

Why Believers Should Join the Jewish People This Month in Celebrating Esther's Courage

This month, the Jewish world is celebrating a story in the Bible that relays how they were saved from annihilation. It's a story most Christians are familiar with but probably do not celebrate it as we should.

The Story of Esther

The story happens during the reign of the all-powerful king of Persia, Ahasuerus (Xerxes). He banishes his queen, Vashti, for failing to appear before him when asked and selects Esther, a beautiful Jewish maiden, to replace her. The king also promotes Haman, an Agagite (likely meaning an Amalekite, the archenemies of the Jews), to the highest position in his royal staff and commands everyone to bow down to him and pay him homage.

Esther's cousin and adoptive father, Mordecai, refuses to bow down—so Haman plots Mordecai's death and the extermination of *all* the Jews. Mordecai calls on Queen Esther to save her people (Esth. 4:8), saying those infamous words: "Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esth. 4:14, NKJV).

Esther risks the king's wrath by boldly appearing before him. She invites the king and Haman to two banquets where she persuades the king to save her people: "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request" (Esth. 7:3). Then she reveals Haman's evil plot. The king has Haman hung on the gallows Haman had constructed for Mordecai (Esth. 8:11). But a royal decree can not be rescinded, so a second decree is issued, allowing the Jews to defend

themselves against any attackers. Hence, the Jews celebrate their survival each year in the festival of Purim.

The Significance of This Event

We love the story of Esther and quote Esther 4:14 “for such a time as this” to encourage ourselves and others that we too are called to God’s kingdom for this time in history and need to rise to the occasion, no matter what the challenge is. However, few of us understand the significance of what happened and the threat to the Jews of Persia in the story because we don’t know the context.

In the twenty-first century, we have almost 200 different countries in the world, so we read the story as a threat to Jews in a certain nation—for example, the Jews of France.

What we don’t understand is that the Persian Empire was the largest empire in history at its time and stretched all the way from India in the East to Ethiopia in the West. Therefore, the Jews of Persia made up almost all the Jews of the world.

If Haman had succeeded in annihilating the Jews of Persia, the Bible would have ended there. God’s promises to use the people of Israel to bless all the families of the world, and His promise to send them a Messiah, would have all died with them.

Without Esther, the New Testament story could not have taken place. Five hundred years later, there would have been no Jewish Joseph and Mary, 12 disciples, or the apostle Paul. Most importantly, Jesus would have never been born, much less die on the cross, for the salvation of the world.

This month, let’s join the Jewish people in celebrating the miracle wrought through the courage and intervention of Queen Esther. When you do, take a quick read through the book of her story, and you will better understand why she had to risk her life to save the Jewish people—and why God positioned her at just that place to be able to do so.

Then ask God why have you been born into the world at this time. His answer just might surprise you. {eoa}

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