

ESTHER 4: 1 Now when Mordecai found out all that was done, Mordecai tore his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and wailed loudly and a bitterly.

On hearing the king's decree to exterminate the Jews, Mordecai mourns, and clothes himself in sackcloth, Est 4:1, Est 4:2. The Jews are filled with consternation, Est 4:3. Esther, perceiving Mordecai in distress at the palace gate, sends her servant Hatach to inquire the reason, Est 4:4-6. Hatach returns with the information, and also the express desire of Mordecai that she should go instantly to the king, and make supplication in behalf of her people, Est 4:7-9. Esther excuses herself on the ground that she had not been called by the king for thirty days past; and that the law was such that any one approaching his presence, without express invitation, should be put to death, unless the king should, in peculiar clemency, stretch out to such persons the golden scepter, Est 4:10-12. Mordecai returns an answer, insisting on her compliance, Est 4:13, Est 4:14. She then orders Mordecai to gather all the Jews of Shushan, and fast for her success three days, night and day, and resolves to make the attempt, though at the risk of her life, Est 4:15-17.

Verse 1

Mordecai rent his clothes - He gave every demonstration of the most poignant and oppressive grief. Nor did he hide this from the city; and the Greek says that he uttered these words aloud: Αἰρεται εθνος μηδεν ηδικηκος, A people are going to be destroyed, who have done no evil!

ESTHER 4: 2 He came even before the king's gate, for no one is allowed inside the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

Verse 2

Before the king's gate - He could not enter into the gate, of the place where the officers waited, because he was in the habit of a mourner; for this would have been contrary to law.

ESTHER 4: 3 In every province, wherever 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.

Verse 3

Fasting, and weeping, and wailing - How astonishing, that in all this there is not the slightest intimation given of praying to God!

ESTHER 4: 4 Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her this, and the queen was exceedingly grieved. She sent clothing to Mordecai, to replace his sackcloth; but he didn't receive it.

Verse 4

Sent raiment - She supposed that he must have been spoiled of his raiment by some means; and therefore sent him clothing.

ESTHER 4: 5 Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, whom he had appointed to attend her, and commanded him to go to Mordecai, to find out what this was, and why it was.

Verse 5

Then called Esther for Hatach - This eunuch the king had appointed to wait upon her, partly, as is still the case in the East, to serve her, and partly, to observe her conduct; for no despot is ever exempt from a twofold torture, jealousy and suspicion.

ESTHER 4: 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai, to city square which was before the king's gate.

ESTHER 4: 7 Mordecai told him of all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews.

ESTHER 4: 8 He also gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given out in Shushan to destroy them, to show it to Esther, and to declare it to her, and to urge her to go in to the king, to make supplication to him, and to make request before him, for her people.

Verse 8

That she should go in unto the king - The Greek adds, "Remember the time of your low estate, and in what manner you have been nourished, and carried in my arms; and that Haman, who is next to the king, has got a decree for our destruction. Pray, therefore, to the Lord, and plead with the king, that we may be delivered from death." But there is not a word of this either in the Hebrew, Syriac, or Vulgate.

ESTHER 4: 9 Hathach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

ESTHER 4: 10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a message to Mordecai:

ESTHER 4: 11 "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, know, that whoever, whether man or woman, comes to the king into the inner court without being called, there is one law for him, that he be put to death, except those to whom the king might hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live. I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."

Verse 11

Into the inner court - We have already seen that the Persian sovereigns affected the highest degree of majesty, even to the assuming of Divine honors. No man nor woman dared to appear unveiled before them, without hazarding their lives; into the inner chamber of the harem no person ever

entered but the king, and the woman he had chosen to call thither. None even of his courtiers or ministers dared to appear there; nor the most beloved of his concubines, except led thither by himself, or ordered to come to him. Here was Esther's difficulty; and that difficulty was now increased by the circumstance of her not having been sent for to the king's bed for thirty days. In the last verse of the preceding chapter we find that the king and Haman sat down to drink. It is very likely that this wicked man had endeavored to draw the king's attention from the queen, that his affection might be lessened, as he must have known something of the relationship between her and Mordecai; and consequently viewed her as a person who, in all probability, might stand much in the way of the accomplishment of his designs. I cannot but think that he had been the cause why Esther had not seen the king for thirty days.

ESTHER 4: 12 They told to Mordecai Esther's words.

ESTHER 4: 13 Then Mordecai asked them return answer to Esther, "Don't think to yourself that you will escape in the king's house any more than all the Jews.

Verse 13

Think not - that thou shalt escape - This confirms the suspicion that Haman knew something of the relationship between Mordecai and Esther; and therefore he gives her to understand that, although in the king's palace, she should no more escape than the Jews.

ESTHER 4: 14 For if you remain silent now, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Verse 14

Then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise - He had a confidence that deliverance would come by some means; and he thought that Esther would be the most likely; and that, if she did not use the influence which her providential station gave her, she would be highly culpable.

And who knoweth whether thou art come - As if he had said, "Is it likely that Divine providence would have so distinguished thee, and raised thee from a state of abject obscurity, merely for thy own sake? Must it not have been on some public account! Did not he see what was coming? and has he not put thee in the place where thou mayest counteract one of the most ruinous purposes ever formed?" Is there a human being who has not some particular station by an especial providence, at some particular time, in which he can be of some essential service to his neighbor, in averting evil or procuring good, if he be but faithful to the grace and opportunity afforded by this station? Who dares give a negative to these questions? We lose much, both in reference to ourselves and others, by not adverting to our providential situation and circumstances. While on this subject, I will give the reader two important sayings, from two eminent men, both keen observers of human nature, and deeply attentive in all such cases to the operations of Divine providence: - "To every thing there is a season; and a time to every purpose under heaven. Therefore withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it."

Solomon.

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows, and in miseries.

Shakespeare.

Has there not been a case, within time of memory, when evil was designed against a whole people, through the Hamans who had poisoned the ears of well-intentioned men; in which one poor man, in consequence of a situation into which he was brought by an astonishing providence, used the influence which his situation gave him; and, by the mercy of his God, turned the whole evil aside? By the association of ideas the following passage will present itself to the reader's memory, who may have any acquaintance with the circumstance: - "There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man!" "Then said, I, Ah, Lord God! They say of me, Doth He Not Speak Parables?"
Rem acu tetigi.

ESTHER 4: 15 Then Esther asked them to answer Mordecai,

ESTHER 4: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. I and my maidens will also fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."

Verse 16

Fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days - What a strange thing, that still we hear nothing of prayer, nor of God! What is the ground on which we can account for this total silence? I know it not. She could not suppose there was any charm in fasting, sackcloth garments, and lying on the ground. If these were not done to turn away the displeasure of God, which seemed now to have unchained their enemies against them, what were they done for?

If I perish, I perish - If I lose my life in this attempt to save my people, I shall lose it cheerfully. I see it is my duty to make the attempt; and, come what will, I am resolved to do it. She must, however, have depended much on the efficacy of the humiliations she prescribed.

ESTHER 4: 17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.
