
אסתר § ESTHER

In the Hebrew Bible, *The Book of Esther* comes last of the five 'scrolls' (*Megillot*), read at the major festivals, Esther being the scroll for Purim; in the *Septuagint*, it is placed among the historical books and has additional passages (107 verses) intended to make it more religious (there is not a single mention of the God of Israel in the Hebrew text). Modern Protestant bibles include these additions among the Apocrypha; herein, they are inserted 'in place', following the Roman Catholic and Orthodox bibles. The book is the fascinating tale providing the 'historical' basis for a non-Mosaic festival. The wisdom of Mordecai and the courage of Queen Esther, wife of the Persian King, saved Jews throughout the Achaemenid empire from an anti-Semitic pogrom. The Hebrew account, unlike the Greek version, is not anti-Gentile. Despite the story's historical trappings and its author's familiarity with Persian history, customs, vocabulary and names, the *Book of Esther* is essentially fiction.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

In its present form, the Hebrew text dates to the early Hellenistic Period, shortly before the Maccabaeon Period (167–135 BCE), when antagonism toward Gentiles ran high among Jews; in 160 BCE, according to 2M 15:36, the Palestinian Jews were celebrating a 'Day of Mordecai', which presupposes that the story, and probably the book, of Esther were well known. The book was probably composed in the second quarter of the 2nd Century BCE. That it was connected with the Feast of Purim originally is doubtful: 9:20–32 is written in a different style and reads like an addition. The origin of the feast itself is obscure, and it is possible that the book came to be connected with it later (2M 15:36 does not use the term 'Purim' but 'Day of Mordecai') to give it an historical basis. Esther may have been composed in the Eastern Dispersion, but Palestine is a distinct possibility. The Greek version was in existence in 114 (or 78) BCE, when it was sent to Egypt to authenticate the Feast of Purim (see 10:3).

Originally, the additions were probably composed in either Hebrew or Aramaic and, if so, were already part of the Semitic text used by the Greek translator; they were not all written at the same time. The latest possible date for their composition is around 100 BCE. It is impossible to say who composed the additions; some may have been composed in a sophisticated Greek Jewish centre, such as Alexandria, but a Palestinian provenance for most is likely.

PREAMBLE (CHAPTER 0)

¹ Ἔτους δευτέρου βασιλεύοντος Ἀρταξέρξου τοῦ μεγάλου τῇ μιᾷ τοῦ Νισα ἐνύπνιον εἶδεν Μαρδοχαῖος ὁ τοῦ Ιαιρου τοῦ Σεμείου τοῦ Κισαίου ἐκ φυλῆς Βενιαμιν, ² ἄνθρωπος Ιουδαῖος οἰκῶν ἐν Σούσοις τῇ πόλει, ἄνθρωπος μέγας θεραπέων ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ τοῦ βασιλέως. ³ ἦν δὲ ἐκ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας, ἧς ἠχμαλώτευσεν Ναβουχοδονοσορ ὁ βασιλεὺς Βαβυλῶνος ἐξ Ιερουσαλημ μετὰ Ιεχονίου τοῦ βασιλέως τῆς Ιουδαίας. ⁴ καὶ τοῦτο αὐτοῦ τὸ ἐνύπνιον· καὶ ἰδοὺ φωναὶ καὶ θόρυβος, βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός, ταραχος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. ⁵ καὶ ἰδοὺ δύο δράκοντες μεγάλοι ἔτοιμοι προῆλθον ἀμφοτέροι παλαίειν, καὶ ἐγένετο αὐτῶν φωνὴ μεγάλη. ⁶ καὶ τῇ φωνῇ αὐτῶν ἡτοιμάσθη πᾶν ἔθνος εἰς

¹ In the second year of the reign of the Great King, Ahasuerus, on the first day of Nisan, a dream came to Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² He was a Jew living at Susa and holding high office at the court of the king. ³ He was one of the captives whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had deported from Jerusalem with Jeconiah king of Judah. ⁴ And this was his dream. There were cries and noise, thunder and earthquakes, and disorder over the whole earth. ⁵ Then two great dragons came forward, each ready for the fray, and they set up a great roar. ⁶ At the sound of them, every nation made ready to wage war against the nation of the

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Vv. 1a–1r, not present in the MT, are included in the Vg (and NRSV) as 11:2–12:6. Here, we use the LXX (Rahlfs) numbering scheme (as does the NJB). ‘Ahasuerus’ is a Latin-English transcription of the Hebrew form of the Persian name ‘Kshajarsha’, or ‘Xerxes’ in Greek (Xerxes I, 486–465 BCE, see Ezr 4:6, Dn 9:1). Throughout the book, the LXX uses the name ‘Artaxerxes’ (Ἀρταξέρξης) – as does the NRSV in its rendition of the Greek version – confusing Ahasuerus with his successor.

- ¹ The LXX has ‘Semeios’ (Σεμειος) in place of ‘Shimei’. The LXX, alone in recording Mordecai’s dream, outlines the story in advance in enigmatic and apocalyptic terms (the key to it is found in 10:3a–3k), thus emphasising the part played by God in subsequent events. ‘Nisan’ (the Babylonian name for March/April – all the month names in this book are of Babylonian derivation) is the appropriate time for a new and significant dream.
- ² ‘Susa’, the winter residence of the Persian kings, lies to the east of Babylon and was formerly the capital city of Elam.
- ³ The author makes free use of chronology: Mordecai’s genealogy (see also 2:5) consists of three names to cover five or six centuries. He himself is represented as being a courtier of Ahasuerus (about 480 BCE), though exiled in the reign of Jeconiah (= Jehoiakim, about 598 BCE).
- ⁴ In place of ‘cries and noise’, (φωναὶ καὶ θόρυβος) the NRSV has ‘noises (voices) and confusion’.
- ⁵ In place of ‘each ready for the fray’, here following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘both ready to fight’.
- ⁶ For ‘the nation of the just’ (that is, the Jews), the NRSV has ‘righteous nation’.

πόλεμον ὥστε πολεμῆσαι δικαίων ἔθνος. ⁷ καὶ ἰδοὺ ἡμέρα σκότους καὶ γνώφου, θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία, κάκωσις καὶ τάραχος μέγας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. ⁸ καὶ ἐταράχθη δίκαιον πᾶν ἔθνος φοβούμενοι τὰ ἑαυτῶν κακὰ καὶ ἡτοιμάσθησαν ἀπολέσθαι καὶ ἐβόησαν πρὸς τὸν θεόν. ⁹ ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς βοῆς αὐτῶν ἐγένετο ὡσανεὶ ἀπὸ μικρᾶς πηγῆς ποταμὸς μέγας, ὕδωρ πολὺ.

¹⁰ φῶς καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ἀνέτειλεν, καὶ οἱ ταπεινοὶ ὑψώθησαν καὶ κατέφαγον τοὺς ἐνδόξους. ¹¹ καὶ διεγερεθεὶς Μαρδοχαῖος ὁ ἐωρακὺς τὸ ἐνύπνιον τοῦτο καὶ τί ὁ θεὸς βεβούλευται ποιῆσαι, εἶχεν αὐτὸ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ ἤθελεν ἐπιγινῶναι αὐτὸ ἕως τῆς νυκτός. ¹² καὶ ἠσύχασεν Μαρδοχαῖος ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ μετὰ Γαβαθα καὶ Θαρρα τῶν δύο εὐνούχων τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν φυλασσόντων τὴν αὐλήν. ¹³ ἤκουσέν τε αὐτῶν τοὺς λογισμοὺς καὶ τὰς μερίμνας αὐτῶν ἐξηρεύνησεν καὶ ἔμαθεν ὅτι ἐτοιμάζουσιν τὰς χεῖρας ἐπιβαλεῖν Ἀρταξέρξη τῷ βασιλεῖ, καὶ ὑπέδειξεν τῷ βασιλεῖ περὶ αὐτῶν. ¹⁴ καὶ ἐζήτησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς τοὺς δύο εὐνούχους, καὶ ὁμολογήσαντες ἀπήχθησαν. ¹⁵ καὶ

just. ⁷ It was a day of darkness and gloom, of affliction and distress, oppression and great disturbance on earth! ⁸ And the entire upright nation was troubled; they feared the evils that awaited them and they prepared for death, crying out to God. ⁹ Then, from its cry, as from a little spring, there grew a great river, a flood of water.

¹⁰ Light came as the sun rose, and the humble were exalted and devoured the mighty. ¹¹ On awakening from this dream and vision of God's designs, Mordecai thought deeply about the matter, trying his best all day to discover what its meaning might be. ¹² Mordecai was lodging at court with Gabatha and Tharra, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the palace. ¹³ Having got wind of their plotting and gained knowledge of their designs, he discovered that they were preparing to assassinate King Ahasuerus, and he warned the king against them. ¹⁴ The king gave orders for the two eunuchs to be tortured; they confessed and were executed. ¹⁵ He then had

⁷ The NRSV has 'tribulation' in place of 'affliction' and 'oppression' in place of 'affliction' (both here following the NJB).

⁸ The literal translation of 'the evils that awaited them' is 'their own evils'.

⁹ The expressions 'little spring' and 'great river' refer to Esther (10:6).

¹⁰ An alternative reading for 'the mighty' (here following the NJB) is 'those held in honour' (following the NRSV).

¹¹ Mordecai knows that the dream forecasts God's action, but he does not yet grasp the interpretation given in 10:6–12.

¹² The translation here follows the NJB; the NRSV reads, "Now Mordecai took his rest in the courtyard with Gabatha and Tharra, the two eunuchs of the king who kept watch in the courtyard."

¹³ It is unclear whether this plot is the same as that of 2:19–23 or is an earlier one.

¹⁴ For this verse (as NJB), the NRSV has, "Then the king examined the two eunuchs, and after they had confessed it, they were led away to execution."

¹⁵ The NRSV opens this verse slightly differently: "The king made a permanent record of these things."

ἔγραψεν ὁ βασιλεὺς τοὺς λόγους τούτους εἰς μνημόσυνον, καὶ Μαρδοχαῖος ἔγραψεν περὶ τῶν λόγων τούτων.¹⁶ καὶ ἐπέταξεν ὁ βασιλεὺς Μαρδοχαίῳ θεραπεύειν ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ δόματα περὶ τούτων.¹⁷ καὶ ἦν Ἀμαν Ἀμαδαθου Βουγαῖος ἔνδοξος ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως· καὶ ἐζήτησεν κακοποιῆσαι τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον καὶ τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν δύο εὐνούχων τοῦ βασιλέως.

these events entered in his Record Book, while Mordecai himself also wrote an account of them.¹⁶ The king then appointed Mordecai to an office at court and rewarded him with presents.¹⁷ However, Haman son of Hammedatha, a Bougean, who enjoyed high favour with the king, determined to injure Mordecai in revenge for the affair of the king's two eunuchs.

¹⁶ The king here rewards Mordecai (but compare 6:3).

¹⁷ The NJB has 'Agagite' in place of 'Bougean' (*Βουγαῖου*), which represents a term of reproach for an Agagite (cf. 1S 15:8). It is implied that Haman shared in the plot and so resented Mordecai's action.

אסתר פרק א

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א וַיְהִי בַיָּמִי אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ
מֵהָדוּ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ שִׁבְעַת וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה:
ב בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם כָּשְׁבַת | הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ עַל כֶּסֶּא
מַלְכוּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוֹשַׁן הַבִּירָה: ג בַּשָּׁנָה שְׁלוֹשׁ
לְמַלְכוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו חֵיל | פָּרֶס
וּמְדֵי הַפָּרְתָּמִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת לִפְנָיו: ד בַּהֲרָאֲתוֹ
אֶת־עֶשֶׂר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת־יָקָר תַּפְאֲרַת גְּדוּלַּתוֹ
יָמִים רַבִּים שְׁמוֹנִים וּמֵאָת יוֹם: ה וּבְמִלּוֹאֲתָן
הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל־הָעָם הַנִּמְצָאִים
בְּשׁוֹשַׁן הַבִּירָה לְמַגְדֹּל וְעַד־קֶטֶן מִשְׁתֵּה שִׁבְעַת
יָמִים בַּחֲצֵר גִּנַּת בֵּיתָן הַמֶּלֶךְ: ו חֹרֹן כֶּרֶס
וּתְכֵלֶת אַחוּז בַּחֲבִל־בּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן עַל־גְּלִילִי כֶסֶף

¹ It was in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus whose ruled over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia. ² In those days, when King Ahasuerus was enthroned in the Citadel of Susa, ³ in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officials and ministers, Persian and Median army, nobles and provincial governors. ⁴ He displayed the riches and splendour of his empire and the pomp and glory of his majesty; the festivities lasted many days, a hundred and eighty days. ⁵ When this period was over, for seven days the king gave a banquet for all the people living in the Citadel of Susa, to high and low alike, in the court of the gardens of the palace. ⁶ There were white and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple thread to silver rings on marble columns, couches of gold and silver on a

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- ¹ The LXX lacks 'to Ethiopia' (וְעַד־כּוּשׁ, literally 'to Cush'), as do some other ancient texts.
- ² The city of Susa (שׁוּשַׁן) served as one of several capitals of Persia during this time; the other locations were Ecbatana, Babylon, and Persepolis. Partly due to the extreme heat of its summers, Susa was a place where Persian kings stayed mainly in the winter months. Strabo indicates that reptiles attempting to cross roads at midday died from the extreme heat.
- ³ The date corresponds to about 483 BCE. After 'army', the NJB conjecturally adds 'commanders'. Banquets of this sort were given quite often (see Gn 40:20, 1K 3:15, Dn 5:1, Mk 6:21).
- ⁴ At the end of this verse, the NRSV adds 'in all' and the NIV adds 'to be exact'; neither phrase is in the MT or LXX and are added for clarity.
- ⁵ The LXX has (αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ γάμου) 'days of the wedding' (the NRSV translates as 'festivity') in place of 'period' and, therein, the length of the 'banquet' is six (ἑξήτασεν), not seven days.
- ⁶ Another translation for 'rings' is 'rods'. The 'fine linen' was 'byssus', a fine, white fabric made in Egypt and Palestine, and imported by Persia. Note that the ך in the opening חֹרֹן is presented as an enlarged letter, just as it appears in almost all Hebrew MSS.

וַעֲמֹדֵי שֵׁשׁ מִטּוֹת | זָהָב וְכֶסֶף עַל רִצְפַת בִּהַט־
וְשֵׁשׁ וָדָר וְסַחֲרָת: ⁷ וְהַשְׁקוֹת בְּכָלִי זָהָב וְכֵלִים
מִכֵּלִים שׁוֹנִים וַיֵּין מַלְכוּת רַב כִּיד הַמֶּלֶךְ:
⁸ וְהִשְׁתִּיָּה כֹדֶת אֵין אֲנִס כִּי־כֹן יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל
כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּרָצוֹן אִישׁ־וָאִישׁ: {ס}

⁹ גַּם וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה עָשְׂתָה מִשְׁתֶּה נָשִׁים בֵּית
הַמַּלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֻׁרוֹשׁ: ¹⁰ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
כְּטוֹב לִב־הַמֶּלֶךְ בֵּין אֲמָר לְמַהוּמָן בִּזְתָּא חֲרַבּוֹנָא
בַּגְתָּא וְאַבְגָּתָא זֶתָר וְכַרְכָּס שְׁבַעַת הַסְרִיסִים
הַמְשֻׁרְתִּים אֶת־פָּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֻׁרוֹשׁ: ¹¹ לְהַבִּיא
אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּכֶתֶר מַלְכוּת
לְהַרְאוֹת הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים אֶת־יָפְיָהּ כִּי־טוֹבַת
מְרָאָה הִיא: ¹² וַתִּמָּאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לִבּוֹא בַּדָּבָר

pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones.

⁷ For drinking, there were golden cups of various designs and plenty of wine provided by the king with royal liberality. ⁸ The royal edict did not make drinking obligatory: the king instructed the officials of his household to treat each guest according to his own wishes.

⁹ Queen Vashti, for her part, gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs in attendance on the person of King Ahasuerus, ¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before the king, crowned with her royal diadem, in order to display her beauty to the people and the officers-of-state, since she was very beautiful. ¹² However, Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command

⁷ For this verse, the LXX reads:

ποτήρια χρυσᾶ καὶ ἀργυρᾶ καὶ ἀνθράκινον κυλίχιον προκείμενον ἀπὸ ταλάντων τρισμυρίων· οἶνος πολὺς καὶ ἡδύς, ὃν αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς ἔπινε. ("The cups were of gold and silver, and a miniature cup was displayed, made of ruby, worth thirty thousand talents. There was abundant sweet wine, such as the king himself drank.")

⁸ The literal translation of this verse (following the MT) is, "Drinking was according to the law; there was no compelling: the king has instructed ..."

⁹ 'Vashti' (the LXX has *Αστυ*), like Esther, is unknown to history. The name is, in all likelihood, Persian, and figures in the original harem tale; Xerxes' queen was Amestris, a Persian (*Herodotus*, VII 61).

¹⁰ The names of the seven eunuchs are different in the LXX: *Ἀμαν* (Haman) for 'Mehuman', *Βαζαν* (Bazan) for 'Biztha', *Θαρρα* (Tharra) for 'Harbona', *Βωραζη* (Boraze) for 'Bigtha', *Ζαθολθα* (Zatholtha) for 'Abagtha', *Ἀβαταζα* (Abataza) for 'Zethar' and *Θαραβα* (Tharaba) for 'Carkas'.

¹¹ 'Crowned with her royal diadem' indicates that she was to appear in royal attire. In the LXX, the coronation of Vashti is the purpose of her appearance, not merely the display of her fabulous beauty to the king's drunken friends.

¹² Ironically, Esther refused to stay away (4:11), which resulted in quite different consequences.

הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר בְּיַד הַסְּרִיסִים וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד
וַחֲמָתוֹ בָּעֲרָה בּוֹ:

delivered by the eunuchs. Therefore, the king was very angry with this and his rage grew hot.

י' וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַחֲכָמִים יָדְעֵי הָעֵתִים כִּי־כֵן דָּבָר
הַמֶּלֶךְ לִפְנֵי כָל־יָדְעֵי דָת וְדִין: י" וְהַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו
כַּרְשֶׁנָּא שֶׁתָּר אַדְמָתָא תַרְשִׁישׁ מֶרֶס מַרְסֵנָּא
מְמוּכָן שִׁבְעָת שָׂרִי פָּרַס וּמְדֵי רֹאֵל פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
הַיֹּשְׁבִים רֹאשֶׁנָּה בַּמְּלָכוֹת: ט"ו כָּדָת מִה־לַּעֲשׂוֹת
בַּמֶּלֶכָּה וְשִׁתִּי עַל | אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָשְׂתָה אֶת־מַאֲמַר
הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשׁוּרוֹשׁ בְּיַד הַסְּרִיסִים: {ס}

¹³ Addressing the wise men who knew the laws and customs (it being the king's practice to refer such matters to lawyers and jurists), ¹⁴ he summoned Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, seven officials of Persia and Media who had access to the royal presence and held privileged positions in his kingdom. ¹⁵ He said, "According to law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti for not obeying the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?"

ט"ז וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹמְכָן מְמוּכָן לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים לֹא
עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ עֹוֹתָהּ וְשִׁתִּי הַמֶּלֶכָּה כִּי עַל־כָּל־
הַשָּׂרִים וְעַל־כָּל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
אַחֲשׁוּרוֹשׁ: י" כִּי־יֵצֵא דְבַר־הַמֶּלֶכָּה עַל־כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים

¹⁶ In the presence of the king and the officials, Memucan replied, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but all the officials and peoples inhabiting the provinces of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁷ The queen's conduct will soon become known to all women, causing them to look with contempt

¹³ The phrase, 'Laws and customs', is conjectural; the MT has 'times'. The 'wise men' (the LXX has φίλοις – Friends) were probably his seven privy counsellors.

¹⁴ The 'access to the royal presence' means that they had the king's confidence (see 2K 25:19). The practice of consulting the sages is also attested in Dn 2:2ff, 5:7–12. In place of the seven privy counsellors (here following the MT), the LXX names three governors: Ἀρκεσαῖος (Arkesaeus), Σαρσαθαῖος (Sarsathaeus) and Μαλγησαρ (Malesear).

¹⁵ The location of the prepositional phrase 'according to law' is a bit unusual in the MT, but not so much so as to require emendation. Some scholars suggest deleting the phrase as an instance of dittography from the final part of the immediately preceding word in v. 14; others suggest taking the phrase with the end of v. 14 rather than with v. 15. Both proposals, however, lack adequate justification.

¹⁶ The name, 'Memucan' follows the Qere (מְמוּכָן), the Kethib has 'Mumecan' (מוֹמְכָן) and the LXX has 'Muchaeus' (Μουχαιος).

¹⁷ At the beginning of this verse, the LXX inserts 'for he had reported to them what the queen had said and how she had defied the king' (καὶ γὰρ διηγήσατο αὐτοῖς τὰ ῥήματα τῆς βασιλίσσης καὶ ὡς ἀντεῖπεν τῷ βασιλεῖ.), which is parenthesised in some MSS (and the NRSV).

לְהִבְזֹז בְּעֲלֵיהֶן בְּעִינֵיהֶן בְּאִמְרָם הַמֶּלֶךְ
 אַחֲשֻׁרׁוּשׁ אָמַר לְהָבִיא אֶת־וּשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לִפְנֵי
 וְלֹא־בָאָה: י"ח וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תִּאֲמַרְנָה | שָׂרוֹת פָּרֶס־
 וּמְדֵי אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת־דְּבַר הַמַּלְכָּה לְכָל שָׂרֵי
 הַמֶּלֶךְ וּכְדֵי בִזְיוֹן וְקֶצֶף: י"ט אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יֵצֵא
 דְּבַר־מַלְכוּת מִלִּפְנֵי וַיִּפְתַּב בְּדַתִּי פָרֶס־וּמְדֵי וְלֹא
 יַעֲבֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תָבֹא וּשְׁתִּי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
 אַחֲשֻׁרׁוּשׁ וּמַלְכוּתָהּ יִתֵּן הַמֶּלֶךְ לָרְעוּתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה
 מִמֶּנָּה: כ' וַנִּשְׁמַע פֶּתַח הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה בְּכָל־
 מַלְכוּתוֹ כִּי רַבָּה הִיא וְכָל־הַנָּשִׁים יִתְּנוּ יָקָר
 לְבַעֲלֵיהֶן לְמַגְדּוֹל וְעַד־קֶטֶן: כ"א וַיִּיטֹב הַדְּבָר בְּעִינֵי
 הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כְּדִבְרֵי מִמּוֹכָן:
 כ"ב וַיִּשְׁלַח סָפָרִים אֶל־כָּל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־
 מְדִינָהּ וּמְדִינָהּ כְּכַתְּבָהּ וְאֶל־עַם וְעַם כְּלָשׁוֹנוֹ
 לְהִיזֹת כָּל־אִישׁ שָׂרָר בְּבֵיתוֹ וּמְדַבֵּר כְּלָשׁוֹן
 עַמּוֹ: {ס}

on their husbands; they will say, “King Ahasuerus himself commanded Queen Vashti to appear before him and she did not come.”¹⁸ Before the day is out, the wives of the Persian and Median officials will be telling every one of the king’s officials what they have heard about the queen’s behaviour; and that will mean contempt and anger all round.¹⁹ If it is the king’s pleasure, let him issue a royal edict, to irrevocably incorporate into the laws of the Persians and Medes, to the effect that Vashti is never to appear again before King Ahasuerus, and let the king confer her royal dignity on a worthier woman.²⁰ Let this edict issued by the king be proclaimed throughout his empire – which is great – and all women will henceforth bow to the authority of their husbands, both high and low.”²¹ This advice pleased the king and the officials, and the king did as Memucan proposed.²² He sent letters to all the provinces of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each nation in its own language, ensuring that every husband is master in his own house and speaks the language of his own people.

¹⁸ The NRSV has ‘rebel against’ in place of ‘be telling’.

¹⁹ The theme of such an irrevocable decree that is promptly revoked is common in those books of the Bible that show Persian influence. This is, no doubt, deliberate: an expression of Jewish irony.

²⁰ The phrase ‘which is great’ is not present in the LXX.

²¹ In place of ‘advice’, the LXX has ‘speech’ (ὁ λόγος).

²² The NJB, following the LXX, omits ‘and speaks the language of his own people’. Aramaic was normally used for such official correspondence.

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אסתר פרק ב

^א אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כָּשָׁךְ חָמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶחְשׂוּרוֹשׁ זָכַר אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂתָה וְאֶת
אֲשֶׁר־נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ: ^ב וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁרָתָיו
יִבְקְשׁוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ נַעֲרוֹת בְּתוּלוֹת טוֹבוֹת מִרְאָה:
^ג וַיִּפְקֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּקִידִים בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת מַלְכוּתוֹ
וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת־כָּל־נַעֲרָה־בְּתוּלָה טוֹבַת מִרְאָה אֶל־
שׁוֹשֵׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל־בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים אֶל־יָד הֶגָּא סָרִיס
הַמֶּלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים וְנֹתֹן תַּמְרָקִיהֶן: ^ד וְהַנַּעֲרָה
אֲשֶׁר תִּיטֵב בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי וַיִּיטֵב
הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן: {ס}

^ה אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוֹשֵׁן הַבִּירָה וּשְׁמוֹ מָרְדֳּכָי בֶּן
יָאִיר בֶּן־שִׁמְעִי בֶן־קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי: ^ו אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה

¹ Some time after this, when the king's wrath had subsided, Ahasuerus remembered Vashti, how she had behaved, and the measures taken against her. ² The king's gentlemen-in waiting said, "A search should be made on the king's behalf for beautiful young virgins, ³ and the king appoint commissioners throughout the provinces of his realm to bring all these beautiful young virgins to the citadel of Susa, to the harem under the authority of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. Here, he will give them whatever they need for enhancing their beauty, ⁴ and the girl who pleases the king can be queen in place of Vashti." This advice pleased the king and he acted on it.

⁵ Now, in the citadel of Susa, there lived a Jew called Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminites, ⁶ who had been deported

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¹ The MT, followed here, implies that the king regrets his treatment of Vashti; the LXX suggests that he has forgotten her:

Kai metá tous lógous toutous ékópasev ó basileús tou̯ θυμου̯ kai oukéti émnḡsθḡ tḡs Astin mnḡmonéúων oíā élállḡsεν kai ós katékrinev autḡn. ("And after these things, the king's anger abated, and he was no longer concerned about Astin or remembered what she had said and how he had condemned her.")

² This verse is slightly different in the LXX:

kai eípav oí diákonoi tou̯ βασιλέως Ζητηθήτω τῷ βασιλεῖ κοράσια ἄφθορα καλὰ τῷ εἶδει. ("And the king's servants said, 'Let beautiful and virtuous girls be sought for the king.'")

³ The LXX does not name 'Hegai' here (but see v. 8).

⁴ The LXX lacks the word 'advice'.

⁵ The mention of Mordecai, like Saul, as a Benjaminites, prepares for the enmity of Haman, an Amalekite of the Agag family, Saul's enemy.

⁶ The LXX omits 'with Jeconiah king of Judah'. 'Jeconiah' is an alternative name for Jehoiachin (2K 24:6), so Mordecai was about 120 years old.

מִירוּשָׁלַיִם עַם־הַגָּלָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָתָה עִם יְכֹנְיָה
מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל:
וַיְהִי אִמֵּן אֶת־הַדָּסָה הִיא אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־דָּדּוּ כִּי אֵין
לָהּ אָב וְאִם וְהַנַּעֲרָה יָפְתַּת־אֵל וטוֹבַת מַרְאֶה
וּבְמוֹת אֲבִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ לָקַחַהּ מֶרְדֳּכַי לֹו לְבַת: ^ח וַיְהִי
בְּהַשְׁמַע דְּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתּוֹ וּבְהַקְבֵּץ נַעֲרוֹת רַבּוֹת
אֶל־שׁוֹשֵׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל־יַד הַגִּי וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־
בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־יַד הַגִּי שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים: ^ט וּתְיַטֵּב
הַנַּעֲרָה בְּעֵינָיו וּתַשָּׂא חֶסֶד לִפְנָיו וַיְבַהֵל אֶת־
תַּמְרוּקֶיהָ וְאֶת־מְנוּחָהּ לְתַת לָהּ וְאֵת שִׁבְעַת
הַנַּעֲרוֹת הָרְאוּיֹת לְתַת־לָהּ מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁנֶה
וְאֶת־נַעֲרוֹתֶיהָ לְטוֹב בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים:
וְלֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מִוְלַדְתָּהּ כִּי
מֶרְדֳּכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגִּיד: {ס} וּבְכָל־יּוֹם

from Jerusalem among the captives taken away with Jeconiah king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. ⁷ He had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his cousin, who had lost both father and mother. The girl had a good figure and a beautiful face and, on the death of her parents, Mordecai adopted her as his daughter. ⁸ On the promulgation of the royal order and edict, a great many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa, where they were entrusted to Hegai. Esther, too, was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, the custodian of women. ⁹ The girl pleased him and won his favour. Not only did he quickly provide all her cosmetic needs and meals, but he gave her seven special maids from the king's household and transferred her and her maids to the best part of the harem.

¹⁰ Esther did not reveal her race or parentage, since Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. ¹¹ Mordecai walked around in front of the

⁷ The name 'Esther' is probably of Babylonian origin (*Ishtar*) like 'Mordecai' (*Marduch*); the name Marduch was borne by a number of individuals, including an accountant from Susa who lived during the earliest years of Xerxes or the last years of his father. 'Hadassah' (lacking in the LXX) is a Hebrew name, meaning 'myrtle'. The verb לָקַחַהּ ('adopted') literally means 'took'; the LXX ends the verse with, "ἐπαίδευσεν αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα", which literally translates as "he instructed her to himself for a woman." Post-Christian Jewish tradition accepts this reading and makes Esther the wife of Mordecai.

⁸ The LXX uses the name Γαῖ (Gai) in place of 'Hegai'.

⁹ The LXX has 'portion' (μερίδα) in place of 'meals'.

¹⁰ The situation is reminiscent of Daniel and his three companions (Dn 1); but in Dn, the king knows the origin of the Hebrew youths and his favour is directly linked to their loyalty to the Law. Esther's concealment of her race is a necessary literary device (v. 20) but the Greek version is at pains to show that, as queen, she strictly followed the Law, including dietary restrictions.

¹¹ Mordecai's closeness to the harem suggests that he was a minor official, perhaps even a eunuch gatekeeper (vv. 19, 21, 6:10).

וְיוֹם מֵרֹדְכִי מִתְּהִלָּה לִפְנֵי חֹצֵר בֵּית־הַנָּשִׁים לְדַעַת
 אֶת־שָׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר וּמִה־יַּעֲשֶׂה בָּהּ: יב וּבִהְגִּיעַ תֹּרֶ
 נַעֲרָה וְנַעֲרָה לָבוֹא | אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֻׁרוֹשׁ מִקֵּץ
 הַיּוֹת לָהּ כַּדָּת הַנָּשִׁים שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ כִּי בֶן
 יִמְלֹאוּ יָמֵי מְרוּקִיָּהּ שֶׁשָּׂה חֲדָשִׁים בְּשֶׁמֶן הַמֶּר
 וְשֶׂשָׂה חֲדָשִׁים בִּבְשָׂמִים וּבִתְמָרוֹקֵי הַנָּשִׁים:
 יג וּבִזָּה הַנַּעֲרָה בָּאָה אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר
 תֹּאמַר יִנָּתֵן לָהּ לָבוֹא עִמָּה מִבֵּית הַנָּשִׁים עַד־בֵּית
 הַמֶּלֶךְ: יד בְּעֶרֶב | הִיא בָּאָה וּבִבְקָר הִיא שָׁבָה אֶל־
 בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים שְׁנֵי אֶל־יָד שְׁעֵשְׂגָז סֵרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר
 הַפִּילֹגֶשִׁים לֹא־תָבוֹא עוֹד אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אִם־חֶפֶץ
 בָּהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִקְרָאָה בְּשֵׁם: טו וּבִהְגִּיעַ תֹּר־אֶסְתֵּר
 בַּת־אֲבִיחַיִל דָּד מֵרֹדְכִי אֲשֶׁר לָקַח־לָּהּ לְבַת לָבוֹא
 אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא בִקְשָׁה דָּבָר כִּי אִם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר
 הַגִּי סֵרִיס־הַמֶּלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים וְתִהְיֶי אֶסְתֵּר נִשְׂאֵת
 חֵן בְּעֵינֵי כָל־רְאִיָּה:

court of the harem every day, to learn how Esther was and how she
 fared. ¹² Each girl had to appear in turn before King Ahasuerus after a
 delay of twelve months forced by the regulations for the women; this
 purification period was as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six
 months with spices and lotions for feminine beauty treatment. ¹³ When
 each girl went to the king, she was given whatever she wanted to take
 with her, since she then moved from the harem into the royal household.
¹⁴ She went there in the evening and, the following morning, returned
 to another harem under the charge of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch,
 keeper of the concubines. She did not go to the king any more, unless he
 was particularly pleased with her and called her by name. ¹⁵ However,
 when it was the turn of Esther the daughter of Abihail, whose nephew
 Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter, to go into the king's
 presence, she did not ask for anything beyond what had been assigned
 her be Hegai, the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. Esther won
 the approval of all who saw her.

¹² The LXX omits the phrase, 'forced by the regulations for the women'.

¹³ In the LXX, this verse is slightly different:

καὶ τότε εἰσπορεύεται πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα· καὶ ὁ ἐὰν εἴπῃ, παραδώσει αὐτῇ συνεισέρχασθαι αὐτῇ ἀπὸ τοῦ γυναικῶνος ἕως τῶν βασιλείων.
 ("And she goes into the king; and she is handed to the person appointed and goes with him from the harem to the king's palace.")

¹⁴ The numerical adjective שְׁנֵי ('another') is difficult here: it could refer to a second part of the harem, under the supervision of a separate official (as the LXX understands it), but then the definite article should precede it. Some emend to שְׁנֵית ('a second time') but this does not completely resolve the difficulty. In place of 'Shaashgaz', the LXX repeats Γαι (Gai), from vv. 8–9, and lacks the clause, 'was particularly pleased with her'.

¹⁵ In the Hebrew Bible, 'Abihail' can be either a male (Nb 3:35, 1Ch 5:14) or a female (1Ch 2:29) name; the LXX has Αμιναδαβ (Aminadab).

^{טז} וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֹׁרוּשׁ אֶל־בֵּית
מַלְכוּתוֹ בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ טֶבֶת בְּשָׁנָה־
שִׁבְעָה לַמַּלְכוּתוֹ: ^{יז} וַיֵּאָהֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר מִכָּל־
הַנָּשִׁים וַתִּשְׂאֶחֶן וַחֲסֹד לִפְנֵי מִכָּל־הַבְּתוּלוֹת
וַיֵּשֶׁם כְּתֹר־מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשָׁה וַיְמַלִּיכָהּ תַּחַת וְשָׂתִי:
^{יח} וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתֵּה גָדוֹל לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו אֶת
מִשְׁתֵּה אֶסְתֵּר וְהַנְּחָה לַמְּדִינּוֹת עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן מִשְׁאֵת
כִּיד הַמֶּלֶךְ: ^{יט} וּבְהַקְבֵּץ בְּתוּלוֹת שְׁנֵית וּמַרְדֳּכָי
יָשָׁב בְּשַׁעֲרֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ: ^כ אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מַגִּידַת מוֹלְדֹתָהּ
וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מַרְדֳּכָי וְאֶת־מֵאֲמָר
מַרְדֳּכָי אֶסְתֵּר עָשָׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה בְּאִמְנָה אֹתוֹ:
{ס}

¹⁶ Esther was brought to King Ahasuerus in his royal house in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign;
¹⁷ and the king liked Esther more than any of the other women; none of the other girls found so much favour and approval with him. So, he set the royal diadem on her head and proclaimed her queen instead of Vashti. ¹⁸ The king then gave a great feast for all his officials and ministers – Esther’s feast; and he decreed a holiday for all the provinces and gave gifts with royal prodigality. ¹⁹ When the women assembled the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the Gate. ²⁰ Now, Esther did not divulge her parentage or race, in obedience to the orders of Mordecai, whose instructions she continued to follow as when she had been under his care.

¹⁶ ‘Tebeth’ (טֶבֶת – December/January), as all the month names in this book, is a Babylonian name. The LXX has ‘the twelfth month, which is Adar’ (March/April) (τῷ δωδεκάτῳ μηνί, ὅς ἐστιν Ἀδαρ) and, in place of ‘seventh’, the Peshitta has ‘fourth’.

¹⁷ The actual queen of Xerxes was Amestris, a Persian woman (Herodotus, vii, 61). The LXX lacks ‘more than any of the other woman’.

¹⁸ An alternative translation of ‘holiday’ is ‘amnesty’ (the LXX has ἄφεσις – ‘remission of taxes’). This being Esther’s wedding feast, the king favours his subjects with largesse.

¹⁹ The NJB emends this verse to, “When Esther, like the other girls, had been transferred to the second harem, ²⁰ she did not divulge...” The LXX ends with, ‘Mordecai was on duty at the palace’ (Μαρδοχαῖος ἐθροάπευεν ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ). The mention of Mordecai and his job here seems wrong and is probably a dittography of v. 21.

²⁰ For this verse, the LXX (NRSV) reads:

ἡ δὲ Εσθηρ οὐχ ὑπέδειξεν τὴν πατρίδα αὐτῆς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐνετείλατο αὐτῇ Μαρδοχαῖος φοβεῖσθαι τὸν θεὸν καὶ ποιεῖν τὰ προστάγματα αὐτοῦ, καθὼς ἦν μετ’ αὐτοῦ, καὶ Εσθηρ οὐ μετέλλαξεν τὴν ἀγωγὴν αὐτῆς. (“Esther had not disclosed her country – such were the instructions of Mordecai; but she was to fear God and keep his laws, just as she had done when she was with him. So, Esther did not change her mode of life.”)

כא בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וּמֶרְדֵּכַי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ קִצָּף
 בְּגָתָן וְתֶרֶשׁ שְׁנֵי־סְרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁמָרֵי הַסֹּף
 וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ לַשְׁלַח יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֻׁרֶשׁ: כב וַיֹּדַע
 הַדָּבָר לְמֶרְדֵּכַי וַיַּגֵּד לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְתֹאמַר
 אֶסְתֵּר לַמֶּלֶךְ בְּשֵׁם מֶרְדֵּכַי: כג וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הַדָּבָר
 וַיִּמְצָא וַיִּתְּלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עַל־עֵץ וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּסֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי
 הַיָּמִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: {ס}

²¹ At this time, Mordecai was attached to the Chancellery and two mal-
 contents, Bigthan and Teresh, eunuchs in the king's service as Guards
 of the Threshold, plotted to kill King Ahasuerus. ²² Mordecai came to
 hear of this and informed Queen Esther who, in turn, told the king in
 Mordecai's name. ²³ The matter was investigated and proved true; and
 they were both sent to the gallows, and the incident was recorded in the
 Annals, in the royal presence.

²¹ 'Chancellery' literally translates as 'the king's gate' (see v. 19). The expression sometimes means the business of administration and sometimes the buildings in which this work was carried out. The 'Threshold' was that of the bedchamber. Xerxes actually fell victim to such a conspiracy of bedchamber servants, as have other Oriental potentates. The LXX does not name the two conspirators but gives the reason for their anger as Mordecai's advancement.

²² The text of the *Book of Esther* does not disclose exactly how Mordecai learned about the plot against the king's life. Ancient Jewish traditions state that Mordecai overheard conspiratorial conversation, or that an informant brought this information to him, or that it came to him as a result of divine prompting; these conjectures are all without adequate support from the biblical text: the author simply does not tell the source of Mordecai's insight into this momentous event.

²³ The 'gallows' was, literally, a tree, i.e. impalement, the normal form of punishment on Persia for political offenders. In the LXX (1:1r), Haman's hostility towards Mordecai begins with his reporting of this plot. At the end of this verse, the LXX adds 'praising the goodwill shown by Mordecai' (ὕπερ τῆς εὐνοίας Μαρδοχαίου ἐν ἐγκωμίῳ).

אסתר פרק ג

א אַחַר | הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה גָּדַל הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֻׁרוּשׁ
אֶת־הַמֶּן בֶּן־הַמִּדְיָהּ הָאֲגָגִי וַיִּנְשְׂאֵהוּ וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת־
בְּסָאוֹ מַעַל כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ: ב וְכָל־עַבְדֵי
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ פָּרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים
לְהַמֶּן כִּי־כֵן צִוָּה־לּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וּמֶרְדֵּכַי לֹא יִכְרַע וְלֹא
יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה: ג וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר
הַמֶּלֶךְ לְמֶרְדֵּכַי מִדּוּעַ אַתָּה עוֹבֵר אֶת מִצְוַת
הַמֶּלֶךְ: ד וַיְהִי בְּאִמְרָם כָּאִמְרָם אֵלָיו יוֹם וַיּוֹם וְלֹא
שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּגִּדּוּ לְהַמֶּן לִרְאוֹת הֵיכַמְדוֹ דְּבָרֵי
מֶרְדֵּכַי כִּי־הִגִּיד לָהֶם אֲשֶׁר־הוּא יְהוּדִי: ה וַיֵּרָא
הַמֶּן כִּי־אֵין מֶרְדֵּכַי פָּרַע וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לּוֹ וַיִּמְלֵא הַמֶּן
חֲמָה: ו וַיִּבְּזוּ בְּעֵינָיו לְשַׁלַּח יָד בְּמֶרְדֵּכַי לְבַדּוֹ כִּי־
הִגִּידוּ לּוֹ אֶת־עַם מֶרְדֵּכַי וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הַמֶּן לְהַשְׁמִיד

ESTHER 3

¹ After these things, King Ahasuerus singled out Haman son of Ham-medatha the Agagite and promoted him, promoting him over all his colleagues, the other officials, ² and all the royal servants employed at the Chancellery bowed down and did obeisance to Haman – such was the king’s command; but Mordecai refused either to bow or to prostrate himself. ³ “Why do you flout the royal command?” the officials of the Chancellery asked Mordecai. ⁴ Day after day, they asked him this, but he took no notice of them. In the end, they reported the matter to Haman, to see whether Mordecai would persist in his attitude, since he had told them that he was a Jew. ⁵ Haman could see for himself that Mordecai did not bow or prostrate himself in his presence; he was infuriated; ⁶ and, on being told what race Mordecai belonged to, he thought it beneath him merely to get rid of Mordecai, but he made up

ESTHER 3

- ¹ The country of ‘Agag’ is not known; the name is that of an Amalekite king conquered by Saul (1S 15:7–9) and may have been chosen to emphasise the antagonism of Haman and Mordecai who, like Saul, is a Benjaminite and a descendant of Kish. The LXX has *Βουγαῖον* (Bougean) in place of ‘native of Agag’ (see #0:17).
- ² The gesture of bowing and prostration in itself could not be objectionable for a Jew; it was the act of respect customary in the oriental court and was also practised in Israel (see 1K 1:23, 2K 4:37, etc.).
- ³ Mordecai’s refusal is not, therefore, a protest of fidelity to God and his Law, as in Dn 1:8, 3:12 and 6:14, but a reaction of racial pride. Nevertheless, the prayer in the LXX gives it a religious significance (4:17d–17e).
- ⁴ The *Kethib*/*Qere* difference here appears to be a case of *bet*/*kaf* confusion but warrants further explanation or commentary.
- ⁵ The LXX opens with, “Haman, realizing that Mordecai was not doing obeisance to him.” (ἐπιγινούσας Ἀμαν ὅτι οὐ προσκυνεῖ αὐτῷ Μαργοχαῖος)
- ⁶ The entire first half of this verse is missing from the LXX, which reads: καὶ ἐβουλεύσατο ἀφανίσαι πάντας τοὺς ὑπὸ τὴν Ἀρταξέρξου βασιλείαν Ἰουδαίους (“and plotted to destroy all the Jews under Artaxerxes’ rule”).

אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְלָכוֹת אַחֲשֻׁרוֹשׁ
 עִם מֶרְדֵּכָי: ^ז בַּחֲדָשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן הוּא־חֲדָשׁ נִסָּן
 בִּשְׁנַת שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֻׁרוֹשׁ הָפִיל פֹּהַר
 הוּא הַגּוֹרֵל לִפְנֵי הַמֶּן מִיּוֹם | לְיוֹם וּמִחֲדָשׁ לְחֲדָשׁ
 שְׁנַיִם־עָשָׂר הוּא־חֲדָשׁ אָדָר: {ס}

^ח וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּן לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֻׁרוֹשׁ יֵשְׁנוּ עִם־אֶחָד
 מִפְּזָר וּמִפָּרָד בֵּין הָעַמִּים בְּכָל מְדִינֹת מְלָכוֹתָךְ
 וְדַתֵּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכָּל־עַם וְאֶת־דַּתִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם
 עֹשִׂים וְלַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין־שׁוּה לְהַנִּיחָם: ^ט אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ
 טוֹב יִכָּתֵב לְאַבְדָם וְעֲשֶׂרֶת אֲלָפִים כֶּכֶר־כֶּסֶף
 אֲשָׁקוּל עַל־יְדֵי עֹשֵׂי הַמְּלָאכָה לְהַבִּיא אֶל־גִּנְזֵי
 הַמֶּלֶךְ: ^י וַיֹּסֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדּוֹ וַיִּתְּנָהּ
 לְהַמֶּן בֶּן־הַמֶּדְתָּא הָאֲגָגִי צָרָר הַיְּהוּדִים: ^{יא} וַיֹּאמֶר
 הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַמֶּן הַכֶּסֶף נָתַן לָךְ וְהָעָם לַעֲשׂוֹת בּוֹ

his mind to wipe out all the members of Mordecai's race, the Jews, living in Ahasuerus' entire empire. ⁷ In the first month, that is the month of Nisan, of the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot) in the presence of Haman, to determine the day and the month. The lot fell on the twelfth month, which is Adar.

⁸ Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain unassimilated nation scattered among the other nations throughout the provinces of your realm; their laws are different from those of all the other nations, and they ignore the royal laws; hence, it is not in the king's interests to tolerate them. ⁹ If their destruction be signed, so please the king, I am ready to pay ten thousand talents of silver to the king's receivers, to be credited to the royal treasury." ¹⁰ The king then took his signet ring off his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the persecutor of the Jews. ¹¹ "Keep the money," he said, "and you can have the people

⁷ 'Pur' is an Accadian word for 'lot', and casting lots was not irreligious (1S 14:42, Ac 1:26, *Herodotus*, III 128). Haman has already decided on the pogrom; he consults the lots only to learn the most propitious day. The LXX, complementing the MT, adds that Haman issued a decree in the 'twelfth year of the kingdom' (ἐν ἔτει δωδεκάτῳ τῆς βασιλείας), that he cast lots to extirpate the race of Mordecai and that the lot fell on the 'fourteenth day of the month called Adar' (τεσσαρεσκαίδεκάτην τοῦ μηνός, ὅς ἐστιν Ἀδαρ). This verse is perhaps an addition, inserted at the same time as the section about the Feast of Purim (9:23–27). In keeping with its de-emphasis of the establishment of the Feast of Purim, the LXX gives no clue until 9:26 that this casting of lots will provide the name of the festival.

⁸ Complaints like this against the Jews are found in several documents of the period (see vv. 13a–13e, Ezr 4:12ff, Jdt 12:2, Ws 2:14ff and 3M).

⁹ Haman offers a fabulous sum as a bribe: according to *Herodotus* (*Histories*, 3:95), the annual income of the empire was 14,500 talents.

¹⁰ Possessing the king's ring would enable Haman to act with full royal authority: it would be used to impress the royal seal on edicts, making them as binding as if the king himself had enacted them.

¹¹ The king refuses the bribe but authorises the pogrom.

כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ: יִבְקְרָאוּ סִפְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּחֲדָשׁ
הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּשִׁלּוּשֵׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ וַיִּכְתֹּב כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-
צִוָּה הָמֶן אֶל אַחֲשֶׁדְרָפְנֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶל־הַפְּחֹת
אֲשֶׁר | עַל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וְאֶל־שָׂרֵי עַם וְעַם מְדִינָה
וּמְדִינָה כְּכַתְּבָהּ וְעַם וְעַם כָּל־שׁוֹנֵי בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ
אַחֲשֹׁרֶשׁ נִכְתָּב וְנִחְתָּם בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ: ¹² וַיִּשְׁלֹחַ
סִפְרִים בְּיַד הָרָצִים אֶל־כָּל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
לְהַשְׁמִיד לַהֲרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים מִנַּעַר
וְעַד־זָקֵן טָף וְנָשִׁים בְּיוֹם אֶחָד בְּשִׁלּוּשֵׁה עָשָׂר
לַחֲדָשׁ שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר הוּא־חֲדָשׁ אָדָר וּשְׁלָלָם לְבוֹז:

too; do what you like with them.” ¹² So, the royal scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month and they wrote out the orders addressed by Haman to the king’s satraps, to the governors ruling each province and to the principal officials of each people, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language. The edict was signed in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with his ring, ¹³ and letters were sent by runners to every province of the realm, ordering the destruction, slaughter and annihilation of all Jews, young and old, including women and children, on the same day (the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is Adar) and the seizing of their possessions.

^a τῆς δὲ ἐπιστολῆς ἐστὶν τὸ ἀντίγραφον τόδε

Βασιλεὺς μέγας Ἀρταξέρξης τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰνδικῆς ἕως τῆς Αἰθιοπίας ἑκατὸν εἴκοσι ἑπτὰ χωρῶν ἄρχουσι καὶ τοπάρχαις ὑποτεταγμένοις τάδε γράφει ^b Πολλῶν ἐπάρχας ἐθνῶν καὶ πάσης ἐπικρατήσας οἰκουμένης ἐβουλήθη, μὴ τῷ θράσει τῆς ἐξουσίας ἐπαιρούμενος, ἐπεικέστερον δὲ καὶ μετὰ

^{13a} The text of the letter was as follows:

“The Great King, Ahasuerus, to the governors of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia, and to the officials under them: ^{13b} Having become ruler of many nations and master of the whole world (not elated with presumption of authority but

¹² The LXX omits the hyperbolic claim that the edict was sent ‘to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language’; instead, it says simply ‘every province from India to Ethiopia’. Aramaic was normally used for such official correspondence.

¹³ The ‘runners’ carrying the royal edict were the famous post service organised by Cyrus. The LXX lacks ‘thirteenth day of the’.

^{13a} Vv. 13a–13g, not present in the MT, are included in the NRSV as 13:2–7 (following the Vg numbering scheme). Here, we use the LXX (Rahlfs) numbering system, as does the NJB.

^{13b} For this verse, here following the NRSV (and LXX), the NJB reads:

“Being placed in authority over many nations and ruling the whole world. I have resolved never to be carried away by the insolence of power, but always to rule with moderation and clemency, so as to assure for my subjects a life ever free from storms and, offering my kingdom the benefits of civilisation and free transit from end to end, to restore the peace that all men desire.”

ἡπιότητος ἀεὶ διεξάγων, τοὺς τῶν ὑποτεταγμένων ἀκυμάτους διὰ παντὸς καταστήσῃ βίους, τὴν τε βασιλείαν ἡμερον καὶ πορευτὴν μέχρι περάτων παρεξόμενος ἀνανεώσασθαι τε τὴν ποδουμένην τοῖς πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις εἰρήνην.

^c πυθομένου δέ μου τῶν συμβούλων πῶς ἂν ἀχθεῖη τοῦτο ἐπὶ πέρας, σωφροσύνη παρ' ἡμῖν διενέγκας καὶ ἐν τῇ εὐνοίᾳ ἀπαρallάκτως καὶ βεβαίᾳ πίστει ἀποδεδειγμένος καὶ δεύτερον τῶν βασιλειῶν γέρας ἀπενηνεγμένος Αμαν ^d ἐπέδειξεν ἡμῖν ἐν πάσαις ταῖς κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην φυλαῖς ἀναμεμεῖχθαι δυσμενῇ λαόν τινα τοῖς νόμοις ἀντίθετον πρὸς πᾶν ἔθνος τά τε τῶν βασιλέων παραπέμποντας διηνεκῶς διατάγματα πρὸς τὸ μὴ κατατίθεσθαι τὴν ὑφ' ἡμῶν κατευθυνομένην ἀμέμπτως συναρχίαν.

^e διειληφότες οὖν τόδε τὸ ἔθνος μονώτατον ἐν ἀντιπαραγωγῇ παντὶ διὰ παντὸς ἀνθρώπῳ κείμενον διαγωγὴν νόμων ξενίζουσιν παραλλάσσουν καὶ δυσνοοῦν τοῖς ἡμετέροις πράγμασιν τὰ χερίιστα συντελοῦν κακὰ καὶ πρὸς τὸ μὴ τὴν βασιλείαν εὐσταθείας τυγχάνειν.

^f προστετάχαμεν οὖν τοὺς σημαινομένους ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ὑπὸ Αμαν τοῦ τεταγμένου ἐπὶ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ δευτέρου πατρὸς ἡμῶν πάντας σὺν

always acting reasonably and with kindness), I have determined to settle the lives of my subjects in lasting tranquillity and, in order to make my kingdom peaceful and open to travel throughout all its extent, to restore the peace desired by all people.

^{13c} “In consultation with our advisers as to how this aim is to be affected, we have been informed by one of them, Haman, eminent among us for prudence and well proved for his unfailing devotion and steadfast fidelity, and in rank second only to our majesty, ^{13d} that there is, mingled among all the tribes in the world, a certain hostile people, opposed by its laws to every other nation and continually defying royal ordinances, in such a way as to obstruct that form of government assured by us to the general good.

^{13e} “Considering, therefore, that this people, unique of its kind, is in complete opposition to all humanity from which it differs by its outlandish laws, that it is hostile to our interests and that it commits the most heinous crimes, to the point of endangering the stability of the realm:

^{13f} “We command that those persons designated to you in the letters written by Haman, who was appointed to watch over our interests and is a second father to us, be all

^{13c} In the NRSV, the phrase, ‘Haman by name’ appears considerably earlier in the verse.

^{13d} In place of ‘mingled’, here following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘scattered’.

^{13e} The phrase ‘all humanity’ follows the NJB; the NRSV has ‘every nation’.

^{13f} The phrase ‘second father’ implies that Haman was ranked second only to the king. ‘Fourteenth day’ is hard to explain; according to 8:12, 9:1 and 16:20, it was the thirteenth day.

γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις ἀπολέσαι ὀλορριζεῖ ταῖς τῶν ἐχθρῶν
μαχαίραις ἄνευ παντὸς οἴκτου καὶ φειδοῦς τῇ
τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτῃ τοῦ δωδεκάτου μηνὸς Ἀδαρ τοῦ
ἐνεστῶτος ἔτους, ⁸ ὅπως οἱ πάλαι καὶ νῦν δυσμενεῖς ἐν
ἡμέρᾳ μιᾷ βιαίως εἰς τὸν ἄδην κατελθόντες εἰς τὸν
μετέπειτα χρόνον εὐσταθῇ καὶ ἀτάραχα παρέχωσιν ἡμῖν
διὰ τέλους τὰ πράγματα.

destroyed, root and branch, including women and
children, by the swords of their enemies, without any pity
or mercy, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar,
of the present year, ^{13g} so that, these past and present
malcontents being in one day forcibly thrown down to
Hades, our government may henceforward enjoy
perpetual stability and peace.”

י פִּתְשָׁגֶן הַכֶּתֶב לְהַנָּתֵן דָּת בְּכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה
גִּלְוִי לְכָל־הָעַמִּים לְהִיּוֹת עֲתִדִּים לְיוֹם הַזֶּה:
טו הָרָצִים יֵצְאוּ דְחוּפִים בְּדֶבֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַדָּת נִתְּנָה
בְּשׁוֹשֶׁן הַבִּירָה וְהַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּן יֵשְׁבוּ לְשִׁתּוֹת וְהָעִיר
שׁוֹשֶׁן נְבֹכָדָה: {ס}

¹⁴ Copies of this decree, to be issued as law in each province, were
published, calling on all people to be ready for that day. ¹⁵ The couriers
went quickly, by order of the king; the decree was first issued in the
citadel of Susa. The king and Haman gave themselves up to feasting and
drinking but consternation reigned in the city of Susa.

^{13g} The NRSV opens this verse, here following the NJB, with, “so that those who have long been hostile and remain so ...”

¹⁴ The letter is delivered and panic ensues (v. 15). After ‘published’, the NJB adds ‘to the various peoples’; here, we follow the NRSV.

¹⁵ The NJB includes the last sentence as v. 16; here, we follow the NRSV and MT. This final statement of the chapter is a sad commentary on the pathetic disregard of despots for the human misery and suffering that they sometimes inflict on those who are helpless to resist their power. Here, while common people braced for the reckless loss of life and property that was about to begin, the perpetrators went about their mundane activities as though nothing of importance was happening. In the *Vetus Latina*, the Jews now pray, expressing sorrow for the sins of the nation and appealing to the faithfulness of God.

אסתר פרק ד

א וּמִרְדֵּכַי יָדַע אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה וַיִּקְרַע מְרֹדֶכִי אֶת-בְּגָדָיו וַיִּלְבַּשׁ שָׁק וְאַפֵּר וַיֵּצֵא בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר וַיִּזְעַק זַעֲקָה גְדוֹלָה וּמָרָה: ^ב וַיָּבֹא עַד לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אֵין לָבוֹא אֶל-שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלִבוּשׁ שָׁק: ^ג וּבְכָל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מִגֵּיעַ אָבֵל גְּדוֹל לַיהוּדִים וְצוּם וּבְכִי וּמִסְפָּד שָׁק וְאַפֵּר יַצַּע לָרַבִּים: ^ד וּתְבוֹאִינָה וְתִבְּאוּנָה נַעֲרוֹת אֶסְתֵּר וְסָרִיסֶיהָ וַיִּגִּידוּ לָהּ וַתַּחֲלֹחַל הַמַּלְכָּה מְאֹד וַתִּשְׁלַח בְּגָדִים לְהַלְבִּישׁ אֶת-מְרֹדֶכִי וּלְהַסִּיר שָׁקוֹ מֵעָלָיו וְלֹא קָבַל: ^ה וַתִּקְרָא אֶסְתֵּר לַהֲתֵךְ מִסָּרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הָעֵמִיד לִפְנֶיהָ וַתִּצְוֶהוּ עַל-מְרֹדֶכִי לִדְעוֹת מַה-זֶּה וְעַל-מַה-זֶּה:

ESTHER 4

¹ When Mordecai learned what had happened, Mordecai tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and walked into the centre of the city, wailing loudly and bitterly, ² until he arrived in front of the Chancellery, which no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter. ³ In every province, no sooner had the royal command and edict arrived, than there was great mourning among the Jews, fasting, weeping and wailing, and many lay on sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ When Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothes for Mordecai to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he refused them. ⁵ Esther then summoned Hathach, a eunuch whom the king had appointed to wait on her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai and enquire what was wrong and why he was acting in this way.

ESTHER 4

- ¹ 'Sackcloth and ashes' are traditional Oriental manifestations of grief and mourning (see Jdt 4:10, 1M 3:47, Is 37:1, etc.), which render one ritually unclean, so Mordecai (v. 2) could not enter the Chancellery. At the end of this verse, the LXX adds (Mordecai's words), "*An innocent nation is being destroyed.*" (Αἴρεται ἔθνος μηδὲν ἡδικαηκός)
- ² This verse is slightly more detailed in the LXX:
καὶ ἤλθεν ἕως τῆς πύλης τοῦ βασιλείως καὶ ἔστη· οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἐξὸν αὐτῷ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν αὐλήν σάκκον ἔχοντι καὶ σποδόν. ("And he got as far as the king's gate, and there he stopped, because no one was allowed to enter the courtyard clothed in sackcloth and ashes.")
- ³ Although prayer is not specifically mentioned here, it is highly unlikely that appeals to God for help were not a part of this reaction to devastating news. As elsewhere, the writer seems deliberately to keep religious actions in the background.
- ⁴ The *Kethib*/ *Qere* difference here (dropping a *yod*) would benefit from a full explanation. Esther sent Mordecai a change of clothing so that he could enter the palace and talk to her.
- ⁵ The LXX rendering of 'Hathach' is Ἀχραθαῖος (*Hachratheus*).

וַיֵּצֵא הַתֶּדֶן אֶל־מֶרְדֵּכַי אֶל־רְחוֹב הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיַּגִּד־לּוֹ מֶרְדֵּכַי אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהּ וְאֵת | פְּרִשְׁת הַכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר אָמַר הָמָן לְשָׂקוֹל עַל־גִּנְזֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּיהוּדִים לְאַבְדָּם: וְאֵת־פַּתְשָׁן כְּתַב־הַדָּת אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן בְּשׁוֹשָׁן לְהַשְׁמִידם נָתַן לוֹ לְהִרְאוֹת אֶת־אַסְתֵּר וּלְהַגִּיד לָהּ וּלְצִוּוֹת עָלֶיהָ לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהִתְחַנֵּן־לוֹ וּלְבַקֵּשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי עַל־עַמָּה:

μνηστῆρῶσα ἡμερῶν ταπεινώσεώς σου ὡς ἐτράφης ἐν χειρὶ μου, διότι Ἀμαν ὁ δευτερεύων τῷ βασιλεῖ ἐλάλησεν καθ' ἡμῶν εἰς θάνατον· ἐπικάλεσαι τὸν κύριον καὶ λάλησον τῷ βασιλεῖ περὶ ἡμῶν καὶ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἐκ θανάτου.

ט וַיָּבֹא הַתֶּדֶן וַיַּגִּד לְאַסְתֵּר אֶת דְּבָרֵי מֶרְדֵּכַי: וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְהַתֶּדֶן וּתְצִוְהוּ אֶל־מֶרְדֵּכַי: יא כָּל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְעַם־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ יָדְעִים אֲשֶׁר כָּל־

⁶ Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the Chancellery, ⁷ and Mordecai told him what had happened to him personally, and about the sum of money that Haman had offered to pay into the royal treasury to procure the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him a copy of the edict of extermination published in Susa for him to show Esther for her information, with the message that she was to go to the king, implore his favour and plead with him for the race to which she belonged.

^{8a} “Remember when you were an ordinary person,” he said, “when you were being brought up under my care. Since Haman, the second person in the realm, has spoken to the king against us and demanded our deaths, ^{8b} call upon the Lord, then speak to the king on our behalf, and save us from death!”

⁹ Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said; ¹⁰ and Esther replied to Hathach with this message for Mordecai, ¹¹ “Royal officials and people living in the provinces alike all know that for anyone, man

⁶ Most LXX MSS omit this verse, but some have, “So Hachratheus went out to Mordecai in the street of the city opposite the city gate.”

⁷ The Kethib/Qere difference here (replacing a double yod with a single) warrants explanation.

⁸ The literal translation of ‘published’ (the NRSV has ‘issued’) is ‘given’.

^{8a} In the LXX, vv. 8a & 8b are part of v. 8; here, the numbering scheme follows that of the NJB. Neither of these verses is present in the MT.

^{8b} After this verse, the *Vetus Latina* adds: “Rise! Why do you sit in silence? Since you are set free, you and your House and your father’s House, all your people and all your descendants. Rise! Let us see if we can fight and suffer for our own people, that God may show mercy on them.”

⁹ The *Vetus Latina* describes Esther’s distress thus: “As Esther read her brother’s letter, she tore her garments and lamented loudly. She shed many tears, her body trembles and her flesh became weak.”

¹⁰ The NJB, in line with the LXX, does not repeat ‘(to) Hathach’ (לְהַתֶּדֶן), here following the MT and NRSV.

¹¹ Interdiction to enter without being summoned was a security precaution.

אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר יָבֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַחֲצֵר
הַפְּנִימִית אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקְרָא אַחַת דָּתוֹ לְהָמִית לְבָד
מֵאֲשֶׁר יוֹשִׁיט־לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־שֶׁרְבִיט הַזֶּהב וְחַיָּה
וְאֲנִי לֹא נִקְרָאתִי לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ זֶה שְׁלוֹשִׁים
יוֹם: י^ב וַיִּגִּידוּ לְמָרְדֳּכָי אֵת דְּבָרֵי אֶסְתֵּר: {ס}
י^ג וַיֹּאמֶר מָרְדֳּכָי לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־תִּדְמִי
בְּנִפְשָׁךְ לְהַמְלִיט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים: י^ד כִּי
אִם־הִחָרַשׁ תַּחֲרִישִׁי בַּעַת הַזֹּאת רוּחַ וְהַצִּלָּה
יַעֲמֹד לַיְּהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר וְאֵת וּבֵית־אֲבִיךָ
תֵּאבְדוּ וְיָמֵי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לָעַת כֹּזֶאת הִגַּעַת לַמְּלָכוֹת:
טו וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־מָרְדֳּכָי: טז לָךְ כְּנוֹס
אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוֹשָׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי
וְאֶל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֶל־תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וַיּוֹם
גַּם־אֲנִי וְנַעֲרֹתַי אֲצוּם כֵּן וּבֹכֵן אָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־כָדַת וְכֹאֲשֶׁר אֲבָדְתִּי אֲבָדְתִּי: יז וַיַּעֲבֹר
מָרְדֳּכָי וַיַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוְתָהּ עָלָיו אֶסְתֵּר:

or woman, who approaches the king in the private apartments without having been summoned there, there is only one law: he must die, unless the king, by pointing his golden sceptre towards him, grants him his life; and I have not been summoned to the king for the last thirty days."

¹² These words of Esther were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ and then Mordecai sent back the following reply, "Do not suppose that, because you are in the king's palace, you are going to be the one Jew to escape.

¹⁴ No, if you persist in remaining silent at such a time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from a different quarter, but both you and your whole father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the throne for just such a time as this." ¹⁵ Whereupon Esther sent this reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶ "Go and assemble all the Jews now in Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink day or night for three days. For my part, I and my waiting-women shall keep the same fast, after which I shall go to the king in spite of the law; and if I perish, I perish."

¹⁷ Mordecai went away and carried out Esther's instructions.

¹² For this verse, the LXX has: *καὶ ἀπήγγειλεν Αχραθαῖος Μαρδοχαίῳ πάντας τοὺς λόγους Εσθῆρ*. ("And Hachratheus delivered to Mordecai all Esther's words.")

¹³ The NJB has 'who' in place of 'and then Mordecai', here following the MT (וַיֹּאמֶר מָרְדֳּכָי), LXX (*καὶ εἶπεν Μαρδοχαῖος*) and NRSV.

¹⁴ The author of the MT avoids using the name of God, implied by the phrase 'different quarter'.

¹⁵ In place of 'Esther sent this reply' (here following the MT), the LXX has 'Esther sent the one who had come to her' (*ἐξαπέστειλεν Εσθῆρ τὸν ἦκοντα πρὸς αὐτήν*).

¹⁶ This fast is the only religious activity explicitly mentioned in the Hebrew text of the *Book of Esther*.

¹⁷ The literal translation of 'Esther's instructions' (following the NJB) is 'everything Esther had ordered him' (following the NRSV).

^a καὶ ἐδεήθη κυρίου μνημονεύων πάντα τὰ ἔργα κυρίου καὶ εἶπεν

^b Κύριε κύριε βασιλεῦ πάντων κρατῶν, ὅτι ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ σου τὸ πᾶν ἐστίν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἀντιδοξῶν σοι ἐν τῷ θέλειν σε σῶσαι τὸν Ἰσραηλ. ^c ὅτι σὺ ἐποίησας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ πᾶν θαυμαζόμενον ἐν τῇ ὑπ' οὐρανὸν καὶ κύριος εἶ πάντων, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὃς ἀντιτάσσεται σοι τῷ κυρίῳ. ^d σὺ πάντα γινώσκεις· σὺ οἶδας, κύριε, ὅτι οὐκ ἐν ὕβρει οὐδὲ ἐν ὑπερηφανίᾳ οὐδὲ ἐν φιλοδοξίᾳ ἐποίησα τοῦτο, τὸ μὴ προσκυνεῖν τὸν ὑπερήφανον Αμαν, ὅτι ἠυδόκουν φιλεῖν πέλματα ποδῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς σωτηρίαν Ἰσραηλ. ^e ἀλλὰ ἐποίησα τοῦτο, ἵνα μὴ θῶ δόξαν ἀνθρώπου ὑπεράνω δόξης Θεοῦ, καὶ οὐ προσκυνήσω οὐδένα πλὴν σοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου καὶ οὐ ποιήσω αὐτὰ ἐν ὑπερηφανίᾳ.

^f καὶ νῦν, κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς ὁ Θεὸς Ἀβρααμ, φεῖσαι τοῦ λαοῦ σου, ὅτι ἐπιβλέπουσιν ἡμῖν εἰς καταφθοράν καὶ ἐπεθύμησαν ἀπολέσαι τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς κληρονομίαν σου. ^g μὴ ὑπερίδῃς τὴν μερίδα σου, ἣν σεαυτῷ ἐλυτρώσω ἐκ γῆς

^{17a} He prayed to the Lord, making mention of all the works of the Lord, saying:

^{17b} “Lord, Lord, Almighty King, everything is subject to your power, and there is no one who can withstand you in your determination to save Israel. ^{17c} You have made heaven and earth, and all the marvels that are under heaven. You are the master of the universe and no one can resist you, Lord. ^{17d} You know all things, you, Lord, know that neither pride, self-esteem nor any love of glory prompted me to do what I have done: to refuse to prostrate myself before proud Haman. I would gladly have kissed the soles of his feet, had this assured the safety of Israel. ^{17e} “But what I have done, I have done, rather than place the glory of a man above the glory of God; and I shall not prostrate myself to anyone except, Lord, to you, and, in so doing, I shall not be acting in pride.

^{17f} “And now, Lord God, King, God of Abraham, spare your people! For their eyes are upon us, there are plans to destroy your ancient heritage. ^{17g} Do not overlook your inheritance, which you redeemed from Egypt to be yours. ^{17h} Hear my

^{17a} Vv. 17a–17i, not in the MT, are included in the Vg (and NRSV) as 13:8–18. Here, we use the LXX numbering scheme (as does the NJB).

^{17b} These prayers are rich in OT piety but they an introspective interest and a concern with self-justification that is not found in the older texts.

^{17c} In place ‘all the marvels’, here following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘every wonderful thing’.

^{17d} The NJB has ‘vainglory’ in place of ‘any love of glory’ (here following the NRSV).

^{17e} The NRSV has ‘see’ instead of ‘place’, here following the NJB.

^{17f} In place of ‘their eyes are upon us’ (literally, ‘they are eyeing us’), here following the NRSV, the NJB has ‘they are plotting our ruin’.

^{17g} ‘Overlook your inheritance’ follows the NJB; the NRSV has ‘neglect your portion’.

^{17h} The NRSV has ‘prayer’ in place of ‘supplication’ (δεήσεως), here following the NJB.

Αἰγύπτου· ^h ἐπάκουσον τῆς δεήσεώς μου καὶ ἰλάσθητι τῷ κλήρῳ σου καὶ στρέψον τὸ πένθος ἡμῶν εἰς εὐωχίαν, ἵνα ζῶντες ὑμνῶμέν σου τὸ ὄνομα, κύριε, καὶ μὴ ἀφανίσῃς στόμα αἰνούντων σοι.

ⁱ καὶ πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ ἐκέκραξαν ἐξ ἰσχύος αὐτῶν, ὅτι θάνατος αὐτῶν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτῶν.

^k Καὶ Εσθὴρ ἡ βασίλισσα κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν ἀγῶνι θανάτου κατελθιμένη καὶ ἀφελομένη τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς δόξης αὐτῆς ἐνεδύσατο ἱμάτια στενοχωρίας καὶ πένθους καὶ ἀντὶ τῶν ὑπερηφάνων ἡδυσμάτων σποδοῦ καὶ κοπριῶν ἔπλησεν τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς ἐταπείνωσεν σφόδρα καὶ πάντα τόπον κόσμου ἀγαλλιάματος αὐτῆς ἔπλησε στρεπτῶν τριχῶν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐδεῖτο κυρίου θεοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ εἶπεν

^l Κύριέ μου ὁ βασιλεὺς ἡμῶν, σὺ εἶ μόνος· βοήθησόν μοι τῇ μόνῃ καὶ μὴ ἐχούσῃ βοηθὸν εἰ μὴ σέ, ὅτι κίνδυνός μου ἐν χειρὶ μου. ^m ἐγὼ ἤκουον ἐκ γενετῆς μου ἐν φυλῇ πατριᾶς μου ὅτι σύ, κύριε, ἔλαβες τὸν Ἰσραὴλ ἐκ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν ἐκ πάντων τῶν προγόνων αὐτῶν εἰς κληρονομίαν αἰώνιον καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοῖς ὅσα ἐλάλ-ησας.

ⁿ καὶ νῦν ἡμάρτομεν ἐνώπιόν σου, καὶ παρέδωκας ἡμᾶς εἰς χεῖρας τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἡμῶν, ἀνθ' ὧν ἐδοξάσαμεν τοὺς θεοὺς

supplication, have mercy on your heritage, and turn our grief into rejoicing, so that we may live, Lord, and sing praise to your name. Do not suffer the mouths of those who praise you to perish.”

¹⁷ⁱ Then, all Israel cried out with all their might, since death was staring them in the face.

^{17k} Queen Esther also took refuge in the Lord, in the mortal peril that had overtaken her. She took off her sumptuous robes and put on sorrowful mourning. Instead of expensive perfumes, she covered her head with ashes and dung. She mortified her body severely, and the former scenes of her happiness and elegance were now littered with tresses torn from her hair. She besought the Lord God of Israel in these words:

^{17l} “My Lord, our King, the Only One, help me, for I am alone and have no helper but you and am about to take my life in my hands. ^{17m} I have been taught from infancy in the bosom of my family that you, Lord, have chosen Israel out of all the nations and our ancestors out of all before them, to be your heritage forever; and that you have treated them as you promised.

¹⁷ⁿ “However, we have sinned against you and you have handed us over to our enemies for paying honour to their gods. Lord,

¹⁷ⁱ The NRSV has the more literal ‘before their eyes’ rather than ‘staring them in the face’, here following the *NJB*.

^{17k} Vv. 17k–17z, not present in the *MT*, are included in the *Vg* (and *NRSV*) as 14:1–19. Here, we use the *LXX* numbering scheme (as does the *NJB*).

^{17l} The *NRSV* has ‘you are our only king’ in place of ‘our King, the Only One’, here following the *NJB*.

^{17m} The family was the chief means of transmitting the tradition of the marvels worked by God for his people, the Israelites (see *Dt* 6:20–25).

¹⁷ⁿ Esther’s people’s captivity is due to their sinfulness and idolatry while living in Palestine (*Dn* 9:16) – the Israelites do not deserve to be saved.

αὐτῶν· δίκαιος εἶ, κύριε. ^o καὶ νῦν οὐχ ἱκανώθησαν ἐν πικρασμῷ δουλείας ἡμῶν, ἀλλὰ ἔθηκαν τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὰς χεῖρας τῶν εἰδώλων αὐτῶν ἐξᾶραι ὀρισμὸν στόματός σου καὶ ἀφανίσαι κληρονομίαν σου καὶ ἐμφράξαι στόμα αἰνούντων σοι καὶ σβέσαι δόξαν οἴκου σου καὶ θυσιαστήριόν σου ^p καὶ ἀνοῖξαι στόμα ἐθνῶν εἰς ἀρετὰς ματαίων καὶ θανατοῦν βασιλέα σάρκινον εἰς αἰῶνα.

^q μὴ παραδῶς, κύριε, τὸ σκῆπτρόν σου τοῖς μὴ οὖσιν, καὶ μὴ καταγελασάτωσαν ἐν τῇ πτώσει ἡμῶν, ἀλλὰ στρέψον τὴν βουλήν σου αὐτῶν ἐπ' αὐτούς, τὸν δὲ ἀρξάμενον ἐφ' ἡμᾶς παραδειγματίσιν. ^r μνήσθητι, κύριε, γνώσθητι ἐν καιρῷ θλίψεως ἡμῶν καὶ ἐμὲ θάρσυνον, βασιλεῦ τῶν θεῶν καὶ πάσης ἀρχῆς ἐπικρατῶν. ^s δὸς λόγον εὐρυθυμον εἰς τὸ στόμα μου ἐνώπιον τοῦ λέοντος καὶ μετάθες τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ εἰς μῖσος τοῦ πολεμοῦντος ἡμᾶς εἰς συντέλειαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ὁμονοούντων αὐτῷ. ^t ἡμᾶς δὲ ῥῦσαι ἐν χειρὶ σου καὶ βοηθήσόν μοι τῇ μόνῃ καὶ μὴ ἐχούσῃ εἰ μὴ σέ, κύριε. ^u πάντων γινώσκεις καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἐμίσησα δόξαν ἀνόμων καὶ βδελύσσομαι κοίτην ἀπεριτμήτων καὶ παντὸς ἀλλοτρίου.

you are upright. ^{17o} But they are not satisfied with the bitterness of our slavery: they have pledged themselves to their idols to abolish the decree that you own lips have uttered, to blot out your heritage, to stop the mouths of those who praise you, to quench your altar and the glory of your House, ^{17p} and instead to open the mouths of the heathen, to sing the praise of worthless idols and forever to idolise a king of flesh.

^{17q} “Do not yield your sceptre, Lord, to what does not exist. Never let our ruin be matter for laughter. Turn these plots against their authors and make an example of the man who leads the attack on us. ^{17r} Remember, Lord; reveal yourself in the time of our distress. As for me, give me courage, King of Gods and Master of all powers! ^{17s} Put persuasive words into my mouth when I face the lion; change his feeling into hatred for our enemy, so that he may meet his end, and all those like him! ^{17t} As for ourselves, save us by your hand, and come to my help, for I am alone and have no helper but you, Lord. ^{17u} You have knowledge of all things, and you know that I hate honours from the godless, that I loathe the bed of the uncircumcised, of any foreigner whatever.

^{17o} In place of ‘bitterness of our slavery’, following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘our bitter slavery’.

^{17p} The NRSV has ‘nations’ in place of ‘the heathen’ and ‘mortal king’ rather than ‘king of flesh’, both here following the NJB.

^{17q} Esther begs God not to allow pagan idols, which have no real existence, to rule the world.

^{17r} The NRSV does not capitalise ‘Gods’, nor the NJB ‘Master’.

^{17s} The NRSV has ‘eloquent speech’ in place of ‘persuasive words’, her following the NJB.

^{17t} ‘Helper’ here follows the NRSV; the NJB has ‘one’.

^{17u} Esther says that she hates her position as queen and wife of the king.

^w σὺ οἶδας τὴν ἀνάγκην μου, ὅτι βδελύσσομαι τὸ σημεῖον τῆς ὑπερηφανίας μου, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου ἐν ἡμέραις ὀπτασίας μου· βδελύσσομαι αὐτὸ ὡς ῥάκος καταμηνίων καὶ οὐ φορῶ αὐτὸ ἐν ἡμέραις ἡσυχίας μου. ^x καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν ἡ δούλη σου τράπεζαν Ἀμαν καὶ οὐκ ἐδόξασα συμπόσιον βασιλέως οὐδὲ ἔπιον οἶνον σπονδῶν·

^y καὶ οὐκ ἠύφρανθην ἡ δούλη σου ἀφ' ἡμέρας μεταβολῆς μου μέχρι νῦν πλὴν ἐπὶ σοί, κύριε ὁ Θεὸς Ἀβρααμ. ^z ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ἰσχύων ἐπὶ πάντα, εἰσάκουσον φωνὴν ἀπηλπισμένων καὶ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἐκ χειρὸς τῶν πονηρευομένων· καὶ ῥῦσαί με ἐκ τοῦ φόβου μου.

^{17w} “You know I am under constraint, that I loathe the symbol of my high position bound round my brow when I appear at court; I loathe it as if it were a filthy rag and do not wear it on my days of leisure. ^{17x} Your servant has not eaten at Haman’s table, nor taken pleasure in the royal banquets, nor drunk the wine of libations.

^{17y} “Nor has your servant found pleasure, from the day of her promotion until now, except in you, Lord, God of Abraham.

^{17z} O God, whose strength prevails over all, listen to the voice of the desperate, save us from the hand of the wicked, and free me from my fear!”

^{17w} The NRSV opens this verse, here following the NJB, with, “You know my necessity, that I abhor the symbol...”

^{17x} On Esther’s claim not to have eaten at Haman’s table, compare 2:18, 5:5 and 7:1.

^{17y} The NRSV opens this verse, here following the NJB, with, “Your servant has had no joy since the day that I was brought here until now...”

^{17z} The NRSV ends this verse, here following the NJB, with, “... and save us from the hands of evildoers; and save me from my fear.”

הסתר פרק ה

^{1a} καὶ γενηθεῖσα ἐπιφανῆς ἐπικαλεσαμένη τὸν πάντων ἐπόπτην Θεὸν καὶ σωτῆρα παρέλαβεν τὰς δύο ἄβρας καὶ τῇ μὲν μιᾷ ἐπηρείδετο ὡς τρυφερευομένη, ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα ἐπηκολούθει κουφίζουσα τὴν ἔνδυσιν αὐτῆς, ^b καὶ αὐτὴ ἐρυθριῶσα ἀκμῇ κάλλους αὐτῆς, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ἱλαρὸν ὡς προσφιλές, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῆς ἀπεστενωμένη ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου. ^c καὶ εἰσελθοῦσα πάσας τὰς θύρας κατέστη ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκάθητο ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσαν στολὴν τῆς ἐπιφανείας αὐτοῦ ἐνεδεδύκει, ὅλος διὰ χρυσοῦ καὶ λίθων πολυτελῶν, καὶ ἦν φοβερὸς σφόδρα. ^d καὶ ἄρας τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πεπυρωμένον δόξῃ ἐν ἀκμῇ θυμοῦ ἔβλεψεν, καὶ ἔπεσεν ἡ βασίλισσα καὶ μετέβαλεν τὸ χρῶμα αὐτῆς ἐν ἐκλύσει καὶ κατεπέκυψεν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς ἄβρας τῆς προπορευομένης. ^e καὶ μετέβαλεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς πραύτητα, καὶ ἀγωνιάσας ἀνεπήδησεν ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνέλαβεν αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τὰς ἀγκάλας αὐτοῦ,

ESTHER 5

^{1a} On the third day, when she ended her prayer, she took off her suppliant's mourning attire and dressed herself in her full splendour. Radiant as she then appeared, she invoked God, who watches over all people and saves them. With her, she took her two maids; with a delicate air, she leaned on one, while the other followed, carrying her train. ^{1b} Rosy with the full flush of her beauty, her face radiated joy and love: but her heart shrank with fear. ^{1c} When she had gone through all the doors, she stood before the king. He was sitting on his royal throne, dressed in all his robes of state, glittering with gold and precious stones – a formidable sight. ^{1d} He looked up, afire with majesty and, blazing with anger, saw her. The queen sank to the floor. As she fainted, the colour drained from her face and her head fell against the maid beside her. ^{1e} Then God changed the king's heart, inducing a milder spirit. He sprang from his throne in alarm and took her in his arms until she recovered, comforting

ESTHER 5

- ^{1a} Vv. 1^a–1^f are included in the Vg (and NRSV) as 15:1–10; here, we use the LXX (Rahlfs) numbering scheme. Unlike the other Greek 'additions' to, the MT versions of 5:1–2 are *replaced* in the LXX; both are included herein. The expansion brings out religious elements absent from the MT.
- ^{1b} Anyone who entered the king's presence without his summons or permission was put to death unless the king forgave them (4:11). To avoid this danger, Esther enhanced her charm by splendid attire; then, with fearful heart, she entered the king's presence.
- ^{1c} For the opening sentence of this verse, here following the NRSV, the NJB reads, "Having passed through door after door, she found herself in the presence of the king."
- ^{1d} For the opening sentence of this verse, here following the NJB, the NRSV reads, "Lifting his face, flushed with splendour, he looked at her in fierce anger."
- ^{1e} That God changed the king's heart is nowhere indicated in the MT.

μέχρις οὗ κατέστη, καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτήν λόγοις εἰρηνικοῖς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ^f Τί ἐστίν, Εσθέρ; ἐγὼ ὁ ἀδελφός σου, θάρσει, οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνης, ὅτι κοινὸν τὸ πρόσταγμα ἡμῶν ἐστίν· πρόσελθε.^{2a} καὶ ἄρας τὴν χρυσὴν ῥάβδον ἐπέθηκεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτῆς καὶ ἡσπάσατο αὐτήν καὶ εἶπεν Λάλησόν μοι.^b καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Εἰδὼν σε, κύριε, ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ, καὶ ἐταράχθη ἡ καρδιά μου ἀπὸ φόβου τῆς δόξης σου· ὅτι θαυμαστός εἶ, κύριε, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπόν σου χαρίτων μεστόν.^c ἐν δὲ τῷ διαλέγεσθαι αὐτήν ἔπεσεν ἀπὸ ἐκλύσεως αὐτῆς, καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐταράσσεται, καὶ πᾶσα ἡ θραπεία αὐτοῦ παρεκάλει αὐτήν.

her with soothing words. ^{1f} “What is the matter, Esther?” he said. “I am your brother. Take heart, you are not going to die; our order applies only to ordinary people. Come to me.”

^{2a} Raising his golden sceptre, he laid it on Esther’s neck, embraced her and said, “Speak to me.” ^{2b} “Sire,” she said, “to me you looked like one of God’s angels, and my heart was moved with fear of your majesty. For you are a figure of wonder, my lord, and your face is full of graciousness.”

^{2c} However, as she spoke, she fell down in a faint. The king grew more agitated, and his courtiers all set about reviving her.

וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַתִּלְבַּשׂ אֶסְתֵּר מַלְכוּת וַתַּעֲמֵד בַּחצֵר בֵּית-הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּנִימִית נֹכַח בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ בְּבֵית הַמַּלְכוּת נֹכַח פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת: ^ב וַיְהִי כִּרְאוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עֹמֶדֶת בַּחצֵר נִשְׂאָה חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּשָּׂט הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר אֶת-שִׁרְבִיט הַזֶּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ וַתִּקְרַב אֶסְתֵּר וַתַּגֵּעַ בְּרֹאשׁ הַשִּׁרְבִיט:

¹ Now, on the third day, Esther put on her royal apparel and presented herself in the inner court of the palace, which was in front of the king’s apartments. The king was sitting on his royal throne inside the Royal Hall, opposite the entrance to the palace. ² No sooner had the king seen Queen Esther, standing in the court, than she won favour in his sight, and the king held out to her the golden sceptre he was holding in his hand. Then, Esther approached and touched the end of the sceptre.

^{1f} The NRSV emends ‘brother’ to ‘husband’. The exact meaning of ‘ordinary people’ (following the NJB – the NRSV has ‘our subjects’) is uncertain.

^{2a} Vv. 2a–2c are included in the Vg (and NRSV) as 15:11–16; here, we use the LXX numbers (as does the NJB).

^{2b} The comparison to ‘one of God’s angels’ is pure flattery.

^{2c} The NRSV, following the Vg, splits this verse in two:

¹⁸ *Cumque loqueretur, rursus corruit, et pene exanimata est.* ¹⁹ *Rex autem turbabatur, et omnes ministri ejus consolabantur eam.*

¹⁵ *And while she was speaking, she fainted and fell.* ¹⁶ *Then the king was agitated, and all his servants tried to comfort her.*”

¹ The expression מַלְכוּת (*the king’s house*) is used twice in this verse: in the 1st instance (*‘palace’*), it is apparently the large palace complex that is in view, whereas in the 2nd instance (*‘Royal Hall’*), it seems to refer specifically to the quarters from which the king governed. See also #1a.

² See the footnotes to 1a and 2a.

⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ מֵהַלֵּךְ אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וּמֵה־
בִּקְשָׁתָךְ עַד־חֲצֵי הַמַּלְכוּת וַיִּנָּתֶן לָּהּ: ⁵ וְתֹאמַר
אֶסְתֵּר אֶם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יָבוֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּן הַיּוֹם
אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתָּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ: ⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ
מִהֲרוּ אֶת־הַמֶּן לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־דְּבַר אֶסְתֵּר וַיָּבֹא
הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּן אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתָּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה אֶסְתֵּר:

⁷ וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר בְּמִשְׁתָּה הַיּוֹם מֵה־שְּׁאֵלָתְךָ
וַיִּנָּתֶן לָּהּ וּמֵה־בִּקְשָׁתְךָ עַד־חֲצֵי הַמַּלְכוּת וְתַעֲשֵׂ:
⁸ וְתִתֵּן אֶסְתֵּר וְתֹאמַר שְׁאֵלָתִי וּבִקְשָׁתִי: ⁹ אֶם־
מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב לָתֵת
אֶת־שְׁאֵלָתִי וְלַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־בִּקְשָׁתִי יָבוֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְהַמֶּן אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתָּה אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה לָּהֶם וּמִחָר
אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּדִבְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:

¹⁰ וַיֵּצֵא הַמֶּן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא שִׂמְחָה וְטוֹב לֵב וּכְרָאוֹת
הַמֶּן אֶת־מֶרְדֳּכָי בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלֹא־קָם וְלֹא־זָעַ

³ “What is the matter with you, Queen Esther?” the king said. “Tell me what you want; even if it is half my kingdom, I will grant it you.”

⁴ “Would it please the king,” Esther replied, “to come with Haman today to the banquet I have prepared for him?” ⁵ The king said, “Tell Haman to come at once, so that Esther may have her wish.” So, the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared

⁶ During the banquet, the king again said to Esther, “Tell me your request; I grant it to you. Tell me what you want; even if it is half my kingdom, it is yours for the asking.” ⁷ “What do I want, what is my request?” Esther replied, ⁸ “If I have found favour in the king’s eyes, and if it is his pleasure to grant what I ask and to agree to my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet I intend to give them tomorrow, and then I shall do as the king says.”

⁹ Haman left full of joy and high spirits that day; but when Haman saw Mordecai at the Chancellery, neither rising nor stirring before him, he

³ ‘Half my kingdom’ is a customary hyperbole (cf. Mk 6:23).

⁴ No reason is needed for these banquets (here and at v. 8), nor for Haman being the only guest; these are but embellishments to the story.

⁵ The NJB includes the last sentence in v. 6; here, we follow the MT and NRSV.

⁶ The expression, ‘half my kingdom’ would no doubt have been understood for the exaggeration that it clearly was (cf. Mk 6:23, where Herod makes a similar promise to the daughter of Herodias. There, she asked for the head of John the Baptist, a far cry from half the kingdom).

⁷ The LXX does not present this as a rhetorical question: “And she said, ‘My petition and request is:’” (καὶ εἶπεν Τὸ αἴτημά μου καὶ τὸ ἀξίωμά μου.)

⁸ The LXX version ends slightly differently: “If I have found favour in the sight of the king, let the king and Haman come to the dinner that I shall prepare them, and tomorrow I will do as I have done today.” (εἰ εὖρον χάριν ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως, ἐλθάτω ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ Ἀμαν ἐπὶ τὴν αὔριον εἰς τὴν δοχὴν, ἣν ποιήσω αὐτοῖς, καὶ αὔριον ποιήσω τὰ αὐτά.)

⁹ After ‘Mordecai’, the LXX adds ‘the Jew’ (τὸν Ἰουδαῖον) – cf. v. 13.

מִמֶּנּוּ וַיִּמְלֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל־מֶרְדֵּכַי חֲמָה: 'וַיִּתְאַפֵּק הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיָּבֹא אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיָּבֵא אֶת־אֶהָבִיו וְאֶת־זֶרֶשׁ
אִשְׁתּוֹ: ^א וַיְסַפֵּר לָהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־כְּבוֹד עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרֹב
בָּנָיו וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר גָּדְלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ
עַל־הַשָּׂרִים וְעַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: ^ב וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵף לֹא־
הִבִּיֵּאָה אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתָּה
אֲשֶׁר־עֹשָׂתָה כִּי אִם־אוֹתִי וְגַם־לְמַחֵר אֲנִי קְרוֹא־
לָהּ עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ: ^ג וְכֹל־זֶה אֵינְנוּ שׁוֹה לִי בְּכָל־עֵת
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי רֹאֶה אֶת־מֶרְדֵּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר
הַמֶּלֶךְ: ^ד וְתֹאמַר לוֹ זֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֶהָבָיו יַעֲשׂוּ־
עִץ גָּבֹהַ חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה וּבִבְקָר | אָמַר לַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּתְּלוּ
אֶת־מֶרְדֵּכַי עָלָיו וּבֹא־עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתָּה
שָׂמַח וַיִּיטֵב הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ הַעֵץ: {ס}

felt a gust of anger. ¹⁰ He restrained himself, however. Returning home, he sent for his friends and Zeresh his wife ¹¹ and held forth to them about his dazzling wealth, his many children, how the king had raised him to a position of honour and promoted him over the heads of the king's officers-of-state and ministers. ¹² "What is more," he added, "Queen Esther has just invited me and the king – no one else except me – to a banquet she was giving, and better still, she has invited me and the king again tomorrow. ¹³ But what do I care about all this, when all the while I can see Mordecai the Jew sitting there at the Chancellery?" ¹⁴ "Have a fifty-cubit gallows run up," said Zeresh his wife and all his friends, "and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then you can go with the king to the banquet, without a care in the world!" Delighted with this advice, Haman had the gallows erected.

¹⁰ The LXX rendering for 'Zeresh' is *Zωσαρα* ('Zosara').

¹¹ Haman's boasting before his friends (the same as in 6:13) will make his subsequent fall even more ironic.

¹² This verse is rather shorter in the LXX: "And Haman said, 'The queen did not invite anyone to dinner with the king except me; and I am invited again tomorrow.'" (*καὶ εἶπεν Αμαν Οὐ κέκληκεν ἡ βασίλισσα μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως οὐδένα εἰς τὴν δοχὴν ἀλλ' ἢ ἐμέ, καὶ εἰς τὴν αὐριον κέκλημαι*.)

¹³ The LXX has 'courtyard' (*αὐλῇ*) in place of 'Chancellery'.

¹⁴ The gallows of 'fifty cubits' (over 20 metres) is hyperbole for literary effect. Haman could prepare this, but only the monarch could condemn anyone to death.

אסתר פרק ו

א בַּלַּיְלָהָ הַהוּא נִדְּדָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לְהַבִּיא
אֶת־סֵפֶר הַזְכָּרֹנוֹת דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים וַיְהִיו נִקְרָאִים
לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: ב וַיִּמָּצֵא כָּתוּב אֲשֶׁר הִגִּיד מֶרְדֳּכָי עַל־
בְּגָתָנָא וְתֶרֶשׁ שְׁנֵי סְרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁמָרֵי הַסֵּף
אֲשֶׁר בִּקְשׁוּ לְשַׁלַּח יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשׁוּרוֹשׁ: ג וַיֹּאמֶר
הַמֶּלֶךְ מִה־נִּעֲשְׂהָ יָקָר וּגְדוּלָּה לְמֶרְדֳּכָי עַל־זֶה
וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁרָתָיו לֹא־נַעֲשֶׂה עִמּוֹ דָּבָר:
ד וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מִי בַּחֲצֵר וְהֵמָּן בָּא לַחֲצֵר בֵּית־
הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחִיצוֹנָה לֵאמֹר לַמֶּלֶךְ לְתִלּוֹת אֶת־מֶרְדֳּכָי
עַל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־הֵכִין לוֹ:

ה וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלָיו הִנֵּה הֵמָּן עֹמֵד בַּחֲצֵר
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ יָבוֹא: ו וַיָּבֹא הֵמָּן וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ

ESTHER 6

¹ That night, the king could not sleep; he called for the Record Book, or Annals, to be brought and read to him. ² It was found written how Mordecai had reported Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold and had plotted to kill King Ahasuerus. ³ The king asked, "What honour and dignity was conferred on Mordecai for this?" "Nothing has been done for him," the gentlemen-in-waiting replied. ⁴ The king then said, "Who is outside in the court?" Haman had, just then, entered the outer antechamber of the private apartments, to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had just put up for the purpose. ⁵ Therefore, the king's gentlemen-in-waiting replied, "It is Haman out in the antechamber." "Bring him in," the king said ⁶ and, as soon as

ESTHER 6

¹ The LXX opens, Ὁ δὲ κύριος ἀπέστειλε τὸν ὕπνον ἀπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως τὴν νύκτα ἐκείνην ("That night, the Lord took sleep from the king").

² In place of בְּגָתָנָא ('Bigthana') (here following the MT), the NJB has 'Bigthan', for which it is an alternate spelling (cf. 2:21).

³ The author of the MT is unaware of the tradition preserved in the LXX (see 1:1q).

⁴ In the LXX, this verse is somewhat longer: ἐν δὲ τῷ πυλῶνι τὸν βασιλέα περὶ τῆς εὐνοίας Μαρδοχαίου ἰδοὺ Ἀμαν ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ· εἶπεν δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς Τίς ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ; ὁ δὲ Ἀμαν εἰσῆλθεν εἰπεῖν τῷ βασιλεῖ κρεμάσαι τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον ἐπὶ τῷ ξύλῳ, ᾧ ἡτοίμασεν. ("While the king was inquiring about the goodwill shown by Mordecai, Haman was in the courtyard. The king asked, 'Who is in the courtyard?' Now Haman had come to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared.")

⁵ For this verse, the LXX (NRSV) reads: καὶ εἶπαν οἱ διάκονοι τοῦ βασιλέως Ἴδου Ἀμαν ἑστῆκεν ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ· καὶ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεὺς Καλέσατε αὐτόν. ("The servants of the king answered, 'Haman is standing in the courtyard.' And the king said, 'Summon him.'").

⁶ For this verse, the LXX (NRSV) reads: εἶπεν δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῷ Ἀμαν Τί ποιήσω τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, ὃν ἐγὼ θέλω δοξάσαι; εἶπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ Ἀμαν Τίνα θέλει ὁ βασιλεὺς δοξάσαι εἰ μὴ ἐμέ; ("Then the king said to Haman, 'What shall I do for the person whom I wish to honour?' And Haman said to himself, 'Whom would the king wish to honour more than me?'")

מֵה־לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
הֵמָּן בְּלִבּוֹ לִמִּי יַחֲפֹץ הַמֶּלֶךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת יָקָר יוֹתֵר
מִמֶּנִּי: ^ז וַיֹּאמֶר הֵמָּן אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ
חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ: ^ח יָבִיאוּ לְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לְבִשְׁבוֹ
הַמֶּלֶךְ וְסוֹס אֲשֶׁר רֹכֵב עָלָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֲשֶׁר נָתַן בְּתֵר
מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשׁוֹ: ^ט וְנָתַן הַלְבוּשׁ וְהַסּוֹס עַל־יַד־
אִישׁ מִשָּׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּרָתָמִים וְהַלְבִּישׁוּ אֶת־הָאִישׁ
אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ וְהִרְכִּיבֵהוּ עַל־הַסּוֹס
בְּרֹחוֹב הָעִיר וְקָרְאוּ לִפְנֵיו בְּכָה יַעֲשֶׂה לָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר
הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ: ^י וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהֵמָּן מָה־רַחֵם
אֶת־הַלְבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַסּוֹס כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ וַעֲשֵׂה־כֵן
לְמִרְדֵּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי הַיּוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־תִּפְּל
דְּבַר מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:

^{יא} וַיִּקַּח הֵמָּן אֶת־הַלְבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַסּוֹס וַיִּלְבֹּשׁ אֶת־
מִרְדֵּכָי וַיִּרְכִּיבֵהוּ בְּרֹחוֹב הָעִיר וַיִּקְרָא לִפְנֵיו בְּכָה

Haman came in, went on to ask, "What is the right way to treat a man the king wishes to honour" "Whom," thought Haman, "would the king wish to honour, if not me?" ⁷ So, he said, "If the king wishes to honour someone, ⁸ royal robes should be brought from the king's wardrobe, and a horse from the king's stable, sporting a royal diadem on its head. ⁹ The robes and horse should be entrusted to one of the noblest of the king's officers-of-state, who should then clothe the man whom the king wishes to honour and lead him on horseback through the city square, proclaiming before him, "This is the way a man shall be treated whom the king wishes to honour." ¹⁰ "Hurry," the king said to Haman, "take the robes and the horse, and do everything you have just said to Mordecai the Jew, who works at the Chancellery. On no account leave anything out that you have mentioned."

¹¹ Therefore, taking the robes and the horse, Haman arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square, proclaiming before

⁷ For this verse, the LXX (NRSV) reads: εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα Ἄνθρωπον, ὃν ὁ βασιλεὺς θέλει δοξάσαι, ("He said to the king, 'For a person the king wishes to honour.'").

⁸ The 'royal diadem' here was an ornament for the horse, such as is pictured on monuments; this last clause is not present in the LXX.

⁹ The verb וְהַלְבִּישׁוּ ('who shall then clothe'), plural in the MT, is singular in the LXX (καὶ στολισάτω).

¹⁰ This is one of the many dramatic reversals in the book and clearly foreshadows the ultimate triumph of Mordecai and his people.

¹¹ For this verse, the LXX (NRSV) reads:

ἔλαβεν δὲ Ἀμαν τὴν στολὴν καὶ τὸν ἵππον καὶ ἐστόλισεν τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον καὶ ἀνέβιβασεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸν ἵππον καὶ διῆλθεν διὰ τῆς πλατείας τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἐκήρυσσε λέγων Οὕτως ἔσται παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ, ὃν ὁ βασιλεὺς θέλει δοξάσαι. ("So, Haman got the robe and the horse; he put the robe on Mordecai and made him ride through the open square of the city, proclaiming, 'Thus it shall be done to everyone whom the king wishes to honour.'")

יַעֲשֶׂה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ: ^{יב} וַיָּשָׁב
 מִרְדֵּכָי אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן נִדְחָף אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ אֲבָל
 וַחֲפוּי רֹאשׁ: ^{יג} וַיְסַפֵּר הָמָן לְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וּלְכָל־
 אֲהָבָיו אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ חֲכָמָיו וְזֶרֶשׁ
 אִשְׁתּוֹ אִם מִזֶּרַע הַיְּהוּדִים מִרְדֵּכָי אֲשֶׁר הִחְלוֹתָ
 לְנַפֵּל לִפְנָיו לֹא־תֻכַּל לוֹ כִּי־נִפּוֹל תִּפּוֹל לִפְנָיו:
^{יד} עוֹדָם מְדַבְּרִים עָמְדוּ וְסָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הִגִּיעוּ וַיְבַהֲלוּ
 לְהַבִּיאַ אֶת־הָמָן אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה
 אֶסְתֵּר:

him: “This is the way a man shall be treated whom the king wishes to honour.” ¹² After this, Mordecai returned to the Chancellery, while Haman went hurrying home in dejection and covering his head. ¹³ He told his wife Zeresh and all his friends what just happened. His wife Zeresh and his friends said, “You are beginning to fall, and Mordecai to rise; if he is Jewish, you will never get the better of him. With him against you, your fall is certain.” ¹⁴ While they were still talking, the king’s eunuchs arrived in a hurry to escort Haman to the banquet that Esther was giving.

¹² Covering the head was a sign of grief (2S 15:30, Jr 14:4).

¹³ At the end of this verse, the LXX (and NJB) adds ‘for the living God is with him’ (ὅτι θεὸς ζῶν μετ’ αὐτοῦ). The MT (followed here) merely hints at the outcome without explicitly mentioning God’s help.

¹⁴ It was a Middle Eastern custom for guests to be brought to an entertainment (Lk 14:17).

אסתר פרק ז

א וַיָּבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן לִשְׁתּוֹת עִם-אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה:
ב וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר גַּם בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי בַּמִּשְׁתָּה
הַזֶּה מִה-שְּׂאֵלְתְּךָ אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְתַנֶּתְנִי לָךְ וּמִה-
בְּקִשְׁתְּךָ עַד-חֲצֵי הַמַּלְכוּת וְתַעֲשֶׂה: ג וְתֵעַן אֶסְתֵּר
הַמַּלְכָּה וְתֹאמַר אֶם-מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְאִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב תִּנָּתֵן-לִי נַפְשִׁי בְּשֵׂאֵלְתִּי וְעַמִּי
בְּבִקְשָׁתִּי: ד כִּי נִמְכְּרָנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרְגוֹ
וּלְאַבֵּד וְאֵלּוּ לְעַבְדִּים וּלְשִׁפְחוֹת נִמְכְּרָנוּ הַחֲרָשְׁתִּי
כִּי אֵין הָצָר שׁוּהָ בְּנֹזֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ: {ס}

ה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשׁוּרוֹשׁ וַיֹּאמֶר לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
מִי הוּא זֶה וְאִי-זֶה הוּא אֲשֶׁר-מָלְאוּ לְבָבוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת
כֵּן: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִישׁ צָר וְאוֹיֵב הָמָן הָרֵעַ הַזֶּה

ESTHER 7

¹ The king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet. ² On this second day, during the banquet, the king again said to Esther, "What is your request, Queen Esther, I grant it to you. Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be granted." ³ Queen Esther replied, "If I have won your favour, O king, and if it pleases the king, grant me my life – that is my request, and the lives of my people – that is what I want. ⁴ For we have been sold, my people and I, to destruction, death and annihilation; had we merely been sold as slaves and servant-girls, I should not have said anything; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king."

⁵ King Ahasuerus interrupted Queen Esther, "Who is this man?" he exclaimed. "Where is the man who has thought of doing such a thing?"

⁶ Esther replied, "The persecutor, the enemy? Why, this wretch

ESTHER 7

¹ The literal translation of this verse is, "The king and Haman went in to drink (together) with Queen Esther."

² The LXX opens, "And the king said to Esther on the second day, as they were drinking wine:". εἶπεν δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἐσθῆρ τῇ δευτέρῃ ἡμέρῃ ἐν τῷ πότῳ

³ The LXX version of this verse is rather shorter:

καὶ ἀποκριθεῖσα εἶπεν Εἰ εὖρον χάριν ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως, δοθήτω ἡ ψυχὴ μου τῷ αἰτήματί μου καὶ ὁ λαός μου τῷ ἀξιώματί μου.

She answered and said, "If I have found favour with the king, let my life be granted me at my petition, and my people at my request."

⁴ The meaning of the Hebrew for the end of the verse is uncertain (here, we follow the NRSV) – the LXX has: οὐ γὰρ ἄξιος ὁ διάβολος τῆς αὐλῆς τοῦ βασιλέως (literally, 'for our antagonist is not worthy of the courtyard of the king').

⁵ The 2nd occurrence of the verb וַיֹּאמֶר ('and he said') in the MT is unnecessary in the context and is probably dittography.

⁶ For this verse, the LXX (NRSV) reads:

εἶπεν δὲ Ἐσθῆρ Ἀνθρῶπος ἐχθρὸς Ἀμαν ὁ πονηρὸς οὗτος. Ἀμαν δὲ ἐταράχθη ἀπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ τῆς βασιλίσσης.

Esther said, "Our enemy is this evil man Haman!" At this, Haman was terrified in the presence of the king and queen.

וְהָמָן נִבְעַת מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמַּלְכָּה: ^ז וְהַמֶּלֶךְ קָם
בַּחֲמָתוֹ מִמִּשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן אֶל־גִּנַּת הַבַּיִת וְהָמָן עָמַד
לְבַקֵּשׁ עַל־נַפְשׁוֹ מֵאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה כִּי רָאָה כִּי־
כָלְתָה אֵלָיו הָרָעָה מֵאֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ:

^ח וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁב מִגִּנַּת הַבַּיִת אֶל־בֵּית | מִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן
וְהָמָן נָפַל עַל־הַמֶּטֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶסְתֵּר עָלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר
הַמֶּלֶךְ הֲגַם לְכַבּוֹשׁ אֶת־הַמַּלְכָּה עָמִי בַּבַּיִת הַדָּבָר
יֵצֵא מִפִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּפְנֵי הָמָן חָפוּ: ^ט וַיֹּאמֶר חַרְבוֹנָה
אֶחָד מִן־הַסֵּרִיסִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ גַּם הִנֵּה־הָעֵץ
אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָמָן לְמָרְדֳּכָי אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר־טוֹב עַל־
הַמֶּלֶךְ עָמַד בַּבַּיִת הָמָן גְּבוּהַ חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה וַיֹּאמֶר
הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּלְהוּ עָלָיו: ^י וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת־הָמָן עַל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־
הָכִין לְמָרְדֳּכָי וַחֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁכְכָה: {ס}

Haman!" Haman quaked with terror in the presence of the king and queen. ⁷ In a rage, the king got up from the banquet and went into the palace garden, while Haman, realising that the king was determined on his ruin, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

⁸ When the king came back from the palace garden into the banqueting hall, Haman was sprawled across the couch where Esther was reclining. The king said. "What! Is he going to rape the queen in my own palace?" As the words left his mouth, they covered Haman's face. ⁹ In the royal presence, Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "There is that fifty-cubit gallows, which Haman made for Mordecai, whose word saved the king. It is all ready at his house." "Hang him on it," said the king. ¹⁰ So, they hanged Haman on the gallows he had built for Mordecai and the king's wrath subsided.

⁷ There is great irony here in that the man who set out to destroy all the Jews now begs for his own life from a Jew.

⁸ To throw oneself as a suppliant at someone's feet was a common custom (8:3, 1S 25:23–24, 2K 4:27, Mk 7:25), but even *touching* the queen's couch was a violation of harem law. The action of throwing the veil over Haman's face was equivalent to a death sentence: people who were going to be hanged had their heads covered.

⁹ The NJB lacks 'in attendance on the king', here following the NRSV. It was inevitable that some servant would think of this as 'poetic justice'. The LXX has *Βουγαθαν* (*Bugathan*) in place of 'Harbona' (חרבוֹנָה) (cf. 1:10, where he is one of the seven named Eunuchs).

¹⁰ Compare the saying about people who fall into a pit they themselves have dug (Ps 7:16, 9:16, 35:7–8, 57:6, Pr 26:27, 28:10, Qo 10:8, Si 27:26).

ESTHER 8

אסתר פרק ח

^א בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשֻׁרוּשׁ לְאַסְתֵּר
הַמִּלְכָּה אֶת־בֵּית הָמָן צָרָר הַיְּהוּדִים
וּמֶרְדֵּכַי בָּא לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר מָה
הוּא־לָהּ: ^ב וַיֹּסֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־טִבַּעְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הָעֵבִיר
מֵהָמָן וַיִּתְּנָהּ לְמֶרְדֵּכַי וַתִּשֶׂם אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־מֶרְדֵּכַי
עַל־בֵּית הָמָן: {ס}

^ג וַתּוֹסֶף אֶסְתֵּר וַתְּדַבֵּר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַתִּפֹּל לִפְנֵי
רַגְלָיו וַתִּבְדֹּךְ וַתַּחֲנוּן־לוֹ לְהַעֲבִיר אֶת־דַּעַת הָמָן
הָאֲגָגִי וְאֵת מַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים:
^ד וַיּוֹשֶׁט הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְתֵּר אֵת שֵׁרֶבֶט הַזָּהָב וַתִּקֶּם
אֶסְתֵּר וַתַּעֲמֵד לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: ^ה וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־עַל־
הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב וְאִם־מַצָּאתִי חֵן לִפְנָיו וְכֹשֶׁר הַדָּבָר
לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְטוֹבָה אֲנִי בְעֵינָיו יִכְתֹּב לְהָשִׁיב אֶת־
הַסְּפָרִים מַחֲשַׁבֶּת הָמָן בֶּן־הַמֵּדָתָא הָאֲגָגִי אֲשֶׁר
כָּתַב לְאַבֵּד אֶת־הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת
הַמֶּלֶךְ: ^ו כִּי אֵיכָכָה אוֹכֵל וְרֹאֵתִי בְרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־

¹ On that same day, King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the persecutor of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Mordecai came before the king, Esther having revealed their mutual relationship. ² Then, the king, who had recovered his signet ring from Haman, took it off and gave it to Mordecai; and, accordingly, Esther gave Mordecai charge of Haman's house.

³ Then Esther again went to speak to the king. She fell at his feet, weeping and imploring his favour, to frustrate the evil design that Haman the Agagite had been plotting against the Jews. ⁴ The king held out the golden sceptre to Esther, whereupon she stood up and faced him. ⁵ "If such is the king's good pleasure," she said, "and if I have found favour before him, if my petition seems proper to him and if I myself am pleasing to his eyes, may he be pleased to issue a written revocation of the letters that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, has had written, ordering the destruction of the Jews throughout the royal provinces. ⁶ For, how can I look on, while my people suffer the

ESTHER 8

¹ The *Kethib/Qere* difference here (replacing a double *yod* with a single in the word for 'the Jews') warrants explanation.

² The transference of the signet ring indicates promotion of Mordecai to Grand Vizier.

³ The LXX has no mention of Esther's 'weeping and imploring his favour'.

⁴ In place of 'she', the MT repeats 'Esther' (אֶסְתֵּר).

⁵ Esther subtly suggests that the edict was not really the king's but devised by Haman.

⁶ In place of 'the calamity that' (following the NRSV), the NJB has 'what'. In place of 'relatives', the LXX has 'country'.

יִמָּצָא אֶת־עַמִּי וְאִיכָכָה אוֹכֵל וְרֹאֲיָתִי בְּאֶבֶדן
מוֹלֶדְתִּי: {ס}

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשׁוּרֶשׁ לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
וּלְמֶרְדֵּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי הִנֵּה בֵּית־הֶמֶן נָתַתִּי לְאַסְתֵּר
וְאַתָּה תָּלוּ עַל־הָעֵץ עַל אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יָדוֹ בִּיהוּדִים
בִּיהוּדִים: ^ח וְאַתָּם כָּתְבוּ עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים כְּטוֹב
בְּעֵינֵיכֶם בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ וְחַתְמוּ בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי־
כָּתָב אֲשֶׁר־נִכְתָּב בְּשֵׁם־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִחְתָּמוֹם בְּטַבַּעַת
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין לְהָשִׁיב: ^ט וַיִּקְרְאוּ סִפְרֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּעַת־
הָהִיא בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ סִיוָן בְּשָׁלוֹשָׁה
וְעֶשְׂרִים בּוֹ וַיִּכְתֹּב כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה מֶרְדֵּכַי אֶל־
הַיְּהוּדִים וְאֶל הָאֲחֻשְׁדָּרפָּנִים־וְהַפְּחוֹת וְשָׂרֵי
הַמְּדִינֹת אֲשֶׁר־מֵהֶדוּ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים
וּמֵאַה מְדִינָה מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כְּכַתְּבָהּ וְעַם וְעַם
כָּל־שָׁנָה וְאֶל־הַיְּהוּדִים כְּכַתְּבָם וְכָל־שָׁנָה: ^י וַיִּכְתֹּב
בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשׁוּרֶשׁ וַיַּחֲתֶם בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּשְׁלַח סִפְרִים בְּיַד הָרָצִים בְּסוּסִים רַבִּי הָרַכֵּשׁ
הָאֲחֻשְׁתָּרְנִים בְּנֵי הָרַמְּכִים: ^{יא} אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ

calamity that is proposed for them? How can I bear to witness the extermination of my relatives?”

⁷ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “See, I have given Esther Haman’s house and I have had him hanged on the gallows for planning to destroy the Jews. ⁸ You, for your part, write what you please regarding the Jews, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s signet; for any edict written in the king’s name and sealed with his signet may not be reversed by any man.” ⁹ The royal scribes were summoned at once – it was the third month, the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day – and, at Mordecai’s dictation, an order was written to the Jews, the satraps, governors and principal officers of the provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia, a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to each province in its own script, to each people in its own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. ¹⁰ These letters, written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king’s signet, were carried by couriers mounted on horses from the king’s own stud farms. ¹¹ In them, the king granted the Jews, in whatever city they lived, the right to observe their own laws, to

⁷ The LXX lacks ‘and to Mordecai the Jew’ and the name of the king. The *Kethib/Qere* difference here warrants explanation.

⁸ In vv. 12c–12o, the LXX explains how the king’s trust had been abused when the ‘irrevocable’ decree was issued.

⁹ Here, we follow the MT; the LXX has, *ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ μηνί, ὅς ἐστι Νισα* ... (“it was the first month, the month of Nisan ...”). ‘Sivan’ is the Babylonian month of May – June; two months and ten days have passed since Haman’s edict to wipe out the Jews.

¹⁰ The NRSV ends the verse with, “... fast steeds bred from the royal herd;” the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

¹¹ ‘To observe their own laws’ (a distinctly religious concern), here following the LXX, does not appear in the Hebrew text.

לְיִהוּדִים | אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־עִיר־וְעִיר לְהִקָּהֵל וְלַעֲמֹד
עַל־נַפְשָׁם לְהִשְׁמִיד וְלַהֲרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת־כָּל־חַיִּל
עִם וּמְדִינָה הַצָּרִים אִתָּם טָף וְנָשִׁים וּשְׁלָלָם לְבוֹז:
יב בַּיּוֹם אֶחָד בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוּשׁ
בְּשִׁלּוּשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ
אַדָּר:

assemble in self-defence, with permission to destroy, kill and annihilate
any armed force of any people or province that might attack them,
together with their women and children, and to plunder their
possessions, ¹² with effect from the same day throughout the provinces
of King Ahasuerus – the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is
Adar.

^a Ὡν ἐστὶν ἀντίγραφον τῆς ἐπιστολῆς τὰ ὑπογεγραμμένα

^{12a} The text of the letter was as follows:

^b Βασιλεὺς μέγας Ἀρταξέρξης τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰνδικῆς ἕως τῆς
Αἰθιοπίας ἑκατὸν εἴκοσι ἑπτὰ σατραπείαις χωρῶν ἄρχουσι
καὶ τοῖς τὰ ἡμέτερα φρονοῦσι χαίρειν.

^{12b} “The great King, Ahasuerus, to the satraps of the hundred
and twenty-seven provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia,
to the governors and to all our loyal subjects, greetings.

^c πολλοὶ τῇ πλείστῃ τῶν εὐεργετούντων χρηστότητι
πυκνότερον τιμώμενοι μεῖζον ἐφρόνησαν καὶ οὐ μόνον τοὺς
ὑποτεταγμένους ἡμῶν ζητοῦσι κακοποιεῖν, τὸν τε κόρον οὐ
δυνάμενοι φέρειν καὶ τοῖς ἑαυτῶν εὐεργέταις ἐπιχειροῦσι
μηχανᾶσθαι. ^d καὶ τὴν εὐχαριστίαν οὐ μόνον ἐκ τῶν
ἀνθρώπων ἀνταναιροῦντες, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς τῶν
ἀπειραγάρθων κόμποις ἐπαρθέντες τοῦ τὰ πάντα
κατοπτρεύοντος αἰεὶ θεοῦ μισοπόνηρον ὑπολαμβάνουσιν
ἐκφεύξεσθαι δίκην. ^e πολλάκις δὲ καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν ἐπ’ ἐξου-

^{12c} “Many people, repeatedly honoured by the extreme bounty
of their benefactors, only grow more arrogant. It is not enough
for them to seek our subjects’ injury but, unable to support the
weight of their own surfeit, they turn to scheming against their
benefactors themselves. ^{12d} Not content with banishing
gratitude from the human heart, but elated by the plaudits of
people unacquainted with goodness, notwithstanding that all is
forever under the eye of God, they expect to escape his justice,
so hostile to the wicked. ^{12e} Thus, it has often happened to those

¹² The date is carefully given, for it is important for the Feast of Purim.

^{12a} Vv. 12^a–12^x, not present in the MT, are included in the Vg (and NRSV) as 16:1–24. Here, we use LXX (Rahlfs) numbers (as does the NJB).

^{12b} Following the NJB, and in keeping with the MT (and NRSV), the name Ἀρταξέρξης (Artaxerxes) has been emended to ‘Ahasuerus’.

^{12c} The translation here follows the NJB; the NRSV opens with, “Many people, the more they are honoured with the most generous kindness of their benefactors, the more proud do they become.” Another reading for ‘benefactors’ is, perhaps, ‘rulers’.

^{12d} The NRSV opens with, “They not only take away thankfulness from others, but ...”

^{12e} The NRSV has ‘calamities’ in place of ‘misfortunes’ (συμφοραῖς), here following the NJB.

σίαις τεταγμένων τῶν πιστευθέντων χειρίζειν φίλων
 τὰ πράγματα παραμυθία μεταιτίους αἱμάτων ἀδῶν
 καταστήσασα περιέβαλε συμφοραῖς ἀνηκέστοις ^f τῷ
 τῆς κακοηθείας ψευδεῖ παραλογισμῷ παραλογισαμένων τὴν
 τῶν ἐπικρατούντων ἀκέραιον εὐγνωμοσύνην. ^g σκοπεῖν δὲ
 ἔξεστιν, οὐ τοσοῦτον ἐκ τῶν παλαιότερων ὧν παρεδώκαμεν
 ἱστοριῶν, ὅσα ἐστὶν παρὰ πόδας ὑμᾶς ἐκζητοῦντας ἀνοσίως
 συντετελεσμένα τῇ τῶν ἀνάξια δυναστευόντων λοιμότητι,
^h καὶ προσέχειν εἰς τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα εἰς τὸ τὴν βασιλείαν
 ἀτάραχον τοῖς πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις μετ’ εἰρήνης παρεξόμεθα
ⁱ χρώμενοι ταῖς μεταβολαῖς, τὰ δὲ ὑπὸ τὴν ὄψιν ἐρχόμενα
 διακρίνοντες ἀεὶ μετ’ ἐπιεικεστέρας ἀπαντήσεως.

^k ὥς γὰρ Ἀμαν Ἀμαδαθου Μακεδών, ταῖς ἀληθείαις
 ἀλλότριος τοῦ τῶν Περσῶν αἵματος καὶ πολὺν διεστηκῶς
 τῆς ἡμετέρας χρηστότητος, ἐπιξενωθείς ἡμῖν ^l ἔτυχεν ἥς
 ἔχομεν πρὸς πᾶν ἔθνος φιλανθρωπίας ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ὥστε
 ἀναγορεύεσθαι ἡμῶν πατέρα καὶ προσκυνούμενον ὑπὸ
 πάντων τὸ δεύτερον τοῦ βασιλικοῦ θρόνου πρόσωπον

placed in authority that, having trusted friends with the conduct of affairs and allowed themselves to be influenced by them, they find themselves sharing with these the guilt of innocent blood and involved in irremediable misfortunes, ^{12f} the right intentions of rulers having been misled by false arguments of the evilly disposed. ^{12g} This may be seen without recourse to the history of earlier times to which we have referred; you have only to look at what is before you, at the crimes perpetrated by a plague of unworthy officials. ^{12h} In the future, we will take care to render our kingdom quiet and peaceable for all, ¹²ⁱ by adopting new policies and by always judging matters that are brought to our notice in the most equitable spirit.

^{12k} “Thus, Haman son of Hammedatha, a Macedonian, without a drop of Persian blood and far removed from our goodness, enjoyed our hospitality; ^{12l} and, he was treated by us with the benevolence that we show to every nation, even to the extent of being proclaimed our ‘father’, and being accorded universally the prostration of respect as second in dignity to the royal

^{12f} For this verse, here following the NJB, the NRSV reads, “when these persons by the false trickery of their evil natures beguile the sincere goodwill of their sovereigns.”

^{12g} In place of ‘what is before you’ (following the NJB), the NRSV has ‘matters close at hand’; the literal translation of the Greek (ὅσα ἐστὶν παρὰ πόδας) is ‘matters beside (your) feet’.

^{12h} For this verse, here as the NRSV, the NBJ has: “For the future, we shall exert our efforts to assure the tranquillity and peace of the realm for all.”

¹²ⁱ In place of ‘in the most equitable spirit’, here following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘with more equitable consideration’.

^{12k} The word ‘Macedonian’ (Μακεδών) attested here and in v. 12o is surprising. ‘Mede’ would have seemed more likely, since the historical context seems to allude to power struggles between Medes and Persians within Xerxes’ empire.

^{12l} The NRSV lacks ‘in dignity’, here following the NJB.

διατελεῖν, ^m οὐκ ἐνέγκας δὲ τὴν ὑπερηφανίαν ἐπετήδευσεν τῆς ἀρχῆς στερεῖσαι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος ⁿ τὸν τε ἡμέτερον σωτῆρα καὶ διὰ παντὸς εὐεργέτην Μαρδοχαῖον καὶ τὴν ἄμεμπτον τῆς βασιλείας κοινωνὸν Εσθῆρ σὺν παντὶ τῷ τούτων ἔθνει πολυπλόκοις μεθόδων παραλογισμοῖς αἰτησάμενος εἰς ἀπώλειαν· ^o διὰ γὰρ τῶν τρόπων τούτων ὥρθη λαβὼν ἡμᾶς ἐρήμους τὴν τῶν Περσῶν ἐπικράτησιν εἰς τοὺς Μακεδόνας μετάξαι.

^p ἡμεῖς δὲ τοὺς ὑπὸ τοῦ τρισαλιτηρίου παραδεδομένους εἰς ἀφανισμόν Ἰουδαίους εὐρίσκομεν οὐ κακούργους ὄντας, δικαιοτάτοις δὲ πολιτευομένους νόμοις, ^q ὄντας δὲ υἱοὺς τοῦ ὑψίστου μεγίστου ζῶντος Θεοῦ τοῦ κατευθύνοντος ἡμῖν τε καὶ τοῖς προγόνοις ἡμῶν τὴν βασιλείαν ἐν τῇ καλλίστῃ διαδέσει. ^r καλῶς οὖν ποιήσετε μὴ προσχρησάμενοι τοῖς ὑπὸ Αμαν Αμαδαθου ἀποσταλεῖσι γράμμασιν διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν τὸν ταῦτα ἐξεργασάμενον πρὸς ταῖς Σούσων πύλαις ἐσταυρῶσθαι σὺν τῇ πανοικίᾳ, τὴν καταξίαν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐπικρατοῦντος Θεοῦ διὰ τὰς ἀποδόνας αὐτῷ κρίσιν,

^s τὸ δὲ ἀντίγραφον τῆς ἐπιστολῆς ταύτης ἐκθέντες ἐν παντὶ

throne. ^{12m} Nevertheless, unable to keep within his own high rank, he schemed to deprive us of our realm and of our life. ¹²ⁿ Furthermore, by tortuous wiles and arguments, he would have had us destroy Mordecai, our saviour and constant benefactor, with Esther, the blameless partner of our majesty, and their whole nation besides. ^{12o} He thought by these means to leave us without support and so to transfer the Persian Empire to the Macedonians.

^{12p} “However, we find that the Jews, marked out for annihilation by this arch-scoundrel, are not criminals: they are, in fact, governed by the most just of laws. ^{12q} They are children of the Most High, the great and living God to whom we and our ancestors owe the continuing prosperity of our realm. ^{12r} You will therefore do well not to act on the letters sent by Haman son of Hammedatha, since their author has been hanged at the gates of Susa with his whole household: a fitting punishment, which God, Master of the Universe, has speedily inflicted on him.

^{12s} “Put up copies of this letter everywhere, allow the Jews

^{12m} The literal translation of ‘life’ (πνεύματος) is ‘spirit’.

¹²ⁿ In place of ‘tortuous wiles’, here following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘intricate craft’.

^{12o} The NRSV has ‘undefended’ in place of ‘without support’ and ‘Kingdom’ in place of ‘Empire’, both here following the NJB.

^{12p} In place of ‘arch-scoundrel’, here following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘thrice-accursed man’, more literally translating the Greek (τρισαλιτηρίου).

^{12q} The king commends Mosaic Law, praises the Jews, and recognises God’s rule.

^{12r} In 7:10, only Haman is hanged; there is no mention of ‘his household’.

^{12s} The NRSV, following the Vg, splits this verse in two:

¹⁹ Therefore, post a copy of this letter publicly in every place, and permit the Jews to live under their own laws. ²⁰ And give them reinforcements, so that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, on that very day, they may defend themselves against those who attack them at the time of oppression.

τόπω μετὰ παρορησίας ἔαν τοὺς Ἰουδαίους χρῆσθαι τοῖς ἑαυτῶν νομίμοις καὶ συνεπισχύειν αὐτοῖς ὅπως τοὺς ἐν καιρῷ θλίψεως ἐπιθεμένους αὐτοῖς ἀμύνωνται τῇ τρισκαιδεκάτῃ τοῦ δωδεκάτου μηνὸς Ἀδαρ τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ·^{12t} ταύτην γὰρ ὁ πάντα δυναστεύων θεὸς ἀντ' ὀλεθρίας τοῦ ἐκλεκτοῦ γένους ἐποίησεν αὐτοῖς εὐφροσύνην.

^u καὶ ὑμεῖς οὖν ἐν ταῖς ἐπωνύμοις ὑμῶν ἑορταῖς ἐπίσημον ἡμέραν μετὰ πάσης εὐωχίας ἄγετε, ὅπως καὶ νῦν καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα σωτηρία ᾗ ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς εὐνοοῦσιν Πέρσαις, τοῖς δὲ ἡμῖν ἐπιβουλεύουσιν μνημόσυνον τῆς ἀπωλείας. ^x πᾶσα δὲ πόλις ἢ χώρα τὸ σύνολον, ἥτις κατὰ ταῦτα μὴ ποιήσῃ, δόρατι καὶ πυρὶ καταναλωθήσεται μετ' ὀργῆς· οὐ μόνον ἀνθρώποις ἄβατος, ἀλλὰ καὶ θηρίοις καὶ πετεινοῖς εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον ἔχθιστος κατασταθήσεται.

to observe their own customs without fear, and come to their help against anyone who attacks them on the day originally chosen for their maltreatment, that is, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is Adar.^{12t} For, the all-powerful God has made this day a day of joy and not of ruin for the chosen people.

^{12u} “You, for your part, among your solemn festivals, celebrate this as a special day with every kind of feasting, so that now and in the future, for you and for Persians of good will, it may commemorate your rescue, and for your enemies may stand as a reminder of their ruin. ^{12x} Every city and, more generally, every country, which does not follow these instructions, will be mercilessly devastated with fire and sword, and made not only inaccessible to human being but hateful to wild animals and even birds forever.”

^y פְּתֻשָּׁן הַכְּתָב לְהִנָּתֵן דָּת בְּכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה ¹³ Copies of this letter, the edict to be issued as law in each province, גְּלוֹי לְכָל־הָעַמִּים וְלַהֲיוֹת הַיְּהוּדִים were published to the various peoples, and the Jews were to be ready

¹⁹ Hoc autem edictum, quod nunc mittimus, in cunctis urbibus proponatur, ut liceat Judæis uti legibus suis. ²⁰ Quibus debetis esse adminiculo, ut eos qui se ad necem eorum paraverant, possint interficere tertiadecima die mensis duodecimi, qui vocatur Adar.

^{12t} In place of ‘all-powerful God’, following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘God, who rules over all things’.

^{12u} The NRSV, following the Vg, splits this verse in two:

²² Therefore, you shall observe this with all good cheer as a notable day among your commemorative festivals, ²³ so that both now and hereafter it may represent the deliverance for you (for us) and the loyal Persians, but that it may be a reminder of destruction for those who plot against us.

²² Unde et vos inter ceteros festos dies, hanc habetote diem, et celebrate eam cum omni lætitia, ut et in posterum cognoscatur, ²³ omnes qui fideliter Persis obediunt, dignam pro fide recipere mercedem; qui autem insidiantur regno eorum, perire pro scelere.

^{12x} Destruction faces every place that does not defend and respect the Jews.

¹³ The two Kethib/Qere differences here would benefit from an explanation (but see #8:1 on הַיְּהוּדִים / הַיְּהוּדִים).

עֲתוּדִים עֲתִידִים לַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְהִנָּקֵם מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם:
יְהִי הָרָצִים רֹכְבֵי הָרָכָשׁ הָאֲחֻשְׁתָּרָנִים יֵצְאוּ
מִבְּהֵלִים וְדַחוּפִים בְּדִבְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַדָּת נִתְּנָה
בְּשׁוֹשַׁן הַבִּירָה: {ס}

טו וּמֶרְדֵּכַי יָצָא מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלִבוֹשׁ מַלְכוּת
תְּכֵלֶת וְחֹזֶר וְעֹטֶרֶת זָהָב גְּדוֹלָה וְתֹכְרִיד בּוֹץ
וְאַרְגָּמָן וְהָעִיר שׁוֹשָׁן צָהָלָה וְשִׂמְחָה: טז לַיהוּדִים
הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשׁוֹשָׁן וִיקָר: יז וּבְכָל־מְדִינָה
וּמְדִינָה וּבְכָל־עִיר וְעִיר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרָה־הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְדָתוֹ מֵגִיעַ שִׂמְחָה וְשׁוֹשָׁן לַיהוּדִים מִשְׁתָּה וַיּוֹם
טוֹב וְרַבִּים מֵעַמִּי הָאָרֶץ מִתִּיהָדִים כִּי־נִפְלַ פָּחַד־
הַיְהוּדִים עָלֵיהֶם:

on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. ¹⁴ So, the couriers, mounted on the king's swift horses, set out in great haste and urgency at the king's command. The edict was also published in the citadel of Susa.

¹⁵ Then Mordecai left the royal presence in a princely gown of violet and white, with a great golden crown and a cloak of fine linen and purple, while the city of Susa shouted for joy. ¹⁶ For the Jews, there was light and gladness, joy, and honour. ¹⁷ In every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and decree arrived, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and holidaymaking. Of the country's population, many became Jews, because the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

¹⁴ The LXX version of this verse is a little shorter:

Οἱ μὲν οὖν ἵππεις ἐξῆλθον σπεύδοντες τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως λεγόμενα ἐπιτελεῖν· ἐξετέθη δὲ τὸ πρόσταγμα καὶ ἐν Σούσοις.

So, the messengers on horseback set out with all speed to perform what the king had ordered; and the decree was published also in Susa.

¹⁵ In place of 'violet' (following the NJB), the NRSV has 'blue'. Mordecai appears in his robes of state, 'crown' being the turban worn by the vizier.

¹⁶ The LXX lacks 'joy and honour'.

¹⁷ In place of 'many became Jews', the LXX is more explicit: 'many Gentiles were circumcised and became Jew-like' (πολλοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν περιετέμοντο καὶ ἰουδαίζον).

אסתר פרק ט

א * ובשנים עשר חדש הוא-חדש אדר בשלושה עשר יום בו אשר הגיע דבר-המלך ודתו להעשות ביום אשר שברו איבי היהודים לשלוח בהם ונהפוך הוא אשר ישלטו היהודים המה בשנאיהם: ב נקהלו היהודים בעריהם בכל מדינות המלך אחשוורוש לשלח יד במבקשי רעתם ואיש לא-עמד לפניהם כי-נפל פחדם על-כל-העמים: ג וכל-שרי המדינות והאחשדרפנים והפחות ועשי המלאכה אשר למלך מנשאים את-היהודים כי-נפל פחד-מרדכי עליהם: ד כי-גדול מרדכי בבית המלך ושמעו הולך בכל-המדינות כי-האיש מרדכי הולך וגדול: ה ויכו

ESTHER 9

¹ Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain power over them, but which had been changed to a day when the Jews would gain power over their foes, ² the Jews assembled in their towns throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, to strike at those who had planned to injure them. No one resisted them, since the various people were now all afraid of them. ³ Provincial officers-of-state, satraps, governors, and royal officials, all supported the Jews for fear of Mordecai. ⁴ For indeed, Mordecai was a power in the palace, and his fame was spreading through all the provinces; Mordecai was steadily growing more powerful. ⁵ Therefore, the Jews struck down all their

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¹ The important date is given again (compare 8:12). In the LXX, this verse is somewhat shorter:

Ἐν γὰρ τῷ δωδεκάτῳ μηνὶ τρισκαιδεκάτῃ τοῦ μηνός, ὅς ἐστιν Ἀδαρ, παρῆν τὰ γράμματα τὰ γραφέντα ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως.

Now, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is Adar, the decree written by the king arrived.

² The 1st sentence of this verse is rather shorter in the LXX:

ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἀπώλοντο οἱ ἀντικείμενοι τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις.

On that same day, the enemies of the Jews perished.

³ In the LXX, this verse is a little different:

οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες τῶν σατραπῶν καὶ οἱ τύραννοι καὶ οἱ βασιλικοὶ γραμματεῖς ἐτίμων τοὺς Ἰουδαίους· ὁ γὰρ φόβος Μαρδοχαίου ἐνέκειτο αὐτοῖς.

The chief provincial governors, the princes and the royal secretaries were paying honour to the Jews, because fear of Mordecai weighed upon them.

⁴ For this verse, the LXX reads:

προσέπεσεν γὰρ τὸ πρόσταγμα τοῦ βασιλέως ὀνομασθῆναι ἐν πάσῃ τῇ βασιλείᾳ.

The king's decree required that Mordecai's name be held in honour throughout his kingdom.

⁵ Most LXX MSS lack this verse.

הַיְּהוּדִים בְּכָל־אֹיְבֵיהֶם מִכַּת־חֶרֶב וְהָרָג וְאַבְדֹן
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְשֵׁנָאֵיהֶם כְּרִצּוֹנָם: enemies with the sword, with resulting slaughter and destruction, and
worked their will on their opponents.

וַיִּבְשְׁשׁוּן הַבִּירָה הָרְגוּ הַיְּהוּדִים וְאַבְדֹן חֲמֵשׁ
מֵאוֹת {ר} אִישׁ: {ס} 6 In the citadel of Susa alone, the Jews put to death and slaughtered
five hundred men,
וְאֶת־ {ר} פַּרְשַׁנְדַּתָּא {ס} 7 and Parshandatha,
וְאֶת־ {ר} דַּלְפוֹן {ס} and Dalphon,
וְאֶת־ {ר} אֶסְפַּתָּא: {ס} and Aspatha,
וְאֶת־ {ר} פּוֹרַתָּא {ס} 8 and Poratha,
וְאֶת־ {ר} אַדְלִיָּא {ס} and Adalia,
וְאֶת־ {ר} אַרִידַתָּא: {ס} and Aridatha,
וְאֶת־ {ר} פַּרְמַשְׁתָּא {ס} 9 and Parmashta,
וְאֶת־ {ר} אַרִיסַי {ס} and Arisai,
וְאֶת־ {ר} אַרִידַי {ס} and Aridai,
וְאֶת־ {ר} וַיְזַתָּא: {ס} and Jezatha,
עֶשְׂרֵת {ר} בְּנֵי הַמֶּן בֶּן־הַמֶּדְתָּא צָרָר 10 the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the persecutor
הַיְּהוּדִים הָרְגוּ וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם: of the Jews; but they took no plunder.

⁶ This verse is more succinct in the LXX:

καὶ ἐν Σούσοις τῇ πόλει ἀπέκτειναν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἄνδρας πεντακοσίους (Now, in the city of Susa the Jews killed five hundred men.)

⁷ The names of Haman's sons, represented as Persian names, appear peculiar in the MT, and favour cryptic interpretations. 'Parshandatha' is an authentic Persian name; it has been found on a carved seal from that general period. The LXX renders the three names as *Φαρσαννεσταιν* (Pharsannestain), *Δελφων* (Delphon) and *Φασγα* (Phasga). The ת in פַּרְשַׁנְדַּתָּא is a small letter in almost all Hebrew MSS.

⁸ The LXX renders the three names as *Φαρδαθα* (Pharadatha), *Βαρεα* (Barea) and *Σαρβαχα* (Sarbacha).

⁹ In place of 'Vaizatha' (following the NRSV and JPS), the NJB has 'Jezatha'. Note that, in the word וַיְזַתָּא, the ו is an enlarged letter and the ז is a small letter; this is how the word appears in almost all Hebrew MSS.

¹⁰ The LXX ends this verse, quite contrarily, with 'and they indulged themselves in plunder' (following the NRSV).

^{יא} בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בָּא מִסְפָּר הַהֲרוּגִים בְּשׁוֹשָׁן הַבִּירָה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: ^{יב} וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה בְּשׁוֹשָׁן הַבִּירָה הָרְגוּ הַיְּהוּדִים וְאַבְדּוּ חֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וְאֵת עֲשָׂרַת בְּנֵי-הָמֶן בְּשָׂאֵר מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ מִה עָשׂוּ וּמִה-שְּׁאַלְתֶּךָ וַיִּנָּתֶן לָהּ וּמִה-בִּקְשָׁתְךָ עוֹד וַתַּעַשׂ: ^{יג} וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אֶס-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יִנָּתֶן גַּם-מָחָר לַיהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוֹשָׁן לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּדַת הַיּוֹם וְאֵת עֲשָׂרַת בְּנֵי-הָמֶן יִתְּלוּ עַל-הָעֵץ: ^{יד} וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת כֹּן וַתִּנָּתֶן דָּת בְּשׁוֹשָׁן וְאֵת עֲשָׂרַת בְּנֵי-הָמֶן תָּלוּ: ^{טו} וַיִּקְהָלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר-בְּשׁוֹשָׁן גַּם בַּיּוֹם אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר וַיַּהַרְגוּ בְּשׁוֹשָׁן שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת-יָדָם:

^{טז} וּשְׂאֵר הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ נִקְהָלוּ וַעֲמָד עַל-נַפְשָׁם וְנוֹחַ מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם וְהָרוּג בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם חֲמִשָּׁה וּשְׁבַעִים אָלֶף וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ

¹¹ The number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day. ¹² The king said to Queen Esther, "In the citadel of Susa, the Jews have killed five hundred men and also the ten sons of Haman. What must they have done in the other provinces of the realm? Tell me your request; I grant it to you. Tell me what else you would like; it is yours for the asking." ¹³ "If it is the king's pleasure," Esther replied, "let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed to enforce this day's decree tomorrow as well; and as for the ten sons of Haman, let their bodies be hanged on the gallows." ¹⁴ Thus, the king having given the order, the edict was promulgated in Susa and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. ¹⁵ So, the Jews of Susa reassembled on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men in the city; but they took no plunder.

¹⁶ The other Jews who lived in the king's provinces gathered themselves together to defend their lives and rid themselves of their enemies. They slaughtered seventy-five thousand of those who hated them; but they

¹¹ The LXX lacks 'the citadel of', here following the MT.

¹² In place of 'the citadel of Susa', following the MT, the LXX has 'Susa, the capital' (Σούσοις τῇ πόλει).

¹³ It is unclear whether Haman's ten sons were hanged out of revenge, or as a deterrent, or as an expression of a sudden turn of fortune.

¹⁴ The LXX version reads:

καὶ ἐπέτρεψεν οὕτως γενέσθαι καὶ ἐξέθηκε τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις τῆς πόλεως τὰ σώματα τῶν υἱῶν Ἀμαν κρεμάσαι.

So, he permitted this to be done, and handed over to the Jews of the city the bodies of Haman's sons to hang up.

¹⁵ On the Kethib/ Qere difference here, see #8:1.

¹⁶ In place of 'seventy-five thousand' (here following the MT), the LXX has 'fifteen thousand' (πεντακισχιλίου) and Lucian has 70,100. The emphasis here (cf. 10 & 15) that the Jews took no booty seems to be a reminder of the Agag story, where they plundered to their own hurt (1S 15:9).

אֶת־יָדָם: י" בְּיוֹם־שְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר וְנוֹחַ
בְּאַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה:
י" וְהַיְּהוּדִים וְהַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר־בְּשׁוּשַׁן נִקְהְלוּ
בְּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וּבְאַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וְנוֹחַ
בְּחִמְשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה:
יט עַל־כֵּן הַיְּהוּדִים הַפְּרוּזִים הַפְּרוּזִים הַיֹּשְׁבִים
בְּעָרֵי הַפְּרוּזוֹת עָשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ
אָדָר שִׂמְחָה וּמְשֻׁתָּה וְיוֹם טוֹב וּמְשַׁלַּח מָנוֹת אִישׁ
לְרֵעֵהוּ: {ס}

... οἱ δὲ κατοικοῦντες ἐν ταῖς μητροπόλεσιν καὶ τὴν πεντεκαι-
δεκάτην τοῦ Ἀδαρ ἡμέραν εὐφροσύνην ἀγαθὴν ἄγουσιν ἐξαπο-
στέλλοντες μερίδας τοῖς πλησίον.

did not lay their hands on the plunder.¹⁷ This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. On the fourteenth day, they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness.¹⁸ However, for the Jews of Susa, who had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth days, the fifteenth was the day they rested, making that a day of feasting and gladness.¹⁹ This is why Jewish country people, those who live in undefended villages, keep the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day of gladness, feasting and holidaymaking, and the exchanging of presents of food with one another,

^{19a} ... whereas those who live in the large cities keep the fifteenth day of Adar as their joyful holiday, also sending presents of food to one another.

כ וַיִּכְתֹּב מֶרְדֳּכָי אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּשְׁלַח
סְפָרִים אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲחֻשׁוֹרוֹשׁ הַקְּרוּבִים וְהַרְחוֹקִים: כא לְקִים עֲלֵיהֶם
לִהְיוֹת עָשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר
וְאֵת יוֹם־חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וּשְׁנָה:
כב כִּימִים אֲשֶׁר־נָחוּ בָּהֶם הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאִבֵּיהֶם

²⁰ Mordecai committed these events to writing. Then he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far,²¹ enjoining them that they should celebrate the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and also the fifteenth day of the same month, every year,²² as the day on which the Jews had rid themselves of their enemies, and the month in which their sorrow had been turned into

¹⁷ The LXX lacks the first sentence.

¹⁸ On the *Kethib*/*Qere* difference here, see #8:1.

¹⁹ The *Kethib*/*Qere* difference here warrants an explanation.

^{19a} This verse, not present in the MT, is included in the NRSV as part of v. 19.

²⁰ From 9:20 onwards, the text appears to be a compound of documents of varying origin.

²¹ In place of 'the fourteenth day', the LXX has 'both the fourteenth and fifteenth (days)' (τε τὴν τεσσαρεσκαίδεκάτην καὶ τὴν πεντεκαίδεκάτην).

²² The LXX tells that the celebrations should last the 'whole month (namely Adar)' (μῆνα ... [ὅς ἦν Ἀδαρ] ... ὅλον).

וְהַחֲדָשׁ אֲשֶׁר נִהְפָּךְ לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֲבֵל לְיוֹם טוֹב לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יְמֵי מְשֻׁתָּה וּשְׂמֻחָה וּמִשְׁלַח מָנוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמִתְּנוּת לְאֲבִינִים:
 כג וּקְבַל הַיְּהוּדִים אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הֵחֵלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־כָּתַב מֶרְדֵּכַי אֲלֵיהֶם: כד כִּי הָמָן בֶּן־הַמֶּדְתָּא הָאֲגָגִי צָרַר כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים לְאַבְדֵם וְהָפֵל פּוּר הוּא הַגּוֹרֵל לְהֵמָּס וּלְאַבְדָּם: כה וּבִבְאֵה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אָמַר עַם־הַסֵּפֶר יָשׁוּב מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ הִרְעָה אֲשֶׁר־חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו עַל־הָעֵץ: כו עַל־כֵּן קָרְאוּ לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה פּוּרִים עַל־שֵׁם הַפּוּר עַל־כֵּן עַל־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הָאֲגִרָה הַזֹּאת וּמֵה־רָאוּ עַל־כִּכָּה וּמֵה־הִגִּיעַ אֲלֵיהֶם: כז קִיְּמוּ וּקְבַל וּקְבָלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים | עֲלֵיהֶם | וְעַל־זִרְעָם וְעַל כָּל־הַנָּלוּיִם עֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא

gladness, and mourning into a holiday. He therefore told them to keep these as days of festivity and gladness when they were to exchange presents and make gifts to the poor.

²³ Once having begun, the Jews continued observing these practices, Mordecai having written them an account ²⁴ of how Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the persecutor of all the Jews, had plotted their destruction and had cast the Pur, that is, the lot, for their overthrow and ruin; ²⁵ but when this became known to the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked plan, which he had planned against the Jews, should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows; ²⁶ and that, hence, these days were called Purim, from the word Pur. So, because of what was written in this letter, and because of what they had seen for themselves and of what had happened to them, ²⁷ the Jews willingly bound themselves, their

²³ In the LXX, this verse is somewhat shorter:

καὶ προσεδέξαντο οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, καθὼς ἔγραψεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Μαρδοχαῖος, ἡ δὲ ἑβραϊστὶς ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρχαία, καὶ ἡ ἑλληνιστὶς ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρχαία. And the Jews accepted what had written to them by Mordecai.

²⁴ The LXX has ‘Macedonian’ (*Μακεδών*) in place of ‘Agagite’, whereas previously (0:17, 3:1, 7:9, 9:9) the name ‘Bougean’ (*Βουγαῖον*) is used.

²⁵ For this verse, here following the WEBBE (and MT), the NJB follows the LXX:

καὶ ὡς εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα λέγων κρεμάσαι τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον· ὅσα δὲ ἐπεχείρησεν ἐπάξαι ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους κακά, ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἐγένοντο, καὶ ἐκρεμάσθη αὐτὸς καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ.

but how, when he went back to the king to ask him to order the hanging of Mordecai, the wicked scheme that he had devised against the Jews recoiled on his own head, and both he and his sons were hanged on the gallows;

²⁶ The LXX explains how the name ‘Purim’ (*Φουριμ*) derives from ‘lots’ – ‘for in their dialect they are called Purim’ (*ὅτι τῇ διαλέκτῳ αὐτῶν καλοῦνται Φουραῖ*). The nationalistic character of the book of Esther does not exclude a wider outlook; proselytes may also share in the celebration.

²⁷ The Kethib/Qere difference here warrants an explanation. In the LXX, this verse ends at ‘without fail’.

יַעֲבֹד לְהִזּוֹת עֲשִׂים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
בְּכַתְּבָם וּבְזִמְנָם בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה: כֹּחַ וְהַיָּמִים
הָאֵלֶּה נִזְכָּרִים וְנַעֲשִׂים בְּכָל־דֹּדֶר וְדוֹר מִשְׁפָּחָה
וּמִשְׁפָּחָה מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וְעִיר וְעִיר וַיְמִי הַפּוּרִים
הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעֲבֹרוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַיְּהוּדִים וְזַכָּרָם לֹא־יִסּוּף
מִזֶּרַעַם: {ס}

כֹּסֶף וְתַכְתֵּב אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה בַּת־אֲבִיחַיִל וּמֶרְדֳּכַי
הַיְּהוּדִי אֶת־כָּל־תִּקְוָה לְקִים אֶת אֲגֶרֶת הַפָּרִים
הַזֹּאת הַשְּׁנִית: לִי וְיִשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים
אֶל־שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה מַלְכוּת
אֲחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ דְּבָרֵי שְׁלוֹם וְאַמֶּת: לֹא לְקִים אֶת־יְמֵי
הַפָּרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּזִמְנֵיהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר קִים עֲלֵיהֶם
מֶרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי וְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְכַאֲשֶׁר קִיְמוּ עַל־
נַפְשָׁם וְעַל־זֵרַעַם דְּבָרֵי הַצּוּמוֹת וְזַעֲקָתָם:

descendants and all who should join them, to celebrate these two days, without fail, in the manner prescribed and at the time appointed, year after year. ²⁸ Thus, commemorated and celebrated from generation to generation, in every family, in every province, in every city, these days of Purim will never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor will their memory perish from their seed.

²⁹ Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim, ³⁰ and letters were sent to all the Jews of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm of Ahasuerus, wishing them peace and security, ³¹ and enjoining them to observe these days of Purim at the appointed seasons, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had recommended, and just as they had laid down for themselves and for their descendants, with additional ordinances for their fasts and their lamentations. ³² The

²⁸ In place of 'seed', the NJB has 'race' and the WEBBE has 'offspring'. For this verse, the LXX reads:

αἱ δὲ ἡμέραι αὗται τῶν Φρουρῶν ἀχθῆσονται εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον, καὶ τὸ μνημόσυνον αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ ἐκλίπη ἐκ τῶν γενεῶν.

These days of Purim were to be observed for all time, and the commemoration of them was never to cease among their descendants.

²⁹ The NJB omits 'along with Mordecai the Jew' (see v. 31, and Esther figures alone in v. 32). After 'letter', JPS adds 'of Purim'. Note that the first ת in וְתַכְתֵּב is presented as an enlarged letter, just as it appears in almost all Hebrew MSS.

³⁰ The LXX lacks this verse. The NJB has 'loyalty' in place of 'security', here following the NRSV.

³¹ The two unexpected 'additional' injunctions doubtless have reference to 4:16; fasting has earned deliverance. For this verse, the LXX reads:

καὶ Μαρδοχαῖος καὶ Εσθήρ ἡ βασίλισσα ἔστησαν ἑαυτοῖς καθ' ἑαυτῶν καὶ τότε στήσαντες κατὰ τῆς ὑγείας αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν βουλὴν αὐτῶν.

And Mordecai and Queen Esther established this decision on their own responsibility, pledging their own well-being to the plan.

³² For this verse, the LXX reads:

καὶ Εσθήρ λόγῳ ἔστησεν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, καὶ ἐγράφη εἰς μνημόσυνον. And Esther established it by a decree forever, and it was written for a memorial.

לְבַי וּמֵאֲמַר אֶסְתֵּר קִיַּם דְּבַר הַפָּרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְנִכְתָּב
בְּסֵפֶר: {ס} ordinance of Esther fixed the law of Purim, which was then recorded in
a book.

אסתר פרק י

ESTHER 10

א וַיֵּשֶׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ | מִס עַל-הָאָרֶץ
וְאֵי הָיָם: ב וְכָל-מַעֲשֵׂה תְקוּפוֹ וְגִבּוֹרָתוֹ וּפְרָשָׁת
גְּדֻלַּת מַרְדֳּכָי אֲשֶׁר גִּדְּלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ הַלְוֵאִים כְּתוּבִים
עַל-סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי מֶדִי וּפָרַס: ג כִּי
מַרְדֳּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי מִשְׁנֶה לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ וְגִדּוֹל
לַיְּהוּדִים וְרָצוּי לְרַב אֶחָיו דָּרָשׁ טוֹב לַעֲמּוֹ וְדָבָר
שְׁלוֹם לְכָל-זֶרְעוֹ: {ש}

1 King Ahasuerus laid tribute on the land and on the isles of the sea.
2 All his acts of power and might, and the account of the high honour
to which he raised Mordecai: all this is recorded in the annals of the
kings of Media and Persia. 3 For, Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to
King Ahasuerus, and he was powerful among the Jews, esteemed by
his many brothers, for he sought the good of his people and cared for
the welfare of his entire race.

א Καὶ εἶπεν Μαρδοχαῖος Παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐγένετο ταῦτα.
ב ἐμνήσθην γὰρ περὶ τοῦ ἐνυπνίου, οὗ εἶδον περὶ τῶν λόγων
τούτων· οὐδὲ γὰρ παρῆλθεν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν λόγος. γ ἡ μικρὰ
πηγὴ, ἣ ἐγένετο ποταμός καὶ ἦν φῶς καὶ ἥλιος καὶ ὕδωρ
πολύ· Εσθὴρ ἐστὶν ὁ ποταμός, ἣν ἐγάμησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ
ἐποίησεν βασιλίσσαν. δ οἱ δὲ δύο δράκοντες ἐγὼ εἰμι καὶ
Αμαν. ε τὰ δὲ ἔθνη τὰ ἐπισυναχθέντα ἀπολέσαι τὸ ὄνομα
3a And Mordecai said, “All these things have come from God.
3b For, I remember the dream that I had concerning these matters,
nothing of which has failed to be fulfilled. 3c There was the little
spring that became a river, and there was the light that shone, the
sun, and the flood of water. Esther is the river – she whom the
king married and made queen. 3d The two dragons are Haman
and I. 3e The nations are those that banded together to blot out the

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- 1 The name, ‘Ahasuerus’, here follows the Qere reading (אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ); the Kethib has אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ.
2 The LXX ascribes this entry to the king. In place of ‘the annals’ (following the NRSV), the NJB has ‘the Book of the Annals’.
3 The last verse in the MT, and the concluding passage of the LXX (vv. 3a–3l) tend to make this book more than ever ‘the Book of Mordecai’ rather than ‘the Book of Esther’ (see 9:4).
3a Vv. 3a–3l, not present in the MT, are included in the Vg (and NRSV) as 10:4–11; here, we use the LXX (Rahlfs) numbers (as does the NJB).
3b The text here follows the NJB; the NRSV reads, “For, I remember the dream I had concerning these matters, and none of them has failed to be fulfilled.”
3c The NRSV does not include the words ‘that shone’, here following the NJB.
3d In place of ‘I’, here following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘myself’ (a more literal translation of the Greek, but more clumsy in modern English).
3e In place of ‘the Jews’, here following the NRSV, the NJB has ‘Jew’; the Greek text has the singular form (Ιουδαίῳ).

τῶν Ἰουδαίων. ^f τὸ δὲ ἔθνος τὸ ἐμόν, οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰσραηλ οἱ βοήσαντες πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ σωθέντες· καὶ ἔσωσεν κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐρρύσατο κύριος ἡμᾶς ἐκ πάντων τῶν κακῶν τούτων, καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ σημεῖα καὶ τὰ τέρατα τὰ μεγάλα, ἃ οὐ γέγονεν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν.

^ε διὰ τοῦτο ἐποίησεν κλήρους δύο, ἓνα τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἓνα πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. ^h καὶ ἦλθον οἱ δύο κληροὶ οὗτοι εἰς ὥραν καὶ καιρὸν καὶ εἰς ἡμέραν κρίσεως ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ⁱ καὶ ἐμνήσθη ὁ θεὸς τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν τὴν κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ. ^k καὶ ἔσονται αὐτοῖς αἱ ἡμέραι αὗται ἐν μηνὶ Ἀδαρ τῇ τεσσαρεσκαίδεκάτῃ καὶ τῇ πεντεκαίδεκάτῃ τοῦ αὐτοῦ μηνὸς μετὰ συναγωγῆς καὶ χαρᾶς καὶ εὐφροσύνης ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ γενεὰς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἐν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰσραηλ.

^l Ἐτους τετάρτου βασιλεύοντος Πτολεμαίου καὶ Κλεοπάτρας εἰσήνεγκεν Δωσίθεος, ὃς ἔφη εἶναι ἱερεὺς καὶ Λευίτης, καὶ Πτολεμαῖος ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ τὴν προκειμένην ἐπιστολὴν τῶν Φρουραι, ἣν ἔφασαν εἶναι καὶ ἐρμηνευκέναι Λυσίμαχον Πτολεμαίου τῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ.

name of the Jews. ^{3f} The single nation, mine, is Israel, those who cried out to God and were saved. Yes, the Lord has saved his people, the Lord has delivered us from all these evils, God has worked such signs and great wonders as have never occurred among the nations.

^{3g} “For this purpose, he appointed two destinies: one for the people of God and one for the nations at large; ^{3h} and those two destinies were worked out at the hour and moment and day that was laid down by God, involving all the nations. ³ⁱ In this way, God has remembered his people and vindicated his heritage; ^{3k} and for them, these days – the fourteenth and fifteenth of the month of Adar – are to be days of assembly, of joy and of gladness before God, from generation to generation forever among his people Israel”

^{3l} In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and Levite, and Ptolemy his son, brought the foregoing letter about Purim. They vouched for its authenticity, the translation having been made by Lysimachus son of Ptolemy, a member of the Jerusalem community.

^{3f} An alternative translation for ‘delivered’ (here following the NJB) is ‘rescued’ (following the NRSV).

^{3g} In place of ‘he appointed two destinies’ (διὰ τοῦτο ἐποίησεν κλήρους δύο), here following the NJB, the NRSV has ‘For this purpose he made two lots’.

^{3h} As in the previous verse, the NRSV has ‘lots’ in place of ‘destinies’.

³ⁱ Lucian adds: “And all the people shouted and uttered loud cries: Blessed be you, O Lord, who remember the Covenants made with our ancestors! Amen.”

^{3k} Some MSS lack ‘and the fifteenth’ (καὶ τῇ πεντεκαίδεκάτῃ).

^{3l} From this appendix, we learn that the Jewish community in Egypt received the Book of Esther from the community in Palestine (see 2M 2:14–15). The ‘King Ptolemy’ in question must be Ptolemy VIII, whose wife was called ‘Cleopatra’, so the date would be 114 BCE.