

Part II - Historical and Prophetic Setting

To pinpoint the time period of the Megilla, we must continue the pasuk mentioned in our introduction:

"**Ish Yehudi** was in Shushan... whose name was Mordechai... **asher hogla MiYerushalayim** - who was exiled from Jerusalem together with the Exile of **Yechonya** Melech Yehuda - who was exiled by Nevuchadnetzar King of Bavel."
([2:5-6](#))

[Note that the shoresh g.l.h. (exiled) is used **four** times in this pasuk!]

This pasuk not only sets our time frame to the Babylonian Exile ("galut Bavel"), it also contains textual similarities to a significant pasuk in Sefer Yirmiyahu:

"Now these are the words of the book that Yirmiyahu sent from Jerusalem to the elders of the Exile, to the priests, and to the prophets and to all the people - **asher hogla** - who were exiled by Nevuchadnetzar from **Yerushalayim** - who were exiled to Bavel with **Yechonya**..." ([Yirmiyahu 29:1-2](#))

[**Note:** If you are not familiar with this time period, it is highly recommended that you read [Yirmiyahu 29:1-15](#) in its entirety before continuing. See also [Kings II 23:31-25:12](#).]

The background to the letter referred to in this pasuk ([see 28:1-29:15](#)) is Yirmiyahu's dispute with the false prophets who claim that the Exile of Yehoyachin (=Yechonya) will be returning within a year or two. Yirmiyahu argues that their stay in Bavel will be for at least **seventy** years. Therefore, he encourages the Exile to set up homes and families in Bavel for they are the 'long term' future of Am Yisrael. Indeed they are supposed to return to Yerushalayim, but only **after** the seventy years of Bavel's reign are over.

To appreciate this prophetic setting, we must note Yirmiyahu's description of God's **expectations** from this Exile at the conclusion of the seventy year period:

"Thus said the Lord, when the 70 years are complete, I shall remember you and keep my promise to return you to this land... [At that time...] you shall **call out** to Me - you shall come and **pray** to Me - and I will hear you... and you will **ask for** Me and **find** Me. **If you will search for me with all of your heart**, then I will be there for you, and I shall turn away your captivity and **gather you from all the nations** wherein you may be dispersed... and I will **return you** to the land from which you were exiled..." ([29:10-14](#))

According to Yirmiyahu, the return of the Exile after seventy years would not be automatic. Rather, it was God's hope that their return would be catalyzed by sincere repentance and a **yearning** to return.

In other words, God intended for the Babylonian Exile, as the word 'exile' implies, to be **temporary**. People don't stay in 'exile' unless they are **forced** to stay. Exile implies that one **cannot** return to his own land. [Otherwise the translation of "galut" should be '**diaspora**.' Hey, not a bad idea!]

This prophetic message is congruent with the primary theme of Chumash that God desires for the Jewish people to become His 'model' nation - a "mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh" ([see Shmot 19:4-6](#)) - in Eretz Canaan, i.e. to become a vehicle through which all nations will come to recognize God ([see Devarim 4:5-8](#)). In an ideal setting, the **Bet HaMikdash** in Yerushalayim was to serve as a symbol of this purpose. [See previous shiurim on Parshiot Reay, Noach, and Vayetze. Recall that the Mikdash is referred to as: "hamakom asher yivchar Hashem l'shakein **shmosham**; [see Devarim 12:5-14](#).]

However, in the time period of Yirmiyahu, God decides to destroy that Temple and exile his people for they no longer fulfilled their purpose. Bnei Yisrael had become so corrupt that rehabilitative punishment became necessary. According to Yirmiyahu, God's hope was for the exiled people to 'learn their lesson' in Bavel and then, after the seventy years were over, they would be spiritually prepared and **eager** to return to their homeland, and to reconstruct its symbolic shrine - the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Cyrus Declaration

Precisely as Yirmiyahu had predicted, seventy years after Bavel had risen to power the opportunity to return arose when the Babylonian empire fell to **Koresh** (=Cyrus the Great), the first king of the **Persian** Empire ([see Yirmiyahu 25:11-12](#), [Ezra 1:1](#)).

In the first year of his reign, Koresh issued his famous proclamation allowing and encouraging **all** of the Jews of the Persian empire to **return** to Jerusalem and **rebuild** the Temple. The prophets clearly understood this historic decree as the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy ([see Ezra 1:1-4](#), [II Divrei Ha'yamim 36:20-23](#)). As God had promised, the time of redemption from the Babylonian Exile had come.

[As you read [Ezra 1:1-9](#), note how the Jews who don't make 'aliyah' are encouraged to send 'money' instead! (Nothing has changed in 2500 years!) Note also that the vessels of the Bet HaMikdash, taken by Nevuchadnetzar, return at this time to Jerusalem.]

Unfortunately, the response of the Jews in exile to this historic opportunity was less than enthusiastic. A group of some forty thousand did return; however, the majority of

Am Yisrael remained in Bavel. For an insight into the tragedy of the missed opportunity, we need only quote the explanation given by Rav Yehuda HaLevi in [Sefer HaKuzari \(II.24\)](#):

"Had the entire nation enthusiastically answered the divine call to return to the Land, the idyllic prophecies of the **return to Zion** would have been fulfilled and the **Sh'china** would have returned. In reality, however, only a small portion returned. The majority remained in Bavel, willfully accepting the exile, as they did not wish to leave their homes and businesses etc..." (sounds familiar...)

Even those who did return lacked enthusiasm. The apathy of the returnees is echoed in the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharya, the prophets of this time period. (See [Chagai 1:1-3](#), [2:3](#); see also [Zecharya 4:10](#); [6:15](#); [7:4-7](#); [8:6](#).)

How does all of this relate to Megillat Esther?

The story of Megillat Esther takes place during the **Persian** time period and thus **after** the time period when the Jews **should have** returned to Jerusalem. Even though there is a controversy concerning precisely which Persian King Achashveyrosh was, he most certainly reigned **after** Koresh (the first Persian king).