

PURIM SPECIAL 2020!

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Prayer for Blessing the Scriptures

Barchu et-Yahweh hamvorach
(*Cong.* Baruch Yahweh hamvorach lay-oh-lam va-ed)
Baruch Yahweh hamvorach lay-oh-lam va-ed
Baruch ata Yah-weh, Elo-hay-nu Melech Ha-Olam
Asher bachar banu michol ha-ah-meem
Ve-nah-tan lanu et-torah tow
Baruch ata Yah-weh no-tayn ha-Torah (ve'breet chah-dash-ah)

ALL READ IN UNISON IN ENGLISH:

Bless Yahweh, Who is to be blessed
Blessed is Yahweh, Who is to be blessed forever and ever
Blessed are You, Yahweh our Elohim, King of the Universe,
Who chose us from all the peoples and gave to us the Torah
Blessed are you Yahweh, who gave us the Torah (and the Renewed Covenant Scriptures)

Telling the Story in Summary Form

My goal in this Purim Special is give all you interesting facts and insights that hopefully are not too commonplace elsewhere. So, since anyone can read Esther in their Bibles and/or go to services where the Scroll of Esther is chanted from, I wanted to take you beyond that experience and supplement that experience with things that are more unexpected, although I still recommend that all of you do take the time to read Esther directly for yourselves. It should be something that feels personal and private, even if you are in a synagogue while doing it, but either way I wanted to do more for you than just read it to you.

On the other hand, to not reference the story at all would certainly be counterproductive to understanding the significance of Abba YHWH's redemption, so let me just paste a quick recap from Wikipedia:

The Book of Esther begins with a six month (180 day) drinking feast given by King Ahasuerus, for the army of Persia and Media, for the civil servants and princes in the 127 provinces of his kingdom, at the conclusion of which a seven day drinking feast for the inhabitants of Shushan, rich and poor with a separate drinking feast for the women organized by the Queen Vashti in the pavilion of the Royal courtyard.

At this feast Ahasuerus gets thoroughly drunk and orders his wife Vashti to display her beauty before the people and nobles wearing her royal crown. She refuses, and Ahasuerus decides to remove her from her post. He then orders all

young women to be presented to him, so he can choose a new queen to replace Vashti. One of these is Esther, who was orphaned at a young age and was being fostered by her cousin Mordecai. She finds favor in the king's eyes, and is made his new wife. Esther does not reveal that she is Jewish.

Shortly afterwards, Mordecai discovers a plot by courtiers Bigthan and Teresh to kill Ahasuerus. They are apprehended and hanged, and Mordecai's service to the king is recorded.

Ahasuerus appoints Haman as his prime minister. Mordecai, who sits at the palace gates, falls into Haman's disfavor as he refuses to bow down to him. Having found out that Mordecai is Jewish, Haman plans to kill not just Mordecai but the entire Jewish minority in the empire. He obtains Ahasuerus' permission to execute this plan, and he casts lots to choose the date on which to do this – the thirteenth of the month of Adar. When Mordecai finds out about the plans he orders widespread penitence and fasting. Esther discovers what has transpired; she requests that all Jews of Shushan fast and pray for three days together with her, and on the third day she seeks an audience with Ahasuerus, during which she invites him to a feast in the company of Haman. During the feast, she asks them to attend a further feast the next evening. Meanwhile, Haman is again offended by Mordecai and builds a gallows for him, with the intention to hang him there the very next day

That night, Ahasuerus suffers from insomnia, and when the court's records are read to him to help him sleep, he learns of the services rendered by Mordecai in the previous plot against his life. Ahasuerus is told that Mordecai had not received any recognition for saving the king's life. Just then, Haman appears, and King Ahasuerus asks Haman what should be done for the man that the King wishes to honor. Thinking that the King is referring to Haman himself, Haman says that the honoree should be dressed in the king's royal robes and led around on the king's royal horse. To Haman's horror, the king instructs Haman to do so to Mordecai.

Later that evening, Ahasuerus and Haman attend Esther's second banquet, at which she reveals that she is Jewish and that Haman is planning to exterminate her people, which includes her. Ahasuerus instead orders Haman hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. The previous decree against the Jews could not be annulled, so the King allows Mordecai and Esther to write another decree as they wish. They write one that allows the Jews to defend themselves during attacks. As a result, on 13 Adar, five hundred attackers and Haman's ten sons are killed in Shushan. Throughout the empire 75,000 of the Jews' enemies are killed (Esther 9:16). On the 14th, another 300 are killed in Shushan. No spoils are taken.

Mordecai assumes the position of second in rank to Ahasuerus, and institutes an annual commemoration of the delivery of the Jewish people from annihilation.

The Top Seven Surprises from the Book of Esther

So now, rather than simply read and tell a story straight that most of you already know very well, I thought I would take a fresh approach and go deeper with some details that are not always apparent from a plain recitation.

1) We can firmly date the time of Ahasuerus reign.

This is perhaps one of the most neglected areas of research around this historical event. To understand why the events in the Book of Esther happen we must first understand the motivation of the King of Persia. There can be little doubt on the matter now, after centuries of scholarship, that Ahasuerus is also known as Xerxes the First, who ruled Persia from 485-465 BCE. While there are other rulers mentioned in Scripture with this same name, they come well after other historical data in Esther, so we know we have the right one.

Therefore when the story opens in his third year, that is 482 BCE, and when it shifts to the month of Tevet in his 7th year when Esther is made queen (2:16-17) this month would have begun at sunset on December 20th, 480 BCE. At that time, this king would have just come out of a major traumatic event borne from his battle against the Greeks and this is the untold story of Purim that we will get to later.

2) We can also firmly date the very days of key events leading to Purim.

Sometime during the first month of Abib, in the 12th year of this king, the lots were cast and the date of execution for the Jews was set to the 13th of Adar (3:7), 474 BCE, and in our calendar Abib 1 translates to March 29th and the intended death date would have been February 29th in 473 BCE.

3) Esther is mentioned in Persian records!

Have you heard of this, folks? If not, I am not surprised because it never seems to make headlines when the Scripture is proven right, does it? In the exact year that Scripture tells us Ahasuerus takes a queen, Persian records tell us he married a lady named AMESTRIS, and this is also recorded by the Greek historian Herodotus. But if we put the term back into its original Aramaic dialect that both the Persians and the Babylonians spoke, AMESTRIS becomes AMMI-ISHTAR, and it is from ISHTAR that we get ESTHER. It is because of this pagan goddess association that the Scripture goes out of its way to call her also by her Hebrew name, HADASSAH; however what is also interesting is that the extra-biblical records give us more information about her family history.

Amestris' father was Otanes, a famed Persian general who was highly regarded at court. He apparently had married a Jewish woman, Abihail (Esther 2:15), and both of them died, so their cousin Mordechai adopted her and raised her according to the heritage of her mother.

4) Mordechai is in Persian records too!

Mordechai was also a relative of Otanes, which explains why he would have the opportunity to be a counselor in Xerxes' court. The Greek historian Ctesias, writing no more than a century after these events, remembered "Matacas/Matacai, the favorite counselor to Xerxes the First" and this is definitely a corruption of "Mordechai" as his name in Greek is properly rendered MARDOCHAIOS.

According to Fausset's Bible Dictionary:

(Mordechai) A Persian name according to Gesenius, worshipper of Merodach. But a Babylonian idol's name would not have been given him under the Persian dynasty, which rejected idols. It is rather Matacai. Ctesias (Prideaux Connect. 1:231-233), who probably saw the Medo-Persian chronicles mentioned in Esth. 10:2, names a Matacas¹, Xerxes' chief favorite, the most powerful of the eunuchs. Xerxes sent Matacas to spoil Apollo's temple at Delphi (Miletus?) a work congenial to a Jew, as the order was to the iconoclastic king.

This same historian says that Matacas/Matacai was a eunuch, which matches the Biblical data of Mordechai having neither wife nor child. Eunuchs were well known to be trusted advisors and have access to Persian royal harems, which Mordechai also did.

However, I personally do not believe a man righteous as Mordechai would, even under royal pressure, accept a name that essentially means "servant of Marduk." Granted Daniel was known by a Babylonian name (Belshazzar = Baal saara usur = Baal protect the king) as were his three friends, but in Daniel's case I believe he was simply responding to the name he was given at age 17 for the convenience of the king but in his heart probably thought of *baal* in its functional usage of "lord, master" rather than the name of a deity. So from Daniel's view I believe he is thinking of his name as *Adonai protect the king*, which matches the way he addresses the kings he works with (Daniel 6:21).

The same is true of Mordechai. While the original etymology of "Marduk" (AMAR-UTU) means "bull calf of Utu", the MAR by itself in Babylonian and Biblical Aramaic means in Hebrew the same as "baal", again "master, lord." Since this is an Aramaic speaking country and culture we are dealing with here, an Aramaic origin for Mordechai's name makes the best sense, as we do not see that name anywhere from the Hebrew part of the Tanakh. As a result, I believe "Mordechai" actually means something

¹ It is very common when crossing dialects or languages within the Semitic Group for "soft" sounds of letters to be switched with their "hard" sounding equivalents. Hence the letter *d* is considered "soft" but its match on the "hard" side is the letter *t*. So when crossing into Persian Aramaic, Hebrew *mor* becomes *mah*, Hebrew *duh* becomes *tah* and the original *kai* ending, though initially preserved on the Persian side, later corrupted to *kas*. Therefore the original Persian rendering was *Matacai* and the later derivation was *Matacas*.

close to *Mar Dochi* (the master who is credited with merit). As such, it may also be a title denoting his status.

5) **Vashti was not casually disobeying the king.**

The command that Vashti defies in 1:11-12 seems an odd one to risk losing her rank over: "Come to me with your crown". That is, until we understand what this really means: Come to me with your crown---wearing nothing but your crown. So the king wanted to show off Vashti's great beauty by having her parade around naked before all his chief advisers and governors.

6) **Haman's Hatred of Mordechai is rooted in conflicts dating back to the time of Jacob.**

In the story, Mordechai's refusal to bow down to Haman though it was Persian custom and the direct order of his king is said to be the main reason Haman conspired to kill all the Persian Jews. Of course, we know that Mordechai's refusal was not meant as a slight against Haman at all but merely because his faith in Abba YHWH precluded such a display towards men.

To be sure, Haman was incensed at Mordechai's behavior, but really, he couldn't have been that surprised. His family group understood Israelite sensibilities all too well from long experience.

Mordechai was the great-grandson of Kish, who went into exile in Babylon. He was also a Benjaminite, the same tribe from which Rav Shaul would arise five centuries later.

Haman, on the other hand, was "the son of Hammedatha the Agagite" (3:1) which made him a direct descendant of Amalek, grandson of Esau. So now we see this grudge has been nursing for a very long time, going back to when Jacob deceitfully acquired his older brother's birthright and blessing:

Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, *even* me also, O my father." So Esau lifted his voice and wept. Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, "Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, and away from the dew of heaven from above. "By your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve; but it shall come about when you become restless, that you will break his yoke from your neck." So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." (Genesis 27:38-41 NAU)

While it's true Esau and Jacob reconciled personally, Scripture also tells us that later generations from Esau's line bore a great hatred for the sons of Israel, such as here:

In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves. Then Joram crossed over to Zair and all his chariots with him. And

he arose by night and struck the Edomites who had surrounded him and the captains of the chariots; but *his* army fled to their tents. So Edom revolted against Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time. (2 Kings 8:19-22 NAU)

One can then imagine Haman, the full weight of centuries of familial hatred on his head, looking for redemption from Jacob's sons that none of his ancestors could claim. Now, at long last, Isaac's prophecies about him breaking the yoke of his rival clan seem to be coming true. Finally—he must have been able to taste it—the long humiliation of Jacob comes by the order of the Persian King. Mordechai should bow—MUST bow—to the son of Agag, the son of Amalek, the son of Esau.

And yet, Mordechai REFUSES, for as a Jew, he will certainly not bow to an Amalekite, even if he bent the rules for showing respect to dignitaries in the court of his king, Xerxes. Haman must have thought, “If the sons of Jacob won't bow to my ancestor now, they never will. I should wipe them off the face of the earth!”

The other reason is that as an Amalekite, Haman holds a grudge against the tribe of Benjamin specifically. It was Benjaminite Saul who, as king of Israel, wiped out a massive number of Amalekites by invading their country (1 Samuel 15:5-20), so now it was payback time!

7) **Haman won't be the only Edomite to kill massive numbers of Jews.**

Haman's wicked plot now being foiled, his family is still not done with harassing the Jewish people. Josephus tells us another from that tribe will arise to slaughter thousands of Jews including Pharisees, leading teachers, members of his own family and even an attempted murder on Messiah Yeshua himself!

But Antigonus, by way of reply to what Herod had caused to be proclaimed, and this before the Romans, and before Silo also, said that they would not do justly if they gave the kingdom to Herod, who was no more than a private man, and an Idumean, i.e. a half Jew, whereas they ought to bestow it on one of the royal family, as their custom was. (Antiquities 14:403)

Not only is Herod from the same line as Haman, they also share something else in common: For both men the full moon of Adar is the last one they will ever see! Herod dies about 2 weeks after a lunar eclipse that happened just before sunrise on March 11th, 4 BCE.

The Missing Chapter of Purim: Greece is the Word Part 1 or “Once Upon a Time in Ionia”

Before we get into this history, I just wanted to say at the outset that while it may not seem this robust historical drama is about Purim, trust me it really is, but it takes a while to get to the connections, except of course for explaining a bit more about the Persians who are at the heart of both interconnected stories.

The Persians were a people generally known for tolerance and even kindness, given the standards of the times in which they lived. Persians were renowned for allowing religious freedom throughout their empire, which is one reason why so many Jews preferred to be under their rule in the first place. It was the Persian king Cyrus that Isaiah calls “messiah” and who first allowed the Jews to return home from Babylon. Other Persian kings like Darius and Artaxerxes, played a direct role in supporting the rebuilding of Jerusalem and her Temple. Not only that, but their taxes were considerably lower than their rival empires. If you were a minority and you wanted freedom, trust me, you wanted Persian rule.

But the Persians also had a dark side²...something that spurred them on to the darkest rage the ancient world had ever known. I can sum it up in a single word: GREECE.

Persian policy was similar to that of Imperial Rome, in that it preferred to rule at a distance through local vassals whenever possible. Usually this system worked very well, especially considering the long patience of the Persians who were really pulling the strings.

The problem though began in a place called Ionia which became a province of Persia because her king asked for help from them to put down a rival. The Persian Emperor agreed and asked only for the Ionian king to do a ritual sacrifice involving fire and water. The Ionian king agreed, but apparently he did not understand that doing said ritual was an act of swearing submission and loyalty to Persia. By the time he figured it out it was too late and he did not have the strength to repel the Persians now in his land.

But, in 499 BCE, a group of Greeks living in Ionia rose up against their local rulers and sparked a civil war. True to their patient policy, King Cyrus at first left the locals to sort out their affairs on their own, hoping to re-establish full sovereignty over whichever faction prevailed. But, the rebels did something no one could have anticipated: They sent out a distress call to Athens for help.

The Athenians then were put in an impossible position. Remember “Greece” as we know it now was not a unified country, but a series of city-states sharing a common language and culture. Emotionally, Athens wanted to defend her Ionian brothers who, like them, were in favor of promoting democracy. To them the Persians were the OPPOSITE of democracy, practically a fascist state in Athenian eyes.

But politically speaking, to attack a juggernaut like Persia was both literally and politically suicide. The Persians, as the book of Esther says, have 127 provinces and

² Another exception had to with an incarnation of the Persians known as the Sassanid Empire (from 224 CE-651 CE). It is a tragedy all but forgotten in the West but when Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, the kings in Persia began to look at Christians in their midst with suspicion as potential Roman spies and massive persecutions of the Aramaic believers began shortly thereafter. In around 340 CE, something the Church of the East calls “The Great Persecution” began and they were nearly wiped off the face of the earth at that time.

millions of armed men at their disposal. Their training and weaponry was also the best in the world. On an open battlefield no one could match them.

Unfortunately though for the Athenians, their sentiment got the better of them, and they supported the Ionians. It was a mistake they would regret forever.

In 490 BCE, the Persians first decided to exact their vengeance on Athens. Their strategy was to invade them by sea and burn their city to the ground. But to the shock of nearly everyone, the Athenians BEAT the Persians at the battle of Marathon, but really, they just got lucky. And yes, in case anyone is curious, this is the same Marathon that the 26 mile race was named after. But as the story goes, the runner who brought news of the victory to Athens simply yelled “Nike!” (Not the shoe, the goddess of victory) and collapsed and died. Think of that next time you put on that pair of cross-trainers.

At any rate, what had happened was that a Greek army luckily was patrolling the beach when they spotted the Persian fleet. Their general, a political leader named Themistocles, quickly organized a defensive posture that all but blocked the beach from the Persians.

The Greeks then charged forward into the water and swamped the Persian ships, decimating the entire naval force. Persia had tried to invade by sea without a land back-up, and Themistocles was the only general who knew, they would NOT make that mistake a second time.

So while the Athenians celebrated their great victory at Marathon, Themistocles was terrified at the size of the Persian navy. He wanted to double his own navy knowing full well the Persians would return, but the other Athenian leaders said no. Even when the Athenians became flush with cash after discovering a massive silver mine that stood to give every Athenian a windfall of about \$1500 in today’s money, other politicians balked at using it on more ships.

What then could Themistocles do to save his own people from certain annihilation? That part of the story is coming up next!

The Missing Chapter of Purim: Greece is the Word Part 2 or “Meet the Spartans”

Themistocles then did what any politician in his shoes would: HE LIED. He basically made up a FAKE enemy so that Athens would be prepared against the REAL ONE, because otherwise they greatly exaggerated the strength of their army and the weakness of the Persians. The deception worked, and Themistocles got his ships, which sets the stage for the next battle. Again, I promise, you will see how this relates to Purim.

Ten years later, in 480 BCE, the stage was set for the biggest last stand in history. Themistocles had entered into an alliance with the greatest “special forces” soldiers on the planet: Sparta. The king Leonites was convinced that Persia represented a common enemy to both Sparta and to Athens, and it was the Athenians own city that the Persians had vowed to burn to the ground. Normally enemies, Spartans and Athenians united in a

land-sea defense to try and stop 300,000—MINIMUM NUMBER—Persians from taking over their world.

Themistocles was put in charge of the Athenian navy and his job was to delay as much as possible the Persian fleet from landing at a narrow pass called Thermopylae, where Leonites and his famous 300 Spartans waited to vigorously defend the narrow pass. Themistocles knew he could not stop or destroy the Persian navy. They were simply too big. But the more of their ships he took out and the longer he made the Persians wait to make landfall the better it would be for his allies on the ground who were also guarding the land route to Athens.

Because the Persians could barely advance more than six men abreast, their huge numerical advantage was negated, and the Spartans killed about 20,000 of them in three days of fighting. But the Spartans could only win as long as Themistocles blocked the Persian navy or until the Persians found another way around the Spartans. So by the third day, the advantage switched to Persia at long last. They had found an alternate route to get behind the Spartans, and from there it was all over. All 300 Spartans were killed, including their king Leonites, and Themistocles had to limp away with his remaining ships in defeat, knowing his beloved Athens was doomed.

The Persians acted on their threat and burned Athens to the ground, but the Spartans and Athenians had held them off long enough for people to learn of the threat and evacuate. By the time the Persians got there, they had a lot of buildings to destroy, but very few people. Then, on their way back home, the Persian navy made a huge blunder and fell into a trap laid by none other than Themistocles himself.

The Persian fleet gets bottled up at a place called Salamis, allowing Themistocles to completely destroy them, but for a few measly ships that escape. That's the story, but here's the punchline:

THE KING OF PERSIA THAT LOST SO MANY AT THERMOPYLAE AND SALAMIS WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE SAME KING ESTHER KNEW, XERXES THE FIRST!

This explains a lot of issues that seem unclear from the Scriptural account alone such as this one:

It happened in the days of Ahasuerus -- that Ahasuerus who reigned over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Nubia. In those days, when King Ahasuerus occupied the royal throne in the fortress Shushan, **in the third year of his reign**, he gave a banquet for all the officials and courtiers -- the administration of Persia and Media, the nobles and the governors of the provinces in his service. For no fewer than a hundred and eighty days he displayed the vast riches of his kingdom and the splendid glory of his majesty. (Esther 1:1-4 JPS 1985)

Okay so the story opens in Xerxes' 3rd year, but look what happens next:

Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, in his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she won his grace and favor more than all the virgins. So he set a royal diadem on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. (Esther 2:16-17 JPS 1985)

So what happened during those four years? History provides an easy and certain answer: The king was out of the country at war with the Greeks!

Then, when he comes back it is IN HIS SEVENTH YEAR, Xerxes is absolutely FURIOUS at the indignities he has suffered abroad. He simply cannot tolerate any more disrespect. After all, Athens was a backwater town, a nobody, and they had just soundly whipped the greatest empire on earth both by land and by sea.

Furthermore, even though five more years pass between these events and the Purim incident, it is clear that Xerxes really knows how to nurse a grudge. He commanded, to give just one small example, that a food taster would whisper in his ear before every meal, "Sire, remember the Athenians" and he would never stop thinking about vengeance against them for the rest of his life.

And now, during his fateful 12th year on the throne, his trusted advisor Haman comes by and what does he say:

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; **their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain.** "If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries." (Esther 3:8-9 NAU)

That's all the king needed to hear. Another group of rebels with different rules who flout his authority, like they did his predecessors and himself at Ionia, Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis. He must have reasoned that tolerance in the past had been his undoing and that rebellions had been allowed to fester until they got completely out of control. Local rulers were either traitors or imbeciles, and either way this was NOT going to happen again on his watch. Better to kill them—nip it in the bud and be done with those rebel Jews.

And this of course is my overriding point. Without this historical context, the normal gentle demeanor of the Persians is completely at odds with the details in the Book of Esther. Fortunately however, we can get the full story from very reliable sources quite close to the actual events and really strengthen the Biblical account!

In the end, this is also a very odd concurrence of little known but important Scriptural truth and ironically the mind of Hollywood that often ridicules it. The sequel to the popular Hollywood version of the 300 Spartans, called *300: Rise of an Empire*, was released right at Purim time in 2014.

Postscript

While the Purim story as it relates to Persia, Athens and Sparta ends here, there are other repercussions from these events that carry forward to future generations. One important example has to do with the fact that so many groups within the Persian Empire were eager to follow Haman's lead and commit genocide, only to face humiliation and mass slaughter themselves.

This is basically a zero-sum scenario. For the Jews to win at Purim a lot of other people had to lose, not just their lives but their prestige before the emperor. The people who opposed the Jews in the book of Esther are in some cases from the same groups who did before and after that time.

And so it was that a generation later Persian Emperor Artaxerxes I appoints Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab to be governors in the nearby lands surrounding Jerusalem, that Nehemiah is now governor of. Each of Nehemiah's counterparts represents a disaffected group that, like Haman did against Mordechai, have deep-seated hatred and jealousy against the newly returned kingdom of Judah. As a result, it is hardly surprising that they try to suppress Nehemiah politically from carrying out his charge, since their predecessors had failed to do this when Haman's plans went awry.

As for Nehemiah, he was made governor of Judah by Artaxerxes I in 445 BCE, and he retained that post until shortly before his death in 409 BCE. One of the reasons we know the time of his death so precisely is because the prophet Daniel is referring to it as the first seven week period of his famous seventy-weeks vision.

In that case, Daniel tells us that time is broken down in three sections: First 7 weeks, then another 62 weeks and then the last (70th week) when Messiah does his ministry for a half-week, or 3 ½ years. Daniel's clock, as we talked about before, started with the decree of Artaxerxes I to rebuild all of Jerusalem and not just her Temple, and that was in the fall of 458 BCE. 7 weeks in a day equals a year prophecy equals 49 years, which bring us to Nehemiah's death in 409 BCE! Daniel's remaining 62 weeks will end in the fall of 26 CE, when Messiah makes his public debut being immersed by his second cousin, Yochanan.

Meanwhile, Nehemiah is replaced after his death with a man named Bagoas, and we know about him because the Jews who have a temple to Father YHWH on Elephantine (Egypt) wrote to him asking for help because the native Egyptians damaged that temple. Bagoas then writes back and promises assistance, which saves their temple for another 50

years or so before being destroyed completely. Once again we see the same opponents of Judah harassing her through one government or another, just as we saw with Esther.

Herod the Great, as mentioned before, was another descendant of Haman and Amalek responsible for harassing and murdering many Jews and he even dies at Purim, at a lunar eclipse in February of 4 BCE, just as Haman did.

Then, after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the long exile of the Jews beginning at the close of the Bar Kochba rebellion in early 136 CE, Jewish tradition in exile begins to slowly take place. Perhaps remembering these very associations we are talking about here, many rabbis identified the Romans (Kittim) as also being descendants of Esau.

To be fair, I personally do not believe this idea to be valid, but the point isn't that. Rather, the point is that in the Jewish mindset descendants of Esau are the consistent foil against the peace and prosperity of Judah, so in that thematic sense the drama of Purim lives on into our own times and beyond.

Timeline for Purim and Related Events

BCE

499-494– Ionian Revolt

490 -Greeks defeat Persia at the Battle of Marathon

485- Ahasuerus (Xerxes the First) ascends to the throne of Persia, vowing revenge for his father Darius' defeat.

482-Queen Vashti deposed.

480-Xerxes loses at Thermopylae and Salamis. Esther is made his queen in December (Tevet) of this year.

474-Lots cast to determine death of Jewish people (probably early April). Death date selected for 13 Adar.

473- (February 29th), anticipated death day for Jews has them turn on their enemies and defeat them. Celebration follows soon after.

465-Xerxes the First dies, succeeded by Artaxerxes I.

457-Start of Daniel's 70 weeks clock when Artaxerxes allows the entire city of Jerusalem to be rebuilt, not just her Temple (Ezra 7, Daniel 9).

Why is Esther not among the Dead Sea Scrolls?

It is perhaps one of the most enduring “side stories” of the Purim story: Why is Esther not found, either in book or fragmentary form, amongst the library of the Dead Sea Scrolls? What makes this question so difficult to answer is that you can't prove a negative. Just because we have not found part or all of Esther among the Dead Sea Scrolls does not prove there wasn't one. Even all these decades, not all of the scrolls have been deciphered and there have been suspicions of cover ups among the small elite cadre of scholars that have dogged this research almost from its inception.

On the other hand, sometimes it is us, not history, which overly complicates matters. For example, technically speaking, Esther is not the only Biblical book missing from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Did you know, for example, that no part of 2 Chronicles has ever been found amongst the scrolls?

And yet, we don't hear many protests or speculations about the "missing" 2 Chronicles because 2,000 years ago 1 and 2 Chronicles were one book and it just so happens that the latter "half" of that book did not have a fragment found.

Therefore, one of the easiest explanations for the absence of Esther is the boring one: The bad luck of the draw determined that all parts of Esther simply did not survive, or perhaps it was lost in another part of another cave, waiting for discovery.

Failing that explanation, could there be other motives at work here? To answer that question, we need to go back to the history behind the people who were believed to have written many of them, the mysterious desert sect called the Essenes. This is what Josephus says in part about them:

We have thought it proper to relate these facts to our readers, however strange they be, and to declare what has happened among us, because many of these Essenes have, by their excellent virtue, been thought worthy of this knowledge of divine revelations. (Antiquities, 15:379)

The doctrine of the Essenes is this:--That all things are best ascribed to Elohim. They teach the immortality of souls, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for; **and when they send what they have dedicated to Elohim into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices, because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves;** yet is their course of life better than that of other men; and they entirely give themselves over to husbandry. (Antiquities, 18:18-19)

The isolation of the Essenes from mainline Judaism and their avoidance of Temple sacrifices in lieu of their own versions in the desert may be pointing to why they also excluded Esther. If Esther's omission is deliberate, it might possibly be based on sectarian grounds. For example, another corpus not in the Dead Sea Scrolls are the books of the Maccabees. This is because one of the groups that fled into the desert to be with the Essenes were the unfair losers of the Maccabean Revolt. By "unfair losers" I am of course not referring to the Syrian Greeks who persecuted Israel. Rather, I am referring to the original line of the priests, known as the Zadokites.

Named after Zadok, a famous priest associated with David and Solomon, this line prevailed in Israel and Judah for more than 800 years. But, after the Syrian Greeks were defeated and the independent Jewish kingdom known as the Hasmoneans arose, these new Jewish kings also wanted to be priests as well, a move that was basically illegal. The Hasmoneans were Levitical, but they were not from Aaron's line and therefore not

qualified to be high priests. Nor were they from Judah and so they had no right to be kings either, so such moves were bound to create backlash in the more traditional Torah based communities.

However, what was perhaps even more important was the fact that the Zadokite line, after eight centuries of service and after being praised by no less than the prophet Ezekiel, were kicked out of power and fled into the same desert the Essenes were, so we have now two groups who were seeking kosher sacrifice and not finding it in the Temple and certainly not in the wider world dominated by pagans. And I believe the Persian Jews would have been looked down upon by these hyper-sectarians. After all, if even the Jerusalem priests were not pure enough for Essene tastes, how well would Jews living away from the Temple altogether have been viewed?

True the story is one of uplifting deliverance of the Jewish people, but it is not Israel-centric, nor is it concerned with matters of ritual purity or priestly regulations that were key to the entire world view of the Essenes and the Zadokites. Add to this the fact that the Essenes viewed almost all Jews outside of their sect as evil and destined for destruction, and I think it becomes clear why Esther was left out of their collection, again, if that omission was in fact deliberate, but we can never really know for sure. Until better evidence surfaces then, this is my best guess as to why Esther is not among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Hidden Aspects of Purim in the NT, Part 1 (Yochanan 5:1-47)

For this section, let me answer a question I get a lot with respect to Yeshua and his Torah observance: Why is Purim seemingly not mentioned in the NT? Could it be Yeshua didn't keep this feast?

This is an important question, because one cannot argue that Yeshua only kept the MAJOR Feasts because of the Hanukkah festival he attended in Yochanan 10. All the others, Passover, Tabernacles, Hanukkah, are all mentioned. Yeshua's feeding of the 4000 was intended to coincide with Shavuot (Pentecost) and also we may infer by his decision to send the Ruach ha Kodesh on that day that Yeshua viewed it as important feast to commemorate. So what about the last one? What about Purim?

In the year 29, the last full year of Yeshua's life, we have the events of Yochanan 5, "the feast of the Jews". This is beyond any doubt in my mind, Yeshua keeping Purim! But how do I know this? Here's how:

- 1) In order to properly divide up the Gospel narrative, we needed to find one event that is reported approximately mid-way through the ministry in all four Gospels, with at least one account giving us a hard time reference. That event is the Feeding of the 5,000, and in Yochanan 6:4 we were told it happened "near" Passover in the year 29, or before April 15th of that year. (Some have thought otherwise but found themselves in need of a Rude Awakening!)

- 2) As a result, more than 95% of Gospel events can be easily classified as happening either before or after mid-April in the year 29. The events in Yochanan 5 are literally just before the Feeding of the 5,000.
- 3) Yeshua's ministry begins in the year 27, which we have gone over before from chronological information in Luke (15th year of Tiberius), Yochanan (46th year since Herod began rebuilding the Temple) and Daniel (483 years from the 7th year of Artaxerxes) which all bring us to that year. So, what we are looking for is an occasion that hits between the spring of 27 and the Passover of 29.
- 4) The Scripture gives us three other clues. First, the healing that Yeshua does in Yochanan 5 is on the Shabbat (5:9). Second, the occasion cannot be a feast already named by Yochanan because it would totally go against his specific writing style. That eliminates Passover (chapter 2, 6,12), Sukkot (chapter 7) and Hanukkah (chapter 10). Third, Shavuot is also eliminated because if Yochanan is willing to name a minor feast (Hanukkah) it would be totally odd for him to ignore the title of a GREAT FEAST since he gives the two others by name, as well as due to special rules by the rabbis that I will get into shortly. Nevertheless, I will check all the feasts during this window of possibility. So here is the "roll call" for all the feasts on the Shabbat:

27 CE: Shavuot (May 28th, 27): 50th day falls on a Friday night, but the feast would not have been observed on the Shabbat. Rabbinic rules laid down by Hillel and Shammai pushed the sacrificial portions of Shavuot-Pentecost to Sunday if the 50th day hit Friday-Saturday, which it did in this case. **Yom Teruah/Rosh Hashanna** (September 17th, 27): This is also another Friday night, so in theory it seems it could be the right time. However, there must be at least one winter between his first ministry year and our target because Yochanan 4:35 references Yeshua saying to the Samaritan woman, "four months and then the harvest". With Passover being "near" in the very next chapter, this must refer to winter, sometime in January, where four months will bring us to the spring harvest. It can't be the fall harvest because four months prior to that puts us in late spring, which hasn't happened yet! Other Gospel events put Yeshua in Galilee for most of this time, not returning to Jerusalem area until it is close to a Great Feast. **Sukkot** (October 1st, 27): Also a Friday night and also eliminated for the same reason as Yom Teruah with respect to Yochanan 4:35 but also because Sukkot is directly mentioned in Yochanan 10, so it makes no sense that it will be not named before that. {PS-No New Moon Shabbats to speak of either.} **Hanukkah** (Wednesday, December 8th, 27 CE), does not fall on Shabbat and also would not have its name ignored when it is mentioned in Yochanan 10.

28 CE: Purim (February 26th, 28) begins Saturday at sunset. Passover (March 27th, 28) is a Monday. **Shavuot** (May 16th, 28) is a Tuesday. **Yom Teruah/Rosh Hashanna** (September 6th, 28) is a Wednesday. Now **Yom Kippur** (September 15th, 28) does hit on a Friday night, but it is a FAST, not a feast, so no good! **Sukkot** not surprisingly can't be a Shabbat, it hits (September 20th, 28) on a Wednesday. **Hanukkah** (November 27th) is also a no-go, being on a Monday. **However the new moon for Kislev is interesting, falling on Friday sunset, November 3rd, 28 CE.** That is a Rosh Chodesh, a New Moon

“feast,” **but it would not have required Yeshua to be in Jerusalem, and we know from other occasions (long story) that Yeshua kept Rosh Chodesh Shabbats in Galilee**, including one in just a few months from now.

That special Rosh Chodesh is sunset on Friday, March 2nd, 29 CE, **and it is the New Moon for 2nd Adar, when Yeshua is in Nazareth at his hometown synagogue**. He was supposed to read from Isaiah 66:23 (From one New Moon to another from one Shabbat to another all flesh will come worship Me) but instead, he flipped the scroll back a tiny bit and got to Isaiah 61 instead. The rest is history, but Purim will be exactly two weeks later, Friday March 16th to Saturday March 17th, when Yeshua will be in Jerusalem!

So now let us read Yochanan 5:1-47 with fresh eyes and new understandings!

After these things was a feast of the Yehudeans (Purim) and Yeshua went up to Urishlim. Now there was a certain place of immersion there in Urishlim, which is called Beth-Khisda, and there were five porches in it. And in these were laying many people who were sick, and the blind and the lame and crippled and they were anticipating the stirring of the waters. For from time to time a Messenger would descend to it, to the place of immersion and would stir them the waters, and whoever would first descend after the movement of the waters would be healed of every pain which he had. **{Explain about the Asklepiion connection.}**

And there was a certain man who was in sickness thirty and eight years. Yeshua saw this man who was lying there, and he knew that he had this disease for a long time, and he said to him, "Do you desire to be made whole?" That sick man answered and said, "Yes my Master, but I have no person that when the waters are stirred up to place me in the immersion pool. Rather, before I come another descends before me."

Yeshua said to him, "Arise! Take your pallet and walk." And that man was healed at once and arose and took his pallet and walked. And that day was the Shabbat. And the Yehudeans said to him, to that man who was healed, "It is not Lawful for you to carry your pallet."

And he answered and said to them, "He who made me whole, he said to me, "Take your pallet and walk." And they asked him, "Who is this man who said to you, "Take your pallet and walk?" But he who was healed did not know who Yeshua was, for he was pressed in by a large crowd, which was in that place.

After some time, Yeshua found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold you are whole again. Do not sin or else something that is worse than before should happen to you." And that man went and said to the Yehudeans that Yeshua is he who had made him whole.

And because of this, the Yehudeans were persecuting Yeshua and were seeking to kill him because of these things he would do on the Shabbat. But he, Yeshua, said to them, "My Father works until now, I also work." And because of this the Yehudeans were seeking all the more to kill him, not only because he had loosed the Shabbat, but also concerning that he would say that his Father was Elohim and was equating himself with

Elohim.

But Yeshua answered and said to them, "Amen, amen I say to you that the Son is not able to do anything by his desire, but what he sees the things that the Father does. For these things that the Father does, the Son also likewise does. For the Father loves the Son and everything that he does he shows to him.

And greater than these works He will show him so that you will marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, likewise also the Son will make alive to those whom he desires. For the Father does not judge man, rather all judgment. So that every man may honor the Son as he honors the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

Amen, amen: I say to you that whoever hears my word and believes in Him who sent me has life that is eternal and does not come into judgment but has passed from death into life. Amen, amen I say to you that the hour is coming, even now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Elohim, and those who hear will live.

For as to the Father, there is life in [the Father's] core substance, and likewise He also gives to the Son, that there might be life in [the Son's] core substance. And He gave him authority to also execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this for the hour is coming when all those who are in the grave will hear his voice!

And those who have done good things will go forth to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil things to the resurrection of judgment. I am not able to do anything of my desire, but as I hear I judge and my judgment is just, for I don't seek my will, rather the will of Him who sent me.

If I bear witness concerning myself, my testimony is not true. Another is he who bears witness concerning me. And I know that his testimony that he testifies concerning me is true. Yochanan was sent to you and he testified concerning the truth. And I did not receive testimony from man; rather I say these things that you may live. That man was a lamp that shone and brought light, and you desired to boast for an hour in his light. But I have a testimony that is greater than that of Yochanan.

For the works that my Father has given to me to complete them, those works that I do, testify concerning me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me testifies concerning me. You have never heard His voice, nor have you seen His appearance. And His Word does not dwell in you because you do not believe in him whom He sent.

You search the Scriptures, because in them you think you have that life that is eternal, and they testify concerning me. And you do not desire to come to me, that you may have that life that is eternal. I do not receive praise from the sons of men.

But I know you, that the love of Elohim is not there in you! I have come in the name of my Father, and you have not received me. Yet, if another should come in his own name,

you will receive him. How are you able to believe, who receive praise from one to another, and yet the One that is from Elohim you do not seek? Why? Do you think I will accuse you before the Father?

The one who will accuse you is Moshe, in whom you place your hope! For if only you had believed in Moshe, you would also be believers in me, for Moshe wrote concerning me. But since you won't believe the writings of that man, how can you believe my words?

Hidden Aspects of Purim in the NT, Part 2

And finally, to wrap up everything we have seen in this Purim Special, we need to look at one more place that Purim imagery is evoked in the NT. Granted, this last one is a bit indirect, but that does not in my view in any case make it any less powerful. What also may be surprising to some is that this event is one that is directly and intimately tied to Pesach—the death and resurrection of Yeshua the Mashiyach! How can that be, you might wonder, well, let me show you and you can decide for yourself.

- Esther, like Yeshua, was raised by a man who was not her biological father (Esther 2:7, Matthew 1-2, and Luke 1-2). Also like Yeshua, Esther was anointed with copious amounts of myrrh and other rare spices before her public debut (Esther 2:12, Matthew 2:11). Also lots are drawn to decide when the Jewish people will die (Esther 3:7, 9:24) and lots are drawn again when the Romans gamble for the clothes of Yeshua while he dies (Matthew 27:35).
- Lots are cast yet another time to determine who will bring the apostles back up to twelve in the wake of Judas' death (Acts 1:26). Although she did not die, both Esther and Yeshua had to be willing to lay down their lives for their friends and people (Esther 4:15-17, Yochanan 10:17-18, 15:13).
- When Mordechai is elevated, he rides into the city on a horse (Esther 6:10-11); when Yeshua is showing his humility, he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11). Mordechai was also clothed with a fine linen robe at his redemption from death (Esther 8:15), while Yeshua was both transfigured in white and resurrected in white linen (Matthew 17:2, 27:59).
- And again, when Mordechai is elevated, a royal purple robe is put on him (Esther 6:6-10, 8:15); but when Yeshua is humiliated, another royal purple robe is taken off of him (Mark 15:17-20). When Esther triumphs gloriously the result is a great feast. When Yeshua triumphs gloriously it already is a great feast. In both cases, the feasts coincide with the full moon.
- The book of Esther ends with the preservation of the Jews saved from what would have been certain death. The Gospels end with Messiah saving everyone from death through the gift of eternal life.

I'm Andrew Gabriel Roth. I hope you enjoyed this Purim Special! Chag Sameyach to you and your house!

March 5th, 2020