

FALL 2026

Access[®] LEADER GUIDE

FOR ADULTS WITH
SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS



Stories from Esther
Stories About Rebuilding Jerusalem
Songs from Psalms

Access LEADER GUIDE

*A guide for teaching Bible stories
to adults and older youth who have special learning needs*

*Fall 2026
Volume 21, Number 1*

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Sharing Your Faith

Your ultimate purpose as a Bible study leader is to share your faith with the men and women who attend your class—to help them understand how they can live for Jesus every day. Use the ABCs to help your learners understand God's plan of salvation.

A—ADMIT

Admit to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin. Read Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Acts 3:19.

B—BELIEVE

By faith receive Jesus Christ as God's Son and accept Jesus's gift of forgiveness from sin. Read John 3:16; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 1:11-13.

C—CONFESS

Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Read 1 John 1:9; Romans 10:9-10,13.

If you are choosing right now to believe Jesus died for your sins and to receive new life through Him, pray to God, calling upon Him alone to be your Savior and Lord.

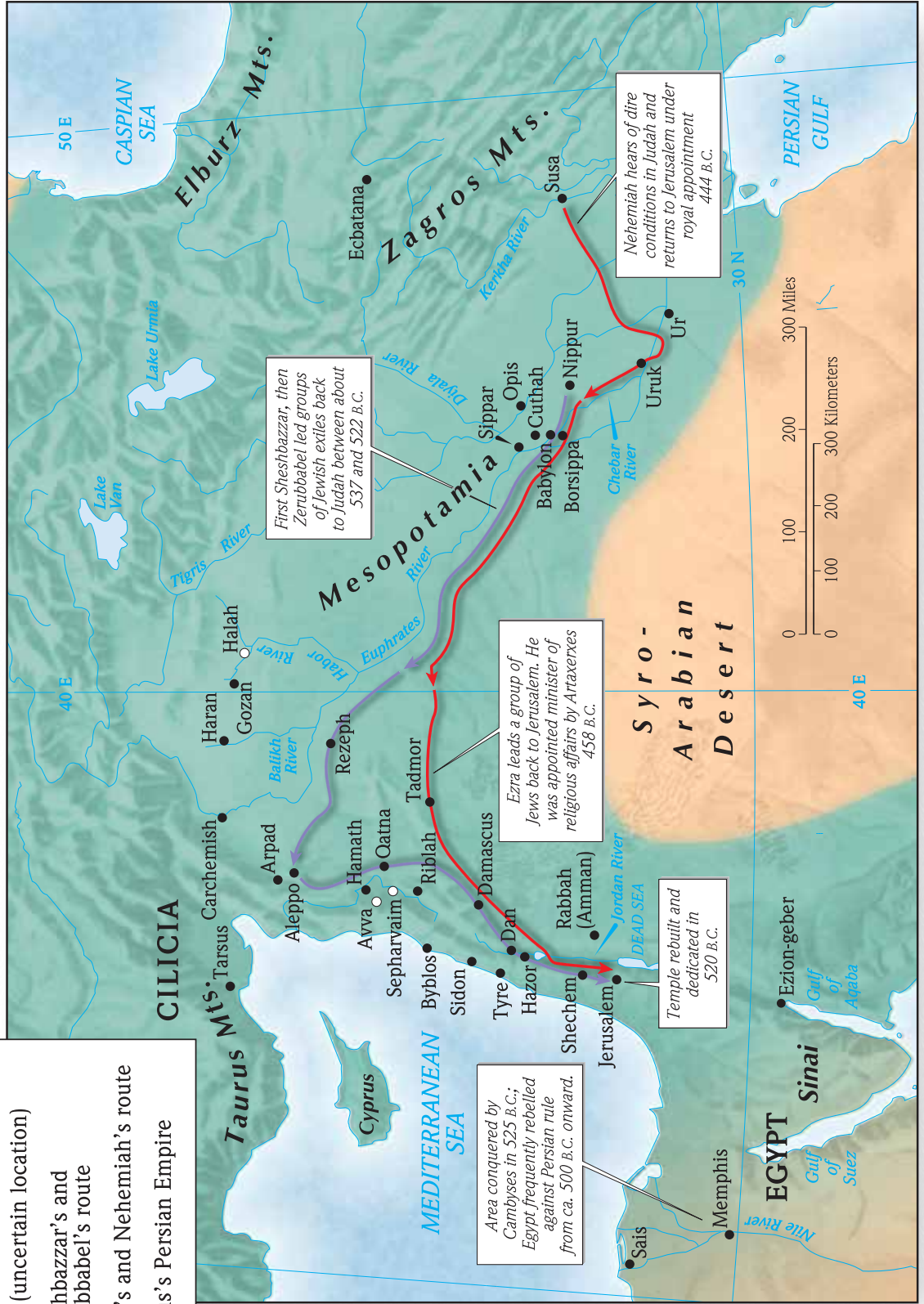
After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, share your decision with another person and, following Christ's example, ask for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:6).

THE RETURNS OF JEWISH EXILES TO JUDAH

THE EDICT OF CYRUS: EZRA 1:2-4; 6:1-4
see also EZRA 1:5-8:35

NEH. 1-3

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- ➔ Sheshbazzar's and Zerubbabel's route
- ➔ Ezra's and Nehemiah's route
- Cyrus's Persian Empire



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Protecting Tomorrow

Parents of children with special needs work hard to ensure their children get the best possible medical care, education, and quality of life. Yet an estimated 60-70 percent do not plan for a time when age, disability, or death will prevent them from caring for their children. The maze of legal terms and government agencies can be overwhelming and confusing, leading parents to put off the essential task of protecting the future for their children.

King David's heart desire was to build a temple, but that would not happen in his lifetime. Instead God gave David detailed instructions about the building process that David left for his son Solomon to carry out. Parents

who feel daunted by the task of building a plan for their children's care after they are gone can be encouraged by David's words: "By the LORD's hand on me, He enabled me to understand everything in writing, all the details of the plan" (1 Chron. 28:19).

Understand the Steps. Future planning is a multifaceted process in which parents develop a comprehensive life plan that shares their vision for their children. Family, friends, professionals, and financial and legal advisors who are well-versed in special needs issues should be involved in various aspects of the planning process. Follow these steps to create a successful plan.

1. Write a letter of intent. This document acts as the blueprint for every other aspect of the plan. In it, parents convey historical and medical information, aspirations, family objectives, religious and social preferences, and all the details needed to achieve the basic goal. It is also a practical document that details diagnoses, medications, functional level, diet, daily routine, the child's likes and dislikes, and anything else that would help a new caregiver step in and take over.

2. Fund the plan, either privately or with government benefit programs, or both. Parents evaluate their current assets, income, and expenditures and project future monetary needs. The plan's monthly income may come from the disabled person's gainful employment, but often it comes from programs such as SSI and/or SSDI. Similarly, healthcare coverage may come from private insurance but is more often funded by Medicaid and/or Medicare. However, each of these government benefit programs has its own set of eligibility criteria, and limits on income and resources place recipients well below the poverty level.

Parents can provide extra resources through a Supplemental (or Special) Needs Trust (SNT), leaving assets to meet their children's needs beyond food, clothing, and shelter without disqualifying them from government benefits. A financial planner can help parents decide how to fund the SNT—with cash, stocks, personal property, real estate, and/or life insurance. Parents must be careful to name the SNT—not their children—as the beneficiary of investments or life insurance policies.

3. Work with an attorney who has expertise in special needs estate planning to make the life plan legally sound. The attorney will assist in drawing up a will, setting up the SNT, filing for guardianship, and creating a durable power of attorney and advance directives. In the will, parents divide assets, declare the SNT, and specify the guardian, if needed.

Parents should not divide assets equally among their children, but should direct assets for special needs children to the SNT. Whereas financial planners help decide how to fund SNTs, attorneys must set up the trusts since SNT laws are complex and vary by state. The SNT must specify a trustee who receives distributions and in turn pays for goods and services used by the disabled person.

Attorneys also can advise parents on whether their children need a guardian, a limited guardian, or an advocate once they reach the age of maturity (18 years, older in some states). Guardians have legal authority to advocate and care for persons who are incompetent to make sound decisions or give informed consent. Limited guardians have legal authority only in certain types of decisions, identified on an individual basis and clearly outlined in a court order. Advocates offer advice and assistance but do not have legal authority to make decisions.

Attorneys also help establish a durable power of attorney to be used when parents become incapacitated and need someone else to make decisions for their minor children. An advanced directive, or living will, is another tool in the legal plan. It specifies what type of medical treatment a person wants or does not want when his or her capacity to communicate is diminished.

4. The final step in creating a life plan is to ensure the plan will be implemented once parents can no longer care for their children. Nondisabled children and other relatives should be familiar with the plan and where it is kept. Every year or so, the plan should be reviewed and revised to reflect necessary changes.

The Best Advice. The best way to protect tomorrow is to plan today, trusting God will grant the wisdom to leave behind specific and detailed instructions as David did for Solomon. Parents will be successful in this task when they follow David's advice: "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Don't be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you" (1 Chron. 28:20).

COVER YOUR BASES

Every parent of a special needs child should complete these steps:

1. Write a letter of intent.
2. Meet with a financial planner and attorney.
3. Inform all relevant persons about the plan.
4. Review and revise the plan as needed.

Access Study Plan

YEAR 1

YEAR 2

Access follows a five-year study plan for adults and older youth who have special learning needs that utilizes a storytelling approach to studying the Bible. Each quarter, learners will examine the stories of Bible events or Bible people from the beginning to the end of the story.

The stories of the Old Testament are presented in chronological order so learners can better understand how the story of Israel unfolded. This will allow adults who have intellectual disabilities to gain some sense of Bible history and recognition of Bible book order. It also will help them know why it was necessary for God to send Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

Stories from Acts are told in sequence so learners can see how the first believers obeyed Jesus's command to share the gospel message first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and then throughout the earth.

Each year from the Christmas season through the Easter season, learners will study Jesus's life. Years 1–4 focus on one Gospel at a time, highlighting stories unique to each Gospel account. Year 5 overviews stories about Jesus's life and ministry that the Gospels share in common.

Here's a quick glance at what you'll study each quarter.

FALL 2022
Stories About
How the World Began
6 stories from Genesis 1–11

Stories About Abraham
*7 stories from
Genesis 11–22*

WINTER 2022-23
Stories About Jesus's Birth
*5 stories from Isaiah 9, Luke 1,
and Matthew 1–2*

Matthew's Stories
About Jesus's Ministry
8 stories from Matthew 3–16

SPRING 2023
Matthew's Stories
About Jesus's Ministry
*7 stories from
Matthew 17–28*

Stories About
Isaac and Jacob
*6 stories from
Genesis 24–33*

SUMMER 2023
Stories About Life in Egypt
*13 stories from
Genesis 37—Exodus 13*

FALL 2023
Stories from
the Wilderness
*13 stories from Exodus 13–40;
Numbers; and Deuteronomy*

Winter 2023-24
Stories About Jesus's Birth
*4 stories from Jeremiah,
Micah, and Luke 1–2*

Mark's Stories About
Jesus's Ministry
9 stories from Mark 1–10

SPRING 2024
Mark's Stories About
Jesus's Ministry
6 stories from Mark 10–16

Stories About Settling the
Promised Land
7 stories from Joshua and Ruth

SUMMER 2024
Stories About the Judges
5 stories from Judges

Stories About
Israel's First Kings
8 stories from 1 Samuel

YEAR 3

FALL 2024

Stories About
Kings David and Solomon
13 stories from 2 Samuel;
1 Kings; 1 Chronicles;
and 2 Chronicles

WINTER 2024-25

Stories About
Jesus's Birth and Childhood
6 stories from Luke 1–2

Luke's Stories About
Jesus's Ministry
7 stories from Luke 7–15

SPRING 2025

Luke's Stories About
Jesus's Ministry
9 stories from Luke 17–24

Stories About Elijah
4 stories from 1 & 2 Kings

SUMMER 2025

Stories About the Prophets
Who Warned Israel
14 stories from 2 Kings;
Amos; Jonah; Hosea;
Isaiah; and Micah

YEAR 4

FALL 2025

Stories About
the Fall of Jerusalem
13 stories from
2 Kings; 2 Chronicles;
and Jeremiah

WINTER 2025-26

Stories About Jesus's Birth
4 stories from Matthew 1–2
and Luke 1–2

Stories About
Jesus's Ministry
8 stories from Matthew,
Mark, Luke, and John

SPRING 2026

Stories About
Jesus's Last Days on Earth
7 stories from Matthew,
Mark, Luke, and John

Stories About
the First Church
7 stories from Acts 1–8

SUMMER 2026

Stories About
the First Church
5 stories from Acts 9–12

Stories from Ezekiel
4 stories from Ezekiel

Stories from Daniel
4 stories from Daniel 1–6

YEAR 5

FALL 2026

Stories from Esther
3 stories from Esther

Stories About
Rebuilding Jerusalem
7 stories from Ezra
and Nehemiah

Songs from Psalms
3 stories from Psalms

WINTER 2026-27

Stories About Jesus's Birth
4 stories from Matthew 1
and Luke 1–2

John's Stories About
Jesus's Ministry
9 stories from John

SPRING 2027

John's Stories About
Jesus's Ministry
6 stories from John

Stories About
Paul's Journeys
7 stories from Acts 13–17

SUMMER 2027

Stories About Paul's Journeys
6 stories from Acts 18–28

Stories About Letters
7 stories from Ephesians;
Philippians; Colossians;
1 and 2 Thessalonians, James,
1 and 2 Peter; and 1 John



HOW TO USE Access

Your *Access* resources help you plan weekly Bible study sessions for adults with intellectual disabilities. The Personal Study Guide (for group members), works with the Leader Guide and Leader Pack to give you all you need to lead a group.

The Leader Guide includes more ideas than you can use during a one-hour session, giving you options for creating the perfect plan for your group. You know your learners better than anyone, so you need to determine what is best to do in any given Bible study session.

Read all the session plans, including the *Bonus Ideas!* at the bottom of the pages. Choose activities appropriate for your learners' skills, abilities, and chronological ages that will help learners understand the biblical truth and life application of each lesson.

Leader Guide

Your teaching plans begin at "Gather Together."

This lesson overview gives you a quick glance at the session content and your teaching goals.

Remember this lesson is for you as well as your learners!

Be sure to check out the Bonus Ideas.

You can quickly identify which Leader Pack poster and Personal Study Guide activities go with each lesson.

Bible Translation
All Bible quotations and commentary in this guide are based on the Christian Standard Bible®, available at book stores and www.lifewaystores.com.

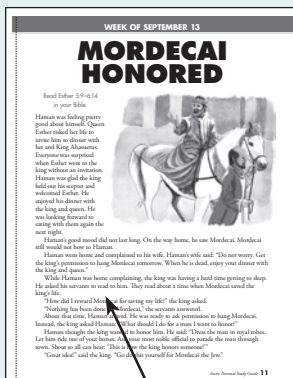
Class Schedule
The teaching plans are written for a one-hour session. They start with all learners in one large group and then move to smaller groups for the Bible story and life application activities. However, use whatever schedule works best for your group.

For example, you may start with learners in small groups, move to large group for the Bible story, and then return to small groups for life application.

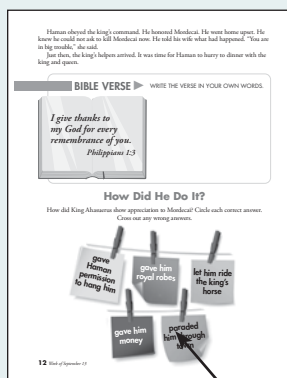
Personal Study Guide

Help learners connect the Bible truth to their daily lives.

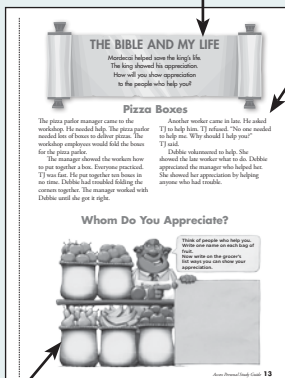
Read and discuss the real-life story in class, or recommend learners read it at home during a devotional time.



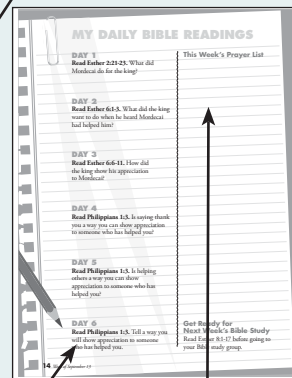
Each lesson includes a Bible story picture and a Bible story written just for adults who have intellectual disabilities.



The teaching plans in the Leader Guide explain how to use the review activity and the life application activity in the group time.

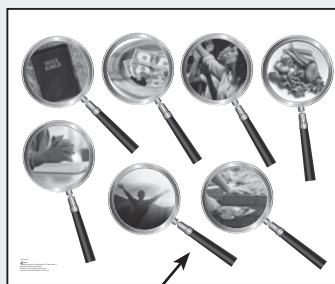


Encourage learners to read their Bibles daily.



Record class prayer requests here.

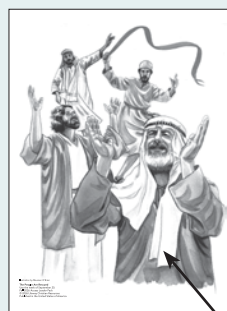
Leader Pack



Each Pack contains at least one poster for each lesson.



The Pack includes a card directing you to a digital pack on the Internet.



The digital pack includes Bible verse posters, Bible pictures, administrative forms, copies of the daily Bible readings from the Personal Study Guide, and teaching plans you can customize for your class.



Basic Classroom Supplies

- CD player or mobile device
- poster board
- newsprint
- construction paper
- large sheets of paper in various colors
- felt-tip markers
- colored pencils
- tempera paints
- colored chalk
- pens and pencils

- air-drying modeling clay
- paper towels
- dowel sticks
- scissors
- tape
- glue sticks
- rhythm instruments
- beach balls
- bandannas
- bean bags
- colored masking tape

Video Viewing

To show videos and DVDs, talk to your church leaders about securing the appropriate license from the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (mplc.com).

Song Lyrics

To project song lyrics, talk to your church leaders about securing a license from Christian Copyright Licensing International (ccli.com).



Where's My Peaceful Life?

For over twenty years, people have come to my counseling room and shared stories of trials, fears, and broken or breaking marriages. These stories often are sad and contain the elements of what they would like to see changed or resolved in their lives. The stories often are similar, but the challenges are unique to each family's or individual's experience.

Focus on God, Not Self. The frustrating thing is that often the problem people seek to resolve becomes the

focus of their lives and actually hinders the resolution. The goal becomes comfort or peace or relief in the face of whatever brings the trial.

The problem often is exacerbated by the fact that one's life becomes defined by wanting to relieve the depression, anxiety, family issue, or whatever the problem may be. Every minute of the day is focused on resolution. One wakes up in the morning thinking, How do I feel? Life is determined by constant evaluation and

implementation of some skill or skill set that is supposed to resolve the problem. The focus becomes self.

We know from Scripture that focusing on self is not God's will for us (Rom. 8:6; Isa. 26:3; Matt. 6:33; Phil. 2:4; and others). Rather, our focus is to be on God and His will for our lives.

One aspect of His will in us is peace. Peace is not always happiness, but it is the acknowledgment of His presence when we are faithful to accomplish His will for His glory. Peace comes from knowing who we are and, in turn, knowing who we are becoming. So the question is, Who are you? This is foundational to approaching anything in this life.

Understand You Are a Child of God. If you answer, I am a child of God, you answer well. But what are the implications? Is this just the response you were taught in Sunday School? Are you practically living in a fashion consistent with your identity as a child of God? Could this be the beginning point of all that troubles you?

In everything that touches us, identity is critical. The problem seems to be that most Christians don't really take the issue of identity all that seriously. Let me give you an example from my own life.

I remember going to the grocery store with my mom and coming home with a piece of bubble gum I retrieved without paying (I stole it). In my family, that type of activity was inconsistent with the parameters my parents had established. Stealing led to tension—not peace. When my infraction was discovered, there were consequences. The good news is that when I was given the opportunity to confess and repent, and I had incurred the consequences of my actions, I was forgiven and peace was restored.

Your walk with the Lord is much the same. If you have trusted Christ as your Savior, you are His, you belong to Him, and this truth is at the core of your identity. If you have trusted Him, you are a child of God. That is the very essence of who you are. He has a plan and purpose for your life. His plan includes parameters in which you must abide. Anything you do or any idea or philosophy you follow that is inconsistent with His will robs you of peace and causes tension in your life (Col. 2:8). Somehow we lose the practicality of that truth.

We believe we can think whatever we want or we can walk in ways that are clearly inconsistent with biblical teaching without consequences. Where do we get these crazy ideas! How can we think God does not want to be involved in every little part of our lives? He loves us and has given us an identity in Christ.

My mother cared whether I stole or lied or trusted her. God cares about our actions too.

Bring Glory to God. Bringing glory to God is our primary function in life (1 Cor. 10:31). Thinking carefully through this concept can radically change your life. It becomes imperative for me to evaluate everything I do to make sure I am thinking first of Him, not myself.

You and your family are facing critical issues on a daily basis. Throughout your journey, I encourage you to live according to counsel from God's Word. I pray you are thinking first of His glory rather than plausible solutions. I pray you are walking in obedience rather than expedience and comfort. Seek the Lord in all your ways (Rom. 11:33; 1 Kings 2:3; Ps. 119:5,15,37,59; Prov. 3:5-6; 14:12; Jer. 29:11) and discover the peace that surpasses comprehension.

Jesus loves you. He died for you. His desire is His glory and your abundant life.

DWELL ON PEACE

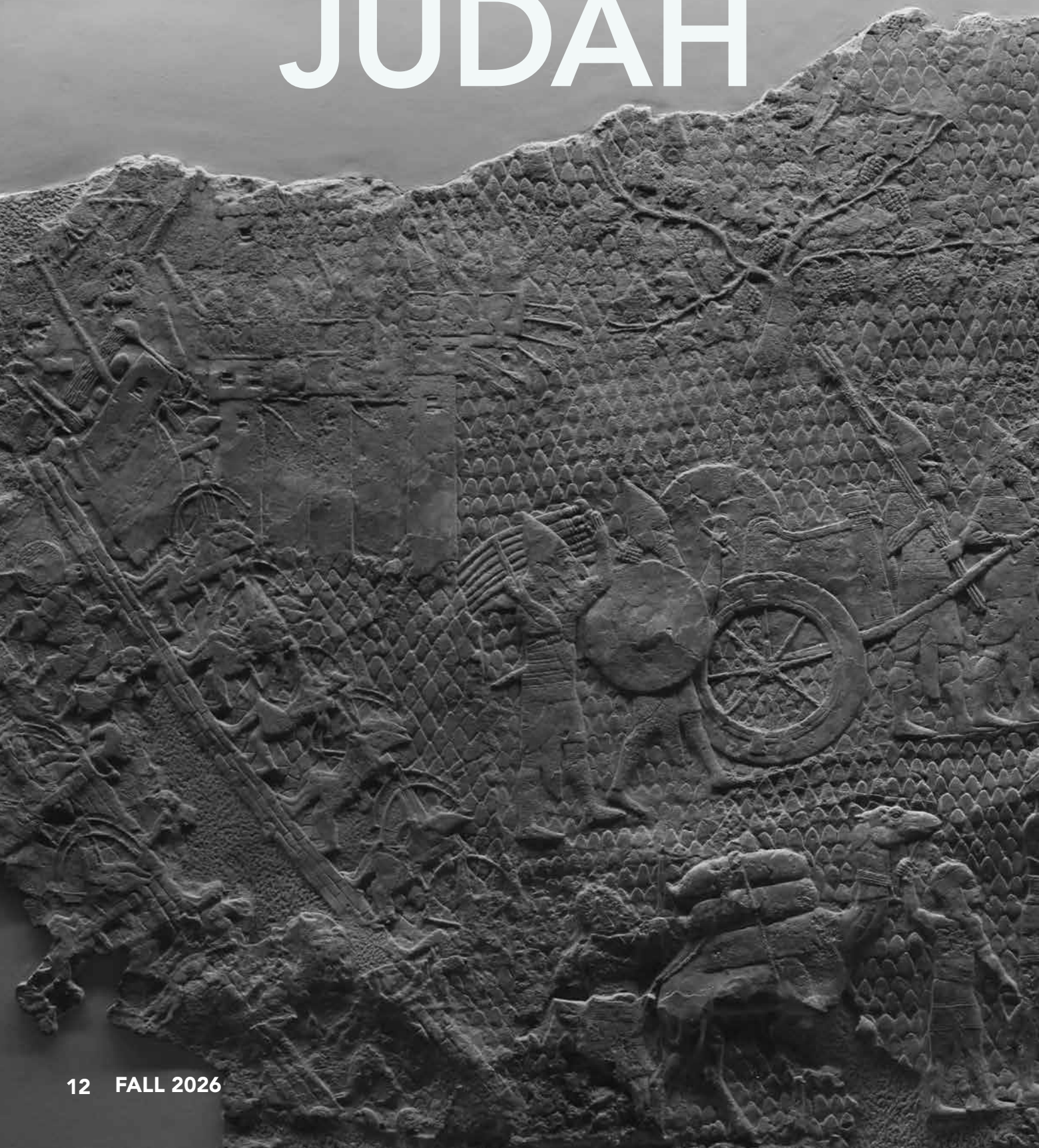
Trust God to bring peace into your heart and life. Study these Scriptures.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful (John 14:27).

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace (John 16:33).

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7).

Returning to **JUDAH**



In order to begin understanding the significance of the events in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah one should look at God's words to the children of Israel in Moab through His servant Moses just before the nation entered into the promised land. There Moses foretold of judgment and displacement, exile, and return and restoration (see Deut. 28–30).

Into Exile

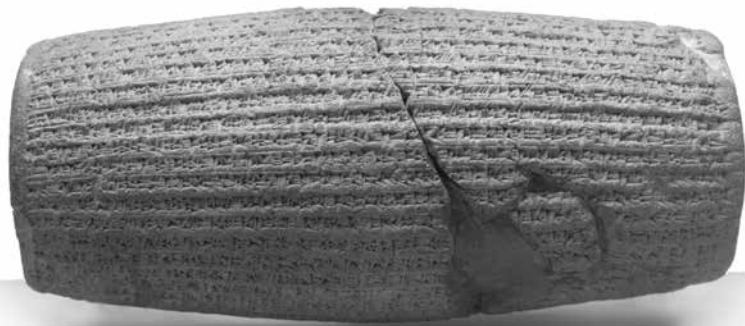
The first deportations of Israelites happened in the north in the eighth century at Assyrian hands. Assyria's King Shalmaneser V laid siege to Samaria, the Northern Kingdom's capital city, in 724 BC. Samaria capitulated to the Assyrians in 722 BC without having received any of the promised help from Egypt. The northern tribes lost their national identity, and for the most part appear to have intermingled with foreigners.

The Assyrians settled foreign deportees into the region surrounding Samaria from a variety of places such as: Babylon; Cuthah, twenty miles northeast of Babylon; and Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim in northern Syria (2 Kings 17:24). These resettled deportees brought into Samaria "a hodgepodge of languages, customs, and religious practices." Ezra and Nehemiah gave every indication they encountered the Samaritans practicing these syncretistic religious activities when the Jews returned to Judah. These pagan religious practices help explain why the returnees' leaders responded so harshly to the people already settled in the land when they asked if they could join the Jews in reconstructing the temple (Ezra 4:1-3). Also, we might more accurately think of the polytheistic Samaritans in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah as "Samaritans" because they should not be confused with the monotheistic Samaritans of Jesus's day.

Over the next century, the political landscape of the ancient Near East changed; Babylonia became the new dominant power. With the aid of Media and under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians defeated

an Assyrian-Egyptian alliance at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. The Assyrians were completely decimated, and Nebuchadnezzar pursued the fleeing Egyptians south into Judah. While there, Nebuchadnezzar's father died. Before returning to Babylon to

Left: Scene from the South-West Palace in Nineveh shows Assyrian soldiers carrying off goods and Judean captives from Lachish. Dated about 700–692 B.C.



Above: The Cyrus Cylinder which dated to the mid-late 6th cent.B.C. and was unearthed at Babylon in ancient Mesopotamia, measures about 9 inches long and 4 inches in diameter. The Akkadian cuneiform script honors Cyrus and commemorates the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. The text also records Cyrus ordering captives to return to their homelands and to reestablish worship once there.

establish his throne, Nebuchadnezzar forced Judah's King Jehoiakim to swear allegiance to him. Nebuchadnezzar also took with him a number of Jews into captivity including Daniel and his companions (Dan. 1:1-2). It was the beginning of what is known as the exile or captivity. This first deportation was in 605; two others followed—in 597 and 586 BC. Nebuchadnezzar completely laid waste to Judah, burnt down Jerusalem, and destroyed the temple in 586 BC.

Returning Home

The First Wave—In less than fifty years, the balance of power in the region changed again. It happened in 539 BC with the invasion of the Medo-Persians led by King Cyrus the Great; he summarily defeated the Babylonians. Cyrus, though, had the policy of allowing exiled peoples to return to their homes, to worship their own gods, and to establish some semblance of autonomy as long as they paid their taxes to his empire and remained his loyal citizens. The Edict of Cyrus demonstrates this Persian policy (Ezra 1:2-4). Shortly following the edict, a group of close to fifty thousand Jews returned to Judah under the leadership of Sheshbazzar in 538 BC (2:64-65). Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, became their governor; a man named Joshua served as the high priest.

Most of the exiles, however, chose to remain in Babylon. Personal prosperity may have been a primary reason many chose to stay behind and not return to Judah when they had the opportunity. Ancient records mention a lending house run by "Murashu and sons." On their client list were the names of sixty

Jews from the time of Artaxerxes I and forty from the time of Darius II. There seems to have been no social or commercial barriers between the Jews and the Babylonians. Their prosperous situation may explain why some chose to remain in Mesopotamia.

Most of those who first returned to Jerusalem, therefore, probably had less wealth; and even though they received support from those who stayed behind, the Jews returning to Jerusalem faced great challenges. Jerusalem still lay in ruins, and the foreigners who had settled there were hostile to the Jews' return. Nevertheless, as soon as they arrived in Jerusalem, the returnees restored the altar on its foundation and began offering sacrifices according to the Law. Next they began rebuilding the temple under the supervision of the Levites. They succeeded in completing only its foundation, though, when foreign opposition convinced the Persian king the Jews were preparing to revolt. So Artaxerxes ordered the work to cease, and the builders were stopped by force of arms by their enemies (Ezra 3–4). Later, they were able to resume their work, and the temple was completed in 516 BC (Ezra 5–6).

Second Wave—In 458 BC, Artaxerxes commissioned Ezra along with whoever would go with him, especially priests and Levites, to return to Jerusalem with the purpose of making sure the people were living in accordance to God's Law. In other words, Ezra was given legal power to enforce God's Law. Artaxerxes also commissioned Ezra to make sure the people were obedient to the laws of the king (Ezra 7). Artaxerxes apparently believed that if the people were obeying their God's laws *and* his laws then he would have peace in this part of his empire, an area which had been somewhat unstable.

Third Wave—As the king's trusted cupbearer, Nehemiah was the perfect choice for governor over Judah. So in 444 BC, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem. Others came with him, but we have no record about who or how many. As governor, Nehemiah faced an economic crisis (see Neh. 5). Non-land owners were short of food, landowners had to mortgage their properties, many were forced to borrow money at extremely high interest rates, and some were compelled to sell their children into slavery. While the Persian kings showed compassion in matters of faith and local administration, they were quite severe in matters of money and taxation. Their economic



Left: Column at Pasargadae with an inscription in Old Persian script, honoring Persia's King Cyrus, who established Pasargadae as his capital city.

Below: Brick with Babylonian inscription that reads: "Cyrus, king of the world, king of Anshan, son of Cambyses, king of Anshan. The great gods delivered all the lands into my hand, and I made this land to dwell in peace."

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRITISH MUSEUM/
LONDON (31/11/56)

policies led to inflationary conditions where the rich got a lot richer, any middle-class became poor, and the poor became poorer and even destitute. The economic conditions Nehemiah faced became prevalent throughout the Persian Empire.

As governor, Nehemiah was in a position to enjoy the spoils that Persian aristocrats enjoyed at the expense of the people under them; but he refused to do so. Instead he lent money and grain to those in need without interest and did not take of the royal food allotted to him as an appointed governor of the king (5:10,14). Most governors became prosperous in their positions at the expense of the people (v. 15), but by his example and leadership Nehemiah helped his people in a time of dire need and withstood any temptation to take advantage of them (v. 17).

The events leading up to the exile, the exile itself, and the return all point to God's sovereignty and grace. Yahweh is not only the God of Israel, but He is the God of the nations. Kings and leaders plan their courses of action, but it is the Lord who raises them up and brings them down for His own glory and purposes. God has always been and always will be faithful to His Word and to His people.

This article is adapted from an article previously published in *Biblical Illustrator*.

Shopping List

Begin gathering these items for upcoming lessons.

- watches and portable clocks
- golden scepter
- church directories
- velvet bathrobe
- stick horse
- an officially sealed document
- wax seal kit
- gold seal stickers
- digital camera or smartphone

STORIES FROM ESTHER

Memory Verse

Perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this.

Esther 4:14

Esther, a Jewish exile, was chosen as Ahasuerus's queen. Ahasuerus ruled the Persian Empire from 486 to 465 BC. Esther saved the Jews from a plot to annihilate them. In celebration, the Feast of Purim was established.

Reigns of the Persian Kings

Cyrus	559–530 BC
Darius	522–486 BC
Ahasuerus/Xerxes	486–465 BC
Artaxerxes	465–425 BC

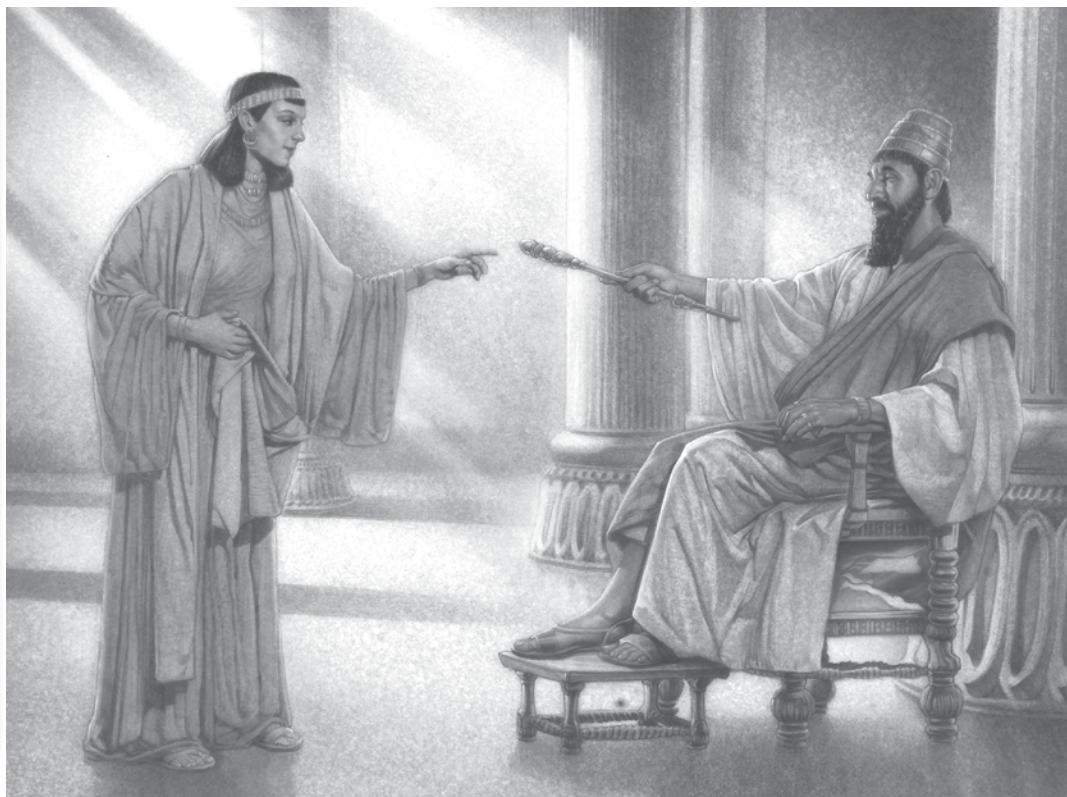
BRAVE ESTHER

Bible Passage
Esther 4:1–5:2

Bible Truth
Esther was brave enough to speak up against something wrong.

Bible Verse
Uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute.
Psalm 82:3

Life Application
I will be brave enough to speak against wrong.



KNOW THE STORY

King Ahasuerus ruled the vast Persian Empire. Vashti, his queen, so displeased the king that he set her aside as queen. Esther, a Jewish girl whose relative Mordecai was her legal guardian, became queen over Persia and Media. Esther, however, kept secret her Jewish heritage.

King Ahasuerus promoted a man named Haman to a high position above all others. Mordecai refused to show respectful honor to Haman. Haman accused the Jews of treason before the king and then urged the king to give an order to execute them all on a single day. Mordecai expressed his grief at the King's Gate to show public opposition against Ahasuerus's murderous edict.

News of Mordecai's mourning soon spread throughout the fortress of Susa. Even Queen Esther heard about her relative's public expressions of grief through reports voiced to her by servants and eunuchs. Still unaware of the king's decree of death for all Jews, Esther sent Mordecai new clothes to replace his sackcloth, but he refused to wear them. *But why?* Esther wondered and dispatched Hathach, one of her servants, to find out.

Mordecai gave the queen's servant a copy of the king's order to destroy God's people. But that was not all. Mordecai sent word to Esther imploring her to go before the king and intercede on behalf of the Jews.

When Hathach got back to the palace, he explained Mordecai's mourning and his appeal for Esther to speak to the king on behalf of the Jews. Esther responded quickly. She sent back word that to do such a thing could mean her immediate death.

Mordecai's response was threefold. First, he told Esther her powerful position as queen was no guarantee she would be delivered from death. Next, he said Esther's silence did not mean God was unable to enlist another person to save His people. Third, Mordecai pointed out Esther's position as queen was no accident, for perhaps she was queen at this very time for the reason of delivering the Jews from slaughter.

Queen Esther then committed herself to God in prayer and fasting and requested all the Jews to do the same on her behalf. She courageously agreed to lay her life on the line for the sake of her people.

UNDERSTAND THE SETTING

Xerxes was a Persian king who ruled his vast empire from 486–465 BC when the kingdom was at the height of its power. The name *Xerxes* arose from an attempt to translate it into the Greek language from the Persian. His name in the Book of Esther is the Hebrew word *Ahasuerus*. Xerxes succeeded to the throne when his father, Darius the Great, died. His mother, Atossa, was the daughter of Cyrus the Great who built the mighty Persian Empire. Xerxes was a weak, undisciplined leader, leaning on the advice and opinions of eunuchs and courtiers.

The early years of Xerxes's reign were marked by his ill-advised attack on Greece around 480 BC. Phoenician subjects helped the king ferry his army across the Hellespont, the ancient name of today's Dardanelles, a strait about 38 miles long between Europe and Turkey that links the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara. (In 1915 this strait was the scene of an attack by Allied troops on Turkey.)

The Phoenicians built a bridge of boats across the strait. Xerxes's army passed over, marched south, and captured Athens. Fortunes turned, however, when the great fleet was destroyed at the battle of Salamis in 480 BC. Out of his own foolishness and insecurity, Xerxes put to death his Phoenician admiral. As a result his naval fleets deserted.

Nonetheless, King Xerxes pressed the war in Greece but was finally defeated by the Athenians at the battle of Plataea in 479–478 BC. In 466 Xerxes suffered his final and ultimate defeat, losing all the territory Darius had won outside of Asia Minor. At last Xerxes limped home with what was left of his army. He retired to his palace at Susa and began expanding and decorating it in a lavishly ornate style. Xerxes had inherited a great empire, but he had been far too foolish, undisciplined, and weak to be the leader such a kingdom required.

During the remainder of his life, Xerxes lived without much energy and enthusiasm for ruling the empire. He focused on his harem and left governing responsibilities in the hands of his ministers and favorites, who often were slaves. Xerxes was murdered by a high official in the empire in 465 BC. He left behind a reputation of cruelty and his often and sudden moods and changes of mind. Beautiful, courageous, selfless, and noble Esther was a striking opposite to Xerxes, whose life was ignoble in comparison.



DETERMINE THE RELEVANCE

What situations in our country do believers need to be brave enough to speak against?

What actions are appropriate when you choose to speak against a wrong at a national level?

Are you facing a personal situation that needs your response? Check below possible reasons why you have not yet spoken out.

- I am afraid of personal reprisal.
- I am waiting on God to answer my prayer for wisdom regarding the best solution.
- I feel uncomfortable dealing with conflicts.
- I fear I will just make matters worse.
- I am still waiting on the right time to speak out.

Jot down the words *I will be brave enough to speak against wrong* and ask God's help, as did Esther, to take the risk and accomplish right and good in a bad situation.

EXAMINE A KEY PHRASE

*perhaps you have come to your royal position
for such a time as this*
(Esther 4:14)

In response to Esther's message that she would jeopardize her life by approaching the king, Mordecai pointed out she likely was crowned queen as God's instrument to save the Jews from annihilation. Mordecai saw God's providential hand in a young, beautiful Jewish woman being in a place of powerful influence. His words turned out to be right. The living God was indeed at work through Esther.

This Week's Prayer Concerns

CREATE INTEREST

GET READY

- ❑ Find **Poster 2** in the Leader Pack.

LEAD

Display **Poster 2** on a table. Ask learners to search the poster for things that are wrong to do.

Read aloud the wrong things to do. Comment: *Sometimes we see or know about others doing something wrong. Today we're going to learn what to do when we spy someone doing wrong.*

GATHER TOGETHER

Lesson Truth

Speak up against wrong.

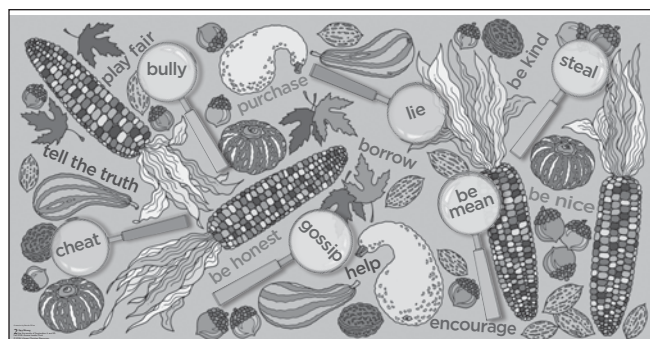
GET READY

- ❑ Gather attendance records.
- ❑ Prepare announcements and simple refreshments.
- ❑ Choose praise songs your learners enjoy.

Tip! You can adapt your teaching plan and print a copy with your modifications. See "Teaching Plans" in the digital pack.

LEAD

Greet learners as they arrive. Take attendance. Collect offerings. Make announcements. Lead learners to call out the names of songs they enjoy and choose two or three to sing. Call for prayer requests and praises. Call on a volunteer to lead in prayer.



POSTER 2

TELL THE STORY

GET READY

- ❑ Provide Bibles and *Access Personal Study Guide*.
- ❑ Gather watches and portable clocks.
- ❑ Find **Poster 1** in the Leader Pack and display on a focal wall.

LEAD

Comment: *Last month we talked about stories from the Book of Daniel. Now we are going to hear stories from the Book of Esther. Direct learners to find Esther 4 in their Bibles.*



POSTER 1

GATHER TOGETHER

Begin a fall craft project with early arrivers. Plan two to three weeks to complete. Draw a large pumpkin on 11-by-17-inch paper. Make two copies for each learner. Instruct each learner to paint two pumpkins. When dry, cut out the pumpkins. Place back-to-back and staple around the edges, leaving the top open. Stuff with shredded paper or cotton balls, then finish stapling the top closed.

CREATE INTEREST

Ask: *Have you ever seen someone do something wrong that was not pleasing to God? Allow a few moments for learners to share. Prompt with questions such as: Have you ever seen someone steal something? lie? cheat? bully someone? After learners share, ask: What did you do when you saw someone do something wrong? Pause for replies, then continue: Today we're going to learn from Queen Esther's example to be brave enough to speak up against wrong.*

Bonus Ideas!

Point out the time line on **Poster 1** and say: *Today we're going to hear Esther was brave enough to speak up against an evil plan.*

Ask learners to take off their watches. Provide a watch or clock for anyone who does not wear a watch. Direct learners to hold up their watches or clocks when they hear the phrase *for such a time as this*. Tell the Bible story in words learners understand.

Brave Esther

(based on Esther 4:1–5:2)

A few years after King Darius put Daniel in the lions' den, Ahasuerus became king of Persia. Vashti was his queen—until the day she refused to obey the king. Then Ahasuerus had her removed.

Esther was Jewish. She lived with her cousin Mordecai. King Ahasuerus was pleased with Esther. He loved her and chose her as his queen. He did not know she was Jewish.

Haman was the highest official other than the king. The king ordered everyone to show honor and respect to Haman. Everyone obeyed the order except Mordecai. Then Haman found out Mordecai was a Jew. He decided to punish not only Mordecai, but all Jewish people.

Haman convinced the king to write a new law: "On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, kill all the Jews living in the kingdom. Kill them all—young, old, men, women, and children."

Copies of the law went to every city. Everyone was confused. Why did the king want to kill all the Jews? All the Jewish people cried and mourned. Mordecai tore his clothes. He put on sackcloth. He covered his head with ashes. He stood in front of the palace gates and cried loudly.

Queen Esther heard Mordecai was terribly upset. She sent her servant Hathach to talk with Mordecai and find out what was wrong.

Mordecai told Hathach: "Haman has ordered the death of all the Jewish people in the kingdom." He gave Hathach a copy of the law. "Show this to the queen. Explain it to her. Tell her to go to the king. She must beg the king to save her people."

Hathach took Mordecai's message to Queen Esther. Esther shook her head. "I cannot do it. Everyone knows the law. No one can go to the king unless invited. The king has not invited me to visit for 30 days. If I go uninvited, he will kill me. The only way I would survive is if the king is happy to see me and holds out his golden scepter."

Hathach told Mordecai what Esther said. Mordecai sent back a message: "Do you think you are safe from Haman's law? You are Jewish too! You can keep silent and do nothing to save your people. God will surely save them in some other way. But you and all your family will be killed. Maybe, just maybe, God made you queen for such a time as this."

Esther agreed. She sent word to Mordecai: "Bring together all the Jews. Tell them to fast for me for three days. I will do the same. Then I will go see the king. If I die trying to save my people, then I will die."

Three days later, Esther dressed up and went to see the king. The king was happy to see Esther. He held out his scepter and welcomed her.

REVIEW THE STORY

Lead learners to complete "Yes or No?" on page 8 in the Personal Study Guide. Ask: *What did Mordecai ask Esther to do? Did Esther say yes or no to Mordecai? Why was it difficult for Esther to be brave and speak up against Haman's evil plan?*

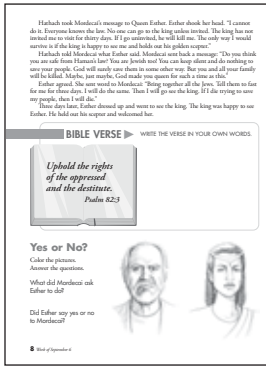
TELL THE STORY

Enlist learners to portray Esther and the king. Provide crowns and a golden scepter. (You can spray paint a paper towel or wrapping paper tube.) Near the end of the story, direct Esther to walk toward the king. Instruct the king to hold out the scepter toward Esther and wave her forward.

REVIEW THE STORY

Print today's "Questions" from the digital pack. Enlist a learner to portray the king and stand in front of the group. Provide a golden scepter. Ask a review question. Direct the king to point his scepter toward the person he wants to answer the question. Continue until the king selects each learner at least once.

Bonus Ideas!



TEACH THE BIBLE VERSE

GET READY

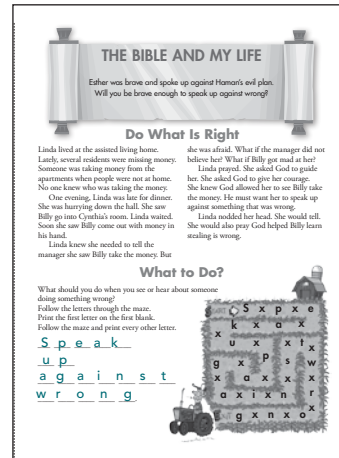
- Mark Psalm 82:3 in your Bible. Preenlist a learner to read it.
- Print today's Bible verse poster from the digital pack.
- Write these definitions on a white board:
Oppressed = people mistreated by their leaders.
Destitute = people who do not have enough food, shelter, and clothing.
- Print each word of today's Bible verse on a separate sheet of paper.

LEAD

Comment: *Queen Esther was brave enough to speak up against something wrong. She was able to go to the king when no other Jewish person could get close enough. Queen Esther obeyed our Bible verse for today. Call on your preenlisted learner to read the verse from your Bible, then hold up the Bible verse poster. Point out the definitions on the white board. Explain that people who are oppressed and destitute cannot speak out for themselves. They need others to be brave enough to speak for them. Guide learners to put the Bible verse word cards in order and repeat the verse.*

APPLY THE LESSON TO LIFE

Remind: *Esther was brave and spoke up against Haman's evil plan. Will you be brave enough to speak up against wrong? Lead learners to complete "What to Do?" on page 9 in the Personal Study Guide.*



CONCLUDE THE SESSION

Recap: *Today we learned Esther was brave enough to speak up against Haman's evil plan. Our Bible verse reminded us to speak up for what is right. Shout Speak up! if you'll be brave enough to speak up against wrong this week. Lead learners to shout in unison, then lead in prayer before dismissal.*

FOLLOW UP

- Prepare a "Miss You Sack" for each absentee. Include today's Personal Study Guide pages, a note, and a small treat. Plan for a leader to visit in person.
- Help learners understand they can prevent wrongs from occurring by encouraging friends and family to do right.

Bonus Ideas!

TEACH THE BIBLE VERSE

Line up ten learners. Give each a Bible verse word card. Mix the order. Ask the remaining learners to direct and move the ten volunteers so the verse is in the correct order.

APPLY THE LESSON TO LIFE

(1) Find **Poster 2** in the Leader Pack. Review the different wrongs learners may see others doing. Ask: *What can you do when you see someone stealing? bullying? lying? cheating? gossiping? being mean?*

(2) Read and talk about "Do What Is Right" on page 9 in the Personal Study Guide.

(3) Remind learners to complete the daily Bible readings on page 10 in the Personal Study Guide.