



*Becoming Fully Devoted Followers  
by Studying the Followers Before Us*

**WEEK 34**  
**ESTHER**

**AUGUST 20-24, 2007**

<b>DAY</b>	<b><i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i></b>	<b>ABBREVIATED STUDY</b>
<b>Monday</b>	Esther 1-5, Psalm 16	Esther 1-2, Psalm 16
<b>Tuesday</b>	Esther 6-10, Psalm 17	Esther 3-4, Psalm 17
<b>Wednesday</b>	Zechariah 1-2, Psalm 18	Esther 5-6, Psalm 18
<b>Thursday</b>	Zechariah 3-4, Psalm 19	Esther 7-8, Psalm 19
<b>Friday</b>	Zechariah 5-9, Psalm 20	Esther 9-10, Psalm 20

***Walk Through The Bible Readings***

**August 19 – Week 34 – Esther**

Monday	Esther 1-5	Psalm 16
Tuesday	Esther 6-10	Psalm 17
Wednesday	Zechariah 1-2	Psalm 18
Thursday	Zechariah 3-4	Psalm 19
Friday	Zechariah 5-9	Psalm 20

**August 26 – Week 35 – Zechariah**

Monday	Zechariah 10-14	Psalm 21
Tuesday	Ezra 1-5	Psalm 22
Wednesday	Ezra 6-10	Psalm 23
Thursday	Nehemiah 1-2	Psalm 24

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**PRAYER JOURNAL**

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**This week I am praying for . . .**

. . . Lyn Bartsch serving with World Impact in Los Angeles. Lyn has been serving as the Human Resources Manager for World Impact since August, 2005. Prior to that she was the principal of World Impact's Los Angeles Christian School.

. . . additional food contributions to the Shepherd's Pantry during the remainder of the summer, a time when donations are traditionally low.

And . . .

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**READ**

Esther 1-2  
Psalm 26

**REFLECT**

Esther is one of two books in the Bible that does not mention God and does not introduce the hero, Esther, until the second chapter. There are no God-given laws handed down or open acts of worship. In fact, during the time of this story (483 BC), most Jews are living in exile in what was Persia and is now Iran. We do not know who wrote the Book of Esther, but it was undoubtedly someone familiar with Persian life, as it is filled with minute details such as the color of the curtains and how the palace furniture was arranged.

The story begins with king Xerxes putting on an exhibit of his wealth for six months. Afterwards, he hosts a week-long party and invites everyone in the city of Susa – important and unimportant alike. The guests could drink as much wine as they liked, served in gold chalices. Such generosity! Imagine opening your house, and wine cellar, and good china, to the city of Glendora for seven days!

On the seventh day, in a drunken stupor, the king calls for his wife to join the party. Queen Vashti is hosting a party for the women in another part of the palace. We are not told why she refuses to come, but her refusal threatens the men. They worry what other wives will do when they hear of her insolence. The king makes a law, which cannot be revoked, banning Vashti from his presence.

Later, the king sobers up, and has second thoughts about both Vashti's refusal and his reaction. King Xerxes' young attendants, seeing him about to waver, advise him to search for a beautiful young virgin to replace Queen Vashti. Have you ever behaved badly or over-reacted?

Were you able to rectify the situation? Who did you turn to for help and advice?

In Chapter 2 we are introduced to a Jew named Mordecai, who is the guardian of his cousin, Esther. Esther is described as a beautiful, obedient girl with a good figure. We are not told how Esther came to the palace, whether she had a choice in the matter or not, but she immediately impresses the supervisor of palace women and is treated well. The king is smitten and makes Esther his queen. Mordecai advises her to keep her family background and race a secret, and he visits the palace every day to check on and get news of his cousin.

One day, while Mordecai was sitting at the palace gate, he overhears a plot to kill the king, and tells Esther, who then tells the king. The plot is foiled and the deed is written down in a logbook kept for the king's use.

**RESPOND**

The events in the Book of Esther are almost 2,500 years old, but they could have happened yesterday. Rich parties, drunkenness, husbands divorcing their wives and replacing them with young beautiful virgins, even murder; these are characters and situations one might find in a current issue of *People* magazine. Yet in all this, we know that God is in control. We are fortunate to live in a place and time where our laws can be amended, women can come and go as they please, and we are free to be Christians.

**PRAY**

Heavenly Father, we don't need to see Your name in blinking lights to know that You are in control. Help us to have the self-control that eluded King Xerxes. May You be the One we turn to first for help and advice, and may we never have to be reticent about our Christian identity, as Esther had to be about her Jewish identity. We pray these things in Jesus' precious name, Amen.

- C.B.

**READ**

Esther 3-4  
Psalm 27

**REFLECT**

In Chapter 3 we meet Haman, the highest-ranking official in the government. Haman is used to everyone bowing and kneeling as he passes. Mordecai is a devout Jew and refuses to pay homage to any mortal man. Everyone tells Mordecai to just bow; what's the big deal anyway? But Mordecai is stubborn and will not compromise his faith. Have you ever been pressured to place some person or thing above God? We are all idolaters at one time or another, placing self above all else. It takes a strong belief to go against fashion and obey God. Yet with Him on our side, we can be fearless, afraid of no one and no thing (Psalm 27:1).

Haman hates all Jews and uses Mordecai's insult as an excuse to eliminate all Jews. (This sounds familiar, does it not? Remember a certain German painter named Hitler?) Haman casts the *pur* – or the lot – to determine a propitious day to launch his plans. The lot was used often in Old Testament times to pick dates, persons or portions. Haman tells the king that he personally will pay to have these “odd set of people” annihilated.

Once again the king is weak, and allows another irrevocable law to be written, this time authorizing the destruction of all Jews – youngsters and old men, women and babies – on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. Orders were sent to every province and posted in every public place so people could prepare for the massacre.

Of course the Jews were frightened and there was much fasting, weeping and wailing. Mordecai instructs Esther to go to the king and intercede for her people. But Esther knows that no man or woman may

approach the king without invitation, and she has not been invited into the king's presence for a month. To seek the king out uninvited means certain death. Mordecai reminds her that she is also a Jew and therefore not safe from the law. Finally he says, “Who knows? Maybe you were made queen for just such a time as this.”

Esther, ever obedient, requests that Mordecai and the Jews fast for her for three days. Determined to go to the king and save her people she says, “If I die, I die.”

**RESPOND**

Did you know that the Book of Esther was banned by the Nazis during WWII? One of the most powerful and aggressive military forces in the world was afraid of a story about a young girl. Yet this one, young girl trusted in God and risked her life to save her people. It is hard to imagine another Haman/Hitler rising up in our time with hatred and plans for murder, but each of us must be ready for “just such a time as this.”

**PRAY**

Oh God, we don't always understand why You place us in certain situations, but we trust You to do what is right and good. Help us to be strong Christians, free from hate and ready to do Your bidding. Thank you for providing us with examples of faith and courage, like Mordecai, Esther, and Jesus. Amen.

- C.B.

**READ**

Esther 5-6

Psalm 28

**REFLECT**

At this point, Esther could have rushed to the king, begging for her people's lives. Instead she fasts, bides her time and prepares. Have you ever rushed into some action and later regretted it? Proverbs 8:12 says, "I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion." Knowing *when* to act can be as important as knowing *how* to act.

Dressed in her finest robes, Esther waits for the king to pass. Remember, she is a beautiful woman, and therefore has power over the silly king. When he sees her, he says, "What do you want? Ask and it's yours – even if it is half my kingdom!" But Esther has other plans, and invites the king and Haman to a dinner party.

At the dinner party, the king again asks Esther to name her desire, but she remains quiet and humble, telling the king she will give him a straight answer if he and Haman will come to dinner the next day.

Haman runs home to brag to his wife and friends, but can't enjoy his success while Mordecai sits at the palace gate, refusing to bow. Haman's wife advises him to build a gallows and hang Mordecai in the morning. It seems Mordecai is doomed.

Who knows why the king had insomnia that night? Perhaps it was the banging of the carpenter's hammer on the gallows' wood. Yet it certainly was God's providence that prompted the king to order his logbook be brought, and to have the account of Mordecai's exposing of the plot to assassinate the king read.

The next morning the king, wishing to honor the man who saved his life, asks Haman, "What would be appropriate for the man the king

especially wants to honor?" Big-headed Haman assumes the king is speaking about him. "Let him wear a robe the king has worn, and ride the king's horse," he says, "and have a prince lead him around the square proclaiming his honor."

How ironic that Haman's grand ideas for himself are instead bestowed on his enemy. Imagine Haman's surprise and dismay when *he* is ordered to take the robe and horse and honor Mordecai exactly as he advised. Haman would have done well to study Proverbs 16:18 which says, "First pride, then the crash – the bigger the ego, the harder the fall."

Afterwards, Haman slinks home to get ready for the dinner party. It is *he* who is now doomed.

**RESPOND**

Psalm 28:5 reminds us that God hears our prayers and those who are wicked "have no idea how God works or what He is up to." Sometimes our best response is to pray and be patient; God will do what He is going to do in His own perfect time.

**PRAY**

Kind and loving Father, give us the wisdom to know when we should be still and when we should act. We know that You rule over our smallest concern. Even kings cannot command sleep unless You grant it. Help us to be humble and content with what we have, because it is only by Your grace that we have anything. We ask this in the name of Your Holy son, Jesus. Amen.

- C.B.

**READ**

Esther 7-8

Psalm 29

**REFLECT**

At the second dinner party and after much wine, the king asks Esther for the third time to take half his kingdom. Instead of taking the money and running, or blurting out, "Save me," Esther butters up the king some more saying, "If I have found favor in your eyes and if it pleases you, give me my life and the lives of my people. We've been sold to be massacred, eliminated." She elaborates, "If we had just been sold into slavery, I wouldn't even have brought it up; our troubles wouldn't have been worth bothering the king over."

Esther has correctly gauged the king's response. He is generous, and hot-tempered. He explodes and demands to know who would do such a monstrous thing. Haman is exposed and grovels at Esther's feet, but he has sealed his own fate. He is hanged on the very gallows he built for Mordecai.

Our Lord is known for turning the tables on His enemies. The seemingly high and mighty are often the most abject and poor-spirited when brought low. Haman's predicament is a reminder to us to approach God with reverence and humility. We cannot possibly ask or expect too much of Him, though we may only deserve His wrath.

With Haman out of the way, Esther pushes the king to counter the planned massacre of the Jews. Since the original law was "irrevocable" and had been published to the satraps, governors and officials of 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia, a new law was needed.

Mordecai was asked to dictate an order in the king's name on behalf of the Jews. This new law authorized the Jews to arm and defend

themselves to the death, killing anyone who threatened them and confiscating for themselves anything owned by their enemies.

As the couriers raced off to post the order throughout the land, Mordecai left the palace wearing the royal robes and crown. Jews everywhere celebrated their deliverance with laughter and feasting.

**RESPOND**

Psalm 29 begins, "Bravo, God, Bravo!" Like a master conductor, God arranged for Esther and Mordecai to be at the right place in the right time, and His chosen people were saved. We don't always have such dramatic circumstances to remind us of God's sovereignty, yet that shouldn't stop us from thanking and congratulating Him with loud acclaim.

**PRAY**

Great Savior, we are in awe of Your power over our lives. We love You and trust You to take care of us, as you did the Jews of Esther's time. Thank You, God, for saving our lives through the blood of Your son, Jesus. Amen.

- C.B.

**READ**

Esther 9-10

Psalms 30

**REFLECT**

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, both of the king's orders came into effect. Yet not one man was able to stand against the Jews. Because of Mordecai, who by now had become very powerful, the government officials helped the Jews defend themselves. Many Persians were killed that day, but no plunder was taken.

When it was over the king asked Esther if she wanted anything else. Esther asked that the order be extended and that the bodies of Haman's ten sons be hanged in public. Why so brutal? Why was she not content with the safety of her people? The text tells us the Jews had many enemies in Persia, and many Jews used this opportunity to free themselves from oppression. It is hard for us to understand the sort of hatred and oppression the Jews of that time faced, yet imagine what would have happened had the Jews of 1940 organized and defended themselves from Hitler. No wonder the Nazis were eager to ban the Book of Esther.

In Persia, the fighting and feasting went on for three days. Mordecai kept a record of all that transpired, and sent copies to all the provinces. He called for an annual celebration on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the twelfth month to commemorate the occasion. This celebration was called "Purim" after Haman's *pur* or "lot" and continues to this day.

Jews today celebrate Purim with prizes, noisemakers, costumes and treats. It is a time to remember the evil scheme of Haman to destroy all Jews; how Queen Esther intervened with the king so that Haman's work should boomerang back on his own head, and how even in these

"civilized" times, other evil-doers can rise up and plot to kill an entire race.

**RESPOND**

Although God is not mentioned anywhere in the Book of Esther, surely Esther, Mordecai, and all the Jews in Persia prayed to God for help and deliverance. And He answered their prayers. He made Esther, a wise, obedient and beautiful woman, available to a weak and foolish king. He let a greedy official set his own fate, and he turned an evil plan back on the evil-doers. It is right that the Jews remember this story more than 2,000 years later, and it is right that we study this story, so rich in detail and lessons for our lives. The themes in Esther – self-control, obedience, wisdom, courage, patience, humility, trust, and joy – are all possible with God's help.

**PRAY**

Psalms 30 is all about giving God the credit. In closing, let us recite verses 11-12, saying: "You did it: You changed wild lament into whirling dance; You ripped off my black mourning band and decked me with wildflowers. I'm about to burst with song; I can't keep quiet about You. God, my God, I can't thank You enough." Amen.

- Christine Boling