

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Esther Chapter 4 — For Such a Time As This

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Esther Chapter 4 is the **turning point of the Book of Esther**.

Chapter 3 ended with Haman's decree calling for the destruction of the Jewish people. Now the consequences of that decree become clear.

Mordecai mourns.

The Jews throughout the empire mourn.

Esther learns about the crisis.

At first, Esther hesitates because approaching the king without being summoned could result in death. Mordecai then challenges her with one of the most memorable statements in Scripture:

“And who knows whether you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Esther must make a decision.

She can remain silent and protect herself, or she can risk her life to stand for her people.

Before she acts, however, Esther calls for fasting.

Her response demonstrates an important biblical pattern:

Crisis → Mourning → Fasting → Courage → Action.

I. MOURNING AMONG THE JEWS

Esther 4:1 — Mordecai Mourns

Verse 1

“When Mordecai learned everything that had happened, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went into the middle of the city, crying out with a loud and bitter wail.”

Mordecai now understands the seriousness of Haman's decree.

This is not merely a political disagreement.

An entire people are facing destruction.

Mordecai responds with deep mourning.

Tearing one's clothes and wearing sackcloth and ashes were outward expressions of grief, humiliation, repentance, and distress.

Cross References

Genesis 37:34

“Jacob tore his clothes and put on sackcloth. He mourned for his son for many days.”

Jacob expressed overwhelming grief after believing Joseph had died.

Job 2:12

“When Job's three friends saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him. They began to cry loudly. They tore their robes and threw dust on their heads to show their grief.”

Job's friends responded to his suffering with visible mourning.

Joel 1:13

“Put on sackcloth and mourn, you priests. Cry loudly, you who serve at the altar. Come and spend the night wearing sackcloth, you servants of my God, because the offerings of grain and drink have been withheld from the house of your God.”

Joel called God's people to recognize the seriousness of their situation.

Crawford Commentary

Mordecai does not pretend everything is fine.

He does not hide his grief.

He openly acknowledges the seriousness of the crisis.

Spiritual Principle

There are times when God's people must honestly recognize the seriousness of a crisis instead of pretending that everything is fine.

II. MOURNING AT THE KING'S GATE

Esther 4:2 — Mordecai Cannot Enter the Gate in Sackcloth

Verse 2

“He came as far as the king's gate, but no one was allowed to enter the gate clothed in sackcloth.”

Mordecai approaches the place where he had previously served.

But his mourning prevents him from entering the king's gate.

The contrast is significant.

The palace represents power and comfort.

Outside the gate is a grieving man representing a threatened people.

Cross References

Genesis 41:14

“So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the prison. Joseph shaved, changed his clothes, and went in to see Pharaoh.”

Joseph changed his appearance before entering Pharaoh's presence.

Matthew 22:12

“He asked, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man had nothing to say.”

The appropriate clothing represented the expectations associated with entering the king's presence.

Zechariah 3:3

“Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel.”

Joshua's clothing represented his condition before God.

Crawford Commentary

Mordecai cannot enter the gate, but his mourning cannot be hidden.

Sometimes grief reaches a point where it demands attention.

III. THE JEWS MOURN TOGETHER

Esther 4:3 — A Nation in Mourning

Verse 3

“In every province where the king's decree and command had reached, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.”

Mordecai is not alone.

Jewish communities throughout the empire respond together.

They:

- mourn,
- fast,
- weep,
- cry out,
- and wear sackcloth and ashes.

Cross References

Joel 2:12

“Even now, says the Lord, turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning.”

Fasting and mourning were associated with turning toward God.

Nehemiah 9:1

“On the twenty-fourth day of that same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads.”

The people gathered together in humility and mourning.

Jonah 3:5

“The people of Nineveh believed God. They announced a fast, and everyone, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.”

A community can respond collectively to a spiritual crisis.

Crawford Commentary

The Jewish people face a crisis that is bigger than any individual.

Their response is also collective.

They mourn together.

Spiritual Principle

When God's people face a crisis, they should not isolate themselves from one another.

IV. ESTHER HEARS ABOUT MORDECAI

Esther 4:4 — Esther Is Deeply Distressed

Verse 4

“When Esther's servants and eunuchs came and told her what Mordecai was doing, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent clothing for Mordecai so he could take off his sackcloth, but he refused to accept them.”

Esther knows something is wrong.

She does not yet understand the whole situation.

She attempts to help Mordecai by sending him clothing.

But Mordecai refuses.

He needs Esther to understand the seriousness of what is happening.

Cross References

Job 2:11

“When Job's three friends heard about all the trouble that had come upon him, they each left their homes and met together to go and comfort him. They were Eliphaz from Teman, Bildad from Shuah, and Zophar from Naamah.”

Job's friends came because they were concerned about his suffering.

Romans 12:15

“Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep.”

God's people are called to share one another's joys and sorrows.

2 Corinthians 11:29

“When someone is weak, I feel weak. When someone is led into sin, I burn with concern.”

Paul demonstrated deep concern for other believers.

Crawford Commentary

Esther is emotionally affected by Mordecai's condition.

She does not ignore his suffering.

But she still does not know what he needs to do.

V. ESTHER SEEKS AN EXPLANATION

Esther 4:5 — Esther Sends Hatach

Verse 5

“Then Esther called for Hatach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been assigned to attend her. She ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why he was acting this way.”

Esther does not simply guess.

She investigates.

She wants to know:

What is wrong?

Cross References

2 Samuel 18:29

“The king asked, ‘Is the young man Absalom safe?’ Ahimaaz answered, ‘When Joab sent me, there was a lot of confusion, my king, and I don't know what happened.’”

David wanted accurate information about what had happened.

2 Kings 5:8

“When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent this message: ‘Why have you torn your clothes? Send Naaman to me, and he will know there is a prophet in Israel.’”

Information was necessary before action could be taken.

John 1:38

“Jesus turned around and saw them following Him. He asked, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said, ‘Rabbi, where are You staying?’”

Jesus asked questions that brought people to the real issue.

Crawford Commentary

Before Esther can act wisely, she needs to understand the facts.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom begins with understanding the situation before deciding what to do.

VI. MORDECAI EXPLAINS THE CRISIS

Esther 4:6 — Hatach Meets Mordecai

Verse 6

“So Hatach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the king's gate.”

Hatach becomes the messenger between Esther and Mordecai.

Esther is inside the palace.

Mordecai is outside the gate.

Hatach carries the information between them.

VII. MORDECAI EXPLAINS HAMAN'S PLAN

Esther 4:7 — The Money Behind the Plot

Verse 7

“Mordecai told him everything that had happened, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.”

Mordecai gives Esther the complete story.

He even tells her about the money Haman offered.

Cross References

Esther 3:9

“If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will contribute ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out the business.”

This connects directly with Chapter 3.

1 Timothy 6:10

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, because they wanted money so badly, have wandered away from the faith and brought many troubles upon themselves.”

Money can become a powerful temptation.

Proverbs 1:19

“That is what happens to everyone who is greedy for money. It robs them of life.”

Greed can ultimately destroy the person pursuing it.

Crawford Commentary

Haman's plan was not only driven by hatred.

He was also willing to use wealth and political power to accomplish his evil purpose.

VIII. ESTHER IS GIVEN THE DECREE

Esther 4:8 — Mordecai Calls Esther to Act

Verse 8

“He also gave him a copy of the decree that had been issued in Susa, ordering the annihilation of the Jews. He asked Hatach to show it to Esther and to urge her to go to the king and plead for her people.”

Now Esther sees the official document.

The danger becomes undeniable.

Mordecai does not merely tell Esther that there is a problem.

He tells her what she must do:

Go to the king.

Cross References

Esther 3:14

“A copy of the decree was issued and made public in every province, giving instructions for the people to be ready for that day.”

The decree is now placed directly before Esther.

Nehemiah 2:4

“The king asked me, ‘What do you want?’ I prayed to the God of heaven.”

Nehemiah responded to a crisis by turning to God before answering the king.

Philippians 4:6

“Do not worry about anything. Instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done.”

Prayer should accompany our concerns.

Crawford Commentary

Esther now faces a decision.

She cannot remain unaware.

She knows what is happening.

She knows what Mordecai wants her to do.

But she also knows the personal danger.

IX. ESTHER HEARS THE MESSAGE

Esther 4:9 — Hatach Reports Back

Verse 9

“Hatach returned and reported Mordecai's message to Esther.”

The message has reached Esther.

Now the decision belongs to her.

X. ESTHER HESITATES

Esther 4:10–11 — The Danger of Approaching the King

Verses 10–11

“Then Esther sent this reply back to Mordecai through Hatach:

‘All the king's officials and the people of the provinces know that any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned is to be put to death— unless the king extends the golden scepter to them. I haven't been called to go to the king for thirty days.’”

Esther is afraid.

Her fear is understandable.

She is not refusing because she does not care about her people.

She knows that approaching the king could cost her life.

Cross References

Hebrews 4:16

“So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.”

Believers today have access to God through Christ.

Esther 5:2

“When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, he was pleased with her and held out the golden scepter toward her. Esther approached and touched the top of the scepter.”

God ultimately gave Esther favor before the king.

Daniel 6:12

“So they went to the king and reminded him about his law. They said, ‘Did you not sign an official law stating that for the next thirty days anyone who prays to anyone except you will be thrown into the lions' den?’”

Persian law could carry severe consequences.

Crawford Commentary

Esther's fear is real.

Faith does not mean that danger suddenly stops being dangerous.

Faith means choosing obedience despite the danger.

XI. MORDECAI CHALLENGES ESTHER

Esther 4:13 — Do Not Think You Will Escape

Verse 13

“He sent back this message: ‘Do not think that because you are in the king's palace you alone will escape when all the other Jews are killed.’”

Mordecai challenges Esther's assumption.

Her position may give her temporary protection.

But it does not guarantee ultimate safety.

Cross References

Amos 9:1

“I saw the Lord standing beside the altar. He said, ‘Strike the tops of the pillars so that the foundations shake. Bring the roofs down on the people below. I will kill those who are left with the sword. No one will escape; no one will get away.’”

No one can ultimately hide from God's judgment.

Jeremiah 25:29

“I have already begun to punish the city that is called by My name. Do you think you will go unpunished? No, you will not go unpunished. I am calling for war against everyone who lives on the earth, says the Lord Almighty.”

Position does not make someone automatically immune from consequences.

Romans 2:3

“Do you think you will escape God's judgment when you do the same things you accuse others of doing?”

God judges impartially.

Crawford Commentary

Esther's royal position cannot guarantee her safety.

Her position gives her an opportunity.

That is different from guaranteed protection.

XII. “FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS”

Esther 4:14 — Mordecai's Great Challenge

Verse 14

“For if you remain silent at this time, deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place—but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows whether you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

This is the central verse of Esther Chapter 4.

Mordecai believes that deliverance will come.

Notice his confidence.

He does not say:

“If you do not act, the Jews will definitely be destroyed.”

Instead, he says:

“Deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place.”

Mordecai recognizes that God's purposes are greater than Esther.

But Esther has been given an opportunity to participate in those purposes.

Cross References

Genesis 45:5

“But don't be upset and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me. God sent me here ahead of you to save people's lives.”

Joseph recognized God's providence in his circumstances.

Jeremiah 1:5

“Before I formed you in your mother's womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you as My prophet to the nations.”

God's purposes can exist before a person understands them.

Galatians 4:4

“But when the right time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman and born under the law.”

God's work unfolds according to His timing.

Crawford Commentary

This is one of the greatest lessons in Esther.

Esther may have thought her position was simply a result of circumstances.

Mordecai challenges her to consider something greater:

Perhaps God placed you there for this exact moment.

Spiritual Principle

God can place people in positions long before they understand why they are there.

XIII. ESTHER MAKES HER DECISION

Esther 4:15 — Esther Responds

Verse 15

“Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai.”

Esther has heard the challenge.

Now she must answer.

XIV. ESTHER CALLS FOR FASTING

Esther 4:16 — “If I Perish, I Perish”

Verse 16

“Go and gather all the Jews who are in Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My attendants and I will do the same. Then, even though it is against the law, I will go to the king. And if I perish, I perish.”

Esther has moved from hesitation to courage.

But notice something important.

She does not rush into the king's presence.

She first calls for fasting.

She understands that the situation requires more than human courage.

She needs God.

Cross References

Job 13:15

“God might kill me, but I have no other hope. I will defend my actions to His face.”

Job demonstrates determination in the midst of extreme suffering.

Joel 2:15

“Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem! Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting.”

Fasting can be a corporate response to crisis.

Daniel 9:3

“So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and fasting. I wore rough sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on myself.”

Daniel responded to a national crisis through prayer, fasting, confession, and dependence upon God.

Crawford Commentary

Esther's statement is one of the strongest expressions of courage in the book:

“If I perish, I perish.”

She is not saying that death does not matter.

She is saying that obedience matters more than self-preservation.

Spiritual Principle

Courage is not the absence of fear; courage is choosing obedience despite fear.

XV. MORDECAI OBEYS

Esther 4:17 — Mordecai Does What Esther Commands

Verse 17

“So Mordecai went away and did everything Esther had commanded him.”

The chapter ends with action.

Mordecai obeys Esther.

The people will fast.

Esther will approach the king.

The crisis is moving toward its climax.

Cross References

Genesis 6:22

“So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.”

Noah responded to God's instructions through obedience.

Exodus 40:16

“Moses did everything exactly as the Lord had commanded him.”

Moses followed God's instructions.

Luke 5:5

“Simon answered, ‘Master, we worked hard all night and didn't catch anything. But if You say so, I will let the nets down again.’”

Peter obeyed Jesus even when his previous experience suggested otherwise.

Crawford Commentary

Mordecai does not merely agree with Esther.

He acts.

Biblical faith eventually produces obedience.

XVI. THE TRANSFORMATION OF ESTHER

Esther Chapter 4 shows a remarkable transformation.

At first:

Esther is afraid.

Then:

Esther receives information.

Then:

She understands the danger.

Then:

Mordecai challenges her.

Then:

She calls for fasting.

Finally:

She accepts the responsibility.

She moves from:

Fear → Faith → Fasting → Courage → Action.

XVII. THE MEANING OF “FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS”

The phrase:

“For such a time as this”

does not mean that every difficult circumstance automatically proves that God specifically caused it.

Rather, in the context of Esther, Mordecai challenges Esther to recognize that her position may provide a unique opportunity to act for the preservation of her people.

She is already queen.

She already has access to the king.

She already possesses influence.

And now her people desperately need someone who can use that position.

Crawford Principle

A position of influence carries a responsibility to use that influence for purposes greater than personal comfort.

XVIII. GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN ESTHER CHAPTER 4

God's name is still not explicitly mentioned.

Yet His providence is evident.

Consider the circumstances:

- Esther is queen.
- Mordecai has access to Esther.
- Esther has servants who can communicate with Mordecai.
- Hatach becomes the messenger.
- Mordecai knows about Haman's decree.
- Esther receives a copy of the decree.
- Mordecai challenges Esther.
- Esther calls for fasting.
- Esther prepares to approach the king.

Nothing appears accidental from the perspective of the larger story.

Crawford Principle

God can work through ordinary people, ordinary circumstances, and ordinary positions to accomplish extraordinary purposes.

XIX. KEY LESSONS FROM ESTHER CHAPTER 4

1. GOD'S PEOPLE MOURN TOGETHER

The Jewish people throughout the empire responded together.

They fasted.

They wept.

They mourned.

Lesson

Do not face every crisis alone.

2. OBEDIENCE REQUIRES COURAGE

Esther was afraid.

But she acted.

Lesson

Fear does not automatically mean that you should stop.

Sometimes fear simply means that courage is required.

3. GOD CAN USE YOUR POSITION

Esther's royal position gave her access to the king.

Lesson

Where God has placed you may provide an opportunity to serve others.

4. FASTING CAN PRECEDE BOLD ACTION

Esther did not immediately act.

She called for fasting first.

Lesson

Before making a major decision, seek God.

5. GOD'S PURPOSES ARE GREATER THAN ONE PERSON

Mordecai believed that deliverance would come even if Esther refused.

Lesson

God's plan does not depend upon one individual, but God graciously allows individuals to participate in His work.

XX. PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question 1 — Why did Mordecai tear his clothes and wear sackcloth and ashes?

Answer:

He was expressing deep grief because Haman's decree threatened the destruction of the Jewish people.

His outward mourning reflected the seriousness of the crisis.

Application

We should not ignore serious spiritual or moral crises.

Question 2 — Why did the Jews throughout the empire mourn together?

Answer:

The decree affected the entire Jewish population.

They responded collectively through mourning, fasting, weeping, and sackcloth.

Application

There is strength in God's people standing together during difficult times.

Question 3 — Why was Esther distressed when she heard about Mordecai?

Answer:

She knew something was seriously wrong with Mordecai but did not initially know the reason.

She wanted him to remove the sackcloth and sent clothing to him.

When he refused, she sent Hatach to find out what was happening.

Question 4 — Why did Mordecai give Esther a copy of the decree?

Answer:

He wanted Esther to understand that the threat was real and official.

He also wanted her to go before the king and plead for her people.

Question 5 — Why was Esther afraid to approach the king?

Answer:

Persian law stated that anyone who entered the king's inner court without being summoned could be put to death unless the king extended the golden scepter.

Esther had not been summoned for thirty days.

Therefore, approaching the king could cost her life.

Question 6 — What did Mordecai mean when he said Esther should not think she would escape?

Answer:

Mordecai was reminding Esther that her royal position did not guarantee her safety.

If the Jews were destroyed, Esther's identity as a Jew could eventually become known.

Her position did not remove her responsibility to act.

Question 7 — What does “for such a time as this” mean?

Answer:

Mordecai challenged Esther to consider that perhaps her position as queen had placed her in the palace at exactly the time her people needed someone with access to the king.

Her position gave her an opportunity to act.

Application

God can use our circumstances and positions to serve others.

Question 8 — Why did Esther call for three days of fasting?

Answer:

She recognized that she needed help beyond herself.

Before risking her life before the king, she called the Jewish people to fast, and she and her attendants would fast as well.

Her fasting demonstrated dependence upon God.

Question 9 — What did Esther mean by “If I perish, I perish”?

Answer:

She understood the danger but decided that saving her people was worth the risk.

She was willing to sacrifice her own safety rather than remain silent.

Application

Sometimes obedience requires sacrifice.

Question 10 — What changed Esther from hesitation to courage?

Answer:

Mordecai challenged her to recognize the responsibility connected to her position.

Esther then called for fasting and prepared to act.

Her courage developed through recognizing the seriousness of the situation and seeking help through fasting.

Question 11 — What does Esther Chapter 4 teach about leadership?

Answer:

Leadership is not merely about having a position.

Leadership involves accepting responsibility when others need help.

Esther had authority and access that others did not have.

She eventually chose to use that access for the benefit of her people.

Question 12 — What does Esther Chapter 4 teach about God's timing?

Answer:

Esther's position as queen existed before the crisis reached its climax.

When the crisis arrived, she was already positioned where she could potentially make a difference.

This demonstrates the theme of providence throughout Esther.

XXI. ESTHER 4 AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

Esther Chapter 4 challenges Christians to ask several important questions.

Where has God placed me?

What responsibilities come with my position?

Am I remaining silent because I am afraid?

Am I willing to sacrifice comfort to help others?

Have I prayed before acting?

Am I willing to stand when standing is costly?

Do I believe God is working even when I cannot see His hand?

These questions move Esther Chapter 4 from history into application.

XXII. FIVE GREAT TRUTHS FROM ESTHER CHAPTER 4

1. CRISIS REVEALS CHARACTER

Mordecai mourns.

Esther initially hesitates.

Then Esther becomes courageous.

2. FEAR DOES NOT HAVE TO CONTROL US

Esther was afraid, but fear did not have the final word.

3. GOD CAN USE OUR POSITION

Esther's position as queen gave her access to the king.

4. SEEK GOD BEFORE TAKING BOLD ACTION

Esther called for fasting before approaching the king.

5. COURAGE SOMETIMES MEANS ACCEPTING PERSONAL RISK

Esther's words summarize her decision:

“If I perish, I perish.”

XXIII. A CRAWFORD COMMENTARY PRINCIPLE

“Your Position May Be Your Assignment”

Esther may have wondered why she had become queen.

She may have thought about her circumstances simply in terms of survival and royal privilege.

But Mordecai challenged her to see her position differently.

She was not merely **in the palace**.

She was **in a position of influence**.

And that position could be used to save lives.

Crawford Principle

God can place a person in a position of influence not merely for personal blessing, but also for the blessing and protection of others.

XXIV. CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the message of Esther Chapter 4.

Help us recognize the opportunities You place before us.

When we are afraid, give us courage.

When we are uncertain, give us wisdom.

When we are overwhelmed, teach us to seek You.

Help us understand that our position, our influence, our opportunities, and our resources can be used to serve others.

Give us the courage of Esther to stand when silence would be easier.

Give us the faith of Mordecai to believe that You are still working even when Your hand cannot be seen.

Teach us to seek You through prayer and fasting when we face difficult decisions.

Help us not to live only for our own comfort.

Instead, help us ask:

“Lord, why have You placed me here?”

Give us courage to answer Your call.

And when obedience is costly, give us the faith to say:

“If I perish, I perish.”

Help us trust You with the outcome.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

XXV. CENTRAL TRUTH OF ESTHER CHAPTER 4

God may place us in a position long before we understand the reason, and when the right moment comes, He may call us to use that position for the good of others.

Esther Chapter 4 begins with **mourning**.

It moves to **fear**.

Then comes **fasting**.

Then **faith**.

Then **courage**.

And finally, **action**.

Esther's greatest moment did not begin when she entered the king's court.

It began when she decided that obedience was more important than personal safety.

She was in the palace.

The crisis had arrived.

Her people needed her.

And Mordecai's question still echoes:

“Who knows whether you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”