



# Esther's Stand Against Injustice: Theology for Women's Political Participation in Indonesia

Iman Kristina Halawa<sup>1</sup>, Daniel Pesah Purwonugroho<sup>2</sup>, Didit Yuliantono Adi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Arastamar, Bengkulu, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Berita Hidup, Karanganyar, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Rajawali Arastamar Indonesia, Batam, Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

This article is designed with the aim of tracing Esther's example in suing for justice in the face of power. Queen Esther's courage in the Book of Esther, especially her action against King Ahasuerus without an invitation, is a representation of courage against potential injustice. Queen Esther's courage was not blind courage but courage with wise strategy. This study looks at how Esther's actions have affected modern leadership and how courage and wisdom can serve as examples for Christian communities and leaders today. This study can inspire modern leadership to dare to declare an injustice lawsuit against the rulers. The research uses the method of religious research to respond to the injustice in the face of power that threatened the Jewish nation under the rule of King Ahasuerus. The results of this study show that fighting injustice must be accompanied by a wise strategy and trust in God's providence for the Jewish nation by returning to moral principles and values. This research contributes in the form of a theological reflection for Christian women to emulate Esther in facing injustice in Indonesia.

Keywords: dare to contest, Esther, exemplary, injustice, theology politics.

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**Corresponding author:** Iman Kristina Halawa (imankristinahalawasttab@gmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

The oppression of the Jewish people in the story of Esther occurred amidst the dominance of the Persian Empire ruled by King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), a discussion that proclaimed the maintenance of God, the patriarchal community, and the involvement of women in voicing their rights in government life (Yanti, 2023). At that time, the Jewish people were a minority group scattered throughout the provinces of the empire after the Babylonian exile (Clines, 1984). They were often subjected to prejudice, stereotypes, and discriminatory policies. This culminated in the plans of Haman, a high-ranking Persian official, who utilised his power to propose the extermination of all Jews by royal decree (Esther 3:8-11). This oppression reflects the socio-political reality in ancient Persia and provides deep insights into the dynamics of power and injustice throughout history.

Esther's courage was highlighted in overcoming this situation, as there was a great risk to her life. Esther chose to appear before King Xerxes I without an invitation, violating court law (Esther 4:11) (Lerrick, 2015). Power is often a tool of oppression when wielded by individuals who lack a commitment to justice and moral righteousness. Esther used her position as queen to speak for her people, demonstrating a model of moral courage, faith, and wisdom in the face of injustice. To facilitate governance, the king of Ancient Persia then divided his territory into provinces, which were led by satraps or governors appointed directly by the king.

Some previous studies have examined Esther's role model from the angle of theological interpretation and reflection on the ethics of courage (Brueggemann, 2014; Newman, 2021), as well as feminist criticism of patriarchal dynamics in the narrative of the book of Esther (Brenner-Idan, 1995). Meanwhile, research on the political participation of Christian women in Indonesia has highlighted the role of spirituality in shaping women's political awareness (Budiatmaja et al., 2025). However, there have not been many studies that explicitly integrate Esther's narrative of strategic courage with the prophetic leadership model of Indonesian Christian women. Therefore, this article offers a contextual theological reflection that highlights Esther's model of moral courage as a paradigm for the fight for justice in a patriarchal political space.

Esther's actions can relate to situations where groups or individuals face forms of oppression, whether political, economic, or social. Modern governments often face pressure to ensure justice and equality, but structural injustices and biased decisions are still common (Whittington, 2015). The story of Esther teaches us that a wise strategy and a belief in moral values must accompany the courage to speak out against injustice. A just and proportional liberation is one in which criticism of injustice must be expressed (Kriswanto, 2020). In Esther's narrative, just and fair deliverance is exemplified when she wisely articulates her condemnation of Haman's injustice before King Ahasuerus. Esther's courage in stating the truth of her claim exemplifies divine justice and fosters an environment conducive to transformation, ultimately securing the liberation of her

community. The denunciation of injustice in this framework emerges as a fundamental component of faith's imperative to confront falsehood with wisdom and courage in accordance with divine intention.

Confronting falsehood with wisdom and courage by divine intent. Esther set an example of resisting injustice. This can be reflected in the life of believers. Every believer has the right to speak out against injustice wisely. The condemnation of injustice in this modern society must be based on the necessity of faith and sincerity. The researcher considers this issue in previous research on social injustice (Schofield, 2024) and the courage to challenge (Mulvey et al., 2023). There are still gaps that can be researched in Esther's perspective to draw a reflection on modern life today. The researcher argues that injustice must be resisted with wisdom and faith in God, as Esther did for her community.

Based on this background, the research questions raised in the article are: How is Esther's courage and strategy in the face of injustice presented as a theological model for women's leadership in the context of power, and to what extent can Esther's actions be contextually reflected upon to strengthen Christian women's participation in contemporary Indonesian politics? The article examines the story of Esther in Scripture as a form of prophetic courage that inspires ethical and strategic actions in the face of injustice. Using a theological-reflective approach highlights the relevance of Esther's narrative in building an Indonesian Christian women's leadership paradigm rooted in faith, wisdom, and moral courage in the face of patriarchal power structures.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a theological qualitative approach with a literature study design. Data were collected through text analysis of the Book of Esther as the primary source and secondary literature in the form of relevant journals, books, and political theology articles. The analysis was conducted in a contextual hermeneutic manner to explore the meaning of Esther's actions in facing authoritarian power, then reflected on political injustice and gender inequality in Indonesia today. This paper explains that religious research and its various topics are open to various approaches because of its nature as a science. Formulating the right paradigm and research background will help researchers design the research design and determine the methods used. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches can be used in this case. This paper presents that religious research and various topics are open to various approaches because of their nature as a science (Zaluchu, 2020). The researcher will use desk research to collect qualitative data. Desk research is crucial for data aggregation. It investigates their ontological significance and function within the broader library ecosystem while explaining their attributes within a theoretical paradigm that accentuates the purpose and understanding of non-numerical information (Sokolov, 2023). The researcher used the Bible as a primary source. The researcher also used academic literature as a secondary

source from Google Scholar. The researcher will explore the social sundries of Esther's era. It will also visualise Esther's courage in the face of injustice. It will also synthesize and reflect on all the qualitative findings of the modern era.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the Book of Esther context, there is a fundamental question of how a person, especially from an oppressed minority group, can challenge injustice in an authoritarian system of power. Esther, a Jewish woman who became queen in the Persian empire, faced a crucial situation in which a royal decree, at the proposal of Haman, approved a plan to exterminate her people. Esther's action to go to King Ahasuerus without an invitation involved significant risk as court law forbade anyone from seeing the king without being summoned. However, Esther's courage to step up, speak up, and devise a strategy showed a relevant example today. That God acted by Esther's faith, which removed doubts and worries. Fasting prayer became a means for Esther to strengthen her faith in facing various problems (Ernawaty et al., 2023). Esther, a young Jewish woman who had experienced the loss of her parents, was cared for by her cousin Mordecai. Esther's ancestors were members of the Jewish community who were forcibly removed from Jerusalem. The guidance Mordecai and his colleagues provided in the royal court eventually resulted in Esther being chosen as the newly appointed queen.

Esther's actions reflected moral courage and wisdom by going to the king in the face of potentially oppressive power. However, it is not separated from the circumstances of her people, who provide mental support by working together through fasting prayers (Singgih, 2021). On the side of the socio-political conflict of King Ahasuerus' plan to expand power and Mordhekai and Esther's tactics amidst racial discrimination for freedom for the Jews, God is present in the story of human life, albeit in an invisible form (Tansul, 2023). The Book of Esther is not simply a historical romance but God's workings in human lives to save, and His intervention in shaping the history of His people. It powerfully echoes the messianic hope through the rescue and preservation of the Jewish people in the Persian and Median domains (Zaluchu et al., 2020).

Persian greatness between 550 and 252 BC can be traced back to the tumultuous Assyrian legacy. In contrast to Assyria, Persia exhibited a more calm, composed, and organised disposition; despite their military conquests, Persia largely refrained from significantly disrupting the Indigenous governmental structures in the territories they annexed. The Persian military was also very respectful and honoured the diverse religious practices prevalent in the territories it conquered. The empire also emerged as a dynamic centre for religious and scientific advancement, avoiding any tendency towards rebellion or internal conflict. The Zoroastrian faith experienced significant growth and development in the 6th century BCE within the Persian Empire, primarily attributed to the teachings of Zoroastrianism. After a profound revelation from Ahura Mazda,

Zarathustra made great efforts to spread this faith and to replace traditional religious practices within the Persian Empire, eventually establishing Zoroastrianism as the state religion of Persia. Besides Zarathustra, another influential figure named Mani also spread his interpretation of divinity. In contrast to Zoroastrianism, Manicheism - the religious framework articulated by Mani - holds that God has no absolute control over the cosmos, drawn from a synthesis of various religious traditions that Mani carefully studied (Toynbee, 2014).

Esther's example of confronting unjust power is an important paradigm for women's political participation in Indonesia. As a figure of faith, Esther demonstrated that courage in the face of injustice is not only a political act but also a spiritual one. She acted with wisdom, prayer, and faith in God, thus becoming a prophetic model for Christian women today. In the context of Indonesia, which still faces gender inequality in the political sphere, this example inspires women to be present as agents of change not just for the sake of representation but as a form of faith calling to fight for justice. This reflection is reinforced by the findings that Indonesian Christian women have begun to build faith-based political awareness (Budiatmaja et al., 2025) and continue to fight against marginalisation in the structure of political representation (Kadriyah, 2023). Therefore, Christian women in Indonesia need to see political participation as a prophetic act based on faith to present the values of justice, truth and love in the nation's life.

### **Leadership Principles**

The Persian kings mentioned above, including Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes, are recognised as divinely employed rulers and significantly contributed to the repatriation of the Jewish population from Babylon to Jerusalem, particularly in the reconstruction efforts of the Temple and the fortification of the city walls of Jerusalem. Mordecai, who held a prominent position during the reign of King Ahasuerus, is also referred to in the texts of Ezra and Nehemiah as an individual who returned from Babylonian exile and was actively involved in the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. Given His unwavering faithfulness, it is no surprise that the book of Esther subtly portrays God's omnipresence in all circumstances. Consequently, this narrative provides us with at least three important insights. In Esther 1:12, it is documented, "But Vashti the queen refused to appear according to the king's commandment, which the eunuch had given her; and the king was furious, and his anger was kindled.

Esther 1:19 articulates, 'If it is deemed favourable in the eyes of the sovereign, let an official decree be promulgated from his presence and written in the laws of Persia and Media, in such a way that it remains irrevocable, thus prohibiting Vashti from appearing before King Ahasuerus, and stipulating that the king will confer her position as queen on another individual of commendable character.' This scenario presented a dilemma that could significantly affect the fate of an entire population, as it pertained to the judgment

of a highly influential king. If the decision was wrong, it could cause significant repercussions or result in many deaths. King Ahasuerus appointed wise men to serve as his closest advisors.

## Leadership Values

In the face of risky situations, such as moral courage, responsibility, wisdom, and faith. Doing the right thing is, at times, a tough choice, especially if one does not know what is right for a particular context, which is more difficult. It means choosing to do the right thing for one person or another, but not for both (McDonald, 2019). Esther's actions can be seen as exemplary for individuals under authoritarian rule, showing that courage and moral integrity can bring about positive change despite difficult circumstances. The Book of Esther not only tells the story of the rescue of the Jewish people but also provides insights into courage, resilience, and the role of women in history.

In the ancient Persian Empire, the laws and customs governing court etiquette were strict and hierarchical. One of the most striking rules was the prohibition of approaching the king without an official invitation, as described in the Book of Esther (Esther 4:11). This rule applied not only to commoners but also to high-ranking officials and even members of the royal family, including the queen. Violation of this rule often resulted in the death penalty unless the king showed mercy by extending a golden sceptre as a sign of forgiveness (Esther 4:11). This rule reflected the absolutist culture of the Persian monarchy.

Esther's identity inspires many people in the modern world to stay true to their principles despite adversity. She showed that having the courage to fight for truth and justice can bring significant change to society as a whole.

In the ancient Persian Empire, the power structure was absolute and highly hierarchical, reflected in rigid court rules, one of which was the prohibition of approaching the king without an official invitation (Esther 4:11). This law applied to anyone, including high-ranking officials and members of the royal family like Esther. It symbolised a totalitarian system of power, where access to power was limited and risky (Berlin, 2001). In this context, Esther's act of entering the king's presence without being summoned was very radical and courageous. She realised that the injustice that threatened her people could not be dealt with passively. Her courage to speak out in the face of repressive power shows that faith-based action and commitment to truth can challenge an unjust system.

From a theological perspective, Esther's actions were a form of prophetic courage born out of ethical responsibility towards her community, not just political action (Brueggemann, 2014). She acted in confidence in God's provision, showing that faith and wisdom can come together in the face of oppressive power structures. This attitude inspires many women in the modern world, including in Indonesia, to not remain silent

in the face of political and social injustice. Esther's example is an important reflection for Indonesian Christian women who want to actively participate in politics that courage based on faith can bring social transformation (Budiatmaja et al., 2025). In Indonesia, which still faces gender inequality in the public sphere, Esther is an important symbol that women's actions in the space of power are not just individual achievements but part of a theological struggle for social justice. Esther proves that women's voices, when fuelled by integrity, faith, and moral responsibility, can challenge unjust systems of power and bring about profound changes in society.

Esther's courage in the face of oppressive power was, without a doubt, a manifestation of deep faith and tremendous moral responsibility. In the context of the Book of Esther story, Esther's act of approaching King Ahasuerus without an invitation was a risky move, given the strict Persian court law which stated that anyone who approached the king without a summons was liable to death (Esther 4:11). However, in this situation, Esther showed that courage is not just a decision without calculation, but also an action based on a higher moral calling and a belief that God has a plan for His people, even though she may have felt fear and doubt at first (Esther 4:14).

Esther's actions reflect what contemporary theologians refer to as civic courage that stems from prophetic spirituality, namely the courage to take risks for the collective good in the light of faith (Brueggemann, 2014). In the modern context, Esther's courage echoes the role of women in the public sphere, which is not only determined by structural power but also by moral calling and spiritual courage (Budiatmaja et al., 2025). Nugroho (2024) asserts that women's participation in politics based on theological values presents a leadership dimension that is not only functional but also transformative and justice-oriented.

The value of Esther's leadership lies in her ability to bring together personal courage, strategic wisdom, and spiritual awareness. She not only made big decisions with high risks but also did so for the safety of her people and with the belief that her life was part of God's plan. This kind of leadership is an important model for women today, especially in the political context, that authentic leadership is born from the courage to act justly, listen to the voice of conscience, and believe that the struggle for righteousness is never in vain before God.

### **Esther's Courage**

Esther's courage was a manifestation of faith in the sense that she believed that God would not let her act alone in this struggle. Esther relied on God in prayer and fasting (Esther 4:15-17) for wisdom and protection as she moved forward. Esther's faith was not just a passive faith but a faith that encouraged bold action for change, a living example that faith must drive action in the face of injustice and threats to the lives of God's people.

Esther's courage also reflected a great moral responsibility towards her people. Although her position as queen gave her power and influence, Esther chose not to allow herself to enjoy the comfort of a secure position but instead took a risky step to save the lives of the Jewish people (Newman, 2021). Esther's actions were driven not only by a sense of personal responsibility but also by a call to protect the larger group, a moral value often referred to in the Biblical tradition as *tzedakah* (justice) and *chesed* (steadfast love).

Esther's courage teaches that true faith must motivate action. A leader's moral responsibility must be directed towards the well-being and strategy of Esther in using the banquet as part of a diplomatic ploy to influence King Ahasuerus and Haman, who were planning the extermination of the Jewish people, is one of the most interesting aspects of the Book of Esther. At a crisis point in the narrative, Esther decides to invite the king and Haman to a banquet that she organizes at the palace instead of directly revealing the big problem at hand (Esther 5:4-8). This approach reflects not only Esther's wisdom but also a deep understanding of power and the Persian court protocol governing interactions with the king.

Esther's courage was a manifestation of an active faith that believed God would not let her walk alone in the struggle against injustice. When faced with a significant threat to her people, Esther did not just act impulsively but first relied on God through prayer and fasting (Esther 4:15-17). Esther's faith was not a passive faith that just hoped for a miracle, but a faith that encouraged concrete action to bring about change. This shows that in both Jewish and Christian faith traditions, true faith should drive action (Brueggemann, 2014). Esther's courage also reflects a great moral responsibility towards her people. Although her position as queen could have provided her with personal comfort and security, Esther chose to act and take risks to save her people. As Newman (2021) points out, Esther's actions were based on the concepts of *tzedakah* (social justice) and *chesed* (loyal love), two key moral values in Hebrew ethics that emphasize active involvement in protecting the lives of others.

Esther's approach to confronting power is not frontal or confrontational. The antithesis of this narrative of heroic courage lies in Esther's very subtle diplomatic strategy: She chooses to use the banquet as a means of building trust and opening a space for negotiation with King Ahasuerus before objecting to Haman's plan to exterminate the Jews (Esther 5-7). Some interpreters have argued that Esther's seemingly 'gentle' strategy reveals a manipulative political aspect, showing that heroic action does not always come in the form of direct opposition but also through clever and planned hidden diplomacy. Even some feminist critiques of the Bible highlight that Esther's success depends on her beauty and proximity to patriarchal power rather than on the equality or structural strength of women themselves (Brenner-Idan, 1995).

Esther's leadership was a blend of active faith and strategic ingenuity. She showed that courage does not have to come in the form of open resistance but can be manifested

in tactical wisdom and precise timing. Esther's leadership taught us that unwavering faith and emotional-political intelligence can work together to create significant change. This is an important lesson for women's leadership today: confronting injustice requires a courageous heart, strong faith, and a wise strategy- a model of leadership that is both theological and effective in the real world.

### **Theological Meanings**

The theological meanings in the Book of Esther are complicated to understand by ordinary people because God's name and power are invisible. Hence, they become the characteristics and characters of the Book of Esther. The controversy of the book of Esther is when this book maintains its spiritual existence so that it is tested whether the book of Esther is a holy book or not with various considerations related to the controversy of God's word. "The controversy surrounding the Book of Esther arises because of its questionable existence as part of the canon of Scripture, mainly due to the absence of any direct mention of God's name in the text, giving rise to the debate as to whether the book truly contains the word of God and is worthy of being considered a writing with spiritual authority." The purpose of this article is to explain and analyze the meaning of God's help based on God's absence throughout the storyline in the book of Esther so that God's invisible presence can be theologically interpreted. Another finding is that although the book of Esther does not contain the word LORD, God's help is also invisible or hidden. It can be felt by the figure of Esther in real terms through the event of Esther being chosen by the king as queen; God's help through Esther turned things around for the Jews (Nendissa et al., 2024).

In Esther 8:10-12, it reads,

Moreover, a message was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring, ... and letters were sent out, saying, The king permits the Jews in every city to assemble, and to defend their lives, and to destroy, and to slay, and to annihilate, all the soldiers, and the children, and the women, of every nation and province that would attack them, and to take away their possessions, on the same day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.

This verse has been the subject of debate in biblical ethics studies as it seems to depict the legitimization of violence as a response to injustice. Some interpreters see this as a reversal of power as the previously powerless Jews are now given the right to defend themselves within the Persian legal structure. In this context, the act was not a form of revenge but a collective rescue strategy against the threat of systematic extermination (Berlin, 2001). This shows that in extreme situations, the use of power by the victim can be legally and morally legitimate as long as it is used as a form of self-defense, not aggression.

Esther and Mordecai, who previously appeared as symbols of faith and wisdom, are tested in the ethical dimension of power. Their leadership must now not only be seen from the perspective of courage to challenge oppressive power but also from how they manage power after obtaining it. When related to the context of women in politics in Indonesia, this verse provides an important space for reflection: the success of women in entering the political arena is not the end of the struggle but the beginning of a new challenge, namely, how to use the authority they have to protect the community without falling into a pattern of repressive power. A leader like Esther is not only measured by her courage against injustice but also by how she organises justice when she has power. This verse is, therefore, not only important as a historical event or symbol of victory but also as an ethical critique of the use of power and a reminder that the desire for revenge should not obscure the restoration of justice. Esther 8:10-12 teaches us that in a world of inequality, sometimes the fight for justice requires decisive and systemic action. However, it must be done in the light of the values of faith, wisdom, and justice, which do not repay evil for evil. Women's leadership, as exemplified by Esther, must be able to combine compassion and courage, power and ethical judgment, to truly be God's instrument in the struggle for human life and dignity. In Indonesia, where women's representation in politics still faces various structural and cultural barriers, reflection on Esther's actions provides a spiritual and ethical basis for Christian women to become agents of change. Faith-based leadership, as demonstrated by Esther, encourages Christian women to understand political participation not merely as quota representation but as a prophetic calling to fight for social justice and favor the oppressed (Setiawan & Abraham, 2024).

### **Theological and Historical Analysis**

The Book of Esther is one of the books of the Bible that tells the story of a Jewish woman who took risks to save her people from annihilation. In the context of Persian rule, Esther's actions illustrate exemplary defiance of authority and show how individuals can influence social and political change. This review will explore the theological and historical analyses of Esther's actions and their relevance in the context of power. Esther not only serves as a saviour but also as a symbol of female courage in the face of the dominant patriarchal system. Her courage to go to the king without an invitation reflects a challenge to social norms and demonstrates that women can have a voice in political decision-making.

From a theological perspective, the Book of Esther shows how God works through individuals and everyday events to protect His people. Although God's name is not explicitly mentioned in the book, His actions are evident through Esther's election as queen and her success in thwarting Haman's evil plans. Esther prayed and asked for support from Mordecai before taking the bold step to go to the king. This shows the

importance of faith and dependence on God in the face of significant challenges. Esther's actions also illustrate the theme of deliverance, where God used Esther to give honour and strength to the Jews in Persia.

Esther's actions can be seen as a role model for individuals under authoritarian rule, showing that courage and moral integrity can bring about positive change despite difficult circumstances. In the context of today's government, this story inspires individuals to speak out against injustice and fight for their rights in a peaceful yet assertive manner. The Book of Esther not only tells the story of the rescue of the Jewish people but also provides insights into courage, resilience, and the role of women in history. With in-depth theological and historical analyses, we can understand the significance of Esther's actions in the context of Persian rule and its relevance to modern society today.

The Book of Esther features a Jewish female character who not only acts as a savior of her people from the threat of annihilation but also as a symbol of courage in the face of an authoritarian and patriarchal system of power. In the context of the Persian empire, Esther's act of going to King Ahasuerus without an invitation was an offense against court law that could lead to the death penalty (Esther 4:11). However, her courage was not impulsive; Esther prepared herself through fasting and prayer, showing that her actions were based on active faith and spiritual awareness (Esther 4:15-17) (Brueggemann, 2014). calls such actions a form of 'prophetic imagination' that refuses to submit to the reality of oppression and presents new possibilities through ethical courage.

Although often seen as a heroic figure, some critics highlight that Esther's success was achieved through a role that remained subservient to the patriarchal system. Esther's position as queen was obtained through a sexist and exploitative beauty selection, where young women were gathered to be chosen by the king based on physical attractiveness (Esther 2). Brenner-Idan (1995) states that 'the book reflects more a female survival strategy in a male-dominated world than a rebellion against the system itself.' In fact, Esther's success depends on her proximity to male power, not because she is able to change the patriarchal structure directly. Moreover, the king's authorization of the Jews to 'destroy, kill and annihilate' their enemies, including women and children (Esther 8:11), raises serious ethical issues regarding the use of power and violence in the book (Clines, 1984).

Despite the structural limitations in the narrative of the Book of Esther, Esther's courage and wisdom can still be seen as a model of strategic and faith-based female leadership. Esther did not fight the system head-on but used loopholes in the power structure to protect her community. This shows a form of leadership that is not only ethical and spiritual but also politically savvy. As Berlin (2001) explains, Esther's actions show that women's leadership can be transformational, not because they control the system, but because they are able to intervene with strong moral strategies. In this context,

Esther's leadership cannot be seen only from a historical dimension but as a spiritual paradigm that represents a synergy between courage, faith, and diplomatic tactics.

Esther's example remains relevant for women in Indonesia who struggle for political participation in a system that is still often discriminatory. Indonesian Christian women can draw inspiration from Esther's courage and wisdom in actively and faithfully fighting for justice and voicing the interests of the community. In the modern world of politics, bold yet strategic action is needed, especially when the existing system has not fully opened up fair access to women's leadership. The involvement of Christian women in politics is part of a 'public spirituality' that aims to bring justice to the social order (Budiatmaja et al., 2025). Thus, the story of Esther is not just a historical legacy but a contemporary call for women to speak up and act in the light of faith and moral responsibility.

### **Relevance in Contemporary Theology**

The story of Esther has long been an inspiration in Christian theology to understand how faith, courage, and wisdom can be used in resisting injustice. In the context of contemporary theology, the story serves as a foundation to support courageous actions taken by Christian individuals or groups in the face of unjust situations. In contemporary theology, Christian leadership is seen as a call to serve with justice, love, and humility. This is in line with Esther's actions, which demonstrated moral courage under tremendous pressure to protect her people.

Esther, a central figure in the Book of Esther, is a powerful image of identity and courage. Known as Hadasa, a name that means "myrtle tree," she was a Jewish woman who was adopted by her uncle Mordecai after being orphaned (Esther 2:7). In the context of Persian rule, Esther's identity as a Jew was critical; especially when she was chosen as queen by King Ahasuerus. However, she had to keep her identity a secret to protect herself and her people from threats.

Mordecai played a crucial role in shaping Esther's sense of identity. He reminded Esther that her presence in the palace was no accident but a divine calling to save her people from the annihilation planned by Haman, a high-ranking royal official (Micah 6:8). In the precarious situation when Esther felt trapped between loyalty to her people and her safety, Mordecai asserted: 'Who knows, perhaps it is precisely for such a time as this that you have gained the position of queen' (Esther 4:14). This sentence underlines that Esther's identity as a Jew and a queen gives her a unique opportunity to fight for justice.

When Esther finally revealed her identity to the king and accused Haman of his evil plans, she showed great courage. At the banquet held for the king, she not only revealed who she was but also acted as a voice for the marginalized (Esther 7:1-6). These actions reflected the moral responsibility that Esther carried as a leader with power.

Perhaps the Holocaust can be attributed to Haman's unintended evil plan, which King Ahasuerus later authorized to love the Jews of that time, Esther 3:13. It was the death of Jews by Nazi Germany under Hitler's orders during the Second World War, which brought down at least 6 million Jews, an unbelievable horror that still leaves traumatized and scarred those who experienced it and those who heard about it. The terrible plan almost worked. However, we realize that God is in control of all circumstances and does not allow evil to flourish unchecked. God's process is highly organized and unpredictable. The chapters of the book of Esther sequentially tell of Esther's enabling and Mordecai's helping the king, Haman carrying out the evil plan, Esther denouncing Haman to the king, Haman being hanged, Mordecai being made second in command and then controlling the kingdom with queen Esther.

### **Esther's Actions Before the King**

Esther was also a symbol of hope for the Jews living in exile. Through her intelligence and courage, she turned the tide and saved her people from threat. Her story teaches that one's identity can be a source of strength in the face of injustice and challenges.

Esther, a Jewish woman living in the Persian court, faced tremendous challenges and risks in her fight to save her people. Raised by her uncle Mordecai after the loss of her parents, Esther was chosen to be the queen of Ahasuerus, king of Persia. However, despite her high status, she had to hide her Jewish identity due to the looming threat of Haman, a high-ranking royal official whose ambition was to annihilate the entire Jewish nation.

As Haman plotted the extermination of the Jews, Mordecai urged Esther to speak to the king for the safety of her people. However, Esther faced a significant dilemma: going to the king without an invitation could be fatal. In Persian culture at that time, anyone who entered the palace without being summoned could be put to death (Esther 4:11). Despite feeling trapped between loyalty to her people and her safety, Esther finally made the courageous decision to go to the king after fasting for three days together with all the Jews in Shushan (Esther 4:16).

When Esther entered the palace, and the king extended his scepter as a sign of acceptance, she knew that her courage had paid off. In the presence of the king and Haman, Esther revealed her identity and accused Haman of his evil plan to kill the Jews (Esther 7:3-6). This act not only showed Esther's courage but also her intelligence in the face of a hazardous situation.

This story teaches us that even in difficult and frightening situations, the courage to stand up for truth and justice can bring about significant change. Esther's identity as a Jew was not a barrier but rather a force that drove her to act for the common good. Asking

her to go to the king and plead for the safety of the Jews, Esther felt caught between a moral obligation and the risk to her life (Esther 4:13-14)

Esther's courage to break this law reflected the gravity of the situation. She realized that if she did not act, her entire nation would face annihilation. Under these circumstances, she decided to fast and seek prayer support from other Jews before going to the king (Esther 4:16). This decision shows that despite the significant risk, Esther chose to take action for the common good.

Uncertainty about the king's reaction to her presence added to the psychological pressure Esther faced, but her courage and faith in God gave her the strength to move forward. This illustrates how cultural norms can create significant challenges for individuals trying to do the right thing in a difficult situation. Even though she had to face the possibility of death, Esther's actions symbolized courage and resilience in fighting for justice in the midst of uncertainty and risk.

In Isaiah 54:17, it is articulated that 'Every weapon formed against you will not prevail, and every individual who brings an accusation against you in a court setting will be proven wrong.' Furthermore, the king respected their advice so much that it significantly contributed to avoiding misguided decisions amidst the turbulent waves of intense emotions.

The king was regarded as the embodiment of divine power, a figure of absolute reverence, and approached with highly formalized rituals. As described in ancient inscriptions and the writings of historians such as Herodotus, the Persian king was surrounded by an aura of majesty that made him almost unattainable to the ordinary people. This concept was known as proskynesis, an act of prostration that showed reverence to the king as a representation of the gods on earth. The prohibition of meeting without invitation was a way of maintaining this hierarchy, ensuring that only those who were summoned could approach the supreme ruler.

In the context of Persian culture, this rule also aimed to protect the king from threats, whether in the form of physical threats or political intrigue. A strict system of palace bureaucracy and protocol was designed to screen interactions with the king and prevent coup attempts or resistance. This prohibition, though harsh, reflected the political realities of the Persian Empire, which was often faced with internal and external upheaval.

The story of Esther has long been a source of inspiration in Christian theology as a narrative that shows how faith, courage, and wisdom can play a role in resisting injustice. From the perspective of contemporary theology, Esther's actions are understood as a manifestation of prophetic leadership, which is born out of an understanding of divine calling in a stressful socio-political context. Esther showed that authentic leadership is not about formal position but about moral responsibility towards the community. Brueggemann (2020) calls this kind of action a 'prophetic obligation,' the courage to act in the light of truth amidst uncertainty and risk. Her courage to go to King Ahasuerus

without a formal invitation (Esther 4:11) reflects a spirituality that is not passive but active and transformational.

Although Esther is seen as a heroic female leader, there is no shortage of criticism questioning the extent to which this story truly liberates or reinforces the patriarchal system. Feminist interpretations, as put forward by Brenner, highlight that Esther's position as queen was obtained through a sexist selection process and the objectification of women (Esther 2), which reinforces women's dependence on male power. Ester does not challenge the system structurally but works 'within the system,' and her success remains rooted in her closeness to the king (Brenner-Idan, 1995). Furthermore, the act of revenge permitted by Mordecai's decree (Esther 8:11), which authorized the Jews to kill and destroy their enemies, including women and children, raises serious ethical questions regarding violence legitimized in the name of justice (Clines, 1984).

From the narrative struggle between courageous faith and dependence on patriarchal structures, we gain an understanding that Esther's leadership represents a complex model of leadership. She did not carry out a structural revolution against the Persian patriarchy, but she successfully intervened in the system from within for a greater purpose—the salvation of her community. Her courage serves as a sign that in an imperfect world, moral and spiritual actions can still be carried out strategically. Berlin (2001) emphasizes that 'Ester's actions show how the ethics of faith can work intelligently within a corrupt system.' Female leadership, as exemplified by Ester, combines identity, faith, and courage within the complex dynamics of power, and this is an important example of building public spirituality in contemporary theology.

The story of Esther is also relevant when compared to historical tragedies such as the Holocaust. In Esther 3:13, there is a systematic plan to exterminate the Jews, which is ideologically similar to the Nazi policy of genocide against 6 million Jews in World War II. Both events demonstrate how plans for extermination can be formalized within state power but also how divine intervention works in hidden ways throughout human history. Mulvey (1997) argues that the Book of Esther offers a 'providential theology without explicit miracles,' yet remains convincing that God acts through individuals willing to take risks for the sake of many. In the context of contemporary Indonesia, this narrative is relevant for inspiring women's involvement in political leadership—not to seize power but to assume ethical responsibility and fight for justice for oppressed groups.

### **Ester's Strategic Approach**

In the early stages, when Ester decided to speak to King Ahasuerus about the fate of her people, she realized the importance of establishing a personal relationship and avoiding risky confrontation. In the context of Persian politics, where the king was considered a nearly divine figure, a direct request for action could be seen as a breach of protocol that could lead to the death penalty. Instead, Esther chose to approach the king

more subtly and diplomatically: through a dinner that appeared to be more social and indirect.

Esther invited the king and Haman to attend a banquet she had prepared, and although she intended to reveal a serious matter, she chose not to discuss it directly at the first meeting (Esther 5:4-5). Instead, she invited them back for a second banquet (Esther 5:8). This approach demonstrates Esther's depth of wisdom and ability to use time and context to achieve her goals, giving the king space to feel comfortable and ready to listen to her demands. In Persian culture, banquets were opportunities for individuals to gain the king's attention in a more personal and intimate way, allowing them to build relationships and gain influence. Therefore, Esther's decision to use a banquet as a medium to initiate conversation with the king also indicates her understanding of political and court culture. A banquet gave Esther the opportunity to speak with the king in a more relaxed atmosphere and reduced the tension that might have arisen if she had immediately made her request. This strategy also implies that Esther knew how to use time and opportunity to her advantage. By inviting the king and Haman twice, Esther not only gave herself and the situation time to develop but also created increasingly tense moments that would pique the king's curiosity. This, in turn, prepared the king to accept Esther's request more openly.

Esther's decision not to present her request directly to King Ahasuerus but rather through two banquets (Esther 5:4-8) is an example of a diplomatic strategy full of caution and emotional intelligence. In Persian culture, a king was positioned as almost divine and could not be approached casually, even by his queen (Esther 4:11). Therefore, Esther designed an approach that was in line with the social and political norms of the palace. She created a friendly and relaxed atmosphere to ease the tension before revealing her true intentions. As Berlin (2001) argues, 'Esther not only understood the political situation, but also exploited the social and symbolic power available to her within a limited system.' Thus, Esther's approach reflects an adaptive and strategic model of leadership within an oppressive power structure. However, Esther's indirect approach also raises serious ethical and feminist questions.

From a feminist critical perspective, Brenner-Idan (1995) argues that the dinner party tactic employed by Esther reinforces women's dependence on charm and informal access to male power rather than on argumentative or structural strength. This strategy, in this view, is not an expression of women's autonomy but rather a reflection of internalized limitations. Clines (1984) even states that 'Ester's deliberate delay in revealing her identity can be understood as a form of political manipulation disguised as humility.' This critique reveals that Ester's success is not entirely free from ethical and structural issues but rather highlights the complexity of women within a patriarchal power system. From the dialectic between wise strategy and structural limitations, a synthesis emerges that Esther's actions constitute a form of contextual and subversive prophetic

leadership. She does not confront the system head-on but undermines it from within through her keen reading of the situation, timing, and cultural understanding. Levenson (1997) refers to Esther's actions as 'faithful subversion,' an effort to maintain the integrity of faith within a repressive system. Its relevance is particularly evident in the context of contemporary female leadership, especially in the Indonesian political arena, where diplomacy, cultural sensitivity, and moral courage are crucial components in advocating for justice within spaces still dominated by patriarchal norms.

## CONCLUSION

Wisdom and diplomacy are crucial in addressing injustice, particularly in complex social and political contexts. Wisdom, which is typically defined as the ability to make sound decisions in difficult situations, enables individuals to recognize critical moments when action is required. Diplomacy, on the other hand, involves communicating and negotiating with those in power to achieve outcomes that are fair and beneficial for all parties involved.

The story of Esther in the Bible is not only a narrative of the salvation of the Jewish people under threat of extermination but also a rich theological reflection on the values of faith, moral courage, and contextual leadership strategies. Esther emerges as a female figure who is not only willing to take risks but also demonstrates an ability to read political and social situations with great care. She combines faith and wisdom in facing absolute power, demonstrating that authentic leadership is born from the courage to act for the common good, not for personal gain.

Between the courage of faith and structural limitations, Esther displays an adaptive prophetic model of leadership: She does not directly overthrow the Persian patriarchal system but successfully intervenes from within through wise and integrity-filled strategies. Although she must operate within the boundaries of male power, she maintains her moral responsibility as the voice of her people. This shows that women can be significant agents of change even in systems that are not yet committed to equality. Theologically, the Book of Esther also affirms that God works through ordinary events and people to fulfill His will. Although God's name is not explicitly mentioned in this book, His presence is evident in every important decision made by Esther and Mordecai.

This teaches us that faith does not always work through spectacular miracles but through daily courage that relies on wisdom and trust in God's plan. In the context of Indonesia today, the story of Esther is a prophetic inspiration for Christian women to become actively involved in politics and the public sphere. Esther's example teaches that women's leadership does not have to imitate patriarchal patterns of power but can be developed through an ethical, contextual, and faith-based approach. Amidst challenges of social injustice and marginalization, women are called to be prophetic voices fighting for justice, love, and a more dignified life for all. The methods or strategies employed by

Esther demonstrate her wisdom and ability to use time and situations to achieve her goals, making the king comfortable and ready to listen to her demands, as the bureaucratic system and customs in the palace were very strict, which were used to prevent communication with the king and prevent resistance or coups.

## **Competing Interest**

The Authors has an interest in Old Testament Theology

## **Author Contribution**

I.K.H. is the first writer of this research article, designs the research title, determines the research topic and develops the theoretical concept.

D.P.P. is the second writer of this research article, continuing the work of the first author, developing research methods, supplementing the discussion and doing the translation.

D.Y.A. is the third writer of this research article, continuing the work of the first and second authors, completing the discussion and undertaking the translation.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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