



“Safety In God’s Plan”

Study: Esther 6:14-7:10

Reading: 2 Kings 6:8-23

Memory: Matthew 5:1

Though I have not faced many situations in life that have been terrifying or times where I felt my life was in danger, one thing that has kept me calm in times of great fear is the phrase, “The safest place to be is in the will of God.” As I have planned missions trips and trips to Israel over the years, I have had many people who have approached me saying they are interested in going, but expressed that they were afraid. My response to their fear was an encouragement to pray that God would show them what He wanted. If He wanted them to go on the trip, I reminded them that they would be safer taking the trip than they would be if they stayed home.

Today, we will read how God used Esther to help spare her people from destruction and be reminded how God was at work through the whole narrative, allowing righteousness to be exalted and evil to be thwarted.

What Does the Bible Say?

Haman was at home after parading Mordecai through the streets and some wise men of the land just finished telling him that it was futile to fight against a Jew. Just then, some eunuch’s arrived from the king’s palace to escort him to the feast that Esther was throwing for the king. The king, Esther and Haman ate and drank together and the king once again asked Esther what she desired. He offered that he would give her up to half the kingdom. Esther then boldly asked the king to spare her life and the life of her fellow Jews. She went on to describe how she and her people had been sold to be killed. If the Jews had been captured and sold into slavery, she probably would have kept silent, but the fact that they were destined to be annihilated caused her to speak up. Esther’s approach was one of great humility and respect to the king and her words stirred up great anger in his heart towards the person who would do this. Ahasuerus responded by asking Esther who it was that would do such a thing to her and her people. In what must have been a stunning moment

for the three of them sitting there together, Esther declared that the enemy of her people was Haman. You can imagine that Haman immediately went pale at the sound of this as he became terrified of the two who were sitting at the table with him (6:14-7:6).

In anger, the king rose from the table and went into his garden to think through this whole situation. Haman and Esther were left behind together in the feasting room and Haman begged Esther to do something to spare his life. When the king arrived back in the room, it appeared to him that Haman was assaulting the queen which surely sealed his fate. Haman was immediately taken into custody and one of the eunuch's told the king about the gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordecai. There is some question about the actual height of the pole that was at Haman's house since 50 cubits was about 75 feet, but we are not given any more details about how this was made or what it would have looked like. We do know that when the king found out about this, he gave the order that Haman be hung on his own gallows. The king's instructions were carried out which calmed his wrath because Haman was now gone (vs 7-10).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you see how God has the ability to protect His children? Haman had masterminded a completely evil plan to rid the nation of all the Jews, but his scheming and planning was no match for the power of God. His selfishness and anger led to great problems and ultimately to his death on the apparatus he had built to kill Mordecai. This also reveals to us how decisions and choices made in anger and frustration don't lead to positive results. Instead, they often come back to hurt those making decisions that are not based on patience and respect. You can trust that if you choose to live the way that God wants you to live that He can protect you and keep you safe from any harm that the enemy wants to bring your way. Anything that happens to you is under His complete control.

Suggestions for Prayer

- * Ask God to help you trust Him to keep you safe.
- * Thank God for His protecting power in your life.

Thought for the day

Who had Haman been talking with (vs 14)? - See the previous verses

Who arrived to take him to the feast (vs 14)?

How do you think Haman felt on his way to the feast?

What did the king tell Esther (vs 2)?

Why do you think he told her this?

What does this reveal about the favor that Esther had earned?

How can the humility of Esther be seen in her approach to the king (vs 3)?

What did Esther express about her people (vs 4)?

What did Esther compare the loss of her people with (vs 4)?

What did the king ask Esther (vs 5)?

What do you think Haman felt during this time (vs 5-6)?

Why do you think the king went to his garden and left Haman and Esther alone (vs 7)?

****There were most likely many servants in the hall where they were.*

What did the king see when he returned (vs 8)?

What was the king told about (vs 9)? Why do you think the eunuch mentioned it to the king?

What did the king order (vs 9)?

Why was it ironic that Haman died this way (vs 10)?

What does this reveal about the great power of God?

“Turning the Tables”

Study: Esther 8:1-17

Reading: Genesis 50:1-20

Memory: Matthew 5:1

Shortly after one of our children was born, I discovered that there was a clerical error and the insurance bill had not been paid, causing our coverage to lapse at the time that our child was born. This meant that we were on the hook for \$10,000 and at that time I was only making around \$25,000 a year. This was a great shock to me and I began to pray. I spent a great deal of time in prayer and wrote a letter to the hospital explaining my situation. Some people also found out about our predicament and gave us some money to help. A short time later, the hospital wrote back and chose to forgive 100% of the medical costs. By that time we had been given around \$1500 for the expense so we were able to give that money to another young family we knew who were struggling with medical bills.

Today, we will read how God has the ability to turn a devastating circumstance into great triumph.

What Does the Bible Say?

After Haman was killed by the king, he gave Haman's house to Esther. He also called for Mordecai to come and see him after Esther told the king that Mordecai was her uncle. The king decided that he would replace Haman with Mordecai and gave him the responsibilities that were formerly Haman's.

Esther also chose to plead for the lives of her people. She expressed great humility before the king and bowed down at his feet, weeping as she exposed the full plan of Haman for killing the Jews. The king held out his scepter once again to Esther, indicating that his favor was on her. She rose to her feet and asked Ahasuerus if he would send letters to the kingdom revoking the original letters that were written by Haman. Esther expressed that she could not bear the thought of having all the Jews killed. The king told Esther that she could write a new order and have the order sealed with the king's ring. This meant that it would now be a crime for anyone to carry out the orders that Haman had originally given

(vs 3-8).

Writing this ordinance was no simple matter. Because the Persian empire was so vast, the ordinance had to be translated into many different languages. The process was completed by the scribes and sealed with the king's ring. Couriers were enlisted and they swiftly rode their horses with the new ordinance in hand. This order not only called for the plans of Haman to be stopped, but gave the Jews a right to defend themselves against any one or any group of people who tried to attack them. This ordinance was to be posted publicly, allowing all the inhabitants of the kingdom to read it. This decree also called for all the Jews to arm themselves to be ready for any attacks that may come against them (vs 9-14).

Mordecai went out into the city wearing royal robes and a crown on his head. There was great rejoicing among the people. Most likely there were crowds of Jews who had gathered to celebrate that their lives would be spared and that the Jews had gone from a place where they feared for their lives to a place of prominence among the nations. The same type of response was seen throughout the empire when Jews read the message. There was great celebration and feasting and many people claimed to be Jews because they feared that the Jews would now have the power to kill them (vs 15-17).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you realize how God has the ability to turn the tables on His enemies? In just a few months time, the Jews went from fearing for their lives to being an exalted nation. Though the actions of Mordecai and Esther played a role in this great change, it was the power of God that did all the work. The key source of this power came from their choice to call for prayer and fasting among the Jewish people. They were obedient servants of God and were used by God in a powerful way and were at the same time exalted among the people. When you choose to obey God and do the hard thing, you don't know what God will do with your willingness. Choose today to be obedient to God and trust Him to work in mighty ways through your obedience.

Thought for the day

What did Ahasuerus give to Esther (vs 1)?

What did Esther tell the king about Mordecai (vs 1)?

What did the king do for Mordecai (vs 2)?

How was this clearly the working of God?

How did Esther approach the king (vs 3)

Why do you think she approached him this way?

What was her request (vs 5)?

What did Esther express in verse 6?

Why did the king say he had Haman killed (vs 7)?

What did the king give Esther permission to do (vs 8)?

What steps did Esther take (vs 9)?

Why was this a great task (vs 9)?

Who took these letters (vs 10)? Why do you think there was such a hurry?

What did the letters say (vs 11)?

Why were the letters displayed (vs 13)?

What had the king urged the riders to do (vs 14)?

What was Mordecai wearing (vs 15)? Why?

What was the attitude of the city (vs 16)?

How was this replicated throughout the empire (vs 17)?

“Going in Reverse”

Study: Esther 9:1-19

Reading: II Samuel 15:31–37; 16:20–17:23

Memory: Matthew 5:1

Multiple times each year there are news reports of people running into shopping centers or convenient stores with their vehicles. Most of these situation involve young drivers or elderly drivers who accidentally put their vehicle in drive instead of reverse. Though there are curbs in most of these scenarios, apparently they give it enough gas to hop the curbs and run into the buildings. Fortunately, in most cases, no harm is done to individuals though thousands of dollars of damage often occur when this happens.

Today, we are going to see how God had the ability to cause things to go in the opposite direction. We will see how He can turn things around to favor His children.

What Does the Bible Say?

When the day came that Haman had planned for the Jews to be slaughtered, the enemies of the Jews had their plans put in reverse. Even though the second edict had been issued by the king, there were still those who hated the Jews and wanted to do them harm. They still planned to go through with the killing, but their plan did not succeed. Many people of the empire stood up for the Jews and the leaders of the land did not dare go against Mordecai. News of what happened between Moredecai and Haman had spread through all the leaders and they dared not repeat the same mistake that Haman made by standing against the God of the Jews. Anyone in the kingdom who tried to kill the Jews was not able to do so, instead they lost their lives. Over 500 people in the capital city were killed at the hands of the Jews and that number included the ten sons of Haman. Contrary to the plans of Haman, the Jews did not take any of the plunder from those who lost their lives (vs 1-10).

A report came back to Ahasuerus that over 500 men were killed in the capital city. He wondered what had been done in the rest of the empire, but this wondering was not a negative response. He approached Esther and asked her if she wanted more done. Esther asked that Haman’s sons

be hanged as well. Most likely this was a symbolic gesture to let all in the city know that they dare not fight against the Jews. The king granted the request, and on the next day, they were hung. Another 300 enemies of the Jews in the capital city were also killed at this time (vs 11-15).

When the final tally came in from the empire, over 75,000 people had lost their lives because they attempted to kill the Jews. The Jews chose not to taken any possessions from those they had killed, revealing that this act was done out of self-preservation and not for any type of profit. On the 14th day of the 12th month, the Jews throughout the empire celebrated this great victory. The Jews in Susa were still taking care of business on the 14th so they did not celebrate until the 15th. This celebration became an annual event, but was celebrated on two different days by those who lived in the small villages and those who lived in the city. This became an event where people would send gifts and food to other Jews as part of their celebration. This celebration is still practiced today in what is known as the Feast of Purim (vs 16-19).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you trust that God is powerful enough to cause the plans of men to be turned around. In verse 1 of the ESV, it states, “the reverse occurred” in reference to the plans of the enemies of Israel. God did this many times for the nation of Israel and this miraculous working can still be seen in modern times through some of the wars that Israel has faced since becoming a nation. God’s ability to rescue His children is not limited to the descendants of Abraham, but has occurred over and over again for those who believe in Christ. When you are going through difficult times or when someone plans to harm you, you can rest assured that God has the power to put things in reverse.

Suggestions for Prayer

- * *Thank God for always working on your behalf.*
- * *Ask God to help you trust Him to turn things around.*
- * *Praise God because He has power over the most wicked plans.*

Thought for the day

What month and day did these events happen (vs 1)?

****This would be sometime in February or March according to the calendar that we use today.*

What had the enemies of the Jews hoped to do (vs 1)?

What did the Jews all over the empire plan to do (vs 2)?

What did all the Persian leaders decide to do (vs 3)?

Why did they decide to do this (vs 4)?

What were the Jews able to do (vs 5)?

How many enemies of the Jews were killed that day in Susa (vs 6)?

Why do you think there was an emphasis about the death of Haman’s sons (vs 7-10)?

Why do you think the Jews did not take any plunder (vs 10)?

What was reported to the king (vs 11)?

What did the king ask Esther (vs 12)?

Why do you think he asked this?

What did Esther request (vs 13)?

What did the king command (vs 14)?

What happened on the 14th day of the month (vs 15)?

What happened in the other provinces of the Persian empire (vs 16)?

What did they do on the 14th day (vs 17)?

What do verses 18 and 19 explain?

“Thrust Into Politics”

Study: Esther 9:20-32

Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-4, 1 Peter 2:13-25

Memory: Matthew 5:1

When my wife and I went to visit my daughter and son-in-law who both work in the office of state representatives in Lansing, my daughter took us around to meet some of her co-workers. It was quite refreshing to find that there are many believers who work in politics and seek to make a difference for the kingdom of God. Two people, in particular, stood out to me. One was a man who I went to Bible college with, and is now serving as a representative. The other who stood out was a secretary. When she looked at me, she said, “You look very familiar. Do you pastor the church on the beach in Frankfort?” Come to find out, she had attended our Lakeshore services a few times while on vacation. This reminded me to be thankful and pray for those who are taking on the very difficult task of working in politics in hope to make changes for the better.

Today, we will read how Mordecai and Esther were thrust into the political scene of the Persian empire and they chose to use that role to help make a difference for the Jews. We will be reminded about the important role that those in leadership positions can have.

What Does the Bible Say?

Mordecai made sure to write down what had happened so that future Jews would know and understand the great power of God. He also sent out letters to all the Jews in the kingdom and told them that the Jewish people should set apart the 14th and 15th day of Adar (the 12th month) each year to celebrate God’s deliverance and to remind themselves of His power to continue to deliver them. They were to celebrate the fact that God not only gave them relief from their enemies, but completely reversed the plans of the enemies. This turned their sorrow into great gladness and the celebration was to be marked by sending food to each other and giving gifts to the poor (vs 20-22).

The reason that the celebration was to be called “Purim” was because Haman had cast “Pur” to see what month that this event should take

place. This was to be a constant reminder of how Haman attempted to use his superstitious ways to try to kill the people of God. Yet, God’s power was greater. Not only was this remembrance celebration to be kept the next year, but was to be kept by the Jews until the end of time. This was not to be a regional celebration, but was to be remembered by every Jew no matter where they were living. The Jews overwhelmingly favored this edict by Mordecai and made the celebration of Purim a regular event that is still celebrated today (vs 23-28).

This was and is a very unique festival because it was commanded to be kept by Mordecai and Esther. This was not a command of God, as many of the other Jewish festivals and feasts, and was not something that slowly gained popularity over time, as many of our modern holidays. This was commanded by the Jewish leaders of the Persian empire who had the power and ability to send letters about this feast to all the regions of the Persian empire. This helped ensure that this feast would be known and celebrated by all Jews, and would solidify it as a feast that is still observed today by both religious and secular Jews (vs 29-32).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you realize how important it is to pray for believers who choose to enter into the political realm? Esther and Mordecai did not necessarily choose to be governmental leaders, but God chose it for them. Yet, they chose to use this position to help influence many others to observe the power of God. Those who are in leadership positions in this secular world can often have a powerful influence for Christ. This is not an easy task for many, especially when they take a stand for morality and what God desires. Take time on a regular basis to pray for believers who are trying to help make a difference in the world around them.

Suggestions for Prayer

- * *Thank God for the godly leaders who are making a difference.*
- * *Ask God to help you know what role you can play in politics.*
- * *Praise God because He is the One who can make a true difference.*

Thought for the day

Why do you think it was important that Mordecai recorded these events (vs 20)?

What did he send to the Jews in the empire (vs 20)?

Why do you think this passage emphasizes that letters were sent to every place in the empire (vs 20)?

What did this leader tell the Jews they needed to do (vs 21)?

What were these days to be a reminder of (vs 22)?

How did God turn their sorrow to gladness (vs 22)?

What were these days to be full of (vs 22)?

How did the Jews respond (vs 23)?

Why was the feast called “Purim” (vs 24, 26)?

How was this to be a reminder of God’s power (vs 25)?

What did the Jews choose to do (vs 27)?

How many years was this feast to be celebrated (vs 28)?

What did Mordecai never want to happen (vs 28)?

Why do you think it was so important to him to establish this feast?

Why do you think that Esther and Mordecai sent a second letter (vs 29)?

Where was this letter sent (vs 30)?

Why do you think that Esther and Mordecai made this an obligation more than a suggestion (vs 31)?

Why do you think it was recorded in writing (vs 32)?

“The Hand of God”

Study: Esther 10:1-3, Ezra 7:1-10

Reading: Psalm 1:1-5, James 1:19-25

Memory: Matthew 5:1

The Bible college I attended in northern Wisconsin was started by a man who grew up on a farm. His name was Paul Patz and he invented a barn cleaner to make life easier for the farmers. It eventually turned into a large business that employed many people in the small farming community of Pound, Wisconsin. Not only was he learning business along the way, but he was also learning the Word of God. He desired for others to know the Word and live it out. He used the money God had blessed him with to start a camp and eventually a Bible college. Though he wasn’t highly educated by world’s standards, this man’s life has affected thousands of others for the cause of Christ.

Today, we will read how the hand of God was on Ezra because he desired to know the Word of God and share that Word with others. We will be reminded that we can have a powerful impact on others when we do the same.

What Does the Bible Say?

God had raised up Mordecai and Esther to save the Jews from destruction, but that was not the end of the story. Mordecai became a fighter for the rights of the Jews in the land. Being in a high position in the Persian government allowed him an opportunity to make a difference for the Jewish people. Mordecai became very popular with the Jews and it appears that many of the people of the land liked him as well. He created a spirit of peace among the Jews and for the Jews. While he was in charge, the hostility towards the Jews waned which meant that most of the Jews didn’t have to live under oppression or fear for their lives during this time (vs 1-3).

Artaxerxes reigned from around 464 B.C. to 423 B.C. He is not to be confused with Xerxes (Ahasuerus) who reigned from 485 B.C. to 465 B.C. during the time of Esther. During his reign, God raised up a man named Ezra who was a descendant of Aaron, the first high priest of Israel. Ezra was very skilled in understanding the Law of Moses and he had also

earned favor with Artaxerxes who chose to give Ezra all of the things that he asked for (vs 1-6).

Ezra went to Jerusalem around 458 B.C. with a number of other Jews who desired to go to Israel to help with establishing regular worship in the temple. To give a little insight into the time it took to travel, we are told that the group headed there on the first day of the first month and did not arrive in Jerusalem until the first day of the fifth month. Many people have tried to estimate the distance of the route from Babylonia to Jerusalem and the general distance seems to be between 900 and 1100 miles, though there are some estimates as high as 1700 miles. Remember, they had to take water into consideration especially when traveling with a large group. The comment at the end of verse 9, “for the good hand of his God was on him,” (ESV) seems to indicate that this was a faster time of travel than many others experienced (vs 7-9).

In verse 6 and in verse 9 it was mentioned that the hand of God was on Ezra. Verse 10 tells us one of the reasons for this. Ezra had chosen to be a student of the Law of the Lord, but he didn’t just want to know it, He wanted to live it out in his own life and he desired to pass it on to other Jews so they could also be in the will of God. In turn, this meant that the hand of God would be on many more Jews because they would be seeking to follow the ways of God (vs 10).

How Does this Apply to Me?

From the reading today, it was made very clear that the hand of God was on Ezra. What was also made clear is why God blessed Ezra greatly. This is not an isolated incident in Scripture, but this theme is prevalent throughout the Word of God. This should be a challenge to you to strive to be a person who loves the Word of God. But your love for the Word shouldn’t just stop with your mind, It should be lived out in your life. When you love the Word and live it out, the next natural response is a desire for others to do the same. You don’t have to have a college degree to be a student of God’s Word. You don’t have to be a gifted teacher to share God’s Word with others. Set your heart on regularly studying God’s Word and chose to live out what you read. As you do this, you will also start developing a desire to share this with others so they can be blessed like you will be blessed by God.

Suggestions for Prayer

* *Ask God to help you become a student of His Word.*

Why do you think we are told about the taxes that King Ahasuerus imposed on the land (vs 1)?

What does verse 2 indicate about Mordecai?

What position did Mordecai have (vs 2)?

How was he viewed (vs 2)?

Why do you think he was viewed this way?

Ezra 7

Who was the king of Persia when this portion of Ezra was written (vs 1)?

Why do you think the lineage of Ezra was traced back to Aaron (vs 1-5)?

Where did Ezra travel from and to (vs 6)?

What description of Ezra was given in verse 6?

Why do you think he was described this way?

When did he go to Jerusalem (vs 7)?

Who traveled with him (vs 7)?

Why was it important to have these men with him in order to establish greater worship in the temple?

How long did it take for the group to travel (vs 8-9)?

What does verse 9 state about Ezra?

What three things stood out about Ezra (vs 10)?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Describe how these are evident in your life?

“Using Unbelievers”

Study: Ezra 7:11-28

Reading: Acts 4:1-22, Genesis 41:1-57

Memory: Matthew 5:1

When I took a missions trip to Kosrae, Micronesia, I was asked to speak at the public high school on the island. I took the opportunity to tell them about the area I was from, showing the students pictures of my ice rink and the snow. What was great about this experience is that I was also able to openly share the Gospel with them. They welcomed me into the classroom because the leaders of the school understood how adherence to the Gospel would make a powerful difference in the lives of their students.

Today, we will read how God chooses to use worldly government institutions to help His children. We will be reminded that when we obey God, the possibilities for us are limitless.

What Does the Bible Say?

Were we not told how Ezra became so well acquainted with king Artaxerxes, but we have seen multiple times since the first captivity of Babylon how Jews were able to take on roles in the royal government. Ezra desired to go to Jerusalem and had asked Artaxerxes to send him with a decree which would permit him to travel back with a large group of Jews. This decree stated that any Jew who desired to go to Jerusalem could join Ezra. Ezra was given permission to go to Jerusalem to help the Jews properly worship God in the temple. He was also allowed to travel with silver and gold under the king's protection, since these were gifts given to him by the leaders of the Persian empire. The money they would travel with would also contain offerings that were given by the Jews all over the region, and were to be used for the worship of the God of the Jews. This money was specifically to be used to buy offerings to offer to God. Any leftover money could be used however Ezra and the others thought that God would like them to use it. Ezra was also sent with some vessels from the king's treasury and was given assurance that if he needed more, the Persian kingdom would help him obtain it (vs 11-20).

Not only was money to come from the Persian coffers, but the

governors in and around the region of Israel were to give Ezra whatever he needed to fulfill God's plans for regular sacrifices. This was to be done to stave off the wrath of God on the Persian empire. On top of all this, Artaxerxes made it unlawful to tax anyone who helped in the temple worship. This included the priests all the way down to those who were called to do the menial tasks of the temple upkeep (vs 21-24).

Ezra was also given the power to appoint godly judges and leaders who would rule over the land of Israel. They were to judge based on the laws of God and not just the laws of the Persians. It was Ezra's responsibility to teach these leaders this law. Those who chose not to obey the laws of God would be subject to punishment by the Persian empire (vs 25-26).

This decree thrilled the heart of Ezra and he blessed God for choosing to put this desire in the mind of the king. Ezra clearly recognized the favor that he was given was a work of God. The fact that the king, his counselors and many of the leading Persians were on the side of the Jews, gave Ezra great hope for this journey (vs 27-28).

How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you realize that God has the ability to work on your behalf? We are not told why Artaxerxes showed such favor on Ezra and the Jews, but he had grown up seeing Mordecai interact with his father Xerxes. He would have first hand knowledge of the events that occurred with Esther, Mordecai and Haman. God used the events of the past to reveal His power to Artaxerxes and caused him to have great respect for the God of the Jews. God also caused great favor to be on Ezra which led to a very powerful letter that Ezra was able to carry with him. Though there are times where God allows leaders to persecute His children, there are other times where He moves in the hearts of leaders to bless His children. Even ungodly leaders can be used by God to help further His cause. Your role is to be a man or women of God and let God cause these leaders to show favor to you. This favor you receive will not be because of you, but because of God and your choice to submit to His plan.

Thought for the day

Why do you think it was emphasized that Ezra had a great knowledge of the law (vs 11)?

How is God described (vs 12)?

Who could go to Jerusalem with Ezra (vs 13)?

Why was it important that Ezra was sent by the king (vs 14)?

What did Ezra have permission to take with him (vs 15)?

Who was asked to contribute offerings for the temple (vs 16)?

What was Ezra to do with the money (vs 17)?

What were Ezra and the other leaders to do with the rest (vs 18)?

What was given to Ezra (vs 19)?

What additional support was promised to Ezra (vs 20)?

What region was directed to help Jerusalem (vs 21)?

What would these things be needed for (vs 21-22)?

Why did Artaxerxes feel the need to help Ezra (vs 23)?

Why do you think that Artaxerxes felt this way?

What ordinance did the king make (vs 24)? Why do you think he ordered this?

What was Ezra to do once he was in the land (vs 25)?

How were they to judge (vs 25)?

What was the consequence for disobeying (vs 26)?

Why did Ezra bless God (vs 27-28)?

Memory Verse:

Matthew 5:1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.