

Esther 7:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

Analysis

For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

Esther reveals the decree's content: "we are sold...to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish." The threefold description echoes Haman's decree language (3:13), emphasizing totality. The phrase "sold" references Haman's financial offer (3:9), suggesting Ahasuerus accepted payment for genocide. Esther's statement "if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue" shows she wouldn't trouble the king for mere slavery—only total annihilation justifies her risky intercession. The phrase "the enemy could not countervail the king's damage" suggests Jewish extermination would harm the kingdom economically or strategically—Jews contributed to Persian prosperity. This appeal combines emotional ("I and my people"), legal (unjust decree), and practical (royal interest) arguments.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern rulers sometimes authorized enslavement or relocation of conquered or troublesome peoples, but total extermination was rare. Esther's argument that Jews weren't merely being enslaved but annihilated emphasized the

decree's extreme nature. Her suggestion that eliminating Jews would damage royal interests had basis—Jews were productive subjects who contributed economically and administratively (Mordecai being one example). The phrase "the enemy could not countervail" might mean the bribe offered for eliminating Jews couldn't compensate for losing their contributions. This argument appealed to royal self-interest, a practical consideration that might move the king when abstract justice wouldn't.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Esther's combination of emotional appeal, justice argument, and practical considerations model effective advocacy for the oppressed?
2. What does her strategic rhetoric teach about adapting appeals to the audience's values and motivations?

Interlinear Text

לְפָרָג וְלְפָשָׁם יְדָעָמִים אָנָּנוּ כִּי
H3588 For we are sold H589 I and my people H5971 to be destroyed H8045 to be slain

נִמְכָּרְנוּ וְלִשְׁפָחָה וְתַּלְעַבְדָּיִם אֵלָן וְלִאָבָד
H4376 H4376 H5650 H8198 H4376

בָּחַב שְׂתִּי אֵין כִּי בְּאָר שְׁנָוֵה
I had held my tongue H3588 H369 although the enemy H6862 could not countervail H7737

בְּמַלְכֵי בְּבֵן יְהָוָה
damage the king's
H5143 H4428

Additional Cross-References

Esther 3:9 (Kingdom): If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.

Deuteronomy 28:68 (Parallel theme): And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you.

Esther 3:13 (Kingdom): And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.

Esther 8:11 (Kingdom): Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.

