



*Divine Deliverance from Death to Life in Esther<sup>1</sup>*



CHRIST COMMUNITY  
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*Changed Hearts. Changed Lives. Changed Community.*

<sup>1</sup> Cover Art: 17<sup>th</sup> Century English Wall Hanging of Esther before Ahasuerus



*Divine Deliverance*  
*from* **Death to Life**  
**in Esther**

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# Epigraph

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“Accounts of salvation are always faith-creating and faith-confirming, and somehow Esther conforms to this norm without the necessity to identify that it is God’s hand at work. In other words, the text serves as an invitation. It is as if the author says, ‘I am inviting you to hear this story and to respond to it with faith.’ This journey to faith requires pondering the events, searching for God within the plot, and choosing to see his active presence. So the story ‘veils’ God’s presence rather than hides it, teasing the reader to look beyond the veil to the greater reality that can be uncovered through searching. The story requires a response to the mystery of the veiled presence of God. This response is faith-creating and faith building, for it is a personal and individual response rather than a second-hand one, built only on the author’s own interpretation of the story.”<sup>2</sup>

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*Debra Reid, Esther: An Introduction and Commentary*

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<sup>2</sup> Debra Reid, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 49.

# Introduction

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Esther, at first blush, may seem like an interesting choice for accompanying us through the Easter Season. However, upon closer examination, we will find many of the key Easter themes providing the structure for the book and helping to deepen our understanding of God's providence. These themes include: times of feasting and fasting, death reversed into life more abundant, judgment for arrogance and self-dependence, grief that gives way to raucous celebration, and the promise-keeping God at work behind it all. As David G. Firth writes, "Thus, what might seem on the surface to be a rather odd book is actually one that invites us to reflect on what it is to know God within this world – a world where the miraculous is rare and yet in which the faithful continue to experience the reality of God's presence."<sup>3</sup> This Easter Season we hope to grow in being able to see God's divine providence at work as He invites us walk in greater newness of resurrected life in Christ. We also hope to improve our ability to discern seasons that call for fasting and grief and how to better celebrate God's faithful fulfilment of our prayers as He delivers us from those seasons.

The author of Esther<sup>4</sup> states in **9:20-22** that the purpose for the story is to explain and encourage the celebration of Purim. The word "purim" is Hebrew for "lots" as in "the casting of lots." Per Mordecai's edict, Jews are to celebrate the Purim Festival beginning on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Adar and extending into the following day.<sup>5</sup> The festival is marked by feasting, drinking, exchanging of gifts, and support of the poor.<sup>6</sup> Barry G. Webb notes, "The feasting of Purim is to be observed as the positive counterpoint to the fasting and lamentation prescribed for other times of the year (9:20-22, 31)."<sup>7</sup> This serves as a foretaste of the celebration of the Passover which occurs the month following to celebrate God's divine deliverance of His people from

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<sup>3</sup> David G. Firth, *The Message of Esther: God Present But Unseen* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Scholars agree that the author's identity is indiscernible from the text and all other available supporting documents.

<sup>5</sup> The Jewish month of Adar falls in and around March. The days in March for Purim shift across the month each year.

<sup>6</sup> Modern celebrations of Purim included an interactive reading of Esther together with people dressing up as the various characters and making some sort of derogatory noise every time Haman is mentioned. Some will enact Purim Plays or have puppet shows of Esther in Punch and Judy style.

<sup>7</sup> Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Ruth* (Downers Grove: Apollos-IVP, 2000), 116.

slavery in Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Esther tells the story of the providential reversal of fortunes for God's people in the exilic diaspora in Persia as He delivers them from what seems like a sure death to taking the place of their enemies in more abundant life.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Purim ultimately celebrates the divine deliverance from death to life as it acknowledges God's providence and humanity's frailty. As Reid writes, "The Purim festival is a reminder that Jewish history results in a faith that needs to be practiced."<sup>10</sup> These regular celebrations of God's faithfulness help cultivate the faith and sacred memories of its participants.

More than just serving as the background for the Purim Festival, Esther also celebrates the faithfulness of God who serves as the Divine Deliverer.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the author accomplishes this by not mentioning God at all.<sup>12</sup> Various hints get scattered throughout the story that may or may not point to God – it's left to the reader to decide. What the author records lacks any miraculous or supernatural elements but, instead, focuses on the daily realities of life for the diaspora Jews who remained under Persian rule. According to Karen H. Jobes, "The Esther story is an example of how at one crucial moment in history the covenant promises God had made were fulfilled, not by his miraculous intervention, but through completely ordinary events."<sup>13</sup> The question becomes do we have the eyes to see and ears to hear where the Lord is at work both historically and in our lives as well as the lives of others.

The historical events in Esther occur around 60 years after the exiles returned to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Most Jews remained behind in the diaspora under the reign of King Ahasuerus (Hebrew name for Xerxes I).<sup>14</sup> This resulted in a tension between those who returned and those who stayed. As Baldwin puts it, "A rift was appearing between the orthodox religious Jews who had given their lives to rebuilding Zion, and those who remained

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<sup>8</sup> Webb, 111.

<sup>9</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *Esther: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1999), 40.

<sup>10</sup> Reid, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Mervin Breneman observes, "The purpose of the Book of Esther is twofold: (1) to demonstrate God's providential care of his people, even those outside the land of Israel, and (2) to commend the observance of the Feast of Purim by relating how it originated (9:24-28)." in *Esther, Nehemiah, Esther* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 289.

<sup>12</sup> Song of Songs is the only other Old Testament book to not specifically mention God.

<sup>13</sup> Jobes, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984), 17. Baldwin estimates that the story occurs between 483 B.C. and 474 B.C., 49. Estimates for Esther's final recorded form range from late 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. to late 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. which covers the time in which Jews remained in Persia before that empire fell to Alexander the Great in 333 B.C.

among the Gentiles, feathering their own nests.”<sup>15</sup> This led to a series of questions for those who remained in Persia: “What future was there for Jews in scattered groups within an alien empire? Was their God with them, and if so what did he require of them?”<sup>16</sup> With these questions lingering, they would have been tempted to fully assimilate and forget their Jewishness and God. They would have also been tempted to despair and feel forgotten by their God.<sup>17</sup> Esther helps to answer those questions to remind the diaspora Jews who and Whose they are as God’s people.

Esther centers on a conflict that arises between Haman and Mordecai that results in a genocidal edict to wipe out the Jews in the Persian Empire, which would have also included those who had returned to rebuild the temple. Like so many circumstances in the Old Testament, there is much more to this story than just the conflict at hand. As Firth observes, “More than any other text in the Old Testament, Esther asks us to read it in light of the canon of Scripture.”<sup>18</sup> Haman is described as an Agagite (also known as an Amalekite) and Mordecai as a Kishite. This proves critical to understanding what’s happening here and Who’s actually behind it. **1 Samuel 15** tells the story of King Saul, a Kishite, who fails to obey the Lord’s command to wipe out the Amalekites for opposing the Lord and His people when He delivered them from Egypt (cf. **Exodus 17:8-16**). This would have fulfilled the promise of judgment from the Abrahamic Covenant for those who curse God’s people. Saul specifically disobeys by preserving King Agag. This sets the stage for whether God would intervene on behalf of His people in Susa to keep His specific covenantal promises even for those who remained in the diaspora. Webb insightfully writes, “Against the background the war with Amalek, which goes on from generation to generation through the Old Testament, is a particular manifestation in history of Yahweh’s covenant promise to be Israel’s defense against her enemies: “I will make you into a great nation...I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse (Gen. 12:2-3).”<sup>19</sup> Understanding the background to the key crisis in Esther helps us also appreciate the glorious ways in which the author chooses to tell the story and bring resolution.

Scholars from every tradition agree that Esther stands out in the Old Testament canon for the artistry of its storytelling. This has led to quite a bit of debate on how much artistic license was taken given its hyperbole and questionable historicity. Reid positively notes, “The

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>17</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Esther & Ruth* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2005), 6-7.

<sup>18</sup> Firth, 33.

<sup>19</sup> Webb, 127.



writer is keen to record history in a memorable and interesting way, in order to stimulate identification with the unfolding drama and to remind readers of their place in the continued line of God's interaction with his people."<sup>20</sup> Jobes further observes that "the author valued poetic license for the purpose of interpretation."<sup>21</sup> Timothy K. Beal states more strongly, "This is a boldly excessive, sometimes enchantingly and sometimes horribly unbelievable narrative, in which history-likeness blends with outlandishness in truly remarkable ways."<sup>22</sup> Regardless of what we conclude about Esther's historicity, Peter H.W. Lau provides a helpful reminder: "...we need to keep in mind that the way they wrote history then is different from the way we write history today, so we cannot judge the historicity of events based on our contemporary criteria."<sup>23</sup> We must remember that the various books of the Bible were written to tell the redemptive story of God's desire to be with His people in grand festivity; Scripture is not a sterile recitation of the facts. Webb refers to Esther as "history as story rather than history as chronicle."<sup>24</sup> Esther artfully tells the story of God's divine deliverance of His people in a particular historical circumstance. Thus, how the story is told and what is included (or excluded) helps tell the story as opposed to a bare reportage of events.

Esther beautifully displays this truth through several literary means. As Webb describes, "The fact that Esther, like Ruth, is a narrative work of considerable artistry and complexity has important implications for how it 'works' as literature."<sup>25</sup> Reid further declares, "The way the story is told, as well as the story itself, testifies to its purpose, and the design of the text is both the instrument of its meaning and the instruction itself."<sup>26</sup> Taking note of the various literary means employed will aid our understanding of the story being told, why its being told, and what we're to do in response.

One major device employed in a variety of ways is humor, which can easily be missed without context. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart highlight this: "The author is a master storyteller, evidenced not only by the way he unfolds the characters and plot, but especially by

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<sup>20</sup> Reid, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Jobes, 35.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy K. Beal, "Esther" in *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry: Ruth & Esther*, ed. by David W. Cotter, O.S.B. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), xvii.

<sup>23</sup> Peter H.W. Lau, *Esther: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary* (Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2018), 4; Jobes, 32 makes the same argument.

<sup>24</sup> Webb, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>26</sup> Reid, 44.



his inclusion of details that provide humor and irony.”<sup>27</sup> Webb acknowledges the ultimate role that humor plays in the Redemptive Story: “As part of its total message, the Bible’s laughter is an anticipation of the eschaton, a reminder of the fact that, in a world where God remains sovereign, it is not the proud and cruel who will have the last laugh, but God and his people (Rev. 18:20).”<sup>28</sup> Esther seeks to cultivate our senses of humor to help us keep from taking the powers of darkness so seriously and recognize the hilarious joy that redemption affords us.

A key place where humor and irony are evidenced is in the characters’ names.<sup>29</sup> Jobes helpfully remarks, “Instead of being the actual name of the historical person, these names may have been chosen or created by the author to characterize the people who nonetheless did actually exist in history with other names.”<sup>30</sup> Note the names of the various characters in the table and their translations or allusions:

Key Character Name in Esther	Translation/ Allusion <sup>31</sup>
<b>Ahasuerus, King of Persia</b>	Sounds like “Headache” in Hebrew for Xerxes I
<b>Vashti</b>	“Beautiful Woman” or “Beloved” in Old Persian
<b>Hadassah</b>	“Myrtle” in Hebrew
<b>Esther</b>	Similar to Ishtar, Babylonian Goddess of Love and War
<b>Mordecai</b>	A possible variant on “Marduk” making his name mean “Subject of Marduk”
<b>Haman</b>	Sounds like “Wrath” in Hebrew

<sup>27</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 115.

<sup>28</sup> Webb, 132.

<sup>29</sup> The use of names in Esther has caused many scholars to stumble over the historicity of the story. Many lean heavily on Herodotus’s *The Histories* as the historical foil to the events of Esther. The fact that Herodotus claims that there were gold-digging ants the size of foxes in Egypt begs the question as to why his account isn’t granted the same scrutiny.

<sup>30</sup> Jobes, 37.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-7.

King Xerxes I is referred to as Ahasuerus which would sound like the word for “headache” in Hebrew. Many suspect that it was a way to refer to him as hard-headed and unable to think for himself, which proves true throughout the story. Esther’s approximation to Ishtar could be an allusion to what she will become to the enemies of God’s people. Consider the paradox of Mordecai being a supposed “subject of Marduk” serving instead as a key instrument in Yahweh’s hands to deliver His people. The harshness of the sound of Haman’s name would help the audience to react negatively every time his name is spoken. Thus, the names given by the author help to tell the story with greater depth and artistry than if he had merely recorded the facts.

In addition, exaggerated numbers help make certain details and things associated with them seem ridiculous.<sup>32</sup> The reported number of 127 provinces proves factually inaccurate. This would have been the point: to cause the audience to pause and consider why this ridiculous number. The same would be true of the length of days reported for the initial feast. Both point to the ostentatious arrogance displayed in the Persian Kingdom and in Ahasuerus’s character. Reid writes, “As (comedic) burlesque, Esther naturally incorporates a tone of mock dignity, exaggerated descriptions, a series of ludicrous coincidences, underdeveloped characters and caricatures, and universal reversals. This does not deny that there is a deeper message in Esther but means that the features and meaning of that message are understood only if the comic qualities of its genre are recognized.”<sup>33</sup> The exaggeration of the oppressor indicates their comedic folly against the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. As Lau points out, “In the Esther narrative, irony points to the true power behind the throne, humor makes us laugh at the downfall of the enemy.”<sup>34</sup> Eshter invites us to laugh at the raging of the rulers of the earth who arrogantly rage against the Divine King who rules even when it doesn’t look like it (cf. **Psalm 2; Hebrews 2:5-9**).

The two main characters, Esther and Mordecai, further evidence the irony of the story told. Compare their characters to that of Daniel and his friends who suffered the beginnings of exile in Babylon as opposed to the current incarnation in which Jews chose to stay despite being allowed to go home. Esther and Mordecai seem to be reacting out of desire to survive (like so many of us) as opposed to proactively seeking to honor the Lord no matter the circumstances as Daniel and his friends did (and as we ought). According to Webb, “...the behavior of the leading characters hover(s) precariously between the commendable and the

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<sup>32</sup> Reid, 40-41.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>34</sup> Lau, 5; Breneman, 295, makes a similar argument.

questionable.”<sup>35</sup> Consider how Esther’s Jewishness would have been affected by sleeping with a pagan king and violating dietary laws with every feast.<sup>36</sup> Or, examine her demand for the slaughter of their enemies including Haman’s 10 sons to continue after Haman was hanged. Note Mordecai’s emotional outbursts whether his refusing to bow to Haman which sparked his murderous antisemitic rage or almost sparking Ahasuerus’s rage by entering the court wailing in sackcloth. How can these be the heroes of the story? Webb points out, “Heroes they may be, but they are at best heroes of questionable morality and orthodoxy.”<sup>37</sup> Even more, “The author neither exonerates nor condemns Esther and Mordecai, and never evaluates their behavior as good or bad in the eyes of the Lord.”<sup>38</sup> The point of the story is not their character which could have actually brought death down upon them and the people of God; the point of the story is to point to promise keeping God, faithful but unseen. Jobes writes, “The story of Esther illustrates that human action is essential to divine providence, yet God’s triumph in history ultimately does not depend on what we do, but on what he does. It depends not on our character, but on his character.”<sup>39</sup> This allows us to not take ourselves too seriously or to think that more depends on us than it really does. We are to instead look to God’s unchanging character being displayed in His providential working in the world.

The author of Esther intends to challenge us to search for God’s presence and working in the various events in the story. This helps us as audience in learning how to see God’s providence at work and grow in faith as a result. As Lau writes, “That God was hidden in the Esther narrative leaves a gap for the audience to fill in as they read the narrative....Paradoxically, our perception of God’s influence is heightened, and our loyalty to him is aroused by his absence.”<sup>40</sup> Reid compares Esther to Jesus’s parables in that it’s seeking to stir us to closer examination and active thoughts concerning its contents and message to us. She writes, “The result is that because our minds are teased, our subsequent theological conclusions incorporate reflection at a number of penetrating and intriguing levels.”<sup>41</sup> Jobes adds, “The book of Esther is a story that, like a parable, makes its point as a whole unit....Because Esther is much longer than a parable, the point it makes is multifaceted and

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<sup>35</sup> Webb, 118.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>38</sup> Jobes, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>40</sup> Lau, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Reid, 20.

invites deeper reflection.”<sup>42</sup> One of our besetting sins in reading Scripture is that we read it too superficially and try to boil it down to a handful of rules for success. Michael V. Fox challenges us to read more actively: “When we scrutinize the text of Esther for traces of God’s activity, we are doing what the author makes us do. The author would have us probe the events we witness in our own lives in the same way. He is teaching a theology of possibility. The willingness to face history with an openness to the possibility of providence – even when history seems to weigh against its likelihood, as it did in the dark days after the issuance of Haman’s decree – this is a stance of profound faith.”<sup>43</sup> Esther forces us to read much more actively to help train our eyes to see presence and power of God in all things.

The actions and words of the characters in Esther point us toward where God is working. As Webb notes, “...the way the characters in the story behave, and the speeches they make at crucial points, clearly indicate *their* belief that something more than chance or purely natural causation is at work.”<sup>44</sup> Jon D. Levenson further states, “If...theology deals with the character of ultimate reality and its manifestation in human history, then Mordecai, Haman’s advisers, and Zeresh have articulated the theology of the book of Esther rather completely: A hidden force arranges events in such a way that even against the most daunting odds the Jews are protected and delivered. The hiddenness of the force is an essential part of this theology.”<sup>45</sup> Esther’s call for fasting indicates belief in a higher power or something beyond oneself that can alter the present circumstances.<sup>46</sup> As Iain M. Duguid writes, “Here there are neither dramatic miracles nor great heroes, just apparently ordinary providence moving flawed and otherwise undistinguished people into exactly the right place at the right time to bring the empire into line and to establish God’s purposes for his people.”<sup>47</sup> God’s preference for working through the ordinary and flawed proves to be the majority of the way He works in Scripture and history. We would be better served to look for Him at work in the everyday as opposed to waiting for historically infrequent miracles and displays of power.

We can also see the Lord at work in the arc of the banquets presented throughout the story. Three different rounds of feasting serve as the backbone for Esther. The first round comes in **1:1-19**, **2:18**, and **3:15**; the second in the middle in **5:1-8**, **7:1-9**, and **8:17**; the final round

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<sup>42</sup> Jobes, 38.

<sup>43</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1991, 2010), 247.

<sup>44</sup> Webb, 121.

<sup>45</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 21.

<sup>46</sup> Webb, 122.

<sup>47</sup> Duguid, 7.

occurs in **9:17-19**.<sup>48</sup> Fox further observes, “The movement of the plot is punctuated by ten banquets which are the sites of important events and signal shifts of power....The banqueting motif is thus the vehicle for the theme of power – its gain and its loss.”<sup>49</sup> This reversal of fortunes reflected in their rise and fall over the course of the banquets serves as an interpretive key to the book. Jobes makes this observation: “This theme of the reversal of destiny is also built into the literary structure of the story, which is characterized by peripety. Peripety is a literary term used to refer to a sudden turn of events that reverses the expected outcomes of a story.”<sup>50</sup> This reversal of death to life points beyond the specific historical circumstance to the ultimate defeat of death that gives way to resurrected newness of life in Christ.

Jobes points to this ultimate reality foreshadowed in the Purim Festival: “Christ’s resurrection from the grave is the ultimate reversal of expected outcomes. Because of this great peripety, we who could expect only death have been given life, a life that is imperishable and eternal. There is no power that can wrest it from us.”<sup>51</sup> In Easter Season, we celebrate the great reversal of the death due us as the wages for our sins. Jesus suffers horrifically in the crucifixion as the Paschal lamb to eternally satisfy the wrath of God towards us. In exchange for His death on our behalf, we receive resurrected newness of life in the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can proclaim with great joy and festivity, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (cf. **1 Corinthians 15:54b-55**). We celebrate not a temporary rescue but an eternal deliverance and restoration! As Duguid powerfully writes:

“In the Book of Esther we see the tossing sea temporarily driven back through God’s grace and providence, but not yet finally stilled. That awaited the coming of one greater even than Mordecai, one who would be the Prince of Peace, for whom Isaiah looked. This coming one would still the raging sea of wickedness once and for all, and would proclaim full and final peace to those who were far away and peace to those who were near (see Eph. 2:17). Yet he did so not by waging comprehensive holy war on the historic enemies of God’s people, the Gentiles, and destroying them utterly, but rather by destroying the ancient enmity between them and God (Eph. 2:14). He came not as a mighty warrior but as the Prince of Peace. In Christ, former Amalekites and Jews are now brought together into the glorious peace that flows to the one new people of God.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Baldwin, 28; Webb, 115-116.

<sup>49</sup> Fox, 157-8.

<sup>50</sup> Jobes, 40-41.

<sup>51</sup> Jobes, 46.

<sup>52</sup> Duguid, 123.

Praise God for tearing down the middle wall of separation between former enemies of both Him and each other to make one redeemed family in Christ!

The truths revealed through Esther's artistry in storytelling make it an excellent companion and guide for us this Easter Season. As Reid notes, "The author of Esther is calling readers to 'do theology' – to reflect on God's nature and seen or unseen role in history. But 'doing theology' also includes responding to the implications of such a quest, and this responsive task will even today require individual and corporate faith as a heart response to God's self-revelation."<sup>53</sup> Let's 'do theology' this Easter Season with joyous laughter and merriment, for we have been divinely delivered from death to life in the finished work of Christ!

We will continue to seek nourishment from the Old and New Testaments for our weekly devotion and worship. Various **Psalms** will serve to call us to worship with a sense of the festivity and celebration due God the Creator and Protector who invites us each week. We will respond together from **Psalm 30:8-12** as we assemble before the Lord to remember that He calls us from death to life in Christ. Our assurances of pardon will come from **the Gospel stories of Jesus's pending crucifixion and resurrection** to help us see the contrast between the ways of this world with our Savior who lays His life down for us. We will receive a benedictory blessing each week from **1 Corinthians 15:53-58** to remind us of profound blessing of being resurrected in Christ. The goal of these various elements is to shape us into a more festive people given the magnitude of the gift of forgiveness and resurrection we've been given in Jesu.

This devotional is designed to encourage daily meditation and prayer in personal devotions and/or family worship. You are encouraged to use it the week prior to the associated sermon so that you and your family are prepared for worship. In addition to the Scriptures and associated questions, there are opportunities to pray for the various aspects of the Church. On Wednesdays, we will pray for the various works we support through Faith Promise. We also have the opportunity on Saturday to prepare for worship on Sunday. On Sunday, the Lord's Day Sabbath, we will pray for the means of grace to bear specific fruits in our lives. May God bless our time in personal devotion, family worship, and corporate worship as we seek for the Church to grow in knowing God's unchanging love and living in a way that reflects our gratitude and His glory!

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

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<sup>53</sup> Reid, 55.

# The Structure of Esther

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Esther's structure proves to be a critical part of the story it tells. The scenes form a chiasm where Scenes A-C reach their climax and pivot in Scene D while Scenes C'-A', which mirror A-C, recede to the Conclusion and Epilogue. King Xerxes' sleepless night serves as the pivot point of the story where death gives way to the resurrection hope of newness of life.<sup>54</sup>

**A: *Esther* 1:**

**Prologue:  
Xerxes' Greatness and  
Persian Feast**

**B: *Esther* 2-3:**

**The King's  
1<sup>st</sup> Decree:  
Esther as Gentile and  
Haman Elevated with  
Antisemitic Edict**

**C: *Esther* 4-5:**

**Haman's Conflict  
with Mordecai and  
Esther's 1<sup>st</sup> Feast**

**D: *Esther* 6:1-13:  
The King's  
Sleepless Night  
and Mordecai's  
Recognition**

**C': *Esther* 6:14-7:**

**Esther's 2<sup>nd</sup> Feast  
and Mordecai's  
Triumph Over  
Haman**

**B': *Esther* 8-9:**

**The King's  
2<sup>nd</sup> Decree:  
Mordecai Elevated with  
Pro-Jewish Edict and  
Gentiles Become Jews**

**A': *Esther* 9:22-10:3**

**Epilogue:  
Jewish Feast and  
Mordecai's Greatness**

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<sup>54</sup> Adapted from Esther's structure in Lau, 5 and Breneman, 288.



# Sermon Schedule

Date	Call to Worship	Assurance of Pardon	Benediction	Sacrament
Sunday, 1/21: Esther 1:1-9	Psalms 50:1-6	Matthew 25:31-46	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	<i>The Lord's Table</i>
Sunday, 1/28: Esther 1:10-22	Psalms 17:6-9	Luke 21:34-36	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	
Sunday, 2/14: Esther 2:1-18	Psalms 37:1-7	John 17:1-5	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	<i>The Lord's Table</i>
Sunday, 2/11: Esther 2:19-23	Psalms 46:1-7	Luke 18:31-34	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	
Sunday, 2/18: Esther 3:1-15	Psalms 124	Matthew 26:6-16	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	
Sunday, 2/25: Esther 4:1-17	Psalms 121	Luke 22:39-46	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	<i>The Lord's Table</i>
Sunday, 3/3: Esther 5:1-8	Psalms 21:1-7	Luke 22:14-23	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	
Sunday, 3/10: Esther 5:9-14	Psalms 21:8-13	Matthew 26:1-5	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	<i>The Lord's Table</i>
Sunday, 3/17: Esther 6:1-13	Psalms 15	John 17:20-26	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	
Sunday, 3/24: Esther 6:14-7:6	Psalms 7:6-11	John 18:1-11	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	<i>The Lord's Table</i>
Friday, 3/29: Esther 7:7-10	Psalms 22:1-5	Matthew 27:45-58	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	
Sunday, 3/31: Esther 8:1-17	Psalms 30:1-5	Matthew 28:1-10	1 Corinthians 15:53-58	

*Sunday, 4/7:*

**Escher 9:1-19**

**Psalm 14**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

**1 Corinthians 15:53-58**

*Sunday, 4/14:*

**Escher**

**9:20-10:3**

**Psalm 42:1-4**

**Luke 24:44-53**

**1 Corinthians 15:53-58**

*The Lord's Table*

# Weekly Congregational

## *Response to the Call to Worship*

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To you, O LORD, we cry,  
and to the Lord we plead for mercy:

“What profit is there in my death,  
if I go down to the pit?

Will the dust praise you?

Will it tell of your faithfulness?

Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to us!

O LORD, be our helper!”

You have turned for us our mourning into dancing;

you have loosed our sackcloth

and clothed us with gladness,

that our glory may sing Your praise and not be silent.

O LORD my God, we will give thanks to you forever!

Amen.

*from* **Psalm 30: 8-12**

# Weekly Benediction

*as Parting Blessing*

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When the perishable puts on the imperishable,  
and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:  
“Death is swallowed up in victory.”  
“O death, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting?”  
The sting of death is sin,  
and the power of sin is the law.  
But thanks be to God,  
who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters,  
be steadfast, immovable,  
always abounding in the work of the Lord,  
knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

**1 Corinthians 15: 53-58**

# Esther 1:1-9

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## *The Week of January 21<sup>st</sup>*

*Monday, 1/15:* **Psalm 50:1-6:** Meditate on how God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, calls you to worship weekly. How should who He is affect your response to His call?

*Tuesday, 1/16:* **Matthew 25:31-46:** According to this passage, what kind of people ought we be if Jesus is Lord and Judge?

*Wednesday, 1/17:* Pray for the Women's Extension to help those they serve feast on God's grace and mercy throughout their recovery process.

*Thursday, 1/18:* **Esther 1:1-9:** Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal God's providential glory through this sermon series to help us grow in knowing how deep His fatherly love for us displayed throughout history.

*Friday, 1/19:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** What of the perishable do you look forward to putting off in the resurrection?

*Saturday, 1/20:* Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring people to worship who need celebrate God's goodness with His people.

*Sunday, 1/21:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath with The Lord's Table:* Pray for the means of grace to help us grow in being more festive as God's beloved children because of all that He has done, is doing, and will do.

# Esther 1:10-22

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## *The Week of January 28<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 1/22:* **Psalm 17:6-9:** How has God recently wondrously displayed His steadfast love for you? Share this with someone this week.

*Tuesday, 1/23:* **Luke 21:34-36:** What things distract you from watching for where the Lord is working in your life? What could help you to mortify these distractions?

*Wednesday, 1/24:* Pray for the Stocks with MTW in Malaysia to have many opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus with those who despair because of the rulers of this world.

*Thursday, 1/25:* **Esther 1:10-22:** Give thanks to the Lord for bringing so much good from so many circumstances in which those involved intended only evil. Share this with someone.

*Friday, 1/26:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** What do you most look forward to putting on that will be imperishable in the resurrection?

*Saturday, 1/27:* Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those to worship who've suffered being unfairly wronged and need healing through God's faithful and just love.

*Sunday, 1/28:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath:* Pray for the means of grace to reveal to us the ways in which we have unfairly reacted to perceived slights from others so that we may repent and bear fruits in keeping with repentance.

# Esther 2:1-18

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## *The Week of February 4<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 1/29:* **Psalm 37:1-7:** How does David advise us to deal with the evil that we see running so rampant in this fallen world?

*Tuesday, 1/30:* **John 17:1-5:** Consider what Jesus endured to serve us as the Bridegroom that redeems us as His bride. Contrast this with how Ahasuerus chooses a wife to replace Vashti.

*Wednesday, 1/31:* Pray for the Sawyers with Straight Up Missions in Kenya to proclaim liberty in Christ to those held captive by the powers of darkness and often celebrate the fruit of their labors.

*Thursday, 2/1:* **Esther 2:1-18:** How has God used a difficult circumstance in your life to put you in a better position to experience His love and be of benefit to others?

*Friday, 2/2:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** What impact does knowing that you will be resurrected with Christ have on your view of death?

*Saturday, 2/3:* Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those who currently sit in darkness to be invited into God's marvelous light in Christ.

*Sunday, 2/4:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath with The Lord's Table:* Pray for the means of grace to improve our ability to see God's hand at work amid the various difficult circumstances in our lives.



# Esther 2:19-23

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## *The Week of February 11<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 2/5:* **Psalm 46:1-7:** How does God's unchanging character affect how you view the uncertainty and suffering in this fallen world?

*Tuesday, 2/6:* **Luke 18:31-34:** Meditate on the sufferings of Christ for your redemption. Prayerfully give thanks for His willingness to endure profound pain for the joy of seeing you restored to your Abba Father.?

*Wednesday, 2/7:* Pray for the Johnsons with Vision 938 to help train missionaries to suffer well in the callings where He's invited them to represent His love.

*Thursday, 2/8:* **Esther 2:19-23:** How is God revealing His patient redemptive providence in your life?

*Friday, 2/9:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** How can you live differently now knowing that death's victory and sting have been conquered in Christ?

*Saturday, 2/10:* Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those who are growing weary in waiting on the Lord so that they might be comforted and helped to endure for His glory.

*Sunday, 2/11:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath:* Pray for the means of grace to help us to patiently await the Lord's sovereign workings as He unfolds His redemptive plan in our lives.

# Ruth 3:1-15

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## *The Week of February 18<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 2/12:* **Psalm 124:** What hope do you have in this fallen world if God is not your sovereign protector?

*Tuesday, 2/13:* **Matthew 26:6-16:** Do you struggle to view celebrating as a waste of time and money?

*Wednesday, 2/14:* Pray for the Robertsons with MTW in South America to equip others to minister to those affected by the hatred of others.

*Thursday, 2/15:* **Esther 3:1-15:** How have you been hurt by the unreasonable anger of another? How have you hurt others with your unreasonable anger?

*Friday, 2/16:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** What sins do you look forward to being free from in the resurrection?

*Saturday, 2/17:* Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those who've suffered because of the unreasonable anger of another to experience God's patient love in worship.

*Sunday, 2/18:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath:* Pray for the means of grace to convict us of where our anger becomes unreasonable and sinful so that we can repent and bear fruits in keeping with repentance.

# Ruth 4:1-17

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## *The Week of February 25<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 2/19:* **Psalm 121:** What circumstances drive you to seek help in the Lord? How might you more regularly seek His help given that He cares for you in all things?

*Tuesday, 2/20:* **Luke 22:39-46:** What help is offered to you when you pray? Give thanks for the various ways the Lord offers you help in prayer.

*Wednesday, 2/21:* Pray for the Blackmans with RUF at KSU to minister to students in their sufferings and disappointments with the healing balm of Christ.

*Thursday, 2/22:* **Esther 4:1-17:** How do you respond when you receive bad news? Which way do you run: to the throne of grace or somewhere else?

*Friday, 2/23:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** Where have you experienced resurrection victory over sin as a baptized one set free from the slavery of sin in Christ?

*Saturday, 2/24:* Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those who are grieving to receive His comfort in worship.

*Sunday, 2/25:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath with The Lord's Table:* Pray for the means of grace to help us grieve what ought be grieved through prayer and fasting.

# Esther 5:1-8

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## *The Week of March 3<sup>rd</sup>*

*Monday, 2/26:* **Psalm 21:1-7:** Pray this Psalm for our current and coming leaders.

*Tuesday, 2/27:* **Luke 22:14-23:** How can you approach the Lord's Table with greater festivity given all that it signifies?

*Wednesday, 2/28:* Pray for First Care Women's Clinic to continue to advocate for both the unborn and born in Christ's name through the various services they provide.

*Thursday, 2/29:* **Esther 5:1-8:** What opportunities has the Lord provided for you to advocate on behalf of another as Jesus has done for you?

*Friday, 3/1:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** What diminishes your experience of resurrection victory in Christ over your sin?

*Saturday, 3/2:* Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those who need to hear of Jesus as their eternal advocate before the throne of grace.

*Sunday, 3/3:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath:* Pray for the means of grace to continue forming us into ambassadors of reconciliation for God's glory, our joy, and the life of the world.

# Esther 5:9-14

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## *The Week of March 10<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 3/4:* **Psalm 21:8-13:** Meditate on God as the Divine Warrior who fights for His people. Give thanks for His protection and provision.

*Tuesday, 3/5:* **Matthew 26:1-5:** Compare Jesus's resoluteness in being crucified and the fearful concerns of the religious leaders opposed to him. Note their desire for a frictionless victory that costs them very little. Give thanks for Jesus being willing to die for you.

*Wednesday, 3/6:* Pray for the Johnsons with Vision Collegiate Ministries to persevere in equipping students with God's wisdom in Christ.

*Thursday, 3/7:* **Esther 5:9-14:** Have you ever been blinded by foolish pride? How did it turn out?

*Friday, 3/8:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** How does knowing that you will be resurrected with Christ help you to live with greater wisdom and joy?

*Saturday, 3/9:* Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to attract those to worship who are blinded by arrogance and need to repent in Christ.

*Sunday, 3/10:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath with The Lord's Table:* Pray for the means of grace to convict us where we're foolish and prideful and help us bear humble fruits in repentance.

# Esther 6:1-13

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## *The Week of March 17<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 3/11:* **Psalm 15:** What impact does how you treat those in your spheres of influence have on your ability to enjoy the presence of the Lord?

*Tuesday, 3/12:* **John 17:20-26:** Meditate on Jesus's heart for you from these verses. Share this with someone this week.

*Wednesday, 3/13:* Pray for the Whittles with ELI in India to continue to equip church leaders in understanding and sharing God's providence as displayed in the person and work of Christ.

*Thursday, 3/14:* **Esther 6:1-13:** Where have you experienced a providential reversal for your greater good in your life?

*Friday, 3/15:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** What helps you to be steadfast in Christ in the various aspects of your life?

*Saturday, 3/16:* Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those to worship who need deliverance from the powers of sin and death to newness of resurrected life in Christ.

*Sunday, 3/17:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath:* Pray for the means of grace to train us to better see where God's providence is at work in our lives and the lives of others.

# Esther 6:14-7:6

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## *The Week of March 24<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 3/18:* **Psalm 7:6-11:** How has God served you as Deliverer and Protector? Give thanks to Him for His loving care.

*Tuesday, 3/19:* **John 18:1-11:** Consider Jesus's constraint in this scene. His declaration of "I am" had felled those who came to arrest Him. How tempted would you be to destroy them in anger? Yet, what is Christ's example for what reason?

*Wednesday, 3/20:* Pray for the Mills with MTW in Thailand to continue to invite others into newness of life in Christ in their home and church.

*Thursday, 3/21:* **Esther 6:14-7:6:** Give thanks to the Lord for inviting you to His banquet of mercy and grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

*Friday, 3/22:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** What helps you to remain firm in knowing you are loved and loving God and neighbor as a result?

*Saturday, 3/23:* Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those who need to taste and see that the Lord is good.

*Sunday, 3/24:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath with the Lord's Table:* Pray for the means of grace to enliven our hearts as we celebrate this gracious feast in the Spirit.



# Esther 7:7-10, 8:1-17

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## *The Week of March 31<sup>st</sup>*

*Monday, 3/25:* **Psalm 22:1-5; 30:1-5:** In **Psalm 22:1-5**, what does David cling to amidst his suffering? How does this teach you how to suffer better? According to **Psalm 30:1-5**, what's truer and more powerful than our suffering?

*Tuesday, 3/26:* **Matthew 27:45-58; 28:1-10:** In **Matthew 27:45-58**, what is Jesus ultimately confessing as He quotes **Psalm 22**? Take note of the joy expressed by those involved in **Matthew 28:1-10**. How can you live more joyfully as one raised to newness of life in Christ?

*Wednesday, 3/27:* **Esther 7:7-10:** Meditate on the differences between Haman's death for his foolish pride and Christ's death in wise sacrifice. Give thanks for Christ's death for your life.

*Thursday, 3/28:* **Esther 8:1-17:** What kind of celebration befits salvation in Christ? How can you help our church grow in being more celebratory given the eternal magnitude of the gift we've been given in Jesus?

*Friday, 3/29:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** Think of time when you abounded in the work of Christ. Give thanks to the Lord for allowing you to experience this.

*Saturday, 3/30:* Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those who do not yet know Jesus to come to know Him causing all of Heaven to break out in a party.

*Sunday, 3/31:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath:* Pray for the means of grace to train us in how to walk in resurrected newness of life.

# Esther 9:1-19

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*The Week of April 7<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 4/1: Psalm 14:* Do you have a healthy, wise fear of the Lord?

*Tuesday, 4/2: Matthew 28:16-20:* Who in your spheres of influence is your salvation for?

*Wednesday, 4/3:* Pray for the Webbs with MTW in Bulgaria to be courageous in sharing the Gospel of the already victorious Jesus Christ among those who don't believe this to be true.

*Thursday, 4/4: Esther 9:1-19:* Give thanks to the Lord that in Christ we battle not against flesh and blood but against the powers of darkness that have already been defeated through the cross and resurrection.

*Friday, 4/5: 1 Corinthians 15:53-58:* Where in your life do you long to abound in the work of the Lord? Pray for the Spirit's help you abound in resurrected newness of life.

*Saturday, 4/6:* Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those to worship who are enemies of God to be adopted as beloved sons and daughters in Christ.

*Sunday, 4/7: The Lord's Day Sabbath:* Pray for the means of grace to help us to love our enemies and long for their redemption in Jesus.

# Esther 9:20-10:3

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*The Week of April 14<sup>th</sup>*

*Monday, 4/8:* **Psalm 42:1-4:** Does worship help you to long for the things of God? If not, why?

*Tuesday, 4/9:* **Luke 24:44-53:** How do the disciples react to Jesus's instruction and ascension? How should we regularly respond in worship?

*Wednesday, 4/10:* Pray for the Larsens with NEXT Ministries to help others take joy in who they are in Christ.

*Thursday, 4/11:* **Esther 9:20-10:3:** Which celebrations help you to remember God's steadfast love and faithfulness? Do you invite others into these celebrations?

*Friday, 4/12:* **1 Corinthians 15:53-58:** Give thanks that what you do in Jesus's name according to God's character in the fruit of the Spirit has eternal implications.

*Saturday, 4/13:* Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those who need to learn how to celebrate God's redemption in Christ.

*Sunday, 4/14:* *The Lord's Day Sabbath with The Lord's Table:* Pray for the means of grace to shape our affections for God's glory, our joy, and the life of the world.

# Suggested Resources

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*for further Study*

## Basic:

Iain M. Duguid, *Esther & Ruth* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2005)

Peter H.W. Lau, *Esther: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary* (Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2018)

Debra Reid, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008)

## Intermediate:

Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984)

David G. Firth, *The Message of Esther: God Present But Unseen*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010)

Karen H. Jobes, *Esther: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1999)

## Advanced:

Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1991, 2010)<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> This book is excellent on the literary qualities of Esther, but it takes the most liberal theological view of the text of the suggested resources.