

# The Gospel in Esther

No matter what it looks like or how great a power that stands against Him, nothing will prevent God from defeating His enemies and fulfilling His redemptive plan.



**GOD'S STORY**  
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Esther

September 13, 2020

(Esther 7:1-10) <sup>1</sup>So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, <sup>2</sup>and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted." <sup>3</sup>Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. <sup>4</sup>For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king." <sup>5</sup>King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?" <sup>6</sup>Esther said, "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. <sup>7</sup>The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. <sup>8</sup>Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. <sup>9</sup>Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman's house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king." The king said, "Impale him on it!" <sup>10</sup>So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

(Esther 9:1-10, 20-22) <sup>1</sup>On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. <sup>2</sup>The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them. <sup>3</sup>And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. <sup>4</sup>Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful. <sup>5</sup>The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. <sup>6</sup>In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. <sup>7</sup>They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, <sup>8</sup>Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, <sup>9</sup>Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, <sup>10</sup>the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder...<sup>20</sup>Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, <sup>21</sup>to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar <sup>22</sup>as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

## COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- **When you look at the world today, do you tend to ask and expect God to do big things, little things, or not much of anything at all? Why?**
- **When have you seen God show His glory in a situation where all hope seemed lost?**

The Book of Esther tells the story of God's sovereign control and protection of His people, the Jews, in a time when all hope seemed lost. The rulers of the day did not seek or know God and evil was having its way. However, Esther was brought to the king's court "for such a time as this" (4:14). In a time when it looked like evil was in control, God was at work revealing His greater gospel story.

Before your group transitions into Esther, watch this week's Bible Project Video to help understand the context of this book of the Bible. [The Bible Project: Esther](#)

## CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD’S STORY

- **When you look at society today which, like Persia during Esther’s time, is focused entirely on appearances and lives as though what we have is more important than who we are, is it easier or more difficult to see God at work? Explain.**

We read about the parting of the Red Sea, Elijah calling down fire from heaven, and a whale spitting Jonah onto land and we know that God was at work. We read about the apostles healing the sick and the growth of the early church and again clearly see that God was at work. But when we read in Esther that a pagan king got drunk and demanded his wife parade in front of his buddies so they could gawk at her, we might be tempted to think, “Where was God?” When he got rid of that wife and held a misogynistic contest to find his next queen, we again wonder, “Where was God when those women were being devalued in such a disgusting way?” Similarly, in the world today we look around and see all manner of evil seemingly unchecked, and we might think God isn’t paying attention. But God was at work behind the scenes in Esther, and He is at work behind the scenes today—to defend His people and glorify Himself.

- **The Book of Esther makes no mention of the name of God. Why should the seeming absence of God’s name in this story actually encourage us when it seems as if God isn’t with us?**
- **Esther was unaware that she was part of God’s divine plan. How is God’s providence, in and of itself, a reason for hope?**

Esther, a Jew, became the queen of Persia through the providential work of God which would have far-reaching consequences for God’s people. Only when we understand the link between providence and sovereignty can we recognize God’s fingerprints in the midst of His apparent absence.

As Esther’s story unfolded, the king elevated Haman the Agagite to a powerful position (3:2), Haman felt snubbed by Mordecai, another official who, unbeknownst to the court, was Queen Esther’s relative and guardian. Haman wanted revenge, so he aimed to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews. Not knowing Esther’s heritage and close relationship to Mordecai, he manipulated King Xerxes into issuing an edict authorizing the systematic killing of all Jews in the Persian Empire. But Haman’s plans began to unravel as the king remembered Mordecai had previously uncovered a conspiracy to assassinate him (Esther 6). The king honored Mordecai, and this began Haman’s downfall. In chapter 7, we find King Xerxes and Haman at the banquet Esther requested in order to expose Haman’s evil (5:8).

Have a volunteer read Esther 7:1-10

- **What does verse 4 indicate to you about the risk Esther took in bringing this matter to the king? What does this passage teach you about God?**
- **Reread verse 10. How does this one verse paint a picture of the gospel story?**

Esther’s accusation made Haman a traitor in the king’s eyes. The king ordered Haman to be hung on the gallows Haman had set up for Mordecai, and in Haman’s death, “The wrath of the king abated”(v. 10). Where evil abounded, God had the final say, demonstrating that even where it seemed He was silent, He was at work.

God saved His people from destruction in this instance so that He could save them from eternal destruction in Jesus Christ. God “set up” the cross for Jesus and there put the sins of humankind upon Him to be crucified once and for all. “He [God] condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering” (Romans 8:3) and the wrath of God was satisfied (Romans 5:9).

Have a volunteer read Esther 9:1-10, 20-22

It was evident that God was at work, but the edict remained in effect because under Persian law the king could not revoke it. However, as a result of Esther's influence, the king allowed Mordecai to write another decree to neutralize the original edict. The two contradictory edicts unleashed 24 hours of violence in the rural areas of the empire as the two sides fought openly in its streets and fields (9:1-32). The Jews quickly overcame all opposition in these areas.

- **Put yourself in the story. When Esther called on all the Jewish people to pray, would you have prayed for God to allow you to protect yourselves or to miraculously prevent the attack altogether? Why?**

God frequently operates within the sphere of the human situation. Here, God limited His work to an edict that used a unique feature of Persian law. This does not lessen the miraculous nature of God's activity. Rather, it ought to cause God's people to recognize His presence and power in everything that happens.

- **After doing what needed to be done in battle, what did the Jews do? Why? Why is it important to regularly remember what God has done? What are some practical ways we can do this?**

The Jews' deliverance from their enemies gave rise to a national Jewish festival, Purim, celebrated on the anniversary of their triumphs. The Jews were to take two days of feasting and rejoicing. The Jews also were to exchange food with each other and give gifts to the poor on the festival days. These activities reflected the great reversal in Jewish fortune. Fasting and mourning had given way to eating and celebration, yet another clear picture of the greater gospel story (Luke 4:18-19).

## COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

- **This week ask God to open your eyes to see how you, like Esther, are part of His great plan to redeem humanity, even when you do not realize it. How could making this truth your filter change your week?**

**PRAYER:** Thank God that He is continually working all things together toward His redemptive purpose in your life and in the world. Ask Him to help you trust Him and to act in faith, even when He seems silent.

## CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD'S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Esther 5-7  
 DAY 2 – Esther 8-10  
 DAY 3 – Nehemiah 1-2  
 DAY 4 – Nehemiah 3-4  
 DAY 5 – Nehemiah 5-6

KEY VERSE: Nehemiah 6:9

Visit [chetscreek.com/gods-story](http://chetscreek.com/gods-story) for videos, study guides, and more.

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.

Explain what the text means.

Apply the verse to your life.

Respond to God.

### OUR VISION

To be a church  
 for the unchurched,  
 here and around the world.

### ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Gospel-centered communities that aim to KNOW  
 GOD together and BE CHANGED by Him in a  
 way that will CHANGE THE WORLD.

**Esther 1-2**

1:1-2. Ahasuerus is the Hebrew name for King Xerxes, who ruled from 486-465 B.C. Chapter 1 of Esther is set in the fortress (Hb "birah") at Susa, one of the three capital cities of the Persian Empire. It is located in what is today southwestern Iran. During Xerxes' rule Susa was the usual location of his winter palace.

1:3-4. In the third year of Ahasuerus, probably 483 b.c., there occurred the first of 10 feasts recorded in Esther, which are important structural and thematic markers in the book. The "feast" was more of a drinking bout than a meal. The ancient Greek writers mentioned that the Persians were famous (or infamous) for their prodigious drinking.

1:5-8. Unlike the first feast, the second banquet was not for the nobility but for all the citizenry in the fortress of Susa. The event is described in great detail (v. 6) to highlight the opulence and wealth of the king. For the Persians, it must have been regarded as a fabulous party because the royal wine flowed freely, according to the king's bounty. Moreover, by royal decree each guest could drink as much as he desired or was capable of drinking since no restraint was placed on the drinking.

1:9. The third feast was given by Queen Vashti, who is first introduced in this verse, and it was only for the women.

1:10-12. No one was as shocked as King Ahasuerus when Queen Vashti refused his royal command. Ahasuerus's intense fury was predictable. His own wife had publicly disobeyed the most powerful man in the Persian Empire.

2:7-9 Mordecai had adopted Esther, who was his cousin. Esther's beauty was overpowering. After thirty-one verses of narrative covering a significant period of time, Esther is finally in the harem of the king.

2:10 One wonders why Mordecai insisted on her concealing her identity. Esther might have had no chance of becoming queen if her nationality had been disclosed. Ambition, however, does not seem to characterize Mordecai elsewhere. He may have thought the knowledge of her identity might prove dangerous to her.

2:12-14 Apparently most of the girls spent only one night with the king. They moved on to the house of Shaashgaz, where they were concubines. There was no guarantee that the king would call them again, so many were confined to virtual widowhood.

2:15 Esther is finally introduced into the narrative. Apparently each girl had certain liberty in choosing her adornment (v. 13). It is said that some took advantage of this to deck themselves with many jewels. Esther was content to stay with Hegai's advice. That was wise since certainly he knew what pleased the king.

2:16 "The tenth month" in the Jewish religious calendar was a cold, wet month in the middle of winter (Dec.-Jan.). "The seventh year" would have been 479 b.c. What happened during the four years since chap. 1? We know that Xerxes waged war against Greece in 480-479, but this fact is of no interest in the story. The only point is that the search for a new wife had taken a long time. Now Esther's arrival changes the entire complexion of the narrative.

2:17 In this key verse in the narrative, Esther became queen instead of Vashti. The future of the story depends on this event. The sudden decision on the part of Xerxes reveals that he was overwhelmed by the sight of Esther. Readers can only imagine. Such beauty can only be made manifest through the presence of God. Such an overwhelmed king probably reflects that as he had done with Pharaoh and Cyrus, God had influenced this foreign king as well.

**Esther 7:1-10**

7:1-10 Up to this point two intertwined conflicts have remained unresolved: the primary conflict, the threat of extinction of the Jews because of Haman's royal edict; and the secondary conflict, the personal struggle between Mordecai and Haman. The national threat is not resolved until chapter 9. This short chapter concludes the confrontation between Haman and Mordecai with poetic justice.

7:2 King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) did not literally expect Esther to ask for half the kingdom, but her delayed answer must have convinced him that she had a well-thought-out, significant request.

7:3-4 Esther's request was direct and to the point: spare her life and spare her people. Esther continued with a carefully nuanced assertion: For my people and I have been sold out. She could hardly charge her husband directly ("You sold me out"), but she couched it in an indefinite passive voice ("have been sold out"; Hb *nimkarnu*). Esther had not told the king she was Jewish, and she did not identify "her people." But as she continued her plea, the king was given a clue: they had been sold out to destruction, death, and extermination, a direct quote from the edict crafted by Haman and authorized by her husband (3:13).

7:5-6 Both Ahasuerus's questions and Esther's reply reflect the intensity of their emotions. The term terrified (Hb *niv'at*) is the same word used to describe King David's terror when he was confronted by the angel of the Lord with a sword in his hand at Araunah's threshing floor (1Ch 21:30), and to portray Daniel's intense fear when the angel Gabriel approached him (Dan 8:17).

7:7 For the first time in the book of Esther the king had to make crucial decisions without his counselors. Suddenly he was forced to choose between his prime minister and his wife. But if he deposed Haman for threatening his wife and her people, would not Haman counter by revealing that the king himself had approved of the plan? While the king struggled with his decisions in the garden, Haman stayed back with Esther to beg (Hb *lebaqqesh*) for his life. Before, it was Esther (v. 3) who had sought ("desire," Hb *baqqashah*) to be spared, but now the tables were turned.

7:8 If the king was still undecided about Haman's fate as he returned from the garden, his decision was made certain as he caught Haman fawning over the queen. Court documents from the Assyrian period state that a man must not come closer than seven steps to one of the women in the palace (D. J. Clines).

7:10 The irony demonstrated in this verse is stated proverbially in Pr 26:27 and Mt 26:52.

## **Esther 9:1-22**

9:1. The theme of reversal comes to its culmination on an empire-wide scale.

9:6-10. Haman's anti-Semitism, and the resentment of those who lost positions of influence when Mordecai replaced Haman, may explain why the Jews in the fortress of Susa had to kill 500 men. Haman had taken pride in his 10 sons (5:11); now they shared his fate.

9:11-15. The king seemed unconcerned about the death of 500 of his subjects. After asking for a casualty report from the rest of the kingdom, he offered Esther any additional help she needed (v. 12). Apparently the struggle within the royal fortress was not finished because Esther requested an additional day for the Jews to battle their enemies (v. 13). Her request to hang the bodies of Haman's 10 sons seems vindictive, but this was a common practice in the Persian period, especially for those who were convicted of insurrection (Herodotus 3:125). Moreover, the display of Haman's sons on the gallows would serve as a powerful deterrent to any who might contemplate further attacks against the Jewish people. Again, as in verses 10 and 16, the text emphasizes that the Jews were not out to pillage and enrich themselves, but only to defend their lives.

9:16-17. The phrase got rid of is based on the Hebrew verb *nuach*, meaning, "to rest." The death of 75,000 of those who hated them seems unusually high, but the text itself is not certain. The Greek text lists the number killed as 15,000, while the Alpha Text has 10,107. Unlike the Jews in Susa, the fourteenth day of Adar was not a day of fighting for the Jews in the provinces. Instead they rested and proclaimed a holiday.