

Rotation.org's @Home Lessons on the Book of Esther

The story of Esther is celebrated each year in the Jewish Festival of Purim. But Purim includes not only a celebration of Queen Esther but also a clear message of religious tolerance. We hear this same message from Jesus himself as he spars with the Pharisees and those who sought to impose their definition of righteousness on others. As the tradition of Purim grew, it also took on the practice of giving food to the poor. Esther reminds us that each of us is an agent of change in the Kingdom of God. Sharing food is a great way to show you care and to break the ice with someone who needs to hear the Good News.



The Story of Esther: Making Challah Bread to Give to Neighbors



Summary of the activity:

As your family explores the story of Esther and its meaning, you will knead, braid, and give away traditional Purim Challah bread dough—in keeping with the Purim tradition of sharing food.

(Rather than make the dough from scratch, this lesson uses purchased frozen sweet dough from the local grocery or kosher food market. If you are interested in a baking project, there are numerous recipes and videos for Challah online that can be used in this lesson.)

Scripture for the lesson:

The book of Esther.

For additional reading, see the [Bible Background](#) at Rotation.org. It has many interesting insights!

What you need:

- A children's Bible retelling of Esther's story (There are several suggested illustrated storybook versions of the Esther story located in this lesson's [Resource Page](#) at rotation.org. The story is too long and complex to read from scripture.)
- Freezer bags or plastic containers to place completed Challah dough in to give as gifts
- Ribbons and cards for labeling the Challah gift, which include instructions and a brief message
- Ingredients for the bread (for more options see <https://tcjewfolk.com/easy-cheating-challah/>)
 - frozen sweet bread dough, thawed according to package instructions
 - butter
 - egg
 - sugar, brown sugar, or honey
 - cinnamon, raisins, seeds (optional)



Start your lesson!

1) Introduce the story of Esther.

Say: Today we're learning about a young woman who became queen. Her name was Esther. Jews, including Jesus, celebrated her story with a festival called Purim. We will also be making bread to give away because it is a tradition to share food during Purim.

Show where the Book of Esther is found in the Old Testament in the Bible. Explain that it is too long to read together. Pull out your preferred Bible storybook and read her story.

Say: In the Bible in chapter 9 of Esther, Mordecai sends a letter to all the Jews in Persia, telling them to remember certain days every year “as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, ... that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.” That celebration is called Purim.

We are going to remember and celebrate what Esther did by sending a gift of food – bread – to one of our friends or neighbors. Be thinking about to whom you want to give the bread we make.

2) Knead the ingredients into the dough.

Say: The bread we are making is called Challah. It is a sweet raised bread, twisted intricately, often baked with raisins, and given as gifts. (The origin of the word *Challah* is uncertain, but may be related to the Hebrew word for “separate” -denoting the separate strands of dough braided to form Challah.)

You will make your purchased sweet bread dough even sweeter by adding a combination of traditional Challah ingredients to the thawed sweet dough. (See complete instructions, ingredients, and pictures at “An Easy ‘Cheating’ Challah Recipe” at <https://tcjewfolk.com/easy-cheating-challah/>.)

Things to talk about while you are kneading:

God has already defeated Evil. “Every knee shall bow....” On the cross, God broke the power of sin and death. But this world is still full of evil people who haven't yet gotten that message. It is up to us to carry that message, proclaim it, and most of all, ASSURE OTHERS that God is still with us and our future is in his hands. That's why we laugh on Purim and smile on Easter.

Throughout scripture we see this theme again and again. Mordecai encouraged Esther to step forward. Like Isaiah, she essentially responds, “Here I am.” Jesus called Peter out onto the waves, and called Paul to be a light to the Gentiles. Jesus wants us to step forward in faith... to not be afraid. And knowing our eternal destination, we are not afraid of anything.



Braiding Challah Bread

3) Braid the bread.

Once you've kneaded the ingredients into the thawed dough, you need to form it into ropes and braid it into its traditional shape. If needed, there are many illustrations and videos online. That said, it's simple. You pinch three strands at the top and then start braiding like you would three strands of hair, then pinch the bottom.

TIP: Consider making the loaves SMALL so that you have enough dough to have one loaf for each child to give away and one for your family to keep.

4) Make cards for the gift loaves.

Make a 4x6 index card for each loaf you are giving away. Include baking instructions and a brief handwritten message about the meaning of Purim and the sharing of Challah Bread.

For example:

“This is Challah Bread, the traditional sweet bread of the Purim Festival which celebrates the story of Esther speaking up against evil. It is meant to be shared and enjoyed as a celebration of God’s victory over evil, and of the freedom we have to worship.”

Baking Instructions: Brush the top with egg to give it the shiny coating Challah is known for, and bake within an hour of receiving (or place in the refrigerator). [Include the baking time and temperature from the bread dough package.]

5) Deliver unbaked bread to your friends or neighbors.

Yes, you could bake it and then give it away; but part of what you’re giving when you give the dough is the glorious smell of bread baking at home.

6) Bake your bread, pray, and enjoy!

The special meal on Purim is like an all day party. As Christians, we recall Jesus eating with the poor and inviting them to God’s Banquet. God excludes no one, and neither should we. All are welcome at our table.

Close with prayer that we will be unafraid to call out evil, to tackle problems, and to celebrate!

Adapted from [this lesson](#) by the Rotation.org Writing Team

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