

Community on Columbia

MEMO

TO: Bible Study Members

FROM: Ole Anthony

SUBJECT: Celebration of Purim

Purim is a transliteration of the Hebrew word Puriym; it means to crush or bring to nothing. Its celebration is on the 14th of the month of Adar, the final month of the Biblical year, and exactly one month before Passover. There are many references to the feast in apocryphal literature: AD Est 10:13-13; II Macc (15:36); Josephus (Ant XI, vi, 13).

There is no reference of Purim made in the New Testament because it was celebrated only locally, but no doubt Jesus and His disciples observed it. The primary meaning of the day is total peace or absence of "againstness." It was a day to observe when the Jews had total rest from all of their enemies. The book of Esther is set in Persia during the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus), 485-465 B.C.

We believe that the Book of Esther is a parable of the entire church (the Bride) being redeemed from the slave market of all man-centered religions so that she can be betrothed to Christ on the Feast of Passover.

The Fast of Esther precedes the celebration of Purim. The fast only lasts from sunrise to sunset on the same day. As you know, this is a wimp fast in that we abstain only from food and smoking. Rabbinical authorities explain that fasting must precede the celebration of Purim and that the purpose of fasting was to permit us to pray at a deeper level. The fast of Esther is in commemoration of her prayer and fasting before she approached the king. The following scriptures are read from the Torah during all fasts: Exodus 32:11-14 and Exodus 34:1-10. These readings are concerned with God's thirteen attributes of mercy. The Rabbis teach that any suffering felt during the fast would be lessened by contemplation of these mercies of God.

Much is made of Purim as a day of friendship and joy, and as the celebration of God at work, as it were, behind the scenes (God is not mentioned at all in the book of Esther). This is in contrast to Passover in which His direct intervention in our lives is celebrated.

During the afternoon prior to the celebration of Purim, the believers gathered together to study the history of the Amalekites. This is because Haman, the enemy, was a descendant of the Amalekites.

Joshua - Exodus 17:8-16
Spies - Numbers 14:39-45
Moses - Deut. 25:17-19
Gideon - Judges 7:12-25
Eglon - Judges 3:13
Saul - I Samuel 14:47,48
David - I Samuel 27:8-9
David - II Samuel 1:1-16
Herod - Matthew 2:12-18

The reading of Esther was so important that the Temple service, sacrifices and the reading of Torah were suspended on Purim so that all would hear.

Other readings during the afternoon were Numbers 24:1-9 and I Samuel 15:1-23. Also, Psalm 22 was taken to refer to Purim, and Psalm 30, the Psalm that was sung at the First Fruit Offerings, was also sung in the afternoon of Purim and taken to apply to Mordecai and Esther.

Esther was considered to be one of the seven female prophetesses in Israel. They are as follows:

Sarah - Genesis 11:29; 21:12

Miriam - Exodus 15:20

Deborah - Judges 4:4

Hannah - I Samuel 2:1

Abigail - I Samuel 25:20

Hulda - II Kings 22:14

Esther - Esther 5:1

At sunset, a major feast occurred after the fast. It included the special Purim foods of boiled beans and peas, said to be a reminder of the pulse Daniel ate in the king's palace. Also a three-cornered dessert known as Hamantashen (Haman's ears).

Immediately following the meal, the book of Esther is read. Everyone is encouraged to read except for a deaf person, an imbecile and a minor, "those under thirteen." At every reading interruption and expansion of the tale are encouraged.

At every reading of Haman's name (a type of Satan) there should be boos, hisses and stamping of the feet.

At every reading of Mordecai's name (a type of Christ) a blessing or a hand is given.

At every reading of Esther's name (a type of the true church) a toast of red wine to the Bride is given.

"...The fourteenth day of the month Adar, a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another."

Schedule

2:00 PM	Readings
4:00 PM	Meal
5:00 PM	Reading of Esther