

THE ESTHER SERIES · PART ONE OF THREE

A Queen in Persia

An Orphan Crowned

SCRIPTURE	WATCH FREE	FILM
Esther 1:1-2:23	phillacolla.com/biblestories	About 11 minutes

Cover: a still from the film. Visuals in this series are AI-generated under the director's guidance.

A Companion Guide for Families, Groups & Students

Choose Your Track

One story, five ways in. Use one track or several. Each is complete on its own.

I **Family Study** — PAGE 3

For parents, grandparents, and kids at home. Watch together, hear the story, talk, play, and pray.

The story simply told · Questions for ages 4-7, 8-12, and teens · Activity · Memory verse · Prayer

II **Kids Ministry** — PAGE 5

For children's ministry teachers. A complete 45-60 minute lesson for grades K-5, with preschool notes.

Teacher prep · Story script · Game · Object lesson · Craft · Small groups · Take-home page for parents

III **Youth Ministry** — PAGE 9

For youth leaders. A 60-75 minute night for middle and high school students.

Hook · Leader talk · Discussion · Breakouts · Reflection · Weekly challenge · Hard questions

IV **Bible Study & Small Group** — PAGE 12

For adult small groups, classes, and Bible studies. A complete 45-60 minute session.

Leader prep · Opener · Watch · Discussion questions · Application · Prayer · Leader notes

V **Deep Dive** — PAGE 15

For teachers, preachers, and anyone who wants to dig deeper into the text.

History and culture · Structure · Commentary · Hebrew key words · Interpretive views · Christ · Further study

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Start by watching the film. Families can go straight to Track I and spread it over a few evenings. Children's and youth leaders will find ready-to-teach plans in Tracks II and III, including a take-home page for parents. Adult groups will find a complete session in Track IV, and Track V is for anyone preparing to teach or wanting to go deeper.

Above all, read the passage itself. The film and this guide are meant to send you back to Scripture, where God speaks.

WATCH THE FILM

phillacolla.com/biblestories
Free on YouTube · about 11 minutes

Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (WEB), current edition as published at eBible.org (public domain); older WEB printings differ in a few words. Hebrew words are cited from the Masoretic text of Esther. This guide is free to print, copy, and share for non-commercial ministry use. Bible Stories Brought to Life · youtube.com/@BSBTLFilms

TRACK ONE

Family Study

For parents, grandparents, and kids of every age. Watch together, read the story, talk, play, and pray.



"He brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter; for she had neither father nor mother." (Esther 2:7a, WEB)

The Story, Simply Told

Part One of the Esther Series, retold from Esther 1-2. Quoted words are paraphrased for children. The gathering of young women for the king is told simply.

In the Daniel stories, Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians. Many years later, a Persian king named Ahasuerus ruled from India to Ethiopia, over 127 provinces. His palace was in the city of Susa.

The king threw a feast that showed off his riches for 180 days, and then a seven-day party in the palace garden. On the last day he sent for Queen Vashti to come and show her beauty to his guests. She refused. The Bible does not tell us why. The king was very angry, and his advisers told him to make a law: Vashti could never come before the king again, and someone else would be queen. Letters went out to every province.

Later, the king's servants gathered young women from all over the empire to the palace, so the king could choose a new queen. In Susa lived a Jewish man named Mordecai. He had raised his cousin Hadassah, also called Esther, because her father and mother had died. Esther was taken to the palace too. Mordecai told her not to tell anyone that she was Jewish, and every day he walked near the women's house to find out how she was doing.

Everyone who saw Esther liked her, and the king loved her more than all the others. He set the royal crown on her head and made her queen. Then Mordecai, sitting at the king's gate, heard that two guards were planning to hurt the king. He told Esther, and Esther told the king, giving Mordecai the credit. The guards were punished, and it was all written down in the king's book. But no reward was given to Mordecai then. The story wasn't over.

God's name is never written in Esther, but His hand is everywhere.

Talk Together

AGES 4-7

1. Who took care of Esther when she had no mom or dad?
2. What did Mordecai do every day?
3. Who helped Esther in the palace? How was God caring for her too?

AGES 8-12

1. Esther was taken to a place she didn't choose. When have you had to go somewhere new?
2. Mordecai's good deed was written down but not rewarded at the time (2:23; 6:3). What does Hebrews 6:10 say about good things people don't notice?
3. Where have you seen God at work when you didn't notice at first?

TEENS

1. God is never named in Esther. Why might a book of the Bible tell a story this way?
2. Mordecai told Esther not to reveal that she was Jewish (2:10). How is her situation like, or unlike, times when you're unsure whether to share your faith?
3. Proverbs 16:9 says we plan, but God directs our steps. Where do you need that today?

Try This Together

Connect the Dots 10 MINUTES On a long sheet of paper, draw five dots in a row. Label them: *a queen refuses*, *a search*, *an orphan finds favor*, *a plot overheard*, *written in a book*. Talk about how no one in the story could see how the dots connect. Then each person adds one dot from their own year that turned out to matter. Finish by thanking God together for one dot each.

Name Hunt 5 MINUTES Read Esther 2 together and look for the word *God*. You won't find it! Then list the places where you think He was quietly at work. Close by reading the memory verse together.

MEMORY VERSE

"A man's heart plans his course,
but Yahweh directs his steps."

PROVERBS 16:9, WEB

Yahweh is God's personal name; many Bibles print it as LORD. Younger children: learn "...Yahweh directs his steps." while walking in place.

A FAMILY PRAYER

Dear God, thank You that You are always at work, even when we can't see You. Thank You for caring for Esther when she had no mom or dad, and for caring for us. When we are in places we didn't choose, help us trust You. Thank You for Jesus, who makes us part of Your family. In Jesus' name, amen.

TRACK TWO

Kids Ministry

A complete 45-60 minute lesson for elementary classes (about grades K-5), with notes for preschool and a take-home page for parents.

THE BIG IDEA

God is at work for me, even when I can't see Him.

LESSON PLAN

	45 MIN	60 MIN
Welcome and opening game	8	10
Bible story (told or film)	10	12
Object lesson	5	6
Craft	10	15
Small groups	7	10
Memory verse	3	4
Prayer and goodbye	2	3

THE STORY IN PLAIN WORDS

Esther was an orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai. When the king of Persia looked for a new queen, Esther was taken to the palace, and the king chose her. Mordecai heard about a plan to hurt the king and told Esther, and she told the king. It was written in the king's book. God's name isn't in the story, but He was at work all along.

READ BEFORE CLASS

Esther 1-2 and Proverbs 16:9. If you will show the film, watch it all the way through first.

What Kids May Ask

"Why didn't Vashti come?" The Bible doesn't tell us. Say: *We don't know why. The Bible tells us what happened next.*

"Did Esther want to go to the palace?" The Bible says she "was taken" (2:8). It doesn't tell us how she felt. Say: *Esther didn't get to choose, but God was with her there.*

"Why did Esther keep a secret?" Mordecai told her not to tell anyone she was Jewish (2:10). The Bible doesn't say why. (See the tip on secrets below.)

What happened to the two guards (2:23). With K-2 and preschool, say only that *the king's helpers stopped them.* If an older child asks, say once, simply: *The king's law punished them with death.* Don't add details.

"Where is God in this story?" Say: *His name isn't written, but He is still taking care of His people.*

Telling the Story

YOU'LL NEED a paper crown, a sheet of paper rolled up like a scroll for the king's book, a large envelope for the king's letters, and a long paper chain with five links. *SAY lines are a dramatized paraphrase for children; READ lines quote the WEB.*

DO Teach the cues. When you hear "the king," sit up tall like royalty. When you hear "written down," pretend to write in the air.

SAY Long ago, the king of Persia threw a giant party. He called for Queen Vashti, but she would not come. The Bible doesn't tell us why. The angry king made a law: Vashti could never be queen again. *(Wave the envelope.)*

DO Hold up the paper chain. Hand one link to a helper for each new part of the story.

SAY In the city lived a man named Mordecai. He had raised his cousin, a girl named Esther, because her mom and dad had died.

READ Esther 2:7a aloud: "He brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter; for she had neither father nor mother."

SAY The king's helpers gathered young women from all over the land, so the king could choose a new queen. Esther was taken to the palace. Everyone who met her liked her, and the king chose Esther! *(Put the crown on a helper.)* But Esther kept a secret: no one knew she was Jewish.

SAY One day Mordecai heard two guards planning to hurt the king. He told Esther, and Esther told the king. The bad plan was stopped, and it was all written down in the king's book. *(Unroll the scroll.)* The king did not reward Mordecai then. But it was written down, and it would matter later. God never forgets.

READ Proverbs 16:9 aloud: "A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps."

ASK Hold up the whole chain. How did each link connect to the next? Who was putting the story together?

USING THE FILM INSTEAD. The film runs about 11 minutes. Preview it, and mark your stop times in your player before class. For grades K-2, show two clips: 4:21 to 5:51 (Mordecai and Esther, through Hegai's kindness) and 6:20 to 6:57 (Esther crowned). **STOP AT 5:51,** before the narration about each young woman's evening with the king, and **STOP AGAIN AT 6:57,** before the plot. The clips total about two minutes: fill the rest of the story time by telling Vashti's refusal and Mordecai's care for Esther first, then the plot and the king's book afterward (from the script above), and finish with two recap questions. For grades 3-5, show 0:30 to 7:49 (starting at 0:30 skips a tease about a murder plot). It mentions the king "merry with wine" (Esther 1:10; at 2:17 in the film), the women's evenings with the king (5:51-6:20, told briefly; nothing shown; you may skip it), and the guards "hanged" (7:34; not shown). Times are from the film's final caption file.

Opening Game: Hidden in Plain Sight

Before class, set a paper crown somewhere in the room where it can be seen but is easy to miss (on a shelf, by a window). Kids walk, no running, and look without touching anything. When someone spots it, they sit down and keep the secret. Play until everyone is sitting; then hide it again for a second round. No one is out.

Wrap up: *The crown was there the whole time, even when you couldn't see it. In today's story, God's name isn't written once. Watch for where He is at work!*

Object Lesson: The Picture Puzzle

YOU'LL NEED a sheet of poster board with GOD IS AT WORK written large on one side, cut into five big puzzle pieces.

Before class, write one story event on the blank back of each piece: *A queen says no. A search. An orphan finds favor. A plot overheard. Written in a book.* Hand out the pieces, blank side up. Ask: *Does one piece make sense by itself?* **Say:** *Nobody in the story could see how all these pieces fit.* Let kids fit them together, then flip the whole puzzle over to show GOD IS AT WORK. *God was putting the pieces together all along. He is at work in your life too, even when things are hard and you can't see how. If something hard is happening, tell a grown-up you trust, and keep trusting God.*

Craft: My Hidden-Message Crown

Kids decorate a paper crown band on the outside. On the inside, where no one can see it, they write **God is at work, even when I can't see Him.** Tape each crown into a ring. Grades 3-5 can add the memory verse. The message is hidden, but it's still there, like God in Esther's story.

SUPPLIES (PER CHILD)

- A crown band, about 4 × 24 inches: two yellow construction-paper strips taped end to end, or one strip of oversized card stock, cut by leaders before class
- Crayons or markers
- Tape (leaders tape for K-2)
- No scissors for children; leaders do all cutting

Small Groups

GRADES K-2

1. Who took care of Esther when she was little?
2. What did Mordecai do every day?
3. How do you think God takes care of you?

GRADES 3-5

1. Esther was taken to a new place she didn't choose (2:8). What helps you when you have to start somewhere new?
2. Mordecai saved the king's life, but he wasn't rewarded at the time (2:23; 6:3). How does it feel when no one notices the good you do?
3. God's name isn't in Esther. How can we tell He was still at work?
4. Read Proverbs 16:9. What does it mean that God "directs" our steps?

Memory Verse Practice

MEMORY VERSE

"A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps."

PROVERBS 16:9, WEB

Motions: on "heart," hand on your heart; on "plans," tap your head; on "directs his steps," walk in place. Say it marching, then tiptoeing. K-2: learn "...Yahweh directs his steps."

Prayer

Invite kids to name one new or hard place they will go this week, out loud or silently. Anyone may pass. Then pray: *Dear God, thank You that You are always at work, even when we can't see You. Go with us everywhere we go this week. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

CLASSROOM TIPS

- **Attention signal:** say "The king!" and kids sit up tall, hands folded.
- **Secrets:** if Esther's secret comes up, add: *If anyone asks you to keep a secret that makes you feel unsafe, tell a grown-up you trust.*
- Use only large, safe items. No coins, rocks, beads, or other small objects: they are choking hazards for little ones.
- **Safeguarding.** If a child or teen tells you about abuse, neglect, self-harm, harmful drinking or drug use at home, or anything else that makes you worried for their safety: stay calm, listen, and thank them for telling you. Don't promise to keep it secret, don't question them for details or investigate, and don't confront anyone involved. Write down what they said as soon as you can, and report it the same day to your church's designated safeguarding lead, following your church's safeguarding policy and any mandatory-reporting law that applies to you. If anyone is in immediate danger, stay with them and call emergency services. Telling a church safeguarding lead does not replace any report the law requires you to make directly to child-protection authorities or police.

FOR PRESCHOOL (AGES 3-5)

- Plan 20-25 minutes: story with cues, the hidden crown game, the crown craft, and prayer.
- Tell it as *Mordecai took care of Esther, Esther became queen, and God took care of them both.* Leave out the guards' punishment.
- Questions: *Who took care of Esther? Who takes care of you?*
- Practice "...Yahweh directs his steps." while walking in place.

TAKE-HOME PAGE · FOR PARENTS

Today in Kids Ministry

A Queen in Persia

ESTHER 1-2

WHAT WE LEARNED

Esther was an orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai. When the king of Persia looked for a new queen, Esther was taken to the palace, and the king made her queen. Mordecai heard of a plan to hurt the king, and Esther told the king. God's name is never written in Esther, but He was at work all along. **Big idea:** *God is at work for me, even when I can't see Him.*

TALK ON THE WAY HOME

1. Who took care of Esther? Who takes care of you?
2. What was written in the king's book?
3. Where do you think God was working for you this week?

MEMORY VERSE

"A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps."

PROVERBS 16:9, WEB

TRY THIS AT HOME

Connect the dots: draw five dots on a sheet of paper, and label each with something from this year that turned out to matter. Talk about how God connected them, and thank Him together.

Watch the film together

Scan, or visit phillacolla.com/biblestories. Free, about 11 minutes, listed there from release day. Parents, preview it first: it briefly narrates the young women's time with the king (Esther 2:12-14) and the guards' execution (2:23). Neither is shown.

GO DEEPER AS A FAMILY

The **Family Study** track of this companion guide, on page 3, has the story, questions for every age, and a prayer. Get the full guide free at phillacolla.com/biblestories. Next in the series: *For Such a Time as This* (Esther 3-5).

PRAY TOGETHER

God, thank You for working even when we can't see You. Help us trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

KIDS: DRAW ESTHER WEARING HER CROWN

Bible Stories Brought to Life · Scripture from the World English Bible (public domain) · Free to copy for church and family use

TRACK THREE

YOUTH MINISTRY

A 60-75 minute youth night for middle and high school students: a hook, a talk, discussion, breakouts, and a challenge for the week.

THE BIG IDEA

God's name is never written in Esther, but His hand is all over it. When your life feels like a place you didn't choose, God is still writing the story.

NIGHT PLAN

	60 MIN	75 MIN
Arrival and hook	9	11
Watch the film	11	11
Leader talk	14	17
Large-group discussion	8	10
Small-group breakouts	12	16
Reflection	4	6
Challenge and prayer	2	4

THE HOOK: PLOT TWIST

Ask: *What's the best plot twist you've seen in a movie, book, or game?* No spoilers for anything recent, and no one has to answer. Take a few answers, then ask: *Looking back, what small details set up the twist?* Bridge: *Tonight's story is full of small details that look random, until you see where they lead.*

Low-prep option: *Didn't Choose It.* Invite students to think of one ordinary thing they didn't decide: a class schedule, a group-project partner, a rainy-day change of plans. They can jot it down privately or just think it; anyone may pass, and no one has to share. Ask: *How does God work in things we didn't choose?*

LEADER TALK

1 **THE MOST POWERFUL MAN ON EARTH.** Ahasuerus ruled "from India even to Ethiopia, over one hundred twenty-seven provinces" (1:1). He threw a 180-day show of wealth (1:4). Yet one queen's refusal set him off (1:12), and his advisers turned it into a law for the whole empire (1:19-22). Power looks big; it is often fragile.

2 **AN ORPHAN IN EXILE.** Esther had "neither father nor mother" (2:7). She belonged to a people far from home, and she "was taken" into the king's house (2:8). Be honest: this was not a fairy-tale contest. Esther was swept into a system she didn't choose. Many students know what it feels like to have big things decided for them.

3 **FAVOR IN A HARD PLACE.** Esther "obtained favor in the sight of all those who looked at her" (2:15), and the king made her queen (2:17). Joseph's story is similar: in a place he didn't choose, "Yahweh was with Joseph…" (Genesis 39:21). The difference is that Esther never mentions God, and neither does the narrator.

4 **WRITTEN DOWN, NOT REWARDED.** Mordecai saved the king's life, and it "was written in the book of the chronicles in the king's presence." (2:23) No reward came (6:3). Some of the most important things you do will go unnoticed for a long time. God doesn't forget (Hebrews 6:10).

5 **JESUS.** *(A gospel connection, not a prediction in Esther.)* Esther was an orphan taken in by Mordecai. In Christ, God adopts people with nothing to offer as His own children (Galatians 4:4-5). The king chose Esther for her beauty; God welcomes us by grace, "not of works" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

6 **HIDDEN, NOT ABSENT.** The film ends by asking where God might be quietly at work in your life, even when you can't see His name written anywhere. You don't have to see the whole story to trust the One who is writing it.

DISCUSSION

MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. The king had huge power but couldn't handle one "no." What does that tell you about him?
2. Esther lost her parents and was taken from her home. How do you think God cared for her?
3. Mordecai did the right thing, and no one rewarded him. Tell about a time you did the right thing and no one noticed. How did it feel?
4. Where could God be working in your life right now, even if you can't see it?

HIGH SCHOOL

1. Why do you think the book of Esther never mentions God, prayer, or the temple?
2. Mordecai told Esther to hide her people (2:10, 20). When is it wise to be quiet, and when does it become hiding?
3. Read Proverbs 16:9 and Proverbs 21:1. How do human choices and God's direction fit together?
4. What's the difference between God being hidden and God being absent?

BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. What's one thing in your life right now that you didn't choose?
2. Where have you seen a "random" detail turn out to matter?
3. Is there something good you did that no one noticed? How can you leave it with God?
4. What's one way you'll look for God's hand this week?

REFLECTION: TWO OPTIONS

Phones down. Hand each student an index card titled *Connect the Dots*. They draw five dots: moments from the past year that seemed random. Beside one, they write where they now think God was at work. Have them keep the card.

Phones out (no social media). Students privately write a note titled *Dots* with three moments from this year they want to bring to God. No one shows a screen or says what they wrote.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

LOOK FOR THE HIDDEN HAND.

Each night this week, write down one thing from the day where God might have been at work: a conversation, a timing, a help you didn't expect. Thank Him for it. Next time your small group meets, share one, if you want to. Anyone may pass.

LEADER NOTES ON HARD QUESTIONS

"WAS ESTHER WRONG TO GO ALONG WITH IT?" The text says she "was taken" (2:8, 16) and doesn't say whether she sinned or resisted. Some interpreters fault Esther and Mordecai for blending in; others stress that a young orphan in a Persian palace had little choice. Present both briefly, and don't shame anyone. Some students have had people with power over them make choices that hurt them. Make clear that is never their fault, and that adults are there to help. Keep the conversation modest; don't speculate about Esther 2:14.

"WHY DID THE KING TREAT VASHTI LIKE THAT?" The text reports a king "merry with wine" (1:10), an angry decree, and advisers worried about wives everywhere (1:17-20). It doesn't hold him up as a model. Vashti's reason is never given, so don't invent one.

"WHERE IS GOD IN ESTHER?" His name never appears in the Hebrew book, and the narrator never says "God did this." But Scripture elsewhere teaches plainly that God rules over kings and lots (Proverbs 21:1; 16:33) and works all things for His people's good (Romans 8:28). So we can say with confidence that God was at work in Esther's story; just be honest that this comes from the whole Bible, not from a statement in Esther.

"DID THIS REALLY HAPPEN?" Most scholars identify Ahasuerus with Xerxes I. Greek historians don't mention Esther or Vashti, and some scholars read the book as a literary story set at court. Ancient sources are partial, and their silence doesn't settle it. This guide, with many evangelical scholars, reads Esther as the account of real events it presents itself to be. See the Deep Dive, page 17.

SAFEGUARDING. If a child or teen tells you about abuse, neglect, self-harm, harmful drinking or drug use at home, or anything else that makes you worried for their safety: stay calm, listen, and thank them for telling you. Don't promise to keep it secret, don't question them for details or investigate, and don't confront anyone involved. Write down what they said as soon as you can, and report it the same day to your church's designated safeguarding lead, following your church's safeguarding policy and any mandatory-reporting law that applies to you. If anyone is in immediate danger, stay with them and call emergency services. Telling a church safeguarding lead does not replace any report the law requires you to make directly to child-protection authorities or police.

PRAYER

Give students a moment of silence to pray Proverbs 16:9: "A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps." Then close: *Father, You see us in places we didn't choose. Thank You that You are never absent, even when You seem hidden. Thank You for Jesus, who makes us Your children. Help us trust You with the parts of the story we can't see yet. Amen.*

TRACK FOUR

Bible Study & Small Group

A complete session for small groups, classes, and Bible studies, with leader preparation and notes. Plan on 45 to 60 minutes.

Leader Preparation

THE BIG IDEA

In a story where God is never named, ordinary events (a king's anger, an empire-wide search, an orphan's favor, a plot overheard and recorded but unrewarded) are already lining up for His people's rescue. God's providence is often hidden, but it is never absent.

> *"He brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter; for she had neither father nor mother. The maiden was fair and beautiful; and when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter."*
>
> ESTHER 2:7, WEB

BACKGROUND

- **Setting.** Susa, a royal capital of the Persian Empire, in the third to seventh years of the king (1:3; 2:16), about 483-479 BC if he is Xerxes I.
- **The king.** Ahasuerus; most scholars identify him with Xerxes I (486-465 BC). See the Deep Dive, page 17.
- **The Jews in Persia.** Cyrus had let exiles return to Jerusalem about 538 BC (Ezra 1:1-4). Many, like Mordecai's family, stayed.
- **God's name.** The Hebrew book of Esther never names God or mentions prayer. The Greek version adds prayers; those additions are not in the Hebrew text and are outside the Protestant canon, though Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include them.
- **The series.** The Daniel series ended under the Medes and Persians. Next: *For Such a Time as This* (Esther 3-5).

SESSION PLAN

	45 MIN	60 MIN
Welcome and opener	4	7
Watch the film	11	11
Read Esther 2:5-23	4	6
Discussion (choose 4-5)	18	24
Application and prayer	8	12

BEFORE YOU MEET

Read Esther 1-2 in full. Preview the film: it handles Esther 2:12-14 briefly and modestly, and the guards' execution (2:23) is narrated, not shown. Read the leader notes on page 14.

The Session

1. **Open.** Think of a time when something that looked random later turned out to matter. What was it?
2. **Watch.** Play *A Queen in Persia* (phillacolla.com/biblestories, about 11 minutes). Ask the group to notice every "coincidence" in the story.
3. **Read.** Read Esther 2:5-23 aloud together (chapter 1 is summarized well in the film). Notice that God is never named.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What image or moment from the film stayed with you?
2. Chapter 1 shows the king's wealth, power, and anger (1:4-12). What picture of human power does the chapter paint?
3. Memucan's advice turned one household's conflict into a law "that it cannot be altered" (1:19). What do you notice about how decisions get made in this court?
4. Esther had "neither father nor mother" (2:7), and Mordecai "took her for his own daughter." Where do you see faithfulness in Mordecai?
5. Esther "was taken" into the king's house (2:8). How should we think about believers caught in systems they didn't choose?
6. Mordecai told Esther not to make her people known (2:10, 20). Was that wisdom, fear, or something else? What does the text say, and what doesn't it say?
7. Mordecai's good deed was recorded but not rewarded (2:21-23; 6:3). How do you handle faithfulness that no one notices?
8. God is never named in Esther. Read Proverbs 16:9 and Proverbs 21:1. How do these verses help us read the book, and our own lives?

APPLICATION

- **Name the hidden hand.** This week, write down three "coincidences" and thank God for His care in them.
- **Be faithful unnoticed.** Do one good thing this week that no one will see, and leave the record with God (Hebrews 6:10).
- **Care for the fatherless.** Like Mordecai, look for someone who needs a family's care: a foster family, a grieving child, a lonely neighbor (Psalm 68:5).

PRAYER

Pray together through Proverbs 16:9: thank God that He directs our steps, even when we make our own plans. Thank Him for adopting us as His children in Christ (Galatians 4:4-5), and ask Him to help each person trust Him in places they didn't choose.

Leader Notes on the Questions

Q2, HUMAN POWER. The king's 180-day display (1:4) and seven-day feast (1:5) show enormous wealth, yet he cannot command his own queen (1:12). The narrator seems to enjoy the irony: a decree is sent to 127 provinces so "that every man should rule his own house" (1:22).

Q3, A LAW THAT CAN'T CHANGE. The idea of an unalterable Persian law returns at the climax (8:8; compare Daniel 6:8). Evidence outside the Bible for such a rule is limited; see the Deep Dive.

Q5, TAKEN. The text uses passive verbs for Esther: she "was taken" (2:8, 16). It neither praises nor condemns her. Interpreters differ on whether to read her as compromised or as a captive with little choice. Hold this with humility, and be gentle; some in your group may carry their own stories of being taken advantage of.

Q6, HIDDEN IDENTITY. The text gives Mordecai's instruction but not his reason (2:10). It will matter later (4:13-14). Don't fill the gap with certainty.

Q8, PROVIDENCE. The narrator never names God or says He is at work. The rest of Scripture teaches His providence plainly (Proverbs 16:33; 21:1; Romans 8:28), so we read the timing of these events confidently as His hand. Be clear that this is reading Esther in light of the whole Bible, and don't claim to know details the text leaves unstated.

IF SOMEONE ASKS ABOUT 2:14 OR 2:23. Answer simply and modestly. Esther 2:14 describes the king's harem; the guards were executed by the king's law. Don't let the group dwell on details; bring the focus back to God's care for His people.

TRACK FIVE

Deep Dive

A closer study of Esther 1-2 for teachers, preachers, and anyone who wants to dig in: history, language, structure, interpretation, and Christ.

How to read this section. Where scholars disagree, the major views held by orthodox Christian interpreters are set side by side and labeled. Scripture is quoted from the World English Bible (WEB). Hebrew words are given in Hebrew script with a simple transliteration. Verse numbers in Esther are the same in English and Hebrew Bibles.

1. Historical and Cultural Background

THE KING CALLED AHASUERUS

Hebrew *ʾăḥašwērôš* (אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ) corresponds to the Old Persian royal name *Xšayāršā*, which the Greeks wrote as *Xerxes*. Most scholars therefore identify him with Xerxes I (486-465 BC), son of Darius I. Ezra 4:6 places an Ahasuerus between Darius and Artaxerxes, the right order for Xerxes. The Greek Septuagint calls the king Artaxerxes. Xerxes' own Persepolis inscription (known as XPh) lists India and Kush among his lands, which fits "from India even to Ethiopia" (1:1). *(The identification is the majority view, not stated in Esther.)*

SUSA THE CITADEL

The king's throne "was in Susa the palace" (1:2), Hebrew *šûšan habbîrâ*, the fortified royal quarter of Susa in southwest Iran. French excavations uncovered the palace of Darius I, with a great columned audience hall (the Apadana) and a monumental gatehouse whose column bases carry an inscription of Xerxes. Some suggest this gatehouse was "the king's gate" where Mordecai sat (2:19, 21). *(A reasonable inference; the text does not locate it.)* Daniel also saw a vision "in the citadel of Susa" (Daniel 8:2).

AN EMPIRE OF 127 PROVINCES

Herodotus counts about twenty satrapies (*Histories* 3.89). Esther's 127 *mĕdînôt* were probably smaller districts. *(An interpretation; compare Daniel 6:1.)* Letters went out "to every people in their language" (1:22). Herodotus (8.98) describes Persia's royal courier relays, mounted riders stationed a day's journey apart.

THE KING'S WOMEN

Herodotus names Xerxes' queen Amestris (*Histories* 7.114; 9.109-112) and never mentions Vashti or Esther. Some identify Vashti with Amestris; others reject the link. Greek writers also describe large royal households with women of different ranks (for example, Herodotus 1.135). Esther 2:14 distinguishes the "concubines" from the queen (2:17).

THE YEARS

Esther is taken to the king "in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign" (2:16), about four years after the feast of 1:3. If the king is Xerxes, his invasion of Greece (480-479 BC) falls in that gap. *(Some connect the two; the text does not mention the war.)*

2. Literary Structure

THE SHAPE OF THE BOOK

Many interpreters see Esther arranged as a mirror, with reversals around a center at 6:1 (see Yehuda Radday's 1981 study).[1] Chapters 1-2 set the stage:

A	ESTHER 1-2	**The king's feasts; an unalterable law; Esther crowned**
B	ESTHER 3	Haman exalted; the king's ring; a decree of death
C	ESTHER 4-5	Fasting and mourning; the gallows built
X	ESTHER 6:1	"On that night, the king couldn't sleep."
C′	ESTHER 6-7	Mordecai honored; Haman hanged on the gallows
B′	ESTHER 8	Mordecai exalted; the king's ring; a decree of life
A′	ESTHER 9-10	The feasts of Purim; days that "should not fail" (9:27)

Esther is also a book of banquets: ten are mentioned, from the king's feasts (1:3, 5) and Vashti's (1:9) to Esther's own (5:4; 7:1)

and Purim (9:17-19). Several plot turns happen at a feast. Chapters 1-2 also plant details that pay off later: the unalterable law, the couriers, the king's gate, the hidden identity, and the book of the chronicles. (Haman's gallows enter at 5:14.)

THE SHAPE OF CHAPTERS 1-2

1:1-9	The king's feasts, and Vashti's
1:10-12	The command and the refusal
1:13-22	Memucan's counsel; the decree
2:1-4	The search for a new queen
2:5-7	Mordecai and Hadassah
2:8-18	Esther's favor; Esther crowned
2:19-23	The plot overheard and recorded

3. Commentary

1:1-9, FEASTS OF POWER. The opening stacks up size: 127 provinces (1:1), 180 days (1:4), "the riches of his glorious kingdom" (1:4). The garden court is described in rare detail (1:6). Persian royal gardens were walled parks with water channels and trees; the Greek word *paradeisos*, the source of our "paradise," comes from an Iranian word for such an enclosure. Notably, "the drinking was not compulsory" (1:8): even the drinking was regulated by decree. Vashti holds her own feast for the women (1:9). Persian administrative texts show royal women controlling resources and running substantial households of their own, so a separate feast fits the court, though the exact banquet custom is not independently documented.

1:10-12, THE REFUSAL. "On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine..." he orders Vashti brought "wearing the royal crown, to show the people and the princes her beauty" (1:10-11). The seven eunuchs are named (1:10); one of them, Harbona, returns at the climax (7:9). She refuses (1:12). The text gives no reason. Later Jewish tradition supplied several; Scripture does not, and the guide does not.

1:13-22, THE DECREE. The king consults those "who knew law and judgment" (1:13). Only seven princes "saw the king's face" (1:14), a detail that matters when Esther must approach him uncalled (4:11). Memucan turns a private refusal into a public threat (1:16-18) and proposes a decree "written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it cannot be altered" (1:19). The result is comic: letters to 127 provinces declaring "that every man should rule his own house" (1:22). *(Many commentators read 1:13-22 as gentle satire of the court.)* The closing phrase, "speaking in the language of his own people" (1:22), is difficult; it may mean the husband's language was to rule the household.

2:1-4, THE SEARCH. When the king's wrath "was pacified, he remembered Vashti" (2:1). The text does not say whether he regretted the decree; some readers infer it. His servants propose gathering "all the beautiful young virgins" to Susa (2:3). The plan pleases him (2:4). The narrator reports the plan without comment, as he does throughout the book.

2:5-7, MORDECAI AND HADASSAH. Mordecai is "a Benjamite" descended from Kish (2:5). The relative clause in 2:6 most naturally refers to Kish, carried away with Jeconiah in 597 BC (2 Kings 24:15); if it meant Mordecai himself, he would be very old by now. *(A common reading; the grammar allows either.)* Esther is his "uncle's daughter" (2:7), his cousin, whom he raised as a daughter. Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, means "myrtle." The names Shimei and Kish also belong to the family of King Saul, a Benjamite (1 Samuel 9:1; 2 Samuel 16:5). Many interpreters see this as setting up the clash with Haman "the Agagite" (3:1) in Part Two. *(An interpretation.)*

2:8-11, FAVOR WITH HEGAI. Esther "was taken into the king's house" (2:8). Hegai is pleased, and "she obtained kindness from him" (2:9); the Hebrew word is *ḥesed*, steadfast kindness. She keeps her people secret on Mordecai's instruction (2:10), and Mordecai walks by every day "to find out how Esther was doing, and what would become of her." (2:11) His care for her is steady and quiet.

2:12-18, ESTHER CROWNED. Twelve months of preparation are described (2:12), and the night with the king briefly (2:14). Esther is called "the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai" (2:15), confirming that she is his cousin. She asks for nothing beyond Hegai's advice (2:15), and "Esther obtained favor in the sight of all those who looked at her." (2:15) The king "set the royal crown on her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti." (2:17) The narrator neither praises nor condemns the system; see section 5. The king then holds "Esther's feast" and proclaims a holiday in the provinces (2:18), the first of the book's feasts to bear her name.

2:19-23, THE PLOT. The meaning of "When the virgins were gathered together the second time..." (2:19) is uncertain; commentators offer several explanations. Mordecai sits "in the king's gate" (2:19, 21), probably as an official *(compare Daniel 2:49)*. He uncovers a plot by two doorkeepers and reports it through Esther "in Mordecai's name" (2:22). The men are "hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the king's presence." (2:23) No reward is given (6:3). The unrewarded record becomes the hinge of the whole story (6:1-3). Notice, too, that Mordecai acts for the good of

the king who rules over him, much as Jeremiah told the exiles: "Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive..." (Jeremiah 29:7)

4. Key Words

WORD	TRANSLITERATION	MEANING AND USE
אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ	*ʾăḥašwērôš*	Ahasuerus (1:1), the Hebrew form of the Persian name the Greeks wrote as Xerxes
הַבִּירָה	*habbîrâ*	"the citadel, the palace" (1:2, 5; 2:3, 5, 8), the fortified royal quarter of Susa
מִשְׁתֶּה	*mištēh*	"feast," literally a drinking party (1:3, 5, 9; 2:18), a key word of the whole book
דָּת	*dāt*	"law, decree" (1:8, 13, 15, 19; 2:8, 12), a Persian loanword; also used in Daniel 6
וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר	*wĕlōʾ yaʿăbôr*	"so that it cannot be altered" (1:19), literally "and it will not pass away"
הֲדַסָּה	*hădassâ*	Hadassah (2:7), from *hădas*, "myrtle." *Esther* may come from Persian for "star" or from the name Ishtar; the origin is debated.
אֹמֵן	*ʾōmēn*	"He brought up..." (2:7), a foster parent or guardian; from the root *ʾmn*, "to be firm, faithful"
חֵן וָחֶסֶד	*ḥēn wāḥesed*	"favor and kindness" (2:17; compare 2:9, 15). *Ḥesed* often describes God's covenant love elsewhere.
שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ	*šaʿar hammelek*	"the king's gate" (2:19, 21), where officials served; Mordecai's post through the book
סֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים	*sēper dibrê hayyāmîm*	"the book of the chronicles" (2:23), the royal record that will be read in 6:1

5. Interpretive Questions

WHERE IS GOD IN ESTHER?

The Hebrew text never names God, and never mentions prayer, the temple, or the covenant. The Greek version adds about a hundred verses, including prayers by Mordecai and Esther; those additions are not in the Hebrew text and are outside the Protestant canon, though Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include them. Readers have explained the silence in different ways: as a deliberate literary choice that invites readers to see a hidden providence, as a reflection of a people living far from the land and temple, or as a story meant to be read in light of the rest of Scripture. Most evangelical interpreters see God's providence throughout, as the wider Bible teaches (Proverbs 16:33; 21:1). Matthew Henry made the point memorably: God's name is not in the book, but His finger is *(a paraphrase)*. Hold the conclusion confidently, and the details humbly: the text never says which events God caused.

SHOULD ESTHER AND MORDECAI BE FAULTED IN CHAPTER 2?

Some interpreters fault both: Mordecai for seeking advancement and urging concealment, and Esther for entering a pagan king's harem and later marriage without protest (compare Deuteronomy 7:3). Others stress the passive verbs: she "was taken" (2:8, 16) and the powerlessness of an orphan in a Persian palace, and compare Joseph and Daniel, who served faithfully in foreign courts. The narrator passes no judgment here, and neither does this guide. Esther's courage in chapter 4 is the turning point of her story.

DID THESE EVENTS HAPPEN?

Many critical scholars read Esther as a historical novel with an authentic Persian setting, pointing to the silence of Greek sources about Vashti and Esther. Evangelical scholars such as Edwin Yamauchi note how accurately the book reflects Persian court life, names, and customs, and that ancient sources are partial. A name *Marduka* appears among officials in Persian administrative texts of this period, though a name alone proves nothing. Some interpreters, with respect, read the book differently, and the

> mention of royal records (10:2) does not by itself prove every detail. This guide, following the book's own presentation of real events and records (10:2), takes the account as historical.

6. Cross-References

- **Daniel 6:8; Esther 8:8**: "the law of the Medes and Persians, which doesn't alter" (Daniel 6:8, WEB).
- **Daniel 8:2**: Daniel's vision "in the citadel of Susa" (WEB).
- **Ezra 1:1-4; 4:6**: the return under Cyrus; Ahasuerus in Persian history.
- **Genesis 39:21**: "Yahweh was with Joseph, and showed kindness to him..." (WEB)
- **Psalm 68:5**: "A father of the fatherless, and a defender of the widows, is God in his holy habitation." (WEB)
- **Proverbs 16:9; 21:1**: human plans and God's direction.
- **Hebrews 6:10**: "God is not unrighteous, so as to forget your work..." (WEB)

7. How Esther 1-2 Points to Christ

An orphan adopted. (A theological reflection.) Mordecai "took her for his own daughter" (Esther 2:7). In Christ, God takes in people who have no claim on Him: He sent His Son "that we might receive the adoption as children." (Galatians 4:5, WEB)

Favor that is earned, and grace that is given. (A gospel contrast.) Esther won the king's favor after a year of preparation (2:12-17). God's favor in Christ is not won: "for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9, WEB)

A queen placed for a coming crisis. (A gospel parallel, not a prediction in Esther.) Esther was raised to the throne before anyone knew her people would need her (4:14). Jesus, the true King, came "when the fullness of the time came" (Galatians 4:4, WEB) to save His people.

A good deed recorded. (A theological application.) Mordecai's service was written down but went unrewarded by the king (6:3). God forgets nothing done for Him (Hebrews 6:10), and the Lord Jesus promised that whoever serves the least of His people serves Him (Matthew 25:40).

8. For Further Study

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NOTES

1. Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Gerstenberg, 1981).

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