

# ESTHER

For Such A Time As This

by

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### FAITH AND FATE

THERE ARE COMPARATIVELY few people who will take the time to survey the whole state of affairs when they get into trouble. Some lose their heads altogether, while others just try to “muddle through.” As one considers the trouble in which Mordecai found himself, one wonders what other course he might have pursued had he anticipated all that resulted from his refusal to bow down to Haman. We gather from his behavior, as described in the first verse of this chapter, that he was quite surprised at the turn which events took, for when he **“perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes.”**

According to Revelation 6:12, it appears that sackcloth was black. It was usually made of goats' hair, and garments made of it “probably resembled a sack, with openings made for the neck and arms, and slit down the front . . . and usually worn over other raiment, but sometimes next to the skin” (Davis). According to one authority, such garments were not even removed at night. In those days sackcloth was the customary attire of mourners. But it was also worn at times by prophets, and frequently captives were dressed in sackcloth. Thus we see that it was symbolic of sorrow, humility, and humiliation.

It will be recalled by those who are conversant with the story of Joseph that when his brother Reuben discovered that he was no longer in the pit into which his brothers had cast him before they sold him to the Midianites, **“he rent his clothes”** as a sign of his grief. And when Jacob received Joseph's coat which had been dipped in blood to make it appear that some wild beast had devoured him, he also **“rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days”** (Genesis 37:29-34). Likewise the prophet Daniel when he set his face unto the Lord his God in prayer and supplication he did it **“with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes”** (Daniel 9:3).

It is entirely possible that Mordecai knew what the saintly Daniel had done and, finding himself in similar circumstances, he did likewise. But we must not take that to mean that he was sorry for what he had done. Evidently he still believed that he had done right in refusing to bow down to Haman. And that seems to confirm the view that his refusal was based on religious grounds even though no reference is made to that here. In any case he made no secret of his grief. We read that he **“went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry.”** It has been

suggested that Esther and Mordecai, as well as all the other Jews in Persia at that time, could have avoided this trouble if they had availed themselves of the opportunity of returning to their own land when King-Cyrus gave them permission to do so.

But who can say that Haman would not have pursued them there as well?

We know from the Scriptures that in the days of Daniel the Chaldeans came near and accused the Jews because they would not fall down and worship the golden image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. As a result Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace which had actually been heated seven times more than usual. The story of their miraculous deliverance is so well known that we need not repeat it here. We merely point out that the anti-Semitism which flared up in the days of Mordecai and Esther was not a new thing. Indeed, it looks as though Mordecai may have had all of this before him when he refused to bow down to Haman. Thus we see that even though he and his compatriots did not return to their own land when they had the opportunity to do so, the Lord made even that to work out for their good and His glory.

Further evidence that Mordecai had no desire to hide his grief is seen in the fact that he **“came even before the king’s gate,”** which none could enter who were clothed with sackcloth. Thank God, such is not the case with the King of kings! The child of God is bidden to come boldly to His throne of grace in order that he may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). But even though Mordecai could not come to the throne of King Ahasuerus, he went as far as he could. And in so doing he was really representing many others. **“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.”**

News of all this finally reached Queen Esther. But it was not Mordecai who informed her. It was her own **“maids and her chamberlains”** who came and told her, and she was **“exceedingly grieved.”** The chamberlains here referred to were eunuchs appointed by the king to wait on her. But it looks as though neither the maids nor the chamberlains took the time to find out just why Mordecai was in trouble. Neither did the queen inquire at first. All she did was to send **“raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not.”**

Trouble such as he had was not to be cured by a mere change of raiment. In the light of what our Lord Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount about fasting, it may be thought that Mordecai should have received this change of raiment from the queen. But our Lord was not speaking of true mourners when He said, **“When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.”** Mordecai was no hypocrite.

The Lord Jesus did say, however, that **“thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly”** (Matthew 6:17, 18). And even though Mordecai was no hypocrite, he did not rise to such triumphant heights as those indicated in the words of our Lord Jesus. Such conduct is possible only when one is in full fellowship with

the Lord. And since His holy name is not even mentioned by Mordecai, we must conclude that he could hardly attain to the standards set by our Lord in His sermon. Then, too, he lived in an age when the light of the glorious Gospel had not yet dawned. Therefore, we could hardly expect him to see things as we may see them now. So, instead of condemning him for not doing better than he did, it might be well for us to ask ourselves how we measure up to the light which we have.

It was Mordecai's refusal to receive the change of raiment from the queen that led her to send one of the king's chamberlains to "**know what it was, and why it was**" that he acted this way. "**So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate.**" Apparently, the king's decree had not been published within the palace itself. If it had, then surely Hatach, and even the queen, would have known something about the cause of Mordecai's grief and sorrow.

It is quite possible that even Haman did not realize that what he had done would affect anyone in the palace, much less the queen herself. As a matter of fact, that that was the case is shown by the discovery which he was to make later. And that reminds us of a statement made by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. In speaking of the wisdom of God he said that none of the princes of this world knew it, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (I Corinthians 2:8). No doubt Satan knows a great deal, but he is not omniscient. And in spite of many defeats he tries again and again to destroy that which is indestructible. Long before the days of Mordecai the Lord had said of Israel, "**No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper**" (Isaiah 54:17). And that which we are considering just now in the Book of Esther is a good illustration of this.

In the public square which was before the king's gate, Mordecai told Hatach "**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.**" Inasmuch as Haman, in his conference with the king, had merely stated that there was "**a certain people**" which it was "**not for the king's profit to suffer,**" or permit to exist, this information would clear up any doubt which there may have been as to the identity of that "**certain people.**" Moreover, the fact that a sum of money was involved would also serve to answer any question that might arise concerning the king's readiness to grant Haman's request. It was "**the king's profit,**" and not Haman's hatred of Mordecai which was made the excuse for this murderous plot. To confirm all of this information Mordecai gave Hatach "**the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them.**" This was documentary evidence right from headquarters.

Hatach was not only to deliver this document to Queen Esther, he was "**to declare it unto her.**" That meant, so I take it, that he was to explain it to her carefully. It is not to be supposed, of course, that she could not read it for herself.

In declaring the matter Hatach would make it very clear to her that she herself was involved, as well as Mordecai, and the rest of the Jews. We may well imagine what a surprise that would be to her. The laws of the Medes and the Persians had the reputation of being immutable. And the royal seal that made this decree effective was none other than that of Ahasuerus himself.

In view of all this, Mordecai's charge must have sounded bold indeed. The charge was that she was to go unto the king **"to make supplications unto him, and to make request before him for her people."** Mordecai did not even suggest an alternative. Neither did he make it optional with her. It was that, or else.

**"And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai."** Little did she dream what she asked for when she sent Hatach **"to know what it was, and why it was"**! Notwithstanding, it would afford her a most unusual opportunity to use her royal office for the salvation of thousands of her people.

As we reflect on that, we feel constrained to point out a lesson for all us here. As Christians we have been brought to royal estate through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some of our fellow Christians who **"have obtained like precious faith with us"** (II Peter 1:1) are this very day being persecuted for His name's sake. And we are clearly taught in the Word of God that if one member of the Body of Christ suffer, all the members suffer with it (I Corinthians 12:26).

Therefore, when their cries for help come to us, it is really our duty to use our royal privileges in making intercession for them at the throne of grace. The ears of the Lord are always open to the cries of His own, and He heareth and delivereth them (Psalm 34:15, 17). And that was no mere theory with the psalmist for when he was **"in a great strait"** he said, **"Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man"** (I Chronicles 21:13).

The Jews were certainly in the hands of men at that time. But He who delivered them into the hands of men, in order to chasten them, did not cease to care for them. And it is with much interest that we see Him work here even though He is not once named. He allowed things to come to such a pass that even the most sanguine might give up in despair. But it is just at that point that He intervenes for their deliverance.

So far as Esther herself is concerned, it seems that she saw no farther than the king. Note how often she mentions him in her message to Mordecai. She commands Hatach to say: **"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."** But **"the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will"** (Proverbs 21:1). What a comfort it would have been to Esther if, in faith, she had recognized that fact at this point! Then, instead of having her eyes on a mere man, she would have endured as seeing Him who is invisible (See Hebrews 11:27).

When her message came to Mordecai he lost no time in replying by saying, **"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews."**

If she had any feeling of personal security because of her exalted position, she must have received quite a shock when she heard that in this particular circumstance she would be no better

off than the rest of the Jews. Evidently, the edict made no exceptions. But she was not to consider that a calamity, but an opportunity to use her royal position in a most wonderful way.

From the words of Mordecai we gather that he believed that deliverance would come, if not through Esther then through someone else. Said he to her, **“If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.”**

We may well wish that he had made that more personal than he did. When he said **“another place”** he spoke after the manner of those who in our own times talk about Heaven helping those who cannot help themselves. Surely, he must have known that well-known verse which says, **“My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth”** (Psalm 121:2). And that is bound to mean a great deal more to a soul in trouble than a mere place.

Previous to this Mordecai had charged Esther not to make known her people or her kindred. This is referred to twice in one chapter (Esther 2:10, 20). But the picture had changed a good deal since then. This was no time for silence. The time had come to speak out boldly and conceal nothing. As we have seen, Mordecai was sure that enlargement, or relief, would come. But he warned Esther that neither she nor her father’s house would share in it if she did not act now.

That sounds as if he believed that she would be specially punished for her failure to do what; she could for her people at that time. But then he did not stop at that. Said he, **“Who knoweth whether thou art; come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”**

Perhaps there is no verse in all the Book of Esther which is referred to more often than this one. And one can see that such a suggestion would be far more powerful than all the threats that he might make. She probably never thought of herself as a woman of destiny. But she was. If she had not come to the kingdom for such a time as that, we would never have heard of her. Adapting a text from another part of Scripture we might say, ***“There were many maidens in Israel in those days and yet to none of them did this opportunity come, save to Esther.”***

Whether it was this challenge, or whether it was fear for her own life that moved Esther, we do not know. But she did as Mordecai bade her. Nevertheless, she had her own idea about the way it should be done. So she **“bade them return Mordecai this answer, 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.”**

Evidently this plan met with the approval of Mordecai because we read that he went his way and did according to all that Esther had commanded him. We have no way of knowing how many Jews there may have been in Shushan at that time. The number must have run into the hundreds because we learn from chapter 9 of this same book that they slew about eight hundred of their enemies in the palace and the city. It would take quite a force to accomplish such a feat. However much they may have been separated from each other before for one reason or another, the fact that they faced a common foe united them as nothing else could.

It seems fair enough to conclude that the three days of fasting may have had some religious significance even though that is not mentioned here. We remember that David was in a great strait after he had sinned in numbering the people, and he was offered “**either three years’ famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the Lord**” (I Chron. 21:12). He chose the last because, as we have already seen, he would rather fall into the hand of the Lord than into the hands of men.

Queen Esther apparently had no such faith. Her final word to Mordecai was, “**If I perish, I perish.**” She was resigned to her fate, as men would say. For her, everything depended on whether or not the king would hold out the golden scepter to her. “No other writer tells us of this custom, but it is in perfect harmony with oriental habits and modes of thought. Some have objected that the king would not always have a golden scepter by him; but the Persepolitan sculptures uniformly represent him with a long staff in his hand, which is probably the scepter” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Legally, Esther had no right to enter the royal presence unless called. But she had “**not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.**” That was why she said, “**If I perish, I perish.**”

At this point the sacred historian notes very simply that “**Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that; Esther had commanded him.**”

He seems not to be at all anxious about the outcome. And while it is true that nothing is said here about his faith in God, nevertheless, he behaved like one who has faith. And in that regard he stands out in contrast to Esther who apparently was none too hopeful at this point.

It was truly a dark hour for all the Jews. But that also meant that the dawn of a better day was not far off.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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