



christ church  
moreton



**Christ Church Small Groups**

**Autumn 2023**

## **Dates**

Study 1	September 13
Study 2	September 27
Prayer Meeting	October 4
Study 3	October 11
Study 4	October 25
Prayer Meeting	November 1
Study 5	November 8
Study 6	November 22

## **Introduction to the Book of Esther**

During the seventy years of the Babylonian exile, God raised up people to faithfully guide and direct His fallen people back to Himself. Amongst these is a young woman, Esther, who found herself in a unique place of influence with a prideful and hedonistic King, Xerxes.

Though God is not mentioned explicitly in Esther, so great is his presence that when the drama ends there is only one question to ask: Who else, other than God, could have done this?

This same God offers tremendous hope to us all. The whole of humanity has been in rebellion and exile from him, and now his eternal judgment lies ahead of us. We too desperately need rescuing.

Incredibly our Judge has become our Deliverer. The task that God gave Esther of saving the Jews is a preview of the greatest rescue mission of all—God sending Christ to save all his people, everywhere and throughout history. And Christians today also have a part in God's great mission as God sends us to the ends of the earth to spread the good news about Jesus. And so the story of Esther, and how God used her to deliver his people from their enemies, is a story for our time too.

## **STUDY 1 (Chapter 1)**

### **WARM-UP**

What was the most fun thing you did this summer?

Our story opens in Susa, one of the four capital cities of the Median-Persian Empire, where Xerxes had come for the winter months. We'll discover the events of this chapter all working together to prepare the way for God's raising a poor orphan Jewish girl to a place of prominence. Against all odds, she would be used to save His people and preserve the line of the Messiah. Let's dig into our story and learn about God's hand of providence at work.

### **Read Esther 1:1-9**

1. What did Xerxes decide to do at this time, and for whom (v. 3,5,9)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are the reasons behind each celebration and what does this tell us about Xerxes?

3. What are the dangers for the people of God in exile under Xerxes in his attitude? What would make it difficult for them to remain the distinctive people of God?

4. In Philippians 3:20 Paul says that our citizenship is in heaven, meaning that we live as exiles in this world. There are many similarities between Persian culture and our own culture today. Briefly identify some of the specific problems that we, our families and our churches face, living as God's people in a secular culture.

5. What makes it difficult for us to be the distinctive people of God?

### **Read Esther 1:10-22**

It is suggested by many commentators that Vashti was being commanded to come into the King's presence wearing little more than her crown, which might explain her refusal.

6. What more do we learn about Xerxes and the culture of Persia here?

7. What was the real reason for Xerxes anger against Vashti?  
(v.18)

8. Do you think he was justified in deposing the queen? Who or what else could be responsible for this humiliating situation?

As a group:

- Praise God for his sovereignty over all the kingdoms of this world, and his continued faithfulness to his promises.
- Thank God for the hope that we have in the gospel, and for Christ, who came to restore what sin has broken.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

In this session we have seen the consequences of Xerxes' drunkenness: pride and showing off; petulant, uncontrolled anger; and blame-shifting. When Christians fall into sinful behaviours like these, how does it affect those around us?

## **STUDY 2 (Chapter 2)**

Describe a time and situation when you felt extremely uncomfortable and out of place. How did it turn out?

### **Read Esther 2**

At least three years have passed since Vashti was deposed (see 1 v 3 , 2 v 12 and 2 v 16). There has been no queen since then, and around this time Xerxes also suffers a shocking and devastating defeat against the Greeks (the Battle of Salamis in the sixth year of his reign).

1. What is so appealing to Xerxes about the advice of the royal attendants, do you think?

2. Compare the qualities that were thought to be most desirable in a new queen (vv. 2-3, 12) with those that are most valued by God. (Proverbs 31:30)

3. In which ways does our society share “Persian values” when it comes to physical appearance? What problems can this create for us (whether we’re male or female)?

4. Read 1 Samuel 16 v 7. How are Christians to be different on this issue of physical appearance?

5. What are some things that we read of Mordecai’s family background (vv. 5, 6)?

6. And what do we learn about Esther (v.7)?



7. Why do you think Mordecai forbade Esther to reveal her nationality and family background (v 10)?

8. Think about the ordeal that Esther went through (vv. 8-18). How do you think Esther felt? How would you feel?

7. We again see God's hand of providence at work raising Mordecai to the position he was assigned. What did he overhear, and what was done about it (vv. 21, 22)?

**Pray together:**

- Praise God that he never abandons us, even in the most difficult circumstances.
- Pray for those experiencing isolating or bewildering circumstances, basing your prayers on what you have learned this session

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Esther found herself in a situation she had no control over. God has promised that he will never leave or abandon us, he will be with us in all the circumstances of life. He will work all things for our best according to His perfect plan (Romans 8:28).

Esther's experiences were similar to those of another young person, Joseph. Both were taken from their families and brought into slavery against their will. Like Joseph, she would be one day raised to the palace despite being in such a situation.

What were Joseph's conclusions about the providence of God when he was able to look back on the things he had to face, and how can it help us face situations we don't understand ((Genesis 45:5-8; 50:20)?

## **STUDY 3 (Chapter 3)**

### **WARM-UP**

When have you faced opposition for being a Christian?

### **Read Esther 3: 1-5**

1. You would think that Mordecai would have been honoured for his actions, but instead what took place (v. 1)?

Haman the Agagite, who we meet in verses 1-2, is an up-and-coming Persian noble, who will play a major part in the story. After generations of hostility between the Agagites and the Jews, Haman's appointment as Prime Minister is bad news for Mordecai.

2. Mordecai refused to bow or pay homage to Haman. Why do you think this is? What are some examples of others who had made a similar decision while in exile? To whom should we bow (Philippians 2:9–11)?

3. Looking back at the end of chapter 2, how do we know that Mordecai isn't simply a rebel against the king in disobeying this decree?

4. Why do we often find it difficult to stand firm for God?

### **Read Esther 3:6-15**

Haman, being determined to destroy Mordecai and the Jews, called together his advisers and fortune-tellers, to find out what day would be most auspicious for his putting his plan into execution. They cast lots and it fell on 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month (Adar)

5. How does Haman put his plan into action? What are his tactics with the king (vv. 8-11)?

6. If Haman's plot had succeeded, how would the rest of Bible history have been affected? What would the eternal consequences have been, both for Jews and non-Jews?

7. You would expect the Jews to be devastated, but verse 15 says that the city of Susa as a whole was bewildered. Why might this be the case, do you think? (Jeremiah 29 v 4-7 might help you here.)

8. How can we be encouraged when we face opposition? (Read 2 Corinthians 2 v 14-16.)

### **Pray together**

- Thank God for Christ who was willing to undergo such suffering and persecution for our sake.
- Ask God to help us stand firm when we face opposition

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

“If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” 1 Peter 2 v 20-21

Do you understand that this is how life as a Christian will be?  
How ready are you to live like this?

## **STUDY 4 (Chapters 4 & 5)**

### **WARM-UP**

Think of a time when someone challenged you personally to do something that you were afraid of. Did they convince you to do it? How?

### **Read chapter 4**

1. How does Mordecai react (vv. 1-8)? Is what has happened all Mordecai's fault?

3. What suggests that despite his distress Mordecai still trusts God (v 14)?

4. Esther's response seems different to Mordecai's. What caused her initial distress? What makes her afraid in verse 11? (See Esther 1 v 12, 19; 2 v 20; 3 v 4, 11; 4 v 2 and also Nehemiah 2 v 2.)

6. What is Mordecai's answer to Esther's fear? Would it have been easy for him to make this plea to Esther?

7. What do Mordecai's words in verses 13-14 tell us about:

- God?
- Mordecai's own faith?
- Mordecai's relationship with Esther?

8: How is Esther different in verses 15-17 from the Esther of verse 11? What do you think has changed her?

### **Read chapter 5:1-8**

9. In what ways is this an encouraging start to Esther's mission?

10. Esther is twice asked by the King what she wants, yet she uses delaying tactics. Why do you think this is? What qualities does this display?

## **Read Esther 5:9-14**

11. Haman displays a whole range of emotions in these verses. What explains the difference between Esther's patience and self-control and Haman's emotional instability?

## **Pray together**

List promises that God has made to his people. Thank him for his faithfulness to each one—most of all for his promise of a Saviour. And pray for each other to be strengthened in faith in him, and for the Holy Spirit to grow the Fruit of the Spirit within us.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Meditate on Mordecai's words in 4:14: "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

How should we respond in a situation where we are fearful of doing what God wants? What have you learned that will help you to obey?



## **STUDY 5 (Chapters 6-7)**

### **WARM-UP**

Have you ever misread a situation and had things turn out completely differently than you had expected – either good or bad?

At the end of chapter five, we saw Haman erecting a 75-foot pole on which to impale or hang Mordecai. As the news of this spreads, the Jews might well fear that God has not heard them. Time for their deliverance seems to be running out. But things are coming to a head.

Five years have passed since Esther became Queen. One night the king is restless and asks for the history of his 12-year to be brought to him. And suddenly, a forgotten event (ch 2:22) becomes hugely significant.

### **Read Chapter 6**

To not even have been thanked for the service that Mordecai had provided to the King was very unusual. Persian kings and Xerxes in particular had been known to immediately reward those that they wished to thank, often lavishly. So, Xerxes is upset at this oversight.

1. How might you have felt if, like Mordecai, your act of loyalty to the king had been ignored? Or if you knew that a gallows had been prepared for you by a powerful enemy?

2. Read Psalm 31 v 15; Acts 1 v 7. What can we learn from the timing of the king's discovery of Mordecai's loyalty?

3. What do these verses show us about Haman?

4. Look again at chapter 5:14 and then at Chapter 6:13. What do you think has brought about their change of mind? What might be the significance of them now recognising Mordecai to be of "Jewish origin"?

5. As Haman is rushed off to a second banquet with Queen Esther, how do you think his expectations and feelings might have changed since the first one?

## **Read chapter 7**

6. What strikes you about Esther's speech in verses 3-4? How is her knowledge of King Xerxes shaping her appeal?

7. This is the first time that Esther admits to her Jewish heritage. What does this tell us about Esther's character?

8. From verse 5, why do you think Esther can now be confident that Xerxes is on her side?

9. How does Haman respond (v 6-8), and how is his fate sealed (v 8-10)?

10. How can these lessons help us when we face opposition for following Jesus Christ?

## **Pray together**

Remind yourselves of the prayers he has answered recently and give thanks to him.

Pray for challenging things that you are facing in the coming week—for his will to be done so that his name will be glorified.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Think through your current station in life. How can you be a better example of Christ both in your words and actions to those around you? How can you make a difference in the areas of influence you have for godliness, and to reflect Christ in all you do? How can you start doing this even this week?

## **STUDY 6 (Chapters 8-10)**

### **WARM-UP**

Describe a time in your life when you thought you had completed a challenge but then found another one ahead. How did it feel?

Haman has been dealt with but the edict against the Jews still stands.

### **Read Esther chapter 8**

1. How are Esther and Mordecai rewarded? (vv 1-2)
  
2. What gives Esther the boldness to plead the case of the Jewish people before Xerxes? And what is the sign that she has found favour with the king? (vv 3-8)
  
3. Verse 8 says “for no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked”. What is the problem they still have?

4. How is the situation dealt with (v 9-14)? What shows how God has completely turned around the situation? Compare with chapter 3:12-15.

5. What do you notice about the celebrations in verses 15-17?

6. Christians know the same deliverance in Christ, who died to save us from sin, judgement and eternal separation from God. What other parallels can you see between this part of the story of Esther and the gospel?

7. What impact can we have on others when they witness the effects of this good news in our lives?

### **Read Esther 9 v 1-17**

Esther 9: sums up this section: “On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned, and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.”

8. From verses 1-17, what things happened to make this possible?

9. In 1 Timothy 6 v 12 the apostle Paul tells us to “fight the good fight of the faith”. What is involved in doing this, do you think?

### **Read Esther 9:7 – 10:3**

10. How did the Jews respond to victory (9 v 17-19)?

11. Why did Mordecai (9:20-22) and Esther (9:29) act as they did?

## **Pray together**

Pray that God will help you to fight valiantly, holding on to his promises.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

We too need to remind ourselves regularly of God's goodness to us, and to ensure that we pass on the truth of the gospel to future generations.

Take note of some practical things that we can do to help each other in this (individually, in families and as churches) and share them with the group next time you meet.