



Royal rescue

ESTHER

by Jane McNabb

Royal rescue
the good book guide to Esther
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The Good Book Company
Tel (UK): 0345-225-0880
Tel: (US): 866 244 2165
Tel (int): + (44) 208-942-0880
Email: admin@thegoodbook.com

Websites

UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

N America: www.thegoodbook.com

Australia: www.thegoodbook.com.au

New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz



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introduction: good book guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, mums and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

- ↔ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- 🗺 **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that’s not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. 🗨 **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with His concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.



why study Esther?

As a Christian, do you believe that God is always with you? Are you certain that He is always working things out for your good? Have you got full assurance that He loves you and cares for you as nobody else in the whole world does?

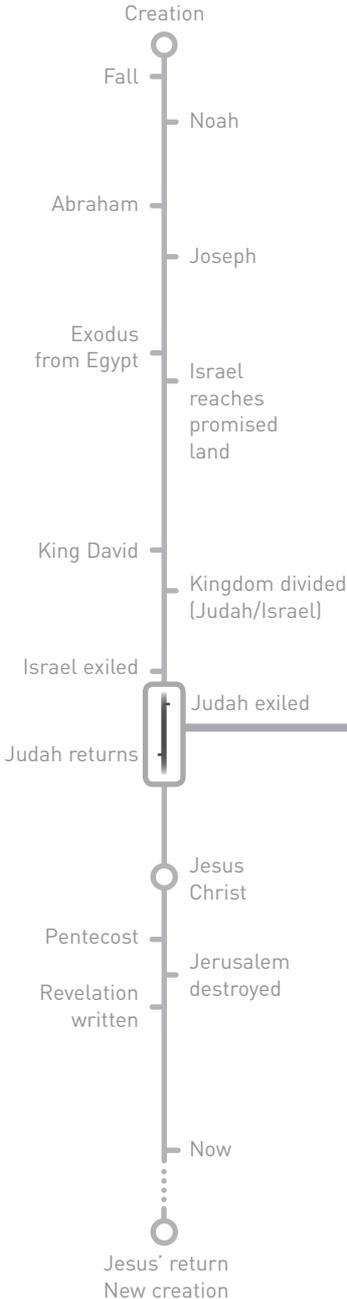
When things are going well in our lives, we are more likely to say yes to these questions. When things are bleak... when the future looks ominous... when we're struggling with our sin and the consequences of our sin... well, that's when the rubber hits the road. Those are the times when we're likely to ask: *Does God truly love me? Is He really in control? Does He actually know what He is doing? Will He rescue me from this?*

These are exactly the kind of questions which the book of Esther poses. God's chosen and special people are facing a crisis of epic proportions. Not only are they exiled far from their home in the land of Judah, but they are threatened with persecution on an unprecedented scale. Their whole future hangs in the balance.

Thankfully, there is someone working behind the scenes—One who is in charge, who loves His people passionately and who will always rescue them. Strangely, this deliverer is not mentioned by name. Yet so convincing is His presence that when the drama ends there is only one question to ask: Who else, other than God, could have done this?

This same God offers tremendous hope to us all. The whole of humanity has been in rebellion and exile from Him and now His eternal judgment lies ahead of us. We too face a crisis of epic proportions. We too desperately need rescuing.

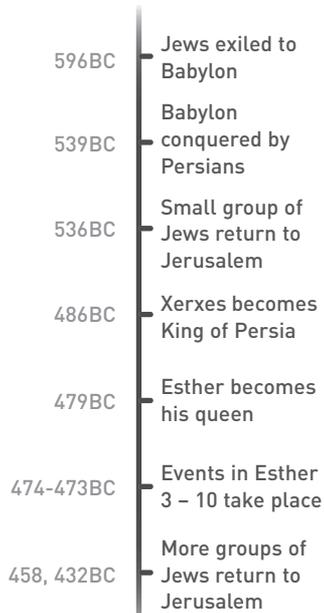
Incredibly our Judge has become our Deliverer. The task that God gave Esther of saving the Jews is a preview of the greatest rescue mission of all—God sending Christ to save all His people, everywhere and throughout history. And Christians today also have a part in God's great mission as God sends us to the ends of the earth to spread the good news about Jesus. And so the story of Esther, and how God used her to deliver His people from their enemies, is a story for our time too.



BIBLE TIMELINE

Where does the book of Esther fit into the whole story of God's word?

ESTHER 596-432BC



1

Esther 1

PARTY TIME AT THE PALACE

The story so far

The story of Esther takes place in the time of the Jewish exile under Persian rule. The exile happened because the Jews rebelled against God—God had frequently warned them. In 587 Judah, which was all that remained of the ancient nation of Israel, was invaded by the Babylonians, and the people either killed or taken into exile.

But less than 50 years later, Babylon was conquered by the Medo-Persians. The Medo-Persian empire was the largest the world had seen. Cyrus the Great was the founder of the Medo-Persian empire and Xerxes, the king of Persia who features in the book of Esther, was the grandson of Cyrus.

By the time of Esther, some Jews had already returned to Judah, though most were scattered throughout the Medo-Persian empire.

talkabout

1. What words would you use to describe 21st-century culture?

investigate

Read Esther 1 v 1-9

2. What do we learn here about the Persian ruler, King Xerxes, and his empire?

DICTIONARY

Cush (v 1): land south of Egypt.

Susa (v 2): a Persian city in modern-day Iran.

Porphyry (v 6): a type of rock.

3. Three celebrations are mentioned. What was the purpose of each?

- v 3-4:

- v 5-8:

- v 9:

4. Xerxes seems very proud of his rule and his kingdom. By contrast, what was the attitude of Israel's greatest ruler, King David? **Read 1 Chronicles 29 v 10-13.**

- The Jewish prophet, Isaiah, lived before the Babylonian conquest and Jewish exile. What did Isaiah specifically prophesy about Cyrus (founder of the Persian empire) in Isaiah 45 v 1-7, 12-13?

5. Imagine yourselves in the shoes of God's people, the Jews, living in exile in Persia at this time. How do you think they might feel?

- What would make it difficult for them to remain the distinctive people of God, do you think?



➔ apply

6. **Read Philippians 3 v 20** and **1 Peter 2 v 11**. In what sense are true Christians living in exile?

- How is the experience of being a Christian in our world similar to the experience of the Jews living in the Persian empire of King Xerxes?

- What makes it difficult for us to be the distinctive people of God?



getting personal

As a Christian, have you realised that you are in exile in this world?

Do you sometimes fear that God is not in control? Or that the world's wealth and power are greater than God's?

How should the truth about God's sovereignty (1 Chronicles 29 v 10-13) both encourage and humble you?

↓ investigate

➤ **Read Esther 1 v 10-22**

7. What more do we learn about Xerxes here?

DICTIONARY

Eunuchs (v 10): castrated men, who often worked as palace officials.

Edict (v 20): an announcement about a law.

8. Who does he blame for the crisis that follows his wife's refusal to comply with his command (see v15)?

- Do you think he was justified in deposing the queen? Who or what else could be responsible for this humiliating situation?

9. What was the ripple effect of this incident, both personally and nationally?



explore more

optional

The New Testament apostles describe the world outside of Christ—the culture and behaviour of the Roman empire. It's strikingly similar to the Persian culture of Esther's day, and to western secular society as well.

- **Read Ephesians 2 v 1-3; Philipians 3 v 18-19; Colossians 3 v 5-10; 1 Peter 4 v 1-4**

What are the behaviour and cultures of the world like, according to the New Testament apostles?

What drives them to be like this?

Is this how we see our society?

How will God's people (true Christians) stand out?



apply

10. There are many similarities between Persian culture and our own culture today. *Briefly* identify some of the specific problems that we, our families and our churches face, living as God's people in a secular culture.

- **Read 1 Corinthians 6 v 9-11.** What hope does the gospel bring?

11. In this session we have seen the consequences of Xerxes' drunkenness: pride and showing off; petulant, uncontrolled anger; and blame-shifting. When Christians fall into sinful behaviours like these, how does that affect those around us?

- **Read James 4 v 6-10.** What do we need to do when we fall into these kinds of sins?



getting personal

Where do you most feel the pressure to act like the non-Christian world around you? Think of one specific way in which you need to repent and change this week.





pray

As a group:

- Praise God for His sovereignty over all the kingdoms of this world, and His continued faithfulness to His promises.
- Thank God for the hope that we have in the gospel, and for Christ, who came to restore what sin has broken.

On your own:

- Spend time repenting of any specific sin in your own life that has been highlighted in this study.

