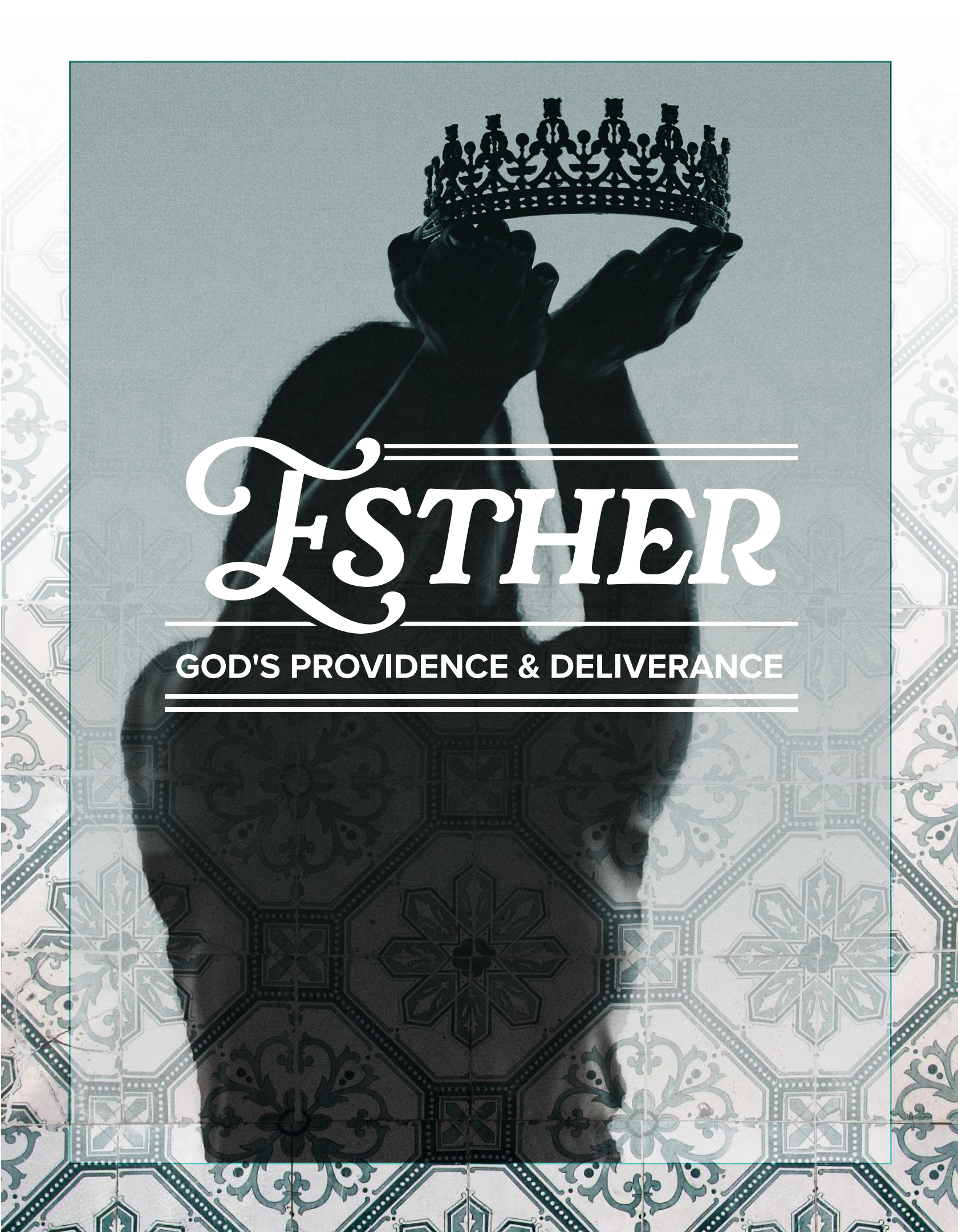

ESTHER

GOD'S PROVIDENCE & DELIVERANCE

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PREFACE

The good news of Jesus Christ's life, death, resurrection, and exaltation is at the heart of LifeConnection Church. We seek to root who we are and all that we do in this message because we are convinced that all of life and mission takes place in the context of gospel-centered community.

In order to truly keep the gospel at the center of our community, we must commit ourselves both to prayer and the diligent study of the Scriptures. In Luke 24:44, Jesus, speaking to his disciples, says: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Jesus Christ is the focal point of all the Scriptures and the hero of every story. From beginning to end, from Old Testament to New Testament, Jesus is at the center of the Bible's grand story. This semester we're going to spend eleven weeks together in the book of Esther to help each other apply the truths of God's word to our daily lives.

This study is designed to help you grow in biblical literacy by teaching you inductive Bible study skills. As you grow in these skills, you'll be better equipped to interpret and apply any biblical passage you choose to study on your own. Each step of the inductive method asks a crucial question.

Step 1: Observation - What Does the Passage Say?

Before we can understand the meaning of a particular passage or even how to apply it to our lives, we must first discover what it is saying. If we do not first understand what a passage is saying, it will be much more difficult to rightly understand its meaning. If we have misunderstood a passage's meaning, then we will run the risk of wrongly applying the Scriptures to our lives. This can be harmful both to ourselves and to others. Every day, your workbook will contain questions that help you make observations and ask good questions of the text. We will note the identity of the author and audience, contrasting words and ideas, the repetition of words and phrases, geographical locations, promises, commands, etc.

Step 2: Interpretation - What Does the Passage Mean?

Once we have observed what a passage is saying, we are in the position to better grasp a passage's meaning or the big idea the author wishes to express. We must remember that context determines meaning. For example, the word trunk can have many meanings depending on how it's used in context. We could speak of the trunk of a tree, the trunk of a car, or the trunk of an elephant. The meaning of trunk will depend on how it's used in context. Each week, your workbook will also contain questions intended to help you discover and comprehend the author's intended meaning located in the text. You'll be encouraged to consider how a passage's paragraphs and surrounding chapters fit together as a coherent whole. We want to learn how to draw out the meaning of the text (exegesis) rather than read into the text a meaning that the author never intended (eisegesis).

Application: How Should I Apply the Passage to My Life?

Bible study should not be a purely academic exercise. It's not merely for our information, but also for our transformation. Once we have a good grasp on the meaning of a passage, we will be in a better position to begin applying it to our hearts and lives. Each day, your workbook will contain at least one application question. Application questions help us think about how the Scriptures should change the way we think about God and ourselves. They help us consider how our relationships with others should change and grow. They help us identify specific ways the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through the Scriptures and leading us to follow Jesus, to be changed by Jesus, and to live for Jesus' mission.

How To Use This Book

This workbook is designed to be used in a specific way. The weekly homework will help you begin the inductive study process. We will use the tools listed on the next page to help develop these study skills. At the end of each week's homework, you will be challenged to meditate on what you have learned about God in that week's portion of the text. To help you with this, a list of God's attributes can be found the back of the workbook in Appendix A. Once you've completed the homework, you will meet every week with your small group for discussion. Your small group leader will come prepared with a few questions from the homework to process together. After your small group discussion, everyone will come back together for the teaching time.

Bible Literacy Tools

Observation

WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE SAY?

- Read the passage repetitively.
- Read the passage in multiple translations.
- Make good observations about the author, the audience, the characters, repeated words and phrases, similes and metaphors, word pictures, analogies, comparisons and contrasts, and conjunctions.
- Ask good questions—who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- Write a main idea in the margin next to the section it describes.
- Look for what the passage teaches about God—Father, Son, and Spirit.

Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE MEAN?

- Consider how the passage fits in the immediate context and the overall context of the book. Read the chapters that come before and after.
- Keep in mind the literary, historical, and cultural context.
- Make connections to other parts of the book or other parts of the Bible (cross-references).
- Paraphrase or summarize the big idea of the passage.

Application

HOW SHOULD I APPLY THE PASSAGE TO MY LIFE?

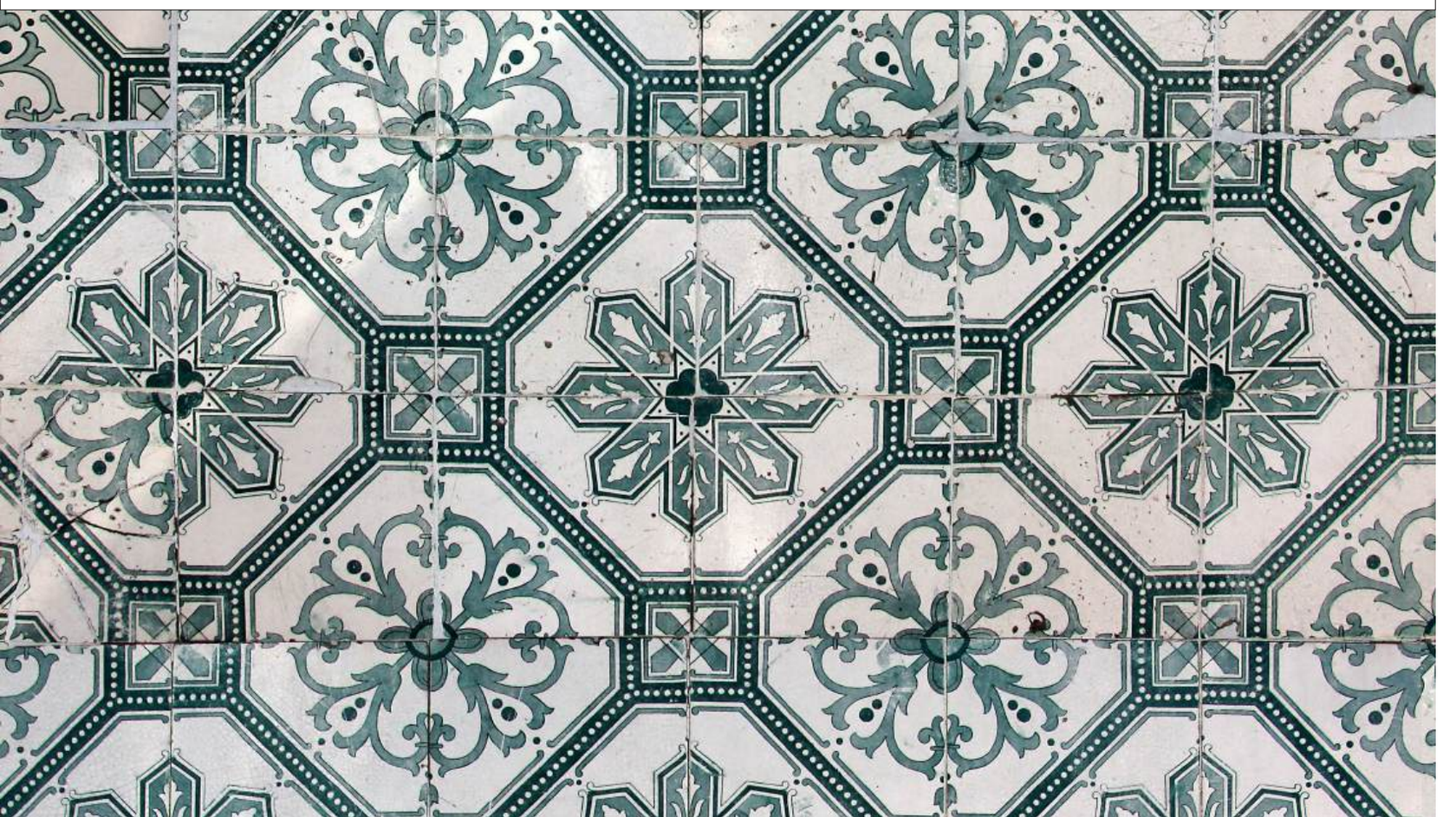
- Consider how the passage's teaching about God should change the way you think, speak, or act.
- Make meaningful connections to your own life:
- Is there a sin to confess?
- Is there an attitude to change or a motive to examine?
- Is there an error to confront or avoid?
- Is there cause for gratitude or praise to God?
- Is there a promise or truth to believe?
- Is there a command to obey or an example to imitate?

Notes

WEEK 1

Introduction

The Old Testament book of Esther is set in the Persian Empire during the reign of King Ahasuerus. It tells the story of Esther, a Jewish orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai, who rises to become queen through a series of providential events. As intrigue, power struggles, and personal courage intertwine, Esther faces a pivotal decision that could determine the fate of her people, the Jews, as they face the threat of annihilation. Though God is not explicitly mentioned in this book, the themes of God's providence and his covenant relationship with Israel are prominent in the narrative. The book of Esther makes a significant contribution to the larger story of Scripture concerning God's covenant promises made to Abraham and his descendents; to be his people, living in his place, under God's rule and blessing for the sake of all the nations.



DAYS 1-5 PRAY AND READ ESTHER 1-10

1. Who wrote the book of Esther?

2. To whom was it written?

3. When was it written?

4. Why was it written?

5. What is the literary genre?

6. What are the central themes in Esther?

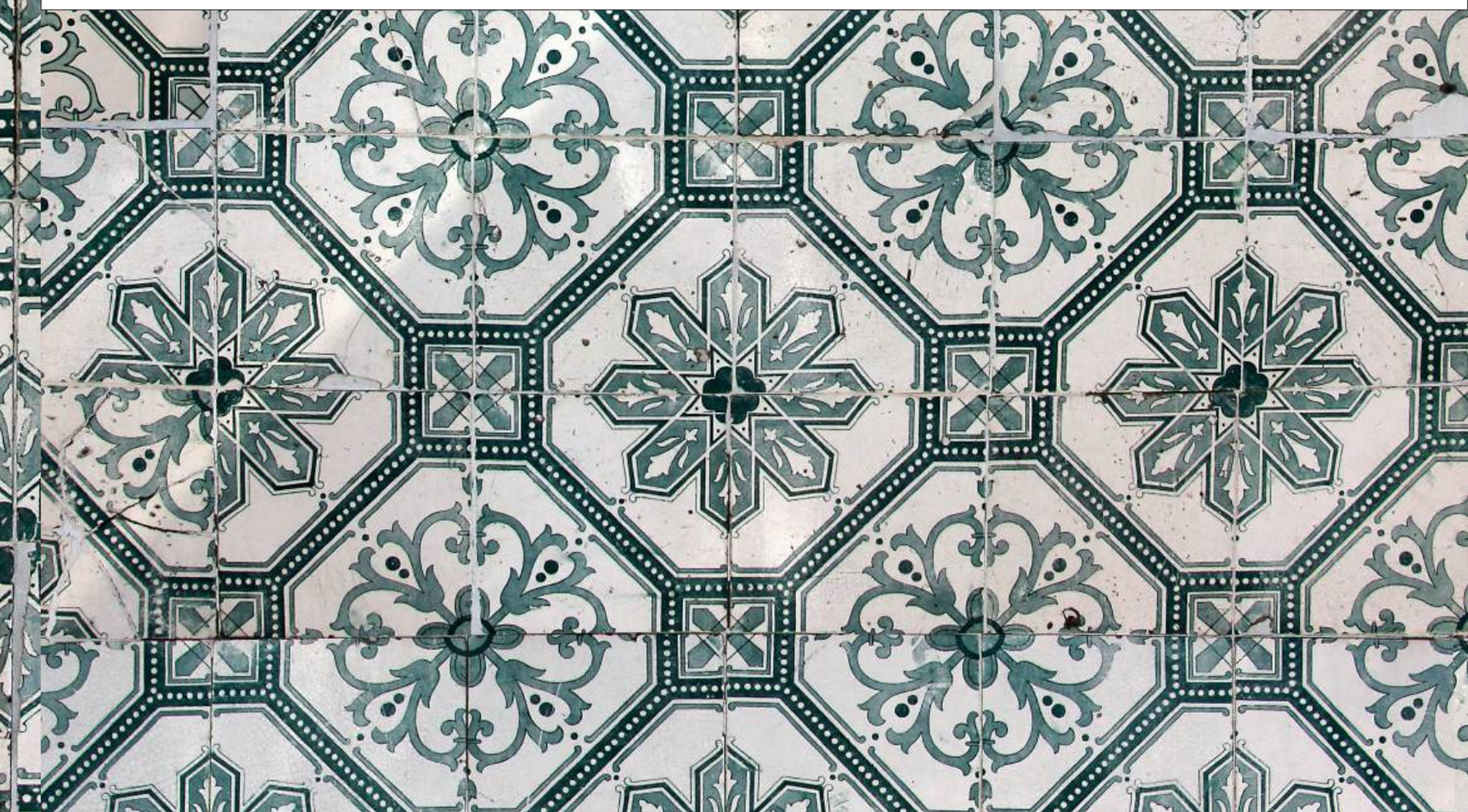
Notes

WEEK 2

The King's Great Banquet

ESTHER 1:1-22

In this passage, King Ahasuerus hosts a lavish banquet in his capital city of Susa, inviting all the nobles, officials, and military leaders of his vast empire. The banquet, spanning about six months, culminates in a seven-day feast for the residents of Susa, showcasing the wealth and opulence of the empire. On the last day, the king commands Queen Vashti to appear before the guests wearing her royal crown, but she defies the king's command, sparking a crisis that sets the stage for the events to follow in the rest of the story.



DAY 1: Pray and Read Esther 1:1-22

1. Summarize each section of the text in one or two sentences.

1:1-4

1:5-9

1:10-15

1:16-22

2. In your copy of the text, make a few important observations of the text, i.e., who, what, where, when, why.
   - Underline each character introduced in chapter 1. (Who?)
   - Circle each location mentioned in chapter 1. (Where?)
   - Put a box around each time stamp given in chapter 1. (When?)
   - Use a highlighter to identify the major events happening in chapter 1. (What?)

DAY 2: Pray and Read Esther 1:1-4

1. **READ 2 KINGS 25:8-12.** What happens to God's people in this passage?

   READ EZRA 1:1-4. What happens to God's people in this passage?

2. Given what you learned above, do you think that both Jews and Gentiles were living in the Persian Empire at the time of King Ahasuerus' reign? Why or why not?

3. **REFER TO THE MAP OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE AT THE TIME OF ESTHER IN APPENDIX B.** Note the size of the kingdom, "India to Ethiopia, over 127 provinces." (1:1) Using the key, measure the approximate distance from one end of the empire to the other. Record your answer below.

4. **READ ESTHER 1:1-2 IN THE NIV (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION).** Given the phrasing here, which statement seems true regarding the authorship of Esther? Circle the true statement below.

   - The author was writing Esther in real time as events were unfolding.
   - The author wrote Esther long after Ahasuerus was king.

5. What sorts of things do you imagine the king did to highlight his "royal glory"? Imagine yourself in the citadel and engage all your senses–what do you hear, what do you smell, what do you taste, what do you see, what do you feel? (1:4)

APPLY: In what ways are you tempted to point toward your own glory?

Is there a particular motivation or circumstance that leads you to do that? In identifying the triggers we can better fight the temptation for self-glorification.

DAY 3: Pray and Read Esther 1:5-9

1. Refer back to 1:3, who is the feast given for?

   According to 1:5, who is the feast given for now?

2. Look up a synonym for *feast* and write it below.

3. The furnishings of the feast are described in detail. What colors and materials are mentioned? (1:6)

   NOW READ EXODUS 25:1-9. What similarities do you see compared to the furnishings listed in 1:6?

4. Fill in the blanks below in the two different translations of Esther 1:7-8 and then answer the question that follows.

   Drinks were served in _____ vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the _____ wine was _____ according to the _____ of the king. And drinking was according to this edict: "_____ ____ ____ _____." For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do ____ _____ _____ _____. (Esther 1:7-8, ESV)

   Wine was served in goblets of _____, each one different from the other, and the _____ wine was _____, in keeping with the king's _____. By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink ____ ____ _____, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man _____ _____ _____. (Esther 1:7-8, NIV)

   According to these verses, describe the overall atmosphere of this event. How are the attendees likely feeling by this time?

5. Who gives a party and for whom is the party given? (1:9)

Do you think this party is in conjunction with King Ahasuerus' party or is it separate? Explain your answer.

APPLY: King Ahasuerus goes to a lot of effort and spares no expense to throw a feast celebrating himself and his reign. All the people in attendance from "great to small" were likely impressed by him and all he had to offer. Are you impressed by displays of great wealth and power? Is that more influential for you than strong character and conviction?

If so, describe a time when you were willing to follow someone who seemed to have it all, but lacked what really mattered (i.e., a political figure, a boss, a friend, a former boyfriend/girlfriend, a church leader).

DAY 4: Pray and Read Esther 1:10-15

1. What is the timestamp given here? (1:10)

   - How long was the feast supposed to last in total? (1:5)

   - Which phrase used in verse 10 describes the king's physical condition?

   - Given his condition, do you suppose he ought to be making decisions and/or giving commandments? Why or why not?

2. What does the king command? (1:10-11)

   How many men are required to execute the king's commandment?

3. How does Queen Vashti respond? (1:12)

   - Why do you think she responds this way? Put yourself in her shoes.

   - How does this make King Ahasuerus feel?

   - Why do you think he feels this way? Put yourself in his shoes.

4. Fill in the table below to learn more about the king's eunuchs and wise men.

	EUNUCHS (1:10-11)	WISE MEN (1:13-15)
Who leads over them?		
How many of them are there?		
What are their names?		
What are their responsibilities?		

- The eunuchs were to King Ahesuerus like _____ is to the President of the United States now.
- The wise men were to King Ahseuerus like _____ is to the President of the United States now.

5. What question is asked of the wise men? (1:15)

What do you think is the root problem they are wanting to address regarding Queen Vashti's behavior?

APPLY: Queen Vashti's refusal to be paraded in front of the king and his party-goers seems like a relatively minor event in the sum of history. Yet, her refusal to obey the king triggered a chain of events that impacted a great number of people. Like Vashti, we too make decisions with far-reaching consequences. Even so, the Lord is sovereign over all our decisions.

Can you identify a poor decision you made this week that negatively impacted others? Take a moment to confess that sin to the Lord (and anyone you harmed), repent from the heart, and ask the Lord to work in spite of it for his glory and others' good.

DAY 5: Pray and Read Esther 1:16-22

1. **READ 1:16-18 IN THE MESSAGE TRANSLATION.** What is the greatest concern for the king and his wise men?

2. Using a thesaurus, look up a synonym for the word *contempt*. In your copy of the text, write that synonym in place of the word *contempt* to more fully understand the verses. (1:17-18)

3. In your own words, summarize the royal order given. (1:19-20)

   What do you notice about the name used for the king's wife here compared to other places in Esther 1? Why do you think this change happens?

4. How does the royal order get communicated throughout the kingdom? (1:22)

   Why do you think it requires multiple scripts and languages? (1:22) To help with your answer, consult your Day 2 homework for a reminder on the historical events leading up to King Ahasuerus' reign and the size/scope of his kingdom.

5. There are two commandments/decrees given by King Ahasuerus in Chapter 1. Write them in the spaces below.

   _____ (1:10-11)

   _____ (1:19)

   The second commandment/decree is given in response to Queen Vashti's refusal of the first commandment. Do you think the second decree carries a proportionate response to Vashti's refusal? Why or why not?

APPLY: The decree made throughout the kingdom is for all women to give honor to their husbands and for every man to be master in his household. Read Ephesians 5:22-33 to see the Christian description of marriage.

- Now compare and contrast what we see from the king and queen versus the call on Christian marriage in Ephesians 5.

- If you are married, which one does your marriage most closely resemble and why?

Wrap Up

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Esther shown you more clearly? (*For help answering this question each week, see the list of attributes in Appendix A.*)

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____

shows me that I am _____ .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

Notes

WEEK 3

Esther Becomes Queen

ESTHER 2:1-23

Esther 2 recounts how King Ahasuerus, still reeling from Queen Vashti's dismissal, seeks a replacement through a beauty contest among the virgins of his empire. Esther, a Jewish orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai, is chosen for her extraordinary beauty, becoming queen of Persia. Meanwhile, Mordecai's vigilance and loyalty are revealed when he uncovers and thwarts a conspiracy against the king, a pivotal act that sets the stage for his future involvement in protecting the Jewish people from impending danger.

DAY 1: Pray and Read Esther 2:1-23

1. Summarize each section below in a few sentences.

2:1-4

2:5-9

2:10-14

2:15-23

2. In your copy of the text, make a few important observations of the text, i.e., who, what, where, when, why.

- Underline each character introduced in chapter 2. (Who?)
- Circle each location mentioned in chapter 2. (Where?)
- Put a box around each time stamp given in chapter 2. (When?)
- Use a highlighter to notate the major events happening in chapter 2. (What?)

DAY 2: Pray and Read Esther 2:1-4

1. **READ PROVERBS 14:17 AND 29.** Now consider Esther 2:1. What do these verses together communicate about the character and leadership of King Ahasuerus?

2. **REFER BACK TO ESTHER 1:13-21.** Who gives advice to the king? How does the king respond?

   - Now, in Esther 2:1-4, who gives advice to the king? How does the king respond?
   - What do these verses communicate about the character and leadership of King Ahasuerus?
   - What do you think the author of Esther is trying to show us about this king?

3. What is the problem the king needs to fix? How do the young men propose he fixes his problem? (2:2-4)

   - Who is to be appointed?
   - What are they to do?
   - What agency or choice do you think the young virgins had in this procedure?

4. How do you feel about the solution that is presented?

How do you think the people in the kingdom would have felt about this solution? (Consider the size of the empire and what many young virgins being taken into the king's harem would entail as well as what happened to the last queen in Ahasuerus's court.)

5. What is King Ahasuerus' primary motivation for his decision-making?

Who is affected by the choices he made in this section?

APPLY: READ JAMES 1:14-15. So far in the book of Esther, we have seen King Ahasuerus make devastating, sinful choices based on his desires. The man who is supposed to be ruling a nation is being ruled by his selfish pursuit of pleasure and his reckless assent to foolish council.

- In what areas of your life are you allowing the desire for pleasure to lure and entice you?

- How are you actively fighting against the foolish counselors of our modern world who would lead you astray from walking in integrity?

- Make a plan this week to combat sin by identifying your fleshly desires and asking God to empower you to resist temptation.

DAY 3: Pray and Read Esther 2:5-9

1. List everything the text says about Mordecai. (2:5-7)

Is there anything the text doesn't tell us that you wish it did? What questions do you have about Mordecai that are left unanswered?

2. **READ 1 SAMUEL 9:1-2.** What similarities do you see between these verses and Esther 2:5?

What do you think the author of Esther is trying to show us? (Hint: in biblical genealogies the phrase "the son of" often means "the descendant of," rather than the direct biological son. Keep this family connection in mind throughout the rest of the book of Esther.)

3. Where did Mordecai live? Where was his family originally from? What would his status have been in the land that he was living? (2:5-6)

Why were Mordecai and the Jews in Susa to begin with? See Deuteronomy 28:15-36 to help with your answer.

4. List everything the text says about Esther. (2:7)

Is there anything the text doesn't tell us that you wish it did? What questions do you have about Esther that are left unanswered?

5. **READ GENESIS 39:1-6.** Compare what you read about Joseph in Genesis to what we read about Esther in 2:8-9. Why do you think Joseph and Esther both found favor with the authorities?

APPLY: God told his chosen people in Deuteronomy 28 the blessings they would receive through obedience to his commands and the curses they would receive if they did not obey. Through the course of history, God's people chose to disobey his commands and suffered the consequence of exile to foreign lands. If God's people had been obedient, Mordecai and Esther would not have been in Susa to begin with.

We may think that the consequences of our sin only affect us individually, but as we see in this text, sin has lasting effects on the whole community. How have you seen your sin negatively affect the people around you?

Review your plan from yesterday for combating sin in your life. Meditate on the blessings that come from obedience to God and consider the negative effects your sin has on others. Ask God to help you continue to fight against sin.

DAY 4: Pray and Read Esther 2:10-14

1. Why do you think Mordecai told Esther to keep her Jewish heritage a secret? What do you think she would have needed to do to protect her secret? (2:10)

2. What does Mordecai do in 2:11? Why do you think he does this?

3. Describe what you think life was like for the women in the king's harem. (2:12-14)
   - What sights, smells, sounds, etc., do you think the young women experienced?
   - What feelings do you think they would have felt?
   - How might Esther's experience have differed from other young women there?

4. **READ ABOUT THE BABYLONIAN EXILE IN DANIEL 1:1-21.** How do Daniel's behavior and choices compare to Esther's?

   How does the story of Daniel influence the way you think about Esther in King Ahasuerus's court? (2:7-14)

5. What happened to the young women after they spent the night with King Ahasuerus? What was their fate if the king did not call for them again? (2:14)

APPLY: In contrast to Daniel and his friends, we can infer from the text that Esther assimilated to the Persian culture in which she lived. While the text is silent on exactly what Esther did or did not do during her 12 months of preparation to see the king, we know that she was at least able to keep her Jewish heritage a secret.

Romans 12:1-2 instructs us not to "be conformed to the pattern of this world." In what ways have you allowed culture to shape your thoughts, beliefs, and patterns of behavior?

In what ways do you need to be "transformed by the renewal of your mind?"

At the beginning of this week you made a plan to combat sin in your life. Take some time today to read and meditate on Romans 12:1-2 and ask God to help you discern "what is good and acceptable and perfect."

DAY 5: Pray and Read Esther 2:15-23

1. What does Esther 2:15 tell us about Esther?

   - Why do you think the author mentions her family line again?

   - How do the people around Esther feel about her?

2. **READ ESTHER 1:3.** How much time has passed since the feast at the beginning of the story?

3. **READ ESTHER 2:17 IN A FEW DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS (NIV, NLT, AND THE MESSAGE).** What different words are used to describe the king's feelings toward Esther?

   - How do these different words help you understand how the king felt?

   - What four things did the king do because of his love for Esther? (2:17-18)

     1.

     2.

     3.

     4.

4. **READ EZRA 9:10-14 AND EZRA 10:10-11.** What was God's command for Jews intermarrying with Gentiles?

How did Esther's marriage to King Ahasuerus line up with this command? What is your reaction to this information?

5. What does Mordecai find out about at the city gates? What does he do with the information he learns? (2:20-22)

   - What happened to the men who were plotting against the king?

   - Why do you think the author tells us the information was recorded in the book of the chronicles? (2:23)

APPLY: We have spent a lot of time this week considering our own struggle with sin. As you considered your fight against sin in your own life, it is likely that you had successes and failures. It is also possible that you felt discouraged and defeated at times.

Today, consider the fact that Esther was a sinner. Throughout the course of this passage she made many choices (or was forced into impossible circumstances) that caused her to live in a way that was not in keeping with God's commands. And yet, time and again she finds favor in the sight of the people around her. We know that God will use her in the rest of the story.

Take heart! Our perfect God works his perfect will through imperfect people. We should never stop our fight against sin, but we can take comfort in the assurance that "for those who love God all things work together for good…" (Romans 8:28)

Take some time to thank God for the work that he has done in your life. Remember the good things he has done in and through you. Praise him for his perfect work through imperfect people.

Wrap Up

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Esther shown you more clearly? (*For help answering this question each week, see the list of attributes in Appendix A.*)

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____

shows me that I am _____ .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

Notes

WEEK 4

Haman's Sinister Plot

ESTHER 3:1-15

In this week's passage, King Ahasuerus promotes Haman to a high position and commands all to bow to him. Mordecai, Esther's cousin, refuses to bow, angering Haman. In response, he plots to annihilate all Jews in the kingdom. A decree is issued, setting the stage for Esther's courageous intervention to save her people.

DAY 1: Pray and Read Esther 3:1-15

1. Summarize each section below in a few sentences.

   3:1-2

   3:3-6

   3:7-11

   3:12-15

2. Chronology is important in Esther. Trace the timeline of events so far in the story.

   - **READ ESTHER 1:3.** In what year of Ahasuerus' reign was Vashti deposed?
   - **READ ESTHER 2:16.** In what year of Ahasuerus' reign did Esther become queen?
   - **READ ESTHER 3:7.** In what year of Ahasuerus' reign was the lot cast to determine the opportune time to destroy the Jews?
   - Approximately how much time has passed between Esther 1:3 and Esther 3:7?

3. Chapter 3 begins with the phrase, "After these things." (3:1) What "things" is the narrator referring to? Summarize below.

DAY 2: Pray and Read Esther 3:1-2

1. What are the two ways Haman is described? (3:1)

    1.

    2.

2. Haman's description evokes the memory of an age-old conflict. To learn about this conflict, read and summarize the passages in the table below. (3:1)

PASSAGE	SUMMARY
Exodus 17:8-16	
Deuteronomy 25:17-19	
1 Samuel 15	

3. Having read and summarized the passages in the table, who does Haman trace his lineage to?

    - Who does Mordecai trace his lineage to? (Look back to 2:5.)

    - How does this insight help us better understand the conflict in the book of Esther?

4. King Ahasuerus promoted and advanced Haman above all his officials. (3:1-2)

   - What was the king's command?

   - How did the king's servants respond to Haman?

   - How did Mordecai respond?

5. Do you think Mordecai's response to Haman was righteous–why or why not?

APPLY: Given Mordecai's earlier service to the king in thwarting the assassination plot, (2:21-23) it would be reasonable to expect him, not Haman, to be rewarded and promoted.

Place yourself in the story. Imagine Mordecai comes to you and asks: "How can I maintain trust in God's goodness and justice when the wicked prosper while the righteous are overlooked?"

What biblical truth(s) would you share with him? Support your response with relevant verse references.

DAY 3: Pray and Read Esther 3:3-6

1. What did the king's servants ask Mordecai? (3:3)

2. Why did the king's servants eventually report Mordecai's transgression to Haman? (3:4)

3. **READ ESTHER 3:4 IN THE NIV TRANSLATION.** How does this translation of the verse clarify what the king's servants were wondering?

4. Why were the king's servants wondering whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated? Fill in the blanks below to answer.

   And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them,

   they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand,

   for he had told them that _____ _____ _____ _____. (Esther 3:4)

5. How did Haman respond when Mordecai refused to bow down and pay homage to him? (3:5)

   Why do you think Mordecai's behavior provoked such strong emotion in Haman?

6. What did Haman seek to do next? (3:6)

APPLY: Consider the ways in which Mordecai's refusal to bow down and pay homage to Haman had a ripple effect on others and write a brief reflection below.

Now reflect on some of the important decisions you have recently made. How are these decisions going to impact your relationships?

- Your communion with the Lord
- Your spouse (if you are married)
- Your children (if you have children)
- Your church family
- Your witness to your friends and family outside the faith
- Other?

DAY 4: Pray and Read Esther 3:7-11

1. What activity is taking place in this section? (3:7) Fill in the blanks to answer.

   they cast _____ (that is, they cast _____) before Haman day after

   day; and they cast it month after month... (Esther 3:7)

   Why do you think they are performing this activity? (Refer back to verse six in the previous section for context.)

2. **READ PROVERBS 16:33.** What important insight does this Proverb provide?

3. **READ ESTHER 3:7 IN THE NIV TRANSLATION.** In what year and month was the lot cast in the presence of Haman?

   In what month was it determined that the Jews would be destroyed?

4. In what three ways does Haman describe the Jews to convince King Ahasuerus not to tolerate them? (3:8)
   1.
   2.
   3.

5. What does Haman say he will do if the king decrees the Jews' destruction? (3:9)

6. How does the king respond? (3:10-11)

APPLY: Haman's opposition to Mordecai and the Jewish people reflects a truth that permeates all the Scriptures–God and God's people will be opposed in this fallen world. How do the following Scriptures instruct us to respond when we are opposed for our commitment to Christ? To answer the question, circle the command(s) in each of the Scriptures below.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (Matthew 5:43-44)

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." (Romans 12:19-20)

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Peter 4:19)

DAY 5: Pray and Read Esther 3:12-15

1. On what date were the king's scribes summoned? (3:12)

2. What was written on this date? (3:12)

   - By whose authority was it written?
   - To whom was it written?
   - In whose name was it written?
   - With what was it sealed?

3. Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces. What four instructions were given? (3:13)
   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.

4. On what date was all this to take place? (3:13)

5. **READ LEVITICUS 23:5.** What is significant about this date?

   What question do you think the Jews were asking God when they considered the historical significance of this date?

6. Put yourself in the shoes of those Jews living throughout the various provinces where copies of the king's decree were issued and proclaimed. How would you be feeling? (3:14-15)

APPLY: Review the list of things the Lord hates from Proverbs 6:16-19. It is obvious which of these Haman struggled with, but which of these sins do you need the Spirit's help to fight? Underline them.

> *There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. (Proverbs 6:16-19)*

1 John 1:9 tells us that we will receive God's forgiveness when we are willing to confess. Confess and seek God's help in fighting these sinful and destructive tendencies. Consider asking a godly person in your small group to hold you accountable in this area. Praise God that he is greater than our sin, and willing to forgive those who come to him in humility and repentance!

Wrap Up

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Esther shown you more clearly? (*For help answering this question each week, see the list of attributes in Appendix A.*)

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____

shows me that I am _____ .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

Notes

WEEK 5

If I Perish, I Perish

ESTHER 4:1-5:14

This week's passage presents a moment of crisis and courage as Mordecai and all the Jewish people in Susa mourn when they learn of Haman's decree to exterminate them. Mordecai sends urgent messages to Queen Esther, pleading with her to intercede with King Ahasuerus. Though she's initially hesitant due to court protocol, Esther eventually resolves to risk her life by approaching the king unsummoned. After fasting and seeking divine guidance, Esther courageously enters the king's presence leading to a series of events that will profoundly alter the course of history for her people.

DAY 1: Pray and Read Esther 4:1-5:14

1. Summarize each section below in a few sentences.

   4:1-8

   4:9-17

   5:1-8

   5:9-14

2. Chapter 4 begins by explaining that Mordecai learned "all that had been done." (4:1) Refresh your memory. Skim the previous chapter and describe all that had been done in 3-5 sentences.

3. In your copy of the text, underline every instance of the following words and phrases in chapters 4-5.

   - Sackcloth/sackcloth and ashes
   - Cry/cried out
   - Mourning
   - Fasting
   - Weeping
   - Lamenting
   - Distressed
   - Joyful/glad of heart
   - Wrath

   Having underlined these words and phrases, how would you describe the emotional tone of these chapters?

DAY 2: Pray and Read Esther 4:1-8

1. When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, what five things did he do? (4:1-2)
    1.
    2.
    3.
    4.
    5.

2. Why do biblical characters sometimes tear their clothes and put on sackcloth[1] and ashes? Answer the question by reading the passages and completing the table below.

PASSAGE	REASON FOR TEARING CLOTHES AND PUTTING ON SACKCLOTH AND ASHES
Genesis 37:26-35	
Numbers 14:1-9	
2 Samuel 3:31-32	
Ezra 9:1-5	

3. How were the Jews affected in every province once the king's command and decree reached them? (4:3)

1 Sackcloth is a coarse garment usually made from goat or camel hair.

4. There is a literary connection between Esther 4:3, 14 and Joel 2:12. Compare these texts below and highlight the phrases common to both.

JOEL 2:12-14	ESTHER 4:3, 14
12 "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; **13**and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. **14** Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?	**3** And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. **14** 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?"

Why do you think the author of Esther wants us to recall God's words in Joel 2 as we reflect on the events of Esther 4?

5. Mordecai's communication with Esther occurs in three stages. Summarize each one below.

- First stage (vv. 4-5):

- Second stage (vv. 6-8):

- Third stage (look ahead to vv. 9-17):

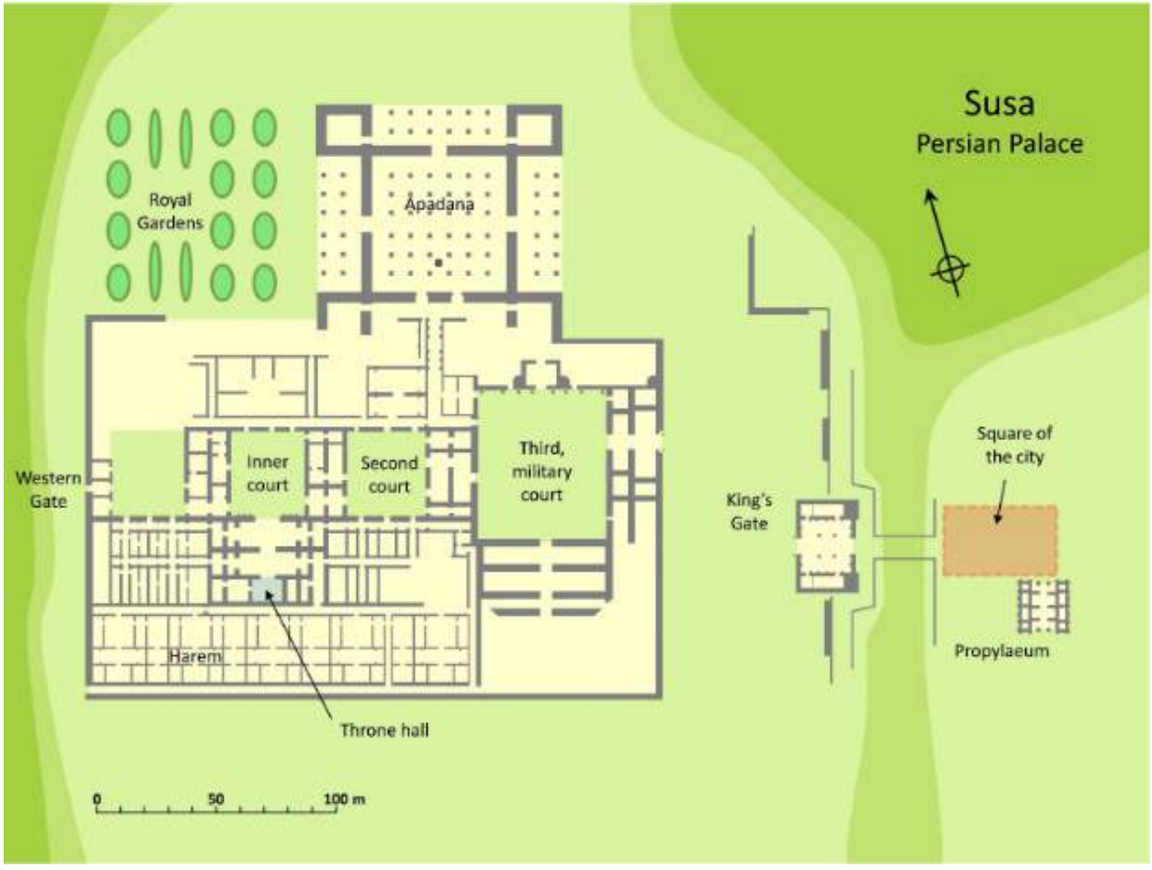
APPLY: As you reflect on the grief and mourning expressed by Mordecai and the Jewish community, share an experience of grief from your own life (past or present). What happened and how did you bring your grief to Christ and his people for hope and comfort during that time?

DAY 3: Pray and Read Esther 4:9-17

1. Who is Hathach? Write down everything you have learned about him so far. (4:5-6, 9-10)

2. What is a eunuch? Read the online article at *gotquestions.org/eunuch-eunuchs.html* and write your answer below.

3. Where did Hathach meet Mordecai? (4:6) Find the location in the image below and circle it.



What activities take place in this location (or in front of the King's Gate) throughout the story of Esther? (2:19, 21; 3:2-3; 4:2, 6-8; 5:9, 13; 6:10-12)

4. Mordecai urges Esther to go to the king, beg his favor, and plead with him on behalf of her people. Why is Esther reluctant to do what Mordecai commands? (4:10-11)

What is the one exception to the law mentioned by Esther? (4:11)

5. How does Mordecai counter Esther's reluctant response? (4:13-14)

Some commentators have wondered if Mordecai's response contains a veiled threat. In the table below, consider some of the interpretive possibilities and then explain what you think Mordecai means when he says: "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time...you and your father's house will perish." (4:13-14)

INTERPRETATION #1	INTERPRETATION #2	YOUR INTERPRETATION
Mordecai is forcing Esther to plead with the king by threatening to reveal her Jewish identity, bringing her under the sentence of Haman's decree.	Mordecai is forcing Esther to plead with the king by warning her of God's judgment if she remains silent and fails to perceive the position she has been placed in by God's providence.	

6. How does Esther ultimately respond to Mordecai? (4:15-17)

Why do you think Esther commands Mordecai to hold a fast on her behalf before approaching the king; what purpose does it serve?

APPLY: Esther decides to risk her life, partly because Mordecai's plea convinces her that God may have placed her as Queen of Persia to serve as his instrument of deliverance. Think about your current circumstances and network of relationships. In what ways do you think God may have providentially placed you in a position of influence?

- In your immediate family ➔
- In your church family ➔
- In your extended family ➔
- In your neighborhood ➔
- In the wider community (recreation, schools, kids activities, civic organizations, etc.) ➔
- In your workplace ➔
- What next step is the Lord leading you to take?

DAY 4: Pray and Read Esther 5:1-8

1. What is the significance of the time stamp in verse 1? (5:1) Look back to Esther 4:16 to help with your response.

2. Where is Esther standing? (5:1)

   Why is this location significant? Look back to Esther 4:11 to help with your response.

3. What is Esther wearing? (5:1)

   - What happened when "the king saw Queen Esther"? (5:2-3)

   - The phrase "won his favor" echoes Esther 2:9. Look back to that verse and compare these two episodes. What do they have in common?

4. For the first time in the narrative, Esther is called "Queen Esther." (5:3) Why do you think that is?

5. How does Esther respond to the king's invitation to make her request? (5:4)

- What does the king do in response? (5:5)

- While "they were drinking wine," the king asks again what Esther wants him to do for her. (5:6-7) What else has happened in the narrative while the king was drinking wine? Look back to Esther 1:10-12 and 3:15 to help with your answer.

6. How does Esther respond to the king's second invitation to make her request? (5:8)

What is surprising about Esther's response to the king's second invitation?

APPLY: Biblical scholar, Karen Jobes, says: "Christians and Jews alike would probably be reluctant to see in the ruthless and pagan king Xerxes a type[2] of God himself. However, it is not necessary to cast aspersion on God's character in order to see some picture of grace portrayed in this scene of Esther's story."[3] With this in mind, how does the king's interaction with Esther point beyond itself to the truth of the gospel? (5:1-3) Explain your response by pointing to as many details from the text as you can.

2 A type is a person, thing, or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows a person, thing, or event in the New Testament.

3 Karen H. Jobes, *Esther* (The NIV Application Commentary) (Zondervan Academic, 1999), 147.

DAY 5: Pray and Read Esther 5:9-14

1. In this section, the narrative shifts back to the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. (5:9-10) What similarities stand out when you look back to Esther 3:2, 5-6a and compare it with Esther 5:9-10?

2. Who did Haman bring to himself? (5:10)

   What four things did he recount to them? (5:11-12)

   1.

   2.

   3.

   4.

   READ THE VERSES BELOW. How does Haman illustrate the proverbial fool? Write your response in the white space to the right of the verse references.

   - Proverbs 13:16

   - Proverbs 16:18

   - Proverbs 16:25

3. After recounting all these things, why does Haman say: "Yet all this is worth nothing to me"? (5:13)

4. How does Haman's wife and all his friends attempt to comfort him? (5:14-15)

Zeresh's counsel to Haman is similar to Jezebel's counsel to King Ahab in 1 Kings 21:1-16. Fill out the table below to compare these stories.

PASSAGE	SUMMARY	SIMILARITIES TO ESTHER 5:11-15?
1 Kings 21:1-16		

5. What is ironic about this scene between Zeresh and Haman when you consider the concerns raised by Memucan earlier in Esther 1:16-22?

APPLY: This portion of Esther 5 subtly portrays Haman as the proverbial fool, serving as Esther's foil.[4] Though no biblical character is put forward as a perfect example, there is an implicit invitation to pursue wisdom (as displayed by Esther) and avoid foolishness (as displayed by Haman). Use James 1:5 below as a prayer guide and ask God to give you wisdom.

> *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (James 1:5)*

4 A foil is a supporting character whose personality and values contrast with those of the main character.

Wrap Up

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Esther shown you more clearly? (*For help answering this question each week, see the list of attributes in Appendix A.*)

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____

shows me that I am _____ .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

Notes

WEEK 6

Honor For Mordecai

ESTHER 6:1-14

In this week's passage, King Ahasuerus is unable to sleep, prompting him to review the royal records. He discovers that Mordecai, who had foiled a plot against him, was never rewarded. Just as Haman arrives to propose hanging Mordecai, the king seeks advice on how to honor someone deserving. Misinterpreting the king's intentions, Haman suggests an elaborate honor, only to be shocked when it's bestowed upon Mordecai instead. This reversal sets the stage for Haman's eventual downfall and underscores the theme of divine providence in protecting the Jewish people.

DAY 1: Pray and Read Esther 6:1-14

1. Summarize each section below in a few sentences.

   6:1-3

   6:4-6

   6:7-11

   6:12-14

2. Make a list of each character presented in Esther 6.

3. This chapter contains a series of so-called coincidences. Take note of each one you can identify.

DAY 2: Pray and Read Esther 6:1-3

1. Briefly summarize the events that took place leading up to the night referred to in 6:1a. See 5:1-14.

2. Esther 6:1 mentions that "the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles" was brought and read to the king. What is this book? Go to ***gotquestions.org/book-of-the-annals-of-the-kings-of-Israel.html*** to help with your answer.

3. What did the king discover in the book of memorable deeds? Fill in the blanks to find out.

   And it was found written how _____ had told about _____

   and _____, two of the king's _____, who guarded the threshold,

   and who had sought to _____ _____ on king Ahasuerus. (Esther 6:2)

4. How many years had passed since the event referenced in 6:2? See Esther 2:16 and 3:7 to help with your answer.

5. Esther 6:3 mentions that Mordecai was not rewarded for uncovering the plot against the king's life. Yet, Mordecai continued to faithfully serve the king well after the event. What insight does this give you into Mordecai's character?

`

APPLY: In these verses, we saw how the king eventually discovered that Mordecai's good deed had gone unrewarded. However, this did not stop Mordecai from faithfully serving the king beforehand. Describe a time in your life when your good deed went unnoticed. How did this make you feel?

How does Colossians 3:23-24 affect the way you can think about unnoticed good deeds?

DAY 3: Pray and Read Esther 6:4-6

1. Why was Haman heading to the king's court? Fill in the blanks to find out.

   Now Haman had just entered the _____ _____ of the king's _____ to speak to the king about having _____ hanged on the _____ that he had prepared for him. (Esther 6:4)

2. Why is it ironic that Haman is present in the court at this particular moment? (6:5)

3. Why would Haman think the king wanted to honor him? (6:6)

4. What do Haman's words to himself reflect about his own character? (6:6)

5. What do these verses imply about the disparity between human plans and divine plans?

APPLY: READ PROVERBS 29:23. Haman serves as a stark illustration of the dangerous consequences of pride. In contrast, who in your life exhibits humility? What can you learn from this person's example?

DAY 4: Pray and Read Esther 6:7-11

1. What suggestion did Haman give to the king regarding "what should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" (6:8-9)

2. Why do you think it is that Haman made this very specific request to the king?

3. How does the honor bestowed upon Mordecai serve as a turning point within the story of Esther?

4. What kind of impact would this public honoring of Mordecai have on Mordecai and the Jewish community living in Persia?

APPLY: Reflect on the reversal seen in these verses. Haman, who plotted harm for Mordecai ends up honoring him instead. How can this inspire you to trust in God's justice in the face of opposition?

DAY 5: Pray and Read Esther 6:12-14

1. Where did Mordecai go after his public honoring? Where did Haman go? (6:12)

2. What does it mean that Haman went home with "his head covered"? See the NIV translation to get a better understanding.

3. **RE-READ ESTHER 5:9-14.** How does Haman's demeanor in these verses differ from his demeanor in 6:12-14?

4. In Esther 6:13, Haman's advisors and wife predict his downfall because he has begun to fall before Mordecai, a Jew. What do you think this reveals about their understanding of the Jews and their God?

5. How do you think Haman felt on his way to Queen Esther's feast?

APPLY: In these verses, we have seen how God orchestrated events to bring about justice for Mordecai. How does this bring you encouragement to trust in God's sovereign control over your personal circumstances?

Take some time to now read and pray through Isaiah 12:2. Come before the Lord in prayer, surrendering any worries you might have to him.

Wrap Up

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Esther shown you more clearly? (*For help answering this question each week, see the list of attributes in Appendix A.*)

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____

shows me that I am _____ .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

Notes

WEEK 7

Condemnation For Haman

ESTHER 7:1-10

Esther 7:1-10 marks the climax of the narrative as Queen Esther reveals her Jewish identity and pleads with King Ahasuerus to spare her people from Haman's genocidal decree. In a dramatic turn, the king learns that Haman not only orchestrated the plot, but also built gallows to execute Mordecai. Enraged, Ahasuerus orders Haman to be hanged on the very gallows he prepared, effectively reversing the fate intended for the Jews. This pivotal moment not only secures the survival of the Jewish community but also demonstrates Esther's bravery and the providential unfolding of events to protect God's chosen people.

DAY 1: Pray and Read Esther 7:1-10

1. Summarize each section of the text in a few sentences.

7:1-2

7:3-6

7:7-8

7:9-10

2. How would you characterize the tone of this passage?

3. Write down any questions you had as you read this section.

DAY 2: Pray and Read Esther 7:1-2

1. How much time has passed between the events in Chapter 7 and Esther's first appearance before King Ahasuarus to plead the case of her people? (7:1) Refer to Esther 5:4, 8 to help with your answer.

2. Briefly describe the events that have taken place between Esther's first feast and the second feast.

3. How do you think Haman was feeling as he arrived at this feast? How do you think you would be feeling in his shoes?

4. Compare the king's question in the verses below. Underline the similarities and circle the differences.

Esther 5:3	Esther 5:6	Esther 7:2
And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom."	And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."	And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

Based on the king's words and character throughout the whole story, how confident do you think Esther could be that he would grant her request?

APPLY: Consider everything that happened between Esther's initial approach to the king in chapter 5 and the feast recounted in this chapter. Think about all of the events that "just so happened" to take place in that 48 hour period. God was at work in ways that Esther could not have known or predicted. Are you in a season of waiting? Is there something you have been praying and waiting for?

Write a prayer of trust, remembering God's past faithfulness and acknowledging the goodness of his timing and plans. He is working even when we cannot see it.

DAY 3: Pray and Read Esther 7:3-6

1. In your own words, what did Esther ask the king for? Does anything stand out to you as interesting about her request? (7:3-4)

2. **READ ESTHER 3:13.** What three things are to be done to the Jewish people according to 3:13 and 7:4?
   1.
   2.
   3.

   Why do you think Esther chose the same words in her request of the king as the edict in chapter 3?

3. How did the king respond to Esther's request? What emotions do you think he was feeling based on his response? (7:5)

   - How does Esther respond to the king's question? What words does she use to describe Haman? (7:6)

   - Why do you think Esther waited to reveal the identity of her enemy until the king asked?

4. Whose idea was the destruction of the Hebrew people? Whose authority made the proclamation into law? (Refer to Esther 3:12 to help with your answer.)

5. How does the text describe Haman's response to Esther's declaration? (7:6)

- Why do you think he felt this way?

- How is this different from the way he was feeling in 5:14 and 6:6-9?

APPLY: In Esther 7, the Hebrew queen displays wisdom and shrewdness as she presents her request to the king. She carefully constructs her request to provoke the response she desires from the king. In what specific areas of your life do you need wisdom and discernment right now? Write them down below. Then ask the Lord, once again, to give you the wisdom you need to make Christ-honoring decisions in those areas of your life.

DAY 4: Pray and Read Esther 7:7-8

1. What did the king do in 7:7?

   - Why do you think he did this?

   - What do you imagine was going through his mind? (Refer to Esther 8:8 for some additional context.)

2. What did Haman do in 7:7?

   - Why did he do this?

   - What do you imagine was going through his mind?

3. What did the king see when he returned from the palace garden? What did he assume about what he saw? (7:8)

   Was his interpretation of the situation correct?

4. Fill in the blanks below and then answer the following question.

   As the word left the mouth of the king, _____ _____ _____ _____. (Esther 7:8)

   What do you think this statement means?

5. **READ PSALM 73.** How is Haman like "the wicked" described by the psalmist? What does his story have in common with the story of the wicked?

APPLY: Perhaps you have been envious of irreligious people who seem to have an easy life and wondered if life would be better if we didn't have to follow so many rules. How do Haman's story and Psalm 73 address those thoughts? (Look specifically at Psalm 73:23-28.)

Now write a prayer of confession using Psalm 73 as a guide. Confess the lies you have believed about "the good life" and acknowledge that God's ways lead us to the best life.

DAY 5: Pray and Read Esther 7:9-10

1. Who is Harbona? (7:9)

   - What was his position in the palace?

   - Why do you think he was present at the feast?

2. What information did Harbona present to the king? Why do you think he gave this information?

3. What event was Harbona referencing when he pointed out that Mordecai saved the king? (2:19-23; 6:1-12)

   - What conclusions might the king have drawn about why Haman wanted to kill Mordecai?

   - What was the actual reason Haman wanted to kill Mordecai?

4. What happened to Haman in 7:10?

How does this background information influence or inform your thoughts on Haman's ending?

5. **READ PROVERBS 26:27.** How does this verse relate to Haman's downfall? What irony can be seen in the ending of Haman's story?

APPLY: Haman's story gives us many warnings of what not to do. Identify as many sinful traits in his story as you can remember (if you are stuck, see Proverbs 6:16-19 for a guide).

NOW READ 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11. If you have believed in Jesus for salvation, you are in him. You have been washed, justified (declared righteous by God), and sanctified (set apart by God and for God). You now have the Spirit's power to live a new life, free from the enslaving power of the sinful traits you listed above. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the atoning work of Jesus and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Be as specific as you can about what sins he has freed you from.

If you have not believed in Jesus, think about what keeps you from giving your life to Christ's loving leadership. Consider what it might be like for Jesus to free you from the sin that entangles you. Ask God to show you your need for him and to reveal his Son to you.

Wrap Up

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Esther shown you more clearly? (*For help answering this question each week, see the list of attributes in Appendix A.*)

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____

shows me that I am _____ .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

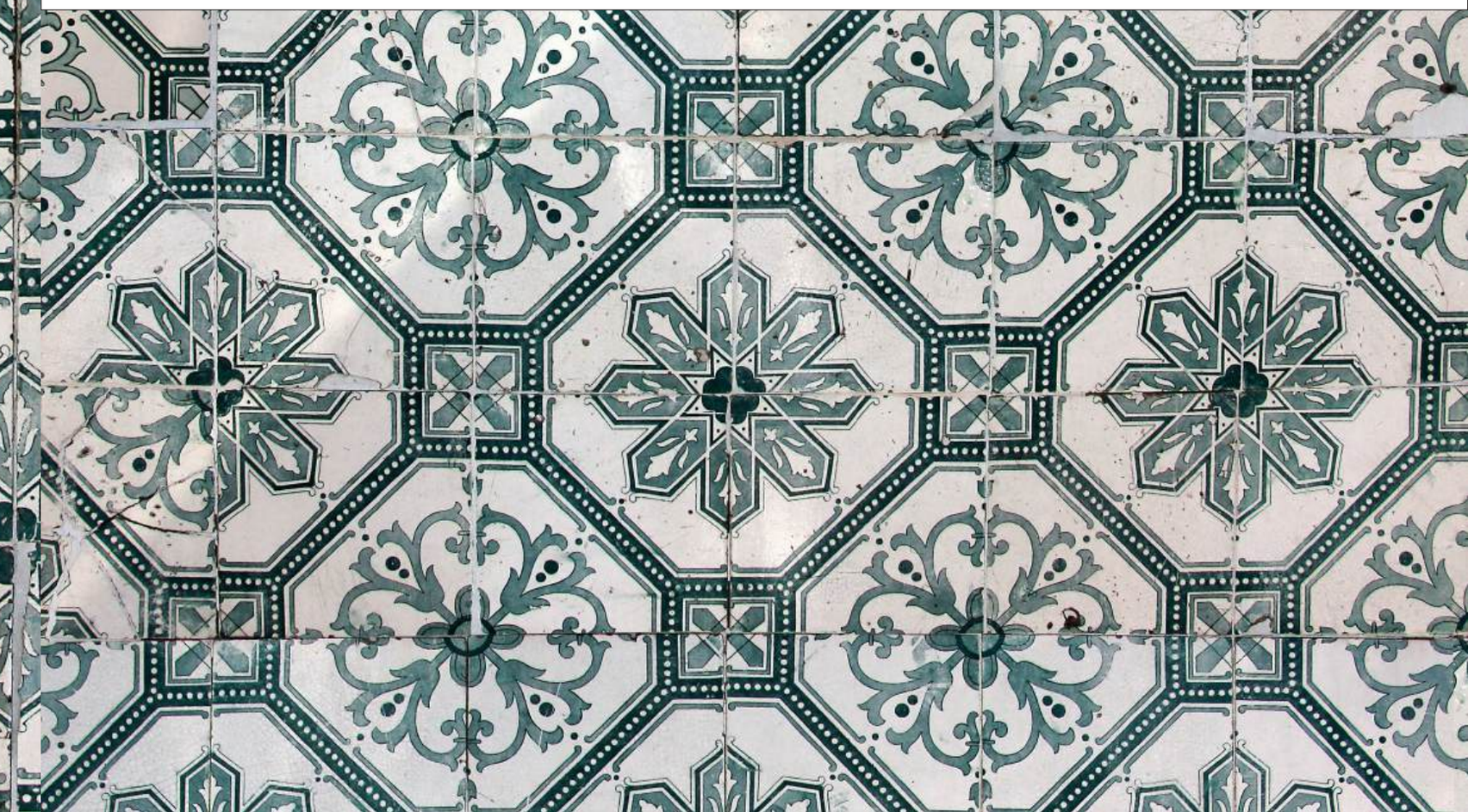
Notes

WEEK 8

The Jews' Rescue is Sealed

ESTHER 8:1-17

This week's passage recounts the aftermath of Haman's downfall, where King Ahasuerus grants Esther and Mordecai authority over Haman's estate and issues a decree to counteract his earlier edict to annihilate the Jews. With Mordecai elevated to Haman's former position as second in command, Esther pleads once more with the king, this time successfully convincing him to issue a new decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies. The Jews rejoice and celebrate their deliverance, while many non-Jews throughout the empire convert to Judaism in response to the newfound respect and fear of the Jews.



DAY 1: Pray and Read Esther 8:1-17

1. Summarize each section of the text in one or two sentences.

   8:1-6

   8:7-9

   8:10-14

   8:15-17

2. In your copy of the text, make a few important observations of the text, i.e., who, what, where, when, why.

   - Underline each character introduced in chapter 8. (Who?)
   - Circle each location mentioned in chapter 8. (Where?)
   - Put a box around each time stamp given in chapter 8. (When?)
   - Use a highlighter to identify the major events happening in chapter 8. (What?)

DAY 2: Pray and Read Esther 8:1-6

1. **REFER BACK TO ESTHER 7:2 AND ESTHER 8:1.** Once again, note the time stamps. The major events in this section happened over what time frame?

2. List everything (tangible or intangible) that Haman lost in that time frame. (8:1-2)

3. Write down everything that Mordecai (tangible or intangible) gained in that same time frame. (8:2, 15)

4. What emotions would someone in Esther's position typically feel right after witnessing such a great and sudden reversal?

5. And yet, how did Esther truly feel in that moment? (8:3, 6)

   - What terms did Esther use to describe the Jews? (8:6)

   - What do these things tell you about Esther's true objective?

APPLY: READ PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4. Do you identify with others in their suffering? Do you consider the individuals in your local church as 'your people' or 'your family'? If yes, what are you willing to risk to serve them?

Have you so insulated yourself that you are unaware of the struggles and needs of others? If that's the case, what steps will you take to nurture deeper relationships within the church?

DAY 3: Pray and Read Esther 8:7-9

1. **READ ESTHER 8:7-9 IN THE NIV TRANSLATION.** How does it differ from the ESV in its description of Haman's punishment?

2. Now read the excerpt below.

> "In the work of the Greek historian Herodotus, impalement is regularly presented as a Persian punishment (see The Histories, 1.128, 3,132, 3.159, 6.30 as examples). Given the setting of Esther, it thus seems likely that the manner of punishment for Haman was in fact impalement. In other words, the fifty-cubit "tree" built by Haman was intended to display Mordecai's body impaled in such a way that no one could avoid seeing it."[5]

Impaling suggests the image of someone thrust down upon a stake, so that the stake goes through the body, and the person is left to die in agony. How does the fact that God's people are associated with something like this make you feel?

3. Fill in the blanks below in Daniel and Esther to learn about the meaning of the king's signet ring.

And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the _____

_____ it with _____ _____ _____ and with the _____ of his

lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. (Daniel 6:17)

"But you may _____ as you _____ with regard to the Jews, in the _____ of _____

_____, and _____ it with the _____ _____, for an edict _____ in the _____

of the king and _____ with the king's ring _____ be _____." (Esther 8:8)

4. Look up some synonyms for *revoke* and write them below.

5 Shaw, Benjamin. "Was Haman Hanged or Impaled?" Ligonier. May 2, 2021. https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/was-haman-hanged-or-impaled.

5. What is the rationale behind the non-revocability of the king's edicts?

How would the act of revoking an edict affect the perception of the ruler's authority?

APPLY: READ JAMES 5:12. Think of someone in your life who has embodied *integrity*, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. How did knowing that person affect you personally?

How are you striving to walk in integrity, to make sure your actions line up with your words, even when no one is watching?

DAY 4: Pray and Read Esther 8:10-14

1. Compare and contrast the two passages below. Underline the similarities. Circle the differences.

ESTHER 3:12-15	ESTHER 8:9-14
Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language.	The king's scribes were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day. And an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews, to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language.
It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.	And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king's signet ring. Then he sent the letters by mounted couriers riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud, saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.
A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.	A copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province, being publicly displayed to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take vengeance on their enemies. 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. And the decree was issued in Susa the citadel.

2. **REFER TO 1 SAMUEL 15:2-3.** Compare this to Mordecai's edict in Esther 8:11. What do you notice?

3. **LOOK UP DEUTERONOMY 8:19-20 IN THE NIV TRANSLATION.** Fill in the blanks.

"If you ever _____ the LORD your God and follow _____ _____ and _____ and bow down to them, I testify against you today that _____ will surely be _____. Like the _____ the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not _____ the _____ your _____." (Deuteronomy 8:19-20)

4. The brutality of a physical "holy war" has troubled some scholars and interpreters. According to Scripture, God does wage a "holy war". But who or what is his enemy?

APPLY: Ephesians 6:12 tells us that our battle "is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

READ REVELATION 19:11-16. Who is God's ultimate warrior and what is the outcome of his battle?

Thank him and pray for strength to live in light of his victory.

DAY 5: Pray and Read Esther 8:15-17

1. **READ ESTHER 6:7-9.** What's the purpose of dressing someone in "the royal robes which the king has worn"?

   What does this say about the king's impression of Mordecai? (8:15)

2. Describe the atmosphere in the city of Susa. (8:16)

   - Describe the atmosphere in Susa back in Esther 3:15.

   - Do you think most of the citizens shared Haman's hatred for the Jews?

3. Why did many people declare themselves Jews? (8:17b)

APPLY: Jesus desires that all people everywhere enter his family. However, this must not happen through fear or forced compliance. Instead, they are to be overwhelmed by God's love displayed in the cross. They are to be won over by the love and patience displayed by the (imperfect) people of God. Our desire should be for people to experience deep heart-change through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!

Take some time to pray for those in your life who are still outside the faith, that they may place genuine faith in Jesus.

Wrap Up

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Esther shown you more clearly? (*For help answering this question each week, see the list of attributes in Appendix A.*)

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____

shows me that I am _____ .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

Notes

WEEK 9

The Triumph of the Jews

ESTHER 9:1-17

Esther 9 describes the day appointed for the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies throughout the Persian Empire. The Jews emerge victorious, striking down those who sought their destruction, including Haman's descendants. Queen Esther requests an extension of the decree to allow them to continue defending themselves the next day. The Jews celebrate their deliverance with feasting and joy.

DAY 1: Pray and Read Esther 9:1-17

1. Summarize each section of the text in one or two sentences.

   9:1-4

   9:5-10

   9:11-14

   9:15-17

2. In your copy of the text, make a few important observations of the text, i.e., who, what, where, when, why.

   - Underline each character introduced in chapter 9:1-17. (Who?)
   - Circle each location mentioned in chapter 9:1-17. (Where?)
   - Put a box around each time stamp given in chapter 9:1-17. (When?)
   - Use a highlighter to identify the major events happening in chapter 9:1-17. (What?)

DAY 2: Pray and Read Esther 9:1-4

1. What command and edict was about to be carried out? Look back to Esther 3:13 to help with your answer.

2. What happens instead? (9:1) Fill in the blanks.

   Now in the _____ month, which is the month of _____, on the

   _____ day of the same, when the king's command and _____ were

   about to be carried out, on the very day when the _____ of the Jews

   hoped to _____ _____ _____ over them, the _____ occurred: the Jews

   _____ _____ over those who _____ them. (Esther 9:1)

3. Why were the Jews able to gain mastery over their enemies? (9:2)

4. Several groups of people helped the Jews. Who were they? (9:3)

   1.

   2.

   3.

   4.

   Why did they help the Jews?

BONUS: For a greater understanding of the Persian government, you can visit *worldhistory.org/Persian_Government/*

5. On the same day that the Jews were to be destroyed, they destroyed their enemies. **READ ROMANS 8:31-39.** What do we gain mastery over?

   How are we victorious?

APPLY: The Jews were able to overpower their enemies because the people and officials feared them and Mordecai. **READ PROVERBS 29:25.** How was the fear of man a snare for these people? (What would happen when the next person of power came along?)

- When has the fear of man been a snare for you?

- How can trusting the Lord provide safety?

DAY 3: Pray and Read Esther 9:5-10

1. Last week we compared the edict directed by Haman with the edict directed by Mordecai. This week, we see the edicts play out. Compare and contrast by filling in the table below.

	HAMAN'S EDICT (ESTHER 3:12-15)	MORDECAI'S EDICT (ESTHER 8:9-13)	REALITY (ESTHER 9:1-10)
In what month did these events occur?	(3:12)	(8:9)	(9:1)
Who was to be (or was) destroyed? List all the details of their age, gender, etc.	(3:13)	(8:11)	(9:5-10)
What could (or did) they take?	(3:13)	(8:11)	(9:10)

What do you notice? What do you wonder?

2. **READ 1 SAMUEL 15:18-19 AND JOSHUA 7:11-12 IN THE NIV TRANSLATION.** Fill in the blanks below.

And he [the LORD] sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and _____

_____ those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage _____ against them until you

have _____ them _____.' Why did you not _____ the _____? Why did you pounce

on the _____ and do evil in the eyes of the _____? (1 Samuel 15:18-19)

Israel has _____; they have _____ my _____, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the _____ things; they have _____, they have _____, they have put them with their own _____. That is why the Israelites cannot _____ against their _____; they turn their backs and _____ because they have been made _____ to _____. I will _____ be _____ _____ anymore unless you _____ whatever among you is _____ to _____. (Joshua 7:11-12)

Why do you think the Jews left the plunder even though they were allowed to take it according to the edict? (9:10)

3. **READ ESTHER 5:11.** What was Haman proud of?

4. **READ ESTHER 9:7-10.** Why do you think it was important that Haman's sons were killed?

5. **READ EXODUS 17:14.** How is the killing of Haman and his sons a fulfillment of God's promise to Moses? (Refer back to week 4, day 2 if needed.)

APPLY: In the Persian language, each of Haman's sons contains the word "self."

- Parshandatha: "curious self"
- Dalphon: "self pity"
- Aspatha: "self-sufficient"
- Poratha: "self indulgent"
- Adalia: "humble self"
- Aridatha: "self assertive"
- Parmashta: "self ambition"
- Arisai: "bold self"
- Aridai: "superior self"
- Vaizatha: "self-righteous"

Which "self" do you most identify with, or struggle with?

All of these "selves" were put to death. Luke 9:23-24 says, "And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.'" Pray and ask the Lord to help you deny your "self" and follow him.

DAY 4: Pray and Read Esther 9:11-14

1. The result of the edicts is reported to the king. (9:11-12)
   - When does the king receive the report?
   - Who does the king share the news with?
   - How do you think the king is feeling at this moment?
   - How do you think Esther is feeling at this moment?

2. What two things does Esther ask for? (9:13)
   1.
   2.

3. Why do you think Esther asks the king for these two things?

4. Last week we learned that being hung on the gallows likely meant being impaled on a stake. **READ ESTHER 9:13-14 IN THE NIV TRANSLATION.** Why might Esther want Haman's sons impaled when they were already dead?

5. **READ DEUTERONOMY 21:22-23.** What is true of someone hanged on a tree?

How does this give more insight into why Esther might have wanted Haman's sons hung/impaled?

6. **READ GALATIANS 3:13.** Who else was cursed by hanging on a tree? Why did he do it?

APPLY: Some commentators view Esther's request for another day of killing to be vindictive while others view it as righteous anger on behalf of God's people. What do you think?

Now think of a time when you wanted to see justice served. What were your motivations behind that desire?

READ HEBREWS 10:30. How does knowing that vengeance is the Lord's help you think about justice rightly?

DAY 5: Pray and Read Esther 9:15-17

1. The second day of the edict, as requested by Queen Esther, is recorded in Esther 9:15.

   - How many men were killed on this day?

   - How many men in Susa is that altogether? (Refer back to 9:6.)

   - What did the Jewish people refuse to take?

2. We learn what happened in the rest of the king's provinces from Esther 9:16. Record the details by filling in the blanks below.

   Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also:

   - _____ to _____ their lives
   - got _____ from their _____
   - and killed _____ of those who _____ them
   - but they laid _____ _____ on the _____. (Esther 9:16)

3. **REFER TO THE MAP IN APPENDIX B.**

   - How does the size of the Persian Empire give insight into how so many people were killed?

   - How does the size of the Persian Empire explain why it is so incredible that nobody laid hands on the plunder?

   - What could have happened if they did? (Refer back to day 3 homework if needed.)

4. All of this happened in the provinces on the 13th day of the month. What happened on the 14th day? (9:17)

5. The Jews throughout the Persian Empire had been exiled and oppressed for centuries. Put yourself in their shoes. What would you be thinking? What would you be feeling?

APPLY: You have probably noticed that God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, but he is there all along. God rescues his people from being completely destroyed through common, sinful people like Esther and Mordecai. He doesn't do anything miraculous like he does in other stories throughout the Bible, but he is faithful to show up for his people. Describe a time in your life or the life of someone you know when it seemed God was absent, but he was really there all along. How did he show up for you or them? Who did he use in common, ordinary ways to show you he cares for you?

Wrap Up

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Esther shown you more clearly? (*For help answering this question each week, see the list of attributes in Appendix A.*)

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____

shows me that I am _____ .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

WEEK 10

The Feast of Purim

ESTHER 9:18-10:3

This week's passage portrays the aftermath of the Jews' victory over their enemies, as Mordecai and Queen Esther institutionalize the annual celebration of Purim. This festival, marked by joyous feasting, gift-giving to the needy, and communal rejoicing, becomes a cherished tradition among the Jewish people. The chapter also highlights Mordecai's rise to prominence in the Persian court, where his wisdom and leadership continue to benefit his fellow Jews, solidifying his legacy as a pivotal figure in their history. Esther 10:3 concludes with a summary of Mordecai's influence and the enduring impact of his efforts to secure the safety and prosperity of his people.

DAY 1: Pray and Read Esther 9:18-10:3

1. Summarize each section of the text in one or two sentences.

   9:18-22

   9:23-28

   9:29-32

   10:1-3

2. What group of people does this passage highlight?

   Tally how many times their name is mentioned in the passage.

3. How would you describe the main theme of this week's text?

DAY 2: Pray and Read Esther 9:18-22

1. Which day(s) of the month of Adar are Jews to celebrate Purim? (9:18)

2. What three elements are to be included in their celebration? (9:19)
   1.
   2.
   3.

3. **READ ESTHER 2:8-9 AND 9:19 IN THE NIV TRANSLATION.** Fill in the blanks below.

   - Esther won Hegai's _____ and he gave her _____

     _____ and _____ _____. (Esther 2:8-9)

   - ....a day for _____ _____ to each other. (Esther 9:19)

   This is the same Hebrew word used in both verses. What is a current example of a gift that might be given to celebrate Purim?

4. Who is recording and sending letters regarding Purim? (9:20)

   How does he describe the events that have led to this point in the story? (9:22)

5. **READ PSALM 30:11 AND JOHN 16:20.** Like Esther 9:22, how do these verses foreshadow the great reversal in Christ?

APPLY: Only the Lord can turn "sorrow into gladness" and "mourning into a holiday." Spend some time thinking about a period in your life when the Lord took what was bad or sad and used it for good. Thank him for his mercy and kindness to you.

If you are currently in a difficult or sad season that the Lord has yet to turn around, **READ PSALM 30:11 AND JOHN 16:20 AGAIN.** Wait expectantly and pray for the Lord to redeem the bad and use it for good.

DAY 3: Pray and Read Esther 9:23-28

1. How is Haman described here? (9:24)

   How is Haman originally described? (Look back to 3:1-2)

2. What was Haman's plan? (9:24)

   - **READ JOHN 10:10.** How has Christ ultimately thwarted this plan?

   - What happened to Haman instead? (9:25)

3. Purim is named after what term? (9:26)

   - What does it mean? (9:24)

   - **READ PROVERBS 16:33 AND JOSHUA 18:6.** Based on these verses, what do you think the term "cast lots" means?

4. **READ LEVITICUS 23.** What were the original 5 feasts prescribed for the Jews by Moses?

    1. Feast of _____ _____
    2. Feast of _____
    3. Feast of _____
    4. Feast of _____
    5. Feast of _____

    What differences do you see between how the original 5 feasts were given (Leviticus 23:1-2) and how Purim was given? (Esther 9:27)

5. How do the Jews respond? (9:27-28)

APPLY: Christians no longer celebrate the 5 feasts or Purim but we do celebrate holidays centering around Jesus' birth and resurrection. Has your family incorporated any meaningful, lasting traditions that have helped you focus on Jesus and his kingdom? If so, describe them below.

If not, how could you begin a tradition (gift giving, food giving, giving to the poor) that would help you and your family love and honor Jesus more deeply?

DAY 4: Pray and Read Esther 9:29-32

1. How is Esther described here? (9:29)

   How is Esther originally described? (Look back to 2:7.)

2. What does Esther provide in verse 29 and also in verse 32?

3. What do you recall about how laws were put into place in the Persian Empire? (Look back to Esther 1:19 to help with your answer.)

   Given what you learned above, what conclusions can you draw about the initiation of Purim?

4. Who is obligated to celebrate Purim? (9:31)

   READ EXODUS 12:14. Who is to observe the Passover?

5. **READ LUKE 22:14-23.** How is this command for remembrance better than the celebration of Purim or Passover?

APPLY: Purim is established as an irrevocable law once it is written and given full authority by Queen Esther. Words matter and their authorship matters. **READ 1 PETER 1:24-25.** Few things will last for all eternity but God's word is one of them. Consider committing 1 Peter 1:24-25 to memory to help you hide this truth in your heart.

DAY 5: Pray and Read Esther 10:1-3

1. How is Mordecai described here? (10:3)

   How is Mordecai first described? (Look back to 2:5-6.)

2. What two things did Mordecai do? (10:3)

   1. Sought the _____ of his _____.

   2. _____ _____ to all his people.

3. **READ JEREMIAH 29:4-7 IN THE ESV AND THE NIV.** This letter was written by the prophet Jeremiah to the Jewish exiles living in Babylon (before the happenings in the book of Esther). How do you think Mordecai has taken these instructions to heart?

4. **READ MARK 10:45.** How does Jesus' leadership also demonstrate the same principles as Jeremiah and Mordecai but to an even greater degree?

5. As the book of Esther comes to an end, use one sentence to describe the theme of the whole book.

APPLY: Mordecai was great among the Jews because he used his power and position not to shine a light on himself but to work for the best of those he served. Unfortunately, in Mordecai's day and ours, there are many leaders who do not use their positions of influence to help others but to self-promote. You may not hold a political office or have a giant sphere of influence but you most certainly have some sphere of influence including your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. How can you use your position of authority or influence to seek the welfare of others and in so doing model a Christlike life of self-sacrifice?

Wrap Up

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Esther shown you more clearly? (*For help answering this question each week, see the list of attributes in Appendix A.*)

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is _____

shows me that I am _____ .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

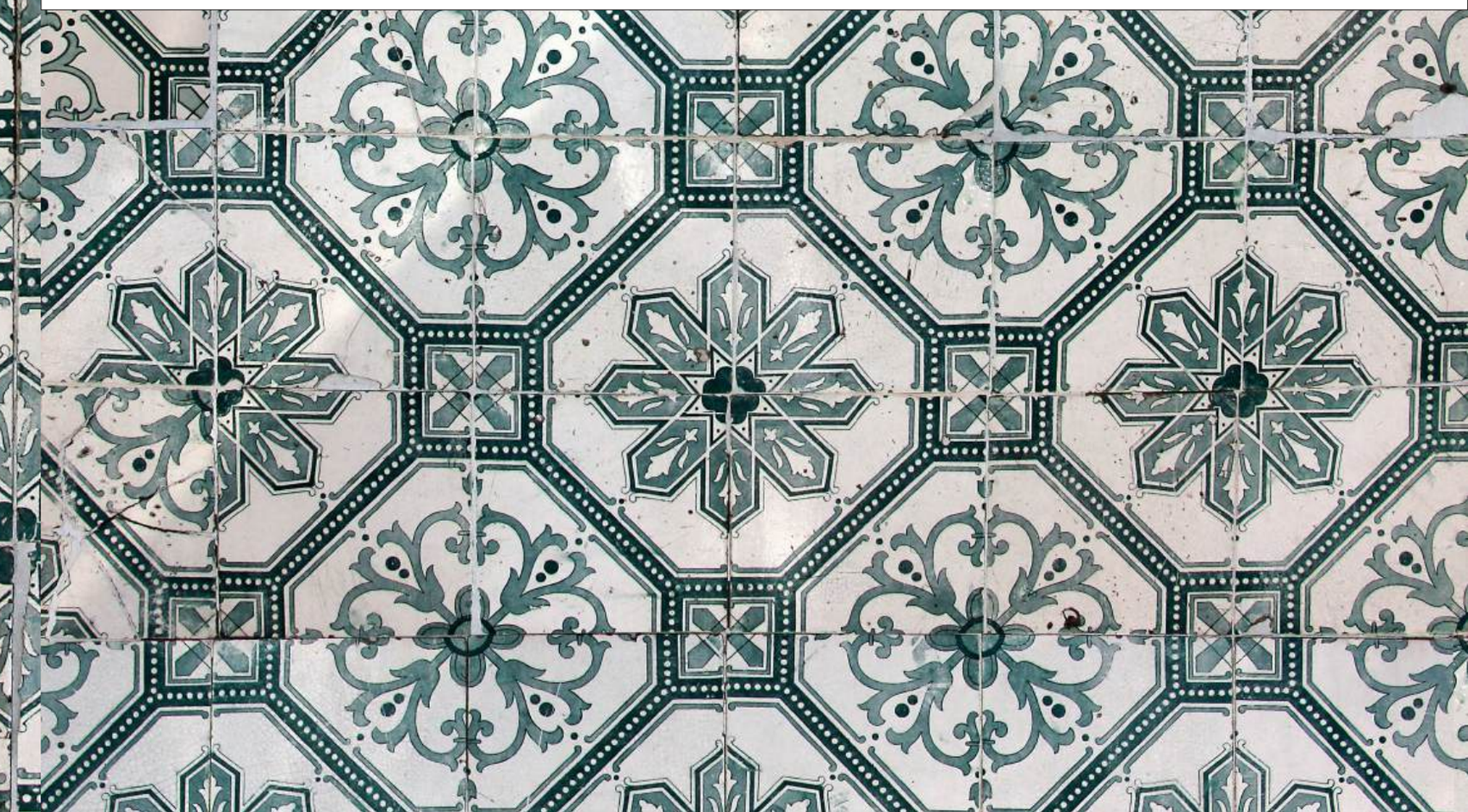
Notes

WEEK 11

Wrap Up

ESTHER 1-10

For ten weeks, you have diligently studied the book of Esther. Now, take some time this week to read Esther from beginning to end one last time. It will be wise to space your reading out over the course of five days rather than trying to read it all at once. Be sensitive to what the Holy Spirit is drawing your attention to along the way. When you finish reading, answer the questions on the next page.



DAYS 1-5: Pray and Read Esther 1-10

1. What attribute of God stands out the most from your study of Esther?

   How does knowing this truth about him change the way you see yourself?

2. How has the Holy Spirit used Esther to convict you of sin? What thoughts, words, or actions need to stop in the power of the Holy Spirit?

3. How has the Holy Spirit used Esther to help you follow Jesus? What thoughts, words, or actions need to start in the power of the Holy Spirit?

4. How has the Holy Spirit used Esther to encourage you personally?

   - How has he used Esther to grow your love for God's people?

   - How has he used Esther to grow your love for those still outside the faith?

5. What verse or passage from Esther stands out most in your mind after 10 weeks of study? Why?

Notes

Attributes Of God

ATTENTIVE
God hears and responds to the needs of His children.

COMPASSIONATE
God cares for His children and acts on their behalf.

CREATOR
God made everything. He is uncreated.

DELIVERER
God rescues and saves His children.

ETERNAL
God is not limited by and exists outside of time.

FAITHFUL
God always keeps His promises.

GENEROUS
God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

GLORIOUS
God displays His greatness and worth.

GOOD
God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

HOLY
God is perfect, pure, and without sin.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE
God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

INFINITE
God has no limits in His person or on His power.

IMMUTABLE / UNCHANGING
God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

JEALOUS
God will not share His glory with another. All glory rightfully belongs to Him.

JUST
God is fair in all His actions and judgements. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

LOVING
God feels and displays infinite unconditional affection toward His children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response or merit.

Attributes Of God

MERCIFUL
God does not give His children the punishment they deserve.

OMNIPOTENT/ ALMIGHTY
God holds all power. Nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.

OMNIPRESENT
God is fully present everywhere.

OMNISCIENT
God knows everything: past, present and future; all potential and real outcomes; all things micro and macro.

PATIENT / LONG-SUFFERING
God is untiring and bears with His children.

PROVIDER
God meets the needs of His children.

REFUGE
God is a place of safety and protection for His children.

RIGHTEOUS
God is always good and right.

SELF-EXISTENT
God depends on nothing and no one to give Him life or existence.

SELF-SUFFICIENT
God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

SOVEREIGN
God does everything according to His plan and pleasure. He controls all things.

TRANSCENDENT
God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

TRUTHFUL
Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

WRATHFUL
God hates all unrighteousness.

WISE
God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

WORTHY
God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

MAP REFERENCE

The Persian Empire at the Time of Esther

c. 479 B.C.

Long before Esther's time, the people of Israel and Judah (later called Jews) had been dispersed throughout the Near East by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Eventually the Persians absorbed nearly all of these lands into their empire, which reached its greatest extent during the time of Esther. Thus Haman's plot to exterminate all Jews throughout the Persian Empire would have annihilated virtually all of the Jewish people, and Esther's daring actions saved them from complete destruction.

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