

A LITERARY COMPARISON BETWEEN THE PRAYERS OF ESTHER (LXX) AND JUDITH¹

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Abstract

In this article the author compares the LXX prayers of Esther and Judith, paying special attention to structure and style. The LXX book of Esther is briefly compared to Judith in terms of their setting and Wirkungsgeschichte. Working from this point of departure, the author then moves to a comparison in structure and style of the prayers. The aim is to show that these two prayers (1) reveal a largely similar structure, and (2) represent a certain forensic process; (3) that these features may have been shared and (4) revised (5) to fit the specific context and (6) to suit the textual strategy of each author.

1. Introduction

Of all of the commonalities between the LXX Esther and Judith that have been pointed out by scholars such as Zeitlin (1972:1-37) – who also notes the sharp difference in religiosity – those found in a comparison between the prayers of Esther (Est 4:17.11-26)² and Judith (Jdt 9) are probably among the most important. Both these stories have a rich tradition behind them. The LXX literary tradition of Esther, as Zeitlin (1972:14-21) argues, may in fact have leaned strongly on that of Judith. In Zeitlin's (1972:15-21) view the additions to Esther may have been composed to give new authority to the old Hebrew text. He even goes so far as to identify the additions to Esther as some kind of

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² The numbering here followed is according to Rahlfs' edition of the LXX. Some translations (e.g. KJV Apocrypha) number the additions to the Hebrew version of Esther, from 10.17. Other scholars, however, number the additions from A to F. According to the first, the prayer of Judith is Est 14 and according to the second, it is Addition C.

polemical event against the Greek text of Judith. Interestingly, Josephus (*Ant.* 11.6.8) gives an account of Esther that is much more similar to the LXX than to the Hebrew version of Esther.³

These are just some of the characteristics that make these two narratives very interesting and will thus receive some attention in this study. Due to limited space, this article will not endeavour to extend the comparison to the form of these prayers, nor to their socio-historical background.⁴ This study will only be a starting point for further research by the present author towards an extensive comparison of the prayers of Esther (LXX) and Judith. The present study will therefore limit its focus to a literary comparison between the prayers in terms of their structure and style. Attention will be given especially to the commonalities and differences between these two texts, in order to form a picture of the possible literary relationship between the prayer of Esther and that of Judith.

2. The Narratives of Esther and Judith

The LXX Esther and the book of Judith contain so many references that are congruent to each other, that many scholars suppose one of the books to be neutralization for the other. One of these scholars is Zeitlin (1972: 14), who argues that Judith must be seen as the neutralization for Esther; however, this may not be the only explanation for the similarities in these two narratives. It is clear from the texts that both Esther and Judith have the same plot, both intending to encourage the Judaeans in a time of severe distress. The greater message, then: God is omnipotent and will help Israel at all times. Times of trial only serve to reprimand the people (Zeitlin 1972: 2-7, 13-15).

Zeitlin (1972: 13-15) sketches the contrasts between the characters of Esther and Judith, and notes that the contrasts between the two heroines are fundamental. This is certainly true, although, as will be shown in this study, there are just as many similarities between Judith and Esther as there are contrasts. This, however, points to the fact that these texts may have their origins in polemical grounds of existence. It is commonly known that the canonisation of Esther was a very controversial issue, so much so that Luther very much doubted whether to include this text in the Protestant Canon. Although the extent of the canonisation will not be discussed in this study,⁵ it is important to know that even in the 2nd and 1st century BCE, this was a hotly debated issue amongst Judaeans. Having noted this, Craven (1977: 75-101) states that the Greek version may have been written to give the original Hebrew version a more religious colour, and that it may even have been

³ Cf. Bickerman (1950:488-520).

⁴ Future studies will be made by the present author in concern of these aspects. A comparison, for instance, of the form of the prayers of Esther and Judith towards each other as well as with other Second Temple LXX prayer texts and Qumran prayer texts, will be made. A further study will also concern the socio-historical background of the prayers of Esther and Judith in which a possible connection of the events of the Maccabean crisis will be discussed.

⁵ For further information on the inclusion of Esther in the Hebrew canon, see: Gottwald (1985) and Zeitlin (1972:21-24). Also cf. Craven (1983:50-52) for information on the relation of Judith to its canonical counterparts: Ruth and Esther.

translated with these additions as a neutralization following the text of Judith. As noted earlier, Josephus, who wrote his *Antiquities of the Jews* in the 1st century CE, certainly knew the LXX version of Esther, which included the additions to Esther (*Ant.* 11.6.8).⁶

Judith is portrayed as a devout woman, a truly religious person, aware of the presence of God in her life. She is depicted as a true heroine, not fearing or caring for her own life, but she only has concern for the lives of her townsfolk, and ultimately for that of her people. She is the one facing Uzziah⁷ and the two magistrates of the town, reprimanding them and calling on them to give her the chance to resolve the situation within the five days which they have set as limit for surrendering to Holophernes. She is thus a strong woman, meant to be religiously strong, a true inspiration for the people of Israel.⁸

Esther, on the other hand, is portrayed as a meek woman. Upon learning of the severe distress of her people, she at first does not want to intercede, but Mardocheus⁹ quickly reminds her that she is to be loyal to the God who has

⁶ This information also sets the *terminus ad quem* for the finalization of the LXX Esther, or, as they are commonly known, the Additions to Esther.

⁷ Uzziah is pictured as the chieftain of the town. We have no clear indication of who this Uzziah may be. The name may refer back to the King of Judah, son of Uriel, reigning from 787-735 BCE. Joiakim is referred to as the high priest at that time in Jerusalem. The high priest referred to here, may be the same Joiakim as the high priest referred to in Nehemiah 12:10, 12, 26. There is, however, another reference to Uzziah in Ezra 10:21. This Uzziah was a priest who had to divorce his wife, as he was a gentile. The events of Ezra-Nehemiah are parallel and thus it may be true that this is a correct reference found in Judith. But this is not enough, as in Jdt.8.21 and 9.8b, mention is made of the defilement of the Temple and the Altar, an event that could only be associated with the Maccabean Crisis (162-161 BCE). Metzger (1972:50) notes that many of the events teem with historical, chronological, and geographical improbabilities. The most obvious historical mistake concerns Nebuchadnezzar, who was not king of the Assyrians, neither had he reigned in Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of the Babylonians, and not of Assyria. It fell seven years (612 BCE) before the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (602-562 BCE) (cf. Metzger 1969:51; Charles 1913:245; Dancy 1972:68-69; Zeitlin 1972:29). Another critical mistake is that Nebuchadnezzar never made war against Ecbatana, nor did he capture Media. Bethulia is also a town that is not known from any other source or from any geographical evidence. Finally, the story refers to rule under a high priest and of a Sanhedrin (6:6-14; 15:8), which could only have been true in a post-exilic historical setting. It is thus clear that the text could not be taken seriously when it concerns historical correctness, but it did have some meaning to encourage the Jews to patriotism for their faith and their nation in a time of great distress, the supposed time being 162-161 BCE (the time of the invasion of Nicanor and Judas Maccabaeus's victory over him; cf. Zeitlin (1972:26-31) for the dating of the text), when the Temple and Altar were defiled (cf. Jdt 9:8; Metzger 1969:50-51; Charles 1913:245-246; Dancy 1972:67-68; Zeitlin 1972:27-28).

To learn more of the origin, the date, the nature of the additions and other related themes, cf. Dancy (1972); Charles (1913); Nickelsburg (1981); and Gottwald (1985:15).

⁸ H. Efthimiadis-Keith has a very interesting view of Judith. She uses the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Hudson and Jacot, in identifying the characteristics of Judith, and especially in her role as female against the sexual attitudes towards women as 'the other.' She also refers to Judith as a very strong character, with her driving force being the knowledge that if she does not act against their enemies, her own people will perish in this war (1999:220). For more information, see Efthimiadis-Keith (1999:211-228).

⁹ Mardocheus is the Greek transliteration for Mordecai.

made her queen in the first place. His address in 4:14¹⁰ comes very near to blackmail, but is effective in bringing Esther to the understanding that this may be the reason that she was made queen, for this day and event (4:14), namely for her to make an appeal to the king to bring justice to the people of God. She did not have the courage for self-sacrifice. She also ate at the table of King Ahasueros¹¹ and she lived with the pagan king – all characteristics that do not at first glance appear to be that of a very strong and pious woman, or even a very religious woman.

These differences, and the fact that the plots of both stories are so much alike, should be kept in mind as we shift our focus to a smaller unit of both texts, namely the prayers offered to God before Esther and Judith take action. The comparison will show how these differences and similarities are visible even in their prayers.

3. The structure of the prayers compared

3.1. *The Setting (Est 4:17.11 and Jdt 9:1)*

The introductory verses of the two prayers are alike. Both verses show the humiliating and humbling of the characters who are about to enter into prayer to God. Below is a comparison between these verses introducing the prayers of Esther and Judith.

Esther 4:17.11		Judith 9:1	
<i>Ἑσθήρ ἡ βασίλισσα</i>		<i>Χήρα</i>	
1	καὶ Ἑσθήρ ἡ βασίλισσα κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον	1	Ἰουδιθ δὲ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ ¹² πρόσωπον
1.1	ἐν ἀγῶνι θανάτου κατειλημμένη		
		2	καὶ ἐπέθετο σποδὸν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς
2.1	καὶ ἀφελομένη τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς δόξης αὐτῆς	3	
2	ἐνεδύσατο ἱμάτια στενοχωρίας καὶ πένθους	3.1	ὃν ἐνεδεδύκει σάκκον
3.1	καὶ ἀντὶ τῶν ὑπερηφάνων ἡδυσμάτων		
3	σποδοῦ καὶ κοπριῶν ἔπλησεν τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς		
		4+4.1	καὶ ἦν ἄρτι προσφερόμενον ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ θυμίαμα τῆς ἑσπέρας ἐκείνης

¹⁰ 'No; if you persist in remaining silent at such a time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, but both you and your father's whole family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the throne for just such a time as this.' Est 4:14: *New Jerusalem Bible*.

¹¹ Ahasueros in the Hebrew version of Esther, usually associated with Xerxes, but specifically called Artaxerxes in the Greek version (Metzger 1969:137).

¹² It takes the accusative in response to the question 'whither?' (Blass, Debrunner & Funk 1961:177).

Esther 4:17.11		Judith 9:1	
<i>Ἐσθήρ ἡ βασίλισσα</i>		<i>Χήρα</i>	
4	καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς ἔταπεινώσεν σφόδρα		
4.1	καὶ πάντα τόπον κόσμου ἀγαλλιάματος αὐτῆς ἔπλησε στρεπτῶν τριχῶν αὐτῆς		
5+6	καὶ ἐδεῖτο κυρίου θεοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ εἶπεν	5+6	καὶ ἐβόησεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ Ἰουδὶθ πρὸς κύριον καὶ εἶπεν

The above analysis clearly shows both the similarities and differences in structure between these two prayers. Both authors start by identifying the characters and their actions. Esther, after sending a messenger to Mardochaeus telling him to gather as many Judaeans in Susa as possible, goes back to her chambers. She is now in distress (col¹³ 1.1) because of what she has heard from Mardochaeus and perhaps also very much afraid of what might happen to her. She ‘takes refuge with the Lord’ (Est 4:17.11), realizing the agony of her own situation and that of her people. Judith, now in the chamber where she has spent most of her time mourning her husband’s death, and after sending the two magistrates away along with Uzziah, ‘fell on her face’ (col 1). It is clear that the intention of the authors of the prayers is the same, namely that the characters humble themselves before praying to God by means of a mourning rite.¹⁴ The author of Esther does seem to be concerned with pointing out the bitter distress that Esther finds herself in. The author accomplishes this by adding the participial clause (col 1.1). The author of Judith, on the other hand, does not have to do this, as in col 3.1 it is clear that Judith was a woman who was already in mourning. The difference now is that she is not mourning her husband anymore as much as she is mourning the bitter distress in which the people of her town find themselves.

It is also important to note the choice of words of the authors concerning the way in which Esther and Judith humble themselves in the first colon. The Greek phrase *Ἐσθήρ ἡ βασίλισσα κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον* is used in Esther; and *Ἰουδὶθ δὲ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον* is used for Judith. The phrase used in Esther is used emphatically to indicate her utter distress, of course linking with the relative clause of col 1.1. This phrase is closely related to the character of Esther, which, we have seen, was not specifically one of bravery. Also note that Esther, the queen – a woman of high status – ‘fled’ (*κατέφυγεν*) to the Lord; once again putting emphasis on Esther’s utter meekness and distress. The phrase used in col 1 of Judith, however, draws attention to a woman who has been in the presence of God in her mourning for some time. Judith simply falls on her face (*ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον*), clearly demonstrating this point. Her actions in the rest of verse 1 support this, as will presently be discussed.

¹³ This refers to the first colon, as numbered in the table above.

¹⁴ Cf. Du Plessis (1988) for information about the use of the mourning rite in the Bible. Also cf. Anderson (1999); and Craven (1983:53-54) where she gives a layout of the model of lament regularly followed by Israelites to take their stressful situation to God. This includes: (i) an address to God; (ii) a complaint; (iii) a petition; (iv) an expression of trust; (v) a word of assurance; and (vi) a vow.

The second parallel between the setting of Esther's and Judith's prayer is seen in the clothes that Esther and Judith put on, or merely take off. The author of Judith, in the clearness of attention to detail, wants to continue enforcing the picture of the pious widow, and does this by stating that Judith merely takes off the clothes (col 3) that she was wearing over the sackcloth in which she was already dressed (col 3.1). Note also that the aorist is used: ἐγύμνωσεν "she stripped naked". The relative clause in col 3.1 is then added with the verb in the pluperfect (ὄν ἐνεδεδύκει σάκκον "the sack that she had been wearing"). Here the pluperfect has the combined function of the aorist perfect (Blass, Debrunner & Funk 1961:177), thus: "she had been wearing." This form thus suggests continuity in the mourning of Judith. Esther is not to be considered in the same light as Judith, and she "rips off her glorious robes," giving emphasis to the fact that Esther was a character considered to be of high stature with the adjectival genitive τῆς δόξης used here, and this, of course, was due to the fact that she was queen. Note the stark difference in the authors' way of illustrating the removal of clothes. Esther 'rips off' her clothes, to put on her clothes for mourning (col 2), whilst in Judith, she already has her mourning clothes on (col 3.1). The verb in col 2.1 of Esther, being the same verb used in Judith (but note: Esther has the verb ἐνδύω in the aorist middle), may be translated with "to put on",¹⁵ further illustrating what is clear from the setting of the prayer in the rest of the book, that Esther is not to be regarded as a woman who was in a continuous state of mourning.

The third point of comparison is seen in colons 3-3.1 of Esther and col 2 of Judith. It is interesting to note that in Judith the author has her scattering ashes onto her head before taking off her clothes which she wore over the sack; whilst Esther rips off her clothes first, and only after putting on other clothes, more appropriate for her mourning, does she 'fill her head with ashes'. The author of Esther seems to exaggerate the humiliation of Esther at this point, for not only did she 'rip off'¹⁶ her clothes, not only does she fill her head with ashes, but she also fills it with dung. A further peculiarity in the intention of the authors is to be noted in the movement of events. Judith seems to have no concern as to first take off her normal clothes before scattering the ashes on her head. In Esther it seems to be clearly indicated that the 'ripping off' (col 2.1) of her clothes had to take place before she filled her head with the ashes and dung. Note then how the author describes the clothes of Esther with the phrase τὰ

¹⁵ Cf. Blass, Debrunner & Funk (1961:166) on the use of the middle in the sense of "to let oneself be".

¹⁶ Louw & Nida (1988:13.38) explains the meaning of the verb ἀφαιρέω as "to put away", "take away", "do away with" 'concerned with putting or taking something away from its normal position – "to put away", "to put out of way", "to remove".' However, the intention of the author of Esther clearly is to over-emphasize the humiliation of Esther, thus the verb should be translated with "ripped off". The verb ἀφαιρέω could also mean "take away", "remove" (Newman (1971, 1993)), however, in this context, it seems that the antithesis between the "glorious robes" (τα. ἰματία θῆ/δου, χη/αὐθῆ/ς) and "clothes of calamity and mourning" (ἱμάτια στενοχωρίας καὶ πένθους) should be noted here and the translation should thus be "ripped off," keeping this antithetical emphasis. The purpose of this Strophe is to say something about the humiliation Esther has gone through and a translation "took off" just does not have the same power as "ripped off" here in demonstrating her deep humiliation.

ἱμάτια τῆς δόξης αὐτῆς (“her clothes of glory”), once again giving emphasis to the character of Esther as queen. It seems to be quite logical that Esther should at least have some concern for the clothes that she was wearing and therefore had to take it off first, as doing dishonour to her clothes would be to do dishonour to her seat as queen, which is quite ironic, as she is about to enter the chamber of the King without permission, which may have the same effect.¹⁷

The text of Judith, much more concerned with the image of Judith as the pious widow, then states the time of these events taking place, in preparation of her prayer. According to Van den Eynde (2004:226), Judith’s prayer is set in line with the concerns of her people. He states that the actions of falling upon her face, putting ashes upon her head, and stripping her clothes off to the sackcloth she was wearing, are similar to the actions taken in prayer by the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Jdt 4:11-12). For the same reason she also prays at the time at which the evening incense was being burned in the temple in Jerusalem, all fitting the image of a pious widow.

In Esther the first part of verse 1 (4:17.11) closes with the same idea found in colon 1, which is also parallel to colon 1 of Judith, Esther lowering herself to the ground (col 4), once again humiliating herself even more by cutting her hair (col 4.1). Colon 1 forms an *inclusio* with colon 4-4.1, thus promoting a neat structural unit.

The last point of comparison concerns the way that Judith and Esther call on God in prayer. In Esther (col 5) *evdei/to*, an imperfect middle indicative 3rd singular of δέομαι, meaning “to ask”, “beg”; “pray”, “implore” is used. The phrase should here be translated: “she begged.” The reason for this translation simply lies in the context in which this verb is used. The verb can be translated with “she prayed,” but that would not do justice to the scenario being pictured by the author. One should also remember the character of Esther here. One must remember that she is indeed very scared and is most likely to beg the Lord to help her in her distress. Judith, on the other hand, ‘cried out to the Lord with a great voice’ (col 5). The verb ἐβόησεν, aorist active indicative 3rd sg of βοάω, is used here. It is interesting to note here that the phrase ἐβόησεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ is an idiom occurring seven times in the LXX (2 Kgs 18:28; 2 Chr 32:18; Jdt 9:1,14:16; Isa 36:13; Suf 1:46; and Bet 1:18). This verb is also used in Ex. 8.8 where Moses cries to the Lord concerning the frogs. It seems that in most of the instances where this verb is used in the LXX, it is connected to some kind of appeal to God in a situation placing the lives of a people in great danger. Also note the choice of words of the author in this colon, not using the very formal προσεύχομαι. This illustrates something of the same humbleness which is found in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, where the Tax Collector simply stands before God and simply calls on him. Judith does the same, illustrating also the closeness of Judith to God in her relationship to him. Once

¹⁷ Think of King Ahasueros who had to hold out his sceptre over the person who enters into his court. If a person entered without the king calling him, his only hope of salvation from being executed is afforded by the king (cf. Achtemeier, E R 1962. Righteousness in the OT. *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press, pp.80-85 on the issue of the king’s right to afford justice).

again, as seen in Esther (col 5), the description of the way Judith comes to God in prayer, is very much in line with the portrayal of Judith throughout the Book of Judith. It seems fitting that a widow, who has been mourning for three and a half years, continue to do so, now shifting her attention to her people who are in great distress.

To summarise, the actions described in the setting are to be associated with one global event, namely that of the mourning rite before engaging into prayer with the Lord. The scene having been set for the prayers, the structure of the rest of the prayers will now be considered.

3.2. *The prayers: Their Style and Structure*

3.2.1 Esther's prayer

Esther's prayer is a distinct appeal to God to deliver her people by the words of her mouth. The way she approaches God in prayer once again gives evidence of a very meek character. Throughout her prayer one can see that she is in fact a very humble character, not to be considered very strong. The prayer of Esther can structurally be divided into five strophes, each consisting of a part of the case being represented to God. The elements of the appeal may be summarized as follows:

17.12-13 : **The history of the case in which Esther will appeal to God.**

Esther calls the history of her and her people with God into memory. In this way, the case-history of the Judaeans with God as the King and thus at the first seat of law, is called to mind. God is also called into mind in this appeal, as he was the Judge in the case that Esther and her people had with God. 17.14-16

: **The *intention*¹⁸ of the appeal.** Calling to mind the condemnation and the reason for the condemnation (17.14), Esther praises God, as he has passed righteous judgement on them (di,kaioj ei= ku,rie), for they have praised the enemy's gods (avnqV w-n evdoxa,samen tou.j qeou.j auvtw/n). But it seems that the Judaeans' and Esther's enemies are not satisfied with this verdict (17.15), namely that the Judaeans be given into the hands of their enemies (17.14). The following sketch will help to identify the antithetical argument followed in 17.15-17.16:¹⁹

- taking the decision of verdict into their own hand and removing the limitations set by God (within the Law) and ignoring those;
- to destroy the heritage of God being in the first seat of Law;
- to shut those up who follow the decisions and commands of God;

¹⁸ Intention from the Latin *intentio*, in forensic terms referring to the intention for the case made against another person, whether for a social injustice committed against a person, or to some property of another person.

¹⁹ Also see the discourse analysis of Esther 4:17.11-26 given in Van der Walt (2005:14-16). Note the arrangement in Est 4:17.15-16; the arrangement given here a b c b' c' a'. This structure reinforces the argument of strophe II (cf. Van der Walt 2005:15).

- and to extinguish the glory of God which was held intact by the House and Altar of the Lord.

Instead, they plan to:

- put their own system in action, ordaining the pagans'²⁰ priests into practice for glorifying their decisions
- of the judge which they will put into the first seat of law.

17.17-20 : **The adjudication.**²¹

Note the use of the verb in the imperative, throughout this strophe.²² Here the *adjudication* is a chiastically arranged plea to God that he must not allow their enemies to speak in his presence (17.17) (A – hand, sceptre); that God must do justice to them, in keeping his verdict passed on them, thus that they be allowed to speak (B – words); and that God will encourage Esther in seeing to it that the verdict passed by him will not be contradicted, by putting words in her mouth in the presence of the lion (B' – words); and finally, that God stretches out his hand to help them (probably asking that God's sceptre²³ will be allowed to cover them (A' – hand, sceptre).

17.21-17.25 : **Esther's case pleading in front of God.**

17.26 : **Esther's final plea.**

3.2.2 Judith's prayer²⁴

Van den Eynde (2004:221) divides the prayer into two main parts, namely 9:2-4 and 9:5-14. The first part of the prayer recalls Simeon and his followers who called on God for help, after his sister Dinah had been raped by Horan (Gen 34:30; Gen 49:5-7). According to Van den Eynde, this scenario is recalled in prayer by Judith as the link between her own situation and that of Simeon. Judith seeks the same kind of vengeance on Holophernes for his dishonouring act against God, wanting to make Nebuchadnezzar the only god. In the same way that God was supposed to have given the sword in the hands of Simeon to take vengeance, does Judith want God to hear her prayer when she seeks to free her people from the hands of her enemy. In the second part that Van den Eynde (2004:222-223) distinguishes, Judith gives a complete outline of her plan against the enemy. She asks God for strength to carry out what she has planned.

²⁰ Note that the word "pagan" is here used, as the word godless would not be appropriate here. Godless implicates that there is no belief system in place for that nation which will take over Israel. It seems clear from the text that the intention of the author is in argument against paganism, which may take over the Temple.

²¹ Adjudication – from the Latin *adiudicatio*, referring to the punishment or recompense for the crime committed or social injustice committed against one's person.

²² Cf. the discourse analysis given in Van der Walt (2005:14-16).

²³ On the function of the sceptre of the King in an Iranian context and other Iranian functions, cf. Shaked (1994:292-303), cf. also note 17 on p.308.

²⁴ To find out more about the character of Judith, cf.: Esler (2002:107-143); and Efthimiadis-Keith (1999:211-228). Craven (2003:187-229) gives a broad layout of the research done on the Book of Judith in the twentieth century. She also has a very complete bibliography, containing 19 pages of sources (2003:210-211).

Her deceit should be the downfall of the enemy (9:3, 10), just as it was the case with Simeon. She also alludes to the shame of the enemy, asking God to give their enemy into the hands of a woman.

This distinction of two main parts is useful, but the structure of the prayer can once again be compared to a formal appeal in a court scenario. The theme of bringing justice to her people and of protecting the name of God is not to be underestimated in this prayer, as will be seen in the following layout of the main moments of the prayer.

9:2-4 : The history of the case of her forefather being recalled as basis for Judith's petition.

The case of Simeon, taking vengeance on the rapists of his sister Dinah (Gen.34.30; Gen. 47), is invoked as the basis of her petition to also take vengeance on Holophernes, who plans to defile the Altar and Temple, and wants to establish the name of Nebuchadnezzar as only god, to be worshipped by all.

9:5-6: Judith's petition to hear her case in the light of the history stated above.

Just as God had given justice in the case of Dinah, she now seeks of God to hear her case as she wants to defeat the enemy in the same deceitful way that Simeon had done.

9:7 : The identification of the defendant and intention.

The oppressor and the one committing the crime against God, Holophernes, wanting to establish Nebuchadnezzar as the only god, are identified. They do not trust in God as the all powerful, but in their weapons, their horsemen – *'they do not know that you are God, the crusher of battle-lines!'* (9:7)

9:8-11 : The petition – with the adjudication and intention chiastically arranged.

9:8 a : **Adjudication.**²⁵ *'Lord is your name! Strike their strength with your power! Break their might in your anger!'*

9:8b : **Intention.**²⁶ *'For they plan to desecrate your Holy Place; to defile the tabernacle – the resting place of your glorious name; to knock down the horn of your Altar with a sword.'*

9:9a : **Intention.** *'See their arrogance.'*

9:9b-10: **Adjudication.** *'Send your wrath on their heads. Give into my hand of a widow the strength which I have thought over.¹⁰ Strike down the slave with the general, by the deception of my lips, and the general with his servant.'*

²⁵ Adjudication – from the Latin *adiudicatio*, referring to the punishment or recompense for the crime committed or social injustice committed against one's person.

²⁶ Intention – from the Latin *intentio*, in forensic terms referring to the intention for the case made against another person, whether for a social injustice committed against a person, or to some property of another person.

9:11 : **Judith's plea for her case.**

Unlike the Assyrians (9:7), God's strength does not lie in numbers, nor is his power in strength. *'You are the Helper of the inferior; protector of the weak; defender of those that despair; the Saviour of those without hope.'*

9:12 : **A call on God to listen to her petition.**

9:13-14 : **The adjudication of the right to Judith to bring the leadership of the enemy (Holophernes) to justice (9:13).**

The objective of the *adjudication*: to bring justice to God and his people, and showing that there is only one god, God himself and not Nebuchadnezzar.

3.3. How do the prayers of Judith and Esther compare?

From the above sketch of the structure of these two prayers, it is clear that they both seem to be structured according to a form of petition/pleading that typically occurs within a forensic process. Both these prayers seem to allude to God as the giver of justice in their times of distress (Est 4:17.12-17.13 and Jdt 9:2-4). Both prayers also seem to invoke the Lord as the Judge in their present cases. It is very interesting to note that both Judith and Esther start their petition with a case history. The contrast between these two characters, then, becomes very clear. The first notable contrast is in the way the characters call on God. Esther calls him: 'My Lord, you are our only King!' (4:17.12), whilst Judith calls him: 'Lord, God of my ancestor Simeon,' (9:2). The difference in the way that they address God can be seen in the characteristics of both these characters. Van den Eynde's (2004: 217-231) insight is very important here in noting that Judith seeks to make it clear that there is only one God, YHWH. Esther, on the other hand, recalls a long history with God as basis for her case with God. This strong form of the prayer, leaning very heavily on the covenantal relationship of Israel with God, could be the tradition derived from the Hebrew version of Esther, which was supposedly written in 480 BCE. It seems that Esther calls on God for justice in the case that she is pleading, as a means of freeing her people and herself.

The second, and most important, parallel is found in the *intention* for the case being made against their enemies, in both Judith and Esther. Both cases have the defilement of the Temple and Altar as basis for the *intention*²⁷ for the case in pleading (cf. the analysis above for the *intention* in Jdt. 9:7, 8b, 9a; Est 4:17.14-16). While in Judith, the *intention* is interspersed with *adjudication*, Judith stating the case and then the *adjudication* directly afterwards (9:8-11), in Esther there seems to be a clear distinction between the *intention* of the appeal, which is clearly stated structurally on its own (4:17.14-16), and the *adjudication* (4:17.17-20). Judith also seems to lay emphasis on the arrogance of Holophernes and his army (9:9) and their reliance on their weaponry and army to protect them. This stresses the conflict between the situations of Judith, acknowledging only God as the true God, and Holophernes who only

²⁷ 'Intention' here understood in legal terms, pointing to the reason for the representation of the case to the judge.

acknowledges Nebuchadnezzar as his god. Esther, on the other hand, seeks justice for her and her people in the fact that Aman has tried to go against the word of God, in this case being God's verdict for Israel which is in exile.²⁸ Esther thus calls on God as a King as the last resort in the legal system.²⁹ This is also clear if we compare the prayer of Esther with the details given in Esther when she finally enters the chambers of the King. Just as the King had to bring his sceptre over a person that entered his chamber without permission, Esther asks that God should not bring his sceptre over those who plan to go against his verdicts (cf. 4:17.17) and want to enter his Temple to defile it.

This seems to be the exact link between Esther and Judith, clearly visible in their prayers. In both these prayers, a petition is made against the enemy as they have tried to go against the word (verdict given in the previous case) of God. In both these cases, the enemy seems to plan on overthrowing the authority of God. In Esther, the authority of God's judgement and his rightful place at the first seat of law was at stake whilst the enemies of Israel planned on overthrowing it. In Judith, the enemy also wants to overthrow the authority reserved for God, but here it is even planned against his seat as God. Judith makes the same plea against their enemy as Esther; both these characters making a strong case for the punishment of the enemy. There is, however, one great difference between Esther and Judith in that, whereas Judith asks that vengeance will come upon the enemy by *her* hand, Esther never does this, but asks the Lord himself to be the one to bring justice through his own hand upon his people. Esther asks that God put *persuasive* words in her mouth, but never *deceitful*. Every act that should be carried out concerning the punishment of her enemies in Esther's prayer is asked to be done by the hand of God himself. And it is exactly in this humbleness of character that Esther and Judith do have some common character traits after all. This seems to suggest that a common form may once have existed for both these prayers.

4. Conclusion

Our aim in this study was to show by a literary comparison that the prayers of Judith and Esther are structurally and stylistically very similar, despite notable differences. Whereas the differences mainly seem to reflect differences in the characterization of the two heroines, the similarities seem to suggest a possible common origin – if not of the respective narratives of Esther and Judith, then quite probably of the prayers that form turning points within these narratives.

²⁸ Note that this is one of the anachronistic details found in the LXX Esther. The reference to both the exile, on the one hand, and the defilement of the Temple and Altar, on the other, is very peculiar. There was no defilement of the Temple and Altar ever mentioned before the Maccabean crisis in 162-161 BCE, given evidence of in 1 Maccabees. The question could also be answered in the light of form- and tradition criticism, which would explain this phrase not as a peculiarity, but rather as a development absorbed into the text. This will be explained in a next article.

²⁹ In the Ancient Near East, the King always seemed to have the last say in any case. In many cases, he was the lawgiver and also the judge. Also cf. King Solomon, hearing cases of people all over the world and passing his judgement of them. In the Roman law, we find the same idea, the emperor being the last resort in any case of appeal. Also cf. Paul calling on the Roman emperor to hear his case in Rome, as he was a Roman citizen, and this right was reserved to him.

Both prayers were shown to represent a form of petition that typically occurs within a forensic process. Explicit appeals to case history, as well as the elements of *intentio* and *adiudicatio* (typical of Greco-Roman forensic process), have been clearly identified in both prayers.

The elements that are added to the LXX Esther, suggest a new setting for the original MT text that is similar to that of Judith. In this sense, the LXX Esther may indeed have been written as a neutralization following Judith.³⁰ References to defilement of the Temple and Altar in both these prayers suggest a connection with the Maccabean crisis.³¹ In Esther these events were interspersed with the details of the Hebrew texts, but it seems clear that the author of the LXX version supplemented the text with the additions to conform to the events of his own time and place that he may have associated with the events described in the Hebrew texts, found to be a parallel to his own *Sitz im Leben*.

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³⁰ Cf. Craven 1977:75-101, also see the discussion relating to the narratives of Esther and Judith above.

³¹ For more information on relationship of the additions to Esther to the Maccabean crisis, cf. Gardner, A E (1984:1-8). She holds the theory that only part of Addition A to the Book of Esther (Mardocheaus' dream) could be related to the events of the Maccabean crisis. It is, however, the view of this study that even Addition C, which contains the prayer of Esther, can also be related to these events.

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