

CANADIAN *Communiqué*

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A NOTE FROM STEVE

On the evening of March 23 Jewish families across Canada will celebrate the happiest day on the Jewish calendar, the holiday of Purim. While in their synagogues, the Megillah (book of Esther) will be read out loud and they will “boo” at the mere mention of Haman’s name. Like Passover and Hanukkah, Purim is a reminder of Jewish deliverance from death. In this issue of the *Canadian Communiqué*, we feature this joyous day. John Plantz provides us with the biblical history of Purim. Larry Mitchell explains how the Jewish people celebrate today and John McKim explains why this book is important for believers.

We are pleased to announce an addition to our ministry team here in Canada. Richard Toviah is a Canadian Jewish believer who will be leaving the pastorate in the warm climate of Arizona to relocate with his family to his hometown of Winnipeg, Manitoba, in June. You will be blessed to read about his journey to the ministry of FOI Gospel Ministry in Canada in our “Happenings” section.



Steve Herzig is the North American Ministries Director of FOI Gospel Ministry.

612 BC**Assyria Falls**

Babylon defeats Assyria. The 10 northern tribes of Israel captured by Assyria in 722 BC now belong to Babylon. *Nahum* 1—3

605–535 BC**Babylonian Captivity**

First deportation to Babylon (includes the prophet Daniel) in 605 BC; 70-year Babylonian Captivity and Times of the Gentiles begin. The Babylonians burn Jerusalem in 586 BC. *Jeremiah* 25:11–12; 39:1–18; *Daniel* 1:1–6; 9:1–2

539–538 BC**Babylon Falls**

Babylon falls to Medo-Persia in 539 BC. Persian ruler Cyrus lets the Jewish people return to their land in 538 BC. 2 *Chronicles* 36:22–23; *Ezra* 1:1–4; *Daniel* 5:1–31; 6:28

538 BC**First Return**

49,897 Jewish people in the Persian Empire return home under Zerubbabel's leadership. *Ezra* 2

535–530 BC**Second Temple**

Zerubbabel begins building the second Temple on the first Temple's foundations and reinstitutes sacrifices. Construction stops due to opposition from enemies. *Ezra* 3—4

515 BC**Second Temple Finished**

Construction of the second Temple resumes and, from this point takes six years to complete under the leadership of Zerubbabel. *Ezra* 5—6; *Haggai* 1:1—2:9

486 BC**Ahasuerus**

Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) becomes ruler over the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire. *Esther* 1:1–2

479 BC**Esther**

The Jewish maiden Hadassah (Esther in Persian) becomes queen of Persia in place of Vashti. *Esther* 2:17

474 BC**Haman**

Haman decrees the destruction of all the Jewish people. Esther foils his plot. Haman is hanged. Purim is established. *Esther* 3—10

464 BC**Artaxerxes I**

Artaxerxes I succeeds Ahasuerus as king of the Persian Empire. *Nehemiah* 13:6

458 BC**Second Return**

5,000 Jewish people return to their homeland under Ezra, the priest and scribe. *Ezra* 7—8

444 BC**Third Return**

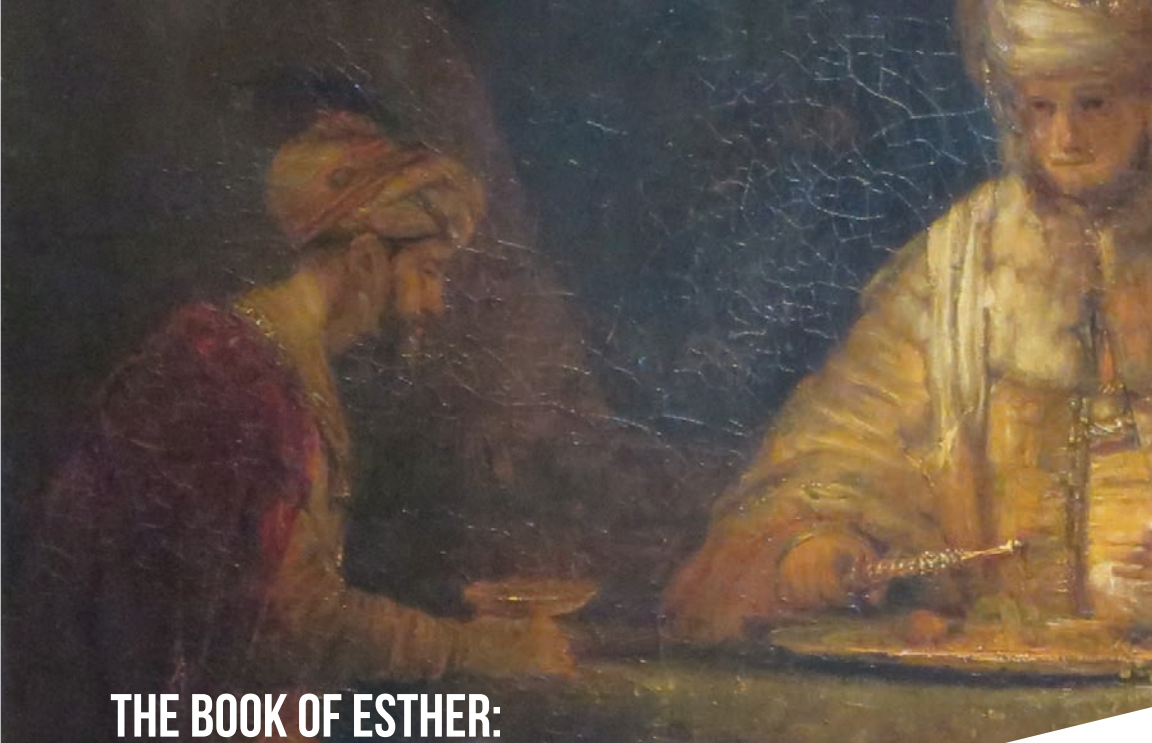
Nehemiah, cupbearer to Artaxerxes, leads the third return to the land to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. *Nehemiah* 1:1; 2:1–10; 13:6

443 BC**Jerusalem Rebuilt 443 BC**

Once construction begins, Jerusalem's walls go up in 52 days. *Nehemiah* 6:15—7:3

ESTHER

IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



THE BOOK OF ESTHER:

PRESERVING GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE

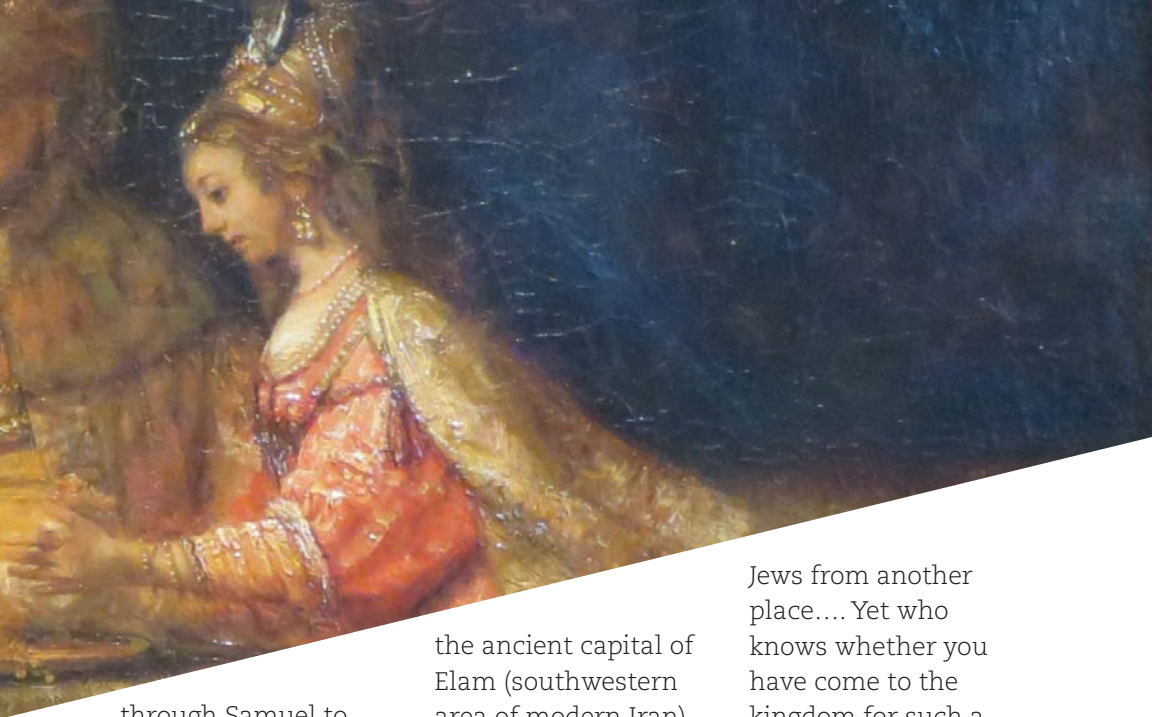
The book of Esther is of great value. At the time of its writing, Jewish people were living in Persia, though they could and should have returned to their homeland when Cyrus gave permission to leave. The book has two underlying distinctions: It is missing the mention of God's name; and it demonstrates vicious anti-Semitism.

Biblical and secular history demonstrate that anti-Semitism

usually results in genocide. In the days of Moses, Pharaoh attempted to exterminate the Hebrew slaves. Antiochus Epiphanes tried to do the same in the days between the Testaments. Jewish people celebrate the failures of both men, with Passover and Hanukkah. In more recent history, we see Hitler, Stalin, and Khrushchev.

Haman was a descendant of Agag

the Amalekite. In Exodus 17:8-16, Moses fought against the Amalekites. The Amalekites "did not fear God" and took cruel advantage of the weak and weary Israelites (Dt. 25:17-19). "Amalek was first among the nations, but shall be last until he perishes" (Num. 24:20). The Amalekites were the first to attack the newly redeemed and separated Israel. Later God told Saul (a Benjamite)



through Samuel to utterly destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:3). Disobedience to God comes at a high cost and can affect generations to come. Because Agag was spared, his descendant Haman was alive to try to annihilate the Jewish people, including Mordecai, also a Benjamite.

“The LORD has sworn: The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Ex. 17:16).

The historical setting of the book of Esther covers 10 years (483-473 BC) of the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus, the Hebrew form of the name). Shushan was

the ancient capital of Elam (southwestern area of modern Iran).

Esther and her cousin Mordecai were among the Jewish families who should have returned to Israel when given the opportunity. Yet, in God’s sovereignty, of all the eligible women in the kingdom, Esther is chosen to be Ahasuerus’ new queen. Mordecai recognizes this divine appointment, suggesting she was placed there “for such a time as this” (Est. 4:14).

Harkening to her cousin’s words, “If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the

Jews from another place.... Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (v. 14). So Esther commits herself to meet with the king to intercede for her people. In so doing, she reveals her Jewish identity to her husband and exposes Haman’s satanic plot. The Jewish people are able to defend themselves with the king’s blessing, thereby ensuring their survival. Thus Purim becomes a day of celebration, remembering Jewish physical salvation.

John Plantz is the Winnipeg, Manitoba, Church Ministries field representative for FOI Gospel Ministries.





CELEBRATING PURIM

by Larry Mitchell

I try not to miss going to the synagogue on Purim, the holiday that commemorates the events recorded in the book of Esther. It is a time of revelry; children (and the young at heart) dress up in costumes, many choosing characters mentioned in Esther. The *Megillah* (scroll) of Esther is read. One local rabbi is known to dress up in a monkey suit to read through the scroll. People call him their gorilla Megillah! Jewish people will cheer whenever Mordecai's name is mentioned. They will make noise with noisemakers (*groggers*) every time they hear the word Haman. Some Jewish people write the name of Haman with chalk on the soles of their shoes, and stomp their feet in order to drown out or erase the name of Haman (cf. Ex. 17:14). Rubber or plastic Purim hammers which squeak upon contact are used in jest to hit one another. They will bake poppy seed triangular cookies called *hamantaschen* (Haman's pockets).

My most memorable Purim did not take place in a synagogue, but in the home of a Jewish friend who was recovering from surgery and unable to attend the synagogue. I decided to visit her on Purim. Together we read through the book

of Esther. The visit was on the spur of the moment and I did not have any noisemakers so we improvised. I rattled my keys every time the name Haman was mentioned. My friend clanged her spoon.

When we came to the phrase *Haman the wicked*, I was able to talk about how Haman paints a picture of a future enemy of Israel known as the Antichrist. I also pointed out that the book of Esther is a wonderful example of God's grace and mercy. Mordecai and Esther were secular Jews. The name Mordecai means "servant of Marduke" (the Babylonian god of war). The faithful remnant had gone home through the ministry of Ezra (Ezra 1:3). Hadassah, whose name means "myrtle tree" (a symbol of the messiah, Zech. 1:7–11), had her name changed to Esther (Isthar—the name of a Babylonian goddess). Esther married a Gentile, which is forbidden in the Law of Moses (Dt. 7:3). Despite their compromise, God protected His Chosen People.



Larry Mitchell is the Calgary, Alberta, field representative for FOI Gospel Ministries.



THE BOOK OF
ESTHER

Is there any relevance in the story of Purim for believers today? Let's consider the following.

An Inescapable Message. That message is the

providence of God. God's name is nowhere seen in the book but His hand is nowhere missing. Even though God was hidden from them, He was still working for them. This tells me that God rules and in the end God wins.

But what might those looming gallows mean for you and me?

Some horrible pain, some threat of illness or need for surgery, some emotional stress that is leading to your demise, some fractured relationship that you cannot repair or get beyond, some sudden loss that leaves you gripped in the vice of grief, some financial catastrophe or the like.

I know not what the gallows of your life are at this moment, but be still and know that He is God (Ps. 46:10). Be convinced that He sees you as He saw

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

LESSONS FROM THE PURIM STORY

by John McKim

Hagar (Gen. 16:13). God is standing in the shadows watching over His own. You may not see Him, but He sees you. He is in control, He rules.

An Inaccessible King (Est. 4:11–12). Oriental monarchs were supposed to hear only good news; they reigned in a world of illusion, sheltered from reality. Even the queen had to have permission to talk to him. How different it is with the King of kings. He has worn the sackcloth of sorrow, He knows how we feel, and He gives us free access to His throne (Heb. 4:16; 10:19–22). Your King is accessible at anytime.

An Incomparable Opportunity (Est. 4:14,16). God uses people to accomplish His purposes, and Esther was God’s prepared servant for that hour (v. 14).

Esther counted the cost: “If I perish, I perish” (v. 16). You and I will not accomplish God’s purpose for our lives until we surrender to

Him and count the cost (Rom. 12:1). If we disobey that call, we will be the losers in the end and God will raise up someone else to get the job done.

An Irrepressible Grief (Est. 4:1–2). A crisis does not make a person; it shows what a person is made of. In spite of the danger involved, Mordecai publicly displayed his grief and let people know his position. He would not stand by and do nothing when the authorities were about to slaughter innocent people, including children.

Edwin Burke said, “All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.”

The solemn words from Proverbs 24:11–12 make it very clear that we cannot be neutral when human lives are at stake.

Is this not what is happening in our world today?

Christians are being slaughtered and babies are being aborted in the millions. Our core values are being attacked. It is time to stand up, and speak up, but it is no time to be silent. We need more Mordecais and Esthers, both men and woman of strong conviction. May their tribe increase.

Is the story of Purim relevant for the believer today? I would answer with a resounding ...YES!!

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4).



John McKim
is the Saint
John, New
Brunswick, field
representative
for FOI Gospel
Ministries.

HAPPENINGS

The Friends of Israel is excited to welcome Richard Toviah!

Shortly after coming to the Lord, Richard met Larry Mitchell, FOI's representative in Calgary. With a great desire to grow in the Lord, Richard spent eight years learning while serving as an FOI volunteer. He went on to serve in Jewish ministry in various capacities and later went into the pastorate. All the while he maintained a hospice ministry where he lovingly shared the Good News with patients in the last phase of life. All that time the Lord was nudging him to go back to Canada and serve among God's Chosen People. Richard will be serving in Winnipeg with John Plantz, as well as carving out his own ministry. He, along with his wife, Gabriela, and four children, are excited to see what God will do through them in Canada.

I grew up in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Both my parents have European Jewish backgrounds, but I wasn't raised in any form of Judaism.

My father drove a taxicab for a living. Every now and then customers would leave items in the back of the cab, and one time someone left Hal Lindsey's book *The Late Great Planet Earth*. My dad gave me the book.

I moved to Calgary, Alberta, with my mother in 1984. In our new home in Calgary I began to read the book. It challenged me greatly. I was heavily involved in the occult, largely due to the influence of my father who remained in Winnipeg. The more I read, the more I became intrigued, to the point that I purchased an old King James Bible at a local used book store. I began to challenge the prophecies I was reading about Jesus being the Messiah because He fulfilled many of the Old Testament promises. I

read parts of Isaiah, Daniel, and Micah, followed by all of the four Gospels. It was the Gospels that convicted me that I was a sinner and that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah.

In April of 1985, at 20 years old, I prayed, repenting of my sins, and asking the Lord Jesus Christ to be my Savior. I didn't know any other believers; my conviction of sin came entirely from the Lord working in my life.

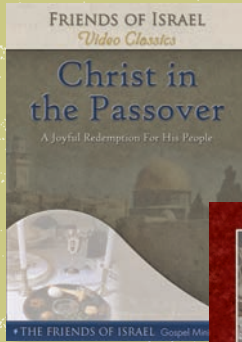
I had a strange feeling of my connectedness to the Jewish people that I never had before. As I was reading the many prophecies of Jesus' First and Second Comings, and the Lord's restoration of Israel in our modern times, my identification with the Jewish people was deeper and more profound than it had ever been. Almost immediately after my conversion I had a burden for my people that has never gone away.

WANT TO LEARN ABOUT ANOTHER UPCOMING FEAST?

Passover begins sundown on April 22.

Christ in the Passover - DVD

Observe a classic Passover seder while learning the clear message that "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). This DVD is a valuable tool in communicating the richness of the Passover message to those who need Christ. (Running Time: 35 minutes) **\$14.95 V04D**



Passover Haggadah

The cup, the lamb, the bread—symbols common to Christianity—all originated with the Jewish Passover. This *Passover Haggadah* unveils the symbolism of the ancient Jewish holiday with clear biblical exposition, holiday songs, and traditional Hebrew blessings. **\$4.95 B29**



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