

# ALLUSIONS TO THE JACOB-ESAU STORY IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER

NAVA FINKELMAN

The situation in Judea during the early years of the second temple was difficult, both economically and politically.<sup>1</sup> These difficulties precipitated a theological crisis as well, as the previous destruction of God's temple and the wholesale exile may have been viewed as evidence for God's rejection of His people. This theological crisis was addressed by prophets both before and after the destruction, assuring the people that God will not, and had not, abandoned them. In this paper I will attempt to demonstrate that the Book of Esther<sup>2</sup> was written with a similar purpose in mind: by use of allusions to the well-known story of Jacob and Esau, the author of *Esther* attempted to persuade these Jews that they are still God's chosen people.

Given the age-old rivalry between the people of Jacob and the people of Esau, post-exilic Jews may have assumed that God had chosen Edom in place of Israel. Elie Assis writes that:

"Judea contended with self-identity in the early Persian period. The question debated was whether Judea was God's chosen people after the serious blows inflicted on them by God. Did the fact that God had exiled Israel from their land, had destroyed His Temple, had mortally stricken the religious and political institutions, mean that God had abandoned His people or not? One of strongest pieces of evidence for these fears was the Edomite colonization of Judea. Edom, Jacob's twin brother, was considered an alternative to Israel."<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the Bible, the Jewish nation is continually referred to as the descendants of Jacob,<sup>4</sup> while the Edomites – who are often the generic enemy – are traced back to their forefather Esau. The twin brothers of the Genesis stories are perceived by scholars "not simply as individuals, but as prototypes of the nations: Edom and Israel."<sup>5</sup> The strained relationship between Jacob and Esau, which started even before their birth,<sup>6</sup> continued as a strife-ridden legacy handed down to their descendants throughout biblical history – and beyond. While God explicitly favors the descendants of Jacob ("Israel is my son, my firstborn" Exodus 4:22), the descendants of Esau were singled out by the

*Nava Finkelman recently received her PhD on the topic "Foreigners who Speak of God in Biblical Narrative," under the guidance of Prof. Joshua Berman, through the Tanakh department of Bar Ilan University. She lives in Beit Shemesh and teaches in Matan and Midreshet Lindenbaum.*

prophets in their oracles of doom.<sup>7</sup> Scholars have attended to the remarkable vilification of Esau (as Edom) in these sources, and traced the animosity to the Edomites' alleged role during the destruction of the first temple.<sup>8</sup> One reason for this animosity may have stemmed from the just assumption that "Edom was expected to behave like a 'brother,' and did not. That may have been the reason for taking Edom's conduct in 587 so seriously."<sup>9</sup> Recognizing this assumption, Second Temple prophets attempted to alleviate the nation's fear, reassuring them that God had not forsaken His covenant, and that the Jews were still the chosen people.<sup>10</sup>

Many prophecies of consolation allude to the age-old rivalry between Jacob and Esau as well. These prophecies refer to the Jacob-Esau stories, in which the question "Who is the chosen one?" hovers in the background, and emphatically declare, even centuries later, that it is Jacob, not Esau. In Genesis, the fates of these two brothers (and their subsequent descendants) were presented as a zero-sum game: the rise of the one will necessarily correlate with the demise of the other.<sup>11</sup> This premise, of the never-ending rivalry between Jacob and Esau, is echoed both by First Temple prophets<sup>12</sup> and by those writing in post-exilic times.<sup>13</sup> Thus we see that one of the ways in which post-exilic prophets endeavored to console the nation, giving them hope that they are still the chosen people, was through the use of the Jacob-Esau narrative. They stress that Esau's downfall necessarily implies Jacob's ascent, and by extension, this serves as further proof that God is still with them.

Jacob and Esau are not mentioned explicitly in *Esther*. The book addresses many issues, such as the legal status of women and minorities; assimilation; life in the diaspora and others. It is peppered with many intertextual allusions, not least among them both linguistic and thematic connections to the stories of Joseph and Daniel.<sup>14</sup> I would like to explore the possibility that *Esther*, by alluding to the Jacob-Esau stories, addresses the main theological concern of post-exilic Jews as well: namely, whether they are still God's chosen nation. I will point out linguistic and thematic connections between *Esther* and the Jacob-Esau story, and then describe the way in which this story of Jews in the Persian diaspora was designed to help alleviate the distress experienced by contemporary Jews in Judaea.

WHAT IS AN ALLUSION?

An allusion is a reference to figures or events from the past, where there is an assumption that the reader will recognize the source.<sup>15</sup> Usually allusions come to enrich or explain the text; however, sometimes an author can use allusions in order to give an ironic twist to a narrative by creating a gap between the later text and the earlier one to which it alludes.<sup>16</sup> Sommer adds that the later text can make tendentious use of the earlier one by ‘changing’ it according to the later author’s agenda. In this way the general theme of the earlier text is maintained in the later text, but some “improvements” are added.<sup>17</sup>

This notion, wherein one biblical text tendentiously alters a previous one, can be illustrated with the following two verses:<sup>18</sup>

*As I live, says the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck you from there* (Jer. 22:24).

*In that day, says the Lord of hosts, will I take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and will make you as a signet ring: for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts* (Hag. 2:23).

Both of these oracles use similar language, invoking the metaphor of the signet ring, but the first oracle is a negative one whereas the second exudes optimism. While Jeremiah delivered his oracle to the Judean king, prophesying the upcoming exile, Haggai spoke to a post-exilic audience, reassuring them of the continued reign of the Davidic line.

Kugel and Greer identify a typological reading of history, in which earlier events are viewed as patterns which tend to recur over time. They further claim that authors tended to identify contemporary people or groups with earlier figures, while viewing the earlier stories as anticipating the later ones.<sup>19</sup> *Esther* is an ideal conduit for this type of historical reconstruction as the lively narrative is one which enables the reader to identify with the existential anxieties portrayed in the story, an identification which ultimately leads to an optimistic hope that they (the readers) will have a ‘happy ending’ as well.<sup>20</sup> In the following section I will list the ways in which the author of *Esther* made use of the Jacob-Esau narrative.

Of course, methodologically, similarity of language is not sufficient proof that one given text alludes to another. In order to claim a connection between two texts, there need be strong thematic ties as well, and the context must

support the claim for allusion or intertextuality. In the end, it is up to the reader to decide whether the evidence presented suffices to validate this claim.

#### COMPARING THE JACOB-ESAU STORY TO THE BOOK OF ESTHER

The renowned fairy-tale scholar Vladimir Propp recommended analyzing fairy-tales according to two dimensions: the characters involved and the narrative sequence. The Esther story is not a fairy tale, and has none of the narrative elements that Propp identified as typical for that genre. Therefore, we cannot make use of the importance of narrated sequence: when elements in one story appear in a different sequence from those in the other, this may not indicate an intentional deviation. Perhaps the deviation is intended to alert us to the author's implied message, and perhaps not. Nonetheless, these two categories, characters and narrative sequence, are useful when searching for common elements in two disparate narratives.<sup>21</sup> I will first compare the literary function of the characters in the two narratives, and then compare some of the narrative sequences.

##### 1. THE CHARACTERS

In each of the two narratives there are four major figures: two rivals + two other characters who are hierarchically superior. In the Genesis story the rivals are Jacob and Esau, and the authority figures are Isaac and Rebekah; In *Esther* the rivals are Mordecai and Haman, and the authority figures are Ahasuerus and Esther.<sup>22</sup>

##### A. JACOB / MORDECAI

Both Jacob and Mordecai fill the role of the 'hero' in their respective stories. Jacob is described as a “*yošev ohalim*” (Gen. 25:27), while Mordecai is described as “*yošev bša'ar hamelekh*” (Est. 2:21). Both these heroes are favored by the female authority figure in their stories (Rebekah/Esther), and dutifully heed these women's directives in times of crisis (Gen. 27:8-14; Est. 4:15-17). Similar to Jacob/Israel functioning both as an individual and as a progenitor and symbol of the Jewish nation, Mordecai is consistently identified throughout his narrative by his nationality, as Mordecai “*haYehudi*.”

##### B. ESAU / HAMAN

These characters represent the 'villain.' Esau is said to have been his father's favorite (Gen. 25:28), and Haman was likewise initially chosen by the king (Est. 3:1). While the nation descended from Esau is known throughout the bible as Edom, Haman is consistently dubbed throughout Esther as "*haAgagi*"<sup>23</sup> In both stories, this 'villain' becomes enraged at the 'hero' (Gen. 27:41-44; Est. 3:5), with a fury that leads to planned murder. Here, however, we encounter a difference: Esau planned to kill Jacob, the forefather and progenitor of the Jewish nation (Gen. 27:41); Haman's murderous intent encompassed *all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus – the people of Mordecai* (Est. 3:6).

#### C. ISAAC / AHASUERUS

In both stories, the male authority figure is authorized to appoint a 'chosen' one, but in both narratives the reader is led to doubt this figure's competence. In the Genesis story Isaac is said to love Esau because of the food he brought home (Gen. 25:28), not an attribute usually considered laudable in the Bible; he is later described as blind and easily fooled by a doubtful disguise (Genesis 27); in the *Esther* story Ahasuerus is depicted as a capricious and foolish king, repeatedly manipulated by his advisors.

#### D. REBEKAH / ESTHER

In both stories a slave/slaves is/are sent far away to search for an appropriate wife for the male authority figure. This potential bride is then subjected to a test (for Rebekah: a test of character; for Esther: a beauty contest), and are both described as beautiful virgins (Gen. 24:16; Est. 2:7). The lineage of these two women is detailed, in a manner uncharacteristic of other biblical females (Gen. 24:15; Est. 2:15), as is their reaction to the proposed match (Gen. 24:58; Est. 2:8). These are the female authority figures, whose role in the narrative is to persuade the male authority figure to transfer his preference from the 'villain' (his original choice) to the 'hero' (her preference throughout).

#### E. GOD

God is notoriously absent from the *Esther* story; He is curiously missing from the Jacob/Esau narrative as well.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. THE NARRATIVE SEQUENCES

There are several thematic similarities between the Jacob-Esau narrative and that of Esther. In some cases the analogy is direct, and in others the *Esther* narrative subtly alters the earlier narrative. This allows the author of *Esther* to both create the allusion to the Genesis story, while tendentiously amending some of the details in order to create the ‘happy ending’ which the post-exilic readers so desperately needed to hear. I will list the main sequences in the Jacob-Esau narrative, and then compare them to the parallel sequences in the Book of Esther.

#### A. THERE IS A 'ZERO-SUM' STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY BETWEEN THE TWO PROTAGONISTS

Both in the prenatal oracle (Gen 25:23) and in the blessings conferred by Isaac upon his two sons (Gen 27:29, 40) the subsequent relationship between the two men (and their descendants) is presented as decidedly antagonistic. Indeed, as discussed above, the rise of one is necessarily contingent upon the demise of the other. This depiction is mirrored in the book’s chiasmic structure, where the fortunes of the one in the first half of the story is overturned in the second half, allowing contemporary readers to hope for a similar destiny.<sup>25</sup>

#### B. ISAAC BLESSES JACOB, BELIEVING HIM TO BE ESAU; ESAU ENTERS AND DISCOVERS THE DECEPTION

This is the turning point of the story. Up until now, Esau was the intended recipient of Isaac’s blessing; now the tables are turned. The blessing Isaac confers upon Jacob includes supremacy over his brother as well as material wealth (Gen. 27:28-9). In *Esther*, the turning point occurs in chap. 6.<sup>26</sup> Upon discovering that Mordecai had saved his life, Ahasuerus decides to reward him. At exactly that moment, Haman enters, and upon hearing the king’s plan to reward a favorite subject, proposes a reward that would include both fame and prestige, assuming himself the intended recipient of this prize. Instead, shocked, he hears that it is to benefit his bitter enemy.

#### C. AS A RESULT, ESAU PLANS TO KILL HIS BROTHER, DESIGNATING A DATE FOR THE MURDER

In both stories, the ‘hero’ gains no immediate advantage upon getting the father’s blessing/king’s reward. Quite the opposite; he becomes the target of

the ‘villain’s’ murderous intent. Both Esau<sup>27</sup> and Haman<sup>28</sup> set the date for their revenge. In Esau’s case, the date is set for after his father’s death, out of respect for his father. That is when the issue of inheritance becomes important: once Isaac is no longer alive, the rivalry between Jacob and Esau has tangible implications, and Esau needs to remove his competitor for the role of Isaac’s successor. In Haman’s case, he not only plans revenge against Mordecai – but against the entire Jewish people, wherever they may be.

However, the author of *Esther* subtly changed the order of events. In the Jacob story Esau decides to kill his brother *after* his blessing was stolen, compelling Jacob to run away until Esau’s wrath dissipates. In contrast, in *Esther*, Haman had decided to kill Mordecai and his people *before* the ‘stolen’ reward. Indeed, after the horse incident, Haman is said to have returned home in mourning, only to be told by his loved ones that “If Mordecai be of the descendants of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you shall not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him.”<sup>29</sup>

By altering both the order of events, as well as the subsequent outcome, the author of *Esther* subverts the expected outcome. Where the audience might cringe at Haman’s downfall in chap. 6, expecting Haman’s murderous revenge, they are surprised by the diametrically opposite result: the Edomite admits defeat, while Jacob’s descendants prevail. Haman’s loved ones’ prediction comes true not long after, when king Ahasuerus removes the signet of favor from Haman’s hand, and transfers it – with all of the power and authority it entails – to Mordecai.<sup>30</sup>

#### D. REBEKAH’S ROLE IN THE STORY: FROM TRICKING ISAAC INTO TRANSFERRING HIS BLESSING TO JACOB, TO ADVISING JACOB TO RUN AWAY FROM ESAU

Rebekah fulfills an important role in the Genesis story. Having received the oracle which proclaimed Jacob’s superiority, she assists Jacob procure Isaac’s blessing by deceit. When Jacob expresses apprehension at being discovered, Rebekah addresses this problem by reassuring him that she will be responsible for any negative outcome (Gen. 27:13), and then gives him clothes (Gen. 27:15-16). When she hears (Gen. 27:42) of Esau’s intended revenge, she urges Jacob to flee – and only then, for the first time, does she turn to her husband with a request (Gen. 27:46).

Esther plays the role of Rebekah in the Book of Esther.<sup>31</sup> When she hears (Est. 4:4) of Mordecai's mourning (following Haman's decree against the Jews), she similarly both provides him with clothes (Est 4:4)<sup>32</sup> and takes upon herself any negative outcome of approaching the king (Est. 4:16). This story, too, emphasizes the lack of communication between the male and authority figure and his wife;<sup>33</sup> when Esther finally does turn to her husband, similar to Rebekah, it is with a request (Est. 5:4).<sup>34</sup>

When Rebekah hears of Esau's intentions, and in an effort to save her beloved son, she urges him to flee. He complies, resulting in years of exile and humiliation. Jacob flees eastward, raises a family and rebuilds his life; but all the while his is a downtrodden and demeaning existence, and he pines for home. The Jews of the early second temple period are familiar with this existence. Like Jacob, they lived a life of exile in the east; however, as opposed to Jacob, they were free to return to their land.

Once again, the author of *Esther* gently subverts the plot. When Esther tells Mordecai that she cannot help, Mordecai refuses her plea for passivity: "For if you altogether hold your peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place."<sup>35</sup> The solution is not to run away, but to face the danger; not to passively await destruction, but to actively determine their own destiny.

While the reader may have expected Mordecai to flee, the book's message is clear: stay and fight for your lives. The nation's salvation is not dependent upon Esther, for if she will not come forth, then deliverance will arise "from another place." This conveys the message that the nation of Israel can withstand the current crisis. However, it adds an additional element. Deliverance will come, but there is need for action on the Jews' part as well. Mordecai instructs Esther to go and plead for her nation.<sup>36</sup> Several scholars claim that the Jews were expected to take an active role in their salvation as well.<sup>37</sup> The Jew reading this story now knows that not only does he not need to flee in fear; instead, he is expected to actively take responsibility for his own fate.

#### E. ISAAC, DESPITE HIS INITIAL PREFERENCE, BESTOWS THE BLESSING UPON JACOB

Who is the chosen son? Isaac prefers Esau, but Rebekah loves Jacob (Gen. 25:28). Isaac intends to bless Esau, Rebekah causes Jacob to be the recipient



of the blessing. In the beginning of the Esther story, Ahasuerus promotes Haman (Est. 3:1), while Esther was under Mordecai's care (Est. 2:7). Echoing the zero-sum relationship oracle given to Rebekah (Gen. 25:23), the fortunes of the two protagonists in the second half of the Esther story is presented as a deliberate reversal of their fate in the first half. In the Jacob-Esau story Esau is given the hope that "it shall come to pass when you shall have the dominion, that you shall break his yoke from off your neck,"<sup>38</sup> a prediction which came true upon Jacob's return from Haran.<sup>39</sup> With a sly wink to his readers, the author of *Esther* recounts that regarding Haman, "Mordecai bowed not, nor paid him homage."<sup>40</sup>

There is an additional motif which connect these two stories, encouraging the reader of Esther to keep the Jacob-Esau narrative in mind while reading the Esther story. While extensive descriptions of food are foreign to biblical narrative, they figure prominently in both stories, and food plays a key function in these two narratives.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. LINGUISTIC CONNECTIONS

Allusions to the Jacob-Esau story in the Book of Esther are based primarily on the characters and the plot sequences, as shown above. In addition, two linguistic formulations connect these two narratives. First, the use of the verb form יָבִיז occurs exclusively in these two stories (Gen. 25:34, Est. 3:6). In both this verb is ascribed to the 'villain' in the story, whose downfall could eventually be traced back to this "disdain." Second, the entire phrase *vayiz 'aq z' aqa g' dola umara* (Gen. 27:34) is repeated almost verbatim in Esther 4:1.<sup>42</sup>

### JACOB AND ESAU IN THE ARAMEAN TRANSLATIONS OF *ESTHER*

Medieval literature, too, viewed *Esther* as a revised version of the Jacob-Esau story. We have two early editions of Aramean translations<sup>43</sup> to *Esther* which provide us with additional ways to connect the two narratives.

These translations view Mordecai as a direct descendent of Jacob, and Haman as a descendent of Esau. In the long genealogical lists given for these two characters, Jacob is identified as the "firstborn,"<sup>44</sup> whereas Haman's genealogy goes back to "... the son of 'Amaleq, the son of the concubine Eliphaz, who is the firstborn of Esau."<sup>45</sup> Besides the strong connection between Mordecai/Haman and Jacob/Esau, the difference between the two descriptions is

striking: whereas the ‘firstborn’ in Jacob’s line is Jacob, that role was given to Eliphaz in the Esau line.

Some of the additions found in the Aramean translations echo the Jacob-Esau story as well. For example, there is a story in which Mordecai and Haman were given provisions before a journey. Haman ate his and quickly became hungry. He asked Mordecai for some food, who consented, on condition that Haman sell himself to Mordecai as a slave; and Haman agreed.<sup>46</sup> Similar to Genesis story, these two characters started off equal, but Haman eventually became subordinate to Mordecai following the barter of food for his freedom.

Another addition relates Haman’s monologue following the aforementioned sale. Here, the sale is an outcome of Mordecai’s refusal to lend money to Haman with interest, because *Esau and Jacob were brothers*. Therefore, Haman had to sell himself to Mordecai, a fate which he swore to bear a grudge forever – *Just like Esau bore a grudge to Jacob, following the sale of the birth-right*.<sup>47</sup>

A third connection mentions how Haman taunts Mordecai, who refused to bow down to him, by recounting how Jacob bowed down before Esau. Mordecai replied that at the time that Jacob had bowed, Benjamin (Mordecai’s direct ancestor) had not yet been born, and had never bowed to any person. That is why, continues Mordecai, God allowed His temple to be built on Benjamin’s portion of the land, a place where all the nations will one day bow in obedience.<sup>48</sup> This too would have been relevant for the Jews in Judea, who were in the process of rebuilding the temple, while wondering whether they are still the chosen ones. The first translation of *Esther* also connects these two events. In a supplement to the translation of Est. 3:1, describing how Haman (having sabotaged plans to rebuild the temple) seems to have the upper hand, God declares that He will take revenge on Haman in the future for all of the troubles he and his forefathers have caused the Jewish people throughout the ages.

#### CONCLUSION

In this paper I claimed the Book of Esther is part of the wider phenomenon of post-exilic prophecies aimed at reassuring the Jews that they are still God’s chosen people. Many of these prophecies specifically refer to the Jacob-Esau story, emphasizing that Jacob is (and will remain) the chosen one. I have showed how allusions to the Jacob-Esau narrative in *Esther* not only connect

Israel's present plight with that of their eponymous ancestor, but that several subtle alterations from the original story which appear in *Esther* suggest a better ending to the original story.

Some evidence from later translations to *Esther* were brought to support this claim. Throughout the ages, from the first temple period onward, Jews (who regarded themselves as descendants of Jacob) viewed the people of Edom as potential competition for the 'birthright' and God's favor. Jewish literature, from biblical times onward, responded to this fear by utilizing the Jacob-Esau story and its variants in their rhetoric.

#### NOTES

1. Post-exilic biblical literature alludes to both the economic difficulties (for example, Neh. 1:1-3) and the strained political situation (Ez. 4:2-6). For extra-biblical sources on the situation in Judea during the early Persian period see John R. Bartlett, "Edom and the Fall of Jerusalem, 587 B.C.," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 114(1), 1982, pp. 13-24.
2. To minimize confusion, I will italicize *Esther* when referring to the book, and leave it in Roman Face when referring to its eponymous heroine.
3. Elie Assis, "From Adam to Esau and Israel: An Anti-Edomite Ideology in I Chronicles 1," *VT* 56(3), 2006, p. 302.
4. Jer. 2:4; Am. 3:13; Hos. 10:11; Mic. 1:5; Lam. 2:3; and others.
5. John G. Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36," in: Martin J. Buss (ed.), *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: SBL, 1979), p. 127.
6. The prenatal oracle given to Rebekah already hints at the future struggle between the two nations (Gen. 25:23).
7. See, for example, Isa. 34; 63:1-6; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35; 36:5; Am. 1:11-12; 9:12; Joel 4:19; Obad.; Mal. 1:2-5; and others.
8. For a detailed study on this topic see Elie Assis, "Why Edom? On the Hostility Towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources," *VT* 56(1), 2006a, pp. 1-20. Bartlett contended that although this view is supported by scripture, the historical facts may not be so decisive. For further studies on the presentation of Edom in biblical literature see James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 354-5, and in post-biblical (rabbinic) literature see Carol Bakhos, "Figuring (out) Esau: The Rabbis and Their Others," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 58(2), 2007, 250-262.
9. Bert Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story*, JSOT supp. 169 (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 2006), p. 185.
10. For example: Lam. 3:31; Ezek. 7:27; Isa. 41:9; and others. For more on this topic, see John Kessler, "Prophetic Hope in the Late-Babylonian and Persian Periods: An Introduction," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 3 (2014), pp. 155-162.
11. So, for example, in the oracle to Rebekah, *and the one people shall be stronger than the other people* (Gen. 25:23); and in Jacob's 'blessing' to Esau, *And by your sword shall you live, and shall*

*serve your brother; and it shall come to pass when you shall have the dominion, that you shall break his yoke from off your neck* (Gen. 27:40).

12. *And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord has spoken it* (Obad. 18).

13. *I have loved you, says the Lord. Yet you say, How have you loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Says the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau . . .* (Mal. 1:2-3).

14. Yitzchak Berger, "Esther and Benjamite Royalty: A Study in Inner-Biblical Allusion," *JBL* 129 (2010), pp. 625-644, illustrates the allusions to Joseph; W. Lee Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *JBL* 92 (1973), pp. 211-223, discusses the allusions to Daniel.

15. Kathleen Morner and Ralph Raunch, *The National Textbook Company's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Lincolnwood: IL, 1994), p. 5.

16. M.H. Adams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993), p. 8.

17. Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 27-29.

18. This example is taken from W. M. Schniedewind, "Are We His People Or Not?," *Biblica* 77 (1995), pp. 540-550.

19. James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer. Wayne A. Meeks, (eds.), *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), pp. 46-7. Thus Isaiah uses the Exodus story as a model for future deliverance, and first temple prophet use the desert Wanderings as a motif.

20. For more on the identification of a reader with biblical narrative see Carmel McCarthy and William Riley, *The Old Testament Short Story: Explorations into Narrative Spirituality* (Yonkers: Liturgical Press, 1986), pp. 84-86; for the ways in which this dynamic is present in general literature see Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

21. Many scholars contend that it has all of the elements of a folktale (See, for example, Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1987), ch. 5.

22. Using a king and queen to represent parental figures is common in fairy tales; see Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (NY: Knopf, 1989), p. 129. Once again, I am not suggesting that Esther is a fairy tale. For the analogy between the authority figures of Isaac and Ahasuerus see Jonathan Grossman, "'Dynamic Analogies' in the Book of Esther," *VT* 59 (2009), pp. 394-414, particularly p. 399.

23. Agag was the king of the Amalekites (see I Sam. 15:8, 32), and Amalek was a direct descendant of Esau (Gen. 36:10-12).

24. The only mention of God in the Genesis narrative is the oracle given to Rebekah before the birth of the twins.

25 " . . . *On the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them*" (Est. 9:1).

26. The reference to 'turning point' in both of these narratives is to the point at which one of the protagonists gains supremacy over the other. There are, of course, other ways in which to view these narratives which would result in determining alternative 'turning points.'

27. Genesis 27:41.

28. Esther 3:7.

29. Esther 6:13.

30. To further drive the point home, Haman (as well as "all their enemies") were executed by royal decree (Est. 7:10, 8:11).

31. Vivien Hiday gave an excellent talk detailing the comparison between Rebekah and Esther. The complete lecture can be found here: <https://www.hatanakh.com/en/lessons/rivka-esther-mirror-images>.

32. Later on, when she has to address Ahasuerus, her clothes are mentioned as well (Est. 5:1).

33. Est. 4:11.

34. Interestingly, both Rebekah and Esther do not voice their concern in their respective requests. Rebekah is concerned for Jacob's safety, but asks Isaac to ensure that Jacob not take a Canaanite wife; Esther is concerned for her nation's safety, but asks Ahasuerus to join her in a banquet.

35. Est. 4:14.

36. Est. 4:8.

37. See Michael V. Fox, *The Redaction of the Books of Esther: On Reading Composite Texts* (Atlanta: SBL, 1991), p. 123. Meinhold avers that the absence of God in the Book of Esther emphasizes the Jews' responsibility for their own fate (Mentioned in Michale V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1991), p. 23. Cohen, quoting Bardke, adds that the Jews' survival is dependent upon their courageous stance as well as upon God's hand in history. Gavriel Hai Cohen, "Haparshanut leMegillat Esther beSarat haZman", *Iyyunei Miqra v'Parshanut* 8, 2008, p. 143.

38. Gen. 27:40.

39. Jacob bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother (Gen. 33:3).

40. Est. 3:2.

41. The Jacob story commences with the concocting and sale of the lentil stew (Gen. 25:29); continues with the entire story of Isaac's blessing revolving around the theme of food (Gen. 27). Wine is mentioned as well. The *Esther* story opens with a grand banquet (Est. 1:3,5); and Esther prepares two banquets while in her attempt to save her nation (Est. 4:5,8). The lack of food is described as well: Esther and her handmaidens fast for three days, calling upon all Jews to do likewise (Est. 4:16). Victory is celebrated with food (Est. 9:17), and an annual commemoration of this victory is to be celebrated with food as well (Est. 9:22).

42. Rabbinic exegesis have expounded on this connection, see *Genesis Rabbah*, 67:4.

43. Both of these translations date circa the 7<sup>th</sup> cent. CE. The first, known as *Targum Rishon*, is a more or less straightforward translation, whereas the second, *Targum Sheni*, has many lengthy additions.

44. Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Sheni to the Book of Esther: A critical edition based on MS Sassoon 282 with critical apparatus* (NY: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1994), on Est 2:5.

45. *Ibid*, on Est. 3:1.

46. This story is also found in BT *Megilla* 15:1.

47. Bernard Grossfeld, *The First Targum to Esther: According to the MS Paris Hebrew 110 of the Bibliotheque Nationale*, (NY: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1983), pp. 50-51.

48. Grossfeld (1994), on Est. 3:3.

---

---



If you have written a paper in the *Jewish Bible Quarterly* and wish to see if it has been quoted in another academic journal, book, or doctoral dissertation, access <http://scholar.google.com> and type in Jewish Bible Quarterly under "journal" and your name under "author".

