



REVELRY AND REJOICING AT THE FEAST OF LOTS

Purim, the Feast of Lots, was established to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews who remained in Persia after the Babylonian captivity. The account is given in the book of Esther. The feast is celebrated on the 14th of the Jewish month of Adar, the very day which had been chosen by the lot (pur) for the destruction of the Jewish people. According to the account, the evil Haman (boo!) used his position as the king's advisor to plot to wipe out all of the Jewish residents of the city of Shushan and the rest of the Persian empire. This would have meant the extinction of the people of God and the thwarting of the redemption God purposed to bring through the Jews!

The account given is a demonstration of the providence of God to deliver his people. Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai were in the right place at the right time to be used of God to bring a turnaround of events. Mordecai, a descendant of Kish (the father of Saul) succeeds in destroying Haman (boo!), a descendant of Agag, the king of Amalek. Saul had disobeyed God in not destroying. (See Exodus 17:8-16, 1 Samuel 15:7-33 and Esther 2:5).

Though preceded by the Fast of Esther the day before, Purim is the merriest of all Jewish holidays and is celebrated in an irreverent and riotous manner. During the synagogue service conducted in (the Ma'ariv Service) and then on the following morning, the scroll of Esther, also known as the Megillah is read in full. From this is derived the expression "the whole Megillah," meaning a long and involved story. During this reading, the stamping of feet and noisemakers known as groggers are used to blot out the name of Haman (boo!). Some people even write the name of Haman (boo!) in chalk on the soles of their shoes so that his name can be literally wiped out. Sometimes Haman (boo!) is even burned in effigy.

A rather interesting part of the Purim celebration, and one which illustrates the extent to which merriment is carried, is the traditional idea of getting so drunk that you cannot distinguish between the phrases, "Cursed be Haman" and "Blessed be Mordecai." Of course, not everyone takes things to this extreme! Traditional foods include tri-cornered poppy seed or fruit-filled cookies known as hamantashen (representing Haman's ears or hat). In addition, kreplach, triangularly shaped meat-filled Jewish-style wontons, are enjoyed. It is considered a commanded good deed or mitzvah to give gifts to at least two

poor people during Purim. Gifts of fruit, cookies, and candy known as shalach mones are also given to friends.

During this festival, celebrants frequently dress up as various Biblical characters. Often a raucous and lively Purimspiel (Purim play) is performed with a great deal of buffoonery. A child may be chosen as a Purim King, or someone may be picked as Purim Rabbi and honored with mock pomp and ceremony. More common in recent times is a beauty contest to pick a "Queen Esther" for the occasion.

PURIM AND THE NEW COVENANT BELIEVER

Though Purim is not specifically mentioned in the New Covenant, the themes involved are of considerable importance to believers in Jesus as Messiah. The providential hand of God is a major theme in Esther. Time and time again in the scriptures that which man meant for evil God used for the salvation of His people. Psalm 22 occupies a central place in the Jewish celebration. This is, of course, the Psalm Jesus quoted from the tree. "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?" The evil Haman (boo!) sought the destruction of the people of God, yet the Sovereign One not only preserved his covenant people but also judged those who opposed Him. Many saw and feared and turned to the Living LORD of Israel. Ironically, if it wasn't for the impalement (a form of crucifixion) of Haman and the deliverance of the Jewish people, the Messiah couldn't have come to deliver both Jews and Gentiles by hanging on a tree himself. He was delivered to death by wicked men, both Roman and Jewish leaders, but God intended it for our deliverance.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Wish your Jewish friend "Hag Sameach" (Happy holiday).
2. Read the book of Esther and boo Haman!
3. Sponsor a Purim party yourself. Bake some hamantashen, put on a play, dress up in costumes, and have some fun. (Go easy on the wine!)
4. Give your Jewish friends "shalach mones," (gifts of sweets).
5. Explain your experience of the providence of God in your life. Tell your Jewish friends the God who was with Esther and Mordecai is still working in the lives of people today.
6. Communicate that Purim is important to you because Jesus our Messiah had to come through the Jewish people.
7. Look up the date each year in the internet, as it changes.

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