

# God loads the purim for His glory

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All passages from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

## History<sup>1</sup>

The Book of Esther is set in the mid-fifth century in Persia before Messiah's earthly ministry. That's basically modern-day Iran. The events occurred just after a federation of Medians and Persians defeated Babylon, which had conquered the Kingdom of Yehudah (Judah) with the fall of Yerushalayim roughly 70 years before. This changing of empires was foretold to Daniel (2:39), who remained as a Medo-Persian official into the reign of Darius the Mede.

Akhashverosh is considered to be the Xerxes, which is the name in Greek, who reigned over Medo-Persia from 485–465 B.C. This, then, would have been during the time of the return of some of the exiles of the Kingdom of Yehudah to rebuild Yerushalayim, because some project opponents in the Land petitioned Akhoshverosh to stop it (Ezra 4:6).

There is an Akhashverosh, who Daniel described as the father of Darius the Mede (Dan. 9:1).

## Themes

### A warning against assimilation

Because the setting of the Book of Esther is likely after the first return or returns of exiles to the Land, the fact that there are Yehudim remaining in Persia is seen as an example of assimilation, or becoming more comfortable with the surrounding culture than one's original *ethos*. Assimilation as well as syncretism, or mixing of the disparate religions, also is a theme of Chanukah.

Guarding against assimilation is seen in rabbinical writings for the need to create standards for knowing whether one was part of Israel or not. In manuscript 4QMMT of the Dead Sea Scrolls, this wall of separation between Israel and the nations is called *מאשה התורה* *ma'aseh ha-torah*, or "a work of the law."

A number of scholars who are exploring what is called the New Perspective of Paul, or that apostle Paul was and remained a Pharisaical Jew, are seeing connections between *ma'aseh ha-torah* and the Greek phrase *ergon nomou*, or "works of [the] law," in a number of passages of the letters to Romans and Galatians. Those passages traditionally have been interpreted and even translated as "following the Law."

### A warning to follow God's commands, even if you can't see any danger in ignoring the full extent

Haman is described as being "of Agag" (Esther 3:1). This has been interpreted as Haman's being a descendant of Agag, king of Amalek. The LORD condemned the people of Amalek to total destruction for their cowardly attacks against the elderly, women and children of Israel (Ex. 17:14). Israel's first king, Sha'ul, opted to leave Agag alive, defying the LORD's command, which the prophet Samuel stepped in and carried out (1<sup>st</sup> Sam. 15:33).

There are few problems with that interpretation. First, the names of *המן*<sup>2</sup> *Haman* and of his father or ancestral line is *המנדא* *Hamandata* are ancient Persian names, with *Humayan* meaning "the great." Second, there was a region adjacent to Media called Agazi in Persian, or Agag in other Semitic languages such as Hebrew. Assyrian king Sargon, the father of Sennacherib, who conquered the Kingdom of Israel and ravaged the Kingdom of Yehudah, wrote about Agazi, "Thirty-four districts of Media I conquered and I added them to the domain of Assyria: I imposed upon them an annual tribute of horses. The country of Agazi (Agag) ... I ravaged, I wasted, I burned."<sup>3</sup>

### A picture of what God will do through Messiah

Daniel Agee presented a look at the Book of Esther that shows many parallels between King Akhashverosh and the Father God, Mordecai as the Messiah and Hadassah/Esther as Israel.<sup>4</sup>

### "all things work together for the good of those who love God" (Rom. 8:28)

One common smear against God in recent times is that He is "an absentee landlord" or "a blind watchmaker" Who may have set everything in motion but now doesn't care or doesn't get involved. Many then blame Him for the evil and suffering that goes on in the world, particularly to those who it appears to us don't deserve it, such as a dying family member or a starving child.

Historian and Rabbi Ken Shapiro wrote that the Book of Esther is *בנהפך הוא* *venahafoch hu*, or "in a overturning

1 McKee, J.K. "Purim for the Two Houses of Israel." Posted March 2009 on *TNNOnline.net*.

2 Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and M. E. J. Richardson, eds. "Haman." *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

3 Orr, James, ed. "Haman." *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1915.

4 Agee, Daniel. "Reflections on Purim, the Feast of Lots in the book of Esther." Posted Feb. 23, 2008 on *Hallel.info* <[hallel.info/reflections-on-purim-2008/](http://hallel.info/reflections-on-purim-2008/)>.

of the thing.” What was decided based on *purim*, or instruments of chance, was really a planned display of the power of God, Who isn’t even mentioned directly in the story.

“The Book of Esther is the ultimate story of God putting the cure before the disease. Everything that’s a seeming disaster, in hindsight works out, so at the end of the story the Jewish people look back and see how incredible it all was. ... Everything has a reason and God will make sure that even in the worst circumstances the Jews are always going to have a way out, so that they can accomplish their mission in this world.”<sup>5</sup>

Apostle Paul wrote to believers in Rome, encouraging them that God had not abandoned them, despite the persecution coming from the empire against Yehudim. Their suffering because of their belief in the God of Abraham, Yitkhak and Ya’akov was not pointless, Paul reminded them.

“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christos, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christos Iesous is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christos? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED’ [Psa. 43:23 LXX]. But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christos Iesous our Lord.” (Rom. 8:16–39)

Apostle Ya’akov wrote to the 12 scattered tribes of Israel that enduring what is unpleasant is an important part of our maturity as believers in God. Those unpleasant things of life ranged from persecution because of allegiance to God to keeping control of what one says.

“James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.” (James 1:1–18)

The prayer for the LORD to “not leave us or forsake us,” as King Shlomo prayed at the dedication of the first temple (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 8:57) has been a continual prayer of true believers in God. Messiah’s and Yokhanan’s arrivals were the first major messages from God in four centuries and of God’s power since the events around Chanukah about 150 years before. Messiah promised that though He physically was returning to Heaven, He was not leaving God’s people alone:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper<sup>6</sup>, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see

5 Shapiro, Ken. “Purim in Persia.” *Crash Course in Jewish History*, No. 24. Posted Feb. 19, 2005, on *Aish.com* <[www.aish.com/h/pur/b/48966271.html](http://www.aish.com/h/pur/b/48966271.html)>.

6 Strong’s Greek lexicon No. 3875. παράκλητον *parakleton* παράκλητος (παρά, καλέω) *parakletos* (para, kaleo) Noun masculine singular accusative “helper,” “advocate”

Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.' ” (John 14:16–21)