

ESTHER 1 — WHEN GOD SEEMS ABSENT
Next Steps Devotional Guide
Sermon Series: Esther — For Such A Time As This
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1. The Book of Esther is the only book in the Bible that never mentions God. For this book to be in the Bible, you would think that there would be at least one reference to God. The Bible says this in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷God uses it to prepare and equip His people to do every good work” (NLT).
 - a. Can you imagine some author writing a book about the history of the birth of the United States, including the American Revolution, the Constitutional Convention, the first federal government and yet they never mention George Washington?
 - b. Obviously, when the Bible was being put together, biblical scholars believed Esther was an inspired book by God and should be in the Bible. For a book in the Bible that never mentions God, why do you think it was put in the Bible?
2. Through the years, many people have given reasons as to why they believe God is not mentioned in Esther:
 - a. The book of Esther has a lot of sordid material in it from drunkenness, to promiscuity, to sensual seduction, to sex addiction, to not submitting to the government when we are commanded to do this in Romans 13:1-7. Other books of the Bible that have this also mention God repeatedly. It is the belief that Esther has no virtue, Mordecai (her cousin) is all about vengeance and therefore God is vacant. What do you think about all of this and why?
 - b. A second reason some argue God is absent in the book of Esther, is that it is a book about dissemination, dogma and indoctrination. Meaning it is a book that is solely about promoting Jewish or Semitic nationalism. It is a book that is selling Zionism to the extreme. What do you think of this and why?
 - c. A third reason some argue God is absent in the book of Esther is a book about fictitious characters and stories or fables. Meaning — these stories are no different than the parables Jesus told in the New Testament. What is your response to this reason and why?
 - d. A fourth reason for God not being mentioned in the book of Esther was given by Pastor Kelly — providence. Providence means that even when God seems absent, He sees ahead into the future orchestrating events and people to a certain purpose or end. Read in your sermon notes Hebrews 13:8 and James 1:17 What do you think of this reason and why?
 - i. Another way to see this is that providence means that God lovingly guides all of history by working behind the scenes for His good purposes and intentions. Read Romans 8:28 in your sermon outline. How does this verse reinforce this idea? When and where have you personally experienced this?
 - ii. It is so easy for us to see things as coincidences or just normal everyday human events. When you look at life this way, do you ever see them as all being under God’s sovereign control resulting from God’s divine plan? If so, when?
 - iii. Read Psalms 135:6, Daniel 4:34b-35 and Romans 9:19-21 in your sermon outline. How do these 3 Bible passages agree that God, working ahead in His sovereignty is orchestrating people and events towards a divine plan?
 - iv. The Bible affirms over and over that even when God’s people forget God, He always remembers His people. Christian author Michael A. Rydelnik writes: “*This view is made all the more significant because the scroll of Esther reveals that the Jewish people had adopted the Persian culture and forgotten their God. The message of this book is that even when Israel forgot God, God always remembered His people. So, God is deliberately left out of this record to reflect the way the Jewish people of Persia had left Him out of their lives. Despite that, the book of Esther is a clear and powerful reminder that God never forgets His promises or plans! God is actively working even when we do not acknowledge Him.*”¹ If God were to present to you an image or picture or illustration of how your life at times is absent of God, how would that look to you?
3. From the very first book of the Bible — Genesis — we see God calling Abraham to be a father to a nation we call today Israel.
 - a. Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 17:1 in your sermon outline. If you were to make a comparison of these Scriptures with Esther 1, what would be your conclusion and why?
 - b. Read Jeremiah 31:35-37 in your sermon outline. Through the years God did establish Israel through Saul, made it superpower through David and then wealthy and blessed nation through Solomon. After the death of Solomon, the nation fell into a Civil War and split into 2 different nations. Both nations fell into idolatry and unspeakable sin. God allowed the Assyrians, then the Babylonians and then the Persians to conquer and subdue them as slaves. The Old Testament prophets Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Ezekiel, Daniel and Isaiah would all have to live and die through this. Put yourself back then. Where would God be to you and why?

¹ Michael A. Rydelnik, 50 Most Important Bible Questions, pp. 211-212, Kindle Edition.

4. One thing is clear about the book of Esther — God is not AWOL. Esther is a Jewish slave girl living in a foreign country called Persia. I wonder how many times she cried her eyes out over the death of her parents? I wonder how many times Esther was seized by the paralyzing grip of fear, panic and loneliness? Has this ever happened to you? How did you handle it?
5. Take your Bible and read [Esther 1:1-4](#).
 - a. Persia was a vast kingdom: some 3,000 miles in width and 1,500 in length with 127 provinces. It took 2 years of King Xerxes first 2 years as king to subdue Egypt and Babylon. As a result, he decided to throw a 180 day celebration (6 months) of partying, drinking, drunkenness and promiscuity for the men. While this was going on, at the same time, Queen Vashti, his wife threw a more civilized banquet for the women. Think back to your victories in life. How did you celebrate them? Where they to the glory of God or to your own glory? Why?
 - b. King Xerxes had a powerful military. His personal bodyguard included 2,000 select horsemen, 2,000 lancers, and 10,000 infantry. His total army was around 2.6 million men. And when he would go to war, he would take up to half of these (1.3 million soldiers with him) and leave the other 1.3 million to guard the homeland. Historians tell us King Xerxes had over 700 tons of gold and silver paid to him annually by other countries. Even with this superpower fell to Alexandria the Great. How does this relate to your life and to America?
 - c. There was no room big enough to get King Xerxes' inflated ego inside it. An inscription was found where he had this put on it: *"I am Xerxes, the great king, the only king, the king of this entire earth, far and near."* In what ways are you like King Xerxes?
6. King Xerxes put on a celebration that would make the movie [Animal House](#) look like a Sunday School meeting. Here in Wilmington, our city has around a week for River Fest and the Azalea Festival. The only thing that tops that is when we shut-down for more than a week is when a hurricane hits us. King Xerxes caused this celebration to last 180 days with parades and showing how wealthy and powerful he was? In what ways can you celebrate the good in your life but point it all to God for people to see?
7. Take your Bible and read [Esther 1:5-9](#). It is clear from these verses that King Xerxes did not live in a dump. Furniture made of gold. Floors made from porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and other costly stones. He had elaborate and expensive curtains. His gardens were so well-known and admired, people called them "paradise." It would be like seeing something on the TV show, [The Rich and The Famous](#). He was proud, boastful, flamboyant and egotistical. Take your Bible and read Jesus' words in [Matthew 6:19-20](#). How are you doing what Jesus said verses how King Xerxes lived his life?
8. It is almost impossible to have alcohol and drunkenness void of immorality, sensuality and promiscuity. Take your Bible and read [Esther 1:10-12](#). The text is clear that King Xerxes ordered his queen, Queen Vashti to make an appearance during the last week of this celebration with her crown.
 - a. She refused? Why? A Persian queen did not wear crowns as the Queen of England does. They wore a turban. King Xerxes ordered her to appear before all these drunk men only wearing her turban — nothing else. She refused to do that. The penalty for disobeying the king was death. King Xerxes does not choose this option even though Queen Vashti has humiliated him and embarrassed him publicly.
 - b. She would rather die with sober dignity than to be paraded around nude like some concubine before a bunch of drunk and wild men, who might try to take advantage of her sexually. Do you personally take a stand for God regardless of the price or do you cave to pressure from peers or your boss or family or someone else? Why are you reluctant to take a stand? Read Jesus' words in [Matthew 10:33](#). Does this passage convict you to take a stand for God? Why or why not?
9. Take your Bible and read [Esther 1:13-22](#), which all eventually sets the stage for Esther to become queen. There are two ironies in King Xerxes' and his advisors reaction to Queen Vashti's refusal:
 - a. First, they wanted to keep this embarrassing situation a secret but, by sending out a royal decree, they literally informed the entire nation of the incident. Has there ever been anything in your life that was embarrassing that you wanted to keep secret, but it became public? How did you respond?
 - b. Second, the king and his nobles were afraid that if the women found out about Vashti's defiance, they would stop obeying their husbands. Yet King Xerxes sent the edict to every household, ensuring that every woman would hear of Vashti's disobedience. The king's edict and advice from his wise men would only backfire showing their stupidity. What is something you tried to either manipulate, control, hide, coverup or determine the message that backfired on you? What did you learn from it?
10. You were given five final points on what we can learn from all of this in Esther 1.
 - a. Read final point #1 and [Matthew 28:20](#) in your sermon outline. What one truth does help you when God seems unresponsive or absent?
 - b. Read final point #2 and [Job 42:2](#) and [John 10:29](#) in your sermon outline. When God seems invisible, it is easy for any of us to not to see His power working in and through us. What one truth from these verses does this help you when it seems your prayers are going no higher than the ceiling or you feel alone?
 - c. Read final point #3 and [Hebrews 13:5](#), [John 15:4a](#) and [1 John 3:24](#). What is one truth you can come to from these verses to remind yourself you have the powerful Holy Spirit indwelling with you no matter what?
 - d. Read final point #4 and [Exodus 20:3](#) and [Matthew 6:33](#) in your sermon outline. With everything going on in your life, what Jesus say that He is the central figure in your life? Why or why not?

Read final point #5 in your sermon outline. As we make our way through the book of Esther, it is easy to say, “*Oh, look how clever Esther and Mordecai were.*” When you have found yourself in a bind and then you got out it, do you pat yourself on your back for your own ingenuity or do you give all the praise to God?