

#1 Purim is one of the most joyous and fun holidays on the Jewish calendar. It commemorates a time when the Jewish people living in Persia were saved from extermination. Purim is celebrated on the 14th day of Adar, which is usually in March. The primary rule of Purim is that you must either read or hear the story of Esther. In large Jewish communities Purim is celebrated in plays with actors. Haman is the villain of the story and it is customary to boo, hiss, stamp feet and rattle gragers (noisemakers) whenever the name of Haman is mentioned during the show. Because we are at school I ask that you do not yell when Haman's name is mentioned but feel free to stick out your tongue, hiss, or shake your fist in anger.

#2

It all began in Ancient Persia in the 4th century BCE. The Holy Temple that had stood in Jerusalem was destroyed more than 50 years earlier, and the Jews were subjects of the mighty Persian empire which extended over 127 lands.

Ahasuerus the Persian king, threw a big party and he commanded his wife Vashti to appear before all the partying men—he wanted to show them all her exquisite beauty. Vashti balked at this request, and at the advice of his advisor, Ahasuerus ordered Vashti's execution.

The King now needed a new wife. His servants suggested that he orchestrate a beauty pageant. All the beautiful girls in his kingdom would be brought to Ahasuerus. And the girl who the king liked best would become the new queen.

#3

The leader of the Jews at that time was a man named Mordechai. He had a cousin, Esther, who was orphaned as a young girl. Mordechai raised her and treated her as a daughter. Though she had no desire to be the queen, Esther was forcibly taken to participate in the contest. While all the other contestants beautified themselves with perfumes and lotions, Esther did nothing.

Esther Chapter 2 Verse 9: And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women.

The king was immediately taken with Esther and chose her as his new Queen. But Mordechai had told Esther not to tell the king that she was Jewish because they were not well liked in the empire.

#4

Meanwhile, Haman, one of Ahasuerus' ministers, was promoted to the position of Prime Minister. Haman was a virulent Jew hater.

Immediately after his promotion, the king issued a decree ordering everyone to bow whenever Haman appeared. Now Haman walked around with a large idol hanging from a chain around his neck. When Mordechai, a proud Jew, refused to bow down because he did not worship idols, Haman was infuriated. He resolved to take revenge against all the Jews.

Haman approached King Ahasuerus and offered him 10,000 silver talents in exchange for permission to exterminate the Jews. Ahasuerus, who was no friend of the Jews, told Haman, "The money is yours to keep, and the nation is yours to do with as you please."

Haman immediately sent proclamations to all the king's land. These declarations, sealed with the royal signet ring, ordered the people to rise up against the Jews and kill them all – men, women, and children – on the following 13th of Adar.

#5

Esther was the Jewish people's only chance, as Queen the King was more likely to listen to her request to repeal the genocide of the Jews. The problem was that no one was allowed to approach the King when he was busy not even the Queen. If she were to try to talk to him and tell him that she was Jewish the King might kill her the way that he had his last wife. Eventually Esther got up her courage and went in to the King. To her surprise he was happy to see her:

Esther Chapter 5 Verse 6: And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.

#6

Esther told the King about Haman and how he wanted to kill her and all of her friends and family. The king quickly stopped Haman's order and then had Haman hung for his desire to kill the Queen. Esther's courage is still remembered today each year at Purim. Her generous spirit is celebrated by giving to the poor during the festivities. There is no symbol for Purim.