

“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS”

THE BOOK OF ESTHER AND HER PLACE IN THE BIBLICAL CANON

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When I was writing this thesis, I used my breaks to update myself on the News. At one point they had an interview with mountain climber, they showed a glimpse of a time when he reached his destination after climbing a glacier of the South Pole or North Pole. He was so happy he succeeded with his goal that he started crying, watching this I could almost rely to his feelings. Although I haven't climbed a glacier, however I have written a master thesis. Moreover, writing this master thesis has really been a fascinating process. I have found myself becoming even fonder of the Old Testament and the Book of Esther. I started out not knowing for sure what direction the thesis should take in order to reach the final destination, a master thesis about the Book of Esther.

My gratitude goes first to Prof. Magnar Kartveit, for helping me stake out the direction. Thank you for guidance and help in this thesis and for staking out the direction for me. It has been a privilege to have you as an advisor.

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ABSTRACT

My independent research for my master thesis from the School of Mission and Theology has been dedicated to a study of the Old Testament, more particularly a study of the Book of Esther and its place in the Biblical Canon. This study is 30 ECTS-Credits, which equals one semester with independent work.

The Question I have asked is:

Why is the Book of Esther in the Biblical Canon?

To answer this I have looked at:

1. The two stories in one summary, the Hebrew and the Greek Esther.
2. How the Canon was established; the aim is to look at old scriptures such as the Babylonian Talmud. The question here is to establish why the majority of the Rabbis validated the Book of Esther as a part of Jewish canon.
3. How can a book so “earthy” be part of our biblical canon? A book that speak of genocide and terror. To answer this I have used newer research such as B.W.Anderson, J.Barton, B.Childs, D.Clines, C.A.Moore, R.Pfeiffer, ect.

In the last chapter (6) I will discuss my findings.

*“Set me as a seal on your heart,
as a seal on your arm;
for love is stronger than death,
passion as relentless as the grave.*

*Its flashes of fire,
a most vehement flame.*

*Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.*

*If a man offered for love
all the wealth of his house,
it would be utterly scorned.”*

Song of Solomon 8: 6 – 8

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version Bible
AMP	Amplified Bible
ms/mss	Masoretic Addition(s) to the Hebrew and Greek text
Macc	the Maccabean Book in the LXX
OT	Old Testament
NT	New Testament
B.C.E	Before Common Era
C.E	Common Era
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
IBC	International Bible Commentary
NIB	New International Bible Commentary

CHAPTER ONE

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why Write a Thesis on the Book of Esther and Her Place in the Biblical Canon?

When I finally shifted over from Intercultural Communication and Religion Studies¹ to Theology I became very fascinated by the Old Testament (OT). After studying Intercultural Communication, Peace and Conflict, and Religion I finally found peace in OT studies. I strangely enough found tranquility in studying the OT Hebrew language. Although the first word we learned in Hebrew grammar was “to kill” (qatal).

However, I would argue that OT studies are probably the finest form of cultural studies there is. The culture from the OT is a culture that is so far away from our western culture, as Prof. Terence Fretheim at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, said in a class “When you study the Old Testament you are truly doing intercultural communication”².

I especially like the stories of the women in OT. In the spring of 2012 I had the pleasure to follow Assoc.Prof., Kathryn M. Schifferdecker's classes on Harlots and Heroines in the Old Testament, and Prof. Terence Fretheim's classes on the Pentateuch at Luther Seminary. The Harlots and Heroine class focused only on women in the OT, but Fretheim also put emphasis on the women of the Pentateuch.

Before I went for my exchange program at Luther Seminary, I had already discussed with Prof. Kartveit my possibilities to write the master thesis on the Book of Esther.

After being in USA and at Luther Seminary, my aim to write a thesis on the Book of Esther was still there. First I wanted to write a more feministic interpretation of the text.

This however, had probably been very interesting, but also very difficult, and in the end it would have been too narrow. Therefore I am very thankful that I ended up with writing about the Book of Esther in our Canon.

Hence, by bringing the canonical debate to the table. Therefore, asking why we have the texts we have in our Bible, and moreover, why we cannot take out those books we do not like, is a topic that is very relevant today.

Also, canonical approach to a text is a fairly new approach to study the Bible.

The emphasis in this approach is to “explore the dialectic between the individual text and the

1 BRIK – Bachelor in Intercultural Communication and Religion at MHS 2006 – 2009

2 This is taken from my memory at one of Prof. Terence Fretheim's Pentateuch Classes at Luther Seminary, Spring 2012, St. Paul, MN, USA

full canonical context”³.

Then when it comes to Esther and her place in the canon, both Jewish and Christian, this approach has been very intriguing. Thus, the Book of Esther is seen as a universal masterpiece⁴, its place in the Bible has been questioned since the book came to be in our canon.

To start of this thesis, I have used some verses from the Song of Solomon. This is with good intention. Song of Solomon is, together with the Book of Esther, among the late writings and the late canonization. Moreover it is also, together with the Book of Esther, discussed according to its place in the Canon since the New Testament has no quotations of either books⁵.

Thus, the Book of Esther raises the problem that God is not mentioned throughout the book. For this reason, I would say that my master thesis has in my own opinion been very exciting, almost like a good treasure-hunt.

1.1.1 Theological Issues Raised in the Book of Esther

The first question often asked is where God is in this story, and how can a book so close to our human weakness is among the Holy Scriptures? A trace of belief in a providence or higher power is where Mordecai urges Esther to raise up to her position as queen and plead for her people’s lives and if she did not, the help will come from another place Est.4:14, indicating that the help would come from God rather than from her. Another place is where Esther encourages to a strict three days fast, Est 4:16, an indication that the fast also includes prayers to God for help and strength.

Esther is also far from the Sermon on the Mount, but it is rather filled with hate, greed and revenge. It is a nationalistic book that celebrates Judaism in the diaspora, but it also gives assurance that the help will come, either by human wisdom or by God’s hand. Another aspect which my thesis will seek to answer is if the Septuagint (LXX) Additions to Esther have saved the Masoretic Text (MT) in its effort to make Esther a more pious example to follow. The Book of Esther is a book that still speaks in our time where there is a lack of believing in God’s divine help and where we mostly rely on our own strength and wisdom.

3 McKenzie Steven L., Haynes Stephen R., *An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application To Each Its Own Meaning*, revised and expanded, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1999, Mary C. Callaway *Canonical Criticisms*, 143

4 Rendtorff Rolf, *The Old Testament An Introduction*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, first paperback edition 1991, 270

5 Hvalvik Reidar, Stordalen Terje, *Den store fortellingen Om Bibelens tilblivelse, innhold, bruk og betydning*, Det Norske Bibelselskap, Oslo 1999, 24

Jews and Christians worldwide are crying for God to help in hopeless and desperate times, and this book provides hope for people in desperate situations with the assurance that the righteous will win.

1.1.2 *Structure of Thesis*

My main aim in this thesis is a textual study of the Book of Esther and her place in the Biblical Canon. I have looked on what theologians and Rabbis up thru the times have said about her and her place in the Biblical Canon.

I start my work in Chapter 2 with presenting my method and then give general background information on the Book of Esther. I have given a summary of the LXX where it comes naturally according to the MT. The LXX paragraphs are marked with A, B, C...etc.

Following, my aim is to point out the differences between the MT and the LXX texts. Then a short question how the Book of Esther was canonized.

In Chapter 3 I will focus on theories like authorship, time of composition, genre and canonization. I will continue in to Chapter 4 asking the question about Esther's canonization from a Talmudic and Medieval point of view. By this present the Rabbis of the Talmud's view on Esther. Continuing with medieval Rabbis and Christian theologians view on Esther. In Chapter 5 my aim is to present Christian theologians modern day view on Esther and the canonical debate.

In Chapter 6 I will discuss my findings in chapter 3, 4 and 5. Then in Chapter 7 I will give a summary of my thesis, followed by a conclusion of my findings.

CHAPTER TWO

2 METHOD AND GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Method

The method I applied in my thesis is the method of Canonical Approach. The reason for using Canonical Approach in my thesis is because this approach has as aim to study both the text alone and in context which the text is found⁶. Hence, when a text is read alone it loses some of its value to the community of faith. However, when the text is read in context with the other texts is it's canon, the meaning changes according to its context.

Therefore the Canonical Approach explores the dialectic between the individual text and the full canonical context⁷. The Canonical Approach aims to build a bridge between the past and now⁸. Further, Mary C. Callaway quotes J. Sanders that his view on Canonical Criticism could resemble "a beadle who carries the critically studied Bible in procession back to the church lectern from the scholar's study"⁹. Therefore Canonical Approach belongs to both the academia and also the Christian Church, or more broadly, the community of faith¹⁰. The reason I have chosen the Canonical Approach in my thesis because the approach, as Childs puts it, the Canonical Approach does not allow for polarizing the text as either 'secular' or 'religious'¹¹. Moreover, the approach interprets the text in to the nation's total life, the past and the future¹².

One of the misunderstandings with the Canonical Approach is to misinterpret the text like a New Criticism in literary analysis¹³. The danger here is to put all the emphasis on the interpretation of the final form of the text, and by such forgetting the community of faith in which the text has been shaped¹⁴.

Another trap is to forget that the Canonical Approach builds on the historical-critical method,

6 McKenzie, Haynes (1999) : 142 – 143

7 McKenzie, Haynes (1999) : 143

8 McKenzie, Haynes (1999) : 145

9 Mckenzie, Haynes (1999) : 145 – Callaway quoted this from: James Sanders, *Canon and Community: A guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 20

10 McKenzie, Haynes (1999) : 145

11 Childs Bevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, SCM Press, London, 1979, : 606

12 Childs (1979) : 606

13 McKenzie, Haynes (1999) : 152

14 McKenzie, Haynes (1999) : 152

and therefor one might try to interpret the text precritical¹⁵.

However, I use the Canonical Approach in my thesis, thus it provides to give a different view on the Book of Esther.

The condition for canonical approach is that a text stands alone, like the Book of Esther did at first in her believing community. However, when the Book of Esther came into the Canon we have to view the Book of Esther in context with other sacred texts, like Exodus, or the Sermon on the Mount, then the meaning of the book changes according to its canonical contexts.

This is the reason why I have chosen the Canonical Approach Method, namely to view how the Book of Esther have a place in our Holy Scripture.

2.1.1 *The data collected*

For this thesis I have focused on a textual study about the Book of Esther in the Biblical Canon, and if the Septuagint Additions (LXX) might have saved her place in our Bible. For this I have viewed several theological commentaries on the Book of Esther and their opinion about the book. I have used the Meggillah in the Babylonian Talmud which is translated by Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, first published 1938, in my research. The Bibles I have used varies from the Norwegian Bible 2011 translation by Bibelselskapet, together with their Norwegian translation of the apocryphal from 1988, the English NRSV Study Bible with Deuterocanonical books and YouVersion online Bible. My focal article for this thesis has been the article by Bernhard W. Anderson The Place of the Book of Esther in the Christian Church (1950). The main opponent in my thesis on Esther's place in the Bible has been Robert H. Pfeiffer's commentary on Esther in his book, Introduction to the Old Testament (1948).

15 McKenzie, Haynes (1999) :152 – 153

2.2 The Historical Period

The Book of Esther was mentioned the first time in Palestine in 2Macc. 15:36 as Mordecai's Day¹⁶. Even if this was the first time the book was mentioned in Palestine, the festival of Purim was most likely celebrated in the Mesopotamia Diaspora by the Jews there long before it reached Palestine¹⁷. However, what was so special with this particular mentioning of Mordecai's Day in the book of the Maccabees? At that time the Maccabees had fought against Nicanor and his army and won. Up to that then they had been under a long period of persecution and exile.

In 198 B.C.E., Antiochus III defeated the Ptolemies, and he brought the Jews from the Ptolemies Empire into the Seleucid Empire by occupying Jerusalem¹⁸. His successor, Seleucus IV (187 – 175), was in turn replaced by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175 – 164)¹⁹. Antiochus IV Epiphanes intervened more aggressively in Jewish affairs²⁰. His armies rallied and butchered down everyone in Jerusalem who did not obey the new Hellenistic rules made by Antiochus IV²¹, and at one time they butchered down Jews during Sabbath²². This gave rise to a revolt against the rule of Antiochus. It started in the countryside by a priest called Mattathias and his sons who got the nickname the Maccabees, meaning “the hammerer”²³. Hence, the Maccabean-Hasmonean period started, where the Jews rose to arms to fight back the transgressions done by the gentiles in their effort to break down the Jewish religion²⁴. This was a very anti-gentile period among the Jews in Palestine, and according to Pfeiffer it was namely, under these circumstances was the story of Esther written. Moreover, at the height of the rule of John Hyracanus in 125 B.C.E., reflecting the lowest state of his rule where proselytes were circumcised under the obligatory of the law²⁵.

16 Pfeiffer Robert H., *Introduction to the Old Testament*, A&C Black, London, first Am.ed.1948, first British ed.1952, reprinted 1953 : 740 – 742

17 Gottwald Norman K, *The Hebrew Bible A Socio-Literary Introduction*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1985 : 563

18 Gottwald (1985) : 443 – 444

19 Gottwald (1985) : 443 – 445

20 Pfeiffer (1953) : 740 – 741

21 Gottwald (1985) : 444 – 445

22 Pfeiffer (1953) : 740 – 741

23 Gottwald (1985) : 445

24 Gottwald (1985) : 445

25 Pfeiffer (1953) : 742

2.3 The Book of Esther

The Book of Esther has through the times brought up the question of its place in the Bible. This is because it is difficult to see the godliness in the book. Anderson use the word “earthy” and by this he quotes Ewald who said “we fall, as it were, from heaven to earth”, by this Anderson remarks how it is to turn to the Book of Esther from the other books in the Bible²⁶. Moreover, Dr. Martin Luther have utterly expressed that the best thing would be if the whole book was taken out of our Christian Canon²⁷. On the other hand, the great philosopher Maimondes exalted Esther to be on the same level as the Jewish Law and above the prophets and the scripture²⁸.

Here follows a summary from the two books, the MT together with the LXX Additions of Esther. The LXX Additions follow the indent and typing’s for quotation, as this makes it easier to differ between the MT and the LXX.

After the summaries of the MT and the LXX, I will proceed by first giving an outlook on the differences between the two texts. Secondly, I conclude and sum up this chapter and proceed with the next where my aim is to provide a more background information about the book of Esther.

2.3.1 Retelling the story of Esther

A: 1-11 Mordecai’s dream. Two dragons that roars, and calls forth ungodly people to fight God’s righteous people. The righteous people cries out to God. Then a small spring comes forth and becomes a river. The righteous becomes courageous and fights back the evil. The sun starts shining and it is spring again.

A: 12 – 17 Mordecai heard about a plot to kill king Artaxerxes, and Mordecai informed the king. The king executes them. Haman is introduced here. He plans to revenge Mordecai for the execution of the two king's men.

Ch.1 The king Ahasuerus invites all his generals and princes from over a 127 provinces to a drinking party lasting 180 days. During these days he shows off his kingdom and all his riches and wealth. When these days came to an end, the king invited the citizens of Susa for a week long drinking party in his castle. Each man drinking as he liked.

26 Anderson, Bernhard W., *The Place of the Book of Esther in the Christian Bible*, pp 32 – 43, in *The Journal of Religion*, vol.30 no 1, jan.1950, Published by: The University of Chicago Press, : 32

27 Anderson (1950) : 33

28 Anderson (1950) : 33

The king Ahasuerus was in the right mood to boast and showed off his wealth. Queen Vasthi had her own party for the women. On the seventh day the king being drunk and merry would like to show off his queen, wearing her crown, but she refused. The king lost his temper and with advice from his vices, he dismissed her from her crown. Because of her rejection, a letter was written to show that this kind of rebellion from any wife was wrong.

Her nobility should therefore be given to another woman more fit for royalty than Vasthi.

2:1- 20 Mordecai and Esther is introduced. Esther is brought to the Harem.

She won favor with the chief eunuch, Hegai, and was given special treatment.

Esther hid her nationality and religion, but Mordecai attended daily to her every need.

v.12 – 14 the girls were sent to the king one by one. The girls could bring whatever they wanted from the harem to the castle. So she would go to the king at night and in the morning she did not go back to the same harem, but went to another harem where the king's concubines were. After that it was up to the king to call her, if he needed her service again.

vv.15-18 Esther's night with the king. Hegai instructed her, and she only brought with her what he advised. Esther won favor with everyone.

Esther was brought to king Ahasuerus in the 10th month, Tebet. In his seventh year as king.

The king loved Esther more than all the other girls. She won favor in his eyes and he put the royal crown on her head and made her queen in Vasthi's place.

He gave a party for her, and gave tax relieves in all the provinces and gave out royal gifts.

vv.19 – 23 after this election Esther was still silent about her background. She listened to what Mordecai told her, just like she had done growing up. Then it happened that Mordecai heard about an assassination against the king. He informed Esther, who informed the king. And in that way they saved the king's life.

This was written down in the history books in Persia.

Ch.3:1 – 6 Haman rises to position. Everyone bowed for Haman, except for Mordecai.

The king's servants pleaded with Mordecai and asked why he did not bow for Haman.

Mordecai told them that he was Jewish and would not bow for Haman. They gossiped to Haman about Mordecai and his refusal to bow down for Haman.

Haman got furious and wanted revenge, but considered it too simple to only punish Mordecai. No, it would be more suitable to get rid of all the Jews in the kingdom of Persia.

vv. 7 – 11 Haman informs the king of an unrighteous people who do not live according to Persian rules. He is given authority to do as he pleases with that people.

vv. 12 – 15a they throw lot or “pur” to find the day and month for the crusade against the Jews. It became the 12th month, adar, and the 13th day of that month. Haman writes in the

king's name to all the provinces of Persia about Haman's commandment and he seals the letter with the king's signet-ring. The message was to annihilate, kill and make an end to all the Jews, men, women and children, young as old, on the 13th day in the 12th month. More so, they should plunder the properties of the Jews.

B: 1- 7 this was king Xerxes letter to all the provinces. A letter that went out against the Jews in Persia. The letter starts with the king reminding the people of the kingdom why he was writing them this letter. All he was pursuing was peace and harmony and the ability for a safe travel throughout the kingdom. His aim was to restore the peace all people long for²⁹.

Now he had heard through his faithful servant, Haman, about this people who did not obey the rules in the kingdom. Because of their own rules that went against all others. They did not obey the king commandment. Further this people were hostage towards all humans.

They disturb the peace and harmony in the kingdom. Therefore, the letter invites everyone to kill this unruly people by sword on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar in that year³⁰.

In that day they should receive a violent death.

Ch3 continues: The message went out to the kingdom and became a law in every province. **v.15b** the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city was in great distress.

Ch.4: 1- 17 Mordecai learned about the annihilation of the Jews and he mourned.

Esther heard about Mordecai's mourning, and not knowing the situation of her people, she tried to comfort him. He told her about Haman's plan to kill all the Jews in the kingdom of Persia. Then Mordecai told Esther to rise up to her position as a Jewish Queen in a foreign country and save her people, for such a time as this. Esther calls for a three days fast and prayer for all the Jews in Persia. For she has to go uninvited in front of the king's throne on behalf of the Jews. Because she knows there is a death penalty to enter it without invitation and she has not been invited for over thirty days.

C: 1 – 10 Mordecai's prayer to the Lord. Reminding God how he made the heavens and the earth, and relying on his power for the salvation of Israel. Furthermore, Mordecai tells God about his intentions for not bowing down and worship Haman. Mordecai assures God that no man deserves greater honor than God³¹. Then he tells God about how their enemies want to destroy Gods own people. There comes a plead to God not to let this happen.

Do not neglect your portion, which you have redeemed for yourself out of the land of Egypt³²

He asked that the sorrow they now had would turned to joy so they could praise the Lord.

29 Det Norske Bibelselskap: *Det gamle testamentes APOKRYFENE Bibelens deuterokanoniske bøker*, Norbok a.s, Oslo/Gjøvik, 2.opplag 1989, B:2b : 90

30 Apokryfene B:6b, : 91

31 Apokryfene C:7, : 93

32 Meeks, Wayne A., with the Society of Biblical Literature: *The Harper Collins Study Bible NRSV Including Apocryphal Deuterocanonical Books Student Edition*, San Francisco, 2006: C:16 This equals to v.9 in the Norwegian Apokryfene

C: 11 now all of Israel cried to the Lord as they stood face to face with death.

C: 12 – 30 Esther's prayer. Filled with fear for her life. She took off her royal dress and clothed herself in a mourning suit. She covered her head in ashes and dirt and hid herself in her long hair. Then she prayed to the Lord, God of Israel. Expressing that Israel's God was the only God she followed. She had learned about her people's God from birth and that everything he promised his people he did. But now, they had sinned against their God and he had given them over to their enemies. They are now slaves and their masters are now planning to put the law of God out of business for good by annihilating the holy people. She asks furthermore, that God will grant her strength and the right words to speak to the king, here Artaxerxes.

In order that God might turn the King's heart from evil to good.

She claims that the help can only come from God. Then she reminds him of her hatred to her crown and royalty. How she defies being with a heathen king, eating unclean food and thereby neglecting the strict eating rules that the Jews had. Even so, she tells God that he knows that she has not touched sacrificial wine or eaten at Haman's table. That her joy has only been in the Lord God of Abraham since the day she came to the castle. She pleads that God will hear their cry, and deliver her people from the evil and deliver her from her fear.

D:1 – 16 Esther goes to the king unaddressed. She prays for God's assistance.

She took with her two of her maidens and went to plead for her people's salvation. One maid supported her and the other held her veil.

She was beautiful and looked happy, but her heart was filled with trembling fear.

The king was sitting on the throne, covered with gold and emeralds.

When he saw her, he lost his temper. She fainted, but God changed the king's heart and he realized that it was Esther, and he cooled down. He ran towards her. Took her in his arms and held her till she came to herself again. While comforting her, he asked what she wanted and assured her that the rule of death did not apply to her, only to the commoners.

The king lifted his golden scepter towards her, touched her neck with it and kissed her, asking again what she wanted. Esther answered that when seeing him in his entire splendor she was filled with awe and fear. He looked like an angel from God. While she spoke she fainted and the king and all his servants tried their best to comfort her.

Ch.5: 1 -8 The third day Esther dresses herself in her most beautiful outfit and stood in the inner garden in front of the king's house. When the king saw her, he looked upon her with favor. She was saved, and the king was curious to what he deserved this visit.

She invited the king and Haman to a banquet the same day. At the banquet the king again asked what Esther wanted. Esther replied once more that she wished to invite the king and Haman to a banquet the next day then she would reveal her intentions.

vv. 9- 14 Haman went from that banquet happy. But his mood was suddenly turned to anger when he saw Mordecai the Jew sitting at the gate. He went home furious, calling his wife and

friends together complaining about this Mordecai. They advised him to build gallows and ask the king for permission to get Mordecai hanged.

Ch.6: 1 – 14 the king have trouble sleeping. His servants to read from the Chronicles. But even this “sleeping pill” could not make the king fall asleep. His servants read the part where Mordecai saved the king's life. The king wanted to know how Mordecai had been rewarded for his act. He learned that nothing had been done in the case of Mordecai.

Early that morning, Haman enters the king's gate to hoping for permission to hang Mordecai. Before Haman gets the chance to ask, the king asks Haman how he should reward a faithful subject.

Haman being selfish said, a royal robe from the kings own wardrobe. A horse that the king himself had used. And a royal crown on his head.

This was the right way dress a man the king wanted to honor. Then let the man ride through the city while the king's most faithful servant went in front and shouted “This is how the king honors those who are faithful”.

The king got excited and told Haman to do this to Mordecai the Jew. Haman had to do all this to Mordecai.

Mordecai returned to the gate and Haman went home with his head covered. He told his wife and friends about this incident. His wife warning him, saying: If Mordecai was a Jew, and then he would be Haman's fall.

Suddenly the king's eunuchs came and got Haman.

Ch.7: 1- 10 Esther's second banquet. For a third time the king requests to know what Esther's desired. Esther told the king that she was of Jewish heritage and somebody had requested annihilation on her and her people.

The king lost his temper. He wanted to know who would to kill his queen and her people. Esther pointed out Haman.

Haman got terrified, shaking out of fear right in front of the king and queen. The king got up and went out into the garden. Haman pleaded to Esther for his life. He now feared the king. The king returns from the garden and he finds Haman stretched out over the bench where Esther is sitting. The king totally lost his temper now, and he accuses Haman for assaulting the queen in the king's own house. The king's men cover Haman's face.

Servants tell the king about the gallows Haman made for Mordecai the Jew.

The king ordered them to hang Haman in it. They hang Haman from the gallows. And the king's anger cooled.

Ch.8:1- 14 Esther set Mordecai over Haman's estate. Mordecai is given the king's signet ring.

Esther pleads again to the king to stop the evil plans against her people.

The king told Esther that a decree signed with his ring could not be undone. They had to write a new letter and encourage the Jews to defend themselves on that day. The king's writers were called at once. The letter was written and sent to all the 127 provinces with in a hast.

In that letter the king gave the Jews permission to defend themselves and kill and exterminate all those who opposed them. Including women and children.

It also gave them permission to take plunder.

E: 1 – 25 The King's letter. It said, when people are given too much power they misuse it for their own benefit. Thereby, hinting to the letter sent by Haman in the kings name. Haman was a stranger among the Persians, being a Macedonian and therefore lacking the Persian gentleness. We welcomed him and called him our kingdoms second father, after the king. But his purpose had been polluted, he wanted to take the kings throne by a coup and in that way give the kingdom in the hands of the Macedonians. Haman tried to destroy Mordecai, queen Esther and all the Jews in the kingdom. But the Persian people did not find anything wrong with the Jewish people, the children of God.

Giving God the glory for how he had kept the kingdom together. The king asks his people to neglect the letter from Haman, whom he has hung in the gallows with his whole family. The letter tells the Jews to defend themselves on the thirteenth adar.

It gives orders for the sympathizers to help the Jews in fighting back.

These days will forevermore become a day of celebration for the Jewish community and the friendly minded Persians and a memory of great downfall for those who hate them. The doom for the provinces who do not obey the commandment, is a to be destroyed with sword and fire, becoming a barren place where no birds or animals could ever live.

(ch. 8 continues) The letter became a law in every province so that on that terrible day every Jew had the right to defend them.

vv.15 - 17 Mordecai got honored in Susa, again dressed in royal robe and wearing a crown. Susa cheered and was joyous. All the Jews were happy.

In every province were the message from the king reached there was great happiness and celebration among the Jews.

The heathens in the land declared themselves to be Jews. A fear of the Jews had come upon them.

Ch.9. 1- 19 on the 13th day in the month of Adar, the law of the king was put into action. The enemies of the Jews had hoped to gain power over the Jews on this day, but it was the Jews that gained dominion over all those who hated them instead.

No one had a chance against the Jews. The leaders in all the provinces were on the Jews side,

because there was a fear of the Jews and a fear of Mordecai. He had become very great in the king's house.

The Jews killed all their enemies with the sword.

In Susa they killed five hundred men and they killed the ten sons of Haman.

But they took no plunder.

The king again asked what more Esther required from him. She asked for one more day of killing and that the sons of Haman would be hung in the city as a warning.

This was granted. The 14th of Adar the Jews in Susa killed three hundred, but they did not plunder.

All the Jews in Persia defended themselves and got peace with their enemies.

They killed seventy five thousand of those who hated them, but they did not plunder.

This was on the thirteenth of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of joy and celebration. The Jews in Susa rested on the fifteenth.

vv. 20 – 22 Mordecai wrote down everything that had happened. He sent a letter to all the Jews in Persia. He commanded them to celebrate the 14th and 15th of Adar as a memory of their salvation from their enemies.

It should be a memory of how their complaining was turned to joy and their sorrow to celebration. They should send each other gifts of food and send food to the poor.

vv.23 – 28 The Festival of Purim.

Remembering how Haman had thrown “pur” that is a lot to find the right day to kill the Jews.

However, the king heard about the plot, and Haman was hung with his sons in the gallows.

This is why these days are called “purim” because of the word “pur”.

These days should be remembered and celebrated throughout all times. Those days should never get lost from the Jews memories.

vv.29 – 32 Queen Esther and Mordecai wrote a second letter concerning Purim. It was sent to all the provinces in Persia for the cause of peace and harmony.

The words of Purim was established by Esther and written in a scroll.

Ch.10:1 – 3 Mordecai is given a high position in the castle.

It was written in the Chronicles of Media and Persia. Mordecai was second to the king in the land. He had a good reputation. He sought the good for all people and promoted peace for all his descendants.

F: 1 – 10 Mordecai’s dream. The dream was from God as a sign for the things to come.

The two dragons being Mordecai and Haman and their roar calling their people on each side to fight each other. The river being Esther marrying the king. Although, the Jews turned to God

for salvation. The Lord remembered them and saved them.

F: 11 Two Jews, Dositeos and his son Ptolemais came with the letter about Purim. It had been translated by Lysimakos who lived in Jerusalem. And it all happened in the fourth year of Ptolemaios and Cleopatras ruling.

2.3.2 Difference in the versions of the MT and the LXX.

The story of Esther told in two slightly different ways. They both have the same main characters, even though the kings are different. The MT has king Ahasuerus, traditionally referred to as king Xerxes I, 486 – 465 B.C.E³³, and the LXX has king Artaxerxes.

But which one of the kings is it? It can be one of the three kings. Artaxerxes I, II and III are considered younger than the traditional story of Esther³⁴, considering that Artaxerxes I reigned from 465 – 424 BCE.

However, the king is mentioned in both versions has a record of reigning in Persia.

Even so, the story of Esther is weighing towards king Xerxes I.

The MT text is so hostile and vindictive in nature and it does not apology for its hostility, like on the contrary Esther does in the LXX by justifying herself in her prayer to God³⁵. Another issue is that the name of God is not mentioned one time throughout the MT, but in the LXX God is mentioned abundantly.

The LXX is floats over with how God will save the Jews, and Mordecai and Esther are merely acting as God's own vessels in a time of desperate fear.

The MT story starts with the king throwing a big drinking party that lasted for 180 days.

Then it continued for another week of lavishly drinking in the palace in Susa.

It seems like a party with no end and no control. The king in his happiness showed of his property and wealth. Already there, he probably made a few enemies among the princes.

The king suddenly has a bright idea to show off his beautiful queen to a drunken party. She turns his request down publicly, and he gets angry and dismisses her from her throne. Here is where Mordecai and Esther are introduced, in chapter 3. However in the LXX they are introduced before the lavishing drinking party, when Mordecai has an apocalyptic dream.

After the dream Mordecai discovers a plot against the king and notify the king about it. Here we are introduced to Haman and his hate against Mordecai, for according to the LXX, Haman was secretly in on the plot against the king.

33 Pfeiffer (1953) : 732

34 Pfeiffer (1953) : 732

35 Anderson (1950) : 32

In the MT Haman is introduced in chapter 3 together with Mordecai and Esther.

In both the MT and the LXX the aim is that the one who wins execute the loosing part.

Haman wishes to execute not only Mordecai, but all of the Jews.

Why does Haman wish to execute all the Jews? It is because of Mordecai's pride in his religion and nationality and by refusing to bow down for Haman.

MT Esther and Mordecai are mere human Jews. Mordecai was a descendant from Kish who was Saul's father, 1Sam.9:1³⁶.

In the LXX Esther story both Esther and Mordecai are given a role as godly people.

Also, we have the prayers of Mordecai and Esther which in turn justify them in front of God for their doing. Esther goes far in her "justification-letter" to God by saying that she hates wearing her royal crown, which she hates like a filthy rag. By that she is referring the crown to a "menstruation rag"³⁷, which in turn goes back to the rules of uncleanness in the book of Leviticus 15:19 – 24.

This was quite strong words by Esther, considering herself unclean and untouchable because of her Persian crown. Also in the prayer she refers to King Artaxerxes as a lion. This is of interest, for the God of Israel is referred to as the Lion of Judah in the Scripture, consider Gen.49:9-10; Rev.5:5.

Furthermore, there are two slightly different told stories of when Queen Esther goes in front of the king. In the MT it is a straight forward text; the king looked upon her with favor and held his golden scepter up for her to touch it, asking what she wanted.

The LXX text on the other hand, is a dramatic text where one really gets the feeling of how nerve-wrecking this task was for Esther.

One example is that her heart was "frozen with fear"³⁸. Another example is that she fainted when the king saw her, Addition D 15:7.

Then, is it right to assume that the LXX Esther justifies the Book of Esther's place in the biblical canon?

Does the LXX Esther restore Queen Esther to be the godly, Jewish woman she was believed to be?

In the LXX Addition she is restored as a role model to follow for both a Jewish and a Christian community.

Her faith in God is strongly present and through her prayer in C:12 – 30 she justifies herself

36 Pfeiffer (1953) : 732

37 NRSV (2006) : 1341 Ch.14:16 and footnotes to that verse.

38 NRSV (2006) : 1341 Ch.15:5

and her actions. In this way she shows that her action is for the salvation of the Jewish community in Persia.

The hatch is that the salvation has a price, namely killing all those who oppose them. The MT Esther gives little indication of a Jewish faith; the only place is that of fasting in ch.4:16.

The LXX Esther is drawn nearer to stories like Joseph, Daniel and Ruth. They are all in a foreign country and eventually in high positions.

They are close to God and executing his will³⁹.

However on the one hand, look at Daniel 1:8. Daniel is not hiding his identity, but he uses his identity or religion to get his way. Because of his religion and identity, he upholds the dietary law that forbids him to eat at the foreign king's table.

Both the MT and the LXX Esther is hiding their true identity, thereby hiding her religion and nationality, although Mordecai daily looked after her welfare ch.2:10.⁴⁰

Looking at the MT version alone, without the addition, one can with right question her place in the biblical canon. In the MT it seems like the only reason Esther is convinced for action, is that her own life is in danger, ch.4:13-14.

Another difference to highlight is that in the LXX there are two plots, one in Addition A that Mordecai hears about a plot against the king, and he alone informs the king.

Then the other plot follows the Hebraic Mordecai where he informs Esther, and she reports it to the king.

It seems like the LXX Mordecai is more visual and given more room than the MT Mordecai. In the MT he functions more as an adviser and helper to Esther.

39 Rendtorff (1991) : 110

40 Pfeiffer (1953) : 732 – 733

2.4 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the canonical approach as method, and I have following given a brief view on how I have collected my data for this thesis.

After those necessities, I have given a short introduction to the Historical Period that the Book of Esther was written. Then I have introduced the Book of Esther and explained how I would go about in my retelling of the book. Then I have followed this with the retelling of the Book of Esther with both the MT together with the LXX Additions. After this I pointed out some main differences between the MT version and the LXX Additions. Hence, I believe that the LXX helped the story of Esther to get canonized. Now I will turn to more background information on the Book of Esther in chapter 3.

CHAPTER THREE

3 HOW DID ESTHER APPEAR IN CANON

3.1 Background

The background for the Book of Esther is the festival of Purim. The festival is described in Ch. 9:16ff.

The wicked Haman cast pûr (lot) in ch.3:7 to find the appointed day to annihilate all the Jews in Persia. When Haman's wicked plans are discovered, from ch.4 and more precisely in ch.7:3ff when the lot falls back on Haman and his allies. Esther and Mordecai appoint 14th and 15th Adar in the Jewish calendar to be forever days of feast and celebration, sending portions of food to the poor and to each other. In Ch. 9:27 it is said that these days must be celebrated every year in remembrance for the Jews salvation.

These days might have been popular in the diaspora around Jerusalem up towards the time of the Maccabees. The first time the festivities are mentioned is in 2Macc 15:36 and then as "Mordecai's Day". Purim was already popular among ordinary Jews and was celebrated in the diaspora before 2Macc 15⁴¹. However, it is of interest that the origin of Purim might have been of pagan origin. Childs suggest that Purim derives from either a Babylonian festival, or a Persian festival that was linked with a murder or to another Persian festival where the feast of the death was celebrated⁴². However, the main issue is that Purim was celebrated in by the Jews in the Mesopotamia Diaspora long before it reached Jews living in the Western Diaspora and Palestine⁴³. In Palestine the first notion of Purim feast was marked in 2Macc 15:36 as Mordecai's Day and was to be celebrated the 14th Adar, but the 13th Adar the Jews should celebrate the fall of Nicanor. Then Purim was celebrated in association with the fall of the anti-Semitic ruler of the Seleucid Dynasty in the Maccabean-Hasmonean time⁴⁴.

41 Gottwald (1985) : 563

42 Childs (1979) : 600

43 Gottwald (1985) : 563

44 Gottwald (1985) : 563

3.2 Authorship

There is no sure source for authorship to the MT book of Esther. It seems as if there has been one author that composed Ch. 1 – 8, and another author(s) that composed the addition Ch. 9:20 – 10:3, for the justification of the festival of Purim⁴⁵. This later addition could have been composed at the same time as the LXX was written.

The author had good knowledge of Persian high culture and court life. Pfeiffer is under the impression that the author was a Jew, residing in Jerusalem, but thru travels or acquaintance had gained enough knowledge about the Persian kingdom to place the story of Esther in the Persian court⁴⁶. However, there are no sure sources for that.

Moore focuses more on the author's intentions with the story, rather than on who the author was and where he lived⁴⁷. The author's intent is according to Moore to provide "historical" evidence for the festival of Purim. The author puts his emphasis on the action and the plot, rather than the characters and their personality. Moreover, the LXX gives the characters more personality by describing Mordecai and Esther's inner feelings in Addition C and D⁴⁸.

However, Moore concludes that the author had a "love for irony" in his plot, and in it he "illustrated the principle of retributive justice"⁴⁹.

The LXX text ends with paragraph F, and in this paragraph naming the author Lysimachus⁵⁰. He has been regarded as the author for the LXX Additions and translating the MT Esther to LXX⁵¹. However, according to Moore it cannot be only one author for the LXX Additions. He argues that B and E may have originated from a Alexandria, but the remaining Additions had their origin from Palestine⁵². Moore than puts emphasis on Addition A and F for being consistent with the anti-gentile spirit of that time, and therefore being more of a Hasmonean propaganda⁵³.

45 Pfeiffer (1948) : 737

46 Pfeiffer (1948) : 737 – 742

47 Moore Cary A., *The Anchor Bible ESTHER Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Doubleday & Company, Inc. New York, 1971 : LII - LIV

48 Moore (1971) : LII – LIV

49 Moore (1971) : LIV

50 Apokryfene, Det norske bibelselskap 2.opplag, (1989) : 107

51 Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob (gen.ed.) *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (NIB)*, D – H, Vol.2, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2007 : 317

52 Freedman David Noel (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD)*, D – G, Vol.2, Si – Z, Vol.6 Doubleday, New York, 1992 : 632 (Vol.2)

53 ABD : 632

3.3 Time of Composition

The source of authorship of the Book of Esther varies so does the time of composition. There are different arguments as to when the book is composed. The most frequent is that the MT version of Esther belongs to the fourth to the second century B.C.E⁵⁴. However, Pfeiffer is of the opinion that the book was composed at the height of John Hyracanus rule in 125 B.C.E, and therefore belongs to the Hasmonean period⁵⁵. Therefore Pfeiffer claims that the even the Hebrew Esther is merely a propaganda tale for the Maccabean period that lasted from 167 – 135 B.C.E⁵⁶. However, it is more likely that the Hebrew Esther belongs to the early second century, and prior to the Maccabean period⁵⁷. Moore states that it has to be prior to the Maccabean period, for there is no trace of antagonism towards the gentiles, or king Ahasuerus, but it is directed directly towards those who tries to harm the Jews. Other than that the book is friendly towards foreign rulers⁵⁸. Therefore I would argue for the Book of Esther was composed between the fourth and the second century B.C.E. When it comes to the date of composition for the LXX Additions, I have showed above in Ch. 3.2 that there is a question about the author. Addition F: 11 gives the credit to a Lysimachus from Jerusalem to have translated them into Greek around 114 – 113 B.C.E⁵⁹. However, according to Moore it seems very unlikely that Lysimachus have translated all of the Additions and the whole of the MT text alone⁶⁰. After Moore’s opinion the latest date for the origin of the Additions is 93 C.E., hence the Additions B, C, D and E are quoted by Josephus in the Antiquities⁶¹. That could mean that A and F are later additions or that they were left out by Josephus because they were too anti-gentile in their style⁶². Moore concludes that all the Additions existed at the time of Origen, around 185 – 254 C.E⁶³. I would argue for Moore’s view that is in accordance with the Book of Esther being questioned well into the fourth century C.E., in the Babylonian Talmud, .i.e. Megg 7a⁶⁴.

54 Kaiser Otto, *Introduction to the Old Testament A Presentation of its Results and Problems*, Translated by John Sturdy, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1975 : 202 – 203

55 Pfeiffer (1948) : 742

56 Pfeiffer (1948) : 740 – 742

57 ABD : 641

58 ABD : 641

59 Apokryfene (1989) : 107

60 ABD : 632

61 ABD : 632, and <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/ant-11.htm> chapter 6, read 10.05.2014

62 ABD : 632

63 ABD : 632

64 Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein (ed.) *The Babylonian Talmud Seder Mo'ed in Four Volumes IV Translated into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices*, The Soncino Press, London, 1938 : Megg 7a : 36 “... and Esther makes the hands unclean!” look at footnote 2 in the Sonico Talmud, two Rabbis agreeing that the Meggillah was not meant to be written.

3.4 Genre

There are many question when it comes to Esther, and the question asked mostly is if it is a true story or not? For this there are even more answers.

According to Rendtorff the Book of Esther follows the narrative genre and more precisely it is a novella⁶⁵. He describes that a novella depicts the events in a limited time and with few individuals in the action, but it skillfully links together narrative threads and sequences of action and continues them over a long period of time⁶⁶. Moreover, Rendtorff puts Esther in the didactic narratives together with Job, Ruth, the Joseph-story and Daniel and his friends, Dan 1 – 6⁶⁷. By this he says that through the story the “hidden action of God” is working through human intrigue⁶⁸.

However, the Book of Esther is placed among the Hagiographa or Writings in the OT, and is found in the third canon of the Hebrew Bible⁶⁹. It is called the Meggillah that means the festival scrolls⁷⁰. Even if Rendtorff attributes the Book of Esther to be a supreme art of narrative that is universally praised⁷¹, not everyone view the book in the same manner.

Pfeiffer on the other hand says that it is everything else then a masterpiece, but puts in the category of a short story⁷². The short story category goes well with the novella. The difference between Rendtorff and Pfeiffer is that Rendtorff sees the work of a hidden God in the story, and Pfeiffer do not. Pfeiffer sees it as a nationalistic story that was written in the heat of battle⁷³. According to Moore, Gerleman sees parallels between the Moses-story and the Esther-story, and that the Book of Esther could have been influenced by the Moses-story⁷⁴.

However, not everyone agrees with Pfeiffer, others view Esther as a myth with root in history and others views the Book of Esther to consist of different folk tales where some of it can be historically true⁷⁵.

65 Rendtorff (1991) : 271

66 Rendtorff (1991) : 86

67 Rendtorff (1991) : 110

68 Rendtorff (1991) : 270

69 Pfeiffer (1953) : 732

70 Kaiser (1975) : 199

71 Rendtorff (1991) : 110

72 Pfeiffer (1953) : 747

73 Pfeiffer (1953) : 747

74 ADB : 639 Moore refers to Gerleman (*Esther* BKAT)

75 ABD : 639

3.5 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have given an introduction to the background, authorship, time of composition and genre. As I have started almost all the sub-chapters here in ch.3, there is no sure proof of anything when it comes to the Book of Esther. There are variations of when it was composed and by who or at least who the author could have been. For this reason the Book of Esther becomes even more puzzling. Nevertheless, this background information supply support for my thesis about the Book of Esther in the Canon.

CHAPTER FOUR

4 RABBINICAL AND MEDIEVAL

4.1 The Rabbinical Tradition

One of the first problems when it comes to the Esther scroll is that it was never found in among the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Qumran community. It is therefore the only Old Testament book that was not represented in the Qumran community, which dated from second century B.C to first century A.D⁷⁶.

One speculation was that the scroll did not exist until late in the Hasmonean Age and therefore the book's absent from the Qumran was proof of that⁷⁷.

However, another speculation was that the absent from the Qumran community was due to theological reasons⁷⁸.

The first most obvious theological reason could be that God was not mentioned once in the Hebrew story. Hence, Esther was not considered a proper Jewess and she broke the law by marrying an uncircumcised, consider Exod. 34:16; Deut.7:3; Ezra 10⁷⁹. She did not observe the neither the Law nor the dietary law Kosher, and she showed some hesitation at first to come to her peoples aid⁸⁰. In this we find a second theological reason for the Qumran community to resent her, namely the lack of Jewish religious elements such as the Law, the Covenant, the Election of Israel and the absent of Jewish dietary laws⁸¹.

Moreover, she was not willing to tell the king if the Jews were merely sold as slaves, but that all changed when her own life was at stake, see 4:13-14. Hence in the following verse we see that the "help" would come from "another place" if she did not step up and help the Jews, which could be a sign of a hidden deity in the story.

Both Anderson and Moore uphold as a fact that the Book of Esther was accepted in the canon at the Council of Jamnia in 90 C.E⁸². However, there is a question if the Book of Esther was canonized at a later stage, and that she was just up for discussion at the Council of Jamnia in

76 Moore (1971) : XXI – XXII

77 Moore (1971) : XXII

78 Moore (1971) : XXII

79 Anderson (1950) : 34

80 Moore (1971) : XXII

81 ABD Vol.2 : 636

82 Anderson (1950) : 33/ Moore (1971) : XXII

90 C.E.

Hence, the scroll of Esther appears in the oldest canonical list, Baraita in Baba Bathra 14b – 15a, a Talmudic work of the second century⁸³. There it appears as one of twenty four books⁸⁴. Josephus (A.D. 37 -100) had only counted twenty two books in the Jewish canon. Moore explains that Josephus had not enumerated the books⁸⁵.

Josephus did retell the story of Esther in his Jewish Antiquities, only there he used he used the LXX Additions and not the MT when he paraphrased her⁸⁶. Therefore, Moore is therefore of the opinion that Josephus had counted Esther in the Jewish canon⁸⁷. However, the argument about Esther's place in the Jewish canon continued long after the Jamnia Council. Melito the bishop of Sardis (fl. A.D 170) did not count Esther in as one of the books of the Jews in the East⁸⁸. However, Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish (A.D. 300) and the great medieval philosopher Maimonides placed Esther on the same level as the Law, higher than the Prophets and the rest of the Scripture.⁸⁹

There are two more reasons that stood for a canonization of Esther.

First, it was that the book claimed to be an accurate historical account from a time when the Jews were saved from total extinction. Secondly, it gave reason for the festival of Purim⁹⁰.

The Rabbis in Talmud also discussed Esther's place in the Jewish Canon.

The Talmud is a collection of Jewish norms and the meaning of Talmud is study or learning⁹¹. Talmud was arranged in to an Oral Law that elaborated from 250 B.C.E to 550 C.E., and on this basis the rabbinic authorities shaped the structure of Judaism after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.⁹².

There are two Talmud's, one from the ancient Babylon and the other from Palestine⁹³. The Babylonian is the oldest, and I have used the English translation by Rabbi I. Epstein here in my thesis. It is the Babylonian Talmud that has become the most important for the European Jews and "the Talmud" mostly denotes the Babylonian Talmud⁹⁴. In the Talmud the rabbinical teachers are discussing the place of the Book of Esther in the Jewish Bible. The

83 Moore (1971) XXII

84 Moore (1971) XXII

85 Moore (1971) XXIII

86 <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/ant-11.htm> chapter 6, read 10.05.2014

87 Moore (1971) XXIII

88 Moore (1971) XXVI/ Anderson (1950) 33

89 Anderson (1950): 33

90 Moore (1971) XXVI

91 ABD Vol. 6 : 310

92 Gottwald (1985) : 91 – 92

93 ABD Vol. 6 : 310

94 ABD Vol. 6 : 310 – 311

Book of Esther is here called the Meggillah, meaning Scroll.

The rabbinical teachers had some inventive exegesis on why the book should remain in the Holy Scripture⁹⁵.

R. Samuel b. Judah said: Esther sent to Wise Men saying, commemorate me for future generations. They replied, You will incite the ill will of the nations against us. She sent back reply: I am already recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia.⁹⁶

Esther is responding back to the Rabbis on why her place was in the Canon. This was ingenious of the Rabbis. Esther did also ensure them that she was already written in history. History itself had canonized her. Therefore, this let the Rabbis with only one choice, to let her stay among the holy books in the canon⁹⁷.

Controversy, not all of the Rabbis were too eager to let Esther be in the canon. This could be because the fact of theological reasons such as the absent of the name of God, Esther's marriage to a non-Jew or simply that they viewed Purim as a merely pagan festival. Another reason could be that the Scroll of Esther was not found at the Qumran as shown above⁹⁸. For this they would imply that the Scroll of Esther made the "hands unclean", and was therefore not meant to be written down. Her sceptic also implied that she could not be an inspired book, .i.e. inspired by the Holy Spirit. This could be because of the lavish drinking that was applied during the festival of Purim. This, however, was met with objections by other rabbinical teachers⁹⁹.

Hence, despite all early the doubts around Esther, the book became one of the most popular books among the Jews, with many Midrash's, .i.e. commentaries, written about it¹⁰⁰. It is actually one of the OT books with most Midrash's written about it in the medieval time, and if we look away from the Pentateuch, it is the only book that beholds two Targums, .i.e. Aramaic translations with expansions¹⁰¹. Because the book describes Purim, and is therefore prescribed the reading of it, the book was favorably among the Jews and there are more medieval manuscripts of Esther than any of the other Old Testament books.¹⁰²

95 Anderson (1950) : 32

96 Megg.7a : 35

97 Anderson (1950) 32 (consider footnote 1 from the Megg.)

98 Bruce F.F. (gen.ed.) *The International Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, (IBC), Guidepost, New York, 1986 : 508

99 Megg 7a, 36

100 IBC : 508

101 IBC : 508

102 IBC : 508

4.2 Historical Problems around the Canonization of the Book of Esther

Throughout history there has always been a question if the Book of Esther should be in our Biblical Canon. Above in Ch. 4.1 I have given an outlook on what the Talmudic tradition discussed her place in the Jewish Canon. Here I wish to both take in consideration Jewish and Christians pros and cons around the book. Some of them find the book delightful, while others argue that the book defiles the whole Scripture.

The great philosopher Maimonides found the book praiseworthy and he gave the book higher statue then the Prophets in the Jewish Scripture¹⁰³. Maimonides claimed that if the whole Jewish Bible would vanish on the day of the coming of Messiah, the Law and Esther would remain¹⁰⁴. Maimonides found support for the Book of Esther in scripture, where God says that he is found among the poor and the desolated to revive them, Isa. 57:15¹⁰⁵. This is what Purim and the Book of Esther was for Maimonides, a chance to make the poor and desolated revived in their spirit by sending gifts of food to them. Maimonides saw a chance in the Purim celebration to resemble the Divine's presence on earth¹⁰⁶. However, among the medieval theologians the thoughts around the Book of Esther was not on the same level as Maimonides. Anderson has quoted Dr. Martin Luther that he utterly detested the book and would rather see it taken out of the Bible. However, he had the chance at the time of the Reformation, hence he left the book in the Bible and the only difference is that he took out the LXX Additions and called it Apocryphal¹⁰⁷.

103 Anderson (1950) : 33

104 Anderson (1950) : 33

105 Rabbi David Etengoff, *The Eternal Nature of Meggilliat Esther*
<http://www.reparashathashavuah.org/3/post/2014/03/parshiot-tzav-zachor-purim-5774-2014-the-eternal-nature-of-megillat-esther.html> read 26.04.2014

106 Rabbi David Etengoff, *The Eternal Nature of Meggilliat Esther*
<http://www.reparashathashavuah.org/3/post/2014/03/parshiot-tzav-zachor-purim-5774-2014-the-eternal-nature-of-megillat-esther.html> read 26.04.2014

107 Anderson (1950) : 33

4.3 Summary and Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to highlight some of the earliest contradictions around the book of Esther. I started with a brief introduction to early canonization of the book and asking when she was accounted for in the Canon. I started with the Qumran Community asking what some of the reasons could be for her non-existence there. Then continued with the question of when she was counted as canonical, which led me to presenting the Talmud and the Talmudic voices for and against a canonical Esther. By that I highlighted some of the problems the rabbinical teachers discussed in Talmud. Then I ended the chapter with briefly presenting some contradictions concerning the Book of Esther in the Jewish and Christian Bible during the Medieval Period. This leads us onwards to the next chapter, where I will present some of the newer theological voices concerning the Book of Esther in our Christian tradition.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 THE CHURCH AND ESTHER

5.1 The Book of Esther and our Christian Bible

In the previous chapters I have presented the book of Esther, the background for it and rabbinical thoughts and medieval thought around the book. Now my aim is to proceed by presenting my findings among the modern day theologians and their view on the book of Esther. All these views vary as much as the previous Talmudic and Medieval thoughts. There is still an ongoing discussion if the Book of Esther should even be in our Christian Bible, and what the meaning of the book really is. For this reason I find the Book of Esther very interesting, and in the proceeding chapters some views will be highlighted. This will serve as a basis for my discussion in chapter 6.

5.2 Theologians view on the Book of Esther and canon

In the 1970's voices started to question the validation of canon. Ideas that it was reasonable to leave out certain books from the Bible became alive again. These ideas we can find further back in the history, example with Dr. Martin Luther and in his Table Talk he strongly uttered those books like Esther and the Maccabees to be taken out of our Bible¹⁰⁸.

Moore finds that a problem with Esther is that the name of God is absent and she also lacks of religious elements, like the observing the Law, mentioning the covenant, the election of Israel or observing Kosher¹⁰⁹. Moore also questions if the name of God always has been absent from the book of Esther. Or if was deliberately and on purpose edited out later¹¹⁰? By this Moore is referring to a possible redaction of the book of Esther, which means that the story could have at an early point included the name of God. However, since the book lacked the importance of including the religious elements such as the Law and the election of Israel, the book could have been adjusted, and the name of God was added out of the book¹¹¹. For

108 Anderson (1950) : 33

109 Moore C.A. (ABD, Vol.2 D – G, Doubleday) : 636

110 Moore C.A. (ABD, Vol.2 D – G, Doubleday): 636

111 ABD vol.2 : 636, 640 – 641

this reason, Moore means that it is possible to see that God is working behind the scene in the book of Esther¹¹². This is followed by Rendtorff's view that the Book of Esther follows the OT's wisdom tradition¹¹³. The wisdom tradition is the idea that the "hidden action of God" is carried out by humans¹¹⁴. The problem with the election is questioned by Anderson, where he means that the Book of Esther is actually raising that question, about the meaning of the election of Israel¹¹⁵. By this he means that the question of blood and culture is nicely knit together in the story of Esther¹¹⁶. She is advised by her uncle to marry and uncircumcised for the sole reason to maintain the cultural and racial identity of the Diaspora Jews who are spread throughout the kingdom of Persia¹¹⁷. Anderson brings up the problem of the separateness and Jews, where the separateness is prohibited by the Law, but maintained by outside persecution¹¹⁸. Anderson says that the author had an intention with not naming God in the story of Esther, hence this could have profaned the sanctions of the religion and he avoided blasphemy of the name of God¹¹⁹. Anyhow, Anderson states that the question of the election raised in the Book of Esther draws lines from the question of election of Israel in OT to the ecclesia in the NT¹²⁰. This is because the question has been handled as a question only concerning Israel, but because of the Cross, Jews and Gentile forms the "New Israel" through the church¹²¹. For this, Anderson quotes Wilhelm Vischer who said that if somebody took the Book of Esther out of the Christian Bible, they did not acknowledge the Jewish question and its solution would not be through Jesus Christ. Hence, Anderson states that even Jesus said the salvation was from the Jews¹²². Even so, Anderson states that the book is certainly a dark book, unveiling the human heart, and that such a "human book has never been written"¹²³. And by this he says that the glorification of the Jews falls, and we can see that they are just like the rest of the humanity, .i.e. humans¹²⁴. In this he states that the Book of Esther bears a witness to Christianity, namely that God is not acting because of perfection by his people but

112 ABD, Vol.2 : 636

113 Rendtorff (1991) : 270

114 Rendtorff (1991) : 270

115 Anderson (1950) : 36 – 37

116 Anderson (1950) : 35 – 36

117 Anderson (1950) : 35 – 36

118 Anderson (1950) : 35

119 Anderson (1950) : 35 – 36

120 Anderson (1950) : 36

121 Anderson (1950) : 36 – 37

122 Anderson (1950) : 36 – 37, Anderson is here following the Barthian theologian Vischer in his christological view on the book of Esther.

123 Anderson (1950) : 39

124 Anderson (1950) : 41

because of the imperfection and humanity¹²⁵. For this Anderson main aim in his article is to advocate for why the canonization of Esther cannot be dismissed as just a historical accident¹²⁶.

However, Pfeiffer is of another caliber than Anderson. He views the Book of Esther as pure fiction made for the Hasmonean Dynasty as a propaganda tale¹²⁷. Pfeiffer states that the Book of Esther together with Daniel, Ruth and Jonah is made to portray life-like events, but they are not historical events but fiction¹²⁸. Pfeiffer also explains that Esther portrays the lowest stage of the Hasmonean Dynasty, when John Hyracanus ruled. Here the story of Esther gives accurate accounts on what happened with the proselytes, they were forced to be circumcised by the law¹²⁹.

One could agree with Gottwald when he exclaims that one can find the strictest form for secularity in the book of Esther¹³⁰. Also that this secularity in writing is colored by the Solomonic Enlightenment, where God's divine intervention counts less and the military and political power was the main focus¹³¹. Gottwald says that stories like Esther and Judith, portraying women who fought, could have been a celebration of women who actively took part in the Maccabean-Hasmonean conflict¹³².

Linda Day in the NIB, states that the story of Esther reflects the Moses-story, for Esther delivers her people and by that establishing a festival¹³³.

Day also has more of an outlook on the story and says that we should read the story in light of the Holocaust, in this aspect the story of Esther is real and experienced and not fiction¹³⁴.

Further, she claims that as Christians we have a responsibility to acknowledge the anti-Semitism that has been part of our history¹³⁵. Hvalvik and Stordalen have a brief introduction of the book of Esther, and they only acknowledge the reading of Esther and Ruth to feminist theology as for the awakening of women's spirituality¹³⁶.

125 Anderson (1950) : 41

126 Anderson (1950): 34

127 Pfeiffer (1948) : 737 – 747

128 Pfeiffer (1948) : 737

129 Pfeiffer (1948) : 742

130 Gottwald (1985) : 552

131 Gottwald (1985) : 552

132 Gottwald (1985) : 553

133 NIB : 320

134 NIB : 320

135 NIB : 320

136 Hvalvik, Stordalen (1999) : 99 – 102

5.3 Summary and Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to give some insight in the newer theological thoughts around the Book of Esther. I have given a brief summary of the different views, but I have put emphasis on the article by Anderson.

The reason is that he is so far the only one who has seen the story of Esther in an Christological view. For this Gottwald and Pfeiffer are probably the contradictions farthest away from Anderson's view. The curiosity is when most of them are looking for traces of God in the story, .i.e. the hidden God, God's work behind the scenes and so on, Pfeiffer and Gottwald gives it the character of belonging to the Solomonic Enlightenment and being purely fiction.

However, on the other side Anderson points out the election of Israel and the importance that as Christians we are also under the New Israel, therefore the story belongs to us also.

The reason for giving an introduction for these views is for my discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 The Canonization of Esther

In this chapter I will discuss my findings from the theoretical chapters above. The question is why the Book of Esther is in our Canon. How the book was canonized, and now a book that is among our Holy Scriptures, has in centuries been a puzzle. Some have loved the book that gave reason for a joyous festival at the end of the year, following a Jewish calendar. Others have hated the book so intensely that they wished it's non-existence.

My aim is to I argue and show why the Book of Esther deserves her place in the Canon, and why we need her in the Canon. For this I follow Anderson's view, that Esther has a rightful and important place in our Canon.

I have divided the chapter in two. First, I will discuss the findings in Talmud about the Book of Esther and her place in the Canon.

Secondly, I will discuss the different theological views around the Book of Esther and her place in the Canon supported by the Canonical debate.

Finally I will sum up and conclude my discussion.

6.1.1 *Talmud and the Canon*

R. Samuel b. Judah said: Esther sent to Wise Men saying, commemorate me for future generations. They replied, you will incite the ill will of the nations against us. She sent back reply: I am already recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia¹³⁷

The Book of Esther, or the Meggillah scroll, is discussed in the Babylonian Talmud. The Rabbis tries to find excuses for when it would be legal to miss out on the readings from the Meggillah¹³⁸.

The one excuse that could be legal for missing out on the readings was when one had to

137 Megg.7a : 35

138 Megg 3a – 3b : 9 – 15

attend a burial, more precisely a meth mizwah. This is the strictest form of burial, meth mizwah is when there is no-one else to bury the dead, and then it is a religious duty to attend the funeral¹³⁹. The Scroll was also an inclusive reading. It was not only men who were prohibited to read it, but women also since they were included in the miracle of the salvation in the Book of Esther¹⁴⁰. Later in the Talmud they come to the sayings I have quoted. The fear that of the Scroll of Esther would incite “ill will” among the nations upon the Jews. Here, some intelligent rabbis have made an inventive exegesis. Esther talks to them. Esther, herself informs them that she is already canonized by history itself. Therefore the hands of the Rabbis are bound by history. This inventive exegesis could it be not only because Purim was so popular among the Jews, but also among the Rabbis? Even though Esther was nationalistic and violent, this was not the emphasis of the story?

The main emphasis was on the remembrance of a miracle, the salvation from external annihilation of the Jews in Persia and Media, or the diaspora. This was followed by days of feasting, sending food to the poor and lavish drinking. According to Raba it was the duty on Purim to mellow oneself with wine till one could not tell the difference between ‘cursed be Haman` and ‘blessed be Mordecai`¹⁴¹.

Now this drinking was according to Talmud tested by at least two of the Rabbis, Rabbah and R. Zera. It resulted that one them, Rabbah, cut R. Zera’s throat during the feasting. When Rabbah discovered the next day what he had done, he prayed for R. Zera and he lived again. The next Purim feast Rabbah invited R. Zera to again celebrate the Purim feast together. R. Zera replied that a miracle do not happen twice.

Could this mellow drinking that is combined with the Book of Esther and the Purim feast be a reason for the lack of the name of God in the book? Clines has a theory that before the MT Esther we have today, there was an earlier addition of the scroll, the A-text. In the A-text the name of God was mentioned and the Esther story was more pious then it is now. The mellow drinking could then be a reason that the name of God has been removed from the text. The outcome from heavy drinking and its stupidity cannot be as fortunate every time as R. Zera replies Rabbah.

Rab Judah said in the name of Samuel: (The Scroll) of Esther does not make the hands unclean. Are we to infer from this that Samuel was of opinion that Esther was not composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? How can this be, seeing that Samuel said that Esther

139 Megg 3b (consider footnote 3 in the Soncino Talmud, ed. Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein)

140 Megg 3b : 15

141 Megg 7b : 38

was composed under the inspiration of the holy spirit¹⁴²...R. Simeon says... , but Ruth and the Song of Songs and Esther (certainly) make the hands unclean`!¹⁴³

Here are two other sayings, implicating the difficulties around Esther. She has already made it clear that history has canonized her, and they cannot move her. Even if the rabbis feared the nations. Rab Judah said that Esther does not make the hands unclean and R. Simeon have the opposite opinion. But what does it mean “to make the hands clean” or “unclean”? According to Rab Judah it is simply that the scroll was inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore it should be recited by heart¹⁴⁴. But should it be written? For this, R.Simeon and R. Joshua agreed that the Meggillah was not meant to be written¹⁴⁵. This was met with objections from others, and in their explanation pro a written Meggillah they used 1 Kings 5:12, which meant that nothing, should be added to the Wisdom of Solomon¹⁴⁶.

Further, how did they explain that Esther was inspired by the Holy Spirit? This is interesting, they argue that since Haman thought in his heart, Est. 6:6, and that Esther won favor in everyone’s eyes, Est. 2:15. And further how did Mordecai find out about the attempted assassination on the king, if not by the Holy Spirit¹⁴⁷? The scroll was clearly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. How else would the author know all this¹⁴⁸?

Already here in Talmud the Rabbis explains the Scroll of Esther, the Meggillah, in connection with other scriptures. They used their Jewish Canon at that time, or the sacred scrolls they had available and explained the Scroll of Esther out from them.

The story had already become highly popular among the ordinary Jews, and the Rabbis in the Talmudic tradition stood almost helpless in the effort to take it out of the Jewish Canon. It is believed that the Scroll of Esther was canonized at the Council of Jamnia in 90 C.E¹⁴⁹. As I have discussed above it looks like the Rabbis themselves were very fond of the Esther story. It actually seems that the majority of the Rabbis found Esther and Purim rather joyous too.

Therefore they found it difficult not to attend readings from the Meggillah on Purim.

They were inventive in their exegesis on the Scroll of Esther,¹⁵⁰ to show why she was sacred.

Thereby also inventive in their discussion on why the Scroll should be in the Jewish Canon.

The problem with the MT Esther is the lack of the name of God. It also is derived from

142 Megg 7a,

143 Megg 7a, 36

144 Megg 7a :35

145 Megg 7a :36 (consider footnotes 2 and 3 in the Soncion Talmud ed. Rabbi I. Epstein)

146 Megg 7a : 36 (consider footnote 4 in the Soncino Talmud ed. Rabbi I. Epstein)

147 Megg 7a :36 Est. 6:6; 2:15, 22

148 Megg 7a :36

149 Anderson (1950): 33

150 Anderson (1950): 32

keeping the Law, considering that Esther married an uncircumcised and not obtaining the eating regulations, Kosher.

God or the Hebrew deity, YHWH, is in fact not mentioned once in the whole story, but king Ahasuerus is mentioned over 190 times¹⁵¹. Hence, there are in fact references to other scriptures from the Jewish Canon in the Meggillah. Esther states that it is written 3 times in the Meggillah about the Amalekites, mentioning Haman the Amalekite three times¹⁵². Then reading in the context with other texts such as; Exod. 17:8 – 16; Deut. 25:17 – 19; 1 Sam 15:8ff.¹⁵³, we find that there is sworn an eternal enmity between the Jews and the Amalekites. That the book mentions it 3 times the Talmud states that Esther is somehow belongs in the Jewish Canon. The Rabbis argue among themselves if she belongs in the Jewish Canon, again Esther answers back that she has actually mentioned the war between Israel and Amalek, thus referring to the Law and the Prophets. Therefore the Rabbis argue that because of this it is hard to neglect Meggillah¹⁵⁴.

So if the story of Esther had not mentioned that Haman was an Amalekite, it would be difficult to get a hold of the hate between Mordecai and Haman. As I have shown, according to Jewish Canon this is an enmity which goes back to Moses and Exodus when the Amalekites came and fought with the Israelites in the desert. After that God swore to Moses that the memory of the Amalekites would be wiped out from the face of the earth and that the Lord would fight against the Amalekites in coming generations, Exod. 17:14, 16. With this promise the enmity continues with King Saul. He defeated the Amalekite king in 1Sam 15:8ff. Or did he? The story says that Saul did wrong against God and saved the Amalekite king's life longer than God had ordered him to do. When the prophet Samuel discovered that, he killed the Amalekite king and never spoke to Saul again. Hence the enmity between the Jews and the Amalekites remained among them, alive and kicking. Then we come to the Esther story with Haman the Amalekite, and in accordance with scriptures mentioned above the enmity were still very much alive. As is pointed out in the story that Haman was an Agagite, a descendant from the terrifying Amalekite king Agag in 1Sam 15:8ff.

3:1 after these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him...., v.10 and the

151 IBC :508

152 Megg 7a : 35

153 Megg 7a : 35 (see the footnotes, (*'have I not written unto thee excellent things'*) *The meaning is, Is not the war of Israel against the Amalek mentioned three times in Scripture...* Further, the text refer to the scriptures I have mentioned in the text. (Exo 17: 8-16; Deut 25:17-19; 1Sam 15)

154 Megg 7a : 35

king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy.¹⁵⁵

This supports the reading of the Book of Esther in line of a canonization, because then the book stands in context with other texts that we have discussed above, that are used by Talmud to exemplify that the Book of Esther belongs in the Jewish Canon. I would argue that if we read the story alone, Mordecai would just be another fool neglecting Persian law with his stubborn behavior. Thus, when we look at the bigger picture, namely the canon, we discover the reason for why Mordecai did not bow down for Haman. They had by history a sworn enmity between them. An animosity that goes back to Moses, Exod 17:8 – 16; Deut 25:17 – 19, and with this animosity there is a sworn death penalty over the Amalekites.

The hostility remains with King Saul in 1.Sam.15:8ff. Furthermore, it continues with King David in 1Sam. 27:8; 30:1ff. Consider also Judges 6:1-6.

In Talmud there is a discussion on whether they should count the Book of Esther in or leave it out of the Jewish Canon, as I have discussed above.

The festival of Purim had already in the Talmudic time won its place in the Jewish calendar, and it was highly popular. The Rabbis argued among themselves about Esther and her place in the Holy Scriptures and one of the claims was that Esther had always been there. Esther herself commanded the Rabbis to make a record of her. When they tried to refuse her, she said that the events had already been recorded in the chronicles of Media and Persia¹⁵⁶. Thus, claiming that she had already gone down in history as a Jewish queen who saved her people. And further, that history itself had already canonized Esther.¹⁵⁷

Therefore the Rabbis were already too late in their effort to get her and the Purim festival out of their Jewish canon. Purim was already too popular amongst the Jewish people. Hence, the Rabbis feared the nations because of the book's nature. That it was so violent, full of intrigues and a revengeful spirit. To their defense Esther had already been canonized by history itself.

Even so, it is interesting how Esther suddenly defended herself in Talmud, given the fact that the story of Esther is older than the Talmud.

Then the Rabbis in Talmud, is after Anderson's opinion, having an inventive exegesis of the book with an aim to defend its place in the canon¹⁵⁸.

155 <https://www.bible.com/en-GB/bible/1/est.3.kjv> read May 2nd 2014

156 Epstein (1938) : 35, 7a

157 Anderson (1950) : 32 (see footnote consider also (Megg.7a)

158 Anderson (1950) : 32

Since the Talmudic tradition is reckon to have developed from around 250 B.C.E., till 550 C.E.¹⁵⁹. On the other hand, the Talmud also shows some hesitation against Esther.

The first is the fear of ill will and the second is the one where R. Simeon claimed that the scroll makes the hands unclean, namely that it was not meant to be written down in the first place and the text was certainly not inspired by the Holy Spirit¹⁶⁰.

The voices pro Esther was stronger than those who opposed to her place in the canon.

Although the problem with the absent of God's name, Esther's marriage to a non-Jew, and the rejection of Purim as a merely pagan festival¹⁶¹, and simply the fact that the Esther scroll was the only book among the OT books that was not found at Qumran. This could certainly justify the Rabbis suspicion against Esther¹⁶².

However, the festival of Purim was already highly popular in the Jewish society¹⁶³.

Maybe the Rabbis pro Esther feared of becoming unpopular among the people if they took the Book of Esther out of the canon? They themselves would also miss out on a joyous and festive celebration. Moreover the story had traces back in the Jewish history, as I have shown above, with Haman being a descendant from the Amalekite king Agag and Mordecai coming from the lines of King Saul¹⁶⁴.

Moreover, the main intention of the Book of Esther and the Purim celebration from a Jewish tradition was not that they should hang Haman and his ten sons over and over again¹⁶⁵.

It should rather be a celebration of the memory of deliverance and salvation of the Jewish people from eternal extinction. This should be marked by giving out food and gifts to the poor ones and friends. Therefore, Esther did not make the hands unclean, but rather clean by doing good deeds in the name of the celebration.

The Rabbis claimed that the Book of Esther was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and therefore it should be recited by heart¹⁶⁶.

However, Anderson says that "Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish and the great medieval philosopher Maimonides put Esther on the same level as the Law and higher than the prophets and the rest of the Scripture"¹⁶⁷.

How could they put Esther on the same level as the law? Rabbi David Etengoff point out that

159 Gottwald (1985) : 91 – 92

160 Megg 7a : 36

161 IBC : 508

162 IBC : 508

163 Anderson (1950) : 32

164 Rendtorff (1991) : 270

165 Childs (1979) : 606

166 Megg 7a : 35 – 36

167 Anderson (1950) : 33

Maimonides said that Purim urged a man to be liberated in his donation to the poor, more so than to prepare a lavish Purim feast or to send portion of foods to friends¹⁶⁸.

For there is no greater and more splendid happiness, than to gladden the heart of the poor, the orphans, the widows and the converts... This resembles the Divine Presences, which Isaiah 57:15 described having the tendency "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."¹⁶⁹

Maimonides put the effort in doing good deeds in the name of Purim. The emphasis was then on 9:22 sending portion of foods to each other and to the poor. Maimonides had even more emphasis on the poor than maybe the text itself, since that is the only place where it is said "and the poor". For this explanation Maimonides has put Esther in a canonical context with Isaiah 57:15 where it says that God sees those who suffer. Therefore at Purim the Jews resembled God and his divine presence on earth by sending gifts of food to the poor. By doing so Maimonides said they gave new energy to the spirit of the humble and gave strength to heart of the contrite.

For this reason, I will argue that Esther's place in the canon is there because it is a book that shows us what it means to be human.

I have showed above that what I mean with 'human' often draws a line to greed, violence, hatred and so on.

Maimonides on the other hand talked differently about the Book of Esther when he referred to the festival, and said it was a time of showing God's mercy to those less fortunate.

What is the reason for the LXX addition? The LXX addition have after my opinion saved the story of Esther from being a purely heathen story. In the MT story there is no mention of God, not even the Jewish form of YHWH, or the Law and the Covenant the only thing mentioned is fasting¹⁷⁰.

This can come from the age of Solomonic Enlightenment¹⁷¹. For the Persian king is on the other hand mentioned in 190 times in its 167 verses in the MT version, but the name of God is not mentioned at all¹⁷². However in the LXX Addition of Esther God's name is mentioned

168 Rabbi David Etengoff, *The Eternal Nature of Megillat Esther*
<http://www.reparashathashavuah.org/3/post/2014/03/parshiot-tzav-zachor-purim-5774-2014-the-eternal-nature-of-megillat-esther.html> read 26.04.2014

169 Rabbi David Etengoff, *The Eternal Nature of Megillat Esther*
<http://www.reparashathashavuah.org/3/post/2014/03/parshiot-tzav-zachor-purim-5774-2014-the-eternal-nature-of-megillat-esther.html> read 26.04.2014

170 IBC : 508 - 519

171 Gottwald (1985) : 552

172 IBC : 508

over fifty times¹⁷³. In the LXX Additions as showed in my retelling, we meet a more religious conscious Esther, where she describes that wearing the royal crown is like wearing a filthy rag, but she does it for the for her people.

In the MT text there are mentioned three times that she won favor, this could indicate that she was very beautiful, but it does not say anything about her religious piety. I will continue in the next chapter to argue that the LXX Additions saved Esther in the Jewish and Christian Canon, even though the LXX are considered non-canonical by the Jews.

6.1.2 *The Christian Church and the Book of Esther*

There has always been the question about which text should be considered in our Christian Canon. This gave rise to theological thoughts that we could leave certain texts out of our Christian Canon.

The question to why we should leave certain texts out of our Holy Writ was, of their inconvenient, with texts portraying an angry and jealous God and a God who promoted war against other nations. Moreover, some texts are simply outdated to modern people and that the culture in those texts was so far from our familiar culture.

Hence, reasons like that gave breeding ground to the study of canonical criticism where the canonical context of a text was in focus. This means that when we look at a text in the Bible we must remember that it stands in context with other texts and therefore also with the Jewish history. This study was introduced in 1970s by James Sanders and Bevard Childs¹⁷⁴.

They introduced it as a response to the demolition of the Church's canon, where theologians tried to rip every text away from its biblical context, and explain it into our modern day context¹⁷⁵. Therefore it lacked the essence that the text stood in line with Jewish history as well as in context with other texts.

J.Sanders and B.Childs with their canonical study tried to counterbalance that demolition out. We can read the text alone as it stands, but then it loses some of its meaning. As I have discussed above in Ch. 6.1.1., if we read the Book of Esther as a story alone and not in context with other texts we lose the Jewish value in historical sense. Then it is more difficult to understand the depth of the enmity between Haman and Mordecai, and the Amalekites and Jews. But if it is read in context of other scriptures the value of the text is more clear and we

173 IBC : 508

174 McDonald Lee Martin, Sanders James A. (ed), *The Canon Debate*, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. Massachusetts, 2002 : 3

175 Barton John, *Reading the Old Testament Method in Biblical Study, Revised and Enlarged*, Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky 1984/ 1996 : 79

can understand that text might have a deeper meaning that first assumed, as Barton says,

Any group of texts that forms a canon – even in the purely literary sense of the ‘canon’ of any given author’s works – will be partly misunderstood if they are read as isolated units¹⁷⁶.

To give you another example than the book of Esther, let’s take the Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis. We can of course read the book *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* as it stands and as a single book. However, coming to the end of it, we discover that the story really do not end there. It continues with the book about Prince Caspian¹⁷⁷. Through all of the books in the Chronicles of Narnia no matter if we are at *The Very End of the World* or in another kingdom than in Narnia, there is always a reference that goes back to the land of Narnia, Aslan, and when the Narnians won over the White Witch¹⁷⁸. There is a canonical circle in the Chronicles of Narnia, drawing us back to the land of Narnia and Aslan.

Let’s turn back to our text, and I argue that any biblical text will always stand in accordance with other texts in the Bible.

Since we work with the book of Esther, let me argue my point from a biblical point of view.

In Ch. 2 we are introduced to Mordecai a descendant of Kish, 2:5, and in Ch. 3 we are introduced to Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, 3:1.

If we read the text alone we would not think twice about why the author had to put emphasis on whom Mordecai and Haman was.

They could easily just have been some random John Doe's. Hence, they were not. Mordecai was a descendant to Kish who was king Saul’s father, 1Sam 9:1, and Haman was the descendant to king Agag the Amalekite in 1Sam 15:8ff¹⁷⁹. There was a fierce enmity between the two that went back in the Jewish history.

Hence, this is why canon is important in the story of Esther. One of the reasons that Childs gave on why canonical approach is important is that the approach:

Does not allow the book to be polarized into 'secular' and 'religious' elements, but incorporates both within a profound interpretation of the nation’s total life which has both a past and a future¹⁸⁰.

176 Barton (1984/1996) : 89

177 Not precisely, it continues with *The Horse and His Boy*, but it is recommended to read Prince Caspian after *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. And Prince Caspian was C.S. Lewis second book.
<http://www.narniaweb.com/resources-links/in-what-order-should-the-narnia-books-be-read/>

178 C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, HarperCollins Publisher, London 2001 (paperback edition)

179 Pfeiffer (1948) :732 – 733

180 Childs (1979) : 606

Nevertheless, Gottwald would say that the Book of Esther belongs among the 'secular' books, and describes her as the most secular book in the Bible. By this he points out that the Book of Esther belongs to the Solomonic Enlightenment¹⁸¹.

By Solomonic Enlightenment it was meant that the book focus more on human politics and military strength than on God's divine interference to save in time of need¹⁸².

However, when looking at the canonical approach in light of the Esther-story we have to have in mind the Jewish history, which is the Jewish scripture, or canon. It would be a shame to just leave out a book because it seems too nationalistic in its nature.

Hence, the Purim festival celebrates the liberation of the Jews; therefore the reading of the book focuses on the festivities. Childs explains it like this, that it is not a goal that every Purim they would hang Haman and his sons. Rather the focus should be on giving gifts to the poor and to share the joy of Israel's deliverance¹⁸³.

This works well with what Maimonides put emphasis on according Purim, to celebrate the deliverance and to give gifts to the poor¹⁸⁴.

In the story of Esther there is a strong emphasis in the story that Haman is an Amalekite, for it is mentioned four times, 3:1, 10; 8:5; 9:24. When we see that in the light of other scriptures such as Ex. 17:16; Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:17 – 19 and 1.Sam. 15, we comprehend the realm of the enmity between Haman and Mordecai.

For this reason it cannot be explained as a mere of differences of opinions between Mordecai and Haman, but rather a historical antagonism.

Another puzzle with the book is its secularity, as I have mentioned above, with its connection to Solomonic Enlightenment literature. Moore is puzzled that there is no mention of any religious observance, not even gratitude to God for their deliverance.

In spite of the lack of gratitude towards God in the story of Esther, Moore do go to the direction that we can see God and his work behind the scene, and from there God follows the play and arranges its successful ending¹⁸⁵. Rendtorff follows up on this idea of God working behind the scenes by binding it up to OT traditions¹⁸⁶.

Hence, the Book of Esther follows other OT narrative that portrays the hidden action of God.

181 Gottwald (1985) : 552

182 Gottwald (1985) : 552

183 Childs (1979) : 606

184 Rabbi David Etengoff, *The Eternal Nature of Meggillat Esther*

<http://www.reparashathashavuah.org/3/post/2014/03/parshiot-tzav-zachor-purim-5774-2014-the-eternal-nature-of-megillat-esther.html> read 26.04.2014

185 ABD : 636

186 Rendtorff (1991) : 270

This draws the lines to the Joseph story where God is also working behind the scenes¹⁸⁷.

Looking further at the Esther story, we can according to Rosenthal compare the Joseph story and the Esther story. Rendtorff shows how Rosenthal claims that the Esther story has been influential by the Joseph story¹⁸⁸.

This again supported by Rendtorff who puts Esther, Joseph, Ruth and Daniel and his friends in the didactic narratives that has wisdom stamp on them¹⁸⁹.

For the Hebrew book, which is the oldest of the two, do not once mention the name of God or the Hebrew deity YHWH¹⁹⁰, nor the Law or the Covenant.¹⁹¹

Hence, king Ahasuerus is mentioned over 190 times.¹⁹²

Instead of mentioning God, his grace and mercy, the book is full of violence. It speaks loud about revenge, and in the end it has a positive view on genocide. In spite of this, the revenge and hostility is not aimed at the political powers, but it is directed on those who wanted to harm the Jews in the first place¹⁹³. Therefore it is difficult to follow Pfeiffer's idea that the Book of Esther is a mere Hasmonean propaganda tale, written at the height of the reign of John Hyrcanus, 135 – 104 B.C.E¹⁹⁴.

Pfeiffer plays out how Haman is a caricature of Antiochus, where he draws a comparison with Haman and Antiochus who both claimed that the Jewish laws differed from all the rest of the people and the king in Persia's laws, in Est. 3:8. Moreover, there is a strong similarity between Haman and Antiochus. For as Haman wanted to throw lot on what day to annihilate all the Jews in Persia, Est.3:1-7. Antiochus was determined to root out all the Jews, and distributed the land of the Jews by lot, in 1Macc. 3:34 – 36¹⁹⁵.

Nevertheless, if it is as Pfeiffer says, then there is no room for the hidden action of God?

Further, Pfeiffer describes that the book reflects the lowest form of spirituality where the focus was to subjugate the gentiles, take vengeance on past wrongs and to increase Jewish power and territory¹⁹⁶.

In the midst of Pfeiffer's understanding of a propaganda tale, can there be a glimpse of a belief in a higher Providence in the story¹⁹⁷?

187 Rendtorff (1991) : 270

188 ABD, Vol.2 : 639

189 Rendtorff (1991) : 110

190 Anderson (1950) : 32

191 IBC : 508

192 IBC : 508

193 ABD : 641

194 Pfeiffer (1948) : 740 – 742

195 Pfeiffer (1948) : 741

196 Pfeiffer (1948) : 742

197 IBC : 508

Is it not possible to sense a God who works behind the scenes¹⁹⁸?

Therefore, if we read the Book of Esther bluntly, not considering the historical elements in the story that connects the book to the rest of the Bible, we will end up either cheering on the slaughtering's of people and the hanging of Haman and his ten sons in the gallows made for Mordecai. Or we will detest it, and would rather see the book taken out of our Holy Writ. Therefore, I would argue that if we read the story alone, as it stands, without taking in consideration its place in the Canon, we would miss out on some major historical and canonical points.

As I have showed above in ch.2 the method of Canonical Approach is used in biblical research to figure out how the biblical canon came to be the one we have today.

There are two ways to think how the OT came into existence. One theory is that the Hebrew canon was ready in the times of Sirak, about 150 B.C.E. In his prologue he confirms that the canon is three, the Law, the Prophets and the Writings¹⁹⁹.

However, there is a question if the Hebrew canon was open for discussion well into the NT times. Was it a closed scripture already around 150 B.C.E? For if the Hebrew Canon was fixed at that time, 150 B.C.E, that would mean that all the scriptures we know, including Esther was already considered a Holy Scripture.

That again raises the question with the Book of Esther being canonized at the Council of Jamnia in 90 C.E.²⁰⁰. Could it be that the canon was not fixed in Siraks time? I would argue that it is wrong to assume that Esther was already counted for in Siraks prologue and also that the Council of Jamnia did not settle the issue with the Book of Esther in the Canon. There are good reasons to believe that the Council of Jamnia did not settle or “freeze” the Book of Esther in the Hebrew canon²⁰¹. It is more likely to believe that the Council of Jamnia was where the rabbinical teachers took up difficult texts for discussion²⁰².

To say it was fixed there is what J. Blenkinsopp in McDonald and Sanders calls “a myth of Christian scholarship without documentary foundation”²⁰³.

In ch. 6.1.1 I have discussed the Meggillah, the Scroll of Esther, and we see that there are questioned raised about the Scroll of Esther place in the Hebrew canon in the Megg 7a²⁰⁴.

198 ABD, Vol.2 : 636

199 Hvalvik/Stordalen (1999) : 22

200 Anderson (1950) : 33

201 McDonald, Sanders (2011) : 152 – 153

202 McDonald, Sanders (2011) : 152 – 153

203 McDonald, Sanders (2011) : 152 , from J. Blenkinsopp, Prophecy and Canon (Notre Dame, Ind./London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977)

204 McDonald, Sanders (2011) : 153

Hence the discussion about Esther in Canon went well into the fourth century C.E.²⁰⁵.

This theory is also supported by Rendtorff when he quotes Schäfer saying that the theory about the Council of Jamnia and the canon being established there is historically incorrect²⁰⁶.

This makes it interesting, if the Book of Esther was not settled at the Council of Jamnia in 90 C.E., but was discussed well into the fourth century, consider Megg 7a where it was stated that Esther renders the hands unclean, and that Esther was not meant to be written down²⁰⁷.

Then there is problem with the Book of Esther's place in the Canon, could the discussion in the Talmud be an explanation to why this popular Jewish book was not referred to once in the New Testament (NT)²⁰⁸?

It is estimated that the Biblical Canon we have today with the both OT and the NT was fixed around 300 C.E. Then there is the interesting question of the Book of Esther in the Canon, since there is no sure evidence in the NT that either the Book of Esther or the Song of Solomon was considered canonical books in the time of NT²⁰⁹, although the Book of Esther and Purim was very popular with ordinary Jews at that time. How can we say that Esther was saved into the canon? First, we have the 9:18 – 32, these verses seem to differ from the rest of the book²¹⁰. They are therefore considered to be later additions to the story of Esther, namely to validate the celebration of Purim²¹¹.

Secondly we have the LXX Addition to the book of Esther.

I would argue that the LXX Additions saved Esther's place in the Canon. The LXX Additions was introduced at a later stage than the MT Esther²¹². Moreover, the Additions never appear in the Jewish Scripture, and the Additions are considered non-canonical²¹³. However, the piety of the characters in the Addition might have softened up some of Esther's critics and thereby increasing her chances for canonicity²¹⁴.

The Catholic Church has the LXX Additions to Esther next to the MT Esther by following the chapters 11 – 16, and coming directly after the MT Esther²¹⁵.

However, in the Protestant Bible these Additions are usually not printed. If they are, they are printed between the OT and NT and are called “deuterocanonical books” or “apocryphal

205 McDonald, Sanders (2011) : 153

206 Rendtorff (1991) : 288 – 289

207 Megg 7a : 36

208 Anderson (1950) : 42

209 Hvalvik, Stordalen (1999) : 24

210 Pfeiffer (1948) : 737

211 McDonald, Sanders (2011) : 25

212 NIB : 317

213 ABD : 626

214 ABD : 628

215 ABD : 626

books”. There the LXX Esther appears with the other apocryphal books, and the MT Esther is found in her regular place between the Book of Nehemiah and the Book of Job.

The Additions to Esther are here paragraphed from A – F. The major difference between the MT and the LXX is the appearance of one new character, namely God. The name of God is mentioned over fifty times in the LXX whereas non in the MT²¹⁶. The LXX clearly shows that God is the director of the play that is portrayed in the book of Esther. In the MT, Esther is so full of violence, greed and vendetta, with the animosity between Mordecai and Haman at the core of the story. Esther even hides her nationality and religion, and she goes beyond Jewish rules and marries an uncircumcised and by that action breaking the Law, Exod. 34:16; Deut. 7:3²¹⁷. Therefore the MT Esther did not set a very good Jewish example for her Jewish sisters.

Anderson claims that the author's intention with not mentioning the name of God in the MT Esther was to avoid profaning the sanctions of Judaism and blasphemy against the name of God²¹⁸. However, I would argue that for this reason we have the younger LXX Additions to Esther. The LXX justifies our MT Esther in the canon. Even though, the LXX Esther is not accounted for in the Jewish or Protestant Christian Scriptures, the pious Esther somehow moves behind the MT scenes. A more pious Esther is painted through the LXX Addition. Then the MT Esther than becomes a good example to follow.

Moreover, both Esther and Mordecai are portrayed as goodly people in the LXX, and they have justified their actions because of the salvation of the Jews.

Although the MT Esther is full of revenge, violence and vindictiveness, and do not at all resemble the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5, I would argue that taking the book out of the Bible would be a mistake. Anderson states that even if the book seems too “earthy” and too profane it is possible to notice the question of the election of Israel. By this he have in mind the meaning of the election of Israel²¹⁹. He claims that even if there are historicity problems with the book of Esther, .i.e. authorship, dating, and so on, there is no historical problem with the tension between Jews and Gentile. That is as old as Judaism itself²²⁰.

Linda Day in NIB reckons that if we read the story of Esther aftermath of Holocaust the story brings theological responsibility to the interpretation of the book²²¹. She states that the horror portrayed in the book can no longer be dismissed as mere fiction; it is now real and

216 ABD : 627

217 Anderson (1950) : 34

218 Anderson (1950) : 35 – 36

219 Anderson (1950) : 36

220 Anderson (1950) : 35

221 NIB : 320

experienced²²². So for Hvalvik and Stordalen to merely say that the only reading of Esther nowadays is for feministic reasons and women's spirituality²²³, is too lightly, theologically speaking. Further Day also says that Christians now have a responsibility to acknowledge the anti-Semitism that has existed throughout the centuries and still exists²²⁴. As Anderson explains, Judaism means to be separated, because of the election of Israel, and therefore they are a separated people by God's choice. Hence this separation is rooted in religion, but enforced by persecution from the outside²²⁵.

6.2 Summary and Conclusion

As I have asked above, why is the Book of Esther in our Biblical canon? I have answered this by first discussing different views from Talmud about the Scroll of Esther. There have been varied views on how the rabbinical teachers of the Talmud viewed Esther. Most of them, as I found, had tried their best to vouch her place in the canon. Even so, other voices were raised that questioned her place and uttered that the scroll was not meant to be written.

Those for the Scroll of Esther in the Jewish Canon effectively used the Holy Scripture to validate their view. Therefore they did what the study of Canon is all about, namely, to see how a text changes its meaning when viewed in accordance with other texts.

Secondly, I have discussed the Christian theological view on Esther according to the study of Canon. The aim was to show how the discussion around Esther and her place in the Bible has, and is still, vividly discussed. Some of them claim Esther to a mere propaganda story and others giving the Esther story more credits than simply being a historical mistake. I have showed how the LXX Esther might have saved the MT Esther's place in the canon, by portraying Esther more pious and with more piety towards her religion.

At the end of my discussion I have touched upon some reasons for why this book is important in our canon and cannot be dismissed as a mere feminist reading among Christians. The base for my discussion has been B.W. Anderson's article *The Place of the Book of Esther in the Christian Bible* and Robert Pfeiffer's *Introduction to the Old Testament*.

222 NIB : 320

223 Hvalvik, Stordalen (1999) : 100 – 102 in connection to Ruth, the Book of Esther is brought into the light again, highlighting women's spirituality.

224 NIB : 320

225 Anderson (1950) : 35

CHAPTER SEVEN

7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

How can we justify the Book of Esther in the biblical canon, or can we?

As I have aimed to show in this thesis, is that the Book of Esther and books like hers have their rightful place in our biblical canon in my opinion. The Book of Esther's is not as beautiful as Jesus words on the Mount and the words “forgive” and “love your neighbor” is not the words one hear ringing in the ears when we read the story of Queen Esther.

Moreover, they are the words of revenge, although these words of revenge have its place in the Bible in my opinion.

Hence, as Anderson calls the Book of Esther an earthy book, and by that, maybe more close to a human heart than any other. The Book of Esther is a book that reminds us of our humanness and that there is room and place for even that in the Bible. The Jewish and Christian Canon is a gathering of Holy Scriptures. In those scriptures God is mentioned in almost all of them. However, what is fascinating with our Holy Scripture is that there is room for humanity, thereby showing the very essence of being human.

Hence the Book of Esther shows the humanity vividly by being a story full of greed, lust for power, love, and protecting those you love by killing those who threatens them. Almost like some of our best entertainment, like the Game of Thrones, or as I have referred to in my discussion, the Chronicles of Narnia.

Maybe we do fall from heaven to earth when we turn the pages in the Bible from other books and to the Book of Esther.

However, the question is still there, is it like Pfeiffer argue for a Maccabean-Hasmonean

propaganda tale that is in the Bible due to historical accident. Or is it as Anderson argues a book that belongs in the Bible, by no accident, but for the reason to show how the human nature is.

Anderson introduces his Christological view, where we as Christians need to read the book in the light of the question of the election of Israel. As stated above in Ch. 5 by Anderson, that the salvation comes from the Jews.

Day also brings an interesting topic to the table, the reading of Esther post-Holocaust.

Then she says that even if the story was fiction or not, that is considered as details, for now the story of Esther is experienced and real.

When it comes to the Canon Debate and Esther, I agree with Anderson that if we were to take the Book of Esther out of our Bible we miss the point with regards to the question of election of Israel.

This thesis had the aim to show if the Book of Esther belonged in the Biblical Canon. For this I have given an introduction to the story of Esther both from the Hebrew text and the Greek. This is followed by the historicity around the Book of Esther. Then I have used the Talmud and the Rabbis discussion about Esther and how they have argued for and against an Esther story in the Jewish Canon. As I have showed, they justified Esther by using the Scripture, by that I would point out, they used the Canonical Approach. After that I pointed out two major differences in the Medieval Period for and against Esther, namely Maimonides and Dr. Martin Luther.

This I followed up with introducing some major views on the Book of Esther by Christian Theologians. At the final chapter I discussed my findings.

The Book of Esther is truly an intriguing book, and the curiosity becomes even stronger when researching her place in the Canon. Why it is there and what purpose does it serve? The Book of Esther that speak louder about 'vindictiveness' and 'justice' than 'forgiveness'. However, trying to be the 'beadle' and carry the Book of Esther back into the Church lectern, and therefore placing the Hasmonean-Maccabean propaganda off at the scholar's study. How should we interpret the Book of Esther today? As a Canonical Approach tries to do, is to respect both the history of the believing community and the present. Therefore, as Day invites us to do, we must read the Book of Esther in a post-Holocaust view. As Christians we should be aware of the anti-Semitism of the past and present.

Moreover, I would point out that having the Book of Esther in the Bible enhances the Scripture. For in this, we see ourselves in our humanness and more, there is room for that in a Holy Scripture.

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