

**Study Notes: Esther 4:4-17**  
**May 29, 2022: “Now is the Time”**  
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***When Esther’s eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king’s eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.***

- Evidently, Esther was not aware of the actions of Haman and the edict of Xerxes to put the Jewish people to death. The first thing she heard about was the actions and attitude of Mordecai (see verses 1-3 and notes). Esther attempted to get Mordecai to remove his sackcloth and put on clothes so he could enter the citadel.
  - The Faithlife Study Bible explains, “Esther’s response is to prevent Mordecai from mourning, perhaps because she is concerned that it will compromise his position as a royal official: He cannot conduct his business in the royal compound while clothed in sackcloth.”
- Mordecai refused the gesture, so Esther sent Hathak, one of her attendants, to go and talk with Mordecai to find out what troubled him.

***So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate. Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king’s presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.***

- When Hathak met Mordecai in the city square, Mordecai gave him a detailed report of what Haman did, including the amount of bribery offered to the king. Mordecai also had a copy of the edict, which he also gave to Hathak to show and explain to Esther.
- Along with giving the reasons for his trouble, Mordecai further instructed Esther to plead before the king for mercy and for her people, the Jews. In Mordecai’s eyes, Esther had been given this position of authority by God, and now must use it to help the people of God.

***Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, “All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”***

- When Esther was given Mordecai’s instruction, she replied to him that what he was asking would violate the law and very likely cause her to be put to death. No one, including the queen, was given free access to the king, and now a significant amount of time had passed since Esther had last been called into the king’s presence.
  - The Expositor’s Bible Commentary notes, “She [Esther] expresses reluctance on the basis of what is common knowledge about a comprehensive restriction; the text specifies ‘any man or woman.’ Furthermore, everyone knows. The implication is that Mordecai should know this too, especially since he seems to have known everything else! Esther’s concern for her own well-being is founded on her not having been called to the king for thirty days — a fact that Mordecai would not have known. Esther is likely aware of other ruthless acts on the king’s part, and the added provocation of admitting she is Jewish will, in her estimation, make the case hopeless.”

***When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"***

- After hearing Esther's reply, Mordecai responded by warning Esther of just how serious the situation was. He was not asking Esther to risk her life for nothing, but to risk her life because her life was also already in jeopardy. The Expositor's Bible Commentary explains the dilemma Esther was in, "Esther's dilemma is one repeated throughout history; she is hemmed in by circumstances and forced to take courageous action and exercise faith (see Baldwin, 79; Berman, 653)."
- Mordecai also believed that even if Esther didn't stand up and take action, God would provide relief and deliverance from another source, but Esther would not be spared. The Faithlife Study Bible explains, "This remark of Mordecai's is one of the most faithful responses in the book, yet it lacks any direct mention of God. Mordecai's thinking seems to reflect that of Judaism in general — that God would find a way for his people to survive, no matter what (compare Isa 10:20). Mordecai may see this relief coming from another person, another city, or God in general."
- Finally, Mordecai spoke words that are at the heart of the purpose of the book, reminding Esther that she had been given her position for this time in history. Clearly, Mordecai's words reveal his belief that God ordered things to provide for deliverance through Esther. His words were meant to spur Esther on to action, and as the story continues, it is clear that they did.
  - Though Mordecai's final words are in the form of a question, the Expositor's Bible Commentary explains that they are meant to be read as a strong statement, "The use of 'who knows' in this context is not an ambivalent expression of doubt but rather a strong statement that Esther is indeed the Jews' only hope and that she has been brought to this point for this time."

***Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.***

- After hearing the warning and encouragement of Mordecai to act on behalf of her people, Esther called on Mordecai to gather all the Jews of the city to fast along with her and her attendants. Though it is not overtly stated, this fast surely included a time of calling out to God for boldness and protection for Esther. At the end of the fast, Esther would go to the king, defying the law and taking her life into her hands.
  - The Faithlife Study Bible adds this note about Esther's call for a fast, "A call to assemble and fast accompanies a similar cry for divine relief in Joel 2:12–16. Although God is not mentioned here, the implication is that the fasting is an observance of a time of intense prayer for the salvation of the Jewish people (compare Psa 35:13; Ezra 8:23; Neh 1:4; Jonah 3:5)."
  - The New American Commentary also states, "Esther felt identified with her people. She now looked to them for spiritual support. 'And fast for me' implies prayer and fasting. This suggests that Esther had a genuine faith in God. By her request for fasting (and certainly prayer is assumed), Esther showed that she needed the support of others and recognized the need for God's intervention. Even she and her maids would fast as well. This meant she would share her faith with these maids. Esther believed God answers prayer. Such prayer changes situations; in fact, it is one of the chief instruments God uses to change history."
- Esther was willing to risk her life for the people, understanding that if she didn't act, she and her people would be put to death anyway.
- Mordecai heard the words of Esther, and acted on them, calling the people to fast in an act of prayer and solidarity for Esther.