

CHAPTER ONE

PURIM – BIBLICAL FAMILY FUN

Purim is a peculiar Biblical festival, often neglected and overlooked by the Christian church; it contains abundant truths for all people devoted to the God of Israel - Jew or Gentile. Unlike the other Feasts of the Lord, this celebration is not commanded in the book of Leviticus, chapter 23. Rather, it was a custom mandated by Mordechai, and established by the Jews of the time, that they and their descendants would never fail to celebrate the festival of Purim according to written instructions and at the prescribed time. (Esther 9:27)

For over two thousand years, Jewish people have celebrated Purim on the 14th (and sometimes 15th) day of the Hebrew month of Adar (February/March). This is the time in the yearly cycle of festivals where many Jewish people gather together in synagogues and homes to rejoice – to celebrate God’s deliverance of His people in Persia from the forces of anti-Semitism, as recorded in the book of Esther.

It is a festival that especially invites children and adults alike to have fun and even indulge in a little silliness. The leader reads the entire book of Esther out loud in Hebrew, (called the reading of the Megilla), while the congregation participates by loudly ‘booing’, stomping their feet, and making a terrible noise with

their ‘groggers’ (noisemakers or raashanim) whenever the name of the villain, Haman (Boooooo!!!!!!) is mentioned. This custom originates in the Lord’s word to Moses,

**“I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek
from under heaven”** (Ex. 17:14),

and

**“The Lord will be at war against the Amalekites
from generation to generation.”** (v. 16)

Since Haman, the villain of the book of Esther, descended from the detestable Amalekites, who attacked the fledgling nation of Israel as Moses led them out of Egypt, the Jewish people join in pronouncing God’s judgment upon the very name of Haman. This is a particularly Jewish form of spiritual warfare!

The History of Purim

The story of Purim takes place in the land of Persia (modern day Iran), after the decree had been declared allowing Judah to return from exile to Israel. The account of the return of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity is recorded in the book of Ezra (1-6). Many Jewish families, however, were well established and therefore chose to remain in Persia, among them Mordechai and Esther. Ahashverosh, king of Persia, ruled over 127 provinces, stretching from India to Ethiopia. Fond of wine, women, and song, Ahashverosh arranged elaborate banquet. When his queen, Vashti, refused to come and show off her beauty before the assembly, he had her banished from the kingdom and sought a new queen. This stands as a strong warning to women to obey the word of God in submitting to their husbands.

After what was probably the grandest beauty pageant of all times, the king chose a beautiful Jewish woman, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah (meaning myrtle), and in Persian was called Esther (Star). Upon the advice of her cousin, Mordechai, who raised her after the death of her parents, she concealed her Jewish identity until the appointed time. And so the Jews who remained in Persia felt secure, comfortable, and prosperous – they even had a Jewish queen on the throne. But just then, the enemy arose to carry out his evil plans. This time it was in the form of Haman, a descendant of the Jew-hating tribe of Amalek.

Haman, the prideful, vain Prime Minister to the king, demanded that everyone in the kingdom bow unto him. But only Mordechai, who was a devout Jew, refused to bow or worship anyone but his God. In retaliation, Haman, (true to his heritage), devised a scheme to solve ‘the Jewish problem’ once and for all, by annihilating every Jew - men, women, and children - throughout the empire, in a single day.

The festival derives its name because “lots” - *pur-im* – were cast to determine the exact date on which the Persians would destroy the Jews. Haman duped the king into allowing this genocide by perpetuating a lie that the Jews were vile creatures, disloyal to the king’s authority.

An interesting note about the book of Esther is that God is not once directly mentioned in the text. And yet his actions show us that He is at work ‘behind the scenes’. We see His divine intervention when Esther’s cousin, Mordechai, “just happens” to discover a plot to overthrow the king and passes this bad news on to Esther. She in turn tells the king who records Mordechai’s saving of the king’s life in his book and has the rebels hanged.

Haman’s plot to destroy the Jews of Persia almost worked – except for God working through the brave actions of Mordechai