

STAND UP: HOW TO FIGHT INJUSTICE



God chooses to work through ordinary people.

We live in a world where injustice thrives.

- » Over twenty million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking.²
- » One in nine people in the world suffer from chronic malnourishment.³
- » Racism abounds on all fronts.

We've seen great injustice played out on the world stage, but we also know injustice on a personal level. It's easy to ask: "Where is God in the midst of the injustice I see?" We may even desire to do something about what we see, but other questions threaten to shut down our best intentions: "Who am I? What could I possibly do to make a difference?"

The Book of Esther gives us insight into these questions. In a time of great injustice against their own Jewish people, Mordecai and Esther rose to the occasion and took a stand. It was a potentially costly stand, but it was the right one. As we look at their lives, we see a model for how we can live for Christ as we stand up for others.

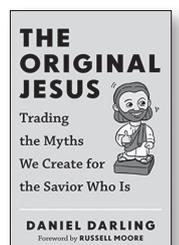
The same God who worked through Mordecai and Esther is working in the world today, calling ordinary people to an extraordinary mission—His mission.

Let's discover how God is calling us to stand up and work for justice.



DANIEL DARLING

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Stand Up: How to Fight Injustice

Session 1 **Be Ready to Stand** *Esther 2:5-10,15-17*

Session 2 **Stand with Conviction** *Esther 2:21–3:6*

Session 3 **Stand Down** *Esther 4:1-3,10-16*

Session 4 **Stand with Humility** *Esther 5:1-14*

Session 5 **Stand Up and Speak** *Esther 7:1-10*

Session 6 **Keep Standing** *Esther 8:1-8; 9:20-22*

SESSION 1

BE READY TO STAND

The Point

God is always at work behind the scenes.

The Passage

Esther 2:5-10,15-17

The Bible Meets Life

We often seek jobs, positions, and opportunities for our own benefit. We gravitate toward those jobs and responsibilities that we might feel especially skilled for and certainly the ones we'd enjoy. There's nothing wrong with that, but we need to realize that God has placed us in a specific situation—working a certain job, living in a particular location, or surrounded by different people—for a greater purpose: to point to Him and further His kingdom.

The Setting

The events in Esther occurred during the reign of King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes. He ruled the Persian Empire from 486-465 BC. In the third year of his reign, this king convened a royal banquet at Susa, his winter capital located in modern Iran. When Queen Vashti refused to appear at his command, the king dethroned her. In his search for a new queen, Ahasuerus appointed commissioners to assemble beautiful young virgins from the various provinces.

What does the Bible say?

Esther 2:5-10,15-17 (CSB)

⁵ In the fortress of Susa, there was a Jewish man named Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite. ⁶ He had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the other captives when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jeconiah of Judah into exile. ⁷ Mordecai was the legal guardian of his cousin Hadassah (that is, Esther), because she had no father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was extremely good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.

⁸ When the king's command and edict became public knowledge and when many young women were gathered at the fortress of Susa under Hegai's supervision, Esther was taken to the palace, into the supervision of Hegai, keeper of the women. ⁹ The young woman pleased him and gained his favor so that he accelerated the process of the beauty treatments and the special diet that she received. He assigned seven hand-picked female servants to her from the palace and transferred her and her servants to the harem's best quarters. ¹⁰ Esther did not reveal her ethnicity or her family background, because Mordecai had ordered her not to make them known.

¹⁵ Esther was the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai who had adopted her as his own daughter. When her turn came to go to the king, she did not ask for anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch, keeper of the women, suggested. Esther gained favor in the eyes of everyone who saw her. ¹⁶ She was taken to King Ahasuerus in the palace in the tenth month, the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷ The king loved Esther more than all the other women. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other virgins. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss **Question #1** on page 81 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): **“When have you been at just the right place at just the right time?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 82): History often turns on seemingly small events. What if Richard Nixon had listened to advisors and rested before his televised debate with John Kennedy

in 1960? What if Gerald Ford had not accidentally misstated his response to a foreign policy question in his final debate with Jimmy Carter in 1976? What if a few thousand voters in key counties in Florida had chosen differently in the election of 2000?

Our lives also often turn on seemingly small events. A lot of people chalk up these moments to coincidence, but could it be more than that? Christians often can look back at certain moments in their lives and see that, although they may not have been aware of it at the time, God had His hand on them and their circumstances.

SAY: “Esther could attest to that. Esther was a young Jewish girl in a strange land, and God was at work in her life, putting her in the right place at the right time. She may not have been aware of it at the time, but God was working behind the scenes to put her in a place of power and significance.”

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point** on page 82 of the PSG: **“God is always at work behind the scenes.”**

LEADER PACK: Bring your group’s attention to **Pack Item #7**, “Stand Up” poster, to introduce the individual session topics of this six-week study.

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer.

TIP: Throughout the week, take time to pray for your group members by name.



PACK ITEMS:

Pack Item #7
“Stand Up” poster

Pack Item #8
“Timeline of the Ancient World” poster

PLAYLIST PICK:

“Hold It All”
By Cody Carnes



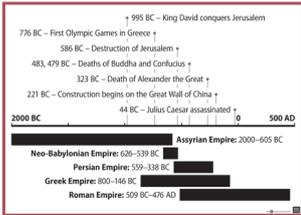
STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

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Esther 2:5-7 (CSB)

⁵ In the fortress of Susa, there was a Jewish man named Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite. ⁶ He had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the other captives when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jeconiah of Judah into exile. ⁷ Mordecai was the legal guardian of his cousin Hadassah (that is, Esther), because she had no father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was extremely good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.



LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item #8**, “Timeline of the Ancient World” poster, to provide historical context surrounding Esther’s life. Point out that events in the Book of Esther occurred from 486-465 BC.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Esther 2:5-7.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 83): Esther was an orphaned Jewish girl who had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai. She lived in a strange land under an authoritarian despot, King Ahasuerus of Persia. How did a Jewish girl end up in this foreign place? In 586 BC, the Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem. God was fulfilling His promised judgment on the rebellious nation of Judah. Then, in 539 BC, the Persians defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jewish exiles to return home (Ezra 1:1-4). Many Jewish exiles made the return trip, but others like Mordecai and Esther chose to stay in Persia. Mordecai may have stayed because he held an important role in the Persian capital of Susa.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What can we learn about Esther from these verses?

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DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 83 of the PSG: **“What part of Esther’s circumstances catches your attention?”**

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 83): Unlike any other Bible book, nothing about God is mentioned in the Book of Esther. Neither His law nor His covenant is mentioned—not even His name! However, God was actively working. Esther was part of God’s grand design to save His people.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, Esther’s life would take a detour from any plans or expectations she held.

Esther 2:5-7 Commentary

Verses 5-6: Verse 5 introduces a Jew named Mordecai. The designation “Mordecai” means “little man.” Ironically, however, this “little man” would play no small role in God’s deliverance of His people. Mordecai was a devout Jew. Mordecai resided in the fortress of Susa. The Hebrew word rendered “fortress” can also be translated “palace” or “castle.” In Esther 2, however, it apparently designates a fortress in the city of Susa. The Persian King Cyrus had previously established Susa as one of his capital cities after he came to power in the mid-sixth century BC.

Mordecai is further identified as a Jewish man. He descended from Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite. These names could refer to Mordecai’s father, grandfather, and great-grandfather respectively. We probably can’t link the individual Kish mentioned here, however, with the father of King Saul (1 Samuel 9:1), also identified as a Benjaminite, an individual from the tribe of Benjamin. He could not have been Mordecai’s great-grandfather because more than five hundred years separated the two men’s lives. Most likely the biblical writer referred to a different man named Kish. On the other hand, the Hebrew term rendered “son of” can be used in the more general sense of “descendant of.” If such is the case, then the inspired writer chose to list only selected individuals in Mordecai’s genealogy, a common practice in the Old Testament. If this second view is preferred, then the name Kish may well refer to King Saul’s father and Shimei could be the individual David knew by that name (2 Samuel 16:5).

Verse 7: At this point the heroine Esther enters the story. She was an orphan who had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai. The Hebrew term translated “cousin” can more literally be rendered “uncle’s daughter.” Esther was the daughter of Mordecai’s uncle.

The name “Esther” means “star.” Some biblical scholars have linked this name to Ishtar, a goddess of fertility. Did Mordecai give her the name Esther to hide her identity as a Jew? Or was this designation applied to her when she was presented to King Ahasuerus? We do not know. In any case, from a Persian perspective a name associated with a fertility goddess would appropriately depict an important aspect of a queen’s role. Esther was initially known as Hadassah. Some Bible scholars believe that Hadassah was Esther’s Hebrew name; if so, it means “myrtle.” Others view the designation as a title applied to Esther. According to this view, the term means “bride.”

Verses 10-11 supply additional background information about this young woman. In obedience to Mordecai, Esther kept her ethnicity and her family background a secret after she entered the king’s harem. Furthermore, Mordecai daily checked on his cousin’s well-being.

Esther 2:8-10 Commentary

Verse 8: Following the proclamation of the king's edict, young women from all over the Persian Empire were brought to Susa. A new opportunity arose for Esther when she was taken to the king's palace and placed under Hegai's supervision. "Was taken" raises the question of whether the girls had a choice in the matter. These young women were brought to the fortress of Susa regardless of how they or their families felt about the government's actions.

Verse 9: Esther soon pleased Hegai and "gained his favor." The Hebrew phrase rendered "pleased" more literally means "was good in his eyes." Apparently not only Esther's physical beauty but also her actions and attitudes appealed to Hegai. The noun translated "favor" is the Hebrew term often written in English as *chesed*. The word depicts such qualities as "kindness," "mercy," and "loyalty." It often appears in the Old Testament in the context of God's covenant with His people.

Esther received a specialized regimen as a result of gaining the harem keeper's favor. First, Hegai increased the pace of Esther's beauty treatments and supplied her with a special diet. Each selected young woman experienced a 12-month beautification process before she appeared before the king (v. 12). Hegai apparently accelerated the process in Esther's case in order that she might appear before the king as soon as possible. The Hebrew term rendered "beauty treatments" designates soaps or perfumes used in bathing. The Hebrew term translated "special diet" conveys the sense of delicacies that Jewish dietary laws forbade. The inspired biblical writer did not record why Esther, unlike Daniel, made no protest to eating this special food (see Daniel 1:8). Perhaps it was connected with the fact that Mordecai had instructed Esther not to reveal her identity (Esther 2:10).

Verse 10: Esther evidently was alone among strangers in her new role. Nevertheless, even in unfamiliar surroundings she remained faithful to Mordecai's training. In obedience to him, she "did not reveal her ethnicity or her family background." Why did Mordecai order Esther to be silent? We do not know. Perhaps he wanted to protect her from anti-Jewish sentiments and the kind of treatment he received from Haman. Verses 11-14 inform us of Mordecai's faithfulness to his cousin after her entrance into the king's harem. Esther demonstrated loyalty to his instructions, and Mordecai's actions reflected his fidelity to her. These verses also describe when the time came for a young woman to enter the king's presence. The woman appeared before the king in the evening. In the morning she returned to a second harem designed for concubines. That woman never entered the king's presence again unless he specifically summoned her. The rejected women apparently lived the remainder of their lives like widows (see 2 Samuel 20:3).

Esther 2:15-17 Commentary

Verse 15: When the time came for Esther to appear before the king, she wisely sought Hegai's advice. She requested no adornments except what Hegai counseled. "Esther gained favor in the eyes of everyone who saw her." The Hebrew term rendered "favor" differs from the Hebrew word in verse 9 that is also translated "favor." The noun in verse 15 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 of finding "favor in the eyes of" 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. However, the focus is typically on the receiver rather than on the giver. Clearly Esther's attitudes and actions impressed those around her.

Verse 16: This verse places Esther's appearance before the king in its historical context. The meeting occurred in the tenth month, the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of Ahasuerus's reign. During the third year of his reign, he had held a royal banquet at Susa, his winter capital. Queen Vashti refused to appear at the banquet. Ahasuerus's third year would have been 483 BC. The king's seventh year would have been 479 BC. Thus the position of queen had been vacant a long time. We can only speculate about the thoughts that must have passed through Esther's mind during her wait. She must have reflected on what might ultimately happen to her.

Verse 17: Esther's wait and preparation had not been in vain. Ahasuerus "loved Esther more than all the other women." The Hebrew verb translated "loved," like its English counterpart, appears in a wide range of contexts in the Old Testament. It can depict both God's infinite concern for His people and the carnal appetite of a glutton. It often describes love between human beings, including a father's love for his son, a servant's love for his master, and a husband's love for his wife. The term also identifies people's love for material objects as well as their love for abstract concepts such as truth, peace, and wisdom. In the context of Esther 2:17 the word depicts Ahasuerus's attraction to Esther. Esther won the king's favor and approval above all the other women in the harem.

In His sovereignty, God worked through this encounter of a Jewish virgin and a pagan king. Ahasuerus crowned Esther as queen in place of Vashti. Vashti's name does not appear again in the Book of Esther. Because Esther was ready to stand, however, she would play a major role in God's deliverance of His people.



Want to dig deeper? Read the article "Royal Persian Architecture" in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "Reversals in the Book of Esther" (Winter 2014-2015), "Xerxes I: His Life and Times" (Winter 2014-2015), "Susa in the Days of Queen Esther" (Spring 2011), and "The Role of Queen Esther" (Spring 2004) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.

