



## **A Bible Reading Plan for Ruth & Esther**

March 28 - May 6, 2016

Mountain Brook Baptist Church  
[www.mbbc.org](http://www.mbbc.org)



# Ruth & Esther

## ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through the books of Ruth and Esther. The plan provides you a devotional thought and suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. On the weekends, we suggest that you re-read the Scripture passages that you have been working through during the past week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to [www.mbbc.org/blog](http://www.mbbc.org/blog), click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit [www.mbbc.org/project119](http://www.mbbc.org/project119).

## INTRODUCTION

As you read through the books of Ruth and Esther, you'll notice that the books are based in different time periods and different countries, but there are several themes highlighted throughout both books that teach us about God's character and our calling.

First, in both books we see women who remain faithful to God. We are reminded of the important role of women in God's redemptive plan in history by seeing how He used Ruth and Esther, both ordinary women with extraordinary calls on their lives. Although they faced trying circumstances, they remained faithful and obedient to God. They are also reminders that God does not always work in the most obvious ways or use the most obvious people; God works through ordinary people – those we often might not expect – to accomplish His purposes.

Second, we are reminded of God's sovereignty and our human responsibility. Ruth and Esther help us to see that life is not purposeless or random; God has a plan, and we see Him working (often behind the scenes!) for His glory and our good. We are also reminded of the important role we play in His story through our call to obedience. We see characters who must make decisions between doing what is easy and what is right – sometimes at great personal risk. Ruth and Esther remind us of the importance of obedience, and that God works through our obedience for His glory.

Third, we are reminded that God remains faithful to His people. As Paul asserts to Timothy – even when we are faithless, God remains faithful, because he cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). When you begin reading Ruth and Esther, you'll notice that both situations look bleak from the outset – but we are reminded that God is faithful to His people. We are also reminded that God's faithful provision to us comes in many different forms.



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK ONE: RUTH 1-2**  
**MARCH 28 - APRIL 3**

## **Monday, March 28 | Ruth 1:1-5 | Doug Dortch**

The story of Ruth is one of the more remarkable stories in the Bible and is an exceedingly important one in light of how its main character becomes the great-grandmother of King David and ultimately an ancestor of our Lord Jesus. A foreigner by birth, this Moabite woman marries into the family of God's people, and when all the men in the story, including her own husband, die prematurely, Ruth accompanies her mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem, where she shows a level of faithfulness that can only be described as breathtaking.

These first five verses set the context of the story. The days of the judges reflect a period of time in Israel when the nation was led by a series of individuals who at times exhibited their leadership militarily, at other times spiritually, at other times politically, and in rare occasions in all three ways. As the story begins, a famine has come upon the region of Bethlehem, which is somewhat ironic considering how Bethlehem means "House of Bread." Nonetheless, Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, decides to take his family to the land of Moab, a land to the east of Israel, inhabited by a people that had made life difficult for Israel during the days of the Exodus (Numbers 25). Elimelech and Naomi's two sons take Moabite women for wives, in blatant disregard of God's decree that no Moabite or their descendants should enter the assembly of the LORD down to the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:3). When Elimelech and his two sons die leaving Naomi and the Moabite wives as widows, a crisis ensues, which only God can resolve.

Imagine the women's anxiety over their future, especially Naomi, who had suddenly found herself alone in a strange land. Have you ever found yourself in such a predicament? If so, how did you respond? In what way did your faith sustain you in your hour of concern? As this story will show us, such seasons can be ones in which we marvel at how God brings persons and situations together in order to make a way. Faith challenges us to trust God with these situations and then be prepared to respond in faith when He does give us direction.

## **Tuesday, March 29 | Ruth 1:6-18 | Doug Dortch**

Upon the death of the men in her family, Naomi prepares to return home to Bethlehem, where the famine has lifted. But knowing that her daughters-in-law are of marriageable age, Naomi bids them to stay behind in Moab where their future will be more secure. While Orpah understandably takes Naomi up on her offer, Ruth remarkably chooses to accompany Naomi back to Bethlehem, where the situation will be reversed and she will be the stranger. In one of the most poignant passages in the Bible, Ruth pledges her faithfulness to her mother-in-law and in so doing shows her openness to trusting her future to Naomi's God, whom she now affirms as her own as well.

(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK ONE: RUTH 1-2**  
**MARCH 28 - APRIL 3**

## **Tuesday, March 29 | Ruth 1:6-18 | Doug Dortch**

(continued from previous page)

Little wonder that this passage is used so often at weddings. The depth of faithfulness and devotion in Ruth's response reveals the level of sacrifice necessary to sustain any relationship, not just a marital one.

How do you sustain your relationships? Is this type of devotion a characteristic of your commitment? Most importantly, can God count on you to pledge your heart in such a way? You can be sure that God has made such a pledge to you, and when you reciprocate in this fashion, you can be certain that you will never be alone.

## **Wednesday, March 30 | Ruth 1:19-22 | Doug Dortch**

The first chapter closes on a disappointing note, though it begins in celebration. Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem and are met with a substantial welcoming committee. But when Naomi is asked to say a few words in response, she rains pessimism on their parade. The name Naomi means "Pleasant." But given the fate that has befallen her, Naomi describes herself as being "Bitter." And who would blame her? From Naomi's perspective God has given up on her. While it may seem that such is the case, the chapter's closing with a simple mention of the barley harvest clues the faithful reader on how God is still very much at work in this story, contrary to all appearances.

All of us find ourselves at low points in life, points that cause us to think that God has forgotten us in our distress. But just because we can't see the hand of God at work doesn't mean that He has abandoned us. As Naomi's story will remind us, God's purposes are sure to come to pass, and He is not above using unforeseen people and circumstances to meet our needs and provide for us a blessed future. God is committed to us not because it is in His best interest, or for any other good reason; God is committed to us because that's the way He is. The rest of the story will remind us of this central truth.

## **Thursday, March 31 | Ruth 2:1-13 | Wayne Splawn**

Ruth made great sacrifices in order to care for her mother-in-law, Naomi. She left her family and chose to settle in the land of her late husband's family so that she would be able to honor her husband's memory and provide for her mother-in-law. Ruth was a woman of impeccable character who was willing to sacrifice her own security and desires in order to meet the needs of others.

Here in Ruth 2:1-13, we see that Ruth's decision to support Naomi would include hard work.  
(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK ONE: RUTH 1-2  
MARCH 28 - APRIL 3**

## **Thursday, March 31 | Ruth 2:1-13 | Wayne Splawn**

(continued from previous page)

Naomi sends Ruth to work in the fields of a man named Boaz in order to provide for their needs. The author of Ruth tells us some important information about Boaz. First, he is a relative of Ruth's husband. Later we will see that this qualifies him to be a kinsman-redeemer for Ruth. Second, and just as important, the author identifies Boaz as a worthy man. That is, he is a man of honorable character. In this respect, Ruth and Boaz are kindred souls. Boaz tells Ruth that he has heard of the sacrifices that she has made for her mother-in-law and that she is welcome to glean in his fields. Boaz, as we would expect of someone of godly character, will use that which God has entrusted to him to provide for those in need.

I think we learn a couple of important truths in this passage. First, God is pleased when we walk according to his ways and seek, with His help, to be people of integrity. It may not be glamorous and it will certainly require us to put the needs of others ahead of our own. However, God will use us in significant ways in the lives of others as we humbly walk in a way that is consistent with God's will. Second, we should understand that all of our possessions are a gift entrusted to us by the Lord to fulfill his purposes. Boaz didn't hoard his material possessions. He didn't believe that he somehow deserved the credit for meeting the needs of others. Instead, he understood that everything he owned was given to him by God to be used for the good of others. May the Lord continue to form each of us into the image of Christ so that we might increasingly become men and women of character who wisely use all that God has entrusted to us to meet the needs of others and advance the kingdom of God here on earth.

## **Friday, April 1 | Ruth 2:14-23 | Wayne Splawn**

What does it look like to live a life of faithful obedience to God? We're tempted to read stories of missionaries who sell everything they have and move to a remote location in order to tell others about Jesus and think that our lives are safe and somewhat boring in comparison. Would our lives look vastly different if we were more faithful to the Lord? Should we do something more radical in our attempts to serve God?

Well, as is often the case, the answer is, "Maybe, maybe not." You see, each of us should be open to the Lord's leading and sensitive to the ways that God may be calling us to drastically change our lives in order to be most effective in our service of Him. God may indeed call us to sell all of our possessions and move to a new place to serve others in the name of Christ. However, God may also  
(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK ONE: RUTH 1-2**  
**MARCH 28 - APRIL 3**

## **Friday, April 1 | Ruth 2:14-23 | Wayne Splawn**

(continued from previous page)

be calling us to continue to remain faithful in the midst of the mundane. In Ruth 2:23, the author of Ruth sums up Ruth's life in the following way: "So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law." Ruth got up each morning, went to work, and lived with her mother-in-law. That's not exactly the description of a life most of us would characterize as exciting. But, it is clear from this passage that Ruth is a healthy example of what it looks like to be faithful.

Perhaps you are in the midst of a season of life that seems routine and mundane. There may be a part of you that longs for a more radical expression of faith that others would consider truly extraordinary. Perhaps you need to look at your life through a different lens. Maybe, just maybe God is calling you to be faithful to His purposes for your life by quietly, humbly, and faithfully serving others whom God has placed in your life. There may be no fanfare or celebrations for you. However, in a world that is increasingly characterized by the pursuit of personal fulfillment and self-actualization, your commitment to Christ-like service and faithfulness may be one of the most radical paths you could choose. And, you can be confident that God will accomplish His purposes for your life as you seek to be obedient and faithful each and every day.

## **Saturday, April 2 - Sunday, April 3 | Ruth 1-2**

Read Ruth 1-2 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK TWO: RUTH 3-4**  
**APRIL 4-10, 2016**

## **Monday, April 4 | Ruth 3:1-5 | Wayne Splawn**

A life of faithfulness is not a life devoid of risks. Last week, we looked at Ruth 2:14-23 and saw that Ruth was faithful to the Lord even in the mundane tasks of life. She woke up each day and went to work in order to provide for herself and for her mother-in-law.

But, here in Ruth 3:1-5, the narrative takes a more exciting turn. Naomi knows that she is not getting any younger. She wants to do her part to provide for Ruth by ensuring that she has a husband who will be able to provide for and protect Ruth. Naomi identifies Boaz as the most suitable person for this role and she instructs Ruth to go to Boaz to ask if he will be willing to marry her and fulfill the role of kinsman-redeemer.

This is certainly a risky move. Will Boaz misinterpret Ruth's intentions? Will he rebuke her and send her away? As she took a risk in leaving Moab to settle in a foreign land, so she must take a risk and boldly approach Boaz to make a serious request. She is vulnerable and is in need of Boaz's kindness and mercy.

In many ways, I believe this is a good picture of how you and I must approach the Lord. We, like Ruth, are the ones who are in a position of vulnerability. When we come to the Lord, we come understanding that God is not bound to show us grace and mercy. We have no claims upon the Lord. However, we do know that God has repeatedly shown Himself to be gracious and merciful to the humble. So, we come to the Lord not on the basis of our own merits. Instead, it is the Lord's character that draws us to Him. Spend some time in prayer this morning. Thank the Lord for the kindness and mercy He has graciously shown you in Jesus Christ. Though you did not deserve His mercy, God has lavished grace and mercy on you in Jesus. Ask God to consistently remind you that everything you have is a gift of His grace and to fill you with gratitude for the ways in which God has chosen to richly provide for your most important need.

## **Tuesday, April 5 | Ruth 3:6-13 | Wayne Splawn**

Everything seems to be going according to plan here in the book of Ruth. Ruth followed Naomi's instructions in approaching Boaz and Boaz has responded with grace and mercy. He will indeed be her kinsman-redeemer. There is just one small problem. There is another man in the family who, according to the customs of the day, should be given the opportunity to serve as Ruth's kinsman-redeemer. Ruth and Naomi would no doubt prefer Boaz, but Boaz knows that they must proceed according to the customs of the day rather than taking matters into their own hands. To do so will require each of the people involved in this story to exercise faith in God's plans and purposes. From our human point of (continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK TWO: RUTH 3-4  
APRIL 4-10, 2016

## Tuesday, April 5 | Ruth 3:6-13 | Wayne Splawn

(continued from previous page)

view, it might seem that things would go more smoothly if they just bypassed the norms of the day, but Boaz knows the importance of being faithful, even if this means things may not turn out as everyone had hoped.

Have you ever been in a similar situation? Perhaps you have devised a plan that will ensure an outcome that you desire, but doing so will require you to be less than faithful in the short-term. We often wrestle with the choice we must make between trusting God and taking matters into our own hands. When we are faced with these types of scenarios, we must remember that our role is to be faithful to God's revealed will and trust Him to accomplish His purposes in our lives. Sure, we can try to manufacture a desired outcome, but in the end we know better. We know that God has a divine perspective that we don't enjoy and that in the end our priority must always be faithfulness to God's ways. If you're facing a difficult situation, ask God to give you a growing sense of trust in His purposes and plans for you. Ask Him to help you avoid the temptation to take matters into your own hands and to help you remain faithful to Him each and every day.

## Wednesday, April 6 | Ruth 3:14-18 | Amy Jackson

Most marriage proposals don't usually begin with stealthily uncovering someone's feet in the middle night (and probably for good reason – that would be awkward!), but our last scene closed with Ruth laying at the feet of Boaz until morning, and Boaz in return promising that he or another kinsman would indeed marry her. When she wakes up, Boaz sends her home to Naomi early in the morning with a great deal of barley. He sends her home early to protect her reputation, and the gift of barley is a picture of Boaz's faithfulness and kindness to their family (it was so much grain that he had to "put it on her" according to Ruth 3:15).

Ruth returns to Naomi, who encourages her to "wait...until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today" (Ruth 3:18). In many ways, we feel the tension of this waiting after such a climatic scene! What will happen? Will the nearer kinsman redeem Ruth, or will Boaz be able to marry her?

If I had to guess, I'd wager that most of us hate waiting. It's the reason why we have fast food restaurants and Amazon Prime! While we might have figured out a way to get around waiting for some things with our advances in technology, we still have to play the waiting game sometimes...and waiting is excruciating, especially when we aren't sure if what we are waiting for will ever happen.  
(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK TWO: RUTH 3-4  
APRIL 4-10, 2016

## Wednesday, April 6 | Ruth 3:14-18 | Amy Jackson

(continued from previous page)

We feel the tension in this text because we often find ourselves waiting for God to prove Himself faithful – sometimes when we cannot see Him at work. Although most of the action in the book seems to be initiated by the main characters of the story (Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, and the unnamed kinsman-redeemer), we trust and know that God works through people and that He is one who is in ultimate control of the situation, even in the midst of the waiting – even when we cannot see Him at work!

Ruth 3 ends with Naomi receiving the barley from Boaz; in Ruth 1, Naomi renamed herself “Mara” because she said “the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20). She told the other women that she “went away full and the LORD brought [her] back empty” (Ruth 1:21). She left Moab as a married woman with children, but returned a widow, with her sons dead. And, at the end of Ruth 3, Boaz gives a gift of barley to Ruth to share with Naomi. This gift is a small token, a reminder to Ruth and Naomi that God has not left them empty-handed. He is faithful, even in the midst of the waiting.

As we continue to watch the story of Ruth unfold, we see His fingerprints of faithfulness written over these words – and we pray that they would also be an encouragement to us in the midst of our own waiting.

## Thursday, April 7 | Ruth 4:1-12 | Amy Jackson

Ruth 4 starts out with the “show down” between Boaz and the nearer kinsman-redeemer. The meeting happens in public, at the city gates, as Boaz faces the nearer kinsman-redeemer, who would have the first right to redeem not only Naomi’s land but also the hand of Ruth. Because Ruth was childless, this would ensure that an heir would be provided for their family.

There’s great tension as the audience waits to hear what will happen – will the nearer kinsman-redeemer seal the deal? At first, this seems to be so, but when he learns about Ruth, he refuses the right of redemption because it would hurt his own inheritance (and the inheritance of his own children). And so Boaz redeems Ruth and their land, and enters into marriage with the widow from Moab.

I think if most of us were trying to pick a suitor for our daughter, Boaz is the kind of guy we’d pick. The author of Ruth highlights his character – he is an upstanding man, who lives with honor and integrity. Boaz’s intentions are clear – he acts with duty and respect to bring the situation to the attention of the nearer kinsman-redeemer – who has the first right to seek redemption. Boaz also takes the  
(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK TWO: RUTH 3-4  
APRIL 4-10, 2016

## Thursday, April 7 | Ruth 4:1-12 | Amy Jackson

(continued from previous page)

responsibility of caring for Ruth and Naomi (and, by association, their family name) upon himself, as opposed to the unnamed kinsman-redeemer, who considers it too great personal cost for himself and for his family.

In Boaz, we see God's command to care for the widows and orphans lived out in very tangible ways. We see that God cares for the transplants, the marginalized, the outcasts, and the foreigners. Just as Boaz chooses to marry Ruth, bringing her into his family and redeeming the land by taking her hand in marriage, we also see God's heart to redeem the nations into fellowship with Himself.

Boaz, in a sense, is a small picture of God's faithfulness to us, a faithfulness best seen through Christ. Though we too were once orphans, dead in our sins and separated from the Father, God reached out to us through the cross of Christ to draw us near and bring us into His family – to make us one of His own! We live in gratitude because of the cross, and that gratitude should open our hearts to show mercy and kindness to others, just as Boaz did. As people who have been shown great mercy, we have the opportunity to show the oppressed great mercy.

## Friday, April 8 | Ruth 4:13-22 | Amy Jackson

Have you ever looked back on a moment and realized things turned out much better than you expected? Perhaps, if you are like me, sometimes you imagine the "worst case scenario" for a situation – and, if that thing doesn't happen, you're quite pleased in the end! We can honestly say that we didn't expect the book of Ruth to end this way – and this reminds us that God is at work, and is often at work in ways we wouldn't expect!

In these final words, we see reversals from Ruth 1; Naomi, the woman who declared that her hands were empty and renamed herself "Mara," holds in her lap a small baby - her grandson, and a living testimony of God's faithfulness and a reminder that those words she declared in Ruth 1 are not true. Her hands are not empty, and the Lord has not left her without a redeemer (Ruth 4:14). We see His faithful provision to Naomi – not just by giving her barley or a kinsman-redeemer for their family, but also through giving her the gift of a daughter-in-law like Ruth. Ruth's love for Naomi and kindness toward her mother-in-law is a testimony that, long before Boaz entered the picture, Naomi's hands were not empty. God cares and provides for His people. In the same way, we see Ruth, a widow from a foreign land, childless, serving as a slave in the fields, enter into marriage with Boaz and receive a hundredfold what she has given – they are blessed with a son, Obed.

(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK TWO: RUTH 3-4  
APRIL 4-10, 2016

## Friday, April 8 | Ruth 4:13-22 | Amy Jackson

(continued from previous page)

I think the genealogy we have in Ruth is a reminder that God works through people, and He works in mysterious ways, to accomplish His glory and purposes. Ruth is not just about a love story but is a story of God's faithfulness and provision to His people. Read on in Ruth 4:18-22 – do you see that the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz is none other than King David? God works in the midst of the ordinary – in the details that might even seem unimportant! A poor widow from Moab comes to glean in a field and meets a man who will be her husband and redeemer, and from their lineage, the greatest king of Israel would come!

And – there are even more surprises! Turn to Matthew 1:1-16 and read through his genealogy. Notice the inclusion of Rahab (a Canaanite prostitute and the mother of Boaz!), as well as Ruth...and notice that this genealogy points us forward to Christ. God enters into our world, and He does so in a very unexpected way, through this particular lineage, for His glory.

I'm sure if you would have told Naomi and Ruth that their great-great-grandson and great-grandson would be the king of Israel, they would have had a hard time believing you as they struggled to make ends meet in a new world without their husbands. But even greater is the good news that through their line, another Redeemer would come – not just to redeem the land or redeem someone's hand in marriage, but to redeem our hearts and draw us to God Himself through the shedding of his own blood! You see, Boaz was right when he told Ruth that there was another redeemer closer than himself - and though he may have been referencing the unnamed kinsman-redeemer in this story, we see His words ultimately pointing to Christ Jesus, who would come from their own lineage to redeem lost sinners to Himself.

We praise the Lord that He works in unexpected ways, for his glory and our good – even when we cannot see it, and even in the midst of what seems like unending waiting. He is at work, and He is faithful.

## Saturday, April 9 - Sunday, April 10 | Ruth 3-4

Read Ruth 3-4 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK THREE: ESTHER 1-2**  
**APRIL 11-17, 2016**

## **Monday, April 11 | Esther 1:1-9 | Hayden Walker**

So much of our lives revolve around stories. Children love to be read fairy tales, with good triumphing over evil and the defeat of villains. As we grow older, books become longer but the same necessary elements for a good story remain. Even if you aren't a reader, surely you have a favorite television show or movie. As we become connected with the characters in a story, it helps us understand our own lives.

The book of Esther is entertaining because it has all the elements of a great story. It seems that the villain will prevail, but the heroine steps in to advocate for her people. Interestingly enough, God is never explicitly mentioned in the book. However, it is impossible to miss the point of the story: God is in control of everything.

Perhaps you are at a point in your life where it seems that God is absent or silent. Esther helps to make sense out of our own lives by reminding us that God is sovereign over every situation. While King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of the giant Persian empire, the King of Kings sat on his throne in heaven. Though Ahasuerus threw an elaborate party for six months, his wealth and resources were finite. God, to whom belongs all things, did not abandon Esther and her people, and He has not abandoned you. Even when it seems that He has left us in silence, we must remember the promise that He is still reigning over all and has not forgotten us. Esther reminds me that in Jesus we truly have our "happily ever after."

## **Tuesday, April 12 | Esther 1:10-22 | Hayden Walker**

The portion of our story today in Esther helps to set up more context for the rest of the book. The story does not begin with Esther; it instead begins with the sovereign way in which God orchestrated prior events which would enable her to come into the presence of the king! If Vashti had not refused King Ahasuerus' command, she would have remained queen. There would have been no opportunity for Esther to take her position. Unbeknownst to Queen Vashti, God was working to save his people even through her obstinance towards her husband.

We also get a bit of background about breaking royal decrees, which will help us understand Esther's fear of approaching the king in Esther 4. If Queen Vashti was banished for a refusal, what might happen to Esther for approaching the king without invitation?

As I read this passage of the Scripture, I am overwhelmed that King Jesus always welcomes us with open arms. Even when we are stubborn and sinful, worse than Queen Vashti, Jesus does not banish (continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK THREE: ESTHER 1-2**  
**APRIL 11-17, 2016**

**Tuesday, April 12 | Esther 1:10-22 | Hayden Walker**

(continued from previous page)

us. Only a few men in this story were privy to speak with and see the king (Esther 1:14), and yet all people are welcome to speak with the King of Kings. Spend some time in prayer today, speaking with God and thanking Him for the ways He is at work in your life. Ask Him to make you aware of His activity and presence around you.

**Wednesday, April 13 | Esther 2:1-11 | Hayden Walker**

Two new and important characters are introduced in today's passage: Mordecai and Esther. When both of her parents died, Esther was left an orphan (Esther 2:7). However, her benevolent older cousin, Mordecai, adopted her and cared for her as his own child. They lived as exiles in the Persian royal city of Susa. Esther 2:5 recounts that the people were still displaced from the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar around the turn of the sixth century B.C.

It is this orphaned, exiled, Jewish girl whom God would use to deliver His people from destruction. God always seems to have a way of incorporating the disenfranchised into His redemptive plan: Abraham and Sarah were barren, Rahab was a prostitute, Ruth was widowed, David was the youngest brother, and Israel was a tiny people group. However, God chooses uses these sorts of people to bring about His kingdom purposes because it is obvious that they have not earned favor themselves. God is glorified through the weak!

If you feel unimportant, alone, or "exiled," take heart – you fit well with this group of people! Esther and Mordecai were not important, but they were faithful to God and exercised wisdom in every situation. Mordecai showed compassion and exemplified his faith when he adopted Esther. Esther demonstrated discretion in keeping her ethnicity quiet within the harem. May we be people who likewise demonstrate faithfulness to God in the midst of our every situation, for we may never know how God will use us!

**Thursday, April 14 | Esther 2:12-18 | Amy Jackson**

On a first reading of these verses, I immediately thought of Japanese culture – specifically, I thought of geishas. While these Persian beauty rituals may not have taken quite as much time as the geisha rituals, they certainly are much more intense than the ten minutes I might spend applying makeup in the mornings before I rush out the door! These girls would spend twelve months in a purification process before going into the king. And, sadly – for many of the girls, their first meeting with the king would often be the last (Esther 2:14). If they did not win the heart of the king, they would go back to  
(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK THREE: ESTHER 1-2  
APRIL 11-17, 2016

## Thursday, April 14 | Esther 2:12-18 | Amy Jackson

(continued from previous page)

live with the other concubines under the custody of the king's eunuch.

Our story's heroine is the brave Esther, who is chosen to be one of the king's women. Although we don't have a record of Esther's thoughts, I would imagine that she wasn't necessarily excited about the prospect of leaving Mordecai, her only family, to live among the harem, among people who were very different, with only the slight hope that she might impress the king enough to be his wife and take Vashti's place as queen.

One of the things we notice when we read the book of Esther is that, at first glance, there seems to be no mention of God. Where is He in this story? Or is this just a story about a glorified beauty contest to appease a spoiled king? In Esther, we see God's providence clearly at work, even when He seems to be hidden. Esther, a Jew, is chosen among the other women to be a part of the group. And, though she takes no gifts or tokens in to please the king (Esther 2:13, 15), she somehow wins his heart and affections (Esther 2:17). Perhaps one might argue that she caught his attention because of her great beauty; while that might be true, we can really assert that she caught the king's eye because the Lord was at work in his heart. The author of Proverbs argues that, in God's hands, kings are like droplets of water – He moves their hearts to do His will (Proverbs 21:1).

Even when we can't see God at work, the story of Esther is a reminder of His providence and how He works through people to accomplish His good purposes! We finish this chapter in Esther seeing how God has placed a Jewish woman, living as an exile, on the throne as queen, in a position to influence the king. We see that God is continually working to deliver and protect His chosen people.

## Friday, April 15 | Esther 2:19-23 | Amy Jackson

Have you ever "been at the right place at the right time"? One of my favorite words is the word serendipity – it means "the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way." We often say things happen coincidentally or by chance, but is that really the case?

In this scene in the book of Esther, we see that Mordecai is "at the right place at the right time" and "happens" to overhear two eunuchs plotting to kill the king! He goes to tell Esther, who give the king this news from Mordecai. The plot is foiled and the men are hung because of their insubordination.  
(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK THREE: ESTHER 1-2  
APRIL 11-17, 2016

## Friday, April 15 | Esther 2:19-23 | Amy Jackson

(continued from previous page)

I think we see two important truths about God and our call to be like Him in this passage, through looking at Mordecai. First, we see that there's no such thing as coincidence or chance. God appointed for Mordecai to be at the gate on that particular day and to overhear that particular conversation. There are no accidents or chances – while we may not hear the audible voice of God in the book of Esther, we see His fingerprints and that He is at work! Take comfort and courage in this reminder, that in your own life, there are no such things as chances – the God of the universe is sovereign and is holding all things together (Colossians 2:17)! There are no coincidences. The places God brings you to are not by happenstance but by His divine appointment.

Second, we see Mordecai living out God's command to the exiles in Jeremiah 29:7 – to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (see Jeremiah 29:1-23). Mordecai seeks after the welfare of his city by seeking out the welfare of his king – a king of a different faith and different ethnic background. He exemplifies the exhortation in 1 Peter 2:17 to “honor everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the emperor.” And notice that Mordecai chooses to do what is right in honoring the king, even when there is no personal gain for him; though Esther gives the king this news “in the name of Mordecai” (Esther 2:22), there is no mention of specific thanks being given to Mordecai.

This is such a reminder to us of the importance in doing the right thing – even when no one is looking, and even when (especially when!) there is no recognition for our integrity. It is a reminder that our behavior reflects the Lord and is honoring to Him – even when we get no recognition, thanks, or fame for being honorable, respectable citizens. After all, we represent Christ and we are His kingdom ambassadors, lights in a dark world. We pray that God would help us to be His lights in fallen, thankless places!

## Saturday, April 16 - Sunday, April 17 | Esther 1-2

Read Esther 1-2 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK FOUR: ESTHER 3-5**  
**APRIL 18-24, 2016**

## **Monday, April 18 | Esther 3:1-15 | Kely Hatley**

What do you think of when you hear words like determined, devoted, or loyal? Do you picture people you know who exhibit these traits when you think of these words? When I read or hear these words, I picture someone who is dedicated to what he or she believes...someone willing to take a stand based on belief and conviction. Mordecai was a man who exhibited these traits in the face of extreme opposition.

In today's reading we find Haman basking in his newfound exalted position bestowed on him by King Ahasuerus ("Xerxes" in Greek). Haman was set above all of the nobles of the kingdom. All nobles were commanded to kneel down to him and to give him honor. Mordecai, a Jewish man of the tribe of Benjamin, would not bow down to Haman. As a Jew, he knew that he could not pay homage to anything or anyone other than God. His dedication to God paired with his Benjamite heritage (the tribe of Benjamin was known to be a fierce warrior tribe skilled in fighting) assured that he would not forsake his devotion to God in the face of human consequence. Others that Mordecai saw daily at the King's gate questioned him about his refusal to kneel and honor Haman. Still, in the face of public pressure, Mordecai stood strong in his belief that he could not honor anyone but God in that way.

What can we learn from this for our daily living? While our president has not ordered all of us to kneel down to pay homage to the vice president, or any other official, we still are tempted to "kneel" to other things in our lives that we deem important. When our coworkers, neighbors, and close friends are encouraging us to do something that we feel wrongly about participating in do we find the conviction to stand up for what we believe and say no? When someone is telling an off-color joke around the water cooler or coffee pot do we silently do nothing (or even laugh to participate) or do we remove ourselves from the situation? If we are truthful with ourselves we all can identify specific instances in our lives where we are faced with standing up for the Lord or passively sitting down saying nothing. Pray that God will give us the strength through the Holy Spirit, to stand up for Him in difficult and hard situations while not appearing to be better than those around us. Pray that God will use the witness of our standing up for the Lord and our convictions in a way that will draw people to Jesus and not push them away.

## **Tuesday, April 19 | Esther 4:1-11 | Kely Hatley**

Fear – the very word brings bad things to our minds. The painting on the next page by French artist Lecomte de Nuoy captures the horror and shock that Mordecai must have experienced when he read Haman's execution order for the Jewish people. In Esther 4:1 we see a picture of a man utterly in panic (continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK FOUR: ESTHER 3-5  
APRIL 11-17, 2016

## Tuesday, April 19 | Esther 4:1-11 | Kely Hatley

(continued from previous page)

and distressed as to what to do next. Fear, as defined by Oxford Dictionary, is "an unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm." Mordecai knew that danger and harm were in store for the Jews. But Scripture says he went into town "wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it." Nothing else is said but that he stopped at the gate. It is logical to assume that once at the gate he sat down...paralyzed by his fear. In a divine turn of events, when Esther's attendant, Hathak, went out to see what was going on, Mordecai was able to gather himself together enough to give a full, detailed explanation of what was going to happen. He even had the courage to ask Esther to intercede on the Jews' behalf by approaching the king and pleading their case.

Fast forward to Esther now...when she learns of Haman's plot and what Mordecai has asked of her, what is her reaction? Fear – paralyzation. Just like Mordecai, she is initially unable to move forward for fear of her own safety. She knew the law and the law stated that entering the presence of the king without being summoned would be punishable by death, unless the king stretched out his scepter toward the person. She was afraid.

What spiritually paralyzes us today? Satan knows what our fears are and he preys upon us by exploiting them. He knows if he can keep us "fearfully paralyzed" then we are effectively useless for God's kingdom purposes. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Part of "being alert and of sober mind" is knowing what our fear buttons are and understanding how to deal with them once they are pushed. Pray that God will help you understand what causes you to be "fearfully paralyzed." Pray for His help to overcome that fear so you are able to continue being a part of His master plan for your life.



*Mordecai As He Reads Haman's Plot* (1892)  
by artist Jean Jules Antoine LeComte de Noüy



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK FOUR: ESTHER 3-5  
APRIL 18-24, 2016

**Wednesday, April 20 | Esther 4:12-17 | Kely Hatley**

"For such a time as this"...this biblical phrase is a favorite of many people and is often used in religious circles. After Mordecai hears Esther's initial response to his request that she approach the king, he sends another thought-provoking message. While it is sometimes difficult to capture the nuance or inflection of a passage when written out instead of spoken, I imagine Mordecai's response to Esther to be delivered in a calm and cool tone, not without emotion, but with determination and faith and devoid of panic. Through his thoughtful response, he was able to jar Esther out of her "fearful paralyzation" discussed in yesterday's reading. What was Esther's "time?" It was time for her to take a stand for the Jewish people. God often moves people into places and positions that will enable Him to work out His plans and purposes in our lives or the lives of others.

Think about your life now. Have you experienced any "for such a time as this..." moments? What do you sense God preparing you to do for Him in your life? Have you already been part of such a moment? If so, when? If not, pray that God would help you to be open to the plans that He has for you. Pray that you would be brave and confident enough (just like Esther) to allow yourself to be used by God to work out His purposes in your circle of influence. Notice that Esther did not enter into her plan lightly. No, she first prepared with fasting before the Lord before she went to the king. Likewise, let us prepare ourselves with prayer, inquiring before God what path we should take for Him. Through the Holy Spirit's power and conviction in our lives, God will lead and direct our paths. Look this week for your "for such a time as this..." moment.



*Queen Esther* (1878) by artist Edwin Long



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK FOUR: ESTHER 3-5  
APRIL 18-24, 2016

## Thursday, April 21 | Esther 5:1-8 | Kely Hatley

Have you ever had a difficult task to do and all you could think about was getting it over with and done? I can only imagine the strain that Esther must have undergone when she approached the king. Put yourself in her place when the king responded to her presence in the court with, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." If I were in Esther's place I dare say that I would not have been as patient as Esther. I probably would have blurted out the request to be spared my life and gushed out all of the other details as well. Not Esther though – she remained calm and collected. We see her allude to her strength in the end of Esther 4 when she sent Mordecai the message, "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Esther was determined to do the right thing and not to be swayed from it, though death might have been the outcome. Now she was given the opportunity by the king to tell why she had approached him when unsummoned. We don't know why she didn't take that opportunity. Of course, she knew more about the king and his demeanor than our few scriptures allow us to know. The king may have been temperamental, or he might have been in a foul mood until he saw her. Perhaps the Lord impressed upon her to wait. Whatever the reason may have been she waited and did not divulge her reason for coming. There is something to be said for the old adage, "Good things come to those who wait."

In our fast-paced society and lives, we often see waiting as a negative thing. Perhaps today's lesson is one that reminds us to be still to allow ourselves the gift of time in waiting for an answer from the Lord, or for a nudge from the Holy Spirit in the right path for our next steps. Lamentations 3:25 states, "The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him." Esther waited for the right time. May we learn today that "now" is always not the best time. Sometimes "later" is a better option

allowing us time to hear from God and to be less tempted to jump so quickly in a direction that might end up in disastrous results. Pray for God to give you wisdom to know the difference when faced with difficult times in your life.



*Ahasuerus (Xerxes) and Haman at the Feast of Esther (1660) by artist Rembrandt van Rijn*



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK FOUR: ESTHER 3-5**  
**APRIL 18-24, 2016**

## **Friday, April 22 | Esther 5:9-14 | Alvin Pelton**

Growing up in church, the account of Esther seems to take many twists and turns. In some ways the story seems a modern-day drama which, when read for the first time, leaves little hope for a good outcome. Esther must now speak for her faith and that of her family and people. She will be guided by Mordecai to understand all that is at stake with each decision. She must respond as she sees the situation unfold.

Our current thinking to this account may be one of questioning as to an actual historical event; however, with a short step of imagination and the development of the story line we can begin to place ourselves within the fear and uncertainty of Esther's situation. Living with and through life even in the modern twenty-first century can bring both believers and non-believers to the same thought as Esther—namely, where is God in all this life and death story? God uses people and circumstances to bring about good for those who love Him and follow His will but sometimes it seems that we cannot see this “good will” during the days of uncertainty.

This section of Esther concludes with Haman in Esther 5:14, “merrily” going to dinner with the noise of a gallows being constructed in the background. All is well with him and going better than he could possibly expect. Haman is seeing his life changed and the prominence so desired becoming a reality. The bottom line for Haman is that he is literally consumed with what is best for himself and he cannot see or imagine any other possible outcome.

This is an all-too-frequent mindset of humankind. It seems that, just because we imagine life as we want it, then it must indeed be reality. The thought that God can be replaced with our plans is indeed a fantasy for the ages and is not limited to the Old Testament, New Testament, or even the present day.

As with any drama we must come back tomorrow to watch the story unfold because it has surely not come to its conclusion. Using more familiar words, the story of God's work in and through our lives is not complete and there is yet much to be added. The assurance is that God works it all out for good, on His timetable and for our best life.

## **Saturday, April 23 - Sunday, April 24 | Esther 3-5**

Read Esther 3-5 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK FIVE: ESTHER 6-8  
APRIL 25 - MAY 1, 2016

**Monday, April 25 | Esther 6:1-13 | Alvin Pelton**

“Rip What You Sew”

Each person seems to find a way to deal with the not-so-easily understood questions, which we all are confronted with at some point or time. In moments of frustration we will hear expressions such as “life goes on, or “when you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.”

My wife’s grandmother, Margaret, always seemed to have a tongue-in-cheek way to size up her thoughts on perplexing situations or people. For many years she worked as a tailor so there were countless hours spent at a sewing machine. When asked a difficult question about the consequences of people’s action, Margaret would simply say, “Well, remember, ‘You rip what you sew.’” Obviously her play on words provides us with the visual imagery that those stitches, which have been placed into a project or life, come with consequences and the outcome may not have been a desirable one. There at the start, with threads locked in place, the seamstress with ever stronger tugs begins to unravel the stitches holding everything together.

With that thought of “ripping what you sew,” allow me to invite you to make the jump in your thinking to the text for the day – Esther 6.

It seems poor Haman was quite good at taking the reality of the current facts of life and rearranging them into a storyline that was real in his mind. Just as Haman was thinking all was well - God was working another plan. God’s time of accountability was just about to close in on Haman and we will see a complete reversal of the situation. What once seemed so well planned and stitched together by this man began to come apart under the holy tug of Almighty God. The final words of Esther 6 begin to reveal the unraveling.

Consider what might have been if Haman had followed the actions of Mordecai. The possible outcome is intriguing. Haman chose his own will and the satisfaction of his own plans, which resulted in the loss of his own life, as well as those around him. We do indeed “rip what we sew,” whether for good or for evil. When we hear that unmistakable sound “rip,” I believe God is piecing together a new work.

Could we be a patchwork of God’s grace until all is completed and we give ourselves to God completely?



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK FIVE: ESTHER 6-8  
APRIL 25 - MAY 1, 2016

**Tuesday, April 26 | Esther 7:1-6 | Alvin Pelton**

"The Cost of Truth"

*"Those who guard their lips preserve their lives but those who speak rashly will come to ruin." (Proverbs 13:3)*

Truth telling was one of the hallmarks of the Old Testament prophets and they knew more than anyone else that telling a king something he may not want to hear could become a life or death venture. In other words, fear was a part of those closest to the king and this young queen indeed was no exception.

On the second day the king again asks Queen Esther, "What is your petition? It shall be granted you up to half the kingdom." He eventually asks a third time...and finally Queen Esther answered. She said, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss" (Esther 7:3).

You have been in these kinds of group conversations before. There is a communication that is being floated but there are underlying currents which move and stir below the surface. You long for someone to speak the truth plainly. Only in time can you begin put pieces together and eventually there is that moment when everything coalesces.

The scene is set - everyone is seated at this gathering table. Haman has been doing a reality check and his fantasy is about to line up with his reality. Not good!

King Ahasuerus is completely in the dark trying to figure out who would try to kill his queen and not realize that he has been manipulated (again) by his own advisor, who is now sitting across the table from him.

Queen Esther is there and she has guarded her lips and the lives of her people but now speaks the truth and seeks grace.

Esther indeed found grace and we, also, can find grace when we come to our Heavenly Father in truth.



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK FIVE: ESTHER 6-8**  
**APRIL 25 - MAY 1, 2016**

## **Wednesday, April 27 | Esther 7:7-10 | Alvin Pelton**

When life falls in on us and things seem so very dark, we tend to look back at the past and allow our memories to recall the cascading series of events which seemed to only compound the trouble and multiply the punishment. We can observe some lives resembling the cartoon character Linus of the Peanuts Gang. Certainly you know people like this where life just seems to provide an abundance of hard knocks.



Esther 7:7-10 has Haman reeling and the man is doing all that he can to save his life. The king is outraged. The queen has spoken the truth. There is no place to run. What's a man to do but fall down and seek mercy? Alas, that act doesn't even go right for Haman. Instead of landing on his face or even his knees Haman lands on the couch of the queen just as the king returns. Outrageous!

We do not have an account of Haman's very last words but they are of no value. The judgment is decreed and the sentence prescribed. The last thing Haman sees is a covering for his head. It all happened so fast! It had only been a few hours earlier that Haman had appeared in the outer court of the royal house to speak to King Ahasuerus about the gallows, which he had prepared for Mordecai. Now Mordecai is elevated in position and Haman is hung on the gallows. Was it a reversal of fortunes or a divine exchange? On this side of the cross we call it grace.

It's never too late to seek mercy and to find grace in a time of need. The thief on the cross found grace in those final moments of his life. We can recall the words of Colossians 2:13, "He forgave us all our sins, and cancels the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Do you know what He has given to us in this divine exchange? The righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is truly an amazing transformation because He takes on our sin and we put on His right standing before the Father. A divine exchange.

## **Thursday, April 28 | Esther 8:1-8 | Mary Splawn**

I was probably twelve when I got my first signet ring. I can remember going to Brendles to purchase it. It was gold and had a cursive "F" on it which represents my maiden name Frady. While this ring had no real seal on it, it did somehow represent to me the significance of my family and I wore it with  
(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK FIVE: ESTHER 6-8**  
**APRIL 25 - MAY 1, 2016**

## **Thursday, April 28 | Esther 8:1-8 | Mary Splawn**

(continued from previous page)

pride. King Ahasuerus' signet ring (think Brendles but better) is mentioned twice in Esther 8:1-8. This ring represents the authority of the kingdom and whoever wears it has the power to speak on behalf of the king. In this case, Mordecai now wears the signet ring that Haman once wore. Because of his position, Mordecai has the power to seal an order that will provide protection for all the Jews (see Esther 8:8).

I can't help but make the connection between the seal of Xerxes' ring and the seal that we have placed on us as followers of Christ. We read about it in Ephesians 1:13 which says, "Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." As with King Ahasuerus' seal, whoever has the seal of the Holy Spirit has the power to speak on behalf of the king. But we don't speak on behalf of an earthly king, rather, we herald the news of the eternal king – Jesus!

Jesus has sealed the deal for us and has provided the stamp of the Holy Spirit as His proof! We can confidently share with others about our King with the help of the Spirit. If you don't know what to say, think about the difference Christ has made in your life and trust in the promise of the Holy Spirit that He will aid you when you are speaking a word on behalf of the King (Luke 12:12).

## **Friday, April 29 | Esther 8:9-17 | Mary Splawn**

*Fancy Nancy* is a children's book about Nancy, a girl from a very ordinary family who is very unlike her family in that she wants everything to be fancy. She likes lots of feathers and jewelry and crowns and French words because everything in French sounds fancy.

I can't help but think of *Fancy Nancy* when I read about Mordecai's attire in Esther 8:15 because of all the extra adjectives used to help us imagine his fanciness. The scripture says that Mordecai left the king's presence adorned with royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. I can only imagine how fancy that party was! And, if we only knew this part of the story, we'd wonder at all of the extra attention on Mordecai for fear he might get the big head!

But, if we've read through Esther, we know where Mordecai has been. The scene in Esther 8 is a far cry from the setting in Esther 4:1 when Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes in order to fast and mourn and weep on behalf of his people the Jews. His physical presence reflected the sorrow and anxiety he felt for his people. At that time, he could not even enter the king's gate and  
(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK FIVE: ESTHER 6-8**  
**APRIL 25 - MAY 1, 2016**

**Friday, April 29 | Esther 8:9-17 | Mary Splawn**

(continued from previous page)

now he is being clothed in the king's attire. I believe that Mordecai appreciates the joyous time all the more because he remembers where he and his people had been.

Isn't that true with us? If you're in a season of celebration, remembering that God has brought you through hard times helps you to appreciate where you are now. Or, if you are in a season of suffering and sackcloth, it helps to remember that where you are is not a permanent place. Wherever you are, you can hold to the underlying truth found in Esther that God has salvific plans. That's a fancy way of saying that God's in the business of saving and that He is at work at all times for our good and for His glory.

**Saturday, April 30 - Sunday, May 1 | Esther 6-8**

Read Esther 6-8 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK SIX: ESTHER 9-10  
MAY 2-6, 2016

## Monday, May 2 | Esther 9:1-19 | Mary Splawn

You've received them in the mail and pinned them to your cork board. They remind you of appointments, parties, and weddings. They help you to remember...wait, I have something that day... what is it???...oh yes, I remember! They are "save-the-date" cards.

I had the "save-the-date" card kind of feeling when I read these verses in Esther 9 about the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. I thought, "Wait, I know that date from somewhere."

While I had trouble remembering the specifics, the Jews in the lands ruled by Ahasuerus during the days of Esther didn't need any reminder about what was supposed to occur on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (Adar). It was the kind of dreaded "appointment" that kept them up worrying at night as they waited for the day to arrive. Remember back in Esther 3 when Haman had a lot ("pur") cast to determine that this day (the thirteenth of Adar) would be the one when the order to "destroy, kill and annihilate all of the Jews" would be carried out? Not exactly something to put on a cute "save-the-date" card.

Yet, instead of the Jews being killed on this date, they were able to strike down their enemies because of a strange and providential turn of events. Who could have dreamed that God would use the crazy antics of a king who wanted a beautiful wife? Who could have imagined that the king's right-hand man who wanted to kill the Jews could be replaced by a Jew himself? Only by the hand of God do these events occur.

What do we make of this story? I think stories like this give us hope that regardless of how things look now, God has the power to change things according to His will. It reminds us that God can turn our weeping into great joy! It makes me think of Proverbs 21:1 which says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases."

As you pray today, remember that you serve the kind of God who has power even over the rulers of this world. Bring your hopes and fears to Him and ask that He would work for His glory and your good!

## Tuesday, May 3 | Esther 9:20-32 | Mary Splawn

In these verses, Mordecai and Esther start a tradition of celebration! Each year to date, the Jews observe the festival of Purim to remember that the Lord has turned their sorrow to joy and their mourning into celebration! They remember that while Haman cast a lot for their destruction, God overruled the lot and delivered the Jews from the hand of their foes.

(continued on next page)



# Ruth & Esther

WEEK SIX: ESTHER 9-10  
MAY 2-6, 2016

## Tuesday, May 3 | Esther 9:20-32 | Mary Splawn

(continued from previous page)

For us, each worship service should be a mini Purim celebration because we too celebrate our change in fate! Our lot in life without Christ is spoken of in the first part of Romans 6:23 which says, "For the wages of sin is death." We all know that since Adam and Even, we've had a sin problem, and because of that, we're doomed to destruction! But, that's not the end of the verse of Scripture is it? No, just like with Esther, God had other plans! The verse continues, "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Through Jesus Christ, God has accomplished the very thing that the Jews celebrate. He has turned our sorrows into joy. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Our new lot lies with the Savior who has defeated death and will one day wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). Now that's something to celebrate!

## Wednesday, May 4 | Esther 10 | Mary Splawn

I love a good pattern. Yes, the kind on a quilt or in nature or in math...well, maybe not so much in math but you get the point. I also love patterns in the Bible and I can't help but notice a Scriptural pattern that emerges in the book of Esther.

It is a pattern of deliverance! All throughout the Old Testament, we see the hand of God delivering people and nations. He delivered Joseph from prison, Israel from Egypt, Daniel from the lion's den, and Mordecai and the Jews from the hands of evil men. Notice in this passage that Mordecai doesn't abuse the deliverance he received; rather, he uses his position of power for the welfare of others. As it says in Esther 10:3, "He worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews."

The stories of deliverance in Esther and throughout the Bible each hint at a greater deliverance that we experience in Christ Jesus. This is the deliverance from the captivity to sin and deliverance from eternal condemnation. And, when we begin to understand and truly experience the liberation that Jesus provides, we are called to pattern our lives after the one who gave Himself up for us.

Paul speaks of this pattern of living when he says, "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:15). Lord, help us to live in a way that doesn't abuse our deliverance but uses the liberty we have in Christ for the good of others and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.



# Ruth & Esther

**WEEK SIX: ESTHER 9-10**  
**MAY 2-6, 2016**

**Thursday, May 5-Friday, May 6 | Esther 9-10**

Read Esther 9-10 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.