

Esther – Purim’s Queen

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When we are asked to name the most important people in the Bible, Esther should make the top three. If not for Queen Esther’s devotion to God and her selflessness an entire race of people would have been eradicated.

Orphaned, and raised by a cousin named Mordecai, Esther’s family tree can be traced back to the Tribe of Judah. (This is something we see Mordecai ask her to keep a secret from King Xerxes to preserve her safety later.) After Queen Vashti at the time (King Xerxes’ wife preceding Esther) refused a dinner invitation from the King and was banned from the kingdom and stripped of her title to ensure that none of the other queens disobeyed their kings, King Xerxes decreed that all young virgins would be rounded up for his personal harem. Esther is regularly described as being beautiful or attractive and was chosen to be a part of the King’s harem – many accounts believe she was only 12-14 years old at the time.

During her year of ‘preparation’ (preparing her body with oils and fragrance), Esther found solace in a eunuch named Hegai who also found himself to have a sweetspot for Esther. Hegai would ensure that Esther received the best of everything so that when it came her turn to be presented to the King he was sure to select her a second time. (Esther 2:12-14) King Xerxes was so impressed with Esther’s beauty that he did choose her to be his queen. It was not long after Esther’s not-so-happy-coronation that Mordecai, still visiting his cousin to check on her safety often, would overhear two eunuchs discussing overthrowing the king. Mordecai reported the eunuchs and after an investigation, they were found to be guilty and hanged. This loyalty to the King would prove to be live saving later as Esther gave credit to Mordecai for reporting the attempt on the King’s life.

Some time later a man named Haman was appointed King Xerxes’ right-hand man. Haman was bowed down to and expected that everyone paid his new position the deference he believed it demanded. Haman felt that Mordecai did not show enough respect, and that act of defiance offended Haman enough to set Haman on a course for taking his anger out on every Jew in the kingdom. Haman convinced King Xerxes that because the Jewish people were scattered all over the kingdom and because they kept different laws than the king’s own that they should be decimated. The king ordered the annihilation of all Jewish people, in all his provinces, under the supervision of Haman; an official order went out to all local leaders to kill the Jews and rob them of their possessions on a particular day.

Mordecai was able to get a message to Esther to warn her know of the impending plan to eradicate all Jewish people in the kingdom; Esther quickly came up with a plan but asked that Mordecai and all Jews fast and pray for three days and three nights on her behalf. Esther herself, we read, takes off her royal clothes and covers her head in ash and dung to pray “My Lord, our King, you stand alone; help me who am alone, and have no helper but you; for my danger is in my hand.”

Finally, after three days Esther takes off her praying clothes, dresses in royal robes and scented perfumes, and “she invoked the aid of the all-seeing God and Savior”. Esther changes the King’s heart -- her request to save her people – and King Xerxes sees the error of his thinking. Queen Esther saves the entirety of the Jewish community in the kingdom.

In the official order that was sent out as a way to rescind the ‘kill order’ King Xerxes says this; “...he in his unbearable arrogance designed to deprive us of our kingdom, and to compass the death of our preserver and perpetual benefactor Mordecai, and of Esther, our blameless partner in the kingdom, together with their whole nation, demanding with intricate deceptions and intrigues that they be destroyed...but we find that the Jews, who were consigned to annihilation by this thrice sinful man, are no evil-doers but are governed by most just laws, and are sons of the Most High, Most Mighty Living God, who has directed the kingdom for us and for our forefathers with most excellent guidance.”

Without Esther, Israelites descended from those who were forced into exile after Nebuchadnezzar defeated Judah would have been exterminated by King Xerxes at the suggestion of Haman. Queen Esther, who did not ask to be a queen nor want it (“You know what I am forced to do – that I abhor the symbol of my proud position, which is placed upon my head on the days when I appear in public; I abhor it like a filthy rag, and never wear it in private.”), selflessly put herself in danger knowing she had God alone on her side to fight for her people. One of the Old Testament’s greatest heroes – is a woman.

Esther wasn’t always a queen. A series of unfortunate events led to Esther’s queenship; from being orphaned, being a stranger in a foreign land, being rounded up for the King’s harem to learning her forced-himself-upon-her-husband was plotting her murder - Queen Esther’s story is nothing if not a good underdog story.

For more Queen Esther you can look into the Jewish holiday Purim.