

It has been said that the Jewish people have attended the funerals of all who have desired their destruction, and history bears this out.

For some 4000 years, the Jews have faced multiple attempts by others to completely destroy them – and yet, God’s chosen people are still here. I think we are most familiar with the Holocaust carried out by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party, where in just a few years, some six million Jews were systematically murdered. It was a terrible slaughter on an unimaginable scale, but Hitler would die, his Nazi party would dissolve, and the Jewish people would survive – even thrive, for later in 1948, they officially formed the State of Israel. It was a historical event, it was a biblical event, and it was an event that enraged the enemies of God, for almost immediately, several of the Arab neighbors invaded Israel and tried to destroy them. They failed – and later in 1967 and in 1973, there were other attempts to destroy Israel by her neighbors, but those attempts failed as well.

Today, terrorist groups like Hamas publicly cry out for the extermination of the Jews, they believe it is their religious obligation to slaughter them all, and their popularity in the region seems to be growing. For Israel, a country the size of New Jersey, there is no sign of letup, and there will be no letup, because according to the Bible, the campaign to destroy the Jews will continue all the way into the Tribulation period.

Now, this morning, we are going backwards in history to see a previous attempt to exterminate the Jews. Last week, we started **Esther 3** and we looked at the first six verses where we learned a few things. If you recall, Mordecai had saved the king’s life, but instead of Mordecai being exalted – this guy named Haman comes out of nowhere and is promoted to the chief of staff. Haman is now the number two man in the Persian Empire, and in his exalted position, he has great power and unquestioned authority, and he expects to be respected.

As the chief of staff, Haman was probably allowed greater access to the king, frequently going back and forth to the palace through the king’s gate, and everyone at the king’s gate was commanded to bow before Haman as a sign of respect – and that’s what everyone did – almost everyone – there was one stubborn holdout.

Mordecai will not bow before Haman. He does not respect Haman even though he is the number two man in the known world, and when pressed for a reason by the other officials, Mordecai reveals he is a Jew. Now, if you remember from last week, that was significant. Mordecai was a Jew and Haman was an Agagite – a

descendant of the Amalekites, and the Amalekites were age-old enemies of the Jews.

Well eventually, Haman is told about Mordecai's disrespect and that he was a Jew and my guess is Haman knew the history and he had been taught to hate the Jews since childhood, and now this disrespect from Mordecai made it personal. Mordecai lit a raging fire of hatred under Haman – and Haman was in the position to do something about it. He wants to kill Mordecai, but not just Mordecai – he wants to exterminate all the Jews under the rule of the Persian Empire.

So, that brings us to **Esther 3**, beginning with **verse 7**.

In the first month, which is the month 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.

It was the twelfth year of the reign of King Ahasuerus, some five years after Esther had become queen, and it was the first month of the year – on the Jewish calendar it is the month of **Nisan** – which for us falls somewhere between April and May.

Anyway, the first month of the year was looked upon by the Persians as a time for determining the best moment to carry out future actions throughout the year, and so as a new year's ritual, the Persian astrologers would be called upon to cast lots – literally rolling the dice in order to select the lucky moment for certain activities to ensure the outcome would be successful and pleasing to their gods.

Well, in this passage, we are told the dice are rolled in the presence of Haman – apparently its private session, and it's for the purpose of selecting the best time to exterminate the Jews. The dice were rolled and they fell on the **twelfth month**, the month of **Adar** – which for us is around the February and March timeframe. So according to the dice, Haman has almost a year to set his plan into motion to rid himself of the Jews once and for all. This is what Haman wants – this is what Satan has wanted all along, and now it would seem the lucky stars are aligned and everything is falling into place for them both.

Obviously, this rolling of the dice leaves a lot to chance, but dice or no dice, let's not forget that God is working behind the scenes – working behind what is seen – and to get really specific here, we are told in **Proverbs 16:33**,

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

In other words, cast your lots, roll your dice, but that does not change the truth that God is still in control, and in this particular circumstance, in His divine providence, God gives the Jews almost a year to prepare for what is to come.

So, Haman still has more work to do to carry out his plan against the Jews, and that brings us to **verse 8**.

⁸ 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. ⁹ If 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.”

As the chief of staff, Haman likely has frequent access to King Ahasuerus, and on this one particular occasion, Haman tells the king about a **certain people**. **Did you notice that Haman avoids identifying these people as Jews?** He only refers to them as *certain people*, and I think he intentionally does this for two very good reasons.

Let’s look in **Ezra 1:1-4**,

¹ Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: ² “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³ Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴ Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.’”

This decree to help the Jews return to the Promised Land to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple came from King Cyrus – and he’s the grandfather of Ahasuerus. That’s the first reason Haman has for not mentioning the Jews by name, but it doesn’t stop there. Later in **Ezra 6:8-12**, we read this:

⁸ Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these elders of Judah in the rebuilding of this house of God: the full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury out of the taxes of the provinces beyond the River, and that without delay. ⁹ Whatever is needed, both young bulls, rams, and lambs for a burnt offering to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and anointing oil, as the priests in Jerusalem request, it is to be given to them daily without fail, ¹⁰ that they may offer acceptable sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons. ¹¹ And I issued a decree that any man who violates this edict, a timber shall be drawn from his house and he shall be impaled on it and his house shall be made a refuse heap on account of this. ¹² May the God who has caused His name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who attempts to change it, so as to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have issued this decree, let it be carried out with all diligence!”

After the decree from Cyrus was discovered, King Darius issues his own decree in support of the Jews, and just so you know, Darius is the father of King Ahasuerus. So, Haman can't come out and say these people are Jews, because the father and the grandfather of the king had been favorable to them in the past and that could pose a problem for Haman in the present.

But Haman is not done. He tells the king – these people are **scattered** throughout the Persian Empire – and that's a true statement – they were all over the place. He says their laws are **different** from those of other people – which is a generalization of the truth, for the Jews are God's chosen people and their laws are God's laws. But then, Haman tells the king these people are rebellious and they don't follow the laws of the king. Yes, the Jews had a rebellious streak – we know that from history and that's why they were in exile in the first place, but it was an outright lie that the Jews did not follow the laws of the land, for the Jews were known to be loyal citizens who sought to live in peace.

So, Haman claims these *certain people* are different and rebellious – rebellious against the king, and because they are different and rebellious, it would be in the king's best interest that they be **destroyed** – and then to seal the deal so to speak, Haman says, “*It won't cost you anything.*” Haman offered to pay for the whole thing – **ten thousand talents of silver**, which would equate to 375 tons of silver or two thirds of the annual revenue for the entire Empire.

I suspect Haman was aware that the previous unsuccessful invasion of Greece took a heavy toll on the royal treasury, and with that knowledge, he expressed a

willingness to pick up the entire tab for the extermination of the Jews – **but does Haman really have that kind of money?** I seriously doubt it – instead his plan would be funded by the confiscation of the homes and the property and the possessions of the Jews he killed. The plunder from the Jews would be used to fund their own extermination, and it should not surprise anyone that Adolf Hitler took a page from Haman’s playbook for much of his war effort was actually funded by the confiscated properties of the Jews.

So, Haman conceals his real motives. He hides his personal hatred. He mentions nothing about the long-standing blood-feud between the Jews and the Amalekites, instead, he simply tickles the king’s ear – feeding him with nothing but generalizations, and half-truths, and outright lies he knows will resonate with the king, and without any follow-up questions, the gullible king takes the bait, and beginning with **verse 10**, we are told this:

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ The king said to Haman, “The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please.”

Without caring enough to even ask any questions about these *certain people*, the king took his **signet ring** and gave it to Haman which would be the equivalent of the king giving a rubber stamp with his signature on it. With the king’s ring in hand – like possessing a signed blank check, Haman could now create any document he pleased and put the king’s seal on it, and the document had to be accepted as law and obeyed. With the ring, King Ahasuerus gave Haman full authority to exterminate a people he knew nothing about – other than what Haman told him.

The king tells Haman the **silver is yours** – fully expecting that Haman would then insist he take it as would be the custom – and the king also says, those people you mentioned are yours too – **do with them as you please**. Haman had the position, he had the power, and he had the authority. It would seem he had everything he needed to do what others before him could not do – what armies before him could not do – he will single handedly destroy the Jews once and for all.

Haman is having a great day, and it gets even better. Let’s continue on beginning with **verse 12**.

¹² Then the king’s scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, 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, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.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.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.¹⁵ The couriers went out impelled by the king's command while the decree was issued at the citadel in Susa; and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion.

So, the story moves quickly to the **thirteenth day of the first month** – the month of Nisan, and on that day, the decree of doom was created. Royal scribes were summoned and they wrote out the official orders given to them by Haman, they were translated into the languages of those in the Empire, they were stamped with the king's royal seal, and they were to be distributed by couriers to all the regional officials and all the governors across the known world.

Every providence within the Persian Empire received the order **to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews**. It was a license to kill – an empire-wide death sentence on the Jews – announced in advance, and it was to be carried out on one single day – **the thirteenth day of the twelfth month** – the month of **Adar**.

We are told that after the plan was set into motion and the extermination order was issued for all to see, the king and Haman sat down to drink to celebrate a job well done while the people in the city of Susa, probably the first to see the decree of doom, was left in **confusion**. The population was perplexed because they knew Jewish people who lived among them, and they knew that they were good citizens who caused no trouble – so, they were confused that such an order was issued, declaring that these Jews were so terrible that their doom was deemed necessary.

Now, at this point in the story of Esther, it would appear that everything is stacked against the Jews. There's no place to run and there's no place to hide, and for almost an entire year, the Jews would live in misery knowing their doom was approaching. So, Haman doesn't want to just kill the Jews, he wants to slowly torture them as their public execution day draws nearer. This had to be agonizing for the Jews, but there is also an interesting irony here, and let me explain.

I want to take you way back in the Old Testament to the Exodus story for a moment. If you remember, there was a time when the Jews were in bondage to the Egyptians, and for 400 years, the Jews lived as slaves under harsh and hostile conditions.

When the time was right, God raised up Moses, and it would be *through* Moses that God would deliver His people from Egypt. As you know, Moses goes before Pharaoh with a message from God – “*Let My people go*” but Pharaoh shrugs it off because he had no plans of letting this massive workforce go.

So, God sends a series of plagues and disasters upon Egypt to reveal His mighty power, and although that had some effect, Pharaoh hardened his heart against God and would not let the Jews go.

Finally, the moment came for the final plague and this time Pharaoh would have no choice but to release the Jews. If you recall, God told Moses that at midnight on a certain night, He would go through the land of Egypt and every first-born son in Egypt would die at that instant. God made it clear that no family would be spared in this – from the Pharaoh’s house to the home of the lowest slave, but God would spare the Jews that night on one condition. They were commanded to slaughter an unblemished lamb and place some of its blood on the doorframe of their home. They were told that God would see the blood of the lamb on the doorframe and literally pass over that house, but if God didn’t see the blood, He would take the life of the firstborn in judgment.

Well, it happened exactly like God said it would happen, and Pharaoh released the Jews, and for every year since then, beginning on a certain day, the Jews have been commanded to observe the Passover as a reminder of God’s deliverance.

Now, you might be asking why did I bring this up? Let’s circle back to **verse 12**, where we are told,

Then the king’s scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, 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, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king’s signet ring.

We are told this decree of doom was written on the 13th of Nisan – the first month of the Jewish calendar, but ironically, the beginning of Passover – a time to

remember God's deliverance was to start each year on the 14th of Nisan – the very next day.

When this decree of doom hit the streets, faithful Jews were remembering God's deliverance, and to me – in God's providence, it's as if God was quickly reminding His people, *“No matter what others may say about your doom, do not forget I can deliver you.” Yes, the king has blindly ordered your destruction, but I am the King of Kings – I see it all, and I can deliver you.”*

During World War II, a US marine was separated from his unit on an island in the Pacific. The fighting had been intense, and in the smoke and the crossfire, he had lost touch with his unit.

Alone in the jungle, he could hear enemy soldiers coming in his direction. Scrambling for cover, he found his way up a high ridge to several small caves in the rock. Quickly he crawled inside one of the caves. Although safe for the moment, he realized that once the enemy soldiers swept up the ridge, they would quickly search all the caves and he would be killed.

As he waited, he prayed, “Lord, if it be your will, please protect me. Whatever your will though, I love you and trust you. Amen.”

After praying, he lay quietly listening to the enemy soldiers begin to draw close. He thought, “Well, I guess the Lord isn't going to help me out of this one.” Then he saw a spider begin to build a web over the front of his cave. As he watched, listening to the enemy searching for him, all the while, the spider layered strand after strand of web across the opening of the cave. He thought to himself, “What I need is a brick wall and the Lord has sent me a spider web.”

As the enemy soldiers drew closer, he watched from the darkness of his hideout and could see them searching one cave after another. As they came to his, he got ready to make his last stand, but to his amazement, after they glanced in the direction of his cave, they moved on. Suddenly, he realized that with the spider web over the entrance, his cave looked as if no one had entered for quite a while. “Lord, forgive me,” prayed the young man. “I had forgotten that in you, a spider's web is stronger than a brick wall.”

Like this Marine, like the Jews in our story, we all face times of great trouble, and when we do, it is so easy to get distracted on the apparent doom and forget the God we serve and the deliverance that He can bring in our lives.

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