

Esther Bible Study Questions and Answers (Free PDF)

Leader's Edition — with Answers

An 8-session walk through Esther, from a deposed queen to the feast of Purim, with open questions for your own answers. Free to print, no sign-up.

An 8-session study of Esther for groups or solo reading.

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?

Esther 4:14 (NIV)

Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.

Esther 4:16 (NIV)

Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Esther 2:17 (NIV)

The study guide

SESSION 1 • ESTHER 1:1-22

A Queen Deposed

At a lavish Persian feast, King Xerxes summons Queen Vashti to display her before his guests. She refuses, and her removal clears the throne for the woman God will use to save a nation.

1. What is happening at the king's banquet, and what does Vashti's refusal cost her?

King Xerxes spends a hundred and eighty days showing off his wealth, then holds a seven-day banquet for the whole citadel (Esther 1:3-5). On the seventh day, merry with wine, he orders Vashti to appear so he can display her beauty (Esther 1:10-11). She refuses, and it costs her the crown. She is removed as queen and barred from the king's presence (Esther 1:19).

2. Why do you think the book opens with the wealth and power of the Persian court rather than with the Jews who will become its center?

The book begins with a king who rules 127 provinces (Esther 1:1) and cannot even command his own household. Many readers see the contrast on purpose. Human power looks huge here, and yet a higher rule is quietly at work behind it, moving toward the rescue of God's people.

3. Where have you seen a closed door or an ending you did not choose turn out to be the start of something you could not yet see?

Leader's note: This question invites people to name a loss that later looked different. Vashti's exit made room for Esther, though no one at the feast could have known it. Romans 8:28 says God works in all things for the good of those who love him. Give the group time, and let no one feel rushed to say the ending was good.

SESSION 2 • ESTHER 2:1-23

Esther Made Queen

Esther, a young Jewish orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai, is taken into the palace and wins the king's favor above all others. Mordecai, watching at the gate, uncovers a plot against the king's life.

1. How does Esther come to be queen, and what does Mordecai tell her to keep hidden?

After Vashti's removal, Esther, a Jewish orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai (Esther 2:7), is taken into the palace with the other young women. The king loves her more than all the rest and makes her queen (Esther 2:17). Mordecai charges her not to reveal her people or family (Esther 2:10).

2. Esther 2:17 says the king made Esther queen. Why might it matter that her rise looks like ordinary favor rather than an obvious act of God?

Nothing in Esther 2 looks like a miracle. A king is pleased with a young woman, and that is all the text says. Faithful readers take this as the way God often works in Scripture, through ordinary favor and timing. Proverbs 21:1 says the king's heart is in the Lord's hand, even when no one sees his fingers on it.

3. Where are you tempted to think God can only work through the dramatic, when he may be working quietly through your ordinary days?

Leader's note: This question is aiming at the belief that God is only at work when something dramatic happens. Esther's rise was quiet and easy to miss. Proverbs 16:9 says we plan our course, but the Lord establishes our steps. Ask the group where their ordinary days may be carrying more than they can see.

SESSION 3 • ESTHER 3:1-15

Haman's Plot

Haman is promoted above all the nobles, and when Mordecai will not bow to him, his wounded pride swells into a scheme to destroy not just one man but every Jew in the empire.

1. What sets off Haman's rage, and how far does he decide to take his revenge in Esther 3:6?

Haman is raised above all the nobles, and everyone kneels to him except Mordecai (Esther 3:1-2). Haman is filled with rage (Esther 3:5). Punishing Mordecai alone is not enough for him. He looks for a way to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom (Esther 3:6).

2. How does one man's pride become a death sentence for a whole people, and what does that show you about where small sins can lead?

A wounded pride gives birth to a death sentence. James 1:15 traces how desire, once it is full-grown, leads on to sin and then to death. Proverbs 16:18 says pride goes before destruction. Small sins are never as small as they look, because they keep growing until something stops them.

3. When someone has wronged you, where do you feel the pull to make the punishment larger than the offense?

Leader's note: This question is meant to be gentle but honest. Most of us know the urge to make someone pay more than the wrong deserved. Romans 12:19 says, "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath." Invite the group to name the pull without being asked to solve it on the spot.

SESSION 4 • ESTHER 4:1-17

For Such a Time as This

Word of the decree spreads, and Mordecai presses Esther to plead with the king. She knows that approaching him uninvited could mean death. Mordecai answers that perhaps she was made queen for this very moment.

1. What does Mordecai say to Esther in Esther 4:14, and how does she answer him in Esther 4:16?

Mordecai tells Esther that if she stays silent, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but she and her family will perish. Then he asks, "who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Esther asks all the Jews in Susa to fast for her three days, and she will go to the king though it is against the law. She says, "if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

2. Why does Mordecai believe deliverance will come whether or not Esther acts, and what does that say about how he understands God's purposes?

Mordecai trusts that God will keep his promise to preserve his people, with Esther or without her. That is what he means by relief coming from another place. His words also show that Esther's choice still matters. God's purposes stand firm, and yet he invites us to have a share in them.

3. What is the place God has set you in right now, and what would courage look like for you there this week?

Leader's note: This question asks for a place and a step, not a grand plan. Esther prepared with fasting before she acted (Esther 4:16). Let that be the pattern. Ask the group to name where God has set them, and to pray together about one small, brave act this week.

SESSION 5 • ESTHER 5:1-14

Esther's Banquets

Esther risks her life by approaching the king, who welcomes her. Rather than blurt out her plea, she invites him and Haman to a banquet, and then to a second, while Haman builds a gallows for Mordecai.

1. How does the king receive Esther, and why do you think she waits rather than making her request at once?

The king holds out the golden scepter, and Esther touches it (Esther 5:2). He asks what she wants and offers her up to half the kingdom (Esther 5:3). She only invites him and Haman to a banquet (Esther 5:4). The text does not say why she waits. Readers often suggest she wanted the right moment, Haman in the room, and the king's heart ready to hear her.

2. What does Haman's joy at the banquet and his rage at Mordecai reveal about a heart ruled by pride?

Haman brags about his wealth, his sons, and his honors (Esther 5:11-12), and then says none of it satisfies him while Mordecai sits at the king's gate (Esther 5:13). Pride is never full. One person who refuses to bow can spoil everything else, and Haman is already building the gallows.

3. Where in your own life do you need the patience to wait for the right moment instead of forcing an outcome?

Leader's note: This question is about the hard work of waiting, when we want to force things to move. Esther was not passive. She was patient and prayerful. Psalm 27:14 says to wait for the Lord, be strong, and take heart. Ask the group where waiting feels most costly right now.

SESSION 6 · ESTHER 6:1-14

Mordecai Honored

Unable to sleep, the king has the royal records read aloud and learns Mordecai was never rewarded for saving his life. In a turn of perfect timing, Haman is forced to honor the very man he meant to hang.

1. What small detail begins the great reversal in Esther 6:1, and how does the timing of that night fall into place?

The king cannot sleep (Esther 6:1). He has the royal records read to him, and they include Mordecai's warning about the plot against his life, with no reward ever given (Esther 6:2-3). Just then Haman walks into the court to ask permission to hang Mordecai (Esther 6:4). Everything lines up in a single night.

2. Why might the book linger over a sleepless king and an old record rather than an angel or a voice from heaven?

The book never names God, and this chapter shows why that matters. No angel or voice appears, only a restless king and an old record. Most readers take this as the heart of Esther. God's providence works through ordinary things, and it is no less his doing for being quiet.

3. Where can you look back and see God's hand in a coincidence that felt like nothing at the time?

Leader's note: This question invites people to look back. What felt like chance at the time may have been God's care. Joseph said something like it in Genesis 50:20, that what was meant for harm God meant for good. Let the group share, and let some stories stay unfinished.

SESSION 7 · ESTHER 7:1-10

Haman's Fall

At the second banquet Esther names Haman as the enemy plotting her people's death. The king's fury falls on him, and Haman is hanged on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

1. How does Esther finally make her plea in Esther 7:3, and how does the king respond?

Esther says that if she has found favor, she asks for her life and the lives of her people, for they have been sold to be destroyed (Esther 7:3-4). The king asks who has dared to do this (Esther 7:5). Esther names Haman (Esther 7:6). The king rises in fury, and when he returns Haman is condemned and hanged (Esther 7:7-10).

2. What does it mean that Haman dies on the gallows he built for someone else, and what does that pattern show about how evil recoils?

Haman is hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai. Proverbs 26:27 says whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone rolled will roll back on the one who rolls it. Scripture teaches that evil turns on itself in the end, and that God is the judge who sees it done.

3. Where do you need to trust God with justice you cannot bring about yourself?

Leader's note: This question is about trusting God with justice that is not ours to carry out. Jesus is the pattern. 1 Peter 2:23 says he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. Ask the group where they are holding a wrong too tightly, and pray for the grace to open their hands.

SESSION 8 · ESTHER 8:1-10:3

Deliverance and Purim

A new decree lets the Jews defend themselves, and the day meant for their destruction becomes the day of their rescue. The feast of Purim is established to remember it, and Mordecai rises to honor in the king's court.

1. How is the threat against the Jews reversed across Esther 8 and 9, and how does Esther 9:22 describe the day they were given?

Haman's edict cannot be revoked (Esther 8:8), so a second decree lets the Jews gather and defend themselves (Esther 8:11). Mordecai is honored (Esther 8:15). On the day their enemies had hoped to overpower them, the Jews gain the upper hand instead (Esther 9:1). Esther 9:22 calls it the time when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration.

2. Why do you think the people chose to mark their rescue every year with feasting and gifts to the poor rather than simply moving on?

A yearly feast keeps the rescue from fading. Esther 9:28 says these days should be remembered and kept by every generation. Feasting and gifts to the poor also share the joy with those in need. Remembering on purpose is how God's people pass his faithfulness to their children.

3. What rescue in your own story is worth remembering on purpose, so that you do not forget what God carried you through?

Leader's note: This question asks the group to name a rescue and to plan to remember it. Psalm 103:2 says, "Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Consider giving each person a moment to say what God carried them through, and how they might mark it.