

PURIM SPECIAL!

Introduction, Title and Purpose

Shalom everyone and welcome to our Purim Special! Last year at this time, One Faith One People and the Scroll to Scroll program were both in their infancy, and I was just getting my proverbial feet wet as to how to explain the wonderful Hebrew feasts in “special programs”. But because of my inexperience at that time, and perhaps because I could have used a bit more personal confidence than I had, I made a strategic decision to not do a “Holiday Special” until Pesach rolled around. Or, to put it another way, I wimped out on Purim.

But even as I did my “strategic withdrawal” last year, I made a promise to myself that if I were so blessed as to be allowed to continue the program to this year, that when Purim did come around again I would finally give the occasion the detailed treatment it so richly deserved, and so here we are.

However, to be fair I did not ignore Purim teaching altogether in 2011. I made it my Torah Thought of the Week in connection with the Tzav Parsha, and I have adapted that essay for our use here, as well as expanded its original scope.

Much of my inspiration on how to do this came from the Hanukkah Special which seems to have been very well received by many of you who have written to me. So, I am trying to follow that same template and also focus on the aspects of Purim that are not always immediately apparent. After all, any teacher can read from the Scroll of Esther, but what can we learn that goes beyond just that book?

As we saw with Hanukkah, the answer was plenty; because Abba YHWH always plants seeds in His Word that get fulfilled later. We found that Hanukkah had several precedents in Tanakh before the actual historical event happened and we also saw that Y’shua kept Hanukkah in the Gospels. Now, we will apply the same approach to Purim, which is the only other post-Mosaic feast that also could have had standing in the Judaism that Y’shua knew. Not only will I be able to prove that, I will also show you exactly where Purim was kept by our Master!

But first, let me show you the “placeholder” for Purim in the Torah, or the place where YHWH uses to tell us that a feast like this will be coming in the future for Israel his people. For that, here is the adapted “Heart of Purim” Torah Thought of the Week that I gave last year...

The Heart of Purim

Purim is a wonderful time of year, commemorating the deliverance of the Jewish people from those who sought to destroy them. Unlike the original Exodus though, many Jews of

course stayed in Persia just as many would opt to do in Babylon even after the Captivity. But my Purim reflection has nothing to do with all of that.

I could focus on the special relationship between Esther and her uncle Mordechai or how Haman was defeated or even why Esther is missing amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls collection. These are all wonderful topics worth studying but—alas no—not this year. In fact I am going to try to tell you something special about Purim that will augment your studies. You all who study the Torah every week know this historical story as well as I do, so what can I bring to this discussion that you haven't already seen?

Well, Andrew, I can hear some of you thinking, you're probably going to bring in something about that calendar thingie of yours, right? And if that's what you are thinking, you are correct, but only partially.

You see, I can't help but associate Purim with the Exodus, admittedly with some key differences between them. Still, the core story is there in two events about a thousand years apart. Let's tell that common story:

A long time ago, a great empire rises up. This empire has a lot of Hebrews in it, far from their homeland, living side by side with the empire folk. For a long time, all is well. Then however an evil man comes to power and he is determined to oppress Israel.

For a time it seems he will succeed and the fate of a people hangs in the balance. But all is not lost. Hiding in this empire's royal family is a deliverer who can save Israel. The problem is this deliverer is uncertain they are up to the task and when it comes to them, they try to say no. Eventually though this deliverer realizes they cannot endure if Israel does not and so the deliverer confronts the king and others involved in this plot and foils it.

Afterwards, the nation of Israel will enshrine this story by commemorating a feast that must take place during the same time of year this happened. (The End)

What a nice tale! Except this time, in the role of Moshe, we have starring tonight a woman. This time the king does not have his heart hardened by YHWH but is merely deceived by the evil Haman. And of course, there are a dozen or so other differences that we get in "Exodus II: The Persian Adventure".

Except, that what I will say a little later may suggest a new title "Purim II: The Story of Moshe"!

You heard me correctly, I am talking about Purim as a PRELUDE to the Exodus literally, and before you all think I lost my mind, bear with me, because I will explain. Before getting into that seemingly impossible matter above, here is my calendar observation, right on schedule. Every year, either a New Moon in March or April will count as the start of our calendar. And every year, no matter which New Moon is the right one, we have a story about the redemption of Israel to guide us in the early days of

spring that coincides with its Full Moon.

In a year like this one, Pesach will come almost as late as it can come, April 17th at sunset, but Purim will be here very soon, just before the Vernal Equinox. In other years, such as the one where the Exodus happened, that Full Moon, the earliest possible time for Pesach, was at the VE itself.

So you see, every spring YHWH has commanded us to remember either one of two events that have the same problem and the same ending. It helps us realize that life is a gift, and what better time than the start of spring to celebrate the continuation of our families and that of Israel?

But now we get to the Heart of Purim itself. At the end of part 1 I asked a bonus Torah question of the week: What is the only Set-Apart occasion commanded by YHWH that did NOT happen? Here is the answer:

And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says YHWH, the Elohim of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" (Exodus 5:1)

And again, here:

"You shall say to him, 'YHWH, the Elohim of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now.'" (Exodus 7:16)

And one more time:

Moses said, "We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to YHWH." (Exodus 10:9)

That's three times—actually four, counting the indirect reference in Exodus 8:27! And yet, we know this Feast, whatever it is, is not Pesach. There is no unleavened bread, no Paschal lamb, no bitter herbs—none of it—mentioned. That's because Pesach commemorates YHWH PASSING OVER the dwellings of the Israelites who slaughtered the male lamb and put the blood on the doorposts!

So if this important feast isn't Pesach and it didn't happen, why would YHWH first command it to be and then never rebuke Israel for enshrining it in their observance? Was it just a ploy to see if Pharaoh would let them go for a little while? What would have happened had Pharaoh agreed and let them go—would YHWH just return the Israelites to slavery? There is no way to know because it didn't happen that way.

And yet, I believe this feast is a “place holder” in Scripture that was fulfilled 1000 years later by Esther! Consider the fact that this un-kept feast and Purim are hitting at the exact same time of year! Surely that cannot be a coincidence. Let’s see this from the Scripture:

Thus the Adonay Elohim showed me, and behold, He was forming a locust swarm when the spring crop began to sprout. And behold, the spring crop was after the king's mowing. (Amos 7:1)

We are also told in Exodus 9:31 that the barley crop had started blooming but was destroyed during the plagues. Both the locusts (Exodus 10:13) and the barley are firmly dated to happen in early to mid-March. Prior to that it is the dead of winter!

That means the original request for this feast in the wilderness is about a month before the Exodus because:

Moshe and the serpents starts the drama. Then....

Nile turns to blood.....1 day later
Blood plague ends/Frog plague begins.....7 days later
Frog plague ends/Gnat plague begins....1 day later
Gnat plague ends....1 day later
Insect plague begins....1 day later
Insect plague ends....1 day later
Pestilence on livestock begins and ends, then plague of boils begins...1 day later
Hail plague proclaimed....1 day later
Hail plague begins/ends.....1 day later (barley ruined)
Locust plague begins...1 day later
Locust plague ends/darkness begins...1 day later
Darkness plague ends....3 days later
Firstborn slain.....1 day later

Now add all these times up and you come to 22 days of plagues conservatively speaking...which is to say assuming 1 day intervals unless another is mentioned, like 7 days for the Nile turned to blood.

However there is another equally important pattern: The timing of all the other feasts in the Torah! For the rosh chodesh and Yom Teruah, these are timed to the New Moon. But almost everything else is timed by the Full Moon, including Purim, Pesach and Sukkot. Therefore, the fact that 21 days passed from the first request of this feast to the slaying of the firstborn at the FULL MOON, must mean that YHWH did NOT intend this feast to be at the NEW MOON. Therefore, this feast had to be the full moon BEFORE Pesach’s full moon—or Purim!

Now whether this is literally provable or not is kind of beside the point. Rather, my point is that the general timing of this “unknown” feast that never happened was more closely associated with the time of Purim than any other feast.

But from a perspective of what I view as beautiful rather than 100% precise and clinical, I think it wonderful that YHWH does seem to have held out a “bookmark” for what will 1000 years later become another deliverance that happens the month before the Exodus, again, so that no matter which full moon happens closest to spring, we have a redemption story to tell our children! And that is the real heart of Purim.

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.

On the other hand, to not reference the story at all may be counterproductive to understanding the significance of 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.

That's the headline...now let's go deeper!

The Top Seven Surprises from the Book of Esther

So now, rather than simply read a 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) Who was King Ahasuerus and when did he rule?

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 Teveth 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) When was the actual Purim event?

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, that's right, on our leap year day, which also happens to be the day I am writing this for all of you this year!

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 Faussett'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 Matacas, 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.

5) Vashti's Reasons Revealed.

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) The Real Reason Haman hated Mordechai and all Jews.

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 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 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 Y'shua 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, {a} 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

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 side... 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. Now this really takes a bit of explaining to do, but bear with me, as the relevance to Purim will become very clear.

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.

But, in 499 BCE, a group of Greeks living in the Persian province of 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, has 127 provinces and 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 view 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.

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, whom 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 stop 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.

Because the Persians could barely advance more than 6 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 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 makes a huge blunder and falls 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. Why for example does the story abruptly skip from his third to his seventh year? Answer: Simple, he was out the country at war with the Greeks!

Then, when he comes back it is IN HIS SEVENTH YEAR and 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 their 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!

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 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).

The Final Surprise: Purim in the Renewed Covenant

However, to conclude with a real “bang” as it were, let me answer a question I get a lot with respect to Y'shua and his Torah observance: Why is Purim seemingly not mentioned in the NT? Could it be Y'shua didn't keep this feast?

This is an important question, because one cannot argue that Y'shua only kept the MAJOR Feasts because of the Hanukkah festival he attended in Yochanan 10. All the others, Passover, Tabernacles, Hanukkah, are all mentioned. Y'shua'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 Y'shua viewed it as important feast to commemorate. So what about the last one? What about Purim?

To answer this question, let me show you something special...

21	22	23	24	25
28	29	30	31 9:32 AM Shevat 30 Adar 1 begins at sunset	1 Feb Adar 1
4	5	6	7	8
11	12	13	14	15 F.M. 12:45 PM Adar 15
18	19	20	21	22
25	26	27	28	1 March
4	5	6	7	8
11	12	13	14	15

This is part of my original calendar grids which date the vast majority of Gospel events to the very day that they happened. You will find a far more advanced version of these for each datable year of Y'shua's life in my upcoming book *Yeshua: The Untold Biography of the Messiah*, which is coming out soon.

In any case this shows a few weeks later in the winter of the year 29, the last full year of Y'shua's life. As you can see, I identify the miracle in Yochanan 5, which happens during "a feast of the Jews" as Purim, proving Y'shua kept that occasion in Jerusalem. 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.

- 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) Y'shua'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 Y'shua 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.
- 5) So here is the "roll call" for all the feasts:
 - 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 Y'shua 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 Y'shua 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), does not fall on Shabbat and also would not have its name ignored when it is mentioned in Yochanan 10. 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 Y'shua to be in Jerusalem, and we know from other occasions (long story) that Y'shua 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 Y'shua 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 Y'shua will be in Jerusalem!

So this Purim, in addition to the Scroll of Esther, please consider reading all of Yochanan 5. I'm Andrew Gabriel Roth. I hope you enjoyed this Purim special! Chag Sameyach to you and your house!

February 29th, 2012