

## Purim (Feast of Lots)

By Hannah Neshet [www.voiceforisrael.net](http://www.voiceforisrael.net)

Purim is a peculiar Biblical festival, often overlooked by the Church, but containing an abundance of prophetic revelation for all people devoted to the God of Israel and His people.

Unlike the other Feasts of the Lord, this festival is not commanded in the book of Leviticus in chapter 23. Rather, it is a special time which Mordechai commanded the Jewish people (and all who join us) to celebrate for all generations as a remembrance of when **God turned our sorrow into joy and our mourning into dancing.** Halleluyah!

**“Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration.”**

(Esther 9:20-22)



An illustration of Queen Esther and the King of Persia, created by a local artist

This festival is characterized by feasting, celebrating, dancing, wearing costumes and great rejoicing. Jewish people also send gift baskets to one another and to the poor, called **Sh'lach Manot**, containing special triangular cookies filled with poppy seeds or other fillings, called Hamentaschen or Oznei Haman (ears of Haman).

This tradition is based on the ancient Scriptural command: **“He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.”** (Esther 9:22)



Another tradition on Purim is for Jewish people to gather together in synagogues in Israel and every nation of the world, to read the entire scroll of Esther, called 'The Megillah'. During the reading, the Jewish people participate by cheering on the hero (Mordechai, uncle of Esther) and booing the enemy – the influential anti-Semite who had called for the annihilation of all the Jews of Persia.



Photo (right): Reading from the Megillah (Scroll) of Esther

The festival of Purim (Lots) celebrates God's deliverance of His people from their enemies in the ancient nation of Persia (modern day Iran). This seems to remain the common theme of most Jewish festivals:

- They tried to kill us
- We won
- Let's eat!

### A Game of Chance?

The name, **Purim**, comes from the word, 'Pur', which means a '*lot, a method of choosing or making a decision, seemingly by chance*'. In the Old Testament, the Cohen (Jewish Priest) would discern God's will through the Urim and Tumim, indeterminate objects upon their breastplate.

Even King David had a way of discerning God's will; for example when he inquired of the Lord if he should pursue the men who attacked their camp at Ziklag, or not? The casting of lots (Pur'im – the plural form of pur) was affirmed as a legitimate way of seeking God's will in making decisions.

Also in the New Testament they cast lots for who would take part in the ministry and replace the missing disciple after Judas (Acts 1:26). As usual, however, the enemy takes what is from God and produces an ungodly counterfeit.

The world is full of divination and fortune telling in the form of crystal balls, tarot cards, i-ching, Ouija boards, astrology and psychic hotlines. Praise God that we don't need to consult such things because we have the pledge of our Good Shepherd (Adonai Roi), that His sheep hear His voice, and that we have the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us into all truth.

In Persia the pur was used as a kind of Babylonian dice, to seek guidance from pagan gods. The day that Haman chose to cast the pur, seemed to be a matter of chance, but if we look at the Hebrew calendar, we can see the deliberate hand of God. On the **13<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of**

**the year**, Haman used the pur to determine the date of the Jews' destruction, which fell on the **13<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of Adar**. (Esther 3:7 & 13)

The edict for the annihilation of the Jewish people would have gone out the next day, the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, which is Nissan. Why is this significant? **Because this very day is Passover!**

Just as every Jewish household in Persia would be sitting together at their Passover Seder (traditional service and meal), recounting to themselves and to their children the greatness of God's power in delivering them from Egypt; they would receive the shocking news.

In exactly eleven months' time, their enemies would attempt to murder each one of them in cold blood for one reason and one reason alone – they were Jews. How merciful is our Heavenly Father to soften the blow. He made sure that uppermost in His people's minds and hearts would be the remembrance of their God's supernatural, mighty, delivering power.

Perhaps God stirred Haman to issue the edit on Passover in order to deliver this message to the Jewish people, ***“He who delivered you from Pharaoh in Egypt long ago is still well able to deliver you from Haman today!”***

Events may occur in our lives that seem random, but the book of Esther contains a message that God is in control. Whatever our situation or circumstance, we can rest in the assurance that our times are truly in God's hands.

The whole story of Esther seems to be one of chance happenings and coincidences:

\* Queen Vashti 'just happens' to pick this time to refuse to come to the King's royal feast. So the King has to find a new queen.

- Mordechai 'just happens' to be in the right place at the right moment to hear of a plot against the King's life.
- The King 'just happens' to have a sleepless night so that when his courtiers read his book it reminds him that Mordechai saved his life.

All these things seem like chance, not the definite, guiding hand of God. Someone once said, *“A coincidence is simply a miracle in which God chooses to remain anonymous.”*

### [Hidden Secrets in the book of Esther](#)

The whole book of Esther is shrouded in secrets, intrigue and mystery, but God is the revealer of secrets. When Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's astrologers, sorcerers, and magicians could not discern the King's dream, he determined to put them all to death.

But when they came to kill Daniel and his friends, they sought the Lord for the secret that would save their lives, and in His mercy, God revealed the secret to Daniel in a night vision. Daniel blessed the name of God, who “...reveals deep and secret things.” (Daniel 2:19-22)

Powerful life lessons have been hidden within the Book of Esther, one of which involves ‘secret or hidden identities’. The very name Esther אסתר comes from a root סתר (s-t-r) meaning ‘hidden or concealed’.

It appears in the Torah in the Hebrew phrase, “I will hide (haster) הסתיר My Face.” (Deut. 31:18)

**Even God is hidden in the Purim story.** If we search the whole megillah (scroll) from beginning to end, we will find no mention of his name. The book of Esther almost didn’t make it into the canon of the Bible because of this fact.

The closest reference to God is when Mordechai tells Esther that redemption for the Jews will come **from “another place” (makom aher).**

But one of the names of God is **YHVH Shamah יהוה שמה**}, which means ‘**The God who is there**’. Even when God seems hidden from us, He is still there, for He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. He is ‘Imanu’ (with us) El (God) – God with us.

Even when we cannot see nor understand what is going on in our lives, with enemies before us, behind us, and surrounding us, God is still there, even if hidden, but faithfully working behind the scenes to work out all the details, divine appointments, and circumstances to secure our victory. He may even ask for our participation in the drama!

Besides the concealment of God Himself, the idea of concealed, hidden or mistaken identities also runs as a theme throughout the Book of Esther and festival of Purim. Traditionally, for Purim we wear costumes and masks to disguise our identity.

Little boys dress as soldiers, Mordechai the King, or even the bad guy, Haman. (Boo!) Now the costumes have expanded to include every conceivable disguise. Purim is a festival to dress up, wear a mask and have fun.



*Photo:* Liat (Queen Esther) and Avi (Sponge Bob) with local child (clown) on the moshav (village) dressed in costume for Purim.



**In Esther, we see other instances of hidden identities.** In obedience to Mordechai's instructions to her, Esther concealed her Jewish heritage from the King until she later revealed her true identity at the exact right moment.

As **another example of mistaken identity**, Haman thought that the King's reward for the man he desired to honor was meant for him; but instead he found it was Mordechai, his enemy.

In God's Kingdom, often things are backwards or upside down from the ways of the world. It is a Kingdom where the first are last and the last are first, where tax collectors and prostitutes enter before Pharisees, where the weak are strong and the poor are rich.

If we look at the heroine, Esther, we see the identity *of a poor, little orphaned Jewish girl named Hadassah*, living in exile in the Land of Persia. We don't see **Esther, a courageous and Godly Persian queen**. But God saw this potential in her.

God also sees our true identity and our potential. Gideon considered himself the least of the least, but God called him a 'mighty man of valor'. (Judges 6:12) God knows who we truly are and has a destiny for our lives. The question is whether or not we will have the courage, perseverance and determination to take hold of it.



Liat, age 6, dressed as Queen Esther

Do we have faith to believe what the Word of God says about who we are in the Messiah? God sees us as a champion, a victor, more than a conqueror in Him!

The Word of God says that even our very life is **'hidden with the Messiah in God.'** (Colossians 3:2-3) Our identity is a true son or daughter of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords – members of a royal priesthood.

Just as Esther was willing to lay aside her own plans and dreams, in order to fulfill her destiny, so must we lay our hopes and ambitions on the altar, and say, "Not My will but Thine be done."

**The Church may also have a secret hidden identity – not separate from the Jewish people –but fellow citizens - an integral part of the commonwealth of Israel.** (Ephesians 2:12,13)

Just as Mordechai called upon Esther to approach the King to petition him for the lives of her people, so is the Ruach Hakodesh (Holy Spirit) crying out to the Church to pray and intercede for the salvation of Israel and the Jewish people from all those who threaten her survival.

**This is not a time to remain silent.** For who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?

**“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”** (Esther 4:14)

Happy Purim!

Love Hannah & family  
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Photo: Celebrating Purim on Streets of Jerusalem

Please receive this blessing I send you from Zion:

**Y'VARECH'CHA ADONAI V'YISHM'RECHA  
YA'ER ADONAI PANA V A LECHA VICHUNECHA  
YISA ADONAI PANA V ALECHA  
V'YASEM L'CHA SHALOM**

**MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU  
MAY THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE SHINE UPON YOU AND  
BE GRACIOUS TO YOU  
MAY THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON YOU  
AND GIVE YOU PEACE**

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About the Author:

Hannah Neshet grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior.

She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, writing and teaching about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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**“For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”  
(Isaiah 2:3)**

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