

ESTHER

When God Works In the Shadows



A Bible Study
by Sue LeBoutillier

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❧ The Book of Esther ❧

Greetings Friend,

Do you believe that God is, and always has been involved in the lives of His people? Some parts of our Bible show His intervention loudly and miraculously, like the plagues on Egypt in order to release Israel, the crumbled walls of Jericho to assist Joshua, and dramatic fire from heaven to prove Elijah's faith. Other parts of our Bible show God's involvement a bit more quietly, a bit more nuanced, as if He is directing from the shadows. That was the type of intervention God was working in the time of Esther.

As we study through the book of Esther, the truth that we'll discover is that God has always been working, everywhere, all the time! In our lives, we don't usually recognize His work in real time because it's rarely as loud as we expect. The Jews in Esther's day certainly did not perceive God's work until He was done. But this narrative helps us understand that He was there from the beginning, working through ordinary events and ordinary people to accomplish an extraordinary deliverance.

This will be a short Bible study, but it will be packed with insights that help us see God's work in our lives when we think He is silent and when we think things are spinning out of control on their own power. This study may just help us to understand God's silent but mighty intervention from the shadows of our lives.

It is my prayer that you are blessed as you invest your time in studying this small but mighty book of the Old Testament!

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"For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

~ Esther 4:14

How to use this Bible Study

Esther is a women's Bible study comprising five weekly lessons. Each of these lessons is broken down into four days of study; but you can adapt it to any system that works for your schedule.

Whether you are meeting to study with a friend, a small group, or doing this study on your own — the following would be an ideal path:

#1 Your first step will be to watch/listen to **Week One — Introduction**, either independently or with your group.

#2 Begin **Week Two in your Study Guide**

- ◆ Read the assigned scriptures and answer the questions for each day. This Study Guide is intended to be completed independently **before** you watch the teaching associated with each week's lesson. (Also note the *Questions for Thought and Discussion at the end of each lesson* — you won't want to miss them).
- ◆ Then watch/listen to that week's teaching using the links below. You can do this privately or with your group.
- ◆ Discuss the week's lesson in your group and pray together about applying the passages to your lives.
- ◆ Repeat this process as you do all the weeks in your Study Guide.

One last reminder — be sure to approach each of the above steps with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to give you understanding and speak to your heart.

To watch the video teachings for this Bible Study go to:

ccontario.com/womens-studies

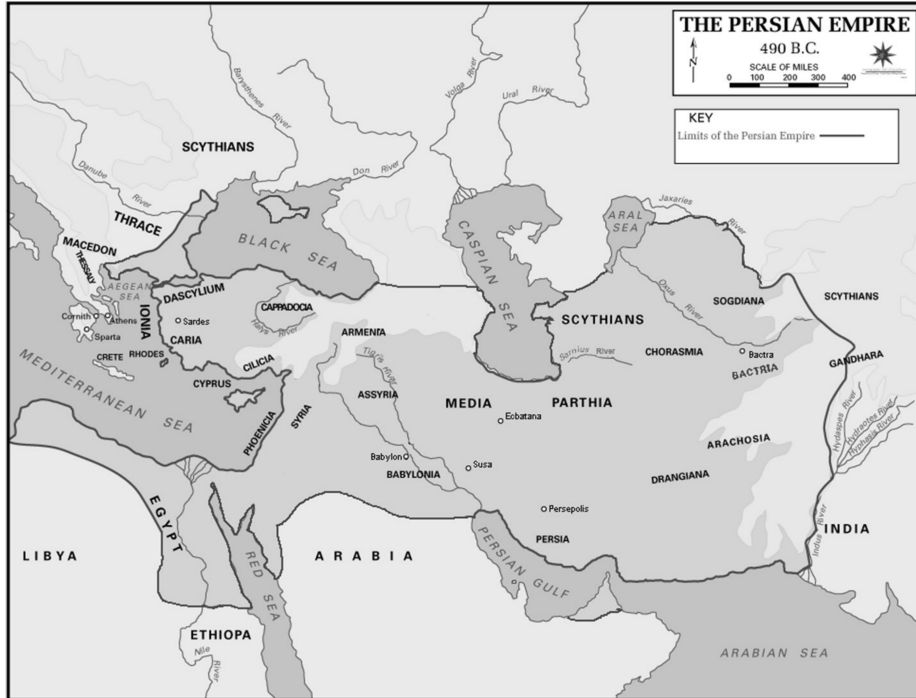
or

[YouTube.com/calvarychapelontario](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCU)

The best translation of the Bible to use is the one you understand best, and using more than one translation can be a useful aid in your study! This study guide was created using the ESV (English Standard Version).



Map of the Persian Empire During the Days of Esther



Notes from Teaching Week 1 — Introduction

Use these pages to accompany the Week One teaching video.
(www.ccontario.com/wow-esther)

If you're studying in a group, the questions on page 7 may provide some good discussion starters following the video.

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Share your thoughts on the character qualities of King Ahasuerus.
2. Memucan claimed that Queen Vashti's offense was not only toward the King, but who else? Do you agree with him?
3. A nugget of truth can sometimes be found under a pile of exaggeration. How does the opening of this story inspire you to keep things in perspective in your own situations in life?
4. In v.12 we read that *the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him*. What tends to enrage you? Read **Proverbs 14:16-17** and discuss how these verses describe Ahasuerus and how they apply to our lives.
5. How do you think the *seven days of liberal drinking* played a part in this offense? How might liberal use of substances play a part in how we perceive offense in our life?
6. Godly advisors can be one of the most important blessings in our life! Discuss some character traits of godly advisors that could prevent you from over-reacting and help you walk in truth?

Week Two — Esther 1-2

In Chapter Two, we'll meet our book's namesake — Esther. But we should remember, she's not the focus of the story, she's merely an ordinary girl that God chose to use for his divine purposes. The main character of the story is God Himself — even though His name is used exactly zero times in the book of Esther, while the king's name is referred to 192 times. God is still the focus and He's still in charge.

Before we begin Chapter Two, we're going to use our first day of study to re-read Chapter One in order for us to revisit some of the important themes.

Day 1: -----

READ Esther Chapter 1 — Learning from a Leader

We covered the history and the setting of this book fairly well in our Introduction. We also touched on some of the personal themes that surfaced in the story during our group discussion time. But, the themes of *anger*, *becoming offended*, and *the influences of our inner circle* are so relevant to our personal lives that I didn't want us to leave them behind until we had a chance to search the Scriptures for a few more layers.

Take a moment to consider these themes, how they played out in Chapter One of Esther and how they may play out in your own life.

Dealing with anger: Maybe, like Ahasuerus, a short fuse (or straight up anger) has been an issue in your life. Consider what the following passages have to say about controlling our anger:

Psalm 37:8

Proverbs 14:15-17

Proverbs 16:32

Ecclesiastics 7:9

James 1:19-20

Overlooking offenses: Maybe anger isn't your button as much as a perceived lack of respect, or just being easily offended in general. What is the Lord saying to you through these passages:

Proverbs 12:16

Proverbs 17:9

Proverbs 19:11

Godly advisors: Note how we can either be helped or sent down a dark path by those who we have allowed close ready into our lives:

Proverbs 1:10

Proverbs 12:5

Proverbs 12:15

Proverbs 13:20

When we see negative traits pop up in Bible characters, it's good to check our own heart, rather than merely cast a verdict on any bad behavior we see in others.

📖 READ Esther 2:7-10 — A Beautiful Contestant

- Our next notable character is introduced in **v.7**. List her names, her relationship to Mordecai, and her appearance.

Hebrew name: _____ Persian Name: _____

Family relationship to Mordecai: _____

Describe her physical appearance:

- What was the one thing that Esther concealed from everyone around her (**v.10**)?
- From **v.10** was there a reason to keep her ethnicity a secret?

- What additional Persian character was introduced in **v.8**?

The word eunuch literally meant 'bed keeper'.

It referred to a male servant, who was usually castrated. Eunuchs could thus provide any type of service to the court, including safekeeping of the harem.

This practice was actually forbidden among the Hebrews and was only practiced among the pagans.

- How do you see God working in the shadows as it relates to the interaction between Hegai and Esther?

Day 3:

🔗 READ Esther 2:11-19 — We Have a Winner

We might be tempted to envy Esther's situation. Who wouldn't love a full year at a spa with all the latest and greatest products? No chores! No demands! No worries! I actually don't think it was that way at all. Plus, there were enormous risks. There would be only one winner, who would become the partner of a power-hungry ruler. There would be hundreds of losers who would never have a real chance at life and love — they would live out their days in the king's harem.

- Mordecai was well aware of Esther's risk. From **v.11** what was his habit and how did this demonstrate his heart as a guardian?
- Describe the beauty treatments that Esther and the young women underwent (**v.12**).
- From **v.13-14** describe the time frame each young woman had to make a good impression on the king. What was she allowed to take with her?
- From **v.17** what was end result of Esther's time spent with the king?

Along with a new queen came another banquet (v.18) — the third banquet (or feast) within two chapters. Obviously the whole country loved the new queen since she was inaugurated with a lavish feast including tax breaks and gifts to all! Esther was set up for success.

But this wasn't all accidental. God was clearly the force behind the positioning of Esther. This is the focus of our study — God's work in the shadows. However, Esther played her part admirably by listening to advice and not being stubborn. Let's consider her positive moves:

In v.8 we note her willingness to be counted among the beauties. This may not have been an option, *or* her cousin may have put her forward as a contestant and she willingly agreed to his suggestion.

- In v.10 how had Esther listened to the advice of Mordecai and complied with his wisdom?

- In v.15 how had Esther listened to the advice of Hegai and complied with his suggestions?

Esther developed a lifestyle of listening to the advice of her mentors and obeying their suggestions. A habit such as this can go a long way toward success. Consider these passages and note anything God is showing you in this area.

Proverbs 12:15

Proverbs 13:10

Day 4:

🔗 READ Esther 2:19-23 — Assassination Averted

Once Esther became queen, she didn't abandon her former habits, especially related to taking advice.

- Explain how Esther still took counsel from Mordecai, and why, from **v.20**.
- Why do you think Mordecai was so persistent in his requirement that Esther keep her heritage a secret? Do you agree or disagree with his insistence?
- What is mentioned twice (**v.19** and **v.21**) about where Mordecai could be found on a regular basis?

The fact that Mordecai was stationed at the 'king's gate' and not merely the 'city gate' meant that he held some form of official position within the king's court.
- While on duty at the gate, Mordecai overheard some important information. What did he hear (**v.21**)?

Seeing God's Work from the Shadows

We know that God is in control all the time, even when we think life is spinning out of control. This particular book of the Bible highlights Divine Providence through ordinary circumstances. We'll use this section to recap and discuss the silent movement of God that we observe in each chapter.

1. How did God use David's pardon of Shimei's offense all those years ago to bring about His plan in the Book of Esther?
2. How did God use the fact that Mordecai had chosen not to return to Jerusalem with the other exiles, but remained in Susa?
3. How did God use the tragic loss of Hadassah's parents and the fact that she was orphaned?
4. How did God use the beauty of Esther in this story?
5. How did God use the king's divorce and his loneliness once he returned from the Greek military campaign?
6. How did God use the king's eunuch, Hegai, to move His plan forward?
7. How did God use Mordecai's position at the king's gate?
8. How did God use Esther's good sense to take advice from her mentors?

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. We highlighted Esther's habit of listening to advice and acting on wise counsel, even after she was elevated to a high position. In what ways might you be tempted to abandon advice once you have achieved some level of importance, age or position?
2. Our internal sense of justice requires rewards for good actions and punishment for bad. Yet, we can see God's hand at work when Mordecai's deed was overlooked. Read **Matthew 16:27**. How can Jesus' words, along with this story, help brace you to gracefully endure injustice, or being overlooked?
3. Discuss the contrast between two relatives: 1) how Mordecai blessed King Ahasuerus without a reward, and 2) how Shimei cursed King David (from **2 Samuel 16**) without punishment.
4. Discuss any qualities you see in Esther that you want to make more of a habit in your life. What would be the steps to achieve those changes?
5. Read **Proverbs 21:1** and discuss how it describes what has been going on in the first two chapters of Esther.

Week Three — Esther 3-4

So far it's been pretty easy to not only *see* God's work in the shadows but to *celebrate* it as well. Most things have turned out better than expected. Esther won the beauty pageant and had become Queen of the Persian Empire. Mordecai seemed to have been promoted to an influential position at the king's gate. And the king himself seemed quite happy with his new queen, not to mention relieved that the attempted assassination plot was revealed and handled.

But, in this week's chapters, God's hidden work from the shadows didn't look quite as attractive. In fact, one might have thought, '*God, how could you let this happen? Where are you in this mess?*'

Day 1:

🔗 READ Esther 3:1-6 — The Birth of Anti-Semitism

Mordecai wasn't the only one promoted to an important position:

- List the next important character that we find introduced in **v.1**, along with his ancestry:

_____ the _____

- Briefly describe Haman's position and the protocol of honor that came along with it.

Mordecai was *not* about to bow before Haman. The *text* didn't spell out exactly why, but the *context* shouts a clear reason — Haman was an **Agagite**, meaning he was an **Amalekite**, an ancient enemy of God's people.

It will become crystal clear if we walk back in Scripture to connect the dots. The problem began way back in Israel's wilderness journey, continued through the time of King Saul, and progressed right up to our current point in history.

Read **Exodus 17:8-16** — Note the conflict between the Amalekites and Israel, along with God's declaration regarding them:

Read **Deuteronomy 25:17-19** — Note God's instructions concerning the Amalekites:

Read **1 Samuel 15:1-26** — Note God's specific instructions to King Saul to carry out His hand of justice:

Not only was Haman an Amalekite, but he was of the lineage of their leader, Agag. It's obvious that Saul's failure hundreds of years prior, contributed to the present threat. Now...back to our current timeline:

- Mordecai's refusal to obey the king's command eventually led to the disclosure of what critical piece of information in **v.4**?
- Describe Haman's over-reaction to this offense (**v.5-6**).
- Compare Haman's response with that of King Ahasuerus' in **1:12**.

Read **Proverbs 29:11**. Consider how it applies to those times when we are tempted to *overreact*! What is the current application in your life?

Day 2:

Haman had gotten all worked up — *filled with fury* — is how the text described him. Anger, rage, and fury often lead to over-reactions, and that was exactly the outcome here. He not only wanted Mordecai dead, but he wanted *all the Jews* dead!

READ Esther 3:7-11 — Haman, the Enemy of the Jews

- From v.7 how much time would pass from the casting of the Pur, in the first month, to the appointed date of the extermination?

Drawing straws or flipping coins isn't necessarily an evil practice for us today. Many arguments between siblings can be solved by the simple toss of a coin. However, in this instance, the casting of lots was definitely a practice meant to be influenced by pagan gods.

Read **Proverbs 16:33** and explain who really controls the outcome of things such as this?

- Haman finally shared his concerns with the king in v.8. How did he describe the *certain people*, and what threat was implied?

- Haman didn't wait for the king to respond but offered his own solution. What was it (v.9)?

- What was the amount of the bribe that Haman offered?

- Read **Exodus 23:8** and explain what affect a bribe has in a relationship.

🔗 READ Esther 3:12-15 — So Let it be Written, So Let it be Done

In Persian rule of law, once an order was put in place, it could not be rescinded. You'll remember this happened in 1:19 with Queen Vashti. It was also a problem in Daniel 6 with King Darius. Anyone who *made a petition to any god or man except the king* would be cast into the den of lions. The law could not be revoked. As we say, *it was what it was*.

- What incentive was listed in the king's order that could have enticed the Persians to carry out this order (**v.13**)?

Can you imagine the shock and confusion throughout the kingdom when these documents were issued?

- Describe the contrast that you see in **v.15** between the king and Haman and the remainder of the people in Susa.

This entire fiasco really sprouted from an offense. Have you noticed that some people in your life are much more easily offendable than others? In which category are you? Can you let things go? Or do small offenses bug you to the point of anger? Read these passages and note what the Lord shows you:

Proverbs 19:11

Philippians 4:5

Esther may have sent a change of clothes to Mordecai to enable him to enter through the king's gate where Esther could possibly talk with him. Mordecai refused. Esther had to move to *Plan B* — a messenger named Hathach.

- What was Hathach to learn from Mordecai (v.5) and why do you think that was a wise move on Esther's part?

- What evidence of the gravity of the situation did Mordecai send back to Esther through Hathach (v.8)?

- What did Mordecai suggest that Esther could possibly do about the situation (v.8)?

- Why do you think Mordecai may have been feeling particularly responsible for these tragic events?

*"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil
is for good men to do nothing."*

Edmund Burke

Day 4:

🔗 READ Esther 4:10-17 — For Such a Time as This

Today's passage contains the most familiar phrase of the entire book — *For such a time as this!* Mordecai's words emphasize God's work from the shadows. Perhaps it was the Lord's plan that Esther would have a prominent position in the palace. Perhaps she was God's tool of redemption at this time. Let's discover how the drama unfolds as Esther sent a return message to Mordecai explaining the road blocks.

- Explain the well-known law that would have put Esther into great peril if she were to approach the king.

- Why was Esther worried that she might not be immediately welcomed into the king's presence.

I've discovered in life that some people are problem solvers and some aren't. Mordecai belonged to the first category. He wasn't about to take *'I can't'* for an answer. He instructed a blunt response to be sent back to Esther.

- Why might Esther have thought that the king's decree wouldn't affect her personally (v.13)?

- What two things did Mordecai predict would happen if she were to remain silent (v.14)?

Mordecai's communications were effective and Esther began to understand God's call on her life. She also began to understand just how unprepared she was to meet the challenge before her! She would need supernatural strength. I would say realizing our weakness is the first step to being empowered by God's strength.

- What did Esther ask Mordecai to organize and for how long?

Although it's not specifically stated, the implication is that the Jews were to fast *and pray* on Esther's behalf that God would grant her favor. This should inspire us as we often face situations for which we feel completely unequipped.

God had already granted Esther some level of courage because she was able to chart a course for the next three days and assume on God's providence. But she would need a big dose of courage on the third day when she would face the possibility of life or death.

Read **Psalm 145:18-20** and note how it inspires you to lean into the Lord for the strength you need for situations in your life.

Seeing God's Work from the Shadows

God's work from the shadows continued in these chapters, even though everything might have seemed evil and desperate. Consider these ways that you see the hidden hand of God at work.

1. How did God use Haman to force Mordecai to reveal his identity?
2. How did God use the outcome of the *lot* (landing on the twelfth month) to the Jews' benefit?
3. How did God use the fact that Mordecai and Esther were related and both held positions in the inner circles in Susa?
4. How did God use Mordecai's connections, so that even though he was not able to talk with Esther, they were able to communicate?
5. How did God use the very presence of Esther in the king's palace at this particular time?
6. How did God use Mordecai's personally connections in the Jewish community to create a network of fasting and prayer?

*"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say?
'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose
I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name."*

John 12:27

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. The very presence of Haman (because Saul hadn't **completely** destroyed the Amalekites) should cause us to consider areas in our own lives that have not been **completely** surrendered to the Lord, and the future problems they might create. Read **Colossians 3:5-11** and discuss possible applications of this principle in a Christian's life.
2. Discuss the wisdom in establishing rules, orders, or laws that cannot be changed. What about in our homes? Is it a good rule if it can easily be changed? Where is the balance?
3. Not many of us have stacks of money lying around to use as bribery, yet we do know how to manipulate people to get them to do what we want. In what way can manipulation be just as destructive as bribery?
4. Esther seemed to understand that she could play her part in God's plan of redemption if she was strengthened by the Lord himself. How does this relate to your life? In what ways has the Lord called you to do something for which you need to be strengthened?
5. The willingness of the Jews in Susa to fast and pray for Esther was impressive and effective. How has this passage inspired you to both ask for prayer from others and offer it as well?

Week Four — Esther 5-6-7

Day 1:

Only three days have passed from the end of Chapter Four to the beginning of Chapter Five. For God's people, they have been days of fasting and prayer, and they have transformed Esther into a woman of confidence and courage.

READ Esther 5:1-8 — From Compliant to Confident

Throughout this entire book, the author has helped us create mental pictures by vividly describing surroundings, even right down to people's clothing.

- Why do you think Esther decided to '*put on her royal robes*' before coming into the king's inner court (v.1)?

- How did King Ahasuerus show that he was favorable toward the approach of Queen Esther (v.2)?

- What offer did he make her (v.3)?

- And what did Esther ask of the king (v.4)?

Right there we may have felt a little disappointed. The people fasted for three days — Esther was looking all royal and beautiful — King Ahasuerus gave her a blank check for whatever she wanted — and she merely asked him to come to dinner? With Haman?

We might think she blew her big opportunity. But, by the end of this week's study it will be clear that all that prayer support had equipped her with wisdom and patience.

She was well aware of the kind of man with whom she was dealing. Yes, she could have manipulated him into giving her what she asked, (just like his advisors had in Chapter One). But Esther resisted the shortcut. This would have to be HIS idea, some how, some way.

- In **v.5**, what helps us see that the king was eager to do what Esther had asked?

- While at the feast, the king asked Esther once more what he could do for her. What was her request the second time (**v.8**)?

Esther is one patient woman. She had been specifically equipped by the Lord to not push forward willy nilly, but to strategically wait for the best possible moment to present her case. We can learn a lot from her example.

Read the following passages and note anything the Lord shows you or wants you to apply to a situation in your life.

Proverbs 16:32

Romans 12:12

Day 2:

🔗 READ Esther 5:9-14 — Building a Gallows

- According to **v.9**, Haman left Esther's banquet quite pleased with himself. Why do you think he might have been *glad of heart*?

- In the same verse, what event changed his happy mood, and how did he respond to that?

In **v.10-12** we find that Haman went home to *toot his own horn* (as we say) before his wife and his friends. List his three bragging points:

-
-
-

Now list the cherry on the top of the list from **v.12**:

-

We continue to circle back to important life lessons throughout this book, like how easily we become irritated or offended.

Do you also find it ironic that the same man who was able to list off all of the positive things in his life was the same man who allowed himself to get tied up in knots over the actions of one humble Jew?

Does that resonate with you in any area of your life? Is there any tiny kernel of offense that you have allowed to consume your thoughts?

Here are some additional passages that might speak to both Haman's situation and perhaps a situation in your life. Note what you find:

Proverbs 12:23

Proverbs 16:18

Proverbs 27:1-2

- What did Haman's wife suggest as the perfect solution for Haman's irritation (v.14)?

We recently read about another wife who crafted a dreadful solution for her pouting husband. Review the story of Ahab and Jezebel found in **1 Kings 21:1-16**.

- List the commonalities from the two narratives.

And right there we find a life lesson for wives. Sometimes the men in our lives do need to blow off some steam and use us as a safe place to express their legitimate frustrations. Our choice of responses could make or break the outcome of the situation.

- If you could have entered the story, what would you have advised Mrs. Haman to say?

Day 3:

📖 READ Esther 6:1-9 — Uneasy Lies the Head that Wears the Crown

- What sort of difficulty did the king have the night after his first banquet with Esther?
- What was his solution for insomnia?
- What account *just so happened* to be read to him (v.2)?

It pleases us that King Ahasuerus seemed to have a sense of justice. Apparently he hadn't been aware that thanks were never expressed to Mordecai for saving his life; that was an oversight! Good call on the king's part to rectify that mistake.

- Who *just so happened* to be hanging around the courtyard right at the moment the king wanted some advice (v.5)?
- What did the writer reveal about Haman's inward thoughts with regard to someone the king wanted to honor (v.6)?
- Because Haman was usually thinking about himself, describe the type of honor that he suggested the king should bestow on the one the king wanted to honor (v.7-9).

📖 READ Esther 6:10-14 — Honor and Humility

Now it perplexes us that King Ahasuerus described Mordecai as a **Jew** in **v.10**. How can the king sign an edict for the annihilation of the Jews one week and then honor a Jew with his royal robes, and a ride on his horse through the square of the city, the next week?

We have no real answer to this dichotomy, other than realizing the plot to kill the Jews wasn't really the king's idea in the first place. Remember, he was sort of *bribed* into it. One wonders if he had perhaps even forgotten about the whole matter.

But, we do know what it meant to Haman as he was the one who had been requisitioned to lead Mordecai and speak words of exaltation!

- Describe Haman's countenance in **v.12** after leading the parade of honor.
- Why do you think his emotions were so dramatic?
- How did his wife and his advisors view this turn of events (**v.13**)?

The author of this book was masterful at expressing events through the tempo of his words!

- How does the final verse of this chapter turn this story into a *page-turner*?

Do they not go astray who devise evil? Those who devise good meet steadfast love and faithfulness.

Proverbs 14:22

Day 4:

🌀 READ Esther 7:1-5 — What a Difference a Day Makes

The second banquet began and ended in the same way as the first — a feast, followed by wine. This was the moment when Ahasuerus asked Esther, once more, what he could do for her. Note that Esther didn't just blurt out what she thought the king should do. She was much more diplomatic, even appealing to the king's self-interest.

- Explain what Esther asked of the king from **v.3-4**.

- What specific information did the king want to know about the enemy who had threatened Esther and her people (**v.5**)?

Finally, the mounting tension in our story has been mildly relieved. Esther called out Haman for his wicked plan. But the drama doesn't end there...

🌀 READ Esther 7:6-10 — A Gallows Named "*Poetic Justice*"

- Describe the king's reaction to Esther's disclosure.

- Describe Haman's reaction to the situation.

Seeing God's Work from the Shadows

God's work from the shadows is probably the most prominent in these chapters. The pace of events is accelerated and the supposed *coincidences* are almost unbelievable! Consider the following ways that you see the hidden hand of God at work.

1. How did God use Haman running into Mordecai just as he left the banquet with Esther?
2. How did God use the terrible advice of Haman's wife and friends to build a gallows and ask for the life of Mordecai?
3. How did God use the king's sleepless night?
4. How did God use the fact that the Book of Memorable Deeds just *happened* to be open to the account of Mordecai uncovering the assassination plot?
5. How did God use the fact that Esther had delayed by one day her request to the king?
6. How did God use the presence of Haman in the king's court at just the moment when the king intended to honor Mordecai?
7. How did God use the awkward moment when Haman was begging the queen for his life to put a final nail in his coffin?

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Esther's patient restraint in presenting her request to the king inspires us. Let's convert this concept into other areas of our lives. Under what circumstances might patience and restraint serve us better than sharing everything all at once?
2. You can often tell quite a bit about a woman by how much it takes to irritate her. What are some practical strategies to learn to let offenses go without challenging every one of them?
3. Are you a fueler or a fencer? Read **Ephesians 4:29**. When a family member or a friend shares their hurts, challenges, or frustrations; do you add fuel to their emotions, or do you help them build a fence around it and lay it to rest.
4. Leaders like King Ahasuerus can be worrisome. We've all been under the leadership of people whom we didn't exactly respect or have huge confidence in their decisions. Read **Proverbs 21:1** and discuss God's sovereignty, even over politicians and leaders.
5. Discuss the parallel between the irrevocable penalty of sin that plagues humans and the unchangeable law that plagued the Jews in Persia.

Week Five — Esther 8-9-10

Day 1:

🔗 READ Esther 8:1-17 — A Reversal for the Irreversible

- What gift did the king immediately give to Esther and how was that a reversal of fortunes?
- What position was immediately given to Mordecai and how was that a reversal of power?

Now that things had settled down a smidge, Esther became bolder and even slightly more vulnerable in her approach to the king.

- From **v.5** what was Esther's plea before the king this time?

Since the king had already given his signet ring to Mordecai, that meant that he basically allowed him to write a new edict that would carry the king's blessing.

Once again the scribes were busy writing and translating and the messengers were busy riding and announcing.

- From **v.11-12** summarize the content of the latest edict written by Mordecai and sanctioned by the king.

- Calculate how many months remained now until the fateful day that was first chosen to kill the Jews.
- How was the second edict communicated to everyone in Persia?

Once again, the writer gave us abundant details for our imaginations, including the quality of the horses, the emotions of the king, and even Mordecai's clothing.

- How did the people in Susa (and most importantly, the Jews) respond to both Mordecai's leadership and the relief that the new edict brought?
- From **v.17** what surprise reversal of events happened among the people in the country?

Day 2:

📖 READ Esther 9:1-19 — A Reversal of Fortunes

The first verse of this chapter could be described as a one sentence summary of the entire book. It has all the important information — the dating, the problem, and the reversal. In fact this week’s lesson will be centered around that word — *reversal!*

- The Jews didn’t go around indiscriminately killing Persians. In **v.2** the writer told us precisely what type of people the Jews were able to avenge themselves on. Write the phrase here:

“to lay hands on _____”

- The same verse also eludes to a certain unseen help that came their way. Write the phrase here:

“no one could stand against them, for _____”

_____”

- It seems that the government itself provided help for the Jews. From **v.3-4** what motivated the politicians to get involved?

- Who was specifically pointed out as being killed by the Jews in **v.7-10**?

- Why do you think that information was important enough so as to list all of their names?

- What was unique about the fate of the plunder from that family?

This story is complicated on so many levels. As always, we will get high-centered if we read it exclusively from a 21st century western viewpoint. It's already perplexing that 500 Persians were reported to have been killed in Susa alone, and a much larger number throughout the country. But then the king turned around and asked Esther what else he could do for her. It's crazy, but it happened!

- In **v.13-17** what two additional things did Esther ask of the king?

You'll remember that the original edict which was crafted by Haman gave permission for the Persians to kill any Jews and seize their property. The Persians had almost a full year's notice to lay their eye on homes, businesses, vineyards, all sorts of property they might like to have for themselves. That type of genocide for profit is almost unthinkable. But once the reversal was in place, the motivation was not the same.

- What phrase from **v.10, 15, 16** was given as a constant reminder to inform us that the Jews were not out for material gain?

- In both the countryside and in Susa, what was the final outcome after the days of avenging themselves on their enemies?

Day 3:

📖 READ Esther 9:20-32 — The Feast of Purim

One of the main purposes of the Book of Esther is to provide a history of the **Feast of Purim** — which is still celebrated to this day. Even in that moment, Mordecai knew that what had just happened was extraordinary and should be commemorated on a regular basis.

- How did Mordecai convey the observance of this new annual feast to all of the Jews living in all the regions of Persia?

- Based on the events in the previous day's lesson, why did some rest and feast on the 14th day and some on the 15th day?

- From the information in **v.22**, write one sentence that describes the purpose of the Feast of Purim:

- From **v.24** and **26** explain how the Feast of Purim got its name.

Day 4:

📖 READ Esther 10:1-3 — The Greatness of Mordecai

These brief three verses of Esther Chapter Ten may seem like an anti-climax, but every great event in history requires an *after-story* — something that lets us know how the events of that time put their mark on history.

- In this case, from these three verses, how would you describe history to have moved on?

- How would you describe the lasting legacy of Mordecai?

The Feast of Purim Today

God had given several feasts to Israel that were intended to commemorate great work He had done in their midst — Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Booths, etc. But this feast was different. It wasn't given by God but was instituted by Esther and Mordecai. That doesn't make Purim unimportant, it just puts it in a different category. Perhaps we could title this category Feasts Commemorating God's Hidden Work from the Shadows!

Today, Purim is one of the most joyous holidays on the Jewish calendar. The Jews participate in a boisterous public reading of the book of Esther. Each time the name of evil Haman is read the children boo or hiss or shake rattles to blot out his name from being heard. People often dress up in costume, deliver baskets of food and drink to friends, give gifts to the poor and eat hat-shaped cookies called Hamantaschen after the villain in the story.

Seeing God's Work from the Shadows

We've been contemplating God's work from the shadows each week. Mostly, we've considered all of the seeming *coincidences* that had to take place for the people of God to be saved.

In this final lesson, we're going to focus on all of the **reversals** that have been imprinted within the story to drive home the point that God is sovereign over all. Even when things seem the most bleak, God is in the business of reversing the trial for His glory.

1. How did God reverse the house and property that originally belonged to Haman?
2. How did God reverse the power and position within the king's palace that originally belonged to Haman?
3. How did God reverse the stigma that originally went along with being Jewish?
4. How did God reverse the original edict against the Jews?
5. How did God even reverse the motivation of the edict from the Persians killing Jews to the Jews defending themselves against their enemies?

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. The greatest theme in the book of Esther is that God often works in the shadows of ordinary life in order to fulfill His promises and enact His purposes. Share something from your own past that seemed ordinary at the time, but that God used for a larger purpose in your life.
2. Share something from a Bible character's ordinary life that God used in an extraordinary way in God's Story of Redemption.
3. Consider something that might be happening right now in your own life, or in your community, or politically that may have God's fingerprints from the shadows.
4. Read **Psalm 7:12-16** and discuss how it relates to this particular story.
5. Finally, share with your group your greatest take-away from your study of the Book of Esther.

REFERENCES

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Women of the Word Bible Studies

The following WOW Bible Studies written by Sue LeBoutillier are available through the **Calvary Chapel Ontario bookstore**, and through our online store at www.ccontario.com.

Old Testament:

- **Genesis** — Divine Design, From Eden to Egypt
- **Exodus** — Divine Deliverance, From Egypt to Sinai
- **Numbers** — The Wilderness Way, From Sinai to the Jordan
- **Joshua** — The Path of Promise, From the Jordan into Canaan
- **Judges** — A Time of Turning
- **Ruth** — Walking with My Redeemer
- **1 Samuel** — The Coming King
- **2 Samuel** — The Reigning King
- **1&2 Kings (Part One)** — Solomon and the House of the Lord
- **1&2 Kings (Part Two)** — Learning from Leaders
- **Esther** — God's Hidden Work from the Shadows
- **Jonah** — The Call of Compassion

New Testament:

- **The Way of Jesus** — The Sermon on the Mount from Matthew
- **Simply Jesus** — The "I AMs" of Christ in the Gospel of John
- **Acts** — Walking in the Spirit, The First Days of the Last Days
- **Galatians** — Finding Grace in a Demanding World
- **Ephesians** — Finding Purpose in a Confused World
- **Philippians** — Finding Joy in a Disjointed World
- **Colossians** — Finding Stability in a Changing World
- **Titus** — While We Wait
- **James** — Real Faith for Daily Life
- **1&2 Peter** — Hope, Holiness and Humility in a Hostile World
- **1,2,3 John** — Light, Love and Logic, Lessons from the Apostle John

