

# Approaching the Throne

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Famous trivia about the Bible includes the fact that, of the 66 books of the canonical library, just two do not bear any apparent mention of God: the Song of Songs, and the book of Esther. This makes sense for the Song, as we explain elsewhere, but any suggestion that Esther is godless, either the person or the book, is absolutely untrue. The name of God happens to be absent from the book, but godly characteristics, godly actions, and synergy with God’s plan are all abundantly present (Figure 1).

Compassion	Mordecai adopts Esther	2:7
Protection	Mordecai helps Esther hide her nationality	2:10
Courage	Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman	3:2
Empathy	Mordecai pleads for God’s people	4:14
Faith	Esther directs a fast for her protection [trust in God]	4:16
Sacrifice	Esther risks her life to save her people [messianic]	5:1
Empathy	Hang Haman on his own pole	7:3
Courage	Repeal law of Jewish genocide	8:3
Protection	Grant Purim; Jews can kill enemies	9:13
Compassion	Further days of Purim	9:22

**Figure 1. The Book of Esther as a chiasm, emphasising godly traits**

Interestingly, the godly traits are structured as a chiasm. Specifically, they are couplets of Compassion, Protection, Courage and Empathy; arranged symmetrically around the central elements of Faith and Sacrifice. The anti-symmetry comes from Mordecai evidencing the four traits in the first half and Esther evidencing them in the second half (with one exception). A chiasm is designed to display the central elements as the most important, so the figure shows that Esther’s faith in God and her courageous acts of sacrifice that prove her faith real are the primary elements of the whole story; and which identify her as the lead character: our Leading Lady.

God's people Israel also hold great importance in Esther's story, which is consistent with the other scriptures. Both Mordecai and Esther plead directly on behalf of the Jews, and Esther literally risks her life to save her fellow Israelis – not once but twice!<sup>1</sup>

## Josephus' testimony

There's independent evidence of the presence of God, and godly conduct, in Esther's story from the ancient historian Flavius Josephus. His commentary isn't part of the biblical canon, but it is widely accepted as reliable history. Josephus writes that God's name is on the lips of Esther and Mordecai, as we might expect; and also King Artaxerxes, and even Haman's wife Zeresh.

### **Mordecai:**

*[Mordecai] had him also tell [Esther], that she must not only provide for her own preservation, but for the common preservation of her nation. For that if she now neglected this opportunity, there would certainly arise help to them from God some other way...*

*Accordingly Mordecai did as Esther had enjoined him, and made the people fast, and he besought God, together with them, "Not to overlook his nation, particularly at this time, when it was going to be destroyed... For although it was not the nation that had at all offended, yet must they so ingloriously be slain; and that he was himself the occasion of the wrath of Haman: because, said he, I did not worship him; nor could I endure to pay that honour to him, which I used to pay to thee, O Lord."*

### **Esther:**

*Accordingly Esther made supplication to God, after the manner of her country; by casting her self down upon the earth, and putting on her mourning garments, and bidding farewell to meat and drink, and all delicacies for three days time; and she intreated God to have mercy upon her, and make her words appear persuasive to the King...*

### **Artaxerxes:**

*"And I give you in charge, that you publicly propose a copy of this epistle through all my Kingdom: that the Jews may be permitted peaceably to use their own laws; and that you assist them: that at the same season whereto their miserable estate did belong, they may defend themselves the very same day from unjust violence: the thirteenth day of the twelfth*

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<sup>1</sup> Esther 4:14, 7:13, 5:1, 8:3

*month, which is Adar. For God hath made that day a day of salvation, instead of a day of destruction to them.”*

**Zeresh:**

*And when [Mordecai and Haman] had gone round the city, Mordecai went in to the King. But Haman went home, out of shame; and informed his wife and friends with what had happened; and this with tears. Who said, that “he would never be able to be revenged on Mordecai; for that God was with him.”*

Why the name of God appears so readily in the secular history of Esther, yet is hidden from the biblical one, remains a mystery, at least to me; but the evidence of God and godliness in Esther’s story is evident nonetheless.

## Faith in action: Approaching the throne

The chiasmic centre of the book of Esther (Figure 1) is realized in the marriage of Esther’s faith and courageous action to risk her life to advocate for God’s people. She was required to place her life in jeopardy by approaching Artaxerxes’ throne and plead for Jewish relief from Haman’s planned genocide. She steeled herself for the sacrificial task with three days of fasting.

*“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” (Est 4:16)*

Esther overcame her very justifiable fear to approach the throne; so likewise we should take pause to consider the excellent encouragement she offers. There’s a massive contrast between the king she was forced to approach and the King we are invited to meet. Esther was a Queen, a fellow royal, and yet was forbidden from the king’s presence – on pain of death! By contrast, our King openly encourages us to approach him with confidence, not because of any worthiness on our part, but because of his empathy with our human condition.

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:15-16, also Eph 3:11-12)*

The two kings could not be more different. Without painting Artaxerxes unnecessarily harshly, he's evidently self-indulgent and prone to rage if he doesn't get what he wants. He is self-absorbed and easily distracted from the plights of others by any detail which might affect him. He is highly manipulable, which is especially dangerous when under the influence of wicked men, such as Haman. Lastly, he is insecure about his authority, which is why he banished Queen Vashti from the capital, in fear that otherwise it might provoke feminine independence in his realm, and threaten the fragile male authority.

Our King is the complete opposite. He is calm, humble, altruistic and God-like.

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. (Is 42:1-4).*

He is focused on God's will, not his own benefit, and always present for those who call on him. Jesus said to those who listened to him,

*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away. (Jn 6:35-37)*

He is unbiased and non-manipulable; he judges impartially and righteously. Nor does he rule in insecurity, or by lashing out in fear or rage, but rather with justice and mercy.

*A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. (Is 11:3-4)*

Thus, if Esther can summon the courage to approach an insecure, self-indulgent, egotistical king, whose instabilities might have precipitated her execution, how can we possibly be slow, or afraid, to approach so godly and caring a King as the One who saves us, and serves us, daily?

Esther's courage compels us to the Throne of Christ.