

Purim Reconsidered

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YHWH commands seven major festivals in the Torah, yet Hanukkah and Purim are not among them. We have included these festivals in this book because many of His people keep them: yet let us ask, "Why do His people keep them?" YHWH set forth His festivals in the Torah, and nowhere does He say that men would have the authority to add to His calendar (and in fact He says the exact opposite). Yet many of His people do keep man-made festivals such as Hanukkah and Purim (as well as Thanksgiving, and others); so let us discuss them here. If the Purim story is true, we might learn something important, as YHWH tends to work in patterns, and history repeats itself.

As we saw in the last chapter, Hanukkah is the story of our Jewish brothers' resistance against the Seleucid Empire, which sought first to assimilate the Jews, and then to destroy those who would not assimilate. In contrast, Purim is the story of how YHWH delivered our Jewish brothers from those who sought to exterminate them outright.

YHWH's name is never mentioned in the Purim story, except in acrostics; yet if the story is true, it does seem clear that YHWH was the only one who could have saved the Jews from the destruction the Babylonians had planned against them.

In order to gain some perspective, let us roll back in history, to 586 BCE. YHWH sent Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, to take the Jews into exile for their failure to follow the whole of the Torah, particularly with regards to letting the land rest on the Sabbath Years.

Divre HaYamim Bet (2 Chron) 36:17-21

17 Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand.

18 And all the articles from the house of Elohim, great and small, the treasures of the house of YHWH, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon.

19 Then they burned the house of Elohim, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions.

20 And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of (Media-) Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of YHWH by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by Evil-Merodach, and then by Belshazzar, who made a great festival.

Daniel 5:1-4

1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his (fore) father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, (so) that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of Elohim which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

Because Belshazzar's heart was lifted up, and because he purposefully denigrated the Temple vessels, YHWH gave Belshazzar a sign that he was soon to die.

Daniel 5:5-6

5 In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 6 Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.

However, since no one understood the writing, they brought in the prophet Daniel to interpret the sign.

Daniel 5:18-31

18 O king, the Most High Elohim gave Nebuchadnezzar your (fore) father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. 19 And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. 20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. 21 Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High Elohim rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

22 "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. 23 And you have lifted yourself up against the Master of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the elohim (g-ds) of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the Elohim who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.

24 Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

25 “And this is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

26 This is the interpretation of each word: MENE: Elohim has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;

27 TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

28 PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

King Darius the Mede was then succeeded by Koresh (Cyrus) of Persia. YHWH then led Koresh to proclaim a release for all of the Jews, so they could return to the Land of Israel if they so choose. However, very few did.

Ezra 1:1-4

1 Now in the first year of Koresh king of Persia, that the word of YHWH by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, YHWH stirred up the spirit of Koresh king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 2 Thus says Koresh king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth YHWH Elohim of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.

3 Who is among you of all His people? May his Elohim be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of YHWH Elohim of Israel (He is Elohim), which is in Jerusalem.

4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of Elohim which is in Jerusalem.

The total number of Jews returning was just over forty two thousand, which was but a small percentage of the millions of Jews living in Media-Persia at that time.

Ezra 2:64

64 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty.... Those who returned to the Land immediately began rebuilding the Temple, but their efforts were frustrated by the Samaritans. Though partly descended from the Ephraimites, the Samaritans were mainly descended from foreign stock that earlier Assyrian kings had brought in to resettle and repopulate the land. The Samaritans initially tried to join the Jewish efforts at building, but then sought to stymie the Jews.

Ezra 4:1-24

1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin (i.e., the Samaritans) heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of YHWH Elohim of Israel, 2 they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your Elohim as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

3 But Zerubbabel and Yeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our Elohim; but we alone will build to YHWH Elohim of Israel, as King Koresh the king of Persia has commanded us."

4 Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, 5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Koresh king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Two years later, King Koresh was succeeded by King Ahasuerus, also known as King Achashverosh, and/or Artaxerxes. The Samaritans wrote to him, saying that if he allowed the Jews to rebuild their Temple, they would soon seek to break away from his reign. Believing their allegations, Ahasuerus then gave orders that the Samaritans should halt the Temple's construction by any means necessary: even by force.

6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

7 And in the days of Artaxerxes Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes (Ahasuerus) king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. 8 Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion: 9 From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions — representatives of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites, 10 and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River — and so forth.

11 (This is a copy of the letter that they sent him): To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth: 12 Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations.

13 Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. 14 Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, 15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers.

And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed.

16 We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River (i.e., the Euphrates).

17 The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria (i.e., the Samaritans), and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth.

18 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me.

19 And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. 20 There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. 21 Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.

22 Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings? 23 Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.

24 Thus the work of the house of Elohim which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Now that we understand the history that took place before it, the stage is set for the Book of Ester to begin.

The Book of Ester opens with King Koresh's successor, King Ahasuerus, throwing a great festival that lasted for one hundred and eighty days (six months), to which he invited dignitaries from all throughout his empire.

Esther 1:1-4

1 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, 3 that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants — the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him — 4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.

Babylon's king was exceedingly wealthy. He could sure throw a big party without having to worry about the cost. However, even rich kings usually throw a party only to commemorate something specific. What was so important to the king that he would celebrate it for a full six months? Let us remember that he had just halted the rebuilding effort that his predecessor Koresh had begun, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy about the restoration of Jerusalem. Is it possible the reason King Ahasuerus was throwing such a great festival was that he believed Jeremiah's prophecy about the return of the Jews from Exile had now been proven to be false?

Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 29:10-14

10 For thus says YHWH: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place (Jerusalem).

11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says YHWH, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says YHWH, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says YHWH, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

Jeremiah had prophesied that the Jews would be in exile for seventy years following the destruction of the first temple. However, is it possible King Ahasuerus had mistakenly believed that the seventy years had begun earlier, when King Nebuchadnezzar ascended his throne? If so, and King Ahasuerus mistakenly believed that the seventy years of Jeremiah's prophecy were already complete, then he would have seen that he had just put a stop to the restoration of the Temple, and most of the Jews remained out in the Exile. Could this have led King Ahasuerus to believe that Jeremiah's prophecy was false, and that therefore YHWH Elohim was dead? Could this be the reason for his party?

After the six months celebration, King Ahasuerus held another festival which lasted seven days. During this festival, the king served drinks in golden vessels that were different from each other.

Esther 1:5-7

5 And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

6 There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble. 7 And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king.

If these were the same Temple vessels that King Belshazzar had celebrated with earlier (above), then King Ahasuerus' purpose was probably to celebrate the end of the Jews as a people set apart unto YHWH, and to denigrate the Temple vessels. If so, YHWH did not terminate King Ahasuerus' life as He had done with King Belshazzar's. Rather, YHWH had an ironic bit of poetic justice in mind, for although he was an anti- Semite, King Ahasuerus was soon to marry the Jewess Esther, and sire Darius the Persian through her.

Becoming drunk with wine, King Ahasuerus called for his beautiful wife Vashti (whose name means "And drink") to show off her figure to the other leaders of his realm. Vashti refused to be humiliated like that; but this only enraged King Ahasuerus, who began to seek a replacement for his queen.

Esther 2:1-4

1 After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her.

2 Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; 3 and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given them.

4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

Enter Mordechai, a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, whom some scholars believe was related to King Shaul, son of Kish; and also enter his beautiful adopted daughter Hadassah, also called Esther (i.e., Ishtar). Mordechai brings Esther to the king's palace, and charges her not to tell anyone she is Jewish.

Esther 2:5-8

5 In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Yair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. 6 Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Yeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

7 And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. 8 So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women. 9 Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women. 10 Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it. 11 And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her.

According to the world's standards, the Jewish people had never had it better. Mordechai was a high-ranking government official, and his daughter was about to become queen of the world's most powerful empire. As we will see below, the king was to decree a festival in Esther's name (i.e., Ishtar/Easter). Yet if Mordechai and Esther were really such good Jews, then why did neither of them return back to the Land of Israel when YHWH had given them the chance under King Koresh (Cyrus)? And why would Mordechai even consider allowing his daughter to marry a pagan anti-Semite such as King Ahasuerus? And why would she consent to it? Why indeed, especially considering that Esther still did not even feel secure divulging her nationality.

Esther 2:16-20

16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth (Tevet), in the seventh year of his reign. 17 The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king. 19 When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate. 20 Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

Mordechai sat within the king's gate; and, one day, as he sat there he overheard two of the palace guards plotting to kill King Ahasuerus. Mordechai told Esther, and she told her husband the king, and Mordechai's loyalty was then recorded in the royal chronicles.

Esther 2:21-23

21 In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22 So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. 23 And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

Curiously, however, Mordechai was not rewarded. Kings rely on tips from their subjects to stay safe, and to retain their hold on power. Yet for some reason, the king never rewarded Mordechai for informing him.

Up to now, the storyline is not one of set-apartness, but of profane behavior. Only 42,000 of the many millions of Jews living in Babylon had chosen to return back home to YHWH's land when they had had the opportunity to do so. Instead, most Jews, including the hero and heroine of our story, had stayed on in Babylon. They were intermarrying with the local people, and were even preparing to marry into (royal) pagan lineages. Yet for all of this profane behavior, Mordechai never lost his identity as an Israelite. In Esther Chapter Three, Mordechai even refused to bow down before a high-ranking government official named Haman, perhaps because he was descended from Agag, king of Amalek.

Esther 3:1-7

3:1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. 2 And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But

Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. 3 Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command? 4 Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. 5

When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath.

6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus — the people of Mordecai. 7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month (of Israel's destruction), until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

Even though YHWH's name is never mentioned in the Book of Esther, and even though Mordechai may not have set himself completely apart, Mordechai still considered himself Jewish. Just as King Shaul son of Kish had slain Agag, king of Amalek (First Samuel 15), Mordechai, of the house of Kish, refused to bow down before the son of an Amalekite. This filled Haman with such wrath that he decided he was not content just to destroy Mordechai, but all of the Jews in the empire.

Esther 3:8-11

8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from all other people, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 And the king said to Haman, "The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you."

Not long before this, the situation had seemed very good for the Jewish people, at least by the world's standards. However, now it seemed very bad. First King Ahasuerus had ordered the Jews in Israel to stop rebuilding the Temple, and now he consented to the extermination of all of the Jews. In fact, he completely consented, for normally when a king grants favor to a decree, he carefully reviews the legislation before placing his signet seal on it. However, in this case, simply upon hearing Haman suggest that the Jews should be killed, King Ahasuerus handed his signet ring over to him. Thus, a day before the Passover, on the thirteenth day of the first month, the king's order went forth that all of the Jews should be slaughtered eleven months later, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month.

Esther 3:12-15

12 Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and a decree was written according to all that Haman commanded — to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province, to the officials of all people, to every province according to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's signet ring. 13 And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month

of Adar, and to plunder their possessions. 14 A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day. 15 The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

Upon hearing of the decree, Mordechai did something which makes no sense to the natural mind (but which only makes sense in the spiritual): he put on sackcloth, and went out into the midst of the city, to cry out.

Esther 4:1-4

4:1 When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. 2 He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. 3 And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the

Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

4 So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them.

The rabbis teach that the Festival of Purim is really about repentance, and trusting in YHWH rather than trusting in our own right hand. Up until this point, while Mordechai's has remained basically loyal to his people, he has also been 'in the world.' He has not treasured YHWH's land, or His temple, but has chosen instead to remain out in the Exile, in the service of an anti-Semitic government, even consenting for his daughter to marry a pagan, anti-Semitic emperor.

However, now that his emperor decreed that both he and his people are to be exterminated, Mordechai changes. He realizes he cannot possibly save himself by his own right hand, and so his behavior reflects this knowledge. Instead of doing the 'sensible' thing by going and speaking with his daughter the queen, Mordechai puts on sack cloth so that he cannot enter the royal palace. Then he cries out in the streets, even refusing to put on regular clothes (which would allow him to speak with his daughter face to face). Even though YHWH's name is never mentioned, it seems clear that Mordechai knows only YHWH's hand can save them. Mordechai's behavior makes no sense to the natural mind; but in Scriptural terms, Mordechai is starting to make perfect sense. He dresses in such a manner as to make it perfectly clear that he realizes that he cannot rescue himself or his people by his own power and strength. Instead, he demonstrates that his life and the lives of his people are completely dependent upon YHWH's unmerited favor: and that is the main point.

However, we should notice that once Mordechai has done that he continues to do what little he can, sending a message to Esther through one of the eunuchs.

Esther 4:5-9

5 Then Esther called Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was. 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate. 7 And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. 9 So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Esther responds that she is unable to go see the king, for those coming into his presence without an invitation are to be put to death, unless the king takes action to stay the execution by holding out his royal scepter.

Esther 4:10-12

10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai:

11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days." 12 So they told Mordecai Esther's words.

Mordechai responds that she must realize she will not survive just because she is married to the king. Then he reminds her that YHWH predestines all things, and proposes that YHWH may have made her queen just so she might play her part in YHWH's deliverance from this present crisis.

Esther 4:13-14

13 And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther responds that Mordechai should command all the Jews throughout the Empire not to eat or drink for three days and three nights, which, amazingly, appears to mean they will be fasting over the Passover (even though the Torah commands Israel to partake of the Passover lamb on that day). Then she will go to King Ahasuerus; and if she perishes, then she will perish.

Esther 4:15-17

15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" 17

So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.

Once again, the rabbis would argue that by calling for all Israel to fast on the Passover (and also by fasting herself), Esther also demonstrates her understanding of how utterly dependent they all are on YHWH's favor.

Not only will Israel be violating the Torah, but normally a bride would also eat and drink before going in to see a king who chose her for her beauty, so as to look her best. However, by fasting three days she will not look her best; and all of their fates will be in YHWH's hands.

Having fasted and prayed, Esther enters the king's presence on the third day. The king, realizing that she would not have risked her life for an audience unless it was really important, asks her why she has come. She defers, asking the king to come to a banquet of wine instead, perhaps to put him in a better mood, and make him more agreeable. Interestingly, she also asks the king to bring Haman, which he does.

Esther 5:1-8

1 Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house.

2 So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter.

3 And the king said to her, "What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you — up to half the kingdom!" 4 So Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him." 5 Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said." So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

At the wine feast, still realizing that Ester would not have risked her life by entering his presence unless she felt it was really important, King Ahasuerus asks Esther again what it is that she wants.

6 At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, "What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!"

7 Then Esther answered and said, "My petition and request is this: 8 If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

Still not realizing that Queen Esther is a Jewess, and still not realizing that she seeks to annul his evil plot, Haman leaves her wine party in high spirits. However, encountering Mordechai in the king's gate, Mordechai still refuses to bow to him. Venting to his wife, she suggests that Haman make a gallows some fifty cubits (approximately seventy five feet) high, upon which he should have Mordechai hanged.

Esther 5:9-14

9 So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. 10 Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh.

11 Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king. 12 Moreover Haman said, "Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. 13 Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." 14 Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet." And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.

Again, YHWH's name is never mentioned in the Book of Esther, and yet a miraculous series of coincidences occur which could only have been coordinated on high. The night before the banquet, King Ahasuerus cannot sleep. Curiously, he orders the royal chronicles to be read to him, whereupon he discovers that nothing was done to honor Mordechai after he had put himself at risk by warning the king of the plot to assassinate him.

Esther 6:1-12

1 That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. 2 And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 3 Then the king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" And the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him."

What would cause a king to lose sleep? The Book of Ester does not tell us the reason, but rather it requires us to 'read between the lines.' Kings depend upon 'inside information' to maintain power and control, and traditional sources tell us the king may have been worried because his subjects had stopped feeding him information. Perhaps the king had asked himself why that was, and had consulted his chronicles in an effort to discover the reason; and that upon inspecting the chronicles, the king realized that nothing had been done to honor Mordechai for his loyalty? This would have presented a serious problem, for had the people reasoned that it was not worth the effort to alert the king to plots against his life (because there was only risk, and no reward), it might lead to his downfall, and even his death. If that was the case, then the best solution would be for the king to make a soon public demonstration that it had only been an oversight; and that King Ahasuerus really did mean to reward those who took risks on his behalf.

4 So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. 5 The king's servants said to him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in."

6 So Haman came in, and the king asked him, "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought in his heart, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" 7 And Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, 8 let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. 9 Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!'" 10 Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken." 11 So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!" 12 Afterward Mordecai went back to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered.

Now we might also surmise why Queen Esther had not asked King Ahasuerus her question straightaway, though it was important enough to warrant risking her life for. Perhaps she also needed some assurance that her petition and requests would be listened to, in light of the fact that the king had earlier been drinking with Haman. However, now that she sees Mordechai being honored publicly, it will seem safe to ask her question.

Esther 6:13-14

13 When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him." 14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.

The Book of Esther gives us many clues, but still asks us to do some sleuthing work for ourselves. Could it be that the reason Esther originally invited Haman to the banquet was in order to give him a false sense of security, so that he might become overconfident, and show some area of weakness that could be exploited, in order to save the Jews? Could it be that what she really wanted was more visibility on him? Still aware that Esther would not have risked her life had it not been important, again King Ahasuerus asks his beloved queen what the matter of importance is.

Esther 7:1-6

1 So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. 2 And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!" 3 Then Queen Esther answered and said, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. 4 For we have been sold, my people

and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss." 5 So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?"

6 And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" So Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

After the king has publicly honored Mordechai, Esther felt safe divulging her true nationality, as well as her reason for risking her life. In the private confines of the festival she had prepared, it became clear to the king that Haman was attempting to exterminate his chosen queen, as well as Mordechai, who has risked his life for him. As Haman tried to talk his way out of the situation, things only got worse for him.

Esther 7:7-10

7 Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. 8 When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?" As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. 9 Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him on it!" 10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided.

Then, after it is revealed to the king that Mordechai is the man who raised the queen, the formerly anti-Semitic King Ahasuerus gives his signet to Mordechai, making him the second in command of his realm. Then Queen Esther begs the king with tears to spare her life, and the lives of her people.

Esther 8:2-8

1 On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. 2 So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman. 3 Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. 4 And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, 5 and said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. 6 For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen?" 7 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen

Esther and Mordecai the Jew, “Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. 8 You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s signet ring; for whatever is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring no one can revoke.”

Shortly after Pentecost, messengers went forth with a new decree, nullifying the earlier evil, and stating that the Jews could defend themselves against anyone who would attack them on that day.

Esther 8:10-12

10 And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed it with the king’s signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds. 11 By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives — to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, 12 on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

When the thirteenth day of the twelfth month came, the Jews’ enemies were overpowered.

Esther 9:1

1 Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, the time came for the king’s command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them.

Haman’s ten sons were also put to death.

Esther 9:6-14

6 And in Shushan the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men.

7 Also Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, 8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, 9 Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vajezatha — 10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews — they killed; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

11 On that day the number of those who were killed in Shushan the citadel was brought to the king. 12 And the king said to Queen Esther, “The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king’s provinces? Now what is your petition? It shall be granted to you. Or what is your further request? It shall be done.” 13 Then Esther said, “If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today’s decree, and let

Haman’s ten sons be hanged on the gallows.” 14 So the king commanded this to be done; the decree was issued in Shushan, and they hanged Haman’s ten sons.

In verse thirteen, Ester asked the king to allow the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies once more (on the fourteenth day of the month). Yet, Ester also asked that Haman's ten sons be hanged, even though they were already dead (and even listed by name in verses seven through nine). Could it be that the reason Ester wanted to hang their corpses up in the sun was, in the aftermath of Haman's earlier order, to make it perfectly clear that no one could safely persecute the Jews in King Ahasuerus' empire? If this chronology is accurate, some of the Jews were finished defending themselves on the thirteenth of the month, while others needed an extra day.

Esther 9:15-17

15 And the Jews who were in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. 16 The remainder of the Jews in the king's provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. 17 This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. And on the fourteenth of the month they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 18 But the Jews who were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day, as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth of the month they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

19 Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwall'd towns celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar with gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another.

Then the Book of Esther reports that because of these things, Mordechai and Esther wrote to their people, and added to the Torah, commanding that the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the twelfth month ('Adar') be kept as a festival in perpetuity, among all the Jews forever.

Esther 9:20-26

20 And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, 21 to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, 22 as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. 23 So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, 24 because Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to annihilate them, and had cast Pur (that is, the lot), to consume them and destroy them; 25 but when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letter that this wicked plot which Haman had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

26 So they called these days Purim, after the name Pur (lot).

Some scholars question the accuracy of the Book of Esther, for reasons we will discuss a little later on. However, even if the Book of Ester is not completely accurate, we can still learn a great deal from it. For example, King Ahasuerus was only in the third year of his reign when he threw his six month long party.

Esther 1:3-4

3 that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants — the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him —4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.

Haman cast the lot (the pur) in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus' reign (to see when the Jews would be most vulnerable and susceptible to attack).

Esther 3:7

7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

Esther and Mordechai's new decree allowed the Jews to defend themselves at the end of the twelfth year of king, which was perhaps nine or ten years after King Ahasuerus had originally thrown his party. However, Daniel tells us that it was not until the first year of Esther's son, Darius the Mede (not to be confused with Darius the Persian), that the seventy years of Exile (as foretold by Jeremiah) were supposed to end.

Daniel 9:1-3

9:1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans — 2 in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of YHWH through Jeremiah the Prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. 3 Then I set my face toward YHWH Elohim to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

It was the second year of King Darius the Mede (son of Ahasuerus and Esther), that those who had returned back home to the Land of Israel were allowed to resume work on the Temple.

Ezra 4:24

24 Thus the work of the house of Elohim which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Ezra records how those who had returned to the Land wrote to the righteous King Darius, asking his pleasure with regards to the building of the Temple. King Darius, who probably knew that his mother was Jewish, gave great favor to those in the Land. He returned all of the temple vessels, and even paid for the Temple's reconstruction at royal expense.

Ezra 6:8-10

8 Moreover I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of Elahah (Elohim): Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes on the region beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered. 9 And whatever they need — young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the Elah of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem — let it be given them day by day without fail, 10 that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the Elah of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

Some rabbinical authorities define Amalek as anyone who has an unreasoning hatred for Israel. Further, they also remind us that YHWH works in patterns, and they draw heavy parallels to Nazi Germany. They also draw parallels between Haman's ten sons, and the New York Times headline of October 1947:

GOERING ENDS LIFE BY POISON, 10 OTHERS HANGED IN NUREMBERG PRISON FOR NAZI WAR CRIMES; DOOMED MEN ON GALLOWS PRAY FOR GERMANY

Julius Streicher was one of the ten condemned men. He is reported to have shouted "Purimfest 1946!" as the trap door to the gallows was sprung, as if to draw a parallel to Haman's ten sons being hanged. The ten men were hung on October 16, 1947. On the Rabbinical Calendar (which is different than the Torah Calendar) this was the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles, which the rabbis call Hoshana Rabbah. The rabbis claim that Hoshana Rabbah is the day that YHWH seals men's fates for the coming year. Considering that YHWH is in charge of all things, many people see these things as support for the idea that we should keep the Feast of Purim. However, we should bear it in mind that YHWH did not command us to keep the Rabbinical Calendar (which is different than the calendar YHWH commands us to keep in Torah).

Many scholars see some suspicious parallels between the Feast of Purim and ancient Babylonian mythology. For example, the names Mordechai and Esther strongly resemble the Babylonian gods Marduk and Ishtar (Easter). Further, in Babylonian mythology, Marduk and Ishtar are cousins, as are Mordechai and Esther in the story (see verse 2:7). Marduk was the patron elohim (g-d) of the Babylonian capital, and Esther is another name for Ishtar (Easter), whom the Babylonians worshipped as a fertility goddess, and as 'the mother goddess.' Some also find it suspicious that King Ahasuerus commands a feast for Esther in Verse 2:18, and wonder if this is the same as the feast of Easter (Ishtar) that is practiced in within mainstream Christianity.

Esther 2:18

18 Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

Some scholars believe that Purim originally derived from the Babylonian New Year's rites, which existed long before the Jews were taken into exile in Babylon. Many of these suspect

that the Book of Esther is a kind of a justification for practicing these Babylonian rituals, much like Christian mythology attempts to justify Easter and Christmas. These point out that the basic story components of Esther all occur in ancient Babylonian celebrations of their new year, including the selection of a queen, the parading of a common man dressed up in royal garments, and a fast and the giving of gifts.

On top of this, the chronology in Esther seems to depart from the historical records. Therefore, some scholars allege that the Book of Esther is not really a historically accurate document, and that it does not belong inside the canon of Scripture. However, that debate is a very involved one, and is outside the scope of this present study.

What is inside the scope of this present study is to state that if there really was an Esther and Mordechai, and if they really did command the Jews to keep a Feast called Purim, Esther and Mordechai do not have the authority to add festival days to YHWH's calendar, for YHWH commands us not to add to His word.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 4:2

2 "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of YHWH your Elohim which I command you."