

*Indian Church of Christ  
Kerala Region*

# *Esther & Jonah*

## *Quiet Time Series*

*January 2024*

### THE PREFACE

*“He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live” — Acts 17:26*

Today is the last day of the year 2023. And I am not sure how you feel when you look back to the year that has gone by.

But I believe in one thing. The Bible says “he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live” when Paul was talking to the people of Athens, about every nation of men that God made. He says that God determines the days and places of every nation of men.

He determined the days, and times set for me ...  
He determined the days, and times set for you ...

Do you believe this? God determines...

You may say ‘But.. I failed to keep my promises, I failed in my purity, I failed in my personal prayer life, ..’, and many more.

But still, God determines. Our failures don’t stop God’s determination. He is capable of working through our failures. Yes God is working in us through those bad decisions that we have made, but He still determines.

I have come to understand after reading the whole Bible, that my decisions cannot counter God’s determination. He is wiser than I. His determination is much beyond my day-to-day decisions. He is Sovereign over everything that happens in this universe.

All the stories we read in the Bible show how God works in ways that show that He’s Sovereign. Story after story, if there is one thing that gets clearer and clearer is that we have a Sovereign God.

As we begin a New Year tomorrow, we are coming up with a 41-day Quiet Time Series first on Esther and then on Jonah. Just as all the stories in the Bible, these two also paint a beautiful picture of God’s Sovereignty.

During these days, as we celebrate God’s Sovereignty, let’s decide to keep on going with these quiet time series.

May I suggest some ways to keep this series going without breaks?

- Let’s pair up with another brother or sister to do this, in person, or online, every day,
- Or, do it in groups on zoom, everyday,
- Or, ask one of those brothers or sisters to keep accountability of you, every day,
- And, let’s call each other higher, in this way we are being true body of Christ.

Let’s look forward to another brand New Year, 2024.

God bless you, and have a wonderful year.

## ESTHER - God's Sovereignty in Your Life

### Day 1

Welcome to 2024. As we usher in the New Year, let's get our hearts warmed up as we go through one of the amazing books in the Bible, the Book of Esther. I would like to call this series "The story of a star". Esther is really a star. (Yes, one of those souls I would look for when I get to heaven... In fact there are so many names I would like to look for when I get to heaven). Just a fancy thought of mine. We have so many stories where the central character is a little girl or even a little princess. When we read such stories our spirit gets lifted up, we feel happy that we read that book or watch that movie. Stories like, Cinderella, Beauty and the beast, Snow white and the seven dwarfs, Sleeping beauty, The little mermaid, Moana, Zootopia, Frozen, Brave, Tangled, etc. there are plenty of similar animated movies. There are plenty of real life stories also. What's your favorite story or movie?

All those stories have an element that captures our attention. One of such story in the Bible is the Story of Esther.

'Esther' is her Greek name which means 'star'. In Hebrew, her name is 'Hadassah' which means 'myrtle'. What is special about this tree? The myrtle tree is a native of Babylonia, transplanted into Israel, it has medicinal values and its flower looks like a starburst, that's why the name. (See the picture). (Another variant of this name is Stella, which also means star). God is the hero of every book in the Bible, in that sense, we know that. But here, Esther is the visible hero of this book, thus the name for the book. We do not know the author of this book (it is assumed that Esther and Mordecai together wrote this book).



There are some interesting facts regarding this book. No direct reference to God, no reference to Moses or The Law, no reference to faith also in here. No quote from this book in the NT. The author is unknown. But as we go through this book, we are going to see that all of us matters to God.

We definitely have seen God working through great miracles, through history, through great events and through great and ordinary people alike, but that's not the only way God works. God works through everyday aspects of life, every day events and mundane activities you and I do every day. God takes those events/acts and puts it together or orchestrates such things and uses it for his broad, bigger and better purposes. God's name is not in this book, but his hand is definitely in each of the scenes in it. As one theologian said, "God works behind the scenes, but God moves the scenes he is behind" (John Nelson Darby).

So the book of Esther is the answer to our questions like: What difference do I make, if I only obey God, when others don't seem to be? If I only go according to the will of God while the whole world is going against it? What difference does it make, if I missed my prayer time and Bible study? What difference does it make, if I do not share my faith? Sometimes, when we go through pain and sickness questions pop up: why me alone suffering, where so many else around, may be worse than me, enjoys happiness in their life? Life seems better for those who do not have a regard for God?

What questions do you struggle with? What doubts usually pop up into your mind about God as you face difficulties in your life?

Be sure to know that, your life matters to God, your soul matters to God, your efforts matter to God, your faithfulness matters to God. The book of Esther makes sense in this regard.

**Prayer focus:** Pray through the different people and circumstances involved in your life. Pray that God gives you insights regarding his purposes in everything that you go through.

## Day 2

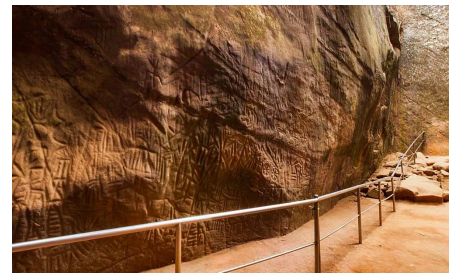
### Chapter 1:1

<sup>1</sup> This is what happened during the time of Xerxes,<sup>[a]</sup> the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush:<sup>(1)</sup>

The story takes place in BC 483 (that means above 2500 years before. Kerala was not formed as a state then, Chera dynasty was ruling our part of the land then along with parts of Tamilnadu, yes, there were exports happening those times, initiated by the Cheras. (Pic 1: Chera coin. Image courtesy: hindujafoundation.org). It is interesting to know that there is a small inscription pointing to the Cheras in the Edakkal caves in Wynad. (Pic 2: Inscription in the walls of Edakkal caves. Image courtesy: mywayanad.com). I used to wonder sometimes as I pray in different places, 2000 years before, who lived here; when Jesus dies on the cross, what was happening here? We do not know.

In BC 483 the story was happening in Persia of that era. The Persian Empire was the largest known empire in the history, known as Mede-Persian Empire, academically known as Achaemenian Empire. Historically the era was known as the Iron Age. The empire was founded by Cyrus the Great also known as Cyrus II. (Pic 3: The Tomb of Cyrus II, situated in the archaeological site in the Fars province of Iran. Image courtesy: Wikipedia). (Cyrus or Korus defeated the Babylonian King as prophesied by Isaiah the prophet – Isaiah 44:28. He is the king who helped the first batch of Israel to return to their home land from the Babylonian captivity, as we see in the book of Ezra. His edict is seen in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23). (Pic 4: The Cyrus cylinder, The British Museum, London. Image courtesy: Wikipedia).

The Mede-Persian Empire extended from India to Cush (Ethiopia), including the present day Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, and parts of Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Arabia. Plenty of archeological evidence supporting the events are recorded in the book of Esther.



<sup>2</sup>At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, <sup>3</sup>and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present. <sup>4</sup>For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.

(1) All scriptures are taken from "New International Version (NIV)"; source: <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

Ahasuerus, ruled in 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. His Greek name is better known, it is Xerxes. His son was Artaxerxes (whose cup bearer was Nehemiah, who was allowed by the king to go back to Jerusalem to build its walls).

We see the book of Esther begins with a party, a six month long party sponsored by the government. There is a background story to it, this story begins in 483BC. Back in BC 586 (or 103 years before) the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezer II conquered Jerusalem and Judah. (Before this, the Assyrians conquered Israel, the rest of the tribes. Now the Babylonians conquered everyone as they conquered the Assyrians). Now the Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians. Now according to the Bible, as prophesied by Daniel, the Greek empire should conquer the Persian Empire (Daniel chapter 2). As the incidents take place in Esther Chapter 1, Grecian empire was getting strengthened on the west side of the Medo-Persian Empire under Philip of Macedonia. His son Alexander the Great fulfilled Daniel's prophecy, the Grecian empire took over the world, defeating the Medo-Persian Empire. So scholars believe that king Xerxes (Ahasuerus) held this party and invited all the rulers who were in alliance with him, to sell them a war plan against the threat of the upcoming Grecian Empire. A six month long party that displayed the power and wealth of the richest dynasty in the world.

Moving on to Verse 5-7:

<sup>5</sup> When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa.

After this big banquet, the king threw a party for his officials and his courtiers, for those who helped him, may be to celebrate the success of his endeavors. All his royals in the capital were present there.

**Prayer focus:** God is the God of the past, present and future. Pray that you trust in his sovereignty. Pray that God includes you in his plans, plans that fulfill his purposes in this age and the age to come.

### Day 3

#### Chapter 1:6-9

<sup>6</sup> The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. <sup>7</sup> Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. <sup>8</sup> By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished. <sup>9</sup> Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

The author goes into the grandeur of the palace decorations.

We can only imagine the extravagance of couches made of gold and silver set on pavements of costly stones. The food, the entertainment and the abundance of royal wine – the kingdom was so wealthy, everything seemed unlimited. The women were taken care by queen Vashti.

<sup>10</sup> On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas— <sup>11</sup> to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. <sup>12</sup> But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

In those days, culturally, men and women would eat separately. They do not appear together in public. On the seventh day of the party, the king wanted to show his beautiful possession, his wife to his guests. Queen Vashti. But she refused to appear before the king's guests. Why did she refuse to come? And why would a king parade his wife, the queen of the Empire in front of his court men?

Because queen Vashti herself was a 'trophy' for the Persian Empire. She was the granddaughter of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylon emperor. And Ahasuerus was the great grandson of Cyrus II who defeated the Babylonians. Now in front of the drunken partiers, his army chiefs and courtiers, the king wanted to bring a trophy to make them feel so full of confidence. Queen Vashti is the living 'victory flag' of their army strength and strategy. That's why the king wanted to parade her in front of his officials and army chiefs. Now you can imagine her mind, why she did not want herself to be paraded in front of all those drunken generals and army men. (It's definitely not easy to face someone who killed her parents, grandparents and cousins and destroyed their kingdom, secondly to display her beauty in front of them when they are drunk is even worse. So she refused to come in front of the guest of the most powerful king of those times).

V12b, the king was not only angry, but his anger was burning inside him. King Ahasuerus was known for his furious anger. History says, he built a bridge in one of his western provinces, built by 300 men, but was wiped out by an unexpected storm. The King was so filled with anger, he went into the ocean and he was beating the ocean. Then, not done with his anger, he beheaded the 300 men who built the bridge. This king never had 'no' for an answer. Now, what's the fate of queen Vashti?

<sup>13</sup>Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times <sup>14</sup>and were closest to the king—Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memukan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom. <sup>15</sup>"According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?" he asked. "She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her."

Is it interesting that, even for such a powerful king as Ahasuerus, who is ruling half of the world, consulting his courtiers regarding matters of law and justice is customary? In his fierce anger, he can do whatever he wanted. Yet when it comes to matters of the kingdom, it is customary for him to consult men of lower rank.

**Prayer focus:** How do you handle your anger and different personal issues? How are you doing when it comes to taking advice or consulting matters with people involved in your life? Pray for a humble heart.

## Day 4

### Chapter 1:16-22

<sup>16</sup>Then Memukan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, "Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. <sup>17</sup>For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.' <sup>18</sup>This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord. <sup>19</sup>"Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. <sup>20</sup>Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest." <sup>21</sup>The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memukan proposed. <sup>22</sup>He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household, using his native tongue

Now the edict has come, with the counsel of Memukan, the king made a command that every woman should obey her husband. V 13-21. One of the things with Persian kings is, once a command is made, no one can change it, even the king who issued it. So Vashti is out of the throne, now, no one can do anything about it. (Now, some of you may say to yourself, "Yeah, this is why I don't take any advice. I would rather listen to my heart". Wait, do not jump into any conclusion so early; this is just the beginning of the story only!). Queen Vashti is such a woman of valor; single handedly she made the whole gang of men in search of cover. Together they produced an edict from the King to protect their pride.

Can love, obedience, respect, faithfulness, etc be produced with a command or passing a law? Only love can produce love.

## Over to Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> Later when King Xerxes' fury had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.

Between chapter 1 and 2 something important took place, historically, a battle took place, called the Battle of Thermopylae, King Ahasuerus went to attack parts of the Greek. Remember, the Greek empire is getting strengthened in the west? The battle wasn't easy. The Greek Spartan (warrior society in Greek) leader Leonidas takes his 300 men to fight against the Persians. (There is a movie called '300', based on this battle.) Though the Persians won the battle, the battle was very hard, because the Greek soldiers were thoroughly trained for the battle individually. So King Ahasuerus retreated from the battle, came back to the palace discouraged, because it was not a piece of cake for him as he intended, as a king he could sense future danger. Sure enough he was missing his dear queen, back in his palace, but it is against his 'status' to go back to her again.

<sup>2</sup> Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. <sup>3</sup> Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. <sup>4</sup> Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

Now Ahasuerus came home, looking for comfort, he realized his wife was no more his wife and he remembered what he decreed against her. Though there were so many women available for him in the harem, he did not have a wife.

**Prayer focus:** Thank God, appreciating your wife, children, family, friends and brothers & sisters. And have a good look at how you include them into your life. Make a decision to give them time and honor.

## Day 5

The King's servants realized that the king needed a wife. So they initiated this plan, a mass 'Miss Universe' contest to find a queen. Aren't we happy that we are not living under such kings and reigns? Everyone is a tool of the king back then. If the king says, 'I want this', then no one can say anything about it. Nothing belonged to you back then, including yourself, your spouse, children, your earnings and belongings. (Remember, this is the same thing God told the Israelites when they asked for a king. God said, I am your king, I can take care of you. But if you appoint a king, he will become a burden for you).

But we have a king, King Jesus, he who does not want to take anything from us, but gives everything that belongs to him to us, even his throne, his holiness and his righteousness.

Now the search for an ideal girl is 'on'.

#### Chapter 2:5-8

<sup>5</sup> Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, <sup>6</sup> who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin<sup>[a]</sup> king of Judah. <sup>7</sup> Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

Now Mordecai is been introduced in the story. Mordecai heard about this kingdom wide search, and he inspired Esther to take hold of this opportunity. Esther, is not a Hebrew name, but originated from Babylonian Goddess, Ishtar, represented by Venus, the goddess of love. Hadassah means Myrtle. So is Mordecai, came from Marduk, the patron god of Babylon.

One of the things you need to do as we go through this story, see how God works, in history, through people and through mundane, everyday acts of people. Though God is not mentioned in this book, God's hand is seen working everywhere in this book. Esther is a war refugee in a foreign land, so is Mordecai.

<sup>8</sup> When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. <sup>9</sup> She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.

Esther, was not only beautiful, but she had a character which pleased people around her. The chief of the beauty contest, Hegai, was impressed with Esther, he took special care of her, giving her the best place and seven attendants to take care of her needs. V12 says she needed to go through 12 months of beauty treatment. Most men complain about how much time women is taking to dress up. Now the king needed to wait for a whole year for his wife-to-be to dress up.

Character is the best beauty of a disciple of Jesus, not looks or skin color or even credentials. Men and women became irresistible when they are confident in the Lord.

Bible is not against physical appearance and beauty, for men and women, Bible in-fact acknowledge beauty in both men and women. But Bible gives more attention to the inner beauty, because inner beauty is more important than outward beauty. The truth is, that outward beauty is the reflection of a person's inner beauty and character.

**Prayer focus:** How are you working on your inner beauty? Take it to God in prayer for those areas you need help and improvement.

#### Day 6

Now Esther will take a whole year to dress up, as she does that, we will go ahead and see what's going around. Because what goes around comes around.

One of the amazing things about humankind is this; most of us do not like our appearance fully. Yes, may be some are so excited about their looks; some don't care because nothing can be done about it. But most of them do not. A person with straight hair wants curly hair, one with blonde hair wants dark hair, one with dark skin wants fair skin, one with fair skin wants tanned skin, and one who is thin

wants to put on weight, one with healthy weight wants to slim down, nobody is happy. That's why the beauty industry is such a large industry now, worth about a whopping 25 lakh crore rupees and growing. It was not different 2500 years ago. Be confident in what God has given you, you will be happy.

#### On to Verse 10-12

<sup>10</sup> Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. <sup>11</sup> Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her. <sup>12</sup> Before a young woman's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics.

Now, what looked like a great opportunity has started becoming complicated, as we see in Verse 10. Esther does not belong to any noble background, she belongs to the Jewish nation, ended up in Persia as a war hostage, and she did not reveal that secret to the king's men also. Moreover, this very act is against the Law of Moses, a Hebrew is forbidden to get married to someone outside of Hebrew. In addition to that, the Persian kings would normally marry from the ranks of noble families. And another risk is, if Esther loses the pageant, she will end up in the harem of the king, becoming a concubine or sexual slave of the king, and she will not see the outside world again. So there is this fear of disobedience to God on one side, and consequences of the failure on the other side. If she won the pageant, there is this fear of the king on the other side because she is a Jew, and she hid that information from king's men. Mordecai who knew this, kept a watch outside the court. Nevertheless, a year later, Esther would be a transformed woman.

#### Fast forward V13-17

<sup>13</sup> And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. <sup>14</sup> In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name. <sup>15</sup> When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. <sup>16</sup> She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. <sup>17</sup> Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

After the preparations, beauty treatment and law, manners & etiquettes training etc., Esther is now on turn to go to the King. She needs to take something to present to the king, but even for that matter she took advice from her trainer Hegai. Who knows the mind of the king best, other than Hegai himself?

As Esther is transforming herself, let's take some time to transform us.

**Prayer focus:** Take some time to thank God for your looks and talents. Take some time to figure out what you lack in what God expects from your personality and character. Ask God to transform you in those areas.

#### Day 7

I want to make a point here about making decisions about your life's partner, for the singles. Yes, I know, it is your sole responsibility. And once you make a decision you are bound to it, you cannot change it for good or bad. But your decision on marriage will reflect your family-spiritual-personal-social-future aspects in life. So it is a wise idea to take advice from mature, spiritual people who



know what godly marriage is all about. It is easy to take advice on marriage from a person who has only imaginations about marriage and relationships, because that person will tell you what you would like to hear. But take advice from someone who understands both the parties and what is at stake in a marriage.

The king was impressed with Esther. He did not even wait for a formal function (which followed later), but he went ahead and appointed her as the Queen of the Empire and the queen of his life. (In other words, Esther was not violated). See how God works, when you are humble and when you have a heart to follow instructions? You are safe even in front of the most powerful king of the era. The same story goes with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Daniel, Joseph, Ruth, Hannah, David, Jonah, Joseph & Mary, Paul...

**Now, it's time to celebrate; Verses 18-20**

<sup>18</sup> And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality. <sup>19</sup> When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. <sup>20</sup> But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.

Now here is the fourth banquet as mentioned in the book, to honor Esther's coronation as a queen. Even when all these things are happening, the Bible wanted to make sure to write this, she followed the advice from Mordecai, her mentor, wholeheartedly.

Now the story line is including another incident, to help us understand God is at work,

**Verses 21-23**

<sup>21</sup> During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana<sup>[b]</sup> and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. <sup>22</sup> But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. <sup>23</sup> And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

Once Esther became the queen, she helped Mordecai to find a position in the king's palace. He was sitting at the gate, means he is in a position, and may be a judge of those days. And see, God was moving scenes after scenes. Initially the scenes look different and not related to us, but to God everything is clear, everything falls under his safe-sovereign authority. God gave Mordecai this opportunity to know about a plot against the king. He in turn gave the information to the queen, and the queen to the king, highlighting Mordecai's part. The king enquired about all these and those men were found guilty and were executed by the king.

For what Mordecai has done, he was not rewarded, YET. 'Yet' is a comforting word, because, it gives hope. Whenever you do good or do justice or do something selfless, you may not get rewarded immediately. When you see God is pending your rewards, be sure to know, God is going to do something very timely, and very special. And it is going to be the much needed time in your life or at the appropriate time decided by God himself, giving you glory and honor.

**Prayer focus:** How do you regard your unanswered prayers? Search some scriptures to know how special you are when your prayers are unanswered.

**Practical focus:** Today in the fellowship, take time to appreciate two or three people who had helped you or you have seen serving others.

## Day 8

The Bible points why we need to give, not to receive it back, but to please God, not for us to be happy that we gave, but to fulfill the will of God and commands of God; not even to be an example to others but to partake in the nature of God. You might not even be noticed in this earth, but God promises to give his reward, it may be here in this world or there in his world. But God would surely reward. Let's persevere in doing good to others, especially for those in the family of God. How is your giving habit when it comes to the church?

### Matthew 10:42

<sup>42</sup> And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

### Hebrews 10:34-35

<sup>34</sup> You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. <sup>35</sup> So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. <sup>36</sup> You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

For Mordecai, the reward was stored up by it being written down in the chronicles of the king's palace in Persia.

### Now over to Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup>After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. <sup>2</sup>All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. <sup>3</sup>Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" <sup>4</sup>Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. <sup>5</sup>When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. <sup>6</sup>Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

The story gets a new dimension, we are now introduced the villain of the story. Haman son of Hammadetha, an Agagite. We will come to those details later. But here he is raised to the highest honor in the Persian kingdom, even above the other nobles and princes. Everyone knelt down before him to give him honor, V2 gives us a hint regarding this, a command from the King. Everyone in the king's gate paid him honor, but Mordecai. Other royal officials even asked him or reminded him that Mordecai is disobeying the King's command. But Mordecai did not listen to them also. So they told Haman about this.

Remember, Mordecai took the mileage of revealing a conspiracy against the king – now the same act is repeated by some of the royal officials, they were pointing Mordecai's disregard to Haman, so that they could get some favors from Haman or from the King. Also they revealed something else also to Haman, that Mordecai is a Jew. The very same thing Mordecai and Esther did not want anyone to know.

There cannot be any secrets in the Kingdom of God, as you know it, because in the kingdom, secrets have a very short shelf life. It is better to keep everything open, especially to those who can help you. Why didn't Mordecai bow down before Haman? Initially I thought it was because of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:4-6 <sup>4</sup>"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.. But then there are other scriptures. In Gen 23, after the death of

Sarah, we see Abraham bowing down before the Hittites as he was buying a tomb for Sarah. Gen 33, when Jacob meets Esau, he bows down before Esau seven times to the Ground. Gen 43 & 48, the brothers of Joseph prostrate before Joseph, Joseph bowing his face to the ground before his father. Exodus 18, Moses bowing down to his father-in-law. 1 Sam 20, David bowed down 3 times before Jonathan. 1 Sam 24, David fall prostrate before Saul the king. The reason for Mordecai's disrespect probably lies in the name of Haman, 'the Agagite'.

**Prayer focus:** Take a good inventory into your heart, emotions and thought processes, express it to God. Take an inventory of your giving to the church also, how can you improve? Decide prayerfully.

## Day 9

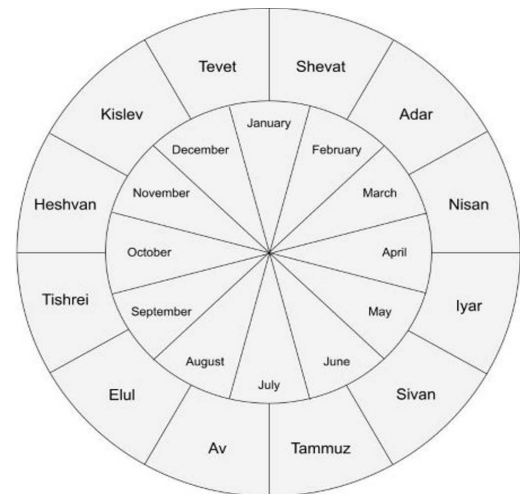
So it was not against the commandment of God to bow down before a man to give him honor and respect or to greet, especially a person in authority. 1 Peter 2:17 "Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor". But bowing down before idols and worshipping them is forbidden by God, worshipping anyone or anything apart from God is forbidden. The reason why Mordecai did not bow down before Haman is because he knew Haman is not a person of honor.

V5 Now things got heated up with Haman, he started noticing Mordecai and becoming enraged. He was so angry that he wanted not only to kill Mordecai, but the entire Jewish community in the Persian Empire.

Verse 7. <sup>7</sup>In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the *pur* (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on<sup>[a]</sup> the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

Haman went ahead and decided a date by casting a lot and he went ahead with his plot. Nisan is the first month in the Jewish calendar, and the lot fell into the month of Adar, which is the last month. Well, God worked here also. (See the calendar comparison. They would add an extra month for their leap year).

Verse 8-9. <sup>8</sup>Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. <sup>9</sup>If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents<sup>[b]</sup> of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury."



Haman plotted a vague decree, so that he could misuse it. What was the command? We have seen the empire spread from India to Ethiopia. The people and their cultures are different, but if one of them (a community) does not obey the king's commandment, they should be destroyed. And he got it signed by the King, by offering him Ten thousand talents of silver. During the times of Jesus, a Talent is 34 kg. But in Persian times it may be different. And also gold and silver had equal footage because silver was not so common like we have today. Herodotus, a Persian Historian who died around 425 BC, (the story of Esther takes place in 483 BC), says the annual income of Persian Empire was 15,000 talents of silver. So what Haman offered to the King was not a small amount, two third of the GDP of the entire Empire. No one can be that rich, but Haman's calculation was clear. He would

have thought that, once he killed all the Jews, he could easily collect that much money. (V13 gives a hint to it)

Even though the king needed money because he was planning great wars, he did not accept Haman's offer. But he permitted Haman to do whatever he liked.

Verse 10. <sup>10</sup>So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. <sup>11</sup>"Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."

Haman was called 'the enemy of Jews'. See his influence on the king, the king could give Haman his signet ring.

Now see what happens: Verse 12-15

<sup>12</sup>Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. <sup>13</sup>Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

David knew what to do in such time as this. Read Psalm 37:7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

**Prayer focus:** What worries bother you often? Pray through Psalm 37

## Day 10

Let's continue with Esther 3:14-15

<sup>14</sup>A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day.<sup>15</sup>The couriers went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

The date and their fate were decided, in a single day, all the Jews are going to be killed and annihilated completely (and also plunder their goods). What Haman wanted is not a silly thing. Haman is now a happy man, things are turning to his favor and glory, moreover, he is the 'glass-mate' of the king too. It looks like the king is a pawn in his game plans. For the Jews in the capital city, they were terrified, because their death sentence is hanging over their head.

Do you think God is terrified? No way. For God, Haman is nothing but just a person. All of us, human beings are nothing but a worm before God, but we were made honorable by the blood of Jesus. Even before us, the Jews became his 'treasured possession' by the covenant. See what Moses wrote to them when he was blessing them, in Deuteronomy 33:29 Blessed are you, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will tread on their heights."

Now who are those blessed people, the treasured possession of God?

Remember, God is the God of crisis, not only God of good times or calm. In peace or predicament, God is present. God is in control.

The situation of Jews is something similar to their great, great forefather, Isaac (Gen 22). Remember, he was tied hand and foot and placed on the fire-wood alive, just waiting to be sacrificed, even the knife is raised – nothing is going to save him. God himself came to rescue him on mount Moriah.

So here the entire community of Jews is placed on firewood, tied hand and foot by the edict of the most powerful king on earth at that time. Only a divine intervention would help here, only someone more powerful than the king of Persia, would intervene immediately to save the ‘new Isaac’, the entire community of Jews. To that to happen, another powerful king has to come and invade the nation and produce a different edict, but even if that happens, firstly it will take a long time, secondly there was no one like that during that era. Their only hope is turning to God, the deliverer of all deliverers. Let’s see what happened.

#### Esther 4:1-3

<sup>1</sup>When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. <sup>2</sup>But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. <sup>3</sup>In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

See the response of Mordecai, tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, because the whole danger of losing the life of the entire Jewish community is taking place just because of his integrity. He did not want to bow down before Haman, because he knew Haman is not a person worthy of respect.

Isn’t it interesting that anyone with a sack cloth was denied entrance to the king’s palace? (Jesus himself made a point about this in Matthew 11:8 - those in the palace wear fine or soft clothing). Reality can be grim and appearance can be deceptive, throughout the human history, ruler and authorities as well as individuals wanted to hide it. We can cover it up, but not for ever.

**Prayer focus:** Pray that you will become more aware and be convicted about the lost state of people around us, not being carried away by their outside appearance. Pray and work hard that you could save many souls this year.

### Day 11

When Mordecai and others turned to God with loud wailing, God came into ‘their’ picture. Let’s see how God is already working..

V4-9 <sup>4</sup>When Esther’s eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. <sup>5</sup>Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king’s eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. <sup>6</sup>So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate. <sup>7</sup>Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. <sup>8</sup>He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king’s presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. <sup>9</sup>Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said.

Esther’s attendants have seen Mordecai in sackcloth, God allowed that to happen. She sent clothes for him, but Mordecai refused to wear it. Then she realizes that there is something more serious, so she sends Hathak to Mordecai to find out what is going on. Mordecai gave a complete picture of what was happening outside of the palace. And he gave her the evidence of the king’s edict. Mordecai also instructed her to venture into the situation.

Esther would be happy to do this, but there is a problem;

V10-11 <sup>10</sup>Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, <sup>11</sup>"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

What we can guess here is, it is a guess, not written in the Bible, probably Haman is taking the king for a ride, giving him wine and woman (remember, the king holds a harem of women). So the king did not see the face of Esther for a whole month. And sure enough, the king is engaged in extensive war plans and developing defense mechanisms. So he would not allow any unwanted person to come into his presence. Going into the presence of the king without being summoned is a fifty-fifty chance; if one goes wrong then the other choice takes place. Why kings do this? Herodotus, Persian Historian who died around 425 BC, says the kings would isolate themselves from everyone, normally, because many kings were killed by someone. How would he know who is an enemy or who is a friend, danger lurks at every careless corner. Kings would do this for protection, and for privacy and dignity. So Esther reported this to Mordecai, we'll see his response:

V12-14 <sup>12</sup>When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, <sup>13</sup>he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. <sup>14</sup>For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Mordecai had faith in God's deliverance, that's why he fasted and prayed. That is why he is working on this matter. I believe that those assuring words of Mordecai should resonate in our head and heart each day as we step into our life and especially when we face difficulties – relief and deliverance will come to me because I am safe in the hands of my deliverer – Jesus Christ.

The way Mordecai challenged Esther should be even more resonating in us in a way that could cause a dopamine rush in us - "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" God has chosen you to be a disciple for such a time as this. God chose you so that you may act on behalf of him in these difficult times. Who knows?

**Prayer focus:** Fast and pray for the curse of illicit drugs that is permeating so many children around us, who do not know the difference between their right hand from their left hand. Pray that relief and deliverance come to this generation.

## Day 12

One question we can ask here is this: why in the world a person in a position like Haman wanted to kill and destroy the entire nation of Jews? The answer points to Satan and his wicked schemes. The redeemer for all the mankind would be coming from the Jews, because they are the nation chosen by God for that very purpose. And Satan knows, if he destroys all of them, then Jesus, the redeemer for the entire humankind would not be coming into this world.

That picture is clearly portrayed in Revelations 12:1-4. Remember the lady in birth pangs, about to deliver a baby, and there was this enormous red dragon waiting to devour the child as the child was born. In the book of Revelation, the child was born, and immediately he was snatched up to God and his throne. (For more reading, kindly refer to 'Revelation Revealed' by Gordon Ferguson, Malayalam translation is available with me). Here in the book of Esther, Satan wanted to destroy the woman, the mother of the Savior, the nation of Israel itself altogether. Satan wants to stop the entry of Jesus into this world. Remember Jesus talks about Satan, he comes to kill and to destroy, a cruel enemy of everything good. But Jesus came to give us life to the full.

Now Esther found her faith.

V15-17 <sup>15</sup>Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: <sup>16</sup>"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." <sup>17</sup>So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

Esther gave out this instruction to fast for three days. At the end of three days, she decided to go to the inner court of the king. She said, "If I perish, I perish". She was logical here, if she did not speak up for the Jews, she would die; someone will reveal the truth that she is a Jew and that is the end. If she did speak, taking a chance to enter into the king's court without an invitation, half chance that she will be alive, and if she is alive, the whole of her community will be alive with her. (We are familiar with the four men who faced the same situation, remember the 4 lepers? You can read story in 2 Kings 7)

For the children of God, our battles are won on knees and hunger, praying and fasting, surrendering to God and humbling ourselves. Jesus, while he was choosing his 12, prayed all night, I am sure he was also fasting. Acts 13, before Paul and Barnabas were chosen and sent to the gentiles, they fasted and prayed. Both Ezra and Nehemiah, before they set out for greater things, they fasted and prayed. Jesus himself was fasting for 40 days before he started his ministry. When the disciples of Jesus could not cast out a demon, Jesus told them to fast and pray. Many occasions, the book of Acts tells us the importance of depending on prayer for God's guidance.

The battles we have cannot be won with our strength and strategies; it can only be won with fasting and prayer. Brothers and sisters, what are your current battles? That makes you lost in thoughts day and night, that bothers you even makes you reactive, takes your joy and pushes you to an inactive spiritual life? Now you know the "manthra" of fighting any battle – be it a relational one, ideological one, with your spouse or child, be it very personal, may it be emotional or psychological, may be you are struggling with some scriptures or matters of the church. Try to invoke God into your battles, and you will find a better position in your fight.

Three days of fasting changed the course of human history, not only the history of children of Israel. After fasting and prayer, Esther decided to risk her life for the people of her God.

**Prayer focus:** Spend some good time, asking God to give you guidance in your battles, purity struggles etc. Decide to confess if you have anything to confess. Also build a culture of fasting and praying, depending on God for everything in your life.

## Day 13

### Esther 5:1-5

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. <sup>2</sup>When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. <sup>3</sup>Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." <sup>4</sup>"If it pleases the king," replied Esther, "let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him." <sup>5</sup>"Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so that we may do what Esther asks." So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared.

The king showed mercy to Esther, appearing in his inner court without being invited. Not only that she was killed, but also was promised half the kingdom. In the Bible, it is a common theme that God made his people favorably disposed in front of their master or even enemies. Wherever Abraham

went, people were good to him, kings and those who in authority were good to David too; Joseph was the favorite of his masters. Daniel and his friends decided not to eat the King's menu but only vegetables and abstain from wine were favorably disposed to their trainers. Israel when they left Egypt, the people of Egypt were favorable towards them that they gave gold and ornaments. The book of Acts is filled with such amazing works of God. For this to happen, I believe, we need to be favorably placed before God – and there comes the importance of fasting and prayer.

Of course do your preparation – Esther did not go to the king wearing her house gown, but with royal robes. Fasting and praying should be part of your exam preparation, part of preparation to initiate into something or anything for that matter.

Now upon the king's words, what did Esther do? Just invited him to a dinner. Like the empirical wisdom says, 'the way to a man's heart is through his stomach'. One of the key things to reach out to people and to make them disciples of Jesus is to build relationships with people. Keep building relationships, and who knows, some of them will open their hearts for the Gospel of Jesus. It's the same thing with the youth ministry, feed them and they will come back to you.

As they were gorging into the savories, the king tried to gaze into the queen's heart, to find out what is bothering his prestigious queen. But she only asked for a second dinner the next day, along with Haman.

<sup>6</sup>As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted." <sup>7</sup>Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this: <sup>8</sup>If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question."

In one way, we can see that Esther seems to be very cautious in dealing with the situation. When she reveals the plot initiated by Haman, she exposes her own nationality too, which she is been hiding for the past 9 years or so from the king. And Haman is closer to the King than Esther, at this time at least, because the King is seeing Haman everyday and Esther not over a month. On the other hand, she is allowing God to work in this situation, see, she got into the mission by holding tightly to the hands of God, personally praying and fasting, got others around her to do the same and got the entire nation to pray for her also. Being a queen did not make her lose her core values as she accumulated riches and fame. See what happened in between...

Esther 5:9

<sup>9</sup>Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai.

Verse 9 says, Mordecai did not bow down before Haman, even after all of this happening, even when the sword of death was hanging on his head; he still wanted to be a person of integrity against all the odds.

**Prayer focus:** Spend time with a disciple whom you do not know much over a coffee and pray together and inspire that person. (Okay, if it not possible today, make sure to do it this week).



## Day 14

Esther 5:9

Integrity of heart is an awesome quality in a human being, and God expects us to have integrity of heart as we walk with him. What is integrity? Integrity has connections with other words – honesty, faithfulness, justice, openness.

The opposite can be found in some verses, like, Pro 10:9 Whoever walks in **integrity** walks securely, but whoever takes **crooked** paths will be found out. Pro 11:3 The **integrity** of the upright guides them, but the **unfaithful** are destroyed by their **duplicity**. Jesus is known for his integrity; when Pharisees came to ask him regarding giving tax to Caesar, they addressed him (even though their heart was not with it): “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of **integrity** and that you teach the way of God **in accordance with the truth**. You **aren’t swayed by others**, because you pay no attention to who they are. We have the example of Job before us (2:3, 2:9). His wife was scolding him for being a person of integrity. The curse of our times is that men and women of integrity are rare, especially in positions of authority. God is not looking for a perfect person, but a person who holds to justice and who acknowledges his or her mistakes or errors. Mordecai holds high respect for his integrity of heart in the presence of God. He did not want to water down his convictions, did not want to bow down to the vile Haman. Now, what awaits him?

Of all the options he had, he chose to do one thing, turn to God, and not to man – he really meant that. Remember what David did, when he was offered with three options from the Lord (three years of famine, three months of war defeat, three days of the sword of the Lord, plague that infest the nation – 2 Samuel 24)? David did not choose anything; instead, he gave the decision over to the Lord, believing that it is always good to fall into the hands of a merciful God. What were the other options before Mordecai? (Go to the king, go to the enemy Haman for a settlement, go gather the people to do something radical, may be going to another powerful king to invade the land or offer more money than that of Haman to the king, but none of this would be a sure choice). To make matter really worse, the Persians king’s edicts cannot be repealed, once it is made into effect. Haman is even more filled with rage and the trap is well placed for the children of Israel.

Haman was enraged against Mordecai, but he wanted to see more destruction for his enemy..

### Verse 10-13

<sup>10</sup>Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, <sup>11</sup>Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. <sup>12</sup>“And that’s not all,” Haman added. “I’m the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. <sup>13</sup>But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.”

Haman had the order of the king to kill and annihilate the entire Jews, so he restrained his anger against Mordecai and went home. Even at home he tried to boast about all of his achievements and wealth, but Mordecai not bowing down to him is still a pain in his neck. Think about his achievements – he holds the same footage of power and influence as the king in the Persian kingdom, except that he does not adorn a crown. But none of these achievements make his heart content. Godliness with contentment is indeed a great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

Isn’t amazing, even amusing how the sinful nature in us work? Our sinful nature holds to ‘one thing’, and that ‘one thing’ leads us to a big fall. One negative comment you hear, one thing that goes wrong, one person does not appreciate you, that “one thing’ destroys your joy and contentment. I am reminded of the nuts in a native monkey trap.

**Prayer focus:** Does your nature tell you that you tend to hold to a destructive 'one thing' habit? If you realize that pray that you will be freed from holding on to that 'lacking but one thing' habit.

**Practical focus:** Today in the fellowship, share about such traits to a friend and make that friend accountable so that you can break your destructive habits.

## Day 15

### Esther 5:14

<sup>14</sup>His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits,<sup>[a]</sup> and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up.

One of the ways we become wise is in choosing our circle of close friends. 1 Corinthians 15:33, bad company corrupts good character – the scripture assures that we will be misled by bad companions. Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.

Brothers and sisters, be wise in choosing your company, or your circle of friends. People might argue that they are having them in their companionship so that they can change such people. Even Jesus had friendship with tax collectors and prostitutes. But see, his company or his close friends, they were the apostles, with them Jesus spend most of his time. With them he had crucial conversations. Do not step over the warning in 1 Cor 15:33, when you choose a company of friends.

Haman's wife and his friends told him, you can get the king to do anything for you, so kill Mordecai as the first thing in the morning, and then be the happiest man on the earth and attend the queen's dinner. Haman was more than happy, he was delighted; he had the pole got ready overnight and went to sleep with that wicked smile in his face. Thinking that he is working, but guess who is at work? God.

### Esther 6:1-3

That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. <sup>2</sup>It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. <sup>3</sup>"What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.

The king, master above 127 provinces spread from India to Ethiopia, could not sleep. Sleep is a blessing, sometimes when are sleepless, rolling on our bed, desiring sleep, we understand this predicament.

Proverbs give a good piece of advice on this: Prov 3:21-24

<sup>21</sup>My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion; <sup>22</sup>they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. <sup>23</sup>Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble. <sup>24</sup>When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

### Ecc 5:12

The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.

## Prov 20:13

Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare.

Do not love sleep. But get some sweet sleep every day.

What did the sleepless king do? Brought the history book, and got an assistant to read it out to him. See, the king has so many alternatives when he is sleepless. Dance, music, drama, magic or any other kind of entertainments are available for him. But here is what we call the hand of God working. The book of chronicles is a huge book with so many pages, everyday whatever happens in the palace will be registered in that book for future reference. But this assistant brought the exact portion when it is written about Mordecai, and he read the exact page where it is written about what he has done to save the life of the King. God is amazing. God works in provisions; he provides whatever is required and needed at the right time.

**Prayer focus:** Do you have questions about God's timing? Take it to your disciple/mentor and scriptures, and wrestle in prayer to get the truth about God.

## Day 16

The king, in his relaxed, sleep seeking mindset asked the right question, "What reward has Mordecai received for this?" the answer is not anything YET.

The book of chronicles is also a book of remembrance. It is written so that the dynasty remembers what is important, the good and the bad.

### God remembers us. Malachi 3:16-17

<sup>16</sup>Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. <sup>17</sup>"On the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him."

The time was so bad, people had no honor of whatsoever for God, and they were rejecting God, hating God. But few of them who feared God came together, talked to each other, encouraged each other to believe in God, trust in God and obey God. And what did God do? A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those God fearing people. God said they will be like his treasured possession. They will be like a dear son and daughter to a compassionate God.

God gives his rewards, in time, in perfect time. God is not a forgetful God. Matthew 10:42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

Now in that hour of the night or rather early morning, the tables are turned.

### Esther 6:4-5

<sup>4</sup>The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about impaling Mordecai on the pole he had set up for him. <sup>5</sup>His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered.

Now the king is into action. "Who is in the court?, he asked. And who was there? Haman, happy to announce the king that a pole is set to execute Mordecai. A sleepless king and Haman who do not want to sleep because of over excitement, both on account of a pious Jew, Mordecai. God is bringing both their actions together to make the next move.

## Esther 6:6-11

<sup>6</sup>When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" <sup>7</sup>So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, <sup>8</sup>have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. <sup>9</sup>Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'" <sup>10</sup>"Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended." <sup>11</sup>So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"

Haman was given the task that he hated with his life. He had everything, he has become number 2 in the kingdom. Accumulated riches honor everything, but he is not content. He is not happy. His discontentment leads him to his down fall from such a lofty position. Paul gives us a good advice on this. 1 Timothy 6:6-7 <sup>6</sup>But godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup>For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. <sup>8</sup>But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

And for Mordecai, he is in a position that only God can help him. But God did help. God is called the "helper of Israel" or the helper of his children. Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who<sup>[i]</sup> have been called according to his purpose.

**Prayer focus:** As we had a good look at our outward appearance to appreciate yourself (day 6), take some time to see what takes away your feeling of being content and satisfied. Pray for help.

## Day 17

Haman came to the king with an evil heart to influence the king, but the King is in a different level of mind right now. The King asked Haman what reward should the king give to the one he pleased. Haman, is like, who else apart from me that the king is pleased with? And he gave the desire of his heart. He wanted to be where the king is, wanted to use his robe, use his horse and wanted the king's children to praise him in public. The king was also excited to do this, but with one change, he meant it for Mordecai. And Haman needs to arrange all this. Not anything less. It's the command of the king, if he disobeys, his head will roll. You can imagine Haman at this point, boiling inside and fuming outside, but covering it all with a mask of obedience to the king.

## Esther 6:12-14

<sup>12</sup>Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, <sup>13</sup>and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!" <sup>14</sup>While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.

Mordecai is not taking this into his head, because his state of mind is different, he behaves normal, went back to his seat at the palace gate.

For Haman, jealousy took him over, never satisfied, never satiated, never enough, till you fall, and then you have nothing. Prov 26:27 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them.

The call came to him for Esther's dinner along with the King. The king could not sleep the previous night, he commanded Haman to honor Mordecai (I think in the morning), he needed to obey the kings

command till evening (may be), went home, depressed, and got warned from the same advisors, and now he is going to attend the feast, with a fearful and vengeful heart.

#### Esther 7:1-2

So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, <sup>2</sup> and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

The King asked Esther, the queen the all important question once more, what is your request? And what he offers? Half of the kingdom. Isn't it interesting that men's understanding of women? Women need connection, men take it as special interest. Women need relationship, men understand it as desire. Women need security, men understand it as a physical need. Women need affection, men understand it as physical relationship. Women need companionship, men understand it as an invitation. Women need to express her emotions, men understand it as advice seeking. The king loved his wine more than his wife, clearly.

One of the things we can learn from here is a comparison between Zeresh and Esther. Zeresh is smart with an evil intent, quick to decide and to act, a talker than a listener, quick to condemn than to reflect and analyze, quick to jump into decision and not studying the outcome, quick to blame and not to take responsibility. Esther on the other hand was intelligent with a godly trait, prayerful in decision making and acting upon it, thorough in studying and detailing, quick to take responsibility and not blame anyone for the situations, very careful with emotions and feelings. Zeresh was a loser, Esther was a winner. Zeresh became a cause of shame for her husband, Esther brought glory to her husband.

The king asked for two things, her petition and her request. Normally people approach the king and give him a present to get a reward from him. May be financial benefit or some recommendation. But here Esther had two things to ask for she had a petition and a request with her.

**Prayer focus:** Have a good look at your prayer patterns, quick to submit all your supplications or spend a lot of time building relationship with God with praise and thanks giving?

### Day 18

#### Esther 7:3-4

<sup>3</sup> Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. <sup>4</sup> For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.<sup>[a]</sup>"

Notice here, her petition is to save her life, and her request is to save the lives of her people. Even when she presents her requisite, she is careful to present her people's need ahead of her need. And she made it clear that she is not just using her position as a queen to get an unmerited favor for her people. Now it is time for the king to ask that million dollar question to the queen in front of the adversary, Haman.

V5-6 <sup>5</sup> King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?"  
<sup>6</sup> Esther said, "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

See how wise Esther is in handling this. First of all she got the favor over towards her side. See, she did not make her request to the king at the instance the king enquired it, because she was not

remembered by the king for a month or so and the king was spending more time with Haman, which means he was close to him at that time. So she won the favor of the King, and she got Haman involved in the process. She revealed the evil intentions of Haman right in front of him, so that Haman would not have an opportunity to butter-up or explain away his intentions to the King. The most powerful shock is that he never realized that Esther herself was a Jew. So Haman was terrified before the King and the queen.

V 7<sup>7</sup>The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

The king (generally kings are) trained to take decisions after a seeking an advice from the council. So here also the king decided to take a walk, went into the garden to think about the situation and prepare himself for making an appropriate decision.

Prov 14:8

The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception.

Take advice, pray for guidance, your life will be blessed. If you are such a person as your heart tells you (your heart tells you that you know everything), you would be the perfect person on earth, but you are not. Your young blood will say to you that you know everything, but your exam results tell you that you don't know everything. Now what happens?

V8<sup>8</sup> Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

Now the king turned back, and Haman, instead of going to the king, fell on the couch of the queen, and the king was not happy. See, generally the Persian kings are known to be protective of their wives, not every dynasty is like this, some of them give away everything in order to protect the king. But the king here had a bad experience by asking his earlier queen Vasthi to parade her beauty in front of his guests while he was drunk. Now, he is drunk, and his trusted friend is leaning on to his loved wife.

See the king's edict cannot be repealed, all of them knew this. For the king, this wicked man, deceitfully getting me to sign the death sentence of my wife, and now he is trying to beg mercy from her. For what? For his evil plan to succeed? This made the king enraged more.

**Prayer focus:** Do you have a tendency to talk behind people? Learn from Esther and pray that you act bold.

## Day 19

The king spoke the word and Haman was destined to be killed, they cover the face of those who are sentenced to death. The king needs to be feared, if he is displeased, your head will roll, no matter who you are. It happened in a wrong way to Vasthi, but in a right way to Haman. Now here is the problem of getting personal gain over the expense of others. It comes back on you.

V 9-10<sup>9</sup> Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits<sup>[b]</sup> stands by Haman's house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king." The king said, "Impale him on it!"<sup>10</sup> So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

There was no one to talk on behalf of Haman, his upward mobility moves over the expense of others, filled bitterness in those around him. Haman's dishonest gains are acquired by dishonest means, and that hurts many people around. Haman never wanted to think about the cost he needed to pay for all the dishonest gains he made

#### Esther 8:1-2

That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. <sup>2</sup>The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate.

This is interesting, Haman had a wife and ten sons, but whatever he owned, everything was gone in a day.

Psalm 37:25 I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. (I saw this verse in my dad's diary, on the first page, I found it secretly). This one verse gives us so much of hope. This was not the case of Haman, he lost everything he made.

Now this is not the end, the edict still stands, and according to the traditions of Mede-Persian Empire whatever the king commanded, it would stay, not even the king himself or any other king could repeal it. So Esther sprang into action again here:

V 3-4 <sup>3</sup> Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. <sup>4</sup> Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.

She entered into the king's presence once more, and the king extended his gold scepter.

V 5-8 <sup>5</sup> "If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. <sup>6</sup> For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?" <sup>7</sup> King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up. <sup>8</sup> Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring—for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."

The king instructed them to find a solution that would seem best for Esther and Mordecai. Now the responsibility is resting on their shoulders.

It is a great example of not forgetting their responsibility when they received the reward already, the vastness of Haman's estate belongs to Esther now, so is for Mordecai. Remember, what Jesus our Lord did with us, he gave us the entire estate that belong to him (Ephesians 2:6), and then asked us to follow him.

**Prayer focus:** Thank God for the riches of heaven that he bestowed upon us.

## Day 20

Since the king gave them the go ahead nod, let's see what they did.

V 9-14<sup>9</sup> At once the royal secretaries were summoned—on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush.<sup>[a]</sup> These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. <sup>10</sup> Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king. <sup>11</sup> The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children,<sup>[b]</sup> and to plunder the property of their enemies. <sup>12</sup> The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. <sup>13</sup> A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. <sup>14</sup> The couriers, riding the royal horses, went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa.

The edict made by Haman is still going into different provinces, but Mordecai made another command from the king, that empowers the Jews to protect themselves by killing anyone who is armored to attack them. And the command was going around faster than the command made by Haman. And the day of execution is the same day Haman decided by his lot. The book of Esther reaches a conclusion here, as we see in Verse 15-17, that there was joy and celebration among the Jews, and people of other nationalities became Jews. As the case of poetic justice, Mordecai is adorned with the royal robe.

V 15-17<sup>15</sup> When Mordecai left the king's presence, he was wearing 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. <sup>16</sup> For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. <sup>17</sup> In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

That means they started believing their God. They cannot become a Jew by any means, but they can become their allies by believing in their God. What is written in Prov 29:2 became true here: When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.

Chapter 9-10 explains how they carried out the king's command.

### Esther 9:1-14

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. <sup>2</sup> The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them. <sup>3</sup> And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. <sup>4</sup> Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful. <sup>5</sup> The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. <sup>6</sup> In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. <sup>7</sup> They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, <sup>8</sup> Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, <sup>9</sup> Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Yaizatha, <sup>10</sup> the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder. <sup>11</sup> The number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day. <sup>12</sup> The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will also be granted." <sup>13</sup> "If it pleases the king," Esther answered, "give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also, and let Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles." <sup>14</sup> So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they impaled the ten sons of Haman.



Here we see a chess game between Satan and God. Satan used the King to put a check – here is the end of your people. But God used the queen to get a checkmate. God is the God of providence, ruler of rulers and authority above all authorities.

**Prayer focus:** When God raise you up, it will be anything but bliss. Pray that God rescue you and raise you up in the church.

## Day 21

Many of us may ask now, why this bloodshed? But imagine if that would not have happened? The wicked scheme of Haman will take place, the bloodshed of the entire house of Israel, a number nearing a million in the Empire of Persia. The king's edict still is in place, and, I think, to eliminate the chances of destruction for the Jews, this could be the only way. What we should notice is whom the Israelites killed, those who are armed to attack them (8:11), and those who are determined to destroy them (9:2).

### Esther 9:15-19

<sup>15</sup>The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. <sup>16</sup>Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. <sup>17</sup>This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy. <sup>18</sup>The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth, and then on the fifteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy. <sup>19</sup>That is why rural Jews—those living in villages—observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other.

Here we see tables turned and Mordecai became very powerful in a subjugating alien nation, and the children of Israel get the upper hand over their enemies. Esther asked for an extended day to execute their plans and it was allowed to her. The author says almost seventy six thousand of them were killed in two days. Remember they lived almost 70 years oppressed by their enemies. But God worked through few faithful ones and gave everyone freedom and security.

These accounts of bloodshed are disturbing for us. But it was life or death situation for the Jews of those times, either this or that situation, there is no middle ground for them. So it is either they die or they kill their enemy, if they would let them go, they will die or their children will be killed. The story of Esther carries the weight of history, and when we understand this, it is easy for us to understand the bloodshed. Let's get back into some history. Chapter 3:1 introduces Haman as this: After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.

Queen Esther mentions many times his family name, Haman the Agagite. To understand the significance of it, we need to go back many centuries. We see the name Agag when Balaam blessed the nation of Israel in Numbers 24:7 "Their king will be greater than Agag; their kingdom will be exalted.

Agag was the King of the Amalekites. Numbers 13:29 says that they were a desert tribe. (The Amalekites live in the Negev). They do not cultivate or produce anything, but they kill others and plunder their belongings for their living.

Balaam makes a prophesy on the Amalekites also when Balak, a Moab king engaged him to curse the Israelites in Numbers 24:20 Then Balaam saw Amalek and spoke his message: "Amalek was first among the nations, but their end will be utter destruction.

The end of Numbers 24 says, Balak went on his way. But later we know what Balaam advised Balak. He advised them to seduce the Israelite men with the Moabite woman, and the Israelite men turned away from God and started worshipping the Moabite deities. But that's not the whole picture. What the Amalekites did to the children of Israel is recorded somewhere else.

#### Deuteronomy 25:17-19

<sup>17</sup>Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. <sup>18</sup>When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. <sup>19</sup>When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

**Prayer focus:** How do you look at Satan, the cruel enemy of God and his children? Do you tend to take him lightly? Pray about it.

**Practical focus:** Today in the fellowship, sit together in a group of 3 or 4, discuss the enemy who is not in 'flesh and blood', the Satan and his schemes to attack the unity of the church (Ephesians 6:12). Pray about it in the group.

### Day 22

Yesterday we read the instruction God gave to the Israelites through Moses. God told them to blot out their name (the Amalekites) from under heaven, and not to forget it. (But they did forget it, we will see that later). The reason why God said this? They waylaid the Israelites when they were coming out of the Egypt, weary and worn out, and attacked all who were lagging behind, means the women and children and the old, and killed them all. This is the reason God is angry with them. It is not an one-time event. Exodus 17:8 we see the Amalekites coming to attack the Israelites. One of the first attackers after the Egyptian army (to my understanding). Moses asked Joshua to fight them, while Moses raised his hands to God. (Anyone remember the name given to God after this victory? Nissi Jehova).

#### And here we see what God says: Exodus 17:14-16

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven." <sup>15</sup>Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. <sup>16</sup>He said, "Because hands were lifted up against<sup>[c]</sup> the throne of the LORD,<sup>[d]</sup> the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."

See how God looks at, God looks at the Israelites as his baby, wandering in the desert, not enough food, no shelter, very tired and weary, and with no training for war (they did not fight the Egyptian army). Such a crowd came under attack by the Amalekites, in a sly way. God wanted to make sure to let them know that God remembers it, God told Moses to write about this, (because it was not the strength of Joshua that won the battle), never to be forgotten and God promises that they (the Amalekites) will be wiped out completely by himself. Because to God the hands were raised, so God would help. God said "I" will be at war with the Amalekites from generation to generation. And God kept his word – generations after generations. (When we raise our hearts to God in prayer, God listens faithfully).

It's not over, Num 14 they joined with Canaanites and attacked the Israelites in Hormah, rerouting the exodus. Judges 3 they joined with Moab and Ammonites to attack Israel, during the days of Judges. Judges 6 they were mentioned along with the Midianites, helping the Medians to be strong. (Now when the story of Esther happens, who were ruling them? Mede-Persians. The Midians become a powerful nation joining hands with the Persians). Now you see how Haman became number two in

Persia. See the Amalekites are smart and powerful, they attacked the Israelites relentlessly, looking at their wealth, but they cannot be smart with God.

And another reason why God hated them is that they had no fear of God (Deut 25:18). (Amalekites, were known as “plunderers” (Khabbatti), also known as ‘a people that licks up’ later came to mean ‘one who licks blood’. They have connections with Esau’s grandson (Gen 36:12). Why did God hate them? God said, they have no fear of God. They became a nomadic tribe known for their brutal and sly attacks. They live in desert and they live on plundering others. God hated them, because of their religious practices also – incest, bestiality, adultery, child sacrifice, rape, temple sex, sex with prostitutes and orgies and unnatural forms of sex. Anyone who lives near them would be pulled into their religious practices, remember the Balaam incident. They did all these for their God Baal and Ashera and a host of them. The excavations in their worship places give many evidences of containers carrying child remains offered to their gods. They definitely had no fear of God; they were brutal and incurably vile. These are the reasons why God hated them.

Now the payback time, in 1 Samuel 15, Israel had their first king, they have an army, they are established as a nation. So God gave this command to Saul the first king of Israel. 1 Samuel 15:2-3 <sup>2</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. <sup>3</sup> Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy<sup>[a]</sup> all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”

**Prayer focus:** God is the God of history; no one escapes from the hands of God. Pray that you trust in his plans.

## Day 23

But King Saul got really messed at this, Verse 20-21.

<sup>20</sup>“But I did obey the LORD,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. <sup>21</sup> The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.”

I did obey God and carried out the mission, destroyed the Amalekites and brought Agag the king. And the soldiers took the cattle and the sheep as the plunder. He had a beautiful explanation, the plunder to sacrifice to YOUR God. Saul was lying, history tells us that, even though Agag was killed by Samuel, his descendents were spared. Saul did not obey what God commanded him.

That is the reason God said he would remove Saul from kingship, 1 Samuel 15:22-23 <sup>22</sup> But Samuel replied: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. <sup>23</sup> For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.”

Later, the Amalekites, whom Saul said he destroyed completely, came back alive when David was wandering in the desert (now that is another proof for Saul’s lie). 1 Samuel 30:1-2 David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, <sup>2</sup> and had taken captive the women and everyone else in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.

The Amalekites were living up to their name, destroying completely and taking everything as their plunder. David went behind them, after the initial shock and discouragement. He defeated them and recovered everything they have taken, including his wives. Later during the reign of King Hezekiah, they were destroyed again. But their destruction was not complete, they were not destroyed but they were thriving. So we see Haman the Agagite here.

But now in the book of Esther, the children of Israel fulfilled the command of God.

We will close it with Genesis 12:2-3 <sup>2</sup>"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

The Amalekites were behind the children of God, the Israelites. They wanted to curse them, but they got under a curse from God. God promises us that all people on earth will be blessed through Abraham. Truly we are the blessed children of Abraham and remember, we are truly blessed by God through Abraham and through Jesus. (See Galatians 3:7 & 29).

In the book of Esther, Ch 9:10, 15, 16 it is said that they did not lay their hands on the plunder. What was the plunder? Haman offered 10,000 talents of Silver (the source may be debatable, but his community must be fairly rich). We have seen that it is two third of the GDP of the Persian Empire. (India's GDP is 257 lack crores. Two third of this amount is huge). For us, it is safe to assume that there was a fairly large amount of plunder available for the Israelites. But, the book of Esther makes it very clear that they did not lay their hands on it, unlike their first king Saul. They have learned to hate what God hates (learned in a hard way). They haven't gone back to idolatry either. For it is said, "It will be provided in the mountain of God".

**Prayer focus:** Do a scripture search to understand what God hates. Pray that you hate what God hates.

## Day 24

Now the background or setting of the book is here in a nutshell. The United Nation of Israel or The House of David was divided after the reign of Solomon. Judah became a single nation (The Southern Kingdom) and rest of the tribes together known as Israel (The Northern Kingdom). Israel was conquered by the Assyrians and later the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians, along with that Israel and Judah. The Babylonians are known as the first world power, and the more powerful, the Medes and the Persians (second world power, founded by Cyrus the Great 1, academically known as The Achaemenian Empire) conquered the Babylonians. The Persian Empire included Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, and parts of Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Arabia. From India to Cush (Ethiopia).

Later the kings allowed the Jews to go back and rebuild Jerusalem, but only about 50,000 went back to Jerusalem from Persia, others, over 1 million stayed there in Persia. We read about the life of those people in the book of Esther. One of their crises is mentioned here in the book of Esther and how God helped them to overcome the crisis. The third world power was the Greeks. Alexander the Great went around the world and made pockets of Greek empire and Greek culture around the world, and he made roads connecting to those pockets. Later the Romans conquered the Greeks and they renovated those roads to better roads. In the NT times, those Greek-Roman culture and the spread of Greek language and the vast network of roads, helped the early Christian missionaries to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Now over to the last part of the Book. Chapter 9:20-28

<sup>20</sup>Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, <sup>21</sup>to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar <sup>22</sup>as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor. <sup>23</sup>So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration

they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. <sup>24</sup> For Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the *pur* (that is, the lot) for their ruin and destruction. <sup>25</sup> But when the plot came to the king's attention,<sup>[a]</sup> he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head, and that he and his sons should be impaled on poles. <sup>26</sup> (Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word *pur*.) Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, <sup>27</sup> the Jews took it on themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. <sup>28</sup> These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never fail to be celebrated by the Jews—nor should the memory of these days die out among their descendants.

The Israelites established the festival of Purim to commemorate their deliverance in the Persian Empire. We do not see the festival in the book of Deuteronomy or anywhere, not commanded by Moses, but it came later. The Jews still celebrate it with gifts, food and celebration. One of the dishes they make is known as Hamantasch, which means Haman's ears (see the picture). And they read the Book of Esther during those days.



The Hebrew Bible has three main parts, Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim (See the list attached). The book of Esther is found in the Hebrew Bible, towards the end, a section called Ketuvim. In this Ketuvim, a section is called 'five megillot or five scrolls'. There we see five books – Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther. In the Hebrew Synagogue, they read those books in particular occasions. SOS during Passover, Ruth during Pentecost/Shavout, Lamentations during Tisha B'Av (remembering the destruction of the Jerusalem temple), Ecclesiastes during Feast of Tabernacles/Sukkot and Esther during Purim.

The rest of the book helps us to understand how they have executed the plans and an epilogue (please read for yourself).

**Prayer focus:** How is your Bible reading habit? Do you want to rework on it? Decide on it prayerfully.

**List of books in the Hebrew Bible (also known as Tanak or Miqra):**

<b>Torah</b> (The law),	<b>Nevi'im</b> (Prophets),	<b>Ketuvim</b> (Writings)
Genesis	<i>Former:</i>	<i>Emet: (Truth)</i>
Exodus	Joshua	Psalms
Leviticus	Judges	Proverbs
Numbers	Samuel	Job
Deuteronomy	Kings	<i>Megillot:</i>
	<i>Later:</i>	Song of Songs
	Isaiah	Ruth
	Jeremiah	Lamentations
	Ezekiel	Ecclesiastes
	The twelve	Esther
		Daniel
		Ezra-Nehemiah
		Chronicles

(Total of 35 books. Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are counted as single books; Ezra & Nehemiah is also a single book. When these books are doubled, we get our number, 39).

## Day 25

The book of Esther is all about the providence of God. God is the God of timings. He does everything when the time is right and ripe. According to ESV Bible, the events in the book of Esther unfold in a time span of 10 years. King Ahasuerus held the banquet during the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of his reign. The events that take place between chapter one and two happens in 4 years. It takes another 5 years till Haman issues the decree to kill the Jews. And the execution date is posted a year later, as we have already seen. But in a matter of two months, Mordecai issued his decree that enables the Jews to defend themselves. Eight months later the decree got executed in a matter of 48 hours. The events take place in Chapters 5-7 takes place in a matter of 48 hours also. We read the entire book in few minutes. God is working even we do not see him working. God is working no matter whether we are there to see him working, fulfilling his promises.

God works amazingly in his provision. Here are some examples to show how God provides: A great famine is coming and only Egypt would survive, because they were the most powerful nation with all the resource survive at that time. God sent a boy named Joseph by being sold to one of the chief officials as a result of sibling rivalry and God used his integrity to reach the second highest position in Egypt and to save Jacob and his family, the Israelites. Another example is Daniel, reaching the number two position in the kingdom of Babylon. God used his integrity of heart to bring solace to a community of refugees. Another example is Joseph and Mary, they were in Nazareth, but Jesus should be born in Bethlehem according to prophecies. God put a thought in the King's mind to get people to their native place before they give their names in the census. Census can be done otherwise also. Another example is regarding the Gospel message to be brought to the highest king of that time, the Caesar. God helped a Roman citizen, who is also a Jew to become a disciple, so that he has the right to refer his case to the Caesar and to profess his faith in Jesus in front of the Caesar. God used the same person to spread the Gospel to the gentile world.

The book of Esther calls our attention to the Deliverer – Jesus. Even while they were facing such an adverse time, they were hopeful of the deliverer or savior. Remember, God's chosen people were in a situation where they were rejected by God, lost their nation and belongings, lost their identity etc. But those who are faithful still believed in a deliverer. We have a strong deliverer, thank God for that. Book of Esther calls our attention to our obedience and faithfulness to God. Imagine this, you are the only person who is faithful to God in this world, even in that case, God will reward your faithfulness, and use your faithfulness for fulfilling his purposes. Our battles are won on our knees, not on swords or money or man power or any other resources. Not on our strength, but on humbling ourselves in the eyes of God. Three days of fasting changed the history of a nation; we are also included in the list of beneficiaries.

The book of Esther tells us that God is in control, he watches over our good deeds, we may not get immediate rewards, but God makes it better and gives it better.

The book Esther tells us that positions of leadership are for us to serve, not to be served. Not to take glory for ourselves but to God. Not to enjoy the benefits of it, but to pour ourselves out for the call.

**Prayer focus:** What have you gleaned from this book? Pray through that so that it becomes your conviction. Share what you have learned with your prayer partner.

## Day 26

One last thing, but very important thing that the Book of Esther reminds us is about God's mercy.

### Esther 5:1-3

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. <sup>2</sup>When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. <sup>3</sup>Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."

God raised his scepter towards us, when he saw our misery. What is that scepter? It is the cross of Jesus, the scepter of his mercy. A scepter dipped in blood. Not only we are permitted to enter into his presence, but, God has given us the privilege of being the "Children of God" and "heir of his entire inheritance". Truly we are the blessed nation whose God is YHWH. And remember, you are the "Lucky Star" for your generation of people, like Esther was for her generation.

Now what's your story? Or what legacy you would leave behind when you are gone to the other shore?

**Prayer focus:** Pray through the crucifixion of Christ, go through the details of his pain on the cross.

One final word, I would like to hear from you, share the impact this book and this series made, and the decisions you made with me, I would be very grateful. Thank you.

## JONAH - God's Sovereignty in Others Life

### DAY 27

#### Introduction to the Book of Jonah

Our daily newspapers and news channels tell us how sin is flourishing in our country. With child abuse, serial killings, and terrorism, the world seems to be filled with violence, hatred, and corruption. Reading and hearing about these tragedies – and perhaps even experiencing them – we understand the necessity of God's judgment. We may even find ourselves wishing vengeance by any means upon the violent perpetrators. But suppose amid such thoughts, if God told you to take the gospel to the worst of the offenders – how would you respond?

Jonah was given such a task. Assyria – a great but evil empire – was Israel's most dreaded enemy. Jonah being an Israelite grew up hearing all the wickedness and the heartless cruelty the Assyrians had done to his people. So, when Jonah heard God telling him to go to Assyria and call those people to repentance, he ran in the opposite direction.

The book of Jonah tells the story of a reluctant prophet and how God stopped him and turned him around. It is much more than a story of 'a man and a great fish' as we see in our children's book.

The purpose of this book is to show us the extent of God's grace toward the ones we would least expect and his care for the individual who is doing his work just as much as he cares about the work being done. This is also a story meant to expose our worst tendencies in our mind-set where "grace for me but condemnation for my enemies".

As we go through the book of Jonah, see the full picture of God's love and compassion and realize that no one is beyond redemption. The gospel is for all who will repent and believe.

**Prayer focus:** Let's begin to pray for those who seem to be farthest from the kingdom, and look for ways to tell them about God.

And learn from the story of this reluctant prophet and determine to obey God, doing whatever he asks and going wherever he leads.

Invite someone to the church tomorrow.

### DAY 28

#### Jonah 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup>"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."<sup>3</sup> But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah and God made it very clear to Jonah what he wanted Jonah to do. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness had reached before God.

God is not unaware of the injustice happening in the world, he sees it and in the appropriate time, he will act.



Nineveh was a powerful and wicked city. (Please read Nahum 3:1-4 to know Nineveh's wickedness) Jonah had grown up hating the Assyrians and fearing their atrocities. His hatred was so strong that he did not want them to receive God's mercy. So, he resisted God and went in the opposite direction, wanting to run away from the presence of God.

When God gives us directions through His word, sometimes we run in fear or in stubbornness, claiming that God is asking too much from us.

It might have been fear or anger at God's mercy that made Jonah run away from the presence of the Lord. But how could Jonah think that he could run away from the presence of the Lord? None of us can go hiding from the presence of the Lord.

Psalm 139:7-10 says:

<sup>7</sup>Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup>If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

<sup>9</sup>If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

<sup>10</sup>even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

So, why did Jonah flee? Jonah could not stand at the thought of God extending mercy to people whom Jonah believed didn't deserve it. He wants them to have judgment from God instead. So, he disobeys God and gets on the ship which is going in the opposite direction after paying the fare. It literally cost Jonah to disobey God. Disobedience to God never comes without its cost.

"When you run away from the Lord, you never get to where you are going and you always pay your fare. When you go the Lord's way, you not only get to where you are going, but He provides the fare"- Donald Grey Barnhouse.

The presence of sin always causes us to flee and hide from the presence of the Lord. We see it in the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 3, when sin first entered into the world through Adam and Eve, their immediate instinct was to go and hide from God.

Is there something God is calling me to and I am not being obedient?

Delayed obedience or partial obedience is disobedience. What is disobedience costing me?

**Prayer focus:** Is there any sin in my life that is causing me to hide from God or others?

**Practical focus:** Today in the fellowship, take someone and talk about the things that cause you to hide from God and keep you away from doing things for God. Make a change.

## DAY 29

Jonah 1:4-9

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup>All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. <sup>6</sup>The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."<sup>7</sup> Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup>So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"<sup>9</sup> He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

It was the Lord who stirred up the storm. We often think of Jesus calming the waters, and He can do that. But God also can stir up the storm.

The ship and the sailors were in a dangerous place; this was all due to Jonah being on the ship. We have a great responsibility to obey God's word because our sin and disobedience can hurt others around us.

While the storm raged, Jonah was sound asleep below the deck. Even as he ran from God, Jonah's actions apparently didn't bother his conscience. Everything was going upside down yet Jonah was sleeping. This portrays spiritual apathy. Perhaps the storm outside seemed insignificant to him in comparison to the storm inside, the storm that came from his resistance against God. If you have ever been resistant to what God is telling you to do or disobedient to his word, then you know that inner turmoil. We are in sin when we are rejecting God's word and running from his presence and it is exhausting and it is blinding. God's word is a comfort to us when we walk in obedience to him but when we walk away from his word it wears us down because we know that we are not in alignment with what we are called to do.

It must have seemed ironic to Jonah that the sailors demanded that he call on his God. His only reason for being on that ship was to *escape* from his God.

Jonah knew very well that the God he was running away from is the God of heaven who made the sea and the land and yet he thought of escaping from that God through the sea. Jonah's life contradicted the knowledge he had about God.

We are God's people and we learn a lot about God through our bible studies and the messages we hear. Are we living in alignment with what we know about God or are living contradictory to the scriptures?

**Prayer focus:** Today ask God to help you see the true condition of your spiritual life, the true condition of your heart.

## DAY 30

### Jonah 1:10-16

<sup>10</sup>This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)<sup>11</sup>The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"<sup>12</sup>"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."<sup>13</sup>Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. <sup>14</sup>Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased."<sup>15</sup>Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. <sup>16</sup>At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

Jonah knew that he had disobeyed God and the storm was his fault, but he didn't say anything about it until the crew cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. Then Jonah was willing to give his life to save the sailors, although he had refused to do the same for the people of Nineveh. But the pagan sailors were more compassionate to Jonah and they wanted to save Jonah. So, they tried to get the ship to the land instead of throwing him into the sea, because they believed his God truly existed and they feared the consequences of throwing a prophet of such a God into the sea. They tried hard to reach the land but they could not. God's purposes cannot be overpowered no matter how much we try. God

is in control of the seas and it wouldn't calm down until they did what God was intending them to do – so that God could fulfill his purpose in the life of Jonah.

Brothers and sisters, God is in control of everything in our lives. His plans can never be changed. Resisting God will never make life easy. (Job 42:2 "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted".)

As soon as they took Jonah and threw him overboard, the sea grew calm. The immediate calming down of the storm proved that Jonah's God did exist, and that Jonah's resistance to God was the real problem. In a logical response, the sailors feared the Lord instead of fearing the storm and they offered a sacrifice to God and made promises to serve him.

We see here the sovereignty of God. God uses even Jonah's disobedience to reveal himself to those with whom Jonah was in contact with through his disobedience. God is able to use even our mistakes to help others to come to know him. It may be painful, but admitting our sins can be a powerful example to those who don't know God.

Is there any area of your life where you are resisting God?

**Prayer focus:** Today, ask God to give you a surrendered heart.

Is there any sin you need to acknowledge today?

## **DAY 31**

Jonah 1:17

Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

God is sovereign over the wind, the sea and the fish. He is sovereign and in control of everything. He appointed a huge fish to swallow Jonah and Jonah was inside the belly of the fish for three days – a very cold, dark and lonely place – where God was going to meet him. Disobedience to God brings about a spiritual decline in our lives. It is possible to know God and not live for him and even so God is not done with us just like he was not done with Jonah. That's why he sent the fish to preserve Jonah's life.

Jonah was in spiritual apathy and God had a plan to wake him up – but it was only in the belly of a fish – a cold, dark and lonely place.

God could have rescued Jonah in any number of ways. He chose this specific way because of the effect it would bring on Jonah's heart.

God knows exactly what specific way can bring us back to his plan and how long. Jonah was there in the belly for three days. We don't know what he was doing during that time, may be sulking but finally, he decided to pray.

If you are in a state of spiritual decline – experiencing spiritually cold, dark and lonely times – what could be the reason?

Is there any pattern of disobedience in you?

Is there any way God is trying to wake you up?

God is not done with you – he is going to meet you right there. He has plans to rescue you.

**Prayer focus:** What are the ways God is trying to shake you up? Pray through it.

## DAY 32

Jonah 2:1-2

<sup>1</sup>From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. <sup>2</sup>He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.

From inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. The mention of the word 'his God' shows Jonah's personal relationship with God.

The whole chapter is titled Jonah's prayer. Jonah's prayer is not a request to save him from the fish but a thanksgiving for being saved by the fish. Jonah was grateful that he was brought inside the fish - the cold, dark, lonely place - where he needed to be confronted with what he was doing and encounter God. God used the fish to save Jonah from drowning and he used the fish to bring about Jonah's repentance.

It is often those difficult times in our lives that God uses to refine us, though from outside they might look like a difficulty. As God is refining us, as he is stripping away our sins, as he is bringing us to a place of repentance so we can look more like him, God is using those difficulties ultimately to save us. If he allows us to keep walking in our own way, that way leads to death. So sometimes the difficult things in our lives, that we wish we could somehow escape from, are God's means of providence in our lives, because he is using those things to bring us to him, bring us to a place of repentance so that we can turn from our sin and turn to him.

When we go through a difficult time in our lives, we might be tempted to see others sins but we need to see the sin in our own hearts and our need for God.

We also need to remember that God doesn't always spare us from the hard circumstances in our lives but he uses those circumstances to do a profound work in us.

**Prayer focus:** Do you ask God to take you out of the difficult situations or do you look into your heart?

## DAY 33

Jonah's prayer is filled with direct references to the Psalms.

Verse 2 – Psalm 120:1

Verse 3 – Psalm 69:2, 42:7

Verse 4 – Psalm 31:22

We see here that Jonah's trials led him back to the Scriptures. Many times, we are like that when there is no way out and when we are desperate, we turn to God, and that's when we try to remember the scriptures. Jonah knew the word of God, so even when he was in the belly of the fish, he had scriptures hidden in his heart, and he was using the scriptures as a light in the moment of trial.

'Exposure to biblical truth doesn't ensure a godly life' – Skip Heitzig

Jonah knew God's word but he was not applying it in life's circumstances.

So just because we know the Bible verses that doesn't necessarily mean that we are living a godly life.

Do we have God's word in our hearts?

Do we know God's truth in a way we are transformed by it and live it out or we just consider it as knowledge?

Verse 3. **You hurled me into the depths**, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.— Here Jonah is not blaming the sailors for putting him into the water. He knew it was God who brought him and it was God who was working through the sailors and it was God's purpose. Jonah didn't think God was unjust by allowing him go through this. He could have easily thought how could God do this as he was serving God all these years.

Verse 4. I said, '**I have been banished from your sight**; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'— Jonah recognizes that he is driven away from the presence of God not just physically but he saw himself away from God spiritually because of his disobedience. So, Jonah misses the connection/ communion.

Verse 7. "**When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you**, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.— At this point he became humble and felt the need of God. Realizes he was slipping away from God. With God and longing for it, he says, 'yet I will look again toward your holy temple'. At a point he reached rock bottom, he realized that all that he needed was the connection with God.

Verse 8. "Those who cling to **worthless idols** turn away from God's love for them.— An idol is anything that we worship that demands our affection more than God himself. Jonah's idol was probably his reputation — he cared about what people thought about him more than obeying God. He knew that if he followed God's call- to speak to Israel's enemy - people would not be happy with him. So, he cared more about his self-image than being obedient to God. Maybe he was too afraid of obeying God because he thought perhaps his image might take a hit. Or his enemies might experience forgiveness when he wanted them to experience judgment.

He promises to eradicate those idols and promises to obey God. Even though he repents Jonah hardens his heart again. Even though God knows all these, he still responds kindly to Jonah. This reveals to us God's mercy. God forgives us when we turn to him even when he knows all the ways we will be failing again. Oh! The mercy and grace of our God!

**Prayer focus:** What are the idols/false that you see in your heart? What do you think about or spend more time pursuing than God?

## DAY 34

Verse 9. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD'.

Jonah comes to the humble realization inside the belly of the fish— '*salvation belongs to the Lord*'. He comes to this realization that he cannot save himself or others. We cannot earn our own salvation or we cannot give salvation to others. It is only God who decides who gets to be saved and who doesn't.

Neither of us earns salvation nor do we deserve it. Romans 5:8 says: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't die for us after we cleansed ourselves up to be worthy of his sacrifice, he died for us while we were still sinners. We cannot think we are too special to be saved and others are not, because they do a lot of bad things than us. We have not done anything to have our salvation. God's mercy is available for everyone no matter how big a sinner is. It is a gift of God.

Verse 10. And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.— Again, we see God's sovereignty over his creation. Just as God appointed the fish to swallow Jonah, now he appoints the fish to vomit Jonah on a dry land. The principle is that creation obeys God. He is in command. He is in control. He is sovereign over everything he created.

So, Jonah was in the belly of the fish for just as long as he could repent and turn to God. The principle we see here is that God often allows us to remain in our difficult situations long enough to accomplish his refining purposes in them. He knows exactly when to take us out of it. We need to trust him.

Sometimes we pray that God remove us from those difficult situations, but God sometimes in his grace allows us to be in that situation long enough to accomplish his refining purpose in them. Jonah was delivered only after his repentance was complete. He was not just sorry for what he did but he was now trusting God again.

**Prayer focus:** Today let's pray through the sovereignty of God in your life, pray that your heart submits to his authority in your life.

## DAY 35

Jonah 3:1-2

<sup>1</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup>"Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

The word of the Lord comes to Jonah the second time.

Jonah had run away from God but was given a second chance to participate in God's work. You may feel as though you are disqualified from serving God because of your past mistakes. But serving God is not an earned position. No one qualifies for God's service, but God still asks us to carry out his work. Thankfully we serve a God of a second chance. God is a God of new morning mercies.

God said to Jonah, 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and deliver the message I give you'. It is the 'message' from the Lord – the 'word of God' – that only has the power to save people. Not our words or any of our strategies.

Verse 2. <sup>2</sup>"Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."— Instead of telling Jonah to go and cry out against Nineveh, this time he simply says Jonah to go there and wait for further instructions. The story of Jonah demonstrates why many times God reveals us only one step at a time without telling us more. When God told Jonah what he should say to the Ninevites, Jonah rejected the call. God often only tells us what we can handle at the time. Sometimes we look for God to give us the whole plan in front of us to start obeying him. But God is looking for us to be obedient to the one step which he has already unveiled. As we move forward in obedience, he keeps opening the next steps and makes our paths straight.

**Prayer focus:** Are you waiting for a second chance?

Are you waiting for God to reveal the entire plan of your future to start trusting and obeying him?

**Practical focus:** Today, as we meet in the church, let's make the fellowship meaningful, talk to someone about your fears that stops you from taking steps for God, and the areas you find difficult to trust God.

## DAY 36

Jonah 3:3-4

<sup>3</sup>Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. <sup>4</sup>Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh, the great city. The Bible doesn't say that Jonah waited for what God would want him to say but he began to go into the city and started preaching. He proclaimed, "Forty more days Nineveh will be overturned". Jonah's sermon had only five words in the Hebrew language. A lot is missing in his sermon. He doesn't tell why or who is going to overthrow them or what they can do to stop this fate from happening. There was not any sort of hope or call to repentance in his message. Jonah may be physically obeying God but verbally he is withholding a lot of information because he wants to make sure the Ninevites don't repent. But from his message one thing is clear - the time is short and judgment is real. And the reality is the same for us today.

Romans 3:23 says we all have sinned and Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. Apart from a savior, apart from Jesus, we are all headed for judgment and our time is short. Life is but of vapors. So, if life is short and judgment is sure, the need for salvation is the most important thing for a human.

**Prayer focus:** Today, let us take some time to thank Jesus for our salvation. Thank the people whom God uses in our lives to know Him.

## DAY 37

Verse 4-5

<sup>4</sup>Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." <sup>5</sup>The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

The people of Nineveh believed God. The Bible doesn't say they believed Jonah, they believed God.

Romans 10:17 says, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

God's word gives faith and his kindness brings repentance. To believe in God, people should be given an opportunity to hear the word. Without hearing the word, no one can be saved. Salvation comes from hearing the message but it doesn't depend upon how eloquent or how powerful we are but how powerful God is. He is the one who moves hearts through his word. So, even though Jonah gave a half-hearted sermon it is the power of God that moved the hearts of those wicked people – who were known for burning children alive, torturing adults, and leaving people out in the scorching sun to death.

God's word has an amazing miraculous power to change any wicked heart.

The Ninevites not only believed in God but they also repented.

Verse 5 says they declared a fast and put on sack cloth. Sack cloth in these times is a symbol of total brokenness and mourning. When they recognized the weight of their sins, they were broken and were mourning over their sin.

This reminds us of Psalm 51:17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

Ninevites' brokenness is validated by the transformation in their lives and their commitment to change. The principle here is that belief always represents itself in action. If we simply say we are broken and continue to turn to our sin then we haven't really reached the place of true repentance.

Turning from sin and turning to God is true repentance. Turning from our ways and turning to God's ways is true repentance.

Are we sharing God's word with people who need salvation?

Are there areas of sin in my life where I need to repent or do I cling to my ways of change?

**Prayer focus:** Are there areas I have fooled myself into believing that I repented, but there has been no action to back it up?

Where do I need to ask God to change both my heart and my actions?

## DAY 38

Jonah 3:6-10

<sup>6</sup>When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. <sup>7</sup>This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. <sup>8</sup>But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. <sup>9</sup>Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." <sup>10</sup>When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Verse 6 says the king of Nineveh rose from his throne and removed his robe. 'Throne' and 'robe' are symbols of a king's authority. So, rising from his throne and removing his robe means the king is removing his authority and humbling himself before the God of Israel. He also covers himself with sack cloth and ashes and he issues a proclamation that the entire nation, including all people and the animals should fast.

Verse 8 "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence"— he calls everyone for an urgent mass repentance. The Ninevites didn't wait until 39 days to repent. Their repentance was immediate. The remarkable fact is that it's never a story of fish and Jonah but the true repentance of this wicked nation after hearing a five-word sermon.

Assyria, (Nineveh was the capital of Assyria), from 30 to 50 years from Jonah's days would invade and conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel. So, we realize that though they are repenting now it's not going to be perfect and we see in history that they turn back to some of their evil ways again.



So, even after a genuine repentance, we know that we may stumble again and mess up again. That's why we needed another king who humbled himself and who took the judgment on himself and he is Jesus. We cannot save ourselves and we need someone who pays for our sins once and for all. God's love requires that he punishes evil. So, sin is always paid but it's your choice whether it is paid by you or Jesus.

The Ninevites were not told the option of repentance but they were only told that they were going to be overturned in 40 days. But they do come to repentance and the king of Ninevites says in verse 9, "who knows? God may relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish".

Verse 10 says God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion on them and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. Repentance starts with believing in God.

**Prayer focus:** Are we responding to the Word of God, or are we responding to the possible consequences of our sins? Let's ponder about this and pray.

## DAY 39

### Jonah 4:1-4

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup>He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. <sup>3</sup>Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." <sup>4</sup>But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Jonah was greatly displeased by God's compassion and the revival of Nineveh. Jonah was a prophet; a preacher and his role was to preach God's word and bring revival in the hearts of people who hear him. So, this was that real success time in his ministry. But here we see that he was greatly displeased about it.

When Jonah was going through hard circumstances, in the belly of the fish he became humble and came to repentance and turned to God. But when things started going well, his heart started to harden again and now we see that he is unhappy with the good work God is doing.

We were wondering all along why Jonah disobeyed God in the first place, why he didn't want to go to the Ninevites and now he is saying the reason for it. Finally, we get to hear from Jonah's mouth the real reason for him resisting God. It was not out of fear that his preaching would go in vain but God would show mercy to Israel's enemies. He says in verse 2, "I know that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relents from sending calamity". Now this is from Exodus 34:6, Jonah throws back to God as an insult the same quote God had said about himself. You are such a merciful God, why do you show them mercy? They don't deserve it. It is good that you are merciful to me but not to them.

It is so easy for us to have the mentality that I deserve grace but they don't. It's wrong. In fact, none of us deserve God's mercy or his forgiveness. But he gives to us as a free gift in Jesus.

People often see the Old Testament as only about God's wrath and judgment, and the New Testament is all about God's mercy. But here we see even in the Old Testament God is eager to save the lost and he delights in extending mercy. These two components of God's character – his judgment and his mercy - are not at odds with each other but rather they are both parts of who he is.

Verse 3. "Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live".

Jonah may have been more concerned about his own reputation than God's. He knew that if the people repented, none of his warnings to Nineveh would come true. This would embarrass him, although it would give glory to God.

**Prayer focus:** How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as one who seeks to do what glorifies God, or as the one who seeks your own interests? Let's ponder and pray.

## DAY 40

Jonah 4:5-9

<sup>5</sup>Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. <sup>6</sup>Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant<sup>[a]</sup> and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. <sup>7</sup>But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. <sup>8</sup>When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."<sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

God is ministering Jonah tenderly as he is to the Ninevites and Israelites and even to us. God could have destroyed Jonah for his anger, but instead he gently taught him a lesson. Verse 6 says, the Lord God provided a plant and it grew to give a shade for Jonah. Jonah was exceedingly happy about it because it brought relief from his discomfort. Jonah was displeased over the salvation of the Ninevites but he was so pleased over his own comfort. Jonah's happiness and his anger had worldly reasons. It was all about self, nothing about God and his will. He was displeased that the Ninevites were being saved because he wanted them to experience judgment. He was exceedingly happy about the plant because he was no longer in discomfort.

Verse 7 says God now provided a worm to attack the plant. So, now the protection from the sun is removed. And then God provided a scorching east wind and the sun blazed on Jonah's head. God increases the discomfort by bringing the heat on Jonah.

The Bible says God provided the worm, provided the wind – sometimes God provides those uncomfortable situations in our lives, as a means of repentance. They are actually coming from God's care for us because he wants to see repentance brought about in our hearts.

Jonah became so angry, as he was going through these uncomfortable circumstances and he wished to die again. But then God says to him "Do you have a right to be angry about the plant?" "Yes, I do" Jonah says. Here we see that Jonah has more care for his comfort than the state of his soul or of his heart.

We might feel how crazy Jonah was to feel like this. But how often are we the same? How often is it uncomfortable for us to share the gospel with a stranger, or give an invitation to church and not feel like "what they will think of me?"

**Prayer focus:** Are we more concerned about our own comfort than for our friends, relatives and our neighbors who are lost?

**Practical focus:** Let's reach out to a lost soul without any delay.

## DAY 41

### Jonah 4:10-11

<sup>10</sup> But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. <sup>11</sup> And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

God is reminding Jonah that if he cares so much for the plant that he has not done anything for it, then how much more should God care for the people who he created in his own image, the Ninevites. The Ninevites are in spiritual darkness and though they were doing many wicked things, God has concern for them. God cares for every soul.

2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

God desires that all should come to repentance. That is his will for everyone.

Through the book of Jonah, we learn that God loves our enemies and he calls us to love our enemies. He wants us to live fully reconciled with him and with other people.

In this story, we see that God intentionally brings Jonah into contact with his enemies to teach him something. When we have difficult people in our lives, people who annoy us regularly with their behavior, we find it very hard to deal with it. We wish we didn't have those issues in our lives. But the book of Jonah presents this question to us – could it be those very people are God's plan and he placed them in our lives so that we can change and grow in our understanding of God and His grace? What is God teaching you through those situations in your life? Are you growing in your patience? Are you growing in your understanding?

Difficult people or difficult circumstances expose what is truly in our hearts so that we can bring those things to God and he can refine us.

By sending Jonah to Nineveh God was exposing the sinfulness in Jonah's heart. In the end, we don't know how Jonah responded. Today, when God exposes the sinfulness in our hearts, how do we want to respond?

Ultimately, Jonah points to Jesus and Jesus is the greater Jonah. (Mathew 12:40-41)

Jonah was reluctant to save the sinners but Jesus on the other hand gave himself up to save us. God's mercy and judgment are not at odds with each other. God is merciful and at the same time, sin must be punished. The good news is that God's judgment is satisfied in Jesus' work on the cross when we put our faith in him.

The Book of Jonah points us to this amazing reality of our salvation.

**Prayer focus:** Let's ask God to give us a heart to see the needs of others, especially that of salvation of those around us, rather than live drenched in our own desires and hurts.

**Practical focus:** As we meet together tomorrow in the church, spend time with a visitor or someone who is in need and share your faith with him/her and help him/her to find strength in the Lord.