

WINTER 2025–2026

Mordecai and Esther

LESSON 09

FEBRUARY 01, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Esther 4:5–16

FOCUS VERSE

Esther 4:14

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God is present even when He seems absent or silent.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will partner with God in faith to do what He calls me to do.

COVENANT CONTEXT

After the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonians, a contingent of Hebrews remained in Persia. Among them was Mordecai and his young cousin, Hadassah. Again, God protected the Jews, even in a foreign land, and showed Himself faithful to His covenant people.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If you could know the outcome of any present situation in your life, which one would you choose?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the uncertainty Mordecai and Esther must have felt as they heard that the Jews were in danger.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. MORDECAI'S CHOICE TO REMAIN FAITHFUL

DISCUSS: *What are some ways parents can raise their children to honor their heritage, their faith, and their God?*

- A. Mordecai Refused to Bow to Haman
- B. Haman's Threat
- C. No matter societal pressure, I will remain true to my covenant identity.

DISCUSS: *Have you ever felt pressure to compromise your identity as a covenant child of God?*

Explain.

II. ESTHER'S CHOICE TO GET INVOLVED

A. Mordecai's Challenge

DISCUSS: *When was a time you recognized God had placed you in a particular situation for a specific purpose?*

B. Esther's Courage

C. I will not stand by while those I love are destroyed by the power of sin.

III. LOOKING BACK ON THE STORY

A. The "Absent" God?

DISCUSS: *Share an instance when you looked back after a trial ended and saw how God's hand had been at work in that difficult situation.*

B. God's Providential Plan

C. I will trust God is working even when I cannot see or hear Him.

DISCUSS: *How do you know God is working, especially when you do not see or hear Him?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to grant us courage to stand firm in our faith during ungodly times
- For God to help us trust He is there even when we cannot see or hear Him

LESSON CONNECTION

During World War II, Irena Sendler was a young Polish social worker. She risked her life to save thousands of Jewish children from the Holocaust. When Nazi Germany occupied Poland and began deporting Jews to concentration camps, Irena joined the Polish underground resistance. She became a key member of Żegota, an organization dedicated to helping Jews escape persecution.

Irena devised an incredibly dangerous plan. Using her position as a social worker, she gained access to the Warsaw Ghetto under the pretext of conducting health inspections. She smuggled Jewish children out in boxes, suitcases, and even garbage containers. At great personal risk, she also taught children to memorize new identities and arranged safe hiding places in orphanages, convents, and with sympathetic Polish families.

Over the course of her mission, Irena saved approximately 2,500 children. To ensure their families could one day reunite, she wrote down each child's original name and new identity on a thin strip of paper, and she buried the papers in jars under a neighbor's apple tree. In 1943 the Gestapo discovered her activities and arrested her. She was tortured and sentenced to death, but her courage remained unshaken. Even under severe interrogation, she refused to reveal the identities of the children or her collaborators. Members of the resistance managed to bribe the guards and enabled her to escape.

After the war, Irena retrieved the buried records and worked to reunite surviving children with their families, though many of the parents had died in concentration camps. Irena Sendler's courage and selflessness remain an extraordinary example of standing against injustice, even in the face of immense danger. In 1965 she was honored as one of the "Righteous Among the Nations" by Israel's Yad Vashem. Her story, once nearly forgotten, has since inspired countless people worldwide. It's a testament to the power of courage and compassion.

We live in a world ravaged by sin, holding people captive and sentencing them to an eventual eternal death. Their only hope is to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ and the hope of the gospel. Our responsibility is to stand in

courage and tell the message of God's love to those who will listen, no matter what it may cost us. Standing for truth will not always be easy, but the Lord will be our strength. We will never stand alone; He will always stand with us.

BIBLE LESSON

I. MORDECAI'S CHOICE TO REMAIN FAITHFUL

It takes a strong family to raise children who, in the midst of captivity in a strange land, stay true and faithful to their faith. Mordecai's family seems to have been such a family. Over one hundred years before the setting of this text, Kish—the great-grandfather of Mordecai—was taken prisoner and carried off into Babylonian captivity. However, over the years, it appears Mordecai was raised to fear and honor his heritage, his faith, and ultimately his God.

DISCUSS: *What are some ways parents can raise their children to honor their heritage, their faith, and their God?*

A. Mordecai Refused to Bow to Haman

Mordecai served in a position in the palace of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes). When the king promoted Haman the Agagite to second-in-command, Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, although the king had issued that command. To Mordecai, bowing would have implied worshiping anyone besides Jehovah. Day after day many of the king's servants close to Mordecai spoke candidly with him to remind him that he was transgressing the king's command by not bowing.

Haman was a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites, ancient enemies of Israel. When Saul disobeyed the Lord, Samuel had to finish Saul's unfinished job, and he killed the Amalekite king (I Samuel 15:1–33). Mordecai no doubt understood this new conflict was simply the same old fight by two new characters, so Mordecai refused to pay homage to Haman, the Agagite. Mordecai's refusal incensed Haman, and in an act of revenge and retribution, Haman plotted to kill all the Jews living in the kingdom ruled by Persia.

B. Haman's Threat

Haman approached King Xerxes with his sinister plan and complained, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed" (Esther 3:8–9). The plan appealed to the king's pride, and he quickly gave his permission for the decree to be signed.

Promptly, the edict was translated for all in the kingdom to understand and sent by couriers "into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey" (Esther 3:13).

When Mordecai heard what had been decreed, grief immediately struck him. Esther 4:1 tells us Mordecai "went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry." He put on sackcloth and ashes. And he was not the only Jew to respond in such a way: "And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes" (Esther 4:3).

C. No matter societal pressure, I will remain true to my covenant identity.

Where was God in all of this? Hadn't His people suffered enough? Had He forgotten His long-standing covenant? Perhaps many of the Jews felt this way and questioned these things in their hearts, but their response indicated their deep-seated faith in the Almighty. They had learned throughout their history that God is present even when He seems absent or silent.

Mordecai's actions challenge us to remain true to our covenant identity, no matter the pressure to conform. Living for Jesus Christ is not always the easy choice. In fact, the longer we live and the more corrupt our world becomes, our commitment to covenant identity will become more difficult to maintain as we also battle our human desire to be accepted. The world's acceptance cannot be our goal; our aim must be to please God in all things. When we seek to please Him, even in a strange land, He will take care of us.

DISCUSS: Have you ever felt pressure to compromise your identity as a covenant child of God? Explain.

II. ESTHER'S CHOICE TO GET INVOLVED

Many times believers are able to follow Jesus without doing so in the spotlight or under scrutiny. However, being in covenant with God marks us and will eventually require us to make difficult decisions. Eventually, someone will become offended. Eventually, the enemy will launch an attack. Eventually, those in covenant with Jesus Christ will have to make the choice: stand up and be counted or compromise our identity.

A. Mordecai's Challenge

When Esther was first chosen to be part of the harem for King Xerxes to choose a new wife, Mordecai had counseled her to keep her Jewish identity a secret. Even when Esther made the final cut and was chosen to be the new queen, Mordecai remained convinced Esther's secret identity would serve her best. That period of time allowed Esther to gain the king's favor, love, and respect. And this favor turned out to be Esther's greatest benefit, even above her beauty, when the coming conflict unfolded.

As soon as the edict was signed, the letters sent, and the decree set into motion, it was decision time for Esther. Mordecai sent a message to Esther urging her to reveal her identity and ask the king to help her and her fellow Jews. But Esther's response revealed her deep fear of making her identity known and doing so without being invited by the king.

But Mordecai did not go easy on Esther. His response to her hesitation revealed his understanding of God's covenant and Esther's place in God's plan. He replied, "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esther 4:13–14).

DISCUSS: When was a time you recognized God had placed you in a particular situation for a specific purpose?

B. Esther's Courage

Mordecai's words hit Esther hard. She did not ask to be the queen of Persia. Nevertheless, a sense of destiny enveloped her and she made a choice. She chose to do what covenant people do. She called a fast and requested all her people to fast and pray with her. Then she sent this message to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

Esther did not pretend it would be easy or ignore the real risks she was taking. She knew protocol and procedure, but she also knew this was a matter of life or death: hers or the entire Jewish race. The Jews' enemies were trying to destroy them from the face of the earth, thus breaking God's covenant to always have a people called by His name. Esther's people were depending on her. She was a woman in covenant with Jehovah, and she knew He would never abandon His covenant with His people. With all the courage she could muster, Esther replied to Mordecai's plea: "If I perish, I perish."

C. I will not stand by while those I love are destroyed by the power of sin.

As people of covenant, we have the privilege of petitioning our King for the lives and souls of the lost all around us. They are facing a coming spiritual death, and we have been placed in a position to intercede for them. We cannot stand by while those we love are destroyed by the power of sin. We must stand up, call on the name of the Lord, and carry the hope of the gospel to those without hope in this world.

III. LOOKING BACK ON THE STORY

A. The "Absent" God?

When times are tough, we may wonder if God is even around. When we see inequity, we assume God has turned His back. When we see the atrocities of war, we cannot imagine God could be near. When we experience sadness and loss, we ask where God is in all of it. We often equate difficult times with God's absence. However, on the other side of the trauma, many times we can look back and clearly see God was there in the midst of our mess. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah that when we pass through difficult times, God is always there (Isaiah 43:2).

One night Haman could no longer abide Mordecai's dishonor. He built a gallows on which to execute Mordecai, and he knew the king would listen to him since Haman was his right-hand man. He immediately went to the palace to ask for Mordecai to be executed on charges of rebellion. But on that same night, the king could not sleep, so he called for someone to read the chronicles to him. As he listened, he discovered Mordecai had foiled an assassination attempt much earlier. In a providential turn of events, when Haman came into the palace, King Xerxes ordered him to honor Mordecai in the greatest and most public way possible.

DISCUSS: Share an instance when you looked back after a trial ended and saw how God's hand had been at work in that difficult situation.

B. God's Providential Plan

Mordecai had saved the king's life, so there was no way the king would agree to execute him. In the middle of the story, we begin to see God at work. After Esther's three-day fast, she curried the courage to approach the king uninvited. He showed her grace and heard her request. She invited him and Haman to a pair of banquets where she would reveal what was heavy on her heart.

At the second such banquet, Esther told her story. She revealed her identity and the danger she and her people faced against an enemy bent on destroying them. King Xerxes could not believe what he was hearing. "Who?! Who would dare hurt my queen?" Esther pointed across the table and shouted with conviction: "This wicked Haman!" In another providential turn, the king ordered Haman to be executed on the same gallows he had built for Mordecai. Further, the king signed a second decree giving the Jews authority to defend themselves against their enemies. God was speaking through Mordecai and Esther and working behind the scenes, even though we do not read His name once in the entire book.

C. I will trust God is working even when I cannot see or hear Him.

As we consider Esther's story, we must ready ourselves. We will experience moments of great conflict that demand we make a decision. In those moments we have a choice: run and hide or stand up and do what covenant people do. Covenant people trust in the God of their salvation. Covenant people know God has not forgotten them. Covenant people trust that God is working even when they cannot see or hear Him. We learn from Mordecai and Esther that God is present even when He seems absent or silent.

DISCUSS: How do you know God is working, especially when you do not see or hear Him?

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate God's love for us even when we don't see Him or realize He is there.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

One crisp autumn morning, sixteen-year-old Lila pedaled off to school, her backpack bouncing with every turn of the wheel. She didn't know that her father, Mark, was following at a distance in his car to make sure she made it safely. He wasn't overprotective by nature, but the world felt different after losing Lila's mom two years earlier.

This routine became his secret ritual. He would drive far enough behind her that Lila wouldn't notice and park just out of sight when she arrived at school. He'd wait for her to lock her bike and disappear into the building before heading off to work. One evening Lila came home unusually quiet.

"Everything okay, kiddo?" Mark asked, setting down his coffee.

"Yeah, just...weird," she replied, fiddling with her backpack. "Today a car stopped to let me cross, but this other one didn't slow down. It came out of nowhere. I thought for sure I was gonna get hit."

Mark froze. His heart raced. He had seen the near accident from his car that morning. In fact, it was his horn that startled the reckless driver enough to stop.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his voice steady but his hands trembling.

"Yeah. Just scared me a little," Lila admitted. "It's no big deal."

The next morning, as Lila rode off to school, Mark resumed his quiet watch. One day after school, Lila approached him in the living room, her face glowing with amusement. "So, Dad," she began, crossing her arms. "Do you think I

don't notice your car parked behind that bush every morning?"

Mark's mouth opened and then closed. "You noticed?"

"Of course I did," she said with a laugh. "I see the reflection of your car in store windows when I'm riding."

Mark sighed, feeling caught, yet oddly relieved. "I just want to make sure you're safe."

Lila's expression softened. "I know, Dad. And thank you." She sat beside him, leaning her head on his arm. "It's kind of comforting knowing you're there."

Their bond grew stronger because she knew he would always be there. We do not always see evidence of God's presence, even in moments of desperate need. However, He has promised to always be there, and His Word reminds us of His great faithfulness. He is committed to the covenant He has made, so let us remain confident in Him and live each day with the faith to stand firm, no matter the situation.