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## SESSION EIGHT

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# Esther (Part II)

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we continue the story of Esther, in which God's good purposes for His people led to a radical reversal. The humble were exalted, those who were condemned received salvation, and those expected to suffer defeat triumphed in victory. When we read God's Word, we are reminded that God is often at work to bring about His purposes even when His people do not realize what He is doing. God calls us to look beyond earthly appearances and strength and to honor and trust Him for final victory.

### SCRIPTURE

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Esther 6:6-11; 7:3-10; 9:1-2

# THE POINT

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**God calls us to look beyond what we can see and trust in Him for deliverance.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Have you ever looked back on circumstances in your life, only to realize God was at work behind the scenes to bring about His will? Sometimes, you realize that God used a painful event or suffering to bring about good (Rom. 8:28). Other times, you realize that your good fortunes were nothing more than the grace of God poured out on your behalf, to accomplish His purposes for His glory (2 Cor. 2:8-9).

Life's various circumstances provide an abundance of opportunities to deepen our trust in the providence of God, regardless of the situations we may face. Sometimes it helps to encounter a biblical example of God's providence to remind us that He does work behind the scenes to accomplish His will. This is exactly what we've seen in the Book of Esther.

- **It has been said, "God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart." Have you ever felt like God was making a mistake regarding the circumstances of your life? If so, how did you handle that feeling? What events in your life have deepened your trust in God's wisdom?**

### Option 2

Movies and TV shows often have "Behind the Scenes" features, in which they introduce the audience to the actors, the set, and maybe a blooper reel. Going behind the scenes of a movie places the audience in the role of the creator, who can see how the movie was made. They know the theme of the movie, the outtakes, and the ridiculous lengths producers, actors, and the film crew had to go in order to capture that perfect shot.

- **Have you ever watched "Behind the Scenes" on a movie? What is one interesting thing you learned from that experience?**

When we watch movies, we only see the end result. In the same way, there are parts of our lives that we don't see, things set in motion in God's plan that don't always make sense to us. Sometimes, we might wish for a "Behind the Scenes" reel of our own lives, but if we trust in God, we will see His plan woven throughout the finished product.

- **Have you ever experienced something you didn't understand at the time, but looking back you were able to see God's purpose in that situation?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God calls us to look beyond what we can see and trust in Him for deliverance.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Esther** - raised by her cousin Mordecai, Esther was a young Jewish girl who was forced to marry a Persian King
- **Hamaan** - a trusted advisor to the king; hated the Jewish people and plotted to have them all exterminated

## PLOT

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As we continue in the Book of Esther, we wrap up a story that is all about God's good purposes for His people, as seen in the radical change of events surrounding Esther and Mordecai.

## TIMELINE

### HAMAN'S DOWNFALL

*Haman's plot to destroy the Jews backfires.*

### NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

*God works through the prayers of His people.*

### THE WALL IS REBUILT

*God restores the surrounding wall.*

## HAMAN'S PLAN AGAINST MORDECAI BACKFIRED

While the Book of Esther doesn't explicitly refer to God, the unfolding events in this story seem to be more than remarkable coincidences. In chapter 6, God's hand clearly moved on behalf of His people to bring about His will.

Esther, an orphaned Jewish maiden, was exalted from humble beginnings to the lofty position to queen of the Persian Empire (Esth. 2:1-18), much like Joseph in Genesis 37-45. A Jewish man by the name of Mordecai, who was Esther's uncle and adoptive guardian, providentially intercepted a plot to assassinate King Ahasuerus (Esth. 2:19-22). From the beginning of the narrative, the situation looked favorable for the Jewish people.

But that picture was quickly overshadowed by the evil intent of a man named Haman, one of the king's officials who had decided to annihilate the Jewish people (Esth. 3:1-15). Let's pick up the story and see how Haman, who wanted to humiliate Mordecai, was forced to honor him instead.

**So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.'" Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor." (Esth. 6:6-11)**

Realizing that he had not honored Mordecai for spoiling the plot against his death, the king decided to reward him. He inquired about who, in the court, might be able to give this reward. Of course, it was none other than murderous Haman, who "happened" to enter the court to ask for permission to hang Mordecai. But God was about to thwart his plans and deliver the Jews from his hands. The way these events moved in favor of Esther and Mordecai made God's providence in the situation undeniable.

## HAMAN WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH

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Humiliation and exaltation were reversed between Haman and Mordecai. Next, this account demonstrated the reversal of judgment and salvation, as Esther once again made a bold request of the king.

**Queen Esther answered, “If I have obtained your approval, my king, and if the king is pleased, spare my life—this is my request; and spare my people—this is my desire. For my people and I have been sold out to destruction, death, and extermination. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent. Indeed, the trouble wouldn’t be worth burdening the king.” King Ahasuerus spoke up and asked Queen Esther, “Who is this, and where is the one who would devise such a scheme?” Esther answered, “The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman.” Haman stood terrified before the king and queen. Angered by this, the king arose from where they were drinking wine and went to the palace garden. Haman remained to beg Queen Esther for his life because he realized the king was planning something terrible for him. Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the house of wine drinking, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, “Would he actually violate the queen while I am in the palace?” As soon as the statement left the king’s mouth, Haman’s face was covered. Harbona, one of the royal eunuchs, said: “There is a gallows 75 feet tall at Haman’s house that he made for Mordecai, who gave the report that saved the king.” The king commanded, “Hang him on it.” They hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s anger subsided. (Esth. 7:3-10)**

Esther risked it all, this time to save her people. Esther had to make a choice: to act or not to act. Esther decided to act and respectfully appealed to King Ahasuerus on behalf of Israel, revealing that she was of Jewish descent. Moreover, without naming the perpetrator, she uncovered a treacherous plan to annihilate her people.

The king interrupted and wanted to know who had the audacity to do such a thing. Esther revealed that it was Haman. Not only was Haman a traitor to the king, he was also an enemy of the Jews. Once the King knew Esther was Jewish, it became clear that Haman had also inadvertently threatened her life.

At that point, Haman was terrified, and rightfully so. He intended to execute his own judgment against the people of God, but God would deliver them from his hand. When Haman realized that he was caught, he desperately sought a way out, but his fate was sealed.

Haman’s death sentence was an ironic example of poetic justice—he was hung on the gallows he set up for Mordecai. Haman’s evil intentions were thwarted by the sovereign providence of God.

- **Read and consider Proverbs 5:22. How was this truth reflected in Haman's life? How does this Proverb serve as a warning for us when it comes to entertaining personal sins in our own lives? (p. 61, PSG)**

## GOD'S PEOPLE EXPERIENCE VICTORY OVER THEIR ENEMIES

Now we arrive at the climax of the story. When God's enemies thought they had finally gained domination over His people, the tables were completely turned. Instead of defeating the Israelites like they hoped, God's enemies were defeated. Because of His sovereign providence, God's people did not end up as the victims, but the victors. The enemies of the Israelites could not prevail against them.

**Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples. (Esth. 9:1-2)**

Throughout the Bible, God often allowed terror to fall on the enemies of His people through changing circumstances or power. It is important to remember that God's hand was behind each circumstance, actively protecting and fighting for His people. The Israelites' victory over King Ahasuerus's provinces was ultimately God's victory. The hand of God is infinitely more powerful than the kingdoms of men. In the Book of Esther, God was truly shown to be the King of kings.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

**Christ's Humiliation (p. 62, PSG)**

*Although God the Son was equal with God and worthy of all the glory God receives, He chose to humble Himself by taking on human flesh. He left His glorious state and came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), and experienced a humiliating death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8) by becoming sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).*

## TIMELINE

### THE CENTRALITY OF THE WORD

*The people gather to hear God's Word.*

### SHALLOW WORSHIP

*The people fail to give God their very best.*

*\*Beginning Spring 2017*

### FROM ABRAHAM TO JESUS

*The arrival of the Promised One.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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The good news of the gospel was foreshadowed throughout this story. Esther was exalted into a high position in order to bring salvation to the Israelites, and in that high position, she was able to be an advocate for her people before the king. Doesn't that sound familiar? Jesus Christ would one day humble Himself to bring about eternal salvation to God's people, sparing them from death. In His resurrection He would be exalted, becoming their advocate before the throne of God (2 Cor. 8:9; 1 John 2:1). Jesus, even greater than Esther, didn't just risk His life, but gave His life to save His people. This is the good news of the gospel.

And with all good news, there is usually bad news. If people do not repent of sin, the story of Haman is a haunting example of what is to come. The punishment of Haman points us forward to the elimination of God's enemies and His final judgment (Rev. 20:7,11-15; 21:8,27). Turn today, before you are caught before the throne of God, and there is no other chance. As you see the weight of your sin, know that the grace of God in Jesus Christ is more than sufficient for your forgiveness. Sure, it is difficult to believe that God can forgive sinners like you and me. But He does. This is the great reversal of judgment and salvation.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What can we learn from this account when it comes to trusting God in the midst of difficult circumstances?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does an eternal perspective help us persevere and trust in God while we are in the middle of tough situations?** *When we focus solely on our circumstances, we essentially blind ourselves to the bigger picture of what may be happening. By taking a step back and considering what God might be doing, we put ourselves in a better situation of seeing the overarching plan of God.*
- **How does Esther's courage and willingness to take risks challenge you in your walk with Christ?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does this session teach us about humility and pride, especially as shown within the lives of Esther and Haman?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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One of the things we often observe in the Bible, and even in life experience, is that God's work is most clearly seen when circumstances are at their harshest, and when we are most desperate. God calls us to look beyond earthly appearances and strength and to honor and trust Him for final victory. If God has delivered us from sin and death, a terror much greater than Haman, can we not trust Him with the uncertainties and struggles in life? If God has provided an advocate in Jesus Christ, much greater than Esther, can we not trust that He is working all things for good even if we do not see it in the moment?

- **In what ways can we learn to fully rely on God during difficult times?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the promise of future victory help you deal with defeat today?** *Knowing the end of the story—that God will make all things new—should affect the way we handle personal defeat in our lives today.*



## HEART

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In the narrative, Haman selfishly thought the king wanted to honor him. He couldn't imagine anyone the king would want to honor more (6:6b). In redemptive history, God often exalted the humble and brought low those in high positions. In the stories of Jacob (Gen. 25:23), Gideon (Gen. 41:39-44), and David (1 Sam. 16:6-13), we see the theme of God lifting up the humble. Haman the high and wicked was brought low, while Esther, the once orphaned Jewish maiden, was elevated to be the queen of the Persian Empire.

- **Why does God often use the low and humble to do great and mighty things?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does this theme of “humbling those who exalt themselves” play out in other stories in Scripture? Why do you think this theme is so prominent in Scripture?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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God's providential hand is usually hidden from us. However, if you take the time to reflect on your life, you will see His fingerprints all over your journey. The same God who worked in the lives of Esther and Mordecai is the same God who is providentially at work in your life.

- **What are some modern day distractions that can prevent you from noticing God's work in your life?** *Social life, school, sports, and so forth.*
- **Like Esther and Mordecai, how will you take risks in your own life for God's glory and the good of others?** *Answers will vary.*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPWIN17Dan](http://lifeway.com/TGPWIN17Dan))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**