

ESTHER

A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

STUDY FOUR

An Evil Interlude

Esther 2:21–3:15

You cannot escape pain in this life, but you can learn to live above the level of misery.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN Adam and Eve tripped over Satan’s lies and fell into sin, all creation crashed down with them and “was subjected to God’s curse” (Romans 8:20). By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve introduced suffering into the world.

From hurricanes to broken legs, depression to murders, wars to cancer, the consequences of sin infect every aspect of our lives. We can’t escape suffering, and trying to escape it delivers only painful disappointment. Try as we might to cushion ourselves from the bumps and brace ourselves for the falls, pain is inescapable.

So, we must face the realities of life in a broken world and “make the most of every opportunity in these evil days” (Ephesians 5:16). We must learn to live with suffering and draw strength from Christ, who teaches us by His example to depend on the Father until that day of bliss when “there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4).

In the book of Esther, evil slinked like a serpent in the shadows as treacherous men devised secret plots first against the king and then the Jews. And yet, through the darkness, God lit a path for His people, and He will light our way as well as we respond wisely to the evils we face today.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus promised that “when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The Spirit illuminates our minds and hearts as we seek Him through His Word in Jesus’ name. Write a brief prayer requesting God to give you understanding of divine truth through this study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The book of Esther opens with King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, celebrating with a sumptuous banquet showcasing Persia’s grandeur and great wealth. As the revelry spread into weeks and then months, the elegant gala disintegrated into a drunken bash. What started out as an exhibition of humanity’s best turned into a display of its worst.

Such is the nature of sin and the consequences of overindulging desires. However, out of this ugliness and debauchery bloomed the beauty and goodness of Esther. God was ordering events to elevate Esther to queen. With God’s hidden hand opening a way for her, she “was admired by everyone who saw her” (Esther 2:15), especially the king. Esther 2 climaxed with another celebration—“a great banquet in Esther’s honor” and a national holiday in which the king gave “generous gifts to everyone” (2:18).

In this idyllic scene, all the wrongs had been righted and all was well . . . or so it seemed.





Observation and Interpretation: Assassination Plot, Genocidal Scheme

Two dark threats emerge in *Esther 2:21–3:15*. The first is a plot against the king which was minor in its impact because it was quickly contained. The second, however, is a major scheme against the Jews that could have wiped out the covenant people of God. This great evil targeted Abraham’s lineage—the genealogical line from whom the Messiah would come—and threatened God’s plan to redeem the world.



As you read the passages in the charts below, use your skills of observation and interpretation to explore the meaning of the narrative as the account unfolds.¹ Remember to observe slowly and patiently and then seek the meaning within the context.

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Mutiny: A Minor Plot Against the King Esther 2:21–23	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read <i>Esther 2:21–23</i> . What is the evil interlude in these verses? Who discovered the plot, and how did he receive credit for stopping the attack?	How did God work through Mordecai, Esther, and the king in this passage? Read <i>Esther 6:1–9</i> . How did God use the mutiny in 2:21–23 for good later on?



That's the way evil is. When it isn't checked, it grows. And when it grows, it leads ultimately to rage and finally murder. Because they yielded to evil imaginations, these two unknowns got themselves involved in a plot that resulted in their lives being taken. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Vengeance: A Major Scheme Against the Jews Esther 3:1–6a	
 Observation	 Interpretation
First, read <i>Esther 3:1–6a</i> slowly. What was the new evil interlude, and how did it arise? What did Mordecai do to provoke Haman's rage?	The king promoted Haman, in the line of Agag the Amalekite, instead of Mordecai. Look up <i>Exodus 17:8–16</i> and <i>1 Samuel 15:1–3</i> . What ancient grudge did Haman bear against the Jews? What do you think Mordecai was thinking when Haman was promoted over him?

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Haman held to a learned trait: hatred of the Jews. He realized if he could ever be placed into power, he would exterminate the race. “Haman sought to destroy all the Jews.” Because, you see, that’s the way evil is. It grows in an exaggerated manner. He’s not satisfied simply to kill Mordecai or to make his life miserable; now, he must kill the people of Mordecai. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Plan for Extermination Esther 3:6b–11	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read <i>Esther 3:6b–11</i> . According to 3:8, how did Haman describe the Jews? Did he name them? How did he obscure the king’s view of the race?	According to Esther 3:6b–7, Haman cast lots because that’s how one determined the favor of the gods in Persian culture. So how did this bolster Haman’s plan before the king?
The end of 3:10 contains the author’s theological interpretation of Haman. What does it say about Haman?	In 3:9, Haman told the king he’d pay 375 tons of silver into the treasury if he agreed. Where would Haman acquire this silver?

Haman was driven by fury, equipped with lies, and clothed with power. Instead of stopping Haman immediately, however, God let the tree of evil grow before cutting it down—which is how He might choose to work in our day as well.

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An Announcement to All Esther 3:12–15	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>According to Esther 3:12–15, do we have any evidence that Ahasuerus knew what was happening?</p> <p>Biblical authors sometimes used repetition and elaboration for emphasis. In what two ways did the author of Esther do this in 3:13?</p> <p>How much time elapsed between the decree and its execution?</p>	<p>What part of this passage tells us the king was aloof to the gravity of Haman’s actions? This is an indirect way the author cast a negative shadow on the transpiring events.</p> <p>The edict went out on the thirteenth day of the first month, Nisan—the day before all Jews would have celebrated Passover. Look up Passover in your Bible dictionary. How is it significant to this account?</p>

The entire “city of Susa fell into confusion” as the decree went out (Esther 3:15). Perhaps the people wondered, *Would the king wipe out other people groups?* The edict shook the foundation of the whole society. And yet God was in charge. God would accomplish His purposes by using the king as well as the king’s evil decree. Pause and give thanks that King Jesus reigns with a thorough knowledge of His people and their needs.

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Correlation: Trusting Our King

When storm clouds enter our lives like the ones we see entering Esther 3, we fall into confusion too. Where better to go with our questions than God? Read the two passages below that express hope in God during times of evil and record the encouragement the Lord offers you through them.

Psalm 42

Habakkuk 3:17–19



Application: Lessons by Example

Three characters from our study teach us vital lessons about evil and how to respond to it. Mordecai's example teaches us to *always remember that someone will resent your independent devotion to the Lord*. Mordecai's loyalty to God prevented him from bowing his knee to Haman. Have you felt pressured to compromise your first loyalty? Where is that pressure coming from, and how might you respond?

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Haman's example warns us to *never underestimate the diabolical nature of revenge*. It will poison your life if you do. Is the Holy Spirit revealing any resentment sprouting in your heart? If so, what might it be? How can you nip it in the bud before it sprouts into something harmful?

The king's example reminds us to *never overestimate our own importance*. Some wise counselor should have come up alongside Ahasuerus and said to him, "What is this you're allowing? And why? Not even you are important enough to decide the fate of an entire race!" If your sense of self-importance has inflated, how can you deflate it?

Evil interludes shake the foundations of our lives at times too. But we can stand firm on our Rock. He is the Lord of heaven and earth whose plan to redeem us and restore His creation cannot fail.

Reflective Wrap-Up

Write one sentence to *summarize* this lesson.

Write one thing to *remember* about God.

Write one way you can *respond* to God's Word.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I affirm that You are always present in this world, that You always know my needs even when I'm hurting, and that all of history works together for the good of Your people—including my own good. I want to release my anxiety over what I can't control and, instead, stand on Your promises because You are faithful. Please teach me to respond with wisdom to the evil, pain, and suffering in my life and the lives around me. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and revised by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1989, 2018, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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