

XI. Purim Instituted, 9:20-32

A. Practiced

TEXT: 9:20-22

- 20 And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far,
- 21 to enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly,
- 22 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.

Today's English Version, 9:20-22

Mordecai had these events written down and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, throughout the Persian Empire, telling them to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar as holidays every year. These were the days on which the Jews had rid themselves of their enemies; this was a month that had been turned from a time of grief and despair into a time of joy and happiness. They were told to observe these days with feasts and parties, giving gifts of food to one another and to the poor.

COMMENTS

v. 20-22: Mordecai's proclamation settled the issue of which Jews would keep which days of the Feast of Purim; all Jews were to keep it both days. At the time of Josephus it appears the Jews were uniformly keeping Purim (Antiq. VI:13). In Hasmonean times the feast was known as the "Day of Mordecai" (II Macc. 15:36). The day is still kept by Jews all over the world. Purim is classified as a "minor" festival and work is permitted on its day.

There is a Yiddish saying that as a high temperature does not denote serious illness neither is Purim a festival.

The main feature of Purim is the unique chanting (different than the Pentateuch or the Haphtarah) of the Megillah (scroll) of Esther both evening and morning, with its accompanying blessings and hymns. The four verses of "redemption" (2:5; 8:15-16; 10:3) are read in louder voice than the other verses. It is customary for the children to hiss and boo and stamp their feet and make noises with specially made rattles every time the name of Haman is mentioned. When the name of Esther or Mordecai is mentioned they cheer. At some celebrations an effigy of Haman is burned. At least two "portions" of food (often confectionery) is sent to a friend, and one must give a present of money to at least two poor men. A special festive meal is eaten on Purim evening of boiled beans and peas (commemorating Daniel's "pulse" diet, Dan. 1:12), and three-cornered pies known as *hamantaschen* ("Haman's ears"). One Jewish-Babylonian teacher named Rava has said that a man is obliged to drink so much wine on Purim that he becomes incapable of knowing whether he is cursing Haman or blessing Mordecai. The more ascetic-minded rabbis tried to explain this away, but liberal imbibing of alcohol is generally encouraged on Purim. Among the masses it became almost a general rule that "on Purim everything is allowed." It became customary to have plays and carnivals on the day and people dressed up in costumes, fancy dress, masquerading and often times men were dressed as women and women dressed as men.

B. Perpetuated

TEXT: 9:23-28

- 23 And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them;
- 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;
- 25 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.
- 26 Wherefore they called these days of Purim, after the name of Pur. 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,
- 27 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;
- 28 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.

Today's English Version, 9:23-28

So the Jews followed Mordecai's instructions, and the celebration became an annual custom.

Haman son of Hammedatha — the descendant of Agag and the enemy of the Jewish people — had cast lots ("purim," they were called) to determine the day for destroying the Jews; he had planned to wipe them out. But Esther went to the king, and the king issued written orders with the result that Haman suffered the fate he had planned for the Jews — he and his sons were hanged from the gallows. That is why the holidays are called Purim, the word for "lots." Because of Mordecai's letter and because of all that had happened to them, the Jews made it a rule for themselves, their descendants, and anyone who might become a Jew, that at the proper time each year these two days would be regularly

observed according to Mordecai's instructions. It was resolved that every Jewish family of every future generation in every province and every city should remember and observe the days of Purim for all time to come.

COMMENTS

v. 23-26a *Symbolism*: Among the more esoteric and mystical Jews (known as the *Kabbalists*) and the modern *hassidim*, much is made of Purim as the celebration "of God at work, as it were, behind the scenes," unlike Passover which celebrates God's more direct intervention. The "lots" of Purim are compared with the "lots" cast on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:8), so what men call "fate" or "luck" is, in reality, a manifestation of Jehovah's providential care.

It does appear from the text (9:26) that the reason the festival is named Pur ("lots") is because Haman's "lots" turned out to be his undoing. On the basis of God's redemptive deliverance documented in the past, it would be logical for any believing Jew to think that the massacre planned through the casting of lots by Haman was reversed by the providence of God as He worked "behind the scenes."

v. 26b-28 *Solemnity*: This feast was not commanded by the Law and was, in fact, legislated by a Jew who had chosen to remain among the Diaspora. It is interesting that the feast was accepted and perpetuated among the more rigidly conservative Jews who returned to Judea after the captivities. But apparently Joiakim, High Priest at that time (Neh. 12:10-12), must have given his approval to the feast and adopted it into the ritual of the nation; or it would not have become so universally accepted and perpetuated.

Mordecai must have taken special care to impress on all Jews through the whole world of that day the solemnity of the reason for the holiday and the imperative need for its perpetuation for all succeeding generations or it would have long since fallen into disuse. It is still observed by most Jews today. The *Adloyada*

carnival in Tel Aviv has been a prominent feature of Purim observance in modern Israel. The words *ad de-lo yada* mean, "Until one no longer knows the difference" between "Blessed be Mordecai" and "Cursed be Haman."

C. Posted

TEXT: 9:29-32

- 29 Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim.
- 30 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,
- 31 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.
- 32 And the commandment of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.

Today's English Version, 9:29-32

Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai, also wrote a letter, putting her full authority behind the letter about Purim, which Mordecai had written earlier. The letter was addressed to all the Jews, and copies were sent to all the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire. It wished the Jews peace and security and directed them and their descendants to observe the days of Purim at the proper time, just as they had adopted rules for observance of fasts and times of mourning. This was commanded by both Mordecai and Queen Esther. Esther's command, confirming the rules for Purim, was written down on a scroll.

COMMENTS

v. 29-32: Apparently Mordecai's first letter was more in the form of suggestions about commemorating their deliverance with a day of festivities. The suggestions having been approved and adopted by the Jews of the whole Persian empire, both Mordecai and Esther now lead the prestige of their official proclamation to the Feast of Purim.

Included in these official letters from the queen and the prime-minister of all Persia were declarations of peace and pledges of truth. This seems to be a proclamation to the whole Persian empire that the violence is over and there will now be peace (especially for the Jews) based on truth so long as Esther and Mordecai retain their positions of authority and power.

Verse 31 suggests that the Jews of the provinces had added to their form of commemorating Purim certain observances with respect to *fasting* and *wailing* (probably mourning the Jews killed in the struggle). The letters of Mordecai confirmed their practices as *kosher*, (acceptable).

Some commentators think *the book* of verse 32 is the Book of Esther. Others think it means nothing more than "it was committed to writing." We think it probably refers to the documentation of this empire-wide Jewish observance in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia (cf. 2:23; 6:1; 10:2).

We may learn the following lessons from this chapter:

1. What may be intended as a very spiritual festivity may be turned into mere festivity.
2. It is probably better not to institute religious observances where the revealed Word of the Lord has not instituted them.
3. One of the best ways to express gratitude for providential deliverance is to give to the poor.
4. There is precedent from past historical deliverances by the providence of God that men may expect His providence to be working in the vindication of truth and justice in events throughout history.

CHAPTER 9:20-32

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did Mordecai settle the issue of which day would be kept as a feast day?
2. What are "Haman's ears"?
3. Why did the Jews name the feast, Purim?
4. Why do you think the Jews of all ages have perpetuated the feast of Purim inasmuch as it is not in the O.T. Law?
5. What was the point of Mordecai and Esther sending a second letter concerning the feast of Purim?