

Esther

Memory Verse: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* (Rom. 8:28 NIV).

Background Helps:

With the story of Esther we now come to the period of the exile, perhaps about 480 B. C. in the Persian city of Susa. Esther is one of two women who have a book of the Bible named after them (the other is Ruth).

A surprising feature of the book of Esther is the lack of any direct reference to the name of God. However, God's providence is continually at work throughout the story, ruling over every event and "coincidence," in order to protect and deliver his people Israel. A key phrase in the book occurs in Esther 4:14, "for such a time as this." In his providence God installed Esther as the queen of Persia in order that she might be his instrument at this time in the salvation of the Jews.

There are significant parallels between the career of Esther and the careers of Joseph and Daniel in the Old Testament. All three served God in a pagan environment using their positions in the secular government to aid God's own people.

Lesson Helps:



Once again a combination of characteristics lesson seems appropriate. Among other qualities Esther displays submissiveness, wisdom, faith, and courage (find examples of these qualities in the story). A possible lesson aim: My aim is to teach my students about the character of Esther, so that they will show these same qualities as they serve God in a pagan society.

The book of Esther is much like a modern short story exhibiting many dramatic elements. See the instructions on storytelling given below.

Application: We live in a post-Christian society. What are some contemporary situations in which we could follow Esther's example? In relationship to our government? In our work situation? At school? What qualities do we need to manifest in every situation? How might we give aid to our fellow-Christians as Esther did to her fellow-Jews?

Another possible aim: My aim is to teach my students about the providence of God in protecting and delivering the Jews, so that they will trust God for his protection in difficult situations. The story of Esther is a wonderful example of the truth of the memory verse, Romans 8:28.

Assignment:

-  Read about the women of Proverbs (Prominent Women of the Bible).
-  Memorize Proverbs 31:30.

Storytelling¹

Storytelling is one of the most effective teaching methods, for children and adults alike. It is true: Everybody loves a story. But good storytelling is an art that follows some time-tested principles. How can you tell a good story? Here are some suggestions:

- Use picturesque, vivid, descriptive, dramatic language.
- Use dialogue between the characters.
- Leave out extraneous details (but sometimes details that seem extraneous at the beginning of a story turn out to be important later on). Be as concise as possible.
- Make sure the story is clearly and logically presented in a manner appropriate to the age level of your audience.
- Arouse interest at the beginning of the story.
- Use questions from time to time to hold the attention of your audience.
- Use visual aids, if appropriate.
- Make sure your story has a point and conveys that point to the audience.
- *Above all, do not merely report the story, but relive the story by dramatic use of both voice and body.* (To achieve this effect, the teacher must know the story thoroughly and enter into the plot through the use of imagination.)
- Use the basic narrative plan as portrayed in the following diagram:

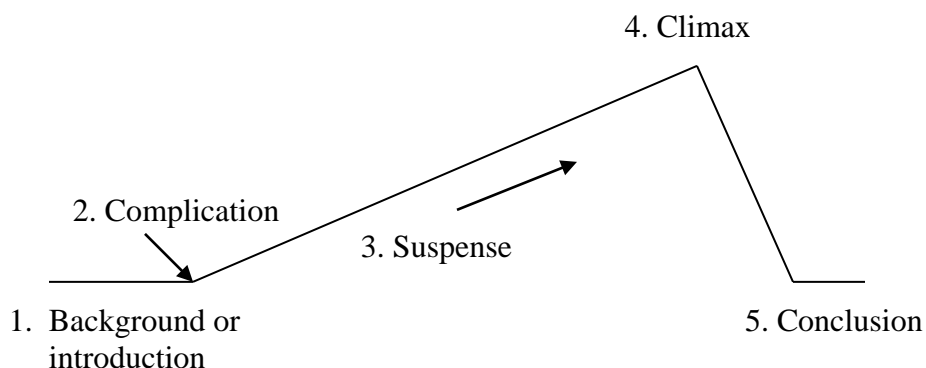


Fig. 6

There are five elements to the basic narrative plan: (1) the background or introductory material; (2) the introduction of some complication or problem; (3) suspense which builds through new complications, failures to solve the original problem, or new insights into the problem; (4) a climax or solution to the problem or problems; and (5) if necessary, a brief conclusion. The teacher is advised to read through the story of Esther in the Bible to see an example of masterful use of this narrative plan and a truly great story.

¹ Jay Adams, *Pulpit Speech* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 21-40.