

ESTHER: REIGNING UNDER GOD'S UMBRELLA®



THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN A PAGAN LAND

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Is God working in your life today? How do you know? There may be occasions when God's sovereign leading in our lives seems obvious. It is easy to see God's hand in the recovery of a sick loved one or the restoration of a broken relationship. But sometimes we may feel lonely or discouraged. Our prayers don't seem to be answered. We may think that God has forgotten us. Is God's faithfulness sporadic? Or, does His lovingkindness continue to influence our lives without interruption, like the continuous swaying of a pendulum on a clock?

Psalm 121:4 tells us that He who watches over us "will neither slumber nor sleep." Yet God often leads with an invisible hand. His leading is often so inconspicuous that we are unaware of His presence. Yet in the Old Testament, a story is told of a woman who experienced God's faithfulness in an unexpected way.

The absence of the name of God in the book of Esther has for centuries caused many to doubt God's hand upon its main characters, Esther and Mordecai. But the book of Esther is like an unsigned painting, challenging us to search its pages to discover the existence of the One who remains elusive. By avoiding any reference to His being, God has succeeded in calling even greater attention to His work. Rather than being an oversight, the omission of His name is evidence of His providence. God dared to omit His name, knowing that He doesn't need credentials or validation. "The heavens declare His righteousness" (Psa. 97:6) and His works among the children of men reveal His presence. His being is discreetly revealed through His faithfulness to Israel (Psa. 98:2,3).

Similarly, in our lives today as believers in Christ, we don't see Him visibly. Peter exhorts us "though you have not seen Him, you love Him and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8). Therefore, we must "walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

Esther then is the one book in the Bible where we must, through the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, interpret the events primarily as an observer of life. The book of Esther provides this choice opportunity to search for evidence of the hand of God in everyday life.

***COME AND SEE THE WORKS OF GOD,
WHO IS AWESOME IN HIS DEEDS TOWARD THE SONS OF MEN (Ps. 66:5)***

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As a result of their disobedience, the ten northern tribes of Israel were taken into captivity over a 150-year period beginning in 740 BC. The scattering of the Jews throughout the Assyrian kingdom was an action designed to prevent future nationalistic uprisings and resulted in their failure to return to the land as a nation. The Southern Kingdom, consisting of the tribe of Judah as well as portions of Benjamin and Simeon, became steeped in idolatry, with only short-lived intermittent revivals. In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign (701 BC), Sennacherib, king of Assyria, seized all the fortified cities of Judah, taking 200,000 captives. In 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Judah, taking 10,000 captives (including Daniel). In 586 BC, he destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. Except for the peasants, Judah was deported to Babylonia.

The seventy-year captivity was a result of apostasy and was a fulfillment of the curses of Deuteronomy 28:15-68. Serving another nation was humiliating for any people since it was believed that their god had been defeated and their removal from their native land eliminated the protective care of their god.

The sacred books of Israel survived the captivity, keeping alive their venerated traditions, especially the hope of God's redemption of His chosen people. As a substitute for Temple worship, the exiled Jews began assembling in synagogues, which served to keep the Hebrew language alive. The high festivals, observed only at the Temple, were replaced by prayer, fasting, and penance (Zech. 7:3-5). The existence of small community of Jerusalem, though in dire poverty, provided a preservation of Hebrew life and tradition in Palestine, and was a symbol of hope for the captives. The promise of a restored nation was kept alive by the prophets. The captivity served to turn the hearts of Jews back to Jehovah. The prophecies of Jeremiah, and other prophets, began to be heeded.

But if the nation Israel would remember the blessing and the curse that were set before them and "return to the LORD [their] God and obey Him," then the nation would be restored from captivity. The curses would then be inflicted instead upon their enemies (Deut. 30:1-3,7; Jer. 32:38-41; Eze. 20:34,41). Although remnants of the nation would be regathered following the Babylonian Captivity, the nation itself will not be restored until the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ at the beginning of the millennium (Jer. 23:3-6, Isa. 11:9-11; Isa. 54:7-8).

Following the fall of Babylonia to Persia in 538 BC, Cyrus the Great's decree permitted Jews to repatriate, fulfilling the prophecy that the captivity would end in seventy years (Jer. 25:11). Zerubbabel, a prince of Judah, led the first colony of captives to Jerusalem about 536 BC (Ezra 1:1-8). Upon their arrival the altar was built on its old site and daily sacrifices were restored. The completion of the Temple in 516 BC was their greatest achievement.

But not everyone's heart was stirred by God to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:5). Many Jews chose voluntary exile in Persia. Some who remained were disobedient to Jehovah. Others may have stayed because they were too young or had positions of leadership (e.g., Ezra and Nehemiah). For over fifty years after the rebuilding of the temple, nothing is known of Jerusalem or the land of Palestine. Then the biblical narrative continues as the scene shifts to Persia, to a mountainous plateau situated to the southeast of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley—the setting for the book of Esther.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

The book of Esther is the only book in the Bible that does not mention the name of God. Esther is not quoted in the New Testament. Neither Mordecai, Esther, nor the Feast of Purim is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain fragments of each Old Testament book, with the exception of Esther. There is no reference to the Mosaic Law, the temple, the priesthood or sacrifices. Although fasting is practiced, prayer is not mentioned. Yet there are more manuscripts of the book of Esther than any other Old Testament book. It offers hope for Israel's future and is the most widely read book of the Bible among Jews today.

Canonicity. Because of these perplexing realities, scholars for centuries have questioned the inspiration of the book of Esther. But God did not list these things as requirements for canonicity.

Authorship. The author was probably an exiled Jewish scribe, possibly keeping records for the Persian king. One indication is the reverence to *Hadassah*, Esther's Hebrew name. The word *Jew* occurs fifty-three times. Jewish nationalism and custom permeate the book. The author's colorful descriptions reveal familiarity with Persian culture and particularly with the outlay of the palace in Susa.

Historical Setting. The events recorded in this book cover a ten-year period during the reign of Persian King Xerxes I (486-465). Historically, the events in the book of Esther occurred between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra. Following the decree of Cyrus, a remnant of Jews returned to Palestine and rebuilt the temple. Animal sacrifices were reinstated and the feasts observed. However, most of the Jews remained in the land of their captivity.

HISTORICAL SETTING OF ESTHER		
Date	Events	Kings of Persia
550 B.C. 538 B.C. 536 B.C.	Decree to rebuild Temple Altar built; Temple foundation laid Harrassment by Samaritans	Cyrus
530 B.C. 521 B.C.		Cambyses Smerdis
520 B.C. 515 B.C.	Hagaai and Zechariah prophesied (Ezra 5:1-2) Temple project completed (Ezra 6:15)	Darius I
486 B.C. 483 B.C. 478 B.C. 474 B.C. 473 B.C.	Accusations against Judah written to Xerxes Feast of Xerxes Esther Crowned Queen Haman's decree; deliverance of Jews Feast of Purim	Xerxes
464 B.C. 458 B.C. 450 B.C. 444 B.C. 423 B.C.	Malachi prophesied	Artaxerxes I

First Return of Exiles under
Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1)
(with Jeshua, the High Priest)

Book of Esther

Second Return of Exiles
under Ezra (Ezra 7:1)

Third Return of Exiles
under Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11)

Ezra 6:22

Ezra 7:1

Content. Esther is one of the world's greatest examples of a dramatic narrative. It is a literary masterpiece—a historical novel filled with action and suspense. The author's use of irony is an effective literary device in this narrative. The world's greatest king has an unsubmissive

wife. The heroine, a Jewish orphan becomes Queen of the Persian Empire. Haman, the villain, is hung on the gallows that he prepared for hated Mordecai, who then is elevated to his office. The condemned Jews become victorious over their enemies. The name of the One who controls the events of the narrative is not even mentioned. The domination of Persian rulers is diminished by the intervention of God for Israel.



Overview. The providence of God is the underlying theme of the entire book. However, the Persian king is mentioned 207 times. The word *Jew* occurs 53 times. The key verse is 4:14, which emphasizes the providence of God. The most well known verse is 4:16, where Esther’s declares, “If I perish, I perish.”

CHART OF ESTHER

	Gentile King	Jewish Queen	Threat to Jews	Intercession of Jewish Queen	Deliverance of the Jews	Jewish Leader
1	Authority of The King Challenged					
2	Selection of Jewish Queen					
3	Haman's Revengerful Decree					
4	Mordecai's Request					
5	Esther's Brave Action					
6	The Exaltation of Mordecai					
7	Destruction of Mordecai					
8	Esther's Petition Granted					
9	Victory of the Jews					
10	The Greatness of Mordecai					
Jews in Danger			Jews Preserved			

Key Theme: Providence of God
 Key Words: *King* (207 times); *Jew* (53 times)
 Key Verse : 4:14

Purpose. Esther was probably written to Israelites to emphasize God's providence with a secondary purpose of recording the institution of the Feast of Purim. The book provides the only post-exilic record of life outside Palestine. It vividly displays God's preservation of the nation Israel.

God's providential care of the nation is evident throughout the book. The Latin word *providence* means "foreseeing." It is a term that depicts God's continual care over His creatures. It includes both His preservation and His governing (Ps. 33:13-22; Isa. 45:7; Acts 17:24-28). The setting aside of Israel during the Times of the Gentiles is emphasized in the book by the 190 references to the King of Persia, yet His providence among the Hebrew nation was ongoing.

The destruction or contamination of the nation Israel, as evidence in the book of Esther, was an ongoing goal of Satan during the Old Testament era. For in Israel, it had been promised, "shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of that promise—Messiah of Israel and Savior of all who believe.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you as you study the Scriptures and seek to understand them. It is best if you complete the questions prior to reading the notes on the portion covered. Ask the Lord how He wants you to apply what you learn. Write down specific ways you use these truths in your own life.

Historical Background

1. Read Ezra 1:1-8. Briefly summarize these events that occurred about 52 years before the reign of Ahasuerus, King of Persia during the time of Esther.

2. According to Deuteronomy 28:1, 2, 8, and 10, what are the requirements of God for the nation Israel to receive His blessing?

3. How had the Ephesians received God's blessing (Eph. 1:1; 2:4-9)?

4. Under what conditions will Israel be subject to God's curse (Deut. 28:15, 20, 36, 37, 45-50, 58, 62-64)?

5. Why would believers today be disciplined by God (Heb. 12:3-11)?

6. Read John 1:12 and 3:16. Are you certain that you are a child of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? How do you know?

7. What does Deuteronomy 30:1-7, 19, 20 say about Israel's restoration?

8. How is a Christian restored to fellowship with God (1 John 1:9)?
 - A. What two attributes of God are manifest in His forgiveness in this passage.

 - B. Is His cleansing partial or complete?

Chapter One: Beauty and the Beast

For six months, the world's greatest monarch, exhibited his royal splendor (Dan. 11:2; Pro. 11:4; 22:1). Angered by the refusal of his Queen to appear at his banquet, King Ahasuerus issues a decree to dethrone the Queen and replace her with one more worthy.

Verse one links this narrative with earlier Jewish history. The year is 483 BC, 102 years after Judah was taken into captivity, and 32 years after released captives rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem (516 BC, the 6th year of Darius), and about 40 years before the return of Nehemiah to repair the walls of Jerusalem. Susa was a principle capital of Persia and the winter residence of the kings. It was the place of Daniel's vision seventy years earlier (Dan. 8:2). Ahasuerus' kingdom (Dan. 5:21) extended from India to Ethiopia, including Israel and Judah. Persia was a world empire for 200 years (BC 536-331) prior to its fall to Alexander the Great.

There are 44 references to royalty in the first chapter of Esther. The king's riches are unsurpassed; his greatness supreme. But as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have a greater king—King of kings and Lord of lords. His wealth is inherent, based on who He is. We are not merely observers of wealth, but partakers—blessed with "all spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3; 1:7; 2:7).

Queen Vashti, "beloved" "or beautiful woman" was probably Queen Amestris, mentioned by Herodotus and Ctesias. She was the mother of Artaxerxes I (born in 483 B.C.), the next king of Persia (465-424 B.C.), under whom Nehemiah served as cupbearer. But she was a brutal woman, a murderer. On the final day of the banquet, the king *commanded* that the seven eunuchs bring Queen Vashti in order to display her beauty (Jud. 16:25). The royal crown signified that she be dressed in her royal apparel.

Under Persian law, Vashti had the right of refusal. The reason for the queen's disobedience is not given, adding to the intrigue of the story. Women in the Orient were forbidden to unveil themselves to men other than their husbands. In addition, it is quite likely that Vashti was pregnant at this time. Since Susa was the location of the winter palace, it is possible that the banquet took place during the winter of 483 B.C. Vashti's son Artaxerxes, was born in 482 B.C. The verse does not imply that Vashti gave any excuse to the eunuchs.

The king's reaction revealed his lack of forgiveness, though he had the right of pardon. His pride and selfishness resulted in anger rather than mercy. His "wise men" (v. 13) sought guidance from the stars (Dan. 2:27; Isa. 44:24, 25; 47:13; Pro. 19:20). Note the honor given to the princes (v. 14), who had the privilege of access to the *presence* of the king and were the highest rulers in the land (governors) (Psa. 95:2; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:16; 10:19; Matt. 11:28).

Like Vashti, a woman's relationship with her husband will have an impact on others. A wife's Christlike behavior keeps the Word of God from being dishonored (Titus 2:5) and keeps others from giving bad reports about her (2:8). Unlike the unenforceable Persian decree, God never asks us to do what He doesn't provide the strength to accomplish (Phil. 2:13; 1 Cor. 10:13). God's Word is eternally irrevocable and will never pass away (Matt. 24:35). The irrevocable decrees of Persia were nullified when the Persian Empire was conquered by Alexander the Great.

The royal estate or position (the title of queen) was to be given to "another who is more worthy [better] than she," implying that submission was the criterion used for measurement of worthiness (Rom. 5:8; Col. 1:10). Our position, unlike that of Queen Vashti, is not at stake. The Holy Spirit of promise is the down payment of "our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13,14). Our heritage is based on our family relationship with the King. As children of God, we are "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). We are not worthy (deserving) (Isa. 6:5; Luke 5:8). We have worth ("in His image," salvation, John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). We are to walk worthy (pleasing Him) (1 Thes. 2:12)

Study Questions for Chapter One

Ask the Lord to give you understanding as you read this chapter. Remember to complete the questions before you read the notes.

1. Read the entire book of Esther as you would a short story, preferably at one sitting. Pay attention to the overall plot rather than to detail. Then write a brief paragraph telling the story in your own words.
2. List the main subjects in this chapter (noting repeated words or ideas). [These subjects are introduced in Chapter One and continue throughout the story as the themes of the book.]
3. Describe in your own words the setting (vv. 1-8) for this story, including possible impressions received by those attending the banquets.
4. Write down your thoughts and reactions to verses 10-12, listing some possible reasons for Queen Vashti's refusal. Do you think she was right to refuse? Give a reason for your answer.
5. Summarize Memucan's comments (vv. 16-18).
6. List the various aspects of the edict and the assumed result (vv. 19-20).
7. What kind of person was King Ahasuerus? What were his strengths and weaknesses as a leader?
8. List the occurrences of the word "presence" (or "come before") in this chapter.
9. Compare the access to King Ahasuerus' presence with Hebrew 4:16.
10. What are some spiritual lessons you have learned from this chapter? How can these be applied to your life?

Chapter Two: The Orphan Queen

Four years have passed since the decree against Vashti. "These things" may refer to the Greek defeat of the Persians. A search begins for a queen among beautiful young virgins "in every province," even among those who had return to Jerusalem.

Esther's uncle, Mordecai, "little man," was a Benjamite from the royal family of Saul (1 Sam. 9:1; 14:51; 2 Sam. 7:12-14). Esther must have been very young since her "bringing up" was not completed. She was a beautiful young orphan girl whom Mordecai had adopted. The adoption of a female cousin, the lack of reference to a wife or children, and the access to the court of the harem, imply that Mordecai may have been a eunuch.

Esther "was taken," along with many other young ladies. Apparently, no choice or right of refusal is possible (e.g. Vashti). In view of the brutality of this king and his followers, death could have been the penalty for refusal.¹ Esther immediately pleased Hegai, probably for her poise and humility (gracefulness), as well as her beauty. Favor is frequently mentioned in Scripture as coming from God (Dan. 1:9). She was already being treated like a queen. Verse 10 is the first mention of Esther's concealing her national heritage. Proverbs mentions the virtue of not revealing secret information (11:13; 13:3).

Verse 11 reveals Mordecai's deep love and concern for his adoptive daughter is revealed in this verse. The taking of Esther and the helplessness of Mordecai are evidence of the curse on disobedient Israel. "Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes shall look on and yearn for them continually, but there shall be nothing you can do" (Deut. 28:32).

Esther's taking the advice of Hegai (v. 15) pays honor to his position before the king and reveals her submission to authority. Her great beauty (and probably her quiet spirit) is evident by the response of all who saw her (Pro. 31:30). The young maidens who were not selected as queen became concubines (wife, Jud. 20:4) of the king. This reveals the inhumanity of polygamy that relegated the concubines to a life of "widowhood."

Esther was taken to a different palace (v. 16), the royal residence of the king (palace of the kingdom) and may be an indication that she was already selected as queen prior to her appearance before the king. Marriage was considered sacred to the Jews, its arrangement and direction providential, its contract honorable. Notice also the finality of the event by the author documenting the year and month (mid-winter, after Passover in late December or early January) as well as the year of the king's reign. It would seem that this information would have been given at the time of Esther's coronation as queen. Some believe this indicates Esther's purity was protected until her marriage.

Esther's submission as a child to her adoptive father (v. 20) is clearly revealed in this verse. There was no need in this home for the decree of 1:22. Esther's obedience as a child prepared her to be a submissive wife (1 Pet. 3:6). Submission to any higher authority requires a trust in the Lord as the ultimate authority and protector. "He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, and has exalted those who were humble" (Luke 1:52). The qualities of Esther, "star of Persia," shine brilliantly in this chapter. As a young orphan taken from her adoptive family, she is trustworthy and obedient (v. 10), humble, teachable, and charming (v. 15), submissive (v. 20), wise and faithful (v. 22). This wise, gracious woman who attains honor (Pro. 11:16) is in stark contrast to the foolish woman of Proverbs (2:16; 7:10; 9:13; 27:15). Esther's character serves as a model for Christian women today, as Mordecai's training in godliness is an example for godly parents.

¹ Ezra wrote that the post-exilic Israelites were still in bondage, living as slaves under the reign of gentile kings (Ezra 9:9).

Study Questions for Chapter Two

As you prayerfully consider this chapter, ask the Lord to show you which characteristics of Esther that He might want to develop in your life.

1. As you read through the chapter, note any references to Esther. What is known about her from these passages (summarize in your own words)?
2. Write a paragraph about her characteristics and her relationships with others.
3. What do you think the effect of the attendants' suggestion might be (verses 2, 3) on the young women? On others in the kingdom?
4. Judging from incidents that have occurred thus far in the book, what do you think was the status of women in this Persian kingdom?
5. Which verses make reference to Mordecai and what is known about him from each passage?
6. What type of relationship did Mordecai and Esther have?
7. How do you know you have obtained favor in God's eyes (Pro. 8:35)? What are evidences of his favor that you have seen this week?
8. What has been most meaningful to you about the lesson this week? How can you apply what you have learned to your own life?

Further Study:

Compare and contrast the taking of Sarai (Gen. 12:10-20) and of Esther into the house of a king. Write a paragraph about your findings.

Chapter Three: Decree of Revenge

Mordecai refuses to pay homage to Haman, the Agagite, stating that he is a Jew. Angered, Haman offers the king a bribe to decree the destruction of a certain people—the Jews. A copy of the edict was published throughout the kingdom.

"After these events" (verse 1) refers to the selection and coronation of Queen Esther and the aborted plot to slay the king. Prince Haman is promoted to chief minister in the kingdom. Haman was an Amalekite or descendent of King Agag (1 Sam. 15:8, 33).² The fact that the genealogies of Mordecai and Haman are the only ones recorded in the book of Esther emphasizes the ongoing hostility between the descendents of Saul and Agag (Exo. 17:16).

Kneeling and paying honor were an act of reverence, indicating worship of a god. Mordecai stood alone (Dan. 3:4-6,11). Our motivation for obeying the Lord should be based on both fear (Pro. 1:7) and love (John 14:21). The only reason Mordecai gave for his refusal was that "he was a Jew." This is the first disclosure of his nationality, implying that Haman would understand Jews could not do such things. Mordecai was not ashamed of his relationship to God. He was subject to a higher authority (Acts 5:29).

Haman, like the king (1:12), was angered when he was not obeyed. But his decree of death is more severe than the king's earlier decree. Verse 6 reveals Haman's hatred of God's chosen people. This is absolute revenge—the destruction of every Jew in the entire kingdom (including the remnant living in Jerusalem).

Haman failed to understand the biblical principle of casting lots, "The lot is cast . . . but its every decision is from the LORD" (Pro. 16:33). In verse 8, Haman's report to the king is deceptive and implies that these people were a danger to the kingdom. Only *one* Jew has been guilty of failing to observe *one* law of the king.

Haman's request was carried out as though it were the order of the king himself. The absolute authority given to Haman, the *enemy of the Jews*, is symbolized by the king's signet ring. At the moment of salvation, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit—God's signet ring (Eph. 1:13).

The three verbs in verse 13 "destroy," "kill," and "annihilate" describe Haman's revenge. There is no doubt that every Jew was to be cruelly destroyed. Widespread anti-Semitism may have been the reason Mordecai told Esther not to reveal her kindred people. The seizing of their possessions would make Haman rich and increase the king's treasury as well.

At the command of the king, the couriers sent the edict to every city. Believers today are also impelled by the King's command to be couriers, preaching the gospel to every creature (Matt. 28:19,20).

While the King and Haman celebrate, the entire city was in a state of confusion. "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules, people groan (Pro. 29:2).

² Some argue that Haman was from the province of Agag.

Study Questions for Chapter Three

As you study this passage, ask the Lord if there is anyone in your life that you are unwilling to forgive.

1. What is known about the character of Haman from this chapter?
2. Summarize the story of King Saul and King Agag in 1 Samuel 15.
3. In view of what is known about Mordecai in this chapter, what do you think may be the reason he refused to bow down or pay homage to Haman? What might some other reasons be?
4. Why do you think Haman sought to take revenge on all Jews rather than just Mordecai?
5. In view of the decree, was Mordecai right to refuse to bow down to Haman? Why or why not?
6. From verses 8 and 9, how did Haman seek to convince the king to side with him?
7. Discuss the king's reaction to Haman's request (vv. 10, 11).
8. List all phrases (with verse references) in this chapter that reveal Haman's attitude toward the Jews.
9. List some instances in your own life when you have had to make a decision to obey God rather than men. What was the result? How did it affect your faith?

Further Study:

- A. Using Daniel 3:15-19, 29; 6:7-10, 16, 22, and 23, compare and contrast these incidents with the command to bow down and pay homage to Haman.
- B. Reread the Book of Esther, note all the references to Haman, and write a paragraph about his character.

Chapter Four: "Long Live the Queen"

Following national mourning, Mordecai begs Esther to go plead to the king for her people. Arguing this would endanger her, Esther submits to Mordecai's appeal to her elevation to royalty.

The mourning of Mordecai is contrasted with Haman's joy; the fasting of the Jews, to the Persian feasts. Mordecai mourned in sackcloth and ashes when he learned of Haman's edict to destroy the Jews. His public humility follows his open refusal to bow down to Haman (Pro. 15:33). Sackcloth and ashes, the attire of mourners, were a symbol of intense grief and usually were accompanied by prayers of personal and national repentance (Joel 1:14; Dan. 9:3; Matt. 11:21). Throughout the kingdom, the Jews mourned greatly. As Christians, our sorrow should lead to repentance (2 Cor. 7:9).

Mordecai's explanation (v. 7) is very descriptive, emphasizing Haman's attempt to bribe the king. The silver offered to the king (one-third of the annual budget of the empire's central government) reveals the intensity of Haman's anti-Semitism (Lev. 26:17). Mordecai sends a copy of the edict to Esther (v. 8) so she will be informed of the details when she pleads with the king (7:7; Ezra 8:23). Mordecai says to her, "Esther, it is time to declare your nationality." Her Jewish heritage is her main bargaining point with the king. Hathach loyally delivers her message, as believers must convey the gospel in obedience to our King (Matt. 28: 19, 20).

Esther's reaction (v. 11) to Mordecai's request may reveal a lack of faith. The "one law" of the kingdom is like the "one way" of John 14:6. She has not been officially summoned to come into the presence of the King since the final day of the Persian festival thirty days earlier.

Mordecai reminds Esther (v. 13) that the king's palace will not serve as a place of refuge. Even though she is the queen, as far as the decree is concerned she is just another Jew—a condemned Jew, sentenced to death. In verse 14, Mordecai's conviction that relief and deliverance (Dan. 3:29) *will arise* is a prophetic declaration and implies that Mordecai was familiar with God's promises to Israel. His faith in the preservation of Israel was justified by God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-21. The covenant with Abraham was an everlasting, unconditional covenant to his descendants (Lev. 26:44).

Mordecai recognizes the providence of God by suggesting that the deliverance of the Jews could very well be the reason why God elevated her to the position of queen at this very time. Israel will be delivered. The only question here is whether or not Esther will be the one who will be influential in its deliverance. God's plan will be accomplished—with or without us. Obedience to God makes us available for His plan. But if we refuse to obey Him, He will simply use someone else. But we will miss the blessing.

Verse 14 is one of the best verses in the Bible depicting the various factors that comprise the will of God in the life of a believer. It reveals that God's will requires our willingness to do His will. His will is in accordance with His Word and integrates His providence with our submission.

The prediction of Esther's death is contrasted with the danger of approaching the king unsummoned. Ecclesiastes 3:7 states, "A time to be silent and a time to speak." Esther's time to speak had come. She will risk her life (v. 15, 16). She submits to Mordecai's challenge. But her appearance before the king was conditional upon the fasting of all the Jews in Susa—for her (Ezra 8:21-23; Neh. 1:4—2:8).

The Persian tradition of fasting was usually for one day and only during the daylight hours. Although Scripture condemns fasting for outward appearances only (Jer. 14:12; Matt. 6:16), this was not Esther's intent. The fasting was for her, implying that prayer was included. God did protect Esther from death and ultimately also saved the entire nation Israel from extinction.

Study Questions for Chapter Four

Pray that the Holy Spirit will direct you as you study the Word of God. Do you sense that God has placed you where you are in order to have a witness for Him "in such a time as this"?

1. Even though the name of God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, what are some indications in this chapter that would signify that Esther and Mordecai believed in Jehovah, Israel's God?
2. What are the reasons for "sackcloth and ashes" in the following passages: Daniel 9:3; Matthew 11:21
3. As you consider the life and actions of Mordecai from Chapters 2 and 3, in which of the above two ways do you think he responded to the decree by attiring himself in sackcloth and ashes? Give reasons for your answer.
4. In verse 8, what two things was Mordecai asking Esther to do when she went into the king?
5. Why do you think Esther responded as she did in verse 11 to Mordecai's request? Do you think her response was due to Esther's fear and a lack of faith? Or, was it a statement explaining the situation in order to enlighten Mordecai? Was she being submissive at this point?
6. List the various factors that are mentioned in 4:14 in regard to the will of God.
7. Write a brief summary about what you have learned in 4:14 about God's will.
8. How does Philippians 2:13 relate to Esther 4:14?
9. How has God specifically revealed His will to you using some of these elements?

Further Study:

Using your Bible concordance, note the references to "fasting." What are some of the motives given for fasting? How does God respond in each instance?

Chapter Five: "I'm the Greatest"

Queen Esther risks her life as she begins the process of interceding for her people. Haman's delight in being invited to Esther's banquets is overshadowed by his jealousy. He orders the construction of gallows to hang Mordecai.

On the third day, the fast (which probably lasted 40-45 hours) has ended. Queen Esther, dressed in her royal apparel, stood in a conspicuous place in the inner court of the king's palace. But Esther was clothed in more than her royal robes—her faith. We as children of royalty have access to the holy place, but without fear of retribution (Heb. 10:19-22; Jam. 1:7). As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have access to the throne of God in the *name* of His Son (John 14:21). What an honor!

Esther "obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter . . ." (Est. 2:9; Dan. 1:9; Psa. 5:12). The heart of the king is in the hand of the LORD (Pro. 21:1). For the king to do nothing would have meant Esther's death. Likewise, if Christ had not died, we would still be in our sins (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). The king's offer of half of the kingdom (v. 3) reveals the magnificence of Oriental promises (Mark 6:22,23).

In verse 4, Esther graciously replies to the king's offer with an invitation to a banquet. Esther knew her life was at stake by appearing before the king, yet by faith she had made preparations for the banquet, believing that God would deliver her from death. In the Hebrew, this verse contains an acrostic for the name of Israel's covenant God—Jehovah.

In verse 7, Esther begins to answer the king, then pauses. Proverbs 16:1 states, "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD." The providence of God is realized as the sequence of events on the following day is unfolded.

Haman's delight at being an honored guest of the queen's banquet was short-lived. Haman is angered as he leaves the palace only to see Mordecai, whom he hated, neither honoring nor fearing him. First Haman got mad at Mordecai for standing up when he should have been bowing. Now Haman is angry because Mordecai is seated instead of standing to honor him.

Mordecai is no longer clothed in sackcloth and ashes. He is back on the job, dressed in his Persian business suit. The fast and mourning are ended—evidence of Mordecai's faith that Esther's life, as well as the Jewish nation, will be spared. Mordecai is not anxiously pacing up and down the courtyard. He is seated—a picture of rest (Phil. 4:6).

In verse 11, Haman tells of his wealth, large family (ten sons) and honored position second only to the king. This is in marked contrast to Paul's acknowledging the Lord as the source of all that he possessed, choosing rather to "boast in the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:7; 2 Cor. 10:17). As Mordecai's humility preceded his exaltation to honor, so Haman's pride foreshadowed his destruction (Pro. 16:18).

For Haman, life is perfect, except for one thing—that Jew, Mordecai. Every time Haman sees Mordecai, he ceases to be satisfied with all of his accomplishments. By way of contrast, Paul states, ". . . I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Phil. 4:11).

Assuming that the king will agree to his plan, Haman ordered the gallows to be constructed. Mordecai's pending death adds to the drama of the narrative. He would be dead prior to the banquet where Esther planned to petition the king for the life of the Jewish nation.

Study Questions for Chapter Five

As you study this chapter, ask the Lord make you sensitive to specific ways in which He wants to use you.

1. As you read this chapter, summarize what is said about the following:
 - a. Esther
 - b. Mordecai
 - c. Haman
2. List the actions of the king in verses 2-5. What traits of the king are apparent in this passage?
3. According to Esther 4:11, what is the significance of 5:1 and 2?
4. What does verse 4 reveal about Esther's faith, especially in light of verse 11 of the previous chapter?
5. Considering Mordecai's resistance to bow down to Haman at the king's command, as well as the subsequent decree of Haman to annihilate the Jews and Mordecai's public mourning, what does verse 9 tell us about Mordecai?
6. Contrast Philippians 4:4, 11 with Haman's response in verse 13, as well as the reason for the advice in verse 14.
7. Using Proverbs 16:8; 11:2; 18:12; 29:23; 7:16, 17, write a brief paragraph on pride. How can this be applied to your life?

Further Study:

- A. According to Psalm 66:18; Matthew 6:7; John 15:7,16; 1 John 5:14,15, and Jude 20, what are the biblical requirements for believers to petition God? What Scripture would you use to contrast the approach of the believer to the throne of grace and the entering into the presence of the king of Persia? How would you contrast the response of the king to the conditions for God answering our prayers?
- B. Reread the book of Esther, focusing on the king. What are his good and bad qualities? Was he a strong leader? Explain.

Chapter Six: Royal Insomnia

The providence and timing of God are evident, resulting in a sleepless night for the king, the honoring of Mordecai, and a prediction of Haman's fall.

God's providence in Esther's hesitancy to reveal her request is evident as the sleepless king reads the chronicles of the kingdom. Haman's appearance in the outer court (v. 4) to obtain permission to hang Mordecai is the timing of the Lord (Matt. 5:44). Esther has entered the inner court in 5:1.

Before Haman had a chance to tell the king of his plan, the king speaks (v. 6), asking what was the most appropriate manner for a king to honor a man. Haman, still arrogant about the recent honor bestowed upon him, assumes that he to be the recipient. Haman is lavish in his description (v. 7-9). Wearing the king's robe and riding the king's horse reveals Haman's desire to be honored as a king—a reminder of Satan's desire to be "like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14: 1 John 3:2). Haman wished to be honored by the noble princes and publicly acclaimed throughout the city square (Gen. 41:43; Pro. 18:12).

The honoring of Mordecai (v. 10) caused a sudden and chilling reversal of Haman's plans. Haman's hatred for the Jews apparently was not shared by the king. Although cognizant of Mordecai's heritage, the king is apparently unaware of the decree to destroy the Jews, which Haman had written in the king's name and sealed with his signet ring.

Haman then honored Mordecai (v. 11) exactly as he himself had recommended. He was helpless to do otherwise. Kings are to be obeyed.

Mordecai then returned to the king's gate (v. 12). The king's servants knew Mordecai was a Jew, condemned to death. They also were aware of Haman's hatred for him, yet Mordecai has just been publicly honored by the king's chief prince (Phil. 2:3). Haman rushed home, humiliated (Pro. 16:18; 25:6,7).

The irony is obvious. Mordecai, who had humbled himself before the Lord as he mourned, is now exalted (Pro. 15:33; 18:12). Haman who exalted himself is now in mourning. "But God is the Judge, he puts down one, and exalts another" (Psa. 75:7).

Haman's wife and his wise men were accurate in their prediction that Haman's fall before Mordecai will be completed. Haman had revealed Mordecai's heritage the previous day (5:13). The implication is that this Jewish nation, of which Mordecai is a part, has a God who keeps on delivering them against impossible odds. Haman cannot prevail against the LORD God of Israel.

The conversation is interrupted (v. 14) as Haman is taken by the king's eunuchs and brought to the banquet. Although previously he had bragged about his invitation to the feast (5:12), his spirits were considerably lower as he was hastily escorted to the banquet.

Study Questions for Chapter Six

The timing of the Lord is unmistakable in this passage. Consider how His timing is evident in your life.

1. As you think through the first six chapters of Esther, what evidences do you note of God's providence or divine intervention?
2. What is the difference between the sovereignty of God and His providence? What are some biblical examples of each?
3. List the words in this chapter that refer to the timing of the Lord and the fast moving sequence of events. What is their significance?
4. What are the specific things in verses 8 and 9 that Haman recommended and why do you think He chose them?
5. What appears to be Mordecai's response to being so honored? What is the temptation in our lives when we are honored or praised?
6. Describe the circumstances under which Haman now goes to the banquet (i.e., what does the king know about Mordecai, Haman, and the decree at this point in time)?

Further Study:

- a. Reread Esther concentrating on verses mentioning Mordecai.
- b. What are qualities do you find in his life?

Chapter Seven: "A Time to Speak"

Esther courageously reveals her heritage, pleading for her people. She then exposes Haman as the enemy of the Jews who has orchestrated their destruction. Esther's failure to intercede for Haman results in his death.

Finally, in God's time, Queen Esther (there are six references in this chapter to Esther's royalty) discloses her Jewish heritage (v. 3). Now we see Mordecai's wisdom and God's foresight in Esther having kept this information secret. She is asking for her life to be spared—a second time. This verse again reveals that the king was unaware of the details of the decree. Although in chapter 3, when referring to the disobedient people, the king had told Haman, "Do with them as you please" (3:9), there is no indication that Haman ever communicated to the king what was written in that decree. The king did not have to sign the edit, since Haman had been given his signet ring.

Notice the accuracy with which Esther replies (v. 4). In the previous verse, she answered both of the king's questions relating to her petition ("grant me my life") and her request ("spare my people"). Now she carefully repeats the exact words of Haman's decree (3:13). No attempt is made on her part to exaggerate or play on the king's sympathy—another evidence of Esther's reliance upon the Lord rather than her own ability.

Esther's implication that slavery would have been tolerable and accepted merely serves to emphasize the magnitude of her request. She emphasizes that the loss of Jewish citizens exceeds the financial gain. Esther rightly concludes that people are worth more than money. Shocked by Esther's revelation, the king interrupts her (v. 5). He doesn't seem to mind that she is Jewish. He doesn't even inquire the details of the death sentence. The king immediately focuses on the culprit, "Who is he?" The king also asks, "Where is he?" implying retribution. Esther now reveals to the king (v. 6) that his favorite prince is the evil perpetrator. The word *foe* implies that Haman is a traitor to the king as well as an *enemy* of the Jews. Haman's terror is well founded.

As the enraged king goes out to the palace garden, Haman remains with the queen and must now humbly plead for his life with a Jew who is under his condemnation of death. As the king returns from the garden, he falsely interprets the scene with Esther and Haman. The attendants covered the head of Haman—the beginning of the death sentence. Esther made no attempt to defend Haman. Perhaps in his condemnation she saw even more evidence of God's providential care for her people.

Harbonah, sensitive to the king's desires, recommended the type of death—one designed by Haman himself (v.9). Harbonah praises Mordecai and condemns Haman in the same breath—an evidence of his loyalty and perhaps an indication of his nationality.

In verse 10, Israel's deliverance has begun. The enemy of the Jews is hanged. God's promise of Genesis 12:3 has been realized, "The one who curses you, I will curse." Regarding Haman, note the following verses in Proverbs: the progression of evil (6:12-15); the punishment of evil (11:21); pride preceding destruction (16:18); and causing one's own death (26:27) (cf. Psalm 37:35,36, the passing away of the powerful wicked).

"The LORD is King forever and ever; nations have perished from His land. O LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will strengthen their heart, You will incline Your ear to vindicate the orphan and the oppressed that man who is of the earth may cause terror no more" (Psa. 10:16-18).

Study Questions for Chapter Seven

This chapter shows that at times, we must speak out against evil. Ask the Lord to give you boldness as you oppose that which is evil and stand for truth.

1. What evidences of the providence of God do you see in this chapter?
2. List the verses that refer to Esther as "Queen," noting her official capacity in each incident.
3. Compare Esther's request in verses 3 and 4 with Mordecai's plea in 4:8 and 4:14.
4. Why do you think Esther failed to defend Haman? Was she right in remaining silent? Support your answer with Scripture, if possible.
5. What are some possible situations where believers should remain silent rather than reveal information?
6. Can you relate a particular time in your own life that this has been true?
7. Are there times when we should speak, but because of shyness or fear, we fail to do so?

Further Study:

- a. What are the issues involved in forgiveness and justice? Give Scriptures to support your view.
- b. Give an illustration of someone that you must be willing to forgive even though you must be do something which would result in his or her punishment. How have you reconciled these two issues?

Chapter Eight: A Cause for Rejoicing

God's providential care of the nation Israel is evident as a decree is written to allow the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies. The Jews rejoice and many of the peoples in the land are converted to Judaism.

There are sixteen references to the Jewish nation in chapter eight, signifying a change in the book's emphasis and demonstrating God's providence. In verse 1, the estate of Haman, enemy of the Jews, is now bestowed upon a Jew, Esther the Queen. Persian law dictated that property of a condemned criminal reverted to the crown. Access to the king's presence is granted to Mordecai on the basis of his relationship to Esther. Likewise our access to God the Father is predicated upon our relationship with Jesus Christ. Esther and Mordecai now work openly in their joint effort of intercession for the nation Israel.

The implication of giving the signet ring to Mordecai (v. 2) is that he has been chosen to replace Haman as the top-ranked prince in the kingdom. Esther's humble spirit is revealed in her setting Mordecai over Haman's house. Although Mordecai has been exalted, Esther has not forgotten her mission—free the Jews from the sentence of death. Her weeping is for her people, a sign of her unselfish love for them. In spite of Mordecai's exaltation, nothing has been done to free the Jews. Esther and Mordecai are still functioning as condemned people.

Esther is specific in her request (v. 5), an amplification of 7:3, "my people [be given me] as my request." While the original decree could not be revoked, a counter decree could be issued in keeping with the laws of the kingdom (Pro. 21:30).

The authority that the king gives Mordecai (v. 8) is similar to that previously bestowed upon Haman (3:1-0-11). The use of the words *king's name*, *king's signet ring*, *decree*, and *name of the king* all emphasize the official act. Note that this decree is to be written specifically to the Jews whereas the only reference to them in 3:11 was "the people."

In verse 9, the longest verse in the Bible, the importance of the issuance of the decree is emphasized by a notation of the date, two months and ten days after Haman's decree. The addition of a special Hebrew translation assured that the decree would be proclaimed to every Jew throughout the kingdom.

Special privilege was given to the Jews, enabling them to defend themselves as a nation (v. 11). The same terms that described the Jewish death decree are now used as an exact counterattack against their enemies. The specific day that the Jews would have the right of self-defense is the same day that they were to be killed (3:13). The city of Susa celebrates Mordecai's appearance as prime minister. When the righteous prevail, the people rejoice (Pro. 11:10). What a contrast to the city's confusion in 3:15. The mourning, fasting, weeping, and wailing of the Jews (4:3) was changed to prosperity, gladness, joy, and honor (v. 16).

The deliverance of Jehovah is obvious and many responded by becoming Jews (v. 17). This is the only occurrence in the Old Testament of the phrase "became Jews," and is the only incident of vast numbers of proselytes (Gentiles converting to Judaism). The only reason to fear the Jews was due to the omnipotence of their great God, who had miraculously delivered them. Whitcomb comments, "Israel had now begun to experience one of the greatest deliverances of God since the Exodus, and the lesson was obvious to many." "So all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of you" (Deut. 28:10).

Study Questions for Chapter Eight

Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you insight as you study this passage on the victory of good over evil.

1. Comment on Esther's actions in the following verses: Verse 1-3, 4-6.
2. What is the role of the King in this chapter?
3. List six things from verse 6 that the decree gives the Jews permission to do.
4. Compare Haman's and Mordecai's decrees to the following verses: Romans 5:12,18; 6:23; 8:1,2.
5. What are some of the evidences in this chapter of God's providence?
6. Why do you think the people responded with dread in verse 17?
7. How can these truths be used in your life as a believer? It may be helpful to relate them to such things as self-worth, forgiveness, thankfulness, motivation, and clarification in sharing the gospel with unbelievers.

Further Study:

Using verses Esther 8:14-17 as an illustration of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, how can the principles found in this passage be applied to your life? (Use Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; and Luke 15:4-7 as references).

Chapter Nine: Cursing Turned to Blessing

The providence of God is visibly observed eight and one-half months following Haman's decree of death. Jehovah's people triumph over their enemies, who had sought to destroy them. The Feast of Purim is established in celebration of the Jews' deliverance.

The blessings of Deuteronomy 28 are experienced as the Jews choose to obey God. The word *Jew* occurs 23 times in this chapter. In accordance with Mordecai's decree, the Jews gathered together with a goal of defending themselves (v. 2). "No one could stand before them." The Jews were undefeatable as in the days of Joshua. "And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you" (Josh. 10:8). The dread of the Jews was evident. Sixty-five years earlier Darius the Mede cast into the lion's den all those who had opposed Daniel (Dan. 6:24).

Verse 4 explains why Mordecai was dreaded. His elevation to power began in the palace, exalted by the king himself; then his fame spread throughout the kingdom, and increased more and more. Joshua was similarly blessed "So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land (Josh. 6:27).

The enemies of the Jews were slain. There were no pardons, no prisoners. The phrase, "did what they please," refers to action without official interference, a carrying out of their will or intent. Haman had many supporters in Susa, the capital. At least 500 did not dread the Jews but sought to carry out Haman's decree, perhaps to revenge his death.

Although the Jews had the right to the plunder (possessions) of their enemies, their refusal contrasted Haman's desire to benefit from the death of the Jews. His generous offer of silver to the king's treasury would have been made possible through seizing the plunder of the Jews after they were slain. The pure motives of the Jews only to defend themselves were evident. Neither did they seek to benefit from the death of their enemies. Abraham found himself in a similar situation in Genesis 14:21-23, refusing to take anything from the king of Sodom lest he would then say, "I have made Abram rich." (1 Chr. 26:27 - spoil was given to repair the house of the Lord.)

The king is amazed at the number of Persians, enemies of the Jews, who were slain. Not only had he not realized that Haman's request for the death of a disobedient people referred to the Jews, but he was also unaware of the extent of their hatred by his own citizens. The enemies were not necessarily only Persians, but could very well have been former captives from surrounding countries who had a history of hatred for the Jews. Esther, faithful to follow through with the original plea for the lives of her people, is loyal in her fulfillment of God's will. The bodies of Haman's sons on public display was a warning against retaliation (1 Sam. 31:8-12).

In the providence of God, this rest from their enemies extended to Jerusalem where the Samaritans had opposed the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4:1-5). Archaeological evidence dates the destruction of Samaria and Shechem during this time.

Following the triumph over their enemies, the Jews set aside the day for feasting and rejoicing—an evidence of thanksgiving. Unlike the ingratitude of the lepers whom Jesus healed (Luke 17:11-19), the Jews were grateful to Jehovah for their deliverance. The "choice portions" that were sent to one another were love gifts similar to those given by Joseph to his brothers (Gen. 43:34). David used the same word in a psalm, "The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup" (Psa. 16:5). "Weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psa. 30:5).

Chapter Ten: Mordecai the Jew

King Ahasuerus elevates Mordecai to the second place in the kingdom. The greatness of this Jew is proclaimed as he intercedes for the nation Israel.

As the book began with King Ahasuerus, so it ends. A Gentile king continues to rule over the nation Israel. His treasury is supplied by tributes (conscripted to forced labor) laid on the people rather than by plunder from Jews slain as a result of Haman's decree. The Jews advance his cause by laying their hands on the plunder from their defense. By Persian law, this plunder would then have been turned over to the crown. The mention of the land and the coastlands (islands) reveals once again the vastness of this great Persian kingdom

The accomplishments of authority and strength refer to those of King Ahasuerus (v. 2). Humanly speaking, Mordecai's greatness was possible because of his relationship to the greatest king on earth. From divine viewpoint, it was due to his relationship with the King of kings and Lord of lords. "The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life" (Pro. 22:4). Mordecai, the "little man," whom Haman tried to make low, was made great by his God.

The greatest benefit and impact of Mordecai's fame was for the Jews. The blessings of Deuteronomy 28 were partially realized as a result of obedience to Jehovah, "The LORD will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before . . ." "So all the people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of you. And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity" (Deut. 28:7,10,11).

As prime minister, Mordecai's goal for the Jew was twofold: the good and prosperity of his people. Similarly, "David administered justice and righteousness for all his people" (2 Sam. 8:15). "Depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it" (Psa. 34:14). Interestingly, there is no mention of Esther in this final chapter. God had used her dramatically as His willing servant-Queen. His purpose has been accomplished.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

- Pagan kings may think they rule the world, but God is in control. He intervened in Esther's time, aborting Satan's plan to destroy the Jewish race and prevent Christ from dying on the cross for the sins of the world.
- If we are unwilling to submit to the will of God, He will use someone else. But we will miss both the privilege of serving Him and the subsequent blessing. And our fellowship with Him will be broken, possibly subjecting us to His discipline to restore our relationship with Him.
- Through our obedience to the will of God, we become partakers of His blessings. But we also become involved in His blessing of others, including the salvation of the lost. Esther's silence would have prevented the greatest conversion of unbelievers in the history of the Old Testament.
- The greatest place of joy and blessing in life is in the center of God's will.

Study Questions for Chapters Nine And Ten

As you meditate on the final chapters of Esther, pray for understanding regarding the providence of God in this book. Ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to share what you have learned with others.

1. Explain Esther 9:1 in light of Genesis 50:20; Deuteronomy 23:5; and Romans 8:28.
2. Why do you think the Jews did not lay hands on the plunder? (Review 1 Samuel 15.)
3. According to Genesis 14:23; 2 Samuel 8:11; and 1 Chronicles 26:27, how was spoil used?
4. What were the various components of the Feast of Purim 9:20-32? What do you think might have been the purpose of each one?
5. Summarize the verses in chapters 9 and 10 that refer to Mordecai.
6. What do you think was the effect of the events in the book of Esther on the average Jew living in Jerusalem at the time?
7. In your own words, what do you think is the purpose of the book of Esther?
8. Give some examples of how God has used this study of the book of Esther in your own life.
9. What are some goals you will set as a result of this study?

Further Study:

- a. Summarize the events leading to the change from Israel's condemnation to her deliverance.
- b. Write a paragraph describing how God used Esther in this Book.

A COMPARISON OF THE BOOKS OF RUTH AND ESTHER

Ruth and Esther are the only two books in the Bible named for women.

The providence of God is an important theme in both books

Both are historical narratives vital to the history of the nation Israel.

Ruth is read by Jews at the Feast of Pentecost; Esther is read at the Feast of Purim

Feasts are important in both books.

Relatives play important roles in each book.

Death is essential to the plot of both stories.

Each story has someone who stood in the way of God's plan

There are many contrasts between the two women:

Ruth was a Gentile woman from a pagan country who married a Hebrew.

Esther was a young Jewish girl who married a pagan Gentile king.

Ruth was a widow; Esther an orphan

Ruth came to Israel; Esther was an exile

Ruth was a Gentile living among Jews; Esther a Jew living among Gentiles

Ruth was a proselyte; Esther influenced many proselytes

Ruth gleaned in a field; Esther ruled in a palace

Ruth was a poor; Esther was rich

Ruth was the grandmother of a king; Esther was related to King Saul

Ruth gave life, Esther ordered death

Both were foreigners living in a land other than their own.

Both found favor in the eyes of those who saw them.

Both were taken into the homes of relatives

Both of their relatives were a blessing to others.

Both were women of integrity

Both were submissive—willing to die in order to do God's will

Both were dressed in special garments in order to make their request

Both brought joy to the Jews

God redeemed Ruth to perpetuate the line of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God saved Esther to protect the nation through whom the Redeemer would be born.

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