



ESTHER – Bible Storying Instructions

STEP ONE

Read through the Bible story carefully so you know it well. Pick up on big themes and questions and ideas. In Esther, for example, themes of persecution, suffering and God's sovereignty will come up a lot, as might the questionable-ness of pretty much all of the characters from time to time!

STEP TWO

At the meeting... Explain to the group the plan for the evening. See who knows the story already. Make sure they don't import all the knowledge they already have but really listen to *this* telling of the story and hear it afresh.

STEP THREE

Make everyone keep their Bibles shut and just listen to the story being read. Read it out loud with a sense of drama!

STEP FOUR

Ask the group to retell the story bit by bit. Try to get everybody involved in this and don't let any one person dominate. Let them interrupt each other and tell them when they missed a bit. Ask questions like, "What happened just before that?" or "And what did she say then?" (This is by far the longest section but it's worth doing properly.)

STEP FIVE

Normally with a shorter story, you'd get them to do this again in pairs to really solidify it, but the Esther story is too long for doing it twice!

STEP SIX

Ask general questions about the story. "What did you think of that?" "What kind of story was it?" "How did it make you feel?" "Where were any characters you associated with and why?" "Was there anything surprising about the story?" "Anything you didn't understand?" Let the discussion go where people want to take it.

STEP SEVEN

Follow up the general questions with more specific application-type questions. This is where you take the lead a bit more clearly and direct the conversation towards the big teaching points you've identified. "How would you have felt if you were a Jew living in Susa?" "Where did we see God at work in the story?" "How might this story help us when life gets hard?" "What have you taken away from reading this story together?"

STEP EIGHT

Pray. After sharing in this way, it's amazing how the prayer time afterwards often really opens up.

General Notes

Remember this is being done at the start of a sermon series so we'll have plenty of time to work out the details. I'm slightly loathed to do this on week one and spoil the ending of the story before we've got there!! But I think it will give people a general intro to it, raise lots of questions and get people excited about delving into the book for the rest of term.

There will be two other studies in Connect Groups on Esther. I will keep those deliberately focused on getting the gist of that part of the story and then applying it through discussion. So do encourage people to have either been there on Sunday to hear the sermon (obviously the best option!) or to listen online before they come (something it would be good to encourage people to do any time they miss a Sunday). It will really help.

What follows is a script of the story. Often I would just read a story straight out of the Bible. This one I have written up in order to make it shorter. Lots of it is taken straight from the text but some is shaped to give the right overall message, e.g. adding lots of "now it just so happened" so people pick up on the theme of 'random coincidences'. Feel free to shorten or adapt it, or just use it as it is.

Enjoy Bible storying...!

*Nathan Burley
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ESTHER – Bible Storying Script

Around 600 years before Jesus was born, God's people were captured by the evil Babylons and taken away from the land God had given them. Hundreds of miles from home, they wondered if God had abandoned them, when really *they* had abandoned God.

God hadn't forgotten them and 70 years later the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians. The Persians let God's people go home! And most of them did. But some decided to stay in Persia. Our story takes place in that time, in Susa, the capital of the Persian empire.

The King of Persia was called Ahasuerus. You might know him as Xerxes the Great. Ahasuerus was the most powerful king the world had ever known. He threw a party for his army and his governors to show off his power and glory. The party lasted 6 months! It finished with a week-long feast for everyone in Susa. Free food and drink and partying in the palace for everyone! Meanwhile, Queen Vashti had a party of her own for the ladies of the palace.

At the end of the week when King Ahasuerus was drunk, he called for his wife so he could parade her before the crowd and show off her beauty. Queen Vashti refused to come in.

The king was furious. His wise men warned him, "If word gets out, then all women will overthrow their husbands saying, 'Queen Vashti said no and so will I.' You must punish her!" And so King Ahasuerus decreed he would never see Vashti again.

But who would be queen in her place? King Ahasuerus began the search. Beautiful virgins from around his empire were rounded up and brought to Susa. The one who most pleased the king would become queen.

Now it just so happened that there was a Jew in Susa called Mordecai. He was bringing up his younger cousin, Hadassah, or 'Esther' in Persian. Esther was beautiful. So when the king's men came, Esther was taken.

Now it just so happened that the man in charge of the harem was fond of Esther and looked after her. For a year she was given food and beauty treatments, with Mordecai visiting her each day. But she never told anyone she was a Jew, because Mordecai made her keep it a secret.

Each evening the king called for a woman who brought him a present. The next morning, she returned to the harem and would never see the king again, unless he called for her by name.

When Esther's turn came she won the king's heart. He loved her more than the rest and made her queen.

One day it just so happened that Mordecai heard of a plot to kill King Ahasuerus. Mordecai told Queen Esther who warned the king. They looked into it and found it was true. So the plotters were hanged on the gallows and Mordecai's name was written in the King's records.

Later, the king promoted a man called Haman and told everyone to bow to him when he walked by. But day after day, Mordecai wouldn't bow down to Haman. Haman was furious. So furious that he decided not just to kill Mordecai but all of Mordecai's people throughout the empire, since he'd found out that Mordecai was a Jew.

Haman went to King Ahasuerus. "There is a group of people scattered throughout your kingdom. They are different. They do not keep your laws. You should not tolerate them. Please give me permission to have them all destroyed, killed and annihilated." The King gave Haman permission.

They cast lots to decide a date – the 13th day of the month of Adar. The decree was written and issued throughout the empire ordering people to kill, destroy and annihilate all the Jews. Every Jew everywhere was going to die on the 13th of Adar.

When Mordecai heard the plan, he mourned and cried. As did all the Jews everywhere, fasting and weeping in sackcloth and ashes. Mordecai sent a message to Esther begging her to plead with the king. But Esther said, "If anyone goes to see the king without being called by him, they are put to death. And he hasn't called me in for a month."

Mordecai warned her, "Do not think you're safe from this in the palace. If you stay silent, you and your family will die, although deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place. But who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther listened and said, "Gather all the Jews in Susa and fast for me for three days. Then I will go in to see the king, even though it is against the law. If I perish, I perish."

Three days later, Esther went to see the king. When the king saw Esther... he was pleased to see her and held out his golden sceptre to bid her come in. He asked, "What is it Queen Esther? Whatever you request, I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

Esther replied, "Please your majesty, let you and Haman come today to a feast I have prepared. And tomorrow I will make my request."

Haman went home delighted at this. Until he passed Mordecai, who still refused to honour him. Haman gathered his wife and his friends together. He boasted of his riches, his family, his promotion and position. He said, "Even Queen Esther let nobody but the king and I come to her feast. Yet all this means nothing whilst Mordecai the Jew still lives."

Haman's wife and his friends said, "Build some gallows, seventy five feet high and tomorrow get the king to hang Mordecai on them." Haman went to bed very happy.

But the king couldn't sleep. He asked for his record books to be read to him. And it just so happened that they read the story of how Mordecai had saved the king's life from those who plotted to kill him. The king asked, "What did we do to honour this man Mordecai?" "Nothing, your majesty."

Now it just so happened that Haman entered the court to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai. The king asked Haman, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?" Thinking the king was talking about him, Haman replied, "Give him the king's robes and the king's horse and parade him through the city declaring, 'This is what happens to the man whom the king delights to honour!'"

The king replied, "Excellent! Fetch the robes and fetch the horse and prepare the parade... for Mordecai!" And so Haman led the procession through the city declaring, "This is what happens to the man whom the king delights to honour." Haman was humiliated.

The next day, Haman and King Ahasuerus came to Esther's second feast. The king asked, "What is your request, Queen Esther, up to half my kingdom?" Esther replied, "If I have found favour in your sight, please give me my life and that of my people. For we have been handed over to be destroyed, killed and annihilated."

The king asked, "Who is the man who dared to do this?" "An enemy, the wicked Haman." And Haman was terrified. He begged Esther for his life, falling at her feet. The king saw it and shouted, "Will he assault the queen right in front of me?! Away with him!"

One of the king's servants had noticed some seventy five foot high gallows outside Haman's house. The king commanded, "Hang him on that." And so Haman was hanged on the gallows he had built to hang Mordecai. And Mordecai was given Haman's position of authority.

But the Jews were still going to die. And so Esther pleaded with the king to revoke his decree that all the Jews be destroyed, killed and annihilated on the 13th of Adar.

But the king answered, "I have hanged Haman and given Mordecai his position. But I cannot change the decree, for once I sign a law it can never be changed."

Instead he wrote another law and issued it throughout the empire. The decree allowed all Jews everywhere for one day to defend themselves and to destroy, kill and annihilate anyone who tried to attack them... on 13th of Adar.

Everywhere the new decree went, there was great rejoicing! The Jews had a feast and a holiday. And many in the empire declared themselves to be Jews for fear of them.

When the 13th of Adar came, on the day when every Jew everywhere was going to be destroyed, killed and annihilated, the opposite happened. The Jews had victory over everyone who hated them. A great many who attacked them were killed in battle. In Susa the king decreed that the Jews could attack on the 14th of Adar as well, and so Haman's 10 sons were found and hanged. Across the empire 75,000 of their enemies were killed, on the very day the Jews were meant to die.

And so the Jews celebrated, giving presents and feasting with great joy. Mordecai wrote to all the empire commanding the Jews every year to celebrate the 14th of Adar every year. For that was the day they got relief from their enemies, when their sorrow turned to gladness, and their mourning into a holiday.

The feast was called Purim, which means 'casting lots', for Haman had cast lots to destroy them but his evil plan returned on his own head. Haman who was tried to kill them was defeated on the very gallows built for Mordecai. And Mordecai was second-in-command to King Ahasuerus, popular with everyone, because he brought peace to all his people.