

Esther 4:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Analysis

And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. The decree's publication sparked empire-wide Jewish mourning. The fourfold description—"mourning, fasting, weeping, wailing"—emphasizes the grief's intensity and universality. The phrase "many lay in sackcloth and ashes" suggests prostration in extreme lamentation. This corporate mourning demonstrated covenant community solidarity—though dispersed across 127 provinces, Jews shared identity and destiny. The fasting particularly suggests appeal to God, as fasting throughout Scripture accompanies prayer for divine intervention (2 Samuel 12:16; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-9). Though God's name isn't mentioned, the community's response implicitly appeals to Him. This sets up Esther's later call for a three-day fast (4:16) as corporate intercession.

Historical Context

News of the decree spread throughout the empire via the same courier system that distributed it (3:13-15). Jewish communities in each province received the terrifying news and responded with traditional mourning practices. The empire-wide Jewish mourning demonstrated diaspora community cohesion despite

geographical dispersion. Archaeological and textual evidence confirms Jewish communities throughout the Persian Empire maintaining religious and ethnic identity. The public mourning would have been visible to gentile neighbors, potentially arousing sympathy or at least awareness of Jewish distress. This public grief contrasts with Shushan's "perplexity" (3:15) and the king's indifferent drinking.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the empire-wide Jewish mourning demonstrate covenant community solidarity across geographical and cultural boundaries?
2. What does their fasting suggest about implicit appeal to God even when His name isn't mentioned?

Interlinear Text

וּבְכָל	וּמְדִינָה	וּמְדִינָה	מְקוֹם	אֲשֶׁר	
H3605	And in every province	And in every province	whithersoever	H834	
	H4082	H4082	H4725		
דְּבַר	הַמֶּלֶךְ	וְדָתוֹ	מֵיָעַ	אֵל בֵּל	גָּדוֹל
commandment	the king's	and his decree	came	mourning	there was great
H1697	H4428	H1881	H5060	H60	H1419
לְהוֹדֹת יָם	וְצוֹם	וּבְכִי	וּמִסִּי ד	שֵׁ ק	וְאֵפֶר
among the Jews	and fasting	and weeping	and wailing	in sackcloth	and ashes
H3064	H6685	H1065	H4553	H8242	H665
וְיָצַע	לְרַבִּים:				
lay	and many				
H3331	H7227				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 22:12 (Parallel theme): And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth:

Isaiah 58:5 (Parallel theme): Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

Isaiah 22:4 (Parallel theme): Therefore said I, Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people.

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: