

Who's Who in the Megilla

Class #1 Achashverosh and Vashti

INTRODUCTION: THE PROPHECY

1)Jeremiah 25:11-12

... And these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. And it shall be, when seventy years are complete, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, says the Lord, for their sin, and the land of the Chaldeans, and I shall make it desolate forever.

2)Jeremiah 29:10

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 kindness —to bring you back to this place.

3)Daniel 9:2

In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, contemplated the calculations, the number of years about which the word of Hashem came to Jeremiah the prophet, to complete the 70 years since the ruin of Jereusalem.

4)Megilla 12A

Daniel also made a mistake in this calculation, as it is written, "In the first year of his reign, I Daniel meditated in the books [etc.]" (Daniel 9:2). From his use of the words "I meditated," we can infer that he [at first] made a mistake.

Calendar:

Year	Event
3318	Nevuchadnetzar assumes the throne of Babylon
3319	Nevuchadnetzar conquers Yehoyakim, king of Judea and exiles the youth . The Jewish land becomes a vassal state of Babylon.
3327	Nevuchadnetzar exiles Yehoyachin, along the royal family, Torah scholars, and civil and military leadership .
3338	Nevuchadnetzar destroys the Beit Hamikdash and exiles the rest of the Jewish nation .
3389	Belshazzar miscalculates the 70 years from Nevuchadnetzar's conquest. He celebrates and dies.

3390	Cyrus orders the construction of the Beit Hamikdash (which is 70 years from the first stage of galut/exile)
3392	Achashverosh becomes king and orders the cessation of the building of the Beit Hamikdash
3395	Achashverosh calculates the 70 years are over. (He counted 70 years from when Yehoyachin and the leading scholars were exiled) Achashverosh makes a party in the 3 rd year of his reign. Although only 68 calendar years have elapsed, he follows the ancient royal custom of counting a fraction of a year as a full year.
3406	Achashverosh dies and is succeeded by Darius, son of Esther
3408	Darius orders the construction of the Beit Hamikdash again. It is 70 years since the destruction of the Temple.

WHO WAS ACHASHVEROSH?

5)Rashi, Esther 1:1

He was [the] Achashverosh. He was equally wicked from beginning to end.

Who reigned. He reigned on his own, and was not of royal seed.

6)Megilla 11A

And when these days were fulfilled (Esther 1:5). Rav and Shmuel, One said he was a clever king, and the other said that he was a foolish king. The one who said he was a clever king said that he did well in entertaining his distant subjects first, because he could win over the inhabitants of his own city any time he wished. The one who held that he was foolish says that he ought to have entertained the inhabitants of his city first, so that if the others rebelled against him, these would have supported him.

7)THE AGENDA OF THE PARTY:

a)To celebrate the downfall of the Jewish people

Megilla 12a:

When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom (Esther 1:4): R. Yose b. Hanina said: This shows that he arrayed himself in priestly robes. It is written here, "And the riches of his glorious [tif'eret] kingdom," and it is written elsewhere [in connection with the priestly garments], "For splendor and for glory, [tif'eret]" (Exodus 28:2).

Megilla 12b:

The verse states: “**And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, the vessels being diverse [shonim] from one another”** ([Esther 1:7](#)). The Gemara asks: Why does the verse use the term *shonim* to express that they are different? **It should have said** the more proper term *meshunim*. **Rava said: A Divine Voice issued forth and said to them: The early ones,** referring to [Belshazzar](#) and his people, **were destroyed because they used these vessels,** the vessels of the Temple, **and yet you use them again [shonim]?**

b)To demonstrate his unlimited power

Malbim, Esther Chapter 1:(Tranlsated by Rabbi Jonathan Taub)

And after he conquered all these countries, in order to consolidate his power, he married Vashti, a descendant of Nevuchadnetzar, [the former emperor of the Babylonian empire], and heiress to the throne. Now his position was doubly assured. His wife was successor to the throne and he, himself, had conquered the empire. If his claim to power rested on his conquest, his dominion would be unlimited; if, however, it was based on his wife’s claim to the throne, the monarch’s power would be limited. Originally, the provinces of the empire had acceded to Achashverosh’s dominion in the belief tht his claim to power rested on his wife’s inheritance of the throne and his monarchy was consequently, limited in power. Achashverosh, though, wanted limitless power, and this was his prime motive in moving the capital city to Shushan, in hosting his huge banquet, and in commanding Vashti to appear before him.

Malbim, Esther Chapter 1: (Tranlsated by Rabbi Jonathan Taub)

At the outset of his rule, his power was so strong that he decided to move the royal residence from Bayblon to Shushan. This would achieve two aims. First, it would show that he intended to rule with unlimited power and was not afraid of public displeasure at the change of location. Second, it would demonstrate his “eminent status.” Generally, when a commoner accedes to the throne, it is an honor for him to be able to sit on the same throne as his royal predecessors. He would not construct a new one for himself because doing so would deprive him of the honor that the old throne conferred. Achashverosh, however, was so arrogant that he ignored all his predecessors, constructing a new throne and moving the capital city to Shushan. This demonstrated that it was not public consent that gave him dominion over his kingdom, but his conquest.

In order to rule with absolute power, Achashverosh displayed the wealth of his glorious kingdom as if it belonged to him, available for his own personal use through his accession to the throne.

8) Esther, Chapter 1

1 Now it came to pass **in the days of Ahasuerus -- he was the Ahasuerus** who reigned from Hodu to Cush, one hundred twenty-seven provinces.

2 In those days, when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in **Shushan the capital**.

3 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.

4 When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the **splendor of his excellent majesty**, many days, yea one hundred and eighty days.

5 And when these days were over, the king made for all the people present in Shushan the capital, for [everyone] both great and small, a banquet for seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's orchard.

6 [There were spreads of] white, fine cotton, and blue, embroidered with cords of linen and purple, on silver rods and marble columns; couches of gold and silver, on a pavement of green, white, shell, and onyx marble.

7 And they gave them to drink in golden vessels, **and the vessels differed from one another**, and royal wine was plentiful according to the bounty of the king.

8 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.

אוֹיְהִי בַיָּמִי אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הוּא
אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ מֵהֹדוּ וְעַד-כּוּשׁ
שְׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה :

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם כָּשְׁבַת אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ
אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ עַל כֶּסֶף מְלֻכּוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר
בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה :

גַּבְשַׁת שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמֶלְכוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה
לְכָל-שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו חֵיל אֶפְרַס וּמְדֵי
הַפְּרָתִימִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינּוֹת לִפְנָיו :

דַּבְּהָרָאתוֹ אֶת-עֶשֶׂר כְּבוֹד מְלֻכּוֹתָיו
וְאֶת-יָקָר תְּפָאֶרֶת גְּדוּלָּתוֹ יָמִים
רַבִּים שְׁמוֹנִים וּמֵאָת יוֹם :

הַיּוֹבְמְלָאוֹת (וּבְמְלוֹאת כְּתִיב) אֶל
הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל-
הָעָם הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה
לְמַגְדוֹל וְעַד-קֶטֶן מִשְׁתֵּה שְׁבַעַת
יָמִים בַּחֲצָר גִּנַּת בֵּיתוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ :

וַחֲוֹר אֶפְרַס וּתְכֵלֶת אַחוּז בְּחַבְלֵי
בוֹץ וְאַרְגָּמָן עַל-גְּלִילֵי כֶסֶף וְעַמּוּדֵי
שֵׁשׁ מְטוֹת אֶזְהָב וְכֶסֶף עַל רַצְפֹּת
בַּהֲטוֹשׁשׁ וְדָר וְסַחֲרֹת :

זֶה שְׁקוֹת בְּכֵלֵי זָהָב וְכֵלִים
מְכֵלִים שׁוֹנִים וַיֵּין מְלֻכּוֹת רַב כֶּנֶד
הַמֶּלֶךְ :

חֹהֲשֵׁתֶיּהּ כְּדַת אֵין אִנֶּס כִּי־כֹן אֶל
יֶסֶד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל כָּל-רַב בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת
כְּרָצוֹן אִישׁ-רְאִישׁ :

9Also, Vashti the queen made a banquet for the women, in the royal house of King Ahasuerus.

טגם וּשְׂתֵי הַמְּלָכָה עָשְׂתָה מִשְׁתֵּה נָשִׁים בַּיִת הַמְּלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ :

10On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Bizzetha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains who ministered in the presence of King Ahasuerus.

יַבְיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כְּטוֹב לִבְהֶמְלֶךְ בִּיָּין אָמַר לְמַהוּמָן בִּזְתָּה חַרְבוֹנָא בְּגִתָּה וְאַבְגָּתָה זֶתָר וְכַרְכָּס שִׁבְעַת הַסְּרִיסִים הַמְּשֻׁרְתִים אֶת־פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ :

11To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the royal crown, to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was of comely appearance.

יֵאֱלֹהִיָּא אֶת־וּשְׂתֵי הַמְּלָכָה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּכֶתֶר מַלְכוּת לְהִרְאוֹת הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים אֶת־יְפִיָּהּ כִּי טוֹבַת מְרָאָה הִיא :

12But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's behest which was [brought] by the hand of the chamberlains, and the king became very wroth, and his anger burnt within him.

יְבוֹתְמָאֵן הַמְּלָכָה וּשְׂתֵי לְבוֹא בְּדָבָר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר בְּיַד הַסְּרִיסִים וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד וַחֲמָתוֹ בָּעָרָה בּוֹ :

9)The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Copied from The Book of Esther with Commentary, Kehot Publication Society)

Why must we read a detailed report of Achashverosh's extravagances: The colors of the drapes, the couches, the marble floors, the vessels, the service, the flowing wine? Vashti's refusal to appear before her husband truly sets the story in motion and leads to Esther's ascension to the throne. Why not begin there? Perhaps the Megilla wants to convey this message: Achashverosh planned a feast to woo his citizenry; he withheld nothing from his guests. He lavished upon them every opulence he could offer. Anyone who can influence his or her surroundings should do the same. We should invest ourselves completely and generously in the pursuit of our tasks. A fundraiser for Jewish education who raises one million dollars but has the capacity to raise two million has not fulfilled his obligation – not to himself, not to G-d, not to the Jewish people. Those blessed with the ability to influence such as writers and artists should use their gifts to convey the message that G-d directs the universe, and that this world ultimately has purpose and meaning. Just as the approval-hungry king poured all he had into his project, so should we use all we are given to further the awareness of G-d and the beauty of his His universe to all who dwell in it.

THE POWER STRUGGLE:

10)Malbim, Esther Chapter 1:(Tranlsated by Rabbi Jonathan Taub)

Achashverosh married Vashti, the granddaughter of Nevuchadnetzar, the former ruler of the Babylonian empire. As a result, their rule was accepted by the people, Vashti being the heiress to the throne. Achashverosh, though wanted to rule with absolute power, and wanted all the provinces to acknowledge that his authority was unconditional. Now, however, his marriage to Vashti was a liability. It reminded people that his claim to throne came through Vashti and was not, therefore, the absolute rule of conquest. He plotted to show that he had not married Vashti because of her title to the throne, owing his position to his wife, but that following his conquest the Babylonina dynasty ceased to exist, Vashti becoming one of his captives. He had married her, according to his historical revisionism, because of her beauty....**"Vashti the queen"** indicates that she was first and foremost "Vashti." Her name preceded her claim to the throne, which according to Achashverosh's version of events, came only through her marriage to him.... Vashti disobeyed the king's command because she was aware that his intention was to degrade her in order that no one think that she had any title as queen in her own right. Therefore **"Queen Vashti refused"** – the description "queen" preceded her name "Vashti," indicating that her title came before her name, through her birth into royalty. This refusal was initiated by two slights to her honor. First the king's bidding itself commanded her to appear as a commoner without her royal crown. Second, it was conveyed by the chamberlains. To be escorted by lowly chamberlains would be a humiliation.

Shouldn't we be proud of ושתוי for standing up for women's rights?

WHO WAS VASHTI?

11)Tractate Megilla 10B

The wicked Vashti was the daughter of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, who burned the ceiling of the house of Hashem.

12)Esther Rabbah 5:2

Why did this befall her? Because she would not allow Achashverosh to grant permission to build the Temple, saying to him: You are seeking to build what my ancestors destroyed? "The king's lads, his attendants, said..." ¹³*She was killed so Esther could replace her, and the Temple could be rebuilt.* ([Esther 2:2](#)).

13)Talmud, Megila 12a-b:

“Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women, in the royal house,” which belonged to King Ahasuerus” ([Esther 1:9](#)). The Gemara questions why she held the feast in the royal house, a place of men, rather than in the women’s house, where it should have been. Rava said in response: **The two of them had sinful intentions.**

The Gemara continues to detail what occurred at the feast. **So too, at the feast of that wicked man, Ahasuerus, when the men began to converse, some said: The Median women are the most beautiful, while others said: The Persian women are the most beautiful. Ahasuerus said to them: The vessel that I use, i.e., my wife, is neither Median nor Persian, but rather Chaldean. Do you wish to see her? They said to him: Yes, provided that she be naked, for we wish to see her without any additional adornments.**

The Gemara comments: Vashti was punished in this humiliating way **for it is with the measure that a man measures to others that he himself is measured.** In other words, God punishes individuals in line with their transgressions, measure for measure. **This teaches that the wicked Vashti would take the daughters of Israel, and strip them naked, and make them work on Shabbat.** Therefore, it was decreed that she be brought before the king naked, on Shabbat. This is as it is written: **“After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her”** ([Esther 2:1](#)). That is to say, **just as she had done with the young Jewish women, so it was decreed upon her.**

The verse states: **“But the queen Vashti refused to come”** ([Esther 1:12](#)). The Gemara asks: **Since she was immodest, as the Master said above: The two of them had sinful intentions, what is the reason that she did not come? Rabbi Yosei bar Hanina said: This teaches that she broke out in leprosy,** and therefore she was embarrassed to expose herself publicly. An alternative reason for her embarrassment **was taught in a baraita: The angel Gabriel came and fashioned her a tail.**

The verse continues: **“Therefore the king was very wrathful, and his anger burned in him”** ([Esther 1:12](#)). The Gemara asks: **Why did his anger burn in him so greatly merely because she did not wish to come? Rava said: Vashti not only refused to come, but she also sent him a message by way of a messenger: You, son of my father’s stableman [ahuriyyarei]. Belshazzar, my father, drank wine against a thousand men and did not become inebriated,** as the verse in [Daniel \(5:1\)](#) testifies about him: **“Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand”; and that man, referring euphemistically to Ahasuerus himself, has become senseless from his wine.** Due to her audacity, **immediately “his anger burned in him”** ([Esther 1:12](#)).

14)Otzar Midrashim:

She refused to go because she started to **menstruate** and was unable to conceal this.

Why do you think Vashti deserved these punishments specifically?

a) Leprosy:

b) Tail:

Maimonides, Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin, Perek Chelek

...The third group consists of people to whom the greatness of the sages is clear. They recognize the superiority of their intelligence from their words which point to exceedingly profound truths..... The members of this group understand that the sages knew as clearly as we do the difference between the impossibility of the impossible and the existence of that which must exist. **They know that the sages did not speak nonsense, and it is clear to them that the words of the sages contain both an obvious and hidden meaning.** Thus, whenever the sages spoke of things that seem impossible, they were employing the style of riddle and parable which is the method of truly great thinkers....

c) Menstruation: