## Purim – Megillat Esther Why is Esther so Scared?

Simon Wolf

Upon being informed of Haman's evil decree to annihilate the Jews, Mordechai rends his garments and dresses in sackcloth and ashes. He cries a loud and bitter cry in reaction to the unbearable news. As the decree disseminated and word of it reaches the Jews throughout the empire of Achashveirosh, they are thrown into a state of public mourning, fasting and crying over the unfathomable pronouncement.1 Sequestered in the royal residence. Queen Esther seems to be the only one left uninformed as to that which has just transpired. Nevertheless, she is shaken to the core when she is informed of Mordechai's attire and behavior. She immediately sends him a change of clothing so that he can enter the royal confines and explain his odd and inexplicable conduct to Esther.<sup>2</sup> Mordechai refuses the change of attire, but through her envoy he apprises her of the dire straits in which the Jews now find themselves due to Haman's diabolical plan. He then tells the emissary to instruct her to approach the king and implore him and plead with him to save her nation.3 Esther's response to Mordechai's request is surprising. "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that every man or woman who comes to the king, to the inner courtyard, who is not called, there is but one law for him, to be killed; only the one to whom the king extends his golden scepter will live. And I have not been called to come to the king these thirty days."4 She is terrified of approaching the king and refuses to carry out Mordechai's request. Why was Esther so scared of seeking an audience with the king? While she does explain her reticence, it seems to be a wholly inadequate reason given the stakes at hand and the Achashveirosh fondness has previously demonstrated towards Esther. What was so

risky for her? She simply could have sought an audience with the king and worse comes to worst her petition would have been denied.

Early on in the prophet Shmuel's career, when the Mishkan was still extant, Bnei Yisrael wage war with the Plishtim. Bnei Yisrael's army is encamped at Even Ha'Ezer and the Plishtim's camp is found at Afek. The first day of battle goes poorly for Bnei Yisrael resulting in four thousand casualties. Upon regrouping in the camp, the elders surmise that their losses were the result of God not being present in their midst and so they send for the Aron to be brought to the battlefield from Shilo.5 Bnei Yisrael celebrate the arrival of the Aron to the military camp and when the Plishtim get wind of the new arrival, they are fearful and bemoan the fact that God will now wage war against them as well.6 Unfortunately, Bnei Yisrael fair no better on the next day of battle. They are vanquished by the Plishtim, losing another thirty thousand infantry men, and the Aron is captured in the battle.<sup>7</sup> The Plishtim take the Aron back with them to display as a victory prize. They exhibit the Aron in the house of their god Dagon found in the city of Ashdod in order to give thanks to their god for helping them to defeat Bnei Yisrael and their Though unlike their god, this God, represented by the Aron, can wage war without any help from Bnei Yisrael. For the next two mornings, the people of Ashdod awaken to find their god Dagon prostrated in front of the Aron. In addition, God wreaks havoc amongst and plagues the Plishti residents of Ashdod. After surmising that it is, in fact, the presence of the Aron that is causing the problems for themselves and their god Dagon, the people of Ashdod seek the counsel of the leadership of the Plishtim as to what to do with the Aron. They decide that it was best to ship off the Aron to the city of Gat, the next metropolis to host the Aron on its circuit of the Plishti cities. Gat faces an even heavier hand of God than Ashdod and they quickly reach a similar conclusion. They no

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וּמְרְדָּכִּי יָדַעׂ אֶת־כָּל־אָשֶׁר נַעֲשֶּׁה וַיִּקְרֶע מָרְדָּכֵיּ אֶת־בְּגָּדָּיו וַיִּלְבָּשׁ שֻׁק וַאֲפֶר וַיֵּצֵאֹ בְּתָוֹךְ הָעִּיר וַיִּזְעָק זְעָקָה גִּדְלָה וּמָרֶה: וַיָּבֿוֹא עַד לְפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמֵּלֶךְ כִּי אֵין לָכָּוֹא אֶל־שַׁער הַמַּלֶךְ בָּלְבִוּשׁ שֵּק: וּבְכָּל־מִדִינֵה וּמִדִינָה מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דְּבַר־הַמֵּלֶךְ וִדְתוֹ מִגִּּיעַ אֵבֶל גָּדוֹל

לְיָהוּדְׂים וְצֵוֹם וּבְּכֵי וּמִסְפֵּד שֵׁק וְאֵּפֶר יֻצְע לְרַבְּים: (אסתר ד,א-ג) בוֹתָבוֹאנָה נַעַרֹּוֹת אָסְתֵּר וְסְרִיסִיׁה וַיִּגִּידוּ לְּה וַתִּתְחַלְחֵל הַמַּלְכָּה מְאֶד וַתִּשִׁלֵּח בְּגָּדִׁים לְהַלְבִישׁ אֶת־מָרְדָּכִי וּלְהָסִיר שַׁקוֹ מעָלִיו וְלָא קְבָּל: וַתִּקְרֵא אֶסְתַּר לְהַתְּךְ מִפְּרִיסֵי הַּמֶּלֶךְ לְּלֵצְת מָה־זֶה (אסתר ד,ד-ה)
אָשֶׁר הָעֻמִיד לְפָּנֶיהָ וַתְּצַוְהוּ עֵּל־מָרְדְּכֵי לְּדָעַת מַה־זֶה וְעַל־מַה־זֶּה: (אסתר ד,ד-ה)

צְּשֶׁר הֶעֲתֶּיוֹ יְלֶבְּלָיהָ וַהְצְּצֵּוֹה ּגֵּע מְוֹדְצֵי ׳ְלֵעוֹת מוֹה זֵּה וְעָל מוֹה זֵּה עָּתׁ וּדְּיה 1. וּצֵא הָתָּךְ אֶל־מְּרֶצֵי אֶל־רְחוֹב הְעִׁיר אָשֶׁר לְפָנֵי שַׁעֲר־הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיַּנָּדְ־לִוֹ מְרְדְּלֵּי אֶת כְּלֹ אֲשֵׁר הָרָהוּ וְאָתוֹ פָּרָשֶׁת הַּכֶּּסֶף אֲשֶׁר ינִּמוֹ בְּשׁוּשׁוֹ לְהַשְׁמִידָם נֵתוֹ לוֹ לְהַרְאוֹת אֶתר אָסְתָּר וּלְהַנְּיִד לֵה וּלְצִוֹת עָלִיהָ לְבוֹא אָל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַתְּסַבְּן־לוֹ וּלְבַקְּשׁ מִלְּפְבֵיו עַל־עְמָה: הַבָּא הָתֶּךְ וַיַּבָּוֹא הָתָרְ וַיַּבְּי (אַסתר ד,ו-ח)

לְבִּלִי עַבְּדִי הַמְּלֶךְ וְתְצֵּוְהוּ אֱל־מְרְדֶכִי: כְּל־עַבְדִי הַמְּלֶךְ וְעָם־מְדִינֹוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְוֹדְעִים אְשֶׁרְ לְהַתְּרָבִי: כְּלִרְעַבְּדִי הַמְּלֶךְ וְעָם־מְדִינֹוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְוֹדְעִים אְשֶׁרְ לְאִ־יְקְלֵא אָחָת אְשֶׁרְ לְאִ־יְקְלֵא אָחָת דְּתְיִבְּי וְאָשְׁרְ וְשִׁיט־לִוֹ הַמְּלֶךְ אֶת־שְׁרְבֵיט הַזְּהָב וְחָיֵה וְאָנִי לְא נִקְרָאתוֹ דְּתַבְּי מְאָשֶׁר וְשִׁיט־לִוֹ הַמְּלֶךְ אֶת־שְׁרְבֵיט הַזְּהָב וְחָיֵה וְאָנִי לְא נִקְרָאתוֹ לְבָרִי אָסְתֵּרֹ (אסתר ד,י-יב) לְבִוֹא אָל־הַמָּלֶךְ זֶה שְׁלוֹשִׁים וְוֹם: וַיִּגִּידוֹ לְמַרְדֶּלָי אֶת דְּבַרֵי אָסְתֵּר: (אסתר ד,י-יב)

וְהִי דְבָר־שְׁמּוּאֵל לְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּצָּא יִשְׂרָאַל ็לְקְרֵאת פְּלְשְׁתִּים לְמִּלְחָמָה וַיִּחָנוֹ עַל־הָאָבָן הָנְיּהְ בַּאֲבָּק: וַיַּעַרְכּוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים לְקְרָאת יִשְׂרָאַל וַתִּפּשׁ הַמִּלְחָמָה וַיְּנְגָּף הְּלֵשְׁתִּים לְקְרָאת יִשְׂרָאַל וַתִּפּשׁ הַמִּלְחָמָה וַיִּנְגָּף יִשְׁרָאַל לְפָנִי פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּבְּּוּ בְּמַאֲרָכָה בַּשְּׁלָה בְּאַרְבַּעַת אֲלְפֵים אִישׁ: וַיִּבְּא הָעָם אָל־הְבֵּעַר אֲלְפֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים נְקְחָה אֵלֵינוּ מִשְּׁלֹה הְמָבְיוֹ וְיִשְׁלָה וְנָבְא בְּקְרְבֵּנוּ וְיִשְׁעָנוּ מִבְּּךְ אוֹבְינוּ וְיִשְׁעָנוּ מִבְּּלְ שְׁרָה וַיִּעְם אְיִבְּיוֹן וְבָּא בְּקְרְבֵּנוּ וְיִשְׁעָנוּ מִבְּּךְ אוֹבְינוּ וְיִשְׁלָּה הָעָם שְׁלֹה וַיִּשְׁאוּ מִשְׁה אָתְיִם בְּרִוֹת יְּקוֹק צְּבָקוֹת וְשָׁב הַכְּנִבְים וְשְׁם שְׁנֵי בְנֵי־עַלִי עִם־אָרוֹן בְּרִית הְאֵלְּהִים חָפָּי הַבְּיִם וְשְׁם שְׁנֵי בְנֵי־עַלִי עם־אָרוֹן בְּרִית הָאֱלֹקִים חָפָּי הַבְּיִם וְשְׁבָּי הְיִבְּים וְשְׁם שְׁנִי בְּנֵים וְשְׁם שְׁנִי בְּנִי־עָלְיִי הַבְּיִם הְּעָבְיוֹ הְיִּבְּים הְשִׁבְּים הְּלִּים הְאָבְיוֹת הְּאָבְּיוֹם הְּבָּעִם הְּבְּיִם הְשְׁבְּים הְּיִבְּים הְיִּבְים הְיבָּאְבְּיוֹם בְּבְּיִם הְיבָּעְם הְּבִּים הְיִבְּים הְיבָּים הְּיבָּים הְיבְּים הְיִּבְּים הְיבִּים הְּבִּים הְּבִּים הְּיבְּים הְרָּבְּיִבְּים הְיבְּים בְּיִבְּים הְיבָּים הְּבִּים הְּבִּים הְשְׁבִּים הְשְׁבְּים הְיבָּים הְּבִּים הְעִבְּים הְיבָּים הְשְׁבְּים הְבִּים הְיבָּים הְיבָּים הְיבָּים הְּיבְּים הְיבָּים הְיבָּים הְיבָּים הְיבָּים הְינְהָם: (שמואל א ד,א-ד)

<sup>١١٠٠ ﴿ وَلَا اللّٰ عَدِرَا الْ حَدَرَىدَ بَرَائِمْ لَيْ رَا مِنْ مِنْ أَنْ مِنْ الْبَرْدِرِ الْحَدَرَى الْبَرْدُرِ الْمِرْدُرِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمُدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمُدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرُونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرُونِ الْمُدْرُونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمُعْلِي الْمُعْلِي الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرِونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمِدْرُونِ الْمُدْرِونِ الْمُدُ</sup> 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> וִיּלְּחָמִוֹ פְּלִשְׁהִּים וַיַּבְּגָף יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיַנְסוּ אָיִשׁ לְאֹהָלִיו וְתָּהִי הַמְּכֵּה גְּדוֹלֶה מָאֶד וַיִּפּל מִיִּשְׂרְאַל שׁלִשִּים אֶלֶף רַגְלִי: וַאָרָוֹן אֱלִקִים נִלְקָח וּשְׁנֵי בְּנֵי־עֵלִי מֵׁתוּוּ חָפְנֵי וּפִינְחָס: (שמואל א

longer have any interest in hosting the Aron and without any consultation, they send the Aron to the city of Ekron.8 Interestingly enough, when the Aron reaches Ekron on its tour of the Plishti metropolises (עזה, אשדוד, אשקלון, גת, עקרון), the people of Ekron warily declare, "...they have sent me the Ark of the God of Yisrael to kill me and my people."9 Much to their chagrin, instead of it being a triumphant trophy of their victory, the seven month presence of the Ark amongst the Plishtim despoils them and their cities. Tired of suffering at the hands of the Aron, 10 after conferring with the local Plishti priests, they decide to send the Aron on a wagon pulled by cows to find its own destination. This way they could finally rid themselves of this menace. The Ark makes its way to Beit Shemesh where it receives a jubilant reception from the people of the city. They offer burnt-offerings and peaceofferings to God to celebrate the return of the captured Aron. At this point, the reader finally breathes a sigh of relief that the Aron is once again safely in the hands of Bnei Yisrael. One expects, with it out of the enemy's hands, that all the devastation spawned by the Aron should finally have come to an end. Moreover, one might be even bold enough to envision that the presence of God, manifest through the Aron, would engender a blessing for those who cherish it and who are excited to see it.11 If it ravages the enemy, then it should grace its patrons. Shockingly, the story throws everyone for a loop, and rather, once again here, things quickly take a turn for the worse and there are a large number of casualties amongst the people of Beit Shemesh because they had "looked" at the Ark of God. Even more disconcerting is that the number of dead in this instance, according to the simple reading of the verse, far exceeds the losses in the battle with the Plishtim and likely surpass the number of Plishtim that perished while they hosted the Aron. 12 They swiftly conclude, "...who possibly can stand before God, the holy Lord"13 and they ask the neighboring city of Kiryat Ye'arim to come pick

up the Aron returned by the Plishtim. The pattern is now obvious. At this point, any reasonable person is certain and would be wise to assume that it is just a matter of time before Kiryat Ye'arim becomes the next victim of the Aron's trail of devastation.

In the beginning of the Megilla, after partying and drinking for guite some time (180 days). King Achashveirosh throws an additional party for those present in the capital city Shushan for seven days. On the seventh day, when the king is well plied with wine, he asks his advisors to bring Queen Vashti in her royal finery before him so he can parade her before all those gathered to show-off her tremendous beauty. rebuffs the king's request. At the behest of his advisors, Achashveirosh then makes Vashti into a public example of what happens to someone who defies the king and a woman who disobeys her husband and therefore Vashti is summarily deposed for her refusal to acquiesce to King Achashveirosh's request.

After Esther is chosen to replace Vashti as the queen, the Megilla goes on a tangent to tell of a seemingly unrelated story. In those days, while Mordechai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigtan and Teresh, two eunuch guards of the king, plot assassinate King Achashveirosh. 14 Mordechai gets wind of the scheme and he discovery his to Esther. subsequently passes the information to the king in Mordechai's name. There is an investigation launched and the sedition is uncovered. corroborating Mordechai's report, and the two conspirators are hanged; the events are recorded in the king's annals. At this point in the Megilla, it is clear that Achashveirosh does not suffer insubordination lightly; if you cross the king, you can expect to be summarily executed or disposed of. At the same time, if one is loyal to the king, the individual can expect to quickly rise within the king's inner circle. The promotion

י וְשִׁלְּקִים ׁ אֶת־אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹקִים עָקְרוֹן וַיְהִי כְּבוֹא אָרוֹן הָאֲלֹקִים ׁ עָקְרוֹן וַיִּלְי בְּלַבְּי הַסָבּוּ אַלֵי אֶת־אָרוֹן אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָהָמִיתָנִי וְאָת־עַמִּי: (שמואל א ה,י)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> וַיִּשְׁלְחָוּ וַיִּאָסְפֿוּ אֶת־כָּלִ־סְרְנֵי פְלְשְׁתִּים וַיְּאמְרוּ שַׁלְחוּ אָת־אֲרֹון אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָשְׁב לִמְלְמֹוֹ וְלָא־יָמֵית אֹתָי וְאֶת־עַמֵּי כִּי־הָיָתָה מְהְוּמַת־מָּוֶת בְּכָל־הָעִּיר כָּבְדָה מְאֶד יַד הָאֵלֹקִים שָׁם: (שמואל א ה,יא)

<sup>11</sup> וַיַּשֶׁב אֲבוֹן יְקְוֹּק בֵּיִת עַבֵּד אֱדָם הַגִּתּי שְׁלֹשֶׁה חָדָשִׁים וַיְבֶּרֶךְ יְקְוֹּק אֶת־עַבֵּד אֱדָם וְאֶת־ כָּל־בִּיתוֹ: וַיַּגַּד לַמֵּלֶךְ דָּוֹד לַאמר בַּרָךְ יְקֹּוֹּק אֶת־בַּית עַבֵּד אֱדֹם וְאֶת־ כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ בַּעֲבָוּר אָרָוֹן הָאֱלֹאֵים וַיֵּלֶךְ דָּוֹד וַיַּעַל אֶת־אָלוֹן הָאֱלֹאָים מִבֵּית עַבֵּד אֱדָם עֵיִר דָּזֶד בְּשִׁמְחָה: (שמואל ב ו,יא-ב)

יַרָּאּ בְּאָרָשִׁי בְּית־שָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי רָאּוּ בַּאָרוּו יְקוֹּקְ נַיְרְ בְּעָם שָׁבְעִים אִישׁ חָמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף אֵישׁ וַיְּתָאֲבִּלְוּ הַעָּׁם כִּי־הָכָּה יְקוָק בַּעָם מִכָּה גִּדוֹלָה: (שמואל א ו,יט)

יוּ וְהַאַבְּיִּרְיִּלְּבָּלְ בָּעָבִי בְּיִתְרִייִּתְּיִלְּבְּלְ בְּעָבְּיִבְּיִי יְתָּוֶקְ הָאֶלְהְיִם הַקְּדְוֹשׁ הַזֶּה וְאָל־הֵי יַעְלֶּהְ וֹיִאְמֶרְרֹּ אֲנְשִׁי בֵּיִתְרֹשְׁׁמֶשׁ מֵי יִנְלָ לַעֲמֹֹד לְפָנֵי יְקְוֹקְ הָאֶלְהָים הַקְּדְוֹשׁ הַזֶּה וְאָלִרִם שְׁבֵּה וַיִּנְּהָוּ מַלֶּינִי יִשְׁרָאֵל אַחָרַי יְקֹוְקָ: (שמואל א ו,כ-כא) כָּל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחָרַי יְקֹוְקָ: (שמואל א ו,כ-כא)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> בַּיָמִים הָהֵׁם וֹמְרְדֵּכֵי שַׁב בְּשִׁער־הַמֵּלֶךְ קְצַף בְּגַּתָן וַתְּרֵשׁ שְׁנֵי־סְרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁמְרֵי הַסְּׁף וַיִּבַקְשׁוֹ לְשְׁלֶח יָדְ בַּמֶּלְךְ אָחַשְׁוֹלִשׁ: וַיִּנְדֶע הַדְּבַל לְמְרְדֵּלִי וַיַּגַּד לְאָסְתַּר הַמֵּלְכָה וַתְּאמֶר אָסְתַּר לְמֶלֶךְ בְּשָׁם מְרְדָּכֵי: וַיִּבְקְשׁ הַדְּבָל וַיִּמְצֵא וַיִּתְּלוּ שְׁנֵיהָם עַל־עֵץ וַיִּכְּלֶּב בַּסְפֶר דְּבָרִי הַיִּמִים לְפָנֵי הַמֵּלְך: (אסתר ב,כא-כג)

of Haman in the subsequent chapter is evidence of this fact. 15

Mordechai seems to be a shoo-in to be counted amongst those loyal to the king. He saved the life of the king by unveiling the subversive plot and exposing those disloyal to the king. It would be no surprise, if after the story of Bigtan and Teresh, the Megilla continued with the following edited excerpt found in the eighth chapter of the Megilla. "And Mordechai came before the king because Esther had told him what he was to her...the king took off his ring...and gave it to Mordechai, 16 and...He exalted Mordechai, placing his seat above all the ministers who were with him<sup>17</sup>...And Mordechai went out from before the king in royal clothing: Techelet and white, a great golden crown, and a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan celebrated and was happy."18

But the story of the Megilla takes an unexpected twist which weighs heavily on Esther. Haman's promotion, "all the king's servants who were at the king's gate would kneel and bow to Haman, for so the king had commanded such regarding him; but Mordechai would not kneel or bow."19 Mordechai indirectly defies the king with his refusal to abide by the king's decree to bow before Haman. One would have thought that saving the king's life would trump this small infraction, but, shockingly, that is not the case. Not only does it not spare Mordechai, it relegates the entire Jewish nation annihilation.<sup>20</sup> The inescapable conclusion is challenging being disloyal that or Achashveirosh is a very dangerous endeavor.

The broad parallels between the story of the Aron and the story of Purim are striking and can explain Esther's extreme reticence to engage the king. Vashti is similar to the city of Ashdod and Bigtan and Teresh are analogous to the city of Gat. Ashdod and Gat defy God by housing the Aron as victorious enemies. They see their rout of Bnei Yisrael and the capture of the Aron as a resounding defeat of God. In victory, they display blasphemous insubordination and a

challenge of God. As can be expected, God does not take well to that type of direct defiance, especially when directed at God's manifestation through the Aron. Not surprisingly, they are swiftly punished. The publicly defiant behavior of Vashti and the seditious plans of Bigtan and Teresh were direct challenges Achashveirosh's authority. Unsurprisingly, the king does not tolerate that type of subversive or mutinous behavior. Expectedly, he summarily eliminates those challenges to his authority. In both of these stories, one justifiably expects the third time to be different. When something transpires twice, it is no longer just a random event, but certainly not an established pattern (חזקה); that is why one would expect the turning point in many stories in Tanach to take place on the third time.<sup>21</sup> Expectations have anxiously been raised, but it changes or pivots on the third time before it becomes entrenched. In these cases too, the two stories lead the reader to believe that the third time will be different; they are now with friend and not foe. The Aron is back in the hands of Bnei Yisrael and is treated as such: celebration and sacrifices rather than Nevertheless, a shocking infraction dashes the reader's expectations and hopes for a different outcome. Not only is the conclusion not positive, it is even worse than the previous two negative results. It leads the people of Beit Shemesh to express despair (יאוש) and declare "...who possibly can stand before God, the holy Lord."22 The third time is a "charm" and the Aron is now equated with death and destruction.

Similarly, from Mordechai, the third character to cross Achashveirosh's path, one expects a different outcome, a change in the pattern. The story obliges and he seems to be on an upward trajectory after he saves the king's life. One would have expected the story to continue momentarily with his status within the government being elevated, but instead the next chapter begins with the promotion of his nemesis Haman. And now, instead of an advancement, he is shockingly charged with subversion for defying the king's order to bow to Haman, an infraction that seems to pale in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> אַחָרוֹ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵּלָה גּדָל הַמֶּלֶךְ אָחָשׁוִרְוֹשׁ אֶת־הָמֶן בֶּן־ הַמְּדֵתָא הָאָגָּגִי וַיְנִשְׁאַהּוּ וַיִּשְׁם אֶת־כִּסְאוֹ מַעֵּל כָּל־הַשָּׁרִים אֲשֵׁר אִתְּוֹ: (אסתר ג,א) \\ וַיִּבוֹאֹ הְמֶן וַיִּאמָר לוֹ הַמַּּלֶךְ מַה־לַעֲשׁוֹת בָּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵּץ בִּיקְרָוֹ וַיִּאמֶר הָמֶן בְּלְבוֹ לְמִי יַחִפְּץ הַמֵּלֶךְ לְעֲשָׁוֹת יָקר יוֹתֵר מִמֵּנִי: (אסתר ו,ו)

בּיָּוֹם כּהֹוֹא נְנֹׁלון כֹמֶלֶךְ אָחַשְׁורוֹשׁ לְאֶסְתַּר הַמִּלְכָּה אֶת־בֵּית הָמֵן צֹרֵר הַיְּהוּדֵים וּמְרְדֵּכִי בָּא לְפְנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־טַבְּעְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הָאַרּ הַה הוּא־לָה: וַנַּסְר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־טַבְּעְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הָעֲבִיר מֵהַמָּוֹ וַזִּתְנָה לְמָרְדֵּכֵי וַתָּשָּׁם אָסְתֵּר אֱת־מָרְדֵּכֵי עַל־בֵּית הָמֵן: (אסתר ח,א-ב)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> אַחַרוֹ הַדְּבַרִים הָאַלֶּה גִּדִל הַבְּּלֶךְ אָחַשְׁוְּרִוֹשׁ אָת־הָמֶן בַּן־ הַמְּדֵתָא הָאָגָגִי וְיִנִשְׁאֵהוּ וַשְּׁם אָת־כִּסְאוֹ מֵעֵל כָּל־הַשָּׁרֵים אָשָׁר אָתְּוֹ: (אסתר ג,א)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> וֹמֶרְדַצִּי יֵצֵאוֹ מִלְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּלְבָוּשׁ מִלְכוּת ֹתְּכֶלֶת וְחוּר וַעֲטֶרֶת זְהָבֹ גִּדוֹלְה וְתַכְּרִיךְ בִּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמֵן וְהָעִיר שׁוּשִׁׁן צָהֲלָה וְשְׁמֵחָה: (אסתר ח,טו)

וֹכֶלְרָעֲבְדֵּי הַמְּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּשָּעֵר הַמֶּלֶךְ כּרְעֵים וּמִשְׁתַחוִים ׁ לְהָמָּן כִּי־כֵן צְּזָה־לָוֹ הַמֵּלֶךְ וּמֵּרְדֵּלֵי לָא יִכְּרַע וְלָא יֵשְׁתַּחֲוָה: (אסתר ג,ב) // כורעים ומשתחוים – לו מפני גדולתו, וכולם היו כפופים לו. צוה לו – צוה בשבילו. (רשב"ם אסתר ג,ב)

יברא הַמָּן פִּי־אֵין מָרְדֵּכִּי כַּרָע וּמִשְׁתַחֲה לָוֹ וַיִּמֵלָא הָמָן חַמָּה: וַיְּבֶּז בְּעִינְּיו לְשְׁלְּחַ יָד' בְּמָרְדַכִּי לְבַדּוֹ כִּי־הַגִּידוּ לָוֹ אָת־עַם מָרְדָכֵי וַיִּבַקּשׁ הָמָן לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מַלְכָּוּת אֲחַשְׁוַרָוֹשׁ עַם מָרְדָּכִי: (אסתר ג,ה-ו)

גירשה - מתחרת וכול בל שלישי לא, מתניתין מני? רבי היא; דתניא: מלה הראשון ומת, שני ומת - שלישי לא, מתניתין מני? רבי היא; דתניא: מלה הראשון ומת, שני ומת - שלישי לא תמול, דברי רבי; רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר: שלישי תמול, רביעי לא תמול... (יבמות סד:)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> וַיִּאמְרוּ אַנְשֵי בֵּית־שָּׁמֶשׁ מִי יוּכַל לֻעמֹד לְפְנֵּי יְּקוֹק הָאֱלֹקִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ הַזֶּה וְאֶל־מֵי יַעֵלָה מֵעֶלִינוּ: וַיְהֹּי מִיּוֹם שֶׁבֶת הָאָרוֹ( בְּקְרֵיִת יְעָרִים וַיִּרְבּוּ הַיָּמִים וַיְּהָי) עֶשְׂרִים שָׁבֶה וַיִּנְּהָוּ כַל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֵרֵי יִקּוֹקָ: (שמואל א ו,כ-כא)

comparison to his previous support for the king. Not only does his prior loyalty not save him, but his fate is far worse than the earlier seditious individuals, whereby he and the entire Jewish nation are slated by the king to be annihilated. The situation seems hopeless, "And in every province, wherever the king's word and his law reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting and weeping and lamentation. Sackcloth and ashes were laid out for the multitudes." The inescapable conclusion is that undermining a decree of Achashveirosh is fatal.

Returning to Esther, the reason she does not want to heed Mordechai's request is not because she is afraid to seek an audience with Achashveiros, but rather because of the intended content of her entreaty to him. The last three people to reject or defy the order of the king were summarily disposed of and none of their previous loyalty or relationships protected After Mordechai's experience, Esther now believes that the king's fondness for her will not save her when she asks for a retraction of the king's decree which will be seen or is synonymous with defying the order of the king. She is petrified of the precedent that has been set and she believes that she will just be the next victim of this now entrenched reaction to subversion and the established pattern of eliminating those that are defiant.

Just at the moment the reader or Esther are made to believe that this is now a permanent inescapable reality, the story takes another unexpected turn. As noted above, any reasonable person is certain and would be wise to assume that it is just a matter of time before Kiryat Ye'arim becomes the next victim of the Aron's trail of devastation. Surprisingly, instead, with a different approach, in the fourth instance, the Ark manages to then spend twenty quiescent years in the house of Avinadav in Kryat Ye'arim until David HaMelech attempts to move it to Ir David (see Parshat Korach - In the Presence of God).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, when Esther takes charge and leads a religious revolution (See Purim - When Did Esther Become Queen?), the outcome is shockingly different than expected and Esther succeeds in her mission to spare the Jews.

In these stories, the narrative lures one in and then dashes their hope. It comes to teach that that one cannot take for granted just because something is now under Bnei Yisrael's jurisdiction or auspices or simply since it now regards a member of Bnei Yisrael does not mean by definition that the outcome or result will Those qualifications might be a prerequisite for a different conclusion, but what is essential in order to change the result is a completely different approach that places God at its center as is evidenced by the positive final outcomes in the stories of Esther and the Aron in the house of Avinadav. In addition, it reminds us that positivity is always the winning formula; not a foolish happy-go-lucky attitude, but a well thought out approach to dealing with the adversity. When faced with despair, there is always hope and out of the most desperate of situations can rise the greatest salvation and the most unexpected results.

"V'NaHaFoch Hu (וְנַהֲפְוֹךְ הֹוּא)"

"And it came to pass, from the day that the Aron abode in Kiriyat Ye'arim, that the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Yisrael yearned after God."<sup>24</sup>

"And so, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month which is the month of Adar, when the king's command and edict were to be executed; the very day on which the enemies of the Jews had hoped to prevail over them; the opposite happened (וְנַהְפִוֹךְ הֹוּא), and the Jews prevailed over their enemies."<sup>25</sup> "On the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them (אֲשֶׁר ֶּנֶהְפַּרְ לָהֶם) from grief to joy, and from mourning to festivity…"<sup>26</sup>

Shabbat Shalom and Purim Sameach

לעילוי נשמת הנרצחים ז"ל בארץ ישראל, לרפואה שלימה לפצועים, לגאולה קרובה לנעדרים ולשבוים, והצלחה ושמירה ובשורות טובות וישועות ונחמות לכל כלל ישראל ובמיוחד לחיילי צה"ל העומדים על משמר ארצנו וערי אלקינו

יָלֶךְ עִּוֹד דָּוֶד אָת־כָּל־בָּתִוּר בִּישְׁרָאֵל שְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף: וַיָּקְםוֹ וַיֶּלֶךְ דָּוֹד וְכָל־הָעָם אֲשְׁרְ אִתֹּוּ מִבְּעֵלִי יְהוּדֶה לְהַעָּלְוֹת מִשְּׁם אֵת אֲרוֹן הָאֵלֹקִים אֲשְׁר־נִקְרָא שָׁם שֵׁם יְלוֹןק צְּבָקּוֹת ישֵׁב הַכְּרֵבִים עָלִיו: וַיִּרְלִבוּ אֶת־אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹקִים אֶלִי עָגֵלֶה חָדָשְׁה וַיִּשְׁאֵהוּ מִבִֵּית אָבִינֵדָב אֲשֶׁר

בַּגָּרֶעֵה וְעַדֶּא וְאֵחָיוֹ בְּנֵיֹ אֲבִינְדָּב נֹהָגִים אֶת־הָעֲגֵלָה חֲדְשָׁה: (שׁמואל בּ ו,א-ג)

24 נִיבְאוּ אָנְשֵׁיוֹ קְרַיִת יְעָרִים וַיִּעָלוֹ אֶת־אֲרָוֹן יְקּוְֹק וַיְבָאוּ אֹתֹוֹ אָל־ בִּית אֲבִינַדֶב בְּגָּבְעָה

14 אָת־אֶלְעָזָר בְּנוֹ קְדְשׁׁוּ לְשְׁמֵר אָת־אֲרָוֹן יְקוֹק: וַיִּהִי מִיּוֹם שֶׁבֶת הָאָרוֹן בְּקְרְיַת יְעָרִים וְאָת־אֶלְעָזָר בְּנוֹ הָיְהִיוּ עְשְׁרִים שְׁנֵה וַיִּנְהָוּ לְּלֹבֵנִית יִשְרָאֵל אַחֲרָי יְקּוֹק: (שׁמואל א ז,א-ב)

15 ויִרְבּוּ הַיָּמִים וַיִּהְיָוּ עָשְׂרָים שְׁנֵה וַיִּנְהָוּ כְּל־בֵּית יִשְרָאֵל אַחֲרָי יְקּוֹק; (שׁמואל א ז,א-ב)

בּשְׁנִים ゚עָשָׁר חֹדֶשׁ הוּא־חָדֶשׁ אֲדֶּר בְּשָׁלוֹשָׁה עָשֵׂר יוֹם בּוֹ אֲשָׁר הָגִּיעַ דְּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדְתַוֹ לְהַעָשָׁוֹת בִּיּוֹם אֲשָּׁר שִׁבְּרוּ אֹיֶבֵי הַיְּהוּדִים ֹ לְשְׁלָוֹט בָּהֶם וְנַהַפְּוֹךְ הֹוּא אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלְטִּוּ הַיְּהוּדִים הַמָּה בְּשִּׂנְאֵיהֶם: (אסתר ט,א)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> פַּיָּמִים אֶשֶׁר־נָּחוּ בָּבֶּם הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאָוּיִבֵייָּם וְהַחֹּדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר נֶהְפַּרְ לָהֶם מִיְגוּן לְשְׁמְּהָׁה וּמֵאֶבֶל לְיִוֹם טִוֹב לָעֲשָׁוֹת אוֹתָּם יְמֵי מִשְׁיָּתֵה וְשְׁמְחָׁה וּמִשְׁלָּוֹחַ מָנוֹת אִישׁ לְרַעַּׁהוּ וּמַתָּנָוֹת לָאֲבִיוֹנִים: (אסתר ט,כב)