



## Why learn Esther?

### 1. Talmud Yerushalmi, Megilah 1:5

ר' יוחנן אמר הנביאים והכתובים עתידין ליבטל וחמשת ספרי תורה אינן עתידין ליבטל. מה טעמא? [דברים ה יט] "קול גדול ולא יסף." רשב"ל אמר אף מגילת אסתר והלכות אינן עתידין ליבטל, נאמר כאן "קול גדול ולא יסף" ונאמר להלן [אסתר ט כח] "וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם," הלכות [חבקוק ג ו] "הליכות עולם לו."

Rabbi Yochanan said: The Prophets and the Writings will be canceled; the five books of Torah will not be canceled. Why? It is written [at Sinai], 'A great voice, and it did not cease.'

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: Megilat Esther and Halachot [mishnah] will also not end. Here the Torah says, 'A great voice, and it did not cease,' and there [Megilat Esther] it says, 'And their memory will not cease from their descendants.' Regarding Halachot, it says, 'The world's leaders [eternal halachot] are His.'

### 2. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Megilah 2:18

כל ספרי הנביאים וכל הכתובים עתידין ליבטל לימות המשיח חוץ ממגילת אסתר, הרי היא קיימת כחמשה חומשי תורה וכהלכות של תורה שבעל פה שאינן בטלין לעולם. ואף על פי שכל זכרון הצרות יבטל שנאמר (ישעיהו ס"ה) "כי נשכחו הצרות הראשונות וכי נסתרו מעיני, ימי הפורים לא יבטלו שנאמר (אסתר ט) "וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם."

All of the books of the Prophets, and all of the Writings, will be annulled in the days of Mashiach. The only exception is the book of Esther, which will still stand like the five Chumashim and like the laws of the Spoken Torah, which are never annulled.

Although the memory of the troubles will be annulled, as it is written (Isaiah 65), "For all of the first troubles have been forgotten, and have been hidden from my eyes," the days of Purim will not be annulled, as it is written (Esther 9), "And these days of Purim will not pass from among the Jews, and their memory will not cease from among their descendants."

### 3. Raavad, Commentary to Hilchot Megilah 2:18

כל ספרי הנביאים והכתובים עתידין ליבטל. א"א דבר הדיוטות הוא זה, כי לא יבטל ספר מכל הספרים שאין ספר שאין בו למוד, אבל כך אמרו אפילו יבטלו שאר ספרים מלקרות בהם מגילה לא תבטל מלקרות אותה בצבור.

This is something which a plain person (possibly: fool) would say. No book from those books will be annulled, for none of those books lack lessons. They only said that even if other books are no longer read, the communal reading of the megillah will not halt.

### 4. Esther 9:27-28

(כז) קימו וקבלו היהודים עליהם ועל זרעם ועל כל הגוים עליהם ולא יעבור להיות עשים את שני הימים האלה ככתבם וכזמנם בכל שנה ושנה: (כח) והימים האלה נזכרים ונעשים בכל דור ודור משפחה ומשפחה מדינה ומדינה ועיר ועיר וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם:

The Jews upheld and accepted upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, without exception, to practice these two days as they are recorded and at their times, annually. And these days shall be remembered and practiced in every generation, every family, every nation, every city. And these days of Purim will not pass from among the Jews, and their memory will not cease from among their descendants.

## Some history

### 5. Persian kings of this period, with their secular chronology

- Cambyses I
- Cyrus (Koresh) 559 BCE – 530 BCE (reigned over Babylon from 539 BCE)
- Cambyses II 530 BCE – 522 BCE
- Darius I (Daryavesh) 522 BCE – 486 BCE
- Xerxes (Achashverosh?) 486 BCE – 465 BCE
- Artaxerxes I (Artachshasta) 465 BCE – 424 BCE
- Darius II (Daryavesh) 423 BCE – 404 BCE
- 330 BCE – The Persian Empire falls to Alexander the Great's invasion

6. Herodotus, The Histories, Vol. 1 133:3-4, Godley translation

They are very partial to wine. No one may vomit or urinate in another's presence: this is prohibited among them. Moreover, it is their custom to deliberate about the gravest matters when they are drunk. And what they approve in their deliberations is proposed to them the next day, when they are sober, by the master of the house where they deliberate; and if, being sober, they still approve it, they act on it, but if not, they drop it. And if they have deliberated about a matter when sober, they decide upon it when they are drunk.

7. Herodotus, The Histories, Vol. 1 135:1, Godley translation

Every Persian marries many lawful wives, and keeps still more concubines.

8. Ezra 4:4-6

(ד) בַּיְהוּדָה עִם הָאָרֶץ מְרַפִּים יָדֵי עַם יְהוּדָה וּמְבַהֲלִים אוֹתָם לְבָנוֹת: (ה) וְסוֹכְרִים עֲלֵיהֶם יוֹעֲצִים לְהַפֵּר עֲצָתָם כֹּל יְמֵי כּוֹרֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרַס וְעַד מְלָכוֹת דָּרְיֹוֹשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרַס: (ו) וּבְמְלָכוֹת אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ בְּתַחֲלַת מְלָכוֹתוֹ כָּתְבוּ שְׁטָנָה עַל יִשְׁבֵי יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם:

And the nation of the land weakened the hands of Yehudah, frightening them in their construction. And hiring advisors against them to ruin their counsel, all of the days of Cyrus, King of Persia, until the reign of Darius, King of Persia. And in the reign of Achashverosh, at the start of his reign, they wrote an attack against the dwellers of Judea and Jerusalem.

9. Daniel 9:1

(א) בְּשָׁנַת אַחַת לְדָרְיֹוֹשׁ בֶּן אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ מִזֶּרַע מְדֵי אֲשֶׁר הִמְלִיךְ עַל מְלָכוֹת כַּשְׂדִּים:

In the first year of Darius, son of Achashverosh, from the seed of Medea, who was made king over the Chaldean empire.

10. Mitchell First, <https://thelehrhaus.com/culture/review-of-yehuda-landy-purim-and-the-persian-empire/>

This identification of Ahashverosh with Xerxes was only determined once Old Persian cuneiform was deciphered in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Once the code was cracked, it was discovered that the name of the king that the Greeks had been referring to as "Xerxes" was in fact "Khshayarsha"; the Greeks could not properly record his name because they did not have a letter to represent the *shin* sound. "Khshayarsha" is very close to the Hebrew אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ, with the two names identical in their consonantal structure, both centering on the consonantal sounds *kh*, *sh*, *r* and *sh*, and the Hebrew only adding two *vavs* and an initial *aleph*. Even scholars who do not believe in the historicity of the Megillah are typically willing to accept that when the Megillah refers to Ahashverosh, the intent is a reference to Xerxes-Khshayarsha.

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

[W]hen the rabbis of the Talmud looked back across Jewish history, seeking to grant it coherence and permanence by assembling its teachings into a canon, they understood Esther to be of the utmost significance in concluding the Bible... 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...

12. Rabbi Yehuda Landy, *Purim and the Persian Empire*

<https://www.amazon.ca/Purim-Persian-Empire-Archaeological-Geographical/dp/1598265199>

What are the themes?

13. Talmud, Megillah 13a

"וישנה ואת נערו תיה וגו'", אמר רב: שהאכילה מאכל יהודי. ושמואל אמר: שהאכילה קדלי דחזירי. ורבי יוחנן אמר: זרעונים, וכן הוא אומר ויהי המלצר נושא את פתבגם... ונותן להם זרעונים.

"And he altered her and her maids for the best in the women's residence." Rav said: He fed her Jewish food. Shemuel said: He fed her the necks of pigs. Rabbi Yochanan said: Seeds, as in Daniel 1:16 "And *hameltzar* took their *patibaga*... and gave them seeds."

#### 14. Talmud, Megilah 12a

שאלו תלמידי רבי שמעון בן יוחאי מפני מה נתחייבו שונאיהן של ישראל שבאותו הדור כליה אמר להם אמרו אתם אמרו לו מפני שנהנו מסעודתו של אותו רשע

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's students asked him: Why did the Jews of that generation deserve destruction? He replied, "You tell me!" The students said: Because they benefited from that wicked person's feast.

#### 15. Talmud, Berachot 57b

שלשה כתובים גדולים הם הרואה ספר תהלים יצפה לחסידות משלי יצפה לחכמה איוב ידאג מן הפורענות שלשה כתובים קטנים הם הרואה שיר השירים בחלום יצפה לחסידות קהלת יצפה לחכמה קינות ידאג מן הפורענות הרואה מגלת אסתר נס נעשה לו

There are three great Writings: One who sees Tehillim should anticipate piety, Proverbs should anticipate wisdom, Job should worry about suffering.

There are three minor Writings: One who sees Song of Songs in a dream should anticipate piety, Ecclesiastes should anticipate wisdom, Lamentations should worry about suffering.

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

#### 16. Talmud, Megilah 12a

"ובמלאות הימים האלה וגו'" רב ושמואל חד אמר מלך פיקח היה וחד אמר מלך טיפש היה. מאן דאמר מלך פיקח היה שפיר עבד דקריב רחיקא ברישא, דבני מאתיה כל אימת דבעי מפייס להו. ומאן דאמר טפש היה דאיבעי ליה לקרובי בני מאתיה ברישא, דאי מרדו ביה הנך הני הוו קיימי בהדיה.

"And at the conclusion of these days, etc." Rav and Shemuel debated: One said he was a wise king, the other said he was a foolish king.

- The one who said he was a wise king said he did well, drawing near the distant first, for he could always appease the residents of his city.
- The one who said he was foolish said he should have drawn the residents of his city near first, for if the others would rebel, these would stand with him.

#### 17. Talmud, Megilah 13b

"ודתיהם שנות מכל עם" דלא אכלי מינן ולא נסבי מינן ולא מנסבי לן. "ואת דתי המלך אינם עשים" דמפקי לכולא שתא בשה"י פה"י. "ולמלך אין שוה להניחם" דאכלו ושתו ומבזו ליה למלכות. ואפילו נופל זבוב בכוסו של אחד מהן זורקו ושותהו, ואם אדוני המלך נוגע בכוסו של אחד מהן חובטו בקרקע ואינו שותהו.

"And their law is different from that of any other nation" – They do not eat of ours, they do not marry of ours, and they do not marry theirs to us.

"And they do not practice the king's laws" – They spend the entire year in 'Today is Shabbat' 'Today is Pesach'.

"And it is not worthwhile for the king to let them be" – For they eat and drink and mock the throne. And even if a fly would fall into the cup of one of them, he would throw out [the fly] and drink it, but if my master the king would touch the cup of one of them, he would throw it on the ground and he would not drink it.