

ESTHER – FACTUAL QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

1. Who was king and queen during the time of Esther?
2. What was the king celebrating?
3. Who did the king hold a feast for at the end of his celebration for his officials and servants?
4. What did the king want from the queen?
5. What fear did the king and his officials have of the people when the queen refused to come to the king?
6. What was done to the queen?
7. Over how many provinces did the king of Persia and Media reign? (1-2)
8. What did Queen Vashti refuse to do? (9-12)
9. Why were the wise men so concerned about Vashti's behaviour? (13-18)
10. What did Memucan recommend that the king do? (19-20)

CHAPTER 2

1. Who was sought for the king to replace Queen Vashti?
2. Who was Esther?
3. What type of preparations did the women go through before seeing the king?
4. What did Mordecai discover during the preparation time of the virgins?
5. What did the king's servants suggest that he do to replace Vashti?
6. Who raised Esther? (5-7)
7. What didn't Esther reveal when she was taken? (8-11,19-20)
8. Who was made queen instead of Vashti? (12-18)
9. What did Mordecai overhear and tell Esther about? (21-22)
10. Where was the investigation and following results recorded? (23)

Chapter 3

1. Who did the king promote to his second in command above all his princes?
2. Why did Haman despise Mordecai?
3. What plan did Haman devise against Mordecai and his people?
4. Who did the king promote above all the princes? (1)
5. Who refused to bow to Haman? (2-4)
6. What did Haman seek to do? (5-6)
7. What did Haman by offering money persuade the king to write and publish to all his provinces? (8-15)

CHAPTER 4

1. Why could Queen Esther not come freely before the king?
2. a. What did Queen Esther ask Mordecai and the Jews in Shushan to do for her?
3. What did Mordecai do when he perceived what was done? (1-2)
4. What did the Jews do in each of the provinces? (3)
5. What did Mordecai request Esther to do? (7-8)
6. What usually happened to a person who came into the king's court not invited?
(11)
7. What did Mordecai tell Esther would happen to her if she did nothing? (14)
8. What question did Mordecai ask Esther? (14)
9. How did Esther respond? (16)

CHAPTER 5

1. What did Esther ask of the king after her three days of fasting?
2. What did the Queen ask of the king after the banquet?
3. a. What angered Haman after the banquet? b. What action was advised to Haman by his wife and friends?
4. What did the king do when Esther entered the inner court? (1-3)

5. What did Esther request of the king? (4-5)
6. At the banquet what did Esther request? (6-8)
7. What caused Haman indignation? (9-13)
8. What did his wife and friends suggest that Haman do? (14)

CHAPTER 6

1. a. Why did the king read the book of the chronicles the night before the second banquet of the queen? b. What did he read?
2. Who did Haman think the king wanted to honor?
3. What was done for Mordecai?
4. How did the king sleep that night? (1)
5. What did the king have read to him that night? (1-2)
6. What did the king ask? (3)
7. What did the king ask Haman? (4-6)
8. Who did Haman think that the king wanted to honor? (6)
9. How did Haman suggest that the king show his honor? (7-9)
10. Who did the king ask Haman to honor? (10-11)
11. What did Haman's wife and wise men recognize? (12-14)

CHAPTER 7

1. What petition did Esther make known at the second banquet for the king and Haman?
2. What did the king discover when he came back into the room?
3. What was Haman's punishment for his plot and assault?
4. What did Esther request of the king at the banquet? (1-4)
5. What did Esther reveal to the king? (5-6)
6. How did Haman react? (6-8)
7. What did the king think Haman was doing? (8)
8. Where was Haman hanged? (9-10)

CHAPTER 8

1. What further request did Esther ask of the king?
2. What did the king suggest to Esther to save her people?
3. What did the king give to Mordecai? (2,15)
4. Who was set over the house of Haman? (2)
5. What did Esther request of the king? (3-6)
6. What were the contents of the decree sealed and sent to all the provinces? (7-14)
7. How did the Jews react when the decree came to them? (15-16)

CHAPTER 9

1. What happened on the scheduled day of annihilation of the Jews?
2. What did Queen Esther further ask of the king?
3. What feast did the Jews declare in remembrance of their rest from their enemies?
4. Who helped the Jews? (1-4)
5. What did the Jews do to their enemies? (4-9)
6. What happened to the sons of Haman? (10-14)
7. What is the purpose of the days of Purim? (18-32)

Chapter 10

1. Where was the greatness of Mordecai written? (1-3)

ESTHER - PERSONAL APPLICATION

“Just Do It” has been a successful and popular slogan the past few years for the athletic company Nike. It refers to getting in shape and participating in athletics no matter what the physical or mental strain. But the slogan brings something else to my mind after spending time in the book of Esther: it reminds me to *just do it*—just do the right thing no matter what the consequences.

In the book of Esther we see the lives of several characters played out. There are those people who are selfish and prideful, seeking only personal recognition, and there are those who risk everything for others and choose integrity in the face of great opposition. Esther is a book about developing godly character. In the midst of a culture which does not emphasize doing what is right, this book speaks to us in profound ways.

As we read through the events of Esther, we are given a description of what godly character is and what it is not. But there is another very strong theme that weaves in and around the theme of character. It is the idea that God is working in the circumstances and events of people's lives to bring about his plans. God is the director, the conductor, the weaver: As God works in our lives, we must choose what is right so that we can be a part of God's plan.

The events of this powerful book take place in Persia during the reign of King Xerxes from 486 to 465 B.C. It has been over one hundred years since the beginning of the exile, and some Jews have returned to Jerusalem. The story is set in the city of Susa, which is where the king has his winter palace. It involves the whole of the Jewish people, but revolves around the lives of King Xerxes, Esther, her uncle, Mordecai, and Haman, the king's highest noble.

Esther's story presents the last major threat to the Jewish people in the Old Testament period. The threat and the Jews' deliverance is recorded in this book. The Jewish festival of Purim, which is still celebrated today, is established in Esther, which accounts for the book's great popularity among the Jewish people. It is a wonderful story of God's providence and the character of his people told with humor, irony, repetition and contrast.

Esther will stir us to examine our character, the deep aspects of our hearts. It will encourage us in taking a stand for what is right and give us courage that God is still in control. It is a book that we need to study so that we can glorify God with our whole being and begin to be witnesses in our world because of our integrity. If we allow the themes of Esther to penetrate our lives, we will begin to stop and question our actions and thoughts and align them with God's desire.

May your study in Esther produce in you a longing for consistent godly character.

1

A Little Respect

Esther 1

Purpose: To show that respect between individuals is built through mutual regard and appreciation rather than through demanding respect or controlling one another.

One of my favorite and most influential teachers was a highschool English teacher. His class was extremely difficult and challenging, but I loved it and worked diligently in order to do well. The reason I respected this teacher so much is that he listened to me and valued me.

We would all like to be respected by others, and so we try many ways of gaining that respect. Some try to gain it through controlling others or by demanding it. However, one of the ways respect is gained is by appreciating others and showing them respect.

1. Think of one person whom you respect. Describe some characteristics of this person and what he or she did to gain your respect.

2. Read chapter 1. Who are the people we encounter in this first chapter?

3. Describe the celebration given by King Xerxes (vv. 2-8).

Why might the king have given such an extravagant party?

4. Why does King Xerxes ask Queen Vashti to come to him (vv. 10-11)?

5. The king's request places Vashti in a difficult position. What factors would she have been weighing in her decision (v. 12)?

6. What can we observe about King Xerxes' character so far?

7. Think of a time when you were placed in a difficult situation. What was your response?

8. Why did the wise men perceive Queen Vashti's refusal to be so dangerous to the kingdom (vv. 16-20)?

9. The wise men mention respect several times in this chapter. In their view how was respect gained and maintained?

10. How does respect actually develop between people?

11. In what ways can you show appreciation and regard to those around you?

12. Describe one thing that you can do this week to show someone respect.

2

Trusting God's Work

Esther 2

Purpose: To recognize God's ordering work in our lives and to trust his direction.

When the curtain rises and the play begins, we see and hear the actors and actresses tell a story. But the most important person in the play is not on the stage. The director is the one who has instructed the cast for months before on where to stand and sit and when and how to say a line. The director is behind the scenes giving final instructions, touching up makeup and encouraging the players. The play is a success because of the director, who has orchestrated every detail of the play.

In the book of Esther God is not mentioned, but he is the key figure in the story. He works through the circumstances to place everything in order so that his plans will be accomplished. God is the director of our lives as well. He puts all the pieces in just the right places and knits everything together. As we look back at different times in our lives, we can see his handprints all over. Our response to him is to look for his hand moving and to trust his direction.

1. Describe a time in your past when you saw God work through circumstances in your life to bring something about.

2. Read chapter 2. Summarize the plan to find a new queen that King Xerxes put into action (vv. 1-4).

3. How does Esther enter the story and become the queen (vv. 5-17)?

4. Many young women were brought to the palace and placed in the harem. What was the role of these women and what were their lives like?

5. It is mentioned three times that Esther won approval in someone's eyes (vv. 9, 15, 17). What does this tell us about Esther?

6. Think of someone you know who finds favor with others because of that person's presence and personality. How can you begin living out one of the characteristics of this person in your own life?

7. How would Esther's life, role and rights be different from the rest of the women in the harem when she became the queen?

8. How does Mordecai enter into the plot of the story (vv. 19-23)?

9. What does this glimpse of Mordecai's life tell us about his character?

10. Even though God has not been directly mentioned in the book, where do you see his hand moving in the story so far?

11. Where do you see God's hand moving in circumstances in your life right now?

How do you think he wants you to respond?

3

Evaluating Advice

Esther 3

Purpose: To discover how to evaluate the counsel we receive from others and to give good advice.

“No man has any right to counsel others who is not ready to hear and follow the counsel of the Lord.” This quote from A. W. Tozer reminds me of the responsibility we have in giving advice to others. It is a serious thing to give counsel, and it is also a serious step to take the counsel of our friends. So often we give quick advice to one another without

truly understanding the situation or without pure motives. Part of godly character is knowing how to evaluate the advice we receive and in turn to offer sound and wise counsel.

1. When in your life have you received good advice and when have you received poor advice?

2. Read chapter 3. List all the words and phrases in this chapter which bring to mind tragedy or conflict.

3. What is the conflict between Haman and Mordecai which causes Haman's intense reaction to Mordecai (vv. 2-6)?

4. How does Haman persuade the king to adopt his plan to destroy the Jews (vv. 8-9)?

5. At what point in your life have you been tempted to use half-truths and lies to convince someone?

What were you feeling at the time?

6. Describe the orders contained in the king's edict (v. 13).

7. In verses 12–14 the words *each*, *every* and *all* are repeated frequently. What might the author have been trying to communicate in this detailed description of the edict?

8. What have we learned about Haman's character in this chapter?

9. This chapter gives us even more detail about who King Xerxes was. What do we learn about him?

10. How might you guard against giving unwise advice?

11. What are some ways you can evaluate the advice you receive from others?

4

Doing the Right Thing

Esther 4

Purpose: To recognize the situations in which God has placed you to do his will and commit to acting with courage and integrity in those situations.

Laszlo Tokes was a pastor in Timisoara, Romania, during the reign of Ceausescu under the communist regime. He had dedicated his life to bringing about revival in the church in Romania despite opposition and danger. He risked his life to preach the gospel and stand up against the communist government. Because of his courage and integrity he helped the people to win their freedom.

God places us in situations where he wants to use us, and in those situations we will be faced with the choice of doing what God calls us to do or doing what is against God. We may never face circumstances like those of Laszlo Tokes, but doing what is right includes little things: giving back extra change when a cashier makes a mistake or letting the cable company know about the free service that's been coming in. Whether the stakes are large or small, it takes the same character qualities of courage and moral strength to choose what is right.

1. Describe an instance where obeying God's call meant taking a risk or facing a difficulty.

2. Read chapter 4. What is the sequence of events?

3. Describe the response of Mordecai and the Jews to Haman's plot (vv. 1-3).

4. How does the fasting of the Jewish people in verse 3 contrast with parts of the first three chapters?

5. Why do you think Mordecai was so confident in his plan to stop the annihilation of the Jews (vv. 6–8)?

6. What is Esther's first reaction to Mordecai's request that she go to the king (vv. 9–11)?

7. What do you think Esther may have been feeling (vv. 9–11)?

8. Think back to the situation God called you to in which obeying meant facing great risks. What was your first reaction, and what were your feelings when God called you?

9. How do Mordecai's arguments in verses 12–14 persuade Esther to go to the king?

10. In this chapter how do we see God's sovereignty and people's responses working together?

11. What character qualities does Esther show in her response to Mordecai's second message?

12. Think of a present context in which God has placed you to do his will. What risks do you face in doing the right thing in this context?

What character qualities must you exhibit in order to do the right thing?

5

The Heart of the Matter

Esther 5

Purpose: To guard against facing difficult times or tasks with anger or bitterness and learn to face them with humility and a dependence on God.

My schoolteacher husband came home one day from work with an unpleasant note from a parent. The note expressed anger and concern over his performance as a teacher. My husband was very wounded and puzzled by the note, but he made an appointment to meet with the parent the next day. In the face of a situation that could have led my husband to bitterness and anger I watched him respond with courage, compassion and humility. Because of his response the misunderstanding was clarified and the relationship was reconciled.

Our character comes through especially in times where we are facing a difficult task or situations or people that anger us. Our response to these kinds of occurrences in our life tells a great deal about our character. Do we face them with courage and humility or with anger, bitterness and pride? Esther faces her task with courage and dependence on God, while Haman is consumed with anger and hatred because of Mordecai. Both show the condition of their hearts.

1. What example comes to mind when you think of a person acting with courage or humility?

2. Read chapter 5. What risks does Esther take in verses 1–8?

3. What do you think Esther may have been feeling in verse 1?

4. Look back at 4:15–16. What enabled Esther to face the risk of going to the king without being summoned?

5. How can the support of other believers be helpful to you in the midst of a trial you are going through now?

6. Esther asks the king and Haman to attend a banquet. What may have been the reason for such a request (vv. 4–8)?

7. The second time the king asks Esther to make her request known, she answers him. What do her words reveal about her character (vv. 7–8)?

8. What characteristics do we see in Haman (vv. 9–14)?

9. Haman boasts about having everything: sons, wealth, position and recognition. Why do you think Haman is still so consumed with Mordecai?

10. How does the passage contrast Esther's character and Haman's character?

11. Where in your own life do you see the qualities of Esther and the qualities of Haman?

12. In what current situation can you try to respond with the courage and humility of Esther?

6 Recognizing Unrighteousness

Esther 6

Purpose: To identify those areas of our character which are displeasing to God and to present those before him, asking him to rid us of these traits.

When I take an honest look at myself, I see many ugly spots that mar my character. One of the ugliest traits is my desire to make myself look better than others. This ungodly character trait seeps into my relationships and damages intimacy. For each of us there are things about our character that are displeasing to God; perhaps it is pride or arrogance, selfish ambition or manipulation. Because we let those things grow in our lives rather than allowing God to remove them, we experience various consequences of our unrighteousness.

1. What is one aspect of your character you would like to be more Christlike?

2. Read chapter 6. What events in this chapter seem coincidental but lead to the development of the story?

3. How does the king respond to discovering Mordecai's role in thwarting the assassination plot (vv. 2-6)?

4. Where do you see irony in King Xerxes' and Haman's actions on this particular night (vv. 1-6 and 5:14)?

5. God has been working quietly to bring together many of the incidents recorded in this chapter. He uses insignificant things to work out his plans. Tell about a time where God used an insignificant thing in your life for his purposes.

6. What else can we discern about Haman's character through his response to the king's question in verses 7-9?

7. How might Haman have been feeling when he discovered that Mordecai, his enemy, is the one to be honored?

8. Haman sought comfort from his wife and friends after his ride through the city with Mordecai, but he receives a very different response. How do his wife and advisors interpret the situation and react to Haman (vv. 12–14)? Why?

How do they seem to be distancing themselves from Haman?

9. How has the ungodliness in Haman's character led to his humiliation?

10. Think back to the characteristic in your life which is not always Christlike. What might be (or have been) some negative consequences of this trait?

11. What is one thing that you can do this week, with God's help, to reform your character?

7

Character No Matter What

Esther 7

Purpose: To commit to doing what is right whether or not we experience justice in this life.

This is what the wicked are like—
always carefree, they increase in wealth.
Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure;
in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. (Psalm 73:12–13)

These words express the struggle in the heart of the psalmist. He is wrestling because he does not see justice being carried out; instead, the wicked prosper and the righteous are plagued. In a similar way Esther and Mordecai have chosen to do what is right throughout the story, yet they face destruction. Haman, who is prideful, angry and bitter, has been successful in plotting against the Jews. Finally, in chapter 7 Esther and Mordecai see justice taking place. However, in our lives we do not always see justice when we choose to do what is right. The people of God must have consistent character whether or not justice prevails in this life.

1. Give an example of a situation in which justice was served.

2. Read chapter 7. Name all of the truths that were previously hidden but are now revealed in this chapter.

3. This chapter revolves around Queen Esther, King Xerxes and Haman. What might each of them be feeling at the beginning of the banquet?

4. How does Esther present her request (vv. 3-4)?

5. What thoughts and emotions might the king and Haman experience when Esther presents her request (vv. 6-7)?

6. What is ironic about the events of this banquet?

7. What do verses 6-8 reveal about Haman's character?

8. How do you see justice carried out in the lives of Esther, Mordecai and Haman?

9. What should be our motivation for doing what is right?

As Christians, when should we expect to see justice served and when should we be satisfied with doing what is right? Give examples from your experience.

10. How can you seek justice in a situation where you currently see injustice?

How will you respond if justice is not served?

8

Praising God's Faithfulness

Esther 8

Purpose: To be aware of God's faithfulness in our lives and continually praise him for it.

As the sunshine filtered through the sanctuary windows, the pastor stood and asked for the congregation to share how God had been faithful. One by one the people rose to their feet. There were testimonies about marriages restored, physical healings, new passion for service, children coming to Christ and spiritual growth. I listened with a joyful heart; certainly God is faithful!

The book of Esther shows that God brings justice in his time and in his way. Sometimes the justice comes in the way we have expected, and at other times we are surprised by God's ways. But one thing remains certain. It is that God is faithful. He will provide and care for his people. From an overwhelming opposition to the smallest concern, God continues to be faithful to us. God provides not only for Esther and Mordecai, but for all of his people. Because he has been faithful, the people respond with rejoicing and celebrating. Our response to God should be no different.

1. Describe a time when God has proven himself faithful to you in a difficult situation.

2. Read chapter 8. List all the ways that Esther and Mordecai are rewarded by God through the actions of the king.

3. In verses 3–6 we see a little of Esther's heart. How does she feel toward her people?

4. What do verses 3–6 reveal about Esther's character?

5. Esther felt deep concern and compassion for her people. For what person or group of people would you like to have that same kind of concern?

How might you develop your compassion for them?

6. How does King Xerxes respond to Esther's plea (vv. 7–10)?

7. God provides for the Jews through the edict Mordecai issued in the king's name. How did the edict (vv. 11–13) provide what Esther was asking for in verses 5–6 without breaking the first edict (3:12–14)?

8. What is the response of the Jews to God's provision and protection (vv. 15–17)?

9. How did the response of the Jews to the first edict in chapter 4 (4:1-3, 15-16) pave the way for the events of this chapter?

10. How can we be faithful when we are waiting for God to act in our lives?

11. Think over the past week and share how God has been faithful to you. What is one way you can express to God your joy and gladness about his provision for you?

9

Remembering and Celebrating

Esther 9-10

Purpose: To learn to become people of thanksgiving, celebrating in tangible, glorifying ways the times when God has provided for us.

It was a beautiful spring day and I was walking along a dirt road that wound through the mountains outside Bear Trap Ranch in Colorado. I was pouring out my heart to God and wrestling with where he wanted to take me in my life. As I strolled among the pine trees, God opened my eyes to the abundant life that lay before me if I would commit my future to his service. It was that moment that changed the course of my life, and I am eternally grateful to the Lord. Every time I visit Bear Trap Ranch I walk along that very road and remember that moment and God's faithfulness to me. Remembering helps me keep my perspective and empowers me to go on in my commitment to his service.

When God does something in our midst it is important to remember it and to celebrate. As we recollect his goodness, our faith is strengthened and so is our ability to face the next struggle.

1. What is something you or your family commemorated, and how was it celebrated?

2. Read Esther 9–10. Summarize the events of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar.

3. Describe the people that the Jews actually destroyed on these days in the month of Adar (9:5–17).

4. The author mentions three separate times that the Jews did not lay their hands on their enemies' plunder. Why might the Jews have left the plunder despite the king's permission to take it (9:10, 15–16)?

5. Mordecai and Esther proclaimed and established the celebration of Purim as a holiday for all the Jews. What was the purpose of the celebration (vv. 20–27)?

6. The wording in verse 28 emphasizes the importance of the celebration for all the Jews. Why is the observation of Purim so crucial?

7. How were the Jews instructed to celebrate Purim (9:22)?

8. How is the celebration of Purim different from most of our celebrations?

9. God has saved his people and blessed Esther and Mordecai for their obedience to him. Summarize what happens to Esther and Mordecai at the end of the story (9:29–10:3).

10. What qualities did Mordecai have that made him a respected leader?

11. Throughout Scripture God instructs his people to commemorate the times when he acted to provide for and save his people. Why is remembering God's acts of faithfulness important for us as Christians?

12. What is one thing that God has done for you that you would truly like to remember?

What are some ways you could celebrate it?