



# ESTHER

FAITHFULNESS IN THE SILENCE



**small  
groups**  
LIFE TOGETHER

*“And who knows but that you  
have come to your royal position  
for such a time as this?”*

**ESTHER 4:14**

# CONTENTS

**PG 7** **STUDY ONE** - ESTHER 1:1-22, 2:1-20

**PG10** **STUDY TWO** - ESTHER 2:21-3:15

**PG13** **STUDY THREE** - ESTHER 4:1-17, 5:1-14

**PG16** **STUDY FOUR** - ESTHER 6:1-14

**PG18** **STUDY FIVE** - ESTHER 7:1-10, ESTHER 8:1-14

**PG21** **STUDY SIX** - ESTHER 8:15-10:3

# LEADER'S NOTES FOR THESE STUDIES

These studies are written in a simple format with around 10 questions a week, including some background. They should take about an hour in a group of 8-12 people and are designed to be helpful for people across a broad range of ages and stages of life and across different cultures. If you desire some harder studies, we encourage you to read a commentary and write a few extra questions for your group. If you find them too difficult, cut a few questions out and write some simpler ones. Remember there are different levels of Biblical understanding in each group.

A few things will help you get the most out of these studies:

- **Prepare beforehand** – do the study on your own. If you don't, you will be OK, but if you do, you and others will probably benefit a lot more.
- **Read the Bible passages while you are together.** Some of them are very long, but this is God's word and reading it together is one of the most important parts of Bible study.
- Usually, the studies suggest you **read a bit, then answer questions, then read a bit more.** This is probably the most helpful way to use the studies. If you read all the passages at the start, it can be more difficult to remember all the details, especially in longer readings.
- Skip questions if you are running out of time. **But try not to skip the last question(s)** – they are usually the ones that tie the whole passage and the application to our lives together. Missing the last question is usually missing the most interesting discussions too!

# INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ESTHER

The book of Esther is one of the most intriguing and unusual books of the Bible. The events of a very strange story unfold in Susa, the capital of Persia. There is no mention of God or of his name Yahweh. The story tells of a time when the Jews were living in Persia and the King decides to banish his wife and find a new one. The Jewish girl Esther is chosen and so begins an incredulous series of events involving King **Xerxes**, his key official, **Haman**, the young girl **Esther**, and her relative and foster-father-figure, **Mordecai**.

The Book of Esther is a historical record of a difficult time in Israel's history around 470 BC. The Persian Empire reigned over much of the world, led by King Xerxes – from Egypt in the West to India in the East. God's people, Israel, were scattered throughout much of this empire, though mostly in the centre near the capital, Susa. The question for Israel at the time was: "Is God still our King?"

The story unfolds with deceptive plots and attempted genocide, but ends with the people of Judah taking bloody justice out against their enemies, with the killing of 75,000 of their enemies in one day. For many scholars studying this book, the events seem too improbable and unlikely. However, there is strong support for us to have confidence that this story is the record of truly historical, and quite amazing, events.

As you read the book of Esther, you may find yourself thinking that there are a lot of coincidences. Yet as we put this book into context with the whole of God's word, we find a much more reasonable explanation – that God is sovereign and although he is not mentioned by name in this book, he is certainly still sovereign over the events and future of his people. To dismiss these events as coincidence is unnecessary. Even when God's people are far from him, and facing the darkest times, God is still there. Even when they fail to mention Him, worship Him, or pay Him any attention, he is still there, and He has a plan for them that will not be stopped by any nation.

# RECOMMENDED COMMENTARIES

Baldwin Joyce G. Esther (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*)  
Inter Varsity Press. 1984. (This may now be out of print)

Peter Adam Esther: For such a time as this (Reading the Bible  
today series) Aquila Press. 2019.

# STUDY ONE

## ESTHER 1:1-22, 2:1-20

### PRAY FOR YOUR TIME TOGETHER

Have you ever wondered if something that seemed to be a coincidence was actually God's deliberate work in your life?

Chapter 1 introduces us to the main players and the event that puts everything in motion. First, we are introduced to the King of Persia, Xerxes (also known in history as Ahasuerus), who reigns over 127 provinces from India to Cush. He is a powerful man, yet we are about to find out what sort of a leader he is.

Another key idea in this chapter is the tension for the Jews. As the people of Yahweh, the Lord, they have allegiance to Him alone. Yet in this empire, they also owe allegiance to the king, Xerxes.

### Read Esther 1:1-22

1. What was the purpose of King Xerxes' banquet? What sort of event could this be compared to today?

*Xerxes was displaying his power. A show of wealth which is often repeated in this part of the world, even in modern times. See quote in next question*

*"For the majority of people in western Asia, then as now, life was hard and food none too plentiful. While labourers received barely enough to live on, even though they were producing works of art that are still unsurpassed, life at court was extravagant beyond imagining. The more lavish the king's hospitality, the greater his claim to supremacy. Strangely to our ears, no protest was even hinted at." (Baldwin "Esther" page 55)*

2. What picture does chapter 1 give us of the type of Kingdom Xerxes was ruling over?

*Xerxes was unopposed as supreme leader. You did not question the King. Even his wife was not able to speak without permission. The kingdom was a display of what a kingdom without God looked like. In fact, the absence of the mention of God in the book of Esther almost helps us feel what it would have been like for Jews under Xerxes.*

3. How can we make sense of the incident with Queen Vashti? Why was she called on? Why did she not come? Why did the King decide to banish her? Was Vashti justified in refusing to come to the King?

*It is unusual – exceptional even. For a Queen not to do what she is told certainly spoke to her character and perhaps to the place she was at – possibly the “I’ve had enough” stage.*

4. Xerxes seeks the wisdom of his “experts” of the law. What is their response/suggestion and why?

*The “double down” response. For fear of other noble women hearing what happened and rising up against the king’s nobles in the same way, she is banished from Xerxes’ presence and another Queen is to be brought into the “royal position”. Marriage does not seem to enter into things here. His wife, the Queen, is merely a royal position.*

5. The response of Xerxes is found in verse 22:

*“He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household, using his native tongue.”*

In what places might we see this sort of thinking in today’s world? Where does the Bible speak for or against this?

*Consider places under despotic rule, and places where freedom of religion is not present. Consider the time of Babel, when language became the great divide and separator between humanity. Language here seems to be used as a weapon to keep people in smaller groups, to prevent them from joining forces against a tyrannical ruler.*



## Read Esther 2:1-20

6. Verses 1-4 tell us that a process was to be established to determine a new queen. What was the plan and why?

*A beauty contest. It seems almost like a game for the king and nobles and a bit of fun, perhaps, for the King?*

7. In verses 5-7, what do we learn about Esther and her family?

*Apart from being beautiful, we learn of Esther's family line – it would be worth just having a look at some other Old Testament references to help people see the lineage. Esther is also an orphan so we do not know who her mother or father were.*

8. Why did Mordecai instruct Esther to hide her nationality and family background (verse 10)? Is she being careful, or weak?

*This is where we start to question what is being "smart" and what is being "weak". Given the tone of things in Persia, perhaps Mordecai is simply protecting his cousin. He also watched over her. Compare other times where this happens – is it good or not? For example: Sarah and Abraham – Genesis 20:2-5. This small detail becomes integral in the story – as we find out many details become. As the thread of this story flows, we see that so many of the minor details in their lives were all important to the final outcome.*

9. It is possible to think that Esther and Mordecai, at this stage, were just going along with an evil King and not speaking out as they should. At this point in time, what do you think of their character?

*With so little known at this stage, it's helpful for people to write down their initial thoughts here, and then come back to them in later week*

## PRAY TOGETHER TO CLOSE

# STUDY TWO

## ESTHER 2:21-3:15

### PRAY FOR YOUR TIME TOGETHER

In 2024, the 45 most dangerous countries to be a Christian are: North Korea, Libya, Eritrea, Yemen, Nigeria... (report by "Open Doors" <https://www.opendoors.org.au/world-watch-list/>)

In Bangladesh, Gonesh is a man who came to faith in Christ, and started sharing the gospel with the people in his village. Some villagers of a different faith threatened him with violence if he continued. He continued to share the gospel and was attacked until he suffered injuries to his limbs and face and was rushed to emergency care. He lives in a state of fear and panic. (<https://www.opendoors.org.au/frontline-faith/bangladesh-beaten-for-sharing-the-gospel/>)

What is your response to Christian persecution in the world today?

*Consider what people know about persecution (Christian or other) today. Are we aware? Are we active in prayer? What is our place in not only knowing about this, but responding to it as Christians?*

### Read Esther 2:21-3:6

*The incident with Mordecai at the gate will become significant soon. The actions of Haman will become significant even sooner.*

1. In 2:21-23, why would Mordecai not ignore this conversation and allow the King to be assassinated? This could have been the end of Xerxes! *Was Xerxes more concerned about helping Esther? Or was he a patriot, respecting the rule of the King over then, no matter what their view. Consider Bonhoeffer's assassination attempt on Hitler as another example.*

**Read Deuteronomy 25:17-19** to hear the history of the people called the Amalekites...*The Amalekites did not fear God and so they attacked Israel. Therefore Israel was told to attack and destroy the Amalekites when they had the opportunity.*

### **Now read 1 Samuel 15:7-9**

Saul was told to destroy the Amalekites completely, yet he did not, and even spares the King, Agag (verse 9). As we now return to Esther, here we are with the big problem: Haman, an Agagite – a descendant of Agag. Haman is now up against Mordecai, a descendant of Saul, who refused to bow down to Haman, the Agagite.

2. Why do you think Mordecai would not bow down to him, given the history here? (Compare here also the story of Daniel not bowing down to the King.)

*It's helpful to look at history of the Israelites as these parts of the Bible actually can give us a lot of insight into the relationships between Israel and other nations.*

3. Given verse 6, it is important to understand this history as it gives rise to Haman's attempt to destroy all of the Jews. Why do you think a person would consider such harsh retaliation against a whole people group?

*Consider modern day examples. The basic idea of racism can be a difficult but helpful area for discussion.*

4. Obviously, there are other times in history when others have attempted to wipe out an entire people. How can, or should, a Christian approach or engage with the issue of genocide today? Is this still a relevant issue?

*Obviously genocide is an awful thing, but we want people to think about why a whole people group may consider doing this to others. Not that it's just wrong, but to ask why people behave like this?*

### **Read Esther 3:7-15**

5. How does Haman secure the King's permission to wipe out the Jews? What reasoning does he use?

*Just as in chapter 1, the King's advisors are appealing, it seems, to Xerxes' insecurity – "people might revolt or stop doing what you say!"*

6. As we read these unfolding events, we can possibly understand verse 15 – that the city of Susa was bewildered. If we put aside Haman for a moment, how does this whole episode reflect on the Kingship of Xerxes? *He is unpredictable. Unlike our God, Xerxes shows a lack of control by trying to control everything. He gives no freedom. Again and again, we are led to question how Xerxes compares to God in his leadership.*

7. Chapter 1 begins the story in the third year of Xerxes reign (1:3). Chapter 3 brings us to the twelfth year of his reign (3:7). What do you think was happening with Esther during the middle 9 years? *Try to help people engage in the text and see the story. Like asking “What was Jesus doing between birth and 13 years old”, these are helpful questions to consider what the story does and does not tell us. Sometimes we don’t know. But sometimes there are hints.*

8. Let’s turn to Jesus now. Compare him to Xerxes. How does Jesus’ rule differ from Xerxes’ rule? *Xerxes is despotic and arrogant, Jesus is omnipotent and humble. There are plenty of other words to use here. They are very different in so many ways – but are there also ways they are the same?*

9. Compare Esther 3:13-14 to Matthew 2:13-16. What role do you think Satan plays in these plots by human kings to kill the people of God? *We want to understand that Satan at work to undermine the rule of God and the plans of God. He is behind the prompting for the evil deeds of people. People are sinful, but Satan work is to deceive and lead away from God.*

# STUDY THREE

## ESTHER 4:1-17, 5:1-14

### PRAY FOR YOUR TIME TOGETHER

If you had the choice of knowing what would happen to you in the next 12 months, would you want to know? Why or why not?

Now the edict has been sent out for the destruction of the Jewish people, and the day had been set, a cloud is over all of the Jewish people in the land. Putting on sackcloth and ashes was a custom observed for mourning (and terror) by many different cultures of the time, including the Persians. We also know of this happening, for example, when Jonah went to Nineveh and warned them to repent.

It is a time of national mourning for the Jews. Yet, even though they mourn, we still see no sign or recognition of Yahweh, the LORD. Are God's people so far from him that even under such tragedy, they fail to turn to him? However, while His people may be far from Him, God is not far from His people. He is still sovereign. The events we see unfold are certainly not just coincidences.

### Read Esther 4:1-17

1. What is the immediate response to the edict from Mordecai? What about the rest of the Jews?

*He tore his clothes and mourned – interestingly, he went into the city to do this. Perhaps to be more public, or perhaps in order that Esther might see. In EVERY province there was mourning amongst the Jews. Take time to imagine what that would have looked like among the Empire of the time. It was happening everywhere.*

2. What does Esther do when she finds out about Mordecai's mourning?  
*She enquired as to why. Tried to send him clothes. Then sent one of her servants to find out more. Interesting chain of events and the*

*process Esther took. It reinforces the distance between Esther and her people at every step. She is isolated.*

*Esther then tries to work out how to respond, knowing her hands are tied in many ways from doing anything.*

*Again, the lack of presence or mention of God is worth noting here. Xerxes is so inaccessible, But God is not. Why do they not pray?*

3. Remember that the King does not know that he has technically signed a death warrant for Esther, his Queen, as he did not know she is a Jew or that the Jews are the people Haman hated (3:8). So what is Esther's problem in simply approaching the King about this matter?

*She is not permitted to approach the King. She risks her life doing so*

4. In verses 12-14,

a. Is Mordecai challenging Esther's courage? Or is he encouraging her?

*Discuss the possibilities of both and the significance of both possibilities. In our faith today, we can often be challenged and encouraged at the same time. For example "I encourage you to read your Bible each day, otherwise, how will you come to know God more deeply?"*

b. What does Mordecai mean when he says "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place"?

*The absence of God is again obvious here. He could have said "God will deliver his people by some other means". But he doesn't. It's worth discussing why. It seems he has faith that God will deliver, but chooses not to use his name. perhaps it may be the culture of the time.*

5. Do you think Esther's response (verse 15) shows courage, faith in God, or just family loyalty?

*Good to discuss what people see in Esther's actions. Fasting for someone would seem like it is a religious/faith response. And perhaps this is the way God's people showed faith without being picked up by the government for religious actions.*

## **Read Esther 5:1-14**

*After the banquets by Xerxes (chapters 1 and 2), we now have two banquets given by Queen Esther.*

6. What were the purposes of

a. Xerxes' banquets? (1:3-5 and 2:18)

*Banquets hold a special place in the book of Esther – they mark significant moments and are very deliberately placed in the text.*

b. Esther's banquets? (5:5 and 5:8)

*Good to compare the banquets of Esther and Xerxes. Motivation and purpose.*

7. What risk did Esther run in approaching the King, and why did she do it?

*Risk of death. But did she have a choice? The idea of someone putting their life at risk in order to potentially save others may sound familiar also.*

8. The rage of Haman against Mordecai is fuelled again (5:9) and after talking with his family, they encourage Haman to build a pole (or a gallows in some translations) set up to impale (hang) Mordecai. It is a huge 23 metres high! Where does Haman's rage and desire for vengeance come from?

*It might be worth a discussion about the rage we see in people today – on the road, or in war zones. Compare this with the way God shows emotion – and his motivation and purposes for his anger/wrath/rage.*

9. The use of a "pole" to kill someone is reminiscent of the cross of Jesus, also sometimes referred to as a "pole". (see Galatians 3:13, where 'tree' also translates as 'pole'). How easy is it for us to desire vengeance? How did Jesus respond to his attackers in the gospels when they plotted to hang him on a pole/tree?

*There are too many coincidences in Esther so don't overlook any of them. Also, we don't; want to read too much into them – we need to make sure the comparisons are really there. But the theme of vengeance and wrath and justice are certainly themes related to Jesus and his death.*

**PRAY TOGETHER TO CLOSE**

# STUDY FOUR

## ESTHER 6:1-14

### PRAY FOR YOUR TIME TOGETHER

#### Opening discussion:

Have you ever looked back a few years and remembered a time when someone really helped you, but at the time, perhaps you didn't realise how significant it was?

#### Read Esther 6:1-14

1. Do you think it is just a pretty good coincidence that Xerxes could not sleep, decided to read the chronicles of his reign, and suddenly remembered Mordecai? Can we be sure this is perhaps not just a coincidence?

*You can compare the idea of coincidences with the idea of God's sovereignty.*

2. Haman is caught up in his own self-aggrandizement. He thinks only of himself and his own glory. He thinks that he is the only one who is deserving of the King's praise, and this thinking backfires. How does Haman's desire for glory compare with Jesus?

*In his arrogance, Haman does not see the way it is going. He is so tied up in his own plans, he cannot see other people at all. Jesus gives up his glory for the cross, only to be glorified by his Father (Philippians 2)*

3. King Xerxes can come across as a little flakey in the Book of Esther. He has given Haman permission to kill a whole race of people, yet in chapter 3 (see verse 11), it is clear that he still does not know that the Jews are actually the source of Haman's hatred. So, Xerxes has firstly unknowingly allowed for the killing of all Jews and has now decided to honour Mordecai, a Jew. What sort of a ruler would you say Xerxes is? How does he compare to today's world rulers/leaders?

*Try not to get engaged in politics. See if you can perhaps find good examples of world leaders today and ask what makes them good, or character traits of poor leaders and what makes those traits bad.*



4. How does Xerxes compare to the Lord God as King?

*This is a question worth returning to again and again. Really helpful to encourage people to write down something tangible on this.*

5. Do you think Haman's family and advisors have come to the right conclusion in verses 12-14? What options did Haman have now?

*Try to plot all the possible outcomes here. Put yourself in the shoes of Haman's family.*

### **Read Psalm 75.**

6. What does this Psalm teach us about the Lord God – his ways and his power?

*Reflect on the character and actions of God, and how they are different to Xerxes.*

7. In Psalm 75, the horn is a symbol of strength and honour, yet when used in arrogance or defiance, God cuts it down. Who is lifting up their horn in the Book of Esther so far? Who is the most arrogant or defiant?

*You could have a debate on this over Xerxes and Haman – or perhaps others?*

8. What does Esther 6 teach us about those seeking honour in this world?

*The book of Esther shows in practice how God humbles the proud and lifts up the humble.*

9. Without mention of God, how is the book of Esther pointing us to God so far?

*Sometimes the absence of God, or the lack of mention, can leave us worried. Imagine a world without God, where everything was just coincidence and Kings did whatever they wanted? Imagine what it would be like. Perhaps Esther points us to the need for God and the reminder that he is always there, even when silent.*

10. In what ways can we be the arrogant ones before God in our lives today?

*A time for honest self-reflection – and a helpful way to build some prayer points for each other.*

### **PRAY TOGETHER TO CLOSE**

# STUDY FIVE

## ESTHER 7:1-10, ESTHER 8:1-14

### PRAY FOR YOUR TIME TOGETHER

#### Opening discussion:

If you could change one law in our country, what would it be?

As we read these chapters, the tables are turned and Haman is finally dealt with. Sadly, justice often brings consequences that are not very palatable. Although we must consider the culture of the day, retributive justice is often not very nice or peaceful.

#### Read Esther 7:1-10

1. When you read chapter 7, are you excited or saddened by the outcome for Haman? Why?

*An opportunity for personal reflections – try to consider why we may feel the way we do when we read these chapters.*

2. What is the point of the note in verse 8? Was this misinterpretation of Haman “molesting” the Queen even necessary?

*The book of Esther has many “circumstances” which seem to happen – often the details seem strangely added yet also seem to add to the storyline in important ways. Perhaps one of the key considerations here is how these sorts of details add to an understanding of the character of the King.*

3. Why are so many Eunuchs involved in the King’s court? And what does this tell us of the royal court of the time?

*Eunuchs were castrated males, hence usually more able to be trusted as non-sexually motivated beings. Head back to the previous question and you see the King’s great concern over people molesting his Queen. And again, the whole tone of chapter 2 in choosing a Queen from a beauty contest says something about the royal court’s focus.*

### **Read Esther 8:1-14**

*The King's edicts, under the law of the Medes and Persians, cannot be revoked. This was their custom. (See also Daniel 6:8 for another example). So it was not possible for the King to revoke the law set by Haman to destroy the Jews. Therefore, the King allows Esther and Mordecai (verse 8) to write any decree they liked to solve the problem.*

4. Is the King lazy or generous in allowing them to do this?

*For all of his power, the King still will not change the law that the law cannot be changed! We begin to wonder what real power Xerxes has to do anything. Handing it over to Esther and Mordecai is an interesting choice. Perhaps consider what you might do yourself in this situation. What were the other options?*

5. Why would the King simply not stop the law that Haman passed to kill all the Jews?

*Good to focus discussion on the **actual** power of King Xerxes.*

6. Can you think of another law Esther and Mordecai could have written that would have solved the problem without bloodshed and without revoking Haman's law?

*Have the group share some ideas here and work them through. Consider how other nations today might do similar things. Then consider how God actually does things. Again, the absence of mentioning God begs the questions – how does the true King work? This is a great opportunity to bring the discussion to Jesus*

7. What are the most important commandments/laws of God? How do they compare with Xerxes' laws?

*Again, another opportunity to come to Jesus. The ten commandments were brought down to two by Jesus – love God and love your neighbour. This is how God protects his people and his world (if only people would obey these commands). Xerxes passes laws to protect his own kingdom, but they are differently motivated.*

8. How secure are human laws? How often does the legal system fail us, and in what ways?

*It may be helpful to grab a recent news headline and discuss the legal outcome for it. Or to think about the laws that are generally accepted across most nations and people. Then consider - why are there these universal laws and why do they fail.*

9. It can be difficult for Christians to serve in a pagan government or legal system. Even though there are many Christian principles in our Australian legal system, what can be the struggles today for Christians serving in politics or law, and how can we support our brothers and sisters serving in these areas each day?

*You could use this time to help establish some empathy for our leaders and politicians, and why 1 Timothy 2:1-7 encourages us to pray for our leaders as it is God's will for us to live peaceful lives. Good to pray about these things.*

10. What is God's punishment for sin against him? Is this fair?

*Talking about heaven and hell can be surprisingly difficult for many Christians. Views of annihilationism or universalism can emerge, rather than accepting the Biblical teaching on eternal salvation and eternal punishment. These can be difficult conversations to have. But central to this is that God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4) and offers eternal life to all who call on him. It's always helpful to recognise that this can be part of a longer conversation (that requires grace and wisdom).*

*In terms of fairness - if we want justice, does there not need to be consequences for law breakers?*

**PRAY TOGETHER TO CLOSE**

# STUDY SIX

## ESTHER 8:15-10:3

### PRAY FOR YOUR TIME TOGETHER

#### Opening discussion:

When is bloodshed acceptable?

*Motivation may be a helpful thing to consider here.*

As we conclude the book of Esther, there is a great victory but also a deep sadness at the bloodshed. As we know, God's people are not always godly, and with no mention of God by name in this book, it can be difficult to work out if what the Jews did was right or just vengeful. When is bloodshed justifiable?

#### Read Esther 8:15-9:19

*The fear of the Jews gripped the whole land and they were successful in every battle. Mordecai became very powerful.*

1. Read 9:5 again. What do you think of this attitude of the Jews? Is this justified as a means of self-preservation?

*Discuss the possible motivations of the Jews in their actions. Can we fully know their hearts? "They did what they pleased" is a key phrase.*

*The King again offers Esther anything she asks for and she replies in verse 13: "If it pleases the king," Esther answered, "give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also, and let Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles."*

2. Why would Esther request such retribution? Is this justified?

*Again, the idea of "pleasing" is inserted here.*

*Yet, compare this to God – is he ever "pleased" with destruction of people? Yet he is pleased with justice. Where do we draw the line? There's an opportunity to consider the pleasing nature of justice alongside the pleasing nature of seeing people punished. Perhaps this*

*is a tension we need to hold. If seeing punishment is not pleasing, is it possible to be pleased with justice but not pleased with punishment?*

3. The Jews in other provinces killed 75,000 of their enemies. What is the purpose in 9:16 (and in other verses) of recording that they did not take any plunder?

*Compare this to the battles in the book of Joshua, for example, where God's people enacted God's judgment on their enemies, but often not for material gain.*

### **Read Esther 9:20-10:3**

*Purim, in verses 20-22, is recorded as a 2-day feast celebrated as a reminder of the month when the Jews got relief from their enemies. It was nearly a year since the lot was cast (3:7) for the date of the month of Adar to kill all the Jews. During this time, the Jews lived in fear of being annihilated.*

### **On the violence of chapter 9:**

*"Scripture does not commend the violence used by the Jews in ancient Persia. Later, a Jewish teacher would say: "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt 26:52). Many avoid the problem of chapter 9 by saying that the event in Esther never happened. But such acts do happen – witness the horrors of the Crusades or the terror of the Holocaust – thought they should not. Vengeance is a divine prerogative, and belongs to the Lord alone (Deut. 32:35; Rom, 12:19; Heb. 10:30)" Lasor, Hubbard and Bush Old Testament Survey (second edition, Eerdmans 1996). Page 541.*

4. Was this bloodshed and celebration in remembrance of their relief justifiable? If not, how else could they have gained their freedom from certain death?

*Consider what options were available to the Jews at this time, as foreigners living under a foreign rule. It is important not to compare this time with the current challenges for Israel. With Jesus arrival, the view of the promised land and the people of God is now different to what it was in Esther's time. Jesus is King. The gospel is for all people. The promised land is in heaven. However, many Christians and churches have perhaps not fully grasped the difference between Israel then and now. This is a sensitive issue for many so it is wise to be gracious in conversation but also to guide faithfully.*

Articles such as this may be helpful in assisting people in understanding that the gospel of Jesus comes to all people the same way today – not with land or heritage, but by trust in Jesus and his heavenly Kingdom:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/to-the-Jew-first.html>

5. In chapter 9, why does Mordecai go to such lengths to record and establish Purim as an annual celebration?

*Jewish traditions and celebrations were often established to remind God's people of the faithfulness of God, such as the Passover meal (the supreme memorial meal). This annual celebration inauguration seems to again point us to the reminder that although God is not mentioned, the Jewish people are very much still Jewish and are still the people of God, still holding to their traditions. Again, this is a subtle way in the book of Esther of pointing to the presence of God, even though his name is silent throughout this time in their history under Persian rule.*

6. In 10:3, Mordecai is recorded as “second in rank to King Xerxes”. In what other times in Biblical history has one of God's people, like Mordecai, been given the position of the second most powerful person in the kingdom (and possibly the world)? Why do you think this happens?

*Consider the stories of Moses and Joseph and other leaders who rise to be second in charge or in other powerful positions in foreign nations. Discuss the strategy of God in placing his people in the world but all the while remaining their only true King. Perhaps it leads us to ask – who IS really in charge? Is Xerxes ever in charge of the circumstances around him through this whole story?*

7. In Luke 13:29, Jesus says: “People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.” What will we be celebrating at the feast in the kingdom of God/heaven?

*Imagine the celebration of all God's people who worship the one true and eternal King. Imagine what that looks like today and what it will look like then.*

## 8. How do these verses remind us that the cost of sin is bloodshed?

- Matthew 26:28 – “for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

*Jesus' blood is innocent blood. Only he can pay our penalty because he has no penalty of his own to pay.*

- Hebrews 9:22 – “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

*Life-blood shed means death to the animal. The cost of sin is death.*

- 1 Peter 2:24 – “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

*The punishment of death reminds us that we need to put sin to death. Explore the healing of our sins by Jesus' wounds.*

## 9. Where is God in the book of Esther?

*He is nowhere and he is everywhere. Esther questions the idea of Kingship and rule in this world. The powerful King Xerxes is anything but powerful. For all his power, he is shown to have no control over his kingdom and moves around in his rule with every changing wind. God, however, has a plan to save his people. Even in the absence of his name, his people are saved from unbelievable circumstances. Even when they do not mention his name, he is present in every detail.*

**PRAY TOGETHER TO CLOSE**