

Session 1 Esther Esther 1-2

Leader notes:

- Some suggest that Mordecai is the author, but it's not known for certain
- Written between 486 BC and 331 BC, the story is based during the world reign of the Persian Empire, after the fall of the Babylonian Empire.
- More than a generation has passed since Cyrus defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jews to return to Israel. Still, many Jews remained in nations at large. Esther features some of these expatriates.
- It's noteworthy that Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes, was king during Nehemiah's time. He may have been influenced by Queen Esther in this handling of the Jews.

Open:

- Have you thrown a big banquet before? What were you celebrating?
- What contest have you ever won? Who was your competition?

Dig:

- Read Esther 1-2
- What might be the occasion of this big banquet? Why does Queen Vashti throw a separate party?

- What would cause a government to establish a law that could not be repealed?

Why do that?

- Chapter 2:1 is a hinge verse spanning 4 years. In that time, what's happened to the king's anger? His memory? His decree? To Vashti?
- What might have happened if Esther had not obeyed Mordecai? How did she manage to keep her ethnic background secret?
- Of what significance is the year-long preparation period? What in your culture corresponds to it?

Reflect:

- What important decision is pending for you? Who are you asking advice from?
- The nobles feared anarchy would result if women were as "independent" as Vashti. At home, how are decisions made if you can't agree or speak the "same language"?
- How would you feel if God, as King, took 4 years to fill a "vacancy" or solve some other problem in your life? How important (to you and to God) is "time" and "timing"?
- If you were chosen queen (or king), what would be the greatest strength or asset you'd bring to your country? Where are you using that gift now?

Session 2 Esther Esther 3-4

Leader notes:

- Some suggest that Mordecai is the author, but it's not known for certain
- Written between 486 BC and 331 BC, the story is based during the world reign of the Persian Empire, after the fall of the Babylonian Empire.
- The book of Esther recounts how the Feast of Purim came to be celebrated—a feast still observed today by Jews in memory of God's sovereign, providential care of his people. The story revolves around 10 banquets. The book of Esther doesn't mention the Name of God. However, it focuses attention on what he is doing constantly, behind the scenes, to effect deliverance for the Jews.

Open:

- In your zealous years, did you march, rally, picket, or "otherwise" protest? Why?
- In what ways have your views changed?
- When have you "cried your eyes out? Over what issue, hurt or loss?

Dig:

- Read Esther 3-4
- Why won't Mordecai kneel? And why is Haman intent on killing all of Mordecai's race?
 - What does these chapters add to your picture of King Xerxes? What half-truths does he agree with (vv.8-9)? What does he disavow? What do his people think?
 - In chapter 4, Mordecai's crying and penitence were culturally accepted (vv.1,3). As for Esther, what options are open to her as queen? As a Jew? At what cost?
 - Which option does Esther finally settle on (vv.15-16)? What hope does she have for success? What else is she feeling?
 - What does fasting involve? Where is God in this?

Reflect:

- In conflicts of conscience, are you more like: Mordecai, a pacifist protester? Haman, an enraged politician? Xerxes, easily swayed or pacified? The couriers dutifully bearing whatever news is given? The people, bewildered?
- Can you imagine a crisis in which you would go "against the law", as Esther does, to find a solution?
- Have you ever fasted? How long? What for? What was the result?
- Is there something important enough right now to fast and pray about? What is it?

Session 3 Esther Esther 5-7

Leader notes:

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Open:

- When you want someone to do a special favor for you, how do you ask?
- What brings on sleep the quickest for you: work, talking, reading, meal?
- "Make your words sweet, you may have to eat them some day"—when have you seen the truth of that proverb in your life?

Dig:

- Read Esther 5-7
- What might be the purpose of Esther's delaying tactic?
- What is the king's response so far to her requests? What does that imply?
- What really infuriates Haman about Mordecai? What does that say about human nature?
- Where do you see the hand of God in Mordecai being honored?
- The king asked again (7:2) implies a previous inquiry. When? Why?
- What does it reveal about Esther's character: self-preservation? Selfless loyalty?

Royal respect? Sweet revenge?

- What about Haman is vile?
- While this chapter 7 ends with Haman's death, what issues remain unresolved?

Reflect:

- In chapter 5, if any request could be granted, as was done for Esther, for what would you ask and why?
- What assurances do you have that when you ask God for something it will be granted?
- Comparing yourself to Haman, how do you react when someone touches your "hot button"?
- What do Haman's pride and racial hatred bring him? What is the object lesson here for you and people who follow God?
- In chapter 7, if you were Esther, would you have handled the situation any differently? How? When have you stepped out on faith? What was at stake?
- What lesson does Haman teach you?