

Esther 04 - Mordecai Learns of Haman's Decree, Informs Esther; Mordecai Appeals to Esther to Confront Ahasuerus, Esther Agrees

I. Threat to the Jews (Esther 1:1—5:14)

- (5) Mordecai influences Esther to agree to intervene on behalf of the Jews (4:1-17)
 - (A) Esther and the Jews mourned upon receiving the word of the decree (4:1-3)
 - (B) Esther through Hatach contacts Mordecai (4:4-6)
 - (C) Mordecai petitions Esther (4:7-14)
 - (a) Mordecai informs Esther concerning the decree (4:7-8a)
 - (b) Mordecai appeals to Esther to appeal to Ahasuerus to halt Haman's plot (4:8b)
 - (c) Esther's reticence due to her concern regarding her own life (4:9-11)
 - (d) Mordecai explains that Esther's death is inevitable and that God had allowed her to become queen to save the Jews (4:12-14)
 - (D) Esther opts to appeal to Ahasuerus on behalf of the Jews (4:15-17)

Esther 4

- (5) Mordecai influences Esther to agree to intervene on behalf of the Jews (4:1-17)
 - (A) Esther and the Jews mourned upon receiving the word of the decree (4:1-3)
- 1 When Mordecai learned of everything that had been done, he tore his clothes, **put on sackcloth and ashes**, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly.
- 1 When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly.
- 1 When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his garments and clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes. He went into the middle of the city and cried out with a loud and bitter cry.
- 1 When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry;
 - Mordecai had a strong reaction to Haman's decree. He likely felt personally responsible for this turn of events since his refusal to bow before Haman caused it to happen (Cf. 3:2-5).

- "...put on sackcloth and ashes" - wearing sackcloth and ashes, tearing of clothes, and crying publicly all signified mourning (Cf. Gen 37:34; Jer 49:3; Dan 9:3; Joel 1:13; Jonah 3:6)

— His feud with Haman, whether legitimate or not, had caused a great crisis for his whole nation. He feared that God's Chosen People would be destroyed and God's program thwarted.

2 And he came as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.

2 He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.

2 He came as far as the front of the king's gate, because no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.

2 And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

3 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 mourning rites; and many had sackcloth and ashes spread out as a bed.

3 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.

3 In every province where the order of the king and his edict reached, among the Jewish people there was great mourning, fasting, weeping, and lamenting, and many lay down on sackcloth and ashes.

3 And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

- Everywhere Jews heard of the edict, and they knew they were under the sentence of death. Yet, meanwhile, God was working behind the scenes to deliver His people.

— It's interesting that there is no reference to prayer in this verse, as normally prayer accompanied the other practices mentioned (fasting, weeping, mourning, etc., Cf. 2 Kings 19:1-4; Joel 1:14)

— Perhaps many of these exiled Jews had wandered so far from God that they did not even pray while in crisis. However, this is an argument from silence, which is never a strong argument.

(B) Esther through Hatach contacts Mordecai (4:4-6)

4 Then Esther's attendants and her eunuchs came and informed her, and the queen was seized by great fear. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai so that he would remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept *them*.

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

4 When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was greatly distressed. She sent clothes for Mordecai to put on so he could take off the sackcloth that he had on, but he would not take them.

4 So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told it her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not.

- Though Esther had not been in the presence of the king for a month (v11), this did not mean that she had fallen from his favor. As his queen she had many luxuries and was waited on by maids and eunuchs, who told her about Mordecai's mourning.

- Esther was told about Mordecai's grief, but wasn't aware of the reason behind it (v5)

5 Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him *to go* to Mordecai to learn what this *mourning was* and why it *was happening*.

5 Then Esther summoned Hathach 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*.

5 Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, whom he had assigned to her, and she ordered him to go to Mordecai to find out what was happening and why it was happening.

5 Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was.

6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square, in front of the king's gate.

6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate.

6 Hathach went to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate.

6 So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate.

(C) Mordecai petitions Esther (4:7-14)

(a) Mordecai informs Esther concerning the decree (4:7-8a)

7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the elimination of the Jews.

7 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.

7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened and the exact amount of money that Haman had said he would pay into the king's treasury in order to destroy the Jewish people.

7 And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them.

- Money was apparently a key motive, at least from Ahasuerus' perspective. He had been clobbered by the Greeks in war, sending out 2 million troops and bringing back only 5,000. This evidently killed the empire's budget.

(b) Mordecai appeals to Esther to appeal to Ahasuerus to halt Haman's plot (4:8b)

8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their annihilation, so that he might show Esther and inform her, and **to order her** to go in to the king to implore his favor and plead with him for **her people**.

8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, 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.

8 Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the written decree ordering the Jews' destruction that had been issued in Susa. Mordecai wanted him to show it to Esther, to explain it to her, and then to instruct her to go in to the king to seek his favor and plead with him for her people.

8 Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people.

- "...to order her" - Mordecai didn't make a suggestion to Esther, he gave her an order

- "...her people" - revealed to Hathach, if he did not know it already, that Esther was a Jew

- The fact that Mordecai knew the exact amount of money that Haman had promised Ahasuerus, and that he had a copy of the text of Ahasuerus' edict, supports the conclusion that Mordecai occupied an official position in the government (Cf. 2:19).

(c) Esther's reticence due to her concern regarding her own life (4:9-11)

9 So Hathach came back and reported Mordecai's words to Esther.

9 Hathach came back and related Mordecai's words to Esther.

9 Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said.

9 And Hathach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai

10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him *to reply* to Mordecai:

10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him *to reply* to Mordecai:

10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach, instructing him⁶ to go back to Mordecai with this message:

10 Again Esther spake unto Hathach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;

11 "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 in the inner courtyard, who is not summoned, he has *only* 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 to come to the king for these thirty days."

11 "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 to come to the king for these thirty days."

11 "Every servant of the king and every person in the king's provinces knows that for any man or woman who goes to the king in the inner court without being summoned there is only one law—that he be put to death—unless the king holds out the golden scepter to him. Only then he will live. For these last 30 days I've not been summoned to come to the king."

11 All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.

- Esther sent word back to Mordecai through Hathach that she couldn't fulfill his "order" until and unless the king summoned her directly. No one could stand before the king uninvited.

— The king had the power to execute anyone who disturbed him without an appointment. For the king to extend the golden scepter to someone showed that he approved of the visit and that the person was welcome and not in danger of death (Cf. 5:2).

— Herodotus records that the law excepted six persons, but confirms the general rule [iii. 84, 118]. Since Esther had not been summoned by him for a month, she did not know whether his attitude toward her would be favorable or not.

- "...golden scepter" - due to sin, we cannot enter the presence of the holy and righteous King. However, this same King, because of His incomparable love and grace, has provided a means whereby even the worst sinners may enter His presence uninvited through the "golden scepter" of the blood of Christ.

(d) Mordecai explains that Esther's death is inevitable and that God had allowed her to become queen to save the Jews (4:12-14)

12 And they reported Esther's words to Mordecai.

12 They related Esther's words to Mordecai.

12 They reported Esther's message to Mordecai.

12 And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.

13 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 *other* Jews.

13 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.

13 Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Don't suppose that because you are in the palace, you will escape any more than the other Jewish people.

13 Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.

- Esther's response to Mordecai was not encouraging. Mordecai increased the pressure and urgency on Esther by telling her that Haman's edict would encompass all Jews, including her.

14 For if you keep silent at this time, liberation and rescue will arise for the Jews **from another place**, and **you and your father's house will perish**. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty **for such a time as this?**"

14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

14 Indeed, if you are silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows but that you were brought to the kingdom for a time like this?"

14 For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

- "...from another place" - Mordecai knew that God, in one way or another, would protect His people. He believed that deliverance would arise from another place if Esther would not approach Ahasuerus about the Jews' plight.

— Notice what is assumed in the passage: Mordecai is confident that God will preserve His people. Deliverance will come. God's purposes are not dependent upon Esther. At the

same time, Esther is presented with a genuine choice: she can speak or she can remain silent. If she acts, she may be the instrument God uses to bring deliverance. If she refuses, God will accomplish His purpose through other means.

— The passage is significant because Mordecai's warning only makes sense if Esther's silence is a real possibility. The statement, "if you remain silent," presents an alternative course of action with different consequences. Esther is not treated as though she is merely carrying out an unavoidable script. She is addressed as a responsible agent whose decision matters.

— What we see here is not God's purposes being threatened by human freedom, nor human choices being swallowed up by determinism. Rather, God's plan stands, yet the individuals involved remain genuinely responsible for the choices set before them.

- "...you and your father's house will perish" - Mordecai is not saying that deliverance will arise for Esther from some other place. He's telling Esther definitively that she is their only possible source of her own deliverance, in an attempt to motivate her to act.

- "...for such a time as this" - Mordecai's question to Esther, through Hathach, is the main basis for the view that the doctrine of God's providence is the key to understanding the Book of Esther.

— Mordecai saw this as Esther's moment of destiny, even though he made no mention of God's providence as Joseph had done (Cf. Gen 50:20)

— Mordecai urged Esther to find some way some how to approach and speak to the king. He viewed her position as a unique privilege, even though he didn't specifically acknowledge God's hand in Esther's elevation.

Though God chooses to use people, He is by no means dependent on them. Many believers act as though they are indispensable to the Lord's purposes, and if they refuse to do His bidding God's work will grind to a halt. Mordecai's challenge to Esther must be heard and heeded. Our sovereign God will accomplish all His objectives with or without us. He calls us not out of His need for us but for our need to find fulfillment in serving Him.
[Merrill]

We should every one of us consider for what end God has put us in the place where we are, and, when any particular opportunity of serving God and our generation offers itself, we must take care that we do not let it slip. [Matthew Henry]

Without God we can't; without us He won't.

(D) Esther opts to appeal to Ahasuerus on behalf of the Jews (4:15-17)

15 Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai,

15 Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai,
15 Then Esther replied to Mordecai,
15 Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer,

16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. **I and my attendants also will fast** in the same way. And then I will go in to the king, which is not in accordance with the law; and **if I perish, I perish.**"

16 "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. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

16 "Go and gather all the Jewish people who are in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, night or day. Both I and my young women will also fast in the same way, and then I'll go in to the king, even though it's against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

- There must have been a significant Jewish population in Susa (Cf. 9:15)

- "...I and my attendants also will fast" - if the conversation between Mordecai and Esther took place on the same day the decree was given, Esther's three-day fast would have spanned the same dates as Jesus' period of death, burial, and resurrection.

- "...if I perish, I perish" - words of courageous determination, not a resignation to the inevitable. Esther was determined to do what needed to be done no matter the consequences. If she were killed for her act of heroism, at least she died doing the right thing.

— Her attitude changed from fear to faith, from hesitation to determination, from concern for her own safety to concern for her people's survival

[Gen 43:14]

17 So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

17 So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

17 Then Mordecai left and did everything that Esther had ordered him.

17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.