



Esther EXPERIENCE

Esther Bible Study

When you organise your own Esther Experience event, you may wish to include a Bible Study on Esther. These notes are just to give you a few ideas as you prepare and to suggest some discussion points that you may wish to explore.

Background

The story of Esther is set in the citadel of Susa, part of the Persian Empire, which now encompasses modern-day Iran. King Xerxes seemed to be far more interested in enjoying the riches of his kingdom and in holding lavish banquets for all his nobles and officials than in taking an active part in ruling over his 127 provinces! His wife, Queen Vashti, incurred his anger when she refused to be paraded before the attendants at the banquet and as a consequence she was deposed so that her conduct did not send out a message to other women that such behaviour was acceptable. (Esther 1:1-22) Once the king's anger had subsided, he decided, on the advice of his attendants, to hold a beauty parade to find a new wife! (Esther 2:1-4)

Enter Esther

Esther, or Hadassah as she was known, was a beautiful young orphaned Jewish refugee, living with her devout cousin Mordecai in the citadel of Susa. Esther was one of the young girls taken to the king's palace to be considered as the king's new queen. There she received 12 months of beauty treatments and special food in preparation for being brought before the King. (Esther 2:5-14)

Discussion point: We may think that the beauty industry is a modern-day invention but it clearly isn't. How do we feel about it and the image of beauty that is presented to young girls, especially on the TV, in adverts, in magazines? To what extent should we as Christians be involved in it? How can we present a balanced view to the girls and young women in our churches, our own daughters and granddaughters? How can we encourage them, and each other, to be beautiful on the inside?



Esther as queen

When it was Esther's turn to be presented to the king she found favour in his eyes and with all those who saw her and the king made her his queen. (Esther 2:15-18) The story could well have ended there except for the fact that, despite Esther's elevation to the status of queen, she maintained her relationship with Mordecai and was obedient to him in not revealing her Jewish heritage. (Esther 2:10) Mordecai demonstrated his faithfulness to Esther by keeping a close eye on her whilst she was in the king's palace and each day he walked up and down near the courtyard where Esther was. (Esther 2:11)



A plot against the king

It was during one of these visits to the courtyard that Mordecai overheard a plot to assassinate King Xerxes. Mordecai reported this to Esther, who in turn reported it to the king and credited it to Mordecai. The plotters were killed and this seemingly insignificant event was recorded in the king's record book. (Esther 2:19-23)



Enter Haman

It was after these events that a new character entered the story: Haman, whom the king honoured above all others. Tension arose between Haman and Mordecai, the devout Jew, when Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman. The result of this tension was that King Xerxes was persuaded by Haman to issue a decree to destroy the Jews as, according to Haman, they did not obey the king's laws. (Esther 3:1-15)

Discussion point: In life we all come across people we find difficult to deal with. Explore the tension between Mordecai and Haman. Have we ever encountered a situation where we had to take a stand for what we considered to be the right thing to do? What were the consequences, positive or negative, and how can we support each other in these sorts of situations?



Mordecai asks Esther for help

When Mordecai learnt of the intended persecution against his people he was bitterly upset and word of his distress reached Esther, who sent for him to find out what was troubling him. He sent word back to her explaining the situation and asking that she approach the king to plead for her people. (Esther 4:1-8). This put Esther in a difficult and dangerous situation for she would be risking her life by approaching the king without being summoned and she would only be spared if he extended the gold sceptre to her. Mordecai's response was uncompromising: as a Jew Esther would not escape the coming destruction just because she was in the palace. Maybe she was there for just this purpose and had come to this royal position for such a time as this? (Esther 4:9-14)

Discussion point: Consider whether any of you have ever faced a difficult situation – maybe not one leading to possible death – but hard all the same, but believe that God put you in that situation for such a specific time and purpose. Discuss Esther's initial reaction (4:10-11) and her subsequent response to Mordecai (4:15-17). What place does fasting (4:16) have in our lives today?

Beauty and intelligence

Esther used her God-given gifts of beauty and intelligence wisely and she displayed immense courage when, with the support of others fasting, she approached the king to ask for his favour to come to not one but two banquets, along with Haman, that she had prepared in their honour. Haman though had never forgotten the apparently disrespectful Mordecai and, encouraged by his wife and friends, he built high gallows on which to have Mordecai hanged. (Esther 5:1-14)

Discussion point: Esther used her gifts of beauty and intelligence wisely. Consider what gifts you believe God has given you and discuss how you use them or how you might use them in the future. Esther risked her life when she approached the king; Christian women around the world in areas of persecution risk their freedom and sometimes their lives just for acknowledging that they are Christians. What is the worst thing we risk by saying that we are a follower of Jesus?

A sleepless night

Another seemingly insignificant incident occurred when King Xerxes had a sleepless night and asked to have his record books read aloud to him. When he was reminded of the earlier plot against his life he realised that he had not rewarded Mordecai for saving his life. Haman, who arrived at that point, unwittingly suggested an appropriate reward, believing the king meant to reward him! (Esther 6:1-14)

Esther's request

It was during Esther's second banquet for the king and Haman that she made her request and petition that she, as a Jew, be spared along with her people. Moreover, Esther informed the king that it was on Haman's orders that the persecution and destruction of her people was ordered. Haman begged Queen Esther for his life but it was to no avail and he was hanged on the gallows he himself had built for Mordecai. (Esther 7:1-10)

The truth is revealed

The truth of Mordecai and Esther's relationship was revealed to the king and Mordecai was appointed by Esther over Haman's estate. Esther again risked her life by approaching the king and begged him to revoke the decree to destroy the Jews; a request that was granted and was met with much joy amongst the Jews, with feasts and celebrations. (Esther 8:1-17)

The final two chapters bring the story to an end and describe how the Jews attacked those who had sought to destroy them; it was established how the event was to be remembered in years to come and Mordecai's greatness was recognised.

Discussion point: It's interesting to note that the name of God is not mentioned anywhere in the book of Esther and yet his divine presence and purpose can be seen on nearly every page. Consider how you can see that God has been at work in your life, maybe even before becoming a Christian, even though you may not have recognised it as God at the time. For some women, those living in the UK and persecuted women around the world, the name of God may not feature largely in their lives, especially if they live in a household where they are the only Christian and yet, consider how God's presence and purpose can still be present in their lives. Discuss what this story teaches us about faithfulness on different levels: our faithfulness to each other and to God and his faithfulness to us.

Prayer points:

-  Praise God for his faithfulness in our lives, his presence and his purpose, even when we may not have recognised it at the time.
-  Pray for any of the situations or difficulties that have been raised during your study.
-  Pray for the modern-day Esthers, wherever they are in the world, that they will be faithful to God and that they too will know his faithfulness to them.
-  Pray that we will all have the courage to stand up for Jesus in our everyday lives.