

Esther 4 • How God Works in the World

Introduction

[NOTE: You will want to download the handout "[How God Works in the World](#)" in order to complete this study.]

Prior to reading this passage it's necessary to understand the significance of Haman being an Agagite, a clan which belonged to the Amalekites, and therefore why Mordecai (in Esther 3:1-2) would not bow down to him. (You may want to review 1 Samuel 15 as well.)

- The Amalekites were one of the Canaanite groups God devoted to complete destruction.
- Saul was specifically ordered to destroy all the Amalekites (descendants of Esau) but instead saved King Agag and some of their choice livestock (1 Samuel 15:8-9)
- Samuel was furious with Saul and relayed that the kingdom would be seized from Saul. (1 Samuel 15:28)
- Samuel himself "hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal" (1 Samuel 15:33) and thus there has been bitter feelings between the Agagites and Jews for centuries.
- Therefore it's no wonder that Haman – the descendant of Agag – became so upset with Mordecai – the descendant of Jacob – for failing to bow down. (The age-old strife between the eldest and the younger.)

It's worth mentioning that the nations of Canaan such as the Amalekites were devoted to complete destruction by God because of their complete rejection of Him in favor of false gods. In Haman and Mordecai we have the intersection of the followers of Satan vs. the followers of God.

¹When 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. ²He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. ³In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: Why is Mordecai so completely shaken?

A: Certainly the order to eliminate all the Jews throughout the whole world would be enough, but in addition it is being accomplished through the age-old conflict with the descendants of Esau and the Amalekites through Haman. This decree, in effect, has the dual effect of both physical and spiritual warfare.

Q: Is this decree limited to just the Jews living in the capital?

A: No, it extends against **ALL** the Jews in the whole known world, which would include those still remaining in Israel.

Q: Haman appears to have gained the upper hand at this point. What spiritual "type" or "person" might Haman represent?

A: Satan. Although God is not mentioned by name in Esther, it's obvious that Satan attempts to work through Haman and God counters by His work through Esther and Mordecai.

Q: What was the reaction of the Jews throughout the empire? Why didn't they just run away since the date of their destruction is nearly a year in the future?

A: Where would you go if the United Nations, for instance, unanimously agreed that on such-and-such a date all Christians would be killed? The empire is so large that it's very close to the same thing.

⁴Then Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept them. ⁵Then 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. ⁶So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate.

⁷Mordecai 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. ⁸He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her, and to order her to go in to the king to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people.

⁹Hathach came back and related Mordecai's words to Esther.

¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him to reply to Mordecai: ¹¹"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days." ¹²They related Esther's words to Mordecai.

¹³Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. ¹⁴For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

¹⁵Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶"Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

¹⁷So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

[Read v.4-12]

Q: What was Esther's first response to Mordecai?

A: To address the physical needs and to have him dressed correctly so he wouldn't be killed for being disrespectful to royalty.

Q: What was Esther's first response to Mordecai's request?

A: Like Vashti the queen before her, she thought she might have fallen out of favor with the king and would herself be killed for an unannounced approach to the king. She didn't see herself as being in the "right place at the right time."

Q: What was the purpose of such a rigid process for approaching the king?

A: Assassination was the greatest threat against kings. Killing anyone who approached the king he did not know – signified by the raising/or not raising of the scepter – was a security mechanism to protect him. [FYI: Historically, this king is eventually assassinated so the threat was real.]

Q: What was Mordecai's personal example to Esther in his approaching the king's gate and mourning?

A: It illustrated that personal risk would have to be undertaken to communicate the problem.

[Read 4:13-17]

Q: What was Mordecai's counsel in v.13?

A: There were at least four aspects:

- He appealed to her inner thoughts & feelings to do the right thing.
- He pointed out that eventually her Jewish heritage would be discovered and she'd therefore suffer the same fate.
- He emphasized that as God's chosen people, God would somehow protect the Jews whether or not she remained silent. There's an implication here that God would protect Esther in the process of speaking up as well.
- He proposes that God probably put her in this very position at this very time to accomplish this work.

This last point puts everything into perspective, interweaving the sovereignty of God into Esther's life, having made her queen **not** for her own sake but for **His** purposes. Therefore she **IS** in the right place at the right time.

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Q: Why would we consider Esther's plan to be spiritually proactive?

A: Not merely reacting to the emotions of the moment, she got people to fast and pray **FOR HER**. Either the king would be supernaturally moved to call for her or she would have to be prepared to break the law and go see him. In either case, she did not want to do so without **SPIRITUAL** support.

[General Application Questions for Yourself/the Group]

1. Why does God sometimes back us into a corner where there appears to be no way out?
2. What should be **OUR** first response in a crisis?
3. Based on the text, what words do you think Esther used to begin her prayers to God the King? A: "*If it pleases the King*"

Esther 5:4, "*Esther said, 'If it pleases the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him.'*"

Esther 5:8, "*if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and do what I request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king says.*"

[Handout: How God Works in the World*]

There are three basic ways that Scripture teaches us God's will is at work, each of which is present behind the story of Esther.

- **Natural Order.** God has set into action through creation a normal working of His universe. He also revealed His expectations of people through His Word and our consciences. An example in Esther is the beauty He gave her.
- **Miracles.** God is not limited to the natural order of things and sometimes breaks it in order to respond to the expressed needs of people. In Esther, He allowed her to speak to the king and live.
- **Providence.** God sometimes overrules the natural order to accomplish an act that people may or may not have requested. An example in Esther is God's allowing Mordecai to overhear the assassination plot.

Our human will can either compliment God's will or go against it.

- **Plan.** We can make plans based on the order and dependability of God's creation, knowing and obeying His Word. An example is Esther's plan to save the people.
- **Pray.** We can ask God to intervene in certain affairs while realizing our knowledge and perspective is limited. In this case, the people prayed and fasted and God allowed Esther to speak to the king.
- **Trust and Obey.** We can trust that God is in control even when circumstances seem to indicate that He is not. In Esther, Mordecai trusted God to accomplish what was impossible in human terms.

But we have a choice and can make mistakes:

- **Disobey vs. Plan.** We can violate the natural order and disobey God's commands.
- **Demand vs. Pray.** We can assume that we understand what is needed and expect God to agree and answer our prayers that way.
- **Despair vs. Trust & Obey.** We can assume God doesn't answer prayer or respond to our needs and live as though there is nothing but the natural order.

Rhetorical Question of the Hour: Is "God" REALLY not mentioned in Esther? Does He have to be specifically mentioned in connection with situation that comes up in life?

** Adopted from the "Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts & Maps"*