



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

HABAKKUK,
ZEPHANIAH & ESTHER

Week 4

Setting the Trap

DAY 22

Esther 5:1-8

Have you ever tried to get rid of mice, rats or other pests around your home? What bait did you use to trap them?

1. Where did Esther stand, risking her life, so that the king could not miss her (v. 1)?
2. How do you picture the expression on Xerxes' face when he noticed Esther (v. 2)?
3. Xerxes was not only happy to see Esther, he expressed his delight with her in what grand gesture (v. 3)? What does this say about their relationship? Who do you think deserves credit for this achievement?
4. Instead of asking Xerxes to save the lives of her people, what unusual request did Esther make (v. 4)?
5. Why do you think Esther chose this approach—inviting Haman and Xerxes to *another* banquet (v. 7)?

“Even up to half the kingdom” (v. 3). It is unlikely that this was a literal offer, but rather a figure of speech. Still, the offer indicated that Xerxes was prepared to be extremely generous to any request she made.

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

The Fly in the Ointment

Esther 5:9-14

OPENING
up to the Word

If you had the power to remove one person from your life who simply drives you crazy, who would that be?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Haman experienced two opposite emotions in the same day (v. 9). What were the causes for them both?

2. What was it that really rankled Haman about Mordecai (v. 9)?

3. When Haman called all his friends and family together that night, what did he talk about (vs. 11-12)?

4. What was the fly in Haman's ointment and what did his wife and friends suggest he do to remove it (v. 14)?

5. What do you think was behind the suggestion to make the gallows over 75 feet high, when shorter gallows would have accomplished the same end (v. 14)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. In each of our lives there is always at least one thing that threatens our happiness and enjoyment. What is the fly in your ointment today?

2. Is the thing that threatens your happiness and joy a situation or a person?

3. Is it possible that you are the fly in someone else's ointment?

WINDOW
on the Word

***"Gallows...75 feet high"** (v. 14) was most likely an impaling stake, the common method of execution in Persia (The Hebrew word for "hang" can mean impalement). It seems clear that the purpose of such a high stake would be to emphasize to all who saw it that Haman was a powerful man. This stake would be visible for a long distance, taller even than the trees.*

The Beginning of the End

DAY 24

Esther 6

One of the worst experiences in life is to be utterly and completely humiliated before someone you really dislike. Have you ever had this experience?

1. What caused Xerxes to have the book of the chronicles read to him (v. 1)? Why do you suppose the king ordered this particular book?

2. What surprising revelation did Xerxes discover (v. 2)? (a) he was owed money, (b) he had never rewarded Mordecai, (c) Mordecai was a Jew, (d) Esther was a Jew.

3. Haman was the victim of a terrible misunderstanding when he answered Xerxes' question. What had he been assuming (v. 6)? What does Haman's assumption say about his character?

4. What unpleasant and humiliating task did Haman have to perform for Mordecai (vs. 10-11)?

5. As things go from bad to worse for Haman, what depressing opinion did his wife and friends share with him (v. 13)? How does this fit with the edict that Haman had set in motion?

6. Do you think Haman knew of the connection between Mordecai and Esther? Do you think he suspected trouble as he left for his final banquet?

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

“Esther said, ‘The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman.’ Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.”

Esther 7:6



Artwork by Gustav Doré

No Escape

DAY 25

Esther 7

There are some things in life we would love to escape if we could, but we can't. What situation would you love to escape from right now?

1. When Xerxes asked Esther again what she would most like, how did she carefully word her response (vs. 3-4)?
2. What did Esther say she would not have complained about to the king since it would not be fitting to trouble him (v. 4)?
3. What was King Xerxes' initial reaction to the disturbing revelation (v. 7)?
4. As Haman realized his life was in jeopardy, what accident made his situation look even worse to the king (v. 8)?
5. Where did Haman meet his fate (vs. 9-10)? Was this mere irony or divine justice?

God granted Mordecai and Esther escape from their dilemma. However, it is not always in our best interest for us to escape from all our troubles. What trouble or issue are you facing right now—and why do you feel God hasn't removed it from you (see 2Co 12:7-10)?

“No such distress would justify disturbing the king”
(v. 4). *In approaching the most powerful man on earth at the time, Esther shows respect. She acknowledges his power of life and death over herself and her people. She also acknowledges his wisdom to rule justly and the importance of his position.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

Cancel That Order!

Esther 8:1-8

OPENING
up to the Word

How hard is it for you to change your mind, admit you were wrong and reverse your course?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What generous gifts did Xerxes give Esther and Mordecai (vs. 1-2)? Do you think this was appropriate?
 2. Do you believe that the king's opinion of the Jewish people had been changed by the actions of Esther and Mordecai?
 3. Why did Esther have to continue begging the king to grant her petition to save the Jewish people (vs. 3-6)?
 4. While Xerxes was sympathetic to Esther's cries, what was the dilemma he faced (v. 8)?
 5. Why couldn't the king simply change his earlier decree? What directive did Xerxes give to solve this situation (v. 8)?
-

LIVING
out the Word

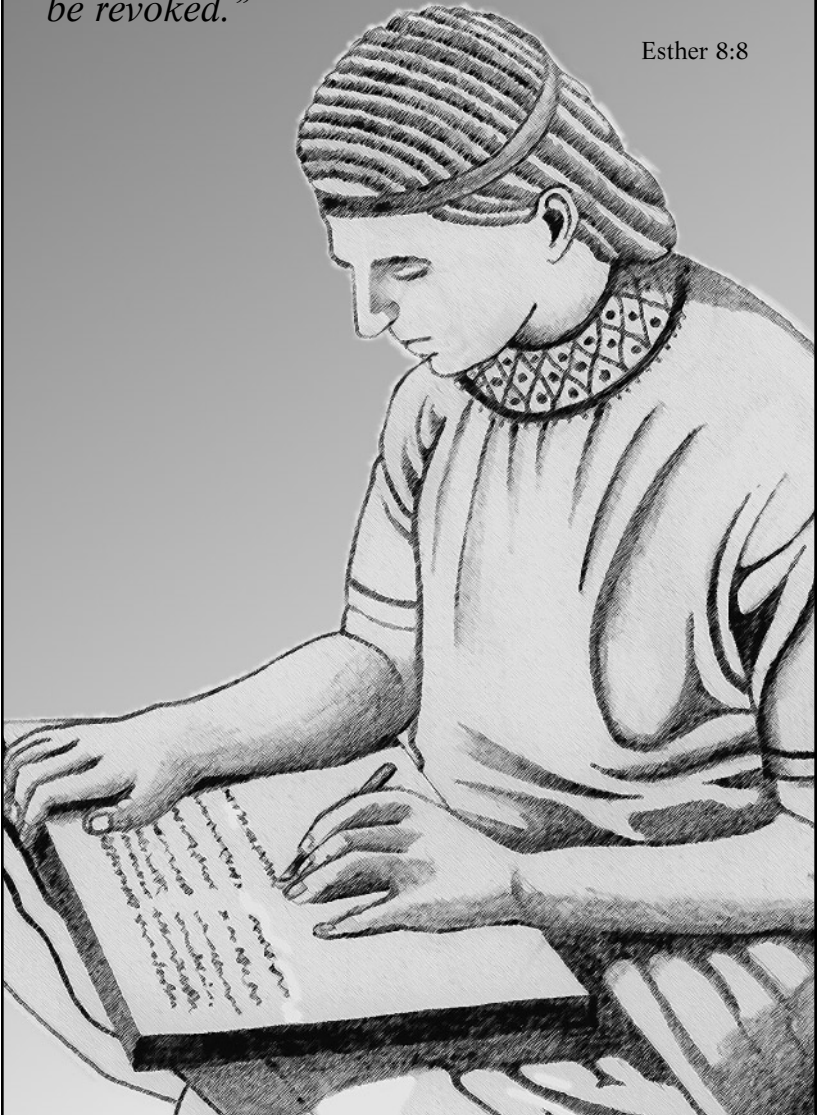
1. Xerxes and other famous people in history held incredible power. Their word was law. Yet it appears that Xerxes was willing to acknowledge that he had been deceived by Haman, and was willing to supersede his former edict. What is one issue that has been very painful for you to change your mind on?
 2. As you get older, do you feel it is easier for you to admit you're wrong, or harder? Why?
-

WINDOW
on the Word

"No document written in the king's name...can be revoked" (v. 8). *According to Persian law, even the king was unable to revoke one of his own laws. However, another law could be drafted that would supersede it.*

“Now write another decree in the king’s name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king’s signet ring—for no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.”

Esther 8:8



The Rules Have Changed

Esther 8:9-17

OPENING
up to the Word

One of the hardest things to do is to reverse an existing government law or policy once it's on the books. Can you think of a time this happened in our country?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. To get the new orders out as quickly as possible, how did Mordecai speed up the process (v. 10)?
 2. What did the king's new edict allow the Jews to do on that appointed date (vs. 11-12)? Do you think this was an effective way to nullify Haman's edict?
 3. What was the reaction of the city of Susa to this new edict (v. 15)? How did this differ from their reaction to the edict of Haman (3:15)?
 4. Many people, as a result of this incredible turn of events, decided to become Jews (v. 17). Why do you think they felt that way?
-

LIVING
out the Word

1. Can you think of three great reversals of existing law in our country and the effect those reversals had?
 2. If you had the power to reverse one law in our country, what law would you reverse, and why?
 3. What effect do you think the reversal of that law would have?
-

WINDOW
on the Word

The **month of Sivan** (v. 9) corresponds to our months of June-July. The **month of Adar** (v. 12) corresponds approximately to our month of March.

The Tables are Turned

DAY 28

Esther 9:1-17

Can you remember a time when you expected something bad to happen, and something good happened instead?

1. Whose hopes were dashed on the day the edict was carried out (v. 2), and what had they hoped to achieve?

2. The Jews received unexpected help on this day of battle (vs. 2-3). Who were their new allies, and what was the cause of their sudden allegiance? Why would they fear Mordecai now?

3. Along with killing hundreds in Susa who had planned to murder and plunder them, who else of prominence did the Jews kill (vs. 7-10)?

4. Although the Jews killed thousands of those who had planned to murder them, what did they refuse to do (vs. 10, 15-16)?

5. What one last request did Esther make of the king (vs. 13-14)? Why was this important?

1. Has something unexpectedly good ever happened to you, after you have worried about something bad happening?

2. Does worrying accomplish anything positive? How do you feel God would have you respond instead (Php 4:6-7)?

3. Would you consider yourself: (a) an excessive worrier, (b) an occasional worrier, (c) an infrequent worrier?

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word



Jewish children celebrating Purim in Israel—ZEFA UK photo

“And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants.”

Esther 9:28

Death Takes a Holiday

DAY 29

Esther 9:18-32

What is your favorite holiday? Why is it so special to you?

1. Why were there two separate days of celebration, one for rural Jews and another for city Jews (vs. 18-19)?

2. Mordecai proclaimed that there should be a national Jewish holiday (vs. 20-22). In what ways were the Jews to celebrate this day?

3. This new Jewish holiday was called *Purim*. Why was it called this, and why was the name so appropriate (vs. 23-28)?

4. By whose authority was this decree confirmed concerning Purim (vs. 29-32)?

1. Which national holiday do you feel is least meaningful?

2. If you could create another national holiday—what would it be, and what would it commemorate?

*The feast of **Purim** was not commanded by the Mosaic Law, but was instituted by Esther and Mordecai. It is a two-day feast, called Purim because of Haman's use of the Pur (or lot) to set the execution day for the Jews. Instead the Pur became a symbol of how God intervenes in human history to protect his people.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

For the Record

Esther 10

OPENING
up to the Word

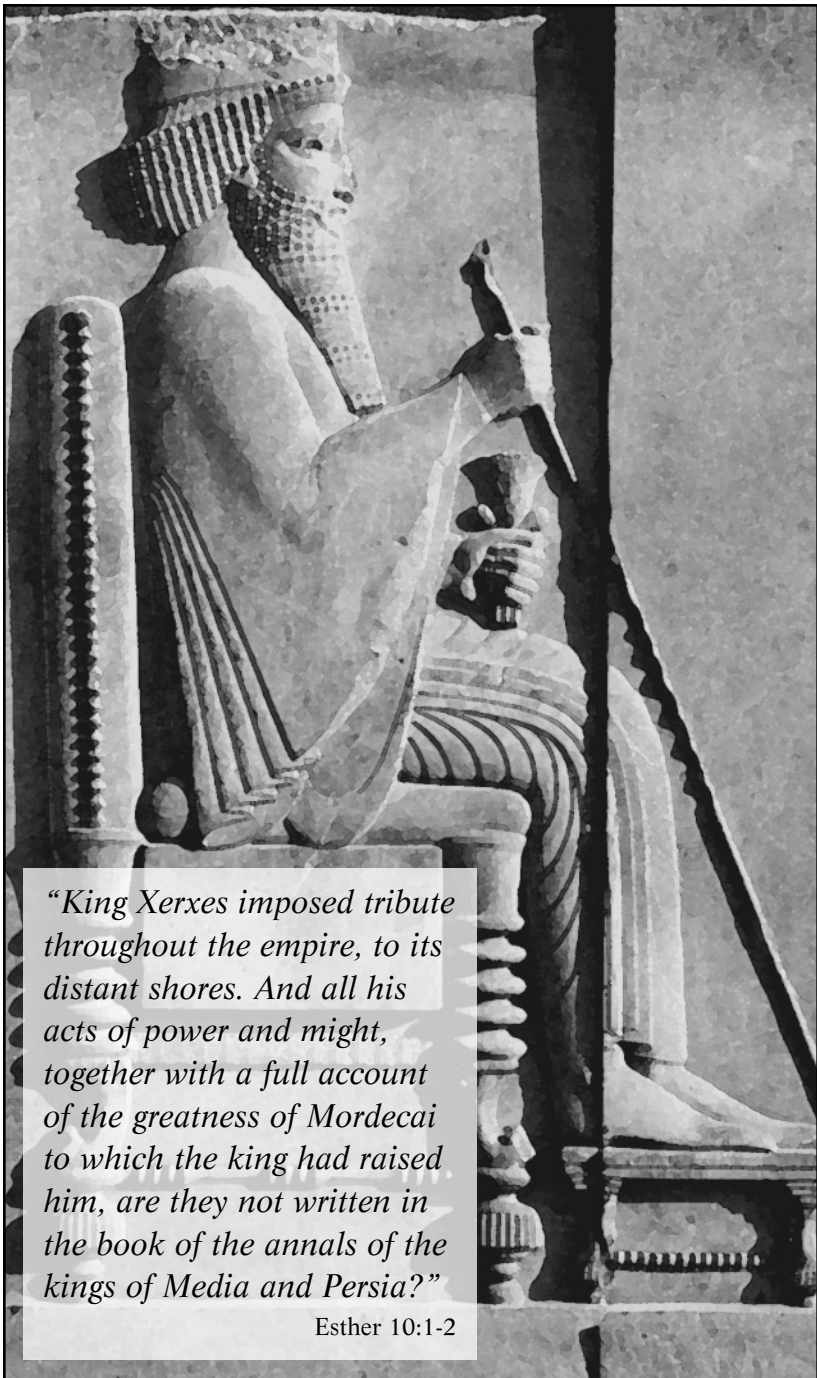
Have you ever received an award or special recognition for something you've done?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What is the final act of Xerxes recorded in the book of Esther (v. 1)?
2. Where were Xerxes' and Mordecai's works chronicled (v. 2)?
3. How much authority did Mordecai have in the greatest empire of his day (v. 3)? Why do you think Mordecai was placed in such a high position? Who else in the Bible was placed in a similar position?
4. What could have been the result of this story had Mordecai not challenged Esther to take her stand?
5. Do you think Esther loved Xerxes?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What award or special recognition have you received in your life that you are most fond of, and why?
2. Do you feel that your work and acts of service have been: (a) completely ignored, (b) mostly ignored, (c) occasionally recognized, (d) fully recognized.
3. How do you feel when you aren't recognized for the things you do?



“King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores. And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king had raised him, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia?”

Esther 10:1-2

Relief of Darius, Xerxes' father, at Persepolis