



The Chosen Life Studies in Esther

Session 12 – The King’s Garden Party | Esther Chapter 1

Our study in Esther opens with King Ahasuerus flamboyantly parading his extravagant wealth and unlimited power for all to see. Meanwhile God’s unseen hand turns the wheel.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the subtle indications of God’s providence all through the story.
- Consider the far-reaching consequences of our choices.
- Pray for the powers-that-be to have wisdom and courage.

Ice Breaker

Give an example of being *in the wrong place at the wrong time* and how you handled that.

Kings and Kingdoms

Esther 1:1-22

Esther’s story opens with an elaborate campaign by King Ahasuerus to show off his vast wealth and supreme authority.

1. The narrator describes an extravagant feast in the third year of his reign. This matches with history accounts of a campaign by Xerxes to rally support for a large-scale invasion of Greece.*
 - a. For six months, the king entertained a rotating stream of key political and military leaders from all parts of his vast empire. It was no small feat to keep such a diverse group (with their own cultures and regional concerns) loyal and motivated to serve his will. How would a grand display of his wealth and generosity have helped to accomplish this?

Good to Know

The Persian Empire spanned two million square miles from modern Pakistan in the east to modern Turkey in the west and part of Africa (Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia).

Xerxes (Ahasuerus’ Greek name) was the king from 486-465 BC. His mother was the daughter of Cyrus who defeated Babylon and let the exiles return to Judah. His father, Darius, treated the Jews kindly (Ezra 6:1-12).

Events in the book of Esther cover a ten-year span, beginning in the third year of Xerxes’ reign (Esther 1:3) to the end of his twelfth year (Esther 3:7).

Xerxes ruled for 21 years and he was killed by the commander of his own palace guard. Artaxerxes (the king that Nehemiah served) took his father’s place.

* Xerxes’ father, Darius had been soundly defeated in an attempt to take Athens. He died soon after and Xerxes vowed to avenge his father’s humiliation and expand his own empire to include Greece and all of Europe. Source: *The History*, by Greek historian Herodotus (485-425 BC).

2. The king held a second feast for men who lived and served at all levels in the palace fortress at Susa (not the ordinary folks who lived in the city itself). The queen did also for the women.
- a. Every detail of this week-long party was intended to impress. From what you read, what is your impression of Ahasuerus? In a sentence or two, describe what's important to him.

- b. As a grand finale, Ahasuerus wants to show off his trophy wife but she refuses to appear. This is understandable, but Vashti's refusal creates an embarrassing dilemma for the king.

Look carefully at how this episode unfolds. The king's advisors were his closest friends (verse 14) and they are in the room (verse 11). It's an awkward moment for everyone—and Memucan breaks the inebriated silence with a solution to help the king maintain his dignity. #spindoctor #madskills

Describe Memucan's plan (verses 16-20) in your own words.

- c. **And the reply pleased the king and the princes.** Early in his reign, Ahasuerus followed a long tradition of keeping royal counselors, but when he promoted Haman over all of his advisors his inner circle went from bad to worse. Consider the verses below and what we can learn from the king's example.

Proverbs 12:26

Proverbs 13:20

Proverbs 20:1

Proverbs 25:28

Good to Know

Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego served in Nebuchadnezzar's council. (Daniel 1:6). Daniel served as a royal counselor for the rest of his life. The last king he served was Cyrus, grandfather of Ahasuerus (Daniel 6:28).

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations.

Psalm 22:28 NIV

Think About It . . .

To what extent do you see God's hand in the leaders and events of our time? Write the names of one government, military and education leader you will commit to pray for by name this week.

She Refused

Esther 1:10-21

Vashti is usually cast, in a positive or negative light, for refusing the king's command. Was she a rebellious wife, or a woman with strong conviction? Or both? The text doesn't really say what Vashti's reasons were but her decision had long-term consequences. So that will be our common ground for this part of the discussion.

1. We all have times when a situation beyond our control comes up and a choice has to be made. Sometimes with short notice, or none at all. The pressure is on, we react, weigh the options. Do what's right...what's easiest...what is safe. Do what others expect you to do.

It's been said that you make your choices and then your choices make you. So how do we make good choices? Consider the following verses and answer in your own words.

Psalm 119:9-11

Proverbs 3:5-7

Proverbs 19:20

2. We should learn from biblical examples. Select a few examples of someone who is making a life-changing choice. Consider two things: How their choice reveals what's important to them; and what their example teaches you.

Eve – Genesis 3:1-6

a) What's important:

b) Teaches me:

Lot – Genesis 13:10-13

a) What's important:

b) Teaches me:

Joseph – Genesis 39:6-12

- a) What's important:

- b) Teaches me:

Ruth – Ruth 1:14-18

- a) What's important:

- b) Teaches me:

Nehemiah – Nehemiah 5:14-19

- a) What's important:

- b) Teaches me:

Mary – Luke 10:38-42

- a) What's important:

- b) Teaches me:

Paul – Philippians 3:7-14

- a) What's important:

- b) Teaches me:

3. Some choices are more important than others—but we can't always identify them ahead of time. Vashti, who was not a worshipper of God, didn't see the far-reaching consequences of her choice. But as a child of God, we have a distinct advantage. What can you count on when faced with a difficult choice? (Note if there is a condition to the promise.)

Proverbs 2:1-5

Isaiah 41:10

Philippians 4:6-7 & 13



Gospel at a Glance: God's Providence | Fifty years before Ahasuerus threw a party to show the world that he was in charge, his grandfather Cyrus quietly slipped his army into Babylon through a water canal and brought down Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty while the king trembled in a drunken stupor. Cyrus was a conqueror and a diplomat who famously allowed his subjects to retain their own customs and religion. God providentially stirred this pagan king to let the Jews return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-4). After Cyrus came Darius, another pagan king used by God to accomplish His purposes (Ezra 6:1-12). Ahasuerus also served God's purposes, even though he remained oblivious to it. Man's plans ultimately serve God's purpose (Romans 8:28)

In simple terms, providence is God working His plan through natural events. Esther's story gives us true-to-life examples of God's providence. Instead of miracles, we see flawed people who make seemingly insignificant choices. Plots are hatched, but then something happens to reverse the outcome and God's people are saved from certain death. It's a picture of the gospel, and the great reversal of outcome that God provided through Jesus Christ. Sin condemns us to death and we are powerless to save ourselves, but at the right time God sent His Son to die for us (Romans 5:6-9).

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will take time to pray—for others and for ourselves, for our church, our communities, and our nation.

As a focus for prayer, you can use the memory verse, another scripture, or simply what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

Notes

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of 25 horizontal lines.