

## Esther's Story

By Caleb Yoder

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I didn't quite know that this is how it would be. I am queen. The highest title a woman could have. I remember Mordecai's beaming face when we were told I was selected.

Mordecai is like a father to me. I was a baby when my real parents died, so Mordecai is the only parent I've ever known.

I am a Jew. We are a people without homeland, scattered across the Empire. We are misunderstood and discriminated against. Mordecai was fortunate. When the Persians took over the Babylonians, Mordecai managed to move his way up the imperial bureaucracy. We've lived in Susa ever since.

So even though I am Queen, I now realize, I'm basically a prisoner. I guess, if it's any consolation, my whole people are basically taken prisoner.

I was naïve when I went in with the other women to receive beauty treatments. I was too taken by the thrill of manicures, and soothing ointments, make-up, perfume, and styling my hair, that I didn't think about what I was signing up for.

I wasn't signing up for a high honor, like they said. I was signing my life away to an old man who was interested only in my body and virginity.

Most people would think great physical beauty is a true blessing. To me, it sometimes feels more like a curse. I've been reduced to my physical attractiveness. I don't get to live out my own life. How I long for a husband who could be a true companion, who could love me for who I really am, instead of being his trophy wife!

Of course, *that* kind of husband would be poor. In that life, I'd suffer hunger and work hard physical labor. My smooth skin would soon be roughened by a rough life, as I've seen happen to so many of my childhood playmates. I wouldn't be dining on this fine royal food.

But in what kind of marriage do you share your husband with hundreds of other women? Where you have no privacy or freedom? Or where you don't have a choice but to come when called, whether to a banquet or the bedroom. That's not a marriage.

(Sigh) It does no good to think about what my life might have been. My life is what it is. I'm part of Xerxes' harem -- what some would say is the greatest honor a woman could have.

Truth be told, what keeps me going is not the wealth, not the esteem of being part of the harem, not the celebrity status. What keeps me going is this inner voice in my heart that I am meant to be where I am "for such a time as this." That voice tells me I need courage.

I say this, because I learned through my attendants that the king has allowed a terrible decree allowing our people's enemies to take up arms and massacre our people. I was so distraught when I learned this, that I sent a message to my cousin Mordecai through one of the eunuchs.

Here in the palace, you feel cut off from the outside world.

Mordecai sent me a copy of the decree that gives our enemies permission to wipe us out. Mordecai wants me to show this to the king and plead for our people.

The problem is that I can't go in to the king unless I'm called. I will be put to death unless the king happens to extend his golden scepter out to me.

Why does life put you into such a bind sometimes? Do I dare go to the king without being called? My heart pounds, and fear lays on my chest like a heavy weight. Why me?