

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Overview of the Literature.**

The various solutions offered to the problem of the narrative integrity of Esther can be grouped into two broad categories: *those which affirm its unity* and *those which deny its unity*. These will now be discussed below.

#### Those which deny unity

Historical-critical approaches which start with the general premise that the book is based on various sources have generally concluded that Esther is not a unity (Loader 1988:114-115). Among those scholars who support this conclusion are:

**Torrey (1944:1-40)**, who maintains that the book is an abridged version of an original Aramaic manuscript. But the story does not read like a translation from Aramaic; moreover, the units of the narrative are so well balanced and integrated that it is very difficult to identify the original version in the existing story.

**Clines (1984:26-60)** maintains that 8:1-17 is the original story. Later chapter 9:1-32 and chapter 10:1-3 were added by a different hand. But if this is the case, then the tension of the plot is not

relieved, making the story actually end in an anti-climax. Further, the additions 9:1-19 and 10:-1-3 are found in the A-text of the story as well suggesting 9:1-19 and 10:1-3 were part of the original story (cf. the critique of Lacocque 1999:308-322).

**Bardtke (1963:248-252)** maintains that there are three different sources for the book, namely, a Vashti, Mordecai, and Esther source.

**Labram (1972:208-222)** maintains that underlying the narrative are two different and separate traditions: an Esther story, which was later expanded by the addition of a Palestinian Mordecai tradition in order to explain the Purim feast. The narrator tries unsuccessfully to combine these two traditions resulting in 'contrived and secondary' references to Esther and Mordecai in the book.

In addition, references to Esther and Mordecai are 'awkward and loose, especially in 9:20-28' (cf. also Moore 1983:180).

**Pfeiffer (1953:737)**

The integrity of 9:20-10:3 and 9:1-19 is denied because:

1. The language and some of the details in the appendix differ from that in the rest of the book;
2. The decree about fasting and lamentation (9:31) is

contrary to the spirit of celebration characteristic of the earlier part of the book (9:17, 19);

3. The difference in the date of the festival in the city and the villages is disregarded in 9:20-22, 27f; and

4. The role Esther plays in the saving of the Jews is ignored by 9:24f; it also assumes that Haman and his sons were killed on the same day, against 7:9f, 9:13f.

**Eissfeldt (1974:510-511)**

The unity of the Esther narrative is disputed on the grounds that the *language* of the appendix 9:20-32 is different to that of the rest of the book. In addition, in 9:20-32 no distinction is made between the Jews in the town and the Jews in the city, therefore *content* argues against the unity of the book. Moreover, 10:1-3 is written in 'chronicle' style whereas the rest of the book is in 'fictional' style, a further reason for the belief that the narrative is not a unity.

**Paton (1964:57-59)**

The point Paton makes is that 9:20-10:3 is not part of the original narrative but was added by a different editor. The reasons for this view are:

1. Mention is made of 'the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia', which means 9:20-

10:3 is derived from this source. The latter is probably a traditional Jewish history of the Medo-Persian kings;

2. 9:24-26 duplicates chapters 3-7. If this is true it suggests a link between 9:24-26 and chapters 3-7, on the one hand, and these two sections of the story and the role of the king in particular. For 9:24-26 portrays him as pivotal to the reversal in the fortunes of the Jews, and depicts him as acting in a cool, rational and controlled manner. The picture we have of the king in 9:24-26 is mirrored also in many instances in chapters 3-8; this in fact contributes to the integrity of the story and does not count against it;

3. 9:19 and 9:21-23 indicate the existence of two different practices in two different areas; the author of 9:20-10:3 tries to smooth out these differences by presenting 9:21-23 as a modification of 9:19, which is a clear command by Mordecai;

4. 9:24 says the king was not aware of Haman's plan, but 3:8-11 shows that he knew about the plan, so 9:24 contradicts 3:8-11, and thus 9:24 cannot be part of the original text;

5. The 3 personal singular pronominal suffix ך in 9:25 can only be translated as *it* and not as *she*; the phrase thus reads 'when it came before the king' and not 'when she came before the king', the latter being a reference probably to chapter 7;

6. 9:25 contradicts the details recorded in 7:8f;
7. The exchanging of gifts and crying and fasting are part of the feast days in 9:22,31 but not in 9:17-19; and
8. phrases common to the body of the text are absent from 9:20-10:3.

These facts mean the author of 9:20-10:3 made use of the 'book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia' and adapted its contents to provide a heading for the story as well as an account of the origin of the Purim feast.

**Fohrer (1976:253:255)**

He maintains that the book is not a unity because:

1. 10:1-3 'is an imitation of the source references in the Deuteronomistic books, and probably represents a later addition';
2. The narrator combines three separate traditions, namely, 'the story of Vashti....the story of Mordecai....and the story of Esther'.

**Humphreys (1973:214, 223)** says 'that there was once an independent Jewish tale of the adventures of Esther and Mordecai, which was not yet linked to Purim, and which had the form of a court tale. This court tale may itself be the product of the re-working and interweaving of several source tales of

both Jewish and Persian origin;' and that 9:20-32 'constitutes a supplement, distinguished from the rest of the book by its ponderous style and by its content, since it prescribes that all Jews are to celebrate the feast of Purim on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar, making no distinction between city and countryside.

Then there are those theories which look to the surrounding religious and cultic practices and traditions for an explanation of the origin and composition of Esther. For example:

**Otto Kaiser (1984:198-205)** maintains that the author skilfully weaved together three separate stories, namely, Vashti, Mordecai-Haman and Esther, into one. He also refers to the supposed mythical origins of the Esther story, as suggested by several scholars;

**Lacocque (1990:301-322)** maintains that Esther is a historisation, based on I Samuel 15, of the Persian New Year mythical festival of the combat between good and evil, and modelled after the Babylonian 'Akitu'.

From this brief overview a lack of consensus regarding the composition of Esther is evident. It is this very lack within the source approaches which calls for a re-examination of the question of the

integrity of the Esther narrative, as is implied by Gordis (1976:43,44) who says, regarding the source theory, that '[s]triking as this theory is, the many assumptions that it require are unnecessary or unconvincing....'

Those which affirm unity

Among those who affirm the unity of Esther are:

**Lowenstamm (1971)**

He has argued that Esther is a textual unity. This unity is described as an 'essential' unity as there is doubt about the authenticity of 9:29-32.

**Jones (1978:36-43)**

According to Jones, there are four basic reasons for regarding 9:20-10:3 as an original part of the Esther text:

1. The extensive inclusion in the narrative;
2. The linear progression of the narrative, culminating in 9:20-10:3. What is said by Loader (1977:96-97), namely, that on the surface level a chain-like arrangement knits the narrative into a unity, can be added here;
3. The synthesising and bringing together of a number of key words which appear throughout the text in 9:20-10:3; and
4. The relation between the so-called appendix of Esther and the rest of the book is described by Jones

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as a 'coda' or 'a funnel' leading Moore to comment that Jones's argument 'proves to me, decisively, that the so-called appendix was actually an original part of the book....' (1983:176-179).

**Berg (1979:31-39, 95-106)**

The arguments presented by Berg in favour of the unity of the Esther text are twofold. First, there is the motif of feasting, which Berg believes is the primary motif in the book. The motif is found throughout the book and strengthens its unity (cf. 1:5,9; 5:5; 7:1; 9:17-18,20-22).

Secondly, Berg identifies a) Power, b) Loyalty to God and Israel, c) Inviolability of the Jews, and d) Reversal, as the themes of the book. These themes demand the presence of the appendix, and 'makes Berg's arguments for the unity of the book rather persuasive' (Moore 1983:179-180).

**Rendtorff (1983:270-272)**

He supports the unity of Esther. Indicative of his support is the comment that '....the name Purim appears only in the conclusion and is explicitly introduced and explained in 9:26. The word פּוּר from which it is derived (9:24,26), already appears in the narrative (3:7) and is explained by the Hebrew word גּוּרל, lot. Moreover, the festival element is anchored in the narrative (9:17,19). So the regular



narrative could have developed from the narrative about a single occasion. It appears that the primary argument here is a linguistic one (cf. also Moore 1983:271).

Moreover, the literary studies which focus on style (Bensusan 1989), intertextuality (Schutte 1989), rhetoric (Berg 1979), whilst making useful contributions, have not fully explored the relevance and importance of characterisation for the composition of the book.

The state of affairs described above calls for a fresh look at the question of the integrity of the Esther narrative. We will address the issue using a narratological-synchronic approach. Such an approach involves a synchronic reading of Esther in which the idea of chiastic-reversal plays an important part; it also calls for a consideration of characterisation and its link to narrative integrity. We begin this fresh look with a discussion of models used in the analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative in Chapter Three. Our own analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative continues in Chapter Four. The basic issue in both chapters is demonstrating the presence of chiastic-reversal in the narrative in its entirety.