

MIKRA'EY KODESH

"Holy Convocations"

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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

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Minor Feasts

PURIM

"The Festival of Lots"

**"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth!"
2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)**

The festival known as Purim (say "Poo-reem") is not one of the biblically mandated feasts found within the listing of Leviticus chapter 23. This feast and its beginnings are found within the secular book of Ester (Esther). Yes, Ester is called a secular book because the name of HaShem is nowhere to be found within it. To be sure, the scroll of Ester, also called the Megillah of Ester, is not considered a sacred scroll, and therefore, may be handled by "common" folk. This scroll is often decorated to commemorate the festive story found within.

Megillah (The Scroll of Ester)

The story of Queen Ester is traditionally read on Purim. I will not take the time to recount all of the events found within that book. Rather, I will simply pull out a couple of verses that serve to summarize the story. Ester 9:23-28 reads,

"So the Jews took it upon themselves to continue what they had already begun to do, and as Mordekhai had written to them; because Haman the son of Hamdata the Agagi, the enemy of the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had thrown *pur* (that is, "cast lots") to crush and destroy them; but when Ester came before the king, she ordered by letters that [Haman's] wicked scheme, which he had plotted against the Jews, should recoil on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. This is why these days have been called *Purim*, after the word *pur*. Thus, because of everything written in this letter, and what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had come upon them, the Jews resolved and took upon themselves, their descendants and all who might join them that without fail they would observe these two

days in accordance with what was written in [this letter] and at the appointed time, every year; and that these days would be remembered and observed throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and that these days of *Purim* would never cease among the Jews or their memory be lost by their descendants."

With the above supplied verses providing us with the biblical reference to Purim, let's turn to a historical background treatment of this holiday. Most scholars place the incidents of the book of Ester around 470 B.C.E. This coincided with the events and locations of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Some have even suggested Ezra or Nehemiah as the author, although Mordekhai has been the traditional candidate. The story surely takes place when the tribes of Isra'el (designated as Y'hudah) were exiled to Bavli (Babylon). Thus, the people were already in despair as the events of the book of Ester unfold.

Russel L. Resnik of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) makes this noteworthy statement in a commentary to Purim:

'The sages ask, "Where is there an allusion to Esther in the Torah?" (Chullin 139b). They answer with a reference to the warning of exile in Deuteronomy 31:18: v'anochi haster asteer panai – 'And I will hide, yes hide my face.' Asteer –"hide"— sounds like the name Esther. The term hester panim, to hide the face, describes the conditions of Israel's long exile, conditions that dominate the story of Esther. Rashi wrote, "In the days of Esther there will be hester panim, hiding of the divine countenance."

God's Invisible Hand

The events surrounding the Purim story have long since been attributed to divine intervention—and rightfully so. For even though the name of God is not mentioned anywhere within the book, surely it is his mighty hand which delivers the Jews from the evil plot of Haman. Consider these four "coincidences":

1. If Amalak hadn't aligned themselves against God's chosen people, the bitter ongoing war with them would not have produced a people who would forever be identified as the "enemies of the Jews" (read Exodus 17:8-15).
2. If king Sha'ul had destroyed all of the Amalakites (whom the sages teach was completely assembled together that day) as HaShem had ordered him to (read 1Samuel chapter 15), then there would not have even been born a Haman, descendant of that wicked King Agag (see Ester 3:1, where we learn that Haman is a descendant of Agag).
3. If Ester had not have been in the right place at the right time, the demise of the Jews might have been certain (read Mordekhai's statement in Ester 4:12-14).

4. If Mordekhai had not been in the right place at the right time, the Jews' demise might have been certain (read Ester 2:21-23; 6:1-13).

So we see that even though God is not specifically mentioned—surely he was with his people! For, the God we serve does not leave circumstances to chance! He is always leading, guiding, instructing and protecting those who are his own—even in the midst of disobedience (remember that Y'hudah was exiled for her gross idolatry; reference the entire book of Jeremiah)!

But Haman the Jew-hater could have learned a thing or two from reading the Torah of Moshe! If he had read, he would have learned that to align himself against God's chosen people is to align himself against God! Indeed every single wicked nation that has plotted to destroy the Jews has met with the wrath of HaShem, and has consequently all but been wiped from the face of the earth. Bible prophecy tells us of 8 famous, wicked kingdoms. Here is a summary of those kingdoms; it's ruler or main leader, and the Bible reference:

1. Egypt: the Pharaoh (Exodus 1:8-16; 5:2)
2. Assyria: Shalman'eser (2 Kings 17:1-6)
3. Babylon: N'vukhadretzar (Jeremiah 25:9; 39:1)
4. Medo-Persia: Haman (Ester 1:1-3; 3:10-13)
5. Greece: Antiochus Epiphanes (Daniel 8:11; 23-25)
6. Rome: Herod (Matthew 2:1-16)

Now these above-mentioned six are recorded for us in the Bible so that we might know that the word mentioned to Avraham (read Genesis 12:1-3) is true. The Bible also alluded to the seventh—and even soon to come eighth evil empire, which both sought and will seek to destroy the Jews. In Revelation 17:10 and 11 we are given a glimpse of the past, present, and future of the evil anti-Christ and his wicked kingdoms. Verse 10 states, concerning his wicked kingdoms, that five have fallen, which correspond to 1-5 above; one is (that is, yet exists in John's day), which corresponds to #6 above; and that one is yet to come. I believe that, by using the criteria mentioned in Rev. 17:10b, that the seventh wicked kingdom very well might have been Nazi Germany and it's wicked ruler Adolph Hitler. Certainly this kingdom (like the previous six) persecuted the Jews! Certainly this ruler (like the previous six) hated the Jews, and aligned himself against them! Even though Hitler himself boasted that his Third Reich would last for 1000 years, this kingdom only lasted a "short space (KJV)"—a scant 12 years. Thanks be unto God that the holocaust only lasted that long!

History Repeats Itself

Yet the sobering truth is that the Bible prophesies that yet one final empire will arise to persecute the people of God again! This is the eighth mentioned in Rev. 17:11. In some mysterious way, he will be a composite of the original seven! What a monster! Considering the qualities of the previous seven rulers, this final

evil ruler—this hater of God’s chosen people will be heinous indeed! Because Christians are grafted into Isra’el, they will be persecuted as well! Be prepared!

It is easy to distance ourselves from the likes of this world’s “Hamans”, we suppose. We as believers in Messiah Yeshua would never speak or think evil of the offspring of Avraham...or would we? Have we unknowingly pitted ourselves against his chosen?

Anti-Semitism?

Consider this teaching on the above-mentioned passage of Genesis 12:1-3: (Taken from my commentary **Parashat Lekh L’kha**) We have been taught many times over (hopefully), that verse three is referring to the ultimate blessing that Avram would be, once his ultimate righteous heir was born. The Torah makes it perfectly clear that this righteous heir is non other than Yeshua (ben-Yosef) ben-Dah-vid, ben-Avraham (see Matthew chapter one)! But our usual sermons focus on the latter part of that verse. I want to call our attention to the first part of verse three.

“I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Here HaShem promises to “bless” those who “bless” Avram. The Hebrew wording used both times for “bless” is “the root word “barakh”, and it literally means to bow the knee. This promise is understood to be extending to his offspring as well, the Jewish People. Moreover, we have seen that many peoples of the world, symbolically and physically, have blessed Avram. To be sure, we don’t hear of many individuals actually “cursing” Avram or his offspring, the Jews (a few unmentioned exceptions do exist). From HaShem’s perspective, he has set up a divine sort of “cause and effect” here: if you (a non-Jew) bless Avram, or his offspring, then in return, I will bless you.

But the really interesting fact is found in the Hebrew word translated as “curse”. In the first instance, the word translated “curse” (in our above translation of the CJB by David H. Stern) comes from the root Hebrew word “arar”. Here is what Strong’s Lexicon and Concordance have to say about this word:

0779 ‘arar {aw-rar’}: a primitive root - curse 62, bitterly 1; (total usage: 63)

to curse.... cursed be he (participle used as in curses).... to be cursed, cursed.... lay under a curse, put a curse on.... to be made a curse, be cursed (adaptation mine)

This is some heavy language! Especially when we realize that this is the Sovereign Creator of the Universe speaking this promise here! But the second word translated as “curse” is surprisingly not the same as the first! The original

word this time is taken from the root word “kalal”. In fact, in our current parashah (portion), chapter 16:4 translates this word as “contempt”, when referring to the attitude that Sarai (Avram’s wife) had towards her handmaid Hagar. Here is what Strong’s Lexicon and Concordance have to say about that word:

07043 ‘qalal {kaw-lal’}: a primitive root - curse 39, swifter 5, light thing 5, vile 4, lighter 4, despise 3, abated 2, ease 2, light 2, lighten 2, slightly 2, misc 12; (total usage: 82)

be slight, be swift, be trifling, be of little account, be light.... be abated (of water).... to be trifling, to be swift, show oneself swift.... to appear trifling, be too trifling, be insignificant.... to be lightly esteemed.... to make despicable.... to curse.... to be cursed.... to make light, lighten.... to treat with contempt, bring contempt or dishonor.... to shake.... to whet.... to shake oneself, be moved to and fro” (adaptation mine)

I hope that this list is a shocker. We usually find ourselves thinking, “As a believer in Messiah Yeshua, I would never meaningfully curse Avram or his offspring, the Jews! I understand that my spiritual heritage is forever bound up in their lineage!” I, as a Messianic rabbi, hope that this is similar to what every well-meaning Christian might say. But the shocker is that according to the word used for “curse”, many well-meaning believers are unknowingly “cursing” Avram and his offspring! If I were to translate this verse along its literal lines, it would read something like this:

“I will [bless] those who [bless] you, but I will [curse] anyone who [despises, makes of little account, lightly esteems, thinks insignificant of] you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Wow! That seems to explain the verse in a whole different light! And so it should! For that is what the verse is alluding to. Allow me to elaborate.

In the fourth century, when the organized Church decided to divorce herself from her spiritual mother, Judaism, she unwittingly planted the seeds of anti-Judaism. Anti-Judaism is not to be confused with Anti-Semitism. The former is the dislike or disinterest of Jewishness and Judaism specifically; the latter is the dislike or disinterest in the Semitic race altogether. By the way, both fall into the category of violating the verse in examination and both are disrespectful to Father Avram and displeasing to HaShem! Over the centuries, this seedbed has blossomed into a full-grown weed called Replacement Theology. This heretical belief fosters the mistaken idea that “HaShem gave up on the Jews when they corporately rejected his Son Yeshua, and instead, adopted the newborn Gentile Church as his chosen people. The unfortunate Jews were left to face the curses of the Torah, and the Wrath of an angry Father, while the Church inherited (spiritually of course) most of the blessings and promises to the Jews, as pronounced in the

Torah.” Fortunately, this theological framework is neither blatantly taught to Christians, openly favored by the same, nor even endorsed by HaShem!

But the damage has been done. Bad habits are hard to change. Our Christian community today is lacking of real spiritual depth, many so-called believers have a superficial relationship with Yeshua, and we owe a significant part of all of this to the teachings that have been passed down from one anti-Jewish generation to the next. Consequently, many Christians are either passive and ignorant when it comes to the Jewish people and communal support, or they are outright opposed to it! The Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings (TaNaKH) have been relegated to the status of “Old Testament”, while the Gospel enjoys the status of “New Testament”. This has a way of causing the Jews to appear to be “old”, “outdated”, and “replaced”, while the Church is defined as “new”, “fresh”, and “current”. Is this not the prevalent attitude of many non-Jews within the Body today? “Your people prove difficult to positively influence, with regards to the Good News and Jesus”, many quip. As a result, Jewish evangelism is weak, understaffed, or (in the few cases where churches have tried) eventually abandoned. Even if not intentional, this type of spiritual ignorance still feeds the Replacement Theological bias, in that, no one is made aware enough to put an end to it. In other words, this ignorance has gone on for far too long.

Tikkun Ha'Olam (Repairing the World)

What can be done to undo some of the damage, and help repair the split between Avram's offspring and the Church? Well, more information than I can post in this format is available to anyone who is serious in answering this timely and important question. I will only provide you with some groundwork: begin to pray about getting actively involved in the current move of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit), to bring about a genuine, heartfelt love for Avram's offspring, from the Church. Ask HaShem to reveal to you your heart, and to forgive you if you have unknowingly harbored these types of thoughts towards Avram's offspring. God is still in the business of forgiveness! What my brothers according to the flesh need is to experience the mercy of HaShem, displayed through your honest concern and support! Ask HaShem to begin to reveal to you your spiritual heritage traced through faithful Avram and continuing through to his offspring, the Jewish People. You will find that according to Romans chapter 11 (just to name a good starting point), you also have some obligations to the “root that supports you”.

Nearly 1900 years ago, the Apostle Paul (a.k.a. Rav Sha'ul) found himself being challenged by the risen Yeshua on a most important mission. Our LORD chose to commission this Pharisaic Jew with an urgent message to the Gentiles:

“However, to those of you who are Gentiles I say this: since I myself am an emissary sent to the Gentiles, I make known the importance of my work... But if some of the branches were broken off, and you - a

wild olive - were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree, then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.”
(Romans 11:13, 17, 18)

A most wonderful truth is being discussed here. What does it mean for Sha'ul to say that the 'wild olive tree' (the Gentiles) is grafted into the 'cultivated olive tree'? The plain sense of the text is not easily confused:

- Through the efficacious ministry of the Messiah Yeshua, Gentile believers are covenant-bound to 'Father Abraham's Olive Tree'—Isra'el—thereby making them fellow citizens and full-participants with the Commonwealth of Isra'el (Eph. 2), thus granting them the divine privilege of following the whole of the Torah.
- We believe that YHVH has written this very same Torah upon the hearts of those, Jews and Gentiles, who have placed their trusting faithfulness in Yeshua (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-12).
- We believe that this same Torah is a foundational revelation of the righteousness of HaShem and serves as a description (along with the rest of the Scriptures) of the lifestyle of the Redeemed Community (James 1:16-27).
- Furthermore, 'grafted in' bespeaks of our affirmation to our true identity as a people—Jew and Gentile—that is securely rooted in the Finished Work of Yeshua HaMashiach.

Haman made a terrible mistake when he pitted himself against God's chosen people. HaShem turned the tables and the very gallows that Haman expected to hang Mordechai on, he himself was hung on! With joy and gladness we can celebrate the goodness and mercy of our Loving, Heavenly Abba! Why, even many of those in that day became Jews because of fear (admonition) of this wonderful people of the Living God (read Ester 8:16, 17)!

As grafted-in believers Gentile Christians are God's chosen ones! Woe to the one who would pit himself against us! He just might find himself fighting against the Living God of the Universe (Acts 5:39-38)! For in Messiah we can victoriously declare—just as the Psalmist declared:

**“ADONAI, how many enemies I have!
How countless are those attacking me;
how countless those who say of me,
“There is no salvation for him in God.”**

**But you, ADONAI, are a shield for me;
you are my glory, you lift my head high.**

**With my voice I call out to ADONAI,
and he answers me from his holy hill.”
(Psalm 3:3,4)**

“Chag Sah-meach Purim!”
(Happy Festival of Purim!)

It is customary to recite this Hebrew blessing upon the conclusion of the reading of the Megillat Ester:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
sheh-heh-chehyanu, v’ki-y’manu , v’higyanu
latz’mahn hazeh!”***

**(Blessed are you, O’ LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
Who has kept us alive, sustained us
And brought us to this place!)**

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