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The Seven Jewish Traditions of Purim



There are seven Jewish traditions on this day. For the Messianic Jew or Gentile they are optional, but observant **Jews** are obligated to keep them. **First, is the reading of *the Megillah*.** It is the scroll of **Esther**; therefore, they must read the book of **Esther** on the feast of **Esther**. In keeping with the principles that we found in **Esther** those cities surrounded by a wall at the time of **Joshua** read the book of **Esther** on the fifteenth day of Adar, but Jews living in villages and towns without walls read it on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar.

The second tradition has to do with the reading of the Torah. The specific passage read on this feast day is **Exodus 17:8-16** (see my commentary on **Exodus Cv – War With the Amalekites**), which describes the war with Amalek. The reason this message is read is because, in Jewish tradition, Haman was a descendant of King Agag, the king of the Amalekites in the days of Saul, the first king of Isra'el.

The third tradition has to do with certain additions to the synagogue service and the additions are made in the daily prayers and the blessing after meals.

The fourth tradition is to give presents of food one to another (9:22b). The rabbis, of course, came up with a number of specifics. The minimum requirement of sending portions to friends is two types of food to one friend. The reason they give is because the term presents is plural, but one to another is singular. Therefore, every Jewish person is to send two portions of food to his or her Jewish friend. Whoever increases this

amount, is giving more than two and is to be considered praiseworthy. But those who do not have enough money should exchange these gifts with a friend, each one sending to the other to fulfill the principle of sending presents of food to one another.

The fifth tradition is to give gifts to the poor (9:22c). The rabbis teach the minimum requirement was two gifts; because the word gifts is in the plural, they should give at least two poor people gifts. This would be greater than normal charity, because even a poor Jew must give two presents of food and two gifts every Purim. This gift can be money, it may be a present, it may be a cooked dish or it may be food. The rabbis teach that it is better to increase gifts to the poor than to make a big meal for oneself or an extra portion to a friend. But, if someone happens to be living in a place that has no poor, then they could give it to a friend, or mail it to the poor.

The sixth tradition for all religious Jews on this day has to do with refraining from eulogies and fasting. It is forbidden to fast or deliver a funeral address either on the fourteenth or fifteenth day of Adar. Even if **Purim** is observed only on the fourteenth or only on the fifteenth, the rule still applies to both days.

The seventh key tradition concerns the Purim feast itself. This is based upon **Esther 9:18** and **22**. **According to rabbinic traditions, they are obligated to eat, drink, and be merry. For the night of the fourteenth, one should rejoice and feast. However, one does not fulfill the obligation by feasting at night because it must be done during daytime, as the Bible says: they made it a day of feasting and joy, not nights of feasting and joy. In addition, the rabbis see it as proper and right to light candles even if the meal is during the daytime, though the light of the candle is not necessary.** One should also feast and rejoice on the night of the fifteenth. The **presents of food to one another** and the **gifts to the poor** should be sent in the daytime and then the meal is at night. The **Purim** feast begins after the afternoon prayers that are said while it is broad daylight, because a greater part of the feast is still in the daytime.

In addition, **Jews** are encouraged, but not obligated, to study the **Torah** for a short time at the beginning of the feast. This is based upon **Esther 8:16**, where it says that **the Jews had light, and gladness and joy, and honor (KJV). The rabbis do not interpret this as literal light, but the light of the Torah. Light is**

shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart (Psalm 97:11).

Drinking during **Purim** is hotly debated within the Jewish community. **One famous rabbi named Rava said, "A man is obligated to drink until he no longer knows the difference between blessing Mordecai and cursing Haman." This statement has given many other Jewish rabbis problems, because it implies that it is permissible to get drunk during Purim. However, other rabbis tried to compromise with his position. The rabbis have come up with four different compromises. First, some believe that it only means to drink more than usual. Secondly, others believe that it means to drink until one falls asleep. A third compromise is that both statements in Hebrew equal a numerical value of 502 and what this means is that they can drink until they can no longer make those calculations. A fourth compromise says to drink until one can no longer understand the rabbinic expression of "cursing Haman," or "blessing Mordecai."** Judaism does not only allow for the drinking of wine, it actually promotes it. Wine is part of many Jewish traditions and rituals. **But the rabbis took a very dim view against drunkenness.** About the only time religious **Jews** are allowed to get drunk is on the feast of **Purim** and even then that is questioned by some rabbis, but not by others.[129]