

LESSONS THIS QUARTER

1) 07 Dec	Esther 1-3	Deliverance is Needed
2) 14 Dec	Esther 4-10	God Provides Deliverance
3) 21 Dec	Luke 2	God Provides a Savior
4) 28 Dec	Ezra 1-6	God Ordains Restoration
5) 04 Jan	Ezra 7-10	God Commands Obedience
6) 11 Jan	Nehemiah 1-2	God Inspires the Work
7) 18 Jan	Sanctity of Life	Protect Human Life
8) 25 Jan	Nehemiah 6	Be Faithful in Adversity
9) 01 Feb	Nehemiah 7	Do Your Appointed Part
10) 08 Feb	Nehemiah 8	Get an Understanding
11) 15 Feb	Nehemiah 9	Return to the Restoring God
12) 22 Feb	Nehemiah 10-13	Commit Your Way to the Lord
13) 29 Feb	Nehemiah 3-5	Establish Justice in God's Community

INTRODUCTION

- Who stands a better chance to serve God to the fullest?
 - Someone living the life of luxury? e.g., Job
 - A wheelchair-bound quadriplegic?..... Joni Eareckson Tada
 - An impoverished widow?Widow w/ 2 mites
 - An unwilling sex slave locked in a harem Esther
- No matter what situation we find ourselves in, God can use us to accomplish His will – if we are willing to be used

Author: The Book of Esther does not specifically name its author. The most popular traditions are Mordecai (Esther's cousin), and Nehemiah (who would have been familiar with Persian customs), or Ezra who compiled it from another primary source.

History: Esther appeared about 40 years after the Temple was rebuilt and about 30 years before the Wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt. Persian records do not contain references to Esther or Mordecai, but the detailed descriptions of practices and customs in the book are archeologically and historically accurate. The action in the book would have taken place around 483-471 BC. The Book of Esther was likely written between 460 and 350 BC. Esther, in all probability, made it possible for Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the Wall.

Quote from Luther: "I am so hostile to this book (II Maccabees) and to Esther that I would wish they did not exist at all; for they Judaize too greatly and have much pagan impropriety." Table Talk, XXIV (Note. Luther also had problems accepting the Book of James)

Question on Canonicity:

- Apocryphal Insertions:** Esther in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) has six extra paragraphs inserted at various places. In the Vulgate these are all removed to the end of the book. English versions omit them entirely, or remove them to an Apocrypha section.
- Esther is not quoted in the NT. But neither is Judges, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Nahum, Obadiah, or Haggai.
- All the books of the Old Testament, except for Esther, were found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (including many apocryphal books)
- Our OT books were definitively established (or recognized) as 'canon' for Jews by Jews by the second century AD.
- Romans 3:1-2:** *Then what advantage has the Jew? First of and foremost, they were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

Other Opening Comments

- Life is not fair – bad things happen to good people
- God can still work wonders, and we can still do His will even in ungodly situations and in ungodly relationships
- Is Esther a willing princess or an unwilling sex slave?
 - Probably a little bit of both – and she learned well
- Banquets.** Feasting is a major theme of this book. There are ten recorded banquets, and many of the events were planned, plotted or exposed at these banquets.

- Esther's dreams of marrying a Jewish man of her choice and raising a family to honor God are shattered
- She is forced into a harem to compete for the affections of an unpredictable, unreasonable, unruly and selfish king
- She dutifully accepts her new position in life with gusto, not only to survive – but to thrive! This prepares her to accomplish big things for God – who's seemingly working behind the scenes
- God is not mentioned once in the Book of Esther

Leading Characters	
Esther	• She saves the Jewish race from near annihilation
Mordecai	• Esther's older cousin who raised her & guided her
Xerxes	• King of Persia who was noted for unruly behavior
Queen Vashti	• Deposed queen who scorned her king
Haman	• A power-hungry Persian official who hated Jews
God	• Not mentioned once, but worked providentially behind the scenes to save His chosen people

Passage	Comments
Esther 1:1-12	<p>Sovereignty of God</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> God can use wicked men, wicked nations, and wicked situations to accomplish His will A lavish party that lasted 6 months started the process v8. King A. seemed reasonable here since he did not force people to do things against their wish (e.g., drink) vv10-12. Men can be such brutes to women, even when sober. Did Vashti [or Amestris (Grk)] do right? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some commentaries say Queen V. was to parade before these drunken men wearing "only" her crown – and she refused out of prudence or modesty It took 7 eunuchs to try to fetch the Queen. Don't know if all 7 went at once or if they went in order
1:13-22	<p>Watch What Wisdom You Chose To Listen To</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vashti was more of a sex-object than a help-mate King's request was selfish, inconsiderate, and possibly immoral to have her parade before drunks v13. Was the wisdom to replace Vashti by the king's counselors ("who understood the times") God-driven? Doing the right thing can get one crucified, but we still need to do it – right?
2:1-9	<p>The World's Ways Can Be Harsh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why was Mordecai & Esther in Susa and not part of the Israelite return to Jerusalem w/ Ezra? Don't know – again, God's providence v7. God endowed Esther with "beauty in form and face" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are looks everything? In this story, it seemingly is. Esther, by the King's edict, was 'taken' from her family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No longer able to marry someone of her choice Must be part of a harem Must adapt to foreign customs (dietary, behavior, and eventually go to bed with a man not of her choosing. AND, if she displeased him, or if someone better came along, she was secluded from ever having the joys of a marriage or a family)
2:10-18	<p>Esther Makes The Best Of Her Situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> She heeds good advice – from Mordecai (v10) and from Hegai (v15) v15-18. She seems to fully accept her lot and works hard to achieve success – and gets it v15. She charms all who meet her vv16-17. She won the contest to please the King

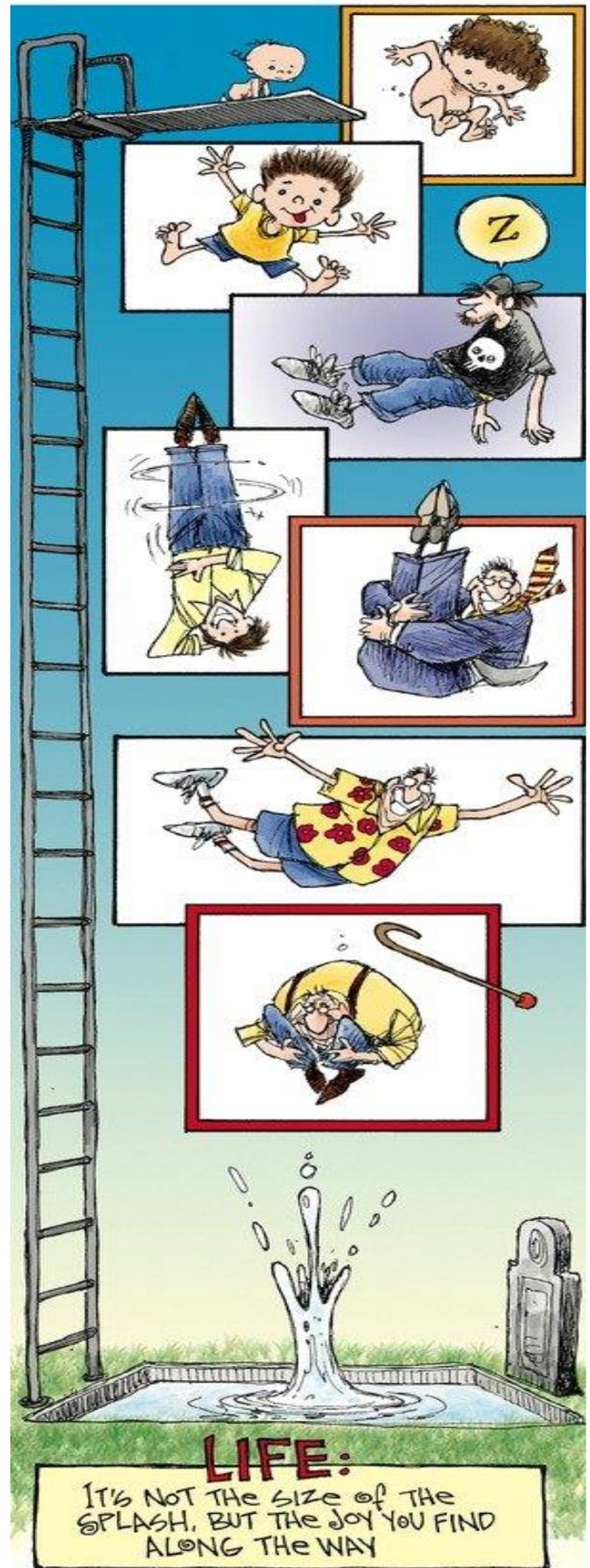
Passage	Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is Esther in a godly marriage or an alternative lifestyle? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The King has many wives and concubines This does not short-change God to work His work Esther is able to be used to accomplish God's will
Tough Illustration	If you were caught up in human trafficking and were forced to live as a prostitute – would you become the best hooker around? Is this what Esther did?
2:19-23	The Plot Thickens <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mordecai is a faithful & trusted Govt worker – though he's part of a conquered people (i.e., Nehemiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego) Mordecai leveraged his ties w/ cousin Esther to save the King's life
3:1-6	Maintaining Testimony Impacts Society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The wicked often look for an excuse to fight Pride gets in the way, and they don't consider the consequences of their actions Lam 1:9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Haman transferred his hate of 1 person to a nation Mordecai showed honor to the King – except for the commandment to give homage to Haman. Should he not have given honor to whom honor is due?. Rom 13:7 There is nothing wrong for Jews to bow down to others (Gen 23:7;27:29; 1Sam 24:8; 2Sam 14:4; 1Kg 1:16) At best, other factors were at work. Haman, an Agagite/Amalekite, was a sworn enemy of the Jews Mordecai may have been heeding God's higher command to dishonor Agagites/Amalekites . Deut 25:19 If Mordecai had bow'd down to Haman, would the Jews still be threatened with national annihilation?
Agagites / Amalekites (the race of Haman):	They attempted to stop the Israelites when they marched out of Egypt and through their territory (Deut 25:18) attacking them frequently (Ex 17:8-16; Num 14:45). We read of them in league with the Moabites (Jud 3:13) and the Midianites (Jud 6:3). God told the Jews to utterly wipe out the Amalekites – men, women, children, and animals (Deut 25:17-19; 1Sam 15:2-3). Saul finally desolated their territory and destroyed their power (1Sam 14:48) but he lost his kingdom due to failure to annihilate them utterly (1Sam 15); and David battled them to save his family and recovered war booty from them (1Sam 30:18-20).
3:7-15	Conspiracy & Manipulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> v8. Jews were noted for their isolation and separation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...and certain critical facts were hidden from the king v9. 10,000 talents of silver to be paid to the king for this genocide (probably gleaned from dead Jews) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equivalent to 340 tons, \$13.50/ounce = \$1.5B v15. The king was far removed from feeling anguish for his people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> God is not hampered by confusion & chaos

CONCLUSION / APPLICATIONS / BENEFITS

- The true essence of this book is how God providentially works behind the scenes to accomplish His will
- Esther realizes and accepts her role as a pawn – who might be sacrificed to accomplish ultimate victory for God's chosen people
- Esther was godly and teachable and showed great strength and willing obedience

NEXT WEEK: Esther 4-10. The issue the Jews were faced with was bigger than they were. They needed God's help, and they apparently got it by fasting. Fasting didn't weaken God's knees to bend to their whims and wishes, rather fasting humbled them to bow before God and trust Him working through the circumstances providentially.

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