

How to Read Esther Prophetically

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MAIN VERSES

Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love. A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God. Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family. So welcome home.

...is right around the corner. Anybody celebrating Purim for the first time this year? Anybody? Yes! Woo! It's fun. So Purim is a celebration, a biblical party that's found in the book of Esther. In the story of Esther, the Jewish community in the Persian Empire had basically been set up to be exterminated. That's what the story is. And a decree was signed and a law that ended up allowing their enemies to kill and plunder them. However, through rather miraculous circumstances, they were vindicated, empowered by the kingdom to fight back. And they received rest from their enemies. That's a huge statement, a key phrase that appears in the book of Esther. The celebration isn't the fact that they got into a fight and they won and they killed them all. It's the fact that they found rest. They found rest from their enemies. And the shalom that engulfed them—apart from the things that were constantly chasing, trying to destroy them. And the book of Esther is an incredible book. Over the past year, it has easily become my favorite book to talk about. We're going to talk about it today.

Finding Rest from Our Enemies

How many of us have read the book of Esther? Everybody raise their hands. How many of you haven't? No one's going to fess up. That's fine. Maybe you haven't, but you think you have. You ever realize there's a book in the Bible that you've never touched? Yeah, I've read my Bible. Have you read Nahum? Yeah, I've read... No, okay. You don't have to come forward. That's fine.

So let's talk about one of my favorite topics. And that's what this message is going to be geared towards. And that is the subject of the history of the Bible itself. Not the history in the Bible. The history in the Bible is awesome. I'm very intrigued by the history of the Bible. From the

evolution of how it became what it is, through textual criticism, its origins, through mankind, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of the God of Israel. And the thing about the Bible is—when you read the Bible, you begin to become very aware of this—it's not always pretty. Anybody else? It's not always pretty. And it's not always appropriate for all ages. It's just not. Everyone's so quick to read the story of Noah to their two or three year old, and it's like... Or [Judges 19](#). That's not a chapter I'm going to sit down and read to my four-year-old anytime in the near future. It's just not.

Why Esther Made People Uncomfortable

And sometimes we pretend, and this was me, this is how I used to think. Sometimes we pretend because we believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible. But when we think about that, sometimes it's as if we believe that the writers or the authors of the Bible were possessed by the Holy Spirit. Eyes rolled in the back of their heads and they just wrote what they wrote and had no control over it, had no input of how they're going to write it, the style, the uniqueness of God working through mankind. And that's not at all how the Bible says it came to be. We spoke a lot about that in the message "What the Bible Is Not," a few months ago. The Holy Spirit inspired men, and most likely some women, to tell and bear witness of their encounter, their testimony, and declaration of God. And there is a mystery to it. Just as the metaphor that Paul uses in [2 Timothy 3.16](#), all Scripture is God-breathed. It comes from Him and bears witness ultimately to Him. And I say all of this because Esther is difficult. Esther is a difficult book. It's complex. It has so much controversy surrounding it throughout its Jewish and Christian history. Martin Luther thought it shouldn't even be in the Bible. He was like, no, we shouldn't touch this thing. It doesn't need to be in the Bible. Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai of the first century said it makes one's hands unclean. Now, whatever that means, I don't know, but it's not a positive note, right? Man, it's a big scandal. I love it.

So when we open up Esther, we need to be prepared for what it's saying and not turn a blind eye to its content. They had a pretty conservative Christian school. And they had—kids nowadays don't understand what these things are—this massive thing over in the corner. It's called Encyclopedia. You know these things, right? This massive collection of these books: A, B, C. And the teacher would let us, okay, it's reading time. And looking back, I thought that at the time she's like, oh, they're going to be edified by reading. And at the time, maybe she just wanted us to entertain ourselves. Y'all can read out of the encyclopedia. So all these third graders, man, the boys knew we would beeline to A. And we'd pull out and we'd be in the back giggling and snickering at A. Because what is in A? Art. And it would have depictions of

Renaissance paintings. And we'd be, "Oh, look a butt." That would just be what—teacher had no idea. She had to take A away. Sometimes we don't realize what's in a book until we read it.

The Controversy Surrounding Esther

And why is Esther so criticized? Well, for one, it never explicitly mentions God, which is a given. But not only that, to a Jewish audience, you have these Jews, Mordecai and Esther, who did not return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. The story never speaks of them keeping Shabbat, keeping kosher—nothing that dictates an outward sign of a good Jewish individual, a covenant holder in God's people. Now you contrast that with the other books of the Bible written around this timeframe, such as Nehemiah or Ezra or Haggai, Zechariah, specifically Nehemiah and Ezra, and what they have to say about the Jews who did return from exile and how they're setting up these lifestyles and Ezra's making all these decrees. You need to be more set apart. And you married someone that's not divorced, kids. It's a very big contrast. And the question underlying both books is: Is God still with us after this? But we'll get to that in a minute.

The King's Rash Decision

And so the story starts off in Esther when the king of Persia—he wanted his wife, Vashti, the queen, to do something seemingly inappropriate in front of his friends. And so she refuses. And so he banishes her. So now Persia has no queen. The king kind of made this rash move. He'd been drinking. It was a big party. A big old party with all of his friends. He'd been drinking. And so he banishes her away. And what do we do now? Our kingdom does not have a queen. How do we find the king a new queen is the question.

Well, in chapter 2, the king's advisors have a solution of all solutions. You guys want to take a look? Yes. So in chapter 2, starting in verse 2:

"Then the king's personal attendants proposed, 'Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm.' Is this a large scope area? Yes, in his realm. 'Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of the realm to bring all of these beautiful young women into his harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Haggai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. And let beauty treatments be given to them. And let the young woman who pleases the king...'"

Look at the king's response here. He was thrilled. And you're wondering why was he so thrilled. The advice appealed to the king. Yeah, let's follow this. Bring all the ladies in. And this is how

she would go to the king. Verses 14-15:

"When the turn came for Esther, the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abahel, to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Haggai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. 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."

Do y'all understand what just took place? How should we determine the next queen? Well, let's get every virgin in the empire, prepare them, and you get one night with each. It'll be like a competition. And whoever wins this little contest, you being the judge, gets to be queen. So again, how did the king respond to this proposal? It appealed to him very much. And he was like, "Yeah, let's do this." Esther won the contest. I always thought this was just a beauty contest. I mean, it was, but it was a contest of who pleased the king the most in the rawest form.

The Scandalous Start of Esther's Story

What a scandalous way to start a story, especially in the Bible. Notice: this is just how the story starts. It's scandalous, right from the beginning. No wonder it made Jewish and Christian leaders uncomfortable throughout history. If it makes you uncomfortable, that's fine. How can you say it's fine? Because it's what the Bible says. A story is being told here though. And I want to encourage you today to be engulfed in the story as the author is writing it. In other words, when you read Esther, don't be afraid to read it as a novel. Historicity is important, but I don't think that was the biggest goal of the author here.

Entertainment in the Text

He's putting in so many other elements of entertainment and drama and conflict to engulf you. Read it that way and see what messages come out then. Sex is a major theme throughout the book of Esther. From Vashti and the king, whatever was happening there, to the bachelorette contest, this big event where Esther wins. The assumed groping of Esther by Haman that the king ultimately leads to his death when the king walks in. That's what the king perceives. All these little details the author puts in there. He can't stop himself.

He even talks about the horses. So in [Esther 8.10](#), there's just a neat nugget. They're talking about the horses going out, the horses that carry the king's messages throughout the kingdom. And the author just can't help himself. He's like, by the way, these are no ordinary horses. They

have been sired from the royal stud. I mean, he just can't stop himself from including these details everywhere. And as we'll see, it's one of the many ways the author of Esther lifts up the narrative. It's a story. It's written as a story. It's meant to give us the feels. It's meant to make us uncomfortable at times. It's written to make us think.

The Bible Is Not Boring

Something important is not judging a story before reading it to the end. But this is why the book of Esther, both in Christian history and Jewish history, has been criticized. And sometimes when we look for a squeaky clean Bible, we don't find it. We do find stories that are meant to engage us and draw us into them and teach us, cultivate wisdom as believers, and hopefully, hopefully help us walk out into the not-so-squeaky-clean world out there in a way that we can actually navigate it for God's righteousness.

The Bible is a story that ultimately leads us to Yeshua, no matter how uncomfortable the story gets at times.

So, everybody good? Introduction. Okay, great.

So some people are shocked to learn that when they've read the story of Esther a million times, they just thought Esther and the king watched Netflix or something all night. And there's more to it than that. And so now that we've discovered this was not written in the genre of a chronicle. It's not written like Kings or Chronicles. It was written as a narrative that doesn't dismiss the historicity of the events in the story, but there's something edifying in here for us. And that's just how the book of Esther is laid out.

Irony and Role Reversals

And something the book of Esther is filled with, something the author took a lot of time to develop and throw in our faces, is blunt irony. Irony entertains an audience, especially in 2020. Irony is one of those tools that you see in movies and TV shows that really entertains us. So you have a supervillain at the beginning of a movie, and let's just say lightning strikes him, and it's like, oh, he's this lightning man, and I'm going to shoot lightning or something, and he's the villain. And let's just say this lightning that empowered him to become who he is at the very end of the movie maybe becomes the very thing that ends up destroying them. And as an audience, what do we do? Ah, gotcha—like it's ironic. We love that. It's one of the things that this author uses a lot in the story of Esther. And it has lots of twists. There are many role reversals throughout the ups and downs of Esther. A minority Jewish girl becoming queen of

the entire Persian empire. You have a Haman and Mordecai switching places and so on. It's intentionally written to be a good read, right? Not just to study or to memorize.

Read Esther as a Story

And I guess I really want to get that point across because if I can be honest, I want y'all to go home tonight and I want you to read Esther as a story, as a good novel, as something the author intended. If you're married, read it together. And I want you to be passionate when you read it. I want you to try to get to know the characters and even be like, oh, and here's what the next verse says: he was killed on the impalement stake that was actually meant for Mordecai. And I want you both to go, oh, that was so ironic. This is how the story was meant to be read. And this is how it's laid out.

There's 10 chapters in the Hebrew version of the book of Esther. There's also a Greek translation that has some stuff added to it. It's kind of neat, but yeah, let's just start out. Let's jump in. So when you look at the book of Esther, it's laid out in three. You could chop it up in four main sections. For me, it's just three. And it starts off, chapters one and two.

Esther and Mordecai in Persia

Esther and Mordecai are Jews living in Persia after the exile has ended. There's a banquet and the king wants to establish that men need to rule over their wives and be this immovable man of the house. All you men who are brave go, oh, three people not sleeping. Okay. That's what he wants, right? You women need to do as I say, right? So he asks his wife at the time to do something that's deemed inappropriate in the story. And he asks her to allow his other guy friends to check out her beauty. And it's assumed that it's exactly what you're thinking, whatever that is. She refuses. And what's he do? I'm the man. No, woman, you need to obey. Fine, banished, get out. So he banishes her.

And why is that an amazing theme to point out? Because we know what happens next. Esther, or Hadassah—her Hebrew name—is changed to Esther, likely after a pagan deity, to create that contrast between the two cultures. The king chooses Esther to be his new wife. Big man going to tell his woman what to do in the story. And banishes his first wife. Couldn't boss her around. Now he has this new wife. He chooses Esther. And the entire rest of the story is about her telling him what to do. It's funny because it's true. That's the whole rest of the story. The author knows that you're going to see that and laugh. Imagine the timeframe when this was written.

Again, scandalous, but good. This is awesome. It's entertaining. You see. The Bible is not boring. Everybody say, the Bible is not boring. Thank you.

These are good storylines, and as we'll see, they lead to something very edifying, as they should be, being in the Bible.

Conflict and Divine Providence

Chapters 3 through 8: huge conflict in the story happens, just like any good story when it's told. Here, Mordecai comes into conflict with a high-ranking official named Haman. All right, we've done this a few times. Good. Haman is an agagite. Historically connected to the Amalekites, the people King Saul was supposed to kill but didn't. So, oh, look, now they're here. And Haman wants Mordecai to bow down to him. He's all high and mighty. He treats Mordecai as a simple servant in the street. And Mordecai refuses, and Mr. H gets ticked off. I'll fix that, yeah. Haman goes to the king. He tricks the king into signing a law that enacts a plot to exterminate the Jews. So we never really know at the beginning of the story why Esther becomes queen. I mean, we know why from the storyline aspect, but this is developing. We're starting to see: is there a divine providence being laid here? What is happening? Something more significant. And now we do.

Esther's Courage and Triumph

Esther's character develops from this timid girl who uses her beauty to get ahead in the world—something ironically given to her by God—to a character of courage, faith, hope, and bravery. She tells the people to fast and pray for three days. And on the third day, she enters into the king's court and approaches the king. And that's a big deal because the law is anybody who approaches the king without being summoned gets killed. Instant death. So to save her people, she approaches the king. And it's a tense moment in the story. It's the big bad king, right? And his big bad law, and this is my way, and he's going to kill anyone who approaches, and oh, it's Esther. No, no, not her. Once again. Esther then requests two different banquets of the king and Haman, and the role reversal takes place when Haman is now placed lesser than Mordecai in the story and has to lead him around the city proclaiming him honored of the king. What's the result of that? He gets very upset. He goes home. He starts making a 75-foot impalement stake. And Haman finds out Esther's Jewish, threatens him. All these things come into play. Irony time. The king sees him on top of Esther. And Haman gets destroyed with the same impalement stake that he was going to use on Mordecai. Reversal. Irony. Then the king allows

another law to be put in place where the Jews are allowed to fight, defend themselves against anyone who would attack them that day, and the Jews are victorious.

The Legacy of Esther

Now, in the concluding chapters, the third part is chapters 9 through 10. It's an overview and conclusion to the broader story. It's almost like a step back, an overview of the celebration of Purim that came from this story. Purim is one of two Israelite traditions—a feast, if you will—that are not commanded in [Leviticus 23](#). And the very reason is that they came long after. The thing about Esther's character, as I've said before, is that it's developing. She finds herself living in two worlds with two different identities. One is this Jewish girl named Hadassah. And the other is this Persian queen with the pagan name Esther, which has no connection to the covenant people of God. She goes from this young girl who relies on her beauty to do what she needs or what she wants, to this powerful Jewish leader on whose authority the customs of Purim still stand today.

And the defining moment in the story, when you read it, you'll see it—the defining moment of her development and character hinges on when she realizes that she can't be both anymore. She can't juggle both anymore. She must choose, even if it costs her her life. She must choose who she's going to be fully. Is she going to live out a life that is a lie, or is she going to embrace the life that has been called by God for her to fulfill? The development in the story is a huge moment when she chooses to identify with God's covenant people at the risk of losing everything. Man, that was potent. You can feel the tension. That's the part in the movie with the epic music and the close-up camera on her face, trying to figure out what she has to do and how she's going to do it. The music's playing and you're on the edge of your seat. What's she going to choose? What an amazing model for those who would seek God.

The Call to Covenant Identification

See, this is the moment in the story where Moses said, okay, I will go back to Egypt instead of continuing to herd sheep on this mountain. This is the point when Joshua says, okay, I'm going to cross this Jordan leading Israel. This is the moment when Matthew got up from the tax collection table. He made a choice: I'm going to embrace this life fully, and I'm going to give it my all and give it my everything to follow that rabbi. As believers, every single one of us would identify with this moment. The moment we walked away from living a half-hearted life or two lives to fully embrace a covenant-driven identity of following God.

Or it's the moment in the story that becomes uncomfortable for believers. Maybe your story, maybe your life—maybe you're still juggling the two lives. One life where you know you were called by God to fully embrace and live out his kingdom, showing the world what a covenant relationship looks and feels like. And another life that has no connection with someone who has been impacted with an eternal covenant of love.

The story is powerful in Esther. When you read it as a narrative, it's powerful. It forces you to put the spotlight back on yourself.

A Moment Every Believer Must Face

Imagine what a post-exilic generation of Jews felt when they read this story with all the background that you have now. Now, here's a neat literary thing: a prominent motif in the book of Esther is the usage of the term feast or banquet. Has anyone ever, especially when we act out the play with kids, seen how Esther keeps going back to the king? No, I want to schedule another banquet. And we're like, you don't need another one. We know it's going to happen. Just have the kids do one. That way we can shorten the play by five minutes.

It's so redundant. It's like, oh, another feast and another. And the Hebrew word is *mishte*. It evokes eating and drinking. It's a party. Matt, why are you saying this is so significant?

The word appears 20 times in the book of Esther. Twenty times. It only appears 27 times in the whole Old Testament. So there's something to that. Why is this word being used? In the story, there's a total of about 10 individual feasts that take place in this 10-chapter book. The story of Esther both begins and ends with pairs of feasts, if you read it in the text, that mirror each other, as well as a pair of feasts right in the middle.

The Literary Motif of the Feast

Yeah, let's see. Do I have it here? Here we go. So here are the feasts. Thus, you have three pairs of feasts that the author decided to bunch up in these sections to mark the beginning of the story. Remember, the king holds a feast and then holds another one back to back. He didn't just connect them. You have the feast at the end of the story when Esther gives two feasts—for all the Jews all over the Persian empire, you're going to celebrate Purim on this day, but the Jews in Susheh are going to celebrate it on this day. It's two feasts. And then right in the middle, when Esther requests two different feasts or banquets from the king and Haman.

Three markers that mark the beginning, the end, and the climax of the story. And the feasts are key to observing the markers of reversals in the story, especially what's commonly referred to by the Greek word *peripeteia*. It's a term that marks the turning points in the narrative, especially in Greek literature, that drives and directs a story.

The King's Sleepless Night

So the Esther story, if you've read it—if not, please go home and read it and watch this again because it's neat. If you've read it, the story's main pivot point is during the king's sleepless night. King's sleepless night. What does that have to do with anything? Nothing. That's not action-packed at all. You're right, it's not action-packed because no one person is directing it. It's an anomaly. What woke the king up? It's the only event that takes place inside one of the three pairs of feasts, causing you to focus your attention on it.

There's a scholar, Old Testament scholar, Karen Jobes. She has a great commentary. She says, by making the pivot point of the *peripety* an insignificant event—waking up from a sleepless night—rather than a height of dramatic tension, like building toward impalement stakes, the author is taking the focus away from human action and implies that an unseen force is controlling the reversal of destiny in the story.

What takes place because the king couldn't fall asleep that night? See, if the king fell asleep that night, then he wouldn't have called his servant. And if he didn't call his servant, then the servant never would have opened up the Chronicles. And if the servant never would have opened the Chronicles, he never would have read about this guy named Mordecai that saved his life. And if he never did that, then the king never would have realized that he never actually honored Mordecai. And if he never actually honored Mordecai, then Haman wouldn't have had the idea to march him through the streets. And if that never happened, then Mordecai never would have been marched through the streets, which would have driven Haman completely insane to the point where Haman went and carved the impalement stake. You see how one sleepless night—a fluke that was not controlled by any man—drove the pinnacle of the story and the drama? Destruction, extermination of the Jews. The elimination of Haman, the Agagite, would have never taken place if it wasn't for this insignificant sleepless night that no human being caused to happen. It's awesome.

So Exodus—Exodus, whoo! There are so many connections between the Exodus story and Esther, which is pretty neat, but regardless. So...

Reading as Intentional Structure

Esther 9:1—the author flat out admits his or her agenda in how they wrote the story. I really want to put this point home because when I was growing up reading Esther, I read it like the book of Kings. This is the study and this is exactly how it happened. It's just facts and nothing. I don't need to read anything outside of just what it says there. I don't need to become emotionally attached. It's not a story that can engulf me. I don't need to be there in the narrative.

Esther 9:1, the author flat out admits her agenda or his agenda of how they wrote this story. The reversals, all of the irony—it wasn't coincidence that you found that in the story. It's how the structure was intentionally set up. On the 13th day of the 12th month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. And on this day, the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them.

If this was written like a chronicle, you could just put a period there because nothing else matters. No extra commentary matters. We don't need to know your opinion, author. But now the tables were turned on the Jews who got the upper hand over those who hated them.

See, we read that and we're like, oh, well, of course he put that in there. No, he didn't have to. This is part of the story. He's breaking in to let you know—aha!—the tables are turned, right?

The Reversals of Esther

As I said before, the book in your Bible was not simply a bunch of stuff that happened in the past. Sure, yes, but an author took the time to edit, conflate, and structure the story to actually make it entertaining and engaging. You weren't meant to read it just like Chronicles. You were meant to read it with the intention of being engulfed by the characters, to have feelings, to have concerns, and to walk away with a life-impacting message about choosing to embrace or live out the life that God has for you to live and stop pretending or being double-faced in how you live your life every day.

This makes the book intriguing, and it's not long. The story of Esther is about a genocidal plan to kill the Jews, which against all odds actually results in the opposite. Instead of being exterminated, the Jews of Persia are delivered. But not just that. They become empowered by the high rank of Esther and Mordecai. Haman, the powerful, sinister destroyer, not only loses all of his power but is himself destroyed. Same day—forced to honor the man he wanted to destroy by taking him around on a horse.

See Vashti, Vashti—it's one of those reversals that we missed. Vashti, the queen in the beginning, risks her life by defying the king's word and refusing to appear before him when summoned. Esther risks her life by defying the king's word and appearing before him unsummoned. So good. Ironical reversals everywhere that conspire against evil to destroy it.

See, the Feast of Purim that we celebrate honors this grand reversal in the month of Adar. That's actually what the writer writes. Another reversal. The month of Adar, when sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning was turned into a day of celebration.

The Story of Saul and Agag

See, one big point the author makes, a huge macro reversal, is seen in the connections that many scholars write about. The story of Saul and Agag, the king of the Amalekites. The Amalekites are mentioned as a people that attacked Israel in the Torah when they were in the wilderness, and God vowed to always destroy them, right? And later in the biblical story, Israel is established in the land, Saul is appointed king, and God decrees that he's finally going to fulfill this. He's finally going to destroy the Amalekites, led by King Agag. And there's only one rule. King Saul, there's only one rule. You're going to destroy everybody and everything. You are not to take any spoils of this battle.

Did Saul do that? But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best sheep and cattle, the fat calf and lambs, everything that was good to them. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak, they totally destroyed. So not only did Saul not kill the king, he took a bunch of spoils. This is the dramatic scene where he reaches out to Samuel's garment and tears it and ends up losing the prophecy. Yeah, God's going to rip this kingdom from you. You're going to be dethroned.

Mordecai and the Amalekite Connection

What's interesting is that Saul is identified as being a Benjamite and a son of Kish. In the story of Esther, Mordecai is also identified as being from the tribe of Benjamin and a son of Kish, of the lineage of Kish. So when you see that connection, what conclusions do you think the author of Esther is trying to get you to recognize? Is there a connection between Mordecai and Saul? Is Mordecai the new Saul? Who's the enemy of Mordecai? Haman. Oh look, he's an Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. Here we have another conflict about to take place between the Amalekites and Israel, built into the story of Esther.

Except this time, the circumstances are different. This time, Israel has no army. Israel has no king. They're not even in their own land. The battle's taking place in Persia. When Saul was king, God asked for faithfulness while they had an army, a priesthood, sacrifices, the prophets, and Israel did not obey. Here we see God's faithfulness does not drop just because ours does. That's an amen moment in the story of Esther.

God's Faithfulness Continues

The reversal that takes place is in the failure of Israel, eventually leading them into exile in Babylon, which Persia ended up taking over. And now what's neat is, like I said, the post-exilic books such as Ezra and Nehemiah and Chronicles and Haggai and Zechariah are being written in the same time scope of their stories, post-Babylonian exile. But for them, they're back in the land. These are the Jews who did not stay in Persia. And these books ask the question, is God still going to be with us? Do we still have a covenant relationship with this God?

And the reversal of Haman's high rank, power, and authority being brought low while Mordecai and Esther and the Jews are elevated is supposed to be a message of hope that just has a big, loud yes. Yes. God is still keeping his part of the covenant. God's promise to cultivate a nation of priests still stood, even in the diaspora, even if they were not in the land.

The Contrast: Obedience and Disobedience

See, Saul chose to disobey, leaning on his own terms, taking plunder from a military victory against the Amalekites. The author of Esther emphasizes that the Jews in Susa, the Jews that stood up and fought against the enemies, Amalekites, if you will, in the story, he puts this little comment in there. By the way, they didn't take the plunder. It's a big reversal.

And when we choose to embrace the covenant identity God has given to us, when we truly rely only on him, when we obey not for our own fortune, but for his glory, salvation, blessing, and guidance happens. In describing how this time of recognizing God's faithfulness was held, it says that they did this. This is a huge point in the story. Therefore, the Jews of the villages who lived in the rural towns. So the word here for gifts in Hebrew is *minot*.

The Meaning of Purim Gifts

And it's good food choices, right? Cheesecake. I don't care if it's not *shavuot*. Cheesecake at Purim is good. But there's another meaning, or another context in the meaning, and that's

found in [Psalm 16](#), 5. So in this verse, we have minot, which appears in Esther, big whoop. But we also have another word, and it's gurel. And gurel is...

The reason why we call this holiday Purim is because the Persian word for die or dice or cast lots is pur. Pur, Purim, casting lots. The Hebrew equivalent of that word is gurel. And both words are found in the book of Esther. But as seen here, gurel is used in the Bible to mean lots, but it's also, as it's here in [Psalm 16](#), 5, it's also used to describe the fate or decision that comes not from casting lots, but from God.

Menot, gurel—both words that are very significant in the book of Esther. So as Purim tradition dictates, we give menote to one another. And in doing so, menote are not simply slices of cheesecake, good food. No, they represent something bigger: the destiny and decision God has made for them. Have it, enjoy it. Be reminded that this is God's decision and destiny for you—that the destiny for you, for God's people, will never be determined by a foreign power as it is here by casting lots.

Purim and Foster Care

So this Purim, by the way, we're not giving food. We typically give food to men's shelters and whatnot. This year, we're actually asking you to bring essentials for children: new shoes, underwear, diapers, bottles, toothbrushes, toothpaste, for us to give directly to the foster care closet in York County. It's a ministry that is specifically set up to directly give these items to foster parents and foster children as soon as they're placed into care. So please do that on March 9th. Bring something to give to children in need.

This year, we want to give them a note that symbolizes the sovereignty of our God in the darkest of places for these children. That's why that's significant.

How to Read Esther Prophetically

Okay, so why does the title of your message say "How to Read Esther Prophetically"? Is Haman a portrait of the Antichrist or something?

I don't think that's the intention of the author of Esther. If someone comes and wants to destroy God's people, they can always be a portrait of Haman. Name every person that's ever persecuted the Jewish people or Christians. They are all Hamans. This is the force of evil that is constantly attempting to exterminate the promises of God. But as believers, we embrace our identity, not wavering, and we stand for God's covenantal promises with boldness.

See, here's the thing about going that direction. We've already tasted salvation. We know the goodness of God and we're told not to fear because of it. So please don't let someone use God's words of hope for fear mongering. It's not what it's there for. The message in Esther is God's providence always stands for his people and his covenant promises. Whatever happens, he has this. He has this, hold onto the hope. Don't fear. He is our rock, he is our shelter. Don't fear.

Prophecy Beyond Prediction

The reason why I included the word prophecy in the title is because predicting the future is not exactly the full scope of prophecy in the Bible. In the Bible, we have many people known as prophets and seers that do much more than just predict future events. A large majority of what they write are not futuristic. It was the messages that God was giving them to tell Israel then, right now. Shape up, come back to me, stop your nonsense. Repent, now, do it now.

Abraham is called a prophet by God himself in [Genesis 27](#). Abraham is not really known for giving future predictions like some Nostradamus, right? No, he's known for living out the covenant of God to all nations. How do we read Esther prophetically? We just did. God's message of hope and providence for his people—that his plan is always going to come through. He is always in control. Do not worry. Don't you know he takes care of the birds and the lilies? Why are you worried? Don't be anxious. Depend, rely, have faith. Someone else said that.

The providence of God is real. And like Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews of Persia, we experience it daily, whether we want to recognize it or not. Are we willing to live that out, that boldness out? Are we willing to say, you know what? I know the king and I am his.

The Resurrection and Covenant Hope

See, there's a type of eschatological hope that does reside in Esther, something that as believers we do not need to dismiss. On the third day, death could not hold the Savior that boldly stared sin and death in the face. Death and sin threw everything they had at Yeshua. And after he was placed in the ground, on the third day something happened. The ground shook, the stone rolled, and his lungs were engulfed with air. Death had no choice but to release him, being defeated in the process. The resurrection of Yeshua has transformed the spiritual heritage of believers, of which the book of Esther, I believe, is a part.

See, as Christians, we know the hope of the resurrection. We too are invited to look at death, stare it in the face, and although it could be painful at times, we can face it with the assurance

that the grave will not be the victor in the end. We will have victory over the grave despite the world around us.

The redemption of the Jews in Persia, I believe, is a hope that foreshadows the redemption of all nations as they enter into a covenant relationship with God through Yeshua as the Messiah. As believers in Yeshua, it's appropriate to look back on the Hebrew Bible and see a journey towards him. So throughout Christian history, this has been the commonly accepted kind of overtone of Esther—that this connection between covenant with God will usher in the ultimate defeat of evil in the end.

God's Providence and Sabbath Joy

And I love that. Something that I really love is in [Exodus 9](#), 16, it says that on the day of the victory in Esther's story, the Jews received rest or relief from their enemies. This is what sparked the celebration. This is the joy, right?—that the thing that was so determined to get them, to destroy them, to conquer them was defeated. The joy was from the peace of knowing that they didn't have to be afraid anymore. The day of death had come and it had gone and they were still there. In a sense, Purim is a type of Sabbath, a joyous rest after the battle with death had passed. This is the ultimate sense of any type of eschatological joy that we would derive from it as believers.

Worship team, you guys can come up.

God's Providence Through Yeshua

The final realization of this pinnacle motive in what we see as believers in Esther can be perceived at the resurrection of Yeshua. In [Revelation 1](#).17, we have this profound verse saying, As believers, Purim runs deeper with the actualization of God's providence through Yeshua, which produces the eternal life that we find ourselves in and living out. This is the prophetic message for now, for you.

And so as we celebrate Purim, know and understand that we celebrate God's providence and his faithfulness and his plan and his will, and our continued prayer should always be for God to give us the courage to step out and fully embrace the identity that he would call us to live out in this world. Not the one of the world, but one that resembles Yeshua.

Esther as a Model

See, the thing about the narrative of Esther and why we encourage our little girls to dress up as Esther in Ephraim, especially after realizing how the story starts out, people would have a problem. Why would we want them to dress up as Esther? Well, the thing about it is when we look at Esther and we want to emulate Esther as a model and as a mentor for our children out of the biblical story, when we encourage them to dress up as Esther, we're telling them to dress up as Esther. As the Esther at the end of the story, not the beginning. We're telling them to dress up as the Esther of the story who faced the trial and had the courage and the bravery to say, you know what? I am going to live out the identity that God has always had for me fully in my life. To stand no matter what. That's why we celebrate the character of Esther as that model. So whether we see God working or not, we trust and we know he is with us always, no matter what we're going through. Will we have the boldness that Esther had at the right moment to say, you know what? I need to make a decision that will forever impact my life and the lives of those around me to accept the identity that God has blatantly called me to live out.

So please stand as we conclude services with worship.

Closing Prayer and Remarks

Alvina Malkinu, our Father, our King. Father, I thank you for this Sabbath day, this time that we can jump into the stories that you have left us about your providence and your faithfulness and your sovereignty, despite how far away we may be from you. Father, I ask in the name of Yeshua that the spirit that resides within us would continue to do its work, to be a comforter, to remind us that you are faithful and that we are not to be afraid ever, but always relying on you in all circumstances, that we would have wisdom in all circumstances and faith holding on to a hope that is only found in your Son. Father, we thank you in the name of Yeshua, we pray. Amen.

Guys, if you need prayer today... I'm Matthew Vander Els, pastor of Founded in Truth Fellowship, and we hope you enjoyed this message and that it was a blessing to you and your family. Founded in Truth exists to cultivate a fellowship of image bearers that live the redeemed life only Yeshua can give. If this ministry has been a blessing to you, we would love to hear from you. Send us an email through the contact form on our site and tell us how God has used this ministry to edify your faith and your relationship with Him. If you would like to donate to Founded in Truth Ministries and be a part of this ministry's continued impact, you can do so through our website. Thank you for joining us, and we pray that you experience the peace and the joy of God's holy Sabbath. Shabbat Shalom.

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