

# **THE ROLE AND PORTRAYAL OF THE KING IN THE ESTHER NARRATIVE:**

**A Narratological-Synchronic reading of the Masoretic text of  
the Esther Narrative**

by

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE AND PORTRAYAL OF THE KING IN THE ESTHER NARRATIVE:

*A Narratological-Synchronic reading of the Masoretic text  
of the Esther Narrative*

The question of the composition and unity of Esther continue to be a matter of debate as Esther studies of the last two decades show. This debate has, however, been conducted primarily from a historical and critical perspective.

The latter half of this century, and the last three decades in particular, has seen the emergence of newer approaches to the text of Scripture. These approaches, influenced by the developments in literary theory, have resulted in an emphasis on the text as a literary unity and have encouraged a synchronic reading of biblical texts. I believe the question of the composition and unity of Esther can be fruitfully approached using these newer literary approaches.

A literary reading of Esther, which demonstrates that it is a narrative unity, is done. The literary reading is

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synchronic in nature, and demonstrates that chiastic-reversal underlies the whole of the Esther narrative. Moreover, careful attention is given to the literary devices of chiasmus and characterisation, which make a significant contribution to the narrative unity of Esther because of the inseparable link, which exists, between these literary elements. This inseparable link derives from the fact that the chiasmus found in Esther is characterised by the reversal of the positions, fortunes, and destinies of the main characters. Furthermore, the role and portrayal of the king is germane to the narrative unity of Esther because intrinsic to the chiastic-reversal pattern in Esther is the role of the king in reversing the positions, fortunes and destinies of the main characters. Consequently his role will receive special attention. In addition, as a character, he can be seen as the glue of the narrative unity of Esther because of the pivotal role he plays in the story's chiastic-reversal pattern. It therefore follows that the way the narrative characterises him must receive attention. In this regard 'traditional' stereotypical descriptions of the king are discussed critically and a fresh perspective of his character is offered.

SAMEVATTING

DIE ROL EN BESKRYWING VAN DIE KONING IN DIE

ESTERVERHAAL:

*'n Narratologies-sinchroniese lesing van die  
Masoretiese teks van die Esterverhaal.*

Die vraag na die samestelling en eenheid van die Esterverhaal bly 'n besprekingspunt, soos blyk uit die navorsing oor die boek Esther gedurende die laaste twee dekades. Hierdie debat word egter gevoer vanuit 'n historiese en kritiese oogpunt, soos aangedui deur die bestaande navorsing wat die teologie van die verhaal, die godsdienstige agtergrond van die verhaal, die argeologiese vrae, inter-tekstuele verbande tussen Ester en ander tekste, en die herkoms en betekenis van die name van die hoofkarakters bespreek.

Die laaste drie dekades van hierdie eeu in besonder is gekenmerk deur nuwe benaderings tot die Skrif. Hierdie benaderings, onder die invloed van navorsing op die gebied van literêre teorie, het tot gevolg dat die teks as 'n eenheid beklemtoon is, en het ook die sinchroniese lesing van Bybeltekste bevorder. Ek glo dat die vraag na die

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samestelling en eenheid van die Esterverhaal vrugbaar ondersoek kan word deur gebruik te maak van die nuwe literêre benaderings .

Gevolgtik word 'n literêre lesing van die Esterverhaal gedoen. Dié lesing dui aan dat dit 'n narratiewe eenheid vorm. Die lesing van die teks is sinchronies van aard en demonstreer dat 'chiastiese-omkering' ten grondslag lê van die hele verhaal. Verder word noukeurige aandag gegee aan chiasmes en karakterisering. Dié elemente maak 'n baie belangrike bydrae tot die narratiewe eenheid van Ester vanweë die onskeidbare verband wat daar is tussen chiasmes en karakterisering. Hiedie verband vloei voort uit die feit dat die tipe chiasmes wat in Ester gevind word, gekenmerk word deur die ommekering van die status (posisie), voorspoed en noodlot van die hoofkarakters.

Ook van belang vir die narratiewe eenheid van die verhaal is die rol en beskrywing van die koning aangesien hy verantwoordelik is vir die ommekering in die status (posisie), voorspoed en noodlot van die hoofkarakters. Gevolgtik sal sy rol spesiale aandag geniet.

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As 'n karakter kan die koning ook beskou word as dié faktor wat die verhaal sy narratiewe eenheid verskaf vanweë sy sentrale rol in die chiasiese omkeringspatroon in Ester. Daarom word die beskrywing van die koning soos dit in die verhaal voorkom, bespreek. In dié verband word 'n kritiese gesprek gevoer met 'tradisionele' en stereotipe beskrywings wat in die Esternavorsing voorkom. 'n Alternatiewe perspektief op die karakter van die koning word in die ondersoek gegee.