

READ The BIBLE Together



Esther

26th May – 20th July 2013

**SHALOM CHURCH, SINGAPORE
(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)**

Introductory Notes

The events described in the book of **ESTHER** took place in Persia almost 500 years before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the only book in the Bible where everything happens in Persia, far from Israel the Promised Land. Babylon (in modern day Iraq) is about 600 miles east of Israel, and Shushan (in modern day Iran) is almost 300 miles further east of Babylon.

During the fifth century – which is when the events of **ESTHER** took place – the Persians were the world superpower. It was the largest empire the world had ever seen, covering Arabia, Libya, the Sudan, parts of Egypt and Ethiopia, Israel, Lebanon, the Jordan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Turkey, 127 provinces in all. It lasted for about 200 years and was finally conquered by Alexander the Great.

The timeline below will put the events of **ESTHER** in its proper historical context:

- 539 B.C. Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians
- 538 B.C. Zerubbabel and Joshua led a small party back to Judah
- 536 B.C. Rebuilding of the Temple started in Jerusalem

- 521 B.C. Darius I Hystapes became king of Persia
- 520 B.C. Zechariah & Haggai began to prophesy
- Construction of the Jerusalem Temple resumed
- 516 B.C. The rebuilding of the Temple completed

- 486 B.C. Egypt revolted against Persian rule
- Darius I Hystapes died
- Xerxes (Ahasuerus) became king of Persia

- 484 B.C. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) subdued the revolt in Egypt

- 483 B.C. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) resumed preparations to invade Greece

- 482 B.C. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) re-conquered Babylon after it revolted

- 480 B.C. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) attacked the Greeks and was defeated at Salamis

- 480 B.C. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) defeated by the Greeks again, at Thermopalye

- 464 B.C. Artaxerxes Longimanus became king of Persia

- 458 B.C. Ezra led the second contingent back to Israel

- 445 B.C. Nehemiah back in Israel

The book of **ESTHER** is located after the books of **EZRA** and **NEHEMIAH** in the Old Testament. Though it is positioned after **EZRA** and **NEHEMIAH**, yet the events recorded in **ESTHER** actually took place before those mentioned in **NEHEMIAH**, and somewhere in the middle of the book of **EZRA**.

A “special” distinctive feature of **ESTHER** is that there is **NO** mention of God in this book. A commentator has asked, “*Where is God hiding? Nowhere is He mentioned, or even hinted at, in any of the ten chapters in the book.*”

It is a fair comment, for search the book through and through, you will not, and cannot, find any mention of God in it. God’s Name is missing in its pages and His Name is also missing on the lips of the main characters.

Compared with **RUTH** (the other Old Testament book named after a woman) the contrast stands out rather sharply. You will find *Naomi* and *Ruth* and *Boaz* mentioning the name of the LORD in their speeches. But you will be very hard pressed to find *Esther*, *Mordecai*, not to mention *Ahasuerus*, making mention of the name of God in their speech!

Although the book is silent about God, it does not teach us that God is inactive in all that transpired there and then. Rather, the truth is that He is hidden behind all the events. He is *there*, though He appears to be *not there*. He is *present*, though He seems to be *absent*.

The comment of Matthew Henry on this matter is worth repeating here: *Though the name of God be not in it, the finger of God is, directing many minute events for the bringing about of His people’s deliverance.*

There is a reason why there is no mention of God in this book. We shall find out why as we read **ESTHER**.

Week 1

[26th May – 1st June 2013]

Day 1 Read **ESTHER 1:1-22**

After reading **ESTHER 1**, write down your *first* impressions of it.

Day 2 Read **ESTHER 1:1-3**

1. **Verses 1-3** introduce us to one of the main characters of this book – *King Ahasuerus*. From the Introductory Notes in pages 2-3, whose son was he and when did he reign as king of Persia?

2. **Verse 3** mentioned that the event of **ESTHER 1** took place in the third year of his reign. This would be 483 B.C.

(While he became king in 486 B.C., 485 B.C. would be the first full year that he reigned as king. Hence 485 B.C. would normally be considered as the first year of the reign of *King Ahasuerus*)

- (a) From the Introductory Notes in pages 2-3, what major event took place before the third year of his reign (483 B.C.)?

- (b) From the Introductory Notes in page 2-3, what major events took place soon after the third year of his reign (483 B.C.)?

Day 3 Read **ESTHER 1:3-9**

These 7 verses mention three feasts being held at this time.

1. Look at the first feast (**verses 4-5**).
 - (a) Who was the host?
 - (b) Who were invited to attend?
 - (c) How long was the feast?
 - (d) What was done during the feast?

2. Look at the second feast (**verses 5-8**).
- (a) Who was the host?
 - (b) Who were invited to attend?
 - (c) How long was the feast?
 - (d) What was done during the feast?

3. Look at the third feast (**verse 9**).
- (a) Who was the host?
 - (b) Who were invited to attend?
 - (c) How long was the feast?
 - (d) What was done during the feast?

Day 4 Summary Notes for **ESTHER 1:1-9**

Ahasuerus, better known to many students of history as *Xerxes*, was the son of *Darius* and the grandson of *Cyrus*. He became king of the great Persian Empire in the year 486 B.C. History depicts *Ahasuerus* as someone who was physically very tall but very lacking in tolerance and emotional sensitivity. Soon after his ascension to the throne in 486 B.C. he had to brutally crush the rebellion in Egypt. The huge celebrations and festivities that we read in **ESTHER 1** could perhaps be traced to this military success as well as his preparations to invade Greece. However, his wars against the Greeks ended in humiliating defeats for him. That was in 480 and 479 B.C. The reign of *Ahasuerus* ended in the year 465 B.C. when he was assassinated.

In the first 9 verses of **ESTHER 1**, the author painted a glamorous picture of *Ahasuerus* by talking about his empire, his parties and his wealth:

- (a) His empire

He reigned from India to Ethiopia. Translated into our world map today, it would be from modern Pakistan to northern Sudan.

While the Persian Empire was normally described as being divided into satrapies, here the author chose to speak in terms of provinces. During that time the Persian Empire has 31 satrapies that was formed by 127 provinces!

Can you see the geographical vastness of *Ahasuerus'* empire? How vast, how wide, how extensive was his empire! One could say that it is from sunrise to sunset!! And it was made up of 127 provinces!! *The readers were supposed to be impressed.*

(b) His parties

Altogether, we are informed of three feasts that took place during the time of **ESTHER 1**.

The first feast was meant for ALL the king's officials and servants in Shushan and all the provinces, lasting 180 days! Note that instead of mentioning half a year, or 6 months, or even 26 weeks, the author chose to put it down as 180 days! Who can sustain a feast of 180 days? Well, *King Ahasuerus* could!!

After 180 days of feasting and exhibition, **verse 5** speaks of another feast, the second feast. This time, even the residents of Shushan were invited -- *the king made a feast lasting seven days for ALL the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small*. How much food would need to be cooked and catered, how many bottles of whisky and beer would need to be uncorked!!

And then, we were told that in **verse 9** that *Queen Vashti* also held a feast, this time for the ladies. Needless to say, *King Ahasuerus* would be the one to pick up the bill.

Why were the feasts mentioned and mentioned in this way? *The readers were supposed to be impressed.*

(c) His wealth

Intimately connected with the feasts is his wealth. The fact that someone could hold a feast of 180 days, and then another feast for 7 days with a third feast running concurrently, with a huge guest list, it speaks volumes about the wealth of this someone.

Not only that, but the fact that someone could hold an exhibition for 180 days to show off his riches (this exhibition took place alongside the 1st feast), he must have some riches!!

The author will point us to **verse 4** and **verse 6** to remind us of just how wealthy was *Ahasuerus*. Also, note that in the second feast, the drinks were served in golden vessels and each vessel uniquely different in shape and size from another!

All in all, *the readers were supposed to be very impressed with Ahasuerus.*

So the author of **ESTHER** began with *a picture of glitter and glamour*. Yet this picture did not last, as we shall see from the second part of **ESTHER 1**.

After reading the Summary Notes above, write down any comments/questions you might have.

Day 5 Read **ESTHER 1:10-15**

1. What was the command of *King Ahasuerus* to *Queen Vashti*?

2. What was the reply of *Queen Vashti*?

3. What was the king's response to the queen's reply?

Verse 12b:

Verse 13-15:

Day 6 Read **ESTHER 1:16-22**

1. To the king's question, what was *Memucan's* counsel? (Use your own words)

2. What were his arguments for giving this counsel?

3. Do you think this counsel was good and wise? Explain your answers.

Day 7 Summary Notes for **ESTHER 1:10-22**

If **verses 1-9** present a glittering and glamorous picture of Ahasuerus, then **verses 10-22** present a foolish and tragic picture of *King Ahasuerus*. This can be seen from the following four scenes:

(a) A not-so-sober decision

In **verse 10**, we see him at the end of 187 days of feasting -- *when the heart of the king was merry with wine . . .* He may not be dead drunk, but he was tipsy, he was not sober. At this point, he decided to bring the whole event to a climax, to a fitting finale, or so he thought. For the last 186 days, he has been seeking to impress his people and servants with his riches and power. Now, he decides to parade his most prized possession --- *Queen Vashti*, and impress them to the hilt!

(b) An unexplained refusal

Unexpectedly and without stating a reason, we are told that *Queen Vashti* refused to heed the king's summon. This came as a shock, and was going totally against what we have been seeing thus far in this chapter. Everything was taking place to show that *King Ahasuerus* rules. Everything belongs to him and for him. No one, absolutely no one, should disobey him or offend him!

Yet, lo and behold, here is the queen and she refused to obey him publicly! The climax has turned into an anti-climax, the exciting finale into an embarrassing finish! All that *King Ahasuerus* has been doing to achieve for the last 186 days has now been washed down the drain by that one rejection from *Queen Vashti*!

(c) An over-the-top reaction

Queen Vashti's refusal brought the immediate onset of the king's anger. **Verse 12** says that *the king was furious and his anger burned within him*. He lost his temper because he lost his face!!! So, he turned to his 7 trusted advisers and asked them how he should handle the situation.

The counsel given by the 7 counselors was a huge unnecessary over-reaction. Listen to what *Memucan* said in **verse 16 & 17**: *Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also ALL the princes and ALL the people who are in ALL the provinces of King Ahasuerus, for the queen's behaviour will become known to ALL women . . .*

It was a domestic problem, between one man and his wife, though no doubt the man was the king. But now the issue was blown out of proportion, making it into an empire-wide issue of far-reaching implications involving threats to internal security! In one word, the reaction of the king and his 7 wise men was over the top, simply out of proportion to the issue at hand.

(d) A foolish finale

The way to deal with the problem was to issue a decree that cannot be altered or revoked -- since *Queen Vashti* would not come, let her never come henceforth.

As for the rest of the female population in Persia, this was what they must know and do:

Verse 20 --- *they must honour their husband.*

Verse 22 --- *each man must be the master of his own house, and speak in the language of his people.*

Man's authority must be re-asserted and stamped on every square inch in the home. He must be the master of his own house, seen to be and acknowledged to be. If the husband and wife come from different ethnic or dialect groups, then everyone in the family must speak the dialect of the husband and father, not the wife and mother. The man's authority must be seen even in such small, domestic area.

This was making a mountain out of a molehill, killing mosquitoes using missiles! To issue an empire-wide imperial decree, and to give such specific instructions concerning domestic matters, this was certainly an over-kill! But that was what *King Ahasuerus* did, and this was how the whole matter was resolved.

At the end of it, we see *King Ahasuerus*, not as a great king, but as a foolish king. Imagine a king issuing an empire-wide imperial decree that all husbands must be masters of their own house, when he himself could not practise it! When the common people asked, "*Why this decree?*" the answer would be because *King Ahasuerus* could not get *Queen Vashti* to obey him!! When it is asked, "*In what condition did he issue this decree?*" it shall be answered, "*When he was very angry and quite drunk!*"

The man who ruled over 127 provinces could not rule his own spirit! The one who had control over all Persia could not control his mind, being drunk! How foolish he would have appeared in the eyes of the people! He has sought to impress ALL the people. At the end, he has only succeeded to disgrace himself in the eyes of ALL the people! He sought to impress ALL the people. In the end, he only succeeded in disgracing himself in the eyes of ALL the people!

After reading the Summary Notes above, write down any comments/questions you might have.

What is the ONE most important lesson you've learnt from **Esther 1**?

Week 2

[2nd – 8th June 2013]

Day 1 Read **ESTHER 2:1-18**

After reading **ESTHER 2:1-18**, write down your *first* impressions of it.

Day 2 Read **ESTHER 2:1-4**

1. Why was this beauty contest held?
2. Who were the participants of this beauty contest?
3. Who was the judge of this beauty contest?
4. What's the prize for winning this beauty contest?

Day 3 Read **ESTHER 2:5-7**

1. In **verse 7**, we are introduced to *Esther*, one of the participants in this beauty contest. We can say the following three things about her:

- (a) She was l_____ and b_____
- (b) She was an o_____
- (c) She had another name: H_____

2. In verses 5 & 6, a relative of *Esther* was introduced.

- (a) What was his name?
- (b) How was he related to *Esther*?
- (c) What else was said about him?

Day 4 Read **ESTHER 2:8-14**

- 1. (a) How were the ladies prepared for the contest?
 - (b) Who was to oversee their preparation?
- 2. How was the beauty contest carried out? (**Verse 14**, cf. **verse 4**)
- 3. What would happen to the ladies after the contest? (**Verse 14**)

Day 5 Read **ESTHER 2:8-14** again

- 1. What happened to *Esther* during the period of preparation? (**Verse 9**)

2. What did *Esther* do during the period of preparation (**verse 10**)? Why?

Day 6 Read **ESTHER 2:15-18**

1. When was *Esther* brought before the king?

2. What was the outcome of the contest for *Esther*?

3. (a) Imagine you were a Jew living in Persia then.

Would you be happy with this outcome? Why?

(b) If you were *Esther*, would you be happy to take part in this contest? Why?

(c) If you were the father of *Esther*, would you be happy to let her participate in this beauty contest? Why?

Day 7 Summary Notes for **ESTHER 2:1-18**

The events recorded in **ESTHER 1** took place in 483 B.C. -- the third year of the reign of *King Ahasuerus* (**1:3**). The beauty contest of **ESTHER 2** took place in 479 B.C. -- the seventh year of the reign of *King Ahasuerus* (**2:16**). So four years have passed since *Vashti* was removed from being queen.

During those four years, we know from the secular history of Persia that *King Ahasuerus* engaged the Greeks in battle twice. Each time, he was defeated. After the second defeat, he stopped his campaign against the Greeks and returned to Shushan. This is *when* our text in **ESTHER 2** began – after 480 B.C.

Verse 1 tells us that the king began to miss *Vashti* and to regret his act of divorcing her. Perhaps the king was beginning to blame his advisors for the removal of *Vashti* and was

now considering how he could circumvent his own decree and restore *Vashti* to her position.

Now, if *Vashti* returned to power, one can imagine what would happen to those seven advisers! Therefore, in view of the possibilities, the advisers had better come up with something good and fast! Hence, they proposed to *King Ahasuerus* to hold this beauty contest to select a queen. It was a most suitable and appropriate solution, given the character of the king and the nature of the problem. Note that the phrase "*beautiful young virgins*" was being repeated twice in one sentence (**verse 2 & 3**). The aim was to get the king to focus on the "*beautiful young virgins*" and therefore push *Vashti* from his mind. The last sentence of **verse 4** tells us the response of the king --- *this thing pleased the king, and he did so*.

Verse 3 states clearly that all beautiful young virgins from all the provinces of the Persian Empire are to be gathered and brought to Shushan the citadel, meaning that there would be at least 127 contestants! The winner of the contest shall not only be crowned as the most beautiful woman in the entire Persian Empire, but also as queen!

According to **verse 4**, there was only one judge and it was *King Ahasuerus*. He alone would decide which lady pleased him most, and he would then put the crown on her head accordingly.

How were the ladies to please *King Ahasuerus*? **Verses 12 & 13** tell us that they would undergo a full year of beauty treatment under the management of *Hegai*. Then each of them would take turns to visit the king in his palace. She would go to see the king in the evening and then leave the next morning, to the second house of the women, under the management of another eunuch called *Shaashgaz* (**verse 14**).

The author was very discreet in his writing. He sought to tell the truth but he did not see any need to go into any great details. So he told us next to nothing concerning what happened from evening to morning when the young ladies visited the king. All he did was to leave us a clue in **verse 14**. The eunuch *Shaashgaz* was the one in charge of all the king's concubines! Thus, to win this beauty contest, each lady would have to commit sexual immorality with the king!

Should *Mordecai* and *Esther* be part of this whole thing? Maybe some would argue that they had no choice! However, we should be very troubled to observe the fact that *Mordecai* charged *Esther* to keep her Jewish identity a secret! Why? Was it because if her Jewish identity were known, then she would be disqualified? If that were so, then making known her Jewish identity would actually save her from the sinful situation!

It was equally troubling that *Esther* obeyed *Mordecai* and hid her Jewish identity. Note also that in **verse 12**, she had to spend one year in the palace preparing for the big day. What would she eat during those twelve months? Remember that a number of years ago, a young man named *Daniel* found himself in a similar situation. He was taken into the imperial courts, and food was set before him that he as a Jew, obedient to God's

commands, could not eat. He made his faith known to the management and sought their understanding. Could *Esther* do the same here? No! She had to eat whatever was set before her, even if God forbade the eating of such food. Otherwise, her real identity would be revealed!

Note also that throughout this book, she was known by her Persian name '*Esther*', never once by her Hebrew name '*Hadassah*'. Again, contrast this with the man *Daniel* – he was known by his Hebrew name '*Daniel*' rather than his Babylonian name '*Belteshazzar*'!

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes above?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Week 3

[9th – 15th June 2013]

Day 1 ESTHER 2:19-23

These 5 verses appear to have happened some time after *Esther* was crowned queen. **Verse 19a** appears to indicate that the king has held another beauty contest! **Verse 19b** tells us that *Esther's* cousin *Mordecai* had become an official in the court of *King Ahasuerus*. **Verse 20a** tells us that *Queen Esther* had continued to conceal her Jewish identity, even after she was queen. **Verse 20b** reveals to us that *Queen Esther* did this in obedience to *Mordecai's* command.

Verses 21-23 tell us of an assassination attempt. We shall have a closer look at this event.

1. (a) Who plotted to kill *King Ahasuerus*?

(b) Why did they want to kill the king?

2. (a) Who discovered their plot?

(b) What happened to the would-be assassins?

(c) How did the whole event end? (Verse 23b)

Day 2 Read **ESTHER 3**

After reading **ESTHER 3**, write down your *first* impressions of it.

Day 3 Read **ESTHER 3:1-4**

The event of **ESTHER 3** took place in the 12th year of *King Ahasuerus* (**verse 7**). This is after 4-5 years after *Esther* became queen (**2:16**). In other words, **ESTHER 3** took place in the year 474 B.C.

Here we read of *Haman* being promoted by *King Ahasuerus*. We do not know the reason why *Haman* was promoted.

1. What can we know about *Haman* from these 4 verses?

2. (a) What did *King Ahasuerus* want all his servants to do concerning *Haman*?

- (b) *Mordecai* refused to obey this command. Why?

- (c) Was his refusal to obey a persistent or just an isolated act?

- (d) Do you think *Mordecai* was right in his refusal to obey this command?

Day 4 Read **ESTHER 3:5-7**

1. (a) **Verse 5** says that *Haman* was filled with wrath. Why?

(b) What did *Haman* plan to do? (**Verse 6**)
2. According to **verse 7**, this event took place in the year _____ B.C.
3. (a) When (which month) did *Haman* and his accomplice cast lots?

(b) On which month did the lot fall?

Note: From the conception of the plot to its execution, there was a time gap of 11 months. This meant the Jews have 11 months to do something to reverse the situation!

Day 5 Read **ESTHER 3:8-15**

1. (a) How did *Haman* describe the Jews to *King Ahasuerus*?

(b) What did *Haman* propose to do with the Jews?

(c) What was the king's response to *Haman's* proposal?
2. According to the decree (**verse 13**), who would be killed and what would be done to their possessions?

Note: The decree was signed on the 13th day of Nisan, to be carried out on the 13th day of Adar. Again, we see that the Jews have 11 months to do something to reverse the situation!

3. (a) What did *King Ahasuerus* and *Haman* do after the decree was issued?

(b) What was the response of the people of Shushan to the decree?

Day 6 Summary Notes for **ESTHER 3** (I)

We do not know why *Haman* was promoted. In fact, reading **ESTHER 3** after **ESTHER 2**, we feel a sense of perplexity since *Mordecai* who should be rewarded was overlooked while the man who would plot to annihilate the Jews was promoted to be second in the empire! We are reminded of **PSALM 75:6-7**: “*For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another.*” Ultimately, God is behind *Haman*’s promotion. Why? We are not sure yet! But it is needful to remind ourselves that God is God and we are not!

Mordecai refused to bow down and pay homage to *Haman*. As a result, *Haman* wanted to take revenge on *Mordecai* by killing him and all his people! He proceeded to carry out his revenge plot in this way:

- (a) He cast lots to determine the auspicious day to annihilate the Jews
- (b) He persuaded the king to sign the decree to annihilate the Jews

In seeking to persuade the king, he painted the Jews in the worst possible light. He started with “*There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom.*” *Haman* did not mention who they were but called them ‘*a certain people*’. So a sense of mystery is created, perhaps tension also is being highlighted. They are here, there, everywhere --- they are all over, scattered and dispersed.

Next, he said, “*Their laws are different from all other people’s, and they do not keep the king’s law.*” Here was a truth mixed with a lie. It was true that their customs were different but it was not true that the Jews were therefore keeping to themselves. In fact, most of the exiled Jews had integrated very well with the rest of the people in the empire! And it was most certainly untrue that they did not keep the king’s laws! *Mordecai* has just demonstrated his loyalty in saving the king’s life!

No doubt, *Haman* was trying to create suspicion, cause doubts and raise the tension. *King Ahasuerus* had to put down two rebellions soon after he became king. He had to come to grips with *Vashti*’s disobedience in the third year of his reign. He had been badly defeated by the Greeks twice in recent years. And in **2:21-23**, he had just survived an assassination attempt! To say the least, he was very sensitive to any

suggestion of disobedience or hint of disloyalty. Hence, what *Haman* had said here was calculated to instill fear, apprehension and suspicion in the king's mind.

The picture of *King Ahasuerus* in **ESTHER 3** is not pretty. He was presented as a rather foolish monarch. He didn't double-check what *Haman* said. He just abdicated his authority and allowed *Haman* to proceed. In fact, **3:15** showed him as being rather callous! After the decree was issued, he sat down to drink with *Haman* while the entire city of Shushan was perplexed!

Hence, due to the one, persistent act of *Mordecai*, the entire Jewish race now face extermination (**verse 13**)! Would the evil plot of *Haman* succeed? By all outward appearances, it had everything going for it! The fate of the Jews looked gloomy and doomed! Yet we see a little glimmer of hope in that the execution of the decree would only take place 11 months later. There was still time to turn the situation around, if it was possible. But who could do it, and how could it be done? More pressingly, where is God in all of these happenings? **What is your answer?**

Day 7 Summary Notes for **ESTHER 3** (II)

Praise be to God that **ESTHER 2** happened before **ESTHER 3**! In **ESTHER 3**, we read of the evil plot of *Haman* to annihilate the Jews. If he had succeeded, then men like *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, *Haggai* and *Zechariah* would all have been killed! More than that, the Messiah would never have come into this world. However, before *Haman* conceived his evil plot, God had already made His move! *Esther* was already placed in a position of influence in **ESTHER 2**. We know that *Esther* would play an important role in the deliverance of the Jews. *Mordecai* had saved the king's life, but for some reason, he was not rewarded. This unexplained oversight of *King Ahasuerus* would also play a part in the deliverance of the Jews. This simple observation ought to greatly encourage us!

Although the name of God was not mentioned even once in **ESTHER 3**, yet God was far from absent from all the proceedings here. *Haman* could have dealt with *Mordecai* by reporting the matter to *King Ahasuerus*, and get *Mordecai* punished. But for some reasons, he did not. Instead, he planned to get *Mordecai* and all Jews killed.

So he cast lots to determine an auspicious date to carry out his evil plan. When was the lot cast? In the first month, the month of Nisan! What was the date 'determined' by the lot? In the twelfth month, the month of Adar! Did not **Proverbs 16:33** says, "*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*"

The Jews had eleven months to do something and to turn the situation around. It was amazing that *Haman* would not kill *Mordecai* immediately. It was even more amazing

that the lot should show up the 12th month. In the midst of evil being executed, and evil men multiplying, this is our anchor -- **God Is Still King. Our God reigns!**

Though we see not, though we know not, though we understand not, He is working. He is still working, behind what is seen, to bring about the deliverance of His people, and the glorification of His Name. In this is our hope, our trust and our confidence.

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes (I) and (II) above?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Week 4

[16th – 22nd June 2013]

Day 1 Special Study on *Mordecai's* refusal to bow and pay homage

We read in **verse 3** that the king commanded all his servants to bow and pay homage to *Haman*. However, *Mordecai* refused to do it and the reason he gave was that he was a Jew (**verse 4**). What does this mean?

It is often assumed that what was required of *Mordecai* was to give religious worship to *Haman*, and as a God-fearing Jew, *Mordecai* was unable to do that. Hence, *Mordecai* was here being persecuted for his faith. However, that may not be the complete case.

First of all, the word 'bow' is '*kara*' which means to '*bring down or low, to couch, to fall, to kneel, to stoop down.*' In **1 KINGS 19:18**, it was used in a religious context ~ *Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed (kara) to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.* However, in **JUDGES 5:27**, the word was used without implying divine worship at all ~ *At her feet he sank (kara), he fell, he lay still; At her feet he sank, he fell; Where he sank, there he fell dead.*

Next, the word 'pay homage' is '*shachah*' which means to '*to bow down, crouch, fall down flat, obeisance, worship.*' So, this word seems to carry a religious connotation, far more than the word '*kara*'. This is the word used in **EXODUS 20:5** ~ *You shall not bow down (shachah) to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.* Very clearly, the word was used to convey religious worship. However, **GENESIS 23:12** used the same word and it carried no religious connotation at all ~ *Then Abraham bowed himself down (shachah) before the people of the land.*

The above exercise shows us that both words have been and can be used to convey a religious act or just a mere civil act. Very often the context itself will provide us the key

as to how to understand the word as used in that passage. So here, in **ESTHER 3:2&5**, how should we understand these two words and the command of the king? Was Mordecai commanded to give divine worship to Haman? We note that in **ESTHER 8:3**, *Queen Esther* fell down, prostrated herself before *King Ahasuerus*. We assume that was an act of civil respect, not religious worship, to the king.

Next, we ask, “*Would all the officials be expected to bow down and pay homage to King Ahasuerus as well?*” If they were not expected to do so to him, why would he command them to do so to *Haman*? Knowing *King Ahasuerus* was very particular about his subjects showing him respect and not contradicting him publicly, it is safe to assume that all his servants were expected to bow down to him and pay him homage. Now, we have no record of *Mordecai* refusing to bow and pay homage to the king.

In short, all that *King Ahasuerus* was demanding was that, in addition to bowing down and paying him homage, all his servants must do the same to *Haman*! The requirement to bow down and pay homage appeared to be no more than a requirement of civil respect. If that is so, then why the refusal on *Mordecai*’s part?

Attention must now be paid to something very significant found in **ESTHER 2 & 3**. In **ESTHER 2**, we were given the genealogy of *Mordecai* – *the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite*. Here in **ESTHER 3**, we were given the genealogy of *Haman* – *the son of Hammedatha the Agagite*.

One was a Jew, a descendant of *Saul* while the other was an Amalekite, a descendant of *Agag*. We note that besides these two men, no other persons in this book has their genealogies traced, not even that of *King Ahasuerus*! What was the author seeking to convey to us?

EXODUS 17:8-16 tells us of the battle between Israel and Amalek in the early days of the Exodus. **DEUTERONOMY 25:17-19** recalls that event and states its implications. **1 SAMUEL 15** records how *Saul* was commanded to attack the Amalekites under *Agag*, and how he failed to obey God. *Agag* was finally killed by *Samuel* while *Saul* lost his kingdom as a result of his disobedience.

There was this centuries-old struggle between the Jews and the Amalekites, and that very significant encounter between *Saul* and *Agag* hundreds of years ago. Did *Mordecai* the Jew refuse to pay *Haman* the Agagite civil respect because of centuries-old hostility? It appeared to be the case!

Take time to ponder over what’s written in the Special Study above. Do you agree with the conclusion? Write down your thoughts below and then discuss them with your RTBT group on Sunday:

Day 2 Read **ESTHER 4**

After reading **ESTHER 4**, write down your *first* impressions of it.

Day 3 Read **ESTHER 4:1-3**

The decree to “*destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the 13th day of the 12th month, which is the month of Adar*” was issued on the 13th day of the month of Nisan.

On the next day (14th day of Nisan) the Jews were supposed to celebrate the Passover! The timing could not be more coincidental! For the past 1,000 years, each time the Jews celebrated the Passover, they would be reminded of the Exodus. They would recall how God had rescued their forefathers, even when the situation looked so difficult and impossible. God had rescued their forefathers from Pharaoh and his Egyptian armies. Can God now rescue them from *King Ahasuerus* and *Haman* the Prime Minister?

1. When *Mordecai* learnt of the decree, what was his response?
2. When all the Jews in all the provinces learnt of the decree, what was their response?
3. In **JOEL 2:12-13** we read the Lord saying: “*Now, therefore, turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.*”

Do you think this was what *Mordecai* (**verse 1**) and the Jews (**verse 3**) were doing here? Explain your answer.

Day 4 Read **ESTHER 4:4-9**

1. (a) What was *Queen Esther's* response when she learnt of *Mordecai's* sorrow? (**Verse 4**)

(b) What was *Mordecai's* response to *Queen Esther's* expression of care?
(**Verse 4**)

(c) Why do you think *Mordecai* had such a response?

2. What did *Mordecai* tell *Hathach*? (**Verse 7-8a**)

3. What was *Mordecai's* command to *Esther*, conveyed via *Hathach*? (**Verse 8b**)

4. If you were *Esther*, what would be your reaction upon receiving *Mordecai's* command?

Day 5 Read **ESTHER 4:10-12**

1. **Verse 11** contains *Queen Esther's* first reply to *Mordecai* concerning his command.

(a) In it, she mentioned a general rule that governs the Persian court. What was it?

(b) There was an exception to the rule. What was it?

(c) She also revealed something about the state of her relationship with the king at that time. What was it?

2. What do you think *Queen Esther* was seeking to tell *Mordecai* in **verse 11**?

Day 6 Read **ESTHER 4:13-14**

These two verses contain *Mordecai's* reply to the answer given by *Queen Esther* in **verse 11**. Altogether, there are four parts.

1. The first part is found in **verse 13**: *Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews.*

What is *Mordecai's* message here?

2. The second part is this: *For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place.*

What is *Mordecai's* message here?

3. The third part is this: *But you and your father's house will perish.*

What is *Mordecai's* message here?

4. The fourth part is this: *Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*

What is *Mordecai's* message here?

5. Imagine that you were *Queen Esther*. After hearing the words of *Mordecai* in **verses 13-14**, what would be your reaction?

Day 7 Read **ESTHER 4:15-17**

1. What did *Queen Esther* want *Mordecai* to do? (**Verse 16a**)

2. What will *Queen Esther* herself be doing?

Verse 16b:

Verse 16c:

3. When *Queen Esther* said, “*If I perish, I perish*”, what do you think she meant?

Week 5

[23rd – 29th June 2013]

Day 1 Summary Notes for **ESTHER 4**

The response of *Mordecai* and all the Jews to the decree was one of extreme sorrow. They fasted, wept, wailed, and put on sackcloth. We read that *Mordecai* tore his clothes as well. This reaction appeared to mirror that of **JOEL 2:12-13**. However, we cannot be very sure that they were actually seeking God and pleading for His mercy. We may perhaps be able to come to a firmer conclusion when we finish reading the entire book of **ESTHER**.

How should we understand *Queen Esther's* words in **verse 16**: “*If I perish, I perish.*” To understand it, we begin with **verse 4** where she was informed of the deep sorrow of *Mordecai*. We note that she was deeply distressed by it. She therefore sent garments to *Mordecai*. The purpose was so that he could take away his sackcloth, wear the garments she sent him, and then enter the palace to speak with her. (We are told in **verse 2** that no one wearing sackcloth is allowed to enter the king's gate.)

Mordecai however refused to accept the garments, resulting in *Queen Esther* sending an eunuch to ask *Mordecai* the reason for his inconsolable anguish. In **verse 9**, we read of the return of the eunuch and his report to *Queen Esther*. We also learnt that *Mordecai* wanted *Queen Esther* to go to the king and make supplication for the Jews. The actual word used in **verse 8** is ‘*command*’!

Queen Esther now knows that all the Jews have a death sentence hanging over their neck. But observe from **verse 11** that there was no expression of any concern for the plight of the Jews at all from her. Instead, she responded by telling how ‘not-so-good’ her marriage has been, and how risky a business it is to go and see the king now!

She wanted to keep out of this whole business, and she cited personal and legal reasons why she should be spared from such a task. First, she mentioned the general rule that no one can go and see the king unless he or she has been called. To do so was to court death. Esther believed that she would be executed if she went. Yes, there is a special provision, as Esther herself mentioned it. Yet she quickly added that she had not been called into the king's presence for the past month, implying that her relationship with the king then wasn't too good. In one word, she did not want to go!

In **verses 13 & 14**, Mordecai detected in her speech a strong orientation to self-preservation. He warned her against that, saying something like, *“Don’t you even think of it! If you refuse to help, we will not die. Relief and deliverance will arise for us from another place.”*

How are we to make of this? Was *Mordecai* talking about God? If he was really thinking of God, why did he not mention it? Remember, he is talking to *Queen Esther*. Why the hesitancy to mention God to her? Why not a simple *“If you refuse to help, God is able to rise up help for us from another place”*?

The next phrase of *Mordecai’s* words is chilling! *“But you and your father’s house will perish!”* This was a threat! Mordecai is here threatening Esther -- *“If you refuse to help, somehow things will still work out for us. But when we are safe, we will not let you off. You and your father’s house shall disappear from the face of this earth forever!!”*

At this point, *Queen Esther* was in a fix. Whether she acts or does not act, she can expect nothing but disaster and death. There was no other viable option opened to her at that time. To do as *Mordecai* has suggested, is the only hope of things becoming better. But even then, there was no guarantee of success. It was at this point that she said those words in **verse 16**: *“If I perish, I perish”*. It was like the words of *Jacob* in **GENESIS 43:14** ~ *“If I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”* They were not the words of faith, but of dark pessimism!

So as we come to the end of **ESTHER 4**, we see no heroes but instead even the supposed hero and heroine were spiritually weak, failing and selfish. *Mordecai* was not the hero. *Queen Esther* was not the hero. The real hero is GOD! He is the ONE on whom all our eyes should be firmly fixed! He is the One whom the Jews should place their trust and confidence and hope. And He will deliver them, even if they are too dull to cry out to Him for deliverance!

He is the One who said, *“I am the LORD, I do not change, therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.”* He is the One who said, *“For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you.”* He and He alone in Jesus Christ is our true trust, our real hope, our only rest.

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes above?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Day 2 Read **ESTHER 5**

After reading **ESTHER 5**, write down your first impressions.

Day 3 Read **ESTHER 5:1-5**

1. As *Queen Esther* went to see the king, did her fears (**4:11, 16**) come true?

2. Look at the king's question in **verse 3**. What does it mean? Was *Queen Esther* supposed to take his words literally? If not, how should she understand his words?

3. (a) To the king's question (**verse 3**), what was *Queen Esther's* reply?

(b) Why do you think she gave such a reply?

Day 4 Read **ESTHER 5:6-8**

1. At the banquet, the king repeated his question (**verse 6**). What was *Queen Esther's* reply?

2. Do you see her reply as an act of wisdom or are you frustrated with her "delaying tactics"? Explain your answer.

Day 5 Read **ESTHER 5:9-14**

1. Why was *Haman* joyful?

2. Why was *Haman* upset?

3. Look at the words of *Haman* in **verses 11-13**. What was he saying?

4. **Verse 14** tells us that '*the thing pleased Haman.*'
 - (a) What was "*the thing*"?

 - (b) Why did "*the thing*" please *Haman*?

Note: Earlier in **3:5-6**, *Haman* was prepared to wait 11 months before finishing off *Mordecai*. Now in **5:14**, he could wait no longer. He wanted *Mordecai* dead within the next 24 hours! At this point, *Mordecai* appeared doomed, for *Haman* was pretty confident he could have *Mordecai* killed before *Queen Esther's* second banquet!

Day 6 Read **ESTHER 6**

After reading **ESTHER 6**, write down your first impressions.

Day 7 Read **ESTHER 6:1-3**

The king had insomnia that very night (**verses 1a**).

1. To battle his sleeplessness, what did he do?

2. What did he discover as a result?

Note #1: The event mentioned in **verse 2** was first recorded in **2:21-23**. It is truly amazing that *Mordecai* should be unrewarded then, and his heroic deed remembered now!

Note #2: **PROVERBS 21:1** says, "*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water! He turns it wherever He wishes.*" Now we have to add that even the king's sleep is in the LORD's hand -- He takes it away or gives it, whenever He wishes! Look at the one who has command over 127 provinces and yet could not command 1 hour of sleep for himself. Why? Because God has decreed that he will not sleep that night!

Week 6

[30th June - 6th July 2013]

Day 1 Read **ESTHER 6:4-11**

1. Who was in the court then?
2. Why was he there so early in the morning?
3. What advice did the king ask of him?
4. What did he end up doing?

Day 2 Read **ESTHER 6:12-14**

1. Note the words of the wise men and *Zeresh* (**verse 13**).
 - (a) Was it encouraging (to *Haman*)?
 - (b) Was it true?

2. If you were *Haman*, how would you respond? How should you respond?

Note: *Haman* had no time to ponder the words of **verse 13**, and make a response. He was rushed to the second banquet of *Queen Esther* (**verse 14**).

Day 3 A summary of **ESTHER 5 & 6**, with a special focus on "Sleep"

ESTHER 5 & 6 covered a period of 2 days and 1 night. On that very eventful night, two of our characters could not sleep while the other two were sound asleep!

We can easily imagine both *Mordecai* and *Esther* sound asleep that night. Perhaps they were secretly pleased that their plans have started rolling, and were looking forward to the second banquet. Unknown to them, the enemy was busy at work – the gallows was being built at night, and a plan was underway to hang *Mordecai* the next morning! The state of *Mordecai* and *Esther* was one of ignorant bliss that would soon turn into one of inconsolable grief --- if God did not intervene and act on their behalf!

While *Haman* could not sleep that night, we note that on the very same night, God would not allow *King Ahasuerus* to sleep. Both were working and planning something that has to do with *Mordecai*, though admittedly, in different directions.

PSALM 3:1-6 say this:

LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God." But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the LORD with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill.

I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me. *I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.*

Dear Christian friends, it could be that our enemies are very busy plotting to do evil and harm to us while we sleep. Yet, like the psalmist in **PSALM 3:5**, we may put our head to our pillow and sleep, although we are surrounded by ten thousands of men who seek our harm. We need not fear, be anxious or fret. Why? Because the One who keeps us never sleeps and the One who watches over us never slumbers!

PSALM 127:1-2 say this:

Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep.

Look at *Haman* -- how busy was he that night, so busy that he was unable to sleep. In contrast, look at *Mordecai* and see him sleep so soundly.

Though *Mordecai* was not the best representative of God's beloved, yet the picture given to us in **ESTHER 5** truly reflects **PSALM 127:1-2** ~ *If the LORD is not on your side, if the LORD is against you, so what if you toil and labour, and that the whole night! It shall all come to naught, it shall all be in vain!*

O how beautiful it is, that while the wicked plot and toil, the saint of God sleep because it is the LORD who gives His beloved sleep!

PSALM 20: 7 & 8 say this:

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They have bowed down and fallen; but we have risen and stand upright.

If the Jews then have trusted in *Esther*, or even *Mordecai*, they shall be deeply disappointed. Like *Haman* (who trusted in his own wisdom) they shall all bow down and fall.

Indeed, some trust in chariots, and some in horses. But as God's people, let us remember God's Name and trust in Him. Christians, remember that your Heavenly Father is the One who counts and knows every strand of hair that is on your head. Remember that He feeds every sparrow that flies in the sky, and He knows when one falls to the ground. Oh see how He works, so silently yet so surely in **ESTHER 6**.

Can you not trust Him? Do you have any difficulty in trusting Him fully? Remember that He is the One who never sleeps or slumbers. Evil men may stay awake the whole night and do their worst to harm you (the Christian) and to harm the Christian church. But all is well, and all shall be well because God is here, and He shall preserve His people. So, why should you worry? Why should you be anxious to the point that you cannot sleep?

The God who works behind what is seen in **ESTHER** is the same God that is working in your life today. Friends, I call you to trust Him solely, and I call you to worship Him only. Oh, bow your knees to such a God, for He is great!

Day 4 Read **ESTHER 7**

After reading **ESTHER 7**, write down your first impressions

Day 5 Read **ESTHER 7:1-4**

ESTHER 7 can be structured around three questions:

The *first* question: *What is your petition, Queen Esther?* (**Verse 2**)

The *second* question: *Who is he and where is he?* (**Verse 5**)

The *third* question: *Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?* (**Verse 8**)

Today, we shall focus on the first question, after reading **7:1-4**

1. This is the _____ time *King Ahasuerus* asked *Queen Esther* this question.

Can you locate the other occasions whereby he asked her this question?

2. (a) How did *Queen Esther* begin her reply (**verse 3a**)?

(b) Why do you think she began in this way?

3. In her reply, *Queen Esther* pleaded for two things:

- That *her life* be spared
- That *the life of her people* be spared

Why do you think she crafted her petition in this way?

4. In her explanation (**verse 4**), *Queen Esther* made a contrast between (i) being sold to destruction and (ii) being sold to slavery.

(a) Concerning (ii), what did she say she would do?

(b) What do you think is her purpose in making this contrast?

Note: The word '*sold*' (**verse 4**) is put in the passive. *Queen Esther* said she has been sold, instead of saying someone has sold her, because in actual fact, the king himself is involved in this '*selling*'! *Queen Esther* was very careful not to say anything that will link *King Ahasuerus* to the crime else the plan to rescue the Jews would crash before it even takes off!

Day 6 Read **ESTHER 7:5-7**

Today, we shall focus on the second question – "*Who is he and where is he?*" after reading **7:5-7**

1. (a) To the king's question in **verse 5**, what was *Queen Esther's* reply? (**Verse 6**)

(b) Was her reply true? Elaborate.

(c) Was her reply complete? Elaborate.
2. **Verse 7a** tells us that *King Ahasuerus* was very angry upon hearing *Queen Esther's* reply. Why was he angry and with whom was he angry?
3. Besides being angry, what else did *King Ahasuerus* do?
4. (a) What did *Haman* do meanwhile? (**Verse 7b**)

(b) Should he have done this?

Day 7 Read **ESTHER 7:8-10**

Today, we shall focus on the third question – "*Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?*" after reading **7:5-7**

1. In his third question (**verse 8**), *King Ahasuerus* actually accused *Haman* of a terrible crime. Was he right in his accusation?
2. What led to the reduction of king's wrath?
3. At the end of **ESTHER 7**, was the problem of the Jews' extermination resolved? Explain your answer.

Week 7

[7th July – 13th July 2013]

Day 1 Review of **ESTHER 7**

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17 say that "*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

ESTHER 7 is Scripture.

1. What doctrine has **ESTHER 7** taught you?
2. How has **ESTHER 7** reproved and corrected you?
3. In what way has **ESTHER 7** instructed you in righteousness?

Day 2 Special Study on 'The Great Reversal'

What a reversal of fortunes *Haman* experienced within a short 24 hours!

After we have seen him humiliated before *Mordecai* in **ESTHER 6**, here in **ESTHER 7**, we shall see a few more.

- Look at **verse 8**. See him begging for his life from one whose life he had threatened to extinguish. Here was a man who demanded that *a male Jew* bow down and pay him homage. Yet now, he is bowing and pleading with *a female Jew* for his life!
- At the end of **ESTHER 5**, he was constructing a gallows to hang Mordecai. Yet at the end of **ESTHER 7**, he was the first person to be hung on that gallows, to be followed by his ten sons later on, as we shall see.
- Even more ironically, what brought him the death sentence was not his evil plot to kill the Jews. What sealed his fate was his kneeling down before a Jewish lady! He was declared guilty of a crime that he did not commit nor even attempt to commit!

What a great reversal! He had pronounced death on all the Jews in punishment for a crime that they were not guilty of. Yet now he shall be put to death for a crime that he was not guilty of.

At this point, we cannot help but recall the following passages from the Scriptures:

Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown.

PSALM 7:13-16

The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made; In the net which they hid, their own foot is caught. The LORD is known by the judgment He executes; The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.

PSALM 9:15-16

With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; With the pure You will show Yourself pure; And with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd.

PSALM 18:25 - 26

The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way aright, but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be caught by their lust. When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, and the hope of the unjust perishes. The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead.

PROVERBS 11: 5 - 8

Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him.

PROVERBS 26:27

Who caused this great reversal? Only God!

What have you learnt from the notes above?

Go look for someone to share what you have learnt: _____
(Name)

Day 3 Read **ESTHER 8:1-2**

1. On the day *Haman* was put to death, what did *King Ahasuerus* give to *Queen Esther*?
2. On (probably) the same day, what happened to *Mordecai*?

Note: While **7:10** tells us that *Haman* lost his life, **8:1-2** tell us that *Haman* also lost his house (this would include his residence and all his possessions) as well as his position. In one word, *Haman* was completely defeated!

Day 4 Read **ESTHER 8:3-6**

1. Since the enemy of the Jews *Haman* was put to death, why was *Queen Esther* coming before the king again?
2. By falling down at his feet and weeping, what was *Queen Esther* conveying by these actions?
3. Note how she began her plea in **verse 5**, and compare it with what she said in her first request in **7:3**.

Is there any difference? If yes, where is the difference?

Notes on **verse 6**: “*Esther does not say that she too would die in Haman’s planned pogrom. She does, however, suggest that her life would come to an end, at least psychologically, for she personally would not have the will or desire to continue living.*”

Barry C. Davis

Day 5 Read **ESTHER 8:7-8**

These two verses contain the reply of *King Ahasuerus* to *Queen Esther’s* impassioned plea.

1. What was *King Ahasuerus* saying in **verse 7**?
2. By saying what he said in **verse 8**, what was *King Ahasuerus* doing?
3. From his words in **verses 7-8**, we can see the character of this king. What was it?

Day 6 Read **ESTHER 8:9-14**

These 6 verses talk about the decree of *Mordecai* (signed and sealed in the name of the king). This decree was the opposite of the decree of *Haman* (similarly signed and sealed in the name of the king) in **3:12-15**.

1. (a) When was this decree of *Mordecai* signed and distributed?

(b) Recall that *Haman’s* decree was to be executed on the 13th day of the 12th month (**3:13**). This meant the Jews had about _____ months to prepare themselves to counteract *Haman’s* decree.
2. In your own words, what was the content of *Mordecai’s* decree?

3. How was *Mordecai's* decree to be distributed to all the people in the vast empire? (8:10, 14)

Note that *Haman's* decree was to be sent by couriers into all the king's provinces (3:13).

Day 7 Read **ESTHER 8:15-17**

1. What was the response of the Jews to *Mordecai's* promotion and the decree? (Contrast this response with their response to *Haman's* decree in 3:15)

2. What was the response of the non-Jews to *Mordecai's* promotion and the decree?

Note #1: *"The transformation of the Jews from a discouraged, dejected, and defeated people to a people filled with joy, gladness, and power is nothing short of miraculous. The author, however, does not record any of the Jews praising God for delivering them from the edict of death or for allowing them to gain the advantage over their enemies."*

Barry C. Davis

Note #2: We should give credit to *Mordecai* and *Queen Esther* here. In **ESTHER 8**, both of them were in fairly secure positions. Surely *King Ahasuerus* would not allow anyone to attack his queen or his newly appointed Prime Minister. Yet both did not rest until the counter edict was written, sealed with royal seal and distributed throughout the empire. They didn't only think of themselves! They were concerned for their people!!

Week 8

[14th July - 20th July 2013]

Day 1 Review of **ESTHER 8**

Take time to review the lessons of the past 5 days on **ESTHER 8**. Then write down the most important lesson you have learnt from **ESTHER 8**:

Day 2 Read **ESTHER 9:1-4**

The Jews have gone from fasting (**ESTHER 4**) to feasting (**ESTHER 8**). Now they will start **ESTHER 9** with fighting and end with feasting again!

The 13th day of the 12th month has arrived, the day when both *Haman's* decree and *Mordecai's* decree would be executed.

1. **Verse 1** is a summary of what happened on that day.
 - (a) Name the two groups of people mentioned here.
 - (b) What was the final outcome for each group at the end of the day?

2. **Verse 2** mentioned that 'no one could withstand them (the Jews)'.
 - (a) According to **verse 2**, what was the reason for this?
 - (b) According to **verse 3**, what additional factor was at play?

3. What do you think "*the fear of Mordecai*" (**verse 3**) meant?

Day 3 Read **ESTHER 9:5-17**

1. **Verses 5-10** tell us what happened on the 13th day of the 12th month in Shushan the citadel.

- (a) How many Jew-haters were killed in Shushan on that day?
 - (b) 10 of them were specially mentioned by name. Who were they?
2. (a) What did *Queen Esther* request of the king in **verse 13**?
- *
- *
- (b) Do you agree with the action of *Queen Esther* here? Explain your answer.
3. **Verses 16-17** tell us what happened on the 13th day of the 12th month in the 127 provinces.
- (a) How many Jew-haters were killed?
 - (b) What did the Jews not do?
 - (c) What did the Jews do the next day?

Day 4 Read **ESTHER 9:18-21**

- 1. What was the name of the new Jewish festival?
- 2. When was this festival to be celebrated?
- 3. How was this festival to be celebrated?

4. What two reasons were given for the celebration of this festival? (**Verse 22**)

5. What was glaringly missing in the celebration of this festival?

Day 5 Read **ESTHER 10:1-3**

What do you think is the message of these three verses?

Day 6 Assessment of *Mordecai* and *Esther*

1. (a) What is your overall assessment of *Mordecai*?

(b) In what ways should we emulate him?

2. (a) What is your overall assessment of *Esther*?

(b) In what ways should we emulate her?

3. Who do you think is the hero of this book?

4. What do you think is the message of this book?

Day 7 Review of the entire book of **ESTHER**

We have spent 8 weeks on the book of **ESTHER**.

1. What is the one most important lesson you've learnt from this book?

2. How has your life changed as a result of these 8 weeks of reading through **ESTHER**?

Now go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Acknowledgement

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Thank you, sisters!

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another! (Proverbs 27:17, ESV)