
ESTHER 3: 1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.

Ahasuerus exalts Haman the Agagite, and commands all his officers to do him reverence, which Mordecai refuses, Est 3:1-3. Haman, informed of Mordecai's refusal, plots his destruction, and that of the Jews, Est 3:4-6. Lots are cast to find out the proper time, Est 3:7. Haman accuses the Jews to Ahasuerus, counsels him to destroy them, and offers ten thousand talents of silver for the damage which the revenue might sustain by their destruction, Est 3:8, Est 3:9. The king refuses the money, but gives Haman full authority to destroy them, Est 3:10, Est 3:11. Letters are written to this effect, and sent to the king's lieutenants throughout the empire, and the thirteenth day of the month Adar is appointed for the massacre, Est 3:12-15.

Verse 1

Haman - the Agagite - Perhaps he was some descendant of that Agag, king of the Amalekites, spared by Saul, but destroyed by Samuel; and on this ground might have an antipathy to the Jews.

Set his seat above all the princes - Made him his prime minister, and put all the officers of state under his direction.

ESTHER 3: 2 All the king's servants who were in the king's gate bowed down, and paid homage to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai didn't bow down or pay him homage.

Verse 2

The king's servants, that were in the king's gate - By servants here, certainly a higher class of officers are intended than porters; and Mordecai was one of those officers, and came to the gate with the others who were usually there in attendance to receive the commands of the king.

Mordecai bowed not - לא ישתחוה lo yichra. "He did not bow down;" nor did him reverence, ולא ישתחוה, "nor did he prostrate himself." I think it most evident, from these two words, that it was not civil reverence merely that Haman expected and Mordecai refused; this sort of respect is found in the word כרע cara, to bow. This sort of reverence Mordecai could not refuse without being guilty of the most inexcusable obstinacy, nor did any part of the Jewish law forbid it. But Haman expected, what the Persian kings frequently received, a species of Divine adoration; and this is implied in the word שחה shachah, which signifies that kind of prostration which implies the highest degree of reverence that can be paid to God or man, lying down flat on the earth, with the hands and feet extended, and the mouth in the dust.

The Targum, says that Haman set up a statue for himself, to which every one was obliged to bow, and to adore Haman himself. The Jews all think that Mordecai refused this prostration because it implied idolatrous adoration. Hence, in the Apocryphal additions to this book, Mordecai is represented praying thus: "Thou knowest that if I have not adored Haman, it was not through pride, nor contempt, nor secret desire of glory; for I felt disposed to kiss the footsteps of his feet (gladly)

for the salvation of Israel: but I feared to give to a man that honor which I know belongs only to my God."

ESTHER 3: 3 Then the king's servants, who were in the king's gate, said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's commandment?"

ESTHER 3: 4 Now it came to pass, when they spoke daily to him, and he didn't 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.

ESTHER 3: 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai didn't bow down, nor pay him homage, Haman was full of wrath.

ESTHER 3: 6 But he scorned the thought of laying hands on Mordecai alone, for they had made known to him Mordecai's people. Therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even Mordecai's people.

ESTHER 3: 7 In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, and chose the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.

Verse 7

The first month - That is, of the civil year of the Jews.

The month Nisan - Answering to a part of our March and April.

The twelfth year of king Ahasuerus - According to the chronology in our Bibles, about five hundred and ten years before Christ.

They cast Pur, that is, the lot - This appears to be the Hebrew corruption of the pure Persian word *pari*, which signifies any thing that happens fortuitously. There is an addition here in the Greek text that was probably in the original, and which makes this place very plain. I shall set down the whole verse, and give the Greek in a parenthesis, that it may be read consecutively with what is in the Hebrew: "In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman, from day to day, and from month to month." (ὥστε ἀπολεσαι εν μιᾷ ἡμερᾷ τὸ γένος Μαρδοχαιου, και επεσεν ὁ κληρος εις την τεσερακαιδεκατην του μηνος ὅς εστιν Αδαρ "that they might destroy in one day the people of Mordecai; and the lot fell on the fourteenth day of the month Adar.")

We see plainly intimated by the Hebrew text that they cast lots, or used a species of divination, to find which of the twelve months would be the most favorable for the execution of Haman's design; and, having found the desired month, then they cast lots, or used divination, to find out which day of the said month would be the lucky day for the accomplishment of the enterprise. But the Hebrew text does not tell us the result of this divination; we are left to guess it out; but the Greek supplies this deficiency, and makes all clear. From it we find that, when they cast for the month, the month Adar was taken; and when they cast for the day, the fourteenth (Heb. thirteenth) of that month was taken.

Some have questioned whether Pur may not have signified also some game of chance, which they played before or with Haman, from day to day, to divert him from his melancholy, till the lucky time came in which he was to have the gratification of slaying all the people who were objects of his enmity; or they cast lots, or played, who should get the property of such and such opulent families. Holinshed, one of our ancient historians, informs us that, previously to the battle of Agincourt, the English army, under Henry V., were so thinned and weakened by disease, and the French army so numerous, that "Frenchmen, in the mean while, as though they had been sure of victory, made great triumphe, for the captaines had determined before how to divide the spoil; and the souldiers, the night before, had plaid the Englishmen at dice." To this the chorus of Shakspeare alludes: - "Proud of their numbers, and secure of soul,

The confident and over-lusty French

Do the low-rated English play at dice. - The poor condemned English,

Like sacrifices by their watchful fires,

Sit patiently and inly ruminat

The morning's danger; and their gestures sad,

Investing lank-lean cheeks, and war-worn coats,

Presenteth them unto the gazing moon

So many horrid ghosts.

Hen. V.

Monstrelet, who is an impartial writer, does not mention this.

Did Haman and his flatterers intend to divide the spoils of the designed-to-be-massacred Jews in some such manner as this?

ESTHER 3: 8 Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws are different than other people's. They don't keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not for the king's profit to allow them to remain.

Verse 8

Their laws are diverse from all people - Such they certainly were; for they worshipped the true God according to his own laws; and this was not done by any other people then on the face of the earth.

ESTHER 3: 9 If it pleases the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who are in charge of the king's business, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

Verse 9

Let it be written that they may be destroyed - Let it be enacted that they may all be put to death. By this he would throw all the odium off himself, and put it on the king and his counsellors; for he wished the thing to pass into a law, in which he could have but a small share of the blame.

I will pay ten thousand talents of silver - He had said before that it was not for the king's profit to suffer them; but here he is obliged to acknowledge that there will be a loss to the revenue, but that loss he is willing to make up out of his own property.

Ten thousand talents of silver is an immense sum indeed; which, counted by the Babylonish talent, amounts to two millions one hundred and nineteen thousand pounds sterling; but, reckoned by the Jewish talent, it makes more than double that sum.

Those who cavil at the Scriptures would doubtless call this one of the many absurdities which, they say, are so plenteously found in them, supposing it almost impossible for an individual to possess so much wealth. But though they do not believe the Bible, they do not scruple to credit Herodotus, who, lib. vii., says that when Xerxes went into Greece, Pythius the Lydian had two thousand talents of silver, and four millions of gold darics, which sums united make near five millions and a half sterling.

Plutarch tells us, in his life of Crassus, that after this Roman general had dedicated the tenth of all he had to Hercules, he entertained the Roman people at ten thousand tables, and distributed to every citizen as much corn as was sufficient for three months; and after all these expenses, he had seven thousand one hundred Roman talents remaining, which is more than a million and a half of English money.

In those days silver and gold were more plentiful than at present, as we may see in the yearly revenue of Solomon, who had of gold from Ophir, at one voyage, four hundred and fifty talents, which make three millions two hundred and forty thousand pounds sterling; and his annual income was six hundred and sixty-six talents of silver, which make four millions seven hundred and ninety-five thousand two hundred pounds English money.

In addition to the above I cannot help subjoining the following particulars: -

Crassus, who was mentioned before, had a landed estate valued at one million six hundred and sixty-six thousand six hundred and sixty-six pounds thirteen shillings and four pence.

C. Coecilius Ridorus, after having lost much in the civil war, left by will effects amounting to one million forty-seven thousand one hundred and sixty pounds.

Lentullus, the augur, is said to have possessed no less than three millions three hundred and thirty-three thousand three hundred and thirty-three pounds six shillings and eight pence.

Apicius was worth more than nine hundred and sixteen thousand six hundred and seventy-one pounds thirteen shillings and four pence; who, after having spent in his kitchen eight hundred and thirty-three thousand three hundred and thirty-three pounds six shillings and eight pence, and finding that he had no more left than eighty-three thousand three hundred and thirty-three pounds six shillings and eight pence, considered it so little for his support, that he judged it best to put an end to his life by poison!

The superfluous furniture of M. Scaurus, which was burnt at Tusculum, was valued at no less than eight hundred and thirty-three thousand three hundred and thirty-two pounds thirteen shillings and four pence.

Anthony owed, at the ides or March, the sum of three hundred and thirty-three thousand three hundred and thirty-three pounds six shillings and six pence, which he paid before the calends of April.

None of these men were in trade, to account for the circulation of such immense sums through their hands. See Dickson's Husband. of the Anc.

ESTHER 3: 10 The king took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy.

Verse 10

The king took his ring - In this ring was no doubt included his privy seal, and he gave this to Haman, that when he had formed such a decree as he thought fit, he might seal it with this ring, which would give it its due force and influence among the rulers of the provinces. The privy seal of many of our sovereigns appears to have been inserted in their rings; and the seals of Eastern potentates were worn in rings upon their fingers. One such seal, once the property of the late Tippoo Sultan, lies before me; the inscription is deeply cut in silver, which is set in a massy carriage of gold. This, as fitted to the finger, he probably kept always on his hand, to be ready to seal despatches, etc., or it might be carried by a confidential officer for the same purpose, as it seems to refer to one of the chief cutcheries, or military officers.

ESTHER 3: 11 The king said to Haman, "The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you."

ESTHER 3: 12 Then the king's scribes were called in on the first month, on the thirteenth day of the month; and all that Haman commanded was written to the king's satraps, and to the governors who were over every province, and to the princes of every people, to every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus, and it was sealed with the king's ring.

Verse 12

Unto the king's lieutenants - אַחַשְׁדַּרְפָּנִי achashdarpeneh. This is in all probability another Persian word, for there is nothing like it in the Hebrew language, nor can it be fairly deduced from any roots in that tongue. The Vulgate translates ad omnes satrapas regis, to all the satraps of the king. It is very likely that this is the true sense of the word, and that the אַחַשְׁדַּרְפָּנִי achsadrapani, as it may be pronounced, is the Chaldee or Hebrew corruption of the Persian word satraban, the plural of satrab, a Persian peer, though the word is now nearly obsolete in the Persian language; for since the conquest of Persia by Mohammedanism, the names of officers are materially changed, as something of Islamism is generally connected with the titles of officers both civil and military, as well as religious.

ESTHER 3: 13 Letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

Verse 13

To destroy, so kill, and to cause to perish - To put the whole of them to death in any manner, or by every way and means.

Take the spoil of them for a prey - Thus, whoever killed a Jew had his property for his trouble! And thus the hand of every man was armed against this miserable people. Both in the Greek version and in the Latin the copy of this order is introduced at length, expressing "the king's desire to have all his dominions in quiet and prosperity; but that he is informed that this cannot be expected, while a certain detestable people are disseminated through all his provinces, who not only are not subject to the laws, but endeavor to change them; and that nothing less than their utter extermination will secure the peace and prosperity of the empire; and therefore he orders that they be all destroyed, both male and female, young and old," etc.

ESTHER 3: 14 A copy of the letter, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published to all the peoples, that they should be ready against that day.

ESTHER 3: 15 The couriers went out in haste by the king's commandment, and the decree was given out in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

Verse 15

The posts - Literally, the couriers, the hircarrahs, those who carried the public despatches; a species of public functionaries, who have been in use in all nations of the world from the remotest antiquity.

The decree was given at Shushan - It was dated from the royal Susa, where the king then was.

The city Shushan was perplexed - They saw that in a short time, by this wicked measure the whole city would be thrown into confusion; for, although the Jews were the only objects of this decree, yet, as it armed the populace against them, even the Persians could not hope to escape without being spoiled, when a desperate mob had begun to taste of human blood, and enrich themselves with the property of the murdered. Besides, many Persian families had, no doubt, become united by intermarriages with Jewish families, and in such a massacre they would necessarily share the same fate with the Jews. A more impolitic, disgraceful, and cruel measure was never formed by any government; and one would suppose that the king who ordered it must have been an idiot, and the counsellors who advised it must have been madmen. But a despotic government is ever capable of extravagance and cruelty; for as it is the bane of popular freedom and happiness, so is it the disgrace of political wisdom and of all civil institutions. Despotism and tyranny in the state are the most direct curses which insulted justice can well inflict upon a sinful nation.