

**The History Channel: Messages from Israel's Historians**  
***Tactical to Practical: Esther in Exile***  
**Esther 4**

Intro: The name of God does not occur in the Book of Esther—as in Song of Songs. The words for prayer, worship, and devotion are also excluded. Fasting and lamentation are the two words that come closest to describing formal religious activities.

It all takes place in Persia, the land of the exile. The people of God are separated from their homeland and their house of worship, the temple. They are under the heel of a foreign oppressor. They may feel forgotten by God. Many of them have hung up their harps because what could they possibly sing in the land of exile?

Psalm 137 was written in Babylon:

- 1 *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.*
- 2 *There on the poplars we hung our harps,*
- 3 *for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy;*  
*they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*
- 4 *How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?*

What do you do when God presence seems far away and his promises seem unfulfilled? The road to take in the silence of God is the road straight ahead that follows his law, acknowledges his people, and depends upon his faithfulness.

### **I. In The Presence of My Memories**

A. In the absence of miracles, what have Esther and the people of God got to count on? Esther records no miracles nor does Ezra or Nehemiah. The Book of Daniel, also written during the Exile, does record at least one miracle: the deliverance from the fiery furnace, and perhaps two more, the amazing health after diet change and the rescue from the lion's den.

B. Esther may not be able to count the miracles around her, but she can recount her own personal miracle story—how she, as an orphan, found a father and a home through the love and kindness of her uncle, Mordecai. She can remember growing up with this remarkable man teaching her and giving her guidance.

C. Esther can remember the stories she was told of the call of Abraham, the slavery and deliverance in Egypt, and the taking of the promised land. The names of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Samuel are familiar to her. Though she has not seen the Red Sea parting the event is part of her memory.

\*\*\*The Lord's Table in our church has carved upon it this phrase, "In remembrance of me."

D. You will come into a time in your life when the activity of God will seem hidden. At that time, in the absence of a miracle, you will be sustained and guided by your memories.

*Precious memories, unseen angels,  
Sent from somewhere to my soul  
How they linger ever near me, And the sacred past unfold.  
Precious memories, how they linger, How they ever flood my soul.  
In the stillness of the midnight, Precious, sacred scenes unfold.*

### **II. In the Presence of My Loyalties: She continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up (2:20).**

A. Esther is a woman in a man's world. She is not free to pick a husband, pursue an education, choose a profession, or even select a hometown. She is at the beck and call of the King. And she is one of his many wives, a member of the harem.

Esther is not free to enter the king's presence without an invitation. She lives in the absence of many liberties that we would consider the self-evident possessions of all humans.

B. The absence of liberties could be an easy excuse for inaction, withdrawal, and discouragement. Esther could simply give up and disappear into this life that she has been given without her consent.

C. But Esther, even without these liberties, remains in the presence of her loyalties. She is not alone in that harem or in the king's banquet hall. She is surrounded by commitments, promises, obligations, and responsibilities—just as you are when once you leave for college or get that job you've been seeking.

D. Esther's loyalties come at four levels:

1. She is loyal to Mordecai. This is a fundamental loyalty that she operates in unconsciously every day. He has been loyal to her all her life, and she would not think of betraying him, stubborn as he is sometimes. Esther had the wisdom when exalted above her adoptive father to continue to seek and follow his counsel. She did this because she had tested his counsel for many years, and he had proven faithful. She did this because Mordecai loved her, and he had proved his love by adopting her and caring for her. Your choice of counselors will be crucial one day. Seek people who have no goal but to love you and to do you good.

2. She is loyal to her extended family and her father's house. Mordecai mentions them to her when they dialogue. Mordecai assures her that God will take care of her. And he assures her that she does not protect herself or her family with her silence. Behind this assurance by Mordecai is an absolute and firm faith in the providence of God. God will not abandon the remnant of his people. He will not allow them to be wiped off the face of the earth. He will protect the seed of Abraham and the seed of David, and he will bring through them the Promised One.

3. She is loyal to her nation, her people. She is a Jewish, and she knows it. The king does not know it, and Haman does not know it. But she knows this about herself. She is going to take certain very risky actions. She will do the right thing because she is in the presence of these loyalties. She will also ask for the participation of her people in three days of fasting before she makes her appeal to the king. They will have a part in her action just as they will benefit from its result. *Gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me (4:16).*

4. She is loyal to her God. This is the fourth level of her loyalties, and the deepest. She knows the law of God. She knows about the land that God promised to her people. She knows about the Holy City that still lies in ruins. She knows that God alone can protect her and her people in this land of exile.

5. When we are alone, we are not really alone. We act certain ways and practice certain habits and make certain decisions because we feel a deep and abiding loyalty at many levels to the persons who made us who we are.

### **III. In the Presence of My Enemies: *If I perish, I perish (4:16)***

A. The Amalekites were in ongoing conflict with Israel from the time of the Exodus. They were the first to attack Israel after the deliverance from Egypt, and they were viewed as the epitome of the powers of the world arrayed against the people of God.

Haman was an Amalekite. He is the bitterest enemy of the Jews. Therefore, he is the fiercest enemy of Esther, though even he does not know it. Haman is launching a holocaust in the Persian Empire. He intends to see the extermination of the Jewish race. This is genocide. And this may be the most serious threat historically to the continuation of the seed of Abraham that is recorded in the Bible.

B. Given the absence of alternatives, Esther must prepare a table in the presence of her enemy. In one of the most comforting poems ever written, King David declares that God prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies.

Esther is a woman, and her world is the world of service, including food service. She is not free to do a lot of things, but she is free to prepare a feast for the king. She shapes her context to this extent, creating a forum in which she is most comfortable to express her heart to the king.

C. Esther brings Haman to the table so that he can be exposed for what he is, and so that the king is forced to choose between his beautiful queen and his devious servant. The table can be a place for honest dialogue, and it can be a place to do serious business, as Esther illustrates. *If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place* (4:14).

D. In fact, a lot of action in the Book of Esther takes place during feasts—the feasts of the king, the banquets of Esther, and the Feast of Purim that is held annually to remember God’s great deliverance of his people in Exile.

E. I wish that I could tell you otherwise, but in this life you will always live in the presence of your enemies. You will not escape the temptations that beset you. You will not finally conquer all your fears here.

F. You will only and always win against your spiritual enemies by appealing to your King. He alone has the power to deliver you.

G. The deliverance that God brings to Esther, to Ezra, and to Nehemiah is like the one brought to Joseph and Ruth in earlier times. This deliverance will come about, not because God intervenes to bend or break the rules of nature, but because God is fully able to work through the deeds of people, good and bad, to bring about his purposes in the earth.

Conclusion: *And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?* (4:14). This is the message of time and place: Everyone has a message from their time and place. God does not ignore our context—he is using it. In fact, he brings us to such a time and place. He shepherds us into the strategic motion and the strategic position. He sets us there for his own purposes.