

Esther — “Thou Art Come ... for Such a Time as This”

Come, Follow Me 2026 — August 3–9 (lesson 32)

Parallel Accounts: Daniel 3:17-18 [↗](#); Genesis 39-41 [↗](#); 1 Samuel 15 [↗](#); Jacob 1:5 [↗](#); Doctrine and Covenants 121:34-46 [↗](#); Doctrine and Covenants 138:53-56 [↗](#)

← Previous: Ezra 1; 3–7; Nehemiah 2; 4–6; 8 — I Am Doing a Great Work

Next: Job 1–3; 12–14; 19; 21–24; 38–40; 42 — Yet Will I Trust in Him →

Overview

Esther is one of only two books in the Old Testament named for a woman (the other is Ruth), and one of only two that never mention God (the other is the Song of Solomon).¹ That second fact is the interpretive key to the whole week.

Jared Halverson (Unshaken) argues the silence is deliberate and perfectly placed. This story unfolds in **Susa, the Persian capital — enemy territory**, in the gap between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7, while other Jews are trickling home to rebuild Jerusalem. If there were ever a time and place where you’d have to *look harder* for God, it is here. Esther is, in his framing, the female counterpart to Joseph in Egypt and to Daniel in Babylon: a covenant child who rises in a foreign court and has to work out how to live faithfully inside a system that owns her.¹

Emily Belle Freeman and David Butler (Don’t Miss This) turn that silence into the week’s central teaching exercise. Tell the whole story, they suggest, and then stop and ask a class: “**Now tell me where you saw God’s hand.**” Someone will start with the fact that Esther was raised by Mordecai at all, and it will cascade from there. Freeman’s conclusion: “*If he’s everywhere in this story, and Bible scholars tell you he’s not mentioned anywhere — then could it be true that he’s everywhere in your story also?*”²

She pairs it with a small, perfect image: a friend once sent her a sunflower emoji for no reason, and suddenly she started noticing sunflowers everywhere — in fields, in her own backyard. They had always been there. “*I didn’t notice how many sunflowers there were until I started looking for those sunflowers.*”

Mark Holt (Gospel Talktrine) sharpens the same point by contrast. Daniel and his three friends **refuse to assimilate** — they will not eat the king’s food, will not bow to the image. Esther and Mordecai are the opposite: assimilated, renamed, hiding their identity. And God works through them anyway. “*God can be hidden in all kinds of places... And yet, God will look after his people.*” For a people about to endure centuries of exile, that is the hope the book exists to carry.³

The CES Old Testament Student Manual makes the same claim in one line: God’s name never appears, “yet an overseeing Providence and purpose are implied.”⁴

The Come, Follow Me title comes from Mordecai’s question in [Esther 4:14](#) — and Halverson notes that the exact wording matters enormously. Mordecai does not say *you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this*. He says “**who knoweth whether thou art come.**” “*To me that’s even better, because it leaves it in God’s hands.*”

Historical and Literary Setting

The king is almost certainly Xerxes I (Hebrew *Ahasuerus*), the Persian emperor famous for the invasion of Greece and the Battle of Thermopylae. The CES manual dates the events to roughly **482–478 BC**, in Susa (Shushan), the winter palace capital.⁴ The book opens by establishing his reach — 127 provinces “from India even unto Ethiopia” — and Halverson notes this is the narrator’s way of making us feel, from verse one, exactly how terrifying it will be when a young woman has to walk into that man’s throne room uninvited.¹

The literary craft is deliberate and dense. Halverson calls the book “a masterpiece” and Ariel Silver (followHIM), whose doctoral work was a *reception history of the Book of Esther* in nineteenth-century American literature, notes it also functions on one level as **fantasy** — a story of hope retold so that a threatened people could remember that deliverance was possible. “*The bad characters are really bad, the good characters are really good. There’s not a tremendous amount of nuance in the story — except in the character of Esther, where we do see a lot of growth and change over the course of the text.*”⁵

Holt adds that the book’s **narrative structure is chiasitic**: everything set up in the first half is reversed in the second.³ Watch for it — the reversals are the plot:

Set up	Reversed
Vashti summoned and refuses	Esther comes <i>unsummoned</i>
Haman promoted, all bow	Mordecai promoted, all revere
Mordecai in sackcloth at the gate	Mordecai in royal apparel through the city
Gallows built for Mordecai	Haman hanged on them
Decree to destroy the Jews	Decree permitting them to defend themselves
Three days of fasting	Two days of feasting (Purim)

Set up	Reversed
Haman casts <i>pur</i> to pick a day of death	That day becomes the festival of deliverance

Esther 9:1 ¹ names the pattern outright: “it was turned to the contrary.”

Key Concepts

1. Hadassah, Not Esther — the Politics of a Name

The first thing we learn about her is a name most readers have never heard. Esther 2:7 ²: “*he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther.*”

Halverson used to torment his seminary students with this — “*you know her as Esther, but that’s not her name.*” And if the Hebrew name comes as a total surprise to us, he says, we have quietly taken the Persians at their word. ¹

- **Hadassah** = *myrtle*, a tree that later prophets use as a symbol of peace and rest.
- **Esther** may play on Hebrew *sathar*, “to hide, to conceal” — appropriate for a woman concealing her Jewishness, and for a God concealed behind human action. But most scholars read it as Persian, likely echoing **Ishtar**, the Mesopotamian goddess of love and war (same consonants).
- **Mordecai** likewise echoes **Marduk**, chief Mesopotamian deity — the same renaming pressure Daniel’s friends faced with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The CES manual gives the simpler gloss: Esther means “star” in Persian; Hadassah means “myrtle” in Hebrew. ⁴

Halverson’s read on the intent: “*every time you are called by your new name, you realize that you’re not who you used to be. You’re one of us. And our gods have now become your own.*”

2. Vashti — the Queen Who Refused

Halverson gives Vashti more attention than most treatments do, and treats her as a hero rather than a cautionary tale.

Read Esther 1:10 ² carefully. Seven days into a drinking party, “when the heart of the king was merry with wine,” Ahasuerus sends seven chamberlains to fetch his wife and display her beauty to the assembled men. Note also verse 8: the King James “none did compel” sounds like moderation, but the NIV is closer — *each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions*. This is a court of unrestrained appetite.

Halverson’s key observation: the summons has **nothing to do with Vashti as a person, and everything to do with Vashti as an object** — one more piece of the king’s glory being put on display. “*I don’t think Ahasuerus*

is showing her off for her sake, but rather for his.”

So she refuses. And Halverson pauses to ask two questions of verse 12:

1. *What does that tell us about the queen?* **“She must have known that she was an agent, not an object, and therefore refused to be objectified.”**
2. *What does it tell us about the king?* That he is a man unused to being told no, whose “anger burned in him,” and who then hides personal wounded pride behind a legal proceeding.

Memucan blows one private refusal into a national emergency (1:16–18) — if this gets out, *no* wife will obey. The irony Halverson points out: in arguing that Vashti is dangerous, they are conceding **how much power one woman’s example has**.

His line worth writing in the margin: **“If you don’t want your wife to act like Vashti, then don’t act like Ahasuerus.”** He sets D&C 121 beside Esther 1 as an exact foil — *D&C 121 is commanding respect; Esther 1 is demanding it. And only one works.*

Don’t Miss This lists Vashti as the week’s **first hero**: *“there are some things that I refuse to do.”*² Silver adds the sober counterweight — Esther enters the palace knowing exactly what happened to the last queen.⁵

Gardner adds a third angle: **Vashti is a forerunner, not merely a casualty.** *“Vashti comes before Esther and provides the way, just as there is a John the Baptist coming before the Savior.”*⁶ Camille Fronk Olson’s description of Vashti: *“Queen Vashti was not merely a trophy wife. She showed moxie.”* Gardner further diagnoses the king: the impulsive anger of Esther 1 comes from a man who *“lacks confidence because he lacks virtue and charity”* — volatility as the symptom of a man without moral grounding.

Vashti lost her social value. She never lost her sense of personal worth.

3. “She Required Nothing”

Esther 2:15 — when Esther’s turn comes and each young woman may take anything she wants from the house of women, *“she required nothing but what Hegai the king’s chamberlain appointed.”*

Freeman loves this: *“she just was humble... I will just go in as myself, as the person that I am.”*² It sits alongside a detail from 2:11 — Mordecai walking before the court of the women’s house **every day** to know how Esther did. Freeman: that becomes his lifelong pattern. *“You see how much he loved her.”*

Silver reads the same chapters with less romance and more honesty about the cost: *“If you want to talk about a process of submission, a process of violation, in order to come to that place where you might have a small measure of influence — that’s Esther. And she does it willingly.”*⁵ Mordecai, she argues, knew exactly what he was doing: **placing Jewish influence inside the palace rather than outside it.**

4. Concealment as Wisdom — and Its Limit

Esther 2:10: *“Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.”*

Halverson resists the easy reading that hiding is cowardice. **“There is a time to shine and there’s a time to hold back. There’s a time to come in with missionary guns blazing, and there’s a time to simply honor the perspectives and experiences of other people.”** He wonders aloud whether Hegai would have shown her preferential treatment, or the king given her the time of day, had her Jewishness prejudiced them in advance — and unpacks the word: *pre-judice*, a judgment rendered **before** any real information.¹

But concealment has a limit, and Mordecai names it in 4:13: *“Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews.”* Halverson: **there is no safe place to hide who you really are.**

Note the asymmetry: Mordecai tells Esther to conceal, but *he* tells everyone he is a Jew (3:4). Different callings, different seasons — and it is that unbending man who raised her.

5. Haman the Agagite vs. Mordecai the Benjamite — a Feud 500 Years Old

This is the detail most readers miss, and it repays the effort.

Mordecai is introduced as *“a Benjamite... the son of Kish”* (2:5). Kish was the father of King Saul, a Benjamite. Haman is *“the Agagite”* (3:1) — a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites, whom Saul was commanded to destroy and spared (1 Samuel 15).¹

So the confrontation in Susa is a resumption of a war Saul left unfinished. And Halverson notes the closing of the loop in Esther 9: Haman’s ten sons — the posterity he bragged about — are slain, ending the Agagite line. *“It took a later Benjamite to accomplish that work, but now it’s done.”*

Why won’t Mordecai bow? The CES manual’s answer: *“Haman was demanding not mere allegiance but worship.”*⁴ Halverson: the first of the Ten Commandments covers “merely mortal” gods too. *“You’re dust of the earth just like I am.”*

6. The Rhetoric of Genocide — Esther 3:8

Haman’s pitch to the king is worth reading slowly, because it is a recognizable script.

“There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king’s laws: therefore it is not for the king’s profit to suffer them.” (3:8)

Halverson catches three moves:¹

1. **He never names them.** “A certain people.” If the king isn’t already prejudiced, naming the Jews might backfire.
2. **Difference is recast as disloyalty.** *Their laws are diverse → neither keep they the king’s laws.*

3. **Then the ledger.** *Not for the king's profit* — followed by 10,000 talents of silver and the spoil. They are worth more dead.

Then the detail that undercuts the whole libel — 3:15: *“the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.”* The neighbors are baffled. There has been no problem with these people for generations.

Halverson draws the line to the 1838 Missouri extermination order, and further: *“This is Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 40s.”* And note the arithmetic: with 127 provinces spanning the known world, this decree could plausibly have ended the house of Israel — **no remnant at all.**

7. Fasting — God's Fingerprint in a Book Without His Name

Esther 4:3 lists the signs of mourning: weeping, wailing, sackcloth, ashes — **and fasting.**

Halverson stops here, because fasting is the tell. Weeping is grief; **fasting is worship.** *“Who are they weeping to? Who are they crying out for? For whose sake are they fasting?”* He calls this the proof that God is present in a book that never names Him.¹

Then Esther's own instruction (4:16): *“Go, gather together all the Jews... and fast ye for me... I also and my maidens will fast likewise.”*

Freeman builds a whole application on those **maidens** — the seven given to Esther back in chapter 2. *“Who are your maidens? ... Are they people who would fast with me? Could I call and say, I am having a disaster moment right now, could you fast and pray with me — and would they think that was just normal?”* If not, she suggests, start praying for people like that.²

8. “Who Knoweth Whether Thou Art Come” — Esther 4:14

The heart of the week.

Mordecai's argument has three parts. First, *you will not escape.* Second — and this is the surprising one — **“then shall their enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.”** Mordecai is not afraid God will fail; he knows a remnant will survive somehow. What he fears is that *this* generation, *these* people, will not be it. Halverson: a good long-term result, a fatal short-term consequence.

Third: *“but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”*

Halverson lingers on **“enlargement and deliverance”** — other translations read *relief and rescue*, but he's grateful the King James translators chose words that carry maternal weight. *“Esther, you can be a mother in Israel... At least be our midwife, and deliver us.”*

He also reads Esther through Jacob 1:5 — **“because of faith and great anxiety.”** She has both, in full measure, and moves anyway.

Barbara B. Smith (BYU, 1982) supplies the most useful corrective to how this verse usually gets preached. Esther was not specially trained for this. *“We have no reason to believe that Esther had prepared specifically for the role she had to play, and yet all her life was preparation, as mine is and as yours is.”* The crisis did not create her courage; it revealed character already formed by ordinary daily choices.⁷

Halverson’s own application list is worth keeping: your calling, your geography, your education, your profession, your personality, your spiritual gifts, your patriarchal blessing — *ask God what He would have you do in this place at this time*. He runs the pattern through Church history (Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Heber J. Grant through the Depression, David O. McKay at the dawn of a worldwide Church, Gordon B. Hinckley in the internet age, Russell M. Nelson the surgeon accustomed to deciding without certainty) and lands where it belongs: *“So have you, and so have I.”*

9. “If I Perish, I Perish” — and “But If Not”

Esther 4:16². Halverson: *“I don’t know of more stirring words of faith, of submission, of acceptance of the divine will.”*

He pairs it precisely with its male counterpart — Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego at the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:17–18²): *our God is able to deliver us... but if not, we will not serve thy gods*.

Both are the same two-part faith: **if it be so**, God can soften the king’s heart and I can be the exception. **But if not** — I will still claim my people and my God.

Holt’s version of the same doctrine, drawn from Daniel: God did **not** deliver the three men *from being thrown into* the furnace. He went into it with them. *“He doesn’t reach down and pull us out of all our troubles. He’s willing to be born into this world and experience the troubles.”* And sometimes, Holt says bluntly, the lions eat you — Abinadi was protected right up until his mission was finished. *“If you ever find yourself on the side of Abinadi getting burned in the fire, just remember you’re in really good company.”*³

Note the reversal in 4:17²: *“Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.”* The guardian is now taking orders from the ward.

10. The Third Day, and the Scepter

Esther 5:1²: *“on the third day... Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court.”* Freeman pictures the morning — *bring my best dress, bring my finest* — and the moment on the threshold.²

Halverson reads it as sacred-space language: she has entered the king’s presence, unbidden, on the third day, and the question hanging over the room is *am I worthy to be here?* Then verse 2 — the golden scepter extended.

His application turns it toward God: *“I’m sure we do the same when it comes to the King of Kings, as we fearfully approach Him instead of coming boldly to the throne of grace... And yet it’s not just a golden scepter He’s holding out. It’s His arms of mercy.”*

Then she asks for a banquet. Both Freeman and Halverson register the anticlimax — *this was your chance!* But watch the phrasing she uses, three separate times: “if I have found favour in the sight of the king” and “if it please the king.” Halverson: that pairing is the balance of *am I worthy to receive the miracle I’m hoping for* and *is it God’s will that I receive it*. Miss either, and you may miss the miracle.

And the delay does work. Between banquet one and banquet two, the king cannot sleep, the chronicles are read, and Mordecai’s forgotten loyalty surfaces — while Haman is at home building a gallows.

11. The Great Reversal — Chapter 6

The hinge of the chiasm, and the funniest chapter in the Old Testament.

The king asks Haman what should be done for “*the man whom the king delighteth to honour*” — and Haman, certain it is himself, designs his own dream parade: the king’s robes, the king’s horse, a herald through the city. Freeman’s favorite detail is that he then has to **lead it himself**, on foot, proclaiming Mordecai.²

Nothing in this chapter is miraculous. A king’s insomnia. A servant’s choice of reading. A courtier’s vanity. That is precisely the point of the whole book.

12. Purim — Masks, Noise, and Portions

The name comes from **pur**, “lot” — the dice Haman cast to pick a day of extermination (3:7⌚; 9:24–26⌚). Halverson: Haman was trying to invoke *providence*. **Providence answered — on the other side**. The CES manual adds that the lot fell nearly eleven months out, which gave Esther and Mordecai the time they needed.⁴

Halverson attended Purim at a synagogue in Israel as a study-abroad student and describes it as the one holiday you can enjoy guilt-free:¹

- **The whole book is read aloud** — short enough to manage in one sitting.
- **Costumes and masks** — fitting for a story about concealed identity and a concealed God.
- **Booing, hissing, noisemakers, stamping** at every mention of Haman (some write his name on their shoe soles to stamp it out). Haman is named 54 times. Butler compares him to Voldemort — *he who must not be named*.²
- **Sending portions one to another and gifts to the poor** (9:22⌚) — Halverson calls it “*trick-or-treating with no tricks. It’s all treats.*”
- **Feasting** — the deliberate answer to three days of fasting.

His challenge: are we passing down *our* sacred past this way? Do we mark December 23rd? Do we keep Easter and Christmas in ways our children will remember?

13. The Second Day — an Honest Difficulty

Esther 9:13 ¹³: Esther asks the king to extend the Jews' right of self-defense by one more day. Halverson does not paper over it: *"some have considered this absolutely unjustifiable violence... If it is, then that was wrong."*

He offers a possible reading — that the fiercest enemies might simply lie low on the 13th and attack on the 14th — while admitting he doesn't know. Silver frames it differently and perhaps more honestly: the book operates partly as **fantasy for a threatened people**, and this is the ideal ending. *"Not only are you not going to get the better of us, but we will ensure to the degree that we can end the oppression that we face."*⁵

Worth teaching as a genuine tension rather than smoothing it over.

14. Two Messiah Figures

Halverson's closing move. **Esther** is the obvious type of Christ: a mediator who enters the presence of the king on behalf of a condemned people, willing to die to save them, on the third day. He points to 7:3 ³ — *"let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request"* — and notes that Christ could **not** ask for both. He chose ours.

But the book ends with **Mordecai**, and Halverson thinks that's intentional. Mordecai is the only one who never bowed; he is singled out as the enemy's target; **a gallows is built for him and the enemy hangs on it instead** (the serpent bruising the heel, the Messiah crushing the head); he is clothed in royal apparel, the city rejoices at his coming, he is second only to the king, and the book's last words describe him *"seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed"* (10:3 ³).

If Mordecai plays the Messiah, then Esther can be recast as **the house of Israel** — the bride, of humble and unchosen origins, undergoing long purification, guided by one who watches over her daily, and charged with delivering others.

Gardner's own Esther-as-Christ reading arrives from a different direction, emphasizing the **orphan-to-glory arc** that Halverson's treatment does not: Esther's lowliness (no parents, no standing), identity concealment until her mission required disclosure, a final meal *with the enemy* (*"She has a meal with the person who was going to kill her people"*), and *"if I perish, I perish"* as Gethsemane submission. *"She is a covenant woman. She is called of God for such a time as this, as the Savior was to perform and save an entire group of humanity."*⁶

15. Patriarchal Order vs. Patriarchy

Barbara Morgan Gardner's **central frame** for reading the whole book is a contrast the text sets up in chapter 1 and resolves across chapters 2–10.

Patriarchy (the world of Esther 1) is power-over, hierarchical control, the world that remained after Moses lost the higher law. The seven-day drinking feast, the king summoning his wife to display her beauty, the panic of the counselors — this is what a court looks like without covenantal love.

The patriarchal order (the world Esther and Mordecai work to restore) is husband and wife as equal, temple-covenant partners. Gardner’s exhibit: Abraham *asking* Sarah, not commanding her. The same standard applies in both directions — D&C 121’s warning that “*amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man*” who exercises unrighteous dominion applies equally to any woman endowed in the temple.

Patriarchal order	Patriarchy
Covenants, service, synergy	Power, hierarchy, control
Mutual submission	Unilateral demand
D&C 121 applied to both	D&C 121 ignored
Esther and Mordecai	Haman and Zeresh

Haman and Zeresh are the **anti-couple**: rather than lovingly correcting her husband’s pride, Zeresh feeds it, designs the gallows, and enables his destruction. “*What kind of wife is doing this?*” — Gardner contrasts them directly with Esther and Mordecai as a model of covenant partnership.⁶

16. Mordecai as Adoptive Father — Covenant Birthright

Gardner adopted children herself and at a conference in Jordan learned that in some cultures orphan daughters cannot be adopted due to birthright laws. That context makes **Esther 2:7** newly specific: **Mordecai’s adoption of Hadassah gives her a birthright she could not otherwise have**. As an orphan in Persia, she had no legal identity, no standing, no covenant inheritance. His adoption is not merely an act of affection; it is the conferral of everything that makes her fit to be queen and deliverer.

Gardner’s application: “*Before a daughter or son understands doctrine... they understand their environment. They’re going to learn the true nature of God by who they are associating with.*” Mordecai walking past the court of the women’s house every day (2:11) is the exhibit — a father who **shows up**, consistently and without drama, teaching what God is like through sheer presence.⁶

17. Covenant Keeper — An Identity Not Tied to Marital Status

Gardner’s closing application cuts across what the traditional Esther lesson usually lands on.

The usual application: *be Esther — courageous, humble, willing to speak up*. Implicit subtext: Esther’s power comes from her position as queen, her beauty, her marriage.

Gardner refuses that reading. Esther is an orphan throughout most of the narrative. She is unmarried for the crucial chapters. Her covenant identity — not her marital status, not her royal title, not her ability to bear children — is what makes her the deliverer.

“If you want to give somebody a compliment, call them a covenant keeper.”

Lorenzo Snow applied the same language to the whole Church: “*For some of the saints to act the part of Esther, the queen, and be willing to sacrifice anything and everything that is required at their hands for the purpose of working out the deliverance of the Latter-day Saints.*”⁶

Gardner cites President Nelson’s “Spiritual Treasures” and “Hope of Israel” talks as the contemporary equivalent of Mordecai’s charge — calling covenant keepers of every age, marital status, and role to be “*a big part of something big, something grand, something majestic.*”⁶

Teaching and Discussion Ideas

1. “Now Tell Me Where You Saw God”

Freeman’s method, and the best single lesson plan for this block: tell the whole story first, then ask the class to find God in it. Expect answers you didn’t anticipate. Then ask the follow-up that makes it personal.²

2. Read It the Way the Jews Do

Read the book aloud in one sitting. Costumes for the kids. Noisemakers for Haman. Then send portions to a neighbor and a gift to someone in need. You will have taught Purim without a single lecture.

3. Vashti Deserves a Conversation

Was she right? What did it cost her? What does it mean that the men in the room were frightened by the *example* of one woman’s refusal? Pair Esther 1 with D&C 121:34–46.

4. “For Such a Time as This” — Your Version

Not a rhetorical question. Ask it: *why this time, this place, this calling, these gifts?* Check the patriarchal blessing. And then let Barbara B. Smith keep it honest — the answer is built out of ordinary days, not dramatic ones.

5. Be a Mordecai for Someone Today

Freeman’s most actionable idea: “*Who needs you to say that to them right now?*” Send the text. Someone needs to be told what you see in them.

6. Who Are Your Maidens?

Who would fast with you on short notice and think nothing of it? Are you that person for anyone?

7. “But If Not”

Set Esther 4:16 beside Daniel 3:17–18. Both are two-part faith. Discuss Holt’s harder point: sometimes the lions eat you — and the promise is that God goes into the furnace, not always that He keeps you out of it.

8. The Rhetoric of Esther 3:8

Read Haman’s speech and name the moves. Where do you hear that script today — difference recast as disloyalty, a group unnamed, then a ledger?

9. Patriarchal Order vs. Patriarchy

Gardner’s contrast makes a good discussion anchor: read Esther 1 (Ahasuerus demanding Vashti’s display, the counselors’ panic, the imperial decree) alongside D&C 121:34–46. What does a home or community look like when it runs on *power-over*? Then read the Esther–Mordecai partnership through the rest of the book: who decides, who sacrifices, who listens, who leads. What does the patriarchal order look like in practice? Bring in the Haman–Zeresh anti-couple as the foil.

Personal Study Questions

1. Where in my life has God felt absent — and if I told that stretch of my story to someone else, where would *they* see His hand?
 2. Am I Hadassah or Esther right now? What parts of my covenant identity have I quietly let be renamed?
 3. When is concealment wisdom, and when has it become hiding? How do I tell the difference?
 4. What would it cost me to be identified with my people — socially, professionally, in my own family?
 5. Mordecai says deliverance will come “from another place” regardless. Does that make my part matter less, or more?
 6. Vashti kept her sense of personal worth after losing her social value. Which of the two do I actually protect?
 7. What has all my life been preparing me for, without my knowing it?
 8. What is my “if it be so... but if not”?
 9. Who has been a Mordecai to me — walking past every day to see how I did?
 10. What day of gladness in my life came after a genuinely bad start?
 11. If someone described my sense of identity and calling — would it be tied to my marital status, my role in a family, my position in the Church? Or could I claim, as Esther did, that my covenant alone is sufficient ground to act?
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Cross-Reference Map

- Esther 2:5 → 1 Samuel 9:1-2; 1 Samuel 15:8-9 — Kish, Saul, Agag: the feud behind Mordecai and Haman

- Esther 2:7 → Daniel 1:6-7 — covenant children renamed for foreign gods
- Esther 2:9 → Genesis 39:2-4, 21-23 — the Joseph pattern: favor with every keeper
- Esther 1:12 → Doctrine and Covenants 121:34-46 — demanding vs. commanding respect
- Esther 3:2 → Exodus 20:3-5; Daniel 3:12 — refusing to bow
- Esther 4:14 → Doctrine and Covenants 138:53-56; Abraham 3:22-23 — foreordination for a time and place
- Esther 4:16 → Daniel 3:17-18; Jacob 1:5 — “but if not,” faith and great anxiety
- Esther 5:1-2 → Hebrews 4:16 — coming boldly to the throne of grace
- Esther 7:3 → John 17:9-19 — the mediator pleading for her people
- Esther 9:1 → Isaiah 61:3; Malachi 4:1-2 — “turned to the contrary”; beauty for ashes; the great and dreadful day
- Esther 9:22 → Mosiah 4:16-26 — gifts to the poor as the mark of a delivered people

Key Quotes

“Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

— Esther 4:14

“If I perish, I perish.”

— Esther 4:16

“It was turned to the contrary.”

— Esther 9:1

“We have no reason to believe that Esther had prepared specifically for the role she had to play, and yet all her life was preparation, as mine is and as yours is.”

— Barbara B. Smith, BYU, 1982

“She must have known that she was an agent, not an object, and therefore refused to be objectified.”

— Jared Halverson on Vashti

“If you don’t want your wife to act like Vashti, then don’t act like Ahasuerus.”

— Jared Halverson

“There is no safe place to hide who you really are.”

— Jared Halverson on Esther 4:13

“I didn’t notice how many sunflowers there were until I started looking for those sunflowers.”

— Emily Belle Freeman

“God can be hidden in all kinds of places... And yet, God will look after his people.”

— Mark Holt

“He doesn’t reach down and pull us out of all our troubles. He’s willing to be born into this world and experience the troubles.”

— Mark Holt, on the fiery furnace as the pattern for Esther’s hiddenness

“God’s name never appears... yet an overseeing Providence and purpose are implied.”

— Old Testament Student Manual

“If you want to give somebody a compliment, call them a covenant keeper.”

— Barbara Morgan Gardner, followHIM Podcast (ep. 32, 2026)

“Vashti comes before Esther and provides the way, just as there is a John the Baptist coming before the Savior.”

— Barbara Morgan Gardner

“For some of the saints to act the part of Esther, the queen, and be willing to sacrifice anything and everything that is required at their hands for the purpose of working out the deliverance of the Latter-day Saints.”

— Lorenzo Snow, *Journal of Discourses* 23:288–293

Sources and Notes

Navigation

← Previous: Ezra 1; 3–7; Nehemiah 2; 4–6; 8 — I Am Doing a Great Work

Next: Job 1–3; 12–14; 19; 21–24; 38–40; 42 — Yet Will I Trust in Him →

Footnotes

1. Jared Halverson, “Come Follow Me — The Book of Esther: For Such a Time as This,” *Unshaken* (episode 32, 2026), transcript in `Sources/Series/Unshaken/Old Testament 2026/32 Come Follow Me - The Book of Esther - For Such a Time as This.md`. See also the two-part 2022 treatment (chs. 1–4 and 5–10) in `Sources/Series/Unshaken/old testament/`. ↩ ↩² ↩³ ↩⁴ ↩⁵ ↩⁶ ↩⁷ ↩⁸ ↩⁹
2. David Butler and Emily Belle Freeman, “Come Follow Me Old Testament: Esther,” *Don’t Miss This*, transcript in `Sources/Series/Don't Miss This/Old Testament/Come Follow Me Old Testament Esther July 25-31 Dont Miss This - Dont Miss This.md`. Their “Summer of

Heroes" treatment names five heroes in this book: Vashti, Mordecai, the maidens, Ahasuerus (for changing), and Esther. ↩ ↩2 ↩3 ↩4 ↩5 ↩6 ↩7 ↩8

3. Mark Holt with Bri Cox, "If I Perish, I Perish" (S01E45), *Gospel Talktrine*, transcript in Sources/Series/Gospel Talktrine/Old Testament/S01E45 - If I Perish, I Perish.md . Note this episode pairs Daniel with Esther on the 2022 lesson schedule; the Esther material is in the final third, and the Daniel material on "God goes into the furnace with you" is the better half. ↩ ↩2 ↩3
4. "Esther: Queen of Persia and Advocate for Her People," *Old Testament Student Manual: 1 Kings–Malachi*, ch. 31 (CES), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/old-testament-student-manual-kings-malachi/chapter-31?lang=eng>. Historical dating (482–478 BC), the meanings of Hadassah and Esther, Haman demanding worship rather than allegiance, the providential delay built into the casting of *pur*, and Purim observance. ↩ ↩2 ↩3 ↩4 ↩5
5. Ariel Clark Silver, "Esther," *followHIM Podcast* (episode 31, 2022), transcript in Sources/Series/Follow Him/Old Testament 2022/31 Ariel Silver ESTHER.md ; show-notes PDF at Sources/Series/followhim_old_testament_pdf/31-Ariel-Silver-ESTHER-followHIM-Podcast-SHOW-NOTES-ENGLISH.pdf . Silver's doctoral work was a reception history of the Book of Esther in nineteenth-century American literature; her interest is female protagonists, rhetoric, and agency. ↩ ↩2 ↩3 ↩4
6. Barbara Morgan Gardner, "Thou Art Come to the Kingdom for Such a Time as This," *followHIM Podcast* (episode 32, 2026), with Hank Smith and John Bytheway. Transcript/show-notes in Sources/Series/Follow Him/Old Testament 2026/32 Dr. Barbara Morgan Gardner.md ; PDF at Sources/Series/Follow Him/Old Testament 2026/PDFs/OT232-Dr.-Barbara-Morgan-Gardner-Show-Notes-followHIM-Podcast.pdf (download from <https://followhim.co/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/OT232-Dr.-Barbara-Morgan-Gardner-Show-Notes-followHIM-Podcast.pdf>). Published August 3, 2026 — the week this lesson is active. Sources Gardner cites: Bingham & Gardner, *Religious Educator* 23:1 (2022); Gardner, *Priesthood Power of Women* (Deseret Book, 2019); Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament* (Deseret Book, 2009) for the Vashti "moxie" quote; Lorenzo Snow, *Journal of Discourses* 23:288–293. ↩ ↩2 ↩3 ↩4 ↩5 ↩6
7. Barbara B. Smith, "For Such a Time as This," BYU devotional, February 1982, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/barbara-b-smith/time/>. The argument that life is cumulative preparation rather than dramatic climax. ↩