

**MEGILLAT ESTHER / PURIM**

**PART I - Historical Setting**

The following questions consider both the time period and prophetic setting of Megillat Esther. This background will help us better appreciate its prophetic message.

1. Our first step is to create a time line of the major events that lead up to the time period of Megillat Esther. To do so, review the following sources - from Yehoyakim (end of the first Temple period) until the time period of Ezra (beginning of 2nd Temple).  
 Your time line should relate to:

- a. II Divrei Ha'yamim 35:19-36:23 & II Melachim 23:23-25:11  
 Note the years of Yehoyakim and Tzidkiyahu.  
 Note when Galut Yehoyachin (=Yechonya) took place.
- b. Yirmiyahu 25:1-14, 29:1-14. Note especially 24:1 & 29:10.  
 Note (from 25:10-13) how Yirmiyahu foresees seventy years of Babylonian rule. Based on 25:1, when do these seventy years begin?  
 Relate also to 27:4->28:3 & II D.H. 36:19-23!
- c. Ezra 1:1-8, 3:1->4:7.  
 What happened when the 70 years were over? Was the Second Bet Ha'Mikdash built during that year? If not, when was it built? Pay special attention to 4:4-6.  
 [Note that aside from Megillat Esther itself, this is the only other mention of Achashverosh in the entire Tanach.]
- d. Zecharya 1:1-17, pay special attention to 1:12.  
 What are the 70 years that Zecharya refers to? Are they the same '70 years' of Yirmiyahu? In what year (i.e. with what event) did they begin, and in what year did they end? [How many years elapse between Yirmiyahu's seventy years and Zecharya's?  
 Relate to your answer to questions a,b,c (above)!  
 [Relate also to Zecharya 7:1-5.]
- e. Chagai/ review the entire Sefer, note 2:15,18.  
 In what year was the Second Bet Ha'Mikdash built?  
 [See also Ezra 6:13-18.]

2. Based on the above sources and Esther 1:1, in your opinion, did the story of Megillat Esther take place AFTER or BEFORE Yirmiyahu's 70 years were over? [In other words, does it take place after or before the "hatz'harat Koresh" (=the Cyrus Decree/ Ezra 1:1-4)?]

- a. From a prophetic perspective, especially in relation to Yirmiyahu 29:10-14, what is the significance of understanding when the events in Megillat Esther take place?
- b. Where were the Jews 'supposed to be' during this time period? Where were they instead?

3. Based on the above sources alone (and assuming that the Achashverosh mentioned in Ezra chapter 4 is the Achashverosh of Megillat Esther), can you pinpoint WHEN the story in Megillat Esther takes place? [i.e. BEFORE or AFTER Daryavesh?]

- a. Based on Ezra 4:4-7, what TWO possibilities exist?
- b. Based on your answer to 1e (above), is it possible that Achashverosh ruled BETWEEN Koresh and Daryavesh?  
 Based on the historical information that can be inferred from Daniel 10:1, and from the chronology of the events in Megillat Esther, what must one assume in order to accept this possibility?  
 [Is this assumption logical? Explain why yes or not!]
- c. If we accept this assumption, does it explain why Daryavesh allows the Jews to build the Bet Ha'Mikdash in the second year of his reign?
- d. If we accept this assumption, what historical event took approximately 70 years prior to Achashveirosh's six month party described in the first chapter of Megillat Esther?

Do Chazal (in the Midrash) raise this possibility?  
 e. If you have a copy of SEDER OLAM, see how he explains the chronology of events during this time period.  
 In your opinion, is this "pshat"?  
 [See also Mesechet Megilla 11b and Erchin 13a.]

- 4. Based on the second possibility (see 3a above), i.e. that Achashveirosh reigned AFTER Daryavesh, make a list of the Persian Kings mentioned in Tanach (in chronological order).  
 [Be sure to list the Persian king Artachshastah as well (see Ezra 7:1-10, Nechemya 2:1-9).]  
 a. From the Tanach alone (based on the above sources), can one determine HOW many years each of these Persian kings ruled? [Can one determine the minimum amount of years?]  
 b. If indeed Achashveirosh reigned AFTER Daryavesh, how would that affect your answer to question #2 (above)?

5. The table below shows the standard list of the Persian Kings found in most academic history books that cover this time period. Can this list be correlated with the above sources in Tanach? (Does it fit according to question #3 or question #4?)

YEAR (BCE)	KING
538	Cyrus
530	Cambyses
521	Darius (the Great)
486	Xerxes
465	Artaxerxes

Based on this table, attempt to correlate the English (or Greek) names of these kings with the names of the Persian kings mentioned in the Tanach.

- 6. If you have time, scan Sefer Ezra and Nechemya (i.e. read the opening psukim of each perek and then do a quick scan of its content). Based on the events described, does the above time line 'fit' with the events in Sefer Ezra?  
 Why do you think that these seforim do not include an exact, or at least a continuous, chronology of events?  
 What is the purpose of these seforim? What do they describe? Do they share a common theme?

7. In Megillat Esther, the entire Jewish Nation is in peril. Does the Megilla itself provide a prophetic reason for this impending punishment? If yes, what is that reason?  
 If not, why do you think it is omitted?  
 [See Mesechet Megilla 12a (about 20 lines down) - "sha'alu talmidav et Rashbi mipnei mah nitchaivu..."]

- 8. Considering that Chazal include Megillat Esther as part of the Tanach, would it be logical to assume that the book should carry a prophetic message? If so, what is that message?  
 In your opinion, was the book written for the purpose of conveying a prophetic message; or was the book written for the purpose of telling a story, and it just so happens that we can learn a lesson from that story?

Which of these two opinions (in your opinion) make the most sense?

In what manner is Megillat Esther different from most all other books of the Tanach. [You should be able to list several major differences.] Can you explain WHY it is different?  
 Does your answer to question #7 relate to any of them?

- 9. Read Devarim 31:14-21, make special note of 31:17-18 and their context. Chazal, in the Midrash, claim that 31:18 may be the source of the name ESTHER. Can you explain why?  
 Does your answer relate in any way to the above questions?  
 Relate as well to Devarim 4:5-8 & Breishit 18:18-19.  
 Does "hester panim" relate to how God may save Am Yisrael when in trouble, or how God may punish Am Yisrael when they break His covenant?  
 Does "shirat haazinu" deal with this question as well?  
 If so, where, and what is its answer?

## PART II - MEGILLAT ESTHER AND SEFER ZECHARYA

1. Does the Megilla describe the palace of Achashveyrosh in a manner similar to the Bet Ha'Mikdash?

If so, list those textual parallels.

Based on the questions of PART I (the Historical Setting), can you suggest a thematic reason for this parallel?

Why do read "v'keilim m'keilim shonim" (1:7) to the tune of Megillat Eicha?

2. Based on 4:10-11, in what manner is the inner chamber of Achashveyrosh's palace similar to the Kodesh Ha'Kedoshim of the Bet ha'Mikdash?

3. Based (once again) on the historical setting of the Megilla, is there any similarity between God's expectations from Am Yisrael (as a nation) during this time period and the behavior Vashti (in 1:11-12)?

Relate your answer to 1:16-18 as well?

Can you also relate your answer to 3:8?

4. How many days elapse between the first edict sent out by Haman to destroy the Jews (see 3:12-15) and the second edict sent out by Esther & Mordechi which saved the Jews (see 8:9-14).

If you follow the plot of the Megilla, approximately on what day was Haman hung? How many days later did Mordechi and Esther ask Achashveyrosh to intervene to reverse the original edict?

On what approximate date do you think those letters should have gone out? When did they go out instead?

Do you think there is any thematic significance on the date they went out instead, considering the number of days which elapsed in the interim?

Can you relate your answer to Yirmiyahu 25:1-10, 29:1-14?

Does the concept of a day for a year (or visa versa) have any other precedent in Tanach? If so, where? Does it thematically relate to you answer? [Relate also the Yechezkel chapter 4.]

5. In the Megilla, the city of Shushan is called SHUSHAN HA'BIRA. [Note the only other earlier use of the word BIRA in Tanach in Divrei Hayamim chapter 29. Read 29:1-25 and note its context, then note the use of the word BIRA in 29:1 & 29:19.]

What does the word BIRA mean in this perek?

Based on that meaning, does it make sense that SHUSHAN is referred to as a BIRA?

If not, why do you think it is called a BIRA?

Could it relate to the historical setting of the Megilla?

Similarly, compare the amount of silver [kesef] that David ha'melech prepares to build the first Bet ha' Mikdash (see Divrei ha'yamim I 29:7 to the amount of money that Haman give Achashverosh as his 'bribe' to issue the edict against the Jews (see Esther 3:7-10). Would you say that these identical amounts are 'coincidental'?

6. In Tanach, prior to Megillat Esther, is there anyone ever called Mordechi. Does the name stem from a Hebrew word?

Note II Melachim 25:27, where E'vil Merodach, the king of Bavel is mentioned. Is his name similar to Mordechi?

Can you explain why?

Note as well the name of the Babalonyian king mentioned in Yeshayahu 39:1-2.

[Btw, for general information, Marduk is the name of an important Babylonian god.]

7. Review the first 8 chapters of Sefer Zecharya, especially chapter 1, and chapters 7->8.

a. During what year are these nevuot given?

How does this relate to the Megilla?

b. What is the primary message of Zecharya?

How does it relate to the rebuilding of the Mikdash?

c. What does Zecharya expect for the people to do?

d. In chapter 7, what question is being concerning the fast of Tisha b'Av ("tzom ha'chamishi")?

Why is this question being asked at this time?

What is Zecharya's answer? [Read thru 8:19!]

e. Should any of this relate thematically to the Megilla?

8. Below is a list of several textual parallels between the Megilla and Sefer Zecharya. See if you can uncover their thematic connection (in relation to Yerushalayim).

ZECHARYA	MEGILLAT ESTHER
1:1-3	1:11-12
1:8-12,16	2:7 [re:Hadasa/see Mes. Megilla 13a!] 6:8-10
2:5-8	9:19
7:4-9	9:22
8:16-19	9:22, 9:29-31!

9. Read 9:29-32 carefully.

What is the purpose of this 'second letter'?

What does "divrei shalom v'emet" (9:30) mean or refer to?

Why is not mentioned if the 'first letter'?

Is "divrei ha'tzmot vzaakatam" referring to Taanit Esther?

If not, what other fast days could this be referring to?

What is pshat in this pasuk, how does it relate to the reason for the 'second letter'?

How and why would the mitzvah of "matanot l'evyonim" and "mishloach manot ish l'ra'ayhu" relate to Zecharya?

10. Read Zecharya 8:20-23. How does it relate to 8:18-19?

What is the meaning of "ish yehudi" in 8:23.

Is this phrase mentioned anywhere else in Tanach?

[You guessed it, only in the Megilla.]

Based on this, how would interpret Esther 2:5.

Compare Esther 2:5-6 to Yirmiyahu 29:1-14, and relate it to your answer.

11. What would be the thematic significance of these parallels if Achashveyrosh of the Megilla is the Persian King AFTER Daryavesh (see questions PART I).

Would you say that Megillat Esther takes for granted that its reader is familiar with Sefer Zecharya?

[And how about Sefer Yirmiyahu?]

12. Let's say that you were asked to complete the following sentence (after reading the Megilla):

"Was it just by chance that: \_\_\_\_\_ ?"

How many phrases can you come up with that could easily complete the above sentence?

Based on those questions, would you say that the Megilla may be causing the reader to reach a certain conclusion - and if so, what would that conclusion be? Does the Megilla ever state that conclusion explicitly? If not, can you explain why it doesn't?

According to 9:25-28, what is the reason for calling this holiday "purim"? What does the word "pur" refer to - and how does this word relate to things happening 'by chance'?

Can you explain why this name was chosen as most fitting to name this holiday? [Relate this to the above questions.]

13. Based on the above questions, would you say that the Megilla contains a 'hidden' message?

If so, what is it, and why is not explicit?

[What earlier nviim gave explicit rebuke?

Did the people ever listen to those rebukes?]

Can you relate this message to certain halachot regarding Purim, e.g. the law of "mukafot chomah" from the days of Yehoshua bin Nun, "ad d'lo yada", "masaychot", etc.?

Where is the primary city in which we celebrate SHUSHAN Purim? Can you explain why?

b'hatzlacha,  
menachem