

Heroism comes at a cost

Esther 4:13-16 HCSB 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."

Tomorrow evening, our family will celebrate Purim. As we'll see shortly, the festival was commanded by Mordecai and the people of Israel bound themselves and "all those who joined them" to an oath to observe Purim perpetually. "All those who joined them" that's us. We who are believers have been grafted onto God's People and so each of us must decide for his or her self whether to continue observing our brother Mordecai's famous party.

Purim is very festive; we're talking serious partying here. It's a happy time when we celebrate the deliverance of God's people from those who would harm them. With all the persecution against our extended family around the world, what better time to observe Purim?

Purim's four main mitzvot are:

1. giving mutual gifts of food and drink (9:22 *misloach' manot*),
2. giving charity to the poor (9:22 *mattanot la-evyonim*),
3. and a celebratory meal (9:22 *mishteh or se'udat Purim*);
4. public recitation of the story of Esther (9:23-26 *keriat ha-Megilla*),

Other customs include wearing of masks and costumes, and public celebration. While the Megilla (the story of Esther) is read, children (and the child-like) may hold noisemakers and make noise every time Haman's name is mentioned in order to blot out the name of evil.



During Purim it is traditional to serve triangular pastries, called Hamantashen ("Haman's pockets") in Yiddish and *Oznei Haman* ("Haman's ears") in modern Hebrew. A sweet cookie dough is rolled out, cut into circles, and traditionally filled with a sweet poppyseed filling, then wrapped up into a triangular shape with the filling either hidden or showing.

In view of the season I figured it would be a good time to go over the story of Esther with you. As we do, I would like to focus on one particular aspect with you. I would like for you to consider the cost that is concurrent to heroism.

First, let's get some background.

The party, refusal and divorce. (Esther 1:1-12)



- **Esther 1:1-12 HCSB** These events took place during the days of Ahasuerus, who ruled 127 provinces from India to Cush. (2) In those days King Ahasuerus reigned from his royal throne in the fortress at Susa. (3) He held a feast in the third year of his reign for all his officials and staff, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the

officials from the provinces. (4) He displayed the glorious wealth of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness for a total of 180 days. (5) At the end of this time, the king held a week-long banquet in the garden courtyard of the royal palace for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were present in the fortress of Susa. (6) White and violet linen hangings were fastened with fine white and purple linen cords to silver rods on marble columns. Gold and silver couches *were arranged* on a mosaic pavement of red feldspar, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones. (7) Beverages were served in an array of gold goblets, each with a different design. Royal wine flowed freely, according to the king's bounty (8) and no restraint was placed on the drinking. The king had ordered every wine steward in his household to serve as much as each person wanted. (9) Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women of King Ahasuerus' palace. (10) On the seventh day, when the king was feeling good from the wine, Ahasuerus commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who personally served him, (11) to bring Queen Vashti before him with her royal crown. *He wanted* to show off her beauty to the people and the officials, because she was very beautiful. (12) But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command that was delivered by his eunuchs. The king became furious and his anger burned within him.

The beauty pageant (Esther 2:2-8)



- **Esther 2:2-8 HCSB** The king's personal attendants suggested, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. (3) Let the king appoint commissioners in each province of his kingdom, so that they may assemble all the beautiful young virgins to the harem at the fortress of Susa. *Put them* under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women, and give them the required beauty treatments. (4) Then the young woman who pleases the king will reign in place of Vashti." This suggestion pleased the king, and he did accordingly. (5) A Jewish man was in the fortress of Susa named Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite. (6) He had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the other captives when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jeconiah of Judah into exile. (7) Mordecai was the legal guardian of his cousin Hadassah (that is, Esther), because she didn't have a father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was extremely good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter. (8) When the king's command and edict became public knowledge, many young women gathered at the fortress of Susa under Hegai's care. Esther was also taken to the palace and placed under the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.

Having established the critical historical context, let's examine the costs that came with the territory.

The Costs:

1. Mordechai lost his niece to the king.

2. Esther was made to live among heathen.

3. Esther was forced to keep her cultural heritage secret. (Esther 2:10)

- **Esther 2:10 HCSB** Esther did not reveal her ethnic background or her birthplace, because Mordecai had ordered her not to.

4. Esther lost a full year of her life to the treatments alone. (Esther 2:12)

- **Esther 2:12 HCSB** During the year before each young woman's turn to go to King Ahasuerus, the harem regulation required her to receive beauty treatments with oil of myrrh for six months and then with perfumes and cosmetics for *another* six months.
- 5. Esther was forced to try out to be the king's wife.** (Esther 2:13-14)
- **Esther 2:13-14 HCSB** When the young woman would go to the king, she was given whatever she requested to take with her from the harem to the palace. (14) She would go in the evening, and in the morning she would return to a second harem under the supervision of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She never went to the king again, unless he desired her and summoned her by name.
- 6. Mordechai's honor overrode his pride and he saved the king's life.** (Esther 2:21-23)
- **Esther 2:21-23 HCSB** During those days while Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two eunuchs who guarded the *king's* entrance, became infuriated and tried to assassinate King Ahasuerus. (22) When Mordecai learned of the plot, he reported it to Queen Esther, and she told the king on Mordecai's behalf. (23) When the report was investigated and verified, both men were hanged on the gallows. This event was recorded in the court records of daily events in the king's presence.
- 7. The Jews were forced to fight.** (Esther 9:3-6, 10-17)
- **Esther 9:3-6 HCSB** All the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and the royal civil administrators aided the Jews because they were afraid of Mordecai. (4) For Mordecai *exercised* great power in the palace, and his fame spread throughout the provinces as he became more and more powerful. (5) The Jews put all their enemies to the sword, killing and destroying them. They did what they pleased to those who hated them. (6) In the fortress of Susa the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men,
 - **Esther 9:10-17 HCSB** They killed these 10 sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. However, they did not seize any plunder. (11) On that day the number of people killed in the fortress of Susa was reported to the king. (12) The king said to Queen Esther, "In the fortress of Susa the Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men, including Haman's 10 sons. What have they done in the rest of the royal provinces? Whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you seek will also be done." (13) Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, may the Jews who are in Susa also have tomorrow to carry out today's law, and may *the bodies* of Haman's 10 sons be hung on the gallows." (14) The king gave the orders for this to be done, so a law was announced in Susa, and they hung *the bodies* of Haman's 10 sons. (15) The Jews in Susa assembled again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed 300 men in Susa, but they did not seize any plunder. (16) The rest of the Jews in the royal provinces assembled, defended themselves, and got rid of their enemies. They killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but they did not seize any plunder. (17) *They fought* on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar and rested on the fourteenth, and it became a day of feasting and rejoicing.
- 8. The Jews were feared by their neighbors thereafter.** (Esther 8:17)
- **Esther 8:17 HCSB** In every province and every city, wherever the king's command and his law reached, rejoicing and jubilation took place among the Jews. There was a celebration and a holiday. And, many of the ethnic groups of the land professed themselves to be Jews because fear of the Jews had overcome them.
- 9. Haman and his family were lost to sin.** (Esther 7:8-10; 8:7; 9:10, 13)
- **Esther 7:8-10 HCSB** Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the house of wine drinking, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Would he actually violate the queen while I am in the palace?" As soon as the statement left the king's mouth, Haman's face was covered. (9) Harbona, one of

the royal eunuchs, said: "There is a gallows 75 feet tall at Haman's house that he made for Mordecai, who gave the report that saved the king." The king commanded, "Hang him on it." (10) They hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's anger subsided.

- **Esther 8:7 HCSB** King Ahasuerus said to Esther the Queen and to Mordecai the Jew, "Look, I have given Haman's estate to Esther, and he was hanged on the gallows because he attacked the Jews.
- **Esther 9:10 HCSB** They killed these 10 sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. However, they did not seize any plunder.
- **Esther 9:13 HCSB** Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, may the Jews who are in Susa also have tomorrow to carry out today's law, and may the bodies of Haman's 10 sons be hung on the gallows."

The final cost is one borne by many people, including my own family.

10. The establishment of the observance of Purim. (Esther 9:23-28)

- **Esther 9:23-28 HCSB** So the Jews agreed to continue the practice they had begun, as Mordecai had written them to do. (24) For Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them. He cast the Pur (that is, the lot) to crush and destroy them. (25) But when the matter was brought before the king, he commanded by letter that the evil plan Haman had devised against the Jews return on his own head and that he should be hanged with his sons on the gallows. (26) For this reason these days are called Purim, from the word Pur. Because of all the instructions in this letter as well as what they had witnessed and what had happened to them, (27) the Jews bound themselves, their descendants, and all who joined with them *to a commitment* that they would not fail to celebrate these two days each and every year according to the written instructions and according to the time appointed. (28) These days are remembered and celebrated by every generation, family, province, and city, so that these days of Purim will not lose their significance in Jewish life and their memory will not fade from their descendants.

Conclusion

The initial cost of heroism is obvious to everyone. The soldier is wounded or killed in his efforts to defeat the enemy that would threaten his country. The fireman must face the danger and discomfort of the fire to save the lives of the people in the building. The doctors must accept the danger of infection and the exhaustion of long hours of mind-numbing, painful decisions as they perform triage. Those costs are obvious to us. But in order for there to be heroes there must be people who are also willing to remember them and to pass the story of their valor on to the next generation.

We are commanded to tell every generation about the Lord.

- **Psalms 22:30-31 HCSB** Descendants will serve Him; the next generation will be told about the Lord. 31 They will come and tell a people yet to be born about His righteousness--what He has done.
- **Job 8:8 HCSB** For ask the previous generation, and pay attention to what their fathers discovered,
- **Psalms 71:18 HCSB** Even when I am old and gray, God, do not abandon me. Then I will proclaim Your power to another generation, Your strength to all who are to come.
- **Psalms 145:4 HCSB** One generation will declare Your works to the next and will proclaim Your mighty acts.

Abraham was chosen because he would do this.

- Genesis 18:18-19 HCSB Abraham is to become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. 19 For I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how the LORD will fulfill to Abraham what He promised him."

David served his part in the grand scheme.

- Acts 13:36 HCSB For David, after serving his own generation in God's plan, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and decayed.

We are to celebrate another great hero – the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Matthew 28:18-20 HCSB Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

He set aside aspects of His divinity for us. He took on human flesh with all its weaknesses and diseases. He put up with humans questioning his every move even though He never did anything but serve them. He willingly went to the cross and died in our place.

What greater heroic act could there be?

- John 15:13 HCSB No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends.

I call on you to join me in ensuring that everyone know THAT story too. Let's make sure that we pass it on to the next generation.