

● Lesson 36

ESTHER

One of the many festivals or sacred days the Jewish people celebrate is called *Purim* (poo-REEM). It is celebrated on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar (our February and March). It includes a day of fasting followed by two days of joyful feasting and giving of presents to celebrate God's faithfulness to His people. The Book of Esther tells the story of why this annual festival came to be such an important one to remember.

The Book of Esther is what is called historical narrative. It is a true story told by the author. One must read the entire book to get the whole story. Since the book contains ten chapters and is quite lengthy, it is condensed here in the form of a play.

NARRATOR: Many Jews who had been taken captive to Babylon still lived there. Babylon had been conquered by Persia (modern day Iran). King Ahasuerus was reigning from his palace complex at Susa, the winter residence of the Persian kings. His kingdom stretched from India to Ethiopia and included 127 provinces. The story opens as the king is giving a great banquet for all the royalty and military leaders at his palace in Susa. The banquet lasts for 180 days. Finally, King Ahasuerus makes an announcement.

KING AHASUERUS: Bring Queen Vashti to me! Tell her to wear her royal robes and crown. I want everyone to see her great beauty!

NARRATOR: But Queen Vashti refused to come, and the king became very angry. He turned to his advisors for help.

KING AHASUERUS: What should be done to Queen Vashti? She has refused to obey my orders. What will be the results of her action around my kingdom? What



will happen to my rule if she gets away with **defying** me?

NARRATOR: After much discussion, the officials advised the king to remove Queen Vashti from her royal position and look for a new queen. Living in Susa at that time was a Jew named Mordecai who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. He had a cousin named Esther, whom he had raised because she was an orphan. When the news of the king's decision reached Mordecai, he went to Esther, who was noted for her beauty.

MORDECAI: The king is looking for a new queen, Esther. You have been chosen as one of the candidates and are going to the palace to prepare for your meeting with the king. You are a very beautiful woman. Who knows? You may be chosen to be the next queen! But do not tell anyone that you are a Jewish exile.

NARRATOR: The candidates spent the next 12 months being made more beautiful for the king. Each candidate then appeared individually before the King. Finally Esther's turn came, and she was brought before the king. He was so struck by her beauty that he put the crown on her head, and a great celebration began.

Memory Verse

I will sing of the lovingkindness of the LORD forever; to all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth.

Psalm 89:1

538 B.C.

536 B.C.

520 B.C.

516 B.C.

Jews begin returning

Rebuilding of temple begins

Zerubbabel

Temple completed

ESTHER: I cannot believe he chose me. I was very nervous, but honored that I was chosen as the new queen. What a celebration!

NARRATOR: After she became queen, Mordecai kept close contact with Esther in the palace. He walked back and forth in the courtyard every day. His job also required that he sit at the king's gate. One day he brought strange news to Esther.

MORDECAI: Esther, when I was sitting at the king's gate today, I overheard two of the guards plotting to kill the king. You must get a message to him immediately!

NARRATOR: Esther relayed the message, and the guards were hanged immediately. The king's life was saved. Some days later—

KING AHASUERUS: I have decided to honor a man named Haman the Agagite. Everyone is to bow down and pay honor to him.

NARRATOR: But Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, which enraged Haman.

HAMAN: Who is this man who refuses to obey the king's command concerning me? Oh! So it's Mordecai! He will pay! Ah, he is a Jew. Well, not only will he pay, but all his people shall pay as well! Let us cast **lots** and select a day that all the Jews in the kingdom will be destroyed.

NARRATOR: So Haman went to the king to announce his plan.

HAMAN: O King Ahasuerus, there are a certain group of people in your kingdom whose customs are different from most and who do not obey the king's laws. They should not be tolerated. If it pleases you, O King, let a decree be issued to destroy these people.

KING AHASUERUS: Here is my **signet** ring, Haman. Do with the people as you please.

NARRATOR: When the Jews heard the decree they began to grieve, and Mordecai also dressed in **sackcloth** and mourned at the gates.

ESTHER: What has happened? Why is Mordecai wearing sackcloth and ashes? What is all the wailing about? Hathach, here, take these clean clothes to Mordecai and find out what has gone wrong.

NARRATOR: So Hathach, the queen's servant, went out to Mordecai in the square by the king's gate.

MORDECAI: Hathach, give this copy of the king's decree to Esther. I will explain everything. Haman has received permission from the king to destroy all the Jews. Tell her she must go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

NARRATOR: But when Hathach brought the decree to

Esther, she was frightened.

ESTHER: Hathach, tell Mordecai that anyone who approaches the king without being asked can be put to death. The only exception is if the king extends his golden **scepter** to such a one. Then that life will be spared. I have not been called to the king for over a month now.

MORDECAI: Esther, do you think that because you are in the king's house, you will escape? If you are silent, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will **perish**. And, who knows, perhaps God has allowed you to come to your royal position for such a time as this?

ESTHER: Go and get all the Jews together who are in Susa. Have everyone fast for me for three days. My maids and I will do the same. After this, I will go to the King. If I perish, I perish.

NARRATOR: On the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace in front of the king's hall.

KING AHASUERUS: Esther. Oh, I'm so happy to see you. See, I'm holding out my golden scepter. Please enter. What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request?

ESTHER: If it pleases the king, let the king together with Haman come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.

NARRATOR: So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared for them.

KING AHASUERUS: Now whatever is your request, Queen Esther, it will be given you. You may have half my kingdom if you request it.

ESTHER: If it pleases the king to grant my request, please bring Haman and come to another banquet I will prepare for you tomorrow. Then I will answer the king's question.

NARRATOR: Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits, **gloating** over his good fortune. But as he passed through the gates, he saw Mordecai.

HAMAN: There's that scum Mordecai again, refusing to bow down and honor me. But I will not let him ruin this glorious day! Friends, come and celebrate with me! You know how the king has honored me and made me ruler over all his officials. And that's not all! I am the only person Queen Esther invited to come with the king to a banquet she gave today. And we're doing it again tomorrow! If only I didn't have to see that **wretched** Mordecai by the gate every time I leave the palace!

NARRATOR: Then Haman's friends gave him an idea for dealing with Mordecai.

HAMAN: What? Build a **gallows** to hang Mordecai? It's a brilliant idea! We'll build a gallows 75 feet high! Then I can be rid of him. Construction will begin tonight!





NARRATOR: But that night the king could not sleep. So he called in his servants to read to him from the book of record of his reign. When he heard the account of how Mordecai had saved his life, he interrupted the readers.

KING AHASUERUS: This Mordecai who exposed the guards that were plotting to kill me, what reward was he given for this? None? Well, I must remedy that!

NARRATOR: The next morning when the king was on the throne, Haman arrived.

KING AHASUERUS: Who goes there? Is it Haman? Bring him in. Haman, good morning! I have a question for you. What should be done for a man the king wishes to honor?

HAMAN: Mmm. Let me think. Well, dress him in one of the king's royal robes, put him on one of the king's finest horses, and have a high official of the court lead him through the streets proclaiming: "This is a man the king delights to honor!"

KING AHASUERUS: Great idea! I have been thinking about this all night. I have now decided who I want to reward. It is Mordecai, the Jew who sits at the king's gate. Now, Haman, go out and reward Mordecai in this way!

NARRATOR: Though shocked by the king's decree, Haman, nevertheless, did as the king commanded and then went home in humiliation and much distress. He told his wife and friends all that had happened and the strange turn of fortune. While he was explaining this, the king's servants arrived to escort him to the banquet Esther had prepared. As the banquet proceeded, the king rose.

KING AHASUERUS: Queen Esther, what is your request? Whatever it is, it will be granted to you.

ESTHER: If I have found favor with you, O King, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me this my request: Spare my people. Otherwise, I and my people are to be totally destroyed!

KING AHASUERUS: What? Who is the person who would dare do such a thing?

ESTHER: This wicked person and enemy of my people is none other than Haman.

NARRATOR: The king's men then informed him of the gallows Haman had built to hang Mordecai.

KING AHASUERUS: Hang Haman on his own gallows instead!

NARRATOR: After the guards hanged Haman, the king's anger subsided.

KING AHASUERUS: Esther, all that was Haman's is now yours. Call Mordecai. He shall have my signet ring and Haman's position.

NARRATOR: The king then gave Mordecai a royal robe and his signet ring and installed him in Haman's position.

ESTHER: I beg you, King Ahasuerus, to let an order be written overruling Haman's edict to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom. Haman's edict is still in effect. How can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?

KING AHASUERUS: Write another decree in my name on behalf of the Jews as seems best to you and seal it with my ring, because no edict written in my name and sealed with my ring can be overruled.

MORDECAI: Scribe, write this in the king's name and send it to all the kingdom by couriers on the king's fastest horses: "All Jews are given the right to destroy any and all peoples who might attack them." Get this decree out quickly so that all Jews will be ready to defend themselves on the day the evil plan was to be carried out.

NARRATOR: The city of Susa then held a joyous celebration. For the Jews, it was a time of joy and happiness, gladness and honor. Everywhere in the kingdom, there was feasting and celebration. Mordecai and Esther decreed that the Jews establish an annual celebration called Purim to observe God's mercy and the Jews' miraculous deliverance from their enemy.

The Book of Esther shows God's faithfulness to His people. Once again, He saved them from destruction. Through one ordinary person, God accomplished this wonderful act of grace. Esther risked her throne and her life to be used by God to save her people.

1. Was Esther an important person before she became queen? Explain. Esther 2:7-8 _____

2. Why was Esther afraid to go to the king? 4:11 _____

3. Did Esther let fear stop her from doing what was right? _____

4. Why do you think Esther was able to do this? _____

Read Esther 4:14. Mordecai believed that Esther had become queen because God knew His people would need deliverance, and He wanted to use her to accomplish His will. Esther was just one person, but she made a difference in her world because she was willing to be used by God where He had put her.

God uses ordinary people who love Him and are willing to serve Him to accomplish His will. Even though the situation you find yourself in may sometimes be hard and things may seem impossible, with God's help the

impossible can be overcome! You, too, can be used by God to make a difference in the world in which you live.

5. Can you think of ways that God may be able to use you in your family, church, or community? _____

Although the name of God is not mentioned once in the Book of Esther, it is obvious that His grace, protection, and supernatural care are at work. The book of Esther is a great example of the **sovereignty** of God. God is in control of all events in the world, and He will take care of His people.

Word Works

Starting with the word marked by the arrow, count every third block after that and write the words in the spaces provided below. Each word is only used once.

His	→	The	sovereignty		Lord	rules		has	over	
established	all		His	Psalm		throne	103		in	19
	the			heavens			and			

Fast Fact: Festival of Purim

- The festival of Purim is also called the Feast of Esther because it celebrates the deliverance of the Jews by God through Queen Esther.
- This festival took place during the first part of the month of February and started with a fast on the first day and ended with a feast of celebration.
- The festival of Purim in later years has been a carnival atmosphere with participants wearing masks and disguises.
- A public reading of the Book of Esther takes place accompanied by boos and hisses when Haman's name is read and cheering at the mention of Mordecai.

Catechism Corner

1. How, then, can the forgiveness of sins be specifically connected with this sacrament? (Q. 369)

Because in the Lord's Supper we receive the body and blood of Christ, which were offered up for us, as a sure promise of the forgiveness of sins.

2. Why is the Lord's Supper a feast of thanksgiving?
