

The Lot Fell on the Twelfth Month, the Month of Adar, in the Presence of Haman

3: 7-9

DIG: What is the *pur*? What was the significance of the eleven-month delay secured by lot (compare verses 7 and 12)? Was this God's providence or coincidence? If Haman the Agagite is a descendent of king Agag (First Samuel 15) and the hated Amalekites, what would that mean for the Israelites? How did King Saul's failure to extinguish all the Amalekites come back, five hundred years later, to haunt Isra'el?

REFLECT: How do believers seek God's direction today? King David said: Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4). So sometimes, do you think that we have a choice which direction we can go? Why or why not? James tells us: If any of you lacks wisdom you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you (James 1:5). Can ADONAI use our wrong decisions for our benefit and His glory? Has that happened in your life? How did you change? How was He glorified as a result?

A little more than four years had gone by since Esther had become queen in 478 BC. It was more than a century after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, some sixty-four years after the first return with Zerubbabel, and sixteen years before Ezra's return to Jerusalem. Mordecai and Esther were from Jewish families that had stayed in Mesopotamia even after the first return from captivity.⁴²

The author included a seemingly obscure part of the account by recording that Haman used a *pur* for the lot, to decide when he should launch his attack. The original readers of Esther would have understood that ADONAI was working to protect His people even in the timing of events. As things worked out, the Jews had almost a year in which to prepare themselves for the conflict with their enemies.

To determine the favorable time for the attack on the Jews, Haman consulted the *pur*, or the plural that is *purim*, the lot. In the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, on the first month, the month of Nisan, the *pur* (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month of the massacre (3:7a). It was believed that in the first month of the year lots were cast to choose opportune days for important events. Archaeologists have discovered *purim*, which were clay cubes with cuneiform characters or dots that looked virtually the same as modern dice. Casting the lot literally meant *throwing*

the dice. Today, dice are used for gambling or board games, but during the time that **Esther** was written they were used for divination. It was their way of asking the gods for answers to questions about the future.

Purim is a Hebrew pluralized form of an Akkadian word that was also used by the Babylonians later on to refer to these cube-shaped objects of divination. This word is found only in the book of **Esther** and nowhere else in the TaNaKh, and when the author first uses it, he also gives his readers the equivalent Hebrew word used to refer to the cube, the *goral*, with the NIV translates as **lot (9:24)**.⁴³ The *goral* was worn by the high priest (see my commentary on **Exodus Ga - Fashion a Breastpiece for Making Decisions**) and used to inquire of the LORD (see my commentary on **Exodus Gb - The Urim and Thummim: The Means of Making Decisions**).

Haman cast the purim and the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar (3:7b). **Haman** would have to wait eleven months for the most favorable day, but **he** immediately spread the word of **the Israelites** future execution (**3:12-15**). It ordered the citizens of **Persia** to kill their **Jewish** neighbors; the young and the old, women and children, exactly eleven months later.⁴⁴ The most important thing to **him** was to choose the "luckiest" day, even if **he** had to wait almost a year to carry out **his** wicked plan. But **he** didn't understand that the hand of God controlled even **his** dice so that **the Jews** would have eleven months to prepare for their defense. **The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD (Proverbs 16:33)**. **Providence!**

Another detail that has been considered improbable by some is that Haman would cast lots to determine the date for the execution of the Jews eleven months in advance. Many people in the ancient near East **cast**, or throw **lots** to receive guidance from the gods. It represented a view toward life that was part of the ancient world. They thought that fate was predetermined, and that humans could only succeed if they cooperated with destiny. They believed that the signs and omens in the stars, nature, and elsewhere revealed fate to the knowledgeable, and everything was preordained according to lucky days. As a result, in **Haman's** worldview it was vital to find the most opportune day to carry out **his** scheme and then stick to it.

Yet the **casting of lots** had a sense of irony to it. The original Jewish readers of the story would have already known how it ended. They were, after all, still alive! When **Esther** was read, the readers quickly realized that the **casting** of the *purim* would not mean the destruction of **the Israelites**; ironically it meant that those who **cast the lots** had suffered the fate intended for **them**.

True to form, **Ahasuerus'** carelessness took precious little persuading to give **Haman** the freedom to exterminate **a certain people he** portrayed as a threat to **his** kingdom. **The king** let Memucan advise **him** on how **he** should deal with Vashti (1:16-22), and then the magi suggested how **he** should choose the next queen (2:1-4). Here, **Haman** very cleverly conceals **his** own evil intentions by making it seem like what **he** proposed was in **the king's** best interest. **Then**, in a deceptive way, **Haman** said to King **Ahasuerus**, "There are certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate" (3:8a). Which implies that **they** had retained **their** identity. **Haman** carefully avoids mentioning that those **people** were **Jews**, and **Ahasuerus** was so uninterested that **he** didn't even ask who **they** were.

"Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them" (3:8b). **Haman's** presentation was a mixture of truth (dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom), half-truth (their customs are different from those of all other people) and lies (they do not obey the king's laws), in that order. While it was true that **the Jews** had **their** own laws, it was false to accuse **them** of disobeying the laws of **Persia**. **In fact, in the rabbis taught that, "The law of the country in which you live is binding."**

Now for the first time we learn that **Haman** was a wealthy man. **He** appealed to **Ahasuerus'** need to refill **the treasury** drained by **the king's** disastrous war with **Greece**. **Haman** sweetens his request by saying: **If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver** (or about 375 tons or 340 metric tons equivalent to several tens of millions of dollars today) **to the king's administrators for the royal treasury** (3:9). At that time **Persia** used **silver** as its money standard. The word translated **treasury** is a **Persian** word, which shows that the author was well acquainted with the vocabulary of the court at **Susa**. This would foreshadow the betrayal of another **Jew, Yeshua Messiah**, for thirty pieces of **silver** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Kc - Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus**).

The Greek historian Herodotus recorded that the annual income of the **Persian** Empire was about 15,000 talents from taxes. If this figure is correct, **Haman** offered two-thirds of that amount - a huge sum. Even if **he** was planning to steal the property of the Jewish families **he** was going to slaughter, **his** proposition would have been absurd if **he** had not had the money already at **his** disposal.

Most of us like to think that through careful planning we can have some control of our lives. While much of the time life might cooperate with our plans, all of us can remember circumstances beyond our control. Sometimes things might turn out better than we expected, and sometimes things turn out worse, but either way our sense of being in control is at times revealed by life's circumstances to be an illusion.

Whether we like it or not, we often feel caught in circumstances beyond our control. There are many seemingly insignificant events, that when we look back on them, really changed the course of our lives. This chain of events continues to happen every day. We have no idea how one leads to the other. Only ADONAI is outside of time and knows the end from the beginning. The author of **Esther** demonstrates the workings of divine **providence**. He works through a series of "coincidental" events and human decisions, even those based on questionable motives at best or evil intent at worst, to carry out His plan. All of the "chance" events in the book of **Esther**, and in our own lives, are really working toward the end that God has determined ahead of time.

Esther suffered the humiliation of being taken into **the king's** harem to be sexually used. Apparently no one considered what plans **she** might have had for **her** own life, plans perhaps to be a godly wife with a home and family. But **her** plans were changed forever when **the king's** men seized **her** from **her** home. Mordecai suffered the humiliation of being deprived of his recognition after saving the life of **Ahasuerus** after overhearing two of **the king's** officers conspire to assassinate **the king**. To make matters worse, **Haman** was gaining the power to turn against **Mordecai** and **the Jews**. There is a sad irony that when the wicked prosper, God's **people** are seemingly overlooked and unrewarded (**Ps 37** and **73**). When all is said and done, God uses even injustice to fulfill His promises to us. As Joseph made clear to his brothers: **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good (Gen 50:20)**.

The revelation of Jesus Christ was written to encourage believers who, like **the Jews of Persia**, found **their** existence threatened when the government under which **they** lived, threatened to destroy **them**. Believers all over the world experience persecution today. One source estimates that in this century alone, an average of 300,000 believers have been martyred each year. The prayer of the earliest believers, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness," must continue to be the prayer of believers today, offered up with a confidence in the LORD's powerful **providence**.

The book of **Revelation** shows that despite the overwhelming power the world empires now have, Yeshua Messiah will ultimately prevail (see my commentary on **Revelation Ex - The Eight Stage Campaign of Armageddon**). Believers are to live faithfully for that day, even under the threat of persecution and death. After describing the beast and his satanic power, **John** acknowledges that those saved during the Great Tribulation will suffer and die when the government of the antichrist turns against them. However, because **Jesus** arose never to die again, they will be safe in Christ. **Whoever has ears, let them hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the holy ones** (see my commentary on **Revelation Dn - All Inhabitants of the Earth will Worship the Beast**).

God intends to save and protect His **people** in Messiah (**Romans 8:28**), and ultimately He plans to destroy those who remain steadfast in their opposition to Him. There is no power, no enemy, that can defeat His **elect** (**Second Timothy 2:10**). We, too, like David in **Psalm 16 CJV**, can praise ADONAI because He has made our lot secure in Yeshua.

Protect me, God,
for You are my refuge.
I said to ADONAI, "You are my Lord;
I have nothing good outside of You."
The holy people in the Land are the ones
who are worthy of honor; all my pleasure is in them.

Those who run after another god
multiply their sorrows;
to such gods I will not offer
drink offerings of blood
or take the names on my lips.

ADONAI, my assigned portion, my cup;
You safeguard my share.
Pleasant places were measured out for me;
I am content with my heritage.

I bless ADONAI, my counselor;
at night my inmost being sustains me.
I always set ADONAI before me;
with Him at my right hand, I can never be moved;

so my heart is glad, my glory rejoices,
and my body too rests in safety;
for You will not abandon me to Sheol,
You will not let Your faithful one see the Abyss.
You make me know the path of life;
in Your presence is unbounded joy,
in Your right hand eternal delight.