

## Esther - the book of the hidden

In the period of *Mordechai* and *Esther*, as described in the *Book of Esther*, the Jewish people faced a ruthless enemy bent on extermination. His defeat is still celebrated on the joyous festival of Purim.

The heroine of the story is *Esther*, chosen by *Ahasverus*<sup>1</sup> to replace Queen Vashti.

Seeking some hint of *Esther* and *Purim* story in the Torah, the Sages<sup>2</sup> point to the similarity between the name אֶסְתֵּר - *Esther*, and the warning of the Lord:<sup>3</sup>

"וְאֵנֹכִי אֶסְתֵּר אֶסְתֵּיר פְּנֵי בְיוֹם הַהוּא"  
"*And I will surely hide my face on that day*".

On which Rashi commented:

*"During the time of Esther  
there will be a hiding of the  
face, and this will be a time of  
great troubles."*

The *Book of Esther* seems, on the surface, a secular story, a Hollywood style plot of intrigues in the royal household, beauty contests, and political power struggles between various factions, an historical narrative bereft of any unnatural or supernatural elements, bereft of any miracles.

God's presence is not evident, and His name is not mentioned once in the entire *Book of Esther*.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Biblical scholars have variously described the *Book of Esther* as:

**"a sort of historical novel",  
"a mythological tale", or  
"a tale from A Thousand and One Nights".<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Identified as Xerxes I, who reigned in Persia from 485-465 BCE.

<sup>2</sup> *Chulin* 119.

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 31:18.

<sup>4</sup> It is hinted at, though, in the first or last letters of the phrases יְבוֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֵּן הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, "*Let the King and Haman com today*" (5:4), וְכֵן זֶה אֵינְנוֹ שׂוֹהֵ לִי, "*And none of this matters to me*" (5:13), and כִּי כִלְתָהּ עָלָיו הַרְעָה, "*For the wrath descended upon him*" (7:7).

<sup>5</sup> "Encyclopaedia Biblica" (Encyclopedia Mikrait) Bialik Institute, Jerusalem 1955, *Esther*, pp. 488-489.

Jewish tradition views the *Book of Esther* very differently.

We read in the *Book of Esther* about the plan by *Haman Ben Hamdata*, a descendant of Amalek, to exterminate the Jewish people on a scale the likes of which had never before been witnessed:

*"... to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, young and old, little children and women."*

Thanks to Queen *Esther's* successful diplomacy and lobbying in the royal palace, the terrible edict was rescinded. The Jews then turned the tables on their enemies, culminating in the execution by hanging of the ten sons of *Haman*, whose names are listed so prominently in the narrative.

An intriguing dialogue takes place between Queen *Esther* and *Ahasverus* a few verses later:<sup>6</sup>

*And the King said to Esther the Queen: The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the capital, and the ten sons of Haman; ... Now whatever your petition, it shall be granted; whatever your request further, it shall be done.*

*Then said Esther: If it please the King, let it be granted to the Jews that are in Shushan to do tomorrow also as this day, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.*

Esther's request seems somewhat strange. **The ten sons of Haman had already been killed<sup>7</sup>, why bother to hang them?**

In the writings of the Sages and the commentators, we find several ideas that could clarify this:

On the word "**tomorrow**"<sup>8</sup>, in *Esther's* request, the Sages comment:<sup>9</sup>

*"There is a tomorrow that is now, and a tomorrow which is later."*

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<sup>6</sup> *Esther* 9:12-14.

<sup>7</sup> *Rashi* on *Esther* 9:13

<sup>8</sup> *Esther* 9:13

<sup>9</sup> *Tanchuma* Bo 13; *Rashi* on *Exodus* 13:14.

In other words, *Esther* was asking that the hanging of *Haman's* ten sons not remain an isolated episode in history, but should recur in the future, as well. Yet, if this is the case, surely King *Ahasverus* was in no position to accede to such a request. Only God could make and keep such a promise.

An examination of the sources solves this problem, too. According to the Sages,<sup>10</sup> every time **King Ahasverus** is mentioned by name in the *Book of Esther*, the reference is to him; whenever the word המלך - **the King**, appears on its own, it refers to God.

Esther was therefor not addressing her request to **Ahasverus**, but to **God** - who granted her request:

*"And the King commanded it  
be done."*

*(Esther 9:14)*

We know from the Talmud that *Esther* spoke with Divine inspiration,<sup>11</sup> and whoever speaks with Divine inspiration will foresee the future with divine help.<sup>12</sup> Therefor we should expect that *Esther's* prophecy would come true.

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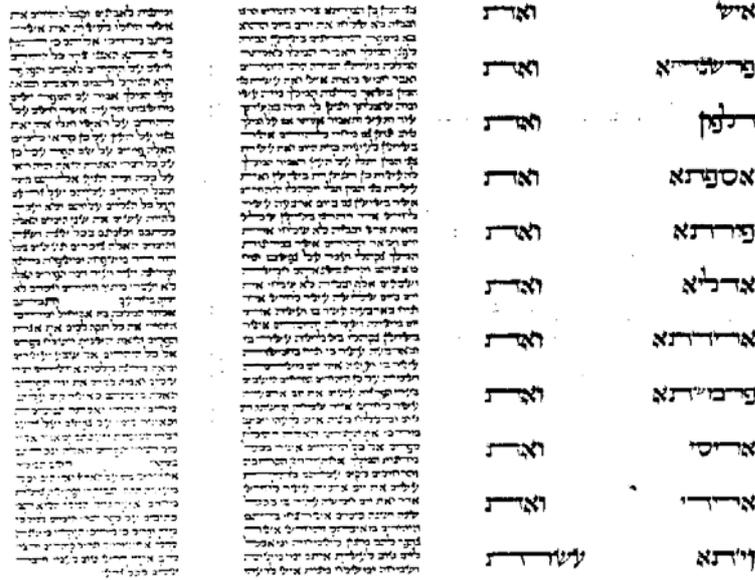
<sup>10</sup> *Esther Rabba* 3:10

<sup>11</sup> *Megilla* 7a.

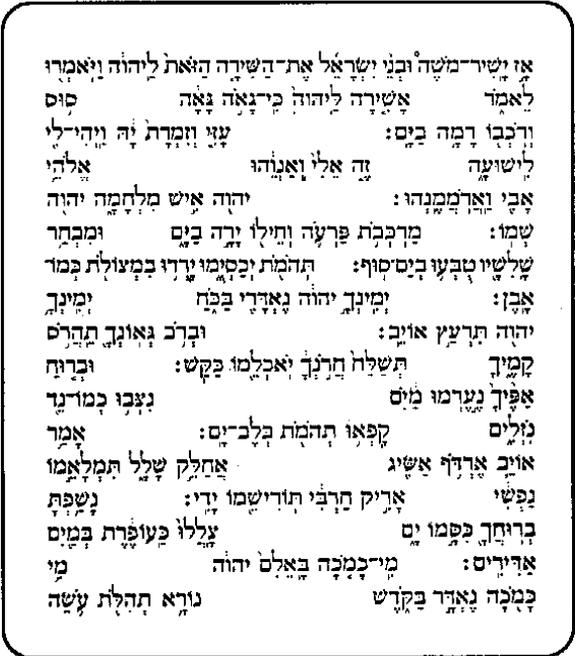
<sup>12</sup> *Rabbeinu Bahya* on Leviticus 8:8' Maimonide's *Guide to the Perplexed* Part 2, 45.

# Has it in fact come true?

In answer to this question, let us look at the scroll depicted below which clearly shows, at first glance, that the list of *Haman's* sons appears on a separate page, written in a prominent, unusual manner.



The Talmud<sup>13</sup> explains that Biblical narratives are written with no breaks between sentences, songs of praise (e.g. The Song of the sea, Exodus 15) in a staggered brickwork pattern...



<sup>13</sup> Megilla 16b.

...while the passage on *Haman's* sons is written in a narrow pattern. According to Talmudical scholars, the narrow base of this structure figuratively and literally allows *Haman's* sons no handhold to rise from their downfall.

Turning from the structural design of the passage, let us now examine the text itself.

The left-hand column contains the word **וְאֵת** (and) ten times. According to the Sages, the word **וְאֵת** is used to denote replication. Thus, we have to conclude that **another 10** people were hung addition to *Haman's* 10 sons.<sup>14</sup>

## Which ten others were hung?

For the answer, we must jump 2,300 years forward...

## The day of the verdict

Special newspaper editions on October 16, 1946 reported the execution of ten war criminals found guilty by the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal.



<sup>14</sup> see *Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez on Esther* (Jerusalem: Or Hadas, 5734), p. 237.

Amazingly, this outcome is hinted at in the *Book of Esther*!

Nachmanides, in the introduction to his commentary on Genesis, says:

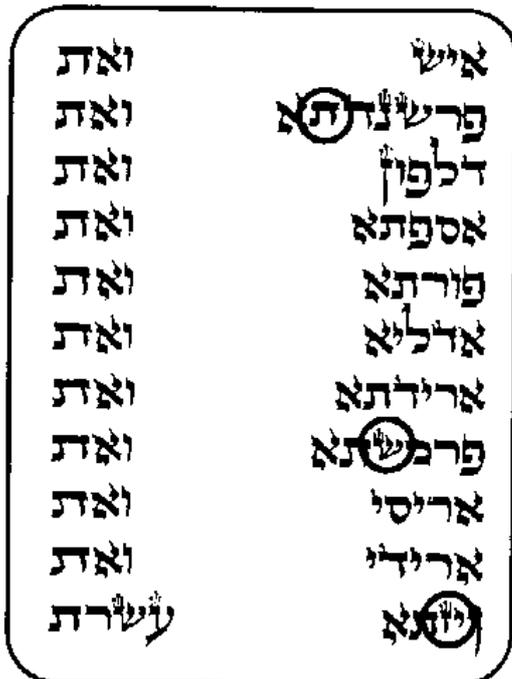
*"Everything is written in the Torah. explicitly or implicitly, hinted in words, in numerical values, in the shape of the letters (whether written in regular or altered from), or in the tips and crownlets of the letter."*

If we examine the list of *haman's* sons, we notice that three letters are written smaller:

The ת of פֶּרְשֵׁי נְדָהָא

The ש of פְּרַמְטָתָא

The י of וִיחַתָּא<sup>15</sup>



The three letters together form תש"ז - the Jewish year 5707 (1946 C.E.), the year that the ten Nazi criminals were executed.

<sup>15</sup> Based on the Zohar (Vayera, antique edition 117), the enlarged י of וִיחַתָּא may refer to the sixth millennium.

Of the 23 Nazi war criminals on trial in Nuremberg, 11 were in fact sentenced to execution by hanging. Two hours before the sentence was due to be carried out, **Goering** committed suicide - so that only 10 descendents of Amalek were hung,<sup>16</sup> thus fulfilling the request of *Esther*:

*"let Haman's **ten** sons be hanged."*

Furthermore, since a military tribunal conducted the trial, the sentence handed down should have been death by firing squad, or by electric chair as practiced in the U.S.A. However, The court specifically prescribed **hanging**, exactly as in Esther's original request:

*"...let Haman's ten sons be **hanged**."*

Though doubts may linger about the connection between the *Book of Esther* and the Nazi war criminals, the condemned **Julius Streicher** certainly had none.

Streicher was editor of the notorious Nazi weekly *Der Stürmer*, which for 22 years disseminated venom and hate against the Jewish people by publishing some of the most virulently anti-Semitic diatribes in history.



Through some insight, Streicher appears to have grasped this link to *Purim*, as revealed by his final shout, with the noose about his neck, mere seconds before he was hanged.

Let us examine reports by eyewitnesses to Streicher's last moments in the execution chamber:<sup>17</sup>

"Streicher appeared in the chamber... his scream of Heil Hitler sent a shiver down the back... as he mounted to the platform, he called: '*And now it goes to God.*'"

He glared at allied officers and the eight Allied correspondents representing the world's press who were lined up facing the gallows.

With burning hatred in his eyes. Streicher looked down at the witnesses and shouted: "*Purim Fest 1946!*"<sup>18 19</sup>

"At the moment the trap was sprung with a loud bang, when the rope snapped taut and the body swung wildly, a groan could be heard distinctly from within the dark interior of the scaffold... ."

Both Goering and Streicher had thus become instruments in the fulfillment of *Esther's* prophecy.

If this "coincidences" are not enough, examine the calendar for that month. The date of the execution (October 16, 1946) fell on the Jewish festival of "**Hoshana Rabba**" (21 *Tishrei*), which is the day God's verdicts are sealed.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> S.Z. Sonnenfeld (ed) *The Man on the Wall* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem (5736) p. 108, relates the tradition, based on the Vilna Gaon, that the German nation descended from *Amalek*.

<sup>17</sup> L. Snyder & R. B. Morris, *Treasury of Great Reporting* (in Hebrew), Achiasaf, Jerusalem (5723), p. 225; B.C. Andrus, *I Was the Nuremberg Jailer*, Coward-McCann, NY p. 197.

<sup>18</sup> *The New York Herald Tribune*, October 16, 1946.

<sup>19</sup> Streicher knew well the story of Purim, having distorted it to sow anti-Semitic sentiment in his *Der Stürmer* article *Das Purimfest*, May 1924, No. 7, P. 3.e

<sup>20</sup> Traditional belief based on *Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana* 84:8 and *Zohar Tzav* 32, which states the seventh day of Sukot (Hoshana Rabba) is the day of final judgment.

# ה'תש"ז (5707) — 1946-47

תשרי SEP.-OCT.						
ראשון SUN	שני MON	שלישי TUE	רביעי WED	חמישי THU	ששי FRI	שבת SAT
—	—	—	—	א 26 יום ראשון	ב 27 יום ראשון	ג 28 יום ראשון
ד 29 יום ראשון	ה 30 יום ראשון	ו 1 יום ראשון	ז 2 יום ראשון	ח 3 יום ראשון	ט 4 יום ראשון	י 5 יום ראשון
יא 6 יום ראשון	יב 7 יום ראשון	יג 8 יום ראשון	יד 9 יום ראשון	טו 10 יום ראשון	טז 11 יום ראשון	יז 12 יום ראשון
יח 13 יום ראשון	יט 14 יום ראשון	כ 15 יום ראשון	כא 16 יום ראשון	כב 17 יום ראשון	כג 18 יום ראשון	כד 19 יום ראשון
כה 20 יום ראשון	כו 21 יום ראשון	כז 22 יום ראשון	כח 23 יום ראשון	כט 24 יום ראשון	ל 25 יום ראשון	—

This was the very day they were hanged. As we have said, all is hinted in the Torah!