

### The Four Kings

Darius the Mede	Sometimes a king is railroaded
Cyrus the Great	Sometimes a king is manipulated
Achashverosh the Anxious	Sometimes a king is afraid
Artachshasta	Sometimes a king is good?

### Introduction

#### 1. Esther 1:3-5

In the third year of his reign, he prepared a feast for all of his officers and servants, the administration of Persia and Medea, the *partimim* and the officers of the lands before him, to display the wealth of the honour of his reign, and the glorious splendour of his greatness, for many days, 180 days.

And at the conclusion of these days, the king prepared for the entire nation found in the capital, Shushan, from great to small, a party for seven days, in the yard of the palace garden.

#### 2. Talmud, Megilah 12a

"And at the conclusion of these days, etc." Rav and Shemuel debated: One said he was a wise king, the other said he was a foolish king.

- The one who said he was a wise king said he did well, drawing near the distant first, for he could always appease the residents of his city.
- The one who said he was foolish said he should have drawn the residents of his city near first, for if the others would rebel, these would stand with him.

#### 3. Kings II 18:31-32

Do not listen to Hezekiah, for so declares the King of Assyria: Give me a gift, and come out to me, and each will eat of his grapevine and each his fig tree, and each will drink the water of his cistern, until I come take you to a land like your own, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil-producing olives and honey, and you shall live and not die. Do not listen to Hezekiah, for he seduces you, saying, "Gd will save us."

#### 4. Talmud, Sanhedrin 94a

Rav and Shemuel debated: One said he was a wise king, the other said he was a foolish king.

- The one who said he was a wise king said that he thought, "If I tell them, 'It's better than your land,' they'll say I am lying."
- And the one who said he was a foolish king said if so [that they are equal], then what would be the advantage of that land?

### Layer 1: The basic narrative of fear

#### 5. Esther 1:13-15, 1:19

And the king said to the wise men... Regarding what to do about Queen Vashti, for she had not performed the word of King Achashverosh, through his officers.

"If it is good to the king, let the royal word go forth before him, and let it be recorded in the laws of Persia and Medea, without violation, that Vashti did not come before King Achashverosh, and the king shall give her reign to her peer, who is better than her."

#### 6. Esther 3:11

And the king said to Haman: The money is given to you! And the nation, to do with as is good in your eyes.

#### 7. Esther 4:11

All of the king's servants and the nation of the lands of the king know that any man or woman who comes to the king, to the inner yard, who has not been called, there is but one law – to kill him. Unless the king extends the gold sceptre, and he shall live. And I have not been called to come to the king in thirty days.

#### 8. Esther 5:3

And the king said to her: What do you want, Queen Esther? What is your request? Up to half the kingdom, it shall be done.

#### 9. Esther 5:8

If I have found favour in the eyes of the king, and if it is good before the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the party I shall prepare for them, and tomorrow I shall do as the king says.

#### 10. Esther 6:1-4, 6:7-10

That night, the king's sleep was shaken. He said to bring the book of records, the accounts of days, and they were read before the king.

And it was found recorded that Mordechai had told of Bigtan and Teresh, two royal officers from the guards of the door, who had sought to send their hand against King Achashverosh. And the king asked, "What was done, what glory and greatness, for Mordechai for this?" And the king's youths, his servants, said, "Nothing was done for him." And the king said, "Who is in the yard?" And Haman had come to the yard...

And Haman said to the king, "For the man the king wishes to honour, let them bring royal garb which the king has worn, and the horse the king has ridden, and which has the royal crown upon its head. And let the garb and the horse be given to a man from the king's officers, the *partimim*, and let them dress the man whom the king wishes to honour, and ride him on the horse in the city street. And let them declare before him, 'So shall be done for the man whom the king wishes to honour.'"

And the king said to Haman, "Quickly, take the garb and the horse as you have spoken, and do this for Mordechai the Judean who resides at the royal gate; do not eliminate anything from all you have said."

#### 11. Esther 7:6-9

And Esther said, "A foe and enemy is this wicked Haman!" And Haman was shocked before the king and queen. And the king arose in his anger from the feast of wine to the palace garden, and Haman stood to seek his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that evil was concluded for him from the king. And the king returned from the palace garden to the room of the feast of wine, and Haman was falling on the bed on which Esther was, and the king said, "Would you also take the queen with me in the house?!" The word had left the king's mouth, and Haman's face was covered. And Charvonah, one of the royal officers, said, "Also, here is the tree Haman made for Mordechai, who spoke positively for the king, standing in Haman's home, 50 cubits tall!" And the king said, "Hang him on it."

#### Layer 2: More subtle results of fear

#### 12. Esther 2:17

And the king loved Esther more than all of the women, and she bore favour and kindness before him, more than all of the young girls, and he placed the royal crown on her head, and he made her Queen in place of Vashti.

#### 13. Esther 3:1-2

After these matters, King Achashverosh elevated Haman, son of Hamedata, the Aggagite, and raised him up. And he placed [Haman's] seat above all of the officers who were with him. And all of the king's servants at the royal gate would kneel and bow to Haman, for so the king had instructed for him...

14. Esther 10:1

And King Achashverosh levied a tax upon the land and the islands of the sea. And all of his deeds of strength and might, and the explication of the greatness of Mordechai, who was elevated by the king, are recorded in the book of the accounts of days of the kings of Medea and Persia.

Layer 3: Midrashic amplification

15. Talmud, Megilah 12b

"And the king was enraged" – Why did her refusal so incite him? Rava explained: She sent a message to him, "Stable-boy of my father! My father drank the equivalent of 1,000 others (per Daniel 5:1) and did not become intoxicated, but you have become foolish with your wine." Immediately, "And his anger burned in him."

16. Talmud, Megilah 13a

"And Esther bore favour [in the eyes of all who saw her]" – Rabbi Elazar said: This teaches that she appeared to each one as though she was from his nation.

17. Talmud, Megilah 16a

We have learned: Haman was the barber of Kfar Kartzom for 22 years.

18. Talmud, Megilah 13b

"And their law is different from that of any other nation" – They do not eat of ours, they do not marry of ours, and they do not marry theirs to us.

"And they do not practice the king's laws" – They spend the entire year in 'Today is Shabbat' 'Today is Pesach'.

"And it is not worthwhile for the king to let them be" – For they eat and drink and mock the throne. And even if a fly would fall into the cup of one of them, he would throw out [the fly] and drink it, but if my master the king would touch the cup of one of them, he would throw it on the ground and he would not drink it.

19. Talmud, Megilah 15b

A thought fell into his mind. He said, "What is this, that Esther invited Haman? Perhaps they are taking counsel against 'that man', to kill him!" Then he said, "If so, isn't there anyone who likes me, who will tell me?" Then he said, "Perhaps there is someone who benefited me and I did not pay him back, and so people refrain from revealing this to me?"

20. Talmud, Megilah 16a

"And the king arose in his anger from the feast of wine to the palace garden... And the king returned from the palace garden to the room of the feast of wine" – Just as he rose in anger, so he returned in anger, for he went and found the ministering malachim, in the guise of men, uprooting the trees of the orchard. He said to them, "What are you doing?!" They said, "Haman instructed us."

He entered his palace, "And Haman was falling on the bed on which Esther was." "Falling"? Shouldn't it say "had fallen"? Rabbi Elazar said: This teaches that a malach came and knocked him down on to the bed.