



*This guide is provided to help facilitate a clear understanding of the Bible passage with a focus on applying God's truth to our lives as individuals and as a group. Therefore, spend at least half your time discussing questions that are application focused. While the guide has been bulked up, you still need to prepare by praying through the passage, reviewing the guide on your own, and thinking about how your group might answer questions and follow-up questions.*

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## Summary of Esther

The book of Esther is set in Susa, Babylon, 100 years after Israel's exile. Whilst some Jews had returned to Jerusalem, others chose to remain in Susa; of which Esther and Mordecai, the protagonists of the story, were amongst. Within this story, God seems completely absent - there is no mention of him, and no overt demonstration of his miraculous power. Further, Esther and Mordecai, are unlikely protagonists with their moral ambiguity representative of a people that have compromised their lives, and have abandoned God's law. Yet, in the midst of this seeming hopelessness, God is amazingly at work to fulfil his covenant promise. In an ironic reversal, God uses imperfect people, returning to faith in the midst of cultural oppression and persecution, to see his purposes fulfilled and his Kingdom come.

## Introduction

The book opens with a description of the rule of King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) who has immense power, but with it, great folly. Through his folly God sees to it that Esther, a Jew, is made queen over Persia. Although God is seemingly absent, he is nonetheless clearly at work to fulfil his purposes even in the midst of sin and brokenness.

## Structure of passage

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|---------|---|
| 1:1-9   | The King's Banquet <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A display of the King's authority and power</li><li>- A display of the King's opulence and indulgence</li></ul>  |
| 1:10-22 | Queen Vashti and her refusal to the King's response <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Queen Vashti's refusal to the King</li><li>- The King's anger kindled; Queen Vashti deposed</li><li>- The King's haste and foolish response</li></ul> |
| 2:1-18  | Esther chosen as Queen <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A successor for Queen is sought</li><li>- Esther finds favour with the King</li><li>- Esther appointed as Queen</li></ul>  |

## Getting to Christ

God is sovereign over evil, and nothing can thwart his plans to redeem humanity. Although king Xerxes and Haman are conduits for evil, God sovereignly works in amongst an evil and seemingly hopeless situation to save his people. This is akin to the cross. Despite the evil that saw Christ crucified, and the apparent loss to earthly powers, God in his sovereign will, used it as a means to redeem humanity, and established Christ as the true and triumphant king.

## Big Idea

God's people find themselves in a very broken world where it may seem that God's purposes are forgotten and not being worked out. Further, God's people might find themselves living compromised lives in such a context. Yet, God has a plan for his people, and wants to redeem their compromised lives for his purposes and his kingdom.

## What Your CG Must Take Away From This Study

- 1) For your group to know that God is at work, his purposes being realised, and his people not forgotten, even in the midst of a very broken world.
- 2) For your group to understand that worldly wisdom and power is diametrically opposed to God's wisdom and power. God reigns, so his people should respond faithfully to God.
- 3) For your group to know that God can and will use broken and imperfect people to fulfil his perfect plan, redeeming compromised lives and in so doing, redeeming humanity.

**Read Esther 1:1-9**

**1** Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, **2** in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, **3** in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, **4** while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days. **5** And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. **6** There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones. **7** Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. **8** And drinking was according to this edict: "There is no compulsion." For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired. **9** Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.

Q1. Where and when is the book of Esther set?

Q2a. What do we learn about King Ahasuerus' (Xerxes) power and wealth?

Q2b. In our world today, how is power and authority displayed? What is typically associated with power?

Q3a. How would you describe the culture and way of living of the time? What challenges would it have presented to the Jewish people of the time? (v8)

Q3b. Consider the world you live in today, and your specific contexts. In what ways do you find it challenging to faithfully follow Christ?

**Read Esther 1:10-22**

**10** On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, **11** to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. **12** But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

**13** Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment, **14** the men next to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom): **15** "According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?" **16** Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, "Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. **17** For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.' **18** This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty. **19** If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. **20** So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike." **21** This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. **22** He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people.

Q4. What was King Ahasuerus' view towards women?

Q5a. Why did King Ahasuerus find Queen Vashti's refusal so infuriating?

Q5b. How does the Queen's refusal, highlight the irony of the king's "authority"?

Q6a. How does King Ahasuerus behaviour and actions demonstrate his foolishness and lack of wisdom?

Q6b. Read and reflect on Philippians 2:5-11. How would you contrast Jesus' kingship, rule, and reign, with King Ahasuerus'?

**Read Esther 2:1-18**

After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. **2** Then the king's young men who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. **3** And let the king appoint officers in all the

provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them. **4** And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so.

**5** Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, **6** who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away. **7** He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. **8** So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa the citadel in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women. **9** And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food, and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace, and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem. **10** Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. **11** And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.

**12** Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women— **13** when the young woman went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. **14** In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

**15** When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. **16** And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, **17** the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. **18** Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.

Q7. Who are Esther and Mordecai - their heritage, and the nature of their relationship?

Q8a. What measures did Esther and Mordercai take to conceal their heritage and assimilate with the culture?

Q8b. Through their actions, how did Esther and Mordercai compromise their faith in God?

Q9a. Although God is not explicit, how does this text shows that God is sovereign and active?

Q9b. Has there been a time where you felt God was absent? How did you assure yourself of the reality of God's presence?

Q10. How does reflecting upon God's sovereignty in using Esther and Mordecai, assure you in your faith and ministry?

**Apply Practically**

In what ways are you being challenged to remain faithful to God in a challenging context and/or environment? In your shortcomings, how have you been discouraged to remain faithful to God? How have you fallen short?

Pray and encourage one another, that despite your context and shortcomings, you would be empowered by God and rest in his grace.