

Lesson 67

Esther pleads for her people: Haman's anger at Mordecai

Esther 4:1-17; 5:1-14



Teacher, please remember that the commentary below is intended to help you in your study, not to be read to your students. Make your own list of applications, using the help from the commentary, but don't necessarily try to cover everything! Think of the students in your class, then be prayerfully selective.

Contents:

1. Preparation
2. Memory verses
3. Theme
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5. Verse by verse commentary (suggested location of activities included)
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9. Bible Text (in full, without commentary)

1. Preparation

- 1) Choose memory verse
- 2) Select attention grabber to start off lesson / break the ice - optional, recommended for younger classes. (see point 7)
- 3) Suggested activities- optional, recommended for younger children (see point 8)

2. Memory verse

Proverbs 16:4

The Lord works out everything to its proper end— even the wicked for a day of disaster.

3. Theme

God has a purpose for our lives.

4. Lesson introduction

Wicked Haman had allowed his anger to consume him. Furious that Mordecai would not bow to him, he pursued a plot to have not only Mordecai killed, but all those who worshipped his God. Haman had persuaded the king to issue a decree for the destruction of the Jewish people on a certain day. God's people were threatened with annihilation! Only days remained. How foolish was Haman to allow his anger, hatred, and pride to govern his actions. Though he felt he would encounter little resistance from God's people, he was contending with the almighty God—the protector of Israel. God was working behind the scenes on behalf of His people. God had a plan. He would deliver His people. Esther, a young Jewish girl, the cousin of Mordecai, had become queen of Persia. She was in the right place at the right time. God has a purpose for our lives. After her, her maidens, and all the Jewish people fasted and prayed, Esther determined to come before the king, though, as an uninvited guest, she endangered her very life. If her approach was acceptable, the king would raise his golden scepter.

Verse by Verse Commentary

Esther 4:1-3

When Mordecai heard the king's decree stating the Jews were to be killed, he went throughout the city mourning and lamenting, even to the king's gate. He cried bitterly, tore his clothes, put on sackcloth (a rough, hairy garment), and spread ashes upon his head as a sign of deep grief. He came to the king's gate but did not enter, since there was a law that no one should enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. Everywhere, the Jews fasted, wept, wailed, and wore sackcloth and ashes. Imagine how the Jewish people must have felt. Not only would they have felt a great sense of rejection (from the King of Persia, himself), but their very lives were threatened. It seemed they had only days to live. It must have seemed hopeless! Yet God was still in control. He had a plan. We may face difficult and seemingly hopeless situations. May we not look at our circumstances and despair; may we, instead, look to our God! He has a plan. A turn of events never surprises Him; though perhaps silently and behind the scenes, He is, indeed, working. He will help us in our time of need and weave the circumstances of our lives together for His good purpose.

Esther 4:4-9

Esther's maids and attendants told her of Mordecai's appearance in sackcloth and ashes (deep mourning) before the gate of the palace. Esther was filled with grief and sent Mordecai regular clothes to put on instead of his sackcloth. Perhaps, she did that so he would enter the palace and explain to her what was wrong. He refused the new clothes, perhaps to make her aware of the extent of his grief and persuade her to question the reason for his attire. Then Esther sent Hathach, one of her attendants, to Mordecai to learn the cause of his mourning. When Hathach came to him, Mordecai told him all that had happened and the amount of money that Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasuries to acquire the king's permission to destroy the Jews. Mordecai also gave Hathach a copy of the decree published in Susa to show it to the queen. Mordecai then told Hathach to command Esther to go in to see the king, to entreat him, and to make request before him for her people.

Suggested Activity: Sackcloth and Ashes

Esther 4:10-14

After Hathach told Queen Esther all that Mordecai had instructed, she sent her response back to Mordecai by Hathach. She told him that she could not--without endangering her life--go to the king and talk to him. There was a law that stated that whoever came to the king without being summoned (asked to come) could be put to death if the king so desired. If the king was pleased to see an uninvited visitor, he would hold out the golden scepter and the visitor would be allowed to enter his presence. Queen Esther had not been summoned to him for thirty days. Realizing the danger—it could cost her life—Esther was afraid of such a bold action. When Mordecai heard of Queen Esther's reluctance, he sent her back a very sober message. "Think not that you will be saved in the king's house above all the Jews." Mordecai wanted Queen Esther to realize her life was also in danger. Haman's intent was to destroy all Jews. In other words, if she does not die because she does not go to the king, she could still die as a result of the decree. Mordecai displayed great confidence in the Lord. He knew that if Esther did nothing, God would deliver the Jews some other way. He knew that the Jewish nation would not perish because

for lack of God's protection. But, he also saw that it was, perhaps, God's plan to use Esther as the one through whom deliverance would come. God has a purpose for our lives. Mordecai encouraged Esther, "...Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Perhaps, Esther had been placed as Queen of Persia for this very purpose—to be God's instrument in protection of His people. Esther had a choice to make. Would she choose to be used by God?

Esther 4:15-17

Esther resolved to go to the king without being asked to come. She urged Mordecai and all the Jews to unite in a three day fast, during which she and her maidens would also fast. God's gracious help was needed in the bold step she was to take. Fasting is when God's people take a period of time to go without food to pray and to seek Him. Fasting allows us to keep our focus on the Lord without distractions. Esther wanted as many people as possible to keep her lifted up in prayer during this very important time. Esther concludes, "If I perish, I perish." These are not words of despair, but the voice of one who has surrendered completely to the will of God. Esther made the right choice. She yielded her life to God, though she was faced with much uncertainty. Let us consider our own lives. God has a plan and purpose for us as He did for Esther. He places us in the right places at the right times, orchestrating the events of our lives so that His purposes may be accomplished. Perhaps, He has placed us in a certain school so that we can be a witness for Him. Maybe there is someone in our family that needs to see an example of Jesus. Maybe God will use us to pray for and help a neighbor in their time of need. As a result of Esther's decision to yield to God and do His will, His plan and purpose in the deliverance of His people will begin to unfold. God has everything under control! We, too, will make a choice. May we choose, like Esther, to be His vessels, yielded to His will, that we may see His plan and purposes accomplished in our lives. God has a purpose for our lives.

Suggested Activity: Fruit of the Spirit Tic Tac Toe

Esther 5:1-8

After the three days of fasting and prayer, the time had come for Esther to go to the king. What relief she must have felt when the king held out his scepter—the sign that she was welcome to come into his presence. The king told Esther that she could ask for anything she wanted; even up to half of his kingdom! God had given Esther a great amount of favor with the king. Esther may have thought she could ask the king for her petition right then and there, but she had a plan. She asked the king and his "right-hand man," Haman, to come to a nice dinner in his honor. At that time, she would tell the king of her request. King Ahasuerus had a very nice time at the banquet. He asked Esther again to voice her request. Once more she delayed; she asked that the king and Haman come back the next day for another banquet.

Suggested Activity: Have a Feast

Esther 5:9-13

The Bible says that Haman went out with a joyful and glad heart. He was glorying in his wealth, his possessions, and his power. He was the second most important guy—or so he thought—in the kingdom. With his great power and influence, he was even able to get the king to issue a decree to destroy those that irritated him! But, when he left the banquet and saw Mordecai, all of his joy was immediately

dissipated! He could not enjoy his power, wealth, and prestige; for there was Mordecai, the Jew, refusing to tremble (or be afraid) before him. Mordecai did not even stand up when Haman passed by. The Bible says Haman was filled with indignation. He was consumed with anger toward Mordecai. Haman restrained himself and went home to the company of his wife and friends. Haman boasted of his importance, his power, possessions, and wealth, and even his invitation to the Queen's Banquet; then he shared his dilemma. All these things gave him no joy as long as Mordecai the Jew sat at the king's gate. As the most important person in the kingdom of Persia, except for the king himself, Haman seemed to be on top of the world; yet he was, likely, the most miserable man in the kingdom; for consumed with hatred, he had no ability to enjoy his power, prestige, and wealth. How sad! One could seem to have everything, yet be miserable. Proverbs 13:7 states, "There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches." True riches are to be found in a right relationship with God. Anger and hatred can destroy us.

Esther 5:14

Haman's family and friends certainly did not encourage him towards righteousness. Instead, they gave him ideas on how to express his anger—a 75-foot gallows could be built in order to hang Mordecai. Perhaps, his family and friends wanted to be on Haman's good side, so they could share in his power and influence. Warning! Be careful in choosing friends. They can encourage you to righteousness, or they can encourage you to evil. What kind of friend would encourage you on a path that would destroy you? Godly friends will correct you when you are acting wrongly. Consider these scriptures in Proverbs: "Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:5, 6). Haman really liked the idea his family and friends had given him! It made him feel good about himself and much better to imagine the world without Mordecai refusing to bow down to him. His sin caused him to lose all perspective. The gallows were built on his property in one night. He could not wait to get Mordecai out of his life. Haman was so filled with hate that it led him to consider murder. In Genesis 4, we see another story about anger, jealousy, and hatred--the story of Cain and Abel. Do you remember this story? Cain became angry because God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his own. Abel's sacrifice came from his heart and was according to God's instructions. But, Cain wanted God to accept the sacrifice made from his hands. He wanted God to be impressed with what he had done. In Genesis 4:7 the Lord said to Cain, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." How Haman needed to heed this same message; for sin certainly was crouching at his door! It is a good thing to learn from the mistakes and bad choices of others. Let us not, as Haman, allow pride, anger, and hatred to consume us. The Bible warns us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. Pride can destroy us. Bitterness, anger, and hatred can destroy us—they can assume control of our lives. If we are wronged, we must forgive (Colossians 3:13). (See, also, Ephesians 4:26,27.) We must not allow sin to crouch at our door and threaten our destruction. As Christians, we are exhorted, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). Anger and hatred can destroy us.

Suggested Activity: "Haman" Hangman

5. Prayer

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to seek God's will for their lives, understanding He has a plan and a purpose for them. Pray that God will guard their hearts against bitterness, anger, and hatred

and to be ready to forgive when they are wronged just as Christ forgave them. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.

6. Attention Grabbers

What you will need:

- 1) Three sheets of paper, tape, chalk/dry erase board.
- 2) Nothing

Carrying out the attention grabber:

1) What's My Line?

God has a wonderful plan for all of our lives. Before class, take three sheets of paper and tape them onto your class chalk/dry erase board. The papers should be in a row approximately 6 inches apart. Choose two or three children from your class and ask the question, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" Do not have them answer just yet. Have your first "chosen" child come up and sit at the front of the class. Have them whisper into your ear what their future profession will be. Write it on the chalkboard, concealing it with a piece of paper and tape. Have the rest of the class, one at a time, ask a question to try to guess. They can ask anything except, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" Have the child in the front answer the questions. Play until either the profession is guessed or everyone has asked a question. If it is not guessed remove the paper from the chalkboard to reveal what it is. Allow the next one or two children to play. Explain to all of the children that no matter what we do in life, God has a wonderful plan for us. No matter where He places us, we can be used for His glory just like Esther was used.

2) Lookout!

Choose two children. One will be the "inside," and the other will be the "outside." Have the remainder of the children form a circle and lock arms. The "inside" child will stand in the middle of the circle. The "outside" child will be outside of the circle. The object is for the outside child to try to tag the inside child. The job for the children in the circle is to protect the inside child. You can say go and give a limited amount of time. Give other children the opportunity to be the inside and the outside child. Today we are going to learn about a very evil man named Haman. He hated Mordecai and wanted to kill him along with all of the Israelites. But God had a plan to protect His people. The Bible says that our enemy is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). But with God's help and the help of our brothers and sisters we can be protected from the attack of the enemy. Compare the game just played to this truth. The lion is the one on the outside trying to attack the one on the inside. By staying together, praying for one another, and putting on the full armor of God, we can be protected from the attacks of the enemy.

7. Activities:

What you will need:

1) Chalk, paper, and tape. One 9" x 9" square piece of burlap for each child, gray or black construction paper or confetti, string or ribbon, paper, markers, and a hole punch.

2) Chalk and a chalkboard.

3) One "Have a Feast" template for each child in your class, gray cardstock, glue, scissors, construction paper, glitter, sequins or small paper shapes, and assorted magazines to cut out food items.

4) A chalkboard and chalk (or dry erase board and dry erase markers).

How to carry out the activities:

1) Sackcloth and Ashes

In Old Testament times, whenever people were sad or mourned, they would put on sackcloth and ashes. Sackcloth was very rough material that would scratch against the skin. They would put ashes in their hair as a sign of sadness. In our lesson, today, Mordecai, and many of the Jews wore sackcloth and ashes because of their sadness over the king's decree. For a craft, you will make a sackcloth pouch filled with ashes. You will need one 9" x 9" square piece of burlap for each child, gray or black construction paper or confetti, string or ribbon, paper, markers, and a hole punch. Begin by laying out the burlap square. Tear several strips of black or gray construction paper into tiny pieces or use confetti and place in the center of the square. Pull up each end of the square and tie the top with string or ribbon. This will make a small pouch. On a small strip of paper, approximately 1" x 4," write "Sackcloth and Ashes" and today's memory verse or theme. Write the child's name on the back of the paper. Punch a hole in the paper and tie to the pouch with string or ribbon. Remind the children that sometimes we can find ourselves in bad situations, like Queen Esther and the Jewish people did. At those times, let us remember that He will be our strength and help; He will deliver us. He may even want to use our lives, like He did Queen Esther, to bring about that deliverance. God has a purpose for our lives.

2) Fruit of the Spirit Tic Tac Toe

If we live a Spirit-controlled life, we can certainly be useful to the Lord. Do our lives display the fruits of a Spirit-controlled life? Draw a large Tic Tac Toe graph on the chalk or dry erase board. In each square put a small number beginning with 1 and going through 9. Each of these boxes will represent a fruit of the Spirit.

1. Love
2. Joy
3. Peace
4. Longsuffering
5. Kindness
6. Goodness
7. Faithfulness
8. Gentleness
9. Self-control

Split up your class into two teams, the "X"s and the "O"s. Have each group take turns choosing which square they would like to take by choosing a number. After choosing the number, in order to capture the square, they will need to get together as a group and "act out" that fruit of the Spirit. They can do anything to demonstrate that fruit. You as the teacher will be the judge if they are accurate and should

qualify to receive the square. Continue playing until someone gets Tic Tac Toe. If you feel they did not earn the square then the other team can try to earn the square. Play the game a few times and have fun. As we yield to God's control, these fruits of the Spirit will be evident in our lives.

3) Have a Feast

For this craft, you will need one "Have a Feast" template for each child in your class, gray cardstock, glue, scissors, construction paper, glitter, sequins or small paper shapes, and assorted magazines to cut out food items. Copy the platter template onto gray cardstock to resemble a silver platter. Have the children cut out the platter and use glue and construction paper, glitter, sequins or small paper shapes to decorate the platter. Allow enough space for the children to write, "God used Esther to save His people." Next, using magazine cutouts allow the children to find food items to cut out and glue onto their platter. Have them take their platters home to remind them how that God used Esther to stop Haman's wicked plan.

4) "Haman" Hangman

Before class, pick out some words that are found in Esther 5:9-14. Use words to describe Haman's character. For example: pride, wealth, honor, anger, elevated, etc. Use these words to allow the children to play a game of Hangman. Split your class into three groups of 5 or 6 children. Decide which child from each group will be the ones giving the words. Tell them three words from your list. The other four or five children will guess. You will have three games going on at the same time. This will allow everyone to get a turn within a short period of time. You can do this on the chalk or dry erase board, or have the children use paper.

8. Bible text (NIV):

Esther 4:1-17

Mordecai Persuades Esther to Help

1 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. 2 But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. 3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

4 When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. 5 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.

6 So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. 7 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. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

9 Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 “All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”

12 When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 “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.”

17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.

Esther 5:1-14

Esther’s Request to the King

1 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. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. 2 When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

3 Then the king asked, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.”

4 “If it pleases the king,” replied Esther, “let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.”

5 “Bring Haman at once,” the king said, “so that we may do what Esther asks.”

So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. 6 As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, “Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.”

7 Esther replied, “My petition and my request is this: 8 If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king’s question.”

Haman’s Rage Against Mordecai

9 Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. 10 Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home.

Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, 11 Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. 12 “And that’s not all,” Haman added. “I’m the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. 13 But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.”

14 His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits,[a] and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself.” This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up.

Template - Time Line

460 BC

VASHTI



ESTHER



HAMAN / MORDECAI



FEAST OF PURIM



Template - Have A Feast



