

Purim

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Purim (Hebrew: פורים *Pûrîm* "lots", from the word *pur*,^[2] related to Akkadian *pûru*) is a Jewish holiday that commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people in the ancient Persian Empire from destruction in the wake of a plot by Haman, a story recorded in the Biblical Book of Esther (*Megillat Esther*).

Purim is celebrated annually according to the Hebrew calendar on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar (Adar II in leap years), the day following the victory of the Jews over their enemies. Purim begins at sundown. In cities that were protected by a surrounding wall at the time of Joshua, Purim is celebrated on the 15th of the month;^[3] Everywhere else, Purim is on the 14th, while the 15th is known as *Shushan Purim*. Due to Jerusalem's importance, it celebrates Purim on the 15th despite it not having been surrounded by a wall since the time of Joshua. This is to prevent less holy cities having an advantage over Jerusalem.

Purim is characterized by public recitation of the Scroll of Esther (*keriat ha-megillah*), additions to the prayers and the grace after meals (al hannisim), giving mutual gifts of food and drink (*mishloach manot*), giving charity to the poor (*mattanot la-evyonim*),^[4] and a celebratory meal (*se'udat Purim*);^[5] other customs include drinking wine, wearing of masks and costumes, and public celebration.

According to the Book of Esther, Haman, royal vizier to King Ahasuerus planned to kill the Jews, but his plans were foiled by Mordechai and Queen Esther. The day of deliverance became a day of feasting and rejoicing.

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Purim



Observed by	Judaism
Type	Joyous
Significance	Celebration of Jewish deliverance as told in the Book of Esther.
Date	14th day of Adar (in Jerusalem and all ancient walled cities, 15th of Adar)
2011 date	Sunset, 19 March – nightfall, 20 March
2012 date	Sunset, 7 March – nightfall, 8 March
Celebrations	Listening to the Book of Esther in synagogue; sending food parcels and giving charity; dressing up in costume; eating a festive meal
Related to	Hanukkah, as a rabbinically decreed holiday and Nowrooz. ^[1]

Part of a series of articles on

Jews and Judaism



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Book of Esther

The primary source relating to the origin of Purim is the Book of Esther, which became the last of the 24 books of the Tanakh to be canonized by the Sages of the Great Assembly. It is dated to the fourth century BCE^[6] and according to the Talmud was a redaction by the Great Assembly of an original text by Mordecai.^[7]

The tractate *Megillah* in the Mishnah (redacted c. 200 CE) records the laws relating to Purim. The accompanying Tosefta (redacted in the same period) and Gemara (in the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud redacted c. 400 CE and c. 600 CE respectively)^[8] record additional contextual details such as Vashti having been the daughter of Belshazzar as well as details that accord with Josephus' such as Esther having been of royal descent. Brief mention of Esther is made in tractate *Chullin* (*Bavli Chullin* 139b) and idolatry relating to worship of Haman is discussed in tractate *Sanhedrin* (*Sanhedrin* 61b).

The Esther Rabbah is a Midrashic text divided in two parts. The first part dated to c. 500 CE provides an exegetical commentary

Principles of faith · Mitzvot (613)
 Halakha · Shabbat · Holidays
 Prayer · Tzedakah
 Brit · Bar / Bat Mitzvah
 Marriage · Bereavement
 Philosophy · Ethics · Kabbalah
 Customs · Synagogue · Rabbi

Texts

Tanakh
 (Torah · Nevi'im · Ketuvim)
 Targum
 Talmud (Mishnah · Gemara)
 Rabbinic (Midrash · Tosefta)
 Mishneh Torah · Tur
 Shulchan Aruch
 Zohar ·

Ethnicities

Ashkenazi · Sephardi · Mizrahi
 Romaniote · Italki · Yemenite
 African · Beta Israel · Bukharan ·
 Georgian · German · Mountain · Chinese
 Indian · Khazars · Karaim · Krymchaks ·
 Samaritans · Crypto-Jews

Population

Jews by country · Rabbis
 Population comparisons
 United States · Israel · Russia
 Iraq · Spain · Portugal · Gibraltar
 Italy · Poland · Germany · Bosnia
 Latin America · France
 England · Netherlands · Canada
 Australia · Hungary · India
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 Iran · China · Pakistan · Romania ·
 Lists of Jews

Denominations

Alternative · Conservative
 Humanistic · Karaite · Liberal ·
 Orthodox · Reconstructionist
 Reform · Renewal · Traditional

on the first two chapters of the Hebrew Book of Esther and provided source material for the *Targum Sheni*. The second part may have been redacted as late as the eleventh century CE and contains commentary on the remaining chapters of Esther. It too contains the additional contextual material found in the Josippon.^[9]

Purim story

The Book of Esther begins with a six month (180 day) drinking feast given by King Ahasuerus, for the army of Persia and Media, for the civil servants and princes in the 127 provinces of his kingdom, at the conclusion of which a seven day drinking feast for the inhabitants of Shushan, rich and poor with a separate drinking feast for the women organised by the Queen Vashti in the pavilion of the Royal courtyard.

At this feast Ahasuerus gets thoroughly drunk and orders his wife Vashti to display her beauty before the people and nobles wearing her royal crown. She refuses, and Ahasuerus decides to remove her from her post. He then orders all young women to be presented to him, so he can choose a new queen to replace Vashti. One of these is Esther, who was orphaned at a young age and was being fostered by her cousin Mordecai. She finds favor in the king's eyes, and is made his new wife. Esther does not reveal that she is Jewish.

Shortly afterwards, Mordecai discovers a plot by courtiers Bigthan and Teresh to kill Ahasuerus. They are apprehended and hanged, and Mordecai's service to the king is recorded.^[10]

Ahasuerus appoints Haman as his prime minister. Mordecai, who sits at the palace gates, falls into Haman's disfavor as he refuses to bow down to him. Having found out that Mordecai is Jewish, Haman plans to kill not just Mordecai but the entire Jewish minority in the empire. He obtains Ahasuerus' permission to execute this plan, and he casts lots to choose the date on which to do this – the thirteenth of the month of Adar. When Mordecai finds out about the plans he orders widespread penitence and fasting. Esther discovers what has transpired; she requests that all Jews of Shushan fast and pray for three days together with her, and on the third day she seeks an audience with Ahasuerus, during which she invites him to a feast in the company of Haman. During the feast, she asks them to attend a further feast the next evening. Meanwhile, Haman is again offended by Mordecai and builds a gallows for him, with the intention to hang him there the very next day.^[11]

That night, Ahasuerus suffers from insomnia, and when the court's records are read to him to help him sleep, he learns of the services rendered by Mordecai in the previous plot against his life. Ahasuerus is told that Mordecai had not received any recognition for saving the king's life. Just then, Haman appears, and King Ahasuerus asks Haman what should be done for the man that the King wishes to honor. Thinking that

Languages

Hebrew · Yiddish
Judeo-Persian · Ladino
Judeo-Aramaic · Judeo-Arabic

History

Timeline · Leaders
Ancient · Kingdom of Judah
Temple
Babylonian exile
Yehud Medinata
Jerusalem
(in Judaism · Timeline)
Hasmoneans · Sanhedrin
Schisms · Pharisees
Jewish-Roman wars
Christianity and Judaism
Islam and Judaism
Diaspora · Middle Ages
Sabbateans · Hasidism · Haskalah
Emancipation · Holocaust · Aliyah
Israel (history)
Arab conflict · Land of Israel
Baal teshuva · Persecution
Antisemitism (history)

Politics

Zionism
(Labor · Revisionist
Religious · Green · General)
Bundism · World Agudath Israel
Jewish feminism · Israeli politics
Jewish left · Jewish right

the King is referring to Haman himself, Haman says that the honoree should be dressed in the king's royal robes and led around on the king's royal horse. To Haman's horror, the king instructs Haman to do so to Mordecai.

Later that evening, Ahasuerus and Haman attend Esther's second banquet, at which she reveals that she is Jewish and that Haman is planning to exterminate her people, which includes her. Ahasuerus instead orders Haman hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. The previous decree against the Jews could not be annulled, so the King allows Mordecai and Esther to write another decree as they wish. They write one that allows the Jews to defend themselves during attacks. As a result, on 13 Adar, five hundred attackers and Haman's ten sons are killed in Shushan. Throughout the empire 75,000 of the Jews' enemies are killed (Esther 9:16). On the 14th, another 300 are killed in Shushan. No spoils are taken.^[12]

Mordecai assumes the position of second in rank to Ahasuerus, and institutes an annual commemoration of the delivery of the Jewish people from annihilation.^[13]



Megillat Esther

Classical and medieval reference

The first century CE historian Josephus recounts the origins of Purim in Book 11 of his *Antiquities of the Jews*. He follows the Hebrew Book of Esther but shows awareness of some of the additional material found in the Greek version in that he too identifies Ahasuerus as Artaxerxes and provides the text of the king's letter. He also provides additional information on the dating of events relative to Ezra and Nehemiah.^[14] Josephus also records the Persian persecution of Jews and mentions Jews being forced to worship at Persian erected shrines.^{[14][15]} Berossus (early third century BCE) provides context for the account in that he records the introduction of idols of Anahita under Artaxerxes II Mnemon throughout the Persian Empire.^[16] An account of the origins of Purim is also included in chapter 4 of the tenth century CE compilation of Jewish history, the *Josippon*. It too follows the original biblical account and includes additional traditions matching those found in the Greek version and Josephus (whom the author claims as a source) with the exception of the details of the letters found in the latter works. It also provides other contextual information relating Jewish and Persian history such as the identification of Darius the Mede as the uncle and father-in-law of Cyrus.^[17]

A brief Persian account of events is provided by Islamic historian Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari in his *History of the Prophets and Kings* (completed 915 CE).^[18] Basing his account on Jewish and Christian sources, al-Tabari provides additional details such as the original Persian form "Asturya" for "Esther".^[19] He places events during the rule of Ardashir Bahman (Artaxerxes II),^[20] but confuses him with Ardashir al-Tawil al-Ba (Artaxerxes I), while assuming Ahasuerus to be the name of a co-ruler.^[19] Another brief Persian account is recorded by Masudi in *The Meadows of Gold* (completed 947 CE).^[21] He refers to a Jewish woman who had married the Persian King Bahman (Artaxerxes II), and delivered her people,^{[20][22][23]} thus corroborating this identification of Ahasuerus. He also mentions the woman's daughter, Khumay, who is not known in Jewish tradition but is well remembered in Persian folklore. Al-Tabari calls her *Khumani* and tells how her father (Ardashir Bahman) married her. Ferdowsi in his *Shahnameh* (c. 1000

CE) also tells of King Bahman marrying Khumay.^[24]

Customs

Like Hanukkah, Purim has more of a national than a religious character, and its status as a holiday is on a lesser level than those days ordained holy by the Torah. Accordingly, business transactions and even manual labor are allowed on Purim. A special prayer ("*Al ha-Nissim*" — "For the Miracles") is inserted into the Amidah during evening, morning and afternoon prayers, as well as is included in the *Birkat Hamazon* ("Grace after Meals.")

The four main mitzvot (obligations) of the day are:

1. Listening to the public reading, usually in synagogue, of the Book of Esther in the evening and again in the following morning (*k'riat megillah*)
2. Sending food gifts to friends (*mishloach manot*)
3. Giving charity to the poor (*matanot la'evyonim*)
4. Eating a festive meal (*se`udah*)

Reading of the Megillah

The first religious ceremony ordained for the celebration of Purim is the reading of the Book of Esther (the "Megillah") in the synagogue, a regulation ascribed in the Talmud (Megillah 2a) to the Sages of the Great Assembly, of which Mordecai is reported to have been a member. Originally this enactment was for the 14th of Adar only; later, however, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi (3rd century CE) prescribed that the Megillah should also be read on the eve of Purim. Further, he obliged women to attend the reading of the Megillah, inasmuch as it was a woman, Queen Esther, through whom the miraculous deliverance of the Jews was accomplished.



Purim in Jerusalem

In the Mishnah, the recitation of a benediction on the reading of the Megillah is not yet a universally recognized obligation. However, the Talmud, a later work, prescribed three benedictions before the reading and one benediction after the reading. The Talmud added other provisions. For example, the reader is to pronounce the names of the ten sons of Haman (Esther 9:7–10 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Esther&verse=9:7-10&src=HE>)) in one breath, to indicate their simultaneous death. The congregation was to recite aloud with the reader the verses 2:5 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com?book=%20Ester&verse=2:5&src=HE>) , 8:15–16 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com?book=%20Ester&verse=8:15-16&src=HE>) , and 10:3 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com?book=%20Ester&verse=10:3&src=HE>) , which relate the origin of Mordecai and his triumph.

The Megillah is read with a cantillation (a traditional chant) differing from that used in the customary reading of the Torah. Besides the traditional cantillation, there are several verses or short phrases in the Megillah that are chanted in a different chant, the chant that is traditional for the reading of the book of Lamentations. These verses are particularly sad, or they refer to Jews being in exile. When the Megillah reader jumps to the melody of the book of Lamentations for these phrases, it heightens the feeling of

sadness in the listener.

In some places, the Megillah is not chanted, but is read like a letter, because of the name *iggeret* ("epistle"), which is applied (Esther 9:26,29 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Esther&verse=9:26,29&src=HE>)) to the Book of Esther. It has been also customary since the time of the early Medieval era of the Geonim to unroll the whole Megillah before reading it, in order to give it the appearance of an epistle. According to Halakha ("Jewish law"), the Megillah may be read in any language intelligible to the audience.

According to the Mishnah (Megillah 30b), Exodus 17:8–16 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Exodus&verse=17:8-16&src=HE>) , the story of the attack on the Jews by Amalek, the progenitor of Haman, is also to be read.

Women and Megillah reading

Women have an obligation to hear the Megillah because "they also were involved in that miracle."^[25] Most Orthodox communities, including Modern Orthodox ones, however, generally do not allow women to lead the Megillah reading except in rare circumstances owing to the notion of "Kavod HaTzibbur". Authorities who hold that women should not read the Megilla for themselves, because of an uncertainty as to which blessing they should recite upon the reading, nonetheless agree that they have an obligation to hear it read. According to these authorities if women, or men for that matter, cannot attend the services in the synagogue, the Megillah should be read for them in private by any male over the age of thirteen. Often in Orthodox communities there is a special public reading only for women, conducted either in a private home or in a synagogue, but the Megillah is read by a man.

Some Modern Orthodox leaders have held that women can serve as public Megillah readers. Women's megillah readings have become increasingly common in more liberal Modern Orthodox Judaism, though women may only read for other women, according to Ashkenazi authorities.^[26]

Blotting out Haman's name

When Haman's name is read out during the public chanting of the Megillah in the synagogue, which occurs 54 times, the congregation engages in noisemaking to blot out his name. The practice can be traced back to the Tosafists (the leading French and German rabbis of the 13th century). In accordance with a passage in the Midrash, where the verse "Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek" (Deuteronomy 25:19 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Deuteronomy&verse=25:19&src=HE>)) is explained to mean "even from wood and stones." A custom developed of writing the name of Haman, the offspring of Amalek, on two smooth stones, and knocking them together until the name was blotted out. Some wrote the name of Haman on the soles of their shoes, and at the mention of the name stamped with their feet as a sign of contempt. Another method was to use a noisy rattle, called a *ra'ashan* (from the Hebrew *ra-ash*, meaning "noise") and in Yiddish a *grager*. Some of the rabbis protested against these uproarious excesses, considering them a disturbance of public worship, but the custom of using a rattle in the synagogue on Purim is now universal, with the exception of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, who consider



A wooden Purim gragger

them a breach of decorum.^[*citation needed*]

Food gifts and charity

The Book of Esther prescribes "the sending of portions one man to another, and gifts to the poor" (9:22). According to halakha, each adult must give two different foods to one person, and two charitable donations to two poor people.^[27] The food parcels are called *mishloach manot* ("sending of portions"), and in some circles the custom has evolved into a major gift-giving event.

To fulfill the mitzvah of giving charity to two poor people, one can give either food or money equivalent to the amount of food that is eaten at a regular meal. It is better to spend more on charity than on the giving of *mishloach manot*.^[27] In the synagogue, regular collections of charity are made on the festival and the money is distributed among the needy. No distinction is made among the poor; anyone who is willing to accept charity is allowed to participate. It is obligatory upon the poorest Jew, even one who is himself dependent on charity, to give to other poor people.^[27]



Gaily wrapped baskets of sweets, snacks and other foodstuffs given as *mishloach manot* on Purim day.

Festive drinking

On Purim day, a festive meal called the *Se`udat Purim* is held. The drinking of wine features prominently in keeping with the jovial nature of the feast. This is based on the fact that the salvation of the Jews occurred through wine and the Sages of the Talmud stated that one should drink on Purim until he can no longer distinguish between the phrases *arur Haman* ("Cursed is Haman") and *baruch Mordechai* ("Blessed is Mordecai"). Alcoholic consumption was later codified by the early authorities, and while some advocated total intoxication, others, consistent with the opinion of many early and later rabbis, taught that one should only should drink a little more than usual and then fall asleep, whereupon one will certainly not be able to tell the difference between *arur Haman* and *baruch Mordecai*. Other authorities, including the *Magen Avraham*, have written that one should drink until one is unable to calculate the numerical values of both phrases.

Greetings

It is common to greet one another on Purim in Hebrew *Chag Purim Sameach* or in Yiddish *Freilichin Purim*. The Hebrew greeting loosely translates to "Happy Purim Holiday" and the Yiddish translates to "A Festive Purim".

Masquerading

The custom of masquerading in costume and the wearing of masks probably originated among the Italian Jews at the end of the 15th-century.^[28] The concept was possibly influenced by the Roman carnival and spread across Europe. The practice was only introduced into Middle Eastern countries much later during

the 19th-century. The first among Jewish codifiers to mention the custom was *Mahari Minz* (d. 1508 at Venice).^[29] While some authorities were concerned about the possible infringement of biblical law were men to don women's apparel, the accepted consensus was to permit all masquerade, as it was viewed as a form of merry-making. Some rabbis went as far to allow the wearing of rabbinically-forbidden *shatnez*.^[30]

Other reasons given for the custom: It is a way of emulating God who "disguised" his presence behind the natural events described in the Purim story, and has remained concealed (yet ever-present) in Jewish history since the times of the destruction of the first Temple. Since charity is a central feature of the day, when givers and/or recipients disguise themselves this allows greater anonymity thus preserving the dignity of the recipient. Persian Exile throughout the Purim story, and since hides behind alludes to hidden aspect of the miracle of Purim which was "disguised" by natural events.^[30]



Purim revellers in costume,
Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus, 1657.

Purim spiel

A Purim spiel was historically a comic dramatisation that attempted to convey the saga of the Purim story. By the 18th century, in some parts of Eastern Europe, the Purim plays had evolved into broad-ranging satires with music and dance for which the story of Esther was little more than a pretext. Indeed, by the mid-19th century, some were even based on other biblical stories. Today, Purim spiels can revolve around anything relating to Jews and Judaism that will bring cheer and comic relief to an audience celebrating the day.

Burning of Haman's effigy

As early as the fifth century, there was a custom to burn an effigy of Haman on Purim.^[28] The spectacle aroused the wrath of the early Christians who interpreted it as a disguised attempt to ridicule their faith and prohibitions were issued against such displays under the reign of Flavius Augustus Honorius (395–423) and of Theodosius II (408–450).^[28] The custom was popular during the Geonic period (ninth and tenth centuries),^[28] and a 14th-century scholar described how people would ride through the streets of Provence holding fir branches and blowing trumpets around a puppet of Haman which was hanged and later burnt.^[31] The practice continued into the 20th century, with children treating Haman as a sort of "Guy Fawkes."^[32] In the early 1950s, the custom was still observed in Iran and some remote communities in Kurdistan^[31] where young Muslims would sometimes join in.^[33]

Purim songs

Songs associated with Purim are based on sources that are Talmudic, liturgical and cultural. Traditional Purim songs include *Mishenichnas Adar marbim be-simcha* ("When [the Hebrew month of] Adar enters, we have a lot of joy" — Mishnah Taanith 4:1) and *LaYehudim haitah orah ve-simchah ve-sasson ve-yakar* ("The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor" — Esther 8:16). The *Shoshanat Yaakov* prayer is sung at the conclusion of the Megillah reading. A number of children's songs (with non-liturgical sources) also

exist: *Once There Was a Wicked Wicked Man*,^{[34][35]} *Ani Purim*,^[36] *Chag Purim*, *Chag Purim*, *Chag Gadol Hu LaYehudim*,^{[37][38]} *Mishenichnas Adar*, *Shoshanas Yaakov*, *Al HaNisim*, *VeNahafoch Hu*, *LaYehudim Hayesa Orah*, *U Mordechai Yatza*, *Kacha Yay'aseh*, *Chayav Inish*, *Utzu Eitzah*.^[39]

Traditional foods

On Purim, triangular pastries called *Hamantaschen* ("Haman's pockets") or *Oznei Haman* ("Haman's ears") are served. A sweet cookie dough is rolled out, cut into circles, and traditionally filled with a sweet poppy seed or prune filling, then wrapped up into a triangular shape with the filling either hidden or showing. Among Sephardi a thin dough called *Fazuelos* are eaten as well as a range of baked or fried pastries called *Orejas de Haman* (Haman's Ears) or *Hojuelas de Haman* are eaten. These pastries are also known as *Oznei Haman*.



Homemade *hamantaschen*

Seeds and nuts are customarily eaten on Purim, as the Talmud relates that Queen Esther ate only these foodstuffs in the palace of Ahasuerus, since she had no access to kosher food. More recently, prunes, dates, apricots, and chocolate fillings have been introduced. This pastry belongs to the Ashkenazi cuisine.

Kreplach, a kind of dumpling filled with cooked meat, chicken or liver and served in soup, are also traditionally served by Ashkenazi Jews on Purim. 'Hiding' the meat inside serves as another reminder of the story of Esther – the only book of Hebrew Scriptures that does not contain a single reference to God who seems to hide behind the scenes.

Aranygaluska, a dessert consisting of fried dough balls and vanilla custard, is traditional for Jews of Hungarian and Romanian descent.

Special breads are also baked among various communities. In Moroccan Jewish communities, a Purim bread called *Ojos de Haman* or *Eyes of Haman* is sometimes baked in the shape of Haman's head, and the eyes which are made of eggs are plucked out to demonstrate the destruction of Haman. Among the Polish Jews, *Koilitch*, a raisin Purim challah which is baked in a long twisted ring and topped with small colorful candies is meant to evoke the colorful nature of the holiday.

Fasts

The Fast of Esther, observed before Purim, on the 13th of Adar, is an original part of the Purim celebration, referred to in Esther 9:31–32. The first who mentions the Fast of Esther is Rabbi Achai Gaon (Acha of Shabcha) (8th century CE) in *She'iltot* 4; the reason there given for its institution is based on an interpretation of Esther 9:18 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Esther&verse=9:18&src=HE>), Esther 9:31 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=%20Esther&verse=9:31&src=HE>) and Talmud Megillah 2a: "The 13th was the time of gathering", which gathering is explained to have had also the purpose of public prayer and fasting. Some, however, used to fast three days in commemoration of the fasting of Esther; but as fasting was prohibited during the month of Nisan, the first and second Mondays and the Thursday following Purim were chosen. The fast of the 13th is still commonly observed; but when that date falls on Sabbath, the fast is pushed forward to the preceding Thursday, Friday being needed to prepare for Sabbath

and the following Purim festival.

Shushan Purim

Shushan Purim falls on Adar 15 and is the day on which Jews in Jerusalem celebrate Purim.^[27] The day is also universally observed by omitting the Tachanun prayer and having a more elaborate meal than on ordinary days.^[40]

Purim is celebrated on the Adar 14 because the Jews in unwalled cities fought their enemies on Adar 13 and rested the following day. However, in Shushan, the walled capital city of the Persian Empire, the Jews were involved in defeating their enemies on Adar 13–14 and rested on the 15th (Esther 9:20–22). In commemoration of this, it was decided that while the victory would be celebrated universally on Adar 14, for Jews living in Shushan, the holiday would be held on Adar 15. Later, in deference to Jerusalem, the Sages determined that Purim would be celebrated on Adar 15 in all cities which had been enclosed by a wall at the time of Joshua's conquest of the Land of Israel. This criterion allowed the city of Jerusalem to retain its importance for Jews, and although Shushan was not walled at the time of Joshua, it was made an exception since the miracle occurred there.^[27]

Today, there is debate as to whether outlying neighborhoods of Jerusalem are obliged to observe Purim on the 14th or 15th of Adar.^[41] Further doubts have arisen as to whether other cities were sufficiently walled in Joshua's era. It is therefore customary in certain towns including Hebron, Safed, Tiberias, Acre, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Beersheva, Beit She'an, Beit Shemesh, Gaza, Gush Halav, Haifa, Jaffa, Lod, Ramleh and Shechem to celebrate Purim on the 14th and hold an additional *megillah* reading on the 15th with no blessings.^{[41][42]} In the diaspora, Jews in Baghdad, Damascus and Prague celebrate Purim on the 14th and hold an additional *megillah* reading on the 15th with no blessings. Since today we are not sure where the walled cities from Joshua's time are, the only city that celebrates only Shushan Purim is Jerusalem.

Purim Meshulash

Purim Meshulash, or the three-fold Purim, is a somewhat rare calendric occurrence that affects how Purim is observed in Jerusalem (and, in theory at least, in other cities that were surrounded by wall in ancient times). When Shushan Purim (Adar 15) falls on Sabbath, the holiday is celebrated over a period of three days.^[43] The *megilla* reading and distribution of charity takes place on the Friday (Adar 14), which day is called Purim dePrazos. The *Al ha-Nissim* prayer is only recited on Sabbath (Adar 15), which is Purim itself, and the Torah portion for Purim is read for *maftir*. On Sunday (Adar 16), called Purim Meshullash, *mishloach manot* are sent and the festive Purim meal is held. The minimum interval between occurrences of Purim Meshulash is three years (1974 to 1977; 2005 to 2008). The maximum interval is twenty years, (1954 to 1974; will occur again 2025 to 2045). Other possible intervals are four years (1977 to 1981; 2001 to 2005); seven years (1994 to 2001); and thirteen years (1981 to 1994; 2008 to 2021).

Purim Katan

During leap years on the Hebrew calendar, Purim is celebrated in the second month of Adar. (The Karaites, however, celebrate it in the first month of Adar.) The 14th of the first Adar is then called *Purim Katan* ("Little Purim" in Hebrew) and the 15th is *Shushan Purim Katan*, for which there no set observances but have a minor holiday aspect to it. The distinctions between the first and the second Purim in leap years are

mentioned in the Mishnah.^[44]

Communal Purims

Until recently, many Jewish communities around the world celebrated local "Purims" that commemorated its deliverance from a particular antisemitic ruler or group. The best known is *Purim Vintz*, traditionally celebrated in Frankfurt am Main, one week after the regular Purim. This commemorates the Fettmilch uprising (1616–1620), in which one Vincenz Fettmilch attempted to exterminate the Jewish community.^[45] According to some sources, the influential Rabbi Moses Sofer (the *Chasam Sofer*), who was born in Frankfurt, celebrated Purim Vintz every year, even when he served as a rabbi in Pressburg.

There is a tradition in the Hasidic Chabad movement that supposedly Joseph Stalin died as a result of some metaphysical intervention of the seventh Chabad leader, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, during the recitation of a discourse at a public Purim Farbrengen.^[46] Stalin was suddenly paralysed on 1 March 1953, which corresponds to Purim 1953, and died 4 days later. Due to Stalin's death, nation-wide pogroms against Jews throughout the Soviet Union were averted, as Stalin's infamous doctors' plot was halted.^{[47][48]}

Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller (1579–1654) of Kraków, Poland, asked that his family henceforth celebrate a private Purim, marking the end of his many troubles, including having faced trumped-up charges.^[49] Since Purim is preceded by a fast day, the rabbi also directed his descendants to have a (private) fast day, the 5th day of Tamuz, marking one of his imprisonments (1629), this one lasting for 40 days.^{[50][51]}

Rabbinic interpretations

Traditional Jews believe that God is hidden behind all the events of the Megillah. Rabbis referred to God's role as *hester panim*, or "hiding of the Face", which is also said to be hinted at in a word play (Megillat Hester) regarding the Hebrew name for the Book of Esther, *Megillat Esther*—literally, "revelation of [that which is] hidden"). Although Jews believe that everything turned out for the best as a direct result of Divine intervention (that is, a series of miracles), the Book of Esther lacks any mention of God's name, and the events described in it appear to have been nothing more than a result of natural occurrences. On the other hand, Jewish philosophers and scriptural commentators believe that God's name is omitted to emphasize the very point that God remained hidden throughout the story, but was nonetheless present and played a large role in its outcome. Furthermore, this lesson can be applied on a much larger scale: Throughout Jewish history, and especially in the present Jewish diaspora, God's presence has been felt more at certain times than at others. Megillat Esther (and the omission of God's name in it) serves to show that although God may not be conspicuously present at times, He nevertheless plays (and has played) an important role in everyone's lives and in the future of the Jewish nation. In remembrance of how God remained hidden throughout the Purim miracle, Jews dress up on Purim and many hide their faces.

Purim and the Nazis

Adolf Hitler banned and forbade the observance of Purim. In a speech made on November 10, 1938, (the day after kristallnacht), Julius Streicher surmised that just as "the Jew butchered 75,000 Persians" in one night, the same fate would have befallen the German people had the Jews succeeded in inciting a war against Germany; the "Jews would have instituted a new Purim festival in Germany."^[52]

Nazi attacks against Jews often coincided with Jewish festivals. On Purim 1942, ten Jews were hanged in Zduńska Wola to avenge the hanging of Haman's ten sons.^[53] In a similar incident in 1943, the Nazis shot ten Jews from the Piotrków ghetto.^[54] On Purim eve that same year, over 100 Jewish doctors and their families were shot by the Nazis in Czestochowa. The following day, Jewish doctors were taken from Radom and shot nearby in Szydłowiec.^[54]

In an apparent connection made by Hitler between his Nazi regime and the role of Haman, he stated in a speech made on January 30, 1944, that if the Nazis were defeated, the Jews could celebrate "a second Purim".^{[54][55]} Seconds before he was hanged, Streicher called out "*Purim Fest 1946!*"^[55]

Iranian Jewish customs

Iranian Jews consider themselves descendants of Esther. On Purim, Iranian Jews visit the tombs of Esther and Mordechai in Hamadan. Some women pray there in the belief that Esther can work miracles.^[56]

See also

- Jewish holidays
- Public holidays in Israel
- Jewish holidays 2000–2050

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External links

- Comprehensive Purim Guide (http://www.chabad.org/holidays/purim/default_cdo/jewish/Purim.htm)

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