

ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

God's Invisible Providence

Survey of Esther

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

God's invisibility in no way nullifies or even hinders His invincibility. He may slip behind the scenes and out of view, but He is always at work accomplishing His will. As the psalmist declared, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3 NASB) and

*Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,
In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.
(135:6 NASB)*

In the book of Esther, we find the majestic interweaving of God's invisibility with His invincibility—His silence with His power. Though the name of God is absent in this book, His finger threads every word on its pages. In fact, God often chooses to work in this way today. He may be silent to you right now, but He is there at work just as He worked in Esther's life almost 2,500 years ago. Let's find out how.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

With this first *Searching the Scriptures* study on Esther, we begin our spiritual adventure, exploring the ways of God in human affairs. However, before we start, it's helpful to gain an *overview* of the book's background and message.

You may consider adding resources to your library to supplement your study of Esther. We recommend *The Swindoll Study Bible*, Chuck Swindoll's book *Esther: A Woman of Strength and Dignity*, and a commentary like *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Also, a Bible dictionary such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* or a Bible atlas like the *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible* proves invaluable for mining the treasures of God's Word.

Quotable

*God's presence
is not nearly as
eloquent as His
absence. His voice,
as important as
it is, is not nearly
as intriguing as
His silence.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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The events of Esther took place between 483 and 473 BC in Susa, the capital city of Persia. King Xerxes, known as Ahasuerus in the book of Esther, ruled Persia from 486 to 465 BC and serves as a key character in Esther. The table below places the events of the book of Esther in the context of Old Testament history.

Overview of Biblical History	
Moses received the law on Mount Sinai.	c. 1446 BC
Kings David and Solomon reigned over the united kingdom of Israel.	1010–931 BC
The kingdom of Israel divided into northern and southern kingdoms.	c. 930 BC
Assyria conquered the northern kingdom.	722 BC
Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and exiled inhabitants of the southern kingdom.	c. 586 BC
Persia defeated Babylon, and Cyrus released an edict for exiles to return home.	539 BC
Events of Esther	483–473 BC

Scholars aren't certain who wrote Esther, but the author was familiar with the Persian court—and was likely an eyewitness. Because the Jews in Susa chose not to return to their homeland following the edict of Cyrus (539 BC), the author answered a major theological question in his day: “Does Yahweh still care for those Jews not in Jerusalem?” Based on the events of the book of Esther, the answer to that question is yes! To this day Jews hold a festival each year called Purim to remember God's faithfulness to His people when He delivered them from evil, as recorded in the Esther story (*Esther 9:26–27*).



Searching the Scriptures Tip

Context, context, context. We always want to understand Bible passages in the correct context. We should think about the immediate context of a passage, the passage's context within its biblical book, and then the passage's context within the whole Bible. In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll explains in detail his four-step Bible study method which consists of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. A strong grasp of the passage's context produces a firm interpretation. This helps us apply the truths of Scripture to our lives. When performing a deep study of a book of the Bible, it's best to do a full read-through before examining each paragraph. This helps us develop a sense of context. So that's what we will do with Esther.



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Observation: Scanning the Story

Before our read-through, peruse this helpful chart Chuck assembled to assist our study of Esther. Notice the flow of events, the main characters, and the theme of the book.

ESTHER

God's providence among His people during . . .						
Hard Times				Happy Times		
King's Banquet	Haman's Edict	Esther's Courage	God's Deliverance	Mordecai's Edict	Jews' Rejoicing	Shalom!
Honoring the kingdom		Urging of Mordecai	Mordecai honored		Enemies destroyed	
Honoring the new queen		Approaching the king	Haman hanged		Feast established	
CHAPTERS 1-2	CHAPTER 3	CHAPTERS 4-5	CHAPTERS 6-7	CHAPTER 8	CHAPTER 9	CHAPTER 10
Circumstances	Threat and trust			Deliverance and praise		
Feasts	of the king		of the queen		of the nation	
Dates	483 BC					473 BC
Theme	The sovereign accomplishment of God's purposes through ordinary people and apparent coincidences					
Key Verses	4:12-16; 10:3					
Christ in Esther	Pictured in Esther, who was an advocate for her people and was even willing to die for them					

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Now that you see the story's direction, let's read it. Esther consists of ten chapters, so you may divide it into two readings for the weekend or five readings, two for each day of the week. If you can read it in one sitting, even better! Don't worry about details or trying to answer questions. Just read and notice how God worked behind the scenes for the good of His people. It's helpful to jot down a few notes during this reading because it keeps your mind engaged.



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Interpretation: Learning the Characters

For this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we will not examine any verse in detail. We simply want to take a moment to become familiar with key terms. In his book *Searching the Scriptures*, Chuck stated that the serious interpreter is a thorough student—not one who briskly finishes homework with cursory glances from page to page. The interpreter digs deeply to develop a mature understanding of the Word with the aim of developing a strong spiritual life.

If you own a Bible dictionary, now is the time to pull it from the shelf. If you don't, we recommend buying *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. For an online alternative, consult "*Encyclopedia of the Bible*," at Biblegateway.com. Let's research the following terms and record a few notes on them.

Xerxes or Ahasuerus (*Esther 1:1*)

Susa (*1:2*)

Persia (*1:3*)



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Vashti (*Esther 1:9–12*)

Mordecai (*2:5–7*)

Esther (*2:7*)

Haman (*3:1*)

Purim (*9:26–27*)



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Correlation: Exploring Our God

The author of Esther did not want us to read the book isolated from God's work in biblical history. He wanted us to remember God's promises to Abraham, His deliverance in the exodus, and His work through the kings and prophets. Without other books in the Bible, we wouldn't be able to see the hand of Providence through both the hard and the happy times of the Jews who remained in Susa.

Chuck brings a few passages to our attention on the sovereign work of our God to help us prepare for our immersion in Esther. Let's look at them and take some notes on God's character and power as conveyed in each passage.

Isaiah 55:8–9

Daniel 4:34–37

Romans 11:33–36



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Application: Embracing the Story

After reading through Esther, we can apply the book through reflection.

Be Quiet

Because the immortal and invisible One is constantly at work in the world, take time to be quiet and ponder how God has worked in your life. Write down what comes to mind.

Be Convinced

Not only has the Sovereign Lord worked in your past, but He is currently working in your present. No matter your circumstances, God is God and He is a good God who loves you (*Romans 8:31–39*). Take a moment to write a prayer of your confidence in Him—whether your current lot be trying or easy—and express your petitions in Jesus' name.

Have confidence, dear friend. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (*Romans 8:32 NASB*). What a comfort to know that “nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God” (*8:39*)! Yes, all your circumstances—even your troubles—are preparing for you an “eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” to this life (*2 Corinthians 4:17 NASB*).



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Searching the Scriptures Wrap-up

Write one sentence to *summarize* this lesson.

Write down one thing to *remember* about God.

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



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You move in mysterious ways performing Your wonders across the earth, the work of Your hands. I will not fear when dark clouds form above my head, and I give thanks for the bright days You give me. Please increase my faith in You and my understanding of You as I continue living under Your smiling providence, awaiting the day when I see Your Son's face in glory. In Jesus' name, amen.



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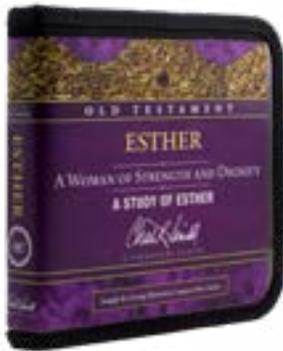
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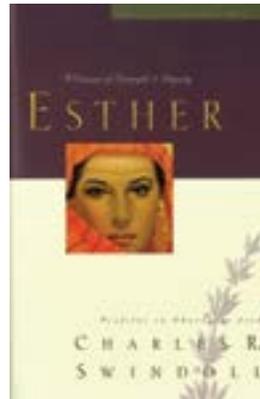
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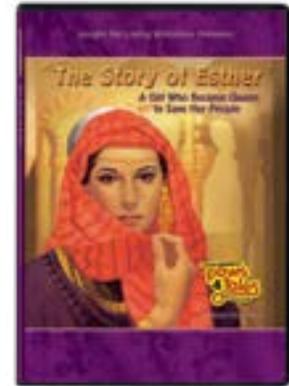
Tools for Digging Deeper



Esther: A Woman of Strength and Dignity
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



Esther: A Woman of Strength and Dignity
by Charles R. Swindoll
Softcover book



The Story of Esther: A Girl Who Became Queen to Save Her People
by Paws & Tales
CD set

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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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