

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

The Alpha-Text of Esther: Exploration of Themes from Selected Passages in the Greek Versions of Esther.

Author

Elkanah K. Cheboi

Lecturer in Theology & Biblical Studies, Kabarak University, Kenya.

Main author email: elkanahcheboi@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper explores themes that emerge from the selected sections of the Addition A, C, and D of the Greek versions of Esther. The textual comparison study will focus on three selected passages from the Alpha-text (AT). Specifically, the first selected text is Addition A (vv. 1–17= 11:2–12:6); the passage describes Mordecai’s dream concerning impending destruction and his discovery of the conspiracy of the eunuchs (A is prefixed to MT 1:1). In this new additional material, characterization of Mordecai will be observed. The following text, Addition C (vv. 1–30= 13:8–14:19), deals with the prayer of Mordecai and Esther for deliverance (C follows 4:17). This text ascertains themes that emerge from the prayer of Esther. Next, addition D (vv. 1–16= 15:1–16; Vulg. 15:4–19), which details an account of Esther’s appearance before the king in anxiety for her own safety (D follows C, and forms an alternative to MT 5:1-2), will focus on the characterization of Esther. These selected sections will be used to sample the themes from the different characterizations of Esther and Mordecai. The study argues that the translator(s) or redactor(s) who included the additional material (AT) to the Hebrew book of Esther wanted to give the book of Esther a bold Jewish outlook, incorporate into the text some socio-political concerns of post-exilic Jewish communities, and to enhance the characterization of the two prominent Jewish characters (Esther and Mordecai) to their diaspora audience.

Article Citation (APA)

Cheboi, E. K. (2022). The Alpha-Text of Esther: Exploration of Themes from Selected Passages in the Greek Versions of Esther. *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.*, 2(01), 139-151.

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The book of Esther is an Old Testament book that has attracted a lot of scholarly activity in the recent past. The book tells a compelling story of the Jewish people under Persian rule and the threats that surrounded them during that historical period. It records the rise of Esther, a Jew, to a position of prominence in the Persian Empire as a queen. The book narrates how Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai managed to avoid the destruction of their Jewish people. It also explains how the holiday of Purim was established in the Jewish calendar. This general structure of the story recorded in many of the Bibles today is based on the Hebrew version as found in the Masoretic Text (MT), but there are other versions of the story in Greek. The Greek versions of Esther contain significant variations when compared with the MT. For example, some sections have extended portions and or endings when compared with the MT. But also, of great interest, there are six additional chapters in the Greek versions of Esther not found in MT. So in total, there are three versions of Esther: one in Hebrew and two in Greek. The first Greek text of Esther, also known as the B text, became part of the Greek Bible (LXX). The second Greek text is commonly referred to as the Alpha-Text (hereafter referred to as AT), or the Lucianic text (L) (Clines, 1984). A comparison of LXX Esther with AT material shows some apparent differences; the AT text, though short, has some material not in either the MT or the LXX.

However, the AT, just like the Septuagint Esther, commonly contain six additional chapters (A-F) that form the focus of this study. Since these chapters can be voluminous, this study will only focus on selected passages. But it suffices to give an overview of these additional sections. Addition A reports Mordecai's dream concerning impending destruction, and his discovery of the conspiracy against the king. Addition B material details Haman's decree against the Jews, while Addition C presents the prayers of Mordecai and Esther for deliverance. Addition D narrates Esther's uninvited approach to the king; this section replaces MT 5:1-2 by expanding the two Hebrew verses to sixteen verses. Finally, addition E highlights the royal decree issued, while Addition F gives the interpretation of Mordecai's dream relating to the events of the narrative (Boyd-Taylor, 2015). These additions to Greek versions of Esther add up to 107 verses (Dorothy, 1997). Therefore these significant additions cannot be ignored; it is estimated that the additional chapters increase the Hebrew Esther by more than two-thirds (Clines, 1984). In the past, scholarship in this area has focused on studying the character, textual features, literary criticism, and the relationship of the Septuagint Esther, Alpha-text (AT) of Esther, and Masoretic text.

This paper explores the themes that emerge from the selected sections of the Addition A, C, and D. The study argues that the translator(s) or redactor(s) who included the additional material (AT) to the Hebrew book of Esther wanted to give the book of Esther a bold Jewish outlook, incorporate into the text some socio-political concerns of post-exilic communities, and to enhance the characterization of two prominent

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud. – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

Jewish characters (Esther and Mordecai) to their diaspora audience. The next section briefly looks at the origins of the AT before the analysis of the selected passages.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Determining the origin of the AT has been a subject of discussion in recent scholarship. Basically, discussions in this area are split into two camps (De Troyer, 2003). The first camp, held by many prominent scholars, attempts to explain AT as “completely or partially based on a Hebrew text that is slightly, very, or completely different from the MT. Going down this road implies the reconstruction of a text which has hitherto not been found anywhere, not in manuscripts, not in Qumran.” Tov (1997) subscribes to this position, “...it is certainly possible that either the LXX or the ‘Lucianic’ version of Esther, or both reflect texts that differ recensionally from MT.” This view assumes that the difference between the texts is due to the differences in the *Vorlagen*. Although this view looks like an easy solution to the matter, it must be noted that the reconstruction process is not that easy. In his book, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, Tov (1997) elaborates on the complications involved in reconstructing the Hebrew *Vorlage*. He states that analysis of LXX should begin with the search for deviations from MT in order to trace back to Hebrew readings it differs from. Even then, he adds that not every deviation in the LXX reflects a different Hebrew reading. This approach may have some grain of truth, but the only challenge is that its conclusion hinges on complicated factors that deal with the reconstruction of the original text.

The second view held by scholars like De Troyer (2003) argues that the author of the AT freely reworked the LXX. This approach emphasizes the redaction process of texts. And so, discrepancies in Esther texts are understood to have been occasioned by: a reworking of texts by redactors, the nature of translation techniques used, and variations due to manuscript transmission. Although this view crucially focuses on the importance of the process, the approach minimizes the volume of the text in question. Greek versions, with their additions, are roughly two-thirds longer than MT.

In my opinion, Tov (1997) raises two critical issues that should be noted. First, LXX translators exercised some amount of freedom in their translation techniques; “the LXX, like most other translations, reflects types of exegesis which introduced elements that deviate from literal representation of the Hebrew text.” Although this freedom is real and typically expected in any translation, excesses should also be checked. The Greek texts of Esther have up to 107 verses, not in the MT. These should not be understood as minor wording discrepancies but major reshaping of a text. A translation that introduces such large blocks of text into a translation by all standards ceases to be a translation. Therefore, to clarify this further, either the

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

translators of the Greek Esther conducted massive redaction work on a text similar to the later MT, or perhaps they were translating from a variant edition of Esther.

Second, “in the course of the manuscript transmission of the LXX, new readings developed in its textual witnesses, often caused by scribal corruption or by contamination with other manuscripts.” Thus, it is more probable that the most competing Greek versions of Esther were separate translations of varying Hebrew originals than the claim that one of them is a reworking of the other. As argued by Tov (1997), the idea of scribal corruption in transmission of texts is a critical issue that can partly explain why the Greek versions of Esther share many similarities but differ significantly from the MT. Jobes (1996), however, advises that this should be critically assessed; the instances of textual corruption and scribal errors should be identified and eliminated to avoid generalization.

Therefore, as a summary, there are two possibilities regarding the origin of the AT. First, it is possible that originally there were two separate versions of Esther: one that would become the MT and another variant (perhaps in Hebrew) that formed the basis for the Greek versions (Clines, 1984). Thus, it is likely that the additional material in Greek Esther came from this unknown variant accessible to the Greek translators of Esther. Clines (1984) is of the view that probably the four of the Additions (A, C, D, and F) originally existed in a Semitic (Aramaic) original and the other two Additions (B and E) are patently Greek composition. Second, it is possible that the unknown *Vorlage* of Greek Esther originally developed from the MT. This accounts for the overall similarities or unity in the structure of the three books. In this study, I argue that the redactors reworked the Hebrew *Vorlage* to omit or introduce additional content intended to communicate thematic issues pertinent to the Jews of diaspora.

3.0 RESULTS

Analysis of Passages on the Character of Mordecai

This section focuses on the analysis of one of the problematic sections of the book of Esther with different versions. It determines the emphasis brought about by the additional material or the variant passages (MT 2:21-23 are: LXX 2:21-23; LXX Addition A 12-17; AT Addition A 11-18). Structurally, these passages deal with the same story, yet they differ in detail. The interest in this analysis will be on the characterization of Mordecai in the MT and the additional material.

1) MT and LXX

The story, according to the MT (MT 2:21-23), narrates the story of Mordecai sitting (יֹשֵׁב) at the king’s gate and near him were two of the king’s eunuch’s (Bigthan and Teresh) who were guarding the doorway. The two eunuchs became angry (קִצְּפוּ) and conspired to assassinate King Ahasuerus. Mordecai learns of this plot

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

and discloses it to Queen Esther, who in turn informs the king. This text assumes Esther is already a queen. The conspiracy was investigated (שקט) and was found to be true, and the two men were hanged on gallows. Further, a record was made in the books of the annals in the presence of the king. In MT, Mordecai is instrumental in saving the life of the king.

The Septuagint version (LXX 2:21-23) of the story refers to the eunuchs also as chief bodyguards (ἀρχισωματοφύλακες) of the king. LXX fleshes out the story by revealing the reason for their anger (ἐλυπήθησαν) to assassinate king Artaxerxes: they were angry because of Mordecai's promotion (προήχθη). De Troyer (2003) rightfully makes a note that "the mention of the promotion of Mordecai in LXX 2:21 looks like a set-up for the reader, for in the very first verse of ch. 3, the promotion of Haman is dealt with. It looks as if the LXX added reference to Mordecai's promotion not only because of Add. A, but also because of ch. 3." Further, there is a relationship in the terminologies translated from the MT; for example, the word for anger in the LXX (λυπω) is simply a translation of the word in the MT (תצק). Just as in MT, Mordecai learns of the plot and warns Esther of the same, who alerts the king. The matter is investigated (ἐτάζω) and the next thing mentioned is that the eunuchs were hanged (ἐκρέμασεν). The king orders a memorandum to be deposited in the royal library in praise of the goodwill shown by Mordecai. Again, the additional material vividly enhances the character of Mordecai. It talks about his promotion, the praise for his heroic act of saving the king's life, and a record of his deed is made and kept in the royal library.

The LXX maintains the same structure as the MT but freely reshapes the MT. Also, the possibility of the translator of LXX translating from a different *Vorlage* cannot be ruled out. Some omissions are evident; for instance, the names of the eunuchs in MT are not featured in the LXX translation; thus, firming the view that the translator might have used a variant *Vorlage*.

2) LXX Addition A, and AT Addition A

In LXX Addition A 12-17 and in AT Addition A 11-18, the general structure of the story is maintained, although with some variations. In LXX Addition A 12-17, the story begins with Mordecai taking a rest in the courtyard with two of the king's eunuchs, identified as Gabatha and Tharra. In the MT, these two are identified by different names but omitted in the LXX. Mordecai learns from their conversation of the intention to lay hands on king Artaxerxes. He reports the matter to the king. In MT and LXX, Mordecai reports to Esther, who then reports to the king, but LXX Addition A text is silent about Esther; perhaps she was not yet a queen. The king confirmed the report through an investigation, and the two eunuchs confessed their evil plan and were executed. The confession made by the eunuchs is a new idea in this text. Again, in this text, two records are made: the king and Mordecai made a record of these happenings.

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* –*Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

The role and character of Mordecai is further revealed. The king rewards Mordecai for laying bare the plot and was appointed to serve at the king's court. As a result, Haman, son of Hammedatha, (a Bougaean) and a prominent official, planned to injure Mordecai and his people because of the execution of the two eunuchs. This detail might have been an insertion to lay the foundation for the content of chapter 6 of the book and provide a background for Haman's animosity toward the Jews. Though the story is the same in form, new details are introduced that tend to enhance and pay close attention to the character of Mordecai.

The AT Addition A11-18 has a similar story but with added details. Generally, the Addition (AT) material provides more specific information omitted in the LXX Esther. Addition AT A11-18 happens under the broader context (Addition A 1-10) of Mordecai's disturbing dream and the story unfolds as an interpretation of the dream. In this text, Mordecai found out the plot to assassinate King Ahasuerus when he was sleeping at the king's courtyard beside the two eunuchs of the king (Astaos and Thedeutes). The text mentions that Mordecai reported the plot because he was well disposed to the king. After the king examined the words of the two eunuchs, he found Mordecai's testimony to be true. He then executed them upon their confession. King Ahasuerus recorded these matters, and for memory purposes, Mordecai's name was written in the king's book. The king ordered Mordecai to serve at the king's court and keep watch over any conspiracy. The story also mentions Haman's enmity toward Mordecai because of making known the plot against the king that led to the execution of the two eunuchs.

The LXX Addition A 12-17 and AT Addition A11-18 bear a close resemblance but not without differences. The names of the eunuchs differ from what is in MT and LXX Addition A. Also, a textual comparison of terminologies indicate that LXX and AT Addition A did not depend on each other. For example, in LXX, the king orders the officials κρεμάννυμι (to hang); while in AT, the verb used ἀπήχθησαν (means to be led away). If the two texts depended on each other, we would have expected similar Greek terminology. In the AT Addition A11-18, the reason why Mordecai made known the plot to the king is laid bare (he was well disposed to the king). The king's name also changes; in this text, Ahasuerus is used instead of Artaxerxes. In AT Addition A11-18 Mordecai is ordered to serve at the king's court and told to be watchful of any conspiracy against the king. Furthermore, the king handed over Mordecai to Haman, who happens to hate Mordecai because of disclosing the scheme intended against the king.

It can be summarized that structurally there are similarities between the Hebrew and Greek versions of Esther (including the AT). At the same time, additional material and terminologies are introduced in the Greek texts of Esther. The differences could have resulted from translator(s) reading from different *Vorlagen*, or the translator(s) or reviser(s) might have exercised freedom in reworking the text. On the character of AT, NETS Bible makes the following observation on the introductory section of the book of Esther,

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

In comparison, the AT, which is about 20 per cent shorter than the MT even including the six additional chapters, exhibits about 81 per cent semantic agreement with the MT and about 52 per cent formal agreement. Hence, the AT is the freer translation of the two, if its Hebrew *Vorlage* is presumed to have been sufficiently similar to the MT. The AT is also more lexically diverse of the two versions, using a greater variety of Greek words to render a given Hebrew word than does the σ text [OG] (Pietersma and Wright, 2007).

In either case, the differences should be interrogated in order to discover underlying themes.

The additions to the Hebrew Esther boldly highlight the character and central role Mordecai played in saving the king's life. He disclosed a plot by angry men, who wanted to assassinate the king, and at the end of the discourse, events turn against him, and he ends up becoming the one hated because of the revelation to save a life. But the story also focuses on the reward, and honour Mordecai receives. It is possible that through the elevation of the character of Mordecai, the Jewish interpreters or editors wanted their audience in the diaspora to emulate Mordecai as a male model figure for the Jews.

Analysis of the Passage on the Character of Esther

The selected passage used to illustrate the characterization of Esther is AT D 18-21. The context before the discourse deals with the execution of Haman, and then Esther makes a plea to the king. The additional material below (AT D 18-2) has been translated by Clines (1984).

Moreover Esther said to the king, 'Grant me permission to punish my enemies with slaughter.' And Esther the queen took counsel with the king also against sons of Haman that they also should die together with their father. And the king said, 'So be it.' And she smote the enemies in great numbers.

In this episode, the characterization of Esther changes from what we know in the MT.

The AT does is silent on the fact that the Persian laws cannot allow the king's edict to be annulled. Hence Esther's request to punish her enemies and subsequent actions make Esther vindictive and vengeful. The motivation for the insertion or rewriting of the story of Esther by translators or Jewish redactors is unexplained; however, it is clear that different characterization of Esther was the issue at hand. Fox agrees that this is not accidental, "the contrast between the AT and the MT shows that Esther's features in the MT are not accidental: in the latter she is deliberately rewritten and allowed to grow into bold, independent leader," (Fox, 2003). In the story, Esther grows to become courageous, stronger, and more assertive in personality. She is also depicted as intelligent and just in other AT passages not studied here. Her intelligence is seen in her degree of knowledge and literacy, quickness of mind, ability to think clearly and

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

reason theologically, and independence of her mind in not following Mordecai's suggestion to flatter the king to get her way (4:8) (Day, 1995). As a just person in the AT,

Esther tends to think of the Jews' situation in terms of justice. She sees injury as having been done and tries to right the wrong. A clue to her perspective is found in her prayer. As in the B text, Esther understands all of what has happened as God's action of justice towards the Jews, as punishment for wrongdoing, but she further thinks of the circumstances in which she is participating as God's working out divine justice.

In addition, Esther is depicted, in the AT, as a selfless person. She is willing to put her life at risk to petition the king for the sake of her people. She makes a prayer to God for the deliverance of the entire community of Israel.

Analysis of the Passage on the Prayer of Esther

The AT Addition C 19-29 records Esther's prayer to God. It comes immediately after the prayer of Mordecai. In this text, Esther mentions the name of God several times. She prays to God for help and deliverance from the imminent danger resulting from Haman's conspiracy against all the Jews. In this prayer, God's active involvement in the history of Israel is recounted. God's faithfulness to the covenant with the nation of Israel is brought into perspective. Esther repents and implores God to remember his covenant with his chosen people. The addition serves then to heighten the role of God and to give greater prominence to Esther (Harrington, 1999).

This section also depicts Esther as a devout woman who remains faithful to the God of Israel despite being married to a pagan king. In reference to her situation, she claims that she abhors the bed of the uncircumcised and hates the splendour of the wicked and alien. She also admits not to have eaten at their table and not honoured the king's feasts nor drunk the wine of libation. These details are not in the Hebrew Esther. Fox proposes, "this addition addresses problem that Jewish interpreters saw in the MT: Esther's dietary practices and her marriage to the gentile king, (Fox 2003)" This could be possible, but more issues than dietary regulation and intermarriage are addressed here, and in the broader context of AT Addition C. Emphasis is also laid on the attributes of God, prayer, covenant, and Jewish history. It gives the AT a fresh Jewish outlook by introducing religious themes reflected in Judaism. Jobes (1996) notes that "the overall effect of addition C, with its interest in the covenant, the temple and altar, and circumcision and with its literary allusion to the prayer of Moses and exodus, draws the Esther story from the periphery into the mainstream of the tradition of the Pentateuch." Therefore these additions establish Esther as a religious book.

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

Making Sense of the AT and Variations of the Greek texts of Esther

How can the variations between MT and Greek texts of Esther be accounted for? Did the translators of Esther read from different *Vorlagen*? To these questions, there are two possibilities: first, it is possible that the variations of the Greeks texts were a result of the free rendering of the MT. This means that the translators or revisers exercised freedom in reworking the MT to reflect their intended meaning to their audience. This view is supported by what we have established in this study that the form of the story of Esther is intact in both Hebrew and Greek versions. Also, Hebrew words have been rendered freely into Greek. To hold this view, one has to contend that the revisers conducted a considerable amount of reworking of the MT to introduce more than two-thirds of Hebrew Esther. Undeniably, these significant amounts of changes and freedom tilt the story in a particular direction. De Troyer (2003) believes the variations were occasioned by the tradition in Judaism of reshaping texts,

The development from the MT to LXX, and then to AT is, in my opinion, a good example of how stories were reshaped in Judaism. Not only is the reshaping of Scripture typical for the Hebrew Bible, it is also characteristic of the Greek Bible. There is rewritten Hebrew Bible, and there is also rewritten Greek Bible.

This remark only acknowledges the problem but does not proceed to tell us why a reviser or translator would choose to reshape a sacred text.

The second possibility is that the Greek texts of Esther were based on a different *Vorlage* distinct from the MT. This view seriously takes into consideration the extent of the variations. When Esther's MT and Greek texts are compared, they exhibit significant changes beyond a few words or phrases. In the additions (A-F), new material is introduced to the structure of the story, and new themes and details emerge. For example, the story's structure is maintained. For example, the two verses in MT 5:1-2 are extended in the Greek texts up to sixteen verses. The changes highlight themes not present in the MT;

The effect of these variations in the two Greek versions is to create stories which differ from the Hebrew version. Although many similarities remain with regard to plot, characterization, and literary devices, the variations must also be acknowledged and taken into account. One of the consequences arising from the variant versions of the story is a difference in the manner in which the story's main characters appear (Day, 1995).

This view is explored further in the next section by looking at the themes and concerns of the revisers who introduced the additional sections in the Greek texts.

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* –*Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

Explicit Themes in the Alpha-Text of Esther Different Characterization of Mordecai and Esther

The additional sections on Mordecai and Esther in this study show that the Greek Mordecai and Esther have been portrayed in a new light. The AT highlights new information that is omitted in the MT. This indicates that the purpose of the translators or redactors was not just to rework the plot of the story but also to characterize the chief protagonists of the story in a new light.

Having the Hellenistic world and, specifically, the Jews of diaspora as the target context and audience of the Greek Esther, respectively, would make it easy to understand the intention of the translators or redactors who reworked the Hebrew Mordecai and Esther. These two figures were towering models that the Jews of the diaspora could emulate or easily identify with. Day (1995) writes, "The varying characterizations of Esther are at the heart of a search for new models, for women and for all persons." Mordecai and Esther in the AT are depicted as godly Jews who unreservedly shine their light at the helm of pagan government. Furthermore, this new characterization must have motivated many Jewish people in the Hellenistic world to seek active leadership roles in pagan governments and see it as an opportunity to serve God's people and the world.

Moreover, new characterization might have been employed theologically to show that it is possible to be a true and committed Jew within a pagan environment. In this case, Esther and Mordecai became a "paradigm for faithful living" to the post-exilic communities (Day, 1995). Rewriting these two key figures and their situation in the diaspora might have also offered the Jewish interpreters an excellent opportunity to reconcile God's promises to Israel to their experience in the diaspora.

Religious Themes

The prayer of Esther in the AT selected for this study (AT Addition C 19-29) highlights critical themes from Judaism and generally from the history of Israel. The additional material in Addition C paints Mordecai and Esther as devout Jewish people living under a pagan rule. Their prayers explicitly mention vital elements of Judaism: dietary practices, temple, sacrifices, covenant, circumcision, intermarriage, and the law. The translators or revisers who reworked Hebrew Esther might have felt that the Hebrew Esther lacked a bold Jewish outlook. The material was then reshaped to show that Esther and Mordecai continued to adhere to the Jewish religious practices even as they served in a pagan context. Besides, the additions recount God's faithfulness over Israel in the past and implore Him to remember the exiles favourably.

The outstanding highlight is the explicit mention of God in the Greek versions of Esther. The MT does not directly mention God, but the Greek texts of Esther have four references to God. For example, in the LXX

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

2:20, Mordecai reminds Esther φοβεῖσθαι τὸν θεὸν καὶ ποιεῖν τὰπροστάγματα αὐτοῦ ('to fear God and to do his ordinances'). Also, Mordecai entreats Esther 'to call upon the Lord' even before she talks to the king, ἐπικάλεσαι τὸν κύριον (LXX. 4:8). This stresses the importance of prayer even to the readers of Greek Esther in the diaspora. Boyd- Taylor (2015) notes that such additional material "underlines the significance of supplicatory prayer within the larger narrative; and, they establish the Jewish piety of protagonists." The name of God is also mentioned in LXX 6:1. It reads ὁ δὲ κύριος ἀπέστησεν τὸν ὑπνονἀπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως τὴν νύκτα ἐκέειν ('But the Lord kept sleep from the king that night'). God is depicted as a sovereign God who is above all world powers. Moreover, in LXX 6:13, after Haman had explained what had happened to him concerning Mordecai, his wife expressed his inability to deal with Mordecai ὅτι θεὸς ζῶν μετ' αὐτοῦ ('because the living God is with him'). Therefore, the religious overtones were introduced perhaps to supplement what the Hebrew Esther lacked in the eyes of the translators. The additions introduced to the book of Esther are intended to reflect how Esther's story was understood and interpreted by the reviser(s)" (Jobes and Silva, 2000) Thus, key aspects of Judaism were incorporated into the Greek versions.

Socio-political Concerns

A reading of the additional material of Esther also reflects sensitivities to the socio-political aspects of the Hellenistic world. It is worth noting that the majority of the readers of Greek Esther lived in key ancient diaspora cities like Alexandria. It is possible that the translators or revisers must have translated the MT with their audience in mind and in light of their socio-political environment. Jobes and Silva (2000) note that the AT emphasizes the theme of royal assassination; on the other hand, they note that Mordecai's role in saving the life of the king is amplified, and Haman's plot of a coup that would have handed over the Persian Empire to the Macedonians is also highlighted. The two authors also give a reason for their argument,

This addition in the Greek makes the point that having a Jew in high office is good not only for the Jewish people, but also for the personal well-being of the pagan king and for the tranquillity of the entire empire. Such a point, for instance, would have reassured the Ptolemies that the Jews of Alexandria were not a threat to the pagan king but were, on the contrary, a friend."

However, this statement raises more questions. For example, to what extent did the socio-political considerations affect the work of the translators or the redactors? According to the quote above, Jobes and Silva (2000) seem to suggest that they were much influenced in their rewriting of the MT. It is worth noting that despite the reworking of the texts, the translators and redactors were conscious of the Scriptures as a sacred text.

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* –*Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: It is clear from this study that the Greek versions of Esther, including the AT, exhibit both similarities and differences. The structure of the MT is maintained in the Greek material but additional details were deliberately included by the translators or revisers of the MT. The study also presented that there could be a possibility that the Greek versions of Esther relied on a different *Vorlage*, or that the translators freely reworked the MT. The new portrayal of Mordecai and Esther shows that the revisers wanted these two figures to be models for the Jews living in the diaspora in their engagement with the pagan world and as they seek to maintain their identity as God's people. The selected texts indicate that the additional material contains religious themes omitted in the MT. The four mentions of God and references to sacrifices, law, circumcision, and dietary practices show that the translators wanted to emphasize the religious themes that characterize Jewish people wherever they live. In addition, the translators must have wanted their message to be relevantly understood within the socio-political context of the Hellenistic world. Therefore from this study, it can be concluded that the translators or redactors who included the additional material (AT) to the Hebrew book of Esther wanted to enhance the characterization of the two prominent characters (Esther and Mordecai) to their diaspora audience as a paradigm for faithful living in a pagan world, to give the book of Esther a bold Jewish outlook and to express sensitivity to the socio-political concerns of their audience and context.

Recommendation: First, the study recommends that scholars look at themes featured in the rest of the Alpha-text. Second, to look at how the translator(s) or reviser(s) of the Greek versions of Esther modified the extant texts to possibly address the contextual needs of the Jewish communities in diaspora.

5.0 REFERENCES

1. Cameron, B-T. (2015). Esther and Additions to Esther. In *T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*. London, T & T Clark.
2. Clines, D. J. A. (1984). The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 30*. JSOT Press.
3. Day, L. M. (1995). *Three Faces of a Queen: Characterization in the Books of Esther*. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 186. Sheffield Academic Press.
4. De Troyer, K. (2003). Rewriting the Sacred Text: What the Old Greek Texts Tell Us about the Literary Growth of the Bible. *Text-Critical Studies, 4*. Society of Biblical Literature.
5. Dorothy, C. V. (1997). *The Books of Esther: Structure, Genre, and Textual Integrity*. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 187. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.
6. Fox, M. (2003). Three Esthers. In *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*. T & T Clark International.
7. Harrington, D. J. (1999). *Invitation to the Apocrypha*. Grand Rapids, WB Eerdmans.

Volume: 02 Issue: 01 | April-2022

Received: 09.03.2022 **Accepted** 12.03.2022; **Published:** 30.04.2022 at www.editoncpublishing.org

Cheboi, E. K., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

8. Jobes, K. H. (1996). *The Alpha-Text of Esther: Its Character and Relationship to the Masoretic Text*. Dissertation Series, no. 153. Scholars Press.
9. Jobes, K. H., & Moisés, S. (2000). *Invitation to the Septuagint*. Grand Rapids: Carlisle, Cumbria, Baker Academic, Paternoster.
10. Pietersma, A., & Benjamin, G. Wright, (2007). (Eds.) *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*. Oxford University Press.
11. Tov, E. (1997). *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*. Second Edition. Jerusalem.