

Esther 8-10 with Luke 23: 33-43 Deliverance 23rd Nov 2025

Prayer: Lord, lead and guide us by your Spirit as we look at your word today. Amen.

Drunken parties, sex, power, greed, the baddies and the goodies, a King, Queens, many eunuchs, nobles. Feasting, fasting, fear, courage, wisdom, folly, irony, satire...the story of Esther has had it all! And today we come to its conclusion. I hope you've enjoyed the journey as much as I have.

The only book in the bible where God is not mentioned, and yet, his unseen hand of providence is everywhere, bringing down the proud and raising the humble. A series of coincidences, or God-incidences as I called them last week, bringing people, places and situations just where God intended for his purposes.

It began with King Xerxes showing off his wealth, enjoying drunken feasts, with much power over his 127 Babylonian provinces. And yet even in chapter 1 we saw he didn't even have power over his Queen Vashti who refused his command to come and be shown off like a prize bull at his drunken banquet. We see a King who can't make a decision without taking (often unwise) advice from others. Aside from the foolish King, there is the villain to the story, the evil Haman who hates the Jews and had plotted their complete annihilation.

The other main characters we met are Mordecai the Jew, who refuses to bow to Haman, and his orphaned cousin Esther who he has been caring for, until she was taken to the palace as a beautiful young virgin and chosen by Xerxes to be the new Queen.

Mordecai and Esther are the heroes of the story, though God is the real hero, as he placed them in their positions, especially Esther, for '*such a time as this*'. A time when action was needed to deliver the Jews from destruction.

God has been turning everything around, and we saw last week, the irony as Haman had to honour Mordecai at the King's command, parading him around Susa, an honour he was sure the King had meant for him. This egotistical Haman was becoming undone.

Esther had been wisely and shrewdly bringing the King to a position, via a couple of fine banquets, where she could expose Haman for his evil intent against the Jews, and we were left last week at the end of chapter 7 where Haman had been begging Esther for his life and the King accused him of molesting her and so he is hung on the gallows, a pole Haman had set up to impale Mordecai on!

Haman had been dealt with, but the danger is not over for the Jews. The irrevocable decree that Haman had sealed with the King's ring to destroy the Jews on the 13th day of the 12th month was still in place.

At the beginning of chapter 8 we read how on the same day, (after the banquet and Haman had been impaled) Esther introduces Mordecai as her relative to the King. We continue to see reversals of fortune and position taking place. Esther is given the estate of Haman, and Mordecai is given the King's signet ring, which he had obviously removed from Haman before the impaling. Mordecai is elevated to the same position of his enemy Haman.

While she can be pleased for herself and Mordecai, Esthers compassion and concern remain for her people. She isn't so restrained in begging to the King with tears to put an end to Haman's evil plan against the Jews.

Again, the King extends his golden sceptre to her and she composes herself, stands and again uses court etiquette to put her request...*If it pleases the King, If I have found favour,* let an order be written overruling Haman's edict.

The King seems to think he has done what he can by impaling Haman and giving his estate to Esther. However, he gives permission to Esther and Mordecai to write another decree as seems best to them on behalf of the Jews, sealed with the King's signet ring.

This is exactly the permission he had given Haman, taking no responsibility for the actions Haman had planned, not even asking who it was he planned to destroy. Power given to the wrong people is dangerous.

But God is the one with ultimate power, and it seems he has brought about this change in circumstances, and now Mordecai could use the power he had been given for the good of his people.

We have details again of how the royal secretaries were sent for and how the new edict was written in all the languages to go to all the 127 Persian provinces. This time the King's fast horses are used to quickly get the new edict out.

What was this new edict? Since the decree to destroy the Jews could not be revoked, Mordecai constructs an order enabling the Jews to defend themselves on the day set for them to be attacked and plundered. The Jews were allowed to protect themselves, in defence against attacks from their enemies. They were not allowed to initiate attack.

As the Jews heard about the new edict there was much celebration. They moved from fasting to feasting. Mordecai could dispense with his sackcloth and was again robed in royal garments, this time with a crown as well.

We didn't read chapter 9 this morning, but this chapter outlines the day of the edict, when despite the new order, there were obviously still plenty of Persians and possibly other nationalities who, despite the new edict, chose to attack the Jews and take their plunder. Like Haman, it seemed there were many who hated the Jews.

Without the new order, if the Jews had tried to defend themselves, they would probably have been accused of murder, but now they were allowed to respond in defence. We read that all of the King's nobles, satraps and administrators helped the Jews. It seems God was on their side. In fact, we don't read of any Jewish casualties, only Persian ones. We read that none could stand against them.

At the end of the day, the King asked Esther if she had another petition. Esther asks for another day for the edict to be carried out in Susa and she wanted Haman's 10 sons to be impaled on poles like their father.

We are seeing a very confident Esther now, in contrast to the one who had been initially frightened of going to the King. Her courage has grown as she stepped out in faith, and as she can no doubt see God's hand at work.

We can but wonder whether the destroying of all the Jews enemies is to bring about another reversal, finishing what Saul had failed to do when he disobeyed God's command back in 1 Samuel 15. The Amalekites had attacked the Israelites many years before, and God had instructed Saul to totally destroy them, and to take no plunder. But Saul spared King Agag, of whom Haman was a descendant, and he took plunder.

This time the Jews destroyed all their enemies, perhaps that is that why Esther asked for a second day – did she know there were still enemies in Susa who wanted to attack the Jews? And we are told 3 times in chapter 9 that this time no one touched the plunder of their enemies, just as God had instructed many years before, even though according to the edict they were allowed to.

And so, the Jews in Persia experienced deliverance from their enemies.

Mordecai and Esther established an annual celebration called Purim (relating to the pur or the lot cast to establish the day of the attack by Haman). Purim was to remember the day they were saved from their enemies. Just like Passover, the celebration of remembrance that God had instructed them to institute after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

The final chapter 10, just 3 verses, shows how life settled down and carried on, with all the events being recorded in the annals.

The exciting story finishes on a much quieter, boring note. This chapter however highlights the complete reversal of the situation from Haman, the evil Jew hater, being second in command to the King, to Mordecai the Jew, taking his place as second in rank to the King. Instead of misusing his power we read that he was held in high esteem, and he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.

Esther is not mentioned in this final chapter, but she had certainly been placed and used by God according to his purposes, to bring about the deliverance of the Jews. And so had

Mordecai, who ends up in a position like Joseph who God had placed in position, second in command to Pharaoh in Egypt to save the people from famine, and then Moses who had been placed as an Israelite baby in Pharaoh's household and later led the Israelites to freedom.

God is not mentioned in this story, but we see his providential hand bringing about deliverance, just like we read in Genesis and Exodus.

It is a story, like others in the Old Testament, that points to a day of greater deliverance for all people. It is part of God's unfolding story of redemption. It points to God's favour resting on another young virgin, Mary, chosen to bear God's son. Like Esther she was obedient and took a risk in trusting God.

It points to Jesus, the greater King to come, who was impaled on the wooden cross to take on our enemy, and to deliver us from sin and death.

How 'co-incidental' that on this day, the final day of our series on Esther, it just happens to be Christ the King Sunday, the gospel reading as appointed by the church lectionary, telling us the story of Jesus' crucifixion. One of the criminals calls out, *'if you are the Messiah, save yourself and us'*.

Jesus was the Messiah, and it was through his death that he has saved us. Dying he destroyed death, and on the third day he rose again, so that we might be free from sin and death and experience new life in him. Remember the link I made to the 3rd day a couple of weeks ago, that after 3 days of fasting and prayer Esther went to the King, the beginning of their journey to deliverance.

Sin and death are irrevocable laws that we are born into, and yet like the second law that nullified the first one and brought about deliverance in the book of Esther, so Jesus' death and resurrection reverse the law of sin and death. Jesus brings about a new law, one that sets us free.

Like the celebration of Purim or Passover, when the Jews remember what God had done for them; Jesus instituted a celebratory meal of remembrance also, in the bread and wine of communion, symbols of his body and blood, given for us.

I hope the story of Esther has strengthened your hope and trust in God, trusting that he is at work in the world, even when we can't see it. He chooses us and places us in particular times and places to be used by him according to his purposes, to act for justice, to defend the downtrodden, to care for and feed the poor, to love as he loves us.

As we put our trust in Jesus, we are saved for all eternity. He is sovereign and will one day come again. As Paul says to the Corinthians in chapter 11, after reminding them of the importance of remembering Jesus in the Lord's supper, he says we are to eat and drink the bread and wine, proclaiming his death until he comes.

On that day, everyone, every evil leader, every enemy, will bow their knee and Jesus, Christ the King, will bring lasting peace and justice.

Let's pray: Lord, we thank you for this captivating story of Esther, a story where we clearly see you at work in the unfolding events, despite your name ever being mentioned. You are the God of great reversals, lifting the humble, bringing down the proud and mighty. You are the God who chooses to use ordinary people to bring about your purposes. May we be inspired by Esther and Mordecai to step forward in faith, to fast and pray and to rely on you for courage and wisdom. Thank you for the greater story of deliverance this story points to. Thank you for Jesus, your son, the King of Kings, Christ the King, who died and rose again, to defeat the enemy of sin and death that we might be set free.

Lord we long for the day when you will come again, in the meantime, please use us to build your Kingdom of love and joy and peace here on earth.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.