

Feast of Purim: Do You Identify With the Jewish People?

The Feast of Purim is a Jewish holiday found in the book of Esther that celebrates God's deliverance of His people from destruction.

Purim is recognized each year in Jewish communities around the world (this year on March 24) with various services, get-togethers and activities. Esther and her cousin, Mordecai, are the heroes, but earlier in their lives, we find that they, like us, had some rather weak moments.

Why Identify With the Jews?

In the biblical account, Esther becomes the Queen of Persia, but she repeatedly hides her Jewish identity: *"Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known"* (Esther 2:10, 20). Presumably, Esther lied about her Jewish background by not disclosing the truth in the Babylonian palace. In God's eyes, not telling the truth is just plain sin (Lev. 5:1).

Why would Mordecai tell Esther not to reveal her Jewish identity? Scripture tells us that God had called His people to return from exile in Babylon to their homeland of Israel. Those who heeded God's call left Babylon. However, those that remained in Babylon were not identifying with the call of God and, therefore, did not identify themselves as the people of God.

It is the same principle for us today. If you will not identify with God's call, you will not identify with God's people. During Esther's time, if a Babylonian found out that his neighbor was Jewish, he could say, "But I thought you Jews

were called back to Israel by God? Why are you still here?" Their unbelief and resulting shame would be revealed.

Heeding His Call

Identifying with the call of God has always been evidenced by identifying with the people of God. Notice this in the life of Moses: *"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time. He esteemed the reproach of Christ as greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he looked to the reward"* (Heb. 11:24-26).

Though not Jewish herself, Ruth identified with the Jewish people when she identified with their God: *"But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from following you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people shall be my people and your God my God"* (Ruth 1:16, MEV).

Though Paul was called to the Gentiles, he lived as a Jew and identified himself with his people throughout his ministry because he was identifying with God's faithful promises and unchanging purpose for Israel (Acts 21:39, 22:3; Rom. 11:1-2).

This was not only Paul's personal commitment; he also influenced other Jewish believers to do the same: *"Then he came to Derbe and then to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewess who believed, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted him to travel with him. So he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek"* (Acts 16:1-3, MEV).

Whether it be Daniel, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Paul, Timothy or you, the challenge of faith is always: Do we believe God will be faithful to His promises? Will we identify with Him and His

people?

Esther's failure to identify with God's purpose and people was indicative of the problem of all the people that stayed behind in Babylon. Since God cared for His people, He confronted this problem head-on by allowing an anti-Semitic man named Haman to arise. This forced the issue of identification with God's people (Esth. 3-4).

In Scripture we see that Gentile believers are called to identify with the Jewish people by standing against anti-Semitism (Ps. 83), pro-actively sharing the Good News with Jewish friends (Rom. 11:11), praying for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6), and identifying with Jewish believers in Yeshua (Ruth 1:16).

Likewise, Jewish believers need to identify themselves and their children as Jews. This is one reason Messianic congregations are available: to help Jewish believers to grow spiritually and testify powerfully, *"Am Yisrael Chai B'Yeshua HaMashiach"* "the People of Israel Live in Yeshua the Messiah!"

Messiah's Identification

Ben Elohim (the Son of God), came in the flesh, identifying Himself with us all (Phil. 2:5-8). But even in this He came as a humble Jewish carpenter. He could have come as a Persian, Greek or Roman, but He chose rather to be identified as a Jew. Messiah identified with us to save us. *"He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ... For I say that Messiah has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers ... for He is not ashamed to call them brethren"* (John 1:11; Rom. 15:8; Heb. 2:11). Those who identify with Him are saved in Him.

If we are ashamed of identifying with the Jewish people, are we not denying the purpose of God in Messiah? This is why Paul proclaims his Jewish identity in the book of Romans: not to

boast in the flesh, but to boast in a faithful God who has not forsaken Israel!

Through a turn of events, and by God's grace, Esther repented (Esth. 4:16) and eventually became a hero. We, as well, can repent of any failure to identify with God or His people. We, like Esther, can also play a significant role in God's work in this world. As a believer in Yeshua, whether Jewish or Gentile, isn't it time for you to identify with God's people, promises and purpose?

Have a Happy Purim!

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