

The background of Esther's story and why Haman hated the Jews

Plotting against the Jews and an irreversible edict of doom

When the Lower Story seems hopeless, God is still writing an Upper Story

Esther comes on scene "for such a time as this"

Discussion questions:

1. What are some of the cultural norms and laws that came into play in this chapter of The Story (for Vashti, for Haman, for the Jews) and why is it important for believers today to understand our culture as we seek to be God's presence and messengers of his grace?
2. What drives a person like Haman and how have you had to negotiate a relationship with a person with similar motivations? What wisdom would you give a Christian who is forced to work, live, and exist around a Haman-like personality?
3. What characteristics marked the life and behavior of Mordecai? How can we take steps to grow character like Mordecai as we seek to follow God's Upper Story in our Lower Story lives?
4. Throughout this entire chapter, what strikes you about Esther's character, how she related to people, and the risks she took? What can we learn and gain from her example?
5. Eventually a great and radical reversal happened between Haman and Mordecai (Esther 5-7). How do you see God's hand at work bringing his Upper Story plan into the Lower Story of Haman's plots and schemes? Tell about a time when you faced a situation that seemed hopeless (from a Lower Story, human perspective) but God miraculously turned things around.
6. In one of The Story's epic moments, Esther resolved in her heart to approach the king, reveal her national identity, and make an appeal for her people—despite the great risk involved. She concluded, "If I perish, I perish." Christians are called to "take up our cross daily" and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). What is a risk God is calling you to take for him?
7. A lesson from Esther's story is that God is going to accomplish his will, with or without us (Esther 4:12-14). Tell about a time you entered into God's story and got to be part of his plan or tell about a time you opted out and missed an opportunity to be part of God's story.
8. At the end of the chapter, we read that God did not remove the danger of attack on the Jews, but provided a chance for them to fight back and defend themselves. What is a battle (against culture, world systems, or some evil) that God is calling you to fight?

Homework assignment: This week identify a "Mordecai" in your life: a family member, friend, church leader, or other person who has offered spiritual wisdom and guidance in some season of your life. Then do 3 things. First, lift up a prayer and thank God for placing this person in your life. Second, write, email, or call the person and express your appreciation. Third, tell someone else about this person's spiritual influence.

For next week, please read Chapter 21 of The Story (Ezra 7; Nehemiah 1-2, 4, 6-8; Malachi 1-4).