

Esther

The goal of this Bible Class is to give the students a working knowledge of the whole book of Esther. It is based on an expository approach to teaching the Bible, preparing the students for the worship of our Savior. The various lessons are to be viewed by the teacher as thematic suggestions to help with preparation. While the lessons are not intended to be read to the class word for word, the main ideas should be the substance of what is taught. The teacher, in preparation for the class, should consider reading through the whole curriculum before beginning the class, as well as the book of Esther several times. This will provide the instructor with a broad and comprehensive understanding of Esther as it is being taught. At the end of the course, the class will be concluded with a Bible Knowledge Evaluation. The instructor should be sure to review the material sufficiently that the students are able to correctly answer the questions on the evaluation at the end of the course.

It is important that the instructor be not only knowledgeable about the material, but also able to teach it with enthusiasm and conviction. Students best learn from teachers that are themselves excited about the scriptures. The use of maps, diagrams, white boards etc. is extremely helpful. Some of these have been provided in the curriculum. It is suggested that the class be conducted in an interactive manner. This can be accomplished by having them read short portions of the scripture texts, asking them questions, and wholeheartedly encouraging them to ask questions. All students should be encouraged to bring a Bible to class.

The inclusion of the Westminster Shorter Catechism as part of the curriculum is designed to help the students acquire a broad understanding of Christian doctrine along with the specific Bible teaching. The Elders of the church will coordinate the specific questions and answers to be used in the class.

It will become evident to the teacher that this course curriculum, while not dealing with every verse and concept in the book of Esther, is comprehensive and deeply theological. It is designed to help the students understand the book of Esther in its wider biblical context, with emphasis on its place in the redemptive history of God's covenant people. The students will be confronted with and asked to understand and remember fairly difficult concepts. It should be remembered that children are able to comprehend much more than we often give them credit for. While this class will be a challenge for both the teacher and the students, the rewards for the efforts of those in the class will be surprising and exciting.

In preparation for these lessons, it would be helpful to consult the following:

Jordan, James B., *Witness or Perish: Studies in the Book of Esther*, Six AudioTape set with syllabus, (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1990).

Leithart, Peter, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament*, (Moscow, ID, Canon Press, 2000), pp. 225-229.

Week One: Esther The Queen

Esther 1-2:18

❖ Westminster Shorter Catechism

Outline of the Book of Esther

Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)

Part 2: Mordecai Becomes Chief Counselor to the King (3-10)

As we have seen throughout the book of Daniel, with the transition from the *former days* (the period of Israel's history

from Moses through the Kings) to the *latter days* (the period of Israel's history from the exile to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70), the Jews will no longer be the exclusive center of God's attention. God began to deal with the nations in a special way. This is the time of transition from the former days to the latter days, and the coming of God's international Kingdom. It is the period of *empire* building. The Kingdom of God would grow and develop into a great international empire, with the Messiah as the True King of kings, whose Kingdom and dominion will last forever. The various kings of the various empires leading up to Christ would be a type of Christ. They would be like Christ in that they would be rulers that would move the Kingdom of God ahead towards its future glory under the Son of Man. As long as the Jews were *faithful* to THE God and were true *witnesses* to Him (as Daniel and his three friends were), they would be protected and nurtured inside of these kingdoms. But if the Jews became unfaithful to God and refused to witness, God would judge them.

The book of Esther is one of the great stories in literature, having romance, suspense, intrigue and action. In addition to being a historical narrative and lesson for the people of that time, Esther presents a picture of Christ the King and His Bride, the Church. Ahasuerus is a King who has secured his kingdom and is now able to sit with his faithful servants at a great feast. He rules his kingdom with decrees that cannot be changed. He exiled his unfaithful bride, and acquired for himself a faithful bride in whom he delights to favor. Although Ahasuerus decreed the destruction of the Jews, he found a way to save them. Jesus has secured His Kingdom and acquired for Himself a Bride that He loves. His sovereign rule over the world is absolute and governs all things for the sake of His Church. Although God condemned mankind to death for sin, the Father made a way to save us by sending His Son to save us.

[Teacher: Give the students the two-page handout (Introduction and Outline for the book of Esther) at the end of this lesson.] As you can see on the outline, there are

two major parts to the book of Esther (which you will need to know for the evaluation at the end of this class). The book of Esther deals with *Esther* becoming the queen of Persia, and *Mordecai* (her cousin) becoming the chief counselor to the King of Persia. Although the Jews were living in the time of the Gentiles and under the God given authority of the Gentile empires, many of the Jews did not want to submit to the Gentiles as God had commanded them. Esther shows what happens to the Israelites who are unwilling to submit. But Esther also demonstrates the mercy of the Lord toward His people who delivers them. When they repent, He triumphs over their enemies and exalts them in the empire.

Witness bearing before the Gentiles is the main theme of both Daniel and Esther. When Esther, at the command of her cousin Mordecai, conceals that she is a Jew (unlike Daniel), the enemies of God's people try to destroy all of the Jews. Mordecai desires power and influence in the Persian court but is unwilling to submit and serve the king properly (unlike Daniel). When he sees the importance of being a witness before the King (like Daniel), the story turns. God not only saved the Jews, but also exalted Mordecai in the Kingdom (like Daniel). The God of Israel is nowhere mentioned in the book of Esther, but He is clearly at work behind the story to direct the history of His people and the Kingdom.

Throughout the book are a series of feasts. At these feast King Ahasuerus makes decisions/laws that are important to the story. The fact that the King is pictured as the Messianic world emperor that is the Host of the Feast and Lawgiver shows us what the true Messianic ruler would be like. Throughout His ministry Jesus is portrayed in the gospels as the host at banquets who teaches the people God's Word.

Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)

- A. The King's Great **Feast** (1:1-9)
- B. Vashti's **feast** & disobedience (1:10-12)
 - C. Advice of the wise men (1:13-22)
 - D. **THE KING NEEDS A QUEEN (2:1)**
THE KING REMEMBERS
 - C' Advice of the wise men (2:2-4)
- B' Esther's Submissiveness (2:5-17)
- A' Esther's Accession **Feast** (2:18)

We do not know for sure who king Ahasuerus (which means "Great One," and was probably a title like Pharaoh) was in history, but he was probably Cyrus or Darius. At the time of this story, Cyrus had already sent the Jews back into the land to begin rebuilding the temple. Mordecai himself had returned to the land (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:7), but in Esther he is back in the Persian capital city of Shushan. As we

will see in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, some people in the area that objected to the projects stopped the Jews temporarily from rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem. Mordecai may have been sent back to Persia to help persuade the king to allow the Jews to continue the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the house of God.

The story begins by saying that in the third year of Ahasuerus's reign, he ruled over a great empire extending from India to Africa, divided into 127 provinces. It probably took three years for him to secure the empire because there were usually difficulties during the beginning years of an empire. But now that his empire is fully in place, Ahasuerus was able to rest and rule, and made a great feast for all the powerful people of his empire. He did this probably to show the princes and nobles of the empire how great his kingdom was so that they would be impressed and submit to his authority. The celebrations of the empire lasted for 6 months. At the end of the celebration he made another feast that lasted for 7 days. His wife, queen Vashti, also had a feast for the women of the palace (the men and women being separated). When the King was happy and had feasted with wine, Ahasuerus commanded that his queen join him at the feast wearing her royal crown to show her beauty to those at the feast (1:11). Just as he had displayed the glory and riches of his kingdom to impress the officials of the kingdom (1:4), the king wanted to show off his wife as well. This was a reasonable command, and was not a sinful thing for him to do (as some people think).

Vashti refused to obey her husband, the king, which made him exceedingly angry. Throughout the book of Esther, Ahasuerus is revealed (several times in Esther) as a wise man who sought the counsel of his advisors who understood the times (1:13). In vv. 13-22 they warn the king that all the women of the empire would know of Vashti's disobedience and that the women of the empire would be tempted to disobey their husbands as well. We know that people tend to imitate the lives of the "rich and famous." Wisely, they saw that Vashti's disobedience could have a great and negative impact on the social order. They suggested that the king should make a decree (according to the laws of the Persians and Medes, so that it could not be changed, 1:19) that Vashti should no more come before the king and that her position as queen be given to someone more worthy than her. This decree was made so that all the wives of the empire would honor their husbands.

Following this judgment and exile of Vashti, the story changes in 2:1 when the king **remembered** what Vashti had done and the decree against her [*remembering* is a common biblical theme in scripture as a time when God or someone remembers someone or something and does something in response, cf. Gen. 8:1; 9:15-16; 30:22; Ex. 2:24; Lev. 26:42, 45; Judg. 8:34; etc.] His counselors advised

the king to find a new wife to be queen. Beautiful women throughout his empire were sought and brought to Shushan the capital to be cared for by Hegai the king's eunuch who took care of the women. One of these young virgin girls was Esther (her Hebrew name was Hadassah, meaning "myrtle"). Esther was her Persian name, which means "star." Esther pleased Hegai and was favored by him, who provided maidservants and the best place in the palace (2:9). Unlike Daniel during his preparation for being one of the wise men of Babylon (Dan. 1:5-20), v. 9 says that Esther accepted the food (allowances or portions) from the king's table during her preparation. Daniel had used the food from the king's table as a way of demonstrating that he was a Jewish worshipper of Yahweh first, and a servant to the king second. But Esther ate the king's food, and concealed her identity as a Jew. **Her cousin Mordecai had commanded her not to reveal that she was a Jew** (2:10). This was a great mistake because, as we have seen in the book of Daniel, witness bearing is the way that God blessed His people in the empire. Daniel always told the Gentile kings that the God of Israel is the True God. Mordecai commanded Esther to do the opposite of what she should have done.

All of the young women spent a whole year preparing for the king's selection of his bride. When the time came, each of the young women would be given an opportunity to spend some time with the king. Whenever a woman went to the king, she was allowed to take whatever she wanted from the harem (2:13). If the woman did not please the king when she went into him in the evening, she would return in the morning to the second house of the women (probably a harem for concubines, v. 14). In the seventh year of his reign (2:16), Esther was taken to the king. She did not request anything except that which Hegai advised her to take (2:15). This demonstrated the wisdom and submissiveness of Esther, and she obtained favor in the sight of all that saw her (v. 15). Esther 2:17 says that the king "loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; and so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti." This love and favor of the king is seen also in 5:2-3; 7:2.

V. 18 tells us that the king held another feast to celebrate the accession [promotion] of Esther to the position of queen. It was the Feast of Esther! As part of the celebration the king proclaimed a holiday in all of the provinces of the empire and gave gifts to people in the manner of a generous king. As we come to this point in the story, it becomes obvious to the reader that Esther was not like Vashti, who was a disobedient and unworthy queen. Esther is the one who was "better than she [Vashti]" (1:19).

While everything looks like it is going well in the story, we are warned that there may be a crisis that will come: Esther has concealed her identity as a Jew. This is a problem because she probably knew about the book of Daniel and the importance of bearing witness. While it is good that Esther was generally submissive to her cousin, she should have been a witness. We are also warned that obedience to the King is important for success in the kingdom. This will become a significant issue in the story, and as a lesson for us.

Homework assignment: Read Esther 3-4. What is the cause of the crisis for the Jews?

Outline of the Book of Esther

Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)

- A. The King's Great **Feast** (1:1-9)
 - B. Vashti's **Feast** & disobedience (1:10-12)
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THE KING REMEMBERS
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Part 2: Mordecai Becomes Chief Counselor to the King (3-10)

- A. Mordecai
 - Schemes for power by concealing the faith (2:10, 19-20)
 - Serves the King (2:21-23)
 - B. The Attack on God's people (Ch. 3-4)
 - 1. Haman promoted (3:1-5)
 - 2. Seeks to destroy the Jews because of Mordecai's disobedience (3:6-11)
 - 3. King decrees destruction & letters sent (3:12-15)
 - 4. The Jews Mourn (King & Haman **Feast**) (3:15-4:3)
 - 5. Mordecai "dies" (4:1-14)
 - 6. Esther decrees a three-day **Fast** (4:15-17)
 - C. Esther's first **Feast** with the king and Haman (5:1-8)
 - D. At the King's Gate (5:9-14)
 - E. The King's Sleepless Night (6:1)**
THE KING REMEMBERS MORDECAI'S SERVICE
 - D' At the King's Gate (6:1-14)
Mordecai honored & Haman mourns with family
 - C' Esther's Second **Feast** with the king and Haman (7:1-10)
 - B' The Deliverance of God's people (Ch. 8-9)
 - 1. Mordecai promoted (8:1-2)
 - 2. Esther and Mordecai seek to save the Jews (8:1-6)
 - 3. King decrees salvation & letters sent (8:7-14)
 - 4. The Jews rejoice and **Feast** – Fear and Conversion of Gentiles (8:15-17)
 - 5. A Day of the Lord: The Jews live, their enemies die (9:1-16)
 - 6. Esther decrees a 2-day **Feast** of Purim (9:17-32)
- A' Mordecai: Serves the King (10:1-2) & serves his people properly (10:3)

{Students: You should memorize the headings for Part 1 & 2}

Homework assignment: Read Esther 3-4. What is the cause of the crisis for the Jews?

Week Two: Mordecai's Service to the King and Disobedience **Esther 2:19-4:3**

❖ Westminster Shorter Catechism

❖ Review

Last week we saw that following the decree of Cyrus for the Jews to return to the Promised Land, the project to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem was temporarily stopped. Mordecai was one of those who had returned to Jerusalem, but is now back in the Persian capital of Shushan (also known as Susa). In the third year of the reign of King Ahasuerus, he made a great feast to demonstrate to all these leaders

of His empire that his was a great and glorious kingdom. At this feast, his Queen, Vashti disobeyed the king's command and was

Outline of the Book of Esther

Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)

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removed from her position as Queen. Ahasuerus, being a wise king, took the advice of his counselors to find a new queen. Through a series of events, Esther was made queen in place of Vashti because she was better than Vashti (probably demonstrating a better attitude and submissive to the king), and the king loved her more than all of the other women. Esther is pictured in chapter 2 as a woman of good character. She wisely submitted to the advice of Hegai the custodian of the harem (2:13, 15), and was obedient to the command of Mordecai her cousin, who had adopted her as his own daughter (2:10).

[Teacher: Give the students the handout at the end of this lesson.]

Part 2: Mordecai Becomes Chief Counselor to the King

- A. Mordecai
 - Schemes for power by concealing the faith (2:10, 19-20)
 - Serves the King (2:21-23)

Beginning with the end of chapter 2, the story moves from focusing on Esther and her becoming Queen to Mordecai. In 2:19-23 we see that there was a second gathering of virgins. Although the king now has a queen, Esther, he still wanted to enlarge his harem, as was the sinful custom of kings at that time. V. 20 we see again (cf. 2:10) that Esther had not revealed that she was a Jew because Mordecai had commanded her not to. This unwillingness to be a witness to Yahweh will be revealed later in the story as a problem for the Jews. The fault for this refusal to witness is Mordecai's, and represents his sinful scheming for power in the Persian court. Unlike Daniel, who rose to a high position in Babylon and Persia while

being faithful to THE God and bearing witness, Mordecai wanted to conceal his identity (as well as Esther's) so that he could have an important place in the Empire. Throughout the book he is known by his Babylonian name Mordecai, which means "worshipper of Marduk" (Marduk was the chief Babylonian god). This may indicate that he was compromised, seeking to hide the fact that he was a Jew. [Although Daniel was often referred to as Beltshazzar (meaning "Protect his life"), the Babylonian name given to him, Mordecai is the only Jew that is solely referred to by his Babylonian name.]

V. 21 tells us that Mordecai was in those days one who sat at the king's gate. This does not mean that he was lazy and sat around to watch the people come in and out of the city. At that time, people thought more symbolically than we do. Gates are the places where people come in and out of a city. Throughout the Bible and other ancient literature, the Elders at the gates are the rulers of the city that decide who will go in or out of the city. There were judges that determined who would remain in good standing in the city, or who must be cast out of the city because they had committed a crime. [The Elder of the Church are given the keys to the kingdom of God who rule according to the Word of God, cf. Matt. 16:19; 18:15-20.] Mordecai sat at *the king's gate*, which was the Supreme Court of the Persian Empire.

While sitting in this high position on the king's Supreme Court at the gates of the palace, Mordecai discovered a plot to kill the king by two of the king's bodyguard. Mordecai told Esther about the plot, and she informed the king in Mordecai's name, so that he would get the credit for saving the king's life. When the report was investigated and the two men were found guilty, they were hanged on the gallows, and the whole affair was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king. This good deed done by Mordecai is important to the story later. One thing we learn is that when you do something that is a threat to the king and his authority, you are hanged on the gallows.

The story begins to change as God raised up an enemy to bring Mordecai to repentance for concealing his (and Esther's) identity and refusing to witness. In Esther 3:1, where we learn that "After these things King *Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite*, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who *were* with him." In order to understand what is happening in the rest of the book of Esther, it is important to be familiar with some background information from the history of Israel. Agag was the king of the Amalekites who had fought with Saul, and whom Saul had refused to put to death. Originally, the Amalekites appear in Exodus 17:8-16 when they attacked Israel as she was leaving Egypt, attacking the weakest Israelites who marched in the back. Deuteronomy 25:17-19 says,

“**Remember** [just as Ahasuerus “remembered” Vashti in 2:1] what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you *were* tired and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess *as* an inheritance, *that* you will **blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven**. You shall not forget.” From that time on, the Lord cursed the Amalekites, and commanded Israel to carry out the ban against them (i.e. to completely destroy them), like they were to do against all of the Canaanite nations when Israel came into the land. Saul fought against the Amalekites, but he sinfully spared the best animals and Agag the King. Because of his disobedience, the kingdom was taken from Saul, and Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal (1 Sam. 15). Haman is one of the descendants of this Amalekite king.

Turn to Esther 2:5-6, where we see that Mordecai was a descendant of king Saul. Does anyone remember who Kish or Shimei were? [Kish was Saul’s father (1 Sam. 9:1-2), and Shimei of the house of Saul came out and cursed David (2 Sam. 16:5).] Mordecai is a new Saul doing battle with the Amalekites. The coming conflict between Haman and Mordecai is the final battle in God’s war against the Amalekites. Israel had not carried out the ban against the Amalekites, and now we see that Haman will plot to carry out the ban against Israel. Esther does not explain this background explicitly, but gives us the details so that we will bring to mind how the history of Israel helps to make clear what is happening in Esther.

Let us look at how this plays out in the story in Esther 3:2ff. Haman the Agagite was promoted by Ahasuerus as the chief counselor to the king (above all the other princes of the empire). All of the king’s servants bowed and paid honor to Haman according to the commandment of the king, **except Mordecai**. Mordecai said that he refused to obey the king’s command to bow to Haman because he was a Jew, although the other servants of the king tried to persuade him to do what was commanded. Apparently, Mordecai remembered the war against the Amalekites, and was unwilling to give honor to an enemy of Israel. But we know already that disobedience to the king by someone with an important position can lead to social disorder, and had been punished by the king in severe ways. Vashti was deposed as Queen, and the bodyguards were hung on the gallows. Mordecai was now a witness to who he was, but was doing so in a rebellious manner. [Mordecai’s rebellion was much like the Pharisees and Zealots of Jesus’ day, who promoted the national identity of Israel against the Romans.] There is nothing in the Bible that forbids bowing or paying respect to men. Righteous Joseph received the homage paid to him in this manner when he was exalted to his position in Egypt (Gen. 41:39-44). Mordecai should have honored the king by obeying his command.

3:5 tells us that Haman was furious because Mordecai refused to bow or pay him homage as the king had commanded. Instead of being blessed because he now was a witness (as Daniel was when he faithfully served both God and the kings), Mordecai had put the Jews in a very situation and caused Haman to plot to destroy the entire nation of Israel (3:6-11). Haman too, probably, remembered the war between Israel and the Amalekites. He was not content merely to lay hands on Mordecai alone, but wanted to destroy all the Jews. In order to discover what the gods said was the best time to kill the Jews, in V. 7 we learn that Haman cast “Pur” (cast the lot, like throwing dice or something similar until they had an answer). It would be like saying, “O great gods, should we kill the Jews in March? May? July? December!” Proverbs 16:22 says, The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision *is* from the LORD. God was directing even the casting of these lots. He could have made the Pur not ever give them an answer. It was God who decreed the destruction of His people. God intended to use the wicked Haman to bring His servant Mordecai to repentance. BUT – God gave the Jews 12 months for to the Jews to repent. Haman went to King Ahasuerus and explained that there was a people that had different laws, and did not obey the king’s laws and that they whole empire was in danger so long as these people remained. While it is true that the laws of God’s people are different than those of the world (i.e. we worship God and obey His Law), and that Mordecai had disobeyed the king, Haman did not tell the whole truth. The Jews were generally good citizens of the Persian Empire. As Christians we are different than the world around us, but we must not discredit the gospel of God by our sinful actions. Because the king trusted Haman, he allowed Haman to do what he thought was right. Ahasuerus gave Haman his signet ring (the ring of authority used to seal letters), and letters written in the languages and scripts of the various nations were sent to all the provinces of the empire. These letters declared the decree of the king to destroy all the Jews in one day 12 months from then, and gave permission to take all their possessions. [Teacher: the chart below helps to show the development of the stories in Esther. It is also on the student handout.]

Parallels in the First Two Stories of Esther

Event	First Story	Second Story
The King issued a command	1:10-11	3:1-2
Vashti & Mordecai openly disobey	1:12	3:2-4
King & Haman Furious	1:12	3:5
King is counseled, the Kingdom is in Jeopardy	1:13-20	3:6-10
King accepts counsel of judgment	1:21	3:11
Letters are sent out to the provinces	1:22	3:12-15

At the end of 3:15 it says that the king and Haman sat down to drink, which means that they had a feast. Notice again that feasting is connected with the rule and decrees of the king (cf. 1:1-3; 1:9-12; 1:17-18). While they were feasting, all the

others in Shushan the Persian capital were in mourning, fear and confusion because of the Jews. Esther 4:1-3 tells us that the Jews were especially in fear, and were in great mourning with fasting, weeping and wailing in sackcloth and ashes. The Jews were excluded from the great feast of history. The question becomes “How can the Jews get back to the feast of the Messianic King?”

The lesson of this part of the story is that we need to submit to the lawful commands of the king/government. It is good to be a witness to God and to do battle against His enemies. But it must be done lawfully and with due submission to the authorities over us. There is no excuse for being rebellious simply as a matter of religious or national pride. Such misguided zeal does not advance the Kingdom of God in the world, but bring the judgment of God. We must be true witnesses to THE God, and live in such a way that people are benefited by our witness.

Homework assignment: Read Esther 4-5, and notice the change that begins to take place.

Mordecai's Service to the King and Disobedience Esther 2:19-4:3

Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)

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Week Three: The Witness of Mordecai and Esther **Esther 4:1-5:14**

❖ Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 13 Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?

A. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God. (Gen. 3:6-8,13, Eccl. 7:29)

❖ Review

<u>Outline of the Book of Esther</u>
Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)
Part 2: Mordecai Becomes Chief Counselor to the King (3-10)

As we have seen, King Ahasuerus is a type or picture of the great Messianic King to come (just as David and Solomon were). Ahas-

uerus is not a perfect picture of Christ (anymore than David and Solomon were), but many of the things that he does and says were used by God to help the Jews (and us) to understand more about the Messiah to come. One of the things that we have noticed is that the book of Esther is structured around seven feasts (See outline). Connected with these feasts are decisions or proclamations by the king that cannot be changed. Thinking biblically, this reminds us that this is what God does. At the feast of Tabernacles, Deuteronomy 14:26 says, that the people were to spend part of their tithe money for whatever their heart desires to eat and drink at the feast, “for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.” Deuteronomy 31:10-12 says, ““At the end of *every* seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall **read this law before all Israel** in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who *is* within your gates, that they may **hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law.**” The book of Esther shows Ahasuerus as the Messianic World Emperor who is also the Host of the Feast and Lawgiver, like God. When Jesus came as the new and greater Messianic World Emperor, He too was revealed as the Lord of the Banquet who proclaimed the Word of God to His people. We now sit at His table, the Lord’s Supper, to feast with Him after hearing God’s Word proclaimed.

Last week we saw that God was bringing to completion His war against the Amalekites by raising up Haman the Agagite. Mordecai had disobeyed the command of the king that everyone should honor and bow before Haman (3:1-2). Mordecai may have remembered that he was a descendent of Saul and that God

had commanded Israel to destroy the Amalekites (Deut. 25:17-19). But he should trusted God to give him a way to wage this war while being submissive to the king. Mordecai simply said that he would not obey the king's command because he was a Jew. He was using his national and religious identity as an excuse for not bowing to Haman in obedience to the king. Not only so, Mordecai had sinfully commanded Esther to conceal her identity as a way to secure more power and influence in the Persian royal court.

Chapter 3 ended with Haman convincing the king that a judgment should be made against a people who refused to obey the laws of the king. Apparently, Haman did not want the King to know that it was the Jews that were to be destroyed, killed and annihilated because he did not tell it to the king. Ahasuerus gave Haman the authority to do whatever he thought was right. After casting the "Pur" (lots), it was determined that the Jews were to be utterly destroyed 12 months later. After letters were sent to all the Persian provinces proclaiming the decree of the king, 3:15 tells us that the king and Haman had a feast.

I. Mordecai dies (4:1-14)

[Teacher: Give the students the handout at the end of this lesson.] Esther 4:1-3 tells us that the Jews were especially in fear, and were in great mourning with fasting, weeping and wailing in sackcloth and ashes. The Jews were excluded from the great feast of history. The question becomes "How can the Jews get back to the feast of the Messianic King?"

When Mordecai heard about the decree he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes and cried out in a loud voice. Tearing one's clothes was a symbol of being killed, and wearing sackcloth and ashes was a symbol of death. Mordecai recognized that what he had done by disobeying the king had brought death upon them and that he was excluded from the position of authority in the empire that he had schemed to have. No one was allowed to wear the clothing of death in the king's gate (4:2). In the House of God (Tabernacle and Temple) only the priests clothed in their priestly garments could get near to God in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. So too, in Ahasuerus's palace only those who were properly dressed and called were allowed in the palace and in the presence of the king. This is another way that the writer of Esther makes a connection between king Ahasuerus (the Messianic World Emperor) and God/Messiah. The king (like God) is so exalted that only special people, at special times and in special clothing were allowed near the king. [Teacher: Explain how the House of God and the Palace of Ahasuerus correspond to each other, as seen on the handout.] Mordecai, being in

mourning, is excluded from not only the king's feast (as were all the Jews), but also from his position at the King's Gate.

When Esther learned that about the decree against the Jews, she was deeply distressed along with the rest of her people (4:3-4). She sent clothes to Mordecai to replace his sackcloth, presumably to raise him from his mourning and symbolic death – to action on behalf of the Jews. But he refused the clothing, presumably because there was nothing that he could do about the problem. What he did was to explain (through Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs commanded to serve Esther) what had happened and that she would have to be the one to plead with the king for the lives of her people (4:5-9). Mordecai now realized that Esther would have to stop concealing her identity, and begin to be a witness (cf. 4:13-14). She would have to tell the king that she was a Jew, as she should have done all along. Mordecai said that maybe it was just for this reason that she was made queen. At this point, Mordecai died to his selfish scheming for power, and in humility knew that it was time to be a witness.

II. Esther decreed a three-day fast (4:15-17)

It was only the priests that were called and allowed by God to enter the Holy Place in the Temple. So too, in the Palace of king Ahasuerus, only those who were summoned were allowed to enter into his presence in the inner court (compare 4:11 and the diagram on the handout). If someone were to enter the inner court without being called, they would be killed unless the king held out his golden scepter. Esther had not been called to go into the king's presence for 30 days, and she thought that she may be killed for going to him without being summoned.

At this point in the story, it becomes clear that Esther is willing to put her faith in Yahweh (the unnamed God of this story). She commanded Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Shushan and to fast for three days, neither eating nor drinking, night or day. Isaiah 58:1-7 teaches that fasting is an act of devotion to God in which one "afflicts his soul" so as to draw near to God in prayer. Esther was commanding the Jews to pray to God for her, knowing that if He did not save her, she would perish. She was entrusting herself to God and His providence in her life, and for the lives of her people.

III. Esther's Feast with the King and Haman (5:1-8)

Read Esther 5:1-2. This passage describes Esther's approach to the king (which can best be understood by looking at the diagram on the handout). The king

represents God in the Holy of Holies above the Ark of the Covenant. Esther came to present her petitions to the king, just as the High Priest offers prayers on behalf of the people before the Ark on the Day of Atonement. She found favor in the eyes of the king (cf. 2:17; 4:11; 8:4), and he extended the golden scepter to her. The king must have known that she wanted something very important for her to come into his court against the law (4:11, 17). He offered to grant to her whatever she requested, up to half of his kingdom. Clearly, God was moving in the king's heart to save his people. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes."

At this point, Esther's only request was for the king and Haman to come to a feast that she had prepared for them. The king and Haman went to the feast of wine (5:6), and again the king asked Esther what her request was. Again, Esther's only request was that the king and Haman would come to a second feast that she would give the next day, at which time she would make her request.

IV. At the King's Gate (5:9-14)

V. 9 tells us that Haman went away from Esther's feast very happy. But his joy was cut short when he saw that Mordecai (now again in the King's Gate) did not stand or tremble before him. In 3:1-5 we saw that it was the king's command that everyone bow and give honor to Haman for a time following his promotion to the position of Chief Counselor to the king. Now, the language is different (standing vs. bowing; trembling vs. paying homage), and Mordecai is not disobeying the king by not standing in Haman's presence. It would appear that Haman merely wanted Mordecai to be afraid of him, and to finally pay him the respect that he thought he deserved. He restrained himself from doing anything about Mordecai's disrespect.

Haman went home and talked to his wife and friends about all the great things that were happening in his life. He was rich, had been promoted, and had been the only one to be honored by being invited to the queen's feast. Not only so, he was invited to go to a second feast the next day with the king and queen. Yet with all of these wonderful benefits, he was unable to enjoy them because of his anger toward Mordecai. His wife and friends advised him to have a gallows made, 75 feet high, and in the morning to suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it. Then he could go happily to Esther's feast. And so he had the gallows built. To be handed was a symbol of special cursing in the ancient world (Deut. 21:22-23).

What began with the sin of Mordecai for the not obeying the kings command, resulted in Haman's use of the king's authority to decree the destruction of the Jews. Even though Mordecai has repented of his sin of refusing to be a proper witness as a Jew, Haman is angrier than ever. His war against the Jews was now focused on Mordecai. But because Mordecai had repented, and that God had granted Esther favor in the eyes of the king, we have hope that Mordecai will be saved.

When we are convicted of our sin, we need to repent and turn away from it to obedience and faith. Esther's faith expressed through fasting and prayer is an important example to us. When we find ourselves in times of difficulty, we should examine our lives to see if there is any sin that we should confess, and humble ourselves before God in prayer. At the right time and in the right way, He will come to our aid. When things look bad around us, we should look up to God in prayer, trusting in His love and mercy.

Homework assignment: Read Esther 6-7 and note how God changed the situation now that Esther and Mordecai were witnessing.

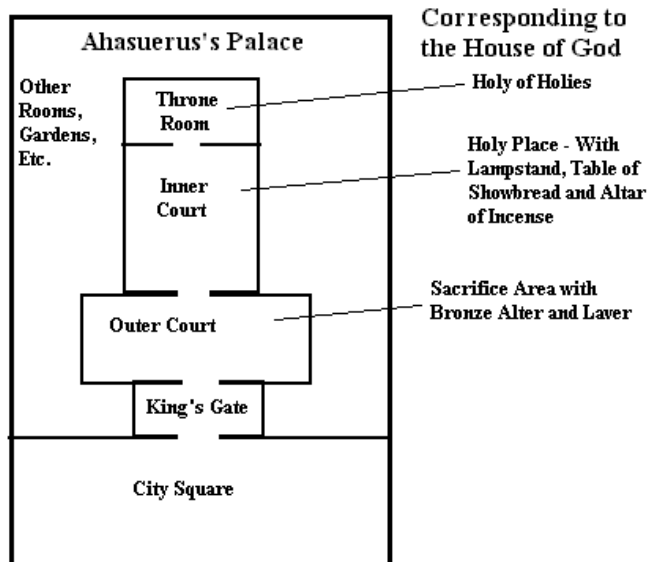
The Witness of Mordecai and Esther

Esther 4:1-5:14

Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)

Part 2: Mordecai Becomes Chief Counselor to the King (3-10)

- A. Mordecai
 Schemes for power by concealing the faith (2:10, 19-20)
 Serves the King (2:21-23)
- C. The Attack on God's people (Ch. 3-4)
1. Haman promoted (3:1-5)
 2. Seeks to destroy the Jews because of Mordecai's disobedience (3:6-11)
 3. King decrees destruction & letters sent (3:12-15)
 4. The Jews Mourn (King & Haman **feast**) (3:15-4:3)
- =====
5. Mordecai "dies" (4:1-14)



6. Esther decrees a three day **fast** (4:15-17)

- C. Esther's first **Feast** with Haman (5:1-8)

- D. At the King's Gate (5:9-14)

Homework assignment: Read Esther 6-7 and note how God changed the situation now that Esther and Mordecai were witnessing.

Week Four: The Turning Point - Mordecai's Honor Esther 6-7

❖ Westminster Shorter Catechism

❖ Review

<u>Outline of the Book of Esther</u>
Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)
Part 2: Mordecai Becomes Chief Counselor to the King (3-10)

We learned from the book of Daniel that God was establishing His international Kingdom in the world through the four great world

empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The Jews had been judged by God for their sins, and moved from Palestine out into the world as witnesses to the nations in which they found themselves. Although God promised to make a new covenant with the Jews, the Restoration Covenant, and return them to the Promised Land to rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem, they would still be interacting with the Gentile nations. The book of Daniel taught them that they must remain faithful to THE God Most High, and to be His witnesses in the world. If they did so, God would bless them and make them prosper in the new international Kingdom context. But if they compromised with the world, they would again be judged. Daniel was a good example of how the Jews were to live in the Restoration period. As he remained faithful to Yahweh, serving and witnessing to the various kings of the nations (Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar of Babylon, and Cyrus the Persian), God protected him and exalted him to important places in the empires.

As we have seen in the book of Esther, Mordecai did not follow the example of Daniel very well. He commanded Esther to conceal her identity as a Jew, instead of being a faithful witness. He refused to bow and pay homage to Haman, instead of obeying the command of the king. He used his national and religious pride as an excuse to disobey the king. But as we saw last week, when he repented, God began to work on behalf of Esther, Mordecai and the Jews. [Teacher: Give the students the handout at the end of this lesson.] As we got to the end of Esther 5, Haman planned to suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on the gallows that he had built for that purpose. But as we shall see, God had other plans for both Mordecai and Haman.

In Esther 2:19-23 we saw how Mordecai had saved the king's life by discovering and informing the king through Esther about a plot by two of his bodyguards to kill

him. This service done for the king by Mordecai was recorded in the book of the chronicles (a record kept of what happened) in the presence of the king. Throughout the book of Esther things are written down so that they would be remembered and acted upon. God has given us His Word as a chronicle of His activities on our behalf, so that we will remember to live according to His Word. Once again, we see Ahasuerus represented as a picture or image of God to His people.

I. The King Remembers & Honors Mordecai (6:1-14)

Esther 6:1 says that the king could not sleep. This is the turning point in the whole story! [Point out on the outline that this event is the center of the chiasm.] He commanded that the book of the records of the chronicles should be brought and read to him. He probably thought that it would put him to sleep to listen to the chronicles. As he listened, the king **remembered** (was reminded) about what Mordecai had done to save his life. As we have seen, when the king remembers something, he acts. When he “remembered Vashti” in 2:1, Ahasuerus began to find a new queen, and the story changed. Now, when the king remembers Mordecai the story changes again. Frequently in the Bible, God is revealed as remembering something and acts. In Exodus 2:24-25 we see that the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt began when God “remembered” His covenant. Once again we see that Ahasuerus is a type or picture of who Yahweh is.

In v. 3, the king asked what had been done to honor Mordecai for what he had done of the king. The king’s servants reported that nothing had been done for Mordecai. The king asked who was in the palace court at that time. Now Haman had gotten in to work early to suggest to the king that Mordecai be handed on the gallows. But Haman did not know that the king had just remembered the service of Mordecai. So the king order Haman to be brought to him.

When Haman came in, the king asked him what should be done for the man whom the king delights to honor (6:6). Notice that the king does not say that it was Mordecai the Jew, or why he wanted to honor him. He concealed this fact. As we saw last week, Haman was very happy with himself and his position in the royal court (see 5:11-12 where he bragged to his wife and friends). Now he thought that the king delighted to honor **him!** His answer in vv. 7-9 was that “a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade

him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!’”

The king responded by saying that Haman should hasten to do as he suggested – For Mordecai **THE JEW!** Haman did not know why the king wanted to honor Mordecai. He probably thought that it was **because Mordecai was a Jew**. Haman was probably very afraid at this time because this change in Mordecai’s status meant problems for him plan and would put him in a bad position.

Just as the king had honored Haman in 3:1-2, requiring everyone to bow and pay homage to him, so now Mordecai is honored. Clearly this represents an important change of events. This is similar to how Joseph was honored by Pharaoh in Genesis 41:43. Notice that the king had not told Haman who he delighted to honor. Notice too that the king knew that Mordecai was a Jew who sits at the King’s Gate. Apparently, the king still did not know that it was the Jews that Haman had plotted to destroy, or if he did, the king intended to honor Mordecai anyway. So, Haman did as the king commanded and honored Mordecai. After this, Mordecai went back to his service of Ahasuerus at the King’s Gate. But Haman returned to his house in mourning, with his head covered (in shame and discouragement (vv.10-13). When Haman told his wife and friends about what had happened, they wisely said that all of his plans against Mordecai and the Jews were beginning to fall apart. Not only so, it looked very much like Haman would fall before Mordecai. While they were still talking, the king’s eunuchs came and brought Haman to Esther’s second feast.

Truly, the tables had turned and God was at work to cause His will to be accomplished for the Jews and Mordecai. The proclamation against the Jews was made, the gallows had been built, but when God’s people gathered in faith to pray, God remembered them and saved them in ways that they could not see. This is what happens when God’s people repent of their sins, trust in Him through prayer, and faithfully witness. Even when things look their worst, we need to be faithful to God because He makes plans and arranges things behind the scenes for our good.

II. Esther’s Second Feast – Haman Hanged (7:1-10)

So the king and Haman dined with Queen Esther at her second feast of wine. Again, the king asked Esther what she wanted from him, up to half his kingdom. She said, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king...” Esther demonstrated great humility and submission to the king when she made her request. She did not demand anything, but appealed to the grace and favor of the

king, just as we should do before God. Then she spoke more specifically in vv. 3-4, "...let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss." Notice that Esther is no longer concealing her identity, but freely declaring that she is a Jew.

The king answered in v. 5, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?" Esther responded by accusing Haman in v. 6, "The adversary and enemy *is* this wicked Haman!" So Haman was terrified before the king and queen." The king was now very angry and left Esther's feast of wine and went out into the palace garden. Haman knew he was in deep trouble with the king, and stood to plead for his life before Esther. Somehow, he stumbled and fell across the couch where Esther was. When the king returned to the place where the feast was, he saw Haman laying on the couch by the Queen and thought that he was attacking her. V. 8 says, "Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?" As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face" Just as Haman had covered his own head in v. 12 because he had to honor Mordecai, now his face was covered in shame for his wickedness. It was the custom in ancient times for an executioner to cover the head of those who were to be put to death. Harbonah (meaning "ass driver" in Persian), one of the king's servants, pointed out the gallows 75 feet high that Haman had made at his house for Mordecai, who had spoken well on behalf of the king and saved his life. The king commanded that Haman be hanged on it. When Haman had been hanged on his own gallows, the anger of the king subsided.

This is another example in scripture of the *Lex Talionis*, "the law of retaliation." Throughout the law of God, justice must be done according to the principle of an eye for an eye (Ex. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21). Whatever is done against someone, so it shall be done to him. Justice requires that the punishment should fit the crime, no more or less. Haman had sought to wickedly kill Mordecai on the gallows, thus the perfect justice ordered by the king was for Haman to be righteously kill on the same gallows.

At this point, king Ahasuerus realized that the Jews were not the problem for his kingdom that Haman had led him to believe (3:8-9). Not only had Mordecai been a member of the Persian Supreme Court (sitting in the King's Gate), but he had also saved the king's life by revealing the plot against him. Not only so, Esther, his Queen, was a Jew whom he loved. The Jews, far from being dangerous for his kingdom and deserving of his judgment, were worthy of being protected.

This story shows us the protection of God's people when they trust Him and are faithful witnesses to Him. He is in control of all of the affairs of our lives, and sovereignly arranges all things according to His will. God intended to use Haman the adversary and enemy of God's people to cause Mordecai to repent and Esther to witness. He also used Haman's sinful actions to complete His war against the Amalekites for their sinful actions against His people. God wonderfully and mysteriously works in His way and in His time to bring His will to pass. He wills the good of His people as they are faithful to Him. He wills to destroy His and our enemies. And He wills to judge His people when we are unfaithful to Him. This story was a lesson to the people in the Restoration period and to us to remain faithful to God as we serve Him in His Kingdom.

In all of this we learn that God always works behind the scenes of history that we can see. We generally do not know what He has been doing to arrange things around us for our benefit. Events around us may look hopeless and frustrating. It may appear that the wicked are getting the upper hand historically and in our culture. In His perfect time, and according to His wise and sovereign control of all things, He makes His justice visible to the righteous and the world around us.

Homework assignment: Read Esther 8-9

The Turning Point - Mordecai's Honor Esther 6-7

Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)

- A. The King's Great **Feast** (1:1-9)
- B. Vashti's **Feast** & disobedience (1:10-12)
 - C. Advice of the wise men (1:13-22)
 - D. THE KING NEEDS A QUEEN (2:1)**
THE KING REMEMBERS
 - C' Advice of the wise men (2:2-4)
 - B' Esther's Submissiveness (2:5-17)
- A' Esther's Accession **Feast** (2:18)

Part 2: Mordecai Becomes Chief Counselor to the King (3-10)

- A. Mordecai
 - Schemes for power by concealing the faith (2:10, 19-20)
 - Serves the King (2:21-23)
- B. The Attack on God's people (Ch. 3-4)
 - 1. Haman promoted (3:1-5)
 - 2. Seeks to destroy the Jews because of Mordecai's disobedience (3:6-11)
 - 3. King decrees destruction & letters sent (3:12-15)
 - 4. The Jews Mourn (King & Haman **Feast**) (3:15-4:3)
 - 5. Mordecai "dies" (4:1-14)
 - 6. Esther decrees a three-day **Fast** (4:15-17)
- C. Esther's first **Feast** with the king and Haman (5:1-8)
- D. At the King's Gate (5:9-14)

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E. The King's Sleepless Night (6:1)

THE KING REMEMBERS MORDECAI'S SERVICE

- D' At the King's Gate (6:1-14)
Mordecai honored & Haman mourns with family

- C' Esther's Second **Feast** with the king and Haman (7:1-10)
Haman's plot exposed & Haman hanged on the gallows he made for Mordecai

Homework assignment: Read Esther 8-9

Week Five: Salvation of the Jews **Esther 8-9:16**

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

❖ **Review**

Review outline [Teacher: Give the students the outline at the end of this lesson.]

Last week we saw the turning point of the story. What two things happened following the king's decree to destroy the Jews that caused the story to change?

- 1) Mordecai humbled himself, and changed his command forbidding Esther to reveal her identity (2:10, 20; 4:8). Now, because of the decree against the Jews, Mordecai commanded Esther go to the king and plead for her people (4:1-8). He realized at this point that the safe and proper thing to do was to confess the Lord and to witness for him.
- 2) The king remembered the service Mordecai had done for him by revealing the plot against the king. Because Ahasuerus remembered, Mordecai was honored.

Because of these two things, the whole story begins to change. Instead of the Jews being in danger of being destroyed at the hand of the wicked Haman, it becomes clear that God (who is never mentioned in the book of Esther) is beginning to work on behalf of his people. Having brought His unfaithful people to near disaster, having driven them to repentance, having forced them to confess Him or die, He begins to reveal His plan for their deliverance. As we have seen, God has been working behind the scenes to accomplish His will. God caused the lots ("Pur") that Haman cast to fall almost a year into the future (Prov. 16:33), giving the Jews a chance to repent and prepare for the deliverance that He would provide them. When Esther approached the king to begin the process of pleading for her people (5:1-4), she found favor in his eyes and was permitted her to enter his inner courts because the heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord (Prov. 21:1). God's hand in saving Israel is clearest on the night before Haman intended to execute Mordecai on his gallows. It was then that the king (who is a picture of God) remembered to bless Mordecai. It was at this turning point that God destroyed Haman's plans and began to save the Jews. Last week we concluded our lesson with the death of Haman, the one who had determined to destroy, kill and annihilate his enemies, the Jews. The table had begun to turn. Not only was Haman killed instead of Mordecai, as we will see today, those who would seek to overpower and kill the Jews would themselves be overpowered and defeated by the Jews and those who helped them.

B' The Deliverance of God's people (Ch. 8-9)
1. Mordecai promoted (8:1-2)

7:10 tells us that after the death of Haman on the gallows, the wrath of the king subsided. His righteous judgment was satisfied. Turn to Esther 8:1-2, where we see that on the very same day, some very important things happen. In this passage we see that not only was the property of Haman given to Esther (Prov. 13:22 says, "... the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous"), but also Mordecai was made the Chief Advisor to the king in place of Haman. Mordecai's pride had led to the decree against the Jews. Mordecai's humility and repentance led to witnessing for God. Haman's pride about his position before the king and hatred for the Jews led to his death, and his position being given to the one he hated. Very often in scripture the wicked are shown to make a trap for the righteous which they themselves fall into (Ps. 7:15-16; 35:8; 37:14-15; 141:9-10; Prov. 11:8). God often works behind the scenes until He makes His justice visible to the righteous and the world around them.

2. Esther and Mordecai seek to save the Jews (8:1-6)

In vv. 3-6 we see that Esther again went to the king without being summoned (as she had in 5:2). Again the king held out the royal scepter toward Esther (cf. 4:11; 5:2) as she fell before the king, pleading with him to save the Jews from the evil plot of Haman the Agagite. In vv. 5-6 she humbly and without any demands, asked king Ahasuerus to grant her request if she pleased him and if he wanted to do so. Once again (5:4; 7:3), Esther demonstrated a godly and humble manner of dealing with her husband the king.

3. King decrees salvation & letters sent (8:7-14)

The king responded to the request by giving Esther and Mordecai the authority to write another decree *for* the Jews, as they thought good. He told them to write the decree in his name and to seal it with the signet ring to demonstrate that it was the king's decree and will, so that no one could change it.

In vv. 9-14 we read about the decree that Mordecai commanded the scribes to write. It is interesting to note the parallels between the first decree written by Haman and the second decree written by Mordecai. The Jews were saved in the same manner in which they were condemned. This was a very just decree, according to the biblical standard of justice (i.e. *Lex Talionis*, eye for eye, Ex. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21).

	Decree Against The Jews Ch. 3	Decree For the Jews Ch. 8
Promotion & Honor Given	Haman Vv. 1-2	Mordecai Vv. 1-2
Signet Ring	Given to Haman V. 10	Given to Mordecai V. 2
Kings Scribes	Decree written, 1 st month V. 12	Decree written, 3 rd month V. 12
Destroy, Kill & Annihilate	Jews	Enemies of Jews
Delivered to 127 Provinces	Vv. 13-15	Vv. 13-14
Reaction of Shushan	City perplexed V. 15	City rejoiced in gladness V. 15
Reaction of Jews	Mourning (4:1-3)	Light, gladness, joy & honor V. 16

Because the first decree (two months previous) could not be revoked, the second decree allowed the Jews to defend themselves from the attacks of those who would seek to assault them (according to the freedom given to them by the first in the first decree). One of the provisions of the decree is that the plunder that the Jews will acquire is given to them. The decree was swiftly (8:10, 14) taken to all the 127 provinces in the language and script of every people. This gave the Jews nine months to prepare for the battle that was before them in the twelfth month.

4. The Jews rejoice and Feast (8:15-17)

After all the things that happened on the day that Haman was killed and the decree was made on behalf of the Jews, Mordecai went out from the presence of the king as the newly appointed Chief Advisor to the king (v. 15). He was dressed in royal apparel to signify his new position, including a gold turban (not a royal crown, as is often translated). As he became more faithful as a witness, God gave him the power and influence he had sought through scheming and concealing the identity of Esther. He was promoted to greater influence, just as Daniel had been because of his faithfulness as a witness (Dan. 2:48; 3:30; 5:29; 6:28).

Apparently the people of the capital city did not much like Haman, and the whole city greatly rejoiced and was glad about the promotion of Mordecai the Jew. Not only so, the Jews also had light (probably meaning hope and a happy countenance), gladness, joy and honor (among the people of Shushan). Everywhere the king's decree had been taken, the Jews had a **feast** and holiday to celebrate. Then at the end of v. 17 we read, "Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them." When the people of God boldly and faithfully witness, God causes unbelievers to have fear of God and His people. The same thing happened in the book of Acts after the day of Pentecost. When God causes such fear to come upon people, many are converted (cf. Acts 2:43; 5:11; 9:31; 13:16, 26; 19:17). If we want to see unbelievers converted to the faith, we should hope and pray for God to cause them to be filled with fear as we boldly and faithfully proclaim the word of God.

5. The Jews live, their enemies die (9:1-16)

The day decreed by the king for the destruction of the Jews (1st decree), and for the Jews to be able to defend themselves (2nd decree) had come. Throughout the Bible, the “Day of the Lord” is a day of *judgment* against the wicked (either Jews or Gentiles), and *salvation* for the righteous. Esther 9:1 says,

“Now in the twelfth month, that *is*, the month of Adar, on the thirteenth **day**, *the time* came for the king’s command and his decree to be executed. On the **day** that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them.”

Because God had caused the fear of the Jews to fall upon the people in the provinces, many had been converted (8:17), making less enemies. Additionally, all of the government officials throughout the Persian empire helped the Jews because of their fear of Mordecai, the Chief Advisor to the King. V. 4 says that Mordecai had become a great man, with significant fame and influence throughout the empire. Because of the witness of the Jews, God caused the fear of them to be used as means for giving them victory over all their enemies. The triumph of the Jews was complete, as they defeated all of those who sought their harm on that day (v. 5).

The Jews killed 500 men in Shushan the capital city (as well as an additional 75 thousand elsewhere), and the ten sons of Haman. Vv. 7-14 is an interesting section that brings together the conclusion of God’s Holy War against the Amalekites. In Holy War, God forbade His people from taking the plunder of those whom they were to destroy. The spoils of Holy War were dedicated to God, and were to be utterly destroyed or taken into the service of the Lord. When Saul defeated the Amalekites, he did not kill Agag the king, and kept some of the plunder (1 Sam. 15:7-26). In Esther 9:10, 15, 16 see that the Jews, in obedience to the Lord, did not lay hands on the plunder for their personal use. They probably sent the plunder to Jerusalem use in the Temple that was being rebuilt. This time the Jews destroyed all of the Amalekites, including the sons of Haman the Agagite. Apparently, the war was not quite finished by the end of the day, so Ahasuerus granted Esther’s request that the war be extended another day [Note: this is similar to the extension of the day for Joshua, cf. Josh. 10.]. She also requested that the bodies of Haman’s sons be hanged, just as the bodies of Saul and his sons were hanged on a wall (1 Sam. 31:9-12). The victory of God’s people against the Amalekites was complete.

When the Jews (especially Mordecai and Esther) began to witness, God granted them not only victory over their enemies, but also the conversion of many of the Gentiles. We do not prosecute holy war today in the establishment of God’s

kingdom in the world, but God is building His kingdom through the sword of His word that goes forth from the mouth of Christ through His people (Rev. 19:15). As we declare the Word of God, Christ uses us to slay men and nations, converting them to the true faith. As the world see what God is doing through His people, they are struck by fear, and either resist by fighting against the Church, or humble themselves and believe.

We need to take the example presented to us in the book of Esther to heart, and boldly and faithfully witness to those around us. When we do, God will surprise us with the conversion of those whom we thought would reject and persecute us. In some cases we may suffer reproach. But God will use even this as a means of causing fear and faith in the hearts of those whom He has determined to save. May God make each of you courageous witnesses of God's mercy and grace to the world.

Homework assignment: Read Esther 9-10

Salvation of the Jews

Esther 8-9

Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen (1-2)

Part 2: Mordecai Becomes Chief Counselor to the King (3-10)

- A. Mordecai
 - Schemes for power by concealing the faith (2:10, 19-20)
 - Serves the King (2:21-23)
- B. The Attack on God's people (Ch. 3-4)
 - 1. Haman promoted (3:1-5)
 - 2. Seeks to destroy the Jews because of Mordecai's disobedience (3:6-11)
 - 3. King decrees destruction & letters sent (3:12-15)
 - 4. The Jews Mourn (King & Haman **Feast**) (3:15-4:3)
 - 5. Mordecai "dies" (4:1-14)
 - 6. Esther decrees a three-day **Fast** (4:15-17)
 - C. Esther's first **Feast** with the king and Haman (5:1-8)
 - D. At the King's Gate (5:9-14)
 - E. **The King's Sleepless Night (6:1)**
 - THE KING REMEMBERS MORDECAI'S SERVICE**
 - D' At the King's Gate (6:1-14)
 - Mordecai honored & Haman mourns with family
 - C' Esther's Second **Feast** with the king and Haman (7:1-10)
 - Haman's plot exposed & Haman hanged on the gallows he made for Mordecai

B' The Deliverance of God's people (Ch. 8-9)

- 1. Mordecai promoted (8:1-2)
- 2. Esther and Mordecai seek to save the Jews (8:1-6)
- 3. King decrees salvation & letters sent (8:7-14)

	Decree Against The Jews Ch. 3	Decree For the Jews Ch. 8
Promotion & Honor Given	Haman Vv. 1-2	Mordecai Vv. 1-2
Signet Ring	Given to Haman V. 10	Given to Mordecai V. 2
Kings Scribes	Decree written, 1 st month V. 12	Decree written, 3 rd month V. 12
Destroy, Kill & Annihilate	Jews	Enemies of Jews
Delivered to 127 Provinces	Vv. 13-15	Vv. 13-14
Reaction of Shushan	City perplexed V. 15	City rejoiced in gladness V. 15
Reaction of Jews	Mourning (4:1-3)	Light, gladness, joy & honor V. 16

- 4. The Jews rejoice and **Feast** – Fear and Conversion of Gentiles (8:15-17)
Acts 2:43; 5:11; 9:31; 13:16, 26; 19:17
- 5. A Day of the Lord: The Jews live, their enemies die (9:1-16)

Homework assignment: Read Esther 9-10

Week Six: Purim & Mordecai's Service **Esther 9:17-10:3**

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

❖ **Review**

Throughout the book of Esther we have seen the providence of God being supplied to His people behind the scenes. He used the historical circumstances recorded in the book of Esther to do accomplish several things:

- Provide a positive influence in the Persian government, Queen Esther and Mordecai, for the support of the Jews during the Restoration period through.
- Bring to a conclusion God's holy war against the Amalekites.
- Further teach His people the importance of being His witnesses to the Gentiles.
- Remind His people that they must not compromise with the world as they live among the Gentiles. As long as they remained faithful to their distinctions as Jews, God would bless them. But if they lived like the Gentiles around them, God would bring His covenant curses upon them. [This was the message of the last part of the book of Daniel regarding the Restoration Era.] By serving God in the context of the Gentile nations, God would build His Kingdom through the prophetic witness of the Jews.

6. Esther decrees a 2-day Feast of Purim (9:17-32)

After their great victory on the Day of the Lord, in the twelfth month, the Jews began to celebrate. 9:17-18 says that they *rested* from their labor of warfare and made a great feast on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month. This is the last feast of the book of Esther. They not only rested and feasted (taking these days off from work as a holiday), but also gave gifts to one another (9:19). The kingdom of Ahasuerus was now at peace and the people celebrated in the same manner that the king did when he held a feast in celebration of Esther becoming Queen (cf. 2:18).

The Jews, because of their sin (particularly Mordecai's sin of concealing Esther's identity and disobeying the King), were excluded from the Great King's feast (3:15-4:3). Once Esther and Mordecai had faithfully witnessed and been given the favor of the King, the Jews are restored to the feast of the great king. Today, in the Church, we have been given the high privilege of feasting with Jesus at His table. Yet, when someone has sinned and refused to repent, they are cut-off from the Lord's Table by the elders of the Church, just as the Jews were cut-off. But when the sinner repents, they are joyfully restored to the table of our great Savior and Messianic World Emperor, Jesus the Christ.

In vv. 20-32 we have the record of two letters that were written by Esther and Mordecai to all the Jews throughout the empire concerning the Feast of Purim.

First letter – Vv. 20-22

In vv. 20-22 we see that Mordecai took the example of the feasting and celebration of the Jews as a pattern to establish a celebration on the same days every year for what God had done for the Jews. Specifically, Mordecai wanted the Jews not to forget that God had provided rest from their enemies, and turned their sorrow into joy. He sent a letter to all the throughout the empire that this feast should be continued annually. Throughout the Bible, God commanded His people to remember His acts of providence and goodness for His people. If the people of God forget what God has done for them through the centuries, they will be prone to disobey and disregard His word to them. (Deut. 4:9-14, 15-40; 6:4-25; 8:1-20; Ps. 9:17; 78:7; 103:2). Disobedience is always the result of forgetfulness. Remembering what God has done for us will cause us to remember His Word to obey it, and to celebrate His goodness and love for us in worship and feasting.

Response of the Jews to the first letter – Vv. 23-28

The response of the Jews throughout the empire was to accept the custom written to them by Mordecai because the salvation that God had provided for them was so great. They called the celebration the “Days of Purim.” It was named this because Haman had cast the lot (in Persian, literally: “Pur”).

In v. 27 says the Jews “established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendents” as a remembrance of God’s salvation on their behalf. The Jews to this day celebrate this feast. Then we see something very interesting in v. 27 that says that “all those who should join them” should keep the feast. Who do you suppose this refers to? It refers to the Gentiles that would become Jews or God-fearing Gentiles (cf. 8:17). By celebrating this feast, the Jews would not only be remembering God’s great works of providence on their behalf, but also calling upon the Gentiles to believe in God as well. Because we are spiritually descendents of the Jews, this story becomes one of our stories of God’s salvation of *us*, His people. This celebration (a winter feast in the twelfth month) and the giving of gifts is a biblical background to our celebration of Christmas (a winter feast in the twelfth month). Because the true King of kings, the Messianic World Emperor has come, the enemies of God’s people are progressively destroyed. The Bride of Christ, the Church, is progressively given rest and promoted in the world as His true people. Because of the birth of Christ, the history of mankind is being brought more fully to its intended goal: the faithful worship and obedience of the world to the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. God forbid that the memory of this great work of

God's salvation for the Jews in the book of Esther perish from our minds. Yet even more, may God never allow us to forget the great works of God through His Son Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Second letter – Vv. 29-31 A second letter about Purim was written by Esther and Mordecai the Jew to establish the royal authority of the feast. It may have been written to make sure that all of the empire knew that the king supported the decree concerning the Jewish Feast of Purim, so that the Jews would not be hindered from celebrating the feast. Also we see that the decree dealt with matters of their fasting and lamentation (v. 31). Apparently there was a period of fasting and lamentation that was connected with the feast of Purim (probably on the day in which Haman had appointed from the destruction of the Jews, on the thirteenth day of Adar). This fasting would have helped them remember the great reversal that had taken place, i.e. God removed their fasting and lamentation by giving them victory over their enemies. Historically, this became known as “Esther’s Fast,” and the feast of Purim became known as “Mordecai’s Day” during the period of the Maccabees under Greek domination of the Promised Land (see 2 Maccabees 15:36).

A’ Mordecai: Serves the King (10:1-2) & serves his people properly (10:3)

The book of Esther concludes in must the same way it began – a description of the greatness of King Ahasuerus’s empire (cf. 1:1-4 & 10:1). As the king ascended to the throne, he reigned from India to Ethiopia, with 127 provinces. He made a great feast to demonstrate to the various officials of the realm the riches and glories of his kingdom. But his queen was found to be inadequate as a helper to him (1:9-22). Now that Esther had not only been found to be a good wife (2:17), but also a good helper to him providing assistance to Mordecai the Chief Advisor to the King (Chapters 8-9), the kingdom is at rest and can flourish (9:30; 10:1). 10:1 tells us that Ahasuerus imposed tribute/taxes on the land and sea (meaning over the vast regions of his empire). This can only be done successfully if his subjects are submitting to his authority. Clearly, the promotion of Esther and Mordecai had been a great blessing to Ahasuerus. The acts of his power and might were recorded in the books of the chronicles of the empire. As we have seen, these chronicles are important for the kingdom to operate effectively. The king remembered to honor Mordecai the first time because of what had been recorded in the chronicles of the king (2:23; 6:1-2). We will see that these same “books of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia” will become important to the Jews when we study the book of Ezra.

The lesson for us in this is that history and accurate records of history are important in the kingdom of God. To understand our own place in history, we need to understand what has come before us. To be forgetful of the past will cause us to not only forget God and His word, but also to repeat the sins of those who have gone before us. We will be unclear about the future because we do not understand our past. Covenant faithfulness in the present and future require and accurate and full understanding of God's actions through history. Today, in America, we have been turning away from the Lord for a long time. As we have done so, historians have been *re-writing history* to reflect a rejection of God and His interpretation of history. History is not just a series of facts that have been recorded in order. Historians always (both Christian and non-Christian) record their *interpretation* of the facts of history to reflect their worldview. If we desire to be faithful to the Lord, we must not only understand what has happened in history, but we should strive to see and describe historically what God has been doing in history. It is only in this way that we will be equipped to move into the future with knowledge and wisdom.

Finally, we see in 10:2-3 that once Mordecai had repented of his sins, God began to use Him in His Kingdom in important and powerful ways. Notice that he is called "Mordecai the Jew" in 9:29, 31 and 10:3 (cf. 5:13; 6:10; 8:7). Mordecai became known (by name) for his association with the Jews. By becoming the witness he should have been from the beginning, Mordecai and the Jews (and Yahweh, the God of the Jews) were exalted and influential in the empire. Through the first half of the book of Esther, Mordecai did nothing but cause trouble for the Jews by his scheming, disobedience and refusal to witness. By the end of the book, he had become one of the heroes of the story. 10:2-3 says that because he was promoted to the highest position in the empire under King Ahasuerus, his influence and power became very great. He used his position not only in service to the King, but also for the good of his own people. God used the events of this whole story to bring both Esther and Mordecai into a position where they could best benefit His people. It didn't happen quickly or in the normal means that we would expect. It happened only when they were willing to be faithful to God as His witnesses in the empire. God continually worked behind the scenes in ways that they did not see. But He caused His will to be done, despite the sinfulness of His people. He used the sins of His people to not only teach them faithfulness, but to destroy His and their enemies. God sovereignly controlled all things for His glory and the good of His people.

May God use the book of Esther in all of our lives to cause us to remain strong in faith and obedience, and to faithfully proclaim our identity as Christians. As we do so, we have the confidence that God will use us to bless His people and do great

things in His kingdom. We need to be careful not to trust in ourselves or our ability to secure places of importance in God's kingdom. Rather, we must merely be faithful to God and trust Him to use us as He sees fit. As we do, we will see more of the great reversals that God has accomplished throughout the history of His people when they are faithful to Him.

Homework assignment: Do the student evaluation. Read the whole book of Ezra at one time.

Week Six: Purim & Mordecai's Service
Esther 9-10

Part 1: Esther Becomes Queen

Part 2: Mordecai Becomes Chief Counselor to the King

- A. Mordecai
 - Schemes for power by concealing the faith (2:10, 19-20)
 - Serves the King (2:21-23)
- B. The Attack on God's people (Ch. 3-4)
 - 1. Haman promoted (3:1-5)
 - 2. Seeks to destroy the Jews because of Mordecai's disobedience (3:6-11)
 - 3. King decrees destruction & letters sent (3:12-15)
 - 4. The Jews Mourn (King & Haman **Feast**) (3:15-4:3)
 - 5. Mordecai "dies" (4:1-14)
 - 6. Esther decrees a three-day **Fast** (4:15-17)
- C. Esther's first **Feast** with the king and Haman (5:1-8)
 - D. At the King's Gate (5:9-14)
 - E. **The King's Sleepless Night (6:1)**
THE KING REMEMBERS MORDECAI'S SERVICE
 - D' At the King's Gate (6:1-14)
Mordecai honored & Haman mourns with family
 - C' Esther's Second **Feast** with the king and Haman (7:1-10)
Haman's plot exposed & Haman hanged on the gallows he made for Mordecai
- B' The Deliverance of God's people (Ch. 8-9)
 - 1. Mordecai promoted (8:1-2)
 - 2. Esther and Mordecai seek to save the Jews (8:1-6)
 - 3. King decrees salvation & letters sent (8:7-14)
 - 4. The Jews rejoice and **Feast** – Fear and Conversion of the Gentiles (8:15-17)
 - 5. A Day of the Lord: The Jews live, their enemies die (9:1-16)
=====
 - 6. Esther decrees a 2-day **Feast** of Purim (9:17-32)
- A' Mordecai: Serves the King (10:1-2) & serves his people properly (10:3)

Homework assignment: Do the student evaluation. Read the whole book of Ezra at one time.

Esther: Student Evaluation

Name _____ Date _____

What are the two main parts to the outline of the book of Esther?

Part 1: _____ (___ - ___)

Part 2: _____ (___ - ___)

Draw a line from the names in the left column that correspond historically and theologically to the names in the right column.

Mordecai

Agag the Amalekite

Esther

Christ – The World Emperor

Haman

The Church – The Bride of Christ

King Ahasuerus

Saul – The Benjaminite

Name a least two ways Esther was “better” than Queen Vashti (1:19).

How many feasts are there in the book of Esther, and what action of the King are generally associated with the feasts? _____

Circle the letter of the statement that is most true about Mordecai.

- A. Mordecai was right to command Esther to conceal her identity.
- B. Mordecai should not have commended Esther to hide her identity, but he was right to not bow to the enemy of the Jews, Haman the Agagite.
- C. Mordecai sinned by commanding Esther to conceal her identity and disobeying the king with respect to Haman.

Mordecai was promoted after he repented of his sin and became a faithful witness.
True or False

Circle the letter of the statement that is most true about King Ahasuerus.

- A. Ahasuerus was a picture of the coming Messianic Emperor, Jesus Christ.

B. Ahasuerus was a good substitute for the kings of Israel during the exile of the Jews.

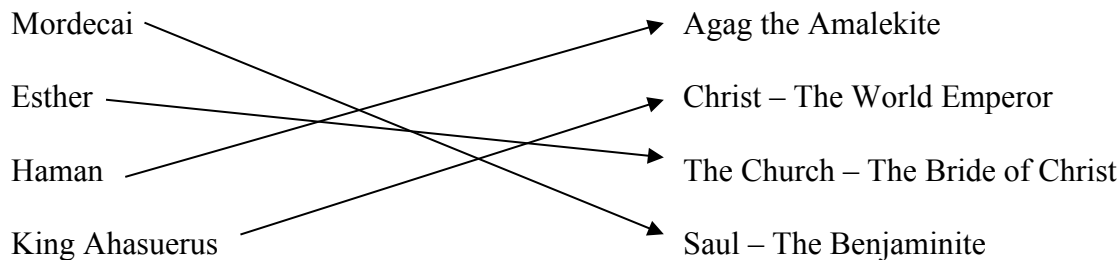
Esther: Student Evaluation Answer Key

What are the two main parts to the outline of the book of Esther?

Part 1: **Esther Becomes Queen (1 – 2)**

Part 2: **Mordecai Become Chief Advisor to the King (3 – 10)**

Draw a line from the names in the left column that corresponds historically and theologically to the names in the left column.



Name a least two ways Esther was “better” than Queen Vashti (1:19).

She was submissive and obedient, she pleased the King, she was humble in the way she approached the King

How many feasts are there in the book of Esther, and what action of the King are generally associated with the feasts? **Decrees/decisions were often made in association with the 7 feasts.**

Circle the letter that is most true about Mordecai.

- A. Mordecai was right to command Esther to conceal her identity.
- B. Mordecai should not have commended Esther to hide her identity, but he was right to not bow to the enemy of the Jews, Haman the Agagite.
- C. Mordecai sinned by commanding Esther to conceal her identity and disobeying the king with respect to Haman.

Mordecai was promoted after he repented of his sin and became a faithful witness and true servant of the King.

True or False

Circle the letter of the statement that is most true about King Ahasuerus.

- A. Ahasuerus was a picture of the coming Messianic Emperor, Jesus Christ.
- B. Ahasuerus was a good substitute for the kings of Israel during the exile of the Jews.