The Nature and Import of the Relationship Between the Joseph Story in Genesis and the Book of Esther

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Citation

Abstract
This study offers an extended, detailed examination of the nature and character of the relationship between the story of Joseph in Genesis and the book of Esther. While also engaging the court narratives found in the first half of the book of Daniel, this dissertation seeks to underscore the sustained and constructive comparison between Joseph and Esther: the author of the latter knew and meaningfully invoked the former throughout his telling of the Megillah.

Firmly situated in the growing field of biblical intertextuality, the present work strikes a different chord on three important but also intertwined issues. While many learned and helpful books in this growing subfield bring scores of intertextual examples from across the entirety of biblical literature, this project has, in an effort to hone in more closely on the complexities of this particular case, limited itself in the main just to the texts of Joseph and Esther; and in so doing, the goal is to bring some of the more difficult theoretical underpinnings of such an endeavor into sharper relief. Second, the argumentation presented here leans heavily upon and therefore strongly encourages the importance of structural overlap, pushing past the oft-cited although admittedly crucial similarities of language that fill the previous studies off of which the present one builds. And third, the precisely defined focus of the evidence examined offers greater diachronic and theological insight into the book of Esther; it therefore does not seek to explain the development and hermeneutical techniques of all, or at least large swaths, of later biblical literature.

Speaking then most directly to the interpretation of Esther and its placement in the canon, this dissertation offers a fresh take on the confusion and disputes that characterizes the scholarly conversation of these two issues. In proving that the author of Esther knew and continuously alluded to Joseph, it will be suggested that the Megillah most certainly presents itself as a key part of the developing literary and theological tradition of ancient Israel; and that any historically sensitive reading of this book must understand it as such. While such an approach in no way endorses reading God into the noticeable and suggestive absence, it does conclude that the patterns initiated by the divine in the past continue to influence and at times even control the present moment of the Megillah.

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And between the two stories of Sinai and Zion, lending further perspective to both, was a centuries-long history of conquest, failure, and judgment (Joshua-Judges). Jerusalem, therefore, might look drab. x. PREFACE. Genesis then falls into fifty-two panels—a refinement of the medieval division into fifty chapters. The relationships between the matching panels vary. In some diptychs, the unity between the two panels is easy to see. Others require patience. Generally, they tend to go from easy to more difficult. Sources and toward a relationship with known documents—the prophetic writings. This shift toward known documents was not altogether new. Already in the nineteenth century, Genesis had begun to be linked with surviving epics. As regards literary unity, the shift was even greater. The Book of Genesis (from the Latin Vulgate, in turn borrowed or transliterated from Greek "γένεσις", meaning "Origin"; Hebrew: תֵּשַׁבָּה, "Bərēšīṯ", "In [the] beginning") is the first book of the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh) and the Old Testament. It is divisible into two parts, the Primeval history (chapters 1–11) and the Ancestral history (chapters 12–50). The primeval history sets out the author’s (or authors’) concepts of the nature of the deity and of humankind’s relationship with its maker: God