

PURIM

Objectives:

- To identify some of the main components of Purim.
- To gain an understanding of how this feast was observed during the time of Christ.
- To gain an understanding of how this feast applies to believers today.
- To explore some of the possible prophetic fulfillments of this feast.

(approach)

**Zola Levitt video "The Seven Feasts of Israel," Vol. 2, section on Hanukkah/Purim
portion on noisemakers at mention of Haman's name**

The feast of Purim is by far the merriest feast on the Hebrew calendar. Today we will study its' origins and discover why the children in this video clip make so much noise in synagogue.

I. HISTORY OF THE FEAST OF PURIM

A. The Feast of Purim is a national feast, not a sacred feast. It is a "feast of the people," and not one of the "feasts of the Lord."

1. You will not find a mention of Purim in Lev. 23. Its' observance was not mandated by God at Mt. Sinai.
2. According to Esther 9, Mordecai instituted the observance of Purim as a memorial to God's deliverance of His people from the hands of the Persians.
3. "But despite this fact, Purim is a biblical feast and the best known Jewish holiday added since the time of Moses."¹

B. The Feast of Purim is the last feast on the Hebrew calendar. It occurs on the 14th day of the twelfth month (Adar).

1. It is a late winter feast that occurs in February or March on our calendar.
2. It is observed exactly one month before Passover.
3. In Jerusalem it is observed on Adar 15 "in commemoration of the Jews in the ancient Persian capital of Shushan who did not rest from fighting their enemies until the following day (Est. 9:18). Adar 15 is therefore known as Shushan Purim."²

¹ Howard, p. 178.

² Ibid.

C. **"Purim" comes from the word "pur" which means "lots,"** thus the feast is also known as the "Feast of Lots."

1. According to Esther 9:24-26, the Jews in Persia decided to call this holiday "Purim" because Haman had cast lots to decide which day they were to be destroyed.
2. One writer suggests that the word "pur" is actually a Persian word and not a Hebrew word. Esther 9:24 is the basis for this suggestion. If this is correct, the feast of Purim is the only Hebrew festival that does not have a Hebrew name.³

D. **The Feast of Purim is the most joyous of all the Hebrew holidays.**

1. It has been compared to New Orleans' Mardi Gras.
2. It is a rowdy, festive celebration of God's deliverance.
3. "The rabbis of the Talmud taught that one should get so caught up (and some even encouraged drinking) in the joy of Purim that he is no longer able to tell the difference between 'cursed be Haman' and 'blesed be Mordecai.'"⁴

E. **The origins of Purim can be found in the book of Esther.**

1. **Identification of the setting:** Shushan, the capital of Persia, which was located just north of the Persian Gulf--modern-day Iran. "The mighty Persian Empire was at the zenith of its power and glory with its 127 provinces stretching from 'India to Ethiopia' (Est. 1:1)."⁵
2. **Insubordination of the Queen** (Esther 1): During a drunken state the King ordered his queen to dance before his court. She refused in order to preserve her reputation. "Because of strict Persian law, which forbade women to be seen unveiled by strangers (much like Islamic law today), she refused his command [and]. . . created a national crisis."⁶ As a result, she was deposed.
3. **Inauguration of a new queen** (Esther 2:1-18): As a result of a beauty contest, Esther, the niece of Mordecai, was installed as the new queen.
4. **Intrigue in the king's court** (Esther 2:19-23): During the course of his official duties in the palace, Mordecai overheard a plot to assassinate the king. He reported the plot and as a result, his heroic deeds are recorded in the chronicles of Persia.
5. **Intentions for Evil** (Esther 3): Haman, a prince who was promoted to prime minister planned to destroy the Jews because of Mordecai's refusal to bow to him. He cast lots to gain direction from the Persian gods as to what date would be best for destroying the Jews. The king agreed to Haman's plan and an irrevokable law was passed that decreed the destruction of the Jews.

³ Scarlata, p. 418.

⁴ Howard, p. 188.

⁵ Ibid, p. 179.

⁶ Ibid, p. 180.

6. **Intercession by Esther** (Esther 4 & 5): When Mordecai heard of the plan for destruction, he tore his clothes in repentance and appealed to Esther. He told her, ***"If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place. . . who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Est. 4:14)*** Esther instructs the people to gather and pray and fast for three days.
7. **Insomnia for the King** (Esther 6): Due to a "divinely appointed" insomnia, the king called for the royal chronicles to be read. He discovered that Mordecai had not been rewarded for his exposure of the assassination plot. The king instructed Haman to honor Mordecai for his heroism.
8. **Incrimination of the perpetrator** (Esther 7): At the second of two banquets Esther held for the King and Haman, she revealed Haman's evil plan and her own Jewishness. The King ordered Haman hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.
9. **Initiation of new decrees** (Esther 8:1-9:16): The laws of the Medo-Persian government could not be repealed so a new law had to be passed that would allow the Jews to defend themselves. When Adar 13 arrived, the Jews killed 75,000 people in the provinces, 800 in the city of Shushan, and the 10 sons of Haman.
10. **Institution of Purim** (Esther 9:17-32): Mordecai wrote letters to all the Jews instructing them to celebrate God's mighty deliverance each year and named this celebration Purim.⁷

II. OBSERVANCE OF THE FEAST OF PURIM

A. Purim is a time of remembrance of God's deliverance.

1. The day before Purim, Adar 13, is known as the fast of Esther. It commemorates the three-day fast Esther and the Jewish people observed before Esther went into the king.
 - a. The actual fast would have been kept near Passover, since the plot of destruction was discovered approximately 11 months before the designated day of destruction.
 - b. This is not a strictly commanded fast so very few actually keep it.
2. "The principal ceremony of Purim is the reading of the Book of Esther in the synagogue."⁸ The Book of Esther is known as the 'megillah' (Hebrew for "scroll").
 - a. There are five books of the Hebrew Bible which are known as scrolls: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther.

⁷ Adapted from Howard, pp. 180-184.

⁸ Ibid, p. 186.

- b. Each of these "scrolls" are read during a particular feast: Song of Solomon: Passover; Ruth: Pentecost; Lamentations: 9th of Av (day of mourning on Hebrew calendar); Ecclesiastes: Tabernacles; and Esther: Purim.
- c. During the reading of the scroll, each time Haman's name is mentioned noisemakers, called groggers, are sounded, feet are stomped, hands are clapped, to drown out the sound of his name. When Mordecai's name is mentioned, everyone cheers.



3. "It is customary to pass a plate in the synagogue in remembrance of the ancient injunction for each Israelite male to donate one-half shekel annually toward the maintenance of the Temple."⁹



B. Purim is a time of giving gifts.

1. Mordecai instructed the Jews to observe Purim by giving gifts to one another and to the poor. (Esther 9:22)
2. It is customary to send gifts of food, particularly some of the delicacies of this holiday, to friends. This is an outward expression of the joy of this holiday.
3. Purim is also a time to remember the poor and to donate to at least two needy individuals so they can also enjoy the holiday.

C. Purim is a time of special foods. According to Esther 9:17 this holiday was to be a "day of feasting."

⁹ Howard, p. 186.

1. Hamantashen is the most popular food for Purim. It is a triangular pastry with a poppy seed or prune filling. The shape of the hamantashen is said to represent Haman's three-cornered hat.



2. Kreplach is another popular dish for Purim. It is a dumpling, shaped in triangular form, filled with chopped meat and onion, served in a soup.

3. The festive meal, held late in the afternoon of Purim is called the Seudah. It is usually celebrated with family and friends.

D. Purim is a time of gladness and joy.

1. "As part of the Purim joy, the holiday is often celebrated with masquerades, costumes, and carnivals."¹⁰

2. "Purim is one of the few synagogue holy days when normal decorum and seriousness are waived in order to enter into unrestrained joy."¹¹



III. LESSONS FROM THE FEAST OF PURIM

A. **God is sovereign and is involved in the affairs of men**, even when it seems He is absent.

1. Although God's name is not mentioned in the book of Esther, we can see His hand, behind the scenes, divinely orchestrating deliverance for His people.

¹⁰ Howard, p. 188.

¹¹ Kasdan, p. 123.

2. He delivered the Jews from the hand of Haman on Nisan 17, the same day He delivered them from Egypt and the day He delivered us from sin by the resurrection power of Jesus.

B. God is faithful to fulfill His promises. Purim illustrates in a simple, yet profound way, God's faithfulness to His covenant people.

1. Zech. 2:8 indicates that God considers Israel to be the apple of His eye.
2. Gen. 12:2-3 records God's promise to make of Abraham a great nation. It also records God's promise to deal with nations as they have dealt with His covenant people. He says, **"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."**
3. "Anytime His people are threatened with destruction, God will intervene because His character is at stake."¹²

C. God uses people to accomplish His plan and purposes.

1. "People have a responsibility to act if the will of God is to be carried out."¹³
2. When Haman's plot was discovered there was a call to prayer and fasting first and foremost.
3. Secondly, there was a call to action for Queen Esther. Mordecai exhorted Esther: **"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)**
4. Esther was married to a king and enjoyed all of the perks that went with being a member of the royal family of this great empire. But her marriage was a mixed one--she was unequally yoked with a man who did not serve her God. She was surrounded by "festivities, food and fun but none of it was kosher."¹⁴
5. And yet her story "reminds us that we are always in His sight and that He is guiding us by His invisible hand, placing us where He wants-for His glory. . ."¹⁵

D. God despises anti-Semitism and never fails to deal with it.

1. "The book of Esther has been referred to as 'a monument in the history of anti-Semitism.'"¹⁶

¹² Kasdan, p. 126.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Glaser

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Scarlata, p. 417.

2. History is strewn with the accounts of those who have plotted, schemed, and counseled together to destroy God's people. "Their treachery has only brought about their own demise. Their only lasting achievement has been an occasion for a new holiday on the Hebrew calendar."¹⁷

- a. Pharoah -- Passover
- b. Antiochus Epiphanes -- Hanukkah
- c. Haman -- Purim
- d. Hitler -- nation of Israel was reborn in one day



Photo from Holocaust Museum in Israel

3. Esther and Mordecai were forced to hide their Jewishness to avoid Persian anti-Semitism. Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah, however her given Persian name was derived from the pagan goddess, Ishtar. Mordecai's name was derived from the Babylonian god, Marduk.

E. God will once more deliver His people.

1. The prophet Daniel saw four Gentile powers who would exercise dominion over Israel. "Each successive Gentile empire would be more hostile and anti-Semitic than the previous one. The Babylonian, Persian, and Greek empires oppressed Israel, but none will compare to the vicious hatred of the coming fourth and final empire, the revived Roman Empire under the leadership of the Antichrist."¹⁸

¹⁷ Howard, p. 177.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 189.

2. "Purim is far more than just the defeat of God's enemies; it is the deliverance of God's people."¹⁹
3. The final deliverance of God's people will not be found in people but through the Person of the Lamb of God. "God has often delivered Israel in the past, but her full deliverance awaits the coming of the Deliverer (Rom. 11:26). For only when the Messiah (the rightful Heir to David's throne) comes will the yoke of Gentile oppression be forever removed from Israel's neck."²⁰
4. The truth of God's coming deliverance is unknowingly proclaimed each Purim season by a chorus that is taken from Isaiah 8:10 ***"Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us."***
5. Immanuel is the Hebrew translation for "God with us." Jesus, the Messiah is Immanuel. "He will destroy Israel's greatest Haman, the Antichrist. He will deliver Israel from destruction. He will bind up the wounds of His people. It is He and He alone who delivers Israel.

(conclusion)

Purim is a national holiday for the nation of Israel but it is a holiday for us as well. Though we are not Jewish by birth, we are part of Abraham's seed and that is reason enough to celebrate God's deliverance of our common ancestors. But a far more relevant reason for us to celebrate Purim with great joy is that we have experienced God's final deliverance already! We have experienced deliverance from eternal death through Jesus, our Messiah. We have experienced forgiveness of sin through His shed blood. What many Jewish people around the world are still waiting for, we have already experienced and that is reason for great joy.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 190.



View from Ar Megiddo

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