

Learning About Purim

Rabbi Bonnie Koppell

rabbikoppell@templechai.com

1. **Setting the Stage**: "When Adar enters joy increases."- Taanit 29a
2. **New Vocabulary**: Shushan Purim, mishloach manot/shalachmones, matanot l'evyonim, hamantaschen, oznei Haman, gragger/ra'ashan, al-ha-nissim
3. **Essential Question**: God forbid that God should be mentioned in such a story!
4. **Important Considerations**:
 - A. Read the Book of Esther- summarize the story.

CHAPTER ONE-

The scene; the banquet. Vashti as feminist icon
1:20- "All wives will treat their husbands with respect!"

CHAPTER TWO-

The king's regret- what have I done?
The beauty contest
One night only with the king- 2:14
Esther is chosen

Sub-plot- vs. 21-23
Mordcai overhears Bigtan and Teresh- events recorded in the king's diary

CHAPTER THREE-

Enter Haman- Mordecai refuses to bow down
mentioned 54x
3:8- "There is a certain people"
note vs. 9- it's all about the money!
decree of destruction- signed, sealed, delivered

CHAPTER FOUR-

Word gets out- Mordecai in sackcloth and ashes

vs. 4- Esther slow on the uptake- sends clothes for him

vs. 14- "Relief and deliverance will come from another quarter- perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis"

Fast declared

Esther rises to the occasion- vs. 6- "If I perish, I perish"

CHAPTER FIVE-

Esther approaches Akhashverosh- "Whatever you say dear" (5:6)

Haman builds a gallows for Mordecai

CHAPTER SIX-

Akhashverosh can't sleep- "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" (vs. 6)

6:13- if your enemy is Jewish, Haman, you are in big trouble
off to the banquet

CHAPTER SEVEN-

Esther intercedes with the king to save the people

vs. 6- "The enemy is the evil Haman"

Haman compounds his problems by literally throwing himself onto Esther (vs. 8)

Quick justice- Haman is hung

CHAPTER EIGHT-

Mordecai is put in charge

vs. 11- Jews given permission to defend themselves

vs. 16- "light and happiness, rejoicing and honor"

vs. 17- suddenly everyone wants to be Jewish!

CHAPTER NINE-

lots of bloodshed- ten sons hung

Shushan Purim

vss. 20ff- Purim established as holiday

CHAPTER TEN-

tax increase declared

B. What are the four mitzvot of Purim?

1. Mishloach Manot/Shalachmones
2. Hear the Megilla

3. Gifts to the Poor- Matanot l'Evyonim
4. Enjoy a festive meal

C. What are some special foods associated with the holiday of Purim?- hamantaschen, oznei Haman- hamantaschen fr. Yiddish- mun taschen, poppy seed cakes, Italian- Orrechi d'Aman

D. What are some other ways that we celebrate the holiday?

1. Taanit Esther- The Fast of Esther (Ta'anit Ester, Hebrew: תַּעֲנִיית אֶסְתֵּר) is a Jewish fast from dawn until dusk on Purim eve, commemorating the three-day fast observed by the Jewish people in the story of Purim. If the date of the Fast of Esther falls on Shabbat (Saturday), the fast is instead observed on the preceding Thursday. Like other minor fasts, Ta'anit Esther begins at dawn (first light) and ends at nightfall (full dark).

2. Purim Torah

A Rabbi, a cantor, and a *shul* president were driving to a seminar when they were kidnapped. The hijackers asked the three of them to hand over all of their money and jewelery. When they replied that they hadn't any, the hijackers told them that immediately after their last wishes were fulfilled, they would be killed.

"My last wish," began the Rabbi, is to give a fascinating, complicated, long sermon that I have always wanted to but never been allowed to give."

"We will grant your wish," the hijackers replied.

"My last wish," said the cantor, "is to sing a beautiful, *Yemenite* style song, one of my own compositions lasting two hours. I have never been allowed to sing it."

"We'll let you sing it," replied the hijackers.

"What is your last wish," the hijackers asked the shul president.

"Please, please shoot me now."

The rabbi of chelm needed funds for his daughter's college tuition- the congregation agreed to vote him an advance, to be paid back over 5 years.

When the grateful rabbi appeared before the board, he said, "I want you to know that I am accepting your generosity on two conditions; if I should live another 5 years, that is your good fortune; but if I should die before the debt is paid, well, that is simply my good luck".

Rabbi Gold is taken ill and is admitted to Scottsdale Healthcare for treatment. A few days after his admittance, Max, the *shul's* secretary, goes to visit him. "Rabbi," says Max, "I'm here on behalf of our Board of Trustees. They have asked me to bring you their good wishes for a speedy recovery and their hope that you should live to be 110."

"Thank you," says Rabbi Gold, "I'm pleased to hear of their good wishes for me."

"And so you should be, Rabbi," says Max, "it was touch and go for a while but the final vote on whether we should send you any good wishes ended up 11 to 9 in your favor."

Susie's Hebrew school teacher brings her to speak with the rabbi. The teacher explains Susie is thinking about what she wants to be when she grows up and is considering the rabbinate. They sit down in the rabbi's office and the rabbi asks, "So Susie, what would you like to know?" Susie says,

"Well, I know about leading services but what else does a rabbi do all day?" The rabbi replies, "You know Susie, I can tell from your question that you are probably not suited for the rabbinate...however, you'd make a fantastic Temple president."

Gottlieb called his Rabbi and said, "I know tonight is Kol Nidre, but tonight the Yankees start the playoffs. Rabbi, I'm a lifelong Yankee fan, got to watch the Yankee game on TV." The Rabbi responds, "Gottlieb, that's what DVR's are for." Gottlieb is surprised. "You mean I can tape Kol Nidre?"

"Rabbi, I wonder whether you could find the time to say a special blessing at my dog's grave?" The rabbi replies, "I'm afraid it isn't possible, Benny. In fact the rules don't really make any allowance for animals."

Benny says, "But I'm really upset, rabbi."

"So maybe you should go to see the priest over the road," says the rabbi.

As Benny walks away dejectedly, he turns to the rabbi and says, "What a shame. I was willing to donate \$1,000 for such a service."

At which point the rabbi shouts, "Come back, come back."

Benny turns round and says, "I thought you couldn't help me."

"Ah," says the rabbi, "but you didn't tell me your dog was Jewish."

Two congregants were discussing how brilliant their rabbis are- My rabbi is so brilliant, she can talk about any subject in the world for an hour. Well, countered the other- that's nothing- my rabbi is so brilliant that she can talk about no subject at all for TWO hours!

A new flood is foretold and nothing can be done to prevent it; in six days the waters will wipe out the world.

The leader of Buddhism appears on TV and pleads with everyone to become a Buddhist; that way, they will at least find salvation in heaven.

The Pope goes on TV with a similar message: "It is still not too late to accept Jesus," he says.

The Chief Rabbi of Israel takes a slightly different approach: "We have six days to learn how to live under water."

Dear Friends,

We have a proposition to make. A recent survey - 'What makes the perfect Rabbi?' showed that: -

- the perfect Rabbi's sermons last exactly fifteen minutes
- the perfect Rabbi condemns sin but at same time never upsets anyone

- the perfect Rabbi works from 8am until midnight and is also synagogue handyman
- the perfect Rabbi makes \$250, wears good clothes, buys good books, drives a good car and gives about \$250 to the poor and needy
- the perfect Rabbi has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all of his time with senior citizens
- the perfect Rabbi smiles all the time but with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work
- the perfect Rabbi makes 15 calls daily to congregation families and the hospitalized, and is always in his office when needed.

If your Rabbi does not measure up to the above, simply send this letter to 6 other *shuls* that are also tired of their Rabbi. Then bundle up your Rabbi and send him to the *shul* on the top of your list. In one week, you will receive 1,643 Rabbis and one of them will be perfect. Have faith in this procedure. One congregation broke the chain and got its old Rabbi back in less than three weeks.

3. "Ad lo yadah"- Rava taught, "We are obligated to drink so much that can't distinguish between cursing Haman and blessing Mordecai." (Megillah 7b)

"Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira once joined together in a *Purim* feast, and they became intoxicated. Rabbah arose, and slew Rabbi Zeira. The next day, Rabbah implored [for God's] mercy, and Rabbi Zeira was revived. The next year, Rabbah said to Rabbi Zeira: 'Sir, let us again join together for the *Purim* feast.' But Rabbi Zeira answered him: 'Miracles do not happen on every occasion!'

4. Purim Rav

5. Shabbat Shekalim- Shabbat Shekalim ("Sabbath [of] shekels" שבת שקלים) read in preparation for Purim, requests each adult male Jew contribute half of a Biblical shekel for the upkeep of the Tent of Meeting. The Torah portion Exodus 30:11-16 is read. This Shabbat takes place on the Shabbat before the 1st of the Hebrew calendar month of Adar, or on the 1st of Adar itself if it falls on Shabbat. In leap years on the Hebrew calendar, when there are two months of Adar, Shabbat Shekalim is on the Shabbat before the 1st of Adar II (or on the 1st of Adar II itself if it is Shabbat).

6. Al Ha-Nissim

7. What is Shushan Purim?- The story differentiates between Jews who lived and fought their enemies for two days within the walled, capital city of Shushan and those who lived in unwalled towns, where only one day was needed to subdue the enemy. The Rabbis determined we should make that same distinction when memorializing the event. Accordingly, if a person lives in a city that has been walled since the days of Joshua (circa 1250 B.C.E.), as Shushan was, Purim is celebrated on the fifteenth of the month of Adar, a day referred to as "Shushan Purim."

Those who live in unwalled cities celebrate on the 14th, the day referred to as just "Purim." The sages considered making Shushan Purim conditional on whether a city was walled from the time of Ahasuerus; but they did not wish to honor a Persian city over one in the Land of Israel, given that Israel was in ruins at the time of the Purim miracle. Joshua was chosen because, in the Book of Exodus, he is the general who begins the effort to annihilate the descendants of Haman's ancestor, Amalek.

In addition, the time of Joshua is related to the Israelite conquest of the Land of Israel, the memory of which reinforces Purim's theme of Jewish victory. For Jews who have been living in the Diaspora, the observance of Shushan Purim is not even a consideration, because we know of no cities in these countries that were walled 3,000 years ago. Anyone visiting Jerusalem, though, should be prepared to celebrate a joyous Shushan Purim.

8. How did the holiday of Purim get its name?

20 And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, 21 to enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, 22 the days wherein the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. 23 And the Jews took upon them to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; 24 because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast pur, that is, the lot, to discomfit them, and to destroy them. Esther 9:20-24

E. What are some important lessons learned from the holiday of Purim?

1. Judaism doesn't always have to be serious; it's okay to have fun
2. Purim Torah- it is important to be able to laugh at ourselves
3. Vashti reminds us of the importance of personal dignity
4. Achashverosh teaches us the mitzvah of hakarat ha-tov, acknowledging the good in how he wants to thank Mordecai
5. We have enemies in every generation
6. Leadership involves taking responsibility
7. Life is unpredictable- who could imagine the end of the story in contemplating how it begins
8. The Megillah begins with the denunciation of "a certain people"- we should avoid stereotyping any group

F. Questions to Consider:

1. Esther 1:12- "Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command."

Was there ever a time when you took a strong position counter to that of someone in authority?
What happened? How did it feel? What were the consequences, negative and positive?

2. Esther 2:10- "Esther did not reveal her people or her birth."

When have you felt the need to hide some aspect of your identity or pretend to be something that you were not? What was the situation? How did it feel? What were the results?

3. Esther 3:5- "When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel or bow low to him, Haman was filled with rage."

What makes you feel rage? When is rage an appropriate response to a situation? What has been helpful to you in moving beyond that sense of rage? What are healthy ways to express rage?

4. Esther 3:8- "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in the King's interest to tolerate them."

Do you find yourself struggling with stereotyping groups of people? Have you ever been stereotyped by others? How can we overcome this tendency to divide people into *us* and *them*? Why do you think people stereotype?

5. Esther 4:16- "Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law, and if I am to perish, I shall perish."

When was a time that you had to reach into the deepest depths of your own being to summon up your courage to face a personal challenge? What was that experience like for you?

6. Esther 6:3- What honor or treasure have we bestowed on Mordecai on account of this?

Acknowledging the good in our lives is a basic Jewish value. When have you been on the giving end of a special acknowledgement? When have you been on the receiving end of a special acknowledgement? How did those experiences feel to you?

7. Esther 9:28- "These days shall be remembered and observed in every generation, family by family, state by state, city by city."

What is a special moment in your and/or the life of your family which you will never forget and is the source of great joy? How will you be sure to remember that moment? How do you share that moment with others?

G. What are the earliest sources re: Antisemitism?

from Wikipedia-

Early animosity towards Jews

Louis H. Feldman argues that "we must take issue with the communis sensus that the pagan writers are predominantly anti-Semitic.[4] Indeed, he asserts that "one of the great puzzles that has confronted the students of anti-semitism is the alleged shift from pro-Jewish statements found in the first pagan writers who mention the Jews... to the vicious anti-Jewish statements thereafter, beginning with Manetho about 270 BCE." [5] In view of Manetho's anti-Jewish writings, antisemitism may have originated in Egypt and been spread by "the Greek retelling of Ancient Egyptian prejudices". [6] As examples of pagan writers who spoke positively of Jews, Feldman cites Aristotle, Theophrastus, Clearchus of Soli and Megasthenes. Feldman concedes that, after Manetho, "the picture usually painted is one of universal and virulent anti-Judaism."

The first clear examples of anti-Jewish sentiment can be traced back to Alexandria in the 3rd century BCE.[7] Alexandria was home to the largest Jewish community in the world and the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, was produced there. Manetho, an Egyptian priest and historian of that time, wrote scathingly of the Jews and his themes are repeated in the works of Chaeremon, Lysimachus, Poseidonius, Apollonius Molon, and in Apion and Tacitus.[7] Hecateus of Abdera is quoted by Flavius Josephus as having written about the time of Alexander the Great that the Jews "have often been treated injuriously by the kings and governors of Persia, yet can they not be dissuaded from acting what they think best; but that when they are stripped on this account, and have torments inflicted upon them, and they are brought to the most terrible

kinds of death, they meet them after an extraordinary manner, beyond all other people, and will not renounce the religion of their forefathers." [8] One of the earliest anti-Jewish edicts, promulgated by Antiochus Epiphanes in about 170-167 BCE, sparked a revolt of the Maccabees in Judea.

The ancient Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria describes an attack on Jews in Alexandria in 38 CE in which thousands of Jews died. [9][10] The violence in Alexandria may have been caused by the Jews being portrayed as misanthropes. [11] Tcherikover argues that the reason for hatred of Jews in the Hellenistic period was their separateness in the Greek cities, the poleis. [12] Bohak has argued, however, that early animosity against the Jews cannot be regarded as being anti-Judaic or antisemitic unless it arose from attitudes that were held against the Jews alone, and that many Greeks showed animosity toward any group they regarded as barbarians. [13]

Statements exhibiting prejudice against Jews and their religion can be found in the works of many pagan Greek and Roman writers. [14] Edward Flannery writes that it was the Jews' refusal to accept Greek religious and social standards that marked them out. Hecataeus of Abdera, a Greek historian of the early third century BCE, wrote that Moses "in remembrance of the exile of his people, instituted for them a misanthropic and inhospitable way of life." Manetho, an Egyptian historian, wrote that the Jews were expelled Egyptian lepers who had been taught by Moses "not to adore the gods." The same themes appeared in the works of Chaeremon, Lysimachus, Poseidonius, Apollonius Molon, and in Apion and Tacitus. Agatharchides of Cnidus wrote about the "ridiculous practices" of the Jews and of the "absurdity of their Law," and how Ptolemy Lagus was able to invade Jerusalem in 320 BC because its inhabitants were observing the Sabbath. [7] Edward Flannery describes antisemitism in ancient times as essentially "cultural, taking the shape of a national xenophobia played out in political settings." [15]

There is a recorded instance of an Ancient Greek ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, desecrating the Temple in Jerusalem and banning Jewish religious practices, such as circumcision, Shabbat observance and the study of Jewish religious books, [16] during the period when Ancient Greece dominated the eastern Mediterranean. Statements exhibiting prejudice towards Jews and their religion can also be found in the works of a few pagan Greek and Roman writers, [17] but the earliest occurrence of antisemitism has been the subject of debate among scholars, largely because

different writers use different definitions of antisemitism. The terms "religious antisemitism" and "anti-Judaism" are sometimes used to refer to animosity towards Judaism as a religion rather than to Jews defined as an ethnic or racial group.

Roman Empire

Relations between the Jews in Palestine and the occupying Roman Empire were antagonistic from the very start and resulted in several rebellions.

Several ancient historians report that in 19 CE the Roman emperor Tiberius expelled Jews from Rome. According to the Roman historian Suetonius, Tiberius tried to suppress all foreign religions. In the case of Jews, he sent young Jewish men, under the pretence of military service, to provinces noted for their unhealthy climate. He dismissed all other Jews from the city, under threat of life slavery for non-compliance.[18] Josephus, in his *Jewish Antiquities*, [19] confirms that Tiberius ordered all Jews to be banished from Rome. Four thousand were sent to Sardinia but more, who were unwilling to become soldiers, were punished. Cassius Dio reports that Tiberius banished most of the Jews, who had been attempting to convert Romans to their religion.[20] Philo of Alexandria reported that Sejanus, one of Tiberius's lieutenants, may have been a prime mover in the persecution of the Jews.[21]

The Romans refused to permit Jews to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem after its destruction by Titus in 70 CE, imposed a tax on Jews (*Fiscus Judaicus*) at the same time, ostensibly to finance the Temple of Jupiter in Rome, and renamed Judaea as Syria Palestina. The Jerusalem Talmud relates that, following Bar Kokhba's revolt (132-6 CE), the Romans destroyed very many Jews, "killing until their horses were submerged in blood to their nostrils." [22] However, some historians argue that Rome suppressed revolts in all its conquered territories and point out that Tiberius expelled all foreign religions from Rome, not just the Jews.

Some accommodation, in fact, was later made with Judaism, and the Jews of the Diaspora had privileges that others did not. Unlike other subjects of the Roman Empire, they had the right to maintain their religion and were not expected to accommodate themselves to local customs. Even

after the First Jewish–Roman War, the Roman authorities refused to rescind Jewish privileges in some cities. And although Hadrian outlawed circumcision as a mutilation normally visited on people unable to consent, he later exempted the Jews.[23] According to the 18th-century historian Edward Gibbon, there was greater tolerance from about 160 CE. Between 355 and 363 CE, permission was granted by Julian the Apostate to rebuild the Second Temple of Jerusalem.

It has been argued that European antisemitism has its roots in Roman policy.[24]

The New Testament and early Christianity

Main article: Antisemitism in the New Testament

Although the majority of the New Testament was written, ostensibly, by Jews who became followers of Jesus, there are a number of passages in the New Testament that some see as antisemitic, or that have been used for antisemitic purposes, including:[citation needed][25][26][27]

Jesus speaking to a group of Pharisees: "I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you... You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him." (John 8:37-39, 44-47, RSV)

Saint Stephen speaking before a synagogue council just before his execution: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." (Acts 7:51-53, RSV)

After Jesus' death, the New Testament portrays the Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem as hostile to Jesus' followers, and as occasionally using force against them.[28] Stephen is executed by stoning.[29] Before his conversion, Saul puts followers of Jesus in prison.[30] After his conversion, Saul is whipped at various times by Jewish authorities.[31] He is accused by Jewish authorities before the Roman courts.[32] However, opposition by gentiles is also described,[33] and

more generally there are widespread references in the New Testament to the suffering experienced by Jesus' followers at the hands of others,

