



All you need to know  
about the Feast of Purim

## Description

# Plus the premiere of Ken Burns' new documentary on Benjamin Franklin

By **Byron Toben**

March 15, 2022

The **Jewish holiday of Purim** begins on the evening of **March 16** and lasts throughout **March 17**, coinciding this year with **Saint Patrick's Day**.

## A quick timetable leading up to Purim

The Jews of antiquity were slaves in Egypt for an estimated 200 years before Moses led them out in exodus around 1313 BCE. They wandered in the desert for 40 years before returning to their pre-slavery exile home in Canaan. There, they eventually formed two kingdoms – Israel in the north and Judea in the south. Around 732 BCE, the north was conquered by what is modern-day Iran, and the population was deported there. Around 597 BCE, the same for the south.

... the vizier Haman plotted to have all the remaining Jews killed but this plot was foiled due to Esther... and her uncle Mordechai. Today, this salvation is celebrated with costumes, noisemakers and pastries, as well as lots of wine.

In 537 BCE, Cyrus the Great gave them permission to return, which some did, but many stayed. Later that century, the vizier **Haman** plotted to have all the remaining Jews killed but this plot was foiled due to **Esther** (the Jewish wife of **King Ahasuerus**) and her uncle **Mordechai**. Today, this salvation is celebrated with costumes, noisemakers and pastries, as well as lots of wine.

An amusing 4-minute depiction of all this is given by TV star **Mayim Bialik**, most recently famed in *The Big Bang Theory*.

## Ken Burns' Benjamin Franklin

From ancient history, we jump to more recent history with a new TV series by none other than **Ken Burns**, the acclaimed documentary filmmaker of some 40 specials over 40 years, largely for the USA **PBS** (Public Broadcasting Service), covering such themes as the U.S. civil war, baseball, jazz and Mohamed Ali.



Portrait of Benjamin Franklin – Image: [Joseph-Siffred Duplessis](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Highly anticipated is his new series on **Benjamin Franklin**, the self-taught autodidact who became a great printer, publisher, writer, scientist, diplomat and one of the founding fathers of the American revolution. The series can be viewed in two parts on **April 4 and 5**.

However, as a run-up to those release dates, PBS has prepared four free introductions that are in themselves fascinating. The first, ***Benjamin Franklin and Writing***, ran on March 3. The second, ***Franklin and Innovation***, ran on March 8.

They contained discussions between Burns, biographers **Walter Isaacson** and **Stacy Schiff**, and professors **Christopher Brown** and **Jane Kamensky**, as well as some excerpts from the forthcoming series. I highly recommend them as fine overviews to the new series.

The third, ***Franklin and Diplomacy***, is scheduled for **March 23** and the fourth, ***Franklin and Revolution***, on **March 29**. Mark them down on your calendars!

[pbs.org/kenburns/benjamin-franklin/](https://pbs.org/kenburns/benjamin-franklin/)



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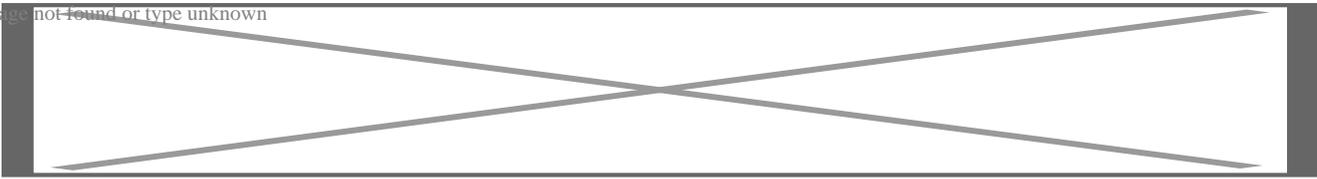
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**Byron Toben**, a past president of The Montreal Press Club, has been WestmountMag.ca's theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites Rover Arts and Charlebois Post, print weekly The Downtowner and print monthly The Senior Times. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.

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**Date Created**

March 2022