



Chosen by God

The Jewish Roots of Christianity

Purim

When I read accounts of Purim celebrations, it brings to my mind a biblical version of the American Mardi Gras extravaganza with the book of Esther publically read as part of the celebration. Mock reenactments, costumes, carnivals, excessive drinking, and general frivolity are elements of the observance of Purim uncharacteristic in the other Jewish festivals.

Purim is not one of the “Feasts of the Lord” and does not originate in the Torah. It is, however, legitimately prescribed in the book of Esther, and as such has been observed by faithful Jews since that time. As we read the book of Esther, we soon see that the role of comedy in the observance of Purim is very fitting. From the burlesque and bawdy beginning, on through a series of comical misunderstandings the story of Esther reads like a humorous short story. It seems meant for fun, and perhaps it is....but there is also much deeper message beneath the fun and laughter it invokes.

The story of Esther, and the celebration of it at Purim, celebrates at its core the triumph of good over evil, with cheering at the mention of Mordecai’s name and booing and hissing at the mention of Haman. It commemorates God’s protection of His people (here the nation of Israel) through otherwise improbable events, and the ultimate victory of God over the schemes of Satan as described in other books like Daniel and Revelation. It acknowledges God’s use of ordinary people willing to be obedient and faithful within the circumstances God has set them. And, it does this without a single mention of God’s name. Fasting is mentioned, and though we make the assumption that it is accompanied by prayer, that activity is never actually named.

Does this in itself have a message for us as we follow the commission to preach the gospel?

Though Purim is not specifically mentioned in the New Testament, it is thought by scholars that the feast Jesus attended in John 5:1 was Purim, followed later by His attendance of Passover in John 6:4. If Jesus thought Purim a feast worth observing, was it only because He was of the Jewish race, as an American would observe Independence Day, or was it for a more encompassing reason?

Should we treat Purim in the same way the community of Essenes (a Jewish sect that was ultra ‘conservative’ in their faith) at Qumran seem to have treated the book of Esther, based on the fact that it was the only book of the Old Testament not found among the Dead Sea scrolls? Or, should we hold to a Christian observance of Purim, with a celebration of God’s protection of the nation that brought us the Messiah, perhaps taking the opportunity to fast and pray for the Jewish nation on behalf of God’s future plans for them as well?

INSIDE:

A Bit of History	2
Divine Providence	2
Puzzle	3
Haman	3
Purim Observed	4
Purim and Yom Kippur	4
Answers and Sources	5

A Bit of History

We don't know a whole lot about the ancient Persians, but we do know that they, in alliance with the Medes, entered the Mesopotamian region from the north around 1,000 BC. The Persians ultimately became the dominant power in the alliance with the rise of King Cyrus in the mid 500s BC. Persian territory expanded greatly, overtaking even the once powerful Babylonian empire. Cyrus was a benevolent ruler, allowing the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Cyrus was succeeded by his son Cambyses, who was succeeded by Darius.

According to Ezra 4:10, and Neh. 2:7, what did King Darius do that was beneficial to the Israelites?

Darius overreached when he attempted to take on mainland Greece and was routed there. After the death of Darius in 486 BC, the throne passed to his son, the King Xerxes (also called Ahasuerus) the unpredictable and self-indulgent ruler we find in the account of Esther. Xerxes led a second invasion of Greece with what was possibly the largest army in ancient history. The Persian forces were routed and driven out of Greece in 479 BC. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the Persians believed that being drunk put them in closer touch with the spiritual world, making them better able to deliberate matters of state. So possibly the opening scene of Esther was actually a lengthy war council in the conflict with Greece.

In Esther 1:2 we are told that the story takes place in Susa, located in Elam (present day Southwestern Iran).

What do we know about Susa from Daniel 8:2? _____

What other biblical character was from this same city according to Neh. 1:1? _____

Divine Providence

The name Purim is derived from the word *pur*, found in Akkadian texts meaning "lot". Lots were cast to determine when the Jews were to be annihilated, by "chance" a time 11 months later. It is interesting that the edict was sent out on the 13th day of the first month—the eve of Passover. Thus Purim became the name for the celebration of the deliverance of the Jews.

Have you ever used a similar technique to make a decision? If so, what was the outcome? _____

What does Prov. 16:33 say about the casting of lots? _____

Throughout the story of Esther, we see the Sovereign hand of God in action. What are some of the ways that divine providence is evident in this story? _____

What was Mordecai confident of in Esther 4:14? _____

Puzzle Page—Purim

IN THE PUZZLE BELOW, FIND THE WORDS ASSOCIATED WITH THE JEWISH FESTIVAL OF PURIM.

I	D	I	Z	G	W	B	H	G	P	X	O	S	M	X	N	N
U	P	I	C	S	C	A	R	N	I	V	A	L	U	N	Q	O
L	V	E	D	H	I	B	O	O	I	N	G	D	M	S	H	I
G	Y	O	R	Y	A	G	Y	J	Y	H	R	O	Q	L	A	S
E	X	C	E	S	S	M	N	Y	W	Q	U	Z	C	N	N	E
K	F	O	B	R	I	B	A	E	J	Y	E	U	Q	G	L	H
E	S	T	H	E	R	A	A	N	T	B	H	U	I	R	N	M
G	W	T	I	B	Y	O	H	Y	T	Q	L	E	K	U	Q	X
I	C	E	L	E	B	R	A	T	I	O	N	E	J	O	V	U
F	A	S	T	I	N	G	S	I	M	O	R	D	E	C	A	I
X	E	R	X	E	S	L	U	C	T	U	P	U	R	I	M	E
S	Y	W	Y	G	E	J	E	J	I	X	H	E	D	I	C	T
Z	I	S	W	D	E	C	R	E	E	R	E	R	L	A	I	U
D	P	S	L	D	E	T	U	P	A	R	T	Y	L	O	J	Z
H	I	S	S	I	N	G	S	J	T	A	V	A	S	H	T	I
Q	B	I	Z	X	B	U	A	E	X	U	P	A	O	K	T	S
Y	H	W	Z	W	R	S	D	R	I	N	K	I	N	G	X	P

Haman

Haman was allowed a large amount of control in his world, and Haman took a great deal of pride in that, demanding that the people bow to him. Ultimately, however, he is replaced by the godly Mordecai who was given the king's signet ring and with it the power and authority of his name. There is ample parallel between Haman and Mordecai and the antichrist and Christ. Haman also fits as a parallel to satan himself is considered to be embodied in those like Hitler who sought to destroy the Jews.

How does Haman fit the description of satan in John 10:10? _____

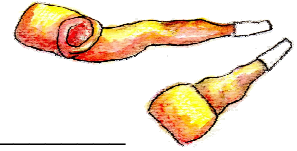
In Heb. 2:14? _____

In Dan. 7:8? _____

In 2 Thess. 2:3-8? _____

How does Mordecai prefigure Christ in clothing, horse riding, crown, response in Susa....? _____

Purim Observed



In Esther 8:15-17, what were the elements of celebration in Susa? _____

Esther 9:18-32 prescribes how Purim was to be observed.

When? _____

Why? _____

How? _____

Who? _____

Though Purim is considered a minor holiday, there are still a number of elements observed and celebrated. The primary requirement of Purim is to recite these three blessings before the reading of the book of Esther during the morning and evening synagogue services.

1. “Blessed art Thou, LORD our God, Master of the universe, who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding the reading of the Megillah. Amen”
2. “Blessed art Thou, LORD our God, Master of the universe, who performed miracles for our fathers in those days at this time. Amen”
3. “Blessed art Thou, LORD our God, Master of the universe, who has kept us alive and has sustained us, and brought us to this season. Amen”

Other customs include:

- Fun synagogue services with a dramatic presentation of the story of Esther, during which the audience boos at the mention of Haman, and cheers at the name of Mordecai.
- Gifts, usually of foods and pastries
- A festive meal where children dress up in elaborate masks and costumes and much festivity and fun.
- Giving Tzedakah (charity) to the poor as a way of thanking God for the gift of deliverance.



Purim and Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement)

According to Jewish sages, any day that is marked by a special deliverance of the Lord can be called a purim. Thus there are little mini local purims celebrated around the world.

What did God promise the Jewish people in Jer. 31:35-37? _____

What does the story behind Purim tell us about God’s promises? _____

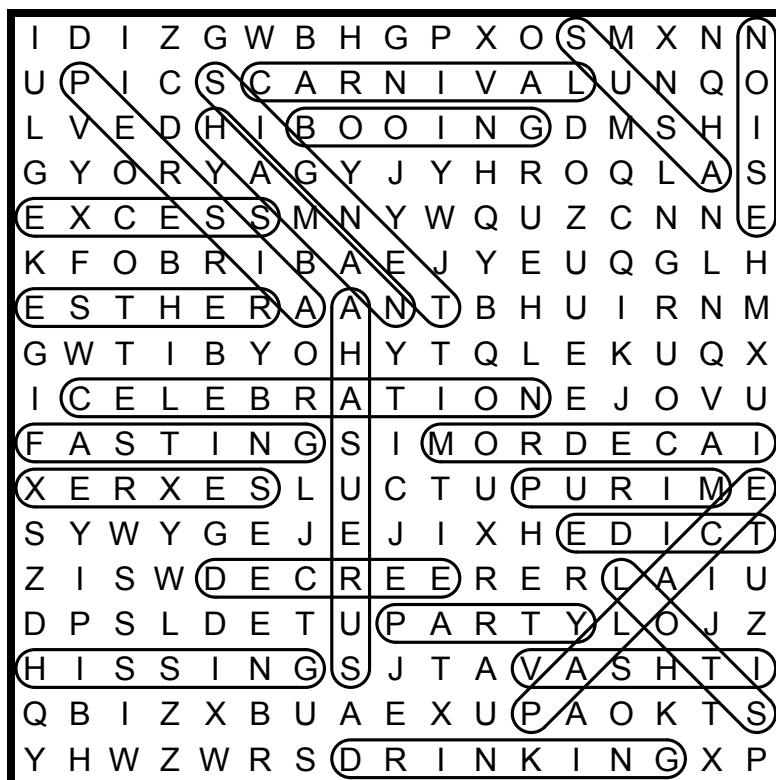
Yom Kippur is also known as Yom Kippurim, or, a day like Purim because it too celebrates God’s deliverance to sinful people. The Old Testament picture of Purim, like the other feasts, points to the sacrifice of Yeshua (Jesus) on the cross as the greatest Purim of all — giving us eternal deliverance from our enemies. And the lesson of Purim does not stop there! Satan’s attempts to destroy God’s people will eventually come down on his head, as surely as it did on Haman’s. When Christ comes again, God’s people will be delivered from the evil one and it will be the ultimate Purim! (See Rev. 19:11-16)

How does 1 Peter 1:8-9 describe a Christian version of “purim”? _____

Puzzle Answers

The Gallows

When we think of being “hung” an image from an old western comes to mind complete with noose around the neck. This is not what the ‘hung upon a tree’ means in the book of Esther however. It is much more likely that they followed the custom of the time and area of impaling the enemy on a pole where they would be a visible example to all. Haman intended that fate for Mordecai, but instead met that end himself—as did his ten sons. The bodies were typically left for some time and the gruesome and decomposing bodies would have provided a horrific sight for all.



Sources:

Booker, Richard. “Celebrating Jesus in the Biblical Feasts”. Destiny Image Publishers; Shippensburg, PA: 2009. Print. 155-170

Robinson, George. “Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals.” Pocket Books; New York: 2000. Print. 116-118

Archaeological Study Bible. Zondervan; Grand Rapids, MI: 2005. Print. 714-731.

Interesting sites to check out:

<http://www.formerthings.com/shushanpalace.htm>

<http://www.mcadams.posc.mu.edu/txt/ah/Persia/Susa.html>

http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Winter_Holidays/Purim/purim.html



Down Victory Road
www.downvictoryrd.com