

# MORDECAI: GRIEF IN THE CITY

## Esther 4.1-2: Mordecai is grieved by Ahasuerus's decision and Haman's decree

**Theme:** Understand how to recognize when (and how) you grieve the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.

**We left off our study of the Book of Esther with an overview of chapter 4:**

- The king has given Haman power and provision to do as he pleases, and Haman has decreed his “law of sin and death” for all the Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom.
- In chapter 4 we see the reaction of Mordecai in the capital city: (v1-2) he is *grieved* by the decree.
- We also see the reaction of the Jews throughout the kingdom: (v3) they are affected just like Mordecai.
- And then in the rest of the chapter we see an interesting interaction between Esther (who seems oblivious to the decree at first) and Mordecai (who can't come into the palace because he's grieving: separation!).

**This morning I'd like to take some time and talk about the grieving Mordecai that we see in verse 1 and 2.**

- (v1) We are going to first see how Haman's decree *immediately* affects Mordecai.
- (v2) And then we are going to see how Mordecai's grief causes a separation with Esther.

### **I. (v1) Haman's Decree Causes Mordecai to Grieve**

#### **A. Mordecai Grieves the Moment he Perceives**

1. The very first thing God says as He starts this chapter is that the moment Mordecai “perceived” what was done, he began to grieve. And the verse mentions three specific things he did:

a) Mordecai *rent* his clothes.

(1) This was an attempt to show on the outside what one was feeling on the inside.

(2) Mordecai's heart was rent with sadness and grief, and he wanted to express that visibly.

b) Mordecai put on *sackcloth with ashes*.

(1) Sackcloth is a material that we would associate with “burlap” (course, rough).

(2) Sackcloth was used to make sacks (like we use burlap bags, etc.), but it was also used to make grave clothes (they would bury people in sackcloth).

(3) And so people would use sackcloth as means of expressing grief.

(a) They would put it on to express grief over their sin (it was rough and uncomfortable against the skin, so it was an expression of penance—an outward expression of repentance for having done wrong).

(b) But also (like we see with Mordecai), sackcloth would be worn to express grief over death (wearing the clothes of the dead). Mordecai's people were condemned to death.

- The ashes worn along with the sackcloth were also an expression of grief (man was made from the dust of the earth, so we say “ashes to ashes” when he dies).

(c) (Ps 30.11) Summary: the wearing of sackcloth was a clear expression of grief and pain, of sadness rather than joy and gladness.

c) Mordecai went out into the city *crying with a loud and bitter cry* (clothes torn, wearing sackcloth, covered in ashes, wailing... he was a walking, crying picture of *grief*).

- And in this picture, we can see how our decisions can grieve the Holy Spirit of God...

2. Just like Mordecai, the Holy Spirit is grieved in the very *moment* we decide to follow the flesh.
- a) (Eph 4.30) God commands us to grieve *not* the Holy Spirit. But, what does that mean...?
- (1) **To grieve** means to make someone feel grief or great sorry. **Grief**, that feeling of sorrow or regret, is often associated with emotional pain and disappointment.
  - (2) We cause the Spirit to grieve (we cause Him grief—sorrow, disappointment) when we choose to do that which is not the best—that which will result in problems and destruction.
    - (a) Grieving the Spirit is different than quenching Him.
      - i) (1Thes 5.19) We quench the Spirit when we refuse to do what He says. He says, “Do this!” and we “quench” that by saying, “No!”
      - ii) But, grieving the Spirit goes beyond that... it goes beyond just disobedience.
    - (b) Think about it this way: A father has child and he loves his child more than just about anything else in his life.
      - i) That child can “quench” the father's desires when he disobeys him.
      - ii) But, the child “grieves” the father when he chooses to not follow his father's advise and leadership. He “grieves” him when he chooses things that will cause him problems in life (that will only result in difficulty, pain, suffering, and destruction).
      - iii) As parents we want the best for our children; we want them to avoid the problems and pain that we have caused ourselves because of our bad decisions. And when we see them make the same mistakes we made... when we see them make choices that are only going to lead them to unnecessary difficulties in life... that grieves us.
    - (c) (Eph 4.31) And we grieve the Spirit of God when we choose to follow Haman and his desires—when we choose to follow the flesh and let the flesh influence our decisions.
      - i) Notice how this list in Ephesians 4.31 is very similar to the list in Galatians 5.19-21, the works of the flesh.
      - ii) These are things that will grieve the Spirit if we allow them into our lives, just like a child can cause grief and disappointment when he makes poor life choices.
    - (d) (Eph 4.32) What God would rather we do is strive to be like Him. That, instead of causing him grief, would give him great pleasure (just like when our children show maturity and wisdom by making good choices in life—that pleases us!).
- b) Understand, also, that Mordecai may be grieving for Ahasuerus and his kingdom.
- (1) Obviously Mordecai, being a Jew, is grieving for the destruction and death of the Jews that Haman's decree will bring.
  - (2) But, Mordecai also knows what this decree implies for the king and his kingdom.
    - (a) (Gen 12.1-3) It's like a quote I have (I think it's from Dr. Ruckman): *The Jew has attended the funeral of every one of the nations that tried to exterminate them.*
    - (b) (Est 4.14) Mordecai knows that God will deliver His people. So his grief is also, in part, due to the consequences he knows will come to Ahasuerus and his kingdom.
  - (3) The Spirit of God is the same way: He grieves when we make bad decisions, decisions to follow the flesh instead of the Spirit.
    - (a) (Rom 8.6, 13) Fleshly, carnal, selfish, self-centered, self-serving decisions will bring about only death and suffering in your life (in all of your “kingdom”).
    - (b) And the Spirit of God is grieved by that (He wants better for you!).

3. One last thing: We ought to be ***thankful*** for the Spirit's grieving.
  - a) Ahasuerus made Mordecai grieve and he didn't even know it (he did it in ignorance). And sometimes we grieve the Spirit in ignorance, too. But, I think most often we know we do it.
  - b) But, regardless, the Spirit is grieved when we make decisions that are *less than the best*.
    - (1) God loves us enough and cares for us so much that when we make bad decisions, He is upset! Think about that! The God of the universe *grieves* when you choose poorly!
    - (2) And that grief (just like in the Book of Esther) is the first step in moving the Spirit to intervene in our lives and lovingly guide us toward victory over Haman (the flesh).
  - c) I think that's pretty neat... that the Creator of the universe would care so much for me (one insignificant man among billions just like me) that He would be grieved—sad and disappointed—when I chose something that is less than the best. ***Think about that: Psalm 63.3!***

#### **B. Mordecai Grieves but does not Leave**

1. The last think I was to draw your attention to in this verse is the fact that Mordecai does not leave the city. He grieves... but, he does so in “the midst of the city” (he doesn't leave Shushan!).
2. Here's something else that ought to move us to much thanksgiving: The Spirit will never leave us!
3. We can do a lot of things to the Holy Spirit of God:
  - a) (Isa 63.10) We can vex the Spirit (irritate, displease Him... make Him mad/aggravated).
  - b) (Acts 5.3) We can lie to the Spirit.
  - c) (Act 7.51) We can resist the Spirit.
  - d) (1Thes 5.19) We can quench the Spirit (similar to resisting Him: telling Him, “No!”).
  - e) (Heb 10.29) We can “do despite” to the Spirit of God (we can insult Him).
  - f) (Eph 4.30) And, of course, we can grieve the Holy Spirit
4. But, there is one thing we *cannot* do to God's Spirit: ***We cannot make Him leave us!***
  - a) Mordecai never left the city in spite of his grief over the decree made by Haman (a decree that Ahasuerus was okay with!).
  - b) And the Holy Spirit of God will *never* leave us nor will He *ever* forsake us.
  - c) (1Cor 6.19) The Spirit dwells in us, inside our bodies (we are *one spirit* with Him; 1Cor 6.17).
  - d) (Eph 1.13-14) The Holy Spirit sealed us in the moment we were saved, and He will remain in us as God's “guarantee” until the rapture and resurrection of the “purchased possession” (us!).
  - e) (Eph 4.30) Even though we may grieve Him, He will never leave us. He will see us to the day of redemption, in spite of our faults, failings, and selfish, carnal decisions.
5. God will never leave us... *and* He will never leave us *in our carnality*...
  - a) He may be grieved, but that grief is only the first step toward spiritual victory over Haman.
  - b) And this should serve a warning for some...
    - (1) (Heb 12.5-8) Every son of God makes these kinds of carnal mistakes; we all grieve Him and therefore we all partake of His discipline.
    - (2) (Heb 12.8) If a “Christian” can sin... live in the flesh... be a “carnal Christian”... without God's grieved intervention... then he is not a son. He is a false convert in need of a Savior.

**C. Review: (v1)** Haman's decree causes Mordecai to grieve, just like our choices to follow the flesh will grieve the Holy Spirit and move God to action (to lovingly guide us to spiritual victory—spirituality).

## II. (v2) Mordecai's Grief Causes Separation from Esther

### A. Separation was a Historical Practice

1. This was common practice in the oriental cultures: They did not permit people to come into the presence of royalty when they were mourning or grieving.
2. (Neh 2.1-2) This is why Nehemiah was “sore afraid” when the king noted his countenance and “sorrow of heart.” He feared for his life!
3. And let me just say this...
  - a) (Ps 100.1-5) We should enter God's presence the same way: with gladness, thanksgiving, and praise! With all we have in Jesus Christ... can we not do that?!
  - b) (Heb 4.14-16) But, let me just say that I am glad I can come into God's presence anytime, any way... sad or happy, grieving or glad, broken or whole. I like that, and it's because of Christ!
4. Separation was a historical practice: Mordecai, because he was grieving, was not allowed into the palace... his grief separated him from Esther.

### B. Separation is an Unavoidable Result (of grieving the Spirit)

1. Mordecai never stopped being the “close relative” of Esther (cousins), but his grieving over Haman's decree kept him out of the palace... and Esther was inside. It affected their fellowship!
2. The Holy Spirit will never leave us; we will always be “close relatives” (sons of God, one spirit with the Lord). But, our decisions to follow the flesh will affect our fellowship with God.
  - The relationship never changes. But, the fellowship sure does...
3. (1Jn 1.5-7) God is light. If we want to be in close fellowship with Him, we need to walk in the light, as He is in the light. We need to walk according to the Scripture:

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. [Ps 119.105]
4. When we decide to allow our flesh (Haman, the old man) to influence decisions in our lives, we have decided to not allow Scripture influence our decisions.
  - a) Every decision not influenced by Scripture and biblical principles is a decision made in the flesh, and that will affect your fellowship with the Lord.
  - b) He'll still be your Father and you will not lose the Spirit (or your salvation). But your time in the Bible will be dry; your prayer life will be slim to none; and you will be robbed of the joy of the Lord that you have when you walk with Him in the Light of His Word.

### Mordecai has an immediate reaction to the “king's commandment,” Haman's decree.

- He's grieved, and he lets everybody in the city know: He went right out in the midst of the city!
- (v4) Esther finds out about it fairly quickly...
- (v3) But, first (before we see Esther's reaction), we need to talk about the reaction of the Jews in the rest of Ahasuerus's kingdom.
  - ✓ Who in their right mind would want to be a Jew now (when Haman's running the show)?!
  - ✓ We need to think about how following the flesh will affect the “light” other people see in us.

### This morning, though, we need to remember and understand this:

1. We grieve the Spirit (disappoint, sadden Him) when we make decisions based on our fleshly desires and not on His Word—when we choose that which is “less than the best.”
  - We grieve the Lord just like a son grieves his father when he chooses things in life that will only bring him problems and destruction.

2. And when the Spirit is grieved, there is a separation between us.
  - We don't lose our salvation. Mordecai doesn't leave the city.
  - But we lose the fellowship, the close “walk” we have with the Lord when we walk in the light of His Word.

**How's your fellowship with the Lord?**

- Have you been making decisions (about what to do with your time, talents, treasure, testimony) based on Scripture and biblical principles?
- Or have you been making decisions based on what *you* want and how *you* perceive things?
- It's your “kingdom” (for now), so it's your call (for now). How do you want to live the rest of your life (for self... or according to Scripture)? That's your choice.