

SUFFERING IS PART OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
Next Steps Devotional Guide — Esther 2:19—3:15
Sermon Series: Esther — For Such A Time As This
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1. Family feuds are a horrible thing. They tear families apart. They put family members against each other. In our lesson today, there is a “family feud” that starts around 1,300 BC and continues down to 480/470 BC. It is between the Jews and the Amalekites.
 - a. Take your sermon notes or Bible and read Exodus 17:8, 13, 16. As the Hebrews/Jews were standing on the edge of The Promise Land (Canaan), as they entered the Amalekites attacked them. Notice specifically what verse 16 states: “. . . so now the Lord will be at war with Amalek generation after generation.” It doesn’t say the war ended with Joshua and the Hebrews, but continued even though God used Joshua and the Hebrews to totally defeat the King Amalek and the Amalekites. Are you aware of any long-term, even generational feuds between families and/or friends? If so, what was it? Why do you think it started? Did it ever end?
 - b. Take your sermon notes or Bible and read 1 Samuel 16:7-9, 32-33. This generational family feud between the Jews and the Amalekites comes to head again 300 years later (e.g., around 1,000 BC). Through the prophet Samuel, God was very specific with King Saul and the Israelite army as to what he was to do with King Agag and the Amalekites. He was to kill all the Amalekites and destroy all the spoils (ex. possessions) of the Amalekites. King Saul did not do this. He killed all the Amalekites, brought the Amalekite King, Agag, back with him. He did destroy the worst of the spoils but brought back the best of the spoils. As a result, God puts in motion the anointing of David to be the next king. Put yourself in King Saul’s shoes and use your imagination. Why do you think King Saul did not obey the Lord?
 - c. In 1 Samuel 15:32, the Hebrew text suggests that Agag was surprised he had not been killed. Samuel, right in front of King Saul, finishes what King Saul was to do and Samuel killed and cut King Agag into pieces. What do you think this looked like? Maybe after 300 years of fighting the Amalekites, maybe King Saul wanted some of the spoils of war as “trophies” for having to fight the Amalekites through the years. Have you ever done anything to get “trophies” for yourself as a reminder of all of your hard work or effort? Explain.
2. Read Esther 3:10 in your sermon notes or your Bible. The villain, Haman, puts in motion a plot to kill every single Jew living in the Persian Empire. This would include Jews living in Israel, Judah and even Jerusalem.¹ We learn from Esther 3:10, that Haman is a descendant of King Agag and the Amalekites. From the time of King Saul and Agag down to our story in Esther, over 600 years have passed. Talk about a grudge holder. Haman sees a way to finally setting this score and he takes the initiative to do it.
 - a. Though it would be easy to see this as personal or political for Haman, I, PK, believe it was spiritual. It would be easy to see Haman doing this out of spite. I, PK, believe it was more the devil’s score. The devil hates everything of God and especially God and God’s people. The devil is no dummy. He knew the prophecies in the Old Testament about a future Jewish Messiah. If he can get Haman to kill all Jews in Persia, then there goes the birth of a future Jewish Messiah. The Book of Esther is about the providence of God — meaning how God works behind the scenes to accomplish His will. When have you experienced the “devil’s scorn” and God intervened to stop it?
 - b. Have you ever had someone personally target you either out of revenge, resentment, bitterness, jealousy or anger? How did you deal with it?
3. Most Bible scholars believe that once Esther became queen, she appointed her cousin, Mordecai, to be a judge or magistrate. In those days, Persian judges would hold “court” in what was known as “The King’s Gate”— a 12,000 square foot space that had a marble staircase guarded by huge lion-like figures measured 200 feet by 100 feet. It is in this area that Mordecai either over heard or was told of a plot to assassinate the king by two eunuchs named Bigthan and Teresh. These two eunuch are in essence the last defense for the king. They would stand outside the door in the hallway to the entrance of the king’s bedchamber.² Much like our own Secret Service agents stand outside the entrances to the private quarters to the President and his family to keep them safe.
 - a. We are not told why they wanted to assassinate King Xerxes, but here might be a reason. Herodotus, who was a historian during this time writes this. In military campaigns against other nations, it was common for the victor, and in this case, Persia, to take as many as 500 boys hostage from these conquered nations and have them undergo forced castration to serve as eunuchs. It was a brutal policy that revealed how everyone—from beautiful teenage virgins who had reached the age where they could become pregnant were at the disposal of the king to satisfy his sexual appetite to even young boys to serve as eunuchs to guard and protect his harem.³ Who in your life have you had thoughts of getting revenge or settling a score with in life? Why? How did you handle it? Do you still carry a grudge or have you totally forgiven them? Explain.
 - b. Think about today. What are ways either corporations or countries or governments or organizations or institutions use people horribly for profit or gain?

¹ A. Boyd Luter and Barry C. Davis, God Behind the Seen: Expositions of the Books of Ruth & Esther, p. 204.

² Debra Reid, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Esther (Tyndale House, 2008), p. 86.

³ Karen H. Jobes, The NIV Application Commentary, “Esther,” p. 95.

4. Read Esther 2:21-23 in your Bible or sermon notes. Mordecai, Queen Esther's cousin, over hears a plot to assassinate King Xerxes. He reports it to Esther, who reported to the king. The two-conspirators, eunuchs Begthan and Teresh, are impaled on a pole.
 - a. Now you would think King Xerxes would have been so grateful for Mordecai saving his life that he would have rewarded him, but King Xerxes did nothing. No-thing. Nothing. Now put yourself in Mordecai's shoes, how would you feel and reacted?
 - b. Have you ever gone over the top for a teacher, or boss or company/corporation and you were not rewarded for it? How did you react? How did you feel?
5. Take your Bible and read Esther 3:1-2. Mordecai, a Jew, refused to bow to Haman, the Amalekite, who was his boss. Resentment and jealousy are very strong emotions that can cause a person to do all kinds of things.
 - a. Are you carrying any grudge or resentment against someone? Why? Read Jesus' words in Matthew 6:15. What does this say to you?
 - b. Read Esther 3:3-4 in your Bible. We are not told why Haman was promoted, but we are told that the other Persian judges were concerned that Mordecai would not bow to Haman, his boss. Eventually after days or weeks, they finally tell Haman that Mordecai is a Jew. Up until this point, Mordecai has insisted that Esther and he keep their Jewish heritage a big secret. Why do you think Mordecai decided to "release to the press" that he was Jewish? Finally, he had made it. Why now?
 - c. This is all Haman needs. Read Esther 3:5-6 in your Bible. Haman doesn't want just Mordecai dead; he wants every single Jew killed. They say, "Revenge is a dish that is best served cold." Haman coldly and callously plots the death of every single Jew though an imperial edict. Have you ever got even with someone? Explain.
 - d. Read Ecclesiastes 7:15 in your sermon notes or Bible. Where have you experienced this or seen it happen to others? What did you learn from it?
6. Take your Bible and read Esther 3:7.
 - a. Historians tell us that when a Persian leader cast lots, they brought in what we would call "voodoo doctors." There were astrologers, those who dabbled in dark magic, and those who practice in the occult to cast these lots (dice) before their Persian gods. "Pur" is the Akkadian word for "stone." These stones were usually made from baked clay and shaped like modern dice, marked on all six sides and cast out from a divination bowl.⁴
 - b. Now why is this significant? The 13th day of Adar (March) is an incredible day for the Jews. It is the day before they would celebrate Passover as a nation to remember how God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt some 900 years earlier. If you remember, the Roman soldiers cast lots (dice) to see who their pagan gods would select to receive the purple robe Jesus had worn. With the lots (dice) saying to start the annihilation of the Jews the day before the Jews traditionally celebrated Passover, Haman would have seen this as the Persian gods picking a day that mocked the Jews trust in God. What trust? That God could save them from a massacre like they claim God did in Egypt.⁵ Now read Proverbs 16:33. What does this tell you?
 - c. Take your Bible and read Esther 3:8-11. Notice how shrewd Haman is. He never says, "Jews." He says, "*There is a certain people . . .*" Yes, the Jews did have different customs and laws but nowhere does the text tell us they were breaking any Persian laws. Haman offers King Xerxes something he does not have personally: 10,000 talents of silver. Today, this would be worth around \$240,000,000. So, where will he get it? From the spoils, possessions, money and wealth of the Jews — just like the Third Reich did in WWII. When a king gave his signet ring to someone, they had unlimited authority to do whatever they wanted. Why do you think King Xerxes did not investigate Haman's claim against the Jews more? When someone tells you something about someone else, do you try to verify it or do you just take that person's word for it? Explain.
7. Take your Bible and read Esther 3:12-15. The edict goes out. The edict gave permission to Persians to kill Jews and take the spoils. They were also free to keep some for themselves — this would motivate them to fulfill king's edict and turn on their Jewish neighbors and friends. Have you ever been given permission to do something wrong? If so, what was it and did you do it? Have you known anyone who was given permission to do something wrong? What was the outcome? Did you try to stop it? Why or why not?
8. It is so easy for us to feel that when someone has an issue with us or evil comes at us, to make it personal. Our battles are not political or relational. They are spiritual. Read Ephesians 6:12 in your sermon notes. How could this verse cause you in the future look at evil, sin, wrong, injustices and suffering differently?
9. The contemporary "wealth/health" preaching today is a lie straight from the devil.
 - a. Read Jesus' words in John 17:14b-15. This is a prayer Jesus prayed within hours of being arrested, scourged, and crucified. Notice Jesus did not pray that we would be protected from evil. What did He pray we would be protected from in life? What does this mean to you?
 - b. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5 and 2 Timothy 1:8 in your sermon notes. What does this say about suffering?
11. Read Romans 8:31b-32, 33-39 in your sermon notes. Until God vanquishes evil, evil will have some victories. In what ways does the Romans 8 passage encourage you? How could you use to encourage others?
12. Read Proverbs 18:10 in your sermon notes. There is irony in this passage. When experiencing evil, if we run to the Lord, we are safe. How are we "safe" when we are experiencing evil, or being wronged, or being sinned against, or suffering or being targeted/harassed by someone?

⁴ C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, Commentary On The Old Testament, "The Book of Esther," p. 344-45.

⁵ Peter A. Stevenson, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, p. 236.