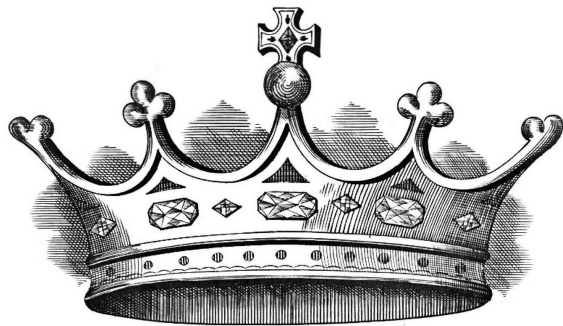


Read through the Bible



Esther Week 1



Monday, July Twenty-Second

Welcome to our two-week summer journey through Esther! This booklet is laid out to help you walk through a portion of the story of Esther each day. Whether you start off your day with this, find some time during your lunch break, or sit down with it before you go to bed, the hope would be for you to engage with the Bible on a consistent basis as God engages you and calls you into His story. May your journey be filled with fresh perspective as you dive into this account of God's sovereignty and faithfulness! – Pastor Chris

Read: Esther 1:1-22

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

The story of Esther takes place around 480 B.C. in Susa, one of the great cities of the Persian empire. During this time period, some of the Jews had returned to Judah after being exiled for 70 years in Babylon. However, as we will see in this story, some stayed behind and lived in and around Susa (what is now modern-day Iran).

- What command did King Xerxes make toward the end of his seven-day banquet? (see verses 10-11) How did Queen Vashti respond to his command? (see verse 12)

While the passage does not explicitly say why Queen Vashti refused King Xerxes' command, the fact that he drunkenly (v. 10) commanded her to "display her beauty" for his guests (v. 11) suggests that this would have likely been embarrassing and belittling for the Queen of the largest empire in the world.

- According to Memucan, why was Queen Vashti's response harmful to everyone in the kingdom? (see verses 16-18)

Memucan believed that making an example of Queen Vashti would coerce wives to obey their husbands in all circumstances. However, he didn't seem to understand that respect is earned, not coerced.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Think of a recent time when somebody showed a lack of respect toward you. How might you talk to and pray for that person?

Tuesday, July Twenty-Third

Over the years, the Miss America pageant has tried to showcase their contestants' wide range of skills and abilities. For example, a contestant may sing opera during the talent portion of the evening, and then answer a series of 'hot topic' questions to close out the competition. While these performances are often given consideration in crowning a winner, the general audience knows that the Miss America pageant is primarily a beauty pageant that focuses on the physical features of the contestants. In today's passage, King Xerxes puts together a Miss Persia beauty pageant to crown his next queen.

Read: Esther 2:1-18

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What qualification was emphasized in determining who would be the next queen? (see verses 1-4, 9, and 12)
- What was the nationality of Mordecai and Hadassah (Esther)? (see verses 5-7) Why did Esther keep this a secret when she went to the citadel of Susa? (see verse 10)

Mordecai likely believed that Esther's Jewish nationality would hurt her chances of being picked by the Persian king. It is also possible that he feared her nationality would bring physical harm to her. Nevertheless, as her guardian and father figure, Mordecai kept a close watch over Esther to make sure she was alright (v. 11).

- Why was Esther chosen to become the next queen? (see verses 16-17)

The name Esther likely meant 'star' in Persian. There was no doubt that Esther's beauty made her a star in the eyes of King Xerxes, which is why he chose her to become the next queen.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Are there situations where you find yourself either hiding or deemphasizing your Christian identity? If so, what about those situations causes you to do so?

Wednesday, July Twenty-Fourth

On August 21, 2015, a terrorist opened fire on a train headed from Amsterdam to Paris. Four people were injured in the attack, but it could have been a whole lot worse had it not been for the heroic efforts of a few American, French, and British passengers who stepped in to subdue the attacker. For their bravery and courage, the French government awarded the passengers with France's highest decoration – the Legion of Honour. In today's passage, a concerned citizen stops an attack from taking place, and is awarded for his heroic efforts.

Read: Esther 2:19 – 3:6

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- Who was given credit for exposing the assassination plot by two of King Xerxes' officers? (see 2:22) Where was the incident recorded? (see 2:23)

The book of annals in 2:23 was a listing of major events that happened during the time of a king. These books allowed kings to look back at these moments during their reign, as well as provide a history for future kings who would take over the throne.

- What was the result of Mordecai refusing to bow down to Haman? (see 3:3-5) How did Mordecai's decision to divulge his nationality make things worse? (see 3:6)

It is interesting that Mordecai would forbid Esther to divulge her nationality (2:10; 20) only to turn around and do so himself (3:4). While the passage doesn't appear to give a reason for Mordecai's disobedience, some scholars suggest that he refused to bow down to Haman because he was a descendent of a tribe of people who were enemies of the Jews (see 3:10 in tomorrow's reading).

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

While Mordecai saved his king, the good news of the Gospel is that we have a King who saved us! Spend some time today thanking God for sending His Son, Jesus, to save us and call us as His own.

Thursday, July Twenty-Fifth

When the Our Savior youth arrived at the LCMS National Youth Gathering in Minneapolis a couple of weeks ago, they could go right on their phone and view all of the scheduled events and activities happening throughout the conference. By using today's technology, the gathering's organizers were able to easily and efficiently disseminate information to the thousands of youth at the event. In today's passage, King Xerxes and his government disseminate important information to all the people of Persia.

Read: Esther 3:7-15

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What reasons does Haman give King Xerxes as to why the Jews should be destroyed? (see verse 8)
- How is King's Xerxes edict to destroy the Jews (vv. 10-11) ironic given the previous events in 2:19-23?

This is a classic example of someone (King Xerxes) taking the word of someone else (Haman) in order to make an important decision (destroy the Jews). It is especially ironic given that the king had been saved by a Jew (Mordecai) in a previous attempt on his life. In this case, King Xerxes chose to surround himself with someone who did not have his best interests in mind. Instead, it appears that Haman's only interest was to settle a score with Mordecai.

- How was the king's edict communicated? (see verses 12-14)

Verses 12-14 give us great insight into how difficult it was to communicate back then. While the Persians' communication system seems quite slow compared to today's standards, it was actually one of the most sophisticated and efficient in the world.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Verse 15 says that the people living in the city of Susa were bewildered by the difficult news that the Jews were to be killed. Think of a recent time when you received some difficult news. How did you respond? How did you involve God in your situation?

Friday, July Twenty-Sixth

Have you ever sung karaoke before? One of the reasons why some people are hesitant to do it is that their performance could either go really well or really poorly. In today's passage, Queen Esther has to make an important decision that could go either way.

Read: Esther 4:1-17

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How did Mordecai and the other Jews throughout Persia respond to King Xerxes' edict? (see verses 1-4)

Mordecai realized the sobering truth revealed to us in 1:19 – once an edict or law was decreed, it could not be repealed. In response, he and the other Jews throughout Persia put on sackcloth and ashes as a public expression of their grief and despair.

- What were the two possible scenarios that could happen if someone approached the king in the inner court without being summoned? (see verse 11)

Queen Esther found herself in a tricky situation. If she went to King Xerxes unannounced, he could either put her to death, or he could spare her by extending his gold scepter. While she would have liked to think that he would do the latter, she realized that she had not been with her husband for a month...how would he respond?

- How did Mordecai reason with Queen Esther? (see verses 12-14) How did Esther respond? (see verse 16)

The end of verse 14 ("And who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?") is the most quoted verse from Esther. Over the centuries, people have taken Mordecai's question to Queen Esther and applied it to their own lives: what if God has brought me to my current situation for a specific purpose? It is this sort of introspective question from Mordecai that gave Queen Esther the courage to go before the king unannounced.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Take time to pray for someone who is facing a difficult dilemma.

Saturday, July Twenty- Seventh

In the movie *Forrest Gump*, there is a scene where Forrest finally works up the courage to tell Jenny something that has been on his mind for quite some. As she leaves the room and heads upstairs to bed, Forrest follows her out and says, “Jenny, will you marry me?” In today’s passage, Queen Esther has to work up the courage to tell King Xerxes something that has been on her mind.

Read: Esther 5:1-8

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

Esther is the only book in the Bible to never explicitly mention God. Does that mean that God is absent from this story? Far from it. As this story continues to heat up, we will consistently see God’s sovereignty and faithfulness throughout. The good news for Queen Esther is that she is not alone as she faces a tough road ahead!

- How did King Xerxes react to Queen Esther’s unannounced visit? (see verses 1-2)
- To what extent was King Xerxes willing to go to fulfill Queen Esther’s request? (see verses 3 and 6)

King Xerxes’ offer to give Queen Esther half the kingdom was not to be considered a literal offer. Instead, the expression simply meant that he was more than willing to grant her request.

- When did Queen Esther promise to answer King Xerxes’ question? (see verses 7-8)

Was Queen Esther afraid to share her request with King Xerxes? It certainly seems that way. By delaying her answer until the next day, Queen Esther was able to buy time and determine how best to tell the king about the terrible thing that Haman had done.

Respond: Apply what you’ve learned in prayer and action

Consider the relationships in your life and determine whether there is something you’ve been wanting to tell someone. If so, take some time to pray for courage, and ask that the Holy Spirit would guide you to speak to that person in a truthful and loving way.

Sunday, July Twenty- Eighth

When people say they had a “rollercoaster day,” they are oftentimes referring to their emotional responses to the events they experienced that day. For example, a nurse might feel grateful to hear some encouraging words from one of her patients, but she then finds herself feeling worried just a few minutes later when another patient ends up being rushed downstairs to the emergency unit. In today’s passage, Haman has a rollercoaster day.

Read: Esther 5:9-14

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What caused Haman’s mood to change after leaving the banquet? (see verse 9)
- Why did Haman feel special and honored? (see verse 12)

Remember, Queen Esther had still not divulged her Jewish nationality. Because Haman believed that he was being honored by Esther at the upcoming banquet, he had no idea what was in store for him, nor that he had sanctioned the death of *her* people.

- How do Haman’s wife and friends suggest that he deal with Mordecai? (see verse 14)

Haman was absolutely delighted to be the special guest at Queen Esther’s upcoming banquet, but his hatred for Mordecai continued to dampen his mood. By constructing the gallows, Mordecai believed he could rid himself of his problem so that he could enjoy the banquet. While we may like to think that this is not normal behavior, people do this all the time (to a lesser extent of course!). Instead of confronting our issues, we often get rid of them or ignore them in the hopes that we will be “happy” once again.

Respond: Apply what you’ve learned in prayer and action

How do you resolve issues in your life? Are you somebody who tends to tackle and resolve them, or are you somebody who tends to ignore and block them out? What issue might God be prodding you to tackle and resolve today? Spend some time in prayer.