



# THE LOOKOUT

JULY 2024

## Unit: Esther Theme: A Hero's Portrait

**Overview:** The exilic book of Esther is different from any other book in the Bible. It never mentions God's name. But God's presence is evident in every chapter. (This idea is effectively conveyed in Donald Sunukjian's article and sermon titled, "A Night in Persia," which also is known as "My Name Is Harbona.") Esther's uncle Mordecai plays a major role in the book; he nudges Esther to step up and play the role of hero. Esther, a young Jewish woman, succeeds Vashti as queen of Persia. She becomes the wife of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) and ends up saving the Jewish people from annihilation. Students will learn how discernment helps achieve favor, how courage rises when it is most needed, how love acts in protection, and how joy is found in God's victory.

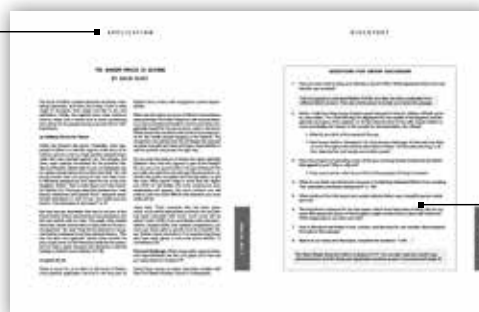
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



**Tabs** indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JULY 21, 2024

**LESSON AIM:** Pursue life-giving love.

**UNIT:** Esther

**THEME:** A Hero's Portrait

**LESSON TEXT:** Esther 7:1—8:8

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Esther 5–6; Psalm 63:2-3; Proverbs 21:21; 24:11-12;  
John 15:11-13; 1 John 3:16-18

## STUDY

### SHE DISPLAYED LOVE

BY MARK SCOTT

Proverbs 24:11 says, “Rescue those being led away to death.” That is what Queen Esther did. Her rescue attempt required courage and love. There may, however, be some dissonance between the lesson title and the lesson text. The title, “She Displayed Love,” sounds soft and gentle. In the text, Esther strongly accused wicked Haman and opted for another edict so that the Jews could at least defend themselves. But love sometimes takes different paths to accomplish its end.

Esther took the bold step of going to the king uninvited. She knew she could perish for doing this. But the king extended the scepter of grace. She invited the king and Haman to the first banquet (which actually is the fifth banquet in the book). At this banquet, she did not reveal her request to the king (Esther 5:1-8). Haman was no doubt on cloud nine as he left the queen’s quarters. But that “high” quickly turned to a “low” when he saw Mordecai and immediately felt disrespected (5:9-14).

While Haman plotted to kill Mordecai, the king’s insomnia prompted him to have his memoirs read (Esther 6:1-3). The memoirs indicated Mordecai had thwarted an assassination attempt and never been honored for his loyalty to the king. In a significant turn of events, Haman was directed to lead Mordecai through the streets so that the Jew, Haman’s enemy, might be honored (6:4-11). Even Haman’s wife knew this to be a bad omen (6:12-14).

#### The Gig Is Up

*Esther 7:1-10*

Haman was fetched for the second banquet. King Xerxes pleaded with Esther to make her request; he lavishly promised to grant to her *up to half the kingdom*. Queen Esther finally made her request: *Grant me my life and spare my people*. Esther made her *petition* (demand or wish) by saying the Jews would be *destroyed, killed and annihilated*—the very same language used in the edict (see Esther 3:13). She confessed she would not have bothered the king had the matter been less significant.

Xerxes blew his stack. Perhaps he thought back to the edict. That Haman was the villain must not have occurred to him before then, because he evidently had not thought about Esther being a Jewess. Esther did not hesitate; she said, “It is *this vile Haman!*” Haman was *terrified* (overwhelmingly frightened), and the king was so mad he had to step outside to gain his composure (or to take a moment to decide how to make Haman pay).

Haman begged Queen Esther for his life and became animated by *falling on the couch where Esther was reclining*. The king returned at that moment and assumed Haman was molesting (assaulting or subduing) the queen. The king ordered that Haman’s face be covered (i.e., that the death cloth be placed on him).

*Harbona*, one of the king’s eunuchs, suggested that the gallows built for Mordecai might be available. The king said, “*Impale him on it.*” The *king’s fury subsided* as Haman’s body dangled on the pole.

#### The New Edict Is Composed

*Esther 8:1-8*

Esther’s courageous love brought about several consequences. Queen Esther received the estate (house) of Haman. This probably meant Haman was now viewed as a criminal. Mordecai was enlisted in the king’s service with a *signet ring* to prove the appointment. Esther set Mordecai over *Haman’s estate*.

To eliminate legislative vacillation, a law of the Medes and Persia could not be revoked. So, even though Esther’s cause had been vindicated and wicked Haman had been executed, the original edict about destroying the Jews still was in effect. Esther displayed her love for her people a second time by going to the king. She pleaded, fell at the king’s feet, wept, and begged the king to do something to reverse the dilemma in which the Jews found themselves. The king again extended his *gold scepter*. The queen wanted the edict overruled (revoked, returned, or turned back).

This could not be done, but Xerxes did the next best thing. He had *another decree* written with the king’s authority and on *behalf of the Jews*. This document was also sealed with the king’s signet ring, just like the initial edict. The text guaranteed that the Jews could kill, destroy, and annihilate anyone by defending themselves against any aggression. Beyond that, the Jews were even given the privilege of taking the initiative and going on offense to plunder the people who meant them harm.

Esther demonstrated love by advocating for her people. ■

*Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.*

## APPLICATION

### WHEN DANGER THREATENS THOSE YOU LOVE

BY DAVID FAUST

What do we have in common with Esther? Nearly 500 years before Christ, she lived in a palace, belonged to a royal family, and was extraordinarily good-looking. Most of us don't do anything newsworthy and heroic, but God used her to save thousands of lives—and a book of the Bible was even named for her!

Yet, like other characters we meet in the Bible, Esther and her problems are surprisingly relatable. Do you ever wrestle with tough decisions or complicated situations that seem unresolvable? Do you ever feel like you are in over your head? Do you ever worry because someone you love is in danger?

#### The Destruction of Families

Esther had good reason to worry. An evil manipulator named Haman persuaded King Xerxes to order the execution of the Jews. Mixing logical arguments with earnest emotions, Esther pleaded for the king to rescind his terrible edict. She concluded her case by asking Xerxes, "For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?" (Esther 8:6).

We are separated from Esther by time, culture, and circumstances, but we all can relate to her worries. We don't want people we love to see disaster. We don't want our nations, churches, or families to be destroyed. Many anxious parents and grandparents could echo Esther's worried words, "How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?"

Satan delights in destroying families, dividing churches, and tempting our kids to give up their faith. How can we protect our children from wolves in sheep's clothing who prey on their minds, souls, and bodies? How can we

resist unbiblical ideas our culture embraces as normative? How can we prepare our kids for the daunting spiritual challenges they will face in the future?

#### The Intervention of God

Psalm 127:4 compares children to "arrows in the hands of a warrior." To shoot an arrow, you must aim it and then release it. That's what parents do with our kids: Aim them the best we can, then release them. Once you release the arrow, you have no direct control over it; but as someone has said, "You still can pray for a favorable wind!" Parents can't control our grown-up children and the decisions they make, but we can aim them in the right direction and pray for God to blow "a favorable wind" their way.

Esther's burdens seemed unbearable, but she boldly brought her concerns to the king; and by God's grace, Xerxes listened to her plea and reversed his edict, saving the lives of the Jews. Aren't you glad we have another throne and a far better King we can ask for help? Through his Son's death and resurrection, it's as if the Father has extended to us "the golden scepter," allowing us to "approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

When we are worried about our families, we can seek God's intervention. If our burdens feel too heavy to bear, we can bring them to the King of kings "who daily bears our burdens" (Psalm 68:19)—even when the burdens seem unbearable and the problems seem unresolvable.

**Personal Challenge:** What is the biggest worry or the heaviest burden you are carrying right now? Through prayer, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). ■

## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever seen someone who treated you badly get their comeuppance? Describe what happened.

Ask two people to read aloud **Esther 7:1—8:8**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. Our lesson text describes the second banquet Queen Esther prepared for the king and Haman. The first banquet is described in Esther 5:1-8. Immediately after that first gathering, Haman was “happy and in high spirits” (v. 9).
  - Review what occurred after that first banquet and before the second banquet (Esther 5:9—6:14).
  - Have you ever known a person like Haman, who allowed one negative in their life to override and ruin all the positives? (See Esther 5:10-13).
3. Why do you think Esther didn’t present her petition and request to her husband, King Xerxes, during the first banquet?
  - After Esther made her petition and request to the king, why do you think Xerxes left the second banquet to go out into the palace garden?
4. Many of the developments in Esther 5–8 occurred almost in sitcom fashion.
  - Discuss some of the ironic and/or humorous elements to this story.
5. In the end, what reasons did King Xerxes have for executing Haman?
6. King Xerxes decided a new decree must be written “in the king’s name in behalf of the Jews” (Esther 8:8). How did that new decree ultimately save the Jewish people?
7. In his Application column this week, David Faust noted that King Xerxes ultimately helped the Jews. But Faust observed: “Aren’t you glad we have another throne and a far better King we can ask for help? Through his Son’s death and resurrection, it’s as if the Father has extended to us ‘the golden scepter,’ allowing us to ‘approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need’ (Hebrews 4:16).”
  - Based on our study and discussion, how is God reaching out to you, and how will you reach back to God this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Esther 9:18-32; 10:1-3**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■