



Esther 4

A royal decree has been delivered throughout the Persian Empire, commanding that all of the Jews are to be killed on a specific day about eleven months in the future.

1. Read Esther 4:1-4 *The compliant queen has no clue*

a. What was Mordecai's reaction when he learned of the decree to annihilate the Jews? (4:1)

b. Mordecai's public display of deep grief was considered inappropriate in proximity to the gate to the palace complex, and his appearance must have caused quite a stir. What was Esther's reaction to the report of Mordecai's anguish? (4:4)

c. Esther and Mordecai have not had direct contact since she was taken to be in the king's harem, How has Mordecai kept informed about her welfare for these six years? (Look back to Esther 2:11)



- d. How did Jews throughout the Persian Empire react to Haman's edict of destruction? (4:3)



2. Read Esther 4:5-12 *The passive queen sees no way that she can help*

- a. Esther has been totally isolated from the covenant community. Jews from India to Ethiopia were lamenting Haman's edict, but Esther knew nothing about it. How was Esther able to find out the cause of Mordecai's distress? (4:5)

- b. Mordecai wanted Esther to intercede before the king and appeal for salvation for the Jews. Why is Esther afraid to do that? (4:11)

Esther may be the Queen of Persia, but she is powerless. She cannot even walk into the king's presence unless he first asks for her. Xerxes has been ruthless, hot-tempered, and impulsive. It is likely he would not hold out his golden scepter to her if the queen's death would somehow serve his interests.

- c. The king had not summoned Esther in thirty days. The king does not sleep alone—what fears would this have sparked in Esther's thinking?

Esther has protected herself in the pagan culture by hiding her true identity as one of God's people. Now she must choose whether to continue to live as a pagan in the king's court, or whether to reveal her true identity and plead with the king for salvation for God's people.

In Esther 4:14. Mordecai expresses his confidence that God is at work in ways we may not see. He suggests that Esther's unexpected and unlikely ascension to the throne of Persia was a work of God in preparation for this crisis—for this very moment.

- e. Proverbs 21:1 teaches this: *“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He will.”* This proverb speaks of God’s ability to shape the decisions even of godless men so that God’s purposes will ultimately prevail. In your study of Esther this year, how have you seen various human decisions turn out to be significant for the accomplishing of God’s good purposes? Think of several examples from the book. What does this teach you about God’s activity in the world?
- f. What sudden change do you observe in Esther’s demeanor and in her relationship with Mordecai? (4:15-17) What has Esther resolved to do?

We celebrate Esther’s courage—that she is willing to *risk* her life for the salvation of her people. But we also see in her story that she is a signpost—a pointer—to the One who, centuries later, willingly *gave* His life for the salvation of His people. Let the story of Esther draw your attention to the eternal salvation we enjoy through the sacrifice of Jesus.

- g. What did Esther instruct Mordecai to do? (4:16)

4. Taking a second look: *God has placed you here for such a time as this*

Life is confusing. We may wonder if there is a higher purpose for our lives, or if merely keeping up with the frantic pace of life today is the best we can expect. Are we adrift in a sea of chaos, or is there some greater reason for our existence on the planet?

The Bible teaches us that God has designed each of us for His good purposes, and no one is insignificant. Consider how God has used these seemingly insignificant people in roles of eternal significance.

- In Genesis 41, Joseph, a Hebrew slave, was chosen to manage Egypt's granaries so that the world was *saved* through a seven-year famine.
- In Exodus 1:15-21, barren Hebrew midwives provided *salvation* for Hebrew babies who were under sentence of death.
- In Joshua 2:1-15, the prostitute Rahab risked her life to *save* the Hebrew spies at Jericho.
- In 1 Samuel 17, David, an adolescent shepherd boy, struck down a giant and *saved* the people of Israel from destruction.

You may look at your life today and think that you are too old or too young; you are too ordinary or too "different"; you are too broken or too busy—but God has designed a role for you in His ongoing work of salvation. You are here for a reason; you are a part of God's plan.

For personal reflection: Does the pace of your life seem to be a barrier to recognizing how your skills and gifts could be employed to accomplish God's purposes for your life? What steps could you take to make yourself more receptive to God's call on your life?

My prayer:

*Father, help me to reorder my priorities so that I can serve you effectively.
Help me to see opportunities to advance Your good purposes.
Enable me to serve You with my whole heart.*