



April 27, 2014

Introduction to Esther

Esther 1:1-3; 2:5-7; 3:1

[Q] Discuss: What are some of your favorite kinds of stories? (Genres of books, movies, true stories, etc...)

We are beginning a ten-week study of the book of Esther. In this story we see male chauvinism, anti-Semitism, attempted ethnic cleansing and political chicanery. Plus, the name of God is never mentioned!

[Q] Discuss from the weekend message: Why in the world would we study a story like Esther?

Review the main characters in the book of Esther

King Ahasuerus (Greek name: Xerxes I)

History remembers Xerxes as the Persian king who unsuccessfully led a major invasion of Greece. He ruled from 486 to 465 BC.

Read Esther 1:1-3:

This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush:² At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa,³ and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present. NIV

Queen Vashti

The beautiful wife of Xerxes. She refused to show off her beauty to King Xerxes and unwittingly set in motion the rise of Esther.

Mordecai the Jew

Read Esther 2:5-7:

Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish,⁶ who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.

Esther (our hero)

⁷ Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. NIV

Haman the Agagite (our villain)

Read Esther 3:1:

After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. NIV

Agag is a reference to the Amalekites, long standing enemies of Israel (Exodus 17; 1 Samuel 15).

Connect with the themes in the book of Esther

God's Providence

Although God is not mentioned, the invisible, providing hand of God is clearly portrayed in this book.

Read Romans 8:28.

[Q] How have you seen the providence of God in your life, your family, your story?

[Q] Esther's story includes God's providential protection of His people during a bleak moment in the Persian Empire. Read God's covenant promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and David in 1 Chronicles 17:11–14 and list some ideas on why God wanted to preserve His people.

The task that God gave Esther of saving the Jews is a preview of the greatest rescue mission of all – God sending His Son to save all His people, everywhere and throughout history.

Opportunities: your part in God's story

The characters in Esther are given opportunities and choices, some small, some large.

[Q] Where has God placed you? (Geographically, workplace, neighborhood, family?)

[Q] What opportunities might God be giving you to advance His purposes?

[Q] What temptations do we all face to try and advance our own "kingdoms"?

Leader option: Introduce "*Sharing Your Story*" as part sharing God's story of grace and mercy.

Pray

For Fun: Check out the movie, *One Night with the King*. [amazon.com/One-Night-King-Tiffany-Dupont/dp/B000JJSJO6/](https://www.amazon.com/One-Night-King-Tiffany-Dupont/dp/B000JJSJO6/)