

The Feasts of the Lord – Purim

by Rufus Barnes



We turn to one of the two Feasts celebrated by the Jewish people which is not referred to in Leviticus 23, but in this case in Esther chapter 9 and verses 20 to 23. This Feast is the Feast of Purim, which takes place about a month before Passover. The Feast celebrates God's faithfulness to His people, having delivered them from the hands of the evil Haman who had planned their extermination. The story is found in the book of Esther.

In summary, because the Jews refused to bow down to him, Haman, the Chief Minister to King Ahasuerus of Persia, planned their extermination throughout the Persian Empire. The Queen was, however, Jewish and her kinsman Mordecai told her that it was God's plan for her to be Queen, **for such a time as this**, and that she was the only person in a position to save her people.

After a three-day fast, risking all, because even as Queen she was not supposed to speak to the King unless he had summoned her, she approached her husband and reminded him that her kinsman Mordechai had previously saved his life and had not been rewarded for this. She also told the King that Haman was planning the death of Mordechai and all the Jews in Persia.

The King was very angry and a cunning plan was concocted. The King asked Haman how he should reward someone who had given great service to him and Haman, believing that the King was thinking how he might reward him, proposed dressing that person in a fine robe and parading him on a fine horse in front of the people. The King did this for Mordechai and, in a twist of fate, hung Haman on the very scaffold that Haman had planned to hang Mordechai. Mordechai was then elevated to a position second only to the King.

It was then decreed that this act of deliverance of the Jewish people should be celebrated for two days annually in perpetuity and that it should be named Purim. On the Feast there is a requirement to give presents, especially to the poor as a reminder that God gave the Jews victory over the plans of Haman. The book of Esther is enacted in synagogues and whenever the name Haman is mentioned it is blotted out by loud noise (rattles and booing), but when Mordechai is mentioned he is enthusiastically cheered. Special cookies are made comprising triangles of folded-over pastry often containing figs or other fruits – these are called Haman's ears!!

In post-Biblical Jewish history there have been other events which are sometimes referred to as a 'second Purim' – some 90 such events have been recorded since the early Middle Ages. Purim has on occasion been chosen by enemies of the Jews as a day to attack them.

The message of Purim can be relevant for us today. Just as Esther was at the right place at the right time, there may be occasions when we may find ourselves placed in a position **for such a time as this** and, like her, we may be called on to do the right thing in what may appear to be impossible circumstances.

Rufus Barnes – April 2020

*After becoming a Believer and getting married, Rufus Barnes went to Bible School in Jerusalem where his eyes were opened to the Hebraic root of the Christian faith. He is currently Vice-Chair of **CMJ UK**, is on the leadership team of **Hephzibah Cambridge** and leads an Israel prayer meeting in his home town in Essex UK. He has led a number of study tours to Israel and was Chair of **Love Never Fails**.*