

PURIM BRIEFING

Starts at Nightfall on Saturday 23rd March and ends
on Sunday 24th March



Ahasuerus and Haman at the Feast of Esther
by Rembrandt

SUMMARY

Purim is a fun and joyous festival celebrated in Jewish communities all over the world, with music, dancing and lots of food and drink!

The festival is a one-day event, this year celebrated from the evening of Saturday 23rd March to Sunday 24th March (14th Adar II in the Hebrew Calendar).

The festival commemorates the defeat of Haman, the advisor to the Persian king, and his plot to enact a genocide against the Jewish people. The story of Purim is told in the Book of Esther. Esther became the Queen to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) of Persia, and through her bravery was able to thwart the attempt to slaughter all Jewish people within the Persian empire.



Purim by Arthur Szyk
1948

Y

King Ahasuerus of Persia was in search of a new queen and summoned beautiful women from across his kingdom in order to find one. After seeing many women, he chose Esther as his new wife. What the King didn't know was that Esther was Jewish.

R

Haman, the chief advisor to King Ahasuerus was an antisemite. He told King Ahasuerus that there were people living within his kingdom who were a separate people - a people who had their own laws and didn't follow the laws of the King. The King agreed that such people should be killed and the date of the planned extermination (13th Adar) was selected by lottery (Purim literally means 'lots').

O

Mordechai, Esther's cousin, found out that Haman was planning to exterminate the Jewish people. He entreated Esther to beg King Ahasuerus for mercy. He told her that there was a reason that she had been chosen as the King's new Queen - that she was supposed to rescue her people.

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Visiting King Ahasuerus came at great personal risk to Esther. The King hadn't sent for her in a long time and approaching the King without being invited could lead to her execution. But when she went to him she found that he was pleased to see her. The King said that Esther could have anything she wanted and Esther requested a banquet with the King and Haman in attendance. The King consented.

S

Y

At the banquet, Esther revealed to the King that she was Jewish and told him that Haman's plan was to annihilate the Jewish people. She begged him to spare her people.

R

The King flew into a rage and left the room. Haman, knowing that the King was going to punish him, begged Esther for his life. When the King returned it appeared that Haman was assaulting her. Furious at what he saw, the King arrested Haman and sentenced him to death.

O

The King then sent a decree giving Jews permission to defend themselves against the previous decree to kill them. After one day of fighting, the potential destruction of the Jewish people was averted. Mordechai, Esther's cousin, took Haman's place as the King's advisor and all was well for many years.

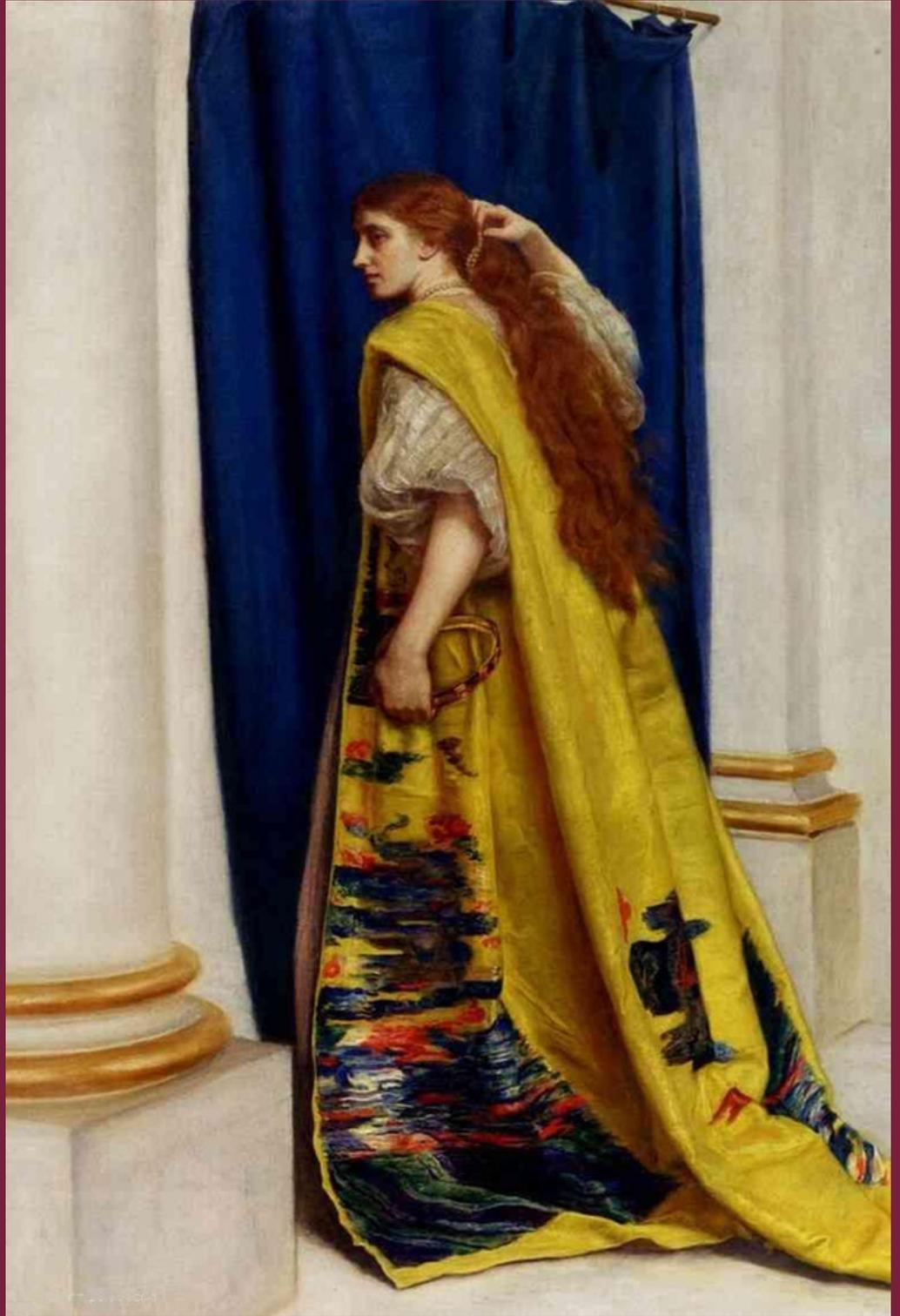
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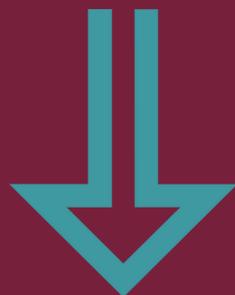
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Esther and Mordechai writing the second letter of Purim by Arent de Gelder

RITUAL



Esther by John Everett Millais
1865, England



There are four mitzvot (good deeds) which are unique to the festival of Purim:

- 1.** Reading of the Megillah (Book of Esther) both in the evening and the daytime. Readings are a joyful affair, with adults and children alike wearing fancy dress and using noisemakers (called groggers) whenever the name of the wicked 'Haman' is mentioned. Unique among Jewish scripture, the Book of Esther does not contain one mention of God. God is indirectly referenced but they are 'hidden' in the story. This is another reason why Jewish people dress up on Purim.
- 2.** A festive meal is eaten. A common treat at this time of year are 'Haman's pockets', called hamantaschen. It is urban legend that these treats commemorate the three-cornered hat Haman wore. These are often filled with poppy seeds or jam. Drinking and partying is encouraged on Purim; According to teachings, a person should drink until they cannot tell the difference between 'cursed be Haman' and 'blessed be Mordechai', though opinions differ as to exactly how much alcohol that is!
- 3.** Sending food gifts to friend (Mishloach Manot). Jews give at least 2 prepared food items (e.g. crisps, chocolate, fruit) to at least one friend.
- 4.** Giving to the poor (Matanot L'evyonim). Traditionally one is obligated to give a gift (e.g. money, food) to two different poor people.

Unlike many other festivals, there are no prohibitions about working, driving or using electronics. Most Jewish people will go to work as usual.

Purim is observed in a similar way in all denominations of Judaism in the UK.

Social Media

Here are our suggestions of what to post on social media:

- Happy Purim!
- Purim Sameach! (Meaning Happy festival of Purim)

Please follow @jlc_uk on Twitter and @jlc.uk on Instagram to see content from the JLC, our members and Jewish communities across the country during Purim.



Esther Pleading Before Ahasuerus
Tapestry c1540–60, Switzerland



The JLC connects and coordinates the Jewish charitable sector, strengthens and supports leadership across our community, and magnifies and amplifies the collective voice of our member organisations.

If you would like to find out more about the festival of Purim visit My Jewish Learning's educational resource.

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Esther and Ahasuerus
British Embroidery, mid-17th century