

Stories of the Hebrew Bible

Lesson 9: Heroes of the Oppressed: Esther and David

4.18.2021

Objectives: Exploring stories of celebrated heroes in the Hebrew Bible.

Materials: Teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop.

Time allotments: Suggested for 60 minute online class.

1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.

2. Zoom Icebreaker: Two Facts and One Dream (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

Have each youth think of two factual truths about themselves plus one thing they dream or wish as being true about themselves. They should be able to describe the three things in three sentences (keep it short). Have one youth share aloud then invite everyone else to write in the chat what they think is the sharer’s dream. As time allows, take turns until everyone has shared.

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from Sam Wells, theologian and ethicist)

“Almost all of us know this story of David and Goliath... You can bet that 99% of people who read this story identify with David. Stand up for the little guy. We want our movies to be about David, but we spend our lives trying desperately hard to be Goliath. We think it’s quaint and clever that David got by with five smooth stones and a sling, but we spend our own energies stockpiling swords and spears and javelins. We admire the fact that David forswore Saul’s armor and gadgetry, but just look at our car, just look at our house, just look at our country: we’ve beefed them up to look like Goliath, with so many safety and security features we can hardly move around in them.”

4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

5. Opening Discussion (5 minutes)

Teacher asks: What do we already know about Queen Esther and King David? Just as with many popular stories we have heard, from *Cinderella* to *Batman*, stories about David and Goliath and Queen Esther have been told in many different ways. Do youth know these stories? What do youth recall about these stories?

**** Share this important note** about how we should read stories from the ancient world: Bible stories can be dangerous if we are not careful about how we read them. Three common dangers to highlight:

- (1) **“God is on our side” danger:** We assume that we are the good guys in the story and therefore, God must be on our side. But if we read carefully, it may not always be clear whose side (if any side) God takes.
- (2) **“Heroes are morally perfect” danger:** Once we determine the “good guy” from the “bad guys,” we assume that the hero can do no wrong or have any character flaws. But the Hebrew Bible often has heroes who are complex human beings like the rest of us.
- (3) **“God approves of violence” danger:** Yes it’s true: the stories of the Hebrew Bible contain a lot of violence, reflecting the way things looked to people in the ancient Middle East. They show how people related to God, to one another, and to the world in ways that seem supernatural or so-called “uncivilized” and often violent to our modern worldview. But we have to remember that the worldview 3,000 years ago is quite different from ours today. **So just because violence is in the Hebrew Bible does NOT mean that it is being endorsed.**
 - There are parts of scripture that critique other parts; violent stories are modified or corrected by other differing stories.
 - More basically, judging ancient views on violence by modern standards of violence is rarely a simple task. In the intervening 3,000 years, religions and cultures have continued to change and develop, reinterpreting the meaning of these stories again and again.

6. Queen Esther (15 minutes)

Screen share lesson attachment 9a (Queen Esther)

- Invite volunteers to read portions aloud. Stop at the end of the page (before David and Goliath).
- Take a moment to look at the art.

Questions for Discussion:

- Esther is often considered a hero, or heroine, of the Israelites. Do you think she is a hero? Why or why not?
- What kind of power or special ability did Esther use/discover in order to go to the king when it was against the law? Did her being a woman play a role? Did her faith play a role?
- What or who does she fight *against*? What or who does she fight *for*?
- Are there others in this story whom you see as heroes?

7. David and Goliath (15 minutes)

Screen share lesson attachment 9a again. Scroll down to page two (David and Goliath).

- Invite volunteers to read portions aloud.
- Take a moment to look at the art.

Questions for Discussion:

- What is similar about the story of queen Esther and the story of David and Goliath? (*Consider: they are both “underdog stories.”*) What is different? (*Consider: Much more obviously than for Esther, God is seen as source of strength and reason for action for David.*)
- What power or special ability does David have that makes him stand out from others? (*Hint: Ironically, David’s power is in what he does NOT have: he’s the youngest, not a soldier, no strength to carry weapons. He’s a nobody whose faith turns him into a hero.*)
- David and Goliath, and other “underdog stories,” reverse our understanding of power and strength. Goliath mocks David for coming out to fight with “sticks” (staff and slingshot) but David comes out “in the name of the Lord.” How is faith in God his greatest strength?

8. Heroes and Goliaths in our Times (15 minutes)

Screen share lesson attachment 9b (Ruby Bridges and Jackie Robinson).

- Invite volunteers to read portions aloud.
- Take a moment to look at the art.

Questions for Discussion:

- Many people have likened Ruby Bridges and Jackie Robinson as modern stories of “David and Goliath.” Who is “David” and who/what is “Goliath”?
- Are there similarities you see to Esther and the risks she took?
- What power or special ability did Bridges and Robinson exhibit?
- So many of the stories we have considered from the Hebrew Bible are stories of faith – an impossible faith of the David-and-Goliath kind, when the odds are stacked against us. What are these stories trying to say to us?
- Is there a purpose or dream that feels like an impossibility for you? What would make it worth risking?

9. Announcement: Next week is COA Sunday, so we don’t have class, but please go to the service and support our 9th graders!

10. Extinguish the chalice, saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

11. Leave zoom breakout classroom: wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”