

MESSIANIC

SPRING HOLIDAY HELPER

edited by Margaret McKee Huey

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Messianic Spring Holiday Helper

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Introduction

“These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD’s Passover. Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, “When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. . . It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places”” (Leviticus 23:4-11, 14b).

One of the most exciting things that is happening in this present season of spiritual renewal, as the Messianic movement grows and expands, is the restoration of the appointed times of the Lord for *all* of His people! His festivals are being recognized by Believers all around the world to be special seasons in which all who follow the God of Israel should actively participate! It is wonderful to hear the reports of how the Father is restoring the truths found in being obedient to His Instruction, as we observe and remember our Hebraic heritage, and consider His plan of salvation history in a very real and tangible way.

Perhaps the most recognizable of the appointed times of the Lord, given to us in the Torah, occur in the Spring. Anyone who is familiar with the Bible’s account of redemption knows about the Exodus and the giving of the Ten Commandments. The plagues dispensed upon Ancient Egypt, and God’s deliverance of the Israelites via the Passover lamb and through the Red Sea, are paralleled in the Apostolic Scriptures by the sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) at Golgotha (Calvary), and the final atonement that He has provided—vindicated by His resurrection from the dead. In the past twenty years, evangelical Christians have been exposed to the Passover *sedar* in significant numbers, and are embracing it as a very meaningful and significant part of their faith. This has helped to expand the growth of the Messianic movement, perhaps more than anything else—as **born again Believers really want to learn to do something that Jesus did!**

To help you and your family during this special season, we have included a variety of important articles on how to deal with your participation in the Spring holidays. We have included articles on Passover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread, what to do about Easter, and *Shavuot* or Pentecost. Many of these teachings come from our Virtual Spring Holiday series from over the

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past few years. These articles address the importance of remembering both the Exodus and the resurrection of Yeshua, and how you can properly commemorate these events with your family, focusing on the truths of the Scriptures. We have a practical guide that includes kosher recipes and a Haggadah for Passover, which you can adapt for your family or congregation. And as an added bonus, we have included articles on the often overlooked holiday of *Purim*, which precedes the Passover season by a month. Common issues and controversies that can arise during the Spring holiday season—both externally *and* internally—are also addressed, as fairly as possible.

Our family believes that the restoration of the Spring holidays is a blessing to us! We, who are to walk as Messiah Yeshua walked, must reach out to others in love at this time when the Father is restoring His appointed times to His people. Yeshua told us that others would know that we are His disciples by the love that we have for one another (John 13:35). We encourage you to love your family and friends in such a way concerning these feasts that they will be drawn to us, and not repelled. Invite your family and close friends to your home, **to join you** for your Passover *sedar*, or to your Messianic congregation or fellowship for a real hands on, educational experience. As you purchase various kosher items for your Passover *sedar*, you will likely encounter Jewish people who do not yet know Messiah Yeshua, and this will be a unique testimony to them of your obedience to the God of Israel.

Dear friends, it is only through our unconditional love for our Christian brethren that one day they will want to know what we know about walking like the Messiah. One day they will want to know why we have become thoroughly Messianic, and what they can learn from us. Likewise, only by Jewish people witnessing Messianics obeying the statutes of God's Torah, will they be provoked to considering the claims of the gospel, and recognize Yeshua as Israel's Messiah.

Let us rejoice in the true understanding that Yeshua not only actively participated in the Spring Feasts of the Lord, but that He was indeed the Passover Lamb Himself! Let us be a positive witness to all we encounter during the Spring holiday season.

Chag Sameach!
Margaret McKee Huey

A Summarization of Purim Traditions

Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee

The holiday of *Purim* (פּוּרִים) is a relatively minor festival in the Tanach (Old Testament), yet it portrays a very important story that all of God's people need to understand. Having been dispersed into Babylonian exile in 585 B.C.E., the Jewish people now find themselves under Persian rule. While many find their new Persian rulers more tolerant than the Babylonians, the Jews are still a minority and often find themselves subject to harassment and persecution. In the Book of Esther, King Ahasuerus' (or Xerxes') grand vizier, the evil Haman, devises a plot to kill the Jews when he is not worshipped by Mordecai. But Ahasuerus' new wife, the Jewess Esther, is placed in just the right position at just the right time to see that this scheme does not come to pass. Instead, Haman is executed using the very means that he intended to use against the Jews.

As can be imagined, a great sense of relief engulfed the Jewish people in Persia when Haman's plans were thwarted. God's people were preserved from mass genocide. Esther 9:20-28 summarizes how the festival of *Purim* was instituted by Mordecai to celebrate the Jews' deliverance from Haman:

"Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, obliging them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same month, annually, because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and *it was a month* which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions *of food* to one another and gifts to the poor. Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them. But when it came to the king's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them, the Jews established and made a custom for themselves and for their descendants and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they

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would not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually. **So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants.**"

Concerning the observance of *Purim*, v. 22 is most significant: "They were to observe them as days of feasting and merrymaking, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor" (NJPS). *Purim* was to be a time of rejoicing and doing good to one another, as God's faithfulness was revealed to the Jewish people through the actions of His followers. Even though "God" or "the Lord" is not mentioned specifically in the Book of Esther, one undoubtedly sees Him work through individuals who are committed to Him.¹

The Formation of Purim

The term *Purim* (פּוּרִים) is actually derived from the Semitic (probably Akkadian) term *pur* (פּוּר),² meaning "lot." It denotes the lots cast by Haman to determine when the mass execution of the Jews in Persia was to occur, as Esther 3:7 indicates, "In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, **Pur, that is the lot**, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month *to month*, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar," with the 13th of Adar chosen as the date to enact the executions (Esther 3:13). The 14th of Adar occurring immediately thereafter is designated as the day to commemorate *Purim*, although on leap years it is celebrated in the month of II Adar. *Purim* will often fall in either late February or early March on the Gregorian calendar. Although one would think that commemorating *Purim* and the almost destruction of one's people would be something negative, the Talmud explains, "when Adar comes, rejoicing increases" (b. *Ta'anit* 29a).³

In the Apocrypha *Purim* is called "Mordecai's day" (2 Maccabees 15:36), indicating that it was being celebrated as an important festivity several centuries before the ministry of Yeshua the Messiah. Traditionally, *Purim* is to be a time when the Jewish community believes that a person's joy is to increase. The tractate *Megillah* in the Mishnah details the celebration of *Purim* and some of the critical lessons it is to teach us. In Jewish tradition, *Purim* "is a minor festival in that work on it is permitted, but it has been joyously

¹ It is notable that God is specifically mentioned in the Apocryphal Additions to the Book of Esther, seen in the Greek Septuagint.

² Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:920.

³ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

A Summarization of Purim Traditions

celebrated in Jewish communities as a reminder of God's protection of His people" (*EJ*).⁴ It is customary that *Purim* not fall on the Sabbath.

Assorted Customs of Purim

The main feature of *Purim* by far is the study of the Book of Esther. Some Jewish Rabbis such as Moses Maimonides afforded Esther a place in the Hebrew canon second only to the Torah. The study of Esther during *Purim* is frequently done with a special *megillah* (מִגִּילָה) scroll in Hebrew. Of particular interest to *Purim* is that it calls members of the Jewish community to remember the trials that they have faced and God's faithfulness through those trials, especially the ones encountered in the Diaspora. Haman beguiled King Ahasuerus with the word, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom" (Esther 3:8), and this has caused many Jews to think of themselves and the additional places they have been scattered throughout history. Ronald L. Eisenberg remarks,

"All too frequently, Jews have faced a variety of Hamans, but in most instances (unlike in the *Megillah*) the conclusion of the story has not been happy. The triumph of the weak over the powerful recounted in the Book of Esther has been enormously uplifting to Jews throughout their long exile."⁵

Jewish theology has always considered *Purim* important because it typifies the salvation history of God, where He interjects Himself into the world of mortals and is able to act on their behalf, providing deliverance. Consequently, many Christian theologians likewise value the themes of the Book of Esther, and how we see God performing these actions through normal human vessels who are called by Him and empowered by His Spirit.

A major feature of *Purim*, detailed in Esther 9:22, is the encouragement for one to give to the poor. This is partially because when one has experienced God's deliverance, he or she should then be grateful to provide out of His abundance for those who have little or nothing. Varied Jewish traditions include the giving of certain kinds of foods based on specific interpretations of the themes of *Purim*.

The centerpiece of the modern observance of *Purim* is what was originally known as the *Purim-spiel*. This custom arose in Ashkenazic Jewish communities in Europe to give a performance for one's family or community to remember the story of Esther. Over time, however, this has developed into a very elaborate "*Purim play*" or dramatic presentation, often with young girls in the community dressing up with fancy gowns and makeup in honor of Queen Esther.

Today, there are some who surmise that under the influence of the Italian Carnival in the Middle Ages, the *Purim play* came about. However, it is more

⁴ Louis Jacobs, "Purim," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. MS Windows gx. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

⁵ Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 255.

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likely that “Under the influence of the Italian carnival...men [were] permitted to dress as women and women as men” (*EJ*).⁶ This would primarily have included “masquerading.”⁷ In this kind of *Purim* reenactment, the gender roles may have been reversed for the play to add a comic element, with men dressing up as Queen Vashti and Esther, and women dressing up as King Ahasuerus and Haman. This is, notably, not something that we see in *Purim* reenactments today, as mostly children are those who play the characters with the gender roles intact.

Traditional Foods

Eating is undoubtedly a major part of celebrating *Purim*, with a variety of traditional foods. One of the most common centerpieces of *Purim* are *Hamantashen* or Haman hat cookies. These are pastry cookies usually filled with fruit. Frequently, this is one of the foods that is made for and given to poor people for *Purim*.

During *Purim*, some Jewish communities observe vegetarian meals, due to the belief that Esther and Mordecai were vegetarian and did not eat from the Persian table. However, most Jews today disregard this custom.

There is some notable controversy surrounding a Rabbi Rava’s teaching in the Talmud that one should get so drunk on *Purim* that he cannot tell the difference between Mordecai or Haman when their names are spoken during the reading of Esther (b.*Megillah* 7b). Following this example has led some to believe that *Purim* is not a time of seriousness, when one recalls the salvation history of God, but instead that it is a holiday of frivolity and lewdness. Thankfully, there are Jewish teachers who have led by an example of encouraging *Purim* to not be a time of drunkenness, but instead sober severity and piety (and even fasting).

When we celebrate *Purim* as Messianic Believers today, we have an opportunity to pause for a moment and consider how our Heavenly Father has worked, and continues to work, through human beings who are faithful to Him. We get to consider that if Esther and Mordecai had not stopped Haman’s rampage, that the hope of our Messiah Yeshua entering into the world through the Jewish people would not be realized. While *Purim* gives us a time to have fun with one another, it should be through that humor and irony when God is able to communicate to us in a unique way, and we recall the miracles that He has performed for us—not just in ancient times, *but also today!*

⁶ Jacobs, “Purim,” in *EJ*.

⁷ Eisenberg, 258.