

Purpose

- To learn about Esther
- To learn about Job

Materials

- Bibles
- Handouts

Background Information**ESTHER**

Sit back you are in for a fast passed story today. Esther is our subject today. Esther is a story of power and of women's choices in a male-dominated world. It is a story of men and their use and abuse of power. It is a story of a threat to the Jewish people in Persia and how one woman delivers her people from certain death. This is one of the most controversial books in the Bible because it is basically not a religious story. God is not mentioned in the whole book of Esther. Not once.

The story of Esther does not begin with Esther. It begins with a Persian king. His name was Xerxes. He was the fourth king of the vast Persian Empire and reigned for 20 years. One day after seven days of feasting and partying (they were really drunk), Xerxes order his queen, Vashti, to come to the banquet hall and display her beauty to the men gathered there. When Vashti refused, the king exploded!!! Vashti was banished from the palace and sent into exile. We do not know what happened to Vashti after she was banished.

In time, Xerxes began to miss his Vashti so he sent his men out to find her. The men who had taken care of banishing Vashti did not know where she was so they devised a plan. They would search the empire for the most beautiful young women. The one who most pleased the king would become the new queen. We aren't sure how many young women were paraded before Xerxes before he finally met one who knocked his socks off! It was Esther.

There are two other people who have a big place in this story. The first is Mordecai, Esther's relative. Mordecai had raised Esther as his own daughter. The second person is Haman, a Persian bureaucrat in Xerxes's government. He (Haman) had such a powerful position that people bowed to him as we walked down the street. Everyone that is except the Jew Mordecai. This made Haman so angry that Xerxes planned to have the entire Jewish population of the empire killed. About this time Xerxes had married Esther so she was now Queen of Persia.

When Mordecai heard about the plot, he went to Esther and urged her to make an appeal to Xerxes to protect the Jews. At first Esther was very hesitant to go to the king because she had never confessed to the king that she was a Jew. Mordecai reminded

Esther that if all the Jewish people were to be slaughtered, she would die too. Esther was very grateful to Mordecai for raising her so she did as he asked.

What follows is a hair raising action thriller, Esther exposed Haman's evil plan, and the Jews survived.

Haman and his followers had devised a plan to kill all the Jews and sent notices out all over the empire telling when this was to happen. This allowed the Jews to plan and respond. Mordecai immediately goes into action. Very publicly Mordecai goes into mourning (tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth, and wailing). Talk about drawing attention to yourself. Esther offers him clothing and he refused. Mordecai again appeals to Esther to confront the king. It's against the law for anyone to approach the king unless he called for them, so Esther cannot approach the king. After another feast and drinking session Esther invited Xerxes and Haman to a private banquet. Once they leave the palace, Mordecai does not bow down to Haman. Haman makes plans to hang Mordecai.

At Esther's banquet the king asks Esther what she wants and she asks that he save her life and the lives of her people. This is the first time that Xerxes realizes that Esther is a Jew. Esther reveals that Haman has planned this plot. Haman pleads with Esther; the king watches but assumes that Haman was attacking Esther. He orders Haman to be hanged on the same gallows that were intended for Mordecai.

Esther again pleads to Xerxes to spare the lives of all the Jews. He agrees and orders Esther and Mordecai to write a proclamation saving the Jews.

Because Esther showed courage as a lowly woman in a male-dominated time the history of the Jews was changed. Remember Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph, two Jews. If all the Jews had been slain Jesus might not have been born. This is why Esther is a very important part of Jewish history even if God isn't directly mentioned the entire book of Esther.

JOB

The book of Job was written to share the story of Job. This book causes a lot of questions about our God and how fair he was to Job.

When Job begins Job was very wealthy farmer living in Uz. He had thousands of sheep, camels, and other livestock, a large family, and many servants. His ten children are all grown, but a close family bond still remains. From everything we are told, Job had done nothing to deserve the suffering that was about to happen to him. Something pain comes to us because it is a consequence of something that we have done. However, sometimes suffering comes simply because we live in a world marked by evil or because God is testing us to bring us to stronger faith. In this case it appears God was teaching Satan a lesson.

Suddenly Satan, the accuser, came before God claiming that Job trusted God only because he was wealthy and everything was going well for him. And so the testing of Job's faith began.

Satan was allowed to destroy Job's children, servants, livestock, herdsman, and home; but Job continued to trust in God. Satan and God talked again and Satan had been wrong. Job did not question God even though he had lost everything. Satan claims that if Job no longer had his health he would turn his back on God. So God gave Satan permission to attack Job physically. Job was afflicted with a painful, disfiguring disease.

Job's wife told him to curse God and die, but Job suffered in silence.

Three of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, came to visit him. At first they silently grieved with Job. Job looked so bad that they thought he was about to die. When Job did not die they were shocked. Finally Job cried out in despair. He wondered why he had ever been born. Given a choice, Job would have chosen death over the incredible pain he was experiencing. They began to talk about the reasons for Job's tragedies; they told him that sin had caused his suffering. They told him to confess his sins and turn back to God. But Job maintained his innocence. The talk between Job and his friends ended in silence. They had said a lot but resolved nothing. When silence fell between Job and his friends God finally spoke. Instead of explaining Job's suffering, God made Job and his friends aware of his majesty and awesome power. In spite of what Job felt or thought, God was in control of Job's situation. Job was not alone. God had a goal in mind all along. What he asked Job to do was trust him.

In the end, Job's fortunes and family were restored to him. God didn't answer all of Job's questions. He doesn't answer all of ours now. Job came out of the fire of testing with a heart humble enough to trust God even in the darkest of despair and trouble.

We may never know the answer to suffering in this life; why does someone in our family die of cancer, why do children die, why does God's children suffer. We don't know why, but we do have the assurance that God is always with us and will help us in our suffering.

Procedure.

- Read background information on Esther. Handout 48-1 and 48-2 will give you more info.
- Check out handout 48-3. Use the whole or whatever you need to answer the question at the top. This is to be sent to me. After you read the background information on Job (handout 48-4), do the second half of 48-3.
- Handout 48-5 and 48-6 are just for fun. I do have the answers to 48-6 so call me if you want it.
- Don't forget to send 48-3 to me.