



The Chosen Life: Studies in Esther

Esther Ch. 4

Inductive Women's Bible Study – Lesson 4

Here is an interesting observation. Until chapter four, none of Esther's words have been recorded. All that we have seen about this young woman—her beauty, her lovely demeanor, her desire to please, her respectful devotion to Mordecai—has been through the writer's eyes. Thus far, Esther's unspoken example is the picture of a meek and modest woman. Now her own words show us another aspect of her character.

Chapter four records a serious conversation that takes place between Esther and Mordecai through her messenger, Hathach. When the queen learns her cousin is making a very public display of sorrow she tries to discover why and what she can do for him. But Mordecai's request stuns Esther. Her response (which is her first recorded statement) could be summed up in two words. *I can't*. What Mordecai suggests forces Esther to realize that her position of privilege is also a position of responsibility. Compelled to step out of her (literal) comfort zone, Esther makes a choice. Her second recorded statement could be summed up in two words. *I will*. As you read how Esther faced this crisis, ask the Lord what He wants to teach you about courage under fire.

Background It has been estimated that there were as many as 15 million Jews living throughout the Persian Empire during this time. With so many citizens fasting, weeping and wailing, it's hard to exaggerate the devastating impact of the king's decree. While Ahasuerus and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was thrown into confusion. As the news spread throughout the kingdom, daily life was disrupted at every level. Mordecai's loud and bitter crying was echoed millions of times in every town and village.

The practice of torn clothes, sackcloth and ashes was an outward sign of grief. To the modern reader, such a strong display seems awkward and embarrassing. But Mordecai's behavior was more than an uncontrollable outburst of emotion. It was a symbolic act of humiliation and repentance toward God. For Jews, fasting was always coupled with prayer. This too, was a way of expressing deep need and seeking God's guidance and help. Though not specifically stated, we can be certain that Esther fasted *and prayed* for God's mercy and intervention in the crisis she and her people faced.



Getting started. Find a quiet place to study. Take your Bible, your lesson and any other study tools you want to use. Plan to spend about an hour each day on your lesson. **Pray.** Take time to settle your heart, focus your thoughts and ask the Lord to help you see with clear eyes.

“Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in Your law.” – Psalm 119:18 NLT

Esther Ch. 4 Read the passage, without interruption, two or three times. If possible, read from more than one Bible translation. Briefly describe in your own words what you have read.

With each lesson, a “working” text is provided for your convenience. You can use this to scribble notes, write down word definitions, highlight events—whatever you find useful to your own personal study. The translation used will vary from week to week.

Working Text for Esther Ch. 4

New Living Translation (NLT)

1 When Mordecai learned what had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail. 2 He stood outside the gate of the palace, for no one was allowed to enter while wearing clothes of mourning. 3 And as news of the king’s decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in sackcloth and ashes.

The original word for “distressed” is a strong verb that suggests writhing in pain or anguish.

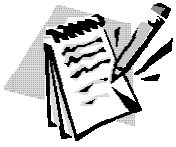
4 When Queen Esther’s maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothing to him to replace the sackcloth, but he refused it. 5 Then Esther sent for Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs who had been appointed as her attendant. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was troubling him and why he was in mourning. 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the square in front of the palace gate.

7 Mordecai told him the whole story and told him how much money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. 8 Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews, and he asked Hathach to show it to Esther. He also asked Hathach to explain it to her and to urge her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. 9 So Hathach returned to Esther with Mordecai’s message.

10 Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: 11 “The whole world knows that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him in more than a month.” 12 So Hathach gave Esther’s message to Mordecai.

13 Mordecai sent back this reply to Esther: “Don’t think for a moment that you will escape there in the palace when all other Jews are killed. 14 If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. What’s more, who can say but that you have been elevated to the palace for just such a time as this?”

15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 “Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I am willing to die.” 17 So Mordecai went away and did as Esther told him.



OBSERVATION – *What do I see?*

Read the section and record what you see. **Use the first column to keep track of what you find in the Bible passage.** (Who? What? When? Where?) Follow along with the writer as he tells his story. Look for clues that tell you when and where the story is taking place. Who is mentioned and what part do they play? What events have taken place? What is happening now? How do the main characters respond to their situation?

Use the second column to record information you gather from other sources. You may want to look up names and places in a Bible dictionary, map or encyclopedia. What else can you discover about the people and places mentioned in this chapter?

You can also use this section to jot down your own thoughts and impressions about people and events. What do you observe about Esther's character? What do you observe in the character and behavior of others in the story?

Esther 4:1–3

Bible Facts and Information:

My Research and Observations:

Esther 4:4-12

Bible Facts and Information:

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My Research and Observations:

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Esther 4:13-17

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INTERPRETATION – *What does it mean?*

Look for a spiritual lesson. Be careful not to read into the Bible an idea that is not there. Examine each verse in light of the verses around it. To help you find a spiritual lesson, ask questions such as, “Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? A condition to that promise? Is there a warning to heed? An example to follow or avoid?” **State the lesson in one simple sentence.**



APPLICATION – *How does it apply to me?*

We don't study the Bible just to gather information—we want to spiritually grow. Our heart needs to be open to change. The only way to move truth off the pages of your Bible and into your life is to **put it into action.**

To apply a spiritual lesson, we must examine ourselves and take deliberate steps to do something with what we have learned. Ask yourself: Is this a new lesson, or does it reinforce what I already know? What does it challenge me to do? Does it point out error in my attitude or actions? What changes does it require? Think of how the lesson relates to you and what specific course of action you will take. **Write your application in the form of a question to make it personal.**

Esther 4:1–3

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Esther 4:4–12

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Esther 4:13–17

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Summary

Write a simple sentence that summarizes what the chapter is about. _____

Give a title to the chapter that will help you personally to remember it.



Take A Closer Look

**“Go, gather all the Jews...and fast for me;
neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day.
My maids and I will fast likewise.
And so I will go to the king...and if I perish, I perish!”**
Esther 4:16 NKJ

One of the things we admire most about Esther is her courage. In a time of crisis and uncertainty she found inner strength and rose to the challenge. “I will go to the king...and if I perish, I perish.” What do you hear in her words? Did Esther utter them in brash self-confidence or from a determined spirit of obedience? Where did Esther’s strength come from? It has rightly been said that courage isn’t the absence of fear; courage is the determination to act *in spite of* fear. Take a closer look at Esther’s resolve with an eye to discover the source of courage under fire.

Esther’s Reluctance

At the beginning of this chapter, Esther appears reluctant and unsure. She sends fresh clothes to replace the sackcloth Mordecai has put on. Perhaps she hopes whatever is troubling her beloved cousin will simply go away. (We mustn’t fault her for wanting an easy solution since that’s human nature.) But when Esther learns how grave the situation is, she knows she must make a choice. We watch and wait while Esther weighs her options, neither of which is ideal.

Describe what Esther’s options were and the probable outcome in either case. _____

Look at Esther’s first response (vs. 11) to Mordecai’s instructions. Why is she reluctant?

Esther’s Resolve

What finally convinces Esther to go to the king? _____

What specific instructions does Esther send back to Mordecai? Why is this significant?

In our modern-day culture, we aren't likely to face Esther's life-or-death situation but we can learn from her example. How are you prone to respond in a crisis situation? Would your response be similar to Esther's? In what way?

Though God's name is not mentioned it is clear, from Esther's actions, that He is uppermost in her mind. Esther waited for three days to act, even though she had already made her decision. What was the purpose for those three days? What can you learn from her example?

Esther's resolve was fortified by waiting on her unseen but ever present God. But what does it mean to "wait" on God? Read Isaiah 40:31 and consider what is promised to those who wait on God. Describe each part of the promise in your own words.

"But those who wait on the Lord..."

"shall renew their strength" _____

"shall mount up with wings like eagles" _____

Eagles have exceptionally good vision. While soaring high in the sky they can spot fish in a lake miles away.

"shall run and not be weary" _____

"shall walk and not faint" _____

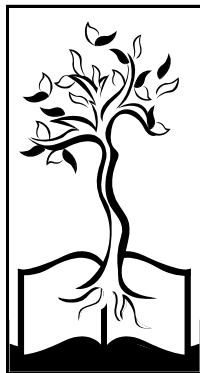
There are different ways to wait. Some people grow restless and look at their watch. Some occupy the time with activities they can accomplish while waiting. Someone might "people watch" or just try to catch a nap. Simply put, some methods of waiting can be more productive than others.

Esther waited *with purpose* and God supplied what she needed. He put iron in her soul to confront the situation with wisdom and confidence.

Is there some “pressure cooker” situation in your life? You may have concerns that are pulling you in opposite directions. When you weigh the options, there is no easy solution. Will you choose to respond like Esther, who resolved to obey and wait on the Lord for strength?

Read each of the following scripture promises to give you courage under fire. As God’s child, you can claim all of them, but choose one in particular to carry you through. Write it down and begin memorizing it today.

Isaiah 41:10 ☩ Psalm 32:8 ☩ Isaiah 43:1-2 ☩ Proverbs 3:5-6 ☩ Romans 8:35, 37



God’s Word Bearing Fruit

For you personally, what has been the most important lesson from this chapter? How will you put what you have learned into practice?

Something to Think About . . .

“When we have sufficiently waited on the Lord, He gets full control of our spirit. At such moments, we’re like a glove, and His hand is moving us where He pleases. Having known that experience, I can testify, there’s nothing to compare it to. It’s marvelous!”

- Charles Swindoll -

