

Faith & Justice
14 April 2024

Two Readings of the Esther Story

Mainstream	Critical
Gender roles	Patriarchy
Women's virtue in beauty & passive role in the story	Women's agency, strategic & political decision making
Mordecai's loyalty to the king	Mordecai's ambition, jealousy & political self interests
Haman's evil nature and antisemitism	Haman's political ambition and rivalry with Mordecai
God's providence and care	Human agency, coincidence and contingency
Jewish unity and faith	Jewish violence and disproportionate revenge against their enemies
Deliverance of Jews from a plotted massacre	Massacre of the Persians as collective punishment
The festival of Purim as a celebration of deliverance	The use of Purim as a political tool for perpetuating narratives of hatred

The Book of Esther

3:2 "All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor."

3:8-11 "8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury.' 10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman ... the enemy of the Jews. 11 "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."

8:11 "11 The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children, and to plunder the property of their enemies."

9:2-3, 6, 10, 16,17 "2 The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them. 3 And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. 4 Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful. 6 In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. 7 They also killed ... 10 the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder. 16 Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. 17 This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

Exodus 11: 4-7

4 So Moses said, "This is what the Lord says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. 5 Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. 6 There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. 7 But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any person or animal.' Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

Job 1: 9-12

9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." 12 The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

Two Models of revelation: Islam & Christianity

Qur'an	Bible (Torah)
1 book	Many books (66) Torah: 5 books
Divine narrative perspective God as the sole author	Divine/Human collaboration Divine source, human authors/editors Invisible or anonymous narrative voice
Direct/verbatim revelation	Inspired revelation
Revealed over 23 years	Revealed and written down over +1000 years
Revealed to Prophet Mohammad (Idea of one prophet, one book)	Inspired to a variety of people
The text itself is holy	Different opinions about the holiness of the material book
The book is a miracle	Scripture contains stories about miracles
Non-chronological order Little emphasis on names or historical details	Chronological order (Torah) Emphasis on genealogies and other details about the names of places and people
Explicit articulation of the moral message	Message communicated via narrative, left for interpretation

Resources:

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2. Gunn, David M., and Danna Nolan Fewell. *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*. Oxford Bible Series. Oxford University Press, 1993.
3. Gordon, Joy. *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions*. Harvard University Press, 2012.
4. Jardim, Georgina. "Biblical Ruth as a Qur'anic Queen of Sheba: Scriptural Narratives of Foreigner Assent." In D. Crowther, S. Shafaie, I. Glaser and S. Akhtar (eds), *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context: Qur'anic Conversations*. Routledge, 2017.
5. Shafaie, Shirin. "Toward Inter-theological Hermeneutics: A Case Study in Reading Between the Joseph Stories." In D. Crowther, S. Shafaie, I. Glaser and S. Akhtar (eds), *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context: Qur'anic Conversations*. Routledge, 2017.
6. Shafaie, Shirin. "Qur'anic Perspective on (In)equality in Relation to the Foundational Concepts of Humanity, Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion." Building Bridges Seminar, Georgetown University, 2018.
7. Shafaie, Shirin. "Bringing Faith Back In': Muslim and Christian Approaches to Nuclear (Non)Proliferation and Disarmament." In Paul Hedges (ed.), *Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters: Developments, Diversity and Dialogues*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.
8. The Building Bridges Seminar. [Video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLyk72vUV-M> (accessed April 14, 2024).