

## Esther Chapter Seven

### *Read Esther 7:1-3*

- **Patiently keep in step with the Spirit.**
  - This was the third time the king asked Esther what she wanted. The first two times, she delayed in giving an answer. This was probably because of her discernment that the time was not right. And just as well - had she asked for the salvation of the Jews two days before (when he first invited her request), it would have been before the king freely chose to exalt a Jew in front of everyone (see 6:1-3,10). He was now far more ready to hear the request than two days earlier. While Esther waited patiently, and while the Jewish people fasted and prayed, God had been at work behind the scenes - sovereignly softening the king's heart toward the Jews. God had moved slowly, but nonetheless, God had moved powerfully.
  - We too need to give God time to act. Only once we have discerned that the time is right for us to act, should we do so. We need to learn how to 'keep in step with the Spirit' (Galatians 5:25). Esther modelled this so well - she neither stepped ahead of God, nor missed the moment. Rather, the moment the Spirit signalled her to act, she did so. Like Esther, we must neither run ahead of God in impatience, nor lag behind God and miss the moment through fear or disobedience.

### *Read Esther 7:3-10*

- **God's judgement may come slowly, but when it comes, it will come powerfully.**
  - In verses 3-7, we see Esther exposing the guilt of Haman. She had finally made her request, and she did so tactfully (v3). She asked the king to spare herself - and her people. She spoke about how her people had been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated (v4). She reminded the king that the Jews were not merely slaves, but people who rightfully belonged to the Persian empire (v4). After hearing all this, Xerxes immediately took the side of his wife. Although he had previously agreed to allow Haman to kill the Jews, he had not realised that his own wife and Mordecai (whom he had just publicly honoured the day before) were Jews. The whole matter suddenly became very clear to him. He realised that Haman had initiated the possible murder of his own wife and her people. He was thus so angry that he left the banquet (v7).
  - In verses 7-10, we see Haman being brought to ruin. Haman had not realised that Esther was Jewish. He had previously been furious that a Jew would not bow down to him, yet now, he begs a Jew for his life (v7). He clung to Esther, which in the eyes of Xerxes, was absolutely unacceptable, since it looked like he was

assaulting her (v8). Doubly humiliated, Haman's head was covered - a sign of the death penalty. Harbona then reminded the king of the execution pole that Haman had built to impale Mordecai on. It was not long before Haman was impaled upon it (v10) - under the two charges of trying to annihilate the king's wife, and of attempting to assault her.

- God had been storing up judgement and anger against Haman. Justice had been moving slowly, but eventually it moved very rapidly. This is a picture of God's judgement against people who proudly ignore and resist him. God's anger slowly builds up, but is then 'unleashed' suddenly, sometimes in this lifetime, but ultimately, on Judgement Day. Romans 2:5 says, 'Because of your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgement will be revealed.'
- What makes Haman's sin particularly evil, was that not only had he resisted God, but he had tried to harm God's people too. When someone does this, and refuses to repent of it, they are warned, 'God is just: he will repay back trouble to those who trouble God's people' (2 Thessalonians 1:6). If we, as God's people, are under attack from someone we can cry out for God to save us (Psalm 7:1) and we can anticipate that, 'He who has dug a pit to trap us will fall into his own hole' (Psalm 7:15).

## Esther Chapter Eight

*Read Esther 8:1-2*

- **The sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.**
  - Haman's possessions landed up belonging to Esther and Mordecai. This illustrates a principle that we see weaved throughout Scripture. Proverbs 13:22 and 28:8 both say, 'The sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous'. Ecclesiastes 2:26 declares that the sinner is given the task of gathering and storing up wealth - only to hand it over to the one who pleases God. All God's people can expect to experience this principle at work in their lives at various times, and to varying degrees. But ultimately, we can expect that 'the meek will inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5). Godless people may own much for a while, but eventually all they own will be lost. Much worse than the loss of their material possessions however, is the loss of something much more valuable - their souls (see Mark 8:36). It is God's people who will ultimately be entrusted with the rule of the new heavens and the new earth.

### *Read Esther 8:3-6*

- **Persevere in prayer.**
  - Although Haman was dead, his decree had already reached all the provinces of Persia. The Jewish execution date was set. So Esther, who had already seen the king answer her one request, persisted in asking the king to change the decree. She was asking the impossible, but the king was honoured by her request. We have already seen her boldly approach the king in 5:1-3, and yet she did so again, because she had more to ask of him. Esther did not just want to see her own deliverance, but the deliverance of her people too.
  - As in 5:1-3, this powerfully depicts prayer. We need to be thorough and persevering in our prayer. Jesus taught us 'always to pray and to not give up' (Luke 18:1). We need to aggressively take hold of the merciful sceptre of our king and make our large requests. We need to make our requests boldly, yet at the same time humbly. Too many of God's people neither approach God in bold prayer, nor learn to persevere in their prayers - and yet we will never change the world through any other means.
  - Esther's king was volatile - ours is not. Esther's king sometimes extended his sceptre of mercy - our king always does. Esther's king was not inviting - our king invites us to approach him. He pleads with us to plead with him in prayer.

### *Read Esther 8:7-13*

- **God demonstrates both his justice and his love in the cross.**
  - The king had already done so much for Esther (v7), but he could not take back his decree - it was law. However, he still sought a way to save the Jews without taking back his decree. He commissioned Mordecai, Esther and the royal secretaries to find a way to solve this predicament - giving them the authority to make any decree (v8). Using the king's ring (which represented the king's authority) Mordecai sent out a new decree (v10-11). The decree was sent to all the people of all 127 provinces and made it legal for Jews to defend themselves on the day they were going to be attacked. They could even plunder the possessions of their attackers (v11-13). What an ingenious solution!
  - This is a vivid picture of the predicament God himself faced in saving human beings from their ultimate destruction and ruin. His holiness had already decreed that sin must be punished (see Romans 6:23 - 'The wages of sin is death.'). But his love desired to save us. God had to find a way to resolve his own predicament. And he did find a way - through the cross. On the cross our sins were punished. And on the cross Jesus, the substitute, Jesus, saved us from our sins. This is why the book of Romans describes the cross both as a demonstration of God's justice (Romans 3:25)

and of his love (Romans 5:8). The cross reflects God's wisdom in that God 'has found a way' for sinful people to be saved. He has resolved the tension between his justice and his love. The cross is God's glorious solution that makes it possible for sinners like you and me to have a relationship with a Holy God.

**Read Esther 8:14-17**

- **God works all things for the good of those who love him.**
  - Haman had tried to destroy the Jews who were an oppressed minority. But the Jews continued to love and trust in God. God intervened by turning what the enemy intended for harm into something good. Haman's plans back-fired and the result was that instead of the oppressed Jews being exterminated, they were liberated. They landed up in a much better position than the one they had at the beginning of this story, despite (and also precisely because of) the evil intent of Haman.
  - This beautifully illustrates how God can take bad things in our lives, and bad things that happen to our churches, and as we trust him, intervene to work it for good. Romans 8:28 says, 'God works all things for the good of those who love him.' Genesis 50:20 says, 'What my enemy intended for my harm, God intended for my good.' The words of an ancient hymn describe how 'God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. You fearful saints, fresh courage take. The clouds you so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break with blessing on your head.'
  
- **The Gospel message urgently needs to get to all people, everywhere.**
  - The Jews had been an oppressed minority who were scared of revealing their faith. But a new decree was written. And it communicated to all people everywhere by messengers - messengers who had the authority of the king (v14). With this new decree, Jews were given the full rights of dignity and self-defence. They no longer needed to be ashamed of their faith. Even Mordecai, who just a few weeks before was wearing sackcloth and ashes (4:1), was now dressed in royal clothing (v15). A message had gone out to the people everywhere - it was a message that seemed to change the Jews' very way of seeing themselves. They had a new sense of dignity. And the result was happiness, joy, gladness, honour, feasting and celebrating (v16-17). Non-Jewish neighbours noticed the change and the joy in the Jewish people and many of them began to convert to the faith of the Jews (v17).
  - This is a beautiful picture of the Gospel-message going out. King Jesus himself commissions the message. And he sends specially chosen messengers to go to all people everywhere with the message. When people hear the message and believe it, it has a

way of deeply changing their lives, and filling them with great joy. This life-change and gladness of heart become observable to people who themselves are then attracted to the same Liberator, Jesus. When Philip delivered the Gospel-message to the Ethiopian eunuch he 'went on his way rejoicing' (Acts 8:39). The Gospel-message brings salvation, which overflows in great joy. It lets us know that the King of the universe is for us, not against us. How desperately we need to all be available to be messengers of this wonderful Gospel-message. 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' (Romans 10:15).

## Esther Chapter Nine

*Read Esther 9:1-17*

- **The church today is very different to ancient Israel with respect to war and violence.**
  - The story now shoots nine months forward to the day of attack and defence. All over Persia, there were people ready to attack and kill Jews as the first edict had said, but the Jews were mobilised to attack those who wished to destroy them. And they did. In Suza, it took two days to get the job done. Despite the killings, they never plundered goods, even though the decree made this permissible. This is because, for the Jews, this war was about self-preservation not vengeance. That is why Haman's sons were publicly impaled - to strike fear into the hearts of those who wished to destroy the Jews.
  - *How can God allow the Jews to kill so many people - 75 000 in all (v16)?* Firstly, we must remember that the world then was barbaric. It has only been since the coming of Christ that more nations have, because of Christian influence, become more peace-orientated. Before Christ's phenomenal teachings and influence, nations could only exist through war. If a country backed off from war, it would only be a matter of time before it was overthrown. The Jews would have been totally eliminated but they fought for their existence. Secondly, we must remember that God was revealing himself progressively and that he was progressively shaping a people for himself. In those days 'the people of God' was a nation, so it had to fight wars to survive, like all other nations. But eventually, through the gift of Christ and the Spirit, the church would become a community of people *within* nations. Jesus taught the church to 'love your enemies'. We, as the church, are not a physical nation, but a spiritual community. We do not conquer through violence. But through love. We are even willing to lay down our lives for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus is the final revelation of God to this planet. Ancient Israel was the first step God took in moving humanity forward. Jesus is the ultimate and final step that God has taken.

- *What can we learn from Esther in these verses? Verse 13 is shocking for the modern reader. Esther wanted another day to kill the enemies of the Jews in Suza. And she wanted Haman's dead sons publicly impaled too. She was not just beautiful. She was tough! Applying her strength to our own lives, we should interpret this through 2 Corinthians 10:3, which says, 'Though we live in the world we do not wage war as the world does.'* Today, our weapons are not physical, but spiritual. And our weapons do not destroy lives, they liberate them. As Christians, we need to be militant in our faith. Esther's unrelenting aggressiveness toward her enemies can be applied to the way we should stand against spiritual opposition today. Although we have been liberated through Christ's victory for us on the cross, we still need to 'stand firm in our freedom'. Our battle to set others free will certainly attract Satan's counter-attacks. But this should not put us off - for the victory will ultimately be ours in Christ (see Ephesians 6:10-18).

<i>Read Esther 9:18-32</i>
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- **Never forget the God-incidences in your life.**
  - The two days of the Jews' victory were celebrated annually. Mordecai and Esther made it an official time of celebration for all Jews everywhere. It would be a time of remembering the hand of God in the events related to Esther and Mordecai. The new celebration festival would be called 'Purim' named after the 'pur' - the dice that Haman threw to decide when to exterminate the Jews. Haman thought fate had decided the dice, but the Jews knew that it was God. The dice gave an eleven month gap before the extermination would begin, long enough for God to 'turn the tables' (see 9:1) so that instead of the Jews being destroyed, they would be highly honoured and their enemies, annihilated.
  - The festival of Purim celebrated the hand of God in their lives, especially the providential God-incidences we have seen through this amazing story. Others may have seen co-incidences but the Jews saw God's hand at work. Esther 'just happened' to have replaced Vashti. Mordecai 'just happened' to have discovered a plot against the king. Haman 'just happened' to have thrown a dice that signalled an eleven month gap. The king 'just happened' to have not been able to sleep one night and instead read of Mordecai's loyalty. Haman 'just happened' to have suggested ways of honouring a person as the king was thinking of how to honour Mordecai. Esther 'just happened' to have chosen to wait two days before presenting the king with her request. Haman 'just happened' to have been impaled on his own pole. If any of these factors were different, then the Jews would not have been liberated, and would probably have not survived the onslaught.
  - God is still at work in each of our lives. We should learn to

recognise, celebrate and affirm the hundreds of God-incidences that have shaped our lives thus far. Some people may say that what we think is the answer to our prayers are really just co-incidences. But it would seem that the more we pray, the more providential 'co-incidences' just happen. From time to time, it is good to reflect, record and celebrate the God-incidences that have shaped our lives. These times will fill us with fresh courage and faith for the future and renewed awe in our loving and powerful King.

## Esther Chapter Ten

*Read Esther 10:1-3*

- **God can raise up Christians to places of great influence in society.**
  - Esther started off as a parentless girl. Yet she ended up as the Queen of Persia. Mordecai was not even allowed in the king's palace, but became second-in-command to the king. Both Esther and Mordecai saw their influence as something God gave them, and they sought to use it for God's glory.
  - We need to trust God to elevate us (and fellow Christians) to places of influence in various circles, spheres and groups of people. This truth is seen in the teaching of Christ where he says that he is making us a 'city on a hill'. This speaks of the prominence and influence he wishes to give us as Christians (Matthew 5:13-16). Our world still needs Esthers and Mordecais who will challenge injustices and courageously stand for Kingdom values in whatever spheres we find ourselves in.
- **Life is tough, but God is good - and his purposes will prevail.**
  - Esther, Mordecai, and the people of God had faced tumultuous times. But the great tests only resulted in greater testimonies. The great fight had resulted in greater faith. They had discovered that life was tough - even life with God - but that God is always good and his purposes will always prevail.
  - Today, we can still expect to go through great tests, but we can also expect to have great testimonies of how God sovereignly works amidst these trials.
  - Perhaps one of the most striking things about the book of Esther is not what stands out in the book, but rather what has been omitted. Shockingly, *the name of God is not mentioned even once*. And yet it is so obvious, as we explore the details of the story, that God's fingerprints are everywhere. We just need the 'eyes of faith' to discern him. In the same way, at the end of our lives, we should be able to tell someone the story of our lives without even mentioning God, and they should respond by saying, 'But God is everywhere in your life!'