

# The Good Word

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## BIBLICAL FESTIVAL OF PURIM AND A NEW LOOK AT THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF ESTHER (PART II)

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### INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Various interpretations of the *Scroll of Esther/Book of Esther* have been suggested by the Jews, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Messianic Jews, and Orthodox Christians. These have been overwhelmingly of a literal-historical or typological-allegorical nature. We will survey mainstream Jewish interpretation first.

#### JEWISH INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER:

##### THE ENMITY BETWEEN AMALEK AND ISRAEL

The traditional Jewish interpretation of the *MT* version of *Esther* has been primarily of a literal-historical nature concerning the enmity between Mordechai, a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, and Haman, an Amalekite descended from King Agag. Commentary reflects upon this enmity as representative of global anti-semitism throughout the ages.

But just who were the Amalekites? They were descendants of Esau the grandson of the Patriarch Abraham. Esau and Jacob (Israel) were twins born to Isaac, the son of Abraham, and his wife Rebekah. While the twins were still in the womb, the *LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger* (Genesis 25:23 KJV). Even though Esau was the older and stronger brother, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of porridge. And even though Esau was Isaac's favorite son, he lost his father's blessing for the firstborn to Jacob through trickery on Jacob's part at the urgings of his mother Rebekah. Together these two acts kindled a deep hatred in Esau toward his brother Jacob. That, in turn, fostered the deeply rooted animosity between their descendants. Amalek is first mentioned in *Genesis 36:12 And Timna [daughter of Seir the Horite] was concubine to Eliphaz, Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek*. Thus, Amalek, the progenitor of the

Amalekites, was the grandson of Esau. In Jewish history and tradition, the seed of hatred planted in Esau grew more pernicious in his descendants.

The Amalekites lived in the south of Israel (*Numbers 13 & 14*) and, as a nation, made their first biblical appearance shortly after the Hebrews, having fled from Egypt and passed through the Red Sea, entered into the Wilderness of Sin.


*Exodus 17:8 Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. 9 And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. 10 So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. 13 And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. 14 And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. 15 And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovahnissi [God is my miracle/banner (Jewish translations)]: 16 For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.*

But there was a little more to this encounter which surfaces later in the *Book of Deuteronomy*:

*Deuteronomy 25:17 Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; 18 How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. 19 Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it.*

Thus, in the wilderness of Sinai, because the Amalekites treacherously attacked Israel from behind (where the weak and the feeble traveled at a bit slower pace), the Amalekites became an anathema to Israel, and were to be destroyed as the LORD commanded.

Later the Amalekites allied themselves with Israel's other enemies, e.g., the Moabites under King Eglon and also with the Midianites (Judges 6, 7, 10). During the



reign of King Saul (c.1020-1012 BC) Israel continuously fought against all her enemies: the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zobab, and, of course, the Amalekites. At that time the LORD brought to Saul (of the tribe of Benjamin and first King of Israel) the remembrance of His anathema against the Amalekites:

*1 Samuel 15:1 Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. 2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. 3 Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.*

However, in brazen disregard for the LORD's command, Saul spared Agag, King of Amalek, and spared the best sheep and oxen for sacrifices to the LORD. The prophet Samuel rebuked Saul for his disobedience, and then hewed Agag to death before the LORD. Saul and his sons were eventually slain in battle by the Philistines. David (of the tribe of Judah) succeeded Saul as king and also fought the Amalekites:

*1 Samuel 27:8 And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites: for those nations were of old the inhabitants of the land, as thou goest to Shur, even unto the land of Egypt. 9 And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish.*

*1 Samuel 30:17 And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled.*

Later in the days of King Hezekiah (739-687 BC) the Israelites fought against a group Amalekites who had previously evaded death:

*1 Chronicles 4:40 And they [of the tribe of Judah] found fat pasture and good, and the land was wide, and quiet, and peaceable; for they of Ham had dwelt there of old. 41 And these written by name came in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and smote their tents, and the habitations that were found there, and destroyed them utterly unto this day, and dwelt in their rooms: because there was pasture there for their flocks. 42 And some of them, even of the sons of Simeon, five hundred men, went to mount Seir, having for their captains Pelatiah, and Nariah, and Rephaiah, and Uzziel, the sons of Ishi. 43 And they smote the rest of the Amalekites that were escaped, and dwelt there unto this day.*

That is the last we hear about the Amalekites in Scripture for a couple of centuries until *Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite* surfaces in *MT Esther*. At that time Mordechai, a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, had been given a position in the palace as a reward from King Ahasurus of the Medes and Persians. When

he found himself in the presence of Haman, the King's prime minister, Mordechai, refused to bow down to him. Haman was enraged at Mordechai's refusal. Upon similar repeated episodes and Haman's learning of his nationality, Haman's passionate ancestral hatred as well as his personal hatred of Mordechai were transformed into a genocidal hatred of all the Jews in the empire. So, he cast lots to determine when the Jews' destruction should take place. Thus, 500 years after Kings Agag and Saul, the stage was set for another fatal encounter between Amalekite and Benjaminite.


The rabbis, however, believed there was more to Mordechai's refusal to bow down before Haman than a long standing ethnic vendetta. And even though the Persians considered court officials to be worthy of veneration, in their commentaries (AD 400-1200), among other possibilities, the rabbis suggested that Haman wore an image of his favorite idol on his clothing, so that bowing down to him would mean that Mordechai would be bowing before an idol and, thus, violating the *Torah*. Consequently, they considered Mordechai's actions to be highly justified.<sup>1</sup> The rabbis further considered Haman's bitter reaction to be typical of anti-Semitism throughout the ages.

A second set of themes in Jewish interpretation centers around Esther and the Torah: How could she, a Jewess, even consider marrying an unclean pagan King? Where was her understanding of her Jewishness, where her obedience to the Torah? How are serious religious Jews to ethically understand and explain it? And, why, at the prodding of Mordechai, did she place herself in danger to save her people, if not for religious reasons?

A third major theme in Jewish interpretation focuses on explaining the total absence of the mention of God and of any religious acts of piety other than fasting in *Esther*. In the *Babylonian Talmud, Seder Kodashim, Tractate Chulin 139b* the rabbis reasoned that God appears "hidden" in *Megillah Esther*, even as her Jewish name *Esther* (אֶסְתֵּר) appeared hidden in the *Torah*: *And I will surely hide* (אֶסְתֵּר) *My face on that day* (*Deut.* 31:18). Nevertheless, they saw God continually and providentially working behind the scenes to effect the rescue of the Jewish people. Otherwise there would be too many coincidences in the book for their rescue to be considered "by chance" alone. Thus, the *Scroll of Esther* demonstrated God's providential care for His people even after they were exiled from their land due to their utter disregard for Him and His covenant. Moreover, and importantly, the

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1. Dr. Rachael Adelman, *Why Did Mordecai Not Bow Down to Haman?* <https://thetorah.com/why-did-mordecai-not-bow-down-to-haman/>



Jewish people see in *Esther* that God can use ordinary people, and even a woman such as Esther, to accomplish His saving purposes.

In summary, the *Scroll of Esther* is highly esteemed by the Jewish people because: (1) it explains the origin of their feast of Purim; (2) it commands them to continue to celebrate its observance (*Esther 9:24-28*); (3) it provides a warning to others against anti-Semitism (*cf. Genesis 12:1-3*); and, most importantly, (4) it gives them the reassurance that no matter how severe a threat to their existence might be, the LORD will at least preserve a remnant of their people.

TRADITIONAL ORTHODOX INTERPRETATION OF  
THE SEPTUAGINT (*LXX*) BOOK OF ESTHER

The Orthodox Church has been relatively silent about its *Esther*. It does not read from *Esther* in its worship services and has only provided us with a handful of patristic comments over the past 2 millennia. What we do see in our early Patristic and Christian writers is that they interpreted Orthodox (*LXX*) *Esther* from a literal and historical perspective:

St. Clement of Rome (AD 35-90) described Esther as “perfect in faith”, courageous, and humble:

“Many women also, being strengthened by the grace of God, have performed numerous manly exploits ... **Esther also, being perfect in faith**, exposed herself to no less danger, in order to deliver the twelve tribes of Israel from impending destruction. **For with fasting and humiliation she entreated the everlasting God, who seeth all things; and He, perceiving the humility of her spirit, delivered the people for whose sake she had encountered peril.**”<sup>2</sup>

The renowned Christian scholar Origen of Alexandria (AD 184-253) extolled both Esther and Mardochai in regard to prayer and fasting:

“But what use is there to recall all the examples of those who, because they prayed as they ought, received great favors from God? Everyone can choose for himself many examples from the Scriptures. Anna obtained the birth of Samuel ... Again, **when as a result of a single order arising from the intrigues of Aman [Haman], the people were about to be destroyed, the prayer and fasting of Mardochai and Esther were heard**, and hence there arose, in addition to the feasts ordained by Moses, the **festival of Mardochai** [Note: not of Purim nor of Esther!!!] for the people.”<sup>3</sup>

By far the best and most detailed commentary on *Esther* was penned by the Syriac Christian ascetic St. Aphrahat (AD 280-345) in his *Demonstrations*. He compared Mordecai’s actions with Jesus’ actions from a literal-historical perspective as well, intimating that Mordecai is a type of Christ -- a deliverer and savior of

the Church, i.e., that Esther is a type of the Church who was well pleasing to God because of Christ Jesus; and that Vashti was a type of those identified only through their failure to do the will of God:

“Mordecai was also persecuted as Jesus was persecuted. Mordecai was persecuted by the wicked Haman; and Jesus was persecuted by the rebellious people. Mordecai by his prayer delivered his people from the hands of Haman; and Jesus was rescued from the hands of His persecutors. Because Mordecai sat and clothed himself with sackcloth, he saved Esther and his people from the sword; and because Jesus clothed Himself with a body and was illuminated, He saved the Church and its children from death. Because of Mordecai, **Esther was well pleasing to the king and went in and sat instead of Vashti, who did not do his will; and because of Jesus, the Church is well pleasing to God and has gone into the king instead of the congregation that did not His will.** Mordecai admonished Esther that she should fast with her maidens, that she and her people might be delivered from the hands of Haman; and Jesus admonished the Church and its children [to fast], that it and its children might be delivered from the wrath [to come]. Mordecai received the honor of Haman his persecutor; and Jesus received great glory from His Father, instead of His persecutors who were of the foolish people. Mordecai trod on the neck of Haman, his persecutor; and as for Jesus, His enemies shall be put under His feet. Before Mordecai, Haman proclaimed, *Thus shall it be done to the man, in honoring whom the king is pleased*; as for Jesus, His preachers came out of the people who persecuted Him, and they said, *This is Jesus the Son of God*. The blood of Mordecai was required at the hand of Haman and his sons; and the *blood of Jesus*, his persecutors took *on themselves and on their children.*”<sup>4</sup>

St. Athanasius the Great (c. AD 296-373) praised the effectiveness of Esther’s fasting, prayer, and faith even though he did not include her book in his list of canonical books of the Old Testament:

“When the whole nation of Israel was about to perish, **blessed Esther defeated the tyrant’s anger simply by fasting and praying to God. By faith she changed the ruin of her people into safety.**”<sup>5</sup>

Our Holy Father, St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan (AD 340-397), commented on the courage and virtue of Esther, and the virtuous actions of King Artaxerxes:


“**Why did Queen Esther expose herself to death and not fear the wrath of a fierce king? Was it not to save her people from death, an act both seemly and virtuous?** The king of Persia himself also, though fierce and proud, yet thought it seemly to show honor to the man who had given information about a plot which had been laid against himself, to save a free people from slavery, to snatch them from death, and not to spare him who had pressed on such unseemly plans. So finally he handed over to the gallows the man that stood second to himself, and whom he counted chief among all his friends, because he considered that he [Aman] had

2. St. Clement of Rome, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, ANF, Vol. 1, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA 1994, p. 20.

3. Origen, *On Prayer* 13.2, in Marco Conti (ed), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS), Old Testament V, Esther 4:5-17*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL2008, p. 384.

4. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, XXI, §20, *NPNF II*, Vol. 13, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1994, p. 400

5. St. Athanasius, *Festal Letter 4*, in Marco Conti, *ACCS*, p. 397.



dishonored him [the king] by his false counsels.”<sup>6</sup>

Blessed Jerome (AD 347-420), scholar and translator of the Latin *Vulgate* Old Testament from the Hebrew, wrote favorably about Esther and the miraculous benefits of her prayer:

“Sleep was removed from the eyes of Ahasuerus, whom the Seventy call Artaxerxes, that he might turn over the memoirs of his faithful ministers and come upon Mordecai, by whose evidence he was delivered from a conspiracy; and that thus Esther might be more acceptable, and the whole people of the Jews escape imminent death. There is no doubt that the mighty sovereign to whom belonged the whole East, from India to the North and to Ethiopia, after feasting sumptuously on delicacies gathered from every part of the world would have desired to sleep, and to take his rest, and to gratify his free choice of sleep, had not the LORD, the provider of all good things, hindered the course of nature, so, that in defiance of nature, the tyrant’s cruelty might be overcome. If I were to attempt to produce all the instances in Holy Writ, I should be tedious. All that the saints say is a prayer to God; their whole prayers and supplication [are] a strong wrestling for the pity of God, so that we, who by our own strength and zeal cannot be saved, may be preserved by His mercy.”<sup>7</sup>

The monk and author St. John Cassian (AD 360-435) who brought the practices of eastern monasticism to the west, noted that the LORD even works in the hearts and minds of pagan kings:

“Above all we should know that the three sources of our thoughts are : They come from God, from the devil, and from ourselves. They are from God when He deigns to visit us by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which raises us up to a higher level of progress; and when we have made little gain or have acted lazily and been overcome and He chastens us with a most salutary compunction; and when he opens to us the heavenly sacraments and changes our chosen orientation to better acts and to a better will. This was the case when **King Ahasuerus was chastised by the LORD and was moved to examine the annals, whereupon he remembered the good deeds of Mordechai**, exalted him to the highest degree of honor, and immediately recalled his exceedingly cruel sentence concerning the killing of the Jewish people.”<sup>8</sup>

Again, all these examples from the first four to five centuries of the New Testament Church interpret *LXX Esther*, including its Latin or Syriac translations, in a literal-historical or typological manner.

What do our Liturgical Texts have to say about Esther and Mordechai? Only she is mentioned in the 9th ode of *Orthros/Matins* on the *Sunday of the Holy Forefathers* and briefly described in the *Synaxarion of Orthros/Matins* for the *Sunday Before the Nativity of*

6. St. Ambrose, *Duties of the Clergy, Book III*, Chapter XXL, ¶ 123-4, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wade, *NPNF II*, Vol. 10, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, p. 87.

7. Jerome, *Against the Pelagians, III*, §10, *NPNF II*, Vol. 6, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1994, p. 477.

8. John Cassian, *The Conferences*, Ancient Christian Writers Vol. 57, I.XIX.1, Paulist Press, New York, NY, 1997, p. 57-58.

*Christ* (December 18-24) in a literal manner:

✠ *We commemorate the righteous Esther, who delivered Israel from death.*

*Verse: Esther saved the Israelite men beforetime, who were to be crowned with the helmet of Hades.*<sup>9</sup>

#### AN ORTHODOX REVISIT OF *LXX ESTHER*

As we consider the *Septuagint* version of *Esther* in comparison to the *Masoretic text* version, let’s first compare them from the literal-historical perspective.

One of the most obvious differences between the two is the nationality of Aman’s father Amadathes from Haman’s father Hammedatha. In the *MT* Haman’s father is definitely described as an Agagite (Agag being King of the Amalekites in the time of King Saul of Israel -- a true enemy of Israel). However, in the *LXX*, Aman’s father is described 3 times as a *Bugean*<sup>10</sup> and once as *the Macedonian* (*ὁ Μακεδών* in *Esther* 9:24). So, in the *LXX*, Aman is not a descendant of Abraham’s grandson Esau, and thus, is not a long-standing national and personal enemy of the Jews as was Haman in the *MT*. Rather, he was a Macedonian. What would be the ramifications of such a change in nationality? A review of the Kingdom of Macedon in the time of Artaxerxes/Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) would be helpful in this regard.


The Kingdom of Macedon in northern Greece had become a vassal state to King Darius I of Persia in 512/511 BC. Thirty years later, King Alexander I of Macedon was forced to supply troops to King Xerxes I’s army during the 2nd Persian-Greek war of 481-479 BC. However, according to Herodotus<sup>11</sup>, Alexander was also a double agent, providing the Greeks with supplies as well as intelligence on Xerxes’ forces. This helped slow the Persian advance toward Athens through the strategic pass at Thermopylae. After the calamitous defeat of the Persian fleet at Salamis in 480 BC, Alexander effectively ingratiated himself to the Persian governor Mardonius and acted as an intermediary for him during the subsequent peace negotiations.<sup>12</sup> In August the following year at Mycale the Greeks destroyed what remained of the Persian navy. On the same day they also defeated the larger Persian army at Plataea. Alexander’s Macedonian ground forces then pursued the retreating Persian survivors and helped in their decimation. Xerxes had little recourse but to retreat home -- an embarrassing humiliation to the

9. *Menaion, Volume Four, The Month of December*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA, 2005, p. 134, column b.

10. Greek = *ΒΟΥΓΑΪΟΣ*, a word used only in Homeric Greek in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* for a bully, braggart, and only used as a term of reproach. See HG Liddell and R Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon With a Revised Supplement*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 324.

11. Herodotus, *The History*, 7.173 and 9.44-46, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1988, pp. 530-531, 632-634.

12. *Ibid.*, 8.140-4, pp. 608-611.



world's largest empire and her king!

Consequently, the implications of Aman being a Macedonian at this same time are of utmost importance:

In struggling to interpret his dream in *Esther 1*, Mardocheus overheard the two chamberlains plotting to lay hands on King Artaxerxes. He informed the king and the two were executed. Both he and the king recorded these events. Afterwards:

*... the king commanded Mardocheus to attend in the palace, and gave gifts for this service. And Aman the son of Amadathes the Bugean was honourable [NETS: highly esteemed] in the sight of the king, and he endeavored to hurt Mardocheus and his people, because of the two chamberlains of the king (LXX Esther 1: Expansion A 13-14).*

Why would Aman be so angered were he not a co-conspirator with the chamberlains, or unless the chamberlains were fellow Macedonians? He certainly wasn't angry with Mardocheus because of his being a Jew at this early time. Personally, I suspect that after the Persians' ignominious defeat at the hands of the Greeks, they kept the Macedonians, and King Alexander I in particular, under careful surveillance. Macedonian spies may very well have been deployed to the Palace. Perhaps Gabatha and Tharrha were part of a long standing undercover Macedonian sleeper cell. In the future Macedon would prove to be a much greater threat. Although a small vassal kingdom in the 5th century BC, it gained its freedom during Alexander I's reign. In the 4th century BC King Philip II of Macedon unified virtually all of the Greek city states under his rule, and then invaded Persia. The vast Medo-Persia Empire, the second great world empire [envisioned as a powerful bear by the Prophet Daniel], finally crumbled in 323 BC before the Macedonian-Greek armies led by Phillip's son, Alexander the Great. Alexander's empire then became the 3rd great world empire [envisioned by the Prophet Daniel as a powerful and swiftly moving leopard with 4 wings and 4 heads].<sup>13</sup>

#### ORTHODOX ALLEGORICAL-TYPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

There is also a not-so-hidden eschatological dimension to Aman and *LXX Esther*. In the *LXX*, Aman was once called τοῦ ἐχθροῦ the adversary and once τῷ διαβόλῳ, the slanderer, both allusions to Satan:

*LXX Esther 7:4. For both I and my people are sold for destruction, and pillage, and slavery; both we and our children for bondmen and bondwomen: and I consented not to it, for the [slanderer] is not worthy of the king's palace. 5 And the king said, Who is this that has dared to do this thing? 6 And Esther said, the adversary is Aman, this wicked man.*

*8:1 And in that day king Artaxerxes gave to Esther all that belonged to Aman the slanderer:*

13. The 4 heads of the "leopard" have been traditionally interpreted as Alexander's 4 generals who ruled the empire after his death.

The Greek phrase translated here as *this wicked man* is ὁ πονηρὸς οὗτος, the evil one this (one), is the same expression (in a different grammatical case) as in the Nicean-Constantinople creed: *and deliver us from the evil one*, τοῦ πονηροῦ, i.e., Satan. Contrast this with the *MT* version of *Esther 7:6* in which Haman is described only as צַר *Tsar*, literally an adversary/enemy in the Hebrew, and not הַצַּר the adversary. In the *LXX* Aman is not just an Amalekite with a long standing ethnic vendetta against the Jews, nor a Macedonian, i.e., a new military adversary, but is representative of a much older and more sinister enemy -- Satan, the dragon/serpent (cf. *Esther A4-11*), the Adversary, the enemy of God and of all mankind. So just as Aman, as a man, persecuted Mardocheus (a type of Christ according to St. Aphrahat) and his people the Jews, so does Satan and the Antichrist (a man), oppose Christ Jesus and persecute His followers. This comparison can be seen on many levels:

(1) Just as Aman, energized by his high status in the empire exercised all the power of the Persian king Artaxerxes, the Antichrist, a man demonically energized by Satan, will exercise all the power of Satan.

(2) Just as Aman achieved worldly success, rising to second in the Kingdom of Persia before his fall, the Antichrist will achieve great worldly success, second to Satan, before his fall.


(3) Just as Aman was a proud braggart, a bully, and full of murderous hatred and intent, so the Antichrist will be full of pride, a braggart and a bully -- and full of blasphemy and murderous hatred.

(4) Just as Aman desired all to bow down before him and was murderously enraged at Mardocheus who refused to do so, the Antichrist will desire all men to bow down and worship him as God, and will angrily murder those who fail to do so.

(5) Just as Aman desired to totally destroy all the Jews in the Persian Empire, so will the Antichrist seek the genocidal extermination of all true Israelites (*those who see God*, i.e., the Church of Christ composed of Orthodox Christians from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds) as well as all others who oppose him.

(6) Just as Aman persecuted Mardocheus and sought to hang him on a wooden gallows, so did Satan (through his Jewish followers) persecute and hang Jesus on a wooden cross/tree (cf *Acts 5:30, 10:39*)

(7) Just as the King Artaxerxes (=whose rule is through justice/truth)/Ahasuerus (=he who rules over men)/Xerxes (self-acclaimed *King of Kings, King of Nations*) personally dispatched Aman/Haman to death on the wooden pole/gallows, so will the Risen Jesus Christ, the KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS, to



Whom all judgment is rendered, personally dispatch Satan to eternal death in the lake of fire and brimstone.

Similarly, *LXX Esther* also adds a great spiritual dimension to the person of Esther herself. Recall that St. Clement of Rome described Esther as “perfect in faith.” Esther is seen fasting and in fervent prayer and supplication for her people even as she exhorts them to intercede for her before the God of Israel and before Artaxerxes, that her petition would be granted by the king. Therefore, just as Esther (the Queen of Persia) eloquently interceded for the Jews and those Gentiles who were joining with them (together the people of God in the Persian Empire), so does the Theotokos (the Queen of Heaven), and the Church (the Bride of Christ), intercede for the people of God helping to protect and save the faithful as well as newly converting souls (of both Jews and Gentiles) until all Israel is saved. Just as Mardocheaus brought up Esther to be **his wife**, so did Christ prepare His Church to be His Bride in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Today there are some among the heterodox, and especially within the Messianic (Jewish) community, who believe that the Esther foreshadows the salvation of the faithful remnant of the children of Israel in the last days: that the days of the Gentile Church will be completed, that God will then graft into the Church the remnant of Jewish believers, i.e., Messianic Christians, out of the suffering and trials of the Great Tribulation period, and bring them into His sheepfold under His New Covenant. However, the *LXX Book of Esther* foreshadows that it is not the Jews alone, but the Jews and those Gentiles who joined with them that are saved through Esther’s and Mardocheaus’ fasting, prayers and courageous actions. Moreover, in their Purim celebrations, Jews and Gentiles alike all rejoice together, feast together, and give portions to the poor together in celebration of their salvation from death at the hands of Aman, his 10 sons, and their followers. In his discussion of the Lord’s two witnesses<sup>14</sup> mentioned in *Revelation 11* St. John of Kronstadt writes that it is not the Jews alone, who will be saved at that time:

“Enoch will be the evangelist of the pagans, while Elijah the Thesbite – of the Jews. The apostolic preaching of the Evangelist John will be required for the sake of the elect, for the restoration of the lost meaning of the Christian teaching, perverted by the interpretations of the rationalists among the Christians... There remains no one Gospel commandment which, like the Talmudists in relation to the law of Moses, the

14. “By these two witnesses all the Holy Fathers and teachers of the Church understand almost unanimously the Old Testament righteous ones Enoch and Elijah, who were taken alive into heaven.” Archbishop Averky (Taushev), *The Epistles and the Apocalypse, Commentary of the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, Volume III*, Holy Trinity Seminary Press, Jordanville, NY 2018, p. 281.

Protestants did not have to change, either by narrowing or by broadening its meaning to an unrecognizable degree... **Corresponding to the success of the preaching of Elijah the Thesbite amidst the Jews, it must be supposed that the preaching of Enoch among the pagans and the preaching of John the Theologian among the Christians will have great success.**<sup>15</sup>

What about Queen Astin/Vashti (= *best/most excellent of women*)? -- whom does she represent? Disobedient Queen Astin in her pride and arrogance, after the 180 day wedding feast, refused the invitation of the King Artaxerxes, through his servants,

*to bring in the queen to him, to enthrone her, and crown her with the diadem, and to shew her to the princes, and her beauty to the nations: for she was beautiful. But queen Astin hearkened not to him to come with the chamberlains: so the king was grieved and angered (LXX Esther 1:11-12).*


As punishment and a lesson to others, Astin was not enthroned, not crowned, and did not have her beauty displayed before all. She was deemed unworthy to ever appear again before King Artaxerxes, just as those who refused the invitation to the wedding of a certain king’s son were deemed unworthy, *cf. St Matthew 22*). Moreover, those who crashed that wedding feast in improper attire (not wearing the wedding garments of faith, i.e., the grace of the Holy Spirit) were cast into the *outer darkness* or *the fire where there shall be weeping, and the gnashing of teeth*. So it will be with the disobedient -- they will be cast out by Him WHOSE RULE IS THROUGH JUSTICE/TRUTH, by Him Who is the KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS to Whom all Judgment is given by the Father -- our Lord Jesus Christ enthroned in the Heavens.

The 9th century AD Latin writer of the first Christian commentary on the *Book of Esther*, Rabanus Maurus Magentius (c. AD 780-856), was also the first to propose that Vashti symbolized the Jews. He was a Frankish Benedictine monk and theologian who studied under Alcuin of York, the Master of Charlemagne’s Palace School of Frankish (i.e., Roman Catholic) theology. In his *Forward to the Empress Judith*<sup>16</sup> for his *Commentary on the Book of Esther* published in AD 836, Rabanus explained that his allegorical approach was based on the text from a Hebrew source-- not from the traditional *Septuagint* text or its Latin translation:

“We have, moreover, **explained in an allegorical fashion** the material that has been **drawn from the Hebrew source**; while **we have chosen to not to comment upon all the other**

15. St. John of Kronstadt as quoted by Vladimir Moss, in *Revelation: The Book of the End: An Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian*, 2011, p. 164 at <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/books/>

16. Empress Judith (AD 805-843), wife of Louis the Pious, 3rd King of the Carolingian Roman Emperors (Frankish)



passages that have been added to it in accordance with the language and the literature of the Greeks.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Rabanus must have been using Jerome’s AD 390-405 Latin *Vulgate* translation. He theorized:

“**Queen Vashti must symbolize the Jewish people**, which at the time seemed to have ruled like a queen since it [Israel] was found to stand apart from all the other nations in its worship of a single God ... **the ancient people of the Synagogue who are represented in the person of Queen Vashti, refused to leave their dwelling**, i.e. to be parted from the letter of the Law, but were rather content to live by their own judgment which they would exercise for the satisfaction of their earthly desires ... **For it was then that Esther in the allegorical sense, i.e. the Church, was being brought from among the nations<sup>18</sup> to Christ the king through the apostles’ preaching, and by means of the belief of robust faith and the sacrament of baptism**; she was shapely, and in the incredible beauty of her virtues she appeared gracious and lovely to all who saw her.”<sup>19</sup>

William Kelly (1821-1906), a prominent Protestant dispensationalist, proposed the opposite typology, that Astin/Vashti symbolized the Gentiles:

“... the great Gentile wife of the great king is discarded, and the singular fact comes that a Jewess takes her place. I cannot doubt, myself, that it is what will follow when the Gentile has proved himself disobedient, and has failed in displaying the beauty that should be in the testimony of God before the world ... Well, **Vashti is the Gentile wife that is discarded for her disobedience and failure in displaying her beauty before the world**. That is what Christendom ought to do. **The Gentile, I say, will be broken off and dismissed, and the Jew will be brought in. This is what is represented by the call of Esther**. She becomes the object of the great king’s affections, and displaces Vashti, who is never restored ...”<sup>20</sup>

Although both of these alternatives seem plausible at first glance, both also appear to espouse “replacement” theology. For example, in Rabanus’ allegory, the Gentile Queen Vashti representing the Jews is replaced by the new Jewish Queen Esther representing the the Gentiles, i.e., the Church drawn from the nations, -- which seems somehow quite wrong. In Kelly’s allegory, the Gentile Queen Vashti representing the disobedient Gentile Church is replaced by the Jewish Queen Esther representing the Jews coming into the

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17. *Commentary of Rabanus Maurus on the Book of Esther*, published AD 836, translated from the Latin by Peter Wyetznier, The Herzl Institute, Jerusalem, Israel, 2015, pp. 42, online at <http://www.yoramhazon.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Rabanus-Maurus-Esther-Commentary-English-v.-1.1-Dec-1-2015.pdf>

18. Was not the New Testament Church first composed solely of believing Jews? Has he forgotten the faithful of the Old Testament?

19. Rabanus, *Chapter 2*, p. 8, 10; *Chapter 4*, p. 16.

20. William Kelly, *The Book of Esther, Lecture by W. Kelly 1873*, Bible Truth Publishers — Oak Park, Ill. quoted in *The Messianic Meaning of the Book of Esther (Part I)*, at <https://messianic613.wordpress.com/2016/03/03/the-messianic-meaning-of-the-book-of-esther-part-i/>

Church at the 11th hour -- to the exclusion (at that time) of the Gentiles, which also seems quite wrong.

I believe both allegories to be forced and lead one astray to follow their respective originator’s fanciful and preconceived notions. The further one reads in Rabanus, the more fanciful and imaginative the commentary becomes with more and more detours into the New Testament *Gospels* and *Epistles* hoping to add weight to his argument. Kelly’s case is based on the corruption and decadence that he saw in other Protestants (Kelly himself being a member of the Plymouth Brethren -- an early evangelical non-conformist Protestant association of independent assemblies not too dissimilar from today’s evangelical Christians). His allegory here would certainly appeal to many Messianic Jewish Christians of the present era, who want the return of the “Jewishness” of Jesus and of the Scriptures to what they see as a “Gentile” Church. However, St. John of Kronstadt’s comments above wherein Elijah and Enoch respectively evangelize the Jews and the Gentiles during the dark days of the Antichrist crushes Kelly’s dispensational typology.

I personally see Astin/Vashti as allegorically representative of all the disobedient throughout the ages; and Esther, of all the obedient throughout the ages who comprise the Old and New Testament Church (of the Jews and those who were joined to them of the nations, the Gentiles) -- just as St. Aphrahat wrote (p.3) and *LXX Esther* appears to support (cf. 8:17, 9:27).

Next, we come upon a couple of the more interesting aspects of Purim in *LXX Esther* -- first, the rejoicing of the Jews and the Gentiles joined to them following the executions of Aman, his 10 sons, and of all the enemies of the Jews;<sup>21</sup> and, second, the exchanging gifts of food amongst themselves and their friends, as well as sending portions to the poor:

*Esther 9:20 And Mardocheaus wrote these things in a book, and sent them to the Jews, as many as were in the kingdom of Artaxerxes, both them that were near and them that were afar off, 21 to establish these as joyful days, and to keep the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar; 22 for on these days the Jews obtained rest from their enemies; and as to the month, which was Adar, in which a change was made for them, from mourning to joy, and from sorrow to a good day, spend the whole of it in good days of feasting [ a wedding<sup>22</sup>] and gladness, sending portions to their friends, and to the poor. 23 And the Jews consented to this accordingly as Mardocheaus wrote to them ... 27 And Mardocheaus*

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21. Aman having 10 sons is reminiscent of the 10 horns of both Satan (the beast/dragon from the abyss in Rev. 12) and of the Antichrist (the beast from the sea in Rev. 13).

22. ἀγειν ὅλον ἀγαθὰς ἡμέρας γάμων καὶ εὐφροσύνης  
Charles Thompson translation: *to keep the whole month as good days of weddings and joy*. Lit: *to keep/be celebrating the whole/entire (of) good days, a wedding and a gladness*

**THE GOOD WORD**

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*established it, and the Jews took upon themselves, and upon their seed, and upon those that were joined to them to observe it, neither would they on any account behave differently:<sup>23</sup> but these days were to be a memorial kept in every generation, and city, and family, and province.*

Similarly, after the defeat of Satan himself, in the *Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian* we see the Saints in Heaven exhorted to rejoice as well:

*Revelation 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. 8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. 9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.*

Lastly, in the time of the Antichrist, a demonic parody of Purim will take place. The followers of the Antichrist will rejoice out of relief when the two witnesses, Enoch and Elijah, are murdered by Satan:

*Revelation 11:7 And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them ... 10 And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth.*

But unlike the Jews since the time of Esther and Mardocheaus, and unlike the rejoicing at the Wedding

23. *Esther 8:17b ... many of the Gentiles were circumcised, and became Jews, for fear of the Jews.* And they observed Purim as well.

Feast of the Lamb, the followers of the Antichrist will have a rather short-lived celebration -- only 3 1/2 days!

Thus, the *LXX Book of Esther* and Purim appear to be a foreshadowing<sup>24</sup> of the deliverance of the Church from Satan and the Antichrist at the end of time by Christ Jesus, the true *KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*, Who desires all who are invited to the Wedding Supper of the LAMB, to come in their finest wedding garments, and to eternally celebrate His wedding feast as His Bride, the Church, whom He “raised” to be His Bride. Therein lies the significance of *LXX Esther*, the deeper meaning of Purim, and perhaps, the real reason the Church canonized it and has continued to read it and champion it as Scripture.



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24. *Isaiah 46:9b (LXX Brenton) for I am God, and there is none other beside Me, 10. telling beforehand the latter events before they come to pass, and they are accomplished together: and I said, all My counsel shall stand, and I will do all things that I have planned:*