

Faith and the Promises of God

Purim Midrash

Esther 4:10-16 HCSB Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to tell Mordecai, (11) "All the royal officials and the people of the royal provinces know that one law applies to every man or woman who approaches the king in the inner courtyard and who has not been summoned--*the death penalty*. Only if the king extends the golden scepter will that person live. I have not been summoned to appear before the king for the last 30 days." (12) Esther's response was reported to Mordecai. (13) Mordecai told *the messenger* to reply to Esther, "Don't think that you will escape the fate of all the Jews because you are in the king's palace. (14) If you keep silent at this time, liberation and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's house will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this." (15) Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: (16) "Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, night and day. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king even if it is against the law. If I perish, I perish."

Spoke to Hathach (v.10). The fact that the conversation between Esther and Mordecai was mediated by Hathach reflects the prohibition against Mordecai's entering the royal citadel dressed in mourning clothes (v. 2) and Esther's isolation from her potential support system.

Have you ever been in difficult situations where you felt you were all alone, adrift from your normal support systems?

Consider the plight of the prophet Elijah:

- **1 Kings 19:10 HCSB** He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of Hosts, but the Israelites have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are looking for me to take my life."

I want you to note that Hathach was not likely a Jew. He was not immediately concerned about the situation. In fact, he probably had every reason to NOT associate himself with the looming pogrom. Yet, he chose to side with God's people and do something.

When you get into a difficult situation and feel isolated, don't be so quick to jump to the conclusion that your feelings reflect reality. It is very likely that God has someone around, someone you wouldn't normally expect, ready to offer help or to reconnect you with your lost support.

Remember Elijah's complaint? Well he said it twice:

- **1 Kings 19:14 HCSB** "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of Hosts," he replied, "but the Israelites have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they're looking for me to take my life."

God's response was telling:

- **1 Kings 19:15-18 HCSB** Then the LORD said to him, "Go and return by the way you came to the Wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive, you are to anoint Hazael as king over Aram. (16) You are to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. (17) Then Jehu will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Jehu. (18) But I will leave 7,000 in Israel--every knee that has not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Elijah was not alone. There were at least three other leaders and some 7,000 faithful people around that he was not aware of. Esther was not alone, she had Hathach. You will not be alone either, if only you will faithfully obey your God.

Death penalty (v.11). There is extra-biblical evidence to support this cultural aspect for Herodotus also mentioned this law. This situation gives us the opportunity to learn how to approach difficult or dangerous tasks. We must:

(1) *Calculate the cost.* Esther knew the stakes.

(2) *Set priorities.* The fate of God's Chosen People superseded her life.

(3) *Prepare.* In this case, the only thing she could do was fast and pray. There was only one Person who was more powerful than the man she was about to deal with – Yahweh Adonai himself. We should do what we can to accomplish the task as successfully and safely as possible.

(4) *Plan.* She developed a multi-stage plan for dealing with the problem. She didn't simply dive in and confront Haman. She developed the king's curiosity and built her own reputation with him first.

(5) *Advance boldly.* She didn't procrastinate. She knew it was a tough task and she knew the potential consequences but she didn't waver.

Don't think you will escape...because...in the king's palace (v. 13). She may have been queen but she had to realize that the previous queen had met with a terrible fate simply because she had failed to display herself upon the king's command. This is a very common mistake. If we fail to act when evil is perpetrated on others, it will sooner or later come to roost. England failed to act on Austria's behalf, and failed to act on Belgium's behalf, and soon found the Luftwaffe knocking at her own door.

If you keep silent (v.14). They could have both given in to their despair. They could have tried to escape. They could have adopted a "wait and see" attitude. Instead, they, like Nehemiah,¹ took personal responsibility for the welfare of our people. When there is something that we could do; even if the consequences are dire and the outlook bleak; we must act. God's people are not allowed to withdraw, act selfishly, or procrastinate when it comes to bringing about justice (Exodus 23:2; Proverbs 24:10-12).

- **Exodus 23:2 HCSB** "You must not follow a crowd in wrongdoing. Do not testify in a lawsuit and go along with a crowd to pervert *justice*."
- **Proverbs 24:10-12 HCSB** If you do nothing in a difficult time, your strength is limited. (11) Rescue those being taken off to death, and save those stumbling toward slaughter. (12) If you say, "But we didn't know about this," won't He who weighs hearts consider it? Won't He who protects your life know? Won't He repay a person according to his work?

As our Master was willing to lay down His life in order to bring justice about, so should we be willing to "take on the mindset of Christ."

Deliverance will come (v.14). Mordecai was confident that God would sovereignly save His people. They would be delivered even if Esther should fail. We must humbly remember that we are not essential; we are not crucial to Yahweh Adonai's plans. We must look for where God is acting and get on His side. We should regard it a privilege to be part of such a great work.

You and your father's house...destroyed (v.14). Esther was an orphan and she had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai. He was saying, "If you disobey God, there are likely going to be consequences for me too." We never sin alone. We always hurt others when we rebel against our rightful King. There is always collateral damage.²

¹ Nehemiah 1:3-4

² cp Matthew 26:24; Acts 2:23

For such a time as this (v.14). Like Joseph,³ each of us should look at calamities, less as a time to sit on the curb and wait for help, and more as an opportunity to get up, and go render help to others who are similarly afflicted. Just because something was even specifically motivated by evil intent does not mean that we have to roll over and allow that evil intent free reign in our lives. Joseph's brothers initially intended to kill him and only after persuasion relented to "just" sell him into slavery. Potiphar's wife intended him to be killed, for that was the usual way a slave who tried to rape his master's wife would have been treated. Yet, Joseph's humble and sweet attitude and his willingness to do his best no matter where God sent him, landed him the second most powerful position in the Middle East.

Similarly, Esther and our people were faced with evil intent but when she and others there (were apparently thousands fasting and praying for three days straight) were willing to do their part, we not only survived the situation, it got so that people were trying to become Jews because it was so advantageous! Mordecai's political position was improved and Esther's relationship with her husband was enhanced while Haman and his ten sons were hanged on the very gallows they had built for Mordecai.

As it is written:

- **Proverbs 26:27 HCSB** The one who digs a pit will fall into it, and whoever rolls a stone--it will come back on him.
- **Proverbs 28:10 HCSB** The one who leads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will inherit what is good.

Assemble all the Jews...and fast for me. Too many people tend to withdraw from the congregation of God when tough times come. They wallow in self-pity and use their difficulties as an opportunity to be mad at God. Dwelling on our sorrows can become a way of getting back at God. "See what you've done to me? See how badly you've hurt me?" It can be a form of rebellion.

When we face difficult times or particularly tough challenges, we need to turn to the talmidim. We need to combine our resources and support one another as fellow sheep amidst wolves. Alone we will be picked off (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

- **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 HCSB (9)** Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. **(10)** For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. **(11)** Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? **(12)** And if somebody overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

When united with the Am Hasefer and with their God, we can be irresistible (Matthew 16:18)!

- **Matthew 16:18 HCSB** And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it.**

Fast...don't eat or drink (v. 16). Though its mention is deliberately omitted here, opportunity for prayer is the principle point of fasting.⁴

I and my female servants. Normally these young women were used to eating choice food (Esther 2:9).

³ Genesis 45:5-7

⁴ Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9; Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 12:16; Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 9:1-3; Isaiah 58:3; Jeremiah 14:12; Joel 1:14; 2:12-17; John 3:6-9

- **Esther 2:9 HCSB** The young woman pleased him and gained his favor so that he accelerated the process of the beauty treatments and the special diet that she received. He assigned seven hand-picked female servants to her from the palace and transferred her and her servants to the harem's best quarters.

Now they all share in the fast. This also demonstrates Esther's fundamental character. Presumably, her servants were not Jewish; yet, they loved their mistress sufficiently to enter into this difficult task with her.

Often, we are able to portray certain character traits in public and yet fail miserably at home. This is not true character. A true test of one's character is that those who see us every day, in our most intimate moments, can also see the fruit of the Spirit. Character begins at home. If you want Hashem's help in your moment of crisis, you need to reliably demonstrate good character in every aspect of your life; not just in public; not just in church on Sundays.

Even if it is against the law. Generally, we must obey the laws of our host nation but if they are asking us to deny God or to act against God's moral laws then we must choose to obey the King of kings rather than our human ruler.⁵

In a similar vein, "*Ain shaliach' le-dvar aveierah.*" –Lit., "there is no messenger in a case of sin." Normally a messenger is not responsible for the content of the message he delivers; responsibility is borne by the one who sent it. However, if a messenger is sent to perform an evil act (a hired assassin, for example), he cannot defend himself with the claim that he was acting at someone else's command. The messenger bears responsibility for the evil he does.

If there is one thing that I know the Bible teaches it is personal responsibility. We cannot blame our parents for our misbehavior. We cannot blame society or poverty or lack of education or the government or the laws or our superiors. Each of us will stand alone before Yahweh, the Lord our Judge at either the Bimah seat (if we are God's children) or the Great White Throne (if we are not). Either way, it is appointed for people to die once – and after this, judgment.⁶

If I perish, I perish. As Jacob was willing to risk great loss for the sake of his tribe,⁷ and as Nehemiah was willing to risk life and limb to serve our people and rebuild Jerusalem,⁸ so we must not choose silence simply for the sake of self-preservation. We must be willing to identify with the Christ and with His causes. To fail in this is to be branded a coward and a wicked servant. We must identify with Christ or He will not identify with us. We must step up, bringing justice by just means or we will bring shame to His house.

If we show faith, God promises to show up.

⁵ Acts 5:29

⁶ Hebrews 9:27

⁷ Genesis 43:14

⁸ Nehemiah 1:11-2:3