

Esther 3-8

Aim of Lesson

To show that people who believe in God and who have the courage to stand up for what is right are helped by him, and that those full of pride and hatred are judged by him.

Background study

As for previous lesson.

Suggested outline of lesson

Start by questioning the children about the story so far, clarifying the characters in the previous lesson. Then go on to show that there was unrest at the court.

Ahasuerus had decided to promote Haman above all his other advisers. The seven counsellors were all highly privileged but Haman was granted a special honour: everyone in the court was commanded to bow when he passed. Maybe Mordecai believed this to be an act of worship, and so refused to obey; maybe he was just being obstinate. Haman might not have noticed Mordecai's action, but it was the other attendants at court who not only reported the matter but linked it with Mordecai's nationality. Note Haman's passionate and vicious reaction and his decision to destroy not only Mordecai but all of the Jews. He knew, however, that to obtain a royal decree for such an action, he needed the consent of all seven counsellors before it could be signed by the king, so he tricked and bribed Ahasuerus into giving him the authority.

Describe the terror and distress that the decree must have caused to all the Jews throughout the provinces and especially in Shushan: the weeping, wailing, fasting, and wearing of sackcloth and ashes. Convey the distress and concern of Esther when she heard the truth from her cousin and saw the writ, which had been brought back to her: she seemed to have won the loyalty of the servants. Her immediate reaction to Mordecai's plea for her to speak to the king was to send word that this was impossible. But when Mordecai's request was communicated to Esther a second time, she courageously decided to risk her life and commit herself to God's care, as her people gave themselves to fasting.

The dramatic events that followed should stimulate the children's imagination. Describe the tense moments as Esther approached the king, the waiting game, and the two sumptuous banquets; Haman's boasting to his friends and family about his invitation, tempered by his extreme hatred and rage against Mordecai which led him to seek his life; the providential reading of the chronicles and the reciting of Mordecai's loyal act; Haman's arrogance in anticipating his aggrandisement and the bitter shock and humiliation in having to confer the suggested honours upon the man he considered his enemy. The second banquet was the setting for the exposure of villainy and for the revelation of the true feelings and intents of all three participants. The king's anger, which Esther had feared, was justly turned on Haman, who was hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

The planned massacre of the Jews, however, was not averted because once an edict bore the king's seal even the king himself could not countermand it. But with Mordecai now the chief minister, the Jews were empowered to defend themselves in whatever way they could. Draw together the sequence of events that led to their triumph over persecution and show how God had put the right people in the right place, at the right time.

Relevance to the children's lives

What sort of man was Haman? Why did he hate Mordecai? Was Haman a happy man? Why not? What often happens to people who show off and are boastful?

Worksheets

The sentence reads 'Queen Esther pleased the king, and asked him to save Mordecai and the Jews from Haman. Haman was then hanged on his own gallows outside the palace'.

The solution to the code is 'I will bless them that bless you and curse him that curses you'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, forgive us for the times when we have been boastful. Help us not to think too much of ourselves. Amen.

Memory verse

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).