

THE PEOPLE RESCUED

CORE PASSAGE: ESTHER 3:7-9,13; 8:5,11-13,17

CONTEXT

Though many Jews returned to Judah to reclaim and rebuild the way of life that had been lost, many stayed put. The original exiles who had survived the deportations settled in their new home, married, and had children, just as Jeremiah had commanded them (Jer. 29:4-7). Over the seventy years of exile and beyond, generations were born and raised in the foreign lands of Babylon and Persia. But because of the passage of time, these lands no longer seemed so foreign; rather, they had become home. Yet even in these places distant from their homeland, God was watching over His people.

KEY CONCEPT

God rescues His people even in the face of imminent destruction.

As you examine Esther 3:7-9,13; 8:5,11-13,17:

- Recognize that though it may seem God is not present or working, He always is.
- Rejoice that God keeps His promises and covenants, preserving His people.



TIMELINE

The First Group of Jews
Returns and Rebuilds the
Temple (Ezra 1–6)

SESSION STUDY:
**Esther and Mordecai Rescue God's
People from Destruction (Esther 3–10)**

Nehemiah Returns and
Rebuilds the Wall Around
Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1–6)

Esther Is Made Queen of
Persia (Esther 1–2)

Ezra the Priest Returns to Judah and
Instructs the People in the Law (Ezra 7–10)

Daily Readings

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|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Esther 1–2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Esther 6–7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Esther 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Esther 8–10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Esther 4–5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 71 |



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

EVEN AT THE BRINK OF SEEMING DESTRUCTION, GOD IS WORKING AMONG HIS PEOPLE (ESTHER 3:7-9,13).

Underline the orders given for the destruction of the Jews.

7 In the first month, the month of Nisan, in King Ahasuerus's twelfth year, the pur—that is, the lot—was cast before Haman for each day in each month, and it fell on the twelfth month, the month Adar. **8** Then Haman informed King Ahasuerus, "There is one ethnic group, scattered throughout the peoples in every province of your kingdom, keeping themselves separate. Their laws are different from everyone else's and they do not obey the king's laws. It is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. **9** If the king approves, let an order be drawn up authorizing their destruction, and I will pay 375 tons of silver to the officials for deposit in the royal treasury." . . .

13 Letters were sent by couriers to each of the royal provinces telling the officials to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jewish people—young and old, women and children—and plunder their possessions on a single day, the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month.

LEADER NOTE: King Ahasuerus of Persia, also known as Xerxes, ruled from 486–465 BC. The story of Esther occurs about fifty-five years after King Cyrus sent his decree throughout Persia that allowed Jews to return to Judah to rebuild the temple (538 BC). Esther 2:5-6 provides genealogical details for Mordecai, Esther's cousin and legal guardian, saying his great-grandfather Kish was taken into exile in 597 BC. Esther's family had been in exile for well over a century.

Embedded in Esther's colorful story—filled with beauty treatments, harems, lavish banquets, and dangerous requests—there was a power struggle. Two men serving the king began to clash. Haman, a descendant of Agag and recently promoted official, took offense when Mordecai, Esther's guardian, refused to honor him. When he learned Mordecai was a Jew, Haman decided to destroy all of Mordecai's people with him (v. 6). Haman would not rest until Mordecai—and every Jew—was put to death.

As the highest-ranking official in the nation, Haman posed an imminent threat to God's people throughout the entire kingdom of Persia. With malicious intent, Haman moved every political mountain he could to eliminate Mordecai and his people. Finally, he manipulated King Ahasuerus to decree the annihilation of the Jews (vv. 8-15).

Why do you think God allows hatred and harm for His people?

Though shocked and in a state of mourning over the deadly decree, Mordecai didn't give up the fight. Five years before Haman had concocted his murderous plot, a young Jewish girl named Hadassah was plucked out of obscurity to become Queen Esther of Persia (2:7,16-17). Mordecai rightly recognized this providential placement and urged Esther to use her influence with the king: "Perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this" (4:14).

The events of the book of Esther read quickly, yet they take place over a decade (483–473 BC). We see the sudden seismic shifts in the story, but we must recognize that many mundane moments passed by in the meantime and that God was working all along. The events that turn our lives upside down do not come as a surprise to God. He's been preparing us for "such a time" all along.

LEADER NOTE: The entire story of Esther follows an inverted, parallel pattern forming a giant "V" outline beginning with the prologue (ch. 1), the king's first decree (ch. 2–3), and Haman's building of the gallows for Mordecai (ch. 4–5). The pivot point is the king's sleepless night (ch. 6), leading to Mordecai's triumph over Haman (ch. 6–7), the king's second decree protecting the Jews (ch. 8–9), and the epilogue (ch. 10). The literary structure of this book points to God's ability to reverse the evil plans of man.

How has God prepared you for particular opportunities or seasons you didn't see coming?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION: God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings (Prov. 19:21). In ways we cannot fully comprehend, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

Notes

**Bonus Content**

Scan this QR code to see how God is at work in Esther's story, even if His name is never mentioned.

GOD CARRIES OUT HIS PURPOSES OF RESCUE AND DELIVERANCE (ESTHER 8:5,11-13,17).

Circle the orders given for the defense and preservation of the Jews.

5 She said, "If it pleases the king and I have found favor with him, if the matter seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let a royal edict be written. Let it revoke the documents the scheming Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. . . . **11** The king's edict gave the Jews in each and every city the right to assemble and defend themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate every ethnic and provincial army hostile to them, including women and children, and to take their possessions as spoils of war. **12** This would take place on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar. **13** A copy of the text, issued as law throughout every province, was distributed to all the peoples so the Jews could be ready to avenge themselves against their enemies on that day. . . . **17** In every province and every city where the king's command and edict reached, gladness and joy took place among the Jews. There was a celebration and a holiday. And many of the ethnic groups of the land professed themselves to be Jews because fear of the Jews had overcome them.

The theme of favor runs through the story of Esther. She first found favor "in the eyes of everyone who saw her" (2:15) and then with the king, gaining "more favor and approval" than all the other women (2:17). Later when Esther risked her life before the king, "she gained favor with him" (5:2) and appealed to that favor in her petitions (5:8; 7:3; 8:5). Esther's rise to royalty was not due to her pretty face and charismatic personality. She didn't earn the crown. Esther had the gracious hand of God upon her life orchestrating these events for His glory and good purposes, even though He is not explicitly named in the story.

LEADER NOTE: The book of Esther never mentions God. Neither Mordecai, Esther, nor the narrator credit with a formal role the One working all things for the protection of His people. Yet His presence, power, and providence permeate the story. Evidence of His favor marks every scene. This shines clearer when we view Esther as one chapter in the larger redemption narrative. Biblical truths about God clearly revealed elsewhere emerge here too: He directs kings' hearts (Prov. 21:1), hears His people's pleas (Ps. 34:17), and turns evil for their good (Gen. 45:5-7; Rom. 8:28). Even when we cannot sense God's tangible presence, we can trust His favor is at work in our lives too.

How have you experienced the unmerited favor of God in your life?

Notes

We tend to read stories seeking a hero to emulate, distilling them down into three alliterative application points for self-improvement. Yet a careful, honest reading through Esther reveals both Mordecai and Esther as works in progress. Even in their correspondence back and forth, there is no mention of trust in God. We can read between the lines and see that God, indeed, was working. But there is no glaring internal evidence from the book itself that Mordecai or Esther possessed the heroic faith we hold them so high for having.

Granting that Esther and Mordecai were the best versions we hope they were, although there are lessons we can learn from their example, ultimately neither of them is the hero of the story. The main takeaway of the book is not to become more like Esther or Mordecai; it is to trust in the provision and power of our all-seeing, all-powerful, all-faithful covenant-keeping God. He is the hero of the story.

LEADER NOTE: The celebration and holiday referenced in Esther 8:17 sparked a regular rhythm of annual celebration for God's people known as the Feast of Purim (9:26-28). Many Jews still observe it today, during which the book of Esther is read the night before the Feast of Purim begins and then again on Purim day. Some scholars believe Jesus may have celebrated Purim as the unnamed feast mentioned in John 5:1.

What characteristics of God stand out to you as clearly displayed in the book of Esther?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

God remains true to His covenant in having a people for Himself and will provide a way to trust in Him. This was true for Esther, even in a foreign land, and it is true for believers today who trust in Jesus to rescue us from sin and death.

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As adults arrive, ask if they've ever witnessed a rescue, whether on the news, in a movie, or in person. Whether the rescues were based on a true story or pure fiction, discuss: "Why do you think we are drawn to stories of rescue? How might the concept of a rescue be part of something bigger?" After discussion has died down, read Psalm 71:1-3.

CONTEXT

SAY: The book of Esther takes place in Persia, where many Jewish people were still living in exile. King Ahasuerus, unaware of Queen Esther's Jewish identity, had issued a decree that called for the destruction of the Jews. Haman, the king's right-hand man, had engineered this execution date. However, God had divinely placed Esther "for such a time as this" in a position to intercede, leading to a counter-decree and the deliverance of God's people (Esth. 4:14). Yet God's work in Esther wasn't just about saving the Jews from immediate destruction. He was preserving His people so that His covenant promises would continue. The Jews were the people through whom the Messiah would come, and if they were wiped out, the hope of salvation for all people would have been lost.

TRANSITION: God's hand in Esther's story points to His ultimate rescue mission—sending Jesus to redeem and rescue not just the Jews but all people of every tribe, tongue, and nation. The Lord's sovereignty is at work, even in the midst of human decisions, to bring about His greater redemptive plan.

RECAP

DISCUSS: Though His name is never mentioned in the book of Esther, God's hand is evident. How did you see God's faithfulness in your personal preparation this week?

TRANSITION: As we examine the story of Esther, we will look at some various ways Esther and Mordecai responded to troubling situations. We'll also consider these through a case study exercise to see how we might and/or should respond in light of God's good and sovereign hand in our lives.



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GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CASE STUDY: Direct your group to page 82 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a case study activity titled “What Would You Do?” Recreate the response sections on a board so you can record the group’s thoughts.

What Would You Do?

Read the case study below and consider Esther’s and Mordecai’s examples for possible ways to respond. Finally, consider what you would do.

CASE STUDY: Recently, a new government law has declared that churches must submit all sermon manuscripts for approval before preaching. Failure to comply could lead to heavy fines, imprisonment, or even the closure of the church. You and your fellow church members must decide how to proceed.

CONCEAL
Esther 2:10-11,20

DEFY
Esther 3:1-5

SUBMIT
Esther 7:1-4

What would you do?

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Esther 3:7-9,13.

MENTION: As Christians living in the West, we do not often experience direct threats or persecution from government agencies such as the threats the Jews faced. But one day we may need to decide what to do in response to government censure.

ENGAGE: Read the case study to the large group, and then form and designate three teams to consider and apply one of the optional responses. Invite a member from each team to read the passage. Instruct the teams to identify how the people responded to Haman’s or the king’s actions and then to discuss how we might apply that example to the case study. After a few minutes, ask a representative from each team to reveal their ideas. Write these on the board so adults may add them to the activity in their PSG.

Notes

DISCUSS: Though any tension between the Jews and others is not apparent at the beginning of the book, Mordecai cautioned Esther to conceal her heritage (Esth. 2:10-11,20). What are some other examples of God's people who faced persecution going into hiding or concealing their meetings? (*Elijah and prophets hid from Jezebel [1 Kings 17-19]; secret churches in countries antagonistic to Christianity*) "What are some other occasions when God's people openly defied those who opposed their faithfulness to the Lord?" (*Daniel's friends faced the furnace [Dan. 3]; Peter and John preached the gospel [Acts 4:18-20]*) "When were God's people expected to submit to unbelieving governing authorities?" (*the Jews were commanded to settle in Babylon and seek the peace of the city [Jer. 29]; Paul and Peter encouraged Christians to honor the governing authorities [Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13]*)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Esther 8:5,11-13,17.

DISCUSS: "How did God rescue His people from Haman's imminent threat? How might we apply this example to our case study? What role does faith in God's sovereignty play in making difficult decisions?" Allow a moment for the group to consider "What Would You Do?" in the activity, and call for responses.

DEBRIEF

How can we know the wise and godly response when facing persecution?

How does knowing that God not only rescues but also preserves His people shape our decisions?

SUMMARIZE

The story of Esther reminds us that God is always at work, even when His people face destruction. He not only rescues but preserves His people so that His greater redemptive plan may be accomplished.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 83). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: There are no accidents in the kingdom of God. He sees all, knows all, and allows only what ultimately will bring forth the greatest good for His people and His glory. Our job is to remember that He is always in control, regardless of how chaotic or dire our situation may seem.

What verses could we memorize this week to help us remember God's power and sovereignty?



HEART: God's favor is a magnificent gift, and His grace continually surrounds us. His hand is in everything for our good. There is no such

thing as luck. His providence rules. As we allow this reality to root deeply into our hearts, God's promised peace can bloom in our lives (Phil. 4:7).

How might a better grasp of God's favor and providence affect your peace?



HANDS: God bestowed favor on Esther with great purpose, not simply so she could become queen and enjoy the "good" life. God granted her great influence so she could save not only her own life but also the lives of many. God's plans are much bigger than just one soul. We're not meant to be cul-de-sacs of God's favor. We are designed to be conduits of God's grace. Though we can't force anyone to receive Jesus and His gift of forgiveness and eternal life, we can share the gospel with all who will hear its magnificent news.

How will you honor God with the influence He has given you "for such a time as this"?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Reflect on a time when you felt abandoned or helpless. How did God work behind the scenes to sustain and rescue you? Commit to trusting His unseen hand, even when your circumstances seem dire.
- Esther risked everything to intercede for God's people. Identify one bold step you can take this week in obedience to Him.
- Today, many believers across the world face life-threatening persecution. Set aside time to pray for their perseverance and for God's protection over them. Consider ways to support them tangibly.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 83 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 71:19-24. Thank God that no matter what we face, He will redeem it for His glory and our good. Pray that He will comfort us and revive us again as He has promised.