

THE BOOK OF ESTHER IN
RABBINICAL EXEGESIS

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Sources

Elaborations upon the Book of Esther was the natural outcome of Israel's harrowing experiences in the land of dispersion. Beaten and crushed in the countries of the diaspora, Israel found consolation in reading about their miraculous deliverance in the time of Mordecai and Esther. If their ancestors survived under the rod of the oppressor for an ideal, they too would endure all suffering for the same ideal. Since the events in Persia were almost contemporaneous history, it was natural that haggadic interpretations to the Book should arise, lifting the people from the depths of despair to the heights of hope. It is no wonder, then, that the Midrashim to Esther started at an early date in Jewish history.

Elaborations upon the original story already appear in the Greek Apocrypha and are called Additions to Esther. These Additions then found their way into the Septuagint. According to Charles, they were written between 125 B. C. E. and 90 C. E., and originated among the Egyptian Hellenistic Jews.¹ Josephus was influenced by these elaborations and made use of them in his history.²

The interpretations of the Book of Esther increased as Israel faced new exigencies. With the passing of time, there arose many expository Midrashim to the megilla. Our work was to examine the various Midrash collections for the Rabbinical story of Esther, for the theology, for the moral lessons, the sayings and superstitions expressed therein. It was with this intention that the following sources were studied:

1. Tractate Megilla (Babli).
2. Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer.
3. Midrash Rabba.
4. Abba Gorion.
5. Panim Aherim I and II.
6. Lekah Tov.
7. Midrash Megillat Esther.
8. Midrash Megilla.
9. Yalkut Shimoni.
10. Josippon.

A word about each of these sources is in order.

Tractate Megilla

In the tractate Megilla of the Babylonian Talmud, which deals with the laws regarding the observance of Purim, many haggadic interpretations to the Book of Esther are to be found. To be specific, most of the comments on the verses of the Megilla are concentrated in 10b - 15a, although there are haggadic references to the story of Esther interspersed throughout the rest of the tractate. Some passages are written in pure Hebrew, while others in the Eastern Aramaic ^{Hebrew} distinct to the Babylonian Talmud. The final redaction took place in the fifth century C. E.

Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer

"This is a haggadic - midrashic work on Genesis, part of Exodus and a few sentences of Numbers..."^{3.} The work is divided

into fifty-four chapters in the printed texts and deals with the divine descents (veridot) on earth, the mysteries of Ma'ase Bereshit, Ma'ase Merkaba, resurrection and redemption.^{4.} Chapters 49 and 50 are important for our purpose. They deal with the descendants of Amalek, one of whom was Haman, and the story of Esther. Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer is the source for later Midrashic writings.

Scholars point out that the author of this work was a Palestinian. They base their decision on the the fact that the Rabbis mentioned therein with the exception of two were from Palestine, and that the customs described were Palestinian.^{5.} Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, to whom tradition points as the writer, cannot be the author. "In no case can this work be ascribed to Rabbi Eliezer (80 - 118 C. E.), since he was a Tanna, while in the book itself the Pirke Aboth is quoted. Late Talmudic authorities belonging to the third century C. E., like Shemaiah (chapter XXIII), Ze'era (Chap. XXI, XXIV), and Shila (Chap. XLII, XLIV) are also quoted.^{6.} Scholars place the final redaction^{7.} around the beginning of the ninth century.

Esther Rabba

The Midrash to the Book of Esther that is joined to the Rabba collection is called Esther Rabba. It is divided into six sections (parashivot) at the heads of which stand poems (petichot).^{8.} ~~It has been assumed that a new section began.~~ The six sections are: I 1; I 4; I 9; I 13; II 1; II 5 -- every one of which, with the exception of section four, is

introduced by one or more proems. It has been assumed that a new section began with III 1, since several proems precede the comment to the verse.^{9.} The Midrash is not complete. The comments become scanty at Chapter VII and at Chapter VIII, they end.

Esther Rabba draws upon the Palestinian Talmud, Genesis and^{10.} Leviticus Rabba, Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer, Targum I and Targum II. Theodor, Strack, Weiss, and Zunz agree that Esther Rabba is a composite work of an early period. They contend that the wholesale borrowing from Josippon, a work of the ninth century, of the Dream of Mordecai and the Prayers of Mordecai and Esther in Chapter VI is no reason for assigning Esther Rabba to a time after^{11.} the Josippon, as Buber would do.

Abba Gorion

This Midrash long remained unknown and undiscovered in a manuscript, until it was published by Jellinek in his Bet Hamidrash.^{12.} Jellinek based his edition on a manuscript discovered in a library in Hamburg (col. 37). This version is, however, faulty and incomplete, whole passages being omitted by the scribe. Endeavoring to improve upon Jellinek's work, Solomon Buber obtained five manuscripts which he carefully examined in issuing a more complete edition.^{13.}

Abba Gorion gets its title from the opening words of the Midrash: "Abba Gorion of Sidon said five things." This name appears in Mishna Kidushin, Chap. V:14 and in T. Soferim, Chap. XV:10. In Jerushalmi Kidushin, Chap. IV:11 mention is made of "Abba Oryion."

This latter version is found in Esther Rabba 3a; evidently the / and the /c are interchanged.

Buber contends that this Midrash was much earlier than the others to the Book of Esther. He is of the opinion that Esther Rabba used Abba Gorion as a source. The other authorities, as was mentioned above, do not share Buber's view that Abba Gorion preceded Esther Rabba in time. They hold that the passages -- namely, the Dream of Mordecai and the Prayers of Mordecai and Esther -- on which Buber based his opinion, are late interpolations and are not an original part of the work.^{14.}

Panim Aherim

Until its edition by Solomon Buber in 1886, the Midrash Panim Aherim had been completely lost sight of.^{15.} He discovered it in a manuscript in the Oxford library (No. 155, Michael 577).

Buber observed that this Midrash had two separate versions, with distinct styles and different dates of authorship. He, consequently, separated them into Panim Aherim I and Panim Aherim II.

Panim Aherim I is relatively small in quantity, containing statements gathered from Tractate Megilla (Babli) and one excerpt from Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer.

Panim Aherim II, being larger in quantity, is a separate Midrash by itself, and has no direct relation to Panim Aherim I. It is a complete edition of the ^{faulty} Midrash Aher al Megillat Esther, published by Jellinek.^{16.}

The manuscript utilized by Buber was incomplete; but in the incomplete passages, the scribe alluded to similar passages in Abba Gorion. Hence, Buber supplemented the text of Panim

Aherim ~~II~~ by adding those passages in Abba Gorion to which the manuscript referred. That this method was imperfect, Buber clearly realized, for as he stated: "The style of Abba Gorion and Pahim Aherim, being ^{of} different times, are naturally different from each other.

Lekah Tov

Midrash Lekah Tov is a Midrashic commentary on the Pentateuch written in the eleventh century by Tobiah b. Elazar. From various dates mentioned by the author in the course of his work, he wrote this commentary in 1097 and revised in 1107 or 1108.

17.

Tobiah b. Elazar was a native of Castoria in Bulgaria. From Tobiah's reference to his father as "the great" and from his allusion to the Mayence massacre of 1096, Zunz inferred that he lived in Mayence and was a son of Eliezer b. Isaac Hagodol. ^{18.} However, since Tobiah evinced a thorough knowledge of Mohammedan customs and frequently attacked the Karaites, it was the conclusion of Rappaport that he spent his last years ^{19.} in Palestine.

of

The title Lekah Tov was selected because its allusion to his name, Tobiah. The author introduces every weekly portion with a verse containing the word "toV." It was intended as a commentary on the Pentateuch and Five Megillot, to be arranged in accordance with the Midrashim and the haggadot of the Talmud. At times it followed the simpler interpretation (peshat), at times the haggadic style of Rem~~az~~. Tobiah manifested his

predilections for good style. He endeavored to arrange the diverse Midrashim in perfect order and to edit them in brief, succinct language. Hence, he shortened the Midrashic passages, and rendered the Aramaic portions into good Hebrew.

Midrash Megillat Esther

Midrash Megillat Esther is the title of a Midrash discovered by H. M. Horowitz.. It should not be confused with Esther Rabba, which in many editions bears the same title.

Horowitz found copies of this Midrash in the libraries of the king of Munich and of the Lorenzos in Florence. He was the first of modern scholars to bring it to light.^{20.} Zunz, in his Vorträge, seemed not aware of its existence. The only publication of this work, according to Horowitz,^{21.} was in Constantinople in 1519.

The subject matter of this Midrash deals with the first eight chapters of the Book of Esther and principally comprises extracts from the Tractate Megilla (Babli), Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer, Midrash Abba Gorion, Esther Rabba, I and II Targum to Esther. It is written in a rather indistinct Hebrew style. The date of authorship was estimated by Horowitz to be the thirteenth century.

Midrash Megilla

M. Gaster in the Kohut Memorial studies published this Midrash which he evaluated as being the oldest extant.^{22.} It was taken from a manuscript compilation which is in the possession

of Gaster. In consonance with Neubauer, authority on Hebrew paleography, he assigns the Midrash to the ninth or tenth century.

As this Midrash follows close upon the Talmud, Gaster^{23.} views it as being based almost exclusively on the latter. It does not contain many of the haggadic comments and embellishments which make their appearance in later Midrashic literature.

The origin of this work was probably Babylon or Persia, as is indicated by certain local peculiarities. Marginal glosses in Persian appear in the text which are of a later hand. The text contains a form of vocalization and pronunciation similar to other post-Talmudic Hebrew texts in Persia. Moreover, the peculiar spelling of God's Ineffable name indicate the Persian - Babylonian origin, as well as the antiquity of the text. Its spelling of the divine name " instead of " is significant.

Yalkut Shimoni

The Yalkut Shimoni is a haggadic compilation on the books of the Bible. It is divided into two sections: the first deals with the Pentateuch, and contains 963 sections; the second deals with non-Pentateuchal books, and contains^{24.} 1085 sections.

From such older haggadot as were accessible, the author gathered diverse interpretations and explanations of Biblical passages, arranging them according to the sequence of the Bibli-

cal portions to which they referred.

In his exegesis of each passage, the author indicated the sources from which he derived his interpretations. In the Salonica edition, they are placed at the beginning of each corresponding Biblical passage, although in later editions they are placed in the margin. The sources embrace not only halakic and haggadic literature during Mishnaic, Talmudic, and Gaonic periods, but also the haggadic literature until the twelfth century.

There have been controversies as to the authorship of the Yalkut. The title page of the Venice edition ascribes the composition of the work to R. Simon of Frankfort, "Rosh Ha-Darshanim." This was accepted by Conforte and Azulai who called him Simon Ashkenazi of Frankfort. Rappaport, on the other hand, maintained that R. Simon (father of R. Joseph Kara), who flourished in the eleventh century, was its compiler.²⁵ Zunz and Epstein believe the work was written by R. Simon Kara, who lived in southern Germany in the thirteenth century, and it was not until later the title "Ha-Darshan" was applied to him.²⁶ A manuscript of the Yalkut, cited by Azariah de Rossi, doubtless existed in 1310. In the fifteenth century, Isaac Abravonel was the first to mention the Yalkut.²⁷

Sefer Yosippon

The "Sefer Yosippon" is a history of the Jewish people from the fall of Babylon in 539 B. C. to the Destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C. E. It contains historical accounts of Babylon,

Greece, and Rome, tracing their beginnings as far back as Adam and Noah. It is divided into six volumes.

In the current text, the author professes to be the ancient historian Flavius Josephus, adding to the name "Joseph" the Greek ending "on." During the Middle Ages, the book was much read and highly respected as a historical source. Down to the eighteenth century, it was universally known as the "Hebrew" or "smaller" Josephus, in contradistinction with the larger work written in Greek by Flavius Josephus.

Scholars have detected internal evidences that reveal its late authorship, such as the names of barbaric peoples as the Franks, Goths, Lombards, and Bulgars. Zunz noted many statements of the Spanish philosophers in its pages.^{28.}

At present it is generally agreed that the work was composed by a Jew living in southern Italy. Zunz believed that he lived in the middle of the ninth century, but Zunz later modified this view, placing the date at 940.^{29.} Trieber held the singular view that the author lived in the fourth century.^{30.} If the conjecture of Basnagi is correct, the date of the book's composition may be placed at the end of the tenth century.^{31.}

Chapter IV is of special interest to us. Here ^{is} ~~are~~ found the Hebrew translation of the Greek Additions to the Dream of Mordecai and the Prayers of Esther and Mordecai.^{32.} Esther Rabba, in turn, borrowed from the Josippon the Dream and the Prayers in abbreviated form.

Chapter Two

The Book of Esther in Midrashic Literature

Queen Vashti's Dismissal

1.1-3a. Now it was in the days of Ahasuerus -- that is, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and twenty provinces. In those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in the castle in Shushan, in the third year of his reign, he made a feast for all his princes and his servants.

Ahasuerus was not of royal stock. He was a very wealthy man who bought himself into office.^{1.} And even though he rose to power through his wealth,^{2.} yet there was none who was better fitted to rule than he. He was one of three kings to have dominion over the whole world.^{3.} As simple as it was for him to exercise his authority over the countries of India and Ethiopia because they were in the proximity of Persia, so also he held sway over the remotest of his 127 satraps.^{4.} Only after a series of conquests was Ahasuerus able to annex those provinces to the Persian empire. In the beginning of his reign he overpowered seven provinces from whom he demanded a levy of troops. With this additional strength his army was able to subdue twenty more governments. Again, he exacted a levy of fighting men from these twenty. Now, with the combined forces of his standing army and the levied troops, Ahasuerus conquered one hundred more nations. Thus he extend^{ed} his authority over the world.^{5.}

In his possession was the precious throne of Solomon, upon which he wished to sit as ruler of the great empire.^{6.} But just as the Lord would not allow Pharaoh Neco nor Nebuchadnezzar to "usurp" the throne which was patterned after the "throne of glory," so too the Lord prevented Ahasuerus from ascending it. Whereupon, the king bade the skilled workers of Alexandria construct one in its likeness. They did not succeed. For three years Ahasuerus was a king without

throne until his artificers made one based upon an artistic pattern of their
minds. He celebrated its completion by a banquet to which he invited all
8.
his subjects.

This was only one of many reasons for Ahasuerus' desire to make merry in
the kingdom. A short time before, he had crushed an insurrection against him
and wished to observe the victory with joy and feasting. Furthermore, the king
9.
had a birthday which he wanted to celebrate with his people. This, ^{also} marked the
third anniversary since he had ordered the work on the Temple stopped, and he
10.
was delighted with what he had accomplished.

1.3b-6. The commanders of the army of Persia and Media, the nobles
and the rulers of the provinces were before him, while he showed the riches
of his glorious kingdom and the precious things of his great majesty, many
days, even one hundred and eighty days. And when these days were completed,
the king made for all the people who were present in the castle at Shushan,
both great and small, a seven days feast in the court of the garden of the
king's palace. There were hangings of white, fine cotton and blue hangings
with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble;
couches of gold and silver were upon a pavement of green and white and shell
and onyx marble.

Among the guests that attended the banquet were the rulers of the 127 satraps.
They were Medians. According to an ancient agreement, the nobles were to be ap-
pointed from the Medians if the king were a Persian; but if the king were a Median,
11.
the nobles would have to be chosen from among the Persians. Jewish officials
also were present.

Ahasuerus proceeded to show his treasures to his guests. So vast were his
possessions that during the one-hundred-eighty days of festivities, he exhibited
12.
each day the contents of six treasure-chambers. He was wealthier than all
13.
the kings of Media and Persia that went before him. What was the source
of such great wealth? When Nebuchadnezzar was nearing his end, he decided to
bury his possessions ~~so that none could find them~~, rather than leave them to
his son, Evil-Merodach. But, because Cyrus consented to have the Temple restored,
he revealed to him the hidden treasure. And now, as the king of Persia,

14.
Ahasuerus claimed it. In his possession also were the confiscated vessels of the Temple and the priestly wardrobe. When the Jewish guests saw the king clad in the sacred garments of the High-Priest, profaning the holy vessels, they were overcome with grief. The king was considerate enough of their feelings 15.
to prepare a special banquet place for them away from the scene.

When the days of feasting were ended and the princes had returned to their respective palaces, Ahasuerus ordered still another seven-day period to be set aside for revelry and mirth, a feast in which all the residents of Shushan were to participate. Again the ruler proved himself an excellent host. He provided his guests with the finest luxuries and delicacies of his time. Since he knew that the Jews would not partake of forbidden things, he prepared for them a kosher menu. 16.
He was so pleased with his own extravagance that he grew boastful before his Jewish guests and said: "Can your God prepare a finer banquet than mine in the future world?" They answered: "If the Lord were to prepare for us a feast no better than yours, we would say, 'We had one 17.
like this at the feast of Ahasuerus.'"

18.
I. 7-8. They served drinks in golden goblets and no two were alike, and the royal wine was abundant according to the liberality of the king. The drinking was according to the law; none could compel, for so the king had ordained--that all the officers of his house do according to each man's pleasure.

So wealthy was Ahasuerus that though the drinking vessels were of gold, he nevertheless ordered them to be used only once. As soon as a guest drank the contents of a goblet, it was removed, and another goblet was provided. 19.
In comparison with the vessels of the Temple which the king also used at the feast, 20.
his own goblets of gold seemed as base as lead. Wine was poured out in abundance to gladden the hearts of those present. The wine served each guest was always 21.
older than the guest himself. One was permitted to drink in the manner he wished and in accordance with his capacity. If a person desired to drink during

the meal, he could do so. He could drink the entire contents of the goblet at one time or he could sip it leisurely. If he wanted a large cup or a small cup, he had only to express his pleasure. ^{22.} The king on this occasion did not follow the ancient Persian practise of requiring the guests at royal feasts to drink the entire contents of a special cup whose capacity was too great for any human being. ^{23.}

I. 9. Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

When the women saw how the holy vessels were being desecrated by the king, they refused to remain at the banquet. Vashti then played the part ^{24.} of a tactful hostess in arranging a separate banquet for the women. She chose as the place for the feast the decorated chambers of the palace rather than the gardens, for she was aware of the fact that women desire luxury more than food. ^{25.} There she kept them so that if the men should rebel, they could be kept as hostages. ^{26.} Vashti was also conscious of the curiosity of women to see the inside of the palace, and this she satisfied by showing ^{27.} them the dining room, the bar, and the bedroom. She placed before them ^{28.} rare delicacies and sweetmeats.

I. 10-12. In the seventh day, when the king's heart was joyous with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Bizzetha, Harbona, Bagtha, and Abagtha, Zethar **Cárcas**, the seven chamberlains who ministered in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the royal crown, to show the peoples and princes her beauty, for she was beautiful. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command by the chamberlains; therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned within him.

The banquet turned into an orgy. Under the spell of intoxicating liquor, the men began to indulge in lewd conversation. Some spoke of the excessive charms of the Persian women. Others praised the rare beauty of the Median damsels. Ahasuerus broke into the discussion with boastful pride: "My wife

is neither a Persian nor a Median. She is a Chaldean, and yet she is superior to all in beauty. Do you wish to test the truth of my statement?" "Yes," shouted the men, "but that we can do only if she appears naked." "Agreed," responded Ahasuerus. ^{29.} Such immoral behavior was quite an accepted thing among the Persians during festivities. There was a custom among the kings of Media to have women come before them unclad and dance during their carousals, ^{30.} in order to see the beauty of their figures.

One is not to suppose that Vashti was a modest being because she refused to appear naked before the king and his guests. Far from it! She was just as depraved as he, and under ordinary circumstances, she would have welcomed such a command. But at this moment she was disfigured by leprosy that sprouted out over her body. ^{31.} Many other opinions were offered by the rabbis to explain Vashti's "virtuous" behavior. One opinion was that Gabriel attached a tail to her body. ^{32.} Another held that the queen was indisposed because of her menstruation. ^{33.} In such a condition she was unable to show herself unclad before the king and his guests lest they be repulsed. She proposed appearing before them in a belt of network, such as was worn by prostitutes. ^{34.} "Stark naked!" reiterated the order. "Fool," she called to the king, "I have your welfare at heart. If they become enamored of my beauty, they will murder you in order to possess me. And if they are displeased with my looks, you will no longer be desirous of me." ^{35.} But even these clever words could not change the mind of Ahasuerus.

I. 13-22. Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times, for so was the king's manner (to speak) before all who knew the law and judgment; and those next to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face and held the first place in the kingdom. "What shall we do to Queen Vashti according to law because she hath not done the bidding of King Ahasuerus by the chamberlains?" Then Memucan replied before the king and the princes, "Vashti the queen has not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes and to all the peoples, that are in all the provinces of the king, Ahasuerus...If it please the king, let there go forth a royal command from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and Medes so that it may not be altered, that Vashti come no more before King Ahasuerus, and that the king give her royal estate to another that is better

than she."...The proposal pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the counsel of Memucan...

Vashti had gone too far. The king could not allow such behavior to go unpunished. He called upon his Jewish ^{re}councillors to decide on a fitting punishment for the queen. They were in a dilemma. If they ordered her executed, or even if they spared her life, punishment ^{for them} would be forthcoming. In the former case, the king would one day arouse himself from his drunken stupor, mark his error and avenge the death of the queen by killing the judges who had condemned her. In the latter case, they would suffer because they would be showing disrespect for the crown either in upholding the queen's action altogether or in recommending mild punishment. Wise, then, were they in asking the king to take counsel with the men of Ammon and Moab. ^{36.} Ahasuerus therefore summoned together his seven court officers to render a decision against his disobedient wife. ^{37.} These gentlemen, originating from various posts of his empire, were employed in the service of the king. The special duty that each performed was indicated by his name. ^{38.} Carshena was caretaker of the animals; Shethar provided the palace with wine; Admatha looked after the produce of the king; Tarshish supervised the affairs of the palace; Meres was in charge of the poultry; Marsena acted as the chief baker; Memucan was the head chef and ^{39.} his wife served as housekeeper. He was none other than Haman, named Memucan because he was singled out for punishment. ^{40.}

No sooner had the king presented the case before these noblemen when Memucan spoke up and condemned the queen to death. He was the least in rank and importance of the nobles and should have allowed his colleagues to hand down their opinion first; but he was eager to take advantage of this opportunity for revenge. Relations between Vashti and himself were strained because she once struck him across the face with her slipper. Others believed that Memucan's feelings were hurt because his wife had not been invited to Vashti's banquet and consequently, this was his turn to strike back. The suspicion also was current that

Memucan had a daughter whose hand he wanted to offer in marriage to the king.

But as long as Vashti was alive, such a desire could not be realized.^{41.} Vashti was killed by decapitation. Her death, and even the day of her death, can be considered as examples of retributive justice.^{43.} Because her father showed disrespect for the Temple vessels and because she herself dissuaded Ahasuerus from granting permission to the Jews to build the Temple, her punishment was divinely decreed.^{45.} Vashti sinned, was judged, and was executed on the seventh day — the Sabbath. There was a reason for that. Since she forced Jewish maidens to profane the Sabbath by work, her downfall was divinely ordered on the Sabbath.^{46.}

Esther Is Chosen Queen

II. 1-4. After those things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was pacified, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what was decreed against her. Then the king's servants who ministered to him said, "Let beautiful young maidens be sought out for the king, and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather together all the fair young maidens to the castle in Shushan, to the house of the women, under the custody of Hegai, the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women, and let cosmetics be given them. And let the maiden who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." And the proposal pleased the king, and he did so.

Soon after the festivities, Ahasuerus emerged from his drunken stupor and asked for Vashti. He did not remember a thing that had occurred during the celebration. Amazed and regretful was he upon hearing that he ordered the queen to appear before the guests undressed. He was furious upon learning that she was put to death at his command. Surely his advisers who had a hand in the queen's execution must suffer, thought he. He ordered them executed.^{47.}

The king accepted the advice of his attendants in regard to the selection of a new queen. Officers were appointed to scour the country for eligible maidens. Literally hosts of women flocked to the palace. Many parents, aware of the wiles of the king, actually paid handsome sums to have their daughters hidden so that they would not be brought to the king's harem.^{48.}

II, 5-7. There was a certain Jew in the castle at Shushan whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been carried away with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother; and the maiden was fair and beautiful; and when her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

Mordecai, the Benjaminite, owed his existence to David from the tribe of Judah. Hence in appreciation of David's kindness he is called a son of Judah — ^{49.} '3/2'. Had David not spared Shimei's life, Mordecai, the descendant of Shimei would never have been born. ^{50.} His father, although a Benjaminite, married a woman from Judah. This, too, explains the reason for his being called ^{51.} '3/2'. Mordecai was a God-fearing Jew. He pleaded with his people not to become defiled by eating unclean food served at Ahasuerus' banquet. But to no avail! He abstained, but his fellow-Jews participated and became unclean. He lived a true Jewish life and ^{52.} therefore deserved the title '3/2'. Many were his virtues. He was well-versed in Jewish law and taught the Word of God to his people. ^{53.} Because of his piety, God could not but answer his prayers. When Nebuchadnezzar exiled King Jeconiah together with the aristocrats of Palestine, Mordecai was among them. Subsequently, he returned to Jerusalem. When Palestine ^{54.} was again besieged, Mordecai had to leave the country a second time.

Esther, his cousin, was an orphan left in his care. Her father died ^{55.} before she was born. Her mother passed away at childbirth. Mordecai watched over her with tenderness and love. Rabbi Judan maintained that when Esther was yet an infant and Mordecai could not locate a wet-nurse for her, ^{56.} he himself suckled Esther. It was taught in the name of Rabbi Meir that ^{57.} Esther became Mordecai's wife.

Her two names, Esther and Hadassah, are descriptive of her character. Her pleasant manner and admirable conduct were as soothing and satisfying as

58.
the sweet fragrance of the myrtle. But although the scent of the myrtle
is sweet, its taste is bitter. And so was Esther. Though she was as a breath
59.
of spring to Mordecai, she was a bitter pill for Haman to swallow. The
name Esther she received from the gentiles who compared her beauty to Venus,
60.
the morning star. Furthermore, she refused to disclose her Jewish identity
61.
to the king and thus deserved the title Esther. Her body was perfectly
62.
formed. She was neither too tall nor too short. Her looks were very de-
ceiving. She was really seventy-five years old, but retained the youthful
63.
charm and vigor of a maiden. This was in keeping with God's promise that
the redeemer of His people in Media would be as old as Abraham when he left
64.
his father's house.

II. 8-11. So when the king's command and his decree were published
and when many maidens were gathered together to the castle in Shushan under
the custody of Hegai, Esther was also taken into the king's palace under
the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him,
and she obtained kindness of him, and he hastened to give her cosmetics,
with her portions, and seven picked maidens who were to be given her from
the king's palace. And he advanced her and her maidens to the best place
in the house of the women. Esther had not ^{yet} known her people nor her kin-
dred; for Mordecai had charged her that she should not tell it. And Mor-
decai used to walk to and fro everyday before the court of the women's
house to learn how Esther was and what would become of her.

It was interesting to observe the excitement that followed the announce-
ment of the king's decree. Maidens spent hours beautifying themselves so that
the officials of the king would find them eligible and take them to the harem.
But Esther, on the other hand, went into hiding for four years, hoping that
in the meantime, the king would fall in love with one of the damsels. But
Ahasuerus dismissed them all during these four years, for none of them was
pleasing. One day the officers of the king accidentally stumbled upon Esther's
hiding place, and finding her "strangely" beautiful, brought her to the pal-
65.
ace. Drawn out of the Jewish circle, as it were, Esther made a quick

adjustment amidst the Persian court. First of all, she inducted into Judaism

66.
her seven handmaids who helped her observe the dietary laws. No food from the king's table touched her lips. Special dishes were served her by the maidens.
67.
Since there was nobody present to remind her when the Sabbath came, she named each of the seven servants after a particular day in the week, so that she would not profane the Sabbath. The maiden who attended her on Mondays was called "Monday," and the maiden who attended her on Tuesdays was called "Tuesday," so that when the Sabbath arrived, she
68.
could observe it piously.

Mordecai made daily appearances at the palace gate to offer her advice
69.
in the matter of ritual purity. Esther also received a great deal of cooperation from her maidens in observing the days of her uncleanness according to the law.
70.
Another motive for Mordecai's daily visit to the courtyard was to prevent sorcery being worked against Esther.
71.
As a reward for his solicitude of Esther, God placed in his trust the welfare of
72.
the people of Israel.

II. 12-15. Now when the turn for each maiden came to visit King Ahasuerus, after it had been done to her according to the law for the women twelve months -- for so long the days of their anointing lasted, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with spices (sweet odours) and with other ointments of the women -- in this wise the maiden came to the king; whatever she desired was given to her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's palace. In the evening she went in and in the morning she returned into the second house of the women to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, who kept the concubines. She did not again visit the king, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name. Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, came to visit the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai, the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, prescribed. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all whose eyes fell upon her.

While the maidens subjected their bodies to massages and beauty treatments for twelve months, Esther applied neither perfumes nor cosmetics to her skin. She made no demands for gowns and jewels, as did the other girls. The others also requested that the handmaids who were to wait on them be of the same stature and complexion as they.
73.
Esther requested nothing.

Her silence greatly vexed the chamberlain, Hegai. His life would be at stake if the king learned that he allowed a maiden to neglect her beauty. To protect himself, he showered her with many kindnesses, gave her many expensive presents, and then asked her not to betray him to the king.

Her competitors suddenly were aware of her surpassing beauty and comeliness, and willingly helped her to dress for her visit to the king. By such a gesture, they reasoned, they would be sure to receive many favors from her when she would be chosen queen. She was escorted into the king's chamber by Persian and Median beauties who flanked her on either side. ^{74.}
^{75.}
^{76.}
^{77.}
But Esther, though surrounded by pulchritude, was like a rose between thorns.

II. 16-20. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his palace in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. And the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she obtained favor and grace in his sight more than all the maidens; so that he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast for all his princes and servants, even Esther's feast; and he declared a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts, according to the liberality of the king. Now when the maidens were gathered together a second time, Mordecai was sitting in the gate of the king. Esther had not as yet made known her kindred nor her people, as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther kept the command of Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him.

When Ahasuerus beheld the grace and charm of Esther, his heart melted. At last he had found his beloved. Four long years had he searched his kingdom for a queen. When none of the maidens satisfied, married women were brought before the king. But they also had no appeal. Their beauty did not even approach that of Vashti, whose picture he still kept hanging over his bed. But as soon as his eyes fell on Esther, he had the portrait replaced by that of Esther. There were many wealthy men in the kingdom who were desirous of Esther and who offered enormous sums of money for Esther's hand. Ahasuerus had to outbid them all.

Ahasuerus was happy with his new queen, and he shared this happiness with his people. He declared a holiday throughout the empire and invited

his subjects to his marriage feast. He showered upon them many gifts. But in spite of his new joy, he was not content. He was greatly interested in learning about Esther's antecedents. But the queen, obeying Mordecai's instructions, would not reveal her identity.

Mordecai had some valid reasons for advising his cousin to keep her ancestry and religion a secret. In the first place, if it were brought to the king's attention that Mordecai was her cousin, the king would no doubt have insisted that he accept an office. Mordecai was too modest a person to enjoy public office.^{81.} In the second place, Mordecai realized that the Jews in the exile were a minority group and were subjected to all kinds of violence. Now if Esther's faith were made known and if by chance she had angered the king, there existed the danger that he would vent his feelings not only upon her but also upon her helpless people.^{82.} Lastly, Mordecai feared that the Jews might rely too much upon Esther's influence in the court to bring them help, instead of beseeching the All-Merciful God to answer their prayers.^{83.}

Mordecai's Service to the King

II. 21-23. In those days, as Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains who guarded the threshold, Bigthan and Teresh, became enraged and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus; but the affair became known to Mordecai, who revealed it to Esther the queen; and Esther told the king in Mordecai's name. When the matter was investigated and when it was found to be so, they were both hanged on a tree; and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

Upon the queen's suggestion, Ahasuerus placed Mordecai the Jew in his service. She showed him that he would not be setting any precedent by such an act. The great monarchs of the past always had depended on the vision of the Jewish counsellors. Both Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar profited from the wise counsel of Daniel. Esther also pointed out to the king that

Vashti's death was the result of the ill-council given by his advisers. Ahasuerus, convinced by such sound reasoning, summoned Mordecai to the court and honored him with the position which he made available by discharging Bigthan^{84.} and Teresh.

The ousted chamberlains, enraged by the consuming fires of anger, then planned their revenge. Together they hatched a plot to poison the king and thus to punish him for awarding to the "foreigner" Mordecai the high position^{85.} which they thought befitted only native Persians, such as they themselves. Furthermore, the king's death might be blamed on Mordecai, in whose care he was now intrusted. The people might easily have reasoned as follows: as long as Bigthan and Teresh served the king, no harm came to him; but as soon as this Jew entered the palace, Ahasuerus was killed.^{86.} The chamberlains, discussing their evil plan in the presence of Mordecai, little realized that he understood the Tarsian language in which they conversed. But Mordecai, as a member of the Great Sanhedrin, was a master of seventy languages. Upon hearing how they planned to place a drop of poison in the king's drink-^{87.} ing cup, Mordecai proceeded to warn His Majesty through Esther.

One night Ahasuerus awoke and called for water. When it was brought to him, he commanded his servants to spill it out. They obeyed. And there^{88.} in the bottom, they found traces of the poison. Bigthan and Teresh were executed, while Mordecai's service to the crown was recorded.

Mordecai revealed the conspiracy against the life of Ahasuerus not alone out of duty to the king. If he did not tell, he feared that the people might blame him for the death of their ruler, since no harm ever came to him when his care was intrusted in the hands of gentile chamberlains. Mordecai also was afraid that women might attribute the king's death to his marrying the Jew^{89.} Esther. Furthermore, Ahasuerus, out of gratitude, might some day render Israel a great service, such as granting permission to build the Temple.

Haman's Cruel Purpose

III. 1-6. After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, and advanced him and placed his seat above all the princes who were with him. Thus all the king's servants who were in the king's gate bowed down and prostrated themselves before Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow down nor prostrate himself. Then the king's servants who were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai: "Why do you transgress the king's command?" Now when they spoke daily unto him and he did not listen to them, they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. So when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down nor prostrate himself, Haman was filled with rage. But it seemed contemptible in his eyes to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had told him Mordecai's race. Therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

As a precautionary measure against his allowing the Temple to be rebuilt, Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the Jew-hater, who would under no circumstance permit the king to do it. Furthermore, the influence of his wealth resulted in his advancement above the rest. It was rumored that Haman had among his vast possessions the treasures of the kings of Judah. He claimed relationship with Esther in order to increase his chances for promotion in the kingdom. He held that even as a Jewess Esther was related to him through the common ancestry of Esau and Jacob. But just as cattle are fattened before slaughter, so was Haman elevated before his downfall.

In order to show the people that the king was honoring Haman, Ahasuerus commanded everyone to bow before this man. But Haman took advantage of the situation. He had an idolatrous image embroidered on his garment, so that when a person kneeled before him, he was in reality prostrating himself before an idol. Mordecai, being a loyal Jew, refused to worship an idol. Yet even if Haman had not worn this "idolatrous garment," Mordecai would never have given him obeisance. Mordecai really expected Haman to bow before him as a slave does his master. And Haman was his slave. He had sold his

freedom to Mordecai in order to save himself from starvation. Haman could not deny the fact, for Mordecai had but to point to the soul of Haman's foot, on which was written the bill of sale, to prove that Haman was the ^{95.} slave of Mordecai.

In reply to the query as to why he did not kneel before Haman, Mordecai courageously confessed that he was a Jew and that his religion forbade idol worship. He spoke: "'Cursed is the man that makes an idol or molten image,' warns the Torah. And this man calls himself a god and demands that people serve him." Mordecai's daring remarks were conveyed to Haman, who sent him the following message: "Even as Jacob, thy ancestor, and his children bowed before my ancestor, Esau, ^{96.} so thou also do likewise." But Mordecai answered: "Benjamin, my direct ancestor, was not yet born when Jacob and his children threw themselves at the feet of Esau. I, neither, ^{97.} will throw myself at yours." So Haman, lest he be held up to ridicule by the people if perchance they witnessed the defiance of Mordecai, went up to him and mumbled a word of greeting to make it appear as if Mordecai's behavior was quite permissible. But Mordecai bravely answered him with the statement: "There is no peace for the wicked, saith the Lord my God." ^{98.} Thus Mordecai made himself so detestable to Haman that Haman vowed to take revenge not on Mordecai alone but on all of his cursed people.

III. 7. In the first month, which is the month Nisan in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day and from month to month, to the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.

As an experienced astrologer, Haman knew that his plans for annihilating the Jews would only be successful if he could calculate the auspicious time to undertake his scheme. The reason he cast lots was to find the propitious moment. First he tried to determine the most suitable day of the week for

Israel's destruction. Sunday was not satisfactory, for its continuation depended upon Israel's existence. If Israel were destroyed on the first day of the week, the day on which God had created heaven and earth, it would mean that Israel's destruction would bring the destruction of the universe with it. Monday also was inadvisable for Haman's intentions, for on that day, the waters above and below the firmament were separated, just as the Jewish people are separated from other nations. Tuesday was unpropitious, for it was the day on which the plants and seeds were created, from which Israel offers Teruma and Maaser and extols God through the means of the palm tree. On Wednesday, the sun, moon and stars, to which Israel had been compared, had been formed. Therefore it proved to be inauspicious. Birds and beasts, with which Israel made atonement, being created on Thursday, made that day inappropriate for Haman's wicked purpose. Friday was also unsuitable, for on that day man was fashioned and Israel were called "men" by the Lord. If Israel were extinguished, all mankind would also be destroyed. 99. Unfavorable was the Sabbath, by which God and Israel are eternally bound.

Haman was not to be frustrated from carrying out his wicked plot against the Jews, even if he could not find a suitable day. Perhaps he would be successful in finding a propitious month for the slaughter. Nisan, however, was favorable to the Jews because of the Passover. Iyar was the joyful month during which Israel was blessed with the manna. In Sivan, the Torah was given to God's chosen people. During Tammuz and Ab the Jews had already experienced their share of misfortune. Elul was the month which saw the completion of the wall of Jerusalem. Tishri marked the inception of Israel's festival season. Sarah died in Heshvan. In Kislev the Jews celebrated the Hanukkah. During Tebeth Ezra ordered the Israelites to divorce their foreign wives. Shebat favored the Jews through the merit of the Great Sanhedrin. When Haman examined Adar, however, he discovered that there were no auspicious

occurrence to guarantee Israel protection. On the contrary, it was the month in which Moses died. Haman now had reason to rejoice, for he planned to exterminate the Jews in unlucky Adar. But he overlooked the significant fact that Moses was born in Adar.
100.

Haman then consulted the signs of the zodiac to determine the constellation most suitable to carry out his designs against Mordecai and his people. Under the Ram, the Jews had the benefit of the paschal lamb. The Bull also was an inappropriate time for Haman's revenge, because Joseph was compared to a bull and also because the bullock was used for sacrifices. The Twins was the constellation in which twins were born to Tamar; Leo was inauspicious, for Judah the ancestor of Daniel was called lion. The Virgin was unfavorable, because Michael, Hannanya, and Azariah, were loyal to God, just as virtuous women are to their husbands. And also under the signs of the Scorpion, Sagittornis, Capricorneus and Aquarius, Israel had merit. However, Pisces according to Haman's computations, was the ideal constellation in which to perpetrate evil. He assured himself that the Jews were about to be swallowed up, little realizing that God was about to swallow him up.
101.

III. 8-15. And Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples throughout all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws are different from those of every people; neither do they observe the king's laws; therefore it is not fitting to leave them alone. If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay then ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of these who have charge of the king's business, that they may bring it into the king's treasuries." Then the king took his ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. The king also said to Haman, "The silver is yours and the people too, to do with them as seems good to you."

Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written according to all that Haman commanded to the king's satraps and to the governors who were over every province and to the princes of every people, to every province according to its form of writing, and to every people according to their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written and it was sealed with the king's ring. These letters were sent by posts to all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to wipe out all the Jews, both young and old, infants and women in one day, even upon the thirteenth day

of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them as plunder. A copy of the writing to be given out as a decree in every province was published to all the peoples that they should be ready for that day. The posts went forth in haste at the king's command, and the decree was given out in the castle at Shushan. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

After casting the lots, Haman's next move was to denounce the Jews before Ahasuerus. He informed the monarch that there dwelt in his kingdom a people despised by their countrymen because of their disloyalty to the crown and because of their peculiar habits. "These Jews were worthy of extermination," Haman argued. "They displayed their disloyalty in every regard. They showed contempt for the laws of the dominion and transgressed them at will. They refused to fight in the army. Their sons did not marry Persian women and their daughters did not take a Persian man for a husband. Their own peculiar laws which they considered superior to those of the kingdom forbade them to eat and drink with Persians. And if perchance a Persian were to touch the outside of a cup that was filled with wine, these Jews would not drink out of it; yet if a fly should happen to fall in the cup, this cursed people merely removed it and would then drink to their heart's content. Nay more, they prayed to their God daily to overthrow the Persians together with all the nations of the world. "They are an impoverished people," continued Haman, "because they idle away their time in the observance of their holidays instead of working. Once every week they observe the Sabbath in idleness and prayer. They gather in the synagogue on that day and beseech their God to lay low those who are proud ¹⁰³ ~~which~~ meaning us. Then they remove the Torah and utter a curse against us. Every thirty days they observe a New Moon celebration. In Nisan they enjoy the Passover; in Siwan, the Shabuoth; in Tishri,

the New Year, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Therefore, if it please the king," Haman said, "let it be prescribed that this people be destroyed." 107.

After Haman's indictment of Israel, God said: "Thou hast spoken with disdain about the Jewish festivals. By my Word, I shall give them an additional festival — Purim — to celebrate thy downfall." 108.

Confounded were the inhabitants of the celestial spheres upon hearing Haman's unjust condemnation. The angel Michael then appeared before God to speak in defense of the Jews. He said: "Master of the Universe, thy children are denounced not for worshipping idols, nor for unchastity, nor for bloodshed,—they are denounced for observing thy laws." There- 109.
upon the Lord assured Michael that He would not forsake His people.

Ahasuerus, convinced by the arguments of Haman that the Jews merited extermination, was nevertheless afraid to carry out such a measure. Many nations in the past which had attempted to overthrow Israel were, in turn, annihilated themselves. Thus he spoke to Haman: "Israel is insurpassable because of their God. The mighty nations, though stronger than we, who have attempted to harm them, were wiped out because of the miraculous deeds which their Lord performed. We must surrender this plot, lest we too suffer the same fate."

The king's denial did not frustrate Haman. He insisted that the matter be reconsidered. Ahasuerus then summoned together his councillors to help him make a decision. He then put the question before them: "Do you think that we ought to annihilate the Jews?" "No," was their unanimous reply. "What madman has placed such a thought in your head? If the Jews are destroyed, the world will come to an end. Furthermore, the Israelites alone are called God's chosen ones, while we are strangers.

Even now their God will champion their cause, as He has done in the past. The extermination of Pharaoh and Sennacherib have taught us not to touch God's anointed ones." 110.

"That is true," interrupted Haman, "but their God who drowned Pharaoh and turned upon Sennacherib can no longer help them. He is too old. He was unable to defeat Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the Temple and exiled the Jews. And were their God, who hates immorality, to become mighty again, He would not come to the aid of the Jews because of their licentious conduct at the king's feast."

Haman's words were convincing. The councillors reconsidered the matter and approved of the scheme to murder the Jews. 111. No time was wasted. An edict was issued throughout the empire for the people to stand in readiness. This was the message:

"Greetings! Be it known unto you that we have a man in our midst of kingly stock, whose name is Haman. He has told us of a despised people in our midst, who would like to witness our destruction. They continually curse the king by reciting the sentence: 'The Lord is King of the universe and the nations will perish from His land.' Besides, they turn upon those who bestow good upon them. Look what they did to Pharaoh who welcomed them into Egypt and let them settle upon the most desirable land. He fed them during the years of famine with the choicest products. Yet when he asked them to build palaces for him, they began to stall and to conspire. They asked for permission to make a three days' journey into the desert in order to worship their God, after which they would return. The request was granted by the benevolent king, who allowed the Israelites to borrow clothes and gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians. And after they had stripped Egypt of its wealth, they fled. When Pharaoh learned about their escape, he went after them to recover the wealth of

his people. But the Hebrews turned to Moses their leader for help when the Egyptians were at their heels. Moses, by the aid of witchcraft performed with his staff, then divided the sea through which the Israelites passed. Pharaoh and his hosts pursued the Israelit^es into the sea and were drowned. This was the tragic end of one who treated this cursed people with kindness.

"That was not all! Haman also related to us how the Israelites dealt treacherously with the other nations. He mentioned how Moses with the aid of a wicked disciple succeeded by occult means in weakening the army of Amalek and thus was able to defeat it. Sihon and Og met a similar fate. Their king, David, was also cruel to the nations about him and forced them into submission. He was succeeded by Solomon, who built a Temple. In time of war, the Hebrews would enter the Temple and after performing some magic, they were able to destroy the universe. However, today they suffer exile because they were faithless to their God, who, we now know, has become powerless. He did not prevent Nebuchadnezzar from capturing Jerusalem.

"Now, although they are exiled among us, they have only contempt for us and our faith. They do not eat our food. They will not intermarry. Therefore, we have resolved to exterminate the Jews on the thirteenth of 112. Adar. Stand by for the day of complete slaughter. Show mercy on nobody."

His purpose accomplished, Haman left the council chamber in good spirits. Ahead of him he noticed Mordecai conversing with three children who had just left the schoolroom. What they were telling Mordecai evidently cheered him, for his face lit up. Haman, curious to know what they told Mordecai, approached and asked the reason for such laughter in the face of doom. Mordecai reponded: "These children today learned in school that God annuls the plan of evil-doers." Haman walked away with the firm resolution that 113. these children should be the first to suffer on the appointed day.

Ahasuerus did not accept the ten thousand talents of silver that Haman originally offered for killing the Jews. Seeing how grieved Haman was to part with that amount, Ahasuerus told him to keep his money. 114.

After the decree was announced, the Jews found it dangerous to frequent public places. The people, now filled with hate of the Jews, openly attacked them in the streets. There were cases reported of Jews being choked almost to death by the gentiles who taunted them by telling them how they were going to dispose of their property. 115.

The city of Shushan fell into a state of confusion. After the royal edict, God visited the general population with many misfortunes. Women who were drying fruit on the roof fell to the ground with broken heads. Men in drawing water from the well fell in and were drowned. 116.

Satan played his part in bringing about the death penalty for the Jews. Before God, he accused them of faithlessness. He demonstrated how 18,500 of them had become defiled at Ahasuerus' banquet, and thus deserved punishment. "Wipe them off the face of the earth!" appealed Satan. "But what will happen to the Torah?" asked God. "Let it remain with the inhabitants of heaven," was the reply. "Good! Now I will make them forgotten by men," spoke the Lord. And the doom of Israel was sealed.

The Torah, dressed in a mantel for mourning, then appeared before God. Bitter was her weeping for the lot of Israel and grieved, she spoke to God, "If Israel is destroyed, why then have a world?" Bitter, too, was the grief of the angels and the luminaries.

Elijah, in an attempt to save Israel, ran in haste and attempted to enlist the aid of the Patriarchs. "Rouse ye from your lethargy!" he shouted. "Are ye immune to the trouble that besets your progeny?" The Angels, the luminaries, and heaven and earth, are deeply touched, while ye pay no heed." But the Patriarchs answered: "We can do nothing, for their fate is sealed."

Next, Elijah sought out Moses to come to the aid of the Jews, as he used to in the past. "Is there a pious man among them?" asked the 'faithful shepherd'. "Yes, Mordecai," came the response. "Then have him engage in prayer, as I will do in heaven; perhaps our combined efforts can avert God's decree which is not yet sealed permanently." 117.

Mordecai's Appeal to Esther

IV. 1-9. Now when Mordecai knew all that had been done, Mordecai tore his garments and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and cried out with a loud and bitter lamentation. And he came even before the king's gate; for none might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. Also in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. And Esther's maidens and her chamberlains came and told her, and the queen was exceedingly pained. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, and to take off his sackcloth; but he did not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's chamberlains who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai, to learn what this was and why it was. So Hathach went forth to Mordecai to the broad place of the city, which was before the king's gate. And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him and the exact sum of money that Haman promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the writing of the decree that was given out in Shushan to destroy them, that he might show it to Esther and inform her, and charge her to go into the king to implore him and to make a request before him for her people. So Hathach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Now Elijah appeared to Mordecai and informed him how Satan maligned the Jews and told him what part he must take to avert the decree. Without delay, Mordecai acted upon Moses' counsel, given him by Elijah; whereupon, he put on sackcloth and ashes, abstained from food, went out into the midst of the city, where he wept aloud bitterly. The rest of the Jews followed his example, with the result that the wailing and lamentation resounded throughout the empire. Esther meanwhile, sheltered in the palace, was unaware of the great tribulation of her people. When Esther's handmaids told her how they had seen Mordecai in mourning before the king's gate, she was so stricken that she swooned and gave birth to a still-born

118.

babe.

Meanwhile she sent a message to Mordecai asking him to remove the sackcloth and put on the garments which she had provided for him. But her servants brought back the garments. Esther then ordered Hathach to find out what tragedy had occurred that her cousin should be dressed as a mourner. He explained his mission to Mordecai. Upon learning that his conduct was the result of the misfortune that was to befall the Jews, Hathach returned to the palace with the sad message. Yet, in spite of its sadness, there were words of encouragement and hope in the message that Hathach delivered to Esther; for ^{Mordecai} he comforted her by reminding her of a dream he once had that augured well for the Jewish people.

This was Mordecai's dream. He beheld noise and tumult, thunderings and earthquakes, upon the earth. And behold, two great dragons came forth, both of them ready to fight, and their cry was great. At their cry every nation made itself ready for war against a small nation. And behold, a day of darkness and of gloom fell upon the earth! The small nation was in straits, and they cried unto God. Then Mordecai noticed that the small stream of water separating the two dragons had now grown into a mighty river that flooded the land. The sun rose, and lo! the small nation was exalted above their enemies. Mordecai then pointed out to Esther that, just as the onrushing stream separated the two dragons, so she too was to become mighty and to come between the two opposing statesmen -- Haman and Mordecai -- and in the end, crush all the enemies of the Jews. Hopeful that this was the correct interpretation of his dream, he requested her to go before the king and make a plea for her
119.
people.

IV. 10-17. Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a message to Mordecai, saying: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that whoever, whether man or woman, comes to the

king into the inner court who is not summoned,-- there is one law for him, that he be put to death, except those to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live; but I have not been summoned to come to the king these thirty days." And they told Mordecai Esther's words. Then Mordecai bade them return answer to Esther: "Think not to yourself that you will escape inside the royal palace any more than all the rest of the Jews. For if you remain altogether silent at this time, then relief and deliverance will rise up for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish; and who knows whether you have not come to royal estate for such a time as this." Thereupon, Esther bade them return answer to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews, that are to be found in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I also and my maidens will fast in like manner and so will I go to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." So Mordecai went his way and did just as Esther commanded him.

Esther at first was hesitant in going before the king, as Mordecai bade her. She feared the horrible consequences that she would suffer if she were to appear before the monarch without his summons. But Mordecai became emphatic: "If you do not come to the defense of your people in this hour of gloom, you will surely pay the penalty in the future world. And furthermore, if you decline aid to the Jews, their deliverance will come from another quarter, for God will not forsake Israel." ^{120.} These words aroused Esther's sense of duty. Now prepared to challenge the cause of her people, she asked Mordecai to proclaim a fast of three days, during which prayers for the success of her mission should be recited by the Jews. But since this was the eve of Passover, a time of the year when fasting is forbidden, Mordecai at first was unwilling to do as Esther bid. Later, when Esther asked him, "What good will the Passover be in coming years if there is no Israel?" ^{121.} Mordecai consented to the fast.

Thereupon, all the Jews in the capitol city, beginning with the eve of Passover, spent three days in fasting and prayer for a favorable outcome of Esther's visit to Ahasuerus. Even the children were not exceptions. Dressed in sackcloth and weeping bitterly, they were taught their lessons ^{122.} by Mordecai.

Mordecai himself piously called upon the God of Israel: "Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest, O Lord, that it was in neither insolence, nor in pride nor in vainglory, that I bowed not before proud Haman. For I would be content to kiss the ^{feet} souls of his feet for the salvation of Israel. But I did this that I might not set the glory of a man above the glory of God. And now, O our God, spare Thy people. Cast this adversary into the pit he has dug for Israel; trap him in the snare he has set for Thy pious servants, so that this destroyer may know that Thou art our Hope
123.
and Stronghold."

Esther, too, seeking the blessing of God on her grave mission, gave voice to her supplication: "Eternal Master of the Universe, help Thy orphan-servant who, as a beggar, asks for Thy mercy on her way to King Ahasuerus. Show favor upon Thy poor servant and deliver Thy people from the enemies that rise up against it. O Thou, Father of orphans, stand at the side of one who trusts in Thy mercy. Make her pleasing in the sight of the king whom she dreads, and humble him in her presence."
124.

The Visit to the King

V. 1-5a. Now it came to pass on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace directly opposite the king's apartment. Now the king was sitting upon his royal throne in the royal palace opposite the entrance of the palace. And when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she met with favor in his sight, and the king extended to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near and touched the top of his sceptre. Then said the king unto her: "What wilt thou, Queen Esther? For whatever is thy wish, even to the half of the kingdom, it shall be given thee." And Esther said: "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet that I have prepared for him." Then the king said, "Bring Haman in haste that he may fulfill Esther's wish."

Upon the termination of the fast, Esther dressed herself carefully for her appearance before the king. To add to her beauty, God provided

her for this occasion with elegant robes that resembled those worn in the heavenly kingdom. As she repaired to the king's apartment, she was escorted by two attendants. One stood at her side to give her support and the other carried her train. Nervously did she approach the king's inner apartment. When Ahasuerus noticed her uninvited presence, he purposely looked in another direction; but angels turned the king's head back so that he was forced to look at her, now more beautiful than ever. However, still maddened by the rage that burned within him, the king started to address Esther in harsh tones. At that moment an angel struck him a hard blow across the mouth, so that the words that now came from his lips were soft and comforting. "Fear not, Esther," he said, running to embrace her. "No harm shall come unto you. And surely yours is a serious mission since you staked your life to come. Tell me what you wish and it shall be granted." So overcome with fright, Esther fell into a swoon. Upon recovering, she invited
125.
the king and Haman to a banquet.

V. 5b-8. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. And the king said to Esther at the banquet of wine: "What is your petition? And it shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of the kingdom, and it shall be performed." Then answered Esther: "My petition and request is: if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to my banquet that I shall prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

Esther's motives for requesting Haman to attend her banquet were carefully thought out. Detaining him, she knew that she would prevent him from going on with any of his nefarious schemes. Furthermore, by making Haman feel that he was the queen's favorite, since he was the only outsider invited to the feast, he would be totally disarmed for that which was to
126.
follow. Esther also ~~for~~ foresaw that the Jews ~~lose~~ ^{would} faith in her as

their savior because of her seemingly friendly attitude toward Haman and

127.
therefore would invoke the help of God, the Redeemer of Israel. It was her intention also to behave in such a way toward Haman that the king might suspect her of carrying on an unmistakable love affair with Haman. True, Esther would be risking her own life thereby in the event that her original plan failed. Yet she was willing to die and if in this way she could implicate Haman. As a matter of fact, she preferred death to the pain and sorrow she would suffer in witnessing the persecution of the Jews.
128.

And Esther did succeed in arousing the king's suspicions when at the banquet she sipped wine and then passed her goblet for Haman to drink and when she offered Haman her own delicacies, while she completely ignored the king.
129.
Although displeased with her conduct, Ahasuerus still remembered his promise to the queen. "What is your petition?" he asked, "and it shall be granted." But Esther, too nervous to proceed with her plans, begged the king's indulgence until the morrow.

The Gallows

V. 9-14. Then Haman went out on that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate and he neither stood up nor moved for him, Haman was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and returned home and sent and fetched his friends and Zeresh, his wife. Thereupon Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches and the multitude of his children and every instance where the king had promoted him and how he had advanced him above the princes and the servants of the king. Haman also said: "Even Esther the queen let no man but me come in with the king to the banquet that she had prepared, and tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. Yet all this suffices me not so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him: "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be erected and in the morning speak to the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon. Then go in merrily with the king to the banquet." And the thing pleased Haman; and he had the gallows made.

Haman, flattered by Esther's unusual attentions toward him at the feast, stood upon the summit of self-importance. There was no doubt

in his mind that he was the most privileged person in the dominion, for he not only occupied a high position in the empire, but also was a favorite of the beautiful queen. ^{130.} "Surely everybody will accord me the respect that is due me," thought he. Consequently Haman's ego suffered terrible injury when Mordecai refused to render homage to him. Greatly incensed, he was moved to give Mordecai a deadly kick. He restrained himself, however, for he realized that it would be a more disciplinary move on his part if he had Mordecai publicly executed. His death then would be a warning to others who should attempt to be disrespectful. ^{131.}

Provoked to the pitch of revenge, Haman arrived home. He immediately summoned together his wife and counsellors and told them ^{how} unenjoyable were his privileges and even the food he ate as long as Mordecai was alive to irritate him.. He then called upon them to suggest the most effective way of disposing of Mordecai's life. The advice of his wife, Zeresh, was superior in his eyes to that of his three hundred and sixty-five counsellors. She warned Haman that he would have to select carefully the means by which Mordecai the Jew was to be put to death, or else his plan to kill Mordecai would fail. She illustrated how useless it was to throw Mordecai in a fiery furnace, for his God would save him from that danger, just as He did for Hananiah and his companions. To throw him into a lion's den was also foolish, for Mordecai could undoubtedly escape, as his predecessor, Daniel, did. To cast him into prison, too, was a vain move, for unquestionably he would be freed, as his ancestor Joseph had been freed. Ineffective too would it be to throw him into an iron furnace, for God would deliver Mordecai as He had delivered Menasseh. It would profit naught even if he were left to die in the desert, for as

the Israelites of old, he too would flourish there. Even to blind his eyes would not avail, for as Samson, he would be more troublesome without his sight than with it. Zeresh therefore counseled death by hanging, because there was no case in Jewish history where God had been able to deliver an individual from the gallows.^{132.}

Convinced by his wife of the expediency for hanging, he proceeded to erect a gallows from which he himself was destined to swing. It was pre-ordained that the scaffold would be made from the wood of the thorn bush. Of all the trees of the forest that came before God and volunteered to give of its wood for the gallows on which Haman the culprit was to be hanged, the offer of the thorn was the most pleasing to God. Since the vine, the olive, the palm and all the other trees already served Israel in some capacity, whereas the thorn did not, God therefore provided the thorn with this opportunity for service to Israel.^{133.}

Nowhere could Haman find a beam that was the required fifty cubits in length. He was finally forced to destroy a section of his house to get the master-beam which answered that measurement.^{134.} From it he constructed the gallows. Upon its completion he himself demonstrated how Mordecai was to be strung up; whereupon a voice from heaven proclaimed: "For you, Haman, is the scaffold ready!"^{135.}

Next, Haman went in search of Mordecai, whose every move he deemed it advisable to watch in order to foil any attempt his victim might make to escape the gallows. In the schoolhouse, he found Mordecai weeping and wailing together with twenty-two thousand children. Haman, intending to murder them on the morrow after hanging Mordecai, had his men put the children in chains. Mothers, learning of their children's misfortune, hastened to the school-room. In their arms they carried food and water of which they hoped their children would partake before dying. The child-

ren, however, vowed that they, like saints, would fast until death came upon them. Returning their scrolls to Mordecai, the children desparingly remarked: "We were under the impression that our days would be many since we were engaged in the study of the Torah. Evidently we have been unworthy of such a blessing. Therefore, take these scrolls from us!" Their cries and bitter tears reached God. He spoke: "Why do I hear sounds of kids and lambs?" Moses answered and said: "They are not the sounds of kids and lambs; they are the cries of innocent children who are to be slaughtered by the enemy of the Jews." God was touched by the plight of these children. He tore up the edict of doom and sent one of His angels to Ahasuerus to make him cancel the edict of persecution which he had issued
136.
against the Jews.

VI. 1-5. On that night sleep forsook the king, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And there was found written what Mordecai had told concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, of those who guarded the threshold, who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Whereupon the king said: "What honor and dignity have been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" Then the king's servants who ministered to him said: "Nothing has been done for him." And the king said: "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had entered the outer court of the king's house to request the king to bring Mordecai to the gallows that he had prepared for him. Accordingly the king's servants said to him, "Behold, Haman is standing in the court." And the king said: "Let him enter."

On the night God revoked the decree of annihilation against Israel, Gabriel entered the bedroom of the king and drove away his sleep. He kept Ahasuerus awake all night long by throwing him on the floor as many as 365 times and at the same time by driving into the mind of the king the thought that he had failed to reward a
137.
benefactor.

Many thoughts flashed through the king's mind as he lay on his couch trying to fall asleep. He reviewed the events of the day, among which was the feast which Esther had given. He recalled the friendly manner in which the queen behaved toward Haman. He bore in mind also that she invited him to the feast on the next day. From this he concluded that Esther and Haman were planning to murder him. But he dismissed this thought. "Surely my friends would warn me of foul play," he reflected. His mind, however, became afflicted with another terrible notion. Suddenly he imagined that his sleeplessness was the result of poisoning placed in his food by his kitchen staff. But when it was brought to the king's attention that Haman and Esther, who partook of the same food as he, had suffered no bad effects, Ahasuerus abandoned this idea of plotting against his life. Suddenly he reflected: "Could it be that I have failed to reward one who has done me a kindness?" Troubled with the thought that he might have neglected to honor a benefactor, the king called for his scribe to read the chronicles of the kingdom.

The record dealing with Mordecai's service to Ahasuerus would never have been read to the king, if it had not been for a miracle. The scribe, a son of Haman, tried his best to skip over the chronicle referring to Mordecai, but the words themselves pronounced the heroism of Mordecai.

139.

This incident soothed the troubled mind of the king so that he fell asleep. But Ahasuerus' sleep was not restful. He had a bad dream in which he saw Haman attack him with a brandished sword. Terrified, the king woke up, and hearing a noise, he shouted: "Who is in the court?" When his servants announced that Haman was standing without, Ahasuerus became convinced of the truth of the

140.
dream. He bid Haman enter.

VI. 6-10. So Haman came in. And the king said to him, "What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" Now Haman said to himself: "Whom would the king delight to honor more than myself?" Therefore, Haman said to the king: "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal garments be brought, which the king wears, and a horse which the king rides and on whose head a royal crown is set; and let the garments and the horse be delivered to one of the king's most noble princes, and let them clothe the man whom the king delights to honor and cause him to ride on horseback through the street of the city and proclaim before him, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!'" Then the king said to Haman: "Make haste and take the garments and the horse, as you have said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew who sits in the king's gate. Let nothing fail of all that you have spoken."

Laboring under the false impression that he was the one to be honored, Haman intimated that the finest gesture the king could make in paying tribute to a person was to clothe him in royal garb and to place the royal crown upon his head. Greatly embarrassed when Ahasuerus commanded him to do accordingly to Mordecai, Haman tried to wriggle out of this unpleasant task. "Oh king!" he said, "there are many people with the name Mordecai. How should I know which Mordecai you mean?" Ahasuerus replied: "I mean Mordecai the Jew." Haman was quick with his retort: "But there are many Jews who have the name Mordecai and I still do not know which of them you are eager to honor." The king answered: "I wish to honor Mordecai the Jew who sits at the palace gate in the manner you prescribed." "Oh king!" pleaded Haman, "don't make me the laughing stock of the kingdom. Mordecai is my enemy. Honor him in some other way. Make him a governor. But, I pray thee, spare me the humiliation I will undoubtedly suffer if thou insist that I, thy minister, render him homage." Ahasuerus was not moved in the least by Haman's

Imprecations (2)
imprecations. He dispatched Hathach and Harbonah to see that Haman
141.
carried out the command faithfully.

Haman's Fall

VI. 10-14. Then Haman took the garments and the horse and clothed Mordecai and caused him to ride through the streets of the city and proclaimed before him: "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor." Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried home, mourning and with his head covered. And Haman related to Zeresh, his wife, and to all his friends all that had befallen him. Then his wise men and Zeresh, his wife, said to him: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, be of the seed of the Jews, you shall not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him." While they were still speaking with him, the king's chamberlain arrived and hurriedly brought Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

Mordecai was seized with fear when he saw Haman heading for the school-house, evidently to fetch him for the gallows. He warned his students that if they did not run for their lives, Haman would wreak vengeance upon them too. But they remained, preferring to die with prayer on their lips, as Mordecai.

As Haman entered, the school-house, the students were busy discussing the laws concerning the Omer. He listened for a while and then remarked: "My 10,000 talents of silver has proved ineffective against this Omer of barley worth a mere pittance." Haman then told Mordecai how he was to be honored and offered him the king's robes. But Mordecai insisted that first he must bathe and have his hair trimmed, for his body needed attention after these three days of mourning. Haman himself was compelled to perform these menial tasks for Mordecai when efforts to get hold of a bathtender and a barber failed. Since Mordecai was too weak after the fast to mount the horse without assistance, Haman stooped down. In this way, Mordecai
142.
raised himself by stepping on his back.

As the procession through the streets began, Mordecai, lifting his voice in praise to God, sang: "I will extol Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast raised me up and hast not suffered my enemies to rejoice over me. O Lord, my God, I cried unto Thee, and Thou didst heal me. O Lord, Thou hast brought up my soul from the nether-world; Thou didst keep me alive, that I should not go down to the pit." At this point his pupils continued the glorification: "Sing praise unto the Lord, O ye His godly ones, and give thanks to His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a life-time; weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning." Then Haman muttered these words: "Now, I said in my security, 'I shall never be moved.' Thou hast established, O Lord, in Thy favor my mountain as a stronghold. Thou didst hide Thy face; I was vexed." Esther now took up the words of thanksgiving: "Unto Thee, O Lord, did I call, and unto Thee, Lord, I made supplication. What profit is there in my blood when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? Shall it declare Thy truth?" All the Jews then lifted their voices in exaltation: "Hear, O Lord, and be gracious unto me; Lord, be Thou my helper. Thou didst turn for me my mourning into dancing; Thou didst loose my sackcloth and gird me with gladness." And then the air resounded with the words of a Holy Spirit: "So that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and ~~not~~ be silent. O Lord, I will give thanks unto Thee
143.
forever."

Haman's daughter remained at home waiting impatiently for the procession to pass the house. In the meantime she had gone up to the roof with a vessel filled with excrement which she intended to empty over Mordecai. But when she discovered that she had thrown by mistake the
144.
filth upon the head of her own father, she threw herself to the ground.

After the procession Haman returned home in low spirits. The death of his daughter increased his grief. His wife and his advisers offered him little comfort. Rather, they added to his mortification in telling him that he would suffer the fate that befell all the enemies of the Jews. To forestall any attempt of rebellion Haman and his sons might plan against the crown in order to bring about a change in his fortune, Esther bade chamberlains hurry him to the banquet where she could keep vigil over him.
145.

VII. 1-10. So the king and Haman went in to drink with Esther the queen. And the king said again to Esther on the second day of the banquet of wine: "What is your petition, Queen Esther? And it shall be granted you. Indeed what is your request even to the half of the kingdom? And it shall be performed." Then Esther the queen answered, saying: "If I have found favor in the sight of the king and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request; for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain and to perish. But if we have been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my peace, since the distress would not have been worthy of disturbing the king." Then King Ahasuerus spoke and said to Esther the queen: "Who is he and where is he who dares presume in his heart to do so?" Thereupon Esther said: "This adversary and this enemy is the wicked Haman." The Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. And when the king arose in his wrath from the Banquet of wine and went into the palace garden, Haman remained to beg for his life from Esther the queen; for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. Accordingly, when the king returned from the palace garden to the apartment of the banquet of wine, Haman was prostrate upon the couch upon which Esther was. Then the king said: "Will he even violate the queen in my presence in the house?" As the words left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Then Harbonah, one of the chamberlains who was before the king, said: "Behold, also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman has made for Mordecai, who spoke good for the king, stands in the house of Haman." And the king said, "Hang him thereon." So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath abated.^{146.}

At the banquet Ahasuerus again assured Esther that she had but to make a request and it would be fulfilled. "If it is pleasing in thy sight, O king," she appealed, "let my life be given me and let the life of my people be restored." "And who is responsible for

this nefarious plot against thy people, Esther?" interrogated the king. Pointing an accusing finger at Haman, she exclaimed: "He is the guilty person!" Ahasuerus was furious because of Haman's ruthlessness and left the banquet table in his anger, going to the royal garden. In order to kindle his wrath even more against Haman, angels, disguised as the sons of Haman, began to hew down the stately trees of the garden. In the meanwhile, Haman remained behind with Esther to beg for clemency. As he kept pleading for mercy, he was thrust by an angel into a compromising position with the queen. When the king reentered and saw Haman upon the couch with Esther, he burst forth in anger and said: "The rascal even dares to violate the queen! For that he shall suffer!" 147.

Harbonah, the chamberlain, seeing that Haman was now in danger, deserted him at this crucial moment. In the presence of Ahasuerus, he now arose and accused Haman of participation in the conspiracy with Bigthan and Teresh and traced Haman's hate of Mordecai to the time when the plot was exposed. Harbonah then informed the king that Haman also had prepared a gallows on which to hang his mortal enemy. Fierce with rage because of Haman's duplicity and chicanery, Ahasuerus ordered him to be hanged together with his wife and his ten sons. 148.

The king not only revoked the decree of annihilation but also allowed the Jews to turn upon their enemies so that the rejoicing of Israel was great on that day. Haman's wealth was turned over to Esther. 149. Mordecai was appointed king of the Jews. He minted coins that had the form of Esther stamped on one side and his on the other. He was revered by all men throughout the land and was 150. a credit to his people.

Chapter Three

Rabbinic Method and Thought in the Midrashic Literature to Esther

A. Textual Exegesis

It is our intention to describe the Rabbinical method of exegesis in the Book of Esther. The Rabbis developed many interpretations by applying to the text the different hermeneutic principles which we shall now demonstrate.

The Gezer Shave

According to the text of Esther, King Ahasuerus ordered Vashti to appear before him on the seventh day (*'רש"ל* *פ"ב*) of the banquet when his heart was joyous with wine. To the Rabbis, *'רש"ל* *פ"ב* did not mean the seventh day of the feast, but the seventh day of the week -- the Sabbath -- just as *'רש"ל* *פ"ב* in Genesis II:1 meant the Sabbath.^{1.}

Since the word *אִישׁ* appearing in Esther II:5 (There was a man in Shushan, a Jew...) also is used in connection with Moses, (Nu. XII:3 -- And the man Moses was very humble), the Rabbis developed the thought that Mordecai in his generation was as important as Moses was in his.^{2.}

Repetition

The repetition of the words מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר in Esther II:6 (who [Mordecai] had been carried away [מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר] from Jerusalem with the captives who had been carried away with Jeremiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon had carried away [מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר]) was of significance. This recurrence was the basis for the interpretation that Mordecai went into exile with Jeremiah but later returned to Jerusalem. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple in 586, Mordecai was carried into exile a second time.^{3.}

In the opening verse to Esther, Ahasuerus' name appears twice (Now it was in the days of Ahasuerus — that is, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia...). This repetition evoked the comment that Ahasuerus wrought wickedness from the beginning to the end of his reign.^{4.}

Word Order

From the position of a person's name in the text, one can determine whether he is a sinner or a saint. The names of the wicked always precede: מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר, מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר, מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר.

It is the reverse with the righteous: מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר, מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר, מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר, מֶלֶךְ אֱשֶׁר.^{5.}

Memucan, being the last mentioned of the king's seven advisers, was considered by the Rabbis the least important. In spite of his inferior station, however, he spoke up first with the advice to execute Vashti. From this, the Rabbis derived the saying that the common man is first to offer an opinion.^{6.}

Numerology

The word β_{on} (Esther III:11 -- The king said to Haman: "The silver is yours and the people, too..."), and the word Lra (Esther VII:10 -- And they hanged Haman on the gallows...) have the same numerical value, 165. Therefore, the word Lra could be substituted for β_{on} in the text, so that it was as if Ahasuerus said to Haman: "The gallows is for you."^{7.}

Vocalization

There is a Midrash taught in the name of Rabbi Meir to the effect that Esther was the wife of Mordecai. This interpretation is derived by changing the word Mordecai (Esther II:7 Mordecai) to Mordecai .^{8.}

B. Theological

1. God and Israel

There is in the Midrashic literature to Esther the comforting message preached by the Rabbis that Israel in exile is still God's people. The story of Esther was an affirmation of their belief that God will not repudiate His covenant with His people and that He will not forsake them. His guardianship over Israel will never cease, and in time of trouble He will send them a redeemer.^{9.}

According to the Rabbis, Israel is as the regal robe of God, which He puts on to glorify Himself. Woe to those persons who would oppress Israel, the royal people of the Lord!^{10.}

Israel alone enjoys a cherished intimacy with God that none of the other nations could hope to have. While all the peoples of the

earth are called strangers
11.
kin of God אֱלֹהֵינוּ .

אֱלֹהֵינוּ , Israel is called the

2. Israel and Torah

The very existence of the world depends on the Torah. Therefore, if Israel, the guardian of the Law, were destroyed, the universe
12.
would not endure. Israel is indispensable to the world as is
13.
the rich soil that yields the produce of man.

It was the duty of Israel to perpetrate the Torah through its study and practice so that the Divine Presence of God would continue to remain in the world. Therefore, school-houses and synagogues had to be erected where the study of Torah could be uninterruptedly pursued. Were it not for school-houses and synagogues, the Lord
14.
would have caused His Shechinah to depart from the universe.

3. Israel and the Nations

Precarious is Israel's life among the gentiles, taught the Rabbis. Every nation among whom it wanders plans its destruction. This unhappy position of Israel is comparable to that of a thirsty fox for whom a trap had been set at the river bank. "What am I to do?" puzzled the fox. "If I go down to the river, I will be caught;
15.
yet if I remain here, I will die of thirst."

In this respect, Israel is also likened to the dove that halts at the entrance of the dove-cote. It dare not enter because of the snake that lies in wait within. It also dares not leave because of
16.
the hawk that stalks without.

Yet, the attempt of nations to crush Israel will avail naught. Israel is indestructable as the rock. Those that come against Is-

rael are^{17.} like the clay vessel that is dashed to pieces when it strikes the stone.

Israel cannot be uprooted. Just as the reed survives every storm^{18.} and gale, so also does Israel withstand the adversity of nations.

It is as impossible to wipe out Israel as it is to dry up the^{19.} sea or to convert the dry land into an ocean.

4. Suffering and Repentance

To the Rabbis, Israel's affliction was the direct result of their faithlessness to God. Through suffering, it was hoped that Israel would undergo a moral and spiritual regeneration, after which they would be restored to God's favor. This belief is illustrated by the following incident. A man had a son whom he loved dearly. This son, however, kept bad company and sinned. Grieved was the father at his son's conduct that he drove him from the house with these remarks: "If you mend your ways, I will restore you to the household." The son, realizing his mistakes, repented of his evil ways and was taken back by his father. Similarly, Israel, the beloved son of the Lord, will be restored to^{20.} God's favor when it will turn aside from its sinfulness.

As long as Israel continues to sin, God will not answer their cries for help. While perverseness remains in its midst, God is impervious^{21.} to their pleas as one who is asleep.

The Lord requires nothing more of man than his acknowledgement of^{22.} sin.

5. Prayer and Fasting

Prayer and fasting are instruments by which the people can make atonement and win God's forgiveness. Most efficacious are the prayers

of the pious. The fervent prayers of the seer Moses and the saintly Mordecai brought about the revocation of the decree of destruction that God had issued against the Jews in the time of Esther. ^{23.} The fasting and the supplication of innocent children arouse God's attribute of tender mercy. The cries of 22,000 innocent children moved the Lord to have compassion on the Jews in Persia during the reign of Ahasuerus. ^{24.}

When Israel in prayer calls upon God in time of trouble, He answers them without delay. ^{25.}

C. Sayings

Abba Gorion coined five maxims: As soon as dishonest men become judges of the people, numerous will be the false witnesses. With the rise of informers among the people comes the confiscation of personal property. Respect for human beings is lost when men become impudent. The teeth of people are set on edge when the person of inferior ability boasts that he is greater than his superior. When God is provoked to anger by the deeds of His beloved children, He sends them punishment. ^{26.}

Rabbi Jochanan said: Whoever voices wisdom, be he a gentile, is called a sage. ^{27.}

The Rabbis taught: Whoever does not give credit to the person he quotes is like one who sheds blood. ^{28.} Rabbi Elazar said: He who gives a statement in the name of its author brings redemption into the world. ^{29.}

Whoever denies "foreign worship" may be called a Jew. ^{30.}

It is the ignorant man who is first to offer an opinion. ^{31.}

32.
When the ox has fallen to the ground, sharpen the knife.

One keen observation is better than a heap of superficial
33.
impressions.

D. Superstitions

According to the Rabbis, divination was an art practised among the heathens. Mordecai had to keep close watch over Esther while she was in the palace so that no sorcery could be performed upon
34.
her. Haman resorted to astrology to determine the auspicious
35.
moment to annihilate the Jews.

36.
The practice of bibliomancy was common among the Jews. The individual would interpret as a good or bad omen the verse just learned by a boy in school. When Mordecai heard about the edict to persecute the Jews, he excitedly went up to three children who had just left the school-house and asked them to repeat the verses they had just studied. The first boy spoke: "Be not afraid of sudden terror, neither of the destruction of the wicked, when it cometh." The second lad said that he had concluded his lessons with a statement from Isaiah: "Take counsel together, and it shall be brought to naught. Speak the word, and it shall not stand; for God is with us." The third fellow quoted the last verse he had studied in school: "Even to old age, I am the same; and even to the time of hoary hairs will I carry you. I have made and I will bear; yea, I will carry and will deliver." Upon hearing these encouraging words, Mordecai's spirit was ~~blased~~^{boosted} with hope.
37.

Deep significance was placed upon dreams. Mordecai found

in his dream of long ago an omen that forecast a favorable outcome for the Jews in Persia. ^{38.} Ahasuerus suspected Haman of conspiracy because of a dream in which he saw Haman brandish a sword over his head. ^{39.}

E. The Wicked

The wicked are subject to the power of their emotions. The righteous, on the other hand, exercise their will over their emotions. ^{40.}

The wicked, unlike the righteous, will go down to defeat, ^{41.} never to rise again.

Cursed is the anti-Semite who seeks to improve upon the violent schemes of his predecessors in order to exterminate Israel. Esau believed that Cain acted foolishly in slaying Abel while their father was still living. He overlooked the fact that Adam, still prolific, would have another son who would become the ancestor of Israel. Therefore Esau said: "Let the days of mourning for my father approach and then I shall slay my brother Jacob." Pharaoh saw how Esau's plan came to naught. Consequently, he ordered that every new-born male child be cast into the Nile. However, he lost sight of the fact that since he allowed the daughters to live, they would bear children through whom Israel would be preserved. Haman, however, realizing Pharaoh's error, gave the command to kill and wipe out all the Jews, young and old, throughout the land. In the future, Gog and Magog will rise up even against God in order to extirpate Israel. Then God will ^{42.} destroy Gog and Magog.

The evil outlook of the wicked plunges them into Gehennom, whereas the spiritual outlook of the righteous lifts them to the divine heights.^{43.}

The wicked will be judged in Gehennom naked.^{44.} There are seven stories of fire in Gehennom: the bottommost is called Arka and is half-fire and half-hail. When the wicked ~~is~~^{are} judged, they are led from fire to hail and back to fire. In Gehennom is also to be found a giant scorpion. The idol worshipper and the disbeliever ~~are~~^{45.} punished by all the elements in Gehennom.

F. Moral Lessons

Bar Jochnai wanted to prepare a feast for the leaders of Rome. He consulted with Rabbi Eliezer, the son of Rabbi Jose. "If you invite twenty guests, prepare for twenty-five; and if you invite twenty-five guests, prepare for thirty," was the advice that Rabbi Eliezer gave him.

Bar Jochnai, however, asked twenty-five people to attend his banquet while he made provisions only for twenty-four. Being short a portion of food, he set before the twenty-fifth guest some of his gold. Angered by the fact that he was deprived of food, the guest threw the gold into the face of his host and remarked: "Do I want your gold? Can I eat gold?" The next day, Bar Jochnai came and told Rabbi Eliezer of this embarrassing episode. "You were right," he told Rabbi Eliezer. "I should have made preparations for more than the number of invited guests, as you said. But tell me, as a person who is engaged only in the study of the Torah, where did you get your knowledge of how to conduct a feast?"

Rabbi Eliezer answered: "Even that we learn from the Torah." ^{46.}

A man should not single out one son and show favoritism to him, lest his other sons grow jealous and thereby be driven to do wrong. Such was the case when Jacob bestowed upon Joseph a coat of many colors. The other sons became envious of Joseph ^{47.} and sold him to a band of Ishmaelites.

The Rabbis came to Barbukin to collect money for the support of scholars. When they overheard him tell his son to purchase for lunch vegetables of inferior quality and of much cheaper price, they said: "How can we expect such a poor man to give a donation? Let us first do our work in the city and then come back to him." After they had raised the funds in the city, they returned to Barbukin and asked for a contribution. He referred them to his wife, who, he claimed, would give them a purse of dinars. "But, tell me," Barbukin interrogated, "why didn't you stop here before you went to the city?" The Rabbis then explained how they stopped and heard him order vegetables that only a poor man would buy. Barbukin replied: "I can stint on myself all I want, but I may not and am ^{48.} unwilling to be economical in performing a Mitzvah."

Rabbi Simon of Yochai accepted an invitation extended him by a gentile friend to partake of a meal. He observed that although the service was of silver and gold, the food was cheap and plain. "Why this inconsistency of poor food and expensive service?" asked Rabbi Simon. His gentile host replied: "As for you Jews, the study of the Torah brings you honor. But if we did not have possessions ^{49.} of silver and gold, we would not command the respect of anybody."

The Rabbis once held a discussion in the attic of Rabbi Tarphon to find an answer to the question: "Who is the person that performs righteousness at all times?" The teachers of Bible and Mishna were eliminated, since they did not engage in the work of righteousness during the moments of eating and sleeping. For the same reason, those who made Tefillin and Mezuzoth also were excluded. The Rabbis then decided that the person who raises an orphan in his house is the only one who engaged in righteousness at every moment.

G. Miscellanies

The wife of Trajan gave birth to a son on the ninth of Ab. Since this was the date of the destruction of the Temple, the Jews mourned. The child died on Channukah; yet, despite the sad occurrence the Jews lit the candles and celebrated the festival. Subsequently an individual came before Trajan's wife and maligned the Jews. "How cursed are these Jews!" he said. "When your son was born, they spent the day in lamentation; and when he died, they kindled lights and rejoiced."

Incensed at this unseemly conduct of the Jews, she sent a message to Trajan, asking him to interrupt his campaign against the barbarians in order to subdue the sons of Israel. Trajan hastened to Palestine by fleet and killed many Jews.

It was taught in the name of Rabbi Nathan that there existed:

In Alexandria,	9	measures of unchastity,	and in the rest of the world only 1;
In Rome,	9	" wealth ,	" " " " " " " " 1;
In Lud,	9	" poverty,	" " " " " " " " 1;

In Egypt,	9	measures of sorcery, and in the rest of the world only	1;
In Ismael, (Arabian)	9	" stupidity, " " " " " " " "	1;
In Ishmael,	"	9 " health, " " " " " " " "	1;
In Persia,	9	measures " vermin, " " " " " " " "	1;
In Media,	9	" " beauty, " " " " " " " "	1;
In East,	9	" " hideousness, " " " " " " " "	1;
In Chaldea	9	" " bravery, " " " " " " " "	1;
In Judah,	9	" " might, " " " " " " " "	1;
In Jerusalem,	9	" " loveliness, " " " " " " " "	1;
In Palestine,	9"	" wisdom, " " " " " " " "	1;
In Palestine,	9"	" Torah, " " " " " " " "	1;
In Jerusalem,	9"	" hypocrisy, " " " " " " " "	1;

55.

It is interesting to note that the Rabbis were familiar with the signs of the zodiac and enumerated them in their proper order. 54. They also had equivalent Hebrew terms for the twelve constellations.

The statement of Rabbi Judan, the son of Rabbi Simeon, may prove of some significance. He holds that Esther resorted to the use of a contraceptive in her sex relationship with Ahasuerus. 55.

Rabbi Nathan of Beth Gubrin made this comment. There are four languages that are excellent for different purposes: Greek for music, Persian for lamentation, Hebrew for conversation, and Latin for war. 56.

Hebrew has speech of its own, but no writing. Assyrian (Ashurit) has a written alphabet but has no spoken word. The Hebrew therefore adopted the Assyrian script. 57.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Thus we bring this work to a close. In its pages we have attempted to reveal the Rabbinical interpretation of the Book of Esther and the message of comfort and hope expressed therein. Although we have more than scratched the surface, the study is hardly complete and exhaustive. If, for example, use was made of Targum I and II, our labor would undoubtedly have been enriched.

However, a great deal of personal enrichment has come to the author of this research. Through it, he believes he has acquired a deeper understanding of Rabbinical exegesis and thought and a certain ease and facility in the pursuit of scholarship.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A. G.	Midrash Abba Gorion (Buber)
B. H.	Beth Hamidrash (Jellinek)
D. D. V.	Der Dor V' Dorshov (Weiss)
E. R.	Esther Rabba
G. V.	Gottesdienstliche Vorträge (Zunz)
J..E.	Jewish Encyclopoedia
L. T.	Lekah Tov (Buber)
Meg.	Tractate Megilla (Babli)
M. M. E.	Midrash Megillat Esther (Horowitz)
M. M.	Midrash Megilla (Gaster)
P. R. E.	Pirke D' Rabbi Eliezer.
P. A. I.	Panim Aherim I. (Buber)
P. A. II.	Panim Aherim II. (Buber)
Y.	Yalkut Shimoni

N O T E S

Chapter One

1. Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the O. T., edited by R. Charles, vol. I, pp., 668, 669.
2. Antiquities, XI, 6 -- Josephus.
3. Shulim Ochser, J. E., X, p. 58. "P. R. E."
4. Ibid. See also Introduction to Talmud and Midrash, Strack, p. 225.
5. Ibid., 59; ibid., 226
6. Shulim Ochser: J. E., X., p. 59. "P. R. E."
7. Ibid., p. 58. Strack, op. cit., p. 226.
8. The introduction to section one has twelve proems.
9. Strack, op. cit., p. 221; Theodor, J. E., V., p. 241, "Esther Rabba."
10. Ibid., p. 221; ibid., p. 241.
11. Weiss: D. D. V., p. 274; Strack, op. cit., p. 221; Theodor, op. cit., p. 241; Zunz, G. V., p. 276; Buber, Sifre D' Aggadta, p. 2a of introduction and note.
12. Bet Hamidrash, I, Leipzig, 1853, pp. 1-18.
13. S. Buber, Sifre D' Aggadta, Vilna, 1886.
14. See note 11.
15. Buber, Sifre D' Aggadta, Vilna, 1886.
16. Jellinek, Bet Hamidrash, I, pp. 19-24.
17. Buber, Sifre D' Aggadta, introduction.

18. Zunz, G. V., pp. 293 ff;
19. Rappaport, Bikkure Ha-ittim, X., pp. 122-123.
20. H. M. Horowitz, Aggadat Aggadot, pp. 47-54.
21. The conclusion of the work reads: "And the labor has been completed by the Patriarch R. Hayim Kasrini, son of Sabbatai Kasrini, in the edition of the master printer R. Ashtruk of Tulum, this 20th day of Siwan, 1519, in Constantinople, which is under the sovereignty of the Sultan Selim, etc., etc.
22. M. Gaster, "The Oldest Version of the Megillat Esther," pp. 167 - 178, Semitic Studies in Memory of A. Kohut, 1897.
23. Several characteristic legends appear here which are absent in the Talmud. Gaster explains this phenomenon by the fact that these were originally in the Talmud, but were later excluded, with numerous other passages, doubtless "for fear of giving umbrage to captious readers." p. 169.
24. In the latter section, the redactor followed the Talmudic order of the prophetic books.
25. Rappaport, Keren Hemed, 1841, VI., p. 25.
Bikkure Ha - ittim, 1829, p. 111.
26. Epstein, "Rabbi Simon Kara V' Ha-Yalkut Shimoni" in the Ha-Hoker, I., pp. 85 - 90, 129 - 137.

27. Cf. Epstein, op. cit., p. 134.
28. Zunz, Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums,
p. 304 f; G. V., p. 154 f.
29. Zunz, op. cit.
30. ~~Triebner~~, in "Nachrichten der Königlischen Gesellschaft
der Wissenschaft zu Göttingen, 1895, pp. 381 ff.
31. Basnage believed that "the coronation of the emperor in
the last section of Josippon referred to the coronation
of Otto the Great (962)." Hence the composition of the
book must be placed after this date. Basnage, "Histoire
des Juifs," VII, p. 89, Paris, 1710.
32. Refer back to Greek Additions, and see also discussion
under E. R. and A. G.

N O T E S

Chapter II

1. Meg. 11a; M. M. E. 57. In contrast to this view, he is described as the son of Darius and descendant of Cyrus.
2. P. H. I 23a; Y. 1045; Meg. 11a. The opposite opinion is also expressed: that Ahasuerus was not the best choice for king, but that he was able to buy his position at a high price.
3. Meg. 11a; Y. 1045; the three kings are Ahab, Nebuchadnezzar and Ahasuerus. P. A. II 28b raises the number of kings to rule over the world to four, Solomon being the fourth. According to E. R. 5a, Ahasuerus ruled only one-half the world, whereas Solomon, Ahab, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus held sway over the entire universe.
4. Meg. 11a; E. R. 5a; L. T. 45a; M. M. E. 57; P. A. I 23a; P. A. II 28b.
5. M. M. E. 57; Y. 1045; L. T. 45a; E. R. 6a.
6. A. G. 2b; E. R. 6b.
7. A. G. 4b; Y. 1046; P. A. II 29b; L. T. 45a.
8. E. R. 7a.
9. A. G. 4b; P. A. II 29b; Y. 1046; L. T. 45a.
10. E. R. 7a.
11. Meg. 12a; M. M. E. 59.
12. A. G. 5a; Y. 1046; P. A. II 29b; L. T. 45b; E. R. 8b.

The latter days of festivities were just as glorious as the former days.

13. P.R.E., chapter 49.
14. E. R. 8a; A. G. 4b; Y. 1046; L. T. 45a - 45b.
15. E. R. 23a; A. G. 5a; Y. 1046; P. A. II 29b; L. T. 45b.
16. P. R. E. 49. Cf. A. G. 5a and Y. 1048, which states that
the Jews were forced to eat food that was not kosher.
17. E. R. 9b; A. G. 5b; Y. 1048; L. T. 45b.
18. The literal translation reads: the goblets being diverse
from one another.
19. A. G. 5b; Y. 1048; P. A. II 30a; L. T. 45b.
20. E. R. 10a; A. G. 5b; Y. 1048; P. R. E. 49; P. A. II 30.
21. P. A. II 30a; Y. 1048; L. T. 46a; Meg. 13a.
22. L. T. 46a; Cf. E. R. 10a; Y. 1048; A. G. 6a. There
were people attending at the banquet who, being unaccustomed
to drink from the Persian goblets, were supplied with vessels
out of which they would drink. Also the guests, ^{who} were in the
habit of drinking before the meal followed their usual cus-
tom. Those accustomed to eat first and then drink followed
their custom.
23. E. R. 10a; A. G. 6a; Y. 1048; P. A. II 30a; L. T. 46a.
24. P. A. II 30b; Y. 1049.
25. E. R. 12b; Y. 1049; A. G. 7a; L. T. 46a.
26. E. R. 12b.
27. Y. 1049; P. A. II 30b.
28. E. R. 12b.
29. E. R. 13a; Meg. 12b; A. G. 7a; P. A. II 30b; Y. 1049;
L. T. 46a.
30. P. R. E. 49.

31. L. T. 46b; Y. 1049.
32. Meg. 12b; M. M. E. 60; L. T. 46b; Y. 1049.
33. M. M. I:10. According to this comment, Vashti's period of menstruation had passed and now she was well again. But as she was about to obey the king's command, she began to menstruate again. This was her punishment for not allowing the Jewish maidens to heed their menstruation.
34. E. R. 13a.
35. E. R. 13a; A. G. 8a; P. R. E. 49; L. T. 46b.
36. E. R. 13b; Meg. 12b; M. M. E. 61; Y. 1050; L. T. 46b - 47a; A. G. 8b; according to E. R., A. G., and L. T., the Jewish councillors were of the tribe of Issachar.
37. Carshema came from Africa; Shettar from India; Admotha from Edom; Tarshish from Tarsus; Meres, Marsena, and Memucan from Jerusalem: A. G. 8b-9a; P. A. II 31a; L. T. 47a.
38. The Hebrew phrase reads in E. R. 14a: *וְהָיָה לוֹ שֹׁמֵר וְהָיָה לוֹ* and the literal translation is: He was guardian over the vetch (a grass or bean fed to animals). By use of ^a this figure of speech, we arrive at above rendition.
39. E. R. 14a. The names are also explained allegorically in this passage.
40. M. M. E. 61; Y. 1051.
41. E. R. 14b; A. G. 9a; L. T. 47a.
42. E. R. 15a.
43. Belshazzar's disrespect. Here we find the view expressed by the Rabbis of the sins being visited upon the children.

lous thought. Whereupon Abahu, to prove its possibility cited a statement of Simon B. Elazar, to the effect that the milk of a man is *מלך*.

57. Meg. 13a; Y. 1053; M. M. II 7; M. M. E. 63.
58. P. A. II 32a; Y. 1053; the myrtle is symbolic of all the righteous. Cf.: Meg. 13a; M. M. E. 63; L. T. 47b.
59. E. R. 18a.
60. Meg. 13a; Y. 1053. Venus corresponds to their deity, As-tarte. Note the use of the word *אֲסַרְתָּ*.
61. Meg. 13a; M. M. E. 63; Y. 1053. Note the play on the words *מלך* and *מלח*.
62. Y. 1053; L. T. 47b.
63. A. G. 9b; Y. 1053; P. A. II 32a. There is the belief that she was 40 years and 80 years. Some readings give 74 years and arrive at it by computing the numeric value of *מלך*, which adds up to 74.
64. A. G. 9b; Y. 1053.
65. P. A. II 32a - 32b.
66. M. M. II:9.
67. Meg. 13a; P. R. E. 50; P. A. II 32b; L. T. 48a.
68. M. M. II 9; Meg. 13a.
69. E. R. 18a.
70. M. M. II 9.
71. E. R. 18a.
72. E. R. 18a.
73. P. A. II 32b; Y. 1053; L. T. 48a.
74. P. A. II 32b; Y. 1053.

75. Y. 1053.
76. P. A. II 32b - 33a; Y. 1053.
77. E. R. 18b; A. G. 9b; L. T. 48a.
78. E. R. 18b; A. G. 10a; Y. 1053; P. A. II 33a; L. T. 48b.
79. E. R. 18b; A. G. 10a; Y. 1053; P. A. II 33a; L. T. 48b.
80. E. R. 18b. Note play on word *נָפְלִין*.
81. Y. 1053; P. A. II 32b.
82. Y. 1053; P. A. II 32b.
83. M. M. V:6.
84. A. G. 10a; P. A. II 33a; Y. 1053; L. T. 48b.
85. E. R. 18b; A. G. 10b; Y. 1053. The reason given in L. T. 49a for taking the king's life is different. Bigthan and Teresh plan the king's overthrow because he did not select a queen from any of their relatives.
86. Y. 1053; P. A. II 33a.
87. Meg. 13b; P. R. E. 50; Y. 1053; M. M. E. 64; L. T. 48b. According to P. A. II 33a, the chamberlains planned to hide a poisonous snake in the king's bedchamber which they hoped would kill him. Furthermore, **Mordecai** learned about the plot through the *רִגְלָן*.
88. P. R. E. 50; M. M. E. 64. According to P. A. II 33b, Bigthan and Teresh, aware that their plot is uncovered, hasten to remove the serpent from the king's bedchamber. But God created a viper and placed it there in order to spare Mordecai any embarrassment.

89. Y. 1053; P. A. II 33a.
90. A. G. 11a.
91. P. R. E. 50; E. R. 19b; P. A. I 23b.
92. E. R. 19a; A. G. 11a; Y. 1053.
93. E. R. 19a; A. G. 10b - 11a; L. T. 49a. To explain Haman's undeserved appointment, the following parable is told. A man had an ass, a donkey and a pig. One day the ass complained to the donkey that ~~both~~ they who worked and sweated for their master received their food in measured quantity, but the pig, who romped about all day, was given as much food as he could consume. The donkey consoled the ass and said: "The time will come when you will see that the pig has not been as favored as you have thought." After the pig was fattened, he was slaughtered.
94. P. R. E. 50; E. R. 19b; P. A. I 23b; M. M. E. 64; M. M. III: 1.
95. M. M. II:5.
96. Genesis XXXIII.
97. E. R. 19b; A. G. 11b; Y. 1054; P. A. I 25a.
98. A. G. 12a; Y. 1054; P. A. II 33b - 34a; L. T. 49b. The biblical verse quoted is from Isaiah 57:21.
99. E. R. 20a; A. G. 12b; P. A. I 23b; Y. 1054; P. A. II 34a; L. T. 49b; M. M. E. 65 - 66; P. R. E. 50; Note slight variations.
100. E. R. 20b; A. G. 12b; P. A. I 23b; Y. 1054; P. A. II 34b; L. T. 50a; M. M. E. 65 - 66; P. R. E. 50; Meg. 13b; M. M. III:7. Note slight variations in details.

101. Ibid.
102. M. M. III:9.
103. M. M. III:8.
104. M. M. E. 66.
105. M. M. III:8; M. M. E. 66; Meg. 13b; Y. 1054.
106. M. M. III:9.
107. E. R. 21a; A. G. 13b; Y. 1054; P. A. I 25b; P. A. II 34b; M. M. E. 66; L. T. 50a - 50b.
108. Ibid.
109. E. R. 21a-21b; A. G. 14a; Y. 1054; P. A. I 25b; L. T. 50b.
110. M. M. E. 68; E. R. 21b; Y. 1057; ^{P.A. 1:23b.} Cf. A. G. 14b and P. A. II 34b: here the fate of Amalek and Sisera, enemies of the Israelites, are also discussed.
111. E. R. 22a, 23a; A. G. 16b; M. M. E. 60; L. T. 50b. Y. 1057.
112. E. R. 22a - 22b; A. G. 15a; L. T. 50b; Y. 1054; M. M. E. 68 - 69. Cf. the different versions in P. A. I 24a, which states that Haman himself issues the decree.
113. E. R. 22b; A. G. 16b; Y. 1057; L. T. 51a; M. M. E. 69.
114. P. A. II 34b; Y. 1054.
115. E. R. 24a; Y. 1056; P. A. I 26a.
116. P. A. II 35a.
117. E. R. 23a - 23b; A. G. 16b; L. T. 51a; Y. 1057; M. M. E. 70. Cf. version in P. A. I:24a : God summons the patriarchs before Him and states the Israelites merit extinction. Their sin was their neglecting to sanctify God in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, etc.

118. E. R. 24b; P. A. I 26a; A. G. 18a; P. A. II 35b.
Cf.: In E. R. 23b, Y. 1056, Meg. 15a, M. M. IV:4, M. M. E. 70, in which we find that the shock she suffered at that time brought on her menstruation. Also note the comment in E. R. 24b and P. A. I 26a, which states that Esther resorted to a practice to avoid pregnancy.
119. E. R. 24b; Y. 1056; cf. version of Dream in M. M. E. 67. The Dream of Mordecai and the Prayers of Mordecai and Esther are to be found in the apocryphal work known as the Additions to Esther. A Hebrew translation of the Greek original is to be found in Josippon, chap. IV. According to scholars, later redactors from Josippon inserted these selections into E. R. See Heb. translations (and also Aramaic) of the Additions to Esther in Jellinek, B. H. M., pp. 1-16. The interpretation of the dream is not given by the Midrash.
120. E. R. 25a.
121. P. R. E. 50; E. R. 25a; M. M. E. 70; Y. 1056; P. A. II 36a. According to P. R. E., E. R., and M. M. E., the fast started on the 13th day of Nisan.
122. E. R. 25a; A. G. 17b. L. T. 51a - 51b.
123. E. R. 25a. Compare Prayer of Mordecai with that found in Jellinek's Hebrew translation of the apocryphal Additions to Esther in B. H. M. V:1-16. Also compare it with versions in P. R. E. 50 and Josippon (see note 119.).

124. E. R. 25a - 25b. See versions of Esther's Prayer as found in Jellinek's Heb. translation: B. H. M., pp. 1-16..
Also compare with Josippon 4.
125. E. R. 25b; L. T. 52a - 52b; Y. 1056, 1059; P. A. II 36a. In P. A. II 36a, there is expressed another version of the appearance before the king: Ahasuerus was smitten with blindness. However, when he set his eyes in her direction, his sight was restored. So overjoyed was he that he held out the sceptre to Esther. She, overcome with fright, had no strength left to lift her hand. Thereupon, the sceptre extended itself the required length necessary for Esther to touch it without expending any energy.
126. Meg. 15b; M. M. E. 71; Y. 1056.
127. M. M. E. 71.
128. M. M. E. 71; M. M. V:6; L. T. 52b.
130. P. R. E. 50.
131. P. A. II 36a - 36b. The words ^{אֵלֶּיךָ} אֵלֶּיךָ are obscure. Buber suggests in note 155 that they be joined to form the word ^{אֵלֶּיךָ} אֵלֶּיךָ, meaning discipline. The suggestion was adopted.
129. P. A. II 36a.
132. E. R. 25b; A. G. 18b; Y. 1057; M. M. E. 73; L. T. 53a.
Compare with the version in P. A. II 36b and Y. 1056.
133. E. R. 25b; A. G. 21a - 21b; Y. 1059; P. A. I 24a -
(~~24b, L. T. 54b - 55a. Cf. weh~~)

24b; L. T. 54b - 55a. Cf. with the version in P. A. II 39a, which differs completely. There, none of the trees was desirous of becoming defiled by the body of Haman. The cedar finally was selected for the purpose. Also cf. with the version in Y. 1054, which states that Haman, by casting lots, found that the cedar tree was most suitable for the gallows.

134. A. G. 21b; Y. 1059; P. A. I 24b; L. T. 53a. According to A. G. 19a, the beam was cut from a tree that grew in the royal gardens. There is another version expressed in the same passage as well as in P. A. II 36b - 37a and Y. 1056 to the effect that Parshandatha, the governor of Kardunia, provided his father Haman with a beam of a cedar tree that was taken from Noah's ark. Cf. this with P. R. E. 50, which states that the beam for the gallows came from the Holy of Holies.

135. E. R. 26a; A. G. 19a; M. M. E. 73; L. T. 53a. In P. A. I 24b, Gabriel, instead of the Bat Kol, makes the declaration.

136. E. R. 26a - 26b; A. G. 19a - 19b; L. T. 53a; M. M. E. 73; Y. 1057.

137. A. G. 19b; P. A. I 24b; P. A. II 37b; L. T. 53b. According to P. A. I, it is the angel Michael who disturbs Ahasuerus' sleep. There is an altogether different version given in P. R. E. 50, E. R. 26b, and Y. 1057 to explain the king's insomnia. Ahasuerus sees in a dream Haman

attacking him with a drawn sword. He then removes the crown from Ahasuerus' head and the regal attire. The king awakens, alarmed with fright. He becomes convinced of the truth of the dream when the servants inform him of the presence of Haman in the palace at such an early hour.

138. A. G. 19b; P. A. I 24b; L. T. 52b, 53b; Y. 1057; Meg. 15b; M. M. VI:1.
139. A. G. 20a; P. A. II 37b; Y. 1057; M. M. VI:1. According to another view expressed in Y. 1057 and P. A. II 37b, the incident was expunged from the chronicle, but Elijah recorded it again. See Y. 1057 about the number of Haman's sons in the service of the king.
140. A. G. 20a; P. A. II 38a; L. T. 53b.
141. Meg. 16a; P. R. E. 50; Y. 1058; P. A. II 38a; L. T. 53b - 54a.
142. Meg. 16a; P. R. E. 50; M. M. E. 72; E. R. 26b; A. G. 20b - 21a; Y. 1058; L. T. 54a; P. A. II 38b.
143. E. R. 27a; A. G. 21a; Y. 1058; L. T. 54a. The psalm recited at the procession was Ps. 30. According to P. A. II 38b, it was Ps. 118.
144. Meg. 16a; M. M. E. 72; Y. 1058; L. T. 54a. Cf. with versions in E. R. 27b and P. A. II 38b, which states that Haman's daughter threw herself from the window when she saw how Haman, leading Mordecai through the streets, was disgraced.

145. A. G. 21a; P. A. II 38b; L. T. 54b.
146. Since the Midrash comments are few in number and greatly scattered after Chap. VII of Esther, we shall cite them along with the Midrashim on Chap. VII, but discontinue giving the text.
147. Meg. 16a; M. M. E. 74; P. R. E. 50; E. R. 27b; Y. 1058; P. A. II 38b - 39a; L. T. 54b. According to P. R. E. and E. R., the angel Michael, disguised as a son of Haman, hewed down the trees. According to M. M. E., L. T., and Meg., angels disguised as men cut down the trees at the order of Haman.
148. Y. 1059; P. A. II 39a. Cf. with P. R. E. 50 and E. R. 27b which maintains that it was Elijah who appeared before Ahasuerus in the form of Harbonah. Meg. 16a holds that Harbonah fled when he saw Haman in danger, for he, too, was implicated.
149. E. R. 27b; Y. 1058.
150. P. R. E. 50; E. R. 28a; Y. 1059.

NOTES

Chapter III

1. Meg. 12b; M. M. I:10; M. M. E. 60; P. R. E. 49; E. R. 13a; Y. 1049.
2. E. R. 17b; P. A. II 41b.
3. P. A. II 32a; Y. 1053.
4. P. A. I 23a; M. M. E. 56; Meg. 11a. Cf. with P. A. II 28b and Y. 1045.
5. E. R. 17b; A. G. 9b; L. T. 47b.
6. Meg. 12b; M. M. E. 62; E. R. 14b; Y. 1051; L. T. 47a. See Esther I:14ff.
7. E. R. 23b.
8. Meg. 13a; M. M. II:7; M. M. E. 63; Y. 1053.
9. Y. 1057; E. R. 21b, 25a.
10. E. R. 20a.
11. E. R. 21b; Y. 1057.
12. Ibid.
13. P. A. I 23b; E. R. 21b.
14. E. R. 3b.
15. E. R. 19b; A. G. 11b; L. T. 49a; Y. 1054.
16. P. A. II 28a; Y. 1045.
17. E. R. 20a; A. G. 12a; L. T. 49b; Y. 1054.
18. P. A. II 39a.
19. E. R. 20a; A. G. 12a; P. A. I 23b; L. T. 49b; Y. 1054.
20. P. A. II 41a.
21. Y. 1057.

22. P. A. II 40a.
23. E. R. 23a; A. G. 16b; L. T. 51a. See also the
Prayers of Esther and Mordecai in E. R. 25a - 25b.
Refer to note//7 in Chapter II.
24. E. R. 26a - 26b; A. G. 19a; Y. 1057; L. T. 53a;
M. M. E. 73.
25. P. A. II 37a.
26. A. G. 1a; E. R. 3a.
27. Meg. 16a; Y. 1058; L. T. 54a.
28. P. A. II 33b.
29. Meg. 15a; P. R. E. 50; M. M. E. 64.
30. M. M. E. 63; L. T. 47b; L. T. 56a.
31. Meg. 12b; M. M. E. 62; E. R. 14b; Y. 1051; L. T.
47a. The literal translation is: The common man
jumps ahead.
32. M. M. E. 74; Y. 1059. According to P. A. II 39a,
the statement reads: When the ox has fallen, the
slaughterers are many.
33. Y. 1049. Literally the proverb reads: One grain of
sharp pepper is better than a basket-full of pumpkins.
34. E. R. 18a.
35. E. R. 20a - 20b; A. G. 12b; P. R. E. 50; M. M. E.
65 ff; Y. 1054; P. A. I 23b; P. A. II 34a - 34b,
L. T. 49b - 50a. See pages 146 and notes of chapter II.
36. See J. E., vol. III, pp 202 ff., article on Biblio-
mancy by M. Grunwald and Kaufman Kohler.
37. E. R. 22b; A. G. 16b. ~~M. M. E. 67~~ ^{Y. 1057; L. T. 51a; M. M. E. 69.} See Chapter II, p.
and note.

38. E. R. 24b; Y. 1056; M. M. E. 67. See Chapter II, page 35 and note.
39. E. R. 26b; P. R. E. 50; Y. 1057. See Chapter II page 43 and note.
40. E. R. 26b.
41. P. A. ~~II~~ 40b.
42. E. R. 23b - 24a; P. A. I 25b; M. M. E. 64; Y. 1054.
43. E. R. 19b - 20a; A. G. 12a; P. A. I 25a; L. T. 49b.
44. E. R. 13b; A. G. 8a.
45. L. T. 51b.
46. E. R. 9a.
47. Y. 1059.
48. E. R. 8b.
49. E. R. 9a.
50. E. R. 17a.
51. Meg. 12b; E. R. 13a; A. G. 7a; L. T. 46. Cf. with P. A. II 30b and Y. 1049, which state that Israel engages in discussions of halacha, Bible, Mishna, and haggadah during their festivities.
52. E. R. 1b.
53. E. R. 7b.
54. See E. R. 21a; A. G. 12b; P. R. E. 50; M. M. E. 65, 66; P. A. I 23b; P. A. ~~II~~ 34a - 34b; Y. 1054.
55. E. R. 24b.
56. E. R. 15a - 15b.
57. E. R. 15b.

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