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 3.

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5 The first decree couldn't be withdrawn (8:8).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.