

**Esther**  
**A Woman who Saved her People**  
**Lesson 7**

**Key Verse**

Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy.  
—Psalm 64:1

**Key Verse Thought:** Read the Key Verse. Begin to understand the importance of prayer. We will learn in this lesson of one who was fearful for her life and the lives of her people – so they fasted, and God spared their lives. Although prayer is not mentioned in the book of Esther, knowing that prayer and fasting go together at times in the Bible, one may consider the idea that prayer was included with their time of fasting.

**Emphasis:** Be encouraged to recognize the power of prayer – and use that prayer to pray for the eternal lives by salvation for our friends and family.

**Lesson Summary:** Remembering that we are studying the Bible in as close to historical order as possible, we will leave the book of Ezra for a week. The events that took place in the book of Esther happened after the seventy-year captivity and after a remnant had returned led by Zerubbabel. However, it also took place before Ezra led another group back to Jerusalem, and before Nehemiah returned to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls. That places the timeframe for the events from the book of Esther in the middle of the book of Ezra.

There are only two books in the Bible named after women: Ruth and Esther. Esther is a most unusual book because God is never mentioned, and we see no miraculous intervention by God recorded. Nevertheless, we can most definitely recognize God working behind the scenes. Read a little insight we find in the book of Isaiah. “**And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood**” (Isaiah 1:15).

King Ahasuerus was king of Persia (remember they defeated the Babylonian kingdom). When he sought for a new queen, Esther was chosen from all of the fair virgins of the land. Her cousin, Mordecai, who had raised her after her parents’ death, told her to keep her Jewish heritage a secret. When Esther became queen, Mordecai sat at the king’s gate, where he made an enemy – Haman. Haman had been promoted above all of the king’s princes, but Mordecai would not bow to him. Haman’s hatred turned from just Mordecai to all of the Jews in the land. He asked the king to sign a decree stating that all of the Jews in the land could be killed on a certain date. The king agreed. Mordecai mourned.

Mordecai sent a message that Esther must go to the king to plead for the Jews lives. After fasting and prayer by all, she went into the king’s presence, fearful for her life. Anyone who entered the king’s presence without first being called would be put to death – unless he held out the golden scepter. When the king saw Esther, she found favor in his eyes, he held out the golden scepter, and asked what she wanted – up to half of the kingdom. She asked the king and Haman to dinner. After the second dinner, she asked the king for her life and the lives of her people to be spared. When the king found out Haman’s plot, Haman was hung. Mordecai was elevated to Haman’s position and another law was written to circumvent the first law. God’s people were spared.

Once again, we read a book in the Old Testament with a very familiar event. In this lesson, we will actually read much of the scripture. If you happen to be in a group or class, read them aloud together, for the events could never be retold any better than it was recorded in God's Word.

### **Suggested Bible Reading to Prepare for This Lesson**

- Monday: Esther 1-2
- Tuesday: Esther 3-4
- Wednesday: Esther 5-6
- Thursday: Esther 7-8
- Friday: Esther 9
- Saturday: Esther 10

### **Esther**

#### **A Woman who Saved her People**

1. Esther Becomes Queen (Esther 1-2)
  - Vashti Banished
  - Esther made queen
2. Haman, the Adversary (Esther 3)
  - Haman's hatred of Mordecai
  - Haman's hatred of the Jews
3. Esther's Plea (Esther 4-7)
  - Esther asked for prayer and fasting
  - Esther asked the king to spare her life and the life of her people
4. The Jew's Triumph (Esther 8-10)
  - Mordecai's elevation
  - The law that spared the Jews

**Note:** We know God’s people were held captive in Babylon for seventy years. After that time, any who wanted to return could, but only a remnant went back to Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel. In our last lesson, we learned that they finally completed the Temple. It is at this point in history that the book of Esther took place. The book of Esther opens with a record of its placement in history. “*That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace*” (Esther 1:2). The first remnant had returned led by Zerubbabel, but many Jews had not left the comfort of their lives in their land of captivity to return to a desolate, barren land where much work needed to be done to rebuild. We read of a few of the struggles of those who had returned to Israel in the last two lessons. Understand that the events in the book of Esther happened between the first group led by Zerubbabel, and the second group led by Ezra. That places the timeframe for these events in the middle of the book of Ezra.

Once again, we read a book in the Old Testament with a very familiar event. If you are in a group for this lesson, it would be good to read much of the scriptures aloud together, for the events could never be retold any better than it was recorded in God’s Word.

To help us even more, notice the two following verses:

“*And I saw in a vision; and it came to pass, when I saw, that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in a vision, and I was by the river of Ulai*” (Daniel 8:2). During the part of the seventy years of the Israelites captivity in Babylon, Daniel served in the palace of Shushan.

Moreover, later we will learn of the following: “*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass ... as I was in Shushan the palace*” (Nehemiah 1:1). Nehemiah too, served in the palace in Shushan.

Reading these verses will help us as we study the book of Esther.

### **1. Esther Becomes Queen (Esther 1-2)**

King Ahasuerus (whose Greek name is Xerxes), was king of Persia (remember they defeated Babylon along with the Medes). After drinking much at a party, King Ahasuerus sent for his queen, Vashti. When she refused to come, the king took his counselors advice and banished her for refusing to come before the king at his request. The king also planned to give her royal estate to another (see Esther chapter one).

“*After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her*” (Esther 2:1). The king had no queen, so the king’s servants made a suggestion. “*2. ... Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king ... 4. And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so*” (Esther 2:2b, 4).

We then have an interlude.

*5. Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; 6. Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. 7. And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom*

Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter. (Esther 2:5-7)

We are introduced to Esther. She too, was brought to the king's house. There, the young maidens spent twelve months preparing to enter into the king's presence (see Esther 2:12). Esther found favor with the keeper of the house, and "... she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, *which were* meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best *place* of the house of the women" (Esther 2:9).

However, Esther kept a secret. "Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew *it*" (Esther 2:10). She honored her cousin, Mordecai's, wishes. Mordecai checked on Esther every day.

The day came when the young maidens were to be brought before the king. "Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her" (Esther 2:15). Esther even found favor in the eyes of the king. "And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti" (Esther 2:17). Esther was made queen, there was a great feast, and "... then Mordecai sat in the king's gate" (Esther 2:19b). What about that secret Mordecai told her to keep? "Esther had not *yet* shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him" (Esther 2:20). Although she was now queen of the land, she still honored her cousin, Mordecai's, wishes.

Once again, we have an interjection in the flow of the story.

21. In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. 22. And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told *it* unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king *thereof* in Mordecai's name. 23. And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king. (Esther 2:21-23)

Mordecai learned of a plot against the king, told Esther (who relayed the message to the king in Mordecai's name), and saved the life of King Ahasuerus. We will learn the importance of this event as we continue through the book of Esther.

**A Deeper Path:** Remember a verse we have learned before, but that is depicted here beautifully. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17). Esther obeyed her cousin, Mordecai, who had raised her even after she became queen of the land of Persia. We will see how God honored that obedience in a magnificent way.

## 2. Haman, the Adversary (Esther 3)

We are introduced to a new character who is promoted in the kingdom – Haman. Read Esther chapter three. (Read it aloud together if you are in a group. Stop where needed to interject explanations or discussion as necessary.)

### Especially notice:

The beginnings of Haman's hatred: "5. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. 6. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, *even* the people of Mordecai" (Esther 3:5-6).

Haman's hatred turned from just Mordecai to the entire Jewish people. He wanted to destroy them, so he came up with a plan.

8. And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws *are* diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it *is* not for the king's profit to suffer them. 9. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring *it* into the king's treasuries. (Esther 3:8-9)

And the king complied. Read the decree Haman made, with the seal of the king's ring. "12b. ... in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring. 13. And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, *even* upon the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and *to take* the spoil of them for a prey" (Esther 3:12b-13).

Notice the reaction of the citizens of the land, "... but the city Shushan was perplexed" (Esther 3:15b).

**A Deeper Path:** Keep in mind that this was not the only time in history that God's people were threatened by annihilation. Remember Pharaoh saw that the people were becoming much greater than his people were, so he ordered all of the male children drowned in the Nile (see Exodus 1). All through the Scriptures, we read of kings and nations that opposed God's people and fought God's people. When we become familiar with the promises of God in His Word, we recognize that God promised One who would take away man's sin. Satan, God's adversary, understood this, too. He wanted to prevent that Promised One from coming and fulfilling God's plan for redemption. Remember the events with King Herod when Jesus was born. "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men" (Matthew 2:16).

## 3. Esther's Plea (Esther 4-7)

Mordecai understood what Haman planned to do to God's people. "When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went

out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry” (Esther 4:1). He was greatly troubled, and began to fast and pray, “And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes” (Esther 4:3). All of the Jews in the land began to fast and pray. When Queen Esther heard that her cousin, Mordecai, was wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes, she sent him new clothes. Instead of receiving the clothes, he sent a message back to Queen Esther.

7. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. 8. Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew *it* unto Esther, and to declare *it* unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. (Esther 4:7-8)

Queen Esther received his message, but she sent another explaining that no one was allowed to enter into the king's presence without invitation – for they would be put to death, except for one to whom the king holds the scepter. Read Mordecai's wise reply.

13b. ... Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. 14. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this? (Esther 4:13b-14)

Esther understood what she must do, but not without the prayers of the people. “Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16). And the people prayed.

**Read Esther chapters 5-7 (if you are in a group setting read it aloud together).**

**Try to understand the events that took place. Especially take note of the following:**

- the king spared Queen Esther (see Esther 5:2)
- instead of making her request immediately, she invited the king and Haman to dinner (see Esther 5:4)
- and a second dinner invitation (see Esther 5:8)
- Haman's joy turns to indignation against Mordecai (see Esther 5:9)
- Haman's personal vendetta against Mordecai (see Esther 5:10-14)
- the king's sleepless night and desire to reward Mordecai (see Esther 6:1-3)
- Haman's further hatred toward Mordecai because of the honor of the king (see Esther 6:4-14)
- Esther's second banquet when she revealed her heritage and presented her request before the king (see Esther 7:1-4)

- the king’s anger, and Haman’s request for his life (see Esther 7:5-8)
- Haman’s death (see Esther 7:9-10)

Especially recognize that even though God is not mentioned, the timing for each event is inexplicable without acknowledging God’s hand in the detailed events.

**A Deeper Path:** Read what Esther obviously understood. “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Proverbs 29:25). She entrusted her life after much fasting and prayer.

#### 4. The Jew’s Triumph (Esther 8-10)

Read of the great reward for Mordecai. “1. On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he *was* unto her. 2. And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman” (Esther 8:1-2).

As you read Esther 8:2-8, 10-14 (aloud would be good if you are in a group setting), recognize how God’s people were protected.

Not only was Mordecai given all of Haman’s house, but his job as well. See the following to understand how he was blessed – and even the people of the land:

15. And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. 16. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. 17. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them. (Esther 8:15-17)

The day the king had signed into law came, “... to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, *even* upon the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and *to take* the spoil of them for a prey” (Esther 3:13). Nevertheless, because of the provision in the law Queen Esther and Mordecai had made for all of the Jews, read what actually took place.

#### Esther 9:2-6; 15-16:

- “2. The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt:
- and no man could withstand them;
- for the fear of them fell upon all people.
- 3. And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews;
- because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. 4. For Mordecai *was* great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater.

- 5. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.
- 6. And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men ...
- 15. For the Jews that *were* in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan;
- but on the prey they laid not their hand.
- 16. But the other Jews that *were* in the king's provinces gathered themselves together,
- and stood for their lives,
- and had rest from their enemies,
- and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand,
- but they laid not their hands on the prey,”

In Esther 9:7-9 we read that the ten sons of Haman were killed in the fight. Notice, as an added bonus, what happened to Haman’s ten sons after they were killed:

12. And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? now what *is* thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what *is* thy request further? and it shall be done. 13. Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which *are* in Shushan to do to morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows. 14. And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons. (Esther 9:12-14)

The family of Haman could no longer be a threat to the Jewish people. Do you think the hanging of Haman’s sons who died in the fight may have put a spark of fear into the rest of the people?

Once the fighting ended, “18b. ... they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 19. Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwalled towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar *a day of* gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another” (Esther 9:18b-19). This feasting and celebrating became a yearly time of remembrance for the Jews. “Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and *of that* which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them” (Esther 9:26).

How was Mordecai remembered? “For Mordecai the Jew *was* next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed” (Esther 10:3).

### **Esther 1-10 at a Glance:**

Chapter 1: Queen Vashti refused to appear before drunken King Ahasuerus at his party, and she was banished

Chapter 2: King Ahasuerus sought a new queen among all of the virgins of the land; Mordecai sent Esther and the king chose Esther; Mordecai saved the king from death by reporting a plot against him

- Chapter 3: Haman advanced in kingdom; Haman convinces king to make a law to have Jews destroyed because of his hatred of Mordecai
- Chapter 4: Great mourning among the Jews throughout the land because of the law; when Esther learned of the law, Mordecai told her to present herself before the king to plead for their lives; Esther proclaimed a three day fast
- Chapter 5: Esther presented herself before the king, and he received her; she invited the king and Haman to a banquet; at the banquet, she invited the king and Haman to another banquet the next day; Haman became quite proud of the invitation, but hated Mordecai even more; Haman's wife encouraged him to build gallows to kill Mordecai
- Chapter 6: When the king could not sleep, he had the chronicles read to him and realized Mordecai had never been rewarded for sparing the king's life; he asked Haman what should be done and Haman had to lead Mordecai through the streets on the king's horse with the king's robe – declaring the king's pleasure in honoring Mordecai
- Chapter 7: the second banquet; Esther asked the king for her life and the lives of her people; Haman indicated as the adversary; Haman hanged on gallows he had built for Mordecai
- Chapter 8: Mordecai set over the house of Haman; Esther again pleads for the lives of her people; the king told Esther and Mordecai to write a law that will save the Jews lives and use the king's ring to seal it – so it could not be changed; all Jews would be allowed to defend their lives and to kill any who came against them
- Chapter 9: When the day drew near, the fear of the Jews fell upon all of the people because Mordecai was great in the king's house; the ten sons of Haman were hanged; the Feast of Purim was established to celebrate this date
- Chapter 10: "For Mordecai the Jew *was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed*" (Esther 10:3).

**Reinforcement:** As we remembered again the events in the book of Esther, we cannot help but recognize God working through these people to spare the lives of God's people.

Read Psalm chapter sixty-four and see that the events of Esther played out much like the events in this Psalm, written by David:

**Psalm 64:1-10:**

1. Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy.
2. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity:
3. Who whet their tongue like a sword, *and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words:*
4. That they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not.
5. They encourage themselves *in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them?*
6. They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward *thought* of every one *of them*, and the heart, *is deep.*
7. But God shall shoot at them *with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded.*
8. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them shall flee away.

9. And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing.
10. The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and shall trust in him; and all the upright in heart shall glory.”

Haman had made great, secret plans to kill Mordecai, personally, while the rest of the people killed the Jews. However, suddenly, Haman’s plans were reversed, and he was hung on the gallows intended for Mordecai, whom he hated (compare to Psalm 64:4, 7-8). Even with all of Haman’s secret plans, God knew them and provided an escape for His people, saving their lives.

**Closing:** It would be good to close with a short prayer reinforcing today’s lesson. Always include any prayer requests you may have. *Today, pray that we will recognize the power of prayer. Just as Queen Esther was able to save her people by the power of prayer, we too, should pray for the eternal lives of our friends and family.*