



Ta'anit Ester -

The Fast of Esther

בְּחִיק יוֹטֵל אֶת-הַנּוֹרָל וּנְיָהוּהָ כָּל-נוֹשָׁפְטוֹ:

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

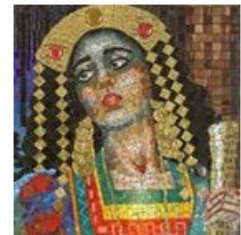
Proverbs 16:33



The Jewish people are a miracle of survival, despite all odds. Many times in their history have the nations risen up to destroy them, but in every case were they delivered by the hand of the LORD God of Israel, blessed be He. The LORD delivered the Jews from the Egyptians, the Amalekites, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Syrians, and from various European nations, including the so-called “christian” crusaders, the Spanish Inquisition, Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, and more recently from the surrounding Arab nations. Presently the "Al-Aqsa" Intifada likewise seeks to destroy the Jewish people and to remove them from their ancient homeland, but this is a vain effort since God Himself will protect His people Israel, as promised in the Scriptures.

The Fast of Esther (*ta'anit Ester*) remembers God's deliverance of the Jewish people from the evil scheming of Haman (said to be a descendant of the Amalekites) during the reign of the Persian King Xerxes (*Ahasuerus* in Hebrew) as described in the Biblical book of Esther. Xerxes became king of the great Medo-Persia empire at the death of his father Darius the Great in 485 BCE.

Upon learning of Haman's decree to annihilate the Jewish people, Mordecai informs his niece Esther (Hebrew name, *Hadassah*) who is the Queen of Persia, who then instructs Mordecai:



mosaic by Lilian Broca

Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. (Esther 4:16)

Esther and the Jews fast for three days, and Esther successfully approaches the king to appeal for the deliverance of the Jewish people (for details, see the topic on **Purim**).



The Modern Observance

Today, Jews remember the fast called by Queen Esther on the day *before* the Jewish festival of Purim. *Unlike* the original fast, however, the modern observance is *not* observed for three days, nor is it observed on the same dates (from Nisan 14-16, immediately after Mordechai was informed of Haman's decree). Instead, the Fast of Esther is observed on **Adar 13**, the day that the nation of Israel was supposed to be destroyed according to Haman's evil decree -- but also the very day in which Israel successfully repelled her enemies:

וּבַשָּׁנִים עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ הוּא-חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר בְּשָׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם
בוֹ אֲשֶׁר הִנִּיעַ דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר
שָׁבְרוּ אִיבֵי הַיְהוּדִים לְשָׁלוֹט בָּהֶם וְנִהְפֹּךְ הוּא אֲשֶׁר
יִשְׁלְטוּ הַיְהוּדִים הַמָּוָה בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם

And so, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month -- that is, the month of Adar -- when the king's command and decree were to be executed, the very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to get them in their power, the opposite happened, and the Jews got their enemies in their power. (Esther 9:1)

בַּיּוֹם-שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר וְנוֹחַ בְּאַרְבָּעָה
עָשָׂר בוֹ וַעֲשָׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה

On the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. (Esther 9:17)

Why is the fast observed for only day on Adar 13th? There are various reasons given in the Jewish tradition, but the main reasons are that fasting is not permitted during the month of Nissan, and the Torah gives precedent for fasting before warfare. The aim of the fast is to affirm that a Israel does not prevail by physical or military strength, but only by lifting her eyes heavenward in prayer so that Divine Mercy might prevail in battle. However, some Jews will fast an additional two days following Purim.



Fast of Esther Customs (Minhagim)

- The fast begins at the break of dawn and ends after the *Megillah* (scroll) of Esther is read that evening in the synagogue. If the Fast of Esther falls on Shabbat, the fast is observed on the Thursday before (since it is forbidden to fast on Shabbat).
- *Selichot* (penitential prayers) and *Avinu Malkeinu* (Our Father, Our King) are recited during synagogue prayer services on Adar 13.
- At the afternoon service the Thirteen Attributes of God's mercy (Exodus 34:6-7) are recited from the Torah three times. It is also customary make a small donation for the poor (made in memory of the half-shekel given by Israel when the temple still stood) at this time.
- The Aneinu prayer (“Answer us”) asking for special forgiveness is added to the morning and afternoon services by the prayer leader.
- Since there are leap years on the **Jewish calendar**, the fast of Esther (as well as Purim) may occur on Adar II (rather than Adar I).
- *Ta'anit Esther* is a time of anticipating God's deliverance for His people. Though it is a fast (*tzom*), it is not a sad time, but rather a time to prepare to behold the victory of the Lord, Adonai Tzeva'ot, on behalf of His people.
- Prophetic Significance: Haman is a type of Anti-Christ (or satan) who will rise up in the last days to attempt (again) to destroy the nation of Israel. The Jewish people will again fast and prepare for God's ultimate deliverance, but this deliverance will clearly come to them at the pierced hands of the Mashiach Yeshua, the true King of Israel. There will be great rejoicing following this tribulation.