

Women in the Bible

Esther

The story of Esther is told in the book of Esther found in the Old Testament. The main characters in the story are Esther, Mordecai a devout Jew, King Ahasuerus of Persia and his wife Vashti and Haman the prime minister. The three latter characters are the villains of the story. During a prolonged feast of one hundred and eighty days held by Ahasuerus to show off his vast wealth, the king decided to show off yet another part of his kingdom. He summoned his wife Vashti to come to join him and his guests wearing her crown so that she too could be displayed. Vashti was also celebrating and she refused to come before the king. On consultation with wise men and princes from Persia and Media, the king deposed Vashti as an example for other disobedient wives. The king then began to search for a new wife and after a long period of searching chose Esther a beautiful Jewish orphan who lived with Mordecai her guardian. The king was not aware that Esther was Jewish.



Soon after marrying Esther, the king gave Haman, his prime minister, power and authority. When Haman rode through the streets everyone would bow down before him except Mordecai. This angered Haman and he planned the extermination of all of the Jews within the Persian Empire. Mordecai told Esther to talk to the King about Haman's plans. However the King had not called for Esther for 30 days so she and her maidservants fasted and prayed for three days before she gained the courage to visit the King. Esther requested a banquet with the King and Haman the following day.

After the banquet Haman ordered a gallows to be constructed on which to hang Mordecai. Ahasuerus remembered that Mordecai had saved him from an assassination attempt and had not been rewarded for this. Esther also told him of Haman's plans to hang Mordecai and told the king that she too was Jewish. The king was angry and ordered Haman to be hanged from the gallows that he had built for Mordecai. The king then appointed Mordecai as his prime minister, and gave the Jews the right to defend themselves against any enemy.

The story of Esther is remembered through the feast of Purim which will be celebrated from 20-23 March this year. Purim is a real fun festival, a time for celebrating with both food and drink. As the story of Esther is told in the synagogue or in school, the children hiss, shake noisy rattles (*greggors*), shoot their toy guns and generally make a lot of noise every time the name of Haman is mentioned. Children also have fancy dress parties, with costumes of pirates and modern day villains being especially popular. Or they may make masks of the villains in the story and wear those.

Gifts are exchanged (usually boxes of sweets and biscuits) and a special filled pastry is eaten, called Haman's ears. These pastries recall how Haman's ears were his downfall when he listened to those who suggested he use his position to bring about the destruction of the Jews.

Sources: Wikipedia, Book of Esther

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