

Esther Goes Before the King

Esther 5

Esther 5:1-8 - *“Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, across from the king’s house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. ² So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter.³ And the king said to her, “What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!” ⁴ So Esther answered, “If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.” ⁵ Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said.” So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.⁶ At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, “What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!” ⁷ Then Esther answered and said, “My petition and request is this: ⁸ If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.”*

Background Notes

At the end of Esther 4, at the risk of her own life, Esther accepted Mordecai’s challenge. She would go in before King Xerxes and expose wicked Haman and his evil plans to do away with the Jewish people.

After three days of fasting (and we assume praying as well), Esther approached the throne room with the attitude, *“If I perish, I perish.”* Esther feared for her life, even though she was the queen, because Xerxes was a very short-tempered man. History supports the fact that Xerxes could fly off the handle at any time, and exhibit bizarre behavior. And of course Esther remembered what happened to Queen Vashti.

Herodotus was a 5th century BC Greek historian, and he recorded his accounts of Xerxes autocratic and atrocious behavior. In one of Xerxes’ wars against Greece, a man whose five sons were in the Persian army came to Xerxes and requested that his oldest son might remain at home where he was needed, because his other four sons were serving in Xerxes’ army. Herodotus records Xerxes’ response: “But Xerxes was greatly angered and replied to him ‘Thou wretch, darest thou speak to me of thy son when I am myself on the march against Greece with sons of brothers and kinsfolk and friends?’ Having thus spoken, forthwith he commanded those to which such tasks were assigned to seek out the eldest of the sons of Pittheus, and having cut his body asunder to place the two halves, one on the right, the other on the left of the great road so that the army might march out between them.”

On another occasion, when Xerxes' engineers were constructing a bridge across the waters of the Hellespont (the Dardanelles today), a storm came up and destroyed the bridge. Xerxes was so furious with the water's behavior that he actually ordered that the waters be chained and scourged! Herodotus wrote: "So when Xerxes heard of it he was full of wrath, and straightway gave orders that the Hellespont should receive three hundred lashes, and that a pair of fetters should be cast into it. Nay, I have even heard it said that he bade the branders take their irons and therewith brand the Hellespont! It is certain that he commanded those who scourged the waters to utter, as they lashed them, these barbarian and wicked words: 'Thou bitter water, thy lord lays on thee this punishment because thou hast wronged him without a cause, having suffered no evil at his hands. Verily King Xerxes will cross thee, whether thou wilt or no. Well dost thou deserve that no man should honor thee with sacrifice; for thou art of a truth a treacherous and unsavory river.' While the sea was thus punished by his orders, he likewise commanded that the overseers of the work should lose their heads."

That was typical of Xerxes' bizarre and irrational behavior, as recorded by Herodotus. King Xerxes was not "Mr. Nice Guy," and we can see why Esther was hoping that Xerxes would be in the right mood and in the right frame of mind, and would hold out his golden scepter to her when she entered the throne room.

Doctrinal Points

1. The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord.

This is actually a text of scripture, from Proverbs 21:1 - *"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. Like the rivers of water He turns it wherever He wishes."* We certainly see the truth of this Scripture in Esther 5. When Esther entered the throne room, the king was not just in a good mood – he was in a *very* good mood! He not only held out the golden scepter to Esther, but he also said, *"What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!"*

When the king agreed to come with Haman to Esther's banquets, once again God was working behind the scenes to accomplish His purpose. Remember, the name of God does not appear in the book of Esther, but the hand and work of God is visible in every chapter!

"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord." Is this as true today as it was in the time of Esther? Yes! 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says, *"I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."*

Can we actually pray for unbelieving rulers and government officials to make right and good decisions? Yes, we certainly can! Xerxes was an unbeliever - he was a pagan king. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord.

You, or someone you know, may be facing what seems to be an impossible legal or business situation right now – closed doors, government red tape, unfriendly courts, overwhelming costs, rubber stamps which only say “Denied”. What should you do? Pray - and trust! Remember that the heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord.

2. The path of the wicked is in the plan of the Lord.

Esther 5:9-14 - “So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. ¹⁰ Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. ¹¹ Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king.

¹² Moreover Haman said, “Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. ¹³ Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” ¹⁴ Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet.” And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.”

Why did Esther delay her exposure of Haman, and propose a second banquet? Did she lose her courage? Did she sense that the king was not in the right mood? We don’t know the answer from Esther’s perspective, but we can see the answer from God’s perspective.

Before Haman was exposed, the events from the end of chapter 5 and chapter 6 had yet to take place, as part of God’s plan. The gallows that Haman constructed for Mordecai’s death would be used for Haman instead. God’s plan to humble Haman still had to be accomplished (chapter 6). Little did Haman know that he was setting himself up for a big fall! Listen to his pride: *“Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king. ¹² Moreover Haman said, “Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king” (v11-12).*

Haman was probably puffing on an expensive cigar at this point, with all this talk of how great he was, and how rich he was, and how he was the king’s favorite, etc. Haman was unaware that God had already declared his fate in one of King Solomon’s proverbs: *“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall”(Proverbs 16:18).* The path of the wicked is in the plan of the Lord.

In our study of Esther 3 we mentioned that Haman is a *type* - an illustration - of the future evil anti-Semite who will come in the last days, whose number is 666. With great cunning, this End-Time ruler will seek to exterminate the Jews, just as Haman did. But just as Mordecai and Esther and the rest of the Jews were driven to fast and pray because of the threat,

so during the coming Tribulation period of the End Times many Jews will look to their only source of hope. They will look to the Lord and acknowledge Jesus as the true Messiah, the Messiah whom they once rejected.

And then, as in the book of Esther, God will accomplish a great deliverance of the Jewish people! Nothing can stop or overthrow God's plan. The path of the wicked is in the plan of the Lord.

Practical Application

Remember - God has extended His golden scepter!

Esther risked her life to go before the king. She wondered – would he extend his golden scepter to her?

What a contrast we have in our King, the King of the Universe! Through Jesus Christ, our gracious God has extended His golden scepter to us. Any person, at any time, can humbly approach God and touch His golden scepter. In fact, believers are encouraged to enter the inner sanctum of God's presence **with confidence!** *"Therefore brethren having boldness to enter the holiness by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:19 & 22).*

What a contrast to the unreliable moods and the uncertain scepter of King Xerxes! We don't have to wonder if our King will accept us! We are part of God's family through Jesus Christ, and He wants us to come into His presence and "touch His scepter" at any time! Remember - God has extended His golden scepter to us!