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MINISTRIES

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The Mo’edim Series - Purim

Purim is a biblical holiday celebrating the deliverance of the Jewish people within the ancient Medo-Persian empire. The Book of Esther records this event, and that’s where we find the institution of Purim. What does this holiday teach us? Should believers in Yeshua celebrate Purim? What are some of the common traditions associated with Purim? This teaching will answer these questions and more.

First, we should mention that Purim is technically not a mo’ed, that is, one of YHWH’s appointed times. The mo’edim are found in the Torah. For instance, Leviticus 23 provides a list of YHWH’s appointed times. Purim was instituted long after the Torah was given through Moses.

Similar to Hanukkah, Purim is not a commanded holiday. For this and other reasons, some choose not to observe Purim while others find nothing wrong with celebrating it. We will discuss those different perspectives later in the teaching.

The name "Purim" literally means “lots” as in “by chance.” Purim remembers and celebrates the saving of the Jewish people from Haman, who was planning to kill all the Jews. This event is recorded in the book of Esther

Esther 9:24-26

For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them. But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur. Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had happened to them,

Before we get into Purim itself, let’s talk about some of the history and events that led to the holiday even being created.

THE HISTORY OF PURIM

In 2 Kings 25:1-17, we see that Babylon conquered the Southern Kingdom of Israel, that is, the House of Judah. God used Babylon as the rod of his wrath to punish the Jews for their apostasy.

After conquering Jerusalem, King Nebuchadnezzar exiled the Jews to the banks of the Euphrates River.

Near the end of the exile, the Medo-Persian Empire, led by King Cyrus and King Darius I, attacked and conquered Babylon. After about a year where Darius was emperor, King Cyrus ascended to the throne. It was during his reign that King Cyrus decreed the Jews should be free to return to Judah to rebuild YHWH's temple.

Many of the Jews left for Judah, which ended the prophesied 70 years of exile. However, many Jews chose to stay, and those are the ones in the story of Esther.

After Cyrus died, Ahasuerus became emperor. Ahasuerus would go on to remove his rebellious wife and marry a young Hebrew woman named Esther, making her the queen over the entire Medo-Persian Empire. (Esther chapters 1-2)

If you haven't read the book of Esther, now would be a good time to pause this teaching and read it. It's not long, only 10 short chapters. We'll review some of the highlights and main points as we go along, but to really get into the details and see the Father working all of the way through, you'll want to read it for yourself.

Some highlights from chapters 1 and 2 are:

- The removal of Vashti as Queen.
- We learn some of Esther's history like how she is the daughter of Mordecai's uncle, but her parents are dead and she is being raised by her cousin, Mordecai, a Benjamite.
- Esther is highly favored over all other women and chosen to be crowned Queen over the Medo-Persian Empire
- Mordecai discovers a plot to kill the King; he tells Esther who informs the King, thereby thwarting the plot.

Chapter 3 is where the story of Esther starts to take off as an evil man is given prominence in the kingdom and sets out to destroy God's people.

In chapter 3 we see:

- A man named Haman promoted to be over all the officials who were with him.
- Mordecai defying the order to bow to Haman at the gate which angers Haman.
- In his anger, Haman decides to destroy all Jews throughout the Kingdom.
- Haman telling the King that there are a people dispersed throughout the land that have their own laws and do not keep the King's law, so it is not to the King's profit to keep them. With this argument he convinces the King that they (meaning the Jews) should be killed, no matter the age nor gender.
- The date is set for the demise of all of the Jews in the land, the 13th of Adar (the 12th month).

It's important to note that in this time, when a king issued a decree, it could not simply be rescinded. The Jews truly appeared to have no hope.

But it's in chapter 4 that the faith of both Mordecai and Esther is put on display and we see how

courageous the young queen is. After Mordecai hears of Haman's vow to kill all of the Jews from chapter 3, he reports these plans to Esther and commands her to go to the King to beg and plead on behalf of her people. That sounds simple enough, right? She's the queen, she should just go talk to her husband; but things aren't so easy.

There is a law in place that states anyone, and we mean anyone, who comes before the king without being summoned by him, is to be put to death. The only saving grace is that the king may extend his golden scepter and allow the person to live. So we see that if Esther does what Mordecai is asking of her, she is facing almost certain death.

Esther responds to Mordecai explaining all of this and then comes to a decision; she'll do what's being asked of her, but first she exercises her faith and calls for a 3 day fast by all the Jews Mordecai can gather, her young women, and even herself before she goes before the king.

It's in chapters 5 through 9 that the salvation of the Jews is provided for. Esther does find favor when she goes before the king and outsmarts Haman. Not only does Haman's plan fail, but he finds himself executed at the king's command on a set of gallows he had constructed to hang Mordecai on.

As a quick side note in chapter 6, we see how the Father actually elevates and honors Mordecai, his faithful servant, before all of the kingdom, and at Haman's expense. In the end of this section, Mordecai is raised to the lofty position once held by Haman and even receives Haman's own home! How great it is to serve our righteous and just Creator.

But you might be wondering about the order to kill all of the Jews, if it could not be stopped by the King, how were the Jews saved? The King allowed Mordecai to send out another order that permitted the Jews to defend themselves and even plunder those who sought to destroy them. When the fateful day arrives, the Jews successfully defend themselves and wipe out their enemies. They were even given a second day to do so, the 14th of Adar. But there's still a little more to the story, but we will get to that shortly.

As you can see and the name of the book implies, Esther is the central instrument used by YHWH to save his people from Haman. Not once, but twice Esther risks her life by going before the king. It is through Esther's faith and courage that the Father saves his people.

THE INSTITUTION OF PURIM

Following the Jews victory, the days of Purim were decreed.

Esther 9:20-22

“And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.”

The month of Adar is the Babylonian name for the twelfth month on the Hebraic calendar and the holiday takes place over two days, the 14th and 15th of the month. It's worth noting that by Jewish

tradition in years when a thirteenth month is added to the calendar, Purim is celebrated during this 13th month instead of the twelfth.

CRITICISMS OF PURIM

On occasion, some challenge the idea of celebrating Purim.

The two main challenges are:

- It is not a feast appointed by YHWH
- YHWH is not mentioned in Esther

To state that Purim is not a feast of YHWH is a valid point. The appointed times of YHWH are called *mo'edim*, or the appointed times.

However, that is where the validity of the criticism stops. Nothing in the Torah states that men cannot celebrate certain events, such as military victories or obtaining freedom over oppression.

In fact, it appears our messiah may have observed Hanukkah, another “man-made” festival (John 10:22-23). Although to be fair, it is hard to say for certain whether or not he was celebrating the holiday or if the notation in Scripture was simply to provide a timeline for the events that were to follow.

However, since it is not a time appointed by the Father to be remembered, no one should be trying to force anyone to celebrate it nor condemn them for not. While there are many who do not celebrate this festival, many do celebrate it. Celebrating Purim violates no established commandment in the Torah, we cannot rebuke nor correct others one way or the other in regard to keeping it.

Keeping Purim does not make a person more or less set apart. What makes us set apart is the keeping of the set apart commandments, nothing more and nothing less. Purim is simply a celebration based on an amazing biblical and historical event.

The other criticism is the book of Esther itself. Maybe you noticed, or maybe you didn't, but YHWH is not mentioned anywhere in the book of Esther. Some take issue with that and question the validity of Esther.

However, we have substantial historical evidence that the book of Esther was treated as valid, even during the time of Yeshua. We have no evidence that the book of Esther is not credible.

In fact, Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, references the threefold canon of his day in his “Against Apion,” which undoubtedly included Esther because he explicitly mentions the reign of Artaxerxes (Ahasuerus). Josephus' canon certainly goes back to a much earlier time.

YHWH's grace and sovereignty is clearly implied throughout the book of Esther from the moment a young Hebrew woman is chosen to be the bride of the king through the salvation of the Jews and elevation of Mordecai. The Father grants favor to Esther and Mordecai again and again as they put their lives on the line to save their people and to honor their God.

TRADITIONS OF PURIM

Purim consists of several traditions. There are traditional blessings that are said. There are traditional foods that are eaten.

One of the more fun traditions, especially when children are involved, is the reading of Esther. When Haman is mentioned, everyone boos, and when Mordechai is read, everyone cheers.

It is a common tradition, even today, to offer gifts and food to the poor during Purim just as Mordecai said to in Esther 9:22.

A traditional meal or feast often occurs on the 14th of the twelfth month. Sometimes people dress in fancy masks and costumes, which symbolize how Esther was “hidden.” We do have some concerns with this tradition. For example, attempts to make costumes resemble common practices of Halloween rather than the typical masks or dressing as Biblical characters found in the book of Esther, should perhaps be understood as a questionable practice. If you employ this tradition, consider giving it some thought on what is being done and why. The stated intent of this day is to remember the Biblical events found in Esther, thus it is reasonable for any traditions associated with this day to mirror that remembrance rather than any other secular holiday.

There also exists a tradition observed by some that includes substantial drinking, so much so that one is to not know the difference between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai.” We would question how such activity would glorify YHWH. If you employ this tradition, we would encourage some thought as to whether it really seems appropriate and Biblically sound.

We hope that this teaching served to offer some of the background and traditions surrounding this holiday. We only provided an abbreviated version of the story, but strongly recommend reading the book of Esther for yourself so that you can see how the Father orchestrates the salvation of his people even before they knew there was a need for it.

Whether or not you choose to observe the traditional celebration of Purim, keep in mind that not everyone will agree with you, and that's okay. The observation of Purim is a manmade tradition; it's no different than celebrating a country's Independence Day. As such, it is not something commanded by our Creator that has to be followed and we shouldn't condemn others whether they choose to celebrate it or not.

We hope that this teaching has blessed you and served to offer some of the background and traditions surrounding this holiday.

And remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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