

The Good Word

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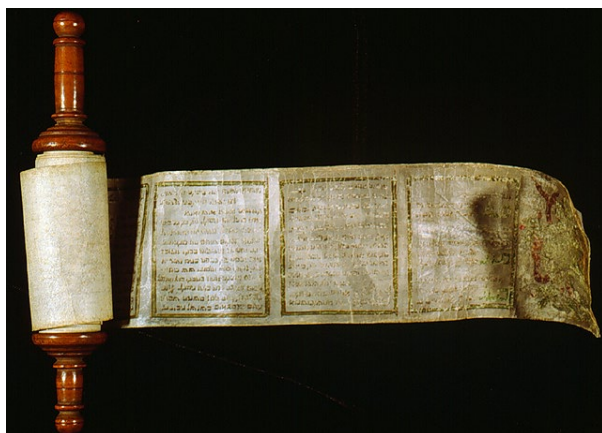


BIBLICAL FESTIVAL OF PURIM AND A NEW LOOK AT THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF ESTHER (PART I)¹

BY DR. SERAPHIM STEGER

INTRODUCTION

We now come to the last biblical festival in the Jewish liturgical cycle: *Purim* פּוּרִים [Hebrew *lots, dice*] This most joyous of all the Jewish festivals is celebrated on Adar 14-15² and commemorates the miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people through Esther and Mordechai from genocidal extermination in the 5th century BC Persian empire of King Ahasuerus. This plot was devised by Haman, a very high ranking official in Ahasuerus' palace and a member of the Amalekites, one of Israel's greatest national enemies. The date for the genocide was determined by the casting of lots, hence the name *Purim* given to their deliverance. The story behind this plot and its foiling is found in the Hebrew *Scroll of Esther*, מגילת אסתר *Megillah Esther*, which is read liturgically by the Jews during Purim.



SCROLL OF ESTHER (AD 701-800), CARY GRAPHIC ARTS COLLECTION, ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Despite nearly being excluded from the Jewish canon of their Bible by the rabbis early in the second

century AD, the *Scroll of Esther* has since been considered second only to the *Five Books of Moses* in importance to the Jewish people.³ Consequently, despite its small size, *Megillah Esther* has extensive rabbinic commentary in *Tractate Basra Bava* of the *Babylonian Talmud* (AD 200-600) and in *Rabbah Esther* (AD 900-1200).⁴ There are more extant scrolls of *Esther* than any other Old Testament book with manuscripts dating from at least as early as the 8th century AD. *Esther* is also the only biblical book with two translations from Hebrew into Aramaic: the *Targum Rishon* (first) c. AD 700 and the *Targum Sheni* (second) c. AD 800 AD. Yet, *Esther* has not been without great controversy among Jews and Christians alike. Consequently, the literature on it is voluminous. But most of that literature is for a different *Esther* --not the longer Orthodox Christian canonical Greek version found in the Septuagint (*LXX*), but the shorter Jewish canonical Hebrew version found in the Masoretic Text (*MT*) used by the Synagogue as well as by most heterodox Christians in translation. This *MT* version lacks any mention of prayer or even of God and appears to condone vengeance and retribution upon the enemies of the Jews. In contrast, *LXX Esther* is worthy to be read for its own sake because it (1) reveals an inner spiritual life in Esther and Mordechai not seen in the *MT*, (2) reveals a different motivation in their evil enemy Haman, and, (3) needs to be interpreted in a different light, i.e., with an Orthodox perspective.

ANCIENT TEXT VERSIONS OF ESTHER

There are 3 ancient text versions for *Esther*: (1) The Greek *Septuagint* (*LXX*) text of the Orthodox Church which is widely attested to in the 4 great uncial biblical codices (*Codex Vaticanus* c. AD 325-350; *Codex Sinaiticus* c. AD 330-360; *Codex Alexandrinus* c. AD 400-440; and *Codex Ephraemi* c. AD 450), as well as by more than 30 minuscule manuscripts; (2) The Hebrew *Masoretic Text* (*MT*):⁵ and (3) the short non-

1. Scripture version: *Septuagint*, Brenton translation, at http://ecmarsh.com/lxx-kjv/esther/est_002.htm unless otherwise stated.

2. Adar is the last month in the Hebrew religious calendar, the month before Passover. In leap years Purim is celebrated in the second to the last month of the year Adar I, followed by the added month Adar II.

3. Lina Haland, *For such a Time as This: The Book of Esther and Her Place in the Biblical Canon*, Master Thesis, Spring 2014, pp. 41-47, at <https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/id/247934/Master>. This is well researched and documented.

4. *Rabbah Esther* is the foremost midrash (commentary) on *Esther*.

5. *Leningrad Codex 19A*, dating from 1008 AD, is the oldest complete Jewish biblical text in Hebrew and contains the book of *Esther*.

canonical Greek Alpha text only found in 5 later manuscripts⁶ -- a translation believed to be based on the *LXX* and revised to conform more closely with the *MT*.

LXX Esther is itself thought to be a free translation of a Hebrew *Vorlage*. As shown in the table below, the *LXX* contains six major “expansions” adding 107 verses beyond the 194 verses present in the Hebrew *MT*:

TABLE OF THE EXPANSIONS IN *LXX ESTHER*

	Location	Subject
A	Preface to Esther	Mordechai’s prophetic dream
B	between 3:13 and 3:14	text of King Artaxerxes’ edict
C	before chapter 5	prayers of Mordechai and Esther
D	replaces 5:1-2	Esther in the court of Artaxerxes
E	between 8:12 and 8:13	text of Artaxerxes’ authorized second edict
F	end of book	Mordechai’s prophetic dream interpreted

The original language of expansions A, C, D, and F was Hebrew, of B & D, Greek. According to the Israeli biblical scholar Emanuel Tov the translation of the text with all 6 expansions appears to be the work of a single person. He also notes there is no reason to distrust the evidence of ancient manuscripts in which all the elements of *LXX Esther* appear to comprise one integral unit. For example, the expansions are so intertwined in chapters 4 and 5 that it is impossible to judge, in an unmarked text, where expansion D begins or ends.⁷

The Greek *LXX* text also contains many smaller additions, alterations, and omissions in comparison to the Hebrew *MT*. For example the *LXX* text mentions both prayer and God:

“Θεός *God* and Κύριος *Lord* appear about 25 times each in the expanded Greek version ... Even the political scenario is altered to fit the times: in [*LXX*] *Esther* 10:14 Haman the Agagite (i.e., an Amalekite -- an ethnic and spiritual enemy of Israel; cf. 1 Sam 15:8-9, 30:1), becomes [Aman] a Macedonian who intends to betray the Persian empire to the Macedonians.”⁸

St. Clement, Bishop of Rome (AD 88-99), in his letter to the Church in Corinth, witnesses to Esther’s spiritual maturity and prayer to God in the *LXX*:

“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**

6. Dating from the 10-13th century AD these manuscripts include *MS 19* (Brooke-McLean: b’); *MS 93* (e2.); *MS 108* (b); *MS 319* (y); and *MS 392* (Vatop. 600) the latter of which preserves a text that is a mix of the two Greek versions. Ref: Michael V. Fox, *Three Esthers*, in Sidnie White Crawford & Leonard J Greenspoon, *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*, T&T Clark International, New York, NY, 2003, p. 55.

7. Emanuel Tov, emeritus Professor of the Department of the Bible, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, *Three Strange Books of the LXX: 1 Kings, Esther, and Daniel Compared with Similar Rewritten Compositions from Qumran and Elsewhere, Die Septuaginta - Texte, Kontexte*, Lebenswelten, 2008, pp. 369-393, @ <http://www.emanuel tov.info/docs/varia/203.varia.three-strange-books.pdf>

8. Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, pp. 87-88.

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.”⁹

Mordechai has been considered the most likely author of *Esther* because he wrote everything down in a book (cf. *Esther* 9:20-27). As to the date of the composition of *Esther*, the 1st century AD historian Flavius Josephus personally believed the book to be written during the reign of King Artaxerxes I of Persian (464-424 BC).¹⁰ Because some parts of expansions B,C,D, & E were included by Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (c. AD 93), they must have been present in his source materials.

As to who, when, and where the text was translated, expansion F gives us the answer:

“In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and Levite, and Ptolemy his son, brought this epistle of Phurim, which they said was the same, and that Lysimachus the son of Ptolemy, that was in Jerusalem, had interpreted it.”

Unfortunately, there were several possible King Ptolemys married to various Cleopatras who could have had a son Lysimachus, so the translation into Greek could be dated any time between 203-51 BC, with different scholars favoring different royal couples.¹¹

Although the Dead Sea Scrolls (dating from 150 BC to AD 70) are generally thought to contain the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of virtually all the books of the Jewish Bible, *Esther* is not among them.

But there are also a number of Greek manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls. A total of 27 koine Greek manuscripts have also been recovered including fragments from Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy from cave 4; and Exodus and many unidentifiable fragments from cave 7¹² -- but no *Esther*! Nevertheless, there is little doubt among scroll scholars that the Qumran community was familiar with a Hebrew version of it based on other scrolls found at Qumran.


However, Qumran has not been the only repository for ancient manuscripts. One ancient fragment of *Esther* has been recovered from among the thousands of papyri discovered in an ancient garbage dump in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. That *Esther Scroll* fragment is a single papyrus scroll page from the *LXX* designated

9. St. Clement of Rome, *1 Letter*, LV, in *ANF*, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ii.ii.lv.html>

10. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk XI.vi.1-13.

11. There were 4 Ptolemys who married Cleopatras: Ptolemy V Epiphanes (203-181 BC), Ptolemy VI Philometor (181-164 BC and 145-116 BC); Ptolemy VIII Physcon (170-163 BC and 145-116 BC), and Ptolemy X Alexander (107-88 BC).

12. *Languages and Scripts*, Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library, https://www.deadseascrolls.org/ilearn-about-the-scrolls/languages-and-scripts?locale=en_US



4443. This well preserved leaf dates from the late 1st to early 2nd century AD and, importantly for Orthodox Christians, contains part of Greek expansion “E”. The fragment begins in chapter 8 line E16 and continues past the end of the expansion at E24 and ends at chapter 9 verse 3.¹³

So why are there no *Esther* scrolls at Qumran? Scholars believe that the ultra conservative Qumran sect objected both morally and theologically to *Esther*¹⁴ -- so much so, that they purposefully excluded the feast of Purim from their 364-day liturgical calendar.¹⁵

Another early scroll is the Chester-Beatty papyrus 968, a 3rd century AD Greek codex containing many verses from *Esther* including additions. Although its origin is unknown¹⁶ it's another witness to *LXX Esther*.

Trumping all of these texts for dating is the reference to *Mardocheus (Mordechai)* at the very end of the canonical *LXX* book of 2 *Maccabees* (15:36)¹⁷ which was composed in Greek in the late 2nd century BC. Surprisingly, it refers to *Purim* as *Mardocheus' day* possibly suggesting that the name *Purim* had not been given to it yet. That would then make the current Hebrew *MT* text somewhat suspect as being the oldest version. In this regard it is important for us to realize that the Jews deliberately changed many biblical texts from their pre-Christian versions to arrive at their *MT*:

“A ‘clear demarcation between biblical manuscripts’ is evident before and after the fall of Jerusalem by early in the second century of the Common Era -- by and large the distinction [is] between biblical texts from Qumran and those from the other provenances covered by the general term ‘Judean Desert Scrolls,’ with the latter being proto-*MT* and close to *Aquila*, *Theodotion*, and to some extent *Symmachus*. Emanuel Tov of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem concludes that, distinctively, Qumran was not ‘tied down’ to the *MT*, while in contrast the other sites were ‘nationalistic’ and therefore used only ‘proto-rabbinic (proto-Masoretic) text in Hebrew and the *Jewish revisions of the LXX toward that Hebrew text*’ ... **Tov holds that a Hebrew version of Esther older than the current *MT* was known at Qumran** ... Such analyses support

13. http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/VExhibition/daily_life/esther.html. *Esther LXX* [15 chapters with expansions] ii.20-23, 4-8, 13, iii.14, iv.3-7, 11-16, v.4, 9-14, vi.3-6, 11-14, vii.6-9, viii.2-6, xiii.3, 5, xiii.12-17, xiv.3-8, 13-17, xv.5-10, 16

14. Eliezer Segal, *From the Sources: Esther and the Essenes*, *JFP*, March 8, 2001, pp. 12-13, at https://people.ucalgary.ca/~elsegaf/Shokef010308_QumranEsther.html

15. James C. VanderKam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance For Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity*, Clark International, New York, NY, 2005, pp. 119-120.

16. <http://www.katapi.org.uk/GBibleText/Ch2.html>

17. 2 *Maccabees* 15:36 *And they ordained all with a common decree in no case to let that day pass without solemnity, but to celebrate the thirtieth day of the twelfth month* [the day of victory over Nicanor by Judas Maccabeus in 161 BC], which in the Syrian tongue is called *Adar*, the day before *Mardocheus' [Mordecai's] day*.

the hypothesis that agreement among the proto-*MT* and the new Jewish Greek versions of scripture produced in the early centuries of Christianity [by the Jews] **represent deliberate changes away from the pre-Christian Semitic versions and the pre-Christian Septuagint.**¹⁸

CANONICITY OF THE *LXX* BOOK OF ESTHER

Origen, St. Hilary of Poitiers, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Epiphanius of Salamis, Rufinus, Blessed Jerome, St. Augustine, Pope Innocent I, and St. John of Damascus all accepted *Esther* as canonical. Bishop Melito of Sardis, St. Athanasius the Great, and St. Gregory the Theologian failed to list *Esther* as canonical but neither did they repudiate it. It was also accepted as canonical by the Councils of Hippo (393) and of Carthage (397).

To this day the Orthodox Church unabashedly upholds Holy Apostolic Tradition by continuing to use the *LXX* version of the Old Testament (with *Esther*), the primary *Bible* of the Apostles for the Greek-speaking world.

SETTING OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Location: The events of the book of *Esther* take place primarily in Susa, *LXX* Σοῦσα (*MT* Shushan שׁוּשַׁן), the capital of the Persian Empire (in the southwest of present day Iran).

Time Frame and Historical Setting: Although Josephus believed that the story of *Esther* took place under King Artaxerxes I (464-424 BC), most historians and biblical scholars now agree that it fits much better with the reign of his father King Xerxes I (485 BC-465 BC), also known as Xerxes the Great, the son of Darius I, the fourth and richest king of the Achaemenid dynasty of Persia. This was the time of the dynasty's greatest territorial size -- the largest empire that the ancient world had seen up to that time. King Xerxes left Susa in 481 BC to invade Greece, to further expand his empire. His enormous armies were significantly delayed from advancing south toward Delphi, Thebes, Plataea, and Athens by King Leonidas and the famous 300 Spartans at the strategic mountain pass at Thermopylae. One month later King Xerxes suffered a crushing defeat in one of the greatest naval battles in the ancient world, at Salamis (near Athens), followed by two more defeats on land at Plataea in Greece and Mycale on the coast of western Asia Minor in August 479, causing Xerxes to withdraw in humiliation back to Persia.

THE MAIN PERSONS AND THEIR ROLES IN ESTHER

The King of the Medes and Persians:

Artaxerxes, *LXX* Ἀρταξερξής, is the Greek name of the king corresponding to אֲרַתַּשְׁטָרְשָׁא Artaxšaçā, in

18. Catherine Brown Tkacz, *Αθήθεια Ελληνική The Authority of the Greek Old Testament*, CTOS, Etna, CA, 2011, pp. 25-29.

the Old Persian, derived from *arta* meaning *justice* or *truth* and *xšāça* meaning *rule*, i.e., *whose rule is through justice/truth* [an allusion to the Risen Christ].

Ahasuerus, *MT* אֲחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ (Ahasveros), is the Hebrew name of this king found in the Masoretic Text:

“We now know that in אֲחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ we have the Hebrew form of what in the Old Persian language was «𐎠𐎡𐎧𐎫𐎡𐎧𐎺𐎠 *Khshayarsan*. This is the word that appears as *Xerxes* [Greek, Ξέρξης] in other histories with which the scholars of Europe and America were familiar before the long-silent records of Eastern rocks and mounds began again to speak.”¹⁹

This Old Persian name «𐎠𐎡𐎧𐎫𐎡𐎧𐎺𐎠, *Khshayarsan*, means *ruling over heroes*, or **he who rules over men**, a name consistent with the titles Xerxes took for himself, the *King of Kings* [a different allusion to the Risen Christ], and *King of Nations*. This title also corresponds quite well with the power and breadth of Artaxerxes’ empire as described in *LXX Esther*.

Indeed, much of what the Jewish translator of *LXX Esther* says about the Persian King “Artaxerxes” does correspond much better with Ahasuerus, King Xerxes I (485-465 BC) than to his son Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC) whom we see mentioned later in the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*.²⁰ Herodotus mentions Xerxes as having a particular affinity for women and wine,²¹ that the king ruled from India to Ethiopia²² in a magnificent palace in Shusan, and that Xerxes sought comfort in his harem following his naval defeat at Salamis in the tenth month of his seventh year as king -- all of which is compatible with the *Book of Esther*.

At the time the *Septuagint* was translated into Greek [2-3rd century BC], the translator misidentified Ahasuerus/Xerxes as *Artaxerxes* instead of Ahasuerus, a mistake carried over into the writings of Josephus, the *Peshitta*, and, surprisingly, the Jewish midrashim.

So, in summary, it would appear that the Persian King named *Artaxerxes* in *LXX Esther* and *Ahasuerus* in *MT Ester* fits best historically with *Xerxes I*. But was Artaxerxes really a misidentification? Or was the translator applying a prophetic/typological title to a future King Who would rule in righteousness and truth?

The Queen of Persia

Astin, *LXX* Ἀστίν -- probably a re-casting of the

Hebrew *Vashti* below into Greek.

Vashti, *MT* וַשְׁתִּי, The name in old Persian with the feminine ending means *best/excellent of women*. Some scholars believe Vashti can be identified with Amestris, the only historically documented wife of Xerxes I. The time between Vashti’s expulsion as Queen due to disobedience to the King, and Esther’s installation as her replacement, coincides with the 4 years that Xerxes was engaged in war with the Greeks.²³

The Jews

Mardocheaus, *LXX* Μαρδοχαῖος, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Jew, a great man serving in the king’s palace. He raised his father’s brother’s daughter Esther **to be a wife** for himself. The Greek name appears to be a transliteration of the Hebrew name below.

Mordechai, *MT*. מֵרְדֵּכָי, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Jew, who raised his father’s brother’s daughter Ester, or *Hadassah*, **as a daughter** (and not a wife) for himself. The Hebrew name means *warrior, a follower, or a worshipper of Marduk* (a Babylonian deity).

A single undated cuneiform tablet from the Persian period, found at Borsippa in Mesopotamia in 1904 refers to a certain *Marduka* who was a finance officer of some sort in the Persian court at Susa and made an inspection tour during the reign of either Darius I or Xerxes I (his son). This is the best evidence we have currently for an historical Mordechai existing within the Persian Empire of that time.²⁴

Esther, *LXX* Ἑσθήρα, derived from the Hebrew, is the only name used in the Greek text.

Esther: *MT* אֶסְתֵּר, meaning *star*, was her Persian name. One of the two Aramaic *Targums to Esther* 2:7 connects the name with the Persian word for “star” ستاره. *setareh* explaining that *Esther* was so named for being as beautiful as the Morning Star. Some think the name derives from a reconstructed Median word *astra* meaning *myrtle*, which would then match the Hebrew name *Hadassah* below. Others believe it may be derived from *Ishtar* the Akkadian/Assyrian/Babylonian goddess of fertility, love, war, and sex. Another view is that the name derives from the Hebrew root הִסְתַּר meaning *hidden* which correlates with the Jewish idea of God’s presence being “hidden” in the book.

Hadassah הַדַּסָּה *MT* derived from the Hebrew word for *myrtle* הַדָּסָה, *hadassah*. It is Esther’s Jewish name and found only once in the *MT*, in *Esther* 2:7.

19. W. Scott Watson. *Authenticity and Genuineness of the Book of Esther*, *The Princeton Theological Review*, 1903, p. 62, at https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ptr/01-1_esther_watson.pdf

20. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI, 1990, p.187.

21. Herodotus, *The History*, 1.133, 5.18, 9.108-110

22. *Ibid.*, 7.8-9, 7:20-21

[7.9] ... if, after conquering and enslaving the Sacae, the Indians, the Ethiopians, the Assyrians, and many other mighty nations ... and though I went as far as Macedonia, and came but a little short of reaching Athens itself.

23. William Shea, *Esther and History*, *Concordia Journal*, July 1987, pp. 234-248.

24. Yamauchi, p. 234-5, and also in *The Cosmic Wisdom: In Quest of the Historical Mordecai*, in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays 1967-1998, Volume 1* (JSOTSup, 292; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 436-43 <http://www.thelivingmoon.com/43ancients/02files/Mordecai.html>

The Adversary, the Evil One:

Aman, *LXX* Ἀμάν is the son of Amadathes a Bugean (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).²⁵ He was also once called **the Macedonian** (ὁ Μακεδών in 9:24). He was a palace official who becomes the great adversary of Mardochaeus, Esther, and the Jewish people. His ethnic heritage is a major difference between the *Septuagint* text and the *Masoretic* text of *Esther*.

Haman, *MT* חַמָּן הַמֵּדִי *Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite*²⁶, who was promoted above all the princes that were in the king's service, became the genocidal adversary of Mordechai, Esther, and the Jewish people. Interestingly, the descriptive term for Haman in *MT Esther* 3:10, 8:1, 9:10, 24 is צֹרֵר *Tso-rayr, an adversary/an enemy*, commonly used in modern Hebrew for the *Antichrist*.²⁷ This corresponds to *τοῦ ἐχθροῦ, the adversary/enemy* (genitive case) used in *LXX Esther* 7:4 and *τῷ διαβόλῳ, the slander* (dative case) in 8:1 -- names for Satan and descriptive of the Antichrist who exercises all the power of Satan.

CHAPTER SUMMARY OF THE GREEK *LXX ESTHER*

Chapter 1: Addition "A", this introductory passage found in the Greek *LXX* is missing from the *MT*. In the 2nd year of Artaxerxes the Great's reign [484 BC], Mardochaeus, a descendant of the Judeans taken captive by King Nebuchodonosor to Babylon, and a great man, was serving in the palace.²⁸ He had a dream of 2 great serpents/dragons preparing to fight. Because of a great voice that came from them every nation was preparing for battle against a nation of the just. The just cried out to God and the lowly were exalted and devoured those held in esteem. While struggling to interpret the dream Mardochaeus overheard 2 eunuch chamberlains Gabatha and Tharrha plotting to lay hands upon the king. He informed Artaxerxes and the two were executed. He and the king recorded these events. Mardochaeus was promoted in the palace. Aman, son of Amadathes the Bugean, deemed honorable by the king, decided to harm Mardochaeus and his people because he had reported the conspiracy to the king. [Was Aman a co-conspirator

25. HG Liddell and R Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon With a Revised Supplement*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 324.

26. In the *MT* Haman is described as an Agagite, i.e., a descendant of Agag, King of the Amalekites, a descendant of Amalek, the grandson of Esau.

27. Asher Intrater, *Ruth Ecclesiology and Esther Eschatology, Part II, Kihilat News Israel*, <https://kehilanews.com/2016/03/15/ruth-ecclesiology-and-esther-eschatology-part-ii/>

28. This correlates well with the historical Marduka, a Persian finance officer at Susa. That he sat in the Palace gate indicates his high status.

- or were they Macedonians? None of this is in the *MT*.]


During the 3rd year of his reign [483 BC], King Artaxerxes held a 180 day marriage [no marriage in *MT*] banquet [more opulent in the *LXX*] in Susa for his nobility, followed by a 6-day [7-day in *MT*] wine party for the locals where he intended to showcase his wife, Queen Astin. She simultaneously held a banquet for the women, but refused to appear before the king when summoned by his 7 eunuchs [a eunuch named Aman is listed among them in the *LXX* instead of Mehumen in *MT*] on the 7th day 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. As punishment and a lesson to others the queen was never enthroned, crowned, or displayed, and, moreover, forbidden to appear before him again -- an allusion to the fate of unbelievers before the Righteous Judge. The king also sent a decree to the provinces in his kingdom according to their languages, that all wives were to give honor to their husbands so they wouldn't rebel in imitation of Astin.

Chapter 2: Some time later [c. 479 BC, after the Persian retreat from Greece], having forgotten Astin, at the advice of the king's ministers, an edict was released calling for a new queen to be chosen from the beauties of the land. Esther, Mardochaeus' niece, but raised to be his wife [his daughter in the *MT*], found grace in the sight of all. The King fell in love with her, and she was crowned queen in the 7th year of Artaxerxes reign [478 BC], but *Esther 2:10 discovered not²⁹ her family nor her kindred ... 2:20 for so Mardochaeus commanded her, to fear God and perform His commandments* [only found in the *LXX*], as when she was with him: and Esther changed not her manner of life.

Later Mardochaeus discovered an assassination plot on the king by two of his chief bodyguards [named *Bighthan* and *Teresh* in the *MT* with no comment on their nationality] because they were grieved that Mardochaeus had been promoted. He informed Esther, who informed the king. The 2 conspirators were hanged [by the king in the *LXX*]. Mardochaeus was again commended and his actions documented by the king.

Chapter 3: After this Aman, the son of Amadathes a Bugean [*MT* an *Agagite*] was promoted to second place in the kingdom. And all in the palace were to bow down before him as instructed by the King. Mardochaeus refused and revealed that he was a Jew. That enraged Aman to the point that he hatched a scheme to destroy utterly all the the Jews who were under the rule of Artaxerxes. Thus, in the 12th year of Artaxerxes [473

29. Thompson (1808) did not disclose; *NETS* (2007) did not reveal



BC] he cast lots to determine when that should happen, and the lot fell to the 14th of Adar, the last month of the year [the day is not specified in the *MT*]. Then Aman deceived the king into thinking the Jews followed their own laws and not his and should be destroyed. He would even fund the purge with 10,000 talents of his own silver. The King was agreeable, but told Aman to keep his silver and gave him his own ring to seal all decrees and documents. Then Aman wrote out the command to execute the Jews on the 14th of Nisan, the day determined by the casting of lots before his gods. This was written and sent out to the rulers of the 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia, in the name of King Artaxerxes. 3:13 *And [the message] was sent by posts³⁰ throughout the kingdom of Artaxerxes, to destroy utterly the race of the Jews on [one day]³¹ of the twelfth month, which is Adar, and to plunder their goods.*"

Greek expansion "B" then describes the Jews as: *a certain ill-disposed people mixed up with all the tribes throughout the world, opposed in their laws to every nation and continually neglecting the commands of the kings,³² so that the united government blamelessly administered by us is not quietly established. Having then conceived that this nation alone [of all others] is continually set in opposition to every man, introducing as a change a foreign code of laws, and injuriously plotting to accomplish the worst of evils against our interests, and against the happy establishment of the monarchy; we have accordingly appointed those who are signified to you in the letters written by Aman,³³ who is set over [the public] affairs and is our second governor, to destroy them all utterly with their wives and children by the swords of the enemies, without pitying or sparing any, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month Adar, of the present year; that the people aforesaid and now ill-disposed having been violently consigned to death in one day, may hereafter secure to us continually a well constituted and quiet [state of] affairs.*

Chapter 4: Mardocheaus and the Jews wail in sackcloth and ashes over the decree. Mardocheaus supplied Esther a copy and informed her of Aman's promise to finance the genocide and exhorted her through her chamberlain that she, as Queen, must intercede for the Jewish people before Artaxerxes:

4:13 Then Mardocheaus said to Achrathaeus, Go, and say to her, Esther, say not to thyself that thou alone wilt escape in the kingdom, more than all the [other] Jews. 4:14 For if

30. The Persian postal system was highly efficient and rapid delivery by horse-borne couriers who each rode for 1 day, see Herotodus, *The History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1988, Bk 8.98.

31. The phrase *one day* is a correction of the Brenton *Septuagint* text *first day* by Karen Jobes and used by her in the NETS translation.

32. In contrast to the *MT* this additional phrase broadens the "problem of the Jews" from that of the Persian Empire to that of all nations.

33. According to the *Book of Esther* itself, the edict was originally written in the many native languages present in Ahasuerus' enormous empire. So there would have been Greek versions of the edicts written at the time of Aman's/Artaxerxes' original Persian edict. Surviving Greek copies could have been used or paraphrased for expansions B and E thus accounting for their inclusion in the *LXX*.

thou shalt refuse to hearken on this occasion, help and protection will be to the Jews from another quarter; but thou and thy father's house will perish: and who knows, if thou hast been made queen for this [very] occasion?

At this prodding she agreed, knowing that to approach the King without his permission was unlawful and could result in her death. Nevertheless, she replied:

*4:16 Go and assemble the Jews that are in Susa, and fast ye for me, and eat not and drink not for three days, night and day: and I also and my maidens will fast; and then I will go in to the king contrary to the law, even if I must die. [the *MT* here reads: *If I perish, I perish*, a most famous phrase.]*

In the *MT* there is no mention of God nor of prayer. However, here, in our *LXX*, in the third expansion "C", Mardocheaus fervently beseeches the Lord to spare His people as did the people. Esther, in *ashes and dung* and *garments of distress*, earnestly besought the Lord from the depths of her soul defending her obedience to Jewish law and what was required of her as Queen.

Chapter 5: This chapter begins with the 4th expansion of the Greek text "D":

5:1 And it came to pass on the third day [the 15th of Nisan, the 1st day of Passover] having passed through all the doors, she stood before the king: and he was sitting upon his royal throne, and he had put on all his glorious apparel, [covered] all over with gold and precious stones, and was very terrible. And having raised his face resplendent with glory, he looked with intense anger: and the queen fell, and changed her colour as she fainted; and she bowed herself upon the head of the maid that went before [her]. But God changed the spirit of the king [to] gentleness, and in intense feeling he sprang from off his throne, and took her into his arms, until she recovered: and he comforted her with peaceable words, and said to her, What is [the matter], Esther?

As she spoke to him she fainted again and fell. Recovering she invited the king and Aman to a private banquet that evening and a subsequent evening. Artaxerxes granted her request. After the first banquet Aman again saw Mardocheaus in the court and became greatly enraged. Arriving home he called his wife and friends together and boasted about his wealth, his large number of sons, the glory the king had given him to bear chief rule in the kingdom, and his invitation to the banquet given by the queen. Yet, he fumed at Mardocheaus the Jew just for being in the court. So his wife, Zosara [Zeresh in the *MT*] told him to build a "gallows" [Gr: ξυλον, wooden pole/beam; Heb. יצור the tree, wood] 50 cubits high and to hang Mardocheaus on it. This pleased Aman, so he prepared the "gallows".

Chapter 6: That night [the 16th of Nisan] the Lord removed the king's sleep from him. So Artaxerxes read his chronicles and realized that he had not rewarded Mardocheaus for his loyalty and having saved his life from the two chamberlains. As he was discussing this with his servants, Aman arrived in the court intending to

speak to the king about hanging Mardocheaus, but the king preempted him with the question of how should the king reward someone whom he wished to honor.

Aman, thinking that it was he that the king wished to honor replied, that the king should dress the person with a royal linen robe and then parade him about the city on a royal steed [but not with the royal crown for the horse, as found in the *MT*] proclaiming, *Thus shall it be [done] to every man whom the king honours*. Aman was told to do precisely that for Mardocheaus. Aman did as he was told and paraded Mardocheaus around the city.



THE ESTHER PANEL IN THE SYNAGOGUE IN DURA EUROPOS, SYRIA AD 244, SHOWING HAMAN LEADING MORDECHAI ON HORSEBACK TO THE ACCLAIM OF THE CITIZENS IN THE CENTER. AT THE TOP RIGHT QUEEN ESTHER IS SEATED BEHIND KING AHASUERUS

Afterwards, despondent, Aman returned home and told his wife what had transpired. She replied, *If Mardocheaus [be] of the race of the Jews, [and] thou hast begun to be humbled before him, thou wilt assuredly fall, and thou wilt not be able to withstand him, for the living God [is] with him [not in the *MT*]*.

Chapter 7: Esther pleads with King Artaxerxes to spare the lives of the Jews for 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. 7:5 And the king said, Who [is] this that has dared to do this thing? 7:6 And Esther said, the adversary [is] Aman, this wicked man. The king got up and went into the garden presumably to ponder the situation. Aman then entreated the queen, but having fallen upon her bed/couch, he was seen by the king when he returned from the garden. 7:8 ... And the king said, Wilt thou even force [my] wife in my house? And when Aman heard it, he changed countenance.*

Chapter 8: The king [only in the *LXX*] immediately had Aman hung on the 50 cubit high "gallows" which Aman had formerly built in anticipation of hanging Mardocheaus. *And in that day King Artaxerxes gave to Esther all that belonged to Aman the slanderer*. She then related to the king that she was related to

Mardocheaus. King Ahasuerus gave the signet ring previously given to Aman to Mardocheaus, and Esther appointed him over all that had been Aman's. She was now concerned with [herself (in the *LXX*) and] the fate of her people and petitioned the king to reverse the decrees sent out by Aman for the destruction of the Jews. The king then authorized her to do whatever she needed to do to protect her people and seal it with his ring. So on the 23rd day of Nisan the first month of the year [the *MT* has *Sivan* (the third month)] the King's secretaries were summoned to write out an edict.

A copy of the edict is then provided as expansion "E" in the *LXX*. Interestingly, It reveals a different motivation behind Aman from that in the *MT* where Haman is described as a descendant of the King Agag of the Amalekites, sworn enemies of the Jews:

8:E10-E16. For whereas Aman, a Macedonian, the son of Amadathes, in reality an alien from the blood of the Persians, and differing widely from our mild course of government, having been hospitably entertained by us, obtained so large a share of our universal kindness, as to be called our father, and to continue [as] the person next to the royal throne, revered of all; he however, overcome by the pride of his station, endeavored to deprive us of our dominion, and our life: having by various and subtle artifices demanded for destruction both Mardocheaus our deliverer and perpetual benefactor, and Esther the blameless consort of our kingdom, with their whole nation. For by these methods he thought, having surprised us in a defenseless state, to transfer the dominion of the Persians to the Macedonians. But we find that the Jews, who have been consigned to destruction by the most abominable of men, are not malefactors, but living according to the justest laws, and being the sons of the living God, the most high and mighty, who maintains the kingdom, to us as well as to our forefathers, in the most excellent order. Ye will therefore do well in refusing to obey the letter sent by Aman ... Almighty God having swiftly returned to him a worthy recompense ...

Mardocheaus was then clothed in royal apparel and given a golden crown and a diadem of fine purple linen. The people in Susa, at seeing him, rejoiced and feasted with gladness when they received news of the edict:

*8:17 in every city and province wherever the ordinance was published: wherever the proclamation took place, the Jews had joy and gladness, feasting and mirth: and many of the Gentiles were circumcised [absent in the *MT*], and became Jews, for fear of the Jews* [Note: not from the fear of God].

Chapter 9: On the 13th of Adar the Jews gained the upper hand over their adversaries:9:2 ... *for no one resisted, through fear of them ... For the chiefs of the satraps and the princes and the royal scribes, honoured the Jews; for the fear of Mardocheaus lay upon them.*

15,000 [75,000 in the *MT*] enemies of the Jews were slain in the provinces on the 13th of Adar. For them the 14th of Adar became a day of feasting and gladness.

THE GOOD WORD

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But 500 were slain in Susa the capital on the 13th of Adar and 300 more the following day including the 10 sons of Aman who were hung. So the Jews rejoiced and feasted on the 14th and 15th.

Esther 9:19. 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, 9:21 to establish these [as] joyful days, and to keep the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar; 9:22 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, to spend the whole of it in good days of feasting [Gr. wedding³⁴] and gladness, sending portions to their friends, and to the poor. 9:23 And the Jews consented [to this] accordingly as Mardocheaus wrote to them, 9:24 [shewing] how Aman the son of Amadathes the Macedonian fought against them, ... 9:26 Therefore these days were called Phrurae [Purim in the MT], because of the lots; (for in their language they are called Phrurae); ... 9:27 And [Mardocheaus] established it, and the Jews took upon themselves, and upon their seed, and upon those that were joined to them [also in MT] [to observe it], ... these days [were to be] a memorial kept in every generation, and city, and family, and province. 9:28 And these days of the Phrurae, [said they,] shall be kept for ever, and their memorial shall not fail in any generation ... 9:31 And Mardocheaus and Esther the queen appointed [a fast] for themselves privately, even at that time also having formed their plan against their own health. 9:32 And Esther established it by a command for ever, and it was written for a memorial.

Chapter 10: Mardocheaus became viceroy to King

34. ἄγειν ὅλον ἀγαθὰς ἡμέρας γάμων καὶ εὐφροσύνης
Thompson: *to keep the whole [month] as good days of weddings and joy.* Lit: *to keep celebrating the whole (of) good days, wedding and gladness [an allusion to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb!]*

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Artaxerxes, and was a great man in the kingdom, and honoured, and passed his life beloved of all his nation. The last Greek expansion “F” is then appended to the LXX only -- an interpretation of his dream in chapter 1:

*And Mardocheus said, **These things have been done of God ... The river is Esther, whom the king married, and made queen. And the two serpents/dragons are I and Aman. And the nations are those nations that combined to destroy the name of the Jews. But as for my nation, this is Israel, even they that cried to God and were delivered: for the Lord delivered his people. And the Lord rescued us out of all these calamities; and God wrought such signs and great wonders as have not been done among the nations. Therefore did he ordain two lots. One for the people of God, and one for all the other nations. And these two lots came for an appointed season, and for a day of judgment, before God, and for all the nations. And God remembered his people, and vindicated his inheritance. And they shall observe these days in the month Adar, on the fourteenth and on the fifteenth day of the month, with an assembly, and joy and gladness before God, throughout the generations for ever among his people Israel.***

NEXT ISSUE, PART II: INTERPRETATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

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