

The Book of Esther: Is It Religious?

Source Sheet by Yosef Lindell

1. Jonah 3:4-8

(4) And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he proclaimed, and said: 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.' (5) And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. (6) And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. (7) And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying: 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing; let them not feed, nor drink water; (8) but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.'

א. יונה ג' י-ח'

(ד) וַיַּחֲלֹל יוֹנָה לְבֹוא בָּעֵיר מִקְלָה יוֹם אַחֶד וַיַּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אַרְכָּבִים יוֹם וְגִינְעָה גִּנְפְּכָתָה: (ה) וַיַּאֲמִינוּ אֲנָשֵׁי גִּנְגָּה בָּאֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרָא אוֹדֶצֶם וַיַּלְבְּשׁוּ שְׁלָלִים מִגְדָּלִם וַעֲדָקָתָם: (ו) וַיַּגְעַן הַקְּבָרָל אֶל-מַלְךָ גִּנְגָּה וַיַּקְרַב מִפְּסָאֹן וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶל-תְּחוֹן מִעְלָיו וַיַּכְסֶן שָׁק וַיִּשְׁבַּע עַל-הָאָפָר: (ז) וַיַּעֲזַב וַיֹּאמֶר בְּגִינְגָּה מִטְעָם הַמְּלָךְ וְגַדְלֵיו לְאָמֶר הָאָדָם וְהַבָּהָמָה הַבָּקָר וְהַצָּאן אֶל-יְתְעַמֵּן מִאָוֹמָה אֶל-יְרָעָו וּמִים אֶל-יִשְׁתַּחַוו: (ח) וַיַּתְכִּסּוּ שְׁלָלִים הָאָדָם וְהַבָּהָמָה וַיִּקְרָא אֶל-אֱלֹהִים בְּחִזְקָה וַיַּשְׁבַּו אִישׁ מִדְרָכָו הַרְעָה וּמִן-הַחֲמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכִפְיהָם:

2. Megillah 7a

Judah said in the name of Shmuel; [The scroll] of Esther does not defile the hands. Is that to say that Shmuel was holds that Esther was not said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? . . . They objected: R. Meir says that Kohelet does not defile the hands, and that about the Song of Songs there is a dispute. R. Yose says that the Song of Songs defiles the hands, and about Koheleth there is a difference of opinion. R. Shimon says that Koheleth is one of those matters in regard to which Beth Shammai were lenient and Beth Hillel

ב. מגילה ז' א

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל אסתר אינה מטמאת את הידים למי 따라 דסביר שמואל אסתר לאו ברוח הקודש נאמרה . . . מיתיבי רבי מאיר אומר קהילת אינו מטמא את הידים ומחילוקת בשיר השירים ר' יוסי אומר שיר השירים מטמא את הידים ומחילוקת בקהילת ר' שמעון אומר קהילת מקולי ב"ש ומהומר ב"ה אבל רות ושיר השירים ואסתר מטמאין את הידים הוא . . . תניא ר' אליעזר אומר אסתר ברוח

stringent, but Ruth and the Song of Songs and Esther [certainly] make the hands unclean. . . . It has been taught: R. Elazar said: Esther was composed under the inspiration of the holy spirit, as it says, "And Haman said in his heart" (Esther 6:6). . . . R. Joseph said: It can be proved from here: "And these days of Purim shall not fail from among the Jews" (Esther 9:28). R. Nahman b. Isaac said: From here: "Nor the memorial of them cease from their descendants" (Esther 9:28).

הקדוש נאמר שנאמר (אסתר ו, ו) ויאמר המן בלבו . . . רב יוסף אמר מהכא (אסתר ט, כה) וימי הפורים האלה לא עברו מתוֹךְ היהודים רב נחמן בר יצחק אומר מהכא זכרם לא יוסף מזרים:

3. Megillah 12a

His disciples asked R. Shimon b. Yohai, Why did the enemies of Israel in that generation deserve extermination? He said to them: You answer. They said: Because they enjoyed the feast of that wicked one. [He said to them]: If so, those in Shushan should have been killed, not those throughout the rest of the world? They then said: You answer. He said to them: It was because they bowed down to an image.

ג. מגילה י"ב א

שאלו תלמידיו את רשב"י מפני מה נתחיהבו שונאייהן של ישראל שבאותו הדור כליה אמר להם אמרו אתם אמרו לו מפני שנחנו מסעודהו של אותו רשות אם כן שבושו יהרגו שבכל העולם כולו אל יהרגו אמרו לו אמר אתה אמר להם מפני שהשתחו לצלם:

4. Esther Rabbah 7:25

[God] said to the tribes: You sold your brother [Joseph] for food and drink, so shall I do to you. This is what it says [in the Book of Esther]: And the king and Haman sat down to drink (3:15). . . . See how long it took to fix, for until the days of Mordechai, the punishment for the sale of Joseph stood.

ד. אסתר רבה ז:כ"ה

אמר להם לשבטים: אתם מכרתם את אחיכם מתוך מאכל ומשתה, כך אני אעשה לכם. הדא הוא דכתיב: והמלך והמן ישבו לשותה. . . . ראה עד היכן היא מתוקנת, שהרי עד ימי מרדכי אותו עונש של מכירת יוסף קיים.

5. Esther Rabbah 6:2

And [why] was he a contrarian that ignored the king's decree? Because when Ahasuerus decreed that everyone should

ה. אסתר רבה ו:ב'

הדא הוא דכתיב: לא יכרע ולא ישתחווה. וכי קנתרו היה ועובד על גזירת המלך? -

bow to Haman, Haman started wearing an idol so that everyone would bow to the idol, and when he saw that Mordechai refused to bow he became very angry. Mordechai told him "there is a Lord who is above all the arrogant. How can I forsake him and bow to an idol?"

אלא כשהזו אחשורוש להשתחוות להמן,
חקק עבודת כוכבים על לבו, ונתכוון כדי
שישתחוו לעבודת כוכבים. וכשהיה רואה
המן שאין מרדכי משתחוה לו, נתמלא
חימה. ומרדכי אומר לו: יש אדון המתגאה
על כל גאים, הילך אני מניחו ואשתחו
לעבודת כוכבים.

6. **Josephus Antiquities Book XI 6.5**

Now there was one Haman, the son of Amedatha, by birth an Amalekite, that used to go in to the king; and the foreigners and Persians worshipped him, as Artaxerxes had commanded that such honor should be paid to him; but Mordecai was so wise, and so observant of his own country's laws, that he would not worship the man.

7. **Ibn Ezra on Esther, Introduction**

Behold, there is no mention of God's name in the Megillah, even though it is part of Scripture . . . because the Megillah was written by Mordechai . . . and the Persians copied it and placed it in the chronicles of their kings, and they were idol worshippers and would write the name of their deity instead of the name of God. . . . It was for the honor of God's name that Mordechai did not mention It in the Megillah.

אבן עזרא אסתר הקדמה

והנה אין ב מגילה זו זאת זכר השם והיא
מספריו הקדש . . . שזו היא המגילה חbara
מרדכי . . . והעתיקوها הפרסים ונכתבה
בדברי הימים של מלכיהם והם היו עובדי
עובדת זרה והוא כותבין תחת השם הנכבד
והנורא שם תועבתם . . . והנה כבוד השם
שלא זכרנו מרדכי ב מגילה.

8. **Additions to Esther (Revised Standard Version): Colophon**

In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said that he was a priest and a Levite, and Ptolemy his son brought to Egypt the preceding Letter of Purim, which they said was genuine and had been translated by Lysimachus the son of Ptolemy, one of the residents of Jerusalem.

9. **Additions to Esther: Mordechai's Prayer**

[8] Then Mordechai prayed to the Lord, calling to remembrance all the works of the Lord. He said:

[9] "O Lord, Lord, King who rulest over all things, for the universe is in thy power and there is no one who can oppose thee if it is thy will to save Israel.

[10] For thou hast made heaven and earth and every wonderful thing under heaven,

[11] and thou art Lord of all, and there is no one who can resist thee, who art the Lord.

[12] Thou knowest all things; thou knowest, O Lord, that it was not in insolence or pride or for any love of glory that I did this, and refused to bow down to this proud Haman.

[13] For I would have been willing to kiss the soles of his feet, to save Israel!

[14] But I did this, that I might not set the glory of man above the glory of God, and I will not bow down to any one but to thee, who art my Lord; and I will not do these things in pride.

[15] And now, O Lord God and King, God of Abraham, spare thy people; for the eyes of our foes are upon us to annihilate us, and they desire to destroy the inheritance that has been thine from the beginning.

[16] Do not neglect thy portion, which thou didst redeem for thyself out of the land of Egypt.

[17] Hear my prayer, and have mercy upon thy inheritance turn our mourning into feasting, that we may live and sing praise to thy name, O Lord; do not destroy the mouth of those who praise thee."

10. **Additions to Esther: Esther's Prayer**

[1] And Esther the queen, seized with deathly anxiety, fled to the Lord;

[2] she took off her splendid apparel and put on the garments of distress and mourning, and instead of costly perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung, and she utterly humbled her body, and every part that she loved to adorn she covered with her tangled hair.

[3] And she prayed to the Lord God of Israel, and said:

Lord, thou only art our King; help me, who am alone and have no helper but thee,

[4] for my danger is in my hand.

[5] Ever since I was born I have heard in the tribe of my family that thou, O Lord, didst take Israel out of all the nations, and our fathers from among all their ancestors, for an everlasting inheritance, and that thou didst do for them all that thou didst promise.

[6] And now we have sinned before thee, and thou hast given us into the hands of our enemies,

[7] because we glorified their gods. Thou art righteous, O Lord!

[8] And now they are not satisfied that we are in bitter slavery, but they have covenanted with their idols

[9] to abolish what thy mouth has ordained and to destroy thy inheritance, to stop the mouths of those who praise thee and to quench thy altar and the glory of thy house,

[10] to open the mouths of the nations for the praise of vain idols, and to magnify for ever a mortal king.

[11] O Lord, do not surrender thy scepter to what has no being; and do not let them mock at our downfall; but turn their plan against themselves, and make an example of the man who began this against us.

[12] Remember, O Lord; make thyself known in this time of our affliction, and give me courage, O King of the gods and Master of all dominion!

[13] Put eloquent speech in my mouth before the lion, and turn his heart to hate the man who is fighting against us, so that there may be an end of him and those who agree with him.

[14] But save us by thy hand, and help me, who am alone and have no helper but thee, O Lord.

[15] Thou hast knowledge of all things; and thou knowest that I hate the splendor of the wicked and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of any alien.

[16] Thou knowest my necessity -- that I abhor the sign of my proud position, which is upon my head on the days when I appear in public. I abhor it like a menstrual rag, and I do not wear it on the days when I am at leisure.

[17] And thy servant has not eaten at Haman's table, and I have not honored the king's feast or drunk the wine of the libations.

[18] Thy servant has had no joy since the day that I was brought here until now, except in thee, O Lord God of Abraham.

[19] O God, whose might is over all, hear the voice of the despairing, and save us from the hands of evildoers. And save me from my fear!"

11. Esther 4:14

(14) For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house will perish; and who knoweth whether thou art not come to royal estate for such a time as this?"

א. אסתר ד:י"ד

(יד) קַי אָמַדְתָּרָשׁ פְּתַרְיְשִׁי בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת רָוֶה
וְהַאֲלָה יַעֲמֹד לִיהְוֹדִים מִמְּקוּם אָחֶר וְאַתָּה
וּבִית-אָבִיךְ פָּאַבְדֹּו וְמַי יַדְעַ אָמְלָעַת כֹּזֶאת
הַגַּעַת לְפָלָכּוֹת:



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