



**So, I looked for someone ... who
would stand in the gap before
me on behalf of the land**

WEEK THREE – ESTHER

***“Yet who knows whether you were born into the Kingdom for such a time as this?”
(Esther 4:14)***

It's worth the effort to read through the book of Esther before you start this study so that you have a better understanding of the background to and reasons for the subsequent events. It is recognised, along with the book of Ruth, as one of the most skilfully written biblical books. The leading character, Esther (or Hadassah), is a young Jewish girl living in Susa, capital city of Persia (modern-day Iran), an orphan but under the care of her uncle Mordecai, the other major character. Although many Jews had returned to their own land, others had remained in the country to where they had been exiled. These events happened from 483 BC to 473 BC when Xerxes (also known as Ahasuerus), was king of Persia. The king ruled over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia. We do not know who wrote the book but clearly it was a Jew who was familiar with Persian customs, possibly Ezra.

There is no actual mention of God in Esther which is unusual, but his presence is evident throughout.

This is an amazing account of someone who was prepared to take a huge risk, standing in the gap to save her people.

Read Esther chapter 1

It makes interesting reading and certainly doesn't fit in with our culture of equality between the sexes, in word, if not always in deed!

- What do the descriptions of the feast tell us about the king and his court, especially verses 7 and 8.
- Clearly the action of Queen Vashti in refusing to come to the feast was a massive insult to the king and court. Whilst she probably had some good reason, given it had been going on for seven days, her actions set in motion in an incredible series of events.

Read Esther chapter 2

Although it does not say exactly how she became one of the young women chosen as a possible bride for the king, her behaviour tells us something about her character. It also shows us Mordecai's love and concern for Esther.

- What made her stand out in that group of women? Can we learn from this?
- Why do you think Mordecai told her not to reveal her origins? Does this remind you of events in our modern world?
- We read that the king loved Esther more than any of the other women brought before him and she was made queen.

I think the second half of the chapter teaches us a lot about obedience. In today's world we are very aware of our 'rights', but sadly not always as thoughtful about our responsibilities. We can also learn from this, that if we acknowledge God in our lives, whilst honouring our family, then he will honour us.

It was at this point that Mordecai, who was keeping a watching brief on Esther from the king's gate heard of a plot to assassinate the king. Passing the information to Esther, she informed the king of the plot discovered by Mordecai, thereby probably saving his life.

Read Esther chapter 3

Enter Haman. The king had set this man above all the other princes and everyone was obliged to kneel and honour him, but one man refused. Mordecai refused to acknowledge Haman who was enraged by this and looked for a way to destroy not only Mordecai but all Jews in the province.

- What does his anger tell us about Haman and his attitudes?
- Notice how he influences King Xerxes in verse 8. He was a manipulator of the first order. We should look at our own lives to ensure we don't try to do this. It is so easy to twist God's word to try and influence people. It is important to make sure our motives are pure in everything we do.
- We often say that history repeats itself because we never learn the lessons. Read verse 13 again. Of what does this remind us?

Read Esther chapter 4

When Esther was made aware of the terrible situation for the Jews, she was extremely distressed and asked Mordecai what she could do. He told her to go to the king, something you were not allowed to do unless summoned by him. When she tried to wriggle out of this, it is then that Mordecai lays it on the line: ***“Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 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." Then comes the clincher: *"Yet who knows whether you were born into the Kingdom for such a time as this?"*

Many years ago I had a friend who was a Canon in Singapore and if you were reluctant to do what he asked he would say: *"If you won't do it for me then do it for God"* – we described it as spiritual blackmail but he was hard to refuse. We, like Esther, are often reluctant to respond to what God is calling us to do, but God knows what he is doing and if he's called us, then he will equip us for the task.

For Esther, it was the 'finger in the dyke' moment. A life changing, and potentially life-threatening situation.

- Read Esther's response to Mordecai in verses 15 and 16, remembering she is still a relatively young girl.
- I can't help but think of another young girl, Mary, when the angel came and told her she would bear a son by the Holy Spirit in Luke 1:38 when she says: *"Let it be to me according to your word."*
- When those difficult times come in our lives, and they always do, pray that we may have the grace to accept the Lord's will. You can probably think of times in the past when this has happened.
- The Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:27 says: *"But even if my life is to be poured out like a drink offering to complete the sacrifice of your faithful service (that is, if I am to die for you), I will rejoice, and I want to share my joy with all of you."* This is 'standing in the gap'.

Read Esther chapters 5 and 6

We read at the end of chapter 4, that Esther asked Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Susa to fast for the days and nights, and she and her maids would do likewise.

- This action was, I believe, pivotal in bringing about the survival of the Jews in Persia. If we want God to answer our prayers, sometimes we must show him we really mean business.
- Esther's God given plan was put into operation. The king extended the royal sceptre to her when she came, uninvited, into his presence. That must have taken much courage.

I love how it says in chapter 6 when the king couldn't sleep, he asked for the book of the records of the chronicles to read to him. Having learned of Mordecai's role in saving his life, he wanted to know what had been done to honour him. We don't have

to tell people, or remind them, what we have done for God as he will honour us in his way and in his time. People may not notice or may forget, but not God.

One of my father's favourite expressions when we had disobeyed him was: *"To every man that sins comes a nemesis."* Fortunately, God, through the death of Jesus has provided a way of escape. Haman however, believing he was to be exalted even further in the kingdom, was given a rude awakening when he suffered the very death he had ordained for Mordecai.

Read Esther chapters 7, 8 and 9

Esther now stepped into the role destined for her. She stood in the gap for the Jewish people of Persia. It was a risk to ask the king to revoke his previous decree, but she knew that she was the only means of saving her people. And so, the king agreed to her request.

Mordecai encouraged all the people to celebrate the great victory by having a day of feasting and gladness known as the Feast of Purim.

- When God does something for us, let us always remember to give thanks.

Prayer:

Father God, may we daily remember to give you thanks for your great salvation and always be willing to step into the role you have for us.



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