



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

OCTOBER 24 2020

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

God the Father, Seventh-day Adventist 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 sup-

pose 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.

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.

He knew how Haman's wrath could be 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

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.

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 acknowledge 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 the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.