



MBS177

A MESSIANIC BIBLE STUDY FROM ARIEL MINISTRIES



PURIM: THE FEAST OF LOTS (ESTHER)



By Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum



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Email: Homeoffice@ariel.org • www.ariel.org



*Therefore do the Jews of
the villages, that dwell
in the unwalled towns,
make the fourteenth day
of the month Adar a
day of gladness and
feasting, and a good day,
and of sending portions
one to another.
Esther 9:19*

NOTES

Today, there are nine major feasts or holy seasons of Israel. Seven of these were inaugurated by Moses in Leviticus 23. Of the two which were inaugurated after the Mosaic feasts, one is Channukah, the Feast of the Dedication or the Feast of Lights; and the other is the Feast of Purim, a feast inaugurated in the Book of Esther.

I. THE NAMES OF THE FEAST

There are three basic names for this particular feast. By far the most common name today is *Purim*, and this is the biblical name according to Esther 9:26. Purim is the plural form of the singular word *Pur* meaning “lot,” so Purim means “lots.” Purim is the Feast of Lots, and the reason this name was given is spelled out in Esther 9:24: because Haman had cast Pur, the lot, to destroy the Jews (Esth. 3:7; 9:24).

A second name is Mordecai's Day. This is a name given to the feast in early Jewish writings between the testaments and is found in one of the apocryphal books, II Maccabees 15:36. It was given this name, because it was actually Mordecai who inaugurated this feast (Esth. 9:20-21).

The third name is *Id El Sukar*. This is Arabic, meaning “the sweet festival.” This name was given by the Arabs of Jerusalem during the Turkish period (1517-1917). It became the Jewish custom in Jerusalem to give sugar candies to Moslem authorities on this day, thus, the Arabs began calling this feast the Sweet Festival.

II. PURIM IN THE SCRIPTURES: ESTHER 9:17-32

NOTES

The only passage which actually deals with this feast is Esther 9:17-32.

A. The Exposition

1. The Origin of the Feast: Esther 9:17-19

This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews that were in Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore do the Jews of the villages, that dwell in the unwall'd towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.

Verse 17 states that outside the city of Shushan, this feast was observed on the thirteenth day of the month of *Adar*, the day that was originally set for the slaughter of the Jews (v. 16). This was done in the provinces. On the fourteenth day of the same month *they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.*

Verse 18 records what was done in Shushan: *But the Jews that were in Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.*

Verse 19 records how this feast was observed in the villages and unwall'd towns: they made the fourteenth of the month a day of feasting and gladness. The word *Therefore* falls back to verse 17; because of the events in verse 17, *the Jews of the villages and they that dwell in the unwall'd towns make this feast on the fourteenth day of Adar*, and then they explain what this day was like and they give it four titles: first, it was a *day of gladness*, in contrast to becoming a day of sorrow; secondly, it was a day of *feasting*, in contrast to fasting; thirdly, it was a *good day*, in contrast to a day of mourning; and, fourthly, it was a day of sending portions *one to another*, in contrast to having things taken away from them.

2. The Letters of Mordecai: Esther 9:20-22

And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both near and far, to enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, as the days wherein the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.

Verse 20 deals with the writing itself: *And Mordecai wrote these things*, the things concerning the observance of Purim. By way of destination, *he sent the letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus, both near and far.*

The admonition in Esther 9:21 was to keep the feast, *to enjoin them that they should keep*; that is, to observe the feast. This was to reconfirm the practice on a yearly basis and the dates were given specifically as the *fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day of the same month*.

The frequency was that it should be observed on a yearly basis. The reason is given in Esther 9:22a, for it was: *as the days wherein the Jews had rest from their enemies* on that day, they had rest from fear and rest from war, *and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day*.

Finally, he spelled out the manner of observance in Esther 9:22b, which included three things: first, they should make these days of feasting and gladness, not fasting and sorrow; secondly, they should make these days of sending portions one to another, in place of having their possessions taken away; and thirdly, it should be a day of sending gifts to the poor.

3. The Observance by the Jews: Esther 9:23-25

And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; but when the matter came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

Verse 23 records the obedience of *the Jews who undertook to do as they had begun*, as the first observance was a spontaneous one. But now they commit themselves to continue this observance on a yearly basis, *as Mordecai had written unto them*.

Verses 24-25 provide the historical background, beginning with the plot of Haman in verse 24: *because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them*.

This is followed by the historical record of the failure of the plot as Haman and his wicked sons were hanged in verse 25.

4. The Naming of the Feast: Esther 9:26a

Wherefore they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur.

Wherefore, meaning because of verse 24, *they called these days Purim*, which is the plural form of a word that means “lot”, *after the name of Pur*. Since Haman cast the lot (v. 24) to determine on what day the Jews should be destroyed, and since that day came down upon his own head, and upon the heads of the enemies, the name chosen for this feast was the Feast of Purim or the Feast of Lots.

5. The Observance of the Feast: Esther 9:26b-28

Therefore because of all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and that which had come unto them, the Jews ordained, and

took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so that it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to the writing thereof, and according to the appointed time thereof, every year; and that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the remembrance of them perish from their seed.

Verse 26b gives the background as signaled by the word *Therefore*: that is, *because of all the words of this letter*—the letter of Mordecai of verses 20-22; and *because of that which they had seen concerning this matter*—the deliverance of the Jews from Haman and his followers; and *because of that which had come unto them*—the threat of destruction; because of all that—came the commitment in verse 26.

In verse 27, *the Jews ordained* to keep Purim. This commitment involved three things. First, they *took upon them*, meaning the generation that was delivered committed themselves to keep this feast on a yearly basis. Secondly, they also made this commitment *upon their seed*, the Jewish descendants of the generation that was delivered from the hand of Haman. And, thirdly, *and unto all such as joined themselves unto them*, meaning Gentile converts to Judaism would also be bound to keep this feast.

The purpose was: *that it should not fail*, meaning it should not fail to be observed.

The content was: *that they would keep these two days according to the writing thereof*, according to Mordecai's letter, *and according to the appointed time thereof*, meaning on the fourteenth day and the fifteenth day of the month of Adar.

The frequency was: that it was to be observed on a yearly basis.

Verse 28 emphasizes the perpetuity: it should be remembered by every Jewish family everywhere.

6. The Letters of Mordecai and Esther: Esther 9:29-32

Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim. And he sent letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim in their appointed times, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had ordained for themselves and for their seed, in the matter of the fastings and their cry. And the commandment of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.

Verse 29 deals with the writing and the writers. This time there were two authors. The first author was Esther, who is described in two ways: first, she was *the queen*; and, secondly, she was *the daughter of Abihail*. The other author was *Mordecai the Jew*, who *wrote with all authority*. This was the *second letter of Purim*. The first was written by

Mordecai alone (vv. 20-22), but this was written by both Mordecai and Esther.

Verse 30 reveals who the recipients of the letter were: he sent them *unto all the Jews*; in other words, copies of the letter were sent to all *the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus*, the Persian Empire. The letter was introduced by *words of peace and truth*.

The second letter provided the confirmation of the feast according to verse 31: *to confirm these days of Purim in their appointed times*, and it was on the basis of two traditions. The first tradition was on the basis that it *had enjoined them*; that is, it was commanded to them by *Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen*. The second tradition was that *they had ordained*, meaning that the subjects ordained or committed themselves and their seed concerning *the matter of the fastings and their cry*, based upon Esther 4:3 and 16.

Finally in verse 32, *there is the commandment of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim*. She confirmed all that Mordecai said and wrote about the observance of Purim. The observance of Purim was now given royal authority by the hand of Esther; with Esther, it took on the status of Persian law. Furthermore, *it was written in the book*. It is not clear which book this refers to. It might be the Book of Esther, which is the book where this feast is found, or it might be a reference to a *book of records of the chronicles* of the Kingdom of Persia mentioned in Esther 6:1.

B. Observations and Conclusions

From this passage we can deduce a total of eight observations and conclusions.

The first observation is that outside the capital city of Shushan, the first observance took place on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar.

The second observation is that in Shushan, the first observance took place on the fifteenth day of Adar.

The third observation is that this set the stage for a differential in later Jewish observances. To this day, in villages and unwalled towns, the Jews celebrate this feast on the fourteenth day of the month, but inside walled cities, they celebrate it on the fifteenth day of the month of Adar.

The fourth observation is that there are five elements in observing the Feast of Purim. First, this was to be a time of feasting in place of fasting, which would have been the case had the Jews been slaughtered. Secondly, it was to be a day of gladness, in place of being a day of sorrow, which would have been the case if the Jews were slaughtered. Thirdly, it was to be a good day in place of a day of mourning, which would have been the case if Haman's plot had

succeeded. Fourthly, it was to be a day of giving portions one to another in place of their own possessions becoming a spoil. For, in order to motivate people to kill Jews, Haman said that those who killed the Jews would then have the right to take over their possessions, thus the Jews would then have had their possessions taken away. And, fifth, it was to be a day of giving gifts to the poor, in contrast to having nothing to give had Haman's plot succeeded.

The fifth observation is that the name for the feast was based on Haman's actions: he cast the *Pur*, or he cast the lot, to determine on which day he would try to destroy the Jews.

The sixth observation is that the Feast of Purim is observed because of Haman's failure.

The seventh observation is that the first observance of the Feast of Purim was purely spontaneous as a sign of relief because they had rest from their enemies.

And the eighth observation is that the practice of the yearly observance was initiated by Mordecai. It was his letters that encouraged the Jews to do so, and it was given the status of law by Queen Esther. The Jewish people then made a commitment to keep it yearly.

III. THE MESSIANIC IMPLICATIONS

As such, the Feast of Purim contains no direct reference to the Messianic Person or Messianic Program. It does, however, have something to teach about the Messianic People, the Jewish people. The Messianic Person is Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth. The Messianic Program is to bring in the Messianic or Millennial Kingdom.

The Book of Esther is a good example of a principle found in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:3): *him that curses you will I curse*.

This principle of the Abrahamic Covenant teaches that those who curse the Jews will be cursed by God. The principle of the Abrahamic Covenant contains a promise of Jewish survival throughout the Times of the Gentiles. Both the Law and the Prophets emphasize the fact that the Jews will survive, regardless of how bad it may get for them during the Times of the Gentiles—that is a biblical guarantee.

The key thing about the Messianic People as taught in the Book of Esther is an example of God's use of providence to secure the survival of Israel in the Dispersion. The one thing about the Book of Esther that is not true of any other book of the Bible is that God's name is found nowhere in this book. This makes the Book of Esther unique from all other books. There is no mention of God, no reference to God, and no prayer to God whatsoever. In fact, the author of this

book is deliberately going well out of his way to avoid mentioning God. For example, there is one situation in the book where Mordecai, the real hero of the book, is arguing with Esther to do something to help the Jews out of a dangerous predicament.

Mordecai's words to Esther are in Esther 4:14: *For if you altogether hold your peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.*

The two words, *another place*, is as close as this book will come to any possible reference to God. It is very obvious that the author of this book is deliberately going well out of his way to avoid mentioning God. But, if that is true, why is this book in the Scriptures? Although God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, God is working. However, God is not working in just any old way, He is working in a perfect way. He is working on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant, especially upon the one principle in that covenant: *him that curses you will I curse.*

Furthermore, we did need at least one example in Scripture that shows how God works by means of providence, rather than by means of direct intervention. Since throughout most of human history, God chooses to work providentially rather than by means of direct intervention, this book is a great example of how that system works.

The Book of Esther shows God's use of providence to secure the survival of Israel during the period of the Dispersion. While great segments of the Jews may be killed, as it was with the Holocaust, God has guaranteed that the Jews as a people and as a nation will survive. And so it will be until Israel's national salvation and the return of the Messiah. With Israel's national salvation and with His return; there will be no further threat to Jewish survival whatsoever.

IV. THE FEAST OF PURIM IN JUDAISM

The fourth and last major category in this study has to do with the Feast of Purim in Judaism, which shall be covered in ten subdivisions.

A. The Fast of Esther

Concerning the Fast of Esther, four things should be noted.

1. The Origin of the Fast

The first thing is its origin. The origin of the Fast of Esther is actually another fast in Jewish sources that comes from the inter-testamental period. That day was known as *Yom Nicanor*, the Fast of Nicanor. Nicanor was the Greek Syrian general who was defeated by Judah Maccabee in the year 160 B.C. For some reason, the Jews began observing a fast on the day that he was killed, and the fast day was the thirteenth day of *Adar*. Later, this fast was transferred to Esther's fast. Esther actually fasted, according to Jewish tradition, in the month of

Nisan, but it was forbidden later to fast in Nisan, so the fast was transferred to the month of Adar.

2. The Date of the Fast

The second thing about the Fast of Esther is its date. The date of the fast is the thirteenth day of Adar, which is the day before the Feast of Purim.

3. The Reasons for the Fast

The third thing is that there are three reasons for this fast. The first reason is that it is based upon Esther 4:16, which records the three days of fasting by Esther. Originally, the fast was kept consecutively for three days. Later it was not kept consecutively, but kept on the Monday, Thursday, and Monday preceding the Feast of Purim. Still later, it became only a one-day fast, the day preceding the feast itself.

The second reason for the fast was to remember the Holy One who sees and hears the prayer for every man in time of distress when he fasts and when he returns to God with all his heart.

The third reason for the fast was that it was the day that the enemies of the Jews were killed, so it should be viewed as a day of mourning, not a day of feasting.

4. The Laws of the Fast

The fourth thing about the Fast of Esther is to point out two rabbinic laws concerning it. First, the fast is not as obligatory as the other four fast days of Scripture and so this one may be relaxed in special cases such as: that of a pregnant or nursing woman; those who suffer sadly from their eyes or have eye problems; a woman who is within three days of giving birth; and a groom who is within seven days of his wedding need not fast. Secondly, if Purim falls on a Sunday, since one is not allowed to fast on either Friday or Saturday by Jewish tradition, the fast is observed on the preceding Thursday.

B. The Seven Obligations of Purim

There are seven specific obligations that a Jew must do on this day. The first obligation is the reading of the Megillah. The Megillah refers to the Scroll of Esther, thus they must read the Book of Esther on this occasion. In keeping with the principles that we found in the Book of Esther, those cities surrounded by a wall at the time of Joshua read the Book of Esther on the fifteenth day of the month of Adar, but Jews living in villages and large towns without a wall read it on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar.

The second obligation has to do with the Torah reading or the readings from the Law of Moses on this occasion. The specific passage read on this feast is Exodus 17:8-16, which describes the war with Amalek. The reason this message is read is because, in Jewish tradition, Haman was a descendant of King Agag, the king of the

Amalekites in the days of Saul, the first king of Israel.

The third obligation has to do with certain additions to the synagogue service and the additions are made in the daily prayers and to the grace after meals.

The fourth obligation for Jews on this day has to do with sending portions to friends. This is based upon what they did in Esther 9:22: *sending portions one to another*. The rabbis, of course, came up with a number of specifics. The minimum requirements of sending portions to friends is two types of food to one friend. The reason they give is because the term portions is plural, but the term friend is singular. Every Jewish person is to send two portions of food to his friend. He must send two portions of meat or two portions of cooked dishes or two kinds of food to his friend. Whoever increases this amount, is giving more than two and is to be considered praiseworthy. However, if someone does not have enough money, he should exchange these gifts with his friend, each one sending to the other to fulfill the principle of sending portions one to another.

The fifth obligation upon all Jews on this day has to do with the giving of gifts to the poor. This is also based on Esther 9:22. According to rabbis, the minimum requirement was two gifts; because the word gifts is in the plural, they should give to at least two poor people. This is greater than normal charity, because even a poor Jew must give two portions and two gifts every Purim, every Feast of Esther. This gift may be money, it may be a present, it may be a cooked dish or it may be food. The rabbis teach that it is better to increase gifts to the poor than to make a big meal for oneself or an extra portion to his friend. However, if someone happens to be living in a place that has no poor, then he can give it to his friend, or he can mail it to the poor.

The sixth obligation for all Jews on this day has to do with the law of refraining from eulogies and fastings. It is forbidden to fast or deliver a funeral address either on the fourteenth day or the fifteenth day of Adar. So even if Purim is observed only on the fourteenth or only on the fifteenth, the rule still applies to both those days.

The seventh key obligation concerns the Purim feast itself. This is based upon Esther 9:18 and 22. According to rabbinic traditions, they are obligated to eat, drink, and be merry. For the night of the fourteenth, one should rejoice and feast. However, one does not fulfill the obligation by feasting at night because it must be done during the daytime, as the text says *days of rejoicing*, not “nights of rejoicing.” Furthermore, the rabbis see it as proper and right to light candles even if the meal is during the daytime, though the light of the candle is not necessary. One should also feast and rejoice on the night of the fifteenth. The portions to friends and the gifts to the poor should be sent in the daytime and then the repast is at night. The Purim feast

begins after the afternoon prayers which are said while it is broad daylight, as a greater part of the feast is still in the daytime.

Additionally, it is good to engage in the study of the Law for a short time at the beginning of the feast. This tradition is based upon Esther 8:16, where it states that the Jews had light. The rabbis interpret this light as being not literal light, but the light of the Torah, the light of the Law. One famous rabbi of the Talmud by the name of Rava, said "A man is obligated to drink until he no longer knows the difference between blessing Mordecai and cursing Haman." This statement has given many other Jewish rabbis problems, because it implies that it is permissible to get drunk at Purim. Other rabbis have taken this whole rabbinical statement and tried to compromise it, and they came up with four different compromises. Some believe that it only means to drink more than usual. Others believe that it means to drink until one falls asleep. A third compromise is that both statements in Hebrew equal a numerical value of 502 and what this means is that they have to drink until one can no longer make these calculations. A fourth compromise says to drink until one can no longer understand the rabbinic explanation of "cursing Haman" or "blessing Mordecai." I might point out that Judaism, in general, looks down upon drunkenness. Judaism does allow for the drinking of wine; in fact, it promotes it because wine is part of many of our Jewish traditions and rituals. But the rabbis took a very dim view against drunkenness. About the only time Jews were allowed to get drunk is on the Feast of Purim and even that allowance was questioned by some rabbis, though not by others.

C. Shushan Purim

The third subdivision of our study has to do with Shushan Purim, meaning, Purim in the city of Shushan. This special observance of Purim in Shushan is based upon Esther 9:18. In the case of Shushan, it is observed on the fifteenth day of Adar, and on that day it is forbidden to fast or give a funeral address and it is customary to make a feast and rejoice. It is permissible to marry on this day, but not on the fourteenth day because, according to Jewish custom, two joys should not be intermixed.

The principle they derived from Shushan Purim is this: cities that were surrounded by a wall in the days of Joshua observe Shushan Purim, meaning they observe Purim on the fifteenth day of Adar based upon Esther 9:18. Because Jerusalem was clearly a city surrounded by a wall, that is when they observe it. For many cities, there are some doubts as to whether or not they had a wall around them in the days of Joshua, so these cities observe it both on the fourteenth day and the fifteenth day. In Israel today these cities include Joppa, Akko, Gaza, Lod, Tiberius, Shechem, Hebron, Safed and Haifa.

But the unwallled towns or villages observe it on the fourteenth day in keeping with Esther 9:19.

D. Other Purim Laws and Customs

First, it is permissible to work on this day, but it is not proper to do so. The rabbis said, "He who works on Purim will never see a sign or a blessing."

Secondly, one should wear fabric clothing on this feast.

Thirdly, if a man injures a neighbor because of too much Purim joy, meaning he was a bit too drunk, he is freed from paying damages.

Fourthly, as soon as the month of Adar arrives, all should be feeling joyful. The month of Adar is the month in which Purim falls.

Fifth, if a Jew has a controversy with a Gentile, he should not go to court during this month.

Sixth, before Purim, it is customary to pay the half-shekel to finance the Temple rituals.

Seventh, if Purim falls on the Sabbath, the Jews of Jerusalem end up by observing three days of Purim: on Friday, the fourteenth, they read the Book of Esther; on Saturday, the fifteenth, they recite the blessing about the miracles; on Sunday, the sixteenth, they eat the Purim meal.

Eighth, upon returning from synagogue, the Jew should find his home ready for Purim, with the light already burning and the table set.

E. Purim Foods

Various Jewish festivities have special foods connected with them and Purim is no exception. The Purim foods concept is based upon Esther 9:22. There are five different foods which are customary among different segments of Jews for this day.

The one most common food is a triangular pastry known as *hamantashen*. No one is quite sure where the word hamantashen originated from, but it has three suggested meanings. Some believe that it means "Haman's hat," which was a three-cornered hat; some believe that it means "Haman's pockets," which were stuffed with bribes; and, some believe it means "Haman's ears," because his ears were cut off as punishment. The hamantashen is a Jewish cookie or a Jewish pastry which is shaped like a triangle so that it has three corners. Originally, it was filled with poppy seeds, but later it was also filled with prunes. Today, both prune hamantashen and poppy seed hamantashen are available.

A second common food for this day is known as *kreplach*. It is a form of Jewish ravioli; that is, a pasta filled with chopped meat and mixed with spices such as onion and garlic. The difference is that it is also fixed in triangular-form and it is eaten on Purim eve. The chopped

meat symbolizes being flogged, because of an old custom of flogging oneself before this day.

A third common dish is beans, cooked with salt, because it was believed to be the diet of Esther in the court of the king. She ate this food in order not to break any kosher laws.

A fourth common meal for this feast is turkey. This is based upon its Russian and Hebrew name. In Russian, turkey is called “the cock of India”; in Hebrew it is called “the chicken of India.” Turkey is eaten to remember that the king ruled from Ethiopia to India. The Hebrew word for turkey and the Hebrew word for India is the same Hebrew word.

The fifth food is called *keylits*. This is the Jewish egg bread, also eaten on the Sabbath. It is a large, braided loaf of white bread, but this one is decorated with raisins, and the top is braided with long strands. The strands are wide and high in the middle but narrow and low at both ends to symbolize the long rope used to hang Haman.

F. Purim Pranks

In the course of Jewish history, various kinds of Purim pranks were developed, but four were primary.

The first prank was the burning of Haman in effigy. This practice began in Babylonia and Persia during the Talmudic period.

A second prank was that of beating Haman in the synagogue. As the Book of Esther was read, whenever the reader came to the name of Haman, there would be a “beating ceremony.” There have been many different practices throughout Jewish history. Sometimes Haman's name was written on two small stones and these were beaten together until Haman's name was eradicated. Sometimes Haman's name was written on the sole of the shoes, and when Haman's name was read in the Book of Esther, the feet were stomped on the floor as a symbol of beating Haman. These two symbols of beatings are not practiced as much today as a third one is. Today, we use a noise-maker known as a “grogger.” This is used whenever Haman's name comes up during the reading of the Book of Esther. Along with the grogger, we stamp our feet. Haman's name is mentioned fifty-four times and so this response is made that many times. It is also made with the naming of the ten sons of Haman for a total of sixty-four times.

A third Purim prank is masquerading and wearing masks. It is customary on this date to masquerade. It is almost a form of a Jewish Halloween in Israel. These masks portray the various characters in the Book of Esther.

G. Purim Plays

A further thing about Purim and Judaism is that there was the

development of various Purim plays. Often these plays involved a rabbi and a king.

NOTES

H. Purim Parodies

Purim parodies began in the 12th century A.D. and started as a distinct branch of literature in Italy. These Purim parodies were either songs or poems that were a parody. Often it deals with Passover, but in parody form.

I. Special Purims

There are special Purims in Judaism. Besides the main one, the Purim in the Book of Esther, there are special Purims in various Jewish communities around the world. Whenever a Jewish community was saved from danger, there was a local observance, which would imitate the format of Purim. There would be a fasting day before a feasting day, and they would read a *Megillah*, a scroll that was written recording the new experience and retelling the new story, and they would recite some of the prayers, which they recite on the Feast of Esther. Altogether, there are over one-hundred special Purims among the various Jewish communities around the world.

J. Purim Odds and Ends

First, the rabbis raised a question, “Why is God's name not found in the Book of Esther?” One rabbi answered, “The reason is that Mordecai knew the Persians would copy it and he did not want God's name to be used for idolatrous purposes.”

A second thing about the Book of Esther is that it contains words found only in the Book of Esther, and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. There are six such words: first, the word *Tebeth*, which is the tenth Hebrew month (Esth. 2:16); the second word is *kasher* (Esth. 8:5); the third word is *patshegn* which is a Persian word for a “copy of the writings” (Esth. 3:14; 4:8; 8:13); the fourth word is *Pur*, the Persian word for “lot” (Esth. 3:7; 9:24); the fifth word is *krpas*, which is the Persian word for cotton (Esth. 1:6); and the sixth word is *ahashteranim*, which is the Persian word for the “king's servants” (Esth. 8:10, 14).

The third thing about the book is that all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are found in verse 3:13.

Fourth, the longest verse in the Bible is Esther 8:9. In Hebrew it contains forty-three words, but in English it contains a total of ninety words.

Fifth, the Samaritans observed this feast a month earlier, in the month of *Sh'vat*.

Sixth, Hadassah, the Jewish women's Zionist organization, was founded on Purim in the year 1912.

Seventh, the Nazis banned Purim observances. Hitler, on January 31, 1944, said that if the Nazis went down in defeat, the Jews would celebrate a second triumphal Purim. How right he was! On October 16, 1946, ten Nazis were hung in Nuremberg like the ten sons of Haman. One of them was Julius Streicher, who said as he was hung, "Purim, 1946."✠

NOTES

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