

## Chapter 20: The Queen of Beauty and Courage

**Timeless Truth: Each of us is an instrument in God's hands.**

### Teacher's Background Notes

Fifty years after the first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem, the majority of Israelites remained scattered throughout the Persian Empire. All the Israelites should have returned to the Promised Land. Their prophets had instructed them to do so even before the exile took place (Isaiah 48:20; Jeremiah 50:8, 51:6, 29:10). They had been exiled for covenantal unfaithfulness; by returning to Israel, they would be returning to a right covenantal relationship with YHWH. Esther and Mordecai, the heroine and hero of this week's story, have often been considered to be exemplary pillars of faith. However, remaining in Susa reveals that they were not fully compliant with God's Law.

Help your students to place this story in its proper historical context; the book itself does not give specific dates. Queen Vashti was deposed in 483 B.C. and Esther was crowned four years later, 479 B. C. The annihilation by Haman was scheduled in King Xerxes' twelfth year, 474 B.C.

The book of Esther is the only book in the Bible where the name of God is never mentioned. In addition, the Law, sacrifices, the temple, and prayer are also conspicuously absent. These combine to give the reader the impression that Mordecai and Esther and their Jewish brethren were not overly concerned with their relationship with God. Yet Esther called for a three-day fast, and all the Jews in Susa complied. So we get a picture of a semi-faithful Jewish population that is still loved and cared for by the ever-faithful LORD. How comforting to all of us who have experienced periods of spiritual lackluster!

The story of Esther has three main purposes. First, it teaches us about the providence of God. In spite of these Jews' partial faithfulness, God remains faithful to His promises. Had Haman been successful, the line of the Messiah would have been cut off. But God had a plan of redemption through the nation of Israel. He would not let Haman or any other creature restrain it. This story reminds all readers that even when we cannot see God working, He is. Secondly, the story of Esther provides future generations of Jews a historical account of the institution of the Feast of Purim. The *pur*, or lot that Haman cast to destroy the Jews ironically became his downfall and instead became a day of deliverance for the Jews. Like Hanukkah and Passover, God's miraculous deliverance from evil oppressors is worthy of an annual celebration. And third, Esther teaches us that anti-Semitism is an abomination to the LORD. To attack His people is to attack God.

Therefore, two very different lesson options are presented here. Option One aims to teach us about the celebratory Feast of Purim by participating in a typical festal reading of Esther and the accompanying holiday activities that Jews enjoy today in the mid-Spring

Two is very different and sobering. The second option aims to examine the insidious roots of anti-Semitism and apply them to the world today. At this writing, anti-Semitic protests are taking place all over the world. Anti-Semitism and other forms of racism are not limited to non-Christians. Christians need to examine their own hearts in search of sin and learn to apply an appropriate response to real-world events that is congruent with a Biblical worldview. Your classroom can be a safe place to analyze deeply held views, current events, and Biblical truth. Our goal as teaching leaders should always be more than information. We should provide lessons that strive for transformation!

### Lesson Plan 1: The Feast of Purim

Non-Jewish Christians usually know very little about the Jewish holidays that are outlined in our Old Testament or how they are celebrated today by our Jewish (including Messianic Jewish) friends. Hanukkah tends to be the most visible as it falls near Christmas and includes the exchanging of gifts. Some Christians have enjoyed the celebration of Passover by participating in a Seder Supper. But very few Christians have even heard of the Feast of Purim. One of the author's purposes in penning the Book of Esther is to pass on to future generations the roots of this tradition. This lesson plan invites you to teach your class about the Feast of Purim by celebrating as Jews do today.

Purim, which falls in the spring, is the one Jewish holiday that is filled with fun! Participants go to synagogue dressed up in costumes of the various characters from the Book of Esther and celebrate. It is the wildest, most action-packed day of the Jewish year because it remembers turning a day of sorrow into a day of joy. All of the other Jewish holidays are somber and reflective, but not Purim. Once at synagogue, the leader reads aloud from the *Megillah*, the Book of Esther, from a handwritten parchment scroll. If you do not have one, you can use *The Story* Chapter 20. It is important to hear every word of the reading because when the name of Haman is mentioned, children and adults alike make noise to eradicate his evil name. They use *graggers* (noisemakers), stomp their feet, and boo and hiss. (Instructions for making *graggers* are included at the end of this lesson.) When the name of Mordecai is mentioned, the celebrants cheer and clap.

After the reading of Esther, family and friends gather to celebrate with a festive meal. Traditionally this meal begins with *challah* bread. This light, braided bread loaf can be purchased in from your local Hebrew bakery or easily prepared at home. Phone ahead to reserve a fresh loaf or two and bring a knife to allow your class participants to enjoy a taste of this Jewish Shabbat bread. The feast normally includes meat and wine, and traditional songs. For dessert, traditional cookies called *hamantashen*—German for “Haman’s ears” or “Haman’s hat”. The pastry sides fold up to make a triangle and have fruit preserves fillings hidden inside to remind us of the hidden nature of the miraculous deliverance of God. They are simple to prepare and will delight your class. You could even solicit the bakers in your class ahead of time to prepare a batch for you and bring to class. (Recipes provided at the end of this lesson.)

One of Purim’s primary themes is unity through charity. Special emphasis is placed on caring for the poor and on enjoying community. Gifts of food are sent to family, friends,

messengers. Worshipers are expected to give food or money to at least two needy people during the daylight hours of Purim. It is especially important to include the children in fulfilling this tradition. You could encourage your class participants to take up a special offering for a specific purpose, or individually give food gift cards to the less fortunate on street corners.

### **Learning Activity: Feast of Purim**

#### **Materials needed:**

- Homemade *graggers* (instructions follow)
- Purim foods to eat together
- Items for sack lunches to give to the poor

Teach your class the essentials of the Feast of Purim by active participation in a mock Purim.

1. Make homemade *graggers*
2. Read the story of Esther (with the accompanying cheers and jeers)
3. Feast on challah bread and hamantashen cookies (sign up volunteer bakers the week before)
4. Pray and thank God for his provision and deliverance
5. Give to the needy (class participants sign up the week before to bring elements of sack lunches, then assemble them together and give them away on the way home from church)

## Homemade Graggers

*Graggers are traditional Jewish noisemakers used during the reading of the story of Esther whenever the name of Haman is mentioned. Have students make graggers (the traditional shape is pictured, but these are made with juice cans).*

### Materials Needed

- Juice cans (cleaned and dried)
- Adhesive backed paper (Contact paper works well)
- Stickers or colored tape
- Jingle bells
- Scissors
- Glitter
- White glue
- Pipecleaners



1. Prepare the juice can by making sure the can is washed and dried.
2. To make the end caps for the can, trace the circular end on the adhesive paper. Draw another circle 1" larger than the outline circle. Cut out the larger circle.
3. With the scissors make cuts spaced 1" apart around the circle, from the outer edge in. Make two, one for each end of the can.
4. Peel off the backing of the adhesive paper. Cover one end of the juice can.
5. Place 1 or 2 jingle bells inside.
6. Now ask an adult to poke a hole in the center of the metal or plastic end of the can.
7. Bend a pipe cleaner in half and insert the two ends into the hole. On the inside of the can, twist the two ends to prevent them from slipping back through the can. The wire loop on the outside of the can will be your handle.
8. Attach the other paper circle over the open end of the can, sealing the jingle bells inside.
9. Cut a strip of adhesive paper the width of the can and long enough to wrap around the can with 1" of overlap. Remove the paper backing and wrap around the can, covering the entire outside of the juice can.
10. Now let's decorate it. You can use colored tape to make stripes or decorative shapes and symbols. Personalize your *gragger* with some of your favorite stickers. Draw decorative lines with white glue and sprinkle them with glitter. Shake off the excess.

## Traditional Hamantashen Cookies

Hamantashen are traditional Purim cookies that all will enjoy. They are shaped as triangles to represent either Haman's hat, or his ear. They can be personalized to your liking simply by changing the filling. Prune butter and poppy seed fillings are traditional, but any kind of jelly or jam can be substituted.

### **Pastry Ingredients:**

4 c flour	1 tsp. vanilla extract
4 eggs	2 tsp. baking powder
$\frac{3}{4}$ c sugar	pinch of salt
1 c margarine, softened	1 tsp. orange rind
1 T orange juice	

### **Fillings:**

1 lb. prepared poppy seed filling  
OR 1 lb. apple or prune butter  
OR 1 lb. strawberry or apricot jam or preserves

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease cookie sheets.

Place all pastry ingredients into a large mixing bowl and beat to a good consistency for rolling out. You may need to add a bit more juice or flour to get it just right. Divide dough into 4 parts for easier assembly.

On a floured surface, roll out 1 portion of dough to about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick. Cut into 3-inch circles using a round cookie cutter. Place  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{2}{3}$  teaspoon of filling into the center of the circle. Shape the cookies into triangles by lifting up 3 sides and meeting in the middle. Only a little filling should be showing. Pinch the edges together. Place on a greased cookie sheet 1 inch apart. Bake for 20 minutes at 350. Allow to cool a minute or two before moving to a cooling rack.

**Lesson Plan 2: The Danger of Anti-Semitism**

*The book of Esther teaches us of the dangers of anti-Semitism, the Divine providential protection of the nation of Israel and the consequences to those who attack the chosen people of God. There is something more profound than a normal racism against a people group when it comes to the Jews.*

Corrie ten Boom tasted the sinister fruit of anti-Semitism. The Ten Boom family were devoted Christians who dedicated their lives to serving others. Their Holland home served as a safe refuge for anyone in need. But during the World War II their home became more than a place of hospitality. It became a hiding place for Jews and the Dutch underground. The faith of a humble watchmaker named Casper ten Boom—and the faith of his two daughters—compelled them to protect Jews and others sought by the Nazis in their Dutch city. There were usually six or seven people illegally living in their safe house. On February 28, 1944, the Gestapo raided their home. They seized thirty people who came by that day. Casper, daughters Corrie and Betsie, and three other relatives were all arrested and imprisoned. Six people were hidden in the false wall in Corrie's bedroom and remained quietly undetected for 47 hours until Dutch underground workers were able to free them.

Eighty-four year old Casper died after only ten days in Scheveningen Prison. When he was asked if he knew he could die for helping Jews, he responded, "It would be an honor to give my life for God's ancient people." Corrie and Betsie spent ten months in three different prisons sharing the love of Christ with other prisoners. Betsie died in prison as did her brother and nephew. Four Ten Booms gave their lives for protecting Jews against the venomous Nazis. Corrie alone survived. The Ten Booms' vibrant faith gave them an understanding of God's Upper Story including a deep love for God's chosen people. Neither Hitler nor Haman can restrain God's redemptive plan.<sup>1</sup>

**I. The History of Anti-Semitism**

- A. From the Garden, man has been in need of a Savior. The separation caused by the sin of Adam would require a perfect, sinless man to restore the relationship between God and mankind. No sinful man could possibly bridge that gap. Man had listened to the creature (the serpent) rather than the Creator. Therefore God promised that one day a seed from the woman would bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Satan has been attempting to defeat God and His redemptive purpose ever since by eliminating the line of the coming Redeemer.



1. *And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.*

—Revelation 12:3-5

2. Although this passage is full of imagery and its full interpretation is beyond the scope of this lesson, the dragon is clearly identified as Satan (Revelation 12:9). The child can be none other than Jesus who was caught up to the throne of God and is the King of Kings who is to rule all nations (Revelation 19:15-16).
  3. It is an epic battle fought through the ages through Satan's various henchmen.
- B. Moses' time (1526 B.C.): Pharaoh tried to destroy the Hebrews by killing all the male babies (Exodus 1:16). The Israelites celebrate this miraculous salvation with the Feast of Passover.
  - C. According to an inscription found on the stelae of Merneptah dated at 1220 B.C., this Pharaoh Merneptah claimed he destroyed the Hebrews.<sup>2</sup>
  - D. Esther's time (474 B.C.): Evil Haman deceived King Xerxes into signing a genocide order to be carried out throughout every one of the king's 128 provinces to eradicate the Jews. Esther's courage saved her people and preserved the line of Messiah. The Israelites celebrate this miraculous salvation with the Feast of Purim.
  - E. Maccabean period (167-164 B.C.): Greek ruler Antiochus IV took the name Epiphanes which means "the Illustrious One," and became known as Antiochus Epiphanes. His goal was to force Greek religion on all his subjects including the Jews. He tried to annihilate the Jews and desecrated the temple. His soldiers attacked Jerusalem on the Sabbath, killed many people, and took many others as slaves. In 167 B.C., he set up an altar to Zeus in the temple and sacrificed a pig there. The Jews who did not submit to the Greek religious practices were either persecuted or martyred. This led to the Maccabean revolt, which Antiochus Epiphanes tried to crush with great cruelty from 167-164 B. C.
  - F. Jesus' time (3-4 B.C.): King Herod tried unsuccessfully to use genocidal means to eradicate the prophesied King of the Jews. He ordered all Hebrew baby boys killed. The gospel writer Matthew chronicles this atrocity (Matthew 2:13-18).

<sup>2</sup>

Mervin Breneman, vol. 10, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The

- G. Since Christ, there has been cruel persecution of the Jews from those professing to be Christians. Early Church leaders' writings and sermons fueled anti-Semitism.
1. These include the sermons of John Chrysostom who said that the Jews were "inveterate murderers, destroyers, men possessed by the devil" who "know only one thing, to satisfy their gullets, get drunk, kill and maim one another."<sup>3</sup>
  2. The Crusades that were initiated in 1096 A.D. when Christians in Europe decided to liberate the Holy Land from Muslims but perpetrated heinous acts of anti-Semitic hate. These so-called Christians forced Jews along the way to either be baptized or face death. Then when they made it to Jerusalem they burned Jews alive in the great synagogue as they sang, "Christ, We Adore Thee."
  3. In 1492, Spain expelled all Jews.
  4. The beloved Martin Luther whose reformations changed the course of Christendom cannot be given a free pass for his anti-Semitic writings. He recommended that synagogues be burned, Jewish homes be destroyed, and their rabbis forbidden to teach, among other things. Yet some of Luther's contemporary Christian colleagues repudiated them as inconsistent with the spirit of Christ and the New Testament.
- H. And of course, the very worst anti-Semitism was the systematic extermination by Hitler's Holocaust.
- It must be noted here that true Christians around the world agonize over the despicable atrocities of the Holocaust and that believers such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Corrie ten Boom stood for Christ as they risked and often lost their lives for the sake of the Jews in Europe.

## II. **The Hatred of All God's People**

- A. In the Upper Room on the night that Jesus was betrayed, He warned His disciples (all Jewish, but it extends to all His then-future followers) that they/we would be hated. *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.* (John 15:18)
1. Why? Because God's people are not of this world (John 15:19-23).
  2. Because haters do not know the Father who sent Christ.
  3. Yet His warning was borne out of love and seasoned with hope.  
*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*
- John 16:33
- B. New Testament believers experienced persecution in nearly every city.
1. After the stoning of Steven, the persecution of believers in Jerusalem drove them out of the city and into various parts of the region. Contrary to its intention, this actually aided the spread of the gospel! As in Esther, God's providential hand will ensure His redemptive plan!



*And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him (Steven) to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

—Acts 8:1

2. The church in Philippi experienced opposition.

*In no way be alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for the, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.*

—Philippians 1:28-30

3. The church in Thessalonica experienced trouble. Y

*You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the world in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.*

—1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

4. The Hebrews writer knew of their trials.

*But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.*

—Hebrews 10:32-33

5. Writing to the Jewish believers scattered beyond Judah, James warned of trials and tribulations.

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*

—James 1:2-3

### III. The Hope of the Persecuted

Our precious God did not leave us to suffer without hope. Rather He provided instructions and exhortations to help His followers endure the troubles of this world. The Upper Story perspective helps us to cope with the Lower Story trials.

- A. The Bible leaves no room for racism of any kind.

- B. Because we share a common ancestor, there is no room for racism.

*He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.*

—Acts 17:26a

- C. In Christ, we enjoy equality of personhood regardless of our earthly experience.

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

—Galatians 3:28

- D. God's plan for the church is Jews and Gentiles in one body (Ephesians

- E. Believers who exhibit racist behaviors, attitudes and speech need to be lovingly corrected.
1. Paul encouraged the church in Rome. The tribulations that Paul experienced resulted in the refinement of his Christlike character because the Holy Spirit works in us.  
*And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*  
—Romans 5:3-5
  2. We can rest knowing that if tribulation causes our faith to weaken, it cannot separate us from Christ's love.  
*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*  
—Romans 8:35
  3. The hope of the persecuted can be found only in the eternal security of God.
  4. Mordecai alluded to a confidence in God's deliverance with or without Esther's participation.  
*For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish.*  
—p. 282 The Story, Esther 4:14
- F. The book of Esther teaches us that God can be trusted for deliverance even though He does not promise us that He will.
- G. The book of Esther teaches us that anti-Semitism is intolerable to God.

## Learning Activity: Case Studies - The Growing Anti-Semitic Trends in the US and Europe

### Materials needed:

- News stories about anti-semitism  
*You might consider the following news stories available in the archives of [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com).*
  - "European Jews Attacked in Response to Gaza Conflict," January 6, 2009
  - "Protestor Calls for Jews to 'Go Back to the Oven' at Anti-Israel Demonstration," January 7, 2009
  - "Anti-Israel Protesters Target U. S. Consulate in Pakistan," January 11, 2009

The current anti-Semitic climate set against the backdrop of Chapter 20, the Book of Esther, provides a real-life laboratory for learners to explore this insidious form of racism. Provide groups of learners an article or articles to read and discuss. Provide questions to consider that help students to put their faith into action.

- What is an appropriate Christian response to the current anti-Semitic protests and violence?
- How might you respond to a Christian friend who expresses anti-Semitism? A non-Christian?
- To what extent should the community of faith take a stand against anti-Semitism and other forms of racism?