

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**ESTH. 4:6** So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate.

**7 And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them.**

8 Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew *it* unto Esther, and to declare *it* unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people.

**9 And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.**

10 Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;

**11 All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, *there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.***

12 And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.

**13 Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself**

**that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.**

14 For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?

**15 Then Esther bade *them* return Mordecai *this answer,***

16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

**17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.**

**5:1** Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on *her* royal *apparel*, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house.

**2 And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, *that* she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.**

# Esther Goes Before the King

Lesson Text: Esther 4:6—5:2

Related Scriptures: Esther 2:8-20; 3:1—4:5;  
5:3—7:10; Proverbs 21:1

TIME: 474 B.C.

PLACE: Shushan

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **LEARNING OF A DEADLY THREAT—Esth. 4:6-9**

Esther was a young Jewish woman living in Shushan (Susa), one of the royal cities of the Persian Empire. She had been raised by her much older cousin Mordecai (Esth. 2:5-7) and had been elevated to become queen to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes).

The king installed a prime minister named Haman (3:1), who decided that the empire needed to be rid of all its Jews. He obtained the king's unalterable decree (vss. 8-15).

When Mordecai learned of the decree, he put on mourning clothes and raised a great cry in the city (4:1-3). Esther dispatched an attendant to find out the reason.

**Mordecai's report on the plot (Esth. 4:6-7).** Esther's attendant, Hatach, found Mordecai in the city square in front of the palace gate. Mordecai did not hesitate to report all that had recently happened, including the detail of how much money Haman was willing to pay into the treasury to fund the slaughter.

**Mordecai's request to Esther (Esth. 4:8-9).** Mordecai supplied Hatach with a copy of the decree for the empire-wide slaughter issued at Shushan and asked him to show it to Esther. Hatach was to urge Esther in the strongest terms to approach the king to beg for mercy ("make supplication unto him") for her people.

Mordecai knew he was not making a light request of his cousin, but the situation demanded it.

### **WRESTLING WITH PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY—Esth. 4:10-17**

**Esther's dilemma (Esth. 4:10-12).** Esther's response was to send Hatach back to Mordecai with a return message. She wanted to make her cousin aware of the danger his charge put her in, no doubt in the hope that he would realize he was asking too much of her and would find some other way of dealing with the problem. She needed Mordecai to be aware of one fact of life in the royal court. No matter who you were, you did not simply waltz into the king's presence uninvited. You had to be summoned. There was a single

penalty for violation: instant death.

The king could grant an exception. If he held out his golden scepter, that person was assured of royal favor and would live. But few would dare to count on finding such approval.

Esther certainly could not be confident the king would make an exception for her, for she had not been called into his presence for some thirty days. It was clearly far too great a risk.

Hatach dutifully reported Esther's words to Mordecai.

**Mordecai's challenge (Esth. 4:13-14).** Mordecai made clear that she was already in danger no matter what she did. If Esther kept quiet in this perilous time, deliverance for the Jews would emerge from some other quarter, but she and her relatives would die. Where did Mordecai get this sudden confidence about deliverance from somewhere else? He certainly did not have specific information about other possibilities. Instead, he was expressing his faith that God had unlimited resources and would intervene in some way. He would not let His people be destroyed from the face of the earth.

But Mordecai's message to Esther was nevertheless urgent, and he wanted her to consider one more crucial possibility. She no doubt assumed that she owed her exalted position as queen to her own beauty and the king's attraction to her. But perhaps she had been elevated to her position for some other reason. What if it was precisely for this perilous moment facing her people?

**Esther's decision (Esth. 4:15-17).** Esther asked Mordecai to assemble all the Jews living in Shushan and hold a fast together for three days and nights. Esther and her maids would do the same. The purpose of fasting was to seek God's favor and intervention.

Knowing the prayer support she would have as she approached the king, she no longer feared for her own

safety: "If I perish, I perish." Esther now was given the grace to look beyond herself and her own concerns.

## **RECEIVING THE KING'S FAVOR— Esth. 5:1-2**

**Esther's risk-laden approach (Esth. 5:1).** Three days later, Esther entered the king's hall. All she could do now was wait for his reaction.

**The king's welcoming response (Esth. 5:2).** When he saw her, he was glad to see her. He held out the golden scepter. The immediate danger evaporated, and the king's favor was now hers and would continue. God engineered deliverance.

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Where did Esther's attendant go to find Mordecai?
2. What information did Mordecai tell Hatach to lead up to his request?
3. What did Mordecai, speaking through Hatach, ask Esther to do?
4. Of what did Esther want Mordecai to be aware? Why?
5. What did the king's extending of the golden scepter convey?
6. What did Mordecai suggest would happen to Esther if she played it safe and kept quiet?
7. How was Mordecai so confident that God would save the Jews?
8. What did Mordecai want Esther to especially consider regarding God's plans and her responsibility?
9. What request did Esther have for Mordecai in return?
10. What was Esther's new attitude toward the risk she would be taking?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Wherever we are, God can use us to help others (Esth. 4:6-7).
2. It is never wrong to urge others to do the right thing (vs. 8).
3. God does not ask His people to deny the presence of danger but to trust Him in that danger (vss. 9-12).
4. God places each of us in the time and place where we can best accomplish His purposes (vss. 13-14).
5. Believers need to support each other as a family of faith in times of trial (vss. 15-17).
6. God often answers prayers through people who are willing to act boldly in obedience to Him (5:1-2).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What pressures did Esther immediately face when she learned of the plot against the Jews?
2. Why had Mordecai and Esther chosen to conceal Esther's Jewish identity (Esth. 2:5-11)?
3. What lessons can the story of Esther teach believers about the sovereignty and providence of God?
4. What practical steps can a believer take to discover God's purpose for him or her in a given situation?
5. How can believers maintain faith in the Lord when it appears that He is silent?
6. How does Esther's boldness in coming before King Ahasuerus provide believers an example to follow in facing a difficult or risky task?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**"I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).**

Esther was a Jew whom God used to prevent the genocide of her people. Esther rose to power by being chosen out of all the maidens of the kingdom to become the king's wife. The golden text is a quote of her self-sacrificial intention to approach the king to attempt to rescue the Jews despite the probability of dire consequences. She concludes with the phrase, "If I perish, I perish," since approaching the king without his permission meant she would be put to death unless he chose to grant her special favor.

Most scholars commend Esther as a woman of faith whose conduct is exemplary. Her approach to the king was motivated by her faith in God and driven by her understanding of His promises to His chosen people. Others question some of her choices and motives.

No matter how Christians interpret Esther's behavior, they may still commend her courage. The king had already deposed Queen Vashti for disobeying his wishes; Esther was risking her life for the sake of her people. Believers today should take from this book that God works all things out for His people's good, even in times of oppression and persecution. We can confidently face similar threats in our own times with the steadfast confidence that God's good plan for us cannot fail.

—Carissa Dobson.