

Esther Among Her Peers: Intertextuality and Religion in the Book of Esther

I. Introduction – Is Esther Religious?

A. Key Absences

1. *No references to God or religion*
2. *Questionable morality of the chief protagonists*
 - a. Esther
 - i. The search for queen
 - ii. The hesitancy to help
 - iii. The request for more killing
 - b. Mordecai
 - i. His role in Esther's hiding her identity
 - ii. His refusal to bow

B. A Strong Negative Reaction – multiplicity of quotations from scholars who take a strong position against the book of Esther

C. Canonicity – the debate over Esther's canonicity (in Jewish and Christian circles)

II. Intertextuality as a Clue to Esther's Religion

A. Esther and Genesis

1. *Mordecai and Joseph* (Est 3.2–5; Gen 39.6b–10)
2. *Haman and Joseph* (Est 6.6–10; Gen 41.39–45)
3. *Other Connections*
 - a. Esther 2.8–20; Genesis 39.4
 - b. Esther 3.15; Genesis 37.25
 - c. Esther 2.21–23; Genesis 40.1, 19, 22–23
 - d. Esther 4.1–3; Genesis 37.34
 - e. Esther 6.8–11; Genesis 41.37–43
 - f. Esther 8.3; Genesis 42.21
 - g. Esther 10.1–3; Genesis 47.13–26

B. Esther and Exodus

1. *Esther and Moses* (Est 4–5; Exod 1–15)
2. *Purim and Passover* (Est 3.7, 12; 4.1, 12; Exod 12.1–28; Lev 23.4–8)
3. *Other Connections*
 - a. Esther 9.3–4; Exodus 11.3
 - b. Esther 9.2–3; Exodus 15.14–16

C. Esther and Samuel

1. *Mordecai and Saul* (Est 2.5–9; 3.1; 9.10, 15–16, 22; 1 Sam 15.1–9)
2. *Ahasuerus and Haman, Nabal and Amnon* (Est 1.10; 5.9; 1 Sam 25.36; 2 Sam 13.28)

D. Esther and the Prophets

1. *Esther and Daniel* (Est 2.8–10; Dan 1.8–16)¹
2. *Esther, Jonah, and Joel* (Est 4.3, 14; Jon3.9; Joel 2.12, 14)
3. *Purim and Zion* (Est 9.22; Jer 31.13)

E. Minor Echoes

1. *Non-Israelite knowledge of God* (Est 6.13; Num 22–24; Josh 2.8–11; 1 Sam 4.8)
2. *The nations fearing God's people* (Est 9.2; Exod 15.14–16; Ps 105.38)
3. *Fasts becoming festivals* (Est 9.30; Zech 8.19)

F. Summary Observations

G. Implications – For the sake of time, this will be skipped, but it is included in the PDF version of this paper for anyone interested

1. *“Another place”* (Est 4.14)
2. *“When it came before the king”* (Est 9.24–25)
3. *The introduction of Esther and Mordecai* (Est 2.4–5)
4. *God's Grand Victory? A Benjaminite descendant of Kish second to a pagan monarch*

III. Conclusion – In short, Esther's intertextuality is not merely about interesting parallels, but about the literary artistry to write a book that points to God and religion without ever mentioning God or religion. Once Esther is seen among her peers, she fits very well into the Hebrew canon.

¹ I am aware that Daniel is not among the prophets in the Hebrew canon. Its inclusion here, with the prophets of the Christian canon, is for convenience.