

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
OCTOBER26 2024

a story of faith

Scripture Story: Esther 1–4.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 49.
Key Text: Esther 4:15, 16.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

"Nearly fifty thousand children of the captivity had taken advantage of the decree permitting their return. These, however, were no more than a mere remnant. Hundreds of thousands of Israelites had chosen to remain in Medo-Persia rather than endure the hardships of the return journey and of reestablishing their ruined cities and homes.

"After twenty or more years passed, Darius Hystaspes, the monarch then ruling, issued another favorable decree. In this way God mercifully provided another opportunity for the Jews to return to the land of their ancestors. The Lord foresaw the trouble-filled times that were to follow during the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus of the book of Esther), and He inspired Zechariah to plead with the exiles to return [see Zechariah 2:7-9]. . . .

"However, most of those who failed to respond to the decree remained unimpressible, and even when Zechariah warned them to escape from Babylon, they did not accept the invitation. Meanwhile conditions in Medo-Persia were changing rapidly. . . .

"Haman misled Xerxes, persuading him to order the massacre of all Jews 'scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces' of Medo-Persia. . . .

"The decree of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked; apparently all the Israelites were doomed to destruction. But in the wise provision of God, Esther had been made queen. . . .

"The crisis Esther faced demanded quick action; but both she and Mordecai realized that unless God would work to help them, their efforts would not succeed. So Esther took time to commune with God. 'Go,' she directed Mordecai, 'gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!' [Esther 4:16, NKJV].

"The events that followed—Esther's appearance before the king, the favor he showed her, the banquets of the king and queen with Haman as the only guest, the king's troubled sleep, the public honor shown Mordecai, and Haman's humiliation and fall—all these are parts of a familiar story. God acted marvelously for His people" (*Royalty and Ruin*, pp. 211, 212).

Although the Jews of Esther's time did not heed the call to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, God provided a solution to save them from what seemed certain death. In His great mercy God appointed Esther at such a time in history when she could play a role that none other could. It was through this humble, wise, and prayerful woman that God offered a second chance to the Jews who had chosen a life of ease and comfort in a foreign land in place of the hardship involved in rebuilding the Temple of God that lay in ruins. Notice from the story Esther's strong devotion to God and her loyalty to her nation. She did not shrink back in the face of great danger. Rather she was willing to risk her own life for the sake of her people that she might

bring about their deliverance through a reversal of the death decree. Meanwhile she did not feel confident in her own strength. She fasted and prayed for three days, surrendering completely to God's leading and trusting Him with the solution.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Become aware of how important faith in Jesus Christ is. *(Know)*
- Feel a sense of peace in knowing that God is never absent from their lives. *(Feel)*
- Rely on God to help them in times of trouble, rather than look for the answer in the world or in themselves. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Father, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 3: "God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also those of the Father." (Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 4:35; Psalm 110:1, 4; John 3:16; 14:9; 1 Corinthians 15:28; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 John 4:8; Revelation 4:11.)

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Divide everyone into groups. Tell each group to think of a situation in their lives in which faith is the key element. After they've done this, ask each group to share the situation they came up with and explain why they thought of it. Then ask them if they've ever been in a similar situation themselves. Also ask them to name a famous person from history or even from today who demonstrated faith or trust in God instead of relying on self.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

In Russia before the Berlin Wall came down, the people were not free to worship as they chose. Many Christians had no choice but to worship God in secret. On this certain day a group of believers gathered together in hiding to hold a worship service. As they were well into their service a group of Russian soldiers violently threw open the door. They were all armed with rifles. They told people that anyone who wasn't a Christian should leave immediately, but anyone who had come to worship the Lord should stay.

The people began to evacuate the room. Most of the people left; however, there were still a few believers who remained. The soldiers then closed the door behind them and locked it. Then they all set down their rifles and told the people who still remained that they were also Christians and wanted to worship God alongside true believers.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

The faith that these people demonstrated is so inspiring that we should all look to their examples and remember them when we are in times of trouble. As long as we remember that God is by our side we have nothing to fear. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28, KJV).

Sometimes people think that their faith is insignificant. But the smallest amount of faith is all that we need to move mountains. The Russian believers in this story had the faith in God to know that He was with them no matter what happened. In this same sense, Esther knew that even though she was risking her life to save her people, God was with her no matter what the outcome.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- Many times we may think we have great faith in the Lord, but when a situation comes around in which faith is needed we seem to forget that God is with us. In what way did Esther's actions demonstrate her faith in God?
- What was Haman's initial reaction toward Mordecai when he realized that he would not

bow down before him?

- What motivates us to have faith in God? What do you think was Esther's driving force that caused her to do what she did?
- Why do you think Haman was so eager and insistent on persecuting Esther's people?
- King Xerxes *did* listen to Haman's wish and granted him what he wanted. Why do you suppose the king would let Haman commit such evil deeds?
- List a few ways in which Esther could be an example to us in our faith and how we trust in God.
- What can you learn from Esther's example when you face major crisis situations?
- Describe an event when you or someone you know experienced God's miraculous answer to prayer.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Luke 17:6; Matthew 8:26; Romans 5:2; Deuteronomy 11:13; 2 Chronicles 19:9.

Another reason we should have faith in God is that He is faithful to us. Here are some verses in the book of Psalms that talk about God's faithfulness: Psalm 57:10; 71:22; 91:4; 108:4.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Throughout our lives we have times when we feel as if we are up on mountains, and other times when we feel as if we are down within valleys. God wants us to put our faith in Him whether we are going through good times or bad times. In the story of Esther we see how even in the most tragic circumstances she did not falter in her unmoving faith in the Lord.

However, we must look on another character in this story who demonstrated faith in God—Mordecai. He knew how Haman's wrath could be

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Faith in Hardship Role-Play

When we face hardships and tragedies it is easy to get discouraged. However if we place our faith in God we can trust that He will be by our side and will not leave us alone.

Working with your students to develop a role-play with Bible characters (such as Esther or Mordecai) may help them explore the experiences of others who have gone through hardships and learn from their example of courage, integrity, and unshakable faith in God.

Have one student play Esther's role and have several others ask her questions about her life. Then "Esther" will answer in the first person. The group discussion can help students internalize the message of the story and apply in practical ways the principles taught in this story.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

used against him, yet he would not bow down before him. He loved God too much to give his reverence to any other but Him. By not bowing down before Haman, he knew he could be facing certain death, yet he did not bow to the arrogance and conceit of Haman. He put his faith in God to be by his side whether he was delivered from the claws of death or not. In a way, he demonstrated his faith just as Esther did. They both knew they were risking their lives by their actions, yet they took a stand for God because they trusted in their heavenly Father.

In this story Haman is the perfect example of a power-hungry and arrogant man who falsely claimed prerogatives that belong to God because He alone is worthy of our worship. His conceit and disdain for others is what eventually brought his downfall. Esther's faith in God is what ultimately saved her and her people from Haman's greedy thirst for power and control.

In our lives we may come into contact with many Hamans. We may know people who, through their arrogance, want only to be recognized and given the power to use other people. We must be careful not to become like Haman. Pride is a character flaw that leads to certain ruin, as in Lucifer's case.

We have a lot to learn from Esther's Christlike example. Her life is a model of unflinching faith in God, integrity, and humble devotion. If we put our trust in God, then not even the most powerful Hamans of our day can control us or use us. We owe our true allegiance and worship only to God. If we place our faith in Him, He will bless us beyond our imagination.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Tell the students to make a list of ways in which they can exercise faith in their daily lives. Make sure the students know that even though they may not be going through extreme trials as Esther did, they can come to God, with even the simplest problems and trust Him to take care of them no matter what the circumstance—whether big or small. Remind them of how significant they are in the eyes of their Creator.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Proverbs 3:5, 6 says: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" (NIV).

The story of Queen Esther is filled with compelling lessons of faith and steadfast trust in God in the face of life-threatening danger. She was willing to risk her life in order to save her nation from destruction. It is her unshakable faith in times of trouble that we should ponder. All of us have experienced various setbacks at some point in our lives and such difficult situations often test our faith in God. It is in the day-to-day experiences that we learn to lean on God and to trust Him to guide us at each step of the way. As with Esther, God wants us to look to Him for help whenever we face times of trouble. In Psalm 46:1 the Bible says: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (NASB).

Ponder the implications and the results of united prayer. God longs to listen to His children who seek Him in faith just as He did with Queen Esther.

Are you willing to allow God to use you as an agent of change? He will do great things even through the most humble child, young person, or adult who surrenders the will to God and cooperates with Him.

Let us remember that our God is the same miracle-working God who has given Esther and her nation the victory. He is more than willing to give us the victory as well when we place our trust in Him!



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*),* chapter 49.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Esther 1–4.
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a story of faith



TERRILL THOMAS

key text

"Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!' "

(Esther 4:15, 16, NKJV)

flashlight

"The trying experiences that came to God's people in the days of Esther were not peculiar to that age alone. The revelator, looking down the ages to the close of time, has declared, 'The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.' Revelation 12:17. Some who today are living on the earth will see these words fulfilled" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 605).

what do you think?

How would you respond if you were facing persecution for your Christian beliefs?

___ Remain faithful to God and His truth regardless of the consequences.

___ Pray earnestly and fast, trusting God with the solution.

___ Encourage your fellow Christian friends and ask them to join you in prayer.

___ Pray for those who persecute you that they may experience the love of Jesus and accept Him as their personal Savior and Friend.

___ Take matters into your hands and deny your Christian faith for fear of punishment or death.

did you know?

Christian martyrs are people who willingly give up their life because they refuse to renounce their faith. Most of today's Christian martyrs are unnamed. It's easy to remember martyrs from the Bible days and from centuries ago; however, most of today's martyrs we may never hear about. In the story of Esther we will learn how she trusted in God and put her faith in Him, even though she knew she could perish. She knew that she must put her faith in her Creator in order to keep her people and their faith from being destroyed. God was with her, and He gave her the strength to face the king. She went before the king even though she knew it might end her life. It is this kind of faith that has been placed in the hearts of millions, even when face to face with death.

INTO THE STORY

"After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor."

"When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged."

"Then Haman said to King Xerxes, 'There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury.'

"So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 'Keep the money,' the king said to Haman, 'and do with the people as you please.' "

"When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. . . .

"When Esther's eunchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. . . . Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. . . .

". . . Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews."

"Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'

"So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions."

(Esther 3:1, 2, 5, 8-11; 4:1-7, 15-17, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

In what way did Esther demonstrate true faith in Jesus Christ?

_____

_____

What was Haman's reaction toward Mordecai when he found out that he would not bow down before him?

_____

_____

What was the driving force that caused Esther to go before the king, even if it was against the law, and risk her life?

_____

_____

What do you think made Haman so eager to persecute the Jews?

_____

Why do you think King Xerxes listened to Haman and granted him his wish?

_____

_____

Name some ways that Esther can be an example to us:

_____

_____

What can you learn from Esther's example when you face major crisis situations? What examples and promises from the Bible strengthen your faith in such times?

_____

_____

Describe an event during which you or someone you know experienced God's miraculous answer to prayer:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

punch lines

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" **(Proverbs 3:5, NIV).**

"Everything is possible for one who believes" **(Mark 9:23, NIV).**

"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong" **(1 Corinthians 16:13, NIV).**

"But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds" **(James 2:18, NIV).**

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" **(Luke 11:9, NIV).**

"He replied, 'Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you' " **(Matthew 17:20, NIV).**

further insight

"The crisis that Esther faced demanded quick, earnest action; but both she and Mordecai realized that unless God should work mightily in their behalf, their own efforts would be unavailing."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 601

Sabbath

Read Mark 9:23.

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Fundamental Belief 3, The Father).

A lot of us probably look at Esther's amazing leap of faith and wonder what we would do if we were put in that situation. It has to do with trust in God. If we put our lives in His hands and commit ourselves to Him fully, He will give us the strength to stand up and do the right thing.

List five situations in your life in which you demonstrated faith in Jesus Christ.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Sunday

Read Joshua 1:5.

God will always be by our side, whether we feel Him there or not. Sometimes we are so caught up in our own lives and problems that we forget that it's Him we should depend on, and not ourselves. However, as in every good relationship, there needs to be consistent two-way communication. God communicates with us through His Word, through the influence of His Holy Spirit on our conscience, and through His unnumbered blessings. In response, we communicate with God through prayer, obedience to the teachings of His Word, and trust in Him for everything that preoccupies us.

What steps will you take to maintain your communication with God regularly?

_____

Monday

Read Esther 4:16.

Esther is quoted as saying, "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16, NIV). It was through faith that God helped Esther save her people from being destroyed. How important is faith in God to you? Are you willing to trust God both in the small and in the great matters of your life?

_____

_____

_____

Tuesday

Read Matthew 10:39 and Philippians 1:20, 21.

The *Flashlight* quote reminds us that one day we may all be faced with a life-and-death situation because of our faith. Based on Matthew 10:39, what do you think it means to lose your life for the sake of God's cause?

_____

_____

_____

What do you think is the connection between living for Christ and being ready to give your life for Him? If you surrender your life to Jesus, how will your perspective on death change? Look at Paul's affirmation in Philippians 1:21. Do you have such a living connection with Jesus?

_____

_____

Wednesday

Read Proverbs 3:5, 6.

We must not lean on our own understanding but lean on God and His Word. God sees the big picture. He knows the end from the beginning, and He has our best interest at heart. Therefore we can trust Him with everything that concerns us.

Read through the entire book of Esther and try to find more examples of faith and trust. Write down three of them that could apply to your life.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thursday

Read Psalm 9:10; Psalm 31:14; and Daniel 3:16-18.

What are some trials, whether big or small, that you've gone through and decided to put your faith wholeheartedly in God?

_____

_____

_____

Friday

Read Hebrews 11:1.

If your life was ever in danger because of your Christian beliefs and you had to defend your faith or the faith of others, what would you say in defense of your faith? Write down three different sentences.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, NKJV).

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 49.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.