

Old Testament Characters 17
“Rising to the Occasion in Times of Crisis”
-ESTHER-
Esther 4:1-17; 5:1-3; 8:9-17

The exiles from Judah had spent nearly 70 years as captives of the Babylonians. After Babylon’s defeat by Persia and King Cyrus, he began to set those captives free. (2 Chron. 36:23) The first wave of Israelite exiles returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, the second under Ezra. A third would follow under Nehemiah. The story of Esther covers a 10 year period between the first wave led by Zerubbabel and second wave led by Ezra.

The Book of Esther begins with the Queen of King Ahasuerus—Vashti—snubbing the king's request to parade her beauty before his guests. This led to a divorce and her banishment from the palace. The king then started a process to pick a new queen, and in God’s providence, he eventually selected Esther. Her identity remains unknown to the king.

In chapter 3, a certain Haman becomes the Prime Minister to the King. He is an evil man and persuades the King to kill the Jewish people. In chapter 4, Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, informs her of this heinous plan. He urges her to *rise to the occasion* and use her position and influence to intervene for her people. How this all plays out is both fascinating and instructive. In it all we discover several truths that emboldened Esther, making her God’s instrument to save her nation. These truths can also encourage us to not be paralysed by fear in times of crisis but to *rise to the occasion* and move forward by faith.

What principles do we see in Esther that challenge us to rise to the occasion in times of crisis?

1. When you think things are out of control, they’re not.

- What did the circumstances look like to the Jews? Esther 4:1, 3.
- What enables us to rise to the occasion (to the challenge) in ‘impossible’ circumstances (compare Hebrews 11:27).

2. When your perspective is clouded, listen to words of wisdom.

- Reflect on Mordecai’s realistic words of wisdom in Esther 4:13-14. What was their effect on Esther?
- What can we learn from Proverbs 15:22-23 about seeking advice?

3. When a decision weighs on you, seek prayer support.

- Why did Esther not just call on the Jews to pray but also to fast? Esther 4:15-16
- Share an experience you have had with fasting and prayer.
- Do you have people who regularly support you in prayer?

4. When fear would paralyze, let God be God.

- How does Esther’s attitude in Esther 4:16b affect her actions (e.g., Esther 5:1-3)?
- How can a comparison of Esther 4:16b with Philippians 1:21 help us rise to the occasion even when fear would stop us?