

Survive or Thrive?
Counsel for Crisis from the Book of Esther



In the fairy tale *The Princess and the Pea* by Hans Christian Anderson, the royalty of the beautiful young princess was validated by her sensitivity to a tiny little pea that was hidden under 20 mattresses! In spite of many layers of padding the dear princess tossed and turned the night away in discomfort, waking up black and blue from the invasive nature of the little pea! Poor dear! The sensitive nature of this young princess is very much like the majority of Christians in America today. Unfortunately, I would often place myself into that category!

In contrast to this young pansy of a princess, we have recorded in Scripture the true story of another royal woman, Queen Esther. Unlike the princess in Anderson's fairy tale, Esther displayed her royal nature not through sensitivity, but through courage and durability. She was prepared and victorious in a time of crisis by living out simple biblical principles. The actions of Queen Esther and her wise cousin, Mordecai, allowed them not only to survive, but to thrive! From their actions, we as women can learn ten principles on how to prepare for times of crisis.

This lesson will start in Est 8:16, 17. It seems like a funny place to start a study of a biblical book; but by examining this verse first, it gives us motivation to overcome in times of crisis. In the great conflict that arose in the Kingdom of Persia, there was imminent threat to the survival of the Jews throughout the Kingdom. But God's Word assures us that, through the sovereign invisible hand of God, the Jews not only survived but many were added to their number by faith in the one true and living God of the Bible. For the Jews, there was more than survival—there was revival!

*“For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor.
And in each and every province, and in each and every city wherever
the king's commandment and his decree arrived,
there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday.
**And many among the peoples of the land became Jews,
for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.**”*

Est 8:16, 17 (emphasis added)

As we face probable crises in the days ahead, we tend to consider with very small vision, “My God, how will we survive?” Let’s remember that in times of crisis people’s hearts are more open to the truth of the Gospel; their souls reach out more readily for purpose in life and for the assurance of life after death. Historically, times of crisis are often times of great revival. Let’s not look to the future with apprehension for our survival, but with passion for revival.

In the Book of Esther, we find five main characters:

- 1. King Ahasuerus** (some Bibles use the Greek form of his name, Xerxes)
He is introduced to us in Esther 1 as the reigning King of Persia. The Book of Esther opens with the king throwing a 180-day banquet throughout the land in celebration of his great majesty, wealth, and power. At the end of these 180 days, he holds a seven-day banquet in Susa, the capital city of Persia. During this time, he asks Queen Vashti to come before his guests to display her beauty and grace. She refuses and the king is quickly advised to divorce her before all women in the Kingdom refuse their husbands’ requests!

The king’s advisors then suggest that beautiful young virgins from all over the Kingdom be brought into the palace for the king’s pleasure. From the many, one will be chosen to be the next queen of Persia. If I were to try and describe King Ahasuerus in one word, I would use the word “worldly.”

- 2. Mordecai**
Esther 2:5–7 introduces us to the man Mordecai. He is a Jew in the lineage of King Saul. He is living in exile in Persia. Mordecai is the older cousin of Esther, and when her mother and father perish, he takes the young girl into his home and into his heart to raise her as his own. Mordecai knows God and knows God’s Word. As the story of Esther unfolds, we find that Mordecai is wise and unwavering. His leadership and discernment are used by God to help change the course of history. To sum up the man Mordecai, I would use the word “truth.” He knows and stands on truth.

- 3. Queen Esther**
When we are first introduced to Esther, she is a Jewish orphan girl living in Susa. As mentioned above, she is being raised by Mordecai when the king calls for beautiful young virgins to be gathered into His Kingdom. Esther is beautiful of form and face and finds favor in the eyes of Hegai (Est 2:8, 9), in the eyes of all who see her (Est 2:15), and in the eyes of King Ahasuerus (Est 2:17). In the world today, beautiful women are a dime a dozen. Wherever we travel in the world, even in remote villages where women have no access to the cosmetics, hair, and beauty products that are so heavily used in Western culture, we find stunning young women. I think for Esther to have “*found favor*” (grace) in the eyes of all who saw her, there must have been something beneath the outward physical beauty—perhaps an inner beauty that permeated her soul and flowed from her

heart. Esther was also a woman of wisdom, for even after she left the home of Mordecai for the palace of the king, she respected and lived by his instruction.

Grace is beautiful, grace is lovely, but grace is also tough, sacrificial, and suffering. To sum up the character of Esther, I would use the word “grace”!

4. Haman

Esther 3 introduces us to the man Haman. He is promoted by the king to a place of honor and authority in Susa. Haman is an Agagite—the people that God commanded King Saul to utterly destroy, but in disobedience to God’s command he was allowed to survive. Haman loved attention, praise, and self-glory. Haman hated Jews.

Haman is the face of evil in the Book of Esther.

5. The One True and Living God of the Bible

One of the unique points about the Book of Esther is that in its entire ten chapters, the name of God is never mentioned. But throughout the book, we see His invisible hand moving in each and every situation to bring deliverance and protection to His people. His name is not in print, but His work is declared in every line, verse, and chapter. I would not even attempt to sum up God’s character in one word, but throughout the book of Esther we find Him to be sovereign over the affairs of man and faithful to His promises and people.

I would encourage you at this point to read the conflict contained within the Book of Esther. But for the sake of this study, I will give a quick summary of its events:

Chapter One. King Ahasuerus celebrates his wealth and majesty. Queen Vashti refuses his request and the king divorces her.

Chapter Two. Esther is taken into the king’s harem and is chosen to be his queen. She does not reveal her Jewish heritage according to Mordecai’s instructions. Mordecai overhears a plot to kill the king and alerts Queen Esther. She, in turn, informs the king and the men plotting the assassination are hanged.

Chapter Three. Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman. Haman convinces the king to agree to a persecution of the Jewish people.

Chapter Four. Esther, Mordecai, and the Jewish people grieve over the evil edict. Mordecai encourages Esther to go before the king to implore his favor and to plead for her people. She agrees, at risk of her own life, and asks for others to join her in fasting.

Chapter Five. Queen Esther invites King Ahasuerus and Haman to a banquet but still does not make her plea. Haman is puffed up over being included in the event. He goes home and builds a gallows on which to hang Mordecai.

Chapter Six. The king cannot sleep and so he reads the chronicles of his kingdom. He finds that nothing has been done to honor Mordecai for revealing the plot to kill the king. He instructs Haman to dress Mordecai in royal robes and lead him around the city on a royal steed saying, “*Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor*” (Est 6:11). This enrages Haman and even his wife predicts his demise.

Chapter Seven. The king and Haman come to Esther’s second banquet, and she reveals her Jewish origin and the evil plot to kill her people. She names Haman as the perpetrator of this plot. The king orders Haman to be hung on the gallows he built for Mordecai!

Chapter Eight. The king gives all that belonged to Haman to Esther. He puts Mordecai in the place of authority and honor that once belonged to Haman. A decree was sent out under the king’s authority that all Jews could defend themselves from attack. Upon seeing God’s hand in favor of the Jews, many people in the kingdom came to believe in the God of the Bible.

Chapter Nine. The Jews prevailed over their enemies and established the Feast of Purim, commemorating God’s deliverance of His people.

Chapter Ten. The king recorded these events in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia.

Ten Principles from the Book of Esther

1. Orient to God’s sovereignty in your life.

- What is a Jewish orphan girl doing in the palace of Persia? God orchestrated circumstances to put her there for “*such a time as this*” (Est 4:14).
- When you find yourself in a time of personal or national crisis, trust God’s sovereignty. He has you right where He wants you, for His purpose and for His glory in just such a time. Don’t fight it, embrace it! God’s plan is perfect (Rom 8:28).

2. Listen to your elders and forerunners in the faith.

- Even after Esther left the care of Mordecai, she continued to heed his wisdom and advice (Est 2:10, 20). As women, we are wise to heed the leadership of parents, husbands, and spiritual leaders in both the serene and severe days of our life.
- Look to the cloud of witnesses. Heb 12:1 speaks of running our race with endurance because of the cloud of witnesses that have gone before us. They are the great men and women of the Bible whose faith in times of crisis are recorded for our edification and encouragement. Study their stories and hide

them in your heart. In times of crisis, you will find courage from God's faithfulness to them. What God did for them, He can do for you!

- Read extra-biblical stories of men and women who have been faced with great crisis and endured. Familiarize yourself with the stories of persecuted Christians, suffering missionaries, and P.O.W's. You will gain insight for crisis by the lessons they have to share with you.

3. Develop good habits—especially obedience to God's Word.

- Because Esther was in the habit of obeying Mordecai's advice in times of peace, it was natural for her to do so in a time of crisis.
- We recently took some firearms training. The instructor was drilling us on good habits. He told a story of a police officer killed in the line of duty. The officer had been trained in practice to pick up his empty cartridges after he emptied his firearm. Because that is what he habitually did on the training field, that is what he naturally did on the killing field. He shot all his rounds at an assailant then reached down to pick up his empty cartridges before reloading his pistol. While picking up his empties, he was shot and killed.
- Every day is a training day! In times of crisis, we are most likely to do what comes natural to us. If we are in the habit of panicking at every little trial, we will panic in a time of crisis. If we are in the habit of praying, trusting, obeying, encouraging, etc., then these things will come naturally to us in times of trial.

4. Savor God's grace.

- Just as Esther "*found favor*" in the eyes of Hegai, the king, and all who saw her, we are objects of God's favor and grace by virtue of our birth into His family.
- Dwell on the grace that God has given to you in Christ. As believers, we are given all "*spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*" Jesus (Eph 1:3).
- Enjoy life! God's grace can be seen in the beauty of a flower, the joy of a child's face, the glory of a sunset. Take time for these things. Thank God for the ability to see, hear, and walk. Appreciate the loved ones you have around you. If you were to know that any or all of these blessings were to be lost to you tomorrow, how you would embrace them today? Any day could be the end of life, as we know it!

5. Do not compromise God's Word.

- When Haman commanded all in the kingdom to bow to him, Mordecai refused. His refusal was in keeping with the command given the Jews in 2Ki 17:35–36, where they are told only to bow to God. It was Mordecai's resistance that drove Haman to make his evil request to the king. Regardless of the circumstances, Mordecai refused to compromise God's Word. Store up God's Word in your heart so it is available to use in time of trouble.

- When the command of man violates the commands of God “*we must obey God rather than men*” (Act 5:29).

6. Grief is allowed.

- When the edict to slaughter the Jews was sent throughout the kingdom of Persia, there was a response of great grief from Mordecai, Esther, and the Jewish people (Est 4:1–4).
- Grief is a normal soul response to persecution, loss, and suffering. It shows that you care about life, righteousness, and the souls of people.
- Caution: don’t let grief paralyze you in the midst of crisis. As believers, we do not grieve like those that have no hope (1Th 4:13)!

7. Toughen up!

- Mordecai instructed Esther to go before the king with a request to spare the Jews. At first, she balked at the idea since going before the king without his invitation was a risk to her life. Mordecai replied by encouraging her to have the faith and courage to take action.
- In today’s vernacular, we could say, “Suck it up, princess!” When times get tough, we need to get tough with them. Practice now! Face your fears, enlarge your comfort zone, take the pea out from under 20 mattresses, and sleep on it! Practice overcoming, practice going without, practice endurance.
- Consider Pro 16:32, “He who rules his own spirit is greater than he who rules a city!”

8. Be the victor, not the victim!

- Esther could have very easily waited in her royal palace and done nothing—crippled by fear or apathy. She refused to be the victim and instead stepped up to the plate to be the victor, to do what she could to help deliver her people (Est 4:15–17, compare this with Dan 11:32b–33).
- In the dedication to Darlene Rose’s book, *Evidence Not Seen*, she speaks of an old Roman coin on which is pictured an ox—one of the servants of man. The ox is facing two things: a plough and an altar. The inscription on the coin reads, “*Ready for Either.*”
- In times of crisis, we must be “ready to serve” and “ready to die.” We must be willing to suffer loss even to the point of death, for the sake of God’s plan and God’s people. If we die, at least we will die trying, and enter eternity with all its glory!

9. Pray!

- After Esther decided to approach the king with a request on behalf of her people, she first dedicated herself to three days of fasting (Est 4:16). The verse doesn’t actually mention prayer, though in the Jewish practice of fasting, it

was for the purpose of humbling one's self before the Lord and dedicating time to prayer. I think we can safely assume that those three days were spent in fervent prayer to the Heavenly Father.

- In this passage, Esther also encourages us to use the buddy system in times of trial. God designs the Body of Christ to work as a team, each part supporting and working together with other parts. If one part is in need, all parts suffer. Esther did not try to go this alone, instead she requested her maidens and all the Jews to join her in humility, fasting, and prayer.
- Pray before and during trial to have the strength and wisdom to fulfill God's purpose. Pray for others who are going through trials in their lives. Pray for the persecuted church throughout the world.

10. Look to the victory and all its glory!

- The Book of Esther is a book of history. As we look at the conflict, we can also look at the victory that grace and truth won over evil. Through the faith, wisdom, and courage of Esther and Mordecai, the Jews prevailed; and Esther and Mordecai were promoted to places of greater authority and privilege within the Kingdom of Persia. On Earth, Esther wore a royal crown, but when we meet her in eternity she will be wearing an eternal crown that gives glory to her Mighty God!
- Our life is not yet a historical story, for as long as there is breath in our lungs, God is still writing the pages of our life. And though we don't know the tests and trials that await us, we do know the end of the story! We share eternally in the victory of Jesus Christ, and live forever to declare His glory! Therefore, in days of peace and in days of crisis, we must look to the crown to give us comfort and encouragement. There is reward for our service, our sacrifice, and our suffering when all is done in faith. (1Pe 2:20, 4:12-16; Heb 6:10-12, and many other passages!). It matters how we live!

How interesting that the Book of Esther opens with King Ahasuerus hosting a great big celebration to display his wealth and glory, but the book ends with the Jewish people celebrating the goodness of God. As we look at society around us, it appears for a short while that evil is thriving while the world parties on. But God has a way of sorting things out, and in the end grace and truth prevail and eternity is our celebration! Until that day, let's learn and apply the lessons from Esther's life and spiritually thrive to the glory of God!