

## Heroes of the Faith: Esther

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*"... If I perish, I perish ..."*

Imagine ascending to the height of royalty and its attendant regalia, only to be thoroughly frightened for the lives of your people . . . as well as your own! This was the plight of Queen Esther (or Hadassah, her Hebrew name). At a time when she would have preferred basking in the limelight of prestige and power, she faced a crucial, life-altering decision.

### **History: Esther's "Everyday" Life (Esther 1:1-2:18)**

Esther ("star") was an orphaned Hebrew young lady, part of the sweeping majority of "post-exilic" Jews who chose to remain in Persia, rather than return to Palestine (approximately 483-473 BC). Her avuncular older cousin, Mordecai, was also her adoptive father. As a result of some elaborate escapades by King Ahasuerus (or the Greek name "Xerxes") which failed, Queen Vashti was to be deposed, and the hunt for a replacement was initiated--an ancient beauty contest, if you will. Remarkably, Esther was chosen over a large number of other candidates. Yet she never revealed her Hebrew lineage until it was absolutely necessary. In the midst of Esther's early days as queen, a nefarious individual named Haman arrived, and began scheming his way up the royal ladder. He eventually became the King's right hand man, much like today's prime minister. Haman's overall quest, however, was much more sinister, and, if successful, would lead to calamitous consequences for Esther and her people.

### **Heritage: Esther's Earthly Labors (Esther 3:1-6:14)**

Haman was plotting to advance the cause of his own people, the Agagites, but in so doing would eradicate his enemies--the Jews! Mordecai learned of this ominous plan, and warned Esther of the devastating dangers involved. At first Esther hesitated, but finally relented, realizing the grave scenario. But to overturn Haman's genocidal edict of annihilation (which the King benignly approved), Esther would need to plead the King's mercy to invalidate the official decree. Mordecai assured her that she had no choice--"Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:14). Esther agreed, and declared her intentions--". . . if I perish, I perish" (4:16).

### **Horizons: Esther's Enduring Legacy (Esther 7:1-10:3)**

After fasting, Esther hosts a banquet for Ahasuerus and Haman. Her bold approach to the King results in exposing Haman's diabolical intentions. Haman is hanged, the edict is expunged, and the Jews celebrate by instituting Purim, a festival (still observed today) commemorating escape from extermination. Esther's legacy is her intrepid nature modeled in facing the giants of her time--against all odds. One lesson from Esther is this--placing our trust in Almighty God, and recognizing that battles may be lost, but our God reigns! Are you able to declare, "If I perish, I perish"? As we face the Goliaths of corruption taking hold of the culture and the government, can we make Esther's words our words?

### **Recommended Reading For Further Focus:**

John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (Crossway, 2003)

David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Multnomah, 2004)

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