



**FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY**

ESTHER

LEADER'S GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION: GETTING INTO ESTHER

Ideally, you'll cover the introduction at your initial gathering, setting the stage for the entire study. You can focus discussion on the characters in Esther and primary themes to watch out for. Also talk about the place of Esther in the big picture storyline of the Bible. Emphasize how and why God's people had come to live in Persia, far away from their homeland, which was centered on the city of Jerusalem.

WEEK 1: A KING'S FEAST

ESTHER 1:1-22

Talk about King Ahasuerus's character this week, how he was an insecure showoff, self-indulgent, and easily angered. You want to emphasize that God's people, due to longstanding, unrepentant sin, are far away from the blessed life under God's leadership, which he had always intended for them. Exposing the character of King Ahasuerus points to the need for a better king, one who cares about his people and does all he can to serve and protect them rather than manipulate and use them. And, of course, King Jesus is the only king who has ever lived up to those high kingly standards.

Talk also about feasting this week. Why do we like lavish banquets? Feasts are an important part of Esther. You'll notice as you work through Esther that feasts are typically held when significant is about to happen or has happened. In other words, feasts are markers in the story. Plan to spend some time on question 6 looking at other biblical feasts and what they point to. Feasting is a powerful image of the gospel and life in Christ because we all not only need food but delight in lavish outpourings of it. All physical feasting is designed to awaken us to the greater delight of—and need for—spiritual feasting.



WEEK 2: AN UNLIKELY QUEEN

ESTHER 2:1-23

This week we meet Mordecai and Esther, and from this time forward, the story centers primarily on what they do. Discuss the realities of life in the Persian harem. Ask how these realities debunk the sanitized view many of them were taught in Sunday school. The primary point to bring out is that these realities show how God accomplishes his purposes through sinful people in a fallen world and that he is always at work even when sin and decadence seem dominant. As you work through Esther 2, be sure to note all the various ways God's hidden hand is at work directing people and circumstances and encounters for his intended purposes.

WEEK 3: AN EVIL MAN AND AN EVIL PLAN

ESTHER 3:1-15

One purpose of this study is to see how the events in Esther tie into the overarching storyline of the whole Bible. Chapter 3 is ideal for this, as we meet the wicked Haman, who determines to wipe out God's people. It's important to look back in Scripture and trace the thread of Haman's ancestors—the Amalekites and the Amalekite king Agag—because this helps us see how all of Scripture is tied together. Tracing this particular story shows us that God keeps his promises and works them out over time—often long periods of time. Also important to cover this week is Haman's casting of lots because this act, which seems random but is actually controlled by God, is the basis for the Feast of Purim, the last and most important feast in the book.



WEEK 4: SUCH A TIME AS THIS

ESTHER 4:1-17

This chapter gives us the most well-known verse in Esther, the one where Mordecai challenges Esther to step up and risk everything for her people: “For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (4:14). In preparation for the challenge, Esther fasts. Take some time to discuss fasting in Scripture and the mourning that so often accompanies it. In what ways is such fasting spiritually beneficial? You might discuss when and how those in your group have fasted and what resulted from it. Be sure also to cover section 3 in your discussion about how God keeps his promises and that this is the basis for Mordecai’s confidence.

WEEK 5: RISE AND FALL

ESTHER 5:1-14

We see significant growth in Esther this week. You might want to discuss the ways she has changed and all that has led up to these changes. In sharp contrast to Esther is Haman. Point out how the author of the story portrays Haman and reflect on how this deepens our understanding of what happens to people who oppose God.

WEEK 6: HAMAN’S VERY BAD DAY

ESTHER 6:1-14

There’s so much to see this week about the providence of God, how his hand is always at work in the smallest details of our lives. Be sure to emphasize this in your discussion! Haman’s conversation with his wife Zeresh helps us see that the events unfolding in Susa are no doubt impacting the Persians’ view of God’s people and, by extension, of God himself. You might want to talk about what this says about God’s purposes, how his care for his own people is designed to attract outsiders to come be part of his people as well.



WEEK 7: EXPOSURE!

ESTHER 7:1-10

Be sure to allow significant time to cover section 2 this week, which helps us understand from other places in Scripture what God is doing in and through all that's happening in Esther. Ask your group which of the passages in this section—Deuteronomy 3:39; Job 42:1–2, Psalm 75:6–7; Daniel 2:20–22; or Romans 13:1—they found most illuminating in this regard. Be sure to talk about how Haman's "lifting up" on the gallows calmed King Ahasuerus's anger and how this foreshadows the lifting up of Christ on the cross, satisfying God's wrath against the sin of his people. It would be good to emphasize the difference between the lifting up of Haman and that of Jesus, which is covered in the last portion of section 2.

WEEK 8: A GREAT REVERSAL

ESTHER 8:1-17

Reversals—that's the big focus this week. Take time to identify the reversals now showing up in the story. It's fun to find them all, and most of all, it shows us the amazing power of God. In your discussion, be sure also to touch on the new edict and why it's such cause for rejoicing, and then this leads naturally into the first "Let's Talk" point at the end of the lesson. A **special note** for those of you who are studying from the first printing of the Esther study (2020), an error got printed in a "Let's Talk" question. Please replace the sentence that reads, "*How does this impact your understanding of Jesus Christ and his gospel? (You might want to take a quick look at John 1:21)*", with this sentence: "*What are some ways the "light and gladness and joy and honor" of verse 16 points to Jesus Christ and his gospel?*"



WEEK 9: DELIVERANCE

ESTHER 9:1-19

You might want to begin this week by reading the first verse of Esther 9, which summarizes the entire story: “The Jews gained mastery over those who hated them.” Be sure to point to Jesus here, how he, as the ultimate Jew, gained mastery over sin, Satan, and death through his death and resurrection—the ultimate reversal! Also touch on how verse 1 carries forward God’s ancient edict to destroy the Amalekites, those old enemies of his people. Talk also about holy wars and why Christians don’t participate in those wars today. The wiping out of enemies in Old Testament times was God’s purging out evil people who could entice or destroy the people he was establishing under his rule and authority. Even so—even in destruction—God’s aim has always been redemptive. When sin and evil fail and are destroyed, people are warned and invited to avoid the same fate. That’s why, today, Christians seek to “conquer” unbelievers with the gospel.

WEEK 10: A FEAST FOR ALL TIME

ESTHER 9:20-10:3

You’ll definitely want to talk about the Feast of Purim this week. Your group might wonder about the significance of this feast, why it’s important enough to serve as the underlying reason for an entire book of the Bible. It might seem kind of irrelevant to the storyline of the Bible, but it is most definitely not, because it’s really a feast about the all-powerful sovereignty of God and how his purposes will always be accomplished. Be sure to leave sufficient time to cover section 4, how the passages listed there enhance or fulfill the big-picture Bible themes revealed in Esther.