

AN EIGHT WEEK LADIES' BIBLE CLASS

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

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Ladies' Bible Study on Esther | Introduction

The book of Esther is one of the most exciting books in all the Old Testament and is nearly unique in employing a woman as its leading character. The book is set during the period after the Babylonian exile in which the nation of Persia (present day Iran) ruled Judah. Esther is a young and beautiful Jewish girl, orphaned but cared for by her cousin, Mordecai. The Jews dwell at the mercy of their Persian overlords and it seems as if the scheme of salvation and the Jewish race are hanging precariously by a thread every moment. Indeed, the book's plot centers on the near extermination of the race and the blood line to Christ by a bigoted official of the king's court.

AUTHORSHIP

The context of the book gives no indication as to the identity of its author. Tradition grants the honor to Mordecai, using Esther 9:20 as dubious evidence. Alternatively, the book has been credited to Ezra, Nehemiah, Joiakim (Neh. 12:10, 26) and the men of the synagogue. Authorship, of course, matters little, if we accept God's providential oversight in the canon.

Dating the book is just as difficult, although we know that it has to have been written in the last few centuries before Christ. The book of Esther is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament, nor anywhere in the New Testament, and is the only book that has no trace in the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is found, however, in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures made 200 years before Christ. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, was acquainted with the book and considered it authentic and ancient.

CONTEXT

After the sacking of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., the remnant Jews had been scattered throughout Mesopotamia by the Persian government that ascended as Babylon fell. The Jews clung to their religious identity and even their flickering hope of a Messiah who would rescue them. King Cyrus of Persia fulfilled a divine prophecy that allowed the Jews to return to Judah and rebuild their faith in 536 B.C. Thousands of them made the trek, but most simply remained where they were in Persia, rather than take the risk of starting over. It seems that Mordecai and Esther were content to dwell in Persia and not make the trip to the desolated and dangerous land of their ancestors.

Providence and Purim are the major themes of the book, but dozens of other lessons can be gleaned by disciples of Christ. Mordecai persuades Esther that it might have been providence that brought her to a position of prominence at just the right moment to save his people and that to refuse her call was tantamount to rebellion.

The Jewish feast of Purim is born out of the Jews' rescue from Haman's threat as the book concludes.

Overall, the book of Esther reminds the Christian of God's providential care and abiding presence. Our Lord will watch over his people and protect them. Some will fall, but even they are promised a heavenly reward in the end. There is not cause to fear for them that love the Lord.

9. Consider Romans 13:11-14. The word “sobriety” is big enough to include both an aversion to drink and a state of clear thinking. Why would the consumption of intoxicating beverages harm our faithfulness?

10. In what condition was the king when he finally called for his wife to come on the seventh day of the feast?

11. Why did he want Vashti to enter?

12. Was Vashti justified in refusing to come, rebelling against her husband’s headship?

13. When is a wife today justified in disregarding submission to the headship of her husband (Acts 5:29)?

14. Would a husband motivated by the Holy Spirit’s revelation in Ephesians 5:22-33 subject his wife to being a spectacle as the king expected of Vashti? What references in that passage support your answer?

15. What was Memucan’s worry about the queen’s behavior?

16. What kind of influence can you have over younger wives and women by the way you treat your husband (Titus 2:3-5)?

Ladies' Bible Study on Esther Chapter 2 | Lesson Two: Pageant

1. Pride was not the only shortcoming of the King. His wrath also burned powerfully and led him to act capriciously. What do the following passages say in warning about wrath?

a. Prov. 21:24:

b. Prov . 25:28:

c. Eccl. 7:9:

d. James 1:19:

2. What is a eunuch? Name another eunuch from the New Testament.

3. It is obvious then that jealousy and suspicion were common in the marriages of this era. How important is trust to a marriage and what things can do harm to that trust?

4. From what tribe of Israel did Mordecai hail? Two other members of that tribe shared the same name--one was a king and the other was an apostle. Name them.

5. How had Mordecai's family arrived in Shushan?

6. What was Mordecai's relationship to Hadassah, that is Esther? What advantage did she have in Persia in going by a name that was not Jewish?

7. What responsibility do we have to those near us who are orphaned (James 1:27 and 1 Tim. 5:8)?

8. Who was Hegai? What was his opinion of Esther?

9. Why had Esther not revealed her people or family?

10. How much preparation went before the young woman spent her single night with the king?

11. How could God's providence have played a role in the fact that Esther seems to have found favor in the eyes of all those who could assist her?

12. It is now 479 B.C., four years since Vashti's stand as Esther gets her chance to meet the king. How impressed was Ahaseurus with her?

13. Where does Mordecai find himself once Esther becomes king?

14. The event that closes chapter two seems insignificant at first reading, but its inclusion in this record hints at its later importance. What did Mordecai do in service of King Ahaseurus?

15. The abiding lesson of this chapter is that sometimes divine providence brings us to the right place at the right time and gives us an opportunity that we can seize better than anyone else. Using the parable of the good Samaritan as an example (Luke 10:30-36), how could the Samaritan have failed to accept his duty in the moment of need?

16. Why do some fail to seize opportunities to do good (James 4:13-17)?

Ladies' Bible Study on Esther Chapter 3 | Lesson Three: Homage

1. Jewish tradition holds that Haman was a descendant of King Agag (1 Sam. 15:8), but his name and those of his family are all Persian. What honor did King Ahasuerus bestow upon Haman as this chapter opens?

2. What is entailed in paying homage and why did Mordecai refuse to do so?

3. Suddenly, in this progressive, open-minded kingdom, the same problem that had existed in Babylon during Daniel's time has appeared. The Jewish religion with Jehovah as its exclusive monarch and higher authority is coming in conflict with the Persian religion that honored esteemed men and national law as supreme. In the United States, we, too, are blessed with freedom of religion, but sometimes our convictions may come in conflict with national law. Is Mordecai's stand one we should duplicate or disavow?

4. The apostles often found themselves at odds with Jewish authorities while preaching the gospel in Jerusalem. Their responses instruct us today on dealing with situations when men are directing us to do something sinful. How did Peter and John reply when ordered not to preach Jesus anymore in Acts 4:13-20?

5. A case study that is not hypothetical arises then. Two Americans are in Afghanistan where the ruling Islamic Taliban has outlawed the name of Christ. Should the Americans erase his name from their lips to obey the law and save their necks?

6. Was the church cowed into defeatism and fear by the movement against the apostles and their faith (Acts 4:23-33). How did they react?

7. In the very next chapter, the apostles are imprisoned for the same offense. How do they answer the charges against them in Acts 5:29?

8. What happens to our faith and discipleship when we overcome threats against our lives, our livelihoods or our relationships and heed the demands of God rather than men?

- Matthew 10:34-39:

Matthew 10:27-31:

Revelation 2:10:

9. When Haman learned of Mordecai's apparent insult, he was filled with wrath. Why?

10. What do the following passages foretell about Haman?

- Proverbs 29:23:

Proverbs 16:18:

11. List a few things that cause people to be sinfully proud.

- | | |
|----|----|
| a. | d. |
| b. | e. |
| c. | f. |

12. What response did Haman begin to plan because of this Jew's insult?

13. Haman's accusation was that the Jews were different and that they walked to a different beat. How has spiritual Israel -- the church -- inherited this characterization today (1 Peter 2:9, 1 Peter 4:1-5)

14. How could King Ahasuerus consent to such a plan with his own wife being a Jew?

15. How is the scheme of salvation threatened in these events?

Ladies' Bible Study on Esther Chapter 4 | Lesson Four: Resignation

1. What did Mordecai do when he learned of Haman's plotting? The first instance of this practice we find is in Genesis 37:25-35. Why had Jacob torn his clothes and put on sackcloth?

2. What else did the Jews do when they learned of the news in their own provinces?

3. Mourning is generally associated with the death of a beloved person, but in this case, it is over a threat to the people in general. How does the degree of their mourning show a weakness in their faith in God?

4. List a few things that are threatening spiritual Israel -- God's church -- in our age.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

5. When America is attacked or threatened, we are often found mourning over our own earthly nation. How far can we go in our patriotic zeal for America without allowing it to interfere with our true citizenship in heaven (1 Tim. 2:1-5)?

6. What value did fasting possess?

7. Does the New Testament command fasting in the same way that the Old Testament did, making it mandatory at certain times? How does the New Testament deal with fasting (1 Cor. 7:5 and Romans 14:17)?

8. What message did Mordecai send to Esther through Hathach (Esther 4:8)?

9. What kind of attitude should a Christian have toward their “kings” (1 Peter 2:17)?

10. Do we, as Americans, have an earthly king? What do we have? Does it make any difference as far as what we must do in honor of the ruler?

11. On what basis did Esther argue against going in to speak to her husband?

12. This month-long separation of Ahasuerus and Esther was clearly the idea of the king. Today, such long separations are sometimes unavoidable, but ought always to be minimized, according to 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. Why?

13. Mordecai’s reply to Esther dealt with any illusions she might have possessed about her own security as the Jews faced slaughter. How much faith did he have that God would preserve his remnant and the blood line toward the son of David?

13. Mordecai makes one other suggestion about the real reason that Esther had ascended to this position. What is it?

14. What did Esther announce to Mordecai as she prepare to approach the king?

15. How is this spirit required in our lives today when called to face tough challenges (2 Tim. 1:7, Rom. 8:31-39)?

Ladies' Bible Study on Esther Chapters 5-6 | Lesson Five: Petition

1. Esther takes the risk and approaches the king's chamber and her fears are quickly allayed. Once more, she finds favor in the eyes of men. Was it luck or providence? What is the difference between luck and providence?
2. How good and important is it to find favor in the sight of men (1 Tim. 3:7)?
3. What was King Ahaseurus willing to give Esther? Name another king who made the same offer to his stepdaughter when she danced for him.
4. What effect did Esther's invitations have on Haman?
5. Why is it unwise to compliment the beauty of a young woman who is conceited because of her appearance (1 John 2:16)?
6. Did Esther's invitations cure Haman of his insecurity at the sight of Mordecai? Describe his attitude.
7. Zeresh is about as valuable a counselor to her husband as was the wife of Job to hers. What is the recommendation of Zeresh and Haman's shortsighted, yes-men friends?
8. Haman was laying a trap for the destruction of his fellow man. What happened when the enemies of Jesus set traps for him in questions about taxation and adultery?

9. What is said of a person who tries to cause his neighbor to stumble or suffer loss in Proverbs 1:10-18?

10. Unlike Haman, how does Jesus instruct us to treat our enemies in Matthew 5:43-48?

11. What can people do to make themselves our enemies? Should we ever respond in kind (Rom. 12:17-21)?

12. What kept the king awake that night? What was the result of his insomnia?

13. What mistaken assumption did Haman make in Esther 6:6?

14. How do you think Haman felt as he was forced to reward his enemy and parade him through the streets in celebration of the king's honoring him?

15. How does Proverbs 3:31-35 describe the downfall of Haman and the elevation of Mordecai the Jew?

16. Why did Haman's friends suddenly become so pessimistic?

17. Inevitable victory is predicted for this son of God and the same is promised to Christians today. Under what conditions is this true (1 John 5:1-5)?

Ladies' Bible Study on Esther Chapter 7 | Lesson Six: Humbled

1. When we think of relationships between husbands and wives, this scenario strikes us as rather odd. First, Queen Esther wonders aloud if she has found favor in her husband's eyes. She was not sure because she had only seen him once now in the previous month. Is it still desirable for a wife to seek the favor of her husband? What must a wife do to find favor in her husband's eyes (1 Cor. 7:1-4)?

2. Marriage counselors report that most marital strife results from four areas: communication, money, sexuality and the children. In the space below, identify how each of these areas can cause one mate to lose favor with the other.

a. Communication:

b. Money:

c. Sexuality:

d. Children:

3. Read the following proverbs and identify how the wisdom of each can lead wives to find the favor of their husbands.

a. Proverbs 12:4:

b. Proverbs 14:1:

c. Proverbs 19:13:

d. Proverbs 31:10-31:

4. Under a special allowance in the law of Moses, a man could divorce his wife if she lost favor with him. Is this still true in the law of Christ (Matt. 19:3-9)?

5. What did King Ahasuerus stand to lose if Haman's enemies were all destroyed?

6. The Jews were often in bondage of one kind or another, to make clear their need for a deliverer. They were actually in a worse bondage than slavery to another nation, however, and that was bondage to sin. Both premillennial "Christians" and modern Jews possess the same shortsightedness. The chief deliverance we seek is from spiritual slavery to iniquity, not into some worldwide and earthly kingdom. Romans 11:26 says that "All Israel will be saved." Consider the context: How could all Israel be saved (cf. Rom. 1:16)?

7. Read Romans 6:1-23. What is bondage to sin like, in your own words? What is freedom from sin like, in your own words?

8. How are we set free from sin (Rom. 6:17-18)?

9. How shocked do you think Haman was when he realized that Esther was a Jew? Would he have done things differently had he known earlier?

10. What can we learn from Haman's example?

11. What was Haman doing when he fell across the queen's couch? How did the king view it?

12. Eventually, it becomes too late to seek mercy. When will it be too late for man to seek mercy from God? How do we learn the same lesson from Esau (Heb. 11:14-17) and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 2:4-6)?

13. How did Haman die?

Ladies' Bible Study on Esther Chapter 8 | Lesson Seven: Signet

1. Of what day does Esther 8:1 speak? What does it mean that the king gave Esther the house of Haman?

2. What did Esther do with the house of Haman? What did the king give to Mordecai, once he was told that he was related to the king's wife?

3. How did Haman's pride and prejudice outlast him?

4. Consider Exodus 20:4-6 in the ten commandments. How would the idolatry of a Jewish man cause injury to successive generations of his family?

5. How can the following sins outlast us and bring injury to our children and theirs?

Drunkenness:

Adultery:

Greed:

6. What lessons can we learn from Esther's newfound courage to approach her husband without the reservations she had before (Heb. 4:14-16, 2 Tim. 1:7, Rom. 8:31-39)?

7. The king seems very noble and moral now, but if the targeted people had been unrelated to his wife, what would have happened to them?

8. We often feel so close to our physical family that we put them ahead of our spiritual one and even ahead of our principles when a conflict arises? What is true of an elder who will not withdraw from his own wayward relatives (Titus 1:8) or a preacher who will not preach on the sin that his children may practice (1 Tim. 5:21)?

9. What is true of a mother who loves her children so dearly that every problem they face is someone's else's fault (Matt. 10:37)?

10. How did the king hope to reverse the effect of Haman's scheme?

11. Were the Persians still allowed to kill Jews? What could the Jews do now, by Mordecai's decree?

12. Do Christians have a right to defend themselves if physically attacked, considering Matthew 5:38-42?

13. What was the religious effect on Persia of all these events?

14. Explain how these events illustrate Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."

Ladies' Bible Study on Esther Chapters 9-10 | Lesson Eight: Purim

1. Why did so many Persians hate the Jews? Why do people hate the Jews today?

2. Today's spiritual Israel is often hated in the same way, but only when she is as determined to live by faith as the ancient Jews were. Why was Jeremiah the prophet hated (Jer. 1:17-19)?

3. What are some unpleasant truths that Christians are aware of today, but which the world would rather not hear?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

4. What is our responsibility toward those who hate us (Rom. 12:17-21)?

5. List three things that others do which might tempt the Christian to hate them.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

6. Are we permitted to hate our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48)?

7. How had Mordecai's fortunes turned? When will Christians get crowned (2 Tim. 4:6-8)?

8. Were the Jews motivated in this “war” by greed?

9. The Israelites were in a similar position many years earlier when Joshua was their commander. Why did they lose the first battle of Ai (Josh. 7:1-26)?

10. Is God satisfied so long as we do the right thing, even if we have the wrong attitudes or motives (John 4:23-24, 1 Cor. 13:1-3, Heb. 4:11-13)?

11. Judging by the number of Persians killed, how great could the slaughter of the Jews had been if Esther had failed to act?

ANSWER: Purim.

13. Did power go to Mordecai’s head?

14. What blessing does the Bible promise the humble (1 Peter 5:5-7)?

15. Summarize the role of divine providence in this book.

16. How does divine providence play a role in our lives today?

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