

Esther Becomes Queen

Esther 1:1 - 2:18

PPT Title

Esther Becomes Queen

Main Point: God is Sovereign. He is in control of all things.

PPT Verse

Key Verse: *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. He directs it like a stream of water anywhere He pleases.* - Proverbs 21:1

Props: Clear glass pitcher (a clear drinking glass would work for a small group of students), water, 4 colors of food coloring, salad oil - as clear as possible, large spoon

BACKGROUND/REVIEW

Note to teacher: The term, "Jew," began as a name for anyone who lived in the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 16:6). Later, after the carrying away of the ten tribes, the term applied to all the Israelites (Jeremiah 32:12).



Say: Because the Israelites had disobeyed God, God allowed them to be taken captive. The tribes were split up and taken to Babylon. At this time, the Israelites were also known as Jews. The Israelites, or Jews, became a sad race. They didn't have a land, they could not worship God in His temple, and they didn't have their freedom. But God promised, through the prophet Jeremiah, that one day **He would gather** the Israelites together again and restore their land (Jeremiah 30:1-4).

Sixty years later, the king of Persia, King Cyrus, conquered Babylon. After the Persians took control of Babylon, the Lord gave a message to King Cyrus. God wanted the Jews to leave Persia and return to Jerusalem in the Promised Land. He wanted them to rebuild His Temple that had been destroyed.



The message was written down. It said, "Cyrus, the king of Persia, says, 'The Lord is the God of heaven. He has given me all of the kingdoms on earth. He has appointed me to build a temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any one of his people among you can go up to Jerusalem. And may the Lord your God be with you.' " - 2 Chronicles 36:22b-23

Many of the Israelites obeyed God's call. The Old Testament book of Ezra tells about the joy-filled returning of tens of thousands of Israelites to Jerusalem after their long captivity. But, sadly, Israel did not return complete. Some Jews chose not to return to Jerusalem as God had commanded. Just two books later, we find the book of Esther. Esther is an account of what happens when we don't stay under the protection of God's commands and promises. In the amazing story of Esther, we will see that **God is FAITHFUL to keep His promises, no matter what people choose to do.**

Esther (Esther 1)



When the book of Esther opens, the great-grandson of King Cyrus, a man named Xerxes, was king over the massive territory of Persia and Media. It had been over 70 years since the Lord had commanded the Jews to leave Persia and return to Jerusalem, yet some of the Jews were STILL living in the Persia. We must ask ourselves why these Israelites were still living in a foreign land where they did not belong. Perhaps they

had grown attached to the land they were in. Maybe they liked the people and the culture. As we saw with the Israelites in the Promised Land, many had probably married the foreigners around them.

Note to Teacher: Xerxes reign began in 485 BC, nearly 75 years after King Cyrus' decree from the Lord in 559 BC (2 Chronicles 36:22).

As chapter one of Esther begins, we read that King Xerxes was throwing a **huge** party. The party lasted for six months!



In the third year of his rule King Xerxes gave a big dinner. It was for all of his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media were there. So were the princes and the nobles of the territories he ruled over. Every day for 180 days he showed his guests the great wealth of his kingdom. He also showed them how glorious his kingdom was. - Esther 1:3-4

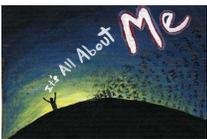
Ask: Who was present at the six month banquet? *All the nobles and officials, military leaders, princes*

Say: *Every day for 180 days he showed his guests the great wealth of his kingdom. He also showed them how glorious his kingdom was. - Esther 1:4*

The King wanted the leaders to think he was amazing. The King gave them all a six month vacation with the best places to sleep, the best food to eat, and the most fun they had ever had.

Ask: Would you side with someone who did all of this for you? *probably, yes*

Say: The six-month party was followed by an additional seven-day party at the palace for EVERY man in the capital city of Susa. That's amazing! There would have been thousands of people there. The king's court was decorated beautifully. The couches they sat on were made of gold and silver and they drank out of golden cups. The King was very determined to show his greatness to everyone. He wanted to be the center of attention. The king's motto would have been, "It's all about me!"



Application: Have you ever wanted people to think you were really cool? This usually does not turn out the way we want it to! The Bible has many verses that warn us about wanting people to think we are really great or really cool. Isaiah 2:11 says, "A man who brags will be brought low. Men who are proud will be put to shame." But, just the opposite, people who value others and do not think too highly of themselves will be honored by God. 1 Peter 5:6 says, "So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor."

Say: But King Xerxes was not a humble man. At the very end of the King's parties, when he was just about finished showing off this splendor to all of Susa, the king made one request. He asked for his wife, Queen Vashti, to be brought to his party. He ordered his officials to go and get the queen.



He told them to bring Queen Vashti to him. He wanted her to come wearing her royal crown. He wanted to show off her beauty to the people and nobles. She was lovely to look at. The attendants told Queen Vashti what the king had ordered her to do. But she refused to come. So the king became very angry. In fact, he burned with anger. - Esther 1:11

Say: In front of all the people of Susa, the King's request was turned down. For the King to be turned down by his very own queen in front of so many people was not alright with the king. He became very angry. Verse 12 says, "He burned with anger."

Ask: How do you respond when things don't go your way, or when you're embarrassed in front of your friends?

Say: The King asked the wise men around him what he should do about Queen Vashti. The wise men told King Xerxes that he should decree that Queen Vashti must be dethroned. Everyone was watching King Xerxes to see what he was going to do. A royal decree meant the King could never change his mind. It would be final. King Xerxes took away the queen's crown. And so, Queen Vashti never saw the King again.



Application: King Xerxes took advice from those around him, and that advice changed the lives of himself, his wife, and everyone in the kingdom. Queen Vashti was wrong to refuse her husband's wish, but sending her away forever was not a good solution. We know that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and God requires us to forgive one another (Colossians 3:13). The people who advised the King gave him advice that was best for *them* (Esther 1:17-18). The Bible says it is wise to get advice (Proverbs 19:20). But, when you look to others for advice, you should choose people who truly care about you and want what is best for you. Go to people who follow God and know what the Bible says. They will give you advice from God's word. It is rich in wisdom (Colossians 3:16). It is the very best advice, because it is from God. He knows the past, present, and future, and He wants the very best for you.

God has breathed life into all of Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, a man of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing. - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

A NEW QUEEN (Esther 2)

Say: Even when sinful people make wrong decisions, **God can use it for His purposes.** We will see that the banishment of Queen Vashti opened the door of opportunity for God to protect His people.



Four years passed between chapters one and two of Esther. According to history, the king may have gone to battle with Greece during this time. King Xerxes' plan of controlling Greece had failed. This meant he would have returned to Susa very disappointed, ashamed, and frustrated - AND without a queen.

Later, the anger of King Xerxes calmed down. Then he remembered Vashti and what she had done. He also remembered the royal order he had sent out concerning her. - Esther 2:1 NET

Ask: What do you think is going through the King's mind in verse one of chapter two? *Regret of what he did, missing Vashti* **Ask:** Have you ever regretted something you did in the midst of being angry or upset? Have you ever hurt someone's feelings with something you said?

Say: King Xerxes was not angry any more. But, because he ordered that Vashti be removed as queen, he could not bring her back.

The king's servants who attended him said, "Let a search be conducted in the king's behalf for attractive young women. And let the king appoint officers throughout all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the attractive young women to Susa the citadel." - Esther 2:2-3a NET

Say: The king's advisers suggested a kingdom-wide search for a new queen. It was almost like a beauty pageant. They would gather all the young women who were not married, take them to a special part of the palace, and give them beauty treatments. The king would meet with each of them, and the one he liked the most would take Vashti's place as queen (Esther 2:4). Here is where Esther entered the scene. She

was one of the women gathered up to be taken to the palace.

There was a Jew living in the safest place in Susa. He was from the tribe of Benjamin. His name was Mordecai. - Esther 2:5a

Mordecai's family had been from the land of Judah to Babylon years before by military force (Esther 2:6).



Mordecai had a very beautiful cousin named Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah. He had raised her as his own daughter, after her father and mother died. When the king ordered the search for beautiful women, many were taken to the king's palace in Susa, and Esther was one of them. - Esther 2:7-8 CEV

Ask: What do we know about Esther from these verses?

- Her Jewish name was Hadassah
- Both of her parents had died
- She was raised by her cousin, Mordecai
- She was a Jew
- She did not return to Jerusalem

Say: Remember that not all people written about in the Bible had picture-perfect families. Esther didn't know what it was like to have a dad, and she didn't have the hugs and kisses of a mom. Instead, God provided her cousin, Mordecai, to care for her. Know that **God works with ALL kinds of people with ALL kinds of families!**



In the palace, Esther lived with girls from all of the provinces from India to Ethiopia. For one year, each young woman received perfume baths and special treatments with the sole purpose of being beautiful for King Xerxes. Esther's cousin Mordecai told Esther to keep it a secret that she was a Jew, and Esther was obedient to his wish. Finally, it was Esther's turn to meet King Xerxes.



She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal house. It was now the tenth month. That was the month of Tebeth. It was the seventh year of the rule of Xerxes. The king liked Esther more than he liked any of the other women... So he put a royal crown on her head. He made her queen in Vashti's place. - Esther 2:16-17



Say: Esther was chosen! She was crowned queen in place of Vashti. King Xerxes held a big dinner in Esther's honor. He made the day a holiday and gave away expensive gifts (Esther 2:18).

This seems like a great thing, but remember that Esther married outside of the nation of Israel. This was not God's best for any of His chosen people. God had always forbidden His chosen people, the Israelites, to marry foreigners because they did not follow Him (Numbers 36, Joshua 23:12-13, Ezra 10:2, Nehemiah 13:27).

In the book of Esther, many Jews had become comfortable in the foreign land where they did not belong. The decisions they made were reflecting the culture around them and not the standards and plan that God had laid out for Israel. The Jews forgot that Persia was NOT their home. They forgot their God, and the Promised Land. But **God did NOT forget His promises and His covenant to make Israel a Great nation.** And so, in the book of Esther, we will watch God stay true to His word, despite the disobedience of His people.

Application: Have you ever hung around with the wrong crowd of people for so long that you start to become like them? Soon, you start to make decisions like they do. We must be careful. We cannot become like those around us who do not follow God. As Christians, God calls us to be different. God wants **us** to affect the people around us. He does NOT want the people around us to affect **us**. Jesus compared Christians



to salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). When we sprinkle salt on bland food, the salt changes the taste of the food. The food does not change the taste of the salt. Also, Jesus said we are the light of the world. When a candle is lit and placed in a dark room, the candle flame lights up the dark room. The dark room does not dim the candle flame. Light dispels darkness. Darkness does not dispel light.



At one time, God wanted His people to be separated from those around them to keep them pure (Deuteronomy 7:16, Judges 2:2-3). But that is not the case now. God does not separate Christians from those around them. Because Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to live inside of every believer (Romans 5:5), we are able to live pure lives, no matter where we are (1 Corinthians 10:13, Titus 2:11-12).

Teacher: Take the large clear pitcher and fill half full with water. **Say:** This glass pitcher represents the world we live in. We'll say this water stands for people. The Bible says everyone in the world has sinned. We'll let this food coloring represent sin. Choose the red food coloring and add several drops to your water. The people break the laws God has given. They do what they want to do, instead of what God wants. Choose another color and add it to the water. They make up their own ideas of what God is like, and they follow that. Choose another color and add it to the water. They choose to hurt other people. Choose another color and add it to the water. They are self-centered and think only about what is best for them. Stir and show the pitcher to the kids. (The water should be very dark by now.) This is the very sinful world we live in. Now, hold up your bottle of salad oil. But, the GREAT news is, when we chose to put our trust in Jesus, He takes our sin away and makes us a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). We will let this oil represent those who trust in Jesus. There is no color in them, because their sins have been washed away. But as we said earlier, Christians are called to live in the world with all the other people. That way, those who don't know Jesus can be affected by the Christians. The non-Christians can see the pure lives of the Christians, and learn about Jesus from the Christians. Pour about an inch of oil into the pitcher. Give the water a good stir each time you mention the following: The Christians live in neighborhoods with other people, they go to school with other people, they work with other people, and they are on sports teams with other people. Remove your spoon and allow the water to settle while you say the next few lines. Remember how Jesus said we should affect those around us, but they should not affect us? The other people in the world are not following God. They are not living pure lives. The Christians are in the world, interacting with these people, but they must live godly lives. Take your spoon, and carefully get a spoonful of oil from the top inch. In a way that the children can see, pour the oil onto a paper plate or white board (tilted toward the students) to show the oil is still clear. Just like the color did not get into our oil, the Christian life must remain pure. This means, we do not live the way the rest of the world lives. We do not choose to sin. We do not do things our own way. We do things God's way. When we live God's way, our lives will be full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. Then the other people will be drawn to us, and we can point them to Jesus (1 Peter 2:12).

Say: Next week we will see what God does next in our story with Esther, Mordecai, and a terribly wicked man named Haman.

PPT Main Point

Main Point: God is Sovereign. He is in control of all things.