

Jane McNabb

# Esther

*Royal Rescue*



 7-Session Bible Study

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Esther: Royal Rescue

A Good Book Guide

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# Introduction

One of the Bible writers described God's word as "a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105, NIV). God gave us the Bible to tell us about who he is and what he wants for us. He speaks through it by his Spirit and lights our way through life.

That means that we need to look carefully at the Bible and uncover its meaning—but we also need to apply what we've discovered to our lives.

Good Book Guides are designed to help you do just that. The sessions in this book are interactive and easy to lead. They're perfect for use in groups or for personal study.

Let's take a look at what is included in each session.

**Talkabout:** Every session starts with an ice-breaker question, designed to get people talking around a subject that links to the Bible study.

**Investigate:** These questions help you explore what the passage is about.

**Apply:** These questions are designed to get you thinking practically: what does this Bible teaching mean for you and your church?

**Explore More:** These optional sections help you to go deeper or to explore another part of the Bible which connects with the main passage.

**Getting Personal:** These sections are a chance for personal reflection. Some groups may feel comfortable discussing these, but you may prefer to look at them quietly as individuals instead—or leave them out.

**Pray:** Here, you're invited to pray in the light of the truths and challenges you've seen in the study.

Each session is also designed to be easily split into two! Watch out for the **Apply** section that comes halfway through, and stop there if you haven't got time to do the whole thing in one go.

In the back of the book, you'll find a **Leader's Guide**, which provides helpful notes on every question, along with everything else that group leaders need in order to facilitate a great session and help the group uncover the riches of God's light-giving 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?

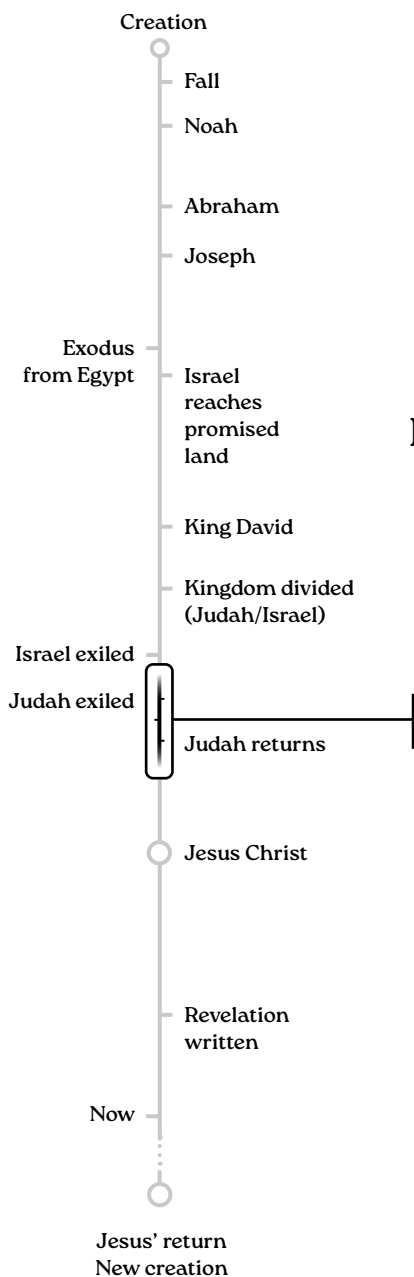
When things are going well in our lives, we are more likely to say yes to these questions. When things are bleak... when the future looks ominous... when we're struggling with our sin and the consequences of our sin... well, that's when the rubber hits the road. Those are the times when we're likely 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 kinds 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.

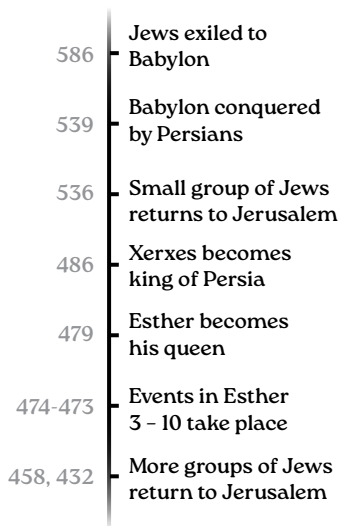
Thankfully, there is someone working behind the scenes—one who is in charge, who loves his people passionately and who will always rescue them. Strangely, this deliverer is not mentioned by name. Yet so convincing is his presence that when the drama ends there is only one question to ask: Who else, other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



## Esther 586-432 BC



# 1

## Party Time at the Palace

### Esther 1

#### **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—despite God frequently warning them to turn back to him. In 586 BC 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 about 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 1:1-9

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## DICTIONARY

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**Cush** (v 1): land south of Egypt.

**Porphyry** (v 6): a type of rock.

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

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2. What do we learn here about the Persian ruler, King Xerxes, and his empire?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Three celebrations are mentioned. What was the purpose of each?
  - Party 1 (v 3-4)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Party 2 (v 5-8)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Party 3 (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 29:10-13.

- 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 45:1-7, 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 3:20 and 1 Peter 2:11. 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?

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## Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

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 29:10-13) both encourage and humble you?

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## Investigate

 **Read Esther 1:10-22**

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### DICTIONARY

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

**Edict** (v 20): an official order from the king.

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7. What more do we learn about Xerxes here?

8. Who does he blame for the crisis that follows his wife's refusal to comply with his command? (See verse 15.)

- 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?

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## 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 2:1-3; Philippians 3:18-19; Colossians 3:5-10; 1 Peter 4:1-4**

- 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?

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## 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 6:9-11. 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 it affect those around us?

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

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## Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

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.

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## 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.*