

I Will Go to the King: If I Perish, I Perish

4: 4-17

DIG: How does the view of women reflected in Esther's story compare with how women are viewed throughout the world today? What are women valued most for today, both in the secular culture and in either the Church or messianic synagogue? How did Esther embrace her culture's view of herself? How did it hurt her? What made this bold transformation in Esther so unlikely? What changed in her to make it possible?

REFLECT: How does Esther's story show us that God values and works through us to advance His kingdom today? How is she a role model for us? Can you think of a defining moment in your life based on your identification with God's people? Can you imagine a crisis in which you would go against the law, as Esther did, to find a solution? Can you say by faith, as Esther did: **If I perish, I perish.**

These verses present three stages of a conversation between **Esther** and **Mordecai** although **they** never spoke face to face. First, **Esther** simply sent **clothes** to **Mordecai** (4:4-5), but he would not accept them. In the second exchange, **Esther** sent **Hathak** to find out why **Mordecai** was grieving, who sent back a **copy** of the Jewish death sentence (4:6-8). Their third dialogue was a longer discussion that explains **Esther's** understanding that to approach **the king** would take planning for the urgency of **her** daring decision.

Although seemingly separated from direct contact with **Mordecai** during the five years of her marriage to **King Ahasuerus**, **Esther** still loved her **uncle** as the one who raised her. When her **eunuchs** and **female attendants** came and told her about **Mordecai**, she was in **great distress** because he was wearing **sackcloth**. Those who waited on **the queen** knew of her affection for **Mordecai**, but didn't know **they** were related. **Esther** was cut off from news outside the palace and did not know about **Haman's** plan of genocide against her people. So misunderstanding why **Mordecai** was in **sackcloth**, she sent him **clothes** to wear. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his **sackcloth**, but he would not accept them (4:4).

Esther dispatched a messenger to find out what was wrong. She could not go herself because her Jewish identity was still a secret. Then **Esther** summoned **Hathak**, one of the king's **eunuchs** assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling **Mordecai** and why (4:5). The name **Hathak** may come from the **Persian** *hataka*, which means *good*. If so, this man lived up to his name. **Ahasuerus** had apparently been careful to choose a man of integrity to wait on his **queen**, and had been willing to release him from his own service to hers.⁵⁸

There was nothing private about **their** meeting. So **Hathak** went out to **Mordecai** in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate where everyone gathered (4:6). **In Oriental cities this open square was used as a market place.** There **Mordecai** told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money **Haman** had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews (4:7). Evidently copies of the edict were posted on the city wall for all to see. A copy delivered to **Esther** herself would reveal the grim reality of what was ahead for all **Jews** in **Persia** - including her.

The messenger, therefore, returned with double bad news. First, He gave him a copy (the word *patshegn*, which is a **Persian** word for a *copy of the writings*, is found only in **Esther 3:14, 4:8, 8:13** and nowhere else in the **TaNaKh**) of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in **Susa**, to show to **Esther** and explain it to her (4:8a). And secondly, he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people (4:8b). **Mordecai had summed up the situation quickly. Action had to be taken immediately if the Jews were to be saved, and there were only two people in a position to help the threatened community: Esther as queen, and he himself as the queen's cousin. He recognized the responsibility for his people that his special position placed upon him, and his first duty was to rouse Esther to an equal sense of her responsibility.** It was the time for her to reveal her Jewishness.

Hathak went back and reported to **Esther** what **Mordecai** had said (4:9). Suddenly **Esther's** ability to keep everyone happy wasn't working. **She** could no longer rely on **her** ability to please. **The king** and **Mordecai**, the two most important **men** in **her** life, were sure to butt heads. **She** couldn't obey **them** both. Furthermore, instead of having someone to think for **her** and to take care of **her**, **Esther** needed to think and take care of **herself**. Not only that, multiple thousands of **her** people would die if **she** failed to act. Suddenly a voiceless **Esther** needed to find **her** own voice and speak out for **her** people, and all within a political system that mandated **her** silence. This **young woman** who never had to think for **herself**, take a stand, or fight a battle needed to stand up to the most powerful **man** on the earth, a **man** whose strongest political enemies trembled in **his** presence. And **Esther** knew all too well what **he** was capable of doing. **She** hadn't forgotten what happened to the last woman who crossed **him**. **She** had **Mordecai's** undying support - along with all **her** people. But the fact remained: **Esther** had to act alone.⁵⁹

Then she instructed him to say to **Mordecai**, "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives (4:10-11a). The etiquette of the **Persian** court was very strict. Except for the seven eunuch's, no one

could approach **the king** unless introduced by a court usher. Like all heads of state, **Ahasuerus** needed to be protected from assassination and the aggravation of a kingdom full of **people's** problems (see **Exodus 18:15-16**). He did give audiences at **his** own discretion and personal invitation, but even **his** wife had no right to approach; however, the law had been passed with unlawful intruders not lawful wives in mind.⁶⁰ To come into **the king's** presence without being summoned was a capital offense, and the offender would be immediately executed by **the king's** attendants unless **the king**, by extending **his** golden **scepter**, showed **his** approval of the act.

Initially, **she** tried to dodge the unwelcomed responsibility, reminding **Mordecai**, "**But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king**" (4:11b). Haman had access to **the king**, but **Esther** did not. Apparently **she** did not expect to see **Ahasuerus** any time soon. **She** didn't request an audience, possibly thinking it would take too long. This is but one example of how dysfunctional life had become in the palace at **Susa**.

When **Esther's** words were reported to **Mordecai** (4:12), he was noticeably unmoved by **her** predicament. In light of the looming holocaust, **her** excuses meant nothing to **him**. He warned **her** that **she** could not hide. The message **he** sent back to **her** must have sent chills up **her** spine: **Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape** (4:13a). **Mordecai** gets right to the point when **he** tells **the queen** that even if **she** should decide to continue to hide **her** Jewish identity, as **he** had previously advised, **she** would still face certain **death**.

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place (4:13b). Some have seen in the phrase, from another place, an implied reference to ADONAI because in rabbinical Hebrew, God is sometimes referred to as "the Place" where all creation exists (see *Genesis Rabba* 68). **Mordecai** did not say that help for **the Jews** would come from "the Place," but merely from another place. Though **Mordecai** is not pictured as a pious man who was righteous in **his** dealings before God, **he** at least had a sense of the covenantal relationship between the LORD and **Isra'el**. **His** is expressing **his** confidence that **the Jews** will not face annihilation, but will be helped through some other human agent. **Mordecai's** thinking was that while **Esther's** life may be in jeopardy if **she** goes before **the king** uninvited, **her** fate is *certain* if **she** does not.⁶¹

But you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this (4:14)? **Providence!** Without precisely telling us how **he** came to the conclusion, **Mordecai** reveals that **he** believes in God and His guidance in individual lives. **Esther's** cousin implies the LORD's ordering of world events, whether the rulers of the world want to acknowledge it or not. This was, of course, faithfully affirmed by the prophets of ADONAI (**Isa 10:8, 45:1; Jer 1:15; Eze 7:24**).

Everything the situation demanded went against the grain of **her** upbringing, **her** conditioning as a woman, **her** well-established habits, and **her** natural preferences. **Mordecai** was calling **Esther** to break **Persian law** and risk **her** life. **Her** first battle, then, even tougher than facing **Ahasuerus**, was to face and overcome **herself**.

Once **Esther** grasped the urgency of **her** calling, **she** commanded **Mordecai**, "**Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me (4:15a)**". Nothing is said about **Esther** praying, although prayer always accompanied fasting in the TaNaKh. Today many **Jews** observe what is called **the Fast of Esther**, which is based on this verse (see **Bw - The Fast of Esther**). **She** continued: **Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. Fasting** was usually for one day only. It was mandated on the Day of Atonement (**Leviticus 16:29-31**), but other than that was voluntary for a specific event (**First Samuel 14:24; Second Samuel 1:12**). **For three days** meant until **the third day** when **she** planned to appear before **the king**. This **fast** pointed to the seriousness of the situation and **her** need for spiritual strength.

My attendants and I will fast as you do (4:15b-16a). **Her** first action was loaded with significance, if we are not careful, it slips right past us. There is a transformation taking place in **Esther**. **She** is growing right before our eyes. **Her** response shows us that **she** has not merely been intimidated into submission by **Mordecai's** authority, for it is not one of resigned acceptance but one of firm conviction. This was the crucial turning point in **Esther's** development. Up till now, though **queen**, **she** was nevertheless completely under **Mordecai's** authority and care. Now **she** is the one who sets the conditions and gives the orders.⁶² Therefore, it marks a major shift in **her** relationship with **Mordecai**.

Esther's reply is also a confession of faith, although it was not stated in overtly religious language. **When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law (see Ac - The Book of Esther From a Jewish Perspective: King Ahasuerus)**. **And if I perish, I perish (4:16b)**. Just because **Esther** was providentially brought to **her** influential position did not mean that life would be easy or that **God** would not test **her** faith (**James 1:3** and **First Peter 1:7**).

Thus, it changed **her** relationship with **Mordecai**, who **went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions (4:17)**. When **Mordecai** obeyed **Esther**, our image of the central character in the book changes, and **she** becomes the initiator of events. The transition is marked by **the king's** rewarding, not punishing, **her** crime in **5:1-5**.

The defining moment in **Esther's** life was brought to a head by circumstances beyond **her** control. It seemed that **she** was caught between the Gentile world in which **she** lived and the Jewish world in which **she** was raised. That is, between the world and **her** faith. But we need to understand that **her** dilemma is our dilemma. Circumstances hem us in and demand that we commit ourselves to act with courage and exercise faith. Regardless of the situation you are in, choose God. Be on His side because His purposes are far greater than yours. **And who knows?** Perhaps **you have come to your** present situation **for such a time as this!**