



# Parshanut and Polemics VIII

Marty Lockshin, Torah in Motion 5781

## Esther 3:6

וַיִּבֹז בְּעֵינָיו לְשַׁלַּח יָד בְּמֹרְדֵכָי  
לְבַדּוֹ כִּי־הִגִּידוּ לוֹ אֶת־עַם  
מֹרְדֵכָי וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הָמֶן לְהַשְׁמִיד  
אֶת־כָּל־הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר  
בְּכָל־מַלְכוּת אַחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ עַם  
מֹרְדֵכָי:

But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone; having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus. (Esther 3:6)

## Esther 3: 8-9

יִשְׁנֹוּ עִם אֶחָד מִפְּזֹר וּמִפְּרֹד בֵּין  
הָעַמִּים בְּכָל מְדִינֹת מַלְכוּתְךָ  
וְדַתֵּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכָּל עַם וְאֵת  
דַּתֵּי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם עֹשִׂים וְלַמֶּלֶךְ  
אֵין שׂוּה לְהַנִּיחָם: אִם עַל  
הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יִכְתֹּב לְאַבְדָם...

**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. If it please your majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction...**

# Greek “additions” to the Book of Esther

(in the King James Version: Esther 13:4-5)

[Haman said:] Among all the nations in the world there is scattered a certain hostile people, who have laws contrary to those of every nation and who continually disregard the ordinances of the kings, so that the unifying of the kingdom which we honourably intend cannot be brought about. We understand that this people, and it alone, stands constantly in opposition to all men, perversely following a strange manner of life and laws, and is ill-disposed to our government, doing all the harm they can so that our kingdom may not attain stability.

# Josephus's Understanding of the Claim Against the Jews

Haman told the king that there was a certain wicked nation scattered throughout the habitable land ruled by him, which was **unfriendly and unsocial** [emphasis added] and neither had the same religion nor practiced the same laws as others, “but both by its customs and practices it is the enemy of your people and of all mankind.” (*Antiquities* 11:212-213)

Professor Peter Schaefer: Some Jewish authors understood that the essence of antisemitism in the Greco-Roman world was “the allegation of *amixia*, ‘unsociability,’ and of a [Jewish] way of life that is hostile to and, therefore, dangerous to all humankind.”

# Megillah 13b

ודתיהם שנות מכל עם – דלא אכלי מינו, ולא  
נסבי מינו, ולא מנסבי לן.

ואת דתי המלך אינם עשים – דמפקי לכולא  
שתא בשה"י פה"י.

ולמלך אין שוה להניחם – דאכלו ושתו ומבזו  
ליה למלכות. ואפילו נופל זבוב בכוסו של  
אחד מהן – זורקו ושותהו. ואם אדוני המלך  
נוגע בכוסו של אחד מהן – חובטו בקרקע  
ואינו שותהו.

“Their laws are different from those of any other people”: They won’t eat from our food, won’t marry our women and won’t allow their women to marry us.

“They do not obey the king’s laws”: They spend all their time [shirking responsibilities and saying] “today is the Sabbath” or “today is Passover.”

“It is not in Your Majesty’s interest to tolerate them”: They eat and drink and revile the king. If a fly were to fall into the wine cup of any one of them, they would throw away the fly and drink the wine. But if Your Majesty were to touch the wine cup of one of them, they would throw the wine on the ground and would not drink it.

# Targum Sheni Esther (8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century?)

מן בנתיהון לית אנחנא נסבין ומן  
בנתנא לא נסבין להון....

ויומא דאינון צבייא למזבן מננא  
אמרין לנא יומא שריא הוא ויומא די  
אנחנא צביין למזבן מנהון אמרין  
יומא אסירא הוא עלן ואסרין  
שוקין....

חד לשבעה יומין עבדין שבא עלין לבי  
כנישתהון קרין בספריהון מתרגמין  
בנביאהון ולייטין למלכנא....

We don't marry their daughters and  
they do not marry ours....

If it's a day that they want to buy  
something from us, they say "today  
is a permitted day." But when we  
want to buy something from them,  
they say, "Today is a forbidden day  
and the market is closed." ....

Every seventh day they observe a  
Sabbath. They go to their  
synagogues, read their books,  
translate their prophets and curse  
our kings...

## Targum Sheni Esther (cont.)

בחמישה עשר ביה [בתשרי]  
ומצלין וחדדין והדרין בהושענא  
ושוורין ומרקדין היך גדיין ולא  
ידיעינן אי מילט לייטין לנא ואם  
מברכא מברכין לנא....

כל דמזבנין מזבנין בעושקא ולא  
זבנין בשויאו.

On the fifteenth [of Tishrei;  
Sukkot] they pray and rejoice, and  
they go in circles [saying] Hoshana  
and they jump and dance like  
goats and we don't know whether  
they are cursing us or blessing  
us....

Whenever they sell to us, they  
cheat us, and they do not give the  
full price when they buy.



## Eikhah Rabba 1:21

א"ר לוי משל למטרונא שאמר  
לה [המלך] אל תשאילי כלום  
לשכינותיך, ואל תשאלי מהם  
כלום, פעם אחת כעס עליה  
המלך טרדה חוץ לפלטין, חזרה  
על כל שכינותיה ולא קבלוה,  
אמרה לו אתה הוא שעשית  
שאמרת אל תשאלי לשכינותיך  
ואל תשאלי מהם כלום, ...

Rabbi Levi said: This can be compared to a king who was married to a woman. He told her: "Don't lend anything to your neighbors and don't borrow from them." Once, the king became angry at her and threw her out of the palace. She went to all her neighbors and they wouldn't let her in. She [later, after they were reconciled] said to him [the king]: It's your fault since you told me not to lend to or borrow from my neighbors. . . . .

## Eikhah Rabba 1:21 (cont.)

... אמרו ישראל לפני הקדוש  
ברוך הוא ולא אתה עשית  
שאמרת לנו לא תתחתן במ  
בתך לא תתן לבנו ובתו לא  
תקח לבנך, אילו הוינו מנסבין  
בנתין לבניהון, או נסבין  
מבנתהון לבנין, הוין מנהון  
מחמי ברתא או חד מינן מחמי  
ברתן גביה, ולא הוה מקביל  
ליה, הוי כי אתה עשית.

..... So also Israel said to the Blessed Holy One: Aren't you responsible [for the dislike of Jews]? You told us "You shall not intermarry with them; do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons." (Deut 7:3) Had we given our daughters to their sons or taken their daughters for our sons, then some of them would have seen their daughters among us or we would have seen our daughters among them. Then would they not have taken me in [in a friendly way]? That is the meaning of the verse (Lam 1:21) "[All of my foes heard of my plight and exulted,] for it is Your doing."

# International Critical Commentary on Esther

by Lewis Bayles Paton (1864-1932)

## **Moral Teaching of the Book**

There is not one noble character in this book.

Xerxes is a sensual despot.

Esther, for the chance of winning wealth and power, takes her place in the herd of maidens who become concubines of the king. She wins her victories not by skill nor by character, but by her beauty. She conceals her origin, is relentless toward a fallen enemy, secures not merely that the Jews escape from danger, but that they fall upon their enemies, slay their wives and children, and plunder their property. . . . The only redeeming traits in her character are her loyalty to her people and her bravery in attempting to save them.

## International Critical Commentary (cont.)

Mordecai sacrifices his cousin to advance his interests, advises her to conceal her religion, displays wanton insolence in his refusal to bow down to Haman, and helps Esther in carrying out her schemes of vengeance.

All this the author narrates with interest and approval. He gloats over the wealth and triumph of his heroes and is oblivious to their moral shortcomings.

Morally, Esther falls below the level of the OT, or even the Apocrypha. The verdict of Luther is not too severe: "I am so hostile to this book that I wish it did not exist, for it Judaizes too much, and has too much heathen naughtiness."

John Edgar McFayden (1870-1933,  
Oxford-educated; taught at the University of Toronto)

[The Book of Esther teaches that] the Jews are born to dominion, and all who oppose them shall fall. . . . [The book's] sanguinary temper [is] separated by a whole moral world from the dying prayer of Jesus for forgiveness for his enemies. . . . [The book's] violent and revengeful temper [could] only be condemned by the Christian conscience.

He wrote in his *Introduction to the Old Testament* that the book of Esther was characterized by “aggressive fanaticism and fierce hatred of all that lay outside Judaism,” and opined that the book’s popularity was due primarily “to the power with which it expresses some of the most characteristic, if almost odious, traits of Judaism.”

# International Critical Commentary (cont.)

## **Estimate of the Church**

. . . In Palestine there was long opposition before it was admitted to the Canon. It is never quoted by Christ or by any of the NT writers. The early Christian Church made no use of it, and no Church Father attempted an exposition of it. . . .

In significant contrast to this attitude . . . stands the high esteem of this book in later Judaism. Later writers . . . ranked it next to the Law. Maimonides declared that even though the Prophets and Writings shall pass away when the Messiah came, yet this book and the Law should remain.

With this view of later Judaism, modern Christians cannot agree. This book is so conspicuously lacking in religion that it should never have been included in the Canon of the OT, but should have been left with Judith and Tobit among the Apocryphal writers.

# Megillah 7a

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל אסתר  
אינה מטמאה את הידים

Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Samuel: Esther does not make the hands unclean [i.e. the book of Esther is not part of the biblical canon].

למימרא דסבר שמואל אסתר לאו  
ברוח הקודש נאמרה

This implies that Samuel felt that Esther was not written with divine inspiration.

והאמר שמואל אסתר ברוח הקודש  
נאמרה

But didn't Samuel teach that Esther was written with divine inspiration.

נאמרה לקרות ולא נאמרה ליכתוב

[He would answer]: It was written [with enough inspiration] to be read, but not to be written [in the canon].

# רמב"ם הלכות מגילה פרק ב' הלכה י"ב

כֹּל סְפָרֵי הַנְּבִיאִים וְכֹל הַכְּתוּבִים  
עֲתִידִין לְבָטֵל לַיְמֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ חוּץ  
מִמַּגִּלַּת אֶסְתֵּר וְהָרִי הִיא קִימָת  
בְּחַמְשָׁה חֻמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה . . .

וְאֵף עַל פִּי שְׂכַל זְכוּרוֹן הַצָּרוֹת יִבְטַל  
יְמֵי הַפּוּרִים לֹא יִבְטְלוּ שְׁנֵאמֹר ( אֶסְתֵּר  
ט כח ) " וַיְמִי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ  
מִתּוֹךְ הַיְהוּדִים וְזָכָרָם לֹא יִסּוּף  
מִזְרָעָם :

All the books of the Prophets and Writings will be nullified in the Messianic era, except for the Book of Esther. It will continue to exist, as will the five books of the Torah . . .

Although all memories of the difficulties endured by our people will be nullified, . . . the celebration of the days of Purim will not be nullified, as it is written (Est. 9:28), "And these days of Purim will not pass from among the Jews, nor will their remembrance cease from their seed."



# Megillah 7a

שלחה להם אסתר לחכמים  
קבעוני לדורות שלחו לה קנאה את  
מעוררת עלינו לבין האומות  
שלחה להם כבר כתובה אני על  
דברי הימים למלכי מדי ופרס . . .

**רש"י: קנאה את מעוררת עלינו –**  
שיאמרו האומות שאנו שמחים  
להזכיר מפלתן

Esther sent [a request] to the rabbis: “Establish me [=my book] for future generations.” They sent back to her [the answer]: You arouse [= the story about you arouses] the anger of the gentiles.” She answered: My story is already written in the annals of the kings of Media and Persia.

# *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, by Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918)

The law thrusts itself in everywhere; it commands and blocks up access to heaven... as far as it can, it takes the soul out of religion and spoils morality.

The Pharisees killed nature through the commandments, 613 written commandments and 1000 other laws, and they leave no room for conscience. One forgot God and the way to him in the Torah.

Jesus casts ridicule on the works of the law, the washing of hands and vessels, the tithing of mint and cummin, the abstinence even from doing good on the Sabbath. Against unfruitful self-sanctification He sets up another principle of morality, that of the service of one's neighbour... Thus religion ceases to be an art which the Rabbis and Pharisees understand better than the unlearned people which know nothing of the law. The arrogance of the school fares ill at the hands of Jesus...

# Solomon Schechter's address, "Higher Criticism—Higher Anti-Semitism", 1903

. . . Since the so-called emancipation, the Jews of the civilized world have been lulled into a fancied security which events have not justified. It is true that through the revelation in the Dreyfus case, anti-Semitism of the vulgar sort has become odious, and no lady or gentleman dares now to use the old weapons . . . . But the arch-enemy has entered upon a new phase . . . "the philosophic 'Hep-Hep'." And this is the more dangerous phase because it is of a spiritual kind, and thus means the "excision of the soul," leaving us no hope for immortality.

# Solomon Schechter's address, "Higher Criticism—Higher Anti-Semitism" (cont.)

I remember when I used to come home from the *Cheder*, bleeding and crying from the wounds inflicted upon me by the Christian boys, my father used to say, "My child, we are in Galut (exile), and we must submit to God's will." And he made me understand that this is only a passing stage in history, as we Jews belong to eternity, when God will comfort His people. Thus the pain was only physical. But my real suffering began later in life, when I emigrated from Romania to so-called civilized countries and found there what I might call the Higher anti-Semitism, which burns the soul though it leaves the body unhurt.

# Solomon Schechter's address, "Higher Criticism—Higher Anti-Semitism" (cont.)

The genesis of this Higher anti-Semitism is partly, though not entirely ... contemporaneous with the genesis of the so-called Higher criticism of the Bible. Wellhausen's Prolegomena and History are teeming with *aperçus* full of venom against Judaism, and you cannot wonder that he was rewarded by one of the highest orders which the Prussian Government had to bestow. . . . This Higher anti-Semitism has now reached its climax when every discovery of recent years is called to bear witness against us and to accuse us of spiritual larceny.

# Solomon Schechter's address, "Higher Criticism—Higher Anti-Semitism" (cont.)

Some time ago I saw in one of the numerous sheets of this country a reference to the Hammurabi Code, concluding with the words, "this means a blow to Orthodoxy." I hold no brief for Orthodoxy in this country or elsewhere. But, may I ask: Is there any wing in Judaism which is prepared to confirm the reproach of Carlyle, who, in one of his antisemitic fits, exclaimed, "The Jews are always dealing in old clothes; spiritual or material." We are here between ourselves, so we may frankly make the confession that we did not invent the art of printing; we did not discover America . . .; we did not inaugurate the French Revolution . . .; we were not the first to utilize the power of steam or electricity . . . Our great claim to the gratitude of mankind is that we gave to the world the word of God, the Bible.

# New York Times (November 1933)

but only inclined  
weeks the  
een more  
recruits.  
all its in-  
in a two-  
e, which  
of official

ree Cross-  
orth three  
rance can  
e road of  
shal Foch  
of the Ger-  
That is  
l contrary  
ne French  
direct con-  
de Briand  
he could  
"constant  
e talks at  
tain, Italy  
king part.  
ds already  
l to so far,  
after con-  
ation.  
ations.  
ies for the  
ect conver-  
erils," the  
ill demand  
edness. But  
try to save

protests of the ultra-nationalist  
press, some change in French policy  
to meet the changed situation is  
generally expected.

## REVISION OF SCRIPTURE IS URGED ON GERMANS

### Return to Heroic Conception of Jesus and Segregation of Non- Aryans Proposed.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.  
BERLIN, Nov. 13.—At a jubilant  
after-election meeting of German  
Christians which filled the Sport-  
palast here tonight, one of their  
leaders, Dr. Krause, declared the  
newly created Reich church could  
fulfill its mission only if "in con-  
fession and ritual it takes account  
only of German experience of the  
Divine."  
"That involves," he continued,  
"the elimination of the Old Testa-  
ment from religious instruction, as  
well as the expurgation from the  
New Testament of distorted ac-  
counts."  
"We must demand a return to the  
heroic conception of Jesus," he  
said, "not as a God enthroned to  
be conceived dogmatically, but as a  
fearless fighter and leader. Sacred  
places should not be sought in  
Palestine, but near at home, and  
not by contrite but by proud hu-

which is the n  
trian official op  
"According to  
tion from Germ  
established that,  
and secret el  
Hitler would n  
per cent of the  
The Reichspr  
tional Socialist  
converting the  
and Communist  
Herr Hitler in  
tion, into sup  
It expresses a  
result of the  
Germany to r  
clauses of the  
The Arbeit  
caustically or  
mous vote ca  
ernment in th  
tration camp,  
and tortured  
free Germany

#### Face Court

LOEBEN,  
The serious  
home guard  
students ear  
oped what a  
clear case  
under the  
Police arres  
the State M  
reported to  
at the Hein  
They face  
the martial