

Let the King and Haman Come Tomorrow to the Banquet I Will Prepare for Them

5: 1-8

DIG: On the third day - of what? Why is that detail relevant to the plot? What might be the purpose of Esther's delaying tactic? What was the king's response so far to Esther's requests? What does that imply?

REFLECT: What would you have asked for if half the Persian Empire had been offered to you? If you could have any request granted by King Messiah, what would it be? What assurances do you have that when you ask God for something, it will be granted (see my commentary on *The Life of Christ Kq - No One Comes to the Father Except Through Me*)?

In **Chapter 1**, Queen Vashti risked her life by refusing to appear before **Ahasuerus** when summoned (1:12); but now in **Chapter 5**, **Queen Esther** risks **her** life by appearing before **the king** uninvited (5:1-3). Archaeological evidence shows **her** fears were not unfounded. Two bas-reliefs have been excavated from Persepolis, the summer capital, showing a **Persian** king seated on his **throne** with a long **scepter** in his right hand. A soldier is also seen standing behind **the throne**, holding a large ax.⁶⁴

After committing **her** cause into God's hands, **Esther** prepared **herself** to approach **the king**. On the **third day** of fasting, **she** did not just try to make **herself** beautiful for **her** uninvited audience with **the king**, **she** put on **her** royal robes. **She had probably worn mourning garb while she was fasting**. No doubt these were in keeping with **the king's** splendid robes of Phoenician purple, heavy with gold embroidery, worn over garments of white and purple.⁶⁵ At the same time **she** decided to identify with **her** people, **she** also would claim **her** authority and power as **the Queen of Persia** as **she** went before **the king**.

The rabbis teach that Isra'el is never left in dire straights more than three days. In a Jewish Midrash, the miracle of deliverance through Mordecai and Esther is compared to events in the lives of Abraham, Jacob and Jonah, which also involve three days (Genesis 22:4, 31:22; Jonah 1:17). It links this miracle to the Jewish tradition that physical death was certain only after three days (see my commentary on The Life of Christ Ia - The Resurrection of Lazarus: The First Sign of Jonah), and spiritual life would "come on the third day." The concept is based on Hosea 6:2, where the prophet declares: After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His presence.

To the northwest of the palace complex stood **the throne room**. It was about 193 feet square, its roof supported by six rows of six mighty columns soaring to a height of 65 feet. To the east and west, **the throne room** was approached by porticoes of two rows of six more of these columns to a depth of 57 feet. To the north and west, below the level of the platform, there were lush gardens, easily watered from the nearby river and protected by a tower at the northwestern corner.⁶⁶

If invited, any guest into **the throne room** needed to prostrate themselves in adoration, for by ancient oriental custom **the king** was in a very real sense divine.⁶⁷ The mere fact that **she stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the throne room**, put **her** in great danger. **The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance (5:1)**. In those days, **a king** protected **himself** from assassination by not allowing anyone into **his** presence that **he** did not specifically call for. It was well understood, therefore, that whoever thus appeared before **the king** deliberately risked their life. As **she** mustered the courage to approach **the king**, **her** heart pounding so loud **she** could probably hear it, the threat of **death** and the hope of life were equally present.

But God moved **the king** when **she** approached **him on the throne**. The columns were not supposed to obscure the vision of **the king** as **he** sat on **his throne**. **When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court in all her royal splendor, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand** granting **her** protected access. This indicated that **she** was supposed to approach and touch **the tip of the gold scepter** to symbolize **her** acceptance. We know from extra-biblical sources that **King Ahasuerus** was a very cruel, moody and temperamental ruler. But it just so happened that **his** mood happened to be just right when **Esther** appeared. **Providence!** **So she approached and as he held out the tip of the gold scepter, she touched it (5:2)**.

On the third day, Ahasuerus extended **his gold scepter** to **Esther**, lest **she die** for coming into **his** presence uninvited. **She** approached **him** and completed **his** gracious gesture by touching **the tip of the scepter**. Therefore, **her** safety in **his** presence was guaranteed. This pictures the act of a gracious **king** who holds the power of life and death. Had **ADONAI** not extended the cross of Jesus Christ to the world, all would die in **His** presence. **On the third day** after the final judgment was handed down on the cross, **Yeshua Messiah** arose to eternal life, guaranteeing safety to enter **God's** presence to all who reach out in faith to touch that cross-shaped **scepter**.⁶⁸ **A star will come out from Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Isra'el** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Av - The Visit of the Magi**).

The Bible says that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (First Corinthians 15:3b-4). If you believe that and have never asked Yeshua to be your Lord and Savior would you pray this simple prayer today: **God, I admit that I have sinned. I believe Jesus Christ died for my sins, and I want to trust Him to save me right now.** It is important that you understand that repeating this prayer does not save you. It is only faith in Christ as your Lord and Savior that saves you. Now you need to find a good messianic synagogue or church that teaches the Word of God faithfully so you can grow in your faith and have fellowship with other believers. Why should God let you into His heaven? That's right. Messiah died for all your sins . . . past, present and future!

For the first time in the book, **Esther** is directly addressed as **Queen Esther**. Then the king asked, "What is it, **Queen Esther**? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you" (5:3). This expression is an idiom commonly used by ancient kings and was not intended to be taken literally. It merely meant **the king** was willing to be generous in meeting the request. It was a good sign. Centuries later, John the Baptist was murdered when Herod offered **up to half my kingdom** to the daughter of Herodias (Mark 6:23). It was then, in front of all his officials, that Herodias knew that Herod would not risk losing face by refusing her request for John's head. **Esther**, however, was not going to put **the king** on the spot - just yet. Rather than demanding **Haman's** blood in that very moment, she bides her time.

Esther's request was anti-climatic, but **the king** was never alone in the throne room. Although they are not mentioned, servants would be present as well as guards and other officials. It was neither the time nor the place to disclose her true intentions. "If it pleases the king," replied **Esther**, "**let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him**" (5:4). The **three days** of prayer and fasting by herself, her attendants and all the Jews in **Persia** had given **Queen Esther** a godly wisdom, and a confidence not her own. She had even prepared a meal, believing that her invitation to **the king** would be accepted.

Once again God's name is hidden in the book of **Esther** (also see 1:20, 5:13 and 7:7). In 5:4 within the phrase **let the king . . . come today**, the name of **YHWH** (see my commentary on **Exodus At - Moses' Second Objection and Answer**) is hidden. It is formed by the initial letters of four successive Hebrew words when read forward: **Ybw' Hmlk Whmm Hywn**.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, God is the true hero of the story. Although hidden from view, He is everywhere at work behind the scenes. He keeps His promises and defends His people - even the ones who chose not to return to the Promised Land. He chooses to work through **Esther** and **Mordecai**, despite their failures, bad choices, and outright disobedience. When the crisis hit, He has **them** right where He wants **them**.⁷⁰

His last audience of the day over, **Ahasuerus**, aware more of his hunger than his supposed divinity, was not slow to accept her offer for dinner. She asked the king to invite **Haman** also. Consequently, **Esther** had the two most powerful men in **Persia** eating out of her hand. "Bring **Haman** at once," the king said, "so that we may do what **Esther** asks." So the king and **Haman** went to the banquet **Esther** had prepared (5:5). It was an unusual honor to be invited to a banquet with the queen, for **Persian** officials were unusually protective of their wives.

The king understood that **Esther** had not risked her life merely to come and invite him to a banquet. He, therefore, repeated his inquiry into the real nature of her wish. Once the leisurely eastern meal was over, the three reclined on their couches and drank wine. An activity that the author takes every opportunity to point out. As they were drinking wine, the king again asked **Esther**, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted" (5:6). Once again, not meant to be taken literally, but simply that **Ahasuerus** was willing to be generous in meeting her request.

Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this: If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and **Haman** come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Using a delay tactic, she merely answered: Then I will answer the king's question" (5:7-8). The LORD had given His wisdom to **Esther** and she must have sensed that the time was not right for her request. In God's providence a few other details had to be worked out. The delay allowed time for **Haman's** misguided self-confidence to ripen.