

Congregation Or Zarua
Purim Lecture (5786/2026) – Marc D. Ashley
Megillat Esther as Political Drama:
Is the Diaspora Good or Bad for the Jews?



1. Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, *The Jewish Way* at 235

Is it an exaggeration to see in celebration of Purim a substratum of despair? Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow Mordechai may be hanged and a new Haman may be enthroned.

2.

**Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*
Laws of Megillah and Chanukah 2:18**

All Prophetic Books and the Sacred Writings will cease [to be recited in public] during the messianic era except the Book of Esther. It will continue to exist just as the Five Books of the Torah and the laws of the Oral Torah that will never cease. Although ancient troubles will be remembered no longer, as it is written: “*The troubles of the past are forgotten and hidden from my eyes*” (Isaiah 65:16), the days of Purim will not be abolished, as it is written: “*These days of Purim shall never be repealed among the Jews, and the memory of them shall never cease from their descendants*” (Esther 9:28).

כָּל סְפָרֵי הַנְּבִיאִים
וְכָל הַכְּתוּבִים עֲתִידִין לְבָטֵל
לְיָמֹת הַמְּשִׁיחַ חוּץ מִמְּגִלַּת
אֶסְתֵּר וְהָרִי הִיא קִיּוּמָהּ כַּחֲמִשָּׁה
חֻמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה וְכֹהֲלֹכוֹת שֶׁל תוֹרָה
שֶׁבָּעַל פֶּה שְׂאִינֹן בְּטִלִּין לְעוֹלָם.
וְאֵף עַל פִּי שְׂכָל זְכוֹרֹן הַצָּרוֹת
יִבָּטֵל שְׁנֵאַמֵּר (יִשְׁעִיָּה סָה:טז):
כִּי נִשְׁכַּחוּ הַצָּרוֹת הָרָאשׁוֹנוֹת
וְכִי נִסְתָּרוּ מֵעֵינַי.
יָמֵי הַפּוּרִים לֹא יִבָּטְלוּ שְׁנֵאַמֵּר
(אֶסְתֵּר ט:כח):
וְיָמֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה
לֹא יֵעָבְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַיְהוּדִים
וְזָכְרָם לֹא יִסּוּף מִזֶּרְעָם

(1) By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we thought of Zion. (2) There on the poplars we hung up our lyres, (3) for our captors asked us there for songs, our tormentors, for amusement: "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." (4) How can we sing a song of God on alien soil? (5) If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; (6) let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour. (7) Remember, O Eternal One, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall; how they cried, "Strip her, strip her to her very foundations!" (8) Fair Babylon, you predator, a blessing on the one who repays you in kind what you have inflicted on us; (9) a blessing on the one who seizes your babies and dashes them against the rocks!

(א) עַל־נְהַרֹת | בְּבַל שָׁם
 יִשְׁבְּנוּ גַם־בְּכִינוּ בְּזָכְרֵנוּ
 אֶת־צִיּוֹן: (ב) עַל־עַרְבִים
 בַּתּוֹכָהּ תִּלְיֵנוּ כְּנַרְוֹתֵינוּ:
 (ג) כִּי שָׁם שְׂאֲלוּנוּ שׁוֹבֵי־נוּ
 דְּבַר־יְשׁוּר וְתוֹלְלֵינוּ שְׂמִיחָה
 שִׁירוּ לָנוּ מִשִּׁיר צִיּוֹן:
 (ד) אֵיךְ נִשְׁרֵי אֶת־שִׁיר־יְהוָה
 עַל אֲדָמַת נֶכֶר:
 (ה) אָם־אֲשַׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלַם
 תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי:
 (ו) תִּדְבַק־לְשׁוֹנִי | לְחֶכְי
 אִם־לֹא אֲזַכֵּרְכִי אִם־לֹא אֶעֱלֶה
 אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל רֹאשׁ
 שְׂמִיחָתִי: (ז) זָכַר יְהוָה | לְבָנָי
 אֲדָוָם אִתְּ יוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם
 הָאֲמָרִים עָרוּ | עָרוּ עַד הַיְסוּד
 בָּהּ: (ח) בַּת־בְּבַל הַשְּׂדוּדָה
 אֲשֶׁר־י שִׁישְׁלֶם־לָךְ
 אֶת־גְּמוּלָךְ שְׂגַמְלֶת לָנוּ:
 (ט) אֲשֶׁר־י | שִׁיחֲזוּ וְנִפְצַע
 אֶת־עַלְלֶיךָ אֶל־הַסַּלַע:

4. Why are there Jews still in the Diaspora?

- The Babylonians destroyed the First Temple in 586 BCE.
- The Persian empire defeated and conquered the Babylonian empire in 539 BCE, bringing all Jews under Persian control.
- Cyrus the Great (Persia) graciously allowed all exiled Jews the option to return to Judea and rebuild the Holy Temple.
- But post-Cyrus, most Jews continued to live outside of Judea.
- Megillat Esther was written in the Diaspora (ancient Persia), well into the two-century period of Persian rule (if not later).
- ***Diaspora vs. Exile: Why are there still Jews living in the Diaspora at the time of Megillat Esther, when decades earlier they all could have returned to their homeland?! Did those Jews believe they were still in Divine exile?***

5. Megillat Esther: from “exile” to “diaspora”

Jewish oddities of Megillat Esther within Tanakh

- Not a single reference to God (virtually unique in Tanakh)
- No mention of the Second Temple in Jerusalem
- No connection to Davidic dynasty (but, rather, to Saul)
- Limited associations with Jewish law, piety or prayers
- Mordechai encourages Esther to intermarry with King
- And how did Esther keep kosher as Queen?
- No focus on allegiance or return to the Land of Israel
- Textual variants make ME more “religious” in nature

6.

BT Chullin 139b

אסתר מן התורה מנין? (דברים לא:יה) ואנכי הסתר
From where in the Torah can one find an allusion to or
a foretelling of the events of **Esther [in Megillat Esther]**?
*“And I will hide [haster astir] My face on that day for
all the evil which they shall have wrought, in that they
are turned to other gods”* (Deuteronomy 31:17–18).

7. Jeremiah 29:4-7 (from “Judean-ism” to Judaism)

Thus said God of Hosts,
the God of Israel, to the whole
community that I exiled from
Jerusalem to Babylon:
Build houses and live in them,
plant gardens and eat their fruit.
You should take wives and beget
sons and daughters; and you
should take wives for your sons,
and give your daughters to
husbands, that they may bear
sons and daughters.
Multiply there, do not decrease.
And seek the welfare of the city
to which I have exiled you and
pray to God in its behalf; for in
its prosperity you shall prosper.

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֹל־הַגּוֹלָה
אֲשֶׁר־הִגְלִיתִי מִירוּשָׁלַם בְּבָבֶלָה:
בְּנֵי בָתִּים וְיָשְׁבוּ וְנִטְעוּ גִזְזֹת
וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־פְּרִיָן:
קָחוּ נָשִׁים וְהוֹלִידוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת
וּקְחוּ לְבָנֵיכֶם נָשִׁים וְאֶת־בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם
תְּנוּ לְאִנְשֵׁים וְתִלְדְּנָה בָנִים וּבָנוֹת
וְרִבוּ־נֶשֶׁם וְאַל־תִּמְעָטוּ:
וּדְרָשׁוּ אֶת־שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר
אֲשֶׁר הִגְלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה
וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בְּעֵדָה אֵל־יְהוָה
כִּי בְשָׁלוֹמָה יְהִיֶה לָכֶם שְׁלוֹם:

8. Ezekiel 20:33-34; 41-42 (“second Exodus”)

As I live – declares the Lord God – I will reign over you with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with overflowing fury. With a strong hand and an outstretched arm and overflowing fury I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered.

When I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands in which you are scattered, I will accept you as a pleasing odor; and I will be sanctified through you in the sight of the nations. Then, when I have brought you to the land of Israel, to the country that I swore to give to your ancestors, you shall know that I am God.

חִי-אֲנִי נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה
אִם-לֹא בְיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזְרוּעַ
נְטוּיָה וּבְחֲמָה שְׁפוּכָה
אֶמְלֹךְ עֲלֵיכֶם:
וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָעַמִּים
וְקִבַּצְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָאֲרָצוֹת
אֲשֶׁר נְפוּצְתֶם בָּם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה
וּבְזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְחֲמָה שְׁפוּכָה:

בְּרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ אֶרְצָה אֶתְכֶם
בְּהוֹצִיאֵי אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָעַמִּים
וְקִבַּצְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָאֲרָצוֹת
אֲשֶׁר נְפוּצְתֶם בָּם
וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּכֶם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם:
וַיִּדְעוּתֶם כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּהִבִּיאֵי
אֶתְכֶם אֶל-אֶדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי
אֶת-יָדֵי לְתֵת אוֹתָהּ לְאַבוֹתֵיכֶם:

9. Shabbat Shacharit Amidah – Kedushah

<p>From Your place, our King, You will appear and reign over us, for we await You. When will you reign in Zion? Let it be soon, in our time; forever may You dwell there. You will be exalted and sanctified within Jerusalem Your City, for all generations and for all eternity. May our eyes behold Your kingship, as it is described in the psalms of David, the anointed one of your righteousness.</p>	<p>מִמְקוֹמָךְ מַלְכֵנוּ תּוֹפִיעַ וְתִמְלוֹךְ עָלֵינוּ כִּי מַחְכִּים אֲנַחְנוּ לָךְ מִתִּי תִמְלוֹךְ בְּצִיּוֹן בְּקָרוֹב בְּיָמֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד תִּשְׁכּוֹן: תִּתְגַּדֵּל וְתִתְקַדַּשׁ בְּתוֹךְ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִירָךְ לְדוֹר וָדוֹר וּלְגִלְגָּל נִצְחִים: וְעֵינֵינוּ תִרְאֶינָה מַלְכוּתָךְ כַּדָּבָר הָאָמוֹר בְּשִׁירֵי עֲזָרָה עַל יְדֵי דָוִד מְשִׁיחַ צְדָקָךְ</p>
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10. Festival Musaf Amidah

<p>Because of our sins we were exiled from our land and made distant from our soil. . . . Unite our scattered people from among the nations and gather our dispersed from the ends of the earth; lead us with song to Zion, Your city, with everlasting joy to Jerusalem, Your sanctuary.</p>	<p>וּמִפְּנֵי חַטָּאֵינוּ גָּלֵינוּ מֵאֶרְצֵנוּ וְנִתְרַחַקְנוּ מֵעַל אֲדָמָתֵנוּ ***** וְקָרַב פְּזוּרֵינוּ מִבֵּין הַגּוֹיִם וְנִפְּוֹצוֹתֵינוּ כִּנְס מִיַּרְכְּתֵי אֶרֶץ וְהִבִּיאֵנוּ לְצִיּוֹן עִירָךְ בְּרִנָּה וְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם בֵּית מִקְדָּשְׁךָ בְּשִׂמְחַת עוֹלָם</p>
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11. Yehuda Halevi, “My Heart Is In the East” (12th C.)

My heart is in the East,
and I am at the ends of the West;
How can I taste what I eat
and how could it be pleasing to me?

How shall I render my vows and my bonds,
while yet Zion lies beneath the fetter of Edom,
and I am in the chains of Arabia?

I'd gladly leave behind me
all the pleasures of Spain –
if only I might see
the dust and ruins of your Sanctuary.

12. God's "anonymous" presence in Megillat Esther

When Mordechai was told what Esther had said, Mordechai had this message delivered to Esther:
“Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis.”

וַיִּגִּידוּ לְמֹרְדֵכַי
אֵת דְּבַרֵי אֶסְתֵּר:
וַיֹּאמֶר מֹרְדֵכַי לְהָשִׁיב
אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־תְּדַמֵּי בְּנִפְשֶׁךָ
לְהַמְלִיט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ
מִכָּל־הַיְהוּדִים:
כִּי אִם־הִתְרַשׁ תִּתְחַרְשִׁי
בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת רֹחַ וְהִצֵּלָה
יַעֲמֹד לַיהוּדִים מִמְּקוֹם אֲחֵר
וְאַתָּה וּבֵית־אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ
וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לֵיעַת כָּזֹאת
הִגַּעְתָּ לְמַלְכוּת:

13.

Ezra 1:1-2

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of God spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, God roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing as follows:

“Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The Eternal God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building a house [of God] in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.”

וּבְשָׁנַת אֶחָת לְכוֹרֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרִס
לְכָלוֹת דְּבַר-יְהוָה מִפִּי יִרְמְיָהוּ
הַעֵיר יְהוָה אֶת-רוּחַ
כָּרֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ-פָּרִס
וַיַּעֲבֹר-קוֹל בְּכָל-מַלְכוּתוֹ
וְגַם-בְּמִכְתָּב לֵאמֹר:
כִּי אָמַר כָּרֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרִס
כָּל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם
וְהוּא-פָקַד עָלַי לְבָנוֹת-לָו
בַּיִת בִּירוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בְּיְהוּדָה:

14.

Ezra 9:9

For slaves we are, though even in our bondage God has not forsaken us, but has disposed the king of Persia favorably toward us, to furnish us with sustenance and to raise again the House of our God, repairing its ruins and giving us a hold in Judah and Jerusalem.

כִּי-עֲבָדִים אֲנִיחֵנוּ וּבְעַבְדֻתָנוּ
לֹא עֲזָבָנוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַיִּטְעֲלֵינוּ
חֶסֶד לְפָנָיו מֶלֶכִי פָרִס
לְתַת-לָנוּ מַחְיָה לְרוּחָם
אֶת-בַּיִת אֱלֹהֵינוּ וּלְהַעֲמִיד
אֶת-חָרְבֹתָיו וּלְתַת-לָנוּ גִזֵּר
בְּיְהוּדָה וּבִירוּשָׁלַם:

15.

Al ha-Nissim prayer for Purim

For the miracles and for the redemption and for the mighty acts and for the salvation and for the wars that You have done for our forefathers in those days in this season.

In the days of Mordechai and Esther, in Shushan, the capital, when Haman, the wicked, rose up against them and sought to destroy, to slay, and to exterminate all the Jews young and old, infants and women, on the same day, on the thirteenth of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions; *But You, in Your abundant mercy, nullified his counsel and frustrated his intention and brought his evil plan upon his own head* and they hanged him and his sons on the gallows.

עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל הַפְּרָקָן
וְעַל הַגְּבוּרוֹת וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת
וְעַל הַמְּלַחְמוֹת
שְׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה

בַּיָּמִי מְרַדְּכִי וְאַסְתֵּר
בְּשׁוֹשַׁן הַבִּירָה
כְּשֶׁעָמַד עֲלֵיהֶם הַמֶּן הַרְשָׁע
בְּקִישׁ לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרוֹג וּלְאַבֵּד
אֶת כָּל הַיְהוּדִים מִנְּעֵר וְעַד
זָקֵן טַף וְנָשִׁים בְּיוֹם אֶחָד
בְּשִׁלְשָׁה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ
שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר הוּא חֹדֶשׁ אֶדָר
וַיִּשְׁלַח לָבוֹז
וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים
הַפְּרַתְּ אֶת עֲצָתוֹ
וְקִלְקַלְתָּ אֶת מַחְשְׁבֹתוֹ
וְהַשְׁבוֹתָ לוֹ גְּמוּלוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ
וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת בָּנָיו עַל הָעֵץ

16. BT Megillah 13b (Rabbis = God's "hidden" salvation)

<p>“After these events King Achashverosh promoted Haman” (Esther 3:1). The Gemara asks: After what particular events? Rava said: Only after the Holy One, Blessed be He, created a remedy for the ailment and set in place the chain of events – i.e., Mordechai finding favor in the eyes of the king by saving his life – that would lead to the miraculous salvation was Haman appointed, setting the stage for the evil decree against the Jews. Rava explains: As Reish Lakish said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, does not strike at the Jewish people unless He has already created a remedy for them beforehand.</p>	<p>”אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה.” אַחַר מַאי? אָמַר רַבָּא: אַחַר שֶׁבָרָא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא רְפוּאָה לַמֶּכֶה דְּאָמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ: אֵין הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מַכֶּה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶלָּא אִם כֵּן בּוֹרָא לְהֵם רְפוּאָה תְּחִילָה</p>
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17. **Keeping kosher in a Diaspora palace?**

<p><u>Megillat Esther 2:9</u> The maiden pleased him and won his favor, and he hastened to furnish her with her cosmetics <i>and her rations</i>, as well as with the seven maids who were her due from the king's palace; and he treated her and her maids with special kindness in the harem.</p>	<p>וְהַיֵּטֵב הַנְּעָרָה בְּעֵינָיו וַתֵּשֶׂא חֶסֶד לְפָנָיו וַיִּבְהַל אֶת־תְּמָר וְקִיָּה וְאֶת־מְנוּחָהּ לְתֵת לָהּ וְאֵת־שִׁבְעַת הַנְּעָרוֹת הָרָאיוֹת לְתֵת־לָהּ מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁנֶה וְאֶת־נְעָרוֹתֶיהָ לְטוֹב בֵּית הַנְּשִׂיִם:</p>
<p><u>Daniel 1:8-9</u> <i>Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the king's food or the wine he drank,</i> so he sought permission of the chief officer not to defile himself, <i>and God disposed the chief officer to be kind and compassionate toward Daniel.</i></p>	<p>וַיִּשְׂם דָּנִיֵּאל עַל־לְבָו אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִתְגַּאֲל בַּפֶּת־בַּג הַמֶּלֶךְ וּבַיַּיִן מִשְׁתֵּיו וַיִּבְקֹשׁ מִשָּׂר הַסָּרִיסִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִתְגַּאֲל: וַיִּתֵּן הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־דָּנִיֵּאל לְחֶסֶד וְלִרְחָמִים לְפָנָי שָׂר הַסָּרִיסִים:</p>

18. Jewish crisis response – prayer required?

<p><u>Megillat Esther 4:15-16</u></p> <p>Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordechai:</p> <p>“Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast in my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!”</p>	<p>וּתְאָמַר אֶסְתֵּר לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־מָרְדֳּכָי: לְךָ כְּנֹס אֶת־כָּל־הַיְהוּדִים הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאֶל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֶל־תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וַיּוֹם גַּם־אֲנִי וְנַעֲרֹתַי אֲצוּם כֵּן וּבִכֵּן אָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־כֹדֶת וְכִאֲשֶׁר אֶבְדֹתִי אֶבְדֹתִי:</p>
<p><u>Joel 1:14</u></p> <p>Make sacred a fast, proclaim an assembly; gather the elders—all the inhabitants of the land— in the House of the Lord your God, <i>and cry out to the Lord.</i></p>	<p>קִדְשׁוּ־צוּם קִרְאוּ עֲצֻרָה אֶסְפוּ זְקֵנִים כָּל יִשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ בֵּית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְזַעֲקוּ אֶל־יְהוָה:</p>

19. BT Megillah 13a (Rabbis = *frum* Esther)

“And the seven maids chosen to be given her out of the king’s house” (Esther 2:9).

Rava said: She would have a separate maid attend her each day, and she would **count the days of the week by them**, so she was always aware when Shabbat was. The verse continues: “**And he advanced her and her maids** to the best place in the house of the women.” **Rav said:** The advancement in the verse signals **that he fed her food of Jews**, i.e., kosher food. **And Shmuel said** an alternative understanding: The advancement was a well-intentioned act in **that he fed her pig hinds**, thinking she would view it as a delicacy, although in fact they were not kosher. **And Rabbi Yochanan said** a third understanding: He gave her **vegetables**, which did not pose a problem with regard to kosher laws. **And so it states** with regard to the kindness done for Daniel and his associates: “**So the steward took away their food** and the wine that they should drink; **and gave them vegetables**” (Daniel 1:16).

”וַיֵּאֱתָן שִׁבְעַת הַנְּעָרוֹת
וְגו’” . אָמַר רַבָּא:
שְׂפָתֶיהָ מוֹנֶה בְּהֵן
יְמֵי שַׁבָּת.
”וַיִּשְׁנֶה וְאֶת
נְעָרוֹתֶיהָ וְגו’” .
אָמַר רַב:
שְׂפָתֶיהָ כִּלְיָה
מֵאֲכָל יְהוּדִי
וְשִׁמוּאֵל אָמַר:
שְׂפָתֶיהָ כִּלְיָה קַדְלִי
דְחִזִּירִי
וְרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר:
זֵרְעוֹנִים, וְכֵן הוּא
אוֹמֵר:
”וַיְהִי הַמְּלָצָר נוֹשֵׂא
אֶת פֶּת בָּגָם וְנוֹתֵן
לָהֶם זֵרְעוֹנִים”

20. Did Esther observe Passover? (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 8)

“One who observes a commandment will encounter no bad thing” (Eccl. 8:5) —

This refers to Esther, who [was ignorant of Haman’s evil decree against the Jews because she] was busy with the commandment to do away with *chametz*.

21. Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 14b

The order of the Writings is: Ruth and the book of Psalms, and Job and Proverbs; Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations; Daniel and the Scroll of Esther; and Ezra and Chronicles.

סִידְרוֹן שֶׁל כְּתוּבִים:
רוּת וְסֵפֶר תְּהִלִּים
וְאִיּוֹב וּמִשְׁלֵי, קֹהֶלֶת,
שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים וְקִינּוֹת,
דְּבִיאוֹל וּמִגִּילַת
אֶסְתֵּר,
עֶזְרָא וְדָבָרֵי הַיָּמִים

22. “Religious” variants of Megillat Esther

<p><u><i>Traditional text 2:20</i></u> But Esther still did not reveal her ancestry or her people, as Mordechai had instructed her, for Esther obeyed Mordechai’s bidding, as she had done when she was under his tutelage.</p>	<p><u><i>Greek-Jewish variant 2:20</i></u> But Esther still did not reveal her ancestry or her people, as Mordechai had instructed her, <i>to fear God and to do His commandments</i>, for Esther obeyed Mordechai’s bidding, as she had done when she was under his tutelage; <i>so Esther did not change her way of life.</i></p>
<p><u><i>Traditional text 6:1</i></u> That night, sleep deserted the king. . . .</p>	<p><u><i>Greek-Jewish variant 6:1</i></u> But the <i>Mighty One kept sleep from</i> the king that night. . . .</p>

23. Megillat Esther 3:8 (“dual loyalty” accusation)

Haman then said to King Achashverosh:
“There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; and it is not in Your Majesty’s interest to tolerate them.”

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּן
לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ
יֵשְׁנוּ עִם-אֶחָד
מִפְּזָר וּמִפָּרֶד בֵּין הָעַמִּים
בְּכָל מְדִינֹת מְלְכוּתְךָ
וְדַתֵּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכָּל-עַם
וְאֶת-דַּתִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֵינָם עֹשִׂים
וְלַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין-שְׂוָה לְהַנִּיחָם:

**24. Ancient “modern” complexities of Diaspora life
Philo of Alexandria, *Adversus Flaccum* (42 C.E.)
(rebutting alleged Jewish “dual loyalty”)**

For no one country can contain the whole Jewish nation, by reason of its populousness; on which account they frequent all the most prosperous and fertile countries of Europe and Asia, whether islands or continents, looking indeed upon the holy city [Jerusalem] as their metropolis [i.e., “mother city”] in which is erected the sacred temple of the most high God, but accounting those regions which have been occupied by their fathers, and grandfathers, and great grandfathers, and still more remote ancestors, in which they have been born and brought up, as their country. . . .

25. Megillat Esther 2:5-6 (Mordechai introduced)

In the fortress Shushan lived a Jew by the name of Mordechai, son of Yair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite.

[Kish] had been exiled from Jerusalem in the group that was carried into exile along with King Yechoniah of Judah, who had been driven into exile by King Nevuchadnezzar of Babylon.

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה
בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבְּיָרָה
וּשְׁמוֹ מֹרְדֳּכַי בֶּן יָאִיר
בֶּן-שִׁמְעִי בֶּן-קַיִשׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי:
אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם
עַם-הַגְּלוּת אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָתָהּ
עִם יְכַנְיָה מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה
אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה
נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל:

26. **Megillat Esther 10:1-3 (conclusion)**

King Achashverosh imposed a tax on the mainland and the islands of the sea. The whole account of his might and power, and the story of Mordechai's advancement – when he was promoted by the king – those are written in the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. For Mordechai the Jew was second to King Achashverosh, great among the Jews; *he was well received by the majority of his brethren*, seeking favor for his people and advocating for the welfare of all his kindred.

וַיִּשֶׂם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ
מִסַּעַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֵי תַיִם:
כָּל-מַעֲשֵׂה תְקוּפוֹ וּגְבוּרָתוֹ
וּפְרָשֵׁת גְּדֻלַּת מָרְדֳּכַי אֲשֶׁר
גִּדְּלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ הַלְוֵאִי-הֵם
כְּתוּבִים עַל-סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי
הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי מִדְיָ וּפָרַס:
כִּי מָרְדֳּכַי הִיְהוּדִי
מִשָּׁנָה לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ
וְגָדוֹל לַיְהוּדִים וְרָצוּי לַרַב
אֲחִיו דִּירֵשׁ טוֹב לְעַמּוֹ
וְדִבֵּר שָׁלוֹם לְכָל-זָרְעוֹ:

27. **BT Megillah 16b (politics at expense of Torah)**

“For Mordechai the Jew was second to the king Achashverosh, and great among the Jews, and accepted by the majority of his brethren” (Esther 10:3).

The Gemara comments: The verse indicates that Mordecai was accepted only **“By the majority of his brethren,”** but *not* by all his brethren.

This teaches that some members of the Sanhedrin separated from him, because he occupied himself with community needs [i.e., politics], and was thus compelled to neglect Torah study. They felt that he rather should have remained more active on the Sanhedrin.

”כִּי מְרַדְכַי הַיְהוּדִי
מִשְׁנֵה לְמֶלֶךְ
אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ
וְגָדוֹל לַיְהוּדִים
וְרָצוּי לְרֹב אֶחָיו.”
”לְרֹב אֶחָיו
וְלֹא לְכָל אֶחָיו.
מִלְמַד שְׁפִירְשׁוּ מִמֶּנּוּ
מִקְצַת סְנֵהֲדָרִין

28. Genesis 45:4-8 (Joseph and his brothers)

<p>Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come forward to me.” And when they came forward, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt. Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. It is now two years that there has been famine in the land, and there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling. God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God—who has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt.</p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הַעֲוֹד אָבִי חִי וְלֹא-יָכֵלוּ אֶחָיו לְעַנּוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו גִּשׁוּ-נָא אֵלַי וַיִּגְשׁוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֶחֱיָכֶם אֲשֶׁר-מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי מִצְרַיִם: וְעַתָּה אֵל-תִּעַצְבוּ וְאֶל-יַחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי-מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי הֲנִי כִּי לְמַחֲזָה שָׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹהִים לְפָנֵיכֶם: כִּי-זֶה שְׁנַתִּים הָרַעַב בְּקָרֵב הָאָרֶץ וְעוֹד חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין-תָּרִישׁ וְקֹצֵיר: וַיִּשְׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹהִים לְפָנֵיכֶם לְשׁוֹם לְכֶם שְׂאֵרִית בְּאָרֶץ וְלִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לְפָלִיטָה גְדֹלָה: וְעַתָּה לֹא-אַתֶּם שָׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הֲנִי כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים וַיְשִׁימֵנִי לְאָב לְפָרְעֹה וְלְאֲדוֹן לְכָל-בֵּיתוֹ וּמֵשֶׁל בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:</p>
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29. Exodus 1:8

<p>A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.</p>	<p>וַיִּקָּם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יוֹסֵף:</p>
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30. **Elihu Katz and Menahem Blondheim,**
***Home Away From Home* (Tablet – March 2012)**

What is more surprising is that some stories about living in Diaspora are not about returning to the homeland, or fighting back against their oppressors, but about remaining in exile and making the most of that situation – the dream of Remain.

Of all the scrolls, Esther is the most explicit illustration of the dream of Remain. . . . There is no mention in the Book of Esther of the most obvious Diaspora dream, that of Return. There is no talk in Esther of fleeing, or going back to the Promised Land – only a concern with living safely in Persia. Living openly and freely as Jews in a foreign land is the dream, and in the Book of Esther, that dream is realized.

Esther's message is that Remain – staying put, but safely – is a worthy dream.

“Esther panel” in ancient Dura Europos synagogue
(third-century CE Syria – eastern Diaspora)

