

Esther 4:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry;

Analysis

When Mordecai perceived all that was done, he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; Mordecai's response to the decree demonstrates profound grief expressed through traditional mourning practices: tearing clothes, wearing sackcloth, covering himself with ashes, and crying aloud. These weren't mere emotional displays but covenantal mourning practices signaling crisis and calling for divine intervention. His public, dramatic grief in the city center served multiple purposes: expressing genuine anguish, alerting the Jewish community to the crisis, and perhaps hoping news would reach Esther. The "loud and bitter cry" echoes Israel's cry to God in Egyptian bondage (Exodus 2:23-24), which God heard and answered. Mordecai's mourning implicitly appeals to the same covenant God, though His name never appears in Esther.

Historical Context

Sackcloth (coarse goat hair) and ashes were ancient Near Eastern mourning symbols, signaling grief, repentance, and crisis. Biblical examples include Jacob (Genesis 37:34), Job (Job 16:15), Daniel (Daniel 9:3), and Jonah's Nineveh (Jonah 3:5-8). The practice expressed both sorrow and appeal to deity for mercy. Mordecai's public display would have been highly visible and culturally

understood. Persian observers would have recognized extreme distress, though they might not have known the cause. For Jews throughout Shushan, Mordecai's mourning served as alarm and summons to corporate lamentation.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does Mordecai's public mourning demonstrate faithful response to crisis through both emotional expression and appeal to God?
2. What does his use of traditional covenant mourning practices teach about maintaining spiritual disciplines during crises?

Interlinear Text

מֹרְדֵּכַי	יָדַע	אֶת	כָּל	אֲשֶׁר	נַעֲשָׂה	וְקָרַע	מֹרְדֵּכַי
Mordecai	perceived				all that was done	rent	Mordecai
H4782	H3045	H853	H3605	H834	H6213	H7167	H4782
אֶת	בְּגָדָיו	וְלָבַשׁ	שַׁק	אֶת	וַיֵּצֵא	בֵּית וְ	
H853	his clothes	and put on	sackcloth	with ashes	and went out	into the midst	
	H899	H3847	H8242	H665	H3318	H8432	
הָעִיר	וַיֵּצֵא קוֹ	זַעֲקָה	גְּדִלָּה	וּמָרָה:			
of the city	and cried	cry	with a loud	and a bitter			
H5892	H2199	H2201	H1419	H4751			

Additional Cross-References

Daniel 9:3 (Parallel theme): And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

2 Samuel 1:11 (Parallel theme): Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him:

2 Samuel 13:19 (Parallel theme): And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying.

Job 42:6 (Parallel theme): Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Job 2:8 (Parallel theme): And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.