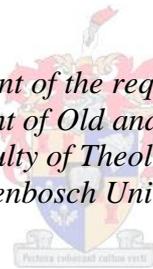


Esther as the New Moses: Deliverance Motifs in the Book of Esther

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author and owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

This study aims to compare the figures of Moses in the Exodus narratives and Queen Esther in the Esther narratives. The study will proceed to argue that Esther, a remarkable Jewish deliverer figure in the Persian period can be viewed as a reinterpretation of the Moses figure in the Exodus narratives. Within a broad analysis of these narratives, the researcher investigates how Esther fits into the Old Testament deliverance motifs. Commonalities between Moses and Esther and their parallels and characterization as Old Testament deliverer figures assist in drawing a comparative analysis between the two. The study proceeds to prove that Esther is a new Moses figure, arguing that the Esther narratives are presented deliberately in such a way that they reinterpret the Moses narratives. A survey of previous studies that investigated the two narratives provides further evidence for the view that the Esther narratives are reinterpreting the Moses narratives, and hence that Esther can be regarded as a new Moses in the Old Testament deliverance motifs. This study argues that Esther stands within the same category of Old Testament deliverer figures like Moses and that female figures like Esther are not ignored in the deliverance of God's people.

The concluding part of this study investigates what implications the Old Testament narratives of Moses and Esther as deliverer figures may have for the modern-day context of African leadership. The focus is on investigating whether biblical models of leadership and deliverance offer anything to the discourse on African leadership. In the last section, the models of Moses and Esther are applied to modern-day ethical problems of leadership in African societies. It is postulated that Old Testament ethical reflections on biblical characters such as Moses and Esther may inform modern-day reflection on responsible leadership.

Opsomming

Die studie vergelyk die rol wat Moses in die Exodus-verhaalsiklus speel met die rol van Ester in die Ester-verhaal. Die argument is dat Ester se rol as 'n merkwaardige bevrydingsfiguur uit die Persiese tyd dié van Moses herinterpreteer. Die studie is 'n breë narratiewe analise wat nagaan of Ester binne die Ou Testamentiese bevrydingsliteratuur 'n geïsoleerde figuur is al dan nie. Die ooreenkomste tussen Moses en Ester saam met tipiese eienskappe van Ou Testamentiese bevrydingsfigure lei die studie tot 'n suksesvolle vergelykende analise van die twee figure. Trouens, dit word duidelik dat Ester 'n nuwe Moses is waar Moses se rol doelbewus herinterpreteer word.

'n Oorsig oor bestaande studies wat die twee verhale nagana, verskaf verdere staving vir die seining dat die Ester-siklus die van Moses herinterpreteer. As sodanig is Ester 'n tweede Moses binne die Ou Testamentiese bevrydingsliteratuur en staan sy geen tree terug as 'n vroulike figuur in die rol nie.

In die laaste en samevattende gedeelte van die navorsing word die implikasies van bevrydingsfigure soos Moses en Ester toegepas op leierskap in Afrika. Die oogmerk is om hierdie Bybelse bevrydingsfigure as model voor te hou en om dan daarmee in gesprek te gaan met die aard van leierskap in Afrika. Die Ou Testamentiese verhale en leiers het bepaalde waardes en oortuigings wat huidige leierskap in Afrika krities onder die loep kan neem. Dit kan 'n vormende invloed op Christelike morele waardes, identiteit en die verstaan van mag uitoefen. As sodanig sal Moses en Ester as modelle voorgelê word om moderne etiese leierskapprobleme en -uitdagings aan te spreek. Die studie is oortuig dat Ou Testamentiese leiers waardevolle insig bied vir etiese refleksie en kontekstuele riglyne vir verantwoordelike leierskap.

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Dedication

To the Rev Robin Quinn and the PCI council for the Global team.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Motivation and Focus of the Study

The Book of Esther, and more specifically the figure of Esther, has intrigued readers of the Old Testament through the ages. The fascinating narrative, in which Esther manages to save her people during Persian imperial reign after a conspiracy to eliminate them, still attracts interest from lay readers and scholars alike.

The *motivation* for the present study arose from two interests of the researcher. Firstly, it is interesting that Queen Esther is portrayed as a deliverer of her people in the narrative in such a way that she seems to stand in the same tradition of great deliverers mentioned in the Old Testament. The researcher is therefore curious to find out more on how the narrative characterises her in such a fashion, and what role such a characterisation played during the time when the Book of Esther originated.

Secondly, the researcher was also influenced by his own life context – namely being a Malawian living on the African continent. Scholars and reporters have highlighted the question of political leadership problems in Africa, which often erupt into political instability in African countries. Peterson even describes the present period as a ‘diaspora for Africans’, seeking transformative leadership to realise socio-political freedom (2007:7). A report by the Public Protector in South Africa, Adv. Thuli Madonsela (2014) also reveals a massive looting of public funds by the state leadership while the post-Apartheid government has failed to address the big margin of economic inequality in the country. According to Khoza, this is “a failure [rather] than triumph in leadership” (2011: vii&17). Another failure of African leadership is the issue of freedom of women. Mosala, when writing on the implications of the text of Esther for the struggle of African women for liberation in South Africa, draws our attention to limitations placed on the social-political and economic freedom of women. Limitations include cultural, economic and injustice aspects, which political leadership in South Africa has failed to address (1992:139).

In Malawi, the Commonwealth summit in 2010 reported on a comparative analysis of Malawian politics which revealed that autocracy and massive corruption are some of the main problems found in Malawian leadership. These findings are also corroborated by reports from

local clergy. Interestingly, the Commonwealth report states that biblical models of leadership may help to nurture transformative leadership roles in African contexts which can promote citizen empowerment and state responsiveness (Vondopepp, 2010:21).

The situation of African leadership, and the role that African leaders play in present-day societies, brought the researcher to asking the question: “Can biblical models of leadership and deliverance offer anything to the discourse on African leadership?” Knowing well that one cannot generalize in terms of African leadership, and being aware of the fact that his own discipline of study is Old Testament and not Leadership Studies in general, the researcher wants to investigate biblical models of leadership in order to serve as potential analogies which can serve the discourse on African leadership.

My interests in the figure of Esther and in African leadership are not unrelated. Although the researcher remains fully aware of the dangers of equating biblical models with present-day situations, the context from which he comes (Malawi) remains the backdrop against which this study is tackled. The *focus* of this study will however be on an analysis of the Book of Esther, and more specifically the portrayal of Esther as deliverer. Since deliverance is generally understood as one of the major themes in the Bible and in the history of Israel, the study of Esther as deliverer will be related to the tradition of deliverance in the Old Testament. Particularly the narrative of the Exodus will feature as backdrop. The Exodus narrative has traditionally been regarded as a primary source of God’s mighty work of deliverance, with Moses described as the great deliverer of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.

1.2. Studies on the Book of Esther

1.2.1 Background to the Book of Esther

The story of Esther is situated in the 5th century BCE in the mighty Persian Empire that was one of the greatest Ancient Near East empires before the Romans. This empire emerged after the Persians conquered the Babylonians in 539 BCE, and it lasted for two centuries (Ramsbottom, 2003:6). Both biblical and non-biblical sources place the events reflected in the Book of Esther between the return of the exiles to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (536 BCE) and the return of Ezra as described as “in the midst of ancient history” under King Ahasuerus (Xerxes 1), who reigned from 486 BCE to 465 BCE (Crawford, 2003:79). For this reason, Crawford singles out the Book of Esther as a “true diaspora book”, as it refers to a period marking the end of the exilic Judaic community with memories of a displaced, scared people (2003:79).

The main character in the Book of Esther tells a story of a courageous Jewish woman, Esther meaning “star” in Persian and “myrtle” in Hebrew, who agrees to put her life in danger for the sake of deliverance of the Jewish community in the Persian exile (Esth 4:13-17). Esther was a Jewish orphan girl brought up by a god-fearing family member, Mordecai (some refer to him as stepfather on account of vs. 14, though this is disputed by other interpretations of this verse). The Book of Esther is one of the two books in the Bible with a woman’s name (the other being Ruth) as its title. Surprisingly, the book provides a dazzling description of the Persian palace and mentions the Persian king 190 times, yet as is often commented, it does not even once mention God or the name of God (YHWH) (Crawford, 2003:88). Most commentators nevertheless agree that the book brings hope to the exiles and that, despite no mention being made of God, God’s hand and providence are revealed in the story in the acts of Esther and the deliverance of the exiles. This is the view of, for example, Elwell who writes that “From Esther one learns that nothing happens by chance, but by the Providence of the Lord” (2001:19).

While Frederic Bush writes on how Martin Luther expressed contempt for Esther, claiming that it is spoiled by too much “pagan impropriety” (Bush, 1996:36), for David Clines considers it a book with hidden depth and delights, in which he discovers the care of God for Israel exactly through the account of deliverance via the woman Esther (1984:17).

1.2.2 Literature review

Although most commentators indicate that the Book of Esther seems strange, there is consensus that it remains unique within the corpus of the Christian Bible. Some are even of the opinion that it deserves to be reckoned among the masterpieces of world literature (Moore, 1982:130).

An interesting fact is that the majority of literature discussing the Book of Esther links it to the theme of deliverance, and particularly with the Book of Exodus. Deliverance is one of the focal points in both books, and has God’s mighty power as background. In both books, the main characters are closely involved in the fulfilment of such a deliverance plan. It seems, however, from the literature that a comparative study of these main figures has not been done before. Each has been compared with other biblical figures as shall be seen in this literature review.

A number of sources provide evidence that Esther was regarded as a deliverer in both biblical and non-biblical literature. Esther 4:3 confirms that Esther, living in stately comfort, could no longer tolerate the oppression of her people. God calls her to deliver, and she responds in verse 16. David Clines argues that the book is worthy to be included in the deliverance stories. The story centres on the conflict of two courtiers that resolves the question of relative ranks and

issues in a dramatic reversal at the Persian court (1984:139). The death plots involved are overcome by a divine plan realised through Esther and Mordecai, which affirms the book's position amongst biblical deliverance histories. Michael Fox, commenting on chapter 7:3, describes Esther's approach in the petition made to the king as best fitting that of a great deliverer: "[S]he opens with a courtly introduction, she asks for her life and for her people and repeats the main terms of the king's offer in a soft voice, 'grant,' 'wish,' 'request'" (1991:83). Fox explains that Esther here equates her life with her people's, realizing that the king will be ready to save his wife. This point sets a crucial deliverance stage in the book.

Esther is also characterised as a strong and courageous leader who was expected to shoulder her people's fate and engineer salvation (Fox, 1991:198). Many scholars, such as Moore, agree that the tension between Jews and Gentiles is as old a phenomenon as Judaism itself. The distinction of Jews is rooted in religion which resulted in frequent persecution requiring deliverance of some kind, as in the Book of Esther (1982:133). This is evident in the conflict between Haman, an Agagite and a Gentile, and Mordecai, a devoted Jew, who refuses to pay homage to Haman. The divine plan through Esther and Mordecai, and the role that Esther plays as a courageous leader, links the Book of Esther with the theme of deliverance in the Old Testament.

Furthermore, literature studies in the Old Testament reveal a link between the Book of Esther and Exodus. Some scholars have described the Book of Esther as a diaspora book which, according to Crawford (2003: 6), depicts events similar to those of the Exodus which has stories of bondage. Firstly, in both books, the main characters (Moses in the Book of Exodus and Esther in the Book of Esther) are presented as strong deliverers in a certain critical situation. Dalglish looks at the link between the two books through the lens of their citizenship of the land and their rights as citizens. He writes that "though the Israelites had grown in wealth, numbers and privilege... they were not citizens of Egypt" (1977:17). This was very similar to the Jews in the Persian period, who were sojourners, victims of injustice, without political rights, who eventually received divine deliverance. The theme of disobedience is another link between both books, as pointed out by Jackowski where he states that in both books present the idea of 'when to disobey' (2005:406-7). He refers further to Exodus 1&2 which present disobedience as a survival technique, not an ordinary action. Esther also acts contrary to the country's law by appearing before the king when it was not allowed. This disobedience was a last resort and resulted in the survival of the Jews (2005:406-7).

Lester Mayer also states that deliverance is a major theme in the Old Testament in which God acts on behalf of the weak and the powerless, emphasising the link between the books of Exodus and Esther(1983:19).Finkelstein and Mazar state that the exodus stories also had a strong impact in the exilic and post-exilic times (2007:52). David Clines agrees with this point , “the bondage in Egypt is their own bondage in Babylon, and the exodus past becomes the exodus that is yet to be” (2007:52). Though the point here is not to present the similarity between the two books, the literature reveals that the narratives are linked, and the Book of Esther might stand in continuation of the deliverance theme of Exodus. The Exodus from Egypt and the memories of the return from Babylonian exile influenced each other in a reciprocal way and had an impact on the literature formation during the Persian period.

The literature reveals that despite the fact that deliverance is one of main themes in Old Testament studies, there are no comparative studies between the roles of Moses and Esther as deliverers. However, other studies have compared Moses and Esther to other biblical figures. Sandra Berth Berg (1979:123) compares Esther to Joseph in her examination of the paradigm of Jewish existence in diaspora within other cultural boundaries. Daube asserts that the patterns of deliverance in the Bible are unique and that Moses in Exodus can therefore not be compared to other biblical figures (1963:11) although in my view, Esther also presents patterns of deliverance that can be compared to Moses. Hambrick-Stowe, adopting a meditative perspective, supports this statement and argues that Esther can be viewed as a prototype of Moses, but a detailed comparative analysis of the two figures of Moses and Esther is lacking in his article (1983:1132). This serves as the point of departure for the comparative analysis that will be presented in this thesis.

1.3. Problem Statement, Hypotheses and Research Questions

1.3.1 Problem Statement

This study wants to research the following problem: “What insights do we gain when the figure of Esther, as portrayed in the biblical Book of Esther, is compared to Moses, as portrayed in the book of Exodus, within the framework of the Old Testament theme of deliverance, and how

does this comparison influence our interpretation of the Esther narrative in modern-day contexts?”

1.3.2 Hypotheses

In order to structure our investigation of the above-mentioned problem and to link up with the double motivation of this study (as discussed above), the following hypotheses will be tested:

- a) The narrative of Esther may be considered as a reinterpretation in the post-Persian era of the figure of Moses who acted as deliverer in the Exodus events;
- b) The dynamics of reinterpretation of an earlier deliverer figure noticed in the book of Esther may provide guidelines of how to interpret this book within the modern-day context of African leadership challenges.

1.3.3 Research Questions

In order to investigate the problem noted above, the research will be guided by the following questions:

- a) How does the Book of Esther characterize the deliverer figure, Esther?
- b) Are there any indications that this portrayal might be a reinterpretation of the deliverer figure of Moses in Exodus?
- c) How do the observations about a possible reinterpretation of the Moses figure in the book of Esther relate to the relative dating of the books of Exodus and Esther?
- d) Does the reinterpretation of the Moses figure in Esther offer any guidelines for interpreting these narratives in modern-day contexts of leadership challenges?

1.4. Research Design, Delimitation and Research Methodology

The research will take the form of a **literature study**. This means that primary texts, that is, the biblical texts of (particularly) the books of Esther and Exodus, will be studied, as well as secondary literature on the characterization of Esther and Moses in the respective narratives, on the formation of the biblical books and their contexts of origin, and on the Old Testament tradition of deliverance.

In order to **delimit** the study to something which is viable within the framework of a Master's degree, the following will be the guidelines:

- Although one of the motivations of the study is to present some guidelines from the side of biblical scholarship for reflection on African leadership, no extensive study will be done on this issue. It will only be motivated briefly, with reference to secondary literature on the topic, why this forms the wider context of this study.
- The tradition of deliverance in the Old Testament will form the context within which the figures of Esther and Moses will be studied comparatively. However, no extensive study will be done on this Old Testament tradition. Rather, a short overview of scholarly perspectives will be provided to motivate why this is chosen as context for the comparative study.
- The Book of Esther will form the focus, but it will not be possible to do exegesis on the whole book. A selection of sections will therefore be made. Esther 4:1-17 form an important turning point in the plot line of the narrative. There it becomes clear that Esther will play the role of deliverer after Haman's conspiracy against the Jews (see Esther 3) has become known to Mordecai. Particularly Esther's direct speech in verse 16 plays a pivotal role in her characterization: "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, who is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" (NKJV). The exegesis will therefore focus on chapter 4.
- In the comparative study between Esther and Moses, it will not be possible to do an extensive study on Moses as deliverer figure, but rather be on a selection of texts from Exodus which depict Moses as deliverer (particularly Ex 3-6), and on how this view is reflected in further parts of the Old Testament.

In order to compare the Esther and Moses figures, exegetical work will be done on selected passages in Esther and Exodus, following a multidimensional **methodology** in which the literary and historical aspects of the narratives will be investigated. Since the Book of Esther is narrative, as well as most of the texts which feature Moses as deliverer, a *narrative analysis* will be done on these texts.¹ The focus will be particularly on characterization of Esther and

¹ The genre of the texts in Esther and Exodus alerts us to the fact that – although the narratives might reflect some historical events of the past – their primary rhetorical thrust is not to convey historical facts, but rather to provide some perspective on the past through the narratives, in order to contribute to the discourse in the respective socio-historical contexts of origin of these two biblical narratives.

Moses, although other narrative aspects, such as plot line analysis and the role of the narrator, will also be discussed. The history of origin of the books of Exodus and Esther will also feature in the multidimensional methodology in order to determine the *relative dating* of this literature. In this way our first hypothesis will be tested whether Esther can indeed be seen as a reinterpretation of the Moses deliverer tradition. The *comparative study* will use the results of the exegesis in order to determine the similarities and differences between the portrayals of Moses and Esther, and will lead to determining what influence it will have on our interpretation of Esther when her narrative is seen as a dynamic reinterpretation of the Moses tradition.

1.5. Further Chapters

The study will proceed in the following way.

Chapter 2: Exegetical Study of Esther 4:1-17

This chapter will contain the narrative analysis of the selected passage, with focus on the characterization of Esther (literary aspects). It will also study the history of origin of the Book of Esther (historical aspects).

Chapter 3: Exegetical Study of Moses as Deliverer

In this chapter a broad narrative analysis will be done on selected texts in Exodus (particularly Chapters 3-6) in which Moses features as deliverer (literary aspects). However, the history of origin of the Moses narrative (historical aspects) will also be studied in order to serve the relative dating of the discussed narratives. A last aspect which will be included in this chapter will be a broad overview of the role Moses plays in the development of the Old Testament tradition of deliverance.

Chapter 4: Comparative Study and Interpretation

This chapter will engage in the comparison of the Esther and Moses figures, and it will determine whether the Esther narrative could be seen as a reinterpretation of the Moses figure. If so, the dynamic and potential of this interpretation will be investigated.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Guidelines for Discussion on African Leadership

This last chapter will summarize the conclusions, and formulate some guidelines which flow from this study as potential contributions in a discourse on African leadership models. The reflections of Moses and Esther as models will also be discussed based on how they show

ethical links to the societies they served and how they nurture ethical frameworks for African leadership contexts.

This chapter has focused on the motivation of the study with a short literature review on the context of the research and the deliverance motifs in the Book of Esther. The theme of deliverance in the Old Testament as backdrop to the study of Esther and Moses has also been discussed briefly along with the research problem, hypotheses, research questions and methodology.

Chapter Two

A Literary and Historical Analysis of the Book of Esther

2.1 Literary Analysis

This chapter contains a narrative analysis of the selected passages from the Book of Esther, in which Esther 4: 1-17 forms an important turning point in the plot line. It is in this passage that Esther plays the role of a deliverer after Haman's conspiracy against the Jews. The exegetical study will therefore focus on the literary features and the contents of the plot of Esther 4. It will furthermore focus on the characterization of Esther and the historical aspects of the Book, namely the date of the book, its history and context of origin and its authorship.

2.1.1 Broader Narrative Structure of Esther

The literary analysis in this section of the study will consider the overall structure of the Book of Esther. The first two chapters of the book set the stage for the narrative. The chapters also introduce its readers to the primary themes and literary motifs present throughout the story.

Chapter One opens with a royal banquet with a series of three court festivals mentioned in succession. This chapter gives the background of the story, where we meet Ahasuerus, a mighty king, known as King Xerxes I in secular history. His greatness is seen in verses 1 – 3 through the description of his vast empire (127 provinces, from India to Cush) and the number of days for the banquet (180). The introduction to the book focuses on the royal status of Ahasuerus as a means of identifying the Persian extent of rule and the universal sovereignty of their kings. Ramsbottom states that at the time indicated in the narrative (the third year of his reign) he had just won battles against the Egyptians and the Greeks (2003:8). The first banquet which is set in this context was held for the king's officials and lasted 180 days; the second banquet was for the general population in the capital and lasted seven days, and the third banquet was held by Queen Vashti for the women of the palace. Scholars like Ramsbottom describe the banquet as lavish, referring to the enormous number of guests, the length of time they continued the display of wealth and the generosity described in verses 3 to 9.

The events are followed by an account of Vashti's disobedience in verses 10-22. The appearance of the most beautiful Queen Vashti and the call to display her beauty seems to be the climax of the feast. According to Laniak, this display was intended to be the final exhibition of the king's royal treasury (1998:36). Her refusal to appear (verse 10) shocks the whole assembly, which Fox describes as a huge humiliation for the king who had a "dangerously

tender ego” (1991:26). The refusal arouses the king’s anger, about which some commentators maintain that the wrath (רַקִּיצָה - verse 12) resulted from the king’s drunkenness and his general lack of emotional control (Laniak 1998:54). The biblical usage of the terms anger or wrath normally have God as their subject, and not a human, suggesting perhaps that this chapter might be making an analogy to God. Laniak (1998:54) agrees that in the Bible, the root רַקִּיצָה is used almost exclusively in reference to God, except in the books of Daniel and Esther. This resulted in Vashti’s deposition as queen, and replacement by Esther. While we have difficulties to justify the harsh rejection of Vashti, it should be understood as God’s mysterious providence as part of His plan. This section forms an important part of the story of Esther, as an indication of how God’s providence unfolds in the book.

Esther 1 concludes with the formation of a plan designed to restore the king’s honour and to protect male honour throughout the empire (see verse 20). The plan starts with the excommunication of Vashti and the proclamation of an edict (verse 19). Her absence creates a vacuum in the king’s court.

Esther 2 has two important sections: Esther replacing Vashti as queen, and the exposure of the conspiracy by Mordecai; both Esther and Mordecai were Jews in the court of Ahasuerus. The replacement of Vashti by Esther as a historical event has been questioned by some scholars, from the ancient historian Herodotus to a modern scholar like Levenson (1997:61), who argues that Esther would have been an unlikely candidate to replace Vashti. She was an exiled Jew, a non-Persian by birth and viewed as an outsider in the Persian kingdom. Ancient historians insisted that Persian queens were chosen from selected royal families. Herodotus indicates that Amestris, a daughter of an influential Persian general, was queen during this period (Herd III: 84). However, it might have been possible as Esther had one quality which would have unlocked the doors of her opportunity; her beauty (טוֹבַת מְרֵאָה) might have attracted the king’s interest. This has been viewed as the best possible motif for the biblical account according to Niditch (1995:35). The replacement of Esther was unexpected and an undeserved favour at the hands of the king and the eunuchs.

Esther 3 is sometimes considered as part of Chapters 4 and 5, while the three chapters form the *immediate context* of the main narrative in the Book of Esther. However, I will concentrate solely on Chapter 4. These chapters comprise the climax of the story (threat section). The status and very lives of Mordecai and Esther (two Jews in the court) are jeopardized, as are the lives of the Jews in the empire. However, there is some discrepancy between the acts in Chapter 3

and the final episode of Chapter 2. The last verses of Chapter 2 end with Mordecai uncovering the conspiracy, but Chapter 3 starts with the promotion of Haman above the other ministers. One wonders why he, and not Mordecai, is promoted.

In Chapter 3:1-3 after Haman's promotion, the king orders that he be honoured by all the royal officials, but Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman, and enmity develops between the two without exchange of words. Verse 7 introduces the “lot” called the *pur*, derived from Old Babylonian ‘*puru*’, meaning lot. The connection of this verse and its context is also questioned as it is only preparing the way for the explanation of the Purim festival in 9:26 (Fox, 1991:47). Haman approaches the king in verse 8 to speak of “a certain people” *עַם אֲדֻמִּים*, who should be destroyed, although the name of the people is not mentioned. Haman might be omitting the name in order to prevent the king from thinking of specific persons, such as Mordecai, the Jew. The king gives Haman his ring, granting him full power to issue a decree on behalf of the empire.

Chapter 5 is also part of the broader context of the narrative analysis of the study. As mentioned, the two chapters (three and five) also help us to locate the position of chapter four, as the three chapters comprise the threat section of the story in the book.

As a continuation of the last episode in Chapter 4 (verse 16), Chapter 5 opens with the narrative of Esther approaching the king. We are told that this was the third day after the prayer and fasting had been declared. The introduction of the chapter indicates the specific moment in Chapter 4:1. The dressing of Esther in her royal robe, agrees with the word Mordecai used in 4:14 as a response to demonstrate her queenship. The king asks what troubles her; her response indicates that something urgent and troublesome has brought her to him, and immediately the king recognizes her royal status, by calling her “Queen” (Fox, 1991: 68).

It is interesting that Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet, contrary to the king's request. The king's quick order to bring Haman to the banquet to please the queen, symbolizes Esther's gain of authority in this regard. Esther's deliberate inclusion of Haman shows that she has a well-designed plan to confront Haman and prevent his plan. Verses 9-14 present Haman's pride about his invitation to two private banquets with the king and queen; later he boasts of his vast wealth and the respect he receives, although he adds that this brings him no satisfaction as long as Mordecai still serves at the king's gate. The advice from his friends and wife to erect a gallows for Mordecai's execution seems to ease Haman's frustration.

As seen above, Chapter 5 has two main sections, the first spanning verses 1-8 with Esther's request to the king, and verses 9-14 with Haman's rage against Mordecai. Chapter 5 has Esther

as the main character and presents a different plot structure in her meeting the king in a more skillful way. There is also a change in time level in this chapter: we are told that it happens three days after Mordecai has met Esther. The space level also changes from the inside courtroom to the inner court, the domain of the king. This contrasts with the second section in which Haman is the main character, and the place changes from the inner court to the king's gate and finally to his house.

Chapter 6 is sometimes described as a divinely pivotal chapter, since it indicates the turning point in the fate of the Jews. The chapter has a series of unlikely coincidences that reflect mostly religious understanding, as if the Jewish fasting and cries to heaven were heard before God. The actions in the chapter seem to come out of nowhere in this tale as an expression of divine providence, meaningful to Jewish deliverance. The chapter locates the events in the inner court inside the king's bedroom, at night, and describes a sleepless night of King Ahasuerus, who is the main character here. Commentators like Carruthers, state that the king wakes in terror after dreaming that Haman was about to kill him with a sword (2008:222).

The reading of the royal annals that mention Mordecai's discovering the assassination plot in 2:21 calls for the king to honour Mordecai; this elicits a blind pride that leads Haman to ruin, after deceiving himself that he was the man the king wished to honour.

The chapter is dominated by direct speech by King Ahasuerus. Verses 1-2 feature indirect speech, while verses 3-10 are cases of direct speech, viz. the discussion between the king and Haman. The last section of the chapter has mostly indirect speech, except verse 13b which is a report of the words said by Zeresh, Haman's wife.

There is also change of mood, shame and honour in Chapter 6. Though Haman's response to the king's command in 6:10, 'go at once' (מהר) seems that he is not affected; he rushes home lamenting and being ashamed. As learnt in 7:8, he covers his head before his hanging, thereby adopting the mourning of the Jewish community in 4:1-3. The contrast of 5:11-12, and 6:12-14 indicates a great change in mood at Haman's residence as well.

This analysis helps the reader to identify which character dominates where in the plot line. In Chapter 4 direct speech occurs between Mordecai and Esther, in Chapter 5, it is between Esther and King Ahasuerus, while in Chapter 6 it is between Ahasuerus and Haman, the opponent of the Jews. These interactions form the pivot of the plot line in the Book of Esther and the deliverance motif in the book. It is interesting that in Chapter 7 three unique characters in the

deliverance plan, Esther (the deliverer), King Ahasuerus (with authority as the ruler) and Haman (the opponent of the Jews), are brought together, face to face at the same table.

In Chapter 7, the king and Haman attends the feast with Queen Esther. This is said to be the second day of the three delegate banquets. For the third time Ahasuerus repeats his offer to Esther whose response is unexpected, being phrased as ‘in your eyes’ which is in the second person, maybe to indicate greater intimacy. Of the ten verses, only three (verses 7-8 & 10) are indirect subordinates, while the rest are direct speech from Queen Esther and the king.

There is a shift in space in the plot in this chapter. The dining (the banquet) takes place inside the court, and later the king goes into the palace garden in anger (after learning that the adversary and enemy of his wife and her people is Haman).

Chapter 8 is about the great authority that King Ahasuerus gives to Esther (Haman’s estate) and Mordecai (Haman’s ring). Thus the main characters here are Esther, Mordecai and Ahasuerus. The chapter is divided into two main events; verses 3-8 centre upon Esther, while verses 9-17 centre upon Mordecai. There are few cases of indirect speech in the chapter with interaction between Esther and Ahasuerus, also centred on pleading with the king (verses 3-8). The timeframe of the events is not clear as the time that has lapsed since the previous events is not mentioned, except in 8:1, ‘same day’. The opening verse indicates the urgency of the flow of events from the previous chapter. Esther’s approaching the king is suggested as a follow-up of her request which has not yet been granted, ‘the salvation of her people’ (7:3) which seems to be her ultimate goal.

Some changes are identified in this chapter. The golden sceptre in 5:2 suggests silence and dignity, while the language in 8:4 shows Esther acting and speaking passionately. Though the phrase used in Hebrew is the same in both chapters, the narrative of the two scenes bear some comparison. Day states that the roles also seem to have changed since the previous episode, when Ahasuerus was more ardent, but now Esther shows great emotion while Ahasuerus remains calm (2005:131). The last section, verses 9-14, has Mordecai’s decree which differs in content from that issued by Haman. While the first was issued to slaughter the Jews, the one issued by Mordecai gives permission to the Jews to slaughter their opponents.

Chapter 9 is about the institution of the festival of Purim. Two things remain notable here, viz. the setting of the date for the Purim, and their commitment to its celebration and the establishment of its character. This forms another important section of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish festival of Purim. After the Jews throughout the empire had gained relief from their

enemies, they celebrated on two different days (9:16-19). We note that Mordecai and Esther remain the main characters here, and Mordecai writes to all the Jews (as second-in-command) to require them to celebrate annually on the fourteenth or fifteenth day of Adar (9:20-22). In verses 29-32, Esther writes again to confirm (לקיים) the observance of Purim. These two, Esther and Mordecai seem to be inaugurating the celebration of Purim in this chapter (Carruthers, 2008:254). The chapter has a specific indication of timeframe, from the fourteenth or fifteenth day of Adar, and the celebration is established as being required annually. However, the chapter has a number of strong finite verbs which are presented as a result of the Jews' assembling and defending themselves, such as 'killed and destroyed' (ואבדהרג) in verse 6, and 'did not stretch their hand' (ידשלה) in verse 10 among others. But these verbs in the chapter raise serious difficulties to understanding the writer's intention and the goal of such celebrations of Purim. So the chapter has acts describing the overwhelming Jewish victory over their enemies which took place on 13 Adar, and the birth of a continuing and normative Jewish practice, the festival of Purim. However, the form used in 9:26 poses a challenge to understanding. We are left puzzled by the naming of the holiday as "Purim" – used in a plural form - since only one lot was cast. On the other hand, the lot casting is mentioned in exactly one verse (3:7) which also gives an odd position to the event. The fact that the Jews are now set free and that revenge seems imminent might remain unique in the book.

Chapter 10 is a conclusion with meaningful key words. The words 'imposing forced labour' in the Old Testament Hebrew, is used collectively referring to persons so subjected, according to Bush (1996:494). This might imply merely 'tribute or tax' according to verse 1. The timeframe or occurrence indicates a general interval or soon after events in Chapter 9. However, the short chapter, though presenting the greatness of Mordecai, seems to have Ahasuerus as the main actor and character, unlike the previous chapters which could have two or three dominating characters. The chapter presents the king in his full position of power in the empire which he exercises by imposing tributes and positioning Mordecai as his second in rank. All the three verses in this last chapter are subordinate indirect speech in third person.

The broader narrative structure above has indicated that the first two chapters of the Book of Esther provide the background to the primary themes and motifs which occur throughout the story. The climax of the feasts in Chapter 1 results into two important changes: Vashti is deposed as queen and Esther becomes the new queen in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 introduces a different scene, with a new character, Haman, whose promotion is followed by his plan to eliminate the Jews and his successful ploy to convince the king of this plan. The analysis above

has typified this part as the threat section of the Book of Esther which provides the immediate context of Chapter 4 which forms the focus of the investigation in this study. We have argued that this chapter typifies Esther as deliverer of the Jewish people. We have furthermore indicated that different space and characters were identified in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in which Esther approaches the king, and divinely pivotal changes follow in favour of the fate of the Jews, and later Haman is hanged. We have also discussed how Esther and Mordecai came into strategic positions in the Empire (narrated in Chapter 8), and in Chapter 9 we looked at the institution of the Purim. The changes in time, characters and places in the broad narratives above provide a clear idea of the progression in the narrative plot.

The above broader narrative analysis of the Book of Esther will now be followed by a more focused narrative analysis, and the further exegesis will focus on Chapter 4. This chapter will be divided into three episodes which will help to indicate how characters in the story interact and perform their roles in the deliverance plan. Episode 1 is 4:1-4 with Mordecai and the Jewish community responding to the edict. Episode 2 is 4:5-9 in which Esther, the intermediary Hathach, and Mordecai feature. Episode 3 is 4:10-17 where Esther and Mordecai play the main roles.

2.1.2 Narrative structure of Chapter 4 (the macro-and micro-units)

This section will commence the study of the main characters of the plot cycle and how they influence each other. The narrower narrative context of Esther 4 will be the main topic for discussion. The focus will be the responses to the edict issued by Haman in 3:12-15 to annihilate the Jews from the whole empire. Whereas the introduction to Chapters 1 and 2 reflects general time, the first verse and action of the narrative in Chapter 4 seems to have happened at a specific moment. The time ratio that is indicated with the messengers (verses 4-13) and Esther's direct speech in verses 11-16 create an impression of a rapid, moment-by-moment recording of events. This situation calls for an immediate response in 4:1, where Mordecai tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth and ashes, while mourning loudly and bitterly, and approaches the entrance to the royal court in sackcloth (vss. 1-3). This is followed by a parallel Jewish ritual of community mourning, and a dialogue between Esther and Mordecai *via* a messenger. Later a solution is reached after Esther agrees to see the king.

The communication between Mordecai and Esther occurs in the same location in a single scene *via* intermediaries. This also indicates the change in character involvement in the chapter on different levels. Thus the cycles in Chapter 4 are not a single unit but interdependent. The intermediaries featuring at different stages include: Esther's maids and eunuchs in verse 4;

Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who is summoned in verse 5-6; Mordecai informs Hathach in verse 7, and gives him written copy in verse 8. Hathach reports to Esther in verse 9, who later speaks to him and commands him to go to Mordecai. Verse 12 presents a dramatic set of characters in this chapter, as the intermediary is an unnamed servant. From this moment on, Hathach is not mentioned again as a mediator.

The study will pay more attention to this section with an aim of getting an overview of the linguistic and the literary features of the text and the way in which the text is assembled. It will also involve the context and the plot stages in the text of chapter four. The macro-and micro-unit of this delimitation will further be analyzed in the subsection that follows in 2.1.4.

2.1.3 Clause Analysis of Esther 4:1-17

This section will provide the structural clause divisions which will be utilized in the verse-by-verse exegesis below. Such an analysis helps to get an impression of the flow of the narrative. The clause division departs from the principle that a clause may not have more than one finite verb. However, subordinate clauses (e.g. those introduced by the relative *אֲשֶׁר*) are treated in unity with the main clause on which it is dependent. In narrative texts Hebrew main clauses mostly start with the waw consecutive plus imperfectum construction (also called the wayyiqtol), which signifies the progression in the narrative. We distinguish between only two levels below, namely the narrative level with indirect speech, and the direct speech parts which are embedded in the narrative.

2.1.3.1 Esther 4:1-17

Direct Speech	Indirect Speech	Clause	Verse
	וּמְרַדְכַי יָדַע אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה	a	1
	וַיִּמְרַע מְרַדְכַי אֶת-בְּגָדָיו	b	
	וַיִּלְבַּשׁ שָׂק וְאַפָּר	c	
	וַיֵּצֵא בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר	d	
	וַיִּזְעַק וְזָעַקָה גְדֻלָּה וַיִּמְרָה:	e	
	וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ	a	2
	כִּי אֵין לָבֹא אֶל-שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלִבְּוֹשׁ שָׂק:	b	
	וּבְכָל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מִגֵּיעָאֲבָל גְּדוֹל לִיְהוּדִים	a	3
	וְצוֹם	b	
	וּבְכִי	c	

ד	ומספד	
e	שק ואפר יצע לרבים:	
a	ותבואינה נערות אסתר וסריסיה	4
b	ויגידו לה	
c	ותתחלתל המלכה מאד	
d	ותשלח בגדים להלביש את מרדכי ולהסיר שקו מעליו	
e	ולא קבל:	
a	ותקרא אסתר להתד מסריסי המלך אשר העמיד לפניה	5
b	ותצוהו על מרדכי לנעת מהנה ועל מהנה:	
a	ויצא התד אל מרדכי אל רחוב העיר אשר לפני שער המלך:	6
a	ויגדלו מרדכי את כל אשר קרהו ואתו פרשת הכסף אשר אמר המן לשקול על גגני המלך ביהודיים לאבדם:	7
a	ואת פתשגו כתב הדת אשר נתן בשושן להשמידם נתן לו להראות את אסתר ולהגיד לה ולצוות עליה לבוא אל המלך להתחנן לו ולבקש מלפניו על עמה:	8
a	ויבוא התד	9
b	ויגד לאסתר את דברי מרדכי:	
a	ותאמר אסתר להתד	10
b	ותצוהו אל מרדכי:	
a	כל עבדי המלך ועם מדינות המלך יודעים אשר כל איש ואשה אשר יבוא אל המלך אל החצר הפנימית אשר לא יקרא אחת דתו להמית לבד מאשר יושיט לו המלך את שרביט הזהב ותיה	11
b	ותיה	
c	ואני לא נקראתי לבוא אל המלך זה שלוש יום:	
a	ויגדו למרדכי את דברי אסתר: פ	12
a	ויאמר מרדכי להשיב אל אסתר	13
b	אל תדמי בנפשך להמלט בית המלך מכל היהודים:	
a	כי אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת	14
b	רוח והצלחה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר	
c	ואת ובית אביך תאבדו	
e	ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת הגעת למלכות:	
a	ותאמר אסתר להשיב אל מרדכי:	15
a	לך	16
b	כנוס את כל היהודים הנמצאים בשושן	
c	וצומו עלי	
d	ואל תאכלו	
e	ואל תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום	
f	גם אני ונערתי אצום כן	
g	ובכן אבוא אל המלך אשר לא כדת	
h	וכאשר אבדתי	
i	אבדתי:	
a	ויעבר מרדכי	17
b	ויעש ככל אשר צוה עליו אסתר: ס	

2.1.3.2 Discussion of Clause delimitation

We see clearly from the above analysis that verses 1-10 consist fully of indirect speech, with the narrator setting the tone in two episodes. In verses 11-17, however, direct speech abounds, with only brief narrative parts in between (in 12a, 13a, 15a and 17a,b). This section presents the focal point of the plot line, with strong imperatives and commands given to a second person. These verses contain a dynamic pace with much speech and little action. It presents the characteristics and nature of the crisis at hand, which is the driving force of the plot. The climax is verse 16 where Esther agrees to approach the king even if it is against the law, for the deliverance of her people. Though the passage is dominated by the role of the messengers, who may be suspected of greater subjectivity, their narration gives the impression of an eyewitness account and claims to present first-hand information (Deist & Vorster, 1986:75).

2.1.4 Structural-Exegetical Analysis of Esther 4:1-17

The structural analysis of Chapter 4 will focus on the alternations between direct and indirect speech, the changes in space of time, place and the character interactions that are narrated, in order to identify the dynamic of the plot line in the text. Chapter 4 presents the first instances of direct speech by both Esther and Mordecai. It is interesting that Mordecai speaks only in this chapter of the narrative with three episodes. Day (2005:77) describes the dialogue that follows as ‘suspenseful and terse’ as becomes evident in the reception of the phrase “such a time as this” in verse 14, which renders this chapter the climax of the plot line. Verses 13-16 provide a sense of the urgency of the present crisis. However, verses 1-10 are presented in a sequence of straight narrations and indirect speech with detailed narrative transitions within first two episodes. The last verses (11-16) are direct discourses with minimal narrative transitions, forming the last episode. It is interesting to note that verse 1 begins with Mordecai going into the city wailing, and verse 17 ends with Mordecai leaving the city with instructions.

There is also a sharp character change in the narrative. Mordecai first appears in the open gate displaying his grief. Then we notice the description of the servants’ actions of relaying messages back and forth, which become briefer as the episode continues, until Esther and Mordecai seem to be speaking directly in their final statements. Scholars like Day (2005:78) characterize the conversation as more immediate and mention that the pace of the narrative accelerates as it proceeds through the episode. However, it is also observed that the narrative pace does not match the pace of actions described. For instance, it would probably take considerable time, possibly several hours, between the sending and receiving of any given message, but such is not the case in this narrative.

The changes in place (space) also play an important role in the episode. Three levels of placement are recorded by Levenson (1997:77) and Day (2005:78). These are: (1) outside the gate, (2) inside the palace generally, and (3) inside the inner court. Chapter 4:2 locates Mordecai going only as far as the king's gate. The Hebrew writing indicates that this simply meant the entry of the king's gate. Verse 6 introduces a change in location as it locates Mordecai in "the open square" of the city but also at the king's gate. This identifies the place as a fully public space open for all. The location of Esther is inside the palace and is described as the second place in the episode.

The narrative here stresses the spatial separation between the two relatives, resulting in the involvement of the eunuch Hathach and other servants as intermediaries between these two levels. Verse 11 locates King Ahasuerus who seems to control the third area. The parallel phrases "to the king" and "to the inner court" are usually equated to a space reserved exclusively for the king. It may also mean interior, the inner ward, precious, and indoor, a place regarded as his domain (Day 2005:78). Thus the change in place of this episode is viewed in three levels of space: the outside gate, inside the inner palace, and inside the inner court.

These three levels of space clearly reflect three varying degrees of power according to Day (2005:78). King Ahasuerus is situated at the centre holding the power of life and death, Esther fits in the next level, though not in control, but with some influence on the king; and Mordecai is the furthest from the inner realm and the centre (i.e., from the king). This model is very important in this study. It does not only present the different roles of these characters, but also attempts to establish a link between them in the story line.

Our discussion will now continue with a verse-by-verse description of the textual unit of Esther 4:1-17. The structural divisions indicated below are based on the clause analyses made in a previous section of our discussion.

Verses 1-3 introduce the whole scene in the text. It starts with the time Mordecai hears about what has happened, viz. the plot to eliminate the Jews in the Empire. Carruthers calls this the section of the great mourning among the Jews (2008:160).

Verses 4-14 are about Esther and Mordecai. This can further be divided as follows: verse 4 and 5, Esther is made aware about the distressed situation of Mordecai at the king's gate through her eunuchs and maids. Esther's response of a gift of a garment does not suffice, and she inquires more about Mordecai. Esther finds out the reason from Mordecai, who tells her of Haman's edict and orders her to plead with the king on behalf of her people. Verses 6-14 are

dominated by the role of a messenger (Hathach) who mediates between Esther and Mordecai. However, most scholars identify the messenger as "Daniel", as will be explained in the next section (Carruthers, 2008:163). In verse 14 the phrase, "from another place" draws our special attention, where the source of deliverance is stated. Mordecai's gesture exceeds the present situation, and he announces deliverance from a cosmic application. This verse provides the paramount example of deliverance motifs in this study.

In verses 15-17 Esther accepts the task, at the risk of her life, to plead with the king to deliver the Jews. She also orders Mordecai and the Jews to fast for three days for her, and announces that she and her maidens will also fast.

Levenson's structural outline of chapter 4 of the Book of Esther is somewhat different, however. He divides the chapter in only two subsections. He regards verses 1-11 as Esther's ignorance and resistance, and 12-17 as Esther's acceptance of her providential role to deliver (1997:76-80).

The following discusses some detailed aspects of the text:

(4:1) *'When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry'* (NKJV). The verse indicates a single character, namely Mordecai, expressing a strong emotion at a specific moment. The narrative first reports how distressed Mordecai is in verse 1, in which both the visible ("sackcloth and ashes") and the audible ("wailing with a bitter cry") reflect his mood. The fronting of the words, ידעוּמַרְדֵּכַי (copula + personal name + 3 sing verb) signifies a specific time or a unique moment in the passage 'when Mordecai heard'. The first action or response of the narrative by Mordecai also indicates a specific moment. This sets an important introduction that connects the events in Chapter 3 to those in Chapter 4.

Sackcloth and ashes are often used in the Hebrew Bible when people lament and mourn because of death or anticipate destruction, as in 2 Samuel 3:31 and Jeremiah 6:26. The Hebrew use of the word זָעַק (meaning to cry) is also associated with a call to assemble people. In this case Mordecai might be using it to assemble the Jews to join him in the lament for the plot laid by Haman in verse 3.

"Tearing his clothes, and putting on sackcloth" is presented in the narrative in a figurative and dramatic way. The mourning rites of tearing clothes, donning sack cloths and putting on ashes and wailing publicly, were very common in ancient Israel and were also connected with turning

away from divine wrath. Levenson states that this act is as close to traditional religious practice as the Book of Esther ever gets (1997:78). It is also used in verse 16 and accompanied by fasting. This agrees with my earlier argument that Mordecai is the central character with a major role in the book. He incites Esther to act on behalf of the Jews. The word נצו (went out as far as) describes a place or location in the plot line.

But what is it ‘all’ that Mordecai perceives or learns? The word ידע is used here in its basic sense, meaning to know, to find out and discern, or to recognise through experience. As a niphal, the word means ‘to be made known’. Fox mentions that it is about the edict that has been published. The root עשה means “to bring forth, to do, or to make”. Thus Fox explains that Mordecai knew much more than what is told here, even including the details of the private deal between Haman and the king (1991:57).

However, scholars are not resolved about the source of Mordecai’s information; it seems he was always present, listening and observing what was happening (made possible perhaps by his knowledge of seventy languages). Commentators such as Moore think that Mordecai is reproaching himself for having provoked Haman (1982:47). I suggest that since Mordecai is the targeted victim, lamenting publicly is a way of getting Esther’s attention. Carruthers states that the scene commends the Jews for their non-violent response to the edict, which he says is a model to the present generation. Mordecai displays a skilled hermeneutics in interpreting the events of the world so as to find God's presence (2008:161).

(4:3) “In every province” כּוֹל indicates a broader setting and space of the narrative. There is a shift from a specific place (king’s gate) in verse 1 to the whole empire, in all the provinces. The emphasis on the word ‘whole’ may mean all the people, or everyone. It also expresses the manner in which people responded to the edict issued by Haman. The space of the plot also changes from outside the king’s gate to the whole Empire. The national grief shows the extent of the response to the threat of annihilating the Jews. The character change is also notable here, viz. from an individual (Mordecai) to the whole community in all the provinces.

Mordecai’s behaviour with his loud and bitter wailing adds additional impact to the situation. Mordecai’s public mourning in verse 1 results in a communal mourning throughout the empire (בְּכִי מִסָּפֵד שֶׁק אָפֶר). The Jewish community in the Empire, not only Mordecai, seeks the divine intervention for their cause. Fasting is used as a religious act designed to influence God’s will, though fasting is used differently in 2 Samuel 12:22 where it is perceived as a form of prayer. However, it is noted that adverbs used in these verses describe the grief and distress of the

mourning Jews. The absence of any direct reference to a religious motive is curious and not clearly evident, which Fox suggests is deliberate (1991:58).

The position of verse 3 is disputed by scholars such as Fox (1998:58), since logically, it should have been placed after 3:15. To Fox, it seems logical that people were to react first, with Mordecai's response following subsequently. I cannot agree with this view, as its placement by the author of the Book of Esther is original and deliberate. The present position of verse 3 in my view, provides a unique progression of the story from verse 2 where unique changes are presented. The first is the change of place (from the king's gate to all the provinces), followed by a change of audience from an individual (Mordecai) to a communal entity (all the Jews in all the provinces).

(4:4-5) having been informed about the situation, Esther (אֶסְתֵּר) expresses great distress. The queen of Persia is introduced first in the episode and plot line, surprisingly with a Persian name meaning "star" and not in Hebrew (Haddasah). This might be because her identity had not yet been made known to the public including the king. The clauses with the verbs בּוֹא and נָגַד are presented in the indirect speech section, the verbal root functioning as 'to make known, to tell, announce or report'.

A number of turning points are evident in this verse. The location has returned to the palace premises, but now inside the palace and the king's gate. These two different spaces require the involvement of intermediaries, thus Esther's maids and the eunuchs are involved, resulting in the change of characters in the plot line and space. The exchange of messages may require a reasonable space of time, yet in the episode events move faster than expected.

In this, we note the conversational character of the passage in the episode: the queen demonstrates a heart for her people and is concerned about their welfare. She embraces solidarity with the Jews; if they are upset, she will be upset as well. The Hebrew term for "deeply distressed" refers not only to Esther's mental anguish but also to movement and physical pain (Day 2005:79). Her direct speech is uttered in short indirect sentences which concern mainly events taking place as a relief to the crisis, such as the offer of clothes. Her maids and eunuchs are mentioned first, bringing the message; later, one messenger (Hathach) is singled out as a link between Esther and Mordecai. As mentioned earlier, this messenger is given special attention by Carruthers who identifies him as Daniel (2008:163). Carruthers explains that Daniel was called Hatakh, the name from hatakh-hu, which resulted from his degraded position. It is indicated that Haman saw him passing messages between Mordecai

and Esther, and he became furious at him and killed him (2008:163). Though the point is interesting as it describes the role of the mediator, the biblical account is passive on the claims made by Carruthers, and challenged further by the historical evidence surrounding the events of the moment. Thus, the idea is difficult to accept.

The major challenge with verse 4 is how Mordecai knows about the plot before Esther, who is much closer to the seat of power. Levenson highlights this “knowledge (v 1-2), versus her ignorance in v5”, adding that this questions the knowledge and the relationship of her staff to Mordecai, when her Jewishness is still a secret (1997:78). I suggest that this might have been so because having being at the gate, Mordecai had more direct access to information than Esther in the inner court.² Perhaps this explains her ignorance of the cause of the public mourning, and highlights the distance between Mordecai the Jew and Esther the Persian (Levenson 1997:79). However, interaction between Mordecai and Esther will later help to construct a plan to subvert Haman’s edict.

Carruthers states that some commentators dismiss Esther’s sending clothes to Mordecai as a feminine preference for appearance over her principle. Yet he quotes Thomas Scott who defends Esther, arguing that she sent clothes ‘as a token of her sincere and deep sympathy with him in his sorrow’ (2008:164). I understand the two views as similar and substantiating each other.

The author seems to have been careful to preserve Mordecai's spatial relationship with Esther in the court, by introducing him in the open ‘city square’ in verse 6. Some commentators such as Levenson have argued that the city square was associated with the rites of lamentations, and it is therefore the proper place for Mordecai to inform Hathach about all that has happened to him. Here it seems as if Mordecai acts as representative of all his people (the Jews).

(4:7) the mention of the word “sum of money” in verse 7 (הכסףפרשת) of the clause analysis declares a specific amount of money. According to Levenson, mentioning Haman’s bribe in verse 7 is rhetorically powerful and serves to underscore our understanding of him as a master tactician. Some of the old commentators like Paton emphasizes that the offer of 10,000 talents handed to the revenue collectors is shrewdly calculated by Mordecai as buying the Jews, and is guaranteed to rouse Esther’s wrath (Paton, 1908:217). This is explained as a vast sum of money, and how he proposed to raise it is not clear. Paton states that the total revenue of the

² The absence of direct speeches in this verse is a challenge to this view, however. The only way Mordecai is said to have been able to know about the plot is his presence at the gate, a fact well agreed by commentators.

Persian Empire was 14,560 Euboic talents, nearly 17,000 Babylonian talents. Thus, Haman offers almost two thirds of the annual income of the empire (1908:205). Biblical references indicate that the king refused to take the offer, which was sufficient motivation for Haman for the destruction of the Jews.

(4:8), צליהו לצות להגיד אסתרא לתלראות “to show Esther to inform her and to command her”. These three infinitive clauses express the purpose for which Mordecai gives Hathach the copy of Haman’s edict to present to Esther. However, their object remains unexpressed, though common in Hebrew as commented by Bush (1996:395), when the intended object has just been expressed or is clear from the text. In this case unexpressed object of both infinitives must be Haman. The copy given to Esther acts as an evidence for Mordecai’s argument. Paton describes this as a wicked plan by Haman and leaves Esther without any doubts as to the gravity of the situation (1908:218).

The original text uses ‘the copy’ and not ‘a copy’, because the following genitive is definite: in this case the copy contained a brief summary of the message to be conveyed. Paton suggests that Esther was unable to read Persian, so that besides showing her the edict Hathach also had to interpret the content (1908:218). Yet the two infinitives can hardly imply that Esther was illiterate (cf. the verb “to explain”), since that would have made it unnecessary to show her the document. The verse concludes with Mordecai’s charge to Esther to go to the king and plead for mercy.

The comparison between Esther 4 and Exodus 7 provide additional information here. Levenson states that the verse invites an analogy with the role of Moses in the book of Exodus, explaining that ‘Esther is to Ahasuerus as Moses is to Pharaoh’ in Exodus: 7:1-2 (1997:79). He also notes that the difference is that whereas Moses and Aaron fail to persuade Pharaoh due to God’s predetermination, Esther and Mordecai succeed with their courage, suggesting divine action.

The specific setting of the publication of the edict is mentioned in this verse as Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire. Worth noting is the closing clause in verse 8, where Mordecai plays his role in the delivery plan in urging Esther to go to the king, to beg, and plead for mercy. This is an indication that Mordecai was a master planner in the delivery of the Jews.

(4:9&10) These verses fall within the role of the messenger Hathach, who still mediates between two characters, Mordecai and Esther. Though most commentators try to skip these two verses, they form the most important part of the chapter in time and space levels. The verses locate the events in the chapter between two levels of space: outside the gate, and inside

the inner palace. Going back and reporting to Esther (verse 9), and bringing instruction to Mordecai (verse 10), indicates a short space of time.

(4:11) The awareness of the Persian law is brought to the knowledge of Mordecai with reference to a number of characters, ‘all the king’s officials’. The setting of the story has not changed, but references point to another place, the ‘inner court’, the dominion of the king. The time frame (thirty days) in this verse is well-defined as the number of days passed since the queen had been summoned to the king. This is the only verse in the narrative with a specified time frame.

This is a very important section with direct responses from Queen Esther. The verse has strong critics speculating on the law that an unsummoned approach to the king carries the sentence of death. The law that individuals had to request an audience applied equally to the queen, who had spent thirty days since she went to the king, which sounds improbable. “Inner” here is an adjective locating a place and defining an interior part of the court which was reserved for the king only. Esther was disobeying Mordecai directly, but I agree with Berg (1997:76) who is of the view that she does argue convincingly, citing the danger to her life. Paton believes that the law that no man should approach the king without summons was designed to allow the king his personal dignity and to protect him from assassination (1908:220).

Levenson states that this narrative surely enhances the dramatic tension, as Esther is risking both her royal office (as did Vashti), and her very life (1997:80). Commentators have pointed out that Esther's willingness to sacrifice her life on behalf of her people marks her transformation from a beauty queen to a heroic saviour, and from a self-styled Persian to a reconnected Jew.

Verses 12 to 17 form the most crucial part of the study, and an important turning point, the climax of the plot line in the narrative, where the deliverance motifs in the book take place.

(4:12) “*They told to Mordecai Esther’s words.*” The verse is expressed in plural form in which the narrator uses the indefinite subject “they” which, according to Bush, is almost passive in the sentence (1996:395). It indicates that more than two mediators are involved to pass the message. Here it means ‘to announce’ by word of mouth to one present. The narrator changes here deliberately in this textual transmission, and switches from indirect (episode 2 v5-9 & 3 10-17) to direct discourse. The narrator dispenses the detailed report of the movement of the necessary intermediaries, and in v15 he omits any reference to them at all (Bush, 1996: 395). The problem most commentators have is with the use of the plural verb “they told” since Esther

commanded only the messenger, Hathach; hence the conflict with the literary development of the scene.

The explanation of this verse by Paton is debatable: he identifies Hathach with Daniel, and mentions that he is killed by Haman, then moves on to mention the angels Michael and Gabriel (1908:221-2). He states that the wicked Haman had seen Hathach, whose name was Daniel, going to and from Esther, and his anger waxed great against him, and he slew him.³ Two things are not clear in his explanation; the mention of angels Michael and Gabriel is not directly evident in the verse. Secondly, the debate between Mordecai and Esther in the subsequent verses does not involve Hathach in the text. The debate seems to be altering, becoming tense, and the intermediary Hathach has disappeared. This results in Esther's accepting the life-threatening mission to save the Jews from annihilation.

(4:13) The response by Mordecai in this verse '*Do not imagine that because you are in the king's house, you alone of all the Jews will escape*' "תדמיאל" (do not imagine)' suggests an alternative interpretation of the situation. Mordecai's direct speech reveals his agenda. The verse is addressed to the first person pronoun. Fox suggests that she might have imagined escaping the penalty either because her identity was secret, at least until after 13 Adar, or through the personal protection of the king (1991:61). Since the edict did not say that 'all Jews must die', but rather that everyone had the right to kill the Jews, Esther would hardly have been exposed to the mob. Mordecai makes it clear to Esther that she is in the same peril as they are. He insists that though going to the king seems dangerous, avoiding approaching the king is as dangerous. Even although she is the king's wife, Haman will not allow her to escape if he knows she is a Jew, particularly a relative of the hated Mordecai. This was a terrible moment for Esther to have taken the decision which would later prove her true character as a hero.

According to Clines, there are *three* suggested sources of danger if she had chosen to remain silent; firstly the anger of the province that had set her on the Persian throne 'for such a time like this'; secondly, the wrath of her kinsmen, and lastly the vindication of Haman's continued search beyond 13 Adar (1984:36). In this and the following verse, Mordecai is used as a mouthpiece of God.

(4:14) 'For if you certainly keep silent at this time (כִּי אִם־הִתְקַרְשׁ תִּתְקַרְשִׁי בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת), relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place'. The traditional way of reading the

³ However, there is no clear evidence in literature (both biblical and non-biblical) that Haman killed Hathach. This makes Paton's argument spurious.

Hebrew text of verse 14a is as a conditional statement, and the second statement completes the thought, introduced by the conjunction ‘then’. If looked in this way, this text seems to mean that if Esther does not take action to help save the Jews, they would still be delivered by some other unnamed agent. As recognised by many scholars, this is the focal point in the Book of Esther. It is placed at the centre of the story expressing the author’s main theological theme.

The verse presents the subject of the narrative in the plot line, which is deliverance. There is a clear indication of the time space in the verse ‘at this time’, describing that deliverance is already granted, and it will still become evident. The time description ‘at this’, describes position of time, while ‘such a time’ describes purpose. It can also be viewed as expressing the same thought, viz. time of and for the deliverance of the Jews. The character focus in this verse remains Esther, and Mordecai tries to convince Esther towards a deliverance plan. The verse poses two problems: the expression (אחר־מקום) “another place”, and the clause “relief and deliverance will rise.” Ancient scholars (such as Josephus and Targums to Esther) and modern commentators agree that the expression ‘another place’ refers to God as will be explained below. These expressions are unique in the narrative as they unveil the *theme and purpose* in the episode.

When Mordecai informs Esther about ‘deliverance from *another place*’ and that she attained her royal status for the purpose of saving her people’, readers detect a veiled reference to God’s providence working behind the scene. Paton believes that this was the author’s intention, to avoid mentioning God deliberately. Despite the omission the speaker is confident of the outcome, considering ancient promises that Israel shall never perish (1908:222).

The major challenge in this section of the verse is to explain the source of this ‘other’ place mentioned by Mordecai. Weibe suggests two complicated ideas in this regard. Firstly, he considers the use of the word ‘maqom’ (place) in the verse which refers indirectly to God, citing the LXX and Josephus having interpreted this word as such. This indicates that the phrase ‘another place’ is actually a ‘substitute for the divine name’ (1991:3). Weibe agrees with Moore’s opinion that ‘place’ here is ‘a veiled allusion to God’ (1982:50). If the thinking is correct, then Mordecai means that if Esther keeps silent, God will intervene in some alternative way on behalf of his people.

However, Ackroyd and Berg argue that applying the adjective ‘another’ to place, refers to sources which would bring about deliverance other than by God (1997:76). Clines (1984:42) offers a further suggestion to identify this other source, stating that Mordecai might be hoping

that support would come from other Jews holding high offices. This may mean that the Jews would rise and revolt, or be assisted by Persians who were sympathetic to the Jews and would intervene somehow (1984:42). However, the story of Esther nowhere even hints at the source of such a hope, thus the identity of their relief remains an enigma in this account. Logically, the solutions presented are nothing more than educated guesses, according to Berg.

The second section of the verse, viz. *'Esther and the house of her father would still be destroyed'* also presents difficulties. It might suggest that if Esther would not stand up for the Jews, then God himself would intervene and punish her. Through God's deliverance for the Jews, Esther would definitely incur God's wrath. This is a direct threat not only to Esther, but also to *'the house of her father'*, meaning none other than *the house of Mordecai*, as will be explained in the next section (Esther's relationship with Mordecai). Yet this prediction by Mordecai on his own house provides further mystery to the interpretation of the verse. How would the author affirm that God's judgement or Jewish retribution would befall him and his house? Wiebe (1991:5) states that the story portrays Mordecai as the real hero, doing all he can to avert the coming disaster. There might be a better explanation for this verse, but we may suggest that Mordecai implied that Esther was the only possible source for relief and deliverance of the Jews.

(4:16). The verse starts with a command from Esther to Mordecai and the Jewish community; *'Go, gather together all the Jews....fast for me....for three days....I will go to the king, even though it is against the law'*. The command is issued in a second person singular to Mordecai, then in a second person plural to the community in which she acts, like Mordecai, as a leader of the community (Fox, 1984:61). 'And if I perish, I perish'; finally Mordecai's argument seems to have persuaded Esther and she resolves to go to the king at once, but desires the Jewish spiritual support. The Jewish community had already been fasting upon hearing of Haman's edict of annihilation. This fast is not that which accompanies grief and mourning, as the crisis lies in the future; this is intercession (Bush, 1996:397).

The verse presents important changes in character and authority. As Esther has grown under the authority and obedience to Mordecai, now it is Esther who commands Mordecai and the Jews. This is a climax of the plot line, and presents a unique change in character and authority.

Fasting and prayer was the only religious act to invoke God's intervention in the situation, though no direct mention is made of God – an avoidance which seems to adhere to the Persian custom. The author in the text strives to avoid the source of Esther's hope in this crucial period.

It is debatable how Esther's maids, being heathens, valued Esther's support or were loyal and willing to undertake fasting.

Laniak describes Esther's statement at the close of chapter 4:16, as reminiscent of Jacob's response to his fate, the news about Joseph's death, "*and if I am bereaved, I am bereaved*" (Gen 43:14). The other echo is the statement of Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego (in Dan 3:17, 18), "*If our God is able to deliver us.... Let it be so. But if not.... We will not serve your gods...*" (1998:88). Paton ponders what finally sways Esther in her despairing situation and surmises that she accepts this offer as one who would submit to an operation as a chance of escaping death. She is willing to perish for the sake of the salvation of the people of the house of Israel, but she does hope to have part in the world to come (1998:226). Esther is facing a danger that she seems not to fear.

The problem here is understanding Esther's first response in verse 11, and whether it reflects a change of mind on her part. It seems she is only making plans on how to proceed as this is the first time we see her as part of the Jewish society.

(4:17) The verse serves as a conclusion and solution (verse 16) to the problem presented in verses 1-3. Mordecai has achieved his mission of persuading Esther to plead with the king. 'And so Mordecai went away'...., 'and carried instructions...'. The text started with Mordecai learning the story, reporting that he 'went' into the king's gate. Here, it ends with Mordecai 'going away'. The verbs 'going and coming in' are unique and grammatically rich. The 'going into' in verse 2 is a hindrance to Mordecai as he goes with limits, not beyond the gate, and with distress. But in this last verse, he goes with joy, after Esther agrees to approach the king. He came to make demands upon Esther, and now does as Esther has commanded him. He came in crying, and goes out with a mission

There is a strong agreement between the first verse and the last verse in this textual unit of the chapter in the person of Mordecai. There is also verbal repetition and agreement in the chapter, where the "went" is only differentiated by the preposition which locates place in the space level, that is, in and out. However, the major change in the chapter is the mood of the main character, Mordecai, in the first and the last verses.

2.1.5 Summary of the literary analysis

The summary of the exegesis, after the analysis of the literary features of Esther 4, will help to wrap up the chapter. It commences with an overview of the plot line, with Mordecai's mourning: he tears his clothes, wearing sack clothes and is going to the king's gate. His clothing

restricts him from entering the king's palace to meet Esther. This is followed by the expanded parallel ritual activities of the whole Jewish community. Verses 4-14 is a debate, discussion and acceptance of the providential role, a passage of 'knowledge versus ignorance' (Levenson 1997:82).

This section of verses concludes after some suspense and tense dialogue, with Esther taking the same kind of ritual, as Mordecai has done, and agreeing to risk her life in order to save her endangered community. Ultimately, Mordecai has persuaded Esther and it now remains for her to win over Ahasuerus, challenging as it is. The plan is set out in verse 16 and is their hope for divine intervention after three days of fasting and prayer. It is observed that Mordecai's speeches in the plot line are rhetorically powerful and favour the success of Esther's strategy of non-violent and human effort over Moses' use of threat and miraculous plagues. Carruthers (2008:172) agrees, commenting that Esther is not a genuine hero in this plot, because deliverance stems not from her initiative, but from Mordecai's orders.

The summary helps us to analyse the main characters, settings, space in time, place and purpose of each element in the deliverance plan and the plot line of the story. However, this chapter provides the larger dynamics of the book's narrative. The chapter locates the point of crisis in the plot line as the motivation for the episode. In this case, *the motivation* is the plot against the Jews, and the *climax of the episode* comes with Esther's agreement to go to the king, though against the law. The episode starts with Mordecai who "went out" in distress, crying... and it ends with Mordecai who "went away" to execute Esther's commands. This beginning and ending indicate significantly the changes in time and place in the episode. Whereas Mordecai "learns" at first, there is no more learning at the end.

2.2 Characters and characterization in the Book of Esther

2.2.1 Preliminary view

It is believed that characters in literature form an important element of the narratives; they function through action and develop through the progression of the events in the plot (Day, 1995: 19). Characters and actions are mutually interdependent; we know the characters of a story primarily as we see them act, and in their connection with other characters. Day states

that we analyse characters in literature as if they were alive, and understand them against the background of our human experience (1995:20).

The biblical characters are noted for their actions in the course of the narratives. Jonker states that biblical characters are most often at the service of the plot, and seldom presented for their own sake (1996:226). Of the characters in the narratives of the Book of Esther, four are presented as fully-fledged characters who manifest multiple traits and qualities. These are: Mordecai, Haman, Ahasuerus and Esther. Though Vashti remains another important character in the book of Esther according to Masenya (2003) and Snyman (2003), not much detail will be given in this study, as the focus is on the characterization of Esther.

Regardless of criticism on the historicity of the book, Fox speaks of them as real figures. To him, this helps readers to learn, react to, and speak about the writer's imagination of their thoughts, feelings, and even subconscious minds (1991:6). The character study also helps to see how the figure of a character appears at various stages in the same story but with a modified personality. The literary figures are recalled vividly, even if the words and the events of the texts in which they first came alive, took place long ago. Day (1995:9) points out that a great deal of the enjoyment we get from the story depends upon its characters. They appear simple and transparent, yet they hold much interest. They are described artfully, yet subtly and craftily.

For the purpose of our study, the analysis of characters and characterization is an important aspect. Since we are focusing on Esther's role and presentation as deliverer it is crucial to focus our attention now on this aspect of the narrative analysis, particularly on the characterization of Esther.

2.2.2 Background of the Characters in the Book of Esther

Before proceeding with a discussion of the characterization of the figures in the Book of Esther, let us consider the definitions and origins of their names, to avoid confusion.

Ahasuerus – (אחשוורוש) He was the Persian king; some commentators state that the name was also used as a title for Persian kings. The name 'Ahasuerus' means 'I will be silent and poor'⁴ The famous historian Herodotus states that the meaning of the name Ahasuerus corresponds to the biblical and midrashic meaning, viz. vain, foolish, fickle and hot-tempered. The Old Testament has some references to the name 'Ahasuerus': Dan 9:1 refers to the father of Darius

⁴Online resource, see www.jewishencyclopedia.com/article/967-ahasuerus. Retrieved on 27th July 2014.

and the seat of the Medes, which is easily confused with the Persian king. Ezra 4:6, also mentions Ahasuerus in the biblical Persian history. The Greek history names him Xerxes.

Haman– (המן) He was the chief minister of Ahasuerus, and the favourite of the king. His name means ‘magnificent’⁵. He was an enemy of Mordecai and initiator of the plot against the Jews. He was an Agagite and son of Hammedatha. His name is mentioned with reference to the royal title of the Amalekites, long-standing enemies of Israel in Ex 17:1 and 1 Sam 15. He is a descendant of Agag, the king of the Amalekites who is frequently called the persecutor of the Jews; Esth 3:10, 8:1, 10:24.

However, Fox (1991:187) explains that Haman’s primary motive is not racial hatred, but rather the need to confirm his power at every step. Mordecai was the first to refuse showing obedience to Haman. It is perhaps his plot against the Jews and his downfall that are remembered during the feast of Purim. However this view is refuted by Jo Carruthers (2008:136) who argues that Haman is not mentioned directly among the princes in this section, and that the idea that he can be raised and exalted to such a position is debatable. We see clearly that in most stories he is involved in the execution of punishment.

Mordecai – (מרדכי) ‘Moredekay’ means ‘little man’ or ‘worshipper’.⁶ The name as explained by the rabbis is a compound of ‘Marduk’, (Aramaic) from the Mesopotamian chief god, and the national god of the Babylonians. Marduk was simply called Bel or Lord, the original god of thunderstorms. Mordecai was a cousin and adopted father of Queen Esther, and son of Jair of the tribe of Benjamin. Under divine providence he initiated deliverance of the Jews from Haman. He was made chief minister of Ahasuerus and is one of the principal characters of the Book of Esther.

His name is mentioned in various parts of the Hebrew Bible. Ezra 2: 2 and Nehemiah 7:7 mention Mordecai in connection with the return of Zerubabel from captivity alongside Bilshan. Some commentators have mentioned that the name Mordecai is identical with the prophet Malachi, but most rabbis agree that Mordecai was a prophet and that he prophesied in the second year of Darius. According to Esther 2:6, and 2 Kings 24:14, Mordecai was carried away to Jerusalem; he might be a member of the great Sanhedrin which sat in a chamber of the square of hewn stone (Targum Sheni). In this group, each member knew all the seventy languages of the great Persian world. This knowledge of language enabled Mordecai to discover the plot of

⁵Online resource, see www.jewishencyclopedia.com/article-Haman. Retrieved on 27th July 2014.

⁶Online resource, see www.jewishencyclopedia.com/article-Mordecai. Retrieved on 27th July 2014.

the two eunuchs who conversed in Tarshish, their native language, thinking no one would understand them.⁷ Fox describes Mordecai as an unblemished, consistently wise and knowing person. His actions save his people, and later promote their welfare, and he served the king loyally (1991:193). Alongside Esther Mordecai represents a leader of a new sort; the diaspora leader.

2.2.2.1 Characterization of Queen Esther in the book Esther

Esther (Persian for star) is from the root name of the goddess Ishtar, a Babylonian goddess. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, meaning a myrtle (a branch that signifies peace and thanksgiving). She is the chief character in the book and in this study. She was an orphan girl brought up by her older cousin, Mordecai. The characterization of Esther will receive more attention in this study than other characters in the book, because Esther is a *focal point* for the actions in this book. She is also the *most engaging* character with great interests to readers. Day (1995:10) notes that in the story, Esther undergoes some character changes regarding her approach to the king and various roles, speeches, responses, actions and appearances throughout the story. This renders her a different type of a person and queen.

Scholars have addressed the portrayal of Esther as presented in the book in various ways. Forster (1974:46-54) finds Esther a *'flat'* character. The description has been disputed strongly, with the argument that the reader's interest in the plot may be neglected in favour of her characterization (Day 1995:11). Scholars like Moore (1990:90) and Anderson (1954:831) agree that Esther is a flat character, suggesting that she is perceived as lacking in depth so that it becomes difficult for the reader to identify with her. This study, however, suggests that her responses to the crisis in the narrative depict her as a hero and a deliverer.

There are also negative portrayals of Esther by certain interpreters of the book. Anderson views Esther as 'lacking virtue' (1950, 38-39), an argument based mostly on the character's lacking the admirable qualities of moral or godly persons. He generalizes that none of the characters in the book are admirable. I find this conclusion unacceptable, and more scholars have contradicted Anderson's view, finding the characters in the Book of Esther highly recommendable and interesting.

⁷ The legend of each person learning seventy languages is debatable, since most Targum Sheni sources seem to have little agreement with the Hebrew Bible sources. This makes it difficult to accept this point of view literally.

Some scholars have maintained the view that from the Book of Esther, one learns that nothing comes by chance, but by the providence of the Lord. Elwell (2001:19) insists that the book is primarily about God's providence and vindication. Despite some observance on morals and the absence of the name of God in the Book of Esther, the book presents how God preserved the Jews. Mordecai (Esther's stepfather according to the account of 4:14, though disputed by some interpretations of the verse) has been described as a god-fearing man. Some arguments are based on the author's intention with the Book of Esther on religious aspects. For example, Zeitlin (1972:13) understands Esther as someone who is 'weak' and irreligious. In most cases her acts betray her Jewish ethical and religious identity: her involvement in the beauty contest, her marriage to a gentile king and her partaking in Persian court rituals are some of her weaknesses.

Fox presents the most positive description of the character of Esther, pointing out how her character changes in the course of her story. Fox views Esther as at first displaying only *passivity*, a characteristic which *turns into activity*, and at last changes *to authority* (1991: 205-11). This might apply to most successful leaders, in my view. Fox explains that though Mordecai is the dominant actor and the more sterling paragon, Esther is the central character in the book, emerging as the most distinct and memorable character in the book naturally identified by most readers.

According to Day, general assessment of the figure of Esther by most recent interpreters describe her as a *strong, wise, and resourceful character* (1995: 14). I suggest that she is as said, 'strong' in terms of her courage in the course of the Jewish deliverance, 'wise' in terms of her skillful approach to the king at the time of the crisis, and resourceful in the way she plans properly for the delivery of the Jews, by engaging her audience in prayer and fasting.

Esther is also described as an *obedient character*. According to 2:7, Esther is said to be raised by Mordecai, to whom she was strictly obedient. This is supported directly by 2:20b. Her having been brought up as an orphan would also contribute to her entire dependence and submission to the authority of her guardians. Her obedience is demonstrated best when she is prepared over a twelve months' beauty treatment and delivered to the king (Fox, 1991:205).

Due to her obedience to Mordecai and in fulfillment of the divine plan, Esther is portrayed by scholars like Fox as being *compliant and opportunistic*. It seems to me that her entry in the contest and being brought into the king's bed was done without consulting her. We can also suggest that the Persians were intolerant of female freedom of choice. Fox further states that

Esther's acceptance of whatever happens to her is evidence of *confidence in her beauty*, her artificial luxuries, which persuades the king to make her queen (1991:206).

Esther is also portrayed as *a national leader*. Fox explains three things that foreshadow her role as a national leader: she sends, she commands, and she inquires. She sends the messages and messengers back and forth between herself and Mordecai toward finding the solution to the plot. Her command in chapter 4:16 shows her *potential authority, as initiator and planner befitting an emerging leader*. Esther emerges as a leader in her direct speech in 4:16, which is pivotal in her characterization: 'Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, even though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish' (NKJV). The verse seems to conclude the scene in an abrupt and surprisingly courageous way. In convening such an assembly and issuing directives to the community, Esther is assuming the role of a religious and national leader (Fox 1991:208).

Esther is described also as a *deliverer* in the story. Her determined behaviour to work her way through a crisis in 4:16 marks her as a woman deliverer. Esther accepts her fate with a declaration, with courage of the one who wants to do her duty successfully. The characterization of Esther both as *a leader and a deliverer, is demonstrated by her courage*. Thus, her determination and the approach of her petition to the king in 7:3, reveal her as a strong deliverer.

Esther is seen to act and speak with *dignity*, which further demonstrates her status as the Queen of Persia. Her character here has an understated quality fitting her position, with a more solemn and dignified manner. Her first approach before Ahasuerus is indicative of her general temper. Esther comes to the king silently, she speaks more formally and less insistently. She does not want to expose the plot publicly, but invites her people's enemy to the king on two banquets. She does so perhaps to dignify her husband's position and that of Haman. Her requests to the king are presented *artfully*, (5:4, 7:3-4, 8:3), perhaps with her well-modulated speech and actions enabling her to succeed easily.

In religious terms Esther may be described as a *pious and prayerful* character. She has a good relationship with God and refuses to worship foreign deities. However, we must also agree that Esther's religion was affected by her day-to-day life in the Persian court with her Jewish identity. We also note that in her relationship with God Esther *relied upon God*. In her prayer she expresses more readily than anybody else her own and her people's present need for God

and relies upon God for help in delivering the Jews (4:16). Her command for the Jews of Susa to join her in fast and prayer provides evidence for this deduction.

2.2.2.2 Esther's Character from a Feminist Perspective

Some scholars working from a feminist perspective find in Esther a woman who acts in compliance with a patriarchal system as a stereotypical woman, and hence one who should not be emulated (Day, 1995:12). However there are those among them who view the figure of Esther more sympathetically and refute the above views strongly. Many of these feminist scholars are of the view that the book presents a fully-fledged character who retains the reader's attention and whose positive qualities outweigh her limitations. Day quotes Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucinda B. Chandler (1974) who see in Esther a woman who possesses wisdom and courage. They also view Esther acting in a self-sacrificing and queenly manner (1995:13).

Esther is also viewed as *a courageous deliverer and liberator* for her people, as emphasized for instance by Lichtenberger, who notes that despite initial hesitance, she offers her own life for the sake of her people (1954, III: 841-47). The response from Esther (4:16) is evidence of this; ".....I will go to the king.....and if I perish, I perish."

According to Darr (1991), both Esther and Vashti are described as respected feminist thinkers and serve *as models* of appropriate behavior for women (1991:188-93). The description of Esther in this regard, contributes to a *true wisdom character* of Esther in the book – in contrast to those who adopt a negative reading of her character.

Her presence and conduct in the Persian court has led some feminist commentators to admire Esther's character, as surpassing even that of Mordecai. Talmon (1963) views Esther as embodying *wisdom qualities* as a courtier (1963:437-53). John F. Craghan agrees, describing Esther as one who expresses liberation and liberates others (1986:7-10). It can be also agreed that the book is one of the two Old Testament books that proposes a positive evaluation of the status of women through *honour and authority*.

The feminist scholar Sidnie Ann White whose essays have proven influential in the studies of Esther, identifies Esther as the main character in the book and *a true heroine* of the story (1989:161-77). She argues that Esther's character and actions must be assessed according to women's standard, and not those of men. This contrasts to Fox who argues that Mordecai, and not Esther is the dominant figure of the book and the one meant to be emulated (1991:205-11). White further states that the displays of Esther were significant for the survival of the Jews in

diaspora. Thus she commends Esther as a hero acting positively for her community for having acted in a way that even Mordecai failed to do (1989:177)

Though it might not be possible to pursue a detailed feminist perspective of Esther, the discussion in this middle section shed light on the feminist view of Esther in deliverance. However, the further focus of this study, is to consider Esther (deliverer of the Persian period) as a new Moses in the Old Testament deliverance narrative. The following chapter will analyze the roles of Moses and Esther, and try to investigate whether Esther can be interpreted as a New Moses.

2.2.2.3 The darker sides of Esther from a Feminist perspective

Apart from the positive characterization of Esther in the book of Esther, there are also a range of points that feminist criticism has raised with regard to Esther's characterization that is less appreciative of her portrayal in the narrative. For example, Zeitlin (1972:13) understands Esther as someone who is 'weak' and irreligious. Her involvement in the beauty contest, her marriage to a gentile king and her partaking in Persian court rituals are some of her weaknesses. Anderson views Esther as 'lacking virtue' (1950, 38-39), an argument based mostly on the character lacking the admirable qualities of moral or godly persons. He generalizes that none of the characters in the book are admirable. Beal (1997:98) describes Esther as playing her part with clinical, deconstructive, and erotic precision, while wrapping Ahasuerus around her little finger to effect her deadly plans. He concludes by describing Esther as a 'hiding character'. B.W. Anderson describes Esther as 'selfish' (1950:39) referring to her winning of the position of queen as a Jewish slave over the Persian beauties and her demotion of Haman. Her greater political influence and control in the empire in her later years are also related to her selfish activities. This idea is confirmed by Fuchs who describes Esther as manipulative (1982:153). Esther uses her beauty and sexual powers in order to reach her goals. Fuchs (1982:154) further argues that Esther's most manipulative activity is her directive to slaughter and destroy those who hated the Jews (chapter 9). This argument is also raised by Masenya (2001:31), one of the African feminist scholars. She finds problematic the "special racial position" the Jews are afforded in the divine plan, in that they are portrayed as plundering "another" race which is not portrayed as chosen even in their own land. Further, Brenner (2004:131), describes Esther more in terms of discrimination than in liberative terms. She bases her understanding on the contrast between chapter 4 and chapter 9, and interprets Esther's work as an incomplete emancipation of tragic, and her actions are similar to Haman's plot. In terms of her feminist scholarly view to claim a gender liberating figure in the book, Nadar (2002:123) describes the character of

Esther as weak compared to Vashti. She states that Esther only possesses beauty, humility, grace, loyalty and obedience, while lacking dignity, pride and independence which would portray her as gender liberator.⁸

The above studies therefore all emphasize the “darker” side of Esther’s characterization in the book of Esther. These studies argue that Esther’s character can – at best – be seen as a negative example to females, of how one should NOT act in crisis situations. Although it should be appreciated that feminist scholarship highlights this negative aspect of the book of Esther, it should not be ignored that the Esther’s portrayal comes in the context of deliverer figures in the Old Testament. One would agree from a modern-day gender understanding of the narrative that criticism should be expressed against the portrayal of Esther. However, in the narrative world constructed in the book of Esther, no negative evaluation is given of her, and she features in the traditions built upon this book as a deliverer figure.

2.2.3 Queen Esther: Relationships with other characters in the Book

The character of Esther can also be compared with other dominant characters in the book, such as Ahasuerus, Mordecai, and Haman, to help us understand the comprehensive analysis of the roles of Esther. Finally the analysis will be summarized in the sense that Esther is viewed as the deliverer, Mordecai the mediator and initiator, Haman as the main opponent and Ahasuerus, as the ruler in this plot line.

2.2.3.1 Esther’s relationship with King Ahasuerus

A discussion of the relationship of Esther with the king does not depart from our focus on chapter four, but rather provides a wider understanding of Esther's roles in the plot line and her deliverance plan. These include the way Esther and the king speak to each other, the manner they rule together and the support they show. Linda Day explains that Esther is most interactive with the king in the story (1991:183). The two are said to be conversing frequently and at greater length.⁹ Both biblical and extra-biblical sources indicate that Esther had gained confidence in Ahasuerus that she trusted and respected him, and began to command him directly. Sometimes they could act as equals. Her free interaction with the king differs from

⁸ See also Nadar (2003).

⁹ Though in Chapter 4 the king never called Esther for thirty days, their interaction after the fall of Haman in the preceding chapters seems to change as they meet and discuss frequently. This might be the point of argument for Day here.

Moses' interaction with the Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. Thus she is an appropriate deliverer in the Book of Esther.

Chapter 7 shows how Queen Esther now approaches the king. She no longer considers bowing before him, but speaks directly and forcefully, which displays a relaxation of the formality in their relationship. As leaders in the palace, they shared the responsibility of issues concerning the kingdom, and seem to understand each other's feelings, as demonstrated by Ahasuerus who can read Esther's inner thoughts in episode 4. The ending of the text does not incorporate the final scene between Esther and Mordecai, which Day suggests may indicate that Esther shares responsibility more with the king (working exclusively as a team) than with Mordecai. However, at times she even persuades the king to make certain decisions.

2.2.3.2 Esther's Relationship with Mordecai

This section will focus on the factors that influenced the relationship between Mordecai and Esther, such as the emotional closeness or distance between the two, the degree to which they work together, and Esther's level of obedience to Mordecai.

According to the Rabbinic Midrash accounts, Esther was a foundling orphan whose father died before her birth, and her mother at her birth.¹⁰ These sources present another interesting angle on the relationship of Esther and Mordecai, and suggest that Esther might have been married to Mordecai before the beauty contest, based on the interpretation of 2:7, of the phrase: "in the house of Mordecai"; the word *לבית* is the same as the word *לבית* (to the house) where the word 'house' is frequently used for marital union in the rabbinic literature.

In contrast to her relationship with Ahasuerus, Esther has an interactive relationship with Mordecai after she moves to the Persian court. This is evident in the narrative location of space between the two in their conversation in Chapter 4. According to Day (1991:187), with reference to Chapter 4, Mordecai does not have great influence upon her decisions and actions, and she does not tend to rely upon him for information (4:5,8), showing that she is less obliged to be obedient towards him (2:7, 11). Though it is agreed that from the beginning she acts more independently of him, their separation sets the tone for their more distant interaction throughout the events of the story.

Mordecai performs an important role towards Esther, both in the court and before she becomes queen. He has influenced her significantly throughout her years (2:7, 10), and she was obedient

¹⁰Online resource, see www.en.wikipedia.com the free encyclopaedia wiki/Esther, Article of the heroine of the Book of Esther, the book of Esther.

to him because she has lived her whole life into adulthood with him. On the other hand, we see that Mordecai continues to influence Esther strongly regarding her decisions and interaction with the king. However, we can also suggest that Esther's obedience to Mordecai is linked to religious duties and her relationship with God (2:20). Among his many related roles the story presents him as central, immediate, and the one who incites Esther to act in the story scenes.

2.2.3.3 Esther's Relationship with Haman

We see Esther's relationship with Haman only in her attitude towards her adversaries in the story. Though Mordecai discovers and reports the plot to Esther, she is the most involved in the delivery plan for the Jews. With her particular attention to the Jewish adversaries, she feels herself individually in conflict with Haman. It might be that it is the conspiracy against the Jews which brings Esther into interaction with Haman. In 7:6, she singles him out as an enemy, and recognises his deceitful character; neither is she fooled by his greater gesture of friendship or obeisance in 7:7. It is interesting that Esther considers Haman her personal enemy in this chapter, with most explicit descriptions in v6, 'adversary', 'evil', and 'enemy' (NKJV). Other interpretations, quoting the Masoretic text sources of Esther, state that Esther was more concerned with Haman as an individual than as an adversary.

2.2.4 Narrative approaches to the character relationship (actantial model)

The relationships of the characters discussed above can also be described in an actantial way. This will help us to distinguish the thematic roles of the characters in the plot line.

The actantial model of the classification of the above characters can be utilized productively for the analysis of the Esther narrative, according to Jonker and Lawrie (1992:104). It is also agreed that the characters in this narrative, especially in Chapter 4, often fill multiple roles which keep changing. For instance, Esther is both recipient and object in verses 4-5, while she is the main player in verses 6-10, and subject of the narrative in verse 15-16 which is the centre of the deliverance plan in the plot line, and the deliverer in chapter seven. Mordecai is the subject of the narrative in both the first verses and the closing verse; he is the sender in the first verses, and the messenger in the last verse of chapter 4. He is depicted as initiator and planner with Esther. Mordecai also acts as mediator between the actor and deliverer (Esther) and the king (Ahasuerus). King Ahasuerus is the source of authority of the Jewish deliverance: he has authority to reverse the decree, and he owns the provinces in which the edict is passed; moreover, Mordecai urges Esther to go and beg the king's mercy. Haman is the only main opponent in this narrative. The description of these characters clearly indicates a reversal of

social roles in the Book of Esther. The summary of the actant model can be explained further as follows:

The objective	Divine plan to rescue the Jews
Subject	Deliverance
Recipient	Jews and Mordecai
Deliverer	Queen Esther
Helper /initiator /planner	Esther and Mordecai
Opponent	Haman

2.3 Historical analysis of the Book of Esther

2.3.1 Preliminary view

The Book of Esther has been challenged by two scholarly criticisms: the religious credibility of the book (this focuses on questions about the religious value of the Book of Esther due to the absence of the name of God in the book); and historical criticism (which questions the historical reliability of the events in the narrative). Although the historical criticism has been the dominant contention over the centuries, the book does possess historical quality and historical evidence supports its authenticity with specific details, as will be discussed in the next section.

Laniak proposes some answers to substantiate the historicity. He uses the literary elements, the genre classification, and offers an analogy between the relationship of Esther, and the story of Moses in which the attention is on the attempt to supersede Passover with Purim (1998:5). Through such arguments, the historical reality of the Book of Esther seems unique. He assumes that the question of genre helps to answer the problem of historicity in the Book of Esther.

2.3.2 Historical nature of the Book of Esther

Some who question the historical nature of the Book of Esther, regard it as an entertaining tale of the accounts of the Jews in the Persian period. However, according to Laniak, most social realities portrayed in the book arise frequently in feminist discourse, shaped by gender analysis inquiries, but the focus of this study is the roles of this female deliverer of the Jews in the Persian Empire.

The literary pattern of the Book of Esther has been described as helpful and limiting by scholars, allowing the reader to find a collection of motifs. In this regard, Laniak suggests that

good hermeneutics should pay attention to at least two or three horizons of texts which seems creative. This will help to search for comparable motifs and parallel movements (1998:7). It is for this purpose that the comparative analysis of the motifs and parallels in Esther can help to expose further patterns.

Fox does not support the idea that the Book of Esther is a fiction or a novel, because the terms applied to the Hellenistic novel do not guarantee historicity, but use only historical personae even in fictional tales (1991:145). He argues that the Book of Esther has some features of the Hellenistic romantic literature, such as attention to the king's love life and the depiction of luxurious royal life. But the book lacks the favourite romance themes and motifs. Xerxes's love for Esther has importance only of furthering her goals, after which there is little mention of it. Fox asserts that in the Book of Esther, the few romantic and novelistic features cannot determine the work's basic character.

There have been suggestions that the Book of Esther is a *diaspora book*, i.e. stories dealing with crises of Jewish life in the diaspora and the responses to them. It is noted that Esther and Daniel– 1-6 belong to this category (Fox, 1991:145). It might be for this reason that several scholars class the book as a 'diaspora novella,' though such a view is debatable on the grounds that while a novel has a short story, the Book of Esther is a story with a diaspora setting. According to Fox, its historicity is based mostly on understanding the characters portrayed in the book. On the other hand, it presents certain fictions of creation legends which cast doubt on its historicity. To Fox, this is tested by the details primarily from the classical Greek historians, Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon who wrote about the Persian Empire (1991:131).

Some scholars have argued for the historical reliability of the Book of Esther on grounds of the evidence of the feast of Purim, as mentioned in 2 Macc. xv. 36, originating in about 160 BCE.

There are also arguments against the historicity of the Book of Esther, based on the author, on 'the indefinite past' of the reign of Xerxes. The first chapter identifies Xerxes as the 'very Xerxes' ruling from India to Nubia with 127 provinces in all (1:1). The problem here is to realize that according to the Jewish tradition, Mordecai is the author of this book. The phrases used, such as, 'in those days' (v1) suggest a perspective of a later generation, while 'and so in these days' and the remark in 9:28 imply a distance of several generations between the report and the events reported.

However, the historical accuracy of the Book of Esther is not proven conclusively. Fox states that the book contradicts the best knowledge of most scholars of the Persian history (1991:132).

Firstly, the given number of 127 provinces that Xerxes ruled, also called satrapies (1:1) differs from other sources. Fox states that there were actually only 20 to 31 satrapies in the Persian Empire. Herodotus agrees that under Xerxes there were apparently twenty satrapies, (III 89), and Darius set up twenty satrapies, though his own monuments list twenty three (Fox, 1991: 132).

Secondly, the selection of the two non-Persians for high offices in the empire is also questionable. The later historical sources also do not mention Esther being included, in spite of her presence in the court. Thirdly, the historical Xerxes would not be as rash as to issue such an edict as quoted in 1:22, since this could unleash a massive, uncontrollable battle leading to death of thousands throughout his empire. Fox argues that the events did not happen as reported, as can be read from the inaccuracies, implausibilities and impossibilities presented (1991:134). On the other hand, they can also be regarded as the work written at a much later period by an author not familiar with the chronology, geography and events.

2.3.3 Composition history and time of the Book of Esther

This section will try to locate the Book of Esther in the period of its composition. The origin of the book is a key and determining factor for the way in which Esther is portrayed. The origin of the Book of Esther is best determined by the origin of the feast of Purim, which according to most scholars is the very reason for its existence. Esther is the only biblical book outside the Torah that addresses the origin of this new festival.

Josephus also wrote that the Purim was observed by the Jews the whole week. His writings suggest similar contents as the book's events on the feast as described. Secondly, the name itself "Purim" is said to have been derived from the Persian meaning 'the lots'. The lots were cast on the fate of the Jews by Persian officials contemplating their extermination.

However, discussing the origin of the Book of Esther in the light of the diaspora period also seems fitting, but the assumption is challenged by two arguments. Firstly, the book resembles the other diaspora books such as Daniel (1-6), Judith and Tobit, but it lacks the pious character and does not prescribe a religious lifestyle. Secondly, the book contains specific details regarding Persian rule which are historically inaccurate regarding the age of Esther's cousin. If Mordecai's grandfather Kish is said to have been carried to Babylon in exile from Jerusalem, and Mordecai was also exiled by Nebuchadnezzar alongside Jaconiah, king of Judah, he would have lived over a century according to events in the book (Esth 2:5-6).

Based on the circumstantial evidence in the Book of Esther, the events can be viewed as historically accurate. The circumstantial arguments assert that many details of the story tally with information from other sources, for instance that King Xerxes really lived and ruled a vast kingdom, and some actual Persian names are used which were not identified in Greek. For example, the name Mordecai was actually used in the Persian Empire, spelled as 'Marduka', referring to two officials with the same name. The evidence from records of events and data seem to verify the story.

The dating of the Book of Esther has presented a challenge to many scholars. Some have located the date in the Hellenistic period, saying that King Xerxes lived in the Hellenistic world (Fox, 1991:139). This assumption has been supported by many modern commentators. Fox further explains that the Greek translation of the Book of Esther was brought to Egypt in the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy XII Auletos, probably in 73 BCE (Fox, 1991:139). This date is considerably earlier than the probable Hebrew dating.

Fox argues for a dating based on the book's language. He and other scholars state that at present our knowledge has little value in determining the actual date of the author (1991:140). Further, the language in the book is typical of late biblical Hebrew, possibly the postexilic period. It is also suggested that the language in Esther is similar to Chronicles (though some scholars such as R Polzin distinguish its language from Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah) with a view that the book cannot have been written earlier than the third century (Fox, 1991:140).

Fox examines a number of linguistic features and concludes that the book's language is composed of a mixture of features and characteristics of the early (pre-exilic) BH. In this regard, the Septuagint requires dating the Hebrew version no later than the second century BCE. Therefore, we can conclude that dating the Book of Esther may be deduced from: the origin of the feast of Purim, the period of the Jewish diaspora in the Persian era, the circumstantial events in the book in relation to the biblical and extra-biblical events, the influences of the Hellenistic world on the Persians and the examination of the book's language. However, the third century dating seems most likely for the authorship of the Book of Esther.

Further, the book's reference to the chronicles of the Medes and Persians in Chapters 1 and 2, and the affairs of Susa and the monarchy, point toward the date of its composition as preceding the destruction of the Persian Empire. This view places the date at about 400 BCE, the time of Artaxerxes I.

Traditionally, the idea that Mordecai was its author, seems to be agreed by many scholars. Raymond Dillard states that the author of Esther has chosen to remain anonymous. He mentions that the events in the book are possibly set in the reign of Xerxes (486-465 BCE) and agrees that the initial version of the story was probably written not long after this period because the author seems to have knowledge of Persian court life (1994:191). This might be the possible dating as the book contains no Greek vocabulary which should favour the time before Alexander's conquests.

According to Ramsbottom, the story of Esther is situated in the 5th century BCE in the mighty Persian Empire that was one of the greatest Ancient Near Eastern empires before the Romans. This empire emerged after the Persians conquered the Babylonians in 539 BCE, and it lasted for two centuries (2003:6). Both biblical and extra-biblical sources place the events reflected in the Book of Esther between the return of the exiles to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (536 BCE) and the return of Ezra as described as "in the midst of ancient history" under King Ahasuerus (Xerxes 1), who reigned from 486 BCE to 465 BCE (Crawford, 2003:79). For this reason, Crawford singles out the Book of Esther as a "true diaspora book", as it refers to a period marking the end of the exilic Judaic community with memories of a displaced, scared people (2003:79). In this case, dating the Book of Esther in the Hellenistic period seems the most plausible to work with in this study because most viewpoints discussed here point to around that period.

There are arguments that the Book of Esther could hardly have been written by a contemporary of the Persian Empire because of the exaggerated stories of the court and the description of events. Explanation reveals that the twelve months spent by the maids in adorning themselves for the king, one hundred and eighty seven days of the feast, all point to the past rather than a contemporary state of affairs.

2.4 Conclusion (Chapter summary)

This section serves as a summary of the whole chapter, and indicates a conclusion that the reader can draw from the narrative study and the overview of the origin and composition of the book. This chapter is the most important section of the study as it covers the core area of the deliverance motifs, and analyses the main exegetical part of the study.

The chapter has three main subsections: the literary and narrative analysis of the Book of Esther, the characterization in the Book of Esther, and the historical analysis of the book. The

literary analysis presents first the broader narrative of the Book of Esther which concentrates on issues of changes in characters, and timeframe settings that determine the different episodes in the story. These changes help the reader to understand different roles in the plot of the deliverance of the Jews. Further, the section is narrowed to a focus on chapter 4:1-17 only of the Book of Esther. The changes are also closely assessed and substantiated with the clause analysis in 2.1.3.1 which is followed by an exegetical analysis of the chapter.

The second subsection focused on the characters and characterization in the Book of Esther, concentrating on four characters; Queen Esther, King Ahasuerus, Mordecai and Haman. The definitions and original meanings of these names were presented, but the emphasis is on their roles in the plot line of the story, and how their roles position them in the deliverance plan in the book. Special attention is paid to the detailed characterization of Esther, to understand her role as a deliverer, equally comparable to Moses, which makes reinterpreting her as new Moses in deliverance motifs possible (to be given in chapter 4).

The last subsection focused on the historical analysis of the Book of Esther, and two main challenges are discussed: the religious credibility¹¹ and the historical accuracy of the book. However, the divine intervention in the deliverance plan, and the act of dependence on God in chapter 4 reveal some religious elements of the book. Its location in history within the Hellenistic world and the language in the book, which is similar to that of the postexilic period indicate the possible composition history of the Book of Esther.

¹¹ The religious credibility is not discussed in detail here, as it is not the main focus in this study.

Chapter Three

A Literary and Historical Analysis of the Moses Narratives in the Book of Exodus

3.1 Literary Analysis

Chapter 3 will focus on Moses and the Exodus narrative. This will offer a broad narrative analysis of selected texts, in particular Chapters 1-12 of the Book of Exodus in which Moses features as a deliverer. The chapter will focus on the literary aspects. However, the methodology will also involve historical aspects, in which the history of the origin of the Moses narrative forms a unique part of this study for the purpose of the relative dating of the discussed narratives. Lastly, examining the role of Moses in the development of the theme of deliverance in the Old Testament will bring an important connection to the theme of this study (Esther as a New Moses: Deliverance Motifs in the Book of Esther), and a possible point of departure for the interpretation of the narratives.

The Book of Exodus narrates the start of Moses' commission and the demands of Yahweh to Pharaoh. From the Book of Exodus, it is noted that Moses, and to a lesser extent Aaron, have a greater role in the exodus story than all the Israelite community. Thus, Moses is regarded as the main character in the book and is fit for the deliverance role in the narratives. Propp analyses Exodus as a heroic adventure story and narrative, recognising three heroes: Moses, Israel and Yahweh (1998:32). In this context, he considers Yahweh as the hero, citing that most references to liberation emphasise God's role and barely mention Moses.¹²

¹²Propp's view is concurred by those that argue that the Exodus story is a battle between Yahweh and Pharaoh over the possession of Israel which in characterisation, is regarded as a "problem of change of master". Cf. Hoffmeier (1997:109), and Houtman (1996:24).

The story of Moses begins in Chapter 2 and dominates every point in the narratives till the end of the Exodus in Chapter 15. This part of the Book of Exodus up to Chapter 12 will be considered for the broader analysis of this study. There are several changes in the character interaction in the Exodus story. Yahweh speaks through Moses in the story (Moses is spoken to, and speaks for Yahweh). Pharaoh is addressed by Yahweh through Moses and refuses his demands, thereby incurring the plagues.

3.1.1 Broader Narrative Analysis of Exodus 1 – 12

As stated above, Chapters 1–12 form the basis of the broader analysis of the study in this chapter. It is within these chapters that the act of delivering the Israelites takes place under Moses. According to Hoffmeier, the recent literary readings of the Exodus narratives reveal that Chapter 1 verse 1 contains key words within a smaller unit (1997:107). These include some linguistic and literary features, which evidently show the stylistic unity in the narratives. The aim in this analysis is to get an overview of the linguistic and literary features of the text, and of the structure, the content and the plot of the text.

The Exodus narratives are usually considered as units made up of historical traditions in the process of self-identification as a nation. The narratives about Israel's sojourn in Egypt in which the exodus of the Israelites features, are considered legendary and epic in nature. As readers, we wonder, for example, how a single family could in a few centuries develop into a whole nation consisting of hundreds of thousands of people. The historical value of these narratives therefore deserves our further attention.

At the beginning of Exodus 1, the writer first takes the reader back to what is said at the end of the book of Genesis. This is an important connection as the writer recalls that Israel is in Egypt, and this sets an important location for the Israelites. The chapter links both people and purpose in the patriarchal history in Exodus. The writer further refers to Joseph's death, and also to the whole generation of those who had come from Canaan in 1:6. Exodus 1:8 introduces an important change in the fortune of the Israelites in the Exodus, which is the rising of a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph. There are a few contentious points in this narrative: firstly, the time frame of these events remains undisclosed; secondly, this Pharaoh, just like the subsequent pharaohs in the narrative, is anonymous. Hoffmeier suggests two reasons for this: firstly, that the silence is evidence for the mythic or legendary nature of the Exodus narratives, and secondly, a demonstration that Hebrew writers were not really interested in history, for

theological reasons related to their faith (1997:109). The absence of Pharaoh's name in the narrative also becomes clear from Chapter 5:1 where Moses and his brother approach Pharaoh with the request to let Israel go, to which the obdurate monarch refuses under the pretext that he has no knowledge of Yahweh and rejects Moses' petition. The so-called "change of master" motif is first introduced here in the narrative.¹³ Pharaoh's response sets the stage for a series of plagues in which Yahweh demonstrates His divine power and authority.

There are also indications of the change of strategy in the further Exodus narratives. Pharaoh's strategy of oppressing the Israelites starts with the introduction of forced labour to reduce their birth increase (1:12-14). In 1:17, the midwives refuse to go along with the king's barbarous decree on moral grounds.¹⁴ It is within this context that Moses is born and escapes this decree. It is mentioned in Ex 2:1-2 that for three months Moses was hidden from the public eye. In the subsequent section, I will survey how these changes affect the delivery plan and role in the Exodus narratives.

The mention of "Hebrew midwives" reveals a lot in this context. Commentators such as Propp describe these midwives as non-Israelites but employed for this particular purpose (1999:137). However, two arguments are crucial to understand this view. The first is that their names שפֶּרָה (Shiprah) and פּוּעָה (Puah) are not Egyptian but Hebrew. Secondly, their brave defiance of Pharaoh implies that they are Hebrews themselves and not just righteous gentiles. This section of the first chapter of the Exodus narratives presents the first act of deliverance, namely by female saviours, by the midwife heroes. Here Pharaoh is not openly flouted but deceived. The midwives' fear of God can be viewed as civil disobedience, as shown in verse 2:17. This is substantiated by the blessings rewarded to the midwives in verse 21 for being God-fearing.

The opening and concluding verses in Chapter 1, provide a good connection to Chapter 2 in terms of a symbol of life principle and women of the Israelite family (Propp, 1999:142). Chapter 1 opens with the fertility of Israel's sons, and concludes with mothers and midwives, and this prominence of women continues in Chapter 2 with Moses' birth and infancy. This indicates a certain unity in the Exodus narrative. The narrator presents the chapter in brief narrative by both direct (by Pharaoh) and indirect speech dominated by subordinate clauses,

¹³The change of master is given a detailed explanation in the following section.

¹⁴Several strategies were set by the Pharaoh to oppress the Israelites. 1:10 dealing with them harshly is planned, 1:11 hard labour is introduced, 1:15 Hebrew midwives are directed to kill boy babies, 1:22 to throw all Hebrew boys born into Nile, and 2:14-15 Moses' murder is revealed and the Pharaoh plans to kill him. Though the vulnerable part of Exodus is not viewed by most scholars, I feel it provides unique contribution to studies in the Exodus narratives.

with verbs in second and third person. The narratives are presented as setting the purpose and plans by Pharaoh.

The writer introduces Chapter 2 with a unique change of focus that shifts the readers' attention from the communal (the generations of the Israelite community) to an individual, Moses the deliverer. This narration starts with his birth. This shows the important role of the narrator in this chapter. The copula (waw) ׀ at the beginning of verse 1 is a waw consecutive form (wayyiqtol). Most clauses in verses 1-6b are presented in direct speech bound with brief narratives. Verse 3 presents a certain change in the narrative. This is important as it leads to the adoption of Moses. Verse 5 presents a change in the characters involved, where Pharaoh's daughter is introduced as the principal character. A close reading of the Hebrew text of the birth narratives reveals that a number of words used are possibly of Egyptian origin, for example words in 2:3 like, "papyrus basket", "bitumen or tar", "pitch", "reeds", "river's bank" which are possibly of Egyptian etymologically (Propp, 1999:160). This will be shown in the analysis below:

The word "basket", Hebrew תבה, is similar to the Egyptian word for "box, coffin" which was also used for Noah's ark and was meant to save Noah's family, and for Moses, to save the Hebrew people (Hoffmeier, 1997:138). This explanation presents a sense of deliverance within the Exodus literature. This study may not present details on this as our focus will be on how these literary elements interact with the deliverance motifs in the book of Exodus.

There is also a structural unifying element in Chapter 2 observed by the repetition of two roots, לקח (take) and ילד (bear, give birth) according to Propp (1999:154). The verb "take" is repeated in 2:1, 2:3, 2:5, and 2:9, while the verb "bear" in 2:2 is qualified by the word "child" which is repeated eight times in this chapter (verses 4, twice in 6, 7, 8, twice in 9, and 10). These verbal changes are important as they indicate the emphasis of the actions in the narrative. Verses 6c-10 are dominated by direct speech by Pharaoh's daughter (unnamed) in a dialogue with Moses' mother and his sister.

The chapter can be divided as follows: the deliverer's birth into a peril of oppression (2:1-10), his identification with the people under oppression (11-15), and his discovery of a new home (16-22). These narrative changes are important for the development of the Old Testament motif of deliverance through Moses, and influence and bring together the theophany and call (Durham, 1987:29) as will be seen in the next section.

The literary analysis of Chapters 3-6 will be discussed when the focus narrows later in this study. These chapters form the immediate discussion of the delivery process and God's mission of delivery of the Israelites from Egypt. The call and mission of Moses in these chapters portray Moses as a leader called for a purpose of delivering the Israelites from bondage.

Chapter 7 has three sections, namely the dialogues between Yahweh and Moses, and Moses and Aaron; the performing of the sign of a staff becoming a snake; and the plague of blood. Chapter 7:1-7 is linked to 6:28-30 as it belongs to the preview of the proof of the Presence of God sequence of the composite narratives (to be discussed in detail in 3.3.1). Chapter 7:1-5 is Yahweh's response to a question raised by Moses in 6:12. Durham states that Yahweh's response indicates his covenantal promises to the fathers through Moses as in Exod. 7:16 (1987:85).

The narrative in this chapter is presented in a dialogue pattern, with subjective commands ("I command you" verse 2) from Yahweh, presented in direct speech. Three characters are presented interchangeably with interacting roles. In my understanding, Moses' acting like God to Aaron does not make him equal to God, but shows that Moses is superior to Aaron. As commented in the clause analysis, this verse forms the pivotal part of the plot development in the narratives, presenting unique characterization of Moses. God speaks first to Moses in 7:1. Later on, Moses and Aaron do just as God commanded in verse 6, presenting an important character response to the command of Yahweh. In verse 8, God speaks to both Moses and Aaron indicating a character interaction in the narrative, an important element in Exodus. Both Moses and Aaron are described as Yahweh's representatives as they repeatedly extend their arms and rods over Egypt to bring down calamity (as in verse 19). Verses 14-25 present the first mighty act in which Yahweh proves his powerful presence to Pharaoh. The turning of "water" מים into blood pollutes the entire land and thereby brings the land under the power of death. The dominance of Yahweh's direct speech, accompanied by subordinate clauses and subjective commands, brings a certain tension into the plague narrative in Exodus. This is evident in different changes in location, characters, and levels of commands, which contribute to important changes in the narratives.

Chapter 8 is a continuation of the mighty acts of God on the land of Egypt and it presents three plagues.¹⁵ There is reference to a specific time frame of a seven day's interval and it is positioned between the mighty acts in Chapter 7 and those in Chapter 8. Verses 1 and 10 present specific

¹⁵The mighty acts of frogs, gnats, and plague of the flies are presented in Chapter 8.

time indications in this narrative. Pharaoh is located at his home in the narrative. The use of the verb ‘to pray’ *העתירו* (the imperative Plural Hiph from the word *עתר*) is interesting as the request for intercession comes from Pharaoh and is addressed to Moses and Aaron. In this we see that Moses is seen as an intercessor by Pharaoh, which confirms his deliverance role.

Yahweh is the subject in the clauses and the source of the mighty acts. The chain of authority is evident in these narratives. It starts from God who addresses Moses who then tells Aaron (verses 5, 16, and 22). The acts were also meant for Israelites to believe in God as Moses and Aaron clearly already believed. Thus the general structure of the plagues narrative consists of a charge and warning to Pharaoh and instruction to Moses, then an enactment by Aaron, and a matching wonder by the Egyptians (Keck, 1994:744). It is peculiar that prayer is seen as a solution in the understanding of Pharaoh. Verbs are presented in dominant direct speech, with commands from Yahweh, setting unique purposeful actions by Moses and Aaron. Some direct speech in the first and second person is presented in a dialogue between Pharaoh and Moses in verses 8-11.

Chapter 9, which features three plagues,¹⁶ is presented by the narrator in a shift from the first to the third person conversation between Yahweh and Moses as described by commentators such as Keck (1994:755) and Houtman (1996:68). In these cases of direct speech, we also note Yahweh referring to himself in the first person. In the plague causing the death of livestock we note that the Israelite livestock were spared. The narrator concludes with an account of Pharaoh’s reaction in verse 7 where he sends out his officials to Goshen to find out about this strange exclusion of the Israelite’s livestock from the destruction (Houtman, 1996:68). There is no reference to Pharaoh’s curiosity in the preceding acts. Chapter 9 presents a shift of power in the narrative, Yahweh becomes stronger (as one establishing sovereignty) toward Pharaoh, who grows weaker and weaker. This change in power is important for the liberation of the Israelites.

The narrator presents Aaron’s role and involvement in the acts from verse 8. The following verses are presented in a dialogue with commands from God to Moses and Aaron (verses 8b – 9), making the plague more complex with the decree and announcements (in 13-21). Yahweh’s dominance in the narrative proves his total presence in the Egyptian affairs. For the first time, the narrator presents Pharaoh clearly admitting that he is wrong and that Yahweh is right.

¹⁶ These are the plagues of the death of the Livestock of the Egyptians, (9:6), the plague of the Boils (9:9), and the plague of Hail (9:19).

However, he still resists Yahweh's commands. This last section is presented with a change from first to third person in Yahweh's speech.

Chapter 10 presents two plagues consisting of devastating locusts and pitch darkness spread over the land of Egypt. The writer presents Yahweh's words to Moses in direct speech as he dictates the eighth mighty act in a proof-of-God's presence motif as a key to a mighty delivery of Israel. The locusts are said to have originated from the east wind causing massive death and destruction, אכל "devouring" the vegetation of Egypt.

The chapter contains some of the rhetorical elements familiar to the book. There is also an ongoing element of the hardening of heart and signs tradition which form part of the rhetoric. The writer also depicts the flow of events in a series of rapidly changing scenes such as Moses and Aaron visiting Pharaoh (10:3-6), Pharaoh and the courtiers (10:7), Moses and Aaron again (8-11), and finally Yahweh instructing Moses (10:12). Moses summons the plague and together with Aaron, they proceed to go and see Pharaoh for the third time. These changing scenes, depicting a rapid flow of events and a repeated succession of elements, are unique in the development of the mighty acts towards deliverance, as shall be examined in the next section. The dialogue pattern in the narrative continues, presenting unique roles of the narrator, with the changes in tensions resulting into important plot development (verses 7-11). Direct speech in first person dominates in verses 6, showing Yahweh's control of the events.

Chapter 11 presents the brief but final plague narrative, the plague of the first born son, the most intensive and extreme action of Yahweh against Pharaoh.

Keck divides this plague narrative into three parts: verses 1-3 contain the conversation between Yahweh and Moses,¹⁷ and it sets the time, location and purpose in the narrative. These verses have some clauses with direct speech in first and second person. Verses 4-8 are a statement of Moses to Pharaoh.¹⁸ Verse 9 is the second address of Yahweh to Moses, while verse 10 is a conclusion with a brief narrative statement. The phrase 'one more plague', presents the narrator's role indicating that Yahweh wants to conclude the drama. Yahweh clearly says this is the last plague, the most severe, and sure to bring results.

¹⁷The form of verses 1-2 shows that the address presents a large picture of Yahweh's strategy and intent.

¹⁸ Keck states that verses 4-8 include the comments of the narrator, an idea with which I agree, but it seems that verse 10 is also the narrator's addition or comment.

Chapter 12 refers to unique events in Exodus and serves the theme of deliverance in the Old Testament.¹⁹ It completes the liberation narratives of 1:1-15:21 with general diverse elements. The first verses set a dynamic and subjective timeframe in the narrative “this month” (verse 1). The dialogue between Yahweh and Moses is interspersed with brief narratives, presented in subordinated clauses with instructions from Yahweh. Direct speech in first person dominates the dialogue presenting dynamic changes in time and place up to verse 20. In verses 21-30, the role of Moses is presented in direct speech, first and second person, in repetitive form, summoning Israelites to hear Yahweh’s instructions. Verse 51, presents the role of the narrator in the Exodus narratives. The chapter has three narrative sections; the Passover narrative (verses 1-30), the Exodus of Israel (31-42) and the Lord’s instructions and restrictions on the Passover (verses 43-50). Chapter 12 is considered as a cultic remembrance and re-enactment of the exodus from bondage, situated in the festival of Passover and unleavened bread (Keck, 1994:773). Thus the chapter functions as a bridging chapter from the confrontation section to the actual exodus of Israel. It presents the implementation of the final plague.

In my view, positioning the introduction of the regularised liturgical practice of the saving events in Exodus, the Passover, interrupts the proper flow of these events from the beginning. The placement of the Passover at the end of the last plagues after verse 29 would have been much more logical. As the text stands, the liturgical festival precedes the saving event. There are also unitary literary aspects in this rich chapter.²⁰ The role of the narrator makes it clear that the two events are put together with a single objective. The section presents both the liturgical instruction by Yahweh (verses 1-20), by Moses (verses 21-30), and the actual Passover (verses 31-51).

A literary understanding of this chapter demonstrates that Yahweh passes instructions to the Israelites only through Moses and Aaron. However, the act is left to Yahweh himself, as according to verses 12 and 13, God “goes out” יצא through the land as a “destroyer” of the Egyptian firstborns, presenting a change of actors in the scene with Yahweh’s direct intervention. The narrative here also shows that God valued the firstborn sons. It presents the change of status of the Israelites who were a powerless and an enslaved community, but are now powerful, significant and rejoicing. Verse 32c (“and bless” בריך) shows that Moses and

¹⁹ The unique events in Old Testament include the institution of the Passover and the actual going out of the Israelites from Egypt.

²⁰ The literary units are twofold here; the two practices converge, putting blood on the doorposts and eating unleavened bread (verses 7-8) are together treated as part of the single event. The sharing of lamb is done by each family unit so that each member of the community must have access to a lamb (verses 3-4).

Aaron now have power and authority to bestow blessings. The chapter, which culminates the broader narrative in chapters 1-12, marks the final exit from Egypt and the liberation of Israel.

3.1.2 Critical changes in the book of Exodus

The Exodus narratives present three major changes which are unique to the Old Testament deliverance motif.²¹ Firstly, the succession of the Pharaohs of Egypt brought about a *change of time in the life of the Israelites* in this foreign land. The new Pharaoh was aggressive because he did not know Joseph. This change of ruler was a major challenge to the Israelites in Egypt resulting in a complete change of their life. The ‘new’ Pharaoh is described as replacing the old Pharaoh.

Second is the *change of the master* for the Israelites, which also signifies an important turning point in this narrative. The Israelites’ status changes from being Pharaoh’s slaves to being God’s people. Houtman states that Pharaoh and Yahweh face off in a battle, both claim Israel and both demand Israel’s service and allegiance for themselves (1996:24). The blow of plagues and confrontations to Pharaoh and the Egyptians can be viewed as part of Yahweh’s strategy in this regard. Propp (1998:249-250) also views the Exodus story as a battle between Yahweh and Pharaoh over possession of Israel. The responses in 5:1 support this view, “Let my people go”, to which Pharaoh responds “Who is Yahweh.... that I would let Israel go?”²² Beside Yahweh, Moses plays a pivotal role and suggests that God is visibly and invisibly at work in the Exodus. This means that the liberated Israel will no longer be under Pharaoh, but rather under God because of the triumph.

This is described as an important “*change in status*” in which Israel is no longer a slave, but a liberated people. Durham agrees with Houtman and Propp that the theological purpose governing Exodus is dealing with the persecution and the delivery of Israel. In this regard, he sees the Exodus deliverance as the act that brought Israel into being the people of God and the beginning of their history (1987: 15).

Finally, the introduction of Moses in the second chapter of Exodus marks a new beginning in the history of Israel. Chapter One presents the family of Israel and dramatically changes to an individual focus in Chapter 2, and later on into a national focus after delivery. This change

²¹These changes influence Character construction in the narratives, and indicate important changes in time and location.

²²Though this indicates Pharaoh rejecting Moses’ petition and denying knowledge of Yahweh, it also shows that Pharaoh is reluctant to release Israel who works for him as slaves at this time; in short ‘he owns them.’

from a family to a nation is very unique to the Exodus narratives, constituting the basic framework which later gave the nation its structure.

3.1.3 Narrative Structure Analysis of Exodus 3-6, and the Deliverance Motifs in Exodus

The narrower narrative analysis of this study of the book of Exodus will focus on Chapters 3-6, where Moses is clearly portrayed as a deliverer. The focal point in the narrower narrative will be summarised as the components of the divine confrontation and commission, objection, reassurance and signs from God to Moses. Chapter 2:1-10 presents the birth narratives of the deliverer, which has the purpose of dealing with the persecution and deliverance of the Israelites. The chapter ends with Moses finding a home. According to Durham (1987:21), this change of place in the narrative indicates the move of Moses, the deliverer, to a place of his final preparation for his grand task. These movements were summarised as three notable changes in the preceding section.

However, I will further narrow the focus of this study in the clause analysis and exegesis section to a more manageable task in the section that will follow. The second narrowing will focus on Chapters 3 and 4 only. The literary and narrative analysis will still be our tool in both sections.

Chapter three is regarded in this study as one of the focal chapters in the book of Exodus. It is dominated by a crucial dialogue between Yahweh and Moses, setting the purpose, main characters, and unique places in the book of Exodus. Verses 1-12 anticipate the immediate introductory contexts for the revelation of the unique divine name of God, and also look forward to the law-giving to the Israelites at Horeb/Sinai. Verses 1-3a are presented by the narrator in indirect speech and set the narrative in terms of place (Midian), the purpose, family setting (Jethro) and the characters. Above all, the narrator sets the scene in a theophany with Yahweh as subject. The place is described as holy, indicating the presence of God with an auditory identification and the calling of Moses by God as the objective in the narratives (Durham, 1987:33).

The writer quickly shifts the reader's attention from Moses' life in Egypt to his family life in Midian. He further makes the reader witness Moses' new role as a shepherd in another environment, the desert and at the mountain of God. This provides a unique setting for the delivery role of Moses within his call.

Verses 1-2 are presented fully in indirect speech, with the narrator specifying the location of Moses's actions. Direct speech is first evident in verses 3 and 4, as the narrator sets off the

action in the narrative. Verses 5-10 introduce the principal character (Yahweh),²³ who addresses Moses in verses 5-7a. Verses 5-6 present both direct and indirect speech with subordinate clauses providing important changes in place, placing a restriction on Moses. In verse 6, Yahweh introduces himself as “the God of your father”, an important description of Yahweh in line with the patriarchs. Verses 7b-10b are presented as direct speech in which the purpose of the call is mentioned and another place is mentioned (Egypt), which is identified with slavery and from whence Israel’s cry has been heard by Yahweh. These changes in setting and place are very important in the purpose and fulfilment of the call. In verses 11-15a a dialogue is narrated providing Yahweh’s presence, assurance, authority, and purpose of the call. Yahweh dominates the last section of verses 15b-22 with the revelation of the divine name, followed by Yahweh’s commands to Moses. The narrative analysis shows different changes in Yahweh’s names (“I AM”, and “God of the fathers”) which are important for the purpose of this study.

Two issues draw our attention here. The first concerns the authority of God through the call of Moses. In verse 12, Yahweh promises to be with Moses in the mission to deliver the Israelites. The misery and the cry to which God responds, mentioned in verse 7, indicates a special status (of slavery) to the people of Israel in Egypt which relates to their vulnerability. The oppression made them a vulnerable community in a foreign land. A second issue is that the Israelites together with Moses should worship God at Mount Horeb. This sign was to demonstrate God’s authority and presence with them. Two changes are evident in these verses. A vulnerable place of Egyptian slavery is exchanged for a place of glorifying God at Mount Horeb (Sinai). It is suggested that the Sinai story in the narrative had a shaping influence on Israel and is the oldest tradition of Israel’s relationship with God.

The section in Exodus 3 presents the divine names and God’s intimate relationship with Israel. It relates to other sections in the book, thereby providing unity in the book. The specific role of Moses at this period of his call is defined as ‘tending to the flock’ of Jethro his father-in-law, who is identified as a priest of Midian.²⁴ Moses’ concern for the flock (3:1) indicates that he was in charge of the flock and was being integrated into his Midianite family (Durham, 1987:30). The writer locates the story at the far side of the desert (3:1), particularly at Horeb, the mountain of God. The experience of Moses’ life in this place as a shepherd and rescuer of

²³Moses speaks in only three verse (verses 3a, 11, and 13), while Yahweh dominates in the rest of the verses. For this, I suggest that Yahweh is the principal speaker here.

²⁴Moses had already performed his role of rescuing the seven daughters of Jethro at the well (2:17). This might be considered as another act of deliverance Moses performed in Midian.

the daughters of Jethro will be followed by his call. This first and main section of the call of Moses provides the identification of the סִנֵּי (thorn bush). This indicates the pivotal role of the bush. Different interpretations are espoused by various scholars as will be discussed in the exegetical section.

The second part of Chapter 3 introduces another important section about the name of God and its meaning (verses 13-22). In verses 13-15, where Yahweh is commissioning Moses, the call is followed by the inclusion of his role of delivering the Israelites in verses 16, 17 and 20 (evident in clauses like “go and assemble” in verse 16, “have promised to bring you out” in verse 17). This role to deliver the Israelites is repeated several times in the narratives.

Chapter 4 is a continuation of the commissioning of Moses. Verse 1a and b are presented as main clauses in indirect speech, followed by a subordinate clause. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section (verses 1-9) is about the signs of Moses’ authority, in which three signs are presented before Moses in order to make him believe. Verses 10-17 is the part of the chapter where Moses speaks, while in verses 18-31, Moses returns to Egypt, now commissioned by God to deliver the Israelites. The section is dominated by signs in which direct and indirect speech serve to illustrate the question of Moses’ authority and credibility. Regardless of the fact that Moses disavowed his own adequacy for the task to which God was calling him for (3:11), God commands Moses to get on with the task (3:16-17). This divine authority, presence and assurance thus become the formative point of departure for the first section of Chapter 4. A number of repetitions and explanations from God to convince Moses dominate verses 1-13. The interaction in the section influences various changes in the narrative, which in turn helps Moses to understand his call and to accept the task.

The second section (4:10-17) comprises the most interesting part, as it deals with a further protest by Moses of his inadequacy. This short passage presents a very tense discussion, in which Moses turns to more specific complaints to underrate himself despite God’s promise. The section also introduces another character in the narrative, Aaron, who is to be Moses’ spokesman (4:14-16). We may note that in this section Yahweh and his presence is the subject of the discussion as He will be responsible for both the message and the messengers. The objective is the deliverance of the Hebrews from oppression in Egypt.

The narrative and structural verse division of chapter 4 (3.1.7.1) indicates that the chapter is dominated by direct speech in a conversation between Yahweh and Moses. Verses 1-10 are subordinate clauses with both direct and indirect speech in both first and second person. In

verses 11-17, direct speech is mostly presented in first person accompanied with unique changes in tone, and tension. The dialogue between Yahweh and Moses carry imperative commands, setting the purpose of the call more clearly. A strong command is noted in verse 12: “now go” (ועתה לך) followed by a sharp change of response in Moses’ characterization in verse 13, which forms the pivotal part of the conversation. Direct and indirect speech is evident in verses 18-31 in first and third person with notable repetitions.

In my understanding, the concluding section of chapter 4:11-17 does not convince the reader that Moses is committed to the task; he still seems to doubt the successful outcome of the liberation of Israel. Most of the requests from Moses were made in conditional sentencing with a certain expectation of “if they do not believe” (verse 9).

In Chapter 5, Moses and Aaron’s first deliverance approach before Yahweh lacks skill and they are not patient enough. Verse 1 is presented as a subordinate clause, introducing a very important scene in the narrative. The word *ואחר* (temporal adverb) normally connects two events following the one after the other. Moses and Aaron introduce themselves to Pharaoh as Yahweh’s spokesmen and without wasting time, they convey to Pharaoh Yahweh’s command to let the Israelites go. Pharaoh’s response presented in direct speech in first person is the opposite of Moses’ expectation. This change in the narrative is important as it marks the beginning of a tense engagement of Pharaoh, Moses and Yahweh. Pharaoh shows that he is not impressed by the demand given in a commanding tone and declares that he has nothing to do with Yahweh and denies that Yahweh has any right at all to command him. In verse 3, Moses and Aaron try to change their tone to be as polite as possible as they repeat their request. According to Houtman, the additional information Moses and Aaron give in 5:3 is meant to strengthen their request by pointing out the terrible things that might happen to them if they do not perform the pilgrimage required by God (1993:456). Later, when the Pharaoh assesses the situation, he notes that Moses and Aaron are troublemakers who incite the people to put down their tools. Thus, in verse 6, the scene changes quickly.

The first meeting with Pharaoh had an adverse effect on the Israelites. Two changes are notable in this scene. Pharaoh continues speaking despite Moses and Aaron's having left his palace, so that his audience now consists of Egyptian task masters.²⁵ Secondly, there is a change in strategy, with hard labour given to the Israelite. Pharaoh subsequently gives new orders and

²⁵ Houtman (1993: 457) mentions that the Egyptian taskmasters were assisted by the Israelite leaders titled as foremen in 5:6; this may suggest that some Israelites were appointed to be masters of their fellow Israelite slaves.

instructions that the supply of straw for making bricks be stopped. However, the Israelites are instructed to produce the same daily quota of bricks with their bare hands in order to make them sweat all the more. This presents another change in the lot of the Israelites, making their load heavier, their situation worse than before. In short, it is a hopeless situation. Since this is reaffirmed by the highest court of the land (by Pharaoh himself), there is no further appeal for Moses, Aaron and Israelites.

The writer introduces different scenes in this narrative. The first is the orders from Pharaoh in 5:6-11, in direct speech in second person with commands given to the slave masters. The second scene occurs from verses 12 to 14 where Pharaoh's orders are the new policy. Here the people obey the order of their superiors. These scenes are important in this narrative as they are dominated by direct speech by Pharaoh and his task masters, accompanied by subordinate clauses. They also present certain important changes in the narrative.

Chapter 5:22-23 may be regarded as part of Chapter 6:1 of the Exodus narrative. The writer presents Moses as a disenchanted man and we hear nothing of Aaron, thus presenting a character change of roles. The narrator presents direct speech by Moses to Yahweh with tension against Yahweh in first and second person. His lack of success with Pharaoh causes Moses to isolate himself. His situation deteriorates as the rift between him and the people grows in verse 21. This is depicted in 6:9 when the people direct their anger against Moses. Some commentators state that Moses had to endure the hostility of the leaders and undergo criticism which in his mind should have been directed at Yahweh (Houtman, 1993:486). Moses has a perfect right to enter into discussion with Yahweh in these two verses. The earlier dialogue makes us wonder whether Moses' misgivings about his call in 4:1 and 5:22 might not be justified, and whether Yahweh would not have done better to pursue Moses' suggestions of sending somebody else in his place (4:13). But one can understand that Yahweh's assurance does not predict a quick success in the struggle with Pharaoh. That may be the reason that we see Pharaoh behaving like a tyrant and Yahweh allowing him to do as he pleases without any attempt to help the people.

In Chapter 5 we clearly see the role of the narrator in verses 6, 10, 15, and 19 in indirect speech clauses which present unique changes in time and moments in the development of the plot, providing a link between different scenes.

Chapter 6 opens with Yahweh's response to Moses' report, in direct speech in first and second person. Yahweh affirms that the liberation of Israel truly depends on Him, being not the work

of a mortal but a divine act, hence credit is due to Yahweh himself. The description of this narrative is as if Yahweh is about to exercise vigorous action upon the Egyptians to let Israel go.

Yahweh dominates in the narrative of this chapter with numerous instances of direct speech accompanied by subordinate clauses presenting different levels of tension to retain the fading hope in Moses. The dialogue explains the purpose of the delivery of Israelites. The chapter includes two interludes: in the first, Moses again addresses the people in 6:9. Although a short scene, we see Moses' encounter with his fellow countrymen as part of his mission work. The second interlude is in 6:14-25. The genealogy of Moses and Aaron, presented somewhat surprisingly, may suggest that the heads of the Israelite families serve for record purposes in this section.

3.1.4 Delimitation of Narrower Narrative Structure (Macro-and-Micro-Units) of Exodus 3-4

As stated in 3.1.3, here I narrow the scope further for greater depth of focus. As noted in the analysis above, Chapters 3 and 4 form the direct macro and micro units of the call and commission in the Book of Exodus which portrays Moses as a deliverer. It is in these chapters where the presence of Yahweh in the fire of theophany is articulated through the auditory experience of Moses. It is also where the divine name of God is found, where the purpose of Moses' call is defined and where the authority of God is revealed in the signs given at pivotal moments in the plot.

The character responses in these two chapters and the changing levels of dialogue, characterised by different character involvement, present changes that are important and significant in the development of deliverance motifs in Moses' story. These two chapters present particular changes of space (place) from the experiences at mount Horeb, to Egypt.

The different descriptions of God's names present different meanings as well. The stating of the name "God of the Fathers" has some equivalence to the other names of God, but with some interpretational differences. Thus Exodus 3-4 are key chapters consisting of crucial events in the Old Testament. The study will pay more attention to this section with the aim of getting an overview of the linguistic, historical and literary features of the text and the way in which the text is structured. It will also involve the context and the dialogues in Chapters 3 and 4 of Exodus. The macro-and-micro-units of this delimitation will further be analysed in two subsections below.

3.1.5 Clause Analysis of Exodus Chapters 3-4

This section of this study will attend to the clause division of the stated chapters to approach the exegetical text in an orderly and logical manner. As noted, Exodus Chapters 3-4 are a key passage for the narrative and structural analysis of the Old Testament and the Torah that unfolds crucial events. Commentators like Propp have concluded that most clauses in these chapters present mostly the divine names with unique connection to the Torah (1999:190). The chapter is dominated by direct speech, though with some main subordinate clauses at the beginning. As done in Chapter 2 of this study, the analysis will only be done on two levels, viz. the instances of direct and indirect speech.

. The clause analysis of the text of Exodus 3:1-22 below is done according to the following system: verse number, clause number, and the clause category (either direct or indirect speech).

3.1.5.1 Exodus 3:1-22.²⁶

Direct Speech	Indirect Speech	Clause	Verse
וּמַלְאָה הָיָה רַעְיָה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתְנֹו כִּהְיוּ מִדְּבַר		a	1
וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחֲרֵי הַמִּדְבָּר		b	
וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלִבְתַּאֲשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה		a	2
וַיֵּרָא		b	
וַהֲנִיָּה הַסֵּנֶה בְּעֵר בְּאֵשׁ		c	
וַהֲסֵנָה אֵינֶנּוּ אֲכָלִי:		d	
וַיֹּאמֶר מַלְאָךְ		a	3
אֶסְרֶה־נָּא		b	
וְאַרְאֶה אֶת־הַמַּרְאֶה הַגָּזֵל הַזֶּה מִדְּוַע לֹא־יִבְעַר הַסֵּנֶה:		c	
וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי סָר לְרַאֲוֹת		a	4
וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה		b	
וַיֹּאמֶר		c	
מַלְאָךְ מַלְאָךְ		d	
וַיֹּאמֶר		e	
הַנִּנְיִי:		f	
וַיֹּאמֶר		a	5
כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדַמְתִּי־קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:		b	
וַיֹּאמֶר		a	6
אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב		b	
וַיִּסְתַּר מַלְאָךְ פָּנָיו		c	
כִּי יָרָא מִהַבֵּיט אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים:		d	
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה		a	7
רְאֵה רָאִיתִי אֶת־עַנְיֵי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם		b	
וְאַתָּה צֹעֵקתָם שְׂמַעְתִּי מִפְּנֵי נַגְשָׁו		c	
כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־מַכְאֲבָיו:		d	
וַאֲרִיד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וְלִהְיוֹתוֹ מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל־אָרֶץ		a	8

²⁶ For a detailed sentence division of this type see LC Jonker, 1996:343.

		טובה ורחוקה אל-ארץ ובתחלב ודבש אל-מקום הנבנעני ותחתי והאמרי וספרזי וסחוני וסבוס:
9	a	ועתה הגה צעקת בני-ישראל באה אלי
	b	וגם-ראיתי את-הלחץ אשר מצרים לחצים אתם:
10	a	ועתה לכה
	b	ואשלוך אל-פרעה
	c	והוצא את-עמי בני-ישראל ממצרים:
11	a	ויאמר משה אל-האלהים
	b	מי אנכי כי אלה אל-פרעה
	c	וכי אוציא את-בני ישראל ממצרים:
12	a	ויאמר
	b	כי-אתנה עמוך
	c	ונה-לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך
	d	בהוציאתך את-העם ממצרים תעבדון את-האלהים על החר הנה:
13	a	ויאמר משה אל-האלהים
	b	הנה אנכי בא אל-בני ישראל
	c	ואמרת לם
	d	אלהי אבותיכם שלחני אליכם
	e	ואמרו-לי
	f	מה-שמו
	g	מה אמר אלהם:
14	a	ויאמר אלהים אל-משה
	b	אתה אשר אתה
	c	ויאמר
	d	כה תאמר לבני ישראל
	e	אתה שלחני אליכם:
15	a	ויאמר עוד אלהים אל-משה
	b	כה-תאמר אל-בני ישראל
	c	יהוה אלהי אבותיכם אלהי אברהם אלוני יצחק ויעקב שלחני אליכם
	d	זה-שמי לעלם
	e	ונה זכרי לדר דר:
16	a	לך
	b	ואספת את-זקני ישראל
	c	ואמרת
	d	אלהם יהוה אלהי אבותיכם נראה אלי אלהי אברהם יצחק ויעקב לאמר
	e	פקד פלדתי אתכם ואת-העשוי לכם במצרים:
17	a	ואמר אעלה אתכם מעני מצרים אל-ארץ הנבנעני ותחתי והאמרי וספרזי וסחוני וסבוס אל-ארץ ובת חלב ודבש:
	a	ושמעו לקולך
18	b	ובאת אתה וזקני ישראל אל-מלך מצרים
	c	ואמרתם אלי
	d	יהוה אלהי העבריים נקרה עלינו

וַעֲתָה גַלְגָּלֵי־נָא דָרָד שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר	e	
וַחֲזָה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ:	f	
אָנִי יֹדְעֵתִי כִּי לֹא־יִתֵּן אֶתְכֶם מִלֶּדֶד מִצְרַיִם לְהִלָּךְ וְלֹא בְיַד חֲזָקָה:	a	19
זֹאתִי אֶת־יָדִי	a	20
וְתִי אֶת־מִצְרַיִם בְּכֹל נִפְלְאוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּקִרְבּוֹ	b	
רִיבֹן יִשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם:	c	
תִּי אֶת־תֵּן הָעַם־הַזֶּה בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם	a	21
כִּי תִלְכּוּן	b	
לֹא תִלְכּוּ רִיקָם:	c	
אֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁה מַשְׁכַּנְתִּיהֶם וּמִגְרַת בֵּיתָהּ כְּלִי־כֶסֶף וְכִלְי זָהָב	a	22
וְשִׁמְתֶם עַל־בְּגֵידְכֶם וְעַל־בְּנֹתֵיכֶם	c	
תָּם אֶת־מִצְרַיִם:	d	

3.1.5.2 Discussion of the Clause delimitation above

From the clause analysis above it becomes clear that the introductory verses 1-2 are presented fully in indirect speech, with the narrator setting the location of Moses. Verses 3-6 are also mainly in indirect speech, with brief direct speech in between (in 3b, 4c, and d, 5 and b, and 6b). Verses 7-10 are dominated by direct speech with the identification of God and the further revelation of the purpose of the call. Verses 11-14 present a dialogue pattern of both direct and indirect speech between God and Moses. This section confirms the authority of the call and further identifies Yahweh. The last section, which consists of verses 15-22, is dominated by God's direct speech.

3.1.6 Structural-Exegetical Analysis of Exodus Chapter 3:1-22

Chapter 3 is usually considered as a call and theophany section of the Exodus narratives. However, one wonders how the sequence and composition of the text brings together the theophany and the call. It is noted that the combination occurs in the narrative dealing with Moses as well as with Israel. It may be argued that the theophany was describing the advent of God's presence and that the call describes the opportunity for response to the presence of God. In this understanding, the theophany provides both stimulus and authority for response.

Chapter 3 can be divided into the following parts, based on the different roles the characters play at different times: Setting the scene (vss. 1-2); dialogue between Yahweh and Moses (vss. 3-22). The second part can be subdivided into the following sections: meeting at the burning bush (vss. 3-5); self-introduction by Yahweh (vs. 6); Yahweh indicating that he has seen the

plight of his people (vss. 7-10); Moses' hesitation and Yahweh's final revelation of his name (vss. 11-14); Yahweh's final commands (vss. 15-22).

The structural analysis of this chapter presents several important changes in space, time and character of the narrative. The sharp character-change noted in Moses' quick response objecting to Yahweh's call in verse 11 is one of them. However, God dominates the chapter in direct speech addressed to Moses.

3:1. This verse seems to be the key to the major events and subsequent results. The subordinate clause locates Moses and the story in Midian with Jethro. This change of location signifies preparation of Moses for his deliverance task. The *את־צאן־רעה* (tending the flock) for his father-in-law seems to be the main concern for Moses. Because the flock was regarded as a major asset for the family in the Ancient Near East, being totally in charge of them indicates Moses' complete integration into the Midianite family.

The second and third part of the verse introduces another special feature of the narrative. The narrator does not indicate whether Moses' leading the flock *אהר המדבר* ("to the far side of the desert") was intentional or a divine arrangement, but simply locates Moses at this time in the *המדבר* (the desert). Mentioning the location of the mountain of God is a surprise in the text, since it is not known whether Jethro or anyone else knew of this mountain before. It seems the narrator mentions the place that is new, strange and distant. Most commentators have indicated that the geographical position of this mountain is problematic, and suggest that Moses may have gone beyond the customary Midianite grazing area. For this, Durham suggests that the position is more theological than geographical (1987:30).

3:2. The use of the word *מלאך* should be understood as used in the Hebrew text (malak), meaning messenger and not in its literary translation of an 'angel' (NKJV). The verse presents three changes in the characters. There is a symbol (flame of fire), the representative character (the messenger of the Lord) and God himself speaking through the flame of fire. The flame of fire is frequently used in the Old Testament as a symbol for God's presence. In this particular verse, it attracts Moses' attention. The role of the messenger here and in the Old Testament in general is to bridge the spatial distance between the sender (God) and the receiver (Moses). In this verse, the messenger announces deliverance and commands Moses to be a deliverer (Houtman, 1993: 336).

3:3. The identification of the 'burning bush' (NKJV) is important because the fire is described as Theophany. According to Durham, the nature of the fire has attracted some exaggerations

by some commentators, mostly referring to the good will of the one dwelling in the thorn bush (1987:31). The mention of the fire is a problem because of the fact that the bush is not burnt nor consumed. To Moses this is an unusual sight.

3:4. A number of changes take place in this verse. The time that God realises that Moses wants to approach the burning bush results in the Lord's inevitable reaction, to call to Moses: "מתוך" "הַסֵּנֶה". The location of God in 'the middle of the bush' is also used as a strong phrase in verse 2. However, in the verse an angel is substituted for God himself, thus presenting a clear case of representation in the text. The other change is in the status of the place of the act. The presence of God leads to the renaming of the place from an ordinary place to a holy one, as pronounced by God himself. Therefore Moses is prohibited from approaching the presence of God in **verse 5**. Most commentators fail to explain convincingly the directive to Moses to remove his sandals in this verse; the act might be done in reverence to God. If the explanation is based on the literal meaning of the phrase as the reason for removing the sandals, then "holy place" אֲדַמַת־קֹדֶשׁ can connote a sanctuary. Propp states that even in the absence of the surrounding structures, the vicinity of the burning bush is like a temple, since the ground is sacred (1999:200). In this regard, bare feet symbolized humility and mortification as in the Israelite tradition (See 2 Sam 15:30).

This verse marks the beginning of unique direct speech of God to Moses. In addition, it acts as God's special address to him in a special revelation. Yahweh dominates the stage in this address while Moses is the recipient.

3:6. The narration of these two cases of direct and indirect speech presents God's manifestation to Moses within the context of the theophany. This experience is important to confirm the identity of the God who spoke to Moses, more fully unveiled in verse 14. There is a clear address now by two characters (God and Moses), and Moses is told that he is being addressed by 'the God of his fathers'.²⁷ Though Abraham is mentioned alongside Isaac and Jacob, the word אָבִי ("father") is presented in a noun masculine singular form. Moses' immediate response to the call of God suggests that he understands that the deity appearing to him is his own God and that of his fathers. The mention of the three great patriarchs can be understood as referring both to biological and theological aspects of the address.

²⁷The phrase 'God of his father' as used in Gen 26:24 is somehow parallel to its usage here, and the meaning might be the same. This indicates that the phrase was an ancient Near Eastern designation for a clan's divine patron (Propp, 1999:201)

3:7 The verse still flows within the Yahweh address to Moses as indicated in the opening verse “וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה” (The introduction to the call is presented by Yahweh as a response, because He has “seen” the oppression and “heard” the cry of the people’s distress. There is also a change of the time frame from the time they came to Egypt voluntarily, to the present time in which they are slaves. The timing and God’s fulfilment is depicted from 2:25 and concurs with 3:7 that God knows the extent of Israel’s need and also knows the right moment to take appropriate action. We can also assume that as “a deity of their father” indicates, he is concerned about the oppression of the clan (Israelites). The words “I have seen ... heard ... am concerned.” (רָאִיתִי ... שָׁמַעְתִּי ... אֲנִי מְבַרְכָּה) are all verbs with an aspect of perceiving from God who is omniscient. This is a unique set of verbs describing an important attribute of the God who is addressing Moses at this particular time and the task that he is to perform through Moses.

3:8 The first phrase of this verse is very uncertain regarding its verb tense, “have come down” (God has descended). If judged literally, it may be a present continuous or future tense (will descend). If it means coming from heaven then God has descended here at Horeb in the desert, and will continue into Egypt to deliver the Israelites. Some commentators like Propp have found the symbols of death and resurrection implied in this imagery (1999:201). Some have understood the phrase topographically, explaining that Egypt is a low country while Canaan is hilly. The coming of deliverance for the Israelites remains unique and undisputable. The term “come down” (יָרַד) expresses letting or sinking down to a lower level from a place of His dwelling above to this specific place. Appearing to Moses indicates the urgency of the need for deliverance as explained in the reason for coming down.

The last part of this verse remains controversial among scholars regarding the land that Yahweh is assuring the Israelites to occupy. We hardly understand why Yahweh is taking Israel to a land that already belongs to a certain people, as the expression shows. The spatial change in the narrative is supported by the description of snatching from a place of restriction and depravity to a place wide and free. The promise is followed by another rhetorical description: ‘fertile land, a land gushing with milk and honey’. However, the fact that the land is identified with six other people should not be overlooked here regarding their future settlement in the land. Durham mentions that the Canaanites, Hittites and the Amorites were major forces in Old Testament history, while the other three were minor (1987:32). But two issues remain puzzling, namely, the intended geographical boundaries of the Promised Land and the obvious knowledge about the ethnic groups mentioned.

3:9. This is regarded as a repetitive verse in the narrative. Key words such as “their cry out’, ‘have heard’ or reached me’ ... ‘have seen”, have already been discussed in verses 7-8 above. The word מצרים (‘Egyptians’) is always used as a collective noun and associated with the word להצים (“are oppressing”). We can understand from this that the Egyptians have violated the Israelite standard of conduct towards foreigners.

3:10. “Come now” (NKJV) is a ‘hiphil’ verb. It is also direct speech from God to Moses, meaning “to lead or to bring”. A different place for the mission is mentioned, namely Egypt, indicating a change of space from a holy place (from Mount Horeb to Egypt). Yahweh states his main intention for the call as ‘deliverance’ of Israel from the hand of Pharaoh who is their present master, and Egypt is identified as a place of slavery. The verb הלך and the phrase ואשלחך indicate that Moses is Yahweh’s agent of deliverance in this regard.

3:11-12. These verses depict Moses’ first response to God in direct speech. He objects to God’s call אנכימי “Who am I ... that I ...?” This is followed by more direct speech from God in verse 12 כי אהיה עמך in which God makes His point clear “I WILL BE with you” – an imperfect verb, expressing future tense. We can clearly see that Moses’s main argument is his feeling about who he is, and that he is trying to evade his commission. On the other hand, who is with Moses is the most important point in these two verses: “I am, and I will be with you”. Durham argues that the phrase ‘I will be with you’ might be an original and theological formula arising from nomadic Israelite thought and devotion (1987:33). If this is correct, then God’s answer to Moses reflects an extensive and widespread pattern of theological rhetoric, since this phrase occurs many times in the Old Testament. The emphatic repetition of the word ‘I’ by Moses and later echoed by God in this section is always reinforced by the phrase I AM (אהיה) an explanation in verse 14. The reference to a sign signifies the presence of God in this section of the theophany, and indicates His promised presence.

3:13. Apparently God’s explanation fails to convince Moses, and he turns to his second question. The phrase “if I” is presented in a conditional way. The specific time is stated as the period Moses addresses the children of Israel for the first time. Moses seems to doubt his status before the Israelites in Egypt which is well known to them, and surely they will want to understand and know about the God who is commissioning him. Scholars like Durham suggest that Moses himself was satisfied by the identification of the God mentioned here, as in verse 6, thus the phrase מה שמו “what is his name” may have little to do with identity as we saw in

verse 11 (1987:37). If understood in that way, the identification is linked with Moses' status and his family in Egypt.

The clause "the God of your fathers" in this text should not be understood merely in relation to patriarchal faith. Durham states that it is supremely theological in the entire Bible. Hence the status of Moses as deliverer fits well in this verse.

What is more interesting is Moses' eagerness to push the Deity to reveal His name. His personal conviction seems to be 'can the ancestral deity have no name'? Moses seems already to know several names of God, but his question is 'Which name should I tell the Israelites once asked?'

3:14. The understanding of verse 13 helps us to get the explanation of verse 14 as it provides a setting for the understanding of the present verse. The answer Moses receives as the name of God is not what he expected. The answer "I AM that I AM" asserts three important things; authority, confession, and the reality of God according to Durham (1987:38). The verbs *אהיה אשר אהיה* are first person common Qal imperfecta of the verb *היה* "to be" which denote a continuing or unfinished action, as the One Who Always Is. Though it is in abstract, it is active in being. Perhaps it is inappropriate to refer to God as "will be" in a future tense, for His active existence is always suggested only by the present.

This explanation helps to answer Moses' protest of his own inadequacy with the insertion of the first phrase, "I will be with you" in verse 13. Thus God supports the authority of His command in the Exodus. I agree with the idea that this strong phrase indicates God's authority here. However, the way Yahweh identifies himself seems strange unless understood in a continuous sense.

3:15. This verse forms the continuation of the direct speech of God's address. Two phrases are repeated here from other verses; "the God of your fathers" and "I am", now only adding more emphasis to the previous ones discussed above. The phrase "I am" is now repeated four times (verse 12 once, and three times in verse 13), probably because it is a revealed special name of Yahweh, adding a more confessional point. That the name should be a "remembrance" *זכר* is to make his presence a reality to the generations to come. Durham mentions the use of this word as a synonym for a *שם* "name" and he further notes that in cultic contexts *זכר* is equivalent to the name of Yahweh and was to be pronounced out loud (1987:40). This practice of pronouncing out loudly for remembrance of the name Yahweh, also resulted into Jews replacing the divine name with simply the name "adonay" meaning "my Lordship"

3:16-17. The commissioning of Moses starts with a brief identification of God, followed by a command לך “to go and assemble” the elders. The Qal imperative indicates that Moses has to depart and proceed with the assigned mission. We also note that Yahweh’s strategy narrows the audience to elders only and not to the whole community. In verse 16, the important connection of Yahweh with “the God of the fathers” is made and the text uses the Niphal ראה “to see” in the sense of “appear”. This still refers to the theophany and it carries the same meaning as in verses 2-3 and 7. In these repetitions we also observe that verse 17 is very close to verse 8 above, in which the phrase “have said” may mean an intended proposition, a thing that was promised long ago. The unchanging space of the narrative describes the name of the Deity in a continuing state.

3:18. The first phrase mentioning that the elders will listen to Moses answers his question, “What if they do not believe?” But the hearing of Moses’ voice will not be enough, for Moses will have to perform signs first before the people. The act of approaching the king is introduced in this verse as a collective act, where “all” elders are to go to the king.

The word עברי (“Hebrew”) is used for the second time in the Exodus narratives after 1:19. The name which is literally translated as “one from beyond” is used both as proper noun and as an adjective. Both here and in the first reference, the word is used with reference to the family of Jacob, which is sometimes referred to as “Israel”. In addition, both Moses and the elders are to call this God of the Hebrews, “Yahweh, Our God”.

3:19-20. These verses present the first reference to Yahweh’s presence in Egypt, in which Yahweh reports that He knows that the request to make a religious journey will be denied by Pharaoh, even though Yahweh is commanding Moses. God’s power in this will be illustrated by his action to נכה “strike” Egypt with a series of extraordinary deeds. The term פלא “perform wonders” which is used in conjunction with the previous term is a key word in the theological rhetoric about Yahweh’s presence. The result of this act is described in a strange form, namely that Pharaoh will not just let them go, but will שלח (a piel) “drive” them out in his eagerness to be rid of them and their God.

3:21-22. The phrase “giving these people favour in the sight of the Egyptians”, is strange in anticipation of the plundering of the Egyptians. It is rather a description of Yahweh’s triumph with His presence over the Egyptians. The explanation, namely that the Israelites will not go empty-handed, is not convincing. It suggests that the mighty hand of God will be the cause for this mysterious act. Some scholars think that this explanation has a connection to the idea

that the Israelites were forbidden to appear ‘emptily’ before Yahweh at pilgrimage festivals as in Ex. 23:15 and Deut. 16:16, or to their tradition that servants were not to be released empty-handed (Propp 1987:208). Although women are mysteriously singled out in verse 22, the favour done to the Israelites applied to both men and women.

3.1.7 Exodus 4:1-31

The text of Exodus 4: 1-31 is provided below. The clause analysis is done according to the following system: verse number, clause number, and the clause category (either direct or indirect speech).

3.1.7.1 Clause delimitation of Exodus 4:1-31

Direct Speech	Indirect Speech	Clause	Verse
	וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה	A	1
	וַיֹּאמֶר	B	
וְהֵן לֹא־יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי		C	
וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי		D	
כִּי יֹאמְרוּ לֹא־נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה:		E	
	וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוָה	A	2
	מִזֶּה־בְּיָדְךָ	B	
	וַיֹּאמֶר	C	
מִטָּה:		D	
	וַיֹּאמֶר	A	3
	הַשְּׁלִיכֵהוּ אַרְצָה	B	
	וַיִּשְׁלִיכֵהוּ אַרְצָה	C	
	וַיְהִי לַנְּחֹשׁ	D	
	וַיִּנָּס מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי:	E	
	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה	A	4
שְׁלַח יָדְךָ		B	
וְאַחֲזוּ בַזַּנְבָּו		C	
	וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ	D	
	וַיִּחַזְק בּוֹ	E	
	וַיְהִי לַמִּטָּה בְּכַפּוֹ:	F	
לְמַעַן יֵאֱמִינוּ		A	5
כִּי־נִרְאָה אֵלָיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵי אֲבֹתֵי אֲבֹתֵי אֲבֹתֵי יִצְחָק וְאַלֹהֵי יִצְחָק:		B	
	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לֹו עוֹד	A	6
	הֲבֵאֵנָּה יָדְךָ בְּחִיקוֹךָ	B	
	וַיָּבֵא יָדוֹ בְּחִיקוֹ	C	
	וַיּוֹצֵאָה:	D	
	וְהָנָה יָדוֹ מְצַרְעַת כַּשָּׁלֵג	E	7
	וַיֹּאמֶר	A	
הֲשִׁב יָדְךָ אֶל־חִיקוֹךָ		B	
	וַיִּשָׁב יָדוֹ אֶל־חִיקוֹ	C	
	וַיּוֹצֵאֵה מִחִיקוֹ	D	
	וְהָנָה שָׁבָה כַּבְּשָׂרוֹ:	E	8
	וְהָיָה אִם־לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לָךְ	A	

	B	
ולא ישמעו לקול האתהראשון	C	
והאמינו לקול האת האחרון:	A	9
והיה * אם לא יאמינו גם לשני האתות האלה	B	
ולא ישמעו לקולך	C	
ולקחת ממימי היאר	D	
ושפכת היבשה	E	
והיו המים אשר תקח מן-היאר	F	
והיו לדם ביבשת	A	10
ויאמר משה אליהו	b	
כי אנכי לא איש דברים אנכי גם מתמול גם משלשם גם מא	C	
דברך אל-עבדך	D	
כי כבד-פה	A	11
וכבד לשון אנכי:	B	
ויאמר יהוה אליו	C	
מי שם פה לאדם	D	
או מי-ישום אלים או חרש או פקח או עור	A	12
הלא אנכי יהוה:	B	
ועתה לך	C	
ואנכי אהיה עם-פיה	C	
והוריתיך אשר תדבר:	A	13
ויאמר	B	
כי אנכי שלחנא ביד-תשלח*:	A	14
ויחר-אף יהוה במשה	B	
ויאמר	C	
הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי	D	
ידעתי כי-דבר דבר הוא	E	
וגם הנה-הוא יצא לקראתך	F	
וראך	G	
ושמח בלבך:	A	15
ודברת אליו	B	
ושמת את-הדברים בפיו	C	
ואנכי אהיה עם-פיה ועם-פיהו	D	
והוריתי אתכם את אשר תעשיו:	A	16
ודבר-הוא לך אל-העם	B	
והיה * הוא יהיה-לך לפה	C	
ואתה תהיה-לו לאלהים: ²⁸	A	17
ואת-המטה הנה תקח בנגדך	B	
אשר תעשה-בו את-האתת: פ	A	18
ויילך משה	B	
וישב אל-יתר חתנו ויאמר לו	C	
אלכה נא	D	
ואשובה אל-אתי אשר-במצרים	E	
ואראה העוֹדֵם חיים	F	
ויאמר יתרו למשה	G	
לך לשלום:		

19	A	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבָּר
	B	לֵךְ
	C	שָׁב מִצְרַיִם
	D	כִּי־מִתּוֹ כָּל־הָאֲנָשִׁים הַמְּבַקְשִׁים אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ:
20	A	וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו
	B	וַיָּרְכַבְם עַל־הַחֲמֹר
	C	וַיָּשָׁב אֶרְצָה מִצְרַיִם
	D	וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מִטַּה הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדוֹ:
21	A	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
	B	בְּלִכְתּוֹךָ לָשׁוּב מִצְרַיִמָּה
	C	רְאֵה כָּל־הַמִּפְתִּיחַ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַתִּי בְּיָדְךָ
	D	וַעֲשִׂיתָם לִפְנֵי * פְּרַעֲה
	E	וְאֲנִי אֶחְזַק אֶת־לְבָבוֹ
	F	וְלֹא יִשְׁלַח אֶת־הָעַם:
22	A	וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל־פְּרַעֲה
	B	כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה בְּנִי בְכָרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
23	A	וְאָמַר אֵלָיְךָ
	B	שְׁלַח אֶת־בְּנִי
	C	וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי
	D	וּתְמַאֲזוּ לְשִׁלְחָו
	E	הַבָּה אֲנֹכִי הִרְגִּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ בְּכַרְךָ:
24	A	וַיְהִי * בְּדַרְדָּר בְּמִלּוֹן
	B	וַיִּפְגְּשֻׁהוּ יְהוָה
	C	וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הַמִּיתּוֹ
25	A	וַתִּקַּח צִפְרָה צֹר
	B	וּתְכַרֵּת אֶת־עַרְלַת בְּנֵיהָ
	C	וַתִּגַּע לְרַגְלָיו
	D	וַתֹּאמֶר
	E	כִּי חֲמוּדִים אַתָּה לִּי:
26	A	וַיִּרַף מִמֶּנּוּ
	B	אֲזו אָמְרָה
	C	חַתּוֹ דָּמִים לְמוֹלַת: פ
27	A	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן
	B	לֵךְ לִקְרַאת מֹשֶׁה הַמִּדְבָּרָה
	C	וַיֵּלֶךְ
	D	וַיִּפְגְּשֻׁהוּ בְּהַר הָאֱלֹהִים
	E	וַיִּשְׁקֵלֵו:
28	A	וַיַּגֵּד מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן אֵת כָּל־דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁלְחָו וְאֵת כָּל־הָאֵתוֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוְּהוּ:
29	A	וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן
	B	וַיֹּאסְפוּ אֶת־כָּל־זִמְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
30	A	וַיְדַבֵּר אַהֲרֹן אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
	B	וַיַּעַשׂ הָאֵתוֹת לְעֵינֵי הָעַם:
31	A	וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָעַם
	B	וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי־פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
	C	וְכִי רָאָה אֶת־עֲנָיִם
	D	וַיִּקְדּוּ
	E	וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:

3.1.7.2 Discussion of Clause Delimitation of Exodus Chapter 4

It is clear that Chapter 4 continues the dialogue between Yahweh and Moses which was presented in the last part of Chapter 3. The conversation continues upto verse 17, and Moses constantly finds new excuses not to obey Yahweh's command. From verse 18 the scene moves to Midian again, with a short interaction between Moses and his father-in-law Jethro first (vs. 18), and then Yahweh repeats the command to the now willing Moses (vss. 19-23). Verse 24-26 present a short interlude on the way to Egypt, and in verse 27 Yahweh unites Moses with his brother Aaron. With indirect speech dominating in the last verses (vss. 28-31), the narrative now unfolds into the phases where the Israelite leaders indeed believe Moses and Aaron when told about Yahweh's concern for their situation in Egypt.

3.1.8 Structural-Exegetical Analysis of Exodus 4:1-31

Chapter 4 is divided into three main sections: verses 1-9 present the signs of Moses' authority, verses 10-17 present the section where Moses speaks, and verses 18-31 present Moses the deliverer going to Egypt.

Reading through Chapter 4, the verses contain direct and indirect speech, which bring about shifts in space, time and characters in the narrative. In verses 1-7 God shows Moses that the elders will listen to him, and the introduction of three signs is intended to convince any sceptic, even Moses himself who is presented as a prime doubter. An important change is noted here; God changes the strategy to convince Moses from a mere explanation to giving him signs to believe. Verse 13 also presents another character change in Moses' response, which shows total reluctance to accept the task, but in verse 18 he accepts the risk.

4:1 The Qal יָאֵן “believe”, which is literally understood as ‘to support, to confirm, or to be faithful’²⁹, occurs six times in this section (verses 1, 5, twice in 8, 9 and 31), clearly operating as a key word. The word does not only involve mere acceptance of the fact but includes confidence built on a relationship (Durham, 1987:44) since the space where the act will happen will definitely change, and the Israelites in Egypt will have no time to verify or share the experiences of the theophany and the commission of Moses. His brief report must be based on trust and confidence in order to gain acceptance.

From another angle we may think that his own clouded reputation, with the Israelites and the Egyptians remembering his murder of an Egyptian, might have been more worrying. . In the

²⁹The same word can be understood as hiphil, meaning ‘to stand firm, to trust or to be certain’ (Durham, 1987:44).

earlier section (where we discussed the broader narrative) we also mentioned that Moses had left Egypt under sentence of death and had been away for a long time, and trusting him would have been difficult indeed.

There is also a connection between 4:1 and 3:16. In 4:1 Moses is responding to a command given in 3:16.

4:2. From Yahweh's response, we can assume that Yahweh acknowledged the validity of Moses' claim, or that signs played an important role in Israelite beliefs. The provision of three signs to Moses is an indication of divine authority, since each sign was divinely empowered. If Moses is only a representative, then the real hero of this call and commission is not Moses, but God.

The use of the word יד ("hand" in Hebrew), could indicate power or means of direction. This is indicated by some scholars like Propp that the hand of a man was usually seen as an indication of strength (1999:187). But in this case and this verse, it refers literally to his hand holding an object (the staff). In this case, Moses is presented as a figure worthy of description as a deliverer.

4:3-4 Throwing the staff (rod) on the ground changes it into a serpent, presenting the first authentic sign, but it is immediately challenged by the fact that there already existed a widely practiced variation of the ancient staff-and-serpent symbolism, and it was replicated by the Egyptians, as in 7:11. According to Durham, the serpent was a symbol of special wisdom, fertility, and healing in Ancient Near Eastern thought (1987:44). He mentions that in Egypt for example, serpents were worshipped. The word נחש ("serpent") is used here as a general term for all snakes, probably those considered as poisonous.

The space change plays an important role here. The same ground described to Moses as holy, now turns the rod into a serpent, and prepares Moses for a great task of deliverance after being convinced through the divine signs. The verbs in verse 4 "put forth your hand" and "take", may suggest that Moses did not expect such a miracle, but feared and fled from it.

4:5. In this verse Yahweh gives the reason for the signs: "so that they may believe". The word נאמן is repeated several times in this chapter, and here (4:5) it is used as a hiphil, imperfect third person masculine plural verb, meaning to stay faithful. Though the divine name is missing in this verse, as in 3:13, Yahweh identifies himself in a theophany as the deity of Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob. The patriarchal lineage was important to help seal the people's trust in Moses about his commission from God.

4:6-7. Yahweh displays a second sign in 4:6, the sign of the hand instantly diseased and instantly healed. Although not many commentators have attended to it, one wonders why this terrible disease is used, in the context of the Israelite understanding of purity. Further we note that the sign is not repeated by Moses in Egypt. In addition, we see that the disease appears in Numbers 12:9-14, where it features as a punishment to Miriam for rebelling along with Aaron. The impurity and judgement associated with it may perhaps explain its omission in the later events in Egypt. Durham states that the religious connotation of the skin diseases. מצרעת was connected in the Old Testament with the judgement of Yahweh (1987:45). However, Moses' experience of leprosy here appears to be done merely as a sign, though the suggestion of judgement can be thought of as being based on his disbelief and his continued resistance. The physical contact with the affected was fearful as they were pronounced unclean.

4:8-9. Another case of direct speech within the sign section of the Exodus narrative occurs when the third authenticating sign is presented, for the reason that "if the first and second signs will be inadequate" for the people to believe. God does recognise the possibility of incredulity and this allows them another chance to strengthen their belief. This sign is given with detailed instruction from Yahweh to Moses, maybe because it will be the first of the ten mighty acts in Egypt. There is additional character involvement and change in the verses as the signs are also meant to convince Moses' audience, identified by the pronoun "they". This will be done if they are not convinced by the first two signs as seen above. This seems to be one of the signs upon which Moses' authority depended.

The theological context of the word אֵימֹת ("sign") refers to something resulting from an act of God and designed to demonstrate the effect of the phenomenon (Durham 1987:46). Though the word is used in some other parts of the Old Testament, in the Exodus narrative it is used in particular reference to "the plagues" which according to Durham are sometimes called "the proving facts" (1987:46).

4:10. Verse 10 marks the beginning of an uneasy section of the Exodus narrative, where Moses presents further protests of his inadequacy for the task. Since Moses' main task will involve persuasive communication on what happened to him, his complaint sounds unique in this

regard, he is “not a man of words”³⁰. Moses’ complaint of being “heavy-lipped and thick-tongued” is rendered before God who knows him better and is his Creator. Comparing Moses’ complaint to the Gideon narrative in Judges 6 as well as to some of the prophetic call narratives (such as that of Isaiah in Is. 6), we agree that Moses’ words resemble the traditions of the “word and messenger” rooted in an Old Testament pattern of the “weak [becoming] strong” (Habel, 1965:316). In this connection, it is understood that deliverance comes not from humankind, but from God.

Moses’ protest on account of his inadequacy in speech is indicated by the narrator with a specific time, namely “from birth”. The word, *מֵרֵאשִׁית* is an adverb indicating both time and place, but here it is used to express time in both past and future tense.

4:11-12. These verses present Yahweh’s answer to the protest of Moses, viz. that the protest is not only invalid, but also irrelevant. He repeats his declaration that he will be with Moses in speech. The word, *עִמִּי־פִיךָ־אֶהְיֶה* is literally translated as “I will be with your mouth”, an expression signifying that Moses will do the work to accomplish Yahweh’s purpose and to His credit.

This strong direct speech is accompanied by rhetorical questions formulating Moses’ realisation that the one sending him has authority to create, to give and to do his will, and the imperative of the verb *הֲלֹךְ* “now go” asserts Yahweh’s divine commissioning of Moses.

4:13. This verse is our main focus as its narration presents a strong response from Moses to God on his call and mission to deliver. The word *שְׁלַח* (“to send”), a verb normally used in Qal, here literally means “to stretch out (the hand)” used as Piel (NKJV). The clause may also mean “to send through a person’s hand as to entrust him or her with deliverance”, according to Propp (1999:212).

This verse contradicts the portrayal of Moses’ character in 3:11 where his humble character is indicated in the petition “who am I?”. References to Numbers 12:3 present Moses as very humble, more than any human on the face of the earth, but his response in 4:13 reveals a different side to his character. How do we resolve the contradiction between Moses’ refusal to go, Yahweh’s anger (4:14), and Moses’ humility described earlier? This verse (13) is very important with unique motivation in this study, as it presents Moses’ character response to the deliverance role, and indicates that he was not prepared for the task. He responds as a risk taker

³⁰The phrase “man of words” is a Hebrew form of the word ‘eloquent’ in English translation.

on his life and freedom. However, Moses finally accepts the call and leaves for Egypt (verse 18), as a clear indication of his acceptance of Yahweh's commission.

4:14-17 This section expresses the responsive character of God, indicating some important changes in the text verses regarding the natural attributes of God and the mood accompanying them. The word "anger of the Lord" is expressed in Hebrew with חַרָּה , a Qal imperfect third person masculine singular verb meaning to be hotly contended, burning in anger. It is used with אָזְנוֹ a noun masculine singular, meaning nose or nostrils. The phrase literally expresses the extent of the Lord's anger.

However, the position of Propp that when Yahweh is angry at a person, the outcome is generally violent (1999:213), is not supported in the responses in this verse, and I do not agree with it either. Yahweh's responses still accommodate Moses positively.

Several changes take place in these four verses. There is a change or a shift in the narrative in the deliverers' blessing from God. A second agent is mentioned, namely "Aaron", who is to be the spokesperson. While Yahweh promised to be "with Moses' mouth" in verse 11, here the change is that Moses will "put words in Aaron's mouth" (verse 15b, NKJV), in which the source of the 'word' changes from God to Moses, and this is complemented in verse 16 where Yahweh says that Moses "will be God instead to Aaron".³¹ This is the pivotal part of the conversation between Yahweh and Moses for the characterization of Moses' roles as a deliverer. The content of this clause in verse 17 is very important to this study as it influence some changes in the text, since they are unique in this narrative, and the roles of these two characters influence our understanding of the deliverance motif in the Old Testament, particularly in the exodus as will be seen in the next section.

Another change we note is the differences in the roles of Aaron in the narrative portions of Exodus, when compared to Leviticus. Aaron is changed from being a prophetic deliverer to becoming a priest. This agrees with the bigger narrative line of Old Testament, that Aaron is changed from being a co-deliverer in the Egypt to becoming the main priest. Aaron is well-known with his cultic association, as a Zadokite priest, the keeper of the cult, and being from the tribe of Levi. His former description and identification by God as spokesperson of Moses is understood in addition to his later office as a Priest.³²

³¹ It is interesting that the word 'God' is used here instead of Yahweh, as earlier in the narrative.

³² Durham (1987:50) states that a wide recognition of Aaron as the priest in the Old Testament came late in the OT history, certainly after the exile. This view agrees with the above change.

4:18-19. The section presents what appears to be the beginning of a conclusion to Yahweh's command in verse 12. Finally, Moses persuades himself that he must return to Egypt to deliver Yahweh's message and present His deeds of deliverance to Israel in bondage. Durham states that Moses logically goes home to Jethro to ask permission for the journey (1987:54). Moses' reference to אָחָיו ("my brothers") in Egypt, indicates a brother of the same parents, half-brother, or a relative. This is an important indication of the memory of his roots. Propp's suggests that Moses' mention of his "brothers" serves an important function in the pentateuchal narrative where Moses invokes his brothers and weakens his Midianite ties, thereby reclaiming the Hebrew identity he had shed in 2:22 (1999:215).

The phrase, "that I may see whether they are still alive" spoken by Moses in verse 18, shows that he does not explain and share his real mission in Egypt with Jethro. On the other hand we may understand that the clause "if they are alive" is a passage indicating time, as a period of severity under Egyptian oppression. The fact that many years have passed, Moses' return seems to be important only for family union in this case.

Durham is correct that the additional command of Yahweh to Moses to return to Egypt in verse 19 does not fit here, because the information that those who had formerly sought Moses' life for his capital crime are now dead does not fit logically with the meeting with Jethro.

4:20. The return of Moses to Egypt is presented in this verse, connected with three aspects; viz. the care of his family, location of his return (Egypt) and his bringing of the staff (מִטָּה) of God. Each of these aspects presents unique changes and influences in the narrative. The problem with the first aspect, "taking his wife and sons to Egypt" is that apart from verse 24-26, they are never mentioned, not in the context of Egypt, nor at any point of their return trip to Sinai, until in Chapter 18:2-6 where they are clearly in Jethro's care. They are also absent in the rest of the Old Testament, except in Chronicles (Durham, 1987:55).

Returning to Egypt signifies a change of space (place) in the narrative, staging the beginning of the great task of Moses to deliver the Israelites from bondage. But the expression of the clause in the verse is indicated by a singular pronominal subject, which might be understood as involving Moses alone. Durham states that the expression of the returning to Egypt in verse 20 is the most ancient statement of the return (1987:55).

The staff which Moses carries is referred to as "the staff of God" in some passages in Exodus. The usage of this phrase is a very important motif which shows that God's role as a deliverer has now gone over onto Moses. The motif is linked to the signs at Sinai and in Egypt, and is

said to be Moses' tool of shepherdry in 4:2. It plays an important role in the mighty acts as indicated in Yahweh's dialogue with Moses earlier.

4:21-23. The verses provide a point of departure in the section with the move from 'signs' at Mount Sinai, to the "wondrous deeds" in Egypt, proving Yahweh's powerful presence.³³ The phrase, בלכתך "when you return" (expressed with the preposition כ plus the infinitive verb) indicates the specific time for the wondrous signs. The word "before" (לפני) Pharaoh refers to his own presence. Verse 21 clearly indicates that the signs were for both Pharaoh as well as the people, as Moses is told of both the purpose and range of these signs and their mighty effects.

The traditional translation of the word "harden" is misleading according to Propp, as the expression of 'hard-hearted' connotes cruelty (1999:217). But the Hebrew word, הוֹק does not imply cruelty on the part of Pharaoh, but rather "to strengthen his resolve, to make him stubborn, to prevail". The usage of the words 'my first-born son' has many meanings, as commented on by most scholars, suggesting the expression of Yahweh's love for Israel and Israel's filial duty of love in return, obedience in the connotation of the "son" as vassal; and the possibility of a covenantal relationship (Propp, 1999:217). But in this text, Yahweh is bound by the kinship duty to rescue or ransom his enslaved son, Israel. This is possible, because Ancient Near Eastern redemption traditions imply that Pharaoh, by oppressing Israel, has violated the law of the son's protection. Exodus 4:22 becomes crucial if understood from the perspective of the plague of the first-born in which we note that Yahweh kills the Egyptian first-born but redeems his own first-born, which is the entire nation of Israel. The death of the first-born is presented in the context of the Passover as the most important plague in Egypt.

The verb, עָבַד ("to serve") in verse 23 has connotations of both bondage and worship (Propp 1999:217). Yahweh demands that Israel no longer work in Egypt as slaves, but work for him as worshipers. Here we come across the complication of the change of master in Pharaoh's understanding to let Israel go and serve Yahweh. Propp understands this relationship between Israel and Yahweh in two metaphors: son and father, master and slave. These changes play an important role in understanding Moses' development in the deliverance of the Old Testament narrative (1999:217).

4:24-26. These verses are the most difficult in terms of location in this particular context. There are certain phrases that require attention in the verses. The first is why the Lord intends to kill

³³ Two changes are important here, the change from signs to wonders and the change of space (place)

a person he has entrusted with an important mission. The second is the act of circumcision in verse 25 by Zipporah in which she identifies Moses as a bloody husband.

The night stop is translated as “inn” מלון, meaning a place where one can spend a night, which is not regarded as a permanent settlement.

The passage is described as the most ancient one referring to circumcision in the Bible. Durham states that since Moses had not been circumcised yet, the move was a demand to the rite by God which resulted in an attack on Gershom, his son (1987:57). If viewed in this way, Yahweh is not considered an enemy, but one who gives Moses his means of grace (circumcision) as a protective sign of the covenant.

We also note the transfer of the ancient circumcision rites in this act (from Abraham). Moses' son Gershom is circumcised and not Moses himself. The reason may be that the son's circumcision was less problematic at this crucial moment. But the translation of the phrase “cast near his feet” (NKJV), which according to Propp is sometimes translated as “approaching his feet” (with ‘feet’ being a well-known euphemistic expression for the male genitals), might mean that the circumcision took place on Moses himself and that it is his own fore skin that is meant here. I find this argument very difficult to accept, and Propp himself notes that it is ‘less likely’ (1999:219).

This is one of the few verses in the Old Testament narratives that mention the phrase “her son”. This usage emphasises the role of Zipporah (Propp 1999:219).

4:27-28. A different character is introduced at this time. Aaron is instructed by God to go and meet Moses. His role is defined in verses 14-17 as ‘spokesman’ to Moses. But the instruction given to Aaron is debatable in terms of its placement and time frame as it looks more convenient if it came prior to verse 14. Durham describes the references to Aaron as an added and intrusive addition to the Exodus narrative (1987:59). The way Aaron responds to God's voice is also interesting; unlike Moses, Aaron shows less surprise and not doubtful like Moses.

4:29-30. These two verses are rich in explanation, interpretation and grammar. The description of the first meeting of Moses and Aaron leads to the invitation of the elders. The character involvement changes here from God and Moses to Moses, Aaron and an unspecified number of elders. Aaron, immediately after Moses' briefing him in verse 28, takes on his role, not only speaking the words from Yahweh, but also performing signs “אותת” in verse 30. The change of

the subject in the clauses is also noteworthy; while in verse 29 the subject is Moses, in verse 30 the subject becomes Aaron.

4:31. This verse concludes the chapter, and presents the return of the deliverer (Moses) to Egypt. Presented in indirect speech, it narrates the people's belief, Yahweh's concern of their misery, and the people's worshipping Yahweh. Different changes and events are tied together to show a concluding link in the text. The motif of the people's belief is evident in verses 1, 5, 8-9, 15, 17, 21 and 23. The verse acts like a chapter summary commencing with the people's belief "אמן" – the same people Moses declared would not believe him, do in fact now believe – and the verse ends with an act of 'שָׁחָה' "worship" expressed in Hitpael form.

3.1.9 Summary of the Literary Analysis

The summary of the exegesis of chapters 3 and 4 will help us to analyse the roles of various characters in the narrative and how they interact within the chapters.

Exodus 3:1-12 immediately introduces the context, revelation and explanation of the unique divine name found in the Old Testament. With the experiences of the Israelites at Horeb in the Presence of God in the fire, an auditory experience is followed by His identification and call of Moses. The last section (verses 13-22) brings us to a proof of God's special name illustrated in the narratives, viz. "I AM WHO I AM". We note that the name was not given until it was explained in a logical response to Moses' questions. The name is stated twice in relation to the phrase "God of the fathers" in a present continuous tense (Durham, 1987:41) and later the verb אֶהְיֶה "I will be" is used, symbolizing Yahweh's active presence.

Chapter 4 has three main sections; the signs section (verses 1-9), Moses' response section (10-17), and Moses going to Egypt (18-31). In verses 1-9 Yahweh is the main character, the subject matter is 'signs as God's authority'. The staff in Moses' hands becomes the main tool for deliverance. This is followed by Moses' protest that the people will not believe him, thereafter his doubt, fear, and rebellion which continue into the next section.

The second section (10-17), literally "the mouth of Moses"; contains responses to Moses' protests of his inadequacy. As the focal point of discussion in this study, it has tense dialogue, and leads to the suspension of Moses' dialogue with Yahweh in verse 13 after Yahweh's anger. The subject here is Yahweh and Yahweh's assurance of his presence, i.e. that he will be with Moses and Aaron in the delivery act.

In the final section (18-31) Moses at last obeys the call and commission of Yahweh and the deliverer returns in obedience to Egypt. Reluctance and a tense dialogue define the purpose of the mission and the uniqueness of preparing a suitable deliverer.

The above summary sections indicate different character responses, involvement and change. They also influence the changes in place and space of time in the delivery act, which are useful in understanding the narrative about the liberation of the Hebrews and the deliverance motifs in the Exodus narratives.

3.2 Moses and the Development of the Old Testament Tradition of Deliverance

3.2.1 Characterization of Moses

This second part of the chapter focuses on a very important aspect of our discussion. Deliverance motifs connected to Moses in the Exodus narrative form part of a broader theme in the Old Testament. In this study, we will focus on the characterization of Moses in the development of the deliverance motif in the Old Testament.

Who was Moses within the context of Old Testament deliverance and of the history of Israel? Moses remains a unique individual depicted with little or no precedent, solitary and set apart from the very community he was born to lead. Moses' origin is not in the community of Israel, as Exodus 2 recognises him as an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter in the Egyptian court. The historical understanding of Moses portrays him as a true Egyptian, ambitious, adventurous, prince or tribal renegade of the Nile (Hoffmeier, 1997:136). We can also understand him as having played a double role of royal ally and rebel to Pharaoh. Moses' adulthood and his attachment to the court according to Exodus 2:11 portray him leaving the comfort of the court to see the plight of his people. This describes Moses as a leader with his people at heart, and concerned about their welfare. Moses may have been acting in some official capacity in the court, an indication that he was living a comfortable life, which meant little to him compared to the welfare of his people. Dozeman summarises that Exodus 2-5 introduces the character of Moses, noting his mixed identity (he is both Egyptian and an Israelite), his good intentions to help his people, and his violent nature (he kills impulsively) (2009:47). It is noted that many scholars have taken a positive view of the history of the Exodus narratives portraying Moses as a great leader of the time. The memory of the hero is encoded in memories of the events attributed to his characterization as a hero (Edelman and Ben Zvi, 2013:339).³⁴

³⁴Edelman and Ben Zvi (2013:339) presents a brilliant analysis on the memories of Moses as a hero.

For some commentators like Hoffmeier, the whole notion of Moses being raised in the Egyptian court seems like training him for leadership responsibility (1997:142). It is said that Pharaoh Thutmose III (1457-1425 BC) initiated the practice of bringing the princes of the subject kings of western Asia to Egypt to be trained and to prepare them to replace their fathers upon their death (1997:142). This might mean that Moses had a divinely engineered opportunity to be prepared for future leadership.

Exodus and other books also show that Moses was a *great deliverer*. Two places are mentioned in the narrative of Moses' preparation for his grand task as a deliverer: in the Egyptian court where he was raised and had the advantage of some training in leadership, and in Midian before God commissioned him for the Egyptian task. These two places function in contrast to one another within the single narrative, creating contrastive contexts for portraying Moses. Exodus 2:11-15 tells the story of Moses murdering an Egyptian. The setting is still Egypt, and after his act had become known to the Pharaoh, the latter wanted to kill Moses. It is clear that Moses was considered a murderer in the eyes of the Pharaoh (Humphreys, 2004:43). The setting changes, however, when Moses flees to Midian. In contrast to being considered a murderer in the Egyptian context, the narrator portrays him in 2:17 as the rescuer of Jethro's daughter. This act of deliverance prepares the way for Moses' commissioning by Yahweh as the deliverer of Israel in 3:10.

Moses' role as a deliverer is particularly substantiated in 3:10, 14, and verse 16 where Moses is sent הלה("to go") to Egypt to deliver Israel from bondage. Earlier in Chapter 2 we see Moses as a *passionate leader* who identifies with his people under oppression. These deliverance acts of Moses overarch the theme of the preparation of the deliverer for his main task in Chapter 3, when his is summoned by God to go to Egypt.

From the exegetical discussion above it becomes clear that Moses could also be described as a leader willing to forfeit his life, who is called to act as a deliverer in a time of Israelite suffering and oppression. Scholars agree that the time was challenging. However, his character responses reveals Moses as *reluctant and unwilling*, not ready for Yahweh's mission in Egypt. The expression in 4:13 (the word 'שלה') indicates sending that is extended to a third party, by appointment from the first person.

Moses is also portrayed as a *human agent* through whom the acts of God were effected. His role in the Israelite exodus is dominated by his portrayal as an agent of God. In Exodus 7:3 the interaction of Yahweh and Pharaoh is prearranged with "heart hardening", in which the

dialogue is manifested by the role of Moses as mediator between God and Pharaoh. This is also the case in 4:16, where Moses is said to be “*like God*” to Aaron and Pharaoh.³⁵ This verse is one of the pivotal sections in the chapter and in the Exodus narrative, and emphasizes the important role of Moses in the plot development.

Moses is also portrayed in the Biblical literature as *a great prophet*. In line with the understanding of the portrayal of prophets in the Old Testament, Moses can rightly be viewed as a great prophet as he accepts Yahweh’s right to command him. Further, according to Propp, he humbly calls the Deity “my Lord” and himself “your servant” (4:10) (1999:228). However, this view can be counter-argued by the fact that throughout the Exodus Moses tries to evade his commission, and even after accepting it, he frequently complains to Yahweh (5:22-23). He sometimes imputes doubts to the people, as in 3:13 and 4:1. In short, we can suggest that Moses doubts even the efficacy of his mission from the start. But both the Old and New Testaments have accepted Moses as a great Prophet (Deut. 34:10, Num. 12:6-8, Heb. 3:2, 5).

In Exodus 3:11 and Numbers 12:3 Moses is characterised as meek and humble, more than all of humanity on the face of the earth. With this indication the writer finds Moses an important character beside others in the Old Testament. However, there are also contrasts to Moses’ humility in the narrative. Moses is inclined to protest his incompetence, such as his speech defects, when God commands him to free Israel. His worst character response appears in 4:13, where he totally refuses to go.

His first approach to Pharaoh in Chapter 5:1 indicates another interesting character trait of Moses in the narratives, namely that of having an *authoritative character*. He begins the conversation with a messenger formula, “Thus says Yahweh” (כה אמר יהוה). He does not present a request, but a command from Yahweh. This indicates his courage in approaching critical situations to carry out the deliverance plan properly. However, this also reveals his lack of skill, in the fact that the approach is arrogant and dramatic. Pharaoh’s response shows that he considers the command absurd, having no experience of Yahweh so that in turn, his response shows an *authoritative, courageous, and commanding* character.

Some commentators like Propp have characterised Moses as a *magician*. When Moses looked like not being satisfied with the mission, Yahweh gave him three signs (אותות) to reinforce his authority (4:2-4, 6-7, and 9). These included turning his rod into a snake and back again,

³⁵ The use of the word “if you were God” in this verse (4:16) is controversial among scholars. This argument has already been explained in the exegesis section.

making his hand diseased and healthy again, and turning the water into blood. These might also be the tests of Moses' nerve (Propp, 1999:226).

In the broader narrative analysis Moses was characterised as an intercessor, especially for Pharaoh in 8:9 (8:5 in MT) and 8:28 (8:24 in MT) where the word עָתָר ("to pray") is used. This term functions in the Old Testament only for supplication to God. With the plagues, God's burden on Pharaoh become unbearable, and he acknowledges Yahweh whom he earlier claimed not to know. Pharaoh asks Moses to intercede for him and for Egypt.

Moses can also be described as a *man with defects*, who was *isolated* from the usual religious life of the Israelites. He was a solitary leader, raised as a prince in the Egyptian court, and his marriage to a foreign wife sets him apart. His having a speech defect led to accommodating his priestly brother Aaron to be spokesperson. Peter Machinist has described Moses as an outsider, and a remote character (Machinist, 2014:6).

The Biblical Moses can also be portrayed as a *shepherd* who cares for his father-in-law's sheep in Midian. This role has different connotations; for example, he was concerned about the assets belonging to the family of which he was part. As a shepherd he experiences God's call and presence, and asks the assurance of his call (3:13).

The characterization of Moses indicates that he can really be referred to as the hero of deliverance in Exodus. Though it is said that God himself was the Exodus hero, in human terms the biblical Moses takes centre stage throughout the Exodus narrative and in the rest of the Pentateuch. Throughout this discussion, Moses is portrayed as a leader who changed the course of history with pivotal significance.

3.2.2 Aaron's Role and Character in the Moses Narratives

Aaron is presented in the narratives as Moses' elder brother (6:20); he grew up among his kinsmen, unlike Moses who grew up in an Egyptian court. Aaron is said to be the son of Amram and Jochebed, and was the brother of Miriam; his wife was Elisheba and he had four sons, Nabab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

He played a leading role in the delivery of the Israelites, despite his several weaknesses as a leader. He is an interpreter (spokesperson) for Moses to Pharaoh in Egypt, since Moses complained to God of having poor speech. He also became instrumental in the divine miracles that convinced Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go.

Aaron is viewed in the narratives as a strong partner of Moses through the delivery process in Egypt and the desert. In 4:13 when Moses expresses self-doubt, Aaron is brought in by God to strengthen Moses.

Aaron is viewed as the first high priest of Israel (4:14).³⁶ He is one of the four important high priests mentioned in the Bible along with Melchizedek (Gen. 14:10, Heb. 6:20), Zadok, and Jesus. The Pentateuch recognises a threefold hierarchy of the Priest and Levites for the tribe of Levi where Aaron and his sons were regarded as high priests. It is accepted by most modern scholars that delineation of the duties of the priest and Levites was a late development (Raymond Abba, 2000:194). The original priests and Levites shared functions, but later, probably around the sixth century BC, the Levites were demoted and the priests elevated to service at the centralised cultic centre in Jerusalem.

On the negative side, despite his leading role, there are instances of conflict over leadership during the period of wandering. Twice Aaron engages in hostile activities with Moses (the making of the golden calf in Exodus 32, and the confrontation with Moses in Numbers 21). Though playing an important part in Moses' life, he also acts as a subordinate and a foil to him. Like Moses, he did not enter the Promised Land; after his death at Hor, he was succeeded by his son Eleazar.

This description of Aaron and his character helps us to analyse his unique role and how it affects the act of deliverance of the Israelites, both negatively and positively.

3.3 Historical Analysis of the Moses Narratives

3.3.1 Preliminary view

Moses dominates in the pages of the Old Testament more than most characters. Most of the roles attributed to him are clearly narrated in Exodus where he is portrayed as the human agent through whom God works (3.2.1). For instance, the signs and wonders in the land of Egypt (Ex. 7:3) were effected through Moses. His role as God's agent results in the liberation of the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh. That he receives the divine laws at Mount Sinai and that he was the agent of God in Israel's exodus from Egypt, gives Moses a unique status throughout Jewish and Christian canonical and non-canonical literature (Hoffmeier, 1997:135).

³⁶This idea is supported by those who hold that Aaron was merely a priest and not a prophet (Propp, 1999:231)

The historical origin of the Moses narratives is challenged by the original meaning of his name. From Chapter 2:5-9 two problems emerge regarding the character and the naming of the child. Pharaoh's daughter (unnamed) is the one who notices the basket, and the one who names Moses. The root name of this great Hebrew leader משה is derived from the Egyptian word *msi*, and from the verb *msy*, which means "to give birth". The name was common throughout the kingdom (Hoffmeier 1997:140). If this observation is correct, then the name is appropriate to the time and events, but the name's authenticity remains questionable regarding the historical sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt and the status of this great leader.

The terms used in the Hebrew Bible for the 'basket' mentioned in the birth narrative of Moses (תבה), has its root in Egyptian literature (*db't*) meaning a 'box' or 'coffin' which was used in the early kingdoms. Montet agrees with the idea that Moses' name is Egyptian. He argues that according to 2:10, ('for I drew him out of the river') the child seems to become the son of the princess who has saved him (1959:30), which may indicate a legal adoption. It is possible that Pharaoh's daughter would take the place of the parents in naming the child. Hence his name is closely associated with his role as a deliverer of the Hebrews from slavery.

3.3.2 Historical Origin and Dating of the Moses' Narratives

This section will focus on dating the narratives with a quest to getting a grip on the history of its origin. It is in these narratives that Moses is featured as a deliverer, and the literary-historical methodology will be used as a tool.

The study in this section will not be a historiographical enterprise, but rather a literary-historical one. This will be an important section because in the next chapter I will be focusing on a comparative analysis of how one earlier literary tradition influenced another later tradition. In order to achieve my intended objective in this section, I will look at those elements in the Exodus narratives that make up the final literary unit.

The literary-historical analysis of the Exodus narratives reveal them to be part of a comprehensive historical work encompassing most of the narratives of the entire book of Exodus. To form this comprehensive work, according to Houtman (1993:1), the authors used materials from various sources, different in nature and of different ages. For such a composition Dozeman states that the presence of different sources indicates that the book of Exodus is a free composition, and he views it as an anthology of liturgy, law and epic (2009:1-2). Also

Tremper Longman, who writes on the narrative structure of Exodus, admits the use of different sources and the composite nature of the Exodus narratives. He states, however, that Exodus is not a collection of isolated traditions but that the narratives are a mixture of stories, liturgy, and law (2009:38).

The composite nature of these narratives can probably be observed in the use of the oracular formula introduced by words such as “Yahweh said”, as in 4:13, 14, 27; 6:2, 10, 13; 7:1; 8:14 etc. (Houtman 1993:5). It is suggested that the oracular formula serves to introduce new divisions in the text. In Exodus, new sections or sub-sections often start with such utterances; however, it is also noted that there are some new sections which do not start with utterances such as in 3:18 and 8:1. These arguments justify that the text’s composition from different source materials renders it comprehensive in nature, in the sense that one overarching narrative was created from the different constituent parts.

Literary-historical studies have come up with numerous theories on which sources were used in the Exodus narratives in particular, and in the Pentateuch as a whole. Some suggest that sources in which the Deity’s names (Yahweh and Elohim) are used in peculiar fashion underlie these narratives, with redactions that were done from deuteronomic and priestly perspectives. Although these further source-critical analyses are helpful for understanding the literary history of the Exodus narratives, our primary concern is not the composite parts or the process of composition, but rather the stage when the Exodus narrative with Moses as primary deliverer figure was more or less finalized so that it could start exerting influence on further literary developments (such as the Book of Esther).

Scholars have used different theories for the approximate time when the exodus narratives was finalised in its composite form. Dozeman, who views the book of Exodus as an anthology of liturgy, law and epic, suggests that its composition might have occurred from many different periods of Israelite history (2009:1). Using a source-critical theory, he distinguishes between two levels of composition (a smaller and larger level). In the smaller level, individual stories and laws existed independently, while in the larger level the entire book of Exodus is related to other Old Testament books (Dozeman 2009:1). Several anonymous authors might have contributed at different times to the composition of the Exodus, making it part of a larger history

In classical Documentary Hypothesis scholarship, interpreters identified three anonymous authors in the composition of Exodus (Dozeman, 2009:31), referred to as the Yahwist (J), the

Elohists (E), and the Priestly writers (P). It is believed that the work of these authors extend throughout most books of the Old Testament. Therefore the exodus narratives cannot be understood as having originated in the Mosaic period, but were rather composed centuries later. Dozeman adds that a careful interpretation of the individual sources provides insight into its social, cultural and religious circumstances. These reflect Israel's monarchical, exilic, and postexilic periods as the approximate time when the narratives were composed in different stages (2009:32). Those who still advocate a documentary hypothesis indicate that the P material is said to be the latest, and was written to compose the history of Israel, possibly in the postexilic period.

Propp states that the composition of the Exodus narratives would not have been done by a single author, and suggests that multiple editors might have produced the narratives by combining several written sources of diverse origin into a composite whole (1999:48). It seems that Propp also uses source theory to locate the approximate time in which the Exodus narratives were composed.

I support the view that the Exodus narratives is a collection of traditions from various periods in Israelite life (Dozeman, Propp, and Houtman). One may therefore assume that the Exodus narratives, including the sections on Moses' deliverance role, were finalized by the early post-exilic phase – thus earlier than the Book of Esther (which was discussed in the previous chapter). This relative dating will be determinative in our comparative study which follows in the next chapter.

3.4 Conclusion (Chapter summary)

This chapter covered the sections in the book of Exodus where Moses features as a deliverer, a description which will be compared to that of Esther in Chapter 4. The chapter had three main sections: (i) the literary analysis of the selected texts in Exodus, (ii) the characterization of Moses and his role in the development of the deliverance motif in the Old Testament, and (iii) the historical origin and dating of the Moses narratives in a literary-historical approach.

The first part analysed Chapters 1-12 which present the broader narrative dynamics, influenced by issues of changes in characters, timeframe, settings, and presenting the interaction between different characters in the broad narratives. The mighty acts against Egypt are the main reason given in the texts for the Israelite liberation. The narrower analysis focused on Chapters 3-6 which presented immediate changes within the text, and the study was narrowed further to

Chapters 3 and 4, where the analysis was based on a clause analysis and an exegetical analysis of these two chapters.

The second subsection focused on the characterisation of Moses and his role in the development of the Old Testament tradition of deliverance, in order to arrive at a portrayal of Moses as the great deliverer in the Exodus and in the Old Testament traditions. Special attention was given to his role in the Exodus deliverance, equally comparable to Esther, as will be seen in the next chapter. The impact of interaction and the effects of Aaron's role and character in the Moses narratives were also discussed.

The last subsection focused on dating the narratives about Moses with a quest of getting a grip on the history of the origin of the Exodus narratives.

This analysis will help us to engage the figures of Esther (from Chapter 2 of this study) and Moses, in a comparative analysis in the next chapter (4). In this, we will clearly see how the earlier literary traditions influenced the later traditions.

Chapter Four

4. Comparative Analysis of the figures of Moses and Esther and their Narrative Reinterpretation

4.1 Preliminary view

This chapter will compare the figures of Esther and Moses, and determine whether the Esther narrative could be seen as a reinterpretation of the Moses narrative. Thereafter, the dynamic and potential of this interpretation will be investigated. This comparison is integral to this study as well as to the Old Testament deliverance motifs since it recognises the roles of both figures (Moses and Esther), hence enhancing our understanding of their aspects of correspondence.

There are several relevant characters in the Bible which can be compared. Most Christians are accustomed to thinking that Jesus Christ is the second Adam and new Moses. Some perceive John the Baptist in the same light as Elijah. One notices preachers and some theologians tracing literary images that link Old and New Testament figures whose lives reflect eternal patterns and renew the ancient message.³⁷ However, rarely (if at all), has Esther been included in such academic comparative analysis before. This study has revealed that the Book of Esther, like Exodus, is unique, respected, charming and alarming in content. This chapter will draw parallels between the characters Esther and Moses. It will also determine whether the Esther persona can be read as a reinterpretation of that of Moses. If so, the dynamic and potential of this interpretation will be investigated.

4.2. Comparative Analysis of the Figures of Esther and Moses

The comparison of the figures of Moses and Esther will be based mainly on their characterization, as covered in 2.2.2.1 and 3.2, with a special attention to the textual understanding of each character. It has been argued earlier that both books of Exodus and Esther are historical narratives, and in them the characters of Esther and Moses play important roles as deliverers. In this discussion we have observed that an integration of their roles suggests the central theme of 'deliverance' from a certain bondage or oppression which is performed by God because Israel belongs to Him.

³⁷ This was covered in 2.2.4 of this study where a narrative approach to different characters in the book of Esther was followed, particularly using the actantial model.

Since a comparative analysis may involve the reading of one character in light of the other in order to occasion fresh insights, the Esther and Moses narratives will be compared, based on both broader and individual character analyses.

4.2.1 Thematic Comparison of Moses and Esther

There are several elements that make Moses the prototype of Esther. In this section, I will focus on the general and broader character comparison. In both the Esther and Moses narratives, their individual lives are portrayed in a *vulnerable* situation. Both Esther (Esth. 2:7) and Moses (Ex. 2:3-4) are vulnerable from birth. Moses is a vulnerable boy in the book of Exodus because the country's law does not allow him to live. Later on Pharaoh's daughter steps in to save Moses. Esther is described having neither father nor mother. Mordecai raises Esther as his own child. In both narrative characterizations, we see that a *caretaker* is responsible for the raising of the two figures.

The Hebrew/Jewish communities are *vulnerable* too in both Exodus and Esther. Their rights are denied to them by Egyptian slavery which dehumanises them. Their lives are threatened in Haman's plot to eliminate the Jews in the Persian Empire. There was a sense of exposure to violence in both communities that necessitated the need for a deliverer who would bring about change. To them, isolation and vulnerability brought a sense of care from God. In Exodus we see that extreme labour had the opposite result, leading to their freedom from slavery.

In both narratives, a *lack of knowledge* which is influenced by temporal-spatial factors was a major challenge. In Exodus, the new Pharaoh was aggressive because he did not know about Joseph who had brought the Hebrews to Egypt. He knew neither the face nor the name of Joseph. In Esth. 2:1, Esther's marriage to Ahasuerus is arranged secretly by Mordecai. In 2:9 we note that her beauty overshadows her Jewish identity which has been kept secret to others. It is evident therefore that both Moses and Esther were *secret Hebrews/Jews* who rose to prominence in a foreign court. We also observe that both come from low positions (status) and ascend into high positions.

Moses did not exercise much authority in Pharaoh's court though, since he lived as Egyptian royalty for more than twenty years, until he had grown up. However, he knew that he was not an Egyptian but a Hebrew. Likewise, Esther attained her position in the Persian court at Susa by winning a beauty contest to replace the deposed queen Vashti. Like the Hebrews in Egypt, Esther and her uncle Mordecai were living in Persia, though not as slaves, and generally their lot was better. Thus in contrast to Exodus, the immediate goal suggested in the Book of Esther

was not to return to their homeland, but to attain success and prosperity in a foreign land. Though both lived in *comfort in the king's courts*, they could not keep their identity secret when their fellow people's lives were threatened. Moses came to know the gravity of the Hebrew oppression when he went out to his people and looked upon their burdens and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people (Ex. 2:11). It seems that this was the first time Moses had seen slaves at labour, and may be the first beating he had ever observed. We see that Esther, like Moses, was unable to live long in *stately comfort* when the oppression of her people became intolerable. They both responded to God's call to become liberators. In both cases (Exodus 2:23 and Esther 4:3) we note that the cries of the Jewish people result in God's intervention.

In both the Moses and Esther narratives, we observe *civil disobedience* to the countries' laws. In Exodus 2:7, Pharaoh is deceived by the Hebrew midwives who perform the first act of deliverance. These midwife heroes, in their fear of God, act bravely by defying Pharaoh's orders. Similarly, in Esther 4:11, her response indicates strong criticism of the Persian law that approaching the king without being summoned carries the death sentence. Berg (1997:78) observes that she argues convincingly when she disobeys Mordecai, citing the danger of her life. Later, in Esther 4:16, she decides to approach the king, even though it is against the law, which also indicates her disobedience to the king's law.

The other general aspect of comparison is the space or location of these two characters. Both are *located in the stately court*. Moses is brought up in the Egyptian court, and this is an advantage to his special leadership training as seen in Chapter 3 of this study, though he spends his adult life outside the court; only to return to the same court as a deliverer. He had a better knowledge of the courtly life than most of his kinsmen. Likewise, Esther became Queen of Persia after Vashti was deposed and becomes a deliverer hero of her people while in the court as Queen. We can see that both had *courtly knowledge* and rose to the prominence in a foreign court though both were at first secret Hebrews/Jews.

There is another point of comparison, if debatable, which will receive more detailed attention in the interpretation section. For Esther's approach to the king she puts on her royal robe and stands in the inner court for his favour. While the king holds out the golden sceptre to Esther, she touches the top. This clearly shows that Esther, like Moses, was in control of the events in the process of delivery. This can be compared to how Moses had been in control of the events in Exodus with his supernatural rod. The passage in Exodus refers to it as "the staff of God",

which is a very important motif indicating that God's role as a deliverer has now gone over onto Moses. However, in the Esther narrative, the process indicates that Esther had become the cleverest and most powerful person at the court, like Moses before Pharaoh. In both narratives, we come across a common unique symbol "*the rod, 'staff of God', golden sceptre*", which is used to indicate control of power for both Moses and Esther. Their different influences will be dealt with in the next section.

Just as Passover celebrated Israel's deliverance through the Exodus (Ex 12), Esther also proclaimed (Esth. 9) a festival celebrating the survival of the Jews after the failure of Haman's plot, viz. Purim. In both festivals Moses and Esther unveil popular days throughout the Jewish line with unique memories within this community. There is a very important connection between the messages of the *two festivals* which will be discussed in the interpretation section below.

Though both Esther and Moses seem to be the most engaging characters in the respective books where they occur, one weakness that compromises the "purity" of their Hebrew/Jewish identity is the fact that they are both portrayed as *getting married to foreigners*, which would be problematic in some parts of the Hebrew/Jewish tradition and difficult to accept and recognise. Despite her status as a Jewish slave, Esther wins the position of queen over Persian beauties, which is followed by her greater political influence and control in the Empire in her later years. Some commentators like B.W. Anderson (1982:153) have described this as selfish activity on her part as discussed in section 2.2.2.1 of this study. Similarly, Moses was married to Zipporah, a daughter of a Midian priest. In section 3.2 of this study, Moses is described as a 'man of defects', and isolated from usual religious life in terms of his marriage to an alien and his upbringing in Egypt. We can see that both descriptions are negative regarding pure Hebrew/Jewish identity.

Based on Moses and Esther's characterization as discussed in sections 2.2 and 3.2 of this study, both are depicted as *national leaders*. We note that Moses is a unique figure who is depicted with the deliverance purpose, a role for which he was set apart. We see him playing a double role as royal ally of and as rebel against Pharaoh. Pictured as a true leader (Exod. 2:1), Moses had the people of his clan at heart; he was one who left the comfort of the court to see the plight of his people. No wonder Hoffmeier describes Moses as a great leader of his time (1997:142). Similarly, Esther was portrayed as a national leader in this study (see section 2.2.2.1). Fox explains three things that foreshadow her as a national leader, namely she sends, she

commands, and she inquires. She sends the messages and messengers back and forth between Mordecai and herself in finding the solution to the plot (1991:208). Her commands in Chapter 4:16 show her potential authority, as initiator and planner befitting an *emerging leader*.

The large narratives of the Book of Exodus present Moses as a *great deliverer*. It has been suggested in Section 3.2 that two instances mentioned in the Moses narratives are like preparation grounds for his grand task as a deliverer. Firstly we observe this in the Egyptian court where he was raised and was at an advantage in terms of some training in leadership. Secondly, we note the same in Midian before God commissioned him for the Egyptian task. As noted earlier (section 3.2), the two instances function in contrast to one another within the single narrative (Exod. 2.1). Moses is considered a murderer, and in 2:17 he is portrayed as a rescuer of Jethro's daughters. Similarly, Esther was discussed in section 2.2.2.1 with reference to Linda Day (1995:10) as the most engaging character in the Book of Esther. Esther's determination to work her way through a crisis (Esth. 4:16) marks her as a *woman deliverer*. She accepts her fate with courageous one who wants to perform her duty successfully. In this case, we see that Esther's characterization as a *heroine, leader and deliverer* is demonstrated by her *courage* which was also noted in Moses. The roles of Moses and Esther as deliverers are particularly substantiated when both are sent "to go" (Exod. 3:10, 14 and 16 for Moses and Esth. 4:8 for Esther). As discussed in section 4.2.2 of this study above this aspect connects the two as deliverers from a certain crisis.

Both characters, Moses and Esther were also discussed as *authoritative characters* in their approach. In Exod. 5.1, Moses' first approach before Pharaoh is authoritative and direct. He begins the conversation with a messenger formula, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel" (NKJV). Here Moses does not present a request to Pharaoh, but a command from Yahweh, which tells more of his character in approaching a critical situation where deliverance is required. Similarly, in Esth. 7:6, when King Ahasuerus asks who the enemy is, she strongly says "The adversary and enemy 'is this' wicked Haman" (NKJV). Though scholars have described Moses' approach as arrogant and dramatic in nature, it shows some connection to Esther's approach, particularly to Haman, who is upset by the confrontation.

Both Moses and Esther are portrayed as *human agents* through whom the acts of God in liberating the Israelites are effected. Moses' role in the Exodus is dominated by his portrayal as an agent. In Exod. 7:3 the interaction of Yahweh and Pharaoh is prearranged with heart-hardening in which the dialogue is manifested by the role of Moses as a *mediator* between God

and Pharaoh. This is similar in Exod. 4:16 where Moses is said to be “like God” to Aaron and Pharaoh. In both verses, his role is that of an agent of God. Similarly, in Esth. 4:16 Esther is portrayed as *an agent* of God in fulfilling the plan as professed by Mordecai, “for if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place” (NKJV). As discussed in section 2.1.4 of this study, deliverance for the Jews was already granted and it was to become evident through Esther. According to Paton (1908:222) in Mordecai’s speech, he deliberately avoids mentioning God directly, but nevertheless God’s providence was working behind the scene in which Queen Esther is a prearranged agent of God in deliverance of the Jews in Persia.

4.2.2. Actantial comparison (Esther as Modelled after Moses)

On the other hand, the figure of Esther as part of the Old Testament deliverance motif, can also be viewed as having been modelled after Moses. Bosman, who contemplates Moses as a model of Israelite and early Jewish identity, acknowledges numerous depictions of the roles played by Moses in the Old Testament such as leader, lawgiver, prophet, and priest (2007:326), and argues that one should refrain from reconstructing a linear, almost evolutionary development of the Moses figure as a model of Israel and early Jewish identity. He suggests that the deuteronomistic traditions about this leader were evoked during the latter part of the monarchy and the exile, but that the priestly traditions flourished in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, remembering Moses particularly as a model lawgiver in deliverance. It might be in these circumstances that Esther was modelled after Moses.

This section tries to argue that Moses as a deliverer is a model to Esther. To understand this better, we will analyse the comparison of the characters of Moses and Esther in analogical and actantial perspective, as was done in section 2.2.4.³⁸ The thematic roles of Esther and Moses in light of other characters will help us to distinguish the two characters in the respective plotlines. The character comparisons are shown below:

	The book of Exodus	The Book of Esther
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³⁸ For detailed information on the actantial models see Jonker and Lawrie (1992:104), who explain that actantial models can be utilized productively for the analysis of characters in the narratives.

Objective	Divine plan to rescue Hebrews	Divine plan to rescue Jews
Subject	Deliverance	Deliverance
Recipient	Hebrews in Egypt	Jews in Persia
Deliverer	Moses/Yahweh	Queen Esther/Yahweh
Helper/initiator/planner	Aaron and Yahweh	Mordecai and Yahweh
Opponent	Pharaoh/Egyptians	Haman

In the above comparison according to an actantial model, the characters portray similar and connected roles. In both books, the objective, subject and recipients are similar/analogical. The setting (place) makes the major difference between them (Egypt for Exodus, and Persia for Esther), resulting also in different opponents (Pharaoh/Egyptians, and Haman respectively). In both, Yahweh acts as a deliverer through a human agent (Moses in Egypt and Esther in Persia). Alongside Aaron in Egypt and Mordecai in Persia, Yahweh is also noted as the main initiator, helper and planner. When viewed from a literary perspective as shown above through the actantial model, then Moses may be regarded as a model for Esther in terms of the deliverance motif. The actantial model presents an interesting and helpful comparison and distinction of the roles of characters in the two narratives and plotlines, providing a very good summary of how the main characters of Moses and Esther are connected as deliverers.

4.2.3 Discontinuities between Esther and Moses as Deliverers

Apart from the above discussed similarities between the characters of Moses and Esther there are also some discontinuities between them. This section tries to give some of these differences based on their roles as deliverers. Even though both Moses and Esther lived at court, Moses probably never exercised much authority in Pharaoh's court as compared to Esther in the Persian court. Moses' short stay in the court may also have contributed to this since he lived as Egyptian royalty for about 20 years until he had grown up. Esther became more influential and powerful in the Persian court after Haman's fall and during the introduction of the Purim festival. She was more in control of events later.

Though we understand that like the Hebrews in Egypt, Esther and Mordecai together with some Jews were living abroad, they were however not slaves. Their residence in Persia was the aftermath of the Babylonian exile. Therefore, their immediate goal in the narratives was not to return to their homeland as was the case with the Hebrews in Egypt. The Hebrews in Egypt needed deliverance from Pharaoh's oppressive hand (slavery), while the Jews in Persia were to be delivered from Haman's slaughtering plot with an aim to attain success and prosperity.

The other difference is their respective responses to the call for deliverance. Mordecai challenges Esther in Esth. 4:13, “Do not think you will escape”, yet in verses 14 he says “...yet who knows whether you have come into the king’s palace for such a time as this” (NKJV). Esther’s reply demonstrates that she is ready to rise to heroism and she replies her intention to approach the king at the risk of her life. Her courageous and intelligent act to preserve the covenant people makes her God’s woman in deliverance. The way Esther finds favour before the king after her careful display of putting on her royal robes in the inner court is regarded by commentators as clever and tactful, and a different approach than that of Moses in Exod. 5:1-2. Moses’ first approach to Pharaoh lacks art and diplomacy. It is surprising that Moses, who had a direct experience of his call with God in the “burning bush”, is surpassed by Esther’s courage and her intellectual approach to authority.

Furthermore, Fox views Esther as a changing character, unlike Moses, pointing out how Esther first displays herself passively, then turns into an active character, and later changes into an authoritative figure (1991:205-11). Through this, Esther features as the most central and distinct character in the book. In contrast, there are only minor changes in Moses’ style of leadership. He maintains his unique dramatic and vigilant character throughout the narratives.

Another difference is noted when we look at the figures of Moses and Esther in terms of the memories of them as reflected in further Old Testament traditions. The substantial difference between Moses and Esther is that the memories of Moses are not encoded in only one book of the Old Testament, like Esther (Edelman, 2013:357). Memories of Moses emerge in many sections in both the Old and New Testaments.

Another contrasting factor of Esther to Moses is the view of Fox that the Esther narratives portray Esther as compliant and opportunistic (1991:206). Fox views her acceptance of whatever happens to her, influenced by her confidence in her beauty and artificial luxuries in spite of her foreign identity, as signs of being opportunistic. Making her way through and persuading the king to make her queen are parts of her tactics. In this understanding, Anderson describes Esther as selfish (1950:39). He adds that Esther’s winning as queen while she was a slave, her effort to demote Haman, and her greater political influence and control in the Empire in the later years are some of her selfish activities. This idea is supported by Fuchs (1982:153) who describes Esther as manipulative. However, such descriptions have been strongly refuted

by scholars like Day (1995:12), who view Esther from a feminist perspective.³⁹ Moses, on the other hand, seems uncompromising toward situations throughout the narratives.

Section 4.2 offered a comparison of the figures of Moses and Esther based on their roles and characterization in the respective narratives. The thematic comparison (4.2.1) compared the two figures in general, based on their roles as deliverers. In the actantial comparison of Moses and Esther (Section 4.2.2) it was shown that Esther was modelled after Moses. Additional to the similarities between Moses and Esther, this study also described the discontinuities between them (4.2.3), which result from the different narrative contexts within which these two figures are presented. The comparative sections form the basis for the further argument that the Esther narrative was a reinterpretation of the Moses narrative, but prompted by another socio-historical context of origin.

4.2.4 A Comparison of the “darker sides” of the Characters of Moses and Esther

It is interesting to note that both characters of Moses and Esther are not only fashioned in a positive way, but also have some darker sides of their characterization. For instance, both characters are involved in some sort of killing. Moses is described as a murderer in Exodus 2:1, as noted earlier (section 3.2), and in 2:17 he is portrayed as a rescuer of Jethro’s daughter by violence where two instances function in contrast to one another within the single narrative. Similarly, Esther was discussed in section 2.2.2.3 initiating deliverance through slaughtering and destroying their enemies as it pleased them in Esther chapter 9. Worse even, Esther further uses this violence to ask the king to extend the killing for another day (Esth 9:13-16).

Both Esther and Moses have another weakness that relates to the “purity” of their Hebrew/Jewish identity, namely the fact that they are both portrayed as *getting married to foreigners*, which would be problematic in some parts of the Hebrew/Jewish tradition and difficult to accept and admit. Despite Esther’s status as a Jewish slave, she wins the position of queen over Persian beauties, by using her beauty and sexual powers to reach her goals. This fact is heavily criticised by some feminist scholars. Some commentators like B.W. Anderson (1982:153) have described this as selfish activity on her part as discussed in section 2.2.2.3 of this study. Similarly, Moses was married to Zipporah, a daughter of a Midian priest. In section 3.2 of this study, Moses is described as a ‘man of defects’, and isolated from usual religious

³⁹ See also Chandler (1974), Darr (1991), Talmon (1986), and White (1989) who view Esther from a feminist perspective.

life in terms of his marriage to an alien and his upbringing in Egypt. Both descriptions therefore criticize the rigid views on pure Hebrew/Jewish identity.

4.3 Dynamics of Reinterpretation

This section will focus on the comparison of Moses and Esther with a view that the earlier narratives (Moses) are reinterpreted in the later (Esther). Subsequently we investigate further how the two narratives influenced one another.

The diachronic relationship of the figures of Moses and Esther will help us to advance our understanding of the argument presented in this study to prove that the Esther narrative was a deliberate reinterpretation of the Moses narratives. To achieve this, three points are presented below: firstly, the different contexts of origin of Exodus and Esther (diachronical placing); secondly, deliverance figures in Old Testament traditions; and thirdly, how the new Jewish festival of Purim builds on the old festival of the Passover.

Firstly, the dating of the Moses and Esther narratives can help to determine the connection and influence between the two narratives. In Chapter 3 (section 3.3.2) we noted that the composition of the Book of Exodus was done from a collection of traditions from various periods in Israelite life (Dozeman, 2009:31; Propp, 1999:48; and Houtman 1993:4). Houtman (1993:1) summarizes that the narrator of Exodus used materials from various sources, differencing by nature and of different ages, with its finalization in the Persian period. We can conclude, therefore, that the Exodus narratives consist of different stories and layers of text which were finalised in the early Persian era. On the other hand, in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.3) of this study, we have seen that the date for the composition of the Book of Esther can be viewed in connection with the diaspora period. It was noted that the Book of Esther resembles other diaspora books such as Daniel (1-6), Judith and Tobit and that it contains a number of Persian laws. Fox, basing his argument on the Greek translation of the Book of Esther, dates the book in the Hellenistic period (1991:139). From this assumption we can conclude that narratives of Esther originated in the context of the late Persian or Hellenistic period.

Based on these observations, we note that the Esther narrative comes after the Moses narratives. Hence, the Moses narratives (early Persian period) could have exerted influence on the origin of the Esther narrative (late Persian or Hellenistic period). In this understanding, the Esther narrative seems to be filling in the Moses narratives with a new context.

Secondly, there are quite remarkable similarities in the deliverance roles and characterization of the two deliverer figures (Moses and Esther) in the Old Testament traditions. The comparative section above has revealed that the Esther story has many parallels to the Moses story in terms of characterization and in their roles as deliverers. These similarities portray Esther as a remarkable female deliverer and national leader in the late Persian era, equal to the portrayal of Moses in the early Persian period. Such similarities in models of leadership of Esther and Moses reveal in my view their connection in the respective contexts in which the two narratives were written. The diachronic perspective on the parallels described in the previous section (4.2) brings the insight that Esther is deliberately portrayed to append Moses' characterization of old. As a new figure in the deliverance tradition, Esther signifies a continuation and further development of this tradition. In this regard, the Esther tradition is a reinterpretation of the Moses traditions, hence convincing the reader that Esther is a new Moses.

Thirdly, it seems that the new Jewish festival of Purim which is closely linked to the Book of Esther, is portrayed as building on the old festival of the Jewish Passover. Just as Passover celebrated Israel's deliverance through the Exodus (Ex 12), Esther also proclaimed (Esth. 9) a festival celebrating the survival of the Jews after the failure of Haman's plot (Purim). There is a very important connection between the messages of these two festivals which have remained popular throughout Jewish tradition. Just as Moses instituted the celebration of the Passover in memory of the Exodus of the Hebrews as recorded in the early Persian era in the book of Exodus, a similar festival of liberation is repeated by Esther as recorded in the late Persian/Hellenistic era Book of Esther. In the Esther narratives, the sanctioning of Purim in written form (see Esth. 9:32) shows similarity to how the regulations for Passover were written down in the earlier traditions. Thus, the Purim festival seems to be reinterpreting the Passover festival.

From the three aspects discussed above, one may conclude that the Esther narrative is a reinterpretation of the Exodus narrative, and that the figure of Esther therefore stands parallel to that of Moses in terms of the deliverance motif.

4.4 Chapter summary

Chapter four presents the core section of our study, the comparative analysis of Moses and Esther, with the argument that the Esther narrative is actually a reinterpretation of the Moses narrative in the Old Testament tradition. In this chapter, I have drawn on the two discussions of Chapters Two and Three of this study (sections 2.2 and 3.2), i.e. the comparison between

Moses and Esther as deliverers, in order to argue that the second narrative (Esther) reinterprets the first (Exodus). The commonality between Moses and Esther, and their parallel portrayal, have been approached in an integral whole in order to show how they contribute to the central theme of deliverance within the Old Testament.

The broader comparison shows that both Moses and Esther were vulnerable individuals together with their fellow Hebrews/Jews, such that their tasks demanded a caretaker. Although both lived in stately comfort, a sense of civil disobedience runs through both cases. Interestingly, related to both characters, the symbol of the ‘the rod’, ‘the staff’ or ‘the scepter’, is central, thus indicating the control of power in both narratives. Both Moses’ and Esther’s respective marriages to foreigners lead scholars to describe them as religiously isolated, with defects, and even selfishness, in the case of Esther. Several further commonalities in character are discussed, such as that both are portrayed as national leaders, deliverers, authoritative characters and God’s human agents. The chapter has also indicated that there are some discontinuities between the figures of Moses and Esther as deliverers and their characterization, according to the different contexts within which the narratives are told.

The last section, dealing with the issue of reinterpretation, presents the main argument of this study and argues that the Esther narrative is a deliberately reinterpretation of the Moses narratives. The argument is advanced on account of the different contexts of origin of the two narrative (diachronic perspective), the parallels of Moses and Esther as deliverance figures in Old Testament tradition, and how the new Jewish festival of Purim builds on the old festival of the Passover. These points present remarkable explanations for the development of the narratives. This study therefore argues that Esther, a female deliverer, is remarkably portrayed as a new Moses and the narratives of Moses are reinterpreted in the Esther narratives.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Guidelines for Discussion on African Leadership

In this last chapter I will draw the study to a close by summarizing the conclusions, and formulating some guidelines which arise as potential contributions in a discourse on African leadership models.

5.1 Study Summary

A comparative study of the figures of Esther (in the Book of Esther) and of Moses (in Exodus) reveals that the woman Esther becomes a remarkable deliverer like Moses in the Old Testament deliverance motif, to the extent that the portrayal of Esther as a female deliverer seems to be reinterpreting the Moses narratives. The study reveals that Esther is not viewed by scholars as an isolated case, but she is put in the same category of other Old Testament figures like Ruth. Unsurprisingly, Esther is involved in the deliverance of the Jews in the Persian era after the plot by Haman. In general terms, deliverance in this study should be understood as an ongoing motif which guides the history of Israel. Thus the Book of Esther should not be read as isolated narrative, but as part of a continuous theme, originating from the Egyptian Exodus, throughout the Old Testament traditions. From the discussion in this study, we observe that female figures like Esther are not ignored in the deliverance of God's people in Old Testament traditions.

The thematic comparison of the figures of Esther and Moses in this study has revealed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three that - based on the origin of the narrative contexts and their characterizations - both Moses and Esther are portrayed as great deliverers in the Old Testament tradition. Apart from the literary analysis done as a point of departure, the comparative analysis presented in Chapter Four formed the main focus of this study. In this regard, the figures of Moses and Esther have been modelled analogically and actantially within a larger context of other related figures in the Old Testament. The analogical and actantial approaches in the two narratives revealed some connections between the figures of Moses and Esther as deliverers in the Old Testament deliverance tradition. This investigation revealed that a female figure played a unique role and had not been ignored in the biblical narratives about God's deliverance. Within this context, it was suggested in this study that Esther may be regarded as a new Moses in the Old Testament deliverance narratives.

In conclusion this study will investigate the implications that the Old Testament narratives of Moses and Esther hold for the modern-day context by applying the models of Moses and Esther to modern-day ethical problems of African leadership. The investigated dynamics of Old Testament reflections will be taken as guidelines for responsible leadership. We see in this study that most Old Testament themes, such as social justice, deliverance, freedom and others provide useful ethical insights for the modern context. In this regard, the Moses and Esther narratives show an ethical link to the societies they served, and these models can help to nurture ethical frameworks for leadership in the African context. Thus, the conclusion will aim to

investigate whether biblical models of leadership and deliverance can offer anything to the discourse on African leadership.

5.2 Old Testament narratives, ethics, and modern-day ethical problems

How do we apply the example of biblical models to modern-day ethical problems such as leadership in society? Interpreters of the Old Testament should be wary of direct application of biblical models, as if those texts were written for today, and ignore that the socio-cultural contexts of the biblical world and the modern world differ remarkably. Such a direct application would lead to unjustified interpretations of the biblical texts and to typologies that will not do justice to the hermeneutical complexity involved in this exercise. However, this does not imply that Old Testament texts, narratives in particular, do not hold any implications for modern-day ethical problems. Faith communities confess that the Bible is the “Word of God” that also speaks loudly for today. In order to reach conclusions on what the Old Testament narratives have to say to modern-day contexts, the Old Testament interpreter should first attend to the subfield of Old Testament ethics. This subfield investigates the dynamics of using the Old Testament for ethical reflection, and formulating guidelines according to which this can be done responsibly.

Considering the fact that discussions on biblical characters are concerned with social aspects (Wright 2004:11), it is strongly suggested that the discussions on Moses and Esther in this study can and should form part of Old Testament ethical reflection, to understand how the comparison of Moses and Esther can be interpreted in the context of modern day ethical problems on African leadership.

The ethical dimensions of the Old Testament narratives have been discussed by some reputable scholars; various approaches are suggested in such discussions, such as theological, social, economical, political, cultural and legal among others. We limit our discussion to some views suggested by prominent scholars, since this is not the place to present fully-fledged technical and philosophical discussions on Old Testament ethical approaches.

John Barton has made a significant contribution to studies of Old Testament ethics. He says that traditionally legal approaches have been followed in Old Testament ethics which are based on the Old Testament laws, with special reference to the Ten Commandments. Such an approach states that these laws addressed the social and theological-ethical problems within Israel’s society in a particular period of history. Barton argues, however, that modern ethical understanding can make progress in the discipline of Old Testament if we broaden our scope

to include sociological and historical viewpoints. He suggests that concentration on the legal material of the Old Testament (with the Ten Commandments as a general principle) does not do full justice to the richness of what the Old Testament can offer for ethical reflection (1998:20). Barton indicates that the Old Testament incorporates “natural law” which stems from general human awareness of right and wrong and from a moral sense based on the realities of how the world works. He states that this natural law has ethical value specifically because it is grounded in the direct commandment of Yahweh, to which obedience was the only proper response.

Barton therefore indicates that fundamentally, ethos consists of obedience to the divine will of God, conformity to the pattern of natural law, and imitation of God. Barton further argues that moral life is fed by reflections on the way narrators capture the essence of human stories. Because of our common humanity with the biblical people, Old Testament narratives help modern people to share the beliefs and values of biblical communities (1998:36). Most of the ethical issues discussed today proceed from general principles reflected in the Old Testament and which are applied to certain individuals and communities today. Even biblical narratives about immoral conduct, injustice, and corruption also illuminate our own lives as they still occur today (Barton 1998:8). This point is very important as stories that feed our moral life provide us with visions of how real human beings can live through various crises and trials while remaining human.

Walter Brueggemann, another remarkable scholar who reflects on the ethical value of the Old Testament, tries to see how the great themes of biblical theology address modern issues. In the narratives of Israel, he finds the messages of the prophets mentioning their passion for justice in the land, which powerfully exposes and affects the dynamics of human relationships in Israel’s society. I am aware that Brueggemann has never produced a book directly on the subject of Old Testament ethics, but his insights in many of his works helpfully bear indirectly on the subfield of Old Testament social ethics. His book on “Theology of the Old Testament, Testimony, Disputes, Advocacy” (1997), though focusing on theologically-interpretative issues in context in a distinctive way, delivers many ethical insights and implications. Brueggemann points out that the prophets were advocates of Yahwistic ethics along with the Deuteronomists and practitioners of a Yahwistic eschatology. He argues that the term ‘ethics’ in Old Testament perspective as a formal category is alien to Israel’s way of life (1997:644). He suggests that Old Testament ethics rather formulates a focus for the practice of justice in everyday life and the shaping of Israel’s faith in Yahweh. Brueggemann further argues that

Christians need to imitate the plurality and diversity of the Old Testament's testimonies about God. These testimonies present alternative accounts of reality for ancient believers to imitate, but also to modern believers. Identification with these testimonies can therefore be recognised from one context to another. Wright (2004:416) comments that most of Brueggemann's work deals indirectly with Old Testament ethics, resulting in a fruitful and suggestive variety of ethical directives.

Bruce C. Birch also takes a positive line in assessing the value of the Old Testament for ethical reflection in his work "Old Testament Narratives and Moral Address" (1988). His main emphasis is on how the power of biblical narratives can help to shape Christian moral identity and character. He states that the Old Testament narratives have moral power in that they expose reality and transform worldviews (1988:75-91). This moral power can in turn challenge the reader to respond in a particular way, depending on the particular context. In this regard, Birch views the Old Testament narratives as a moral resource for Christian decision-making and for the church's moral response to the world. In his work, *"Let Justice Roll Down"* (1991) Birch claims that Old Testament ethics is a resource for providing and shaping Christian ethical behaviour and choices. Therefore, Old Testament ethics offers possibilities for the ethical task of facing society in the modern world.

Christopher Wright emphasises that the ethical thrust of the Old Testament is primarily social, rather than individual. Old Testament ethics is based on the Old Testament which is the story of a people (a whole society) in which individuals are part of the wider community (2004:11). This implies that one should not in the first place be looking for individual ethical guidelines from the Old Testament, but should rather focus on the ethical implications for modern-day societies. He states further that the Old Testament cannot be understood as a matter of timeless and universal abstract principles, but should be interpreted within the historical and cultural particularity of specific people. Wright explains that the past therefore has a valid influence on the present through ethical reflection (2004:13). Seen from this perspective, the stories in the Old Testament can bring meaningful light into our modern ethical reflection.

With the above studies in mind, we may confidently state that Old Testament ethics, when properly understood and applied, has vital relevance for our present ethical concerns. From this discussion, on the why and how of the Old Testament ethics, we see that most themes, such as social justice, deliverance, freedom and others, provide useful ethical insights to the modern context. As these themes shaped Israelites' life ethically, they can help to shape the modern

context's identity and character too. As will be discussed in the next section, our conclusion will show that biblical narratives have moral power to challenge the modern context morally, as a resource for Christian decision-making.

5.3 Brief Overview of Leadership problems in Southern Africa

The situation of African leadership, and the role that African leaders play in present-day societies, brought the researcher to asking the question: "Can biblical models of leadership and deliverance offer anything to the discourse on African leadership?" In this section, I will not generalize in terms of African leadership, and I am aware of the fact that my own discipline of study is Old Testament and not Leadership studies in general, but I assume that the investigated biblical models of leadership in this study may serve as potential analogies which can serve the discourse on African leadership. Since the Esther and Moses characters discussed in this study show an ethical link to the societies they served, these models of Old Testament ethics can help us to nurture an ethical framework for leadership in the African context.

Scholars and reporters have highlighted the question of political leadership problems in Africa, which often result in political instability in African countries. Peterson even describes the present period as a 'diaspora for Africans', seeking transformative leadership to realise socio-political freedom (2007:7). Though this study is not aimed at providing a political view of African leadership, we would like to investigate the ethical thrust of the discussed biblical narratives (of Moses and Esther) and how they can address the problems of African leadership in the light of the ethical frameworks suggested by Barton, Brueggemann and Wright. Two leadership problems will form a central backdrop to our discussion in this section, viz. the problem of corruption and the challenges faced with women leadership in some countries in the southern Africa.

It is true that corruption is a serious feature of most southern African social, political and even religious life with disastrous consequences. Corruption has impeded economic development and has also increased poverty by making a few individuals richer and many poorer. Corruption increases social evils in the community, encourages lack of transparency of those in authority and leads to ignorance of the legal requirements and make it difficult to obtain justice (Kunhiyop, 2008:167).

For example, a report by the Public Protector in South Africa, Adv. Thuli Madonsela (2014) reveals massive looting of public funds by the state leadership while the post-Apartheid

government has failed to address the big margin of economic inequality in the country. According to Khoza, this is “a failure [rather] than triumph in leadership” (2011:vii).

Another example is Malawi. In 2010 the Commonwealth summit reported on a comparative analysis of Malawian politics, and revealed that autocracy and massive corruption are some of the main problems found in Malawian leadership. These findings are also corroborated by reports from local clergy (see 1.1). The first two decades of democracy in Malawi (1994-2014) were characterised by massive corruption and poor governance, resulting in the country’s acute economic challenges. Before 2012, Malawi suffered aid withdrawal following president Bingu wa Mutharika’s poor governance, autocracy and poor human rights. In 2013, after six months of Joyce Banda in office, about \$13 million went missing from the government coffers. She took a bold decision to fight corruption and bring about economic restoration and international donor relations frayed by her predecessor. Addressing a press conference she said “enough is enough”(The Guardian Mail, 18 May 2014, “Malawi’s Banda calls ‘Cashgate’ her election triumph”). With a short time to elections, the approach taken by Joyce Banda to fight corruption was critical and risky as those involved fought back and tried to bring her down. She called this her ‘greatest achievement’ as the practice had been in the system years before she came into office. The cashgate revelation was a ‘breakthrough’ in the president’s fight against corruption.

Interestingly, the Commonwealth report of 2010 states that biblical models of leadership may help to nurture transformative leadership roles in African contexts which can promote citizen empowerment and state responsiveness (Vondopepp, 2010:21). Apart from criticism on their fateful leadership style, leaders must also be held accountable and responsible in managing resources available. For most African leaders the tendency toward corruption is a failure to manage government resources responsibly. Good leadership takes into consideration the lives of the poor masses, and tries to address them.

The second leadership problem in some southern African countries is the challenges of accepting female leadership. It is hard to deny the fact that some patriarchal African states fail to recognise and appreciate the potential of female leaders. This tendency hampers some potential women leaders in their ability to serve their people effectively. The other challenge to female leadership is the failure of African addressing the freedom of women. In Zimbabwe, for example, Joice Mujuru, served in government throughout Zimbabwe’s 34 years of independence and as vice president seemed likely to succeed Robert Mugabe, the oldest sitting

president in the world. However, she could not find enough male support to do so. Failure to recognise potential in women is also evident in the Namibian (SWAPO) government's problems to implement a fifty-fifty campaign to address the gender gap. In Malawi female leadership between 2012 and 2014 was faced with gender-related challenges besides the pressure from international donors due to corruption scandals. Some individuals were not comfortable with being led by a woman, basing their arguments on both political and religious reasons. Joyce Banda's losing of the presidential elections of 2014 was probably due to her status as a woman candidate.

5.4 Guidelines for Effective African leadership

Going through the Book of Esther, Megillat Esther, which means "the scroll of Esther", one may find a number of concealed lessons. According to Sher (2009:10), its models and contents may potentially contribute to sound African leadership. A summary of some guidelines to good and effective leadership are presented below.

Moses, who is usually regarded as the greatest of biblical leaders, acknowledged as a servant of God, teaches African leadership the concept of servant-leadership. Moses is an example of a true leader, a servant-leader, who cared more for the people than for himself (Friedman, 2012:2). Moses had clean hands and in a large context (Num. 16:15) was able to say: "I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them" (NKJV). How many African political leaders can make this claim today? Servant leaders are humble and do not use their positions to amass personal wealth, fame, power nor glory. A servant leader is not obsessed with honour and glory like Haman, in his response to what should be done to the man the king desired to honour. Similarly, Mordecai is teaching Esther the most interesting lesson in leadership: a leader has to be willing to risk his/her life for the people. Esther accepts to go to the king though it is against the law, saying "... if I perish, I perish" (4:16). A wise leader plans skilfully in order to be successful like Esther in her deliverance plan. Esther's plan is to get Ahasuerus jealous to engage him without difficulty for an important task.

Effective and successful leadership requires recognising the potential God vested in other people. Good leadership appreciates this potential like Mordecai, who recognises that at that particular moment, Esther was strategically positioned by God for such deliverance, "yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esth. 4:14). Most African leadership is characterized by pulling down figures who have potential and are capable, particularly if they are females. Good leadership should be able to "see like Mordecai" (5.2), who acknowledged the leadership of a female, Esther. Vondopepp is correct in his

Commonwealth report in which he states that biblical models of leadership may help to nurture transformative leadership roles in African contexts, which can promote citizen empowerment and state responsiveness (2010:21). In my view, the Book of Esther provides essential leadership models and lessons to effective leadership in African contexts.

However, the studies on the darker sides of the characters of Moses and Esther (sections 2.2.2.3 and 4.2.4) also contain some warnings for the moral reflection on effective African leadership. Those deliverer figures may also be prone to misusing their power and influential positions to perpetrate violence and eradication of oppositional forces. The book of Esther, as reinterpretation of the Moses narrative, is therefore not only a model of good leadership, but simultaneously a warning against the misuse of power in leadership contexts.

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