

## Learning to Trust God's Unseen Hand

### A Study of Esther

#### Esther 4:1-17

Lesson #6: Trust God to place you right where you need to be for the purpose He intends.

#### Verses 1-3

- “Wailing loudly and bitterly” shows Mordecai’s intense grief over the edict. In the West we tend to keep our emotions to ourselves, but in Oriental society it was common to show one’s grief. Mordecai was a man of strong feeling as well as strong convictions. One should not hide one’s concern in crisis situations. “He tore his clothes” is an expression of intense grief seen throughout the Old Testament (Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 1:11; Isa 3:24; Dan 9:3); it also was customary among other nations (Isa 15:3; Ezek 27:30–33). Herodotus told how the Persians under Xerxes tore their clothes because of their grief at having lost the battle at Salamis. “Sackcloth and ashes” also was a way of showing extreme grief (cf. Job 2:7–8). First, the garments were torn. Next, a hairy garment was put on and ashes spread on the head. Sackcloth, or haircloth (made of goat hair), was the apparel of mourners, especially those mourning for the dead.<sup>1</sup>
- Let’s be clear as to what Mordecai was mourning: it was not his refusal to bow down, but the edict of extermination.
- It is interesting to note that some commentators see the grammar of the text and the actions described as indicative of Mordecai staging somewhat the expression of his grief. They suggest that Mordecai controlled the timing of the outward expression of his grief in order to achieve certain ends.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps; and it would not be altogether wrong considering the circumstances.

#### Verses 4-11

- Esther and Mordecai had, with the help of the eunuchs and others, established a chain of communication between them that was to prove critical. She soon became aware of Mordecai’s distress but remained ignorant of the cause. Her initial reaction was to encourage him to ‘cheer up’ (This was, perhaps, Esther’s way of not calling attention to the scene Mordecai was making). Mordecai responded by giving her a full account of the impending disaster. He made sure that she saw a copy of the edict so that no doubt could

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<sup>1</sup> Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 333–334.

<sup>2</sup> Barry C. Davis, “Expositions of the Book of Esther,” in *Ruth & Esther: God behind the Seen*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 220.

remain in her mind. Having done this he urged her to intercede with the king on behalf of her people.<sup>3</sup>

- But notice that the chain of information did not include Esther. She had no clue what would be taking place unless Mordecai provided the written documentation of the impending genocide.
- Her fear of approaching the King is justifiable. She knows that she must go before the King if she intends on doing anything about the situation her and her people face, but she is keenly aware that an unauthorized or uninvited entrance before the King would probably be rewarded by a death sentence.

#### Verses 12-17

- Now we begin to see the purposes behind Mordecai's instruction for Esther to remain quite regarding her ancestry. Esther 4:14 is the closest we come to reading the involvement and the intent of God for His people. But we also learn that as God's people, we have a responsibility to act when and where we can.
- With conviction, faith, and fear, Esther directs that a fast (prayer always accompanied religious fasting, Deut. 9:9; Judg. 20:26, 27; Ezra 8:21–23; 2 Sam. 12:16; Dan. 9:3) be undertaken on her behalf. God honored the faith of the Jews at this time by saving them from destruction. Fasts generally were prescribed for only one day. This unusually long fast points to the seriousness of the situation and effectively contrasts with the feasts that stand at the beginning and end of the book (1:3, 5, 9; 2:18; 9:17–18).<sup>4</sup>
- Early church father, Clement of Rome summarizes this chapter nicely when he wrote: "To no less peril did Esther also, who was perfect in faith, expose herself, that she might deliver the twelve tribes of Israel, when they were on the point to perish. For through her fasting and her humiliation she entreated the all-seeing Master, the God of the ages; and He, seeing the humility of her soul, delivered the people for whose sake she encountered the peril."<sup>5</sup>

Three truths to remember when trusting God to place us where He needs us for His divine purposes:

#### **1. Trust God to place you where you will do the most *good*.**

- Esther had the ear of the King and access to the throne because she was Queen.

#### **2. Trust God to place you where you will be *received*.**

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<sup>3</sup> Colin D. Jones, *Exploring Esther: Serving the Unseen God*, Exploring the Bible Commentary (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2005), 61.

<sup>4</sup> R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 685.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Barber Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 80.

- Although she was wisely concerned about going to see the King, she knew that a risk had to be taken in order to be obedient to God. That risk would be rewarded.

**3. Trust God to place you where you will *lead* well.**

- From this point on, Esther led Mordecai and her people to deliverance.