



 ESTHER

Devotional Guide
Summer 2024

Contents

Introduction

Historical Background

Week of July 7: Esther 1:1-22

Week of July 14: Esther 2:1-23

Week of July 21: Esther 3:1-15

Week of July 28: Esther 4:1-17

Week of August 4: Esther 5:1-14

Week of August 11: Esther 6:1-14

Week of August 18: Esther 7:1-10

Week of August 25: Esther 8:1-17

Week of September 1: Esther 9:1-10:3

Introduction:

Esther is the only book of the Bible that doesn't mention God's name. Yet we see God's invisible hand in the world in a mysterious, behind-the-scenes way. God's name might be absent in this book, but His fingerprints are all over it.

The book of Esther is a powerful example of the doctrine of God's providence. Providence is the teaching that God rules over the world through human events. God is continually working to accomplish His purposes for the glory of His name. He uses our choices, Satan's evil schemes, and natural forces to work for the good of His people and bring all things to completion and maturity in Christ (Romans 8:28-29).

When you understand the providence of God, you can still trust the Lord even though you don't see, feel, or hear from Him. The doctrine of providence assures us that He continues to work on our behalf. As the apostle Peter writes, "Though you have not seen him you have loved him..." (1 Peter 1:8).

Esther is profoundly relevant to the believer's life because much of life is incredibly ordinary. There are times and seasons in the Christian's life when God doesn't seem present. You may not see or feel Him, but Esther teaches us that God is always at work in His world to accomplish His purposes.

God is at work in the world, and He is at work in your life. Our prayer as your pastors is that this summer will deepen your understanding and confidence in God and His providential work. In the book of Esther, we'll see that it doesn't matter who you are, the mistakes you've made, or where you've come from. It is never too late for God to use those who are His if they are willing to obey and seek to honor Him—God can even use the most broken circumstances and compromises to accomplish His purposes.

Your Pastors,

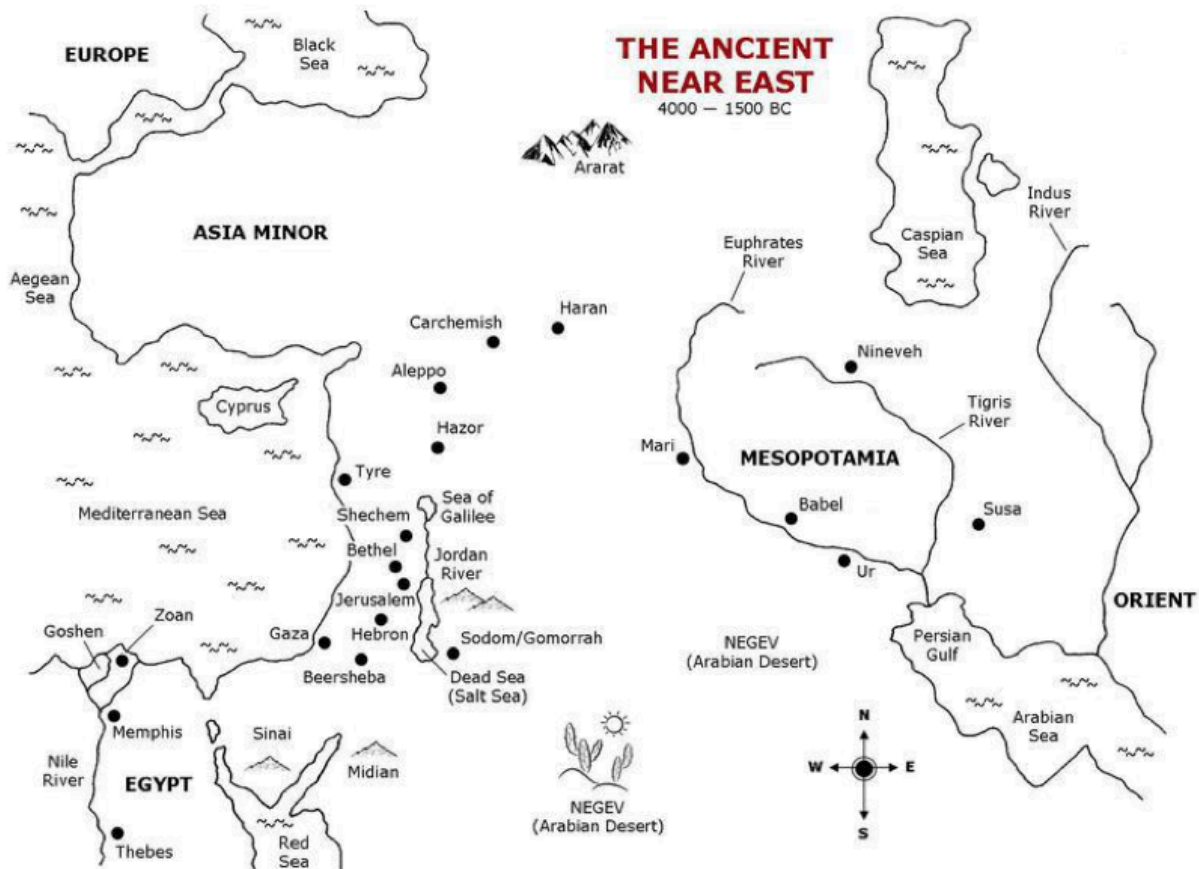
Dan & Chris

Historical Background:

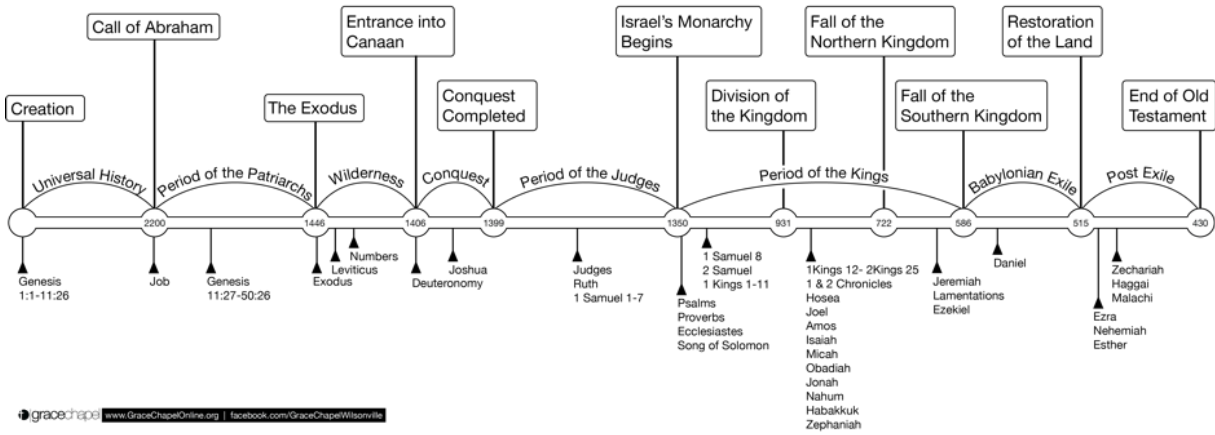
The book of Esther, part of the *Ketuvim* ("Writings") section of the Jewish layout of the Old Testament, is set in the Persian Empire during the reign of King Xerxes I (486-465 BC). During this period, the Persian empire dominated a vast territory stretching from India to Ethiopia. The narrative revolves around the Jewish *diaspora* (dispersion) living in Susa, the Persian capital, on the border of current-day Iraq and Iran.

In the 6th century BC, the Jewish people were first carried off into exile by the Babylonians for disobeying the Lord. After Babylon fell, the Persian king, Cyrus, allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. Many Jews returned, but many did not, choosing to live in foreign cultures for the rest of their days. Esther tells the story of Jews who were still dispersed within the Persian empire and focused on their precarious position as they faced potential annihilation orchestrated by Haman, a high-ranking Persian official. The Jewish people found deliverance through the courageous actions of Esther and her cousin Mordecai.

Map of the Ancient Near East



OLD TESTAMENT TIMELINE



When God Seems Invisible

Read: Esther 1:1-22

Opening Question:

What do you find appealing, and what do you find distasteful about the lifestyles of the rich and famous?

Study Questions:

1. What can you observe about God and His hidden actions?

2. What do you see about human nature?

3. Where do you see your need for Christ in this story?

4. How should Christians respond to this passage?

Questions for Reflection:

1. What is ironic in this passage about how human government and raw power are displayed?

2. What would Christian leadership look like in contrast to the leadership displayed in this passage?

3. How should Christians interact with the empire?

4. Read Isaiah 25. Why is God's end-time feast even better than Ahasuerus' banquet? What kind of hope should that fill you with as a Christian?

Prayer: Write out a prayer of response below.

Living for God's Favor in a Hostile Culture

Read: Esther 2:1-23

Opening Question:

When are you most tempted to assimilate into the culture around you?

Study Questions:

1. What can you observe about God and His hidden actions?

2. What do you see about human nature?

3. Where do you see your need for Christ in this story?

4. How should Christians respond to this passage?

Questions for Reflection:

1. In what ways do you see that you have adopted the values of the culture around you? Are there ways you, like Esther, might have two names (i.e., two different identities)?

2. Esther kept her religious beliefs and background a secret. Is this a temptation for you? How do you think God would have you to respond?

3. How does the gospel free us from the need to pretend or hide our true identity before the world?

Prayer: Write out a prayer of response below.

The Horrible Haman

Read: Esther 3:1-15

Opening Question:

How do you decide right or wrong, especially in cases where the Bible may not be explicitly clear and requires wisdom?

Study Questions:

1. What can you observe about God and His hidden actions?

2. What do you see about human nature?

3. Where do you see your need for Christ in this story?

4. How should Christians respond to this passage?

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why do you think Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman but has no issue bowing before the king? How might that relate to your own decisions?

2. We see profound evil in the heart of Haman, not only to destroy one Jew but to commit genocide. How do you interact and make sense of such evil in the world?

3. How does the gospel free us from the power of evil but also move us to do something about it?

4. The world might be “thrown into confusion,” while those in power seem exempt. What does Psalm 2 tell us about who is really in control?

Prayer: Write out a prayer of response below.

For Such a Time as This

Read: Esther 4:1-17

Opening Question:

Have you ever been in a place you didn't want to be but realized later that it was precisely where God wanted you? How did God use that to change you or those around you?

Study Questions:

1. What can you observe about God and His hidden actions?

2. What do you see about human nature?

3. Where do you see your need for Christ in this story?

4. How should Christians respond to this passage?

Questions for Reflection:

1. Esther wants to keep her head low and avoid the risk posed to her. How have you noticed similar temptations regarding difficult decisions requiring courage to follow Jesus?

2. Mordecai trusts that God will bring deliverance regardless of Esther's choice--do you have that kind of confidence in God's deliverance and protection?

3. God placed Esther uniquely in a position of influence. How might God use your unique beauty, skills, school circumstances, and job opportunities for the kingdom?

4. How does the gospel produce the courage to take significant risks for the kingdom?

Prayer: Write out a prayer of response below.

Esther's Party and Haman's Pride

Read: Esther 5:1-14

Opening Question:

When was the last time you had to do something that required courage and risk?

Study Questions:

1. What can you observe about God and His hidden actions?

2. What do you see about human nature?

3. Where do you see your need for Christ in this story?

4. How should Christians respond to this passage?

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why do you think Esther received favor in the eyes of the king? How do God's invisible fingerprints in this story give you the confidence to do what's right?

2. How is God's favor toward us in Christ similar to the favor Esther gets from the king? How is it different? How is God's favor better than worldly favor?

3. Haman's pride is painfully ridiculous. His friends and family boost his ego rather than tell the truth about reality. What kind of friends have you surrounded yourself with? Do they speak truthfully and honestly in a way that produces humility?

4. How does the gospel free us from pride and produce in us genuine humility?

Prayer: Write out a prayer of response below.

The Man the King Delights to Honor

Read: Esther 6:1-13

Opening Question:

Can you think of an example of a time when you experienced comedic irony, either personally or in a movie or story?

Study Questions:

1. What can you observe about God and His hidden actions?

2. What do you see about human nature?

3. Where do you see your need for Christ in this story?

4. How should Christians respond to this passage?

Questions for Reflection:

1. How do you see God’s hidden hand at work orchestrating the events in this chapter? What kind of comfort does that bring to your life today?

2. Scripture tells us to “Humble [ourselves] in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift [us] up” (James 4:10). How do you see that happening for Mordecai? How does that make acting with humility worthwhile even when you don’t get credit?

3. How is the gospel itself a story of dramatic irony? What does that do for our day-to-day faith when it seems like evil might be winning?

Prayer: Write out a prayer of response below.

Esther's Plea and Haman Hanged

Read: Esther 7:1-10

Opening Question:

How have you seen God work to turn a bad situation for good in your life?

Study Questions:

1. What can you observe about God and His hidden actions?

2. What do you see about human nature?

3. Where do you see your need for Christ in this story?

4. How should Christians respond to this passage?

Questions for Reflection:

1. Scripture tells us that we are not to fear those who can kill the body but to fear the one who can cast us into hell. How does the gospel free us from fear of man and teach us to fear God properly?

2. How does King Ahasuerus' wrath toward his enemy give us a picture of what God will do to His enemies? What kind of response should that invoke in us?

3. How does the gospel motivate us to relentlessly pursue justice for those who cannot defend themselves and simultaneously rest when we realize we cannot do it all alone?

Prayer: Write out a prayer of response below.

Reversing the Curse, Pt. 1

Read: Esther 8:1-17

Opening Question:

How can God's dramatic action lead others to want to become Christians?

Study Questions:

1. What can you observe about God and His hidden actions?

2. What do you see about human nature?

3. Where do you see your need for Christ in this story?

4. How should Christians respond to this passage?

Question for Reflection:

1. Saving the Jews required ingenuity and creativity on Esther's part. How might you need to be more creative or thoughtful in reaching your unbelieving friends or classmates?

2. God's dramatic rescue of the Jews led to many joining the faith. How might sharing your story of transformation be a powerful witness to friends or co-workers?

3. How does the gospel, which tells us of God's rescue from the power of sin, become a powerful means of hope and celebration for those who believe it?

Prayer: Write out a prayer of response below.

Reversing the Curse, Pt. 2

Read: Esther 9:1-10:3

Opening Question:

What are some ways God has resolved conflict in your story for good? How are you still trusting Him to find a resolution?

Study Questions

1. What can you observe about God and His hidden actions?

2. What do you see about human nature?

3. Where do you see your need for Christ in this story?

4. How should Christians respond to this passage?

Questions for Reflection:

1. God redeems past sin and compromises. How can God make you new and redeem you from some of your past mistakes?

2. The last verse of Esther speaks of Mordecai’s leadership. What makes Mordecai a godly leader? What can you learn from Mordecai’s example?

3. How does the gospel give us hope for a better future and resolve all our ultimate fears? How does God, through Christ, lift us up and make us great?

4. Jews still celebrate Purim to this day. Their celebration often includes reading the book of Esther. Yet, Esther is not merely for Jews but also us as Christians. How is this story our story?

Prayer: Write out a prayer of response below.
