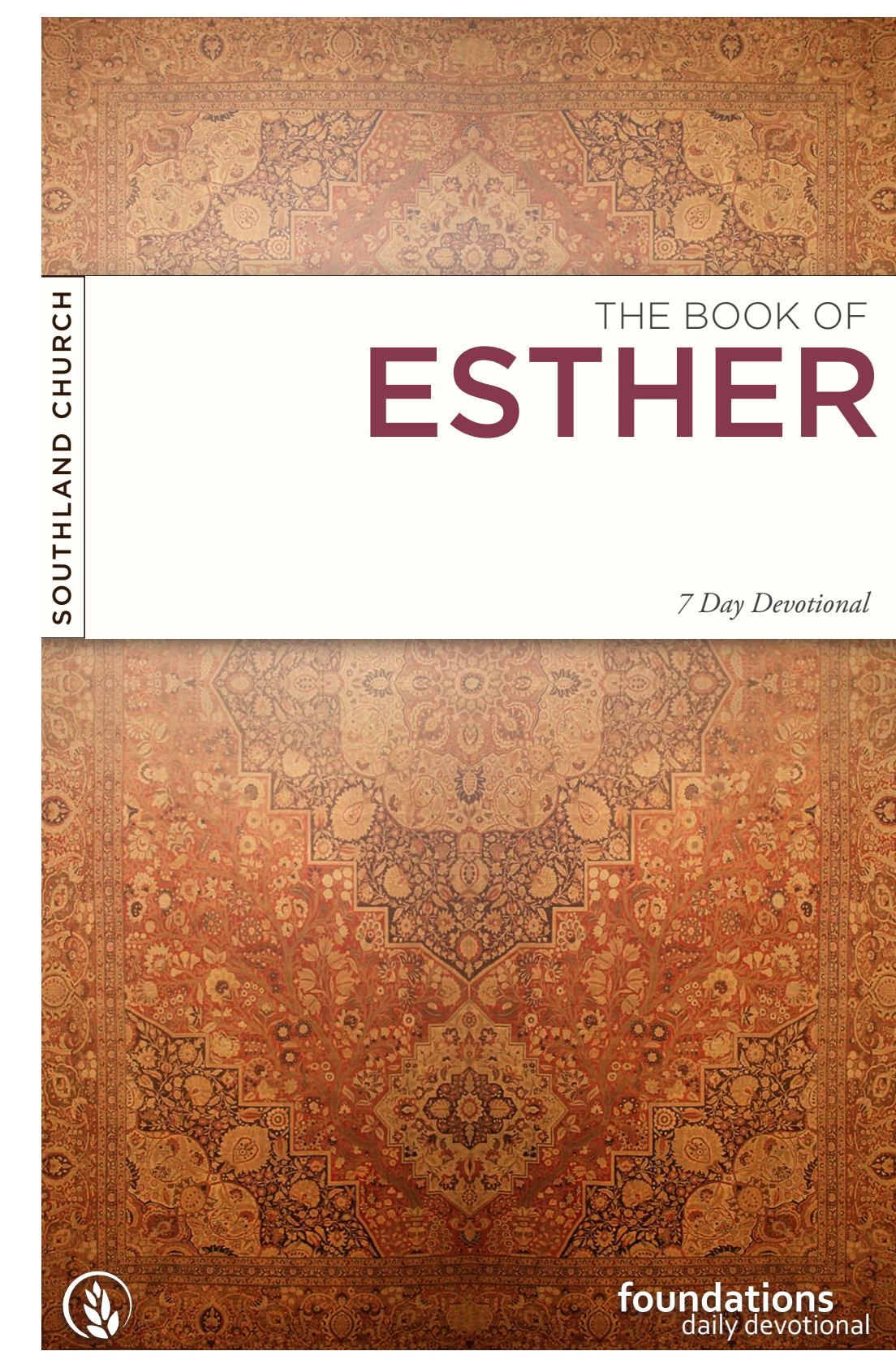




SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF
ESTHER

7 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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ESTHER

7 Day Devotional

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daily devotional



SOUTHLAND
CHURCH

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Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

DAY 1**READ:** Esther 1

The book of Esther describes the establishment of the Jewish holiday of Purim. This particular holiday was not instituted by Yahweh in the Law of Moses (such as Passover, the Feast of Booths, etc.); this holiday was instituted by the Jewish people to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews through Esther. Purim continues to be observed today to celebrate the survival of the Jewish people throughout history, despite intense persecution across the ages. The book of Esther is about a few people's calling and courage amid a culture that becomes increasingly hostile towards their people. This makes theirs an important story for the church today, as our culture, too, becomes more and more adverse towards Christianity.

The story of Esther takes place during the Babylonian exile during the reign of Xerxes (also called Ahasuerus), King of Persia. Chronologically the story fits in between chapters 6 & 7 of the book of Ezra, between the first and second waves of Jewish exiles returning to Jerusalem. While King Cyrus gave permission for all Jews to return to the land of Judah (see Ezra 1), only a handful actually went. Esther's parents and grandparents had evidently chosen to remain in Susa, one of the Persian capitals.

The story begins with the description of two banquets. We are introduced immediately to King Xerxes who appears to be a man of pomp and pride, taking six months to display his wealth and majesty to his guests. History tells us that Xerxes was preparing to go to battle against the Greeks at this time, and was aiming to gain support from the guests through these extensive festivities. In a somewhat drunken state, Xerxes summons for his wife, Queen Vashti, to parade herself before his guests, that they might see her beauty. Her refusal puts him in a difficult position, particularly since his guests are people he hopes to impress so that they will support him in his quest against the Greeks; what will they think if he cannot even control his own wife? He is angry and, by the council of his wise men, makes a rash decision to banish Vashti from his presence forever, and a countrywide decree that every man is to be master of his own household.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. We know from Esther chapter 2 that King Xerxes will regret banishing Vashti. Have you recently done or said something rash out of hurt or anger? Confess your actions to the Lord. Is there anything that you need to make right? Make a plan to do that today.
2. Take some time to pray for our government leaders and officials. Pray that they would not make rash decisions. We will learn in the book of Esther that God is in control, even when sinful plans are put in place. Pray for God's will to be done in our nation; pray that He would use our government leaders for His glory.

3. Spend some time asking God to prepare your heart to receive the things He wants to teach you as you read the book of Esther over the next number of days. Ask Him to make the story come alive for you. Ask Him to speak to you clearly through the Scripture you will read. Ask Him to open your eyes to things you have not seen before.

DAY 2



READ: Esther 2

Four years have passed since Vashti's banishment in 483 B.C. Xerxes has been to battle and back again, and upon his return, seems to be pining over his love, lost at his expense. But his attendants' suggestion to hold a beauty pageant of young virgins is all he needs to get his mind off of the former queen, and officers are sent out to gather up the most beautiful women in the land.

Esther, an orphaned Jewish girl in the care of her cousin, Mordecai, is one of the many women chosen to come before the king. The process for the "contestants" was quite serious: they were brought into the first harem where they received a whole year of beauty treatments, followed by initiation into the king's second harem: when it was her turn, each woman would spend the night with the king; in the morning she entered the second harem where she would stay for the remainder of her life, never allowed to marry, and never to go to the king again unless he called for her. When Esther enters the first harem, she quickly wins the favour of the head eunuch, Hegai. As a result, he provides her with all she needs and gives her the best place in the harem. Not only is Esther beautiful, she is humble and likeable. She listens intently to Hegai's direction and wins the favour of the king who, upon seeing her, falls instantly in love with her and crowns her queen.

Verses 10 and 11 give us a hint of the anti-Semitism (prejudice against Jewish people) that is to come later in the story, and that was prevalent at the time. The Jews were an exiled people trying to maintain their way of life while under foreign governance. Mordecai knew that Esther's Jewish heritage would pose a hindrance to her eligibility as queen and urged her to keep quiet. Clearly God is behind this, giving wisdom to Mordecai as he advises Esther, and setting in place the means for the salvation of His people.

The book of Esther is written in a most thrilling way, with foreshadowing and suspense, keeping us on the edge of our seats. Verses 19-23 describe an incident that will come greatly into play later on in the story. It seems that through Esther's influence, Mordecai has been given a job as one of the king's officials, putting him in a position to easily watch over his cousin. Mordecai happens to be in the right place at the right time and overhears two of the king's eunuchs plotting a royal murder. He tells Esther who tells the king, making sure to give credit to Mordecai, and the king has the two thugs hanged on the gallows and Mordecai's loyal act recorded in the chronicles of his kingship.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Like the Jews in Persia, we as Christians are living as foreigners in this world – or at least we should be. It is not easy, but we are called to be different. Read 1 Peter 2:11-12 and Titus 2:11-14. These passages urge us to say “No!” to the ungodliness in the world. Meditate on these verses.
 - a. Is there a specific situation where you are finding it hard to say “no” to ungodliness? Ask God to help you to do good – to love righteousness like Jesus does. Pray that God would be glorified through our obedience – that others would see and know Him.
2. Esther was in a precarious position – a Jew in an environment somewhat hostile towards Jews. She needed wisdom and discretion and favour from God. Our country is becoming increasingly hostile towards Bible-believing Christians, yet we must continue to stand firm, looking forward to our “blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ”! Spend some time interceding for believers across our nation. Pray that they would hold firmly the hope of Christ’s return. Pray that they would love righteousness and hate wickedness. Pray that, like Esther, God would give them wisdom and favour.
3. Esther didn’t choose her position, and she certainly didn’t know what God had in store for her. Perhaps you are in a position that you didn’t choose. Whatever the case, God has purpose for you. Are you willing to say “yes” to His purposes for you? Take a moment to recommit yourself to the Lord today; tell Him you are willing to say “yes” to His purposes for you, even though you may not know them yet.

DAY 3



READ: Esther 3

Here is where the plot thickens, where the heart of the story comes to life. We are introduced to Haman, a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites and enemy of Saul, king of Israel (see 1 Samuel 15). Haman is a man of intense hatred and pride, carrying the generational loathing of the Jewish people that originated with his ancestors. King Xerxes gives Haman a promotion, setting him above all of the king’s officials. It was a custom of Persian etiquette to bow to ones superiors, not in worship, but in respect. However, for whatever reason – whether it was because of Haman’s open hatred towards Jews or for some other reason – Mordecai refused to bow.

We see Haman, like others before and since, emerging as Satan’s pawn to destroy the Jewish people. The reader feels his pure loathing, not only for Mordecai, but for the Jewish people as a whole, as he sets forth to annihilate the Jews, even offering a bribe to the king’s treasury! A day is chosen by the casting of lots and a decree is sent throughout the empire that on the 13th day of the 12th month, all

people are to kill and plunder the Jews – young, old, women and children. And we see the wickedness of both Haman and King Xerxes as they sit down to drink to the destruction of an entire people group.

This was no small thing; the Persian Empire encompassed all of the Jews. This was a deliberate act of Satan to destroy God's chosen people and stop the coming of the Messiah. He had already tried through other leaders (Pharaoh (Exodus 14), Athaliah (2 Kings 11)), and he would not stop at Haman! Herod would condemn hundreds of baby boys to death when he would hear about the Messiah's birth from the Magi. And this isn't just a thing of ancient civilizations – Hitler unabashedly tried to wipe out the Jewish people only a short while ago in our own "civilized" society. Satan and mankind are not getting *less* evil. Satan's goal has *always* been to destroy God's people, and mankind has *always* had a sin nature. Through sinful people willing to follow him, Satan continues to work towards the destruction of God's people, both Jews as God's chosen and Gentiles who have been grafted into the family. But our God will not be mocked; His plans will not be thwarted. This is why the Apostle Paul declares with great joy in Colossians 2:15 what happened when Jesus went to the cross: *"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."* Jesus openly shamed Satan when he rose from the grave, and He will triumphantly defeat Satan one final time yet to come. Our God is indeed great!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Hatred is a slippery slope. We are to hate only sin and never people. Hatred towards others is the exact opposite of God, who is Love. When we hate others, we are breaking the most important commandments: to love God and to love others, for if we hate our brother or sister, we do not love God (see 1 John 4:20). Read 1 John 2:9-11. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have hatred in your heart towards another individual. Spend some time confessing this to Him, asking Him to cleanse you from these feelings. Ask Him for a step of obedience He wants you to take in loving this person.
2. The Jewish people continue to be hated by other nations; we see evidence of this in the news every day. We need to pray for the Jewish people, that God would continue to protect them and their land, and that their eyes would be opened to the truth about Jesus. Many Jews have dismissed Jesus and are still waiting for their Messiah to come; others have no active faith at all. Pray for a great turning among the Jewish people, that they would learn and love the truth.
3. Spend time worshipping God for His sovereignty. While Haman and Xerxes drank wine and plotted the destruction of the Jews, God was not ringing His hands in fear or discouragement. God is never afraid; His plans are never frustrated. There is no one like our God! Thank Him for who He is. Think of a situation that has you frustrated, discouraged or worried. Remember that God is not feeling these things. Thank Him for who He is in your situation.

DAY 4**READ:** Esther 4

The Jews hear of the edict for their destruction and they grieve. Imagine the death sentence! Being told that in a year you and your family and your people will be slaughtered! When, in the first month, he cast lots to determine a date, Haman might have been disappointed that he had to wait so long for the date of destruction, but certainly he would have used his twelve months to prepare by trying to turn the hearts of the Persian people against the Jews. Haman wanted a bloodbath on the 13th day of the 12th month.

We see now that the sovereignty and strategy of God was behind Mordecai's earlier command for Esther to keep quiet about her identity. Her silence has allowed her a key position in the palace. But the time for silence is over; she must now use her position to intercede for her people. Mordecai is adamant and convincing, clearly anointed throughout this conversation with Esther. Though Mordecai does not mention the name of God, His presence is clear as crystal. With extreme faith, Mordecai declares what He knows about God – that He will always protect a remnant of His people. He also understands that those God chooses to fulfill His purposes will be held accountable to how they respond to His calling – he is convinced that if Esther remains silent, she will die.

Esther, like Joseph and Daniel before her, has been given a position of power in a pagan society. Like Daniel, she has the opportunity to step out in courage or to hide in a closet. She is a courageous woman and she readies herself to rise up to the call, knowing that to appear before the king uninvited is a risk of death itself. She calls her people to fast for her and resolves to rise up to her calling, even if it means death.

This is an incredibly important chapter for the church today. God is calling for Esthers and Mordecais to rise up within their spheres of influence. None of us is in the position we are in because God needs us and can't find anyone else to do our job. God doesn't need us. God can use a donkey to fulfill his purposes – and he did (see Numbers 22)! God has purpose for His people and He will hold us accountable to what He calls us to; if we don't obey, He can easily raise up someone else, but we will miss out on the blessing that comes with our obedience. We don't have to be queen or king's official to make a difference – we can lead others *wherever we are, no matter our position*.

Our society is becoming increasingly anti-Christian. This shouldn't surprise us; Jesus said that the world would hate us because of Him. We cannot continue to blend into those around us; as God's people, we are called to be different, to stand for what Jesus stood for, to care about what God cares about. Are you ready to be an Esther?



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God to show you clearly what He has called you to – what He is asking of you – in your sphere of influence (job, friendship groups, roles, etc.). Ask Him how He wants you to walk that out, even today.
2. Are you stepping out in boldness, or are you shirking your calling and trying to blend into the background? Take some time to write out your fears, the things that keep you from being bold and stepping out. Ask Jesus to take these fears from you. Ask Him to tell you His truth about each of your fears.
3. Joseph, Daniel and Esther were God's people working in high places within pagan societies. Take some time to think about the following:
 - a. Think about the things they did – the decisions they made and the ways they refused to compromise.
 What kind of suffering did they endure?
 What blessings did they receive?
 What legacy did they leave?
 - b. Be inspired by these people of great courage! Ask God to give you that kind of courage and faith. Thank God for the incomprehensible blessings that await you in heaven.

DAY 5



READ: Esther 5-7

The remaining chapters move quite quickly. After three days of fasting, Esther goes to see the king, knowing that she is quite possibly walking to her death. But Xerxes is in a joyful mood and accepts her readily. Some would read the first half of the chapter and think Esther is stalling for time, afraid of what will happen if she tells the king she is a Jew. But Esther is shrewd and patient, having thought through how she will reveal her secret to the king; her aim is to fully win his favour so that he will sympathize with her entirely when she tells him the truth about herself... and Haman.

Speaking of Haman, Esther is setting him up for a big fall, inviting him to her banquets and thus pumping up his pride which oozes out of him in the second half of chapter 5. He's almost unbearable to listen to – bragging about his promotion and position and good fortune to his friends and family. He is painted as a temperamental child: anger quick to flare and feelings quick to bruise. Offended by Mordecai's lack of respect, and fueled by his satanic hatred of the Jews, Haman orders a 75-foot gallows be built on which he plans to hang Mordecai on the coming slaughter day. Little does he know, in building the gallows, Haman is digging his own grave.

Chapter 6 begins to reveal the incredible irony of the story. The king has insomnia and decides to do some reading in the chronicles of his kingship. He just happens to come across the account where Mordecai saved his life and is astonished to learn that Mordecai never received a reward for his service. Just as he is thinking up a suitable tribute, Haman comes in – he is so excited about his gallows and his plan to hang Mordecai that he, too, cannot sleep and has come to tell the king of his plan. What happens next is really hilarious for us to read. What a blow to Haman's pride, having to honour Mordecai the way he himself expected to be honoured! Again, he runs home to whine about his plight, and his wife and friends finally end up giving him some wise advice: *"If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him."* (6:13) Again, God's name is not mentioned outright, but His presence is blaring – it is HE who make the Jewish people indestructible! Yahweh had a reputation, known even by pagans. God deserves all glory and honour. He rescued the Israelites time and time again, and continually fulfilled His promises, *for the sake of His Name* (see Ezekiel 20). God's glory and reputation have always been the foundation for His grace, His love and His justice.

Chapter 7 brings us to the second banquet where Esther finally reveals that she is a Jew, and that Haman is behind her destruction and the destruction of her people. She is shrewd, even in her plea, to play to the king's self-interest by pointing out that the destruction of the Jews will be an economical loss to his empire (v 4). Things could not have gone worse for Haman; his world quickly falls apart and he is sentenced to be hung on his own gallows.

There are a number of lessons we learn from this central part of the story. Perhaps most clearly we see Proverbs 16:18 prove painfully true: *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* Haman was so pumped with pride that he was blinded to the truth. He had so elevated himself above others that he couldn't imagine ever being dethroned. His dedication to hatred and refusal to humble himself ultimately caused his demise. If anything, this should give us incentive to rid our lives of pride as quick as possible!

We learn another truth – that God is in full control of who sits where. In Esther 4:14, Mordecai told her that if she did not step up to her calling, God would use another; God can easily depose us if we do not obey Him. We see this in the life of Haman. He had everything going for him – wealth, power, esteem – but because he sought to destroy God's people, he was removed. God can do the same to us if we choose to disobey Him and go our own way.

We also learn the value of patient wisdom in these chapters, as Esther bides her time, waiting for the exact moment to reveal her secret. Had she moved in fear or haste, the story could have ended quite differently. Surely Esther drew on the Lord for strength and wisdom, which He fully provided, as He promises to do for those who put their trust in Him.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Haman's pride and hatred set him to seek revenge, which ultimately brought him to a hard fall. Ask God to open your eyes to areas of pride in your life. Some questions to ask yourself:
 - a. Do I put myself above others? Is there anyone who I think of as being below me?
 - b. When talking to my friends and family, do I talk more than I listen? Do I ask people questions about *them*, or am I talking about myself most of the time?
 - c. Are you easily offended? When people hurt you, do you think things like, "*How dare they do that to me!*"?

Spend some time in repentance, saying sorry to God for putting yourself on a throne. Thank God for revealing areas of pride to you and ask Him to help you to be humble. Ask Him to make you like Jesus *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant"* (Philippians 2:6-7).

2. These chapters show us the importance of ACTION. Surely Esther prayed as she fasted, but there was something for her to DO after those three days. To quote one study Bible, "We should pray as if it depended on God and act as if it depended on us." As Christians, we must rely on God – His power – but we cannot just sit and let Him do all the work. We are co-workers for the kingdom! Are you a person of action in God's kingdom? Do you err on the side of much prayer and little action, or on the side of quick action with little prayer? Perhaps you are lazy in both. Ask God to speak to you about this point. What does it mean for you to be active in your faith?
3. Are you being obedient to God in the position you are in? Are you spending your time, your money, your love, etc. the way God has asked you to? Don't be afraid to ask God if you are! He is not out to get you or to trick you; He *loves* you and is *for* you! Isaiah 48:17 says *"I am the Lord your God who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go"*. Ask God to *teach* you and *direct* you in your position.

DAY 6



READ: Esther 8

This portion of the story reveals the destiny of the Jews after Esther's brave request. Esther is not finished with the role she has been called to; clearly by the king's response, *she* is safe from slaughter, but the edict against the Jews remains an irreversible proclamation. Esther's love for her people is revealed as she weeps at the king's feet, pleading for something to be done for the cause of the Jews.

Unlike King Hezekiah who, when he was told of the calamity that would come to his family after his death said, “The word of the Lord is good; at least this won’t happen in *my* lifetime!” (see 2 Kings 20:16-19), Esther’s own salvation was not good enough for her. She fought for the welfare of her people, begging the king to provide some sort of protection for them.

Though his initial decree cannot be revoked, Xerxes puts forth a second command – that all Jews have full permission to fight back on the 13th day of the 12th month if anyone should try to attack them. The end of the chapter describes the joy that spread throughout the Jews in the land – a far cry from the mourning that overtook them with the king’s original edict. With the king and queen on their side, fear of the Jews spreads across the land! This is another evidence of God’s sovereign hand guiding the events of the story, and gives us a glimpse of what it means to have a fear of the Lord: when we see people and circumstances change in miraculous ways, our eyes are opened to the incomprehensible power of God, who is sovereign over *all things* and *all people*. This should cause us to fall on our knees before Him – if we don’t do it now, we certainly will someday (see Phil 2:10-11).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Esther had a true love for her people. Esther’s “people” were the Jews; in comparison, our “people” is the church. Unfortunately some of the biggest hurts happen within the church; but we are called to love each other, and if we can’t love our brothers and sisters in Christ, who *can* we love? Do you love the people in the church?
 - a. Ask God to show you how you are doing at walking out the commandment to “love your neighbour as yourself”. Let Him encourage you in the good things you are doing and convict you where you need to step it up.
 - b. Ask God for an active step in loving someone from the church today.
2. Think back over the story of Esther that you have read so far – how do you see God’s all-powerful, sovereign nature throughout the story? Our God is ALL powerful, ALL knowing, ALL wise! What does this mean for you today? Think of a specific struggle you are dealing with: how does God want to use this truth to encourage you?

DAY 7



READ: Esther 9 & 10

Chapter 9 describes the events of the 13th day of the 12th month. It seems there is enough anti-Semitism in the land that a significant number of adversaries rise up against the Jews, but the Jews have favour with the king and with God. They are able to defeat all who attack them! Some would read this chapter and believe that

the Jews were ruthless in their attack, but the text is clear that they killed only to defend themselves, not even taking the possessions of the slain.

We see the effect of Haman's sin on his entire family: all 10 of his sons (and with them, his family name) are put to death. Haman's story goes to show that the accumulation of wealth and power on this earth lasts only as long as our individual lives. Haman's position and wealth is quickly given to others; they no longer matter for Haman. It is sad how many of us strive for these two things – wealth and power – on this earth, completely forgetting that there is a world to come. It is for *that* world that we should be living for. That, too, will be a world with much wealth and power (and wonder and joy!), but just how these things are divvied up will be determined by how we live now. How easy it is to forget Jesus' words: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6:19-21)

Esther's story concludes by describing how the Feast of Purim was established. The anniversary of the day that the Jews were delivered by being able to defend themselves against their enemies was made a holiday – a day of feasting and gladness. Purim continues to be celebrated among Jewish communities today. It is a day of eating and drinking, of giving to the poor and of remembering the story of Esther. The story is read or acted out, and whenever the name of Haman is spoken, the listeners boo, hiss and rattle noise-makers in attempt to blot out his name forever.

Purim celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from the hand of their enemies. Haman is the antichrist-like character of the story, whose plans are thwarted by the providence of God. And every attempt in history to eradicate the Jews has been foiled by God. Scripture tells us that, through the antichrist, Satan will make one final attempt to wipe out God's people, yet we are told the outcome of that, too: *"Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. And the One sitting on the horse was named Faithful and True. For He judges fairly and then goes to war. His eyes were bright like flames of fire, and on His head were many crowns. A name was written on Him, and only He knew what it meant. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in pure white linen, followed Him on white horses. From His mouth came a sharp sword, and with it He struck down the nations. He ruled them with an iron rod, and He trod the winepress of the fierce wrath of almighty God. On his robe and thigh was written this title: King of kings and Lord of lords."* (Revelation 19:11-16) Jesus Himself, along with the saints, will fight and conquer the enemies of His people. He will defeat Satan once and for all (see Revelation 20:7-10), and *finally*, after making *all things new*, God will make His home among His people! (Revelation 21:1-5) Then we will *really* celebrate God's deliverance! Let us look forward to this day with joy and anticipation! God has spoken it; it WILL come to pass!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Haman was much too preoccupied with the wealth and power of this present age, and look where it got him – hanging on his own gallows and mocked throughout history! He is a prime example of one who reaps what he sows: he sowed hatred and destruction and reaped the same.
 - a. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and to show you what kinds of things you are sowing into. In what ways are you sowing into worldly, useless things? How are you sowing into God's kingdom?
 - b. How can you make a point to sow into God's kingdom today instead of into the things of this world? Ask God to give you clear direction in this.
 - c. Spend some time in prayer, asking God to give you an eternal perspective. Ask Him to open your eyes to the value of sowing into His kingdom. Tell Him you are willing to sacrifice things of the world for His sake.
2. Read and meditate on Revelation 21. This chapter gives many things for Christians to look forward to – write down everything of anticipation in this chapter. Thank God for the truth of His Word – that He WILL come back, that He WILL defeat Satan, that He WILL make all things new, and that He WILL live among us for all eternity. Celebrate God's deliverance!



The Book of Esther

The book of Esther is a powerful drama full of conspiracy and courage. It is one book of the Bible where God's name is not mentioned; however, His presence is strongly evident. This story is incredibly important for the church today, as we, like Esther, must step out in courage to accomplish the things God calls us to do.

Esther 4:14 (ESV)

"For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"



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