

# Applications From Esther

Suggested reading: Hebrews 11:32-34

(All Scripture quotes are from NKJ unless otherwise stated)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.A. Authorship

The book oddly contains no reference to God or worship, with the possible exceptions of fasting and divine providence (4:14, 16).

- Moral uprightness, piety, historical accuracy, and purpose attest to its divine inspiration.
- The Jews have always accepted its canonicity.
- Exact author is unknown, probably written around 400 BC.

### 1.B. Time Setting

#### 1.B.1. The Imperial Kingdom

The king in this story is in all likelihood Xerxes I, who took the throne of his father, Darius, over the Medo-Persian empire after his death in 486 BC.

He is a conquering king, ruling over a vast empire (1:1).

#### 1.B.2. The Israelite Nation

Having been exiled by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews continue to live peacefully in various places throughout the empire, as are citizens of other conquered nations (2:6).

This places the events circa 478 - 473 BC:

- Aftermath of Babylonian captivity
- After restoration of the temple (536 - 516 BC)
- Before Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's walls (444 BC):
- Temple restoration <40 yrs> Esther <30 yrs> Walls repaired

### 1.C. Features Of The Book

#### 1.C.1. Style

- Literary masterpiece, as a modern short story.
- Intrigue in a royal palace with ironic plot and counterplot.
- Suspense and danger with villains and heroes.

#### 1.C.2. Central Purpose

God's deliverance and perpetuation of the Jewish nation in order to preserve the law and bring about the Messiah.

## 2. Story Synopsis

### 2.A. The Main Characters

- **Ahasuerus** - A powerful and feared king who is easily manipulated by his officials.
- **Esther** - A stunningly beautiful Jewish woman with poise, grace, selflessness, tact, courage, and patriotism.

- **Mordecai** - An elder cousin and foster father of Esther; a lover of justice.
- **Haman** - The king's right-hand man, second in command, full of self and envy.

## **2.B. The Plot**

### **2.B.1. A Feast (1:1-27)**

Ahasuerus proclaims many feasts celebrating the riches of his empire. To one feast, his wife, queen Vashti, is invited to display her beauty to the princes, but she refuses to attend.

### **2.B.2. A New Queen (2:1 - 2:20)**

Ahasuerus is convinced to depose Vashti and seek a new queen from among all the peoples. Esther is recruited and heavily promoted for selection. She is selected, but she does not reveal her Jewish ancestry.

### **2.B.3. An Assassination Plot Foiled (2:21-23)**

After Esther becomes queen, Mordecai learns of a plot of two officials to assassinate the king. He informs the king, and after an investigation, the matter is confirmed, and the conspirators are executed, but Mordecai is given no reward or recognition for his actions.

### **2.B.4. Haman Is Promoted (3:1-4)**

The king promotes Haman to a position above all others and orders homage to be paid unto him. Haman is given the king's signet ring (3:10), giving him legislative power. However, Mordecai refuses to pay him homage.

### **2.B.5. Haman's Outrage (3:5 - 4:8)**

Haman is outraged at Mordecai and therefore plots to annihilate all Jews dwelling throughout the empire. An official decree is made to this effect, and Haman casts lots to determine the day of destruction. Mordecai delivers the document to the queen and implores her intervention.

## **2.C. The Counterplot**

### **2.C.1. An Audience With The King (4:9 - 5:3)**

Esther is fearful to approach the king unbidden, so she makes herself conveniently available to the king, who invites her to the throne, asking her request.

### **2.C.2. Two Banquets (5:4 - 6:3)**

Before voicing her request, Esther proposes two banquets for the king and Haman, which the king grants. After the first banquet, Haman is sure his position with the king is strong, and he builds a gallows on which he intends to hang Mordecai. The night before the second banquet, the king decides to honor Mordecai, having learned that he saved his life.

### **2.C.3. A Twist Of Fate (6:4 - 6:10)**

Haman comes to the king the next day to ask for Mordecai's death. Before he can ask, the king asks him what should be done to honor a deserving servant. Thinking it is for him, Haman proposes a most extravagant honoring ceremony. The king then instructs him to see that such honor is bestowed upon Mordecai.

### **2.C.4. Haman Is Humiliated (6:11 - 7:6)**

Humiliated, Haman reluctantly honors Mordecai, and the time for the second banquet quickly comes about. With Ahasuerus, Haman, and Esther together at the banquet, the king asks for Esther's request, at which point she begs for the Jews to be spared and reveals Haman's treacherous plot against her and her ancestors.

### **2.C.5. The King's Rage (7:7 - 8:2)**

The king, in rage, leaves the banquet hall for a moment. Upon his return, he finds Haman (pleading for mercy) in a compromising position with his wife, and he orders his immediate execution upon the gallows he built for Mordecai.

## 2.D. The Deliverance

### 2.D.1. A New Decree (8:3-17)

Esther implores Ahasuerus to revoke the decree for the destruction of the Jews. Since an order sealed with the king's signet ring could not be revoked, he issues a new decree that all Jews have the right to defend themselves and take plunder from their adversaries. Instead of simply eliminating the threat, Ahasuerus provides for the elimination of the ones threatening. As a result, many citizens of the land profess themselves to be Jews.

### 2.D.2. Restitution (9:1 - 9:16)

The Jews successfully defend themselves with a great slaughter against those who hate them. Haman's ten sons are killed and hung in public defamation. The Jews take no plunder, and their nation is saved.

### 2.D.3. A New Jewish Feast (9:17 - 10:3)

Esther and Mordecai institute the feast of Purim to celebrate and commemorate their deliverance. Mordecai is promoted to Haman's former position, serving the nation in peace and advancing in favor of the king and all the people.

## 3. Applications

*Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

Here are some things we can learn:

### 3.A. Lessons From Mordecai – Do The Right Thing (3:1-5)

The king's command was to reverence (KJV), bow down, pay homage (NAS), and do obeisance (NRS) to Haman. This is from the Hebrew SHACHAH {shaw-khaw'}, which occurs 172 times in the Old Testament and is translated in the KJV as crouch (1 time), stoop (1), fall down (3), reverence (5), obeisance (9), bow down (18), and bow (31). However, **99 times** it is translated "worship." In the stem form in which this verb here appears (Hithpael), it specifically means "1c1) to bow down, prostrate oneself 1c1a) before superior in homage 1c1b) before God in worship 1c1c) before false gods 1c1d) before angel" (BDB). This is the word typically indicating the reverence due unto God, as used in Exodus 20:5:

*Exodus 20:2-5 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. <sup>3</sup> You shall have no other gods before Me. <sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; <sup>5</sup> **you shall not bow down** to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me..."*

It is not the same word to indicate proper respect for one in civil authority, as used in Esther 6:6: "So Haman came in, and the king asked him, 'What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to **honor**?'". This is YEQAR {yek-awr'}, meaning "1) price, value, preciousness, honour, splendour, pomp 1a) preciousness 1b) price 1c) honour, esteem" (BDB). Mordecai knew the difference and knew this was wrong.

#### 3.A.1. Examples

An angel refuses to accept such homage from John.

*Revelation 22:8, 9 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."*

Paul refuses to accept worship at Lystra.

*Acts 14:11-15 Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying... "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" <sup>12</sup> ... <sup>13</sup> Then the priest of Zeus... brought oxen and garlands... intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. <sup>14</sup> But when*

*the apostles... heard this, they tore their clothes,... crying out, <sup>15</sup> ... "Men, why are you doing these things? We... preach... that you should turn from these useless things...."*

Herod, failing to rebuke his worshippers, accepts their homage and is punished.

*Acts 12:21-23 So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. <sup>22</sup> And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" <sup>23</sup> Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.*

### **3.A.2. Unwilling to do wrong even in pretense**

Mordecai might have reasoned to himself that he could have spared himself a lot of grief if he would have just gone along with it, pretending to honor outwardly only. After all, God knows our hearts. However, although God knows, others do not, and such action will encourage them to do wrong, sincerely following our open example. Mordecai fundamentally knows he cannot give lip-service to one while giving heart-service to the other.

*Isaiah 29:13 Therefore the LORD said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, <sup>14</sup> Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people,..."*

### **3.A.3. Take a visible stand**

Let others know your convictions, as Mordecai does, "For Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew" (3:4). That means something more to Mordecai than mere national heritage. When facing immoral temptations from our peers, we should say, "I'm a Christian, and we don't behave that way." Being a Christian should mean something more than mere "church affiliation;" it should demonstrate the God whom we serve.

*Matthew 5:14-16 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Does all our homage go to the true and living God? What gods do we serve:

- Materialism?
- Our own personal desires?
- Respected men whose false teachings we follow or tolerate?

## **3.B. Lessons From Esther – Answer The Call With Action (4:11-16)**

### **3.B.1. Courage**

In the culture of Persian kings, the royal guards would view anyone approaching the king unbidden as a possible threat, and they have authority to execute a trespasser on the spot. Even Esther, the queen, is not exempt. Esther does not make excuses or claim that she should not be compelled to do more than the minimum requirement, but she musters the courage she needs, in spite of the possible consequences, saying, "If I perish, I perish" (vs. 16).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego also meet their challenge with unspeakable courage, refusing to worship the idol at the threat of torture.

*Daniel 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."*

*Matthew 10:26-28 Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

### 3.B.2. Opportunity

Esther finds a way to make herself visible and available. Her physical beauty possibly gives her an advantage, which she is able to exploit without compromising any moral principles. We ought to be seeking opportunities to let our lights shine. God can find ways to use us from the most peculiar circumstances, if we avail ourselves. We need to get out of our comfort zone and get involved.

*Esther 4:14 "For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-7 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:... <sup>7</sup> A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;*

It is Esther's time to speak; sometimes, the time is ours. Take advantage of opportunities; they quickly vanish.

*Ephesians 5:15, 16 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, <sup>16</sup> redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

*Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

Note that both Mordecai and Esther reveal that they are Jewish only when necessary. Though we ought always live a life reflecting Christ, the term "Christian" ought not be used as a title or a label by which we arbitrarily brand ourselves before others in name only, like a badge or to draw attention to ourselves rather to Christ.

*John 8:39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham."*

### 3.B.3. Self-sacrifice

Esther puts aside her own concerns to do the will of her father for the good of her people.

*Mark 10:28-31 Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You." <sup>29</sup> So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, <sup>30</sup> who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time -- houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions -- and in the age to come, eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*

### 3.B.4. Discipline

God can use our misfortunes to make us stronger in character and bring about His will.

*1 Peter 4:12-16 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; <sup>13</sup> but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. <sup>14</sup> If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. <sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. <sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.*

*Hebrews 12:5-12 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; <sup>6</sup> For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." <sup>7</sup> If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. <sup>11</sup> Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. <sup>12</sup> Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,...*

Parents are instructed to train their children unto righteousness (Ephesians 6:4). As Lois and Eunice teach Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5), so also Mordecai does his best to teach Esther the ways of Jehovah under difficult political conditions. She sees fit to accept it and live it.

*2 Timothy 3:14, 15 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, <sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

### **3.C. Lessons From Haman – Pride And Envy (5:11-13)**

Haman exalts himself and is envious of any good fortune that comes to others. Almost everything in Paul's description of evil in the world accurately describes Haman:

*Romans 1:28-32 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, <sup>30</sup> backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; <sup>32</sup> who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*

Conversely, Mordecai never complains about the lack of recognition and praise for his vital part in saving the king. Spiritual maturity calls us to not become envious when we sometimes see a weaker brother in the church receiving the more needed attention.

*1 Corinthians 12:23-25 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, <sup>25</sup> that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*

A righteous man never seeks to claim his own honor but allows it to come in due time as the Lord wills.

*Proverbs 25:6, 7 Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king, And do not stand in the place of the great; <sup>7</sup> For it is better that he say to you, "Come up here," Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince, Whom your eyes have seen.*

From Luke 14:7-11, Jesus' parable of the wedding feast:

*Luke 14:11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

Be careful what you sow; that is what you will reap.

*Galatians 6:7, 8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. <sup>8</sup> For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.*

*Proverbs 26:24-27 He who hates, disguises it with his lips, And lays up deceit within himself; <sup>25</sup> When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart; <sup>26</sup> Though his hatred is covered by deceit, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly. <sup>27</sup> Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him.*

### **3.D. Lessons From Ahasuerus – Beware Of Evil Influences**

#### **3.D.1. Doing as others do**

It is foolish for Ahasuerus to decree that Haman should be paid such homage (3:2). However, secular history indicates that the worship of rulers was common among the nations. In biblical history, both Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:31) and Belshazzar, Babylonian kings, elevate themselves against the Lord. More notably, Darius the Mede issues a decree for all prayer to be offered to no one other than himself (Daniel 6:6-9). Ahasuerus is no doubt simply doing as his

father and the nations did without regard for how it might conflict divine law. None of them learn anything from Nebuchadnezzar's punishment (Daniel 5:18-21).

*Daniel 5:22, 23 But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. <sup>23</sup> And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven....*

Even while knowing better, some Christians today do just whatever the crowds do. If the majority of church members are willing to tolerate a heretic among them, many others are too often willing to go along, as was the case in Thyatira:

*Revelation 2:20 "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols."*

The Lord is not angry with the church in Thyatira because this woman is leading people astray but because they are **allowing** her to do so – unchecked.

### **3.D.2. Not confirming the reports**

Ahasuerus allows himself to be easily manipulated by Haman. He trusts him, not discerning the evil within his heart. Haman deceives Ahasuerus with vagueness. He refers to the God-fearing Jews only as "certain people" and unfairly portrays them as lawless rebels (3:8), and Ahasuerus fails to apply due diligence to Haman's reports.

We ought never put undue trust in the words of other men, no matter how faithful they might appear. False teaching preachers and elders today will mask their heresies with complicated word wrangling and ambiguity. The sound Bible student will investigate all things carefully in order to determine the truth.

*1 Thessalonians 5:21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.*

*1 Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, <sup>4</sup> he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, <sup>5</sup> useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.*

It is hard to believe that king Ahasuerus actually reads completely and with comprehension the decree which Haman issues, or else he would have been appalled by it well before Esther rehearses it with him. We certainly ought to be reading God's law more carefully than Ahasuerus reads his own.

*Acts 17:11 These [Bereans] were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

*1 Timothy 4:15, 16 (NAB) Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. <sup>16</sup> Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things,....*

## **3.E. One Final Lesson – Remember Your Deliverance (9:1-5)**

### **3.E.1. The Lord will provide**

God always provides a way to sustain His faithful. If not through Esther, Mordecai knows, through the examples of Jewish history and scripture, that God will provide deliverance by some other means.

*Psalms 37:23-28 The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. <sup>24</sup> Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand. <sup>25</sup> I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread. <sup>26</sup> He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed. <sup>27</sup> Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore. <sup>28</sup> For the LORD loves justice, And does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.*

So it is today; the Lord will see us through any ordeal we might face in this life.

*1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

### 3.E.2. Types and antitypes

Some parallels can be drawn from these accounts. As with all allegories, the comparisons are not always perfect or far-reaching, but we can relate to certain similar aspects and consider further insight into spiritual principles.

As those Jews, we also are under captivity and a death sentence by sin.

*Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death,...*

Haman is like Satan: our deceitful enemy.

*2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,<sup>10</sup> and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish,...*

God's chosen people of Israel is like the church.

*1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

Mordecai is like an apostle, bringing a message of warning.

*Colossians 1:28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

Esther is like Christ: our advocate and mediator, pleading our case before God our judge.

*1 John 2:1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

A new joy is found in our freedom from the consequences of sin.

*Romans 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*

*1 Corinthians 15:56, 57 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.<sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Colossians 1:13, 14 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,<sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*

Purim is like the Lord's Supper: our commemoration of deliverance.

*Luke 22:19, 20 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."<sup>20</sup> Likewise He also took the cup....*

## 4. Summary

If you've heard the gospel, you know the right things that you must do:

- In faith, trust God alone (Hebrews 11:6).
- In faith, renounce and turn away from sinful behavior (Acts 3:19).
- In faith, confess your belief and allegiance to Him (Matthew 10:32, 33).
- In faith, accept God's deliverance through baptism (1 Peter 3:21).