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## Additions to Esther

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## Additions to Esther

The book of Esther is unique in the Old Testament for having three distinct literary editions. Most familiar is that of the Masoretic text (MT), 10 chapters in Hebrew found in all Hebrew Bibles and most English translations. However, two Greek versions of Esther also exist, the Alpha (A) text, a Greek translation of a Hebrew version slightly different from the Masoretic text, and the Septuagint (LXX) Esther, a translation of the Masoretic text that has been altered and expanded enough that it should be considered a separate literary work from the Masoretic text Esther. The Septuagint version is canonical in the Orthodox churches.

The Septuagint Esther contains six "Additions" to the Masoretic text text, as well as internal changes. These Additions, labeled for convenience A, B, C, D, E, and F, are interspersed throughout the text. Addition A appears before ch. 1, Addition B follows 3:13, Additions C and D follow 4:17 (the Septuagint also omits 5:1-2 of Masoretic text). Addition E follows 8:12, and Addition F ends the book. It should be noted that after the Septuagint had been translated into Latin, Jerome, when constructing the Vulgate edition, excised the Additions from the Latin text and placed all of them at the end of Esther, in order to bring his version into closer harmony with Masoretic text Esther. Thus in Vulgate Bibles the Additions will be found at the end of Esther and numbered 11:2-12:6; 13:1-7; 13:8-14:19; 15:1-16; 16:1-24; and 10:4-11 (F precedes the other Additions in the Vulgate).

The purpose of the Additions in the Septuagint Esther is straightforward. Masoretic text Esther is notorious, both today and in the past, for its lack of religious language, particularly its omission of any mention of God. The Additions supply this lack, containing prayers and a prophetic dream, and giving credit for the salvation of the Jews entirely to God. Further, the Additions heighten the dramatic interest of the story by emphasizing the emotions of the characters.

Addition A contains a prophetic dream of the chief male character, Mordecai. In the dream, Mordecai sees two dragons, ancient symbols of chaos, battling while the rest of the world, in particular the Jews, looks on in fear. The conflict is resolved by God, who sends a stream of water and light. The Jews rejoice, and Mordecai wakes up. This dream, which is meant to foreshadow the story of Esther, serves to move the conflict between Mordecai and Haman, the chief antagonist, out of the realm of petty human politics and into that of cosmic struggle, where the only possible resolution comes from God. This places the book of Esther squarely in the realm of religious literature. Addition A also explains how Mordecai discovered the plot of the eunuchs against the Persian king (cf. Esth. 2:21-23), and places the blame for the plot on Haman.

Additions B and E function as a pair. Addition B giving the text of Hainan's edict for the destruction of the Jews, and Addition E the text of the king's counter-edict. Both Additions, written in a rather florid Greek, are meant to give an air of historical verisimilitude to the text, although neither is actually authentic.

Additions C and D, which follow one another in the text, are the dramatic heart of the Septuagint Esther. Addition C contains the prayers of Mordecai and Esther, which locate the plight of the Persian Jews in the context of the salvation his-

tory of Israel and place the fate of the Jews completely in the hands of God. These prayers, especially Esther's, more than compensate for the lack of religiosity in Masoretic text Esther.

Addition D, which contains Esther's unsummoned appearance before the king, is the dramatic denouement of the Septuagint edition. In the Masoretic text, this scene occupies a mere two verses (Esth. 5:1-2) and is rather dry. Although Esther has declared previously that to appear unsummoned before the king is to risk her life, when she actually does so she simply appears in the door, the king extends his scepter to her, and she makes her request. The scene lacks any sense of tension or danger. In Addition D, however, Esther is so agitated that she must cling to her maid for support, and when the king glares at her from the throne she is so frightened she faints, not once but twice! At this moment the real purpose of the Septuagint Esther is revealed. Ad.Esth. 15:8 declares, "Then *God* changed the spirit of the king to gentleness," and he rushes to comfort her. Thus, for the Septuagint Esther, the real moving force behind all the events is God, and the reader is reassured of a positive outcome.

Addition F gives the interpretation of Mordecai's dream, in which the two dragons are identified as Mordecai and Haman, and the stream as Esther. The dream and its interpretation do not quite fit the elements of the plot of Esther, indicating their secondary character.

Addition F contains a colophon, unique among biblical books, which attributes the translation to one Lysimachus, who brought it from Jerusalem to Alexandria in the 1st century B.C.E. The historical truth of this colophon cannot be verified, but it seems clear that the Septuagint version of Esther, with the Additions, first circulated among the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria in the 1st century B.C.E.

**Bibliography.** J. D. Levenson, *Esther*. OTL (Louisville, 1997); C. D. Moore, *Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions*. AB 44 (Garden City, 1977); S. A. White, "Esther." in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe (Louisville, 1992), 131-37.

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