

July 26-31, 2022

# Esther

“THOU ART COME . . . FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS”

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**Summary:** *Esther 1. Abasuerus of Persia and Media makes royal feasts—Vashti disobeys the king and is deposed as queen.*

*Esther 2. Abasuerus seeks a new queen—Mordecai presents Esther—Esther pleases the king and is chosen as queen—Mordecai exposes a plot against the king.*

*Esther 3. Mordecai, the Jew, refuses to bow to Haman—Haman arranges a decree to kill all the Jews in the kingdom.*

*Esther 4. Mordecai and the Jews mourn and fast because of the king's decree—Esther, at the peril of her life, prepares to go in unto the king.*

*Esther 5. The king receives Esther—She invites him and Haman to a banquet—Haman plans to have Mordecai hanged.*

*Esther 6. Mordecai receives great honors—Haman mourns and is counseled by his wife.*

*Esther 7. Esther reveals Haman's plot to destroy the Jews—He is hanged on his own gallows.*

*Esther 8. Mordecai is honored and placed over the house of Haman—Abasuerus issues a decree to preserve the Jews.*

*Esther 9. The Jews slay their enemies, including Haman's ten sons—The Feast of Purim is instituted to commemorate their deliverance and victory.*

*Esther 10. Mordecai, the Jew, stands next to Abasuerus in power and might.*

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## Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

### What is one of the cheeriest holidays in the Jewish calendar?

One of the happiest festivities in Jewish life is *Purim*, the celebration of the Persian Queen Esther's victory in standing up as a Jewish woman and protecting her people. The holiday of *Purim*, meaning “lots,” was so called because lots were cast by Haman to decide on a day for killing the Jews. “Jewish settlements spread throughout the Persian empire. Jews rose to high positions and their communities were rich and powerful. The biblical books of Daniel

and Esther give a vivid picture of Jewish life in Persia, and there are many references in the (writings of the) Prophets to Persian power.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

### How does “martyrdom” or self-sacrifice play out in Jewish history?

“Jewish history is replete with examples of those willing to die for their faith from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who in the Book of Daniel refused to worship an idol and thus endangered their lives, up to the recent and present generation of Soviet Jews who suffer indescribable hardships rather than give up their

Jewishness. Under Antiochus Epiphanes, Hellenizers applied violent methods toward the Jews. The Fourth Book of Maccabees is almost entirely a sermon on the meaning and glory of self-sacrifice. Whereas in Christian and Muslim thought martyrdom is chiefly regarded as the act of individuals warranting canonization as saints, in Judaism it remains a task for each and every Jew to fulfill if the appropriate moment should come.”

([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) Queen Esther, a Jewess, must have considered a self-sacrifice as well as a pogrom against the Jews in Persia as she exercised humility and faith in saving her people.

### **What makes the Esther account so important in Jewish history?**

“*Purim*, one of the minor festivals in the Jewish calendar, commemorating the deliverance of the Jews of the Persian empire from extermination, sometime during the fifth century B.C.E. The story of *Purim* is told in the biblical Book of Esther. Haman, chief minister of the Persian King Ahasuerus, plotted to destroy all the Jews of the empire, because of a personal grudge against the Jew Mordecai. After gaining the king’s consent, he fixed the date for their destruction by lot (*pur* in Persian and Hebrew) for the 13th of *Adar* (12<sup>th</sup> month of the Biblical calendar). Esther, the King’s Jewish wife and stepdaughter of Mordecai, courageously interceded with Ahasuerus, and as a result the king authorized the Jews of his realm to defend themselves from attack on the appointed day. They succeeded in routing their enemies, and the following day the Jews celebrated their victory, calling the day *Purim*, in allusion to the lots that Haman had drawn. Ever since that day has been marked with festivities and rejoicing. In Shushan, the capital of the Persian empire, fighting continued for a second day and the victory was celebrated on the 15th of *Adar*. As a result, the tradition subsequently arose

that ancient walled cities (such as Jerusalem) observe *Purim* on the *Shushan* anniversary. In addition, in memory of the three- day fast undertaken by Queen Esther in preparation for her intercession with the king, the day before—*Adar* 13th—is observed as a fast day.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) *Shushan Purim* is an exceptional day of the Jewish holidays. *Purim* is the only holiday that happens on the date where you celebrate it. For most of the world, *Purim* occurs on the 14th of *Adar*. However, residents of Jerusalem or *Shushan* city in Persia (where *Purim* originated), or any Biblically walled city, *Purim* is on the 15th of *Adar*. Therefore, it is also called “*Shushan Purim*.”

### **What caused the Book of Esther to only be later added to the Bible writing collection?**

“The book of Esther offers no exact dating for the events described. Some authorities have identified Ahasuerus with King Xerxes I (485-465 B.C.E.) but many biblical scholars question the historical truth of the story, pointing to marked similarities between it and ancient Babylonian folk tales. However, the festival had unquestionably long been established by the second century C.E. and has throughout subsequent history been celebrated not only as a commemoration of the specific events recorded in the book of Esther, but also of all the major and minor deliverances from disaster experienced by various Jewish communities throughout the world.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

### **How is Purim celebrated?**

“Many laws and customs, as well as a rich folklore, are associated with *Purim*. The most important ceremony is the reading of the Book of Esther from a specially prepared and handwritten parchment scroll called a *megillah*. The regulations

for the reading, as for the celebration of Purim in general, are discussed in the *Talmudic* tractate *Megillah* (the Hebrew word for scroll). Both men and women are obliged to hear the *megillah*, which is read both on the evening of the 13th of *Adar* and on the morning of *Purim* day itself. Before the reading, three special blessings are pronounced. During the course of the reading it has become customary to make a *din* (of noise) through the sounding of noisemaking objects called *gregers* in Yiddish, each time the name of Haman is mentioned. This symbolically represents the fulfilment of the biblical commandment to “blot out the memory of Amalek” from whom Haman was traditionally descended. Other customs, made obligatory by Jewish law, include the sending of gifts to friends, usually two kinds of foods (*mishloah manot*), and the giving of alms to the poor (*matanot le-evyonim*). An important feature of the Purim celebration is the banquet held during the afternoon of *Purim* day. This was the one time of the year when great levity and even drunkenness was tolerated by the rabbis. During the Middle Ages the custom developed for groups of young people to

go from house to house staging little plays either on the *Purim* story or on contemporary communal events. This type of playlet was known as a *Purim Shpil* (*shpil* is Yiddish for “theatrical play”). Another widespread feature of the Purim celebrations was “dressing up” children—and grownups too—dress themselves up either as the characters of the *Purim* story or as well-known figures. Often the fancy dress chosen represents an idea or a chapter in Jewish history. This aspect of *Purim* is still very popular, especially in the State of Israel. “Through the ages, *Purim* has come to take on the atmosphere of an “upside-down day” when nothing is really what it seems to be.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) The local English language newspaper, the *Jerusalem Post*, has an hilarious edition on *Purim* with “opposite” and humorous stories. One *Purim* edition during the successful peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel was printed when Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin (1913-1992) and U.S. Secretary of State, Alexander Haig (1924-2010) were meeting. The headline was themed, “*Now, ‘Begin and Haigs’ acceptable in Israel!*”