

# Series: Biblical Heroes and Zeros – week 9

**CDOBC – beginning on 10/17/10**

Title: **“Esther – Risking it all for God”**

*January 16, 2011*

Esther

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**OBJECTIVE:** To help believers gain confidence in God’s sovereign control of life, and confidence in the opportunity to be used by God.

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## **Announcements**

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- "Mommy and Me" on Sunday? The kickoff is Feb. 4th, 10:00 am and they'll be meeting in the 2 and 3 year old room.
- Needed: Volunteers and tools for the Grand Prix workshop – Feb. 5<sup>th</sup> 9:00 - Noon

## Opening prayer

Drama, suspense, romance, betrayal, deception, and forces of good and evil. All of these are components of the book of Esther.

Esther is an unusual book, because God is never mentioned. But He can be seen all throughout the book as He sovereignly directs the events and as some of the characters are faithful in their belief and actions to certain aspects of the O.T. Law of God.

I believe Esther is a Biblical hero because she was willing to risk everything – to risk it all – to save the Jewish people.

Turn to the book of Esther (after Nehemiah, before Job & Psalms) Some of you have been in the church your entire life, and you’re very familiar with the story, some of you have been in the church a long time, but are not familiar with the details of the story, and some of you have never heard the story of Esther. The book and story of Esther is ten chapters long...too long to read through in our time this morning, so I’ll be summarizing the story – working through the major events of each chapter, and we’ll read through the key chapters - #6&7.

## **Removal because of a royal refusal 1:1-22**

The setting of the story is in the kingdom of Persia, during the reign of King Xerxes. Chapter 1 opens in the city of Susa, and the year is 482 B.C.

After some preliminary statements and facts about king Xerxes, the story of Esther opens with the king making a request of his wife, queen Vashti. Vashti refuses to do what the king asks, and the result is that Vashti is removed from her position as queen.

## **A royal beauty pageant 2:1-18**

### Chapter 2

After the Kings anger subsided, he longs for another queen, so his advisors propose that they gather the most beautiful virgins from every province in the kingdom, and they hold a beauty contest, and the sole judge is...King Xerxes. The prize for the winner...she gets to be queen, wife to the King! In chapter 2, we are introduced to Esther, who was one of the virgins included in this royal beauty pageant. Esther had an older cousin, Mordecai, who had raised her after she became an orphan at a young age (2:7). Now, you must understand that at this time in history, the Jewish people were living in exile throughout the Persian kingdom. The kingdom of Persia had expanded as they conquered many nations – they were the superpower of their day, and their expansive kingdom included many different nationalities – and many different cultures. We're told in vs. 20 that Esther kept her Jewish nationality a secret – most likely to protect them from discrimination or mistreatment. Esther wins the beauty pageant, and the text tells us that Mordecai has a position at

the king's gate (2:19). This would be a position of leadership – some sort of noble or political official – most likely a position that Esther secured for her father-like cousin – probably so they could communicate more easily.

While at the gate, we're told that Mordecai overhears a conversation between two of the king's officials, about plans they have to assassinate the king. He tells Esther, who in turn tells the king and gives Mordecai credit for the information. The plot is foiled, and those planning it are executed.

### **Haman's rise to power and his hate for the Jews. 3:1-15**

#### Chapter 3

Haman is introduced in vs. 1. We're not told why, but King Xerxes promotes Haman to a position above all the other nobles (vs. 1). Haman is referred to as an 'Agagite' (vs. 1) – probably indicating he was a descendent of King Agag, who was king of the Amalakites (1 Samuel 15:8, 33). Agag was a descendant of Esau, and the descendants of Esau, called the Edomites, were enemies of the descendants of the line of Isaac and Jacob (the Jewish people).

A common practice and belief in ancient culture was that the king / high public officials were considered deity – and they would be worshiped by the people. In vs. 2, the writer informs us that the king gave a command that the other nobles kneel down before Haman.

Mordecai's inconvenient Godly obedience vs. 2-4

But Mordecai refused to bow down. For days the other nobles tried to convince Mordecai to kneel down before

Haman, but he continued to refuse. The reason he refused was, as a faithful Jew, he obeyed what God had forbidden. “Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you...” Deut. 6:13-14

But, at the end of vs. 4, we read that under the non-stop questioning and pressure from the other nobles, Mordecai tells them the reason he cannot comply with the king’s command is because his is a Jew.

Vs. 5-6 – Haman is enraged over Mordecai’s lack of obedience as he refuses to bow down to him. But instead of punishing Mordecai, the text says he, “...looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai’s people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.” 6b

At this point in the story, Esther had been queen for over four years.

Haman then approaches the king, and tells the king (vs. 8-9) that there is a group of people dispersed throughout the kingdom whose customs are different from all the other people in the kingdom, and these people do not obey the king’s commands. Haman proposes that the king issue a decree to destroy this group, and Haman even commits to cover the expenses of the soldiers who are charged with this duty.

Vs. 10-11 – The king gives Haman full permission and authority to carry out his plan. Royal secretaries write up the orders and the orders are sent out in multiple languages, to all the provinces in the kingdom. The orders were to kill all the Jews, “...young and old, women and little children – on a single day.” 3:13

3:15 – Business as usual...while a death sentence is issued for millions(?) of Jews, Haman and the king have a cocktail!

“...but, the city of Susa was bewildered.”

It’s difficult to know with certainty what this last phrase in vs. 15 is telling us, but it seems as though the people of Susa did not have any problem with the Jewish population in their city, and they were “bewildered” / confused as to why the king was taking this drastic action.

### **Recruiting royal help at great risk 4:1-17**

#### Chapter 4

Mordecai’s public mourning over the king’s extermination edict.

Mordecai tells Esther that she must talk to the king about this matter. Esther is hesitant to approach the king, because approaching the king without being invited – invited the death penalty!

Mordecai’s response to Esther’s hesitation on this issue (4:13-14) is the key verse in the entire book:

“Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”

(This passage will be part of our application.)

#### Chapter 5

Esther approaches the king. The king is so pleased with her, and probably taken aback by her beauty - like the country song lyrics:

*She got a gentle way that puts me at ease*

*When she walks in the room I can hardly breathe*

*Got a devastating smile knock a grown man to his knees*

(Zac Brown Band, "Whatever")

Instead of having her killed, he says, "What is it Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given to you." 5:3

Esther invites the king, and Haman, to a banquet given in their honor. At the banquet later that day, the king again asks what she wants, and for whatever reason, she doesn't mention to him the impending execution of the Jewish people, and instead she says, "My petition and my request is this: If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question." 5:7-8

Vs. 9-14 – Haman leaves the banquet on cloud 9 (apparently, Esther had that affect on men! – see vs. 12). As he is walking home, he passes Mordecai, who is still mourning, and who is still refusing to bow down before him. Haman is enraged again at Mordecai's refusal. At home that evening, Haman relives the day's events for his wife and some friends, and when his anger toward Mordecai flares up again, his wife suggests that he build a gallows seventy-five feet high – and in the morning, ask the king to have Mordecai hanged / impaled on it. Then, go to your second banquet tomorrow night with Queen Esther and the king, and enjoy yourself!

This seemed like a great idea to Haman – so he has the gallows built, and sleeps like a baby as he looks forward to the next day.

## **Sleepless in Susa** 6:1-14

### Chapter 6

While Haman is sleeping soundly and dreaming of gallows and banquets with the most beautiful woman in the kingdom, King Xerxes can't sleep. His insomnia was probably related to why Esther had risked her life in coming to see him, yet not reveal to him what motivated her to this action. So, he requests a bedtime story. But, instead of Sleeping Beauty or Robin Hood, he requests "*The Chronicles of the Great King Xerxes*" to be read to him (wouldn't you do the same if you ruled the world?).

## Read chapter 6

### Esther's risky request 7:1-10

#### Chapter 7

At the banquet, the king asks Esther what her petition is, and she replies, (**Read vs. 3-10**)

The rest of the book, chapters 8-10, recount some significant events. **First** was the rise of Mordecai to a position of power in the kingdom. The estate of Haman was given to Esther, who in turn appointed Mordecai to oversee the estate.

**Second** was how the king enabled the Jews throughout the kingdom of Persia to be victorious over their enemies, and how they didn't take any of the plunder of those they defeated (9:1-17). **The third** thing these last chapters tell us is the establishment of the Jewish holiday of Purim.

*(Purim begins at sunset on Saturday, March 19, 2011. Its celebration continues through sunset on Sunday, March 20, 2011)*

Purim is the only Jewish holiday not commanded in the Torah, but observance of Purim is just as binding as the holidays listed in the Law of Moses.

## Application

Be confident in the sovereignty of God

All throughout the book of Esther, we see the hand of God – albeit, working behind the scenes. The plans and actions of the king and Haman are used and changed in a way that accomplishes the purpose of God and brings glory to Him.

Rom. 8:28

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Gen. 50:20

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

God is always sovereign over the plans and intentions of man – even when those plans and intentions are evil.

Don't miss your God-given opportunities in life.

One of the messages of the book of Esther is that God puts you in a position where you can have influence on a person or event.

“And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”

But right before Mordecai said this to Esther, he said, “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. (4:13-14)

In other words, God puts you in a position to influence others, but if you don't act accordingly, God is not out of options. His will is not dependent on you or me acting according to His will, but out of His grace He gives us opportunities to be used by Him as He accomplishes His plan. "...but you and your father's family will perish." indicates that if we don't act in accordance with God's will, then we will miss out and suffer loss. So, what is your God-given opportunity?

Family?

Somebody at work?

Somebody in your neighborhood?

Someone here at church?

Maybe you can look back on your life and see opportunities God brought to you in the past, but you're not sure what opportunity you have in the present. Simply pray, and ask God to give you the wisdom to recognize the opportunities He brings to you and the courage to act in obedience so that you can have a part in God's redemptive work.

Remember God's work in history

Purim is a holiday that finds its origins in the events of Esther. Purim is an annual celebration of how God saved the Jewish people from annihilation. This is a great example and reminder to us of how important it is to remind ourselves of God's redemptive work throughout history. The holidays we celebrate, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and others (Reformation Sunday, Pentecost) are vital for they help us see our lives in the broader context of human history. i.e. Our monthly observance of Communion

Close in prayer