



# 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.

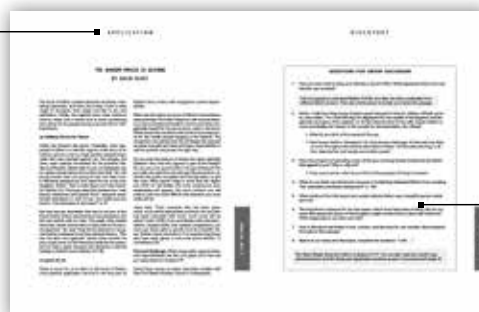
## HOW TO USE

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 28, 2024

**LESSON AIM:** **Celebrate the Lord's  
victories with joy.**

**UNIT:** Esther

**THEME:** A Hero's Portrait

**LESSON TEXT:** Esther 9:18-32; 10:1-3

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Esther 8:9—9:17; Psalm 147:1-7; 1 Peter 1:1-8;  
1 Thessalonians 4:4-7; Luke 15:1-32

## SHE BROUGHT JOY

BY MARK SCOTT

When oppressed people are liberated, they are joyful. That was certainly true for Esther, Mordecai, and their fellow Jews following the victory over Haman's evil and deceitful edict. King Xerxes very much took a "do whatever you want" attitude with the new edict. The Jews' fear of the people was reversed and became the people's fear of the Jews. Some people even declared themselves to be Jews—even though they were not—so they would not be harmed (Esther 8:17). The very day of doom became the actual day of victory for the Jews (9:1).

**Purim Established***Esther 9:18-28*

Moses commanded three feasts to be observed by the Jews: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The Feast of Purim, however, did not come about until the time of Esther during the Jewish captivity. The word *pur* means "lot," as in casting lots to discern God's will. The Jews cast lots to see what day(s) to celebrate God's reversal of their circumstances . . . of God's deliverance of his people. This feast was to be celebrated on the 14th and 15th of the *month of Adar*.

The celebration consisted of joy, resting, feasting, and the giving of presents, specifically *gifts to the poor*—a type of Hanukkah celebration. Word traveled slower in those days—thus allowing more than just one day for the festival to be observed. Mordecai took care of the details. He not only *recorded* (to write down or to enroll) the events, but he also *sent letters throughout the provinces*. The Jews were to celebrate that their sorrow had been turned into joy and their *mourning into a day of celebration*. Psalm 147:3 says, "He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds."

One might say the Jews were celebrating the irony of God. Wicked Haman had cast lots to see what day to kill, destroy, and annihilate the Jews. But there was a reversal that came *back onto his own head*, for ultimately Haman and his sons were *impaled on poles*. Therefore, Purim became a national holiday celebrated every year. The Jews wanted to be sure the day was never forgotten. Joy came to the Jews by God's grand reversal.

**Positions Established***Esther 9:29-32; 10:1-3*

Not only did the Jews thwart their enemies, the events that Purim celebrates also propelled Esther and Mordecai into even more significant positions of authority.

Esther was already queen, but she used her position of influence to write a *second letter* concerning the future celebration of Purim. This became an official document that ensured an ongoing annual celebration for, as the text said, *it was written down in the records*.

Mordecai's influence and power were enlarged. He continued to correspond with the Jews in all 127 provinces of *Xerxes' kingdom*. These official government documents were written with *words of goodwill and assurance* and also designated *times of fasting and lamentation*. Esther 10:1-3 indicated that accurate records were kept of all these proceedings. The *book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia* is lost to us today, but it was still well-known at the time of the writing of Esther.

Mordecai was *second in rank to King Xerxes*. Not only was he *preeminent* (delightfully respected) by the Jews, but the people of Xerxes' kingdom also had to respect him. He was the Jewish advocate from this time forward.

**Perspective Established**

While the way the book of Esther ends pleased the Jews, it can create intellectual challenges for Christians today. After all, it is estimated that 76,000 people lost their lives by virtue of the Purim reversal. As this is being written, the nation of Israel has killed more than 35,000 people in their war against Hamas. The terrorists killed just over 1,200 Jews in the original incursion of Jewish territory (October 7, 2023). How are Christians to think about such things?

Sometimes God's people can become overly zealous and are more interested in being right than in being righteous. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck) states that nowhere in the book of Esther does it say that "Mordecai was a righteous individual or that he was careful to follow the Law." Did Mordecai go too far? While the Jews did not plunder, they did kill. Was this killing commanded by God or permitted by God? When Ezra held his mass divorce session, was that what God intended or did Ezra go too far (Ezra 10)? These are hard issues for Christians to think through. Remember, not all things recorded in the Bible automatically have God's approval. ■

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## APPLICATION

### WHEN THE TABLES ARE TURNED

BY DAVID FAUST

“Weeping may stay for the night,  
but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

Things looked grim. The evil official Haman persuaded King Xerxes to issue an edict calling for the annihilation of the Jews. But when Esther bravely confronted the king and explained the situation to him, Xerxes changed his mind; and what initially looked like impending disaster turned into a day of victory and celebration.

“On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them” (Esther 9:1).

That’s an interesting phrase, isn’t it? “But now the tables were turned.” The expression comes from the old practice of playing board games like backgammon or chess at a table. If “the tables were turned,” players had to accept what previously had been their opponent’s position. We use the expression to describe a significant role reversal or a change of outcome—a comeback in which an underdog gains the upper hand. When the tables are turned, the weak become strong, losers become winners, and disadvantages turn into advantages.

#### **The Lord, the Table-Turner**

Although God remains unnamed in the book of Esther, it’s clear he turned the tables for the Jews. Instead of being destroyed, the opposite occurred as the Jews gained mastery over their enemies.

At crucial moments in history, the Lord has turned defeat into victory and misery into joy. He turned the tables when Hebrew slaves plundered the Egyptians before marching to freedom in the Promised Land, and when David defeated the giant Goliath. Jesus literally overturned tables in the temple courts because merchants and money changers had corrupted God’s house and turned it into a shopping mall (John 2:15).

The greatest table-turn of all happened when Jesus was crucified. It looked like the powers of darkness had won a decisive victory. The Great Physician was killed, the Master Teacher silenced. The disciples wept while the Messiah’s body lay lifeless in a borrowed tomb . . . but joy came on Sunday morning.

#### **The Table-Turn Ahead**

At the end of time, the Father’s righteous judgment will set this upside-down world aright. The tables will be turned. The last will be first. The overlooked will be honored. The weak will be strong. The poor in spirit will be richly rewarded. Mourning will change to morning. Long, dark nights of weeping will dissolve in the glow of God’s glory. Mortals will be clothed with immortality as death gives way to life.

Those who can’t walk will run and jump. Those who love music, but can’t carry a tune, will sing in harmony with heaven’s worship choir. The weary will rest. The sad will be comforted. Those who have been abused, misunderstood, neglected, or belittled will be enveloped in God’s abiding love. The blind will behold heaven’s glorious colors. The deaf will hear God’s voice. The paralyzed will leap with joy. The lonely will enjoy never-ending companionship.

For nearly 2,500 years, the Jews have celebrated the Feast of Purim and retold the story of Esther. But because the Lord turned the tables when he saved us by his grace, there is a far greater feast ahead. “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” (Revelation 19:9).

**Personal Challenge:** Can you think of a time in your life when God intervened and turned a near-disastrous situation into victory? Are there any circumstances right now that move you to call on the Lord to intervene and “turn the tables” so righteousness will triumph over evil? ■

## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever experienced a time of mourning that soon became a time of celebration? Or, in the case of a death of a loved one, mourning that became a time of happy reminiscence? Describe what happened.

Ask two people to read aloud **Esther 9:18-32; 10:1-3**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. After the events of our last lesson (Esther 7:1—8:8), orders were written and distributed that allowed the Jews to protect themselves from the annihilation authorized by the first irrevocable order. Read Esther 8:11-13 and discuss why and how the second edict protected and empowered the Jewish people.
3. Describe and discuss Mordecai's metamorphosis throughout the book of Esther. In Esther 2, he seemed to spend much of his time at the king's gate. In the middle chapters, Mordecai and his people are almost killed. At the end of Esther, Mordecai is the second-most powerful ruler in Persia.
  - Does Mordecai's story arc remind you of any other biblical heroes?
  - What positive attributes did God surely see in Mordecai?
4. How did Purim, which is both a festival and feast, get its name? (Hints: it is also known as the Feast of Lots. See Esther 3:5-7.)
  - Why is Purim a two-day celebration?
5. What good and bad examples of the use of authority are evident in the book of Esther?
  - Consider the authority you have as a Christ follower and/or as a church leader. How will you exercise the authority you have been given?
6. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Haggai 1:5-15; 2:1-9** as we begin a unit on these three Minor Prophets: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The theme for August is "Give Careful Thought." You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■