

THE ESTHER SERIES · PART THREE OF THREE

The Gallows and the Reversal

Sorrow to Gladness

SCRIPTURE	WATCH FREE	FILM
Esther 6:1-10:3	phillacolla.com/biblestories	About 12 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 12 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.



"...days of feasting and gladness, and of sending presents of food to one another, and gifts to the needy." (Esther 9:22, WEB)

The Story, Simply Told

Part Three of the Esther Series, retold from Esther 6-10. Quoted words are paraphrased for children. Haman's end and the battles of chapter 9 are told simply.

On the very night Haman built a gallows for Mordecai, the king couldn't sleep. So he had the royal record book read to him, and he heard how Mordecai had once saved his life. "What did we do to thank him?" the king asked. "Nothing," said his servants.

Just then Haman arrived to ask permission to hang Mordecai. Before he could speak, the king asked, "What should I do for a man I want to honor?" Haman thought, "He must mean me!" So he said, "Dress him in the king's robe, put him on the king's horse, and lead him through the city shouting, 'This is what the king does for a man he wants to honor!'" "Good," said the king. "Go do all that for Mordecai." So proud Haman had to lead Mordecai through the city.

At Esther's second banquet, the king asked again what she wanted. Esther said, "Please save my life and my people! We have been sold to be destroyed." "Who would dare do this?" the king asked. Esther pointed: "This wicked Haman!" Haman's evil plan was exposed, and the king punished him. *(For older children: Haman was put to death on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, 7:9-10.)*

The king gave Haman's ring to Mordecai. Haman's law could not be erased, so Mordecai wrote a new law that let the Jews defend themselves. When the day came, God's people were saved. Their sorrow turned to gladness, and every year since, Jewish families remember it with a holiday called Purim, with feasting, gifts of food to friends, and gifts to the poor.

> *"...the month which was turned to them from sorrow to gladness..."*
>
> (Esther 9:22, WEB)

Talk Together

AGES 4-7

1. The king couldn't sleep. What did he find out when his book was read?
2. Who rode on the king's horse?
3. How did Esther's people feel at the end?

AGES 8-12

1. Name three things in the story that turned upside down.
2. God's name isn't in the book of Esther. Where do you see Him working anyway?
3. Can you remember a hard time when someone helped you? Is there something hard you're still waiting or praying about? You may pass.

TEENS

1. Haman's plans fell back on his own head (9:25). What does that say about evil?
2. Why do you think the Jews "didn't lay their hand on the plunder" (9:16)?
3. Purim includes "gifts to the needy" (9:22). Why might people who've been rescued want to share with others?

Try This Together

Turned Around 10 MINUTES Anyone who wants to shares a time God helped them through something hard, or one thing they're still waiting for God to turn around. Anyone may pass. Write the second kind on a card, put it somewhere you'll see it, and pray for it together through the week. Close by reading the memory verse.

Gifts of Gladness ONE AFTERNOON Purim is celebrated with "presents of food to one another, and gifts to the needy" (9:22). As a family, put together a small gift for a neighbor and a gift for someone in need, such as canned goods for a food pantry. Deliver them together.

MEMORY VERSE

"The lot is cast into the lap, but
its every decision is from Yahweh."

PROVERBS 16:33, WEB

Many Bibles print God's name, Yahweh, as LORD. Younger children: learn "...its every decision is from Yahweh."

A FAMILY PRAYER

Dear God, even when we can't see You, You are in charge of every day. Thank You for saving Esther's people and turning their sorrow into gladness. Thank You for Jesus, who turned the worst day into the best news. Make us generous and glad. 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 turn sorrow into gladness.

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

On a sleepless night, the king learned Mordecai had saved his life, and proud Haman had to honor him. Esther asked the king to save her people, and Haman's wicked plan fell back on him. A new law let the Jews defend themselves, and their sorrow turned to gladness.

READ BEFORE CLASS

Esther 6-10 and Proverbs 16:33. If you will show the film, watch it all the way through first.

What Kids May Ask

"What happened to Haman?" Say: *The king punished him for his wicked plan. The trap he set for Mordecai caught him instead.* No more detail is needed for younger children.

"Was it okay for the Jews to fight?" Say: *Their enemies were coming to hurt them, and the king let them protect their families.* (See the Youth notes for older kids.)

"Why didn't God's name show up?" Say: *The writer never says His name, but God was working the whole time, like on that sleepless night.*

"What is Purim?" A happy Jewish holiday that remembers this story, with a feast and gifts of food for friends and the poor (9:22).

"Can God turn my sad thing around?" Say: *God cares about your sad things. Tell Him, and tell a grown-up you trust.*

Telling the Story

YOU'LL NEED a paper crown, a bathrobe or blanket for the royal robe, a stuffed animal for the king's horse, a book for the record book, and a chair for the 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. When you hear "turned around," everyone turns around once in place.

SAY Haman had built a gallows for Mordecai. But that very night, the king couldn't sleep. *(Yawn and open the book.)* He read in his record book that Mordecai had saved his life, and nothing had been done for him.

READ Esther 6:1 aloud: "On that night, the king couldn't sleep."

SAY The king asked Haman how to honor someone. Haman thought it was him! But the king said, *Do it for Mordecai.* So Haman had to lead Mordecai on the king's horse. *(Put the robe on a helper; walk the horse.)* Everything turned around!

SAY At Esther's banquet, she asked the king, *Please save me and my people!* She pointed at Haman, and the king punished him. His wicked plan fell back on him. Everything turned around!

SAY Mordecai wrote a new law so the Jews could protect their families. God's people were saved, and their tears turned to joy.

READ Esther 8:16 aloud: "The Jews had light, gladness, joy, and honor."

ASK What turned around in the story? Who was working even when no one could see Him?

USING THE FILM INSTEAD. The film runs about 12 minutes. Preview it, and mark your stop times in your player before class. For grades K-2, show two clips: 0:22 to 3:49 (the sleepless night through Esther's "this wicked Haman!"), then 4:43 to 6:50 (the king's ring through "light, gladness, joy, and honor"). **SKIP 3:50-4:42,** Haman's fall, and stop at 6:50. For grades 3-5, the default is two clips: 0:22 to 3:49 and 4:43 to 8:15. **SKIP 3:50-4:42,** which has the king's "assault" accusation (4:05) and "Hang him on it!" (Esther 7:9; at 4:29 in the film); at the skip, say simply: *The king punished Haman for his wicked plan.* After previewing, a leader may choose to play straight through, 0:22 to 8:15, for a class that is ready (Haman's face is covered and only a distant pole is shown). At 6:51-7:22 the battle day is narrated briefly; no fighting is shown. Times are from the film's final caption file.

Opening Game: Upside Down

Play like "Simon Says," but kids do the opposite: when you say *stand up,* they sit; *hands up,* hands down; *look sad,* they smile. Anyone who slips just laughs and keeps playing. No one is out. Finish with *Turn around!* (they stand still), then *Stand still!* (they turn around).

Wrap up: *Today everything turns upside down for Haman and for Esther's people. Let's find out how!*

Object Lesson: Turned Around

YOU'LL NEED a paper plate with a sad face drawn on the front and a happy face on the back, taped to a craft stick.

Show the sad face. **Say:** *Esther's people were very sad. A law said they would be destroyed.* Ask kids to name sad things in the story. Then slowly turn the plate around. **Say:** *But God turned it around! The Bible says "the opposite happened" (9:1). Their sorrow turned to gladness.* Hold up the happy face. *God can turn sad things around. Sometimes it takes a while, and sometimes He gives us comfort while we wait. But in Jesus, sorrow never gets the last word.*

Craft: Gifts of Gladness Bag

Kids decorate a paper lunch bag with a happy face, stars, and the words **God turns sorrow into gladness.** At home, families fill the bag with a small gift for a friend, a neighbor, or someone in need, as in Purim's "gifts to the needy" (9:22). Grades 3-5 can add the memory verse. No food in class (allergies).

SUPPLIES (PER CHILD)

- One brown paper lunch bag
- Crayons or markers
- Large paper stickers (optional)
- A tag with the memory verse (grades 3-5), pre-cut by leaders
- No scissors for children; leaders do any cutting before class

Small Groups

GRADES K-2

1. What happened because the king couldn't sleep?
2. Who got to ride the king's horse?
3. How did God's people feel at the end?

GRADES 3-5

1. Name three things that turned around in the story.
2. What happened after the king couldn't sleep? The book doesn't say why he was awake. How do you see God's care in the timing?
3. Purim includes gifts for the poor (9:22). Why would happy people want to give?
4. Read Proverbs 16:33. What does it tell us about God?

Memory Verse Practice

MEMORY VERSE

"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh."

PROVERBS 16:33, WEB

Motions: "The lot is cast," pretend to toss a cube; "into the lap," pat your lap; "its every decision," hold up a finger; "is from Yahweh," point up. Grades K-2: learn "...its every decision is from Yahweh."

Prayer

Invite kids to name something sad they want God to turn around, out loud or silently. Anyone may pass. Then pray: *Dear God, You are in charge of every day. Please turn our sad things into gladness. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

CLASSROOM TIPS

- **Attention signal:** turn the plate to the happy face; kids smile and look at you.
- **Haman's end:** keep it simple for younger kids; don't describe the gallows.
- 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 the robe and horse, the Upside Down game, the bag craft, and prayer.
- Tell it as *The king couldn't sleep, Mordecai got a parade, and God saved His people.* Leave out Haman's end and the battles.
- Questions: *Who rode the horse? Was everyone happy at the end?*
- Explain simply: *Long ago people tossed a little cube to decide things. God was in charge even of that!* Then practice "...its every decision is from Yahweh." with a point up.

TAKE-HOME PAGE · FOR PARENTS

Today in Kids Ministry

The Gallows and the Reversal

ESTHER 6-10

WHAT WE LEARNED

On a sleepless night, the king learned that Mordecai had saved his life, and made Haman honor him. Esther pleaded for her people, Haman's plan fell back on him, and a new law let the Jews defend themselves. Their sorrow turned to gladness, remembered every year at Purim. **Big idea:** *God can turn sorrow into gladness.*

TALK ON THE WAY HOME

1. What turned around in today's story?
2. Where did you see God working, even though His name isn't written?
3. What sad thing could we pray about together?

MEMORY VERSE

"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh."

PROVERBS 16:33, WEB

TRY THIS AT HOME

Fill today's Gifts of Gladness bag with a small gift for a neighbor or someone in need, and deliver it this week.

Watch the film together

Scan, or visit phillacolla.com/biblestories. Free, about 12 minutes, listed there from release day. Parents, preview it first: it includes Haman's execution (Esther 7:9-10; not shown) and a brief summary of the battles of chapter 9.

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: *The Drought* (1 Kings 17), the start of the Elijah series.

PRAY TOGETHER

God, turn our sorrow into gladness, and make us generous. In Jesus' name, amen.

KIDS: DRAW MORDECAI RIDING THE KING'S HORSE

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 never absent, even when He seems hidden. He can turn the worst moment around, and in Jesus He turned the cross into the world's greatest reversal. Our response is gladness and generosity, not revenge.

NIGHT PLAN

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

THE HOOK: FLIP IT

Write four things from Esther 3-5 on the board: *Haman's gallows. The king's ring. Haman's decree. Mordecai in sackcloth.* In pairs, students guess how each one might flip by the end of the story. Give a small prize for the best guess. Bridge: *In tonight's film, every one of these turns upside down, and none of it by chance.*

Low-prep option: *Best Plot Twist.* Students name the best plot twist they've seen in a movie or book and why it worked (no spoilers required).

LEADER TALK

1 **A SLEEPLESS NIGHT.** “On that night, the king couldn’t sleep.” (6:1) Of all the pages he could have heard, he heard about Mordecai. Of all the moments Haman could walk in, he walked in then. The narrator never says “God did this.” He leaves it unstated, but the rest of Scripture tells us plainly who rules the lot and the king's heart (Proverbs 21:1): “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh.” (Proverbs 16:33)

2 **PRIDE'S TRAP.** Haman thought, “Who would the king delight to honor more than myself?” (6:6) He designed his own dream parade, then had to lead it for Mordecai. His friends saw it coming: “you will surely fall before him.” (6:13) Pride writes the script for its own fall.

3 **ESTHER SPEAKS.** At the second banquet, Esther finally names the danger: “For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.” (7:4) And then the enemy: “An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman!” (7:6) Her courage in chapter 4 becomes clear speech in chapter 7.

4 **THE REVERSAL.** Haman dies on the gallows he built (7:10). Mordecai gets the king's ring (8:2). A new decree answers the old one (8:8-11). When the day came, "but it turned out that the opposite happened" (9:1). The month "was turned to them from sorrow to gladness" (9:22).

5 **JESUS.** *(A gospel connection, not a prediction in Esther.)* Haman was hanged for his own evil. Jesus was hanged on a cross for ours: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." (Galatians 3:13) Jesus told His friends, "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." (John 16:20) The resurrection is the greatest reversal.

6 **GLADNESS THAT GIVES.** Purim celebrates rescue: "days of feasting and gladness, and of sending presents of food to one another, and gifts to the needy" (9:22). Chapter 9 also records deadly conflict, and we should read it honestly, as the self-defense the king's decree allowed (8:11; 9:2), and in light of Jesus' teaching: "Don't seek revenge yourselves…" (Romans 12:19). People who've been rescued become generous.

DISCUSSION

MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. Which unexpected event in the story mattered most to what happened next? Why?
2. How did Haman's pride set him up to fall?
3. Esther finally spoke up clearly (7:3-6). What changed since chapter 4?
4. What's something you're waiting for God to turn around?

HIGH SCHOOL

1. The book never names God, yet the timing is everywhere. Why might the author tell it this way?
2. Read Proverbs 24:17 and Romans 12:19-21. How should Christians feel when someone who hurt them falls?
3. Chapter 9 is hard to read. What helps you read violent parts of the Bible honestly?
4. How is the cross the greatest reversal of all?

BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. Where have you seen God work in a way you only noticed looking back?
2. When someone does something wrong to you, what are safe ways to respond without seeking revenge (Romans 12:21)? If someone is hurting or threatening you, the right step is to tell a trusted adult.
3. What sorrow do you want to see turned to gladness?
4. Who is one person you could give a "gift of gladness" to this week?

REFLECTION: TWO OPTIONS

Phones down. Hand each student an index card. On one side they write *Sorrow*: something hard they're carrying. On the other, *Gladness*: one thing they thank God for. Have them keep it and flip it over when they pray this week.

Phones out (no social media). Students privately write a note titled *Turned around* with one hard thing and one thanks, and set a reminder to pray over it. No one shows a screen or says what they wrote.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

A GIFT OF GLADNESS.

Give one gift this week, of time, words, or something small, to a friend and one to someone in need. If someone has hurt you, pray for them instead of planning payback. Next time your small group meets, share how it went, if you want to. Anyone may pass.

LEADER NOTES ON HARD QUESTIONS

"IS IT OKAY TO BE GLAD WHEN THE BAD GUY LOSES?" We can rejoice that evil is stopped and the oppressed are safe. But Scripture warns, "Don't rejoice when your enemy falls." (Proverbs 24:17) and tells us to leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:19). Gladness at rescue is not the same as gloating.

"WASN'T CHAPTER 9 JUST REVENGE?" The new decree let the Jews "defend their lives" (8:11) against those who would attack them. The text repeats that they took no plunder (9:10, 15, 16). Verse 8:11 also mentions "little ones and women"; some read it as copying Haman's decree, others as protecting the Jews' own families. Present both views and don't overclaim. Christians today are never called to holy war; we are told to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

"WHAT ABOUT ESTHER ASKING FOR A SECOND DAY (9:13)?" Interpreters differ: some think enemies remained in Susa; others question her request. Haman's sons were already dead (9:10); hanging them showed the danger was over. It's okay to say the text doesn't explain.

PASTORAL CARE. Some students carry real hurt from someone. Don't push them to "just forgive" on the spot; forgiveness is a process. If anyone is being hurt or is unsafe, connect them with a trusted adult.

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 with their cards. Then close: *God, You were never absent from Esther's story, and You're not absent from ours. Turn our sorrow into gladness. Keep us from revenge, and make us generous. Thank You that Jesus turned the cross into victory. 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 book that never names God, everything turns at the right moment: a sleepless night, a misread question, a gallows that catches its builder. God's hidden providence reverses the plans of the wicked and turns His people's sorrow to gladness, and the fitting response is remembrance, joy, and generosity.

> *"...as the days in which the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned to them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending presents of food to one another, and gifts to the needy."*
>
> ESTHER 9:22, WEB

BACKGROUND

- **Setting.** Susa, the night before Esther's second banquet. The counter-decree goes out in the third month (8:9), almost nine months before the day set (9:1).
- **Irrevocable law.** A sealed royal law "may not be reversed" (8:8), so the king authorizes a counter-decree instead.
- **Purim.** Still kept by Jewish communities on 14 Adar (15 Adar in walled cities), usually in February or March.
- **The series.** Part One: *A Queen in Persia* (Esther 1-2). Part Two: *For Such a Time as This* (Esther 3-5).

SESSION PLAN

	45 MIN	60 MIN
Welcome and opener	4	7
Watch the film	12	12
Read Esther 6:1-7:10	4	6
Discussion (choose 4-5)	17	23
Application and prayer	8	12

BEFORE YOU MEET

Read Esther 6-10 in full. Preview the film: Haman's execution is spoken of but not shown, and chapter 9's battles are summarized in narration. Read the leader notes on page 14.

The Session

1 **Open.** Share a time when something that looked like a disaster turned out for good.

2 **Watch.** Play *The Gallows and the Reversal* (phillacolla.com/biblestories, about 12 minutes). Ask the group to count the reversals.

3 **Read.** Read Esther 6:1-7:10 aloud together, then skim 9:20-28.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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

2 List the "coincidences" in chapter 6. What do they add up to?

3 Haman's friends predict, "you will surely fall before him." (6:13) Why do even outsiders see it?

4 How does Esther present her case to the king (7:3-6)? What can we learn from her wisdom?

5 The first decree couldn't be withdrawn (8:8). What did the second decree allow the Jews to do (8:11), and what dangers still remained?

6 Three times the Jews "didn't lay their hand on the plunder" (9:10, 15, 16). Why might the narrator stress this?

7 Purim is marked by feasting, gifts to friends, and gifts to the needy (9:22). What does this say about remembering God's rescue?

8 Where is it hardest for you to trust that God is at work when you can't see Him?

APPLICATION

- **Remember.** Write down one past rescue in your life and thank God for it this week.
- **Give.** Plan one "gift to the needy" as a group or household (9:22).
- **Refuse revenge.** Pray by name for someone who has wronged you (Romans 12:19-21).

PRAYER

Pray together through Proverbs 16:33, and thank God for His unseen care. Pray for anyone in the group waiting for sorrow to turn to gladness, and thank Jesus for the cross and the empty tomb (John 16:20).

Leader Notes on the Questions

Q2, THE COINCIDENCES. The king can't sleep (6:1); the reading falls on Mordecai's deed (6:2); no reward had been given (6:3); Haman is already in the court (6:4); the king's question is ambiguous (6:6). None alone proves anything. Together, they show the narrator's quiet theology of providence.

Q3, ZERESH'S WARNING. "If Mordecai... is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him..." (6:13). Even pagans in the story sense that this people is protected. *(An interpretation; the text doesn't say how they knew.)*

Q5, DECREE AND COUNTER-DECREE. The king can't cancel the first law, so he authorizes a second (8:8-11). Let the text speak first: the Jews may now defend themselves, but the enemies' day still comes (9:1). Do not equate Haman's murderous decree with God's good law (Romans 7:12); the counter-decree is part of Esther's rescue story, not a model of how the gospel works. If the group wants a Christian connection, speak of it as an analogy: God delivers His people, and in Christ He gives a far greater deliverance.

Q6, THE PLUNDER. The decree permitted plunder (8:11), but they didn't take it. Many see a contrast with Saul, who took the plunder from Amalek (1 Samuel 15:19), since Haman is "the Agagite" (9:24). *(A widely held interpretation.)*

IF SOMEONE ASKS ABOUT CHAPTER 9'S VIOLENCE. Acknowledge it honestly. The text presents it as self-defense against those who "hated them" (9:1, 5), and the numbers in chapter 9 are summarized, not voiced, in the film. See the Youth leader notes and the Deep Dive, section 5.

TRACK FIVE

Deep Dive

A closer study of Esther 6-10 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

ROYAL RECORDS AND BENEFACTORS

The king has "the book of records of the chronicles" read to him (6:1). Herodotus says Xerxes' scribes recorded the names of captains who distinguished themselves at Salamis (*Histories* 8.90), and that royal benefactors were listed and rewarded (8.85). *(Outside evidence is consistent with the text; it does not mention Mordecai.)*

ROBE, HORSE, AND CROWN

Haman asks for "royal clothing... which the king uses to wear, and the horse that the king rides on" (6:8). Wearing the king's own robe was a rare honor; Plutarch tells how a courtier asked Artaxerxes II for his robe and was given it but forbidden to wear it (*Artaxerxes* 5). The wording of 6:8 most naturally puts the royal crown on the horse's head. *(The detail is debated.)*

DATES AND COURIERS

The counter-decree is written "in the third month, which is the month Sivan, on the twenty-third day of the month" (8:9), about seventy days after Haman's decree (3:12). If the king is Xerxes I, the day of reversal, 13 Adar of his twelfth year, fell in early 473 BC. *(An estimate based on the identification of the king.)* Couriers ride "royal horses that were bred from swift steeds" (8:10).

MORDECAI'S RANK

Mordecai ends "next to King Ahasuerus" (10:3), Hebrew *mišneh*, "second." A Persepolis tablet names an official called Marduka in this period; whether he is the biblical Mordecai is uncertain (see *A Queen in Persia*).

IRREVOCABLE LAW

The book of Esther twice presents a royal decree as unalterable: Memucan says so in 1:19, and King Ahasuerus in 8:8. Daniel speaks the same way of "the law of the Medes and Persians" (Daniel 6:8, 15). No Persian source states this rule outright, and some historians doubt it; the Bible presents it as practice at this court. *(The historical question is debated.)*

PURIM

Esther 9:20-32 establishes the feast. The earliest outside reference is usually traced to 2 Maccabees 15:36 (probably late 2nd century BC), which mentions "Mordecai's day," the day after 13 Adar. Jewish practice today includes reading the scroll of Esther, gifts of food, gifts to the poor, and a festive meal, all drawn from 9:19-22.

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).[1] Chapters 6-10 mirror chapters 1-5:

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)**

The center verse is the hinge: from 6:1 on, nearly every element of chapters 1-5 returns reversed. The Hebrew word for it appears in 9:1, *it was turned around* (see section 4).

THE SHAPE OF CHAPTERS 6-10

6:1-14	A sleepless night; Mordecai honored
7:1-10	The second banquet; Haman hanged
8:1-17	The ring, the counter-decree, the city's joy
9:1-19	The day of reversal
9:20-32	Purim established
10:1-3	Mordecai's greatness

3. Commentary

6:1-3, THE NIGHT. "On that night, the king couldn't sleep." (6:1) The reading happens to fall on Mordecai's report of the plot (6:2; 2:21-23), and the servants say, "Nothing has been done for him." (6:3) The deed had been written down years before, soon after Esther became queen (2:19-23), and left unrewarded until this night. In Hebrew, the king's sleep "fled" (see section 4).

6:4-11, THE QUESTION. Haman has come early "to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai" (6:4). The king's question omits a name: "What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" (6:6) Haman assumes the answer is himself and designs a near-royal honor: not money, but the king's own robe and horse (6:8). Then he is ordered to give it to "Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate." (6:10).

6:12-14, THE OMEN. Mordecai returns to his post, and the narrator records no celebration; Haman hurries home "mourning and having his head covered" (6:12). His advisers now speak of "fall" three times in one verse (6:13). Before he can respond, the eunuchs hurry him to the banquet (6:14).

7:1-6, THE PETITION. The king repeats his offer from the first banquet: "Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed." (7:2; 5:6) Esther asks for her "life" and her "people" (7:3), using the words of the decree: "to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish" (7:4; 3:13). The king asks, "Who is he, and where is he…?" (7:5). She adds that slavery alone would not have been worth troubling the king (7:4). Her silence about her people (2:10) ends here. Esther answers, "An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman!" (7:6)

7:7-10, THE FALL. The king storms into the garden. Haman falls "on the couch where Esther was" (7:8) to beg for his life, and the king takes it as an assault. As he speaks, "they covered Haman's face" (7:8); the custom is not otherwise known. *(Its meaning is uncertain.)* Haman, who raged when a Jew would not bow to him (3:5), now falls before a Jewish queen. *(A literary observation.)* Harbonah points out the gallows "which Haman has made for Mordecai" (7:9). "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai." (7:10)

8:1-14, THE COUNTER-DECREE. Esther receives Haman's house, and Mordecai the ring (8:1-2). Esther pleads again "with tears" (8:3), and the scepter is held out again (8:4). Her request piles up courtesies: "If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight…" (8:5). Since the first decree cannot be revoked (8:8), Mordecai writes a second in the same form, words, and couriers (8:9-14). The scribes are summoned as in 3:12, and the letters again go out in haste (8:14; 3:15). The new decree grants the Jews "to defend their lives" (8:11). It goes to all 127 provinces, and this time also "to the Jews in their writing, and in their language" (8:9).

8:15-17, JOY. Mordecai goes out in royal blue and white (8:15). Haman's decree had left Susa "perplexed" (3:15); now "the city of Susa shouted and was glad" (8:15), and "The Jews had light, gladness, joy, and honor." (8:16) Many "became Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen on them" (8:17). The verb occurs only here in the Old Testament (see section 4).

9:1-19, THE DAY. On the day the enemies "hoped to conquer them," "the opposite happened" (9:1). Officials help the Jews "because the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them" (9:3). The day, the provinces, and the wording all answer Haman's decree (3:13; 8:11-12). The text reports the deaths in Susa and the provinces (9:6-16), stresses no plunder three times, and ends with rest and "feasting and gladness" (9:17-19).

9:20-32, PURIM. Mordecai and Esther fix the feast in writing. The month "was turned to them from sorrow to gladness" (9:22), and the days are named Purim after the lot Haman cast (9:24-26). The lot meant to fix the day of destruction fixed the day of deliverance (compare Proverbs 16:33). The letter is sent with "words of peace and truth" (9:30). A second letter from Esther and Mordecai confirms it (9:29), and "it was written in the book" (9:32).

10:1-3, MORDECAI. The king "laid a tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea" (10:1), and the book closes with Mordecai "seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his descendants" (10:3), a quiet ending for a man who began at the gate. His deeds are "written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia" (10:2), an appeal to the royal records like the one that began the reversal (6:1).

4. Key Words

WORD	TRANSLITERATION	MEANING AND USE
נָדְדָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ	*nādĕdâ šĕnat hammelek*	"the king couldn't sleep" (6:1), literally *the king's sleep fled*; compare Daniel 6:18, "his sleep fled from him"
יְקָר	*yĕqār*	"honor" (6:3, 6, 7, 9; 8:16); Haman wants it, Mordecai gets it, and finally all the Jews have it
נָפוֹל תִּפּוֹל	*nāpôl tippôl*	"you will surely fall" (6:13); "fall" returns as Haman falls on the couch (7:8)
צַר וְאוֹיֵב	*ṣar wĕ'ôyēb*	"An adversary and an enemy..." (7:6)
וְנַהֲפוֹךְ הוּא	*wĕnahăpôk hû'*	*it was turned around* (9:1), translated "the opposite happened"; the key word of the book's reversals
מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה	*miyyāgôn lĕśimḥâ*	"from sorrow to gladness" (9:22)
מִשְׁלֹחַ מָנוֹת	*mišlōaḥ mānôt*	"sending presents of food" (9:19, 22); still the name of the Purim custom
וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם	*ûbabbizzâ lō' šālĕḥû 'et-yādām*	"they didn't lay their hand on the plunder" (9:10, 15, 16)
מִתְיַהֲדִים	*mityahădîm*	"became Jews" (8:17); this verb occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament
פּוּרִים	*pûrîm*	"Purim" (9:26), the plural of *pûr*, "lot"
שָׁלוֹם	*šālôm*	"peace" (9:30; 10:3), the book's last note

5. Interpretive Questions

HOW SHOULD WE READ CHAPTER 9?

Readers are troubled by the deaths in chapter 9, and rightly take them seriously. Three points are common. (1) **Self-defense.** The counter-decree allows the Jews to defend themselves against those who would attack (8:11; 9:2, 5), on the day their enemies had chosen. (2) **Restraint.** They take no plunder, though permitted (8:11; 9:10, 15, 16). (3) **Description, not prescription.** The narrator reports what happened; Christians read it in light of Christ's teaching (Romans 12:17-21). The ancient Greek translation gives 15,000 in 9:16 instead of 75,000. *(A textual variant; the Hebrew reads 75,000.)*

WHAT DOES 8:11 PERMIT?

The decree allows the Jews to destroy "all the power of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women" (8:11). Some read "their little ones and women" as objects of the attack, mirroring Haman's decree word for word (3:13). Others read the phrase with "assault," meaning those who would attack the Jews' own little ones and women. The Hebrew allows both. In Susa, chapter 9 numbers only men (9:6, 15).

WHY A SECOND DAY IN SUSA (9:13)?

Some see Esther acting wisely against remaining danger in the capital. Others think her request goes too far. The text gives no evaluation. Haman's sons were already dead (9:10); displaying their bodies (9:14) was a public sign that the threat had ended. *(A common reading.)*

WAS PURIM A LEGITIMATE FEAST?

Purim was not commanded in the Law of Moses. It was fixed by the letters of Mordecai and Esther (9:20-32), and the Jews "imposed on themselves" its observance (9:27). Some early readers questioned it. Most Christian interpreters see no conflict: it is a feast of remembrance, not a new sacrifice. John 10:22-23 shows Jesus in the temple at another later feast, "the Feast of the Dedication," though the text does not say He kept it. *(An observation.)*

6. Cross-References

- **Proverbs 16:33**: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh." (WEB)
- **Psalm 7:15-16; Proverbs 26:27**: the pit-digger falls into his own pit.
- **Genesis 50:20**: "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..." (WEB)
- **Psalm 30:11**: "You have turned my mourning into dancing for me." (WEB)
- **Daniel 6:18**: a sleepless king; compare Esther 6:1.
- **1 Samuel 15**: Saul, Agag, and the plunder.
- **John 10:22**: Jesus in the temple at a later Jewish feast.
- **Romans 8:28**: "all things work together for good for those who love God" (WEB)

7. How Esther 6-10 Points to Christ

The one hanged on a tree. (A contrast, not a prediction in Esther.) Haman died on a "tree" (Hebrew *ʿēṣ*) for his own evil. Christ died on a tree for ours: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." (Galatians 3:13, WEB)

A decree answered. (An analogy, with a caution.) Haman's decree was wicked; God's law is "holy, righteous, and good" (Romans 7:12), so the two are not alike. The likeness is only this: a written sentence stood against God's people, and God provided deliverance. At the cross God dealt with "the handwriting in ordinances which was against us... nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14, WEB).

Humbled, then exalted. (A gospel parallel.) Mordecai went from sackcloth to the king's robe and ring. Christ "humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death" (Philippians 2:8, WEB), and "God also highly exalted him..." (Philippians 2:9, WEB).

Sorrow to gladness. (A gospel application.) "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." (John 16:20, WEB) The empty tomb is the final reversal.

Every nation and language. (A theological application.) The decree of life went to every people "in their language" (8:9), and many from the nations "became Jews" (8:17). The gospel goes further: "Go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19, WEB).

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).

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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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