

## **Book of Esther**

### **Historical Background**

The book of Esther records the events that occurred from 483 BC to 473 BC, during the first half of the reign of King Xerxes, who chose Esther as his queen. During this time period, two major groups of Jews are identified in the book: the one hand, the first remnant of Jews who had returned to Judah. On the other hand, Jews had chosen to stay in Susa, the capital city of Persia, where the story is set.

### **How is the book of Esther relevant to us today?**

Esther is the only book in the Bible, not to mention the name of God. Sometimes, it almost seems like the name of God is omitted, if not censored, in Western society, where atheism, agnosticism, and scientism are pervasive. But that is not to say that God was and is absent. God's presence permeates the story and our present world. In addition to God's sovereignty and faithfulness operating in the background, God is also the great promise keeper. May we not dismay even when it seems like God's name has disappeared, dismissed, and disregarded because God is who God is, and God was/is/will be at work in our world.

### **Esther 1 (Purpose)**

**Observation:** What happened at King Xerxes' banquet? What emotions/expressions do you see and identify in this chapter?

**Interpretation:** How had King Xerxes' banquet paved the way toward serving God's purpose? What is/are God's purpose(s)?

**God loving Us:** How has God gifted us with a sense of purpose?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who demonstrated/demonstrate purpose-led lives, when and where did you experience their practices?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you cultivate and discern purpose in life?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can practice/demonstrate purpose-led life?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating purpose-led life?

### **Esther 2 (Loyalty)**

**Observation:** What relationships do you see built and unbuilt? How had Mordecai helped Esther and King?

**Interpretation:** Why do you think Mordecai's help is important? How is it so?

**God loving Us:** How has God gifted us with people who are loyal to us?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who were/are loyal to God, when and where did you experience their loyalty toward God?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you stay loyal to God?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can practice/demonstrate your loyalty toward God in your life, in your church, and the world?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating loyalty toward God in the future?

### **Esther 3 (Conflict)**

**Observation:** What conflicts do you see (and not see) in this chapter? How did these conflicts impact the larger community?

**Interpretation:** Why would Haman bring Mordecai into conflict with King Xerxes? Why would Haman deal with Mordecai the way he did?

**God loving Us:** How has God gifted us with people who manage conflict well?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who managed/manage conflict well, when and where did you experience their conflict management?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you manage conflict well in your life, in a community, in a church, and the world?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can manage conflict well?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating conflict management in the future?

### **Esther 4 (Listening)**

**Observation:** How had Mordecai listened to the news of Haman's scheme? How did Mordecai react/respond? How had Esther listened to the words of Mordecai? How did Esther react/respond?

**Interpretation:** Why was listening important, and how was its significance reflected in this chapter?

**God loving Us:** How has God gifted us with careful and active listeners?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who demonstrated/demonstrate active listening, when and where did you experience their practices?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you actively listen?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can actively listen?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating active listening in the future?

### **Esther 5 (Justice)**

**Observation:** What did Esther do to address Mordecai's concern?

**Interpretation:** What do you think Esther needs to face King Xerxes and Haman?

**God loving Us:** How has God gifted us with justice?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who pursued/pursue justice, when and where did you experience their relentless pursuits?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you cultivate the steadfast pursuit of justice?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can practice/demonstrate in pursuing justice in your life?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating in pursuing justice in the future?

### **Esther 6 (Attentiveness)**

**Observation:** What did King Xerxes do when he was reminded of Mordecai stopping the king's assassination plot?

**Interpretation:** Why is paying attention important? How has King Xerxes's action demonstrated such importance?

**God loving Us:** How has God paid close attention to us?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who paid/pay close attention to people's lives, when and where did you experience their attentiveness?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you pay attention to God and neighbors?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can pay attention to God and neighbors?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating attentiveness toward God and neighbors in the future?

### **Esther 7 (Radical hospitality)**

**Observation:** What was the intention of the banquet Esther hosted? What happened at the banquet? How did King Xerxes react/respond? How did Haman react/respond?

**Interpretation:** How had Esther's banquet served both? What was needed of Esther to host this banquet?

**God loving Us:** How has God gifted us with people who are unafraid to serve even enemies?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who demonstrated/demonstrate radical hospitality, when and where did you experience their practices and actions?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you cultivate radical hospitality in your life?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can practice/demonstrate your radical hospitality in your life, in your church, and in the world?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating radical hospitality in the future?

### **Esther 8 (Providence)**

**Observation:** How had God provided for God's people?

**Interpretation:** What role had Esther played in God's providence? How had she done it?

**God loving Us:** How has God provided for us?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who met/meet (a) need(s) for others, when and where did you experience their actions?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you meet the need(s) of others?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can meet the need(s) of others?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role of practicing/demonstrating/cultivating God's providence through your actions?

### **Esther 9 (Remembrance)**

**Observation:** How do the people of God commemorate and remember God's activity in their lives?

**Interpretation:** Why is commemorating and remembering important? What's its function and goal for the people of God?

**God loving Us:** How has God gifted us with ways to remember and commemorate important things?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who provided/provide for others to remember and commemorate important things, when and where did you experience their actions?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you cultivate remembrance and commemoration?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can demonstrate remembrance and commemoration?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating remembrance and commemoration?

### **Esther 10 (Leadership)**

**Observation:** What were Mordecai's past actions that led him to become the prime minister?

**Interpretation:** How had Mordecai's actions been a result of his leadership? What was needed of him to exercise his leadership?

**God loving Us:** How has God gifted us with a leader who guides and directs?

**God Meeting Us:** In the life of the saints who led/leads, when and where did you experience their leadership?

**God Refining Us:** What are some people or means to help you cultivate leadership in your life?

**God Inspiring Us to Serve:** What are some ways in which you can exercise your leadership?

**Real Life Today:** What kind of community would you like to play a role in practicing/demonstrating/cultivating leadership?