

The Millie Arbesfeld  
**Midreshet Yom Rishon**

Sunday Morning Learning Program for Women

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From Haman to Hitler-Purim  
Through the Ages



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י" אדר תשע"ח • February 25, 2018

### **I. Important Dates/ Facts to Note:**

- 586 BCE- Destruction of the First Beit Hamikdash
- 539 BCE- Cyrus conquered the Babylonian Empire and issued the famous Edict of Cyrus. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, rebuild the Temple and he ordered that the vessels of the First Temple be restored. This edict is recorded in the Cyrus Cylinder:



**Cyrus Cylinder- British Museum**

- 516BCE- Under Darius, the building of the second Beit Hamikdash is complete. The majority of Jews remained in Persia and did not return to Israel. Darius moved the capital of the Persian Empire to Shushan.
- 486-465BCE - Under Xerxes I the events recorded in Megillat Esther occurred. Xerxes also ruled from Shushan as recorded in the Megillah as well.
- 458BCE-Under Artaxerxes I, Ezra was given the ability to strengthen the religious level of the Jews in Judea.
- 445-443BCE the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt during Nechemiah's time.

### **II. Persian Chronology**

<b>Persian Kings</b>	<b>Period of Reign (Approximate)</b>
Cyrus II "the Great" – (Koresh)	550-529 BC
Cambyases II (Rashi makes mention of this King in his commentary on Daniel)	529-522 BC
<a href="#">Darius</a> I (Daryavesh)	522-486 BC
Xerxes I- (Achashverosh)	486-465 BC
Artaxerxes I (mentioned in Ezra)	465-425 BC
Xerxes II	425-424 BC
Darius II	423-404 BC
Artaxerxes II	404-359 BC
Artaxerxes III	359-338 BC
Arses	338-336 BC
Darius III (Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire)	336-330 BC

### III. Archeological Evidence of the Persian Period:

Written in Assyrian script in the Aramaic language found on the island of Elephantine in Upper Egypt- an inscription found in Papyrus documents shows the tolerant policies of the Persian rulers:

*“To my brethren, Yedonia and his colleagues, the Jewish garrison, your brother, Hananiah. The welfare of my brothers may G-d seek at all times. Now, this year, the fifth year of King Darius, word was sent from the king to Arsames saying, “Authorize a festival of unleavened bread for the Jewish garrison.” So do you count fourteen days of the month of Nisan and observe the festival of unleavened bread. Be (ritually) clean and take heed. Do no work on the fifteenth or the twenty-first day, nor drink beer, nor eat anything in which there is leaven from the fourteen at sundown until the twenty-first of Nisan. Bring into your closets anything with leavening that you may have on hand and seal it up between those dates. By order of King Darius”*

Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 491, cited in Rabbi Yaakov Landy’s “Purim and the Persian Empire,” p.93.

### IV. Relevant Verses in Megillat Esther:

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|--|---|
| <p><b>א</b> ויהי, בימי אחשורוש: הוא אחשורוש, המלך מהדו ועד-כוש--שבע ועשרים ומאה, מדינה.</p>  | <p><b>1</b> <u>Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus--this is Ahasuerus who reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces--</u></p>  |
| <p><b>ב</b> בימים, ההם--בשבת המלך אחשורוש, על כסא מלכותו, אשר, בשושן הבירה.</p>  | <p><b>2</b> that in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the castle,</p>  |
| <p><b>ג</b> בשנת שלוש, למלכו, עשה משתה, לכל-שריו ועבדיו: חיל פרס ומדי, הפרתמים ושרי המדינות--לפניו.</p>  | <p><b>3</b> in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the army of <u>Persia and Media</u>, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him;</p>  |
| <p><b>ד</b> בהראתו, את-עשר כבוד מלכותו, ואת-יקר, תפארת גדולתו; ימים רבים, שמונים ומאת יום.</p>   | <p><b>4</b> <u>when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty</u>, many days, even a hundred and fourscore days.</p>   |
| <p><b>ו</b> חור כרפס ותכלת, אחזו בחבלי-בזץ וארגמן, על-גילי כסף, ועמודי שש; משות זקב וקסר, על רצפת בהט-ושש--וידר וסחרת.</p>                                 | <p><b>6</b> <u>there were hangings of white, fine cotton, and blue, bordered with cords of fine linen and purple, upon silver rods and pillars of marble; the couches were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of green, and white, and shell, and onyx marble.</u></p>             |
| <p><b>ז</b> והשקות בכלי זקב, וכלים מפלים שונים; ויין מלכות רב, כיד המלך.</p>   | <p><b>7</b> <u>And they gave them drink in vessels of gold--the vessels being diverse one from another--and royal wine in abundance, according to the bounty of the king.</u></p>   |
| <p><b>כב</b> וישלח ספרים, אל-כל-מדינות המלך--אל-מדינה ומדינה ככתבה, ואל-עם ועם כלשונו: להיות כל-איש שרר בביתו, ומדבר כלשון עמו. {ס}</p>                    | <p><b>22</b> <u>for he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and speak according to the language of his people. {S}</u></p> |
| <p><b>ז</b> בחודש הראשון, הוא-חודש ניסן, בשנת שתים עשרה, למלך אחשורוש: הפיל פור הוא הגורל לפני המן, מיום ליום ומחודש לחודש שנים-עשר--הוא-חודש אדר. {ס}</p> | <p><b>7</b> <u>In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast pur, that is, the lot, before</u></p>   |

Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. {S}

ח ויאמר המן, למלך אחשוורוש--ישנו עם-אחד מפזר ומפזר בין העמים, בכל מדינות מלכותך; ודתיהם שנות מפל-עם, ואת-דתי המלך אינם עשים, ולמלך אין-שנה, להניחם.

8 And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus: 'There is a certain **people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from those of every people; neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it profiteth not the king to suffer them.**

יב ויקראו ספרי המלך בחודש הראשון, בשלושה עשר יום בו, ויכתב ככל-אשר-צוה המן אל אחשדרפני-המלך ואל-הפחות אשר על-מדינה ומדינה ואל-שרי עם ועם, מדינה ומדינה ככתבה ועם ועם כלשונם: בשם המלך אחשוורוש נכתב, ונחתם בטבעת המלך.

12 Then were the king's scribes called in the first month, on the thirteenth day thereof, and there was written, according to all that Haman commanded, unto the king's satraps, **and to the governors that were over every province, and to the princes of every people; to every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language;** in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and it was sealed with the king's ring.

יג ויספר המן לגרש אשתו, ולכל-אחביו, את, כל-אשר קרהו; ויאמרו לו חכמיו וגרש אשתו, אם מזרע היהודים מרדכי אשר החלום לגלל לפניו לא-תוכל לו--כי-נפול תפול, לפניו.

13 And Haman recounted unto Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. **Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him: 'If Mordecai, before whom thou hast begun to fall, be of the seed of the Jews, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.'**

## V. Fast forward- Toleration within the German society:

### Wilhelm 1:

#### A. North German Confederation and Jewish Emancipation (July 3, 1869)

"We, Wilhelm, by the Grace of G-d, King of Prussia, etc. with the approval of the Bundesrath of the North German Confederation as follows:

All still existent restriction on civil and political rights derived from the difference in religious confessions are hereby repealed. In particular, the qualification for participation in communal and provincial representative bodies and for holding public office shall be independent of religious confession.

#### B. Emancipation in Bavaria (April 22, 1871)

"We, Wilhelm, by the Grace of G-d, German Emperor, King of Prussia, etc., Decree, in the name of the German Reich, following the approval of the Bundesrath and the Reichstag, as follows:

From the day on which the present law goes into effect the following shall be in force... the law of July 3, 1869, concerning the equality of confessions with respect to civil and political rights.

(Documents cited in The Jew in the Modern World, p. 153- Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz)

## Weimar Republic – 1918-1933

“Jews constituted less than one percent of the population of Germany during the Weimar Republic, the period from the end of World War I to the rise of National Socialism.

Though they lived almost exclusively in villages and small towns at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by 1900 the majority of—though by no means all—German Jews lived in big cities. In 1910, 60 percent of German Jews lived in urban areas with more than 100,000 inhabitants. In 1933 more than 70 percent of German Jews resided in cities. Only 10 percent of German Jews lived in the countryside, while 20 percent lived in smaller towns and villages. The career profile of German Jews differed markedly from the general population. Historically prohibited from many professional endeavors, Jews were disproportionately represented in some areas of the economy, such as journalism, law, medicine, and retailing. Concentrated in a small number of professions (more often than not in urban areas), Jews were especially visible to the Weimar Republic’s often violent critics.” (Information taken from the US Holocaust Museum, ushmm.org)

### **VI. Hitler and Haman:**

#### **A. Adolf Hitler-Mein Kampf -1923** (cited in Jew in the Modern World p.637)

“There were few Jews in Linz. In the course of the centuries their outward appearance had become Europeanized and had taken on a human look; in fact, I even took them for Germans. The absurdity of this idea did not dawn on me because I saw no distinguishing feature but the strange religion. The fact that they had, as I believed, been persecuted on this account sometimes almost turned my distaste at unfavorable remarks about them into horror... Then I came to Vienna....

Once, as I was strolling through the Inner City, I suddenly encountered an apparition in a black caftan and black hair locks. Is this a Jew? was my first thought. For, to be sure, they had not looked like that in Linz. I observed the man furtively and cautiously but the longer I stared at this foreign face, scrutinizing feature for feature, the more my first question assumed a new form:

Is this a German?

As always in such cases, I now began to try to relieve my doubts by books.

I could no longer very well doubt that the objects of my study were not Germans of a special religion, but a people in themselves, for since I had begun to concern myself with this question and to take cognizance of the Jews, Vienna appeared to me in a different light than before. Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity.

### **B. Comparisons Begin:**

Jewish Telegraph Agency, April 8, 1935

*“Adolph Hitler was compared today With Haman, the Persian minister of ancient times who plotted to massacre the Jews, in an article appearing in the Nazi paper Judenkenner.” “Both Hitler and Haman are leaders with a*

*profound knowledge of the Jews," the Nazi paper says, adding that the Jews had better be careful about "the red flame of hatred against Hitler" because this flame may destroy them utterly."*

### **C. He Who Compares himself:**

In 1944, Hitler addressed the Reichstag and stated:

**"If the Jews defeat me they should make a second Purim!"**

(Purim Anthology, Phillip Goodman, 1949 (also cited in Time Magazine 2012)

### **D. Nazis compare themselves:**

One Purim, SS guards took ten Jews to be hanged in Zduńska Wola for payment for the hanging of Haman's ten sons.

(20<sup>th</sup> Century Jewish Thought, p. 949).

### **E. Purim in Buchenwald:**

And so, one night, when we recalled that old saying, "when Adar enters, there is great rejoicing," we decided to prepare secret Purim festivities, according to faith and the law. "And with my last vestiges of strength, I labored for several days to gather all kinds of paper refuse from around the camp yard, whether it was a torn memo from the people in the office of the Nazis, a piece of thick, coarse paper from a sack of cement, or a page from a Nazi comic book whose margins were blank and could therefore be used. "I collected all of this with extreme care because I had decided to write the Megillah from memory on these bits of paper. We divided the papers among a few people in the group. We only had one pencil, or I should say, not pencil – just the black lead from some breakable pencil used by craftsmen and carpenters. The pencil passed from one hand to the next. Each person wrote down a few verses from the Megillah from memory, since each of us was eager to take part in the great religious duty of writing the Megillah. "... At the end of the fast of Ta'anit Esther, we all gathered at the predetermined time in the attic of the barracks. The excitement that we felt was palpable, and some of the other prisoners in the camp approached us: 'We also want to take revenge on the wicked Haman.' " Their dull eyes sparkled with a last flash of faith and hope. We began the reading of the Megillah late at night for fear that our wonderful plan would be discovered by the murderous guards. " " It was clear to us that according to the law, we could not bless the reading of the Megillah, since the 'Megillah' had been copied by us with trembling fingers on to a bunch of unmatched pieces of paper. However, the reading itself evoked sublime elation and great fervor in us." "And the main thing: when we finished reading the Megillah, we broke into

the song 'Shoshanat Yaacov (The Lily of Jacob) rejoiced and was glad.' With this song in our mouths, we burst out in a whirlwind of dancing. It seemed to us that the whole Buchenwald camp was holding its breath and listening to us, trembling: 'Accursed be Haman, who sought to destroy me; blessed be Mordechai, Mordechai the Jew!' "The next day we got up again and dragged our feet like the day before and the day before that. Even so, we felt as if something in the camp's atmosphere had changed because we had dared to read 'Accursed be Haman,' and it was quite obvious to everyone who this 'Haman' referred to, and our terrible hardship was eased more than a little. "That same day, we experienced the joy of Purim in an even more tangible way than Avraham Eliahu, the most energetic man in our group, came to sweeten our ears with a big secret: 'The Ukrainian capo, that stupid, evil guy, whispered to one of us today: 'Hitler kaput' – Hitler's lost!' "

Jacob Frankel – Those Who Did Not Surrender, vol 2.

**E. "Purimfest" 1946- Julius Streicher**  
**Kingsbury Smith of the International News Service recorded the events at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, October 1946:**

*...Julius Streicher (He was the editor and publisher of the anti-Semitic newspaper "Das Strummer." 1924 Streicher wrote and published an article on Purim titled "Das Purimfest") made his melodramatic appearance at 2:12 a.m.*

*While his manacles were being removed and his bare hands bound, this ugly, dwarfish little man, wearing a threadbare suit and a well-worn bluish shirt buttoned to the neck but without a tie (he was notorious during his days of power for his flashy dress), glanced at the three wooden scaffolds rising menacingly in front of him. Then he glanced around the room, his eyes resting momentarily upon the small group of witnesses. By this time, his hands were tied securely behind his back. Two guards, one on each arm, directed him to Number One gallows on the left of the entrance. He walked steadily the six feet to the first wooden step but his face was twitching.*

*As the guards stopped him at the bottom of the steps for identification formality he uttered his piercing scream: 'Heil Hitler!'*

*The shriek sent a shiver down my back.*

*As its echo died away an American colonel standing by the steps said sharply, 'Ask the man his name.' In response to the interpreter's query Streicher shouted, 'You know my name well.'*

*The interpreter repeated his request and the condemned man yelled, 'Julius Streicher.'*

*As he reached the platform Streicher cried out, 'Now it goes to G-d.' He was pushed the last two steps to the mortal spot beneath the hangman's rope. The rope was being held back against a wooden rail by the hangman.*

*Streicher was swung suddenly to face the witnesses and glared at them. Suddenly he screamed, 'Purim Fest 1946.'*