

BIBLE TIMELINE ASSEMBLIES

56. ESTHER

This assembly has been adapted, with permission, from an assembly published by Scripture Union in 'Everyone Matters' by Emlyn & Tricia Williams

Bible Base: Esther 1-10

Key Christian Belief: In a hostile world, God wants us to do what we can for others.

Aim: To encourage children to do what they can for others even when it is costly to do so.

You will need:

- seven strips of paper each with one of the following secrets written on it:

Secret 1: I am Jewish

Secret 2: They were planning to assassinate the king.

Secret 3: I am going to have all the Jewish people killed.

Secret 4: I am going to ask the king to save my people.

Secret 5: I am going to have Mordecai hanged.

Secret 6: I am going to reward Mordecai for saving my life.

Secret 7: I am going to tell the king what Haman has done.

- seven envelopes labeled 'Secret 1', 'Secret 2' and so on, each with the appropriate secret inside.
- labels to hang on volunteers representing Esther, the king, Mordecai and Haman.
- the audio track for the song 'For Such A Time As This' (see below) and the attached PowerPoint presentation.

Introduction

Talk about some 'big reveals' that the children may be familiar with - such as the identity of the new Doctor Who or the winner of the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award. These are closely guarded secrets until the time comes for them to be revealed.

Talk about award ceremonies where the names of the winners are kept inside sealed envelopes until the time comes for them to be announced.

Show the children the envelopes that you have brought with you and explain that today's story is one that is full of secrets that will all be revealed as they listen.

Ask for four volunteers to represent four of the characters they will meet in today's story and ask them to stand across the front of the stage.

Hang the labels on them and introduce their characters as follows:

- Esther - a brave and beautiful queen
- Mordecai - Esther's cousin who had looked after her since her parents died and who has an important job in the king's government
- Haman - the wicked Prime Minister
- The king - who is crazy about Esther and has made her his queen

Bible Story

Secret 1

The king of Persia was looking for a new queen. The old one had made him angry so he had decided to get rid of her and find a new queen instead. Lots of beautiful girls were taken to meet the king and he chose Esther. She was very beautiful and clever but there was something about Esther that the king didn't know.

Give envelope 1 to Esther and ask her to open it and read out what it says.

The Jews were God's special people. As we heard last time, many of them had been captured by the Babylonians. But now, many years later, the Persians had taken over and many of the Jewish people had been forced to move to their capital city, Susa. And it was there that Esther had been born. However, if the king had known she was Jewish, it is unlikely that he would have wanted to marry her - so Esther kept quiet about it.

Secret 2

Esther was an orphan and from a young age she had been looked after by her uncle Mordecai. He was a kind and highly respected man and he had been given an important job in the king's government. It was while he was working in the palace one day that he overheard two men talking about a secret plan. They didn't know that Mordecai was listening and that he had discovered their secret.

Give Mordecai envelope 2 and ask him to open it and read out what it says.

Mordecai told Esther about this and she told the king. As a result the king's life was saved. The king was very grateful to Mordecai and the story of what he had done was written down in the king's chronicles so that it would not be forgotten.

Secret 3

Soon afterwards, the King made a man called Haman, who was from Persia, the Prime Minister. Haman was very pleased with himself and expected everyone to bow to him. Everyone did except for Mordecai. He explained that he couldn't bow down to Haman because as a Jew he was not allowed to bow down to anyone except God. This made Haman furious and he soon came up with a very wicked plan.

Give envelope 3 to Haman and ask him to open it and read out what it says.

Haman did not know that Queen Esther was a Jew. And so he went to the king, told him lots of lies about the Jewish people and persuaded him to sign a law saying that in a certain month, on a certain day, all the Jews were to be killed.

Secret 4

When Esther found out about this, she knew that she and all her people were in great danger. She sent a messenger to Mordecai to ask what he thought she should do. He gave this message to Esther: 'Who knows, but perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?'

Esther thought about what Mordecai had said. 'Yes,' she thought, 'perhaps this is the reason why I have been made queen, so that I can save my people.' She thought long and hard about what she should do and soon decided on a very brave plan.

Give Esther envelope 4 and ask her to open it and read out what it says.

This was a brave plan because it meant telling the king that she was a Jew and also because in those days you could get into big trouble if you went to see the king without being invited. And so she asked Mordecai to send word out to all the Jews throughout the land asking them to pray for her for the next three days.

After three days, Esther finally took a deep breath and went in to see the king. To her great relief, the king held out his sceptre (a sign that he was happy to see her) and asked, 'What do you want, Queen Esther?' She wasn't ready to tell him her secret yet so she asked him to come to dinner that evening.

As they were having dinner together, the king asked her again what she wanted. Esther asked him to come to dinner again the next night and to bring Prime Minister Haman with him this time too.

Secret 5

When Haman heard about the invitation, he was delighted, thinking that the queen wanted to show how pleased she was with him. He couldn't help boasting to others that he was the only one that Esther had invited to dinner with the king.

However, he was still very angry with Mordecai for not bowing down to him. He just couldn't stop thinking about it. His wife suggested that he would feel better if he got rid of Mordecai. So Haman came up with another secret plan.

Give Haman envelope 5 and ask him to open it and read out what it says.

And so Haman began to build the gallows in his back garden. But he did not tell anyone what he was building or why he was building it just yet...

Secret 6

That night, the king couldn't sleep. He asked for the chronicles he had kept to be read out to him - and his servant read out the story of how Mordecai had saved his life.

'What did I do to reward him for this?' the king asked.

'Nothing' replied his servant.

So the king decided to do something about it at last.

Give envelope 6 to the king and ask him to read out what it says.

Early next morning, Haman came to the palace to see the king. He was secretly planning to ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had been building.

'Good morning Haman' said the king when he saw him arrive. 'I have a question for you. What should the king do for the person he wants to reward?'

'Well' thought Haman to himself. 'Who else would the king want to reward but me?' And so he thought of all the things he would like for himself. 'Have him dressed in a royal robe' he suggested. 'And then have him ride all around Susa in the king's best chariot and have it announced that this is what the king does for those he wants to reward.'

'Excellent!' said the king. 'That's exactly what I will do. Now go and see that this is done for Mordecai - the one who saved my life.'

Haman almost exploded. The king was asking him to parade his worst enemy around the city streets and get everyone to clap and cheer for him. The day wasn't going the way he had planned. He certainly couldn't ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai now!

Secret 7

Meanwhile, Esther was planning her second dinner party and she had another secret.

Give envelope 7 to Esther and ask her to open it and read out what it says.

At the second dinner party, the king again asked Esther what she wanted. 'Whatever it is, I will give it to you, even if it is half my kingdom' he said.

Esther knew that the time had come for her to speak up, and so with great courage she said, 'My Lord, if I have pleased you, then spare my life and the lives of my people, because we are going to be killed.'

'Who is going to kill you?' asked the king in surprise.

'It's Haman' the queen replied, pointing the finger at him. 'The Jewish people including me and my uncle Mordecai have served you and your country well but this man has told lies about us in order to have us killed.'

The king was so angry when he heard this that he ordered Haman to be hanged on the very gallows that he had been building for Mordecai. And Mordecai was made Prime Minister instead of Haman.

Because of Esther's bravery, the Jewish people were saved. It would have been easier for Esther to say nothing but she chose to speak up. She could have been killed for going to see the king without being invited. But she was brave and chose to risk her life in order to save her people. She did it because she could see that God had put her where she was for that very reason. She had become queen for 'such a time as this'. (4:14).

Exploring Christian Belief

Christians believe that God has placed each one of us exactly where we are and that He has put us there for a reason. So imagine that like Queen Esther you find yourself in just the right place to do something to help someone else. There is no one else around who is either able or willing to do it. It is up to you! It may be easier to say or do nothing. If you get involved, there is a risk that you will be rejected or laughed at. So what will you do? Will you be selfless and brave like Queen Esther was?

Give examples...

- Making friends with someone new on their first day.
- Telling the truth so someone else doesn't get in trouble or punished unfairly.
- Sticking up for someone no one else likes.

So remember Esther and the courage she showed in speaking up for her people when they were in danger. Look out today or in the week to come for opportunities you may have to speak up or do something to help someone else and ask God to help you to be brave enough to do it no matter what it may cost you to get involved.

Song

Teach the children the song 'For Such A Time As This' which is based on the story of Esther. It is from the album 'Get Real' by Nigel Cameron and is available on iTunes. Permission is given to use this song copyright free in the context of a school assembly.

Prayer

Finish with a prayer asking God to give the children the courage they need to speak up and do what they can for others no matter what it may cost them to do so.