

EDICT AGAINST THE JEWS

ESTHER 2:19 – 3:15

+ *ADDITION B THE LETTER*

[Vulgate 13:1-7]

Mordecai foils a plot against the king

¹⁹When the virgins were being gathered together, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.

²⁰Now Esther had not revealed her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had charged her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him.

²¹In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Ahasuerus.

²²But the matter came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai.

²³When the affair was investigated and found to be so, both the men were hanged on the gallows. It was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

Mordecai hears about a plot to assassinate the king and uses Esther to get a warning to him. The Greek Addition A (11:12-17) offers a variant account of this episode. In the Addition it is Mordecai who warns the king. Here he works through Esther. The eunuchs are named, but there is no mention of Haman, or of Mordecai being rewarded (see later, 6:3, 8:1-2, 15). The differences are important for the dramatic power of the plot as it is played out in the Hebrew Version.

Haman is on stage for the first time in the Hebrew text (He has already appeared in the Greek Addition A; see 12:5). The hero of our story, Mordecai, was not rewarded for his service to the king. The villain, Haman, is advanced to be prime minister. He is presented as a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites, ancient enemies of Israel (see Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

The story-teller is setting up the key antagonism of the plot. Mordecai, a Jew who is proud of his nation, would never bow down to an Amalekite. Haman determines to take revenge on the whole Jewish nation.

Using lots ('Pur' - whence the Jewish festival gets its name, 'Purim') Haman chooses the thirteenth day of Adar (March) for the pogrom.

He offers a huge amount of money (estimated as almost two-thirds of the total revenue of the Persian Empire) to Xerxes which the king accepts in exchange for his giving his nod to destruction of the people 'who do not keep the king's laws' (verse 8). Haman does not identify the rogue nation as being Jews, nor does he mention the personal affrontery he is avenging.

In verse 9, the word 'treasuries' [גְּזָזִים, g^enāzîm] is another example of a Persian loan word.

¹²Some time later, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He advanced him and made him prime minister.

²All the king's servants at the king's gate used to bow down and prostrate themselves Haman; for so king had commanded. But Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance. ³Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" ⁴When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's conduct would be tolerated (He had told them that he was a Jew).

⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance to him, he was infuriated. ⁶But he thought it beneath him to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

⁷In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur—which means "the lot"—before Haman—for the day and for the month, and the lot fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. ⁸Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and unassimilated among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not appropriate for the king to tolerate them. ⁹If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, so that they may put it into the king's treasuries." ¹⁰So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

Decree sent out to wipe out the Jews

¹¹The king said to Haman, “The money is given to you, and the people as well, to do with them as it seems good to you.”

¹²Then the king’s secretaries were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king’s satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language; it was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king’s ring.

¹³Letters were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces, giving orders to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

¹⁴A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation, calling on all the peoples to be ready for that day.

¹⁵The couriers went quickly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

There is irony in the fact that the fate of the Jews (though the king does not know that they are the rogue nation) was sealed ‘on the thirteenth day of the first month’ (verse 12), the day before they celebrated the Passover, the festival commemorating their deliverance from Egypt (see Leviticus 23:5-8).

In verse 12, ‘satraps’ [אֶתְשָׂרְרֵי־בְנֵי־מִן, ’aḥšarp^cnîm] is yet another example of the many Persian loan words in the Hebrew text, as is ‘copy’ [פְּתִשְׁגֵּן, patšegen] in verse 14.

The annihilation was set for exactly eleven months later (verse 13).

This addition in the Greek Septuagint Version is inserted between verses 13 and 14 in the Hebrew Text. It is a Greek composition, lacking any signs of being a translation from a Semitic original.

¹This is a copy of the letter: "The Great King, Artaxerxes, writes the following to the governors of the hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia and to the officials under them:

²"Having become ruler of many nations and master of the whole world (not elated with presumption of authority but always acting reasonably and with kindness), I have determined to settle the lives of my subjects in lasting tranquility and, in order to make my kingdom peaceable and open to travel throughout all its extent, to restore the peace desired by all people.

³"When I asked my counselors how this might be accomplished, Haman—who excels among us in sound judgment, and is distinguished for his unchanging goodwill and steadfast fidelity, and has attained the second place in the kingdom—⁴pointed out to us that among all the nations in the world there is scattered a certain hostile people, who have laws contrary to those of every nation and continually disregard the ordinances of kings, so that the unifying of the kingdom that we honourably intend cannot be brought about.

⁵We understand that this people, and it alone, stands constantly in opposition to every nation, perversely following a strange manner of life and laws, and is ill-disposed to our government, doing all the harm they can so that our kingdom may not attain stability.

⁶"Therefore we have decreed that those indicated to you in the letters written by Haman, who is in charge of affairs and is our second father, shall all—wives and children included—be utterly destroyed by the swords of their enemies, without pity or restraint, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, of this present year, ⁷so that those who have long been hostile and remain so may in a single day go down in violence to Hades, and leave our government completely secure and untroubled hereafter."

