NOTES AND READINGS

Human Anger and Divine Intervention in Esther

The religious perspective of the author of Esther has long presented an enigma to traditional and critical readers alike. Generations of readers have been puzzled by the absence of explicit references to God's name in the book,[1] and it was presumably this fact that aroused the dissatisfaction of the authors of the Septuagint additions,[2] whose primary purpose was to introduce an appropriate religious tone, spelling out the miraculous nature of the Jews' salvation from the peril that threatened to engulf them. Without deviating from the Masoretic text, the Rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash performed a similar task of filling in the gaps in the scriptural account, such that its heroes are motivated primarily by religious values and considerations, and the manipulating hands of God and His angels are always perceptible behind the scenes.[3]

In contrast to such traditional religous readings, much of modern Esther scholarship has argued that the book expresses an essentially secular worldview. Proponents of this approach assert that, according to the author of Esther, the currents of Jewish history are determined by a combination of human decisions and chance factors, rather than by supernatural providence.'

Such fundamental differences in approach make it difficult for moderns to utilize the traditional Jewish interpretations of Esther that are embodied in the many midrashic compilations on the scroll, and scattered among various Talmudic works, notably the lengthy Babylonian commentary preserved in TB Megillah. Clearly the motives of the Rabbis were not those of objective literary or historical scholarship; Their explanations of the biblical texts usually arose out of homiletical needs, and it was inconceivable to them that any meaningful divergences in religious values could exist between the biblical authors and themselves.

In spite of all the above reservations, none would deny that the meticulous attention paid by the ancient Jewish sages to their sacred texts encourages a fruitful sensitivity to the carefully created language of biblical literature, that is capable of enhancing and deepening our appreciation of the scroll—even if we do not share their assumption that divine inspiration lends untold significance to each word and letter.

In the present study, I propose to explore one such insight, involving some typically rabbinic observations on Esther that may help us in unravelling some major literary and theological puzzles of that book.

In a number of places in Talmudic literature, the ancient Jewish sages draw our attention to the importance of anger as a factor determining the plot. Thus,

PROOFTEXTS 9 (1989) 247–256

the following passage comments on Esth. 1:12, describing King Ahasuerus' reactions to Vashti's refusal to display herself before the guests attending his feast: "This greatly incensed the king, and he grew hot with anger."[5]

> Said R. Johanan: Throughout those seven years—from the time when Vashti was put to death until Haman was crucified—his wrath continued to burn within him.[6]

R. Johanan, probably the most distinguished Palestinian teacher of the mid-third century, is alluding to the fact that the story of Esther both begins and ends with references to royal anger. The plot is set into motion by Ahasuerus' incensed removal of the disobedient Vashti, and reaches its denouement in the execution of the villainous Haman in 7:9: "the king's rage abated."[7]

The Midrash itself is quick to point out that the king's rage over Vashti does actually subside before this, at the very beginning of Chapter 2, and offers its own resolution of the objection.[8] The fact remains, however, that much of the action in Esther owes to the surging of wrath, be it the king's or that of other protagonists in the intricate plot. It is likely that the observation attributed to R. Johanan is trying to underline this truth.

Anger is indicated in Esther chiefly by means of two Hebrew words: *ḥemah* and *qatsaf*.[9] If we examine the actual occurrences of these roots in the Scroll, we observe, as did R. Johanan, that they occur at crucial points in the narrative.

Let us note first of all that the principal narrative tension in the plot, that of Haman's genocidal intrigue against the Jews of the Persian empire, is attributed in Esther to his uncontrollable anger against Mordecai's refusal to bow down before him (3:5). Haman's reaction is to become "filled with rage" against Mordecai and his people. This element is so central to the author's perception of the story as to be repeated again in 5:9, in a verse that underscores the viciousness of Haman's fury, as the sight of Mordecai transforms him instantly from extremes of good spirit to blind rage. This episode is strategically positioned at the turning-point of the narrative: Until now, the plot has described the steadily mounting tide of peril rushing to engulf the Jews. Though some significant foundations have already been laid for their eventual deliverance, the tide will not really begin to turn in the Jews' favor until the following chapter. The author's reiteration of Haman's anger, at precisely this critical juncture, is obviously an intentional underscoring of its importance to the Scroll's thematic structure.[10]

Since the villain of the story is driven by fury, it is not inappropriate that his undoing should be achieved largely through the subtle manipulation of anger in several of the book's characters. As we trace the various allusions to anger and wrath throughout Esther, we note that almost every major turn in the plot is described in relation to the surging or subsiding of anger.

Thus, in 1:2 it is Ahasuerus' rage against Vashti (arguably an overreaction to the stimulus)[11] that causes her to be removed from the throne, creating the opening for Esther to succeed her, a turn in the plot without which the desired outcome of the story would be inconceivable. Similarly, it is the eventual

assuaging of the king's wrath at the beginning of Chapter 2—which presumably involved a longing for his deposed queen[12]—that actually allows Ahasuerus to commence searching for her replacement. Without this reversal in his temperament, he might logically have chosen to continue his reign without a queen. This too would have been intolerable for the requisite unfolding of the plot.

Similarly, the anger which incited Bigtan and Teresh to plot the king's assassination in 2 2 1 fulfills an important precondition for the subsequent unravelling of the narrative, in Chapter *6* where Mordecai's deed is recalled and results in his enjoying royal honors at Haman's humiliating expense. The narrator's attribution of the plot to the eunuch's anger—an anger whose grounds are never explained13-is obviously significant: There is no shortage of reasons why courtiers might try to kill their monarch, not the least of which is plain political ambition. Indeed, the narrative might easily have described the plot without spelling out its precise motivation. The fact that the author does take the trouble to supply such a motivation is evidently not without importance.

The implications of this fact become more apparent when we read it in conjunction with the description (in Chap. *6)* of how the king does eventually come to recall, at a strategic point in the story, his debt to Mordecai. The famous "sleepless night" interlude, which prompted Ahasuerus to have the royal chronicles read before him, has been recognized by both traditional and modern commentators as a strong indication of divine workings in the plot.14 The suggestion seems to be that the anger of Bigtan and Teresh, which provided the initial occasion for Mordecai's assisting Ahasuerus, is to be perceived as no less a providential interference in the natural course of events.15

We have seen above that the ***abatement*** of Ahasuerus' anger was presented as a sign of supernatural manipulation of the events. It appears reasonable to propose that a similar conclusion may legitimately be drawn with respect to the ***absence*** of the king's anger at another critical juncture in the plot. We are referring to the most suspenseful episode in the story, when Esther agrees to go unsummoned before the king in order to invite him and Haman to the first of the feasts which she had devised with a view to bringing about Haman's final undoing. Esther is profoundly aware (4:11) that to enter the royal presence uninvited, in addition to constituting a grave and punishable breach of palace protocol, is also likely to kindle the fury of a king whose unpredictable temper has already been proven in the past. In theory, there is no obvious reason why Ahasuerus should not respond to the queen's *lèse majesté* just as he had reacted earlier to Vashti's analogous provocation[16] or, for that matter, as Haman had reacted to Mordecai's conduct. The fact that, against all likelihood, the king did ultimately receive her graciously, rather than with the expected burst of royal rage (5:2), was evidently also portrayed by the author as a miraculous manipulation of his emotions.

In the end, what actually seals Haman's doom is the successful directing of the king's fury against him. Having put Ahasuerus in a contented and receptive

mood, Esther now paints before him a fully pathetic picture of the evil fate to which Haman has consigned her. The result is (7:7) that "the king arose in anger from his wine";[17] in his rage he orders that Haman be hanged, and only after the villain is hanged upon the gallows that he erected for Mordecai does the text conclude that "the king's anger was abated" (7:9). This final subsiding of the king's fury marks the virtual termination of the story, with the subsequent chapters constituting, for the most part, a denouement and unravelling of processes that by now are virtually irreversible.

The reader will have remarked that our analysis of the place occupied by anger in the Esther narrative has not been restricted to literary observations: It appears obvious, in view of the phenomena we have indicated, that underlying the author's symmetrical construction of the events stands a firm theological conviction that God, while generally allowing the events to take a natural course, is also assumed to be tweaking at the strings at strategic moments in order to ensure that justice will ultimately prevail. It would be anachronisitic to expect the biblical author to systematically confront the theological difficulties implied in such apparent limitations of human free will. He seems at peace with the notion that the inherently irrational realm of human emotions such as anger[18] is a legitimate area for the exerting of providential influences.

The narrator's treatment of anger takes on further significance when we relate it to another feature of Esther's literary structure, one which has been observed and recognized by both traditional19 and modern students:[20] i.e., the close thematic and stylistic similarities it exhibits to the Joseph stories in Genesis. Though scholarship has agreed that such similarities and allusions were introduced intentionally by the author of Esther, there is considerable disagreement as to their meaning and implications.

Like Esther, the Joseph story is told in a naturalistic manner, such that most of the events result from the personalities and decisions of the protagonists. As found in its present context in Genesis, God has already promised to Abraham (in Chap.15) that his descendants will find themselves enslaved in a strange land; and the reader, at some level of consciousness, is expected to be aware that the whole story is somehow being channeled toward that end. The divine workings are never spelled out, though they can be presumed to be imminent in such phenomena as the respective dreams of Joseph, of the imprisoned royal servants, and of Pharaoh; as well as in the famine which ultimately forces Jacoband his family to migrate to Egypt. In comparing the tale of Esther and Mordecai to that of Joseph and his brothers, the author of Esther is likely making a statement about the nature of God's workings in human affairs—but what is the statement? Some have argued that he is intentionally contrasting the two stories through his conspicuous removal of references to God or traditional religious concepts, in order to present a totally secular world view according to which national deliverance is to be furthered through purely human agencies.[21] Others have countered by noting the presence in Esther of such distinctly religious elements as fasting and crying-out (4:1–4, 16, etc.), which would be meaningless outside the context of a prayerful appeal to divine deliverance.'' While it would far transcend the scope of this study to attempt to say the last word on this venerable controversy, we would propose that our reading of the evidence lends support to a religious interpretation of the

author's intention. A more moderate and acceptable formulation of the religious position might be that the author of Esther is convinced that in his own time God's workings are no longer as manifest as they were in earlier generations; thus the Joseph story can serve as a better model for his contemporaries than the visible and public miracles of Moses or Elijah.[23]

With these issues in mind, we may proceed to an investigation of the appearances of anger in the Joseph story.

It is a matter of some surprise that the normal Hebrew words designating anger (*qṣf, ḥmh, 'f*) are not employed at all to indicate the relations between Joseph and his brothers, which are described in terms of hatred, jealousy, etc. The root *qṣf* makes its appearance in only one place, in 40:2, where it is related that "Pharaoh was angry with these two eunuchs, the chief butler and the chief baker, and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard etc."

Once again, the Rabbis of the Midrash (here too the tradition is attributed to the same R. Johanan whom we cited above) supply us with some useful insights on the question:[24]

> Said R. Hiyya bar Abba in the name of R. Johanan: [God] aroused the anger of a king upon his servants in order to carry out the will of a righteous man—i.e., Joseph, as it is written: "And Pharaoh was incensed against his two servants." And He aroused the anger of servants against their master in order to carry out the will of a righteous man—that is: Mordecai. . . ."

As perceived by Rabbi Johanan, the analogy to Esther is most instructive. The imprisonment of the eunuchs performs a function similar to that of the assassination plot of Ahasuerus' eunuchs,[25] with respect to which the same root *qṣf* is also employed: It is a requisite link in a complex chain of events, without which the desired outcome of the story might not have been achieved. As with the Esther parallel, no cause is supplied for Pharaoh's anger,[26] and the account might easily have omitted the detail altogether. And in a manner reminiscent of Esther, the fact of the eunuchs' imprisonment is in itself of no use to the progress of the plot until it is coupled with the incident of the king's interrupted sleep, in Genesis 41, which leads to the butler's telling Pharaoh of Joseph's prowess in the interpretation of dreams.

Seen from the perspective of the Joseph story, I believe that this single incident presents further evidence of the function of anger in Esther. Just as in the Joseph story,[27] where God's behind-the-scenes operations constitute an unquestioned assumption of the story, so also in Esther, it is God who is inciting the wrath of Bigtan and Teresh, in order to create a situation which will eventually lead to the glorification of Mordecai at the expense of Haman[28]—precisely as observed by R. Johanan.

Our analysis of the treatment of anger in Esther, inspired by the perceptive observations of rabbinic commentators, has served to support a conservative reading of Esther, in which the absence of explicit references to God or traditional religious value-concepts is not to be ascribed to a secularist world view. The specific topic of anger is to be combined with a number of other literary devices through which the author29 has skillfully portrayed a world in

which, while humans appear to be either autonomous agents or objects of circumstance, there exists a higher power that is able, through imperceptible machinations, to determine the outcome of historical events.

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NOTES

1. A good summary of the problem is found in C. A. Moore's introduction to the *Anchor Bible* [= AB] version of Esther (Garden City, 1971), pp. xxxii–xxxiii; cf. L. Paton, *International Critical Commentary* [= ICC] commentary to Esther (Edinburgh, 1951), pp. 94–96. Some other studies will be cited below. This is a suitable occasion to put to rest the oft-quoted thesis proposed by C. Torrey, "The Older Book of Esther," *HTR* 37 (1944): 11, and included in Paton's commentary, to the effect that God's name was removed from Esther because of its association with the drunkenness of the Purim festivities. The truth is that the custom of drinking on this holiday is a late (fourth-century) Babylonian one, and does not appear to have been known in the Land of Israel. In fact, the Palestinian *Midrash Esther Rabbah* uses the events of Esther as an object lesson in the evils of inebriation. See also: S. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structures* (Ann Arbor, 1979), pp. 1, 11–14, 70.

In light of the above facts, it is particularly surprising to note how some recent studies of Esther and Purim persist in interpreting them anachronistically, according to medieval European practices. An unfortunate example of such ahistoricism is the recent article by E. L. Greenstein, "A Jewish Reading of Esther," in: J. Neusner, B. Levine, E. Frerichs and C. McCracken-Flesher, eds., *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 225–45. Greenstein explains the literary character of Esther in terms of the Jewish customs and attitudes of later eras (such as the late medieval Italian masquerades [p. 231]!). Though ostensibly fending off such criticism in his announcement (p. 226) that the study is made "with tongue nestled in cheek," one wonders why an exercise of this sort should have been included in a scholarly collection. (Hopefully he is not serious when he writes [p. 223] that "to ask what a text says is the same as asking . . . what we do with the text.")

2. Moore, A. B., lxi–lxiv; *Studies in the Book of Esther* (New York, 1982), pp. xxii–xxiv; 448–602; Paton, ICC, 29–47; cf. C. Torrey, "The Older Book of Esther," pp. 1–40; D. Clines, *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story* (JSOT 30; Sheffield, 1984), is the most thorough attempt to date to utilize the Greek materials for the purpose of literary analysis. In his remarks on the Septuagint (168–74), he argues that the purpose of the reworking was not to *introduce* the religious element, since it was obviously found implicitly in the Masoretic version (see next note), but simply to make it *explicitly* conform to the norms of postbiblical historiography.

3. On the theological presuppositions of midrashic exegesis see: I. Heinemann, *Darkhei ha'aggadah* (Jerusalem/Tel Aviv, 1974), especially pp. 15–95. Good examples of modern variations on the traditional approach may be found in: A. D. Cohen, "'Ha-Goral': The Religious Significance of Esther," *Judaism* 23 (1974): 87–94; Y. Kaufmann, *History of the Religion of Israel* 4 (New York/Jerusalem/Dallas, 1977): 520–26.

4. See sources cited by Y. Kaufmann, *History*, p. 583 n. 30; A. Meinhold, "Die Gattung der Josephsgeschichte und des Esterbuches: Diasporanovelle II," *ZAW* 88 (1976): 72–93 (reprinted in Moore, *Studies*, pp. 284–305); G. Gerlemann, "Studien zu Esther," *Biblische Studien* 48 (1966): 1–48 [Moore, 308–49]; *Esther* (BKAT 2111–2, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1970–73); Moore in his AB commentary (pp. xxxii–xxxiii) reviews the "normal" Jewish

religious values and legal concerns that are lacking in Esther. Clines never doubts the author's underlying belief in divine manipulation of the events; see, e.g., his remarks on pp. 26 ("providential coincidences") and 170; cf. p. 19. See also: E. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York, 1967), pp. 178,197–98. Berg, pp. 11–14,173–84 presents an important analysis of the issues and earlier literature; as will become evident below, I accept most of her conclusions. Of especial interest is S. Talmon's thesis, presented in "'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther," *VT* 13 (1963): 419–55, that Esther represents a narrative version of "Wisdom" ideals which by their nature have a secular flavor. We shall have occasion to discuss some of the arguments below (especially in nn. 23, 28).

5. The translation here follows the *New English Bible.*

6. *Esther Rabbah* 3:15; *Midrash Abba Goryon* 1 (ed. S. Buber, [Vilna, 1887]: 16). On the correctness of the translation "crucified" [impaled? hanged?], cf. J. M. Baumgarten, "Does TLH in the Temple Scroll Refer to Crucifixion?" *JBL* 91 (1972): 472–83.

7. Clines, p. 16: "Not [Haman's] wicked plot, but the king's outrage costs him his life. . . ." A Palestinian midrashic tradition underlying many explanations in *Esfher Rabbah* allows unnamed references to "the king" in Esther to be applied to God. Accordingly, we find Esth. 7:9 interpreted as a *double entendre;* as in TB Megillah 16a; *Midrash panim aherim* B (ed. S. Buber [Vilna, 1887]), p. 77; *Leqah tov,* p. 108. Note Moore's comparison to Gen. 7:1 (AB 17).

The fact that the story continues long after it has been resolved (certainly by the end of Ch. 8) is dealt with at great length by Clines, especially pp. 39–68 (also pp. 27, 29, 30), where he attempts to draw source-critical conclusions from the anomalies of Chs. 9 and 10 *vis-à-vis* the rest of the book; cf. B. W. Jones, "The So-called Appendix to the Book of Esther," *Semitics* 6 (1978): 36–43, discussed by Clines, pp. 60–63.

8. *Abba Goryon, Esfher Rabbah,* ibid. Also in *Leqah tov* (ed. Buber [Vilna, 1887], p. 108): "They object: Is it not written (2:1) *keshokh*— *[It* says] *keshokh* but not *shokh;* i.e., it was assuaged, and yet not assuaged. But when Haman was crucified (7:10), then 'the king's wrath was [fully] assuaged'." Clines, p. 100, sees 7:10 as a stylistic borrowing from 2:1.

9. The more common biblical way of expressing anger, *h y 'f* is not found at all in Esther, though it is employed frequently in biblical books that are at least as late. It is typically applied to *divine* anger (see Baumgarten, citing Yadin). The other two terms, though more freauent in later writings, are well attested in all strata of biblical Hebrew. All three terms get grouped together regularly for purposes of parallelism: see the lists of synonyms assembled in *BDB,* pp. 404, 893. Moore in his AB commentary, to 1:12 (9), notes the typical use of parallelism between *ḥmh* and *qṣf* and cites additional examples. The difficult phraseology in 1:18 does not appear to have direct bearing on our discussion.

10. On Haman's rage at Mordecai and how crucial it is to the plot see Clines, pp. 26, 44, 65, 141–42, etc. On Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman, see ibid., 45 (and notes). Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible,* cites the apt portrayal by Dante of Haman confined to the terrace of anger in Purgatory in the company of other victims of blind fury, and doomed to gaze upon the objects of his wrath. Bickerman sees Haman's irrational rage as his dominant personality trait.

11. The midrashic accounts supply Vashti with an assortment of suitably arrogant and defiant responses; see the material cited by L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1969) 6:456 nn. 36–37.

12. See Ginzberg *Legends,* 457–58 n. 52. Cf. Moore, AB, 17, 25; Clines, p. 11.

13. The pivotal status of this event for the subsequent unravelling of the plot is noted by Clines, pp. 9–10, 105. On various speculations about the eunuchs' motives (a preoccupation that goes back as far as the Septuagint), see Moore, AB, 31–32; cf. the rabbinic retellings in Ginzberg, *Legends,* 6:461 n. 88. **Cf.** G. Driver, "Problems and Solutions," *VT* 4(1954): 239 (cited by Moore, AB, 63).

14. The perception of a divine cause for the king's insomnia is an ancient one; cf. references in Ginzberg, 6:475, n. 161. Clines (104–7) cites the remarkable variants of the

Greek "A-Text," to 6:1, according to which the courtiers express their envy of Mordecai before the king. According to Clines' reconstruction, the underlying Hebrew had actually spoken of the courtiers'anger at Mordecai!

15. In characteristic fashion, the Rabbis expressed this supernatural intervention in terms of angels; e.g., *Midrash* Abba *Goryon* 1 (p. 16, to Esth. 1:12 [also in Esther Rabbah 3:15; *Leqah Tov* p. 921)—"Said R. Hanina [On the reading of the name, see Buber's n. 233]: At that very moment the Holy One indicated to the angel in charge of wrath (*heimah*). He said to him: Hurry and blow on the embers, and cast some brimstone into the furnace" (see various editions for textual variants).

16. The text makes it clear that Esther had not been summoned before him for thirty days; i.e., she had every reason to suppose that she was in a state of official disfavor, perhaps even disgrace. On the significance of this passage see also Clines, p. 16.

17. See *Midrash panim aherim* B (ed. S. Buber [Vilna, 1887]), p. 76: "At that very moment, the king's wrath arose, and Satan was burning it within him." The Midrash there (see references in Ginzberg, 6:478 n. 181) goes on todescribe in more explicit terms how God sent angels disguised as Haman's sons to further fan the king's anger by appearing to chop down the trees in the royal garden.

18. The same might apply to other psychological drives, like "favor" (hen), which often appears here as sexual attraction. There is some question whether the authors of Esther and other biblical writings felt that Jews were immune to such emotional manipulation. Maimonides' well-known explanation of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, as outlined in the last of his Eight Chapters (the introduction to his Commentary to Mishnah Avot) is methodologically instructive for such questions.

19. See for example Esther Rabbah 7:7: "R. Johanan said in the name of R. Benjamin son of R. Levi: The descendants of Rachel are alike in the miracles they experience . . ." followed by a long list of linguistic parallels between the Joseph and Esther sagas; cf. TB Megillah 16a–17a.

20. L. A. Rosenthal, "Die Josephsgeschichte, mit den Büchern Ester und Daniel verglichen," ZAW 15 (1859): 278–84 (also in Moore's Studies); M. Gan, "The Book of Esther in the Light of the Story of Joseph in Egypt" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 31 (1961–62): 144–49; Meinhold; Cohen, p. 93, n. 15. The examples and scholarly literature on the subject are reviewed by Berg, pp. 124–42. The evidence offered in these studies proves overwhelmingly that the similarities transcend any mere stylistic borrowing that might have been attributed to the fact that Esther's author, no longer fluent in Hebrew, was looking for a convenient source of vocabulary for a story whose venue was a royal court. The extent of the parallels also demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that there is more than a coincidental similarity of plot (i.e., two stories of Jews who save their peoples by succeeding in a royal court).

21. This position is argued most coherently by Meinhold, esp. 90–92,

22. Y. Kaufmann, 4:523–26, marshalls an impressive collection of evidence to the author's religious convictions (including the oft-discussed reference to salvation coming from "elsewhere" in 4:14, a verse which was already recognized as a veiled reference to God by Josephus, Antiquities 11:227; 279–820; cf. Clines, 36 and n. 4). According to Kaufmann, Esther is to be understood against the background of general biblical perceptions of God's workings in history. Note in particular his comments on p. 526:

> Thus it is evident that the logical structure of the narrative, which to the secular reader seems artfully contrived, is for the author the "plan" of the unseen hand of divine providence as religious Jewry has always understood it. Vashti's refusal to obey the king, her fall, Esther's favor before Ahasuerus, her ascent, Mordecai's saving the king's life, the king's restlessness on the night before the fateful banquet—all these events occurred, each in proper sequence according to design, to culminate in the deliverance of Israel. . . .

This approach is also accepted for the most part by Moore (though he attaches greater weight to the opposing arguments) in the introduction to his AB commentary (xxxiii), and in his comments to 4:14–16 (50–52). Berg (14) also finds it inconceivable that an ancient Jew could doubt the reality of God's controlling history. Further on (178–83) she concludes that Esther, through intentional contrast with the Joseph cycle, points to "the hiddenness of Yahweh's presence in the world," a perception which she ties in with other central themes of the scroll, such as human responsibility and election.

23. A similar position is well argued by Cohen:

> Before the final word of God was entrusted to man, it was made clear that in post-Biblical times, a time lived in *galut,* where the presence of God was not overt, His word not direct, and His face not revealed, still, behind the veil of *purim,* God's providence toward His people, would uphold them against adversary and ideological force alike, as in Passover of old. (p. 94)

[The significance of the unemphasized references to Passover in Esther (e.g., 3:12) is elaborated in his article]. See also: R. Gordis, *Megillat Esther* (New York, 1972), p. 12; and other works cited by Berg, p. 13. A well-balanced summary of the religious features that are and are not present in Esther leads S. Talmon to suggest that what we have before us is a *different* type of religiosity, involving "the concept of an unspecified and remote deity devoid of any individual character" (430), a conception typical of Wisdom literature. He sees the similarities with the Joseph story as arising largely from the concern of Wisdom authors with questions of proper behavior in royal courts (434). In his opinion (454), Joseph is also to be seen as an example of wisdom ideals. See n. 28 below. Berg, p. 27 (n. 78) notes that Talmon was preceded in his general theory by A. E. Morris.

24. Sources cited by Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:342 n. 144. Add: *Leqaḥ ṭov* to Esther, 96.

25. Joseph's imprisonment is also ascribed to Potiphar's anger, designated in Gen. 39:19 as *wayyihar appo.* The use of the more common expression might indicate that this is regarded as a normal human reaction to the situation, not requiring further divine interference; though his wife's adulterous urges, which gave rise to the fury, may well be perceived at least by the author of Esther, as a supernaturally incited turn of events. Cf. Meinhold, p. 81; Rosenthal, p. 279. Berg, pp. 126–27, notes these parallels, but seems to write them off as being too superficial to be significant.

With considerable hesitation, may we suggest that, in naming the conspirators, the author was intentionally alluding to the eunuchs in Genesis. Thus, "Teresh echoes the Hebrew *tirosh,* a common term for wine, while "Bigtan" may be related to [*pat*] *bag,* an Aramaic-Persian word appearing frequently in Daniel to designate food or bread, certainly appropriate references to a butler and a baker. See BDB 834; cf. H. Gehman, "Notes on the Persian Words in the Book of Esther," *JBL* 43 (1924): 323 [237 in the Moore anthology]; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Les Noms des Eunuques d'Assuérus," *Muséon* 66 (1953): 107–8 [275–76 in the Moore anthology], suggests that the name Bigta in 1:10 might be interchanged with Tarshish in 1:14; cf. Clines, 116–17.

26. For midrashic speculations on the subject, see the sources cited by Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:342 n. 143.

27. Whether or not this was the actual intention of the Genesis narrator, this was evidently the way the fact was understood by the author of Esther; the idea is well expressed in the medieval commentary of R. Bahya b. Asher to Gen. 40:14 (ed. C. Chavell [Jerusalem, 1981], p. 326), which emphasizes that the encounter with the cupbearer could not have been a mere coincidence.

28. Talmon, pp. 442–44, notes how the king's and Haman's "inane rage" and irritability are the antithesis of Wisdom values, as contrasted with the consistently wise level-headedness of Mordecai, who is never blinded by personal hatred. Thus, anger has no theological function in Talmon's reading of Esther, but is part of the presentation of an ideal "wisdom personality." One weakness which he himself indicates in his position

(447 n. 1) is his comment that Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman goes against the normal Wisdom ideology—which usually advises against antagonizing one's superiors—and is explained better as a 'conventional' religious reluctance to offer adoration to a mortal (cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:463 n. 100). This problem is also noted by Berg, p. 133, who ultimately rejects Talmon's thesis as unconvincing. See also: W. L. Humphreys, "A Life-style for the Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *JBL* 92 (1973): 211–23.

29. I prefer to speak of an author, rather than a redactor. The above analysis makes no reference to source-critical interpretations of Esther, as found in the important studies by H. Gazelles, "Note sur la compostion du rouleau d'Esther," in H. Gross and F. Mussner, eds., *Lex Tua Veritas* (Trier, 1961), pp. 17–30; Torrey, Bickerman, Clines and others, who have attempted to solve some of the literary puzzles of Esther by positing a combination of two or more earlier literary documents, reconstructing the sources of the Greek versions, etc. This omission does not imply a rejection of the approach, but rather a methodological stance; i.e., the aim of the study was to evaluate Esther in its final redacted form, as a completed and integral work. As such, I accept the methodological approach enunciated by Berg, pp. 14–18 (and the present article might be regarded in some respects as a footnote to her work of seeking out significant motifs).

Clearly, it would be overly simplistic to claim that acceptance of a documentary thesis (especially one that posited a clumsy and forced stitching-together of sources) would not have affected the broader conclusions. Nonetheless, the relatively limited scope of my investigation does not seem to bear directly upon such source-critical studies (cf. Berg, p. 28, n. 89).