

ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

God's Invisible Providence

Survey of Esther

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

God's invisibility in no way nullifies or even hinders His invincibility. He may slip behind the scenes and out of view, but He is always at work accomplishing His will. As the psalmist declared, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3 NASB) and

*Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,
In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.
(135:6 NASB)*

In the book of Esther, we find the majestic interweaving of God's invisibility with His invincibility—His silence with His power. Though the name of God is absent in this book, His finger threads every word on its pages. In fact, God often chooses to work in this way today. He may be silent to you right now, but He is there at work just as He worked in Esther's life almost 2,500 years ago. Let's find out how.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

With this first *Searching the Scriptures* study on Esther, we begin our spiritual adventure, exploring the ways of God in human affairs. However, before we start, it's helpful to gain an *overview* of the book's background and message.

You may consider adding resources to your library to supplement your study of Esther. We recommend *The Swindoll Study Bible*, Chuck Swindoll's book *Esther: A Woman of Strength and Dignity*, and a commentary like *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Also, a Bible dictionary such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* or a Bible atlas like the *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible* proves invaluable for mining the treasures of God's Word.

Quotable

*God's presence
is not nearly as
eloquent as His
absence. His voice,
as important as
it is, is not nearly
as intriguing as
His silence.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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The events of Esther took place between 483 and 473 BC in Susa, the capital city of Persia. King Xerxes, known as Ahasuerus in the book of Esther, ruled Persia from 486 to 465 BC and serves as a key character in Esther. The table below places the events of the book of Esther in the context of Old Testament history.

Overview of Biblical History	
Moses received the law on Mount Sinai.	c. 1446 BC
Kings David and Solomon reigned over the united kingdom of Israel.	1010–931 BC
The kingdom of Israel divided into northern and southern kingdoms.	c. 930 BC
Assyria conquered the northern kingdom.	722 BC
Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and exiled inhabitants of the southern kingdom.	c. 586 BC
Persia defeated Babylon, and Cyrus released an edict for exiles to return home.	539 BC
Events of Esther	483–473 BC

Scholars aren't certain who wrote Esther, but the author was familiar with the Persian court—and was likely an eyewitness. Because the Jews in Susa chose not to return to their homeland following the edict of Cyrus (539 BC), the author answered a major theological question in his day: "Does Yahweh still care for those Jews not in Jerusalem?" Based on the events of the book of Esther, the answer to that question is yes! To this day Jews hold a festival each year called Purim to remember God's faithfulness to His people when He delivered them from evil, as recorded in the Esther story ([Esther 9:26–27](#)).



Searching the Scriptures Tip

Context, context, context. We always want to understand Bible passages in the correct context. We should think about the immediate context of a passage, the passage's context within its biblical book, and then the passage's context within the whole Bible. In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll explains in detail his four-step Bible study method which consists of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. A strong grasp of the passage's context produces a firm interpretation. This helps us apply the truths of Scripture to our lives. When performing a deep study of a book of the Bible, it's best to do a full read-through before examining each paragraph. This helps us develop a sense of context. So that's what we will do with Esther.



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Observation: Scanning the Story

Before our read-through, peruse this helpful chart Chuck assembled to assist our study of Esther. Notice the flow of events, the main characters, and the theme of the book.

ESTHER

God's providence among His people during . . .						
Hard Times				Happy Times		
King's Banquet	Haman's Edict	Esther's Courage	God's Deliverance	Mordecai's Edict	Jews' Rejoicing	Shalom!
Honoring the kingdom		Urging of Mordecai	Mordecai honored		Enemies destroyed	
Honoring the new queen		Approaching the king	Haman hanged		Feast established	
CHAPTERS 1-2	CHAPTER 3	CHAPTERS 4-5	CHAPTERS 6-7	CHAPTER 8	CHAPTER 9	CHAPTER 10
Circumstances	Threat and trust			Deliverance and praise		
Feasts	of the king	of the queen		of the nation		
Dates	483 BC			473 BC		
Theme	The sovereign accomplishment of God's purposes through ordinary people and apparent coincidences					
Key Verses	4:12-16; 10:3					
Christ in Esther	Pictured in Esther, who was an advocate for her people and was even willing to die for them					

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Now that you see the story's direction, let's read it. Esther consists of ten chapters, so you may divide it into two readings for the weekend or five readings, two for each day of the week. If you can read it in one sitting, even better! Don't worry about details or trying to answer questions. Just read and notice how God worked behind the scenes for the good of His people. It's helpful to jot down a few notes during this reading because it keeps your mind engaged.



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Interpretation: Learning the Characters

For this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we will not examine any verse in detail. We simply want to take a moment to become familiar with key terms. In his book *Searching the Scriptures*, Chuck stated that the serious interpreter is a thorough student—not one who briskly finishes homework with cursory glances from page to page. The interpreter digs deeply to develop a mature understanding of the Word with the aim of developing a strong spiritual life.

If you own a Bible dictionary, now is the time to pull it from the shelf. If you don't, we recommend buying *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. For an online alternative, consult "*Encyclopedia of the Bible*," at Biblegateway.com. Let's research the following terms and record a few notes on them.

Xerxes or Ahasuerus (*Esther 1:1*)

Susa (*1:2*)

Persia (*1:3*)



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Vashti ([Esther 1:9–12](#))

Mordecai ([2:5–7](#))

Esther ([2:7](#))

Haman ([3:1](#))

Purim ([9:26–27](#))



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Correlation: Exploring Our God

The author of Esther did not want us to read the book isolated from God's work in biblical history. He wanted us to remember God's promises to Abraham, His deliverance in the exodus, and His work through the kings and prophets. Without other books in the Bible, we wouldn't be able to see the hand of Providence through both the hard and the happy times of the Jews who remained in Susa.

Chuck brings a few passages to our attention on the sovereign work of our God to help us prepare for our immersion in Esther. Let's look at them and take some notes on God's character and power as conveyed in each passage.

Isaiah 55:8–9

Daniel 4:34–37

Romans 11:33–36



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Application: Embracing the Story

After reading through Esther, we can apply the book through reflection.

Be Quiet

Because the immortal and invisible One is constantly at work in the world, take time to be quiet and ponder how God has worked in your life. Write down what comes to mind.

Be Convinced

Not only has the Sovereign Lord worked in your past, but He is currently working in your present. No matter your circumstances, God is God and He is a good God who loves you (*Romans 8:31–39*). Take a moment to write a prayer of your confidence in Him—whether your current lot be trying or easy—and express your petitions in Jesus' name.

Have confidence, dear friend. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32 NASB). What a comfort to know that “nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God” (8:39)! Yes, all your circumstances—even your troubles—are preparing for you an “eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” to this life (2 Corinthians 4:17 NASB).



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Searching the Scriptures Wrap-up

Write one sentence to *summarize* this lesson.

Write down one thing to *remember* about God.

Write down one way you can *respond* to God's Word.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You move in mysterious ways performing Your wonders across the earth, the work of Your hands. I will not fear when dark clouds form above my head, and I give thanks for the bright days You give me. Please increase my faith in You and my understanding of You as I continue living under Your smiling providence, awaiting the day when I see Your Son's face in glory. In Jesus' name, amen.



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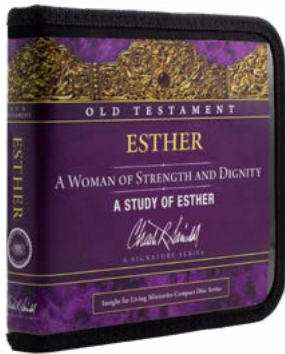
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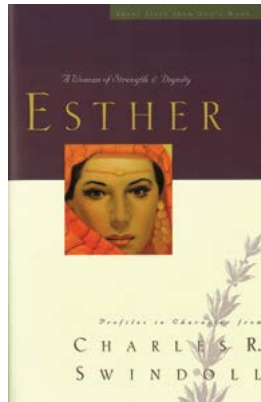
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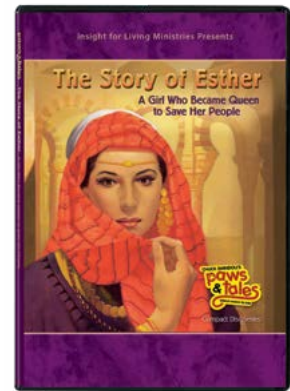
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

Esther 1:1–2:7

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Most days begin rather predictably: the alarm clock rings, we get out of bed, and then we flip on the light to start our morning routine. Yet God is a specialist in working His sovereign plan through the mundane . . . even through the most secular of people and situations.

When King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes in the New Living Translation), happy from much wine, ordered Queen Vashti to show her beauty to his guests, he met only her rejection. She refused to parade herself before a roomful of inebriated men (Esther 1:12).

In this study, Chuck Swindoll teaches us how God orchestrated this moment of marital friction into a melodious movement of providence to exalt an ordinary Jewish woman. We'll gain wisdom and confidence knowing that God's plans can never be frustrated no matter how carnal or godless the leaders of this world may be.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study on [Esther 1:1–2:7](#), we will observe how the author moves our gaze from the royal family of the Persian Empire to an orphaned Jew, who “was beautiful of form and face” (Esther 2:7 NASB). You may want to grab your copy of our previous study, “God’s Invisible Providence,” to reference dates, Chuck’s book chart, or your notes on key terms in Esther.

Quotable

*God is a
specialist in
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mundane into
the meaningful.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

Esther 1:1–2:7

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Searching the Scriptures Tip

The narratives in the Bible can be a feast for our senses. In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck tells us how to study the Bible using the method he's employed throughout his ministry. The steps are observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. In observation, he encourages us to read with our eyes, ears, nose, hands, and tongue. Engage all your senses! Make it fun. Make it real. Sense the emotion. Slow down and enter the world of the author. As you observe *Esther 1:1–2:7*, notice the designs on the gold goblets, touch the linen curtains on the silver rings, smell the perfumes, and feel the heartache of the young women taken from their homes.



Observation: Reading Slowly

When we observe what the Bible says, we pay attention to the author's words—repeated words, conjunctive or disjunctive words, conceptual words, sensory words, and contrasting words. With these studies we want to help you read slowly and carefully as you observe God's Word. In narratives like our passage, authors use abstract ideas and then convey concrete words. With the abstract, the author *reveals* his intent in writing and how he *feels* about the subject. With the concrete, the author *illustrates* his intent.

A Casual Glimpse into a Persian Palace—*Esther 1:1–9*

Read *Esther 1:1–9*. Verses 1–3 provide a snapshot of the time and place of the book and describe the characteristics of King Ahasuerus' reign. How do verses 5–8 relate to verse 4?

Read 1:9. Where was Vashti?



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

Esther 1:1–2:7

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A Royal Conflict and a Royal Edict—Esther 1:10–22

In this section of the passage, the author described even more specifically the events of the king's party. Read Esther 1:10–22. What did Ahasuerus command, and how did Vashti respond?

What did Memucan advise the king to do after Vashti's refusal?

How did the king respond?

A Lonely King and an Obscure Woman—Esther 2:1–7

The author then introduced the main character by connecting her story with the story of King Ahasuerus. Read [Esther 2:1–7](#). What did the king's attendants propose to the king, and how did the king respond?



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

Esther 1:1–2:7

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Lastly, the author turned from the subject of all the young women being brought to Ahasuerus' harem to one woman in particular—Esther. Write down what verses 5–7 reveal about Esther.



Correlation

We correlate a passage by comparing it with others in the Bible—in this case, the book of Esther with the book of Proverbs. While reading this first part of Esther, we may think, *Where is God?* But notice how the king made his decisions. He listened to Memucan and to nameless attendants (Esther 1:21; 2:4). Their advice pleased Ahasuerus, and he acted according to his pleasure. Even though no one can comprehend “all that goes on in the king’s mind” (Proverbs 25:3), “The king’s heart is like a stream of water directed by the LORD; / he guides it wherever he pleases” (21:1). God directed Ahasuerus—despite the king’s carnal desires—and influenced the outcome for His renown and for the good of His people.



Interpretation: Understanding Clearly

Once we’ve read the author’s words, we then seek to understand what they mean. Because we likely live in a culture different from biblical cultures, we must avoid imposing our modern-day opinions on the Bible. Rather, we must try to think as the author thought. Sometimes interpreting a narrative is tricky because the author portrayed what happened without giving the direct meaning. So we must look for clues. Clues may be summary statements, authorial commentary, or simply the space the author devoted to a topic.

Look at the space the author devoted to the king’s banquet in *Esther 1:5–8*. What did the author emphasize here?



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There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

Esther 1:1–2:7

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Lest we think the queen was with Ahasuerus, the author revealed in Esther 1:9 that Vashti gave a banquet for the women. A historian named Herodotus, who lived in the same century as Esther, shared that a Persian once boasted to him, saying, “It is our custom in Persia to get our wives and mistresses to come and sit with us in the dining-room.”¹ What then are possible reasons for the king and queen to have given separate banquets in this book?

Sometimes the outcome of the event contains the reason for the author including the event itself. After the king listened to Memucan’s advice (Esther 1:16–20), what do we now learn about Vashti? Before reading ahead to chapter two, what do we now learn about Ahasuerus?

In Esther 2:16–17, Ahasuerus coronated Esther as queen in his seventh year of reign (c. 479 BC). So it took Ahasuerus four years from his edict against Vashti to find another queen. When Ahasuerus returned from his campaigns against Greece around 480 BC, he came back looking for a wife. In a sentence or two, record why the author included this information in Esther 2:1–4.

How do verses 1–4 relate to verses 5–7?



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There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

Esther 1:1–2:7

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The author could have simply written, “There was a young Jew named Esther who lived with her cousin Mordecai,” but he connected Mordecai and Esther with the exile. Remember the significance of the exile? The kingdom of Judah rejected God’s Word and did evil in God’s eyes, so God used Babylon to sack Jerusalem and exile the Judeans into slavery (2 Chronicles 36). Even through this act of judgment, God planted the seed of deliverance (Esther 2:5–6) for His people almost one hundred years after He exiled them. In God’s judgment and discipline, there’s still mercy.

In Esther 1:1–2:7, the author explained how Esther became a Persian queen. Remember that God’s name is not mentioned once, but His Spirit blew through the halls of the Persian courts and even revealed Himself in the whims of the king. Reflect on and record how God worked through Esther up to this point in the story.



Application: Receiving Personally

In application, we allow “the Bible’s truths to grip us in areas that need attention and call us to action.”²

God’s Work in the World

In Esther 1:1–2:7, we witness God working in the secular events of the Persian royals and through the carnal advice of the king’s servants. Have you recently been tempted to think God is absent in the judicial system of your land or in the dictates of the earth’s leaders? How may the book of Esther alter your understanding of God’s providence in our world? Perhaps you may even take a moment to pray for your government’s leaders.



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There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

Esther 1:1–2:7

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God's Purposes in Moral and Marital Failures

We also witness God's purposes unfolding despite a king's sinful actions toward his queen. Sometimes we're tempted to think God can't use us because of our past. Do you think this? Do you dismiss people because of their failings? Write down what you've learned and what needs to change from any moral failure that comes to mind. Also, consider how you can encourage and restore those who've fallen morally.

God's Lowly People in High Places

Chuck encourages us with the fact that God can exalt any ordinary Christian to a position of influence. Do you doubt God's ability to do great things with your life? No matter your background, education, or societal status, God has given Christians supernatural power to shine His light in a dark world. Some He will call to great positions in the world's eyes, but He calls us all to express His selfless love—something far greater and more powerful than being queen of Persia.



Searching the Scriptures Wrap-up

Write one sentence to *summarize* this lesson.

Write down one thing to *remember* about God.



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There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

Esther 1:1–2:7

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Write down one way you can *respond* to God's Word.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for recording Your sovereign ways in the book of Esther that we may see Your sovereign wisdom. Your providential hand still grips the vicissitudes of our world, moving some left and others right. I ask for an open heart to receive the lot You've chosen for me, for wisdom to do what I ought to do, and for courage to do what I know to do. I trust You and love You. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt and John Marincola (New York: Penguin, 2003), Kindle 5803.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 161.



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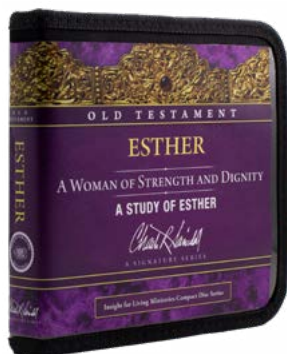
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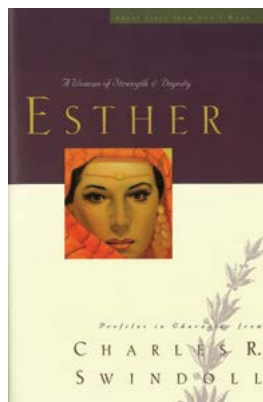
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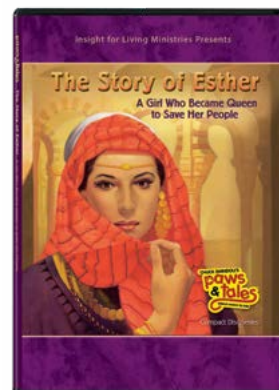
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

Strength and Dignity on Parade

Esther 2:8–20

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

God bestows a special glory to women so that they uniquely express His image and presence in our world. Among a woman's innumerable traits are:

1) Intuition—sensing what isn't said, 2) Endurance—persevering through trials, 3) Responsiveness—tuning in to God and others, and 4) Vulnerability—remaining unguarded and transparent.

In the book of Esther, we see how God chose to display a woman's strengths through a particular, young Jewish woman whom He used for the sake of His glory and for the good of His people. With acute clarity, Chuck Swindoll highlights some of these strengths in this study on Esther 2:8–20. Women can glean insight for spiritual maturity while men can learn to encourage and honor godliness in the special women in their lives.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

For this passage, you'll need your Bible and the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study of this series on Esther to reference dates or notes you took on key terms. Also, it's always helpful to have a Bible dictionary on hand. We recommend *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*.

In light of the vanity of King Ahasuerus (King Xerxes in the New Living Translation), let's read the psalmist's prayer in Psalm 119:37–38 (NASB):

*Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity,
And revive me in Your ways.
Establish Your word to Your servant,
As that which produces reverence for You.*

Quotable

*God has given the
woman a sense of
strength and dignity
that is found in
not another of
His creations.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

Strength and Dignity on Parade

Esther 2:8–20

SEARCHING
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Personalize this prayer by writing it in your own words. When studying God's Word, it's important to pray for the Spirit's aid as we seek His counsel.



Observation: Reading Slowly

The first phase of Chuck's four-step Bible study method is observation. If you aren't familiar with this method or you want to go deeper, we recommend his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*.

During observation, use only your Bible to focus on the words of the author. Don't consult commentaries or dictionaries. Block out time and find a place without distractions. (Some consider coffee a must!) With pen, paper, and an attentive mind, use this time of observation to commune with God through His sacred text.

Slowly read [Esther 2:8–20](#).

Pursued and Discovered — Esther 2:8–9a

King Ahasuerus' search for a queen to replace Vashti (Esther 2:1–4) turned the spotlight onto Esther and her older cousin Mordecai (2:5–7). Mordecai and Esther lived in Susa because their ancestors were exiled by the Babylonians from Jerusalem.

How do verses 2:8–9a connect Esther and Mordecai to King Ahasuerus?

Did Esther go voluntarily to the harem? How do you know?



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Prepared and Chosen—Esther 2:9b–20

Look at Esther 2:9b. How did Hegai respond to Esther?

How does 2:10–11 indicate that Esther still respected Mordecai, and where did Mordecai meet her?

Peruse 2:12–14. Can't you just smell those perfumes and feel the ointments? What could the women carry with them the night they were summoned to the king's room? Remember, no detail is insignificant in observation; the biblical authors were intentional with what they wrote.

According to 2:15–16, in what year was Esther taken to King Ahasuerus' room? How many years had passed between Ahasuerus' argument with Vashti and Esther's entrance? Did you notice what Esther took with her into the king's room? Each detail has something to tell.



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No mincing words—the author gets right to his point; what happened in Esther 2:17?

What does 2:18 reveal about Esther’s new status? What did Ahasuerus do once he crowned Esther? And what do the king’s actions tell us about how he felt toward her?

What new role did Mordecai receive in 2:19–20? What did the author repeat in these verses which was also mentioned in 2:10?



Interpretation: Understanding Clearly

With interpretation, we seek to understand the meaning of the text. For this passage in the book of Esther, we contemplate God’s presence in the story, though His name is never mentioned. Also, we consider Esther’s winsome, queenlike qualities.



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In Esther 2:8, we see the hand of God intertwine the story of an inconsequential, young Jewish woman with the life of the most powerful man on earth, the king of Persia. For 2:9, let's look at the New English Translation (NET) at [Lumina](#). On the right panel, click *Hebrew*. In the left panel, read 2:9 and hover your mouse's pointer over the word *favor*. It should highlight the word and the corresponding Hebrew word on the right. At the bottom of the Hebrew panel, read the pop-up text box with other translations of the Hebrew word *chesed*. How did Hegai view Esther?

What may have been a reason for Mordecai wanting to keep Esther's Jewish identity concealed (Esther 2:10)?

Imagine the competition that may have existed between the women in the lifestyle described in 2:12–14. What do you think each woman asked for before seeing the king (2:13)? In the king's harem, Esther differentiated herself in the eyes of all who saw her. What does 2:15 say? Return to the Hebrew panel at [Lumina](#) and look at the translation for *approval*. It's the Hebrew word *chen*.

What phrases about Esther are repeated in 2:8–20? What do these reveal about Esther's loyalty and humility?



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The king remembered Esther's name and loved her more than all the women (Esther 2:17), so he made her queen in place of Vashti. In Esther 1–2, the author answered the question, "How did a young Jewish girl become queen of Persia?" God used Esther's charm, elegance, teachable spirit, and her authenticity along with her beauty to persuade the king. Esther 2:17 says Esther "found *favor* and *kindness*" with the king (NASB, emphasis added). Ahasuerus viewed Esther with both *chesed* and *chen*, goodness and grace. This is the first place where both Hebrew words are used to emphasize Esther's effect on the king. Both words are often used of God throughout the Old Testament.



Correlation: Comparing Carefully

We correlate a biblical passage by comparing what it says with other biblical passages. For some passages, correlation is vital for our understanding while it is more complementary for others. God moved in the heart of the king and others to favor Esther ([Proverbs 21:1](#)), allowing them to see His grace and goodness in her.

Read [Proverbs 31:10–31](#). This vivid passage paints an inspirational portrait of a godly woman. Note each area of life it speaks of, and jot down anything you find interesting. You may even search for traits Esther might have shown to Hegai, the women, and King Ahasuerus.



Application: Receiving Personally

The last step in studying the Bible is application. With the truth of the Bible and an openness to the Holy Spirit, we grow in godliness as God conforms us to the image of His Son ([Colossians 3:10](#)).

Women—Growing in Godliness

As Esther endured uncontrollable circumstances—taken from her home and placed in a harem—she focused upon what she knew to be right and wise. She even asked Hegai for advice (Esther 2:15). Are you in a season where you focus too much on what you can't control? Write a prayer expressing your confidence in God's goodness and your commitment to do what you know to be right and wise.



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

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Esther 2:8–20

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When Esther had the opportunity to lavishly adorn herself, she didn't. She didn't embrace the added superficiality in an already superficial environment but remained humble, loyal, and displayed a depth of character that others noticed. Do you spend time developing your character? What can you put into practice this week to foster your own spiritual growth?

Men—Encouraging Godliness in Women

Men, think of the special women in your life. First, simply write a prayer of gratitude for those women.

Now let's take time to think seriously about one or two things we can do this week to encourage them in their journey toward godliness and spiritual depth. Record what comes to mind.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how great it is to see You exalt into high places those who choose not to exalt themselves—like Esther. So I pray for humility. I ask for a greater awareness of Your control in my circumstances and for a deeper assurance of Your goodness toward me. Conform me, dear Father, into the image of Your Son, Jesus, and use me as You will—whether as a royal on the earth or as one who's despised. In Jesus' name, amen.



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

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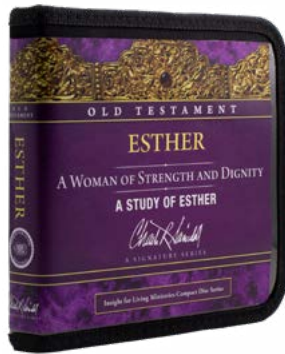
Esther 2:8–20

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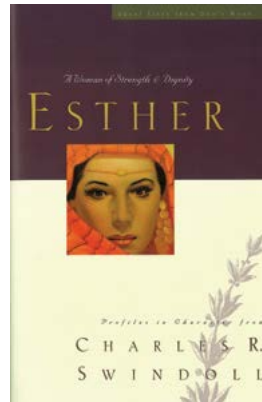
STUDY



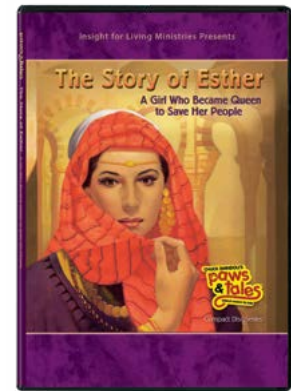
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

An Evil Interlude

Esther 2:21–3:15

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

When Adam and Eve tripped over Satan's lies and fell because of their lack of faith, all creation crashed down with them. Now, according to the apostle Paul, evil fills our days ([Ephesians 5:16](#)). From hurricanes to broken legs, depression to murders, wars to cancer, we can't escape suffering, and trying to escape it delivers only painful disappointment.

So we must learn to live with suffering and draw strength from Christ, who teaches us by His example to depend on God the Father until that day of bliss when "there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain" ([Revelation 21:4](#)).

In the book of Esther, evil slinked in the shadows as treacherous men devised secret plots first against the king and then against the Jews. And yet, through the darkness, God lit a path for His people, and He will light our way, too, as we respond wisely to today's evils.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

[Esther 2:21–3:15](#) occupies the focus of this *Searching the Scriptures* study. You who've followed along will recall that we use Chuck Swindoll's four-step process as discussed in his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*:

1. **Observation:** We read what the text says, perceiving how each word fits in sentences, how each sentence fits in paragraphs, and how each paragraph fits in the book.
2. **Interpretation:** We understand what the text means, delving into word studies, ancient cultural practices, history, and theology.
3. **Correlation:** We compare our passage with other biblical passages on the same topic to complement our understanding of the topic from our main passage.
4. **Application:** We integrate the biblical truths and principles into our lives, obeying Jesus' commands, believing Jesus' promises, and walking with Jesus always.

Quotable

*You cannot escape
pain in this life,
but you can learn to
live above the level
of misery.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

An Evil Interlude

Esther 2:21–3:15

We should pray before reading the Bible because it contains divinely revealed truth. God promises to illuminate us by His Spirit as we seek Him through His Word in Jesus' name. So write a brief prayer, requesting God to give you understanding and strength through this study.

Sometimes it's better to perform observation and interpretation together in concise chunks so you understand the meaning of the narrative as the story unfolds. Remember to first observe slowly and then interpret.

Mutiny: A Minor Plot against the King Esther 2:21–23	
 Observation	 Interpretation
1a. Read Esther 2:21–23 slowly. What is the evil interlude in these verses?	2a. How did God work through Mordecai, Esther, and the king in this passage?
1b. Who discovered the plot, and how did he receive credit for stopping the attack?	2b. Read Esther 6:1–9 . How did God use the mutiny in 2:21–23 for good in Esther 6:1–9?



Bigthan and Teresh let their anger-driven imaginations inspire them to plot the murder of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes in the New Living Translation), but God stopped them. Even so, evil reared its head once again—except this perpetrator was a man who oversaw all other nobles in the king's palace.



ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

An Evil Interlude

Esther 2:21–3:15

Vengeance: A Major Scheme against the Jews Esther 3:1–6a	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. First, read Esther 3:1–6a slowly. What was the new evil interlude, and how did it arise?</p> <p>1b. What did Mordecai do to provoke Haman's rage against him?</p>	<p>2. Haman, in the line of Agag the Amalekite, received a promotion instead of Mordecai. Look up Exodus 17:8–16 and 1 Samuel 15:1–3, and write down what we can infer about the hostility between Haman and the Jews.</p>



Injustices run rampant today just as they did in Mordecai's day. The vicious evil of prejudice narrowed Haman's perspective and compelled him to contrive a pogrom against Mordecai and the Jews. In such instances, it becomes easy to think, *Where are you, God?* Sounds familiar, right?



ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

An Evil Interlude

Esther 2:21–3:15

Plan for Extermination Esther 3:6b–11	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. Read Esther 3:6b–11. According to 3:8, how did Haman describe the Jews? Did he name them? How did he obscure the king's view of the race?</p>	<p>2a. In Esther 3:6b–7, Haman cast lots because that's how one determined the favor of the gods in Persian culture. How would the king have viewed this act?</p>
<p>1b. The end of 3:10 contains the author's theological interpretation of Haman. What does it say about Haman?</p>	<p>2b. In 3:9, Haman told the king he'd pay 375 tons of silver into the treasury if he agreed. Where might've Haman acquired this silver?</p>



King Ahasuerus removed the signet ring from his finger and placed it in Haman's hand—signifying the king's approval of Haman's diabolical plan to extirpate the Jews in all 127 Persian provinces. Haman was driven by fury, equipped with lies, and clothed in power. Instead of stopping Haman immediately, God let the tree of evil grow before cutting it down . . . which is how He might choose to work in our day as well.



ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

An Evil Interlude

Esther 2:21–3:15

An Announcement to All Esther 3:12–15	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. According to Esther 3:12–15, do we have any evidence that Ahasuerus knew what was happening?</p>	<p>2a. What part of this passage tells us the king was aloof to the gravity of Haman's actions? This is an indirect way the author cast a negative shadow on the transpiring events.</p>
<p>1b. Biblical authors sometimes used repetition and elaboration for emphasis. In what two ways did the author of Esther do this in 3:13? Also, how much time elapsed between the formation of the decree and its execution?</p>	<p>2b. The edict went out on the thirteenth day of the first month, Nisan—the day before all Jews would have celebrated Passover. Look up <i>Passover</i> in your Bible dictionary. How is it significant to our passage?</p>

We can now see the dangers the Jews faced in this account. As all the people of Susa read the decree with confusion (Esther 3:15), perhaps they asked themselves, *Would the king wipe out other people groups?* God chose to let Ahasuerus reign despite his ignorance. Pause and give thanks that King Jesus reigns with a thorough knowledge of His people and their needs.



ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

An Evil Interlude

Esther 2:21–3:15

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Correlation

When dark clouds enter our lives, like the one we see entering the story of Esther in chapter three, we're compelled by the Scriptures to approach God. Read the two passages below that express hope toward God during suffering and evil, and record any encouragement you receive from them.

Psalms 42

Habakkuk 3:17–19



Application

Three characters in this passage teach us vital lessons about evil and how to respond to it.

From Haman

Someone will always resent your independent devotion to the Lord. Don't second guess your obedience by believing his or her resentment suggests God's disapproval of your actions.

From Mordecai

Never underestimate the diabolical nature of revenge. We should especially be aware of any resentment sprouting in ourselves.



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

An Evil Interlude

Esther 2:21–3:15

From King Ahasuerus

Never overestimate your own importance. Some wise counselor should have come alongside Ahasuerus and said to him, “What is this you’re allowing? And why? Not even you are important enough to decide the fate of an entire race!”



Searching the Scriptures Wrap-up

Write one sentence to *summarize* this lesson.

Write down one thing to *remember* about God.

Write down one way you can *respond* to God’s Word.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I confess that You are always present in this world, that You always know my needs even when I’m hurting, and that all of history works together for the good of Your people—including my own good. I want to release my anxiety over what I can’t control and, instead, stand on Your promises because You are faithful. Please teach me to respond with wisdom to the evil, pain, and suffering in my life and the lives around me. I pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.



ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

An Evil Interlude

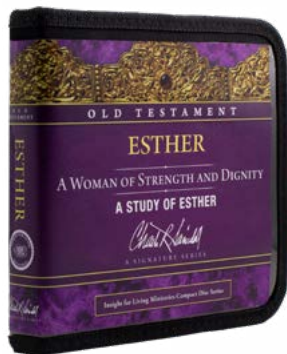
Esther 2:21–3:15

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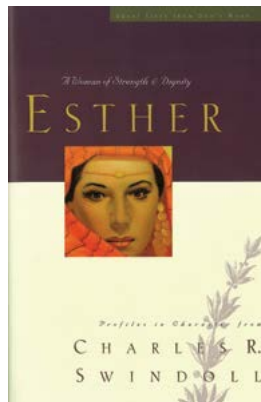
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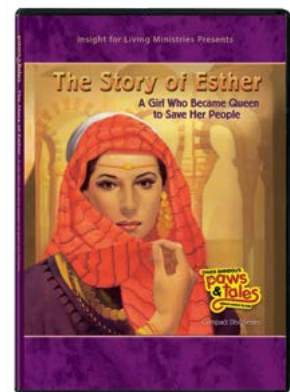
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

Thinking and Saying What's Right—Regardless

Esther 4

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STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In a world with more than 7.5 billion people, it's easy to feel like a statistical speck of dust without much significance. But you aren't an afterthought penciled into history by God. No—you hold immense value in His eyes, and He made you unique with special qualities. You breathe for a purpose—and that purpose stems from Him.

In Esther 4, God's purpose for Queen Esther unfolds before our eyes as we discover that she alone had the best opportunity to combat Haman's diabolical plan. Esther initially wavered against Mordecai's risky request, but she turned to God for strength and deliverance.

In this study, Chuck Swindoll teaches us the impact just one person can make.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Having a few study resources can greatly enhance your time in God's Word. If you want Chuck's full coverage of his study method, we recommend you grab a copy of *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*. Also, you may want to pick up Chuck's book *Esther: A Woman of Strength and Dignity*. Additionally, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* or *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* are especially helpful. Chuck recommends adding a new resource to your library once a month.

Also, the *Bible Study Tools* and *Bible Gateway* websites offer free access to all the English Bible translations you need. Bible Study Tools lets you perform searches for words or phrases in a single book or in the whole Bible. Another terrific online resource offered by Bible Study Tools is *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

Quotable

*Not until we
believe one person
can make a
difference will
we be willing
to risk.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

Thinking and Saying What's Right—Regardless

Esther 4

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Before delving into [Esther 4:1–17](#), write a prayer in your own words requesting God's Spirit to increase your understanding of and love for Him as well as to increase your courage to think and say what's right, regardless of circumstances.



Observation

During observation, we answer the question, *What does the text say?* We avoid using any resource except our Bible. We observe by performing a slow reading of the text, then we reread it as much as time allows. You can even read the text in multiple translations. [The New Living Translation](#) and the [New American Standard Bible](#) complement each other well. We'll examine Esther 4 in its three main sections.

Mourning and Weeping

Read [Esther 4:1–4](#).

How and where did Mordecai express his sorrow after learning of the king's command regarding the Jews?

Sometimes, biblical authors use repetition for emphasis, which reveals more clearly their intent in writing. How did the author use repetition for emphasis in Esther 4:1–4?



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

Thinking and Saying What's Right—Regardless

Esther 4

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What news did Esther's eunuchs and maids share with her, and how did she respond?

Record any additional observations you find.

Mordecai's sorrow compelled him to rebuff the queen's consolation. Each of us has endured (and will endure) seasons of suffering without relief. In such times, we can always turn to Jesus, who overcame the most intense of sufferings, because He will give us His peace, strength, perspective, and hope to make it through.

Informing and Responding

Observe *Esther 4:5–12*. This paragraph chronicles the first of Esther and Mordecai's exchanges.

In *Esther 4:5–9*, what steps did Mordecai take to precisely convey all the information Esther didn't know? In what verse, and in what way, does it seem that Mordecai had insider knowledge to the innerworkings of Haman's plot?

What two reasons did Esther use to evade Mordecai's command (*Esther 4:11*)?



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

Thinking and Saying What's Right—Regardless

Esther 4

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Pleading and Praying

Observe [Esther 4:13–17](#), the last of Esther and Mordecai's exchanges in this chapter.

In what four ways did Mordecai appeal to Esther to petition the king?

Esther faced two choices—both of which would likely result in a speedy death.

What did Esther require of Mordecai before she did what he asked?



Interpretation

During interpretation, we answer the question, *What does the passage mean?* We want to understand the theology of the passage because the Bible is a book about God. To do this, we must understand the culture, language, and intent of the author as best we can.

Esther 4 contains references to fasting. Look up in your Bible dictionary the purposes of a fast, discern which kind was used in Esther 4, and record how it informs your understanding of this section. If you don't have a Bible dictionary, you can use the online Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology to look up the word [fast](#).



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Thinking and Saying What's Right—Regardless

Esther 4

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Reread Esther 4:13–14. In it, Mordecai made a subtle theological claim about the significance of God's work in and through the Jewish people. What was that claim, and what do we learn about God from it?

Esther demonstrated a change in attitude from verse 11 to verse 16. What was that change? How would her faith in God have produced that change?

Even with ripped goat skin for clothing and flowing tears at the royal gate, Mordecai couldn't get the attention of King Ahasuerus. But it didn't take long for Esther to learn of Mordecai's sorrow and, in that discovery, learn that his sorrow was also her own. From Mordecai's urging, she made up her mind to act in God's strength.



Correlation

During correlation, we answer the question, *How does it compare?* We compare our text with other biblical passages to gain a deeper understanding of the truths and principles our text teaches.

The Bible is replete with individuals who act in faith to further God's purposes. [Hebrews 11](#) contains a helpful definition of faith and gives a snapshot of the faithful and their deeds. Read and reflect on Hebrews 11. How did Esther demonstrate the meaning of faith as defined in Hebrews 11:6?



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In *Hebrews 11:32–39*, the author described a variety of outcomes that faith produced in biblical figures from the past. God approved of their faith in Him despite some of them suffering what the world would typically call a defeat. The author of *Hebrews* wrote that some overthrew kingdoms and quenched fire while others were killed and imprisoned. The success of our faith by the world's standards does not reflect whether or not God has approved us. It's His opinion that matters most.



Application

During application, we answer the question, *How should we respond to the text?* Chuck quotes Howard Hendricks: “If you observe and interpret and correlate the Scriptures but fail to apply the Scriptures, you have committed an abortion.”¹ Challenging words. Let's look at Chuck's two application principles from Esther 4.

The Difference of One

Not until we believe one person can make a difference will we be willing to take risks. As we read in *Hebrews 11*, God's power can pour through one person for the benefit of many. Take a moment to consider if you truly believe this for yourself. As the first step to affirm or reaffirm your faith, write a prayer acknowledging God's power and stating your willingness to be used for His purposes even if it means taking actions that may put your comfort or convenience at risk.

From Theory to Action

Only when we move from the safe harbor of theory to the world of reality do we make a difference. Often our consistent, small actions—though seemingly insignificant—make the most difference. Are you silent when you shouldn't be? Are you letting indecision plague you to the point of inaction? Take a moment to write down the action you feel the Spirit prompting you to take.



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Sometimes, we're tempted to put the great ones in the Bible on a pedestal of faith. But consider the apostle James' words on the power of prayer: "Elijah was a human as we are" (James 5:17). In other words, we're no different from Elijah. His courage came from the same kind of faith we can have . . . because we worship the same God.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for preserving the story of Esther and for the encouragement it brings Your people. Please strengthen my heart to act when I need to act and to speak when I need to speak. I know You are with me and control the outcome, so please glorify Your Son in my life. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2017), 160.



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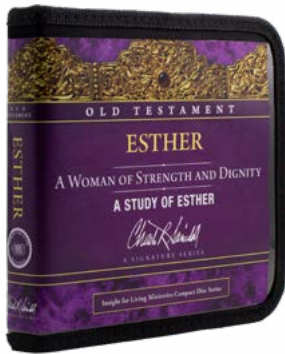
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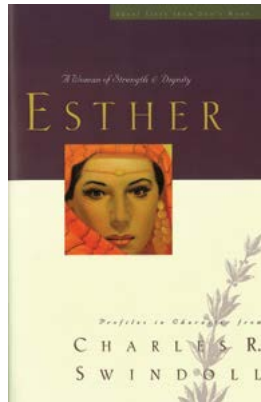
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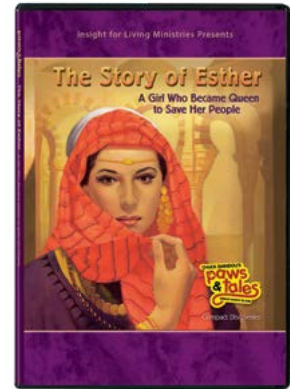
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Without warning, life sometimes prods us down a path that forks into two roads. Even though both choices appear to end with a cliff, we're forced to choose because time doesn't stop. When this happens, all we can do is wait on the Lord, seek His face, and proceed in faith.

If you're going through difficult situations, Isaiah recorded several promises for you:

*Yet those who wait for the LORD
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary. (Isaiah 40:31 NASB)*

Do you see the four promises in this passage? God will give us new strength, a better perspective, greater energy, and a determination to persevere. Esther needed these promises, so she turned to the Lord and received them. Let's explore Esther 5 with Chuck Swindoll and learn from Esther's example in order that we, too, may turn to the Lord during the trials of life.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Before delving into our study today, you may want to refresh your memory of the book of Esther by perusing our brief [introduction](#) to the book and glancing at Insight for Living Ministries' overview chart.

Proverbs teaches us wisdom to help us navigate the vicissitudes of our years. It says,

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart;
do not depend on your own understanding.
Seek his will in all you do,
and he will show you which path to take. (Proverbs 3:5–6)*

Quotable

*When you wait on
the Lord, it doesn't
mean that you do
weird things.
You go on with your
activities focusing
more fully on
the Lord.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Record a prayer in response to this passage requesting God's Spirit to provide you wisdom and strength through this study.



Observation

Chuck's four-step Bible study method begins with observation. Observation does not necessitate a sophisticated college degree nor a Sherlock Holmes aptitude for deduction. Observation merely requires that we slowly examine what the text says, reading the lines rather than reading *between* the lines.

With that in mind, take a moment to concentrate on the words of Esther 5. Read the passage a few times, and write down components that strike you as important. Look for the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the passage.

What did Esther's requests contain that indicate her deference to the king ([Esther 5:4, 7–8](#))?

How did Mordecai express his displeasure with Haman, and how did Haman let this pique his pride?



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What did Haman's wife Zeresh and Haman's friends counsel him to do?



Interpretation

During interpretation, we move beyond the words of the text to discern the author's meaning. Because the Bible is a book about God and God's ways, we must examine how He worked in the past to know how He works today.

A Calm Yet Wise Plan—Esther 5:1–8

Notice the text says, “On the third day of the fast” (Esther 5:1). On that day, Esther didn't procrastinate in fear, nor did she waiver in doubt. She coupled her prayer with action. Based on Esther 5:4, what do you imagine Esther did during the three-day fast prior to her meeting with the king?

In this passage, how did Esther display patience before making her request of the king (5:1–4)?

While drinking wine at the banquet with Haman and King Ahasuerus, how did Esther display self-control (5:5–8)?



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Imagine sitting across from the man who wants to pilfer and eliminate your entire race. With poise resulting from her repose in God, Esther ate her meal and engaged in conversation before Haman and the king. She awaited the right time to reveal Haman's diabolical plan. Her dependence upon God gave her the wisdom to determine the right time to make her request and strengthened her with unyielding self-control in the presence of an enemy. What God did for her, He can do for you.

A Proud and Sinister Response—Esther 5:9–14

Haman's swollen pride required all to serve him in fear—just one snub popped his egotistic balloon right after the banquet with Esther and Ahasuerus. How did the author of Esther build tension and elevate urgency for God's intervention in Esther 5:9–14?

Haman and Esther, in Esther 5:1–14, exemplify two contrasting character traits: pride and humility. How does faith in God promote humility like Esther's? How does a lack of belief in God demonstrate pride like Haman's?



Correlation

During correlation we compare the truths of our passage with other biblical passages to expand our understanding. Passages connect when they speak on a similar topic—whether historical (like Israel's exile), theological (like God's mercy), or practical (like how we handle money).



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Our text focuses primarily upon God's sovereign work for the good of His people—as seen in Esther's patience and trust in Him. Slowly read and meditate on Psalm 121, a psalm about God's sovereignty and care for His people.

*I look up to the mountains—
does my help come from there?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth!
He will not let you stumble;
the one who watches over you will not slumber.
Indeed, he who watches over Israel
never slumbers or sleeps.
The LORD himself watches over you!
The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade.
The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon at night.
The LORD keeps you from all harm
and watches over your life.
The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go,
both now and forever. (Psalm 121)*

Can you imagine Esther affirming this psalm after she approached the king and lived? After reflecting on Esther 5 and Psalm 121, write a statement in your own words defining God's sovereignty as it relates to you personally.



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Application

During the last step of Chuck's Bible study method, application, we incorporate into our lives the truths we've learned so that we might think and live differently. Chuck has provided four excellent principles to help us use the truths from Esther 5 in all seasons of life:

1. *When preparing for an unprecedented event, wait on the Lord before getting involved.*
2. *When dealing with an unpredictable person, count on the Lord to open doors.*
3. *When working through an unpleasant situation, trust the Lord for enduring patience.*
4. *When standing against an unprincipled enemy, ask the Lord for invincible courage.*

Which principle is most important to you in your current season of life? Take a moment to describe how you would like to implement that principle. What kind of doors would the Lord need to open? Or what would it look like if you demonstrated invincible courage? Remember to be specific—specificity is the first step toward clarity and action when accomplishing what God commands and believing what God promises.

Do you know someone—a friend or family member—who's going through one of the situations mentioned above? Take a moment to write a prayer for that person. You may even share Psalm 121 in a letter or e-mail, expressing how you're praying for him or her.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for taking care of the unknowns in my life. I confess that I want to control everything, and I ask that the vice grip of anxiety and worry on my heart would loosen that I may rest well. I know You're working in countless places because this world is about Your glory and Your purposes rather than me and my wants. Only You can give me the peace and faith I seek, so I humbly ask for those things. I pray this in the strong name of Jesus, amen.



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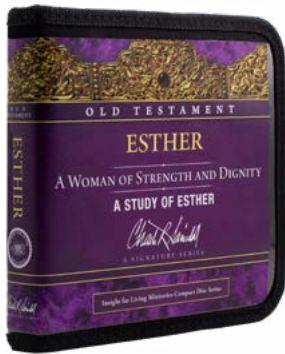
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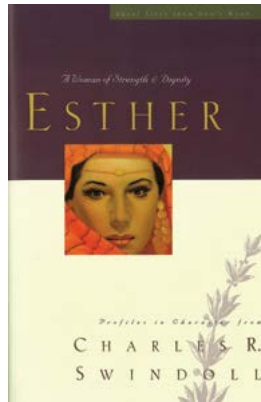
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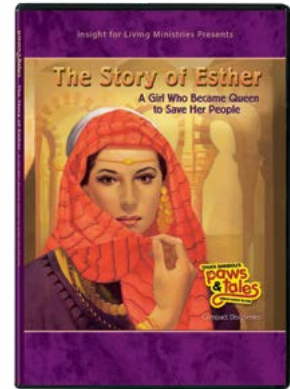
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

What Goes Around, Comes Around

Esther 6

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

God does not always respond to our schedule. Often, when just a few grains of sand remain in the hourglass, God reveals to us He is not aloof from our situation. He acts in ways we would never expect. Like when He provides funds the day before the payment's due or when the phone rings after you figured you'd never hear back.

Things are not always as they seem in our day just like they weren't always as they seemed for the Jews living in Susa during Esther's day.

In this study, we'll explore the divinely orchestrated turn of events in one of the Bible's most adored chapters—when the proud became humbled and the humble exalted. Explore Esther 6 with Chuck Swindoll so you can learn to trust God's timetable instead of your own.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

You'll recall that we use the same Bible study method Chuck uses in his own studies as detailed in his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*. Four steps undergird this process and are important to distinguish so we don't skip ahead or get confused.

1. **Observation:** We read what the text says, perceiving how each word fits in sentences, how each sentence fits in paragraphs, and how each paragraph fits in the book.
2. **Interpretation:** We understand what the text means, delving into word studies, ancient cultural practices, history, and theology.
3. **Correlation:** We compare our passage with other biblical passages on the same topic to complement our understanding of the topic from our main passage.
4. **Application:** We integrate into our lives the biblical principles from our passage—obeying Jesus' commands, believing Jesus' promises, and walking with Jesus always.

Quotable

*Even when
no one seems
to notice or care,
God is very
much alert to
our situation.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Before searching the Scriptures, it's always important to pray that God will guide your study and grant you the hope, correction, faith, and encouragement your specific situation requires. Take some time to formulate this prayer in your own words below.



Observation: Reading Slowly

Begin your study with a slow reading of *Esther 6*.

Esther 6:1 says, "That night." Which night specifically was the author referring to? What had just happened that day, and what was supposed to happen the following day (*Esther 5:14*)?

Why was Haman in the king's court so early? List the ways Haman told King Ahasuerus (Xerxes in the NLT) that he should honor the man whom the king wished to honor (6:7–9)?

After Mordecai was honored, where did he go (6:12)? Where did Haman go, and how did he respond to Mordecai's veneration (6:12–13)?



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

What Goes Around, Comes Around

Esther 6

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How did Zeresh and Haman's friends respond to Haman after he told them what happened (Esther 6:13)? How does this response compare to their response in 5:14?



Interpretation: Understanding Clearly

Haman constructed a monumental wood stake stretching seventy-five feet into the air. Almost certainly word had gotten to Mordecai about Haman's plan to impale him. Instead of highlighting Mordecai's anxiety or strategy to prove his loyalty to Ahasuerus, the author revealed how God worked through the king's restlessness.

Sleep evaded King Ahasuerus, proving in Mordecai's case that not all was lost even when things appeared so. Such is your case as well.



Searching the Scriptures Tip: Interpretation

Interpretation produces two core components that fill our understanding of the Bible and help us apply its truth to our lives. History is the first of these components and includes studying the language, culture, and events that are bound by space and time. But it's from these events that we learn about God. How God worked in biblical history informs our understanding of His character, actions, and desires for people today—which leads to the second component: theology. Theology spans space and time. We worship the God who is always involved in this world.

The King's Soporific—Esther 6:1–3

The deliverance of Mordecai hung on the slender thread of the king's insomnia. In [6:1–2](#), what did King Ahasuerus order his servants to read to him to help him fall asleep?



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You'll recall from Esther 2:21–23 that Mordecai received no reward for unveiling Bigthan and Teresh's plot; rather, the king spotted Haman and honored him (Esther 3:1). From Mordecai, we learn that even when others fail to take proper notice, God notices.

A Providential Turnaround—Esther 6:4–12

As God would have it, the king's attendants ushered Haman into the king's presence to develop a plan to honor the person Haman wanted to murder.

Anthony Tomasino summarized nicely Haman's motive behind his advice to the king:

Haman does not ask for money, power, or promotion, all of which he already possesses. Instead, he asks for the opportunity to be “king for a day.” . . . In the ancient world, clothing was closely associated with the people who wore it. . . . For Haman, wearing the king's robe meant identifying in some sense with the king himself.¹

After Haman honored Mordecai according to the king's command, notice the response of both Haman and Mordecai in Esther 6:12. What can we infer about each one's character from their responses?

The contrast couldn't be clearer about these two officials. Had Mordecai been proud and ambitious, he almost certainly would not have returned to his station at the king's gate. But he did. He did not exalt himself. Instead, he relied upon God's timing and providence.

Back to the King—Esther 6:13–14

As a sort of prophecy about what was to come—for Haman and the reader—Haman received counsel from his wife and friends. Notice how Haman didn't get to respond to their warning. Where was he taken in verse 6:14, and what thoughts might have been swimming in his head as he made his way there?



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God didn't sit still once He exalted Mordecai. The Jews throughout Persia needed rescue. Not only did His providence keep Esther's story moving, it orchestrates your story as well.



Correlation: Comparing Carefully

Because this chapter provides an example of a humble person before God as well as a proud person, let's perform a study on humility and pride in the book of Proverbs. Remember that the Proverbs illustrate how the world works and how we should live as God's people in it.

Humility

Humility is the opposite of pride and arrogance. Humility means to have a modest perception of one's self. Using Bible Study Tools, search for *humble* and *humility* in the book of Proverbs within the New Living Translation. Review the verses and summarize what you learn from them.

Pride

Pride is unwarranted self-confidence causing an inflated view of one's own importance, possessions, or abilities. Using Bible Study Tools, search for *pride* and *proud* in the book of Proverbs within the New Living Translation. Review the verses and summarize what you learn from them.

Remember the Proverbs portray how life *typically works*; unfortunately, the proud sometimes win, and the humble sometimes lose. However, Jesus' death and resurrection guarantee that He will arbitrate justice on the last day. Humility may not receive its reward until then.



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Application: Receiving Personally

To help us apply the truths of Esther 6, Chuck shared four principles from this text.

1. *When all seems lost, it isn't.* As Mordecai slept and Haman constructed his gallows, God unfolded His plan.
2. *When no one seems to notice, God does.* God used the king's insomnia to initiate Mordecai's exaltation.
3. *When everything seems great for our enemies, it's not.* God arranged the plans for Haman to honor Mordecai the very day Haman sought to kill Mordecai.
4. *When nothing seems fair, God is just.* Haman's sorrow for not receiving the king's honor didn't prevent God's plan to cease Haman's pogrom against the Jews.

Which of the principles above speaks most to you in your season of life? Do you feel like God is ignoring your struggles, or do you feel like things keep getting worse no matter how faithfully you live in obedience to God? Write a prayer expressing to God how you feel.

Now summarize the hope you have drawn personally from Esther 6.



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Searching the Scriptures Wrap-up

Write one sentence to *summarize* this study.

Write one thing to *remember* about God.

Write one way you can *respond* to God's Word.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for always noticing me and caring for me no matter my situation. I confess that life is not always as convenient as I want it to be and that I often feel like my will should be done on earth rather than Yours. But You are good, and Your ways are unsearchable. Give me strength to trust in Your goodness as You mold me into Your Son's image. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Anthony Tomasino, *Esther: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*, ed. H. Wayne House and William Barrick, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2016), 279–80.



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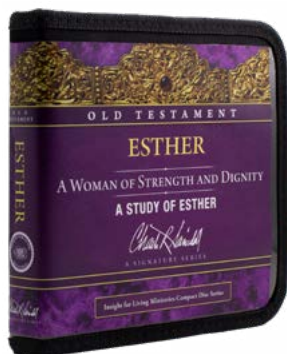
Esther 6

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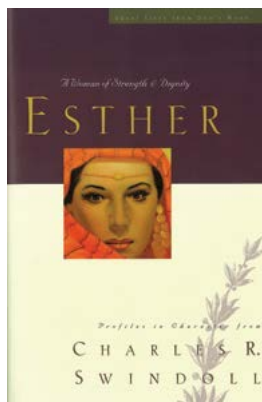
STUDY



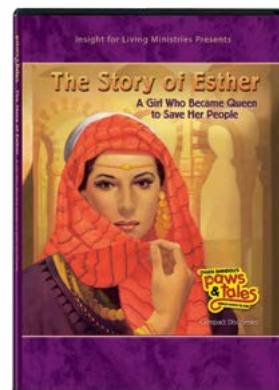
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

God's Surprising Sovereignty

Esther 7

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

The seasons of God's silence can feel like we're stranded in the middle of a lake swimming blindly amidst a thick fog. No voice from shore. No certainty we're swimming the right direction. Just dense cloud cover and water before our eyes. But God's silence does not mean He's unaware or indifferent to our plight. Likewise, God's hidden nature doesn't reflect His absence.

Though we can't see beyond our circumstances, God transcends time. He views the past, present, and future at once. Similarly, though we can't know what lies outside our physical presence, God hears secrets whispered in shadows and governs the unseen details of our world. So when He seems silent or absent, we must trust that His hand is at work, simply doing what we know to do—like Esther.

In chapter seven, Esther had no guarantee her exposure of Persia's second in command, Haman, would be well received by Ahasuerus. But she acted in faith as she approached the king, arranged the banquet, and waited for the moment to speak for her people. Let's study Esther 7 and increase our confidence in God's sovereignty.

Quotable

*The periods
of God's silence
are just as
significant as the
times in which
He speaks.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Before we apply our *Searching the Scriptures* study method to Esther 7, let's review. Write a one sentence summary of each chapter. Consult Chuck Swindoll's [overview](#) and [chart](#) if you need to.

Esther 1	
Esther 2	
Esther 3	
Esther 4	
Esther 5	
Esther 6	

Prior to studying God's Word, we should ask God for insight. His Spirit will help us see what biblical truths we need to learn and give us the ability to internalize those truths so we might become more like Christ. "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him," (Colossians 2:6 NASB). Take a moment to express this request to God.



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Observing What You Read

You'll know by now that we begin our study with observation—a careful examination of the details in the text.

We observe by:

1. Asking *Who? What? Where? When? Why?* and *How?*
2. Imagining what we can see, touch, taste, hear, and smell
3. Noting the logical connections and flow of thought
4. Examining what's repeated, emphasized, related, alike, and unlike

Let's observe [Esther 7](#). Begin by slowly reading the chapter once or twice. If you'd like to broaden your Bible reading, Chuck also prefers the [New American Standard Bible](#), which nicely complements the New Living Translation.

Observe Esther 7 according to the four categories above, and record what you find.



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Interpreting What the Passage Means

After thoroughly examining what the text says, we are now prepared to interpret what it means. During interpretation, we consult our resources and attempt to understand the author's message. Interpretation encompasses two core components: history and theology. First, we look for what happened and what was said, then we look for what the passage teaches about God.

King Ahasuerus honored Mordecai, but what about Esther and the Jews? That's the question the author addressed in [Esther 7](#).

Just imagine how Esther's hands must have shook as she drank her wine when the king said, "Tell me what you want" (Esther 7:2). But she acted in faith by doing what she knew was right. Imagine Haman's anger as his mind traced the events that had transpired earlier that day—perhaps even ignoring the dinner conversation. Notice the language Esther used in verse 7:3. How did her request in this verse express her deference to the king?

Read how Esther described what was to happen to the Jews in 7:4. How does her explanation compare to the edict presented in Esther 3:13? Why is this important?

At the end of Esther 7:4, Esther said she would not have troubled the king had her people been "merely" sold as slaves. How would selling the Jews as slaves benefited the king? The implication in her statement is that his decree to kill the Jews would cost the king. Notice how she appealed to the king's finances just as Haman did in Esther 3. What do you learn from Esther's approach?



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Esther 7

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The aloof king failed to recall the edict that Haman wrote to abolish an entire race . . . until Esther pointed her finger at Haman. Notice there were three verbs Haman used against the Jews, and in verse 7:6, Esther described Haman with three descriptors. In what way might her descriptors have influenced the king's thinking?

The king rushed to his palace garden (Esther 7:7). Probably alone. Earlier in the book of Esther, he made decisions based on his counselors, but this time he had to decide what to do himself. While he settled his thoughts walking among the flowers, Haman turned to Esther in fear and pled for mercy. Mervin Breneman writes, "Haman, in typical Near Eastern form, probably grabbed the feet of Esther, kissed them, and begged for forgiveness."¹ Review Esther 3 and record what Mordecai did to anger Haman. Write also how God produced a turnaround for Haman in Esther 7.

In Esther 6, we saw how God exalted Mordecai because Mordecai had maintained his integrity toward the king. In Esther 7, we read how God ensnared Haman in Haman's own treacherous trap. The chapter ends with Haman impaled upon the stake he had built for Mordecai. As the king's anger against Haman subsided, a firm principle settles in our hearts: those with nothing to hide have no fear of being caught.

Record what this chapter teaches us about God. It could be something new that we haven't already learned in the book of Esther, or it could be an affirmation of a truth we've already received.



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Certainly, Esther didn't have the slightest clue how the king would respond to her request. While we have yet to discover the outcome of the Jewish people in this story, we do know the edict against them angered the king, leading him to execute Haman. As Esther looked back on her situation, she realized God handled those details which she couldn't see. Such as it is with us. Often, it's only in hindsight that we're able to see God's orchestration of events with 20/20 spiritual lenses.



Correlating Our Passage with Other Biblical Passages

Israel's king, David, recorded in Psalm 40 an expression of praise to God for God's care and deliverance. David said he was in the pit of despair as he waited upon God who eventually lifted him out of the miry bog.

Psalm 40 complements Esther 7 in which God gave Esther favor in the sight of King Ahasuerus. God delivered Esther from Haman's plot. Take a moment to reflect on David's prayer.

Why did David praise God?

How did David respond to God's deliverance?

What did David request from God?

Such a lovely psalm filled with praise and petitions is worth emulating in our own prayers to God.



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Applying What We've Learned

After we have observed, interpreted, and correlated our passage, we want to put its truths into practice. The Bible is a practical book that connects us with God and enlightens us as to how we should live.

Reflect

Record a time in your life when you believed God's delay meant He was late, but you realized later His timing was perfect.

Respond

Have you recently been through a season of God's silence when you've heard very little, if anything, from God? If so what have you learned? How does Esther 7 help us trust God during those seasons?

Reach Out

Do you know someone who's wandering through the fog of God's silence? If so, what is a simple, meaningful way you can encourage him or her? Go ahead and schedule this act of kindness now so you can follow through later.



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You will experience seasons when it feels like the volume knob of God's voice has been turned down—or maybe even off! Surely Esther felt similarly that afternoon before the banquet. At times, the silence will be deafening. On the cross, Jesus cried out in pain not because of the nails but because of His Father's silence. But God invites us to trust Him. Have confidence that no system, whether Persian or Roman or any in the world as we know it, will thwart His perfect providence that works for your spiritual and eternal good.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I trust that You are the governor of my life. Even when You seem absent or silent, I know You are there, that You see me, and that Your plan will unfold into something beautiful. I pray for strength and courage like Esther's so my life may glorify Your Son. It's in His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, vol. 10, electronic ed., The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 350.



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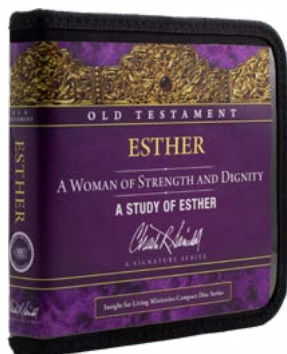
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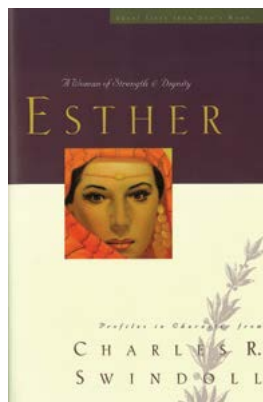
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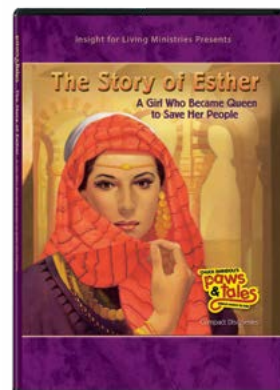
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

And the Walls Came Tumbling Down

Esther 8

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

No wall looms so large in our minds from recent decades than the Berlin Wall. For twenty-eight years it divided East and West Berlin, communism and capitalism. It stretched across the city like an ugly gash with barbed wire forming cruel stitches. Its great masses of concrete seemed immovable. But on November 9, 1989, the wall was pulled down—collapsed without a bullet fired.

Even though it was unthinkable at the time, the wall came down. Spiritual “walls” also fell throughout Esther 8 in which God turned an unchangeable heart, conquered an irrevocable edict, and lightened an impenetrable gloom. God’s in the business of bringing down walls no matter how big they may be. In this study of Esther 8, we’ll join Chuck Swindoll to learn that the walls in our life are no match for God.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As Moses prepared the wandering people of Israel for their chosen inheritance—to enter the promised land after their exodus from Egypt—he delivered sermons to reaffirm the Sinai covenant and reconstitute their identity as Yahweh’s people. In the first of Moses’ sermons, he uttered the remarkable statement interpreting the reason God gave them manna:

“Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”
(Deuteronomy 8:3)

God’s Word nourishes us spiritually as nutritious food nourishes us physically. With a plethora of Bible study gismos and gadgets, remember the reason for them all—to encounter the living God, to enjoy His presence, and to receive His gifts which are His joy to give us.

Quotable

*There is no
wall so strong
that God is not
stronger still.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

And the Walls Came Tumbling Down



Esther 8

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Take a moment to quiet your mind, marvel at this privilege we have, and ask for the Lord's aid as you study His Word. Record your prayer below if you wish.

Now take a moment to slowly read [Esther 8](#). Also, as you study each of the following tables, remember to complete the observation column before moving to interpretation.

An Unchangeable Heart Esther 8:1–4	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. Use your observation study method to note the top five details in Esther 8:1–4.</p>	<p>2a. What significant event happened to Haman's property in this scene?</p>
<p>1b. When did Haman receive the signet ring (Esther 3:1–10)? When did Mordecai receive it (8:1–2)?</p>	<p>2b. What tells us that the king's heart toward Mordecai and Esther had softened?</p>
<p>1c. How was Haman viewed by the author in 8:1–4, and what threat remained for the Jews?</p>	<p>2c. How did God work on behalf of the Jews in Esther 8:1–4?</p>

No heart is so hard that God cannot penetrate it. In Esther's life, God swayed the heart of the most powerful man in the world, which proves He can do the same for that friend, colleague, or spouse in your life.



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An Irrevocable Edict Esther 8:5–14	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. Now note the significant details you see in <i>Esther 8:5–14</i> using observation.</p>	<p>2a. How did the new edict in 8:8–11 protect the Jews from the first edict?</p>
<p>1b. According to the new edict (Esther 8:11), what were the Jews allowed to do to their attackers? How does this language compare to the first edict (3:13)?</p>	<p>2b. In this passage, how did God specifically use Esther to initiate the protection of the Jews? How does 8:12–14 demonstrate God granting favor to Esther in the sight of Ahasuerus?</p>

Coupled with the death of Haman, God worked through the political pragmatics of this world, allowing a second edict to protect His chosen people. Ahasuerus granted the Jews the opportunity to take every retaliatory action against their attackers. In this passage, we see that God not only softens unchangeable hearts, He also reverses the most irrevocable of edicts—even those unjust edicts against *you*.



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

And the Walls Came Tumbling Down

Esther 8

An Impenetrable Gloom Esther 8:15–17	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. Finally, record the top five most significant details you see in <i>Esther 8:15–17</i>.</p>	<p>2a. Why is the response of the Jews—and the non-Jews—to Mordecai’s decree important?</p>
<p>1b. Contrast the people of Susa’s response to Mordecai’s decree (Esther 8:16) with their response to Haman’s decree (3:15).</p>	<p>2b. Do you think the people who converted to Judaism in 8:17 were sincere? Why did the author of Esther include this in the story?</p>
<p>1c. Contrast the Jews’ response to Mordecai’s decree (8:16) as well as their response to Haman’s decree (4:2).</p>	<p>2c. Summarize the theological point of this chapter with a clear sentence specifying the author’s subject and what he said about it.</p>

The cold wall of impenetrable gloom loomed over the Jews until God burst through it with His light of grace and His outstretched, providential hand.



ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

And the Walls Came Tumbling Down

Esther 8

SEARCHING
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Correlation

Sometimes God breaks down the intimidating and isolating walls of our lives speedily while, at other times, He lets them linger. Israel's King David encountered this from time to time. One such wall developed when murderers sought to unjustly kill him. He wrote about these enemies in Psalm 139:19–22.

O God, if only you would destroy the wicked!

Get out of my life, you murderers!

They blaspheme you;

your enemies misuse your name.

O LORD, shouldn't I hate those who hate you?

Shouldn't I despise those who oppose you?

Yes, I hate them with total hatred,

for your enemies are my enemies.

Strong language from the pen of the king. Nevertheless, he wrote one of the most cherished psalms in his anger—Psalm 139. David's response to his wall of murderers guides us through how we should pray when facing our own walls, whatever they may be.

David wanted to uphold his *integrity* even when hotly pursued by enemies (Psalm 139:1, 23–24a). Of all places David could have turned, he took refuge in God's providential care and comforting presence showing his Godward *devotion* in that pressing time (139:2–18). Lastly, David sought God's everlasting way, demonstrating *hope* in God's provision of grace and goodness even as bloodthirsty murderers chased after him (139:24b).

Peruse [Psalm 139](#). Note how David prayed while in anguish. Record what you would like to remember for those seasons when you face formidable walls.



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And the Walls Came Tumbling Down

Esther 8

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Application

Walls take many different forms—spiritual, physical, financial, emotional, relational, racial, marital, or even religious. Are you facing a wall? If so, record how God’s work in the life of Esther might help you respond to it.

If you’re not facing a wall now, you have probably faced one in the past. Can you think of one? If so, reflect on how you navigated it. What did you learn from it? Would you do anything different when facing a similar wall in the future?

While not mentioned in the headlines, the toppling of the Berlin Wall was an answered prayer for many. In fact, Christians gathered for ten years at a church in Leipzig, East Germany, to pray for the wall to come down. In the final months before it fell, thousands of Christians met daily to pray. Many from these meetings participated in enormous demonstrations, calling for action from the political powers that had erected the wall.¹

Fervent prayer reminds us of our dependence upon God, of His care for us, and His involvement in our lives. Don’t let your wall dishearten you. Pray . . . and stay at it. God listens and will guide you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, no wall barricades Your power. No wall in my life deafens Your ears from my prayers. Keep me running hard after You, confident in Your rich supply of grace and generous in my display of love. As Your Son conquered the cross by His victorious resurrection, I know You will eventually conquer all walls in my life. So I trust You. I pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. B. Clayton Bell, Sr. “Revolution by Candlelight,” *Christianity Today* (April 23, 1990): 16.



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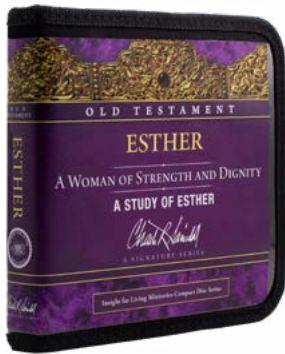
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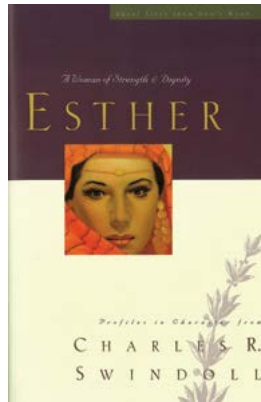
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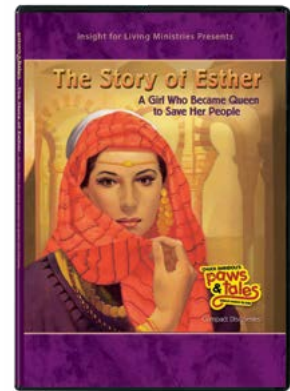
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

To slap when we've been slapped, to trick when we've been tricked, or to mock when we've been mocked—no one needs any training to return like for like. The impulse to strike back settles in all of us from childhood through old age. But no matter how strong the urge to retaliate grips us, we don't have to let it steer us.

God's Spirit grants us the fruit of self-control that we all might rein in our temptation to retaliate. Even though retaliation promises sweet satisfaction, no one ever regretted choosing self-control once tasting the honey its peace provides.

Today, we'll study with Chuck Swindoll Esther 9:1–16 and explore the limits of retaliation and the benefits of exercising self-control.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

If you already feel like you're sinking in spiritual waters at the mere mention of *self-control*, take a deep breath and repeat after Paul, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

God has equipped you through His Spirit and with His wisdom to do all He would have you do. That includes living with the spiritual fruit of self-control.

Before we employ Chuck Swindoll's four-step Bible study method—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—let's pray.

Father, thank You for giving us power, love, and self-discipline through Your Spirit. All these are gifts because of the work of Your Son. I realize that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit because no amount of my own energy can restrain my urge to retaliate. Through this study, help me lay down my will and embrace Yours because it is better—in every way it is better. In Jesus' name, amen.

Quotable

*Don't take your
cues from what
the world will do
because it will
invariably retaliate
with vengeance.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



Observation

Fast-forward from the dispersing of Ahasuerus' edicts to the climactic thirteenth day of Adar—March 7 in the NLT. It's the day Haman authorized the Persians, with the king's blind approval, to annihilate and plunder the Jews. It's also the day Mordecai later authorized the Jews, with the king's delighted awareness, to defend, even avenge, themselves against their attackers.

The author examines three core events in *Esther 9:1–16*. Take a moment now to read the passage slowly.

Esther 9:1–4

In Esther 9:1–4 what significant details do you observe?

You'll notice the author not only recorded the events that happened but interpreted them for the reader as well. Below, write how the author imported the theological meaning of these events.

Esther 9:5–14

Now observe Esther 9:5–14 and record any important details you discover.



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What were Esther's two requests of the king?

1. _____

2. _____

Esther 9:15–16

Lastly, examine Esther 9:15–16, and record your observations below.

Remember, biblical authors sometimes repeated themselves to emphasize their points. What did the author repeat in this section?

Now that we've observed Esther 9:1–16, let's interpret it.



Interpretation

Observation is like walking through a colorful garden, noticing all the petunias and roses, the elephant ears and ivies. We take it all in, noticing as much as we can. Then, during interpretation, we begin to notice the planting patterns the gardener used to pair flowers, the path he intended us to take through the garden, and the color schemes he established in the grand design.



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Power and the Powerful—Esther 9:1–4

How did the author explain the use and transfer of power in this section?

Throughout the entire book of Esther, the author never mentioned Mordecai's piety or devotion to God. Do you believe Mordecai was a pious man devoted to God, or do you believe the public officials viewed him as a harsh man? Why? Really think about this, and determine how your conclusion influences your understanding of God in His use of Mordecai.

In a foreign land with idol worshipers, Yahweh gave Jews the upper hand against their enemies. God, not government, always has the final say—even if it seems the government consistently perverts justice.

The Outcome of Haman's Family and Followers—Esther 9:5–14

Whether defending Haman's honor or lusting after silver, groups attacked the Jews despite the second edict. In this paragraph, how did the author suggest God's involvement?



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With Haman impaled and his property confiscated, the Jews enacted a final humiliation against this anti-Semite: his sons were killed—probably to ward off a coup against Esther, Mordecai, or any official. Based on Esther’s first request of the king (Esther 9:13), why did she ask for Haman’s sons to hang like Haman?

God ensured the Jews were protected and their enemies defeated.

Esther 9:15–16

The author emphasized the Jews’ newfound safety, then he expressed their newfound victory. Note how many were killed. Remember that Esther’s request for the following day paralleled the terms of the first—the Jews killed only those who attacked them, not those they disliked (*Esther 8:11–12*). What in this passage reveals the Jews’ remarkable self-control?



Correlation

Sandwiched between the two statements about the Jews not taking plunder lies an easily overlooked Hebrew phrase that carries loads of meaning. The author wrote that the Jews “gained relief from all their enemies” (Esther 9:16) or gained “rest from their enemies” (9:16 *NASB*; see translation endnote). This statement emphasizes God’s promise to give the Jews *rest* from their enemies (sometimes translated *relief* in the NLT). Below we will examine a few verses that develop this major biblical theme.



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

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Esther 9:1–16

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STUDY

Record what the following verses say about *rest*.

Deuteronomy 3:20; 12:9–10

Deuteronomy 25:19 (Don't miss the reference to Amalek, the ancestor of Agag, who is in the lineage of Haman—*Esther 3:1*); *Joshua 1:13–15*

2 Samuel 7:1–11; 1 Kings 8:56

Alas, the great King Solomon could not retain the rest God granted him and his people. Solomon pursued other gods. Therefore, God raised up prophets to bring the wayward Israelites back to Himself. Review these two passages in Isaiah in which God promised a future rest for His people.

Isaiah 11:10; 32:17–18 (NASB)



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After developing a quick historical overview of God's promise of rest to His people, it gives new theological meaning to the Lord's adored offer: "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Can you now see more clearly the theological significance of *rest* used by the author of Esther in 9:16? In Esther, *rest* means to be undisturbed by enemies. In other words, the term means to be free to enjoy our work—our God-given purpose—in the same way God did when He "rested on the seventh day" of creation (Genesis 2:1–3). *Rest* doesn't mean inaction but performing the *right* action—doing what God made us to do. Further in the biblical narrative, *rest* takes on a deeper meaning: an inward peace from God because of our relationship with Him—the chief reason for which God made us.



Application

To exercise the kind of self-control displayed by the Jews and promised by the Spirit, we must enjoy a profound, supernatural rest in Christ. We would grow weary if we tried to avenge ourselves of every snub. Chuck's three principles help us move spiritually toward this rest in Jesus, so we can refrain from the bitter root of retaliation.

1. *Remember, you are a Christian, which means you are different from the world.* God has given you resources unavailable anywhere else. Enjoy His presence, comfort, and peace.
2. *Remember, as a Christian, you are a part of a family.* You are a child of God. We take our direction from His grace rather than retaliatory instincts.
3. *Remember, the Lord is your defender.*

Never pay back evil with more evil. . . . Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD. . . . Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good. (Romans 12:17–19, 21)

Do you want to retaliate? If so, consider speaking with the person antagonizing you and pursuing peace with him or her. Before you do, however, prepare how you will address the situation, and pray for the Lord's blessing on your efforts of reconciliation. Record your plan and desired outcome below.



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Do you know of a relationship in conflict right now that is failing because of constant retaliation? Record your prayer for those people.

God's Spirit can quiet the unsettled soul from the deep desire to retaliate. How unfathomable was Jesus' cry from His cross, "Forgive them" (Luke 23:34). How remarkable! He has the power that can make reconciliation possible, and He will extend that power to the one who asks because He is good.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for peace that conquers conflict and for joy that expels anger. Christ has purchased for me all the riches I could ever want, so please fix my mind on who I am in Him and the hope I have in Him. Satisfy me with Your presence so I may exercise supernatural self-control that forgives rather than retaliates. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.



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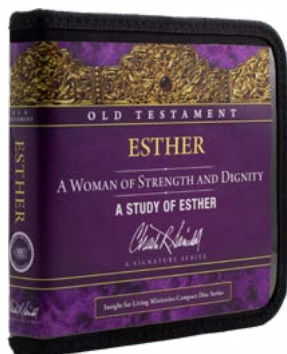
Esther 9:1–16

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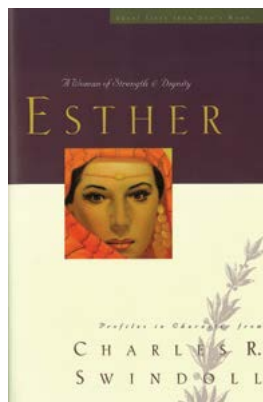
STUDY



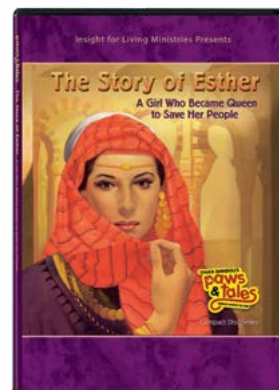
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

After the Ache . . . Celebrate!

Esther 9:17–32

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Have you ever been on a nice walk in your neighborhood or having lunch at work and *WHAM!* out of nowhere your mind hits you with a memory you hate to relive? Too often our minds focus on negative memories when we think about the past. We need hardly any effort to recall the people, events, circumstances, or decisions that have caused us pain, strain, or shame.

However, these seismic memories don't have to shake or topple us. They can be tools that increase our gratitude to God or give us insight for living. Frequently, the aches we despise draw us closer to God, helping us see Him more clearly. It's that perspective and deeper appreciation which we should never forget after our journeys through trials.

Focusing on Esther 9:17–32, Chuck Swindoll reveals how we can use our memories to preserve wisdom gained through hardship and to adore our God for His faithfulness and grace.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Esther 9:17–32 records the purpose for which the author wrote the book of Esther: to recount and preserve the story of God's protection of the Jews who lived in Susa during the days of Mordecai and Esther.

In this eleventh *Searching the Scriptures* study on Esther, we'll explore the value of intentional reflection.

Quotable

Life flies in the fast lane. Quick decisions.

Quick money.

Fast action. Strong competition.

So little time spent stopping and recording and reflecting.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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After the Ache . . . Celebrate!

Esther 9:17–32

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

To begin, let's read Psalm 143:5–6. In this short poem, David asked God to deliver him from an enemy who wished to kill him. Remembering what God had done in the past led David to trust God in his present circumstances.

I remember the days of old.

I ponder all your great works

and think about what you have done.

I lift my hands to you in prayer.

I thirst for you as parched land thirsts for rain. (Psalm 143:5–6)

In the same spirit, write your own prayer requesting God's guidance through this study and for His strength to turn your memories into monuments of celebration.



Observation

Because observation focuses solely upon the biblical text, we always begin observation with a slow reading of the passage—even two or three times. Do that now with [Esther 9:17–32](#). As you do, look for anything the author repeated, key events, or explanations of those events. Record those things along with any other significant details you find.



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Why did the author write that the Jews called the festival “Purim”? What were *purim* in Persia?

What did Mordecai and Esther do to solidify Purim as a celebratory festival?

In what verse is the theme *remembrance* discussed? What was the purpose of remembrance according to the author of Esther?



Interpretation

Sometimes interpretation requires correlation because authors depend upon prior biblical sources to convey key points. The author of Esther did this indirectly, so we'll explore a few other biblical passages in our interpretation phase.

All the feasts and festivals prior to the time of Esther had their origin by Yahweh's command through Moses. For example, God commanded the sabbath rest (Exodus 20:8–11) and the Passover feast (23:15). Leviticus 23:1–2 summarizes the origin of the feasts:

The LORD said to Moses, “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. These are the LORD’s appointed festivals, which you are to proclaim as official days for holy assembly.”



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Notice how this language is not present in Esther. How does the origination of Purim through Mordecai contrast with the other festivals commanded during the exodus? What gives Purim its theological significance? To answer this question, we recommend consulting your Bible dictionary to look up *feasts* and *festivals* as well as *Purim*. For an online resource, consult the article, “*Feasts*,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Bible* at biblegateway.com. Also, you might consult your commentary on Esther.

Notice how Esther 9:24–25 restates what happened to Haman. With this statement, the author affirmed theology conveyed throughout the book. What is that theology as it relates to the Jews and as it relates to the idea of pride?

According to Esther 9:28, the Jews celebrated when they remembered their deliverance. What would they lose if they didn’t remember this event? Why is remembering what God did in the past important even for those who didn’t experience the event themselves?



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

After the Ache . . . Celebrate!

Esther 9:17–32

SEARCHING
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SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Esther 9:32, the last verse of chapter nine, states, “So the command of Esther confirmed the practices of Purim, and it was all written down in the records.” Why did the author end with this statement? What might the author have meant theologically by this statement?

In this last section of Esther 9, we read how Mordecai initiated Purim and how he and Esther authorized it as an annual festival of gratitude for what God had done. After God delivered the Jews from their impending extermination, they turned their survival into a memorial of celebration.



Correlation: Comparing Carefully

In the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, we examined how the theme *rest* threads the entire canon of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, so that it carries theological weight when the author uses the phrase. You probably noticed it used again in our passage today (Esther 9:17–18, 22).

In this study, we’ll examine the theme of *remembrance* and its development and significance in the biblical narrative as well as the importance of reflection in our own lives.

What were the Jewish people commanded to remember in *Exodus 13:1–16*? Why were they commanded to reflect on this?

What was the importance of reflection in *Deuteronomy 5:12–15*?



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After the Ache . . . Celebrate!

Esther 9:17–32

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Psalm 105 consists of forty-five verses all devoted to remembering. Peruse the first five verses and record the relationship between remembrance and worship.

The New Testament continues this theme. For this study, we'll read just one. What did Paul want us to remember in *Ephesians 2:11–16*?

Based on the passages above, write a summary of the importance of reflection as a spiritual discipline.



Application

Chuck provided two principles for application in his sermon on Esther 9:17–32. These are especially helpful for those who squirm at the recollection of personal past events.

1. *Raise up a mental memorial to turn your sadness into celebration.* Bad memories don't have to haunt us. While weeping may last through the night, God can bring joy in the morning (Psalm 30:5).
2. *Don't turn your memorial into a shrine.* We don't worship the memory, nor do we remember for the sake of remembering. We use the memorial to draw closer to God, celebrate the good He has done, and glean the added wisdom He's given.



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Do you have a memory that troubles you? Out of the rubble of regret, build a monument of God's grace, unearthing the positive out of that recollection that has bothered you for so long.

Sometimes, our past points an incriminating finger at us, filling us with shame and guilt as if we had just recommitted the sin. Indeed, the corrupting power of sin leads us to think and act in shameful ways. But sin does not dictate who we are. In Christ you have a new name. God has forgiven you and filled you with His Spirit to live a new life. Express your gratitude to God who has adopted you as His child into His family.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for not dealing with me according to my sins and for strengthening me through the traumas of my past. You know how fragile I am. All people are like a flourishing flower of the field that is gone with a gust of wind. But You are not harsh. You are gentle, and You lavish me with steadfast love through Your faithful Son, Jesus Christ. With Him I walk. In Him I hope. Because of Him, I can celebrate. In His strong name, amen.



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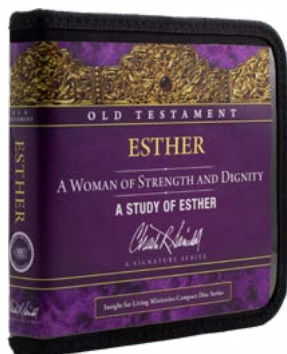
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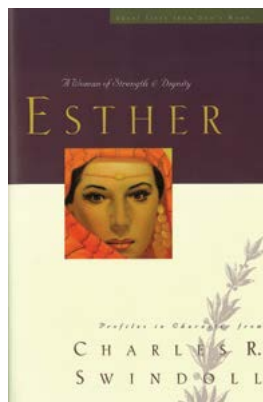
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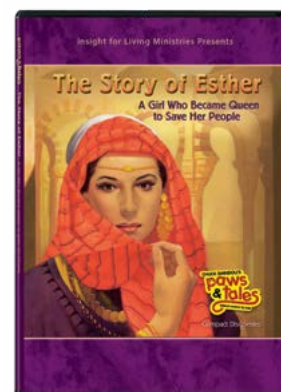
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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

In the End, God Wins

Esther 10

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

All earthly woes, all financial pressures, all emotional trauma, all physical disabilities, all domestic conflicts, all international wars and rumors of wars, all plagues, and all demonic influence will one day cease.

God has promised victory for His people—a future when there will be no more hurting, crying, or pain. Until then, we can see in the Bible, as the record of God's history of redemption, foretastes of God's ultimate triumph.

Today as Chuck Swindoll informs our understanding and encourages our hearts, we'll see that *in the end, God wins!*



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

This twelfth *Searching the Scriptures* study on Esther closes the series on this wonderful book that magnifies the providence of God. By now, we can surely agree with J. I. Packer who wrote,

The doctrine of providence teaches Christians that they are never in the grip of blind forces (fortune, chance, luck, fate); all that happens to them is divinely planned, and each event comes as a new summons to trust, obey, and rejoice, knowing that all is for one's spiritual and eternal good (Romans 8:28).¹

Quotable

*Amid the struggles
and the storms and
the battles and the
sufferings of life,
we always focus
beyond us today
and we see a
triumph; we
see a victory.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

In the End, God Wins

Esther 10

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Before we delve into [Esther 10:1–3](#), let's retrace God's providence in the previous chapters of Esther. Write a one-sentence summary of each chapter, recapping the key events and themes. You can refer to Insight for Living Ministries' [overview](#) and chart for help.

Esther 1	
Esther 2	
Esther 3	
Esther 4	
Esther 5	
Esther 6	
Esther 7	
Esther 8	
Esther 9	

Before we study, let's pray:

Father, thank You for using Your power for my good. All good things come from You even when I don't recognize them. Please help me to have eyes to see and ears to hear, so I can perceive more clearly how You're working in my life. I pray You bless my time as I study this last chapter of Esther. In Jesus' name, amen.



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In the End, God Wins

Esther 10

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



Observation

As we always strive to do when studying the Bible, let's begin with a slow observation of *Esther 10*. Read the chapter and write down any details you find important.

Record the five characteristics of Persia's new prime minister, Mordecai, mentioned in Esther 10:3.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



Interpretation

Now let's explore what the text means. We'll answer the question *What is the author communicating?* Remember, during interpretation we consult commentaries and other resources to aid our understanding of the history and theology in the passage. Online, Thomas Constable offers free summaries and an extensive commentary. Look for Constable's Notes in the right reading pane of *Lumina*.



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ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

In the End, God Wins

Esther 10

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

What are two reasons why the author might have included the statement about King Ahasuerus in Esther 10:1?

You'll remember in the prior study the significance of record keeping in the ancient world and through the Old Testament narrative. How might Esther 10:2 validate the story of Esther as a whole?

Why would the author want to end with the description and influence of Mordecai?

When God rescued the Jews from Egypt, He formed them into a political state among the powers of the ancient Near East. But when Israel disobeyed God's Law, He dissolved Israel's unity and exiled them from their land. Why is it significant that the Jews can successfully follow God's will while in a foreign state?



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For the faithful Jews who were to be exiled with the unfaithful nation in the 590s and 580s BC, God comforted them with this word from Jeremiah,

This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: "Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:4–7)

This same command applies to the Jews who stayed in Persia instead of returning home at the decree of Cyrus in 539 BC. As Mordecai sought the good of his people and spoke for the peace of the Jews, he certainly pursued the welfare of Persia as Ahasuerus' trustworthy second-in-command.



Correlation

The Jews survived. Mordecai grew in honor and influence. God's people prospered. Their situation became a foretaste of the end of history. A few studies ago, we traced the theme *rest* through a few key passages. Let's do the same with the theme *peace* in Esther 10:3 (translated "welfare" in the NLT and NASB).

Each passage highlighted in the following paragraphs develops the theme *peace* (*shalom* in the Hebrew Old Testament and *eirene* in the Greek New Testament). Review and record how each author used the term.

When peace was lost in Eden, God began working to restore it through Noah and Abraham as well as Joseph and Moses. As He prepared the Jews to become a political nation, He gave them a conditional promise. How did Moses reference *peace* in [Leviticus 26:1–6](#)?



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As Israel and Judah refused to worship God and decided to follow their own religious machinations—silver gods on the walls and idolatrous prostitutes in the high places—God called them to turn back, but they refused. Review what [Jeremiah 8:11–15](#) says about this.

But the prophets didn't condemn without also offering hope. While God promised peace, conditioned on Israel's obedience to the Law of Moses, He uttered the unconditional promise that His people would be restored along with the whole world. How did Isaiah portray God's promise in [Isaiah 9:1–7](#)?

For the world to experience peace, people must first be at peace with God. So Jesus came to give peace to you and me as a foretaste of the peace that will one day fill the world when He returns. Review [John 16:16–33](#).

Our peace with God through Jesus Christ is only the beginning. While not mentioned specifically in [Romans 8:18–25](#), how does this verse paint a rich picture of the peace and glory for which all creation longs and which all creation will soon enjoy?



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After this brief correlation of the theme *peace* throughout biblical history, reflect on how this helps us understand the significance of Esther 10:3. Record your thoughts below.



Application

To end our study of Esther, we reflect upon what we have learned to help us live our new life in Christ. The Holy Spirit gives us strength and wisdom to believe God's promises and follow God's ways. Chuck has helpfully provided three principles to aid us in this last study on Esther.

Unexpected People

When God wins, He often uses unexpected people. In the past weeks, we read how God used Esther and Mordecai even though they were from lowly beginnings. God does not always look for the greatest names, those with the fullest bank accounts, or the most polished demeanor. He often works through ordinary people. Reflect on how you choose your friends—the people you like to spend time with.

Do you let those sneaky prejudices mentioned above creep into your social routine? What can you do to combat that kind of favoritism?

Jesus' cross equalizes all people, abolishing prejudice derived from an attitude of superiority. By living in the power of His forgiveness, peace, and renewal, we display that we belong to the people of God who loves everyone.

Unpretentious Qualities

When God wins, He usually upholds unpretentious qualities. Mordecai did not seek to make his name great, nor did he seek his own good. As a humble servant, he sought the good of his people. What qualities attract you to people? Oftentimes, it's those qualities to which we're attracted that we want in ourselves.



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Do you try to control or manipulate how others see you? Write down ways you can develop unpretentious, godly qualities in your life.

Universal Message

When God wins, the message He honors most often is universal. Mordecai didn't enjoy God's victory alone; many benefited from Mordecai's exaltation. God invites all to enjoy His victory, greatly contrasting the world's victories which often include looking out for number one. Remember that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news extended to everyone.

What specifically can you do to help your church spread the message of peace through Jesus Christ? Can you serve the missions committee? Reach out to a new neighborhood? Speak peace into your own family? Write your ideas below.

Through the story of Esther, we learn how God works in uncommon ways through the common affairs of life. We see that God not only reigns as the powerful Sovereign, but He also governs as the beneficent King, exercising His providence for the ultimate good of His people. Remember His faithfulness, receive His peace, and rest in His sovereign control today.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in Christ I have all I need. I ask that His peace remove all my anxiety, His wisdom guide all my plans, His presence subdue all my depression, His love flow through all my actions, and His hope carry me through all my woes. Let all people see, even in my withering flesh, a supernatural energy that operates according to Your good providence for Your good purposes. I pray this that Jesus may be glorified and my joy be full. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 56.



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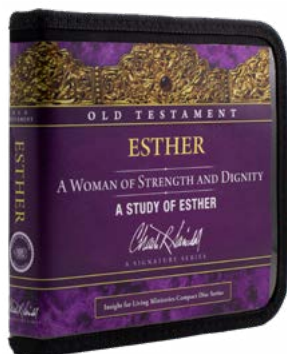
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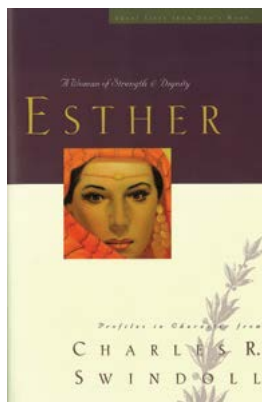
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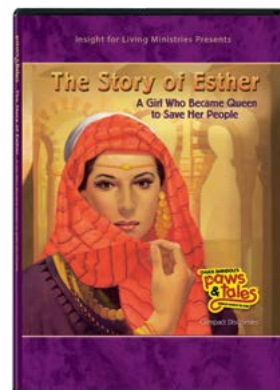
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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