

Bible Studies on

Esther

5 studies

Leaders Notes

Study 1: Esther 1-2 - Appearances

Study 2: Esther 3:1-5:8 - Hatred

Study 3: Esther 5:9-6:14 – The King could not sleep

Study 4: Esther 7-8 - Reversal

Study 5: Esther 9-10 – Celebration

Anthony Elyard

Leaders Notes

Introduction

To give your group a quick introduction to the book of Esther, it is worth watching the Bible Project's video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JydNSlufRIs>

Context

God created the world and it was good. Humanity was the pinnacle of creation, but they sinned and were thrown out of God's presence, from the Garden of Eden. But God promised Abraham that his descendants would be blessed and all the world would be blessed through him (Gen 12:1-3). God's people became the people of Israel but they were enslaved in Egypt (Exodus). But God rescued them and gave them the law to live by and a land to live in (Exodus). Once settled in the land, God raised David to be king (2 Samuel 2). David and Solomon's reigns were blessed by God but both kings were sinful (2 Samuel & 1 Kings).

As punishment for their sin, after Solomon dies, Israel is torn in two (922 BC cf 1 Kings 12):

- Israel, the northern kingdom, is made up of ten tribes (capital Samaria)
- Judah, the southern kingdom, is made up of two tribes (capital Jerusalem)

Israel, from the start, sets up idols to be worshipped to stop the people from going to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. Each king of Israel is evil and does not follow God's ways. God sends prophets to Israel to call them back to Him, but they are ignored. Finally, in 722 BC, God sends Assyria to punish Israel and Israel as a country is destroyed (2 Kings 17).

But there is some hope through Judah.

Judah continues to be led by kings who are descendants of David. Some of these kings like Hezekiah and Josiah are godly and follow the Lord. Many do not. God sends prophets to Judah to call them back to Him. Sometimes they are obeyed but mostly they are ignored. Finally, in 586 BC, God sends the Babylonians to punish Judah and the people of Judah and carried them off into exile (2 Kings 25 cf Deut 28:15, 36,64). God's people are scattered.

The Exile was a turning point in biblical history that forever changed the character of Judaism. Without the temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood and the monarchy, God's people could not function as He had commanded. Esther is in this situation after the Exile. Thus, exiled Jews, focused their religious lives on the study of the Law because that could go with them wherever in the world they went.

But God is still in control of His world. The Persian Empire conquers the Babylonian Empire and the new king, Cyrus, decides to send the Jews home (covered in Ezra and Nehemiah) as promised by God (Jer 30:3). However, not all Jews return home. Some stay in Persia for generations, like Esther and Mordecai. This raises the question, does God look after His people even if they are not in the land of Israel?

This exiled group is called the remnant and their survival brings hope. Back in 2 Samuel 7, God promised David that His throne would be eternal. These promises will be fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. Jesus ultimately deals with the issue that has troubled both Israel and Judah, in fact, what has troubled all humanity: sin. The problem of sin is dealt with by Jesus dying on the cross and rising again. God's people can then come back into His presence, wherever they are.

Esther Bible Studies – Leader Notes

What is the book of Esther about?

The book of Esther is about God, His care for His people and His faithfulness to His promises. Esther, a Jew (from the people of Judah), becomes queen of an evil empire called Persia. But Haman, the second in charge of the empire, wants to destroy all the Jews. The Persian Empire is so big that almost all the Jews in the world are within that empire. Only Queen Esther can save her people but only by risking her life. God uses Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai to save His people in unexpected ways. The Esther story is an example of how at one crucial moment in history the covenant promises God has made were fulfilled.

The big theological question for God's people is their status concerning the covenant they had broken – because they are still in Persia does that mean they are still part of God's people?

Some things to note:

- God is never mentioned in the book of Esther
 - But silence doesn't necessarily mean absence or abandonment
- The book of Esther is never quoted in the New Testament
- The motives and morality of the main characters are rarely made clear, thus leading to the book to seem ambiguous
- So why is the book in the Bible?
- It highlights the challenges we face living in a fallen and ambiguous world
 - The ambiguity of the characters highlights the ambiguity of the Jews living outside of the Promised Land and the ambiguity of living as a Christian when we can't physically see God and are unsure of why things are happening in the world
 - Like Esther and Mordecai, we live in a fallen, pagan world, with no earthly king, no earthly prophet and no earthly kingdom
 - But we have the Holy Spirit, God's word and a spiritual kingdom
- God is there behind the scenes all the way through
 - This is highlighted by the series of coincidences or turning points (that are not coincidences at all, because God is in control) and unexpected reversals
 - God's providence is key in God fulfilling His promises (both then and now)
 - So reversal is the key to the plot of the book of Esther
- The word Jew is used 40 times in Esther (the next highest book has only 9 references)
 - These are God's people but after the exile, they are still not in the promised land
 - Will God still look after His people outside the land?
- Banquet or feast is used 20 times (and only another 24 times in the rest of the Bible)
 - Feasts are used as a literary device to link sections of the book to see the parallels or reversals
- Also, where one sits and what one wears is important for the narrative
 - i.e. Haman and Mordecai switch places and clothing throughout the book

It is important to know the timeline while reading through Esther. The following table helps give the period and historical setting for each section of Esther:

Esther Bible Studies – Leader Notes

Reference	Event	Month	Day	Year of Xerxes's reign	Year
1:3	Xerxes holds his banquets			3	483 BC
2:16	Esther goes to Xerxes	10		7	479
3:7	Haman casts his lots	1		12	474
3:12	Haman issues his decree	1	13	12	474
3:13	Date planned for the destruction of the Jews	12	13	13	473
8:9	Mordecai issues his decree	3	23	13	473
8:12; 9:1	Day upon which the Jews could defend themselves from attack	12	13	13	473
9:6-10, 20-22	Ten sons of Haman executed; the feast of Purim celebrated	12	14, 15	13	473

Source: ESV Study Bible p855

Note:

- ESV uses the name Ahasuerus (Persian) whereas the NIV uses Xerxes (Greek)
- Hughes (amongst others) believes the references are to another king and thus this affects the dates. However, it does not affect the meaning of the book. I have chosen these dates as this appears to be the view of most scholars.
- The gathering for the banquet to plan in 1:3 and the gap in time from 1:3 to 2:16 fits in historically with the Persian planning for an invasion of Greece (480-479 BC)
- Although the book covers ten years, notice that time slows down from chapter 3

Plan for these studies:

The following table gives you a quick overview of the five studies and how they fit together:

Study	Passage	Summary
1	Esther 1-2	Appearances: what the Persian Empire is like
2	Esther 3:1-5:8	Hatred: kill them all!
3	Esther 5:9-6:14	The king could not sleep
4	Esther 7-8	Reversal: save them all!
5	Esther 9-10	Celebration: what God's salvation (kingdom) is like

Esther Bible Studies – Leader Notes

Recommended Commentaries

Two good commentaries on Esther are:

- **The NIV Application Commentary on Esther** by Karen Jobes
- **Teaching Ruth and Esther** by Christopher Ash

Christopher Ash's three tips in studying Esther

- **Avoid moralising**
 - Unless the narrator indicates that they want us to approve or disapprove of something, that may not be the point of what is being said
 - Many actions that people take in the book are morally ambiguous and perhaps deliberately so
- **Seek Christ in Esther**
 - The book of Esther doesn't mention God, but He is there all the way through
 - Very often there's a human figure who in some way foreshadows or has the shape of Christ
- **Read "Jew" in light of biblical theology**
 - ie read Jew as the people of God

Appendices:

Three appendices have been added to help your understanding of the book of Esther.

- **Appendix A**
 - Shows a map of the Persian Empire at the time of the book of Esther
 - This helps to understand the breadth and magnitude and therefore power of the Persian Empire
- **Appendix B**
 - Shows a Bible timeline for the whole of the Bible
 - This helps to see where Esther is in the context of the rest of the Bible
 - The book covers the period from 483BC to 473BC
- **Appendix C**
 - Shows a Bible timeline for the period around the book of Esther
 - This gives a close-up of important events around the time of Esther and thus can see the political and religious context of the book

Esther Bible Studies – Leader Notes

Structure of Esther

The structure of Esther is helpful to see the literary pattern in Esther, which helps understand the book. It also helps in understanding the breakup of the Bible studies.

A chiasmic structure has the outer sections paralleling, moving towards a key central section.

The value of a chiasmic structure is primarily two things:

- The centre of the chiasm is usually the key part of the book (whereas with Western literature generally, the climax is at the end)
- Also, the matching sections show the literary links which may bring out contrasts or developments in the storyline

With my adjustments, this structure is based on Scarlett and Hughes's structures. Also, highlighted are some of the reasons for this break-up and the location of some of the important features of the book. The colourings show the break-up of the Bible studies. This is similar to the Bible Project's chiasm.

A Introduction: the glory of Xerxes (Est 1:1-2)

B Two feasts of Xerxes (Est 1:3-22) king decree 1

C Esther decreed Queen & Persians killed (Est 2:1-23) king decree 2, annals

D First royal decree, Jews fast (Est 3:1-4:17) turning point 1; king decree 3;
Agag

E Esther's first banquet (Est 5:1-8) turning point 2; Queen!

F Second royal decree, Jews celebrate (Est 5:9-14) Zeresh

G The king can't sleep (Est 6:1-3) annals; turning point 3

F' Haman's humiliation (Est 6:4-14) Zeresh; reversal 1

E' Esther's second banquet (Est 7:1-10) reversal 2

D' Second royal decree, Jews celebrate (Est 8:1-17) Esther decree 1; Agag

C' Esther's decree & Persians killed (Est 9:1-17) reversal 3; Esther decree 2

B' Two feasts of the Jews (Est 9:18-32) Esther decree 3

A' Conclusion: the glory of Xerxes and Mordecai (Est 10:1-3) annals

Source:

- Hughes: http://www.epctoronto.org/press/publications_JRHughes/Esther.pdf (p20)
- Scarlett: <https://www.forestbaptistchurch.org/chiasmus-lovers-love-chiasmus/>

Esther Bible Studies – Leader Notes

There is also a similar pattern with the feasts or banquets in Esther:

B Xerxes's banquet for the nobles of the empire (Est 1:3-4)

B Xerxes's banquet for all the men of Susa (Est 1:5-8)

C Esther's coronation banquet (Est 2:18)

E Esther's first banquet (Est 5:1-8)

E' Esther's second banquet (Est 7:1-9)

D' Feasting in celebration of Mordecai's promotion (Est 8:17)

C' The first day of Purim feasting throughout the empire (Est 9:17, 19)

B' The second day of Purim feasting in Susa (Est 9:18)

The feasts introduce the story (1:3-4, 5-8), bound the climax of the story (5:1-8; 7:1-9) and conclude the story (9:17, 18, 19).

Since the book both begins and ends with pairs of feasts, it is striking that Esther also gives not one but two banquets for the king and Haman. So pairs of events are important in the story.

Study 1 – Esther 1-2 “Appearances: What the Persian Empire is Like”

The book of Esther begins in 483BC, in the Persian Empire. This is after the exile of the Jewish people to Babylon. And the Persian Empire has since taken over the Babylonian Empire. A previous Persian king, Cyrus had decided to let the Jews return to Jerusalem (decree in 539BC). But some, like Esther and Mordecai, stayed in Persia. The Persian Empire is the wealthiest and most powerful empire in the world at the time and includes all of Israel.

1. Have you ever had a situation where you wonder where is God? Why doesn't He fix this?

A summary of these chapters is:

- King Xerxes of Persia has a banquet to highlight his wealth
- While drunk, and to impress his male friends, he asks his beautiful wife, Queen Vashti, to parade herself before him and his friends
- She refuses and is axed as queen. A search for a new queen leads to Esther, a beautiful Jewish girl who keeps her Jewishness a secret.
- Her cousin and guardian, Mordecai, discloses a plot to kill the king (and this is recorded in the annals – the kings' book of important things)

Read Esther 1

2. What do you think we should take out of this picture of this lavish banquet that the king is throwing and all the detail given?
 - *It's way over the top*
 - *The king rules 127 provinces and he shows off his wealth for 180 days*
 - *And therefore highlights his power while having a massive banquet*
 - *But it is also incredibly superficial*
 - *The king looks like he has it all*
 - *He wants to show off his beautiful wife to his drunk friends*
 - *A living trophy of his power and glory*
 - *But in v12, Queen Vashti refuses to come at the king's command – she is very brave*
 - *He's having a banquet to show off his wealth and power, and she says no!*
 - *Is the king worthy of respect? No!*
 - *Note: in Persian culture, strangers were not allowed to look at Persian wives*
 - *Also note: historically, the timing fits with Xerxes gathering all his military leaders to plan the invasion of Greece, thus again underlining his embarrassment*
 - *He subsequently lost this invasion in battles from 480-479BC*

3. What does the king do in response to Vashti's refusal?

- *He gets very angry. He's extremely embarrassed*
 - *He is not used to being disobeyed*
- *But he is also a weak leader*
- *The king asks his advisers for advice. He didn't know what to do and therefore is easily manipulated. In the entire book, the king never decides on his own – he always needs someone to tell him what to do.*
 - *He never seeks wise counsel or the truth, but only hears from those who tell him what they think he wants to hear*
- *Presumably 'better' (1:19) to Xerxes means completely obedient!*
- *A decree is proclaimed across the whole empire, that wives are to respect their husbands in all things*
 - *A way over-the-top solution to the issue – his power is brute force*
 - *But the irony is in publicising the decree he publicises his own weakness*
 - *The fear was that Vashti's behaviour would become known to all women – 1:17 (and of course, it would have with the decree!)*
- *He is impulsive and doesn't think through the ramifications of his actions*
- *So he is easily led by those around him, who have worked out how to control him*
- *But this also highlights a culture of fear – the king is impulsive, insecure, all-powerful and never wrong (his decree cannot be reversed)*
 - *Therefore his empire is not a safe place to be*
- *But most importantly for the story, the kings' stupidity and Vashti's brave response sets up a series of events that leads to the unexpected salvation of God's people*

4. Can you respect someone by being told to do it?

- *No. being forced to respect someone is not allowing respect at all*
- *The arrogance to think that a decree can guarantee respect and control of all circumstances*

Read Esther 2

5. How does this king treat women?

- *As sex objects*
- *The fact that the king's servants are all eunuchs and the women are his on-demand also suggests that women are the king's possessions*
- *Notice also that the author never mentions once that Xerxes and Vashti are married (same with Esther)*
- *The empire is not impressive – it is very dark*
- *But whoever impresses the king the most, physically and sexually, will be the new queen*
- *The king only cares about appearances and obedience, not the heart and character*

6. What do we learn of Mordecai and Esther's heritage? Do these specifics remind you of anyone else in the Old Testament?

- *They are both Jews (2:5), of the tribe of Benjamin (2:5) and descendants of Kish and Shimei (2:5)*
- *King Saul was also a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin, son of Kish (1 Samuel 9:1-2), whose descendant was Shimei (2 Samuel 16:5)*
- *The passage also highlights that the Jews are in exile (2:6) – this is the context of the book*

7. How many names does Esther have? Why might this be significant?

- *Hadassah is her Jewish name (2:7) and Esther is her Persian name (2:7). This is a derivative of the name of the Babylonian goddess of love, Ishtar*
 - *Interestingly, Hadassah means Myrtle tree, which seems associated with rest and peace (see Zech 1:10-11)*
- *This is significant because Esther will struggle with her identity in two worlds – the world of God's people and the world of the enemies of God's people (members of the empire)*
- *But Esther also listens to advice and seems to be able to discern wise advice*
- *And just like the empire values, all we otherwise know about Esther is her appearance*
- *It appears that Esther has sold out to the culture*
 - *At this point*
 - *Feminists hate her and love Vashti*
 - *Religious conservatives hate her because she is not like Daniel who obeys all the Jewish laws about what to eat and who to marry, while still under threat of death in Babylon*
- *But what else could she do? The book is asking us to struggle with ambiguity.*

8. Why do you think Mordecai and Esther won't reveal their ancestry?

- *Likely because of fear (although the author does not reveal the real motive)*
- *There are people in the empire who are hostile to God's people*
 - *In 3:1-4, it seems Mordecai knew this (and this certainly turns out to be true)*
- *And Mordecai checks on Esther's welfare every day (2:11)*
- *Remember, Esther has been taken by force into a harem (like the Jews were taken by force into exile) – 2:8*

9. So what is going on? What is God doing?

- *Esther is made queen (2:17), but why?*
- *It's wrong to think just because she is queen means she is powerful (Queen Vashti wasn't)*
- *What it does mean is that she has a measure of access to the king*
- *We also learn that Mordecai once saved the king's life*
 - *This is recorded in the king's book of annals (his favourite items about himself and his empire)*
- *God is setting things up for the rest of the book*
- *Remember also Psalm 2 – God is in control of all the kingdoms of the world*

10. Can you relate to some of the same issues as Esther? How?

- *You could perhaps discuss things like materialism, the focus on appearance etc*
- *Ambiguity is also an issue – as a Christian, how far should you assimilate into a worldly culture?*
 - *Unlike Daniel, Esther shows no concern for dietary laws and conceals her identity (which Mordecai insists on)*
 - *She has sex with a Gentile she is not married to (albeit in a situation of great pressure)*
 - *But the text is silent on these issues (Esther is not exonerated or condemned)*
 - *The ambiguity highlights what Jews would feel living outside the Promised Land – are we God's people or not?*
- *So based on how they live, you could ask are they God's people or not?*
 - *The answer in Esther is that being part of God's people is not based on what you do (because Jesus has done everything to save us by dying on the cross and rising again)*
 - *And yet He doesn't let us off the hook to live however we want (later Esther has to step up, at the risk of her life, and identify herself as one of God's people)*
 - *Regardless of their character or motives or faithfulness to God, God uses the decisions of Esther and Mordecai for His purposes*
- *But it is also a world led by anxious, insecure and flawed people*
 - *The temptation is to become part of the world with its enticements*
 - *A world that is obsessed with appearances and self-absorbed*
 - *Externals matter more than character*
 - *What you have matters more than who you are*

Esther Bible Studies – Leader Notes

- *Without divine revelation, the human experience is inherently ambiguous and cannot always be perfectly understood*
- *But God is always present although He is invisible*
 - *God is in control but you have to look carefully to see Him and trust His word*

11. Read Matthew 20:25-28. What does Jesus model that is different to the Persian empire?

- *Servant leadership*
 - *Matthew 20:25-28 describes how Jesus wants us to live – through servanthood*
 - *Remember how Jesus uses His power, to die for us, in an act of servant leadership, an act of a perfect leader even with absolute power*
 - *So be worthy of the personal power you wield*
 - *Also, in a similar situation in John 17:14-19, Jesus prays for protection from the devil (ie their salvation), not a change in the circumstances*
- *And He offers salvation to all, while we are still sinners (Romans 3:23), in the ambiguity of our lives*
- *Actually, God wants you (the church) to be His spouse (Revelation 21:2)*
 - *He wants an intimate relationship with God's people, with you*
- *Jesus gives up everything for you, not because you're lovely, but to make you lovely*
 - *And Christ shows His genuine love by sacrificially dying in your place*
- *And if you understand that Jesus's heart delights in you (shown by His actions) you can be free from the world's definition of beauty*
- *What Jesus has done and the model He offers gives us the motivation to live and the model to live by*
 - *Motivation: Jesus' salvation shows our value and gratitude for this is motivating*
 - *Model: servant leadership*

Summary

These two chapters set up the context for the remainder of the book: an evil empire, ruled by an all-powerful idiot, surrounded by yes-men, and who see women as objects. But it is an empire with a strong hint of fear and a reason to keep your place in the people of God a secret. It is an ambiguous world for one of God's people, a world like ours now. But a world that God controls and that Jesus has already saved us from. It is a world of opportunity for the Gospel.

Study 2 – Esther 3:1-5:8 “Hatred: Kill them all”

Last time we saw what an evil empire looks like: self-absorbed, focused on appearances and wealth. It is difficult to know how to live as a Christian in a world like this. In this study, we'll look at the hatred of Haman for the Jews. He hates them so much he wishes to kill them all, and he has the power to make this happen. But what does Esther do, as a believer, in response to this?

1. How do you think God uses you in the roles that you have? ie at home; work/school/education; in the community etc

A summary of these chapters is:

- Haman (the new second in charge in Persia) hates the Jews and when Mordecai refuses to bow to him it makes him so angry that he plans genocide
- Esther is in a position to try to stop this at the risk of her life - Will she do it?

Read Esther 3-4

2. Does Esther have a religious role?

- *No, she is a secular queen*
- *But who does God use to restore His people after the exile?*
 - *Ezra – a teacher of the Law (Ezra 7:10)*
 - *Nehemiah – an urban planner (Nehemiah 2:17)*
 - *Esther – a court official in a pagan palace (Esther 2:17)*
- *Without all three, God's people would not exist*
- *God uses people like Joseph, Nehemiah, Daniel and Esther in key secular roles*
 - *Believers everywhere have a role in His plan*

3. What do we learn about Haman?

- *He is the king's second in command (3:1) – ironically right at the point where we expected Mordecai to be favoured*
- *He is an Agagite (3:1)*
 - *This is important because it is outlined five times (3:1; 3:10; 8:3; 8:5; 9:24)*
 - *We'll see that this links the Jews of the diaspora (those living outside of Israel) with the covenant God made with His people*
- *He hates the Jews (3:6) and Mordecai not bowing brings his hatred to the surface*
- *Note: The royal officials are commanded to give him honour (3:2) – does this imply he doesn't deserve it?*

Esther Bible Studies – Leader Notes

4. Why do you think he hates the Jews so much?

- *There is a history*
- *Haman is an Agagite (a descendant of Agag)*
 - *By highlighting this, the author is making the book of Samuel a backdrop to the book of Esther*
- *Recall Exodus 17:8-15 & 1 Samuel 15*
 - *Exodus 17:8-15*
 - *The Amalekites were the first people to try to kill the Israelites after they escaped from Egypt*
 - *Because they attacked God's people, God promises to destroy them all and until then they will perpetually be at war (vv14-15; Deut 25:17-19)*
 - *1 Samuel 15*
 - *The king of the Amalekites in Saul's day was Agag*
 - *Saul and Agag go to war and Saul wins*
 - *Here, Saul disobeys God by not killing all the prisoners and not taking any plunder (vv8-9)*
 - *This disobedience ultimately leads to the loss of Saul's kingship (v26)*
- *So the author is making a point here about a descendant of Saul against a descendant of Agag again!*

Parallels between Saul and Esther include:

Saul	Esther
May lose your position to another (1 Sam 15:28)	Vashti's position lost to another (1:19)
Kish and Benjamin (1 Sam 9:1)	Kish and Benjamin (2:5)
Saul is good-looking (1 Sam 9:2)	Esther is good-looking (2:7)
All people love his appearance (1 Sam 10:24)	All those who saw her loved her (2:15-17)
Subservience to a protective father (1 Sam 9:3-4)	Subservience to a protective guardian (2:10-11)
Passive reaction to women (1 Sam 9:11-13)	Passive reaction to royal courtiers (2:15)
Humbly declines to reveal selection for reality (1 Sam 10:16)	Submissively declines to reveal her national identity (2:10)
Challenge to take the initiative in response to a national threat (1 Sam 10:27)	Challenge to take the initiative in response to a national threat (4:10-11)
Humbly silent when scoffers dismiss his ability to deliver victory (1 Sam 10:27)	Warned not to be silent in response to a threat (4:14)
Told that all Israel's eyes are on him and his house (1 Sam 9:20)	Warned you and your house could be lost (4:14)

5. What is the impact of this hatred?

- *Recall that Mordecai does not bow to Haman (Esther 3:2)*
 - *We are not told exactly why but why do you think?*
 - *Perhaps he knew Haman was an Agagite*
 - *Perhaps he just saw Haman as an evil man and not worthy of respect*
 - *Perhaps he would not bow down to any man because of his belief in Yahweh*
 - *This triggers unexpected but massive consequences*
- *3:13 – we see a trilogy of genocidal terms: destroy, kill, annihilate*
- *Haman is determined to wipe all the Jews from the face of the earth*
- *He has the power to do it and almost all Jews are within the Persian Empire*
- *To get his way:*
 - *He is not specific – “a certain people” (3:8)*
 - *He lies, saying they don’t obey, whereas Mordecai had saved the king’s life (3:8)*
 - *He bribes the king, promising great wealth (3:9)*
 - *Sounds like Satan in the garden!*
- *And the king doesn’t even ask who is to be killed!*
- *But the people of Susa are bewildered, they don’t understand the depth of this hatred (3:15)*

6. What is the response of the Jews? Of Mordecai?

- *Mourning, fasting, weeping, lamenting (4:3)*
- *For Mordecai it is the same (4:1-2) but he also approaches Esther*
 - *What Mordecai does and what happens to him recalls Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel 2:6-10. Those in the dust heap will be exalted. God is in control.*
- *He asks Esther to approach the king and beg for mercy*
 - *But Esther knows if the king doesn’t grant her permission to see him, she will be put to death*
 - *Also, he hasn’t asked to see Esther for 30 days – is there something wrong?*
 - *And given his character, he has to have been sleeping with other women during this time*
 - *He seems to only value her appearance and her body*

Esther Bible Studies – Leader Notes

7. But Mordecai answers Esther’s objections in 4:13-14. Why does he say what he says?

- *Mordecai says four things:*
 - *You won’t survive either*
 - *Deliverance will come from another place if you don’t stand up*
 - *You and your father’s family will perish*
 - *Who knows, you may be in your position just for this event?*
- *Why does he say these four things?*
 - *The first is pretty straightforward (she is a Jew too and people know so someone will tell, to get a favour, and she’ll die as well)*
 - *She may survive if she approaches the king but she certainly won’t if she doesn’t*
 - *Secondly, he is preaching the Gospel to her. The covenant with Abraham and David (Gen 12:1-3; 2 Sam 7; Gal 3:8) means that God will send a Saviour from the line of David, and thus they won’t be wiped out because God is faithful to His promises*
 - *You need to decide whose side you are on (highlighted by the ambiguity of Esther’s actions thus far and her two names)*
 - *He knows God will save His people (if not via Esther then another way)*
 - *So her actions will show where her heart is*
 - *Thirdly, don’t be passive and silent like Saul was*
 - *If you don’t go to the king, you’re an orphan, therefore your family line will end when you die. And even if you live, you’ll from then on be considered only Persian, a traitor, so in effect, your Jewish line will end.*
 - *She must redeem Saul’s failings because the promise of the Amalekite’s destruction has not been fulfilled yet*
 - *Fourthly, this is linked with the idea of deliverance. Perhaps God has set things up for you to be in this position for this particular event. And we know by the rest of the book that this is the case!*
- *So if you risk your life, you **might** lose everything. But if you don’t, you **will** lose everything.*

8. How does God’s power compare to King Xerxes (as outlined in chapter 1)?

- *God is all-powerful and all-knowing and all-wise*
- *God makes His own decisions which are always perfect (needs no advisers)*

Comparison	King Xerxes	God
Dominion	Many nations, 127 provinces (1:1)	The universe (Heb 1:2)
Authority	All his people (1:1)	All creation (Rev 2:26)
Throne	In Susa (1:2)	In Heaven (Rev 22:1-3)
Invitations	Nobles (1:3)	The poor (Mt 22:8-10); All (1 Tim 2:4)
Glory	180 days worth (1:4)	Gives heaven light (Rev 21:18-20)
Wealth	180 days worth (1:4)	All the universe (Rev 21:18-20)
Banquets	187 days and on earth (1:5)	Heavenly banquet (Mt 26:29; Is 25:6)

Read Esther 5:1-8

9. How does Esther respond (4:15-5:8)?

- *She knows Mordecai is asking her to risk everything*
- *She says to get all Jews to fast (implied they pray also) for her*
 - *Why? Because she knows she needs the support and encouragement of her people*
 - *For the first time she identifies with the people of God*
 - *And she knows ultimately her fate is in God's hands (who controls all things)*
 - *She needs more than just human courage (she needs God's favour)*
- *She accepts her fate and will try to see the king and persuade him*
 - *She has the strength and courage to act, regardless of the cost (4:16)*
 - *There is no guarantee for her safety (she is vulnerable), only courage to act*
 - *There is danger in being in the palace (the last queen was too bold)*
- *She comes up with a plan: two banquets*
 - *The first presumably to get the king onside (5:4-7)*
 - *The second to make her request (5:7)*
 - *She seems to understand what will appeal to the king*
 - *Esther is now taking over from Mordecai as the leader of this deliverance*
- *And the author shows Queen Esther stepping up because aside from when she first becomes queen (2:22), 13 out of the 14 references to Queen Esther are from chapter 5 onwards eg 5:2*
 - *Esther is now acting like the queen that she is*
 - *She has dignity and is smart and has faith (requests fasting)*
 - *She now identifies herself with the people of God*
 - *She lives in the palace but doesn't identify with it anymore. Therefore, the palace becomes a tool to serve God (and His people) with*

10. How is identity gained if not from the world?

- *Esther has beauty she didn't even earn (by grace, she was born that way)*
- *But she worked hard with her talents (talents God gave her - grace)*
- *From God*

11. Is Esther an example for us to follow?

- *Not really – there is something more important to see*
- *If she is only an example, any changes in you may not last because your motivation may be because of guilt or legalism*

12. So who is Esther a signpost to and why?

- *To Jesus*
- *We owe Him everything*
- *Esther saves her people by two things*
 - *Identification – with her people (the Jews), risking her life*
 - *Mediation – the role as queen meant she could mediate*
- *So the favour she gained from the king was passed onto her people as well (imputed)*
- *With Jesus*
 - *He identified with us as humanity by becoming human*
 - *And He could then mediate between God and us*
 - *But not at the risk of His life, rather at the **cost** of His life (5:1 resurrection link??)*
- *Therefore, He is the ultimate beauty, the living in the ultimate palace, with the ultimate glory*
- *His death shows that you are valuable to Him and it secures your future with Him in heaven and thus it changes your identity (from the world to God's people)*
- *Therefore, it highlights your real worth and puts everything else into perspective*
- *And therefore, you are then free to risk everything to serve God*

13. How should we live in light of this teaching in Esther and our identity in Jesus?

- *The Gospel confronts us with the decision to continue to live as pagans or to identify ourselves with God's people*
- *Our choices define who we are and with which people we identify*
- *This can give us purpose for great things and highlights our hope beyond death*
- *But our choices aren't often as dramatic as Esther's*
- *Regardless, God's purposes are greater than ours*
- *Like Esther, we too need a transformation of ourselves so that we no longer live as pagans*
- *1 Peter 4:12-19 talks about a similar situation to Esther's that Christians face*
- *"And who knows but that you have come to your (royal) position for such a time as this?"*

Summary

God has given us the gifts, talents and opportunities that we have. Each day we have a choice as to what to do with them: to serve the world and ourselves or to serve God and His people. This is the challenge of the book of Esther.

Study 3 – Esther 5:9-6:14 “The king could not sleep”

This is the climax of the book of Esther. You can feel the tension rising. What is going to happen when everything looks to be going so badly?

Chapter 1 occurred in the third year of Xerxes' reign, chapter 2 in the seventh year and from 3:12 we're into the thirteenth year of his reign. The author is slowing down the pace of the book. This is usually done to highlight something important. Chapters 5-7 slow right down and happen all within two days. And we get to see what Haman is thinking. He plans to kill all the Jews but can Esther and Mordecai stop this?

1. Have you ever missed out on being honoured for something good that you did? How did that feel?

A summary of these chapters is:

- Haman decides to kill Mordecai, based on the advice of family and friends
- However, the king decides to honour Mordecai for saving his life
- And thus Haman, who thought the honouring must be for him, has to honour Mordecai

Read Esther 5:9-6:14

2. What do we learn about Haman in this passage?
 - *He is egotistical and completely self-absorbed*
 - *He cannot think that anyone else would be honoured except for himself*
 - *To kill Mordecai he builds a pole 50 cubits high (25 metres) – 5:14*
 - *The pole is as big as his ego! And he wants to kill Mordecai as a public spectacle*
 - *The honours that he asks for are almost a claim to the throne (to be like the king)*
 - *5:11 literally says he was counting the glory of his wealth*
 - *Once again, a person with evil motives gets bad advice*
 - *Even with all his power, wealth and influence, he is still not happy (5:13)*
 - *This parallels Ahab and Jezebel when Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16) – with the same result: Jezebel suggests he should kill Naboth (and he does!)*
 - *His need for honour and respect outweighs the value of human life, and this is particularly ironic because he doesn't deserve this honour and respect*

3. So what happens to Mordecai?

- *Instead of being executed, Mordecai is honoured*
- *It seems that even with this slight of not being rewarded for saving the king's life, Mordecai still serves him faithfully*
 - *Again, even with his loyal service, it took five years before Mordecai was honoured and it was only by chance in the end*
- *It is Haman who must lead this honouring*
- *This is one of the great reversals of the book (Haman expected to be honoured but had to instead honour his hated enemy, Mordecai)*
- *Haman is in grief (6:12)*
- *This honouring, although temporary here, will become permanent by the end of the book (8:15). Mordecai was crying throughout the city (4:1) and now he is honoured throughout the city (6:11). Mordecai was wearing sackcloth and ashes (4:1) and now wears royal robes (6:11).*

4. How does Haman's wife Zeresh's advice change?

- *Her advice completely reverses*
- *Firstly, she suggests that Haman execute Mordecai (5:14)*
 - *Then go and enjoy the banquet – violence is nothing to these people!*
- *Secondly, she is a prophetess of doom (6:13)*
 - *Since Mordecai is a Jew and he has started your downfall, you're doomed she says of Haman! And she is right.*
 - *It's like she knows the history that tells of the fall of the Amalekites and God's power*
- *God has a plan for His people and continues to be with them*

5. The key turning point in the book of Esther is when ‘poor’ Xerxes cannot sleep. Why would Xerxes read the annals? Is there anything deeper going on?

- *He reads the annals, the book about the great deeds of his kingdom (Esther 6:1)*
 - *Reinforcing his egotistical behaviour*
- *And where does he turn to?*
 - *An event that happened five years ago*
 - *He has forgotten to reward Mordecai*
- *This shows, as well as many other instances, that God is in control of the events that lead to the salvation of His people*
 - *The king couldn't sleep and decided to read the annals, turned to the page that involved Mordecai and hadn't rewarded him then*
 - *This is all on the night before Mordecai is to be executed (not that the king knew)*
- *There are too many coincidences to be a coincidence*
- *This is a pivotal point and since it is such a random thing, the author takes the focus away from human action*
- *This makes the point that no one in the story, not even the most powerful person in the empire, is in control of what is about to happen – only God is*

6. So did Haman ask for the wrong thing? (see 6:7-9)

- *In one sense no*
- *He wanted to be honoured by the one person he saw as above him*
- *For him, this is the ultimate assurance of his worth*

7. What did he do wrong?

- *His motives were all selfish*
- *But what he also did wrong is to look for glory through the wrong king*
 - *There is a better king than Xerxes*
 - *The ultimate King, the Creator of all the universe, came to earth, stripped Himself of His glory, and the cross stripped Him of His Father's love and approval*
- *He reversed places with us*
- *Knowing He did this shows the goal to be self-forgetful*
- *To know He died humbles and to know He had to die affirms the worth of those He died for*
- *Seeing Him do this gives the motivation and strength to serve Him*

8. In what ways does God shape life for good?

- *Beneath the surface of human decisions and actions is an unseen and uncontrollable power at work, which can be neither fully explained nor thwarted*
- *That power is God*
- *Regardless of how circumstances appear, God is ruling history according to the covenant He made with God's people*
- *We don't live in the Garden or in Heaven where God is physically present but He is still ruling and controlling the world*
- *Philippians 3:20-21 we are like the exiles in Persia, citizens of another place, that place being heaven*

9. What circumstances did God use to bring you to Himself?

- *This is ultimately the most important event of your life*

Summary

God is in control of all things. We see this in the lives of the main characters in the book of Esther. So many small things happen to lead to God's planned outcome, the salvation of His people. We don't always know what God is doing but we do always know His goal is to love.

Study 4 – Esther 7-8 “The Reversal: Save them all”

Haman plans to kill all the Jews because of his hatred of Mordecai. But Esther comes up with a plan to stop Haman. Esther’s plan is coming together in a stunning reversal of what Haman expected.

1. Can you describe a great reversal in your life?

A summary of these chapters is:

- Queen Esther pleads with the king to save her people
- The king’s eyes are opened and he has Haman killed
- Mordecai replaces Haman as the second in charge of the empire
- Queen Esther and Mordecai come up with a plan to reverse Haman’s decree, thus saving the Jews
- There is a great celebration

Read Esther 7-8

2. What tactics does Esther use to help get the king’s favour?
 - *It is a dangerous task to accuse Haman without incriminating the king*
 - *She invites the king to eat at her home*
 - *This has cultural and emotional significance*
 - *This is in effect saying “I want a relationship with you”*
 - *So she has two banquets*
 - *Obviously, this is the sort of thing the king loves*
 - *She wants him to be in a really good mood before she asks her request (remembering that she can be killed by the king for any offence – real or imaged)*
 - *This will give her the best chance of the king granting it*
 - *Particularly since it is against an official he favours and it could cost Esther her life*
 - *Three times in chapter two she wins the favour of those around her (2:9, 15, 17)*
 - *So she knows how to do this*
 - *So three times she asks for a request based on “If she has found favour” (5:8; 7:3; 8:5)*
 - *Esther is wise and states her case in three points:*
 - *Firstly, a premise: “If I have found favour” (7:3)*
 - *You chose me as queen*
 - *You gave me your heart*
 - *Secondly, the petition: “Save my life”*
 - *This leads to shock for the king and Haman*
 - *And because of the premise, an assault on the queen is an assault on the king*
 - *Finally, the explanation: my people are about to be annihilated*
 - *Therefore, so am I*

- *The king's response: who did this?*
 - *He doesn't see the link to Haman*
- *But now the king has a problem*
 - *He didn't do his due diligence - by looking at the implications of the decree*
 - *But he blames Haman*
- *Notice now that in chapter 7 Esther is referred to five times as Queen Esther – when she fights for her people she is behaving like a queen*
- *She also frames her request by responding with the king's phrases, and includes herself with the Jews, grouping her fate with her people's*
 - *What is your petition? (7:2) – “grant me my life – this is my petition” (7:3)*
 - *What is your request? (7:2) – “And spare my people – this is my request” (7:6)*
- *She gets the king to be angry at this horrible situation (7:4) before revealing who did it (7:6)*
 - *Like Nathan with David (2 Samuel 12)*

3. What reminds us of the seriousness of the situation?

- *Twice Esther reminds us that her people are going to be “destroyed, killed and annihilated” (7:4; 8:11)*
- *What sort of an evil person is Haman?*

4. How does the king solve his dilemma and what is the outcome for Haman?

- *The king is responsible for the decree but needs to save face*
- *Haman solves the king's dilemma by falling on Queen Esther*
- *Therefore, he is to be put to death*
 - *No one can be alone, let alone touch any of the king's women*
- *Haman is impaled on the massive pole he had built to kill Mordecai (the man who had saved the king) – 9:9*
 - *Recall Deut 21:23 (anyone hung on a tree is cursed by God Himself)*
 - *And Gen 12:3 (anyone who curses God's people will be cursed)*
- *Curiously, Harbona knew all about the pole and why Haman had built it and yet says nothing until Haman's fate is sealed*
 - *This highlights the culture of people-pleasing and fear (9:9)*
 - *And also how hated Haman was (think back to how people had to be ordered to bow – 3:2)*
- *He is terrified but not repentant*
- *Ironically, he falls before Queen Esther (7:8), which Mordecai would not do to him (3:5)*

5. What do we learn about the king?

- *He is stupid and self-absorbed*
 - *He can't even remember a decree to kill every one of one race (7:5)*
- *And he is just like Haman*
- *His fury subsided after he had someone killed (7:10 cf 5:14)*
- *Where did this fury come from?*
 - *Because someone had threatened something of his (even unknowingly) – pride*
 - *He doesn't care about the Jews (people of his kingdom)*
- *His instability is why there is so much fear in his court*
- *So unlike Jesus our King*

6. But how do Queen Esther and Mordecai (now second in charge in the kingdom) get around the kings' decree to kill all the Jews when a decree cannot be revoked?

- *Haman is gone, but the evil he started still exists*
- *Mordecai now has the signet ring (the sign of the king's authority) – 8:2, 10 cf 3:10, 12*
- *They send a second decree*
 - *On the same day (13th day of the twelfth month of Adar cf 3:13), the Jews can defend themselves and kill anyone who threatens them without retribution and plunder their property (8:12)*
 - *They empower the people affected by the first evil decree and they are given the same terms of destruction that had been pronounced against them*
- *Note: the fact that any decree from the king cannot be revoked highlights that the king sees himself as infallible (when we know he is anything but this)*

7. What are the results of Queen Esther's request to the king? (see 8:15-17)

- *Mordecai is now permanently in royal robes (8:15) cf his mourning (4:1)*
- *Susa celebrates (8:15), where before they were bewildered by Haman's decree (3:15)*
 - *This shows how out of touch Haman and the king were with the people*
 - *And how personal the animosity was from Haman to the Jews*
- *The Jews celebrated with joy and feasting (8:16-17), effectively celebrating their salvation cf their mourning (4:3)*
- *And many people from other nationalities become Jews (8:17)*
- *Ultimately, Queen Esther completes what her ancestor, Saul, should have done – the annihilation of the Amalekites, the enemies of God's people*
 - *This is the destruction of a people who wanted to destroy God's people*
 - *The words of the second decree match the Lord's words through the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 15:2-3 cf Exodus 17:8, 14-16 and cf Esther 8:11-12)*
 - *The difference being, however, to only act on those who were going to attack them!*

Esther Bible Studies – Leader Notes

So we see a sequence of great reversals in the book of Esther:

Chapter 3	Chapter 8
3:10 – the king gives Haman his signet ring	8:2 – Mordecai is given the same ring
3:12 – Haman summons the king’s scribes	8:9 – Mordecai summons the king’s scribes
3:12 – letters written and sealed with the ring	8:10 – letters written and sealed with the ring
3:13 – the Jews, even women and children, are to be killed in one day	8:11 – the enemies of God’s people, even women and children, are to be killed in one day
3:14 – Haman’s decree was displayed publicly as law	8:13 – Mordecai’s decree was displayed publicly as law
3:15 – couriers go out in haste	8:14 – couriers go out in haste
3:15 – the city of Susa is bewildered	8:15 – the city of Susa rejoices

8. What does God do ultimately about the problem of evil, the great reversal of sin?
- *In Esther, both a decree of death and a decree of life come in the king’s name (the king’s signet ring is used for both)*
 - *Evil is always against God (sometimes indirectly through His people). In this case, Haman’s evil does not prevail*
 - *But we all have sinned (Rom 3:23), maybe not like Haman, but we all deserve death because of our sin (Rom 6:23)*
 - *This is God’s decree of death*
 - *But Jesus conquered evil by His death on the cross and His resurrection confirms this*
 - *By identifying with His people, Jesus was able to pay the price for their sins*
 - *This is God’s decree of life*
 - *God cannot simply revoke the decree of death determined at the Garden of Eden*
 - *It is the just punishment for sin (unlike the king’s first decree)*
 - *But He issues a counter decree and takes the punishment on Himself (unlike Xerxes)*
 - *So there is perfect love and perfect justice*
 - *However, we don’t see the full outcome of salvation and judgement until Jesus’s second coming, when justice is fully determined*
9. How does knowing that God is in control of all things and has conquered sin impact us?
- *We as His people can go directly to Him without fear and trust Him*
 - *We should identify with His people as He did at the cross*
 - *Even when we see injustice, we know God is in control and ultimately all will reap what they sow (Gal 6:7)*

Summary

In these chapters, the solution to the first decree is determined. Although a horrible situation, the story of Esther and her people is a signpost to the ultimate solution to the problem of evil that Jesus fulfils and triumphs over.

Study 5 – Esther 9-10 “Celebration: what God’s salvation is like”

Because of the decree from Esther and Mordecai, the Jews are empowered to fight any who attack them. God fulfils His covenant promises through His providence (through His control of events). Because the Jews are delivered from genocide, they survived to bear the Messiah, through whom all the nations of the world have been blessed (Gen 12:1-3).

1. Have you ever been saved from a situation you didn’t think you’d get out of? What was your response once it was over?

A summary of these chapters is:

- The decree reverses everything (9:1)
- Now the Jews can defend themselves and they have a great victory over their enemies
- They now celebrate this salvation annually

Read Esther 9-10

2. Why don’t the Jews take any plunder (after all the decree says they can – 8:11)? It is repeatedly mentioned that they don’t take any plunder, see 9:10, 15, 16.
 - *They seem to be using Holy War regulations*
 - *There was to be no personal profit in Holy war because the destroyers were not acting on their behalf but were agents of God’s wrath*
 - *This is not about gaining wealth but about destroying those who oppose God*
 - *It also reverses what Saul does by keeping the best of the plunder which Samuel accosts him for doing (1 Sam 15:18-19)*
 - *The death of the ten sons of Haman (9:7-10) also highlights a connection with Saul and the death of his ten sons (three in 1 Sam 31:2 and seven in 2 Sam 21:7-9)*
 - *Also, although there is permission to kill women and children, none are mentioned as being killed*
 - *In Susa only men are mentioned as killed (9:6, 12)*
 - *However, the final count is referred to in the general sense as enemies (9:16)*

3. So with all this killing, why are the Jews to rejoice?

- *They are to rejoice because the people of God are rescued*
 - *And we are to rejoice because we are the people of God who have been rescued*
- *God is faithful to His promises*
- *Moses was asked by God to write down God's promise to wipe out the Amalekites and he did (Exodus 17:14)*
 - *It has now been fulfilled*
- *Not only are the Jews saved but they are also empowered*

4. Why does the author contrast the two sets of feasts (from chapters 1 and 9)?

- *In chapter 1, Xerxes gives two feasts*
- *In chapter 9, the Jews have two feasts*
- *But the motivation for them is very different*
 - *The first, is to show how good Xerxes is*
 - *The second, is to celebrate their salvation, highlighting how good God is*
- *Note the reversal, see 9:22*

5. What does Purim celebrate?

- *The rescue or salvation of the people of God*
- *The focus is not on the killings but on the rescue*
- *It celebrates that the fate of God's people is not based on Haman casting lots to his gods, but rather on Yahweh the God of the universe*
- *It gives people reassurance*
- *Reassurance that God's people will survive against the powers that want to destroy them*
 - *A record of past deliverance and also a prophecy of future salvation*
- *Purim celebrates a re-identification as God's people, even when they are outside the Promised Land*
- *Now the Jews have rest. But as we know from history, this is a temporary rest. Rest is ultimately through Jesus, and ultimate rest is in heaven.*

6. How has Esther transformed throughout the book?

- *This can be shown by the two references to her father, Abihail*
 - *2:15 – Esther, the Jewish girl Mordecai adopted*
 - *9:29 – Esther, Queen of the most powerful empire in the world*
 - *So she is both Persian and Jewish*
- *But most importantly, she now fully identifies as one of God's people*
- *The ambiguity is now gone*
- *Her partnership with Mordecai was critical (Esther is referenced 55 times and Mordecai 52 times)*
- *She doesn't remain silent like Saul and thus ends up saving her people*
 - *Countering the behaviour of Saul that led to his removal as king*
- *But a key way Esther doesn't change is that she always looks for and takes wise advice (2:10, 15, 20; 4:12-14) – She is wise*

7. What is the upshot of what Esther gains for her people? (see 9:22)

- *Relief (or rest) for her people cf Deut 12:10*

8. What does Daniel or Isaiah promise the Saviour/Messiah will do? (Isaiah 14:3; 28:12; 63:14; Daniel 12:13)

- *Give God's people rest*

9. How does Jesus give us rest?

- *Jesus says He is the Son of Man (Matt 16:13-16)*
- *Therefore, the Jews expected Him to defeat the Romans*
 - *But this would only bring again temporary rest*
- *But Jesus says to love your enemies (Matthew 5:43-44) – what?*
 - *Love the Romans??*
 - *That's a pretty tough ask given that the Romans ruled over the Jews and oppressed them*

10. Jesus dies forgiving His enemies, why?

- *At the cross, Jesus loves His enemies and dies for them*
- *This is the ultimate warfare on our enemies because it brings the ultimate rest*
- *How?*
- *Galatians 3:13 – you are cursed by God if you are hung on a tree*
 - *This is the judgement of God on sin*
- *With grace there is the prospect of permanently destroying an enemy*
- *If there is no sin, there is no enemy*

11. Who are our enemies and how can we have rest from them?

- *Our ultimate enemies are sin, death and Satan*
 - *Only Jesus can save you and this is humbling*
 - *But this also shows that Jesus values you and affirms your worth by dying for you*
- *So what is your real identity?*
 - *In what Jesus has done for you*
 - *The God of the universe thinks you are beautiful and worth dying for*
- *Therefore, enemies cannot touch your real identity*
- *And you can go out into the world and give them what you got from Jesus*
- *If you forgive them, you can turn enemies into friends*
- *And Jesus has done this permanently*

12. What does the book of Esther foreshadow?

- *The deliverance of the Jews in Persia foreshadows the redemption of those from all nations who enter into God's covenant through Jesus the Messiah*
- *The day of death has come and gone and God's people will live*

13. Are we responsible for what we do or is God?

- *God is Sovereign and humans are responsible for their actions, at the same time*
 - *God continually sustains life and rules over the world*
- *Both Esther and Mordecai were critical as God worked providentially to fulfil His covenant to His people exiled in Persia for their sins – but they did have a choice!*
- *God’s pattern is that He wants to involve us in His plans*
- *And here God works powerfully through people in religious or secular roles*
- *God keeps His promises despite the politics of this world*
- *God fulfils His covenant and purposes through His providence (His control of events)*
- *The story of Esther illustrates that human action is important to divine providence, yet God’s triumph in history ultimately does not depend on what we do, but on what He does*
- *And yet, like Esther, if we don’t want to be involved God will achieve His purposes another way*

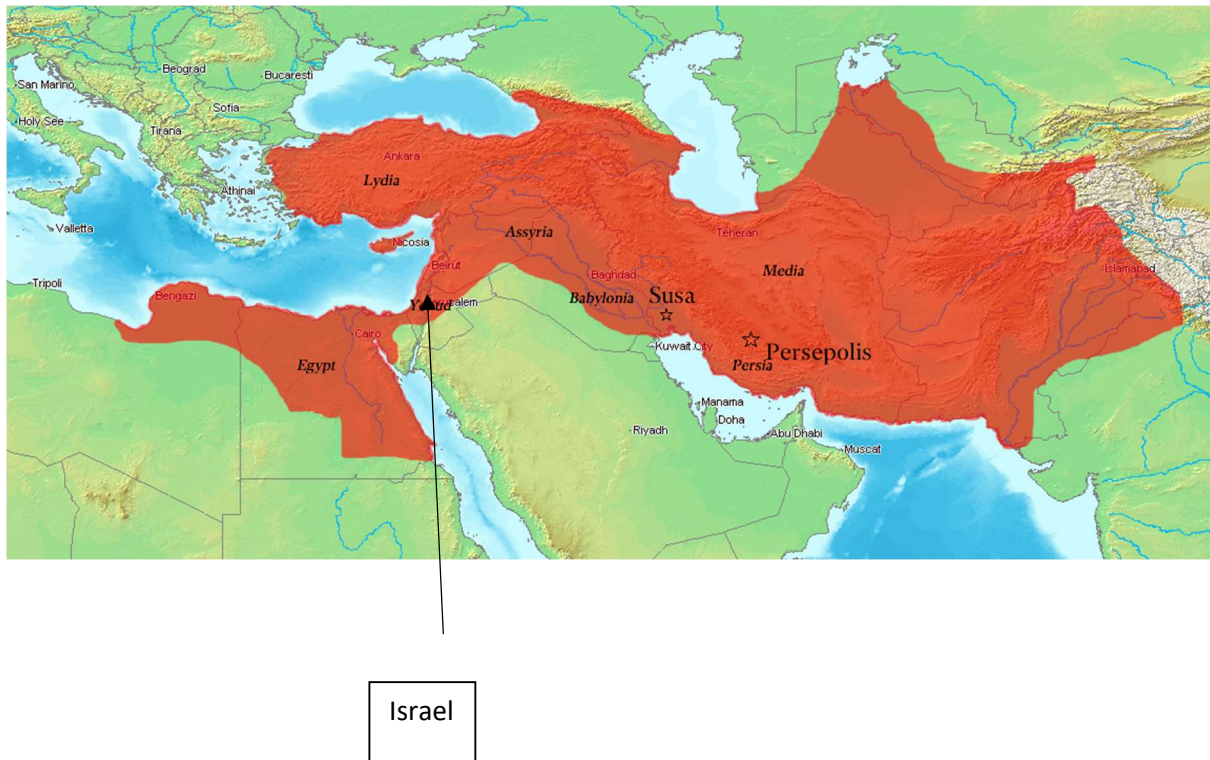
14. Who are our enemies today? How does the book of Esther inform how we are to engage them?

- *The world is hostile to God’s people and life often seems ambiguous*
- *But God is in control (even when you cannot see Him)*
- *In fact, He has already saved us and thus we should celebrate*
- *God’s apparent absence in Esther is similar to what we go through day by day*
 - *However, as we have seen, if we dig a little below the surface, we see that God is very active in bringing about His purposes and watching over His people*
 - *This is also helpful for the Jews to understand, particularly those after the exile, in foreign lands, without the temple*
 - *God directed the events that leads to the salvation of the Jews*
 - *Any one event looked inconsequential in and of itself, but together they formed a chain that led to an awesome outcome*
- *Jewish scholars believe this deliverance without miracles was the reason the Jewish people finally came to rest their faith in the Torah the Word of God, rather than God’s miraculous displays of power*
- *The book of Esther invites its readers to ponder the nature of faith in a world where God is unseen*
 - *Revelation does a similar thing – it is written to assure Christians facing persecution, where even mighty Rome could not frustrate His plans*
- *Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”*
 - *The very definition of faith calls us to a certainty in the unseen reality behind visible events*
 - *And even still, Jesus promises to be with us until the end of the age (Mt 28:20)*
- *It gives people assurance because we are saved by what Jesus has done and not by anything we can do. And He has already done everything needed to save us.*

Summary

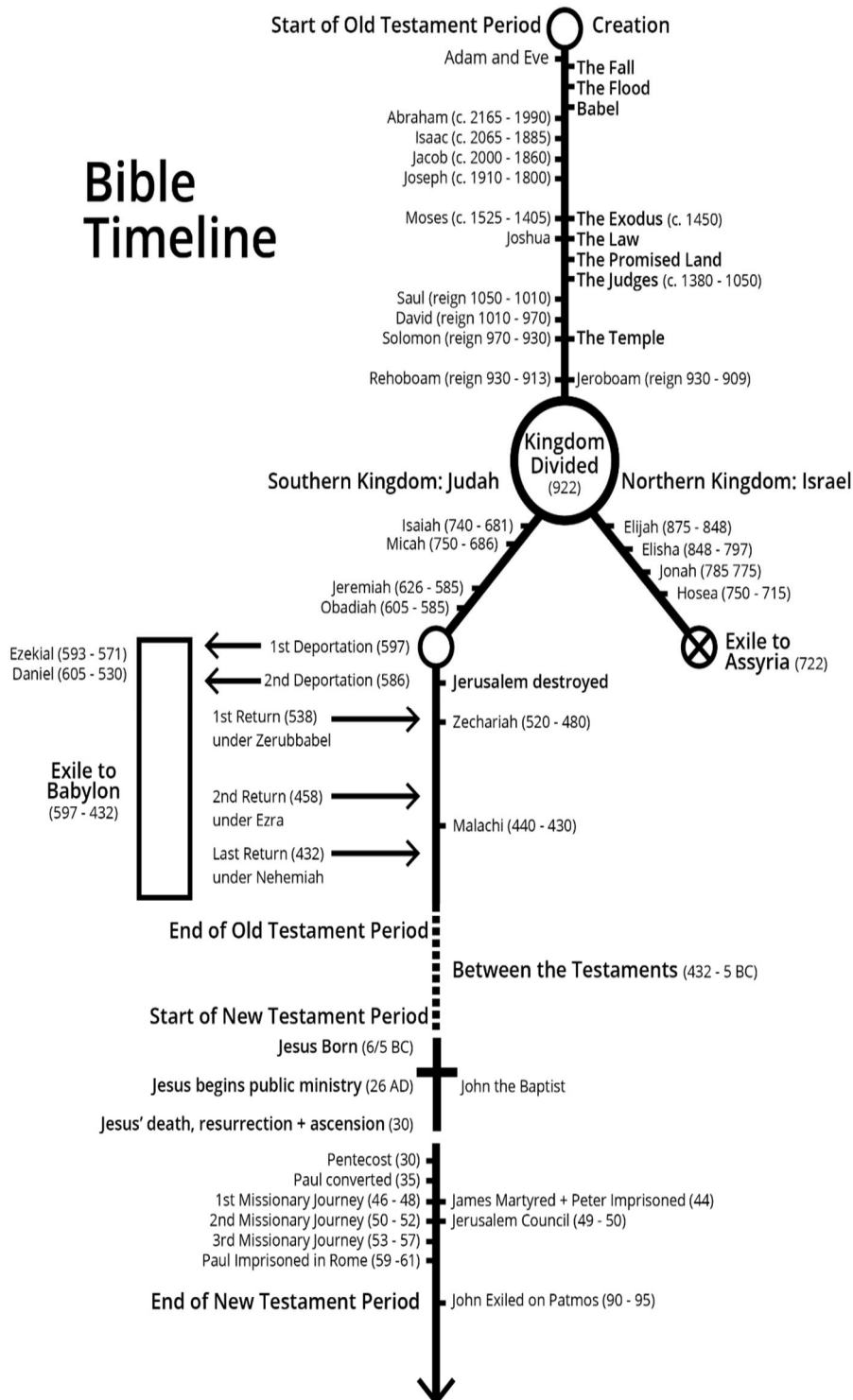
The absence of God's name in Esther is not trying to tell us that God Himself is absent. Rather, it tells us that when God appears to be far away, He is very close. God appears to us, but He appears invisibly and He speaks silently. We need to look closely at ourselves and our actions and identify as one of His people. God wants us to be like Esther and He shows what this ultimately looks like through His Son: one who identifies with His people and is willing to lay down His life for them.

Appendix A – Map of the Persian Empire at the time of Esther (473BC)



Appendix B – The Bible Timeline

Bible Timeline

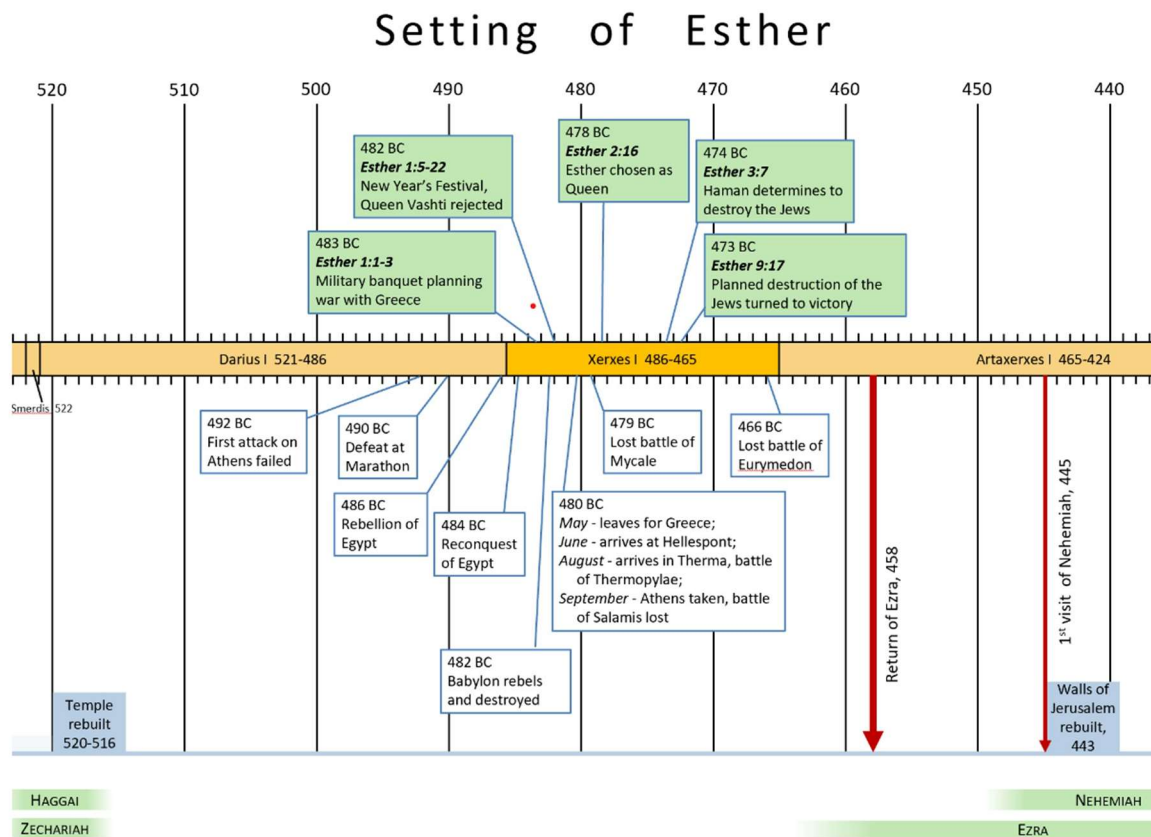


480BC

Esther becomes Queen

Appendix C – Bible Timeline – focusing on Esther

Esther becomes Queen in 480BC, after the decree from king Cyrus (the first Persian king) for the Jews to be able to return from Babylon to Jerusalem (539BC) but before Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's walls (457-445BC).



Source: <https://crossroadsbible.net/2019/01/18/esther-chronology/>

Note:

- The first deportation of Jews to Babylon occurred in 605BC
- The second deportation of Jews to Babylon occurred in 597BC
- The fall of Jerusalem occurred in 586BC