

Esther 06-03-21B

Let's continue our study now in Esther chapter 3. Haman is upset because when he walks through this gate of the king, this administrative area, archaeologists, there was a French expedition that went over to the area of Shushan back in the 1970s and found the palace complex of Ahasuerus and about 90 yards east of the palace is this thing called the King's Gate. It's 13,000 square feet and this was where the ancient historians like Herodotus and Xenophon had spoken of as being the administrative and supply areas for the Empire. They found inscriptions indicating this and so on.

There's, you know, you can read the archaeological support, but this is a pretty huge complex. This is the seat of government. This is like the big federal building and so when Haman comes in, everybody is supposed to stop and fall on their face and treat him as though he is a divine personage and of course Mordecai refuses to do this.

So as a result, Haman decides he's going to wipe out all the Jews, probably thinking that if he just gets Mordecai, then the other people are going to say, well, look at his fine example. He was a Jew. We're Jews.

Let's do what he did and they need to have to wipe him out anyway. So he's just going to cut to the chase. So in verse 7 of chapter 3, in the first month, month of Nisan, does this ring a bell? What happens in the month of Nisan? This is the new year on the religious calendar, isn't it? Civil calendar.

It's the seventh month, but God said this Passover month is going to be the first month for you. It's going to be the head of the year. So even though Rosh Hashanah is down in the fall, this is going to be the head of the year, Nisan or Abib.

So in that month, Haman says, well, I've got to figure out when to put this plan into effect. And Haman decides to read his horoscope. He's superstitious.

The Persians are really superstitious. We talked about how the Babylonians were all hung up on dreams and visions and whatnot in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Well, in the pagan world, in the godless world of the ancient Near East, everyone was aware that something supernatural was going on.

But if they didn't hold with the God of Israel, then they had to believe in something else. And so they thought there were these mysterious forces at work. And by casting lots, he could find a fortuitous time.

So this is like going to the astrologer. It's like reading the horoscope saying, well, I'm a Sagittarius or I'm a Virgo or a Leo or a Capricorn or whatever. I'm going to read my tea leaves.

I'm going to open up a bird and read its entrails. You know, all these pretty bizarre practices. So

what these people would do is cast lots.

And these lots are called poor. Now, this is not the word used elsewhere in the Bible for lots. We have lots of passages that talk about lots in the Old Testament.

And the word is, the root of it is G-O-R. I have to get down here where I can find it. But no, the Bible doesn't use poor.

This is the Persian word for lots. And it just reminds us that this is a pagan form of lot casting. This is not the kind of lots that were cast to find out that Jonathan was the one that ate the honey in the battle back in the books of Samuel.

It's not the kind of lots that were cast in earlier biblical days. So what we do know is that in elements of chance such as this, oh, it's goral, G-O-R-A-L is the Hebrew word. This foreign word poor actually goes, has its roots back in Akkadian.

There's an Akkadian idiom called pu-ra-ka-ru-ru to cast a lot, just in case you wanted to know, which is the equivalent of the English ha-feel poor. If you study Hebrew and you have the hyphel stem, well hyphel is the causative. And it's like when you cast a thing, you make it happen.

And the hyphel is the causative stem in Hebrew and it's related to this word. Ha-feel poor is what we have here. They cast lots before Haman to determine the day and the month and the lot fell.

Now, do you think that this is a happenstance? Do you think that it's just completely random and God had nothing to do with this lot falling when it fell? It fell about as far away as it possibly could because the day that is determined by the casting of these lots is 11 months later. Haman is all upset with Mordecai. He'd probably love to start right away, but he's superstitious.

So when he cast the lots, it doesn't say, well, next Tuesday or a week from Friday. It says 11 months from now. And Haman, you can imagine him kind of gripping his head and saying, well, you know, the dice don't lie if it's 11 months and it's 11 months.

So this is the month of Adar. And so if you think about it, this is going to be cleared down in the late winter time, so to speak. So Haman said to King Hasuerus, there is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom.

Their laws are different from all other peoples. We get another clue as to the reason that Mordecai gives for not bowing. It's something to do with these people's law, right? Their laws are different from all other peoples.

Now, what law does Israel have that nobody else has? That would be the law of Moses. They do not keep the king's laws. Now, this is a flat out lie.

This lie is going to be repeated in a different form in the days of Jesus, isn't it? He's a law

breaker. The Pharisees and the scribes and the religious leaders are going to claim your disciples are breaking the law. He breaks the law.

He's equating himself. He's worthy of death under our law. Jesus Christ did not come to destroy the law or to abrogate the law or to deny the law, but to fulfill it.

Those charges were false. The Lord Jesus Christ never broke any part of the law of Moses. He broke a lot of the tradition that had crept up around the law.

Many times today we look around and in Christianity there is a conglomeration of tradition that has grown up. You can be despised and rejected by fellow believers because they think that you're not conforming to the traditions. There's a strong tradition that if you don't evangelize, you're a horrible Christian.

And the measure of your Christianity is when's the last time you gave the gospel to someone? I can tell you several occasions where someone sat across a desk or a table from me and looked deep into my eyes and said, Sam, when's the last time you led someone to the Lord? Like when I was applying to go to seminary. And this is a measure, you know, if you say, well, maybe I've never led anybody to the Lord. Maybe it's been a year.

Maybe it's been five years. Maybe I don't remember. I had discussions with people, but I didn't sit them down and say, now, you're not leaving until you confess.

You're not leaving until you lay hold of Christ. I want to hear you say the words. Repeat after me, etc.

You talk with somebody and let the Lord work on them. Well, this is the idea that people get. So Haman says, well, these people do not keep the king's laws.

Now, there's no record anywhere that the people of Judah, the people of Israel scattered through the Persian realm were lawless, seditious elements. But this argument has come up again and again and again down through history. What do we call it? Anti-Semitism.

It came up in the Roman Empire. Purge out the Jews. It came up in the Catholic church.

Purge out the Jews. It came up in the Third Reich. Purge out the Jews.

It's come up in the Middle East amongst the Palestinians. Purge out the Jews. So what does Haman go on to say? They don't keep the king's laws.

Therefore, it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. They must be purged, exterminated, wiped out. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed.

Then it says, I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work to bring it into the king's treasuries. 10,000 talents is, if I remember right, is about 750,000 pounds. Silver, I checked today, price of silver is just a shade over \$10 an ounce.

\$10.30, \$10.50. You figure it at \$10 an ounce times 16 ounces per pound times 750,000. If my math is right, you feel free to check it, but I believe that works out to \$120 million in silver. Now, this looks like Haman is saying, I'll go down to the bank and write a check for 10,000 talents and pay the people to do the work so it won't cost the king anything.

That's not what's being said here. I mean, Haman may be a great guy and people may be bowing to him, but he doesn't have 120 mil sitting in his bank account. What this says is, the word here, I will pay, this is the word that means, this is shaka.

It's not that different from where you get the word shekel. S-H-Q-L is the root here. Shekel.

And it means to move, to bring or take. It means I will put this money in their hands. Now, where's this money going to come from? This is not Haman's personal fortune and it's not money from the king's treasury.

This is money that is going to be brought into the king's treasury. Look at the end of the verse. I will put 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work to bring it into the king's treasuries.

Where's this money going to come from? You wipe out the people and you take their stuff. Haman has already done his work looking at the census or whatever the kind of tax rolls or other records they have there in the capital city, Shushan of the Persian empire. And he has figured out about how many Jews, at least how many known Jews, are on the rolls.

And he has figured out by the time we wipe these people out and confiscate their stuff, there's going to be a minimum of 120 million dollars in cash that we're going to be able to bring in. And who knows what all else in property and chattel and crops and so on. But this is just cash.

10,000 talents of silver. He says, I can promise you I'll bring that much in. And you get the idea that this is probably just in the immediately surrounding area and who knows what else.

But that's what's going to come via the hands of the people who do the work. They're going to go out and kill the people and take the stuff and they'll channel it, fund it all back into the king's treasuries. So what does this amount to? Haman is sweetening the deal for the king.

You begin to understand why the king thought Haman was such a good guy. Haman figured out ways to make money for the king. Haman would demonstrate for the king how it was in his own interest to do various things.

And of course, Haman profits on the side. So at least politically, if not financially. So he says, if it please the king, let the decree be written that they be destroyed.

I will put 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work to bring it into the king's treasuries. I will supervise and organize this. And I've already figured out that this is going to make us this much money.

So the king thinks this is a good deal. Took his signet ring from his hand, gave it to Haman, the son of Hamadatha, the Agagite. And once again, we are given the pedigree of Haman and it's not by accident.

Why? Amalek has been an enemy of Israel since they first walked out of Egypt. Who is the first enemy Israel saw walking out of Egypt? Who was on the way into Egypt to take over the land when Moses and the Israelites were going out? The Amalekites. They are the Hyksos.

They're the shepherd kings. They're the ones that went in and opportunistically seized Egypt. When it was all beaten down from the plagues.

And they had several dynasties of rulers there before the Egyptians finally rose up and retook their own government. But this is Haman, the son of Hamadatha, the Agagite. You remember, Agag is not a personal name.

It is a throne name. Mordecai is of the princely blood. He's a Benjamite, the Benjamin and Judah.

Those are the two tribes that formed the southern kingdom of Judah. It's Judah and Benjamin. And those are the two tribes that produced kings for Israel.

Saul first and then the line of David. And it's a warrior tribe and they have a lot of clout, a lot of fame, a lot of prestige. And that's where Mordecai is from.

That's what Esther is from. And here's Haman. And he's from the princely royal line of the Amalekites.

And all down through their generations, they've hung on to this Agag deal. This in some ways reminds me of Jewish people that you find today who had the last name Cohen. You find a lot of people named Cohen when you look through Jewish communities, entertainment or whatever.

And that name has survived the millennia because Cohen is the Hebrew word for priest. And these people are descended from Levi. And all down through history, they have retained that name because it means something to them.

And they remember their attachment. Now, if Israelites can keep track of their Cohen name for 3,400 years, do you think Haman's family can keep track of the Agag name for a few hundred years? Of course, about 500 years in this case. So the king says to Haman, the money and the people are given to you to do with them as seems good to you.

Now, this had to sound good to Haman because the king is basically saying, okay, fine, feel free to dip into this 120 million when it comes in to whatever extent you'd like. Obviously, Haman is not going to keep it all. But he says the money and the people are in your hands.

So you just do whatever seems fit. And over the time that the king has been dealing with Haman, Haman has always made sure that the king has benefited greatly. That's how he's

gotten into his good graces.

So now look at this. This is interesting. The king's scribes were called on the 13th day of the first month.

And the decree was written according to all that Haman commanded. 13th day of what month? Nisan. If Israel were in the land, if you were, say, in the days of Jesus, circa 30 AD, what would be going on on the 13th of Nisan? What day is Passover? 14th of Nisan.

When was the final decree for Jesus' crucifixion handed down? 13th of Nisan. And here, 400 and so many odd years earlier, what year did I say this was? I get my Daniel and my Esther mixed up. However many years earlier this is, it's the very day.

13th Nisan. 13th day of the first month, the decree is written according to all that Haman commanded to the king's satraps, governors over each province, officials of all people, every province according to its script and to every people in their language. It's a big empire, lots of different languages.

It's translated, it's disseminated, carried out by runners. In the name of King Ahasuerus, it was written and sealed with the king's signet ring. Now, when it says it's sealed with his signet ring, what kind of documents do you think these are? These are official and it's something that can be impressed.

They're not using a lot of papyrus at this time. They're using clay tablets. And so, these tablets have this writing in them.

And then at the end, you have the impression of the king's ring. Who's got the king's ring? Haman. So, letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, kill, annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province being published for all people that they should be ready for that day. This includes the province in which Israel and Judah now sit. Couriers went out, hastened by the king's command, and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan, the citadel.

So, the king and Haman sat down to hoist a few, sat down to toss a few goblets of wine back. But the city of Shushan was perplexed. This tells us that Haman sort of has Ahasuerus in thrall.

He's kind of got him a little deluded, a little bit out of touch with reality. The rest of the city says, whoa, wait a minute, because they know merchants and neighbors and fellow citizens and businesses and farms and a lot of good people who are Jewish scattered through the realm. Notice, nowhere does Haman mention the identity of these people to the king.

He just says, there is a people. And the king says, well, get rid of them. Take whatever you need.

Keep whatever you want. And so, they're down eating and drinking. And once again, we see the less than great leadership of Ahasuerus.

He doesn't inquire. He doesn't check. He's sloppy.

He trusts his subordinate too much. And the rest of the city can see what's coming. He doesn't.

Well, chapter four, when Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went as far as the front of the king's gate.

He went to the outside of this big 13,000 square foot administrative building, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. Now, I thought this was Mordecai, the big rule breaker, who doesn't bow when Haman comes around, yet he won't go into the building with his sackcloth. What's the difference? There's nothing in the law of Moses that prevents Mordecai from obeying this rule and many other rules and laws that pertain in the kingdom of Persia.

The one that he could not obey is the one to prostrate himself in obeisance and worship in front of Haman. And it's probably easier knowing that Haman is an Agagite anyway, given his family history. But he cries out with a loud and bitter cry.

Now, who's he crying to? Doesn't tell us, does it? Who would you imagine he is crying out to with a loud and bitter cry? Oh, people of Shushan. Rats. Fooey.

What have I done? Not at all. He cries out with a loud and bitter cry. This is a cry of anguish.

It is a cry of distress. And there is nothing wrong with being anguished, and there is nothing wrong with being distressed. We sometimes think that we're supposed to be some sort of immovable rock, and if we ever waver from that, well, we have sinned and there's something the matter with us.

Many, many believers in the Word of God have been distressed and have cried out. David, all through the songs, talks about how he raises his voice and cries out to the Lord. Many individuals have cried.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself cried out to God in his time of distress. There is nothing wrong with recognizing that there is a crisis, recognizing that it is a time of pressure, and crying out. This is a loud and bitter cry.

He went as far as the front of the king's gate. Every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. Now, fasting, sackcloth, and ashes in Israel, in Judah, among the Jews, is associated with appeal to God.

It's not just a random act of mourning like you see in Nineveh. Yet, 40 days, Nineveh will be

destroyed. Everybody put on sackcloth and ashes.

In Israel, this is an expression of humility, an expression of appeal to God. My strength, my glory is nothing. I need that of the Lord God.

So, there's mourning among the Jews, fasting, weeping, and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. So, Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed.

Nothing wrong with bad news making us greatly distressed. It's what you do in those times of distress that makes a difference. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them.

She figures that Mordecai doesn't put on the right clothes and go to work inside the administration building. He's going to be the first to go. And so, she says, look, send him some fresh clothes.

He's tore all of his clothes up, but if he keeps carrying on like this, they're going to make him the first. And of course, she doesn't know yet all of the details. But then Esther called Hatak, one of the king's eunuchs, whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai to learn what and why this was.

You get the idea that maybe Hatak has served as an intermediary to get information back and forth between Esther and Mordecai before, because Esther trusts him. She knows that there's probably going to be something to do with Jewish things and their history together. And Hatak is a trusted servant here.

So, this is probably not the first time he has been an intermediary. Hatak goes out to Mordecai in the city square, in front of the king's gate. Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to put into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews.

He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go into the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. So, Hatak returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Esther spoke to Hatak and gave him a command for Mordecai.

All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes in to the inner court to the king, who has not been called, has but one law to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Now, this is a custom that is known from the days of Darius, the days of the early Persian rulers from secular history. Darius allowed only his seven trusted advisors to come into his throne room, no one else.

And that custom and that rule of the palace persisted down to this day. So, Esther is literally taking her life into her own hands, or putting it in God's hands, to go before the king. Everyone is bewildered.

The Jews are wearing sackcloth and ashes. Mordecai is crying bitterly in the streets. Where is our confidence? Where is our guidance in a time of stress and danger such as this? We know that our fate and our future lies in the hands of God, right? Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

Esther and Mordecai know the same thing. But in the same way that that is not evident to the people in Persia, and it's not evident to the people in the government, and it's not evident to Haman, and it's not evident to those in the royal court, and it's not evident to those who are in the administration building, it isn't evident in the account of the book of Esther either. It doesn't say, and behold, Mordecai went and fell on his face before the Lord, or Esther fell on her face before the Lord.

We have to infer. We have to understand that this is the case. And we work backward from what we know of God and what we know of the deliverance that He is about to bring through them.

So they have to make a choice here. There's great danger. We often face tough decisions that seem to have dire consequences.

And it boils down to whether we are going to live our life like any other person in the world or live like a believer should, trusting God that when we do the right thing, He'll make sure everything comes out okay. And a lot of times God will arrange circumstances to where we can't see where deliverance will come. We can't see how it's going to turn out, and it looks dark and it looks bleak.

Well, of course, it wouldn't be a test if we could see the deliverance, if we could see the outcome and we knew everything would be okay from a human point of view. It's only when we know it's going to be okay by faith that that test really counts. Well, this is where we're going to have to leave Esther and Mordecai for tonight.

We'll resume in chapter 4, verse 10 next time. Father, thank you for giving us this great example in the book of Esther. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will remind us of it in the days ahead.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.