

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 134** and ask **Question #1: What do you remember about your first experience with public speaking?**

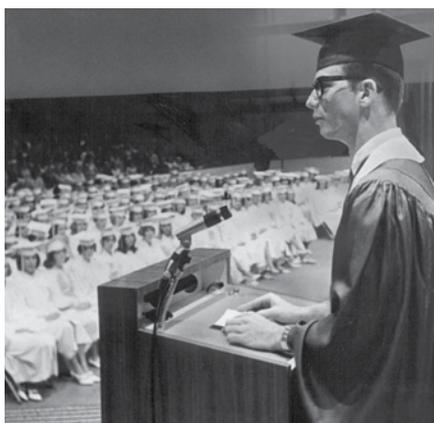
GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 135** to the statistics about public speaking. Survey group members: on which end of the spectrum would they fall? (Ten percent look forward it; ten percent dread it to the point of great anxiety.)

SAY: "Today, we will see in the story of Esther her boldness as she stands up and speaks."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 135: Be bold, but leave the results to God.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to give us the courage to stand up and speak for Him, even when we are filled with fear and trepidation.

SESSION 5 STAND UP AND SPEAK



The Point

Be bold, but leave the results to God.

The Bible Meets Life

Too many people want to deal with wrongs against themselves or others by being the judge, jury, and executioner. These roles have never been given to Christians; rather, we

serve the One who is the ultimate Judge. Our role is that of a witness, to expose the wrong and point to the right. God calls us to be witnesses to His truth and what is right.

The Passage

Esther 7:1-10

The Setting

Haman constructed a gallows on which he planned to hang Mordecai. Meanwhile, the king experienced a restless night and requested the daily record book read to him. He learned Mordecai had been instrumental in saving the king from an assassination attempt. Because Mordecai had received no recognition for his act, Ahasuerus commanded Haman to honor this Jew. Following that humbling experience, Haman rushed to the banquet Esther had prepared for the king and him.

Esther 7:1-6

- 1 The king and Haman came to feast with Esther the queen.
- 2 Once again, on the second day while drinking wine, the king asked Esther, "Queen Esther, whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you seek, even to half the kingdom, will be done."
- 3 Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your eyes, Your Majesty, and if the king is pleased, spare my life; this is my request. And spare my people; this is my desire.
- 4 For my people and I have been sold to destruction, death, and extermination. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent. Indeed, the trouble wouldn't be worth burdening the king."
- 5 King Ahasuerus spoke up and asked Queen Esther, "Who is this, and where is the one who would devise such a scheme?"
- 6 Esther answered, "The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman."

Haman stood terrified before the king and queen.

1 ▶ **Verse 1.** God expects His people to expose deeds of darkness. Esther courageously approached King Ahasuerus on behalf of her people's lives (Esth. 5). In chapter 6, the suspense increases as King Ahasuerus endured a sleepless night. He did what kings did in those days to cure insomnia. Ahasuerus ordered that the book recording daily events in the kingdom be read to him. God's providential hand designed that the reading included an occasion when Mordecai had saved the king from being assassinated by two of his guards.

When Ahasuerus learned nothing had been done to recognize Mordecai for his act, the king asked Haman what should be done for the man the king wanted to honor. Arrogantly assuming the king wanted to honor him, Haman responded that the esteemed individual should receive royal treatment. Imagine Haman's shock when Ahasuerus

STUDY THE BIBLE

Esther 7:1-6



20 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 138.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on this page and page 140 to provide the background for today's passage. You may want to read Esther 6 to capture the details and nuances of the story.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Esther 7:1-6.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:

Encourage group members to list stories, books, or movies that have surprise endings. Share how these stories often use irony to keep us guessing about the final outcome. Remind group members that the Jews of Esther's day had a death sentence hanging over them. Say, "But they served a God who specializes in surprise endings, who works behind the scenes on behalf of His people."

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 2 to set up the second banquet. Compare the similarities to the first banquet (Esth. 5:6-7).

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 3 on this page and page 141 for an explanation of verse 3, where Esther makes her appeal to King Ahasuerus on behalf of her people. Note that:

- *She courageously took a stand and spoke.*
- *She was courteous, yet formal, using court etiquette.*
- *Remind group of the repetition of the phrase “found favor in your eyes” (2:15; 5:2,8).*
- *She identified herself with her people. This was the opposite of what Mordecai originally instructed her (2:10), but that later changed when Mordecai made her aware of the royal edict to exterminate the Jews (4:7-8).*

commanded him to honor Mordecai as Haman had suggested! Haman honored Mordecai as the king commanded. As Haman reeled from the shock of this assignment, his advisers and wife warned Haman of his certain downfall. ◀

2 ▶ As the chapter ends, the king’s servants rushed Haman to the second banquet Esther had prepared. So **the king and Haman came to feast with Esther the queen.** This meal probably occurred in the afternoon. At this second banquet the matter with Haman would reach a climax.

Verse 2. Just as he had at the preceding day’s banquet (see Esth. 5:6), the king again asked Esther to state her request. **While drinking wine**, typically served at the end of the meal, Ahasuerus asked to know Esther’s petition. Again the king stated that his queen would receive whatever she sought, **even to half the kingdom.** This phrase evidently was a formality or an example of cultural courtesy. It indicated that the king favorably received Esther. It expressed Ahasuerus’s generosity, but it was not intended to be taken literally. ◀

3 ▶ **Verse 3.** At this time Esther voiced her real request. She courageously took a stand and spoke. The queen began her petition courteously and formally, using court etiquette. She addressed the king as “**Your Majesty**,” literally “O, king.” Esther did not presume upon Ahasuerus’s goodwill. Yet she made her appeal direct and to the point. We’ve noted the Hebrew term translated **favor** in the Book of Esther (2:15; 5:2,8). This word comes from a root word meaning “to be gracious” or “to show favor.” Inherent in the word is the concept of experiencing acceptance. The expression **found favor in your eyes** often occurs in biblical contexts dealing with the relationship of a superior to one regarded as inferior, such as the relationship of a king to his subject.

The supreme moment of risk and revelation had come. In petitioning the king for her people’s lives, Esther identified herself with them. She pleaded with the king to spare her life and her people’s lives. The two pleas were inseparably linked.

With its record of Esther’s plea to spare her life and her people, verse 3 reveals at least two paradoxes. First, at this moment when Esther appealed for the preservation of her own life, she put herself in greater danger by revealing that she was a Jew. Second, at this moment when the queen obeyed Mordecai who had urged her to speak on her people’s behalf (Esth. 4:13-14), she also disobeyed his instruction not to make known her ethnicity (2:20).

Ahasuerus must have been stunned and startled at Esther's words. He no doubt wondered why Esther's life was in danger. In making her plea, Esther surely remembered Vashti's fate and realized the potentially severe consequences of her own actions. Nevertheless, Esther proceeded with her heroic response. Part of that response is abrupt in the original Hebrew. Such language possibly reflects her desperation and her anxiety regarding Ahasuerus's reply to her petition. ◀

4 ▶ Verse 4. Without pausing to wait for the king to speak, Esther continued. She identified her people and herself as having **been sold**. The queen used the passive voice to state what had happened. She wisely did not implicate the king, although Ahasuerus had authorized the Jews' destruction (see 3:9-11). The verb probably alludes specifically to the monetary agreement between Haman and the king (see Esth. 3:11; 4:7).

Esther piled up words to describe the fate to which she and her people had been assigned—**destruction, death, and extermination**. In the original Hebrew language these same three words formed part of Haman's decree recorded in Esther 3:13, rendered "destroy, kill, and annihilate" in the earlier passage.

The Hebrew term rendered *destruction* carries the distinction of always appearing in passages that deal with vengeance or with God's judgment. Furthermore, this Hebrew word typically appears with persons as the objects of destruction. The destruction the term portrays normally involves a rather sudden calamity such as war or mass killing.

Esther and her people had also been handed over to *death*. The Hebrew word basically means "to kill." The root includes the concepts of murder and capital punishment or judicial execution. The verb initially appears in the Old Testament in Genesis 4:8 to identify Cain's sin of murdering his brother, Abel. Typically the term depicts people violently killing other people. Sometimes such killing appears justified from a human perspective, but often it does not.

The third term in Esther's trio depicting that to which she and her people have been sold is *extermination*. This word, again a verb in the original language, essentially means "to perish." In this verse the verb appears in an intensive form that indicates cause. Thus to cause someone to perish is to exterminate or destroy that individual.

Repeating the same three verbs Haman had employed in his decree, Esther subtly called the king's attention to the individual responsible for attempting to destroy her people and her. Furthermore, the threefold repetition of the same thought signaled completeness. Thus the focus falls on Haman's desire to totally exterminate the Jews.

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 4 on this page and page 142 for a more in depth explanation of verse 4.

- *By saying her people had been sold, she did not implicate King Ahasuerus, although he had authorized the Jews' destruction.*
- **Destruction**—implies vengeance or judgment, usually by way of a war or mass killings.
- **Death**—means "to kill"; includes concepts of murder or capital punishment.
- **Extermination**—to perish or destroy.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 137** to show how Esther exposed this dark deed with great boldness, but she also did it with wisdom.

1. *Esther didn't point the finger of blame at the king, though King Ahasuerus had unwittingly signed her death warrant. She appealed both to his innocence and his self-interest.*
2. *Esther spoke on behalf of others. She didn't simply advocate for her own life, she spoke up for all her people. Esther entered into the suffering of her people.*

DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 137): What do you find interesting about Esther's overall handling of this situation?

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible Commentary 5 on this page and page 143 to show how each participant responded in verses 5-6:

- **King Ahasuerus**—*who would devise such a scheme, or “who has filled his heart to destroy the Jews?”*
- **Esther**—*replied boldly and succinctly to the king's inquiry: “the adversary and enemy is this evil Haman.”*
- **Haman**—*he was “terrified.”*

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 138): How can we expose works of darkness without sounding self-righteous?

(Alternate: What are some fears that often hinder us from speaking out against the darkness in our world?)

Sensitive to the king's power and perspective, Esther tactfully added that if it had simply been a matter of selling her people as slaves rather than destroying them, she would not have bothered Ahasuerus with this matter. She would not have spoken up.

The final segment of Esther 7:4 is hard to translate. Some translators interpret the phrase to mean that the Jews' deaths would be a greater economic loss to Ahasuerus than being enslaved would be a loss to the Jews (ESV). Others, including the CSB and NIV translators, understand the segment to mean that selling the Jews into slavery was not an important enough matter with which to trouble Ahasuerus by bringing it to his attention. The Hebrew text allows for either view. ◀

5 ▶ Verse 5. The suspense builds as the narrative continues. How would Ahasuerus reply to Esther's request? This pivotal verse records the king's response. His questions reveal his sense of outrage. The phrase rendered **would devise such a scheme** is literally “has filled his heart to do so.” The heart represented the seat of the will or the center of decision making. Thus when Haman filled his heart to destroy the Jews, he decided to get rid of these people (see Acts 5:3).

Did the king regard the plot to kill the Jews that also included Queen Esther as a personal affront? Did he ignore his complicity in the matter? Did Ahasuerus think he had been duped into agreeing to the Jews' destruction? When Haman sought the king's approval on an order to destroy the Jews, he did not mention them by name. Thus the king may have been unaware of the complete contents of the decree he had signed. In any case, the earlier plot on the king's life had been foiled by a Jew—Mordecai. Here the plot on the queen's life was foiled by another Jew—Esther herself.

Verse 6. Esther replied boldly and succinctly to the king's inquiry: **“The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman.”** Stressing Haman's utter wickedness, Esther utilized three words to describe him. *Adversary* derives from a Hebrew verb meaning “to show hostility toward.” The Hebrew word focuses on harassment and torment. *Enemy* also conveys the concept of hostility. In a number of contexts, theological implications are evident in the usage of this word. In these contexts being an enemy of God's people meant being God's enemy also. The final word in this trio is the designation *evil*. It contrasts with “good” and can indicate moral deficiencies that injure oneself or others.

Esther made her case clearly and strongly. In taking her stand before Ahasuerus, Esther spoke boldly. In contrast, Haman **stood terrified before the king and queen**. He responded appropriately for Esther had unmasked his evil deed. The Hebrew word translated *terrified* is the same verb appearing in 1 Chronicles 21:30 to identify David's terror of a sword carried by the Lord's angel. In announcing Haman as the enemy, Esther also revealed that she was a Jew. Her words sealed Haman's fate. No wonder he felt doomed. Esther's heroic stand reminds us of Paul's teaching: "Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Eph. 5:11). ◀

Esther 7:7-10

7 The king arose in anger and went from where they were drinking wine to the palace garden. Haman remained to beg Queen Esther for his life because he realized the king was planning something terrible for him.

8 Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining.

The king exclaimed, "Would he actually violate the queen while I am in the house?" As soon as the statement left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

9 Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said: "There is a gallows seventy-five feet tall at Haman's house that he made for Mordecai, who gave the report that saved the king."

The king said, "Hang him on it."

10 They hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's anger subsided.

6 ▶ **Verse 7.** God expects His people to leave vengeance in His hands. Too late Haman realized he had made Ahasuerus angry. The Hebrew word rendered **anger** can also be translated "wrath." It derives from a root word meaning "to be hot" and depicts an inner, emotional heat that can rise to

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 138** and recruit two group members to read the following verses and make application for believers today:

- *Galatians 6:9-10*
- *James 1:27*

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we will see how Haman reacts to the accusation by Queen Esther and see another dramatic reversal in the story."

STUDY THE BIBLE Esther 7:7-10



15 minutes

READ: Read Esther 7:7-10.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Display a prescription bottle. Say, "Next we will examine how Haman got a taste of his own medicine. Look for ironies evident in this conclusion."

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 6 to provide an explanation of verse 7.

- The Hebrew word rendered **anger** can also be translated “wrath.” It derives from a root word meaning “to be hot.”
- What were possible reasons why the king left the room?
- Haman was aware that he was in a desperate situation as he pleaded for his life from Queen Esther, a Jew.

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 7 on this page and page 144 to provide more details of the dramatic conclusion.

DISCUSS: Question #4

(PSG, p. 140): What makes it hard to wait on God for justice?

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 141** and ask two volunteers to read the following verses that warn us against taking revenge.

- James 1:20
- Romans 12:19

varying degrees of intensity. The same term appears in Genesis 27:44 to identify Esau’s fury or rage after Jacob deceitfully took his brother’s blessing. The same Hebrew word also portrays Haman’s rage toward Mordecai in Esther 5:9.

Why did Ahasuerus retreat to the palace garden? The text provides no explanation. For the first time in the Book of Esther, however, the king faced making a crucial decision without the assistance of advisers. Ahasuerus had to choose between his key official and his queen. The king faced a substantial dilemma. If Ahasuerus deposed Haman for threatening the lives of Esther and her people, Haman could defend himself by stating that the king had approved the edict. The king probably left the banquet to get his wrath under control and to collect his thoughts before deciding what action to take.

When the king departed, Haman saw the handwriting on the wall. He remained with Esther to plead for his life. The tables had turned. Previously Esther the Jew pleaded for her life and her people’s lives because of Haman’s evil plot. Once his evil deed had been exposed, however, Haman pleaded for his life before Queen Esther. Haman’s trek from arrogant hatred to heartless bloodshed began when Mordecai the Jew refused to bow to him. With his own life at stake, however, Haman begged a Jew for mercy. The Hebrew word translated **something terrible** literally means “evil.” In this context it conveys the sense of “calamity” that Ahasuerus was preparing for Haman. ◀

7 ▶ Verse 8. The drama heightened in intensity. Ahasuerus returned to the banquet at the precise moment Haman fell on the **couch** where Esther reclined. Ancient Middle Eastern people, including the Persians, reclined on couches at their feasts. Haman probably grabbed Esther’s feet and kissed them as he begged for mercy. Ironically, he who had demanded that Mordecai the Jew bow before him was groveling at the feet of Esther the Jew. In Persian custom no men except the king and designated eunuchs were permitted within seven paces of women belonging to the king’s harem.

Haman’s timing couldn’t have been worse. As the king entered the room, he interpreted Haman’s act as an attempt to violate the queen. Ahasuerus’s response sealed Haman’s fate. The king’s **statement** does not refer to his question. The Hebrew term rendered *statement* refers to a judicial decree. The king pronounced the death sentence on Haman. Servants or court officials **covered Haman’s face**. The

Greeks and Romans covered criminals' faces before leading them away to execution. Although we cannot be certain, that may have been Persian practice as well.

Verse 9. Harbona, one of the king's seven personal eunuchs (see Esth. 1:10), immediately recalled the seventy-five feet tall **gallows** Haman had constructed for Mordecai. He also remembered that Mordecai's report had saved Ahasuerus's life. Harbona's words effectively served as another charge against Haman. The eunuch's reminder that Haman had plotted the death of a man who had saved the king from an assassination attempt guaranteed Haman's doom. Ahasuerus swiftly replied, "**Hang him on it.**"

Esther's story contains a magnificent wordplay on the verb rendered "fall" in the original language. The verb first appears in Esther 3:7 referring to the casting or falling of the lot that determined the Jews' fate. The same Hebrew verb occurs in 6:10 where in the original Hebrew, Ahasuerus commanded Haman to let nothing "fall," hence, to do everything for Mordecai that Haman had determined should be done to the man the king wanted to honor. The word next appears in 6:13 where Haman's wife stated that he had begun to "fall" before Mordecai and that Haman's "downfall" was certain. In Esther 7:8 we find Haman "falling" on the couch where Esther was reclining, sealing his fate.

Verse 10. This verse calls to mind the biblical principle that we reap what we sow (see Prov. 26:27; Gal. 6:7). The gallows Haman had built for Mordecai became the instrument of his own death. After Haman's hanging, Ahasuerus's **anger** or rage abated (see comments on Esth. 7:7).

Esther acted boldly, but it was not within her power to determine the ultimate fate of her enemies. The story of Esther reminds us of the foundational truth that we are to leave vengeance to God. This principle is not a passive one; it is predicated on our first interceding and exposing wrongdoing. Ultimately, justice is in the hands of the Supreme Authority, the Lord Himself: "Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). ◀

DISCUSS: Question #5

(PSG, p. 141): **Where do we have opportunities to be bold about injustice in our community?**

(Alternate: Was Esther being vengeful or wise when she didn't spare Haman's life? Explain.)

LEADER PACK: Display

Item 11: Fight Injustice to lead a conversation about injustices in our culture.



DO: Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity "**Speak Up**" on **PSG page 142**. Share responses with the group.

LIVE IT OUT

5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:**
Be bold, but leave the results to God.

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 143)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Encourage group members to be aware of the injustices going on around them. Consider ways God may be at work to position us to be the ones who will stand up on behalf of others.

PRAY: “Father, reveal to us when You want us to stand up and speak out on behalf those who are victims of injustice. Grant us the courage, wisdom, and discernment that Esther displayed in her life.”

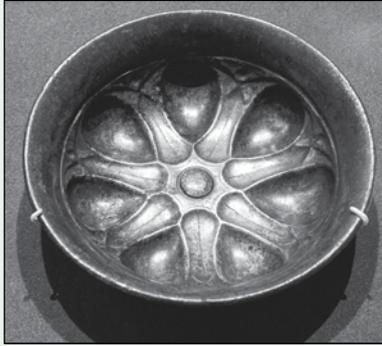
LIVE IT OUT

It’s not always easy. It takes courage. But you can do it. What steps will you take to stand up for others?

- ▶ **Pray.** Ask the Lord to reveal ways you can use what He’s given you—your time, possessions, influence, and position—to speak out against evil and injustice in society.
- ▶ **Look.** Do some research into opportunities in your community to help fight injustice.
- ▶ **Act.** As a group, prayerfully consider what you can do either through your local church or a trusted local organization to help make a difference in the area God is calling you to serve.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



Drinking bowl found at Susa, which is the biblical city of Shushan, or at Persepolis. Dated 559-330 BC.

Writers of dramatic literature understand that a good plot grasps the reader's attention and generates a desire to know more. Certain literary devices move the plot along toward the climax of the story. In Esther, the literary device of *reversal* moves the story line toward its dramatic finale. One finds an almost antithetical structure in which the characters trade roles of pride, prominence, power, and prestige for those of humility, marginalization, weakness, and dishonor.

Because of the multiple changes of fortune in Esther, the writer comes near to overusing the motif of reversal. Among the most obvious reversals are the following: (1) Queen Vashti in contrast with Esther, (2) the assassins in contrast with Mordecai, (3) the Agagites in contrast with the Benjaminites, (4) Haman in contrast with Mordecai, and (5) the destruction of the Jews' enemies in contrast with the Jews' vindication and victory.

The reversals in Esther teach us that (1) We must develop the capacity to distance ourselves from our immediate circumstances to perceive the workings of Divine Providence; (2) Fatalistic acceptance of circumstances is not necessarily synonymous with being in God's will; (3) The value of one's personhood must be measured on the basis of what he does with what he has rather than compared with what others do.

The excerpt above is from the article "Reversals in the Book of Esther" (Winter 2014-15), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

We must publicly confess our faith in Jesus as Lord. If we confess Him before men, He will confess us before the Father (Matt. 10:32).

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the [Groups Ministry blog](#).

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry