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STUDIES IN THE ESTHER NARRATIVE

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THE Book of Esther raises important literary, historical, religious, and ethical questions which have been discussed for centuries. Modern critical scholars have differed with regard to the provenience and date of Esther, its literary genre, its historicity, its moral quality, and its relationship to the festival of Purim.

It is fair to say that the two positions occupying opposite ends of the spectrum have few advocates today. On the one hand, not many contemporary scholars would maintain that Esther is a genuine historical narrative;¹ on the other, the view that it is a myth involving Elamite and Babylonian deities transformed into human terms has few supporters.² While some scholars have treated Esther purely as a work of fiction,³ the most generally accepted description of the book is a "historical novel." However, the relative stress on the noun and the adjective in the phrase varies widely with the degree of authenticity scholars are prepared to accord the book.⁴ As for its place of origin, different scholars have proposed Egypt,⁵ Palestine,⁶ and

¹ As maintained, for instance, by J. Hoschander, *The Book of Esther in the Light of History* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1923) 240.

² H. Jensen, "Elamitische Eigennamen," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 6 (1892) 47-70, 209-26; H. Zimmern, "Zur Frage nach dem Ursprunge des Purimfestes," *ZAW* 11 (1891) 157-69.

³ E. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 1967) 170-86. He regards Esther as an amalgam of two oriental tales, one of a conflict between two courtiers and the other of a struggle between a queen and a courtier, with both tales being prefaced by a third telling of a queen deposed because of her disobedience. He maintains that when the process of "contamination" of these two plots took place, many loose ends and contradictions remained. Striking as this theory is, the many assumptions that it requires are unnecessary or unconvincing. On the contrary, I share the general view that the narrative in Esther is unified and clear (at least through 9:19). See n. 14 below. However, Bickerman's study is invaluable for the large amount of literary and historical parallels he adduces from oriental and classical sources.

⁴ Thus, R. H. Pfeiffer (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [New York: Harper, 1948]), O. Eissfeldt (*The Old Testament: An Introduction* [trans. P. R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper & Row, 1965]), E. Bickerman (*Four Strange Books*), and C. A. Moore (*Esther* [AB 7B; Garden City: Doubleday, 1971]) all use the term, though with varying emphases. J. M. Myers (*The World of the Restoration* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968] 92) wisely observes: "Perhaps the emphasis has fallen too much on the noun rather than the adjective," a judgment which Moore quotes with approval (p. lii).

⁵ So H. Willrich, *Judaica: Forschungen zur hellenistisch-jüdischen Geschichte und Literatur* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900); P. Haupt, "Purim," *Beiträge zur Assyriologie* 6 (1906) 1-28.

⁶ So L. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1938; rev. ed., 1963), 2. 679.

Persia.⁷ With regard to its date, the earlier critical view held that the work originated in the Hellenistic period, a position still widely maintained.⁸ Increasingly, however, the book is being moved up to the late Persian or early Hellenistic period.⁹

Whether the incidents described in Esther served as the basis for the Purim festival, as the book itself claims, or, on the contrary, Esther was written to explain a secular and probably pagan festival and to naturalize it in Judaism has been much debated by scholars.¹⁰

In spite of this divergence of views, three main conclusions may be set down as the scholarly consensus today: (a) Whatever his date, the author of Esther has an excellent familiarity with Persian law, custom, and language in the Achaemenid period.¹¹ (b) From the literary point of view, the book ranks high as an outstanding example of narrative art.¹² (c) Its moral attitude is that of hostility and vengeance. The first two conclusions seem to me to be unassailable; the third, as will be demonstrated below, is highly questionable.¹³

This paper approaches the Book of Esther as a literary unity,¹⁴ the work of a highly-gifted writer who, while thoroughly familiar with Aramaic, the *lingua*

⁷ So E. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books*, 207.

⁸ Bickerman (*Four Strange Books*, 204-7) places the author in the 2d or the 3d century B.C.E.; L. B. Paton (*The Book of Esther* [ICC; New York: Scribner, 1908] 60-62) in the late Greek period after 135; R. H. Pfeiffer (*Introduction*, 742) after 125; F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, ("Esther, Judith und Daniel," *Die aramäische Sprache unter den Achämeniden* [Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann, 1963], 1. 195-213) after 190 B.C.E.

⁹ The phrase is Moore's; see *Esther*, pp. LVII-LX.

¹⁰ H. Gunkel, *Esther* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1916) finds the prototype of Purim in the Persian festival of the Magophonia. J. Lewy ("The Feast of the Fourteenth Day of Adar," *HUCA* 14 [1930] 127-51) derives Purim from the Persian New Year carnival-celebration Farvardigan. E. Bickerman (*Four Strange Books*, 201) finds its origin in seasonal mock-fights patterned after Persian models, in which one side called itself "the Jews" and the other "the enemies." L. B. Paton (*Book of Esther*, 77-94) discusses many other theories.

¹¹ For evidence of the author's familiarity with Persian life and institutions, see L. B. Paton (*Book of Esther*, 64-66), R. H. Pfeiffer (*Introduction*, 737), C. A. Moore (*Esther*, xxv-xli), and the brief summary in R. Gordis (*Megillat Esther* [New York: Ktav, 1974] 5-8). In addition to thirty personal names of Persian and Elamite origin, there are at least twelve Persian loanwords. This fact would be contrasted both with the total absence of Greek words in Esther and with the situation in Daniel, which is projected to an even earlier period, the Babylonian era, and yet contains three Greek musical instruments (3:5, 10, 15) and probably another Greek word, *kārōzā*² (3:4), on which see the judicious observations of J. A. Montgomery (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [ICC; New York: Scribners, 1927] 22-23).

¹² Only Paton finds the style "awkward and labored" (*Book of Esther*, 62). Moore, who apparently agrees with Paton, nevertheless concedes that the story "is told in a clear and interesting way" (*Esther*, lv).

¹³ Thus E. Bickerman (*Four Strange Books*, 211-18) maintains that Luther's estimate of Esther in his *Table Talk* has been misunderstood. He argues that Luther's strictures were directed against the absence of material in the book contributing to Christian faith, but that in his preface to the German translation of Esther he recognizes that "it contains much that is good."

¹⁴ The integrity of the book is clear until 9:19. The remainder of the Hebrew text consists of three appendixes: (a) the Letter of Mordecai (9:20-28); (b) the Letter of Esther (9:29-32); and (c) a supplemental account of Mordecai's career as a vizier and a Jewish leader purportedly based on the royal chronicles (10:1-3).

franca of the Middle East in his day, commands the full resources of postexilic Hebrew. The question of the degree of historical authenticity in the book may be reserved for treatment elsewhere.

The outstanding literary characteristic of the author of Esther is his interest in the swift flow of the action. He, therefore, strips the plot of all non-essentials, concentrating on events rather than on motivations, on incidents rather than on descriptions of character. Thus, he does not inform us as to the reasons for the king's two banquets, or Vashti's disobedience, or the grounds for Bigthan and Teresh's conspiracy. We are not told why Mordecai instructs Esther not to reveal her origin, nor why he himself refuses to bow down to Haman.

Because of the same over-riding consideration, the author does not concern himself with filling in the background against which the incidents take place. The structure of government and administration in Persia, the relations subsisting between the Jews and the general population, the religious practices and ethnic customs of the people — all these are passed over in silence, so as not to impede the swift pace of the narrative.

It is, therefore, necessary for the reader to be on the alert for hints that shed light on various aspects of the book. A meticulous examination of the text can disclose significant insights into such subjects as the social stratification in Persia, the official position of Mordecai, and the terms of the edict issued after Haman's downfall, in addition to various other aspects of the book.

I. *The Social Stratification in Persia (1:18)*

In the sequel to Vashti's refusal of the king's command, the text of 1:18 has proved troublesome to the commentators on two counts: (1) the verse seems repetitious after vs. 17, and (2) the verb *tō³marnāh* apparently has no object.¹⁵ Hence, modern commentators often seek to remedy the situation by emending the verb to *timrēynāh*, "will rebel."¹⁶ However, the emendation becomes unnecessary and the alleged difficulty of the text is solved by taking note of a semantic principle utilized by A. B. Ehrlich¹⁷ in his interpretation of Gen 3:1. In this verse, the specific term *nāhāš* and the general term *hayyat haššādeh* both occur. He points out that the latter phrase must mean "all living creatures *except* the serpent," since manifestly the serpent was not "more cunning than all the animals," of which it was one. We may formulate the principle involved as follows: When an all-inclusive term is used in juxtaposition to a more limited one, the general term includes the entire category, *except those in the specific term*. Thus, the noun *gōy*, when

¹⁵ Most commentators, particularly the older ones, following the targum supply an object "will say the like" or "will tell it" after the verb. See L. B. Paton, *Book of Esther*, 156. Thus the *RSV* reads: "will be telling it all." It is equally unsatisfactory to regard the clause following as the object and render "will speak—and that in abundance—scorn and indignation."

¹⁶ So M. Haller (*Die fünf Megilloth* [HAT 18; Tübingen: Mohr, 191], L. B. Paton (*Book of Esther*), C. A. Moore (*Esther*), the *NEB*, and the *NAB*).

¹⁷ A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* (Berlin: Itzkowitz, 1901), 1. 9.

contrasted with "Israel," refers to all the peoples except Israel, and hence means "Gentiles," as in the phrase *g^elil haggôyîm*, "district of the (Gentile) nations" (Isa 8:23).¹⁸ This principle is also the key to the interpretation of Eccl 7:28. Here ²*ādām*, being juxtaposed to ²*iššāh*, means "a human being except a woman, hence, a male."¹⁹ A familiar instance of it occurs in postbiblical Hebrew usage; Jews are divided, for ritual purposes, into three groups, *kōhⁿîm*, and *l^wîyîm*, and *yîsr^eēlîm*. The last term is, therefore, applied to any Jew who is neither a priest nor a levite.

This semantic principle applies to this Esther passage. In vs. 17, the generic term *kol hannāšîm* occurs; in vs. 18, the specific term *šārôt pāras ûmāday*. Hence, the former term means "all the women (except the ladies of the court)," i.e., the generality of women, while the latter phrase means "the ladies of the aristocracy."²⁰

It is worth noting that Persian class-distinctions were evidently strictly observed, being indicated twice in the chapter. The king gives two banquets, first for the nobility (1:3, 4), followed by one for the masses of the people (1:5-8). The sequence in vss. 17, 18 of the ordinary women followed by the noblewomen is in chiasmic relationship to the order of the banquets (vss. 3-4, and 5-8).

This structure is not merely literary. Vashti's defiance of the king had taken place during the second feast "for all the people" (*kol-hā^aām*, vs. 5). Their wives (*kol-hannāšîm*, vs. 17), would, therefore, be the first to know of it; the women of the nobility would learn of it a little later (vs. 18).

When this differentiation is held in mind, the emendation of the verb becomes unnecessary, if, in addition, the conjunction ²*ašer* is understood not as the relative "who," but as the conjunction "that," equivalent to *kî*. This use of ²*ašer* occurs in all stages of biblical Hebrew, but becomes particularly frequent in late biblical Hebrew, as in Ecclesiastes, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It is especially common in Esther (2:10; 3:4; 4:11; 8:11). This use of the conjunction occurs after the verb ²*amar* in Neh 2:5; 2:65; Ezra 2:63, etc., as well as after the verb *šiwwāh*, "command" (Esth 2:10) and *higgîd*, "told" (Esth 3:4).

The conjunction ²*ašer* introduces the substance of what the noblewomen would say. The vocable *l^kol* means "in the presence of all (the king's princes)." For the identical usage, see Gen 45:1, *l^kol hanniššābîm c^alāyw*, "Joseph could not control himself in the presence of all those standing near him."

The word *ûk^eday* is best construed as the substantive *day*, "enough," with the asseverative *kaph*, attested in Hebrew and Ugaritic.²¹

¹⁸ BDB, s.v., section c, p. 156b.

¹⁹ See R. Gordis, *Kohelah: The Man and His World* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1951; augmented ed., New York: Schocken, 1968) 284.

²⁰ L. B. Paton (*Book of Esther*, 156) suggests that vs. 17 may refer to women in general throughout the empire, while vs. 18 speaks of women in the aristocracy, but he does not deal with the semantic usage involved.

²¹ See R. Gordis, "The Asseverative Kaph in Hebrew and Ugaritic," *JAOS* 63 (1943) 176-78.

The verse is, then, to be rendered: "And the noblewomen of Persia and Media will say this very day that they had heard what the queen had said in the presence of all the king's lords and there will indeed be plenty of shame and anger."

II. *The Second Gathering of the Maidens (2:19)*

The opening words in 2:19, *ûb^ehiqqabēs b^etûlôt šēnît*, can only mean "when the maidens were gathered a second time." This phrase has occasioned great difficulty and led to many different explanations, none of which are convincing.²² Thus, it can hardly refer to a group of contestants who arrived late, for there would be no point in having them gathered after Esther had been officially chosen. Nor is it likely that the king, not satisfied with Esther's charms so soon after her selection, needed other women. Even less likely is the view that the purpose was to arouse Esther's jealousy in the very hour of her coronation!

The problem raised by this "second gathering" impels Ehrlich to emend *šēnît* to read *šônôt*, "various virgins," a suggestion which is adopted by Moore, who is then constrained to treat vss. 19-20 as a doublet to vss. 8-10. This approach leaves unexplained (a) why the second passage was inserted altogether, and (b) why the alleged insertion took place at this point, since conflated texts always appear cheek by jowl with one another. In general, conflation should be assumed only when no other reasonable interpretation is available.²³

Actually, neither vs. 19 nor vs. 20 is repetitious or out of place. To be sure, the reason for "the second gathering of the virgins" is not set forth in the text, in accordance with the author's terse narrative style throughout the book. In view of the context which describes Esther's coronation, we suggest that the verse refers to a second procession of the unsuccessful contestants, whose undeniable charms served to set off in more striking relief Esther's beauty. This assembling of the virgins before they were sent home took place at the conclusion of the ceremonies elevating the new queen to the throne.

III. *Mordecai "Sitting in the Gate" (2:19)*

While a good deal of attention has been directed to the opening phrase of 2:19, the significance of the final clause has not been adequately noted.²⁴ The

Clear instances of this usage occur in Num 11:1; Isa 29:2c; Hos 5:10; Obad 1:11e; Ps 119:9; 122:3; Lam 1:20; Neh 7:2. Others are Isa 10:13 (*k'îth*); Hos 4:4c; Prov 10:27b; Job 3:5c; 11:6.

²² Cf. L. B. Paton (*Book of Esther*, 186-87); C. A. Moore (*Esther*, 23-24).

²³ On conflation as an early stage in the redaction of the MT, see the early discussion in R. Gordis, *The Biblical Text in the Making: A Study of the Kethib-Qere* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1937; augmented ed., New York: Ktav, 1970) 40-43.

²⁴ The words occur again in 2:21; 5:9, 13, and 6:10. As will be noted, none of them are devoid of significance.

phrase "Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate" is repeated by Ahasuerus in his order to Haman in identifying Mordecai, "the Jew who sits in the king's gate" (6:10), as the man whom he wishes to honor. Obviously, the king is not giving Haman directions as to where Mordecai is to be found. Nor is it a meaningless tag in any of its five occurrences in the book. The phrase in question has an official connotation.

As is well known, throughout the ancient Near East "the gate" was the area where trials were conducted and justice was dispensed.²⁵ This function continued into the postexilic period (Job 5:9; 31:21; Ruth 4:1, 11). While the litigants stood during the proceedings, the judge, who might be the king himself, an official whom he had appointed, or even laymen co-opted for the occasion, "sat."²⁶ Both themes appear in the description of the husband of "the woman of valor": "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land" (Prov 31:23, *RSV*).

In view of this usage, the clause "Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate" takes on concrete significance and is directly relevant to the theme in vs. 20-21. After Esther becomes queen, she has Mordecai appointed a magistrate or judge, a lesser position in the elaborate hierarchy of Persian officials. Not only is this a recognition of what Mordecai has done for her, but it gives him easier access to the royal quarters. The sequence of clauses in the verse would suggest that Esther lost no time in having Mordecai elevated to the magistracy. If our proposed interpretation of vs. 19a is correct, the appointment took place even before the final ceremonial parade that concluded the coronation festivities. One is, perhaps irreverently, reminded of the celerity with which newly-elected officials in our society seize the spoils of victory and hasten to fill jobs with their own aides and associates.

It now becomes clear that 2:20 is no mere repetition or doublet of 2:10. Though Esther has been instrumental in having Mordecai named to a governmental post and he is known as a Jew, she continues to keep her Jewish origin a secret, as Mordecai has instructed her. Obviously, her role in his appointment did not *ipso facto* indicate that the queen herself was Jewish. Mordecai's official position is also directly relevant to the assassination plot, for it facilitates his overhearing the conspiracy of the courtiers, Bigthan and Teresh (vs. 21).

Finally, the clause, which occurs again in 5:9, "when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate," and in 5:13, when Haman complains, "but all this is worth nothing to me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the king's gate," is not superfluous. The verses mean not that the mere sight of Mordecai arouses Haman's wrath, but rather that the spectacle of Mordecai as a royal official, obstinately refusing to pay deference to his superior, infuriates Haman.

²⁵ E.g., Deut 21:19; 22:15; 2 Sam 19:8; Amos 5:12, 15; Isa 29:12. Cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), I, 152.

²⁶ Cf. Exod. 18:14; Amos 1:5, 8; Ps 61:8; 122:5; Ruth 4:2.

IV. *The Edict of Mordecai (8:11)*

As is well known, the canonicity of Esther has been challenged, or at least frequently questioned, for two millennia, since the talmudic period in Judaism²⁷ and the patristic era in Christianity.²⁸ The absence of the name of God in the text of the book posed an obvious problem for readers ever since antiquity. In modern times, the gravamen of the challenge has shifted from the theological to the ethical sphere. The book has been criticized as "vengeful, blood-thirsty and chauvinistic in spirit."²⁹ The principal proof-text for the accusation has been 8:11. The rendering of this verse by two of the most recent versions may be cited. The *NEB* translates:

By these letters, the king granted permission to the Jews in every city to unite and defend themselves and to destroy, slay, and exterminate the whole strength of any people or province which might attack them, women and children too, and to plunder their possessions.

Even more explicit is the rendering of the *NAB*:

In these letters, the king authorized the Jews in each and every city to group together and defend their lives, and to kill, destroy, wipe-out, along with their wives and children, every armed group of any nation or province which should attack them, and to seize their goods as spoil.³⁰

²⁷ Rab Judah reports this negative view in the name of the 3d century Babylonian Amora Samuel: "Esther does not defile the hands," i.e., is not canonical (*b. Megillah* 7a). Levi ben Samuel and Huna bar Hiyya (3d-4th century) declare that "Esther does not require a mantle" (*b. Sanhedrin* 100a).

²⁸ Those opposed to the canonicity of the book included Melito of Sardis, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. There were gradations in the negative attitudes taken toward the book, many of the Eastern Fathers rejecting and the Latin Fathers generally accepting its canonicity. C. A. Moore (*Esther*, xxviii) explains the divergence as follows: "Since the Latin Church knew the Old Testament only through the Septuagint, it could more easily be ignorant of problems posed to those Christians in the East who lived in greater proximity to Jewish centers." However, as is clear from his own useful chart (*Esther*, xxvi, xxvii), the Church Fathers in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Damascus agreed with those of Rome and North Africa in accepting the canonicity of Esther. They were obviously far closer to Jewish centers than were the Church Fathers in Asia Minor, who rejected the book. Another more likely explanation may be offered. The fact that Esther remained in the Jewish canon influenced the Latin Fathers and those living in Jewish centers to do likewise, while those having less contact with Jews tended to downgrade the book.

²⁹ Cf. C. A. Moore, *Esther*, xxx, 80.

³⁰ The older versions are less explicit. Thus, the *RSV* renders: "By these, the king allowed the Jews in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to slay and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them with their women and children, and plunder their goods." In the absence of any accompanying commentary, the rendering of the Jewish Publication Society version is also ambiguous: "... that the king had granted the Jews that were in every city to gather themselves together and to stand for their life, to destroy, and to slay, and to cause to perish, all the forces of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey."

The verse is thus taken to mean that the Jews were empowered to kill the children and wives of their enemies.³¹

Naturally, efforts have been made to explain the moral difficulty away. Bonart argues that since the Jews did not take the spoils (9:10, 16) which this new edict permitted, *a fortiori* they did not kill the women and children, an explanation which Paton rejects. He declares, "The older comm. are more troubled than the author over the question whether it was right for the Jews to kill the women and the children."³² Haupt declares that the permission given was to kill only those women and children who attacked the Jews, a far-fetched idea indeed, for which there is no warrant in the text. C. A. Moore calls the words in the verse *ṭap w^enāšīm* a "shocking phrase."³³ J. Hoschander, for all his conservatism, is constrained to delete the phrase as a gloss, without any supporting evidence.³⁴ B. W. Anderson comments, "This is truly measure-for-measure retaliation, patterned after the sanguinary terms of Haman's original decree" in 3:13.³⁵ His approach is very close to that of Moore, who declares that the passage is an expression of the Wisdom doctrine of retributive justice, since Haman's original decree had given him and his supporters the identical power to annihilate the women and children of the Jews. Moore adds that the passage should be seen in the context of theology rather than history.³⁶

In reconsidering the passage, we may note that it is scarcely likely that the royal edict would permit the Jews to slaughter the women and the children of the general population (though of course no such compunctions troubled the king in originally extending similar powers over the Jews to Haman). On the other hand, it is hard to believe that a theme as fundamental as retribution would appear in the book in so indirect and peripheral a form, without being made far more explicit for the reader.

In spite of their divergences, all interpreters agree in construing the words in question, *ṭap w^enāšīm ūš^elālām lābōz*, as containing the reaction permitted to the Jews in retaliation for Haman's original decree of total extermination in 3:11. They all regard this passage as patterned after the earlier text in 3:13, *l^ehašmīd lah^arōg ūl^eabbēd ṣ^eṭ-kol-hayy^ehūdīm minna^car w^ead zāqēn ṭap w^enāšīm . . . ūš^elālām lābōz*.

However, an examination of the syntax and the linguistic usage of both passages indicates a radical difference between them. In 3:13, the clause *ṣ^eṭ-kol-hayy^ehūdīm . . . ūš^elālām lābōz* follows immediately after the verb *ūl^eabbēd*, so that it is clear that the phrase is in the accusative and the object

³¹ Cf. L. B. Paton, *Book of Esther*, 274: "Accordingly, in spite of the absence of a conj., we must regard *children and women*, like *armed force*, as objects to *kill, slay, and annihilate*."

³² C. A. Moore (*Esther*, 83) calls it "Mordecai's admittedly heartless directive."

³³ *Esther*, 80. His comment: "The phrase is still just as embarrassing for present-day Jews as the Crusaders' cry 'to the greater glory of God,' used in certain tragic situations, is embarrassing today to Christians" (*ibid.*, 83).

³⁴ *Book of Esther*, 240.

³⁵ "The Book of Esther," *Interpreter's Bible* (New York/Nashville: Abingdon, 1952), 2. 866.

³⁶ *Esther*, 83.

of the verbs. In 8:11, no less than seven words intervene between $\dot{u}l^{\epsilon}abb\ddot{e}d$ and $\dot{t}ap w^{\epsilon}n\dot{a}š\dot{i}m$. Moreover, there is a direct object of the three verbs following immediately upon them. It is $\dot{e}t-kol-h\ddot{e}l \text{ } ^{\epsilon}am \dot{u}m^{\epsilon}d\dot{i}n\dot{a}h$, but not $\dot{t}ap w^{\epsilon}n\dot{a}š\dot{i}m$.

Because of the superficial resemblance between the two passages, the presence of the intervening words in 8:11 has been disregarded, and the phrase $\dot{t}ap w^{\epsilon}n\dot{a}š\dot{i}m$ has been construed as the object of $\dot{u}l^{\epsilon}abb\ddot{e}d$. Actually, the words $\dot{o}t\dot{a}m \dot{t}ap w^{\epsilon}n\dot{a}š\dot{i}m$ in 8:11 constitute the direct accusative of $h\dot{a}šš\dot{a}r\dot{i}m$. The Masoretic accentuation, which links these four words together,³⁷ offers a clue to the correct exegesis of the passage, a clue which has been unfortunately overlooked: "attacking them, their children, and their women." The pronoun $\dot{o}t\dot{a}m$ refers to the noun $h\dot{a}y\dot{y}^{\epsilon}h\dot{u}d\dot{i}m$, which occurs earlier in the verse.

Contributing to the misconstruing of the verse is the inadequate treatment of the root $\dot{s}arar$ in the lexica, which render the root "harass, vex," a meaning which it does indeed possess in some passages (Num 33:55; Ps 129:1, 2).³⁸ However, it often carries a stronger meaning, "assault, attack," as in Num 10:9; 25:16. Indeed, the derived nouns $\dot{s}or\dot{e}r$, $\dot{s}ar$, and $\dot{s}ar$, widely used in biblical Hebrew, bear only the stronger connotation of "enemy."³⁹ In fact, Haman's epithet *par excellence* is $\dot{s}or\dot{e}r h\dot{a}y\dot{y}^{\epsilon}h\dot{u}d\dot{i}m$,⁴⁰ which can hardly mean "he who vexes the Jews." The verbal forms of $\dot{s}arar$ clearly mean "attack."⁴¹

In this passage $h\dot{a}šš\dot{a}r\dot{i}m$ is the participle, "attacking," with conative force. It lends additional support to our view that $\dot{o}t\dot{a}m$ is to be construed with $\dot{t}ap w^{\epsilon}n\dot{a}š\dot{i}m$ as the accusative of $h\dot{a}šš\dot{a}r\dot{i}m$, and the entire phrase is to be rendered "attacking them (i.e., the adult males), the children, and the women."

A closer analysis of the usage of the idiom $\dot{t}ap w^{\epsilon}n\dot{a}š\dot{i}m$ is also in order. It is noteworthy that $\dot{t}ap$ never occurs with $n\dot{a}š\dot{i}m$ alone, being preceded invariably by a noun or by a more extended term referring to adult males: (a) $m^{\epsilon}t\dot{i}m$ (Deut 2:34; 3:6); (b) $^{\epsilon}n\dot{a}š\dot{i}m$ (Deut 31:12; Jer 40:7; 43:6); (c) $g^{\epsilon}b\dot{a}r\dot{i}m$ (Jer 41:16; 43:6); (d) $\dot{z}\dot{a}q\dot{e}n \dot{b}\dot{a}h\dot{u}r \dot{u}b^{\epsilon}t\dot{u}l\dot{a}h$ (Ezek 9:6); (e) $kol-q^{\epsilon}hal-y\dot{i}sr\dot{a}^{\epsilon}l$ (Jos 8:35); (f) $y\dot{o}š^{\epsilon}b\dot{e} y\dot{a}b\dot{e}š \dot{g}il^{\epsilon}ad$ (Judg 21:10); and (g) exactly as in this Esther passage, a pronoun $\dot{o}t\dot{a}n\dot{u} . . . n\dot{a}š\dot{e}n\dot{u} w^{\epsilon}t\dot{a}pp\dot{e}n\dot{u}$ (Num 14:3).⁴²

The verse should, therefore, be rendered: "By these letters the king permitted the Jews in every city to gather and defend themselves, to destroy, kill, and wipe out every armed force of a people or a province attacking 'them,

³⁷ The accents are respectively *mērkhāh*, *tiphāh*, *mūnāh*, *ʿetnahtāh*.

³⁸ Cf. BDB, 865b; KB, 818b.

³⁹ Cf. Exod 23:22; Ps 7:5 (note 7:6a); 8:3. Thus, *šorēr* is frequently parallel to $\dot{o}y\dot{e}b$ "foe" or *qām*, where it clearly carries this meaning of active hostility. The nouns *šar* and *šar* clearly carry the meaning of "military foe" and also occur as parallels to $\dot{o}y\dot{e}b$ or *mʿšannē*.

⁴⁰ Cf. Esth 3:10; 8:1; 9:10, 24.

⁴¹ As in Num 10:9, *haššar haššorēr ʿetkem*, "the enemy who attacks you"; Num 25:17, *šarōr ʿet hammidyānim wʿhikkītem ʿotām*, "attack the Midianites and smite them."

⁴² The only instances where the phrase $\dot{t}ap w^{\epsilon}n\dot{a}š\dot{i}m$ occurs without an immediate reference to males as the third element are cases where a clear distinction is being drawn between the adult males and the rest of the population. Such are the arrangements for settling the Trans-Jordan tribes on the east bank of the Jordan, when the adult males continue to participate in the conquest of Cis-Jordan, while leaving the women and children behind (Num 32:26; Jos 1:14).

their children and their wives, with their goods as booty.'” The last five words in the Hebrew text of 8:11 are not a *paraphrase* of 3:13, giving the Jews permission to retaliate in precisely the manner planned by Haman, but a *citation* of Haman’s original edict, against which his intended victims may now protect themselves. In accordance with modern usage, the citation should be placed in quotation marks.⁴³

The book, therefore, underscores that, while the Jews were now empowered to fight against those who “sought to do them harm” (9:2), their only goal was to repulse those who might attack them, their wives, and their children.

Another consideration may be adduced in favor of this conclusion. The taking of booty was recognized as a legitimate activity of victors in a battle, so that regulations were set down for its distribution (Num 31:25-54; 1 Sam 30:24-25). When, therefore, Mordecai’s edict is carried out, the author explicitly indicates that the Jews refrained from taking booty from their enemies (9:15-16). Had Mordecai’s edict authorized the killing of women and children, the book would surely have referred to so important a matter, either to confirm that such action was taken or to deny it. In fact, the text refers only to the killing of men in the encounters (פֶּסֶק, 9:12, 15).

It is clear that the cohorts of Haman were not scattered individuals or small, isolated bands, but organized armed forces drawn from various ethnic groups and provinces (*hēl am ūmēdīnāh*). That some inveterate enemies of the Jews might attempt such an attack, even after Haman’s downfall and the drastic change in political climate, is entirely credible. They might well rely upon Haman’s earlier edict, which, according to the Book of Esther, could not be rescinded even by the king (8:8).

To be sure, the interpretation of 8:11 here proposed runs counter to views that have been deeply held and long maintained. It is to be hoped, however, that the exegesis here proposed may lead to a recognition that, while the book is antagonistic to the enemies of the Jews and rejoices in their destruction, it is not anti-Gentile in spirit. The book is hostile only to Haman and his supporters, and not to the king, his court, or the general population. The book records that the proclamation of Haman’s edict aroused grief in the city

⁴³ The use of quotations without an explicit *verbum dicendi* or *cogitandi* and, of course, without quotation marks, is an important stylistic usage for which we have used the term “virtual quotations.” It is demonstrable in Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, biblical and rabbinic literature, and is a valuable tool for understanding many otherwise incomprehensible texts. The variegated functions of “virtual quotations” have been analyzed by the writer in a series of successive studies: “Quotations in Wisdom Literature,” *JQR* 30 (1939) 123-47; “Quotations as a Literary Usage in Biblical, Oriental and Rabbinic Literature,” *HUCA* 22 (1949) 157-219 (reprinted in *Poets, Prophets and Sages: Essays in Biblical Interpretation* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1971] ch. 5); *Koheleth*, ch. 12; *The Book of Job and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965) ch. 13 and relevant notes, especially p. 349 n. 14. It is of considerable interest to note that the Targum of Job found in Qumran Cave 11 recognized the use of a “virtual quotation,” as predicated in the studies listed above, in the case of Job 22:8. It thus offers significant support twenty centuries old to a contemporary insight. See my forthcoming *The Book of Job: A New Commentary and Translation* (now in press).

of Susa (3:15), while Mordecai's elevation to the viziership evoked rejoicing in the city among the general population (8:15), which is clearly differentiated from the Jewish inhabitants (8:16). This standpoint is entirely comprehensible in view of the generally tolerant attitude of the Achaemenids toward subject people, in general, and the Jews, in particular.

Thus this passage receives a clear and straightforward meaning, and a theological difficulty finds a philological solution.

V. Exegetical Notes

1:13-15: The opening words in vs. 13, *wayyô²mer hammelek*, "and the king said," cannot properly be given the meaning "and the king consulted,"⁴⁴ an interpretation to which scholars have been driven because of the apparent absence of any words spoken by the king. The difficulty of the phrase, as well as the syntactic problems of vs. 15 in general and its opening word *k^edāt* in particular, are solved when the latter verse is recognized as the quotation of the king's words to his counsellors, who are introduced in vs. 13: "And the king said to his counsellors. . . , 'According to law, what may be done to Queen Vashti,' etc." Vs. 14 is parenthetical.

1:22: "Speaking in the language of his people." For reasons difficult to fathom, the text has been widely regarded as corrupt.⁴⁵ Hitzig's emendation, which C. A. Moore and other modern scholars have adopted, *ûm^edabbēr kol šōweh immô*, is taken to mean "speaking whatever suited him," but it is impossible Hebrew. P. Haupt deleted the clause as a late gloss which has the meaning that a man must speak plainly to his wife.⁴⁶

I believe that the interpretation of older commentators is entirely appropriate. In the face of an incipient revolt of the women, the king takes official measures to reassert the husbands' authority. The Persians were liberal in granting cultural and religious autonomy to the various peoples living under their rule, so that even royal decrees were promulgated in various languages (3:12; 8:9). When a marriage took place between people of different ethnic backgrounds, the mother's language would normally prevail in the home and tend to become the language of the children. Nehemiah explicitly complains that when some Jews married foreign wives, their children spoke the language of their mothers (Neh 13:23-24). Ahasuerus' edict was designed to make the father's language dominant in the home.⁴⁷

2:14: *Šēnî* has occasioned much difficulty. P. Haupt deleted the word, but it is attested by the LXX. C. A. Moore construes it as an adjective modifying *bêt hannāšîm* and uses it as the basis for the assumption of a "second harem." This is hardly a sufficient foundation for constructing so elaborate a structure, aside from the fact that normal usage would require the definite article. Ryssel emended the form to *šēnît* and rendered it "a second time," which is the most

⁴⁴ So taken by C. A. Moore, *Esther*, 2: "The king immediately conferred."

⁴⁵ See L. B. Paton, *Book of Esther*, 31.

⁴⁶ See C. A. Moore, *Esther*, 31-32.

⁴⁷ So the targum, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and adopted by older modern commentators.

satisfactory meaning in the context. This passage thus contains a pleonasm, "Esther returned again," a usage very common in ordinary discourse, as, e.g., "He came back again." The adverb *šēnîl*, which occurs in vs. 19, is also frequent in rabbinic Hebrew in the meaning of "again."

However, no error need be assumed in the text; the omission of final letters in the writing of MSS is commonplace in rabbinic texts and undoubtedly existed earlier.⁴⁸ We believe that the deletion of the final *taw* occurs also in Job 38:33, where *mištārô* is best understood as a plur. *mištārôt*, "laws (of the earth)," parallel to *hûqôt šāmayîm*, "statutes of the heavens."⁴⁹

5:11: The two opening words in the phrase *wē^eṭ kol ^ašer giddelô hammelek* are ignored by virtually all the commentators and translations. C. A. Moore, who has no comment on the words, evidently takes them into account in his translation, rendering them freely as "every instance where the king has honored him." While this rendering is a possibility, one would have expected some substantive after *kol*.

A key to the meaning of the enigmatic phrase *ṭet-kol* in this verse is to be found in Gen 20:16, *wē^eṭ kol wēⁿôkâhat*. Here *wē^eṭ* and *kôl* occur in the absolute state because each receives its own accent, whereas in this passage the two vocables are in the construct, being linked by a *maqeph* to *ṭašer*. E. A. Speiser⁵⁰ declares that in the Genesis passage "neither the vocalization nor the consonantal text inspires confidence," and renders the clause, "You have been publicly vindicated," apparently understanding the two words to mean "in the presence of everyone."

We believe that the text is in order in both Genesis and Esther and that the phrase is to be translated literally, "with everything," with a slightly differing nuance in each passage. In Genesis, the phrase cited means "with everything," i.e., after all that has taken place, you are vindicated. The *waw* of *wēⁿôkâhat* introduces the conclusion after a preliminary phrase.⁵¹ In this passage, the

⁴⁸ That biblical texts were abbreviated by scribes has been recognized by many scholars, e.g., F. Perles (*Analekten zur Textkritik des Alten Testaments* [Munich: Ackermann, 1895; Neue folge; Leipzig: Engel, 1922]); N. H. Tur-Sinai (*Lašon Wasepher* [3 vols.; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1948, 1950, 1956]); G. R. Driver ("Abbreviations in the Masoretic Text," *Textus* 1 [1960] 112-31). In Ps 22:33, the LXX adds *kyrios*, thus reading the final *he* of *āšāh* as an abbreviation for the tetragrammaton. In Amos 1:11, *wayyitrôp* is emended by most modern commentators, following the LXX and the Peshitta to *wayyittôr*, parallel to *šmārāh*, and the two final stichs are rendered: "He guarded his wrath forever, and his anger he kept eternally." On the two parallel verbs, see Jer 3:5. The reading of the MT arose through the erroneous assumption that the original reading *wytr* was an abbreviation for *wytrp*. Cf. Deut 32:35a, where the MT has *li*, and the LXX reads *kyôm* parallel to *lēt* (stich b).

⁴⁹ M. Pope (*Job* [AB 15; 3d ed.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1973] 290) renders *mištārô* as "his rule," ignoring the absence of an antecedent for the sg. suffix. The *NAB* translates it as "their plan," evidently emending to *mištārām* "of the heavens," but this conjectural emendation effectively destroys the parallelism. The *NEB* interprets the passage as I do, but naturally does not present the grounds for the somewhat periphrastic translation: "Do you proclaim the rules that govern the heavens, or determine the laws of nature on earth?" See my *Commentary on Job* (now in press) for this omission of the final *taw*, exceedingly common in rabbinic MSS.

⁵⁰ *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964) 150.

⁵¹ Cf. Gen 3:5; Exod 16:6; Lev 7:16; Gen 40:9, and see BDB, s.v. *waw*, sec. 5, 254b.

vocable ²ašer is the conjunction, "that", frequent in Esther.⁵² The noun *kol* carries the additional nuance "all this," as is the case in Job 13:1a, *hen kol rā²aīāh cēni*, which means, "Behold, all this my eye has seen."⁵³ Hence the verse is to be rendered, "And Haman recounted to them his great wealth and the large number of his sons, and, with everything (i.e., together with all this), that the king had promoted him, etc."

7:4: The difficult final clause in this verse *ki² en haššār šōweh b'nezeq hammēlek*, has long baffled translators and commentators. The LXX translates it, "for the slanderer is not worthy of the king's palace," meaning apparently that Haman does not deserve to be in the king's court. Not only is this rendering distant from the Hebrew text, but it is much too weak an accusation.

The basic question in the interpretation of the verse is whether the second clause in Esther's statement is to be directly related to the first or an ellipsis is to be assumed between the two clauses. If the latter approach be adopted, the passage could mean, "But now that we are being exposed to massacre, our distress would not equal the loss the king would sustain by our destruction." This would mean that the suffering of the Jews by Haman's pogrom would be less severe than the damage caused to the king's interests. Another approach, which likewise assumes an ellipsis but treats *haššār* as meaning "the enemy" rather than "the distress," renders the passage, "But as it is, the enemy will be unable to compensate for the harm done to the king."⁵⁴

For an example of an ellipsis in the protasis of a conditional sentence, see Job 21:4b, *wē²im maddūa^c lō² tiqšar rūhī*, "As for me, is my complaint to a mere man, but (if it is not to a mere man), why should I not be impatient?" Here the ellipsis may have been induced by metric exigencies. In Esther we would need to assume the ellipsis of the protasis in a prose context, perhaps because of its self-evident nature.

Most exegetes prefer to relate the closing clause directly to the opening clause, without assuming an ellipsis. The concluding clause is then taken in one of two ways: (1) The affliction of the Jews would not have been so injurious to the king, if her people had been threatened only with slavery and not with annihilation.⁵⁵ (2) Esther would not have troubled the king about their problem, if only slavery were involved.⁵⁶

Each of the last two approaches is confronted by two difficulties. The first

⁵² Cf. 1:18; 2:10; 3:4; 4:11; 6:2; 8:11, and the discussion above on 1:18.

⁵³ The LXX reading *tauta* does not presuppose ²elleh in the text, but is an explication of its content. Hence, inserting ²elleh after *kōl* is semantically unnecessary, as the usage in this verse demonstrates, and is disruptive of the meter. The meter-pattern of the verse is 4:4, if one stress is given to each word. The verse may also be scanned in 3:3 rhythm, by giving both *hen kōl* and *waiāben lāh* only one stress each, since each pair constitutes a single thought-unit.

⁵⁴ So the *NAB*.

⁵⁵ Thus the *NEB*: "For then our plight would not be such as to injure the king's interests" (similarly the *RSV*).

⁵⁶ Thus C. A. Moore (*Esther*, 68): "For our problem would not have been worth bothering the king."

is common to both interpretations. It inheres in the necessity to give the participle in ³ên haššār šōweh a hypothetical, contrary-to-fact meaning. In addition, each rendering has an additional drawback. The first interpretation assigns a meaning to the passage which can be extracted from the text only with the greatest difficulty: "The affliction (suffered by the Jews) would not be worth (i.e., be equal to) the injury to the king." This rendition must then be taken to mean, "The king's injury would be far less than the Jews' suffering" — still highly awkward and unclear.

The second view must give the noun *nezeq*, which is frequent in rabbinic Hebrew in the meaning "damage, injury" (as in the name of the Mishnaic order *N^eziqîn*, "Damages"), the much less emphatic significance of "trouble, unpleasantness." The latter objection may be attenuated by assuming that the strong term *nezeq* is an exaggeration induced by court etiquette, since it refers to the king's being inconvenienced. On balance, the second view seems preferable. Hence the verse should be rendered: "For our distress would not justify troubling the king."

7:8: The final clause is generally rendered, "they covered Haman's face," but the syntax and the word-order are at variance with this interpretation, which would have required *wayeh^epu p^enê hāmān*. We suggest that *hāpû* be construed as the archaic form of the participle passive of a *tertia* *yodh* verb, the later and more familiar form of which would be *hāpûy*. The archaic form survives in the *k^etîb* four times, e.g., in Job 15:22, *šāpû*, where the *q^erê* is *šāpûy*.⁵⁷ It also occurs in the MT of Job 41:25, *he^cāšû*, without a *k^etîb-q^erê* variation.⁵⁸ The singular of the participle may perhaps be explained by attraction to *hāmān*. Translate: "And Haman's face was covered." The phrase apparently refers to the practice of covering the heads of condemned persons, not attested in our extant sources for the Persians, but for which there is evidence among the Greeks and Romans.⁵⁹

9:19: Here the *q^erê*, *happ^erāzîm* is preferred by virtually all modern commentators over the *k^etîb*, *happ^erûzîm*. The *q^erê* is generally given the meaning "hamlet dwellers"⁶⁰ or "villagers."⁶¹ However, this meaning is inappropriate in the two other biblical passages where the noun *p^erāzî* occurs. In Deut 3:5, *āre^c happ^erāzî* is contrasted with *ārîm b^ešûrôt hōmāh*, "cities fortified by a wall." In 1 Sam 6:18, *kōp^er happ^erāzî* is contrasted with *īr mibšār*, "fortress cities." It is clear that the noun *p^erāzî* in both passages, like its feminine counterpart *p^erāzāh* (Ezek 38:11; Zech 2:8), means "open villages,"

⁵⁷ Cf. R. Gordis, *Biblical Text in the Making*, 106-107 and relevant notes.

⁵⁸ We suggest that the identical form *āšû* is to be construed similarly in Hos 2:10, where the final stich is to be rendered, "and gold, made over to the Baal," the stich being in complementary (or climactic) parallelism to the preceding: "and silver I increased for her." The New Jewish Version (*The Five Megillot and Jonah* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968]) translates as we do, but the basis for the rendering is not indicated.

⁵⁹ See L. B. Paton (*Book of Esther*, 264) and C. A. Moore (*Esther*, 72) for the references to Curtius and Livy.

⁶⁰ BDB, s.v., *p^erāzî*, 826b.

⁶¹ So C. A. Moore, *Esther*, 85, 89.

not "villagers." This meaning for the *qerê*, *pērāzîm* is not suitable in this passage, since we require an epithet modifying "the Jews." On the other hand, the *Kerîb*, which is to be vocalized as *happērûzîm*, is entirely appropriate in the context. It is the plural of *pārûz*, "inhabitant of an open settlement, villager." The noun occurs in rabbinic Hebrew, e.g., *pārûz beṇ yômô*, "a village-dweller of one day's duration."⁶²

The MT in this verse is conflate, embodying two parallel readings: (1) *happērûzîm*, "villagers," and (b) *hayyôšêbîm be'arê happērāzôt*, "dwelling in open cities." This conflation was an early proto-Masoretic technique designed to preserve variant readings from different manuscripts.⁶³ As one instance of this phenomenon, we may cite Exod 6:4. Here the MT includes two conflate readings: ²et ²erēṣ *m'gûrêhem*, and ²ašer *gārû bāh*.

9:27: There is no need to emend the phrase *lô² ya^{ca}bôr* to the plural *lô² ya^{ca}brû*, "they shall not pass over" (Moore). The clause is adverbial, "not to be abrogated," lit., it shall not pass away; cf. Job 6:10, *lô² yaḥmôl*, "(in trembling) which is merciless."

9:30: The three last words in the text, "words of peace and truth," are rendered as "friendly and sincere letters" by Moore, who then moves them to the beginning of the verse. He believes that many Jews were unwilling to observe the Purim festival and that this letter of supplication was therefore sent by Mordecai and Esther in order to persuade them to do so.

We suggest that the phrase be understood as the initial formula of greeting in the letter, for which we have parallels in virtually all cultures. Such are the familiar Greek *chairein* and the Roman formula *Ego valeo; si vales bene est*, "I am well; if you are well that is good."

More germane is the evidence from Aramaic epistolography, both biblical and extra-biblical, roughly contemporaneous with Esther.⁶⁴ In his comprehensive study of the subject,⁶⁵ J. A. Fitzmyer devotes considerable attention to the formulas employed. He writes: "In the vast majority of instances, some expression, involving *šlm*, 'peace, well-being,' or the verb *brk*, 'bless' has been used."⁶⁶ In his analysis, he finds five types of the former formula and two forms of the latter.

It may be added that in the 19th century, modern Hebrew epistolary style began with an abbreviation of the phrase *ʔaḥar d'rišat š'elôm k'êbôdô*, "after inquiring concerning your well-being." In contemporary Hebrew, the initial

⁶² E.g., b. *Megillah* 19a.

⁶³ See our early discussion of conflation in *Biblical Text in the Making*. The thirteen instances of conflation cited in the first edition (1937, pp. 40-41) are augmented by 28 more in the "Prolegomenon" to the second edition (1970, pp. liv-lvi). This was apparently overlooked by S. Talmon ("Double Readings in the Masoretic Text," *Textus* 1 [1960] 142-84, and in later studies). See the additional bibliography in O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, 720.

⁶⁴ Biblical examples are Ezra 4:17; 5:7. For the larger number of extra-biblical examples, including several from *Nahal Hever*, see J. A. Fitzmyer, "Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography," *JBL* 93 (1974) 201-25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 214-15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

formula frequently used, *šālôm ûb^erākāh* combines the two types analyzed by Fitzmyer. The phenomenon constitutes a striking, if minor, instance of the persistence of cultural forms.

In the actual text of the letter sent by Esther and Mordecai⁶⁷ the initial formula "greetings of peace and truth," i.e., sincere greetings of peace, was followed by the text, which recapitulated the events which led to the institution of the holiday and urged its observance. The bulk of the letter is not cited *in extenso* in the book, but is summarized in vs. 31, probably because of the length of the document and the reader's familiarity with the events narrated in it.

⁶⁷ It is noteworthy that of the three terms for "letter" cited by Fitzmyer ("Some Notes," 210), ²*igg^erā²* (²*iggartā²*), *sēpēr* (*siprā²*) and *niš^twān*, the first two are applied in Esther to this epistle (9:29, 30).