

"Purim: When God Intervenes"

Esther 9:20-10:3

The Feast of Purim is not one of the Spring or Fall Feasts that God originally gave to Israel to commemorate in Lev. 23 but it, and another, Hanukkah, are prophetically significant in light of all the Feasts. In a few weeks when we get into Passover, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits, we will discover that the spring Feasts not just marked a past historical event in the life of Israel but also had a prophetic fulfillment in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. And then when we get into the Fall Feasts of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Tabernacles, again we will see the past historical event that marked these but also anticipate the future prophetic fulfillment of Jesus' return.

And during the winter months between the end of the harvest/fall season (Tabernacles) without Jesus coming back yet, and starting all over again with Passover in the Spring, you have two feasts that encourage us to remember God is still working to bring about His plan to bring Jesus back and right all the wrongs in the world.

And Purim is a great reminder of that. So what is Purim? Let's start with the word 'Pur' is the singular of 'Purim'. The word Pur means the lot, as when Haman cast the pur/lot to determine when he would carry out his evil scheme to wipe out the Jews. We might call it the Feast of the Dice, although that doesn't sound as spiritual! But in reality it is a reminder that even though someone tried to carry out an evil plot to destroy God's people, God overrode the casting of the lot to determine an almost as late a date as possible on the calendar to give God and His people time to carry out His plan to save His people and defeat His enemies.

While we don't have time to read the whole book (that's why we watched the Bible Project) we do see in Ch. 9 the implementation of the command to celebrate the Feast of Purim each year and why, which gives us a summary of the book. If we were Jewish celebrating Purim, one of the things we would do is listen to an entire dramatic reading of Esther (about 30 minutes) where we would be encouraged to cheer every time Mordecai or Esther's name is mentioned. And you are highly encouraged to boo or hiss and swing your grogger whenever Haman's name is mentioned. I'll tell you why in a few minutes but a grogger is basically a noisy rattle, much like a ratchet, that you swing and it makes noise as it goes around.

As we come to the middle of Ch. 9 the events surrounding the days of the first Purim, which were determined by lot and fell on the 12th month of the Jewish calendar – which is our February/March – have been completed. Now Queen Esther with King Xerxes permission and Mordecai's authority (as second only to Xerxes in the Persian kingdom) issue the edict for the Feast of Purim to be observed annually by all Jews from now on. And so why should Israel perpetually remember and observed this day? And what spiritual implications does it have for all God's people of every generation?

The Feast of Purim first and foremost reminds us that

God Saves His People from Their Enemies **(9:20-24)**

In v.20 we read,

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, ²¹ to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar ²² as the time **when the Jews got relief from their enemies**, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor. ²³ So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. ²⁴ **For Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the pur (that is, the lot) for their ruin and destruction.**

V.22 tells us this was the time when they got relief from their enemies and v. 24 explains that it was Haman, the enemy of all Jews, who instigated the plan for their destruction. Notice it didn't take an army of people to bring about persecution of God's people but one person of influence who had the government leader's ear. Sadly, we are often led to believe that there are hoards of people opposed to laws of morality, biblical values or Christianity/Jesus in general when the truth it is, it is a small minority of influential people who have the ear of the leaders of government.

Why did Haman hate the Jewish people? The author tells us indirectly. Haman is introduced in 3:1 as an Agagite. Who was Agag? We have to go back to 1 Sam. 15 and Ex. 17. In 1 Sam. 15, the prophet Samuel approaches King Saul with a message from God. God said in 15:3,

² *This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. ³Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'*

While we struggle with these types of commands, God explains why in v.2. The Amalekites were a thorn in Israel's side going all the way back to the days of Abraham in Gen. 14, when Abraham rescued Lot from them in battle. The next time we encounter the Amalekites is in Ex. 17. Moses has just freed the Israelites from Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea and now making their way to Mt. Sinai. But they are attacked by the Amalekites. This was an unprovoked act of war on an unsuspecting people and they would have attacked any Israelite including women and children. God tells Moses to take Aaron and Hur with him and leave the fighting to Joshua. Moses prays as Aaron and Hur hold his arms up while Joshua eventually defeats them. God assures Moses and Israel in Ex. 17:14,

"Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven."

While Israel wins the Amalekites survived. Jump about 400 years later and God tells Saul, today is the day we wipe them out once and for all. And while Saul kills many, he doesn't kill the king of the Amalekites, Agag. Samuel confronts Saul and says you disobeyed God. Samuel kills Agag but obviously not everyone from his family was put to death. Some survive. They multiply and now 600 years later, the descendants of Agag (Haman) and Saul meet again. When we are introduced to Mordecai in 2:5 we read,

⁵ *Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimej, the son of Kish, ⁶ who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.*

Kish was the father of Saul the Benjamite. This helps us understand why God would issue such a harsh decree to wipe an entire people out. Because he knows the evil they will potentially

cause. And Haman is the result of Saul's failure to obey God; he allowed a seed of hatred to grow and it fully developed in Haman and could have resulted in an attempt to wipe out the Jews.

But God will never let that happen, even when a few have tried. The reason why there is so much anti-semitism in the world is because Satan wants to rid the world of the Jews. If he can remove every Jew then how can God's promises to Israel come true? How can Jesus reign from David's throne in Jerusalem and bring in Israel's promised millennium if there is no Israel.

Nor will God allow the annihilation of the body of Christ, followers of Jesus. The ultimate Haman, the Satan-possessed anti-christ will one day try and wipe out both Israel and the followers of Jesus in the 70th week of Daniel. But he too will fail.

The book of Esther encourages God's people to know that God will not allow Israel's ruin. Even when Mordecai approached Esther to go and see the king, he assured her

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

So that's one reason why God's people remember Purim. We get another reason in vv.25-26,

²⁵ But when the plot came to the king's attention, he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. ²⁶ (Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word pur.) Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them.

God not only will rescue His people but the Book of Esther and Purim remind us that ...

God Silently and Sovereignly Guides World Events **(9:25-26)**

One of the strangest parts of Esther is that God's Name is never mentioned. The verse we just read in 4:14 that deliverance will come from 'another place' and that she was appointed 'for such a time as this' is typical in that God is intimated as the deliverer and that God appointed Esther to be in that time and place. God works silently behind the scenes. You and I have the advantage of reading Esther through the eyes of God's sovereignty. The only reason Esther ever came into that position was because of a drunken party and a silly request from the king to ask his wife the queen show off her beauty to hundreds of drunken men! And God uses his terrible decision to remove her and desire for a new queen. Esther just happens to be the right age, a virgin and beautiful and intelligent.

And Mordecai just happens to be an intelligent, resourceful man who follows the example of another Jewish politician in a foreign court – Daniel – and is committed to the welfare of the King, who just happens to be in earshot of a plot to kill the king and reports to his niece, who now just happens to be the King's new wife. And then later the king can't sleep one night and wants to read something that will put him to sleep and reads boring minutes of meetings and reports and realizes he never thanked Mordecai. And doesn't know how to thank him so he asks for an advisor and Haman just happened to be there. And Haman is so arrogant that he thinks the king is talking about him as the one who he wants to honour and thinks of this elaborate idea about parading him around in the king's robes on the king's horse, and the king says 'Wonderful idea!' and tells him to do this for Mordecai!!

And of course Haman builds a gallows 50' high with the plan to kill Mordecai so everyone in the city can see it, only to have himself killed on his own gallows and in full view of the entire city. And of course King Xerxes' willingness to allow Esther in his presence when she is not requested, etc.

And the whole point is to encourage the reader that whatever time frame they are living in earth's history, however their situation seems bleak, even if it looks like evil is winning, our God is silently working behind the scenes ready to turn the tables on the plans of the wicked one day because He is sovereign over the world and uses the arrogance of sinful men to accomplish His own purposes to ultimately bring Jesus back.

And Purim reminds us that this isn't the first time God has delivered His people and won't be the last so don't forget to

Regularly Celebrate the Saving Acts of God **(9:22,-27-28)**

²⁷ the Jews took it upon themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. ²⁸ These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants.

And again v.22 said it is a day of celebration when God turned their mourning to joy. Today if you went to Israel and witnessed how Purim is celebrated it has become a big drunken party for those who don't follow God. They dress up in silly costumes and have drunken parades and eat and eat. And so for many it's more celebration than commemoration. But they do dress up as Hamans and Mordecais and Xerxes and eat Hamantaschen (Haman's hat shaped in a cookie) and re-read the story and cheer their heroes and boo the villains because it really happened. And God orchestrated the whole thing.

And on the Jewish calendar in just a few weeks, Jewish people will commemorate the Passover and celebrate how God turned the tables on the Pharaoh, who also tried to wipe out the Jews in a different way, yet God miraculously intervened in a very direct way. Likewise, we are called to celebrate the resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who in the plans of wicked men was killed, yet all along God was going to use His death for our rescue.

In the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and sons, that they all end in a party, a celebration of that which was lost has now been found. Even the angels celebrate when a sinner is rescued from the fires of hell when they put their trust in Jesus. And many of our memorial services have this mixed sadness and gladness because we know that their earthly death has resulted in their eternal reward. We need to celebrate more when God answers prayer, when God reveals His behind the scenes work and we now see how He directed us, moved hearts of unsaved and saved people and showed us what he was doing all along. Each small celebration is a rehearsal to the final celebration when sin is tossed into the lake of fire and our salvation is complete.

The last 4 verse of Ch. 9 remind us that it was because of Esther and Mordecai's faith that God worked the way He did.

²⁹ So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim. ³⁰ And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Xerxes—words of goodwill and assurance— ³¹ to establish these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants in regard to their times of fasting and lamentation. ³² Esther’s decree confirmed these regulations about Purim, and it was written down in the records.

10 King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores. ² And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king had raised him, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? ³ Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.

Purim reminds us

To Trust God that He May Call upon You to Act Bravely Because You are in a Position to Make a Difference (9:29-10:3)

If God is sovereign over the world that means He’s sovereign over every part of the world including where we live and work and who we have relationships with. God used Mordecai in his place of work to be the godly influence he could be. God placed Esther in the relationship she had so she could be the godly influence she was. Both had crucial moments in their lives where they had to make a decision to step out in faith, revealing they were a child of God to point out the evil going on around them.

There are Hamans all around us. Some are as overt at their hatred of God’s people as he was and some are more subtle. But each of us needs to ask God, ‘Lord, how can I be Your voice where You’ve placed me and with whom You have connected me with? What part can I play in deterring the evil around me; in my place of work, in my school, in my home and community, with my friends, in my country and world?’ Give me Holy Spirit led boldness to stand up, speak up or reach a hand out to help those hurt by and drawn to evil so that You can do a work in their heart and bring this situation to light. Or save a soul from the fires of hell. And help us celebrate every victory You give us.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net