

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Analysis of the Esther Narrative: The Cyclical Model

#### **Introduction**

The models discussed in the previous chapter recognise that chiastic-reversal underlies the structural composition of the narrative of Esther. Nevertheless, the actual acknowledgement this structural principle receives is limited indeed (see also Fuerst 1975:72). In addition, the models do not take into account the important aspect of the link of character to chiastic-reversal.

Before we proceed with the analysis of the structure of the narrative we will define our understanding of the terms *chiasm*, *structure* and *chiastic-reversal* because these are key to a proper analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative.

#### **Definition and Terms**

Murphy's comment (1981:155) that '[a]nother feature is the *antithesis* (my emphasis) which extend throughout the work', points to the fact that chiasms in Esther can also be described as antitheses, and that the latter can be characteristic of a whole book.

Welch (Greinadus 1988:209) agrees, remarking that

chiasm is 'a significant ordering principle within, not only verses and sentences, but also within and throughout whole books.' Loader (1977:95) defines structure as 'the way in which the various pericopes within themselves are built up as well as the arrangements of these larger units in the composition of the book as a whole.'

Radday (1973:7) in discussing the structure of the Jonah narrative remarks: 'It must be admitted that the symmetry of the two parts is parallel and not in reverse, i.e. not chiasmic.' From this comment it can be inferred that important to the concept of chiasm is the element of *reversal*. According to Fox (1991:158) '[t]he most important structural theme in Esther, the one that organises much of the presentation and wording of events ....is peripety: the result of an action is actually the reverse of what was expected' (see also Goldman 1990:21). Hence our somewhat tautological term 'chiasmic-reversal' as the principle governing the structure of the Esther narrative. Earlier Radday remarks (1973:6) 'that the Biblical authors placed, according to the chiasmic structure in vogue at the time, the main idea of each work, its thesis or turning point at the centre of the work....'

With reference to the idea of chiasmic-**reversal**, in which the characters of a narrative are an important factor, Bensusan (1988:71) says it is: 'a stylistic

device expressing a contrast or reversal of a role or situation.' He continues to say that chiasmus is 'usually associated with individuals and groups of people. Whilst events can be contrasted or run parallel and can be concealed, *it is only people's roles which can be reversed* (emphasis mine). The Book of Esther includes many instances of chiasmus or contrast associated with individuals....' In discussing the structure of Ruth, Radday (1973:8) says that: '[t]he dramatis personae themselves are chiastically distributed.' This is especially true of Esther.

Berg (1979:119 n42) also confirms the critical importance of characters in the chiastic-reversal pattern when she remarks that '[Harbona] plays his small role in reversing the fortunes of the main characters' (cf. 1:10, 7:7).

A careful reading of the narrative, bearing in mind the definitions above, shows that the following characters are the subjects of the chiastic-reversal pattern:

Vashti	=====	Esther
Haman	=====	Mordecai
Enemies	=====	Jews

It will be noted, contrary to Schutte (1989:64-79, cf. also Bensusan 1988:72, Moore 1979:14) that the Jews and their enemies are identified as characters,

as Loader rightly points out when he says, '.... the whole story is framed on what I call a chiastic thought pattern. First Haman-Mordecai, Mordecai-Haman, and then extended to enemies-Jews and Jews-enemies' (1977:101).

The narrative consists of Three Cycles. Cycle One includes the introduction to the story as a whole and Cycle Three includes the conclusion to the story. These elements are incorporated in the aforementioned cycles because of the inseparable link between them. The division into cycles is based on the inter-relationship between the pattern of chiastic-reversal and the fortunes of the main characters in the story, namely, Esther, Mordecai, Haman, Jews and enemies. The resultant cycles are:

1. Vashti-Esther      1:1-2:20
2. Mordecai-Haman    2:21-8:17
3. Jews-Enemies      9:1-10:3

#### **1. Structural analysis:the Vashti-Esther Cycle**

**(1:1-2:20).**

The section 1:1-2:20 is usually treated as the introduction to the story. For example, in Loader's structure (1977:96), 1:1-2:20 serves as the introduction to the main action of the narrative which encompasses 2:21-9:19. In terms of this

arrangement chiastic-reversal is not present in 1:1-2:20. The reason for this, says Loader (1980:15), is the fact that this section of the story consists of two independent and complete wholes. Yet he gives 1:1-22 the title 'Vacancy in a key position' and 2:1-20 'Vacancy filled by Esther' (1977:96). A careful consideration of these titles suggests that they are mirror images of each other, that they counterbalance each other and are thus clues to the presence of chiasmus and reversal. This will become evident once the introductory formula of 2:1 is discussed in detail. We will do so below.

Here 1:1-2:20 is treated as the first main cycle of the narrative, and is called the Vashti-Esther Cycle, because it is organised on the basis of the twin ideas of a) the chiastic-reversal principle, and b) the reversal of the fortunes and destiny of two of the main characters. In addition, there are syntactic considerations which lead to the conclusion that 1:1-1:20 is a closely knit unit. We proceed now to discuss how the Vashti-Esther Cycle is built up.

### 1.1 1:1-9

1:2a is introduced by a temporal phrase **בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם**, and verse 10a begins with a temporal phrase **הַשְּׁבִיעִי בַּיּוֹם**, which means one scene ends at verse 9. Concurring Bush (1996:342) says '[t]he ending of the episode is signalled by the shifts....in v9 to the



sentence order of subject plus verb.' Thus we have another scene starting at 1:10a. In addition, **משתה** v3, is repeated in v9 (**משתה**), binding the unit together. The unit 1:1-9 is, moreover, constructed as a inclusion (Davis 1995:106) giving the result below:

המלך	אחשורוש	v1
אחשורוש	למלך	v9

Two feasts are mentioned within this chiasm; the first in vv1-4 and the second in vv5-9. The first (vv1-4) is introductory and sets the scene for the narrative as a whole. The second (vv5-9) provides the setting for the start of the plot of the story (Fox 1991:16), for it is here that the first leg of the reversal takes place, in that Vashti is ordered to come before the king at the second banquet. The first main reversal of fortunes in the story begins at 1:5. Fox (1991:16) comments that 'the garden surrounding or before the royal pavilion [is] also the locale for the climax of Chapter 7.' The garden then becomes the site for reversals (cf. also Bush 1996:347).

The king is dominant in vv1-9. The focus is his power and greatness. This is clear from the descriptive details of the unit: a) the extent of his kingdom (v2); b) the officials in attendance at the feast (v3); c) the display of his wealth and glory for 180 days (v4); d) the making of a second feast (v5); e)

the splendour of the second feast (v5-7a); f) the royal generosity (v7a-8); g) the contrasting feast hosted by Vashti the queen (v9a); h) the identification of the locality of the queen's feast as **בית המלכות אשר למלך אחורוש** (v9b).

This unit serves to introduce two of the main characters, Ahasuerus and Vashti, who will be involved in the first main reversal of the story. It also introduces the readers to the site where the first main reversal will take place.

#### 1:2 1:10-12

The next unit which starts at v10a is introduced by a temporal reference **ביום השביעי**, and describes the king as **כטוב לב-המלך**. In v12b, on the other hand, the king is described as **המלך מאד וחמתו בערה בו** **ויקצף**. Here it is the contrast of the moods of the king which binds the unit. In 10a he is merry (**כטוב**) but in 12b he burns with anger (**ויקצף**). The verses in between give the reason for this change in the mood of the king. The verses 1:10-12 are also the turning point of the section 1:1-22. The king sends his court officials to tell Vashti to appear before him and his guests with her royal regalia as a display of the splendour of his greatness. The exhibition of his greatness and splendour of 1:10-12 is a continuation of that depicted in 1:1-9. She refuses. The king gets very angry at her refusal.

The unit 1:10-12 keeps the focus on the two characters Ahasuerus and Vashti, introduced in 1:1-9, with this difference, they are depicted as involved in a power struggle. This unit also provides the reason for the first main reversal of the story, namely, Vashti's refusal to obey the command of the king.

### 1.3 1:13-22

The next unit begins at v13. וַיֹּאמֶר signals the start of the unit. It consists mainly of two direct speeches. The first is the quoted speech of the king. It begins in v13 and ends in v15. Here we have a report of the discussion between the king and his advisors concerning the appropriate action to be taken against Vashti.

The second speech, which is a reply to the king, begins in v16 and ends at v20. This speech by Memuchan starts with וַיֹּאמֶר.

Since v21 begins with waw-consecutive and v20 with a waw-conjunction, it points to the discontinuity between v20 and v21. Verses 21-22 are therefore the epilogue of the section 1:13-22. It is narrative discourse which reports that the king agreed with the decision of the royal court to depose Vashti. These factors show that 1:13-22 is a self-contained unit.



We have, then, a very long section of direct discourse, v13-v20. It deals with the outcome of the struggle between two of the main characters of the first main reversal, i.e. Ahasuerus and Vashti. The outcome is the dethronement of Vashti.

It will be noted that no specific mention is made of Vashti's dethronement. In fact, she is not mentioned again until 2:1. But implicit in the king's command and the execution of that command is her dethronement. The whole of this section 1:1-22 is directed at the dethronement of Vashti.

The king's dethronement of Vashti creates a vacancy in the royal palace which sets the scene for the second leg of the first main reversal of the story.

#### 1.4 2:1-4

It is generally agreed that 2:1 begins a new section. The expression **אחר הדברים האלה** marks the start of this new section. In addition, v2 introduces the direct discourse of the **נערי־המלך**, which ends at v4a. Furthermore, in a study on the word order of clauses in Hebrew and its relationship to emphasis, Bandstra (1992:116) points out that the phrase **אחר הדברים האלה** can also indicate continuity. Commenting on the phrase **ויהי אחר הדברים האלה** in Genesis 22:1, he says: 'While this is a verb-first pattern, it is not

typical of V-S-O or V-O functions. The WP of *hyh* is a special case. While it does not narrate action, *it still functions to maintain continuity with the preceding textual unit* (emphasis mine). This is further indicated by *hdbrym h'lh* "these things", vaguely referring to the preceding events' (Bandstra 1992:116). If *hyh* 'does not narrate action', even though it is a verb, it follows that Genesis 22:1 and Esther 2:1 can both be regarded as verbless clauses. Consequently, the introductory formula in 2:1, as is the case in Genesis 22:1, has a twofold function. It indicates the beginning of a new section, and maintains continuity with the previous section of the narrative. Murphy (1981:160) comments that '[t]he triple use of the particle "et" (the grammatical object marker) in 2:1 is quite effective in making the connection with the events in ch. 1.'

Verse 1b, starting with **וְכִי**, also links to 2a. Since verse 5 introduces a new character, Mordecai, it begins a new section; v4b links back to v2 because both are narrative discourse. In addition, v2a mentions Vashti being remembered and v4a mentions Vashti being replaced; the repeated reference to Vashti binds 1:2-4.

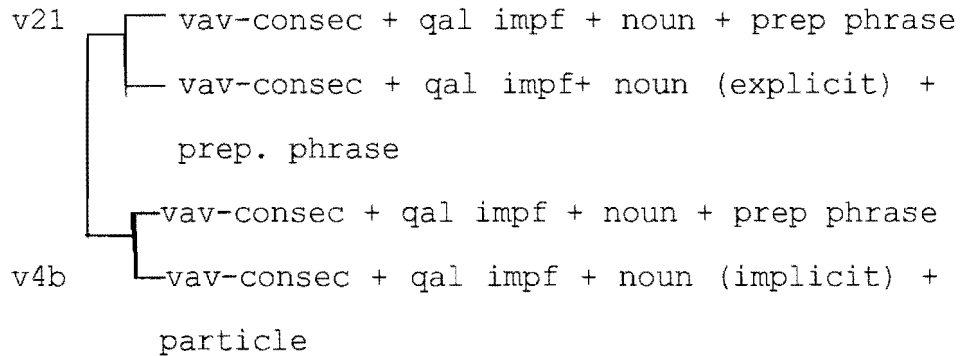
We also have chiasm in 2:1-4 around literary elements:

A. Narrative discourse 2:1

B. Direct discourse 2:2-4a

A. Narrative discourse 2:4b

It should be noted too that there is a syntactical similarity between 1:21 and 2:4b, so that although 2:1-4 is a closely knit unit, there is still a link between 1:1-22 and 2:1-4 as shown below:



On the basis of the indicators discussed above we conclude that 2:1-4 is a unit with a twofold function: a) it serves as the hinge between 1:1-22 and 2:5-20; and b) it keeps the focus on one of the main characters of the first main reversals, namely, Ahasuerus. A detailed discussion of the next leg of the first main reversal follows.

### 1.5 2:5-20

As mentioned above, v5 begins a new section in the story because it introduces a new character, Mordecai. It will be noted that vv5-20 is written as

narrative discourse. The focus of this narrative discourse is Esther. Throughout vv5-20 she is portrayed as passive, and is described through her interaction with other characters. In each phase of the description the narrator turns the spotlight on Esther. The section divides into three parts:

a)v5-8a;                    b)v8b-15; and                    c)v16-20.

The basis for the division is the syntactic parallelism:

וּחִלְקָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶל-בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ	v8b
וּחִלְקָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשׁוּרוֹשׁ	v16a,

but Bush (1996:359-360) has an opposing point of view. Each part will now be commented on.

#### 1.5.1 2:5-8a

Mordecai is introduced in vv5-6, but this is done in such a way that we in fact meet Esther. Following the introduction of Mordecai, the focus shifts, specifically, to Esther until v11, when he re-appears. But his re-appearance merely focuses the attention on Esther again, in that his parading in front of the house of the women is to find out what had happened to Esther. Sure, it shows Mordecai's care and concern for Esther, but it is Esther all the same who remains in focus. The reference to the

social (personal) circumstances and appearance of Esther underscore this fact (v7b).

#### 1.5.2 2:8b- 15

Esther's physical appearance obtains for her preferential treatment from Hegai (v8b-9). Mordecai struts impatiently in front of the house of the women to see if she has obeyed him and kept her identity a secret (v10-11). Both these happenings help to keep the focus on Esther.

The detailed description of the process of preparation is aimed at Esther. Her situation is in sharp contrast to that of the other women for:

1.5.2.1 She requires a shorter period of treatment because of her natural intrinsic beauty. This is clear from the repeated reference by the narrator to Esther's physical appearance; the fact that Hegai could speed up her preparation and treatment (v9), and the admiration of all who saw her (v15b); and

1.5.2.2 She does not take with her all the things the women normally took when they went to the king, (v15a). Why? Because of her physical beauty.

Moreover, the detail description of the preparation process and the entry of the women to the king, as well as the contrast drawn by the narrator between Esther and the other women, slows the narrative down (Thiselton 1992:480; Gräbe 1986:270) so that the attention of the reader is focused on Esther. Herein

lies the function of the otherwise out of place detailed description of the preparation process. Esther is thus the focus of 2:8b-15.

In addition, the slowing down of the narrative prepares the reader for the transition in Esther's role from one of obscurity to prominence; from this point on she is one of the dominant characters. Further, it prepares the reader for the transition in the relationship between Esther and Mordecai, namely, she becomes queen and he remains a subject.

### 1.5.3 2:6-20

The narrator continues to keep the focus on Esther by his description of the king's actions toward her:

- a) He loves Esther more than the other women v17a;
- b) He enthrones Esther in place of Vashti v17b; and
- c) He makes a feast for Esther v18.

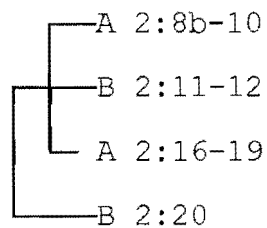
Moreover, whereas Esther remains in the palace the other women are returned to the harem. Here **שנית**, a second time, has the meaning of 'again'. It is used to contrast Esther with the other women, cf. v17a, **מכל-הנשים**, and **מכל-הבתולה**. Verses 17-19a form an inclusion:

a) **מכל-הבתולה**

b) **ובקבץ בתולה שנית**. The point of this inclusion is to contrast what happened to Esther with what happened to the other contenders. This redundancy also keeps the focus on Esther. In

addition, the section ends with Mordecai at the gate, concerned for Esther's welfare. Although it is Mordecai whom the narrator describes in these verses, the purpose is to focus attention on Esther.

It is interesting to note that 2:8b-10 parallels 2:16-19 and that 2:11-12 parallels 2:20. Both units end with a description of Mordecai's concern for Esther, giving the following structure:



The ABAB pattern means that 2:8b-20 is a closely bound passage. Furthermore, 2:5-8a is linked to 2:8a-20 via a common subject, namely, Esther. In addition, Moore (1972:22) points out that the phrase **ואחד-עמה מולדתה** (2:20) is reversed in 2:10, suggesting inclusion and so makes 2:10-20 one unit. For this reason 2:19-20 are included here rather than linked to 2:21-23. It brings the passage to a close by focusing the attention on Esther in a twofold way:

a) The gathering of the virgins for a second time (see Gordis 1973:47) functions as a contrast to what happened to Esther, that is, she remained at the palace as queen. In this indirect way the narrator

keeps the focus on Esther's enthronement.

b) The attempt by Mordecai to obtain news about Esther keeps the focus on her.

Consequently the whole of 2:5-20 is held together by its focus on Esther, culminating in *her enthronement by the king* (2:17a-19).

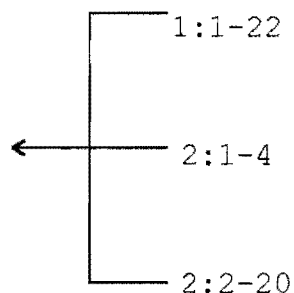
So, in the section 2:5-20 we are introduced to the third character involved in the first main reversal of the story, i.e., Esther. Throughout 2:5-20 the spotlight is on her.

I pointed out that 2:1-4 is a separate unit with its own chiastic structure, but that it also links with 1:1-22 via syntactical parallelism (see above). Similarly, although 2:5-20 is a separate unit, it also links to 2:1-4 via the repetition of the phrase:

v4a תמלך תחת ושהי

v17b וימליכה תחת ושהי, resulting in

the following overall structure:



Thus 1:1-22 and 2:1-20 are not two independent parts of the narrative but two parts linked by the introductory formula of 2:1. It also provides the



counterbalance between the vacancy in the position of the queen (1:1-22) with the filling of this vacancy (2:1-20). McBride (1991:219) says that Esther 'is crowned Xerxes' queen, completing the book's *first manifest crossing/reversal*' (my emphasis). Agreeing, McCarthy and Riley (1986:89) state "[Q]ueen Vashti's downfall is Esther's opportunity". Esther holds in reserve her identity and is rewarded with crowning; Vashti holds in reserve her beauty and is rewarded with de-crowning.

It is also clear from this diagram that the king plays a pivotal role in the first main reversal of the narrative. For he reverses the roles and fortunes of Vashti and Esther, dethroning the one and enthroning the other. It can be summarised as follows:

A The king dethrones Vashti: Vacancy results

1:1-22

B The king initiates the filling of the vacancy

2:1-4

A The king enthrones Esther: Vacancy filled

2:5-20

#### Summary

Our analysis and discussion shows that 1:1-2:20 is the first Cycle of the story and that it deals with

the first major reversal of the narrative. It involves the dethronement of Vashti and the enthronement of Esther by Ahasuerus the king and also constitutes the first example of the chiastic-reversal principle, which is evident throughout the entire narrative. This is unlike Loader (1977:96), among others, who treat 1:1-2:20 as the introduction to the main section of the narrative which encompasses 2:21-9:19. It is evident from his structural analysis and discussion that Chapter 1:1-2:20 does not share in the chiastic-reversal pattern because it is held that it consists of two independent and complete wholes (1980:15). Yet he gives 1:1-22 the title 'Vacancy in a key position' and 2:1-20 'Vacancy filled by Esther' (1977:96). These titles, however, are mirror-images of each other; they counterbalance each other and are clues to the presence of chiasmus and reversal.

Thus the vacancy occasioned by the dethronement of Vashti is reversed and filled by the enthronement of Esther. An unknown Jewish maiden occupies the second highest position in a foreign kingdom, while a well known and secure queen is banished into obscurity. The tables have been turned, the reversal of the fortunes and destinies of two of the main characters of the story has been completed.

The chiastic nature of 1:1-2:20 is also evident from the following:

In v10 the king is said to be **כטוב לב** and in v12 he is **ויקצי**, which demarcates vv10-12 as a second unit.

The reasons for this mood change are given in vv10b-12a. This unit also marks the turning point in this part of the story.

In vv13-22, the third unit, we have two passages of direct speech. The first is from vv13-15, which is the King's speech, and is introduced by **ויאמר**. In this unit is quoted the speech of the king regarding the action to be taken in response to Vashti's refusal. The second speech, vv16-20, is that of Memuchan, which constitutes a reply to the speech of the king. Since v21 begins with waw-consecutive plus a verb, indicating the start of a new unit, Memuchan's reply ends at v20. The result of Memuchan's speech is the demise of Vashti.

Thus we have two units of direct speech (vv13-20) followed by narrative discourse in v21-22, recording the implementation of the king's decision. These verses provide the epilogue to the unit v13-20.

Integral to and implicit in the king's decision and its implementation is the dethronement of Vashti as queen. It is clear then that the development of the plot in 1:2-22 is directed at the demise of Vashti.

Chapter 2:1 sees the start of a new part of the narrative as is indicated by the formula **הדברים האלה אחר**. But according to Bandstra (1992:116) this formula can also indicate **continuity**. Commenting on the phrase **ויהי אחר הדברים האלה** in Genesis 22:1, he says: 'While this is a verb-first pattern, it is not typical of V-S-O or V-O functions. The WP of *hyh* is a special case. While it does not narrate action, it still functions to maintain **continuity with the preceding textual unit** (emphasis mine). This is further indicated by *hdbrym h'lh* "these things", vaguely referring to the preceding events.' If **היה** 'does not narrate action', even though it is a verb, it follows that Genesis 22:1 and Esther 2:1 can both be regarded as verbless clauses.

Consequently, the introductory formula in 2:1, as is the case in Genesis 22:1, has a twofold function. It indicates the *beginning* of a new section, and *maintains continuity* with the previous section of the narrative (cf. also Murphy 1981:160). Thus 1:1-22 and 2:1-20 are *not two independent parts* of the narrative but two contrasting parts of the narrative linked by the introductory formula of 2:1. It provides the

counterbalance between the vacancy in the position of the queen (1:1-22), with the filling of this vacancy (2:1-20).

Chapter 2:1 and the function it serves in linking chapter 1 and 2 also points to the presence of chiastic-reversal in the cycle 1:1-2:20.

The chiastic nature of 1:1-2:20 is evident from another perspective. Chapter 2:5 introduces a new character, Mordecai, indicating the beginning of a new section. It marks 2:1-4 off as a separate unit. This is further shown by the chiasm of 2:1-4:

2:1 discourse  
2:2-4a direct speech  
2:4b discourse.

The thought flow in v1-4 is as follows: the king remembers, this leads to the speech of the servants, which in turn results in the narrated action of the king. The focus and center of this unit therefore is the king. His action stated in 2:4b ultimately moves the plot from a situation of a vacancy in the palace to one of a vacancy filled in the palace reversing the previous situation.

Moreover, 2:5-20 is narrative discourse. It describes the beginning, mid-point and conclusion of the



process of filling the vacancy occasioned by Vashti's dethronement in 1:1-22. In 2:5-20 the spotlight falls on Esther, who is portrayed as passive and is characterised as reacting rather than responding, yet she is the focus of the passage as follows:

- a) 2:5-8a describes Mordecai who is the foil for the introduction of Esther.
  
- b) 2:8b-15 focus on the appearance of Esther and the action of Hegai, motivated by her appearance. Hegai's response to Esther's appearance, and Mordecai's anxious strutting in front of the palace-gate keeps the spotlight on Esther.
  
- c) 2:16-20 records the actions of the king in relation to Esther. The essence of this action is the enthronement of Esther as queen in the place of Vashti, thus filling a vacancy caused by the dethronement of Vashti. Using Loader's concept of vacancy (1977:96), the discussion above can be represented as follows:

A. Vashti dethroned: Vacancy results 1:1-22

B. King initiates Filling of the Vacancy  
2:1-4

A. Esther enthroned : Vacancy canceled 2:5-20

The preceding analysis and discussion show that 1:1-2:20 has a chiasmic structure. It is not merely a general introduction to the narrative, as Kaiser (1984:204-205) recognises when he remarks that '[t]he characters are strongly stylized. The rejected *Vashti* is contrasted with the wise and fortunate *Esther*, the overbearing, self-seeking and cruel *Haman* is contrasted with the faithful and successful *Mordecai*' (my emphasis).

We conclude, then, on the basis of the preceding discussion that the section 1:1-2:20 is structured and organised by the narrator in accordance with:

- a) The principle of **chiasmic-reversal**; and
- b) The idea of the reversal of the destiny and fortunes of **characters** in the story.

Chapter 1:1-2:20 constitutes the Vashti-Esther Cycle which is also the *first main reversal* of the narrative.

## **2. Structural analysis:the Haman-Mordecai Cycle (2:21-8:17).**

This cycle is the longest. It is also the main cycle since the main reversal of roles, fortunes and destinies, namely that of Haman and Mordecai, takes place in this cycle. It is made up of four sections: the Bigthan/Teresh Incident, 2:21-23; Haman's plot

7:10; and the Rise of Mordecai, 8:1-17.

### **2.1 The Bigthan/Teresh- Ahasuerus Scene (2:21-23)**

Opinions among scholars on the link of this unit to the rest of the narrative as well as its function in the story varies. Murphy (1981:160) sees it as an independent unit; Bensusan (1988:75-80) does not feature it in his analysis of the structure, and neither does Berg (1979:106-107). Radday (1973:9) and Fox (1991:157) see a very loose link between this pericope and chapters 8-9. Loader (1977:97) and Schutte (1989:27-32) see an indirect link between 2:21-23 and 3:1-9:19; it serves as an introduction to the main section 3:1-9:19. It is my view, however, that 2:21-23 is:

- a) A unity;
- b) That it is directly linked to 3:1-8:17 and only secondarily to 9:1-19; and
- c) That it is structured according to the chiasmic-reversal principle, as the following considerations will amply demonstrate.

**The unity of 2:21-23** is evident from: firstly, the temporal phrase **בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם** with which v21 opens. This phrase points to the beginning of a new unit. The placing of the grammatical subject, Mordecai, in a pre-verbal position further identifies it as a new

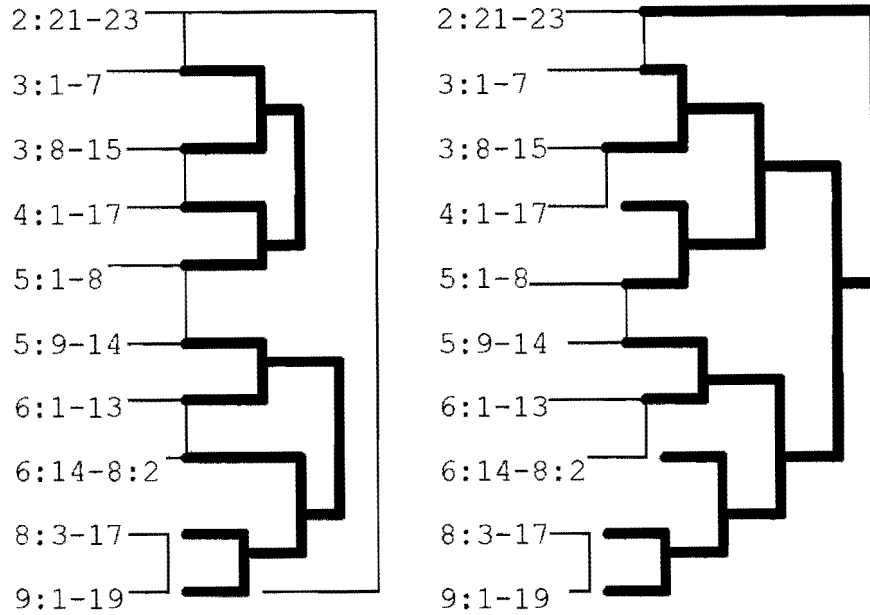


unit. In addition, we also have a shift in geography; from inside the palace to outside the palace, viz. the gate of the palace. Secondly, chapter 3 opens with **אחר הדברים האלה** indicating the start of a new section in the story. Thirdly, v21a is the introduction and situates the story. Verse 21b and c introduce the characters Bigthan and Teresh, their anger and the plot against the king. We are not given the reason for the anger. Fourthly, v22 is the turning point because Mordecai gets to know about the plot and reports it to Esther. We are not told how Mordecai came to know about it, nor how he communicated it to Esther. She in turn informed the king **בשם מרדכי**. The expression is significant in the light of the fact that the king did not honour Mordecai. It would appear that the king's failure to honour Mordecai is used to enhance the tension in the plot development, for in the next scene Haman is introduced as the one being honoured. In this way the plot action is introduced via a reversal. Fifthly, v23 brings the story to an end. The matter is investigated, it is found to be true and Bigthan and Teresh are found guilty and are executed (hanged) on orders from the king.

**That 2:21-23 is linked directly to 3:1-8:17 is evident from the following factors. Chapter 2:21-23**

appears to be a story within a story in which the author anticipates the outcome of the macro story. The audience is shown the final resolution of the crisis of the main plot before its narratological resolution, because the characters responsible for the resolution of the tension in the mini-drama (2:21-23), also play a major role in the resolution of the tension and crisis in the main story.

Loader (1977:97) identifies chapter 3:1-9:19 as the section in which the main action of the narrative happens, and 'in which pericope 3 [i.e. 2:21-23] is of course included.' He sees the relation of 2:21-23 to chapters 3:1-9:19 as indirect rather than direct; and describes the function of 2:21-23 as heightening the tension of the Haman-Mordecai conflict. But this is not all it does. Given the chiastic nature of the pericope it really functions as the introduction to the main section of the narrative, namely, 3:1-8:17. The narrator, by prefixing 2:21-23 to 3:1-8:17, gives the audience the outcome of the main drama through the mini-drama, and in this way maintains interest without giving away too much of the plot development. So, instead of just having a link to 9:1-19 at the level of the surface and deep structure, 2:21-23 is linked to 3:1-9:19 as a whole. Diagrammatically the differences can be represented as follows:



Moreover, the similarities between the mini-drama of 2:21-23 and the main drama indicate a direct link between the two, for:

- \* As in the main episode, we have a plot as well, ( i.e. by Haman);
- \* As in the main episode, the plot is reported to the king and by the same character, viz. Esther;
- \* As in the main episode, the antagonists Bigthan and Teresh are hanged;
- \* In addition, as in the main story, the death of those who threatened the life of the Jews ends that story, just like the

death of those who threatened the life of  
the king ends the story; and

\* As in the main story, the events take  
place in the palace and its environs.

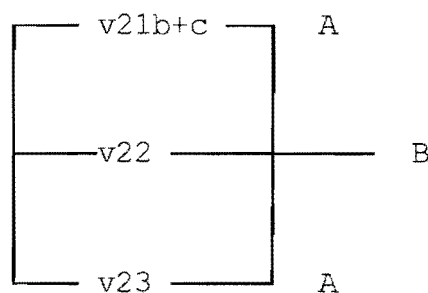
The main difference is while Esther and Mordecai are pivotally instrumental in the reversal of the king's situation, in the macro reversal, it is the king who is pivotally instrumental in the reversal of the situation of Esther and Mordecai and the Jewish nation. There are overwhelming similarities between the two stories such that one can be seen as a miniature mirror image of the other.

It is noteworthy that Bal (1989:89, 99n24) defines 2:21-23 as a *mise en abyme* (her emphasis) and then goes on to explain the latter phrase as follows: 'A sign that *represents the work as a whole* (my emphasis) in which it is incorporated....' I believe similarly that 2:21-23 is the micro-mirror image of the macro-plot and story and therefore it links directly to 3:1ff. This view finds resonance in the comment of Claassens (1996:70) who says '[d]ie verwysing na die oorwinning oor die Ammoniete is 'n *vooruitgryping* (my emphasis) na wat verder gaan gebeur in die storie. Dit is tipies van Hebreeuse verhaalkuns dat daar nie eintlik sprake is van 'n spanningslyn nie. Die aap word eers uit die mou gelaat en dan word die storie verder vertel' (see

also Witherington III 1998:290). What was said concerning the syntactic function of 2:1a holds true for the syntactic function of 3:1a, which shows that there is a direct link between 2:21-23 and 3:1. This is not only true syntagmatically, but also paradigmatically, for one can replace the role of Bigthan and Teresh with that of Haman and the enemies of the Jews; Esther and Mordecai with the king, and the king with that of Esther, Mordecai and the Jewish nation.

**The presence of chiastic-reversal in 2:21-23** cannot be disputed for according to Loader (1977:101) 'It is significant that we find a miniature of the chiastic thought pattern in a stylistic chiasmus when Mordecai confronts Esther with her responsibility to her people....', an idea he appears to overlook in 2:21-23. The representation which follows draws attention to the chiastic nature of 2:21--23:

- A. The king's life in danger    2:21b and c
- B. Mordecai and Esther reveal the plot    v22
- A. The king's enemies are executed    v23



We conclude that 2:21-23 is a unified pericope which:

- a) serves as the introduction to the main drama, 3:1-8:17
- b) is structured in terms of chiasmic-reversal
- c) is a closely knit unit
- d) is directly linked to 3:1-8:17.

## **2.2 Haman's plot against the Jews 3:1-4:17**

This sections divides into several sub units, as follows:

### **2.2.1 The clash between Haman and Mordecai 3:1-7**

Haman's promotion by the king sparked off a clash between him and Mordecai. The result of the clash was the plot by Haman to destroy Mordecai and the Jews. When we come to the end of the scene it would appear that Haman had succeeded.

Haman's promotion by the king is recorded in v1b.

There is parallelism between v1b, בן-המדהא האגגי, גדל המלך אחשורוש את-המן, and v2a, כן צוה-לו המלך, כי, that is, v2a ends in the same way v1b starts. Furthermore, the pronominal suffix לו in 2a points back to את-המן in v1b. We are not told why Haman got this promotion. Since 2:21-23 is so closely linked to 3:1ff, it would seem that the king made this appointment for reasons of security, given the fact that he had just survived an assassination plot (cf. Dan. 6:1-5). It was thus primarily a political

decision. In this regard Edwards (1989:35) says that the command of the king that officials were to bow to Haman 'was a political command to all the king's subjects....' In acknowledgement of his promotion, the officials of the king were to bow and prostrate themselves in the presence of Haman (v2a). Hyman's attempt (1989:153-158) to argue that the bowing had religious significance is not convincing. Why Haman and not another of the leaders got the promotion, we are not told either.

Verse 2b contrasts the behaviour of Mordecai to that of the king's officials, so the conjunction is adversative.

Verse 3-4 sees the behaviour of Mordecai first questioned and then challenged. So, vv1-4(a) set the scene for the clash between Mordecai and Haman which takes place in v4b-5.

Verse 5 suggests that Haman investigated and established for himself that what the officials reported, was indeed true. The narrator, however, sees the clash not only as something between two individuals. The clash is a national issue because 3:4a implies that Mordecai must have told the officials that the king's command did not apply to him since he was a Jew. They in turn wanted to test this claim (3:4b), so they informed Haman. The issue therefore is not about bowing or not bowing to Haman *but about the validity of the king's law forthe*

*Jews. Are the Jews subject to the law of the land and the king (3:22a, 3b)?* So, a personal clash is elevated to one of national proportions by the narrator (Humphreys 1973:215 concurring). It is in the light of this nationalisation of the personal that Memuchan's interpretation of Vashti's behaviour (1:16-22, and especially v16) should also be viewed.

Verse 6 shows the nationalisation (or the ethnisation) of the clash (cf. I Samuel 15, Deut. 25:17-19), and Haman's determination to destroy the Jewish nation. The clash ends with the intention of Haman to put an end to the Jews. The first step towards that goal was to determine (v7) the exact date for the destruction of the Jews (Mordecai).

Verse 7 is disjunctive in relation to v6 as the prepositional phrase with which the verse begins, indicates. Continuity with what precedes is maintained via content, as v7 signals the beginning of the **ויבקש** of v6b. The plot begins with the fixing of the time for implementing Haman's intention. This is done by the casting of the lot (**פור**). The narrator explains that **פור** is a synonym for **גורל**. The outcome of the lot is that the twelfth month, the month of Adar, was to be the time to implement the plot. This is 11 months into the future, quite a long delay in the implementation of the decree. The delay creates hope for there would still be time for the situation to change (cf. Fox 1989:185). On the other hand, the



casting of the lot means that the execution of the plan was determined by divine means. If the plan fails, it would be, in the view of the narrator, a victory for the God of the Jews over the god of their enemies. In the end Haman's promotion becomes a threat to the existence of the Jewish nation.

### **2.2.2 Haman persuades the king to issue a decree**

#### **3:8-15**

Destroying Mordecai was a straightforward matter, and Haman could have done that given his authority as vizier. He needed royal permission, however, to exterminate the whole Jewish nation. In this section he goes about obtaining that permission. Haman's strategy in obtaining the royal decree is recorded in 3:8-11. He needed to persuade the king to authorise his plot, which he does from vv8-11. We have, from v8-v9, a number of waw-conjunction clauses detailing what Haman did to persuade the king to give him the authority he needed to exterminate the Jews:

a) He depicts the Jews as comprising a great number of people(v8a). Even though the Jews are said to be עם-אחד, yet they are described as מלכותך מדינות מלכותך (v8a), they are מפרד בין העמים בכל (v8a). The impression created is of a people who pose a danger and threat to the stability of the kingdom. Note here too how supposed

national interests are used to persuade the king to act. Later, Esther will use the same strategy (cf. also Memunach 1:16);

b) In v8b he uses the laws and customs of the Jews (cf. Dn.6:1-6). These are said to be different, **שְׁנוּה**, from all the peoples in the kingdom. Note here how people and king are unified, i.e. what is a threat to the people is a threat to the king and vice versa ( **מלכותך** v8a and **מכל-עם** v8b);

c) Haman says (v8c) they refuse to obey the laws of the king. This is of course a reference to Mordecai's refusal to give obeisance to Haman, 3:2b. In this way the clash between two individuals is made a national issue and Mordecai becomes the symbol of the Jewish people. This nationalisation of a personal issue is carried out both by Haman and the narrator, each for his own end;

d) He appeals to 'self-interest' (v8d); but in the light of the unity between king and people it is really an appeal to national interest. They have become a threat to national stability and to leave them alone is not the appropriate thing to do for the king. Haman is suggesting to the king that he will be seen to act against national interests if he failed to act against the Jews;

e) He appeals next to the prerogative of royal power (v9a), for Haman may have overplayed his hand a little by suggesting it is not fitting for the king

to tolerate this situation; almost accusing the king of acting against national interest (v8d). So he requests (יִכְחֹב is a jussive) that the king exercise the royal prerogative and issue a written royal decree that the Jews be destroyed; and

f) Finally (v9b) the economic benefit of the destruction of the Jews for the kingdom is pointed out. Haman guarantees the king that he will ensure that ten thousand talents of silver is paid into the national treasury. The silver obviously will come from the looting of the property of the Jews who would be destroyed (cf. v11).

In this way, in the words of Humphreys (1973:215), 'he presents (with a certain skill) his plan for the destruction of Mordecai and all the Jews in terms of the king's own benefit and interest.'

These are the elements of Haman's strategy to obtain royal approval and legitimisation for his plot.

Verses 10-11 conclude this section. It shows that Haman's strategy was successful. He obtained the royal authority which enabled him to implement his plot to exterminate the Jewish people.

The next act was the publication and distribution of the decree, 3:12-15. A new section begins at v12, signified by the introduction of the scribes of the king. They are summoned and write down the decree authorising the extermination of the Jews. The

documents are sealed with the king's signet ring and despatched with the runners to the governors, satraps and leaders of the people of all the provinces of the kingdom in their own script and language. Thus, the decree to destroy the Jews is disseminated throughout the empire.

Three features mark the narrator's description of events in this pericope: firstly, the speed with which things happen. There is this rush to spread the news. The staccato-like manner of writing indicates this element of haste by means of the waw-conjunction and non-conjunction clauses we have from v12b-v14 as follows: in v12b a preposition begins the clause; v13a has a waw-conjunction; v13b a waw-conjunction; v14a a noun; and v14b an infinitive construct. The result is that the clauses of v15 are independent of each other, each one describing a new and separate happening which is loosely connected to the preceding one. The cola parallel each other syntactically since they have the same syntactic structure, that is, S-V-O/M (Bandstra 1992:109). This kind of structure according to Bandstra (1992:116-117) '....signals that new or unexpected information is being introduced.' Consequently, the narrative reads staccato-like and one event is made to follow swiftly upon another event.

Things happen with such speed that it would appear that the destruction of the Jews is inevitable and

irreversible; nothing can stop it; there is no time to stop the decree from being carried out. Haman has succeeded.

Secondly, contrasting the different attitudes displayed by role players. We are told that the runners went out in haste (רחופים); the law was promulgated (immediately) in Susa the capital. In contrast to this, the king and Haman sat down to drink, while the capital Susa was in consternation (the waw of וְהָעִיר is adversative).

How are we to understand the drinking of the king and Haman? The narrator draws attention to this by concluding with the contrasting description of the behaviour of the king and Haman over against that of the city. What are we to make of it? Is this feasting by the king and Haman? Is it a celebration of the eminent extermination of the Jews? Is it just a casual drink, or a combination of the aforesaid?

To answer these questions a number of factors need to be remembered. In 3:10 the king gives his signet ring to Haman to lend royal authority to and so legalise the decree he was about to send out. The scribes are called (3:12) and write down the decree which was sealed with the signet ring of the king (3:12b). After this the written decree was sent out to all the provinces of the kingdom. Next we are told that the king and Haman sat down to drink. Given this sequence

of events it follows that after the decree was sealed, Haman returned the king's signet ring (cf. 8:2). At this point he is invited by the king for a drink. The king is mentioned first in the clause since, even though Haman occupied this senior political position, he could not invite himself for a drink. Strict rank of order was to be maintained at all times. For the king this is a casual social drink; for Haman, however, it is the crowning of his plot; it is a celebration of the victory he has just obtained against Mordecai and the Jews (5:13).

The overall effect of the drinking event is to underline the inevitability and irreversibility of the destruction of the Jews.

Moreover, the mention of the drinking incident creates a sense of crisis and urgency, as well as a sense of uncertainty in the audience (and the reader). What is going to be the outcome? Does the drinking by Haman and the king mean he has won? Was there no way to stop the destruction of the Jews?

So then, the function of the depiction of the role players in v15 is to intensify the existing situation of crisis.

Thirdly, the narrator creates hope against the background of crisis and urgency. A comparison of v12a and v13b is very revealing. According to v12a the decree is sent out by Haman בשלושה עשר יום בו בחדש הראשון, that is on the 13th day of the *first*

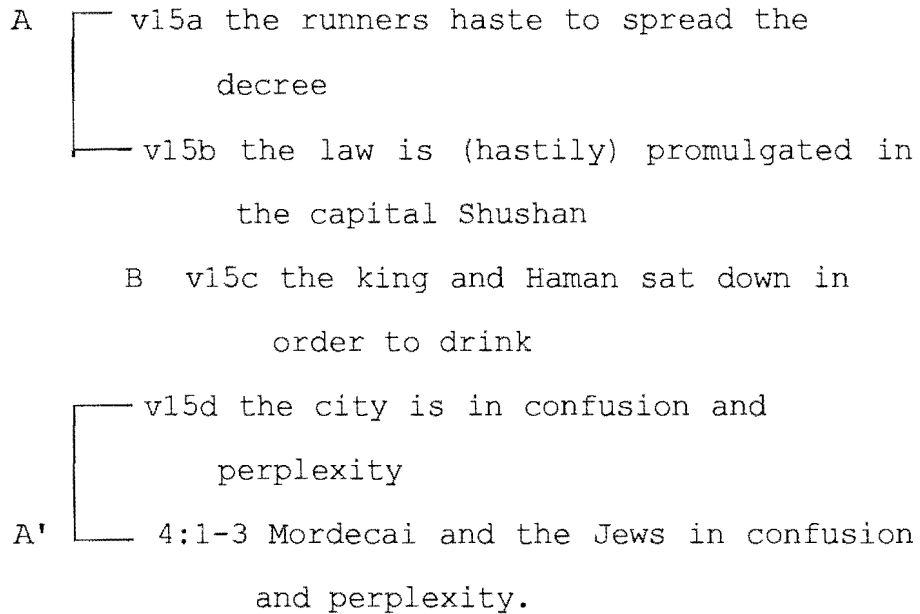
month. But v13a indicates that the killings will take place only עשר לחדש שנים-עשר הוא-חדש אדר בשלושה, that is, the 13th day of the *twelfth month*, which is the month Adar. There are then another ten months before the killings actually begin. Therefore there is also hope that things might still turn out differently (cf. also 4:14a). With this time gap the narrator might be suggesting that Haman's celebration in 3:15 is premature, for the time gap creates the space for the events which are to follow. These events result in the reversal of Haman's decree. So the creation of a sense of hope is another feature of this pericope, but this hope is a very tiny ray of light which shines in the darkness of the apparent victory of Haman over Mordecai and the Jews. For it is Haman's success in persuading the king to issue the decree which dominates 3:1-15.

When we come to the end of this section of the narrative, it is clear that Haman dominates events from 3:1 onwards. The whole section from 3:1 to 3:15 is held together by Haman in the same way as Esther held together 2:5-20.

### 2.2.3 Mordecai's response to Haman's decree 4:1-17

Chapter 3:15, which I suggested symbolises Haman's premature victory celebration, forms a very close link with chapter 4 in general and 4:1-3 in particular (contra Davis 1995:220). The latter verses

describe Mordecai's reaction when he came to hear about Haman's plan. The link is set out below:



In this chiasmus A and A' symbolise urgency and crisis. In stark contrast to this is the king and Haman who sat down to drink. Furthermore, 3:15-16 and 4:1-7 have a literary link as the narrator contrasts king+Haman (drinking) with city (perplexed) in 3:15-16 and king+Haman (drinking) with the Jews (fasting/mourning) in 4:1-7. Mordecai dominates this part (4-17) of the narrative. Esther is present to the extent that she responds to Mordecai's reports and instructions. Her reply to Mordecai in 4:10-12 forms the pivot of the section. Its main idea is that the situation of the Jews is irredeemable. The crisis is portrayed by Mordecai's

behaviour, 4:1-9, Esther's personal circumstances,



4:10--12, the action of the Jews, 4:13, and the desperate measures taken by both Esther and Mordecai 4:13-15. We have then depicted in 4:1-17 a deepening of the crisis which began in 3:1--15. In this situation the request of Esther recorded in 4:16 is significant. The fast she asked for began on the evening of the celebration and commemoration of the Passover (Bush 1996:398). This is reminiscent of the Exodus event.

Mordecai's first task was to bring to Esther's attention the precarious situation facing the nation (Bush 1996:394; Fox 1991:57-58). In Judaism the custom of lamenting and dressing in sackcloth and ashes was used whenever the nation faced a national crisis. The present crisis is a national one, as the actions of Mordecai make clear:

v1b He tore his clothes;

v1c He clothed himself in sackcloth and  
ashes;

v1d He goes into the centre of the city;  
and

v1e He cries out in a loud and bitter cry.

In addition he goes to the king's gate dressed in sackcloth, something which was forbidden (v2). Moreover, the Jews in the provinces also drew attention to their critical situation by mourning,

lamenting and the wearing of sackcloth and ashes (v3). Thus there is a national outcry concerning the decree. It is interesting to notice, once again, how the personal and the national (v3) are intertwined, for otherwise v3 would be out of place in the flow of events in chapter 4. This fluidity between individual and nation is used by the narrator to portray the crisis as much more than a personal matter: it is something which affects the nation as a whole.

Esther is informed about Mordecai's actions. She sends clothes to Mordecai. This was an act of compassion and concern for him (but cf. Bush 1996:394) since he faced the danger of being executed (cf. v2b). He refuses to put them on (4:4) and risks being killed, thus underlining the fact that a national crisis is being faced. In such circumstances personal sacrifices must be made and considerations of personal safety are of least importance. This act on his part justifies Mordecai's instruction to Esther which is to follow shortly (4:8b), and his response, 4:13-14, to her reply, 4:10-12. He would thus be seen as not asking her to do anything he himself was not prepared to do. He is prepared to sacrifice his life for the nation; she should be prepared to do likewise.

Following her failed attempt to intervene, Esther sends a court-official to Mordecai to find out what is going on and the reason for his behaviour.

Mordecai, through Hatach, provides Esther with a fourfold reply: first, a verbal report, v7a (קרהו) should at this point be translated as 'what he came to know' in line with 4:1 [ע''] and 4:7b, and not translated as 'happened to him'; secondly, he singles out the aspect of the price put on the lives of the Jews by Haman, v7b; thirdly, he gives written information so that Esther can read for herself the desperate crisis facing the nation, v8a; and fourthly, he commands her to take action by going to the king knowing that this action involves risking her own life, v8b and v11a. All this is done to impress upon Esther the urgency of the situation. Hatach carries Mordecai's reply back to Esther (4:9). Esther's reply to Mordecai is recounted in 4:10-12. These verses form an inclusion. She informs Mordecai of the impossibility of carrying out his command to go to the king. Now if she cannot go to the king the position of the nation is perilous indeed. They are going to be destroyed and Haman will have won. The positioning of these verses at the centre of the structure of the passage 4:1-17 heightens the irreversibility of the situation of the Jews, for there is no access to the one person, the king, who is able to turn around what appears to be the inevitable fate of the Jewish nation. Everything Mordecai does must then be viewed in the light of this pericope. A desperate situation calls for

desperate measures, even the sacrifice of one's own life as Esther is instructed to do by Mordecai.

Mordecai's strategy of persuasion changes in 4:13-14. He uses a different route. He points out that her own destruction is inevitable in the event that the Jews are exterminated, for she is a Jew for good or ill. In addition, her father's house will also be destroyed. He therefore appeals to her ethnicity: she is a Jew; and also to her personal (social) links: her own family too will be destroyed. Put differently, by sacrificing her life in going to the king, she will save the nation and also her own family. Furthermore, there is the fact of her becoming the queen. It was not just an accident of history, it happened for a purpose. The time of that purpose may have arrived now, namely, the salvation of the nation. Here (v14b; cf. also v14a), we have an allusion to the general idea of the presence of the divine in human affairs. She is reminded that her becoming queen was not just a decision and choice of the king, or the result of her own beauty but that it was driven by a bigger purpose which is now ready to be revealed and to fail to go to the king is to be disobedient to this bigger purpose. It is to try to resist providence. In this way Mordecai impresses upon Esther the extremely critical position facing the nation, including herself.

Mordecai prevails upon Esther as 4:15-16

demonstrates. She agrees to go to the king although it is against the law (v16b). Mordecai's strategy of persuasion was successful in the same way Haman succeeded in his strategy of persuasion (3:12-14) in regard to the king. The section concludes (4:17) with Mordecai doing what Esther requested. This conclusion is open-ended though. The threat to the Jews still hangs over their heads; there is no knowing whether Esther's mission will be successful. We will have to wait and see. This open-endedness sustains the suspense and maintains the interest of the audience (and the reader).

The conclusion of this pericope parallels that of 3:15; in fact 3:1-15 and 4:1-17 are parallel sections of the narrative :

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. 3:1-7   | 1. 4:1a   |
| Haman's plan to destroy the Jews.                                  | Mordecai learns of Haman's plan to destroy the Jews.      |
| 2. 3:8-11  | 2. 4:1b-14  |
| Haman's strategy in persuading the king to issue the royal decree. | Mordecai's strategy to persuade Esther to go to the king. |
| 3. 3:9-14 the decree is issued.                                    | 3. 4:15-16  |
|  | Esther agrees   |

to go to the king.

4. 3:15 Haman celebrates.                      4. 4:17 Mordecai  
did as instructed.

It was pointed out above that the main idea in 4:1-17 is Mordecai's attempt to make Esther aware of the desperate position of the Jews, thus motivating her to go to the king. Mordecai's persuasion strategy is the main means for accomplishing this. The pivotal role of 4:10-12 in helping to determine the main idea of this section can now be seen from the representation below. It is organised around the repetition of the names of Mordecai and Esther, as follows:

- a *Mordecai's* reaction 4:1-3
- b *Esther* responds to news about *Mordecai* 4:4-6
- c *Mordecai* informs *Esther* 4:7-9
  - d *Esther* replies to *Mordecai* 4:10-12
- c' *Mordecai's* reply to *Esther* 4:13-14
- b' *Esther's* reply to *Mordecai* 4:15-16
- a' *Mordecai's* obedience 4:17

When we come to the end of the pericope Esther is ready to go to the king. Mordecai has succeeded in persuading Esther but Haman still has the upper-hand because the royal decree is still in force (Fox 1991:66-67).

### 2.3 The fall of Haman the Agatite 5:1-7:10

This section of the narrative is a unit because it deals with the fall of Haman (cf. Fuerst 1975:69; McCarthy and Riley 1986:95). In this regard Bush (1996:420-421) comments: '[t]he conclusion to scene three skilfully resumes the previous act, dramatically broken off in mid-course, as Esther's invitation to Haman and the king to "come tomorrow to the banquet which I shall prepare" (5:8) becomes "the king's eunuchs brought Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared" (6:14). It makes a smooth transition to the next act, for the prediction of Haman's wife and his friends that his downfall is utterly certain is still hanging in the air....' Concurring Davis (1995:248,254) writes: 'for the author organises the passages to highlight what is the beginning of the end of Haman.' His fall takes place in four stages: 5:1-8; 5:9-14, 6:1-12 and 6:13-7:10 (cf. also Haupt 1907-8:145; Bush 1996:412; Fox 1991:73-82, and the occurrence of  $\text{אָנָה}$  in 5:14 and 7:9-10).

We now give an overview of the four stages before a detailed discussion of each.

The tide turns for the Jews in 5:1-8, when Esther decides to act. She ventures into the vicinity of the king's throne-room, a very dangerous act (Fox 1991:62). Ahasuerus, who is seated on his throne at the time, notices her, holds out the golden sceptre and Esther enters the inner court. Esther survives

the traditional law of the king (cf.4:11). This incident begins the process of the fall of Haman. It sets in motion a series of events which brings about the end of Haman.

In 5:9-14 he loses the battle against the internal struggle with his obsessive hatred of Mordecai and the Jews. For a while it looks as if he would be able to control himself, 5:9-10a; but when he arrives home he loses the self-control he achieved earlier, as can be seen from his acceptance of the advice given by his wife and friends, viz. hang Mordecai, a continuation of his fall.

In 6:1-12 he suffers public humiliation since he is instructed to dress his arch-enemy in royal regalia, and parade him in the town square, declaring: this is what is done to the man the king desires to honour. It must be noted that 6:1-12 is not the promotion of Mordecai. If it had been the case it would have been a great tragedy for the Jews as Mordecai is returned to the gate, 6:12, leaving the Jews in no better position, since the decree authorising their destruction still hung over their heads. No, the main point of this passage is not the promotion of Mordecai but the humiliation of Haman. The victory this gives Mordecai over Haman is of secondary importance. Implicit in this humiliation of Haman is the reversal of Mordecai's position from one

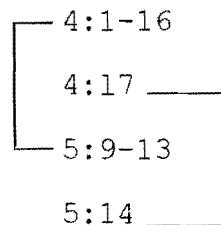


of a threat of death (5:14) to one of honour (6:10-11). Haman's humiliation symbolises his fall.

In 6:13-7:10, Haman suffers ultimate defeat as he is hanged on the gallows he prepared for Mordecai. This is the culmination of his fall. Again implicit in this final fall is the reversal of positions, Haman dies and Mordecai, who was supposed to have died, lives. Haman is hanged on his own gallows, the gallows he prepared for Mordecai. Each phase of the fall of Haman will now be described.

### 2.3.1 The first phase of the fall of Haman 5:1-8

The ending of 5:9-14 is rather interesting. It is very similar to that of 4:17. In the latter Mordecai did what he was told by Esther and in the former Haman does what he is told by his wife and friends. Below we set out this similarity:



The structure illustrates the similarity between 4:17 and 5:14 and so conjoins 4:1-17 and 5:1-14. Presented slightly differently it points to the fall of Haman by contrasting the leaving of Haman with the entry of Esther. It would appear that whenever

Haman leaves the king's presence, he is on the downward road:

- |    |        |                                   |
|----|--------|-----------------------------------|
| A  | 4:17   | conclusion                        |
| B  | 5:1-8  | Esther enters the king's presence |
| B' | 5:9-13 | Haman leaves the king's presence  |
| A' | 5:14   | conclusion                        |

This arrangement suggests that Esther's entry into the king's throne-room (5:1-2) results in life. On the other hand, Haman leaves the palace (5:9) to return to his house and this departure, in contrast, is the beginning of his 'departure' which ultimately takes place in 7:10 when he is hanged (Fox 1991:74). Chapter 5:9-14 therefore links closely to chapter 4:1-17.

Against this background 5:1-8, which is the first phase of Haman's fall, is a pivotal passage. It begins with Esther preparing herself to go to the king, 5:1. Her preparation is deliberate. She was tasked by Mordecai to :

a) להתחנך-לו

b) ולבקש מלפניו על-עמה (4:8b).

Before she can do this she must first get into the inner court of the royal house where the king' throne

is located. Once there she will have to win him over. She must gain a sympathetic ear for her case. An account is now given of how she did both these things.

The ויהי at the beginning of v1 marks the start of a new scene in the narrative. But ביום השלישי (5:1) links back to ובכן and שלשת ימים לילה ויום of 4:16, thus connecting chapter 5 to chapter 4. A further link between the two chapters is the contrast in the dress of Mordecai and Esther. According to 4:1 Mordecai וילבש שק ואפר but in 5:1 it is said מלכותה אסתר, suggesting the fasting of chapter 4 is over.

Furthermore, 5:1 parallels 4:1-2 in that Esther, like Mordecai before her, takes her life into her own hands (cf. 4:16b). He did it by going to the king's gate clothed in sackcloth and ashes, she by going into the king's presence when not summoned.

Chapter 5:1-2 is, therefore, introductory and sketches the background for the events which are to follow.

In the next scene, which starts with ויהי, the tension and suspense are somewhat relieved for the king holds out the sceptre to her. Her life is saved. And since the fate of the Jewish nation is predicated on the fate of Esther we also have here the beginning of the resolution of the main plot. The first pointer of the

change to come is in 5:2a, נשאה חן בעיניו, i.e. literally, 'she lifted up favour in his eyes'. He was pleased to see her. At this point the audience sighs a sigh of relief. But the crisis is long from over. The narrator draws out the suspense, and by so doing the crisis, by giving unnecessary details in his account of Esther's entry into the king's presence. For example, in v1 which has a detailed description of where the king was seated, the phrase בבית המלכות מלכותו is not necessary. Further, Esther's entry to the king's presence is given in minute detail: first, she finds favour with him, secondly, he holds out the sceptre to her, the wording הזהב אשר בידו being unnecessary, then she comes near, and finally she touches the head of the sceptre. With this Esther is now in the king's presence, but it has taken a long time in terms of the narrative to get there.

Esther's entry to the king's presence is followed by a dialogue initiated by the king, in contrast to 5:1-2 which was discourse. We have two dialogues between Esther and the king comprising 5:3-8. The syntax of the first part of v3 is very interesting. The prepositional phrase is in the primary post-verbal position, according to Bandstra (1992:117), 'to effect contrast with' what precedes, in this case 4:10-11a. So, in contrast to the inability of everyone else to gain unsummoned access to the king's

presence, Esther has obtained it. Here already we find the seed of the ultimate reversal of the position of the Jewish nation. A law which applies to all is reversed and is not applied to Esther (Jews?). Next follows the two questions of the king which are prompted by Esther's non-traditional entry into his presence. Since he had not sent for her, it follows that she was there because she had some request, hence his invitation to her to request whatever she wants, up to half the kingdom. This generosity on the part of the king is not so surprising in the light of 5:2 and 2:17. Esther's answer to the questions of the king is an invitation to a banquet which she has caused to be arranged (this is the force of the *hiphil*). For the second banquet is one which she will arrange personally (5:8b, note the verbs **אעשה** twice). **עשתה אסתר** (5:5) must also be understood in this sense even though the verb is perfect. The dialogue ends with the king and Haman going to Esther's banquet. She has won round number one. She entered the presence of the king unsummoned and lived, a symbol of what was to happen to her people.

The first banquet (5:6-8) is dominated by the same questions the king asked before the banquet. Esther's reply is the same as before with some slight word changes, namely, an invitation to a second banquet, this time prepared by her personally. The persistence

of the king with his questions indicates that he is aware that Esther has more in mind than an invitation for him and Haman to come to a banquet.

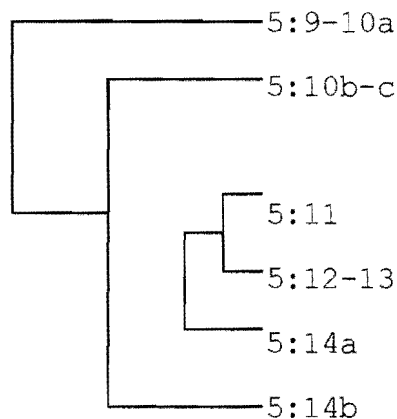
In the second dialogue Esther softens up the king. She knows that she has found favour with the king. The very fact that she is alive and that he is at the banquet testifies to that. Yet she prefaces her reply with the words **אם-מצאתי חן בעיני המלך**. The king had already stated his willingness to grant her request, even up to half the kingdom, yet she says **ואם-על-המלך טוב לחת את-שאלתי ולעשות אתבקשתי**. She is ingratiating herself to the king. The second dialogue and the first banquet end with Esther's invitation to the king and Haman to the second banquet, which the king accepts.

The narrator, in his detailed account of Esther's entry into the king's presence, as well as the description of her invitation to the banquets, is slowing down the narrative significantly, perhaps to the point of exasperation on the part of the audience (and the reader). The nation is facing a major crisis. Esther has taken the risk of going to the king, not knowing whether she will get access. Now that she has the access, she seems to dilly-dally in the king's presence instead of coming to the point and make her request so that the nation can be saved. She not only invites the king to one banquet, but two (Fox 1991:70-71)! One can sense the impatience of the

audience (and the reader) with Esther; some may even be angry with her for wasting such a golden opportunity to save the nation. But by the delay the narrator increases the tension in the hearers and so sustains their interest in the story and its final outcome (Davis 1995:251). Bush (1996:405-406), however, maintains that 'the delay is a deliberate part of Esther's plan, which is to get the decree against the Jews cancelled.' But the Esther of 4:16 hardly has a plan, as indicated by her words 'If I perish, I perish.'

### 2.3.2 The second phase of the fall of Haman 5:9-14

Sandwiched between the two banquets is what Loader calls the second clash between Haman and Mordecai (1977:97). They have contact for a second time. The passage is undoubtedly dominated by Haman to whom Mordecai refuses to make obeisance. The passage is a close-knit unit according to the arrangement below:



We have a new scene as the waw-consecutive of v9a and the waw-conjunction of v8b show. The scene changes to the road on the way to Haman's house. He has just left the banquet and is in high spirits (v9a). But then things change. He sees Mordecai sitting at the gate of the king. Mordecai refuses to **קם** and **זע**. At this Haman gets intensely angry.

Chapter 5:9 and 10a forms a close-knit unit since they have the same syntax, V-S-M (Bandstra 1992:109). They also form an inclusion, as follows:

ויצא המן  
וכראות המן את-מרדכי  
וימלא המן על-מרדכי  
ויחאפק המן

The Haman portrayed here is one who is in control of himself and his emotions. He did not allow Mordecai to get the upper hand over him. He might have recalled at this point the decree authorising the extermination of the Jews.

From v10b the focus shifts to Haman's behaviour. The scene also moves from the road leading to his house to inside his house. In fact, v10c-14 forms one unit as the chiasm shows:





- A            את־אהביו  
B            את־זרש אשתו  
B            זרש אשתו  
A            וכל־ אהביו

He is now at home and sends for his wife and friends, who are brought to him. Their arrival is followed by two speeches by Haman. The first, i.e. v11, is a description of Haman's personal possessions, wealth, honour and status. The second speech concerns his greatness and glory evidenced by his promotion to viziership, the invitation to attend the first and second banquets of the queen, a privilege not afforded the highest ranked noble of the king. With the exception of the information about the invitation to the second banquet, everything else is known news.

The narrator recounts it for the purpose of the contrast which comes in v13. He contrasts his wealth, honour, prestige, status and glory with the unfulfilled desire to see Mordecai and the Jews destroyed. The destruction of the Jews is incomparably more worthwhile to him than all his wealth and prestige. That Haman could make this comparison is an indication of the intense hatred he has for the Jews.

The speech of Haman is followed by that of his wife and friends (v14a). The לו is post-verbal in order to maintain continuity (Bandstra 1992:119). They advise him to make a gallows (v14a), get permission from the king the next day and hang Mordecai. This was their solution to Haman's problem, which was: **בשער המלך ראה את-מרדכי היהודי יושב**. Haman accepts their advice and has the gallows made. But by having the gallows built Haman shows that he has been defeated by Mordecai. He was beginning to fall, as his friends would predict in 6:13. So, Haman's fall did not start in chapter 6 but it continues in chapter 6.

Summarising then: 5:10b-14 is contrasted with 5:9-10a. In 5:9-10a Haman is in control, whilst in the former verses he is being controlled by his hatred for Mordecai and the Jews. Because he is controlled by his hatred he loses the battle against Mordecai and the Jews. This loss culminates in his fall.

The section, as such, is not so much a depiction of a second clash between Haman and Mordecai, a la Loader (1977:96-97), but a clash of Haman with himself. Mordecai merely serves as the foil for this clash of Haman with his inner self. It shows how Haman loses this battle which in turn leads to the loss of his life.

There is another perspective to 5:9-14. It shows the intense hatred of Haman for Mordecai and the Jews.

But this hatred serves to intensify the crisis which Mordecai and the Jews face. They are up against a determined enemy, who is prepared to go to any length to destroy them. Against this background 5:9-14 functions to dampen any optimism on the part of the Jews or the audience based on the events of 5:1-8, which show the progress Esther has made. Its message to the audience (and the reader) could be that they must not be too hopeful too soon for the enemy is a formidable one. It serves to bring them back to reality, the reality of the deep crisis facing the Jews, rather than a situation which is improving. Thus it delays the resolution of the situation and puts the brakes on too early a celebration in the same way that the writer points out that Haman's celebration (3:15) was premature.

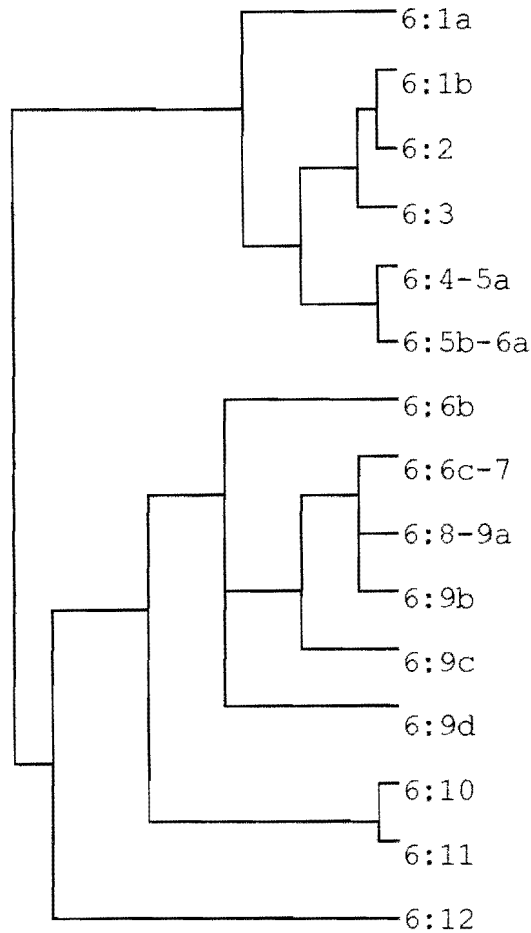
### **2.3.3 The third phase of the fall of Haman 6:1-12**

#### **The humiliation of Haman**

This section of the narrative is usually seen as the belated rewarding of Mordecai for saving the life of the king in 2:21-23. Even if this is the case, it serves a function more important than just narrating the belated rewarding of Mordecai. Thiselton (1992:480) underscores this view when he remarks, '[t]he purpose of such a re-ordering is not to deceive the reader, who is usually aware that conventions allow for such re-ordering.'

It is to facilitate movement, direction, suspense, surprise, imagination, or reader-engagement in the plot.' That Mordecai is not the main focus here is also borne out by the fact that reference to him is made only eight times in the chapter, whereas the events of the chapter are dominated by the king and Haman. In addition, the conclusion (6:12) undoubtedly focuses on the *humiliation* of Haman because he is instructed by the king to honour Mordecai. Therefore it is more appropriate to see this episode as part of the continuum of the fall of Haman. Bal (1991:78-79), referring to Rembrandt van Rijn's 1665 painting of Haman's honouring of Mordecai, says that it 'represents the next episode, the downfall of the plotter. Haman is strangely represented as almost literally falling, moving forward, falling into the viewer's lap when quitting the scene....'

The structure for the next phase in the fall of Haman is given below:



We have here the beginning of a new scene in the story. Indicators are the *geographical*, i.e. the story moves from Haman's house (5:10) to the palace; *grammatical*: we have the fronting (i.e. placing it in a pre-verbal position) of the temporal prepositional phrase בלילה ההוא which also shows that a new scene begins at this point. The LXX at this point reads, 'and the Lord he sent away the sleep from the king.' Since God has not been mentioned before as directly intervening in the narrative, it

is unnatural to introduce him here, therefore, the Masoretic Text is accepted.

וַיֹּאמֶר, v1b, marks the beginning of direct speech and means there is no direct link between v1a and v1b. They are, however, joined on the basis of sharing a common subject, namely, הַמֶּלֶךְ.

Apart from the waw-consecutive, the elliptical אַחֲסַפְרֵי הַזְּכֵרֹנוֹת links v2a to v1b. Chapter 6:2b is connected to v2a via the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר, which continues the description of Teresh and Bigthan which was started in the previous verse. Here, they are said to be the ones who sought to kill the king. In this verse the servants of the king read to him from the chronicles of the kings. When he hears the content of what was read, he asks what had been done (i.e. deeds/acts of honour and dignity) for Mordecai. The וַיֹּאמֶר signals the continuity of v3a with v1b, since it is still the king who is speaking. עַל־זֶה points back to v2, thus providing a link between vv2-3. The answer of the servants to the king's question is given in v3b, which is very closely tied to v2b by the following: the pronominal suffix 3 masculine singular יוֹ, the niphal 3 masculine singular verbs נַעֲשָׂה,

and the fact that v3b is the answer to the **מה** of v3b. The servants who are implicit in v2 are now made explicit. Their answer is that nothing has been done for Mordecai; he has not been rewarded at all. So the king decides to reward Mordecai, but desires some advice on the matter. This results in the question of the king in v4a. He asks after the availability of his court officials since it is now morning, as indicated by the presence of Haman (5:14a, 6:4b).

Chapter 6:4b is a comment by the narrator to the effect that Haman has just entered the outer court of the palace. Haman is there to seek the king's permission to hang Mordecai, in keeping with the advice his wife and friends gave him in 5:14a. Although the **ו** of v4b is disjunctive in relation to v4a the repetition of **הצַר**, ensures continuity between v4a and b. The irony of this situation is that whereas Haman comes to seek the death of Mordecai, the king seeks to reward him. The timing of Haman's entry at this point is a device of the narrator, for Haman's presence is needed for what is to follow, the honouring of Mordecai. The timing parallels the

incident in 2:21-23 where Mordecai happened to be at the right place at the right time to hear Bigthan and Teresh plotting to kill the king. In 2:21-23 the timing meant saving the life of the king; here it means saving the life of Mordecai. So in both cases the timing relates to the reversal of the destiny of a character. In 2:21-23 it is that of the king, now it is that of Mordecai. In addition, in 2:21-23 Mordecai saves the life of the king; now the king saves the life of Mordecai, illustrating the important link between characters and the principle of chiastic-reversal, as well as the direct link between 2:21-23 and 3:1-8:17, as argued before.

Chapter 6:12a, together with 6:3a, 6a, and 7a strongly suggest that the promotion of Haman in 3:1 was not a reward for the saving of the life of the king. It is not the case that Haman is rewarded in 3:1 for the outcome of 2:21-23 and that now Mordecai, the real hero of 2:21-23 is rewarded. The decision to appoint Haman was simply a good political decision by the king to increase or improve the security around him. The delay of Mordecai's reward follows the chiastic pattern characteristic of the narrative and is used as a means to foil the plan of Haman to hang him.



וַיֹּאמְרוּ, v5a, continues the narrative giving the reply of the servants to the question of the king in v4a, which has the forward pointing מִי. The pronominal suffix 3 masculine singular, יוֹ, refers back to הַמֶּלֶךְ in v4a, providing a direct link between v4a and v5a in the form of a chiasm as follows:

A וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מִי בַחֲצַר  
B וְהַמֶּן בָּא לַחֲצַר  
A וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ... הַמֶּן עֹמֵד בַּחֲצַר

The term עֹמֵד in v5a means 'standing and waiting'. The king has someone with whom he can discuss the rewarding of Mordecai.

In v5b Haman is summoned into the inner court. He obeys in v6a. So v6a is linked to v5b as it contains the fulfilment of the king's command issued in v5b. Haman is in the presence of the king. He is there with his own agenda, unbeknown to the king of course, and the king likewise has his agenda unbeknown to Haman, illustrating the narrative device of concealment so characteristic of the story. Haman's entrance brings to a close the dialogue between the king and his servants.

The ויאמר of v6a marks the beginning of the dialogue between the king and Haman. The 3 masculine singular pronominal suffix ם provides a link with v6a, as it refers to המן. The dialogue is started with a question from the king to Haman. Note here again the use of concealment, for the king does not reveal the name of the person he wishes to honour.

Haman's reply begins in v6c, in which Haman conducts an internal dialogue. He interprets the king's non-disclosure as meaning the king desires to honour him. This is not such an incredible idea, given 3:1-5.

This is the second occurrence of self-talk or inner self-encounter recorded of Haman, the first being 5:9-10a, thus effecting a link between the second and third phases of the fall of Haman. Chapter 6:6b and 6c have parallel syntactic structures joining them, viz.:

ויאמר לו המלך v6c

ויאמר המן בלבו v6b.

There is a further link between v6c and b since v6b ends with מה-לעשות...המלך חפץ, while v6c begins with למי יחפץ המלך לעשות. The actual reply of Haman starts in v7 and ends in v9. Haman replies in a very interesting manner (v7b). He

quotes the question of the king first and then gives his reply. He in fact repeats the question verbatim. Haman does this 'since he is so sure that this refers to him (Bush 1996:415).' The first thing to be done for the person the king desires to honour concerns clothing the person in royal regalia. He is to be clothed in the very clothes of the king (v8a). The verb **יָבִיא** is hiphil imperfect 3 masculine plural while the explicit subject **לְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת** is singular. The plurality of the verb points to the royal dignity symbolised by the clothes, and could thus be understood as a plurality of royal dignity. Verse 8b is joined to v8a by the waw-conjunction for this half verse is a continuation of Haman's speech. The link is enhanced by the syntax of the verse in that both v8a and v8b have a nominal phrase followed by a relative clause:

לְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לְבוּשׁ-בּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ  
וְסוֹס אֲשֶׁר רָכַב עָלָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ

The verb **יָבִיא** governs both the clauses, therefore its suffix is plural. To really emphasise the honour, the dressing of the person, the bringing of the king's horse and the setting of the person upon the horse, must all be done by one of the most noble of the king's princes (v9a). The waw-conjunction of v9a signals the continuation of this clause with 6:8b.



Further, vv8a, 8b, and v9a are held together by the terms **סוס** and **לבוש** for the discussion in vv7b-9a focuses on the clothes and crown the person will be dressed in, and the horse on which he will be led through the city, and this requires the plural verb **והלבישו**. Moreover, the verses form an inclusion as follows:

איש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו v7b

האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו v9b

The inclusion brings to a close the first part of what must be done to the person the king desires to honour.

The second part of the honouring process is detailed in v9b. The waw-conjunction at the beginning of the clause marks the continuation of Haman's speech, which started in v7a. Two actions are described here: firstly, the person must be taken around the city square on the king's horse; secondly, as this is done, the following must be announced: 'this is what is done to the person whom the king desires to honour'. With this clause the speech of Haman comes to an end, and also completes his description of what is to be done to the person the king desires to honour.

We have a very detailed and extravagant recommendation as a reward for the person the king wishes to honour. Such detailed description would probably not have been the case were the identity of the person known and emphasises the wisdom of the king in concealing the person's identity.

Chapter 6:10 constitutes the king's reply to Haman. It is introduced by ויאמר, which marks the beginning of the king's second speech. Grammatically, it links back to vv7a-9 as is shown below:

ויאמר המן אל המלך v7a

ויאמר המלך להמן v10

The verse consists of three imperatives, two in the first clause and one in the second. The imperative constructions end with a prepositional phrase. They are the king's instructions to Haman to do exactly what he told the king should be done. At this point the identity of the person is revealed. The chiasmic structure of v10 reveals that it is Mordecai the Jew who is to be honoured in this way by Haman:

קח...כאשר דברת

ועשה-כן למרדכי היהודי

אל-תפל...מכל אשר דברת

It is interesting that the narrator does not describe what Haman felt or thought on hearing this news. The least that could be said is that he must have been in shock and utter disbelief. The very person whose death he planned, he now has to honour.

Chapter 6:11 details Haman's obedience to the commands of the king. He carries them out exactly as he told the king. To be noted in v11 is the lack of any reference to the crown, therefore it is argued that v8c is a scribal gloss derived from 8:15; v11, moreover, stands in contrast to that of 4:1-3. There Mordecai was clothed (לבוש) in sackcloth and ashes; here he is clothed in royal regalia, a situation of transformation and reversal.

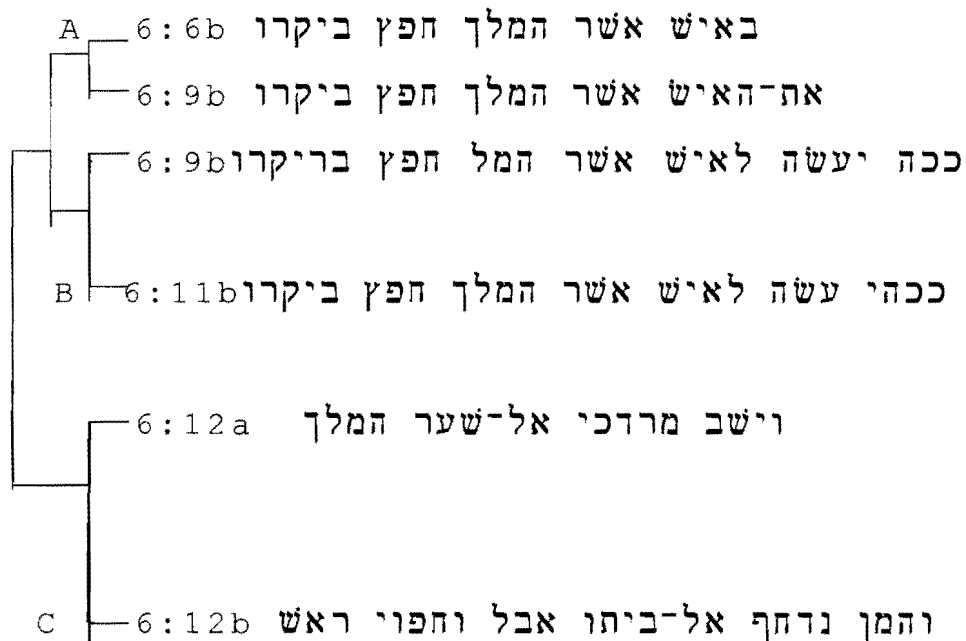
The conclusion to the scene is v12. The waw-consecutive of v12 is disjunctive in relation to v11b. The conjunction in v12b links the two clauses. The result for each person is given in this verse. For Mordecai it was a return to the king's gate (v12a). But this return means victory for Mordecai in that Haman's plot to kill him had been reversed by the king's decision to honour him. Instead of being hanged he was rewarded, instead of being lifted-up on a gallows he was lifted up onto the king's

horse and paraded in the public square by his arch-enemy; instead of public shame there is public acclaim and honour. This reversal of shame and honor is very obvious culturally given the role reversal of rider and leader of a riding animal we have in this incident. As Sider (1995:110) remarks: '[t]he social distinction between riders and leaders of riding animals is crucial in middle Eastern society. Much to his surprise and humiliation, Haman (who expects to be the rider) finds himself leading the horse on which his enemy Mordecai is riding (Est. 6:7-11).' Being back at the king's gate means that 5:13-14 has been overturned by the king's decision to honour him and the king's instructions that Haman does the honouring.

But the return to the king's gate has another significance. It means the conflict continues, the threat of Haman to the Jews is not over yet. There has been a temporary set-back, there has been a temporary reversal (cf. Davis 1995:274,275,n24).

As for Haman, he returns home, in a hurry, compelled by the events of the day to make a quick getaway. He hurries home with his head covered (**אבל וחפוי**). When

compared with 4:1-3 we see the rich symbolism of v12b. The roles are reversed. What Mordecai did then as result of Haman's decree, Haman now does because of the king's rewarding of Mordecai. Haman is utterly *humiliated*. The humiliation takes place publicly (cf. 3:1-2). Haman is on his way down. Therefore, this section depicts the third stage in the fall of Haman. The overall structure makes it clear that Mordecai is incidental to this part of the narrative. The main characters are the king and Haman, with the real focus on Haman and his humiliation as he continues on the downward slope (Bush 1996:417; Fox 1991:82; Davis 195:274). We see this below:



A is the first dialogue between the king and Haman and B the second. The dialogues are the focus of the



passage 6:6b-11b. The outcome of the dialogues is C, i.e. v12a and v12b. Both the outcomes concern Haman, because Mordecai's return to the king's gate and Haman's hurried return home, speak of his humiliation. The striking thing is that this humiliation of Haman comes at the hands of the very king who was responsible for his promotion in 3:1-5. So chapter 6 is primarily about the humiliation of Haman; the rewarding of Mordecai is secondary. This humiliation takes Haman another step closer to the final act of his downfall, namely, his execution, which is the main idea in the next section.

#### **2.3.4 The fourth phase in the fall of Haman**

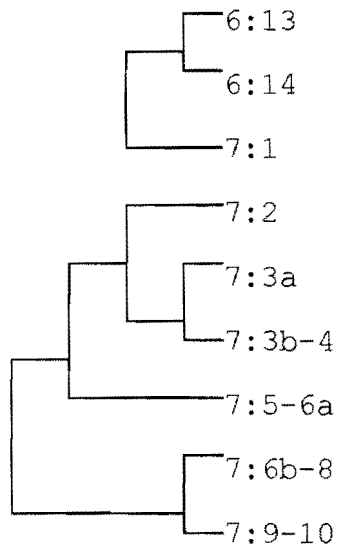
##### **6:13-7:10**

We reach now the fourth and final stage of Haman's fall. It culminates in his execution and exit from the narrative, though he continues to exercise an influence through the decree he issued for the destruction of the Jews. The close connection between the third and fourth stages in the fall of Haman is illustrated by the diagram below:

- a. Haman returns home                      6:12b-13a
- b. Prediction of Haman's fall    6:13b
- a. Haman leaves home                      6:14

The unit 6:12b-6:14 functions as an introduction to the next section of the story because pivotal to it is the prediction of Haman's fall. In addition, Haman's departure from home for the banquet (6:14) is symbolic of his permanent departure from this life, because he does not return home from the banquet. He is hanged on his own gallows. The occurrence of **העץ** (gallows) in 5:14 and then again in 7:9-10, underscores this symbolism, it being interrupted by the honouring of Mordecai by Haman (6:1-12) at the command of the king.

The full structure of the passage is given below:



Chapter 6:13a moves the story back to the house of Haman (cf.5:10). Haman **ספר** (5:11), that is, tells his friends and wife what has happened to him. The

same word ( **קרהו** 4:7, 6:13) is used by Haman and Mordecai to recall their experiences, but the contexts are now reversed. In chapter 4 Mordecai changes from resistance to mourning, and now Haman changes from certainty (5:14) to shame. The king's decision to honour Mordecai in exactly the manner recommended by Haman, overturned his own plot and made a public spectacle of him. This overturning of events re-inforces Mordecai's claim made in 3:3-4, namely, that he is a Jew, and therefore that the law does not apply to him, which is affirmed by the prediction of the wife and friends of Haman which follows in 6:13b. Verse 13b is joined to v13a by the 3 masculine singular pronominal suffixes **ו, ו, ו**, and **ו**. In addition, the repetition of the terms **חכמיו** and **אהביו** and the phrase **זרש אשתו** provides a link between v13 a and b. The clause details the response of Haman's wife and counsellors (wise men). The content of their speech is the prediction of his ultimate fall given the fact that he has already started (**החלוח**) to fall before Mordecai. They are here referring to the humiliation suffered by Haman when he has to honour Mordecai at the command of the king.

What is noteworthy is their reasoning ,namely, that Mordecai's Jewishness will result in the final fall of Haman; for they say **היהודים מרדכי...לא-תוכל לו**

אם מורע. The fall of Haman is regarded by his wife and advisors as inevitable, which prepares for v14a. The discussion between Haman, his wife and advisors is interrupted by the eunuchs of the king who came to take him to the second banquet, as indicated by the expression עורם מדברים. With this interruption the scene moves from Haman's house back to the palace. The two pronominal suffixes ם' and ם as well as the pronominal suffix 3 masculine singular ך joins v14a to v13b.

The purpose of the eunuchs is given in v14b, which is linked to v14a via the 3 masculine plural pronominal suffix ך, and which refers to those who came to fetch Haman. This scene in which Haman is hurriedly fetched to be taken to the feast prepared by the queen, reminds one of chapter 1:10 where Vashti is sent for. This is also in the context of a feast, and which results in her downfall.

The prediction of Haman's advisors and his wife, coupled with the arrival of the eunuchs to take him to the feast, confirms that this feast will result in his fall. This is a reminder, too, that the significance of the feasts is predicated upon the events happening at them.

Chapter 7:1 brings the preparations for the second feast to a close with the arrival of Haman and the king. The waw-consecutive marks the continuity between v1 and the preceding verses; the vocabulary of v14b and v1 joins the two clauses as well, for example, Haman and Esther are mentioned in both clauses. The clauses have a parallel syntactic arrangement of W-PC + Prep Phrase + Infinitive Construct. The verb is singular because it has a composite subject **המלך והמן**. Chapter 6:13a to 7:1 set the scene for the events which take place during the second feast. The temporal expression **ביום השני** in v2a means the start of a new scene. It is now the second day of the feast. The link with the preceding clause is maintained by the prepositional phrases **לשהח** (v1) and **במשחה היין** (v2a). The king addresses Esther repeating his previous questions (cf. 5:3,6). His persistence shows his real concern for the well-being of his queen. The 3 masculine singular suffix **ו** of v2b links back to v2a. The king's second question is recorded in this clause. A further link is provided by the 2 feminine singular suffix **ך**, which refers to Esther in the preceding clause, as well as the elliptical **לך** which is the indirect object of the verb **והעש** at the end of the clause. With this clause the first speech of the king (i.e. v2) at the second banquet comes to an end.

Esther's reply to the king starts in v3a. The fact that v3a is the answer to the twice repeated **וְכִי** of v2 forms the link between these clauses. This part of the reply is in the form of two conditional clauses introduced by the particle **כִּי**. The conditions cited by Esther are real fulfillable conditions, for she has found favour with the king and, given his previous offer of half the kingdom, it is safe to assume her request will be regarded by him as acceptable. So both conditions are real. These conditions are the same ones Esther named in 5:7-8a, and one is left wondering if she is not being manipulative, projecting too humble an attitude, for she uses exactly the same approach in chapter 8 when she requests the reversal of the written decree issued by Haman. This may be a revelation of the not too savoury side of Esther's character. On the other hand, it could be seen as a mark of the cleverness of Esther. She uses her knowledge of the king's care for her to good effect. She exploits his love for her to achieve her goal, namely, the deliverance of herself and her people. Since this is a life and death situation

one should not be too harsh in one's judgement of Esther.

We reach the substance of Esther's answer in v3b. The 1 common singular suffix occurs five times in this clause linking it with v3a, since the suffix points back to the phrase 'Esther the queen' of v3a. Her reply functions at two levels. She wants her life and the lives of her people spared. Her answer has a personal and national dimension. This is another instance of how closely the personal and the national are intertwined. The king now knows the motivation behind the risky approach to his throne room (5:1-8), as well as the two banquets. The causal particle 'כ' gives the reason for Esther's request and so joins v3b to v4a. The reason is that she and her people have been sold to complete annihilation, a reference to the decree issued by Haman. It is noteworthy that both Mordecai in 4:7b and now Esther place the emphasis on the monetary aspect of the decree authorising the total destruction of the Jews, yet v4b makes it clear that selling people into slavery was an accepted practice of the day. It may be the killing plus the financial gain to be had from it

that are regarded by Mordecai and Esther as despicable. The verb **מכר** is passive, i.e. Esther does not reveal the name of the 'seller'. We encounter again the use of concealment to good effect. She conceals the person's identity until the king is worked-up and then in a dramatic manner and with dramatic effect she makes his identity known in v6. The king employs the same device of concealment in 6:6-10 with the rewarding of Mordecai. We may see in this again the cleverness of Esther; she obviously knows the king and how to handle him to achieve her purposes. As before, we have in this clause three words for the destruction of the Jews. This heaping up of terms by the narrator (cf. 3:3) is of course to stress the desperate situation facing Esther and the Jews.

The waw-conjunction of 7:4b is adversative, contrasting the two clauses. The verbal form, which is the same in both clauses, joins them. **אלו** is a composite particle of **לו** + **אם** translated 'if'. In this clause Esther explains that her objection is not that they were merely sold as male and female slaves. In fact if that were the case she would have remained silent (**חחרשתי**).



Since it is not the case she cannot keep silent (cf. 4:14 where the same verb **חָרַשׁ** is used). And the reason why she would have kept quiet, if they were merely sold into slavery (cf. Davis 1995:259, 288-289 for an opposing view), is introduced by **כִּי**. BHS proposes that **הַצְלָה שׁוּה** be read for the M.T. **הַצֵּר שׁוּה**, but Bush (1996:428-429) argues convincingly for the retention of the M.T. reading (Gordis 1973:56, cf. also Haupt 1907-8:50-51). Her point is that the enemy is of so little consequence that had he merely sold them into slavery she would have kept silent and not bothered the king. Her contempt for Haman is evident when we compare the use of the word **שׁוּה** by Haman in 3:8 and Esther's use of it here. In 3:8 Haman argues that the Jews are of no gain, worth and value to the king, and that their presence in the kingdom can only mean trouble for the king. Here, Esther counters that Haman is not worth the annoyance of the king, thus expressing her utter disgust with him. In essence, therefore, Esther cannot keep silent for it is not **מִכְרָנוּ** **לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהָרוּג וּלְאָבֵד** (v4b) but **נִמְכְּרָנוּ** (v4a).

Verse 5 continues the dialogue between the king and Esther as indicated by **וַיֹּאמֶר**. BHS proposes that the second **וַיֹּאמֶר** in v5 be replaced with **וַיִּמְהַר** or that it be deleted. The first suggestion, it seems to me, is based on an *a priori* concept of the king's character, which is not sufficient grounds for the change. The second, which is suggested on the grounds of simple expansion by a scribe, is more reasonable. There is a third possibility, that is, to leave the text as it is and to translate the two occurrences of **וַיֹּאמֶר** as 'and the king answered' for the first, 'and the king said' for the second (cf. Bush 1996:428-429). Since the acceptance of anyone of the suggestions does not make a significant difference to the meaning of the clause, the existing reading is retained. The form of the content of the king's speech is rhetorical. He asks a double question: **זֶה מִי הוּא**, who is this?; **וְאֵי זֶה הוּא** (Bush 1996:426), and where is he? We have here an inclusion **הוּא זֶה זֶה הוּא**, pointing to the king's interest in the identity of the person. The relative clause introduced by **אֲשֶׁר**, is translated by Haupt (1907-8:149) as

'who has filled his heart, i.e. who has the audacity'. The implication of the king's remark is that the person who decided to do such a thing has gone too far, has become arrogant and has arrogated to himself powers belonging to the king alone. This depiction of the king further underscores the interpretation of 3:15, especially the idea that the signet ring of the king, symbol of his royal authority, is returned to him by Haman on the occasion of their social drink. There might be a suggestion here by the king that such a person is trying to usurp his throne. So we perhaps have an allusion to 2:21-23? The king's response is also a reference to the fact that he alone has the authority to decide the destiny of persons and nations in his kingdom. If there is going to be any change in the destiny of people he is the one who would give effect to it. This confirms his pivotal role in the reversal of the position and situation of the characters in the story.

Finally, in v6a the identity of the person to whom Esther was referring is made known by her. This is done in dramatic form. The connection between v6a and v5a is

syntactic, for as Haupt (1907-8:150) points out **אִישׁ צַר וְאוֹיֵב** of v6a answer the **מִי־זֶה** of v5b; the **וְאִי־זֶה** of v6a answer the **הַמֶּן רָעָה הַזֶּה** of v5b. Moreover, the **הַזֶּה** of v6a points back to the **זֶה...זֶה** of v5b. With this revelation Esther accomplishes her purpose in inviting the king and Haman to the banquet. She wants to show the king that the man he promoted is a very evil person. Esther's revelation of the identity of the arch-enemy of the Jews is also the turning point in this part of the story. From now on the consequences of her revelation are played out.

The first result is the effect it has on Haman, v6b. The pre-verbal position of the subject prefixed by a waw-conjunction (**וְהַמֶּן**) indicates the beginning of a new phase in the story. According to Haupt (1907-8:150) the verb **בָּעַתָּה**, given its Arabic cognate, does not mean terrified but 'to happen unexpectedly, to come or fall upon a person suddenly and unexpectedly'. The reason is that Haman is overtaken by surprise at the fact that the queen identifies him as the person she is talking about all the time. Haupt implies that Haman thinks Esther is unaware of his plot to kill the Jews, which

is impossible given 4:1-17. It is more likely that he is surprised to find out that Esther is a Jew as well. Given this new knowledge, the true nature of his deed dawns upon him so that he is not only overtaken by surprise, but is also terrified. The expression in v6b **המלך והמלכה מלפני** would also suggest that Haman is filled with terror. This expression also argues against the view of Haupt (1907-8:50) who comments: '....he collapsed, not because he had tried to exterminate all the Jews, but because he knew that the King was aware of the fact that Mordecai, and not Haman, had saved the King's life, and that Haman's hatred of the Jews was chiefly due to his apprehension lest the trick to which he owed his sudden elevation became known to the King'. Haupt's argument is that Haman hated the Jews because he was worried that if he was to kill Mordecai the real reason for his unexpected promotion would become known, therefore he plotted the general extermination of the Jews and in this way would get rid of Mordecai and protect his secret. But this flies in the face of 5:14 where Haman decides to go ahead and have Mordecai killed, something which would be extremely foolish even for

the fool Haman to do. Moreover, I argued above that Haman's promotion happens, not at the expense of Mordecai, but as a simple, straightforward yet necessary *political decision* on the king's part, given the events of 2:21-23. For this reason 2:21-23 is linked directly to 3:1-5. Furthermore, both Haman and the servants at the king's gate saw Mordecai's refusal to bow as a violation of the command of the king (3:3-6). Consequently, Haupt's view is untenable. Finally, Holladay (1971:45) gives the meaning of **בעה** as 'be overtaken by sudden terror, Dan 8:17'. We conclude, therefore, that the first result of Esther's revelation of the identity of the person she is talking about is that it terrifies Haman.

The second consequence comes in v7a. Again we have the subject of the clause in a pre-verbal position prefixed with a *waw*-conjunction (**והמלך**). This points to its independent status as a clause, but linked to the preceding clause as a consequence of it. The king rises in anger from his seat and goes into the palace garden. This is the second account of the king's anger

(cf.1:12). He goes into the garden obviously to think about what action to take but also because he himself must have been surprised by the revelation of Esther. We have syntactic parallelism between v7b and v7a in that it too has the subject Haman in pre-verbal position with the prefixed waw-conjunction. This construction provides the connection between the two clauses. As the king exits, Haman remains (standing). This is the meaning of עמד here. He seeks the intervention of the queen in order to save his life. Previously, Esther pleaded for her life and that of her people on account of Haman, but now the tables are turned and he seeks his life from the person he sought to destroy. This scene illustrates how the fall of Haman is gaining momentum and how the prediction of 6:13b continues to be realised. The כִּי introduces the reason for Haman's plea. He senses that the king has already determined his fate. This is how he interprets the exit of the king from the banquet. ראה cannot mean 'seeing', but must refer to Haman's knowledge of the practice of the day. He realises that given what he has done, only one sentence is possible: death.

It must, therefore, be understood as 'knowing'. Haman's case is thus similar to that of Vashti in 1:13-15.

Verse 8a has the same syntactic arrangement as the other clauses, only this time the subject is the king. He returns to the banquet. On entering the banqueting room (אל־בית משחה היין) Haman is seen falling on the couch on which the queen was sitting. Given Haman's knowledge of Persian law and practice he could not have attempted to rape (לכבוש) the queen, as the king perceived it. Haman is credited with being a fool, but one has to attribute some measure of common-sense even to a fool. Why then does the king interpret the scene he encounters upon his re-entry to the banquet as an attempt to rape the queen? According to Haupt (1907-8:151) the king's remark is a '....cruel jest. It showed how the king was disposed toward Haman', something he already perceived (cf. 7:7b). Fox (1991:87) sees this as the king extricating himself from a difficult situation by making Haman the guilty party in a plot in which he was an accomplice. It seems more probable to attribute the king's interpretation of the scene to what he has just heard. The revelation shocks and angers him and so clouds his perception. This remark of the king contains Haman's death sentence. It serves to accelerate the momentum of Haman's fall.

Verse 8b has the same syntactic arrangement as the previous clause, i.e. a pre-verbal subject without



the conjunction. **הַרְבֵּר** refers to the remark of the king in v8a; it went out from the mouth of the king. BHS proposes two alternative readings for **הַפּוּ**, namely, **הַפּוּ** which means 'to be, feel ashamed, or behave shamefully' (Holladay 1971:98, 112-113); and **הוֹרֵר**, which means to 'grow pale [white]'. Haupt (1907-8:152) supports the first alternative on the grounds of haplography of the **ר**, and gives Psalm 34:6 as support for this suggestion. But given the nature of Haman's situation portrayed in 7:6b-8a, shame is hardly an adequate rendering; he is facing death after all. The second reading suggested by BHS has more to commend itself for it fits the context well. But if we take **הַפּוּ** figuratively as meaning that Haman's face was veiled, (covered) in fear (cf. Holladay 1971:98), the reading of the text can be retained, especially since in v8a the king announces Haman's death sentence (but see Gordis 1973:56 for an opposing view). The expression on Haman's face shows that the end has come. According to BDB (1975:341) **הַפּוּ** is used 'in token of sentence of death'. This further underscores the probability of retaining the existing reading. What is expressed figuratively will next take place literally.

Verse 9a sees the beginning of the actualisation of the word of the king. It is initiated by the appearance of Harbona on the scene. He gives more condemnatory testimony against Haman by bringing to

the king's attention the intended hanging of Mordecai, who only spoke well of the king. His knowledge of Mordecai must have been gained from doing duty at the king's gate where Mordecai was stationed, or else he could be referring to the Bigthan-Teresh incident (cf. 2:21-23). His words confirm everything the king has heard from the queen, for as Haupt (1907-8:152) comments: 'Harbona thinks Haman is a **בן מורה**; he ought to be impaled, and we have not only a malefactor worthy of impalement, behold! There is also (**גם**) the pole which Haman set up for Moredecai'. Harbona, with his remarks, encourages the king to put Haman to death. His appearance on the scene seals the fate of Haman. It reverses the destiny of Haman already determined by the king. He seems to play the same role Memuchan played in the dethronement of Vashti. Verse 9b links up with v9a through the pronominal suffix 3 masculine singular **ו** and the 3 masculine singular suffixes **וה** and **וה**. They make reference to the servants and Haman respectively in v9a. The clause contains the command of the king that Haman be hanged, bringing to a tragic end the life and career of Haman.

This is the end-result of his obsessive hatred of the Jews and his plot against them. Haman has fallen; the prediction of 6:14b has been fulfilled. It is left to the king who promoted Haman to put the final nail in the coffin of his fall by giving the command for his

execution.

In 7:10a the command of the king which forms the link between v9b and v10a is carried out. It brings to an end the events of the second banquet. Moreover, vv9-10a is held together by the phrase **הָעֵץ** which is found in v9a and v10a making it a close-knit unit.

The conclusion to the second banquet is v10b, for it is at this banquet that the king's anger is provoked (v7). Thus the repetition of the phrases **בַּחֲמָתוֹ** (v7) and **וַחֲמָתוֹ** (v10b) binds together vv7-10 into a unit. With the anger of the king pacified, things have been restored to normality; there is order again in the kingdom. Moreover, the hanging of Haman brings to an end the consternation, anxiety and perplexity of chapter 3:15a and 4:1-3. As the news spreads through the capital there is a sigh of relief but not of release.

#### Summary

The threat faced by the Jews at the end of chapter 3 is reversed through a process which led to the ultimate demise of Haman. It started with Esther's successful but unaccustomed entry into the presence of the king (5:1-8), followed by the loss of the battle for self-control by Haman (5:9-14); next was the humiliation of Haman (6:1-12), and finally the execution of Haman (7:1-10). But the crisis is not

over yet, because the written decree, issued by Haman, still hung over the heads of the Jewish nation (Bush 1996:474). How this threat was overturned, is our concern in the next section, namely, chapter 8:1-17.

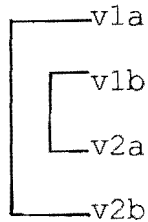
#### **2.4 The promotion of Mordecai the Jew 8:1-17**

The previous main section concluded with the hanging of Haman. Interestingly though, we may have a parallel with the Vashti episode (1:19-21). In the latter episode a vacancy is created with the dethronement of Vashti which is filled by Esther. Now as a result of the hanging of Haman a vacancy exists in the position of vizier of the kingdom, a position which is shortly to be filled by Moredcai.

Haman's promotion was to increase the security around the palace. Mordecai's promotion, from the viewpoint of the narrator, serves to reverse the decree of Haman (8:7-8). By promoting Mordecai the king might be making a straightforward administrative decision, replacing one vizier with another. The narrator, however, sees in this the key to the reversal of Haman's decree.

The section divides into several units. And, as was the case with Haman, we also have several phases to the promotion of Mordecai.

The first phase of Mordecai's promotion is recorded in 8:1-2. Given below is the arrangement of 8:1-2:



This passage serves as an introduction to what follows, for the reversal depicted in this paragraph will be worked out in detail in the following verses (see our discussion of 2:21-23).

At v1a we encounter a 'new stage in the action' of the king as shown by the fronting of the prepositional phrase, as well as the absence of a prefixed conjunction to the prepositional phrase (Bandstra 1992:117). Yet there is continuity with what precedes via the phrase **ביום ההוא**. The king is still the actant and in control. He controls Haman's property (**ביתו**) despite the fact that his sons are still alive (cf. 9:7-10). This act on the part of the king affirms the fall of Haman. It also carries within it symbolism in terms of the decree of Haman, for according to it (3:13) the property of the Jews was to be taken as loot. The situation is reversed as Esther the Jew takes possession of the property of Haman the arch-enemy of the Jews.

The characterisation of Haman as one who hates the Jews again raises the issue from the personal to the national level (cf. 3:8-9).

The ׀ of v1b is disjunctive indicating a separate action. The fronting of the subject **מרדכי** confirms this. In this clause Mordecai appears before the king (cf. 6:4b). This is the first face to face meeting between himself and the king. It was Esther's explanation of his relationship to her (**מה-הווא-לה**) which resulted in his appearance before the king. We should note, however, that Mordecai is made to meet the king when it matters most, at the point that the reversal of the decree of Haman is to be arranged.

Chapter 8:2a continues the narrative via the ׀ consecutive. The link between v1b and v2a is via anacrusis in that v1b begins with **מרדכי** and v2a ends with **מרדכי**. The 3 masculine singular suffix ׀ further links v1b to v2a since it refers back to **המלך** in v1b. Mordecai is installed by the king as the new vizier. It is done presumably because of his relationship to Esther (cf. 6:1-12, 7:9, 8:1b). Mordecai's promotion is not the result of something he has done, unless one wants to contend that the king remembered what he heard about Mordecai in 7:9 and was influenced by this in the promotion of Mordecai. But such a suggestion would run counter to the close

structural link between 8:1b and 8:2a. It would seem rather that Mordecai is promoted because of his relationship to Esther (8:1b) and also because a vacancy exists in the position of viziership. Given this background it is now even more clear that Haman's promotion was not based on something he did, namely, falsely claiming to have saved the king's life, as maintained by Haupt (1907-8:150). There is a clear parallel between the promotion of Haman and Mordecai in this respect. Both promotions are not the result of anything done by the characters. It also strengthens the argument presented above that the motivation for 3:1-5 must be sought in 2:21-23, making the link between these passages direct.

The ׀ consecutive in v2b joins v2a and v2b. In addition, both clauses have **מרדכי** as the object of a verb. Yet something new is happening, as indicated by the new subject, Esther. She places Mordecai over the property of Haman, which shows she has considerable power, as Day (1995:139,142) confirms saying 'Esther still appears more the authority figure'. This action differs from 8:1a in that the king **נתן** the property to Esther as a possession, while she makes

Mordecai the administrator of it by putting him in charge of it (Fox 1991:90; but cf. Clines 1984:104 for a opposing view).

This clause brings to a conclusion the first phase of Mordecai's promotion. The next phase will take place in 8:15-16 as the parallel below points out:

8:1b            מרדכי בא לפני המלך

8:15a           מרדכי יצא מלפני המלך. This

syntactic parallel also marks off the section 8:1-17 as a unit on its own (Bush 1996:438,442; Fox 1991:106). The section 8:1-2 forms an inclusion as follows:

8:1a           אח-בית המן

8:2b           על-בית המן.

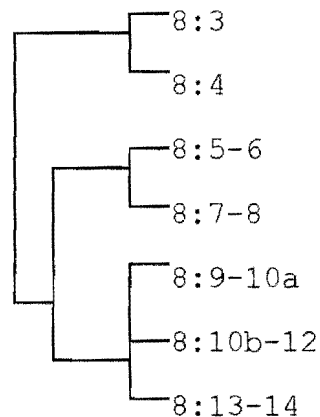
It is dominated by Mordecai since we have three direct, and one indirect, references to him. Its focus is his promotion. At a secondary level it also summarises the fall of Haman because apart from the fact that his life was taken away (7:1-10), we see here that his property and his position are also taken away and given to his arch-enemy Mordecai, thus completing the first phase of the promotion of Mordecai.

Mordecai's promotion has several effects. One is the reversal of Haman's decree, 8:3-14. Although Haman is dead he continues to threaten the existence of the



Jews from the grave through the decree he issued authorising their total destruction. Esther, Mordecai and the Jews have won the fight, but the battle for national survival is far from over. It is to this battle that we turn our attention now.

I mentioned previously that Mordecai's promotion came at a time when it mattered most: when it could do the most for the nation. For if 6:1-14 had been the final reward of Mordecai the nation would have lost the battle for national survival. But Mordecai is promoted at this point so that with his position and power the remaining threat, that is, the decree of Haman, can be dealt with. The structure of the effect of Mordecai's promotion is set out below:



The link between v2b and v3a is provided by the verb  $\eta\delta'$  as well as the  $\eta$  consecutive. Esther continues

(Holladay 1971:137) by pleading for the lives of her people (cf. 5:4, 8; 7:3f). She abandons herself to the mercy of the king just as she did before; this time it is done more dramatically: she falls down at the feet of the king.

Verse 3b is joined to v3a by the 3 masculine singular pronominal suffix ך which points back to מלך in v3a. Esther is also the common subject of v3a and b. Moreover, all the verbs in v3a and b are imperfect verbs. What Esther does here can be seen as a continuation of 7:3-4, where she started to plead for the life of her people. At that point, however, it was interrupted by the final fall of Haman. She is continuing then from where she ended in 7:3-4. The link between verses 4 and 3 takes the form of an act-response formula, for v3 describes the acts of Esther in the presence of the king. The king responds with acts too: he holds out the golden sceptre and Esther rises to her feet (v4). Nothing is being said, everything is acted out. We have in vv3-4 an inclusion based on syntactic parallelism and focused on the falling down and standing up of Esther:

v3 ותוסף אסתר... ותפל לפני רגליו

v4 ותקם אסתר ותעמד לפני המלך

Now, according to 8:1-2, Esther is already in the presence of the king. In addition, the verb **סָפַד** indicates that what follows in verse 8:3f is continuous with v2b and that what happens in 8:3f, takes place in the presence of the king (Bush 1996:440, Fox 1991:91-92;). Since the holding out of the sceptre gives access to the presence of the king, and since Esther is already in the presence of the king, what is the significance of v4a, in which the king holds out the golden sceptre? It means that Esther's plea is granted, that not only her life but also the lives of her people will be spared (Davis 1995:304; Fox 1991:92). The acts of Esther and the king are also symbolic of what is shortly to happen to the nation. Esther, humiliated in v3 is elevated in v4; likewise the nation, humiliated at present, will be exalted soon. The reversal of Esther's physical position (**עמד/נפל**), through the intervention of the king, symbolises the impending reversal of the position of the nation through the intervention of the king (see 9:24-25). This is in keeping with the intertwining of the personal and national in the narrative. At a secondary level the dramatisation of the nation's plight by Esther parallels that of Mordecai in 4:1-2, stressing that both of them were equal in their concern for the plight of the nation.

Verse 5 introduces a new section, as the direct speech marker **וַיֹּאמֶר** indicates. Esther's speech comprises vv5-6 and is in the form of a conditional clause with the protasis in v5a and the apodosis in v5b. The protasis has four conditions introduced by the particle **אם**, the last two being elliptical. The conditions focus on the king's view of the matter (5a), the king's view of Esther (v5b+d), and the king's view of the intrinsic value of the matter (v5c). These conditions are real ones since they can all be fulfilled by the king. The apodosis comes in v5b making the link between v5a and b syntactical. It is introduced by a niphal imperfect 3 masculine singular verb which is jussive. Esther's request is that the decree of Haman be **שׁוּב**, that is, the king must cause the previous decree to be turned around. In this request she recognises that the king alone is able to reverse the existing threat hanging over the heads of the Jews (9:24-26 cf. also 4:8). The pivotal role of the king in the reversal of fortunes in the narrative is therefore affirmed once again.

The **כִּי** of v6a links it to v5 since it continues the speech of Esther. It gives the reason motivating her request to the king. The clause is in the form of an interrogative, **אֵיכָנָה**, how? The question is rhetorical. Her point is that she cannot be expected to see evil about to engulf her people and do nothing about it. Her request must be heeded because this is

what any human person would do in the same circumstances: even the king, is the implication. ן conjunction connects v6b to v6a. Verse 6b continues Esther's speech and contains the second rhetorical question. It repeats v6a with this difference: עמי is replaced with מולדתי. Esther bases her appeal on nationalism, yet another example of how intertwined the personal and national are in the story. This brings Esther's speech to a close.

וִיאמר, v7a, introduces the speech of the king. It points to the beginning of a new unit, but since it constitutes the king's reply to Esther, it is a continuation of the former. The king addresses both Esther and Mordecai. The suffix ך common singular ך provides the link between v7b and v7a as it refers to המלך in v7a. In this clause the king states what he has already done for Esther and the Jewish people and, by implication, that he is unable to do any more. This inability is made explicit in v8b. He cannot do literally what Esther requested. He does however give them some help, as v8a makes clear. The ן conjunction links v7b and v8a. The fronting of the personal pronoun אהם seems to suggest that the king is stressing that the time has now arrived for them to act; he has done what he could. He then gives to them the authority to issue another decree המלך בשם to counter the previous one.

The ו of v8b gives the reason for the instruction to them in v8a. Any writing in the name of the king and sealed with his signet ring is irrevocable. With this the king not only points out his own limitations but also points out to them the power they already have since the signet ring was given to Mordecai in 8:2 (cf. 3:10-11). The main point made by the king is that there are limitations to what he is able to do and that Mordecai and Esther should now act as, Fox (1991:95) remarks: ' I have done my part, now you go and finish the job'. Contrary to Davis (1995:309) and Bush (1996:445) this is not an irritable dismissal of Esther and Mordecai by the king, but simply an admission that he has done what he is able to do. With all he has given them, especially the signet ring, they should now act.

#### 2.4.1 Mordecai's decree counters the decree of

##### **Haman 8:9-14**

Verse 9 (3:12f) starts a new scene with the appearance of the scribes of the king. The link with v8 is the fact that v9 is the response to the imperative of the king, כהוב, recorded in v8a.

The assembling of the scribes happened on the twenty third day of the third month, Sivan. A detailed account follows on how the decree was written: a) it was written in accordance with everything commanded

by Mordecai; b) it was written to the whole kingdom, including the Jews; c) it was written in the script and language of all the peoples of the kingdom. The **ו** consecutive of v10 continues the description of how the decree was written and so links back to v9. The verb **ויכתב** mentioned in v9a is repeated at the beginning of v10a, thus strengthening the link between v9 and v10a. In v9 the verb is niph'al with Mordecai as the subject of the verb, emphasising the fact that Mordecai was writing on the authority of the king, but in v10a it is a qal. Finally, the document was sealed with the king's signet ring. It is now ready to be distributed. Verse 10b narrates the dispatching of the decree by means of the traditional manner of communication, namely animals.

The relative pronoun **אשר** of v11a has **ספרים** of v10b as its antecedent. In this way v11a links directly to v10b. Verse 11a further details the empowerment of the Jews through the decree. It gives to them power to: a) **על-נגשם** **ולעמד** **להקהל**; b) **ולאבד** **ולהרג**, **להשמיר**, all the people and provinces which attempt to attack them. The Jews are given permission to organise and defend themselves; they are not given permission to attack anyone they suspect of being against them (Fox 1991:103).

Verse 11b contains the last aspect of their empowerment by the king, that is, they can plunder

their enemies. The expression **ושללם לבוז** (v11b) links backward to **אשר נהן המלך ליהודים** of v11a. The 3 masculine plural suffix **ם** of **שלל** points back to "the people of power" and "every province" mentioned in v11a. The decree empowers the Jews to counter the content of the previous decree.

Verse 12a is a verbless clause and therefore disjunctive in relation to v11. Continuity with the previous clause is maintained by the prepositional phrase at the beginning of v12a. In addition, v11b ends and v12a starts with a prepositional phrase, thus making for a close link between the clauses.

Verse 12b is also a temporal clause like v12a, this makes for the close connection of the two clauses. Chapter 8:12 links 8:11 and gives the time and place for the acts of v11. These are to be carried out on one day and in the whole kingdom.

The pre-verbal position of **פתשגן** in v13a means the start of a new unit. On the basis of **הכתב**, however, a link is maintained with the previous verses. A copy of the decree is made available to every province and it is announced to all the peoples of the kingdom. The **ו** of v13b joins it to v13a. In v13b the same announcement is made to the Jews so that they ready themselves for the thirteenth of Adar, to avenge themselves on anyone who seeks to harm them. BHS suggests the deletion of the **ו**. This would make v13b a purpose clause which would state that the



announcement was to be made to all the peoples so that the Jews would hear it and ready themselves for that day. The same result could be obtained if we regard the waw as a waw explicative, and so the verbal form in the text is retained.

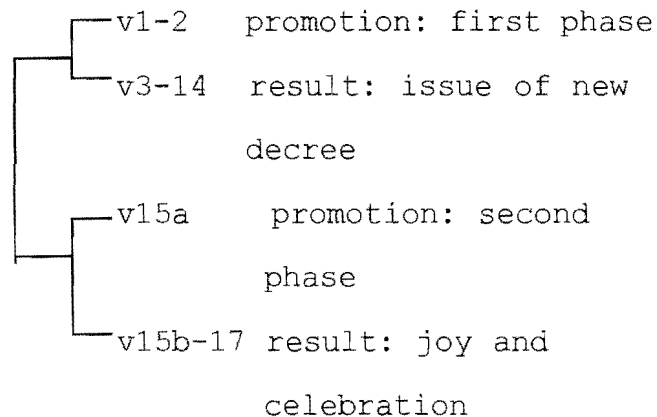
Chapter 8:14 concludes the process of issuing the new decree which would counter Haman's decree, and so remove the threat which was hanging over the heads of the Jews. The pre-verbal subject-phrase indicates that we have an independent unit. In v10b it is stated *that* the messengers and riders were sent out by Mordecai to deliver the decree. Here we are told *how* they went out, that is, with real urgency. The ׀ of v14b is conjunctive, linking v14a and v14b. The two clauses also have a similar syntactic structure, namely, S-V-M, and both end in prepositional phrases beginning with ך. The two clauses describe the kingdom-wide announcement of the new decree, which empowers the Jews to defend and avenge themselves against their enemies.

The section 8:9-14 is a unity. It is held together by terminology about writing and laws: ספרי (v9) ויכתב (v9) ויכתב (v10) ספרים (v10) הכתב (v13) דה (v13) דה (v14). The first four terms form an inclusion. The section can, broadly speaking, be divided into three units:

- 6:9-10a deals with the writing of the decree;  
 6:10b-12 deals with the distribution of the  
 decree;  
 6:13-14 deals with the proclamation of the  
 decree.

#### 2.4.2 The second phase of Mordecai's promotion 8:15a

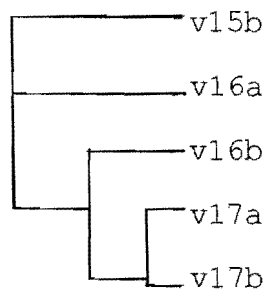
Viewed from a structural perspective, the second phase, which completes the promotion of Mordecai, dominates the section 8:1-17 as follows:



Chapter 8:15a begins with a  $\bar{\text{v}}$  conjunction which links what follows to the preceding verses, but the pre-verbal position of the subject indicates that we have a new unit starting at this point as well. It also seems to take up the story about Mordecai's promotion recorded in 8:1-2, and can be seen as the second stage in that promotion. In 8:1-2 he received the signet ring of the king. Here the process is completed when he receives the garments symbolising

his new position of power as vizier. Chapter 8:15a parallels chapter 6, except that whereas in chapter 6 the crown is missing, here no mention is made about the horse. With 8:15a the promotion of Mordecai is complete, and the threat which hung over the heads of the Jews has potentially been averted. It must still be actualised, but that comes in the next section of the narrative.

The decree issued by Mordecai had several results (8:5b-17). Below is set out the arrangement of this part of the narrative:



In 8:15a-17 is a number of waw-conjunction clauses which describe the result of the decree. They are all independent of each other. The point of this is to show that the results are not caused by the promotion of Mordecai but by the news that a new decree had been announced counterbalancing the effects of the previous decree (cf.3:15-4:3). News of the new decree results in:

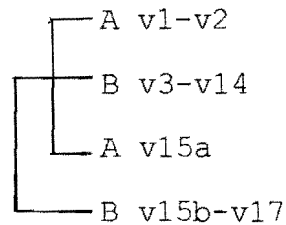
v15b joy and rejoicing in Shushan the capital;  
v16 light, gladness, joy and honour for the Jews;  
v17a joy and gladness in the whole kingdom;  
v17b feasting and a good day for the Jews;  
v17c mass 'conversion' to the Jewish faith, or  
more probably, many people becoming  
sympathetic to the Jews.

We have thus in 8:15-17 the reversal of 3:15-4:3. Moreover, the parallelism between 8:14-17 and 3:15 gives support to the suggestion that 3:15 is a celebration by Haman of his victory over the Jews, however premature that celebration was. The whole of 8:1-17 can be summarised as follows:

1. Mordecai is promoted, phase one v1-2;
2. The decree of Haman is potentially reversed vv3-14;
3. Mordecai is promoted, phase two v15a;
4. The results of the potential reversal of the decree v15b-17.

Haupt (1907-8:161) believes that the resultant joy and rejoicing was not because of the new decree but because of the fall of Haman. But this view flies in the face of the obvious parallel between 8:3-17 and 3:1-15. Moreover, Haman was publicly hanged before this event, in 7:10. The question that arises, if we follow Haupt, would be why the narrative delays the

rejoicing of the people till now. Haupt gives no explanation for this. Further, the sequence of events in 3:15 makes it clear that the perplexity of Shushan was directly linked to the publication of the decree, and since 8:3-17 parallels 3:1-15, the cause for joy in 8:3-17 should parallel the cause of the perplexity in 3:1-15. Finally, the structure of 8:1-17 argues against Haupt's position:



#### Summary of 2:21-8:17

It has already been stated that this is the longest cycle. It is also the pivotal cycle since it contains the main reversal of the narrative, namely, that of the fortune and destiny of Haman and Mordecai.

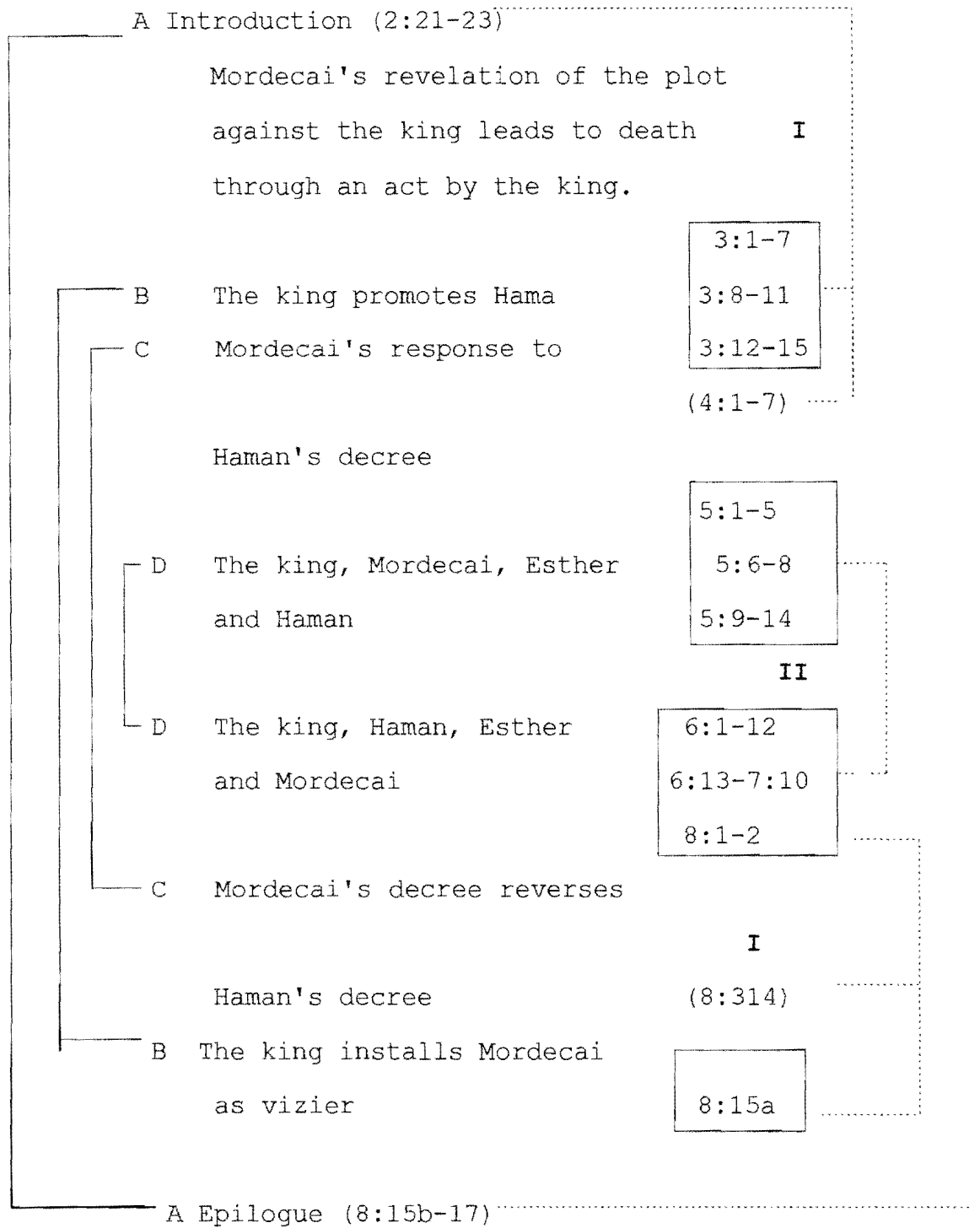
The plot development of the section is as follows: the king's life is threatened, but through Mordecai's revelation of the assassination plot it is saved (2:21-23); the result is the king's attempt to improve palace security by promoting Haman (3:1-7); this leads to a clash between Haman and Mordecai resulting in a plot by Haman, authorised by the king, to exterminate the Jews (3:8-11); Haman prematurely celebrates his supposed victory over Mordecai and the

Jews (3:12-15).

Mordecai's response to Haman's decree follows in 4:1-17. The essence of this response is to make Esther aware of the crisis facing the nation and challenging her to go to the king to seek his help. He succeeds in that Esther agrees to go to the king (5:1). But Esther's entry to the king's throne-room, contrary to custom (5:1-8), sets in motion the process which leads to the fall of Haman; this process includes the loss, by Haman, of the battle with his inner-self (5:9-14), his humiliation (6:1-12) and his final demise (7:1-10).

With the demise of Haman, Mordecai comes face to face with the king, resulting in his promotion (8:1-2), the reversal of Haman's decree (8:3-14), Mordecai's installation as vizier (8:15a), and concludes with the rejoicing in the city at the news that the former decree has been reversed (8:15b-17). Thus the attempted assassination and death at the beginning of the cycle (2:21-23) is reversed by joy, rejoicing and gladness (8:15b-17) at the end of the cycle.

The cycle has symmetry, as the diagram below shows. It is also organised around a pivotal event, namely, the demise of Haman and the rise of Moredecai, structurally presented in the following manner:



The king's coronation of Mordecai as vizier leads to rejoicing and gladness.

### 3. Structural analysis: the Enemies-Jews

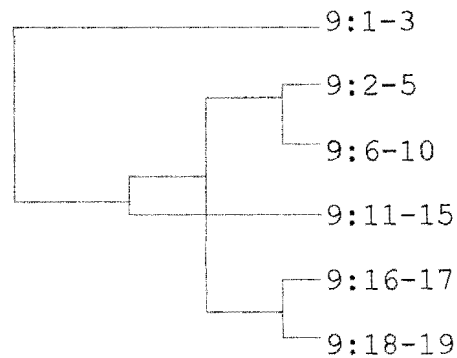
#### Cycle (9:1-10:3)

When we come to the end of this cycle the clash between Haman and Mordecai on the individual (personal) level is resolved. But the individual and the national are closely linked in the narrative. Consequently, the reversal of fortunes and destinies played out on the individual level, also plays itself out on the national level.

Many scholars (Bensusan 1988:52-53; Haupt 1907-8:124, Loader 1977:103, 1980:61,146; Schutte 1989:66) have referred to the fact that the clash between Haman the Agite and Mordecai the Jew has a national flavour, reflecting the clash between Israel and the Amalakites. In addition, I have on numerous occasions referred to the intertwining of the personal and the national. In this cycle it finds its fullest expression.

Loader (1977:96) heads this section as 'Unfolding of reversal', for in 3:1-15 the decree of Haman is promulgated, as is the decree of Mordecai in 8:3-4. Both these decrees take effect in this cycle. Fox (1991:158, n12) states that peripety is an important structural principle in Esther, including 9:1-10:3. Consequently, the arrangement of this cycle is set out below in the following manner:





### 3.1 The structure of 9:1-28

We have at the beginning of v1a a temporal expression in the form of a prepositional phrase: **עשר יום בו** **ובשנים עשר הוא-חדש אדר בשלושה**. This indicates the start of a new section in the narrative. The time for the events contained in the two decrees has arrived, as the phrase **הגיע דבר-המלך ודחו להעשות** shows (cf. also Holladay 1971:227). Verse 1a therefore announces the theme for section 9:1-19 and provides the immediate link between 8:1-17 and 9:1-19. **ביום** of v1b refers to **הוא-חדש אדר בשלושה עשר יום בו** of v1a and joins these clauses. It further identifies the 13th Adar as the day on which the enemies of the Jews had hoped (**שברו**) to gain the upper-hand over them. But, in contrast to this expectation, (ו) 'it was changed' (Haupt 1907-8:162). The day was transformed into one in which the Jews gained power over

those who hated them. So 9:1 presents the reversal as an accomplished fact '[b]y stating the scene's outcome at its beginning....' (Fox 1991:108), the remainder of the passage describes how it was accomplished (cf. Bush 1996:456-457). Verse 1 is also separated from the rest of the passage by the vocabulary (city, provinces, feast day, joy, rest), which dominates the remainder of the section. But its character as an introduction is evident from the fact that 9:1d and 9:5c end with the same phrase **בשנאיהם** (Bush 1996:451).

Chapter 9:2a, which begins the unit 9:2-5, has a perfect verb, niph'al 3 masculine plural, indicating the start of a new pericope. In addition, the pronominal suffixes **ו** and **הם** make reference to the Jews in v1b, thus linking v2a to v1. The first successes of the Jews over their enemies were gained in the provinces [cf. **בעריהם בכל-מדינות** (v2a), **-וכל** (v3), **בכל-המדינות** (4a)]. They accomplished this as they **נפּהלו** themselves. The verb **פּהל** means not merely to assemble on the 13th Adar, but to organise themselves in preparation for the 13th Adar, so that they are able to defend themselves and offer effective resistance against their enemies (Haupt 1907-8:158). It is important to note that the Jews were given power to defend themselves, even if that

defence took a violent form, but they were not given authority to go on the offensive, seek out those whom they believed hated them and then destroy them. They could act only against those who sought to harm them. The waw-conjunction of v2b expresses continuity with v2a. This clause reports the result of the organising activity of the Jews. The conjunction functions as a causal particle, namely, 'with the result that or so that'. The Jews in the provinces struck fear into their enemies and thus were able to over-power them easily. Here, their victory is attributed to what they themselves did. Verse 3a, via the waw-conjunction, gives the second way in which success was accomplished in the provinces. We are told that the various leaders of the provinces **אֲחֵי הַיְהוּדִים מִנְּשָׂאִים**, that is, they helped the Jews. We are not told how they were helped but it would seem best to understand this as non-interference on the part of the various leaders rather than direct support.

The reason for the behaviour of the leaders of the provinces is given in v3b-v4. We have three causal clauses (Bush 1996:457), each one introduced by **כִּי**. The first attributes the co-operation of the leaders of provinces to their fear of Mordecai. The remaining two reasons motivate the fear: firstly, the position of Mordecai: he is grand vizier; and

secondly, the news of his increasing greatness within the kingdom. Alternatively, the third כִּי can be taken as a particle introducing a substantive clause translated 'that', meaning the news which was spreading throughout the kingdom was that Mordecai was increasingly becoming greater and greater. Whichever way one understands the final causal particle, the net result is the same.

There are two interesting things to note here. We have the same causal clause repeated in 8:17b, 9:2b and 9:3b, suggesting a close link between 8:1-17 and 9:1-19:

- A כִּי־נפל פחד היהודים על־הם 8:17b  
 B כִּי־נפל־פחדם על־כל־העמים 9:2b  
 C כי נפל פחד־מרדכי עליהם 9:3b

We also have the same intertwining of the individual and the national referred to so often in that the success of the Jews in the provinces is attributed both to their own efforts as well as to the influence of Mordecai (see Bush 1996:456 for a contra view). The outcome of the organised resistance by the Jews in the provinces is recorded in v5a. The waw-consecutive indicates continuity with the preceding

vv2-4. As a result the Jews struck down their enemies with the sword and killed and destroyed them.

The pronominal suffixes ך and ם join v5b to v5a. This clause is not a separate result but expresses the previous result in a different way. The phrase כרצובם does not mean the Jews had *carte blanche*, for their behaviour was regulated by the decree issued in the name of the king. It means rather that they had gained the upper-hand over their enemies, and in this they were not hindered (Haupt 1907-8:163).

So, the decree of the king was carried out on 13 Adar, but the day was reversed from possible destruction of the Jews to one of victory for the Jews over their enemies. This happened first in the provinces.

Shushan the capital was the next place in which the Jews gained victory over their enemies according to the discourse starting at v6. The Jews mentioned in v5 are still under discussion as the ך suffix indicates. The same terminology for destroying their enemies, הרג and אבד, is used in v5 and v6, linking the verses. In addition, these terms are the same as those used in the decree itself, strengthening the link between 8:1-17 and 9:1-19. Haupt (1907-8:163) points out that הבירה is an addition 'due to scribal expansion'; the fight between the Jews and their assailants did not take place in the Acropolis, but

in the city of Shushan (cf. 1,2; 4,16; 9,12-15). But the term can also be regarded as a merismus, the part being used for the whole, so that in the context of Esther it refers to the capital city. This use of הבירה with and sometimes without שושן is very similar to the style of the narrator in the description of personal names, e.g. the king and King Ahasuerus, Esther and Esther the Queen, Mordecai and Mordecai the Jew, Haman and Haman the Agite (Bush 1996:474). Five hundred people are said to have been killed in the capital, Shushan. According to Fox (1991:110), the figure is a hyperbole but Alter (1992:85-106) believes the figure of five hundred is a real figure. The other event which took place in the capital is the death of the ten sons of Haman, 9:7-9. There have been various attempts to reconstruct the original forms of these names because it is believed that the existing forms have been corrupted. Concerning these attempts Haupt (1907-8:166) rightly remarks: 'All these explanations are, of course, entirely conjectural', since it is now impossible to reconstruct the original forms of the names (cf. also Davis 1995:327 n15). Moreover, in the context of the narrative, the original forms of the names are not significant anyway.

The verbal suffix ׀ joins 9:10a to 9:7-9; v10a is also epexegetical in relation to 9:7-9, giving the identity of the list of names in 9:7-9. This clause describes the fate of Haman's sons. Why does the

narrator specifically mention the names of Haman's sons? I think it is to stress the complete and utter fall of Haman (Bush 1996:475; Fox 1991:110). The terms used in the decree were of the total, complete and utter destruction of the Jews. Instead of this happening to the Jews, it now happens to Haman. This is another example of how 13 Adar was reversed (אָדָר וְנֶהְפֶּךָ, 9:1b) for the Jews. With the death of his sons Haman has no posterity and therefore also no memory and future, emphasising his utter destruction. The waw-conjunction in 9:10b is the bridge between it and v10a. The verbal suffix ך means the Jews. It is now said of them that they did not take the spoils. The spoils are that of the five hundred people killed in Shushan because, according to 8:1-2, Mordecai has already taken control of Haman's property. The fact that the Jews did not take the spoils confirms the qualification expressed in regard to the understanding of the term כְּרִצּוֹנָם in v5. They acted within the law and went even further by not doing all the law entitled them to do. They are portrayed as law-abiding citizens (cf. also 9:15b,17a). The success the Jews had in the provinces is repeated in the capital city, as the passage 9:6-10 demonstrates.

We have, for the first time (9:11-15), the direct involvement of the king since the carrying out of the **דבר-המלך ודחו** (9:1). The direct speech which depicts this intervention takes the form of a dialogue between the king and the queen. **ביום הוא**, v11 is a pre-verbal prepositional phrase starting a new part of the story. The discourse informs the king of the number of people killed in the capital, Shushan. Why the king was interested in the number of people killed, and by whom he was informed, we are not told. The king seems to show a lack of interest in fact that 'his own people' were being killed. But one has to remember that this was a war situation in which leaders tended to be less emotional about casualties. It also appears that the king had taken sides with the people of the queen. The king responds to this news in direct speech as the **ויאמר** of v12 shows. The nature of his speech takes the form of three questions (reminiscent of 5:3,6;7:2,5) introduced by the particle **מה**. The import of the last two questions is an offer of help by the king. For the first time the king takes sides. By this offer he declares his support for the queen and by implication for the Jews as well.

Esther responds with a twofold request (v13): a) She wants the king to issue an additional decree enabling



the Jews in Shushan to defend themselves for another day; and b) She wants the dead sons of Haman gibbeted.

Noteworthy in the response of Esther is that she ignores the king's question about the numbers killed in the provinces. She apparently was not as concerned as the king about the numbers. The first request might be motivated by the fact that the enemy's threat was greatest in the city; the second request was to expose Haman's family to humiliation. Regarding the possible motivation of Esther, Haupt (1907-8:160) says: '....the gibbeting of Haman's ten sons and the massacre in Shushan may have been necessary in order to prevent further anti-Jewish outbreaks. The personal safety of the Queen and the Grand Vizier made it necessary in Shusan to teach the enemies of the Jews a lesson' (cf. 2:21-23; Fox 1991:112; Davis 1995:330,331).

Chapter 9:14a, beginning with the direct speech marker **וַיֹּאמֶר**, records the reply of the king. He gives instructions that Esther's request be carried out. Verse 14b-c reports that what the king commanded, was carried out. The decree, making provision for an additional day for the Jews in the capital to defend themselves, was issued, and Haman's ten sons were gibbeted. Verse 15 forms the conclusion to this passage. In v14a it is said that **דַּת בְּשׁוּשָׁן וַתִּנְהַן**. What was decreed in v14b is now carried out.

In 9:12a the king asks the queen **מדנרת המלך מה עשו** **בשאר**. I pointed out that the queen ignores this question and does not answer it. Now, however, the answer to that question is given by the report to the palace (Fox 1991:113). The pre-verbal noun clause of v16a indicates that we have the start of a new unit. The focus of attention is the Jews in the remainder of the king's provinces. The first part of v16a is old information for we have already been told this in 9:2-5. The attention shifts from reporting the killing of their enemies to the celebration of the victory of the Jews in the provinces over their enemies. The difference between 9:2-5 and v16a is the mention of the number of Jews killed, namely, 75,000. BHS suggests that **נרה** be deleted. This makes for a much smoother reading of the verse. However, if **וחרג** is given the sense of 'having killed', namely, being understood as having the meaning of a participle, which meaning can be justified contextually, then **נרה** makes perfect sense as it now stands. The verse would then read: 'and to defend their lives and to rest from their enemies having killed seventy five thousand'. Verse 16b comments on the restraint shown by the Jews as they defend their lives. BHS also suggests that v16b and v17a be transposed. It is clear that v16b interrupts the flow of thought from v16-v17. We follow BHS at this point. Further, v17a states that the victory of the Jews in

the provinces was accomplished on 13th Adar, thus giving the time context for v16a-b.

Verse 17b contains the real point of 9:16-17, namely, that the Jews in the provinces celebrated on the 14th Adar. The rest took the form of feasting (מִשְׁחָה) and joy (שְׂמֵחָה). Chapter 9:16-17, which is discourse material, makes the point that in the provinces they celebrated the 14th Adar as the day on which to remember the victory of the Jews over their enemies. The geographical shift from the provinces to Shusan and the pre-verbal subject וְיְהוּדִים introduce a fresh unit of discourse in this section of the story. The information in v18a is old (cf. 9:6-10,13-15), and maintains a link with what has gone before (cf. Bandstra 1992:113-114). The clause states that the Jews in the city fought their enemies on the 13th and 14th Adar. This is in contrast to their fellows in the provinces who fought only on the 13th Adar. The waw-conjunction of v18b joins v18a and b. In contrast, the Jews in the city celebrated the 15th Adar as a day to remember the victory over their enemies. What we have then are two different feast days celebrating the same event. The main point of v18 is to highlight the day on which the Jews in the city celebrated the victory of Jewry over its enemies. Verse 19a starts with the causal particle עַל-כֵּן. It gives the reason for v18 grammatically, and for 9:16-17 contextually. Old information is

again given first to maintain continuity with 9:2-5, and 9:16-17. The Jews in the provinces are described as the Jews of **הפרוזים הישבים בערי הפרוזות**. The only difference with v17b is the addition of the expression 'and a good day'. It would appear, based on the discussion above that the purpose of vv16-19 is to provide the rationale for the celebration by the Jews in the provinces on the 14th Adar instead of the 15th Adar as their city counterparts did (Fox 1991:115).

Loader (1977:97-98) says that 'the principal events of division B are repeated summarily in pericope 13'.

This provides a link between pericopes 12 and 13. He continues: 'In the last place nexus also exists between pericopes 13 and 14. In this last pericope a chronicle-like conclusion formula is given. Balance is effected between Esther's prominence in section 13 and the prominence given to Mordecai in the last one [i.e. section14]'.

These remarks indicate the presence of chiasmus in pericopes 12-14 of the structure of Loader. It further makes for a link between the surface and deep structures of these pericopes.

The discussion of 9:20-10:3 which follows will make explicit the presence of chiastic-reversal in this part of the narrative as well.

The intervention of the king (9:12-14) brought about the situation in which Jewry celebrated her victory

over her enemies. This took place at two different times. It is obvious that such a situation would be untenable and would create major problems, confusion and disunity in the nation. Mordecai rectified this anomaly according to 9:20-28. The pericope narrates the authorised regularisation of the celebration of the Purim Feast as well as its origin and commemoration. The origin of the Purim Feast, according to this passage, does not come from Mordecai or any instruction given by him. It originates in the historical experience of the Jewish nation (9:26), an experience in which King Ahasuerus plays a pivotal role (9:25). Firstly, Mordecai in 9:20a sends instructions to the Jews dwelling in the provinces of the empire regarding the celebration of the Feast of Purim. The expression **אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים לַאֲלֹהֵי** points forward to 9:21-22 and not backwards to the preceding passage. This, plus the waw-consecutive, indicate the start of a new unit at 9:20. The Jews in the provinces do not celebrate Adar 15 like those in Shushan, the capital. According to 9:1-13 and 16-17a, the Jews in the capital, Shusan, and those in the provinces start to defend themselves against their enemies on the 13th day of Adar. But as a result of Esther's request, the Jews in Shusan, the capital, continue their defence on the 14th of Adar as well (9:15,18a). In contrast to this the Jews in the provinces celebrate their victory over their enemies

on the 14th day of Adar (9:17b,19). The Jews in Shushan on the other hand, celebrate the 15th day of Adar (9:18b). Mordecai writes to the Jews in the provinces (9:20-23) in order to rectify this anomaly, so that Jewry at the time, and in the future, will celebrate the 14th and 15th day of the month of Adar in memory of their victory over their enemies (we can also cf. Lacocque 1999:314, without accepting all he says). This is contra Fox (1991:117-119) who maintains that Mordecai's purpose in writing was 'that each locality should observe a single day....'. But there are several objections to this view: a) The text itself says that Mordecai wrote to encourage the Jews in the provinces 'to confirm upon themselves the celebration of the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day thereof....' (ibid 1991:116); b) The writing of Mordecai is addressed specifically to the Jews in the provinces, indicating where the problem lies; c) Fox (1991:117) says that Mordecai 'seeks to make it [the celebration] a regular institution', that is, regular in the sense of a two day celebration and regular in the sense of an unbroken national celebration. According to Fox (1991:121-123) 'The duty of celebrating the holiday on two days is stated so emphatically as to sound polemic, as if a contrary view or practice is being repudiated'. I think that this is indeed the case, and the contrary view is the celebration in the provinces of Purim on the 14th only. So Mordecai's

letters (9:20) are sent to establish uniformity in the celebration of the Feast of Purim. Chapter 9:21 records the content of Mordecai's instruction, namely, that they continue to keep the 14th of Adar but now also celebrate the 15th of Adar as a feast day.

We have in 9:22 a description of the symbolism of 14 and 15 Adar, i.e. their rest from their enemies, while the month itself reminds them of the reversal of their situation (Fox 1991:118; Davis 1995:340). These days are to be days of feasting, rejoicing, sharing of gifts with each other and caring for the poor. Verse 23 forms the conclusion. It points to the obedience of the Jews in the provinces to the instructions of Mordecai. The waw-conjunction at the beginning of v23 is disjunctive in relation to v22 and v23a and b is linked via two parallel syntactic structures:

v23a            אשר-החלו לעשות

v23b           אשר-כתב מרדכי אליהם

In addition, the pronominal suffix ך in v23a and the pronominal suffix ם in v23b link them with each other. Furthermore, symmetry is provided by the parallelism between 9:20a and 9:23b as follows:

9:20a ויכתב מרדכי

9:23b כתב מרדכי

We therefore have in 9:20-23 the *celebration* of Purim as the dominant idea. Day (1995:160,161) states that Mordecai 'establish....the precise times Purim is to be celebrated and the feasting and the acts of benevolence to be performed'. The celebratory emphasis comes to the fore also in the vocabulary of these verses: **מיגון לשמחה, נהפך להם, נחו בהם**, **ומאכל ליום טוב** (v22a), and all of v22b. Mordecai's instruction seeks to ensure that there is *uniformity in the celebration* of the Feast of Purim in the capital, Shusan, and the provinces. The celebration motif and the syntax bind 9:20-23 into a close-knit unit.

The next unit deals with the key role played by the king in the origin of the Purim Feast. The unity of 9:24-26a and its centrality in the passage 9:20-28 are evident from the following: firstly, the causal particle 'for' (**כי**) links v24 to 9:20-23 and not just to 9:23. It gives the reason for the celebration authorised and regularised by Mordecai's instruction contained in his letters (9:20). But the fronting of the subject 'Haman son of Hammadat the Hagite' separates v24a from v20-23, making the latter the start of a new unit; secondly, v24b describes the plotting of Haman and v24c tells how he is to carry



out his plot. The waw-conjunction of v24c links v24c to v24a and b. The phrase **הוא הגורל** defines the antecedent **פור** and explains that **פור** means 'that which decides the fate of a person or a thing'. The use of the phrase **להמם ולאבדם** points to the complete, utter and entire destruction of the Jews, since both verbs are semantically parallel. This phrase parallels **כל-היהודים** in 9:24a. The placement of the object **פור** immediately after **והפיל** (v24c) means that the subject of v24a is implicit in v24c, namely, Haman. By means of the latter two elements symmetry is given to v24a,b, and c; thirdly, v25 is contrasted with v24 as the 'but' indicates. The temporal prepositional phrase means that at v25a we have the start of a new unit. **המלך** is the subject of the clause confirming the start of a separate unit. The king issues a decree, (**אמר עם-הספר**) which reverses (**ישוב...ראשו**) the situation of the Jews. Haman (reaching back to 7:9-10) and his sons (9:13-14) are hanged in the capital, v25b. The latter links back to v25a as the carrying out of the imperative (**ישוב**). The king's command is done. The waw-conjunction of v25b conjoins v25a and b. The written decree of the king is at the heart of the reversal of the fortunes of the Jewish nation. It is evident from this clause that the role of the king in the reversal of the Jews' circumstances is pivotal for the narrator (Davis 1995:342). Finally, 9:26a concludes



the unit with the conclusionary particle **על-כן** (therefore). It states that the 14th and 15th days of Adar derive their names linguistically from the word 'Pur' (**על-שם הפור**), but also historically from the life-situation of the Jews, a situation reversed by the decisive action of the king. As a result of the king's action the danger facing the Jews is averted. For through the action of the king, Haman's scheme is turned on his own head. According to this half-verse then the *origin* of the Feast of Purim has both linguistic as well as historical roots. Pur which normally carries the meaning of 'that which decides the fate of a thing or a person' is given a new meaning through a historical experience as Fox (1991:121) confirms by stating that '[t]he Jews take the obligations of Purim upon themselves and their descendants for two reasons: Mordecai's epistle and *their own awareness of recent events...[t]he Purim grows out of their suffering and their joy*' (my emphasis; see also Cohen 1974:87-94).

The Jews in the provinces can celebrate since Haman, the arch-enemy of the Jews, is dead because the king ensured that the plot of the arch-enemy of the Jews came to naught by acting decisively. Symmetry is given to 9:24-26a by the repetition of the causal particles **כי** in v24, and the **על-כן** of 26a, making v24 and v26a a closely knitted unit, with the dominant idea of the origin of the Purim Feast and the pivotal role played by the king in its origin.

In section 9:26b-28 the Purim Feast is instituted as part of the cultus of the nation. The waw-conjunction (ו) of v26c does not join v26c to v26a and b but rather joins v26c to v26b. The causal particle כִּן־עַל, moreover, points forward (Bush 1996:484; Davis 1995:345). A twofold rationale is now provided for what follows in vv27-28. In these verses the *cultic commemoration* of the Feast of Purim is described since '[t]he days will be commemorated everywhere for forever' (Bush 1996:484; Davis 1995:342,346; Fox 1991:142). Verse 26b and c gives the reason for such commemoration. According to it the reasons are: a) 9:26b the decree of the king received through Mordecai (cf. v20b,25); b) 9:26c their own personal experience (Bush 1996:484; Davis 1995:345).

A new unit starts at 9:27. The explicit subject הִיהוּדִים in post-verbal position indicates this. The verse describes the commitment made by the Jews for themselves, their descendants and all those joined to them. It is stated negatively in v27, repeated positively in v28a, and stated negatively again in v28b. Verse v27-28 more importantly describes the commemoration of the Purim feast, the celebration of which the Jews committed themselves to. It becomes a national event in the cultic calendar and faith of the Jewish nation. The vocabulary of 9:27-28 also points to the commemoration of the Purim Feast, for example: 'custom' v27, 'descendants' v27,

'celebrate... according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually' v27; 'remembered' v28, 'celebrated throughout every generation, family' v28, 'Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants' v28. Structurally, the passage can be represented as follows:

A v27b ולא יעבור להיות עשים את שני הימים האלה (n)

B v28a והימים האלה נזכרים ונעשי (p)

A v28b וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו (n)

The structure places the remembrance and the keeping of these days centrally, thus putting the focus on the commemoration of the Purim Feast (Day 1995:162). Verses 26b-28 is a unity with the dominant idea that Purim should be perpetually remembered. On the basis of this discussion, 9:20-28 can be structured as follows:

A 9:20-23 Regularised celebration of Purim

B 9:24-26a Ahasuerus's role in the origin of  
Purim

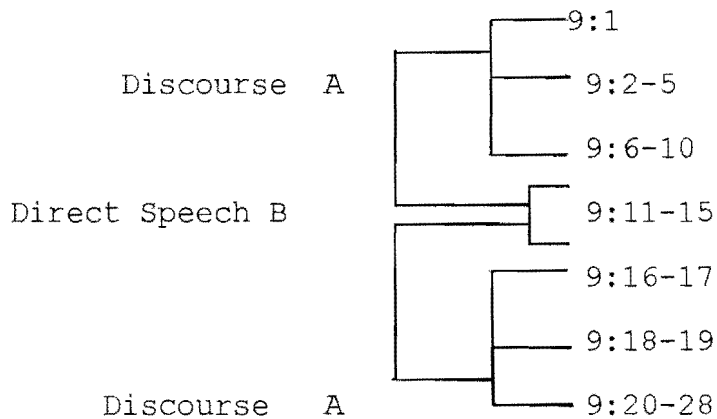
A' 9:26b-28 Commemoration of Purim

A and A' are *cultic* in nature, whereas B is *historical* in nature. The religious and the

historical are intertwined in the narrator's explanation of the origin of the Purim Feast (cf. Murphy 1981:169).

### Summary

The discussion above shows clearly that chiasmic-reversal is also present in 9:20-28. Moreover, given the type of material found in this section (Fox 1991:122), its structure can be set out as follows:



The events of 9:1-10 lead to 9:1-15 and the events of 9:16-28 flow from 9:11-15.

### 3.2 The Power relations: Ahasuerus, Esther and Mordecai 9:29-10:3

In this part of the story (9:29-10:3) we have a repeat of the instructions regarding the keeping of the Purim Feast. This time around, however, the sending of the instructions serves a different function since it is placed in a different context

by the narrator, namely, the context of the exercise of power and authority. The passage narrates the relationship of Ahasuerus, Mordecai and Esther to each other. The concept of power is used as the key to the discussion of this relationship. The issue is the authorisation of certain activities by Ahasuerus on the one hand, and Mordecai and Esther on the other. In commenting on 8:8, in which verse the king commands both Esther and Mordecai, Day (1995:144-145,150,163-164) says '[h]e appears more authoritarian and she more under his control....the king allows Esther and Mordecai to give orders just about the Jews ("write concerning the Jews" **היהודים' על**)'. The idea of authority is present in 8:1-2, 8:7-8 and 9:28-10:3, providing a link between chapter 8 and chapter 9:28-10:3. It will further be seen that the principle of chiastic-reversal is present in this passage also.

Chapter 9:29 begins a new section. **ויאמר**, is in the initial position in the clause and the explicit subject **מרדכי היהודי...אסתר המלכה**, follows the verb. Verse 29b is linked to v29a by the fronting of a verbal complement, i.e. **ל** + Qal infinitive construct, which gives the purpose for the writing of Esther the Queen and Mordecai the Jew in v29a. We have a singular verb governing a composite subject, Esther the Queen and Mordecai the Jew, thus placing Esther and Mordecai on the same level as far as power is concerned. They act together yet individually as



the qualification **בת-אביחיל** indicates. The post-verbal position of the object **ספרים** marks v30a off as independent, but **וישלח** marks the continuation of v30a with v29.

The verb is singular, making a direct link with Mordecai the Jew of v29b. This clause (v30a) states that it was Mordecai who sent the letter, but it was written by both him and Esther (v29) to the Jews of the empire. Verse 30b is a construct plural phrase which qualifies **ספרים** in v30a, and so links v30a and b. Notice here that the adjectival phrase which qualifies **ספרים** is displaced from its normal position, that is, following the noun it qualifies, to a final position, thus drawing attention to the nature and character of the letters. Given this, it can be concluded that v30 describes Mordecai as acting independently, and that the **ספרים** sent by him was different from the 'writing' referred to in v29a. For the content of his writing is **דברי שלום ואמה** (v30b), whereas the writing of v29a concerns the **דברי הפרים האלה** (v32a). The parallelism between v29b and v31a points in the direction of the separateness of v30 and thus the independent action of Mordecai. Verse 31a repeats the purpose of the letter sent by Mordecai and Esther as the **ל** + Qal infinitive construction shows. It was to confirm the keeping of the days of Purim at their set times.

This confirmation is in keeping with the **קימו** (v31a), or the enjoining upon them by Mordecai the Jew and Esther the Queen (v29a). It is also in keeping with their previous decision to undertake to enjoin themselves and their descendants **וועקתם** **דברי הצמות** (cf. 9:27-28). The **ו** of v31a points back to v27-28, i.e. the Jews. Moreover, the nominal clause of v31b is the direct object of **קימו** of v31a. In this way v31a and b are linked. The initial position of the nominal clause describing the subject marks v32a off as the beginning a new unit. Yet it is continuous with v31 since both share the same subject, viz. Esther. The focus of v31 is the command (decree) of Esther confirming the **הפורים האלה** **דברי**, which is then recorded as a permanent record. Here we see that '[h]er writing and establishing regulations is an act of authority, for she does so in total power and strength. Esther is commanding in this narrative. And the effects of her directive extend the greatest distance, over the Jews throughout the entire kingdom' (Day 1995:163). In matters royal she is senior to Mordecai. On this issue Fuerst (1975:66), commenting on 4:17 says '[a] slight, but important touch in the narrative comes with the inversion of roles; heretofore the advisor and guide, Mordecai leaves to follow Esther's order. Did the author deliberately place together the compliance of someone powerful and dominant....?' The answer is yes (cf. Day 1995:51; also Fox 1991:91;



8:1-2).

The power relationship between Esther and Mordecai is illustrated by the diagram below:

A Esther the Queen 9:29a  
 B Mordecai the Jew  
 B he (Mordecai the Jew) 9:29b-31b  
 B Mordecai the Jew  
 A Esther the Queen  
 A Esther (the Queen) 9:31c-32

Noteworthy about this diagram is the manner in which reference is made to Esther and Mordecai. She is referred to by her royal title, and he by his ethnic and national title (Bush 1996:474; Clines 1990:50).

As an inclusion it also points to Esther's dominance. The section 9:29-9:32 is dominated by decrees and letters as the various words for 'written document' demonstrate: **וּתְכַתֵּב** (v29), **אִגְרָת** (v29b), **סְפָרִים** (v30a), **וּמֵאִמָּר** (v32a), **וּנְכַתֵּב** (v32b). The purpose of this is to focus the attention on the power and authority of the written documents (cf. Bal 1989:77-102), or even better, the power and authority of those who stand *behind* the written documents. This is evident from the phrase **אֶת-כָּל-תְּקֵף** (v29a). The expression **תְּקֵף** is found again in 10:2a, the only two places that it appears in the narrative. The issue seems to be the *authority and power of Esther and Mordecai*, in that Esther is more powerful than Mordecai in matters royal (Bush 1996:492; Fox

1991:124-128).

Chapter 10:1 is discontinuous in relation to v32b. The post-verbal explicit subject **המלך אחשורוש** indicates the start of a new unit. Yet the **וישם** points to the continuity of this unit with the preceding section of the narrative. It describes the taxing of the 'earth' and the 'islands' by Ahasuerus. The scope of the taxation points to Ahasuerus's power and greatness (Bush 1996:495; Fox 1991:130). It also links this Chapter to Chapter One which also mentions the vast territory ruled by Ahasuerus. According to Daube (1946-47:139-147; Fox 1991:129) the tax of Chapter 10 is declared to make up for the tax the king refused from Haman in Chapter 3, thus providing a link between Chapters 10 and 3. Verse 2a commences with a waw-conjunction making it disjunctive in relation to v1. The clause discusses the deeds which express his power, strength, and might. One illustration is the act by which Ahasuerus made Mordecai great (8:15). Verse 2b is linked to 2a by the masculine plural pronominal suffix **הם**, which points back to **מעשה** and **ופרשת** of v2a. The latter is recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. Chapter 10:1 and 2 are also linked by the parallel expressions, **על-הארץ ואיי הים** (v1a) and **למלכי מדי ופרס** (v2b). This gives symmetry and 10:1 and 2 form an inclusion. The theme of 10:1 and 2 is, therefore, the power, authority and greatness of the

king.

A new unit starts at 10:3 because it has a new subject, Mordecai the Jew. The ם can be translated 'and' at this point.

Noticeable is the absence of the expression 'Esther the Queen', because previous to this the phrases 'Mordecai the Jew' and 'Esther the Queen' occurred together. This absence means that the spotlight falls on Mordecai alone. It is his standing in the Jewish nation which is discussed here. In the kingdom he may rank second (10:3a), but among the Jews he is the greatest, greater even than Esther (Day 1995:151). For although in matters of the kingdom they may share equal power, she as queen and he as premier (vizier); in matters relating to the Jews per se, Mordecai is on his own, more powerful than Esther, but not more powerful than the king, for Day (1995:150) rightly states that '[s]he, along with Mordecai, controls orders written for Jews only, not for the entire population of the kingdom' (cf. also Fox 1991:130). The terms אֲחִיו and זָרְעוֹ are not biological but ethnic terms referring to the Jews. They are synonyms for לְעַמּוֹ (v3b). Whereas Esther appears to be superior in power and authority to Mordecai in 9:29-32, here in 10:3 he is on his own; *Mordecai has unequalled power and authority* in relation to those matters affecting the Jews as a nation (Fox 1991:117).

Thus we have in 9:29-10:3 a chiastic *comparison* of the power and authority of Esther and Mordecai in relation to the king as Davis (1995:352) correctly suggests saying, '[t]he author of the book of Esther makes a contrasting interposition in 10:3 to highlight the different natures of two powerful leaders'. This comparison is expressed by means of actions they are able to take. Whereas Esther and Mordecai have relative authority, the king can act authoritatively in respect of the whole kingdom, inclusive of the Jewish nation which is of course part of the kingdom. He has absolute authority (Day 1995:352). This comparison is reflected in the arrangement of the passage set out below:

- A 9:29-32 The Power of Esther the Queen
- B 10:1-2 The Absolute Power of Ahasuerus
- A 10:3 The Power of Mordecai the Jew

Based on what was said above it is evident that 9:29-10:3 is also organised according to chiastic-reversal which dominates the story of Esther; a fact not usually noted as exemplified by Davis (1995) who finds chiasmus in the whole narrative, except 9:20-10:3.

#### Concluding Summary

Analysis seeks to unfold the development of the plot of a story. The models discussed in the previous and

present chapters are ample evidence of this. These models show that chiastic-reversal is a key structural principle in the Esther narrative. This chapter in particular demonstrates that chiastic-reversal is present in 1:1-2:20, 2:21-8:17, and 9:1-10:3. In these cycles of the narrative we also encounter the three main reversals in the narrative, namely, Vashti-Esther, Haman-Mordecai, and Jews-Enemies. This in turn points to the very close link between plot and narrative characters. It is not surprising therefore to find that characters are intrinsic to each of the macro-reversals which describe the turn-about of the fortunes and destiny of the main characters. Adequate attention has not, however, been given to the link of character and chiastic-reversal in Esther. Mention of it is virtually non-existent. In fact, I know of only one reference to it, that is, the comment by Berg (1979:119, note 42), who says: 'Finally, note the ironical role of Harbona, who appears in 1:10 and 7:9. [In 1:10 he] was among those sent to bring Vashti, thus beginning the series of events that led to Esther's rise. [In 7:9 he] re-appears .... in the narrative to suggest the means to Haman's demise. *He thereby plays his own small role in reversing the fortunes of the main characters*' (my emphasis).

Our analysis and discussion of the structure of Esther, using the Cyclical Model, demonstrate that



chiastic-reversal is intrinsic to the Esther narrative from chapter 1:1 to chapter 10:3. It further shows that a critical aspect of chiasmus in the Esther narrative is the reversal of the fortunes and destiny of the main characters, namely, Vashti-Esther, Haman-Mordecai and Jews-Enemies. Characterisation is therefore a very important part of chiastic-reversal in Esther.

This analysis and discussion support the claim of Radday (1973:6) 'that the narrative parts of Scripture are chiastically constructed; and that this claim holds....for single books'. We have a fine example of this in the Esther narrative.