

Esther Bible Study

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Perhaps among the most notable facts about the book is that God is not mentioned by name at all. The author seems, therefore, to be deliberately avoiding any reference to God. There is no depiction of anyone worshipping anywhere in the narrative. Not only that, the Jews we meet in this story have chosen to remain living in the pagan Persian society and to not return to Jerusalem and identify with the restoration community of Israel being re-established there. The biblical *Book of Esther* is set in the third year of Ahasuerus, a king of Persia. The name Ahasuerus is equivalent to Xerxes, both deriving from the Persian, thus Ahasuerus is usually identified as Xerxes I (486-465 BC). The king was about 36 years old when he took over for his father Darius the first. He was not the first born but because his mother was the daughter of Cyrus her offspring were given preference. Xerxes proclaimed himself..."King of Kings" and King of the World" which he was for a while.

The Book of Esther tells a story of palace intrigue and genocide thwarted by a Jewish queen of Persia. In short, this appears to be an almost 'secular' story about a group of non-religious Jews. Another fact that separates this book from others is that there does not appear to be one reference to it by a New Testament writer.

But if that is all that it was, the ancient Hebrews would never have recognized it and received it as part of Scripture. Rather than being a theological weakness or "lapse", the hiddenness of God is a powerful literary device to bring home its message about the absolute sovereignty and grace of God.

It has been said when describing this phenomenon that though Shakespeare never appears in his plays, his presence is pervasive. Every act, every scene, every line of dialogue bears the imprint of his pen. He is the genius behind all the characters, each twist of plot and every poignant ending. So this book may not bear God's name directly, every page bears testimony to its author.

This book is often like the dramas played out in our everyday lives. It seldom happens that when an enemy is on our heels that our Red Seas part as a means of escape or redemption. Seldom when disaster is at our door are we warned by angelic visitors. Seldom when we are in need of direction are we instructed by God from a burning bush. And neither was Esther.

It is easy to see God in the miracle. It is not so easy to see Him in the mundane. But that is where most of us live. All the more reason why we need to be sensitive to His voice...so that we don't miss His presence with us that may not be as loud as it has for some in the past. In fact, if we are waiting to hear God above the storm we will likely be

waiting a long time since God usually speaks in a “whisper.” This book can help us sharpen our spiritual senses.

A.W. Tozer once wrote: *“Whoever will listen will hear the speaking Heaven. This is definitely not the hour when men take kindly to an exhortation to listen, for listening is not a part of popular religion. We are at the opposite end of the pole from there. Religion has accepted the monstrous heresy that noise, size, activity and bluster make a man dear to God. But we may take heart. To a people caught in the tempest of the great conflict God says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God,’ and still He says it, as if He means to tell us that our strength and safety lie not in noise but in silence.”*

Also, it is noteworthy that in the oldest Hebrew Bibles, Esther was not grouped with the historical books (Judges, Kings, and Chronicles) but with the wisdom literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes). This association of Esther with wisdom literature is instructive. It reflects an awareness that the book is about practical principles for living wisely in a pluralistic, pagan society like ancient Persia. This book clearly gives principles and addresses questions like: *Can we live a life of faith and integrity in a faithless culture and society?* Its answer is a resounding “yes”. Then another question it addresses is: *“How can we live faithfully in such a society?”* The narrative itself will yield answers to that question as we study and reflect on it.

The Message- Though God seems invisible, He is always present and sovereign over all.

When reading this book it would be easy to say, as many have through the years, that it has nothing to do with me but that would be a false conclusion for it was written under the inspiration of God. And according to II Tim. 3:16-17- ***“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*** So we must look at this book knowing that it is for us today as well. It is history but it is much more than that it is life for us today.

Bible Study Esther 1

A. Prayer

B. Introduction

The book of Esther has had many critics. Martin Luther was particularly unhappy with it; *“I am so hostile to this book (II Maccabees) and to Esther that I would wish they did not exist at all; for they Judaize too greatly and have much pagan impropriety.”* Table Talk, XXIV. But Later when writing an introduction to the translation of Esther he said, *“Esther includes much that is good”*. A great number have questioned whether it should be in the Bible at all.

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This book is often like the dramas played out in our every day lives. Seldom when an enemy is on our heels does our Red Seas part as a means of escape or redemption. Seldom when disaster is at our door are we warned by angelic visitors. Seldom when we are in need of direction are we instructed by God from a burning bush. And neither was Esther.

It is easy to see God in the miracle. It is not so easy to see Him in the mundane. But that is where most of us live. This is a reason why we need to be sensitive to His voice...so that we don't miss His presence with us. It certainly won't be as loud for us as it was for many in the past. In fact, if we are waiting to hear God above the storm we will likely be waiting a long time since God usually speaks in a "whisper." This book can help us sharpen our spiritual senses.

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answer is a resounding “yes”. Then a second question is addressed: “*how can we live faithfully in such a society?*” The narrative itself will yield answers to that question as we study and reflect on it.

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The Message- Though God seems invisible, He is always present and sovereign over all. God is sovereignly in control, even when he appears to be completely absent.

C. Esther 1

1. Who are the major “players” so far in this drama that God has penned for us to read? Summarize what you learned about the characters of Xerxes, Vashti, and Memucan from this chapter.
Ahasuerus, King of the Medes and Persians, known as Xerxes in many biblical and extra-biblical works. Vashti, his queen. or main queen. Memucan, a Persian and Median prince ...someone of great importance. How can I say that he is someone of importance? **He is sitting “next to”...HEB.= “which saw the king’s face...”or understood to be “within close proximity to” the king...closer than all the other guests... and it seems this was his place at the king’s table. Greek history of the Persians tells us there were 7 families that were kept close to the king from which the king could choose his wives...they were governors of prominence. These leaders had complete access to the king while the only others who had this type of access were the king’s children.**
2. The text begins by saying, in the ESV, “*Now in the days of Ahasuerus...*”... Interestingly this is one of those places that the King James actually gets it better than the ESV... “*Now it came to pass...*” What came to pass? **A party. Actually 2 parties maybe 3 if you include the queen’s party.** How big was this party? **187 days long ...one half of the whole year...where the bounty of the King was displayed in food, wine and the showing off of the riches of the Persians and Medes. The Persians and the Medes were known for doing everything to excess especially drinking... it seems.**
3. Why do you suppose that God paints such a picture of opulence for us in this first chapter? (Think also beyond the obvious) **They were an indulgent people. He had consolidated his father Darius’s Kingdom making it larger, stronger and more affluent. They were accustomed to putting on shows to show their great power and wealth. What can this Persian society represent today? This culture represents every culture of man that is not centered on Christ and His rule...this is what we might look like**

to someone in the future. I heard just this summer that people living in/at poverty level in our culture have a cell phone, a big screen TV, and a car, at least.

4. In this chapter alone we see talk of at least 4 proclamations of the king: vs. 8, where the king proclaim that the men can use their own judgment on the amount they will drink; vs. 10, where the king commanded the queen to come into his presence; vs.19, where the king issue a decree that can not be reversed (in fact, all of his decrees fall into this category, but the king was never above his own rule...he could change the “unchangeable law” anytime he wished... Herodotus, the Greek historian) that Vashti was to never ever be in the kings presence again....and that the king get another queen to take her place; vs. 22, where the king appears to send another letter decreeing the leaders to be the masters of their households and even telling them to speak in the language of his people. What does this tell us that the king thought about himself and his word?

Sovereign over all things and all people. How did the people view the king? **As their sovereign...even Memucan’s response to the king in verse s 15-16 shows no one was willing to go against the kings wishes...Xerxes was fiery mad ...drunk...put out. He was the absolute ruler...who was going to oppose him at this point? Historical note: Xerxes was considered unstable at times...No big surprise from someone who proclaims himself King of Kings...he was known for his anger and swift decisions which usually meant someone was going to die. He even would get angry with the “gods” and lash out at them as if he was more powerful than them. When building a bridge to cross over a causeway into Greece a storm came up and destroyed the bridge...well storms were controlled by the gods so he order his men to “lash” “whip” the water as if it were a person for disobeying him and listening to the gods. Also, on that same blunder all his Phoenician engineers that were building this bridge were be-headed for not doing their job well enough. Another time when his fleet was defeated at Salamis he had his main admirable be-headed for the defeat. So he was prone to instability another reason not to push him...especially when he had too much to drink.**

5. What is the dilemma that arises in verse 10-12? **The queen says NO! to her husband who is also the sovereign who is not used to being said no to. Remember she was throwing a party for either the wives of the rulers that were at Xerxes party or a party for all the concubines...the former seems more in line given the discussion that ensues because of Vashti’s contempt of the command of the king and how her actions would influence the wives of the other rulers. Why do you think Vashti refused the request, though she probably knew of the danger? History tells us that this was probably an unusual request even for kings that lived so loosely. Vashti was his first wife...maybe even his only wife and obviously she did not want to be paraded around as if**

she was his possession. Or as one commentator put it...a courageous wife showing us an example of the limit's of a wife's submission... that might be true if this was a society founded on biblical principles but I think this is giving her too much credit for her stubbornness. But there might have been some issues of decorum ...her beauty was hers and her husbands. She does not recognize his sovereignty... it must be hard when you live with the sovereign to submit to him since as his wife she knows just how "sovereign" he is!! How does the dilemma get resolved? Decrees are issued and Vashti is banished and an order is given to strengthen the households of all the leaders in the land. (Xerxes probably rethought the whole idea of allowing women freedom to party by themselves as well...I just saying...look what happens when you give them too much freedom.. ☺ ☺)

6. **What is ironic about the sovereign in the midst of this dilemma? He seeks counsel. Why? Maybe he doesn't want to make a decision right a way...after all history tells us that this woman was his wife long before he was the absolute sovereign....maybe he recognizes that he is too drunk to make a clear decision...the texts seems to indicate that this was his habit when it came to matters of the law...showing that he isn't all-knowing...even then they had to "dumb down" the definition of sovereign. This sovereign stands in contrast to the true sovereign who we will see engineering events to occur just the way they are suppose to ...One who does not have to seek advise.**
7. **Why did Xerxes decide to order all husbands to rule their wives? His pride was definitely wounded to be sure. He seems to seek to humiliate the woman who had humiliated him. To assert control...not a good way to have control. Asserting his sovereignty he also wished that his leaders would have similar attributes to him. Just the way this is written there seems to be more going on than the text tells us. It would seem that women may have been becoming more and more influential and now was the time and this was the action by the queen that set the whole getting the country back under control of the men in order. We will certainly see another people of influence that will soon come under fire as well...the Jews. How do you think this looked to the rest of the country? If there was a women's movement starting this put it off for a while to be sure!!!**
8. **How would you answer this question, "How involved is God in my day to day life, really...specifically?" Where do you see Him, experience Him, and know He is there? (See Isaiah 55:8-11)**
9. **How is God's sovereignty being displayed generally in this chapter?**
 - a. **His plans are unhindered even when the events are secular and carnal...His sovereignty penetrates a drunken banquet or a Gothic cathedral.**

- b. His purposes are not frustrated by moral or even marital conflicts...God's purposes can not be thwarted since He is the one who oversees all events...the One who actually commands the king to do what he does.**
- c. "A vacancy opened up at the top and just 'coincidentally' we see God has someone set to take that position...in the next chapter."**

10. Where specifically in this chapter do we see God's sovereign providence working? **Specifically, vs. 19..."...let the king give her position to another..." See Prov. 21:1 for confirmation of the sovereign involvement of God in this matter. The gears of providence may grind slowly as someone once said...from our perspective...but the track perfectly the sovereign course the LORD has designed.**
11. Queen Vashti is a character that gets almost lost in this story. She is either a woman of great arrogance like her husband, thinking she was above the law or a woman of great conviction. She stood either way to lose a lot and she did...her crown and her home...because she refused to give into the king's momentary whims. Does any principle or conviction mean that much to you that you would be willing to risk job or your reputation over? Could you really stand firm if you had to for the truth? (These are personal reflection questions. For you to pray about and consider.) **In this day and age we have and will be called upon to take a stand for the TRUTH. This can not be compromised. We are told that everything is negotiable and that everything can be worked out to everyone's satisfaction...but that is simply not true.**

Next Time: Esther 2

Bible Study Esther 2

- A. Prayer
- B. Review

- 1. How did the king perceive himself? Who really was in charge?
- 2. How do we know for certain?
- 3. **Read out loud Chapter 1 again.**

C. Esther 2

1. Who are the main players in this chapter what do we come to know about them? **Mordecai- history records Mordecai as becoming one of the most powerful eunuchs- the grand vizier- in Xerxes palace. Some evidence of this is the ability for him to legally adopt a female cousin and the fact that he seems to have access to the “harem”, as well as in the early days sitting at the king’s gate as a doorkeeper or what we would call a porter/butler type...he had to be a hard worker... a true servant...never pushy and adapting to the culture to serve well... , Hadassah/Esther- the first is her Hebrew name the latter her Persian name, Hegai- the keeper of the virgins...most likely a eunuch in charge of these particular virgins, who takes a liking to Esther, King Ahasuerus.**
2. Down through the history of time marches an endless succession of courageous and visionary women...virtuous women...self sacrificing women. Esther is one of them and most of them would not consider themselves thus.
3. What indication is there that the king may have had regrets for such a hasty action against his last queen? **Historical note: “*After these things...*” doesn’t give us an exact time when his anger abated. The different histories of the time suggest that it was before he began his 1st wars he waged on Greece in 480-479 BC in which he suffered defeat...upon arriving back there was no wife to comfort him. Others say that it was before these battles...either way we are looking at a period of at least 3 to 4 years between the party 483 BC and the wedding, if you want to call it that, given the time period we get in verse 16 of this chapter. He was obviously a pretty busy guy to be sure. He was obviously despondent...a battle loss and no wife to comfort him his regret is known throughout the palace hence time for a new bride.**
4. What were the criteria that they used in choosing a new queen? Why? Does the text give us any hints? **They didn’t check education...they didn’t even check ethnicity. It was good to be tolerant...maybe they couldn’t ask that question. They were so bent on getting the king the best and the best coming from their region so they might ensure favor with the king that these things didn’t matter. In fact, with the decree of the king about the place and influence of woman being clarified they were not wanting an outspoken influential type. Josephus reports that there were as many as 400 women involved in this rather interesting competition engineered by God.**

5. Why do you suppose that Mordecai tells Esther to not speak of her ethnicity? **Historically this was a time of peace among the people of the realm...but all subject races...minorities... were just that subject not pure born, if you will and were not afforded the same luxuries so Mordecai obviously wished her to use her Persian name...** Can you think of someone else in the Bible that benefitted from another name? Why? **We see God working in Paul's life with his Roman name to advance His causes just like here.**

6. What was it about Hadassah/ Esther that wins the heart of this man Hegai and others for that matter? (Remember he was a eunuch!) See Esther 2:7-20 **I know he was still a man, but there isn't any implied romantic attraction in the Hebrew... what we have is someone who seems to be very aware of the type of queen this king needs.**
 - a. **Vs. 7 may give us our first clue for when it speaks of her beauty the Hebrew word that is translated "*was lovely to look at*" is also the word for "countenance" which in its simplest form is the word "face" but it also speaks of character behind the face...he obviously saw there was something more about her than simple beauty...and he sensed it. "*Found favor...*" is used 3 times...vs. 9,15 and 17...see Dan. 1:9. God's will to favor her and His plan.**
 - b. **Grace filled charm- vs. 9 could be translated, "*Now the young lady lifted up grace before his face.*" The one who took her out of her home is the one she showed grace to. By showing grace to Hegai**
 - c. **Honest and restraint- vs. 10,20—she tells no one that she is a Jew...she kept her word to Mordecai.**
 - d. **Teachable- vs. 10,20- she listened to Mordecai and learned from Hegai as to what this king really wanted.**
 - e. **Authentic and unselfish- vs. 12-15- she was herself...no pretense...no show...not tempted by the competition. Did she have an assurance that God was with her in this? What else would have kept her so calm as to realize that this was part of a greater plan.**
 - f. **☺ ☺ - I read the other day some results of a survey which found that 15 % of women questioned tinted their hair, 22% wore false eye lashes, 38% periodically wore wigs or hairpieces, 80% wore rouge or some other kind of facial cosmetics, 93% wore nail polish, 98% some kind of eye makeup, and 100% voted in favor of a resolution condemning any kind of false advertising!!**
 - g. **Kind and winsome- vs. 15-17- being pleasant, delightful, attractive in an engaging way..."Miss Congeniality".**
 - h. **Humble- vs. 7-20- seems to be aware of her environment and her purpose to some degree at least...as a humble servant she follows Mordecai, Hegai and ultimately her Lord's direction.**

7. What would you say is the reason that the king loves her so? See I Peter 3:3-4. What does this I Peter passage tell us that would be appropriate to the situation in Esther and our life in general?

8. What happens in verses 19-23? **The plot to assassinate the king discovered and it is dealt with.** Does the text tell us when this plot occurred? **“In those days”...the days of the celebration perhaps.** Why would this be timely if you were plotting assassination? **Everyone was happy and comfortable...or so it was thought.** Why such a swift death? **To assert their authority ...to instill fear...** Side note: The ESV says, *“...the men were both hanged on the gallows.”*... the usual form of death for such people came from the Assyrians...impaling through their body by a stake... not the usual hanging from gallows as we know from the old Westerns...this was used but they preferred to impale people. The Hebrew and the Greek seem to prefer the act of impaling...I think it is an image that the English translators were trying to stay away from. Interesting, even with such swift justice evil still exists. It may control most deeds of a criminal nature but it does not do away with it. What is significant about this event at this particular time? **Mordecai a known Jew has just saved the king from assassination...and the new queen Esther is the one who informs the king making her status before the king even higher...for not only does she save the king but obviously she has the confidence and love of the people. He doesn't know at this point that her and Mordecai are related.** Just to make sure we notice. What was recorded *“in the book of the chronicles”* in the presence of the king? **This will become important later on.**

9. Once again, who is conspicuously “absent” from this Biblical narrative so far? Where do you see God's sovereign hand at work?
 - a. **Every event on one hand but specifically again with the provision of Mordecai...a faithful/covenantal Jew/believer to take care of Hadassah.**
 - b. **His access to the king's palace.**
 - c. **Esther being chosen.**
 - d. **The favor she receives from Hegai and the King along with the court.**
 - e. **Mordecai being privileged to hear of the plot and then to turn in the would be assassins.**
 - f. **From our perspective on things it is obvious that these cannot be “coincidences” or accidents that happened to come together in this sequence especially looking ahead to why she was placed there in the first place...to provide salvation for her people.**

10. How is this chapter similar to Daniel chapter 1:8-21? **A story about another one of God's children "forced" into captivity and forced, expected to live as the people that had forced them into bondage...but God had placed him there for a time such as the world would later know about as well. He did in fact, become one of them without losing everything about himself namely his faith. Every outward expression could be gone but not that. God gave Daniel favor with his captors and he rose to be the 3rd highest and then the 2nd highest in the land. Think also about Joseph.**
11. What are some take away points we Christians can learn from these first 2 chapters? **God can and does do as He wills. His purposes are beyond us. That He even uses us for such elaborate plans is amazing.**

Next Time: Esther 3

Bible Study Esther 3

A. Prayer

B. Review

1. What was it about Hadassah that she won favor with so many? **God's will and His favor on her and His plan.**
2. What are some of the ways we see God's hand up to this point?
3. **Read aloud chapters 1 and 2 before we move forward.**

C. Esther 3

1. Who are the main players in this chapter? **Haman the Agagite- a descendant somehow of Agag an Amalekite king that were sworn enemies of the Jews. One that got away from the destruction of the Amalekites. This would be a excellent reason for Mordecai's hatred of Haman; Mordecai; King Ahasuerus**
2. Mordecai and Esther are the ones who told the king of the assassination, but who seemingly gets the credit at this point in the story and why? See 3:1 **Life is not fair because there is evil in it. Haman was probably the one who actually lassoed the bad guys and took them to be hung and so he was the public face of the justice of the king.**

3. What more do we learn about Mordecai from this chapter? **He won't bow down to this man, Haman. Why? Is he upset that he is not getting the credit? No he says it is because he is a Jew. What does that simple statement mean? He won't bow down to anything on earth. He is a man of principle...a man of faith...a man of conviction...not much different than Daniel. He will not compromise his faith even living and working in a corrupt culture.**
4. What do we learn about Haman's character from this chapter? **Prideful, liar, prejudice, lacks control of his temper... "filled with fury"... cunning and evil. He is scheming- in seeking to know the right time to set the trap before the king...vs. 7... superstitious in depending upon the casting of lots...Assyrian calendars have on them lucky and unlucky days already pointed out...casting lots to determine lucky days is still a practice of the Middle east according to some sources...sort of like a Ouija board... looking for a sign... godless.**
5. Have you ever wondered why Haman was not just angry with Mordecai but why he wanted to whole Jewish population exterminated? **Haman the Agagite...the Hebrew actually reads... "Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite."... there can be much in a name to cause you to mistrust especially in the OT. Does the name Agag ring a bell? The king of the Amalekites an archenemy of Israel... descendants of Esau. This explains why his anger rises to such a level...it is an old blood feud. This had been bred into him to hate the Jews...much like the Palestinians and the Jews today...each are taught to hate the other...the descendants of Esau play an interesting role in history. Can you name another prominent descendant of Esau that persecuted the Jews? King Herod.**
6. What was Haman's plan for the assassination of the Jewish people? **A bit ironic, don't you think, the swiftness justice handed down when there is a direct threat to the king's person...but no such justice when there is a direct threat to a whole people. Same kind of underhanded scheming and planning but no justice yet for the Jews.**
7. Why do you suppose Haman begins his request by saying that there is "...a certain people..." rather than calling them Jews in the presence of the king? **The king might remember Mordecai and his saving the king... in fact, I wonder if the king even knew what people Haman was talking about until after the decree went out where it would appear then the name of the particular people group was put in the documents. Remember how Daniel was set up against King Darius who loved and respected him?**

8. At the end of verse 15 we see something interesting occurring. What is it? **Haman and the king sit down to drink and the people of Susa, the capital, are thrown into confusion by this decree.** What is happening? **Haman had the king hoodwinked... interesting thing about earthly sovereigns...they aren't very sovereign to be sure. The people were confused because of all the people who had been conquered the Jews were model citizens and good neighbors. History tells us just like in every other place and time in history they adapted to their surroundings not necessarily losing their heritage but adapting where they could. This seems to be true of these people. They were good for the empire...many seem to see that their annihilation would weaken the kingdom rather than help it...but Xerxes was known for unpopular decisions. The Jews themselves were also bewildered and confused over such an order not unlike the Jews again in the 1930's and 40's in the ghetto's of Warsaw, and the attempted annihilation in Nazi Germany.**

9. Why do you suppose the Jews are given between 9 and 11 months before the judgment is carried out? **Much speculation has occurred on this since this is not how Xerxes usually handled dealing with those he saw as enemies...(remember the assassination plot.) Some have said this was a way for him to show his mercy by giving them a chance to "clear out of dodge" and have enough time to leave the kingdom. Some have said, that the Jews might think they have no where to go so it would be a long cruel wait for their death...but they did have a place to go had they wanted. Others have said that they were so intermarried and so tied to this Persian culture that they were praying and awaiting a savior from this possible calamity just like God had provided in the past. Adapted to the culture externally, not internally. They got the learning of the society they were in and were completely 'at home' in its customs, education, literature, art. But they maintained the moral, spiritual, and theological world-view of the true faith. Their faith consisted less in external customs (dress, food, style) and more in intellectual world-view and moral character.**

10. What continues to be true of this "sovereign"? **He needs advise. He is not very sovereign for he has been bested by his subjects...Vashti humiliates him...he makes a decree that makes him look foolish based on the advise of others....Haman sets him up...Esther best the king by revealing to him his mistakes. Why do I keep asking this question? This battle is not against these...but against belief and non-belief...2 conflicting worldviews...man's arrogance and God's sovereignty... Man thinking he is sovereign and God showing that He is...doesn't need advisors to help Him. Men will always have need for others...interesting creation truth...built into our DNA...we can not exist alone as God does.**

11. What does this chapter tell us about what to expect in our day and age when we refuse to compromise our faith? **Others will resent our devotion and will seek to undermine it some way. The battle rages...don't be surprised by those who oppose Christianity openly...be wary of those who do it behind your back. We are to never underestimate the power of the enemy to move the hearts of men in a way that is evil. We are never to overestimate our ability to withstand the devil's temptations and power.**
12. Knowing what we know of God, where do you see Him acting in these first 3 chapters clearly? **The choice of the least of these...an orphaned Jewish girl raised by her uncle in relative obscurity...God delights in using the unassuming, the weak to accomplish His plans.**

NEXT TIME: Esther 4

Bible Study
Esther 4

- A. Prayer
- B. Review

- 1. What was Haman's plan for the assassination of the Jewish people? **A bit ironic, don't you think, the swiftness justice handed down when there is a direct threat to the king's person...but no such justice when there is a direct threat to a whole people. Same kind of underhanded scheming and planning but no justice yet for the Jews.**
- 2. Knowing what we know of God, where do you see Him acting in these first 3 chapters clearly?

- C. Esther 4

- 1. How do Mordecai's actions in verse 1-2 represent the struggles of the rest of the Jewish people of the empire? (See verse 3) **He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city crying bitterly and loudly. Even today Eastern culture still grieve loudly...may be one reason why they have less heart disease than we do...they let things out...loudly!** What was he able to do because of his position that none of them would be able to do? **He could wail at the King's gate.**

2. Why is Esther concerned for Mordecai?
 - a. **He was a servant to the king and he couldn't fulfill his job while he was in sackcloth... which was a common thing even among the Persians that is why there is a law against it in the land.**
 - b. **She may have wanted to see him face to face and find out what was going on but she couldn't if he remained in his sackcloth which he does.**
 - c. **It was also considered to be an evil omen by the people of Persia... "you can grieve and you can grieve wherever you want but don't bring this grief down on the king"...is the sentiment that was often lauded.**

3. How does Mordecai deliver the information needed for Esther to be able to make her decision in vs. 5-8? **He doesn't seem to become emotional. He doesn't seem to exaggerate the facts. He seems to be very careful with the information to be exact. "all that happened"... the exact amount of money....a copy of the written decree"** these are all phrase of precise and verifiable information. **Why bother asking such a question? Because we live in a day where hearsay is elevated to the truth...when few people pass along information that is precise and reliable. The facts don't seem to be important it is what we feel about the facts...our interpretation of the facts that is important. Mordecai wants to make sure that Esther has just the facts...with as little of personal commentary up to this point as possible...that will come later.**

4. What is Esther's first response to Mordecai's request (vv.8-12)? Why? **She is concerned for her life and besides what can one person really do? What do you think Esther is feeling? Fear!**

5. What three arguments does Mordecai use to persuade Esther to act (v.13-14)?
 - a. **If you do nothing sooner or later you will also be found out.**
 - b. **If you do nothing the Jews will still survive for this has been God's promise from the beginning...He will simply use someone else.**
 - c. **This event may be the reason why you were placed on the throne.**
 - d. **In the end, as a good parent he knew his "daughter" so well he knew how he could push her...he speaks to her faith...and her character...and she reacts. As parents we must know our children so well so that we are able to speak into their lives when necessary...but more importantly we are to develop their character so that when we can't be with them they will be guided by the truth.**

6. What is Esther's response? (vs. 15-16) How is it a model for us? **Her whole outlook shifts from fear to faith...from reluctance to resolve... from concern for herself to concern for God's people...from being a follower to becoming a leader.**
7. While God is never named, where do we see Him in this chapter? Where do we see faith in God being exhibited?
 - a. **With Mordecai's clear assertion of God's will being done with or without her.**
 - b. **Esther's calling for a fast can have no other purpose for her being a Jew than to obtain God's favor and protection in the dangerous course she was preparing to begin.**
 - c. **Esther's deciding to perish if need be. She is willing to put it all on the line. She also needed the people prayers to see this through for she knew there was power in prayer. (See Eph. 6:18)**
8. What does Mordecai seem to believe about God that affects his whole life according to this passage? **He believes God's covenant promise to His people...Gen. 12:1-3. Genesis 12:1-3 tells us that God planned to bring salvation into the world through a family and a people, descended from Abraham. Abraham's people were to be guardians of both the true faith and the "Messianic seed" which would one day produce a Savior who would redeem the world. A threat to the Jewish nation was, therefore, an attack by the world on God's redemptive plan.**
9. What do these first 4 chapters remind us about the world that we need to remember daily? **Wherever there is a people of God that are enemies of God. And where there are enemies of God there will be some kind of warfare...that is not ultimately against flesh and blood, but with the schemes of the devil. Eph. 6:10-13.** Why is this important for us? What does this point reveal about the nature of God?
10. In these last couple of chapters how do the personalities of Haman and Mordecai reflect the world and the Christian today? **The writer contrasts *two conflicting world-views* — that of Haman and that of Mordecai. Haman believes in chance-fate. He casts lots to determine the best time to annihilate the Jews (3:7-11). He thinks he can control history by the exercise of his power. The other world-view is that of Mordecai. He believes that there is a divine presence over-ruling history (4:14) but whose plan is not dependent on nor thwarted by human power or decision. *"The book sets the two worldviews in contrast and shows by the outcome which is to be preferred."***

11. Given Esther's modeling her faith that we see in her decision to do God's will, where do you need to apply it? What does it ultimately matter if you get involved in working out your faith or not? Can one person make a difference? How?

NEXT WEEK: Esther 5

Bible Study
Esther 5

A. Prayer
B. Review

1. What is Esther's response to Mordecai's reasoning of why she must go before the king? (vs. 15-16) How is it a model for us?
2. What do these first 4 chapters remind us about the world that we need to remember daily?
3. Why is this important for us? What does this point reveal about the nature of God?

C. Esther 5

1. There is an interesting pause between chapters 4 and 5. How long before we pick the story back up? **3 days**. If this was you, what do you suppose you would be doing during these 3 days? **Obviously, she is doing what she said she would do...fasting with her maids in concert with the other Jews of Susa. She was waiting upon the LORD and allowing her to guide her thoughts and to help her frame her words.** How might Isaiah's words in Isaiah 40:31 be helpful here as we consider the principle for our own day and age?
 - a. **God's word promises new strength when we wait upon Him...while waiting we are able to exchange weakness for His strength;**
 - b. **God's word promises renewed or better perspective when we wait upon Him...eagles can spot a fish in a lake several miles away on a clear day, by waiting we will be like the eagle and have a better, clearer or renewed perspective on things;**
 - c. **God's word promises us renewed energy...besides strength a renewed energy/desire to overcome will come from waiting;**
 - d. **God's word promises to deepen our determination to persevere...because of His promises, His strength, better perspective, and renewed energy we begin to feel "invincible".**
 - e. **All of these obviously came to Esther for she seems now to do that which was at best reckless and at worst life threatening...approach the king without his direct summons.**

f. With this type of promise why don't we fast more often?

2. What does she do that is so risky? **According to Persian law she couldn't even stand in the doorway unless she had been summoned...without extending his scepter she was to die immediately...Interesting wording her in the Hebrew, "over against the kings house..."where the ESV says she stood "...in front of the kings house.." the wording seems to indicate that she may have been leaning up against the door post of the door that is always open so the king lifted up on his throne can see who is coming in after they have been called...in other words she was clearly seen by the king in the court before being called to him.**
3. What happens next? (vs. 2) **You gotta love the Lord here...There are a few words written in the Hebrew that are lost in the ESV..."And it was so or and it happened..."What was so? The king's heart was moved at her sight. See Prov. 21:1 again...How does this shed light on what is going on here?**
4. What kind of favor do we see Xerxes showing to Esther that has obviously engineered by God in verses 2-3? **Favor, extending the specter, genuinely showing concern, making her feel at ease by promising her what he does and seeking too attend her banquet so readily.**
5. Why doesn't she spill her guts her before the king? **She has listened to the Lord.** Knowing what we know of these guys up to this point, what is the purpose of the banquets (we won't see the exact purpose of the 2nd banquet until chapter 7)? **Banquets set a tone in the Persian culture of trust, honor, and respect...hospitality has always played a big part in Middle eastern culture and obviously, it plays a big part in the Christian's life as well.. Esther bides her time...God's time...**
6. Now thinking of these men and also comparing our egos to theirs, what was going through their minds with this kind of treatment, especially the mind of Haman? **Xerxes, might be saying ...absence does make the heart grow fonder while at the same time he would know obviously by his question and offer to her be aware that she has something extremely important to ask him and she is doing things decently and in order... Haman, especially with the knowledge of the 2nd banquet his ego is growing and still needs to grow more so he can be completely blinded by what is going on...or what will be going on. In his mind it is good to be in good with the queen, it will gain him further favor from the king ...but obviously he doesn't know as much as he thinks he knows. You gotta love the way God sets the stage and executes His plans.**

7. How is Esther's approach of her husband different the Vashti? **She doesn't put him in a publically bad place, she doesn't seemingly seek to humiliate him, in other words she doesn't try to manipulate him. Knowing his pridefulness and how important it is to make her husband look good and keep him at ease...given his fits of anger..., doing things in private would be more comfortable for him....remember he knows she is troubled by something. Why is it important to consider this contrast? Understanding people is always crucial from those closet to you to your enemies.**

8. How can she be so patient and seemingly calm in the face of the greatest enemy she will ever encounter? What does her patience teach us today?
 - a. **If we are on the verge of a big decision the prudent thing often is to wait. Maybe even the bigger the decision the longer the wait. There is that 60 inch Tv you want the moment you see it...STOP...go home and wait a day or 2 and see if the desire is still there...maybe by that time you will realize the desire is still there but not the pocketbook.**
 - b. **When dealing with unpredictable people or predictable people for that matter wait on the Lord to open doors and give you words...for they will usually be wasted unless they are the right ones at the right time and only God knows when that is.**
 - c. **When you are in the midst of other unpleasant situations pray for patience...which causes us to look to the Lord. Pace yourself and wait for the right times that God will reveal.**

9. Next, the scene changes for a time and we see Mordecai in verse 9. What does Mordecai do...or not do as the case may be? **At first Mordecai refused to bow to Haman...read "prostrate himself before Haman"...Now he doesn't even take notice of him...in fact, the Hebrew seems to indicate that he doesn't even move out of the way when Haman wants to go out of the palace...even more Haman seems to have had to give way to him. Look closely at the picture here. What has changed? Mordecai is in the king's gate, not outside of the gate as before...the throne room or the gate coming into the throne room as an attendant to the king. Obviously he has changed clothes...he knows something is changing.**

10. Haman's response? **ESV... "he sent and brought his friends and his wife..."** Hebrew says he **"...called for his friends and wife..."** or **"caused them to come..."** He demanded that they be brought to him...no asking here. Or as the term means theologically **"calling"** means being summoned by one in authority...a summons you cannot ignore. What is Haman doing in verses 10-13? **His ego has been bruised so he surrounds himself with his "friends" so he can speak of his greatness to them who would openly agree with him ..even speaking of his manly prowess with the proof of that his multiple sons (9:10 says he had 10 sons. Actually the Jewish Targum (the Aramaic version of the Hebrew Bible along with interpretive notes) said that he up to 208 sons). "Look at me...I am the king of the world in my own mind even the queen thinks I am something."**
11. With all his wealth, power and prestige that Haman has you would think that he would be satisfied to let by-gones be by-gones. He has it all, but his all... isn't enough. Why? What character trait seems to be the strongest in him? **Revenge? Hatred? These so consumed him that only the death...and an agonizing death would appease him. People abound in not being able to give up on something...even when pointed out to them how wrong they are their pride just won't let them let things go.**
12. Zeresh and Haman's "friends" speak up and says what? Put it in the modern language of today. **"Okay, okay...if this is troubling you so much, then why don't you do something about it and here is an idea. Build a cross or a stake 75 ft which is 7 stories." A little overkill don't you think...pun intended. Why so tall? (1) they are playing on his ego; (2) it would be an event as big as his accomplishments; (3) it would shut up his whining to think about such a thing and to do it. The word for gallows here is the word most often translated "tree"...or "stake". So it could be referring to a cross...remember Jesus was crucified on a "tree"...the wood from...or a stake to have Mordecai impaled upon. The Romans got the idea of crucifixion from the Phoenicians who got it from the Persians.**
13. Interesting...God's timing seems to require one more day to get things in proper place...and Haman...well he goes to sleep hearing the sounds of the preparations for Mordecai's death.

Bible Study
Esther 6-7

A. Prayer

B. Review

1. How important will it be that Xerxes has already granted to Esther anything she wants up to half his kingdom? Why?
2. How is Esther's approach of her husband different the Vashti?

C. Chapter 6:1-11-the sleepless night.

1. Given the main players Esther, Haman, Mordecai and Xerxes how would you describe their state of mind on this evening?
2. The opening words say, "*On that night...*" what night was it and why is it significant? (think about the moment not what is just around the corner.) **Same night that Haman has gone to bed listening to the construction of the cross or stake that would be for Mordecai. Coincidence that the king couldn't sleep? He obviously has used the chronicle as a sleep aid in the past. Reading to go to sleep is still true today...but of course he doesn't go to sleep this time. God has already thwarted Haman's plans...the plans of men come to naught...on that night! You have to love the plans of God. No more waiting...He is moving forward.**
3. Who is working? How do we know? What does this teach us for today? **When no one seems to notice the trouble we are in, God does. This is a truth we must hang on to as life often gets hard and we feel abandoned and alone. But God is working, He is watching over His own...He never sleeps or slumbers...** (See Psalm 121:4)
4. What does he discover while being read to that gets his attention...it wakes him up even more? (All this is going on while Haman sleeps probably soundly.) **Many annuals of the monarchs speak to the fact that many of these leaders couldn't read ... hence being read to. What does he want done? It was a settle principle of the Persian government that royal benefactors were to receive an adequate reward. The names of such person were placed on a special scroll and great care was taken that these people be properly compensated for their acts of loyalty, bravery, and honor. The sovereign was bound to do this or their could be spiritual repercussions...remember they were a superstitious people. Timing was not always important but it was important to do it... honor and one's kingdom could be at stake.**

5. Read verses 4-11. What was Haman trying to do in thinking he was setting himself up? **Ordinarily each suggestion that Haman was to make...royal apparel on someone else, a royal crown to be set on the subjects head...would have been capital offenses, if done without permission for each of these would have signaled extreme favor with the king...or in the case of someone who didn't deserve these honor and overthrow of the kingdom. Another reason why, I think, he may have been a silent partner in the original plot...his eye is on the kingdom. Or actually, as this chapter winds down his eye is probably on the stake!!**

D. Read chapter 6:12 through chapter 7- The banquet.

1. What is the difference between Earthly Standard Time and heavenly Mountain Time?
 - a. **Earthly Standard Time-**
 - (1)**Objectively measured...think watches, clocks, cell phones, calendars.**
 - (2)**Accountable- it can be seen and experienced and digitally recorded and watched over and over again.**
 - (3)**Rarely ignored- we are captives to it.**
 - b. **Heavenly Mountain Time-**
 - (1)**For God, time is infinitely immeasurable**
 - (2)**Absolutely intangible**
 - (3)**God rules our time rather than time ruling Him. He is outside of time as we imagine it. He sees the end at the beginning.**
2. Why is what Zeresh says to Haman in verse 13 particularly prophetic? **She is claiming that she knows God's promise to the Jews. See Gen 12:1-3 again. She understands that to take on God's chosen people is a fools game to which Haman has now fallen into.**
3. This is the third time the king makes his request of Esther (vs. 2). What significant event has taken place in the interim of the requests? Why would that one event change the outcome of other main event? What does all of this confirm for us today? **Now as the play unfolds in our time we can see the reason for the delay and the need for the 2nd banquet. God wasn't late or negligent. He was synchronizing the events after His sovereign plan for the right...what we would perceive as optimal effect.**
4. How is the way Esther made her request of the King an example for us today (vs.3-6)?

5. How was it possible that the king would not have made the connection until Esther points things out? **Of what true importance was it to the king...he sign dozens of edits every day...each one probably meant the same to him. And besides his most trusted one how couched things in such a way that he had a solution to a problem the king didn't even know he had for the good of the kingdom. He didn't give much thought except that if there was a problem then take care of it...get-r-done!** How does this change in the heart of the king reveal to us how God moves and shakes kingdoms as He sees fit?
6. What was the final nail in Haman's coffin according to our text? **He was laying on the same couch as Esther...a major no-no...that type of presumption always brought immediate death. By making the statement that he does against Haman the king seals Haman's "fate"...everyone knows it so they cover his head for the king can no longer look upon such a traitor.**
7. What is the irony highlighted here in these chapters? **Haman must not have checked to see if this was a "lucky" day on the calendar or it was a defective calendar. Philosophers and writers calls it irony...Christians call it sovereignty!**
8. Now that we have look at these first 7 chapters, let me throw out something that is more theological than practical, but it is very practical as well. In these chapters a lot has been said about "seeing and being seen". What is the significance of this theologically and practically for believers today?

Next Time: Chapter 8

Bible Study Esther 8

- A. Prayer
- B. Review

1. What had God promised His people that we see Him fulfilling in this story thus far? **Gen. 12:1-3—He promised to bless His people and to curse those who curse them.**
2. What is the irony highlighted here in these chapters? **Haman wanted to be lifted up by the king and he WAS!!! Philosophers and writers calls it irony...Christians call it sovereignty!**

C. Chapter 8

1. What is so amazing about these first acts of the king in verses 1-2 after Haman's death? **The King was powerful and prone to excess in his personal habits as well as his ruling habits. He threw out his wife of many years for simply displeasing him. These types of events "didn't just happen" in the courts of the Persians who were always on the look out for assassination attempts and coups...but in this case Haman had made Xerxes look bad to the level of treason and we all know what happen to people who make the king look bad...or appear to be seeking power beyond that granted to him.** What specifically does he do almost immediately? **Xerxes gives Esther Haman's lands, bank accounts servants and all investments and elevates Mordecai to Grand Vizier at this point by giving him the signet ring of Haman...the 2nd in command. Normally the lands, money, servants and investments would simply become the property of the king but in this case he gifts it to Esther who in turn gifts it to Mordecai. Amazing to consider....the image of God in man even this pagan king exhibits grace and generosity. Interesting side fact, Haman could have amassed as much as 1/2 Xerxes kingdom in wealth and influence...interesting given the promise of the king to Esther.**
2. Why would the King be so quick to elevate Mordecai so quickly after all of this? **Prov. 21:1-2 again...it is not coincidental that this all "just" happened. On a more practical level, as we have seen from this king particularly and history records that Xerxes was more than willing to hand off the governing of the kingdom to someone else. He enjoyed to warring and the partying too much to be bothered by governing... and there is precedent in Persian history that the kings had used eunuchs before with great success.**
3. In verse 3-4 we see something extraordinary again. How much respect does the King seem to have for his wife? Why? **Esther once more "intruded" on Xerxes unsummoned...which could have brought death... but doesn't.**
4. So in verses 3-6 what is Esther's request of the king? **To turn back the first decree that would have annihilated the Jews.** What is interesting about how she makes her request here? **It appears to be an unusual request for there weren't many decrees overturned... this one doesn't get overturned either....She first asks his favor...which she already has...but she doesn't presume any more than necessary on the king's affection. 2nd, she speaks of "the letters devised by Haman..." or as the Hebrew says... "the letters; the devise of Haman...which he wrote..." Esther is careful to represent this deed as Haman's work not the king's thus protecting the king's dignity. A side question: How does Esther represent for us a true biblical "helpmate"?**

5. Why do you suppose that Mordecai doesn't make the next request of the king given he is now 2nd in command?

6. How does the King deal with the edict that Haman wrote given the problem with the permanence of the law of the Medes and the Persians in verses 7-8? (See Daniel 6:8,12,15 on this) **Once again, "coincidentally" the king is open to changing his own edict which was "unchangeable" in a sense. When I say "in a sense" it seems evident that while the law was the law on these edicts of the Medes and Persians...the absolute monarch always had leeway with these and could at any moment "change" his mind. He starts out by reminding her of what he has done already for the Jews and how his benevolence has at least stopped any killings in Susa and how he has saved Mordecai for her. So he tells Mordecai to write a decree for the Jews however he sees fit. But he says the original decree cannot be reversed...that would break protocol.**

7. Humanly speaking, as you read this section from verses 9-17, what would you say was motivating the king in agreeing that the Jews could defend themselves from anyone who might attack them...an event that could lead to what could become civil war in his own country? (We will look closer at this next week.)**The decree had gone forward and Haman's troops...those people loyal to Haman...(see verse 11) were poised and ready to carry out "his" commands. Is it possible that Xerxes saw this as a way to punish those who were not loyal to him? Many "became Jews" (vs. 17) so they wouldn't be seen as supporting the insurrection. Also the Jews were seen as the "favored ones" with Mordecai a Jew being elevated and Esther...a Jewess ...it became as fashionable as wearing the same clothes as Duchess of Cambridge...Kate Middleton...**

8. What does the desire for haste in this matter *"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..."* reveal about the king? (Remember the last time a decree was made he gave 11 months for preparation.) **After all there was plenty of time...the text tells us that it had only been 2 months or so since the last decree had gone out...and so it would have only taken another 2 months to spread the news again...which leaves 5 full months of waiting and wondering what would happen. Clearly he wanted to rectify his earlier mistake and show how much he trusted his wife. And he wanted to make sure that the governors understood his orders giving them ample time to seek counsel for anything they didn't understand. Do we clearly see changes in this man due to God putting him together with Esther?**

9. What had changed in the city of Susa that called for such response of the people in general...not just the Jews in particular in verses 15-17)? **The Persians had already been known for thinking the first decree unjust so they would be overjoyed not just financially but personally as well since there had been so much inter-marriage by this time. The people had lived these past couple of months wondering what all of this meant. Not to be always skeptical about why these people became Jews because there is also something infectious about people living in freedom...in our case the freedom of the Lord...there's as well, literally. When Christians live in the freedom of Christ it is infectious enough that we see in Acts God adding to their numbers daily. People can not stay away from the audacious joy of God's people...especially when there is a street party as big as the one that is alluded to in the original language.**
10. Ray Stedman once said, *"In the eyes of the world, it is not our relationship with Jesus Christ that counts; it is our resemblance to Him!"* What does this quote say to you and how might it apply to what we are learning from this text as to how we are to live in this world? **In the midst of circumstances that look like certain defeat, there is no more powerful testimony than the joy produced by faith. It is important for us to be authentic so we can be relevant.**
11. How is God at work in the midst of all of this?
12. What do these chapters tell us about our life in secular society, where believers will sometimes have to choose between conflicting authorities? **Mordecai and Esther have to face very difficult choices between obeying legitimate human authority and obeying the ultimate authority of God. Though it is not completely clear why, Mordecai refused to prostrate himself before Haman. Esther had to risk her standing and resist the natural desire to conform and obey. Believers in a secular society have to be careful to not 'stand up' and resist too often or too seldom. Wise living in a pluralistic society includes the ability to know when to speak up and when to keep silent.**

Next time: Chapter 9 and 10

Bible Study
Esther 9-10

A. Prayer

B. Review

1. In the last couple of chapters, how much respect does the King seem to have for his wife? Why?
2. Ray Stedman once said, *"In the eyes of the world, it is not our relationship with Jesus Christ that counts; it is our resemblance to Him!"* What does this quote say to you and how might it apply to what we are learning from this text as to how we are to live in this world?
3. Let's recollect a moment. What are the events that have brought here? **Way too many events to be "coincidental"!**

C. Read Esther 8:11-13 closely.

1. What specifically were the Jews able to do according to this edict?
 - a. **Jews in every city of the realm could defend their lives...**
 - b. **By destroying, killing, and annihilating any force that would come against them, even to include the women and children**
 - c. **The Jews could plunder all their spoils of those they utterly destroy.**
 - d. **The Jews were to be ready on the 13th day of the 12 month of Adar to take "vengeance" or to "avenge" on their enemies.**
2. For one day, who are the most powerful people in the land? What does this type of power often do to people? Why?

D. Esther 9:1-19

1. After reading this text what character trait (s) do the Jews seem to exhibit, in light of the edict written for them to protect themselves? **Self-control. The Jews had been given absolute authority over the lives, property and families of any and all who might seek to destroy them...Haman's folks. They had been given legal sanction to totally destroy their enemies...the crown's enemies as well... down to the women and children. But notice their restraint...nowhere in Chapter 9:1-16 are women and children ever mentioned in the retaliation that does occur...in fact what else is true? They don't mess with the plunder either. 3 times this is mentioned...3 times...why are things restated for us...in this case to make the point of self-control! They did not take their wealth because their destruction of their enemies was a simply act of justice — it was not an imperialistic action of self-interest or exploitation. The temptation to go farther must have been great but they showed great restraint. The reason I bring**

this up here is because many have tried through the years to paint this as an unrestrained bloodbath of revenge...and obviously there was restraint or the blood shed would have been worse ...for they had *mastery over the people...and no one could stand against them.*

2. Back in 8:13, we read, “...and the Jews were to be ready to take vengeance (or to avenge) on their enemies.” What is another word for vengeance or avenge in our culture? **REVENGE. The English words vengeance and avenge come to us through the French, and both languages got it from the Latin *vendicare*, which has the same root as the word “vindicate”. Isn’t that interesting? Vengeance which is passion out of control based on hatred= revenge. Vindication is what God claims to do when defending His people or His own name and commandments. And these two words are from the same root word. They carry contrary messages. In order for there to be restraint in vengeance self-control must be applied.**
3. How do you suppose they were so willing and apparently able to show such great restraint given what they knew of their enemies and that their enemies would not have shown restraint? **Well let’s not forget they were Jews and they had been trained in the Words and deeds of God. This new decree could have shaken them to the core of who they were ... to the point of remembering God’s ways and they could see the providential ordering of events just like we do years later...and this providential ordering was not to be taken lightly. Humbled in fear of what could have happened they show self-control realizing that this was God working and they didn’t have the right to seek revenge or vengeance...that was God’s covenantal job. Now to be honest the Jews didn’t always show such clarity but they did usually see hands when their very existence was in jeopardy.**
4. I have made the point that no women and children were apart of the retaliation. There was one “exception”. Who were the “exceptions” and for what reason would they have picked out these? **Most of them probably weren’t children anyway...they may have been grown. But as was the custom to destroy the home of your enemy they would have taken out the sons to ensure no revenge from that family. Remember Haman was an Agagite...a sworn enemies of the Jews. They had been promised a rest from the Amalekites by God.**

5. What is going on in verses 11-14? How much restraint does the king show? Or better yet, how does the king show his respect for Esther? **He trust her judgment. When he may be feeling enough is enough ...he asks her what more he can do for her, revealing strong feeling for her and her judgments...her opinion obviously matters a lot to him... so she says stake up the boys of Haman which might causes bigger issues but he does as she asks even giving the Jews in the capital city one more day to get rid of the kings and the Jews enemies.** What was the point of “staking up the boys”? (They were already dead.)

E. Esther 9:20- 10:3

1. Turn a moment back to Esther 3:7. what word shows up there that will form the celebration of Purim? **Interesting, when Haman was trying to decide when to carry out his plot to exterminate the Jews, he relied on the ancient custom of “casting lots”- Pur to discover his “lucky days”. And that lucky date to do this was the 13th day of Adar. In English when we want to make something plural we usually place an “s” or an “es” on the end of the word. But in the Hebrew or Aramaic a singular term is made plural by adding “im” to it. Hebrew word for many cherub iis cherubim. S here is Haman casting the Purim...casting the lots...to discover his lucky days. The kings 2nd edict took effect on the 13th day of Adar ...coincidence or cleverness on the part of the king? Well the Jews saw the hand of providence so that was the day they day... verses 17-18, days for the celebration of Purim. Haman even named their celebration for them...he would have been rolling over in the grave or in his case on the stake when he heard of this turn of events. You have to love the irony in this book ...or the sovereignty that iis more than overt if you are at all paying attention.**
2. So, why was Purim established? **“..as the days the Jews got relief on the enemies...” the days of their deliverance and rest. They were seeking to claim the “rest” that God promised some day to give them. Deuteronomy 25:19 promised that some day, “Amalek” will be destroyed, and the people of God will experience “rest” from their enemies. The end of the book of Esther shows that this “rest” was partially fulfilled in the ministry of Esther (see 9:22). But the book of Hebrews tells us the “rest” of the Sabbath day and the “rest” of military triumph over enemies is only a dim hint of a greater “rest” to come (Heb.3:7-4:16). “There still remains a rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.” (Heb.4:10). That rest is the resting from our good works through the grace of the “gospel” (Heb.4:6). The roots of Purim can oonly be found iin this book. It is on these days that they read the scrolls of Esther to their children so they don’t forget. On these days the children come into the synagogue dressed in costumes and adults dress up as well. The atmosphere is like a play where the good guys win.**

Everyone cheers for the hero and the heroine (Mordecai and Esther) and they boo, hiss and stomp their feet when the name of Haman is mentioned. It is not simply a reenactment but a celebration of deliverance. What are equivalents to this in our own culture? Memorial day, Memoriams for 9/11, Reformation Day, Christmas, Easter...this was not a celebration established by God but it is one that He endorsed for it brought to light His actions for His glory.

3. We have seen throughout Esther that she seems to be happy to be behind the scenes...(even though the people would have surely known of her involvement at least in the city of Susa and then through out the land as the word went out...for you couldn't hide such things even in so great a country) so what is going on with her in these last verse of chapter 9 even putting her name on this mandated new celebration of the Jews? **She has been renewed and now is bold for the truth and she wishes above all else to use her authority one last time it seems to make sure she institute a remembrance and a celebration so the people would not forget...so they would always tell their children...so they would never forget. With out cemeteries, monuments and memorials we are destined to forget and we are also destined to live lives with no relation to our past and without a past we have little to know definition. Preserving the past is crucial for our present and our future. She used her position to make sure the memory of God's work would go on from generation to generations so that God would be praised.**

4. The end.10:1-3. I love it when a story is wrapped up. I hate it when a TV show just ends or a book keeps you hanging for the next book which will keep you hanging...or movies that are sequels ad infinitum. Here in this book we see truth winning, right winning over wrong...the good guy wins...all nice and tidy. But wait 3 more verses. What do we have here? **Well, we have the same king we started with and the same kingdom and we are in the same city we started in. Some things have changed Xerxes seems to be about governing, Vashti is no longer queen, Esther is. A queen who truly won her husbands heart and respect and loyalty. Wicked plans were thwarted...evil has been dealt with. Mordecai has been promoted by the king to 2nd in command. Alls well that ends well. The king needed to tax and govern because he had lost to the Greeks and he needed to replenish his stores of money for the projects that laid ahead of him...building projects...he never went to war again...content to stay home with a loving wife? His reign last approximately 21 years in total.**

5. So sum up this book and the teaching for us today.
 - a. **God kept His promises in the older times and He will today as well.**
 - b. **God was sovereign then and he still is today.**
 - c. **God still uses people we wouldn't expect to do His will...US!**
 - d. **God still wins...and as such so don't we!**