

Purim: The Holiday Behind the Mask

Source Sheet

Elon Gilad

— Part I: The Investigation —

Source 1: Mordecai's Genealogy

Esther 2:5

There was a certain Jew in Shushan the capital, whose name was Mordecai the son of Yair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite.

Source 2: Haman's Genealogy

Esther 3:1

After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.

Source 3: Saul's Failure

1 Samuel 15:8–9, 17–19

And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them.

And Samuel said: 'When you were little in your own sight, were you not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed you king over Israel? And the Lord sent you on a journey and said: Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed. Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord, but swooped down upon the spoil, and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord?'

Source 4: Mordecai's Correction — The Plunder Refused

Esther 9:10, 15, 16

The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, they slew; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. (9:10)

...and slew three hundred men in Shushan; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. (9:15)

The other Jews who were in the king's provinces gathered to protect their lives, and got relief from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy-five thousand; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. (9:16)

Source 5: Mordecai's Dynasty

Esther 10:3

For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people, and speaking peace to all his descendants.

Source 6: The War and the Holiday

Esther 9:16–18

The other Jews who were in the king's provinces gathered to protect their lives and got relief from their enemies, and killed of their foes seventy-five thousand.

This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews who were in Shushan assembled on the thirteenth and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

Source 7: The Turning — Mityahadim

Esther 8:17

And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. And many of the people of the land mityahadim [became Jews / allied with the Jews]; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

Source 7b: The Irrevocable Decree

Esther 8:8

Write also concerning the Jews as it pleases you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for a writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, no man may reverse.

— Part II: The Evolution —

Source 8: From Fire to Noise — The Stones of Provence

Rabbi Avraham ben Natan of Lunel, Sefer HaManhig (12th Century)

And therefore, it is the custom of the children in France and Provence to take smooth stones and write 'Haman' upon them. And when the reader of the Megillah mentions the name of Haman, they strike the stones one against the other to erase his name, as it is written: 'The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked shall rot' (Proverbs 10:7). And so it says in the Midrash: 'Blot out the memory of Amalek' — even from off the trees and off the stones.

Source 9: The Prohibition of Cross-Dressing

Deuteronomy 22:5

A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.

Mahari Mintz, Responsa §17 (15th Century, Padua)

Since they only intend for the sake of simple joy [simcha be'alma], there is no prohibition.

Rema, Orach Chaim 696:8 (16th Century)

What people have practiced — wearing masks on Purim, and a man wearing a woman's dress and a woman wearing a man's attire — there is no prohibition.

Source 10: The Purim Ball in America

Mordecai Yoel Mustein, Ha-Melitz (1884)

Last Wednesday evening, many of our wealthy brethren celebrated the Purim feast with dance and laughter, with masks and veils on their faces in the great theater 'Metropolitan Opera House'... for more than twenty years a society has existed in our city called 'The Society of Those Occupied with the Purim Feast'... just as the children of the stranger do in the days of Carnival in their time.

In years past, the Purim feast bore the face of Purim... you saw Mordecai in royal robes and Queen Esther with a crown. But as the years passed, these customs were canceled... and it didn't even smell like Purim.