



**HOLY TRINITY CHURCH  
DOWNTOWN  
THE BOOK OF ESTHER  
COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY – PART II  
FALL 2011**

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## WELCOME TO A COMMUNITY GROUP

Welcome to a Holy Trinity Church community group! You may be asking, “What is a community group?” Well, community groups at Holy Trinity Church help us connect on four levels:

- ***Connect to God:*** All people were designed for relationship with God, and God has always been gathering a people to Himself. If our community groups excel at the other three points of connection below, but fail to connect people to the one true and living God, then we’ve failed. Ultimately, the only thing that will matter in this life is if our relationship with God has been restored. Through God’s acts in history, He has provided for our redemption through the person and work of Jesus Christ. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, the others in your community group will be journeying alongside you by studying God’s Word, and collectively you will be learning how to be re-connected with God.
- ***Connect to the Word:*** We at Holy Trinity Church are confident that God has spoken to humanity through the Bible, and since God has spoken we need to listen! Therefore, the study of God’s Word is paramount in your community group experience. We believe as Jesus said in Luke 24:44–47, that all of God’s Word is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Through our study of the Word, we will always connect the text back to the larger story of God’s redeeming acts, culminating in Jesus Christ.
- ***Connect to other people:*** Most of us reside in the bustling city of Chicago, but we are often isolated from authentic community. We were made for relationship with each other. Participation in a Community Group will allow you to connect to other people through our common exploration of the Bible and related times of fellowship.
- ***Connect to the city:*** We believe God has called Holy Trinity Church to be on a mission for his kingdom. This desire comes from what we have experienced through being in communion with God, and the resulting joy and hope in our life. We want to include as many people as possible to experience our community. God cares about each and every Chicagoan! Consequently, we give of our own time and resources to serve others in Chicago so that everyone in Chicago can be part of God’s community. Community Groups will endeavor to develop participants’ hearts with a desire to serve the poor and disenfranchised.

### ***Community Group Gatherings***

Community Groups meet weekly in homes from mid-September to early May. Each group may take a slightly different approach, but generally the time (typically two hours) is broken down between discussion of a previously assigned biblical text, prayer, and social interaction over dessert or periodic dinners.

## FALL 2011 COMMUNITY GROUP CALENDAR HTC DOWNTOWN

### ***Week of:***

- Oct 24 Group Study #7 Esther 5:1–8  
*personal study/sermon/group discussion*
- Oct 31 Group Study #8 Esther 5:9–6:14  
*personal study/sermon/group discussion*
- Nov 7 Group Study #9 Esther 7:1–8:2  
*personal study/sermon/group discussion*
- Nov 14 Group Study #10 Esther 8:3–17  
*personal study/sermon/group discussion*
- Nov 21 Group Study #11 Esther 9:1–10:3  
*personal study/sermon/group discussion*

### **EDITOR'S NOTE:**

The individual studies were written by Joel Miles (studies #1, 2, 6, 7, and 11), Jon Chenot (studies #4, 5, and 10), and Andrew Stravitz (studies #3, 8, and 9). Jon Dennis, Joseph Kim, and Craig Devereaux provided feedback and direction to the project. Joel Miles took on the additional role of project manager, and helped shape a significant amount of the final product, including writing the *Introduction to the book of Esther*, and co-writing a number of the studies. Dana Adams served as copy editor. Tom Barrett served as general editor, and any mistakes are mine.

For God's Glory,

*Tom Barrett*

## **LEARNING ESTHER TOGETHER – A 3-MONTH STUDY**

From September 2011 through November 2011 we are studying the book of Esther together. We are excited to continue this format of pairing up our sermon texts with what we study individually and discuss in our Community Groups weekly. We believe this approach will better help us understand the text, God, and ourselves, as well as to help us better apply the text to our lives.

### ***Objectives of this Study Guide***

#### *Greater Growth*

We believe that the frequent study of God's Word is critical for your spiritual growth. We are providing you with materials to study in an accountable context to foster greater growth in the gospel.

#### *Greater Application*

We believe that the opportunity to study the Scripture a number of times personally, hear a sermon preached on the text, and to then discuss in your Community Group will allow for a deep richness of understanding and application.

### ***How It Works***

We are asking you to engage the biblical text through:

- *Personal study* - Study each passage on your own three times,
- *Sunday study* - Hear a sermon preached on the text, and
- *Community Group study* - Discuss and apply the passage with the others in your Community Group.

*Note: While we recognize that each person will develop their own rhythms for studying this material, we suggest you complete the three readings associated with the personal study prior to the related Sunday sermon.*

#### *Personal Study*

To grow spiritually one must be committed to reading God's Word. We suggest that you find a regular time and place for thirty minutes each day to learn from the Scriptures. Bring a pen or pencil, your Bible, a notebook, and study materials. In the following pages, each study suggests three readings for each text, along with a set of questions for each reading. The questions that follow the readings each have a slightly different focus, as explained below:

- *Observations:* The same series of five questions is given for each text to help the reader get an overall sense of the passage.
- *Taking a Deeper Look:* These are more in-depth questions specifically tailored to the passage being addressed. Within this section we will periodically give certain information with the questions, be it historical, contextual, or interpretive, which will hopefully help the reader understand the passage.
- *Concluding Study:* In this section we simply ask the reader what they believe is the main point (theme) and main application (aim).
- *For Those Who Want More:* This section contains no questions, and does not need to be completed. Furthermore, this section is not meant to be viewed as the correct answers to the

questions. Please use this section for further information on the passage, and for ideas of how the writers may have answered these questions.

### Sunday Study

Typically each Sunday you will hear a sermon based on the same text the Community Group study is based on. The sermon is another supplement to assist us in better understanding and applying the biblical text we will be studying privately and in our groups. The Sunday sermon will also be available online at [www.htcchicago.org](http://www.htcchicago.org) for those unable to make the service, or for those who would like to listen again.

### Community Group Study

Most weeks you will have a chance to study and discuss the text together in your Community Group (see calendar on page 4).

### **Resources**

#### Resources Provided through Holy Trinity Church:

In order to help you grow in God's Word, we will provide you with the following resources:

- *The Biblical Text:* The attached studies have the applicable biblical text printed at the beginning of each study. All of our study efforts are primarily focused on understanding the biblical text.
- *Personal Study Questions:* The attached studies contain three sets of questions for each study. Please prioritize your time during the week to allow for three separate daily readings of this text, attempting to answer the questions to the best of your ability, and praying over prayer requests that come to mind as you interact with the biblical text.

#### Additional Optional Resources:

The following list of books were consulted and used to help the authors write this study. Therefore, if you would like to study Esther at a more in-depth level, we recommend the following commentaries and resources:

#### Less technical commentaries/resources:

Duguid, Iain M., *Esther and Ruth: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005).

Howard Jr., David M., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1993).

Jobes, Karen H., *Esther: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999).

#### Technical commentaries/resources:

Berlin, Adele, *Esther: The JPS Bible Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication, 2001).

Bush, Fredrick, *Ruth-Esther* (Waco, TX: Word Press, 1996).

Fox, Michael V., *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991).

Levenson, Jon D., *Esther: The Old Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

#### Background Resources:

Scott Jr., J. Julius, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995).

Tomasino, Anthony J., *Judaism Before Jesus: The Events & Ideas That Shaped the New Testament World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).

## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ESTHER

### Approaching the Book of Esther

There tend to be two different mind-sets most people have when approaching the book of Esther. While some approach the book excited to dive into the incredible story of an orphan-turned-queen who must find the strength to save her people from a sinister enemy, many find themselves intimidated by the difficulties the book presents. I was part of the latter group. The intimidation one has regarding the book stems from the book's heavy themes of war and justice, and its unique feature of never mentioning God's name. Furthermore, I have a strong conviction that the New Testament teaches us as Christians to understand the Old Testament through the lens of Christ. In other words, I approached Esther believing that if I truly understood this book, it would lead me to see Christ (Luke 24:27; John 5:39; Rom. 1:1–6; Col. 1:24–29).

There is a good chance that many of you using this study guide are experiencing a mix of the feelings I just described—excited, but intimidated. So as we approach this book I want to encourage you. I want to encourage you because studying this book has helped me better understand the themes of war and justice within the Bible. Moreover, I believe that the absence of God's name within the book is one of its unique strengths. Though God seems to be hidden in this book, His work and His presence are painted on every page. In this way we are constantly reminded of God's faithfulness, even when He seems absent; we are reminded to trust God, even when we do not see Him; and we are reminded that it is often through hindsight, that we clearly see God at work.

Lastly, I want to encourage you because my conviction concerning Christ has been strengthened by my study of Esther. Esther is the story of a people condemned to death, who have a mediator step forward, through whom these people are restored and exalted. Likewise, the gospel is the story of a people condemned, who have Christ take their condemnation, leading to the exaltation and restoration of the condemned. As we continue to study this book, I pray that through Esther we will all allow God to speak to us.

### How to Read the Book of Esther

#### *Esther Is a Narrative*

Though it may seem odd to point this out, Esther is a narrative. This is at once one of the most exciting and most difficult things about studying Esther. It is exciting because the book of Esther is a fascinating story. The twists and turns within the plot, the speeding up and slowing down of time, the intense contrast and contention between the main characters, and the surprise ending make this story an absolute joy to read. Be that as it may, it is difficult because Esther is Scripture, and as a result one cannot only approach it for the joy of reading. Rather, one must approach the book knowing that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Interpreting narrative is much different from interpreting other genres of the Bible such as Paul's letters, poetry, or the Prophets. For example, in a very basic and general way one can split the book of Romans into two sections. Chapters 1–11 contain Paul's explanation of the gospel, while 12–16 contain Paul's application of the gospel. In this way it is much easier to understand how Romans is profitable for teaching, for reproof, etc. Esther, however, cannot be neatly split into explanation and application sections. There are no “therefore, do this” sections. Esther makes its points through things like plot twists, setting, characters and their genealogies, and dialogue. Therefore, the way we approach this book, gain application, and ask questions concerning the text must be different from that of other books of the Bible.

### *Understand the Beginning in Light of the End, and the End in Light of the Beginning*

Esther is one complete story told in ten chapters. Each of these chapters impacts the way one should understand the others, and therefore we must be careful not to treat a passage in isolation. For example, at the end of chapter 8 the reader learns that after a counter-edict to deliver the Jews is written, Mordecai is wearing royal clothes, and the Jews celebrate with feasting. If we treat this passage in isolation, we will miss the complete reversal from chapter 4, where after the first edict against the Jews is written Mordecai tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth and ashes, and the Jews mourn with fasting. Esther is a wonderful story, and the more familiar we are with the whole book, the better we will be able to understand the message of the individual passages.

### *Allow the Text to Speak*

Modern novels are usually filled with detail. Authors will include details such as the reasons behind characters' actions, their individual thoughts, or specific details on the appearance of characters and settings. This is not the way Esther is told. The amount of detail the author of Esther includes is much less than a modern novel. Nonetheless, the details that are included are the details that we want to pay attention to. When studying the Bible it is easy to add details to the story where the text leaves them out. An example of this is the number of wise men who come to see Jesus after He is born. Many of us think that there were three. The fact is we don't actually know, because the text never tells us.

On the one hand, the text of Esther will sometimes give an overwhelming amount of detail, for example the décor of the feast in 1:6–7. On the other, the text often lacks detail where one might desire it to be present, for example the reason for the assassination plot against the king in 2:19–23. Because of this we must be careful to pay close attention to details that the text does provide, and be cautious when adding in details where the text is silent. This is extremely important as regards the morals in the book of Esther. Many people have approached the first chapter of Esther from a moralistic standpoint. Some have argued that Vashti was correct in standing up to her husband, while others have used this passage to argue that wives need to be submissive. Though there is a place for discussing these issues as it relates to the book of Esther, the text never makes a moral judgment on this event. Therefore, we must be careful not to make a moral judgment on the main point or main application of the text. We need to let the text tell the story, without adding in details, or trying to make moral applications or judgments when the text doesn't give us warrant to do so.

### *View in Light of the Bible Narrative*

Historically speaking, Esther is one of the latest books in the Old Testament (483–474 B.C.)<sup>1</sup> and does not take place in the land of Israel. In 586 B.C. the Jewish people living in the land of Judah (southern Israel) were conquered and taken into exile by the Babylonians, and Jerusalem was burned to the ground. This historical event was due to Israel's sin and abandonment of God's covenant with them,<sup>2</sup> as prophesied in Deuteronomy 28:15, 16, 64:

*But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. . . . The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. . . . And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other.*

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Jobes, *Esther: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 22.

In 539 B.C. Cyrus II, the founder of the Persian Empire, defeated the Babylonians and therefore became the ruler of Jewish people. It is under Cyrus that the Jewish people were able to return to the land of Israel, as recorded in the book of Ezra (cf. Isa. 44:21–45:7). However, though many did return, many stayed in the lands of the exile. The Jews that one encounters in the book of Esther are those who have chosen to remain. In fact, the book takes place in the ancient Persian city Susa, where the king Ahasuerus, better known by his Greek name Xerxes I, lived.<sup>3</sup> Xerxes is best known for his military campaign against Greece, which historically took place between chapters 1 and 2 of Esther, fictionally depicted in the movie *300*.

Jews who remained in lands other than Israel, like those in Esther, became known as living in “The Diaspora” (called such because they were “dispersed” all over the world). Due to the nature of the Diaspora numerous religious and theological questions were being asked, such as: “Is God present outside the land of Israel?” “Are those in the Diaspora loved by God?” “Can those who do not have a temple come before God?” “Is God still faithful to his covenant?” and “Is God really in control?”<sup>4</sup> These are important questions to keep in mind while reading Esther, and many of these questions are answered in the story. For example, as mentioned above, God seems hidden in Esther. Ahasuerus, on the other hand, is extremely present. His feasts are described in ways similar to God’s temple, people fear him, he issues edicts, etc. However, as events unfold one sees that Ahasuerus never makes a decision by himself, and all events turn to work out for the good of God’s people. Through the literary decision to leave God’s name out, the text answers some of the questions by showing that God is present even when He seems hidden, He does love those in the Diaspora, and He is still faithful to His promises.

Lastly, we need to see Esther in light of the biblical narrative that leads to Christ. How God providentially works through Esther and Mordecai to bring about a reversal for the Jewish people points us to the way God works through Christ to bring about the ultimate reversal, where sin and death are conquered, and God’s people are reconciled to Him. Let us, therefore, allow God’s Word to teach, reprove, correct, and train us in righteousness, and let us allow this book to point us to Christ!

### **Themes and Interpretive Principles of Esther**

1. Literary Principle: God’s apparent absence, yet definite presence.
2. Literary and Structural Principle: Feasting (ten feasts in the book), identity marker for Jews.
3. Theological Principle: God’s faithfulness and the perseverance of His people.
4. Application Principle: Cannot simply moralize or make principles from the story.
5. Redemptive Theme: Exile and Christ’s coming. (But perhaps even more important is the flow from condemnation to death → a mediator comes [mercy] → deliverance.)
6. Primary Theme: Reversal.

### **Main Point (Theme)**

Esther is about God’s providential work—His faithfulness, and His presence when he seems so invisible—to bring about a reversal (9:1).

### **Main Application (Aim)**

Trust and look to the God who is faithful, who is forever present, and who can and has brought about the ultimate reversal.

*Joel Miles* August 22, 2011

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>4</sup> J. Julius Scott, Jr., *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 109–110.

## Study #7: Esther 5:1–8

Week 7 - **Week of October 24<sup>th</sup>**

Community Group calendar: **Study #7**

Text: **Esther 5:1–8**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study (we recommend three separate readings)
- Listen to sermon preached on October 23<sup>rd</sup>
- Group discussion during week of October 24<sup>th</sup>

### **Esther 5:1–8 *English Standard Version (ESV)***

#### **Esther Prepares a Banquet**

<sup>1</sup> On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. <sup>2</sup> And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. <sup>3</sup> And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." <sup>4</sup> And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king." <sup>5</sup> Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked." So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. <sup>6</sup> And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." <sup>7</sup> Then Esther answered, "My wish and my request is: <sup>8</sup> If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

#### **Introduction**

In 1967 Rubin "Hurricane" Carter was convicted of a triple homicide. Though he was tried and convicted again in 1976, his conviction was eventually overturned in 1985 and he was set free. During his imprisonment Carter received an immense amount of support from those outside of prison. Many of his supporters, including George Lois, Mohammed Ali, and Bob Dylan (who co-wrote the song "Hurricane" with Jacques Levy about Carter) attempted to use their positions of influence and connections to aid in his predicament.

Even though the support of Lois, Ali, and Dylan was not the direct cause of Carter's release, their support highlights the impact one's position of influence can have on a situation. Though Mordecai and all the Jews had been sentenced to death, it was the Jewish orphan Esther whose position offered an opportunity to reverse their death sentence.

### **First Reading: *Observations***

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this verse relate to that verse?” “Should we view this character as a model?” etc.
2. List all characters in the text and whether they are major or minor characters.
3. What role or contribution does each of these characters play in the story?
4. Where does this scene take place? Include any descriptions about the setting that you find significant, odd, or confusing.
5. What “plot twists” do you see in this passage?

### **Second Reading: *Taking a Deeper Look***

1. Compare Esther’s actions in this passage with how she has previously acted in chapter 4. What do you notice? What made this difference? Can you point to a place where Esther does something that results in this change?
2. How does Esther’s change apply to you? What actions or decisions have you made in your life that have resulted or should result in this kind of change?
3. In verse 6 we see that the king is drinking wine. Where else have you seen Ahasuerus drink wine? Compare the actions taken by Ahasuerus when he is drinking wine. Do you notice a pattern?

4. Look back at 1:22. Ahasuerus makes an edict for all husbands to be masters in their own households. However, what do you see happening in this passage? Why is this significant? Who is really in control?

5. In 5:8 we see Esther ask for the king and Haman to come to another feast, which takes place in chapter 7. Why do you think Esther asked for them to come to another feast, rather than tell the king what she tells him in 7:3–6?

In the Jewish temple, the “inner court” referred to the area directly in front of the actual temple structure, where the priests would perform the sacrifices. In Esther (the only place in the Bible where we find the phrase “inner court” used to refer to something other than the temple) the “inner court” refers to a place directly in front of the king’s quarters. Though Israel did have earthly monarchs, it was God who truly was their King, and his throne was in the temple upon the ark (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16). Before any priests were able to come before this throne (which is also referred to as the “mercy seat”), certain rituals had to be performed in the inner court. First, priests would dress in their priestly clothes as they came before the Lord (Ex. 29:29–30; Lev. 16:4). Second, a priest must make certain sacrifices or else would be killed when he came before the Lord (Lev. 16:1–5).

6. In light of the link with the temple language, what similarities do you notice between how the priests would act and how Esther acted in verses 1–2?

7. What similarities do you see between how God acts towards those who come before Him and how Ahasuerus acts towards Esther in verse 2? (For help see Exodus 33:12–23.)

8. What role does Esther begin to play on behalf of the Jewish people in this passage?

9. Read Hebrews 9:1–15. In light of this and your answer to the previous three questions, what significance do you see between Christ’s actions and role for us and Esther’s?

### **Third Reading: *Concluding Study***

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?
2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

### **For Those Who Want More**

#### *Summary of the Plot*

After Esther's decision to work to save the Jewish people, the text immediately reveals the dramatic results of Esther's decision. Esther puts on her royal robes and goes before the king in the inner court. The king graciously accepts her, so Esther invites the king and Haman to come to two successive feasts, promising to reveal her true desire at the second feast.

#### *Important Points from the Text*

This passage immediately follows Esther's decision to identify with the people of God in 4:16. In this passage one can clearly see Esther's actions are altered from her previous involvement in these affairs. The action that takes place in this passage, therefore, serves to reveal the transformation that has occurred in Esther through her decision.

While we notice Esther's identification with the people of God within this passage, we also must notice her identification with her royal position. The language in this passage, specifically 5:1, is filled with "royal" descriptions. Just as in chapter 1, much of this language is used to describe the décor of the king's palace and court. We should also note Esther's decision to "put on her royal robes" and the author's decision to refer to Esther as "Queen Esther." These details are significant following Mordecai's words in 4:14, "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" God's providence has in fact brought Esther to this place for a reason, and so while identifying with the people of God, Esther uses the position God has put her in to become a mediator for God's people.

Esther's life could have been taken here, but "she won favor in [the king's] sight." This acceptance by the king foreshadows the favor the Jewish people will receive through Esther and reveals to the reader Esther's role as mediator.

Verse 5:6 contains the third reference to the drinking of the king, which will again be noted by the author in 7:2. This detail, along with many others, reveals a contrast between Vashti and Esther. Esther comes before the king without being summoned; Vashti does the opposite. Esther prepares a meal for the king; Vashti has a meal with the women and will not attend Ahasuerus. Drinking is involved in Vashti's disposal; drinking is involved in the king's willingness to grant Esther's wish.

Furthermore, as will be discussed in study 9, Esther's request of Ahasuerus while he is drinking reveals wisdom on Esther's part, since many drastic decisions he makes in the book come while he is drinking wine.

In 4:17 the author surprisingly informs the reader that Mordecai is now following the commands of Esther. In chapter 5 we also see Esther, through God's providence, become the one leading the king (see 5:5). This is a reversal in light of the king's edict in chapter 1, that each husband

should be master. In chapter 5 it is not the husband, but the queen who is in charge, and it will not be God's people who are destroyed, but their enemies.

#### *Other Ways This Speaks into Our Lives*

What positions has the Lord put you in where you believe you can be used? Do you believe the Lord has put you into a position for a reason? These are important questions that we need to consider. It is unlikely that we will be used in our positions to the same degree that Esther was. However, that does not mean that the Lord has not led each one of us to the places we are for the purpose of serving Him. What ways do you believe you can serve Christ and His church in the position you are in?

#### *Relation to Main Story Line of Esther*

Esther's decision to act in the previous passage would have been for nothing if the king had killed her. Though the previous passage introduced the turning point in the plot, it is in this passage that Esther actually takes her place as mediator and God puts her in a position to save the Jewish people.

#### *Christological and Theological Points*

Though Esther was a Jew, it was her position as queen that enabled her to be accepted by the king. In fact, it is because of this that we can affirm Mordecai's words in 4:14, that it was for such a time as this that Esther ascended to the throne, and therefore became the much-needed mediator for the Jewish people. We also are in need of a mediator, because just like the Jews in Esther, we are under condemnation. However, we cannot have just any mediator. Our mediator must be Christ Himself. For Christ is both God and man, He lived a perfect life, He died on behalf of our sins, and He rose from the grave. Therefore, just as Esther was acceptable to the king, Christ is the only acceptable mediator before God. He is the only one who could bring us out of our condemnation.

#### *Main Point of the Passage*

Because the king graciously accepts her, Queen Esther becomes the active mediator for the Jewish people.

#### *Final Application Summary*

Just as Esther's identification with God's people led to a transformation in her actions, so also our identity in Christ must transform our actions.

## **PRAYER REQUESTS**

## Study #8: Esther 5:9–6:14

Week 8 – Week of October 31<sup>st</sup>

Community Group calendar: Study #8

Text: **Esther 5:9–6:14**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study
- Listen to sermon preached on October 31<sup>st</sup>
- Group discussion during week of October 30<sup>th</sup>

### **Esther 5:9–6:14: *English Standard Version (ESV)***

#### **Haman Plans to Hang Mordecai**

<sup>9</sup> And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. <sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. <sup>11</sup> And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. <sup>12</sup> Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king." <sup>13</sup> Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." <sup>14</sup> Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.

#### **The King Honors Mordecai**

<sup>1</sup> On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. <sup>2</sup> And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. <sup>3</sup> And the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." <sup>4</sup> And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. <sup>5</sup> And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." <sup>6</sup> So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" <sup>7</sup> And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, <sup>8</sup> let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. <sup>9</sup> And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.'" <sup>10</sup> Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." <sup>11</sup> So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor." <sup>12</sup> Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his

head covered.<sup>13</sup> And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.”

### **Esther Reveals Haman’s Plot**

<sup>14</sup> While they were yet talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried to bring Haman to the feast that Esther had prepared.

### **Introduction**

*The Count of Monte Cristo* is a classic tale of reversal. The protagonist Edmond Dantès, a young and successful sailor, is about to marry the love of his life in Marseille, France. Three men play the role of antagonist to Dantès, and their actions result in his demise. Because of their actions, on the eve of his wedding, Dantès is unjustly arrested and sentenced to life in prison without a trial, even while the presiding magistrate knows that Dantès is innocent.

In prison, Dantès learns of the location of an immense treasure, and upon his escape, is able to use the treasure to fund his return to Marseille and exact revenge on the antagonists who sought to destroy him more than fourteen years earlier.

In Esther 5:9–6:14 we see a similar reversal. Not only has Haman succeeded in having an edict be sent out under the king’s name ordering the destruction of the Jews, but Haman also follows through on the advice of his wife and has gallows made for the purpose of hanging his chief enemy Mordecai. The Jews’ and Mordecai’s demise appears imminent. But the tables are about to be turned, and in quick fashion. Unlike *The Count of Monte Cristo*, where the reversal of fortune takes more than fourteen years, in Esther the reversal of fortunes of Haman and Mordecai takes place in a matter of hours.

### **First Reading: *Observations***

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this verse relate to that verse?” “Should we view this character as a model?” etc.

2. List all characters mentioned in the text and whether they are major or minor characters.

3. What role or contribution does each of these characters play in the story?

4. Where does this scene take place? Include any descriptions about the setting that you find significant, odd, or confusing.

5. What “plot twists” do you see in this passage?

**Second Reading: *Taking a Deeper Look***

1. Based on 5:9–14, how would you characterize Haman?

2. Judging by how the text describes Haman, why was he unable to be satisfied with his immensely fortunate life?

3. Compare 5:14 with 6:13. Though it is not easy to understand why Zeresh and all Haman’s friends completely switch their advice, what message does this communicate about God’s people and God’s faithfulness?

4. How does your answer to question 3 apply to you?

5. List all the aspects of chapter 6 that seem coincidental and lead to the exaltation of Mordecai.

6. What other events in the book of Esther affect the outcome of chapter 6?

7. How do these seemingly coincidental events speak to our understanding of God?

8. From 6:10–14, Haman is said to “hurry” a total of three times. Haman is also consistently portrayed as someone who is making plans against his enemies and for his advancement. Contrast all of Haman’s planning and hurrying with how Mordecai is depicted in the text. Why such a difference? Doesn’t Mordecai have a lot at stake?

9. Compare the outcomes of Haman and Mordecai in chapter 6 with how they are first depicted in chapter 5. What has happened to their positions?

10. Read Luke 1:51–53. How does Mary describe what the Lord was accomplishing in her day through Jesus? How does this relate to our text?

### **Third Reading: *Concluding Study***

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?

2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

### **For Those Who Want More**

#### *Summary of the Plot*

Esther 5:9–6:14 is the platform for the major climax and reversals of the story. Leaving Esther’s first feast, Haman is thrilled with his position and fortune, but cannot be content while Mordecai lives. After devising a plot to kill Mordecai, Haman goes to ask the king’s permission to follow through. The king, however, was unable to sleep and was reminded of the gracious act Mordecai had performed for him. Desiring to exalt Mordecai, he asks Haman what should be done for such a person. Haman, thinking he is referring to himself, gives advice to highly exalt such a man. Much to Haman’s chagrin, the king hastens him to perform all his fantasies of glory for Mordecai. The rest of the morning, Haman must treat Mordecai like he is the king, and Haman’s downward spiral begins. Before the passage ends, the author informs us that even Haman’s wife and closest friends have turned on him, realizing that Haman’s demise is not yet complete.

#### *Important Points from the Text*

The comment made by Zeresh and Haman's friends in 6:13 is the second time in the book we find a verse guaranteeing the survival of the Jews. However, this time it comes from the mouths of Gentiles, rather than from a Jew.

If one were to translate 6:1 literally it would read, "On that night the king's sleep fled." This is important since it portrays the king as a passive character; his sleep is the subject of the sentence. This further points to God's providential hand behind the seemingly coincidental events in this passage.

Historically speaking, the first number of chapters in the book take place over a long period of time. However, in this passage, stretching from 5:1–7:10, events occur in rapid succession. One day Haman is the highest ranking person in the kingdom next to the king; the next he is hung on gallows constructed for a Jewish gatekeeper.

We once again see the king following the advice of another, rather than making a decision for himself.

#### *Other Ways This Speaks into Our Lives*

When we esteem ourselves more than everyone else, we tend to be easily offended and discouraged when we discover we're not that important. It's easy to think of Haman as a rare example of someone far too full of pride. But are we really so different? Do you ever act foolishly when you aren't honored as you think you ought to be? Be careful not to consider yourself more righteous than Haman.

By trusting God that deliverance would come, Mordecai exemplifies humble faith. Our worrying and sometimes our hurrying demonstrates we aren't trusting God. How easy it is for us to have fear in the midst of our circumstances when we are trusting in things or people other than God. Mordecai rested upon the promises made to his people by God. Do you rest upon the promises made to the Church?

#### *Relation to Main Story Line of Esther*

It is in this passage that we begin to see reversals take place. Though Esther has begun to initiate a plan to overturn the fortunes of the Jews, it is in this passage where seemingly coincidental events lead to the exaltation of Mordecai and the demise of Haman. Furthermore, this reversal is not over, since the next passage completes the reversal between Mordecai and Haman, as Haman is hung on the gallows built for Mordecai in 5:14.

#### *Christological and Theological Points*

Luke 1:46–55 records a beautiful song by Mary known as the Magnificat. The reason for Mary's singing is the fact that she has Jesus sitting in her womb. Mary realizes that with the birth of this child, God is fulfilling his promises made long ago. Verse 51–53 read, "[The Lord] has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty." This passage reminds us that what Jesus brought about was the demise of those who longed to exalt themselves, and the exaltation of those who humbly serve Him. This is the Savior that we serve, one who humbles the proud like Haman, and exalts the humble like Mordecai.

#### *Main Point of the Passage*

Self-honor leads to eventual destruction, but God exalts the faithful and humble.

#### *Final Application Summary*

Faithfully and humbly serve the Lord, knowing that at the proper time He will exalt you.

## PRAYER REQUESTS

### Study #9: Esther 7:1–8:2

Week 9 - **Week of November 7<sup>th</sup>**

Community Group calendar: **Study #9**

Text: **Esther 7:1–8:2**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study
- Listen to sermon preached on November 6<sup>th</sup>
- Group discussion during week of November 7<sup>th</sup>

#### **Esther 7:1-8:2 *English Standard Version (ESV)***

<sup>1</sup> So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. <sup>2</sup> And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” <sup>3</sup> Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. <sup>4</sup> For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.” <sup>5</sup> Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” <sup>6</sup> And Esther said, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

#### **Haman Is Hanged**

<sup>7</sup> And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king. <sup>8</sup> And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman’s face. <sup>9</sup> Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” <sup>10</sup> And the king said, “Hang him on that.” So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

#### **Esther Saves the Jews**

<sup>1</sup> On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. <sup>2</sup> And the king took off

his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

### **Introduction**

“The bigger they come, the harder they fall” is a saying that captures well the trajectory of people who let pride, ambition, and success lead them to continually push the envelope, until one day their world comes crashing down. In 2003, accomplished hiker and mountaineer Aron Ralston was so confident in his abilities that he decided to head off for some canyoneering in Utah without telling anyone of his plans. In many ways, this summed up well Ralston’s psyche: he was on a seemingly upward and continuous string of personal accomplishments, from academic, to professional, to outdoor pursuits—in other words, the sky was the limit for Aron Ralston. An account of his fateful endeavor is recounted in a mountaineering blog as follows:

*Ralston was 150 yards above the final rappel in Bluejohn Canyon. He was maneuvering in a 3-foot wide slot trying to get over the top of a large boulder wedged between the narrow canyon walls. He climbed up the boulder face and it seemed very stable as he stood on top. As he began to climb down the opposite side the perfectly balanced 800-pound rock shifted several feet, pinning his right arm—he was trapped.<sup>5</sup>*

Ralston barely survived his “fall.” In Esther 7:1–8:2, we see the fall of Haman, a person who appeared to be on a continuous upward trajectory but had let his own pride blind him to the dangers he was running headlong into. Aron Ralston survived his hard fall; Haman will not.

### **First Reading: *Observations***

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this verse relate to that verse?” “Should we view this character as a model?” etc.

2. List all characters mentioned in the text and whether they are major or minor characters.

3. What role or contribution does each of these characters play in the story?

4. Where does this scene take place? Include any descriptions about the setting that you find significant, odd, or confusing.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://climb-utah.com/Roost/bluejohn2.htm>.

5. What “plot twists” do you see in this passage?

**Second Reading: *Taking a Deeper Look***

1. Though our studies have split Esther 5:1–8:2 into three different sections, it really is a continuous section in the book. The first four chapters of the book happen over a number of years. However, read 5:8–9, 5:14–6:1, 6:10–7:1, and 8:1. What do you notice about the timing of these events?

2. Compare 5:6 and 7:2. What do you notice?

3. Now read 1:7–8, 1:10–12, and 3:15. In each of these cases the text associates the king’s drinking of wine with a rash edict or promise. What does this reveal about Esther and how she went about trying to save the Jews through these feasts with the king?

4. Contrast Esther’s request in 7:3 with Haman’s response to king Ahasuerus in 6:6–9. What do you notice?

5. Esther’s request is structured exactly the way the king asked his question. The king asks, “What is your wish. . . what is your request?” Esther answers, “Let my life be granted me *for my wish*, and my people *for my request*.” Are these two different petitions? What does this reveal about Esther’s connection to her people?

6. Looking back at 3:8–11 we see that both King Ahasuerus and Haman are involved in the edict against the Jews! However, in 7:5–6 Esther only accuses Haman. Why does she do this? Again, what does this reveal about Esther?

“Harem protocol dictated that no one but the king could be left alone with a woman of the harem. Haman should have left Esther’s presence when the king retreated to the garden. . . . Even in the presence of others, a man was not to approach a woman of the king’s harem within seven steps. That Haman should actually fall on the couch where Esther is reclining is unthinkable!”<sup>6</sup>

8. However, judging by how we have seen King Ahasuerus make decisions throughout the book (see 1:15–21, 2:2–4, and 3:7–11), why does Haman stay to beg Esther for his life, if it is the king who is determined to hurt him and it is against the law?

9. Why is it significant that a person as unimportant as a eunuch is the one who influences the king to hang Haman?

10. Read 5:10–11, 8:1–2, and 9:9–10. Though Haman clearly loses his life in 7:7–10, how do these texts point to an even more complete reversal of Haman’s fortune compared to Mordecai’s?

11. Though Esther is clearly instrumental in bringing about these events, it was not Esther who stopped Mordecai from being killed earlier that day. Esther did not cause the king to be restless, she did not convince Haman to build those gallows and go to the king early in the morning, and it was not her who suggested Haman be hung. Someone else was at work. How does this speak to how we should think about and rely on the Lord?

12. Read 5:14. What was Haman’s plan for that day? What actually happened?

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<sup>6</sup> Jobs, *Esther*, 165.

13. Read Luke 19:47 and 24:44–49. What was the plan of the chief priests, scribes, and principle men for Jesus? What actually happened?

### **Third Reading: *Concluding Study***

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?
2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

### **For Those Who Want More**

#### *Summary of the Plot*

Esther's second feast occasions her request of the king for her life and her people. The forgetful king, enraged at the culprit, demands to know who it is. Though both Ahasuerus and Haman are guilty, Esther accuses Haman, who becomes terrified. The king leaves in a fit, and Haman falls on Esther for mercy. But as he is pleading, the king returns and thinks Haman is attacking the queen. Eunuchs cover his face to carry him away, and finally, to mark Haman's utter fall, a bold eunuch speaks freely to point out the gallows Haman had made for Mordecai's murder. The king orders Haman to be hung on the gallows, and once he is dead, the king's wrath abates.

#### *Important Points from the Text*

This is the second of Esther's feasts in as many days for the king and Haman. However, since the last feast we have already begun to see Haman's fall, which climaxes in this chapter.

The author reminds the reader three times (7:2, 7, 8) that wine was consumed at the feast. Every other time the author refers to wine it is in the context of the king making a rash edict. This is important as it reveals that the queen is appealing to the king's desire and favor, knowing full well that the king is always guided by his whims. This demonstrates Esther's wisdom, which leads to Haman's demise.

The queen's wisdom is displayed yet again as she flatters the king by asserting that the annihilation of her people is firstly a loss to the king, implying the Jews belong to the king.

The king didn't know Esther's ethnicity because Mordecai had told Esther to keep it a secret. The king's immediate rage at the plot reveals the king's complete ignorance, both of Esther's identity and of his own culpability as the one who signed off on the edict.

Esther's request is a complete contrast with Haman's. In fact, the king's question reveals that he expects some request similar to the intentions of Haman—self-promoting. Instead, Esther petitions for her life and people with the same structure as the king's question. Her wish is for her life and her request is for her people. Therefore, unlike selfish Haman, "Esther is saying that her life and the life of her people are one and the same. Her destiny is one with her people."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jobs, *Esther*, 164.

It is important to note the reversal of Haman's plan. This is the first major reversal in the book, with other reversals coming in the next three chapters. In this way, Haman's reversal really is a foretaste of what is to come.

*Relation to Main Story Line of Esther*

The primary enemy of the book is now completely taken down, as his plan to kill Mordecai is reversed upon himself. Furthermore, Esther has finally revealed her true identity to the king, who has listened to her and clearly chosen to help her.

*Christological and Theological Points*

In Luke 19:47 the author gives us a glimpse into the desires of the leaders of Israel to "destroy" Jesus. The result of this desire was the crucifixion of Christ. However, just as Haman, the enemy of the Jews, saw his plan turned upon his head, so also did those who hated Christ. Their plan to destroy Jesus led to his resurrection from the dead and subsequent birth of the Church.

Furthermore, Esther's wisdom in pleading for her people and accusing Haman before the king herald her as one exalted from humility through the providence and wisdom of Yahweh to mediate for Israel through intercession and through gaining victory over their wicked foe and enemy. Because of this, Esther is yet another hero for God's people, and her place in the Bible is undeniable since the main themes of the story tie into Scripture's trajectory for a messianic hope.

*Main Point of the Passage*

The first of the concluding reversals is complete: Haman's plan for another is enacted upon himself.

*Final Application Summary*

Be wise and dependent upon the Lord to work for His people, in His time and in His ways.

## **PRAYER REQUESTS**

## Study #10: Esther 8:3–17

Week 10 - **Week of November 14<sup>th</sup>**

Community Group calendar: **Study #10**

Text: **Esther 8:3–17**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study
- Listen to sermon preached on November 13<sup>th</sup>
- Group discussion during week of November 14<sup>th</sup>

### **Esther 8:3–17 *English Standard Version (ESV)***

#### **Mordecai Discovers a Plot**

<sup>3</sup> Then Esther spoke again to the king. She fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews. <sup>4</sup> When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, <sup>5</sup> Esther rose and stood before the king. And she said, “If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. <sup>6</sup> For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming to my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?” <sup>7</sup> Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he intended to lay hands on the Jews. <sup>8</sup> But you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king’s ring, for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king’s ring cannot be revoked.” <sup>9</sup> The king’s scribes were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day. And an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews, to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, provinces, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language. <sup>10</sup> And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king’s signet ring. Then he sent the letters by mounted couriers riding on swift horses that were used in the king’s service, bred from the royal stud, <sup>11</sup> saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, <sup>12</sup> on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. <sup>13</sup> A copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province, being publicly displayed to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take vengeance on their enemies. <sup>14</sup> So the couriers, mounted on their swift horses that were used in the king’s service, rode out hurriedly, urged by the king’s command. And the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. <sup>15</sup> Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. <sup>16</sup> The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. <sup>17</sup> And in every province and in every city, wherever the king’s command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

## Introduction

The events of Esther 8 through the end of the book can be difficult to read. Brutal acts are called for and committed in the conclusion of the unfolding events of the book. Inevitably, for readers like us, we may view these events through our own experiences and situations. Most of us have lived in the most powerful country the world has ever known, with the most powerful military the world has ever known, and in a society that has generally not had to face the threat of annihilation. One could argue that even the nuclear threat faced by the US during the Cold War was averted due to America's nuclear stockpile, thus adding to the sense of invulnerability of the United States. The apparent invincibility of the US is unique. Throughout history, and across the world, people groups have faced the very real threat of annihilation from an enemy that for as long as they have breath, will do anything to carry out their desire to destroy the people group they hate.

As a modern reader of Esther 8 and 9:1–10:3, we may think things such as: Why not sign a peace treaty? Why not bring in the United Nations to keep the peace? Why don't the Jews just arm themselves and fight for their lives? These may be valid options today in some contexts, but they were not viable options for the Jews in the book of Esther. The events of Esther 8:1–10:3 were necessitated by the longstanding nature of the animosity between the Jews and their ancient enemy the Amalekites, whom Haman descends from (see Exodus 17:8–16, 1 Samuel 15, and Esther 3:1). The Jews' only option was to eliminate all of those who sought to destroy them.

## First Reading: *Observations*

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this verse relate to that verse?” “Should we view this character as a model?” etc.
2. List all characters mentioned in the text and whether they are major or minor characters.
3. What role or contribution does each of these characters play in the story?
4. Where does this scene take place? Include any descriptions about the setting that you find significant, odd, or confusing.

5. What “plot twists” do you see in this passage?

**Second Reading: *Taking a Deeper Look***

1. Based on chapters 7:1–8:2, have the Jews actually been delivered yet?

2. Repetition is often used in the Bible to highlight important information. There are two times in the text that the reader is reminded that Haman is an Agagite, in the lineage of the Amalekite king Saul failed to kill in 1 Samuel 15. Read Exodus 17:8–16. Why does the text continually point out Haman’s lineage?

3. Read Esther 4:11 and 5:1–2. What are the consequences Esther could have faced for coming before the king again?

4. Compare Esther’s actions in this passage, specifically in 8:3–6, with Esther’s reaction to Mordecai in 4:9–11. What do you notice?

5. Read 8:5–6. Why is it significant that Mordecai is the one who writes this new edict?

6. Compare 3:12–15 and 8:9–14. What do you notice? Why is this significant?

7. Specifically, how did Mordecai and the Jews react to Haman’s edict in 4:1–3?

8. How do you see their reaction reversed in regards to the new edict in 8:15–17?

9. What does Esther not reveal about herself until chapter 7? How does this relate to the last sentence in chapter 8? Why is this significant?

10. Did this new edict guarantee the Jews' deliverance from their enemies?

11. Read Romans 8:1–39. If you are a Christian, has what Christ did on the cross guaranteed your deliverance? How should you respond to this?

### **Third Reading: *Concluding Study***

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?

2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

### **For Those Who Want More**

#### *Summary of the Plot*

There still remains the decree of destruction that was devised by the enemy of the Jews. This compels Esther again to intercede and advocate for the rest of her people. The king shows her favor and allows a decree to be written that the Jews do to their enemies what their enemies would do to them. In the same way that Haman's edict was written and issued forth, Mordecai's command is written by the same scribes, sealed with the same signet ring, and sent in the same swiftness. This decree, along with Mordecai's exaltation, causes great rejoicing and feasting among all God's people.

#### *Important Points from the Text*

One might see how important it is to have the background and a thorough memory of what has happened up until this point in the story in order to understand the true significance of these events. The honor of Mordecai in chapter six seems to be the first glimpse of something actually going right and of true justice being administered in the kingdom. Even further, it is an important twist in the plot that shows the great reversal of fate that is unfolding for God's people, the Jews.

Here, the challenging concepts of retribution, war, and what may be called genocide are revisited from a different perspective. Earlier in the narrative the Jews were faced with a threat against their very existence as a people group in the Persian Empire. However, the edict that was sent against them is now combated, with an edict permitting the Jews to strike their enemies on the day they were to be destroyed. This sets up the final reversal of events in chapter 9.

This is in essence a sanctioned civil war within the kingdom. By allowing the Jews to defend themselves, this edict is giving them a significant place of importance and honor in the empire. But the reason for the preservation and the protection of God's people should be taken from their covenant context. We learn about this in Deuteronomy 7:7, which says, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples," as well as Deuteronomy 9:5 where Moses tells the Jews, "Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations. . ." God's work to preserve and save his people has to do with his own loyal love that says more about God's gracious character than the goodness of the Jewish people.

The final part of chapter 8 reveals a complete reversal of the Jews' reaction to Haman's edict in chapter 4. In chapter 4 we see Mordecai tear his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and go up to the entrance of the king's gate. Next the author describes the Jews mourning, fasting, weeping, and lamenting. However, in 8:15–17 Mordecai is now wearing royal robes in the king's presence. Furthermore, the Jews are rejoicing and feasting!

#### *Other Ways This Speaks into Our Lives*

We now see how much Esther cares for her people. Haman has been disposed of, Mordecai has been exalted, yet she still returns to the king to beg for her people. How much do you care for God's people? It is often easy to criticize a church, but do you genuinely care for the Church?

#### *Relation to Main Story Line of Esther*

This passage sets up the final reversal in the story. It is because of this sanctioned war that the Jews are able to fight and destroy their enemies. Furthermore, we see a complete reversal from Haman's edict earlier in the story. Haman wrote his edict because of his hate for Mordecai. However, Mordecai is now exalted to Haman's position and writes an edict combating the first out of love for God's people.

#### *Christological and Theological Points*

In Revelation 5, the apostle John is allowed to witness a scene in the heavenly realm. John sees an angel hold up a scroll that is sealed and ask, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" (Rev. 5:2). No one is found. Because of this John begins to weep. He weeps because the scroll represents the plans of God—plans to deliver His people, to eradicate sin from the world, and to bring about the new heavens and new earth. However, as he weeps, Revelation 5:5 says, "And one of the elders said to me, 'Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'" John is then enabled to see the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. The acts of Esther 8 provide a potential deliverance for the people of God. However, Christ's life, death, and resurrection mean that our deliverance is guaranteed, because He has conquered!

#### *Main Point of the Passage*

The mediators set the scene for the deliverance of God's people.

#### *Final Application Summary*

Recognize that our mediator has brought about guaranteed deliverance through His death and resurrection.

## PRAYER REQUESTS

### Study #11: Esther 9:1–10:3

Week 11 - **Week of November 21<sup>st</sup>**

Community Group calendar: **Study #11**

Text: **Esther 9:1–10:3**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study
- Listen to sermon preached on November 20<sup>th</sup>
- Group discussion during week of November 21<sup>st</sup>

#### **Esther 9:1–10:3 *English Standard Version (ESV)***

##### **The Jews Destroy Their Enemies**

<sup>1</sup> Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. <sup>2</sup> The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples. <sup>3</sup> All the officials of the provinces and the satraps and the governors and the royal agents also helped the Jews, for the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them. <sup>4</sup> For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces, for the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful. <sup>5</sup> The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them. <sup>6</sup> In Susa the citadel itself the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men, <sup>7</sup> and also killed Parshandatha and Dalphon and Aspatha <sup>8</sup> and Poratha and Adalia and Aridatha <sup>9</sup> and Parmashta and Arisai and Aridai and Vaizatha, <sup>10</sup> the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, but they laid no hand on the plunder. <sup>11</sup> That very day the number of those killed in Susa the citadel was reported to the king. <sup>12</sup> And the king said to Queen Esther, "In Susa the citadel the Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men and also the ten sons of Haman. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled." <sup>13</sup> And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict. And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows." <sup>14</sup> So the king commanded this to be done. A decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. <sup>15</sup> The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed 300 men in Susa, but they laid no hands on the plunder. <sup>16</sup> Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but they laid no hands on the plunder. <sup>17</sup> This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they

rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness.<sup>18</sup> But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness.<sup>19</sup> Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the rural towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another.

### **The Feast of Purim Inaugurated**

<sup>20</sup> And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far,<sup>21</sup> obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year,<sup>22</sup> as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.<sup>23</sup> So the Jews accepted what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them.<sup>24</sup> For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them.<sup>25</sup> But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.<sup>26</sup> Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur. Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had happened to them,<sup>27</sup> the Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year,<sup>28</sup> that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every clan, province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.<sup>29</sup> Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim.<sup>30</sup> Letters were sent to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, in words of peace and truth,<sup>31</sup> that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther obligated them, and as they had obligated themselves and their offspring, with regard to their fasts and their lamenting.<sup>32</sup> The command of Queen Esther confirmed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.

### **The Greatness of Mordecai**

<sup>1</sup> King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea.<sup>2</sup> And all the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honor of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?<sup>3</sup> For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

### **Introduction**

Reading about the large number of deaths caused by any war is devastating, and usually leaves the reader asking *Why?* In the HBO series *Band of Brothers*, episode 9 depicts Easy Company stumbling

upon a concentration camp near Landsberg, Germany. It is interesting to note that the title of this episode is “Why We Fight.” This title helps illustrate the view almost all people have toward the atrocities of World War II. Though the war of 1939–1945 was a great tragedy, the brutality performed upon millions of people had to be stopped.

When approaching a text such as Esther 9:1–10:3, there is a tendency to try to avoid the difficult topics of war and justice. For many, the idea that God’s people in the Old Testament were involved in killing their enemies is difficult to handle. Like our response to the human devastation of war, we want to ask the question *Why?* Why did this war have to be waged? Why were so many people killed? To answer this question we must look closely at the text of Esther 9:1–10:3, and allow the Bible to inform our understanding.

### **First Reading: *Observations***

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this verse relate to that verse?” “Should we view this character as a model?” etc.

2. List all characters in the text and whether they are major or minor.

3. What role or contribution does each of these characters play in the story?

4. Where does this scene take place? Include any descriptions about the setting that you find significant, odd, or confusing.

5. What “plot twists” do you see in this passage?

### **Second Reading: Taking a Deeper Look**

1. If you had to highlight the main verse in this passage what would it be? Why?

2. List all the places throughout this passage where you see the theme of reversal explained or spoken about.

3. What other events in the Bible have reversal as a primary theme? How do these other events relate to you?

4. How are the people the Jews fought against consistently referred to?

5. Read Romans 5:1–11. What is similar between the way we are referred to in Romans and the way those whom the Jews fought against are referred to in our passage?

In Esther 3:1 the author clearly puts Haman in line with the Amalekites when he refers to Haman as the son of Agag, who was the king of the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15. The Amalekites, as a people, are consistently referred to as God's enemies throughout the Bible (Ex. 17:8, 14–16; Deut. 25:17–19; 1 Sam. 15:2–3). As God's enemies, the Amalekites deserve to be judged by God. Of course, we also deserve to be judged by God, but we rely upon Christ who took that judgment for us. Though it does not always seem fair, it is important for us to understand that from a biblical perspective God's enemies deserve to be judged.

Within the Old Testament there are two types of war that one sees waged by God's people: (1) wars of judgment and (2) wars of self-defense. One of the differences between the two is how plunder is handled. In a war of judgment, plunder is prohibited in order that one would know that the war was not for personal gain (Josh. 6:18; 1 Sam. 15:1–3). But in a war of defense plunder was permitted for compensation as well as for those whose war contribution was less direct (Deut. 20:14; 1 Sam. 30:24; 2 Chron. 20:25) (Hugenberger, G.P., 2001, *Some Introductory Notes on the Biblical Ethics of War*, unpublished paper). Since Mordecai's edict was a complete reversal of Haman's it allowed the Jews to take plunder. However, in 9:10, 15, and 16, the author points out that the plunder was not touched.

6. Even though the edict of 8:13 refers to the Jews as defending themselves, what kind of war does it appear the Jews saw themselves waging?

7. Do you believe the war waged in the book of Esther was just, from a biblical perspective? Why or why not?

8. Considering the way Romans 5:1–11 refers to us, what do we justly deserve? But what do we receive through Christ?

9. Compare Esther 9:22 with John 16:16–24. What similarities do you see?

10. How would you summarize what the festival of Purim celebrates?

In the first study we talked about the difficult theological questions arising from the situation the Jews in Persia were in. They were not in the Promised Land, they did not have a king in the line of David, and they did not have a temple. Many looked at their situation and believed that God had abandoned them. They believed that God would not use the people in Persia because they were outside the Promised Land. They believed that the people's prayers would not be answered since they did not have the temple.

11. However, looking at this passage how do you think the Jews in Persia would answer those questions?

12. Have you ever felt that God has abandoned you? Have you ever felt that you could no longer come before God? Have you ever thought that you were outside God's blessing? What message does this book have for you?

13. What is the ultimate reversal brought about by Christ? How was this assured? When will this be completed? (For help see 1 Cor. 15:12–28 and Rev. 21:1–8.)

**Third Reading: *Concluding Study***

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?

2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

## For Those Who Want More

### *Summary of the Plot*

The reversal of the book is finally completed as the Jews all over the Kingdom and within Susa destroy their enemies, but leave the plunder. In response to this great reversal the festival of Purim is instituted to be observed by all Jews throughout time. And the story finally concludes with both Esther and Mordecai in their exalted positions.

### *Important Points from the Text*

The action of this passage must be seen in light of the edict of 8:11–12, a direct reversal of the edict of 3:13. However, it also must be seen in light of biblical history, which refers to the “Amalekites as a people—men, women, and children—as paradigmatic in biblical theology as the enemies of God’s people”<sup>8</sup> (see also 1 Sam. 15:2–3; Ex. 17:8, 14–16; Deut. 25:17–19). Haman’s decree in 3:13 threatened to reverse God’s words to Israel throughout the ages to destroy their enemies (see references above). However, with Mordecai’s decree, and chapter 9, we see God is the one who actually works a reversal. In fact, it is appropriate and important for us to see the carrying out of Mordecai’s edict as influenced by this biblical theology. Since Mordecai’s edict was a complete reversal of Haman’s it allowed the Jews to take plunder. However, in 9:10, 15, and 16, the author points out that the plunder was not touched. The author is showing, therefore, that these Jews of the Diaspora not only succeed where Saul and the Israelites who lived in the land failed (1 Sam. 15; see also Genesis 14; Joshua 6–7), but also that they saw their carrying out of this edict as fulfilling God’s ancient edict against the enemies of the Jews. Even though the edict drawn up by Mordecai is worded as a defense, this war was actually a war of judgment against the enemies of God.

The hanging of Haman’s sons, explained in 9:6–10, also contributes to the theme of war of judgment and the relationship to Saul, for he and his sons were hanged in 1 Samuel 31:1–13.

Esther 9:1 explicitly states that these actions should be seen as a reversal of the plans of the enemies. In fact, the very feast of Purim is celebrated because it was in these days that “the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from *sorrow into gladness and from mourning into holiday*; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor” (9:22). Purim, therefore, is a celebration of a reversal.

There is also a reversal with the feasts that begin the book of Esther. Just as Ahasuerus held a feast with people from across Persia and Media and then just with people from Susa, so also the Jews in all the provinces have a feast on one day, while the Jews in Susa have their feast on a different day (9:17–18).

Another reversal is found in Queen Esther’s command at the end of the book. The book begins with Ahasuerus decreeing for husbands to be masters in their households. However, the book now ends with Queen Esther decreeing something. In fact, the author words it as, “The command of Queen Esther confirmed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.”

### *Other Ways This Speaks into Our Lives*

As this is the end of the book, we now can look at all the events that unfold within this story and clearly see God at work. In our lives it is often the case that the easiest way to see God at work is in hindsight. It is unlikely that Esther saw her rise to the throne, or Mordecai saw his revelation of an

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<sup>8</sup> Jobs, *Esther*, 186.

assassination plot, as God providentially working for His people. However, in hindsight a proper understanding of how God was working becomes clear. We also must trust that even in the events in our lives that do not seem significant, or even in ones that do, God is at work!

#### *Relation to Main Story Line of Esther*

This is what the book has been building up to. It is in this passage that one can finally see how the intricate parts of this story have moved toward a complete reversal of the Jews' fortunes.

#### *Christological and Theological Points*

Esther's work as mediator for the Jewish people brought about a complete reversal. The Jewish people were condemned to death, but on the day that this death was to take place the reverse occurred. The human race is by nature children of wrath; we were the enemies of God condemned to death because of our sin. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:4). This is the assurance of the great reversal accomplished through Christ's work on the cross, a reversal that will be fully realized when Christ comes again and makes all things new.

This great reversal includes the day when the final war of judgment will take place. Upon this day the enemies of God's people will once again stand to "gain mastery over them" (Esther 9:1). We see this scene in Revelation 19:

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. (Rev. 19:19–21)

Once again we see God working a reversal, but this is a reversal which finally punishes evil and obliterates it from the world.

#### *Main Point of the Passage*

The plots of the enemies of the Jews are turned upon their heads, as God providentially brings about the final reversal.

#### *Final Application Summary*

Know that Christ's victory on the cross assures the full and final reversal when God's enemies are fully defeated.

## **PRAYER REQUESTS**



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