

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER 4

This chapter relates the mourning of Mordecai, and of the Jews in every province, on account of the edict to destroy them, (^{<T00A>}Esther 4:1-3), the information Esther had of it, and what passed between her and Mordecai, through Hatach, a chamberlain, by whom he put her upon making a request to the king in their favour, (^{<T00A>}Esther 4:4-8), to which she at first objected, because of a law in Persia which forbids any to come to the king unless called, (^{<T00B>}Esther 4:9-12), but being pressed to it by Mordecai, she agreed, and ordered a general fast among the Jews, (^{<T00B>}Esther 4:13-17).

Ver. 1. *When Mordecai perceived all that was done*, etc.] By the king, at the instigation of Haman, against the Jews; which he came to the knowledge of, either by some of the conflicts or by common fame, or on the sight of the edicts which were published in Shushan; though the Jews think it was made known to him in a supernatural way, either by Elijah, as the former Targum ^{f124}, or by the Holy Ghost, as the latter:

Mordecai rent his clothes: both behind and before, according to the same Targum; and this was a custom used in mourning, not only with the Jews, but with the Persians also, as Herodotus ^{f125} relates:

and put on sackcloth with ashes; upon his head, as the former Targum; which was usual in mourning, even both; (^{<K012>}Job 2:12 ^{<T00B>}Daniel 9:3)

and went out into the midst of the city; not Elam the province, as Aben Ezra, but the city Shushan:

and cried with a loud and bitter cry; that all the Jews in the city might be alarmed by it, and inquire the reason of it, and be affected with it; and a clamorous mournful noise was used among the Persians, as well as others, on sad occasions ^{f126}.

Ver. 2. *And came even before the king's gate*, etc.] Or court, that Esther might if possible be made acquainted with this dreadful calamity coming upon her people:

for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth: or appear in such a dress at court, where nothing was admitted to damp the pleasures of it.

Ver. 3. *And in every province whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came,* etc.] For destroying the Jews on such a day, in every place where they were to be found:

there was great mourning among the Jews, and weeping, and wailing; which continued all day:

and many lay in sackcloth and ashes: all night; made use of no other bed to lie on, nor clothes to cover them with.

Ver. 4. *So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told it her,* etc.] Her maids of honour and eunuchs that attended her, which they might tell her merely as a piece of news, there being something shocking in it to tender minds; or perhaps nothing more than that Mordecai was in sackcloth; and they might have observed, by some incident or another, that there was some connection between Mordecai and Esther, and that she had a peculiar respect for him:

then was the queen exceedingly grieved; even though she might not know the whole of the matter; but perceiving whatever it was it greatly affected Mordecai, with whom she sympathized:

and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him; that so he might appear at court, and she get better intelligence of the cause of all this:

but he received it not; refusing to be comforted, or appear cheerful under such melancholy circumstances.

Ver. 5. *Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her,* etc.] Which, according to the Targum, was Daniel^{f127}; but it is not likely that Daniel should have lived to this time; however, this officer was not only intrusted with the care of the queen by the king, but she had also an high opinion of him, and therefore employed him in this affair:

and gave a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was; what was the reason of his appearing in sackcloth, and why he did not receive the clothes she sent him.

Ver. 6. *So Hatach went forth to Mordecai, unto the street of the city, etc.]* Where he was, in a public manner, expressing his grief and sorrow:

which was before the king's gate: that led to the royal palace.

Ver. 7. *And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, etc.]* How that, for refusing to reverence Haman, he was incensed against him, and against all the Jews for his sake; and had vowed revenge on them, and had formed a scheme for the ruin of them:

and of the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them the 10,000 talents of silver he proposed to pay into the king's exchequer in lieu of the Jews' tribute; which Mordecai observes, to show how bent he was upon the destruction of the Jews, and cared not what it cost him to gain his point; and perhaps Mordecai as yet might not know that the king had remitted it.

Ver. 8. *Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, etc.]* Which had now been published in the city; by which means Mordecai had had a sight of it, and had transcribed it; (see ^{<17B14>} Esther 3:14)

to show it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her; what Haman intended against the people of the Jews; as the Targum adds:

and to charge her; in his name; whose charges she had always regarded, both before and since she was queen; or in the name of God:

that she should go in unto the king to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people; signifying there was a necessity of doing it speedily, and of urging her request with great earnestness and importunity, since it was not the life of a single person, but the lives of a body of people, and her own, that lay at stake.

Ver. 9. *And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.]* Both the case of the Jews, and the cause of it, and what he would have her do at this critical juncture.

Ver. 10. *Again Esther spake unto Hatach, etc.]* For there was no other way of corresponding and conversing but by an eunuch; the wives of kings being altogether under their watch and care:

and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; to go unto him, and what he should say to him from her, which is as follows.

Ver. 11. *All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces do know*, etc.] Not only the princes and courtiers, but all the king's subjects, the meanest of them; there is scarce a person throughout the whole empire, to whom the following law is not known; this is said, to show how notorious it was:

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; according to the former Targum, Human got this law to be made now, to prevent any application to the king about this affair; but then it would not have been so universally known as before declared; and it appears that there was such a law among the Medes, made by Dejoces, that none should go into the king's presence, but all should be done by messengers^{f128}; and this was altered among the Persians, for the seven princes that slew Smerdis made an agreement, that whoever of them was chosen king, the rest should have the liberty of going unto him when they pleased, without a messenger to introduce them^{f129}; it seems by this account it was death to go into the inner parlour, where the king usually was, without leave, or being called; this was made both for the king's safety, and for awe and reverence of his majesty, and to prevent any insinuations into him by ill-designing persons:

except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live; which, whether he would or not, was very precarious; so that a person ran a great risk to go in uncalled:

but I have not been called to go in unto the king these thirty days; which looked as if the king had not that fond affection for her he formerly had; and therefore there was greater danger in going in to him uncalled, and the less hope of success.

Ver. 12. *And they told to Mordecai Esther's, words.*] The messengers she sent to him.

Ver. 13. *Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther*, etc.] Gave in charge to the messengers what they should say to Esther from him, by way of reply:

think not with thyself that thou shall escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews; signifying that her being queen, and in the king's palace, would be no protection to her; and she would be no safer there than the Jews elsewhere, since they had no greater enemies any where than in the king's court; and it was or would be known of what nation she was, and therefore must not expect to escape the fury of the enemy.

Ver. 14. *For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time*, etc.] And will not speak to the king in favour of the Jews, because of the danger she would be exposed to in doing it:

then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; Mordecai seemed confident of it, that by some means or another the Jews would be delivered; if not through the intercession of Esther, yet from some other quarter, or by some other hand:

but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; for such neglect of the people of God when in distress, want of pity to them, and not exerting herself as she might in their behalf; so that seeing she and her family must perish, it was better to perish in a good cause than in a bad one:

and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? he intimates that he believed that the providence of God had raised her to that dignity, that she might be an instrument of saving his people in the time of their distress; and this he said to encourage her to make the experiment.

Ver. 15. *Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer.*] Which follows, and was sent by the messengers she sent the above to him.

Ver. 16. *Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan*, etc.] To acquaint them with what follows; but not to continue in a body together, which might cause suspicion of an ill design in them; according to the latter Targum, 12,000 chosen priests were found in it; but that must be an exaggeration of their number; it can hardly be thought there were so many Jews in all there:

and fast ye for me; that is, pray for her, that she might have courage to go in to the king, and meet with success; for prayer was the principal thing, fasting only an accessory to it, and as fitting for it, and expressive of affliction and humiliation of soul:

and neither eat nor drink three days, night nor day; it was to be a continued fast unto the third day; as Aben Ezra interprets it, they were not to eat at evening, but fast two whole days, and two whole nights, until the third day came, on which Esther went in to the king, (~~TARGUM~~ Esther 5:1).

I also and my maidens will fast likewise; in the same manner and as long; these maids of honour were either proselytes, perhaps of her making, or Jewish ladies, she being allowed by the king to choose whom she pleased:

and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; or “afterwards”, or “and then”^{f130} when they, and she and her maids, had fasted and prayed so long, then she was determined in the strength of the Lord to go into the king’s presence with her petition, though it was contrary to law:

and if I perish, I perish; signifying, that she readily and cheerfully risked her life for the good of her people; and if such was the pleasure of God, that she should lose it, she was content, and acquiesced in his will, leaving herself entirely in his hands, to dispose of her as he thought fit.

Ver. 17. *So Mordecai went his way*, etc.] About the business he was directed to; the word used having sometimes the signification of passing over or transgressing, Jarchi interprets it of Mordecai’s transgressing the command, by fasting on a festival; the letter being written on the thirteenth of Nisan, (~~TARGUM~~ Esther 3:12), the next day was the passover, on which he supposes the fast began; and the three days were, the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth of the month, and belonged to the feast of the passover and of unleavened bread; so the Targum:

and did according to all that Esther had commanded him; got the Jews together, and kept a fast three days; according to the Midrash^{f131} they were the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth of Nisan.