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C1309 – February 27, 2013 – Esther 3:1-15
Haman's Plot

Tonight we come to Esther 3 where we meet the villain Haman in the story and the plot thickens. But before we meet him we want to review the providential work of God on behalf of his disobedient people in Persia up to this point. The Book of Esther is written to be read in a single sitting and it truly is a literary masterpiece. If someone were looking to put on a theatre production Esther is a manuscript ripe and ready for a great production. And if someone would like to market something like this for the Fredericksburg Theatre Company I'd be glad to be consulted. The only problem with putting this on theatrically is getting the audience to grasp who the main character in the story really is because every production I've seen of this book makes Esther and King Ahasuerus the main characters. But that misses the point. God is the main character and if you miss that you don't have a clue what Esther is all about.

What is Esther all about? The theme of Esther is how God providentially works on behalf of His disobedient people in order to save them from certain extermination because of His promises in the Abrahamic Covenant. The problem is that most people want to make heroes out of Esther and Mordecai. They are not heroes, they are not examples to follow, Daniel and his friends are heroes, Rahab is more of a hero than these two clowns. And if you don't see that you don't see the mercy of God upon His people even when they are in disobedience, you miss that entire point because you're too busy trying to find some spirituality in these two goofball Jews. They might not even be believers but that's not the point. The point is that God chose Israel and despite Israel's disobedience, despite their sin, despite their vile behavior, He is going to rescue them because He has made promises to them! The chief character is God.

Now in chapters 1-2 we have seen how God providentially orchestrated events “behind the scenes” so that His team would be in place to thwart Haman’s future plan to destroy the Jews.

Chapter 1 begins in 483BC where we are introduced to King Ahasuerus and his Queen Vashti and how he held a great banquet in preparation for his campaign against Greece, but upon commanding Vashti to make an appearance to display her beauty she refused to come. This infuriated Ahasuerus and he sought counsel from his wise men. One of them, Memucan advised him to banish Vashti from the office of queen and give her position to another more worthy than she lest women all over the kingdom rebel against their husbands. The king was agreeable to this advice and issued a decree banishing Vashti. The author wrote this chapter in hindsight to show how God providentially worked through these events in order to clear the way for Esther to be the next queen so she could work on behalf of the Jews.

Chapter 2 occurred in 479/478BC after King Ahasuerus had returned from his campaign against the Greeks. He was defeated and downcast. He remembered Vashti and wanted to take solace in her but he remembered she had been banished. His advisors suggested that there be a kingdom wide beauty contest among all the virgins and he pick the next queen. God’s providential work in giving Esther great beauty led to her to be chosen as Ahasuerus’ queen. This chapter concludes with a final stage setting sovereign act of God. He strategically placed Mordecai at the king’s gate thereby allowing him to overhear a conspiratorial conversation. His linkage with Esther led to his name being mentioned before the king as the one who foiled the assassination plot. His loyalty to the king was written down in the royal chronicles of the king but providentially he was not rewarded at that time paving the way for the chronicles being read to the king later and his reward at the proper time. By the end of chapter 2 God had providentially accomplished a major part of His plan by putting His team of Esther and Mordecai into place to foil Haman’s future plan to destroy the Jews.

In Esther 3 we meet the villain in the story, Haman. He’s Satan’s team and he plots to destroy, to kill and to annihilate every Jew in the whole world. Verse 1, **After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who were with him.** The year is not

stated here but it says **after these events** meaning it was sometime after the events at the end of chapter 2 when Mordecai overheard the plot to assassinate the king and the two men had been executed and the author is implying that we are to have expected Mordecai to have been rewarded by being promoted to the position Haman was promoted to, but in God's providence it was only written in the chronicles of the king at that time and so the position that Mordecai would have been granted is rewarded to another named Haman.

Now this Haman is said to be **the son of Hammedatha the Agagite**, that's his heritage, and it's an important heritage if you know your Jewish history. Agag, from which Agagite is derived, was the name of an Amalekite king six centuries before. The Amalekites were a people that attacked Israel when they left Egypt on their way to Mt Sinai. And then later they were in the land and God told the first king of Israel, King Saul of the tribe of Benjamin, to annihilate the Amalekites under the rules of Holy War. But King Saul didn't kill the Amalekite king Agag. So when Samuel the prophet came and saw that the Amalekite king had not been destroyed he rebuked King Saul for his rebellion against God and hewed the Amalekite king Agag to pieces, made chopped beef out of him. Now the Jews think that this Haman was descended from this Agag that was hewn to pieces six centuries before and that's why his heritage is mentioned in verse 1. There's a history between his family and the Jews that is not a very friendly one, there's animosity between them that has been brewing for six hundred years and he's going to have a run in with a Jew named Mordecai.

Who's Mordecai? What's his heritage? Well, we know he's a Jew because in 2:5 we were told that he was "a Jew." But we were also told there that he was "the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite." King Saul, who defeated the Amalekites, was also a Benjamite. So Mordecai is not only a Jew but he's of the same tribe of Jews that defeated the Amalekites six hundred years before. And it seems the author has in mind from the start that these two have an ancient and longstanding enmity. Haman and Mordecai are not coming into the story neutral, they have six centuries of baggage and so there is more than meets the eye at first glance in this chapter.

Notice in verse 1 that **Haman**, this **Agagite** has been **promoted...and advanced** such that **his authority is over all the princes who were with** the king. He was at the top of the totem pole so to speak because typically the Persian kings at this time had seven **princes** who were all at the top of the totem pole but this exaltation of Haman above even them made him second only to the king in all of Persia.

Now Mordecai is daily sitting at the king's gate which Haman is going to go in and out of, in and out, in and out and he's going to be passing by Mordecai every day, day in, day out and the centuries long animosity between these people is going to create a situation. Observe verse 2, **All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage.** Why didn't Mordecai bow down to Haman and pay homage? See, some people want to paint Mordecai as such a godly Jew at this point. Mordecai is obeying the first commandment, "Thou shalt not have any other gods before me...thou shalt not worship them or serve them." And Mordecai is refusing to worship Haman. And they make a big argument over bowing down is worship and so he's refusing to worship. He's like Daniel's three friends who wouldn't bow down to the golden statue that Nebuchadnezzar had erected in the plain of Dura. And I say nonsense, that is pure nonsense. In the first place, what the king commanded is not the worship of Haman. Men were not worshipped in Persia. Bowing down and paying homage was Persian court etiquette, it was how you showed respect for a governing office. And there was nothing in God's law against showing respect for the office of a government official. Such respect was given by the godly Nehemiah when he said to the Persian King Artaxerxes, "Let the king live forever" (Neh 2:3). Daniel honored those in governing positions when he said to Darius the Mede, "O king, live forever" (Dan 6:21). So if Daniel and Nehemiah did not shy away from respecting governing officials then why should Mordecai? Because he had an axe to grind with Haman the Agagite. He hated the Amalekites from which Haman descended and he was no more going to show respect for his authority than the man in the moon.

Verse 3, **Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's command?"** We don't know why they asked him this, maybe they were concerned for his well-being,

maybe they were just curious, but they knew that respect for the office was not being given by Mordecai and that it was a breach of the king's law and so why are you doing that? Are you just looking for trouble? Well, he may have been and this went on day after day after day; Haman walks through the gate, everyone bows and pays their respects and Mordecai turns his nose up.

Verse 4, **Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew.** So the reason he finally put forth was **that he was a Jew.** I'm a Jew and Jews don't respect the people of Agag because we've had centuries of conflict with them. And apparently they had to drag this out of him because **they had spoken daily to him** about all this, warning him of the consequences if he got caught but **Mordecai would not listen to them.** The bottom line was that the king commanded respect be given to Haman and Mordecai refused to give it. And so finally these **servants...told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand** in the very court of law they were standing in at the **king's gate.**

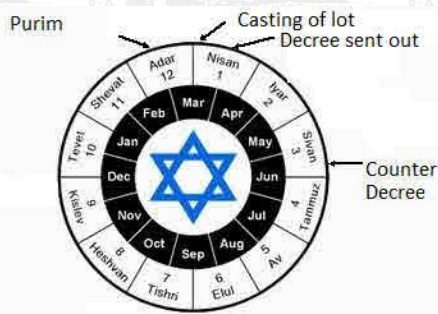
Now when Haman was told that Mordecai was a Jew he started a little experiment. Daily as he would walk through the king's gate he would watch. He apparently was too good to pay much attention to these lower officials before but now he began to pay attention to Mordecai and in verse 5, **When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage.** Here was an Agagite who finally had the upper hand on a Jew and this Jew wouldn't even give him the time of day, total disrespect for authority. And so he was filled with rage, the Hebrew word means "hot displeasure," he got really hot under the collar on this one and incidentally this is going to be the exact word used later for Ahasuerus' rage toward Haman when he finds out the evil in Haman. It's the kind of anger that will lead you to do something extreme, something destructive.

And verse 6 we find it, **But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they told him who the people of Mordecai were; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.** Haman may have been successful at arresting and executing **Mordecai alone** but his plan is extremely excessive. You see he's going to take the rebellion of the one Jew

Mordecai and extrapolate it to all the Jews so he can make an opportunity **to destroy them all**. And when he says **all** it means **all**. **All the Jews** in the world because all the Jews lived within the borders of the vast Persian Empire. And so here we have the problem of anti-Semitism that plagues the world. And we can say that it existed between Haman and the Jews because of the history of conflict between his people and the Jews but even that conflict was ultimately fueled by Satan. Satan is the ultimate anti-Semite and when you see anti-Semitism you are seeing Satan. Satan hates the Jews and he wants to destroy the Jews. The Hebrew word for destroy means “to exterminate.” In Satan’s mind the Jews are a bunch of cockroaches, not even fit to be called human and that’s why the verse begins by saying **he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone**. The Hebrew word **disdained** means “to undervalue, to accord little worth.” Haman did not value the Jews, they were nothing but a bunch of cockroaches that needed to be exterminated from Persia. But to seek to exterminate the Jews of the whole world would be to invoke the principle of Gen 12:3, “he who curses you I will curse.” God will be called into action to rescue His people anytime anyone tries to touch Israel, the apple of His eye. And so what we see here is Satan strategizing through the natural enmity of Haman to exterminate the Jews. Now Satan has four strategies he has used to exterminate the Jews. The first is by war, declarations of war against Israel and this was actually the first way the Amalekites tried to destroy the Jews in Exod 17. Second, by taking away Jewish wives. You remember Abimelech tried to do this. Third, by killing Jewish boys and you remember that strategy used by Pharaoh in Egypt, also used by Herod in Rome. And fourth, the fourth strategy Satan uses is to make anti-Semitism the official government policy. Make it illegal to be a Jew or make a day when it is legal to kill any Jew you don’t like and take all his stuff. And it’s this strategy that Haman will employ. He’s going to make anti-Semitism the official government policy of Persia and set apart one day when anyone of any other nationality in all the kingdom of Persian can kill a Jew legally and take all his stuff. And this strategy is the same one inspired by Julius Straucher’s propaganda and embodied in Eichmann’s extermination program for the Nazi machine of the 1930’s and 40’s. And yet all four strategies of Satan to destroy the Jews have always and will always fail because Jer 31:35-36 says the only strategy that will successful exterminate the Jews is to do away with the fixed order of the sun, the moon and all the stars of heaven. So good luck, I don’t think that’s ever going to happen.

But Satan keeps trying; he's relentless and so in verse 7 Haman calls up the diviners and magicians to determine the exact day this legal extermination of Jews is to be carried out. **In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.** Now it may sound a little strange the way it's worded but the way of determining the day was to cast the lot, that is the **Pur**. **Pur** is the Babylonian word for "lot." In archaeological excavations at Susa Julius Oppert discovered a quadrangular prism with numbers engraved on the side. And Haman went down to the local Zoroastrian temple and had the astrologer priests and magicians cast something like a quadrangular prism to determine the day of extermination. They were using chance to determine fate. These are always the twin gods of paganism, chance on one hand determining fate on the other. So the casting of the lot was the Persian way to decipher fate, the day they would have the greatest success in exterminating the Jews. But ironically the day that is determined is the thirteenth day of Adar and the number thirteen was considered unlucky by the Persians. But that's the day the chance die determined and so that was the day that was chosen for extermination. But since chance does not determine fate and since those twin gods don't exist but the Personal Sovereign God does exist when the lot is cast every decision is the Lord's. As Prov 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, But it's decision is from the LORD." So the casting of the lot in that Zoroastrian temple was providentially overseen by the LORD such that the lot fell in the twelfth month of the year on the thirteenth day of the month. Now this day was not only ironically an unlucky Persian number but it also was no time soon and so this casting of the lot gave time for God to set up a counter decree that would give the Jews plenty of time to prepare for their attackers. And this will result in the establishment of the Feast of Purim which comes from the word Pur, casting of lots since the lot actually was in favor of the Jews on that day and not the anti-Semites.

Now to see how providential the timing was in the casting of the lot I've given you a Babylonian calendar.



Verse 7 says the lot was cast **in the first month...the month of Nisan**, and it was probably on the first of the month when the gods were thought to determine the fate of men for that year. Then on the thirteenth of that month the decree went out with haste to all the provinces of the Persian Empire. But in chapter 5 Haman's plot is foiled in the third month of Sivan and on the twenty-fifth day of that month a counter-decree was issued that gave the Jews the right to defend themselves. And that gave them nine months to prepare for the day which came on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar when the Feast of Purim was established that memorializes the truth that the lot is cast into the lap but its every decision is from the LORD. The Jews were highly successful that day in defending and defeating their attackers.

So verse 8 Haman comes into the king and gives him his plan, **Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain. 9If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries."** The plan is to destroy the Jews, the operational expenses will be completely covered out of Haman's personal treasury. Now that's a lot of money, silver was the monetary currency of Persia and a talent of silver was about seventy-five pounds. He's going to put 10,000 talents or 750,000 pounds of silver into the king's treasury out of his own pocket, that's 2/3 of the annual income of the king. So you can see Haman was quite wealthy and he's willing to fund the entire extermination program.

Now observe Haman did not mention which people. There were a lot of different people in the Persian Empire. Haman didn't mention which one was

to be exterminated. He just said in verse 8, **There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom.** That was true enough, the Jews were scattered throughout all the provinces of Persia, but so were other peoples. Then he states a half truth. Satan always starts with truth and then moves to half-truths and then outright lies. The half truth is that **their laws are different from those of all other people.** Yes and no, some of them were but some of them were not. The outright lie is next; **they do not observe the king's laws.** That's not true because in truth it was only one Jew, Mordecai, not honoring Haman. But that was probably not true of other Jews. So he's made an extrapolation from one Jew to all the Jews in order to satisfy his lust of anti-Semitism.

I take it from verse 10 that the king was a very lax ruler, he didn't investigate anything himself, didn't even ask which people were about to be destroyed, he was prone to just listen to his advisers and do whatever they suggested. **Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.** See, he wasn't just the enemy of Mordecai, he was **the enemy of the Jews** and this signifies almost a title for this man, almost as if he is an incarnation of Satan showing that Satan has been at work to raise this particular man, this one who had all this enmity of the Jews built up because he was **the son of Hammedatha the Agagite.** And now **the enemy of the Jews** holds the **signet ring** of the **king**, meaning he has the authority to act in the stead of the king. Verse 11, **The king said to Haman, "The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please."** Now the silver will go into the treasury as we'll see later, so the words **The silver is yours** is not the king saying forget about the money, in the Hebrew it's the words that would signal the initial stages of bargaining. Ultimately the 10,000 talents of **silver** will be agreed upon and will go into the royal treasury. Esther says later that she and her people were sold meaning that Ahasuerus was bought off by Haman and it shows another little insight into the king, he was greedy. He didn't care who was being destroyed he just cared about the increase to his treasury.

Verse 12, with Haman in full control of the situation (or so he thought) **the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month**, it was the twelfth year of the king so 473BC, he had been married to Esther for four or five years. He summons the stenographers **and it was**

written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, the Jews had enemies from various peoples who spoke various languages because Satan is the god of this world and he corrupts all peoples against the Jews. And the letter was **written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.** Verse 13, **Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder.** It was official government policy, a free day to kill Jews, won't that be fun, it's happened before, it happened in Nazi Germany, it will happen again, people love to make laws that say it's illegal to be a Jew and then when the day comes they hunt Jews down and take all the loot. Verse 14, **A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day.** Get ready to kill. Think of the animosity, hatred of the Jews is not a natural animosity, it's an anomaly. Verse 15 **The couriers went out impelled by the king's command** another reference to the postal system of Persia, many think they invented the pony express system of mail couriering. The speed of transit is what made the Persian mail system unique. And as the **couriers** were being sent out we come to the final and very poignant contrast, **and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion.** You can imagine the confusion not only among the Jews; the text says the whole **city...was in confusion.** If such despotic rule could decide so arbitrarily to destroy a whole group of people in Persia, might our people be next? And yet in wild contrast, **the king and Haman sat down to get drunk.** They could care less.

So that's the state of affairs at the end of chapter 3. The villain Haman has been introduced into the story; he was promoted to second in command of all Persia, he was one who, in particular, already had a natural enmity of the Jewish people because of the century's long conflict between his people and Mordecai's, so one run in with Mordecai was enough to trigger him to hatch a plot to exterminate all the Jews in the whole world. The king upon hearing the general plan to destroy a certain people nonchalantly accepted his suggestion, gave Haman his signet ring and told him he could do whatever he

wanted to do. And having cast the die according to Persian astrology chance gave rise to fate resulting in the day being determined in the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. While the decree went out the people were in chaos but the king and Haman were getting drunk.

What conclusions can we draw? First, God providentially rules the universe. There is no such thing as impersonal chance giving rise to cosmic fate. There is a personal sovereign God who rules over all. When the pagan astrologers cast the lot it's every decision was the Lord's. That day and month were determined personally by God Himself to be a day the Jews would have the greatest ability to defend themselves and have victory over their attackers. So it is with all events in history, they are not by chance, the timing is not by chance, they are according to God's personal plan for history on His perfect time table. Second, God's providence is over events. God had already placed Esther the Jew in the position of queen more than four years before Haman hatched his plot to destroy the Jews. If Haman had known Esther was a Jew he would never have come up with this plan. But God is so far ahead of Satan that we see it is really no contest between God and Satan. Third, God's providence is over time. The exact day and month at the very end of the year gave plenty of time for Haman's evil to be unveiled and a counter decree issued that would give the Jews time to prepare to defend themselves. Fourth, and perhaps most stunningly, God providentially works on behalf of his people even when they are in disobedience. Mordecai's refusal to pay respect due to the office of Haman was not a godly thing. He should have respected the office under the divine institution of human government. And yet God worked through this to draw out the plan of Haman to destroy the Jews; a plan He had already prepared for by placing Esther as queen in order to save His people. It's remarkable to know that even when we are in disobedience God is still working on our behalf to bring about our salvation. We may not care about God but God cares about us. Think about that.

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