



## The Book of Esther

### 1. Prof. Yoram Hazony, *The Dawn*, pp. 2-3

To begin unraveling the riddle of Esther's meaning we must first recognize that Esther is a book about exile. That is, unlike most of the other writings in the Bible, which depict the Jews in their efforts to come to the land of Israel and build a Jewish nation there, Esther describes a world in which the Jews are distant from their land, their tradition and their G-d...

In exile, whether in ancient Persia or in a more contemporary one, Jewish life must somehow persist without the immense resources made available by independent, sovereign power. In exile, the Jews must live in dispersion, their institutions weak, their concerns wandering far from Jewish things, and their politics alienated from every obvious source of cohesiveness, direction and strength...

### 2. Talmud, Berachot 57b

הרואה מגלת אסתר נס נעשה לו

One who sees the book of Esther [in a dream] – a miracle has been done for him.

### Why did Achashverosh summon Vashti?

#### 3. Esther 1:10-15

On the seventh day, when the king's heart was good with wine, he said to Mehuman, Bizta, Charvona, Bigta and Avagta, Zetar and Carcas, the seven *sarisim* who served before King Achashverosh, to bring Queen Vashti before the king in the royal crown, to show the nations and nobles her beauty, for she was of good appearance. And Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's word via the *sarisim*. And the king was very angry, and his rage burned in him. And the king said to the wise men, knowers of the times, for such was the word of the king before all who knew protocol and law. And those close to him were Carshena, Shetar, Admata, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, Memuchan, seven nobles of Persia and Medea who served before the king, sitting first in the empire. Regarding what to do about Queen Vashti, for she did not do as King Achashverosh instructed via the *sarisim*.

#### 4. Talmud, Megillah 12b

ויקצף המלך מאד אמאי דלקה ביה כולי האי אמר רבא שלחה ליה בר אהוריריה דאבא אבא לקבל אלפא חמרא שתי ולא רוי וההוא גברא אשתטי בחמריה מיד וחמתו בערה בו

"And the king was enraged" – Why did her refusal so incite him? Rava explained: She sent a message to him, "Stable-boy of my father! My father drank the equivalent of 1,000 others (per Daniel 5:1) and did not become intoxicated, but you have become foolish with your wine." Immediately, "And his anger burned in him."

#### 5. Midrash, Esther Rabbah 3:2

ארבע נשים נטלו ממשלה בעולם ואלו הן, איזבל, ועתליה מישראל, ושמיירמית, וושתי מאומות העולם.

Four women took the reins of power in the world: Izevel and Ataliah from the Jews, and Semiramis and Vashti from the nations of the world.

#### 6. Malbim to Esther 1:9

איה סכלות גדול מזה, שמושל אדיר כזה יצוה להביא אשת חיקו, להראותה לפני המון גוים והמון לאומים כי יפת מראה היא. ובשגם לקבלת חז"ל שצוה להביאה ערומה. וביותר יפלא איכות הבאתה אשר נראה שצוה תיכף להביאה בע"כ ביד הסריסים, כמביאים אחת הנבלות, עד שנבחר לה מות מחיי הבוז והקלון.

Where is there a greater foolishness, that a mighty king like this should bring his intimate bride to display her before the masses of the nations and the masses of the states, for she is beautiful. Especially with the rabbinic tradition that he commanded that she be brought unclothed. And it is even more shocking how she was to be brought; it appears that he commanded that she be brought immediately, against her will, via the *sarisim*, as a degraded person would be brought – such that she chose death rather than live with disgrace and humiliation.

7. An archetype Melachim I 21:25, Melachim II 10:13, Melachim II 11:1, Shemuel II 6:20, Melachim I 7:1-8

8. Talmud, Megillah 11a

"המלך" אמר רב שמלך מעצמו. אמרי לה לשבח ואמרי לה לגנאי, אמרי לה לשבח דלא הוה איניש דחשיב למלכא כוותיה, ואמרי לה לגנאי דלא הוה חזי למלכותא וממונא יתירא הוא דיהב וקם.

"Who reigned" – Rav said: He took the throne on his own. Some said this positively, some said it degradingly. Some said it positively, that there was no one as worthy of being king as he was. Some said it degradingly, that he was not worthy of reigning, and he gave excessive money and so he took the throne.

9. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra to Esther 2:9

וידענו כי מרדכי היה מגדולי ישראל כי הנה הוא שלישי לשרים העולים עם זרובבל. וכאשר ראה כי לא נבנה הבית בא אל עילם והיה בשער המלך בארמון והיא מעלה גדולה, והנה דניאל הפקיד חביריו על מלכות בבל. והוא בשער המלך ולולי שהיה מרדכי קודם מעשה אסתר ממשרתי המלך לא עזבוהו המשרתים להתהלך לפני חצר בית הנשים:

And we know that Mordechai was among the leaders of Israel, for he was third among the nobles who ascended with Zerubavel. And when he saw that the Beit haMikdash was not built, he came to Elam and he was at the king's gate at the palace, which reflects great stature. Ad Daniel placed his colleagues in charge over the kingdom of Babylon (Daniel 3:30). And he was at the king's gate, and if Mordechai had not been among the king's servants before the event with Esther, the servants would not have let him walk before the yard of the women's house.

10. Talmud, Megillah 12a

"בית המלכות" - "בית הנשים" מיבעי ליה! אמר רבא: שניהן לדבר עבירה נתכוונו.

"In the royal palace" – It should have been in "the women's house"! Rava said: Both of them intended immorality.

11. Talmud, Megillah 12b

"ביום השביעי כטוב לב המלך ביין" - אטו עד השתא לא טב לביה בחמרא? אמר רבא יום השביעי שבת היה... שבמדה שאדם מודד בה מודדין לו, מלמד שהיתה ושתי הרשעה מביאה בנות ישראל ומפשיטן ערומות ועושה בהן מלאכה בשבת. היינו דכתיב "אחר הדברים האלה כשך חמת המלך אחשוורוש זכר את ושתי ואת אשר עשתה ואת אשר גזר עליה" - כשם שעשתה כך גזר עליה.

"On the seventh day, when the king's heart was good with wine" – Until now his heart wasn't good with wine? Rava said: The seventh day was Shabbat... For in the way that one metes out to others, thus is meted out to him. This teaches that wicked Vashti brought Jewish girls, removed their clothes and made them work on Shabbat. Thus it says, "After these things, when the wrath of King Achashverosh settled, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what was decreed upon her" – As she did, so was decreed upon her.

Why did Vashti refuse?

12. Midrash, Esther Rabbah 3:14

שלחה ואמרה לו דברים שהן נוגעין בלבו. אמרה לו: אם רואין אותי נאה, הן נותנין עיניהם להשתמש בי והורגים אותך, ואם רואין אותי כעורה את מתגנת בי! רמזתו ולא נרמז, עקצתו ולא נעקץ.

שלחה ואמרה לו: קומיס איסטבלאטי של בית אבא היית, והיית למוד להיות מכניס לפניך נשים זונות ערומות, ועכשיו שנכנסת למלכות לא חזרת מקלקולך?! רמזתו ולא נרמז, עקצתו ולא נעקץ.

שלחה ואמרה: אפי' אנדתיקוס של בית אבא לא נידונו ערומים! הדא ה"ד (דניאל ג') "באדין גובריא אלך כפיתו בסרבליהון פטשיהון"...

She sent and told him that which would touch his heart. She said: If they see that I am attractive, they will want to use me and they will kill you. And if they see that I am ugly, you will be disgraced through me! She hinted and he didn't take the hint; she stung him and he was not stung.

She sent and told him: You were my father's head of the stables, and you would bring unclothed *zonot* for yourself. Now you have become king, and you have not left your corruption?! She hinted and he didn't take the hint; she stung him and he was not stung.

She sent and said: Even my father's defendants were not judged unclothed! As in Daniel 3...

13. Talmud, Megillah 12b

מכדי פריצתא הואי דאמר מר "שניהן לדבר עבירה נתכוונו", מאי טעמא לא אתא? אמר רבי יוסי בר חנינא מלמד שפרחה בה צרעת. במתניתא תנא: בא גבריאל ועשה לה זנב.

But if she was immoral, as [Rava] taught, "Both of them intended immorality," why didn't she come? Rabbi Yosi bar Chanina said: This teaches that *tzaraat* broke out on her. In a *braita* it was learned: Gavriel came and gave her a tail.

14. Dr. Tamar Kadari, *Vashti: Midrash and Aggadah* <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/vashti-midrash-and-aggadah>

This collection of midrashim presents Vashti in a very negative light. The adverse attitude of the Rabbis in Babylonia to Vashti might possibly have resulted from the fact that Vashti was Babylonian, and for the Rabbis she represented the local Babylonian women, who were promiscuous and Jew-haters. Emphasizing their negative traits probably aided in erecting barriers between the Jews living in Babylonia and the local Gentile women.

15. Midrash, Esther Rabbah 3:9

"גם ושתי המלכה, " אין גם אלא ריבוי... מה זה בבגדי כהונה גדולה אף זו בבגדי כהונה גדולה..."

"Also Queen Vashti" – "Also" is only an expansion... As this one used the clothes of the kohen gadol, so this one used the clothes of the kohen gadol...

16. Midrash, Esther Rabbah 3:10

"בית המלכות, " נתנה אותן בבתים מרווחין מפני שדרכה של אשה מצויה לקלקל.

"In the royal palace" – She put them in large rooms, anticipating the way of women to be corrupt.