



The Scandal of Esther

Should Christians Celebrate Purim?

Historically the “church” has disregarded the Book of Esther and therefore ignored the Biblical holiday of Purim. The following topic discusses why the message of the Book of Esther – and the holiday of Purim – should matter to Christians.

Introduction

Over the centuries, virtually no other book of the Tanakh (“Old Testament”) has received more mixed reviews than the Book of Esther. In general it may be said that the book has been well received by the Jews, but disliked by most Christian theologians and “church” leaders. For example, the Jewish scholar Maimonides (the Rambam) praised Esther as being close in rank to that of the Torah itself: “When the Messiah comes, only Esther and the Torah will remain” (*Mishneh Torah, Megillah*). On the other hand, the Christian scholar Martin Luther detested the book and wished that it didn’t exist at all, primarily because he thought it “Judaized” too much (*Luther: Table Talk 24*). Sadly, many Christian theologians have tended to agree with Luther and regard the book as unworthy of inclusion in the Bible, whereas many others do not seem to understand its message. Some Christian teachers have defamed the Book of Esther as being “a memorial to the nationalistic spirit of Judaism” (*A. Weiser, Intro to OT, 1961*) and even a “bloodthirsty attempt to justify ethnic pride in being a Jew” (*B.W. Anderson, Esther, 1950*). Others have stated that “there is not one noble character in the entire book” (*L. B. Paton, The Book of Esther, 1908*). Indeed, more Christian anti-Semitic statements have been made regarding the Book of Esther than any other book of the Old Testament (*Moore: Esther, 1971*). Do you wonder why this might be the case?

Anti-Jewish Bias in the Church

Perhaps such anti-Jewish statements have been made about the Book of Esther because many Christian theologians are essentially *anti-Jewish* in their thinking.... After all, the basic point of the book centers on God’s providential *care for ethnic Israel*, and



theologians such as Luther typically find this conclusion *abhorrent* to their theological biases. Indeed, the Book of Esther leads inescapably to the celebration of *Jewish identity and survival* despite the evil plans and designs of anti-Semites, and therefore Christian theologians who believe that the church *replaces* Israel will tend to regard the message of the book with deep suspicion (hence some teachers openly express indifference to the existence of the modern State of Israel today). For those who understand that the church *partakes* of the covenantal blessings given to Israel, however, the Book of Esther is a beautiful story about God's faithful love and care for His people...

Some Christian theologians attempt to “excuse” their oversight of the Book of Esther because they find in it no obvious message for the Church. Unlike the Torah-based holidays of Passover and Shavuot (which they regard as fulfilled in the New Testament), the Book of Esther seems parochial in its focus and “disconnected” from the rest of the Scriptures. In other words, since the Book of Esther (and therefore the holiday of Purim) celebrates the existence and perpetuity of the Jewish people, these theologians regard it to be of little consequence for Christians. This is actually an astounding conclusion, however, especially since Esther is part of the Christian canon of Scripture, and the book clearly states that “these days *should be remembered and kept* throughout every generation ... and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants” (Esther 9:28). It is painfully obvious that the only way to ignore the message of the book is to deny the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. How church leaders regard the Book of Esther functions as a test case of whether or not they accept the erroneous doctrine of Replacement Theology...

God's Faithfulness to Israel

Did you know that the *Brit Chadashah*, or “new covenant,” is described in *only one place* in the entire Old Testament? Here is the relevant passage:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD (יהוה), when I will make a new covenant (*brit chadashah*) with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my Torah into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they need to teach one another and say to one another, "Heed the LORD"; for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me - declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquities, And remember their sins no more. (Jer. 31:31-4)



Most Christian theologians stop here and ignore the *surrounding context* of this passage, namely, the remarkable promise that ethnic Israel would continue to exist as a unique people as long as the laws of nature are in operation:

Thus saith the LORD (יהוה) who gives the sun for a light by day and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, Who stirs up the sea into roaring waves, Whose name is LORD of Hosts: If these laws should ever be annulled by Me -- declares the LORD -- only then would the offspring of Israel (*zera' Yisrael*) cease to be a nation before Me for all time. Thus said the LORD: If the heavens above could be measured, and the foundations of the earth below could be fathomed, only then would I reject all the offspring of Israel (*zera' Yisrael*) for all that they have done - declares the LORD. (Jer. 31:35-37)

From this passage – the only in the Tanakh that explicitly mentions the New Covenant of Yeshua – it's clear that the continuation and perpetuity of the physical descendants of Israel (*zera' Yisrael*) is to be reckoned as sure as the very “laws of nature” that are upholding the physical universe. In other words, so long as there is a sun shining during the day and moon and stars during the night, Israel will continue to be a nation (*goy*) before the LORD for all time (*kol-hayamim*). Using another analogy, it is as likely for someone to accurately measure the extent of the heavens and earth than it is to suppose that the LORD will cast off all of the seed of Israel. Note especially the last qualifying clause of this verse, “for all they have done,” indicating that the *unconditional* faithfulness of the LORD is not based on the conditional behavior of national Israel.

Have you seen the sun, moon or stars today? If so, you can be assured that ethnic Israel retains a place in God's plan. The gift and the calling of God is irrevocable (Rom. 11:29).

The Christian Neglect of Esther

It is *shameful* that so many Christian theologians miss the point of the Book of Esther and thereby become unwitting enemies of the God of Israel. The tragic character of Haman represents the Biblical archetype of all those who refuse to acknowledge God's faithful love for the Jewish people.... Those who disregard this message are impugning the faithfulness of God. After all, if God will not keep His covenant promises to ethnic Israel, what makes these Christian theologians believe He will keep His promises to the “church”? Indeed, churches or theologians who claim that God has abandoned ethnic Israel are directly *impugning* the credibility of the Gospel message itself! Yes, it's that serious of an issue...



Throughout the centuries and in various places, many have tried to destroy the Jewish people, but none has succeeded. *Am Yisrael chai*: “The people of Israel live!” Israel is God’s “super sign” that He is faithful to His covenant promises (Jer. 31:35-37). And since God keeps His promises to Israel, Christians can likewise trust that God's sovereign hand works all things together for good – even if at times things appear bleak and desperate (Rom. 8:28).

The Scandal of Esther: “Chosenness”

The Book of Esther is all about God's faithfulness and care of the Jewish people, and by extension, for all those (among the nations) who become *partakers* of Israel’s blessings through Yeshua the Messiah. The “scandal” of the book turns on the “scandal of election,” or the idea that God *personally* chooses some people – for reasons that are entirely His alone – to be the recipients of His covenantal love. The Jews are called the “chosen people,” *am segulah*, just as Christians are “chosen [εκλεγομαι] in Yeshua before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). In both cases we note God's sovereign prerogative to choose those who are in relationship with Him. Yeshua told his followers: “No one can come to me (δυναται ελθειν προς με) unless the Father who sent me *drags* [ϋλκσ] him” (John 6:44, 6:65), and also said “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you” (John 15:16). God is the Initiator of the relationship; He is the Master of the Universe and “the God of the spirits of all flesh” (Num. 16:22). If there is revelation from heaven, it is Heaven’s prerogative to bestow it on Heaven’s own terms...

Regarding this divine prerogative, Paul reminded us of God’s words to Moses: “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Rom. 9:15). He then follows this up with the statement: “So then it depends *not on human will or exertion*, but on God, who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:15-16). If this sounds “offensive” or “unfair,” it may be that we are secretly appealing to our own supposed merit in order to find acceptance before God. The “scandal” of the gospel is that God loves whom He loves for reasons that are His alone, and this is likewise the scandal of God's sovereign choice of ethnic Israel. In either case, God is preeminent.

Israel's Election -- and your own

Israel’s election says something about your own... God called *you* by name -- *before* He created the very universe itself. “God has chosen you *from the beginning* for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). God loves you with an “everlasting love” (*ahavat olam*) and with lovingkindness *draws* you to Himself



(Jer. 31:3). There is no fear in God’s sovereign and irresistible love for your soul (1 John 4:18). “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

It is interesting to note that the Book of Esther was “canonized” by the Jews at the Council of Yavne in AD 90, though there is little doubt that the book originated in Persia during the 4th century BC (Jewish tradition regards it as a redaction by the Great Assembly of an original text written by Mordechai). The Essene Community at Qumran appears to have rejected the book (i.e., it is the only canonical book of the Tanakh not found among the Dead Sea Scrolls), though this might be based on the book’s omission of the Name of God, the fact that the Torah or the covenant is not made within its pages, or that the heroine of the book lived as an assimilated Jew during the years of exile... In other words, the Essenes might have rejected the Book of Esther for theological reasons similar to those they made about Chanukah (i.e., because of Chanukah's connection with the corrupt Hasmonean dynasty that controlled the Second Temple). On the other hand, Josephus (AD 37–100) clearly regarded the Book of Esther as canonical (*Antiquities XI*) as did the early church fathers who incorporated it into the canon of the Christian Bible.

Christians Should Observe Purim

In closing, it is evident that Christians, that is, those who love and serve the King of the Jews and who believe that the LORD God of Israel is true to His word – should indeed recognize the value of the Book of Esther and celebrate the Biblical holiday of Purim. God does not “play dice with the universe,” and we can trust in His sovereign care and plans – both for ethnic Israel and for those who accept Yeshua as their Savior and Master. Purim is a time to celebrate that the LORD God of Israel is our Sovereign King, our Faithful Protector, our magnificent Savior. Like the Jews of ancient Persia we were delivered by God in order to experience the joy of His love... The goal or end of salvation is abundant life filled with “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (John 10:10, 1 Pet. 1:8).

Haman and the "Anti-Christ" Spirit

Finally, it’s important to remind ourselves that the world is full of various sorts of “Hamans,” and some of them are even teachers and pastors in various Christian churches and schools! We must be vigilant, *chaverim*. Haman accused the Jews of being “different” because they refused to submit to illegitimate claims of authority: “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not



keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed" (Esther 3:8-9). The "princes of this age" – the world's politicians and their enforcers – are often quick to accept the lie that those who submit to the greater authority of the LORD God of Israel are to be regarded as enemies of the State....



Haman is clearly a type of Anti-Christ (lit., "replacement of Messiah") who desires to see the Jewish people exterminated once and for all. In the New Testament we know that there is soon coming one who is the embodiment of this "spirit of Haman," and of Hitler, and of all the other anti-Jewish murderers throughout the ages. This one is the "man of sin" or the Messiah of Evil (2 Thess. 2:3), who will broker peace in the Middle East and feign to be friendly to Israel, but who will ultimately betray her and seek to have her utterly destroyed.

Satan's final attempt to provide the ultimate "Final Solution" will be foiled, just as Haman's attempt was foiled. His plan will boomerang upon his own head, just as Haman's plan boomeranged upon him. And he and his children will all hang from the gallows, just as Haman and his children did.

When Yeshua returns at the end of the Great Tribulation, He will destroy the Messiah of Evil by the Word of His Power and physically deliver Israel as her rightful King and Lord. Israel's long-awaited Mashiach ben David will be clearly revealed and understood to be Mashiach ben Yosef Himself. Then, and only then, will Israel experience the true deliverance and salvation of God – and the rejoicing of that Purim will be like none other!

Purim Sameach!

So *Purim Sameach*: "Happy Purim," friends, and may Yeshua our LORD return speedily, and in our day. *Amen*.