

# FEASTING WITH THE ORPHAN QUEEN



- THE BOOK OF ESTHER -

Bible Study Term 3 2018

## BIBLE STUDY PROGRAM – TERM 3 2018

Week commencing		Reading Plan	Page Number
<i>July 29<sup>th</sup></i>	<b>Global Missions Week</b>		
<i>August 6<sup>th</sup></i>	<b>1. A feast for the tyrant king</b>	Esther 1:1-22	7
<i>August 13<sup>th</sup></i>	<b>2. A feast for the orphan queen</b>	Esther 2:1-18	10
<i>August 20<sup>th</sup></i>	<b>3. A feast for the proud vizier</b>	Esther 2:19-3:15	14
<i>August 27<sup>th</sup></i>	<b>4. A fast for the walking dead</b>	Esther 4:1-5:14	18
<i>September 3<sup>rd</sup></i>	<b>5. A feast as God's plans transpire</b>	Esther 6:1-7:10	22
<i>September 10<sup>th</sup></i>	<b>6. A feast of gladness and joy</b>	Esther 8:1-10:3	25

Bible Studies written by Brett Middleton  
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 St Luke's Anglican Church, Miranda

ST LUKE'S  
**2020**  
**VISION**

**Imagine a church:**

Where delight in God  
overflows into all of life

Where enduring truth  
inspires courageous witness  
and a heart for the nations

Where the lost surrender  
to the mercy of Christ

Where a hunger to  
know, love & serve Christ  
renews every season

Where the broken find  
a family and the outsider  
is embraced

# Introduction to Esther

## Historical Setting

As we begin the study the book of Esther, it is worth reminding ourselves of the historical setting and how other biblical books fit around it. In 605 BC, Babylon, ruled by King Nebuchadnezzar, besieged Jerusalem and forced the Jewish people to become a vassal state (Daniel is taken into captivity following this siege). This began a series of conflicts culminating in the fall of Jerusalem (cf 2 Kings 25). During these conflicts large numbers of Israelites are removed from their homeland in a succession of deportations and taken to live in Babylon. This period becomes known as the 'Exilic Period'. Ezekiel and Jeremiah are prophesying during the exilic period and much of the book of Daniel takes place during this period. The book of Lamentations and a number of Psalms (Psalm 137 for instance) reveal the utter devastation felt in the hearts of God's people during the exile.

In 539 BC the reign of Babylon comes to an end. As was promised by God through his prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 44:28, 45:1,13), the Medo-Persian empire, ruled by King Cyrus, invades and overcomes (the night of this invasion is recounted in Daniel 5). Cyrus issues a decree allowing the Jews to return home and rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4). This begins the 'Post-Exilic Period'. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are prophesying during this period and Ezra-Nehemiah describe events occurring in Jerusalem during this period.

However, not all Jews would return to Jerusalem and a Jewish presence would remain throughout the Persian Empire. Some had become indispensable in positions of prominence. Daniel, for instance, is still in Persia 3 years after Cyrus' decree (Daniel 10:1). Some born in exile would opt to stay rather than return to an unknown homeland. Some during the post-exilic period would leave Jerusalem for the opportunities available throughout the Persian Empire. This is the world of Esther and her cousin Mordecai who, 25 years after Cyrus ends the exile, find themselves feasting with the Persian King.

## Author and Date

Like many OT books, Esther is an anonymous work. It is possible that the author was someone like Mordecai, who had access to historical documents (2:23; 6:1) and an interest in Jewish affairs.

The story is set in Susa, one of the Persian capitals, during the reign of King Ahasuerus, better known by his Greek name, Xerxes I (486–464 b.c.).

## Overview

The book of Esther shares similarities with the stories of Joseph and Daniel in so far as it depicts the rise of Jewish people (namely Esther and Mordecai) to positions of power in a Pagan empire. Esther becomes the queen of Persia and saves her people from a plot to destroy them.

However, the story of Esther differs from that of Joseph and Daniel in significant ways. While Joseph and Daniel are consistent in their faithful actions and witness, Esther and Mordecai are not. We see them entangled in the pride and immorality of Persia. In contrast to Daniel's steadfast witness in exile, Esther is encouraged to keep her identity a secret. As the story plays out we see the consequences of their compromises in the near annihilation of all Jewish people. Furthermore, while God seems present and active in the stories of Joseph and Daniel he seems unnervingly absent in Esther. God does not speak or appear. He does not send dreams or visions. God's people do not pray, make sacrifices or worship. Indeed, you will not find God mentioned anywhere in the story. Yet as the story plays out we see that God is anything but absent. His providence and sovereignty over all matters in all places becomes clear. Even when God appears distant we see he works for the good of those he loves. Even the fearful and compromised amongst us are used by God to see his plans fulfilled.

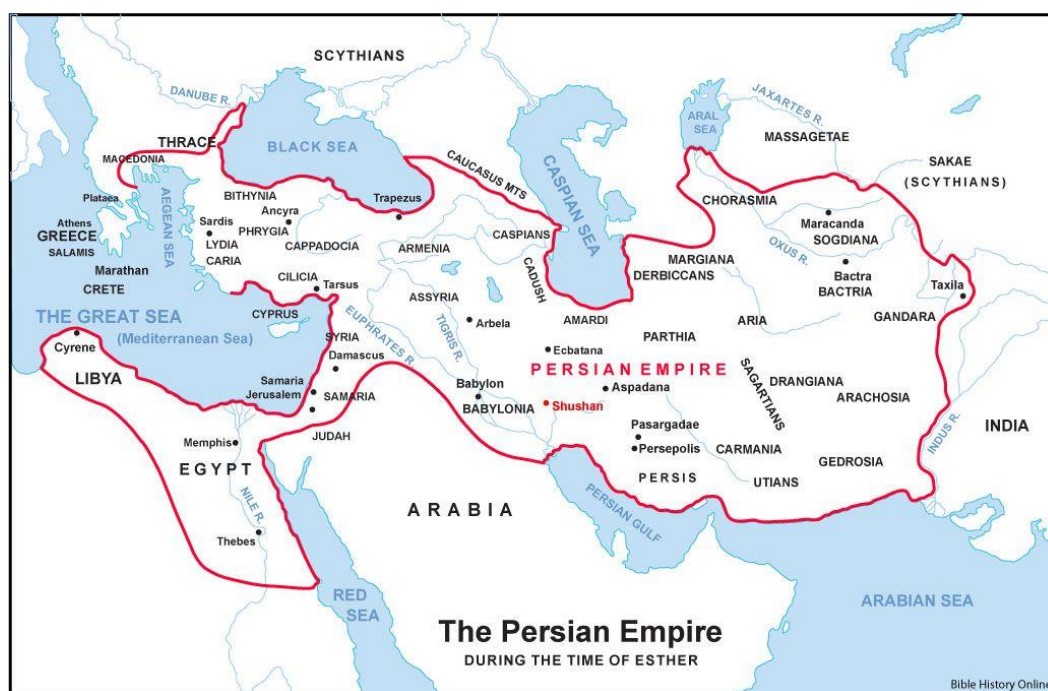
## Key Themes

Esther is an entertaining historical story that also reveals important truths about how and why the Jews survived such an overwhelming threat:

1. *Divine providence.* God is not mentioned by name in the book of Esther. But it shows clearly that, even when God is most hidden, he is still working to protect his chosen people. This is a regular theme through the scriptures that climaxes on the day of Jesus crucifixion. On that day, when

God seems to turn his face away, he achieved the great victory over sin and death.

2. *Human responsibility.* Esther and Mordecai show great initiative and courage. Their actions are obviously significant. The providence of God does not negate the responsibility of people to act with courage and resolve when circumstances require it.
3. *The absurdity of wickedness and pride.* Ahasuerus and Haman were important people who had considerable power. But the story of Esther often causes laughter at their expense. The proud people of this world are not nearly as powerful as they think they are. When they oppose God's people they bring about their own destruction. God laughs at such people (Ps. 2:4). The story of Esther invites us to laugh with him.



# Study 1 – A Feast for the Tyrant King

## Esther 1:1-22

### Talk

- 1) Has anyone read the book of Esther? What do you remember about it?
- 2) Does anyone know which period of Israel's history provides the setting for Esther?

### Read Esther 1:1-22

- 3) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

### Investigate and apply 1:1-9

- 4) What impression do verses 1-9 give us of the Persian Empire, King Xerxes and the royal court?
- 5) The author describes the citadel of Susa in great detail. Does the description remind you of any other part of the bible? Why might the author have done this?
- 6) There seems to be no shortage of wine in the king's court. Consider for a moment what Proverbs, the bible's training manual rulers, has to say about wine (Proverbs 20:1, 23:20, 23:29-35). With this in mind, what are we to think of Xerxes?

**Investigate and apply 1:10--22**

- 7) How does our original impression of Xerxes change with the refusal of Vashti?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 8) How does Xerxes respond when he is humiliated? Are you ever tempted to respond similarly when someone refuses, embarrasses or rebukes you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 9) Xerxes appears to be a strong leader yet his inadequacy is revealed by the disarray of his most intimate relationship? How does this relate to the way the church is to choose its leaders?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 10) Xerxes royal decree that “all women will respect their husbands” and that “every man should be ruler over his own household” sounds misogynistic. However, is it not similar to King Jesus’ royal decree to households (Ephesians 5:22-24)?



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## **Weekly Prayer Points**

### **Staff**

Pray for Brett and Mardi, Evie, Harriet, Olivia, and Willow Middleton. Pray for Brett as Focus Pastor for 10am. Pray for Brett as he heads up our Ministry profile for St Luke's through the training program MTS and as he takes on the role of Acting Senior Minister.

Pray for Jennie and Don Everist. Pray for Jennie as Focus Pastor of the 8am congregation and as Pastoral Care Minister for St Luke's. Pray for Jennie's Pastoral Care ministries, especially in her work in visitation and Bible Study in our local retirement villages.

### **Missionaries**

Pray for Shane and Ruth, Kye, Joel, and Finn Sparks and their mission work with Pioneers in Gijon, Spain.

Pray for Pastor John and Jodi, Gemma, Amber, Zoe, Jasmine, Claudia and Elias Lovell and their work with CMS in the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church in Valencia, Spain.

### **Community**

Pray for our Church Wardens: Colin Adams, Jack Normand and Joel Garlato. Pray for our Parish Councillors: Laurie Davidson, Amanda Garlato, Angela James, Nathan Pollock, Simon Veltmeyer (also our treasurer) and Kath Telfer. Pray for our Parish Nominators: Michael Easton, David Francis, Amanda Garlato, Louise Parkes, and Lloyd Zietsch. Pray for our Synod Reps: Michael Easton and Amanda Garlato.

Pray for our Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, and his government. Pray for our local and state members, Eleni Petinos, Mark Speakman and Scott Morrison. Pray for our Premier, Gladys Berejiklian. Pray for our Mayor, Carmelo Pesce.

### **Local Mission**

Pray for the wide range of outreach opportunities that we have with local schools. That our scripture teachers would be diligent and loving as they teach classes, that our school chaplains would effectively model Christ in the way they love and support the school community and that St. Luke's Miranda North would continue to build a healthy relationship with the school we meet in. Pray for the breakfast club at Miranda Public and Port Hacking High School.

## Study 2 – A Feast for the Orphan Queen

### *Esther 2:1-18*

#### Talk

- 1) Have you ever been chosen for something over others (a job, an award, a place on a team)?

#### Read Esther 2:1-18

- 2) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

#### Investigate and apply 2:1-4

- 3) How long did it take for the anger of King Xerxes to subside (make note of the time markers offered in 1:3, 2:12, 2:16)?

- 4) What do you think it means for Xerxes to ‘remember Vashti’?

- 5) The pageant proposed by the King’s advisors is grotesque. Yet does our culture celebrate and engage in similar practices?

Investigate and apply 2:5-18

- 6) What do we know about Mordecai and Esther (Hadassah)?
- a) What do their names mean?
  
  - b) What is their family background?
  
  - c) What is their social status?
- 7) How do you feel about:
- a) Esther's involvement and compliance in the King's search for a wife?
  
  - b) Mordecai's command that Esther not reveal her nationality and family background?
- 8) Have you ever felt like hiding your faith in Jesus? In what areas of your life might it be to your advantage to hide your allegiance to Jesus?

9) Esther's compliance and failure to witness must be attributed largely to Mordecai. He has taken her in as his own daughter yet he allows her to walk a path of moral compromise. He commands her to deny her God.

a) Are we careful to teach those in our care the commands of God (Deuteronomy 4:10, Psalm 78:5)?

b) Are we careful not to lead those in our care into sin (Matthew 18:6)?

c) Are we ever tempted to encourage our children or friends to play-down their faith in Jesus to maintain social status (Mark 8:38)?

10) Esther is chosen by Xerxes, but only after perfecting herself for his approval. How might we contrast this with the way Christ chooses and prepares his bride (Ephesians 1:3-10 and 5:25-27)?

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## Weekly Prayer Points

### Staff

Pray for Tim and Shona, Annika, Hamish, Edward and Hugo Goldsmith. Pray for Tim as he leads Miranda North and Church at 5. Pray for Tim as he heads up our Local Mission profile for St Luke's and focuses on outreach and evangelism.

Pray for Russ Denten as Focus Pastor for JNR Church and undergoes his ministry traineeship; that his ministry and studies would bring glory to God.

### Missionaries

Pray for Matt and Lauren, Ezra and Joanna Thomas and their mission work with OMF in South East Asia.

Pray for John-Francis and Anup Wallace and their mission work in Indore, North India.

Pray for Sarah Prabhakar and her work in India with BCTI and SIM.

### Community

Pray for those who serve to protect our country. Pray for health and safety for the service men and women and their Chaplains both here and overseas. Pray for their families waiting at home.

Pray for peace and wise leadership in our world, specifically in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Sudan and South Sudan, Somalia, Pakistan, Mexico, Libya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Ukraine. Pray that there would be opportunities for Christians to share the love, peace and saving grace that Jesus offers to all.

### Local Mission

Pray that the word of God we heard on Sunday, might shape how we live Monday to Friday. Pray that we would be respectful of workplace boundaries, but that we'd also *"be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have"* (1 Peter 3:15). Thank God that we have the opportunity to represent Christ in how we speak and act in the workplace.

## Study 3 – A Feast for the Proud Vizier

### *Esther 2:19-3:15*

#### Talk

- 1) Have you ever had a boss, teacher or coach that you found it difficult to honour and respect? What was it about them that made it hard?

#### Read Esther 2:19-3:15

- 2) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

#### Investigate and apply 2:19-3:6

- 3) Why do you think Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman?
  - a) Might there have been religious motivations to refuse to bow?
  - b) How might the events of 2:19-23 provide a motivation? Are you someone who is capable of holding grudges like this?
  - c) How might Haman's family lineage provide a motivation?

- 4) It seems as if Mordecai wrongly uses his Jewish identity as an explanation for his refusal to show honour to Haman (3:4). Have you ever witnessed Christians using their allegiance to Jesus as an explanation of their poor behaviour?

Investigate and apply 3:7-15

- 5) The date of the destruction of the Jewish people is to be set by the casting of lots, which are dice used to enquire of the gods. The lot falls the 12<sup>th</sup> month (Adar) and the news of the impending genocide goes out on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month (Nisan).
- a) Considering the size of Xerxes empire, what does this edict mean for God's people?
- b) What is the significance of the day the King's decree is written and released (Esther 3:12 and Leviticus 23:4-5)? How might this heighten the spiritual crisis they face at this time?
- 6) Read Proverbs 16:33 *"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."* On the surface God may seem troublingly absent in Esther, yet again and again we see His providential hand at work.
- a) How has God cared for His people in the date He has set by lot?

b) Why doesn't God just save His people immediately? Why this long process where the wicked prosper and His people live in fear?

7) Where do we lay the blame for this disaster set to befall God's people?

a) Certainly blame must be laid at Haman's feet. Can you think of people or groups who seem eager for our eradication as followers of Jesus?

b) If Esther had been honest about her identity, it's doubtful Haman could have carried out a plan to destroy all Jews. Consider the following verses and discuss some of the implications if we are ashamed of our identity in Jesus (Romans 1:16, Ephesians 6:18-20, Revelation 21:8).

c) If Mordecai had given honour where honour was due, rather than responding with stubborn pride, perhaps Haman would not have sought the eradication of all Jews. Consider the following verses and discuss some of the importance of Christians maintaining a good reputation with unbelievers (1 Timothy 6:1, 2 Peter 2:2, 1 Corinthians 6:6, 1 Timothy 3:7, 1 Peter 2:12, Romans 2:21-24).

8) What do you think you would do if a decree was issued allowing Christians to be killed? Would you remain faithful or commit apostasy? What beliefs must be robust if we are to endure such a time?



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## **Weekly Prayer Points**

### **Staff**

Pray for Sam and Jess, Percy and Lois Morton. Pray for Sam as Focus Pastor of Night Church. Pray for Sam as he heads up Youth Ministry at St Luke's – coordinating our youth groups on Friday nights and high school Scripture in our local schools. Pray for Sam as he also heads up Young Adults ministry and Young Adults Bible Studies.

### **Missionaries**

Pray for Andrew and Adele, Isaac, Lucy, and Finn Southerton and their church plant in Wellington, New Zealand. Continue to pray for Isaac's health.

Pray for Geoff and Liz, Johanna, Will, Tom and Zoe Robson and their work with TSCF (Tertiary Students Christian Fellowship) in Canterbury University, Christchurch, New Zealand.

### **Community**

Pray for our ongoing and various Children's, Youth, and Young Adults Ministries; that God would be using the leaders and volunteers to sow seeds and help people grow into mature and loving relationships with Jesus and that this would be a great witness to the wider community.

### **Local Mission**

Thank God for the many and varied resources available to us as a parish. As we seek to witness to the goodness of God daily, pray that we might make the most of opportunities to invite people we know to events at church. Pray that God would be preparing the heart of people you could invite to an upcoming event.

## Study 4 – A Fast for the walking dead

### *Esther 4:1-5:14*

#### Talk

- 1) Can you think of a time you were given a task or a time you faced a crisis that you felt inadequate to overcome?

#### Read Esther 4:1-5:14

- 2) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

#### Investigate and apply 4:1-17

- 3) As the king's edict goes out condemning all Jewish people to death. What is the response of Mordecai and the Jewish men and women in the provinces? Is this response spontaneous, symbolic or both?
  - a) This crisis prompts Mordecai to repent and rely on God (these are the attitudes of heart associated with his symbolic gestures). Has a crisis of some sort ever had a similar effect on you?

4) What is the one place no expressions of sadness are permitted?

a) What insight does this give us about the king and the court he has established?

b) How is our King, Jesus, the exact opposite of Xerxes in this case (Isaiah 53:4, Philippians 2:6-8, Mark 15:25-37, Hebrews 2:17)?

c) Do churches and Christian homes run the risk of becoming modern versions of Xerxes Palace in this regard?

- 5) Mordecai requests that Esther plead for her people. Having commanded her to stay silent about her true identity, he now calls her to bear witness and align herself with all Jewish people. What is her initial response?
- a) Does this remind you of any other Old Testament characters who fixate on their own inadequacy rather than God's supremacy? Do you respond similarly when it comes to bearing witness to Christ or confronting injustice in this world?
- 6) What do you think about Mordecai's response to Esther's hesitation?
- 7) What is Esther's response? What is the symbolic meaning of this response?

Investigate and Apply Esther 5:1-14

- 8) Chapter 5 opens with the time marker "on the third day". What expectations does such a phrase raise (Genesis 22:4, Genesis 40:12, Exodus 19:11, 2 Kings 20:5, Luke 24:7)?

9) Having turned back to God, how has Esther's character changed? How has it remained the same?

10) Mordecai's pride leads many to be condemned. Esther's willingness to die leads to the chance of salvation. What gospel themes resonate with this?

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## **Weekly Prayer Points**

### **Staff**

Pray for Music Student Minister James Peters and his work at Miranda North.

Pray for Sarah Evans as she looks after music at St Lukes.

### **Missionaries**

Pray for Rob and Jo, Lili, and Jemma Copland and their work with AFES (Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students) in Wollongong University's ECU (Evangelical Christian Union), Sydney.

### **Community**

Pray for our Scripture Teachers, Kids Hope Mentors, and the School Lunch program leaders as they go into the schools in our Parish in outreach to children and youth.

### **Local Mission**

Thank God for his loving provision in drawing us to him and making us his children and heirs. Pray for members of your family and those close to you who do not know Jesus and Lord and Saviour. Pray for both wisdom and boldness in how to share the good news we have with those who are nearest and dearest to us.

# Study 5 – A Feast as God’s plans transpire

## *Esther 6:1-7:10*

### Talk

- 1) Have there been times in your life when God has seemed absent? Thinking back over the book of Esther, has God seemed present or absent? Why might the Spirit have inspired such a book to be written and included in our scriptures?

### Read Esther 6:1-7:10

- 2) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

### Investigate and apply 6:1-14

In chapters 6-7 we see one of the major themes of the book come into the foreground: the providence of God. While God may have seemed absent through the book, we see here that he has been working through a myriad of everyday happenings to see his plans fulfilled.

- 3) In what events in this chapter and throughout the story so far, do we see God’s providential hand at work for the good of His people?
  
- 4) Take some time to think and share with each other how God’s providence through everyday events and people lead to your conversion and continued growth as a Christian.

5) The failure of Xerxes to honour Mordecai in 2:19-23 seemed unfair at the time. How in our passage does it now prove to be crucial?

a) Have you ever experienced God's providence working in and through difficult moments in your life?

6) Romans 8:28 says "*we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*" We see the truth of this verse at this point in the book of Esther. Are there circumstances you have faced or are facing that make Romans 8:28 hard to believe?

Investigate and apply 7:1-10

7) What do you think is going on in Xerxes head as he retires to the palace garden in a rage?

8) Consider the following proverbs. How do we see their truth in the story of Esther?

a) Proverbs 11:2, 16:18, 29:23

b) Proverbs 27:18

c) Proverbs 25:15

9) We are introduced to Esther as a woman morally compromised. Here she appears as a hero able to be used by God to save her people. What other characters of the bible does she remind us of? Is this a reminder you need to hear?

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## **Weekly Prayer Points**

### **Staff**

Pray for Cam and Katrina Harte. Pray for Cam as he heads up Children's Ministry, including KOS (Kids on Sunday), Primary Scripture, Alive (lunch-time Christian group at Miranda North Public School), Homework Club, Children's Thursday night programs, and Kids' Clubs.

### **Missionaries**

Pray for David, Kathryn and Reuben Luis and their work with AEFS at the Geelong Campuses of Monash University.

### **Community**

Pray for our Scripture Teachers, Kids Hope Mentors, and the School Lunch program leaders as they go into the schools in our Parish in outreach to children and youth.

### **Local Mission**

Pray for the everyday outreach that the church has through ministries such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. For those who are involved and for those who attend who don't yet know Jesus as Lord. Pray that the staff would be wise in their presentation of the gospel, that they would be thoughtful in their interactions with people and that they would be eager to make the most of every opportunity to speak of Christ the King.



## Study 6 – A Feast of gladness and joy

### *Esther 8:1-10:3*

#### Talk

- 1) Has your Christian faith ever brought you into conflict with anyone? Did you avoid the conflict (flight) or defend your faith (fight)? Are there any other options open to us as we are persecuted?

#### Read Esther 8:1-10:3

- 2) What initial thoughts, questions or insights arise from the passage?

#### Investigate and apply 8:1-10:3

- 3) These chapters revel in the many reversals God's providential hand achieves? What are some of these?
- 4) What are some other moments God achieves great reversals in the bible and overturns that which seems impossible to change?
- 5) Have you ever experienced God overturning that which seemed impossible to change? Spend some time thinking together about Ephesians 3:20. What are some aspects of our world or your current situation you can call upon God to overturn?

- 6) There is a pattern in many of the stories of the bible where God's people are first persecuted, second saved and third bring blessing to the nations (consider the Exodus story for instance). How is this pattern evident in Esther?
- 7) Although Haman's edict still hangs over the heads of all Jewish people, Mordecai's edict has given them hope enough to feast and celebrate.
- a) Are there any resonances here to the gospel message that brings us to celebrate at the Lord's Supper?
- b) Could this feasting and celebration provide a 3<sup>rd</sup> option to us as we deal with persecution for our faith?
- 8) The Jews begin their defensive efforts and are victorious. It seems Susa, and Haman's family in particular, are the eye of the storm (9:13). As with all depictions of Holy War in the bible, these are hard for us to read and accept, and rightly so.
- a) How is this campaign by God's people of a different tenor to that which was to be waged against them (see 8:11 and compare it with 9:6, 9:10, 9:15)?

b) How has our attitude to enemies changed since Jesus victorious resurrection (Matthew 5:44)?

c) How has our waging of Holy War changed since the victorious resurrection of Jesus (Ephesians 6:11)?

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## **Weekly Prayer Points**

### **Staff**

Pray for Emma and Stephanie as they work alongside Cam while doing Year 13.

Pray for Sharyn and Lisa as they deal with the day to day running and administration of St Luke's.

### **Missionaries**

Pray for Kylie Zietsch and her work at Johannesburg Bible College, South Africa.

Pray for Elisha and Eleanor Bililiza and their church, Holy Trinity Church, in Bukoba, Tanzania.

### **Community**

Pray for English as a Second Language classes each Friday. Give thanks for Marina and her team as they teach and encourage those who come along.

Pray for Miranda North; that there would be many opportunities to connect with the local community through school and other activities.

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