

# Iran, Persia, and Purim

by Michael Rudolph

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I am going to tell you some things about *Purim* that may surprise you. First, the celebration of *Purim* was not commanded by God; it was merely declared at the end of the Book of Esther as a memorial of God's intervention to save the Jewish people from destruction during the Babylonian exile. This is what is written about the origins of *Purim*; it's a little long, but hang in there while I read it to you:

*Esther 9:20-32: "Mordekhai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all the provinces of King Achashverosh, both near and far, instructing them to observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day, every year, [to commemorate] the days on which the Jews obtained rest from their enemies and the month which for them was turned from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; they were to make them days of celebrating and rejoicing, sending portions [of food] to each other and giving gifts to the poor. So the Jews took it upon themselves to continue what they had already begun to do, and as Mordekhai had written to them; because Haman the son of Hamdata the Agagi, the enemy of the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had thrown pur (that is, "cast lots") to crush and destroy them; but when Ester came before the king, he ordered by letters that [Haman's] wicked scheme, which he had plotted against the Jews, should recoil on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. This is why these days have been called Purim, after the word pur. Thus, because of everything written in this letter, and what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had come upon them, the Jews resolved and took upon themselves, their descendants and all who might join them that without fail they would observe these two days in accordance with what was written in [this letter] and at the appointed time, every year; and that these days would be remembered and observed throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and that these days of Purim would never cease among the Jews or their memory be lost by their descendants. Then Ester the queen, the daughter of Avichayil, and Mordekhai the Jew, gave full written authority to confirm a second letter about Purim. He sent copies of it to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Achashverosh, ensuring their peace and security and requiring the observance of these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordekhai the Jew and Ester the queen had enjoined them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants concerning the matters of fasting and lamenting. At Ester's order these matters of Purim were confirmed and put in writing in the book."*

So the annual celebration *Purim* was not commanded by God, but rather by Mordechai, and subsequently endorsed by Esther and King *Achashverosh*, who was not even a Jew. Not only that, but the Book of Esther is one of two books of the Bible in which God's name is not mentioned or referred to even once; the Book of Esther doesn't even say that Esther prayed; it only says that she fasted, and we assume that she prayed. If all this causes you pause, it is no wonder, because these are the very reasons why the Book of Esther almost missed making it into the *Tanach* when the Jewish Canon of Scripture was decided upon.

Now I started this message from the end of the Book of Esther without first laying a foundation of what came before. If I read the entire book to you we will be here for quite a long time, so I will give you a condensed version instead:

**MY PURIM SONG**  
**by Michael Rudolph**  
**Originally composed February 2010**

*To the tune of “Bingo was His Name-O”*

There was a queen, a stubborn little queen, and Vashti was her name-O  
V-A-S-H Tee spells “Vashti”  
2X  
*Vashti* was her name-O.

There was a king, an angry Persian king, Achashverosh was his name-O  
A-“chh”-A-S-H plus “verosh”  
2X  
Achashverosh was his name-O.

This Persian king, this angry little king, he didn’t like Queen Vashti-O  
“Leave my sight” he said to Vashti  
2X  
“I’ll get me a pretty replacement-O.”

So they rounded up women, and held a contest, to find a replacement queen-O  
E-S-T-H-E-R won it  
2X  
And became the land’s new queen- O.

Now there was an evil man, in the court of the king, and Haman was his name-O  
H-A-M-A-N spells “Haman”  
2X  
He plotted to kill the Jews-O

Esther had an uncle, a little Jewish uncle, and Mordechai was his name-O  
M-O-R-T-Y spells “Morty”  
2X  
And Morty learned of the plot-O.

So Morty told Esther, Jewish Queen Esther, of the plot to kill the Jews-O  
So Esther prayed [we assume], and Esther fasted  
Esther prayed, and Esther fasted

Esther prayed, and Esther fasted  
And cooked up a plot of her own-O.

So she held some banquets, like Shirley's Tea Parties, to butter up the King-O  
P-A-R-T-Y spells "party"  
2X  
To butter up the King-O.

One of the nights after partying hard, the King couldn't fall asleep-O  
So he read from a book of a plot to kill him  
He read from a book of a plot to kill him  
He read from a book of a plot to kill him  
And how he was saved by Morty-O.

The king brought Haman and asked what to do for a man he wanted to honor-O  
Thinking the king meant to honor Haman  
Surely the king meant to honor Haman  
Haman told the king how to honor the man  
And was told to honor Morty-O.

Haman made a gallows, to hang Uncle Morty, as he planned to kill all the Jews-O  
But Esther revealed that she was a Jewess  
Esther revealed that she was a Jewess  
Esther revealed that she was a Jewess  
And the plot to kill her fam-ly-O.

The king was enraged, and made things right, and hung Haman on his gallows-O  
G-A-L-L-ows spells "gallows"  
2X  
And hung Haman on his gallows-O.

So that's how Pur-im first began, and how the Jews there were saved-O  
P-U-R-I-M spells "Purim"  
2X  
And that's how the Jews were saved-O.

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Purim is kind of a strange holiday because it has both a light celebratory side to it, and also a side that is deadly serious. I do not use the word "deadly" by accident because before Achashverosh saw the light, he was a willing participant in Haman's plan to massacre all the Jews in his kingdom. And, were it not for God's intervention, he would have.

I cannot help but connect this ancient story with the one we are living through today in Iran's threat to annihilate Israel. Look at these similarities:

- King Achashverosh and his henchman Haman were Persians. And what is the land of modern Iran? Persia.
- Modern Persia, now called Iran, is no longer a kingdom, but rather a *muslim* theocracy ruled by its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Alli Khamenei. The Head Minister of Iran is no longer Haman – it is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.
- In the story of Esther, King Achashverosh is the Supreme Ruler, and Haman is given the king's delegated authority and power to act as the kingdom's executive and spokesperson. In modern Iran, Ayatollah Alli Khamenei is the Supreme Leader, and Ahmadinejad has been delegated his authority and power similar to Haman.
- In the story of Esther, King Achashverosh appears as a powerful behind-the-scenes ruler who allows Haman to have his way in the Kingdom. In modern Iran, Ayatollah Alli Khamenei is a powerful behind-the-scenes ruler whom we know little about, and who appears to allow Ahmadinejad to have his way in Iran as Haman was given his way in ancient Persia.
- According to the Book of Esther, King Achashverosh had no basic dislike of the Jews, but was manipulated by Haman who hated the Jews for not bowing down to him. In modern Iran, we do not hear very much directly from Ayatollah Alli Khamenei, so we can only surmise his position on destroying Israel and the Jews. On the other hand, Ahmadinejad is very clear about it, and we see no indication that Khamenei intends to rein him in.
- In ancient Persia, the conflict was essentially between the God of Israel, and Haman and Achashverosh, who established themselves almost as human gods to whom the populace had to bow down upon penalty of death. In modern Iran, Ahmadinejad wants to bring death and destruction upon Israel and the Jewish people, because they will not bow down to the Iranians' *Muslim* god – *Allah*.

I can go further in these analogies, but I think I have made my point that the *Purim* story is being repeated today in Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East before our very eyes. Customarily, at Purim, we focus on the two heroes of the story, Esther and Mordechai. Let's remember, however, what Esther asked Mordechai to do, that we read in Chapter 4, Verse 16:

*"Go, assemble all the Jews to be found in Shushan, and have them fast for me, neither eating nor drinking for three days, night and day; also I and the girls attending me will fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."*

Earlier, I said that there is no mention of God or praying to God in the Book of Esther, but the inference here is clear since without relying on God, fasting would have been valueless. Notice that, not only did Esther and her attendants fast, but so did all the Israelites in *Shushan*. I do not intend to take anything away from Esther or Mordechai by saying this, but it was not their fasting

and courageous actions alone that moved God to save Israel; it was the corporate prayer and fasting of the Jewish People.

The need for the Jewish people and others who support them to fast for the protection of Israel (especially considering what is happening in the Middle East today) should be considered one of the main messages of the Book of Esther. That is why, on March 7 of this year, Ohev Yisrael will join with other Messianic Jewish congregations (both in America and in Israel) to fast and pray for Israel's protection from its neighbors who would destroy it – chief among them being Iran. In doing so, we will be relying on the promise in James 5:16:

*“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”*

And because we perceive a spirit of anti-Semitism that hovers over the entire Middle East, we might also consider the relevance of Yeshua's instruction to his disciples when they were having trouble ridding a boy of an unclean spirit:

Mark 9:29 (NKJ) *“This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”*