

Esther Conclusion: Greek vs. Hebrew

Overview of Esther in Greek and Hebrew:

Hebrew

- I. Threat to Judeans
 - A. King's Banquet
 - B. Queen Vashti's Refusal
 - C. Esther Chosen Queen
 - D. Mordecai Discovers a Plot
 - E. Haman Plots Against the Judeans
 - F. Esther Agrees to Help Judeans
 - G. Esther Prepares a Banquet
 - H. Haman Plots to Hang Mordecai
- II. Deliverance of Judeans
 - A. King Honors Mordecai
 - B. Esther Reveals Haman's Plot
 - C. Haman is Hanged
 - D. Esther Saves Judeans
 - E. Judeans Destroy Enemies
 - F. Feast of Purim Inaugurated
 - G. Greatness of Mordecai

Greek

- I. Threat to Judeans
 - A. Mordecai's Dream from God**
 - B. King's Banquet
 - C. Queen Vashti's Refusal
 - D. Esther Chosen Queen
 - E. Mordecai Discovers a Plot
 - F. Haman Plots Against the Judeans
 - G. Copy of Haman's Decree**
 - H. Esther Agrees to Help Judeans
 - I. Mordecai and Esther's Prayers**
 - J. Esther Prepares a Banquet
 - K. God Changes the Heart of the King**
 - L. Haman Plots to Hang Mordecai
- II. Deliverance of Judeans
 - A. King Honors Mordecai
 - B. Esther Reveals Haman's Plot
 - C. Haman is Hanged
 - D. Esther Saves Judeans
 - E. Copy of Mordecai's Decree**
 - F. Judeans Destroy Enemies
 - G. Feast of Purim Inaugurated
 - H. Greatness of Mordecai
 - I. Fulfillment of Mordecai's Dream**

The Story

The **story** of Esther without the mention of God is: **Mordecai and Esther** save the Judean people.

The **story** of Esther with the mention of God is: **God** saves His people.

Immediately we notice two differences: subject and object. The subject is very obvious, but the change in object is more distinct. While we recognize that "the Judeans" and "God's People" are one in the same, "the Judeans" are a historical ethnic group and "God's People" are a religious body. One term refers to the place they're from, the other refers to the faith they follow, but both are often called by the same term: Jews.

So the story of Hebrew Esther is: two people of a certain ethnic group save their ethnic group. Whereas the story in Greek is: a religious deity of certain ethnic group saves His religious followers.

Historically, what effect might that difference have on the verification of Esther?

Esther is more likely to be verified as a historical document if it's read as a historical document. It would simply be about verifying facts, and not dealing with theological issues.

Evangelistically, what effect might that difference have on the target audience of Esther?

Non-believers are far more likely to trust historical sources than religious sources. This leads us to our first point supporting the Hebrew version of Esther compared to the Greek: Esther is able to reach a unique group of readers that other books (including Esther in Greek) cannot.

The Theme

The **theme** of Esther without the mention of God is: The Judean people cannot be defeated. (H-4:14)

The main theme is found in the turning point of Esther's character. Her conversation with Mordecai brings her from anxious and afraid to wise and brave. And it's specifically because of one line he tells her: "The Jewish people will be fine, whether you help or not. Do you want to live as one of them, or fall alone?"

The **theme** of Esther with the mention of God is: God will not let His holy lineage fall. (G-15:9)

Again the object shifts from ethnic group to religious group. It's not about a people, but a specific lineage of salvation. "Saved" and "delivered" are the key words Mordecai uses when summarizing the story.

The natural conclusion when comparing those themes is that the Hebrew story is all about luck. The Judean people always seem to get lucky at just the right moment. The Greek story comparatively is that it's not luck and never has been. It's always been God working for a specific plan, and the story of Esther is no different.

So how does the version with seemingly less connection to Jesus become the chosen version?

While the Greek version answers the questions it poses, the Hebrew version creates a sense of wonder. When Mordecai says, "deliverance will rise for the Jews from some other place," but doesn't say where, it forces the reader to ponder what he meant. Reading Esther without having the direct answers given to you will naturally lead to pairing other books with Esther as you read. Esther acts as a gateway to the Jewish story because of the question it's theme leaves unanswered. This is useful for building the faith of both the believer and non-believer, whereas the theme in the Greek version will typically only build the faith of those who already believe.

Conclusion

The differences in both the story and theme of Esther when compared side by side give us a clear reason the Hebrew version was chosen by early Church fathers over the Greek: The Hebrew version is written for both the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek version is not.

Despite the Greek version having a much more explicit connection to God and His work in creation, the Hebrew version better lines up with the purpose of Jesus' mission, despite not directly mentioning it. Because of this, it fits better as a book included in the narrative of Jesus than it's Greek version.

So why do the additions in Greek exist if they're not necessary? Read 1 Corinthians 1:22.

The Jews demand signs. We will never know if the author of the additions was present during the story of Esther. We don't know how much of what he wrote is authentic or given to him/her by God. But one thing is certain: he/she was not happy with the story of Esther leaving out those details. Greek Esther exists because a Jew did what Jews do when they don't immediately see God, search for where He was at work and make sure He's included in the story.

There are positives and negatives to this type of thinking. It's always good to actively seek God in everyday life, whether His working is obvious or not. It's often good to include Him in the story, acknowledging His work in creation. However, it can be bad to force God into a story, downplaying the purpose for which He created humans: to tend the earth. The truth is that sometimes God doesn't directly stick His hand into a problem and fix it. Sometimes He trains and sends His people to fix it and that's enough. People's desire to see an awesome, powerful, and vengeful God sometimes blind them to where God is actually working, like in Word and Sacrament. In fact, that was the exact problem of the Jews of Jesus' time: they were looking for God where they wanted Him to be instead of where He was.

And that's why the Greek additions exist: Jews "needed" them despite not actually needing them.

So why don't we use the Greek Old Testament that includes the additions and other books?

1. *The purpose of the additions and extra books are specifically for the Jews. They are not stories that will have any impact (in fact they might actually have negative impacts) on Gentiles. And since the Bible is a grouping of books about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, and His works for the salvation of all peoples, and those additions and added books do not speak to all people, they are not necessary to include. They are useful for certain people in certain situations, but to add them to the general Bible given to all men would only cause a stumbling block for many.*

2. *They are not referenced by any New Testament books. While the NT authors do quote the Septuagint, the additions to Esther and other added books are never quoted. This means the authors themselves (and the Holy Spirit working through them) did not find anything in the additions that was necessary to the Gospel, unlike, say, Paul and his thorough distinction between other Old Testament moral, civil, and ceremonial laws that have changed with the coming of the Messiah.*

The story of Esther highlights the answers to both these questions. The additions change the story and theme of Esther, being useful to some, but limiting evangelistic resources to others. However, they don't change the story of the Bible at all, and therefore are not and should not be deemed "necessary".