

Relief and Deliverance

Esther 4

We are in the middle of the book of Esther.

If you are here for the first time today, you have missed a lot. I cannot catch you up. But here are just a few of the key points up to this point.

Both Mordecai and Esther are Jews living in one of the capital cities of the Persian Empire.

Many of their fellow Jews have returned to the Land of Israel. They have remained behind.

Both Mordecai and Esther have hidden their Jewish faith. They have not taken any religious stands similar to Daniel and his three friends.

Esther is now queen - wife of the Persian king. But as we will see, the original flames of affection have been somewhat cooled of late.

King Ahaseurus has promoted a man named Haman to the second place in the kingdom.

Haman is an Agagite. Mordecai is a Benjamite. Benjamites do not like Agagites. Therefore, Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman.

This refusal to show personal respect to Haman, infuriates him. And rather than pour out his wrath on Mordecai alone, Haman works a deal with the king to wipe out all Jews anywhere in the kingdom.

This is where we find ourselves in chapter 4.

Before we look at chapter 4, I want you to turn with me to the book of 1 Peter. The Bible is one book. It has an OT and a NT, but it is one book with one basic message.

All of its parts fit together. God is its Author.

Because this is true, it is often helpful to use one part of Scripture to help us interpret another part of Scripture.

And 1 Peter will help us to get in the right mindset to properly understand Esther 4.

1 Peter 1:3-9 ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, as was necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested

genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Two things in this passage that I want you to have lodged in your mind as we study Esther 4:

1. God is the one who is actively working to bring about a tested and genuine faith in his people.
 - a. Everything that I have just reviewed for you in the book of Esther is entirely under the Hand of God's Providence.
 - b. He is orchestrating everything for the preservation of his people, but more specifically, so that his people will be brought to a tested and genuine faith in him.
 - c. This is our God. And he is doing the same thing in the lives of his people today.
2. Even though we cannot see God, we love him and believe in him.
 - a. God is nowhere mentioned in the book of Esther. It is the only book of the Bible that does not mention the name of God. God is hidden.
 - b. But God is not absent. In fact, in Esther 4 we will begin to see the faith of Esther begin to grow and flourish. She will begin to love and trust, the God whom she cannot see.
 - c. We are on the same journey as Esther. We too are learning to love and trust the God we cannot see.

Read Esther 4:1-3.

ESV **Esther 4:1**

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, (Haman's plan to destroy all Jews)

Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes,
and went out into the midst of the city,
and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

² He went up to the entrance of the king's gate,
for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.

³ And in every province,
wherever the king's command and his decree reached,
there was great mourning among the Jews,
with fasting and weeping and lamenting,

and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

What is the significance of the reaction of Mordecai and the rest of the Jews?

1. Jews as a whole: The correct reaction to crisis.
 - a. Whether or not they were clinging to God up to this point, the crisis has forced them into a posture of dependence upon God.
 - b. And who is the One who is in control of the crisis? The unseen, but most certainly present, God of Israel.
 - c. I do not want to go into the details of fasting today. It is an appropriate way to respond to terrible news. It is a way of humbling oneself before God and reflects earnestness in prayer.
 - i. Prayer is not specifically mentioned here.
 1. Some see this as a sign that the Jews no longer prayed. (I find this difficult to believe.)
 2. I think that they prayed, but consistent with the writer's desire to not mention God, he omits any mention of prayer to Yahweh.
2. Mordecai: All the same reasons just mentioned, but with a few added issues.
 - a. Mordecai does his mourning right out in the open. He stands right in the middle of the city where he can be seen by anyone who walks by.
 - i. Mordecai is not the central character in the story. Esther is.
 - ii. But it is important to see that Mordecai is no longer a hidden Jew living in a pagan world.
 - iii. His Jewish faith is front and center.
 - iv. His personal animosity towards an Agagite, flowing from a long standing family feud, has been the spark that has brought him to make his faith central to his entire existence.
 - v. Mordecai puts everything on the line in order to stand with the people of God.
 - vi. And who is the one who has orchestrated all of this?
 1. Your God, who works the same way today to bring about a tested and genuine faith in your life as well.
 - b. Mordecai goes right up to the entrance to the king's gate.
 - i. Everyone in the kingdom knows about the plan to annihilate the Jews - except Esther.
 1. Esther is living in the Palace of the King and apparently, no one saw fit to tell her that her fellow Jews were scheduled for termination.
 2. Why would they? No one in the palace knew that she was a Jew.

- ii. Mordecai makes certain that Esther will hear the news. People know that Mordecai is connected with Esther. They may not know the whole story, but they know that they know one another. So, when Mordecai is standing right outside the gate of the king, someone goes and tells Esther.
- iii. Esther knows that Mordecai is mourning, but she does not know why.

Read Esther 4:4-8.

4 When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed.

She sent garments to clothe Mordecai,
so that he might take off his sackcloth,
but he would not accept them.

5 Then Esther called for Hathach,
one of the king's eunuchs,
who had been appointed to attend her,
and ordered him to go to Mordecai
to learn what this was
and why it was.

6 Hathach went out to Mordecai
in the open square of the city
in front of the king's gate,
7 and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him,
and the exact sum of money
that Haman had promised to pay into the king's
treasuries
for the destruction of the Jews.

8 Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued
in Susa

for their destruction,
that he might show it to Esther
and explain it to her
and command her to go to the king
to beg his favor
and plead with him
on behalf of her people.

Esther's first reaction: What are you doing Mordecai?

- You will be singled out.
- We are a lot like Esther.

- Her first reaction is not to understand why. She does not first seek to know the cause of the problem.
- Her first reaction is to simply take care of the symptom of the problem.
- We are so much like Esther. We want the bad circumstances of our lives changed. But we often forget to search out God's purposes for the circumstances in the first place.
- But mercifully, the Hidden Hand of Providence will not allow Esther to simply deal with symptoms.
- Mordecai refuses the clothes.

Now that Esther cannot fix the problem in her own strength, she begins to ask questions as to what is really going on.

Esther sends Hathach to find out what is going on. Hathach is one of the King's eunuchs, but he has been assigned to care for Esther. He must be well trusted by Esther for her to send him on this errand.

Where is Mordecai when Hathach questions him?

- In the open square of the city
- In front of the king's gate
 - Very public
 - We don't have mention of witnesses, but it is likely that others would have seen them conversing.

Mordecai explains everything. (including the money)

- for the "destruction of the Jews"
- including a copy of the written decree for their destruction.

Mordecai then commands Esther to go to the king and plead with him to change his mind.

- He commands Esther: Mordecai already has his plan in mind. Esther has influence and will be able to change the mind of the king.
- Esther is to beg the favor of the king.
- And to plead with him on behalf of her people.

I find this ironic. There is no mention of anyone begging the favor of Yahweh or pleading with Yahweh on behalf of His people. And yet, Mordecai wants Esther to beg the favor of the pagan king: Ahaseurus.

How will Esther respond to all of this new information and Mordecai's command?

Esther has all of the fears that any one of us would have if we were in her place. How often have we placed before God all of the reasons why we cannot do His will?

But God is not helpless in the face of our fears.

We might like to see God show up at this time. Some sort of Theophany: a burning bush, an angel maybe.

Not happening. God is present, but he is hidden.

And so, we have the voice of God, come through the mouth of Mordecai.

Read Esther 4:12-14.

- 12 And they told Mordecai what Esther had said.
13 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther,
 "Do not think to yourself
 that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all
 the other Jews.
14 For if you keep silent at this time,
 relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another
 place,
 but you and your father's house will perish.
 And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for
 such a time as this?"

Mordecai is given Esther's first response of fear.

Hathach was sent. I do not know why the pronoun is in the plural "they".

Maybe there were others with Hathach.

But Mordecai is not going to back down now.

This is Mordecai's famous reply! (Worth Memorizing - Key verses in each book.)

1. "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews."
 - a. This was certainly one thought that went through Esther's mind.
 - b. She took great care not to directly go to Mordecai herself.
 - c. She obviously wants to keep her distance from Mordecai.
 - i. But how likely is it that she will be able to keep her identity hidden?
 - ii. By now there are several who know her connection to Mordecai.
 - iii. The beans may not have been spilled yet, but the can is certainly open and beginning to tip.
 - d. Mordecai speaks truth to Esther: You cannot hide your faith. You will be found out.

- i. You may think that there is danger in going to the king, but there is certain destruction in doing nothing.
- ii. This reminds me of Jesus' words to his disciples and Peter's response when many of his followers were leaving him because they were offended by his difficult teaching.
- iii. **John 6:67-69** ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."
- iv. If Peter had any other options, he may have taken them. But he knew that he did not.
- v. We are in the same situation as Peter, and Esther:
 1. Peter tells us explicitly that salvation is only found in being united to Jesus. We stand with him. We identify with him.
 2. Esther must find the faith to stand with God's people, the "body" of Christ.

Here is a general principle that will help you when you are trying to interpret narrative passages like we find in Esther: Use passages that teach on an issue directly to help you interpret narrative passages.

Esther is dealing with the dilemma: Can I openly identify with God's people? Can I stand strong for God even if it means my own death?

Jesus teaches on this very thing.

Matthew 12:30 ³⁰ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Matthew 10:32-39 ³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. ³⁴ "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

These are direct teachings of Christ.

Esther is an example and illustration of what Christ is teaching. Only she lived hundreds of years before Christ.

You cannot remain a part of the world and be a Christian.

It is an impossibility.

God, in his providence, wants you to be confronted with the choice of standing with him.

It may not be your death. It could mean the loss of your job, or maybe a promotion.

It may mean the loss of your girlfriend or boyfriend.

It may just be the loss of your pride.

For Esther to not acknowledge God before men, puts her in a terrible position.

2. “For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish.”
 - a. “but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven”
 - i. Mordecai does not mention the name of God, but how else can he say, “you and your father’s house will perish”?
 - ii. Esther is at the defining moment in her life. She must choose God and his people, or she will perish.
 - iii. You and I must also ask ourselves the question: Are we denying Jesus before men?
 - iv. All of us at one time or another have denied Jesus before men, either in our words or actions. We all need his cleansing blood. But are we denying him? Or are we in faith standing with him and with the people of God.
 - b. “Relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place”
 - i. How can Mordecai know this?
 - ii. He does not have any plan “B”. Esther is his only plan.
 - iii. But he speaks it anyway.
 - iv. How can he say this?
 - v. Because the Word of God says as much.
 - vi. Where?
 - vii. In God’s covenant promises to Abraham. God will bless Abraham and his descendants. God will have a people for himself.
 - viii. Mordecai may not know how it will happen, but he is certain that something will happen.

- ix. Because God's Word says it will happen. And God's Word never fails.
- x. This, by the way, is why Paul takes three chapters to discuss unbelieving Jews in the book of Romans.
- xi. God's promises must be fulfilled. All of them.
- c. I know that churches and denominations can become so far removed from the Word of God that Jesus will remove their lampstand. I know that this happens.
- d. But I also know that God will always have a visible church until he comes. And I don't care how weak and miserable the Church may look in our day, She will win. And you will do well to identify yourself with her and with Jesus.
- e. **2 Timothy 2:11-13** ¹¹ The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful- for he cannot deny himself.
 - i. Many take this passage to mean: I can deny Jesus and still go to heaven because I trust in Jesus and he cannot deny himself.
 - ii. The point is nothing of the sort.
 1. If you in faith endure, you will reign with Jesus.
 2. If you deny him (before men), he will deny you. (before the Father)
 3. But do not think that your denial will mess up the promises of God. Your lack of faith cannot prevent God from carrying out his plan of redemption. But you put yourself in danger of not being a part of the victory celebration.
 4. Mordecai and Jesus and Paul give us the same warning.

But let's not end with the warning!

3. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?
 - a. Here is the positive!
 - b. Up until this moment you have lived your life in obscurity. You have not had any idea how your life fits into God's plan. You are queen, yes! But what good has that done you? You spend your days living in luxury waiting upon the whim of the King to call you into his presence. Really, is that all your life is about?
 - c. Is it not exciting to think, that in God's Sovereign hand of providence, you have been brought to this day, just for such a time as this?

- d. And I would tell you all here today, that your life somehow fits into God's perfect plan to redeem his people.
- e. No matter what you may think of your life.
- f. No matter how many mistakes you have made so far in your life.
- g. No matter if you have denied Jesus in the past.
- h. God is ordering your life. Stand with him today. Identify with his people. And I guarantee you that your life will have purpose and meaning.
- i. We may not see exactly what this purpose is now. But when we are all gathered on the victory day, it will be made clear.
- j. Quit looking for your purpose in yourself, and find it in serving the kingdom of God.

How will Esther respond to Mordecai's/God's challenge to her?

Read Esther 4:15-16.

15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai,
 16 "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa,
 and hold a fast on my behalf,
 and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day.
 I and my young women will also fast as you do.
 Then I will go to the king,
 though it is against the law,
 and if I perish, I perish."

Esther's response of faith!

1. Hold a fast on my behalf (3 days)
 - a. I do not have the strength in myself to do this.
 - b. She fasts with her young women.
 - c. She calls on God's people to fast with her.
2. I will go to the king
 - a. The Obedience that flows from Faith!
 - i. She is throwing in with God's people.
 - ii. She has made her choice!
 - b. If I perish, I perish!!!!
 - i. The Hebrew implies resignation: I expect to die!

Esther's character develops throughout the book - Here is where she becomes our heroine.

"Her decision energizes her, gives her purpose, and emboldens her to face a threatening and uncertain future." Jobs

Esther has died “to herself”.

In her mind, her life is over. For her, life has become nothing more than the need to follow through with her decision to stand with God’s people.

Have you been brought to this point?

Have you died to your own life here, such that you can truly live by faith - earnestly awaiting the return of your Lord and Savior?

I was reading in World Magazine of a church in _____ where ...
The picture is a picture of the Christians gathered in worship the day after the killing.

They understood: If I perish, I perish.

Read Esther 4:17.

¹⁷ Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

No longer will Mordecai command Esther.

From now on Esther will be giving the orders.

This is not about authority. This is about Esther now being in line with God’s plan. She is now on his page. And we will see what God is going to do!

Amen!