

# Underdogs

## “Esther: Leading Lady”

Ester 3-4

### Small Group Plan

Though God’s name is not mentioned in the book of Esther, his presence fills the story. Notice the following “coincidences” that point to a God who protects his people.

- *Mordecai raises his orphaned cousin Esther (2:7).*
- *Esther enters the harem of king Xerxes (2:8).*
- *The chief eunuch favors Esther (2:9).*
- *Esther is chosen as queen (2:17).*
- *Mordecai hears of a conspiracy and saves the king's life (2:21-22).*
- *Xerxes can't sleep and reads a book that recalls Mordecai's deeds (6:1-2).*
- *Xerxes spares Esther and offers her anything she wants (5:2-3).*
- *Esther asks the king to save her people (7:4).*

#### **Esther 4:14**

*Who knows but that you have come to your royal position  
for such a time as this?*

#### **Proverbs 19:20-21**

*Listen to advice and accept discipline,  
and at the end you will be counted among the wise.  
Many are the plans in a person's heart,  
but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.*

### **OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...**

- How would you define the providence of God?

### **LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...**

#### **— HAMAN'S PLAN —**

##### **Esther 3:1-15**

<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. <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 the twelfth month, the month of Adar. <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 of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury." <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." <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. <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.

- Why won't Mordecai kneel before Haman?
- Why is Haman determined to wipe out Mordecai's entire race?
- What is clashing here: personalities, priorities or perception?
- What does this story tell us about King Xerxes?

## — MORDECAI'S REQUEST —

Esther 4:1-11

<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. <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. <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 is Mordecai's immediate need?
- What do Esther's actions towards Mordecai tell us about her character?
- How have the tables been turned regarding Mordecai and Esther (see 2:5-7)?
- Describe, in your own words, the message Mordecai gave Esther (vs. 6-9).

### — ESTHER'S RESPONSE —

#### **Esther 4:12-17**

<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?" <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.” 17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.*

- Esther is both a Jew and the queen. What options are open to her and what are the implications of each option?
- What does Mordecai seem to understand about God’s sovereignty and care?
- What hope does Esther have for success?
- What might she be feeling as she makes her plans?
- How is Esther an example of trust?

### **USE IT / APPLY IT ...**

- Mordecai began crying in sackcloth and ashes, but then moved to calm and trust (4:1, 14). Why the change? How did it occur?
- What is involved in trusting God when the future is unknown?
- What is involved in trusting God when that trust could make life difficult or even put you in harms way?
- Describe a time when have you been asked to do something that involved personal risk or cost?
- Close in prayer thanking God for his care and protection. Allow a time for silent, individual recommitment to trust God during difficult times.