

## Esther Chapter 4

Verses 1-3: The “sackcloth” that Mordecai wore was likely made from the hair of goats or camels. It was uncomfortable to wear next to the skin, providing a physical reminder of his sorrow. This display of deep grief was something that Hebrew and Persian alike would have understood (Joshua 7:6; 2 Sam. 1:11; Jonah 3:5-6).

Mordecai “rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes”: These customs were attested in widely separated Old Testament periods (Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 1:11; Isa. 3:24; Dan. 9:3), and were practiced by other nations (Isa. 15:3; Ezek. 27:30-33), as well as by Israel. The law against wearing sackcloth in the king’s gate is not otherwise attested, but it is intrinsically credible (Neh. 2:2).

**Esther 4:1 "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;"**

“Sackcloth with ashes”: An outward sign of inward distress and humiliation (Jer. 6:26; Dan. 9:3; Matt. 11:21). Mordecai realized that he had prompted this genocidal retaliation by Haman.

Haman made sure that the king did not know what the edict said, until it was too late to stop it. Now, it seems to be common knowledge even to the Jews themselves. When Mordecai heard of this, he went out in the middle of the street so all could see, and rent his clothes, and threw ashes upon his head in mourning. Either thing that he had done would have revealed mourning, but this is a very deep type of mourning. He cried out with a loud voice as well, which drew the attention of the people to him. However he was crying to God as well.

**Esther 4:2 "And came even before the king's gate: for none [might] enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth."**

Or court, that Esther might if possible be made acquainted with this dreadful calamity coming upon her people.

"For none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth”: Or appear in such a dress at court, where nothing was admitted to damp the pleasures of it.

He had possibly gone all over the town in this manner. He lived in the palace, so he had come back there still mourning. He might arouse the attention of Esther with his cries. No one could come inside the gate in mourning clothes, so he must stay outside the gate.

Verses 3-4: “In every province” in the kingdom, the “Jews” mourned. Mordecai’s decision of “received it not”: (meaning the clothes Esther sent), and that this was not just a moment of sorrow but a national calamity.

**Esther 4:3 "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."**

For destroying the Jews on such a day, in every place where they were to be found.

"There was great mourning among the Jews, and weeping, and wailing": Which continued all day.

"And many lay in sackcloth and ashes": All night; made use of no other bed to lie on, nor clothes to cover them with.

There was no way to stop this, but by God. They were fasting, praying, and mourning in hope the LORD would see their problem, and come to their rescue.

**Esther 4:4 "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."**

"She sent raiment": Mordecai could then enter the king's gate (4:2), and talk with Esther directly (Neh. 2:2).

The chamberlains here, were the eunuchs who served Esther. The queen had many maids who helped her. One of the jobs the eunuchs did, was to keep Esther in touch with what was happening outside the palace walls. They ran errands for her, and did things that her maids could not do. One of them took clothing out to Mordecai for her. Mordecai was so grieved, he would not be comforted, or take the clothing.

**Esther 4:5 "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]."**

"Hatach": A trusted eunuch who knew of Esther's Jewish background.

Esther wanted to hear from Mordecai exactly what this was all about, and how this edict was made.

**Esther 4:6 "So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which [was] before the king's gate."**

Where he was, in a public manner, expressing his grief and sorrow.

"Which was before the king's gate": That led to the royal palace.

Verses 7-8: That Mordecai possessed this specific knowledge and a copy of the edict further evidences his prominent position in Persia.

**Esther 4:7 "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."**

How that, for refusing to reverence Haman, he was incensed against him, and against all the Jews for his sake. And had vowed revenge on them, and had formed a scheme for the ruin of them.

"And of the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them": The 10,000 talents of silver he proposed to pay into the king's treasury in lieu of the Jews' tribute. Which Mordecai observes, to show how bent he was upon the destruction of the Jews, and cared not what it cost him to gain his point. And perhaps Mordecai as yet might not know that the king had remitted it.

Mordecai did not know that Haman had tricked the king into this edict. The king had not written this, Haman had. The mistake the king had made was to let Haman use his signet ring.

**Esther 4:8 "Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to show [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."**

Which had now been published in the city; by which means Mordecai had had a sight of it, and had transcribed it (see Esther 3:14).

"To show it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her": What Haman intended against the people of the Jews; as the Targum adds.

"And to charge her; in his name": Whose charges she had always regarded, both before and since she was queen; or in the name of God.

"That she should go in unto the king to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people": Signifying there was a necessity of doing it speedily, and of urging her request with great earnestness and importunity, since it was not the life of a single person, but the lives of a body of people, and her own, that lay at stake.

This was a big load to put on the head of Esther. If the edict was carried out, she would die the same as all of the other Jews. The king did not know that she was a Jew. Haman did not know that at this point either. Mordecai sent her a copy of the edict, so she would know in detail what it said. Mordecai knew that the king loved Esther. He felt if anyone could sway him to stop this senseless murder of the Jews, it would be Esther.

Verses 9-14: Access to the king was strictly limited, since he needed to be protected both from attempts on his life and from vexation with people's problems. Even his wife had no right to approach. That she had not been called for "thirty days" is just one more indication how abnormal life was in the palace at Susa. Mordecai's response put pressure on Esther, for he reminded her that she risked death whether she approached the king or not (verse 13). There are three lines to his argument:

1. Esther herself will not be exempt from destruction under the edict;
2. He reveals his own conviction that God will not permit the extinction of His people: If Esther fails, God will have another way of saving the Jews, since God's purposes are not thwarted by the failure on one individual to respond positively to His leading;
3. The outcome of her decision is so far-reaching that, without exaggeration, she is now at the very moment when her life's purpose is at stake (verse 14).

#### **Esther 4:9 "And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai."**

Both the case of the Jews, and the cause of it, and what he would have her do at this critical juncture.

Hatach must have suspicioned that Esther too, was a Jew. He was her servant, so it was not likely he would tell anyone.

#### **Esther 4:10 "Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;"**

For there was no other way of corresponding and conversing but by a eunuch. The wives of kings being altogether under their watch and care.

"And gave him commandment unto Mordecai. To go unto him, and what he should say to him from her, which is as follows.

"Verses 11-14": Mordecai no doubt knew the infamous law of the Medes and Persians about approaching the king. He also knew the king could be persuaded, just as he had been when he made the law that brought Esther to the palace. So he urged Esther to take a risk, in case she had been providentially appointed "for such a time as this".

**Esther 4:11 "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 scepter, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days."**

“Golden scepter”: In order to protect the king’s life from would-be assassins, this practice prevailed. Seemingly, the king would extend the scepter (a sign of kingly authority), only to those whom he knew and from whom he welcomed a visit (5:2; 8:4).

“These thirty days”: Perhaps Esther feared she had lost favor with the king since he had not summoned her recently.

Esther explained to Mordecai, that if she went in to the king, when he did not call for her, he would have the right to kill her. There was one exception to the rule. If the king reached out his scepter to her she could live and have audience with him. She knew if she went in, it could mean her death.

**Esther 4:12 "And they told to Mordecai Esther's words."**

The messengers she sent to him.

The messenger took the message to Mordecai and waited for his answer to take back to Esther.

**Esther 4:13 "Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews."**

Gave in charge to the messengers what they should say to Esther from him, by way of reply.

"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews": Signifying that her being queen, and in the king's palace, would be no protection to her; and she would be no safer there than the Jews elsewhere. Since they had no greater enemies anywhere than in the king's court. And it was or would be known of what nation she was, and therefore must not expect to escape the fury of the enemy.

It would make no difference at all, that she was the queen. If they killed the rest of the Jews, they would kill her also. Someone would tell the king that she was a Jew and he would have to kill Esther along with all the rest, because it was the law.

**Esther 4:14 "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?"**

“Enlargement and deliverance”: Mordecai exhibited a healthy faith in God’s sovereign power to preserve His people. He may have remembered the Lord’s promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 17:1-8).

“Shall be destroyed”: Mordecai indicated that Esther would not escape the sentence or be overlooked because of her prominence (4:13).

“Such a time as this”: Mordecai indirectly appealed to God’s providential timing.

The word “providence” means “foreseeing” and suggests the idea of providing for the future. In theology, the term is used of God’s continuous activity whereby He makes all events work out according to His purposes. Thus, the Scriptures teach that God rules over the physical universe (Psalm 103:19), animal life (Job 12:10), the nations of the earth (Job 12:23), and the affairs of individual lives (1 Sam. 16:1).

While the Book of Esther never records the name of God, the story is one of the fullest biblical illustrations of God’s providence, in His use of a young woman to protect His people. As we confront situations in life, we should remember these come directly or indirectly from God. We should therefore seek to accomplish His will in every circumstance. (Gen. 24:27; Esther 4:14; Isa. 40:13).

Mordecai was sure that God would stop the murder of the Jews. If Esther did not do what she could, God would do it another way. There had been many people who had given their lives to save their fellowman. This was what Mordecai was asking Esther to do here. If it was the will of God for Esther to do this and she did not, God might destroy her himself. Mordecai now, believed that was why Esther was chosen by the king. He believed that God placed her there to help her people.

Verses 15-17: Esther’s reply is also a confession of faith as she implies that she accepts the suggestion of Mordecai as her duty, but that she is full of apprehension at the thought of fulfilling it. Her statement “and if I perish, I perish” is not a blind fatalism or a hopeless resignation (Gen 43:14), but rather a confidence in God’s will and wisdom (Job 13:15; Dan. 3:17-18).

**Esther 4:15 "Then Esther bade [them] return Mordecai [this answer],"**

Which follows, and was sent by the messengers she sent the above to him.

**Esther 4:16 "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."**

“Fast ye”: The text does not mention prayer being included such as was Daniel’s practice (Dan. 9:3), thought it surely was.

“Perish”: Esther’s heroic willingness to die for the sake of her fellow Jews is commendable.

In a declaration of courage and faith, Esther states, “If I perish, I perish”. Her words should echo in every Christian’s heart, reminding them that survival is not the only concern. The most important matter is to cooperate with God wherever He places them. If Christians are walking in complete obedience to God’s will, they can be confident nothing will happen to them that is outside of His sovereign control.

This short book describes 10 feasts, but this verse mentions a “fast” instead, prompted by great sorrow.

Esther had gathered up all the courage she had. She decided to go ahead and speak to the king, even if it meant her death. She did want them to fast and pray for her safety. She would do the same with her maids. It was almost as if she was saying I might perish either way, so what do I really have to lose. We are all going to die sometime. The important thing is to make our lives have a purpose. She had realized that the life of all the Jews was worth taking the risk.

**Esther 4:17 "So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him."**

About the business he was directed to; the word used having sometimes the signification of passing over or transgressing. Jarchi interprets it of Mordecai's transgressing the command, by fasting on a festival. The letter being written on the thirteenth of Nisan (Esther 3:12), the next day was the Passover, on which he supposes the fast began. And the three days were, the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth of the month, and belonged to the feast of the Passover and of Unleavened Bread; so the Targum.

"And did according to all that Esther had commanded him": Got the Jews together, and kept a fast three days. According to the Midrash they were the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth of Nisan.

This was saying he gathered the Jews together and proclaimed a three day fast. Many of the Jews realized the seriousness of the edict, and they would have gladly fasted with him to try to get help from God.

### **Esther Chapter 4 Questions**

1. When Mordecai heard the edict, what did he do?
2. Where did Mordecai do this?
3. Why did he choose the place for this show of mourning?
4. Why could he not enter the king's gate?
5. Who was mourning, besides Mordecai?
6. What was the Jew's only help?
7. Who told Esther about Mordecai?
8. What did she send to Mordecai?

9. Would he take it?
10. Who were the chamberlains, here?
11. Who did she send to ask Mordecai, what the problem was?
12. Who had promised to pay money to have the killing done?
13. Mordecai did not know that Haman had \_\_\_\_\_ the king into getting this sealed with his ring.
14. What did Mordecai give to Esther's chamberlain?
15. What did Mordecai ask Esther to do to stop this?
16. The king did not know that she was a \_\_\_\_\_.
17. Why did Mordecai want Esther to speak to the king?
18. What law did Esther remind Mordecai of?
19. How is the only way she could keep from being killed?
20. How long had it been, since she had been called to the king?
21. What word did Mordecai send Esther in verse 13?
22. What was Mordecai sure that God would do?
23. Why did Mordecai believe that Esther had become queen?
24. What did she insist Mordecai do, if she agreed to go in to the king unannounced?
25. Who fasted with Esther?