


THE ESTHER SERIES · PART TWO OF THREE

# For Such a Time as This

*If I Perish*

| SCRIPTURE | WATCH FREE | FILM |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Esther 3:1-5:14 | 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.*



*"So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter." (Esther 5:2, WEB)*

## The Story, Simply Told

Part Two of the Esther Series, retold from Esther 3-5. Quoted words are paraphrased for children. Haman's plan to destroy the Jews is told simply.

Esther had become queen, but no one in the palace knew she was Jewish. Her cousin Mordecai had saved the king's life, and he still had not been rewarded.

Then the king made a man named Haman more important than all his other leaders, and he ordered everyone at the gate to bow down to Haman. Mordecai would not bow. Haman was furious. He decided to destroy not just Mordecai but all of Mordecai's people, the Jews. He cast lots, called *pur*, to choose a day. Then he told the king that a certain people didn't obey his laws, and the king let Haman write a law, sealed with the king's ring, that the Jews would be destroyed on that day.

When Mordecai heard, he tore his clothes and cried out loud in the city. He sent word to Esther: go to the king and plead for your people. But anyone who went to the king without being called could be put to death, unless the king held out his golden scepter. Mordecai answered, "Don't think you'll escape because you live in the palace. Who knows? Maybe you became queen for such a time as this!"

Esther asked all the Jews in the city to fast for her for three days, and she and her maids fasted too. Then she said, "I will go to the king, even though it's against the law. And if I perish, I perish." On the third day she stood in the king's court. The king held out the golden scepter, and Esther touched its tip! She invited the king and Haman to a banquet, and then to another one the next day. Haman went home proud, but still angry at Mordecai, and he prepared a terrible plan against him. *(For older children: Esther 5:14 says he had a tall gallows built to hang Mordecai.)* That night, the king could not sleep.

*"Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

(Esther 4:14, WEB)

## Talk Together

**AGES 4-7**

1. What did Esther have to be brave about?
2. What did the king hold out to Esther?
3. Who can you be kind to or help this week?

**AGES 8-12**

1. Why was it dangerous for Esther to go to the king?
2. Esther asked others to fast with her before she went. Why do you think that mattered?
3. When is it hard for you to speak up for someone?

**TEENS**

1. Mordecai said Esther might be where she was "for such a time as this" (4:14). Where might God be calling you to do good right where you are?
2. Esther said, "if I perish, I perish" (4:16). What makes courage different from not being afraid?
3. Haman had everything but was miserable over one man (5:13). What does pride do to a person?

## Try This Together

**Who Can I Speak Up For?** 10 MINUTES Each person draws three circles: home, school or work, and church or team. In each circle, write one person who might need a kind word or someone on their side. Pray for those people by name. Finish by choosing one step each person will take this week.

**A Family Courage Fast** ONE EVENING Esther's people fasted before she went to the king. As a family, give up one treat or screen time for an evening (never meals for children), and use that time to pray together for people who are in danger or treated unfairly. Close by reading the memory verse.

**MEMORY VERSE**

"My times are in your hand."

PSALM 31:15, WEB

*Older children: learn Psalm 31:14 too, which begins, "But I trust in you, Yahweh."*

**A FAMILY PRAYER**

*Dear God, thank You that our times are in Your hand. Thank You for Esther's courage. When we are afraid to do what is right, make us brave, and help us speak up for people who need help. Thank You for Jesus, who gave His life to save us. 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 can use me to help others, even when I'm afraid.**

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

Proud Haman was angry that Mordecai would not bow, so he made a plan to destroy all the Jews. Mordecai asked Queen Esther to go to the king for help, even though going without being called was dangerous. Esther and her people fasted. Then she went, and the king held out his golden scepter.

READ BEFORE CLASS

Esther 3-5 and Psalm 31:14-15. If you will show the film, watch it all the way through first.

## What Kids May Ask

**"Why wouldn't Mordecai bow?"** The Bible doesn't say exactly. It says only that he had told them "he was a Jew" (3:4). Say: *We don't know all his reasons, but we know Haman's anger was wrong.*

**"Why did Haman want to hurt the Jews?"** He was angry at one man and wanted to destroy all his people (3:5-6). Say: *That was a terrible, wicked plan. God loves people from every nation.*

**"Was Esther scared?"** The Bible doesn't tell us her feelings. It tells us what she did: she fasted, she asked others to fast, and she went (4:16; 5:1).

**"What is fasting?"** Going without food for a while, often to focus on God. Say: *Kids shouldn't skip meals. You can give up a treat and pray instead.*

**"Should I break rules to help?"** Say: *If someone is being hurt, tell a grown-up you trust right away.*

## Telling the Story

YOU'LL NEED a paper crown, a paper towel tube covered in yellow paper for the golden scepter, a sheet of paper rolled like a letter, and a chair for the king's throne (the leader sits; kids stay on the floor). *SAY lines are a dramatized paraphrase for children; READ lines quote the WEB.*

DO Teach the cues. When you hear "Haman," stomp your feet softly (at Purim, people still make noise at his name). When you hear "scepter," hold one arm straight out.

SAY The king made Haman the most important leader, and everyone had to bow to him. But Mordecai would not bow. Haman was so angry that he made a terrible plan against all of Mordecai's people. He tricked the king into sealing a law with his ring. *(Hold up the rolled letter.)*

SAY Mordecai was very sad, and he asked Queen Esther to talk to the king. But nobody could go to the king without being called, unless the king held out his golden scepter.

| | |
|---|---|
| **READ** | Esther 4:14 aloud: "Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" |
| **SAY** | Esther asked all her people to fast for three days. Then she said, *I will go to the king. And if I perish, I perish.* |
| **DO** | Sit on the chair with the crown on. Invite a helper to walk slowly toward you. Pause. Then hold out the scepter. |
| **READ** | Esther 5:2 aloud: "So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter." |
| **SAY** | The king was kind to Esther! She invited him and Haman to a special dinner, and then to another one. God was at work, and the story wasn't over yet. |
| **ASK** | What did Esther do even though it was scary? Who could you help this week? |

**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 3:41 to 7:33 (Mordecai mourns through Esther's "Not yet. Tomorrow."), and tell the beginning yourself. **STOP AT 7:33,** before Haman plans a gallows for Mordecai. For grades 3-5, the default is two clips: 0:24 to 3:17 and 3:33 to 7:58 (starting at 0:24 skips the opening tease). This skips the decree read aloud, which names "little children and women" (Esther 3:13; 3:18-3:32 in the film), and **STOPS AT 7:58,** before Haman's friends propose hanging Mordecai (7:59-8:14). At the skip, say simply: *The law said all the Jews would be destroyed on one day.* After previewing, a leader may choose the full range, 0:24 to 8:15, for a class that is ready for it. No violence is shown on screen. Times are from the film's final caption file.

## Opening Game: The Golden Scepter

The leader holds a paper "scepter" and stands at one end of the room. Kids line up at the other end. One at a time, a child walks slowly toward the leader. When the scepter goes down, they freeze; when the leader holds it out, they may walk again. When they arrive, they touch the tip gently with one finger and go to the back of the line. No running, crowding, swinging, or poking; only the leader holds the scepter. No one is out; anyone who moves early just takes one step back.

**Wrap up:** *Going to the king was dangerous. Queen Esther went anyway, to help her people. Let's find out what happened!*

## Object Lesson: A Voice for Others

**YOU'LL NEED** a sheet of poster board rolled into a megaphone and taped.

Stand at the back of the room and whisper, *Please help.* Ask: *Could you hear me?* Then say it again through the megaphone. **Say:** *Esther's people couldn't get to the king, but Esther was close to him. Her place in the palace was like this megaphone: she could speak where they couldn't. God puts each of us in places where we can speak up for others, with kind words, or by telling a grown-up when someone is being hurt.* Close by having the class say through the megaphone, *God, help me be brave!*

## Craft: My Golden Scepter

Kids wrap a cardboard tube in yellow paper and tape it. For the top, they crumple a sheet of yellow paper into a big ball and tape it on firmly. On a paper tag tied or taped to the scepter, they write **God can use me to help others.** Grades 3-5 can add the memory verse.

**SUPPLIES (PER CHILD)**

- A cardboard tube (paper towel size)
- Two sheets of yellow construction paper
- Tape and a paper tag (tags pre-cut by leaders)
- Crayons or markers
- No scissors for children; leaders do any cutting before class

## Small Groups

GRADES K-2

1. Why was Esther brave?
2. What did the king hold out to Esther?
3. Who is someone you could help this week?

GRADES 3-5

1. Haman had power and riches but was still angry (5:11-13). Why do you think he wasn't happy?
2. Mordecai said Esther might be queen "for such a time as this" (4:14). What do you think he meant?
3. Esther asked others to fast with her (4:16). The verse doesn't mention prayer. Why might it help to have people stand with you when you face something scary?
4. Read Psalm 31:15. What does "My times are in your hand." mean?

## Memory Verse Practice

MEMORY VERSE

### "My times are in your hand."

PSALM 31:15, WEB

*Motions: on "My times," tap your wrist like a watch; on "in your hand," hold out an open hand, then point up. Say it slowly, then quickly, then in a whisper. Grades 3-5: add Psalm 31:14.*

## Prayer

Invite kids to name someone who needs help or a friend, out loud or silently. Anyone may pass. Then pray: *Dear God, our times are in Your hand. When we are afraid, help us be brave and kind. Thank You for Jesus, who came to save us. Amen.*

CLASSROOM TIPS

- **Attention signal:** hold out the scepter; kids freeze and look at you.
- **Fasting:** never ask children to skip meals. Suggest giving up a treat instead, with parents' permission.
- 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 scepter game, the scepter craft, and prayer.
- Tell it as *Esther was brave, she asked the king for help, and God took care of her.* Say only that Haman had a mean plan.
- Questions: *What did the king hold out? Who can you help?*
- Practice "My times are in your hand." with an open hand.

TAKE-HOME PAGE · FOR PARENTS

*Today in Kids Ministry*

# For Such a Time as This

ESTHER 3-5

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Proud Haman made a plan to destroy Mordecai's people, the Jews. Mordecai asked Queen Esther to go to the king, though it was dangerous. Esther and her people fasted for three days. Then she went, and the king held out his golden scepter. God was at work, even though His name is never written in Esther. **Big idea:** *God can use me to help others, even when I'm afraid.*

## TALK ON THE WAY HOME

1. What was Esther brave about?
2. When is it hard to speak up for someone?
3. Who could our family help this week?

## MEMORY VERSE

**"My times are in your hand."**

PSALM 31:15, WEB

## TRY THIS AT HOME

Draw three circles: home, school, and church or team. In each, write someone who might need a friend or someone on their side. Pray for them by name, and choose one kind step to take.

### Watch the film together

Scan, or visit phillacolla.com/biblestories. Free, about 11 minutes, listed there from release day. Parents, preview it first: it reads Haman's decree to destroy the Jews (Esther 3:13) and his plan to hang Mordecai (5:14). No violence 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: *The Gallows and the Reversal* (Esther 6-10).

## PRAY TOGETHER

*God, thank You that our times are in Your hand. Make us brave to help others. In Jesus' name, amen.*

KIDS: DRAW ESTHER AND THE GOLDEN SCEPTER

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 is sovereign and at work, even in places we didn't choose. Staying silent is a choice too. Courage isn't the absence of fear; it's stepping forward and trusting God with the outcome.**

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: RISK LADDER

On a whiteboard, write five risks: sitting with a new student at lunch; standing up for someone being mocked; telling an adult about something unsafe; saying you follow Jesus when someone asks; admitting you were wrong. Students rank them, on paper, from easiest to hardest. No one has to share. Ask: *What makes the hard ones hard?* Bridge: *Tonight a young queen faces a risk that could cost her life.*

**Low-prep option:** *Would You Speak Up?* Read two everyday scenarios and ask students to think, silently, what they'd do. (1) *In a group chat, people start posting mocking memes about a classmate who isn't in the chat.* (2) *A new student sits alone at lunch for the third day in a row.* Ask: *What makes speaking up hard? What would one small, kind step be?* If a situation involves real danger, the right step is telling a trusted adult.

## LEADER TALK

1 **ONE MAN'S PRIDE.** Haman was promoted above everyone (3:1). When Mordecai wouldn't bow, “Haman was full of wrath.” (3:5), and one man wasn't enough for him: he “sought to destroy all the Jews” (3:6). Wounded pride can turn into hatred of a whole people. Even later, with riches and honor, he said, “Yet all this avails me nothing…” (5:13)

2 **A SEALED DECREE.** Haman cast lots for a date (3:7), offered a vast payment to secure the king's agreement (3:9-11), and sealed a law with the king's ring (3:12). Then “The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Susa was perplexed.” (3:15) Evil often looks calm and official.

**3** **SILENCE OR COURAGE.** Esther had a reason to stay quiet: approaching uncalled meant death unless the king held out the scepter (4:11). Mordecai answered, "For if you remain silent now, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:14) Silence is a choice too.

**4** **IF I PERISH.** Esther didn't act alone. She asked her people to fast with her for three days (4:16), then went in, "which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." (4:16) Courage isn't feeling no fear. It's doing the right thing and leaving the outcome with God.

**5** **JESUS.** *(A gospel connection, not a prediction in Esther.)* Esther risked her life to plead for her people, and she lived. Jesus willingly laid down His life for His people: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11) Now the risen Christ "lives forever to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Because of Him, we never have to wait for a scepter. We can "draw near with boldness to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16).

**6** **YOUR SUCH-A-TIME.** The film asks: what is the "such a time as this" in your life? Is there someone who needs you to speak up? You don't have to be fearless. Take the first step and trust God with the rest. Courage can also mean asking for help: if you or someone else is in danger, telling a trusted adult is the brave step.

## DISCUSSION

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. Haman had wealth and honor, yet one man's refusal consumed him (5:11-13). What does his reaction tell us about pride?
2. Why was it so risky for Esther to go to the king?
3. Esther asked her people to fast with her. Who are the people who "have your back" in prayer?
4. Where could you speak up for someone this week?

### HIGH SCHOOL

1. Mordecai said relief would come "from another place" if Esther stayed silent (4:14). What does that say about God's plans, and about our part in them?
2. Esther went against the law to save lives. Read Acts 5:29 and Romans 13:1. How do we tell the difference?
3. Haman targeted a whole people because of one man. Where do you see that kind of hatred today?
4. What's the difference between being fearless and being courageous?

### BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. When have you stayed silent when you wish you had spoken up?
2. Where has God placed you right now: school, team, family, friendships?
3. Who is one person in that place who needs someone on their side?
4. What's one first step of courage you could take this week?

REFLECTION: TWO OPTIONS

**Phones down.** Hand each student an index card titled *For Such a Time*. They write where God has placed them, one person there who needs help or a friend, and one first step. Have them keep the card.

**Phones out (no social media).** Students privately write a note titled *Such a time* with one name and one step, and set a reminder to pray for that person. No one shows a screen or says what they wrote.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

### ONE STEP OF COURAGE.

Pray each day for the person on your card. Then take one step: sit with them, stand up for them, or tell a trusted adult if they are in danger. Next time your small group meets, share how it went, if you want to. Anyone may pass.

## LEADER NOTES ON HARD QUESTIONS

**"WHY WOULDN'T MORDECAI BOW? WASN'T THAT JUST STUBBORN?"** The text gives one clue: "he had told them that he was a Jew" (3:4). Bowing to honor a ruler was normal in Scripture (1 Samuel 24:8), so many think the issue was Haman himself, an Agagite (3:1), a descendant of Israel's old enemy Amalek (1 Samuel 15). Others think the homage had a religious edge. Be honest that the text doesn't settle it.

**"WAS ESTHER WRONG TO BREAK THE LAW?"** She broke a court rule to save lives, and she did it openly, accepting the risk. Scripture calls us to honor authorities (Romans 13:1) and to obey God when the two conflict (Acts 5:29). This is not permission to ignore parents or teachers in ordinary matters.

**"DOES HATRED LIKE HAMAN'S STILL HAPPEN?"** Yes. Jewish people have faced hatred and violence many times since, and Christians must reject antisemitism and every kind of hatred of a people. Jesus Himself was a Jew. Some students have experienced racism or bullying; listen with care and connect them with a trusted adult.

**"DOES GOD NEED ESTHER?"** Mordecai trusted that rescue would come "from another place" (4:14). God's purposes don't depend on us, yet He invites us into them. Fear is normal; help students see courage as a next step with God, not a feeling.

**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 Psalm 31:15: "My times are in your hand." Then close: *Father, You are at work even in places we didn't choose. Give us courage to speak up for others and to trust You with what happens next. Thank You that Jesus laid down His life for us and that we can come to You anytime. 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

When a decree of death falls on God's people, Esther must choose between safety and solidarity. Silence is not neutral. God's purposes do not depend on us, but He places His people where they are "for such a time as this," and calls them to step forward in faith.

> *"For if you remain silent now, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*
>
> ESTHER 4:14, WEB

### BACKGROUND

- **Setting.** Susa, about five years after Esther became queen. The lot is cast in the first month of the king's twelfth year (3:7), about 474 BC if he is Xerxes I.
- **Haman the Agagite.** Many link "Agagite" to Agag, king of Amalek (1 Samuel 15:8). See the Deep Dive, page 17.
- **The decree.** Sealed with the king's ring and sent in every language (3:12-13). The day set was almost a year away (3:13).
- **The scepter.** Approaching the king uncalled meant death unless he held out the golden scepter (4:11).
- **The series.** Part One: *A Queen in Persia* (Esther 1-2). Next: *The Gallows and the Reversal* (Esther 6-10).

### SESSION PLAN

| | 45 MIN | 60 MIN |
|---|---|---|
| Welcome and opener | 4 | 7 |
| Watch the film | 11 | 11 |
| Read Esther 4:1-5:8 | 4 | 6 |
| Discussion (choose 4-5) | 18 | 24 |
| Application and prayer | 8 | 12 |

### BEFORE YOU MEET

Read Esther 3-5 in full. Preview the film: Haman's decree (3:13) is read aloud, including its words about children, and Haman plans a gallows (5:14). No violence is shown. Read the leader notes on page 14.

## The Session

1 **Open.** When have you had to choose between staying safe and speaking up?

2 **Watch.** Play *For Such a Time as This* (phillacolla.com/biblestories, about 11 minutes). Ask the group to notice what Esther does before she goes to the king.

3 **Read.** Read Esther 4:1-5:8 aloud together. Notice that God, prayer, and the temple are never mentioned, even during the fast.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 What image or moment from the film stayed with you?

2 Haman's anger at one man became a plan against a whole people (3:5-6). How does pride grow into hatred?

3 "The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Susa was perplexed." (3:15) What does this contrast show?

4 Esther first explains why she can't go (4:11). How is her hesitation understandable?

5 Read Mordecai's reply (4:13-14). What does he say about deliverance and about Esther's responsibility? What does he leave unstated?

6 Esther asks for a community fast before she acts (4:16). What does that teach about courage and dependence?

7 Esther doesn't make her request at once, but invites the king and Haman to two banquets (5:4-8). Why might she wait?

8 Haman has wealth, family, and honor, yet says "all this avails me nothing..." (5:13). What does his complaint reveal about what matters most to him?

## APPLICATION

- **Name your place.** Write down where God has placed you, and one person there you could serve or speak up for.
- **Don't go alone.** Ask one or two people to pray with you before a hard conversation, as Esther did.
- **Draw near.** Thank God that in Christ we can "draw near with boldness to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16).

## PRAYER

Pray together through Psalm 31:14-15, which begins, "But I trust in you, Yahweh." Pray for persecuted believers and for people anywhere targeted for who they are, and ask God for courage to speak for those who cannot (Proverbs 31:8).

# Leader Notes on the Questions

**Q2, PRIDE AND HATRED.** Haman "scorned the thought of laying hands on Mordecai alone" (3:6). His accusation to the king is vague and slanted: "a certain people," with laws "different from other people's" (3:8). He never names them. Watch for how prejudice works by generalizing.

**Q3, THE CONTRAST.** The king and Haman celebrate while the city is "perplexed" (3:15). The text doesn't say how different groups in Susa reacted, only that the city was troubled. Indifference in high places is part of the story's evil.

**Q5, MORDECAI'S FAITH.** Mordecai is confident that "relief and deliverance" will come (4:14), but he does not say from where, and he never names God. Many read this as quiet trust in God's covenant promises; others read "another place" more generally. Let the group notice what he says before drawing out what he may believe. Either way, he holds deliverance and Esther's responsibility together.

**Q6, THE FAST.** In Scripture fasting usually accompanies prayer (Ezra 8:21-23; Joel 2:12), but Esther 4:16 doesn't mention prayer. Don't claim more than the text says; it's fair to note what fasting meant elsewhere in the Bible.

**Q7, TWO BANQUETS.** The text gives no reason for the delay. Some see wisdom and timing; others, hesitation. The delay sets up the sleepless night of 6:1.

**Q8, HAMAN'S COMPLAINT.** Notice the contrast the chapter sets up: Esther's people fast (4:16) while Haman feasts and still is not satisfied (5:12-13).

**IF SOMEONE ASKS ABOUT THE DECREE'S WORDS (3:13).** The text is stark: the decree targets children too. Acknowledge the horror honestly and briefly, without dwelling on it. Some in your group may have family histories of persecution; be gentle.

TRACK FIVE

# Deep Dive

*A closer study of Esther 3-5 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

### HAMAN THE AGAGITE

Haman is "the son of Hammedatha the Agagite" (3:1). Many interpreters, ancient and modern, link *Agagite* to Agag, the Amalekite king whom Saul spared (1 Samuel 15:8). Mordecai, for his part, descends from Kish, a Benjamite (2:5), the name of Saul's father (1 Samuel 9:1). Read this way, Esther replays an old conflict: Amalek attacked Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19). Josephus also calls Haman an Amalekite (*Antiquities*, book 11). Others take *Agagite* as an unknown place or family name. *(A widely held interpretation, not stated in Esther.)*

### CASTING THE LOT

In Haman's presence, "they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman" (3:7). *Pûr* is a borrowed word, from Akkadian *pūru*, "lot." A small inscribed clay cube from Assyria, the lot of Yahalu (Yale Babylonian Collection, YBC 7058; 9th century BC), calls itself a *pūru* and was associated with the ceremonial designation of the official whose name marked the year; whether the lot actually decided the choice is debated.[1]

### TEN THOUSAND TALENTS

Haman offered "ten thousand talents of silver" (3:9). If a talent was about 30 kg, that is roughly 300 metric tons. *(An estimate; ancient talents varied.)* Herodotus put the annual tribute of the whole empire under Darius I at 14,560 Euboic talents (*Histories* 3.95), so the offer was enormous. The king's reply, "The silver is given to you..." (3:11), may decline the money or accept it politely; interpreters differ.

### APPROACHING THE KING

Esther 4:11 says anyone who came uncalled into the inner court would die unless the king held out the golden scepter. Herodotus says the Median king Deioces had people deal with him through messengers (1.99), and that Intaphernes, one of the nobles allowed to enter unannounced, was still turned away because Darius I was with a woman (3.118). Reliefs at Persepolis show the enthroned king holding a long staff. *(Outside evidence is consistent with the text but does not describe this exact law.)*

### THE CALENDAR

The decree was written "on the first month, on the thirteenth day of the month" (3:12), the day before Passover was to be kept (Exodus 12:6). If Esther's fast followed at once, it overlapped the feast that remembered the exodus. *(A common observation; the text draws no link.)*

## 2. Literary Structure

### THE SHAPE OF THE BOOK

Many interpreters see Esther arranged as a mirror around a center at 6:1 (see Yehuda Radday's 1981 study).[2] Chapters 3-5 build the crisis:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 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) |

Feasting and fasting alternate. The king and Haman drink (3:15) while the Jews fast (4:3, 16); Esther then holds a banquet (5:4). The book's reversals start to show: Haman goes home "joyful and glad of heart" (5:9) and ends the chapter building a gallows.

**THE SHAPE OF CHAPTERS 3-5**

| | |
|---|---|
| 3:1-6 | Haman exalted; Mordecai refuses to bow |
| 3:7-15 | The lot, the offer of silver, the decree |
| 4:1-3 | Mourning in Susa and the provinces |
| 4:4-17 | Esther and Mordecai: "for such a time as this" |
| 5:1-8 | The golden scepter; the first banquet |
| 5:9-14 | Haman's rage; the gallows |

## 3. Commentary

**3:1-6, THE REFUSAL.** "After these things..." (3:1) covers about five years: Esther was taken to the king in his seventh year (2:16), and the lot is cast in his twelfth (3:7). The king "set his seat above all the princes" (3:1) and commands homage to Haman (3:2). Mordecai "didn't bow down or pay him homage" (3:2). Asked daily, he gives one explanation: "he had told them that he was a Jew" (3:4). Haman "scorned the thought of laying hands on Mordecai alone" (3:6) and seeks to destroy all the Jews.

**3:7-11, THE LOT AND THE ACCUSATION.** The lot is cast "from day to day, and from month to month" (3:7). Haman's charge mixes truth and slander: the people are "scattered abroad and dispersed"; their laws are different; "They don't keep the king's laws." (3:8) He never names them. The lot has fallen on Adar, the twelfth month (3:7), almost a year away. The king hands over his ring (3:10) without asking who they are. The ring that gives Haman royal authority now seals the decree against the Jews.

**3:12-15, THE DECREE.** It is written in the king's name and sealed with his ring (3:12), ordering "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day" (3:13). A copy is "published to all the peoples" (3:14), so neighbors would know the day. Then the narrator sets two scenes side by side: "The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Susa was perplexed." (3:15)

**4:1-3, SACKCLOTH.** Mordecai tears his clothes and puts on "sackcloth with ashes" (4:1). He comes "even before the king's gate" (4:2) but no farther, since no one in sackcloth could pass inside, and the mourning spreads: "In every province... there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing..." (4:3). In the rest of the Old Testament such mourning is usually directed to God (Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8). Here the text is silent about prayer.

**4:4-12, MESSAGES.** Esther sends clothing; Mordecai refuses it (4:4). Queen and cousin can no longer meet; every word passes through Hathach, a eunuch appointed to attend her (4:5), in the city square before the gate (4:6). Through Hathach he sends the decree and "the exact sum of the money" (4:7), and urges her "to make request before him for her people" (4:8). Esther explains the law of the inner court and adds, "I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days." (4:11)

**4:13-14, FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS.** Mordecai's reply is the theological center of Esther's story. He warns that the palace will not protect her (4:13). He is confident that "relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place" (4:14). And he asks, "Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:14) The question is humble ("Who knows"), yet it assumes a purpose behind her position.

**4:15-17, IF I PERISH.** Esther takes command: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are present in Susa, and fast for me..." (4:16). The fast is total: "neither eat nor drink three days, night or day" (4:16). She and her maidens fast too. She will go in, "which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." (4:16) Then "Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him." (4:17) The orphan who obeyed Mordecai (2:20) now gives the orders.

**5:1-8, THE SCEPTER AND THE BANQUET.** "Now on the third day, Esther put on her royal clothing..." (5:1). The Hebrew says literally that she "put on royalty," an echo of the crown she had been given (2:17). *(An observation.)* The king "held out to Esther the golden scepter" and she "touched the top of the scepter" (5:2). He offers "even to the half of the kingdom" (5:3), a courtly way of saying "ask generously." *(An interpretation.)* She asks only for a banquet, then a second (5:4-8), and each time the offer is repeated (5:6). Her words are carefully courteous: "If it seems good to the king..." (5:4).

**5:9-14, HAMAN'S RAGE.** Haman leaves "joyful and glad of heart" (5:9) until he sees Mordecai, who "didn't stand up nor move for him" (5:9). Yet "Haman restrained himself..." (5:10) and went home. There he recounts "the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children" (5:11) and his private invitation from the queen (5:12), then confesses, "Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." (5:13) Zeresh and his friends propose a gallows "fifty

cubits high" (5:14), about 75 feet. The Hebrew *ʿēṣ* means "tree" or "pole"; see *The Gallows and the Reversal* guide.

## 4. Key Words

| WORD | TRANSLITERATION | MEANING AND USE |
|---|---|---|
| הָאֲגָגִי | *hā'ăgāgî* | "the Agagite" (3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24); often linked to Agag of Amalek (1 Samuel 15:8) |
| כֹּרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים | *kōrĕʿîm ûmištaḥăwîm* | "bowed down and paid homage" (3:2); the second verb is also used for worship |
| פּוּר · הַגּוֹרָל | *pûr · haggôrāl* | "Pur, that is, the lot..." (3:7). *Pûr* is from Akkadian; *gôrāl* is the Hebrew word that explains it. |
| צֹרֵר הַיְּהוּדִים | *ṣōrēr hayyĕhûdîm* | "the Jews' enemy" (3:10; 8:1; 9:10, 24), Haman's title |
| שַׂק וָאֵפֶר | *śaq wā'ēper* | "sackcloth with ashes" (4:1, 3), signs of mourning and humbling |
| רֶוַח וְהַצָּלָה | *rewaḥ wĕhaṣṣālâ* | "relief and deliverance" (4:14). *Rewaḥ*, literally "space, breathing room." |
| מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר | *mimmāqôm 'aḥēr* | "from another place" (4:14); its meaning is debated (see section 5) |
| לְעֵת כָּזֹאת | *lĕʿēt kāzō't* | "for such a time as this" (4:14) |
| אָבַדְתִּי אָבָדְתִּי | *'ābadtî 'ābādĕtî* | "I perish, I perish." (4:16), the same verb as "perish" in 3:13 and 4:14 |
| שַׁרְבִיט הַזָּהָב | *šarbîṭ hazzāhāb* | "the golden scepter" (4:11; 5:2; 8:4) |

## 5. Interpretive Questions

### WHY WOULDN'T MORDECAI BOW?

The text gives only one clue: "he had told them that he was a Jew" (3:4). Bowing to honor rulers was not forbidden; David bowed to Saul (1 Samuel 24:8). Three explanations are common. (1) **Israel and Amalek.** Mordecai, a Benjamite, would not honor an Agagite, given God's judgment on Amalek (Exodus 17:14-16; 1 Samuel 15). (2) **Worship.** The homage had a religious edge; the Greek additions to Esther, which are not in the Hebrew text and are outside the Protestant canon (Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include them), explain his refusal this way. (3) **Unexplained.** The narrator leaves it open, and so should we. In any case, Haman's response is plainly evil.

### WHAT IS "ANOTHER PLACE" (4:14)?

Many Jewish and Christian interpreters read "another place" as a veiled reference to God's providence; later rabbis even used "the Place" as a name for God, though that usage comes after Esther. Others think Mordecai meant another human source of help. Either way, his confidence that deliverance would come fits God's promises to preserve His people (for example, Jeremiah 31:35-37). The text itself does not name God, and the guide does not put words in Mordecai's mouth.

### DID ESTHER'S FAST INCLUDE PRAYER?

Esther 4:16 mentions fasting only. Elsewhere in Scripture, fasting nearly always goes with seeking God (Ezra 8:21-23; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-9). Most interpreters assume prayer was involved. The Greek additions supply prayers for Mordecai and Esther, but they are not in the Hebrew text and are outside the Protestant canon, though Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include them. Teach what the text says, and note what fasting meant in the rest of the Bible.

## 6. Cross-References

- **Exodus 17:8-16; 1 Samuel 15**: Israel and Amalek; Agag.
- **Proverbs 16:18**: "Pride goes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall." (WEB)
- **Psalm 31:15**: "My times are in your hand." (WEB)
- **Proverbs 31:8**: "Open your mouth for the mute, in the cause of all who are left desolate." (WEB)
- **Daniel 3:17-18**: "But if not..." courage that leaves the outcome with God.
- **Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5**: fasting and mourning before God.

- **Hebrews 4:16**: "Let's therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace..." (WEB)

## 7. How Esther 3-5 Points to Christ

*A mediator who risks everything. (A gospel parallel, not a prediction in Esther.)* Esther stood between her people and death, saying, "if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). Jesus is the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5, WEB), and He did not merely risk death: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11, WEB)

*The scepter held out. (A theological reflection.)* Esther approached a throne where she might be killed. In Christ, believers come to a throne of grace by invitation: "In him we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him." (Ephesians 3:12, WEB)

*A people under sentence. (A theological application.)* A sealed decree hung over every Jew in the empire, and no one could revoke it (3:12-13; 8:8). Haman's decree was unjust; the condemnation the gospel speaks of is just, and Christ bore it for His people: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 8:1, WEB) The answer to Haman's decree comes in Part Three.

*Pride and humility. (A theological reflection.)* Haman sought honor for himself and was never satisfied (5:13). Christ "humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death" (Philippians 2:8, WEB), and God exalted Him.

## 8. For Further Study

**COMMENTARIES (ACCESSIBLE)** - KAREN H. JOBES, *ESTHER*, NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY (ZONDERVAN, 1999). - IAIN M. DUGUID, *ESTHER AND RUTH*, REFORMED EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY (P&R, 2005). - DEBRA REID, *ESTHER*, TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES (IVP, 2008). - JOYCE G. BALDWIN, *ESTHER*, TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES (IVP, 1984).

**COMMENTARIES (ADVANCED)** - FREDERIC W. BUSH, *RUTH, ESTHER*, WORD BIBLICAL COMMENTARY 9 (WORD, 1996). - MERVIN BRENEMAN, *EZRA, NEHEMIAH, ESTHER*, NEW AMERICAN COMMENTARY 10 (B&H, 1993). - JON D. LEVENSON, *ESTHER*, OLD TESTAMENT LIBRARY (WESTMINSTER JOHN KNOX, 1997).

**HISTORY AND BACKGROUND** - EDWIN M. YAMAUCHI, *PERSIA AND THE BIBLE* (BAKER, 1990). - WILLIAM W. HALLO, "THE FIRST PURIM," *BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGIST* 46 (1983). - PIERRE BRIANT, *FROM CYRUS TO ALEXANDER: A HISTORY OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE* (EISENBRAUNS, 2002). - HERODOTUS, *HISTORIES* 1.99, 3.95, 3.118; JOSEPHUS, *ANTIQUITIES*, BOOK 11.

## NOTES

1. William W. Hallo, "The First Purim," *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 (1983).
2. Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Gerstenberg, 1981).

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