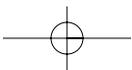
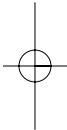
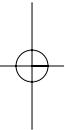


# TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 13

TOTC

ESTHER



# TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 13

SERIES EDITOR: DAVID G. FIRTH  
CONSULTING EDITOR: TREMPER LONGMAN III

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## ESTHER

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

DEBRA REID



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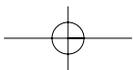
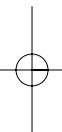
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## GENERAL PREFACE

The decision to completely revise the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries is an indication of the important role that the series has played since its opening volumes were released in the mid-1960s. They represented at that time, and have continued to represent, commentary writing that was committed both to the importance of the text of the Bible as Scripture and a desire to engage with as full a range of interpretative issues as possible without being lost in the minutiae of scholarly debate. The commentaries aimed to explain the biblical text to a generation of readers confronting models of critical scholarship and new discoveries from the Ancient Near East, while remembering that the Old Testament is not simply another text from the ancient world. Although no uniform process of exegesis was required, all the original contributors were united in their conviction that the Old Testament remains the word of God for us today. That the original volumes fulfilled this role is evident from the way in which they continue to be used in so many parts of the world.

A crucial element of the original series was that it should offer an up-to-date reading of the text, and it is precisely for this reason that new volumes are required. The questions confronting readers in the first half of the twenty-first century are not necessarily those from the second half of the twentieth. Discoveries from the Ancient Near East continue to shed new light on the Old Testament, and emphases in exegesis have changed markedly.

Whilst remaining true to the goals of the initial volumes, the need for contemporary study of the text requires that the series as a whole be updated. This updating is not simply a matter of commissioning new volumes to replace the old. We have also taken the opportunity to update the format of the series to reflect a key emphasis from linguistics, which is that texts communicate in larger blocks rather than in shorter segments such as individual verses. Because of this, the treatment of each section of the text includes three segments. First, a short note on *Context* is offered, placing the passage under consideration in its literary setting within the book, as well as noting any historical issues crucial to interpretation. The *Comment* segment then follows the traditional structure of the commentary, offering exegesis of the various components of a passage. Finally, a brief comment is made on *Meaning*, by which is meant the message that the passage seeks to communicate within the book, highlighting its key theological themes. This section brings together the detail of the *Comment* to show how the passage under consideration seeks to communicate as a whole.

Our prayer is that these new volumes will continue the rich heritage of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries and that they will continue to witness to the God who is made known in the text.

David G. Firth, Series Editor  
Tremper Longman III, Consulting Editor

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In June 2006, I was privileged to hear the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, deliver a lecture entitled 'Living as a biblical people in a secular age'. In his lecture, the Chief Rabbi took the following themes: the importance of rest, learning, community, trust in times of insecurity and uncertainty, and maintaining a sense of destination (our part in the eternal narrative). What an apt summary of the challenge that the book of Esther presents to us today! In the course of this project, I have been surprised again by the present relevance of this ancient story. It is a story written to inspire and challenge us, and to move us to celebrate the moments in our own life stories for which we are truly grateful. I hope you will find time to sit down and read the story of Esther in one sitting. Its meaning is to be found most clearly in its wholeness, although there are significant pointers to that meaning in its individual units. This commentary attempts to give due credit both to the story's literary finesse and to its didactic purpose (hence the introductory section and, in the commentary itself, the employment of the headings 'context', 'comment' and 'meaning'). But, like all stories, its impact remains personal as you relate it to your own unique story. Wherever appropriate, I have used section headings that employ the wording of the biblical text (in inverted commas) in order to emphasize the way in which the divisions I have used rely on emphases within the text itself. Due to its widespread use in churches today, I have used the New

International Version as the basic English translation, quotations from which are given in italics. Other versions have been consulted, and I have indicated where I found their renditions particularly interesting. I should perhaps stress that in a book like Esther, with its careful literary design, many of its design features are hidden in translation, hence the frequent comment on the Hebrew text itself.

I am indebted to many other commentators whose insights have proved invaluable, not least Joyce Baldwin, the writer of the first Tyndale Commentary on Esther. The bibliography lists the works that I have consulted regularly, and I recognize that this Commentary would never have emerged without convenient access to such resources of knowledge and understanding. It is therefore with great gratitude that I record the generous assistance of Mrs Judy Powles, Librarian at Spurgeon's College. I was originally invited to write this commentary by the former Series Editor for the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Dr Martin Selman, who died in December 2004. Having worked with Martin for over seventeen years, I owe much of my own love for the Old Testament to his inspiration, example and encouragement. I am thankful to David Firth, the newly appointed Series Editor, for continuing Martin's legacy by offering me his own patient, insightful and encouraging assistance.

Finally, I record my thanks to all those who have suffered my obsession with Esther over these last two years, including my colleagues at Spurgeon's College, my fellow church members at Horley Baptist Church and my family. Special thanks are reserved for my husband David, who has undertaken more than his fair share of home and family duties recently. I dedicate this book to our three lovely boys, Peter, Matthew and Andrew. I hope Esther's story will inspire them, and that they, with us all, will one day understand their own life stories, whatever twists and turns they may take, as examples of God's intervening and saving activity at work in our world today.

Debra Reid  
Spurgeon's College

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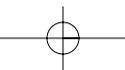
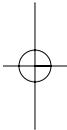
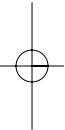
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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolf, Stuttgart, 1969–1975, 1984 <sup>3</sup> )
CHJ. I	Cambridge History of Judaism, vol. I, ed. W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
<i>ET</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
GK	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, (ed. E. Kautzch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910)
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>NCBC</i>	<i>New Century Bible Commentary</i>
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

### **Texts and versions**

KJV	King James' Version
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
NKJV	New King James' Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version

## INTRODUCTION

### **1. The nature of the book of Esther**

What kind of book is Esther? It is this question that taunts us as we try to understand the significance of this short OT book. On the one hand it appears to be a simple historical account. On the other it is a carefully crafted piece of literary genius. From one perspective, its main focus is upon the individual who gives the book its name; from another the spotlight is on a whole nation. Thematically and stylistically there is both simplicity and complexity, a transparency that is mixed with intrigue. Theologically there are obvious implications of the story, but there is also mystery and dilemma. Ethically, good triumphs over evil, but does the end justify the means along the way? Is the book relevant or irrelevant? Is it to be enjoyed at a surface level or penetrated for its hidden depths? Is it meant to convey historical facts, or is its meaning to be found in application to our lives? Is its value for one nation or many, or for individual people? What is the *raison d'être* of the book of Esther?

These questions are reminiscent of those we sometimes pose of the parables of Jesus. We are fully aware that a full explanation of their details and their meaning somehow escapes us. The New Testament scholar C. H. Dodd claims that the parables 'leave us in sufficient doubt about their precise application in order to tease our minds into active thought' (1961: 16). This is at least part of Esther's compelling quality. The story taunts and teases us. As soon as we think we are beginning to understand its themes or its literary features, we become alert to our own dissatisfaction with our perception. But rather than being deterred, we become more absorbed. Take, for example, the fact that God's name is never mentioned in the text. Instead of giving up on a theological quest, we find ourselves searching more earnestly for a God whose non-appearance seems to enhance his presence. The result is that, because our minds are teased, our subsequent theological conclusions incorporate reflection at a number of penetrating and intriguing levels.

This, of course, is similar to our responses to personal testimonies about journeys of faith. Testimonies are our life stories – how life began for us, how we came to experience salvation through Christ, how life has continued for us. It is my contention that the value and meaning of the book of Esther lies in its testimonial value. In this book we read of Esther's early life (living with her uncle in the Persian Empire). We read what life is like for Esther when she encounters deliverance and salvation (her unenviable position in the king's palace), and her active acceptance of her own role within these processes (*for such a time as this*, Esth. 4:14). The story is concluded by the description of what life is like for Esther after this particular event of deliverance, but somehow it is a story that remains ongoing and is open-ended. Another way of reading the story is to understand that it represents the testimony not of Esther alone but of her people together. This adds further significance to the references to the establishment of the Purim festival at the end of the book. Life now will never be the same for Esther's people. An encounter with salvation always has lasting and wide-ranging effects, encompassing its original participants as well as those to whom the testimony is conveyed. This, after all, is Scripture, and Scripture is a document of faith, the story of salvation – history that deserves to

be heard and that teases its every hearer into active thought as well as personal and corporate reflection.

## 2. Origin and date

The book of Esther clearly emerged within the general time band between 465 BC (the end of the reign of Ahasuerus) and AD 70 (when Josephus made full use of the story in his *Antiquities*).<sup>1</sup> The question is, can this time band be narrowed further? The earliest date would allow the author to be a contemporary of the events described which occurred immediately following Ahasuerus' reign. Esther 1:1 may imply that time has elapsed since Ahasuerus' reign, and therefore the events described would have happened in the reign of Artaxerxes (464–423 BC). If this is indeed the implication, then a late fifth-century *terminus a quo* is established. It seems that the book reflects a Persian setting (the Persian period lasting from Cyrus' capture of Babylon in 539 BC until Alexander captured Tyre in 333/2 BC) but this does not mean that the final form of the book was settled during this era.<sup>2</sup>

A look at the internal evidence has led many to conclude that a third-century Hellenistic date of writing is probable.<sup>3</sup> To support this argument scholars have drawn on the evidence of the second-century BC Qumran Scrolls, which seem to present a Hebrew language later than that found in the book of Esther.<sup>4</sup> Having

- 
1. The Greek additions suggest that Esther was translated into Greek by Lysimachus, by the fourth year of Ptolemy and Cleopatra. If this claim is accurate, then the *terminus ad quem* can be pushed back to 112 BC or 76 BC, depending on whether Ptolemy VIII or Ptolemy XII is intended.
  2. For example, it is possible that the book was written in the fifth century BC, even if it reached its final form in the third/second century BC.
  3. See, for example, Michael Fox who concludes that Esther would not refer to the 127 satrapies of Persia if the Persian Empire still existed (1991: 139).
  4. Shemaryahu Talmon (1995: 249–267) has argued that phrases from Esther are alluded to in the Qumran Scrolls, so the book must have been known by the community, even if it was not preserved by them.

established a pre-second-century dating for Esther on the basis of the diction, idiom and syntax of the Hebrew text, Driver (1960: 484, followed by many others) settled on a third-century date.

But this traditional date has not been universally accepted. Recently, importance has been assigned to the dating formulas within the book of Esther itself. Friedberg argues that these formulas lead to the probability that Esther was written at a much earlier date. He asserts that the post-exilic books show a development in dating formulas, moving away from the traditional numerical system (where months are not given names but referred to by numerals, beginning at spring time), to the complete adoption of the Babylonian system of names for months (i.e. month 1 becomes Nisan etc) – a process that is complete in Ezra-Nehemiah (second half of the fourth century). Friedberg shows that Esther lies in the middle of this post-exilic process, because it uses mixed formulas, indicating that the process to full use of the Babylonian system had begun but was not completed, and therefore concludes that a late fifth-century date for Esther is most probable.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that at least the possibility of a late fifth-century date for Esther has been established. Furthermore, it is likely that Esther was written within the Persian period, not least because the story is most meaningful within that setting, and the absence of reference to Hellenistic culture supports this. This reduces the time band for Esther to between late fifth century and the first half of the fourth century BC, a time span consistent with the internal and linguistic evidence within the book itself.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Historical background and setting

While questions about the historical reliability of the Esther story will be addressed in a later section (p. 30), it is necessary here to

- 
5. Friedberg (2000: 361–365) lays out the details of his argument and a response has been made by Larsson (2002: 130–131). Friedberg (2003: 427–429) has replied to support his case.
  6. Note that this conclusion marks a return to the view of Baldwin (1984: 48–49), which has generally been abandoned in the intervening years.

consider the historical setting in which this story emerges.

The origin of this book, by virtue of its dating, language and thematic content, is firmly fixed within the Persian Empire governed by the Achaemenid kings. Between 545 and 538 BC, the Achaemenid kings conquered the whole of the Middle East (including Palestine) and had established the largest of all the empires in the ancient world. Cyrus (559–530 BC) was particularly responsible for the extension of the Empire's borders, and although his military advances were quite conclusive, even ruthless, he treated people within his Empire with respect, seeing himself as their liberator rather than a tyrant. Cyrus (who is portrayed as the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 45) allowed the Jewish people to return to Palestine at the end of the Babylonian exile (539 BC) in order to rebuild the temple. Cyrus was followed by Cambyses II (530–522 BC), who spent much of his time occupied with advances into Egypt, and then by Darius (522–486 BC). During this time, the Empire's power was consolidated, despite internal power struggles (Darius' ascension was by no means straightforward), and administrative structures were developed, including the division of the Empire into satrapies and smaller sub-provinces. Darius was also responsible for the palace complex built at Susa (the ancient capital of Elam, modern-day Iran). After Darius came Xerxes (Ahasuerus, 486–465 BC) in whose reign the story of Esther is set (Esth. 1:1), and then Artaxerxes I (464–423 BC) in whose reign the first version of the story probably emerged.

This period was dominated by territorial concerns and intellectual advances. Xerxes himself lost strategic battles with the Greeks at a time when Greek culture flourished in Athens with the emergence of Socrates, Pericles and Pythagorus. Our main evidence about this era comes from Herodotus, the Greek historian, whose *Histories of the Persian Wars* (490–480 BC) tell us about the Persian kings and their campaigns. Although we must be cautious about the reliability of Herodotus' accounts (he was after all a Greek writer whose allegiance to the Greek people would have made him an enemy of the Persian Empire), his writings do bear evidence to Persian personalities and practice. For example, Herodotus describes Xerxes as tall and handsome, an ambitious ruler and warrior. It appears that Herodotus was quite fascinated by Xerxes,

because about a third of his history book is taken up with his reign. Further information about Xerxes is available in the Behistun Inscription of Darius that contains the Persian records of the Empire. Here Xerxes is portrayed as a successful ruler who quelled revolts in Babylon and Egypt – certainly in Babylon he ordered hard penalties, not least the destruction of the temple and statue of the Babylonian god Marduk.

So the story of Esther finds its meaning within such a setting. It concerns the fate of a group of Jews, who, about fifty or sixty years after being allowed to return to Jerusalem, still found themselves in the eastern Persian Empire. Their situation was not easy. While some Jews clearly rose to prominence (compare the evidence in the book of Daniel), the kings were lenient towards them only to a point, and any hint of subversive activity was treated ruthlessly. This volatile situation lies behind the drama of the Esther story – for its first readers the tension would need no explanation. To this, the religious tension needs to be added. We know that Xerxes completed the palace at Persepolis, in honour of himself and the Zoroastrian god Ahuramazda (having removed the worship of Daiva, the old Iranian god).<sup>7</sup> To a king who made religious concerns his business, the Jewish population with their own religion and customs would be viewed as particularly troublesome. Against such a background, was there any hope for God's people? It is therefore the historical setting of this story that imbues it with theological meaning.

#### 4. Canonical status

The acceptance of Esther into the OT canon was not straightforward. To some extent, our knowledge of the process raises as many questions as it provides answers.

The process of the establishment of the canon of the OT as a whole is itself problematic. There is no widespread agreement about when the OT canon was finally agreed, or the timing of steps towards

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7. For further details of the evidence from the Daiva Inscription of Xerxes, see CHJ, I: 293.

it. Most scholars concur that the Jewish canon reached a point of closure some time between 200 BC and AD 200.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the second century AD, most of our information about the canon's development comes from three Jewish sources: evidence from Qumran (150 BC – AD 70), Josephus (AD 90), and the early rabbinical writings. These sources give clues about Esther's early place within the OT canon:

- (i) *Qumran*: Esther is the only book of our present OT canon that is not found among the Qumran Scrolls. While it has been argued that this suggests Esther did not enjoy early acceptance, it could equally be because the Essene community did not celebrate the festival of Purim, and therefore its omission from the Scrolls is to be expected. It would have been surplus to requirements.<sup>9</sup>
- (ii) *Josephus*: Reliance on the evidence of Josephus does not take us much further in our appraisal of Esther's canonicity. Josephus states that there are twenty-two OT books, thirteen of which record the history of Israel from the death of Moses until Artaxerxes. In neither case does Josephus name the books that make up the numbers cited. While the very mention of Artaxerxes suggests Josephus knew Esther, this cannot be proved beyond reasonable doubt.<sup>10</sup> What Josephus' evidence does suggest is that the concept of canon existed at this time, even if diversity within Judaism allowed for non-universal canons.
- (iii) *Early rabbinical evidence*: There is limited evidence that a council

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8. For a summary of the issues relating to the formation of the canon, see Goldingay, 1990: 138–145. Note that Goldingay argues that canon establishment should not be linked to the synod at Jamnia (AD 90), because the status of this synod and the precise meaning and value of its canonical decisions are themselves debatable. See also Sundberg 1958: 113–128 and Sandmel 1978: 14.

9. Shemaryahu Talmon (1995: 249–267) argues that the Qumran Scrolls allude to Esther, suggesting that the story was known to, even if not preserved by, the community.

10. See Josephus, *Against Apion*, I: 37–43.

in Jamnia (Palestine) in AD 90 decided that Esther should be accepted.<sup>11</sup> The Mishnah (assembled in the first two centuries AD) gives directions about how the 'Book of Purim' should be read, suggesting Esther's place had been established in the canon at least by the end of the second century. The Mishnah is important because 'it forms the foundation for the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. It therefore stands alongside the Hebrew Bible as the holy book upon which the Judaism of the past nineteen hundred years is constructed'.<sup>12</sup>

It is possible that the Palestinian Talmud implies that Esther's canonicity was disputed as early as the second century on the basis that it advocates a festival not instituted in the Pentateuch.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Rabbi Samuel (third century AD) is cited as the source of a claim that Esther was not a sacred book.<sup>14</sup> Finally assembled in the fifth or sixth centuries AD, the Midrash (a book containing collections of exegetical studies) contains commentary on Esther (along with the Pentateuch, Lamentations, Songs and Ruth). There are two relevant Midrashim: Esther Rabbah 1 (which expounds Esth. 1 and 2) and Esther Rabbah 2 (which expounds Esth. 3:1 – 8:15).<sup>15</sup>

11. But see footnote 8, above.

12. See Neusner (1988: xv). The instructions concerning Esther come in the tenth subdivision entitled megillah of the second division of the Mishnah dealing with moed (appointed times). The entry deals with when Purim should be celebrated, where and how the Scrolls of Esther should be read and who should read them. It concludes with discussion about the offerings and Torah readings that accompanied the festival (see Neusner's translation, 1988: 316–324).

13. Megilla 70d affirms that only Mosaic laws and festivals should be observed by Jews.

14. The evidence comes from Megilla 7a (Babylonian Talmud), which refers to Rab Judah recalling the comments of Samuel that Esther does not make the hands unclean.

15. It is usually agreed that Esther Rabbah 1 was redacted at the start of the sixth century (drawing on Aquila's translation), and Esther Rabbah 2 in the eleventh century (making use of the Septuagint Additions).

The interpretation of this evidence is varied. While it may imply a reluctance to accept this book, it may alternatively suggest that interest in Esther, and its distinctive nature, was aroused from the outset. Certainly if we accept an early date for the establishment of the OT canon, then the rabbinical debates concern a book already established in the canon (and questioned by a minority), rather than a book seeking to make an entry (and questioned by the majority). Indeed, the canonicity of Esther is rarely a matter of debate after the first four centuries AD, and it has been argued that Esther became one of the most important books outside the Pentateuch in later Jewish circles.<sup>16</sup>

Christian sources provide some further information. Early evidence comes from Melito (Bishop of Sardis), who in AD 170 omits Esther from his list of canonical books (which otherwise reflects the present canon). In the writings of the early Church Fathers, there is silence in both commenting and referring to Esther. But Esther was affirmed by the church councils of Hippo (AD 393) and Carthage (AD 397), and at this point the Christian church considered the canon of the whole Bible to be established. Prior to this, Beckwith (1985: 296–297) suggests that there was a split between the Eastern church, where Esther's canonicity was questioned (for example, in the fourth centuries by Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Theodore of Mopsuestia) and the Western church, where Esther was widely accepted.

The evidence is obviously inconclusive, but it should be remem-

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16. Beckwith (1985: 291–292) suggests that this view is supported by the Cairo Genizah, where fragments from Esther are more numerous than any other book outside the Pentateuch. This view is disputed by researchers at the Cairo Institute at Cambridge, who suggest that fragments of Esther do not outnumber those of other OT books. The present writer, however, notes that Esther's appearance in medieval Jewish rabbinical literature is sporadic. (See Debra K. Reid, 'The Fragments of the Commentary on Isaiah by Saadya Gaon ben Josef Al-Fayyumi', appendix 5, pp. 490–502, unpublished thesis, 1991. This Commentary quotes liberally from OT books [601 quotations from 35 books] but there is no use of Esther.)

bered that the distinctive content and character of Esther might itself account for uncertainty about its status.

Over the centuries there has always been interest in Esther. We know that in the early Middle Ages Rhabanus Maurus (Bishop of Mainz, ninth century) wrote a commentary on Esther. Luther (*Table Talk*, 1914; see Laniak, 1998) seemed to dislike the book of Esther and accused the story of impropriety and excessive Judaizing. Even today modern scholars make similar complaints, adding to Esther's sins that of gratuitous violence (see Pfeiffer 1948, Eissfeldt 1965 and even the Jewish scholar, Sandmel 1978).

However, the book of Esther remains central to Jewish festival liturgy, and Christian theologians today appreciate its historical progress into the canon as a sign of its centrality and importance within the faith story of God's people.

### ***Position within the canon***

In Hebrew manuscripts, Esther is usually positioned as the last of the five scrolls (*megillôt*). These books (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther) are read at the five major festivals of the Jewish year and were given the collective label 'Scrolls' by the tenth-century Tiberian Masoretes. In BHS these Scrolls follow Job and precede Daniel in the third section of the OT, the 'Writings' (*ketûbîm*), which follow 'Law' (*tôrâ*) and 'Prophets' (*nebí'im*).<sup>17</sup>

The Christian Bible places Esther as the last of seventeen books of sacred history. It opens with the formula *nyhy* ('and it happened'), typical of the history books (cf. e.g. Joshua, Judges, Samuel and

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17. The order of the Scrolls is related to the order of the Jewish festivals at which each scroll is read, beginning with the spring new year: Song of Songs is read at Passover (April); Ruth at Shavuot (May–June); Lamentations on ninth of Av (July–August); Ecclesiastes at Sukkot (September–October); and Esther at Purim (March). Other Hebrew canons bear evidence to a differing ordering of the OT books. Sometimes the megilloth do not appear as a group (e.g. Ruth appears with the historical books, Esther sometimes follows Daniel and precedes Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles).

Ezra). This means that the Christian Bible no longer places the five Scrolls (*mēgillōt*) together. In fact, over the years, Esther's position in the Christian Bible has been variable (for example, it has also appeared at the very end of the OT canon, possibly reflecting the view that it was the last book to find its place within the OT canon).

### ***Relationship to the rest of the canon***

Thematically Esther has a number of connections with other material within the OT. Indeed, it is possible that its position in the Hebrew canon is connected to its theme. For example, the hope and celebration in Esther contrasts with and replaces the despair and mourning of Lamentations. Esther also connects with Daniel (which follows the *mēgillōt*), as both share a similar setting and plot, focusing on Jews prospering in a foreign land. The most obvious connections with other OT books relate to the emphasis that God's people have a history and future because of God's intervention. Thematic overlap exists with the stories of Joseph's exploits in Genesis and more generally with the book of Exodus. With a more individual focus, Job and Ruth also investigate the theological theme of the apparent absence of God in the life of his people.

When it comes to Esther's relationship with the NT canon, we are confronted with the fact that Esther (along with Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon) is not cited in the NT. However, recent studies by Beckett (2002) and Jobes (1999) have re-emphasized the possibility of typological interpretations of Esther (renewing some medieval approaches), even suggesting the possibility of Esther representing a type of Christ as servant of the Lord.

Esther has many parallels with the apocryphal book of Judith. Judith means 'Jewess', which in turn implies devotion to her nation's cause. Written c. 150 BC, the book tells the story of Judith, a beautiful woman, who causes the downfall of Nebuchadnezzar's chief general. Like Esther, the hopeful theme is that God will deliver weak people who trust him.

Other connections to the Apocrypha relate to the Greek additions of 106 verses that have a reverential tone and exalt God's righteousness (see Appendix).