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WHAT CHRISTIANS CAN LEARN FROM THE CELEBRATION OF PURIM



EAST-WEST STAFF

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In late winter or early spring, Jews celebrate a lively festival called Purim. The holiday commemorates the bravery of a Jewish queen whose actions led to the Jews in her nation being saved from total destruction.

Though Christians might not be familiar with Purim, they will recognize its origins from the book of Esther. Understanding this Jewish holiday will help in showing the love of Christ to Jewish friends.

WHAT IS PURIM?

According to the book of Esther, King Xerxes was looking for a new queen to replace Queen Vashti, who had dishonored him. Xerxes had young, beautiful virgins brought to his palace. Esther was one of those virgins, and she caught the attention of Xerxes more than the other women and was made queen. However, she did not tell the king that she was Jewish.

A short time later, King Xerxes elevated a man named Haman to a position of nobility and ordered the people to bow down to him. But Mordecai, Esther's cousin, refused to do so. This angered Haman, and he plotted to kill not just Mordecai but all of his people—the Jews. He convinced the king to sign an edict, ordering the annihilation of all Jews on a single day.

When Mordecai learned of the edict, he was distressed and asked Esther to plead to the king on behalf of the Jews. Esther told Mordecai that if she went to the king without him summoning her, she could be killed. But Mordecai responded that perhaps she was given her royal position *“for such a time as this (Esther 4:14)”*. Esther agreed to go to King Xerxes, at the risk of her life. She revealed to the king that she was a Jew and plead for her people. Xerxes, angered with Haman, ordered for him to be killed and allowed the Jews to destroy those who sought to kill them. This happened on the 14th day of the month of Adar, which is the day when Purim is celebrated on the Jewish calendar.

HOW IS PURIM CELEBRATED?

Purim is a communal holiday that involves getting together with friends, family, and neighbors. Festivities often include reading from the story of Esther (the Megillah), feasting, dressing up in costumes, giving gifts to the poor, and sending gifts to a loved one. One common food at a Purim feast is hamantaschen, a triangular pastry often filled with fruit. The name for hamantaschen comes from Haman and can be translated to mean “Haman's ears.”

Because of the levity of this festival, people are encouraged to partake in activities that would be restricted at other times during the year, such as drinking alcohol.

HOW IS PURIM CONNECTED TO OUR GOD?

The book of Esther is unique because it does not mention God, but God is implied in the book. When Mordecai asked Esther to plead to King Xerxes on behalf of the Jews, he said, *“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place ... (Esther 4:14a).”* He did not say where deliverance would come from, but the Jews know that God is sovereign and is ultimately the source of rescue. Throughout history, the Lord has delivered the Jews from all sorts of evil, and it's generally understood that God was the One who ordained salvation for the Jewish people in the story of Esther.

As your Jewish friends reflect on God's salvation through Esther, ask them how they believe they will ultimately be saved at the end of their lives. Then, you can ask if you can share what you believe about salvation, that God sent a person to once again save the Jews and all other people in the world. This person is Jesus, a Jew Himself who most certainly celebrated Purim as well.

This Purim, pray that Jews would see the salvation described in Esther's story as just a glimpse of the greatest salvation found in Christ.

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