

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL
SESSION 11 | THE FEAST OF PURIM

THE UNORDAINED FEASTS

We have looked at the *biblical* feasts (ordained by God in Scripture). Now we turn our attention to what we will call *unordained feasts*. These are *seen in Scripture* but not *ordained in Scripture*. These include Purim, Hanukkah, and the Feast of Wood. While Jews are not obligated by God to keep the feasts, to do so showed devotion to God and patriotism toward their nation.

PURIM: THE HAPPY FEAST

THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION FOR THE FEAST

The first *Purim* was held during the time of Esther, celebrating the defeat of Hamaan. Purim stands as a reminder of his defeat and the salvation of the Jewish nation and identity at that time. The account of this first Purim is found in Esther 9:14-32. Outside of Shushan (the Persian capital at the time), the feast was observed on the 14th and 15th days of Adar, the last month of the religious year (Nissan being the first). Within the city, the feast was held on the 15th of Adar. Esther 9:19 instituted the tradition of those living in **unwalled towns** celebrating on the 14th. It became **a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another** (Est. 9:19). This is the tradition of all modern Jews today since they are all considered to live in **unwalled towns**.

In Esther 9:26 we are given the understanding of the name *Purim*. The word **pur** is the Persian word for *lot*. The "coincidence" of finding rest from enemies on the day of destruction is indicative the way in which God deals with His elect nation when they are out of fellowship with Him. Rather than dealing directly and explicitly, His work in such times is through what appears to be *happenstance*.

In verses 27-28 the Jewish people banded together, **so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time 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.**

THE MODERN OBSERVANCE OF PURIM

There are four *mitvahs* (activities which fulfill a Biblical instruction) that are observed by Jews today. According to *Chabad*, these are:

- Reading of the Megillah (book of Esther), which recounts the story of the Purim miracle. This is done once on the eve of Purim and then again on the following day.
- Giving money gifts to at least two poor people.
- Sending gifts of two kinds of food to at least one person.
- A festive Purim feast, which often includes wine or other intoxicating beverages.¹

To put it mildly, the Jewish observance of Purim is the singular Jewish holiday in which *chaos breaks loose!* It is the "happiest" day in the Jewish year. In fact, the festive feast day involves so much wine that it is encouraged that adult Jews get drunk (something rare in Jewish life). The sages said that an

¹ *What Is Purim?* https://www.chabad.org/holidays/purim/article_cdo/aid/645309/jewish/What-Is-Purim.htm. Accessed September 14, 2022.

adult Jew should drink so much they can't tell the difference between "Blessed be Mordechai" and "Cursed be Haman."

One Rabbi explained the madness of the day as follows:

You really have to have been [to] a religious community to conceive of the madness of this day. A hundred hands are out asking for money—because the rule is that on Purim, if they put out their hand, you give. There are always those precious souls who have a list of needy families in hand and stand at the synagogue or go door to door collecting thousands of dollars to help needy families pay the rent or put food in their fridges. The side streets are gridlocked, because everyone is out delivering their packages of food and treats to all their friends and neighbors—as well as to complete strangers. Kids and adults are walking the streets in some of the craziest costumes imaginable. Parties are everywhere, so that the entire neighborhood becomes one big party.²

THE "HALLOWEEN" CONNECTION

If you were to be in a Jewish community on Purim, you would see all the Jewish children (and many adults) wearing costumes that we would associate with Halloween, though always with a happy connotation. You would see superheroes, animals, Kings and Queens, children's fictitious characters, and the like. And you would likely wonder, "What does this have to do with Purim?"

The tradition is associated with the very name, Purim. As we previously mentioned, *pur* is a *lot*, and it was "by chance" that God saved the people from Haman. God's work was not *obvious*, but *providential*. Jews today try to be *hidden in plain sight* on Purim.

There are two others (besides God Himself) who are *hidden* in the story, and these are two hidden Kings, Agag and Saul. Agag was king of the Amalekites, the first enemy encountered by Israel after leaving Egypt. In 1 Samuel 15:7-11 the Bible tells us that King Saul was to kill King Agag but failed to do so. For this reason, God determined to remove Saul from the throne and give it to another. But how are these two Kings embedded in the Purim story?

In Esther 3:1 we learn that Haman, the villain of Esther who attempts to eradicate the Jewish people from the Kingdom, is an **Agagite**, a descendent of Agag! And it was King Saul who saw supposed to destroy Agag but did not. But remember Mordecai, the "hidden hero" of the Esther account? According to Esther 2:5, Mordecai was **the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite**. And why does that matter? Because, according to 1 Chronicles 12:1, King Saul himself is said to be **the son of kish, a Benjamite**.

Therefore, hidden in this story is a *secret Saul* who puts to death a *secret Haman*, and a *secret God* orchestrates it all using a *secret Jewess* named Esther.

² Freeman, Tzvi. *Why Do Jews Go Berserk On Purim?* https://www.chabad.org/holidays/purim/article_cdo/aid/3263355/jewish/Why-Do-Jews-Go-Berserk-on-Purim.htm. Accessed September 14, 2022.