



And He will lift up a standard for the nations,
and will assemble the banished ones of Israel,
and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the
four corners of the earth. Isaiah 11:12

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March 2015

The Holiday of Purim

By Rev. Gary Cristofaro

Today Purim is celebrated as a joyous and fun holiday. But what Purim commemorates has been a sad and all too common historical pattern. It memorializes deliverance from one of the many attempts to exterminate the Jewish people. The first Purim took place in Persia, eerily in the very same region where decrees of Israel's annihilation are still being spoken today.

The story of Purim is found in the Biblical book of Esther. Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah and her cousin Mordecai raised her while in Persia. Esther was quite beautiful and was taken to be a part of the King's harem but was instructed by Mordecai not to reveal her Jewish identity. This turned out to be a fateful decision as King Ahasuerus fell in love with Esther and favored her above the rest of the women in his harem.

The king also had a very close advisor named Haman who demanded that all the citizens of his kingdom bow at his presence. But Mordecai was faithful to The God of Israel and he refused to bow down to Haman. This infuriated Haman and as is often the case in Jewish history, Haman's hatred of Mordecai extended to all the Jewish people in the kingdom. Haman pleaded his case to the king. Esther 3:8 says; Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "*There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. (Esther 3:8)* When the king gave permission to Haman to do as he pleased with the Jewish people, he devised a plan to kill them all.

When Mordecai learned of Haman's plan he called upon the one person who was in a position to influence the king more than Haman, Esther. But Esther could be killed if she approached the king uninvited. When Mordecai sensed Esther's reservations he said, *For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

After fasting for three days Esther approached the King and he welcomed her. She later was able to expose Haman's plot and save her people. In a miraculous turn of events the Jewish people were saved from annihilation and Haman was hung on the gallows he intended for Mordecai.

The 13th day of the Hebrew month of Adar was the day Haman had chosen by lots for the extermination of the Jewish people. But they prevailed and the 14th day of Adar was chosen as a joyous feast day to perpetually celebrate this great deliverance. The name Purim means "lots" and refers to the lottery that Haman used to choose the day to carry out his plan.

The lesson for us today is clear; one person can make a difference. Imagine for a moment Mordecai was speaking to you right now and said; *For if you remain completely silent at this time (In other words; if you do nothing) relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place (In other words; God will be faithful and deliver His people, but He will have to use someone else)*

... Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

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