



## **ESTHER SMALL GROUP SERIES**

### **LESSON 1**

Writer: Kate Roache  
Project Supervisor: Annie Snyder  
Editor: Angela Ivey

**Created by Ministry to Youth**  
[www.ministrytoyouth.com](http://www.ministrytoyouth.com)

## **ESTHER - SMALL GROUP SERIES**

THEME- God's providence is always at work for his children.

### **LESSON 1**

Bible: Esther Chapters 1 and 2

Bottom Line: Even though we can't always see God at work, it doesn't mean that he isn't working. God always works on behalf of his children.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The book of Esther is one of only two books in the Bible named after a woman, the other book being the book of Ruth.

The author of the book of Esther is unknown, but some scholars suspect it to be Mordecai, Ezra, or Nehemiah.

Esther is after the book of Nehemiah and before the book of Job in the Christian Bible.

It is believed that Esther was written around 470 B.C.

Before this time the Jews were enslaved by the Babylonians, but then the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians. So now the Jews were under the rule of the Persian king Xerxes.

Xerxes was a very powerful ruler who ruled over 127 provinces that stretched from India to Ethiopia.

In the entire book of Esther, God is not mentioned once, and this happens to be the only book of the Bible that does not mention God.

Esther is a Jewish woman who has to hide her identity and changes her name from Hadassah to Esther. Esther means to hide or conceal.

In the Jewish faith, Esther's story became a big part of the Jewish culture, where they read the book often and celebrated a holiday around her story.

### **LESSON**

In Chapter 1 of the Book of Esther, the Persian King Xerxes has this big elaborate banquet that lasts 180 days.

#### **Read Esther 1:3-4.**

*In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. He invited all the military officers of Persia and Media as well as the princes and*

*nobles of the provinces. The celebration lasted 180 days, a tremendous display of the opulent wealth of his empire and the pomp and splendor of his majesty.*

After the 180 days, King Xerxes holds another banquet for seven days, but this banquet isn't only for the nobles and the military officers. It is for everyone—no matter their rank or status.

The banquet was held in the courtyard, and it was decorated elaborately with fancy linen and expensive stones. The King was generous and gave everyone alcohol with no limit to how much they could drink.

### **Read Esther 1:6-7.**

*The courtyard was beautifully decorated with white cotton curtains and blue hangings, which were fastened with white linen cords and purple ribbons to silver rings embedded in marble pillars. Gold and silver couches stood on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and other costly stones. Drinks were served in gold goblets of many designs, and there was an abundance of royal wine, reflecting the king's generosity.*

At the same time, the queen was holding her very own banquet for the women.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think King Xerxes is holding these elaborate banquets?
2. What type of king do you think King Xerxes was? (Example: He was a powerful king, and he was also a very boastful king who showed off his riches and power.)
3. Do you think you would get tired of partying for 180 days, or do you think you would find it fun?

### **Read Esther 1:10-12.**

*On the seventh day of the feast, when King Xerxes was in high spirits because of the wine, he told the seven eunuchs who attended him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown on her head. He wanted the nobles and all the other men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman. The king wanted to show her off just like he had been doing with all his money and power at the banquet. But*

*when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger.*

Not only was the king angered, but so were all the men who were beside him. They all felt if the queen was going to disrespect the king like she did it would also mean that other women would think it would be okay to disrespect their husbands as well.

Due to King Xerxes' anger, he deposes Queen Vashti, making her his queen no longer. To find a new queen, Xerxes holds a beauty pageant.

This is part of the story where Esther, our main character, comes into the story. Esther is a Jew, and she is an orphan due to both her parents passing.

Since she had no parents, Mordecai takes Esther (his cousin) in and treats her like a daughter. Esther hides her Jewish identity from others.

Esther's real name is Hadassah, and she changes her name to Esther, which means to hide or conceal.

It is Mordecai's idea for Esther to hide her Jewish identity. Mordecai knows that people of the Jewish culture are looked down upon in the kingdom.

Because of the king's decree, Esther and many other young women were brought to live at the king's harem. The women were essentially joining a beauty contest for the king to find his new queen.

Esther instantly became a favorite of everyone's and was treated very well. Esther's cousin Mordecai walked by the palace every day to check on her and to make sure she was doing okay.

**Read Esther 2:12-13.**

*She was given the prescribed twelve months of beauty treatment, six months with oil of myrrh, followed by six months with special perfumes and ointments. When it was time for her to go to the king's palace, she was given her choice of whatever clothing or jewelry she wanted to take from the harem.*

Any woman who was going to be brought before the king was placed on this intensive beauty regimen of perfumes, oils, and such.

Esther was put on this regimen, and when it was her turn to be brought before the king, he loved her so much that he had her moved into the palace. He placed his crown on her and made her queen.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How must Esther feel to have all this treatment and long beauty regimen?
2. What kind of character does Esther have to make her so special? (Example: beautiful, kind)
3. What do you think is special about Esther's new name? (Example: Not only does it hide her Jewish identity, but it also represents the meaning of hidden or concealed.)

### **Read Esther 2:18-20.**

*To celebrate the occasion, he gave a great banquet in Esther's honor for all his nobles and officials, declaring a public holiday for the provinces and giving generous gifts to everyone. Even after all the young women had been transferred to the second harem and Mordecai had become a palace official, Esther continued to keep her family background and nationality a secret. She was still following Mordecai's directions, just as she did when she lived in his home.*

Esther was considered very beautiful and quickly became not only the king's favorite but the favorite of many in the kingdom.

One day, Esther's cousin Mordecai was on duty, and he witnessed two of the king's guards talking and plotting to kill the king. Mordecai went to Esther and reported what he had heard.

Esther went and told the king, Mordecai's report was found to be true, and the two men were impaled on a sharpened stake.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why does Esther feel the need to hide her identity? (Example: Being Jewish at this time is considered to be the lowest of the kingdom.)
2. Why do you think Mordecai told Esther about the two men planning to assassinate the king instead of telling the king himself? (Example: At this time Esther has the trust and the ear of the king.)
3. Since Mordecai's report was found to be truthful, what could this do to his status with the king?

Just in the first two chapters of Esther, we can see that God is not mentioned at all.

Then you might ask yourself why the book of Esther is an important book not only in the Jewish faith but also in the Christian faith.

There is so much in the book of Esther that answers this question.

Let's first look at the characters in the story. King Xerxes was a very powerful king with large amounts of property and wealth.

Not only was he powerful, but he also loved to show off his power and wealth to others. This is part of the reason King Xerxes threw such large elaborate banquets.

King Xerxes was also in control of Jewish people living in his land.

Esther and her cousin Mordecai were Jewish. Neither came from wealth, and they would be considered the bottom of the hierarchy.

Both had to keep their identity a secret due to prejudice against the Jewish people.

Even though we do not hear from God in these chapters, we can see where divine planning and intervention took place.

First, it's not a coincidence that the Jewish people came to live in the Persian empire.

It's not also a coincidence that Mordecai and Esther were living in Susa, the capital city of the Persian empire.

From past Biblical history before Esther's time, you can see many stories where God uses the unqualified or the underdog.

Both Esther and Mordecai could be considered unqualified and underdogs. Mordecai held no powerful position, and Esther was an orphan.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Has there been any time in your life that you felt that God was absent or maybe hiding? (Leader: Have an example in your life where you felt God was hiding or absent.)
2. Why might God hide from us?
3. Do you think that Esther and Mordecai had any clue what God was up to?

## **Conclusion:**

This is just the beginning of Esther's story.

The more we learn about Esther the more we will see how even though God seems to be hiding, that doesn't mean He isn't still working on behalf of His children.

Let's think about what hiding means. Imagine the last time you played hide and seek.

When you were hiding, were you still able to see the seeker? Were you able to move to another hiding place?

When God is hiding from us, it does not mean He isn't able to see what is going on. It also does not mean that God is not able to do things to help us out.

Hiding doesn't mean absence, and it doesn't mean that He isn't with us. God always has a reason for His actions (or seeming inaction), and He does good on our behalf.

There is a reason for God's hiding, and Esther's story will help us have a deeper understanding of God in our own lives when we are wondering why it feels like God is hiding from us.

With God, there are no coincidences. He plans every plot twist and orchestrates everything for the good of His people.

We can learn so far from Esther's story that when we feel like God is hiding, it doesn't mean we did something wrong, and it doesn't mean that He is far from us.

Each of us will come to a time in our lives when we question what God is doing, but we need to hold fast to our faith, knowing that our loving Father is taking care of things that we cannot see.

One day we will be able to look back on our lives and see exactly how He was moving and how He continues to move.

Next week we will see more of Esther's story unfold and see more of what God was doing.