has Christ brought us into peace (Isaiah 9:6, 7; Ephesians 2:14—18) and truth (John 8:32; 14:6)?
6. Esther 10:3 serves as the key verse for realizing what impact one person, here Mordecai, can have when they are submitted to God. What does this verse tell us about this man and how he impacted others?
7. Someone once said, “Only one life, will soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” Our lives will have an impact on others one way or the other; we need to choose to have our lives make the right impact for God’s kingdom. As you think back over the things you have read in the Book of Esther, what in particular stood out to you about the impact that Esther and Mordecai had in others’ lives, and how has that motivated you personally?

