

SUNDAY STUDY | church on the drive

Scripture: Esther 1-3



Socially distant, spiritually connected - During this time when we have to keep a safe distance from each other, we want to be socially distant, but spiritually connected. In order to do that, we as a body of believers are all studying the same thing today! You are invited to take out a journal and record your thoughts through this bible study and share them with members of your community group and/or family, whether via telephone or in person.

1. Prayer

- a. Thank God for today and all that you get to enjoy as part of it
- b. Pray for people you love
- c. Pray for people you have trouble loving
- d. Ask God's help during this COVID-19 pandemic - for you, for our city, for our world
- e. Pray for our leaders - government and church
- f. Ask God to help you minister to those around you in the best possible way

2. Watch this video online to get context for today's study: <https://vimeo.com/194571312>

- a. Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BCE and the conquering king, Nebuchadnezzar, exiled most of the inhabitants of that land to other parts of the Babylonian empire. Nearly fifty years later, Cyrus II, founder of the Persian empire, conquered Babylon and decreed that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. Not all of them returned. Many stayed in their new lands; including, it seems, Esther and her uncle Mordecai.
- b. In this story we see the nature and necessity of risk regarding salvation. We see the tension between our timing and the timeliness of God. We also see a multifaceted picture of salvation as God works out His plans through human actions. Yet one of the most simple and profound beauties of this book is that the hero is Esther, a woman, without whom, it seems, the promises of God would have been cut off. We can learn much from the nuances of her story, but what rises to the surface is the truth that God brings salvation to His people through an intercessor, a signpost to a greater story and display of this truth: Jesus and the gospel.

3. Read Esther 1:1-22

- a. Verse one begins the same way other historical books of the bible do: "This is what happened..." From the beginning, the author wants to make clear that these are events that actually happened. The writer doesn't want these events to be taken as allegorical. We are not able to prove the historicity of this book, but the author is subtly trying to convince us that this story is historical.

- i. The story takes place during the time of King Xerxes, whose name is pronounced Ahasuerus in Hebrew. He ascended the throne in 486 BCE at the age of thirty-two. This story begins here in the third year of his reign.
- b. It may seem odd or inappropriate to modern readers that the king and his court would get drunk and make big decisions at banquets, but it was a custom of the Persians and many ancient societies to do so. They believed that when they were intoxicated they actually would make better decisions because they were closer to the spiritual world.
- c. At this point in his reign, Xerxes was trying to display his power and strength in order to solidify his nobles behind him so he could go to war against the Greeks. That's the point of the banquets, the drunkenness, and the display of grandeur.
 - i. For Vashti to refuse to obey him in this context would have put his reign in jeopardy.
- d. What role did pride play in this part of the story?**
- e. How does Xerxes's absolute power set in motion all that happens? How does that compare to the way of Jesus?**

4. Read Esther 2:1-23

- a. Mordecai and his niece, Hadassah, or Esther, were living in the capital city of Susa, deep in the Persian Empire. Through providential circumstances, King Ahasuerus took Esther as his new queen, and for her safety, it remained hidden that she was a Jew.
- b. Mordecai found out about an assassination plot against the king and spoke up. So often it can be easy to keep quiet if we feel like it doesn't really affect us. Mordecai could not have known that he would be taken seriously or that he would ever be rewarded.
 - i. **What can we learn from Mordecai in chapter two?**

5. Read Esther 3:1-15

- a. After Mordecai uncovered the plot against the king, Haman is promoted to the highest level in the kingdom. The king decrees that everyone will bow to Haman. Haman is enraged to see that Mordecai will not.
- b. Why wouldn't Mordecai bow to Haman?**
- c. What role does pride play in chapter three?**

6. For further reflection

- a. **Do you think God has a plan? How meticulous is it? Can anything stop it? Why or why not? What happens to God's plans if Haman is successful in killing Jews?**
- b. **What do you think God's plan is for you right now? How can God use you in your neighborhood and circle of friends?**

7. Pray and thank God for continued faithfulness.

8. **This week:** Write down times in your life when God has been faithful. Share some of those times with people in your family or community group. Remind them God will be faithful!