

Esther 4
August 15, 2021

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We are going to pick up where we left off last week. You will recall that Haman, with the help of King Xerxes, sent out an edict to annihilate any Jews in Susa and the surrounding areas. There were approximately **15 million Jews** scattered throughout the Persian Empire who were now appointed to die.

Throughout history in Scripture, God raised up nations and rulers to accomplish His will to save His chosen people. He used Egypt to provide for Jacob's family during famine and used Moses to rescue the Israelites from oppression in Egypt. Today we read about Esther, who was a Jew and who became Queen of Persia at a time when the Jews faced annihilation.

Transition: Our reading opens with Mordecai, Esther's cousin, publicly bewailing the edict to destroy the Jews signed by the king of Persia at the urging of Haman. Esther, who seemed not to know of the edict, tried to cheer up Mordecai, until he informed her of what was about to happen. Let's begin and see how this story unfolds.

BOOK:

Mordecai Persuades Esther to Help

4 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. ² But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. ³ In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴ When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵ Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

⁶ So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

⁹ Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, ¹¹ "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

¹² When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We cannot help but see a modern spiritual application of these chapters. Satan is the destroyer, and millions of people are going to go to hell unless somebody rescues them. Some Christians are like the king—eating and drinking and enjoying life, unconcerned about the danger. Others, like Mordecai, are deeply concerned to save the condemned people. And there are the Esther's too, who sacrifice themselves to intercede on behalf of the lost. Which are you?

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Es 4)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

IV. Mordecai the Protector (4)

The Jew that sat at the king's gate now comes to the fore; he is God's prepared vessel to save the nation. Immediately, Mordecai went into mourning publicly, even at the king's gate! He was not ashamed of his people or his God, although he had counseled Esther to hide her nationality. No doubt he became quite a "pest" as he sat at the gate and "cried with a loud and bitter cry." Esther sent him some new clothes and suggested that he stop, but he sent her the explanation for his actions. Esther in the palace was not likely to know all the policies and politics going on, and she had not seen the king for a month (v. 11). Mordecai sent her a copy of the decree that she might realize how desperate the situation really was. We see here two kinds of saints: those who are in joy because they are ignorant of what is going on, and those who are in sorrow because they know the signs of the times.

Is Esther making excuses in v. 11 or merely explaining the situation? Certainly, she must have realized that she was the only one who could save the Jews. Keep in mind that Esther probably knew nothing about Haman's true character. Haman was a favorite of the king, and Esther would have no reason to doubt his sincerity. Mordecai reminded her that she would not escape death even in the palace. He added, "If you hold your peace, God will send deliverance some other way!" Mordecai knew God's covenant with Abraham, that He would never allow the nation to perish.

We must admire Esther's sensible, spiritual reaction: she asked for prayer! She realized that entering into the king's presence could mean death, but she presented herself as a "living sacrifice" to do God's will. "If I perish, I perish!" was not the desperate cry of a martyr; it was the testimony of a believer willing to give all for her God. See Dan. 3:13–18. Esther was now forced to reveal her people. You cannot hide the light under the bushel very long! Esther in the OT and Joseph of Arimathea in the NT (John 19:38–42) were both "hidden believers" whom God had placed in special circumstances to perform a special ministry. (The word "secretly" in John 19:38 is literally "secreted." God had hidden him for the special purpose of burying the body of Jesus.)

We cannot help but see a modern spiritual application of these chapters. Satan is the destroyer, and millions of people are going to go to hell unless somebody rescues them. Some Christians are like the king—eating and drinking and enjoying life, unconcerned about the danger. Others, like Mordecai, are deeply concerned to save the condemned people. And there are the Esther's too who sacrifice themselves to intercede on behalf of the lost. Which are you?

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Be Committed* (pp. 105–116). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

***A Day of Decision* (In which the queen goes into her counting house and counts the cost)**

There were perhaps 15 million Jews scattered throughout the Persian Empire. Because of Haman's enmity and the king's stupidity, all of them were now appointed to die, unless they pulled up stakes and left the kingdom. But if they did that, where would they go? Even their own land of Israel wasn't safe because it was under the rule of Ahasuerus. Since the Persians ruled "from India to Ethiopia" (1:1), there were very few accessible places to which the Jews might flee.

In the empire, the responses to Haman's decree were varied. Haman and the king completely ignored the plight of the Jews and sat down to a royal feast. Meanwhile, the people of the capital city were perplexed and didn't know what to do (3:15). Secluded in the royal harem, Queen Esther knew nothing about the danger that she and her people faced. While the Jews in the various provinces began to fast and mourn (4:3), only one man, Mordecai, was able to do anything about the peril; and he immediately began to act.

1. He expressed his concern (Es. 4:1–3)

Mordecai's appearance and actions (v. 1) were those of a person showing great grief (2 Sam. 1:11–12; 13:19) or deep repentance (Jonah 3; Neh. 9:1–2). Mordecai was neither afraid nor ashamed to let people know where he stood. He had already told the officers at the gate that he was a Jew; now he was telling the whole city that he was not only a Jew but also that he opposed the murderous edict. Although it can't be documented from his writings, a statement usually attributed to the British politician Edmund Burke certainly applies here: "All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

"Deliver those who are drawn toward death and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'Surely we did not know this,' does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?" These solemn words from Proverbs 24:11–12 (NKJV) make it clear that we can't be neutral when human lives are at stake.

Mordecai ended his mournful pilgrimage at the king's gate, which was the commercial and legal hub of the city, a combination of marketplace and courtroom. That was as far as he could go because Oriental kings lived in an artificial paradise that sheltered them from the realities of life. "No sackcloth must come within their gates," said Scottish preacher George H. Morrison. "They must have a good time at any cost. They must live their easy and comfortable lives, as if there were no voices calling them" (*The Afterglow of God*, p. 72). How opposite from our Priest-King in heaven who welcomes us to bring our burdens and sorrows to Him!

What could Mordecai hope to accomplish at the gate with his sackcloth and his wailing? Well, perhaps somebody from the palace would take notice of him and get a message to Queen Esther. The queen's ladies-in-waiting knew Mordecai (Es. 2:11), although they didn't know the relationship between him and the queen; and Mordecai had already transmitted information to the queen through some of her retainers (2:22). Since Mordecai couldn't enter the house of the women, this was his only hope.

Esther received the report that Mordecai was dressed in sackcloth and ashes, mourning at the king's gate. Since she wasn't told the reason for her cousin's strange conduct, she did the logical thing and sent him fine clothes to put on lest his sackcloth arouse the concern of the king's officers and guards. What if the king should come out to the gate for an audience with the people? Mordecai would then be in trouble.

The queen's motives were fine, but her method was faulty. Before sending the new clothes to Mordecai, she should have found out what the problem really was. If Ahasuerus did appear at the gate, Mordecai's courtly garments might save him temporarily from the wrath of the king; but they couldn't rescue the Jews from the penalty of death that Haman had issued for them. Mordecai's mourning, however, finally got the attention of the queen; and that's what he wanted.

2. He explained their peril (Es. 4:4–9)

Mordecai's refusal of the new clothes gave him opportunity to get his vital message to the queen, for she sent one of her eunuchs to the gate to ask Mordecai what was wrong. I doubt that Hathach realized what an important part he was playing in God's plan to defeat Haman and save the Jews. So often in the work of the Lord, He uses obscure people to accomplish important tasks. What was the name of the lad who gave Jesus his loaves and fishes? Who were the men who rescued Paul by lifting him over that Damascus wall in a basket? What was the name of the little servant girl who told Naaman to go see the prophet? We don't know, but God used these people to accomplish His purposes. As great doors can swing upon small hinges, so great events can turn upon the deeds of "small" and sometimes anonymous people.

Mordecai not only knew all the facts about the decree, but he also had a copy of it for Esther to read for herself. This proves that he held a high position in the government, a position God had given him for the very purpose of saving the Jewish nation. But Mordecai did much more than inform the queen. He urged her to reveal her true nationality and go to the royal throne and intercede for her people.

When Mordecai told Hathach to tell the queen to ask for mercy "for her people," he divulged to him the fact that Esther was a Jewess. Did it shock Hathach, or was he perhaps a Jew himself, and that's why Mordecai entrusted him with this secret? Like Daniel and his three friends in Babylon, Jewish exiles in the Persian Empire were often pressed into royal service.

Now, the big question was: how would Queen Esther respond to this crisis?

3. He exhorted the queen (Es. 4:10–14)

Keep in mind that Mordecai couldn't speak directly to Esther but had to send his messages to her via Hathach. Esther had no way of sensing *personally* how Mordecai felt, nor could Mordecai fully understand how Esther was expressing herself. What a difference it makes when we can see the faces and hear the voices of the people we communicate with! Hathach certainly had a great responsibility placed on him as the living link between two distressed people who held in their hands the salvation of the Jewish nation.

In verses 10–11, Esther's reply was not an evasion but an explanation. She reminded Mordecai of what he already knew, that nobody, not even the queen, could rush into the throne room and ask for an immediate audience with the king. If she were to do so, she would take her life in her hands. Not only was the king of Persia sheltered from seeing sorrow and hearing bad news, but he was also protected from interruptions that might interfere with his schedule.

Again, I don't think this was an excuse on Esther's part, but rather a plea that Mordecai give her some guidance. He knew palace protocol, he was a man, and he was in touch with what was going on. She was isolated in the harem and incapable of devising the kind of strategy needed to solve the problem. Besides all this, she hadn't seen the king for a month; and it was possible that she had somehow fallen out of favor. Ahasuerus was unpredictable, and Esther didn't want to make matters worse.

I get the impression that Mordecai misinterpreted Esther's message. It sounded to him like she was trying to hide her nationality and avoid the responsibility of presenting herself to the king. Had he seen and heard her in person, he probably would have judged her differently.

In his reply, Mordecai reminded Esther of three solemn facts. First, he told her that her being a palace resident was no guarantee that she would be delivered from death. The royal edict said "all the Jews" (3:13), and Haman would see to it that every last Jew was discovered and slain, even those in the palace. For that matter, there were probably palace personnel who were still loyal to Vashti and would be happy to see Queen Esther removed.

Second, Mordecai reminded her that her silence wouldn't prevent deliverance from coming from some other source. The reference here is to the providence of God even though the name of God isn't mentioned. Knowing the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1–3), Mordecai had faith that the people of Israel would be protected from annihilation. However, he warned her that even if deliverance did come, some of the Jews might still be slain, and Esther might be among them.

Why would God send “relief and deliverance” (NIV) to the Jewish people but allow Esther and her relatives to be slain? Perhaps Mordecai saw this as a punishment for her unwillingness to intercede for the people. To know to do good and not do it is sin (James 4:17). Therefore, instead of protecting herself by her silence, Esther would be putting herself into greater jeopardy. Haman and his agents would have little trouble finding her in the palace and taking her life.

Mordecai emphasized a third fact: Her being in the palace was not an accident, for she had “come to royal position for such a time as this” (Es. 4:14, NIV). He didn't say that God had put her there, but that's what his statement amounted to. If Esther would just take the time to review her life, she couldn't help but see that there had been divine leading all the way. Now, if God brought her to the throne, then He had a purpose in mind, and that purpose was now evident: She was there to intercede for her people. The statement of Joseph to his brothers comes to mind: “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:20, NKJV).

As you ponder Mordecai's words, you will learn some basic truths about the providence of God that are important for Christians today. The first is that *God has divine purposes to accomplish in this world*. God's purposes involve the Jewish nation as well as the Gentile nations of the world. They also involve the church. God deals with individuals as well as with nations. His purposes touch the lives of kings and queens and common people, godly people and wicked people. There is nothing in this world that is outside the influence of the purposes of God.

Mordecai made it clear that *God accomplishes His purposes through people*. For reasons we don't fully understand, God permits wicked people to do evil things in this world; but He can work in and through unbelievers and His own people to accomplish His purposes. While He was not the author of his sins, God permitted the king's drunkenness and his foolishness in deposing Vashti. He used the king's loneliness to place Esther on the throne; and, in chapter 6, he will use the king's sleeplessness to reward Mordecai and start to overthrow the power of Haman. In great things and little things, God is sovereign.

The third truth that Mordecai emphasized was that *God will accomplish His purposes even if His servants refuse to obey His will*. If Esther rejected the will of God for her life, God could still save His people; but Esther would be the loser. When ministers and missionaries appeal to the church for volunteers for Christian service, they sometimes give the impression that God's work is at the mercy of God's workers; but this isn't true.

If you and I refuse to obey God, He can either *abandon us* and get somebody else to do the job, and we will lose the reward and blessing; or He can *discipline us* until we surrender to His will. Two examples come to mind. Since John Mark left the mission field and returned home (Acts 13:13; 15:36–41), God raised up Timothy to take his place (16:1–3). When Jonah ran from God, the Lord kept after him until he obeyed, even though he didn't obey from his heart. When God isn't permitted to rule, He overrules; and He always accomplishes His purposes.

The fourth lesson from Mordecai's speech is that *God isn't in a hurry but will fulfill His plans in due time*. God waited until the third year of the king's reign before taking Vashti off the throne. Then he waited another four years (Es. 2:16) before putting Esther on the throne. It was

not until the king's twelfth year (3:7) that God allowed Haman to hatch his evil plot, and He decreed that the "crisis day" for the Jews would be almost a year away.

If you were reading the Book of Esther for the first time, you might become impatient with God and conclude that He was doing nothing. In chapters 1 and 2, a drunken king and his flattering advisers seem to be in charge. From chapter 3 to chapter 6, it looks as though wicked Haman is in control. Even after Haman is off the scene, it's the king's unalterable decree that keeps everybody busy. *But where is God?*

God is never in a hurry. He knows the end from the beginning, and His decrees are always right and always on time. Dr. A.W. Tozer compared God's sovereign purposes to an ocean liner, leaving New York City, bound for Liverpool, England. The people on board the ship are free to do as they please, but they aren't free to change the course of the ship.

"The mighty liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history," wrote Dr. Tozer. "God moves undisturbed and unhindered toward the fulfillment of those eternal purposes which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began" (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 118).

The sovereignty of God doesn't suggest fatalism or blind determinism, both of which would make life a prison. Only a sovereign God is great enough to decree freedom of choice for men and women, and only a sovereign God could fulfill His wise and loving purposes in this world and even make evil cooperate in producing good (Gen. 50:20). The question is not, "Is God in control of this world?" but, "Is God in control of my life?" Are we cooperating with Him so that we are a part of the answer and not a part of the problem?

To quote Dr. Tozer again: "In the moral conflict now raging around us whoever is on God's side is on the winning side and cannot lose; whoever is on the other side is on the losing side and cannot win" (p. 119).

4. He expedited the plan (Es. 4:15–17)

When we first met Esther and Mordecai, they were hiding their identity as Jews. Now Mordecai is enlisting other Jews in the struggle against Haman, and Esther is commanding her Gentile ladies-in-waiting to participate in the fast.

Even though the name of God is not mentioned in the text, this act of humiliation was obviously directed to the Lord and was certainly accompanied by prayer. Fasting and prayer are frequently found together in Scripture, for fasting is a preparation for concentrated and humble prayer. (See Ezra 8:21–23; Ps. 35:13; Dan. 9:3; Acts 13:3.) Of itself, fasting is no guarantee that God will bless, for fasting must be accompanied by sincere humility and brokenness before the Lord (Isa. 58:1–10; Joel 2:12–13; Matt. 6:16–18). If fasting is only a formal religious ritual, it accomplishes no spiritual purpose.

Since Jews throughout the empire were already "fasting, weeping, and wailing" (Es. 4:3), it wasn't difficult for Mordecai to unite the Jews in Shushan to pray for Esther as she prepared to intercede before the king. This was a matter of life and death both for her and her people, and God used the crisis that Haman had created to bring a spiritual revival to His people scattered among the Gentiles. It's often the case that God's people have to experience trouble before they will humble themselves and cry out to God.

How should we interpret Esther's words, "And if I perish, I perish"? Do these words suggest unbelieving resignation ("Well, you forced me into it, so I'll do what you say, even if it kills me!") or trustful submission to the will of God ("I'll do God's will, whatever the cost!)? I vote for the second interpretation. To me, Esther echoes the same surrender and confidence that Paul

expressed to the Ephesian elders: “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24, KJV).

From the human point of view, everything was against Esther and the success of her mission. The law was against her, because nobody was allowed to interrupt the king. The government was against her, for the decree said that she was to be slain. Her sex was against her, because the king’s attitude toward women was worse than chauvinistic. The officers were against her, because they did only those things that ingratiated themselves with Haman. In one sense, even the fast could be against her; for going three days without food and drink would not necessarily improve her appearance or physical strength. But “if God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31, KJV)

The answer of faith is— “Nobody!”

Martin, J. A. (1985). Nahum. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 706-707) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

C. Mordecai mourned (4:1–3)

4:1–3. Whatever had been Mordecai’s reasons for not bowing to Haman, he was now in great mourning. His feud with Haman, whether legitimate or not, had caused a great crisis for his whole nation. He feared that God’s Chosen People would be destroyed and God’s program thwarted. He knew the amount of money Haman had agreed to spend on this vast project as he had a copy of the edict (vv. 7–8). Wearing **sackcloth and ashes** and crying publicly signified **mourning** (cf. Gen. 37:34; Jer. 49:3; Dan. 9:3; Joel 1:13; Jonah 3:6). **Mordecai** was identifying himself to the public as one in great distress. Perhaps he was remorseful for having revealed his nationality (Es. 3:4) and thus having endangered the lives of thousands of his people. Everywhere **Jews** heard of the edict, and they had the same response. Certainly many Jewish people must have prayed fervently, though the Book of Esther does not mention it. Meanwhile God was working behind the scenes to deliver His people.

III. Calamity Averted by Esther (4:4–9:19)

Nothing has been said so far in the Book of Esther to suggest Esther and Mordecai were people of great faith in Yahweh. But here it is revealed that they at least believed that God was concerned for the welfare of His Chosen People. In this climactic section the interworkings of various events reveal God’s sovereignty in working on behalf of His own. Though God’s name is not mentioned, the abundance of “happenstances” surely point to God’s control.

A. Communications between Esther and Mordecai (4:4–17)

4:4–8. The action in this section centers around **Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs assigned to Esther**. Though **Esther** had not been in the **presence** of the king for a month (v. 11), this did not mean that she had fallen from his favor. As his queen she had many luxuries and was waited on by **maids and eunuchs**, who told her about Mordecai’s mourning. She assigned **Hathach ... to find out why Mordecai** was carrying on that way in public places. Esther may

have been embarrassed about him. Or perhaps she was concerned for his welfare since she sent out new **clothes for him** to wear so he would not be seen in **sackcloth** and ashes. Esther's unique position in the harem apparently shut her off from normal lines of communication. She did not seem to be aware of **the edict** about the execution **of the Jews**.

In response to Hathach's inquiry to Mordecai **in the open square**, Mordecai **gave him a copy of the edict to show to Esther**. He also told Hathach to tell her all the details of how the edict came about and **to urge her to go** to the king on behalf of **her people** to beg for their lives. The words "her people" revealed to the eunuch Hathach, if he did not know it before, that Esther was a Jewess. Without some reprieve from the king, Esther and Mordecai and all their people would die.

4:9–11. Esther's response to **Mordecai** was not encouraging. Persian monarchs (like those in most ancient nations) were protected against unwanted visitors. **Esther** reminded **Mordecai** that she could not simply enter the king's **inner** chambers unannounced or she might **be put to death**. **The king** had the power to execute anyone who disturbed him without an appointment. **For the king to extend the golden scepter** to someone showed that he approved of the visit and that the person was welcome and not in danger of death (cf. 5:2). Since Esther had not been **summoned** by him for a month, she did not know whether his attitude toward her would be favorable.

4:12–14. Mordecai's response to Esther has often been taken as a great confession of faith. Actually, though, **Mordecai** apparently was expecting help from the Persian monarch. However, Mordecai did believe God in some way would protect His people: **deliverance** would **arise from another place** if Esther would not approach Xerxes about the Jews' plight. Though Mordecai is not pictured as a pious man who was righteous in his dealings before God, he at least had a sense of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. He was aware that the promises to Abraham, Moses, and David would not be fulfilled if the entire nation was wiped out. Therefore he was confident that God would act on their behalf. He hoped that God would work through Esther because of her unique **position**.

Mordecai reminded Esther that if she did not attempt to avert this terrible calamity she would surely die, even though she was a member of the royal household. Whether Haman's power was great enough to reach to the palace and execute the queen is not stated. Mordecai simply planted the idea in Esther's mind that she would die if she did not act. Therefore, death by order of the king for entering into his presence would be no worse than waiting and meeting death at the hands of Haman.

4:15–17. **Esther** understood the situation well. In concluding her **reply to Mordecai**, she noted, **If I perish, I perish**. She resolved to carry out the wishes of Mordecai and **go to the king** even if it meant her death. In this section, as elsewhere in the book, Esther and Mordecai are seen as great patriots on behalf of the Jewish nation, but are not presented as righteous people, like others in the Old Testament who fully trusted the Lord. Nothing is said about Esther praying (though many commentators say that her fasting meant she also prayed). She simply instructed Mordecai to **fast.... for three days** (with **the Jews ... in Susa**) as she and her **maids** would also **do**.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 726). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

4:11 Skeptics often attack the credibility of the book of Esther by claiming that the law Esther quoted was ludicrous. They assert that if such a law existed, no one could ever be in the king's presence. However, these objections result from a failure to read the text carefully. Esther did not say that no one could see the king without being summoned, but that anyone who approached the king without being summoned could forfeit his or her life. Josephus supports this fact (*Antiquities*, XI 205), also noting that the king surrounded himself with men bearing axes who would punish anyone who approached the throne without being summoned. Herodotus describes a similar, but not exact, policy (*Her* 3:85, 118, 140).

4:14 Mordecai acknowledged the sovereignty of God. He knew that Haman could not ultimately succeed in his campaign because God's design cannot be thwarted. God is the one in control and He was committed to the preservation of the Jews, who are beneficiaries of God's covenant with Abraham (Gn 17:1–9).

4:17 Some feminists claim that the Bible devalues women. Mordecai's response to Esther reveals the opposite. Obviously, he held women in high esteem. Mordecai was perfectly willing to follow the leadership of a woman, an example found in other places in the Bible, for example, Deborah (Jdg 4). (See also the article, "Does the Bible Demean Women?" page 730.)

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 195–196). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

HAMAN'S THREAT (4:1–5:14)

Esther's position enabled her to save the Jews if she were willing to risk her own standing. After recounting Esther's vow of devotion, the author told how Esther took the lead and devised her own scheme to outmaneuver Haman. Ironically, Haman unwittingly devised his own end.

Mordecai's Plea (4:1–17). When Mordecai learned of the murderous plot, he and all the Jews joined in mourning, fasting, and the wearing of sackcloth and ashes. This spontaneous act of grief evidenced the solidarity of the Jews. The custom of sackcloth and ashes included prayers of confession and worship (1 Kgs. 21:27–29; Neh. 9:1–3; Dan. 9:3). Esther learned of the decree from her messenger Hathach, who relayed Mordecai's plea for her help. But Esther explained that she could not approach the king because Persian law meted out death to anyone entering uninvited. Mordecai answered by warning her that as a Jewess her own life was in jeopardy and that God could save His people by another means if she failed. He believed that her exaltation in the palace had a holy purpose. Esther's trust in God was the turning point. She requested a communal fast by all the Jews as they petitioned God (Ezra 8:21–23; see Acts 13:3; 14:23). She replied to Mordecai with courage and confidence in God's will: "If I perish, I perish" (see Dan. 3:16–18).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Es 4:1-17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.