

PURIM – Feast of Lots*

BACKGROUND:

Purim is considered a “minor holiday” by the Jewish community. However, it is also one of the most joyous and fun holidays on the Jewish calendar. Its story is told in the book of Esther. Purim commemorates a time, about 450 B.C.E., when the Jewish people living in Persia were saved from a hateful government official named Haman, and his plan to exterminate them.

Haman had become an advisor to King Achashveros (called Xerxes in secular history). In his pride, Haman required that all the King’s servants bow to him and give him the respect he insisted he was due. A Jew named Mordechai was one such servant. Knowing ADONAI’s decree regarding who should be bowed to, Mordechai refused to bow to Haman. Haman therefore hated Mordechai, and all Jews, and convinced the King to make a decree to exterminate them (Esther 3:8-11). Haman then “cast the lot” (“*Pur*” in Hebrew) to determine the precise date the Jews would all be annihilated. It was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

“But GOD”. That wonderful phrase. ADONAI had other plans. Mordechai’s niece Esther had become the favorite of King Achashveros, who did not know she was a Jew. Mordechai would work through her to reach the King to reveal the truth of Haman’s deceptions. He was hanged on the very gallows he had built to hang Mordechai on. The Jews were delivered from Haman’s schemes as well, because though by law Achashveros could not remove or change any decree once he had made it, he could make additional, even counter, decrees. He therefore further decreed the Jews could defend themselves by every means available which they did, and ADONAI, their means, provided them His great delivery. Esther is a very exciting account to read, and we encourage you read it in full.

THE FESTIVAL:

Purim then, is a time of great joy and remembrance, celebrated by feasting, rejoicing, sending portions of food to one another, and an emphasis on *Tzedakah* (charity) – the giving gifts to the poor.

Tradition includes a setting aside of the normal holy day solemnity and decorum, in favor of celebrating in unrestrained joy - often including costume parties sporting a wide array of costumes, from Esther and Mordechai to Haman and the King – whatever costumes the celebrator chooses. (Even super heroes and Mickey Mouse have been seen among the revelers.)

Included is a festive meal called *Seudah* as well as a full reading of the book of Esther, shared with family and friends or at the Assembly or synagogue – usually in the afternoon of the day of Purim, though the attitude of feasting continues throughout the entire period.

Traditional symbolic food includes *hamantaschen* cookies - triangular dainties stuffed with jam or other sweet filling. Note the beginning of that cookie name – ‘haman’ - a reminder of their great antagonist and the victory over him they were granted.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Purim brings many things to our remembrance.

- Haman, and the defeat of a significant plot to exterminate the Jews.
- For the Jews all GOD’s people, our redemption.
- *Tzedakah* (charity), the giving to the poor of the community as a reminder of our responsibility from Elohim to the less fortunate.

- For the Jew, it was (and remains) a day of rest, looking forward to the greater day of rest yet to

come in the Messiah

– And for Believers, a reminder of ADONAI’s great plan of redemption and rest, past, present and future.

We are reminded too, of the great covenant promise of ADONAI to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you” (Gen. 12:3). We are assured of HIS veracity, knowing we can count on HIM for our protection throughout all generations.

And it pictures for us that just as Mordechai, Esther and the Jews devoted themselves to fasting and prayer when they found out Haman’s plot against them, and they moved into action in carrying out ADONAI’s plan for their deliverance, so should we be devoted to prayer and moved to action today and every day in bringing out those who are entrapped and in danger of death. The plots of the enemy are grave against the people of GOD; ever-present, without end.

And lastly of course, it brings to our remembrance that great future day of our sure hope - toward which we always look with excitement and expectance - when we will be resurrected, delivered from the body of this death, it being raised an incorruptible body, after which we will always be with our ADONAI, and the darkness will be no more.

Hallelu Yah.

*Much of this information has been extracted from: *God’s Appointed Times*: Barney Kasdan, Lederer Books, copyright © 1993, pg. 121-4, along with a few other books and website sources.