

The **Book of Esther**, also known in Hebrew as "the Scroll" (*Megillah*), is a book in the third section (*Ketuvim*, "Writings") of the Jewish *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible) and in the Christian Old Testament. It is one of the five Scrolls (*Megillot*) in the Hebrew Bible. It relates the story of a Hebrew woman in Persia, born as Hadassah but known as Esther, who becomes queen of Persia and thwarts a genocide of her people. The story forms the core of the Jewish festival of Purim, during which it is read aloud twice: once in the evening and again the following morning. The books of Esther and Song of Songs are the only books in the Hebrew Bible that do not explicitly mention God.

The plot is structured around banquets (*mishteh*), a word that occurs twenty times in Esther and only 24 times in the rest of the Hebrew bible. This is appropriate given that Esther describes the origin of a Jewish feast, the feast of Purim, but Purim itself is not the subject and no individual feast in the book is commemorated by Purim. The book's theme, rather, is the reversal of destiny through a sudden and unexpected turn of events: the Jews seem destined to be destroyed, but instead are saved, suggesting that the power of God is at work behind human events.

Story synopsis:

The Book of Esther begins with the Queen of King Ahasuerus—Vashti—snubbing the king's request to meet with her. Naturally, being a rather unstable fellow, Ahasuerus divorces her. Now he needs to pick a new queen and manages to select Esther—a young (secretly Jewish) woman who is a part of his harem.

As for her backstory, Esther's an orphan who was raised by her righteous cousin, Mordecai. When the king came looking for young virgins to possibly fill the role of his new queen, Esther made sure to jump into line. She wins favor with the people in the harem and eventually with the king himself, becoming queen. Moreover, Mordecai helps uncover a plot to kill the king, allowing Esther to warn

him in time. But all is not well in the king's courts—treachery is afoot. When Mordecai refuses to bow down to the evil counselor Haman in the street, the evil, mustache-twisting counselor decides to engineer a plot to murder all the Jews in the Persian Empire. The plot basically involves Haman going to the king and saying, "I think we should kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire." And the king says "Alright."

Haman walks away, twisting his mustache some more, glad that the king has agreed to his genocidal plans. The king doesn't know that his own queen is Jewish, because Esther's been keeping it secret. But the threat of the Jews' imminent demise kicks Esther and Mordecai into action. Mordecai goes and wails outside the palace gates while wearing sackcloth, and Esther fasts for three days before visiting the king.

Esther is worried the king will execute her for visiting him unannounced, but—to the contrary—he is mellow and pleased. He offers to give her whatever she wants. She asks him to have a banquet for her and Haman the next day. Then, after that banquet, she asks for another one on the following day. Meanwhile, Haman is excited about the massacre that's about to happen. He builds a huge gallows to hang Mordecai.

But his hopes are dashed the following morning, when the king—remembering how Mordecai saved his life—orders Haman to honor Mordecai and lead him in a parade through the town (which Haman very reluctantly does). At the second banquet, Esther asks the king to punish Haman for trying to kill her and her people—and the king does. Haman and his 10 sons are hanged to death on the same gallows he had built for Mordecai! The Jews of Persia massacre all of Haman's agents and supporters (roughly 75,000 people in all), Mordecai is made into the king's new counselor, and Purim becomes an official Jewish holiday to celebrate!



מדי אשר
די המלך
יצא דבר
מדי ולא
המלך
לרעותה
שר יעשה
יתנו יקר
דבר בעיני
ממוכץ
מלך אל
כלשונ
כלשון
האלה
את ושותי
היא ויאמרו
נערות
פקידים
כל נערה
אל בית
הנשים