



ESTHER



Friend.

Esther is a story of Kings and Queens. Of palaces and royal gates. Filled with twists and turns and a plot for revenge. The stakes are high and the consequences... even higher.

It's easy to read this book for the glitz, glamor, and drama—the same way you'd watch a great movie. (Or maybe a soap opera is more accurate!) With all of the drama, it's easy to miss that something is missing from this book. Or rather, that *someone* is missing.

God.

God isn't mentioned in this book. At all. Not even once! And yes, this is the Bible.

But even though God isn't mentioned, He's definitely not missing. Just the opposite! We see God moving in the lives and hearts of Mordecai, Esther, and even the King. We see God using real, messy people and events.

The same is true for us, isn't it? We don't often have someone announcing what God is doing, how God is moving, or hear the voice of God speaking to us out loud.

But God is still all over our lives. Yes, even yours and mine. God *is* active & moving. We can't always tell what He's doing, but He is dependable and trustworthy.

One more thing. I've added some notes in each chapter. These notes are thoughts from a friend you can have a conversation with, not commentary from an all-knowing expert.

There's also room for you to journal as you read. Your notes, your thoughts, and the way God stirs your heart as you read deserve to have their place in this book too. I can't encourage you enough to take the time to write them down along the way.

For such a time as this.
Adam



ESTHER

We don't know exactly when this book was written, or who its author is. Some people who study the Bible and history think it was likely written sometime between 300-200 BC. But others say it could have been written even earlier - between 500-350 BC.

Esther is set in the Persian Empire. The King in this book, King Xerxes, was the son of King Darius, who expanded the empire to its largest—stretching from modern-day Ethiopia all the way to India. Only 3 years after the events of Esther, King Xerxes lost a significant battle to the Greek army (which was led by Alexander the Great).

In order to understand this story, we have to back up a bit and look at the history of Israel. Israel was conquered by Babylon in 597 BC, and the Jewish people were taken captive and exiled to Babylon. They lost their places of worship, and had to rebuild their community and their culture in a foreign land.

A few decades before the events of Esther take place, Jews were no longer treated as captives. Some returned to their homeland. Others stayed in Persia where they rose to high

positions and gained influence. But they were still seen as outsiders. They had to be careful how they worshiped and lived out their faith. This raised the stakes of the events in our story for Mordecai, Esther, and for the Jewish people as a whole even more.

All through this story there are reversals, or opposites. Similar events happen, but turn out differently. Power and authority change hands. Favor is gained and lost. The hopeless become the hopeful, and vice versa.

As much as it's filled with reversals, Esther is also filled with feasts, including the Festival of Purim, which is still celebrated by Jewish people today as a remembrance of God's faithfulness.

Take 9 minutes to watch The Bible Project summary of the story of Esther by scanning here.





CHAPTER 1 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 1 & 2 - Some background on King Xerxes: King Xerxes lived from 519 BC to 465 BC. He became king of the Persian Empire in 486 BC and this story takes place in the third year of his reign.

Fun fact: Only three years later, in 483 BC, Xerxes would start a war against the Greeks which ended with the Persian empire falling to a guy you might have heard of—Alexander the Great. It's so cool to see this story connect to a specific point in history!

V. 3 - Persia was a massive empire at this time. Many scholars think that it stretched from modern day Ethiopia all the way to India. While you read this story, remember that this isn't a small kingdom. We're not talking about a place the size of Sioux Falls here (even though I know we all think Sioux Falls is the New York City of the Midwest, sorry Tea!) It's one of the largest empires in the history of the world.

V. 4 - Ego much? Maybe a bit of a messiah complex. I shouldn't judge too much though, I'd love to hold a 180-day feast to display my vast collection of cuckoo clocks! Please pray that my wife lets me get more of them!

Truthfully though, we do the same in some ways, don't we? Check out my new car, my latest fancy vacation, or the addition to my house. We aren't kings, but we all have this deep, kind of ugly desire to show off our wealth to other people.

V. 8 - Kinda interesting: usually the toastmaster would tell people when they could drink, but in this case the King said people could drink whenever and however much they wanted. This party was a true ancient rager!

V. 9 - Historically, King Xerxes' queen's name was Amestris. Queen Vashti might have been Ametris, because the name Vashti means "sweetheart." So Vashti could have just been a loving nickname. Or the King might have had multiple queens throughout his lifetime. #player.

The Queen and the King were having separate parties. In Persian tradition, it was not common for the men and the women to be separate. So why the separate parties? Could it be that their union was already fractured?

As we'll see in this story, King Xerxes is not a model of great leadership. If you didn't know, poor leadership isn't always seen in the big fractures. Instead it typically comes out in the little things, like when you begin to lose the people closest to you.

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CHAPTER 1 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 10 - That's a nice way of saying it #drunk.

Eunuchs were men who had been castrated. They were often put in charge of the King's harem. Because they were unable to father children (and didn't have the desire to have sex), the King's lineage would be protected! For some reason the show *The Young & The Restless* comes to mind - ha. Not sure why!

V. 12 - This book is titled "Esther," but don't let the courage of Queen Vashti go unnoticed. She stands up to a powerful (and very intoxicated!) King. She won't compromise herself for him. This is so important! Do we compromise because people in power tell us to do so? Are you willing to stand up and do what you know is right, even though a person in power might get angry with you?

V. 13 - When it comes to relationships, decisions, leadership, life, & goals, who do you ask for advice? Different people might be "experts," but are they following God? Will they tell you the truth or just what you want to hear? And are you really looking for wisdom—God's wisdom—or do you just want them to agree with what you already want to do?

V. 16 - Who you listen to & surround yourself with is huge. Do your friends help you assume the best or the worst? Do they push you toward offense or grace? Toward jadedness or humility? Do they push you toward life or death? The wise counselors in our lives not only impact us, but they also impact the way we treat others!

V. 17 - Instead of learning from Queen Vashti, the King and his advisors feel the need to control her. Not only her—all the wives in the Kingdom. In ancient Persia, women had few rights, so the most powerful men in the country are trying to hold onto their control, even at the expense of others. It is the same for us. Our need for control causes us to miss what we need to learn, to miss what God is actually doing, and even hurt the people around us.

V. 20 - When it comes to any relationship, trying to control or force something will never work. The only way to have great relationships is to love. To sacrificially give of yourself to another person. Whenever you try to control another person or a group of people, you will only run into problems.

V. 21 - I don't want to beat a dead horse here, but do the people around us tell us what we want to hear?

"Yes, be upset."

"Yes, they wronged you."

"If you don't do something now, it'll only get worse."

"They deserve this."

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CHAPTER 2 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 3 - "Let beauty treatments be given to them." My wife might sign up for this part. Especially if you can't bring any kids along!

Gonna be honest, this kind of sounds like an ancient version of *The Bachelor*. :) "Let's search the country for all the beautiful women to compete for one man's love!" Unlike *The Bachelor* though, most of these women would not have wanted to be part of this. They would have been forcibly taken away from their families and communities.

Xerxes continually views women as beautiful things to look at, yet this book is all about women being much more than that. By the end of this story, it won't be the beauty of these women that stands out, it will be their courage and intelligence.

V. 5 - Ancient history talks about a man named Mardukaya who served under King Xerxes. This could be the same person as Mordecai. Mordecai also means "little man." That's certainly how he starts out in this story, in comparison to the King & his advisors!

V. 6 - We are finally introduced to the main character of the book: Esther. Esther means "star" in Persian and that's why there is a star on the front of this book! Esther also has another meaning: "to hide" or "hidden." Like how God is hidden in this book.

V. 7 - "Hadassah." Hadassah means "myrtle tree" in Hebrew. The myrtle tree is mentioned a few times in the Bible, and the most important reference is in Isaiah (55:13 to be exact), where the myrtle tree is a sign of the greatness of God's name and that it will not be cut off or destroyed.

"Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful." People say the same thing about me! It gets old. God, keep me humble!

Mordecai adopted Esther. As a father who has adopted, it is always powerful to see these stories in the Bible. Adoption is so close to the heart of God. We see adoption in the story of Moses as well. To give a family to the father and mother-less. More than anything, we're told that God offers to fully adopt us as His sons and daughters.

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CHAPTER 2 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 9 - "Won his favor." This favor comes from God. The word favor means "to lift up." It's not about being God's favorite.

Something super interesting about the book of Esther is that God's name is never mentioned. Ever. Not once. Yet He's all throughout the story. The "favor" in Esther, where does it come from? It's not by chance or coincidence. It comes from God! The same is true of our lives. Whether or not we acknowledge or speak about God, doesn't change the fact that He's at work in and through all of our stories, orchestrating His overall good and perfect plan in our lives.

V. 10 - Naturally as humans we are so quick to talk. But in the book of Proverbs, Solomon calls this foolishness. Mordecai telling Esther not to speak is actually wisdom. This wisdom is foreign to our world.

There is so much wisdom in being quiet. There is wisdom in being patient. You don't have to say everything. You don't have to post everything. I've found that if you say "everything" people will hear nothing.

V. 12 - More beauty treatments! I think I need a spa day after reading this.

V. 15 - Esther is kind and leans on the people around her. Just by the way she carried herself, she was able to win over everyone around her. Do you win people over by your interactions with them, or do you push them away? Do people want to be around you, like they wanted to be around Esther?


This is one of the places in this book where God isn't mentioned by name, but if we're watching, we can see His hand. Out of all the women, Esther was the one the King chose to make his Queen. A Jew could never have become King of Persia, but Esther is made Queen. God's hand is at work to place Esther exactly where she needs to be!

V. 22 - Mordecai (not just Esther) is also being placed in the right place at the right time by the hand of God.

V. 23 - Mordecai does good for the King, but the opposite of good follows. His good actions seem to be forgotten. Like they don't matter at all. Why even bother? Some seeds take years to grow into trees. Keep planting. Keep doing good.

"Impaled on poles." No thank you!

NOTES





CHAPTER 3 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 1 - Every great story has a villain and one has finally entered the stage: Haman. Haman means "the magnificent."

Haman the Magnificent is an Agagite (a descendant of King Agag of the Amalekites). To say the Israelites and Amalekites didn't like each other would be an understatement! It was worse than the Bengals and the Pittsburgh Steelers!

The Amalekites attacked the Israelites in the wilderness and Exodus 17:15 says that the Israelites would be at war with them from "generation to generation." Haman would have definitely been aware of the animosity between his people and Mordecai's.

V. 2 - We are not really told why Mordecai wouldn't kneel to Haman. Did he not kneel to anyone but God? Would he not kneel to him because he was an Amalekite? Or is there personal beef between Haman and Mordecai? The story doesn't really tell us, but we have to admire Mordecai's courage. He did what he believed was right. He didn't push his beliefs on others, but he held onto his own convictions.

V. 5 & 6 - "he was enraged." In rage we always overreact. It would have been enough to just punish Mordecai and move on but Haman has to take it up another notch. He's angry and on a power trip. Mordecai's and Haman's people had beef. And Haman is about to bring down the hammer, on not just Mordecai, but on all Jews.

Have you ever found yourself doing a smaller version of this? You get mad and completely overreact? Yeah me neither. :)

V. 7 - "The pur was cast." Think of a pair of dice being rolled. It seems like random chance is dictating when the Jews will die, but instead it is the God of the universe who is ordering the events.

V. 8 - People who are easily offended infect others. They try their hardest to convince others. It's a virus. At times, we need to separate ourselves from these people: friends, news sources, influencers. Unfollow their Twitter accounts. Follow people who assume the best.

One talent is approximately 200 thousand dollars. 10 thousand talents is around 2 billion dollars. Not a bad investment into King Xerxes' 401k.

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CHAPTER 3 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 10 - Giving his signet ring was a way of giving Haman unlimited authority. King Xerxes might not be the villain of the story, but the author of Esther definitely presents him as incompetent. He fights with his queen, listens to bad advice, and now gives away his authority to an egomaniac.

V. 12 - The edict went out on the 13th day of Nisan. That was the day before Passover, when God saved the Israelites from death in Egypt by protecting them from the angel of death. Now the Israelites need God's intervention to save them again.

V. 15 - The King and Haman partied while the city was bewildered. Another way to say it was that the city was in an uproar. The leaders don't care about their people, instead they continue to drink and exert their control over them.

If you are a leader, do you care about the people you lead? Do you lead by control, or do you serve those that you lead?

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CHAPTER 4 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 1 - Don't forget that at one point, Mordecai saved the King's life. Yet this still happens. This was scary, horrible news. He grieved. He wasn't afraid to show emotion.

V. 3 - Over and over in the Bible, you see real grief: tearing of clothes, fasting, weeping, wailing. We try to hide our grief or move on from it as quickly as we can. But if we don't grieve well, we won't be the healthiest version of ourselves. We have a lot to learn from the Bible on this.

V. 5 - It would have been risky for Esther to send Hathak to talk with Mordecai. Mordecai was a Jew and he was hated by Haman. But Esther had won over all those around her because of her consistent character. Hathak was willing to go out and risk talking to Mordecai because of this.

V. 8 - Before it was time to be quiet, but now is the time to speak! Now is the time. It's not always clear when to speak up and when to be quiet. What should we do? It's critical to seek and ask God for His wisdom. Ask God for guidance. Talk with wise, godly friends. Trust God's timing. Before speaking (especially where there's so much in the balance), always stop and ask God!

V. 13 - Esther is a bit nervous to stand up to the King—who wouldn't be after what happened to Vashti in Chapter 1? But Mordecai reminds her that while it might be dangerous to approach the King, it's even more dangerous for all of Esther's people if she doesn't approach him.

This is so true in life, isn't it? It is often really difficult to do what is right, but we forget to think about the consequences that will come if we don't do what is right. Our character suffers, other people suffer. In the long run, we will never regret doing what is right.

V. 14 - You can't remain silent anymore. "For such a time as this." This is probably the most famous line in the whole story! Esther is a bit apprehensive, but Mordecai suggests that she might be queen for this very purpose! This is so powerful to think about, not just when it comes to Esther, but also in our own lives. What if God has you where you are right now for a very special purpose? Let's go!

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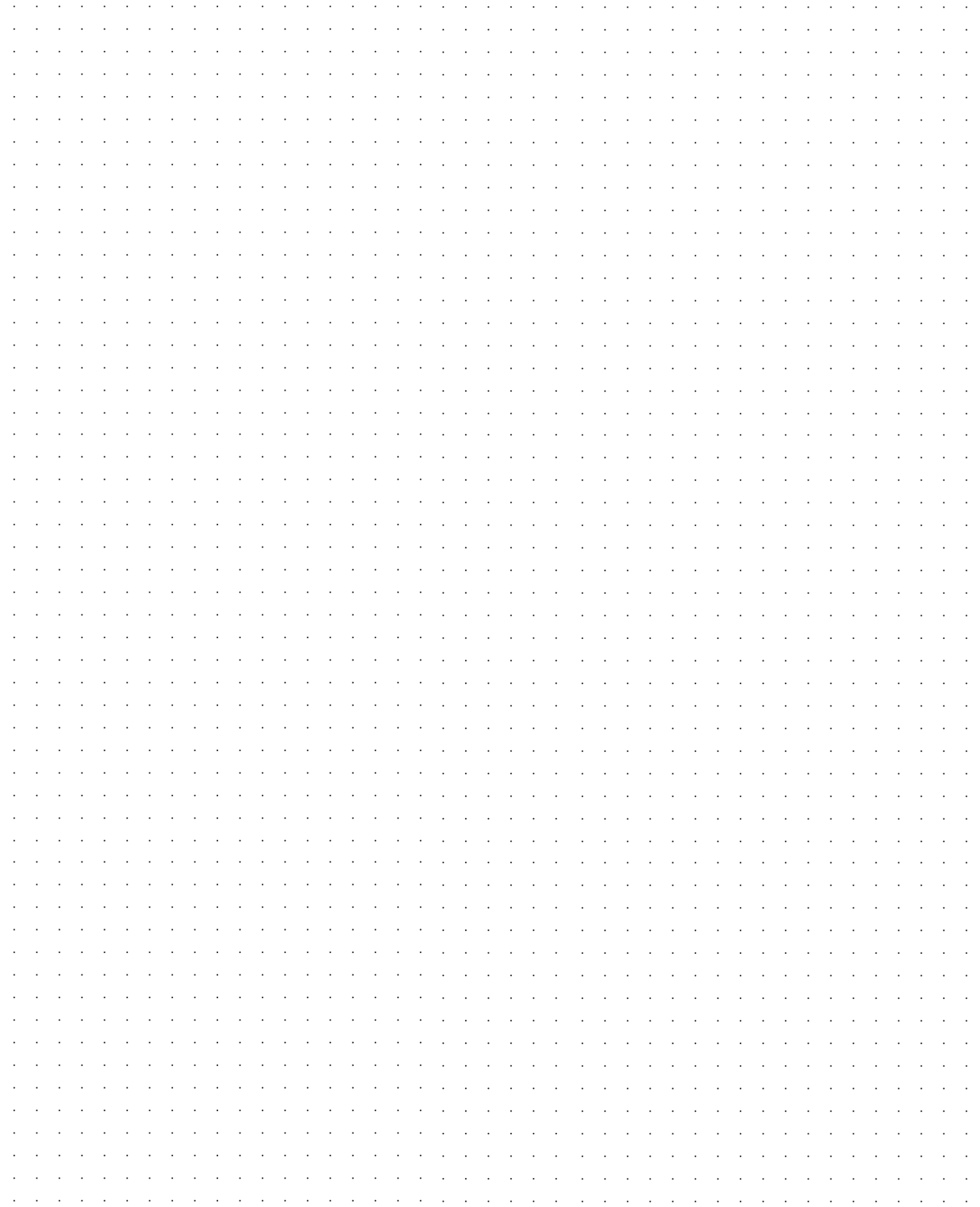
CHAPTER 4 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 15 & 16 - Esther says, I will go. I will step out. I'm willing to risk my life.

This is a critical point in the story. Esther has a choice to make: to say nothing in order to protect herself from the wrath of King Xerxes and try to keep her Jewish identity a secret, or to speak up and risk her life for the sake of all Jewish people in Persia. Both options are a risk to her own life, but the latter is a choice to trust God. And that is exactly what Esther decides to do.

Esther knows what she needs to do, but she doesn't just go do it. She prepares spiritually. Esther fasts and has the Jewish people do the same. Fasting is a reminder that even though we can't, God can. We can do little. God can do the impossible.

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CHAPTER 5 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 1 - Numbers and "the third day" specifically are significant throughout Scripture. Most notably, on the third day Jesus was resurrected.

V. 3 - The King gives Esther so much power and influence. More accurately, *God* gives Esther so much power and influence.

V. 5 - "Bring Haman at once." Esther doesn't ask the King to save the Jewish people right away. Her plan was to wait and reveal it at one of the parties she threw. Why did she wait? The story doesn't say. But maybe after prayer and fasting, God revealed this plan to her. It is one thing to take action but it is another thing to have the right plan and timing. Note to self: take action God's way, not your way!

V. 6 - These people really love their wine!

V. 7 - The tension builds! You think that Esther is going to ask the King to save her people, but she doesn't. Instead, she decides to throw another party the next day. The beginning of this book started out with two parties... the second party here would have been a signal to the original readers that the events of the first section are about to repeat, but will hopefully turn out differently for the Jewish people.

V. 9 - Haman's happiness obviously rests in being honored. He loves it when the King honors him, when Queen Esther honors him, but when he sees Mordecai—a man who doesn't honor him—his happiness instantly turns to rage. That sounds kinda extreme, but if you've ever had road rage, you might have something in common with Haman here. As I like to say, you need to check yourself before you wreck yourself!

V. 11 - Look at the things Haman boasts in: his wealth, his honor, his position. Jesus tells us that these are all things that moths and rust destroy (see Matthew 6:19). Be careful of getting too excited about these things in your life. They don't last!

V. 13 - Basically Haman is saying, "I can't be happy until Mordecai is gone."

Now, we'd most likely never go to the lengths Haman does, but how many of us can't be happy because of one specific person in our life? Someone who has wronged us, someone we're jealous of, someone that just annoys us? "I won't be happy until this person is out of my life!" This can end up consuming us if we let it. Or worse, it can end up destroying us!

Whenever we begin to think this way about someone, it should be a huge red flag in our lives. Danger. Warning. Bad things ahead.

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CHAPTER 6 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 1 - "Could not sleep" is literally translated as "The sleep of the King fled." Once again, this is the hand of God. God took away King Xerxes' sleep. And this will end up being a major turning point in the story.

Also, I've found that God does a lot of speaking to me in the middle of the night! Everything is quiet. There are no distractions. Maybe it's there that God can finally get our attention? When you wake up at night and can't fall back asleep, ask God to speak to you. You might be up for a reason.

I love that he reads about the "record of his reign" in the middle of the night. This guy is so full of himself. :) Maybe I need to start reading my own books to help me fall asleep? I'm sure my wife would love this! Or not... that actually sounds terrible!

V. 3 - God's timeline is often different from ours. Keep doing good and trust God with what comes from it. Keep planting good seeds. Keep doing good even when it seems like only bad things are coming your way. With God, nothing we do is wasted. It always comes to light!

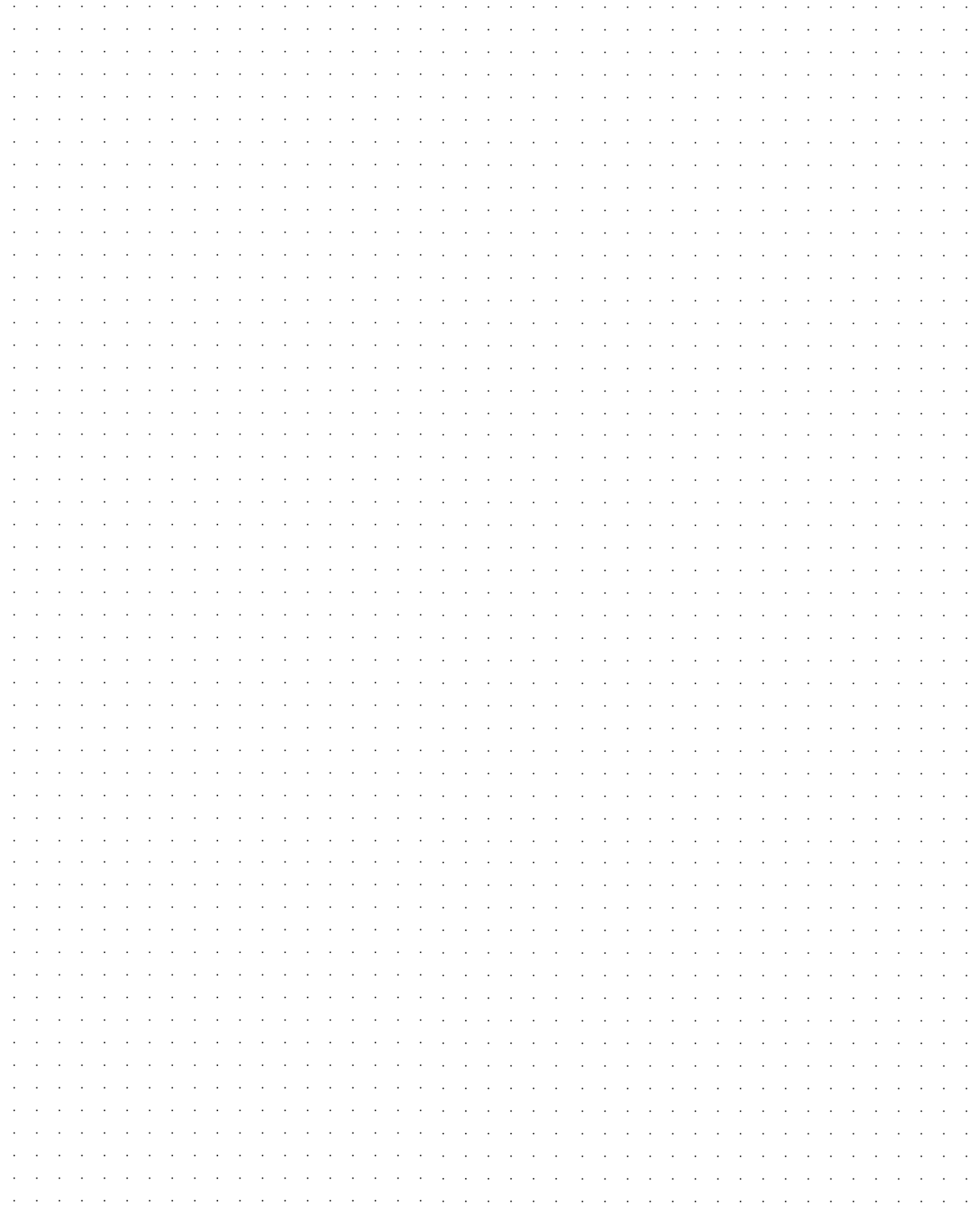
V. 6 - "Now Haman thought to himself." Ego. Pride. Arrogance. "The King is obviously thinking about me right?!? I mean, I totally deserve it!"

What if we actually treated, honored, and celebrated others the way that we think we should be treated, honored, and celebrated? How different would our world be?

Haman's arrogance blinds him. He thinks way too highly of himself and it is going to cost him big time. There is almost always a huge fall from pride and arrogance. It is just how the world works. Stay humble because pride will ruin you.

Pay attention to the differences between Haman and Mordecai in this exchange. Mordecai had done something great for the King, but he was never honored for it. Haman thought too highly of himself and tried to take honor that he didn't deserve. We need to be careful of thinking we deserve honor. Honor typically comes to those who do what is right and wait for it. Want to be honored? Let God take care of that! If you're concerned about honor, tell God about it. It's not your job to make sure you're receiving it.

NOTES



CHAPTER 6 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 7 - The honor that Haman has dreamed about ends up going to a man he despises. Think about the greatest honor you've ever received in your life. How would you feel if that was taken from you and given to the person you despise?

Jesus says unbelievable things like love your enemies and bless those who persecute you because he knows there is an amazing freedom that comes from blessing your enemy instead of destroying them.

Haman is an extreme example of what happens when we let resentment grow: death. It isn't always physical death, but things in our hearts and minds will begin to die. Things like peace, hope, kindness, or even our dreams begin to die.

V. 9 - Extravagance. Over the top!

V. 10 - "Do not neglect anything you have recommended." Do everything. Not for you, but for the one you hate! God's reckless love and grace is poured out!

V. 11 - Hahahaha I can't imagine! Maybe they should make candidates who lose political elections do this. Drive through the streets saying how amazing their opponent is. Best idea ever!

V. 12 - Haman's happiness has turned to total embarrassment. Haman's pride has been humbled. He goes home in grief. It can't get any worse... actually it can! And it does. Keep reading!

V. 13 - The very people who encouraged Haman to kill Mordecai are now saying there is nothing you can do to stop him.

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CHAPTER 7 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 2 - Esther can ask for anything she wants from the King of one of the most powerful empires in the world. What would you ask for in the same situation? It would be at least a little tempting to ask for something selfish, to ask for half the kingdom (or maybe an unlimited supply of vintage pens? Asking for a friend). Yet Esther's one request is to save her people.

V. 5 - "Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?" The first time reading this I thought the King was just really dense, that he already forgot that he allowed Haman to kill the Jews. But go back and read Esther 3:8. Haman never actually tells King Xerxes what group of people he wants to kill. He just calls them "a certain" group of people. Now that the King realizes these people are Esther's people, his rage towards Haman is intense.

V. 6 - The truth always comes to the surface. No matter how many lies we tell, no matter how much we try to manipulate the situation, the truth is always too powerful. And if you get by with lies in this life, you won't in your next life.

V. 7 - Haman is now begging the Jewish Queen for his life. He's pleading for mercy from a people group that he was so willing to wipe out. Mordecai wouldn't bow to Haman, but now Haman is basically on his knees begging Esther for his life. And he won't find mercy.

V. 8 - Things are really hitting the fan now. Haman is now accused of "molesting" Esther. Haman falsely accused the Jews at the beginning of the story, and now he is getting a taste of his own medicine.


V. 9 - Haman is killed by the very trap he set for Mordecai. It doesn't work to set traps for other people. It doesn't work to be manipulative and lie to get what you want. Oftentimes, the same manipulation, the same trap that we use on someone else, will end up being used on us.

Looking for revenge? Filled with hate? You can be certain God is *not* part of your plan. He's actually working against you! No matter how right and justified you feel. Especially out of an angry, arrogant, pride-filled heart, God is not on your side!

Nothing is more powerful than the hand of God.

V. 10 - How would our response change toward those we hate if we got the punishment we asked for them to receive? If we got the full brunt of revenge that we wished upon those we don't like?

NOTES





CHAPTER 8 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 1 & 2 - "The King took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman and presented it to Mordecai." This story is just full of redemption and reversals. "gave Esther the estate of Haman." "And Mordecai came into the presence of the King." Everything that Haman had is given to Esther and Mordecai. Everything bad that Haman planned for Mordecai happens to Haman.

This seems like the climax of the story. Haman is dead. Esther gets Haman's estate. Mordecai gets Haman's ring and the King's authority. All is good? All is right? Not quite!

V. 5 - This is wisdom. Esther makes sure not to blame the King for the edict. Instead she says that Haman was the one who devised this plan. Haman is the one who tricked the King. But overturning the edict was still going to be tricky. It was signed with the King's ring. That was a big deal. And of course, as we already know, King Xerxes doesn't want to look bad.

V. 6 - Esther spent so much time building her influence and we continue to see her use it. Not just for herself or her family, but for all Jewish people. Influence is a powerful tool. When you have good character and people trust you, they will often go to great lengths to help you when you really need it.

V. 7 - How wild is this?! Two Jewish people are now writing an edict to counteract the one that was meant to kill them. When you are going through a low place in life, never stop serving God. Never stop doing good. Trust that God will provide for you.

V. 8 - God gave her more than she asked for. "You write it." At the beginning of the book, Esther was quiet and in the background. It seems like she has very little influence in the things that happened to her. Now, it's an entirely different story! She is in control and has the influence and authority to determine what happens to others.

V. 11 - The Jews are given the right to assemble and protect themselves. More than anything, the right to worship. This was especially significant because they were outsiders, captives of war and exiles in Persia. They were the minority living in a country where most people worshiped different Gods.

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CHAPTER 8 | ADAM'S NOTES


V. 12 - The same day that Haman planned to kill the Jews. This would give the Jews the opportunity to act in self-defense if someone attacked them. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Some of this might seem harsh, but the Jews didn't ask for any of this. They were merely defending their families and their people. And if nobody would have attacked the Jews, then nothing would have happened.

The edict goes one step even further: if they are attacked, the Jews can "plunder" the property of their attackers. It seems like this edict is really trying to dissuade people from attacking the Jews. They could lose their life and all their property.

V. 17 - We talked earlier about how the Jews were good at grieving. They were also really good at throwing parties and festivals! We'll see this even more later.

And the most important part: many began to follow God because of it all. It brought people to God. God used it all for His glory.

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CHAPTER 9 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 3 - Mordecai is now a powerful leader with the support of the people. But crowds can sway. Crowds often aren't that smart, they simply follow the easiest route. When you have the support of the crowd, you can appreciate it, but be careful not to let your desire for popularity or praise control you the way it controlled Haman.

V. 4 - Mordecai was tested over and over. He was faithful. God spread the word about him.

V. 5 - This is really the climax of the story. The Jews would have never survived in Persia without God being on their side. The fact that the Jewish people were seeing victory can only be attributed to a God who cares deeply for His people. A God they could trust to provide for them. A God we can still trust to provide for us today.

V. 10 - They wiped out the 10 sons of Haman. Haman previously had bragged about his wealth, his property, and his sons. He has now lost it all.

V. 5-17 - Just to acknowledge the elephant in the room, there is a lot of violence in these verses. It's difficult to read this stuff and imagine it happening. Or even a step further, wrestling with the thought that God was involved in making it happen.

A few thoughts on this: for ancient readers of this story, violence and war would have been part of their lives. They wouldn't have viewed this in the same way we do today, as we've become more aware of the horrors of war.

Secondly, brokenness entered into the world as a result of humans sinning, choosing to not follow God. God is trying to write the best story He can, so the most people possible can experience His love while still allowing the free choices of sinful people. The story is messy but God is still good.

Lastly, as Christians we believe the fullness of God has been revealed in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is still true, but it was incomplete. Jesus brought us the full teaching, the full way of living, from God. It is obvious from Jesus' life and teaching that war and violence are not the heart of God. God longs for us to not kill our enemies, but to actually love and bless them.

Now this doesn't mean that sometimes war isn't necessary or that people shouldn't defend themselves. But in general, God doesn't desire violence. He loves the world and longs for all people to come to Him.

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CHAPTER 9 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 13 - Haman's sons are impaled on poles. Haman was the one who did evil, but his sons also paid the price. Our bad choices and sin never just impact us. Instead, it affects others. The people closest to us. Often our families. Our kids. Friends. Complete strangers!

V. 21 - The Feast of Purim is still celebrated today. It begins with a day of fasting, and then the Jews read the whole book of Esther to celebrate their deliverance from Haman. They also exchange gifts and are encouraged to give to the poor.

V. 22 - "Their sorrow was turned into joy." This is what God does. He doesn't promise us an easy life. But He does promise us joy and celebration. Our plan is different from His. Our timing is different than His. His outcome is not only different, it is better than ours.

It's so hard to trust when you are struggling with grief and sorrow, but hold onto the promise that God gives us in this story. He turned the Jews' sorrow into joy, and He can do the same thing with you.

V. 28 - The Jewish people are so good at celebrating with feasts. They do this as a way of always remembering what God has done. This is why we take communion in church. Every time we take communion it is a feast (I know it is a stretch to call those stale crackers and grape juice a feast!), to remember what God did through Jesus Christ on the cross. It is really cool to think about fellow Jesus followers taking communion for thousands of years to remember what Jesus did.

V. 31 - For them and their descendents. This always challenges me. What am I passing on to future generations? Am I passing on things that will have a lasting legacy in the lives of those that come after me? Am I taking time to remember what God has done in my life and to share those stories with my family and friends? To celebrate God's faithfulness? Esther and Mordecai passed on a feast that is *still* celebrated today!

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CHAPTER 10 | ADAM'S NOTES

V. 1 - Mordecai is a person who is faithful out of the spotlight. God elevates and brings him into the spotlight. Why? His focus isn't the spotlight. It's faithfulness.

V. 3 - Esther is really a story about responses. We can't always control the events of our lives (Mordecai couldn't. Esther couldn't.) But we can choose how we respond. And as Esther, Mordecai, Haman, and even the King show, our responses matter just as much as what happens to us.

Mordecai and Esther received power and wealth but they each worked for the good of their people. When we work for the good of others and use our power and influence for others, God will raise us up to do amazing things.

As you look at your job, your influence, your position, and even your finances, could you say that you are working for the good of others? Or just the good of yourself?

Haman used it all on himself. The King foolishly gave his away to others without discernment. Mordecai used his to point others toward God. Esther used it all for God and her people. What about you? Your glory or His?

Like we said at the beginning, God is not mentioned once in this whole story, but the hand of God is seen everywhere. The author of this book wants us to see that even when you don't see or hear from God, He is always still working. Does God seem absent from your story? Are you struggling to hear His voice or see His hand at work? Don't lose heart! He didn't leave Esther, Mordecai, or the Jewish people, and He won't leave you either! Keep trusting in Him. Keep following Him and doing what is right and God will always show Himself faithful to you.

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You did it!

You just read one of the most dramatic and captivating books of the Bible!

As you've read through this story, I pray you were reminded:

God comes through for His people.

He does and not just for Esther. God does this again and again all over the Bible. And to this day, He does the same for us too.

Even though this is true, sometimes it can be hard to see where God is or what God is doing in your life. It can feel like He's hiding, just like He's hidden in the book of Esther. But God is there and He is at work.

Whether this is the first book of the Bible that you've read through (and if it is, can I just mention how excited I am about that!?), or if you've been reading it for years, I'd encourage you to keep going!

Suggestions on where to read next?

Read through the Gospel of John.

Read through the book of Psalms. One psalm a day.

Or you can also check out several online devotionals I've created at iamembrace.com/devos.

Well done!

Adam

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