

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;

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

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.

When Mordecai learned about all Haman's treachery, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes as a sign of great distress. He went out into the street in front of the king's gate crying loudly and bitterly. He couldn't take his normal position in the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.

As the king's decree was publicized in each province, there was great distress among the Jews. They fasted and cried out loudly and mournfully; many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

sackcloth = coarse material used to bag grain

According to Eerdman's: "In the postexilic period fasting was used as a means of calling on God's direct assistance when the community was in great danger."

Though God's name is not mentioned in the book of Esther, I think this is the first implied reference to Him.

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.

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*.

Esther's servants informed her of Mordecai's actions, as I am sure he intended when he took up his position in front of the king's gate and made such a loud, conspicuous display of himself. The queen was greatly distressed and sent clothing to Mordecai urging him to put off the sackcloth, but he would not. Esther then called for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains assigned to her, and sent him to Mordecai to get an explanation for his actions.

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

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.

Esther 4:8 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.

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

Hatach went to see Mordecai. He told the servant all that had happened to him and how Haman had promised to pay the king's treasuries a huge sum of money to accomplish his purpose of killing the Jews. I don't believe that this was published in the decree, so he must have had informants from within the palace.

He also gave Hatach a copy of the decree to show to Esther and explain it to her. He told him to tell Esther that she should go in to the king to intercede for her people. Hatach delivered Mordecai's message.

If Hatach didn't already know, he now knew that Esther was a Jew.

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

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 sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.*

Esther gave Hatach another message to deliver to Mordecai. It was to inform him that no person is allowed to go before the king in his inner court without being called. The penalty of disobedience was death unless the king held out the golden scepter in pardon and permission. She then admitted that she had not been called to see the king for 30 days, implying that she may have fallen out of his favor.

Esther was basically saying, if I go before the king, I may die. Her focus was on self—not on her people. She evidently hadn't thought it through to the point that she would be a victim of the decree as well.

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

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.

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?*

Esther's message was delivered to Mordecai and he responded sternly. He basically told her that her life was forfeit anyway if she did not go to the king. He confidently declared that if she refused to help, deliverance and rescue for the Jews would come from another source. She and her father's house, however, would be destroyed. He then basically reminded her of God's sovereignty; he told her that maybe she was in her position for just this time.

Mordecai knew that God had made a covenant with Abraham that He would not break; he knew the people of Israel had an eternal future.

*Genesis 17:5–8 “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee....And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an **everlasting** covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an **everlasting** possession; and I will be their God.”*

I believe he was also thinking of Joseph, who realized that God had used what had happened in his life to raise him to power to provide deliverance for his people.

Genesis 50:19–20 “And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”

Again, though God is not mentioned outright, His sovereignty is definitely in reference.

Esther 4:15 Then Esther bade *them* return Mordecai *this answer*,
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.
Esther 4:17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

Esther answered Mordecai by telling him to gather together all the Jews in Shushan and call for a three-day fast for her—a complete fast of no food or drink. She promised that she and her maid servants would do the same. After that she would go to see the king in spite of the law; if she dies, so be it. In other words, I think she is saying that she will put herself in God’s hands.

Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther had commanded.

Gill makes an interesting observation about the timing of this fast. “...the letter being written on the thirteenth of Nisan (*cf* 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....”