

The Essential Intercession of Queen Esther

¹⁶ “Go! Gather together all the Jews who are in Shushan and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast in the same way. Afterwards, I will go in to the king, even though it is not according to the law. So if I perish, I perish!” (Esther 4:16)

For Esther's people in Persia, life turned bleak overnight. Because of a wicked plan conceived in the anti-Semitic mind of Haman (an *Amalekite*), every Jew in the nation was suddenly living on borrowed time. Before the year was out, their bodies would lie in the mass graves of genocide, interred by none other than their Gentile neighbors (same as in WWII). We see the diabolical plan set in motion in Esther 3:8-15. The capital city was thrown into a state of confusion. For decades, the Persian policy toward foreigners had been one of tolerance. Was this new edict the beginning of hostilities toward all races? Our Jewish people were particularly stunned by the news. Could the royal edict really be true? Could there be no appeal? Couldn't anyone change the plan? Amend it? Delay it? Abolish it? All of a sudden the sky was falling, and there was no place to hide.

Mourning and Weeping: The edict devastated our Jewish people. Every one of them who heard it cried out to God (sound familiar?). When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among our Jewish people, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many put on sackcloth and ashes. (Esther 4:1-3)

“ When Mordecai learned all that was done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the middle of the city crying out in a loud and bitter voice. ² He went only as far as the king's gate, because no one could enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. ³ In each and every province where the king's edict and law came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many put on sackcloth and ashes” (Esther 4:1-3).

The people of Eastern cultures do not restrain their grief. Funeral processions are public times of loud wailing and weeping. No one hides his or her sorrow at tragic events, and Mordecai didn't either. It was common in those days to wear loose-fitting, dark-colored, coarsely-woven garments made of goat's hair to signify repentance; sitting in a pile of ashes was a way of showing bitter remorse. So for Jews doing these things was an acknowledgment that they were in utter ruin and that only God could restore them.

However, Esther lived in another world, a world of silks and satins' sheltered from the sorrow in the street. That is, until news of her people's mourning reached her. Then Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish: *“⁴ When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, the queen was greatly distressed. She sent clothes for Mordecai to put on so he would remove his sackcloth, but he refused” (Esther 4:4).*

Informing and Responding: Seeking a reliable source to explain this outburst of sorrow among her people, Esther sent a servant to question her uncle Mordecai. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept them. Then Esther summoned *Hathach* from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. So *Hathach* went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate. Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict that had been issued in Susa for their destruction. (How important was this servant? He was after all, just a slave!): *“⁵ So Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to find the cause and reason for this. ⁶ So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the king's gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, even the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him a written copy of the decree, which had been distributed in Shushan, for their annihilation, to show to Esther and to explain it to her. He instructed her to go in to the king, to beg his favor and plead before him on behalf of her people” (Esther 4:5-8).*

In the phrases: “*everything that had happened... exact amount of money... a copy of the decree.*” See how carefully Mordecai passed on the information to Esther? He didn't hide the truth, but neither did he exaggerate. He didn't estimate numbers; he was exact. He didn't pass on rumors; he provided her with documented information.

Let's pause here for a moment of application. Are you careful in passing along information? Are you able to document your stories? Do you make sure of the facts you're communicating? Mordecai was careful to pass on accurate facts because he wanted the queen to be well informed. And he wanted her to be well informed because he wanted her to get involved. In fact, through *Hathach* he ordered her “*to go in to the king, to beg his favor and plead before him on behalf of her people*” (vv. 8).

Undergirding Mordecai's plea for Esther's involvement was the belief that one person can make a difference. But Esther churned at the request. Yes, there were her people to think about, but there was also her own life. Then Esther spoke to *Hathach* and ordered him to reply to Mordecai: “¹⁰ *Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him instructions for Mordecai: ¹¹ “All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces fully understand that for anyone, man or woman, who approaches the king in the inner courtyard without being summoned, he has one law—that he be put to death, unless the king extends his golden scepter permitting him to live. But I have not been summoned to come to the king for 30 days.” ¹² So they conveyed Esther's words to Mordecai” (Esther 4:10-12).*

Pleading and Praying: Upon hearing her response, Mordecai was faced with a dilemma. Should he back off or add pressure? With parental frankness, he sent a second appeal. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther: “*Do not think in your soul that you will escape in the king's household more than all the Jews. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place—but you and your father's house will perish. Who knows whether you have attained royal status for such a time as this?*” (Esther 4:13-14)

Follow the lines of his reasoning: First, if you do nothing, sooner or later they will find out that you are a Jew and you, too, will be destroyed. Second, the Jews will survive, for God's promise to His people is greater than your willingness to be involved. If He has to, God will simply use someone else (see Gen. 12:1-3). Third, this threat to God's people could explain why you were elevated to such a high position.

Mordecai's power-packed rhetoric is reminiscent of one of the fiery speeches of Winston Churchill: “*Let us...brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say: ‘This was their finest hour.’*” Esther had the same opportunity the British people had during WWII. If she chose to stand, this could be her finest hour. Her decision? It's found in *Esther 4:16*.

The king had chosen her to be queen on the basis of her beauty but God had chosen her on the basis of her character. And now character was rising to the occasion with heroic resolve: “*So if I perish, I perish.*” She also rose to leadership as well: “¹⁷ *So Mordecai left and did all that Esther commanded him*” (vv. 17).

Notice how Esther's entire outlook shifted in the space of this chapter: from fear to faith; from reluctance to resolve; from concern for her personal safety to the concern for the safety of her people; and from respect for Mordecai's leadership to the emergence of her own. A new leader is now on the scene!

As our world becomes more and more crowded, it's easy to feel lost in that crowd or to underestimate our significance. We wonder what difference we could possibly make in light of the spread of problems as abortion, homelessness, crime, hunger, and drugs. But one person can make a difference. Not until we believe this is true will we really be willing to risk. And only when we move from the safe harbor of theory to the rough waters of reality to actually do something will we see any changes take place. Do you really want to know how much difference one person can make? Scripture tells us that *Yeshua* values one person so much that He's willing to leave the ninety-nine sheep that are safe and go after the one that is lost (see Luke 15:3-7). For no matter how big the fold, one is always a valuable number to God. Everyone needs a Mordecai in our lives! We are not always in the best of attitudes, the best of behavior, or ready for the challenge. Praise God that He has sent many a Mordecai in my life. Be thankful He has also sent a Mordecai to your life also.