

Name: _____

The Story of Queen Esther

The story of Esther is part of the Jewish *Bible* and the Christian *Old Testament*. It tells of a young queen whose courage and faith saved her people from total destruction.

Esther was a young Jewish woman who lived in the Persian Empire about 400 BCE. Esther's mother and father were dead, so she lived with her older cousin Mordecai, who took care of her. Mordecai worked at the palace of the Persian king, King Ahasuerus.



King Ahasuerus needed a wife, so he ordered that all the young women of his kingdom be brought before him so that he could choose among them. As it turned out, when Ahasuerus saw Esther, he immediately fell in love with her and made her his queen.

Ahasuerus wasn't aware that Esther was a Jew. Mordecai knew that there were powerful people in the kingdom who hated the Jews. So he was afraid for Esther and had warned her not to tell anyone that she was Jewish.

King Ahasuerus' vizier (chief advisor), Haman, was the most powerful person in the kingdom after the king. He was also a very proud and vain man. When he rode down the street on his horse, he expected everyone to bow down to him. But Mordecai would not bow down to Haman, because his religion forbade him to bow down to anyone but God. This made Haman very angry, and he decided to get revenge, not just on Mordecai, but on all the Jews. He had a huge gallows built outside the palace where he planned to kill all the Jewish people in the kingdom.

When Mordecai learned of Haman's plan, he was very upset. He went to Esther and told her that she was the only one who could save the Jews.

Esther was afraid to talk to the king. She fasted and prayed for three days before she got the courage to face him. But finally she invited the king and Haman to have dinner with her the next night, and the king agreed.

During dinner, Esther told the king that she was Jewish, and begged him to stop Haman's plan to kill the Jews. Ahasuerus was very angry when he learned of Haman's plan to kill the Esther and her people, and he ordered that Haman be hung on his own gallows. Then the king made Mordecai his new vizier. The Jewish people rejoiced at being saved and lived happily in the Persian Empire for many years thereafter.

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Every spring, the Jewish people celebrate the Feast of Purim during which they retell the story of Queen Esther and eat special cookies—called 'Hamantashen'—that look like little pockets filled with fruit. They also give gifts of food to one another and money to the poor. Children often dress up as the characters in the story and put on skits and plays. This year Purim falls on Thursday, March 17.

We are going to read a Readers Theatre script that tells the story of Queen Esther in more detail. But before we do, see if you can answer these questions:

1. Ahasuerus wasn't *aware* that Esther was a Jew. What does it mean to be *aware* of something?

What is an antonym for the word 'aware'?

2. Why wouldn't Mordecai bow down to Haman?
3. Haman plans to get *revenge* on Mordecai. What is *revenge*?

What word is an antonym for 'revenge'?

4. How did Haman plan to get revenge on Mordecai?
5. What is a *gallows*?

If you don't already know what a *gallows* is, how can you figure it out from the text?

6. Why do you think that Esther is afraid to talk to the king?