

CHAPTER 9

MINOR FEASTS

Hanukkah

Hanukkah means “dedication,” referring to the rededication of the Temple after a great Jewish military victory in 164 B.C.E. This feast did not originate with Moses, nor is it mandated in the Bible. It is found in the books of First and Second Macabees in the Apocrypha, the books written in the 400-year “silence” between the Tanakh and B’rit Hadashah. Adonai was *not* silent in these years, however. He was still at work fulfilling His promises and preserving His people. Furthermore, there are good Biblical reasons to celebrate this feast. The first is that Yeshua observed this holiday:



“Then came the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem. It was winter and Yeshua was in the Temple area walking in Solomon’s colonnade” (John [Yochanan] 10:22-23).

Secondly, Daniel prophesied the events at Hanukkah centuries before:

“Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others” (Daniel [Dani’el] 11:3-4).

The “mighty king” was Alexander the Great. Then Daniel (Dani’el) goes on to describe Alexander’s successor . . .

“. . . a despicable person . . . and his heart will be set against the Holy Covenant . . .” (Daniel [Dani’el] 11:21-28)

“His forces will desecrate the sanctuary and do away with the regular sacrifice, and they will set up the abomination of desolation” (Daniel [Dani’el] 11:31).

This prophecy accurately describes Antiochus IV, who reigned from 175-164 B.C.E. He was one of many throughout history who tried to eradicate the Jewish people. The survival of the Jewish people is a firm testimony of Adonai’s faithfulness.

“All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis [B’resheet] 12:3).

Yeshua, the Messiah of all mankind, would come through the Jewish bloodline. Antiochus wanted everyone united under Greek Hellenism, thus he was not tolerant of the Jews.

“Then the king shall do according to his own will. He shall exalt and magnify himself above all gods and speak blasphemies against the God of gods” (Daniel [Dani’el] 11:36).

As a foreshadow of the Anti Messiah, the king called himself “Antiochus Epiphanes,” “visible god.” He made people bow down to his statues, and if they didn’t comply, the consequence was death! Social and political pressures caused some Jews to follow Antiochus, and they bowed down to his statues.

“By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the Covenant, but the people who know their Adonai will display strength and take action” (Daniel [Dani’el] 11:32).

Many Jews took the easy way out and tried to “go Greek.” Others understood that assimilation and elimination of Jewish worship, sacrifices and traditions would be the destruction of Judaism itself . . . making Adonai a liar! The Jewish people faced persecution. Antiochus’ heavily armed soldiers were sent to force people to worship the king and make sacrifices (pigs) on the holy altar. This was the “abomination” Daniel (Dani’el) foretold. The penalty for resistance was, again, death.

Antiochus’ actions foreshadowed Hitler’s axiom to the Jews:

- First: “You can’t live among us as Jews.”
- Then: “You can’t live among us.”
- Finally: “You can’t live.”

In 167 B.C.E., soldiers arrived in Modin outside Jerusalem to force an influential Jewish family, led by Mattityahu (Matathias) and his 5 sons, to adopt Greek worship. Mattityahu would not forsake his faith. He tore down the Greek altar and sounded the call to battle, “*Mi Le’Adonai Ehly*,” “Whoever is for Adonai, follow me!” This marked the beginning of the Jewish rebellion. The Jewish people knew they faced great odds, but their banner was “Who among the mighty is like You, Adonai?” (“*Mi Kamocha Ba’Elim Adonoi!*”) The name for the Jewish heroes of Hanukkah comes from using the first letters of these Hebrew words to form “Macabee.” Mattityahu’s oldest son was nicknamed Yehuda Ha’Macabee, “Judah Macabee,” “the hammer,” because he fought so hard. The battle was difficult for untrained Jewish farmers against the well-equipped Syrian soldiers.

“The people who know their Adonai shall be strong and carry out great exploits” (Daniel [Dani’el] 11:32).

The real miracle of Hanukkah is that a few, with Adonai on their side, triumphed over a multitude of powerful enemies. Remember: Adonai’s people + Adonai = VICTORY!

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says Adonai Tzva’ot” (Zechariah [Z’kharyah] 4:6; Haftorah reading for Hanukkah Shabbat).

On the 25th of Kislev, the date we celebrate Hanukkah, the Macabees regained Jerusalem and the Temple that had been desecrated by Antiochus. Daniel (Dani'el) also prophesied this date:

“How long will it be until the daily sacrifice is restored again? How long until the desecration of the Temple is avenged and Adonai’s people triumph?” He replied: ‘For 2,300 evening and mornings; then the Holy Place will be properly restored’” (Daniel [Dani’el] 8:13-14).

This is great confirmation that Adonai’s word is true: the start of Antiochus’ persecution of the Jews in 171 B.C.E. until the restoration of the Temple in B.C.E.: 6 years, 3 ½ months = 2,300 days!

How did the tradition of the 8 days and lighting 8 candles begin? When the victorious Macabees were cleaning the Temple, they found only one small jar of oil for “ner tamid” Menorah, enough for only one day. They sent a messenger for more. Meanwhile, the small amount of oil burned miraculously for 8 days. Another explanation for the 8-day observance is that some rabbis believed it was a delayed celebration of Sukkot, which also lasts 8 days.

The ancient Jewish Historian Flavius Josephus narrates in his book Jewish Antiquities XII, how the victorious Yehuda Ha’Macabee ordered lavish yearly eight-day festivities after rededicating the Temple in Jerusalem that had been profaned by Antiochus IV Epiphanies. Josephus does not say the festival was called Hanukkah but rather the "Festival of Lights":

"Now Yehuda Ha’Macabee celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days, and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon; but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored Adonai, and delighted them by hymns and psalms. Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity, that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival. Judas also rebuilt the walls round about the city, and reared towers of great height against the incursions of enemies, and set guards therein. He also fortified the city Bethsura, that it might serve as a citadel against any distresses that might come from our enemies."

During Yeshua’s time (in John [Yochanan] 10:22), people’s minds were focused on deliverance and rededication, oil and light.

“My sheep shall hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand” (John [Yochanan] 10:27-28).

Yeshua was promising His people deliverance from sin and death . . . not just for a season, but also for eternity!

Earlier in John [Yochanan] 8:12, Yeshua proclaims “I am the light of the world . . . he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” The people listening to Yeshua understood what He was saying . . . they knew what Adonai had promised through the prophet:

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined” (Isaiah [Yeshayahu] 9:2).

“Adonai is my light and my salvation” (Psalms [Tehillim] 27:1).

“Yeshua,” in Hebrew, means salvation in the present tense. Hanukkah is referred to as the “Festival of Lights” (Hag Ha’Urim). And it was during this season that Yeshua described Himself as the “light of the world.”

A future Hanukkah is described in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8, where Paul writes about the second coming of Mashiach:

- Many will turn away from Adonai (as some Jews did who followed Antiochus’ Hellenism).
- The “son of perdition exalts himself above Adonai” (as Antiochus Epiphanes did).
- Adonai will destroy him with the “brightness of His coming” (we remember this victory when we gaze at the lights of our Hanukkah menorah).
- Adonai will usher in His millennial kingdom with the overthrow of the “lawless one” in a miraculous way. (A miracle to consider when we retell the Hanukkah story).

The shammash, or “servant,” is the candle used to light the other candles of the Hanukkah menorah. Yeshua is our shammash:

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew [Mattityahu] 20:28).

Other traditions:

- Display your menorah in the window to show Adonai’s miracle to the world.
- So eat some latkes and donuts already! Oil (the symbol of the Ruach) is associated with the Hanukkah miracle. Fry the latkes in oil, and don’t think about the calories . . . think about the miracle!
- The Sehvivon – draydel: The four Hebrew letters mean “a great miracle happened there” (*nes gadol haya sham*). Children play a game with the draydel where each letter has an assigned value: *nes* (nothing), *gadol* (all), *haya* (half), and *sham* (put in).

Tu B'Shevat

When you come to the land and you plant any tree, you shall treat its fruit as forbidden; for three years it will be forbidden and not eaten. In the fourth year, all of its fruit shall be sanctified to praise Adonai. In the fifth year, you may eat its fruit. (Leviticus [Vayikra] 19:23-25)

There are four new years... the first of Shevat is the new year for trees according to the ruling of Bet Shammai; Bet Hillel, however, places it on the fifteenth of that month.
Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1

Tu B'Shevat, the 15th day of the Jewish month of Shevat, is a holiday also known as the New Year for Trees. The word "Tu" is not really a word; it is the number 15 in using the Hebrew, Aleph Bet.

As it is mentioned before, Judaism has several different "new years." This is not as strange a concept as it sounds at first blush; in America, we have the calendar year (January-December), the school year (September-June), and many businesses have fiscal years. It's basically the same idea with the various Jewish new years.

Tu B'Shevat is the new year for the purpose of calculating the age of trees for tithing. See Leviticus (Vayikra) 19:23-25, which states that fruit from trees may not be eaten during the first three years; the fourth year's fruit is for Adonai, and after that, you can eat the fruit. Each tree is considered to have aged one year as of Tu B'Shevat, so if you planted a tree on Shevat 14, it begins its second year the next day, but if you plant a tree two days later, on Shevat 16, it does not reach its second year until the next Tu B'Shevat.

Customs

There are few customs or observances related to this holiday. One custom is to eat a new fruit on this day, or to eat from the Seven Species (shivat haminim) described in the Bible as being abundant in the land of Israel. The Shivat Haminim are: wheat, barley, grapes (vines), figs, pomegranates, olives and dates (honey) (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 8:8).

Some people plant trees on this day. In my childhood, Jewish children commonly went around collecting money to plant trees in Israel at this time of year.

Purim

The Feast of Purim shows Adonai working “behind the scenes.” It is also called the “Feast of Esther (Ester)” and the “Feast of Lots.”



The best way to learn about Purim is to read through the book of Esther (Ester) in one sitting. It is an exciting story, full of intrigue, plotting, last minute turn of events, and irony. The book of Esther (Ester) was originally written on a small one-handle scroll called a “megillah,” which is still used in traditional synagogues. It is one of the five short books in the Tanakh which are associated with feasts: Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) with Sukkot, Song of Solomon (Shir-HaShirim) with Pesach, the book of Ruth (Rut) with Shavuot, and Esther (Ester) with Purim. Esther (Ester) is unique in that it never overtly mentions Adonai, the Torah, or the Temple. None of the main characters, Esther (Ester), Mordechai, or Haman, is mentioned again in the Bible. However, it clearly shows Adonai’s hands orchestrating everyday events that seem unconnected, yet work together to enact His will.

The name “Purim” is Hebrew for the plural of “pur,” or lots (similar to dice) used by Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to determine the best month and day to destroy the Jewish people in fifth century Persia. This date fell on the 13th of Adar in the Jewish calendar, usually mid-March.

The events of the story take place during the reign of King Ahasuerus (Achashverosh), a.k.a. “Xerxes,” who reigned during the peak of Persia’s power. Among his lands was a sizable Jewish population dispersed earlier to Babylon. The Jews in Esther’s (Ester’s) time had chosen to live comfortably in the Diaspora, rather than return to the homeland promised by Adonai. Some had even taken Persian names, such as the hero, Mordechai, from the Persian “warlike,” derived from the pagan god Marduk. Even the namesake for the book, Esther (Ester), is taken from the Persian “Ishtar,” or star. It seems these Jews, in assimilating, had detached themselves from Adonai’s program, and perhaps this is why He does not identify Himself with His name in this book.

King Ahasuerus (Achashverosh) was looking for a replacement for his queen, Vashti, after her refusal to indulge him at a great party. This search led to a Jewish girl, Hadassah, being chosen as the new queen. Her cousin Mordechai, who convinced her to hide her Jewishness and adopt the Persian name Esther (Ester), was raising her. Mordechai, was given a post outside the palace, where he foiled a plot on the king’s life. This deed was recorded, but no reward was given. Meanwhile, the king’s prime minister, Haman, became perturbed with Mordechai, when, honoring the one true Adonai, he refused to bow down to Haman. While the Persians considered court officials to be worthy of worship, a Midrash records that Haman wore an image of his favorite idol on his clothes, so bowing to him would mean bowing to an idol. Haman’s reaction was typical of anti-Semites throughout Jewish history:

“Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces with the order to destroy, kill and *annihilate all the Jews* — young and old, women and little children — on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods” (Esther 3:13).

Haman had the decree sent out a full eleven months before the action was to take place. Perhaps it was his sadistic way of having this death sentence hang over the Jews. However, this providential timing allowed Adonai to orchestrate events to save His people. He gave a timid young lady holy boldness to intervene for her people. Esther’s (Ester’s) position seemed safe in the king’s court, but Mordechai, reminded her:

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. *And who knows this but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?*” (Esther [Ester] 4:14)

Esther (Ester) is given the choice to remain comfortable or take a step of faith to be a part of Adonai’s team. Adonai had put her in a position where she could be used to glorify His name by helping save His people.

Due to court etiquette, Esther (Ester) could not simply ask the king for a favor. She would have to have his royal scepter extended to her or face death for intruding. Her solution to this dilemma gives us good advice if we find ourselves in similar situations:

“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. *I and my maids will fast* as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish” (Esther [Ester] 4:16).

It is understood that accompanying their fast, these Jews would be praying to Adonai of Abraham (Avraham), Isaac (Yitz’chak) and Jacob (Ya’akov), and repenting of any sins. They understood this moves the heart of Adonai:

“When my people, who are called by my name, will ***humble*** themselves and ***pray*** and seek my face and ***turn*** from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles [Divrei-HaYamim Bet] 7:14).

Adonai showed Esther (Ester) favor in the king’s eyes:

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Adonai; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases” (Proverbs [Mishlei] 21:1).

He was open to her suggestion for a banquet, part of a plan to avert the Jew’s destruction by revealing her identity and Haman’s evil intent.

It is interesting to note, according to rabbinical commentary, that after seeking Adonai in fasting, prayer, and repentance, a hint of God’s name appears in the story:

“‘If it pleases the king,’ replied Esther (Ester), ‘let ***the king, together with Haman, come today*** to a banquet I have prepared for him’ (Esther [Ester] 5:4).

The Hebrew for these words, which mark the turning point in the fate of the Jews, is “Ya,vo Hamelech ve’Haman hayom.” The first letters of each of these words spell out the sacred name of Adonai, “Yud Hay Vav Hay.”

Just when the situation looked grim for the Jewish people, Adonai used a seemingly insignificant event to change the course of history. The night before Haman and the king were to meet, the king could not sleep. This king who ruled 127 provinces could not command his eyes to close in sleep . . . an even greater King was awake with him:

“Indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalms [Tehillim] 121:4).

He decided to have his diary read to him:

“So he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him” (Esther [Ester] 6:1).

In this record, the king heard the recounting of how a Jew, Mordechai, had foiled a plot against his life and it sparked him to ask:

“‘What honor and recognition has Mordechai, received from this?’ The attendant replied, ‘Nothing has been done for him’” (Esther [Ester] 6:3).

This bothered the king and he decided to honor Mordechai immediately. He summoned whomever he could find in his court at this early hour, which “happened” to be Haman, to bestow an honor on his forgotten hero Mordechai. It could only be Adonai’s irony that Haman must now lead Mordechai through the streets on the king’s horse, wearing the king’s robe, announcing: “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor.” Doubly ironic is how Haman himself suggested these honors, thinking the king was going to bestow them on him! Adding insult to injury, a Midrash says Haman’s daughter looked out the window and saw the procession below. Assuming the one leading the horse was Mordechai, she emptied the chamber pot on him (who, of course, was her father!).

Later, at the banquet, Esther (Ester) revealed herself as a Jew, and how Haman had plotted to kill her and her people. The king was so enraged, he had Haman and his sons hanged on a huge gallows Haman had constructed to use on Mordechai. With Esther’s (Ester’s) intervention, another decree was issued, allowing the Jews to protect themselves from their enemies. The Jews were victorious, Mordechai was promoted to a place of high honor, and Esther (Ester) issued a decree:

“Make the 14th day of the month of Adar a holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions of food to one another . . .” (Esther (Ester) 9:19-22)

The holiday Purim was established, and the appointment with Adonai was made. The holiday was to be observed forever . . .

“The Jews established and made a custom for themselves, and for their descendants, and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they should not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation, and according to their appointed time annually. So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants” (Esther [Ester] 9:27-28).

Esther (Ester) had only asked for the right of self-defense in the face of destruction, but the king also gave them the right to plunder the spoil of their enemies. However, three times the Jews refused:

“ . . . but *they did not lay their hands on the plunder*” (Esther [Ester] 9:10).

“The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but *they did not lay their hands on the plunder*. Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king’s provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but *did not lay their hands on the plunder.*”

Why is this important enough to be mentioned three times? The answer reveals the antecedents to this story of Purim. Esther (Ester) describes Haman as a descendant of king Agag:

“So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the **Agagite**, the *enemy of the Jews*” (Esther [Ester] 3:10).

Agag was king of the Amalakites, Israel’s and Adonai’s enemy:

“He said, ‘For hands were lifted up to the throne of Adonai. Adonai will be at war against the **Amalekites** from generation to generation’” (Exodus [Sh’mot] 17:16).

This leads to the reason Haman and his ten sons were executed. In I Samuel [Sh’mu’el Alef] 15, Adonai promises to punish Amalek, and commands Saul (Sha’ul) to eradicate them. Saul (Sha’ul) disobeys, spares Amalek, and even takes some of the spoil. It took 500 years to correct this, but finally Mordechai finishes what his ancestor did not . . . for Mordechai is described as a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin (Binyamin):

“Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew **of the tribe of Benjamin** (Binyamin), named Mordechai, son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish . . .” (Esther [Ester] 2:5)

This explains why the Jews were reluctant to take any of their enemy’s spoil . . . perhaps they were reminded of Saul’s (Sha’ul’s) downfall.

Some Purim traditions are:

- We fast on the 13th of Adar, in remembrance of Esther's [Ester's] decree to fast before she saw the king.

- We celebrate Purim on different days, the 14th or 15th of Adar:

“The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth, and then on the fifteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy. That is why rural Jews —those living in villages — observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other” (Esther [Ester] 9:18-19).

- We dress in costumes, a tradition related to those who dressed up to look like Jews, in fear of retribution for Haman's decree:

“And many people of other nationalities became Jews, because fear of the Jews had seized them” (Esther [Ester] 8:17b).

- We read the Megillah, which is the entire book of Esther.

“Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Avihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. 30 And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, 31 to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting. 32 So the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book”. (Esther [Ester] 9:29-32)

- We use “Groggers,” or noisemakers and sound them each time the name Haman is mentioned . . . a reminder of Adonai's instruction to “blot out Amalek:”

“When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of Adonai. When Adonai your Adonai gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, **you shall blot out the memory of Amalek** from under heaven. **Do not forget!**” (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 25:18-19)

- We celebrate with food and games, a reminder of deliverance from annihilation.

“In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and **gladness** among the Jews, with **feasting and celebrating**” (Esther [Ester] 8:17a).

- We deliver “mishloah manot,” plates of food and treats to neighbors and those in need.

“He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and *gifts to the poor*” (Esther [Ester] 9:22).

The idea of giving is further connected with Purim, since a descendant of King Ahasuerus (Ahashverosh), Darius, gave provisions from the royal treasury to rebuild the Temple (as told in Ezra [‘Ezra]) . . . could he be Esther’s (Ester’s) grandson?

- We eat “hamantaschen,” Yiddish for “Haman’s pockets,” triangular pastry filled with fruit; associated with the three-cornered hat Haman supposedly wore. In Israel they are called Oznai Haman, literally means, the ears of Haman.

It has been interpreted that since Shushan (“Susa”) was a walled city — all cities known to be walled since the days of Joshua (i.e., Jerusalem) — were to celebrate Purim on the 15th. In a “leap year,” with two months of Adar, it is celebrated during Adar II.

Purim shows us once again that Satan will use whoever he can to destroy the Jews. Even Hitler knew the story of Esther (Ester), and ordered synagogues barred on Purim. On Purim in 1942 in Poland, ten Jews were hanged in a sadistic parody of the fate of Haman’s sons. However, as we saw with Hanukkah and Pesach, Adonai is faithful to miraculously save His people.

In the Purim story, we see a representation of Yeshua in the king’s scepter held out to Esther, allowing her to enter his presence. Numbers (B’midbar) 24:17 describes a “scepter that will rise out of Israel,” a prophecy of the Messiah. Hebrews 1:8 (quoting Psalms [Tehillim] 45:6) speaks of Yeshua as the “righteous scepter.” Adonai extends His scepter to us, Yeshua, so when we acknowledge Him, we can enter into His presence.

Yom Ha Shoah – Holocaust Remembrance Day



The plots to destroy the Jews hatched by Pharaoh, Haman, Antiochus, and others in history were almost realized in recent times by Hitler’s “final solution,” the plan for the complete destruction of the Jewish people. “Shoah” means “calamity,” which barely describes what happened to so many of our people at the hands of the so-called “civilized Christian nation.” Mass murders are all too commonplace in history, but never before had any state, with all its leaders’ authority, announced its intentions to extinguish the Jews, including the old, women, children and babies, using every resource available, with great zeal. While not all victims were Jews, every Jew was a victim. Why were Jews the main target? The answer lies in Genesis:

“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; *and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*” (Genesis [B’resheet] 12:2-3).

“I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an *everlasting covenant* between me and you and your descendants after you in the generations to come, *to be your Adonai and Adonai of your descendants after you*” (Genesis [B’resheet] 17:6-7).

Blessings to the whole world were promised through the descendants of Abraham, the most famous of which is Yeshua. The devil, the father of lies, is always looking for ways to prove Adonai a liar . . . destroying the Jewish people would prevent them from fulfilling Adonai’s promise, and also proving that Adonai does not keep His covenants. In Satan’s attempt to do this, he enlisted men with wicked hearts to carry out his deeds.

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah [Yirmeyahu] 17:9)

The calling of the Jews to be holy and set apart for Adonai often led to their being singled-out for discrimination, as we learned in Esther (Ester):

“Then Haman said to King Xerxes, ‘There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom *whose customs are different* from those of all other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to *destroy them*, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business’” (Esther [Ester] 3:8-9).

Often, the Church was silent on the persecution of Jews, or, in some cases, even encouraged it. Seeds of hate were planted by early church fathers, such as John Chrysostom (4th Century): “Thy synagogue is a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ, the domicile of the devil. Indeed, Jews worship the devil . . . their rites are criminal and impure. Their religion is a disease. Jews are the most miserable of all men.” His sermons had great influence, and were followed by others with similar misguided ideas. Martin Luther (1500’s) wrote: “Concerning the Jews and their lies, Jews are poisoners, ritual murderers, usurers, parasites on Christian society. They are worse than devils, doomed to hell. Their synagogues should be set on fire; their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed. Let us drive them out of the country for all time.”

Centuries later, these ideas were carried out in the mostly Protestant Germany. In November of 1938, one of the first large-scale pogroms was established by the Nazis in honor of Luther’s birthday. The seeds of hatred for the Jews were especially evident in pre-World War II Germany. 1873 saw the first use of the term “anti-Semitism” by Wilhelm Marr. Before this, the Jews were considered evil for what they believed. Now, they were considered a separate race, fundamentally different from “Aryans,” a fictitious super-race invented by the Nazis. In 1920, the book *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was translated into German and sold 120,000 copies the first year. Even when this book was proven a forgery and totally bogus, it grew in popularity. Lectures and classes were given on the “international Jewish conspiracy” posed by this book.

Later, in the 1920's, the worst inflation hit Germany. This was partly caused by Germany's huge reparation bill from Germany's losing World War I, ironically blamed on the Jews, even though 100,000 fought in the war, and 12,000 died for Germany. Money became worthless, unemployment escalated, there were food riots . . . and someone had to be blamed. Since the Middle Ages, Jews were prohibited from many trades, except debt collection, as a service to landowners. This tradition in finance led to them being targeted for all Germany's financial woes, even though they consisted of only 1% of the population. Paradoxically, while Jews were accused of being too successful as capitalists, they were also accused of being Communists, and thus enemies of Germany. Hitler's Nazis rose to power on the platform "The Jews are our misfortune!" Hitler's cause of Jew hatred became intertwined with German nationalism to the level of a religion, with Hitler as god. The Nazi said: "In fighting the Jew, I am doing the Lord's work." This new Nazi "religion" had its roots in the occult, which Hitler and his associates practiced

Under the guise of "protection" for Germany, laws and policies were established that slowly, but persistently, disenfranchised the Jews. Soon, they were no longer citizens and had no rights. Men were expelled or were driven out. Towns would probably boast to be "Judenrein," cleansed of Jews. November 9, 1938, the "Kristallnacht," "night of broken glass," left no doubt about Germany's attitude toward the Jews: 190 synagogues destroyed, along with 800 Jewish-owned shops, 30,000 Jewish men sent to concentration camps, and thousands murdered. All Jewish owned factories were nationalized, and as a "bonus" for this treatment, Jews were fined one billion reichmarks, about \$400 million.

When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, persecution of the Jews escalated. Warsaw, the center of European Jewry, was turned into a ghetto, where up to 5,000 people a month died of disease, starvation, and attacks by both the Germans and their eager accomplices. In 1941, Reinhard Heydrich organized a "final solution" to the "Jewish problem." Jews were deported from all over Europe to death camps. In all, over 6 million Jews were murdered, a figure that cannot describe the toll in human suffering it represents.

Despite the accounts of "righteous Gentiles" who came to our peoples' aid, most of the world was silent, or even in agreement with this destruction. Jews who sought to escape certain death were given the cold shoulder. The U.S. and U.K. limited Jewish emigration with laws and quotas. Anti-Semitic papers, magazines, and radio shows reflected an attitude that the Jews deserved their fate. At the Evian Conference of western powers in 1938, the response to the Jews' plight was represented by Australia: "As we have no real racial problem here, we are not desirous of importing one." Britain would not even let Jews immigrate to Israel . . . refugee boats were refused entry, and turned back from every port, with no solution but to return to the Nazi gas chambers.

Such is the story of the Saint Louis. On May 13, 1939, the German transatlantic liner *St. Louis* sailed from Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba. On the voyage were 938 passengers, 930 were Jewish refugees. They all were Jews fleeing from the Third Reich.

Most were German citizens, some were from Eastern Europe, and a few were officially "stateless."

The majority of the Jewish passengers had applied for US visas, and had planned to stay in Cuba only until they could enter the United States. But by the time the *St. Louis* sailed, there were signs that political conditions in Cuba might keep the passengers from landing there. The US State Department in Washington, the US consulate in Havana, some Jewish organizations, and refugee agencies were all aware of the situation. The passengers themselves were not informed; most were compelled to return to Europe.

Since the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 9-10, 1938, the German government had sought to accelerate the pace of forced Jewish emigration. The German Foreign Office and the Propaganda Ministry also hoped to exploit the unwillingness of other nations to admit large numbers of Jewish refugees to justify the Nazi regime's anti-Jewish goals and policies both domestically in Germany and in the world at large.



Refugees aboard the Saint Louis

The owners of the *St. Louis*, the Hamburg-Amerika Line, knew even before the ship sailed that its passengers might have trouble disembarking in Cuba. The passengers, who held landing certificates and transit visas issued by the Cuban Director-General of Immigration, did not know that Cuban President Federico Laredo Bru had issued a decree just a week before the ship sailed that invalidated all recently issued landing certificates. Entry to Cuba required written authorization from the Cuban Secretaries of State and Labor and the posting of a \$500 bond (The bond was waived for US tourists).

The voyage of the *St. Louis* attracted a great deal of media attention. Even before the ship sailed from Hamburg, right-wing Cuban newspapers deplored its impending arrival and demanded that the Cuban government cease admitting Jewish refugees. Indeed, the passengers became victims of bitter infighting within the Cuban government. The

Director-General of the Cuban immigration office, Manuel Benitez Gonzalez, had come under a great deal of public scrutiny for the illegal sale of landing certificates. He routinely sold such documents for \$150 or more and, according to US estimates, had amassed a personal fortune close to \$1,000,000. Though he was a protégé of Cuban army chief of staff (and future president) Fulgencio Batista, Benitez's self-enrichment through corruption had fueled sufficient resentment in the Cuban government to bring about his resignation.

After Cuba denied entry to the passengers on the *St. Louis*, the press throughout Europe and the Americas, including the United States, brought the story to millions of readers throughout the world. Though US newspapers generally portrayed the plight of the passengers with great sympathy, only a few journalists and editors suggested that the refugees be admitted into the United States.

Sailing so close to Florida that they could see the lights of Miami, some passengers on the *St. Louis* cabled President Franklin D. Roosevelt asking for refuge. Roosevelt never responded. The State Department and the White House had decided not to take extraordinary measures to permit the refugees to enter the United States. A State Department telegram sent to a passenger stated that the passengers must "await their turns on the waiting list and qualify for and obtain immigration visas before they may be admissible into the United States." US diplomats in Havana intervened once more with the Cuban government to admit the passengers on a "humanitarian" basis, but without success.

Quotas established in the US Immigration and Nationality Act of 1924 strictly limited the number of immigrants who could be admitted to the United States each year. In 1939, the annual combined German-Austrian immigration quota was 27,370 and was quickly filled. In fact, there was a waiting list of at least several years. US officials could only have granted visas to the *St. Louis* passengers by denying them to the thousands of German Jews placed further up on the waiting list. Public opinion in the United States, although ostensibly sympathetic to the plight of refugees and critical of Hitler's policies, continued to favor immigration restrictions. The Great Depression had left millions of people in the United States unemployed and fearful of competition for the scarce few jobs available. It also fueled anti-Semitism, xenophobia, nativism, and isolationism. A *Fortune Magazine* poll at the time indicated that 83 percent of Americans opposed relaxing restrictions on immigration. President Roosevelt could have issued an executive order to admit the *St. Louis* refugees, but this general hostility to immigrants, the gains of isolationist Republicans in the Congressional elections of 1938, and Roosevelt's consideration of running for an unprecedented third term as president were among the political considerations that militated against taking this extraordinary step in an unpopular cause.

Roosevelt was not alone in his reluctance to challenge the mood of the nation on the immigration issue. Three months before the *St. Louis* sailed, Congressional leaders in both US houses allowed to die in committee a bill sponsored by Senator Robert Wagner

(D-N.Y.) and Representative Edith Rogers (R-Mass.). This bill would have admitted 20,000 Jewish children from Germany above the existing quota.

Two smaller ships carrying Jewish refugees sailed to Cuba in May 1939. The French ship, the *Flandre*, carried 104 passengers; the *Orduña*, a British vessel, held 72 passengers. Like the *St. Louis*, these ships were not permitted to dock in Cuba. The *Flandre* turned back to its point of departure in France, while the *Orduña* proceeded to a series of Latin American ports. Its passengers finally disembarked in the US-controlled Canal Zone in Panama. The United States eventually admitted most of them.

Following the US government's refusal to permit the passengers to disembark, the *St. Louis* sailed back to Europe on June 6, 1939. The passengers did not return to Germany, however. Jewish organizations (particularly the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) negotiated with four European governments to secure entry visas for the passengers: Great Britain took 288 passengers; the Netherlands admitted 181 passengers, Belgium took in 214 passengers; and 224 passengers found at least temporary refuge in France. Of the 288 passengers admitted by Great Britain, all survived World War II save one, who was killed during an air raid in 1940. Of the 620 passengers who returned to continent, 87 (14%) managed to emigrate before the German invasion of Western Europe in May 1940. 532 *St. Louis* passengers were trapped when Germany conquered Western Europe. Just over half, 278 survived the Holocaust. 254 died: 84 who had been in Belgium; 84 who had found refuge in Holland, and 86 who had been admitted to France.

<http://www.ushmm.org>
US Holocaust Memorial Museum

Adonai sees it differently:

“Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?” (Proverbs [Mishlei] 24:11-12)

When the war ended, the full horror of the “final solution” was revealed to the world. The word Holocaust derives from the Greek word “holo,” “whole,” and “caustos,” “burned,” meaning entirely consumed by fire. Out of this fire, Adonai faithfully preserved a remnant of His people.

“But Zion said, ‘Adonai has forsaken me, Adonai has forgotten me.’ Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!” (Isaiah [Yeshayahu] 39:14-15)

The Israeli Knesset chose the 27th of Nisan, usually the beginning of May, as Yom Hashoah, a day to remember the Holocaust. It is uncertain why this date was chosen, but it is linked with the end of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, one of the few instances of Jewish organized armed confrontation with their persecutors. It also falls one week before the celebration of Israel’s Independence Day, symbolically linking it with the fall

of the old European-style Jew, and the birth of the modern Zionist, the strong, independent Sabra. It is possible to say that the Holocaust caused world opinion to show some favor to the founding of a Jewish state, and that the Jewish people saw once and for all that no matter how well-assimilated, no matter how indifferent to Zionism, they would only be safe in their own land, the land of Israel promised to them by Adonai.

Yom Ha Zikaron – Israel’s Memorial Day

The fourth of Iyar, the day preceding Israel's Independence Day, was declared by the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) to be a Memorial Day for those who lost their lives in the struggle that led to the establishment of the State of Israel and for all military personnel who were killed while in active duty in Israel's armed forces.

Joining these two days together conveys a simple message: Israelis owe the independence and the very existence of the Jewish state to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for it.

Yom HaZikaron, the Israeli Memorial Day, is different in its character and mood from the American Memorial Day. For 24 hours (from sunset to sunset) all places of public entertainment (theaters, cinemas, nightclubs, pubs, etc.) are closed. The most noticeable feature of the day is the sound of the siren that is heard throughout the country twice, during which the entire nation observes a two-minute "standstill" of all traffic and daily activities. The first siren marks the beginning of Memorial Day at 8:00 P.M., and the second is at 11:00 A.M., before the public recitation of prayers in the military cemeteries. All radio and television stations broadcast programs portraying the lives and heroic deeds of fallen soldiers. Most of the broadcasting time is devoted to Israeli songs that convey the mood of the day.

Yom Ha'Atzmaut – Israel’s Independence Day

Israel’s Independence Day falls on the 5th of Iyar, usually early May. This day has been celebrated since 1948, the date of the founding of the modern state of Israel. In Israel, the whole country celebrates with parties, performances, and military parades. The latter reminds us that there are those who would dispute Israel’s right to exist. This is a good time to be reminded of Adonai’s promises concerning the land of Israel:



“He also said to him, ‘I am ADONAI, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to *give you this land* to take possession of it’” (Genesis [B’resheet] 15:7).

“In the fourth generation, *your descendants will come back here*, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” (Genesis [B’resheet] 15:16).

“***The whole land of Canaan***, where you are now an alien, I will give as an ***everlasting possession to you and your descendants*** after you; and I will be their Adonai” (Genesis [B’resheet] 17:8).

“I will give you ***every place where you set your foot***, as I promised Moses” (Joshua [Y’hoshua] 1:3).

“But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for ***they will soon come home***” (Ezekiel [Yechezk’el] 36:8).

“For I will take you out of the nations; ***I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land***” (Ezekiel [Yechezk’el] 36:24).

“***You will live in the land I gave your forefathers***; you will be my people, and I will be your Adonai” (Ezekiel [Yechezk’el] 36:28).

“This is what the sovereign ADONAI says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will ***resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt***” (Ezekiel [Yechezk’el] 36:33).

“You are to divide it equally among them. Because I swore with uplifted hand to give it to your forefathers, ***this land will become your inheritance***” (Ezekiel [Yechezk’el] 47:14).

This promise of land is everlasting. Although the occupation of the Promised Land was interrupted by exile, due to Israel’s sin, the promise was never annulled. Specific boundaries were given, so no mistake would be made about the promise of land for Israel:

“On that day, ADONAI made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘***To your descendants I give this land***, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites’” (Genesis [B’resheet] 15:18-21).

“ADONAI said to Moses (Moshe), ‘Command the Israelites and say to them, ‘When you enter Canaan, ***the land that will be allotted to you as an inheritance***, will have these boundaries: Your southern side will include some of the Desert of Tzin along the border of Edom. On the east, your southern boundary will start from the end of the Salt Sea, cross south of Scorpion Pass, continue on to Tzin and go south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and over to Atzmon, where it will turn, join the Wadi of Egypt and end at the Sea. Your western boundary will be the coast of the Great Sea. This will be your boundary on the west.

For your northern boundary, run a line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor and from Mount Hor to Lebo Hamath. Then the boundary will go to Zedad, continue to Tziphrone and end at Hazar Enan. This will be your boundary on the north.

For your eastern boundary, run a line from Hazar Enan to Shepham. The boundary will go down from Shepham to Rivlah on the east side of Ain and continue along the slopes east of the Sea of Kinneret. Then the boundary will go down along the Jordan (Yarden) and end at

the Salt Sea. This will be your land, with its boundaries on every side” (Numbers [B’midbar] 34:1-12).

These borders include much more land than Israel occupies now, and more than even at the peak of its empire, during the reign of Solomon (Shlomo). From scriptural descriptions, the boundaries stretch from eastern Egypt to past Damascus, all the way into present-day Iraq. The promise of this land will only be fulfilled in the end times. Then we can look forward to the greatest Yom Ha’Atzmaut celebration, when the Messiah returns to reign in Jerusalem!

Tisha B’Av

Tisha B’Av, the ninth day in the Hebrew calendar month Av, usually July or August, marks a day of tragedy, sadness, and fasting for the Jewish people. On this same day in history, a series of calamities are linked in a supernatural way, beyond the realm of coincidence:



TISHA B’AV

1. Traditionally, this is the day the spies sent out by Moses (Moshe) to explore Canaan returned with a false report, believed by the people in spite of Joshua (Y’hoshua) and Caleb’s (Kalev’s) exhortation. For this, they were punished by wandering forty years in the wilderness. However, the rabbis predicted in the Talmud that for crying over the false report, the Jewish people would cry on that day for generations to come.
2. In 586 B.C.E., led by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple. 100,000 Jews perished, and millions were exiled.
3. On the same day 656 years later, in 70 A.D., the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans, led by Titus. Again, many Jews died and were exiled.
4. Sixty-five years later, in 135 A.D., the Roman Emperor Hadrian crushed the Bar Kochba revolt. The fortress of Beitar, a Jewish stronghold, was liquidated, and over 100,000 Jews were slaughtered.
5. The Roman general Turnus Rufus plowed under the Temple area and its surroundings. Jerusalem was rebuilt as a pagan city named Aelia Capitolina, and access was forbidden to Jews. The land of Israel was renamed from Judea to Palestina, after Israel’s enemy the Philistines.
6. In 1096 Pope Urban II declared the First Crusade. Tens of thousands of Jews were killed, and many Jewish communities were obliterated.
7. In 1290, this day marked the first nation-wide rejection of Jews when the official decree expelling them from England was signed.

8. On the same day in 1492, one of the greatest upheavals in Jewish history occurred when the large Jewish community in Spain was expelled.
9. Jews were first ordered into a ghetto on this date in 1555, when the Jews of Rome were ordered to live in a district near the Tiber.
10. WWI broke out on Tisha B'Av in 1914, when Germany declared war on Russia. German resentment from the war set the stage for the Holocaust.
11. In 1941 on the same day, Reinhard Heydrich was ordered to carry out the "final solution" for the European Jews.

Not all the calamities for the Jews occurred on this day, however history records too many calamities for an entire month of Tisha B'Avs. The important thing to remember on this day is not man's inhumanity to Jewish people, but Adonai's preservation of His people in spite of Hasatan's best attempts. This day is mentioned in Scripture:

"This is what ADONAI Tzva'ot says: '***The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months*** will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore, love truth and peace'" (Zechariah [Z'kharyah] 8:19).

The month of Av is the fifth month, and even in the days of Zechariah [Z'kharyah], it was known as a fast. Lamentations [Eikhah] is the megillah traditionally read on this day. It is appropriate, on this day of sad memories, to recall Adonai's enduring love and faithfulness, giving us hope in any of the Tisha B'Avs we may face in our personal lives.

"Yet this I call to mind and therefore ***I have hope***: Because of ***Adonai's great love*** we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; ***great is Your faithfulness***. I say to myself, 'Adonai is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.' Adonai is good to those whose ***hope*** is in Him, to the one who seeks Him; it is good to wait quietly for the ***salvation*** of Adonai" (Lamentations [Eikhah] 3:21-26).

Yeshua is our ***hope*** and ***salvation***!