

# Esther and Mordecai



## SABBATH—DECEMBER 16

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Daniel 1:1–12; Esther 2:1–9; Esther 3:1–15; Esther 4:1–14; Esther 9:1–12.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Here is what the Lord says to me. ‘It is not enough for you as my servant to bring the tribes [family groups] of Jacob back to their land. It is not enough for you to bring back the people of Israel I have kept alive. I will also make you [the same as] a light for the Gentiles. Then you will make it possible for the whole world [the people on earth] to be saved’ ” (Isaiah 49:6, NlrV).

As Queen of Persia, Esther had an important part in Bible history.

**ESTHER AND HER UNCLE MORDECAI** were Jews who lived in Susa. Susa was the capital city of the Kingdom of Persia. Many Jews had gone back to live in the land of Judah. But Esther and her uncle, along with other Jews, stayed in Persia.

Then Esther became queen of all Persia. “The king loved Esther more than any of the other young women, and she became his favorite. He approved of [liked] her more than any of the others [young women]. So King Xerxes put a crown on Esther’s head and made her the new queen in place of Vashti” (Esther 2:17, ERV).

As Queen of Persia, Esther had an important part in Bible history. Her story shows how God’s people can share His truth in foreign lands.

Take time to read the book of Esther for this week’s study.

## A PRISONER OF WAR IN A FOREIGN LAND (Daniel 1:1–12)

Esther was a prisoner of war. Living in a foreign country isn't easy. We may have a hard time understanding the experience of Esther and other Jews living in a foreign land, first under the Babylonians and then under the Persians.

None of us lives in an Adventist country where our religious beliefs are the same as the laws of our land. Before the Jewish people were taken to Babylon, they lived in their own country. So, their religious beliefs and the laws of the land were the same. Keeping the Sabbath was part of their religious law and part of the laws of their land. So, living in Israel should have made it easy for Jews to honor God, right?

The Bible shows us that laws are not enough to make people holy. Our faith and loyalty to God come from our heart. Laws can't force our obedience. We must want to obey God. If we don't want to, sin will control our lives.

“ ‘These people worship me only with their words. They honor me by [with] what they say. But their hearts are far away from me. Their worship doesn't mean anything to me. They teach nothing but human rules that they have been taught’ ” (Isaiah 29:13, NIV).

Isaiah 29:13 shows a picture of false worship. Compare this picture with Bible stories of people who obeyed God with their whole hearts. Many of these men and women showed faith in God during hard times, when having faith was hard. Their stories show us that God's loyal followers will obey Him in the worst of times.

**God's people often can have a hard time living in foreign lands. Read the stories in Daniel 1:1–12; Daniel 3:1–12; and Daniel 6:1–9. What are some of the hard times that God's people have in these stories?**

We all live in places where the laws of the land or the lifestyle around us can make it hard, at times, to share Jesus. The stories in Daniel show us that God's people can stay loyal to Him when times are hard. The stories in Daniel have a happy ending. Not all stories end in a happy way. But we must obey God anyway.

**What are some of the things that make it hard for you to share your faith? How do you solve these problems?**



The stories in Daniel show us that God's people can stay loyal to Him when times are hard.

## IN A FOREIGN PALACE (Esther 2:1–9)



The king commanded his leaders to send the most beautiful young women in Persia to Susa so that one of them could become his new queen.

After the Kingdom of Babylon ended and the Kingdom of Media-Persia started, many Jews went back to their country. But not everyone went home. Some Jews stayed in Persia.

This bit of history helps us understand the story of Esther better. The Bible tells us the time and place where Esther's story happens. "In those days King Ahasuerus sat on the king's throne in the city of Susa" (Esther 1:2, NLV). So, we understand from this verse that Esther's story happens during the Persian Empire under King Ahasuerus. (Another name for Ahasuerus is Xerxes.)

In chapter 1, Queen Vashti loses the king's favor. So, the king removes Vashti from being queen. Then the king looks for another queen to replace Vashti. That's when Esther and her uncle, Mordecai, come into the story.

**Read Esther 2:1–9. What do these verses teach us about Mordecai and Esther?**

As far as we can tell, Mordecai works for the king. As part of his job, Mordecai sits at the gate of the king's palace. So, he lived in the city of Shushan (also named Susa) with his adopted daughter, Esther. Esther was really Mordecai's cousin. (But Mordecai adopted Esther as his daughter.) So, Mordecai and Esther were part of Persian culture or the way of life around them. Soon, the king commanded his leaders to send the most beautiful young women in Persia to Susa so that one of them could become his new queen (Esther 2:2–4). Then the Bible tells us, "When the king's command had been heard [announced], many young women were brought to the capital city of Susa. They [the young women] were put under the care of Hegai. Esther was one of these women. She [Esther] was taken to the king's palace and put into Hegai's care. Hegai was in charge of the king's women" (Esther 2:8, ERV).

**Read Esther 2:10, 20. What happens in these verses? Why does Mordecai give Esther this command?**

The verse doesn't say why, but the answer isn't hard to guess. Esther and Mordecai were foreigners in a land that often didn't like strangers. As we will see, Esther and Mordecai were wise to keep silent about their family and people.

**MORDECAI: A LOYAL WITNESS FOR GOD (Esther 3:1–15)**

Mordecai and Esther lived in a foreign land. As Jews, their ways and beliefs were different from the Persians. Sooner or later, Mordecai and Esther were going to have trouble in Persia if they wanted to stay loyal to God.

**Read Esther 3:1–15. What happened in these verses? Why did it happen?**

In Esther 3, we learn that King Xerxes honored Haman. Everyone was told they must bow down to Haman. The Bible tells us: “But Mordecai did not bow down or give him honor” (Esther 3:2, NLV). The Bible doesn’t give the reason that Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman. But we know why. Mordecai is loyal to God. Also, Mordecai, as a Jew, is not willing to bow down to an Amalekite. The Amalekites were the children of Agag and the enemies of God’s people since the time that God led His people out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 25:19). How can a loyal Jew bow down to an Amalekite? How can a loyal Jew worship anyone except God?

“Then the king’s leaders at the gate asked Mordecai, ‘Why don’t you obey the king’s command to bow down to Haman?’ ” (Esther 3:3, ERV). We learn the answer to this question in the next verse: “Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew” (Esther 3:4, ERV). For sure, Mordecai explained to the king’s leaders that he was a worshiper of the God who made the skies and earth. So, Mordecai couldn’t worship a fallen human. No doubt Mordecai shared his faith with these men. Sad to say, Mordecai’s faith put him in danger.

“Daniel, his three friends, and Mordecai were the same as bright lights. They shined God’s truth in the palaces of Babylon.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 13, 1884, adapted.

Haman became angry when Mordecai refused to honor him. “Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus [Xerxes], ‘There is a certain [special group of] people spread out [who live] among the people in all the parts of your nation [kingdom] whose laws are different from those [laws] of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws. So it is not good for the king to let them stay’ ” (Esther 3:8, NLV).

**Has God given you a test of faith the same as He gave Mordecai? How do we “pass” these tests of faith?**



**Mordecai, as a Jew, is not willing to bow down to an Amalekite.**

**FOR A TIME THE SAME AS THIS TIME (Esther 4:1–14)**

**Read Esther 4:1–14. Why was it important at this time for Esther to remember that she was Jewish?**

Mordecai contacted Esther for help. Esther had been married to Ahasuerus for several years. But a Persian law said that no one may come to the king's throne without an invitation from the king. The king could kill anyone who refused to obey this rule. Esther knew the risk of going to the throne room without an invitation. She went anyway.

Mordecai wanted to fill Esther's heart with faith and courage to help her people. Mordecai said to Esther, "You live in the king's palace. But don't think that just because you are there you will be the only Jew who will escape. What if you don't say anything at this time? Then help for the Jews will come from another place. But you and your family will die. Who knows? It's possible that you became queen for a time just like [the same as] this [time]" (Esther 4:13, 14, NIV).

Mordecai asks Esther to remember her love for her people. No one knew Esther was Jewish except Mordecai. When Esther made the decision to help her people, she put her whole heart into helping them. She was not afraid to die for her people if she needed to.

Esther's faith in God was strong. She knew that without God's help she would fail. "Then Esther sent this answer to Mordecai: 'Mordecai, go and get all the Jews in Susa together, and fast [don't eat any food or drink any water] for me. Don't eat or drink for three days and nights. I and my women servants will fast too. After we fast, I will go to the king. I know it is against the law to go to the king if he didn't call [invite] me, but I will do it anyway. If I die, I die'" (Esther 4:15, 16, ERV). Mordecai sent this information to the whole Jewish community in Shushan (Susa). The people fasted and prayed. "On the third day, Esther put on her special robes. Then she stood in the inside area of the king's palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his throne in the hall, facing the place where people enter the throne room. When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court [hall], he was very pleased. He held out to her the gold scepter [stick] that was in his hand. So Esther went into the room and went near the king. Then she touched the end of the king's gold scepter" (Esther 5:1, 2, ERV).



**Esther knew the risk of going to the throne room without an invitation. She went anyway.**



**GOD SAVES HIS PEOPLE (Esther 9:1–12)**

God's name is not written in the book of Esther. Esther is the only book in the Bible where God's name isn't included. God's name may not be used in the book, but the Jews in Esther's time saw that God saved them. This idea may explain why God chose to include the story of Esther in the Bible.

Can we see God working behind the scenes in our daily lives? God can work in many ways in our lives. He can work in nature and in the things that happen every day. So, we must pay careful attention so that we don't miss His working in our lives!

**Read Esther 9:1–12. What did Esther do? What happened because of Esther's actions?**

God works a miracle to save His people in an interesting way. The law to destroy the Jews isn't changed. But the king writes a new law that permits the Jews to protect their own lives.

Also, look at what happened in Esther 9 and how God used these things to save His people. The Persians saw that God worked to save the Jews, too.

So, what happened in the story of Esther when God helped His people?

"Many people from other nations [people groups] announced that they had become Jews" (Esther 8:17, NIV). This story shows us how the Lord used the things that happened to teach non-Jews about Himself.

The Jewish leaders saw how God worked a miracle to help His people. The Jews announced a special holiday named Purim to celebrate how God saved them from being destroyed. Today, Jews still celebrate Purim as a time of thanksgiving to God for saving them.

**Task #1: Pray that God will give you the courage to share something God did for you with someone on your prayer list.**

**Task #2: Make a daily record of special little things or big things God does for you. Read your record and pray that God will help you remember these things at the right time so you can share them with someone.**



**God can work in many ways in our lives. He can work in nature and in the things that happen every day.**



**“In Bible times, the Lord worked in a wonderful way in the lives of holy women. These women worked with men that God chose to do His work.”**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** “When trouble comes, every family, school, parent, teacher, and child who knows the Good News about Jesus will need to answer the question that Mordecai asked Esther: ‘Who knows? It’s possible that you became queen for a time just like [the same as] this [time].’ Esther 4:13, 14, [NirV].”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 263, adapted.

“In Bible times, the Lord worked in a wonderful way in the lives of holy women. These women worked with men that God chose to do His work. Together, these men and women honored God. God used women to win many important fights. God used women to save the lives of many people during hard times. God used Queen Esther to save His people from death. At a time when the Jews thought no one could save them, Esther and her women servants prayed. They ate no food and drank no water during this time. Their efforts helped save the Jewish people. . . .

“Study God’s work in the lives of women in the Old Testament. This study will teach you lessons that will help you solve the problems in your work for God today. We may not stand in front of kings as Esther did. But God can use women who give their lives fully to Him. These women have an important part in God’s work. Many women have been doing this work and are ready to do it now.”—Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God*, pages 45, 46, adapted.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read Esther’s famous words to Mordecai: “ ‘If I die, I die’ ” (Esther 4:16, ERV). These words have filled people’s hearts with courage and hope during hard times. Read Revelation 13, with Esther’s words in mind. How do Esther’s words show us the suffering of and courage of God’s people during the end times?
- ② Mordecai told Esther not to let anyone know she was a Jew when she became the queen. Can you think of times when it may be a good idea not to let anyone know you are a Christian? Or should we not do that? If no, why do you feel that way? Explain.
- ③ The Jews prayed and fasted for Esther’s success. As we saw already, “to fast” means to eat no food and drink no water for a short time. What lessons can we learn from Esther’s story about how important prayer and fasting is to our own success in God’s work?

## DREAMING DREAMS: PART 2

Joseph Delamou went to church every day since he was a small boy. Joseph knelt in worship in front of statues because that's what his father did. Then Joseph had a strange dream after he asked God if he was going to the correct church. Joseph believed the dream was an answer to his prayer. God was asking him to leave his father's church. So, 16-year-old Joseph joined another church in Conakry. Conakry is the capital city of the country of Guinea in West Africa. People speak the French language in Guinea. Soon, Joseph became the youth leader at his new church. He helped the young people share Jesus with folks in the community. Several years passed. Joseph's father grew upset with his son for going to a new church. Father said, "Joseph, I want you to learn English. You need to stop working for your church and start studying English."

Joseph wanted to keep going to church. But to make Father happy, Joseph quit his church work. Then he started studying English. He was 23 years old. The English teacher was named Fortunate Kaloubilori. Fortunate started each class with prayer. Joseph was surprised. He thought he was giving up God to learn English. But his teacher prayed to God before he taught every lesson. Three weeks later, the teacher asked Joseph for help. Fortunate said, "I have many papers to grade. Please, can you stay and help me?"

When Fortunate and Joseph finished grading papers, Fortunate invited Joseph to study the Bible with him. Joseph was pleased. He thought, "God follows me everywhere!"

Joseph learned new Bible teachings that showed him that both his new church and his father's church weren't following Bible truth. The new Bible teachings showed Joseph that Fortunate's church followed the Bible. Fortunate was a Seventh-day Adventist. The Bible study left Joseph confused about what he should do. Joseph blamed his father and said to himself, "I only have these problems because my father sent me to learn English."

Joseph continued Bible studies for two months. Then he went to his pastor for advice. Joseph wanted to know which church was the correct church. The pastor said the Adventists were wrong. "Don't pay attention to them."

Joseph decided to pray for three days about what to do. Then he had another dream.

Your 13th Sabbath Offering on December 30 will help church workers share the Good News about Jesus in West Africa, which includes Guinea. Thank you for planning to give a big offering. Read more about Joseph and Fortunate next week.

INSIDE  
*Story*  
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



His teacher prayed to God before he taught every lesson.

