

“A Study In The Book of Esther”

Edited By

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LESSON #4

Esther's Courageous Mission

Esther 4:1–5:8

What would you do if you suddenly discovered that you, your parents, your brothers, your sisters, your grandparents, your aunts, your uncles, your cousins and all your loved ones were to be killed on a certain day in only eleven short months? What did Mordecai do (Esther 4:1–2)? Who else did the same thing (Esther 4:3)?

_____ Why were Mordecai and the Jewish people so upset and troubled (Esther 3:13)?

In Old Testament times people would rend or tear their clothes to show their deep grief and sorrow and distress. Usually this was done by tearing slits in the bottom of an item of clothing, not in tearing the entire garment into shreds. They might also clothe themselves with sackcloth which was a loose, rough cloth made of goats' or camels' hair. They would sit among ashes or put ashes upon their heads. For example, when Jonah told the people of Nineveh that they would be judged and destroyed in forty days (Jonah 3:5), what did the people and their king do (Jonah 3:5–6)? _____

Also, in times of great trouble and distress, the Jews would often fast (go without food-Esther 4:3). Although eating is necessary, there are times when other things are far more important and food must be set aside for a time. Suppose word came from the President that certain terrorists were about to drop a nuclear bomb on your city. Do you think someone would say, "Don't bother me with that news. I'm busy eating my hamburger"?

Esther Learns About the Royal Decree

When Esther was told about Mordecai, she was greatly concerned (Esther 4:4). She knew something must be terribly wrong for him to dress and act like that. Queen Esther had not yet learned about Haman's wicked decree. Esther sent one of her trusted servants to Mordecai to find out what was wrong (Esther 4:5). What is this all about? Why are you dressed in sackcloth? What is the meaning of these things? These are the questions the Queen wanted answered.

Mordecai told Esther's servant about Haman's evil plot to D_____ the Jews (Esther 4:7), and he even gave him a copy of the royal decree (Esther 4:8). What one thing did Mordecai want Esther to do? Circle the correct answer:

- a. Pray to God
- b. Fast (go without food)
- c. Go before the king and seek his favor ("Be gracious to us!") and request that the Jews be spared from the coming destruction
- d. Put on sackcloth
- e. Kill Haman

Esther's Brave Decision

When was the last time Queen Esther had been called or invited to see the king in his inner court (Esther 4:11)? _____ Remember, at this time Esther had been queen for almost five years (compare Esther 2:16 with Esther 3:7). If a person were to barge into the king's presence without being invited, what would probably be done to him (Esther 4:11)? _____ Was this true for all people, including the queen? _____

Even today it is often difficult to gain access into the presence of rulers or important people. Suppose you were to go to the White House and ask the guard at the gate for permission to talk to the President of the United States. Do you think your request would be granted?

The most important Person is the living God! In the Old Testament times God dwelt in the tabernacle and in the temple. Within the tabernacle (or temple) there were two rooms: 1) the holy place (sanctuary), which contained the lampstand and the table of showbread (Hebrews 9:2) and 2) the most holy place, also called the _____ of all (Hebrews 9:3) where God Himself dwelt. Who was the only person invited into this inner room where God was present (Hebrews 9:7)? _____ How often did God invite this person to come in (Hebrews 9:7)? _____ If the wrong person were to enter, or if the right person were to enter at the wrong time, what do you suppose would happen?

*Today, does the believer have access into the presence of the King of Kings (Ephesians 2:18)? _____ Can we **boldly** (with confidence and without fear) enter into the most holy place (Hebrews 10:19-20)? _____ Can we draw near to the King of the universe or must we fearfully keep our distance and draw back (Hebrews 10:22)? _____ Does the King invite us to come into His throne room (Hebrews 4:16)? _____ How often do you take advantage of this privilege? How often do you have a private audience with the Almighty God?*

If a person should come before the King of Persia without being invited, he would surely be put to death unless the king should hold out (extend) his golden _____ (Esther 4:11). This would be the sign that the person has been accepted by the king. A scepter is a rod or staff (baton) carried by a ruler as a symbol of royal power and authority.

To Esther, this must have seemed like an impossible mission. There were three great problems that had to be overcome: 1) the problem of seeing the king without being put to death (Esther 4:11); 2) the problem of changing an unchangeable decree; 3) the problem of getting the king to oppose Haman whom the king so highly regarded (see Esther 3:1-2). To Esther this seemed impossible, but what did Esther need to realize (Matthew 19:26)?

God delights in doing things that seem impossible!

Mordecai sent a message back to Esther which helped her decide to undertake this mission in spite of its difficulties and dangers (Esther 4:13-14). Mordecai made three important points which convinced the queen that she must go before the king:

- 1) Although the risk seemed great, if Esther should fail to speak for the Jews at this time, she would perish later (Esther 4:13-14). If she should try to save her life now, she would lose her life later.
- 2) If Esther should fail to act on behalf of the Jews, relief and deliverance would come from another place (Esther 4:14). Mordecai knew that the Jews could not perish because the continuance of the Jewish nation was **guaranteed** by God's promises, and God cannot _____ (Numbers 23:19).

Jeremiah was a prophet who wrote about 100 years before Mordecai's time. Read Jeremiah 31:35-37. In order for Haman and the Persians to get Israel to cease from being a nation, they would have to do the following things: 1) stop the sun from shining (interfere with the day-night cycle); 2) find out how big the universe is and how many stars it contains; 3) dig a hole to the center of the earth. If these things are not done, then the nation Israel will continue being a nation before the Lord! This is but one of the many promises God gave to the nation Israel (see also Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:6-8; Deuteronomy 30:1-10; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; etc.). Mordecai knew that God would deliver His people because He knew that it was impossible for God to break His promises!

3) Mordecai felt that there was a great reason and purpose for Esther being queen at this crucial time (Esther 4:14). God in His wisdom had allowed Esther to become queen and God was working out His wonderful plan for His glory and for the good of His people. Did God have a reason for making Joseph governor over all the land of Egypt (compare Genesis 50:20)? _____ Did God have a reason for making Esther queen at this particular time? _____ In Esther 4:16 we learn that Esther made her decision. What did she decide? (Circle the correct answer.)

- a) "I will go in to the king."
- b) "I will not go in to the king."

She was willing to do this, even if it should result in her death (Esther 4:16; compare Daniel's three friends who were willing to do God's will even if it meant death—Daniel 3:17–18).

Esther Stands Before the King

When the king saw Esther, did he accept her or reject her (5:1-2)? _____ What did the king do to show that he had accepted her (Esther 5:2; compare Esther 4:11)

_____ Someone might think, "Queen Esther was a very lucky person. She just happened to find the king in a good mood! If he had been in a bad mood, she would have been put to death!" We must never forget that God was working out His plan and "the _____ heart is in the hand of the _____, ...He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Proverbs 21:1). God was in complete control of the situation. Suppose you were to stand in the presence of the King of Kings who is holy and righteous and who hates sin. Suppose also that God were to say to you, "Why should I accept you? Why should I allow you into My presence? Why should I not destroy you in hell?" What would your answer be? (Circle the correct answer.)

- a. Because I have tried to live a good life
- b. Because I have done more good deeds than bad deeds
- c. Because I have gone to church, prayed every day and read my Bible
- d. Because I have been a faithful Christian
- e. Because (fill in an answer) _____

Esther's Request

The king knew that Esther must have a very urgent request since she risked her life to come before him without being invited. The king happened to be in a very generous mood and was willing to give her almost anything she asked (Esther 5:3; compare Esther 5:6 and Mark 6:22-23).

Instead of immediately making her request known, she invited the king and Haman to a **banquet** ("drinking feast"-- Esther 5:6) which would be held on that same day. During this banquet, the king once again asked Esther to tell him what her request was. She begins: "My _____ and my _____ is..." (5:7) but then she stopped. For some reason Esther did not feel that this was the right time to speak. If she were now to speak out against Haman as she did later (Esther 7:6), it might have been the wrong time, and her attempt to save the Jews might have failed. Sometimes the Lord directs us to open our mouth; at other times He keeps our mouth shut! God wanted Esther to speak, but not yet! This was the second time the queen refused to tell her request to the king (Esther 5:3-4 and 5:6-8). Instead she invited the king and Haman to another feast on the following day.

In the next lesson we will see how God can take an impossible situation and bring about a surprising solution.

"Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jeremiah 32:17).

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