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The Comfort of God's Providence

Esther 4

In 1940 C. S. Lewis penned the book *The Problem with Pain* which is a masterpiece when it comes to understanding why and how God uses pain in the life of the child of God. A lifetime later (two years before his death in 1963), he wrote the book, *A Grief Observed* which literally is that. The book was NOT written as a didactic treatment of what the Bible says about pain. RATHER, it invites the reader to observe Lewis' private life of thought and deliberation as he grieved the death of his wife, Joy.

The book contains raw, and to a degree, unfiltered emotion in which this man of God struggled

with God's goodness and will. For example, Lewis wrote:

When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be- or so it feels- welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become...' (Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 2015, pp. 5-6)

I will admit, such language from a man of God is shocking and somewhat disturbing. Could a genuine believer think such thoughts? Everything within us wants to say no, until you live long enough to have your dreams crushed, your expectations crossed, your health compromised, or a loved one taken from you. At those moments you begin to understand what Lewis meant when he talked about "the silence of God."

This is where life found God's people when Esther was written, which once again is why God's name is NOT found in this book. Yet gloriously, the book of Esther was penned in part to address this very question. What comfort is there for the child of God who feels betrayed by God, who knows the silence that occurs in times of need?

Our focus turns to the comfort of God's providence in which, like *A Grief Observed*, the reader is privy to three responses when it comes to the Christian facing tragedy (which in this case was the extermination of an entire race of people in eleven short months). We pick it up with the first response, manipulation.

Response #1 to Crises: Manipulation, vv. 1-8.

Esther 4:1-2, "When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes¹, put on sackcloth and ashes², and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. And he went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.³"

This details Mordecai's initial response to the death sentence upon the Jews. Understandably, he was devastated as he "tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly." Each of the elements referenced here when it came to Mordecai's grief — the tearing of clothes, sackcloth and ashes, and wailing — were typical of how Jews and non-Jews alike grieved in the ancient world.⁴ They did NOT suffer in silence. They put on or laid upon the most uncomfortable fabric- sackcloth- and then together wailed loudly and long!

Now in his grief, Mordecai moved from the town square — where all the other Jews would have gathered — to "the king's gate" where he could go no further. Kings in the ancient world

generally did NOT want to be bothered by grieving citizens.

Why do you suppose Mordecai went there? Either he went there to speak with the king or to communicate with Esther. Either way, it is where Mordecai did NOT go that stands out!

Esther 4:3, “And in each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, WITH FASTING, weeping, and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.”

Once again, we have here a description of the mourning elements of the Jews at this time. Now the repetition of the details involved in the Jewish mourning calls for a comparison (just as Esther and Mordecai’s actions call for a comparison with Daniel and his friends). So, let’s do a comparison between Mordecai’s mourning and the rest of the Jews.

- Both involve mourning with weeping, wailing, and sackcloth and ashes.
- Yet there is one obvious difference between the two... what is it? Fasting! In v. 2 we read that all the Jews throughout Persia commenced a fast whereas Mordecai did not.

This difference is significant!

“Fasting” in Scripture is a Christian discipline of devotion and dependence where instead of eating during scheduled mealtimes, the participant uses the mealtime to pour his heart out to the Lord (e.g., Lamentations 4:40-66⁵). As the fast progresses throughout the day(s), the participant is reminded of the incredible dependence he has on the things of this passing world — a dependence which he prays would be the expression of the heart toward God. Ian Duguid wrote this:

What normally accompanies such fasting, mourning, sackcloth, and ashes? It is prayer. Even the pagans of Nineveh knew how to repent properly: when Jonah preached to them, they immediately put on sackcloth and ashes, started fasting and calling out mightily to God (see Jonah 3:5-8). (Duguid, 2005, p. 46)

This is what the compromised Jews of Susa did in response to the decree. But that is NOT what Mordecai did. As a compromised child of God, what did he do? He went to Esther!

Esther 4:4, “Then Esther’s maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed⁶ in great anguish.⁷ And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept *them*.”

From the book of Nehemiah, we are clued in to how dangerous it was to be sad in the presence of a king.

Nehemiah 2:2, “So the king said to me, ‘Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.’ Then I was very much afraid.”

As an attendant of King Artaxerxes I (who followed Xerxes), when Nehemiah's sorrow over the condition of God's people in Palestine was perceived by the king, what was the result? Nehemiah became "very much afraid." Why? Because to be grieved in the presence of the king was a death sentence in that day.

No doubt that is why upon hearing of Mordecai's grief "at the king's gate" Esther "writhe in anguish." Yes, he stopped at the gate, BUT we're talking about a man who already disobeyed the king in refusing to bow to Haman! What else would he do? And so, understandably, she "sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him."⁸ Yet Mordecai would have nothing to do with the clothes. He was after something else.

Esther 4:5-8, "Then Esther summoned Hathach⁹ from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him *to go* to Mordecai to learn what this *was* and why it *was*. So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square¹⁰ in front of the king's gate. And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction [clearly Mordecai was prepared- for what reason?...], that he might show Esther and inform her, and to order her to go in to the king to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people."

And here we have it. When pressed beyond his ability to cope, Mordecai's initial response- unlike his fellow Jews, was NOT to go to God in "prayer/fasting", BUT to go to Esther and appeal to her to use her influence to protect God's people.¹¹ Ian Duguid, speaking of Mordecai, put it this way:

The language he adopts of 'begging his favor' and 'pleading' is precisely the language of the prayer that would normally accompany fasting and sackcloth (compare Daniel 9:3). Instead of seeking God's favor and pleading with him for deliverance, by means of prayer, it seems that Mordecai was placing his hopes on an intervention at the human level, with King Ahasuerus. (Duguid, 2005, p. 48)¹²

And herein is the response that we typically give when facing an obstacle too big for us to bear. We resort to manipulation. We want to do things in our own strength. We do what we think will fix the problem! The word "manipulate" comes from two Latin words, *man* (hand) and *plere/pele* (to fill). Accordingly, the word literally means to fill with the hand or to do things by hand.

Now, what makes Mordecai's response wrong is NOT the act itself (for truly, it will be through Esther's appeal to the king that God's people will be delivered). RATHER, what made the appeal wrong was NOT what he did BUT what he did NOT do.

- He did NOT call on God, and

- He did NOT appeal to Esther to call upon God.

RATHER, he looked ultimately to Ahasuerus as the key to the Jewish survival and so ordered his cousin to call upon Ahasuerus in order to save the Jews. Any identify with Mordecai here?

This naturally led to a second fleshly response on the part of a child of God facing crises.

Response #2 to Crises: Self-Preservation, vv. 9-12.¹³

Esther 4:9-12, “And Hathach came back and related Mordecai’s words to Esther. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him *to reply* to Mordecai: ‘All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned^{14,15} to come to the king for these thirty days.’^{16,17} And they related Esther’s words to Mordecai.”

First off, let us NOT downplay the danger in which Mordecai put Esther if she followed his command. As we already have seen, in the ancient world there was a strict protocol when it came to being in the presence of a King. For example:

- As we’ve seen this morning, you could NOT cry or grieve.
- And as we saw a couple of weeks back, you weren’t allowed to eat or drink freely. You only could eat and drink when the King ate or drank.

When it came to entering into the presence of a king, you could only enter his presence upon his permission — either you were summoned by invitation or he “held out his scepter.”¹⁸ Now, if you sought an audience with him without an invitation there were two possibilities:

- He would “extend his scepter” which granted you permission to approach.
- Or If he did not, you would be executed.

So most certainly, Mordecai placed Esther’s life in danger should she obey his command. And that is why Esther responded by saying essentially, *“Mordecai, I can’t go to him. If I do, I could die!”*

Though understandable, nevertheless this is a response of self-preservation!¹⁹ Esther is NOT living in light of God BUT her earthly wisdom and reasoning.

So, along with manipulation, self-preservation is a common response when confronted with a burden too great to bear.

Now again, I am not criticizing Mordecai or Esther. I’ve walked in their shoes plenty of times and so know well their two initial responses! I’ve lived them! Yet herein is the beauty of trial,

it brings us to the end of ourselves where we come face to face with the inability of earthly resources! C. S. Lewis wrote:

Error and sin both have this property, that the deeper they are the less their victim suspects their existence; they are masked evil. Pain is unmasked, unmistakable evil; every man knows that something is wrong when he is being hurt... And pain is not only immediately recognisable evil, but evil impossible to ignore. We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities... But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 2015, pp. 90-91)

And so, with this crises God shouted to Mordecai and Esther that they might wake up, open their eyes, and do what? Place their trust, hope, and confidence in the Lord. That truly is what only brings comfort in difficult times! That brings us to the third response.

Response #3 to Crises; Trust/Reliance upon God, vv. 13-17.

Esther 4:13-14, “Then Mordecai told *them* to reply to Esther, ‘Do not imagine that you in the king’s palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place²⁰ and you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?’”

At this point we have just entered upon sacred ground where we are privileged to behold the tempering work of God in the life of Mordecai. Heretofore Mordecai was a compromised, compromised child of God. And yet on account of this trial, his faith in God and God’s promises is brought out! And such is the trajectory of a tempered faith. It moves from the horizontal to the vertical... from man/self to God.

And so, Mordecai now is resting NOT in Ahasuerus. RATHER he is resting upon two of the most fundamental promises God has given us in the Gospel. Recall, when “the gospel was preached to Abraham” (cf. Galatians 3:8), God gave many promises of which the following two stood out to Mordecai...

Genesis 12:1-2a, 3a, “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you... And the one who curses you I will curse...”

Furthering Abraham’s understanding of this promise, God told him in...

Genesis 15:1b, “...Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you...”

Inherent in the gospel is this glorious promise that God will always be His people’s protection

and shield. Calling this to mind Mordecai was both encouraged and emboldened, "...relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place..." (v. 14a)!^{21,22} Yet there was another promise that he referenced here.

Genesis 17:1, "Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless.'"

This is a second assurance that accompanies the gospel message: The Lord our God is God Almighty and therefore determines all things from the great to the small. It was this to which Mordecai appealed when he told Esther, "And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (v. 14b)^{23,24,25} It is as Joseph proclaimed:

Genesis 50:20, "And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

Mordecai was enlivened on account of these two covenant promises of the Lord — gospel promises which rest and continue to rest upon ALL of God's children regardless of what they have done or become. The Lord is the Lord of Hosts and works His promises NOT on behalf of those who give Him a proper performance, BUT on behalf of all of those on whom He sovereignly has set His love — you and I!

In his compromised state Mordecai undervalued these truths! Yet when pressed, his faith was revived as he called to mind these glorious promises! And it would be these promises that would revive Esther as well...

Esther 4:15-16, "Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai, 'Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day.^{26,27} I and my maidens also will fast in the same way.^{28,29} And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.'"

Talk about a change! Esther sounds like Shadrach, Meshack, and Abed-nego (cf. Daniel 3:16-18)! Think of it:

- Prior to Mordecai's response, Esther was in fear for her life.
- Yet, with the recollection of God's faithfulness and commitment to her and her people, Esther was brought to the place of reliance and hope in which she and her attendants spent three days fasting and praying!³⁰ And this too had a glorious effect...

Esther 4:17, "So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him."

Now Mordecai is fasting... praying... depending!!

From this, let us not miss a very important truth when it comes to God's providence. Though it revolves around God's glory, nevertheless it always involves the benefit of God's people, no

matter their state or what they've done! This is the comfort of God's providence!

I want you to go back in your minds to Lewis' *A Grief Observed*. While it contains raw emotion on the part of a grieving saint, nevertheless the book moves on to include that which lifted Lewis from his "bed of sackcloth and ashes". The following are just a couple of things Lewis learned:

And I believe I can make sense out of it. You can't see anything properly while your eyes are blurred with tears... (Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 2015, p. 45)

That is why trial in the life of the Christian draws us to God. He is our *Pou Sto* — that leverage point outside of ourselves which enables us to see reality objectively.

My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence? (Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 2015, p. 66)

Wonderful! Our view of God is so stilted! Amen? That in part is why God ordains trial. It destroys the graven images we have set up in our minds about God and replaces them with the real McCoy. Speaking of God's character:

Heaven will solve our problems, but not, I think, by showing us subtle reconciliations between all our apparently contradictory notions. The notions will all be knocked from under our feet. We shall see that there never was any problem. (Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 2015, p. 71)

It is as Scott Richardson wrote:

If we had God's power, we would change everything. If we had His wisdom, we'd change nothing.

This is what brought Mordecai and Esther out of the shadows into the light of God's glory. It wasn't a change in their environment. In fact, Ahasuerus' decree would NOT be rescinded. What changed when it came to Mordecai and Esther was their trust! It moved from the horizontal (self, others, money, another person, etc.) to the Vertical- God Almighty who works all things for His glory and our good!

How wonderful and encouraging. And yet, there is much more to this chapter as we consider it against the backdrop of Christ and His Kingdom.

[Some of the Redemptive Principles Revealed in this Chapter, Select.](#)

In order to stand in the presence of Ahasuerus, one had to wear the proper dress (vv. 2, 4). So it is with God; yet, unlike with Ahasuerus, the dress required is the dress He supplies.

Isaiah 61:10, "I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness..."

In Christ we understand that that "robe" is nothing less than the right-standing given to us on account of the perfect life of Jesus Christ.³¹ Such we possess this moment and forevermore in Christ!

In Ahasuerus' day, regardless of one's dress or credentials, only those who had the permission of the king could enter into his presence (v. 11). Such is not the case with God. One need only to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ and you can enter His presence any time you like...

Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

Everyone who enters into a saving relationship with Christ receives an eternal summons to stand boldly before the Lord in His presence! As Paul wrote:

Ephesians 3:12, "[In Christ] we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him."

Who here would take lightly the privilege of talking to a king, a president, or a famous person? Yet on account of Christ, we have free access into the presence of God twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. May we NOT grow bored of or take lightly such an august privilege!

Trusting in the promises and character of her God, Esther entrusted herself to God, "If I perish, I perish" v. 16. This is where God wants all of us to live.

1 Peter 4:19: "Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."

The word for "entrust" is a banking term in which a patron deposited or "entrusted" his money into the safekeeping of a bank. Such a deposit in Christ's day as in our own was secure/protected and produced a return/growth.

That is what God wants us to do with "our souls." He wants us to deposit them with God and so entrust them to His keeping and His grace by which to grow it! For by doing so we release any and all claims we might make before the Lord: our wealth, family, jobs, future, trial, difficulty, and grief.

While Mordecai looked to Esther to mediate a "cease fire" for the Jews, we have a better Mediator!

1 Timothy 2:5, “For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus.”

What a powerful statement! Yet the text does NOT say “there is only one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus.” What does it say? “There is only one mediator between God and men, *THE MAN* Christ Jesus.” Because “*the*” is NOT in the original (which is why the *NASB* italicized it), the translation would be better, “Christ Jesus, Himself man.”

So, NOT ONLY do we have a God appointed Mediator who intercedes on our behalf before the Father, BUT He intercedes NOT only as Almighty God, BUT as a man and so understands NOT only our spiritual needs, BUT ALL our needs!

Hebrews 4:15-16, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things *AS WE ARE*, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”

So many in Christ today live as if they do NOT have a mediator. They live in guilt. They are performance driven. They believe God is out to get them! Brothers and sisters, let us not live as atheists. Rather, let us live in light of and so enjoy the ministrations of our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ! It is to Him we turn now in prayer...

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End Note(s)

¹ “‘He tore his clothes’ is an expression of intense grief seen throughout the Old Testament (Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 1:11; Isaiah 3:24; Daniel 9:3); it also was customary among other nations (Isaiah 15:3; Ezekiel 27:30–33).” (Breneman, 1993, pp. 333-334)

² “‘Sackcloth and ashes’ also were a way of showing extreme grief (cf. Job 2:7–8). First, the garments were torn. Next, a hairy garment was put on and ashes spread on the head.

Sackcloth, or haircloth (made of goat hair), was the apparel of mourners, especially those mourning for the dead.” (Breneman, 1993, p. 334)

³ “The law against the wearing of sackcloth in the king’s gate is not otherwise attested, but it is intrinsically credible (cf. Nehemiah 2:2). Evidently the wearing of sackcloth was known also in Persia, but why should the king be reminded of disasters by having mourners within his gates?” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 77)

⁴ “These customs are referred to at widely separated periods in the Old Testament (e.g., Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 1:11; Isaiah 3:24; Daniel 9:3) and are practised by other nations (Is. 15:3; Ezekiel 27:30–33) as well as by Israel. Indeed, the Persians of Xerxes’ time in Susa are recorded as having torn their clothes in unappeasable grief after their defeat at Salamis.” (Baldwin, 1985, pp. 76-77)

⁵ cf. also Ezra 8:21, 23; Nehemiah 9:1.

⁶ כִּיל (chil), lit., “writhed in pain”

⁷ “Notice how isolated Esther had become from the rest of the covenant community. Every Jew from India to Ethiopia was mourning and lamenting Haman’s edict, but Esther had no clue. She was apparently the only person in the whole Persian Empire who had not heard the news. Perhaps she didn’t have time between her manicures, pedicures, and other beauty treatments to keep up with the local coffee klatch about the fortunes of her own people. Perhaps bad news, like sackcloth, was not permitted inside the king’s palace. In addition, since she had done such a good job of concealing her identity, why would anyone think to inform her of the threat to this particular people? In just the same way, when we compromise with the world, we easily find ourselves becoming isolated and distant from God’s people and out of touch with God’s concerns in the world, just as Esther did.” (Duguid, 2005, p. 47)

⁸ “Yet [Esther] didn’t catch on to the seriousness of the situation immediately. Her first response was to send clothes to Mordecai to take the place of his sackcloth, as if her only concern was to stop her relative making an exhibition of himself, not to deal with whatever issues were causing his distress. Only after Mordecai had refused her clothes did she send her servants to find out why he was mourning.” (Duguid, 2005, p. 47)

⁹ “The name Hathach may be derived from Persian hātaka, ‘good’; if so, this man lived up to his name. Ahasuerus had been careful to choose for his queen a man of integrity to wait on her, and had been willing to release him from his own company of retainers.” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 78)

¹⁰ “Hathach looked for Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate, an area probably used as a marketplace. There Mordecai told the eunuch what had happened that caused him to be in mourning.” (Huey, 1988, p. 4816)

¹¹ “Those commentators may be right who argue that Esther’s intention in sending clothing to Mordecai was that he should qualify to enter the palace, but in that case his refusal to accept them was extremely discourteous. It would nevertheless be in keeping with his awkwardness which caused the crisis in the first place.” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 77)

¹² Ian Duguid also noted, “Yet instead of crying out to God, Mordecai’s first thought was to appeal to the king through Esther. He couldn’t go and speak to her directly, sequestered as she was, so he went to the entrance of the king’s gate in his sackcloth and ashes, knowing that word would get back to Esther of his condition.” (Duguid, 2005, p. 46)

¹³ “This portrayal of Mordecai and Esther and the Jewish community with them as dogs who have forgotten how to bark- people whose entire lives are built around theological presuppositions whose existence and implications they studiously ignore- is at odds with the way many have read the book. In their desire to rescue Esther from herself, some fill in the ‘woof’ for Esther, drawing out the implicit theology of the chapter that God is working in history and turning her into a bold heroine, eager to seize the moment for God. Others neuter the dog altogether, making the book an entirely secular tale in which the Jews survive through their inner strength and potential for self-help.

Neither approach does justice to the author’s literary artistry, which in fact highlights a very real conundrum that pastors wrestle with on a weekly basis. Simply put, it is this: ‘How can people who confess an orthodox creed week after week so easily and completely lose track of the implications of that theology whenever problems emerge in daily life?’ Mordecai’s worldview may have been based on a solid theology, but he had difficulty connecting that theology to

the issues of everyday life. If we know people, and the motions of our own hearts, we will not have to travel back to ancient Susa for examples of this phenomenon. In times of crisis, for all our orthodox theology, our own first response is frequently the whimper of resignation or human strategy rather than the bark of robust faith in God. We believe in God, but in practice react to life's crises as if we were virtual atheists." (Duguid, 2005, p. 53)

¹⁴ Herodotus recorded that "Deioces introduced for the first time the ceremonial of royalty: admission to the king's presence was forbidden, and all communications had to be through messengers. Nobody was allowed to see the king." (Herodotus, 2009, p. i. 99)

¹⁵ "Though later practice may have been read back into tradition, the evidence is still valid for later times, and Herodotus shows it in operation at the time of the accession of Darius Hystaspes, who overthrew two usurpers within the palace." (Baldwin, 1985, p. 79)

¹⁶ "Since she had not been summoned by the king for a month, Esther did not know whether he would forgive her if she approached him without a royal summons. She may have concluded that she had lost the king's favor. It appears that initially Esther was more concerned about her own welfare than about her people." (Huey, 1988, p. 4817)

¹⁷ "According to custom, visitors had to be summoned into the presence of King Ahasuerus; no one could appear unannounced. The penalty for violating this law was death, unless the king extended his scepter in welcome. Everyone knew this, even people from the outlying provinces (see Esther 4:11). The implication of Esther's reference to these outsiders was, 'How much more should you, Mordecai, as a civil servant, know the seriousness of what you are asking!' What is more, Esther hadn't been summoned into the royal presence for thirty days- not a good sign, since doubtless the king had not been sleeping alone. So Esther didn't actually refuse to go, but by reminding Mordecai of the likely consequences, she implicitly asked him to reconsider his request." (Duguid, 2005, pp. 48-49)

¹⁸ Such was the case even if you were a foreign dignitary. Joyce Baldwin wrote, "Access to the king was strictly controlled, as everyone knew. Like every head of state Ahasuerus needed to be protected both from attempts on his life and from vexation with people's problems. Not that he sat days at a time in isolated splendour on his secluded throne. He gave audiences, at his own discretion and by his personal invitation, but even his wife had no right of approach. Like everyone else she appeared between the columns of the throne room at her peril." (Baldwin, 1985, pp. 78-79)

¹⁹ "'I will go' marks Esther's momentous decision that risked her own life. At first Esther apparently was more concerned about her own safety." (Breneman, 1993, p. 337)

²⁰ "The phrase 'from another place' remains an enigma. Lucian's recension of Esther, Josephus (*Antiq. XI, 227 [vi. 7]*), and the Targums consider 'place' (*māqôm*) as a veiled reference to God (cf. Berg, p. 76; Streane, p. 29). This seems to be the correct interpretation, though some scholars believe it refers to political help that would come from another source, perhaps a foreign power (e.g., Anderson, p. 854)." (Huey, 1988, p. 4817)

²¹ "The future of Mordecai's people was assured only if the God who had inextricably linked his name to his people in the ancient covenants would provide deliverance for them for the sake of his name." (Duguid, 2005, p. 50)

²² "...the author alluded to a principal theme of the book, that God takes care of his people Israel; he will deliver them when enemies try to destroy them." (Breneman, 1993, p. 336)

²³ "Without explicitly spelling out in detail how he came to his convictions, Mordecai reveals that he believes in God, in God's guidance of individual lives, and in God's ordering of the world's political events, irrespective of whether those who seem to have the power acknowledge him or not. This was, of course, constantly declared by the prophets of Israel (e.g. Isaiah 10:8 ff.; 45:1; Jeremiah 1:15; Ezekiel 7:24), and need not come as a surprise, especially in the light of the return from exile in 538 and subsequent occasions (Ezra 1-2; 5-6)." (Baldwin, 1985, p. 80)

²⁴ "Mordecai's statement reveals a deep conviction of God's providence, a belief that God rules in the world, even in the details of the nations and in the lives of individuals. Mordecai told Esther, 'If you remain silent, ... you ... will perish' (v. 14)." (Breneman, 1993, p. 337)

²⁵ "Then Mordecai asked the question that has become the *locus classicus* for support of the doctrine of providence as a key to the understanding of the Book of Esther: "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (v.14). Her exaltation as a queen

may have been God's way of obtaining a savior for his people." (Huey, 1988, p. 4817)

²⁶ "The added words 'night or day' mean the fast was to be continuous (not broken by eating at night); fasting usually was practiced only during the day." (Breneman, 1993, p. 338)

²⁷ "Fasting was usually for one day only. It was obligatory on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31), but otherwise fasting was undertaken as a voluntary act for a particular occasion (1 Samuel 14:24; 2 Samuel 1:12). Esther's three-day fast indicated the seriousness with which she regarded the emergency and her own need of strength." (Baldwin, 1985, p. 81)

²⁸ "From the viewpoint of human policy, this was counter-intuitive, to say the least. The king liked his women well-fed (see 2:9) and looking their best, and three days of fasting would hardly enhance that side of Esther's appeal. Since she was not allowed to speak to the king unless he first chose to receive her, all she had to offer him was her appearance. However, now at least the whole community would be involved in this appeal, silently rooting for Esther to succeed." (Duguid, 2005, pp. 51-52)

²⁹ "'And fast for me' implies prayer and fasting. This suggests that Esther had a genuine faith in God. By her request for fasting (and certainly prayer is assumed), Esther showed that she needed the support of others and recognized the need for God's intervention. Even she and her maids would fast as well. This meant she would share her faith with these maids." (Breneman, 1993, p. 337)

³⁰ "By asking that all the Jews in Susa join her in a fast Esther acknowledges that i. she needs the support and fellowship of others and ii. she depends on more than human courage. Though prayer is not mentioned, it was always the accompaniment of fasting in the Old Testament, and the whole point of fasting was to render the prayer experience more effective and prepare oneself for communion with God (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9; Judges 20:26; Ezra 8:21-23)." (Baldwin, 1985, p. 80)

³¹ Yet there is more here. For in addition to this robe of righteousness, God wants us to be ourselves before Him. Unlike Ahasuerus who could NOT bear to have someone grieve in his presence, our God welcomes us before Him, burdens and all!