

HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Esther
Leader's Guide

Hearing the Word Esther Leader's Guide

Nigel Barge and Isobel Coupland
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Nigel Barge, April 2017

Scripture Quotations taken from

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Hearing the Word: A Tool for Bible reading



LOOK – What does it *say*?

- 1) The Text
 - a) What questions does it raise - *Who, What, When, Where, Why, How?*
 - b) What surprises you?
- 2) The Context?
 - a) the surrounding text
 - b) the Book of the Bible
 - c) the whole Bible
 - d) the place in the Bible Story



LEARN – What does it *mean*?

- 1) What type of writing is it?
- 2) Answer the questions
- 3) Summarise the passage



LISTEN – What is the *message*?

- 1) Which is the main point?
- 2) Which is the key verse?



LIVE – How should we *respond*?

- 1) What does it show about God, (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) :
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace*
 - c) Jesus / his salvation**
- 2) What should I do?

* God's undeserved generosity is evident throughout the Bible, and it is perfectly expressed in Jesus.

** The Bible, from 'the fall' onwards, describes God's plan of salvation through his Son. Thus, *all* the Scriptures speak in some way of Jesus (Luke 24:27).

INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER

The context

God chose Abraham and his descendants to be the instruments through whom he intended to bless the world (Genesis 12:1-3). He committed himself to them in an everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:1-27).

He gave them a land of their own – Canaan. However, he warned them of consequences if they failed to be faithful to their side of the covenant. Such failure would ultimately result in exile from their land. (Deut 28:15,36). After the reigns of David and Solomon, the Kingdom split, leaving 10 tribes in the north, still known as Israel and two in the south, called Judah. The Lord continued to warn them through his Prophets but they were not heeded. This led first to the exile of the northern kingdom (Israel) to Assyria in 721 BC. Later, after the Babylonians had overrun the Assyrians, the southern Kingdom (Judah) was exiled to Babylon in 587 BC.

The 10 northern tribes of Israel were dispersed through the Assyrian empire and remained so. When the Persian King, Cyrus, conquered the Babylonian Empire in 537 BC, however, the Jews of Judah after 70 years in exile were allowed to return to Jerusalem.

The contemporary setting

Esther is set in the reign of the Persian king, Xerxes. Herodotus, a Greek historian, says Xerxes launched two unsuccessful campaigns against the Greeks at the start of his reign. Then he retreated to his citadel in Susa where he occupied himself in building projects. He was a brutal tyrant: *eg* when a storm damaged both pontoon bridges across the Hellespont (Dardanelles), built to let his armies reach Europe, he had his engineers put to death! During his reign, he put down rebellions in Egypt and Babylon. In 465 BC he was assassinated by one of his court. His wife 'Amestris', deposed in his reign, returned to favour when their son Artaxerxes succeeded him.

In the Jewish book of Esther, he is shown in ch 1 variously as all-powerful v3, wealthy v4, splendid v4 – 6, 'liberal' v7, high spirited v10a, furious and burning with anger v12b, with integrity v13, ,wise v 21. In chapter 10, he has total control of his empire, 'to its distant shores'.

It seems the writer had knowledge of Susa. Recently, French archaeologists found remains of a palace there, whose ornate detail, bright colours and size of frieze support the description in Esther 1.

Contemporary writings make *no* mention of Esther, Mordecai, Haman, or the foiled plan to kill all the Jews in the Empire. This raises the question of the *type of Scripture* in which God has given the book of Esther.

The type of Scripture

All scripture is God breathed (2 Timothy 3:16); it is very concise (John 21:25) and it all speaks of Jesus (Luke 24:27). However, it is given in different literary forms: story, law, prophecy, poetry, parable, vision, letter. The question is, *what is the literary type of the book of Esther?*

Commentators argue strongly about whether Esther is historical or a work of fiction. In one sense that is the wrong question. Is it the Word of God? If it is, then the right question surely is, 'What is God saying to us through it?'

It seems that the Jews, after controversy, confirmed Esther as part of their scriptures at the council of Jamnia (AD 90). Two issues made them hesitate:

- a) There is no mention of God, the Law, prayer, sacrifice, praise, Scripture. The glaring omission of 'The Lord' or 'prayer' is, however, very contrived:

Eg Who is expected to deliver the Jews? (4:14)

Why bother to fast without prayer? (4:16) (Even atheists call out to God when they face destruction!)

Why delay, except by divine instruction? (5:8)

Who kept the king awake and prompted him to read? (6:1)

Who brought Haman in at the right point? (6:4,5)

Who makes people of Jewish origins insuperable? (6:13)

What was the other reason for assembling? (8:11)

Why rest (as on a Sabbath) and celebrate? (9:17)

Some explain these omissions as showing a lack of commitment and identity among the Jews. Yet they are clearly identifiable *eg* 3:8 Haman tells the King about this people (the Jews) 'whose customs are different...and who do not obey the kings' laws'. True, God is not mentioned by name, but He is 'the elephant in the room'! His apparent absence underlines the reality that He is in complete control behind the scenes.

- b) The Jews in the story do not appear to submit to the Law, either its ritual or ethical dimensions.

When Jesus presented God's Word, he sometimes used a historical context familiar to readers. *eg* in the parable of the 10 minas, 'a man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself crowned king ... But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'we don't want this man to be our king' (Luke 19:12,14).

This alluded to a contemporary context. Herod the Great left the title, 'King of Judea', to his son Archelaus whom most people detested. They sent repre-

sentatives to Rome to ask that he should *not* be given the Kingdom. The Emperor sent Archelaus back to Judea *without* the title of 'King'. He ruled 4 BC - 6 AD before being deposed and banished.

Jesus ends his parable with the command '*But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me*' (v27)

It seems Jesus used the 'carcass' of a contemporary event to illustrate the character and nature of God Himself - and He ends it in a 'brutal' fashion!

In the parables in general, God is not explicit. Though he is represented in all of them, He is not always depicted in 'flattering' terms! *eg* as 'the unjust judge'! (Luke 18:1). This was given so that 'we should pray and not give up.' This parable does not imply God is unjust! It *contrasts* God with a bad *human* judge.

As we read the book of Esther, we might ask why 'God'/Xerxes seems so undiscerning and 'taken in' by Haman (ch 3)? However, it is perhaps similar to the questions asked of God and Satan in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3) or indeed in God's willingness to see Job's family put to death (Job 1)

In conclusion therefore, perhaps through the book of Esther, God speaks His Word in a form of an extended parable or an allegory, like Jesus used, set in a well-known contemporary context. If this is the case we should ask, '*Where is God / Jesus portrayed; and how are we required to respond to His rule?*'

The characters

- a) *The Jews*: By the time Xerxes ruled, some Jews had returned to Jerusalem, but a large population remained dispersed through the Persian Empire.
- b) *The enemies*: Though Haman is the 'vile enemy' and instigator of the plot to destroy the Jews, he is reliant on a large number of accomplices all over the empire who are eager for the destruction of the Jews (9:1,2). These are shown to number at least 75,000.
- c) *God*: His plan for his people to be a blessing to the world is progressing on one front: his people are spread across the world and some individuals in various nations are coming to acknowledge Yahweh (8:15; cf Psalm 67)

However, there was still little sign of the advent of the great Saviour who would deliver the salvation that the faithful were hoping for

The Timing

3rd year of king's reign –

king's banquet, 180 days (1:4) for leaders / nobility, displaying wealth etc
banquet in King's garden, 7 days (1:5) for all in citadel of Susa.

on the 7th day (1:10) – Queen Vashti refused to come to king's banquet.

7th year 10th month – Esther chosen as queen, taken into royal palace (2:16)

12th year 1st month: Day for destruction of Jews selected by lot (3:7).

13th day: Royal secretaries wrote 1st edict: D-day = 12th month 13th day (3:13)

3rd month /23rd day –2nd edict: Jews may protect themselves (8:12).

12th month /13th day – Jews overpowered their enemies (9:1).

Esther and Jesus.

The Jews faced annihilation at the hands of a ‘vile enemy’, Haman, who was hell-bent on their total destruction. Through Esther and Mordecai, God effects a plan not only of total deliverance, but also of triumph and victory for his people over all their enemies.

However, it anticipates and foreshadows the total and eternal salvation that God would bring through Jesus. Undiscerned by even his closest followers, Jesus ‘broke cover’ and died to save his people. He *‘disarmed the powers/authorities [and] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.’* (Col 2:15)

One can only wonder if Jesus mentioned Esther to Cleopas (Luke 24:27) in his sweep through all the scriptures, showing how they all point to Himself. (The NT, however, nowhere quotes or alludes to the book of *Esther*.)

The festival of Purim was a lasting ordinance (Esther 9:28). However, as with all festivals, it anticipates and is then fulfilled in and through Jesus. (Matt 5:17). So, Christians no longer celebrate it in isolation; it is subsumed into the single great celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Like a diamond, the book of Esther glitters from its many facets in multiple ways. Xerxes sometimes stands for God the Father; at different times, Mordecai and Esther represent Jesus and His ministry.

NB When Jesus likened himself to Jonah, (Matt 12:40) it was not a complete likeness; there were aspects of Jonah’s character and action that were most unlike Jesus! Similarly, it is aspects of God’s work and character that are alluded to in the people of the Book of Esther.

If the book foreshadows the work of Jesus, then seen through this lens, we may discern:

- a) the authority of God, centre stage, behind the character of Xerxes who opens and closes the book.
- b) the intention of the devil behind ‘the vile Haman’, hell-bent on the complete destruction of the Jews.
- c) the reversal (Haman’s plans turned into Mordecai’s triumph) foreshadows Jesus’ triumph over the Devil on the cross.
- d) Mordecai’s elevation to second in command to the King is a picture of Jesus’ elevation to reign at the Father’s right hand.

The great irony is that, though Purim anticipates the deliverance of God's people from death by Jesus, it is still celebrated by the Jewish 'elder brother' who fails to see that the great day of God's salvation has come in Jesus.

The message of Esther

The great issue the book addresses is Authority and where it lies: 'Who is in charge?' The Jews, by whom and for whom this was written, understood that Yahweh, the God they worshipped, ruled over all nations:

"The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake. Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations." (Ps 99:1,2)

It is God who has promised the Saviour from Abraham's seed (the Jews) and 'neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation' will be able to thwart his loving purpose. (Romans 8:38,39)

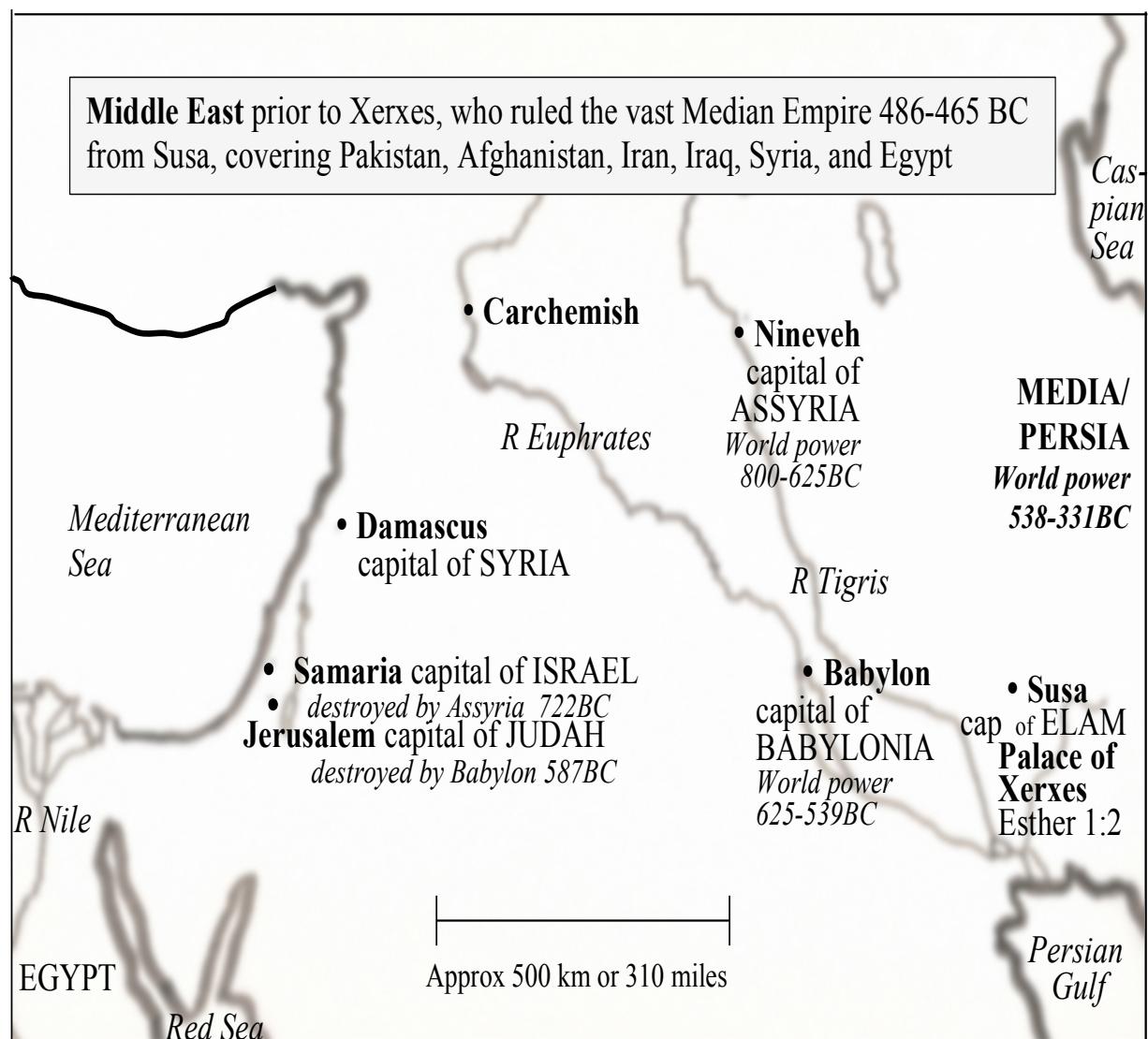
At the heart of this book many other people of other nationalities became Jews because of fear of the Jews (8:17). It is of course not this small dispersed, enslaved nation that engenders such fear, but the Almighty God, whom they serve. Perhaps through this book God is speaking His Word, assuring His people that at all times whether 'seen' or not, He reigns supremely overall, is committed to them and has a plan!

Relationship to other books of Scripture.

Cyrus of Persia had conquered the Babylonian Empire in 539BC. He had issued a decree allowing some Jews to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the Temple. These events are covered in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It wasn't until 457 BC that the *son* of Xerxes, Artaxerxes, permitted Ezra, the priest, to return. Thirteen years after that, he sent Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Thus, Esther possibly predates them by a generation.

Esther is not a quaint side-show in the history of God's dealing with his people. On the contrary, it lies at the heart of the OT. It reminds the people of God that whatever the external appearances, God is able and willing to effect the ultimate salvation of his people as he has *covenanted* to do. When God appears to be least evident, His authority over all things remains total.

Sketch Map



Submit to one another out of reverence for the King

Background information

Nebuchadnezzar took the Jews into exile in Babylon in 597BC.

Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon in 539BC. Xerxes was probably the grandson of Cyrus. In modern terms his kingdom extended from roughly southern Pakistan in the East to Turkey in the West and northern Sudan.

According to the Greek historian, Herodotus, *Histories of the Persian Wars, 490-480BC*, in 483BC the third year of his reign, Xerxes gathered his Generals and Advisers together at Susa to plan a war against Greece. This would be the occasion for this banquet.

It appears the normal custom was that guests should only eat and drink when the King did himself but on this occasion, they were given freedom to choose themselves. It was normal for wives to be present at Persian drinking feasts.

Word List

1 <i>Xerxes</i>	Persian king of former Babylonian Empire, 486-465BC. Greek means 'he rules over men'. (Hebrew - <i>Ahasuerus</i>)
<i>Cush</i>	Region of the Upper Nile. North Sudan today.
2 <i>Susa</i>	one of four royal cities, the administrative centre, c 160 miles North of Persian Gulf, 225 miles East of Babylon.
<i>citadel</i>	fortified section of city where the palace lay.
3 <i>3rd year of reign</i>	180-day display plus the 7 day feast takes it to 3½ years.
<i>Media</i>	NW Iran, modern Azerbaijan & part of Persian Kurdistan
3,5,9 <i>banquet</i>	term is associated with drinking
9 <i>Queen Vashti</i>	Head wife of Xerxes.
10 <i>Mehuman...</i>	Eunuchs were the harem attendants, ie Xerxes used the proper channels to summon the Queen

Bible Connections

1	'And it came to pass' (AV) OT uses this phrase in 4 cases to introduce a story where impending doom gives way to a happy ending. (Genesis 14:1 Ruth 1:1; Isaiah 7:1; Jeremiah 1:3)	
4	<i>Splendour / glory</i>	<i>see Deuteronomy 5:24; Job 40:10; Psalm 96:6; 145:5; Isaiah 2:19</i>
6ff	<i>Banquet display</i>	<i>see Mark 6:21</i>
	<i>Attitude to authority</i>	<i>see Rom 13:1-5; Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:1</i>
	<i>Law of Medes and Persians</i>	<i>see also Esther 8:8; Daniel 6:8,12</i>
	<i>Man's role in household</i>	<i>cf Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Corinthians 7:3,4; 11:3</i>

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 Who was Xerxes and what was 'that time'?
- 3 What was the purpose of the banquet?
- 4 Why did he display 'the splendour and glory of his majesty'?
Why did he do it for 180 days?!
- 5 Who was the banquet for?
What was the citadel of Susa?
Why 7 days' banquet, 7 eunuchs (10), 7 wise men (14)?
- 6 What was the significance of the decorations?
- 8 What was the significance of the freedom of choice of wine?
- 9 Why did Vashti give her own banquet and how did it compare?
- 10 Why does it take 7 Eunuchs to command the queen to come?
- 11 Why did the King want her to wear her royal crown?
- 12 Why did the King burn with anger at her refusal?
- 13 Why did Xerxes consult and not just act? Did he not know the Law?
- 15 Why does he not know the Law?
- 16 How had Vashti wronged the nobles and peoples of the provinces?
- 17 Why will there be 'no end of disrespect and discord'?
- 19 In what ways should Vashti's successor be 'better'?
- 22 How did the decree banishing Vashti (19) proclaim that 'every man should be ruler of his household' (21).

What surprises or confuses you?

- 13 Why is so absolute a King so tied to the Law in so simple a matter?

2) The Context

Surrounding passage

As well as setting the scene for Esther's introduction, this event establishes the theme of the book as 'Authority': who is in charge? The basic building block of authority is the relationship between husband and wife, but the non-mention of God is the writer's device for drawing attention to Him and His authority over all things.

Individual book

- 1 Xerxes ruled over a vast empire (10:1,2)
- 5 least to the greatest (20)
- 12 Importance of King's command; to go uninvited meant Death! (4:11)
Respect of Esther (5:1ff)

Whole Bible

- 4 God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen (Romans 1:19,20)
The Lord reigns (Psalms 93:1; 97:1; 99:1)
Jesus is the King of Kings (1 Timothy 6:14; Revelation 17:14; 19:16)
All authority in heaven and earth is given to Him (Matthew 28:18)
- 5 Least to greatest, cf 'whoever' (John 3:16; 4:14; 11:26; 12:46)
First last, last first (Mark 10:31)
- 8 'You are free to eat any fruit in the garden (Genesis 2:16)
- 12 Wrath of God (Ps 79:6; Jn 3:36; Rom 2:5; Eph 5:6; Rev 6:16)
- 13 'It is written...' (Luke 4:3,8)
Jesus the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8)
The men of Issachar understood their times (1 Chronicles 12:32)

22 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21)

Bible story

Man rejected God's authority in the fall. God was committed to graciously bring all things back to live under his rule. As history progressed, the people whom he chose to bring this blessing repeatedly rejected him and his authority. As a result, they were defeated, enslaved and dispersed from the land he gave them. Only a small remnant at this time had returned to Jerusalem.

It must have appeared to them that God was no longer in control and had lost his authority in his world. 'Esther' emphatically teaches that this is not the case.

LEARN

- 1) What type of literature is this?

Narrative

- 2) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

- 1 Xerxes – King of Persia, vast empire, Grandson of Cyrus, son of Darius 3rd year of reign, after crushing revolt of Babylon and Egypt
- 3 The banquet was to bring together all the powerful ones in his Empire and impress upon them his wealth, glory, splendour.
- 4 He displayed 'the splendour...of his majesty' so they'd appreciate him 180 days is ½ a year – a long time!
- 5 Susa, a city north of Persian Gulf, was the capital of the empire. The military leaders of Persia & Media, the princes, the nobles of the provinces were invited, all the people from the least to the greatest in Susa .

Seven is the divine number – perfect and complete.

Everything was stunningly opulent.

- 6 *It underlined the King's liberality.*
- 8 *The significance of 'being allowed to drink in his own way' was acknowledging and valuing their free will.*
- 9 *Vashti's own banquet was smaller – just the women in the palace - but it 'rivalled' the king's by taking the wives of the King's courtiers.*
- 10 *Seven is the perfect / divine number – it was a 'Godly' command.*
- 11 *Her royal crown was a symbol of her status; it displayed the authority that he had given her by making her queen.*
- 12 *He was angry she publicly flouted his authority, humiliating him.*
- 13 *Xerxes consulted first, showing his integrity & unity with the Law.*
He did know the Law but the writer wanted to demonstrate he did everything in concert with the law.
- 15 *In the story he asks in order to show that he is consistent with it.*
- 16 *Vashti wronged the nobles etc when the nobles' wives followed her example and despised their husband's authority in the home.*
- 18 *If authority is ignored in the home, it will spread to the king's subjects ignoring him - causing no end of disrespect and discord.*
- 19 *Vashti's successor should be 'better' not just in beauty but in humility and submission to the King.*
- 22 *The announcement of Vashti's exclusion for not submitting to her husband was a warning to all his subjects that (his) authority must be acknowledged – starting in the home.*

3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

Conforming to the Law showed his absolute consistency/integrity.

4) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

The King displays his wealth to impress / gain allegiance from his nobles.
Meanwhile his authority is challenged by his wife. Wise men tell him to deal with this, for unless there is authority in the home, there will be anarchy in the empire.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

Every man should have authority in his household, (reflecting our relationship with God).

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage?

22b ‘... every man should be the ruler over his own household.’

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

4 God’s glory is evident for all who will see.

8 God devolves His authority to man and we are free to respond or not to that authority.

17 Reverence for the King (God) is reflected in the family between husband and wife.

22 God wants His authority acknowledged and reflected by men.

b) His grace?

19 Our rejection of God’s authority (Gen 3), unlike Vashti’s, was not met by permanent exclusion but by grace – we may again enter His presence through Jesus .

c) Jesus and His salvation?

11 Jesus wants His church to display her beauty for His Glory among the nations.

Underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do ?

12 Note - All, like Vashti, have the free will to respond to commands of the ‘King’ (Jesus).

Unlike Vashti, obey the King’s command

18 Note - Respect for the ‘King’ brings accord and respect in human relations.

19 Make God’s Law (‘Law of Medes and Persians’) the reference point in submission to and the exercise of authority.

20 Try to ensure in your family that authority is exercised correctly – like Jesus. (Luke 2:51; Eph. 5: 21, 22, 25; 6:1, 4)

22 Note – Every man should exercise authority in his own household.

Underline the application of the Main Point

Put the Lord first

Background information

There is a gap of four years between the banquet in chapter 1 and Esther's selection as Queen in 2:16-17.

Benjamin and Judah were the tribes exiled to Babylon in 597BC and 587BC. The other 10 (northern) tribes had earlier been captured and scattered throughout the Assyrian empire. Mordecai's condensed genealogy links him to King Saul, son of Kish, also in the tribe of Benjamin.

Word List

1	<i>subsided</i>	Unusual word - used 5 times in OT, also in 7:10.
4,9	<i>pleased</i>	literally, 'good in the eyes of'
5	<i>Mordecai</i>	Hebrew equivalent of name of Babylonian 'god', <i>Marduk</i> ?
	<i>Kish</i>	Father of King Saul (1 Samuel 9:1f) (only other lineage given in book is Haman's, 3:1,10).
7	<i>Hadassah</i>	Hebrew <i>Myrtle</i> , a fragrant shrub (some say from Hebrew <i>str</i> = to conceal (cf God Himself Deut. 31:18)
	<i>Esther</i>	Hebrew transliteration of a Persian name, probably meaning <i>star</i> . The Hebrew letters could mean, 'I am hidden'; might this refer to Esther, or God himself?
8	<i>brought, taken</i>	Neutral words – no force or coercion implied
16	<i>7th year</i>	Esther crowned (3½ years after Vashti deposed).
21	<i>sitting at king's gate</i>	May mean he was a minor royal official (cf Ruth 4:1,11).
23	<i>hanged on a gallows</i>	shame, a public disgrace (cf Deuteronomy 21:22)

Bible connections

Jews in city of Susa had been allowed to return to Jerusalem	<i>see Ezra 1</i>
Jehoiachin and people exiled to Babylon	<i>see 2 Kings 24:12-14</i>
Favour with custodian	<i>see also Genesis 39:21</i>
Special food and treatment	<i>see also Daniel 1:15</i>
Myrrh: Holy anointing <i>see Ex 30:23ff</i> Sensual <i>see Song of Solomon 5:5,13</i>	
	Christ's birth Matt 2:11; death Mark 15:23; burial John 19:38
True beauty in a woman	<i>see 1 Peter 3:3,4</i>
Submission to earthly authority under God	John 5:16ff; Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1-10, Ephesians 5:22ff; 1 Peter 2:13ff
God enabling identity to be kept hidden	<i>see also 2 Kings 6:18</i>

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *What exactly did he remember?*
- 2 *Why are advisers mentioned – not merely that ‘the King did.....’?*
- 4 *In what way were the girls expected to please the King?*
- 5 *Why the extended lineage?*
- 6 *Which captives came with Jehoiachin?*
- 7 *If she was named Hadassah, why was she called ‘Esther’?*
- 9 *How did Esther please Hegai?*
Why 7 maids?
- 10 *Why did Mordecai forbid Esther to reveal her nationality?*
Why was he so attentive to her?
- 14 *Why the evening to the morning?*
- 15 *Why does the reader need reminding who Esther was?*
Why did she take only what was suggested?
- 17 *How did she win the King’s favour?*
- 18 *Why was it called ‘Esther’s banquet’?*
Why was it only for his officials?
Why did the King proclaim a holiday and give gifts?
- 19 *What was the second time the virgins were assembled?*
- 20 *How was she able to keep it secret, with her Jewish ‘Father’ sitting at the gate and having been raised by him in Susa?*
What other instructions did he continue to give?
- 22 *Why did Mordecai tell Esther, and not report to the King himself?*
Why did Esther feel the need to give Mordecai the credit?

What surprises or confuses you?

Why no ‘trauma’ associated with Esther going into the king? (8,16)

2) The Context

Surrounding passage

- 9 *7 maids (c.f. 7 Eunuchs in 1:10, 7 nobles in 1:14)*
- 18 *Royal liberality (1:7)*

1 King's anger subsided (7:10)
 9 'grace' (5:2,8; 7:3; 8:5)
20 kept her nationality hidden from the enemy of the Jews (3:6)
For a minimum of 5 years (2:16 -3:7)

Whole Bible

The exiles of Jehoiachin – (2 Kings 24:12-14)

8 Prohibition on marrying non-Jew – in Judah (Deut 7:3) and in exile (Ezra 9:1-10:44; Nehemiah 13:23-31)

9 Favour with custodian (Genesis 39:21)
 Favour with the world around (Acts 2:47)

10 Special food and treatment (Daniel 1:15)
 Openly exercising faith in the Lord (Daniel 6:10)
 Obeying God not man (Acts 4:20)

12-15 3 times 'to go in' / to enter - strong sexual overtones (Ruth 4:13; 2 Sam 11:4)
 Don't commit adultery (Ex 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18)

12 Myrrh six months - holy anointing (Ex 30:22-33), Perfume
 Song of Songs (3:6; 4:14; 5:5,13)

14 By name (John 10:3)

18 Jesus when ascended gave gifts (Psalm 68:18; Ephesians 4:8)

20 Obeyed stepfather not husband? (cf Genesis 2:24)
 Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death (Phil 2:5ff)

23 Hung on gallows, killed and disgraced (cf Deut 21:22; Joshua 8:29;
 1 Samuel 31:10)

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?
 - 1 *He remembered Vashti, her rejection of his authority and his decree that she should be banished from his presence*
 - 4 *They were expected to please him in the way that Vashti did not. The advisers were mentioned to show he was in accord with them.*
 - 5 *The extended lineage is shown because Mordecai is the main character (?)*
 - 6 *The captives with Jehoiachin were the nobility (2 Kings 24:15)*
 - 7 *She was called 'Esther' to show she hid her Jewishness?*
 - 9 *Esther pleased Hegai personally (not sexually)*

7 maids – God’s number?

10 Mordecai forbade Esther to reveal her nationality to ensure she would be treated well / have an opportunity to become queen/ because God told him to?

11 He was attentive to her because he loved her / God had made him aware of the importance of her situation.

14 The evening to the morning because the meeting was sexual.

15 The writer reminds us of who Esther was, to underline she was a Jewish girl being considered as Queen of the Persian empire!

She only took what was suggested by Hegai because she trusted him / God for the future.

17 Her beauty and submissive personality earned her favour.

18 It was called ‘Esther’s banquet’ as she attended it (with her crown on?) unlike Vashti. She was a Queen subject to her husband.

Only for his officials as the rulers of the provinces had gone home.

The King proclaimed a holiday and gave gifts to ensure that the whole empire knew he had such a queen?

19 The second time the virgins were assembled – same groups of ‘virgins’ who had been in to the King recalled for entertainment?

20 God must have enabled her to keep her identity secret/blinded King or the detail was ‘over-looked’ in the creation of the story.

The instructions he continued to give pertained to God and His plan.

22 Mordecai reported it to Esther so she would show the king she was for him/completely on His side.

Esther gave Mordecai the credit because he told her to / to show he too was for the king?

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

There was no trauma for Esther as she was ‘steadfast, trusting in the Lord’(?) (c.f. Ps 112:7)

3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

After Vashti’s dismissal, following the King’s advisors’ proposal, a replacement queen was sought in a beauty contest. Esther came to Susa, kept her Jewishness concealed at Mordecai’s command. She won the favour of Hegai (9), all who saw her (15) and the king (16). He made her queen in Vashti’s place and gave a great banquet for her.

While Mordecai waited at the King’s gate, Esther continued obeying his instruction to hide her Jewishness. Mordecai, hearing of a an assassination plot

by two kings officers, Bigthana and Teresh, reported it to the King through Esther. They were hanged and this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the King.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

It is right for God's people to live in submission to earthly authorities, but subject to his overarching authority.

(Our faith in God is stronger than any other relationship.)

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage?

"Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality, just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up". (20)

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

5&6 *God knows those who are His, whatever their current circumstances.*

God has been 'working all things for good' to bring you to your current circumstances.

9 *God keeps His hand on His people in **all** circumstances.*

20 *God institutes human authority.*

b) His grace?

8 ***All** things work for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)*

c) Jesus and His salvation?

20 *Jesus obeyed the authorities but always in submission to His Father. (John 5:16ff; Matthew 22:21)*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do ?

6 *Like Mordecai and Esther, trust God for direction and 'good' amidst disasters.*

8 *Note - Godly behaviour wins favour of the world around. (9,15,17)*

8, 9,10 *Submit to God first, then to authorities around you. (Mordecai and Esther to the King, Esther to Mordecai, Esther to Hegai).*

20 Obey God's command - 'Women respect your husbands' / (Everyone respect human authority).

22 *Always go through God's channels.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

Study 3

Esther 3:1-15

There is an enemy of God's people

Background information

Haman, it would appear, was a descendant of *Agag*, king of the Amalekites. There was a long history of enmity between the Jews and the Amalekites. See Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19; 1 Chronicles 4:43. In 1 Samuel 15:1-4 the prophet Samuel told King Saul to destroy the Amalekites and everything belonging to them, totally. But Saul spared King Agag and kept the best of the spoil. Agag was then killed by Samuel (1 Samuel 15:7-9; 15:32-33)

Esther becomes queen in 7th year of Xerxes reign (2:16-17) and Haman presents his plan of genocide to the king in the 12th year of his reign (3:7).

Word List

1 *Haman* the Agagite *see above*
6 *The people of Mordecai* (x2) – shows Mordecai represents the Jews(?)
7 *Nissan* March/April in our Calendar.
Pur probably the Akkadian word *puru*, meaning small clay cubes for casting lots. *Hebrew* plural *'Purim'*. Forerunner of dice?
Adar February/March in our Calendar
9 10,000 talents – unimaginably large sum *cf* Matt 18:24
10 *signet ring* sign of the king's authority
11 'keep the money' or 'the money is given to you' *cf* Esther's description 'sold for destruction' (7:4) in her plea to Xerxes
12 *13th day of 1st month* the day before the Jewish Passover. (Lev 23:5)
Satraps, governors, ..nobles ie to all of the king's domain
15 *the whole city* Bewildered - *cf* rejoicing (8:15)

Bible connections

1 The curse on those who curse God's people *see* Gen 12:3 *cf* Amalekites/
Agag (Exodus 17:16; 1 Samuel 15:7f)
2 Kneeling and paying homage *see* Philippians 2:5-9; Matthew 4:9
5 God's 'peculiar' people *see* 1 Peter 1:1
7 Casting lots *see* Proverbs 16:33
9 10,000 talents – unimaginably large sum *cf* Matt 18:24
10 The king gave permission (His signet ring) to the devil! *see* (Job 1:12)
13 Seeking to destroy God's people *see* John 10:10; 1 Peter 5:8
 Hatred of God's people *see* John 15:18; 17:14

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

1 *Who was Haman?*

Why was he honoured above all others?

2 *What did the kneeling of the king's officials signify?*

Why would Mordecai not bow down to Haman?

3 *How did Mordecai get away with disobeying the King?*

4 *Why did they want to see if Mordecai would be tolerated?*

Why had Mordecai told them he was a Jew?

5 *Why was Haman enraged?*

6 *Why did hearing that Mordecai was a Jew make a difference to Haman?*

7 *How long had Esther been queen when Haman resolved to destroy the Jews?*

What is the significance of the 12th month of Hadar?

Why did they 'cast a lot' to select a day?

8 *Why did Haman not name the Jews before Xerxes?*

Why was it not in the King's best interests to tolerate them?

9 *What does the amount of money signify?*

10 *What did the transfer of the ring mean?*

Why is the full description of Haman added here?

11 *Why was the money not necessary?*

13 *Why was a single day chosen and publicised in advance?*

Why was permission given to plunder the goods of the Jews?

14 *Why was it made a law?*

15 *Why was the city of Susa 'bewildered'?*

What surprises or confuses you?

8 *Why weren't the Jews mentioned by name – would it have made a difference?*

2) The Context

Surrounding passage,

1 *After these things (2:1)*

Mordecai's loyalty not rewarded (2:22)

7 *Genealogy of Haman cf Mordecai (2:5ff)*

Individual book

2 *kneel down cf Esther's prostration before Xerxes? (8:3) (both words used in context of worship??)*

- 5 'enraged' four times of King (1:12; 2:1; 7:7,10) and twice of Haman (3:5; 5:5)
- 8 'tolerate'? Hebrew verb is 'nwh' as in 9:17,18,22
Mordecai had saved the King (2:22)
Jews get 'rested / relief' (9:17,18,22)
- 9 if it pleases the king (5:4,7,8; 7:3-4; 8:5-6; 9:13)
- 13 dispatches – used by king (1:22); Mordecai(8:14,9:20) Esther (9:29)
Ch 1, ch 2, ch 3, chs 5-7, ch 9 – feasting!

Whole Bible

- 2 Bow down and worship the devil (Matt 4:9,10)
- 5 The world hates God's people (John 15:18)
- 6 The enemy /destroyer of God's people (1Pet 5:8; Rev.9:11)
- 10 The Agagites were implacable enemies of the Jews (1 Sam 15:1ff)
The delegation of authority to the evil one (Rev 9:1ff)
- 12 Jewish Passover (Ex 13:1-16)
- 13 Total destruction of Amalekites ordered (1 Sam 17:3)

Bible story

The line of God's promised saviour for the world was threatened with extinction by the enemies of his chosen people≥

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?
 - 1 Haman was a descendent of King Agag, an Amalekite – see above.
We are not given a reason for this honouring of Haman.
 - 2 Kneeling signified submitting / honouring / even worshipping?
Mordecai would not submit to, honour or worship an enemy of God.
 - 3 They wanted to see if Mordecai would be tolerated because they knew he was a Jew (and knew how Haman hated the Jews).
 - 4 Mordecai told them he was a Jew to explain his peculiar behaviour / devotion (?)
 - 5 Haman was enraged not merely by the disobedience but by the implication – Jews historically were sworn enemies of his people.
 - 6 It made a difference to Haman because he hated all Jews.
 - 7 Esther had been queen for five years (2:16) when Haman resolved to destroy the Jews.
The 12th month meant waiting 11 months before acting (3:13).
They thought 'casting a lot' gave divine help / guidance

8 *Haman didn't name the Jews, when trying to ensure Xerxes' support, as they were law-abiding, good citizens whom he had slandered by implying they did not obey the king.*
It wasn't in the King's best interests because they might rebel against him, incited by their 'higher authority.'

9 *The amount of money shows Haman's wealth (it was about half the Empire's annual tax revenue) and the strength of his desire to wipe out the Jews.*

10 *The transfer showed the king abdicating responsibility, giving Haman an apparent carte blanche.*
The full description of Haman underlines he had always hated Jews.

11 *The money was 'given to him' as it was a non-issue?*

13 *The single day was chosen and publicised in advance to ensure concerted effort and complete success?*
Plunder was the 'spoils of war'.

14 *It was made law to ensure everyone would comply.*

15 *The city of Susa was 'bewildered' as this had come out of nowhere; the Jews had done nothing to merit it.*

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

8 *The Jews weren't mentioned by name because they were evidently 'for' the king / good citizens*

3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

The line of God's promised saviour for the World was threatened with extinction by the enemies of His chosen people.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

Our enemy, the devil, seeks to destroy God's people because they will not worship him, the devil.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? **v 6**

Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole Kingdom.

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

6 God tolerates evil in His world – for a time.

7 God is in total control of all things.

b) His grace?

13 God's time is perfect – He is never too late for deliverance.

c) Jesus and His salvation?

13 The apparent greatest defeat of God's people may mask the greatest triumph e.g. the Cross of Jesus

Underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do ?

1 'Do not assume that 'success' is a sign of God's blessing.

2 Stand firm as God's people and worship Him and Him alone.

Wait on God for His fair response / recognition.

4 Be resolute to stand on God's truth – whatever opposes you.

5 Note - The devil implacably hates God's people.

6 Acknowledge that the devil seeks to totally destroy God's people.

Note - The devil is not omniscient.

8 Note - The devil is a liar.

9 Note - The devil boasts total wealth and power.

12 Note - Evil may be done using God's name.

15 Note -The world may be bewildered by the apparent triumph of evil.

Underline the application of the Main Point

Put your trust in the Lord

Background information

Up to now it is the King and his officials who have been taking action. Mordecai's public display of mourning induces Jews to follow his example and allows Esther to become instantly aware of the threat to the Jews.

Mordecai, having earlier told Esther to hide her religion, now commands her to identify herself with the Jews and ask the king to help them. Esther emerges as the figure of hope upon whom the outcome of the story depends.

Word List

1 <i>cry out</i>	<i>lit.</i> 'he cried out with a great and bitter crying out' (cf Jonah 3:7)
<i>sackcloth and ashes etc</i>	a customary sign of mourning & prayer
<i>into the city</i>	better 'through the city'
4 <i>great distress</i>	very unusual form of verb <i>hyl</i> to describe a physical response to pain or anguish
5 <i>Hathach</i>	a trusted and reliable servant?
6 <i>The open square</i>	where Mordecai is honoured by the King (6:9,11)
8 <i>urge</i>	the verb means <i>command</i> 'Beg for mercy' - <i>lit</i> 'seek that he should stoop'
11 <i>gold sceptre</i>	Symbol of power and authority
<i>30 days passed...called to king</i>	perhaps Esther was not particularly favoured by the king at this point.

Bible connections

1 Sackcloth and ashes	<i>see</i> Daniel 9:3; Luke 10:13
1,3 Fasting, weeping and wailing	<i>see also</i> Joel 2:12
Interceding before the throne	<i>see</i> Job 16:19; Proverbs 18:23; Romans 8:26,34
11 Death in presence of God	<i>see</i> Exodus 33:20
15 Three days and nights	<i>see</i> Matt 12:40
16 Free to lay down life	<i>see</i> John 10:18
Ready to perish in hands of God	<i>see</i> Daniel 3:18

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

1 *What had been done?*

Why did he go out into the city wailing and crying?

What was the purpose of fasting, sackcloth and ashes?

2 *Why was no one in sackcloth allowed to enter?*

4 *Why did Mordecai not contact Esther direct?*

Why was Esther in great distress?

5 *Why didn't Esther know about the Jews when Mordecai did (1)?*

Why did she not summon Mordecai?

7 *What had 'happened to him'?*

Why does Mordecai tell him the 'exact' amount of money?

8 *What was the basis of Esther's appeal to the King?*

Why didn't Mordecai go in to the Kings presence himself?

11 *What was the Golden sceptre and what did it mean?*

Why had 30 days passed since she was summoned?

Why was Esther reluctant to go in to the King?

13 *What did Mordecai think was the reason for her reluctance*

14 *How could he be so sure deliverance would come?*

Why does he invoke the perishing of her father's family?

Who does know?

16 *Why three days and nights?*

Why should the maids fast if they were Persians?

17 *Why all her instructions?*

What surprises or confuses you?

3, 16 *Why is prayer not mentioned?*

2) The Context

Surrounding passage,

1 *All that had been done – dispatches - 13th day of 1st month, kill all Jews on 13th day of 12th month – whole empire (3:12-14)*

Individual book

5,8 *Esther was now being told to declare herself a Jew by pleading for her people' (c.f. 2:10,20)*

11 *This law - universally accepted by those in authority*

Whole Bible

1 *and ashes (Daniel 9:3; Matthew 11:21)*

Tore his clothes – sad regret (Gen 37:29 Godly repentance) Joshua 7:6; 2 Kings 19:1)

4 No mourning in God's presence (Rev 21:4)
 When one part suffers, every part suffers (1 Corinthians 12:26a)
 Jesus intercedes for us (Hebrews 7:25)

11 No man shall see God and live (Exodus 33:20)
 30 days – mourning Aaron and Moses (Numbers 20:29; Deut. 34:8)
 - no praying (Daniel 6:7)

14 Jesus baptised / implicated with his fellow creatures (Matt 3:14)

15 Dilemma for a saviour (Luke 22:42)

16 If I perish, I perish (Gen 43:14; Daniel 3:17)
 Into your hands I commit myself (Luke 23:46)
 Free to lay down life (John 10:18)
 Three days and nights (Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:40)
 Interceding before the throne (Job 16:19; Pr 18:23; Rmns 8:26,34)

Bible story

Not mentioning Prayer is like not mentioning food in the context of hunger. It is so glaring an omission that it draws attention to the fact that people are seeking God, and He is working behind the scenes.

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?
 - 1 An Edict from the King ordering the annihilation of all Jews on a day 11 months ahead had been sent round the whole empire.
 He went out to the city wailing to make a public show of his grief.
 Fasting, sackcloth and ashes were enhancers of prayer to God?
 - 2 Sackcloth / mourning had no place before an omnipotent king(?)
 - 4 Mordecai didn't contact Esther directly at once because his priority was to seek God first in prayer.
 Esther's distress was great because she loved Mordecai and knew there must be a serious problem.
 - 5 Esther, isolated from society, did not know what the problem was.
 She did not summon Mordecai because she was a Jew 'under cover' and he was in sack cloth and ashes (2) so they conversed through an intermediary.
 - 7 Haman's conspiracy against the Jews 'had happened to him'.
 Mordecai tells him the 'exact' amount to show how serious the situation was.
 - 8 The basis of Esther's appeal to the King was mercy for her people – mercy not justice; she now owned her nationality.

11 Golden sceptre, symbol of authority means he had power to have mercy.
 30 days passed since she was summoned because the King was occupied with other affairs – of state, or women!?

Esther reluctant to go in to the King because she feared rejection?

13 Mordecai thought the reason for her reluctance was she feared rejection / death.

14 He could be sure of deliverance because he trusted God's covenant.
 He invokes the death of her father's **as her** Father's name continuing depended on her?
 God alone knows.

16 The three days & nights was preparation for deliverance and victory
 Her maids, though Persian, were part of her household.

17 It was completely over to her!

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?
The unmentioned 'elephant in the room' is prayer. It 'shouts' that God is in control though not seen.

3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.
Mordecai's response to the news of the edict was to pray (to God). Esther enquires, through an intermediary, of the reason. M tells her she should go to the King to tell him about the fate of the Jews, that she is a Jew too and plead for mercy, because (God) has put her in this place to do this. She responds by calling for all the Jews to fast (i.e. asks for prayer without naming it) and trusts in Mordecai (God's) word.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?
God is committed to fulfil His promise and save his people through a willing servant.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? **v 4**
For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from another place (4:14).

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

11 God's presence is Holy – we cannot approach Him.

14 God is faithful to His covenant – he will not let His people perish.

b) His grace?

14 There is no payment or trick that can stop it. (cf Haman) Deliverance for God's people comes in God's time and God's way.

c) Jesus and His salvation?

11 The gold sceptre is extended to us in Jesus.

Underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do?

1 Make public the oppression of God's people.

3 Seek God in prayer when the chips are down.

4 Share the pain that brothers and sisters in Christ experience.

Beware the first reaction to cover the problem.

7 Be frank about the serious, imminent need of salvation.

8 Make people aware of the predicament of God's people.

Petition God that He should stoop / be merciful in salvation.

13 Note: The people of God cannot 'sit on the fence' r/e the Devil.

14 Note: God has work for you to do on behalf of His people.

16 All God's people are involved in the Saviour's approach to the King.

'Three days' – in God's time, that His people might seek deliverance.

Better to 'perish' with God than to try and live without Him.

Underline the application of the Main Point

Wait on God

Background information

On the third day of the Jewish fast, Esther approaches the inner court in front of the King's Hall. Archaeological excavations have revealed an inner court in this location. This hall was his audience chamber.

Verse 1 uses the Hebrew word *malkut* ('royalty') three times. Esther literally 'puts on royalty', Xerxes sits on his 'throne of royalty' in 'the house of royalty'. This emphasises Esther is entering her other world, the king's realm.

Word List

3 *even up to half the kingdom* indicates the greatest favour, with the King remaining in complete control.

9 *High spirits* lit. 'of good heart' (cf 1:10)

10 *friends* called Haman's 'advisers' in 6:13

boasted Hebrew verb is *spr*, to relate/to recount

11 *vast wealth* better 'the glory of his wealth'

14 *seventy five feet high* Hebrew 50 cubits, (about 23m)

Bible connections

3,6 Gift of half a Kingdom *see also* Mark 6:23

8 The right time for deliverance *see* Galatians 4:4

 Acting with wisdom *see* Proverbs 13:15; 16:22; 19:11

9 No fear *see* 2 Timothy 1:7

11 Boasts earthly wealth/power *see* Luke 12:18-19

14 Acting with folly *see* Proverbs 12:16; 13:16; 14:8; 15:14; 17:16; 20:3; 26:7-9; 29:9,11

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *Why did she wait till the 3rd day?*
Why did she put on her royal robes?
What was the significance of the King facing the entrance?
- 2 *Why was he pleased with her?*
Why did she touch the tip of his sceptre?
- 3 *Why did he call her 'queen'?*
Why did he offer up to half his kingdom?
- 4 *Why did Esther invite him to a banquet and not just tell him?*
- 5 *Why did he call for Haman?*
- 6 *Why 'as they were drinking wine'?*
Why offer 'up to half his kingdom' again?
- 8 *Why did she put off, for a further day, and until another banquet, before making her real request to the King?*
- 9 *What so angered Haman?*
- 10 *Why did Haman restrain himself / not deal with Mordecai then?*
Why did Haman call his friends together?
- 13 *Why does he call him 'that Jew Mordecai'.*
- 14 *Why did his wife/his friends suggest having Mordecai killed?*
Why were the gallows so high?

What surprises or confuses you?

- 4 *Why doesn't she ask for Haman's head on a platter?!*

2) The Context

Surrounding passage

- 1 *On the third day is the end of her fast (4:16)*
Unsolicited entry may result in death (4:11)

Individual book

- 1 *Contrast Vashti not coming to see the king (1:10)*
- 9 *Haman filled with anger (3:5)*
- 11 *Haman - riches (5:11,12), big family (9:7-10), royal decorations (3:1)*

Whole Bible

- 1 *Robes (Luke 15:22) Royal robes (Revelation 7:9,13,14; 22:14)*
3rd day (Luke 24:7,21,26)
- 2 *The royal sceptre (Psalm 45:6; Hebrews 1:8)*
- 3 *Half the Kingdom (Mark 6:23)*

- 5 Haman – prince of this world (?) (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)
- 7 At the name of Jesus every knee should bow (Philippians 2:10)
- 8 Happy and in high spirits (1 Kings 8:66; 2 Chronicles 7:10)
Tomorrow - A time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1)
- 9 Don't be anxious about anything (Philippians 4:6)
He will have no fear of bad news. His heart will be steadfast trusting in the Lord (Psalm 112:6)
- 14 50 cubits = Breadth of ark (Gen 6:15), of tabernacle (Ex 27:12,13)
not a hair in your head will perish (Luke 21:18 Matthew 6:25ff)

Bible story

It appeared that the Saviour's line would be extinguished - but the Lord was working his purpose out, in His time.

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

I She had vowed to fast till the third day.

She put on her royal robes because she was to see the king.

The King was ready to receive visitors.

2 *He was in the mood to be pleased with her (God's provision again).*

Touching the tip of his sceptre was an act of submission / acknowledging his power.

3 *He called her 'queen', acknowledging her royal status.*

'Up to half' was a sign of acceptance of her, while retaining the greater part of the kingdom left him in absolute control.

4 *The banquet was to demonstrate fellowship – Esther, and her request, were being included within the King's concern.*

5 *He called for Haman because Esther had asked for him at the banquet too.*

6 *The wine left them relaxed and at ease, engrossed in the banquet.*

'Up to half' meant the King was always in control but he would give her anything short of that.

8 *It must have been the Lord's prompt to put off for a further day her request to the King.*

9 *Haman was angered because*

a) Mordecai had a privileged place at the king's gate.

b) He had shown Haman no respect.

10 *The king's gate was not part of Haman's jurisdiction.*

Haman called his friends together to massage his ego which had been bruised by the encounter with Mordecai?

13 *He said, 'that Jew' because that was the source of his problem.*

14 His wife/his friends suggested having Mordecai killed by the King because they didn't realise his significance.
The gallows were this high to demonstrate Haman's power.

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

4 *It was not the right (the Lord's) time.*

3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

Esther approached the king, was received and invited Haman and him to a banquet. They came and enjoyed it but were invited back to another banquet the next day. Haman could not enjoy this fully as Mordecai was present at the King's gate. His complaint to his wife and friends elicited from them the suggestion of having Mordecai hanged the next morning. Haman delighted in this and had the gallows built.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

Wait on God for His timing concerning His people.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? **v 8**

Let Haman and the King come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then, I will answer the question. (5:8)

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

1 God awaits and welcomes.

3 God is willing to give 'up to half his kingdom' in Jesus.

8 God heeds the humble requests of His people.

b) His grace?

3 By grace God is willing to offer us all that we need.

7 We depend completely on God for His favour.

c) Jesus and His salvation?

2 God extends His welcome to us in Jesus.

Jesus 'touched God's sceptre on our behalf'.

Now underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do?

- 1 Approach the king wearing the 'royal robes' i.e. – through Jesus.
- 2 Wait on God for His timing / initiative.
- 4 Await God's pleasure.

8 Note - The right thing at the wrong time is the wrong thing.

9/13 Note - The devil is enraged by the devotion of God's people.

Note - God's people know peace in the face of their enemies as they trust Him to deliver them.

10 Note -The devil bides his time.

11 God has given the devil great wealth and resources but he is not omnipotent.

14 Note -The devil is not omniscient – he thinks he can win!

Now underline the application of the Main Point

God's timing is perfect

Background information

This is the turning point of the narrative. There are certain 'coincidences'; God is in complete control:

1. Events happen on the night Haman builds gallows for Mordecai (5: 14)
2. The King can't get to sleep (6:1a)
3. The King decides to read the chronicles – which mention Mordecai (1b)
4. Haman came to the court to seek Mordecai's *death* just as the king was looking for someone to *honour* Mordecai (v4).
5. Haman mistook the King's question, thinking *he* was to be honoured (6).
6. As he talked to his friends, the King's eunuchs arrive to take him to Esther's banquet (14).
7. The Persians had a society called *Orosangae* or 'Benefactors of the King' for men who had given the King some special service. They were extravagantly honoured or rewarded. None of Haman's suggestions in v8-9 were unusual in the Persian culture.

Word List

1 <i>could not sleep</i>	literally 'the sleep of the king fled'.
<i>book of the chronicles</i>	which recorded anything that happened if it concerned the King.
3 <i>recognition</i>	or 'promotion'
6 <i>delights</i>	lit 'bend towards' (6, 7, 9 <i>twice</i> , 11; 2:14)
9 <i>city streets</i>	'open square of the city' (cf 4:6)

Bible Connections

2 Bighana and Teresh's plot	<i>see</i> Esther 2:21-23
3 Rewarding loyalty	<i>see also</i> Genesis 41:42-43
6b Pride before a fall	<i>see</i> Proverbs 11:2; 16:18; 28:14; 29:23
13b The futility of fighting God/his people	<i>see</i> Acts 5:39

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

1 *Why could the King not sleep?*

Why order the book of the chronicles, 12 years into his reign? (3:7)

Why was he reading the dull bits, not the successful battles?!

2 *How was it found amidst much detail?*

Why did he not know whether Mordecai had been rewarded?

3 *Did the King already know 'Mordecai'?*

What was the timing – did he read, ask and get a reply in a short space of time?

4 *How is the timing so closely synchronised*

What is 'the court'?

5 *What does 'Haman standing in the court' mean?*

6 *Why the hyperbole – delights.*

Why did Haman assume it would be him?

7f *What did royal robe, horse, crest mean?*

Why did Haman ask for this?

9 *Why one of the king's most noble princes?*

Did the King realise Haman was thinking of it for himself?

10 *Why does the King call him Mordecai the Jew?*

11 *Why did Haman do it – i.e. not find and excuse not to?*

12 *What does Mordecai returning to the King's gate show?*

Why was Haman filled with grief?

13 *How did they know that Haman's downfall was inevitable?*

Why did they not give this advice at first (5:14)?

14 *What was the rush?*

What surprises or confuses you?

6 *Mordecai had broken the King's law (3:2-5; 5:9)*

13 *Where did this view of the invincibility of the Jews come from?*

2) The Context

Surrounding passage,

4 *outer court, c.f. inner court (4:11)*

8 *Royal robes (5:1; 8:15)*

10 *At once c.f. downfall had started (13), hurried away (14)*

14 *Hurried by others (c.f. 5:5)*

Individual book

- 1 The incident with Mordecai was recorded in the annals ‘in the presence of the King’. (2:23b).
- 12 Return to the King’s gate (2:19,21; 5:9).
The edict still stood (3:13).
- 13 Not stand – said to the 2nd most important man in the empire (3:1)!

Whole Bible

- 6 Left hand not to know what your right hand is doing ... Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:3).
Store treasures in Heaven (Matt 6:20).
- 4 At just the right time (Gal 4:4).
Outer court / inner court, holy of holies (Ex 26:33,34; Lev 16:2ff).
- 6b Do not take a place of honour (Luke 14:8).
The one the king delights to honour cf Jesus made himself nothing... therefore God exalted him (Philippians 2:6ff).
- 12 Head covered (2 Samuel 15:30).
- 13 Reverence for the God of the Jews (Dan 6:26).
Disarming and exposing enemies of God (Colossians 2:13-15).

Bible story

The devil has instituted a plan to kill all the Jews. The plan begins to unravel at the last minute (cf the crucifixion is past. It’s Sunday morning. There is a creak from the tomb of Jesus!)

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

1 The Lord was at work!

The Lord prompted him to.

Ditto!

2 Ditto

He didn’t know or had forgotten. It can’t have been recorded.

3 It is not clear whether the King already knew ‘Mordecai’. It would seem so if he added the description, ‘the Jew’ in v 10.

This seems to have happened at once.

4 The timing is because God had ordained it.

‘The court’ is the outer court.

5 ‘Standing’ in the court implies he is waiting for an audience.

6 delights = literally ‘bend towards’.

Haman assumed it would be himself because of his pride.

7 It meant he was made equal to the King (?)

Haman asks for this as he thought it was for himself.

9 ‘One of the most noble princes’ because he seeks the highest honour.
It does not say whether the King realised Haman was thinking of it for himself.

10 The King called him ‘Mordecai the Jew’ as that is how he was widely known?

11 Haman did it to obey the king’s command.

12 M humbly returns to the King’s gate, unaffected by all the fuss.

He was filled with grief as he had lifted Mordecai above himself.

13 Haman’s downfall was inevitable as he challenged the Jewish God.

They did not give this advice at first (5:14), because they did not realise Mordecai was on God’s side.

This view of the invincibility of the Jews came from God Himself.

14 The rush underlines his helplessness and the inevitability of his demise.

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

6 *Mordecai had broken the King’s Law only as it related to Haman. In all other matters he honoured and served the King (cf 2:22ff).*

13 *The view that the Jews were invincible must be a writer’s perspective, or Haman would not have hatched the plan in the first place?*

3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

Esther waits (prayerfully). Haman waits (in malicious ignorance). God moves (invisibly). He orchestrates events so that rather than destroying Mordecai, Haman has to give him the highest honour of the King. As Mordecai returns to work, forgets himself and focuses on the salvation of his people. It is plain to those closest to Haman that his attempt to kill God’s people is leading to his inevitable downfall.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

God inevitably and in a timely way delivers the Jews / His people from all who would extinguish them.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? v 13b

Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him – you will surely come to ruin.

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

1 God is in complete control even when things look black!

4 God's timing is perfect.

12 God not only defeats his enemies – he publicly humiliates them.

13 God, the all-powerful, is absolutely committed to His people.

b) His grace?

11 Our deliverance is dependent on and completely in God's hands.

c) Jesus and His salvation?

11 Through Jesus, he delivered us from death and made a public spectacle of the powers and authorities (Colossians 2:17)

Now underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do?

1 Note: God works through 'coincidences' in day-to-day circumstances.

Pray. Do what you are able. Trust God to work out of your sight / imagination.

3b Don't look for recognition – God sees and will reward you in due course.

6b Pride come before a fall.s

11 Do not fear enemies - God will expose and vindicate.

12 Remain focussed on work of Kingdom & salvation of God's people.

13 Note: the downfall of all who hate the Jews / God's people is inevitable.

Now underline the application of the Main Point

The evil one is defeated

Background information

If chapter 6 is the turning point of the story then chapter 7 is perhaps the heart of it. Irony and ‘coincidence’ continue along with a number of other tension-raising devices. The scheduling of events is tight, as one event, revelation or decision builds the foundation for the next.

Esther’s character develops as she moves from being passive and reticent to forcefully pro-active.

The Greek historian, Herodotus, tells us that requests made at Persian royal banquets could not be refused; they had to be honoured.

An edict about conduct in the harems says a courtier or a eunuch ‘when he would speak with a woman of the palace, should not approach closer than seven steps.’ Xerxes finds Haman in a compromising position and so accuses him of molesting the queen.

Furthermore, Herodotus reports that the law ‘suffers not the king himself to slay a man for one offence’. Thus, Haman would be executed for two crimes - the plot against the Jews and for molesting the queen?

Word List

1	<i>Queen Esther</i>	Repeated (2,3,5,7)
2	<i>even up to half the kingdom</i>	Same wording as 5:3. The ultimate generous gesture while retaining control / authority.
4	<i>destruction, slaughter, annihilation</i>	Hebrew repeats exactly the three verbs used in 3:13
8	<i>exclaimed</i>	lit. ‘the <u>word</u> went out from the King’s mouth and’
	<i>covered Haman’s face</i>	a sign that the king’s judgement of guilty has been delivered.

Bible Connections

6	Making petitions known	<i>see</i> Philippians 4:6
	A vile enemy	<i>see</i> 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:10

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

1 'So' what?

2 What is the significance of drinking wine?

Why did Esther wait till the second day of the second banquet?

Why did the king make his offer of 'up to half my kingdom' again?

3 Why is she so obsequious?

4 Why 'sold' for destruction?

Why is slavery not worth avoiding?

5 Why does the king not connect 'destroy, kill etc' with the decree Haman got him to make? (cf 3:8, 13)

6 Why was Haman terrified – was he not the favoured one?

7 Why was the king angry?

Why did he leave his wine?

Why did the King go to the palace garden?

8 Which word left the King's mouth?

What was the reason for covering Haman's face?

9 How did Harbona know the gallows had been made for Mordecai?

Why did he 'stick up' for Mordecai now?

10 Why does he not need to consult his advisers? (cf 1:13)

Why does the narrator mention the king's anger subsiding?

What surprises or confuses you?

4 Why is the queen so deferential?

2) The Context

Surrounding passage

1 so ... (Haman hurried off 10, 12 13,14)

7 The king hanged Haman 'because he had attacked the Jews' (8:7)

Individual book

2,7 wine (1:7,8,10)

2 'as they were drinking wine' (5:6)

3 deferential, contrast Vashti (1:12)

up to half the kingdom (5:3,6)

Esther reveals her Jewishness .(2:10)

4 'Sold' implies a transaction took place? (3:9; 4:7)

7 Rage/fury (10; 1:12)

Garden of the palace (1:5,6)

9 Harbona (1:10)

The gallows, 50 cubits high (5:14)
Spoke up to help the king (2:21-23)
Hang him (consultation over Vashti – cf 1:13)

Whole Bible

- 2 *Giving us all things (Romans 8:32)*
Jesus' complete authority over the world (Matthew 28:18)
- 3 *Making petitions known (Philippians 4:6)*
Humble yourself before God (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6)
Found favour cf Noah (Gen 6:8). Mary (Luke 1:30)
- 6 *Adversary (1 Peter 5:8 cf Rev 12:10)*
- 8 *Covered face (Psalm 34:5)*
- 9 *The devil destroyed (Rev 20:10)*
- 10 *Public spectacle triumphing by the cross (Colossians 2:15)*
Wrath of God (Romans 1:18, 25; Revelation 6:16f; 19:15)
Jesus – propitiation for our sins (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10)
(NB propitiation = averting the divine wrath)

Bible story

The means of the destruction of the principal of God's people is utilised instead to destroy the enemy. (cf the cross of Jesus)

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?
 - 1 *So – indicates the next stage of the action (same words as in 5:5b for first banquet).*
 - 2 *The drinking of wine had them relaxed and unsuspecting?*
Esther waits till the second day as she was waiting on the King's / the Lord's initiative.
He wanted to assure her of his favour.
 - 3 *She is so 'obsequious' because she recognises his rightful authority.*
 - 4 *'Sold' indicates she knew about Haman's 'bribe' to the king.*
Slavery was worth avoiding but it was not an absolute as death was.
She recognises the king's absolute power
 - 5 *The king did not make the connection (3:8, 13) as he was hoodwinked!*
 - 6 *Haman realised to his horror he was no longer the favoured second-in-command.*
 - 7 *The king was angry as he realised Haman had manipulated him.*
He left his wine expressing change in mood, celebration to judgment.
The King went to the garden to 'count to ten'! (Or relieve himself?!)
 - 8 *The death sentence was pronounced, at least, for molesting the queen.*

9 *Harbona knew, as it was common knowledge; Harbona stuck up for him as he had known of Mordecai's loyalty to Xerxes and Haman was now finished.*

10 *This was treason – an attempt to molest the queen. The narrator mentioned the king's anger subsiding to show that Haman alone was the cause of it.*

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

4 *The queen is so deferential because she recognises the ultimate authority of the King.*

3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

With words of foreboding from his wife and advisors, Haman is hustled into the second Banquet with Esther and the King. When the King presses Esther for her request, she pleads for her life and that of her people who have been sold for destruction, slaughter and annihilation at the hands of the vile enemy - Haman.

His fate is sealed and despite pleas for his life, he is taken out and hanged / 'hoist with his own petard'!

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

The anger of the king is assuaged as the evil one's worst plan is turned on himself.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? v10

So they hanged Haman on the gallows they had prepared for Mordecai. Then the King's fury subsided (v10)

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

2 *The King is willing to give His Kingdom to his people....*

3 *The King is worthy of our worship.*

7 *The King is furious when his people are plotted against.*

9 *The King decrees that evil will be extinguished.*

b) His grace?

2 *The Lord owes us nothing but offers us everything / His Kingdom within His Lordship.*

c) Jesus and His salvation?

10 The cross which was for the Lord's / our destruction was the means for the destruction of the Devil / His works.

Now underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do?

3 *Humble yourself before God.*

Make your petitions / situation known to God.

7b *Beware the 'on the couch' appeals of the devil.*

9 *Be ready to speak up for the Lord / God's people.*

10 *Believe that the stake / cross deals with the devil and God's anger.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

Study 8

Esther 8:1 -17

God gives the victory that is yet to be fully realised

Background information

The historians Herodotus (Greek) and Josephus (Jewish) tell us that the property of convicted criminals was at the disposal of the crown. Xerxes gives Haman's estate to Esther to indicate his favour. She now raises her central concern, addressing Xerxes in a deferential way, 'If it pleases the king...'

The edict Esther and Mordecai are permitted to send out countersmands exactly that of Haman the Agagite in 3:13. Jewish readers would be struck by the parallels with Saul's attack against the Amalekites, especially the instruction to destroy them totally (1 Samuel 15:3).

The irony is that Haman's attempt at genocide instead *increased* Jewish numbers, by conversion!

Word List

2,8 <i>signet ring</i>	symbolic of king's authority. A new decree was needed because, legally, any previous law could not be reversed or cancelled.
5 <i>dispatches</i>	Esther avoids the irrevocable overtones of <i>dat</i> (law) <i>be written overruling</i> verb is 'to turn around' i.e. revoke (<i>cf</i> Judges 11:35)
9 <i>Sivan</i>	the 3 rd month, i.e. 9 months before Haman's plan to annihilate the Jews was to be put into action.
11 <i>assemble and protect themselves</i>	literally 'stand up for themselves'
12 <i>Adar</i>	the 12th month, and the 13th day was the exact date of Haman's plan against the Jews.
13 <i>avenge</i>	'not senseless killing, but justified retaliation' <i>cf</i> 1 Samuel 12:25
16 <i>happiness, joy, gladness, honour</i>	<i>cf.</i> Mourning, fasting, weeping, wailing (4:3)

Bible Connections

8 Signet ring	<i>see also</i> Genesis 41:42
11 Reversal for the weak	<i>see also</i> 1 Samuel 2:1-10
17 Other nations becoming Jews	<i>see also</i> Genesis 17:12; Ps. 67; Isaiah 49:6
Fear of the Jews	<i>see also</i> Deuteronomy 2:4; Joshua 2:8,9
Joy	<i>see also</i> Psalm 16:8-9,11; 34:1-8; 126:1-3

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *How much did Haman's estate consist of?*
What does 'coming into the presence of the King' mean?
- 2 *What power did the signet ring give Mordecai?*
What did appointing him over Haman's estate mean?
- 3 *What was the reason for the manner of approach. (cf 4:8; 5:2; 7:3)?*
Why not fasting before this approach (cf 4:16)?
Why was Haman's plan still 'live'?
- 4 *Why did the King extend the sceptre again?*
- 5 *Why these form of words – were they standard (5:7; 7:3)?*
Why so many 'ifs'?
What did she mean 'overrule'?
- 6 *Why no mention of herself?*
- 7 *What was the King's reasoning?*
- 8 *Why the 'carte blanch' again? (cf 3:10)*
What made the documents irrevocable?
- 9 *Why were the secretaries summoned 'at once' – no time to think?*
What is the reason for the emphasis of all words to each and every (cf 1:21; 3:12)?
- 10 *Why emphasis on speed – they had 9 months to go?*
- 11 *Why was edict an exact counter to Haman's – kill & plunder? (3:13)*
- 12 *Why was the same (single) day appointed – not pre-emptive?*
- 13 *Why every people, not just the Jews?*
- 14 *Why was the city of Susa also included?*
- 15 *What was the significance of blue & white linen? / Was Mordecai wearing the King's curtains?! (1:6)*
Why did the city of Susa celebrate?
- 16 *Why was it a time of 'honour'?*
- 17 *What was the reason for their joy – they had not won yet?*
Why did they become Jews?
Why did they fear this small, dispersed, enslaved nation?

What surprises or confuses you?

- 9 & 12 *Why did they have to wait from 23rd of 3rd month to 13th of 12th Month?*

2) The Context

Surrounding passage

- 1 *the same day when Haman, the enemy of Jews, was hanged (7:10)*

Individual book

- 1 *enemy of the Jews (3:10; 9:10)*
Relationship of Esther and Mordecai (cousins, 'adopted father and daughter (2:7)
- 3 'the Agagite' (3:1f)
- 4 *The king's welcome (5:2)*
- 6 *no mention of her own destruction? (4:14)*
- 8 *no revoking of order with the King's seal (3:12)*
The same day as the attack ordered (3:12)
- 9 *the scribes were summoned (3:12)*

Whole Bible

- 1 *Jesus is given all authority over all things (Matt. 28:18)*
- 3 *Approaching the throne (Ex.33:20)*
- 3-5 'if' (Luke 22:42a)
6 *intercedes for his people (Rom 8:26,27)*
Yet not my will but yours be done (Luke 22:42b)
- 8 *The immutable law of God (Matthew 5:17f)*
The delegation of authority to the evil one (Revelation 9:1ff)
He cannot disown himself (2 Timothy 2:13)
- 9 *Doing the Father's work, in the Father's name (John 5:19,30,43)*
- 11 *The provision of protection (Ephesians 6:10)*
Thanks be to God who give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57)
- 12 *The Lord appoints the time (Ecclesiastes 3:1ff)*
- 15 *Jesus, equal to God, is exalted by the Father to the highest place (Philippians 2:6-9)*
Rejoice in the Lord always (Philippians 4:4)
- 16 *Victory anticipated (1 Corinthians 15:57)*
- 17 *Joy anticipating victory (1 Peter 1:8)*
The people of Tarshish (Jonah 3:10)
Adopted into God's family (Romans 8:15ff)

Bible story

The devil is defeated. His power is broken. God's people are given the victory and the ability to counteract the enemies of God.

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?
1 *Haman's estate must have been vast as number 2 to the emperor.*

‘Coming into the presence of the King’ means the King received him.

2 The signet ring gave Mordecai the Emperor’s power.
Appointing Mordecai over Haman’s estate means he was in his place.

3 Esther was overcome with emotion on behalf of others / her people.
The fasting had been the precursor; now was the time for action.
His plan was still ‘live’ as there was no instant communication to revoke it.

4 Esther had made another request and the king was acceding to it.

5 The courteous form was standard but this was the most extreme - four precursors to the request.
Esther was entirely at the king’s mercy.
She was asking if the king would / could negate (overrule) Haman’s command.

6 No mention of herself because she was entirely identified with her people.

7 The King’s reasoning was that that Haman pronouncements (in the Kings name) could not be revoked but they could be countered by another pronouncement

8 It was the nature of the King’s government – it was through his representative.
The king’s seal made the documents irrevocable?

9 The countermanding was from that moment; all Jews must know it.
It was absolutely universal.

10 The emphasis on speed was to let all the Jews to know, asap.

11 The edict was an exact counter to Haman’s to enable the Jews to defend themselves.

12 The same day was appointed to make the Jews’ action responsive to the aggression.

13 All the world was to know that the King had given the Jews the right to defend themselves.

14 The city of Susa was also specified to underline that every part of the kingdom was included.

15 Mordecai wore the King’s ‘colours’ / bore the King’s authority obviously for all to see.
Susa had been ‘liberated’ from the rule of Haman.

16 ‘honour’ because of the King’s support

17 Victory was sure; they celebrated in anticipation.
They became Jews to join the winning side
Their fear was not of the tiny nation, but of the Jews’ God!

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

They had to wait as force could only be used against those who were actually attacking them.

3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

Esther approaches the King for a second time to plead for her people. The king again receives her with favour and gives his seal to Mordecai to countermand Haman’s irrevocable decree in the king’s name. He does this by issuing another decree giving the Jews the right to defend themselves on the same day that their enemies had been ready to kill them. This is taken immediately throughout the empire and received with great joy by the Jews. The ensuing fear of the Jews led many non-Jews to convert.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

God gives His people the right and ability to defend themselves against their enemies.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? **v11**

The King’s edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves. (v11)

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character

2 Jesus is given all power and authority over all things

3 God welcomes our requests in Jesus

10 The Lord appoints the time

13 The Word of the Lord is for everyone

11 God equips us to be victorious against evil

17 The Word of God brings joy and gladness

b) His grace?

1 The estate is given – not earned or fought for.

c) Jesus and His salvation?

10 Jesus speaks with the authority of the King to ALL his subjects.

Now underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do?

- 1 Note – *all the devil's possession are given to God's people!*
- 5 Be reverential as you present your requests to the King.
- 6 Hold the fate of God's people, very dear.
- 9 Note - *Salvation of God's people is universal - all people, all places, all times.*
- 11 Note - *God's people have His right to fight evil in anticipation of complete victory in all things.*
- 12 Respect God's timing.
- 16 God's people celebrate that the victory promised will be seen (by faith).
Be honoured that God has given Jesus,
- 17 Note - All believers in all places are to enjoy the victory,
Note - All peoples may become part of the family of God,

Now underline the application of the Main Point

Celebrate His victory

Background information

The tables were truly overturned: the second edict outweighed the first and so it was understood the King favoured the Jews. To help the Jews now amounted to remaining loyal to the king.

The Jewish action was limited to retaliation and self-defence. Special mention is made of the ten sons of Haman. The Hebrew text is laid out differently from other lists of names in 1:10 & 14, adding solemnity: each name stands alone, separate from the next by a line space and the sign of the direct object (*cf* Joshua 12:9-24). The hanging of their bodies on gallows in v14 implied that the line of enmity against the Jews was now permanently disgraced.

The Jews did not plunder their enemies' goods although they had the King's permission to do so (8:11) (*cf* the opposite with King Saul and Haman's ancestor, the Amalekite King Agag. (1 Sam 15:3-9)

V17-19 confirm the Purim festival began as a spontaneous response from the Jewish community to the deliverance experienced in Esther's time. Mordecai and Esther then write to all the Jews to decree that this celebration should happen every year, with both the fasting beforehand to mourn for the threats they had faced, and the joyous celebration of their deliverance.

Word List

1 <i>Tables turned</i>	the Hebrew verb <i>hpk</i> - to overturn - is emphatic here, i.e. a complete turnaround <i>cf</i> Deut 23:5, Nehemiah 13:2
19 <i>presents</i>	<i>Heb</i> means <i>portions</i> as in choice portions / food portions
23/26 <i>pur</i> / <i>Purim</i>	<i>Pur</i> means <i>the lot</i> ; <i>Heb</i> adds <i>im</i> to make plural
32 <i>the records</i>	or <i>the book</i> <i>ie</i> the record of the king's reign (6:1)

Bible Connections

1 Overturning	<i>cf</i> Deuteronomy 23:5; Nehemiah 13:2
Evil intent	<i>see</i> Acts 4:10
2 Fear of the Jews/of God	<i>see</i> Deuteronomy 2:25
10 Not plundering enemies	<i>see also</i> 1 Samuel 15:1-11 (<i>cf</i> vs 15,16)
22 Sorrow turned into joy	<i>cf</i> Ps 30:11; Lamentations 5:15; Isaiah 61:3
Gifts at celebrations	<i>see also</i> Nehemiah 8:10-12

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 Why did the Jews get the upper hand - against 75,000 (16)?
- 2 Why were the people of all the other nationalities afraid of them?
- 3 Why had the fear of Mordecai seized the governors?
- 4 How could he become more powerful – he was second to the King?
- 6 Why in the citadel of Susa?
- 7 Why did they kill Haman's sons?
- 10 Why 'ten' sons of Haman?
Why did they disobey the decree (11) and not touch the plunder?
- 11 Why was it reported to the King the same day?
- 12 What is the difference between the 'petition' and the 'request'?
- 13 Why would it take an extra day to defeat the enemies in Susa?
Why were Haman's sons hung if they were already dead?
- 14 What was the edict and who issued it?
- 15 Why 300 men?
Who were the 300 men in Susa?
- 16 Why were Jewish mortalities not mentioned?
- 17 Why could they feast on the 14th – were all their enemies destroyed on a single day?
- 19 Why the need to explain the different timings of Purim?
- 20 Who wrote 'Esther' – was it Mordecai?
- 22 Why did Mordecai write instituting a feast when they already had done this (17)?
- 24 What is the significance of the casting of the lot?
- 28 Why have we ceased to celebrate purim (- or have we?!)
- 29 Why did Esther, daughter of Abihail, add her name to the letter?
- 32 Why was it 'Esther's decree'? It was Mordecai who had the king's ring.

What surprises or confuses you?

- 13 Why did the Jews in Susa ask for an extra day to destroy the evil one's family?

2) The Context

Surrounding passage,

- 2 Fear of the Jews (8:17)
- 3 Nobles, satraps etc (8:9)
- 4 more powerful – c.f. given the king's signet ring (8:2)
- 5 struck down enemies / protected themselves (8:11)
- 10 didn't lay hands on plunder – c.f. 'plunder property' (8:11)

Individual book

- 1 *The 13th day of the 12th month (3:13; 8:12)*
- 2 *Unable to stand against them (cf 6:13)*
- 4 *fear of M apparent (c.f. Haman needed the King's command 3:1-2)*
- 5 *destroy and kill (not annihilate) (3:13; 8:11)*
- 12 *What is your petition ..? (5:3,6; 7:2)*
- 13 *'If it pleases ...' (1:19; 3:9; 5:4; 5:8; 7:3; 8:5)*
Hanged on the gallows. (7:10)
- 18 *On third day. (5:1)*
- 22 *mourning 'overturned' (Ps 30:11; Lam 5:15; Is 61:3)*
- 32 *records (lit. the book) c.f. 6:1*

Whole Bible

- 1 *The right time for salvation (Galatians 4:4; John 7:6,30; 8:20)*
- 2 *Stand against the devil's schemes. (cf Ephesians 6:11)*
- 10 *Plunder belongs to God in Holy war. (Deuteronomy 13:16)*
Wrongful retention of plunder from Amalekites / Agag (1 Sam 15)
- 14 *Hung on Gallows – a curse (Deuteronomy 21:22,23)*
a display of conquered dead (Joshua 8:8; 10:26; 2 Sam 4:12; 21:12)
a public spectacle of the enemies of God on the cross (Col 2:15)
- 17 *Feasting after victory (Revelation 19:17)*
- 18 *On the third day (Luke 24:46)*
- 20 *Recording and remembering God's deliverance (Ex.12:17; Lk 22:19)*
- 24 *Lots (Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55; Jonah 1:7; Acts 1:26)*
- 27 *Everlasting ordinance for celebration (Exodus 12:14; Lev 23:39-41)*
- 29 *'all authority' (cf Matthew 28:18)*
- 30 *Assurance following salvation (Hebrews 10:22)*
- 32 *All promises get the 'Amen' in Jesus. (2 Corinthians 1:20)*

Bible story

The enemies of the Jews are destroyed. The people celebrate this and are commanded to do so in perpetuity.

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?
 - 1 *The Jews get the upper hand because the Lord was with them.*
 - 2 *The people were afraid of them cf 8:17 (They were irresistible because the Lord was with them).*
 - 3 *The fear of Mordecai seized the governors, because the Lord was with him.*

4 He became more powerful as He brought the King's reign to bear throughout the Kingdom.

6 The citadel of Susa was the centre of the empire.

7 They killed Haman's sons for being implicated in their father's plot.

10 'Ten' sons of Hama were numbered to show that they killed all his sons
They did not touch the plunder (15,16) as this was not about possession but about God's will.

11 It was reported to the King the same day as it was being done under his authority.

12 The 'petition' has to do with rights and the 'request' has to do with charity (?)

13 The enemies in Susa were dealt with on the 13th & 14th but on the third day they feasted (cf the resurrection).
Haman's sons were hung to make a spectacle of them, so all could see they were dead.

14 The edict was a command by the King.

15 Why 300 men?
300 men were enemies of the Jews /accomplices of Haman's sons.

16 Jewish mortalities are not mentioned as there weren't any (?)

17 No, there were still enemies to be dealt in Susa on the 14th & 15.

19 This was to explain why Mordecai gave two days in the letter he sent out (20-22)

20 Mordecai sent a letter to all Jews including Queen Esther.

22 They had done it as a one-off (17). Mordecai made it a continuing celebration.

24 Casting the lot was in those days seen as a way of seeking God's will.

28 Christians ceased to celebrate Purim as all the OT festivals have their fulfilment in Jesus.

29 Esther was needed to confirm the legislation (32)

32 It was 'Esther's decree' as she was part of the King, not merely acting in his stead

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?
Practically they could not have communicated with the rest of the empire at a day's notice.
At the heart of the empire the victory would be evident over 3 days.

3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

On the appointed day, the Jews destroyed all their enemies throughout the empire, but they did not plunder their property as permitted in the King’s decree. The edict was extended for a day in the capital of Susa at Queen Esther’s request and by the King’s command, to finish off their enemies and to display Haman’s dead sons. After this Mordecai recorded these events. He and Esther wrote to all the Jews commanding them to celebrate God’s deliverance annually at a feast called Purim.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

The victory God gives his people over their enemies should be celebrated regularly and with joy.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? **v 20-22**

“Mordecai recorded these events …to have them celebrate annually the 14th & 15th days of the month of Adar, as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies and … their sorrow was turned into joy.”

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

- 1 God is never outflanked by His enemies.
- 2 He is invincible, as are His people when working to His plan.
- 3 He instils fear in others through His people.
- 5 He deals with those who hate His people / Him.

20-22 God wants you to remember and celebrate His triumph over evil.
24ff God is sovereign over chance / all things.

b) His grace?

13 All is dependent purely on the Kings pleasure.

c) Jesus and His salvation?

- 1 Jesus overturned the tables through His death and resurrection.
- 12 The Lord invites our petition (through Jesus).
- 28 The celebration of Purim finds its fulfilment in Jesus.
- 29 Note – Mordecai and Esther represent Jesus, the one to whom full authority is given.

Now underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do ?

2 & 16 Note: God's people are to defend themselves together.

3 Note: Jesus pleads our cause at the Father's feet.

5 Note: God's people are to be merciless with their enemies (principalities and powers).

10 Note: God's people do not assume the 'devils plunder'.

13 Be demonstrative of God's victories.

17 Keep the Lord's timing.

20-22 Celebrate the Lord's victory for us (over sin and death).

32 Listen to the 'practices' recorded in the Word of God.

Now underline the application of the Main Point

The Lord reigns

Background information

The last chapter echoes the opening of the first: 1:1-9 takes the reader into Esther's world; 10:1-3 bring us out of the story to reflect on its legacy. What began with Xerxes ruling a vast empire of 127 provinces, ends with him successfully receiving tribute from them.

Mordecai was honoured by the King. The writer claims authority for his record of events by referring to the written records about the kings of Media and Persia of which there is no record today.

Word List

1	<i>tribute</i>	a tax
	<i>distant shores</i>	literally ' <i>the land and the coastlands of the sea</i> ' ie the writer thought Xerxes ruled the whole known inhabited earth!
2	<i>are they not written</i>	The Bible often uses this question style as an obituary at the end of a king's life. <i>E.g.</i> 1 Kings 11:41,42; 14:29; 15:31 <i>etc.</i> Including Mordecai's name may mean he too has died by the time of writing.
3	<i>welfare</i>	Hebrew is <i>shalom</i> - peace
	<i>The Jews</i>	lit ' <i>his seed</i> ' ie 'offspring' of Genesis 3:15; Acts 3:25; 7:5

Bible Connections

1	Tax imposed for Gentile king	<i>see</i> Genesis 47:24
3	Jews in high positions	<i>see</i> Genesis 41:41; Nehemiah 1:11; Daniel 2:48

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

1 *What does 'impose tribute' mean?*

Why does he impose it?

Why does the writer draw attention to it?

What does 'the distant shores' imply?

2 *What were his acts of 'power and might'?*

Why is the 'full' account of Mordecai's greatness included?

Why is it written as a question?

3 *What does '2nd in command' mean?*

Why is he pre-eminent among the Jews?

Why 'held in high esteem'?

How do 'worked for good' and 'spoke up for welfare' differ?

Why does the book end with a description of Mordecai – not Esther or Xerxes?

Surprise? *Why is there no mention of Esther?*

2) The Context

Surrounding passage,

1-3 *no mention of Esther (cf 9:32)*

Individual book

2 *'greatness' of Mordecai cf 'greatness' of Xerxes' (1:4)*

Annals of the Kings of Media and Persia (2:23; 6:1-3)

The king had raised him – contrast with Haman (5:11)

3 *Haman had been given a seat higher than all other nobles (3:1)*

Whole Bible

1 *tribute c.f. (Genesis 47:26)*

- for the Lord by his people (Numbers 31:28ff)

- for David by enemies (2 Samuel 8:2)

- for Solomon by his peaceful subjects (1 King 4:20)

- for God's son, the king (Psalm 72:10)

the land and coastlands ... = whole known world (cf Is 42:4, 10)

The Lord reigns (Psalm 99:1,2)

2 *Raised him to greatness (Philippians 2:9)*

God will not share His glory (Isaiah 42:8)

Are they not written. (c.f. 1 Ki 11:41; 14:29; 15:23; 16:14; 2 Chr 25:26)

Acts of power and might (Psalm 150:2)

Recorded (for all to see) (Romans 1:20)

3 Second in command (cf Genesis 41:38; Daniel 2:46-49)

- sat at right hand of God (Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2)

Work for good – being a servant of (Philippians 2:7)

Work for good especially those of faith in Jesus (Galatians 6:10)

Pre-eminent, esteemed, for working for good of Jews (Rev. 5:9)

‘Did not spare His Son ... how much more ... all things’ (Romans 8:32)

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

I The tribute was a required gift, received as an act of submission.

He imposed it as a mark of his power and authority?

‘The distant shores’ implies throughout his whole empire

2 *His acts of power and might were the salvation of the Jews that had been brought about in his name.*

Mordecai’s greatness was the honour he brought to the King and the welfare of his people

A question is posed because agreement is invited from the readers.

3 *2nd in command meant he spoke for the King.*

He was pre-eminent among the Jews because he was 2nd in command to the King.

He was ‘held in high esteem’ as he had saved the nation of the Jews.

He not only delivered them from death but provided for their life.

The book ends with a description of Mordecai as an acknowledgement that it is through him that God has saved his people.

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

There is no mention of Esther because she is not the central character – the King is, then Mordecai.

3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

The King is pre-eminent throughout his Kingdom. Moredcai the Jew was second-in-command and worked for the good for His people.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

The welfare of God’s people is secure because they have a representative at the throne of the Almighty.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? **v3**

Mordecai was second in rank to King Xerxes, pre-eminent among the Jews...because he worked for the good of his people. (v3)

LIVE

- 1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?
 - a) His nature and character?
 - 1 *The Lord reigns supreme.*
 - 2 *The glory of God and His Son has been revealed for all to see.*
 - 3 *He is faithful to His promises and saves his people.*
 - b) His grace?
 - 3 *He not only saves but he gives provision for their welfare.*
 - c) Jesus and His salvation?
 - 3 *Jesus works for the good and well-being of His people.*
Jesus is at the Father's right hand (second to Him).

Now underline the application of the Main Point

- 2) What should I do ?
 - 1 *Note: All creation owes God their worship.*
 - 2 *All His majesty is revealed in His Word.*
 - 3 *Rejoice and relax, being in Jesus' care.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

Sharing the Word

Use

'Hearing the Word' can be used alone, with another, or in a group.

Preparation

Time put in alone beforehand will greatly benefit time spent together.

Work through the stages - LOOK, LEARN, LISTEN, LIVE. *

Write down your own questions and answers.

(With good preparation and discipline in the time together, the study may be conducted in as little as 45 mins!)

Format

- a. LOOK - Any questions? (If answer is known or not!)
Relevant cross references in rest of the Bible?
- b. LEARN - Answers to questions?
- c. LISTEN - Key verse and Main Point?
- d. LIVE - What does it show about God /His grace/ Jesus?
What should I do

n.b. Leave plenty of time for the LIVE section!

By also eating together and a time of prayer, you will have shared something of the life of the early church! (Acts 2:42-47)

Remember!

As we gather round God's Word -

- a) Listen to the views of others.
- b) Make room for the novice. (They can join in too when you start by listing 'Any questions'.)
- c) Don't let the 'knowledgeable' dominate. Encourage everyone to think for themselves.
- d) Try to include others, especially 'seekers', in your time together.

* The **process** is explained and practiced in a four-hour course, suitable for all, called '**An Introduction to 'Hearing the Word'**

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