

Rising From the Ruins

Consequences

Esther Chapters 7-10

Leaders Guide

It is hard to escape the consequences of our decisions and our actions. At the end of Esther's story we finally see the consequences of the decisions that were made by Esther, Mordecai, Xerxes, and Haman. There is revelation, retribution, reward, rejoicing and remembrance.

Revelation

The scene was the second banquet of Esther. Esther, Xerxes and Haman were reclining on couches as they ate. Everyone was relaxed and having a wonderful evening. Then King Xerxes asked Esther what favor he could do for her. Esther revealed to Xerxes the plan to exterminate her people and the perpetrator of that evil plan. She needed the king to save her people and herself.

In verse 7:4 the Hebrew word translated as destruction, slaughter, and annihilation is ***shamad*** which means to desolate or *utterly* destroy. Esther wanted the king to understand the terrible fate that would result from Haman's edict.

Read Esther Chapter 7.

Answer the following questions:

Level A

- What was Esther's request and how did she present it to King Xerxes?
- What did Haman do to try to save himself? How did that make things worse?
- How did Xerxes react to Esther's revelation and to Haman's actions?
- What happened to Haman?

Level B

- Esther couches her petition to Xerxes by indicating that she would not ask if it wasn't serious. How does her comment reflect the cultural attitude toward slavery in ancient Persia?
- King Xerxes misconstrued what Haman was doing when he returned to the room. Why do you think Esther didn't clarify the situation? Have you ever been in a situation where an action was misunderstood? Did someone try to explain? Do you think a person should always step in with the truth?
- How was Haman's ultimate destruction a result of his heritage, his ego, and his lust for power? What does Matthew 5:3-12 tell us about how to avoid falling into Haman's trap?

Level C

- Esther called Haman "vile" in verse 7:6. The Hebrew word used here is **rah** which means wicked or evil. Haman is more than just an enemy or adversary, he is morally corrupt. Looking back over your lifetime and modern history, are there any individuals that you believe deserve that same adjective? Explain why. What were the consequences of their wickedness?
- Xerxes trusted Haman to use his signet ring and write policy for the empire. How do you explain King Xerxes turning so quickly against Haman? Why didn't he trust him after Esther's revelation? How can leaders guard against evil people gaining their trust?
- Harbona (the same eunuch who was asked to bring Vashti to the first banquet years ago) is quick to suggest a punishment for Haman. What does this suggest about Harbona's feelings toward Haman, his position in the palace, and his value to Xerxes?

Rescue

Haman was dead. King Xerxes gave Esther Haman's estate. Esther appointed Mordecai to be the guardian of the estate. Xerxes gave Mordecai his signet ring. Things were looking good for Esther and Mordecai, but the genocide was still going to happen. Esther must save her people!

Kingly edicts could not be revoked, even by the king (Esther 8:8). The words revoke and overrule from verses 8:5 and 8:8 are the same word in Hebrew, **shuwb**. The root from which this word derives means to return to the starting point. How could the disaster be

stopped if even the king could not revoke his previous edict?

Read Esther Chapters 8 and 10.

Answer the following questions:

Level A

- What does Esther request from Xerxes in order to save the Jews?
- How does the new edict help the Jews? How did the Jews react to the new edict?
- What was the surprise result? (see verse 8:17) Discuss how setting an example can bring others to faith.
- How is Mordecai rewarded?

Level B

- Esther had to plead again. Xerxes could have thought he had done enough, but he extends his gold scepter to her. Discuss Esther's tact and the wording of her request. What strategies used by Esther would be helpful when someone makes a request of a person in power?
- The earlier edict to attack the Jews cannot be revoked, so how is the new edict supposed to help them survive that attack?
- How are Esther 8:9-14 and 3:12-15 similar? What do you think will happen on the 13th day of Adar? How do you feel about this solution?

Level C

- Notice the parallels between Esther 8:9-14 and 3:12-15, and 1 Samuel 15:2-3, 7-11. How might the story of Esther have been different if Saul had followed God's instructions as stated in Samuel? What lesson on obedience might these verses highlight?
- The 13th day of Adar is going to be bloody. The Persians have permission to kill the Jews and take their possessions. The Jews have permission to defend themselves, kill their enemies, and take their possessions. Why would anyone want to include this story in the Bible? Where's the positive message?
- Compare these three pairs of verses:
 - Esther 8:2 with Esther 3:10
 - Esther 8:15 with Esther 6:7-9
 - Esther 10:2 with Esther 3:1
 - What happened to everything Haman valued? Do you see a connection with Matthew 6:19-20? What's the lesson?

Retribution

The tables have turned. The 13th day of Adar has arrived. Two edicts were in force—the edict of Haman and the edict of Mordecai. No one was safe. The final consequences of everyone’s decisions and actions would be revealed.

Note for leaders: When the passage says that Esther asked that the sons of Haman be hanged, this is not a hanging to kill them as they are already dead. This refers to a display of the bodies publicly—in Persia that typically meant the bodies were impaled.

Read Esther 9:1-17

Answer the following questions:

Level A

- Whose side did the authorities of the provinces take? Why?
- As a consequence of the edicts, what happened in Susa?
- What did Esther ask of the king at the end of that day?
- What part of the edict did the Jews *not do* even though they had permission?

Level B

- How did the response of the authorities echo Genesis 12:3?
- The reason the Jews did not take plunder was connected to their history. Read 1 Samuel 15:2-19. How did Saul disobey God? How did that event hold back the Jews in Persia from plundering? Discuss how some consequences can be bad and others can be good.
- The consequences of forced immigration are abuse, hatred, and injustice. How does this lesson in Esther illuminate the pent up anger of both the Jewish immigrants and the citizens around them? Where do you see this happening in our world today?

Level C

- Smart politicians switch sides when it is to their benefit. How was this demonstrated in Esther 9:1-4? Have you ever witnessed someone switching their allegiance or point of view because of fear of retribution? Share examples.
- Read Samuel 15:2-19. The Jews remembered their history. The act of Saul’s disobedience of God is in their collective memory. What action of the Jews in Persia was a consequence of Saul’s actions with the Amalekites? Discuss how consequences can be bad or good.

- The consequences of forced immigration are abuse, hatred, and injustice. How does the story of Esther illuminate the pent up anger of both the Jewish immigrants and the citizens around them? How might Christians handle the problems caused by immigration differently?

Rejoice and Remember

As a result of the salvation of the Jews by Esther and Mordecai, a new holiday was created, Purim. As Mordecai decrees in the book of Esther, specific actions are to be taken in memory of this event.

Read Esther 9:18-32.

Answer the following questions:

Level A, B, and C.

- What did Mordecai list as the ways Purim was to be celebrated?
- Why does Purim last 2 days? (see verses 9:17-18)

Modern day Jews celebrate Purim as one of their most joyous holidays. They read the scroll of Esther (Hebrew - *Megillat Esther*), they have a festive meal called *seudah*, they give gifts to the poor, and they give gifts of food, *mishloach manot*, to their friends. It is also tradition to bake cookies called hamantaschen. These are triangular cookies filled with jelly.

This year Purim is on March 16th and 17th. Consider celebrating Purim with your friends, your growth group, or family this year by rereading Esther, giving gifts to the poor and to your friends, and by having a festive meal. Bake hamantaschen with your children (recipes can be found by googling hamantaschen) or buy some at your local bakery. We can all celebrate how God uses the least of us to accomplish great things.

Final Thoughts

Perhaps you noticed that God is never mentioned in the book of Esther. Scholars have argued over why and debated whether the book of Esther should be included in the Bible. Here are some opinions of others to discuss with your group.

Answer the following questions:

Level A, B, C

- Gordon McConville says, “the story [of Esther] can become...a powerful statement about the reality of God in a world from which he appears to be absent.” Where is God when he doesn’t seem to be at work in a situation or event? Have you ever wondered that during a difficult time in your life? Discuss.
- W. P. Benn states that the Book of Esther could be called a book of “providence.” **Providence** is defined in the dictionary as the foreseeing care and guidance of God or nature over the creatures of the earth. How does the Book of Esther demonstrate God’s providence in life and in history? Where have you seen providence in your life?
- Barry Webb believes that “the hiddenness of God that we find in Esther mirrors the world many of us live in today...” What examples can you give of God being hidden in today’s world? What is the role of Christians and the church in changing that?