

celloutlines | week five

These Cell Outlines are written by ALOVE UK. They are available each week from our web site. For more information and other cell resources, visit www.salvationarmy.org.uk/alove/resources

ESTHER BIBLE STUDY WEEK FIVE

The Persian Times

Victorious Jews

For two whole days the Jews have valiantly defended their homes and families, their race and their God. The King's recent edict (designed to nullify the effects of a previous one devised by Haman) gave the Jews permission to stand against any enemies that would seek to destroy them. Much blood has been shed across the empire but the Jews have emerged victorious. Their campaign has been conducted with the utmost dignity, they have sought only to defend themselves; they have not looted or stolen from those seeking their destruction. It has been said that many people of other nationalities have become Jews because they have seen the 'one true God' at work in this land.

Celebrations Begin

Jews across Persia have been celebrating their successful deliverance from their enemies. Mordecai called for a day of celebration and feasting to give thanks to God for saving his people. Neighbourhoods have been witnessing street parties the like of which has not been seen since the King's coronation. Whole communities have given themselves over to such joy, laughter and partying and even those who are not Jews have been carried along in the celebrations. The capital city of Susa is buzzing with such tangible excitement

and air of celebration that normal day-to-day activities for all nationalities have been suspended. It has been said that Mordecai and Queen Esther have given all palace staff an unexpected holiday and can frequently be seen in tears of joy as they witness the rejoicing and appreciation of their fellow countrymen. Mordecai has called for an annual celebration of feasting and thanksgiving so that the Jews will always remember how their God delivered them from their enemies and to ensure that future generations hear this amazing story.

Obituary

It is with sadness that The Persian Times must announce the death of Queen Esther, arguably one of the greatest queens yet to grace the throne of the Persian Empire. Born into a troubled race, living in exile in Persia, we don't know much about her difficult early years that resulted in the loss of her parents. We do know that she was an orphan who was adopted by her older cousin Mordecai, son of Kish. Mordecai became a father to Esther and it was he who guided Esther through many of her early years at the palace. When Vashti was deposed and the King mounted his search for a new queen, Esther was the girl he chose from thousands of others, and

she served and obeyed him as well as any queen of the land. Of course, Queen Esther will be mostly remembered for her role in saving the Jewish race from certain annihilation at the hands of the evil Haman. Many would say that she was simply part of a bigger plan being outworked by the one true God, who ensured she was in the right place at the right time. But Esther's willingness to be thus used, her courage in the face of certain death, her obedience and trust in God, remains to this day an inspiration to us all, whatever our faith. We can all take confidence in a divine plan and purpose for our existence and strive that we too might play some important role in history!

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LET'S CELEBRATE!

You Will Need

Bibles

Pens/paper

Photocopies of the 'Awards Ceremony' sheet below (or produce your own)

'Whilst we have been together' cards; can be made by photocopying and cutting up the attached sheet or writing your own.

Large box of 'Celebration' chocolates

WELCOME

Award Ceremony

This is a lighthearted look at each individual's contribution to the team. As a group you must discuss each award and choose a person to receive it. The attached sheet gives you some ideas but feel free to come up with your own. This should be done with a lot of laughter and good humour... think carefully about the awards that you use in case anyone is likely to be offended. And be sure that everyone gets awarded something! When the group has completed the sheet you could hold a little 'ceremony' and call people up to an imaginary stage for a sweet award (maybe Celebrations chocolates?) and to make a speech!

WORD

Read the articles from *The Persian Times* above.

Instruct the group that every time Esther or Mordecai's name is mentioned they must cheer and clap loudly. When Haman's name is mentioned they must jeer and boo and stamp their feet.

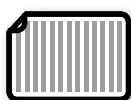
1. The Celebrations of the Jews

Read Esther 9:18-23

Discuss the following questions:

- What exactly were the Jews celebrating at Purim?
The Jews were celebrating victory and rest after defeating their enemies, and joy after the threat of extinction was taken away. They were no longer going to die but had all of life to look forward to.
- How were the Jews instructed to celebrate?
By feasting and giving gifts to each other and to the poor.
- What other occasions did the Jews celebrate?
(Exodus 12:1-14; Leviticus 23:9-14; 26-32; 33-43)
The Passover – remembering their deliverance from Egypt.
The First Fruits – thanking God that he supplied all their physical needs.
The Day of Atonement – when God cleansed the people from their sins.
The Feast of Tabernacles – remembering the Israelites living in tents during their 40 years in the desert.
- Why were the Jews instructed to make this an annual celebration?

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People tend to have short memories when it comes to God's faithfulness. That's why Mordecai wrote down these events and encouraged an annual holiday to commemorate the historic days of Purim. Jews still celebrate Purim today. Celebrations of feasting, gladness and gift-giving are important ways to remember God's specific acts... like Christmas or Easter.

- Ask the group if anyone knows how Purim is celebrated by Jews today. Purim is celebrated as a day of joy, marked by merrymaking and feasting. It takes place in mid-March. It includes the exchange of gifts, especially of food, the giving of alms to the poor, the presentation of Purim plays, and the wearing of costumes, especially by children. In Israel, a Purim carnival is held. They read aloud from the book of Esther. The story is re-enacted and many children dress up as characters from the story. Cheers go up whenever Esther's and Mordecai's names are mentioned. Jeers, boos and the stamping of feet, banging of drums, greet any mention of Haman's name... the aim being to drown out the sound of his name – the enemy of the Jews. It is a time of jubilant celebration, feasting and remembering.

2. Celebration as a spiritual discipline

As a short interlude from the discussion, tip a box of Celebrations out on the floor. (You may want to make sure the chocolates are all well wrapped beforehand). Tell the group they may each eat as many chocolates as they like within a given time period (say two minutes)... IF they can open the chocolates using only their feet! No hands allowed! (Don't forget to check for allergies beforehand!)

For older groups you could ask each person to identify the chocolate they are eating without seeing it... by taste alone!

Read the following two quotes together.

Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ. He entered the world on a high note of jubilation: 'I bring you good news of a great joy,' cried the angel, 'which shall come to all people' (Luke 2:10). He left the world bequeathing his joy to the disciples: 'These things I have spoken so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full' (John 15:11).

(Richard Foster)

We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, in conjunction with our faith and confidence in God's greatness, beauty and goodness.'

(Dallas Willard)

- What sort of things, and in what ways, do people celebrate today?
- What do you celebrate personally, in your family, in your church/corps?
- How can these celebrations become a reminder of God's goodness and faithfulness?
- How can the practice of celebration lead us into a deeper relationship with God?
- What do you understand by the term 'joy'?
- When and how do you experience real joy in your life?
- Mordecai wrote a record of events to remind the Jews how and why to celebrate. What helps you remember to celebrate your salvation?
- Purim was to be celebrated by successive generations. What do you want the next generation of Christians to be celebrating?

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When God does something in our midst it is important to remember it and to celebrate. As we recollect his goodness our faith is strengthened and so is our ability to face the next struggle.

3. Celebrating our time together

Celebration involves looking back as well as looking forward. Take some time now to celebrate your time together as a cell group, using the following activities.

Object Representation

Before this cell group, ask each individual in the group to bring an item that represents something about the time they have spent in this cell group. It could be absolutely anything, as described in last week's notes.

Ask the group to put the items in the middle of the room and gather round. It is not important to know who brought which item. Take a few moments to look at all the items. Then ask people one at a time, probably in no particular order, to pick up an item (it does not have to be their own one) and explain to the group what they think that signifies about the time spent together. Answers can be serious or humorous, but try to get the group to be as creative as possible in their responses!

Whilst we have been together

Write out some 'Whilst we have been together' statements on separate cards and put them in the centre of the circle. Take it turns for each person to pick a card and complete the sentence, eg 'Whilst we have been together the best thing that happened was...' There are several statements provided on the template, which you could simply photocopy and cut into strips. But feel free to write your own.

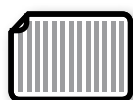
PRAYER

Put a piece of flipchart paper in the middle of the group and give everyone a pen. Ask the group to write on the sheet one thing that God has done for them during these last few weeks that they would truly want to remember. Take some time to thank God for all he has done.

Pray for each person in the group individually (perhaps get them one at a time in the middle) and send them out with the following blessing taken from Romans 15:13 and Isaiah 55:12 in *The Message*:

May the God of hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!

And you'll go out in joy, you'll be led into a whole and complete life.



Award Ceremony 2010

As a small group we have decide to present these awards to the following people:

To.....for great, in-depth knowledge of the Bible!

To.....for being the most genuinely caring person we have ever met!

To.....for being game for everything!

To.....for asking such thought-provoking questions!

To.....for always having a good word to say about everyone and every situation!

To.....for ALWAYS having a Bible, pen and paper!

To.....for providing the most hilarious moment of the whole month!

To.....for fantastic organisation skills; always knowing what we were doing, where we were meeting and what we had to take with us! We'd never have survived the month without you!

To.....for facing his/her fears.

Whilst We Have Been Together....

The funniest thing that happened was.....

The most enjoyable thing was.....

The most exciting thing was.....

The thing that scared me the most was.....

The person whose company I really enjoyed was....

The most stressful thing was....

The worst thing that happened was....

The thing I feel I achieved well in was.....

Something that made me cry was.....

Something that made me laugh was.....

The thing I learnt about myself was.....

The most difficult thing was.....

The best thing that happened was.....

My favourite memory is.....

The thing I would like to do again is.....

The thing I have valued the most has been.....

The most encouraging thing was....