

This book is the International version of a college level textbook prepared a few years ago for a Bible college in South India.

It can also be used for Bible study groups in local churches and for individual students of the Bible. It was written it with the South Indian Christian context in mind. But with minor adaptions it should be useful in any cultural context.

The Bible quotations are based on the World English Bible (WEB) translation.

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## Role models

We all have role models, even from our birth. Most of us will have our parents or others guardians and close relatives as our first role models. We watch them, we listen to them, we see how they behave – and we copy them. We behave like them.

As we grow older we add persons to our gallery of role models. Classmates, older children in our street, teachers, friends, pastors and other leaders of our church. We admire them, we follow them, we learn from them – and we copy them. We talk like them, we act like them, we dress like them – and we admire them. They become our heroes.

Then we will add people we do not know personally to our gallery of role models. People we read about in books and newspapers, people we watch on TV or in films, people we heard about from our friends or our pastor. Some of them we will try to copy. We may dress and walk and talk like a movie star, or like a famous cricket player, or like a popular TV evangelist. They too become our heroes.

But there is one big problem with role models: they come in different shapes. We can roughly divide them into two main categories: good people and bad people. Some of the people we copy and try to act like – they could be parents, relatives, friends, teachers, politicians, sportsmen, movie stars, or whatever – are good people. Others – even they could be parents and friends, or movie stars and TV evangelists, or sportsmen and pastors – are bad people.

What I just said is, of course, not quite true. There are very few person who are entirely good, and there are just as few persons who are entirely bad. Most of them are, just like you and me, both good and bad. There is some good and some bad in all of us.

So we need to learn to evaluate people. We need to study their personalities and the way they live. Their good character traits, their good behavior, and – most of all – their godliness are to be imitated by us. But their bad character traits, their bad behavior, and – most of all – their ungodliness are to be shunned by us.

We can also say that people with many good character traits, and those who most of the time behave well and live unselfish and godly lives, are good role models. Their example should be admired and followed. While people with many bad character traits, and those who most of the time behave arrogantly, selfishly and ungodly, are bad role model. Their example should not be followed. These people should instead be warnings to us.

In the pages of the Bible we come across hundreds of people. But it is important that we understand that these people are not all good people just because they have been given a place in the “good book," the Bible. A few of them are good, many of them are bad, and most of them are both good and bad. Even great persons like Moses and David had weaknesses and shortcomings. They were evidently mightily used by God, but they didn’t get everything right. Moses became angry, discouraged, and disobedient, and God did not allow him to enter the Promised Land. David was an adulterer and a murderer, and God did not allow him to build the Jerusalem temple. We can learn many good things from great people like them. But we must not follow their example in things that they did wrong.

In the three Old Testament books that carry the names of Ruth, Daniel and Esther, we find some unusually positive role models. It is actually quite difficult to find any faults at all with Ruth and Boaz, with Daniel and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and with Esther. Also Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi and Esther’s uncle Mordecai are basically very good people. The purpose of this book is to study these positive role models in their historical context and see what we can learn from them. Their personalities, their behavior, their achievements, and the way they were used by God in those days can help us deal better with our own lives and situation in South India today – and inspire us to be used by God even more effectively.

As Christian believers today, we are people of the New Covenant. We have access to the New Testament texts. We have the gospel stories about Jesus – his life, his ministry, and his teaching. We have the book of Acts about how the Holy Spirit worked through the apostles and the believers in the early church. We have the epistles, which interpret the gospel and teach us how to live lives that are pleasing to God. We have the book of Revelation, where Jesus walks among the churches, evaluating their spiritual lives and inspiring them to look forward to the ultimate fulfillment of the Kingdom of God with his second coming and the new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). Until that day, we as God’s people in South India should live lives that reflect the principles of the Kingdom of God, so that people can see Jesus Christ through us and be drawn to him. Our goal for our individual – and collective – spiritual lives should be to become full grown people, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). Jesus is our ultimate role model!

Ruth

# Ruth studies

### Introduction to Ruth

The story of Ruth takes place during the time of the judges, which began with the death of Joshua (around 1375 BC) and ended with the introduction of the monarchy with Saul as its first king (around 1050 BC). Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi lived during the latter part of this period.

The period of the judges was a dark period in the history of Israel. It was a time of backsliding, of low moral standards, and of false spirituality. It was also a time when the Israelites experienced periodical political unrest and oppression by foreign nations.

Again and again the Israelites turned their backs on God and his covenant. Instead they worshiped the Canaanite gods. They also copied the lifestyle of the pagan nations among whom they had settled in the Promised Land. They behaved as if they were spiritual and godly. But their hearts were full of sin and falsehood.

Their backsliding brought God’s punishment on them. It came in the form of foreign oppressors. But in their sufferings caused them to turn to God and beg for his deliverance. God in his faithfulness had compassion on them. So he sent deliverers (called judges) to save the Israelites from their foreign oppressors.

These judges were mainly warriors, not leaders like Moses, or Joshua, or Samuel (who was called the last of the judges; he was the prophet whom God used to anoint the first two Israelite kings), or king David (who was “a king of God’s own heart” and who became the model for all future kings of Israel). The book of Judges ends on a very pessimistic note: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everybody did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

So the historical setting of this sweet little story about Naomi and Ruth is very dark indeed. We will appreciate the book of Ruth better if we keep the troubled period of the judges in mind as we go through the texts.

This is not a story about mighty warriors and saviors of the nation. It is a story about an Israelite family from Bethlehem in Judah and the foreign woman Ruth who marries into this ordinary family. So it is a story about God working in the lives of ordinary people. But it is also a story that throws light on God’s wider purposes: both king David and the Lord Jesus were later born in the family line of Ruth, a humble and faithful Moabite woman.

The book of Ruth is a literary masterpiece, written by a very skillful, but anonymous, author. The story moves from famine to harvest, from death to birth, from emptiness to fulfillment, from despair to contentment, from hopelessness to hope.

In a few pages – only four chapters in our Bibles – we get to know three great role models:

1. Naomi is a God-fearing woman from Bethlehem in Judah, whose life is turned from emptiness to fullness and from bitterness to contentment, as God’s plan is fulfilled through her and her family.
2. Ruth is a young Moabite widow, totally committed to her mother-in-law Naomi and even willing to become an Israelite and follow the faith of the people of Israel. She is God-fearing, humble, obedient, and faithful – and used by God to fulfill his plan for the nation of Israel and for the salvation of mankind.
3. Boaz is a God-fearing, righteous, and honorable man, who is willing to do the right thing during one of the darkest periods of the history of Israel.

We who live in South India today have much to learn from them.

### Study 1: Naomi and Ruth, chapter 1

Comments

The events of the book of Ruth took place “in the days when the judges judged” (v 1). This was about 1375–1050 BC. As Ruth was the great-grandmother of king David (5:17), who was born around 1040 BC, we can assume that that the famine in the area of Bethlehem in Judah occurred around 1130 BC.

Moab was situated east of the Dead Sea. The Israelites camped on the plains of Moab during the time of Moses before they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. Ever since those days there had been periods of hostility between the Moabites and the Israelites. And the idol-worshiping Moabites are depicted very negatively in most Old Testament texts. But in the book of Ruth we do not find any such hostility. On the contrary, the Israelite couple Elimelech and Naomi seemed to have lived peacefully in Moab. And after the death of their father, the two sons Mahlon and Chilion both married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah (v 4, see also 4:10).

In ancient Israel there was a law to protect the widow and guarantee the continuation of the family line (see Deut 25:5–10). Naomi referred to this law when she asked, “Do I still have sons in my womb, who could become your husbands?” (v 11) She was too old to have any more children. And even if she did marry and have sons, Ruth and Orpah would be too old to have children by them at the time they had grown up. We will say more about the so called “levirate marriage” custom in study 4.

It is of interest for us to note the way in which the author makes use of the meaning of the Hebrew names. “Bethlehem” means “house of bread," and the story begins with letting the readers understand that there was no bread there (perhaps indicating God’s punishment on Judah), while food must have been available in the neighboring country of Moab. “Elimelech” means “the Lord is king," and the book of Ruth illustrates that God is in control of the events. “Naomi” means “pleasantness.” But when she returned to Bethlehem, Naomi said that she should be called “Mara," which means “bitterness” (v 20). Ruth and Orpah are Moabite names.

After the death of all the three men of her family, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. It was possible for her to do so, as there was no longer famine in Judah (v 6). She set off with her two daughters-in-law in the month March or April so that they would arrive in time for the barley harvest. In ancient Israel the barley was harvested in April (v 22) and the wheat in May (2:23).

Questions

1. Why did Elimelech and his family go to Moab?
2. Why did Naomi decide to return to Judah?
3. What reasons must Naomi have had to ask her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab?
4. What does the reader find out about Orpah?
5. What reasons did Ruth give for not wanting to stay behind in Moab?
6. What kind of reception did Naomi and Ruth receive, when they arrived at Bethlehem?
7. How did Naomi describe her life during the past ten years?
8. How would you characterize the three women in this chapter?

### Study 2: Ruth and Boaz, chapter 2

Comments

The law of Moses made various provisions for needy persons (the poor, the fatherless, the widows, and the foreigners). One such law was “the law of gleaning” (see Lev 19:9–10; 23:22; Deut 24:21). In the story about Ruth, we see this law in practice: Ruth (a poor and widowed foreigner) was allowed to gather barley and wheat from Boaz’s fields (2:2, 7, 9, 23).

In ancient Israel, men and women worked together with the harvest. The men cut the standing grain with hand sickles, and the women (sometimes together with some of the men) bound the grain into sheaves (compare v 9).

As the result of Boaz’s generous instruction to his harvesters (v 15–16), Ruth had a very successful first day as a gleaner. She brought back a whole ephah (about 20 liters) of threshed barley to her mother-in-law that evening (v 17–18).

A kinsman-redeemer (compare “a near kinsman” in v 20) was responsible for protecting the interests of needy family members, for example to redeem land that a poor family member had sold to person outside the family (Lev 25:25–27), or to redeem a relative who had been sold into slavery (Lev 25:47–49). A kinsman-redeemer could also provide an heir for a brother who had died (see Deut 25:5–10; compare Mark 12:18–19). In the book of Ruth, the term kinsman-redeemer is used about two persons. First, Naomi saw Boaz (who belonged to the clan of Elimelech, 2:1) as a kinsman-redeemer in 2:20. Then at the end of the story, the women of Bethlehem called Boaz’s and Ruth’s son Obed a kinsman-redeemer (4:14–15).

The reader is repeatedly reminded of Ruth’s vulnerable situation. She was a foreigner from Moab (v 2, 6, 11, 21). She and her mother-in-law Naomi were both widows and had no man in their home who could provide for them (v 11). So Ruth had to make use of gleaning in order for them not to starve. Not all landowners would allow gleaning, so Ruth needed to find a field that belonged to a kind and generous man (v 2, 19). It was also dangerous for a young and beautiful woman to work in the field of a stranger (v 9, 22).

Questions

1. Who was Boaz?
2. Why did Ruth want to go to the fields?
3. What dangers could Ruth face in the fields?
4. In what ways did Boaz help Ruth?
5. Why was Naomi surprised, when Ruth came home that first evening?
6. How long did Ruth glean from Boaz’s fields?
7. How can we characterize Boaz in this chapter?
8. How can we characterize Naomi in this chapter?
9. How can we characterize Ruth in this chapter?
10. In verse 3, the Hebrew text has a phrase that means “as it happened” or “as it turned out.” Why do you think the author uses this phrase?

### Study 3: At the threshing floor, chapter 3

Comments

During the harvest season, the landowner often spent his nights on the threshing floor so that he could guard his grain. But the harvest season was also a time of festivity and celebration (“they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest,” Is 9:3), when the landowner and his workers feasted together in the evening after a day of hard work in the fields and on the threshing floor.

What happened between Ruth and Boaz that night on the threshing floor outside of Bethlehem must be understood in the context of the characters of the three persons involved (Naomi, Ruth and Boaz) and in the context of ancient Israelite culture. Nothing wrong or indecent took place between Ruth and Boaz. Naomi was dealing with the hardships of her and her daughter-in-law Ruth by trying to find the help of a kinsman-redeemer in accordance with the law of Moses (2:20; 3:2). One way to do so, was to find a home for Ruth where she would be safe and provided for (v 1). Ruth’s reputation was impeccable. All Bethlehem knew that she was a woman of noble character and that her character would not be tainted by following Naomi’s advice (v 11). Boaz was a prominent and wealthy man (2:1) and evidently a respectable citizen. He behaves honorably all through the book of Ruth. So we should not interpret what happens in this chapter in the light of our own South Indian culture, but in the light of the culture of ancient Israel.

But we also find that Boaz was careful not to give room for gossip and evil talk. So he made sure that Ruth left the threshing floor early in the morning, before anybody else was around to see her (v 14).

Two symbolic actions took place between Ruth and Boaz that night on the threshing floor. First, Ruth uncovered Boaz’s feet and lay down at his feet (v 4, 7). By doing so, Ruth reminded Boaz of his obligation as kinsman-redeemer. Second, Ruth asked Boaz to spread the corner of his garment over her (v 11). By doing so, she was asking Boaz for his protection as her kinsman-redeemer. Some Bible scholars read a marriage proposal into this request (compare Ezek 16:8, where God tells Israel, “Later when I passed by you and looked at you I saw that you had reached the age of love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I pledged myself to you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God. And you became mine”).

Questions

1. How did Naomi tell Ruth to prepare herself for the night? What could have been the reason for these preparations?
2. How was Boaz disturbed in his sleep during the night?
3. How did Boaz respond to Ruth’s request that he spread the edge of his cloak over her? And what do you think he referred to by the expression “You have shown more loyalty to me now than at the beginning” (v 10)?
4. What did Boaz tell Ruth about their relationship?
5. How did Naomi react to Ruth’s report about her night with Boaz?
6. How can we characterize Boaz in this chapter?
7. How can we characterize Naomi in this chapter?
8. How can we characterize Ruth in this chapter

### Study 4: Boaz marries Ruth, chapter 4

Comments

In times of peace the city gate was the center of town life in ancient Israel (v 1). That was where elders administrated justice, where business transactions were made, and where merchants conducted their business. Most citizens would pass through the city gate during the course of a day, and witnesses were easily available there (v 11). As soon as Boaz saw his competitor coming to the gate, he assembled ten of the elders (v 3) to settle the matter of who should be the kinsman-redeemer in the case of Elimelech and the surviving women of that family.

What Boaz said about Naomi selling the property that had belonged to her dead husband Elimelech (v 3) can be understood in two ways. One, Naomi had inherited the property from her husband Elimelech and was now the owner of it. But she was poor and she was more in need of money than land. So she felt forced to sell her land in order to survive. It was the duty of the kinsman-redeemer to buy this land so that it would not be sold outside the family. Two, Naomi did not own the land. It had belonged to her husband Elimelech, who had been forced to sell it before he and his family moved from Bethlehem to Moab. Naomi owned the right of redemption, the right to buy the land back, but did not have the money to do so. So what she was “selling” (v 3) to the kinsman-redeemer was her right of redemption, her right to buy the land back.

To understand what happens in this chapter we need to know about the levirate marriage. This was an ancient Israelite custom (also found among other nations, and still practiced among orthodox Jews today), by which a man must marry his brother’s widow in order to provide an heir for the dead brother. In the Bible this custom goes back to the story about Judah, his son Onan and Onan’s sister-in-law Tamar (Er’s wife) in Genesis 38. Judah tells Onan, “Go in to your brother’s wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her, and raise up seed to your brother” (Gen 38:8). Onan did not fulfill his duty, so Tamar took matters in her own hand and tricked her father-in-law Judah so she became pregnant by him. The son born to them was Perez. This story is referred to in the book of Ruth (4:13). Levirate marriage was regulated in the law of Moses: “If brothers dwell together and one of them dies and he has no son, then his wife must not be married outside the family to a stranger: Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her to him as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. The firstborn whom she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, so that his name is not blotted out of Israel” (Deut 25:5–6). In the case of Ruth, the duty of marrying her – and thereby carrying on the name of both her dead father-in-law Elimelech (whose surviving widow Naomi was too old to have any more children) and her own dead husband Mahlon – fell upon one of Elimelech’s close male relatives, the kinsman-redeemers. Boaz was Elimelech’s second-closest kinsman-redeemer.

Ephrathah (v 11) was a name for the area surrounding Bethlehem. It means “fruitful land” in Hebrew. Micah used this name in his prophecy about the origin of the Messiah (Mic 5:2), which was partly quoted by the scribes at the court of king Herod the Great when the Magi from the East came to Jerusalem looking for Jesus (Matt 2:1–6).

Questions

1. Explain the two ways in which Boaz’s statement in verse 3 (“Naomi is selling the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech”) can be understood. Use your own words and do not just read from the comments above. Which of these two possibilities do you prefer? Why?
2. Why did the first kinsman-redeemer change his mind? What does his change of mind tell us about Boaz?
3. Who were present when the kinsman-redeemer matter was settled?
4. How was the transfer of property legalized?
5. The blessing that the elders and the witnesses at the gate bestowed on Boaz contains references to earlier biblical characters. Who are they?
6. How does the author express the conception of Ruth’s and Boaz’s son?
7. What do we learn about Obed and Ruth through the women’s blessing of Naomi? And how do the women express the relationship between Naomi and Obed? How should this relationship be understood?
8. How was king David related to Ruth?
9. In the New Testament we find two genealogies of Jesus, one in Matt 1 and one in Luke 3. Which of these genealogies mentions Ruth?
10. How can we characterize Boaz in this chapter?

### Study 5: Role models in the book of Ruth

Introduction

During our study of the book of Ruth, we have come to know its three main characters, Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, quite well. In spite of their differences in sex, age, cultural background, and social standing, they had one thing in common: They were good representatives of the people of God during Old Testament times.

Naomi, Ruth and Boaz were people of integrity and godliness in a dark and difficult period of the history of Israel. We, too, need to be people of integrity and godliness. We, too, live in a dark and difficult period of the history of mankind. We, too, need to be good representatives of the kingdom of God.

So what can we learn from Naomi, Ruth and Boaz? In what way can they be role models for us?

Assignment

Prepare a paper on either Naomi, Ruth or Boaz. Call your paper

* + “Boaz – a role model for me,” or
  + “Naomi – a role model for me,” or
  + “Ruth – a role model for me”

Use material from the four previous studies. Your paper must consist of two parts:

Part 1: A description/characterization of the person you have chosen.

Part 2: An explanation of the ways, in which that person is a role model for you. Your explanation must include reflections on problems and issues that you face as a Christian believer in South India today.

Present your paper to your fellow-students. It could be done as a part of this course. Or it could be done in connection with a college devotion.

# Ruth answers

### Answers 1: Naomi and Ruth, chapter 1

Answers

1. Elimelech and his family went to Moab to find relief from the famine that had struck Judah. They did not plan to settle there permanently (“sojourn,” v 1), but they ended up living there for ten years (v 4). During these years three important things happened in the family (v 3–5): Elimelech died. The two sons grew up and married local women. But before they had any children, they also died.
2. Naomi decided to return to Judah as soon as she found out that the period of famine was over in Judah (v 6).
3. Naomi must have had two main reasons for asking her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab:
   * Moab was their home country, and they would be happier there than in Judah, where they would be strangers. In Moab they had family. They knew the local culture. There they could also worship the gods of their own people.
   * They would be able to remarry and have children if they remained in Moab. But there would be no chances for two Moabite women of finding husbands in Judah. And Naomi herself was too old to have more sons so that they (in accordance with the law of Moses) could marry them and so carry on the family line of Elimelech. And even if she did have sons, it would take too many years for them to grow up and become old enough to marry Ruth and Orpah.
4. Orpah listened to Naomi’s advice. She went back to her own people and to worshiping their gods (v 15). Chemosh was the main god of the Moabites (compare Num 21:29; Judges 11:24).
5. Ruth had one main reason for not wanting to stay behind in Moab (v 16–17): She wanted to stay with her mother-in-law Naomi, wherever she went and as long as she lived. God would be her witness to her commitment, which had two consequences:
   1. She would become an Israelite like Naomi.
   2. She would worship the Lord of Israel, Naomi’s God.
6. Naomi and Ruth were received with surprise, when they arrived at Bethlehem. But it was difficult for the women to recognize Naomi (v 19). Perhaps she had changed a lot over her ten years in a foreign country. Or perhaps the people of Bethlehem never expected that she would return so they wondered who these two women in foreign clothes might be.
7. Naomi used two metaphors to describe her life during the past ten years (v 20–21):
   1. Her name should really be changed from ”Naomi” (which means “pleasantness” in Hebrew) to “Mara” (which means “bitterness” in Hebrew). Her life was pleasant when she left Bethlehem, but now it had become bitter.
   2. She went away “full” (referring her family: husband and two young sons), but she returned “empty” (referring to her loss of both husband and sons). But she was also “empty” in another sense: Her womb was “empty” as she was too old to have any more sons. Because of this, the family line of Elimelech had been cut off and become “empty”.
8. The three women in chapter 1 can be characterized like this:
   1. Naomi: She is faithful to her husband, so she comes with him to Moab. She is also a faithful Israelite, so she returns to Bethlehem to rejoin her family and her people as soon as the famine is over. She is concerned about the welfare of her two daughters-in-law and wants the best for them. She is also concerned about the future of her husband’s family line – now that her sons are dead without leaving any children behind, and she is too old to bear any more children. She is well aware of her situation, her “emptiness” and her “bitterness.”
   2. Orpah: She is a good young woman. She is willing to settle in a foreign country with her mother-in-law Naomi. She is also obedient to Naomi and returns to her own country and people when told to do so.
   3. Ruth: She is an outstanding young woman. She is totally committed to her mother-in-law, even willing to become an Israelite and convert to the faith of the people of Israel.

### Answers 2: Ruth and Boaz, chapter 2

Answers

1. Boaz belonged to the same clan as Elimelech, Naomi’s dead husband (v 1). It was one of the clans of the tribe of Judah. So Boaz was related to Naomi and Ruth by marriage (v 20). He was a prominent and rich man (v 1). So he had a good reputation in the city of Bethlehem. He was also a landowner.
2. Ruth wanted to go to the fields to provide food for her and Naomi (v 2, 7). They had no source of income. And the law of Moses had provisions for poor people (particularly the fatherless, widows and resident foreigners). They could pick the leftovers from the harvest field. But not all landowners were generous enough to allow this practice. So it was important that Ruth found a field that belonged to a good and generous man.
3. The main danger that Ruth faced in the fields was assault from men (v 9, 22). Of course she could also be beaten and chased away by the landlord or by his harvesters.
4. Boaz helped Ruth in several ways:
   1. He invited her to glean from his fields during the whole harvest season (v 8, 21, 23).
   2. He told his harvesters to be generous to Ruth. They should even allow her to pick stalks from the sheaves, and they should leave some grain behind for Ruth to gather (v 15–16).
   3. He invited her to drink from the water jugs that he had brought for his harvesters (v 9). He also invited her to have food and drink with him (v 14). He gave her so much food that she could save some of it for her mother in the evening (v 18).
   4. He treated her very politely and gave her useful advice (8–9, 12).
5. I think there were three reasons, why Naomi was surprised, when Ruth came home after that first evening of gleaning in Boaz’s field:
   1. Ruth had brought with her so much barley – more than one woman could be expected to glean in one day (v 18).
   2. Naomi must also have been surprised about the leftover food that Ruth brought home for her (v 18).
   3. But most of all she was surprised about the Lord’s guidance. God had led Ruth to a field that belonged to Boaz, their close relative and a possible kinsman-redeemer (v 20). This verse is a turning point in the story, as the darkness of Naomi’s despair is punctured by a glimmer of hope.
6. Ruth gleaned from Boaz’s fields during the whole season of the grain harvest (v 23). This season lasted for several weeks during April and May. First the barley was ready for harvest, then the wheat.
7. Boaz can be characterized like this in this chapter:
   1. He was a God-fearing man, who kept the law of Moses and allowed Ruth (a poor, foreign widow) to glean from his fields. He also realized that God’s hand was at work in the circumstances of Ruth’s life and wished her God’s blessings (v 12).
   2. He was a polite man, who treated his servants and a young foreign woman with much respect and decency.
   3. He was a generous man, who allowed Ruth to pick more grain than the letter of the law stipulated. He also shared his meal with her and allowed her to take home the leftovers for Naomi.
   4. He was man who showed concern for the safety of a young and vulnerable woman like Ruth.
8. Naomi can be characterized like this in this chapter:
   1. She was a God-fearing woman, who realized that it was God who had guided Ruth to a field that belonged to Boaz. She knew that God would now take care of their future (v 20).
   2. She was concerned about Ruth and wanted to know how her day had been (v 19). She was also concerned about Ruth’s safety (v 22).
9. Ruth can be characterized like this in this chapter:
   1. She was a hardworking woman and willing to support both herself and her aging mother-in-law.
   2. She was a polite woman, who asked for permission to glean from Boaz’s field. She also treated Boaz with much respect.
   3. She was a woman of good reputation. Boaz had heard about her hardships, her faithfulness to Naomi, and her commitment to a new country and a new faith (v 11–12).
   4. She was a thankful woman, who appreciated – and thanked – Boaz for what he was doing for her and her mother-in-law (v 13).
   5. She was a humble woman, who knew her status as a young and foreign woman before a man of standing like Boaz (v 10, 13). She had no right to demand his kindness and generosity, and he could have done whatever he wanted with his harvest and with a young, foreign woman like Ruth.
10. In the wider context of the story, the phase “as it happened” (v 3) is best understood as the narrator’s way of discretely signaling to his readers that God’s hand was at work behind the scene of these everyday events.

Of course, most people would understand what happened to Ruth on her first day of gleaning as the work of chance, or her good fortune (“as it happened”). But those who fear the Lord know that God was orchestrating Ruth’s and Naomi’s future – and the future of the history of Israel.

We who belong to the New Covenant also know that God, through these events, was preparing for the coming of Jesus, the Savior of the world.

### Answers 3: At the threshing floor, chapter 3

Answers

1. Naomi told Ruth to prepare herself for the night by taking a bath and putting on her best clothes. She also told her to wear perfume (v 3). Naomi’s reason for these preparations was to make Ruth as attractive as possible for Boaz. She new that Boaz was one of their kinsman-redeemers (2:20). She also knew that he was a good and honorable man, who had already shown that he was willing to help them. Furthermore, she thought that Boaz would be a suitable husband for Ruth (v 2) and that he would be able to provide a good home for her (v 1).
2. Boaz was sleeping heavily after a festive meal with lots of good food and drink. So he didn’t notice when Ruth came to lay down at his feet (v 7). But later during the night, he realized that someone was there with him. But at first he didn’t recognize Ruth (v 8–9).
3. Boaz responded to Ruth request that he spread the corner of his cloak over her by blessing her (v 10). Then he said, “You have shown more loyalty to me now than at the beginning” (v 10). I think that Boaz was referring to his earlier conversation with Ruth: “I have been told all that you have done to your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. And how you have left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth, and have come to a people that you didn’t know before” (2:11). But Boaz was also pleased that Ruth had come to him for protection (and probably with a hint about a future married life together), instead of seeking the help of a younger, and perhaps more attractive, man. Boaz’s statement also reveals that he must have been many years older than Ruth. Boaz promised Ruth to do all she asked for (v 11). So he promised to redeem Elimelech’s family property and to arrange an honorable marriage for Ruth.
4. Boaz gave Ruth one important piece of information about their relationship: Even if they were relatives and he was a kinsman-redeemer, there was another man who was more closely related to Naomi (and thereby to Ruth). So that man had the first refusal in the matter of who should redeem the property and marry Ruth. But Boaz was willing, and he promised before God to settle the matter somehow (v 12–13).
5. Naomi was very pleased to get Ruth’s report about her night on the threshing floor with Boaz. She now knew that their difficulties were over. Boaz was an honorable and God-fearing man, who would not break the promises he had given Ruth in the presence of the Lord (v 18).
6. Boaz can be characterized like this in this chapter:
   1. He was a man who enjoyed the pleasures of this life, as he celebrated harvest with his workers. He was happy, and he ate and drank well. He lay down to sleep on the threshing floor with a good conscience after an evening of feasting. He also seemed to be pleased about getting the attention of a much younger woman.
   2. He was a polite and courteous man. He blessed Ruth, even after she had disturbed him in his sleep. Not only that, he even called this disturbance a great kindness (v 10).
   3. He was an honorable man, who did not take advantage of Ruth when she came to his bed at night. He also did not want to risk Ruth’s reputation by allowing his workers to find out that she had visited him on the threshing floor.
   4. He again showed his concern for Ruth’s vulnerable situation by allowing her to stay with him until morning, instead of sending her home in the middle of the night (risking attacks from wild animals or drunkards).
   5. He was a man of responsibility. When he realized that Ruth had a claim on him as a kinsman-redeemer, he did not shy away from that obligation. He was even willing to ask God to be a witness to his promise to Ruth.
   6. He was a man of action, who immediately took steps to settle the matter of who should act as kinsman-redeemer in Ruth’s case, he or the other man.
   7. He again showed that he was a man of generosity, as he gave Ruth barley to take home to Naomi.
7. Naomi can be characterized like this in this chapter:
   1. She was concerned about Ruth’s future. She wanted to see her daughter-in-law settled, in a good home and with a good husband.
   2. She was determined to do something about their situation. So she carefully prepared Ruth for the next step – how to approach Boaz and make him realize his obligations as a kinsman-redeemer.
   3. She was patient, and confident, that God, through Boaz, would settle the matter of kinsman-redeemer and thereby solve all their problems (v 18).
8. Ruth can be characterized like this in this chapter:
   1. She was obedient and willing to follow Naomi’s instructions in every detail.
   2. She once again revealed her humility. After Boaz discovered her presence, she called herself his “servant” Ruth. In a quiet and humble way she not only obeyed Naomi’s instructions, but she also made herself attractive to Boaz.

### Answers 4: Boaz marries Ruth, chapter 4

Answers

1. I prefer the second of these two possibilities – that Naomi was selling her right of redemption, her right of buying back the land that Elimelech had previously owned but sold during the time of famine before he and his family left Bethlehem for Moab. So I don’t think Naomi owned any land when she and Ruth returned to Bethlehem after the famine. This alternative makes more sense in the context of the levirate marriage, which was the second of the responsibilities that the kinsman-redeemer had to undertake in the Naomi/Ruth narrative. Ruth’s husband (whether it would be Boaz or the other man) must have been wealthy enough to provide for Ruth and Naomi, and he must have had manpower enough to cultivate Naomi’s land. So there would have been no need for Naomi to sell her land, if she had had any.
2. The first kinsman-redeemer changed his mind, when he heard that there were two obligations involved in the case – to buy the land that had belonged to Elimelech and to marry Ruth. The reason he gave was that his marriage to Ruth might endanger his estate (v 6). So there was financial risk involved in this kind of levirate marriage: If a son by Ruth would be the kinsman-redeemer’s only surviving heir, his own property would be transferred to this son and to Elimelech’s family line.

This change of mind tells us that Boaz was a man of great integrity. He faced exactly the same financial risk by marrying Ruth as the other man. But he was a God-fearing and upright person, who was willing to take this risk in order to fulfill his obligations as a kinsman-redeemer in accordance with the law of Moses.

1. When the kinsman-redeemer matter was settled, these people were present: Boaz, the man who was first in line as a kinsman-redeemer, the ten leaders of Bethlehem, and all the people at the city gate who were witnesses to the transaction (v 1–3, 4, 9–10).
2. The transfer of property was legalized by the other man handing over his sandal to Boaz (v 7). This act symbolized that he transferred his right to purchase Elimelech’s property to Boaz.
3. The blessing that the elders and the witnesses at the gate bestowed on Boaz contains two references to earlier biblical characters:
   1. Rachel and Leah (v 11): They (with the help of their servant girls) became the mothers of all the twelve Israelite tribes. In such a way Ruth should become fruitful and Boaz become famous in the district of Ephrathah. King David was born in the family line of Boaz and his son Obed. God built a house (a dynasty) for David which would last for ever (see 2 Sam 2:27–29).
   2. Judah, Tamar, and their son Perez (v 12): Perez was Boaz’s forefather (v 18) and he was born as the result of a levirate union (see Gen 38).
4. The author uses the words “the Lord enabled her to conceive” to express the conception of Ruth’s and Boaz’s son (v 13). Ruth had not given birth to any child during the time she was married to Mahlon in Moab (1:4). But God gave her a son through Boaz. The author makes it clear to his readers that God is in control of life and death, of fertility and barrenness.
5. We learn these things about Obed and Ruth through the women’s blessing of Naomi (v 14–15):
   1. Obed would be famous throughout Israel. This happened when David became king over all Israel and Obed was recognized as his forefather.
   2. Ruth was precious to Naomi. Her love and care for her mother-in-law exceeded the value of seven sons.

The women used the word “son” to express the relationship between Naomi and Obed. So Naomi, who was too old to bear any more children, had now through Ruth received an heir (a “son”) in the place of Mahlon (her dead son and Ruth’s first husband).

1. King David was Ruth‘s great-grandson (v 21–22).
2. In the New Testament we find two genealogies of Jesus, one in Matt 1 and one in Luke 3. The one in Matthew mentions Ruth.
3. Boaz can be characterized like this in this chapter:
   1. He was a man of action. He didn’t delay settling the matter of who should be the kinsman-redeemer, he or the other man. He settled it the very same day.
   2. He was a strategic and wise man. He presented the matter in the presence of the other party before the court and with the necessary witnesses at hand. He made sure that the other party understood the full implications of assuming the responsibilities of a kinsman-redeemer in the case of Naomi/Ruth.
   3. He was a man of great integrity. He was willing to take the financial risk (and perhaps also the risk of losing some of his social standing, marrying a poor widowed Moabite woman like Ruth) to become the kinsman-redeemer for two destitute women.

Daniel

# Daniel studies

### Introduction to Daniel

Daniel is undoubtedly one of the greatest biblical role models in the history of the Christian church. He lived a very long time ago and in social and cultural circumstances very different from our own. In spite of that, we who profess the Christian faith in South India today have much to learn from his example.

These studies only cover the first six chapters of the book of Daniel, a book that consists of two distinctive parts, a biographical part (chapters 1–6) and a visionary (or prophetic) part (chapters 7–12). The third chapter of the book is not so much about Daniel, but about his close Jewish friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were sentenced to death for their refusal to worship king Nebuchadnezzar’s statue of gold.

Daniel lived most of his life in Babylon. He was probably a young teenager, when he and some other people of noble birth were brought as hostages from Jerusalem to Babylon. This happened in 605 BC, at the very beginning of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who was the greatest king of the short-lived Babylonian Empire. So Daniel belonged to the very first group of Babylonian exiles from Judah.

The first two or three stories of the book take place while young Daniel and his friends were under training at the royal court in Babylon. The king wanted to prepare them for future service in the administration of the empire.

Daniel made an amazing career as a wise man, an interpreter of dreams, and an adviser of the kings. Belshazzar, the last ruler of Babylonia and the son of the emperor, even made him third in rank of the entire empire.

Daniel was still alive and active, when the Persian king Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonians many years later. This was in 539 BC. Daniel was used by God even a few years after that (10:1). So at the time of his death, Daniel must have been at least in his mid eighties.

Daniel was an aristocrat from the very beginning of his life in Jerusalem, and he lived an unusually privileged life at the royal court in Babylon. But even then he faced enemies, threats, temptations, and other challenges – just like most of us do. In the midst of all this, Daniel was faithful to his God in heaven and to the kings he was called to serve here on earth.

No doubt Daniel is a great role model for us today!

### Study 1: Daniel comes to Babylon, chapter 1

Comments

Nebuchadnezzar was not yet king of Babylon when he went west with his armies to attack Egypt and its allies. A decisive battle took place at Carchemish on the west bank of the Euphrates River in present-day Syria. Pharaoh Neco of Egypt suffered a decisive defeat, and Babylonia took control over a large area, including Judah. That happened in 605 BC. Jehoiakim, who was king of Judah at that time, became Nebuchadnezzar’s vassal for three years (2 Kings 24:1). Daniel was in the first group of exiles that were brought from Jerusalem to Babylon at this time.

Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon 605–562 BC. He attacked Jerusalem again in 597 BC, when more exiles, including king Jehoiachin of Judah and Ezekiel the prophet, were brought to Babylon. Finally, he destroyed the city of Jerusalem and its temple in 586 BC. This time not only a third group of exiles, but also treasures from the Jerusalem temple, ended up in Babylon.

Daniel and his three young fellow Israelite friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced two problems with the food and drink that were served at king Nebuchadnezzar’s court. First, it was the custom of the kings of those day to sacrifice parts of the food and drink to their gods before the rest was placed on the royal table. A devout Israelite would consider this practice idolatrous and a first step toward spiritual compromise. So Daniel asked for them to be served water instead of the king’s wine, even though wine as such was an accepted drink for the Israelites. Second, the king’s food included dishes made from pork-meat and horse-meat, which were prohibited in the law of Moses (see Lev 11:2–8: Meat from pigs was forbidden. As the horse has an undivided hoof it was also declared unclean). The vegetable diet that Daniel asked for was not eaten by the king so it would not have been presented before the idols.

The author presents a fascinating picture of the Babylonian royal court to his readers. Nebuchadnezzar’s successful military campaigns were over. It was now time to focus on internal matters. So he established an academy for the training of future courtiers as a way of integrating princes and nobles of the conquered nations into the administration of his enormous empire. Daniel and his three friends were selected for this exclusive training program.

Questions

1. How does the author explain what happened to king Jehoiakim?
2. What did king Nebuchadnezzar do with the articles from the Jerusalem temple?
3. What qualifications did king Nebuchadnezzar require of his trainees?
4. Who was Ashpenaz, and what did king Nebuchadnezzar want him to do with the young Israelite men? And for what purpose?
5. Why did Daniel and his friends request a different diet?
6. How does the author explain Ashpenaz’s reaction to this request?
7. What compromise was reached between Daniel and their Babylonian guard? And what was the result of this compromise?
8. Analyze the way Daniel dealt with the controversial food issue.
9. How does the author explain the progress that Daniel and his friends made in their studies?
10. How long did Daniel serve at the Babylonian court?
11. Put yourself in Daniel’s shoes in this chapter. Describe how this Israelite teenager would have felt in verse 3, in verse 8, in verse 15, and in verse 20.
12. Daniel and his friends did not object to their training program, neither its cultural content nor its goal. But they would not share the king’s food and drink. How can we as Christian believers in South India today determine which activities we should participate in and which activities we should say no to?
13. In Babylonia Daniel’s Jewish values were challenged. In spite of his youth he responded with great maturity and wisdom. What can you learn from Daniel’s attitude and actions when your own biblical values are challenged in a non-Christian environment?
14. How do you evaluate Daniel’s personality and conduct in this chapter? What can you do to be more like him?

### Study 2: Nebuchadnezzar’s first dream, chapter 2

Comments

Already while still in the second year of his training (probably in 604 BC, which was also the second year of king Nebuchadnezzar’s reign), Daniel became involved in state affairs in a decisive way. This happened as the result of the king’s bad dreams.

Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler of the greatest kingdom of the world at that time. During his military campaigns he had collected vast tributes and a huge number of captives from the conquered nations. All these were brought to Babylonia. Historical records present a positive picture about they way Nebuchadnezzar reigned and administered his huge empire. He reunited his country and provided justice for his people. He also completed massive building projects, including walls and quays along the Euphrates River, city walls (with the famous Ishthar Gate on the north side), and a magnificent palace.

The wise men (v 12, 13, 14, 18, 24, 27, 48) of king Nebuchadnezzar’s court can be seen as the king’s cabinet ministers. They were his government advisers. But as wise men, they also had certain religious duties connected with interpreting omens and predicting the future. They were technically divided into four categories (v 2): magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans (who were astrologers). Daniel was one of the king’s wise men, so he belonged to this occult religious system. But in spite of this, he remained faithful to the Lord.

In ancient Mesopotamia, dreams and the interpretation of dreams belonged to a wide category of omens and interpretation of omens (including reading deformities in the livers of sacrificed animals, and interpreting the shapes and patterns of smoke, oil in water, and flights of birds). Dreams were thought to provide a window into the world of the gods. To dream was to have communication from the gods. Archaeologists have found a large number of dream manuals from Babylon, written by the wise men of the courts of the kings. They contain long lists of dreams and their meanings. So the interpretation of dreams was one important way of finding out about the future. In the book of Daniel, dreams and dream interpretation play an important role. The author (and Daniel) see dreams as mysteries, which contain the secret purposes of God. These mysteries can only be revealed by God to his servant Daniel (v 18–19, 23).

The statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream symbolized four empires, beginning with the Babylonian Empire (the head of gold), followed by Persian Empire established by king Cyrus in 539 BC (the chest and arms of silver), the Greek Empire established by king Alexander the Great around 330 BC (the belly and thighs of bronze), and the Roman Empire founded by Caesar Augustus in 27 BC (the legs of iron with its feet of partly iron and partly clay; but Roman control of Jerusalem and Palestine goes back to 63 BC). The magnificence of each empire is symbolized by the decreasing value of the metal: gold, silver, bronze and iron. The metals also symbolize the increasing strength of each empire, the iron of the Roman Empire symbolizing the strongest and most enduring of the four empires in the dream. In addition, the sections of the statue represent the concentration of power of each empire, beginning with the total despotism of Nebuchadnezzar (the head) and ending with the sharing of power in the complicated political system of the Roman Empire (the legs and feet ).

The rock that smashed the statue stands for the eternal kingdom of God. It will crush and bring to an end all the previous kingdoms, and its authority will extend over the whole earth. It will endure forever.

Questions

1. Why was Nebuchadnezzar not able to sleep?
2. Who did the king call to solve his problem?
3. Why were the wise men of Babylon not able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream?
4. How did the king decide to punish his wise men? And who was Arioch?
5. How did Daniel find out about the punishment?
6. Imagine yourself in Daniel’s situation. What would you do if your life depended on interpreting a dream that you knew nothing about?
7. What can we learn from Daniel’s example in v 14–18?
8. What do we learn about God in Daniel’s prayer (v 20–23)?
9. Why did Arioch take Daniel before the king?
10. What did Daniel tell the king about the topic of his dream?
11. What did Daniel tell king Nebuchadnezzar about God (v 27–30)?
12. Describe the statue that the king saw in his dream. What happened to it?
13. Describe the rock that the king saw in his dream.
14. What was the meaning of the statue?
15. What was the meaning of the rock?
16. How did king Nebuchadnezzar react to Daniel’s interpretation of his dream?
17. In this chapter we see Daniel’s spiritual maturity in three areas:
    1. Wisdom: He reacts to a crisis with wisdom.
    2. Prayer: He reacts to a problem with prayer.
    3. Praise: He reacts to a problem with praise.

Evaluate your own spiritual maturity in the areas of wisdom, prayer and praise. Which area is most developed? Which area is the weakest? What steps do you need to take to improve your spiritual life in these three areas?

### Study 3: Daniel’s friends in the fiery furnace, chapter 3

Comments

The image that king Nebuchadnezzar had made was “of gold," which does not mean that it was made of solid gold, but that the statue was covered with gold leaf.

The statue probably represented the god Nabu, who was the son of Marduk (the chief Babylonian deity). The name of this god is found in the first part of the king’s own name: “Nebuchadnezzar” means “Nabu, protect my son” (or “my boundary”).

Dura was perhaps a place few kilometers south of Babylon, where a series of mounds can be seen today. Or it could just refer to the “walled enclosure” (this is what dura means in Babylonian) where the statue was set up.

Questions

1. Why did king Nebuchadnezzar assemble all the administrators of his vast empire to the plain of Dura?
2. What did the herald tell the administrators to do when the music started playing?
3. What did the herald say would happen to those who refused to obey?
4. What were the accusations against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that some wise men brought to king Nebuchadnezzar?
5. What alternatives did the king give Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?
6. What reply did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego give to the king’s alternatives?
7. Why did the soldiers die as they were throwing Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fiery furnace?
8. What did the fourth person in the fiery furnace look like? How do you understand this person?
9. Why did king Nebuchadnezzar praise God?
10. What decree did the king issue about the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?
11. How did the king honor Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?
12. What understanding did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have about God? Do you agree with their understanding?
13. Some Christian believers have been taught that a sickness or a difficulty is always the result of sin or of lack of faith. How do you evaluate that doctrine in the light of verses 16–18?
14. In what way do you see Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as role models for you? Explain how.
15. What steps can you take before God today that will help you to face the pressures of the Hindu culture around you?

### Study 4: Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream, chapter 4

Comments

This chapter is about two kings. Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful human king of those days is disciplined by the Most High God, the Lord of the universe and the ruler over the kingdom of men. Their encounter changed Nebuchadnezzar’s understanding of God, but also of himself.

Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliating experience during seven long years transformed his life. And so he becomes a role model for us, both negatively and positively.

King Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC, shortly after his return to sanity.

Questions

1. This chapter consists of two kinds of texts: There are two passages where king Nebuchadnezzar gives his testimony, and there is one passage where the narrator gives his account. Show how.
2. Chronologically verses 1–3 come last in this chapter. Explain how.
3. In what way is Nebuchadnezzar’s proclamation in verses 1–3 different from his statement about God in 3:28–29?
4. Whom does king Nebuchadnezzar address in the beginning of the chapter?
5. Why did the king call for all his wise men?
6. How does Nebuchadnezzar describe Daniel in the beginning of the chapter?
7. What did Nebuchadnezzar see in his dream? And what happened to the thing he saw?
8. How did Daniel react when Nebuchadnezzar told him about the dream? Why do you think he reacted like that?
9. How did Daniel interpret the dream (the tree, the cutting of the tree, the stump of the tree)?
10. What advice did Daniel give Nebuchadnezzar after he had interpreted the dream?
11. When did the fulfillment of the dream begin? And what triggered it?
12. How did the fulfillment of the dream come to an end?
13. What was God’s purpose for giving Nebuchadnezzar this dream?
14. What does Nebuchadnezzar say about God in this chapter (see v 2–3, 34–35, 37)?
15. In the light of verse 17, even evil rulers have come to power by God’s decree. How does this fact challenge our understanding of who God is and how he acts?
16. This experience completely changed Nebuchadnezzar (compare v 29–30 with v 34–37). What do you think about this changes? Was it genuine? Or did God force him to become humble? Explain.
17. Nebuchadnezzar’s experience gives us some understanding about how God works in peoples lives. How can this understanding help us become more like Jesus?
18. This chapter is more about king Nebuchadnezzar than about Daniel. In what ways is Nebuchadnezzar a warning and an example to us?

### Study 5: The writing on the wall, chapter 5

Comments

There is a gap of twenty-three years between chapters 4 and 5. King Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC. He was succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach (king 562–560 BC), who was murdered by his brother-in-law Nergal-Sharezer (king 560–556 BC). Nabonidus, from a priestly family and not from the royal line, took over the throne and became the last king of the Babylonian Empire (556–539 BC). Nabonidus soon handed over the rule to his son Belshazzar, the “king” of this story. The word “father” in verse 7 can also mean “predecessor.” Nebuchadnezzar was not Belshazzar’s father (or “forefather”). They were not even of the same family line.

The events in this chapter took place in 539 BC, the very night of the fall of Babylon to the Persian army led by king Cyrus the Great. The Babylonians considered their city invincible. The main part of Babylon was enclosed by a 100 km long wall, 45 meters high and 27 meters thick. It was built to enable four chariots to be driven side by side on top of it. There was also had twenty years of food supplies stored within the city. Fresh water was abundantly available from a canal that flowed through the heart of the city from the Euphrates River. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus writes that the Persian army captured Babylon like this: The enemy dug another canal so that the river water could be diverted. Then they opened the new canal ton he night of Belshazzar’s feast. So the Persian army could easily march into Babylon on the dry riverbed. The Babylonian soldiers were asleep, and Belshazzar was partying, so the enemy army met hardly any resistance.

Daniel was now more than eighty years old and seems to have retired from his previous high position in the Babylonian royal court (compare v 11–12).

The three words that were written on the wall (MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN) were ambiguous, as each word had more than one meaning. First the words had to be read in the right way, and then they had to be interpreted. The wise men of Babylon failed to understand what was written on the wall (v 8).

Bible scholars are uncertain about the identity of Darius the Mede (v 31), who is not mentioned in ancient historical records apart from in the book of Daniel. It could be another name for king Cyrus the Great, who ruled over both Media and Persia (compare v 28). Or it could be the name of his viceroy, who is otherwise unknown. Or it could be another name for Gubaru, who was an officer in Cyrus’s army and who became governor of the Persian province of northern Babylon.

Questions

1. What is the occasion of this story?
2. How did king Belshazzar and his guests drink their wine?
3. What did they do as they were drinking?
4. What made king Belshazzar so frightened?
5. Why did king Belshazzar call for his wise men?
6. Belshazzar promised that the person who could interpret the words on the wall would “be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom” (v 7, 16, 29). How should this promise be understood in the light of the information about the rulers of Babylon given in Comments above?
7. How did the queen describe Daniel?
8. What do we learn about Belshazzar’s sins from Daniel’s words to him?
9. Daniel’s words to Belshazzar can help us become more humble and thankful to God. Explain how.
10. Use your own words to summarize Daniel’s interpretation of the text on the wall.
11. How can Belshazzar be a warning to us?
12. How is Daniel a role model for us in this chapter?

### Study 6: Daniel in the lions’ den, chapter 6

Comments

In the previous study we saw that Bible scholars and historians have problems identifying “king Darius” (v 1), called “Darius the Mede” in 5:31. In this chapter, we see how Darius organizes the administration of the whole Persian Empire (v 1–2), which consisted of both Media and Persia. He is also called “king” throughout the story, by the narrator (v 2 and so on), by the satraps and administrators (v 6–8, 12–15), and by Daniel (v 21–22). We know from historical records and from the Bible (2 Chron chapter 36; Ezra chapter 1) that Cyrus was the name of the first king of the Medo-Persian Empire, the empire that replaced the Babylonian Empire. It is also possible to understand 6:28 as referring to one king known under two names (Darius and Cyrus): “So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

We saw in chapter 3 that he Babylonians punished serious criminals by burning them to death in a fiery furnace. But the Medes and the Persians worshiped the fire-god. So they would not execute criminals in the same way they offered sacrifices to their gods. Instead they put criminals to death by throwing them into a cave or a deep hole together with hungry lions.

Questions

1. What official position did Daniel have at the beginning of king Darius’s reign? And what further plans did the king have for him?
2. What do we learn about Daniel’s character in the first part of the chapter?
3. What was the content of the first decree that king Darius issued?
4. How did Daniel respond to the decree? What could he have done instead? How would you have done, if you had been in his place?
5. How did the king react to Daniel’s predicament?
6. What were the king’s “farewell” words to Daniel? What do these words indicate?
7. How did the king spend the night?
8. What did Daniel tell the king about the events of the night?
9. How did the king react to Daniel’s good news?
10. What happened to Daniel’s accusers?
11. What was the content of the second decree that king Darius issued?
12. How did king Darius describe God in his second decree?
13. Who are the main characters in this story, and how do they relate to one another?
14. Compare this story (chapter 6) with the story about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (chapter 3). What striking parallels do find between them? And what conclusions do you draw from these parallels?
15. How is king Darius a warning example to us in chapter 6?
16. How is Daniel a role model for us in chapter 6?
17. In this story we see that Daniel’s daily routines were closely watched by people around him. Imagine that people around you are closely watching you in the same way. What changes would want to make in your present lifestyle? Explain why and how.

### Study 7: Daniel – a role model

Introduction

During our study of the first half of the book of Daniel we have come to know its main character, Daniel, quite well.

Perhaps we have had some problems identifying ourselves with him. His life and character were so different from ours. He did not seem to have had any of our weaknesses or blemishes. He came from the very highest strata of society, so different from our everyday lives in South India today. He served the kings of two great ancient empires, while we struggle to feed ourselves and our families. He was used by God in extraordinary ways, while we sometimes wonder if God will ever use us. And he lived thousands of years ago in a country thousands of kilometers away from us.

But there are also similarities. Daniel was a Jew in exile in idol-worshiping Babylonia. And we Christian believers in South India today sometimes feel that we are exiled in the Hindu culture that surrounds us. Daniel had to stand up for his Jewish faith, just as we have to stand up for our Christian faith. Daniel faced enemies and persecution, just as we face enemies and persecutions. Daniel faced temptations, just as we face temptations.

So what can we learn from Daniel? In what way can he be a role model for us?

Assignment

Prepare a paper on Daniel. Call your paper “Daniel – a role model for me.” Use material from the six previous studies Your paper must consist of two parts:

Part 1: A description/characterization of the person Daniel as found in the first six chapters of the book of Daniel.

Part 2: An explanation of the ways, in which Daniel is a role model for you. Your explanation must include reflections on problems and issues that you face as a Christian believer in South India today.

Present your paper to your fellow-students. It could be done as a part of this course. Or it could be done in connection with a college devotion.

# Daniel answers

### Answers 1: Daniel comes to Babylon, chapter 1

Answers

1. The author explains what happened to king Jehoiakim as God’s work. It was the Lord who delivered him into the hand of king Nebuchadnezzar. So the author’s theological perspective is that God is in control of the events of world history.
2. King Nebuchadnezzar brought valuable articles from the Jerusalem temple to Babylon and put them in the treasure house of his god there. Marduk (often referred to as Bel, which means “lord”) was the chief deity of the Babylonian state and the patron god of its kings.
3. These were the qualifications that king Nebuchadnezzar required of his trainees (v 3–4):
   1. They had high social background (they came from the royal family and the nobility).
   2. They were young.
   3. They did not have any physical defects.
   4. They were smart and intelligent.
   5. They were suitable for future service at the royal court.
4. Ashpenaz was the chief of king Nebuchadnezzar’s court officials (v 3). The king wanted him to give the young Israelites a three year training program in Babylonian language and literature (v 4–5). The curriculum must have covered various traditional and cultural topics (compare v 20). The purpose of the training was to prepare these young men for service at the king’s court (v 5).
5. Daniel and his friends requested a different diet, because they did not want to “defile themselves” (v 8). This means that they did not want to compromise their Jewish faith by eating food that was forbidden in the law of Moses and consume food and drink that had been dedicated to the Babylonian gods.
6. The author gives a spiritual explanation to Ashpenaz’s positive reaction to Daniel’s request. It was God who made the Babylonian official listen to Daniel with favor and sympathy (v 9).
7. A compromise was reached between Daniel and their Babylonian guard regarding the food and drink issue. The young Israelites were allowed to demonstrate that their diet would not have negative effects. After a trial period of ten days their appearance was evaluated against the other young men who had eaten the king’s food. The result of this compromise was positive for Daniel and his friends. Their health had actually improved, so they were allowed to continue with their special diet (v 11–16).
8. This is how Daniel dealt with the controversial food issue (v 8–16): He did not make a big fuss (shout and scream, or organize a protest march, or turn his back on the royal court and refuse to participate in its training program). Instead he approached his superior with a wise alternative plan – and he was willing to bear the responsibility for the outcome of this alternative plan.
9. The author again presents a spiritual explanation for the progress that Daniel and his friends made in their studies. Earlier God had made Ashpenaz positive to the needs of the young Jewish trainees (v 9). Now the author gives God the ultimate credit for their academic success (v 17). But, of course, the four young men were also involved in the process themselves. They must have worked very hard with their studies, and they must have kept their lives pure during the three years of training at the royal court in Babylon.
10. Daniel served at the Babylonian court until king Cyrus of Persia had conquered Babylon (v 21). This was in 539 BC. So Daniel served the Babylonian kings for a total of about 66 years.
11. I think Daniel would have felt something like this in verse 3, in verse 8, in verse 15, and in verse 20:
    * Verse 3: Daniel had mixed feelings about being brought to the king’s court. He felt honored and privileged. He also felt nervous and expectant, wondering what was going to happen and how he would be able to be faithful to the Lord of Israel in a completely pagan cultural environment.
    * Verse 8: Daniel felt very challenged when he realized what kind of food and drink that he had to consume at the king’s court. He probably prayed to God for help to find a solution to the problem: Should he stay at the court? Or should he go on strike or organize a demonstration against the menu at the court? Or should he compromise with his faith and eat the food and drink the wine that the king offered? Or was there any alternative solution to his difficult situation?
    * Verse 15: Daniel felt relieved. God had heard his prayer and helped him find a solution that worked. Now he could stay at the royal court without having to compromise with the Jewish dietary laws. Now he would be able to carry on his first-class training to become a courtier at the court of king Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful ruler in the world. That evening Daniel must have praised and thanked God for his help and guidance.
    * Verse 20: Daniel breathed a sigh of great relief. His long and tough training was finally completed. He had passed with honors. Now he could look forward to a long and distinguished career at the Babylonian court. The highest administrative positions in the world were within his reach. That night Daniel must have thanked God for his help and guidance during the past three years, and asked the Lord for wisdom to serve him faithfully in the best possible way.
12. Daniel and his friends did not object to their training program, neither its cultural content nor its goal. But they would not share the king’s food and drink. Their way of standpoint can help us Christian believers in South India today decide which activities to participate in and which activities say no to:

Daniel only objected to the Babylonian culture when conflicted with the clear instruction of the law of Moses. For example, he and his friends did not object to their new Babylonian names, in spite of the fact that these names contained or referred to the names of local pagan gods, in this case Nabu and Aku. Christian believers today have the word of God and the teaching of the Bible to guide them as they plan activities and live their lives. If the New Testament speaks against an activity or a plan, then God’s will is clear: Do not get involved in it! If the Bible allows an activity or does not say anything about an issue, then a believer must consider other factors , for example: Will my activity cause another believer to stumble and fall into sin because of what I plan to do? Or, will this activity contribute to me sharing the message of Christ with friends and neighbors? Or, would I feel comfortable to ask Jesus join me in this activity?

1. –
2. –

### Answers 2: Nebuchadnezzar’s first dream, chapter 2

Answers

1. Nebuchadnezzar was not able to sleep because of his bad dreams (v 1).
2. The king called his royal advisers (his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers/Chaldeans) to solve his problem (v 2–3).
3. The wise men of Babylon were not able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, because the king refused to tell them about what he had seen in his dream (v 4–5).
4. The king decided to punish his wise men by having all the wise men of Babylon killed (v 12). He told Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard, to carry out the executions (14).
5. Daniel found out about the punishment through Arioch, who had come to carry out the king’s order. Daniel and his three friends were counted among the wise men of Babylon in spite of their youth.
6. –
7. We can learn at least six things from Daniel’s example in v 14–18:
   1. To use both prudence and discretion (v 14): When Daniel received the disastrous news from the commander of the king’s guard, he spoke to him with discretion and got the necessary information from him. He also used his prudence (human wisdom as well as spiritual wisdom) as he dealt with the crisis.
   2. Not to panic: Daniel did not panic. Instead he went to the king to ask for time, and then he explained the situation to his friends, telling them to bring the matter before God in earnest prayer.
   3. To give God time to work: Daniel asked the king for time so that he could bring the matter before God and give God time to reveal the mystery of the dream to him.
   4. Willingness to bear the consequences in case our plan fails: Daniel knew that he and his friends would die unless God intervened and revealed the truth of the dream to him.
   5. Not to blame others for the crisis: Daniels and his friends had not been part of the discussion between the king and his wise men in the beginning of the chapter. In spite of their innocence, they were about to be executed. Daniel did not accuse the older wise men of incompetence or blame them for his own predicament. Instead he dealt with the problem himself.
   6. To face the crisis: Daniel did not run away or hide. Instead he dealt with the situation. In spite of his young age and his inexperience he rose to the challenge with great spiritual and human wisdom and with maturity.
8. We learn at least five things about God in Daniel’s prayer (v 20–23):
   1. God is a God of power and wisdom.
   2. God is in control of the fate of the rulers of this world.
   3. It is God who gives wisdom and discernment to people.
   4. God knows everything, so nothing is hidden from him.
   5. God is a God of revelation.

Daniel closes his prayer by thanking God for giving him wisdom and power to know and interpret king Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

1. Arioch took Daniel before the king at Daniel’s request. Daniel was ready to interpret the dream before the king (v 24).
2. Daniel told the king that his dream was about the future (“what will happen in later days," v 28–29, 45).
3. Before Daniel interpreted the dream, he described God to king (v 27–30, see also v 37–38):

The gods that Nebuchadnezzar knew and worshiped were limited in various ways. But the God that Daniel knew and worshiped is an all-powerful God of knowledge and revelation. He can reveal mysteries, even about the future. Nebuchadnezzar thought that Israel’s military defeat proved that Babylon’s gods were more powerful than Israel’s God. But he was wrong. It was the almighty God of Israel who had allowed Babylon to defeat Israel (see 1:1–2). It was the true God of Israel who had placed king Nebuchadnezzar in his powerful position (2:37–38).

1. The statue that the king saw in his dream had four parts (v 31–33): a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron (with the feet partly of iron and partly of clay). The statue was crushed by a rock that was cut out by God, and no trace was left of it (v 34–35).
2. The rock that the king saw in his dream became a huge mountain (v 35).
3. The meaning of the statue (v 36–43) was that its four parts represented four empires.
4. The meaning of the rock (v 44–45) was that it represented a divine kingdom that would never be destroyed. This kingdom would be set up in the time of the kings of the fourth empire of the statue, and it would crush and bring all the previous kingdoms to an end. It would endure forever.
5. Nebuchadnezzar reacted strongly to Daniel’s interpretation of his dream (v 46–49):
   1. He fell down before Daniel and arranged an offering of incense before him.
   2. He acknowledged God’s supremacy and God as a revealer of mysteries.
   3. He gave Daniel lavish gifts.
   4. He placed Daniel in a high position and put him in charge of all his wise men.
   5. On Daniel’s request, he also gave Daniel’s three friends (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) high administrative positions in Babylon.
6. –

### Answers 3: Daniel’s friends in the fiery furnace, chapter 3

Answers

1. King Nebuchadnezzar assembled all the administrators of his vast empire to the plain of Dura for the dedication of the huge statue of gold that he had set up there (v 3).
2. The herald told the administrators to fall down and worship the statue of gold, when the music started playing (v 4–5).
3. The herald said that those who refused to obey would immediately be thrown into the blazing furnace (v 6).
4. There were three accusations against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that some wise men brought to king Nebuchadnezzar (v 6–12):
   1. They did not obey the king’s decree. They were disobedient traitors.
   2. They did not serve the Babylonian gods. They did not support the Babylonian culture and religion. They refused to integrate into Babylonian official life.
   3. They did not fall down and worship the statue of gold. They were arrogant and rebellious, and didn’t seem to care about the serious consequences of their rebellious behavior.
5. The king gave Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego two alternatives:
   1. To worship the statue
   2. To be thrown into the fiery furnace
6. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego gave this reply to the king’s two alternatives (v 14–18):
   1. They would not worship the statue of gold.
   2. God was able to save them from the fiery furnace, if he wanted to.
   3. But even if God didn’t save them, they would still not worship the idol.
7. The soldiers died as they were throwing Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fiery furnace, because it had been heated more than usual. “Seven times” could be a way of saying that the furnace had been heated as much as possible.
8. The fourth person in the fiery furnace looked like “a son of the gods” (v 25). Most Bible scholars understand him as an angel. Some say that he was Jesus, but I don’t find that view convincing (compare v 28). Anyway, the point is that God was with the three men in the furnace with his protection.
9. King Nebuchadnezzar praised God, because God had rescued his servants Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (v 28).
10. The king issued a decree that nobody would be allowed to speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (v 29).
11. The king honored Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego by promoting them (v 30).
12. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego understood the supremacy of God (v 17–18). I agree with them. We often treat God as our servant, expecting him to answer our prayers in accordance with our own human understanding. God always hears our prayers, but we should trust him enough to let him answer our prayers in accordance with his divine love and supreme understanding.
13. Some Christian believers have been taught that a sickness or a difficulty always is the result of sin or of lack of faith. In the light of verses 16–18, I think that that doctrine is wrong. God is, of course, able to deal with our difficulty, heal our sickness and end our suffering. But he may not always do so. Even then, he expects us to trust him and to carry on our lives in obedience to him.
14. I see Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as role models in several areas:
    * Their understanding of the supremacy of God
    * Their willingness to submit to God’s will (compare Jesus, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done”, Luke 22:42)
    * Their willingness to suffer for their faith
    * Their refusal to serve the Babylonian gods and to worship the statue of gold
    * Their boldness before king Nebuchadnezzar
15. We should prepare in advance for challenges to our faith. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (like Daniel in 1:8) had already decided that they would obey God’s word, whatever problems and challenges the future had in store for them. Their decision was made long before the challenge came.

So here we find one more area in which Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (and Daniel) are role models for us.

### Answers 4: Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream, chapter 4

Answers

1. This chapter consists of two kinds of texts. There are two passages where king Nebuchadnezzar gives his testimony (v 1–18 and v 34–37). And there is one passage where the narrator gives his account (v 19–33).
2. Chronologically verses 1–3 come last in this chapter. These verses are the conclusions that Nebuchadnezzar reached after his experiences (recorded in verses 4–37). So there is a time gap of at least eight years between his dream (v 4–18) and his testimony about his experiences.
3. Nebuchadnezzar’s proclamation in verses 1–3 differs from what he said about God in 3:28–29. In chapter 3 Nebuchadnezzar praises the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In chapter 4 he praises the same God, but from the perspective of his personal experience and knowledge of him.
4. In the beginning of the chapter king Nebuchadnezzar addressed everybody who lived in this world (v 1). So he wanted he whole world to know about what God had done to him and how this had changed his life.
5. The king called for all his wise men to ask them interpret the dream that had made him so afraid (v 5–6).
6. Nebuchadnezzar said two things about Daniel (v 8):
   1. He called Daniel Belteshazzar after the name of Nebuchadnezzar’s god. Belteshazzar means “protect his life” and was probably short for “Bel-belteshazzar” (which means “may the god Bel protect his life”) or “Nebu-belteshazzar” (which means “may the god Nabu protect his life”). Bel was the state god of the Babylonians and the court god of the royal family. Nabu seems to have been king Nebuchadnezzar’s personal god (Nebu-chadnezzar means “may Nabu protect my son”).
   2. Nebuchadnezzar saw Daniel as a man who had the spirit of holy gods in him – in contrast to the other wise men of the royal court.
7. Nebuchadnezzar saw an enormous tree in his dream (v 10). But the tree was cut down by divine order (v 13–14).
8. When Nebuchadnezzar told Daniel about the dream, he was perplexed and terrified (v 19). I think he was shocked by the meaning of the dream and wondering how he should tell Nebuchadnezzar about it.
9. Daniel interpreted the dream like this:
   1. The tree represented king Nebuchadnezzar (v 22).
   2. The cutting of the tree meant that Nebuchadnezzar would be driven away from his kingdom (v 25), because had become insane (compare v 34).
   3. The stump of the tree still had its roots. This showed that Nebuchadnezzar’s kingship would be restored (v 26). This would happen after seven years, when Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God’s lordship over him.
10. Daniel’s advice to Nebuchadnezzar after he had interpreted the dream was that he would leave his sinful life and his wickedness. Instead he should do what was right and be kind to the oppressed (v 27).
11. The fulfillment of the dream began one year later. It was Nebuchadnezzar’s pride and boastfulness that triggered it (v 28–29).
12. The fulfillment of the dream ended seven years later, when Nebuchadnezzar turned to God and acknowledged his lordship over the whole world (v 34–35).
13. God’s purpose for giving Nebuchadnezzar the dream is repeated three times (v 17, 25, 32). God wanted to make Nebuchadnezzar understand who was supreme – God, not Nebuchadnezzar. So in this story, God chose to impress Nebuchadnezzar with his absolute authority instead of with his grace and love.
14. Nebuchadnezzar says at least five things about God in this chapter (see v 2–3, 34–35, 37):
    1. God is a God of signs and miracles.
    2. God is eternal, and his kingdom is eternal.
    3. God’s power is supreme. It cannot be questioned by humans.
    4. God is righteous and just.
    5. God is worthy of our praise because of his righteousness and justice.
15. In the light of verse 17, even evil rulers have come to power by God’s decree. This fact seriously challenges our understanding of who God is and how he acts.

God is supreme in his power. So somehow he allows the presence of evil and corrupt rulers in this world. But he is not powerless in situations where policies of incredible oppression and justice are pursued. He is not the source of evil, but he allows evil to run its course so that he can accomplish his ultimate purposes. God will certainly judge unrepentant rulers and leaders for their sins. The fact that God is supremely in control of events, does not take away their responsibility. Nebuchadnezzar is a very good example of this truth.

1. This experience completely changed Nebuchadnezzar (compare v 29–30 with v 34–37). I think that he showed a genuine change of attitude. The way in which he expressed his repentance and his changed perspective on God shows his sincerity.
2. Nebuchadnezzar’s experience gives us some understanding about how God works in peoples lives. This understanding can help us become more like Jesus:

God’s purpose was fulfilled in Nebuchadnezzar’s life. His goal and purpose for our lives is our spiritual maturity and our transformation. He wants us to reach the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13) and by his Holy Spirit transform us into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). To achieve this goal and purpose God will sometimes allow even painful things to happen in our lives.

1. Daniel showed boldness, when he gave Nebuchadnezzar his interpretation of the dream. But on the whole, I think that this chapter is more about king Nebuchadnezzar than about Daniel:
   1. Nebuchadnezzar is a warning to us about the dangers of pride and boastfulness.
   2. But he is also a good example to us: He was repentant. He was willing to change his life. He was willing to see himself – and God – in a new light. He was open about what had happened to him and how God had dealt with him, as he gave his testimony to the whole world.

### Answers 5: The writing on the wall, chapter 5

Answers

1. The occasion of this story is a great banquet that king Belshazzar gave in Babylon for his nobles (v 1).
2. King Belshazzar and his guests drank their wine from vessels made of gold and silver that king Nebuchadnezzar had looted from the Jerusalem temple about fifty years earlier (v 2–3).
3. As they were drinking, king Belshazzar and his guests exalted their Babylonian idols (v 4). They must have used the holy vessels for this worship.
4. King Belshazzar became very frightened, when he saw a hand (but there was no person that the hand belonged to) that wrote some mysterious words on the wall (v 5–6).
5. King Belshazzar called for his wise men, because he wanted them to read and interpret the text on the wall (v 7).
6. Belshazzar promised that the person who could interpret the words on the wall would “be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom” (v 7, 16, 29). In Comments, we saw that Belshazzar was not really king over Babylonia. He was ruling in the place of his father Nabonidus. The two highest rulers in the kingdom were, of course, king Nabonidus and his son “king” Belshazzar. So the person who could read and interpret the writing on the wall, would come after the two kings in rank.
7. The queen described Daniel like this (v 11–12):
   1. He had “the spirits of holy gods in him.” That meant he was like the gods in insight, intelligence and wisdom.
   2. He had the highest position among the wise men during the reign of king Nebuchadnezzar.
   3. He had an excellent “track record” as an interpreter of dreams, explainer of riddles and solver of problems.
8. We learn these five things about Belshazzar’s sins from Daniel’s words to him (17–24):
   1. Belshazzar’s sins would catch up with him. His predecessor, the great king, Nebuchadnezzar, had not been able to avoid the consequences of his sins. How then would Belshazzar be able to do so?
   2. Belshazzar knew about Nebuchadnezzar’s sins and how God had punished him for them. But he had been too proud and arrogant to learn anything from his predecessor’s lesson.
   3. Belshazzar had insulted God by profaning the vessels of silver and gold that Nebuchadnezzar had looted from the Jerusalem temple.
   4. Belshazzar had not honored God. Instead he had praised the useless gods of the Babylonians and worshiped idols made of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone.
   5. Belshazzar had not understood the true nature of God, the God who controls the events of history and the lives of men.
9. Daniel’s words to Belshazzar (v 17–28) can help us become more humble and thankful to God. Here are three reflections on that statement:
   1. God revealed his sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. As we read the Bible, we again and again find that God reveals who he is. We should thank God that he is a God of revelation. He wants mankind to know his sovereignty and power, but also his love and concern for his creation.
   2. God dealt severely with Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and punished them for their arrogance and pride. This is a warning to us. God wants even great kings to be humble before him. This should teach us, who are just ordinary people, humility. The Lord upholds the humble (Ps 147:6).
   3. God gave Nebuchadnezzar a second chance. God restored him, when he humbled himself before him. We should thank God for his forgiveness. When we humble ourselves and turn to him, he forgives us our sins. The Lord crowns the humble with salvation (Ps 149:4).
10. This is my summary of Daniel’s interpretation of the text on the wall:

“God is not happy with you and your reign. So he will crush the Babylonian Empire and allow the Medo-Persian Empire to replace it.”

1. Belshazzar can be a warning to us, like this:
   1. God is sovereign God. Belshazzar did not acknowledge God’s sovereignty. Instead he praised and worshiped the Babylonian idols. This is a warning to us.
   2. God is a holy God. Belshazzar did not respect God’s holiness. Instead the desecrated articles from the Jerusalem temple and used them at his banquet to worship his pagan idols. This is a warning to us.
   3. Belshazzar’s pride and arrogance brought destruction on both himself and his kingdom. The Lord will uproot the house of the proud (Prov 15:25). This is a warning to us.
   4. Knowledge is not enough. Belshazzar knew about Nebuchadnezzar (his pride, God’s punishment of him, his change of heart, and his restoration). But Belshazzar did not act on his knowledge. He did not learn the lesson of history. This is a warning to us. The Bible teaches us about who God is and about his will for mankind. But it is not enough for us to know these things intellectually. We also need to act on our knowledge. We need to humble ourselves before God and receive his salvation.
2. Daniel is a role model for us in this chapter in at least these three ways:
   1. He was willing to be used by God even at a very old age.
   2. He was still bold enough to speak the truth to a powerful king, who was arrogant, blasphemous, and probably drunk.
   3. He had not lost his spiritual wisdom with the passing of years. He was still able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. And he had not lost his spiritual fervor.

### Answers 6: Daniel in the lions’ den, chapter 6

Answers

1. King Darius appointed Daniel as one of the three administrators over the Medo-Persian Empire. Under them were 120 satraps (v 1–2), provincial governors. Because of Daniel’s extraordinary qualities the king also planned to promote him to be in charge of the whole kingdom (v 3).
2. We already know that Daniel was extraordinarily competent. Then we learn these additional things about his character (v 4–5):
   1. He was not corrupted.
   2. He was trustworthy.
   3. He was not negligent.
   4. He was considered faithful to his Jewish religion.

So Daniel could not be found doing anything wrong. Nor could he be found neglecting to do what was right and correct. So his enemies knew that the only way to overthrow Daniel was to set a trap for him. They had to force Daniel to obey God instead of the king.

1. King Darius’s first decree stated that during a period of thirty days, no gods, apart from the king (who was considered divine in many ancient cultures), could be worshiped (v 7, 12).
2. Daniel responded to the decree by ignoring it. He went on as usual with his daily prayers to the God of Israel, facing Jerusalem. His other two options would have been to stop praying for thirty days, or to pray secretly during these thirty days. I don’t think that he would have considered praying to the king an option at all.

What would you have done, if you had been in his place?

1. The king reacted strongly to Daniel’s predicament. He was greatly distressed, and he was trying to find some way of saving Daniel’s life. But because the decree had been issued according to the law of the empire, he felt that it had to be obeyed (v 14–15).
2. The king’s “farewell” words to Daniel was a blessing and a prayer that the God of Israel, whom Daniel had been so faithful to, would save him (v 16). These words indicate that Daniel’s character and faith had made a strong impact on the king. Also, Daniel must have talked to king Darius about God. So the king realized that Daniel’s God had the power to save him (compare verse 20).
3. The king did not eat any supper and he did not arrange any entertainment for the evening. Instead he spent the whole night without sleep, because he was so worried about Daniel (v 18).
4. In the morning, Daniel told the king that he was unhurt. God had sent an angel during the night who had shut the mouths of the lions (v 21–22).
5. The king reacted to Daniel’s good news with great joy. He then told his servants to lift Daniel out of the lions’ den (v 23).
6. Daniel’s accusers were thrown to the lion together with their families (v 24).
7. King Darius’s second decree stated that all the inhabitants of the Medo-Persian Empire had to fear and revere Daniel’s God (v 26).
8. King Darius described God like this in his second decree (v 26–27):
   1. God is a living God.
   2. God endures forever.
   3. God’s kingdom cannot be destroyed, and it will stand forever.
   4. God is a savior and a rescuer. He proved this by saving Daniel from the lions.
   5. God is a God of signs and wonders, in the heavens as well as on the earth.
9. These are the main characters in this story (apart from God, his angel, and the lions): Daniel, his enemies among the satraps and administrators, and king Darius. They all closely related to one another through their official positions in government of the Medo-Persian Empire. Daniel had authority over the satraps. Daniel’s two fellow-administrators were his co-workers. King Darius was Daniel’s boss.
10. The story about Daniel in the lions’ den (chapter 6) and the story about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace (chapter 3) have striking parallels:
    1. Belief in God can be costly: Both stories are about Jews in exile who remained firm in their faith. They refused to worship the local gods and were sentenced to death. When we choose to believe in God we join up with him and rely on him. The problem is that the world is set against God. So when we become God’s friend we also become the world’s enemy. This happened with Daniel and with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
    2. God is present: Both stories are about men who experienced the presence of God in the face of death sentences. God’s faithfulness is integrated in his character. He will never leave us or forsake us no matter what happens to us.
    3. God vindicates himself and us: Both stories show God’s faithfulness. He honored the trust of Daniel and his friends. God is faithful and true. He will always be victorious. He will always be finally vindicated.
    4. God rescues: Both stories show how God saved his faithful followers from death sentences. God is faithful and true, and he never abandons those who belong to him. He will ultimately rescue and save his people.
11. King Darius is a warning example to us by the way he gave in to flattery. The proposal that Daniel’s enemies came with flattered him. So he foolishly signed the decree.
12. Daniel is a role model for us in chapter 6:
    1. By the way he performed his duties: He was trustworthy by not being corrupted and by not neglecting his duties.
    2. By the way he was firm in his faith: He did not give in to or compromise with the king’s edict. Not even with a death sentence hanging over his head.
13. –

Esther

# Esther studies

### Introduction to Esther

Esther is a book about godly character. We live in a culture that does not emphasize doing what is right. As we look around us, we find people who are selfish and proud, corrupt and dishonest. Everybody seems to put their own selfish interests first, seeking personal recognition and wealth and power. But Jesus has called us to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” in the midst of this ungodly culture. So the study of the book of Esther can help us develop the godly character that we are so much in need of.

But in the book of Esther there is also another theme that concerns human character and human life in this ungodly world. That is the theme of God working in the circumstances and events of people’s lives in order to bring about his plans. God it not even mentioned in the book. But he is the one who directs the course of events. He is in control of what happens. As God works in our lives, we must choose what is right so that we can be part of God’s plan. Just like Esther made the right choices and became God’s tool in his plan to save the Jews from total destruction.

The events of the book of Esther take place in Persia during the reign of king Xerxes, called Ahasuerus (which is the Hebrew form of his name) in many Bible translations. He was the son and successor of king Darius the Great and ruled Persia from 486 to 465 BC. The Jews (this is how the Israelites often were by this time) had been living in exile in Mesopotamia for more than a hundred years. The Babylonian Empire was conquered by king Cyrus the Great of Persia in 539 BC. He allowed the Jews to return to the Jerusalem and Judah. And some of them did. But most Jewish families were well settled in Mesopotamia and remained there. Among them was Esther’s family.

The story is set in Susa (or Shushan), a fortified city where the king has his winter palace. It involves all the Jews of the Persian Empire but centers on the lives of king Xerxes, his queen Esther who is a Jewess, her uncle Mordecai the Jew, and Haman, the chief noble at the king’s court and an enemy of the Jews.

The story describes the last major threat to the Jewish people in the Old Testament period. God uses Esther’s courage and wisdom to save the Jews from extinction. In commemoration of these events a feast called Purim (still celebrated by the Jews all over the world) is established.

This is a beautiful story about God protecting his people, and it is told with great skill. The author is unknown. But he must have been a Jew living in Persia and writing his book not very long after the time of Esther.

In the book of Esther we find two positive role models for us who live in South India today:

* Esther, a young Jewish girl, who becomes the queen of Persia and who saves her people from extinction
* Mordecai, her uncle, who uncovers the plot against the Jews and who guides and mentors Esther and becomes a respected leader of the Jewish community in the Persian Empire

But we also find Haman, a very nasty person indeed. He is a schemer who plots the extinction of all the Jews of the Persian Empire. His evil character should serve as a warning to all of us.

### Study 1: Queen Vashti removed, chapter 1

Comments

Xerxes (Ahasuerus) was king of Persia 486–465 BC. He ruled over a vast empire, from the Indus River in the east to Egypt in the west. The narrative of the book of Esther begins 483–482 BC (in the third year of his reign, v 3).

Cush/Ethiopia was the name for a region which is now part of southern Egypt and northern Sudan.

Susa/Shushan was the winter residence of the Persian kings. It consisted of a fortified area where the royal palace was located (the citadel of Susa, 1:2) and the main city where the ordinary people lived (the city of Susa, 3:15).

One of the key concepts in this study is “respect”.

Questions

1. What could have been the reason for the king’s lavish banquet?
2. Imagine yourself as this banquet. What would you be experiencing (sights, sounds, smells and so on)?
3. What could have been the reason for the king to ask Vashti to come to him?
4. Why do you think Vashti refused to come to the king at his banquet?
5. Why did the wise men think that Vashti’s refusal to join the king’s banquet would be dangerous to the kingdom?
6. What happened to Vashti?
7. Describe the people that we encounter in this chapter: Xerxes, Vashti, the wise men.
8. The key issue in this chapter is “respect”: how to gain respect and how to maintain respect. Look at the main characters (Xerxes, Vashti and the wise men) from this perspective. What are your conclusions?
9. Think of a time when you were asked to do something you were uncomfortable doing. How did you feel?
10. How does respect actually develop between people?

### Study 2: Esther becomes queen, chapter 2

Comments

Jews had been living in the cities of Mesopotamia and beyond since the deportation of Israelites of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in 721 BC. More Jews were exiled by the Babylonians around 600 BC. Some of these Jews (around fifty-thousand according to Ezra 2:64–67) returned to Palestine in the restoration under king Cyrus of Persia in 538 BC. But most of them must have stayed. The presence of a large Jewish population in the Persian Empire is confirmed by archaeological discoveries from the fifth century BC. Some of these Jews had attained positions of importance and wealth.

One of these Jews was Mordecai. His name is Babylonian (from the god Marduk). Just like his young relative Esther, he must also have had a Hebrew name, which is not disclosed in the story. This Mordecai is probably the “Mardukaya” mentioned on a Babylonian clay tablet. He was an offcial at the Persian court in Susa during the early part of the reign of king Xerxes. Anyway, the fact that Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate (v 19) shows that he held a high position in the civil service of the empire.

“Esther” can be understood either as a variant of Ishtar, a Mesopotamian goddess, or as a Persian word for “star”). Her Jewish name was Hadassah (v 2), which means “myrtle” in Hebrew.

Esther was taken to king Xerxes’s royal court at the end of 479 or the beginning of 478 BC (in the tenth month of the seventh year of his reign, v 16). The fact that she kept her family background a secret (v 10, 20) is important to the plot of the story. Otherwise it would have been impossible for her to save the lives of the Jewish population. God, who is not openly mentioned in the book, is the director behind the scene. He orchestrates every detail of the drama. He works through the circumstances to place everything in order so that his plans will be accomplished.

The plan to replace queen Vashti is very detailed and takes years to complete.

Questions

1. Make a summary of king Xerxes’s plan to find a new queen (v 1–4).
2. How does Esther come into the story? And how does she become king Xerxes’s queen (v 5–17)?
3. Imagine that you are Esther. How do you think she felt during the long process of selection and preparation for queenhood?
4. Imagine that your are Mordecai. How do you think he felt as Esther was selected and being prepared for queenhood?
5. The author mentions three times that Esther won the approval of someone’s eyes (v 9, 15, 17). What does this tell us about Esther?
6. The king’s harem housed many women. What do you think was the role of these women? And how would Esther’s life as queen be different from the lives of the other women?
7. Mordecai repeatedly told Esther to keep her identity hidden. What could have been the reason for that?
8. How does Mordecai enter into the plot of the story (v 19–23)?
9. What do we understand about Mordecai’s character (v 19–23)?
10. God is not been openly mentioned in the book. But where have you seen his hand moving in the story so far?
11. Think of somebody you know who finds favor with others because of his/her personality. What can you do to be like that person?
12. Describe a time in your past when you experienced God working through circumstances in the background but you did not realize it until afterwards.
13. Can you see God’s hand moving in circumstances in your life right now? Explain how.

Prayer

Pray for the ability to see God’s hand at work in your circumstances – whether they are positive or negative.

### Study 3: Haman’s plot, chapter 3

Comments

In this study a new person enters the stage. It is Haman, one of the nobles of the empire. He is called “an Agagite," which probably means that he was a descendant of Agag, king of Amalek (1 Sam 15:20). The Amalekites had attacked the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt. This brought God’s condemnation on them. So when Saul (who belonged to the tribe of Benjamin) attacked the Amalekites many generations later, he killed king Agag and most (but not all, 1 Chron 4:42–43) of his subjects. Now in Esther, five hundred years after Saul, we find how the Benjamite Mordecai (2:5) continues the war against the Amalekites, represented by Haman.

No reason is given why king Xerxes decided to elevate Haman to a special seat of honor.

In this study we will look at the importance of evaluating advice. One aspect of godly character is to know how to evaluate the advice that we receive from others. But we must also learn how to offer sound advice to others without seeking personal benefits. God wants our motives to be pure.

Questions

1. Explain the conflict between Haman and Mordecai (v 2–6)?
2. How does Haman persuade the king to accept his plan to destroy the Jews (v 8–9)?
3. Describe the orders contained in the king’s edict (v 13).
4. The author uses words like “every” and “all” several times in verses 12–14. What could be the reason for that?
5. Describe the atmosphere among the people of Susa after the stipulations of the edict has become known.
6. What do we learn about Haman’s character in this chapter?
7. In this chapter we also get more information about king Xerxes. Explain.
8. Imagine yourself a Jew at the time of the proclamation of king Xerxes’ edict. How would you have felt?
9. Think of a time in your own life when you were tempted to use half-truths and lies to convince somebody. What were your thoughts and feelings at the time? And how does it feel now to tell other people about it?
10. How is our character reflected in the way we give or receive advice?
11. How can you guard yourself against giving unwise advice?
12. How you can evaluate the advice you receive from others?

Prayer

Pray for those who come to you to ask for your advice and counsel. Also pray that your advice will be godly and sound. Also pray that people who come to you will be blessed and helped by your advice.

### Study 4: Mordecai and Esther, chapter 4

Comments

When the Jews find out about the edict they are greatly disturbed. They dress in sackcloth. They wail, mourn and fast. Also Mordecai walks through the city of Susa dressed in sackcloth .

Esther, who is secluded in the royal harem, knows nothing about the king’s edict until her maids tell her about the strange behavior of Mordecai and the other Jews. She sends Hathach the eunuch to get more information from Mordecai. Esther now has all the details about the king’s order to destroy the whole Jewish population. The question is: What can she do about the situation?

Chapter 4 is the central chapter in the book of Esther. Esther’s character is clearly shown as she responds to the situation and through the decisions she makes to deal with it. We find that she does the right thing. As God’s people, we, like Esther, are expected to do the right thing in each situation.

Questions

1. List the order in which the events are presented in this chapter.
2. How did Mordecai and the Jewish population of Susa react to the news of the king’s edict (v 1–3)?
3. The reaction of Mordecai and the Jews when they find out about Haman’s plot tells us something about the Jews and their situation in Persia at that time. Explain.
4. There is a contrast between the fasting of the Jews in verse 3 of chapter 4 and some of the events found in the first three chapters. Explain.
5. How does Esther react to the situation? How do you think Esther feels as matters progress (v 9)?
6. Explain Mordecai’s understanding of Esther’s role and responsibility in the situation?
7. Mordecai’s arguments in verses 12–14 convince Esther that she must approach the king. Explain how.
8. In this chapter we see God’s sovereignty and people’s response work together. Explain how.
9. Describe Esther’s character as seen in chapter 4.
10. What about us? What character traits do we need in order to do the right thing in difficult situations?
11. Think of a situation in the past, when God called you to do something that could become dangerous. What was your first reaction? How did you feel? Share your testimonies.
12. Think of your present life. What risks do you face to do the right thing? Share your testimonies.

Prayer

Pray to God for the courage to be obedient in the current circumstances of your life.

### Study 5: Esther’s request, chapter 5

Comments

As the story progresses the differences between Esther’s and Haman’s characters are highlighted. In chapter 5, we clearly see how they are contrasted. They both have to make a decision. Esther has to decide how to approach the king so that the disastrous edict can be revoked. Haman has to decide how to deal with the personal matter of Mordecai’s disrespect for him.

The way in which we face a difficult situation reveals our character. And the way in which we react to people that annoy us shows who we really are. Do we face situations like these with courage and humility (like Esther) or with anger, bitterness and pride (like Haman)?

Questions

1. In verse 1–8 Esther takes three risks. Explain how?
2. Put yourself in Esther’s place at this stage in the story. What does she feel and think?
3. What could have given Esther the strength and courage to face the king without an invitation (compare 4:15–16)?
4. Esther requests the king and Haman to attend a banquet in her private quarters of the royal palace. What could be the reason for such a request (v 4–8)?
5. What do we learn about Haman’s character in verses 9–14?
6. Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter interviewing Haman in the evening of the day that chapter 5 ends. What questions would you ask him? And how do you think he would answer your questions?
7. Esther’s and Haman’s characters are clearly contrasted in this chapter. Explain how.
8. The support of fellow-believers is often very helpful to us when we face trials and difficulties. Have you ever experienced this in your own life? Share your testimonies.
9. Sometimes we find it difficult to ask fellow-believers for help and support? What could be the reason for that?
10. Haman was obsessed with Mordecai and resentful of him. These feelings and attitudes poisoned his life and made him forget all the good things in life. He was rich. He had a high position in society. He had political power. He had family and friends. What can Haman’s obsession teach us today?
11. What about yourself? In which areas of your character are you like Haman? And in which areas of your character are you like Esther? Share your testimonies.

Prayer

Pray that God will give you courage and keep you humble and content as you interact with people in your everyday life.

### Study 6: Mordecai honored, chapter 6

Comments

The first verse of this chapter marks the literary center of the narrative of the book. When things could not look worse, a series of coincidences that at first glance seem insignificant take place, things that later bring the story to a very happy ending: The king cannot sleep. So he requests the court annals to be read to him. The reader happens to choose the passage about Mordecai preventing the murder attempt on the king (an event that took place five years earlier). Haman’s gallows is raised and ready to be used (5:14). Haman’s sudden entry into the outer court to pursue his own evil agenda. Haman’s thoughtless assumption that he was the man the king wanted to honor. All these events show that God is in control of the situation. Circumstances that at first seem insignificant prove to be of crucial significance, as the story unfolds.

We all have traits in our characters that displease God. It could be things like pride, boastfulness, arrogance, selfishness, jealousy, and anger. Perhaps we are schemers and manipulators just like Haman. Or perhaps we like to show off our wealth, our success, our power, our spirituality and appear better in the eyes of others than we really are. When we let ungodly things like these grow and develop in our lives, we can expect them to have all kinds of negative consequences. “He who sows wickedness reaps trouble” (Prov 22:8).

Haman’s experience in this chapter illustrates Jesus’ words in a parable directed to the highly respected but proud Pharisees, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11).

It is important that we as believers are frank and open about the areas of our lives that we suspect displease God. We must present them before God, asking him to remove those defects from our character. Our prayer should be, “Lord, make me more like Jesus!”

Questions

1. In this chapter we find four events that at first seem to be accidental but later turn out to be crucial for the happy ending of the story. List these events.
2. What does the king do when he finds out about Mordecai’s role in preventing the assassination attempt on his life five years earlier (v 2–6)?
3. There is a contrast between the activities that king Xerxes and Haman are occupied with during the night. Compare 5:14 and 6:1–3 and explain the contrast.
4. The author uses irony in the way he contrasts the vagueness of Haman’s information to king Xerxes in 3:8 and the vagueness of the king’s question to Haman in 6:6. Explain how.
5. The vagueness of king Xerxes’s question in verse 6 contains a literary device called tragic irony. Explain how.
6. What can we learn about Haman’s character through his response to the king (v 7–9)?
7. How do you think king Xerxes, Mordecai and Haman would be feeling during the events of this historic day?
8. After Haman has been forced to honor his arch enemy Mordecai the Jew, he hurries back home to his wife and friends to report what has happened. He probably hopes that they will comfort and support him. But he finds them totally changed (compare 5:14). How do Haman’s wife and friends react to him this time (v 12–14)? Why?
9. How does Haman’s life illustrate Jesus’ words in Luke 14:11?
10. In this chapter we have seen God working behind the scene using insignificant events and matters for his plans to be fulfilled. Has there been a time in your own life when God used an insignificant event or matter for your future good? Share your testimonies.

Prayer

Make a list of all the Christlike qualities that you can think of. Pray about your own life. Let the Holy Spirit show you the areas where you need to become more like Jesus. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you deal with these areas of your life.

### Study 7: Haman hanged, chapter 7

Comments

This short chapter is very dramatic. It begins with the second banquet that Esther arranged for king Xerxes and his top official Haman. And it ends with the hanging of Haman. It is a chapter about justice. Haman’s true character is revealed, and he is punished for his evil plan to destroy Mordecai the Jew and with him the whole Jewish community. Haman prepared a gallows for Mordecai but he himself is hanged on it. Esther’s wisdom and courage before the king and her faithfulness to God and her people are rewarded. Esther saves not only herself, but also Mordecai and all Jews of the Persian Empire. At the banquet the king finds out what has been going without his knowledge at his court, as Esther describes the situation to him with very strong words, “For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slaughtered, and to perish.” The word sold refers to the bribe that Haman offered to the king (see 3:9 and 4:7).

In this chapter we again find irony at work as the evil plot unfolds and things are beginning to be put right.

Questions

1. In this short chapter four previously hidden truths are revealed. Make a list of them.
2. Describe the way in which Esther presents her petition to king Xerxes (v 3–4)?
3. How do you think king Xerxes and Haman think and feel as Esther presents her petition (v 6–7)?
4. How is irony at work in this chapter?
5. What do we find out about Haman’s character (v 6–8)?
6. Justice is carried out in this chapter. Explain how.
7. “Character and justice” are two key concepts in the book of Esther. Explain how character and justice work together in this chapter?
8. In our answer to the previous question we saw how justice and doing what is right worked together in the lives of Haman and Mordecai the Jew. But in our own lives we do not always see this happen. How do we react when we face injustice instead of justice in the circumstances of our own lives?

Prayer

Pray for a consistently righteous character, a character that will always reflect God’s ethical standards in spite of the unrighteousness and the injustices that surround us.

### Study 8: The king’s second edict, chapter 8

Comments

King Xerxes is gracious to Esther. He not only pardons her for her audacity and accepts her petition. He also rewards her with Haman’s property. He then installs Mordecai the Jew in Haman’s previous position as chief courtier by putting his signet ring on Mordecai’s finger.

The edict that Haman tricked king Xerxes into issuing cannot be revoked, but it can be counteracted. So the king authorizes Mordecai to write a new edict that in effect will neutralize the effects of the first edict that was issued a little over two months earlier. The royal secretaries are summoned, and the new edict is formulated in all the languages and scripts of the Persian Empire. It allows the Jews not only to defend themselves but even to destroy their enemies.

The second edict is issued in June 474 BC and the following year a new Jewish festival commemorating the salvation of the Jews, called Purim, is celebrated for the first time.

The book of Esther has a very happy ending. God proved himself faithful to the Jews of the Persian Empire. He cared for them and he saved them from total destruction. Esther and Mordecai experienced that even in this hostile and unrighteous world God’s people will receive justice.

The Jews responded to God’s faithfulness with rejoicing and celebration. That should also be our response to God. God has saved us from a life in sin and misery, he has installed us as heirs of the kingdom of God, and he has granted us eternal life with him in heaven.

Questions

1. Esther and Mordecai are rewarded by God through the actions of the king in four ways. Make a list.
2. What additional things do we learn about Esther and her character (v 3–6)?
3. King Xerxes reacts positively to Esther’s petition (v 7–10). How?
4. The ruling of the first edict could not be canceled. So how did the second edict (v 11–13) meet Esther’s requests (v 5–6) without breaking the first edict (see 3:12–14)?
5. How did the Jews respond to God’s protection (v 15–17)?
6. Explain the link between the response of the Jews to the first edict (4:1–3; 15–16) and the events of chapter 8?
7. In the book of Esther, Mordecai and Esther faithfully serve God and do what is right. For this they receive earthly rewards (see your answer to question 1 above). However, we must be careful not to let earthly rewards be our motivation for choosing to do what is right. Why not?

Prayer

Thank God for his faithfulness to your group or to you personally. Spend some time in prayer.

### Study 9: The Feast of Purim, chapters 9–10

Eight months and twenty days after the writing of Mordecai’s edict, its orders are carried out. They are in conflict with the orders of the earlier edict, which the evil Haman had instigated. But the nobles, the governors and the administrators of the Persian Empire are wise enough to follow the new edict and disregard the old one.

The events recorded in chapter 9 take place in March 473 BC. That year, the Feast of Purim was celebrated for the first time. The days of celebration were the 14th and 15th day of the month of Adar, the first of these days in the provinces, the second of these days in Susa, the capital city. Today, Jews over the world celebrate Purim on the 14th, but in Jerusalem it is celebrated on the 15th.

The end of the book of Esther with its account of sword and death troubles many modern readers. But it should be read as a description of a unique experience that God’s chosen people had at the time of the Persian Empire. But it should not be read as a recurring pattern in the life of God’s people.

The story is remarkable because the context of the Purim celebration is death and destruction. But it is not the loss of life that is celebrated. No, the celebration is in honor of God’s faithfulness. The Jews of the Persian Empire celebrate that God has saved them from annihilation.

So the Feast of Purim is about remembering what God has done and celebrating his goodness and faithfulness. It is important that we as God’s people today also remember and celebrate the things that God has done for us. When we remember and celebrate his goodness and faithfulness, our faith is strengthened. So remembering and celebrating will help us grow in the Lord and help us face the struggles ahead of us.

Questions

1. What happens on the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar?
2. The account of the events on the fourteenth and fifteenth day of Adar contains so much killing and destruction that most modern readers are disturbed. So we need to realize the significance of what happens on these days (9:5–17). Explain.
3. Three times the text mentions that the Jews did not lay their hand on the spoils (9:10, 15–16). Why do you think the Jews leave the spoils in spite of the fact that the new edict allows them to take spoils (see 8:11)?
4. What is the purpose of the Purim celebration (9:20–27)? The wording in 9:28 emphasizes the importance of the Feast of Purim. Explain how.
5. How is Purim celebrated (9:22)?
6. In what way can the Purim celebration inspire Christian believers today?
7. What happens to Esther and Mordecai after the Purim celebration are over (9:29–10:3).
8. Why was Mordecai such a good and respected leader? Make a list.
9. As we read the Bible we find many occasions when God tells his people to remember the times he helped his people, or when he provided for them, or when he saved them from their enemies. Why is it important for us as Christian believers today to remember what God has done for us?
10. Are there occasions when God has done something great or something decisive for you or for your church, something that you would like to remember? Would it be good to celebrate these occasions in some way or other? And in that case, how would you celebrate/commemorate (either individually or as a church)? Share thoughts and ideas in your group.

### Study 10: Role models in the book of Esther

Introduction

In the book of Esther we have come to know two persons, who were used by God in extraordinary ways to save the Jewish population of the Persian Empire from total extinction – Esther and her uncle Mordecai. They were both Jews by heritage and faith. They were both placed in high positions in the court of the Persian king Xerxes (Ahasuerus). They both had to face exceptional challenges. And they both lived in circumstances where the people of God were a scattered and threatened minority.

But they were also very different. Esther was a young and beautiful girl who went through an elaborate selection process to replace Vashti as queen of Persia, but her faith and ethnicity were not revealed to the royal court. Mordecai, on the other hand, was open about his Jewish faith and ethnicity. He was probably a middle-aged man, probably an official in the service of the king, possibly a eunuch (as nothing is mentioned about him having wife or children and as he seems to have had some kind of access to the royal harem, 2:11).

Esther and Mordecai were used by God in spite of their limitations and their difficult circumstances. We, too, want to be used by God – in spite of our personal limitations and in spite of our difficult circumstances as Christian believers in South India today.

So what can we learn from Esther and Mordecai? In what way can they be role models for us?

Assignment

Prepare a paper on either Esther or Mordecai. Call your paper “Esther – a role model for me” or “Mordecai – a role model for me.” Use material from the nine previous studies. Your paper must consist of two parts:

Part 1: A description/characterization of the person you have chosen.

Part 2: An explanation of the ways, in which that person is a role model for you. Your explanation must include reflections on problems and issues that you face as a Christian believer in South India today.

Present your paper to your fellow-students. It could be done as a part of this course. Or it could be done in connection with a college devotion.

# Esther answers

### Answers 1: Queen Vashti removed, chapter 1

Answers

1. This could have been the reason for the king’s lavish banquet:

The author gives a lot of details about the lavishness of the banquet, which was part of a six-month-long celebration. Probably king Xerxes wanted to display his great wealth and power to the nobles and officials of his vast kingdom. It is also likely that he wanted to use this festive occasion to plan his upcoming military and political activities. We know from history that Xerxes launched a massive military campaign on Greece in 481 BC.

1. Imagine yourself as this banquet. What would you be experiencing (sights, sounds, smells and so on)?

Comment: Think of the smells of all kinds of food, perfumes and flower arrangements. Think of the sounds of instruments, singing, dancing, talk and laughter. Think of the beautiful decorations and clothes and of the aristocratic demeanor of nobles of all kinds of nationalities. Think of the behavior of the guests as the partying progressed and many of them got drunk and disorderly. Describe how you would have felt if you had been there.

1. This could have been the reason for the king to ask Vashti to come to him:

The king had shown his great wealth and valuable possessions and now, perhaps a little drunk like most of his guests, he wanted to show off his most beautiful treasure, his queen. So his motive seems to have been to impress his guests even further by letting them see his wife’s beauty. He probably expected even more praise from them.

1. There were probably two reasons behind Vashti’s refusal to come to the king at his banquet:
   1. The king’s request was not a noble one: he wanted to display her to his drunken guests. So it would have been degrading for Vashti to come.
   2. Vashti had obligations to her own guests at her banquet for the women. At the same time, refusing to obey the king’s command would most certainly have serious consequences for Vashti. But it would also put the king in an awkward position. So Vashti must have thought carefully before she refused to come.
2. The wise men thought that Vashti’s refusal to come to the king at his banquet would be dangerous to the kingdom. Vashti’s behavior would become a bad example to the other women and cause them to be disrespectful to their husbands and thereby undermine the authority of the husbands. This would lead to nationwide disrespect and discord.
3. This happened to Vashti: She was permanently banned from the presence of the king.
4. The people that we encounter in this chapter (Xerxes, Vashti, and the wise men) can be described like this:
   1. Xerxes: King of the Persian Empire, very wealthy and powerful, eager to display his wealth and power to the leaders of the nation. So he is probably a proud man. But the story also shows him as a bit of a reveler and a person eager to follow the advice of his wise men. So his character is not very strong and independent.
   2. Vashti: Queen of Persia, extremely beautiful, willing to risk her position for what she thought was right.
   3. The wise men: Seven men who were very close to the king and who had special access to him at all times, eager to follow the law of the land but also eager to avoid controversial issues.
5. The key issue in this chapter is “respect”: how to gain respect and how to maintain respect. As I look at the main characters (Xerxes, Vashti and the wise men) from this perspective, I come to these conclusions:
   1. King Xerxes: He did everything to gain the respect of the leaders of his vast empire. He did that by showing off his wealth and possessions. He tried to maintain respect by listening to the advice of his wise men and by following the rules of the land as he expelled Vashti from his presence. But he doesn’t show respect to Vashti as a person. So he loses our respect.
   2. Queen Vashti: She was eager to maintain her personal integrity (as a hostess and as the queen of the land) by not leaving her banquet and by not giving in to her drunken husband’s request. By doing so she really gains our respect. She was willing to take a stand on issues that she felt strongly about; this is a respectful choice.
   3. The wise men: They were a group of very cautious men who did everything to maintain the respect that they had gained as the top royal advisors. So they interpreted the law of the land in a legalistic way and advised the king to expel Vashti so that the respect of the husbands of the country could be maintained. They thought that respect was something that had to be demanded and gained through forced obedience, not by mutual respect and appreciation.
6. –
7. I think that this is how respect actually develops between people:

Respect only develops where people share their concerns and appreciate one another. A dictionary will tell us that respect has to do with a feeling of deep admiration as you show esteem, consideration and appreciation for another person.

Think of why you respect another person. Then apply those reasons to yourself – if you want to gain the respect of others!

### Answers 2: Esther becomes queen, chapter 2

Answers

1. This is my summary of king Xerxes’s plan to find a new queen (v 1–4):

Four years passed between the great banquet when Vashti was dethroned (in the third year of his reign, 1:3) and the ceremony when Esther was crowned to replace her (in the seventh year of his reign, 2:16). During part of this time king Xerxes was busy with his military campaign against Greece. It ended with his defeat in 479 BC. After his return to Susa he remembered what had happened to Vashti. This is a summary of what then happened:

* 1. Xerxes remembers and misses Vashti.
  2. His personal attendants propose that he try to find a replacement for Vashti among all the beautiful virgins of the empire.
  3. Xerxes agrees to the proposal and puts his eunuch Hegai in charge of the search and of the “beautification” of the girls found.

1. This is how Esther comes into the story and how she becomes king Xerxes’s queen (v 5–17):

Mordecai, a Jewish official, is first introduced. He has in his custody a beautiful orphan relative by the name of Hadassah/Esther. Esther is found by those who are looking for beautiful virgin girls for the king. Hegai the eunuch approves of her and arranges for her “beautification.” But Esther tells nobody of her ethnic background. The beautification process takes a whole year. Then she is taken to the king to spend the night with him. The next day she is not brought into the concubine section of the harem like the other girls who has slept with the king. Instead she is taken to the royal residence where she is crowned.

1. How do you think Esther felt during the long process of selection and preparation for queenhood?

Esther was probably very nervous about what would happen to her. How would she be treated? What were here chances of becoming queen, or would she just remain one of the many other women of the royal harem? How would her life be at the royal court? Was it really God’s plan for her life to become the queen of whole empire? She would be also have been sad about leaving och family and all her old friends.

1. How do you think Mordecai felt as Esther was selected and being prepared for queenhood?

Mordecai was probably both nervous and anxious about the future of his young and extremely beautiful relative Esther: How would she be treated? What were her chances of being selected? What kind of life would she have as queen of the mighty Persian Empire? Would she be able to have any influence? How would God use her in such an elevated position?

1. The author mentions three times that Esther won the approval of someone’s eyes (v 9, 15, 17). That makes us understand something important about Esther:

Esther would not have won everybody’s approval just because of her physical beauty. Esther’s personality and character must have been more important than her beauty. For example, verse 17 implies that the king found her appealing not just in a physical sense. Her humility and modesty are also evident from the fact that Esther (probably in contrast to the other beautiful virgins) only chose to bring with her what Hegai suggested (v 13–15).

It is important for us to remember that the way in which a person wins approval (or rejection) reveals a lot about his/her personality and character.

1. The king’s harem housed many women. What do you think was the role of these women? And how would Esther’s life as queen be different from the lives of the other women?

The king’s harem consisted of two parts, one for the virgins and one for those who had been with the king (v 14). The main purpose of the women of the harem was to provide sexual pleasure for the king. They could not leave the harem. So their lives were restricted and probably quite boring. They stayed in one part of the harem until the king called for them to spend the night with him. Then they were sent to the other part of the harem to live like widows, more or less forgotten by the king. There would be some young children in this part of the harem, children fathered by the king.

Esther’s life as queen was very different. She had more freedom, power and influence. Only as queen was she in a position where God could use her to save her people.

1. Mordecai repeatedly told Esther to keep her identity hidden. Here are three possible reasons:
   * Perhaps Mordecai was afraid that Esther would be treated poorly if it had become known that she was a Jewess.
   * Perhaps he realized that God had a plan to use Esther in her position as queen.
   * Perhaps he realized that the proper time would come later when God wanted her identity to be revealed.
2. This is how Mordecai enters into the plot of the story (v 19–23):

Mordecai is sitting at the king’s gate (v 19, 21) performing his duties as one of the officials of the empire. There he comes to know about a conspiracy against the life of the king. He reveals the assassination plot to queen Esther, who in her turn informs the king. The traitors are hanged and the incident (including Mordecai’s name) is recorded in “the book of the annals.”

1. We understand these things about Mordecai’s character (v 19–23):
   * Mordecai shows courage and integrity when he decides to reveal the plot against the king’s life. He risked his position and perhaps his life by doing so.
   * Mordecai shows deep concern for Esther by keeping in touch with her. He keeps on visiting her and counseling her.

People form an understanding of our character from each time they meet us. It doesn’t matter if these contacts are very brief. God wants us to be godly people all the time. Our character must be consistent. Consequently we must choose to do the right thing in every situation.

1. God is not been openly mentioned in the book, but he is working in many ways behind the scene:
   1. God has blessed Esther with extraordinary beauty.
   2. God has placed Mordecai as a high official of the empire so he can get to know about the assassination plot.
   3. God led queen Vashti to refuse to obey to come into the king’s presence when he was drunk. This led to her expulsion and opened the way for the new queen Esther.
   4. God worked through the hearts and minds of the people who selected Esther to become queen.
   5. God made sure that Hegai the eunuch choose Esther to be included in the king’s harem.
   6. God ensured that Mordecai’s name and good deed were included in the king’s book of the annals.
2. to 13. –

### Answers 3: Haman’s plot, chapter 3

Answers

1. This is the conflict between Haman and Mordecai (v 2–6):

It begins with Mordecai refusing to honor Haman by bowing down to him. But the historical conflict between Mordecai’s people (the Jews) and Haman’s people (the Amalekites) adds to the problem. In other Old Testament stories we find that Jews bowed before kings and others to show honor and respect (Abraham before the Hittites, Gen 23:7; Moses before his father-in-law, Ex 18:7; David before king Saul, 1 Sam 24:9). So the reason why Mordecai refuses to honor Haman by bowing down to him must be the old conflict between Jews and Amalekites (and not an expression of “idolatry”). In the same way, Haman’s furious overreaction to Mordecai’s show of disrespect has the same historical background.

1. This is how Haman persuades the king to accept his plan to destroy the Jews (v 8–9):

Haman gives the king a false picture of the Jews, without mentioning their name (or else the king might have objected to his description of them as both disobedient and dangerous). He also tries to give the king a bribe, which he initially turns down (probably just a polite gesture). However, the king does not seem very concerned about the matter and gives Haman a free hand by allowing him to use his signet ring. So Haman influences the king by appealing to his greed for money and his desire for power. As a matter of fact, the Jews in the Persian Empire were obedient to the king and they never caused any trouble, even if it is true that they had their own customs. So Haman gives the impression that he is acting only in the king’s interest, while he is in fact only promoting his own agenda.

1. The orders contained in the king’s edict can be described like this (v 13):

On a certain day all the Jews throughout the empire were to be killed and destroyed, men and women, old and young. In addition, all their property would be confiscated.

1. The author uses words like “every” and “all” several times in verses 12–14 in order to emphasize the extreme and total threat against the Jews. The detailed description makes absolutely clear that the stipulations of the edict would be implemented in every nook and corner of the huge Persian Empire. The result would be the eradication of the Jews.
2. The atmosphere among the people of Susa after the stipulations of the edict had become known is like this:

The people are bewildered (v 15). They probably cannot understand why the Jewish population is to be targeted in this disastrous way. Meanwhile the Haman (the villain of the story) and his ill-advised and misled king Xerxes sit down to drink.

1. We learn these things about Haman’s character in this chapter:
   1. He is proud as he insists on Mordecai kneeling down to him.
   2. He is ruthless as he plans the total destruction of the innocent Jewish population (not only of the person, Mordecai, who has offended him).
   3. He is scheming as he works out the details of his plan.
   4. He shows cleverness as he manipulates the king.
2. In this chapter we get two important pieces of new information about king Xerxes:
   1. He is easily convinced by the evil and proud schemer Haman to destroy a whole group of people.banquet
   2. He seems to succumb to his greed by accepting Haman’s bribe, even if he initially turns it down.
   3. The last verse shows that his is not concerned at all about the people he has just decided to wipe out. He has no compassion for the thousands of innocent people that are about to die. He is more interested in having a drink with Haman.
3. –
4. –
5. I think that we always reveal our own character by the way we give or receive advice:
   1. We reveal humility or pride.
   2. We reveal concern or lack of concern.
   3. We reveal selfishness or concern for the well-being of others.
6. Here are a few things to consider as we guard ourselves against giving unwise advice:
   1. We must first approach God for his wisdom. Only he knows the situation.
   2. We must be willing to allow God to deal with matters that are displeasing to him in our own lives.
   3. We must humble ourselves before God and allow him to use us as tools in his hand.
   4. We must humble ourselves before the person who seeks our advice and counsel, knowing than in ourselves we are nothing.
7. Here are a few of things to consider when we evaluate the advice we receive from others:
   1. It is easy for us to be swayed by others so that we follow their advice even when it is poor (just like king Xerxes followed Haman’s evil proposal).
   2. We should always seek the Lord’s wisdom. His Holy Spirit will guide us and help us discern the difference between right and wrong, good and bad.
   3. We should always evaluate the advice we get from people in the light of the truths of the Bible. If their advice is contrary to sound Christian doctrine, we know that it should not be followed.
   4. We should not accept advice from just anybody. Instead we must be selective of the people we listen to. It is good to have heard the opinion of more than one person before making an important decision. If king Xerxes had consulted any wise and honest person in his court, he would have been advised not to accept Haman’s evil proposal.
   5. We must be prepared always to evaluate any counsel we receive from others. The Holy Spirit will help us do so.

### Answers 4: Mordecai and Esther, chapter 4

Answers

1. This is the order in which the events are presented in this chapter:
   1. The grief of Mordecai and the Jewish population, v 1–3
   2. Esther’s initial reaction to Mordecai’s grief, v 4–5
   3. Mordecai informs Esther through Hathach the eunuch about the annihilation edict and asks her to plead with the king, v 6–9
   4. Esther informs Mordecai that it is impossible for her to approach the king, v 10–11
   5. Mordecai warns Esther that she and her family will also die as a consequence of the edict, v 12–14
   6. Esther asks the Jews to fast for her and agrees go to the king, v 15–17
2. This is how Mordecai and the Jewish population of Susa react to the news of the king’s edict (v 1–3):

Mordecai responds to the news by tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth and ashes, and mourning. He publicly displays his grief by wailing through the city streets. The Jews of Susa respond in the same way, with sincere mourning, with fasting, with weeping and wailing. Wherever the content of the edict becomes known, the Jews react in the same way.

1. The reaction of Mordecai and the Jews when they find out about Haman’s plot tells us something about the Jews and their situation in Persia at that time:
   * They are a closely knit community. So they all respond to the disastrous news in the same way. They make common decisions about how to respond to the threat.
   * They are an open and bold community. So they are not afraid of making a public show of mourning, crying loudly, wearing sackcloth sprinkled with ashes.
   * They are a religious and devout community. So they turn to God for help. This is the significance of putting on sackcloth sprinkled with ashes, of fasting, of wailing and crying. This is how Jews seek God’s protection and help.
2. There is a contrast between the fasting of the Jews in verse 3 of chapter 4 and some of the events found in the first three chapters:
   * In the first chapter we find a lot of feasting and celebration (the king’s banquet that Vashti refuses to attend, 1:3–9; the banquet and special holiday to celebrate Esther’s crowning as queen of Persia, 2:17–18; Haman and the king drinking and relaxing together, 3:15).
   * This feasting and celebration contrast dramatically with the public mourning of the Jews in chapter 4.
3. Esther reacts and probably feels like this in chapter 4:
   1. First Esther reacts to the way in which Mordecai is displaying his mourning. Perhaps she is concerned about him. Or perhaps she is embarrassed about his behavior. At this point she does not realize the threat to the Jews.
   2. When Esther receives detailed information from Mordecai about the threat to the Jews and his request that she should see the king and plead for them, she responds with fear. Not fear for her people, but fear for herself, because for her to approach the king uninvited is risky and dangerous. So at this point she is not yet thinking about helping her people or using her position to influence the fate of the Jews.
   3. Esther only realizes the full implication of the king’s edict after she hears Mordecai’s explanation of the full consequences of the edict. She now understands that her own life and the life of her family will also be affected. She feels that there is only one solution: She must risk everything and approach the king. She understands that her obedience to God must come first. She is determined to go ahead, not letting her fear stop her.
4. This is Mordecai’s understanding of Esther’s role and responsibility in the situation:
   * He knows that Esther has a lot of influence as queen of Persia. So he realizes it will be possible for her to change the course of events.
   * He also knows that it was God’s plan for Esther to have been crowned queen of Persia (“… who knows whether you haven’t come to your royal position for such a time as this?” v 14).
5. Mordecai’s arguments in verses 12–14 point out two important spiritual principles to Esther:
   1. Mordecai points out to Esther that if she fails to obey God and approach the king, she too will be affected by Haman’s evil plot. Her disobedience to God will have consequences.
   2. Mordecai also points out to her God’s plan and purpose for her life. God has placed her at the royal court for a specific purpose: to help her own people at a time when they desperately need her help.
6. In this chapter we see God’s sovereignty and people’s response working together, like this:

* It can be seen in the way Mordecai argues: He is convinced the God will provide deliverance for the Jews in some way or other, even if Esther decides not to approach the king. God will not allow his own people to be destroyed.
* It can be seen in the way God chooses to work through Esther: God will surely use Esther if she decides to approach the king. In addition, God will surely bless her if she decides to be part of God’s salvation plan. If she, however, decides not to be part of God’s plan, God will still save the Jews. But Esther will miss out on God’s blessings.

1. Esther’s character as seen in chapter 4:
   1. She has courage.
   2. She depends on God.
   3. She shows moral strength.
   4. She shows wisdom and humility (she turns to her people for support and she realizes that she must turn to God in order to be able to face the risks, v 16).
2. Important character traits needed to do the right thing in difficult situations:

* See the previous list
* In addition, we often need patience.

1. –
2. –

### Answers 5: Esther’s request, chapter 5

Answers

1. Esther takes these three risks in verse 1–8:
   1. She comes before the king without have been asked to. She risks a death sentence by doing so. But the king is in good mood and holds out his golden scepter as a sign of his favor.
   2. She twice delays giving an answer to the king question. By doing so she risks the king’s displeasure which might lead to her expulsion from the royal court.
   3. She risks the annihilation of her own people, the Jews, if the king sentences her to death or sends her away from the royal court. What will then happen to the Jews?
2. Put yourself in Esther’s place at this stage in the story. This how she might have felt and thought:
   * She might have felt fear, wondering what was going to happen.
   * She might have felt doubt, wondering if God really had everything under control.
   * She might have experienced that her confidence in God was strong enough to trust him whatever the future would have in store for her and her people.
   * She might have confidence in the support from her own people, the Jews. She trusted Mordecai and his commitment and judgment. She knew that she belonged to a strong and closely knit community who had survived many hardship in the past.
   * She might have felt hope and curiosity, hoping that God would have everything under control, curious about God would solve the problem.
   * She might have felt eagerness, waiting for God to use her to bring a happy ending to the dangerous situation.
   * Most probably she experienced a confusing mixture of feelings and thoughts.
3. Here a some things that could have given Esther the strength and courage to face the king without an invitation (compare 4:15–16):
   1. The plight of her people
   2. The spiritual support of her people as they were praying and fasting
   3. Her trust in God
   4. Her determination to fulfill God’s purpose with her life

You may have come up with other things as well.

1. Esther requests the king and Haman to attend a banquet. The reason for such a request is not specifically stated in the text (v 4–8). But we can be certain that God guided her as she was fasting and praying. God must have told her to approach the king and present her request in such a progressive way.

The fact that she asked the king to attend two separate private banquets like this must have made the king curious. Perhaps also thought that her request must be really important.

The delay is very important for the development of the plot, as four things happened before Esther presented her request to the king: Haman’s arrogance and pride blossomed. A confrontation between Haman and Mordecai took place. Haman had time to build a gallows for Mordecai. The king happened to find out about Mordecai’s role in preventing an assassination plot aimed at the king some time earlier.

We can be certain that Esther was aware that her own people were fasting and praying for her and that God’s plan would be fulfilled through her. She must have wanted her own timing to be according to God’s plan and timing.

As readers, we can clearly see how God’s hand was at work in the timing of each event, even if Esther herself was not aware of it at the time.

1. We learn these things about Haman’s character in verses 9–14:

Haman is easily flattered. He feels privileged to be invited by the queen to a private banquet with the king. This makes him even more proud. He is very arrogant. He wants to receive honor from others and is furious when people don’t show him the honor that he expects from them. He is boastful and he brags to his friends and family about his wealth and position. He is also vindictive, resentful and bitter, so he cannot forget or forgive the disrespect than Mordecai showed him. He is evil as he accepts his wife’s suggestion to have a gallows built for Mordecai and persuade the king to have Mordecai executed. He wants to have control and influence over other people.

1. Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter interviewing Haman in the evening of the day that chapter 5 ends. What questions would you ask him? And how do you think he would answer your questions?

Here are some questions that I would want to ask Haman:

* 1. Question: Why are you so upset with Mordecai?   
     Haman: He is really an arrogant fellow. He keeps on refusing to treat me with the respect that I deserve.
  2. Question: Is it really true that Mordecai and you are involved in a power struggle at the king’s court?   
     Haman: Of course not. There is no need for that. I am the highest noble in the empire and the king always listens to my advice. But Mordecai is just nobody.
  3. Question: Is the rumor true that you not only used you influence but also bribed to get this controversial edict passed?   
     Haman: Of course not! I have never bribed anybody. Why do you listen to these malicious rumors about me?
  4. Question: These rumors also claim that the king is not aware of the contents of the edict, that he never read it, and that he just gave you his signet ring to use. Do you deny these rumors?   
     Haman: Of course I do! I explained every detail of the edict personally to the king, and he himself used his signet ring on it. That ring never left his finger!
  5. Question: Don’t you think that the edict is too harsh? Are there really any reasons to wipe out the entire Jewish population from the empire? As far as we know, the Jews have never caused any problems. Isn’t it enough if Mordecai is punished?   
     Haman: No, it is not enough! All Jews deserve to be wiped out from the face of the earth. They are the worst people. Ever since ancient times they have fought against the Amalekites and other nations. As an Agagite myself, I have all the historical documentation.

1. This is how Esther’s and Haman’s characters are contrasted in this chapter:

Esther has both courage and humility to act in the correct way. She takes enormous risks for her people. She does the right things in the eyes of God. Her character traits are very positive.

Haman’s character traits are very negative. He is evil, selfish and arrogant. He promotes his own agenda. He does what is wrong throughout the story.

1. The support of fellow-believers: Here are a few examples:
   1. In this story we find that fasting was a great support for Esther. It was probably accompanied by prayer.
   2. Moral support and words of comfort and encouragement
   3. Counseling, especially if you are confused about what to do
   4. Physical presence: people staying with you, accompanying you and so on
2. Some reasons why we sometimes find it difficult to ask fellow-believers for help and support:
   1. We are proud and feel that it is embarrassing to ask for help.
   2. We don’t want to expose ourselves and show our weaknesses.
   3. We want to prove that we can manage. We want to be independent.
   4. We think that it is our lack of faith (or low spiritual standards) that is the cause our present difficulty.
3. Haman’s obsession and its consequences teach us not to be like him:
   1. He was obsessed with power.
   2. He was willing to use unjust means (manipulation, bribery, intrigue, lies) to get more power.
   3. He was not content with what he had, but wanted more.
   4. He was proud, boastful, vengeful and full of selfish ambition.

Selfish ambition and discontent is a very dangerous combination. It will tempt us to act dishonestly and it will embitter our lives. Haman is not a good role model for us.

1. –

### Answers 6: Mordecai honored, chapter 6

Answers

1. The plot of the book of Esther is built on circumstances that God use to bring about his purposes. In this chapter we find four events that at first seem to be accidental but later turn out to be crucial for the happy ending of the story:
   1. The king happens to have a sleepless night.
   2. The courtier just happens to read to king Xerxes the portion in the court annals about Mordecai’s disclosure of the assassination plot five years earlier.
   3. Haman happens to enter the outer court when the king is deciding how to honor Mordecai the Jew.
   4. So Haman happens to be the person who honors Mordecai (instead of having him hanged, which was what he has come to see the king about).

Here we see how God makes use of small and everyday happenings for his purposes to be fulfilled and to bring glory to his name. This is an important theme in the book of Esther.

1. This is what the king does when he finds out about Mordecai’s role in preventing the assassination attempt on his life five years earlier (v 2–6):
   * First he finds out how Mordecai was honored. He is told that Mordecai wasn’t honored at all.
   * Then he happens to come across Haman and asks him what would be a good way for the king to honor a person whom he is pleased with.
2. There is a contrast between the activities that king Xerxes and Haman are occupied with during the night (5:14 and 6:1–3):
   1. Haman wants to see Mordecai the Jew killed. So he spends his night building a gallows and thinking about how to persuade king Xerxes to have Mordecai executed. His intention is to destroy Mordecai.
   2. The king spends the later part of his night thinking about how to honor someone who has saved his life and not been rewarded for his good deed. His intention is to honor Mordecai.
   3. So it is ironic that the very person both men are thinking about is Mordecai, but with contrasting intentions.
   4. The irony is increased by the fact that Haman enters the court with the purpose of requesting king Xerxes to order Mordecai’s execution. But he does not realize that he will leave the court with king Xerxes’s instructions to publicly honor his enemy.
3. The author uses irony in the way he contrasts the vagueness of Haman’s information to king Xerxes in 3:8 and the vagueness of the king’s question to Haman in 6:6:

Haman was intentionally vague in 3:8 when he didn’t disclose to the king that it was actually the Jews that he had in mind with his expression “a certain people.” By being vague he achieved his evil purpose. In 6:6 the king is unintentionally vague about whom he refers to with his expression “the man whom the king delights to honor.” Haman wrongly concludes that he himself is that man. But the king is actually referring to Mordecai the Jew, Haman’s enemy who was the main target of his evil plot in chapter 3.

1. The vagueness of king Xerxes’s question in verse 6 contains a literary device called tragic irony. This means that the reader has crucial information which the person in the story is unaware of, information that may lead to his downfall. In this case the reader knows that the king wants to honor Mordecai, but Haman assumes that the king wants to honor him. So he answers the king’s question in a way that he will soon deeply regret. And his answer will result in his own death that same night.
2. There are three points in Haman’s response to the king (v 7–9) that add to our earlier understanding of his character:
   1. Haman is so conceited that he immediately thinks of himself, “Who else could the king want to honor?”
   2. He goal in life is public recognition. He wants even more prestige.
   3. He was dissatisfied with what he already had (wealth, power, social status). He wanted even more recognition.
3. This is perhaps how king Xerxes, Mordecai and Haman would be feeling during the events of this historic day:
   1. King Xerxes: He would be wondering throughout the day what is going on and whom he can trust.
   2. Mordecai the Jew: He would start the day praying for the situation of the Jews, and for Esther. He would worry about if Esther is making progress trying to make the king revoke the edict. At the end of the day he would be thankful to God for the miraculous way his life has been saved. He would also feel happy to have been honored by the king in such an elaborate way.
   3. Haman the Agagite: In the morning he would be happy knowing that his revenge on Mordecai the Jew was just round the corner. Then as the king approaches him with his question about how to honor a good person, he would be proud and filled with great anticipation of being honored by the king in such an elaborate way. Then as he is forced to honor Mordecai, he would feel angry, humiliated, defeated and bitter, perhaps even afraid about his future.
4. After Haman has been forced to honor his arch enemy Mordecai the Jew, he hurries back home to his wife and friends to report what has happened. He probably hopes that they will comfort and support him. But he finds them totally changed (compare 5:14). This is how Haman’s wife and friends react to him (v 12–14):

They do not support or comfort Haman at all. They even say that it was wrong of him even to have tried to oppose Mordecai. Note that the previous evening his wife was the one who suggested to Haman to build a gallows for Mordecai!Now they suddenly seem to have remembered the foolishness of opposing the Jews. They even predict that this would be the end of Haman! So Haman finds himself abandoned by everybody, even those who have been closest to him.

1. Haman’s life illustrates Jesus’ words in Luke 14:11 like this:

Haman’s downfall was the consequence of his pride and his desire for public recognition. His goal in life was to be exalted. This ungodly desire ultimately destroyed him. God, who was in control of all the events in the Persian Empire under the rule of kung Xerxes, blessed the humble and unselfish Mordecai with honor and recognition but punished the proud and selfish Haman with disgrace and defeat.

Haman is a lesson of warning to us: We too will one day see the consequences of our pride and desire for public recognition. Our ungodliness will ultimately lead to our downfall.

1. –

### Answers 7: Haman hanged, chapter 7

Answers

1. Four previously hidden truths are revealed in this chapter:
   1. Esther’s Jewish ethnicity is revealed to the king and to Haman.
   2. King Xerxes finds out that the community that Haman has tricked him into destroying are the Jews.
   3. Esther and Xerxes find out that Haman has built a gallows for Mordecai the Jew and that he plans to have Mordecai executed.
   4. The king find finds out about Haman’s true character. Haman’s secrets are now revealed to him. Haman’s fate confirms Jesus’ words in John 3:20, “For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come into the light so that his deeds may not be revealed.” Haman’s evil deeds have been brought into the light and the consequence is his downfall.

The story has now reached the point when everything has been brought into the light. There are no longer any secrets. The truth has been revealed to the king and his people.

1. This is how Esther presents her petition to king Xerxes (v 3–4):
   1. Esther begins her approach humbly and politely. She asks the king if she has found favor in his sight.
   2. Esther then states her petition in a very blunt but also intriguing way: He asks the king to spare her life and the life of her people. It must have surprised the king to find out that she belonged to the disobedient community that he was about to annihilate by his edict.
   3. But Esther also makes an allusion to the circumstances of the edict by using the word sold. The king sold the Jews to destruction when he received money from Haman. The king allowed Haman use the king’s signet ring and formulate the words of the edict.
2. King Xerxes and Haman perhaps think and feel like this as Esther presents her petition (v 6–7):
   1. King Xerxes is surprised to find out that queen Esther belongs to the Jewish community. He is shocked about his part in Haman’s plot. He is furious with Haman for manipulating him and putting him in this embarrassing situation. He reacts by leaving the banquet and going into the garden. He needs to cool down and come up with a good way of punishing Haman.
   2. Haman is terrified. Everything that he has planned has been ruined in a matter of minutes. Now his own life is at stake.
3. We find at least five examples of irony at work in this chapter:
   1. It is ironic that Haman is exposed by one of his enemies. Not until this point in the story does he realize that Esther is a Jewess.
   2. It is ironic that Haman’s only solution to his problem is to beg Esther save his life. As a Jewess Esther would have been killed by the edict.
   3. It is ironic that Haman, who became angry when the Jew Mordecai refused to bow down before him, now has to bow down before Esther a Jewess.
   4. It is ironic that Haman’s very act of pleading for his life becomes the act that seals his death sentence. As he bows down before Esther he trips and falls onto her sofa. The king re-enters the room and misinterprets Haman’s act as a sexual assault on his queen.
   5. It is ironic that Haman ends his life on the very gallows that he built the previous night for the hanging of his enemy Mordecai, Esther’s relative.
4. This is what verses 6–8 reveal about Haman’s character:

Esther openly states that Haman is a vile person who has plotted against the Jews. As the king leaves the room, Haman stays behind with queen Esther to plead for his life. By doing so he breaks the strict rules of the court. To approach the queen and speak to her without the king present was a great offense. Haman is either foolish or totally desperate.

1. This is how we see justice carried out in this chapter:
   1. Haman’s true character is revealed. His plot is uncovered. He is punished for his wickedness and executed. So Haman receives justice.
   2. Esther’s life is saved. She is also able to save the whole Jewish community. So Esther receives justice.
   3. Mordecai the Jew was rewarded earlier by the king. Now he is vindicated as his enemy Haman suffers the death that he had planned for Mordecai. So Mordecai receives justice.
2. This is how the key concepts of “character” and “justice” work together in this chapter:
   * The wicked person is punished. Haman is wicked and he gets what he deserves. He did the wrong thing, and his punishment was just.
   * The righteous persons are rewarded. Esther and Mordecai did the right things, and their rewards were just.

So we find that those who have integrity and godly character (Esther and Mordecai) triumph over those who are evil (in this case Haman). The story has a very happy – and just – ending. But, in our own experience this is not always what happens (see the following question).

1. There are four possible responses when we face injustice instead of justice in the circumstances of our own lives:
   1. We take justice into our own hand. We make sure that the person who has caused us injustice is punished, one way or another.
   2. We get bitter. Our whole life gets entangled in bitterness. We cannot forget the injustice that we have suffered. We cannot get on with our life. We lose spiritual direction in our life.
   3. We lose faith in God and his justice. We turn our back on God and on a life in fellowship with him.
   4. We bring our situation before God (just as the psalmist does in Psalm 73). We put our trust in God and his justice. We understand that one day (even if it is not in this world or during our own lifetime) his justice will be manifested: God will truly reward the just. God will truly punish the unrighteous.

Of these four possible responses only the last one shows that we have godly character.

### Answers 8: The king’s second edict, chapter 8

Answers

1. Esther and Mordecai are rewarded by God through the actions of the king in four ways:
   1. King Xerxes lets Esther have Haman’s property, probably as a compensation for the threat against her and her people. In those days the king seized all the property of convicted criminals.
   2. Esther puts Mordecai in charge of her estate.
   3. Mordecai replaces Haman as “chief minister” of the royal court and is given the king’s signet ring. The ring authorizes him to act on behalf of the king.
   4. Mordecai is dressed in royal clothes, a crown is placed on his head and he is given royal horses to ride. From now onwards he ranks second in the entire Persian Empire.
2. In chapter 8 we learn even more about Esther’s character and heart:

Esther’s compassion and concern for her people are deep and sincere. So she pleads with king Xerxes to do everything in his power to reverse the evils of Haman’s edict. Her heart really cries out for her people. She thinks more about them than about herself. She is not content with the safety of her own position as queen of Persia, as long as the lives of her own people are threatened (v 3–6).

1. Ting Xerxes reacts positively to Esther’s plea (v 7–10):
   1. First, the king rewards Esther and Mordecai for what they have done. He reminds them of this (v 7).
   2. Then the king makes sure that Haman’s evil edict is neutralized by instructing Mordecai to issue a second edict with the help his royal secretaries.
2. The ruling of the first edict could not be canceled. This is how the second edict (v 11–13) met Esther’s requests (v 5–6) without breaking the first edict (see 3:12–14):

Mordecai formulated the second edict so that would counteract the effects of the first edict. The first edict allowed the destruction of the Jews on a certain day. So the second edict allowed the Jews to gather together and defend themselves against this attack from their enemies. This must mean that the Jews were allowed to kill those who tried to kill them and steal their properties. But the king would not have agreed to an edict that gave the Jews a free hand to attack and kill their enemies without restriction. Such an edict would have been disastrous to the empire.

1. The Jews responded to God’s provision and protection with joy and celebration. They praised and thanked God for his goodness and faithfulness. The celebrations took place both in the city of Susa and in every province and city throughout the Persian Empire. They called this feast Purim, and it is still celebrated by Jews all over the world.

The inhabitants of the Persian Empire amazed at what God had done for his people the Jews. So many of them converted to Judaism (v 15–17).

1. The link between the response of the Jews to the first edict (4:1–3; 15–16) and the events of chapter 8:

In chapter 4 the first edict is made known to the Jews. They realize that this would be the end of them as the community of God’s people. So they turn to their Lord with deep mourning, prayer, supplication, and fasting. They have none else to turn to. God, their Covenant Lord, hears their supplication. He has mercy on them, and he acts to save them. How God achieves this is described in chapters 5–7.

In chapter 8 we see the result of what the Jews did in chapter 4 and what God did for them in chapter 5–7. The Jews turned to God in prayer, and God graciously answered their prayers. He protected them and saved them. Now the Jews are filled with joy and gratitude. So they feast and celebrate.

1. We must be careful not to let earthly rewards be our motivation for choosing to do what is right:

It is true that God often acts on behalf of his people just like he did in the book of Esther. Mordecai and Esther faithfully served God. They did what was right and they received earthly rewards. But the Bible also contains many stories where faithful and godly people are not rewarded like this. Most of Jesus disciples were martyred for their faith. So as God’s people, we are not guaranteed earthly rewards for our good acts in this world. Earthly rewards may come, or they may not come. Our motivation should be our love for God and our fellow man and our desire to be like Christ. Jesus taught his disciples, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Matt 5:10–12).

### Answers 9: The Feast of Purim, chapters 9–10

Answers

1. This is what happens on the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar (chapter 9):
   1. The thirteenth of Adar: The Jews assemble in their cities to attack those who seek their destruction. People are afraid of attacking them. The Jews are supported by the leaders of the Persian Empire. The Jews strike down all their enemies with sword, killing and destroying them. In the citadel of Susa five hundred men are killed. Haman’s ten sons are hanged. In the provinces the Jews kill seventy-five thousand men. No plundering takes place, neither in Susa nor in the provinces.
   2. The fourteenth of Adar: The king permits the Jews of Susa to carry on their destruction of their enemies for one more day. Three hundred men are killed. But still no plunder takes place. The Jews in the provinces make this a day of celebration.
   3. The fifteenth of Adar: The Jews of Susa, who have been busy the previous day carrying on the destruction, make this a day of celebration.
2. Two days of killing and destruction.(9:5–17):

We must remember that it is absolutely crucial for the Jews to defend themselves and ensure that the annihilation ordered by the first edict cannot take place. So the motivation of the Jews is self-defense, not revenge. They search for and kill all those who may be a threat to them. The Jews have been living in relative peace with their Gentile neighbors for many years. So we can assume that they do not indulge in unnecessary slaughter. But we must also take into account the emotional stress of the Jews since they learned about the contents of the first edict. It is hard for most of us even to imagine having that kind of death threat hanging over our heads.

1. The author mentions three times that the Jews did not lay their hands on the spoils (9:10, 15–16) in spite of the fact that the new edict allowed them to take spoils (see 8:11):

The very fact that the author repeats this information about the spoils shows that he wants to make a point. His point is that the Jews now finish the task that king Saul had left unfinished (see 1 Samuel chapter 15). Saul disobeyed God by taking spoils but not killing all the Amalekites enemies. Here the Jews kill all their Amalekites enemies (among them Haman’s ten sons; Haman was an Agagite and the Agagites were Amalekites) and they take no spoils.

1. The purpose of the Purim celebration (9:20–27) is to ensure that the Jews remember what God did as he turned their sorrow into joy and their mourning into celebration.

The repetition of the word “every” in 9:28 emphasizes the importance to the Jews of the Purim celebration. This must be remembered by everyone, both now and for future generations. It commemorates God’s salvation at a crucial time in the history of the Jews, a time when the Jews as a people were saved from total destruction. Celebrating and remembering this event would also strengthen the Jews when they had to face new trials in the future.

1. This is how Purim is celebrated (9:22):
   * The Jews rejoice and feast. So Purim is a festival of celebration.
   * They send gifts of food to each other. This strengthened their community feeling.
   * They give gifts to the poor. These gifts were probably food parcels so that even the poor among them could celebrate with good food.

So we find that the celebration of Purim was a feast for the whole Jewish community. It brought them together and consolidated them.

1. The Purim celebration can inspire Christian believers today in at least three areas:
   1. The importance of strong community ties: Do our celebrations unify us and strengthen our feeling of togetherness? Or do we focus more on ourselves – forgetting those among us who are poor and lack resources?
   2. The importance of remembering God’s faithful acts: Do our celebrations help us remember what God has done for us in the past? Or do we forget God in the midst of all our festivities?
   3. The importance of glorifying God: Do our celebrations bring glory to God? Or are we more concerned with filling our stomachs with good food and having a good time?
2. This is a list of what happens to Esther and Mordecai after the Purim celebration are over (9:29–10:3):
   1. Together Esther and Mordecai write a letter to all the Jews in the Persian Empire confirming how Purim is to be celebrated.
   2. We can see how Esther is still concerned about her people, particularly their relationship to God through the celebration of the Purim festival. She makes sure that the instructions about Purim are recorded for the benefit of future generations. She realizes that this feast will benefit the Jews in years ahead.
   3. Mordecai is confirmed in his high rank. He is second only to the king.
   4. But Mordecai is also foremost among the Jews and appreciated by his own people. He seeks the good for his people and intercedes for the welfare of all the Jews.
   5. Mordecai’s greatness is even recorded in the “book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia.”
3. This is why Mordecai was such a good and respected leader:

He is unaffected by his place of power and prestige. He does not strive for personal gain, but for the good of the Jews. He speaks in their defense and for their welfare. He is also well received by people in general, probably for his fairness, honesty and integrity. All this reveals the positive qualities of his character and his deep commitment to godliness.

1. It is important for us as Christian believers today to remember what God has done for us:

If we want to be godly people, we must understand that we need to remember and celebrate God’s work in our midst. Remembering and celebrating glorifies the Lord. It also becomes a testimony to those around us. The apostle Paul often reminds his readers to be grateful. Showing gratefulness to God is an act of worship. Celebrating God’s deeds in our midst is also an act of worship.

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