

2019 Through the Bible Reading: Bible Study Support

The Book of Esther	
<p>Background (Who, what, why, when)</p>	<p>The book of Esther is the last book in the <i>Five Megilloth</i> (scrolls), which was designated to be read at one of the Jewish feasts known as Purim. The story of Esther takes place in 478 B.C. The title of the book is named after Esther who is one of the main characters in the story. Queen Esther’s Hebrew name is Hadassah. The root of Esther in Hebrew is hester, “Hidden”. The name can be derived from the Old Persian (ستاره) setāra, meaning “star”. The title in Greek is ESQHR (εσθηρ), meaning Esther.</p> <p>The book of Esther is important to Christians because even though there is no mention of God throughout the story, God is intricately woven into each event.</p> <p>King Ahasuerus was searching for a new queen since Queen Vashti had refused the king’s request to appear at his feast to display her beauty before his officials (Esther 1:17 NKJV). The seven princes closest to the king convinced the him to replace Queen Vashti because her behavior towards the king would become known to all women and they would treat their husbands in the same manner. So, the king issued a decree that all wives would honor their husbands, great and small (Esther 1:20).</p> <p>Then the king’s servants who attended him said: “Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king” (Esther 2:2). Because God is the Creator and Orchestrator of all that is good, Hadassah, who is Esther, was lovely and beautiful (Esther 2:7). Esther was chosen and received favor by Hegai the custodian of the women. As a result, Esther and her maidservants were moved into the best place in the house of women. Esther so beautifully executes this verse throughout her tenure in the palace, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so <i>doing</i> some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:2). As a result, Esther was given tremendous favor by the king and people in the palace which would aid her in obtaining freedom for the Jews as well as a position of leadership and authority for her cousin Mordecai.</p>
<p>Interesting Facts in Esther</p>	<p>The book of Esther is said to have been authored by anyone from the unstated or unknown, to Mordecai the cousin of Esther or perhaps even Nehemiah. The book of Esther was later redacted by the Great Assembly (a Jewish Council of sages in antiquity). Mordecai may have authored the book of Esther. The author was possibly a resident of Persia and Mordecai was exiled there and was well-informed of Persian customs. He had detailed knowledge of Susa and royal places.</p> <p>It is also possible Nehemiah may have authored the book of Esther; Nehemiah served Artaxerxes Longimanus I (465 – 424 B.C.), the successor of Xerxes (Ahasuerus, 486-464 B.C.).</p>

	<p>Nehemiah would have known of the event of Purim proclaimed in Esther either through living through it or hearing of it by his parents. Nehemiah may have known Mordecai. Nehemiah was familiar with the palace, customs, and the government. He also had access to the royal archives.</p>
<p>Reasonable Defense for the faith in Esther.</p>	<p>In the book of Esther, faith is prevalent and demonstrated many times throughout the story. Mordecai knew that if Esther did not go into the king’s court and plead for the lives of the Jews, they along with Esther would be killed as decreed by the king (Esther 4:14). Esther was burdened with the task of going to the court of the king and approaching him without permission, which could have resulted in her death. But Esther went in anyway. (Esther 4:16 and 5:2). To ensure Esther’s safety and well-being, Mordecai would go every day to the women’s quarters to inquire and find out about her day (Esther 2:11). Additionally, Mordecai did not deviate from his routine of sitting faithfully within the king’s gate. As a result, he was able to obtain information about two eunuchs plotting to harm the king and told Esther and the Bible says, “Esther informed the king in Mordecai’s name (Esther 2:22). This only heightened and shored up the trust and favor the king had for Esther. Mordecai announced to the king’s servants he was a Jew. This is significant because as well, Mordecai would not bow or pay homage to Haman as had been commanded by the king (Esther 3:2). Haman was an evil sort and was second-in-command to the king. Haman was also a descendant of the Amalekites who were enemies of the people of God (Numbers 24:7; 1 Samuel 15:8). The king’s servants told Haman about Mordecai and Haman was enraged. This event set in motion Haman to cast the lot called “pur” which would establish when the Jews would be exterminated. Haman was so angry with what Mordecai had done, it heightened his contempt for Mordecai and the Jews and as a result, he was determined to annihilate Mordecai and all Jews. Haman even convinced the king to allocate money to have all the Jews killed and to issue the command to all his provinces. When Mordecai was made aware of this, he could have fled, but instead, at midday, he went into the city and up to the front of the king’s gate in sackcloth and ashes and, “He cried out with a loud and bitter cry (Esther 4:1). Esther was informed of Mordecai’s presence at the king’s gate through her maids and eunuchs. Esther sent her eunuch Hathach, who was assigned to her by the king, to speak with Mordecai. Hathach told Esther all that Mordecai said urging her to go into the king’s court and “Plead before him for her people (Esther 4:8). This is significant because “”Any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put <i>all</i> to death. Esther’s response was, “Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days (Esther 4:11). Mordecai responded back to Esther, “For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jew from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you’ve come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). No one knew Esther was a Jew</p>

	<p>except Mordecai. Regardless of the circumstances that prevailed, Mordecai stayed the course in the midst of what looked like defeat. Mordecai’s words strengthened Esther and her response to her cousin was, “And so I will go to the king, which is against the law: and if I perish, I perish!” (Esther 4:16). Though death was imminent, Esther and Mordecai did not deviate from their plan. They knew what they had to do and stuck to the plan. The Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). Esther is a shining example of what that verse represents. Esther feared for her own life momentarily, but was later encouraged by her cousin Mordecai to do what was necessary. Not that any of us can be compared with Deity, but a similar situation took place as Jesus hung on the cross when Christ asked God, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done (Mark 22:42). So, in essence, Esther’s response, “If I perish, I perish, was the same as Jesus’ “not My will, but Yours be done” which in both instances allowed God’s plan to unfold.</p>
<p>Memory Verse</p>	<p>“And so, I will go to the king which is against the law and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16 NKJV).</p>
<p>Practical Application to memory verse</p>	<p>Committing this verse to memory will remind Christians that no matter the test, trial or circumstance, we are to obey God and trust Him for the outcome. He is truly the author and finisher of our fate.</p>
<p>Life Application from Biblical Themes in Esther.</p>	<p>1) Just like the beast of the earth and birds of the air, God has given man a purpose. God gave Esther, beauty, grace, charm, knowledge and boldness which helped her to navigate difficult circumstances. The choice to utilize her gifts was solely up to Esther and with some prodding from Mordecai, Esther was successful at saving the lives of her people.</p> <p>2) Though God gave humanity a will, we must remember that the choices we make impact more than ourselves. Mordecai was a friend of God and Haman was God’s enemy. Both men were on a mission. Mordecai’s interest was his cousin Esther’s safety, but quickly changed to include all Jews after Haman’s evil plot to destroy the Jews unfolded. Mordecai’s ability to stay focused and not abandon circumstances that clearly were not in his favor or within his capacity to change, is a testament to his belief in something that was much greater than himself. Because Mordecai was relentless, uncompromising and determined to stay the course, in the end he was rewarded with unforeseen favor, authority, financial status and freedom for himself, Esther and the Jews.</p> <p>3) Fear. These words were so eloquently penned by Butler (1996), “Sometimes fear is our normal human reaction when we are faced with a seemingly impossible decision. Acknowledging our lack of courage is the first step to overcoming it. But we must not allow fear to paralyze us into taking no action at all.” When a person does nothing, it allows something else to transpire that may or may not be in their favor or part of the plan, resulting in a whole plethora of issues. The truth is that life and issues are tests and if we fail them,</p>

	<p>God graciously gives us an opportunity to try again or until we get it right.</p>
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	<p>A final thought from words that are inscribed on the monument to Lord Lawrence in Westminster Abbey that we as Christians should aspire to; "He feared man so little because he feared God so much."</p>
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