

# **A Good Shepherd Sacred Story**

## **Esther**

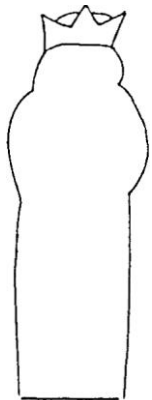
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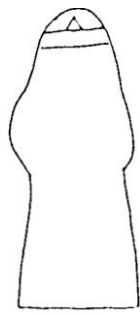
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## **ESTHER ... MATERIALS**

- medium wicker basket to hold:
  - wooden Xerxes figure
  - wooden Vashti figure
  - wooden wisemen figures (2)
  - wooden Esther figure
  - wooden Mordecai figure
  - wooden servant figures (2)
  - wooden Haman figure



Xerxes



Vashti



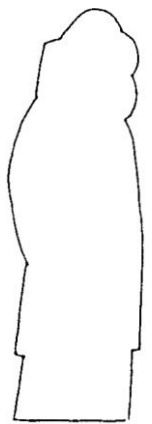
Wiseman



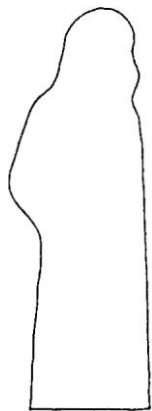
Wiseman



Esther



Mordecai



Servant



Servant



Haman

## **ESTHER ... ESTHER 1-10**

### **ACTIONS**

After speaking stand and get the story basket from the shelf and return to the circle.

Allow 10-15 seconds of silence as you reverently touch one or more of the wooden figures to center yourself and the children.

Place the Xerxes figure in the center of the story telling area. Place Vashti to one side as you speak of her.

Touch Xerxes as you speak.

Turn the Vashti figure away from Xerxes and shake your head as you say "no".

Place two wise men next to Xerxes.

Touch one wise man as you speak.

Touch the second wise man.

Place the Vashti figure behind you.

Place Mordecai and Esther to one side of the storytelling area.

### **WORDS**

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

All the words to this story are inside of me. Will you please make silence with me so I can find all the words to this story?

Once there was a Persian king named Xerxes. He had a wife named Vashti who was very beautiful.

One night, Xerxes had a party at his palace. Late in the evening he told his servants to have Vashti come out wearing her crown so everyone could see how beautiful she was. But Vashti said, "No."

King Xerxes became very angry. He talked to the wise men in his palace and asked them what he should do.

The wise men said, "If the other women in the kingdom hear about this, they won't obey their husbands either. You must make a law that will keep Vashti from ever seeing you again.

Then you can let someone who respects you become your new queen.

So Xerxes did what they said. He divorced Vashti and made a law that she could never see him again. Then he began to look for a new queen.

There was a man named Mordecai who had a beautiful niece named Esther. He had raised her since her parents died.

Indicate the whole area with a sweep of your hand.

Place Esther toward the center, closer to Xerxes.

Touch Mordecai and then Esther.

Move Esther and Mordecai closer to each other.

Touch Xerxes.

Move Mordecai close to Esther. Then touch Xerxes

Place Haman in front of the other figures.

Move Mordecai slightly apart.

Use an intense voice and rest your hand on Haman.

Again use your hand to indicate the entire area.

Move Xerxes and Haman closer.

Xerxes servants went all over finding young women who would be a good queen.

Esther was one of the young women chosen to go to the palace.

Mordecai told her not to tell anyone that she was Jewish. So Esther told no one.

Xerxes saw many young women, but when he saw Esther he fell in love with her and made her his new queen.

One time two men became angry with Xerxes and planned to kill him.

Mordecai found out and asked Esther to tell Xerxes about it. When Xerxes learned it was true, he had the men killed. Then he had this written in his record book.

Later, a man named Haman was given an important job in the kingdom. He was so important that King Xerxes made a law that everyone should kneel down in front of him.

Everyone knelt before him, except Mordecai. Jewish people only knelt before God.

When Haman found out that Mordecai wouldn't kneel before him because Mordecai was Jewish he became very angry.

He decided he would kill Mordecai and all the Jewish people in the land.

He told King Xerxes that the Jewish people wouldn't obey his laws and should all be killed. Then the King could get their property and possessions and be very rich.

Place Mordecai and Esther to the opposite side of Haman and Xerxes.

Touch Esther as you speak.

Turn Mordecai to face Esther and then rest a hand on Esther as you speak. Emphasize the last sentence.

Move all the other figures aside and place Esther and Xerxes together.

Rest your hand on Xerxes.

Touch Esther as you speak.

Place Haman with Xerxes and Esther.

Turn Xerxes to face Esther.

Touch Esther as you speak.

Move Xerxes slightly away from the others.

Touch Haman as you speak.

When Mordecai heard that he and all his people would die, he went to Esther for help. He asked her to go to the King and try to save their lives.

But Esther said, "There is a law. If anyone goes to the king and he hasn't asked for them, he may kill them. Only if he holds out his golden scepter to you do you live."

Mordecai told her, "Don't think you won't die too Esther, just because you live in the palace. And remember, maybe you were made queen for a time like this"

So Esther went before the King.

He held out his scepter to her and asked what she wanted. He said he would give her anything, even half of his kingdom.

Esther asked Xerxes if he and Haman would have dinner with her. He said yes.

That night Xerxes asked what she wanted. Again, Esther said, "Will you and Haman have dinner with me tomorrow night? Xerxes and Haman said yes.

At the second dinner, the king asked Esther, "What can I give you?"

Esther said, "If you really care for me and will help, then save my people. That's what I want. A reward has been promised to anyone who kills a Jewish person."

Xerxes became angry. He said, "Who would dare do that?"

Esther told him it was Haman.

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Move Haman behind you.

Touch Xerxes.

Use no actions as you tell this part of the story.

Gently move some of the figures away.

Touch Esther as you speak of the festival.

Place all the wooden figures in the basket, one at a time.

After speaking, stand and carry the basket back to its shelf. Return to the circle and sit down.

Dismiss the children when everyone has had a chance to choose his/her work.

Xerxes then had Haman killed.

After that he gave permission for the Jewish people to defend themselves.

So when other people tried to hurt them, they fought for their lives.

It is very sad that many different people died when they were fighting.

Even today, Jewish people celebrate the festival of Purim each year to remember what Esther did to save her people.

### **WONDERING QUESTIONS**

I wonder how Queen Vashti felt when she said "no" to King Xerxes?

I wonder how it felt to Esther when she couldn't tell anyone she was Jewish?

I wonder how God felt when the people killed each other?

Watch carefully how I put these materials away so you will know how to use them if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

Watch carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

I wonder what you will do for your work today? Let's begin.



## **ESTHER ... TEACHER HELPS**

Many who read this story think that if we are celebrating women in the Bible we need to pay as much attention to Vashti as we do to Esther. Perhaps she is the better model for young women today. She refused to be paraded around by a husband who had too much to drink and was trying to prove his manhood to all who were in attendance. She refused to be put on display at his whim. And then Xerxes divorced her. He did so because the advisors told him that if he didn't act quickly all the women of the kingdom would think it was ok to disobey their husbands. Think of the power these men put in the hands of Vashti.

The setting of our story is in Persia, during the time of the Exile. Esther is the daughter of a family taken by Nebuchadrezzar when the city of Jerusalem and the temple were burned to the ground and the people deported to Babylon. At the beginning of the story she is an orphan, cared for by an uncle. Soon she becomes the new Queen, although she is instructed by Mordecai not to tell Xerxes that she's Jewish. Esther kept that secret for years, divulging it only when it became necessary for her to negotiate for the lives of those she loved.

This story is one that seems to have come right out of "Aladdin". Although it is not an historical novel, it does move within the structures of the courts in Persia very well. It's purpose may have simply been to keep in the minds of Jewish people why they celebrate the festival of Purim each March. Only this book and the book of Ruth carry the names of women. The book of Esther has been somewhat controversial because it never mentions the name of God.

I have left out the details of death in a couple of cases. Hanging seems to have been the preferred form of execution in Persia at this time. Both the men who plotted to kill Xerxes and Haman are hanged. This is a detail I did not feel was necessary to share with the children. As always with Good Shepherd, when we talk about death we talk about it sadly and with pain. Even the death of our enemies takes the lives of some of God's children.

I have also left out the ending of the story where the Jewish people turn and basically slaughter thousands of people. This may be good discussion for older children or adults, as we consider why people who are given their freedom turn and do to others what they had feared themselves.

The other point I didn't emphasize much is the beauty pageant aspect of the search for a queen. Notice that not only were all the young women prepared for a year, but Xerxes slept with each of them. They all became his "wives". But they didn't all have the full privilege of wives. In other words, he tried them to see if he liked them. He slept with all of them, and then chose his queen from the one he liked the best.

As you can tell, this story speaks on many different levels. It is a powerful story for those who are ever afraid that they can't complete a task because of what might happen to them. Mordecai's words to Esther, "Maybe you were made queen for a time

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like this", are a call to each of us today. We can all use whatever resources we have to stand up for those who need us and to tell the great story of God's love.

In the first wondering question we ask how the children think Queen Vashti felt when she said "no" to the king. These questions are always fun as you see girls and boys alike struggle with the roles of male and female. We don't know her feelings, but the children will probably lead us in a great direction.

Next we wonder how Esther felt when she couldn't tell anyone she was Jewish. Most of the children will believe she was sad, or maybe angry. Some will even connect that she was lying and may wonder how God felt about that. Most children remember a time when they have "not told" something that might have been important. Their responses to this question will probably reflect their own feelings about that time.

The final wondering question asks how God felt when so many people were killed. This is put in to help the children to continue to articulate God's choice of life for us and the sadness of death. If you have told the story with sadness in your voice as you speak of death, the children will probably say that God was sad. Some of the younger children may say that God was glad because they were going to hurt Esther and her family and friends. As hard as that is, let it stand. Often an older child will make a different statement about God's feelings in response to such an offering.

#### **SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN**

When Mordecai told Esther not to tell anyone she was Jewish, he was asking her to lie. Why did he ask her to do that? Was it right or wrong? Why?

Have you ever had to pretend when you were with a group of people? How did you feel?

In the whole book of Esther, God's name is not mentioned once. Why do you think that might be?

How do you feel about the women in this story; Vashti and Esther? Do you think they knew each other? If so, do you think they would have liked each other?