

Esther 4

Verses 1- 3

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

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.

Even though Mordecai was justified in his actions it brought contempt on all his people not just himself.

This tradition of sackcloth and ashes can be traced back to antiquity.

1. The time of Jacob, 1739 BC.

See Genesis 37:34

³⁴ So Jacob tore his clothes, and put on a sackcloth undergarment over his waist, and mourned for his son many days.

2. The time of Job. 2500 BC.

See Job 42:5-6

⁵ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;

⁶ Therefore I retract,
And I repent, sitting on dust and ashes."

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

We can see from this verse that this custom of mourning in sackcloth was a custom practiced by numerous nations that were living in Persia at that time.

³In 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.

Even though the name of God is not mentioned in Esther, this outpouring of grief was an appeal for God's intervention. While the Jewish people often ignored God during the good times they were quick to cry out to him during times of crises. This is true of every culture and even some unbelievers when things get critical.

The fact that God's name is never mentioned in this book probably means that it was not written by a Jew so the writer could be almost anyone. However, it may have been someone who had access to Persian court records.

Verses 4 - 8

⁴Then 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*. ⁵Then 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*. ⁶So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square, in front of the king's gate. ⁷Mordecai 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. ⁸He 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.

⁵Then 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*.

Her servants had told her that Mordecai and the Jews were in mourning but they did not know what was causing the distress so Hathach was sent to get more information.

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.

Esther's servants didn't know she was a Jew but that secret would soon be known when they heard the message from Mordecai. The king may not have learned about it until Esther told him.

Verses 9 - 12

⁹ So Hathach came back and reported Mordecai's words to Esther. ¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him *to reply* to 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." ¹² And they reported Esther's words to 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."

Esther did not refuse to accept Mordecai's order but she did advise him of the extreme danger in such a request. When her visits with the king were more frequent she could have revealed this message to him at the right time but not having seen the king for a month she had reason to fear that he did not wish to see her.

Here, we have a glimpse into the life of a woman living in the harem of a Persian king. Days and months could elapse and she might not see her husband and this wife was one that he loved above any of the others. One has to wonder if the king kept a rolodex to remember the names of all his wives and concubines.

If we assume this event took place in the first month, which seems like a reasonable assumption, then there was still plenty of time to get the message to the king but when Mordecai heard her response he was alarmed and replied with a stern message that got her attention.

Verses 13 - 17

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.”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?”¹⁵ Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai,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.”¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Mordecai reminded Esther about some negative outcomes if she didn’t help.

1. Do not imagine that you can escape any more than all the *other* Jews

Mordecai had revealed her secret when he sent the communication.

2. Liberation and rescue will arise for the Jews from another place, and you and your father’s house will perish

If she doesn’t act God will send someone else and she would suffer the consequences for not helping her fellow Jews. He was reminding Esther that death awaited her whether she went to the king or remained silent.

3. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?

He was letting her know that this was God’s will for her.

Esther did not leave the outcome to chance but told Mordechai to do the following:

1. Gather all the Jews in Susa.
2. Do not eat or drink for 3 days and 3 nights.
3. She and her attendants would do the same.
4. She said she would so to the king by saying “If I perish, I perish.”

Even though she was the Queen the outcome of her appeal was no slam dunk.