

Esther Series

Revised – August 2010

Good News Bible Studies

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Esther's Purpose

Esther 4

Chosen For an Unexpected Calling (Esther 4:1-14)

1. “When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. He went as far as the king’s gate, for no one was to enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth. In each and every province where the command of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.” (Esther 4:1-3)
 - Many commentators conclude from this text that Mordecai may have felt personally responsible for this decree that was issued to annihilate the Jews.
 - 1) We know that it was Mordecai’s actions in refusing to bow to Haman that was the catalyst to this whole diabolical plan.
 - 2) It is clear from this text that Mordecai was deeply move in that this proposed edict had serious consequences for he and the other Jews.
 - 3) The edict itself evidenced a growing hatred of the Jews (Anti-Semitism) throughout the Persian Empire during this period of history.
 - 4) It is entirely possible to assume that Mordecai knew that something like this would come about and why for so long he deemed it necessary to keep a low profile as to he and Esther’s Jewish heritage.
 - 5) Whatever was the cause or catalyst to this event, the edict is now in play and unable to be reversed (it will be modified – which we will see in chapters 8-9). Perhaps Mordecai realizes that without Divine intervention, the potential results looked grim for him and the other Jews.

- The actions by Mordecai to; “tear his clothes and put on sackcloth” was a somewhat normal custom/behavior for such a major crisis.
 - 1) We see similar grief and mourning when Jacob heard the news (although it was a false deception by his other sons) that his son Joseph had been killed by wild animals. (**Genesis 37:34**)
 - 2) Another instance where we see something similar is in Daniel’s prayer over his people who were in Babylonian captivity and he was so deeply moved that he prayed with fervency that the captivity would come to an end. (**Daniel 9:3**)
 - 3) Even other nations and cultures had a similar practice (**Isaiah 15:3, Ezekiel 27:30-33**)
 - 4) According to Herodotus (the Greek historian), the Persians of King Ahasuerus time also tore their clothes in a sign of grief after their defeat at Salamis.
 - 5) The meaning of the act is simply; *an outward sign of an inward distress and often used as a sign of mourning, sorrow or grief.*
- Something worth noting here is that Mordecai did not hide his grief:
 - 1) We are told that “he went out into the city and wailed loudly and bitterly”
 - 2) Is it healthy and beneficial to share our grief and despair or should we keep it hidden from others? Why or why not?
- We are also told here in this passage that “no one is to enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth”. What might be the reason for this?
- How did the rest of the Jews in Persia respond?

2. “Then Esther’s maidens and her eunuch’s came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish. And she sent garments to cloth Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept them. Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king’s eunuch’s, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was” (Esther 4:4-5)
- It appears that the communication between Esther and Mordecai needed to take place through third parties (her maidens and eunuch’s)
 - 1) **This might have been because of the edict** and since it was known that Mordecai was a Jew – any direct communication between Mordecai and Esther might have put her in jeopardy before something could be done.
 - 2) The fact that Mordecai was dressed in sackcloth and ashes may also have prohibited him from getting close to the Queen and thus it was necessary to use a trusted liaison to pass information between Esther and Mordecai.
 - Take note of how Esther responded to the news that she received from her maidens and eunuch’s – she “writhed in great anguish”.
 - 1) Hearing the news about the edict and seeing Mordecai dressed this way would have been devastating to her.
 - 2) Her anguish and pain was evident to all
 - 3) Esther appeared to want to have direct communication with the one who raised her and mentored her.
 - 4) Esther knew that Mordecai could not come to her dressed the way he was so she sent a fresh set of clothes for him to wear.
 - How did Mordecai respond to Esther’s offer of new clothes and what might have been his reasons for this?
 - Esther sends her trusted servant Hathach to visit Mordecai to find out all of the details surrounding these recent events and what Mordecai wanted her to do.

3. “So Hathach went out to Mordecai to city square in from of the king’s gate. Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king’s treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her, and to order her to go into the king to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people”. (Esther 4:6-8)

- Esther and Mordecai must have had a high level of trust in God and a high level of trust in Hathach (his name which is derived from the Persian word **hataka** means “*good*”) as this was a pretty big risk that they were taking.
- There does not seem to be any secrecy to their meeting:
 - 1) I would imagine that Haman had spies throughout the land as this plot was no small operations and yet Mordecai apparently had no fear of being found out by Xerxes, Haman or anyone else.
 - 2) This boldness could very well exemplify great faith that the Lord will protect them no matter what the circumstances are. (see Esther 4:14)
 - 3) **How would we behave in the midst of such pending tragedy? Would our faith in the Lord be strong?**
- Mordecai completely discloses Haman’s plot to kill the Jews (**Esther 4:7-8**)
 - 1) He no doubt shared with Hathach the complete story of what transpired between himself and Haman.
 - 2) He describes the financial inducement that Haman offered to the king in allowing Haman to kill all of the Jews throughout the empire.
 - 3) He gives a Hathach a copy of the _____ that would prove that his words were true and accurate.
 - 4) Mordecai’s parting words to Hathach was to _____ Esther to use her influence with the king and plead for the lives of her people.

4. “Hathach came back and related Mordecai’s words to Esther. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him to reply to Mordecai: All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days” (Esther 4:9-11)

- Hathach returns to inform Esther of what he learned from Mordecai
- Take note of the trust that both Mordecai and Esther had in Hathach – some conclude that he was so trusted by Esther that he was aware of her nationality but remained silent about it.
- Upon receiving this news from Mordecai – Esther was faced with a real dilemma:
 - 1) Access to the king (**even by his queen**) was strictly _____ to protect him from assassins and probably to keep the king from being burden with everyone’s problems.
 - 2) Esther needed an _____ to see the king and she wasn’t on his calendar
 - 3) To go to the king without an appointment was to put her life at _____.
 - 4) The only way to see the king without an appointment was to go to him and hope that he extends his “_____” in her direction.
 - 5) The risk (even for Esther) was great and she knew that if the king did not extend his golden scepter to her that it could mean she would be put to _____.
- It is possible that Esther had been out of favor with the king as she hadn’t had any interaction with him for the past 30 days. This put Esther in a precarious position and she felt uneasy about the whole situation.
- Her pause and concern draws an interesting reply by Mordecai which seems to embolden Esther and will set in motion a plan that will expose Haman for who he is and provide a way of escape for the Jews of the Persia Empire.

5. “They related Esther’s words to Mordecai. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, Do not imagine that you in the king’s palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another 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?” (Ether 4:12-14)

- It seems that Esther may well have been hemmed in by her circumstances:

- 1) This is something many of us can relate to in our struggles of life as our circumstances can often get us off track.
- 2) Sometimes we need a fresh reminder as to who is in control and the Lord will often use those same circumstances or the counsel of other people to bring us around to realize He is in control.
- 3) Do you have any comments or personal experiences that you would like to share?

- Mordecai’s response to Esther is pretty straightforward:

- 1) Esther was a Jew and ultimately she would suffer the same punishment as the rest. **She couldn’t just _____ the problem and think it would go away.**
- 2) He reminded her that it was no _____ that she became Queen.
- 3) He expressed total _____ that God would deliver the Jews as He promised that He would. (Isaiah 10:20-30)
- 4) He encouraged her not to _____ her heritage and to not _____ think she could live comfortably by standing by and doing _____.
- 5) He closes out his remarks by saying that it is very possible that this is the _____ you were made Queen – to save your people from annihilation!

- **Are there areas in your life where you need to trust God and not the circumstances?**

Courage to Accept the Challenge (Esther 4:15-17)

1. “Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, Go, assemble all the Jews who are assembled 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 into the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther commanded him” (Esther 4:15-17)
 - Esther agrees to proceed and in doing so she recognizes the risk that is involved
 - She calls for a fast from her own people and asks the same from her helpers
 - 1) The appeal to only fast for her and not pray is taken by some commentators to show a lack of **piety** (a reverence for God or devout fulfillment of religious obligations).
 - 2) Although prayer is not mentioned, I am not sure we can draw the conclusion as some do that Esther and Mordecai were only interested in acting in some patriotic manner and lacked genuine spiritual drive or faith.
 - 3) In my mind, a call to fast was a call to show a genuine contrite heart that is laid out before the Lord in submission to His will.
 - 4) I don’t believe we can conclude one way or the other as to what was the genuine motivation behind the act (a call to fast) – but I don’t believe Esther would have made such a request if she didn’t understand its purpose and value to the Lord.
 - Take note of Esther’s response – “If I perish, I perish!” I see this as courage and you can find a similar courage displayed by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Book of Daniel - chapter 3.
2. Esther does her part by putting her life on the line to be an instrument of God’s will and although she didn’t know the outcome at this point she was prepared to trust the Lord to do His will and that is what faith is all about!!!
3. Stay tuned for the results of her meeting with King Ahasuerus in the next chapter!