



ESTHER, A COURAGEOUS QUEEN

- *a young woman who faced her fears*
- *a wise woman who fasted for wisdom*
- *a queen who saved her people*

KEY VERSES

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. —Galatians 6:7

Your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings. —Jeremiah 32:19

PROLOGUE

This lesson is a condensed version of Esther's story and focuses on the principle of sowing and reaping. The Bible tells her full story beautifully. You might enjoy reading the complete, dramatic biblical account with all its interesting detail, found in the book that bears her name.

STORY AND STUDY

When Hadassah's parents died, she lived with her cousin Mordecai in Shushan, the royal city of Ahasuerus, King of Persia. Mordecai and Hadassah were Jews. Their ancestors came into Persia as captives long before Hadassah was born. At the time of this story, the Jews and the Persians lived together agreeably. Hadassah took a new name—Esther—from the Persian word for *star*.

A new queen

King Ahasuerus was a stern man and was known to call himself King of all the other kings. He ruled with authority and expected complete obedience from everyone. One time he became so angry with his wife, Queen Vashti, for disobeying him that he sent her away with ominous threats. He'd give her crown "to another who is better than she" (*Esther 1:19*). He'd select a new queen to replace her.





His counselors advised him to “appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan.... Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti” (Esther 2:3-4). Ahasuerus thought it was an excellent plan, so his officers took the most beautiful women of the land into custody at the palace.

Pause for thought: Scripture says the women had to be gathered. They did not volunteer; they were required to go. There’s no indication that they were asked if they wanted to be on the King’s list. How do you suppose these young women felt?

“Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her.” But would she be most pleasing to King Ahasuerus?



Esther was one of the women gathered and taken to the palace for 12 months of beauty treatments before being presented to the King. During this time, “Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her” (verse 15). But would she be most pleasing to King Ahasuerus?

Pause for thought: Think about this beauty contest. If you were a young woman, would you want to be on the King’s list? It might be nice to live in a beautiful palace, but it would be dangerous to upset the King in any way. All her life the Queen would have to be very careful about what she said and did. What about the women who were not chosen to be Queen? Could they go home, get married and have a family? Probably not. Do you know why? They were the property of the King and likely had to spend the rest of their lives in the King’s harem.

Hidden identity

Mordecai believed Esther had the best chance of becoming Queen, but he also warned her not to say she was a Jew (verse 10). The Bible doesn’t explain why Mordecai said this. Some people think Ahasuerus had to marry a Persian woman and not a woman of another ethnicity. Would the King marry Esther if he knew she was a Jew? It was better not to take a chance, so Esther kept quiet about her identity.

Eventually it was her turn to be with the King. Now he “loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (verse 17). They married and lived peacefully for several years. But a problem came up between Mordecai and the King’s chief of staff, a man named Haman.



Now he “loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight.”

Kill the Jews

Because Haman was an important man with a very high position in the palace, “all the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage” (Esther 3:2). He said bowing would break the commandments against idolatry. Haman was furious and turned his anger against all the Jews in Persia.

Without checking the truthfulness of Haman’s words, King Ahasuerus sent out an order to kill the Jews and take all their belongings.

*Pause for thought: Can you recite the 10 Commandments from memory?
Which one talks about idolatry?*

Enraged, “Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai” (verse 6). With lying words Haman persuaded Ahasuerus to destroy the Jews because “they do not keep the king’s laws” (verse 8). Without checking the truthfulness of Haman’s words, King Ahasuerus sent out an order to kill the Jews and take all their belongings. What do you think was Haman’s real motive in all of this?



“Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

Esther’s fears

When Mordecai heard about this terrible order, he wailed loudly and bitterly. He told Esther to beg the king for mercy and for the safety and deliverance of the Jews. Mordecai further instructed Esther not to naively believe “that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews” (Esther 4:13). Mordecai said she was the only person who could do something to save her people. He rhetorically asked, “Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom [as Queen] for such a time as this?” (verse 14).



Mordecai's request made Esther afraid. First of all, she was a Jew. How long could she hide her identity from an evil man like Haman? When he found out she was a Jew, he would make sure she died with all the other Jews.

Second, it was a rule in Persia that people couldn't see the King unless he asked for them to come. Guards with swords took the life of anyone who entered the royal court without the King's invitation or permission. The King hadn't asked for Esther to come in over a month. How could she get in to see him?

“I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”

Esther's decision

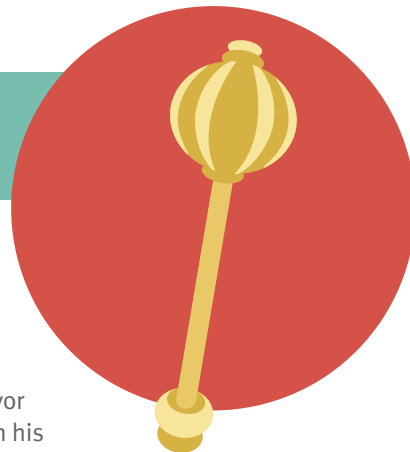
She asked Mordecai, her maids, and all the Jews to fast for three days. During the fast, Esther thought about her people and the terrible danger they faced. She thought about the risk to her life. At the end of the fast, Esther knew that saving her people was more important than saving her own life. She decided, “I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!” (verse 16).

“She found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand.”

Pause for thought: What is a fast? Why do you think Esther called for a fast at this time? Turn in your Bible to Isaiah 58:6 for a clue.

Esther's bravery was blessed: “It happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter” (Esther 5:1-2).

Esther didn't make a request for her people at that time. She invited the King and Haman to a banquet where she so graciously entertained them that the King was happy to grant her request. He asked, “What is your petition? It shall be granted to you. What is your request, up to half of the kingdom? It shall be done!” (verse 6). Then Esther revealed Haman's evil plot and asked the King to save her life and the lives of her people.





Pause for thought: Why do you think Esther did not make her request immediately? Would you say that she was using wisdom? Why?

“Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, he himself will fall into his own pit.”

Conclusion

It often happens when people do something bad, they get their “comeuppance.” The Bible says it this way: “Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, he himself will fall into his own pit” (Proverbs 28:10).

Haman conspired to kill the Jews, and he built a gallows on which to hang Mordecai. This would prove quite ironic, for “when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letter that this wicked plot which Haman had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows” (Esther 9:25). Haman received the very punishment that he planned for Mordecai.

It also often happens when someone does something good, he or she is blessed. After Esther bravely went to the King, he gave her Haman’s house and made Mordecai the new chief of staff (Esther 8:2). King Ahasuerus also allowed the Jews to protect themselves and save their property by making another proclamation: “And in every province and city, wherever the king’s command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday” (verse 17). The Jews celebrate this event even today on a day called Purim.

?? QUESTIONS

1. Knowledge

Why was Esther living with her cousin? What does her Persian name mean?

2. Comprehension

What did Mordecai mean when he told Esther, “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews” (Esther 4:13)?

3. Connections

Can you think of someone else who showed courage as a young shepherd in protecting his father’s flocks and later did battle with a giant enemy of Israel?



DISCUSSIONS

1. Esther's brave actions saved her people and brought good rewards. Haman's evil actions brought him swift punishment.

The Bible says that behavior works like planting seeds. If you plant radish seeds, you will have radishes to eat. If you plant pumpkin seeds, you will harvest pumpkins. The kind of seeds you plant ("sow") in your garden will produce the same kind of crop for you to harvest ("reap").

It works the same way with us. If we do good things, we usually get good results—sometimes right away and sometimes later on—and when we do something wrong, we usually end up getting into trouble ([Galatians 6:7](#)). God sees what we do and rewards us for good and bad behavior ([Jeremiah 32:19](#)).

What do you think would happen if for a whole day you were grumpy, irritable, complaining and quarrelsome? Would your family like that? How would they treat you? Do you think they would be happy with you? Would they do nice things for you?

2. Can you remember a time when you had to do something hard that you didn't want to do? Maybe it was going to the dentist. Maybe it was riding the bus to school. Maybe it was telling the truth about something you did wrong. Why is it hard to do the right thing? Is it better to do the right thing even if it is hard?

ACTIVITIES

1. Secret Experiment

Without telling anyone, take a whole day to try sowing good seed. Talk about things that are pleasant. Be friendly. Don't complain or quarrel. Say "thank you" lots of times. Do nice things for as many people as you can.

At the end of the day, think about how it went. Was it a good day? Did people thank you or say nice things? Did you see smiles? Keep doing and watching for results!

2. Good Kings and Queens

There are many kings and queens ruling in countries around the world. Some of them rule wisely and, like Esther, love the people they serve and work hard to do the best for them. Do an internet search or ask your parents about Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom. How long did she rule her people? She acted bravely in World War II and when her father the King died. Like Esther, she entertained very graciously and didn't forget her responsibilities to others. Can you find a picture of her as a beautiful young Queen? Can you find additional royals who are good examples?

