

Esther 3:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.

Analysis

The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed. The messengers departed swiftly, spreading the genocidal decree. The final sentence captures moral contrast: "the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed." While the architects of genocide celebrated with wine, the city was "perplexed" (navochah, נְבוֹכָה)—confused, troubled, distressed. Even the pagan population recognized something deeply wrong. The casual celebration by perpetrators while innocent people faced destruction demonstrates moral callousness. Yet this very indifference would contribute to their downfall—they didn't anticipate the consequences of their decree. God's providence uses even the arrogance and complacency of the wicked to prepare their judgment.

Historical Context

The phrase "sat down to drink" parallels 1:10 where the king's drunkenness led to poor judgment with Vashti. Here again, wine accompanies moral blindness. The city's perplexity may reflect:

1. horror at the injustice
2. fear of civil unrest

3. concern about economic disruption from losing the Jewish community
4. simple confusion about why this decree was necessary.

Shushan had substantial Jewish population, including palace officials like Mordecai. The city's distress suggests the Jews were generally well-regarded, making the decree surprising and troubling to neighbors. This detail demonstrates that evil often disturbs even those not directly threatened, and that genocidal policies rarely enjoy universal popular support even in authoritarian regimes.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does the contrast between celebratory perpetrators and perplexed citizens illustrate the moral gap between those who cause suffering and those who witness it?
2. What does the city's perplexity teach about how even pagan populations often recognize injustice when confronted with it?

Interlinear Text

וְהָיָה יָמָם	וַיֵּצֵא וְ	דְּחוּפִים	בְּדָבָר	וְהָמָלֵךְ	וְהַדֵּבָר	
The posts	went out	being hastened	commandment	And the king	and the decree	
H7323	H3318	H1765	H1697	H4428	H1881	
וְנָתַן הָ	שׁוּשָׁן	הַבֵּיחַ הָ	וְהָמָלֵךְ	וְהָמָן	יָשָׁב וְ	לִשְׁתּוֹת
was given	Shushan	the palace	And the king	and Haman	sat down	to drink
H5414	H7800	H1002	H4428	H2001	H3427	H8354
וְהָיָה יָר	שׁוּשָׁן	נִבְּוֹכָה:				
but the city	Shushan	was perplexed				
H5892	H7800	H943				

Additional Cross-References

Esther 8:15 (Kingdom): And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

John 16:20 (Parallel theme): Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

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