

The Chosen People



Volume XII, Issue 3 March 2006



PURIM

God Saves His People

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Purim Again?



*The festivities of
Purim remind us that
our God is faithful — even when His
presence is not easy to discern.*

Dear friend of the Jewish people,

Shalom in His grace. This month, Jewish people around the world will celebrate the Festival of Purim. This wonderful story of God's providence and power is told in the Book of Esther and the entirety of this treasured portion of Scripture will be read in synagogues from Brooklyn to Jerusalem!

Many beautiful traditions are associated with Purim. This issue of *The Chosen People* will introduce you to some of these customs.

Almost every Jewish holiday is intended to serve as a reminder of God's steadfast faithfulness—although many have attempted to destroy the Jewish people, the Lord has always saved us!

The Story of Purim

The story of *Purim* (“Lots”) unfolds in ten brief chapters, and we are introduced to some of the most intriguing and colorful characters in all the Bible. We meet our heroine, the beautiful Esther (“Hadassah” in Hebrew), who is used by God to save the Jewish people from destruction. We are introduced to her venerable cousin, Mordecai, who has the spiritual “knack” of always being in the right place at the right time.

We also meet King Ahasuerus, who is evidently quite in love with Esther and turns out to be a fair-minded king. Finally, we meet Haman, the perpetrator of wickedness who seeks to destroy the Jewish people.

One unique element of the Book of Esther is that the name of God is not mentioned *even once*—although His sovereign presence is felt in every twist and turn of the plot! He is always involved, behind the scenes, making sure that His people are not harmed.

The Book of Esther and God's Covenant Promises

It is especially helpful to view the Book of Esther in light of the Abrahamic Covenant. This passage, found in Genesis 12:1-3, describes this covenant, and outlines God's future plan for the Jewish people. These verses reveal His plan to bring blessings to the world through Abram and his descendants:

Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Through this passage, the Lord also teaches the nations of the world to bless the Jews. If they do so, they will be blessed—but if they curse the Jews, they will be cursed themselves.

A careful reading of the Book of Esther reveals that the story of Purim is the unfolding of the Abrahamic Covenant. Haman attempts to curse and destroy the Jewish people. However, the Lord prevents this from happening by using Mordecai and Esther to influence the King so that his terrible plot is foiled.

The clearest picture of Genesis 12:3 is found in the hanging of Haman on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. As the passage promised, "... I will curse him who curses you."

Lessons to Be Learned from Purim

There are many lessons to be learned from Purim. The first and most profound lesson is that God

always keeps His promises. Our God is faithful to His Word. This should give us great comfort as we experience the challenges of life. Although sometimes His presence cannot be seen or felt, He can always be trusted nonetheless!

Another lesson that I learned from the Festival of Purim helps me in my service to the Lord—especially in reaching Jews and Gentiles for the Messiah.

Just as Mordecai and Esther found themselves to be in the right place at the right time, so will we, as we trust the Lord and make ourselves available to Him. He will place us where we need to be, if we are willing to go and be used by Him.

So, dear friend, trust the Lord to use you! Make yourself fully available to Him and ask Him to lead you. He will put you in the right place at the right time with the right person so you can tell them about Jesus!

A Final Lesson and Concern

These are difficult days for Israel, and at this time, I am especially moved by Esther's plea to the King:

For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen? (Esther 8:6)

I do not often make comments in our newsletter about politics. But like Esther, I feel compelled to say something about the evil that looms over our Jewish people. The modern Persian Empire—Iran—is once again issuing threats against God's chosen people. The president of Iran has recently called for the destruction of Israel and has publicly denied the Holocaust.

I find that the way in which Iran is treating the Jewish people and Israel has crossed a line. It is one thing to criticize Israel, but it is

quite another to promote the international hatred of the Jewish people. This is intolerable!

It is hard for me to see the president of Iran on television making these statements. But it is even harder for me **not** to see his views rebutted by Christian leaders in our country! For the good of our nation, we cannot allow these Haman-like statements to continue! Those of us who love the Lord and believe the Bible must say something to our national leaders to counter the efforts of those who want to destroy the Jewish people!

We must learn the lessons of the Book of Esther and find creative and effective ways to bring these issues to the attention of our national leaders.

As those who love the Jewish people, we cannot sit back and allow these statements to go unchallenged. At the very least, we must pray for the leaders of Iran, that they might come to know the Jewish Messiah. That will certainly change their attitudes to His kinsmen according to the flesh.

I would also encourage you to stand up for the Lord and the Jewish people in your community and say something to your local officials, newspapers and even your congressman to express your concern about these vitriolic attacks against God's chosen people.

God will richly bless you for taking action!

Thanks for caring about our work among the Jewish people. Enjoy the rest of the newsletter, and remember—He is faithful to His promises!

Happy Purim!

Your brother,



Mitch



Dr. Mitch Glaser
President



Purim Around the World



Purim celebrations include the reenactment of the story of Esther (Berlin, top) and dressing up in fun costumes (Israel, middle; Australia, bottom).

Purim! Is there a more festive celebration in the entire Jewish world? No indeed! Purim is a foot-stomping, shouting, eating, singing, joking Jewish carnival for all ages. The Book of Esther provides the background and Jewish tradition has taken it from there. Throughout the world, Purim is celebrated in many ways, as Jewish people from many cultures have infused their festivities with their own particular local customs.

But along with the differences, there is a continuity that is solidly based in the Scripture and the story it tells of God's deliverance through the bravery and obedience of His chosen servants.

The Four Mitzvot (Commandments) of Purim

The rabbis have identified four main commandments to be observed on Purim by Jewish people wherever they might live. The first is the reading of *Megillat Esther* (Scroll of Esther), which is done aloud in the synagogue service. But if you're thinking of a solemn religious service, forget about it!



The children in the service bring *groggers* (noisemakers) into the service and whenever the villain Haman's name is mentioned, they make as much noise as possible to blot out his name and his memory. Also Esther 9:7-10, which lists the names of Haman's ten sons, is read in a single breath (you should try this!) to emphasize that they died together.

The other three commandments are sending food gifts to friends, giving money to the poor, and eating a special holiday meal in celebration of the deliverance of the Jewish people from Haman's plot to destroy them.

Purimshpiel – Another Purim Tradition

Do you remember an "Upside Down Day" at school or camp, when students changed places with teachers and performed skits they never would have dared to do on any other day of the year? Purim is something like that, for on Purim "nothing is as it seems."

Colorful costumes and skits have been a part of Purim for about 600 years.

Beginning in 15th century Europe, the Ashkenazi (German and Eastern European) Jews celebrated Purim with funny monologues or short plays called *shpiels*—a Yiddish word meaning "plays" or "skits." On Purim, these became known as Purimshpiels. One might almost trace the beginning of "stand-up comedy" to these early demonstrations of the Jewish gift of humorous gab.

As the centuries passed, these became more elaborate, and today some synagogues treat them almost like Broadway



productions, complete with scenery, costumes and professional-caliber scripts. Also, subjects may include not only characters from the Book of Esther, but also popular Bible stories such as David and Goliath, Abraham and Isaac and a host of others.



Purim Festivities Around the World

Jewish communities around the world have developed Purim traditions with a local flavor. Here are some examples of how various Jewish communities in different countries have celebrated Purim.

In **France**, children would inscribe Haman's name on smooth stones and strike them together repeatedly during the Megillah reading whenever his name was mentioned. At the end of the reading, Haman's name would be worn off the stones. Elsewhere, people write the name of Haman on the soles of their shoes and stomp their feet at the sound of Haman's name.

In the 18th century city of Frankfurt-am-Main in **Germany**, Jewish people would fashion wax figures of Haman and his wife Zeresh with wicks inside. As the reading of the Megillah commenced, the wicks were lit. As the congregation heard the story of Haman's undoing, they could also watch as Haman and Zeresh melted away into nothingness.

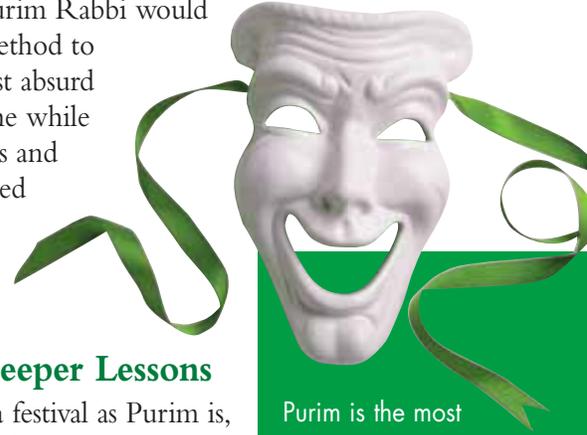
The Jewish people in the Yemenite town of Asaddeh would use rags to make a large effigy of Haman, which they would place on a donkey. Then the children would lead the donkey around the town, and families from every house they stopped at would give them good things to eat. Elsewhere in **Yemen**, the effigy of Haman would resemble a scarecrow, with beads for eyes, a false beard and colorful rags for clothes. "Haman" would then be placed on a wooden cart led by a horse, while the children proclaimed, "Thus shall be done to the wicked Haman."

The Jewish community of **Bukhara** was often still in the throes of winter during Purim. There, the people would build an enormous "snow-Haman" near the synagogue with carrot nose and charcoal eyes. He was then adorned by an official-looking "gold chain" of watermelon peels that hung over his stomach. A cracked pot for his head completed his outfit. After the meal, a bonfire was started close by and the community gathered to sing songs as they watched snow-Haman melt away in the heat.

In **Lithuania**, Purim coincided with the end of the winter school term for Yeshiva students, which would of

course add to the already high spirits. After the Purim meal, the *Rosh haYeshiva* (Head of the Yeshiva) would open his home and the Yeshiva students would perform their Purimshpiel. Then one of the students was selected to be the "Purim Rabbi."

Wearing the clothing of the *Rosh haYeshiva*, the Purim Rabbi would teach the lesson of the day, while the real *Rosh haYeshiva* would take his place among the rest of the students. The Purim Rabbi would use Talmudic method to support the most absurd arguments, all the while giving the rabbis and the most dignified townspeople a good-natured teasing.



Purim's Deeper Lessons

As hilarious a festival as Purim is, there is an underlying serious meaning in all the mischief. It is that all through history, the Jewish people have been a powerless and vulnerable underdog. Throughout the centuries, Jewish communities have seldom had anything more than a tenuous foothold in many societies. This is why we celebrate our triumphs so whole-heartedly—they are so few and far between. This is why we make so much of laughter, for so often, it has been the only weapon we have had to fend off the hatred of a world that has repeatedly threatened to swallow us up.

The festivities of Purim remind us that our God is faithful—even when His presence is not easy to discern. Nonetheless, although we have suffered much, we live in hope.

After all, by God's grace, we have outlasted all the Hamans who have come against us—and through His promises, we always shall!

Purim is the most festive of Jewish holidays—a time of prizes, noisemakers, costumes and treats. The Festival of Purim commemorates a major victory over oppression and is recounted in the Megillah, the scroll of Esther. Purim takes place on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, the twelfth month of the Jewish calendar. This year Purim begins at sundown on March 13.

Sources consulted and recommended reading:

http://www.aish.com/purimfamily/purimfamilydefault/The_Purim_Story.asp

http://judaism.about.com/od/purim/a/purim_play.htm

<http://www.virtualjerusalem.com/jeisholidays/purim/worldcus.htm>

<http://www.jafi.org.il/education/festivs/purim/pugn07.html>

See the THROUGH JEWISH EYES Bible

by Daniel Goldberg, Th.D., D.D.

The Life of David

Where do we look to find out about the exciting, inspirational and instructive life of King David? His biography is found primarily in the

sacrificing to the Lord at Shiloh (I Samuel 1:3).

Politically, Israel demanded kingly rule rather than continuing under God's direct rule. Samuel reluctantly became a kingmaker, anointing Israel's first two kings, Saul and David.

Internationally, Assyria and Egypt, the great empires of the world, were in decline. Their weakness allowed Israel to develop as a nation. Only the Philistines posed a threat because they had a monopoly on iron that gave them a military advantage.

Prominent Themes in I and II Samuel

The major theme of I and II Samuel is the sovereignty of God and the fulfillment of His will on earth. As a unit, these books demonstrate that God's intent was for Israel's kings to foreshadow the reign of the Messiah as "King of Kings." Messiah alone will combine the offices of prophet, priest and king and will rule as God's regent (I Corinthians 15:24, 28).

These books also offer insight into the effects of sin nationally through the reign of Saul and individually in the life of David and his family (II Samuel 12:9-11). They also provide information on the unique ministry of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament times (II Samuel 23:2) and on the development of an official prophetic office through Samuel and the "schools of the prophets" (I Samuel 10:10).

Another important theme in I and II Samuel is David's stature as a servant of the Lord. As we continue to study his life, we hope to glean valuable facts and spiritual lessons from both his greatness and his frailties. ☆

books of I and II Samuel, which follow the Book of Judges in the Jewish Bible and the Book of Ruth in the Christian Bible.

I and II Samuel were originally one Hebrew scroll. Together with I and II Kings, they present a history of Israel and Judah.

Authorship and Date

The Talmud identifies the prophet Samuel as the author of the first 24 chapters of I Samuel, before his death is recorded in chapter 25. I Chronicles 29:29 identifies David's other biographers as Nathan and Gad.

Since parts of the scroll were written after Samuel's death and perhaps after the division of Israel in 931 B.C., we may date the writing of I and II Samuel to

about 1025-900 B.C. since there is no reference to the fall of Samaria (the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel) in 722 B.C.

Historical Setting

The books of Samuel are a vital link that trace the transition from the rule of the judges to the kingship of Israel. They portray the rule of Saul and the exploits of David, with particular emphasis on how David built the Hebrew empire, conquered Jerusalem and established it as Israel's capital.

As I Samuel opens, we find Israel at a spiritual low point. The priesthood is corrupt (I Samuel 2) and the people refuse to listen to the voice of Samuel, their prophet (I Samuel 8:19). Only a righteous remnant was worshipping and

A CANDLE BURNS BRIGHTLY IN ISRAEL

Victor and Julia B. who are serving with Chosen People Ministries in Israel, have good reason to be proud of their daughter. After renewing her faith in Messiah two years ago, their daughter (who is now 17) has a burden for the many young people from believing families who are isolated from their peers. In response, she has helped to found a youth ministry called "Neriyah"—the candle of God. Recently, this group has started meeting on Thursday nights. Victor reports, "It was a great joy to follow their very simple, but very deep and sincere worship and to see twenty young Israelis serving the Lord."

CONCERT LEADS TO "DAY OF DISCOVERY" FOR JEWISH WOMAN

Chosen People Ministries staff member Eva Rydelnik, who serves in the Chicago area, has been ministering to Rebecca,* who was raised in a secular Jewish family. Although Rebecca values her Jewish identity, her spiritual search had left her with unanswered questions about the source of eternal truth. Returning from a concert of classical music, Eva and Rebecca began discussing the Biblical truth behind some of the musical pieces. As they parted, Eva gave Rebecca a copy of the "Day of Discovery" program on Messianic prophecy that Eva's husband, Dr. Michael Rydelnik, had recorded in Israel. After more prayer and reflection, Rebecca has put her trust in Jesus the Messiah! Please pray for her growth in the Lord.



GOINGS-ON IN GOLDERS GREEN

Daniel Nessim, Director of Chosen People Ministries UK, lives with his family in the heart of the Jewish community of London, Golders Green. Recently, Daniel wrote: "The climate for evangelism among the Jewish community here is such that the police asked the leader of the local Christian fellowship not to put up their book table in Golders Green. This has been a weekly

outreach for years, but now outreach will have to go on without the table because of 'complaints.'" Daniel is not discouraged by this, however. It simply reinforces the need to have a Jewish person in the community who can express the Gospel in a distinctly Jewish way. Please pray for Daniel and the Jewish community of Golders Green.

"OPEN HEART" VIDEO MINISTRY EXPANDS TO JERUSALEM MESSIANIC CENTER

Israel staff member Maxim K. has expanded his "Open Heart" video ministry from Tel Aviv to the new Jerusalem Messianic Center—and the Lord has already blessed this effort with the fruit of salvation. The friendly atmosphere of the Jerusalem Center is the perfect environment for young Jewish seekers to view Gospel videos in Hebrew, Russian and English. Maxim met Joel,* who was open to the Gospel. After they watched some videos about Biblical prophecy, Maxim and Eugene, another staff member, spoke with Joel at some length. That night, around midnight, Joel prayed to receive the Lord. Please pray for Joel, who has personal problems and needs to be discipled.

JEWISH MAN "GOES PUBLIC" IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Chosen People Ministries' Larry Feldman was approached by a Jewish man after a service at the Messianic congregation he leads in Irvine, California. Ira,* who is in his fifties, had been attending since last fall, and had met with Larry several times to explore the Gospel. Now Ira told Larry he was ready. Larry suggested they find a quiet spot and pray together. Ira asked if his wife (who already was a believer) could join them, and when she did, Ira prayed to receive the Lord. After an emotional moment, he said, "Does this mean I now have to go public?" He answered his own question for himself, and Larry suggested a few people in the congregation with whom he could start to share his decision.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA OPENS ARMS TO "CELEBRATE MESSIAH" DIRECTOR

You might not know it, but Israel and the Jewish people have steadfast friends in the island nation of Papua, New Guinea. Lawrence Hirsch, the director of Chosen People Ministries' Australian affiliate "Celebrate Messiah," was invited to officiate at a wedding and to speak at several meetings in a small town there. When he landed at Wewak Airport, he was overwhelmed by the greeting he received from hundreds of people waving Israeli flags. For the next two days, Lawrence led teaching sessions. Despite the heat, some people walked for four days to attend! Lawrence writes, "The highlight of my time there was the wedding of the senior pastor's son to his chosen bride...Of course, the color scheme was blue and white—the colors of the Israeli flag."

*Names changed

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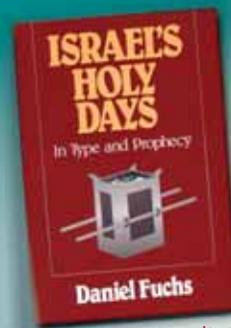
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In Leviticus 23, God presents seven annual sacred feasts of Jerusalem. This passage is more than a list of holy days; it is actually an outline of God's calendar from eternity to eternity. In *Israel's Holy Days*, Daniel Fuchs examines the festivals, their history, present celebration in the synagogue and home, and their prophetic fulfillment.

Israel's Holy Days #3013 \$9.95^{US}



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Please remember Chosen People Ministries in your will. "I will bless those who bless you." (Genesis 12:3)