

Handout Esther Lesson 5

Esther, a woman made perfect by her faith, [...] humbled herself and fasted when she prayed that the Lord who sees all things, the God of all ages, would deliver the people for whom she risked her life.

St. Clement of Rome, *Ad Corinthios*, 55.6

Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your vindication as the light, and your right as the noonday (Ps 37:5-6).

The Church reproves every form of persecution against whomsoever it may be directed. Remembering, then, her common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, she deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of antisemitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews.

Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 4).

Significant dates:

479 BC: King Ahasuerus marries Esther and makes her the Queen of Persia.

474 BC: Haman issues the Edict of Annihilation against the Jews to take place on the 13th of Adar in 473 BC (other verses have the 14th of Adar).

473 BC: Esther and Mordecai issue the Edict of Vindication of the Jews, and the Feast of Purim becomes a national Jewish celebration on the 14th and 15th of Adar.

The topics in this lesson:

1. The issuing of the Edict of Vindication and God saves His people (8:1-12, LXX 12a-v, 13-17)
2. The institution of the Feast of Purim (9:1-19, LXX 19a-9:32)
3. Epilogue (10:1-3, LXX 3a-1)

The Book of Esther began with Mordecai's account of his dream. When he first described his dream, he confessed he had no idea what it all meant (LXX 1:11), but now, in the last chapter, he finally understands:

1. Everything that happened is God's doing.
2. The little spring that became a great river is Esther through whom God made His light appear and the sun of His abundant grace flow like a flood of water.
3. The two dragons are Haman and Mordecai.
4. The nations are the different Gentile peoples in the Persian Empire who banded together to exterminate the Jews.
5. The single nation is God's nation, the children of Israel who cried out to God and "were saved."

Colophon of the Greek Text: *In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who affirmed [ephe] that he was a priest and Levite, and Ptolemy his son brought the foregoing letter [ten prokeimenon epistolen] concerning Purim. They vouched [ephe] for its authenticity, the translation having been made by Lysimachus son of Ptolemy, a member of the*

Jerusalem community. [...] = Greek words in the text (Carey A. More, Anchor Bible Commentary: Esther, page 250).

The correct literary term for these last verses is a colophon, an inscription at the end of a book or manuscript giving the title or subject or verification of the work.

The best candidate for the Pharaoh in the colophon is Ptolemy III, Soter II ca. 114 BC. A date of 114 BC is compatible with the literary style and theological emphasis of the Greek text of the Book of Esther (*The Ptolemies of Egypt*, London: Arrowsmith, 1938).

King Ahasuerus I, called Xerxes I by the Greeks, was assassinated in 465 BC, fourteen years after choosing Esther as his queen and eight years after the attempted massacre of the Jews. A royal minister named Artabanus attacked and murdered him in his bedchamber.

The colophon verses are of crucial importance because:

1. They provide information for determining the date of the Greek translation from a Hebrew text that is no longer extant, perhaps written by Mordecai (9:20, 23).
2. The unique colophon can be used as an argument in favor of its authenticity.
3. The colophon implies the existence of another translation while claiming to be the authentic Greek version.

The most significant word in the passage is the Greek word *ephe* that means “to certify” as in he attested to the document in a formal way as to who he (Dositheus) was and the origins of the text. He could also mean “to claim” as he is affirming something in an emphatic and authoritative way (Carey A. More, page 250-251). He was probably aware of the other Hebrew version of Esther and the difference between it and the additional over hundred verses in the version he discovered. His reference to the *epistolen*, a term inclusive of all forms of written documents, suggests his document is not simply the letter Mordecai and Esther wrote in 9:29 but the entirely complete version of their story which he “certifies/affirms” as authentic and perhaps came from the record of events kept by Mordecai.

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