

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash
Megillat Esther
Yeshivat Har Etzion

Shiur #23: Stages of Acceptance of the Festival
(chapter 9)
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The plot of Esther concludes with the description of the battles in which the Jews prevailed over those who sought to harm them: "It was reversed, such that the Jews ruled over their enemies" (9:1). However, the book does not end at this point, and before we reach the long-awaited "calm" (chapter 10) there is an entire unit detailing the process of acceptance of the festival of Purim throughout the Jewish Diaspora. Not surprisingly, the key word in this unit is the root "k-y-m" (to fulfill, confirm, establish), which appears here seven times,[1] and expresses the essence of the discussion: the establishment, or institutionalization, of the festival.

From the very nature of this unit (describing – as we shall see below – different historical stages) it is clear that it was not written immediately after the battles, but rather from a more distant perspective. At the same time, this unit should be regarded as an organic continuation of the narrative, and not as an addition inserted at a later stage[2], such that it is reasonable to suggest that the entire narrative is related from a distant historical perspective, rather than at the time of the events. In any event, from the very fact that the process of acceptance of the festival is a subject addressed in the text at length, it is clear that the festival was not easily or automatically accepted throughout the Jewish world, and it appears that a special campaign of persuasion was required.[3]

Sometimes this chapter is perceived as a technical, historical note that is meant to connect the plot set out in chapters 1-8 with the festival of Purim as celebrated by Jews, and therefore there is a tendency to ignore its literary molding. However, like every other chapter of Esther, this chapter too integrates "hidden writing." As we shall see in the next shiur, beyond the technical description of the stages of acceptance of the festival there lies a fierce debate as to the status of Jews in exile in general, and their position vis-à-vis their brethren in the Land of Israel in particular.

Let us follow the stages of acceptance of the festival as arising from the description in this chapter:[4]

" .1And the rest of the Jews who were in the provinces of the king... and rested on the fourteenth, and made it a day of feasting and joy. But the Jews who were in Shushan... and rested on the fifteenth, and made it a day of feasting and joy" (16-18.)

The first stage is a spontaneous, popular celebration on the part of the Jews immediately following the battles, in the year of the war itself (the twelfth year of the reign of Achashverosh). This stage is celebrated on two different dates by two different populations: the Jews of Shushan celebrate the day after the second day of battles (the 15th of Adar), while the Jews of the other provinces celebrate after their single day of battles – i.e., on the 14th of Adar.

" .2Therefore the Jews of the villages, who dwelled in un-walled towns, would make the fourteenth of the month of Adar a day of joy and feasting and holiday, with the sending of portions to one another" (19.)

As the second stage, the narrator describes the spontaneous celebrations that were held in the "un-walled towns" in the following years ("osim - would make," indicating a fixed custom.)

This stage is surprising on two levels. Firstly, from a linguistic point of view, the definition of the Jews outside of Shushan is unusual: "The Jews of the villages (haperazim), living in the un-walled towns (be-arei ha-perazot)." This is a new definition that appears here for the first time. We would expect to find the more common definition: "The Jews who were in the rest of the king's provinces." What is the meaning of this uncommon expression, and why does the narrator choose this particular definition here?[5]

Secondly, in terms of content, it is strange that the narrator ignores the Jews of Shushan. Following the description of the Jews of the villages, the reader expects to find some record of the celebration by the Jews of Shushan, so as to parallel the first stage, where both populations were described. However, the narrator simply ignores them. Did the Jews of Shushan not celebrate in the following years? Theoretically, of course, this is possible,[6] but to my mind it is not a reasonable hypothesis. Furthermore, this omission represents a break with the literary model which, throughout the chapter, has presented "the Jews who were in the other provinces of the king" alongside "the Jews who were in Shushan." Why does the text here ignore the celebration of the Jews of Shushan?

It may be that the narrator seeks to emphasize that which is novel or surprising rather than that which is self-evident. The fact that the Jews of all of the king's provinces celebrate on the fourteenth of Adar is indeed surprising: why do they not postpone their celebrations by one day, thereby identifying with their brethren in Shushan? (Obviously, this question applies to the following years, not the year of the battles.) It must be remembered that the essence of the deliverance came thanks to the actions of Jews of Shushan – Mordekhai and

Esther – and as a result of everything that took place in the royal court in Shushan. Seemingly, the Jews of all the provinces should have shown their appreciation for the efforts of Mordechai and Esther by holding their own celebrations, too, on the 15th of Adar. Moreover, The 15th day of the month – when the moon is full[7] – is already associated with Jewish festivals, including Sukkot (15th of Tishrei) and the Festival of Matzot (15th of Nissan). Since Purim is not a biblically-ordained festival, but rather one which the Jewish leaders sought to introduce, it would seem appropriate to establish the festival on a date that is a familiar one for festivities, especially since it is the day when the Jews of Shushan were saved (or, more accurately, the day when they "rested"). Despite this, and with seemingly deliberate defiance, the Jews of all the provinces continue to celebrate on the 14th of Adar, thereby underlining the separation between themselves and the Jews of Shushan![8]

It is perhaps with a view to highlighting this point that the author employs the unusual expression, "Of the villages, who lived in the un-walled towns." The accepted term that has appeared consistently throughout the text ("the other provinces of the king") highlights the inferior status of these areas in relation to Shushan: there is the royal city, and there is "the rest." In celebrating the deliverance of the Jews on the 14th rather than the 15th, the Jews of the "other provinces" demonstrate their independence; therefore they "deserve" an independent title ("of the villages"), rather than one that is relative to Shushan. Obviously, this serves only to reinforce our question: why is it so important to the Jews of the other provinces to distinguish themselves from the Jews of Shushan? Why do they not identify with them, and with their leaders, thereby expressing gratitude?

We shall return to this question and to the special term "villages," at a later stage.

In any event, the description of the festivities of the Jews outside of Shushan includes several elements:

" .1Joy and feasting" – this, of course, is the primary definition of any celebration: the celebrants are happy and they eat together. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that in the context of Esther, the concept of "mishteh" (feasting, partying) holds a place of honor: no less than ten feasts or parties are mentioned over the course of the narrative.[9] Here, the Jews ultimately express their joy in "feasting." Some opinions have felt that this reflects a dangerous proximity to the gentile culture described in the narrative[10]. However, attention should be paid to the fact that in the descriptions of all of the Jewish parties, the word "joy" (simcha) is added, while the gentile feasts in Esther lack even the briefest hint of such joy. The narrator thereby hints to a most significant distinction: there is a type of partying that is an expression of joy, and there is a type of partying that revolves around the drinking itself and the accompanying inebriation.

" (2And a holiday" – There is room for discussion as to whether this expression implies a day when creative labor is forbidden.[11] In contemporary halakhic consciousness such an idea is almost inconceivable, since only God can command the observance of such days; the festivals introduced by rabbinical decree can never carry a prohibition on labor. According to this line of thought, the concept of "holiday" in the context of Esther must be understood as a general expression indicating a day of gladness; a day of much goodness.[12] Still, there is room for a reading that would suggest that, at least at this stage of the acceptance of the festival, the Jews of the other provinces sought to apply the mood and character of a festival as familiar to Jewish culture, to the days of Purim as well, and therefore applied the prohibition on labor here too. It is difficult to ascertain which understanding is the more accurate one, since the question is dependent on other issues pertaining to the nature of the festivals and the manner of their celebration in ancient times.

" (3And the sending of portions to one another" – this statement is usually regarded as the identifying characteristic of the days of Purim, and indeed, Jewish law has established this as one of the special commandments related to the festival. It represents a profound correction and counter-balance to Haman's description of the Jews to the king: "There is a certain nation, scattered and divided among the nations, throughout the provinces of your kingdom" (3:8). The members of the nation that is "scattered and divided" now send food portions to one another, thereby renewing and reasserting their special identity and the community framework that facilitates the creation of collective identity. At the same time, on the literal level, the expression "the sending of portions" should be viewed as part of the definition of the day as one of joy and holiday. The same expression occurs in Nechemia: "And Nechemia the Tirshata and Ezra the priest-scribe, and the Levites who taught the people, said to all the people: This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn, nor weep... Go, eat sumptuously and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, for this day is holy to our God; do not be grieved, for the joy of God is your strength... And all the people went to eat and to drink and to send portions, and to make great joy" (8:9-12). When Nechemia sought to encourage the nation to celebrate Rosh Ha-shana (the first day of the seventh month), he asked them to eat fine food and to send portions of food to those who had none. And indeed, the nation responded to his request: the people ate and drank, and make a great celebration, and "sent portions." Actually, this idea has its source in Devarim, where, alongside the command concerning the actual festivals, there is also a command to ensure that the festival will be a happy one also for the destitute, who lack the means to celebrate properly (Devarim 16). The simplest reading of this expression, then, connotes the institution of this day as a festival, involving – as Jewish tradition requires – ensuring the inclusion of those who lack the economic means to hold a festive meal themselves.[13] According to this reading, the "sending of portions" parallels the expression that will be incorporated in Mordekhai's letters (in the next stage) – "gifts to the poor." [14]

" .4Then Mordekhai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Achashverosh, near and far, to establish for them the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, as the days when the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which had been turned for them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning to holiday, that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and the sending of portions to one another, and gifts to the poor" (20-22.(

This third stage is no longer spontaneous; it is based on letters sent by Mordekhai to all of the Jews, "near and far" – i.e., the Jews of Shushan and the Jews of the other provinces.[15] Fox argues that the verb, "Established for them," (le-kayem aleihem) implies that Mordekhai did not present his words as a demand to create a new custom, but rather as a formalization of the popular custom that was already being practiced:

"The uses of qayyem elsewhere show that it means 'validate' or 'confirm,' rather than 'command, demand'... In all cases, it refers not to the inception of a legal action or condition, but rather to the formalization or fulfillment of a decision or a previously declared intention." [16]

Even if Fox is correct, it seems that this verb is used here because Mordekhai wants to establish and institutionalize the custom of the celebration that had begun, as explained above, with a spontaneous popular outburst of joy. However, this does not mean that Mordekhai did not introduce anything new in his formalization of the Purim festival. On the contrary, I believe that the change that he effects by means of his letters is the main point being made here.

Mordekhai's request is simple, although it is sometimes confused with the custom that is prevalent today.[17] Mordekhai asks that all the Jews celebrate for two days: "The fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, year by year." [18] It is reasonable to assume that the intention here is that the celebration of the 14th should be a commemoration of the victory of all the Jews of the king's provinces, while the celebration of the 15th should be a commemoration of the victory of the Jews of Shushan, but that all are required to commemorate both victories. This idea is highlighted in the concluding verses of this stage, where Haman also receives a new title: "For Haman, son of Hamedata the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews, to destroy them" (9:24). Haman has already been called the "enemy of the Jews" in three other places in Esther (3:10; 8:1; 9:10). However, it is only now – when Mordekhai dispatches his letters, seeking to establish the celebration of Purim – that the text refers to him as "enemy of all the Jews." Of course, this underlines the danger that had threatened all of the Jews, and Mordekhai expects that all will celebrate the same two-day period.

In Mordekhai's words we sense an allusion to the point we raised previously, concerning the special importance of the 15th day of the month in Jewish culture. Mordekhai asks that the Jews celebrate "the days when the Jews rested from their enemies," but he also adds that they should celebrate "the month that was changed for them from sorrow to joy and from mourning to holiday".

As noted, the essence of the month is the time of the full moon, on the 15th.[19] Thus Mordekhai hints to all the Jews of all the provinces that the day of rest of the Jews of Shushan should be celebrated, too.

As to the nature of the festival, there are two interesting differences between the formulation of Mordekhai's letters and the spontaneous celebrations described in the previous stage. Firstly, Mordekhai omits the description of the festival as a "holiday." This is especially striking in view of the appearance of this expression as a characteristic of the general reversal of the month: "And the month that was changed for them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning to holiday." The use of the expression in question in a context other than its integration in the previous stage (where it is recalled as a characteristic of the days of Purim themselves) requires some explanation. If what the expression means, at the stage of the popular celebrations, is a day characterized by general joy, then it is difficult to understand why the text introduces the change. Perhaps it is nothing more than a matter of maintaining linguistic variety and preserving a similar sentence structure[20]. In other words, because Mordekhai adds one detail, he omits another so as to preserve the pattern of the sentence and its rhythm, such that there remain three characteristics:

Description of the festival, stage 2: "Joy and feasting/and holiday/and sending of portions to one another"

Description of the festival, stage 3: "Feasting and joy/and sending of portions to one another/and gifts to the poor".

However, if the meaning of this expression is related to a prohibition against labor, then alongside Mordekhai's demand that the days of salvation be celebrated, he is also hinting at the difference between these days and those whose celebration is commanded in the Torah. According to this reading, the omission of the term "holiday" has great significance with regard to the nature of the days of Purim.

As noted, there is another characteristic that is added by Mordekhai, and which is missing from the description of the popular celebrations: alongside the "sending of portions," Mordekhai adds, "and gifts to the poor." Since we were previously inclined to regard the expression, "sending of portions" as one implying the provision of goods for the feast to those who had none, all that Mordekhai is doing here is to emphasize this; he is not introducing something new. In the combination of these two differences we discern Mordekhai's responsibility as leader: he chooses to highlight the obligation of including others in the joy of the day and the giving of charity rather than the festivity itself, the actual "holiday." It is perhaps for this reason that he mentions "feasting" before "joy," in contrast to the popular celebration that is defined as "joy and feasting." The mention of feasting first renders it a normative obligation that must be fulfilled year by year, ensuring that the members of the community have the means to fulfill it.

At first glance it seems that Mordekhai's demand is indeed accepted by all of the Jews: "The Jews undertook that which they had started to do" (23a) – in other words, the celebration of the 14th – "And as Mordekhai had written to them" (23b) – the addition of another day of festivity, the 15th of Adar. The reader's impression is that this is the final stage in the acceptance of the festival, as it would seem from the general verses of conclusion that follow (24-28:(

"For Haman, son of Hamedata, the Agagite, enemy of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast a pur – that is, a lot – to consume them and to destroy them. But when she [Esther] came before the king, he ordered in writing that his evil scheme, which he had schemed against the Jews, should come back upon his own head, and so they hanged him and his sons on the gallows. Therefore they called these days Purim, on account of the pur; therefore, because of all the words of this letter, and of what they saw concerning this matter, and what had befallen them, the Jews established and took upon themselves and upon their descendants and upon all who joined themselves to them, that they should not fail to keep these two days, as they were written and at their proper time, every year; and that these days would be remembered and kept in every generation, in every family, in every province and in every city, and that these days of Purim would not fail from among the Jews, nor their memory perish from their descendants".

These verses offer not only a clear summary of the entire narrative (albeit with some slightly different details – see below), but also an etiological statement, i.e., an explanation for the celebration of the days of Purim and for their name: "Therefore they called these days Purim, on account of the pur; therefore, because of all the words of this letter...." This is a fitting conclusion to the narrative as a whole, and the closing sentence, looking to the future ("That these days of Purim would not fail from among the Jews, nor their memory perish from their descendants") creates a clear sense of finality and conclusion. Thus, the innocent reader feels that this is the end of the story.

To his great surprise, he discovers that there is yet another stage, describing Mordekhai and Esther dispatching yet another set of letters! Before examining this matter and clarifying the custom as practiced today, let us address the conclusion presented in the verses cited above – which, as noted, differ in certain important details:

"For Haman, son of Hamedata the Agagite, enemy of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews, to destroy them, and had cast a pur – that is, a lot – to consume them and to destroy them. But when [Esther] came before the king, he ordered in writing that his evil scheme that he had schemed against the Jews come back upon his head, and they hanged him and his sons upon the gallows" (9:24-25(

There are several discrepancies between this concise description and the full plot as set out in chapters 1-8. Firstly, Mordechai is entirely absent from this description. Secondly, there is no mention of the battles waged between the Jews and their enemies. Furthermore, in this concise summary the pur is awarded a special place. However, the main difference between this description and the plot of the narrative concerns the king's response to Esther's request. In the narrative itself, the king claims that it is not possible to "revoke Haman's scheme," since letters signed by the king cannot be revoked. Here, in the summary, we read: "When [Esther][21] came before the king, he ordered in writing that the evil scheme of Haman, which he schemed against the Jews, come back upon his head".

Some scholars have viewed these discrepancies as proof that this description represents an independent source explaining the basis for the festival which does not accord with the Esther narrative.[22] However, the narrator still chooses to bring it here, and the commentator must explain what it contributes. In fact, it is specifically in light of the differences that we must ask why the narrator chose to leave the summarized story as is, rather than amending it to conform with the full narrative.

To explain this let us first of all note that in fact these discrepancies need not be regarded as real contradictions, but rather as a different style of writing – or, more accurately, writing from a new perspective, one that is more distant and general. The plot of a narrative, owing to its nature, focuses on details. In contrast, official letters that are sent to every province and city will tend to convey the essence of the event, even at the expense of changing certain details for the sake of brevity and clarity.

At the same time, I do believe that by integrating the summary of the story within the broader narrative, the narrator makes a statement of general literary value: the story could also be told in a different way! Perhaps to some readers this will sound like a post-modernist suggestion, but one of the expressions of the "hidden writing" in Esther is the narrator's awareness that the events may be presented from several angles and perspectives. As we have seen, even from the midst of the plot itself, the narrator hints through various devices that the reality may be understood in different ways. Indeed, in some cases he provides certain information in the plain text, while hinting, beneath the surface, to a different message, pointing to a different interpretation of the events and their significance. Here this phenomenon assumes overt expression, with the narrator explicitly integrating a description of the events from the official, royal point of view. Suddenly we discover that were the story to have been told from the king's perspective, it would differ in certain central details – such as, for example, the king's involvement in the cancellation of Haman's decree.

The next stage of the acceptance of the festival (the dispatch of Esther's letters), and a clarification of the custom as observed today, will be discussed in the next shiur.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

[1]In verses 21,27,29,31,32. Special attention should be paid to verse 31, which concludes the chapter and features this verb over and over: "To confirm (le-kayem) these days of Purim at their proper time, as Mordekhai the Jew and Queen Esther had established (kiyem) for them, and as they had established (kiymu) for themselves and for their seed with regard to the fasting and lamentation".

[2]Berlin, p. 143; Fox, pp. 114-115 and Bush, pp. 456-460 agree; see at length in B. W. Jones, "The So-Called Appendix to the Book of Esther," *Semitics* 6 (1978), pp. 36-43. For a different approach, see for example Clines, pp. 39-49; Beal, pp. 107-109.

[3]Y. Tabory, "Mo'adei Yisrael bi-Tekufat ha-Mishna ve-ha-Talmud," *Jerusalem* 5755, p. 324.

[4]A similar analysis may be found in an article by Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, "Anshei Keneset ha-Gedola Hem Hotmei ha-Amana be-Ma'amad Ezra ve-Nechemia," *Meshalev* 36 (5761), pp. 5-20. He maintains that chapter 9 presents five stages, while in my humble opinion there are only four. Beal discerns three stages: verses 20-23; 24-28; 29-32 (Beal, pp. 114-115), but this division fails to take into account the spontaneous celebration of the year of the actual battle. I agree with his division, but since the division of the celebration over two separate days is so intrinsic to the chapter, the spontaneous festivity of the year in which the events take place must be taken into consideration, since this represents the basis for the division into two days.

[5]Some scholars have claimed that this verse, speaking of the "un-walled towns," is a later addition (a gloss); see, for example, Moore, p. 89; G. Gerleman, *Esther, Biblischer Kommentar, Neukirchen-Vluyn* 1973, p. 142. However, I believe that Fox is correct in his assertion that "[t]he unit as a whole is outside the time sequence, because it is not another event in the story but an etiology for the later usage. Verse 19 is the heart of the etiology and could not appear earlier in the unit" (p. 114). Still, we must ask why the narrator chooses to use the unusual term "villages," rather than the expression that he has used consistently throughout the text, "the other provinces of the king".

[6]Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun raises this possibility: "It is also possible that the Jews of the walled towns felt no special danger, regarded themselves as significantly protected, and felt no need to celebrate at all" (in the article mentioned above, p. 15). Also D. Herman, "When Was the Book of Esther Included in the Biblical Canon?," *Beit Mikra* 48 (2003), p. 323.

[7]Philo explains the selection of this date in this way, too.

[8]The festival of the Pesach sacrifice is celebrated on the 14th of Adar. However, it seems that this date is significant not in its own right, but rather as the day preceding the 15th, when the Festival of Matzot begins. The reader may well deliberate whether the 14th and 15th of Adar are meant to parallel the 14th and 15th of Nissan.

[9]Many scholarly opinions agree that there are ten feasts, although other counts have been proposed, including the following two: G. H. Cohen, "Mavo li-Megillat Esther," *Da'at Mikra*, Jerusalem 5733, p. 7 (counting Vashti's feast independently from that of Achashverosh); Y. Grossman, "Bein Mishteh le-Tzom bi-Megillat Esther," in *Hadassi Hi Esther*, pp. 73-92 (where the fast of Vashti and the feast of Achashverosh are counted as one feast, but the two feasts of celebration by the Jews following the war – 9:17-18 – are counted separately.)

[10]See S.D. Goytein, *Iyunim ba-Mikra*, Tel Aviv 5727, p. 60

[11]Berlin 2001, pp. 137-138 compares this expression with the accepted definition of a festival in the rabbinical literature. Since the Bible does not refer to those days when labor is forbidden as "holidays," it is difficult to determine whether there is a connection between the definition of Purim in our text and the rabbinical definition of the festivals.

[12]BDB, p. 373; KBL, p. 400.

[13]Obviously, this reading, too, presents the Jews as the complete contrast to their depiction by Haman, as noted above.

[14]This is not in accordance with the opinion of the Sages, according to which the "sending of portions" involves any friend or neighbor, not necessarily the poor, while "gifts to the poor" refers specifically to those who are lacking. Berlin adopts the reading of the Sages and adds, "The Megilla draws a distinction between 'portions,' which are distributed to everyone, and 'gifts,' which are given to the poor" (Berlin, p. 146). I regard this as a regular instance of the biblical phenomenon of parallel expressions.

[15]We regard the expression, "Mordekhai wrote these things" as a heading for the contents of the letters which are immediately set forth; this accords with the opinions of Paton (p. 293) and Dommershausen (p. 123.)

As we know, the medieval commentators regard the expression as a hint to the writing of the actual text of Esther. Rashi, for example, writes (ad loc): "'And Mordekhai wrote' – this very Megilla, just as it is." Some modern scholars have adopted this reading, although they offer alternatives (Moore, p. 93). For a discussion of the difficulties inherent in this interpretation, see Clines, p. 177. The Septuagint adds, "Mordekhai wrote these things in a book"; this addition is apparently inspired by Rashi's reading.

[16]Fox, p. 118

[17]Among modern scholars, too, there have been some who projected the custom as practiced today onto Mordekhai's words – to my view, without justification. (See, for example, Fox, p. 114; Berlin, p. 147.)

[18]This reading arises as a possibility in a discussion in the Babylonian Talmud: "And let us say un-walled [cities] on the 14th, walled [cities] on the 14th and 15th, as it is written, 'To establish for them the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same?'" The answer that the Gemara supplies is that the text could have read, "the fourteenth and the fifteenth"; this would have denoted a two-day celebration. The insertion of the direct object ("et") indicates that the two days are treated as two separate entities. Of course, the plain reading of the text also allows for the possibility raised in the Gemara's question.

[19]The Yerushalmi deduces from this expression that it is appropriate to read the Megilla throughout the month of Adar: "It is taught in the name of Rabbi Natan: the entire month is proper for the reading of the Megilla. For what reason? [Because it is written,] 'And the month that had been changed for them from sorrow to joy.'" (Yerushalmi, Megilla, 1:1.)

[20]Hermann (above, note 6; p. 325), suggests that the omission of the term "holiday" in Mordekhai's letters "arises from consideration for the views of those who opposed the perpetuation of the events; the establishment of these models of perpetuation represented a

sort of compromise, according to which two days would be commemorated, but would not have a publicly festive character as expressed in the wearing of festive clothing, public gatherings etc. Rather, they would suffice with the customs of feasting and joy, the sending of portions to one another, and giving gifts to the poor." However, the context would indicate that at this stage Mordekhai was not yet aware of the popular opposition to the celebration of the 15th, such that it is difficult to conclude that the omission of the term "holiday" is meant as a compromise.

[21]Paton doubts that Esther is the subject, since she is not mentioned in the sentence at all. He therefore adopts the version of the Septuagint, proposing "When he [Haman] came before the king" (Paton, p. 296). Driver offers a daring interpretation: to his view, the word "u-vevo'a" ("when she came") is a corruption of "u-vevo aleph heh" – an abbreviation for "when Queen Esther came..."; G. R. Driver, "Abbreviations in the Massoretic Text," *Textus 1* (1960), p. 128. As far-fetched as this suggestion sounds, it is adopted by Moore, who incorporates it into the body of his translation: "But when Queen Esther came before the king" (Moore, p. 92.)

[22] Paton, for example, asserts: "The non-mention of Esther in this passage is additional evidence of its literary independence... A different account of the transaction and of the reason for the King's sentence is given in 7:8. This is a further evidence of the literary independence of this section" (p. 296).