



**THRU** the **BIBLE**

with *J. Vernon McFee*

# ESTHER

BIBLE COMPANION



HISTORY

# READ THIS FIRST

This Bible Companion is a summary of Dr. J. Vernon McGee's teaching of the book of Esther heard on THRU the BIBLE. These summarized lessons get to the heart of Bible passages and are intended to stir your own thinking, prayer, and study.



**Begin with prayer.** Dr. McGee said, "We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace, when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us." Before you start each lesson, ask the Lord to use it to grow you up in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in that section. Dr. McGee said, "This is the secret of life and of Christian living."



**As you study, read the Bible passage first.** Invite God to open your eyes and deepen your understanding of His Word. That's a request God loves to answer!



**If you want to listen to Dr. McGee's complete teaching on any specific passage, go to [TTB.org/Esther](http://TTB.org/Esther)** (or any book of the Bible). The corresponding audio messages are listed at the top of the summaries. You can also use this Bible Companion to follow along and take notes while you listen to Dr. McGee teach a book of the Bible on the radio or online.



**After every lesson, several questions are listed for your personal consideration or, if you're reading this as a group, for your discussion.** Ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what He wants to show you.

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LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU  
RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM AND TEACHING...

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COLOSSIANS 3:16<sup>A</sup>

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## LESSON 1

# THE UNSEEN HAND OF HISTORY



Begin with prayer



Read **Esther 1**



Listen at [TTB.org/Esther](https://www.TTB.org/Esther) to **Esther 1:1-3** and **Esther 1:4–2:3**

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The book of Esther is one of the most remarkable books in the Bible. Why? Because it doesn't speak of God even once. You won't find His name anywhere, not even a hint. Prayer is not mentioned either. The story of Esther isn't quoted in the New Testament, not even a casual reference to it. It's also unusual because it's one of two books in the Bible named for a woman.

All those things considered, the story of Esther is remarkable because it is a living example of the romance of providence. That is how God directs this material universe in which we live today. In fact, it's the way He directs all of His creation.

Now why would God's name not be mentioned? And how could it then teach the providence of God?

Certain books of the Bible teach certain great doctrines of the Christian faith. *Redemption* is taught in the book of Exodus; the book of Ruth illustrates the *love side of redemption*. The book of Job teaches *repentance*. *Resurrection* is the hidden theme of the book of Jonah. The book of Esther, as we'll see, wraps the concept of God's *providence* into a beautiful story.

Esther's story really began not in Persia, where we'll find her, but way back in the land of Israel, hundreds of years earlier. In Deuteronomy 31, God outlined the children of Israel's history for them. He told them about the Babylonian captivity and also about the Roman captivity and how both would destroy the city of Jerusalem and the people would be taken into captivity. It actually happened that way. He tells them in verse 18, "I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done, in that they have turned to other gods." Idolatry will send them into Babylonian captivity, and because they turn their back on God, He says, *"I'm going to hide My face from them."*

Not only do people not mention God's name in Esther's story, but God has hidden His face from them. One thing is for sure, though—we know God's character and can say with confidence that He is standing in the shadows, keeping watch over His own. The book of Esther essentially gives us a record of how a group of people willingly walked out of the will of God and how God kept protecting them from the shadows.

The children of Israel were in captivity in Babylon for 70 years. Then, in 538 B.C., King Cyrus declared they could return to their land. Problem is, they had gotten comfortable in Persia and knew Jerusalem had been destroyed. Why go back? According to the record of Ezra and Nehemiah, less than 60,000 Jews returned like God commanded. The books of Haggai and Zachariah tell us a little more. Between these four books, we get a picture of what was happening back in the land of Israel. And through Esther's story, we see what was happening to the Jews in Babylon after the captivity. This is just one page out of their history; one small item of their experience, and one shred of evidence in their voluminous records. But in this little scrap of a story, we see God. Though the people living in Babylon are not in His will; God still directs them and protects them. How? By His providence.

God's people, in a foreign land, rebellious to His order to return to the land, are out of the will of God. They forgot God; they're far from Him. They don't call on His name. Decades before when they first came into the land, they said, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4). They couldn't; they simply sat down and cried when they remembered Zion. But now God's people have forgotten Zion. In fact, it's in rubble and ruins and they don't want to go back there. They're not praising God nor are they praying to Him.

Because God hasn't forgotten them. He still will direct them by His *providence*. Providence is the means by which God directs all things—both animate and inanimate, seen and unseen, good and evil—toward a worthy purpose, which means His will must finally prevail. Or as the psalmist said, “His kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19). And the New Testament, in Ephesians 1:11, Paul says, “[Jesus Christ] works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

Providence means God is running the universe, friends. Many think it has slipped out from under Him, but it hasn't. Who's running it? Well, the Lord Jesus Christ is, “upholding all things by the word of His power” (see Hebrews 1:3). Colossians 1:17 tells us that “in [Jesus] all things consist [hold together].” What is the “stickum” that holds this universe together? What is it that's making it run like clockwork today so they can send a man to the moon and plot exactly where the moon can be, and they can send a little gadget out toward Mars and they know exactly where Mars will be? The universe runs like clockwork. Who's running it? Well, the Lord Jesus Christ is running it, upholding all things by the word of His power.

God's name may not be mentioned in the book of Esther, but He's on every page, directing the events of history to accomplish His will. Somebody has to hold this thing together.

Providence is the way God directs this universe. He's moving it into tomorrow. Providence means “to provide.” God will provide. You remember what Abraham said on top of Mount Moriah when Isaac said, “Where is the sacrifice?” Abraham said, “God will provide” (see Genesis 22:7-8). God provided 2,000 years after Abraham on the top of that same ledge that goes through Jerusalem. On Golgotha, the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. God provided a Lamb where “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) was offered. God provides.

Now providence means the hand of God in the glove of human events. He's the coach on the sidelines calling signals to the runner on second base. That's the way providence works. He's the unseen rudder on the ship of state. He's the pilot at the wheel during the night watch.

And as someone has said, “God makes great doors swing on little hinges.” A little baby's cry and a woman's heart were brought together down by the River Nile when Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe and the Lord just pinched little Moses and he let out a yelp to draw this woman to come down

and look at him. God used that to change the destiny of a people, by the way. And in Esther's story, we're going to find out one night a king couldn't sleep and he didn't have any aspirin tablets, so he read some records. And it's a good thing he read them because it changed the destiny of a people. That's providence and we'll see it over and again in this book.

Now, let's get into the story.

First, let's establish that we are in the king's palace in Susa. Secular history confirms that the king in Esther's day was the great Xerxes, who reigned over a great empire that stretched from India to Ethiopia, all through the great Fertile Crescent. At the time it was the very heartland of the world. Ahasuerus was his title and Xerxes was his name. If you're curious about this man's vast and powerful reign, look him up. He made an indelible mark on history. He was one of the rulers of the second great world kingdom, the Medo-Persian Empire, that Daniel wrote about over a hundred years before.

This powerful king was hungry to take over the world, and he had his eye on the Greco-Roman region thriving to the north. Xerxes, just three years into his reign, set in motion a plan to rally his troops.

First, he threw a great banquet, greater than any other banquet had ever been. He invited the rulers of the 127 provinces in his kingdom for the purpose of selling them on a military campaign, a war, against Greece. How did he win their support? By proving to them he had the money to pull it off. The more lavish the king's hospitality, the greater his claim to supremacy.

The party ran for six months—180 days of the wildest and most extravagant partying. The Greek historian Herodotus referred to this meeting and said it took Xerxes four years (484-481 B.C.) to prepare for his Greek campaign. While Xerxes planned for victory, he showed off the luxury, the opulence, and the wealth of his kingdom. It was a great, godless feast.

God's Word introduces us here to a pagan, heathen court where decisions were made that affected the world and it looks as if God is left out. But God wants you to know that He's overruling these circumstances and will accomplish His own purpose.

Around 486 B.C., the king upped his game by throwing a smaller banquet for VIP's in his courtyard. The gaudy display of wealth wowed everyone: the silver, the gold, and all the jewels, and dozens of beautiful tapestries. For seven days the finest foods and wine flowed freely—wine drunk out of gold vessels, each custom made. Everything was there in abundance.

At the same time, Vashti, Xerxes' wife held a banquet for the women. Social custom of the day dictated they celebrate separately. But then something happened that changed everything.

On the final day of the banquet, the king got drunk and did something he would regret. He commanded his personal servants to bring him Queen Vashti wearing her royal crown. He wanted to show off her extreme beauty to the guests and officials. There could also have been some crude connotations to his intent. Very ungentlemanly. He never would have done it had he been sober. He displayed his glory and his riches, and now he wanted them to see the glory of Vashti, his treasure, his jewel.

But the king who ruled the whole world couldn't bend his own wife to his will. She refused to come. We don't know exactly why, just that she wouldn't. This is a family scandal—a kingdom-sized scandal. Her disobedience enraged and embarrassed the king.

Xerxes called an emergency cabinet meeting. What are you going to do in an embarrassing moment like this? Apparently, there was no law they could exercise. Vashti had the freedom to refuse.

So, they had to come up with a severe and harsh law to make Vashti an example to other wives in the kingdom. The cabinet members were afraid that if something wasn't done, they weren't going home. Their extreme conclusion was to create a law of the Medes and Persians, a law that couldn't be revoked. The law said that because Vashti wouldn't obey her husband, she was permanently banned from King Xerxes' presence and her royal position would be given to another woman (who *would* obey). Their hope was that when this ruling became public throughout the Medo-Persian kingdom, every woman, regardless of her social position, would show proper respect to her husband.

***After these things ...*** –Esther 2:1a

Apparently, Xerxes couldn't get the queen to do what he wanted to, but he got all the rulers in the kingdom to join with him in the great campaign against Greece. We have to turn to secular history to fill in the story here, because Esther's story doesn't record what happened next.

Here's what we know from history: Xerxes led a great army by land and by sea into Europe, and there he met the Greeks at Thermopylae. Unfortunately, the Persians' strength was in numbers. The individual soldiers were not as



well-trained as the Greeks. Greek philosophy emphasized the individual and, as a result, one Greek soldier could take out ten Persians. In the battle of Thermopylae, only a few soldiers could get in the pass at a time and, as a result, the Greeks got a signal victory over the Persians. Xerxes carried on the battle at a place where he was doomed to lose.

God had already said the power was to pass from Persia to Greece. And if you want to know whether God intervened or not, listen to this. Xerxes had 300 ships that had circled around to come for a rear attack in the bay at Salamis. The plan was to weigh anchor and the next day they would land and attack from the rear. It would be a decisive win. On the land, the historian Herodotus recorded that 6,400 Persian bodies were counted on the battlefield; the Athenians lost only 192 men.

So Xerxes, now very much defeated, returns to his palace a broken man. Gone was the glory in battle and gone was his wife at home. The law that he wrote to punish her removed her permanently from his sight. The law of the Medes and Persians couldn't be changed. After his defeat, in his loneliness, he walked the halls of the palace. His servants knew something had to be done. And they had a plan.

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**NEXT: A beauty contest determines a new queen.**

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## LESSON 1



# FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What do you love so far about this true story?
2. It happens in most every great story. Things look bleak ... but then something happens. This is God's providence at work. Can you think of a time in your life as you look back that you now see God was at work? Describe what happened.
3. The setting of the book of Esther is Persia, after God commanded His people to return to Israel. How have you seen God at work in circumstances where people were living outside His will? Was He still gracious and kind? Was He still involved? What could have been the cost? The blessing?

4. One of the lessons we can learn about God from Esther's story is "silence doesn't mean He's not there." How does this reality impact your thinking about your own story? About history in general?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. If you love history, you'll be interested to know that the events of the book of Esther (483-473 B.C.) happen during an intense season of wars in world history. Explore online outlets for world history timelines to find out more, especially how King Xerxes impacted the world stage. Some other historical people also lived and died in this time range, including Buddha in India and Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, in Greece.

6. On the topic of God's providence:

Read and ponder/discuss the following verses:

Genesis 50:20

Proverbs 21:1

Romans 11:36

Job 12:23

Daniel 2:21

Colossians 1:17

Psalms 103:19

Jeremiah 29:11

Philippians 2:13

Proverbs 16:9, 33

Romans 8:28

2 Peter 1:3

How does this shape your view of God at work in our history?

## LESSON 2

# THE BEAUTY CONTEST



Begin with prayer



Read **Esther 2**



Listen at [TTB.org/Esther](https://www.TTB.org/Esther) to ***Esther 2:4-15*** and ***Esther 2:16–3:6***

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We last left Ahasuerus, the great king Xerxes, in a terrible state. Four years have gone by since he ruled against Vashti at the banquet. His expensive and costly campaign against Greece had failed miserably, and he arrived back at home in absolute humiliation and defeat. His servants saw his depression and loneliness and wanted to do something to cheer the man up. So they suggested a contest to vie for the king's favor that would bring in the most beautiful women from all the kingdom's 127 provinces.

This is where the real story begins, and we'll see the hand of God moving in the background events of the palace. On the surface it looked like nothing spiritual was going on there, but God was overruling the events of the day. In His providence, He was arranging these events so that, at the proper time, He'd have someone close to the king to intervene for His people.

The focus of the story now turns on a man named Mordecai, a Jew, who we learn at first introduction belonged to the royal family of Israel, to the family of Saul. In one of the first raids led by Nebuchadnezzar, Mordecai, as a boy, had been carried out of Israel into captivity. When Mordecai heard about the beauty contest, he thought of his cousin, Esther, whom he had raised like a daughter. Esther's Persian name meant "star." And she certainly was a star,

apparently a very beautiful young woman. (Her Jewish name, Hadassah, referenced a myrtle bush common to Israel, a shrub with star-shaped flowers.) Inside and out, Esther was lovely.

Some would question if God approves of beauty contests. Why would God's people, the Jews, be involved in such a thing? In this case, remember these Jews were operating outside of God's will; God permits many things that He doesn't approve. He can and will rule through these events that the Christian is doing today, even when He doesn't approve. Over and over again in the story of Esther, we see how God overruled the events of the day. Most Christians today live way out on the fringe of God's will. They're not motivated or directed to do God's will. But God is still directing them by His providence. Sometimes we call this the "leading of God." Esther entered the beauty contest thanks to the permissive will of God.

As we have learned, God's *providence* was at work. Providence is the hand of God in the glove of circumstances. God's hand was moving the glove of circumstances in Esther's story, and He is equally moving in our lives.

Mordecai lived in the Shushan palace. He had some minor position there. The fact that Mordecai was in the land at all proved he was disobedient to God's command to return to Jerusalem. But let's see how God worked.

Because of his job, Mordecai observed these beauty contestants as they came from the different regions of the empire. He likely said to himself many times, "Well, that girl is not nearly as beautiful as my Esther is." He thought Esther could win the king's heart, but he couldn't know for sure.

Mordecai is on thin ice here. To begin with, he's disobeying God. God had told His people not to intermarry. He's breaking the Mosaic Law when he entered this girl into the contest whose reward was a Persian crown. He was also running the risk that if Esther didn't win, she would live the rest of her life as the king's concubine in his harem. He willingly risked exposing this girl to an awful life. But he did it anyway—Esther is entered in the contest. She's turned over the one in charge, Hegai.

In God's providence, Esther became Hegai's favorite. He got her maids to help her and all the makeup she wanted to make herself even more attractive. (Shouldn't we all do the best we can with what God has given us?) Esther looked like a winner to everyone, and so she was put up front. That's God's hand at work.

The one thing Esther did not reveal was that she was a Jew. Mordecai had cautioned her against it. He knew the minute she revealed her nationality, she would reveal her faith. The Jews were thought to be odd, with strange laws and practices. Their enemies said, "They don't worship idols like us."

Mordecai stayed as close to Esther as he could. He walked every day in the courtyard to her palace, watching to find out how she was. We don't know if they had prayed about this decision and perhaps Mordecai was worried, up all night wondering if he had made the right decision. Sometimes faith is not faith at all. It's foolishness. And God has never asked anyone to take a leap in the dark. Mordecai was out of God's will and so he hasn't anything to rest on at all.

This goes on like this for one year. Mordecai waits and Esther is hidden away attending to all the beauty treatments she wanted. During this time, the contestants, one by one, would have one night with the king. If he wasn't pleased with her and didn't ask for her again by name, she would go to another house, where she'd be a concubine. This is the life Mordecai and Esther were willing to risk.

When it was Esther's turn to visit the king, she had everyone rooting for her. She had a natural beauty and a sweet disposition. Is this the hand of God moving? Yes! Is this the will of God? No. This is God moving by His providence. God is working a plan to put Esther on the throne next to the king in order to save their whole nation.

Just as everyone hoped, Esther won king Ahasuerus's favor and his heart, over every other woman in the kingdom. He put the royal crown on her head and made her his queen. And the king is so delighted with her that he cut everyone's tax bill.

Did this happen by chance or accident? No, Esther received this favor by the providence of Almighty God. God was making arrangements to protect His people. And this is how He did it. He gave us the background in chapter one of a great pagan palace where a drunken orgy is taking place in the banqueting hall. He let us see how He overrules, by His providence, what mankind and Satan does down here. This should be a comfort to God's children today.

With Esther on the throne, Mordecai rose in position in the king's palace. He's now a judge in the king's gate where he overhears something important. Two men, Bigthan and Teresh, who were on the king's staff were

talking about an assassination plot on the king. Mordecai immediately got word to Esther, who then told the king. The king likely said he'd look into it and in short order they found out it was true and put the traitors to death. What's important about this story is that it was written down in the chronicles of the king. These were the logs of the kingdom. But no mention was made of any reward given to Mordecai. The event was just passed by. (But God was working.)

Around this time, the king promoted a man by the name of Haman to be his second in command. Haman comes from a long line of anti-Semites—those who hate Jews. Trace the history of this world and you'll always find attempts to eliminate the Jews, all the way from Haman to Hitler. Haman's family can be traced all the way back to Pharaoh in Egypt who tried to eliminate the Jews by killing the first-born, and to the Agagites (Amalekites), the enemy of Israel God told Saul to wipe out. (See 1 Samuel 15:8.)

Down through the ages, God has protected His people. He appointed them to be the custodians of His revelation that through them we would have a Savior. The Messiah came through these people. God has made good on that. God even went a step further. In Isaiah's time, He promised: "No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me" (Isaiah 54:17).

God says no weapon against you will prosper. And that included this new prime minister, Haman, who despised the Jewish people. If God hadn't moved Esther to the throne, Haman would have exterminated the Jews.

The king sent word across the kingdom about Haman, his new appointment. He made it a law to bow before Haman. But Mordecai wouldn't. Why doesn't he bow? Perhaps it was because he was brought up under the Mosaic Law and was taught not to bow to anyone but God (see Exodus 20:3). Mordecai's coworkers begged him every day to get down on all fours before Haman. "*You're foolish! You're jeopardizing your position and your life.*" But Mordecai wouldn't do it and, finally, he had to tell them he was a Jew. He worshiped the one and only God (see Deuteronomy 6:4). He had to take a stand, and now they knew why.

Everyone understood ... except Haman. Haman seethed with anger. He's not going to take out his hatred on just Mordecai, he's going to take it out on his people, the Jews.



Now we see the plot. Haman is working to destroy the entire nation of Israel.

Now we can also see how God was moving behind the scenes in this pagan, heathen court, putting someone on the throne next to the king in order, at the right moment, to intervene on behalf of God's people. God was standing in the shadows, keeping watch over His own.

What's Haman going to do? He's a clever rascal, and he'll come up with some wicked plan to destroy God's people.

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**NEXT: God stands in the shadows, keeping watch over His own.**

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## LESSON 2



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Recount the events that led to Esther being appointed the queen of Persia. How do you explain how God was working behind the scenes?
2. Esther was given a year of “beauty treatments.” Of course, “look as good as you can,” Dr. McGee joked. What “beauty routine” can you practice for your soul?
3. “Trace the history of this world and you’ll always find attempts to eliminate the Jews, all the way from Haman to Hitler.” Read the account of Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus 1:15-22) and Herod in Bethlehem, killing Jewish little boys (Matthew 2:16-18). Why do you think the Jews have been hated? Why does God protect and preserve them?



6. Dr. McGee said, "Did this happen by chance or accident? No, Esther received this favor by the providence of Almighty God. God was making arrangements to protect His people. And this is how He did it. He gave us the background in chapter one of a great pagan palace where a drunken orgy is taking place in the banqueting hall. He let us see how He overrules, by His providence, what mankind and Satan does down here. This should be a comfort to God's children today." Why do you think this should comfort us today?

A person in a dark jacket stands in the center of a large, dark stone archway. They are holding a lit torch, which casts a warm, orange glow on the surrounding stone walls and floor. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the torch. The archway is made of rough-hewn stones and has a small, dark rectangular opening at the top center.

**GOD HAS NEVER ASKED  
ANYONE TO TAKE A LEAP  
IN THE DARK.**



**THRU**the **BIBLE**

## LESSON 3

# FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS



Begin with prayer



Read **Esther 3–4**



Listen at [TTB.org/Esther](https://www.TTB.org/Esther) to **Esther 3:7–4:2** and **Esther 4:3–5:4**

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Now we meet the villain of the story.

Haman, a wicked man, was an anti-Semite (literally “hostile to Jewish people”). He stood in a long line of haters who attempted to destroy the nation of Israel. Pharaoh tried it. Later Herod tried it. Even more recently Hitler tried it. Satan has been anxious to destroy the people God loves.

But God has His hand of protection on His people. Through them, the Word of God has come to the world. Also, the Lord Jesus came through this ancestry line. Today, however, the Jewish nation is far from God, just like all other nations. But God has a purpose for the Jews, and there will be a turning back to Him when God concludes His purpose in the church.

Behind every act of antisemitism is the Evil One, trying to destroy the Jews. But God has put up a hedge of protection around them. All you have to do is read history to find out that what God promised Abraham is true, that He will bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse them (see Genesis 12:3). Too bad Haman didn’t know about this promise, because his evil actions towards the Jews were his undoing.

At this point in our narrative, Haman has been elevated to a very high position in world politics; he is the Prime Minister of one of the strongest empires on earth at the time. Even so, the fact that Mordecai would not bow to Haman really disturbed him. And he's going to do something about it. But he didn't want to just lay hands on Mordecai—Haman turns his malice to the entire Jewish nation.

Haman and Xerxes were politicians facing an age-old problem: They needed to raise taxes. Remember Xerxes had a big bill from the war against Europe, and he needed a strategy to pay for it. So first they raised taxes through a lottery, a form of gambling called "casting Pur." But it didn't raise enough money, so they had to look for some other fundraising method. Haman was a savvy guy, and he had some wealth of his own. He saw an opportunity to get two agendas accomplished: raise money and get rid of the Jews.

Haman persuaded the king to write one of his famous laws—this one condemning a group of people in the kingdom whom he claimed were not really loyal. He told the king, "These people (he didn't name them) aren't really your people—they follow Moses' law, not yours." Haman accused them of following different laws and disobeying the king's laws. His strategy was to get the Jews killed and bring their money into the king's treasury. Apparently, it was just the amount needed to meet the deficit (see Esther 3:9).

Like most politicians, the king was interested in any plan to raise more taxes and get himself out of a jam. He never asked who the people were. Haman even offered to personally pay a large sum of money to execute the plan. Xerxes not only agreed, he gave Haman his signet ring—his royal stamp of approval to carry out the wicked plan.

Even the king showed little regard for human life. He had depleted the wealth of this kingdom in a campaign against Greece. In addition, up to two million soldiers died in the campaign. But it didn't worry him a bit that he had made a bad move. No wonder he easily turned his ring over to Haman.

When a plan like this was made into law, it took quite an effort to get the word out across the vast Media-Persian Empire. Word had to travel across India, all the way to Asia, down through the Fertile Crescent and Mediterranean Sea. It then needed to be communicated across some of Europe, all of Asia Minor, and down into Africa, through Egypt down to Ethiopia. This was an enormous kingdom, with different tribes, with a minimum of 127 different spoken dialects and languages. This was quite a government project.

Bulletins were sent out by couriers to all 127 of the king's provinces with this order that was antisemitism of the worst kind and Satanic to the core: On the 13th day of the month of Adar (roughly a year away), the government is ordering the massacre of all the Jews—children and old men, women and babies—and their property will be given to those who killed them. Copies of this bulletin were to be posted in each province, publicly available to all people, to get everyone ready for that day. These letters were signed in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with his ring.

Then the king and Haman sat down in the palace of Sushan, and they drank to their plan. Meanwhile, the city fell into confusion and panic.

You can imagine the effect this had on everyone. The population of Susa, the capital, was perplexed. They couldn't understand this. The Jews were not traitors; they hadn't committed a great crime. Why should such extreme measures be used like this to exterminate these 15 million people throughout the kingdom? The king didn't mind the confusion. He and Haman had happy hour and were delighted with their strategy. Haman's personal agenda would be satisfied; the king's money problems would be solved.

But Ahasuerus didn't think this law going into effect would touch his queen. He didn't know at this time that she belonged to the nation Israel. He will find it out in time.

Remember that this law of the Medes and Persians cannot be revoked. It's the same type of law that set aside Vashti the queen and it couldn't be changed. Once it's sent out and passed with the king's signature, it's not able to change—not even by the king.

How will God save His people? Somebody's going to have to intervene. And God had been preparing for this.

Remember at the beginning of this book we got a look into a pagan palace where there was a drunken orgy going on and thousands attended a banquet? That's when we witnessed the family scandal and the queen refused to obey the king. You may wonder what that has to do with it? Everything! God was moving.

Because of these family events, God moved a person right into the palace, right next to the throne, who will be the instrument by which God saves His people. He does it by His providence. This king isn't interested in God's will, but God will overrule him. God is standing in the shadows keeping watch over His own.



When Mordecai learns about all that Haman had done, he cries out loud and long. He puts on sackcloth and ashes, like a mourner in grief. He realizes this law is accurate and actionable. He believes it and knows it can't be changed.

God makes a decree today that the world doesn't believe. God says that "all have sinned" and come short of righteousness (see Romans 3:23). We've come short of the glory of God. We don't meet God's standard. Even the thief on the cross dying next to our Lord Jesus said to the other thief, "We indeed justly..." (Luke 23:41). *"This man dying next to us, this wasn't for Him. He's dying in another's place. But we indeed die justly."* You and I deserve death because we belong to the human race in which it's said, "in Adam all die..." (1 Corinthians 15:22). And death is passed upon all men because all have sinned. Hebrews 9:27 says, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." The decree goes out from God: The soul that sins, it shall die.

Many people today think that law has been changed. They believe that somehow God has gotten soft and sentimental, and He won't go through with the judgment. *Doesn't He love everybody?* Yes, He does, but He'll never save you by His love. He saves you by grace (see Ephesians 2:8). The decree has never been changed; the law can't be overruled. But it can be satisfied another way.

As Haman's wicked decree spreads throughout the kingdom, all the Jews mourned. They fasted and sat in sackcloth and ashes. But do you notice? No prayer.

Esther was somewhat isolated in the palace. She didn't realize the magnitude of the decree and how it would affect her or her people. She didn't understand Mordecai's reaction and so sent him beautiful clothes to replace his sackcloth. But when he got them, he sent them back. No new fancy clothes will change the king's edict.

When her gift came back, Esther knew it was something serious. She wanted some answers. Through her staff she got her questions to Mordecai. *"Please explain, why are you wearing sackcloth?"* Esther's assistants found Mordecai in the king's gate, and he explained all that had happened and the exact amount of money Haman had promised to deposit in the royal bank to finance the massacre of the Jews. He then proposed a daring and courageous plan to be communicated to Esther. Mordecai told her she should go to the king and plead for her people.

Mordecai was making a very big ask, and he knew it. Esther knew it, too. No one dared do what he proposed—enter the king’s presence without an invitation. If you did, you could be put to death on the spot. The only exception would be if Esther entered his inner court, and he held out the golden scepter to her. Esther said she hadn’t seen the king in 30 days, and she didn’t know what his response to her would be.

But then Mordecai put it on the line. He said in effect, *“Don’t think you’re secure, just because you’re a queen in the palace. This decree touches you. Remember there was another queen before you, and a decree was made to set her aside. Take a warning from that. This decree is that all Jews are to be slain. And you will be slain, too.”*

But then he showed himself to be a man of faith. Mordecai offered, *“But if you stay silent, help and deliverance will arrive for the Jews from someplace else; but you and your family will be wiped out. Who knows? Maybe you were made queen for just such a time as this.”*

His conclusion makes you wonder what other place Mordecai had in mind. Would help come from the north or the east? This king is a world ruler, a dictator. Not another person on earth could deliver the Jews. Mordecai was detecting the hand of God moving. Esther had been put in the palace for a purpose.

Even so, Mordecai said, *“If you don’t speak up, deliverance will come from somewhere else.”* Where? The only other place is from above. That is the closest thing to a reference to God there is in this book.

God by His providence has been moving. He’s prepared the way of deliverance for His people. God knows what’s coming. And that’s the reason we can trust Him. He has the power to hold us. He knows what’s going to happen tomorrow and the next day and the next day. You can trust Him.

In this risky plan, Mordecai takes a stand for God. He’s willing to die for Him. Esther is, too. She directed, *“Get all the Jews living in Susa together. Fast for me. Don’t eat or drink for three days. I and my maids will fast with you. If you will do this, I’ll go to the king, even though it’s forbidden. If I perish, I perish.”*

Esther is willing now to die. She reveals her noble character. And, though she is out of the will of God in a foreign land, she will be faithful. It’s a good lesson to learn in a day when people so easily judge each other that we should let God determine who are the faithful ones.

## THE GOLDEN SCEPTER

We don't have to wait long to see what Esther will do.

King Ahasuerus was in the middle of conducting state business when he saw his wife standing in his courtyard. He was pleased to see her and extended the gold scepter and by doing so saved her life. He invited her to approach, and she touched the tip of the scepter.

Friends, God holds out the scepter to us today—the Scepter of Grace. He asks you to come and accept His offer of life. Just put your hand out by faith and accept what He has to offer. He's not saving us today because we're beautiful or worthy or good. We're none of these. He holds out His offer of life because He loves us.

Notice the gracious, lovely thing the king does. He must have loved her. The king asked, *"What's your desire, Queen Esther? What do you want? Ask and it's yours!"* He knows she has not come on some petty issue. He knows something is troubling his queen. She might even have been trembling because she could have been put to death on the spot.

So in a way, the king hands her a signed blank check and tells her, *"You can have anything you want. Up to half of the kingdom, it's yours! Just name it."*

Although she's relieved, Esther is still timid. She says, *"Would you come to a luncheon I've prepared and bring Haman?"* He knows she's holding back the request.

What's going to happen now? How will this courageous young girl let the king know what's taking place? How will God use her to save His people? It's a great true story that God is writing here.

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**NEXT: God's providence is revealed when a young woman puts her life on the line for a nation.**

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## LESSON 3



## **FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION**

1. Why do you think antisemitism continues to have a stronghold in the world?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Describe the concept of “God’s providence” in your own words. What are examples of it in history/today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Read Esther 4:4-7 and trace the progression of her attitude. How did she change? What was her plan?



7. How do you see God at work in the progression of this true story?

## LESSON 4

# GOD'S PROVIDENCE REVEALED



Begin with prayer



Read **Esther 5–7**



Listen at [TTB.org/Esther](https://www.TTB.org/Esther) to **Esther 5:5–6:8** and **Esther 6:7–7:10**

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We're about to witness a young girl do an audacious and brave thing. On a human level, Esther is the only hope her people have in light of the treacherous law Haman set to annihilate God's people. God has placed her on the throne, near the king, by His providence, for this exact event.

With courage and grit, Esther risked her life when she entered the king's presence uninvited. We were relieved to see him hold out his scepter to Esther, his wife, the minute he saw her and give her a blank check. He realized something was urgent and important to her and so he offered her anything she needed. *"Half of the kingdom is yours, if you want it."*

God's unseen hand of providence is moving. How do we know? 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." Even when rulers are cruel and brutal and godless, their hearts are in the hand of the Lord. God could squeeze it anytime He wanted to remove him. He can turn the king just like you turn water that's running downhill. God is moving here in a very definite way.

Even though the king asks Esther to make her request, she asked instead for the king and Haman to come to a lunch. She'd let her request be known there.

So Haman and the king go to Esther's for lunch. The king sees that she's actually afraid; something very weighty is on her mind and heart, but she's hesitant to say what it is. For the second time, the king promised to hear and respond generously to her request. But Esther again lost heart and postponed her answer again. She invited both men to come to a banquet the next day.

As Haman left the palace that day, he couldn't be more happy to attend another private meal with the two royals. But he certainly is playing the fool. When he walked across the court, he saw Mordecai sitting at the king's gate, oblivious to him. It made Haman furious to be ignored, but he restrained himself and went home. He got his friends together with his wife, Zeresh, and started bragging about how much money he had, his many sons, all the times the king had honored him, and his promotion to the highest position in the government. (Three things that all men brag about: money, family, and position.) *"On top of all that,"* Haman said in effect, *"Queen Esther invited me to a private dinner she gave for the king, just the three of us. And she's invited me to another one tomorrow. But I can't enjoy any of it when I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."*

This petty man with his wounded spirit revealed how little things made him angry. He is riding high in his career but is derailed by one guy who wouldn't respect him. We generally reveal what kind of a person we are by the things we let annoy us. Certainly Haman is letting this little thing annoy him, the mark of a little person. (The name "Haman" literally means "little.") Haman's very human, isn't he? As well as being an outstanding rascal and a villain.

Then Haman's wife and friends thought of a plan: Build a gallows 75 feet high. First thing tomorrow morning, ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then with that off your mind, enjoy the banquet with him and Esther.

Haman loved that idea, so he immediately had them start building a gallows. Bitterness and hatred lead human beings to do terrible things. All through the night, you could hear the sound of the hammer in Shushan as these gallows were being erected.

Something else was happening that night, too. God was working.

That same night, King Ahasuerus had a restless night. He couldn't sleep, so he asked for someone to read to him the chronicles of the kingdom, the log that describes the day-by-day happenings. But this time, the servant who read to him just happened to turn to a certain place in the notes.



By the way—do you see that little coincidences are beginning to pile up? They reveal that God’s hand is in the glove of human circumstance. His providence is moving, overruling and overriding events.

- It wasn’t an accident Mordecai served at the palace.
- It wasn’t an accident his girl, Esther, became queen.
- It’s no accident she found favor in everyone’s sight, especially the king’s.
- It’s no accident that she courageously asked the king her request, that he generously granted it. and that he’s coming to her private banquet.
- And it’s no accident that on this night when he can’t sleep and asks for the chronicles to be read to him, that the exact thing which is read points to a certain event. None of this is by accident; God by His providence is overruling.

Then this happened: The servant read aloud about a recent event in which Mordecai reported an assassination plot to kill the king and two of the king’s staff were arrested and executed. The king then asked, *“What honor or dignity have we done to thank Mordecai for this?”* The servant looked through the pages and said, *“Well, there’s nothing here.”* The king recognized Mordecai’s great service and now wants him rewarded. Who’s in the palace courtyard that can help? None other than Haman, who arrived with Mordecai’s name on his murderous mind. He had come early to talk to the king about hanging Mordecai on the six-story gallows that he had built in the night.

These two circumstances were brought together not by accident, but by the providence of God.

As the king’s Prime Minister, Haman had easy access to the king. But before Haman even got to his request, the king had the first word. He asked Haman, *“What would you do for the man who the king wants to honor?”*

Of course, the king had Mordecai in mind. But likely Haman thought he was talking about him. *First, I’m invited to lunch. Now tonight I’ll dine with the royals. They think very highly of me, and now he wants to honor me with something special.*

Haman’s response—this is what would honor a man: Let him wear a royal robe that the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crown on its head, and have a prince lead him on horseback through the city square, shouting before him, *“This is what is done for the man whom the king especially wants to honor!”*

What's behind Haman's proposal? Perhaps he was plotting to get the throne of the Media-Persian Empire. Perhaps he was planning to usurp the throne—get the people used to seeing him with a crown on his head, the royal apparel on his shoulders, and riding the king's horse. He perhaps was subtly revealing his intention to overthrow the king.

Perhaps Ahasuerus saw through Haman's plot. He told him to go get the plan done and not to miss a detail. "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate!" (Esther 6:10).

*What?* Nothing could have been more offensive, more humiliating, more distasteful, more hateful to Haman than to put the royal garments and the royal crown on Mordecai, the man he intended to hang on the gallows. Now he had to put him on the king's horse and lead him through the streets, shouting all the way that *this is the man that the king delights to honor*.

Haman was miserable, and apparently the king began to read between the lines but does nothing about it yet. Haman ran home and cried on his wife's shoulder. She just shook her head and said, "*I told you so. You're beginning to fall.*" And as they're talking, the king's servants arrive to escort Haman to Esther's palace. He's going to be late for the dinner he'd been so looking forward to. The events are thickening so fast he can't keep up with them. He has no control over the events that are turning against him. (By the way, he *doesn't* have any control over them. At that very moment, God is overruling all of Haman's wicked schemes so his plot cannot succeed.)

Haman now goes to dinner with mingled feelings. He's thrilled that the queen has invited him, but he's confused by the way things have worked out. He has just spent the day with Mordecai. Why now is *he* being honored? He'll find out in just a minute.

So, once again, Esther sat with the king and Haman at a meal, and the king asked her what is troubling her and how he could help. Again, she was nervous. She may not even have known about Mordecai being honored that day and how these two men were involved.

So the king turned the whole evening over to Esther, saying in effect, "*Be comfortable. Ask whatever you want, and it will be yours.*"

And so Esther took a deep breath and began. She says something like, "*My request and my petition is this: Please spare my life and my people.*"

The king must have been alarmed. And just imagine the three-alarm it was for Haman. He didn't know the queen was Jewish.

The king is absolutely amazed. Who would *dare* attempt to destroy the queen? And who would *dare* attempt to destroy her people? Then Esther says something shocking. *"If we'd been sold into slavery, I would have kept quiet. But we've actually been betrayed, and we're about to be destroyed as a people. And I'm included among them."*

The king exploded. *"Who would do this? Where is he? This is outrageous!"*

As a sidenote, Ahasuerus never took the trouble to ask Haman about the people he proposed they murder and plunder. At this moment, the king hasn't put two and two together. He just can't believe anybody would attempt such a thing on the royal family. Human life was cheap to this king; thousands of soldiers had perished in that campaign against Europe, and it hadn't disturbed him at all. Now it is close to home.

God was moving behind the scenes. He was in the shadows, keeping watch over His own. The Lord made it very clear that no weapon formed against Israel would stand.

When the king asked who would dare do such a thing as this, Esther pointed across the table. *"An enemy. An adversary. This evil Haman."*

When that word left Esther's mouth, all the blood drained from Haman's face. He was terror-stricken, and the king was angry and puzzled. He believed his queen as she pleaded for her life. But he had to think this through because Haman was, after all, his trusted advisor. So he stomped out into the palace garden and left Haman there to plead for his life.

This little man, who was so glib in asking for others be put to death, now groveled at Esther's feet like a slave. As the king came back from the palace garden into the banquet hall, Haman was pawing at Esther as she sat on the couch. He's insane with fear; he doesn't realize what he's doing. The king roared out, *"Will he even molest the queen while I'm just around the corner?"*

Esther hadn't yet called out for help, but she's frightened. With the king's roar, the servants standing guard step in and arrest Haman. What's going to happen to him? One of the chamberlains points out the window:

***"Look! The gallows, fifty cubits [75 feet] high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him on it!" -Esther 7:9***

You just can't mock God. Whatsoever you sow—you'll reap. Little man Haman had his day. You can be a villain if you want to. You can run against God's plan and purpose for you, but you won't defeat God.

But Esther's story isn't over.

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**NEXT: An important message must be delivered in haste.**

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## LESSON 4

### FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. "At the right place at the right time." How does this describe Esther's opportunity?
2. Describe what it takes to be willing to stand for God or do the courageous thing?
3. In an earlier part of the story, Mordecai performed a loyal service and saved the king from an assassination attempt. At the time, he didn't receive any credit or reward, nor did he seek it out. What does Colossians 3:22-24 say about doing your job?

4. “It was no accident that ...” Rehearse the pieces of the story that prove God was at work behind the scenes. In retrospect, do you see any events of your life that show God was working?
5. Read Psalm 37:35-36. How does this principle apply to Haman, to king Ahasuerus, to any of our world leaders today?
6. “You can’t mock God.” Why is this an important truth to remember today in light of world events?

THE ONLY TIME  
GOD WANTS YOU  
TO BE IN A HURRY, FRIEND,  
*is to be in a hurry  
to get saved.*



THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 5

# WHAT HAPPENED NEXT



Begin with prayer



Read **Esther 8–10**



Listen at [TTB.org/Esther](https://www.TTB.org/Esther) to **Esther 8** and **Esther 9, 10**

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In one of history's great reversals, the day that Haman hung on the gallows he built for Mordecai we see a bigger story being written by God. Throughout Esther's story, God was at work behind the scenes.

On that day, the king gave Esther Haman's entire estate. Esther also introduced her cousin Mordecai to the king. She explained how Mordecai was her family, the one who raised her after her parents' deaths. The king then took off his signet ring and gave it to Mordecai, and Esther appointed Mordecai over Haman's estate. This signet ring, when pushed down into wax, made a law that would destroy a people. First the king gave it to Haman; now he passed it to Mordecai.

But there was still the problem of the decree to massacre the Jews that could not be reversed. Haman is out of the picture, but something still must be done to save the Jews. They were still scheduled to be slain on a certain day.

Esther again spoke to the king, bowing to him and begging him with tears to counter the evil Haman had done when he plotted against the Jews. The king again extended his gold scepter to Esther. She got to her feet, stood before him, and said in effect, *"If it please the king and he regards me with favor and thinks this is right, and if he has any affection for me at all, let an*



*order be written that cancels the bulletins authorizing the plan of Haman to annihilate the Jews in all the king's provinces. How can I stand to see this catastrophe wipe out my people? How can I bear to stand by and watch the massacre of my own relatives?"*

But the original decree couldn't be changed. Even the king couldn't change the law (as we saw regarding his first queen, Vashti). But he could proclaim another decree that countered the first one. And that's the law that was sent out with the king's signature. Previously the king was in judgment of the Jews, but now he's come over on their side.

So he told Esther and Mordecai, *"Go ahead and write whatever you decide on behalf of the Jews; then seal it with the signet ring."* Now the nation, Israel, could take action! They could take advantage of this new decree—if they believe it. And they can accept this means of salvation that the king provides for them.

But there are some significant challenges in getting the news to the 127 provinces that extend from India to Ethiopia. The first was the immense geography that needed to be traveled. This was before the age of mass communication. No radio, no television, no internet. Instead, the news spread throughout the kingdom by way of camels, donkeys, and runners.

Language was also a real problem. Every province had a different language with many tribes. Scribes needed to be hired to translate the Persian over into the languages of the different tribes. This was a huge undertaking. The message was this: The king is now on the side of these people. They can believe the king and be saved. That's the heart of this really good news.

The book of Esther may not mention the name of God, but in this scene, we have one of the most wonderful pictures of our salvation that we have in Scripture. All of these things happened to them to be examples for us.

Here's how this picture relates to us. First, we are given a decree. "...The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). This applies to absolutely everyone in all corners of society, in all corners of the world.

Ponder these truths from God's Word:

- "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).
- "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10).
- The righteousness of man is "like filthy rags" in His sight (Isaiah 64:6).

God cannot save us today based on our perfection, because we can't offer it and He can't lower His standard. So the decree of judgment comes out from God.

This is the problem we face today as the human family. If we sin, we deserve to die. The problem lies at the center of our own hearts. People don't like to hear this, but it's the truth.

And God must judge sin. But from that same throne that sent out the judgment to all the world that all are lost comes another decree. That decree is, "...Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Make peace with Him. You don't have to do anything to reconcile God—but He's already done it for you. Christ died for you. You can't add anything to what Christ has done. You can't do anything to soften God's heart. Jesus did that for us.

Now we can say, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Well, nobody. He's on our side. The decrees come out today: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). You can believe Him and, if you believe Him, you're saved.

And that's what the Jews throughout the kingdom had to do—all they had to do was believe the decree from the king. Now he's on their side. He's going to protect them. This decree of grace overcomes the other decree of judgment.

When God saves today, He's saving sinners. None of us are good enough to go to heaven. We never can be. We simply accept a salvation that gives us a robe of righteousness that's perfect, and it's found in Jesus Christ. We could never improve on that because He's wonderful. He died for us because He wants to be our Savior.

Like in Esther's story, this message must be delivered in haste. Today, if you'll hear His voice, believe God wants to save you—even when you're a sinner. And He's provided His Son, Jesus Christ. Would you believe this? This is the only time God wants you to be in a hurry, friends, and that's to be in a hurry to get saved. It's a wonderful thing to be saved. If you come to Christ, you'll find out what real joy is. The throne of God is not a throne of judgment; it's a throne of grace. God doesn't want to hurt you. He's got His arms outstretched to a lost world. He says, "*Come. But you'll have to come My way. You'll have to believe Me.*" There's no salvation apart from that.

Back in our story, we learn that when the Jews heard this second decree, they threw a party and feasted and had great joy and gladness. They gave such a good witness that other people wanted to become Jews. This event

is known as the Feast of Purim. It's not mentioned in the New Testament, but Jews still celebrate it today. They recognize it as a day of great deliverance for them. For on the day that was supposed to be their deaths, the king's second decree said they could defend themselves and the government (that had condemned them) would now help them. This is God's providence at work. People were in awe of how the Jews had been protected and no one could withstand them. Why? Because the man, Mordecai, stood by the side of the king now.

Today there's a man in the glory, Jesus Christ, standing at His Father's throne. He knows exactly how you feel. He's there for us today, interceding for us. How wonderful to know we've got somebody up there for us. See, things have changed for us sinners.

Today at the Feast of Purim, Jews pray three prayers of thanksgiving. They thank God that they are counted worthy. They thank God for saving their ancestors. And they thank God that they've lived to enjoy another festival. They celebrate "the keeping power of God," His providence. Jesus Christ keeps His nation, Israel. He keeps His church. And He keeps the individuals that are His. He's "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him" (Hebrews 7:25).




4. When Jews today (and for centuries) celebrate the Feast of Purim (pronounced “poo-REEM”), it is the happiest day of the year. They observe many traditions, including reading this book of Esther aloud as a family. Every time the name of Haman is read, all should boo and hiss or make noise to drown out the villain’s name. An easy search online will explain many more joyous traditions—and some significant recent historical events—surrounding the feast day.

5. How does the concept of God’s providence change the way you see history? Change the way you understand current events? Change the way you see how God works in your life?

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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