



LESSON 32

God uses Esther to protect His people

ESTHER 1:1-10:3



God is protecting His people even when it doesn't seem like He is.



“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esth 4:14).

Supporting Truths

1. God is in control, even when we can't tell what He's doing.
2. God uses “coincidences,” good actions, and bad actions to protect His people.
3. God turns wickedness against the wicked, but He turns disaster into deliverance for the righteous.
4. God can protect His people even when they are outsiders in an unbelieving world.
5. God is able to deliver without us, but it is better for us to choose to be used by Him.

Objectives

1. State that the book of Esther never mentions God.
2. List how God used seemingly random events and both good and bad people for His purpose.
3. List how God turned things completely around for Haman, the Jews' enemies, Mordecai, and the Jews.
4. Explain that the Jews were exiles, describe Haman's accusations, and list the honor the Jews received in the end.
5. Recite Esther 4:14.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

God uses Esther to protect His people • Esther 1:1–10:3



Lesson Summary

The Jews were living as exiles in a foreign, unbelieving land. During this time, Haman, an enemy of the Jews, sought to destroy all the Jews. But even though God performed no obvious miracles, He was still present to protect His people. He arranged for Esther to be queen, then He worked through Esther and Mordecai to preserve His people and destroy their enemies. Wicked men were caught in the trouble they had planned, while the godly were exalted to positions of honor.

Spotlight on the Gospel

By preserving Israel, God preserved the line of Christ from the continuing attempts of the Devil to destroy it. God was faithful to preserve the line of Christ before Christ came, and He will also be faithful to complete the work Christ came to accomplish. Neither the sin of His people nor the wickedness of their enemies will be able to separate them from the love of God that He has shown us in Christ Jesus.

LAST WEEK



God shows mercy to
Jonah and Nineveh
Jonah 1:1–4:11

THIS WEEK



God uses Esther to
protect His people
Esther 1:1–10:3

NEXT WEEK



God uses Daniel to
interpret the king's
dream
Daniel 2:1–49

DIVIDED KINGDOM

EXILE

Lesson Commentary

God is protecting His people even when it doesn't seem like He is.

Esther is an unusual book. First, it talks a lot more about Persia than about Israel. Persia was the new home of the Jews after the final destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC (2 Kgs 25:8–12). This raises a question: can believers survive as a distinct people of God in an unbelieving world? Second, Esther never mentions God. This reminds us of God's **providence**—*His behind-the-scenes care and control over His creation*. Even when it is hard to see God at work, He is still there, working through nations, kings, good people, bad people, and “coincidences” to protect His people, even when they live in an unbelieving culture.

Setting: Jews in high position and remembered (1:1–2:23)

This story happened between Ezra 6 and 7 during the reign of Ahasuerus (Esth 1:1), also known as Xerxes, who ruled Persia from 486–465 BC. It took place in Susa, one of Persia's great capital cities far away from Jerusalem. Susa was powerful and ridiculously luxurious (1:1–8), but its king lacked power over himself, his family, and his kingdom (1:9–12, 19). At the advice of his silly wise men,

Ahasuerus' family problem grew into an empire-wide emergency (1:13–22). How would the Jews survive as God's people under such a lousy leader?

But God often uses even inept leaders to protect His people, as He had used Ahasuerus' father (Ezra 6) and would use Ahasuerus' son (Ezra 7). In the 1st of at least nine “coincidences” in this story, God used Ahasuerus' passion to select a Jewish orphan, out of all the women in Persia, to replace Vashti as queen (Esth 2:1–18). Then in a 2nd “coincidence,” Esther's cousin and adoptive father, Mordecai, overheard a plot against the king (2:21–22), and his loyalty was recorded in the king's book (2:23). God had put Esther on the throne and Mordecai in the record book, perfectly positioned to protect His people when the time came.

Crisis: A plot against the Jews (3:1–4:17)

Ignoring loyal Mordecai, incompetent Ahasuerus exalted wicked Haman to 2nd in command. Haman was a descendant of Agag, the wicked Amalekite king captured by Saul and killed by Samuel (1 Sam 15). The Amalekites were the treacherous nation who attacked Israelite stragglers from behind during their flight from Egypt (Deut 25:17–18). Haman was Israel's worst nightmare come true, a hater of Israel with immense power. But as Saul had toppled Agag, so Saul's relative would topple Haman. Mordecai was a Benjamite, descended from the same family as Saul (Esth 2:5; 1 Sam 9:1). Consistent with his family background, Mordecai refused to bow before Haman (3:2). Mordecai and Haman were arch-enemies, the 3rd “coincidence.”

True to his heritage, Haman retaliated against Mordecai by seeking the annihilation of every Jew (3:6). Like other enemies throughout history, Haman mixed truth with lies, using the Jews' unique customs to falsely accuse them of not fitting in with society (3:8). Ahasuerus, caring only to protect his own authority, did not even bother to ask who these people were (3:10–11). Even the non-Jews were horrified, for when a wicked man rules, the people groan (3:15; Prov 29:2).

Mordecai urged Esther to take action (4:4–9). He didn't tell Esther, “God needs you.” Instead, he said that God always has a way to deliver His people (4:13–14). But then Mordecai called Esther to act boldly anyway.

If she did not act, she and her family would suffer for not using her position to honor God and protect His people.

Climax: Haman caught in his own plot (5:1–8:2)

Esther acted boldly (5:1–3), then she also acted skillfully by delaying twice in order to entice Ahasuerus into committing beforehand to grant her



THINK ABOUT IT
The Protector of Israel does not slumber or sleep (Ps 121:4).



THINK ABOUT IT
When God's providence puts believers in influential positions, He expects them to use their influence for His glory and His people's good.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

God uses Esther to protect His people • Esther 1:1–10:3



request (5:4–8). This shows that God's providence does not rule out courage and cunning, but Esther's delay was also part of God's secret plan. In between the two banquets, God arranged for Haman's anger against Mordecai to boil over, then for Haman's wife and friends to suggest executing Mordecai the very next day (5:9–14). Haman thought all would be well.

But God arranged a sleepless night for the king, a 4th "coincidence" and the turning point of the story (6:1). The king asked for the book of records to be read, which led to a 5th "coincidence": his servants happened to read the part about Mordecai (6:2). Then a 6th "coincidence": the king, who failed to reward Mordecai five years earlier, asked about the reward (6:3). Then a 7th "coincidence": Haman, driven by his evil schemes, arrived early in the morning just when the king wanted advice (6:5). Finally, an 8th "coincidence": when the king asked for advice, he failed to mention who was to be honored (6:6). God does indeed work behind the scenes.

So Haman, scheming for honor, planned his own humiliation—all this while the man he planned to execute was given the highest honor (6:10–12)! Even Haman's family realized he had already lost (6:13–14). After all, God had a history of cursing those who curse His people Israel (Gen 12:3).



THINK ABOUT IT

Those who honor themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be honored (Luke 14:11).

in time to see Haman standing over Esther's couch (7:7–8). This, along with timely news of Haman's plans (7:9), sealed Haman's demise: the one who set a trap for others was caught in the trap himself (7:10; Prov 26:27), while the wealth of the wicked was given to

the righteous (Esth 8:1–2; Prov 13:22). God is *just, punishing and rewarding according to each person's actions*.

Resolution: The plot against the Jews undone (8:1–9:19)

All along selfish Ahasuerus really only cared about having a smiling queen, so the Jews were not safe yet. So Esther cleverly appealed to her own happiness (8:3–6), persuading the king to give Mordecai the power to issue a new decree (8:8–14). Confusion in the city (3:15) turned into rejoicing (8:15; Prov 29:2). The Jews' mourning and fasting (4:3) turned into joy and celebration (8:17a). The Jews' fear of others (4:4) turned into others fearing them (8:17b). The anticipated hateful destruction of the Jews (3:5, 13) turned into the destruction of those who hated the Jews (9:1–16). Because of God's providential power, all the evil intentions of wicked men were undone, bringing about just the opposite of what had been planned (9:1).

Outcome: Jews remember and enjoy high position (9:20–10:3)

This sudden reversal has been remembered ever since by a holiday called Purim (9:20–32). Named after the lots Haman had cast to determine the fateful day, Purim is a reminder that God is faithful to preserve the line of the Messiah despite the ongoing attempts of Satan to eliminate it (Gen 22:17–18). In addition, Mordecai's rise to power and care for the Jews show that God's people can live successfully even in a foreign, unbelieving world (10:3).

About 450 years later, the Messiah came and brought about a reversal even greater than the one in Esther. He overthrew the evil one, turned death into life, defeat into victory, slavery into freedom, and sin into righteousness (Col 2:13–15). Because of Christ's victory, we, like Israel, can hope in God as we live in a foreign, unbelieving world. For as God was faithful to send the Messiah once, He will do so again, when Jesus comes to take over the government and rule as the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6–7; Zech 9:9–10).

Lesson Outline

God is protecting His people even when it doesn't seem like He is.



AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. Esther became queen of Persia (1:1–2:23).
2. Haman hated Mordecai and wanted to kill all the Jews (3:1–15).
3. Mordecai told Esther and Esther told the king (4:1–7:6).
4. God created everything by speaking (1:14–30).
5. The king hanged Haman and the Jews defeated their enemies (7:7–9:19).



AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Setting: Jews in high position and remembered (1:1–2:23).**
 - Esther replaced Vashti as queen (1:1–2:18).
 - Mordecai stopped a plot and was remembered in the record book (2:19–23).
2. **Crisis: A plot against the Jews (3:1–4:17).**
 - Haman the Agagite hated Mordecai the Jew (3:1–5).
 - King Ahasuerus let Haman decree death for all Jews (3:6–15).
 - Mordecai urged Esther to use her position to save the Jews (4:1–17).
3. **Climax: Haman's plot catches Haman (5:1–8:2).**
 - Esther bravely came to Ahasuerus (5:1–7).
 - Haman set up a stake on which to execute Mordecai (5:9–14).
 - Ahasuerus could not sleep and made Haman honor Mordecai (6:1–14).
 - Haman was accused by Esther and hung on his own gallows (7:1–10).
 - Esther was given Haman's property as a reward (8:1–2).
4. **Resolution: The plot against the Jews undone (8:1–9:19).**
 - Esther again used her position to save the Jews (8:3–8).
 - King Ahasuerus let Mordecai decree that the Jews could defend themselves (8:9–17).
 - The Jews defeated all their enemies who hated them (9:1–19).
5. **Outcome: Jews remember and enjoy high position (9:20–10:3).**
 - Purim remembers how Mordecai and Esther stopped Haman's plot (9:20–32).
 - Mordecai replaced Haman as second in command of Persia (10:1–3).





Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **What beautiful Jewish orphan became queen of Persia?**
Esther.
2. **Who was Esther's cousin who cared so much about his people?**
Mordecai.
3. **Who was the wicked man who tried to kill all the Jews?**
Haman.
4. **Did God stop Haman and protect the Jews?**
Yes.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **Why doesn't the book of Esther ever mention God's name?**
This illustrates for us that even when we can't see God at work, God is still real, and He is still protecting His people.
2. **Why didn't Haman and Mordecai like each other?**
Since the time of Agag and Saul, their families were archenemies. Haman's family always wanted to destroy Israel, and Mordecai's family defended Israel.
3. **How did God prepare to protect His people Israel?**
He put Esther on the throne and Mordecai in the record book of the king.
4. **How did Mordecai persuade Esther to speak up for her people?**
He said that God did not need her, but that God had put her in a place of power and would hold her accountable to do the right thing.
5. **How many "coincidences" can you remember? What do they show us about God?**
See the commentary for nine different "coincidences." This shows us that God is in control even of events that seem "random."
6. **What were some ways God paid the wicked back for their wickedness?**
Haman had to honor the man he hated. Haman was hanged on his own stake. Those who planned to kill the Jews were themselves killed.
7. **What were some ways God blessed His people?**
God made Mordecai second in command, saved the lives of all the Jews, and caused them to be honored by the other people in Persia.
8. **What is Purim?**
Purim is the holiday when Jews remember how God used Esther to rescue them. It reminds us that God is faithful to save through Jesus Christ.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

HOLIDAYS

Begin by discussing modern holidays—political holidays such as Independence Day or Memorial Day, or religious holidays such as Easter or Christmas. Ask the children why we celebrate each of these holidays and what special things their families do to celebrate. Tell the children that today they will learn about a Jewish holiday. They should listen carefully during class to see if they can remember the name of this holiday and what the Jewish people remember by celebrating it.

CHOICE OR CHANCE?

Write the name of each child on a slip of paper and put all of the slips of paper in a hat. During class, pull names out of the hat to help with classroom duties (line leader, lesson helper, etc.). Explain that even though at times it might seem like things happen by chance, God really is the one who controls all things. Tell the children that in today's lesson they will hear about many things that seem to have happened randomly, but God was in control of them all.



ILLUSTRATE

VISUAL AIDS

Use various props, and explain how each one's use changed as the story progressed. Use a crown when speaking of Vashti, but later give it to Esther. Use a rolled-up paper "scroll" to symbolize the record made of Mordecai saving the king; later, the scroll can be read when the king cannot sleep. Use a badge to symbolize Haman's authority, and later give it to Mordecai. Use a noose when you talk about Haman's plot, but later explain that Haman was hanged with his own noose. Use a sword when talking about Haman's plan to kill the Jews; later, the sword can symbolize the destruction of the Jews' enemies. Each time you describe a "later" use, emphasize God's sovereign plan.

ONE PIECE AT A TIME

Color a coloring sheet and cut it into smaller pieces. As you teach, reassemble the pieces one at a time. Explain that just as the children did not know what picture you were assembling, the Jews did not know God's complete plan until the end.



APPLY

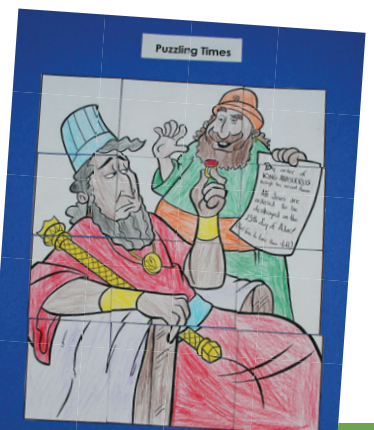
PUZZLING TIMES

See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheet, construction paper, scissors, glue, and crayons.

Directions: Draw a puzzle grid over the craft sheet, and make a copy for each student. Cut the pieces apart, and give each student a set to assemble and glue onto a sheet of construction paper. Once their puzzles are complete, the students can color the picture. Use this craft to explain that sometimes we cannot see how God is using situations in our lives, just as we cannot initially see how a single puzzle piece fits into the whole.

Puzzling Times
See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*.



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8 



INTRODUCE

A FOREIGN LAND

Talk in a foreign language and/or describe a foreign custom that would sound unusual to the children. Ask them to imagine living in a place where no one speaks your language and where they don't do things the same as you. In our lesson today, the Jews were living in a foreign land—Persia.

BY ORDER OF THE KING

Help the children understand the vulnerability and helplessness that Esther and the Jews must have felt at being out of control of their circumstances by playing a game. Choose a “king” (preferably a teacher or assistant), and tell him to be as fickle and indiscriminate as he would like. Have some children stand before him and, one at a time, try to please him in some way—by being friendly, funny, desperately sad, etc. If the king chooses to be pleased, he extends his scepter and “spares” the child. Explain that in today's lesson, the children will learn about the danger God's people faced living under a bad ruler. But God used even the bad ruler to preserve and honor His people.



ILLUSTRATE

GOD'S PLAN UNFOLDS

Copy a simple drawing onto the board, line by line. Have the children try to guess what you're drawing. Explain that God often does something similar: He has a wonderful plan but reveals the plan a little at a time. While His plan is unfolding, we can try to guess what He is doing, but we often will not guess correctly until He reveals His entire plan.

OUT OF CONTROL

Help the children to think through situations that are beyond their control (for example: getting sick or injured, being treated unfairly, winning or losing a competition, having plans ruined because of bad weather, etc.). These types of situations are beyond our control, but nothing is beyond God's control. He knows all things and controls all things. He is involved in the affairs of the world, from entire nations to individuals (Isa 40:17, 23). He created and controls the seasons (Gen 1:14; Lev 26:4). All authorities, along with their rules and decisions, are instituted by Him (Rom 13:1). And all good things are gifts from Him (Jas 1:17).



APPLY

PAPER-DOLL FIGURES

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheets, scissors, brads, glue, tape, and crayons.

Directions: Have students color and cut out the four characters on the craft sheet. Cut out 8 half circle base pieces. Cut four half circles from the straight edge along the black line. Tape the curved part of these to each character. Next cut the other four half circles from the curved edge up to the black line. Attach these to the half circles that are already taped to the characters to form a stand. Use a brad to attach the king's arm to his sleeve. Glue on the king's crown and Esther's crown.

Paper-Doll Figures
See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2.



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

OUR PLANS VERSUS HIS PLANS

Divide the class into two teams, and have them compete in some simple games. The games should be obviously unfair; “fix” each one so that a particular team will win.

Examples: Have the teams compete to build the highest tower, but give more blocks to one team. Have them play tug-of-war, but adjust the rope or relative strength of one team. Tell them to have a bouncing contest, but give one team better balls. These games likely will frustrate the children as they realize that there is nothing they can do to alter the outcome. Explain to the class that Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews faced a similar difficulty. But God, who is perfectly good and loving, sovereignly determines the outcome of every situation. Haman thought he could manipulate events for his own wicked purposes, but God was in control, protecting His people.

LIVING FOR GOD IN A SINFUL WORLD

List some things that our culture thinks are normal and okay, but are not right according God’s standard. Ask the children what they think about these things. Can you still live a godly life if you live in a culture that embraces these things?



ILLUSTRATE

MASTER PLAN

Set up a chessboard and begin moving the pieces around. Explain that God is doing something like this as He controls all the events of this world—from the big decisions of important rulers to the little “coincidences” of life. In a much greater way than an accomplished chess player, God has a “master” plan He is executing that encompasses the entire world.

STILL ACCOUNTABLE

God is completely sovereign, but that does not mean that we are not accountable for our actions. Read Acts 2:23 as a class. Explain that God, from eternity past (2 Tim 1:9; Rev 13:8), determined that Jesus would die on a cross for sin, but those who nailed Jesus to the cross were still held accountable for their sin.



APPLY

COURAGEOUS INFLUENCE

Ask the children to list positions of influence. Guide answers to include government, cultural influence like that of celebrities, the power of the rich, etc. How should believers who enjoy such positions use their power? Now have the children list areas in which they themselves have influence. This can be as simple as the influence they have on their friends. Do they see their positions of influence as part of God’s providential plan? How can they get in the habit now of using their influence for God’s glory and the good of God’s people? Could this expose them to ridicule or danger? What can give them courage despite difficulty or danger?