

Esther, Queen of Persia

(Esther 1-2)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Have you ever asked yourself, “Lord, what is Your plan for my life?”

From the moment you were born God has had a plan for your life. He has chosen you to take part in the work of His kingdom.

Today we'll learn about an orphan girl named Esther. When her mom and dad died and left her all alone, she probably wondered what would happen to her. But, God had a wonderful plan for her life! Listen today as we learn how Esther became the Queen of Persia through some very unusual circumstances.

Opening Prayer

Father, it is exciting to know that You have a plan and a purpose for our lives. Encourage us to read our Bibles and to talk to You every day so that we might know what Your plan is so that our lives will bring You honor and glory. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,” says the Lord,
“Thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

Lesson

Toward the end of the Old Testament times, King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and took the children of Israel captive. He marched them 900 miles to Babylon, which is present day Iraq.

The Israelites were enslaved there for 70 years. Towards the end of their captivity, the Babylonian kingdom was taken away from Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, and it was divided between the Medes and the Persians. (Remember the story when Daniel saw the handwriting on the wall?)

Some years after that there was a young girl named Esther. Both her parents had died and she was raised by her cousin, a man by the name of Mordecai who was like a father to her. He worked in the Palace of King.

Now Xerxes was the king of Persia. [Teacher, some translations of the Bible say his name is Ahasuerus. Xerxes is the Persian form of his name and Ahasuerus is the Hebrew form of his name.] His kingdom stretched from India to Ethiopia. It was a huge empire, so he had seven princes who each looked after a section of the kingdom.

In the third year of his reign he held a great feast for all of his princes. He wanted to show off his beautiful palace and his riches. This party lasted for six months!

Let's read about it.

Esther 1:3-4

In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. He invited all the military officers of Persia and Media as well as the princes and nobles of the provinces. (4) The celebration lasted 180 days—a tremendous display of the opulent wealth of his empire and the pomp and splendor of his majesty.

Boy, that must have been some party! It lasted six months!!!

Esther 1:7

Drinks were served in gold goblets of many designs, and there was an abundance of royal wine, reflecting the king's generosity.

For 6 months, everyone ate, drank, and was merry.

Then on the final day, when the king was feeling high, half drunk from wine, he told his servant to bring Queen Vashti to him. He wanted to show them his beautiful wife.

Esther 1:11

to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown on her head. He wanted the nobles and all the other men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman.

But Vashti didn't like the idea of being put on display.

Esther 1:12

But when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger.

It was very bold of Vashti to refuse the King! He was angry and upset and didn't know what to do. No one had ever refused him! So, he consulted with his lawyers. He never did anything without their advice because they knew Persian law and the king trusted their judgment.

So he asked his advisors what he should do about this situation. He wanted to know what penalty the law provided for a queen who refuses to obey the king's orders.

Here's what the king's advisors said,

Esther 1:16-17

Memucan answered the king and his nobles, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also every noble and citizen throughout your empire. (17) Women everywhere will begin to despise their husbands when they learn that Queen Vashti has refused to appear before the king.

The king's advisors thought the king should punish Vashti severely or all the wives in the empire would start to disobey their husbands. They suggested to the king he get rid of Queen Vashti.

Esther 1:19

"So if it please the king, we suggest that you issue a written decree, a law of the Persians and Medes that cannot be revoked. It should order that Queen Vashti be forever banished from the presence of King Xerxes, and that the king should choose another queen more worthy than she.

The king thought this sounded like a good idea so he made a royal decree.

Now, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, once a king made a law, no one could ever change it – not even the king, himself!

But after King Xerxes' anger cooled off, he realized he would never see Vashti again and he began to be sorry. He missed her.

So, his officials suggested that they run a beauty contest and let the king choose the most beautiful girl to take the place of Vashti.

This naturally pleased the king very much, and he put the plan into immediate effect.

When Mordecai heard about this beauty contest, he decided to enter Esther in to it. After all, she was a very beautiful girl. But before he sent her, he gave her a warning. Because many Persians didn't like the Jews, Mordecai told her not to tell anyone that they were Israelites.

Esther was taken into the palace and put into the care of Hegai, who was in charge over all the girls. When Hegai saw Esther he was very impressed.

Esther 2:9

Hegai was very impressed with Esther and treated her kindly. He quickly ordered a special menu for her and provided her with beauty treatments. He also assigned her seven maids specially chosen from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

Esther was given seven maids, a beautiful home to live in and one whole year's worth of beauty treatments.

Esther 2:11

Every day Mordecai would take a walk near the courtyard of the harem to find out about Esther and what was happening to her.

Finally, it was Esther's turn to be presented before the king.

Esther 2:17-18

And the king loved Esther more than any of the other young women. He was so delighted with her that he set the royal crown on her head and declared her queen instead of Vashti. (18) To celebrate the occasion, he gave a great banquet in Esther's honor for all his nobles and officials, declaring a public holiday for the provinces and giving generous gifts to everyone.

Although she was an orphan, raised by her cousin, her remarkable beauty caught the king's eye and she was chosen to become the queen and to live in the royal household.

Esther 2:20

Esther continued to keep her family background and nationality a secret. She was still following Mordecai's directions, just as she did when she lived in his home.

When she was chosen as queen, the king did not know she was Jewish. The people of Persia were afraid of the Jews and marriage to a Jew was strictly forbidden in the Persian Empire. It would have been dangerous for her if anyone knew she was an Israelite. But God's hand of protection was on her.

Next week we'll learn that God's chosen people, the children of Israel, were in danger. They were about to be wiped out by the enemies of God. A wicked scheme had been launched against them.

But, as we continue the story, you'll see that God's plan placed Esther in the palace just at the right time.

God has a special plan and purpose for every life. You may not know or understand why things turn out the way they do, but you must learn to trust God. You might have to move to a new city or go to a new school. Perhaps it is so you will be there when a need arises, just like Queen Esther.

God had a plan to use Esther to protect His people. God has a plan for your life, too. He knows exactly what it will take for you to accomplish His will. As you devote your life to Him and seek to do His will, He takes care of the details, blessing you in the process.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that you do have a plan and a purpose for each of us. Help us not to be afraid when we can't see what You're doing or where You're taking us. Help us to have faith and trust in Your plan for our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Crowns

Have the children make and decorate crowns. As they work on them, talk about what it might have been like for Esther, an orphan girl, to go to the palace to live. Talk about the crowns we will one day be given when we get to heaven.

Game Center

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. King Xerxes (or Ahasuerus) held a great feast to show off his beautiful palace and his riches. How long did that party last? (6 months)
2. What did the king do on the final day of the feast? (He told his servant to bring Queen Vashti to him. He wanted to show her off to his princes.)
3. What did Vashti do when her husband asked her to come to the party? (She refused to come.)
4. When Vashti refused to come to the party, what did the King do? (He was angry. He asked his lawyers what to do.)
5. What did the king's advisors tell the king to do about Queen Vashti's disobedience? (They told him to punish Vashti by banishing her from the kingdom.)
6. But after the king's anger cooled off, what happened? (He began to be sorry he banished Vashti, he missed her.)
7. How did the king pick a new queen? (He ran a beauty contest.)
8. What did they do for Esther for a whole year before she was brought before the king? (They gave her seven maids, a beautiful home to live in and a year's worth of beauty treatments.)

9. Why did Mordecai tell Esther not to tell anyone she was a Jew?
(The Persians were afraid of the Jews.)
10. How can you know what God's plan and purpose is for your life?
(By reading the Bible and praying to Him.)