THE STORY OF ESTHER

A WOMAN OF DESTINY

BY MARILYN HICKEY

The Story Of Esther: A Woman Of Destiny

Did you ever say to yourself, "I wish I could change the world, but what can I do? I'm only one person—what difference can I, alone, make?" You can make a tremendous difference in your family, neighborhood, city, or nation—simply by choosing to make a commitment to the Lord. God has made provision to help you stand alone in crises and arise victoriously. He can see you through hard times and bring the miraculous.

I once heard about a young man who decided to take a stand for God and change circumstances in his life. At the end of his sophomore year in high school, the young man boldly declared to his classmates that he was a born-again Christian. He wasn't interested in drugs or alcohol, and he told members of his football team that he wasn't interested in hearing any more dirty jokes or the latest gossip about any of the other students in the school.

After taking this bold stand, it appeared that the young man lost all his friends. Throughout his entire junior year none of the girls would date him, and the boys barely spoke to him. However, he didn't give in to his circumstances; rather, he continued to believe God to honor the commitment he had made. And God did honor the young man's commitment—by the time he graduated, over 80 percent of the students at his high school were born again. God made a provision for that young man to stand alone and arise victoriously! And God is no respecter of persons—He will make a provision for you to stand in faith and see victory in your situation too.

The Bible gives us an example of a young woman who literally changed her world by standing alone for God. From a natural standpoint Esther appeared to be an obscure Jewish maiden who lived quietly with her cousin Mordecai. Although Esther's life may have seemed insignificant and "ordinary" to some—in God's hands she became a woman of destiny. Today we serve the same mighty God, and He is still using so-called "ordinary" men and women to accomplish His divine purposes.

Penetrating Dark Times

Esther lived in an historically dark time. Following the Persian Empire's destruction of Babylon, many Jews had been displaced into Persia. The Persian king, Ahasuerus, ruled a kingdom of over 125 provinces, extending

from India to Ethiopia. He was extremely wealthy and very astute in worldly matters.

As a demonstration of his worldly wealth, Ahasuerus called all the leaders of his provinces together for a six-month party. Can you imagine holding a six-month smorgasbord? Talk about guests who made themselves at home! Ahasuerus hosted the drunken orgy of the century, after which he held a seven-day feast for everyone in the palace.

The palace was elaborately decorated with gold and silver. Even the wine was served in golden vessels, each differing from the next. It was one of the most elegant celebrations that the world has ever known.

But I wondered, "Why would King Ahasuerus go to all the trouble of holding a six-month feast and then hold another seven-day feast?" I discovered that he was preparing for war against Greece, and the manpower in his kingdom was essential for his military success. Ahasuerus had an ulterior motive for wining and dining all these men —he needed their military support!

It was not customary for men and women to mingle at feasts; therefore, Queen Vashti simultaneously hosted a special feast elsewhere in the palace for the women.

During the feast the king became drunk with wine and began to boast about the grand collection of objects that he had accumulated from throughout the world. It took several days for him to walk people through his palace to flaunt his great wealth. Then one of the guests mentioned that he would like to see the queen. The king bragged, "She's a real knock-out!" He sent word for Vashti to come naked into the court so that he could "show her off":

But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him (Esther 1:12). Vashti had the guts to say, "I am a human being, and I refuse to be exhibited like one of your golden vessels." Vashti was no "women's libber"; she simply exercised good taste.

Ahasuerus consulted his seven princely wise men about Vashti's behavior. One wise man, Memucan, was particularly upset with Vashti. My guess is that Memucan was henpecked at home. He probably thought, "This is a great opportunity to get back at my own wife!"

Memucan advised the king, "You had better handle this woman, because she's too gutsy. If you let her get away with this, all the women in the empire are going to rebel against their husbands. They won't cook meals, wash the clothes, or babysit the children! You have got to do something about her!"

Memucan then recommended that the king divorce Vashti:

... let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she (Esther 1:19). In a moment of anger King Ahasuerus took Memucan's advice and deposed

Vashti, but he soon realized that he had made a big mistake—because he truly loved her. Unfortunately, it was too late, because, in those days, the king's laws couldn't be retracted.

Four years passed, and King Ahasuerus was still depressed over losing Vashti. In an effort to cheer him, the king's servants suggested that he hold a beauty contest in which all the beautiful women in his empire could participate. The servants said, "Surely, there is a woman in your vast empire who could become a suitable queen." The king eagerly agreed to hold the contest. Esther was a young Jewish girl who lived near the palace. Evidently, her family had been killed during the first Babylonian invasion, and she had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai, who was raising her as his own daughter. Mordecai and Esther were both captured during the second Babylonian invasion and exiled to Persia. While in Persia, Mordecai changed Esther's name from *Hadasseh,* meaning "myrtle tree," to disguise her ancestry. She was given a new Persian name, *Esther,* meaning "star."

I think her new name, "Esther," really fit her. Like a star, Esther allowed the light of God to shine through her to penetrate a very dark generation. We live in dark times too. You may think that you are one small individual engulfed in a world full of degradation and sin, but remember, your light is always greater than darkness, and God is calling *you* to penetrate the darkness of *your* generation.

God's Portal for Failures

You might be thinking, "I have really blown it. I can never be a person

of destiny." But, believe me, you are not the first person in God's kingdom to "blow" a situation. Both Mordecai and Esther started as bad news. The prophet Jeremiah had instructed the Jews to return to Jerusalem after their 70-year captivity, but most refused. Cyrus, the first Persian king to rule over the Jews, had passed a decree stating that Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. But only 60,000 Jews had chosen to return; the rest, over 2 million Jews, including Esther and Mordecai, decided to remain in Persian territory. So Moredecai and Esther were defying God.

Besides that, Mordecai decided to enter Esther in the king's beauty contest, which wasn't a very holy thing to do. If she didn't win, she automatically would become a concubine to the king!

Mordecai was not a very spiritual man—he even stooped to deceit in his efforts to conceal Esther's Jewish heritage: "We'll call you 'Esther' because that is a Persian name, and no one will ever suspect that you are Jewish." In effect, Mordecai and Esther even denied that they belonged to God.

Do you ever try to conceal your Christian identity? Today many Christians live their day-to-day lives without even hinting that they know Jesus. Of course, they may act differently by not swearing or doing other ungodly things, but they rarely share their faith openly either. People of destiny cannot "hide their lights under a bushel"; rather, they must be bold!

For one full year, all the beauty contestants were groomed and trained in a manner appropriate for a queen. Today, many men would get upset and say, "I hate when my wife goes to the beauty shop for three hours!" But these Persian beauty treatments took a whole year!

At the end of the year, Esther was presented to the king, who **"... loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins;..."** (Esther 2:17). Esther delighted the king and she was chosen to be his queen. Remember, the king loved to eat, so he held a great feast in Esther's honor. Ahasuerus gave her many gifts, and for one year he cancelled all the taxes in his kingdom—just to celebrate the beautiful new wife he had chosen.

Do you think that God ordained this marriage? From our natural viewpoint, the union between a Jewess and a rich, materialistic, *heathen* king does not appear to be a match made in heaven. But remember, God is a God of "providence." What does that mean? In the Hebrew it literally means "God provides." God provided Esther with special access to an ungodly king so that

she could divert her generation from impending destruction. Likewise, each of us is given opportunities through God's providence to change our world for the better. The important thing is how we accept and use those opportunities.

God's providence is evident throughout the entire book of Esther; but I want to point out a very strange fact: His name is not mentioned even once! Although no one mentions God during this entire time period, He is present to move and guide the course of events that occur. Occasionally, it appears that God's people have forgotten Him, but He never forgets His people. He is still a God Who can provide needed help. He is always a God of providence.

Building for a Harvest

I have heard many young people say, "I am a good Christian person, but nobody invites me to go out. Yet I know unspiritual people who go out all the time. It looks like it doesn't pay to be a Christian." But hold on—payday is coming! It pays to serve the Lord and build for a harvest. If you sow to the flesh, you are going to reap death, but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap life. We see this principle of sowing and reaping applied in Mordecai's life.

One day Mordecai, who worked in the palace, overheard two of the king's chamberlains scheming to kill the king. Evil plots were nothing new in those days—nor in our day. Mordecai sent an urgent message to Esther, "Two men on Ahasuerus' cabinet are untrue and unfaithful to him. Somebody better tell the king right away, because they are planning to murder him!" Esther forwarded the message to the king, and the evil plot was squelched.

What was done to reward Mordecai? Initially, nothing. No one said, "Oh, Mordecai, you're such a hero!" Have you ever been an unheralded hero and thought, "It's not worth it!" Believe me, if you stay true to God, then His hand will be in your situation. Eventually, God rewards a hero's deed with a hero's pay: **"And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not"** (Galatians 6:9).

In time you will reap, if you don't give up! Say it out loud: "I am not going to faint. I will reap!"

In Esther 3:1, Ahasuerus promoted a very ungodly man—Haman—to the number-one position in the kingdom, and the law of sowing and reaping was set in motion once again. Haman, as the highest of the king's princes, was consumed with pride He loved his position in the Persian empire. Haman, however, was not a Persian, he was an Agagite (which means he was

of Amalekite descent). His position required everyone to bow down to him when he passed on the street. No one dared to defy Haman! But Mordecai refused to bow—he had become spiritually bold.

"Get with it, Mordecai," said another of the king's servants. "Bow down! Don't you know this is Haman, the number-one man to the king?"

But Mordecai stood firm, "No, I won't bow down. I am a Jew. I belong to God. I don't bow down to men, I only bow down to God."

I believe there comes a time in our lives when we have to choose whether we will yield to people or to God. At last, Mordecai took a firm stand for God—now watch God move on Mordecai's behalf!

Backsliders on the Rebound

You may be thinking, "Why should God help these Jews? They weren't serving Him!" God helped them because He loves His people. And even when they "blow it," if they will repent, He will intervene on their behalf and turn their adverse circumstances into blessings.

Haman was furious with Mordecai. Mordecai had suddenly come out of his quiet corner and had taken a daring stand against Haman. What a blow to Haman's ego! Although Haman was enraged, he was afraid to confront Mordecai directly. So Haman went to the king and asked, "You know that group of people called the Jews? Well, they are really a big problem to you and your empire. Now that you are preparing for war with the Greeks, you will need a lot of money. Just think— there are about two million Jews: if you have all of them killed, you could confiscate their property and add their wealth to yours. This would help you financially in that upcoming big battle!"

"Haman, do whatever you think would be best," replied the king. The king signed Haman's decree, which proclaimed that all the Jews were to be killed. The decree was translated into all languages of the provinces, and messengers went to the different areas to proclaim: "Kill all the Jews, both young and old, and take all their belongings!"

Now no one, except Mordecai, knew that Esther was a Jewess. Esther had never told anyone —just like the times when we hide the fact that we are Christians. Since she was secluded in the palace, she was in a real predicament and didn't even know it.

Remember, the law of the Persian king could not be altered once it was passed, and Esther was included in the death decree.

Satan and sin had declared a death decree against us too. Likewise, it was an unalterable law, because the wages of sin is death. But, God is a God of providence, and He will always provide a way for His people to escape sin and death.

When Mordecai heard the decree, he put on sackcloth and ashes and began to weep in front of the palace gate. Someone went to Esther and said, "Your cousin is outside crying. And he looks awful. He's wearing sackcloth and ashes!"

Esther did what many women do when they are frustrated—she went shopping! Esther bought Mordecai a brand-new suit and sent a messenger to tell him, "Take off your sackcloth and ashes, and put on this new outfit!" She probably thought that new clothes would help to cheer him up.

But Mordecai told the messenger, "Send the suit back to Esther and tell her, 'We are in a very serious time. The king has signed a decree to kill all the Jews. You may think that you will escape this purge because you are his queen. But, Esther, it is not going to happen that way!'"

God wants backsliders to rebound! He is not going to let us shirk our responsibility to tell others that we are Christians. We have to make a choice either for or against Him before He will come into our situations. Mordecai concluded by stating:

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14).

Out of the Woodwork

Some people say, "Why was I ever born? I am not important." But you were created for "such a time as this!" Although you may think that you cannot make a significant difference in the world around you, God has His hand upon you in a supernatural way. He wants to use you in His providence during this time on the earth.

Mordecai said, "Esther, if you don't act, God will simply get somebody else to do the job." So Esther came out of the woodwork and told Mordecai to gather together a group of Jews to fast with her for three days. Then she would go in to see the king:

... and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish (Esther 4:16).

The simple Jewish maiden Esther made the commitment to trust God and allow Him to use her in His divine plan to rescue the Jewish nation. God did not look at Esther in the natural realm and declare, "She has a beautiful face, so I can use her," or "Esther got straight 'A's' in high school, so she's smart enough to change the course of her nation." No, God only asks that our hearts be pure and that we be willing to follow His guidance. If we meet those requirements, our boundaries are limitless, and we can *expect* to perform tremendous feats in our world.

The Door of Favor

After the Jews had fasted and prayed, Esther went to see the king:

... when the King saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand .... Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom (Esther 5:2,3).

God again gave Esther favor with the king. Stand up for God, and He will stand up for you!

Esther thought it would be wise to butter him up a little bit before making her request, so she replied, "I just wanted to ask you and Haman to come to dinner."

At the dinner party the king was so enamored by Esther that he said to her again, "Ask whatever you like. I will give you up to half of my kingdom."

Esther replied that she would rather not answer him right away. However, she invited the king and Haman to come back again the next evening for another banquet.

Haman really thought he had it made now that he had been invited to two of the queen's dinner parties. Little did he know that the next party would be a "necktie" party, and he would be the guest of honor. Haman told his wife Zeresh, "I love my life, and I just love my job. The only flaw in my life is Mordecai, the man at the gate who won't bow to me."

Zeresh exclaimed, "I have an idea! Build a tall gallows and hang Mordecai from it. That will take care of him and any other rebellious man who won't do what he is told."

Haman leaped at his wife's suggestion. He wanted revenge so badly that he ordered his men to build a 104-foot gallows just to kill Mordecai. Now Jewish men were short—the name *Mordecai* even means "small." So why did Haman build such a tall gallows? He wanted to make a big example out of a small man! The future looked pretty bleak for Mordecai, but remember, God is a God of providence. Whenever His children call upon His name, He will move heaven and earth to protect them.

The Downfall of Pride

The Bible says that pride always precedes a fall. Haman was ensnared in a tremendous web of pride, and he was about to plunge into disaster. After Haman had the gallows built, King Ahasuerus had a sleepless night. Who do you think was keeping the king awake? God. He used a simple little thing like sleep to change the course of history.

After tossing and turning for awhile, the king finally gave into his insomnia and decided to get some work done. He asked his servants to read to him from the book which contained everyone's name who had blessed the king:

And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus (Esther 6:2).

The king said to his servants, "Mordecai saved my life. Has he ever been honored for his noble deed?" "No," was their simple reply. The next day the king decided to ask his number-one assistant, Haman, for advice: "What could I do to honor a man who has been especially good to me?" Thinking that he was the one to be honored, Haman replied:

Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour (Esther 6:8,9).

Haman pictured himself wearing the king's beautiful robes and parading through the streets on the king's white horse, while everyone—including Mordecai—bowed down to him.

Then Haman asked the king, "Who is to be honored?"

"The man who saved my life," stated the king, "Mordecai!"

Greatly disappointed, Haman rushed home to tell his wife and friends what had happened. Zeresh was troubled about the gallows that had been built. She asked her husband, "Wait a minute —is Mordecai a Jew?"

"Yes, that is why he refused to bow down before me," replied Haman.

Haman's wife and friends became frightened for him and said:

...If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him (Esther 6:13).

Infiltrating the Devil's Plans

No situation is impossible for God; He can interrupt the devil's plans and change a curse into a blessing. Watch how God reversed the devil's plot to annihilate the Jews.

At Esther's second banquet the king must have been on pins and needles wondering what Esther could possibly want. Finally, she made her request, "My people have been condemned to death, and I want them to be saved."

"What do you mean *your people?"* asked the king.

"I am a Jewess," stated Esther.

Realizing that he had signed his own wife's death warrant, the king became so upset that he went for a walk in the garden. Haman knew that he was in big trouble, so he ran over to the couch upon which Esther was reclining and began to beg for his life. Upon his return to the banquet room, the king saw Haman crawling all over Esther and yelled, "Will he also rape the queen in front of me in my own home?"

One would think that nothing more could go wrong for Haman, but, in reality, his trouble was just beginning. The king became even more incensed when he learned about the gallows that Haman had built to execute Mordecai. Not wanting such fine workmanship to go to waste, the king sentenced Haman to die on his own gallows.

In the meantime, the Jews were still sentenced to death. So Esther approached the king and pleaded with him on their behalf. The king soothed Esther's concern, "Don't worry, Esther, I will issue another decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves when the Persians attack." The new decree was issued just in time to save the Jews! Sometimes God may be "last

minute," but He is never "too late!"

What Is Your Destiny?

The book of Esther beautifully illustrates how God transforms seemingly "average" people into glorious vessels that He can use to penetrate dark and sinful times. What is your destiny? Have you sensed God's call to stand against the deplorable conditions that plague our society today? Divorce, pornography, abortion and child abuse, and other family tragedies have reached epidemic proportions.

But just as God enabled Esther to become a woman of destiny and thwart Haman's plot against the Jews, God will enable *you* to halt Satan's attempts to destroy your family and nation.

Ungodly forces are powerless against a believer who is standing on God's Word. By calling on God in the name of Jesus, and by standing on God's Word, you can become a person of destiny who opens the door for the mighty power of God to enter every situation. *Don't hesitate* to call on the name of Jesus and to stand on God's Word! Like Esther, you, too, can become a person of destiny who overcomes circumstances and changes the course of history.

What is Your Destiny?

Have you sensed God's call to stand against the deplorable conditions that plague our society today? We need only pick up any daily newspaper or listen to the news to learn that pornography, abortion, child abuse, and other family tragedies have reached epidemic proportions. But you may say, "I'm just an 'ordinary' person. What can I, alone, do?" In this dynamic teaching, Marilyn shows you how to become a person of destiny who opens the door for the mighty power of God to enter every situation.

The Old Testament gives us a beautiful example of one woman who changed the course of history. To many, Esther appeared to be an obscure Jewish maiden who lived quietly with her cousin Mordecai. Although Esther's life may have seemed insignificant and "ordinary" to some—in God's hands she became a woman of destiny whom God used to save the Jewish nation.

Today, we serve the same mighty God, and He is still using so-called "ordinary" men and women to accomplish his divine purposes. Through Jesus 9 Christ you can become a person of destiny—one § who overcomes circumstances—and, perhaps, 1 changes the course of history.

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