



Megillat Esther

- The biblical Book of Esther is set in the third year of Ahasuerus, a king of Persia. The name Ahasuerus is equivalent to Xerxes, both deriving from the Persian Khshayārsha, thus Ahasuerus is usually identified as Xerxes I (486–465 BCE), though Ahasuerus is identified as Artaxerxes in the later Greek version of Esther (as well as by Josephus, the Jewish commentary Esther Rabbah, the Ethiopic translation and the Christian theologian Bar-Hebraeus who identified him more precisely as Artaxerxes II)

Esther

- A Jewish queen of the Persian king Ahasuerus. Ahasuerus is traditionally identified with Xerxes I during the time of the Achaemenid empire. Her story is the basis for the celebration of Purim in Jewish tradition
- There have yet to be any non-biblical accounts to verify her existence

Biblical Books That Don't Mention God

- Song of Solomon
- Esther

Esther Dating

- Esther is usually dated to the 3rd or 4th century BCE
- The Greek additions to the Septuagint version of Esther (which do not appear in original Jewish/Hebrew version) are dated to around the late 2nd century or early 1st BCE

Greek Additions

- An additional six chapters appear interspersed in Esther in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the bible. This was noted by Jerome in compiling the Latin Vulgate
- The Greek text contains many small changes in the meaning of the main text. Jerome recognized them as additions not present in the Hebrew Text and placed them at the end of his Latin translation as chapters 10:4–16:24

Greek Additions

- An opening prologue that describes a dream had by Mordecai
- The contents of the decree against the Jews
- Prayers for God's intervention offered by Mordecai and by Esther
- An expansion of the scene in which Esther appears before the king, with a mention of God's intervention
- A copy of the decree in favor of the Jews
- A passage in which Mordecai interprets his dream (from the prologue) in terms of the events that followed
- A colophon appended to the end, which reads: In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and Levite, and his son Ptolemy brought the present letter of Purim, saying that it was genuine and that Lysimachus, son of Ptolemy, of the community of Jerusalem, had translated it

Vashti

- When the king's heart was "merry with wine," the king orders his seven chamberlains to summon Vashti to come before him and his guests wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty... (Only her royal crown?)
- Harriet Beecher Stowe called Vashti's disobedience the "first stand for woman's rights."
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote that Vashti "added new glory to [her] day and generation...by her disobedience; for "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God."

Esther

- Esther was originally named Hadassah. Hadassah means "myrtle" in Hebrew. It has been conjectured that the name Esther is derived from a reconstructed Median word "astra" meaning myrtle
- An alternative view is that Esther is derived from the theonym Ishtar. The Book of Daniel provides accounts of Jews in exile being assigned names relating to Babylonian gods and "Mordecai" is understood to mean servant of Marduk, a Babylonian god. "Esther" may have been a different Hebrew interpretation from the Proto-Semitic root "star/'morning/evening star"

Haman, An Agagite

- Traditionally a descendant of the Amalekite people, of King Agag, whom King Saul of Israel was commanded by the prophet Samuel to utterly destroy because of their wickedness; but Saul chose to spare their king instead (1 Samuel 15:1-33). Haman's hatred of the Jews may have had its root in this event

Persian Culture

- Given the great historical link between Persian and Jewish history, modern day Persian Jews are called “Esther's Children”
- A building known as the Tomb of Esther and Mordecai is located in Hamadan, Iran, although the village of Kfar Bar'am in northern Israel also claims to be the burial place of Queen Esther

Esther in Canon

- The status of Esther as a canonical book of the Bible has historically been under dispute. For example, in the first several centuries of Christianity, Esther does not appear in the lists of books produced by Melito, Athanasius, Cyril, Gregory of Nazianzus, and others
- No copies of Esther were found at Qumran in the contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Nevertheless, by the fourth century CE, the majority of Western churches accepted Esther as a part of their Bibles

Purim

- Exchanging reciprocal gifts of food and drink known as *mishloach manot*.
- Donating charity to the poor known as *mattanot la-evyonim*.
- Eating a celebratory meal known as a *se'udat Purim*.
- Public recitation ("reading of the megillah") of the Scroll of Esther, known as *kriat ha-megillah*, usually in synagogue.
- Reciting additions, known as *Al HaNissim*, to the daily prayers and the grace after meals.
- Other customs include drinking wine or any other alcoholic beverage, wearing of masks and costumes, and public celebration.

Purim

- When Haman's name is read out during the public chanting of the Megillah in the synagogue, which occurs 54 times, the congregation engages in noise-making to blot out his name



Purim Spiel

- A Purim spiel was historically a comic dramatization that attempted to convey the saga of the Purim story
- By the 18th century, in some parts of Eastern Europe, the Purim plays had evolved into broad-ranging satires with music and dance for which the story of Esther was little more than a pretext. Indeed, by the mid-19th century, some were even based on other biblical stories
- Today, Purim spiels can revolve around anything relating to Jews and Judaism that will bring cheer and comic relief to an audience celebrating the day

Food

- On Purim, Ashkenazi Jews eat triangular pastries called Hamantaschen ("Haman's pockets") or Oznei Haman ("Haman's ears"). A sweet pastry dough is rolled out, cut into circles, and traditionally filled with a poppy seed filling; this is then wrapped up into a triangular shape with the filling either hidden or showing. More recently, prunes, dates, apricots, apples, and chocolate fillings have been introduced
- Among Sephardi Jews, a fried pastry called Fazuelos is eaten, as well as a range of baked or fried pastries called Orejas de Haman (Haman's Ears) or Hojuelas de Haman. These pastries are also known as Oznei Haman



Nazi Germany and Purim

- In an apparent connection made by Hitler between his Nazi regime and the role of Haman, he stated in a speech made on January 30, 1944, that if the Nazis were defeated, the Jews could celebrate "a second Purim"
- Julius Streicher was heard to sarcastically remark "Purimfest 1946" as he ascended the scaffold after Nuremberg















