

Jews in Foreign Courts - from the Bible till today

1. The context: fragmentation and feasting

Esther:

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ מֵהַדּוֹ וְעַד-כּוֹשׁ שִׁבְעַת וָעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה... בַּשָּׁנָה שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמַלְכוּתוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה לְכָל-שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו... וְהַשְּׂקוֹת בְּכָלֵי זָהָב וּכְלִים מְכֻלִּים שׁוֹנִים וְגַיַן מַלְכוּת רַב כְּנֶד הַמֶּלֶךְ: בְּהִרְאֹתוֹ אֶת-עֹשֶׂר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת-יָקָר תְּפָאֶרֶת גְּדוּלְתוֹ...

It happened in the days of Ahasuerus—that Ahasuerus who reigned over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia... in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all the officials and courtiers—...and royal wine was served in abundance, as befits a king, in **golden beakers, beakers of varied design**. He displayed the vast riches of his kingdom and the splendid glory of his majesty...

Daniel:

בַּשָּׁנָה שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמַלְכוּת יְהוֹיָקִים מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה בָּא נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל וְרוּשְׁלָם וְגִצְרַת עָלֶיהָ...

בְּלִשְׁאֲצָר מֶלֶכָּא עֲבַד לְחָם רַב לְרַבְרַבְנֵיהִי אֶלְף וְלִקְבֵּל אֶלְפָּא חֲמֵרָא שְׁתֵּה... בְּלִשְׁאֲצָר אֶמֶר | בְּטַעַם חֲמֵרָא לְהִתְיָה לְמֵאֲנִי דְחֵבָּא וְכִסְפָּא דִּי הַנְּפִק נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר אֲבוּהִי מִרְהִיכְלָא דִּי בִירוּשָׁלַם וְיִשְׁתַּוֵּן בְּהוֹן מֶלֶכָּא וְרַבְרַבְנֵיהִי שְׁגִלְתָּהּ וְלְחַנְתָּהּ:

In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it.

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for his thousand nobles, and in the presence of the thousand he drank wine... Under the influence of the wine, Belshazzar ordered the gold and silver **vessels that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple at Jerusalem** to be brought so that the king and his nobles, his consorts and concubines could drink from them.

Joseph:

וַיְהִי | בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יוֹם הַלֵּלֶת אֶת-פְּרֵעָה וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֵּה לְכָל-עַבְדָּיו...

On the third day—his birthday—Pharaoh made a banquet for all his officials...

2. The Jewish immigrant

Esther:

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה וּשְׁמוֹ מְרַדְּכַי בֶּן יֶאֱזִיר בְּרִשְׁמַעְי בְּרִקְיִשׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי: אִשְׁרָה הַגְּלָה מִירוּשָׁלַם... וַיְהִי אִמּוֹן אֶת-הַדְּחָה הִיא אֶסְתֵּר בִּתְדָדוֹ כִּי אִין לָהּ אָב וְאָם וְהַנְּעָרָה יִפְתִּיחָר וְטוֹבַת מְרָאָה...

In the fortress Shushan lived a Jew by the name of Mordecai, son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite. who had been **exiled from Jerusalem**... He fostered Hadassah—that is, Esther—his uncle's daughter, for **she had neither father nor mother**. The lass was **shapely and beautiful**...

Daniel:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַשְׁפֶּנֶז רַב סְרִיסָיו לְהַבִּיא מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִזֶּרַע הַמְּלוּכָה וּמִרְהַפְרֵתָמִים: יְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר אִין-בְּתָהֶם כָּל-מֵאוֹם [מוֹם] וְטוֹבֵי מְרָאָה וּמְשָׁכִילִים בְּכָל-חֲכָמָה וְיָדְעֵי דְעֵת וּמְבִינֵי מִדְּעָה...

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief officer, to bring some Israelites of royal descent and of the nobility— youths without blemish, handsome, proficient in all wisdom, knowledgeable and intelligent...

Joseph:

Now Joseph was attractive and handsome...

וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יָפָה תֹאֵר וְיָפָה מְרָאָה...

3. The Contest

Esther:

וּבְהִגִּיעַ תִּרְאֶסְתֶּר בִּתְאֻבֵיחַיִל דָּד מְרֻדְכַי אֲשֶׁר לָקַח-לוֹ לְבַת לְבוּא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא בִקְשָׁה דְבָר כִּי אִם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֹאמֶר
הֶגַי סְרִיס־הַמֶּלֶךְ שִׁמְר הַנְּשִׂימ וַתְּהִי אֶסְתֵּר נְשִׂאת חֹן בְּעֵינֵי כָּל־רְאֵיֶיהָ:

When the turn came for Esther daughter of Abihail—the uncle of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his own daughter—to go to the king, she did not ask for anything but what Hegai, **the king's eunuch**, guardian of the women, advised. Yet Esther won the admiration of all who saw her.

Daniel:

וַיֵּשֶׁם דְּנִיאל עַל־לְבוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִתְגַאֵל בְּפִתְבַּגַּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וּבִינְיוֹ מִשְׁתַּיִו וַיִּבְקֹשׁ מִשָּׂר הַסְּרִיסִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִתְגַאֵל: וַיִּתְּנוּ
הָאֱ-לֹהִים אֶת־דְּנִיאל לְחֹסֵד וְלִרְחֻמִּים לִפְנֵי שַׂר הַסְּרִיסִים לְדְנִיאל יָרָא אֲנִי אֶת־אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲשֶׁר מִנָּה אֶת־מֵאֲכַלְכֶם וְאֶת־מִשְׁתֵּיכֶם אֲשֶׁר לָמָּה יִרְאֶה אֶת־פְּנֵיכֶם זְעָפִים מִרְהִילָדִים אֲשֶׁר פְּגִילְכֶם וְחִיבְתֶם אֶת־
רֹאשֵׁי לְמַלְכֶ: וַיֹּאמֶר דְּנִיאל ... נִסְגָּא אֶת־עֲבָדֶיךָ יָמִים עֶשְׂרֶה וַיִּתְּנוּ־לָנוּ מִרְהוּרְעִים וְנֹאכְלָה וַיִּמָּס וְנִשְׁתָּה: וַיִּרְאוּ לִפְנֵיךְ
מִרְאִינוֹ וּמִרְאֵה הַיְלָדִים הָאֲכָלִים אֶת פִּתְבַּגַּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְכֹאֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה עֶשֶׂה עִם־עֲבָדֶיךָ: וַיִּשְׁמַע לָהֶם לְדְבַר הַזֶּה וַיִּנְסֹם
יָמִים עֶשְׂרֶה: וּמִקְצֹת יָמִים עֶשְׂרֶה נִרְאָה מִרְאֵיהֶם טוֹב וּבְרִיאֵי בָשָׂר מִרְכָּל־הַיְלָדִים הָאֲכָלִים אֶת פִּתְבַּגַּ הַמֶּלֶךְ:

Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the king's food or the wine he drank, so he sought permission of the **chief eunuch** not to defile himself... And G-d disposed the chief eunuch to be kind and compassionate toward Daniel. The chief eunuch said to Daniel, "I fear that my lord the king, who allotted food and drink to you, will notice that you look out of sorts, unlike the other youths of your age—and you will put my life in jeopardy with the king." Daniel replied... "Please test your servants for ten days, giving us legumes to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the youths who eat of the king's food, and do with your servants as you see fit." He agreed to this plan of theirs, and tested them for ten days. When the ten days were over, they looked better and healthier than all the youths who were eating of the king's food.

Joseph:

וַיִּסְרַף הַיּוֹבֵד מִצְרַיִמָּה וַיִּקְנֶהוּ פּוֹטִיפָר סְרִיס פְּרַעֲוֶה שַׂר הַטְּבָחִים אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם מִיַּד הַיִּשְׁמַעֲלִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹרְדוּהוּ שָׁמָּה:

When Joseph was taken down to Egypt, a certain Egyptian, Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his **chief eunuch**, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there.

4. An uneasy ruler

Esther:

בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא נִדְדָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לְחַבִּיָּא אֶת־סֵפֶר הַזְּכוּרֹת דְּבִרֵי הַיָּמִים וַיְהִיו נִקְרָאִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיִּמְצָא
כְּתוּב אֲשֶׁר הִגִּיד מְרֻדְכַי עַל־בְּגִתְנָא וַתִּרְשׁ שְׁנֵי סְרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁמַרְי הַסּוֹף אֲשֶׁר בִּקְשׁוּ לְשַׁלַּח לָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשׁוּרוּשׁ:

That night, sleep deserted the king, and he ordered the book of records, the annals, to be brought; and it was read to the king. There it was found written that Mordecai had denounced Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, who had plotted to do away with King Ahasuerus.

Daniel:

וּבְשַׁנַּת שְׁתַּיִם לְמַלְכוּת נְבֻכַדְנֶצַּר חִלָּם נִבְכַּדְנֶצַּר חִלָּם נִבְכַּדְנֶצַּר חִלָּם נִבְכַּדְנֶצַּר חִלָּם וַתִּפְעֹם רוּחוֹ וַשְׁנָתוֹ נִהְיָה עָלָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְקָרָא
לְחַרְטֻמִּים וְלֹא־שָׁפִים וְלִמְכַשְׁפִּים וְלִכְשָׁפִים לְהַגִּיד לְמַלְכֶ: חִלְמָתוֹ וַיִּבְאוּ וַיַּעֲמְדוּ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: עֲנָה דְנִיאל קִדָּם מַלְכָּא
וַאֲמַר רָזָה דִּי־מַלְכָּא שְׂאֵל לֹא חִפְיָמִין אֲשָׁפִין חַרְטָמִין גְּזָרִין יְכַלְוּ לְהַחְנוּגָה לְמַלְכָּא: בְּרָם אִיתִי אֶ-לָּה בְּשִׁמְיָא גְּלָא רָזִין
וְהוֹדַע לְמַלְכָּא נְבֻכַדְנֶצַּר מָּה דִּי לְהוּא בְּאַחְרִית יוֹמִיָּא חִלְמָךְ וְחֻזְגִי רֹאשֶׁךְ עַל־מִשְׁכַּבְךָ דִּנְהָ הוּא:

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, **Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was agitated**. The king ordered the magicians to be summoned in order to tell the king what he had dreamed... Daniel answered the king and said, "The mystery about which the king has inquired, magicians cannot tell to the king. But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what is to be at the end of days.

Joseph:

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנַתִּים יָמִים וּפְרָעָה חֵלֵם וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל־הַיָּאֵר: וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַתִּפְעַם רוּחוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־כָּל־חַרְטֻמֵּי מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־כָּל־חַכְמֵיהֶם וַיִּסְפָּר פְּרָעָה לָהֶם אֶת־חֲלֹמוֹ וְאִין־פֹּתֵר אוֹתָם לְפְרָעָה: אֶת־שְׁלֹם פְּרָעָה: ... וַיַּעַן יוֹסֵף אֶת־פְּרָעָה לֵאמֹר בְּלִעְדֵי אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶה

After two years' time, **Pharaoh dreamed** that he was standing by the Nile. **Next morning, his spirit was agitated**, and he sent for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men; and Pharaoh told them his dreams, but none could interpret them for Pharaoh... Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "Not I! God will see to Pharaoh's welfare."

5. Rise to power and assimilation

וַיִּקַּח הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־הַלְבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַסּוּס וַיַּלְבֵּשׁ אֶת־מֹרְדֵכַי וַיַּרְכִּיבֵהוּ בַרְחוֹב הָעִיר וַיִּקְרָא לְפָנָיו בְּכָה יַעֲשֶׂה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ:

So Haman took the garb and the horse and arrayed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square; and he proclaimed before him: This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor!

Daniel - Beltshzar:

בְּאֵדְנוּ | אָמַר בְּלִשְׂאֲצָר וְהַלְבִּישׁוּ לְדַנְיָאֵל אֲרָגְנָא וְהַמוֹנְכָא [וְהַמְנִיכָא] דִּידְהָבָא עַל־צוּאָרְהָ וְהַכְרִזּוּ עָלוּהִי דִּילְחָנָא שְׁלִיט תַלְתָּא בְּמַלְכוּתָא:

Then, at Belshazzar's command, they clothed Daniel in purple, placed a golden chain on his neck, and proclaimed that he should rule as one of three in the kingdom.

Joseph – Tsofnat Paneach:

וַיֹּאמֶר פְּרָעָה אֶל־יוֹסֵף רְאֵה נִתְּתִי אֶתְּךָ עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַיִּסֶר פְּרָעָה אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדּוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל־יַד יוֹסֵף וַיִּלְבֹּשׁ אוֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי־יִשָּׁשׁ וַיַּשֶּׂם רֶבֶד הַזָּהָב עַל־צוּאָרוֹ:

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt." And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck.

6. Jealousy, Jewish identity and dual loyalties

Esther:

וְכָל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ כָּרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהֶמֶן כִּי־כֵן צִוָּה־לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וּמֹרְדֵכַי לֹא יִכְרַע וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְמֹרְדֵכַי מִדּוּעַ אֲתָה עוֹבֵר אֶת מִצְוַת הַמֶּלֶךְ:

All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low. Then the king's courtiers who were in the palace gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's order?"

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ יִשְׁנֵן עִם־אֶחָד מִפְּגָר וּמִפְּרֵד בֵּין הָעַמִּים בְּכָל מְדִינֹת מַלְכוּתְךָ וְדַתֵּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכָּל־עַם וְאֶת־דַּתִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם עוֹשִׂים וְלִמְלֶךְ אִין־שׁוּחַ לְהַנִּיחָם:

Haman then said to King Ahasuerus, "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.

Daniel:

וּמְרַדִּי־לֹא יִפֹּל וְיִסְגַּד בַּהֲשַׁעְתָּא וְתַרְמָא לְגוֹאֲמַתּוֹ נִוְרָא יִקְדְּתָא :

Whoever will not bow and worship [the statue] shall at once be thrown into a burning fiery furnace.

אָדְנוּ גְבַרְיָא אֶלְדָּא אֶמְרִין דִּי לֹא נְהַשְׁבַּח לְדִנְיָאֵל דְּנָה פִלְעֵלָא לְחֹן הַשְׁפִּחְנָה עֲלוּהִי בְדַת אֱלֹהֵהּ: ... דִּי-יִבְעָא מִן-כָּל-אַלְהָ וְאִנְשׁ עַד-יוֹמִין תִּלְתִּין לְהוּ מִנְדָּא מִלְכָּא, יִתְרַמָּא לְגוֹב אַרְנוֹתָא...

Those men then said, “We are not going to find any fault with this Daniel, unless we find something against him in connection with the laws of his G-d.” ... Whoever shall address a petition to any god or man, besides you, O king, during the next thirty days shall be thrown into a lions’ den...

Pharaoh:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְעִמֹן הַזֶּה עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעֲצוּמִים מִמֶּנּוּ: הֲבָה יִתְחַכְּמָה לּוֹ פְּרִי־רִבְּוָה וְהִלְיָה כִּי־תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסְף גַּם־הוּא עַל־שְׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם־בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ:

And he said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground.”

7. Stepping forward

Esther:

וַיֹּאמֶר מְרַדְכַּי הַשֵּׁיב אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־תְּדַמִּי בְּנַפְשִׁי לְהַמְלִיט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכְּלֵה־יְהוּדִים: כִּי אִם־הִחַרְשׁ תִּחְרִישִׁי בְּעֵת־הַזֹּאת רִוַח וְהַצְלָה יַעֲמוּד לְיְהוּדִים מִמְּקוֹם אַחֵר וְאֵת וּבֵית־אָבִיךָ תִּאֲבָדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לָעֵת כְּזֹאת הִגַּעְתָּ לַמַּלְכוּת:

Mordecai 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.”

8. Political stability – good for the Jews?

Esther:

וַיִּשָּׂם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ מַסַּע עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֵי הֵימָּן: ... כִּי מְרַדְכַּי הַיְהוּדִי מִשְׁנָה לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ וְגָדוֹל לְיְהוּדִים וְרָצוּי לְרַב־אֲחֵיו דָּרַשׁ טוֹב לַעֲמוֹ וְדָבַר שְׁלוֹם לְכָל־זָרְעוֹ:

King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the mainland and the islands... For Mordecai the Jew ranked next to King Ahasuerus and was highly regarded by the Jews and popular **with the multitude of his brethren**; he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his kindred.

Joseph:

וַיִּלְקֹט יוֹסֵף אֶת־כֹּל־הַכֶּסֶף הַנִּמְצָא בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם וּבְאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּשֶׁבַר אֲשֶׁר־הֵם שִׁבְרִים וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף בְּיַתֵּהּ פְּרָעֹה:

Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, as payment for the rations that were being procured, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s palace.

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֲחָיו אֲנֹכִי מֵת וְאֵל־הָיִים פִּקֹּד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהָעֵלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב: וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פִּקֹּד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהָעֵלְתֶם אֶת־עַצְמוֹתַי מִן־הַזֶּה:

Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die. G-d will surely take notice of you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “When G-d has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here.”