

Esther 4:1-9

Esther 4:1-9 When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. (2) He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. (3) And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. (4) So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them. (5) Then Esther called Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was. (6) So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate. (7) And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. (8) He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. (9) So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Questions On The Text

How did Mordecai respond to the decree?

Verses 1-2: Whatever Mordecai's motives were for refusing to bow to Haman, he must have been acutely aware that his actions had resulted in a catastrophe, both for himself and his nation. On learning of the decree, his response was to go into immediate mourning which, by Western standards, is bewilderingly demonstrative.

However, in ancient times, as in many parts of the world today, Mordecai's actions were normal. Nevertheless, the wearing of sackcloth excluded him from taking up his normal position within the king's gates (see 2:19) which must have made it somewhat more difficult to contact Esther.

How did the rest of the Jews respond?

Verse 3: There was great mourning among the Jews right throughout the kingdom.

What did Esther do?

Verses 4-6: Esther received reports from her maids and eunuchs that Mordecai was in mourning which demonstrates how isolated she was in her quarters from what was happening not only throughout the empire, but even outside the palace walls. The news caused her to be deeply distressed but she had no idea why Mordecai was mourning and sent him fresh clothes. When Mordecai refused them, she sent a trusted eunuch to inquire why Mordecai was mourning.

What did Mordecai tell the eunuch?

Verses 7-9: Mordecai revealed all the details of the situation of the Jewish people, including his own involvement, and the money Haman had promised to the king in order to destroy the Jews. To support his claim, he also supplied a copy of the decree for Esther's perusal. He then sent a command via the eunuch for Esther to plead with the king for the Jews, thereby reversing his previous command not to reveal the identity of her people (see 2:10).

Further Questions For Discussion:

How do you think Mordecai felt about the edict? Do you think he might have felt responsible?

How did the Jews throughout the kingdom express their mourning?

Do you think that demonstrative mourning is a good thing or a bad thing, or merely cultural?

Why would Esther have sent clothes to Mordecai?

Why did Esther not know about the decree?

Was Mordecai's expectation that Esther plead before the king for her nation reasonable?