

Megillas Esther, Chapter 1

Timeline

-442	3319	Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne (kingdom of Babylonia established)
-434	3327	King Yehoyachin was exiled
-423	3338	The first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed

Exile in Babylon

SECULAR YEAR	JEWISH YEAR	EVENT IN HISTORY
-370	3391	Building of Second Beit Hamikdash commenced, then halted
-366	3395	Achashverosh II made his great banquet
-362	3399	Esther was taken to the palace
-357	3404	Esther took action against Haman's decree
-355	3406	Mordechai proclaimed the celebration of Purim
-353	3408	Building of the second Beit Hamikdash resumed
-349	3412	The second Beit Hamikdash was completed

Authorship

1. Esther 9:29

ותכתב אסתר המלכה בת אביחיל ומרדכי היהודי את כל תקופת לקימים את אנגרת הפורים הזאת השנית.

Then Queen Esther, daughter of Avichail, and Mordechai the Jew, wrote with full authority to ratify the second letter of Purim.

2. Talmud, Bava Basra 15a

אנשי כנסת הגדולה כתבו (קנד"ג סימן) יחזקאל ושנים עשר דניאל ומגילת אסתר.

The Great Assembly wrote Ezekiel, *Trei Asar*, Daniel and the Book of Esther.

3. Talmud, Megillah 7a

שלחה להם אסתר לתכמים: פתבוני לדורות. שלחו לה: "הלא כתבת לך שלישים", שלישים ולא רבעים, עד שמצאו לו מקרא פתוב בתורה: "כתב זאת זכרון בספר". "כתב זאת" — מה שפתוב כאן ובמשנה תורה. "זכרון" — מה שפתוב בנביאים, "בספר" — מה שפתוב במגלה.

Esther sent to the Sages: Record me for generations! They sent to her: "Have I not recorded for you *shalishim*" – Three, not four." Until they found a text in the Torah, "Record this as a memorial in the book" – 'Record this' which is written here and in Deuteronomy, 'A memorial' which is recorded in the Prophets, 'In the book' which is written in the megillah.

Why is Hashem's name not mentioned in the Megillah?

4. Ibn Ezra, Introduction to Megillas Esther

והנה אין במגילה הזאת זכר השם והיא מספרי הקדש... כטעם פתשגן והעתיקוה הפרסיים ונכתבה בדברי הימים של מלכיהם והם היו עובדי עבודה זרה והיו כותבין תחת השם הנכבד והנורא שם תועבתם... והנה כבוד השם שלא יזכרנו מרדכי במגילה.

The Megillah doesn't mention Hashem's name, yet it is included in the Holy Writings... The reason is that these events were publicized and written down in the history books of the Persians. Since they were idolaters, they would replace the name of Hashem with the name of their abominable deities... Thus it was for the honor of Hashem that Mordechai did not mention His name in the Megillah.

Why did Achashverosh throw a party?

5. Esther 1:1-3

(א) ויהי בימי אחשורוש הוא אחשורוש המלך מהדו ועד פוש שבע ועשרים ומאה מדינה: (ב) בימים ההם כשבת המלך אחשורוש על פסא מלכותו אשר בשושן הבירה: (ג) בשנת שלוש למלכו עשה משתה לכל שריו ועבדיו חיל פרס ומדי הפרתמים ושרי המדינות לפניו.

Now it came to pass in the days of Achashverosh -- he was the Achashverosh who reigned from Hodu to Cush, one hundred twenty-seven provinces. In those days, when King Achashverosh sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the capital. In the third year of his reign, he made a banquet for all his princes and his servants, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces [who were] before him.

6. Talmud, Megillah 11a

"המולך", אמר רב: שפלו 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: [This comes to teach] that he reigned on his own [without having inherited the throne]. Some say this to his credit, and some say it to his disgrace. Some say this to his credit, that there was no other man as fit as him to be king. And some say it to his disgrace, that he was not fit to be king, but he distributed large amounts of money, and in that way rose [to the throne].

7. Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Esther 1:2

וטעם "כשבת המלך אחשורוש" ששקט ממלחמות הודו וכוש כי גבור היה וככה כתוב במגלה על כן בשנת "שלוש למלכו".

The reason that it says "when King Achashverosh sat" is because the wars with Hodu and Cush were over, and [Achashverosh] was victorious. Thus, it is written in the megillah: "in the third year of his reign."

8. Malbim, Commentary to Esther 1:3

למען הוציא חשקו זה מכה אל הפועל להיות מלכותו בלתי מוגבלת, התחכם בשנת שלוש למלכו - זה המלכות אשר חשב למלוך ביד חזקה לז"א 'למלכו'. עשה משתה למען שבמשתה הזאת יקים מזמות לבבו. ותכף בסדר הקרואים הראה את תכלית כונתו, שהקדים תחלה שריו ועבדיו וחיל צבא פרס ומדי, ואחריהם הושיב את הפרתמים ושרי המדינות אשר היו שם שרים לפניו, ר"ל לפני כבשו הממלכות האלה, ובוזה הראה שאינו חושב כי ברצונם ובבחירתם נתמנה שאז הלא שרי המדינות הגדולות קודמים לשרי המדינה הקטנה שמלך בהתחלה וכ"ש לעבדיו וחיל הצבא...

In order to realize this desire of his, for his reign to be unlimited, he acted cleverly in the third year of his monarchy – which he planned to reign upon with a mighty hand, thus it says, "of his reign." He made a party, so that he could establish his heart's plot at this party. And immediately, in the order of those invited, he demonstrated his goal. First he put his nobles, his servants, and the armies of Persia and Media, and after them he seated the *partimim* and officers of the lands who had been officers before him, meaning before he conquered those kingdoms. Thus he showed that he didn't consider himself appointed at their will and desire, for then the nobles of the great lands would have preceded the nobles of the small land where he reigned first, and certainly his servants and the soldiers of the army...

9. Jeremiah 29:10

כי יכה אמר ה' כי לפי מלאת לבבל שבעים שנה אפקד אתכם והקמתי עליכם את דברי הטוב להשיב אתכם אל המקום הזה.

For thus said Hashem: When Babylon's seventy years are over, I will take note of you, and I will fulfill to you My promise of favor—to bring you back to this place.

10. Talmud, Megillah 11b

”בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם כָּשְׁבֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ”, וְכָתִיב בְּתַרְיֵיהּ: ”בַּשָּׁנָה שְׁלֹשׁ לְמַלְכוּתוֹ!” אָמַר רַבָּא: מַאי ”כָּשְׁבֶת”, לְאַחַר שְׁנַתֵּי־יִשְׁכָּבָה דְעָתוּ... אָמַר [בלשצר]: הַשְׁתָּא וְדַאי תּוּ לָא מִפְּרָקִי, אֲפִיק מְאֵנִי דְבִי מְקַדְשָׁא וְאַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּהוּ... וְכָתִיב: ”כִּי־הָיָה בְּלִילֵי־אֵל קָטִיל בְּלִשְׁאֲצַר מֶלֶכָא... אָמַר [אחשוורוש]: אִיהוּ מִיטְעָא טְעִי, אֲנָא חֲשִׁיבְנָא וְלָא טְעִינָא... כִּי־וּן דְחֲזִי דְמָלוּ שְׂבָעִין וְלָא אִיפְרוּק — אָמַר: הַשְׁתָּא וְדַאי תּוּ לָא מִפְּרָקִי, אֲפִיק מְאֵנִי דְבִי מְקַדְשָׁא וְאַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּהוּ.

“In those days, when the king sat” and then “In the third year of his reign”? Rava said: What is “when [the king] sat”? When his mind was settled... Belshazzar said, “Now, certainly, they will not be redeemed! I will take out the vessels of the Temple and use them.” ...And it says, “That night, King Belshazzar was killed”... [Achashverosh] said “He erred; I will calculate and not err.”... When he saw that the seventy were complete and they were not redeemed, he said, “Now, certainly, they will not be redeemed! I will take out the vessels of the Temple and use them.”

11. Esther 1:4

בְּהִרְאוֹתוֹ אֶת עֹשֶׁר כְּבוֹד מְלָכוּתוֹ וְאֶת יְקָר תַּפְאָרְתּוֹ גְּדוּלְתוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים שְׂמוֹנִים וּמָאתַיִם יוֹם.

When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his majestic greatness.

12. Talmud, Megillah 11b

”בְּהִרְאוֹתוֹ אֶת עֹשֶׁר כְּבוֹד מְלָכוּתוֹ”, אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסֵי בַר חֲנִינָא: מְלָמַד שְׁלֵבֶשׁ בְּגָדֵי כְהוֹנָה. כְּתִיב הֵכָא: ”יְקָר תַּפְאָרְתּוֹ גְּדוּלְתוֹ”, וְכָתִיב הֵתָם: ”לְכָבוֹד וְלִתְפָאָרְתּוֹ”.

Rabbi Yosei bar Chanina said: This teaches that Achashverosh wore the priestly vestments, as it is written here: “The riches of his glorious [*kevod*] kingdom and the honor of his majestic [*tiferes*] greatness.” And it is written there [with regard to the priestly garments]: “For glory [*kavod*] and for majesty [*tiferes*]” (Exodus 28:2).

A Kosher Party?

13. Talmud, Megillah 12b

שְׁאַלוּ תַלְמִידָיו אֶת רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בַּר יוֹחָאי: מַפְנֵי מָה נִתְחַיְיְבוּ שׁוֹנְאֵיהֶן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂבָאוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר כְּלָיָה? אָמַר לָהֶם: אָמְרוּ אִתָּם. אָמְרוּ לוֹ: מַפְנֵי שְׁנֵהֲנוּ מִסְעוּדָתוֹ שֶׁל אוֹתוֹ רִשְׁעִי.

The students of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked him: For what reason were the enemies of Jewish people [a euphemism for the Jewish people themselves when exhibiting behavior that is not in their best interests] in that generation deserving of annihilation? [Rabbi Shimon] said to them: Say [the answer to your question] yourselves. They said to him: It is because they benefited from the feast of that wicked one [Achashverosh].

14. Esther 1:8

וְהַשְׁתֵּיָה כְּדַת אֵין אֲנִים כִּי כֵן יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל כָּל רַב בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּרִצּוֹן אִישׁ וְאִישׁ.

And the drinking was according to the law [with] no one coercing, for so had the king ordained upon every steward of his house, to do according to every man's wish.

15. Midrash, Esther Rabbah 2:13

רַב אָמַר: אֵין אֲנִים כְּיֵין נִסְדִי.

Rav said: There was no coercion to drink forbidden wine.

16. Chasam Sofer on the Torah, Tetzaveh 158

ויש לדקדק הא גם אם אכלו נבילות וטריפות באותו סעודה אינם במיתה אלא במלקות והנה לפי"מ דאיתא במדרש ששתו סתם יינם ולחד מ"ד שאכלו בישולי גוים. יש ליישב דהעובר על דברי סופרים חייב מיתה, לכן נתחייבו כליה. ונלע"ד כיון דהי' אותו סעודה על הרבן ביהמ"ק ששמח בה אחשוורוש ואמר השתא תו לא מיפרקי ואפיק כלי בית מקדשא... ונלע"ד י"ל כיון דאכלו ברבים מאכלות טריפות ואסורות ונתחלל שם שמים מאוד להעשות כן ברבים ובפומבי ובפרט לעיני הגוים ועון חילול השם הוא במיתה.

Vashti

17. Esther 1:9-12

(ט) גם ושתי המלכה עשתה משתה נשים בית המלכות אשר למלך אחשורוש: (י) ביום השביעי כטוב לב המלך בינו אמר למהומן בנותא חרבונא בגתא ואבגתא זתר וכרפס שבעת הסריסים המשרתים את פני המלך אחשורוש: (יא) להביא את ושתי המלכה לפני המלך בכתר מלכות להראות העמים והשרים את קנה כי טובת מראה היא: (יב) ותמאן המלכה ושתי לבוא בדבר המלך אשר ביד הסריסים ויקצף המלך מאד ותמתו בערה בו.

Also, Vashti the queen made a banquet for the women, in the royal house of King Achashverosh. On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Bizzetha, Charvona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains who ministered in the presence of King Achashverosh. To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the royal crown, to show the nations and the princes her beauty, for she was of beautiful appearance. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's behest which was [brought] by the hand of the chamberlains, and the king became very enraged, and his anger burnt within him.

18. Midrash, Esther Rabbah 3:14

"ותמאן המלכה ושתי" - ... שלחה ואמרה לו קומים איסטבלאטי של בית אבא היית, והיית למויד להיות מכניס לפניך נשים זונות ערמות, ועכשיו שנכנסת למלכות לא תזרתי מקלקולך, רמזתו ולא נרמז עקצתו ולא נעקץ, שלחה ואמרה, אפלו אנדתיקום של בית אבא לא נדונו ערמים, הדא הוא דכתיב (דניאל ג, כא): "באדין גבריאי אלה כפתו בסרבליהון פטשיהון."

She sent and told him: You were my father's stable-boy, and you would bring naked prostitutes 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. See! It is written: "So these men, in their shirts, trousers, hats, and other garments" (Daniel 3:21).

19. Talmud, Megillah 12b

"ויקצף המלך מאד". אמאי דלקה ביה כולי האי? אמר רבא, שלחה ליה: בר אהוריייריה דאבא, אבא לקבל אלפא חמרא שתי ולא רוי, וההוא גברא אשתטי בחמריה, מיד: "ותמתו 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 (Daniel 5:1) and did not become intoxicated, but you have become foolish with your wine." Immediately, "And his anger burned in him."

20. Talmud, Megillah 12b

"ביום השביעי כטוב לב המלך בינו". ... אמר רבא: יום השביעי שבת היה... שבמדה שאדם מודד — בה מודדין לו, מלמד שהיתה ושתי הרשעה מביאה בנות ישראל ומפשיטתן ערומות ועושה בהן מלאכה בשבת. היינו דכתיב: "אחר הדברים האלה כשוף חמת המלך אחשורוש זכר את ושתי ואת אשר עשתה ואת אשר נגזר עליה", כשם שעשתה — כך נגזר עליה.

"ותמאן המלכה ושתי". מפדי פריצתא הואי, דאמר מר: שניקו לדבר עבירה נתפוגגו, מאי טעמא לא אתאי? אמר רבי יוסי בר חנינא: מלמד שפרחה בה צרעת. במתניתא תנא: [בא גבריאל ועשה לה זנב].

"On the seventh day, when the king's heart was good with wine" – ... Rava said: The seventh day was Shabbos... 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 Shabbos. 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.

"But the queen Vashti refused to come" (Esther 1:12). Since she was immodest, as [Rava] said above: The two of them had sinful intentions, what is the reason that she did not come? Rabbi Yosi bar Chanina said: This teaches that she broke out in leprosy. It was taught in a *baraisa*: The angel Gavriel came and gave her a tail.

21. Esther 1:13, 15-16, 21

(יג) ויאמר המלך לחכמים ידעי העתים כי בן דבר המלך לפני כל ידעי דת ודיו... (טו) כדת מה לעשות במלכה ושתי על אשר לא עשתה את מאמר המלך אחשורוש ביד הסריסים: (טז) ויאמר [מומכן] ממוכן לפני המלך והשרים לא על המלך לבדו ענתה ושתי המלכה כי על כל השרים ועל כל העמים אשר בכל מדינות המלך אחשורוש... ויטיב הדבר בעיני המלך והשרים ויעש המלך כדבר ממוכן.

And the king said to the wise men who knew the times - for so was the king's custom, [to present the case] before all who knew law and judgment... "According to the law, what shall be done to Queen Vashti, inasmuch as she did not comply with the order of the king, [brought] by the hand of the chamberlains?" Then Memuchan declared before the king and the princes, "Not against the king alone has Vashti the queen done wrong, but against all the princes and all the peoples that are in all King Achashverosh's provinces... And the matter pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memuchan.

22. Rabbi Yonatan Grossman, "The King's Judgment: Responsible or Ridiculous Rule?"

The ministers find themselves in a most difficult quandary. On one hand, they cannot do that which, seemingly, they would most want to do in this situation: to gently bring the king to his senses, encourage him to drink some coffee, and wait for him to sober up. Any minister daring to offer such a proposal will obviously be regarded as showing contempt for the crown. On the other hand, it is difficult to think of any law that may be legislated with a view to solving the king's problem with his wife. The law, by nature, is a general sphere that applies to the entire kingdom, while in the instance at hand the problem pertains exclusively to the royal couple. Moreover, the ministers must bear in mind that within a few days the king is likely to sober up, and then they will have to give a logical accounting for the special law that they passed!

The most brilliant of the ministers, as quickly becomes apparent, is Memukhan. An examination of his response to the king shows how he resolves the ministers' quandary... Memukhan starts with the central idea that he will develop in the course of his monologue: "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king." This idea is emphasized through the use of the word "all" which is repeated over and over, a total of seven times, in his speech. This word sums up the point that Memukhan is making: the problem is not the king's personal problem, but rather an issue that affects ALL of the kingdom and ALL of the couples living within it. We can almost hear Memukhan telling the king (if only through hints): "How fortunate that my lord the king has invited your important ministers. Indeed, a general problem confronts us and it must be addressed by means of a general, thought-out law. The issue at stake is not, as some people might think, a matter of a private problem between the king and his wife. No! The entire kingdom faces a problem; every couple now confronts inestimable strife." The sophisticated reader imagines Memukhan winking at the other ministers as he holds forth. This is hinted at in the introduction to his words: "Memukhan said, before the king AND THE MINISTERS." They, too, await breathlessly the solution to the dilemma in which they have unwillingly been placed. And Memukhan supplies the goods, by pretending to side with the king's approach, only exaggerating it even further.

The king is happy with Memukhan's suggestion, as are the other ministers: "The thing was good in the eyes of the king and the ministers, and the king did as Memukhan had said" (1:21). (We may assume that the king was happy with the "good advice" that he had received, while the ministers were glad that Memukhan's quick thinking had removed them from their predicament.)...

This model serves to expose Achashverosh's kingdom in all of its fickleness. How are matters decided? Does order really prevail in this world power?

King	Reign	Country	Comment
Nebuchadnezzar	442-398 BCE	Babylon	Destroyed Jerusalem (3338/423 BCE)
Evil Merodach	398-375 BCE	Babylon	Freed King Yechonyah
Belshazzar	375-372 BCE	Babylon	Last Babylonian king
Darius the Mede	372-371 BCE	Persia-Media	Defeated Belshazar
Cyrus	371-368 BCE	Persia-Media	Authorized return of exiles and building of the Temple
Achashverosh	368-354 BCE	Persia-Media	Husband of Esther
Darius the Persian	368-319 BCE	Persia-Media	Esther's son: Authorized Temple's completion