

The Book of Esther

Listed Scriptures

Esther 4, 6, 8

Lesson Aim

- 1) That the students may understand the circumstances of the people of God during the time of exile, and how they kept their faith
- 2) That the students may understand that we should be conscious of our blessings and to know how to be good Christians wherever God puts us
- 3) That the students may reflect upon their values and convictions in their Christian walk of faith

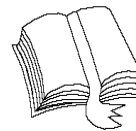
Memory Verse

“Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Esther 4, 6, 8

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



The book of Esther tells the story of the origin of the Purim, which is still being celebrated today as a major Jewish festival. It is a simple story of how the Jews were delivered from persecution and death. This is a book that has generated many controversies among biblical scholars. Firstly, neither the date nor location of the book's composition can be determined with any precision. There is an absence of clear historical allusions or perspectives (perhaps with the exception of the mention of King Ahasuerus). Secondly, Esther and Mordecai seem to be unconstrained by Torah regulations that defined Jewish identity for many. Esther could successfully conceal her Jewish identity, in the way she dressed, her diet and even her behavior. Thirdly, God is not mentioned at all. To some scholars, this point lends a secular tone to the book.



When you think about the word sacrifice, what are the first impressions that come to your mind? (Let students respond.) What constitutes sacrifice? We live in a society where each man is for himself. Faced with such a social backdrop, what is the true meaning of sacrifice? This is a question that probably cannot be answered in just one lesson. But, bear this question in mind. It is something worth thinking about as we meet more people, more challenges and new ideologies in our lives. It is worth thinking about not only for our sake, but also for the sake of people around us. It is a question fundamental to the human spirit, for it is something that goes hand in hand with love, without which we can not exist.



The Book of Esther

The book of Esther records the story of how a little Jewish orphan became the queen of Persia and later saved her people. This legendary story took place about 40 years after the rebuilding of the holy temple, which was about 30 years before the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. The setting is the capital of the Persian Empire, the city of Sushan. There is no mention of God in the entire book. Some believe that this was due to the situation that the people were in at that time. It was a time of captivity, and hence, a dark and inglorious period in the history of the Jewish people. Nevertheless, the power and grace of God over His people can be clearly seen.

A. Esther Crowned Queen of Persia (1-2:18)

- a. The feasts of King Ahasuerus
King Ahasuerus, more commonly known as Xerxes I, was one of the great kings of the Persian Empire, ruling from 486–465 B.C. He was the son of Darius (I) the Great. According to archeological findings, an inscription at Persepolis indicates his great power during his reign. He put down rebel-

lions in his empire brutally and even attacked Greece, burning the city of Athens in the process. The Greeks, however, managed to push the Persians back into Asia Minor about 466 B.C. Xerxes was assassinated in 465 B.C. The crowning of Esther probably took place around the year 478 B.C. From the description in the Bible, we can conclude that the feasts and celebrations were grandiose.

- b. Vashti lost her royal position (1:9–22)
King Ahasuerus held the great feasts to give a full display of the power and wealth that he wielded. He even wanted to show off his beautiful queen, Vashti, to all his guests. Unexpectedly, the queen refused to go along with the king and failed to show up, thus incurring the great wrath of the king. In his fury, he heeded the voices of the highest ranking officials and annulled the royal position of Vashti.
- c. Esther chosen as the next queen (2:1–18)
When all the beautiful girls from around the kingdom were selected, Esther was among them. She obtained the favor of the custodian of these girls and he gave her the best beauty preparations. Eventually, Esther emerged as the winner and was chosen as queen. Esther was Jewish. After the death of both her parents, her cousin, Mordecai brought her up. She looked upon Mordecai as her own father and was very obedient towards him. Mordecai instructed Esther to conceal her ethnic identity and parentage.

B. The Loyalty of Mordecai (2:19–3:4)

- a. Mordecai saved the king (2:19–23)
Mordecai thwarted the plans of two eunuchs who attempted to kill the king. He reported their ploy to Esther who then informed the king about it. This incident was recorded in the book of the chronicles, but the king never got around to rewarding Mordecai. Yet, Mordecai never asked to have any reward. He did not get upset nor did he try to take advantage of Esther's position.
- b. Refusal to bow down to Haman (3:1–4)
Haman was favored by the king and was promoted to a high position. In his pride, he demanded that all the subjects of the kingdom bow down to him. Mordecai knew that as a worshiper of God, he should never bow down and pay homage to any one other than God. That incurred the hatred of Haman. But, in the end, we see how God protects those who hold on to Him even in difficult times.

C. Haman's Ploy (3:5-3:15)

- a. The ploy was laid out (3:5-7)
Haman bore a grudge against Mordecai for not bowing down to him. He found out that he was a Jew and hence, plotted to kill not only Mordecai but his whole race! The lot (Pur) was cast and a date (thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar) was determined as to when the Jews would be annihilated.
- b. The edict to have all the Jews killed (3:8-15)
Haman deceived the king with crafty words, asking that the "rebellious" race, the Jews, be destroyed. The king did not inquire further into the matter and merely gave power to Haman to do as he pleased. The edict was sealed, that on the thirteen day of the month of Adar, all the Jews in the Persian kingdom had to be killed.

D. Esther Saves Her People (4-10)

- a. Mordecai persuaded Esther to meet with the king (4)
The Jewish people faced the impending great annihilation. All the Jews in the Persian kingdom were shrouded in a cloud of gloom. Mordecai reminded Esther to think of her position and her responsibility to save her own people from death. Esther was convinced that her royal position was something she could use to help her people. Facing the possibility of death for going into the king's inner court without being summoned, Esther put aside all her fears and decided to see him. In the meantime, she asked that all the Jewish people fast and pray for three days for her mission.
- b. Esther invited the king and Haman to a dinner (5)
By the grace of God, Esther was spared from death when she went into the inner court to see the king. She was very careful and wise not to complain to him right away. Calmly, she asked that the king attend a dinner at her court, together with Haman. Up to this point, she had kept her ethnic identity under wraps. This way, she had the upper hand, for Haman did not even suspect her. Happily, he looked forward to the dinner that the queen had specially invited him to. On his way home, he saw Mordecai, who refused to bow down to him as before. He revealed his anger to his wife, Zeresh, and his friends. At their suggestion, he had the gallows made, in preparation for Mordecai's head!

- c. The king could not fall asleep (6)
One night, the king tossed and turned in his bed, trying in vain to fall asleep. He commanded that the book of the chronicles be brought and read to him. It was then that Mordecai's role in saving the king was brought to his attention. It was also told to him that Mordecai had never been rewarded. The king consulted with Haman as to how a man whom he wanted to honor ought to be rewarded. Thinking that the person in question was himself, Haman suggested a highly publicized parade. To his great dismay, the king revealed that it was Mordecai whom he wanted to honor. Haman was given the task of conferring all the public honors on him!
- d. Esther unveiled the evil plot of Haman (7)
On the second night of the feast, Esther pleaded with the king to spare herself and her people, revealing to the king her ethnic identity. By the grace of God, the king's favor was upon Esther and Haman was sentenced to death instead. He was hanged at the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai!
- e. Esther pleaded with the king to revoke the earlier edict against the Jews (8)
After Haman was hanged, all his possessions were given to Esther. Mordecai was promoted to a position to oversee the house of Haman. Although the lives of Esther and Mordecai were safe for that moment, the edict against all the Jews was still valid. The king therefore gave his signet ring to Esther, that she could draft another edict to revoke the earlier one. The new edict decreed that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, all the Jews could destroy whoever sought to take their lives. Indeed, the tables were turned, and God's people were preserved.
- f. Purim (9-10)
On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the Jews destroyed all their enemies. On the fourteenth and fifteenth days, they celebrated with great feasting. These two days became the Purim, and it was passed down through the generations as a commemoration of how the Jews were spared from the hands of their enemies.
- g. Conclusion
We can see how the path of each and every man is different from one another. It does not matter what stage of life we are in, as long as we know that God has arranged for us to be there. Our role is to do the will of God and to be humble and just in all our dealings.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1 What do you think was so special about Esther that she obtained the favor of the custodian and stood out from among all the candidates?

2 What do you think was going through the mind of Esther when she approached the inner court to see the king without being summoned?

3 Mordecai did the king a great favor but was not rewarded. In today's world, people are so used to making sure others know what they have done. What do you think was in his mind when he quietly continued to serve the king faithfully?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Values and Convictions

Esther was faced with some difficult choices. At the most crucial point, she had to choose between life and death. It's not a decision that anyone would want to make, but it is also during these times that we learn what we really feel convicted about. Below is an excerpt of a testimony written by a brother. After sharing his answers, ask the students to think about the same questions and have them write down their thoughts. Be sure to ask them to share their answers so that all the students can be edified.

1. Write down one conviction that you have had for a long period of time. Please explain why by backing it up with an example.

A conviction is a fixed belief you regard so highly that you are willing to uphold it at all costs. One conviction that I uphold is sexual purity. I am very adamant against sexual relations before marriage. Thank God for giving me a fearful heart of Him so that I may obey this important commandment.

In college, it was uncommon to hear of someone who hadn't already "done it." These days a person is considered inexperienced and prude if he or she has not performed sexual intercourse with at least one partner. As the world becomes more "liberal" and corrupt, it is harder to find good friends that hold the same values and beliefs as you. Many are tempted and many will fall. Those who

are with Christ Jesus can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, control themselves from falling in. I've had friends in high school and college who proclaim themselves as "Christians" yet they regard fornication as something that can be compromised.

My conviction was tested a few times during my college years. I can recall an incident my junior year. One night a classmate and I were studying for an exam in the dormitory study lounge. We went through some old tests, reviewed our notes and chatted. Unexpectedly, my classmate proposed a question that took me by surprise. She asked me if I wanted to sleep with her that night. I thought I had misheard her so I casually played it off as if I didn't know what she meant. She reiterated her question and awaited my response. She had told me stories before of her ex-boyfriends, so that made it very easy for me to decline. It was scary to think how easy I could have just agreed with it and nobody would have known. Just one night, no strings attached. How many young people of this modern time would pass on that? Thank God for His omnipresence and for imparting to me a conscience where I understood the severity of the matter and that my entire life would have changed had I accepted that simple proposal. I was convicted not to fall into the lust of the flesh.

I realize that feelings and lustful desires can spur up at any moment, even for Christians. As Christians, however, we possess spiritual knowledge and the Holy Spirit to restrain our thoughts and control our actions to guide us away from eternal death. We must make a conviction for Christ and guard our bodies.

2. If you were to teach one value to your peers, what would that be? Explain in steps how you would teach it (4 to 5 steps).

I would teach the value of good language. First, the meaning of profane language would be defined. Next, I would give some reasons why people use profane language (i.e., to act "cool" and be accepted, to belittle others in an effort to raise his self-esteem, and/or from habit). After that, the students will learn why Christians should refrain from using foul language. As Christians we ought to be a better example to others in order to exude the fragrance of Christ and manifest the fruit of the Spirit. The Ten Commandments instruct us not to use our Lord's name in vain. Jesus' teachings and Paul's exhortations tell us to love one another and forgive our enemies. If you love your neighbor and forgive your enemies, you will not have a need to curse and use profanity. Lastly, I would use some examples of people who use foul language and people who use good language and contrast their characters so that the students can choose which they would rather be. The most important point to remember is that as a teacher, you must be the example to the value that you teach. You can not just "talk the talk," you have to "walk the walk."

1. Define profane and vulgar language
2. Give reasons why people use profanity

3. Discuss why Christians should not curse or use profane language by referencing to the Scriptures
4. Provide examples/testimonies of people who curse and people that use good language; contrast their characters
5. Be a living example

3. Read Ephesians 4:17-32. Pick one value that you also share from the passage. Explain how you would teach this value to your class (4 to 5 steps).

I would teach the value of telling the truth. The same method would be employed as mentioned in question 2. First, the definition of a lie would be given. Next, I would explain the different types of lies there are, ranging from “white lies” to the most severe ones. Then I would discuss why Christians should not lie and back it up with verses from the Bible (such as the Ten Commandments, Peter’s denial of Jesus, and Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians and Colossians). Then, I would contrast the consequences of lying against the rewards of telling the truth by using real world examples/testimonies. Once again, setting an example for the students is so important. If you don’t practice what you teach, you can not expect them to either.

1. Define the meaning of lies
2. Explain the different types of lies
3. Use the Bible to explain why Christians should not lie
4. Tell real-life testimonies to illustrate the outcomes of lying and being truthful
5. “Practice what you teach/preach”

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



There are many things we feel strongly about. Some of us resolve to never smoke while others feel convicted about staying pure. However, when we are faced with real-life situations and we are forced to make a choice, that is when our values are truly put to the test. And unfortunately, not all of us pass. At the same time, society teaches us that we often put our standards too high. If we were to lower them just a little bit, then we would be able to maintain our value system. But as Esther demonstrated, our values, especially our Christian beliefs, can not be compromised, no matter how difficult the choice. Let us resolve to remain strong so that we may fight the good fight and win the race to the heavenly kingdom.