

ESTHER STUDY 4 – CHAPTER 4:1 to CHAPTER 5:14

After the introductory chapters setting the scene we are now right at the heart of the book. We saw last time that a great crisis has arisen. A law that cannot be revoked has been passed calling on people to annihilate the Jews (3:13). This is terrible, not just for its violent intent, but especially because if this is carried out the plan of salvation for the world will be wiped out as well. We left the last chapter with the King and Haman feasting, but the rest of the city bewildered.

The best way to get to grips with this chapter is probably by taking the three main characters in turn.

Mordecai

Mordecai is a man in mourning. The seriousness of what has just happened is not lost on him. The things he does in verse 1 are the kinds of things you would do if you had already suffered a serious loss. However, no matter how strongly he felt, he was not in a position to do anything about the problem (verse 2).

Mordecai's agony is in great contrast to the situation of Esther. She seems to be unaware of the situation. She is distressed but not because of the situation, she is distressed by Mordecai's distress. She sends new clothes to Mordecai. This is a bit like saying to him "cheer up, it's not so serious, it'll be ok". But he refuses to wear them – he knows the gravity of the situation. Finally his seriousness leads Esther to find out more, and she sends one of the King's Eunuchs to find out and Mordecai makes things clear (verses 6-8).

Sometimes, if we take God's word seriously, and if we take the plight of our world seriously it will lead to times when we are out of step emotionally with those around us. They may want to shake us out of how we are feeling and how seriously we are taking things. But they may be interested once they see we really won't be distracted.

Mordecai calls Esther to use her position for the sake of the Jews (verse 8). Initially she is full of excuses. She does not see or believe in the powerful sovereignty of God. She says she is bound by the rules of the King. She can't just turn up and talk to him.

Mordecai's answer to Esther is a wake up call. In effect he says "get real Esther". Just because she lives in the Kings palace she will not be exempt from this law (verse 13). He also expresses great faith in verse 14. Although he does not mention the LORD by name, it is obvious he knows and trusts him. In a humanly hopeless situation he knows this is not the end for the Jews. Haman and the King will not succeed. He also recognises that it may be that the LORD has placed Esther where she is precisely for this moment.

Verse 14 is a great model of how to view our lives. The Lord will achieve his purposes on earth, and he does not depend on us. Old Christian songs that say "he has no hands but our hands" are nonsense. However our call is to be faithful to him, and if we are then we may have the privilege of being used by him to achieve his purposes in possibly very big ways (who knows?).

Esther

Despite her hesitant start Esther takes Mordecai seriously. She fasts for three days (4:16, 5:1) certainly expressing the fact she now takes the situation as seriously as Mordecai, and possibly this is the writers code for the fact she prayed as well? For a Jew a time of fasting was a time of self humbling and waiting on God.

To be used as the Saviour of the Jews Esther has to risk her life (see 4:11). The gap between verse 1 and 2 of chapter 5 is a tense one. Will the King put Esther to death for approaching him? He does not, and allows her to enter.

Esther's scheme seems like it is an odd one, but the strategy may flow out of trust in the Lord. She continues to ask for banquets to be given with Haman and the King and does not rush into asking her request. We know that this was the wisest thing she could have done, as it is in the delay that the Lord acts.

Haman

Haman is a man who is arrogant, who hates the Lord and his people, and yet does not see the trouble he is really in. He is a picture of the world's proud and blind opposition to the Lord. His pride comes through in 5:9-13. His utter hatred comes through at the end of the paragraph. He cannot enjoy all he has because Mordecai is still alive.

Yet the irony of that pride is there in 5:14. The gallows are comically high. Yet they will be used, not for Mordecai, but for Haman himself later in the story. He does not see the danger he is in, or the inevitability of his end.

He is like the wicked man in Psalm 37. He seems so powerful. He plots against the righteous. He has made a weapon to be used against them. Yet that weapon will be finally used against him. When we face people (or human powers and institutions) like Haman we must wait on the Lord and recognise he will act.

Possible Questions

How does Mordecai view the situation the Jews are in? How does Esther view Mordecai's distress – what does she do? What do you think she is saying by doing this?

Does Mordecai accept Esther's gift? What does he call Esther to do?

Why does Esther refuse to act?

Does Mordecai think Esther will be exempt from this law?

How does what Mordecai says in verse 14-15 show his faith in the Lord? What does it tell us about our role in the Lord's purposes?

What attitude does Esther have to have about her life, if she is to do what Mordecai asks? (see verse 16)

Summarise Esther's actions in 5:1-10. Does Esther rush into trying to deal with the problem?

What characteristics does Haman show in verses 9-14? What is his driving motivation in his life? Does he think he is safe or in danger?

Read Psalm 37:1-15. How does this summarise the situation of Haman. What should we do when we face people (or groups of people) like Haman?