



Esther



Once there was a great nation full of many different types of people. King Ahasuerus ruled over all the lands of Persia and Media reaching from India to Ethiopia and including the land of Babylon. One of the peoples was the Jews who had made a home there after they had been taken from their home, Jerusalem, so long ago after it was destroyed by Babylon.

One day King Ahasuerus, who lived in a palace in the city of Shushan, decided to have a great feast that lasted over 180 days. He commanded that all of his court participate, and the king was the highest power and must be obeyed. He and his princes and nobles would eat drink and be merry. Even his queen, Vashti, made a feast for the women; because the women and men sometimes feasted separately.



During one of these days, the king had drunk a lot of wine and commanded that Vashti come to his feast with her crown on so he could show her off. But Vashti proudly disobeyed the king, angering him. The wise men of the king's court were afraid that if Vashti was allowed to disobey the king than others would too. So they recommended that the king divorce Vashti as punishment and send her away. King Ahasuerus agreed and Vashti was sent away by a royal decree (a law that can't be rescinded or erased even by the king).

After a time, the king remembered Vashti as his beautiful wife and began to be sorry that she was gone. So, his wise men suggested that they gather up all the pretty, unmarried girls so he could pick a new queen. One of these girls was the beautiful Hadassah, the Jew. She was an orphan and had been raised by her cousin Mordecai like she was his daughter. Before she was taken, Mordecai told her not to tell anyone that she was a Jew and changed her name to Esther.



Esther was taken with the other girls to the king's house into the care of Hegai, the keeper of the women. Esther's kindness, gentleness, humility, and beauty endeared her to Hegai and anyone else who met her.

Each girl was bathed, pampered, and perfumed to get her ready to meet the king. When it was Esther's turn to meet the king, King Ahasuerus loved her more than any other girl and made her queen. He was so happy that he declared another feast and even gave gifts.

Mordecai had made sure to stay close to wherever Esther was so he could hear any news about her. When she was made queen, he found a place in the King's gate. One day he overheard two of the king's chamberlains planning to kill the king. He got word to Esther, who warned the

king. When the matter was investigated and found to be true, the two chamberlains were punished and the event was written in the king's chronicles.



After all this had happened, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the Agagite, above all his princes. All the servants in the king's gate bowed before him and worshiped him; except Mordecai who, as a Jew, could only worship God. Haman began to hate Mordecai and then sought to destroy all the Jews.

Haman had lots, or Pur, cast to decide which day and month to have the entire Jewish people destroyed. The month would be the month of Adar and the day, the thirteenth. Then Haman went to the king and weaved a tale about a certain small but lethal people dispersed within the kingdom who defied the king and didn't keep the king's laws. Haman offered to pay 10,000 talents of silver to make up for any taxes lost. The king trusted Haman and he gave Haman his royal ring to do whatever was necessary without the king needing to know anything.



Haman sent out copies of the royal decree, sealed with the king's ring, that all the king's governors, lieutenants, and all the rulers and all the people should kill all the Jew on the thirteenth of Adar. As the king and Haman sat down to feast, the whole city of Shushan was left to wonder why.

Mordecai and the other Jews cried when they heard the news. Mordecai tore his clothes and wore sackcloth and ashes, a sign of mourning, and sat in front of the kings gate, since no one in sackcloth could go in. Esther hadn't heard the new law so was confused when she found out what Mordecai did. She sent her servant with new clothes for Mordecai, but he refused to take them. So she sent her servant back to him to find out why. Mordecai gave the servant a copy of the decree and sent it back with a message that Esther must do something.



Esther was afraid. The king had not sent for her in a month and no one was allowed to go before the king without being sent for. If they did, they could be put to death; unless the king reached out his golden scepter. But Esther feared that the king didn't love her anymore.

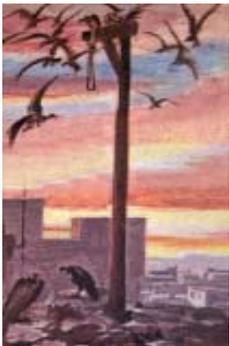
Mordecai sent a message to tell her: "Don't think that you'll escape what will happen just because you're in the king's house. The Jew's will be saved by someone else and you will be punished for doing nothing. Maybe you were made queen for a time like this."

Esther told her servant to tell Mordecai: "Gather all the Jew's in Shushan and fast for me, don't eat or drink for three days. My maids and I will fast too. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, then I perish."

All the Jews did as Esther told them; and, on the third day, Esther rose and bathed and dressed in her royal garments. Then she went into the king and stood in the inner court. When the king saw Esther standing there waiting quietly and humbly, he remembered how much he loved her. He held out the golden scepter and told her to come forward. He asked her what her request was and that he would give it to her if it was within his power.



Esther asked that the king and Haman come to a banquet that she prepared. Happily the king and Haman went. There, the king asked what Esther wanted; and she asked that the king and Haman come again to another banquet that she would prepare the next day and then she would tell the king what she wished.



After the banquet, Haman left joyfully. But when he saw Mordecai, who still refused to bow, Haman hated Mordecai even more. Haman tried to ignore it as he went home and boasted to all his friends and family about all of his accomplishments and the glory and riches he had received. And how the queen had asked that no one but the king and himself come to her banquet. But still he could not enjoy all this while Mordecai the Jew lived. So Haman's wife and sons told Haman that he should build a gallows where he could hang Mordecai. So Haman agreed and commissioned it to be made.

That night, the king couldn't sleep and commanded that the chronicles be read to him to help him. As it was read, he heard and remembered when his two chamberlains planned to kill him, and how Mordecai the Jew had saved his life. King Ahasuerus realized that Mordecai had never been rewarded and so the king asked his servants who among his princes was in the court so he could ask their opinion. Only Haman had come into the court and so was brought into the king's room. Haman had decided to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai but before he could the king asked how Haman would reward someone who the king wants to honor.

Haman thought the king wished to honor him so he said that the king should cloth and crown the man in his own garments and that the man should sit on the king's horse and be taken around the city by one of the princes. The king told Haman, "Do this for Mordecai."



Horrified at what he had said, Haman followed the king's command; then went home in humiliation. But, his family reminded him, Mordecai will still die on the thirteenth of Adar. Even as they said this, chamberlains of the king came to bring Haman to the queen's feast.

The king and Haman ate well at Queen Esther's feast, and again the king asked what Esther wanted. Esther answered: "If I have found favor in your sight, and if it pleases the king, spare my life at my petition and my people at my request. If we had only been sold into slavery I would have remained silent but we are sold to be destroyed."

King Ahasuerus demanded to know who had done this; and Esther told him it was Haman. The king stood up and left in a rage into the garden. Haman, realizing that the king might not side with him, he began to beg the queen for his life.

When the king returned, he saw Haman on the bed where Esther was and he yelled in anger: "Will he hurt my queen in my own house in front of me?!" The king commanded his guards to grab Haman. Harbonah, one of the king's chamberlains told the king that Haman had built a gallows to hang Mordecai, who had saved the king. The king commanded that Haman be hung there.

The power that the king had given to Haman, he now gave to Mordecai. After some thought Mordecai sent out another decree, since the first could not be changed even by the king, which said the Jews could fight back and even take the fortune and lands of any who would attack them.

Because of this, all the people among all the nations of Persia and Media knew that the king favored the Jews and many protected the Jews and fought against the enemies of Jews.

From then on, the thirteenth and fourteenth days of Adar were days of feasting and gift-giving for the Jews called Purim. They are remembered as the days when God turned the fate of the Jews onto their enemies.

