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The Shepherd of Israel



The Hidden Meaning of Purim

by Michael Wechsler



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The Festival of Purim is a joyous holiday, for on that day we celebrate God's miraculous redemption of His people from almost certain genocide in the vast Persian empire of the fifth century B.C.E. The only other event of *national* redemption recorded in Scripture is the Exodus, in which God performed unparalleled signs and wonders before Egyptians and Israelites.

God in Hiding

Unlike the book of Exodus, however, the book of Esther paints a picture of God's hidden working on behalf of His people. Likewise, Esther is the only book of Scripture which omits the name of God or any explicit reference to Him. Students and scholars have puzzled over this seeming anomaly for ages. Some maintain that the book of Esther should never have been included in Scriptures at all.

The Talmudic sages, however, connected God's absence to the curse foretold for Israel's disobedience in Deuteronomy 31:18: "And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evil which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods" (JPS:1917). This verse, say the sages, is an allusion to the hiding of God's face during the period of exile covered by the book of Esther, for the expression "I will surely hide" is conveyed by one Hebrew word which is spelled the same (consonantly) as "Esther" (see Talmud Bavli, *Chullin* 139). In other words, the "hiding" of God throughout the book of Esther—even reflected in the book's name—is the direct result of Israel's failure to keep even the first of the ten commandments ("Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," Exodus 20:3), which was the reason for their exile in the first place.

Preserved from Extinction

Despite the seeming "absence" of God in Esther, He was still working on behalf of His chosen people. When God judged Israel for her rebellion, there was always a qualifier that He would preserve a remnant—and through them the Jewish people as a whole. Nothing in the universe could cause God to reject His people completely (see Jeremiah 31:35-37). In the book of Esther, as in the Exodus, God preserved His people from extinction for the express purpose of providing a genealogical line for Abraham's seed—the Messiah—to bring a blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3; 26:4).

The Hidden Meaning of Purim

(continued)

The Passover Connection

Just as each Hebrew prophet adds bits and pieces to the picture of Messiah, so too does Esther contribute to this picture, though in an implicit manner more in keeping with the theme of the book. By looking carefully at the chronology in Esther 3:7-12, we find that Esther's fast (4:16) began during the daylight hours of Nisan 14, the first day of Passover, and ended three days later on Nisan 16 (see the *Targum Rishon*, Talmud Bavli *Megillah* 15a, and Rashi on the latter). During this three day period, Esther humiliated herself with fasting (see also Psalm 35:13; Isaiah 58:3, 5). After this, she put on her royal robes and appeared before the king to ask for the redemption of her people.

In the same manner, Jesus underwent a three day period of humiliation by death (Philippians 2:8), having been nailed to a tree and killed by the Roman authorities on Nisan 14, the first day of Passover (Matthew 27:1-46), and resurrected three days later on Nisan 16 (Acts 10:40). Through His sacrificial death, Jesus presented Himself before the King of the Universe and secured forever the atonement of all who would come to believe in Him (Hebrews 9:24-10:18).

An Unpopular Idea

The idea that Messiah should suffer or undergo any kind of "humiliation" is truly unpopular among most Jewish people today—we want a powerful Messianic king who will appear on the scene and immediately put an end to all evil and wipe away every tear. However, just as



Esther identified with her people, so too, the prophets tell us, would God Himself identify with us by taking on the identity of the Messiah, and taking upon himself the punishment for our sin (Isaiah 9:6; 53:5).

What good is a Messianic kingdom when the hearts of the King's subjects are unprepared to receive it? David ben-Gurion said of the First Zionist Congress: "On that day, the Jewish State was indeed founded, for a state is founded first in the hearts of the people." Today is the day that the Messianic King, Jesus, wants to establish his State in you.

A Hunger in my Spirit

by Akiva Cohen



I was visiting Jerusalem to see my grandmother, but in the process, my visit stirred up a deep sense of being Jewish and finding a much more extended family and identity. I began to ask, perhaps for the first time in my life, "Just what does it mean to be Jewish?"

When I returned home, my spiritual hunger continued to gnaw at me. I began studying with an Orthodox rabbi and was deeply attracted to the rabbinic life. There was a certain reverence about the rabbi and his teachings, a certain beauty in the traditions and rituals he followed, that brought me closer to the God I was seeking. I was reminded of how I used to feel when I said the Shema at bedtime. Still, something undefinable was missing from my life, something that made me realize that this form of Judaism mastered only the mechanics of religion, and not the relationship I was seeking.

A Road Through Eastern Mysticism

The next step in my search seemed natural: Eastern religions. Soon I was meditating and practicing techniques to alter my consciousness. This seemed to free me to discover God. My soul felt like it was liberated and expanded. I was on the right path at last, or so I thought. Still, something within me kept whispering that what I was doing was only a counterfeit of the reality I was seeking.

I longed to know God and to fulfill the spiritual desires that my visit to Israel had awakened. Daily, I asked God to show me the way. He answered by placing a belief in my heart, like a dim light at the end of a tunnel, that He greatly desired to reveal

Himself to me. Somehow I knew that His desire for me far exceeded my desire for Him.

One day I fell on my knees and cried out, "Help me!" I could not even articulate what I wanted help for. I only knew I was lost. During the next week, everywhere I went, people would tell me about Jesus. I began to get the message—loud and clear. When a friend invited me to church, I was eager to go. As soon as I entered, I sensed a sincere presence of God among the people, and started to attend regularly.

Finding the Presence of God

The holiness and love of God were evident in each meeting. His love was almost overwhelming. To my surprise, I discovered dark places within me that shrieked out against the holiness of God. More than once, I was literally compelled to run out of the services when these feelings of struggle and oppression came over me. It was evident that the Eastern religions I had so faithfully followed were not going to release me so easily. One evening, someone spoke about victory in death and how Jesus had conquered our final enemy. I knew this message was for me.

Travelling from Death to Life

Death had always seemed like a dark and evil subject to me, but at that meeting, I saw the miraculous victory of the resurrection of Jesus over death. Jesus conquered this enemy! He arose and can give us new life!

Slowly, I began to find strength to deny these feelings of doubt and darkness. The evidence of His power was staggering! The



We believe...

That the Bible (both Old and New Covenants) is sacred and inspired by God.

That the Tenach, our Holy Scriptures, predicted that Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Genesis 3:15).

That Messiah would be born in Israel, specifically in the town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:1).

That Messiah would be God living among the men and women He created (Isaiah 9:6-7).

That Messiah would die for the sins of Jews and Gentiles, even though He was innocent and did not deserve punishment (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53).

That Messiah would die at the exact time predicted by the prophet Daniel, more than 2500 years ago (Daniel 9:24-26).

That Messiah would rise from the dead (Psalm 16, Isaiah 53).

That Messiah would return to heaven and come back again to reign as our king (Zechariah 12:10, Isaiah 11:1 and following).

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A Hunger in my Spirit (continued from page 3)

evidence of His love was overwhelming! I reached out in my heart and said "yes" to God. Over the next month, I struggled with the new life that Jesus offered. I decided that I needed to study the Scriptures.

My studies, as well as several Messianic Jews God brought into my life, helped me recognize that I was in contact with the God of

Israel, the God of my fathers for whom I had longed so ardently. My search for God had come full circle!

One day, a friend at the church asked me if I wanted to pray to receive Jesus as my Messiah. That day, I did.

That was around 16 years ago now. The peace in my heart—knowing I am forgiven—has accompanied me ever since.

Hamantashen Recipe Your Mother Wouldn't Make

This is a variation (or violation) of a traditional recipe, which involved hours of slaving over a hot stove. This one only involves a few minutes of slaving!

- 1 pkg Duncan Hines Deluxe Yellow Cake Mix
- 1 cup flour
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbs water



Filling: apricot, or raspberry jam, or Solo prune or poppyseed filling, if you can find it in your supermarket!

Combine mix, flour, eggs and water with mixer until well blended. Roll out some dough onto a lightly floured surface to 1/8" thickness. Cut into 3" circles. Place one tsp. of filling in center, drawing up three sides to form a triangle. Pinch edges together, lightly moistening them with water if necessary.

Place on lightly greased cookie sheet. Bake at 375° for 6-8 minutes or until golden—and enjoy!