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Ancient Storytelling and the Book of Esther

Telling history in the form of a story may be unfamiliar to us today, but it is perhaps an especially fitting way for biblical truth to be told. **In later Jewish writings the rabbis talked of the *halaka*, which had to do with one's walk, and it contains commands and principles one should follow. On the other hand, the rabbis classified Esther as *haggada*, a narrative that is instructive, by example, on the way one should live.**[5] From our earliest attempts to communicate using language, we tell stories about ourselves and others. When children first learn how to read, they read stories. Only much later do they acquire the skills of abstract thinking required to read, for instance, a textbook of philosophy. Consequently, because narrative is the form of communication accessible to most people, it is appropriate that ADONAI has revealed Himself to us in stories.

Furthermore, storytelling has two effects even apart from the story's content. It defines and builds relationships, and has the power to change others' lives as they identify with the story. When we are getting to know someone, we ask, "Tell me about yourself." We expect to hear a story that narrates what that person considers to be significant events of his or her life. When our spouse or child comes home at the end of the day, we often ask, "How was your day?" expecting to hear a narrative of the highlights (sometimes lowlights) of the day's events. Storytelling is one way we get to know each other. Consequently, biblical stories, written under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, tell us about ADONAI and His relationship with His people. We read biblical narratives with the implied request, "LORD, tell me your story."

Storytelling also helps to build community. The book of **Esther** was the story that came about when someone thought about the experiences and events that explained how Purim came to be celebrated. Those experiences of a previous generation had an impact on ensuing generations. Those later generations who participated in the celebration of Purim believed that the book of **Esther** was significant to them personally, and joined a distinct group of people who shared ownership of the story. Every family, society or culture is defined, at least in part,

by the stories of past experiences it shares. It, therefore, seems appropriate that the LORD would give us Bible stories that both draw us into relationship with Him and define us as a people who love the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.[6]