



GOD'S CREATURES TELL THE STORY

Queen Esther's Courage

Teacher's Packet

FREE ♦ PHOTOCOPY FREELY FOR YOUR CLASS

Five lesson plans, discussion questions for two age bands, a new reproducible Bible Detective worksheet, a new ten-question quiz with answer key, background notes on Persia and Purim, and projects for the one book in the Bible that never mentions God. Built for readers ages 11–17 from the full narrative of *Queen Esther's Courage*.

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How to Use This Packet

Three tracks, one book. Pick the one that matches your setting and ignore the other two. Everything here may be photocopied for your own class or family.

Track One — Family Devotions (eight days)

- Eight chapters, one a night. A shorter book than most in the series and a good one to read straight through.
- Close each reading with one question from page 4, chosen for the age at your table.
- Assign each family member a reporter to follow — Penny, Professor Hoot, or Dominic — and have them report what their reporter noticed that the others missed.
- Use the devotion starters and prayer on page 6 for the Sunday evening.

Track Two — Sunday School (four weeks)

- **Week 1 — The Empire.** Chapters 1–3. A hundred and twenty-seven provinces, a banquet that runs six months, and a queen dismissed for saying no.
- **Week 2 — The Orphan.** Chapters 4–5. A Jewish girl taken into the palace under a hidden name, and a cousin at the gate who will not bow.
- **Week 3 — The Decision.** Chapter 6. Three days of fasting, an uninvited walk to the throne room, and a golden scepter.
- **Week 4 — The Reversal.** Chapters 7–8. A sleepless king, a gallows, a counter-decree, and a festival still kept today.

Track Three — Homeschool (across subjects)

- **History.** The Achaemenid Persian empire under Xerxes I — roads, satrapies, a postal system, and a policy of religious tolerance.
- **Literature.** Esther is built almost entirely out of reversals. Chart them.
- **Geography.** Susa, and an empire reaching from India to Cush.
- **Culture.** Purim — how a story became a festival, and how the festival still retells the story. The book’s section on this is excellent.
- **Writing.** A palace servant’s account of the third day. See page 7.

A NOTE ON THE AGE BANDS

This packet is banded 11–13 and 14–17. The book’s own supplements do not band their questions at all; use these. Older readers will notice how Esther was brought into the palace and will ask about it. Page 8 gives you language that is honest without being graphic.

Before the First Session

- Read page 8. The most important fact about this book is something that is missing from it.
- Photocopy pages 5 and 9 — one per student. Everything else is for you.
- The book’s own Purim activities are worth keeping alongside these — the gragger and the hamantaschen are the real festival, not decoration.

Five Lesson Plans

Each lesson names a key verse, the chapters to read, one main point, and one activity that can be done in the room. The lessons require the book; the verses are ones the narrative itself puts on the page.

1. A Queen Who Said No

READ Chapters 1–3 · **KEY VERSE** *Esther 1:12*

Main point: Vashti refuses a summons and loses everything, and the book does not tell you what to think about her. The empire’s response — a written law sent to a hundred and twenty-seven provinces because one woman said no — tells you what kind of place this is before Esther ever appears.

Activity: Read Esther 1:16–22 and ask what the king’s advisers were actually afraid of. Then ask what it takes to make an empire that nervous.

2. Hidden in Plain Sight

READ Chapters 4–5 · **KEY VERSE** *Esther 2:10*

Main point: Esther enters the palace under a Persian name with her people concealed on Mordecai’s instruction. She has no power and no choice about being there. Everything she will later risk depends on a secret she was told to keep.

Activity: Her Hebrew name was Hadassah and her Persian name Esther. Ask what it costs to answer to a name that hides who you are, and what it might cost to stop.

3. For Such a Time as This

READ Chapter 6, first half · **KEY VERSE** *Esther 4:14*

Main point: Mordecai’s argument has two halves and classes usually only hear one. Deliverance will come from somewhere regardless — that is the first half. The question is whether Esther will be part of it. He does not tell her she is indispensable. He tells her she has a choice.

Activity: Read Esther 4:13–14 twice, once stopping at the end of verse 13 and once whole. Ask how the argument changes.

4. If I Perish, I Perish

READ Chapter 6, second half · **KEY VERSE** *Esther 4:16*

Main point: Esther asks for three days of fasting first, then walks into a throne room where uninvited entry carried a death sentence — and once inside, she does not make her request. She invites the king to dinner. Twice. Courage here is patient, not impulsive.

Activity: Track the timeline from Esther 5:1 to 7:6. Ask why she waited, and what happened in the gap that she could not have planned.

5. The Book That Never Says God

READ Chapters 7–8 · **KEY VERSE** *Esther 9:22*

Main point: God is not named once in the book of Esther. And yet a king cannot sleep on exactly the right night, and the record read to him lands on exactly the right page. The absence is the argument: this is what providence looks like from the inside, when nobody hears a voice.

Activity: Have the class list every coincidence in the story. Then ask at what point a list of coincidences stops being a list of coincidences.

Discussion Questions

Choose three or four per session. Esther is the best book in the series for students who want to know where God is when nothing obviously miraculous is happening.

AGES 11–13

1. God's name is never written anywhere in the book of Esther. Does that make it feel different from the other stories you have read?
2. Vashti refused to come when the king called and lost her crown for it. Do you think she was brave, foolish, or something else?
3. Esther kept her family and her people secret for years. What would that have been like?
4. Mordecai would not bow to Haman even though everyone else did. What made it worth the risk?
5. Esther asked everyone to fast for three days before she went to the king. Why do something first instead of going right away?
6. The king could not sleep on exactly the right night. Coincidence, or something else?
7. The Jewish people still celebrate Purim today, thousands of years later. Why do you think remembering matters that much?
8. Esther had the king's attention and did not ask right away — she invited him to dinner instead, twice. Was that clever or was she stalling?
9. Haman was furious over one man who would not bow, even though everyone else did. What does that tell you about him?

AGES 14–17

1. Mordecai tells Esther that relief will come from another place if she stays silent. Why does he make the argument that way instead of telling her she is the only hope?
2. Esther had no say in being taken to the palace. How does that change the way you read her courage later?
3. The book is built out of reversals — the gallows, the parade, the decree. Trace three of them. What is the writer arguing by that structure?
4. God is never mentioned, yet the book was kept in Scripture. What does its inclusion say about how God works in ordinary history?
5. Mordecai's refusal to bow is never explained. What reasons can you construct from the text, and which do you find most persuasive?
6. Persian law could not be revoked, so the counter-decree gave the Jews the right to defend themselves rather than cancelling the first order. What does that constraint reveal about how God worked here?
7. Chapter 9 records a great many deaths in that self-defense. How should a reader hold that alongside the joy of Purim?
8. Esther delays twice before making her request. Was that strategy, fear, or discernment? Argue it from the text.

Bible Detective

“A good reporter always checks the details twice.” — Penny the Squirrel. Answer from the book, then verify against the verse. Answer key on page 10.

NAME _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____ / 9

1. How many provinces did the king rule, and how far did the empire reach? (*Esther 1:1*)

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2. What was Esther’s Hebrew name, and who raised her? (*Esther 2:7*)

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3. What happened to anyone who approached the king without being summoned — and what was the one exception? (*Esther 4:11*)

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4. What did Esther ask her people to do for three days before she went in? (*Esther 4:16*)

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5. What did Haman build, how tall was it, and who ended up on it? (*Esther 5:14; 7:9–10*)

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6. What kept the king awake, and what was read to him? (*Esther 6:1*)

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7. **Challenge.** Where does the name “Purim” come from, and what does the word mean? (*Esther 3:7; 9:26*)

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8. **Challenge.** Persian law could not be undone. So what did the second decree actually do? (*Esther 8:8–11*)

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9. **Super Sleuth.** Read the book of Esther straight through and find how many times God is named. Then say what you think that means.

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Family and At-Home

Five devotion starters, a prayer, and one application to carry into the week. None of these require a craft table or more than fifteen minutes.

DEVOTION STARTERS

One — The name that is missing. God is never mentioned in Esther, and the book is still Scripture. Ask where our family has looked for God and not obviously found Him. Read Esther 4:14.

Two — Both halves of the argument. Mordecai says relief will come whether or not Esther acts. Ask what it means that God's purposes do not depend on us and He invites us anyway. Read Esther 4:13–14.

Three — Preparation before courage. Esther fasted three days before she walked into that room. Ask what our family does before a hard thing, and whether we do anything at all. Read Esther 4:16.

Four — A sleepless night. The whole story turns on a king who could not sleep and a record read at random. Ask what small thing in our family's history turned out to matter far more than it looked. Read Esther 6:1–3.

Five — Remembering on purpose. Purim exists so nobody forgets. Ask what this family would lose if we stopped telling one particular story. Read Esther 9:20–22.

MEMORY VERSES

- *Esther 4:14* — for such a time as this.
- *Esther 4:16* — if I perish, I perish.
- *Esther 9:22* — sorrow turned into joy, mourning into a holiday.
- *Romans 8:28* — the New Testament sentence Esther illustrates.

A FAMILY PRAYER

Father, You are at work in rooms where nobody says Your name. Give us eyes for the ordinary things You are arranging. When we are afraid, teach us to prepare rather than freeze, and to act rather than wait for certainty. Thank You that Your purposes do not depend on our courage — and thank You that You invite us anyway. Help us to remember out loud what You have done, so our children know it too. In Jesus' name, amen.

APPLICATION FOR THE WEEK

Esther's people fasted three days before she acted. Choose one hard conversation somebody in this family has been avoiding. Do not have it yet. Spend three days praying about it first, together, and then have it before the week is out. Then talk about whether the three days changed how it went.

And take one evening this week to tell a story from this family's own history that the youngest person at the table has never heard. Purim exists because somebody decided a rescue was worth repeating every year forever. Families forget faster than that.

Activities and Projects

Ordinary household supplies only — a jar of beans, a highlighter, a map, some cookie dough. The book's own Purim activities pair well with these.

AGES 11–13

Chart the Reversals. *Supplies: paper, folded into two columns.* On the left, what Haman planned; on the right, what actually happened to him. The gallows, the royal robe, the parade, the decree. Four rows. The pattern is the book's whole design.

Map the Empire. *Supplies: a world map.* Esther 1:1 says the empire ran from India to Cush. Find both on a modern map and measure across. Then find Susa. Every decree in this story had to be copied and carried that entire distance by horse.

Make the Noise. *Supplies: a jar and dried beans.* Build a gragger, then read Esther 3 aloud and drown out Haman's name every time it appears. This is how the story is actually read at Purim, and it is thousands of years old.

Bake the Cookies. *Supplies: cookie dough and jam.* Roll, fill, and fold into triangles. Hamantaschen are eaten at Purim and named for Haman — a festival where you eat the villain's hat is doing something worth talking about while the cookies bake.

Count the Days. *Supplies: a calendar.* Haman's decree went out in the first month and set the killing for the twelfth (Esther 3:12–13). Mark both on a calendar. That gap — nearly a year of knowing — is easy to read past and impossible to live through.

AGES 14–17

Find the Missing Name. *Supplies: the book of Esther and a highlighter.* Read all ten chapters and mark every reference to God. You will finish with a clean copy. Then write five hundred words on why a book with no God in it belongs in the Bible.

The Third Day. *Supplies: paper.* Write eight hundred words as a servant in the queen's household on the morning Esther put on her royal robes and walked toward the throne room. The servant does not know how it ends. Do not let the writing know either.

Two Decrees. *Supplies: Esther 3:12–15 and 8:9–14.* Compare the two edicts line by line — who wrote them, who carried them, what they authorized. Then write a page on what the second one could and could not undo, and why that limitation matters theologically.

Providence Without a Voice. *Supplies: Genesis 50:20, Romans 8:28, and the book of Esther.* Joseph names God directly; Paul states the principle; Esther never mentions Him. Write five hundred words on what Esther adds that the other two cannot, precisely because it stays silent.

Xerxes in Two Sources. *Supplies: a library or reference site.* Research Xerxes I from Persian and Greek sources, then set what you find beside the king of Esther 1. Note where the accounts agree, where they differ, and where the book of Esther simply is not interested in the same questions a historian would ask.

For the Teacher

Background you will want before a sharp fourteen-year-old asks. The first box is the fact the whole book turns on.

GOD IS NEVER NAMED

Not once in ten chapters. No prayer is recorded, no miracle occurs, no prophet appears. This is unique in the Old Testament and it is not an oversight — it is the book’s method. Esther shows providence as it is actually experienced: a series of ordinary events that only look like design in hindsight. Students who have been told God always speaks audibly need this book.

THE EMPIRE, VERIFIED

Xerxes I reigned 486–465 BC; the book’s dating is sound. A hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Cush (Esther 1:1). Susa was one of several royal capitals. The road network, the mounted couriers, the irrevocability of a sealed royal edict, and the death penalty for unsummoned approach are all consistent with what is known of Achaemenid practice.

HOW ESTHER CAME TO THE PALACE

Older students will notice and will ask. Young women were gathered by royal officers, placed under a custodian, given a year of preparation, and brought to the king one at a time. Esther did not volunteer and could not refuse. The book reports this without comment. Say that plainly, without detail, and then note what it changes: her later courage is the courage of someone who had never before had a choice about anything.

WHY MORDECAI WOULD NOT BOW

The text never explains it. Bowing to superiors was ordinary in that world and Scripture records it elsewhere without objection. The most common explanations are that Haman was an Agagite — connecting him to Israel’s old enemy Amalek — or that the homage demanded went beyond civil respect. Both are inferences. Let students weigh them rather than handing them one.

PURIM

Pur means lot; the plural gives the festival its name, from the lots Haman cast to choose a date (3:7). It is kept on the fourteenth of Adar, usually in March, with the book read aloud, noise made at Haman’s name, food gifts exchanged, and gifts given to the poor so everyone can celebrate. The book’s own section on this is accurate and worth using as written.

THE COUNTER-DECREE, AND CHAPTER NINE

A sealed Persian edict could not be revoked, so the first decree stood. The second gave the Jews the legal right to defend themselves on that day. Chapter 9 records that they did, at considerable cost in lives, and notes three times that they took no plunder. This is the hardest part of the book. The honest framing: this was defense against a standing extermination order that could not be cancelled, recorded without triumph over the killing itself. Older students may still find it difficult. That is a reasonable response.

ESTHER AND HADASSAH

Hadassah is Hebrew for myrtle. Esther is generally connected to a Persian word for star, and Jewish tradition also hears an echo of the Hebrew root for “hidden” — a wordplay, not an etymology, but a fitting one for a book about concealment.

Professor Hoot's Quiz

Ten questions. Circle one answer for each. Scoring guide and answer key on page 10.

NAME _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____ / 10

1. How many provinces did the king rule?
a) 12 b) 70 c) 127
2. Why was Queen Vashti removed?
a) She refused to come when summoned b) She plotted against the king c) She left the palace
3. Who raised Esther?
a) Her aunt b) Her cousin Mordecai c) The king's steward
4. What did Mordecai refuse to do?
a) Pay a tax b) Leave the king's gate c) Bow to Haman
5. What did Esther ask for before going to the king?
a) Three days of fasting b) A royal escort c) A written invitation
6. What saved a person who approached the king uninvited?
a) A signed letter b) The king extending his golden scepter c) A guard's permission
7. What happened to the gallows Haman built?
a) It was torn down b) Haman was hanged on it c) It was never finished
8. What does the word "Purim" mean?
a) Lots b) Rescue c) Feast
9. How many times is God named in the book of Esther?
a) Once b) Seven times c) Never
10. What did Mordecai say relief would do if Esther stayed silent?
a) It would never come b) It would arise from another place c) It would come too late

Bonus. Name one event in this story that looks like a coincidence, and say why you think the writer included it.

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Answer Keys and Where to Go Next

QUIZ ANSWER KEY — PAGE 9

1	c — 127	6	b — the golden scepter
2	a — she refused to come	7	b — Haman was hanged on it
3	b — her cousin Mordecai	8	a — lots
4	c — bow to Haman	9	c — never
5	a — three days of fasting	10	b — arise from another place

Bonus. Accept any of: Esther made queen before the crisis; Mordecai overhearing the plot; the king's sleeplessness; Haman arriving at that exact moment. Strong answers see that the writer stacks them on purpose.

BIBLE DETECTIVE ANSWER KEY — PAGE 5

- 127 provinces, from India to Cush (1:1).
- Hadassah; her cousin Mordecai raised her after her parents died (2:7).
- Death, unless the king extended his golden scepter (4:11).
- Fast three days and nights, neither eating nor drinking (4:16).
- A gallows fifty cubits high; Haman was hanged on it (5:14; 7:9–10).
- He could not sleep, so the book of the chronicles was read to him (6:1).
- From *pur*, meaning lot — the lots Haman cast to pick the date (3:7; 9:26).
- It could not cancel the sealed first decree; it granted the Jews the right to assemble and defend themselves (8:8–11).
- Zero. Answers vary on the meaning; the best ones connect the silence to how God works through ordinary events rather than announcements.

SCORING GUIDE

9–10 correct — Senior Correspondent. Reading at the level of detail Penny would sign off on.

7–8 correct — Field Reporter. Solid. Send them back for the two they missed and let them find the verse themselves.

5–6 correct — Cub Reporter. The courage landed; the palace did not. Re-read chapters 3 and 6.

Under 5 — Back to the Newsroom. Not a failing grade. Read the book together rather than assigning it.

WHERE TO GO NEXT — MORE FREE DOWNLOADS

- **The Six Sacred Rules of Divine Reporting** — one-page classroom poster.
- **Meet the Divine News Team** — one page, four character cards.
- Teacher's Packets for every other title in the series.
- **52 Questions: A Year of Family Bible Conversations** — one a week, from across the series. Coming soon.

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