

ESTHER: SESSION 3

ANOTHER PASSOVER

REVIEW "INVITATION" ASPECTS OF ESTHER: ESTHER INVITES US TO PLAY WITH BIBLICAL TEXTS

- ◆ Farcical nature sets the tone of serious fun
- ◆ Comparable to an ancient "Rocky and Bulwinkle Show" with its *Fractured Fairy Tales*
 - We get the author's point because we know the real "fairy tale" so well
- ◆ Esther's author demonstrates a breadth of knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures
 - Creation
 - Passover
 - Stories of Joseph and Abigail
 - Monarchy and power issues in the Bible
 - Wisdom issues in the Bible
- ◆ Esther's author demonstrates a knowledge of the sacred myths of the surrounding cultures
 - Ishtar
 - Marduk

BIBLICAL TEXTS EVOKED BY:

- ◆ Certain key phrases
 - "A good day" (הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה) - associated primarily with creation narrative
 - "To send a hand against" (לְשַׁלַּח יָד בְּ-) - associated with creation text, other exilic narratives, and Psalms describing God's salvific action
- ◆ Certain numbers and dates
- ◆ Key elements of the story such as the gallows / tree, ubiquitous horses, and wise men as consultants
- ◆ Key themes of law and power

AUTHOR'S PURPOSE IN EVOKING BIBLICAL TEXTS

- ◆ Reminds the Hebrew reader of their textual tradition without even mentioning God
- ◆ Addresses serious religious questions in the secular language of an assimilated people
- ◆ Reminds the Hebrew / Jewish reader of their identity as God's people, even when they may appear to be just as pagan as anyone else in their neighborhood

CREATION THEMES IN ESTHER

- ◆ Shared key phrases
 - The good day
 - By a word of the king

- To send or stretch out a hand
- Good to look at
- ◆ Shared elements
 - Number 7
 - Prominence of tree in narrative of fall

"THE GOOD DAY" IN ESTHER

- ◆ Appears in Esther 8:17, 9:19, and 9:22
- ◆ The good day is a holiday
- ◆ Notion of rest is associated with the holiday in Esther 9:17 (Suggesting a new creation)
- ◆ Death, annihilation and extermination become feasting, joy, gifts of food for neighbors, and almsgiving
- ◆ No possibilities become possibilities even in exile

THE NUMBER 7 IN ESTHER

- ◆ King's banquet lasts 7 days (Esth 1:5)
- ◆ On 7th day of banquet, king commands 7 eunuchs to bring Vashti before the banquet guests (Esth 1:10)
- ◆ King consults with 7 Persian princes to decide what to do about Vashti (Esth 1:13-14)
- ◆ Esther's special position vis a vis Hegai includes the selection of 7 maidens (Esth 2:9)
- ◆ Esther's night with the king occurs in the 7th year of his reign (Esth 2:16)
- ◆ King gives a holiday or rest to his people in the 7th year of his reign to celebrate Esther's coronation (Esth 2:18) (Note: this is **הַיָּמִים** not **שָׁבָת** - LV translates this requires or rest while KJV, RSV follow the LXX in translating this as a remission of taxes)

"THE WORD OF THE KING" IN ESTHER

- ◆ Vashti refuses to come "on a word of the king" (Esth 1:12)
 - Followed by "a royal word" which forbids Vashti to come into the king's presence (Esth 1:19)
- ◆ Beautiful maidens are gathered because of the king's word (Esth 2:8)
- ◆ Haman's edict becomes synonymous with "the word of the king" (Esth 3:15)
 - Distribution of this very "word of the king" causes great mourning among the Jews of the kingdom (Esth 4:3)
- ◆ Esther promises to "do according to the word of the king" if the king will come to her banquet (Esth 5:8)
- ◆ Mordecai's edict becomes "the word of the king" which the royal messengers carry (Esth 8:14)
 - This "word of the king" causes great rejoicing and reverses the situation of the Jews (Esth 8:17 & 9:1)
 - What is the result of the word of King Ahasuerus, his law? Mainly loss of life

THE WORDS OF OTHERS IN ESTHER

- ◆ Haman's words accomplish the reverse of his intentions - his advice on how to honor someone is used for Mordecai (Esth 6:10)
- ◆ Mordecai's words have weight with palace officials other than Haman (Esth 3:4)

- ◆ After Haman's edict, Hathach reports Mordecai's words to Esther (Esth 4:9)
- ◆ Harbona reminds the king that it was "Mordecai who spoke for the good of the king" (Esth 7:9)
- ◆ Esther's words are reported to Mordecai after Haman's edict (Esth 4:12)
- ◆ Mordecai does all that Esther commands of him (Esth 4:17)
- ◆ King hurries Haman "to do the word of Esther" (Esth 5:5)

APPEARANCES IN ESTHER

- ◆ Vashti, the gathered virgins, and Esther are "good to look at" (Esth 1:11, 2:2-3, &7)
- ◆ Maiden to replace Vashti will be the one "who is most pleasing in the eyes of the king" (Esth 2:4)
 - The plan itself is said to be "pleasing in the eyes of the king"
- ◆ Esther is "pleasing in his(Hegai's) eyes" - translate this as the eyes of the king (Esth 8:5)
- ◆ Haman is told to do what "is good in your eyes" (Esth 3:11)
- ◆ Esther and Mordecai are to write "as seems good in your eyes" (Esth 8:8)

CREATION NARRATIVE

- ◆ Creation takes 7 days, culminating with a day of rest for God on the 7th day
- ◆ First day - light is good
 - On third, fourth, fifth, and sixth days - God declares what he sees to be good - this declaration is followed by numbering the day
- ◆ God speaks creation into existence - bringing an abundance of life
- ◆ Fruit of the forbidden tree in the garden is "a delight to the eyes"
- ◆ Tree in the garden plays a role in the fall of humanity while the gallows tree of Haman culminates in his downfall

PASSOVER IN ESTHER - GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- ◆ Haman issues his edict on the 13th of Nisan, the day before Passover (Esth 3:7, Lev 23:5)
- ◆ Both are stories of liberation
- ◆ Heroine/Heroes of both stories share similarities
 - Names reflect the culture of the oppressor: Moses is Egyptian, Esther and Mordecai are Persian
 - Partnership is essential: Moses needs Aaron, Esther needs Mordecai
 - Both Moses and Esther express an initial reluctance to undertake their task
- ◆ Hebrew verb for passing over is used frequently in Esther
 - God passes over to "smite the Egyptians"
 - Israelites pass through the Red Sea
- ◆ Horses play an important supporting role in both narratives
- ◆ Both King Ahasuerus (and Haman) and Pharaoh consult with wise men (Esth 1:13, 6:13, Ex 1:10 & 7:11)

USE OF VERB - TO PASS OVER (עָבַר) IN ESTHER

- ◆ The laws of the Persians and Medes may not be passed over" (Esth 1:19)
- ◆ King's servants ask Mordecai, "Why are you passing over the command of the king?" (Esth 3:3) (A signal

that this contest is not just Mordecai vs Haman but Mordecai vs the king - Recalls the contest of God with Pharaoh)

- ◆ Mordecai passes through the city after speaking with Esther (Esth 4:17) (Can be simply the apparent meaning of going on to carry out Esther's commands - compare with God's actions in Ex 12:12 and 12:23)
- ◆ King's signet ring passes over from Haman to Mordecai (Esth 8:2)
- ◆ Esther pleads with the king to pass over Haman's evil plan (Esth 8:3) (Note brief interlude between Esther plea for her life and this new request - & that earlier request specifically states that Esther wouldn't bother the king if this were only a matter of slavery for her people - 7:4 - also the scheme to be avoided was devised the day before Passover - Read pp 22 & 23 of thesis)
- ◆ Observation of Purim is not to be passed over (Esth 9:27 & 28)

HORSES IN ESTHER AND PASSOVER NARRATIVES

- ◆ Horses are a major part of Haman's scheme to gain public recognition - Poor Haman, he just wants to go horseback riding - on one of the king's favorite mounts (Esth 6:8) (Note: discussion of who is wearing the crown here)
 - Position of the king is equated with the king's clothing and his royal steeds
 - Compare with honor given to Joseph (Gen 41:43)
- ◆ Horses as the backbone of Persian Pony Express (Esth 8:10)
- ◆ City of Susa acts like a horse - it neighs (Esth 8:15)
- ◆ Horses part of livestock wiped out by pestilence (Ex 9:3)
- ◆ Pharaoh's power is represented in part by the horses and chariots which he commands in pursuit of the Israelites (Ex 14:9)
- ◆ Pharaoh's horses wind up at the bottom of the Red Sea (Ex 14:23)
- ◆ God's victory over Pharaoh is depicted in terms of "throwing horse and rider into the sea" (Ex 15:1, 19, & 21)
- ◆ Other biblical texts equate God's victory over the Egyptians with defeat of horses (Deut 11:4)
- ◆ Prophets denounce Israel for relying on Egypt and her horses instead of God (Is 31:1, Ezek 17:15)
- ◆ So ... Esther's author expects the audience to understand that the Persians are just Egyptians in disguise