

Lesson 114

Esther Trusts God

God used Esther to protect his people.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Esther was gathered with other young women as a candidate and then chosen to be queen of Persia. Next, Haman plotted to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom, but Esther appealed to the king on behalf of her people. God had positioned the young Jewish queen to foil the plot and save the Jews.

Key Passages

Esther 2:8–9, 2:16–17, 2:21–23, 3:8–10, 4:15–17, 8:5–8

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Describe God's sovereign control over the events in the book of Esther.
Explain how God used people to protect the Jews.

Memory Verse

1 Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

As the book of Esther opens, King Ahasuerus (see historical section below) had prepared a great feast, but his queen, Vashti, refused to appear before the king's guests. As a result, the king's counselors directed him to remove the queen and seek a new queen from among the beautiful, young virgins of the Persian Empire. This decree by the king (whose heart was in God's sovereign hand—Proverbs 21:1) brought Esther into the picture.

Before Esther was known as Esther, her name was Hadassah. Her great-grandfather, Kish, was among the captives carried away by Nebuchadnezzar with King Jehoiachin in 599 BC (Esther 2:5–6). After her parents died, she was cared for by her older cousin Mordecai. They lived in Susa—the winter residence of the Persian kings. Esther was among the beautiful, young virgins who were gathered together, possibly by force, at the palace. Mordecai asked her to not let anyone know that she was a Jew (2:10, 2:20). Hadassah (meaning "myrtle" in Hebrew) would be immediately recognized as a Jewish name, so her name was changed to the Persian name Esther, which likely means "star."

In the palace, the women were cared for by Hegai, the king's eunuch, and given beauty treatments for one year (2:8–14). We see God's hand in Esther's favor with Hegai and his special treatment of her (2:9, 2:15). On the day Esther was to appear before the king, she pleased him above all others and was made queen. God had elevated a Jewish captive to be the queen of Persia.

All the while, Esther's cousin Mordecai, who was likely a scribe or advisor in the palace, had been keeping in touch with her (2:11, 2:19). At one point, Mordecai uncovered a plot to murder the king. He informed Esther, the men were executed, and all of it was recorded in the chronicles of the king. Sometime later, a man named Haman came to power under King Ahasuerus. Because Mordecai would not bow to him, Haman became enraged and arranged a plot to have all the Jews in Persia killed (3:1–15).

As Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews around the kingdom heard of the decree to kill the Jews, they were distraught. When Esther contacted Mordecai (4:1–9), he asked her to confront the king and ask him to spare the Jews. She was afraid to do so, knowing that she could be put to death for approaching the throne uninvited, but Mordecai counseled her with wise words. He reminded her that since she was a Jew, she would not escape the decree. If she did not go to the king, Mordecai was certain that deliverance would come from another place. He also recognized her placement in the palace as God's providence: "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:14).

Esther appeared uninvited before the king and was granted access—her life was spared (5:1–2). Surely, the king's heart was in God's hand. After this, a series of events quickly unfolded, again demonstrating God's hand: Esther arranged a banquet for the king and Haman; Haman planned to kill Mordecai; Mordecai was honored by the king; at a second banquet, Esther revealed Haman's plot to kill her and her people; the king ordered Haman hung on the gallows at his own home; Mordecai was elevated to Haman's position; and Esther and Mordecai were allowed to write their own decree to protect the Jews.

As you read through Esther, there can be no doubt that God was just as involved in protecting the Jews at this point as he was involved in leading them out of Egypt. Even though his name is not mentioned in the book of Esther, we dare not deny that God was accomplishing his plans through each of these people.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Although the book of Esther appears relatively early in the Old Testament sequence of books, the events happen rather late in the actual timeline of Old Testament history. The time period of Esther occurs with the historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah while the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, whose books appear later in the Bible, actually lived long before Esther.

There is debate about the identity of the king in the book of Esther. Some believe the time period of Esther was during the reign of Xerxes (485–465 BC), but we will connect him to Darius I who reigned from 521–485 BC. This places these events from about 520–510 BC with Esther being made queen in 515—the same year that the temple was dedicated by Zerubbabel (Ezra 6). The dates and explanations used in this curriculum are based on the work of Archbishop James

Ussher. It is difficult to assign exact dates in this period because there are few records and multiple rulers at the same time. Some rulers used the same titles and names. Also, the records in Greek use different names than the Persian records, and the biblical names are sometimes transliterated into Hebrew. With that said, whether this was one king or another, God was still in control.

The events recorded in the book of Esther are still celebrated by Jews today. After the Jews were delivered from annihilation, the festival of Purim was celebrated (9:18–32). This festival is still celebrated each year by the Jews to commemorate God's deliverance through Esther and Mordecai.

Here is another important idea to consider from a historical perspective: If Haman's plan had been carried out, Zerubbabel, who had led the return to Jerusalem, would have been killed. Why does that matter? Zerubbabel was a descendant of David who is in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:12. If the line of David had been destroyed, then the promised Messiah would not have come to pass. And yet God's plans stand. Let us proclaim along with Job: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2).

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