



Esther: Chapter 5



Perimeter
CHURCH

Discussion

At your table, have someone read Esther 5 aloud.

- On your own: Circle or underline anything that you think is significant. In the margin, note any questions that come to mind.
- As a table: Try to place yourself in the story as a follower of the Lord in Susa. What emotions would you be feeling in each section of the chapter?

The Context: Faith Among the Faithless



Esther 4:14-16

For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."

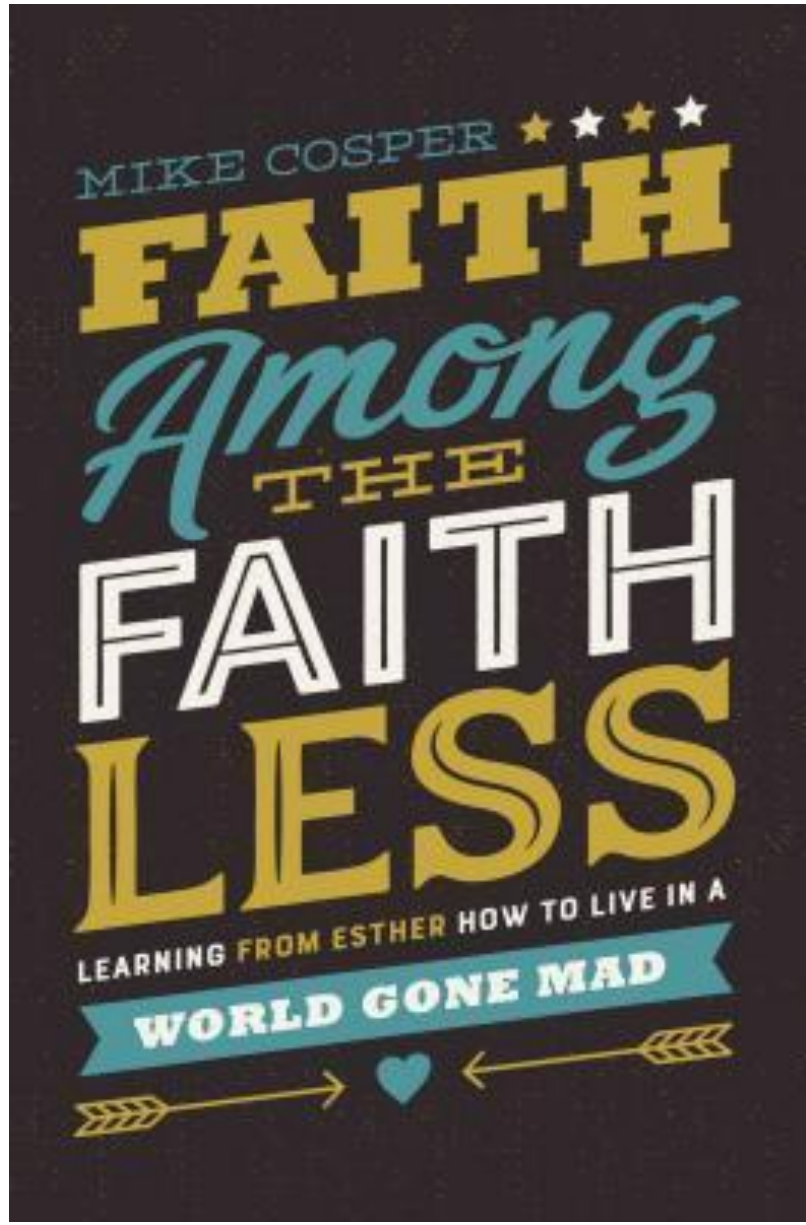
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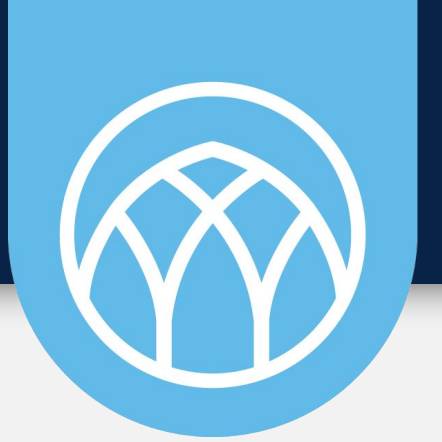
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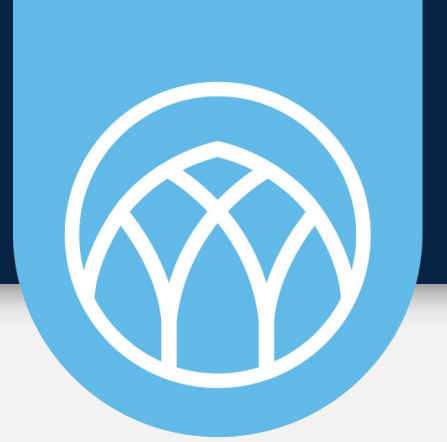
Ch 3: Mordecai's “Conversion”



“Mordecai passed for a Persian. He had nothing to gain from revealing his Jewishness and refusing to bow; he only had something to lose. And yet, for the sake of his soul, for the sake of God’s people, and for the good of the city, he refused to bow to Haman.”

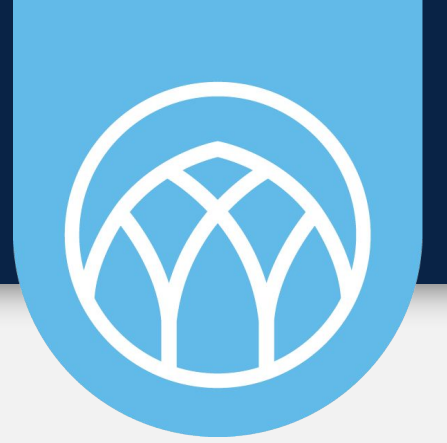
-Casper, Mike. Faith Among the Faithless: Learning from Esther How to Live in a World Gone Mad p. 88

Ch 4: Esther's "Conversion"



“She called for a fast—which is the only explicitly religious moment in the whole book—and committed herself to approaching the king. Rather than appealing to her own strength and wits, she threw herself on God’s mercy. “If I perish, I perish,” she said, knowing it is better to perish as one of God’s people than to live apart from them. This is not to be mistaken with passivity, of course. It was a path of action, of taking steps that were for the good of her people, even though they put her at great personal risk. Thus, she embraced her identity as the girl with two names. Esther the queen would come to the king as Hadassah, the Jew. We previously saw Mordecai refuse to bow to the idol of power.

Ch 4: Esther's "Conversion"



The threat Esther faced here was the same: a power that threatened her and wanted to bully her into silence. This power might also have tempted her to evade the crisis by virtue of her royalty. But in faith, like Mordecai, she chose a path that rejected power and embraced vulnerability. She put herself at risk for the good of the city, the good of God's people, and the good of her own soul."

-Cosper, Mike. Faith Among the Faithless: Learning from Esther How to Live in a World Gone Mad p. 118

Rising Tension: The Danger



1. Identifying with the People of God

Esther 3:13-14 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. 14 A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day.

2. Approaching the King

Ch 4: Esther's "Conversion"



“As soon as Esther identified herself to the king as a Jew, she came under Haman’s edict of death. The dark powers and principalities of this world are against the Christian church just as they were against Jesus and God’s covenant people before him. When a woman or man takes a stand with Jesus Christ, he or she becomes part of a people who are targeted in spiritual battle by those who want to destroy the work of Christ in history.”

-Karen H. Jobes, Esther, The NIV Application Commentary, 149.

Rising Tension: The Danger



1. Identifying with the People of God

2. Approaching the King

Esther 4:10-11

Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.”



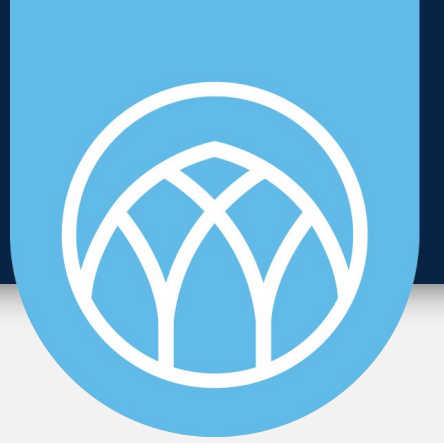
Assimilation



Hebrews 11:13-16

13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Assimilation



Esther's story is the story of a prodigal, far from home, assimilated into a world where she didn't belong, who had an awakening. Make no mistake, life among the pleasures of the palace is no different from life among the pigs—at least, not after you've awoken to the reality of the kingdom of God. Which, really, is what happened to Esther. She had the choice of being counted among the Persians or counted among the Jews, and once she remembered who she was, there was no turning back. As the psalmist says, "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10). Better to die as one of God's people than to live as the queen of Persia. If I perish, I perish.

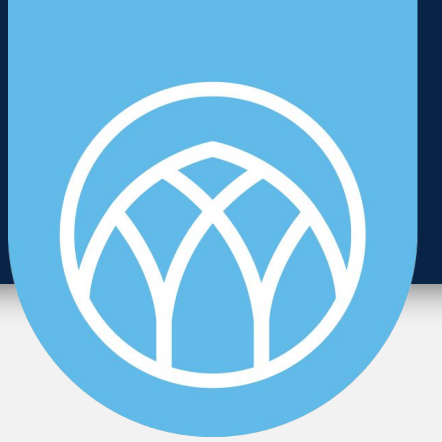
-Cosper, Mike. Faith Among the Faithless: Learning from Esther How to Live in a World Gone Mad (pp. 137-138)

Assimilation



In Esther's case, her life was a movement from compromise to conviction. She had the wealth, power, and beauty that many of us believe will make us happy. Her compromise was her means of accumulating power; likewise, we compromise our own convictions, desires, and preferences in exchange for something we want—power, prestige, cultural influence, or something else. To make the opposite choice, to sacrifice power for the sake of our convictions, is difficult and painful. But this is our holy invitation in a world gone mad.

Assimilation



Jesus said, “Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:38–39). It’s a choice between death and death—the soul-destroying death of numbness and self-interest, or the death to self that comes from giving our lives away to others. We follow Esther, and, moreover, we follow Jesus on a pathway that allows for real risk in our homes, our relationships, and in our cities, entering a world of death and decay and bringing, in our own deaths, flourishing and life.

-Casper, pp. 141-142

Personal Reflection

Where have I assimilated to a godless culture and let it define who I am and what I do more than God?



Esther gathered her closest allies and confessed her secret. She asked them to fast with her—to fast for her—as she prepared to risk her life and appear before the king. For three days, they fasted. Esther herself took no food or water. Her fears robbed her of sleep. She shrank in frame as hunger and dehydration set in. Her eyes hollowed; her skin paled; her posture sank from weakness and weariness. She embraced and embodied suffering. The third day came, and she steadied herself for the challenge ahead. Her chambermaids dressed her in her royal robes, somber, fearing that they may never see her again. She left her chambers and entered the palace, crossing a wide courtyard with cobbled steps. Banners waved above the palace towers and the king's gate. Guards and officials shuffled about, some startled at the sight of the weary queen.



Xerxes' throne room was a massive hall. At its entrance a curtain ran the full height of the chamber, with guards at either side and others standing nearby. Esther watched a eunuch exit the chamber, leaving for some official business. She approached the guards. "I need to see the king." "Have you been summoned?" Esther was silent. "You know the law." "I know the law." The guards looked at one another. They looked at the shrunken queen. One reached up and slid the curtain open, and the queen entered. At the far end of the throne room, the king's throne sat atop a pedestal, high above the advisors who gathered around him. Their chatter echoed dimly in the empty, enormous room. Torchlight animated the painted reliefs along the walls, so as Esther passed them, images of violence and power moved about her. It seemed as though the carvings noticed her before the officials did.



She neared the throne and the conversations ahead of her gradually died. She was met by stunned eyes, officials nearly recoiling in fear at the sight of the queen breaking the law of the land. She arrived at the edge of the pedestal, her eyes down. The king stared at her—her downcast eyes, her slumped shoulders, her frame sunken into her robe. When she looked up, she saw the king descending the stairs, extending his scepter—a sign that he was showing her mercy. His face wasn't angry, but saddened, even horrified, at the sight of his broken queen. She touched the end of the scepter and knew that her life had been spared. “What is it, my queen?” he said, taking her hand and leading her up the steps, where he then took his seat again on his throne. “Ask anything of me and I'll give it. Even half of my kingdom.”



“If it would please you, I want to prepare you a feast.” The king paused, curious. So dramatic a gesture for such a simple request. He sat back, cocked his head, trying to comprehend his broken queen. “Of course,” he said. “Anything you ask.” She bowed and turned to leave. Paused, turned back. “And bring Haman.” The king summoned Haman at once.

Mordecai vs Haman: Round 2

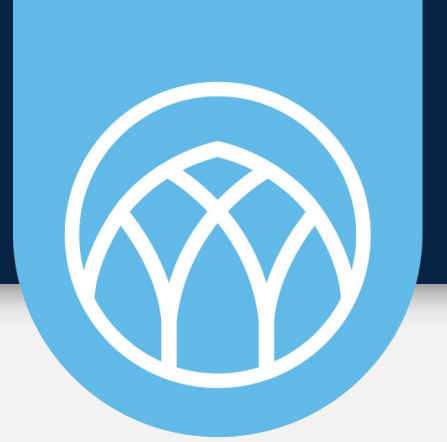


- 1. Evil**
- 2. Irony**

The irony of this scene builds on that of chapter 1. Haman's haste to elicit and follow the evil advice of his wife and friends (5:14) contrasts with the king's order that "every man should be ruler over his own household" (1:22). By commanding respect through the brute exercise of power, the king and Haman may be able to save face, but reality laughs behind their backs.

Karen H. Jobes, *Esther*, The NIV Application Commentary, 146.

Queen Esther



As the four major characters are introduced in the story, one would least expect Esther, the woman who hid her Jewish identity, to emerge as a respected leader among the Jewish people on whose authority Purim still stands...

The transformation of Esther's character from a person of "weak character" to one with "heroic moral stature and political skill" proceeds from that defining moment when she decides to identify herself with God's covenant. Esther is referred to by name thirty-seven times in the story. In only fourteen of those references she is "Queen Esther." All but one of those fourteen references to her as "Queen Esther" occurs after 5:1. Esther assumes the dignity and power of her royal position only after she claims her true identity as a woman of God.

-Karen H. Jobes, Esther, The NIV Application Commentary, 146.

Discussion

- Where do you see God in this chapter?
- What is your most significant takeaway from today?