

WOMEN IN THE
BIBLE
RUTH &
ESTHER

HEROIC WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

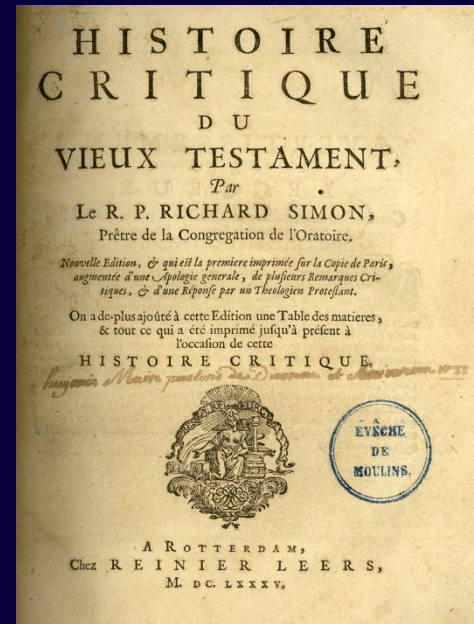
Ruth & Esther



- In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent (1545-63) unleashed a Catholic Counter-Reformation that directly attacked *Sola Scriptura*. One attack was the advent of Bible criticism, which continues to this day.

- Scholarly study of the Bible was overwhelmingly concerned with the validity of Scripture:-

- Early academic critics questioned whether Bible events like Noah's Flood actually occurred.
- Later scholars cast doubts on book authorship and dating based upon the grammar used, etc.
- A current approach is concerned with dating the biblical texts themselves and placing them in a social, cultural and historical context, rather than in the *mythical* content itself.



“Critical History of the OT”
by Fr. Richard Simon, 1685.

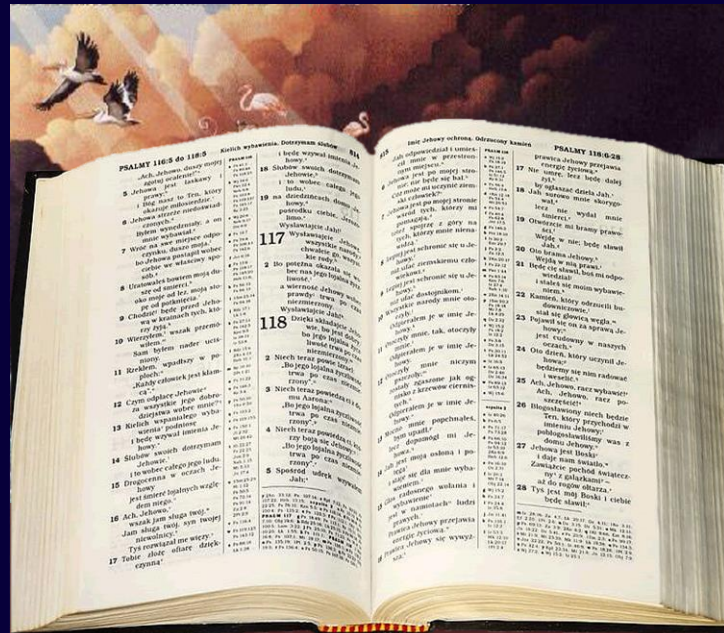
- In the last few decades another academic method has arisen, a genuine appreciation of the bible's literary art, regardless of its historical veracity or religious value. This isn't to say that one can't be interested in all three realms: religion, history, and literature.
- It's now again becoming acceptable in some circles to simply appreciate the Bible as literature, focused on two traditional literary genres found throughout the Old Testament, namely narrative and poetry, with traces of a third genre, drama.



- Narrative trades in stories, with characters and events presented by an narrator, usually in the form of a plot with conflict or tension that builds and is resolved. Narrative can take the form of either prose or poetry.
- And here we meet a problem, because as with prophecy, the eastern view of poetry contrast sharply with the western view.
- From the **Western point of view**, most poetry in the Bible is essentially non-narrative and tends to fall in the category of lyric poetry, short poems, generally spoken in the first person, which tend to focus on the inner life of the speaker as opposed to presenting a plot with characters or action.



- But its easy to completely miss that most Bible books are poetic in the **Eastern sense**, not with meter, rhyme or rhythm, but with parallelism of thought.
- Thus English translations of Ruth and Esther can be read and appreciated by Westerners as narrative prose while a Jew may find their overall structure both poetic and deeply edifying.
- Even so, about a third of the English Old Testament is lineated, that is, set off in lines that stop before the right margin (the most basic definition of poetry), verse as opposed to prose. This gives rise to the white space in the biblical text.
- Let's briefly look at Western and Eastern poetry.



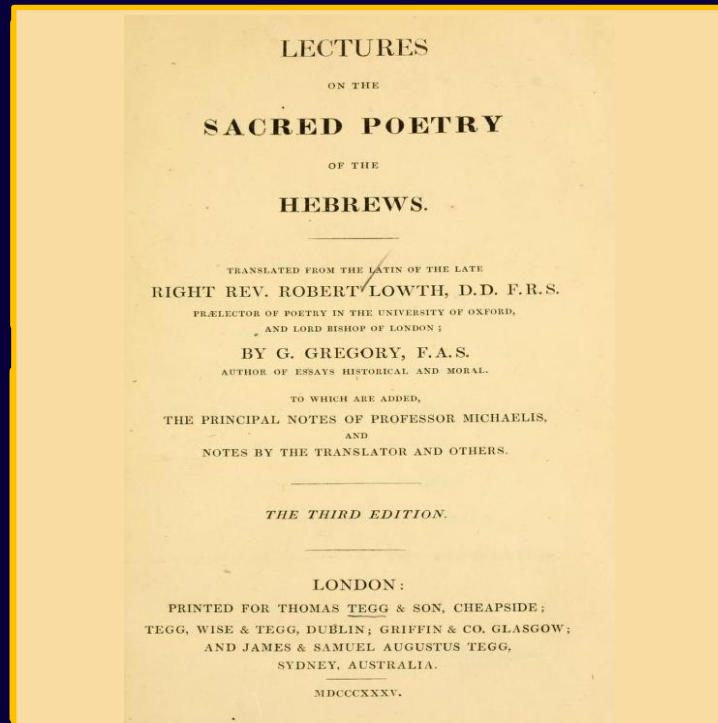


Rome and Juliet

Prologue to Act II

Now old desire doth in his death-bed lie,
And young affection gapes to be his heir;
That fair for which love groan'd for and would die,
With tender Juliet match'd, is now not fair.
Now Romeo is beloved and loves again,
Alike betwitchèd by the charm of looks,
But to his foe supposed he must complain,
And she steal love's sweet bait from fearful hooks:
Being held a foe, he may not have access
To breathe such vows as lovers use to swear;
And she as much in love, her means much less
To meet her new-beloved any where:
But passion lends them power, time means to meet
Tempering extremities with extreme sweet.

- But in ancient Hebrew poetry neither metre nor rhyme are determining factors in the poetic line. For most western critics, the basic principles of ancient Hebrew poetry go largely unrecognised or at least uncommented upon.
- In 1815, the Lord Bishop of London Richard Lowth published a book entitled “Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews” which “rediscovered” that the central feature of Hebrew poetry is “parallelism.” Parallelism is the balancing of thoughts in successive lines of poetry. The words don’t rhyme, the thoughts do.



- Many simplistically twisted this to suggest that ancient authors were obliged to write every line twice, using different words. But Hebrew poetry is far more sophisticated than that. They used many different techniques to convey the parallel concepts at varying levels throughout their elegantly structured works.
- Both Ruth and Esther show parallelism of thought throughout their entire structure. And their overall structures both display chiasmic parallelism, whereby a series of thoughts builds up logically and then inverts and the thoughts run down in reverse order.

We have escaped like a bird,
Out of the fowler's snare;
The snare has been broken,
And we have escaped.
(Psalm 124:7)

Chiasmic parallelism

This pattern is termed abb'a',
Where 1 is the first thought
and b the second.

Literary structure of Ruth 1

A

The genealogy of Elimelech (1:1-5): "Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his sons Mahlon and Chilion; Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah" travel to Moab.

B

Naomi loses her heirs (1:6-22): "Go back, my daughters! Have I other sons in my womb who may become your husbands?"

C

Ruth negotiates (2:1-23): "I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your cloak over me, for you are my next of kin."

D

- A. Genealogy
- B. Naomi's heirs
- C. Ruth and Boaz
- D. Ruth accepted in

Boaz accepts kinship responsibility for Ruth (3:1-18).
So be assured, daughter, I will do for you whatever you say.

C'

Boaz negotiates (4:1-10): "I take Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, as my wife, to raise up a family for her late husband on his estate."

B'

Naomi gains an heir (4:11-17): "And the neighbor women gave him his name, at the news that a grandson had been born to Naomi."

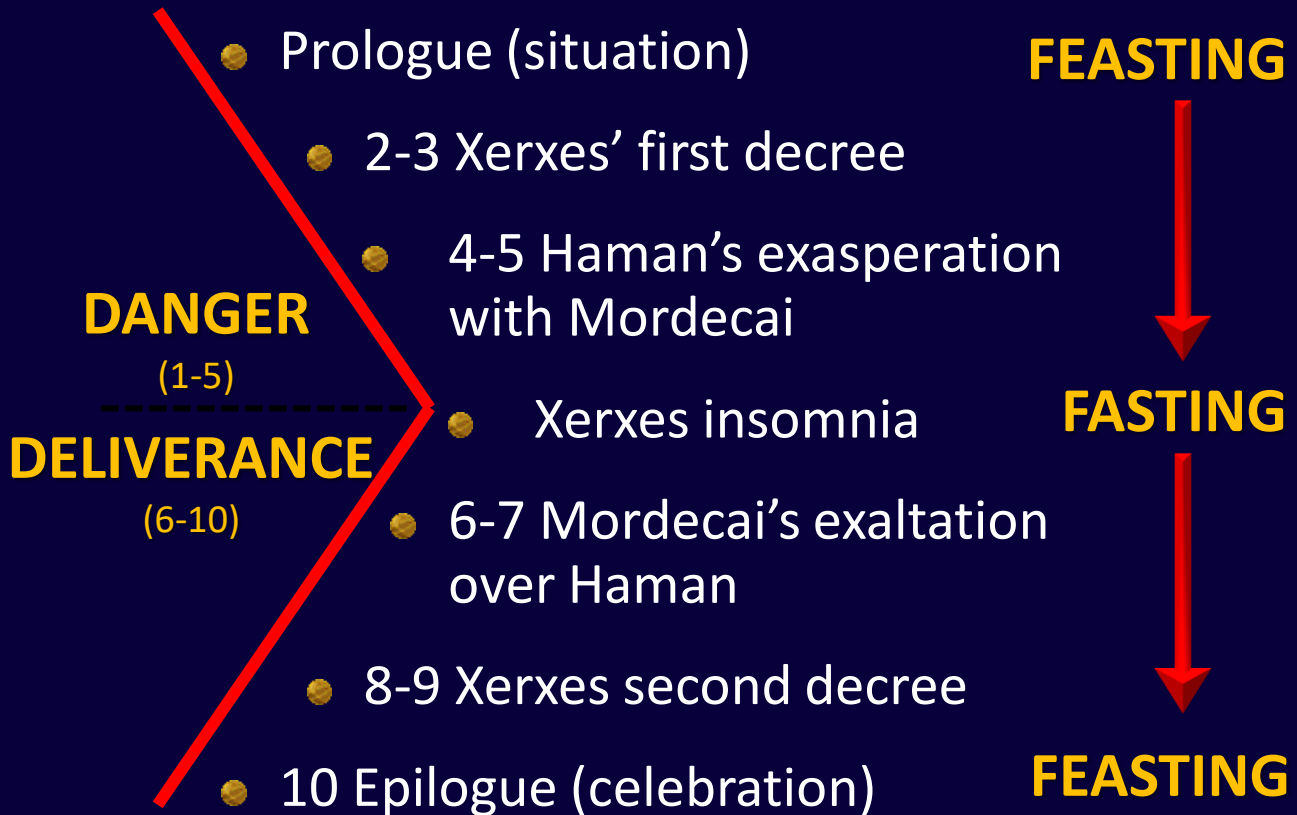
A'

The genealogy of David (4:18-22): "These are the descendants of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron...."

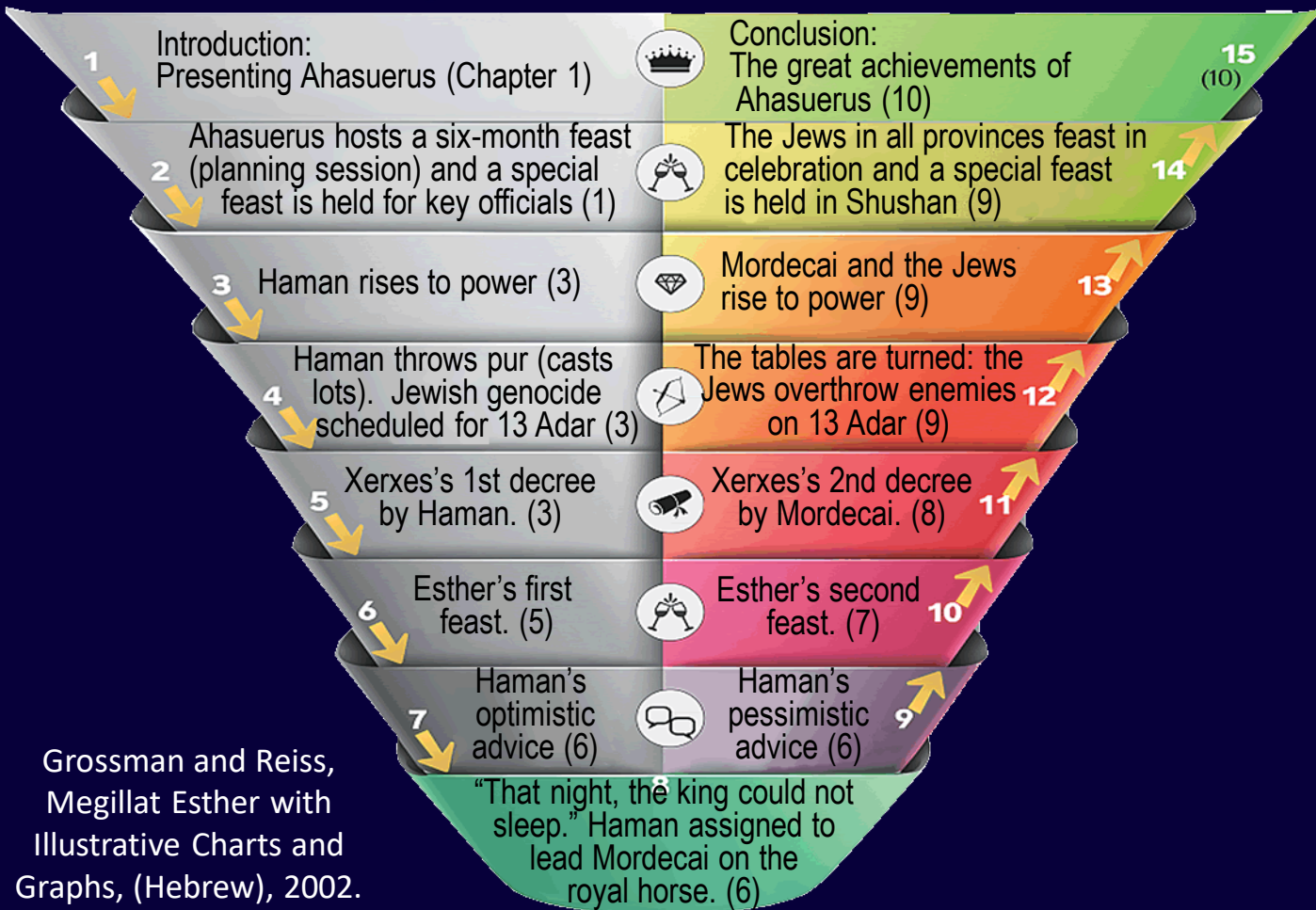
Literary structure of Ruth II

- A Naomi is too old to conceive [Ch. 1]
- B The possible Redeemer is introduced [2:1]
- C Ruth and Naomi's plan begins [2:2]
- D Ruth and Boaz's field [2:3]
- E Boaz comes from Bethlehem [2:4]
- F Boaz asks, "Who is that young woman?" [2: 5- 7]
- G Boaz gives Ruth food; Ruth gives Naomi barley [2: 8- 18]
- H Naomi blesses Boaz [2:19]
- I Boaz is the one in a position to redeem [2:20]
- J Ruth joins Boaz's workers [2:21-23]
- K Naomi and Ruth's plan to obtain rest [3:1-8]
- J' Ruth requests Boaz's protection [3:9]
- I' Ruth asks Boaz to act as Redeemer [3:9]
- H' Boaz blesses Ruth [3:10]
- G' Boaz promises to marry Ruth; gives Naomi barley [3:11-16]
- F' Naomi asks, "Who are you?" [3:16-18]
- E' Boaz goes to Bethlehem [4:1]
- D' Ruth and a field [4:2-12]
- C' Ruth and Naomi's plan ends [4:3]
- B' The Redeemer redeems [4:14-16]
- A' Naomi receives a son [4: 17]

Literary structure of Esther I



Literary Structure of the Esther II



Grossman and Reiss,
Megillat Esther with
Illustrative Charts and
Graphs, (Hebrew), 2002.

So what is poetry, anyway?

- The English term “poetry” goes back to ποίημα, which means to make or to create. So literature is something crafted, something constructed, the product of deliberate and sustained fashioning.
- What does this mean in terms of reading the Bible as literature?
 - Are we willing to find an imaginatively created world, a linguistically created world, and allow oneself to be absorbed into that world as we read?
 - Are we willing to be transported, rather than persuaded (which is the academic quest in pure theology)?”
 - How far does what we read resonate with our own experience as if the words come from within rather than from without?
- Thus far in this course what we've done is read the books analytically for insights and details.

“Literature was not born the day when the boy crying ‘Wolf, Wolf’ came running out of the Neanderthal Valley with a big grey Wolf at his heels: literature was born on the day when a boy came crying ‘Wolf, Wolf’ and there was no Wolf behind him.”

Vladimir Nobokov

- Literature is not about communicating info.
- It exploits our ability to use language beyond that.



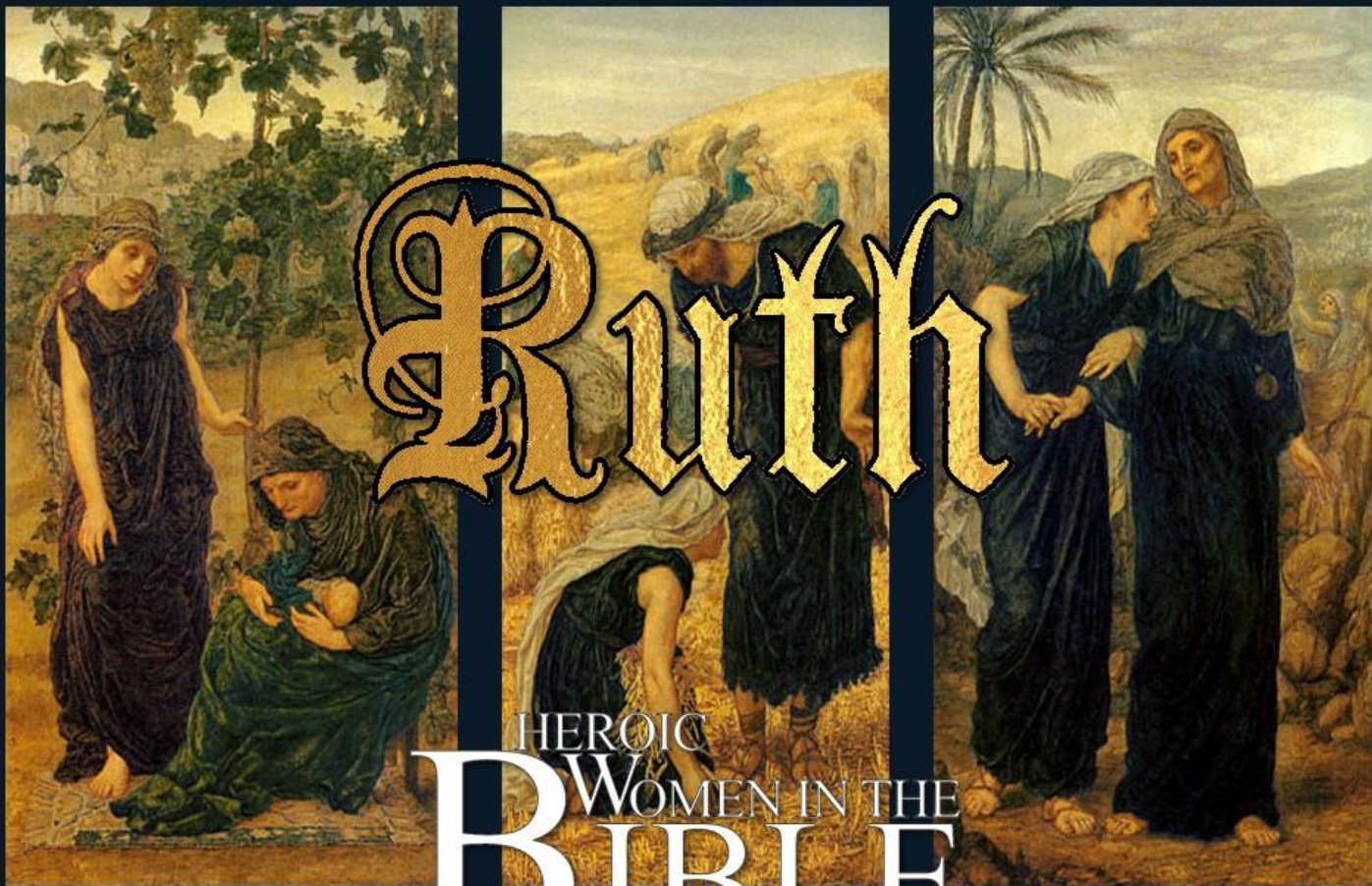
The Boy Who Cried Wolf by Paperlait, 2010.

- If we read Ruth and Esther solely for theology or ethics or history, once we take in the information we need, there's no need to go back to them.
- But to read them as literature is to pay attention to those qualities that do more than communicate information, those qualities of linguistic imagining that may startle or comfort, or perhaps just ask us to enjoy the play of language itself, because we can.
- And rather than simply giving us some high moral understanding to take away from the Bible, we may be drawn back to it again and again. After all, common sense stories and poems tend to withhold some of their favours for repeated visits.
- If the ancient authors had only wanted to tell readers about God or ethics or history, they didn't have to write stories and poems, and they didn't have to craft them into genuine literary art.
- But this is what they did - not always, but often enough - and the books of Ruth and Esther are both prime examples.



So let's read these two books for the sheer enjoyment that they bring as exciting adventures in places far, far away and in times in the distant past.





Ruth

HEROIC
WOMEN IN THE
BIBLE



Esther

HEROIC
WOMEN IN THE
BIBLE

Both are central to a major feast



Both are about people



Contrasts



Ruth was a pagan
Gentile woman who
married a Jew.

Esther was a Jewish
girl who married a
pagan Gentile king.



Contrasts

Ruth was a destitute widow.

Esther was an orphan.



Contrasts

Ruth was a migrant
to Israel.

Esther was an exile
from Israel.



Contrasts

Ruth was a Gentile
living among Jews.

Esther was a Jew
living among Gentiles.



Contrasts

Ruth was aided by her
mother-in-law.

Esther was aided by her
Uncle/cousin.



Contrasts

Ruth gleaned
in a field.

Esther ruled
in a palace.



Contrasts

Ruth was poor.

Esther was rich.



Contrasts

Ruth was a proselyte.

Esther influenced
many proselytes.



Contrasts

Ruth became great-grandmother to a king and an ancestor of the king of kings.

Esther was descended from one king and married to a king of kings.



Contrasts



Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David.

Esther was deliverer of King David's descendants.



Contrasts

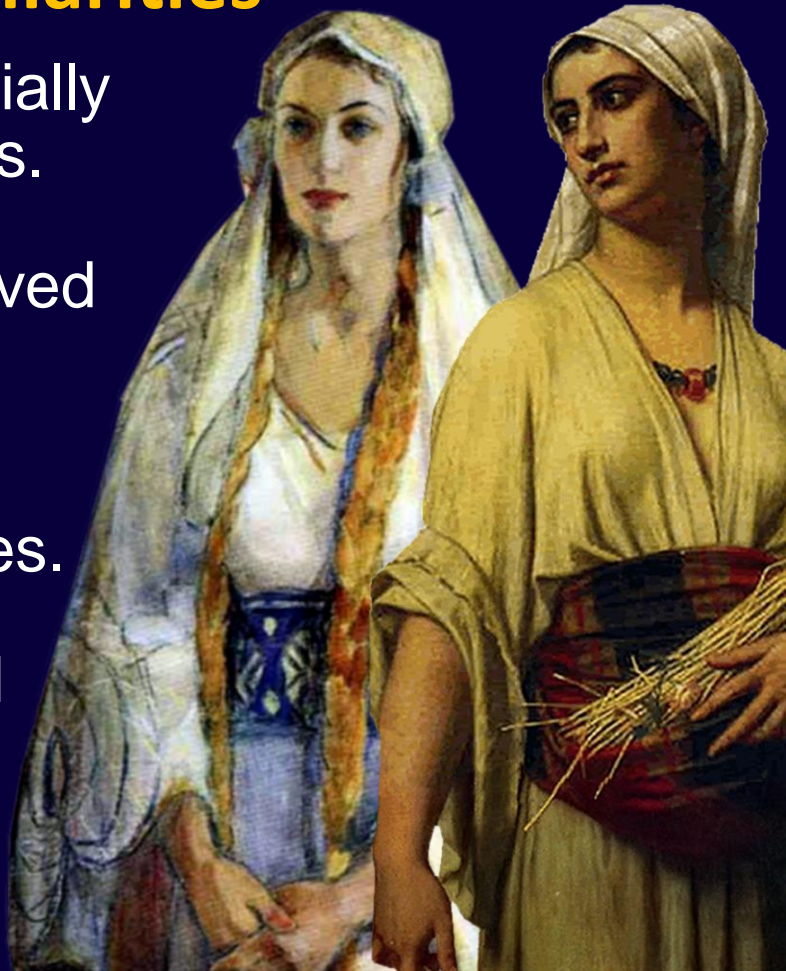
Ruth gave life.

Esther ordered death.



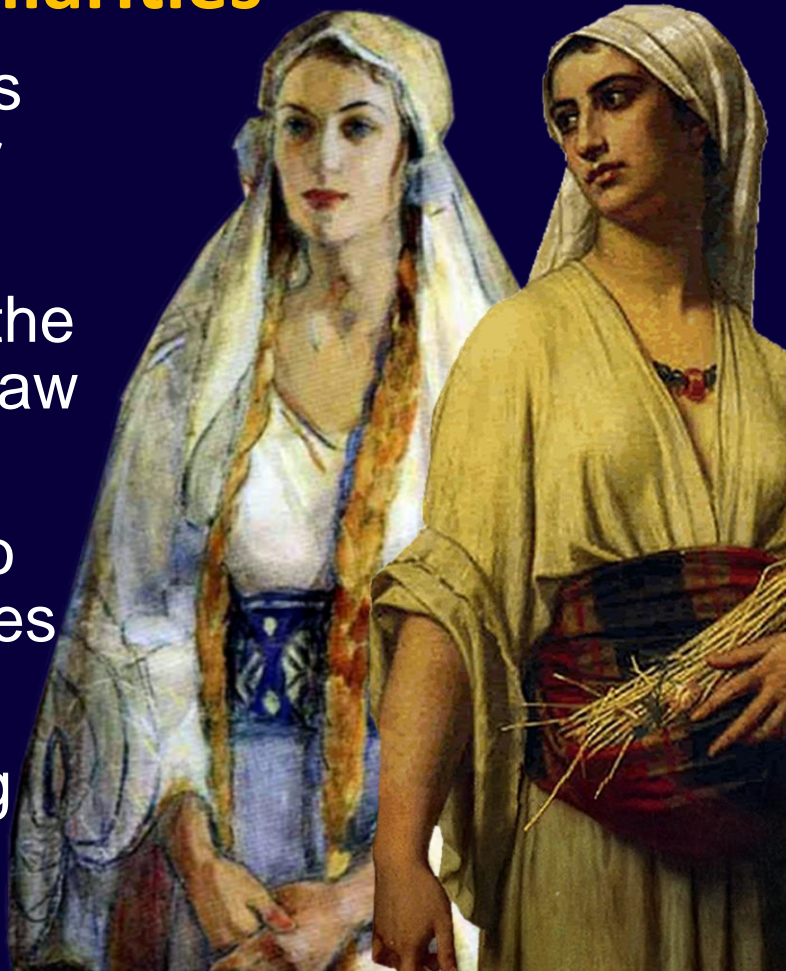
Similarities

- Both were providentially led to their husbands.
- Both were deeply loved by their husbands.
- Both were very compassionate ladies.
- Both were rewarded for their faith.



Similarities

- Both were foreigners living in a land other than their own.
- Both found favor in the eyes of those who saw them.
- Both were taken into the homes of relatives
- Both had relatives who were a blessing others.



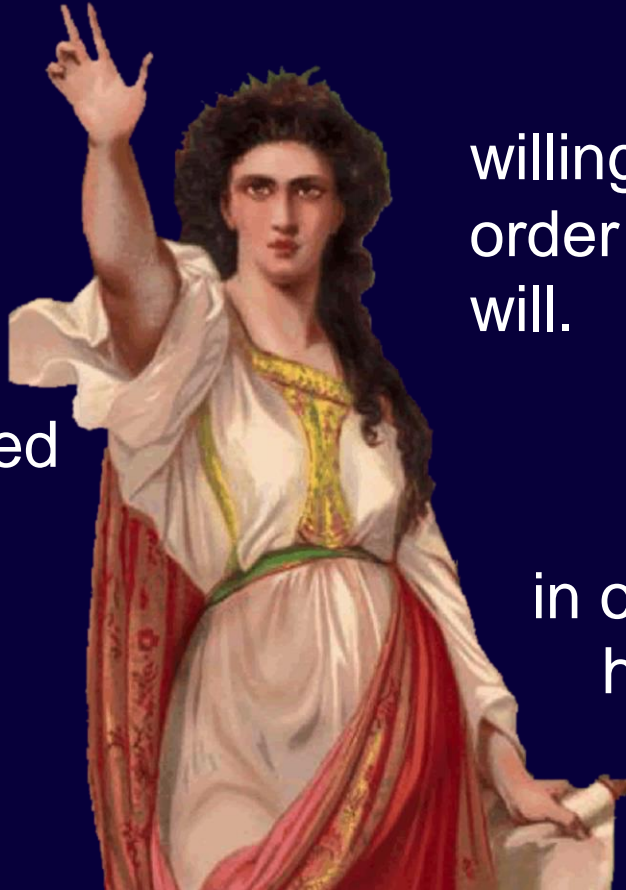
Both were women of integrity

Both were
submissive

Each dressed
in special
garments

willing to die in
order to do God's
will.

in order to make
her request.



Both brought joy to Humankind

God redeemed Ruth to
perpetuate the line of the
Redeemer, the Lord
Jesus Christ.

God saved Esther to
protect the nation
and the People
through whom
the Saviour
would be born.



HAPPY PURIM



CHAG
PURIM
SAMACH

"Happy Purim" by Shapiro.

Shapiro

The short version of Purim.

THEY TRIED TO KILL US.

WE



WON.

LET'S EAT!

Four Mitzvot of Purim

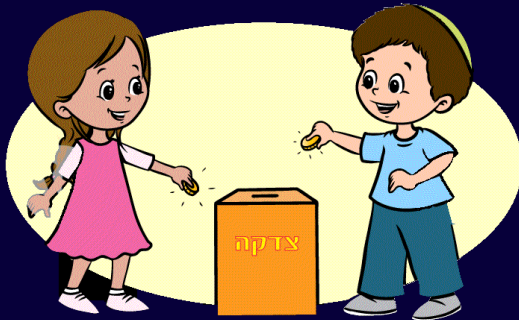
- Reading the Megillah, (the Book of Esther).



- Sending mishloach manot (gift baskets).



- Matanot La'evyonim, (giving to the poor).

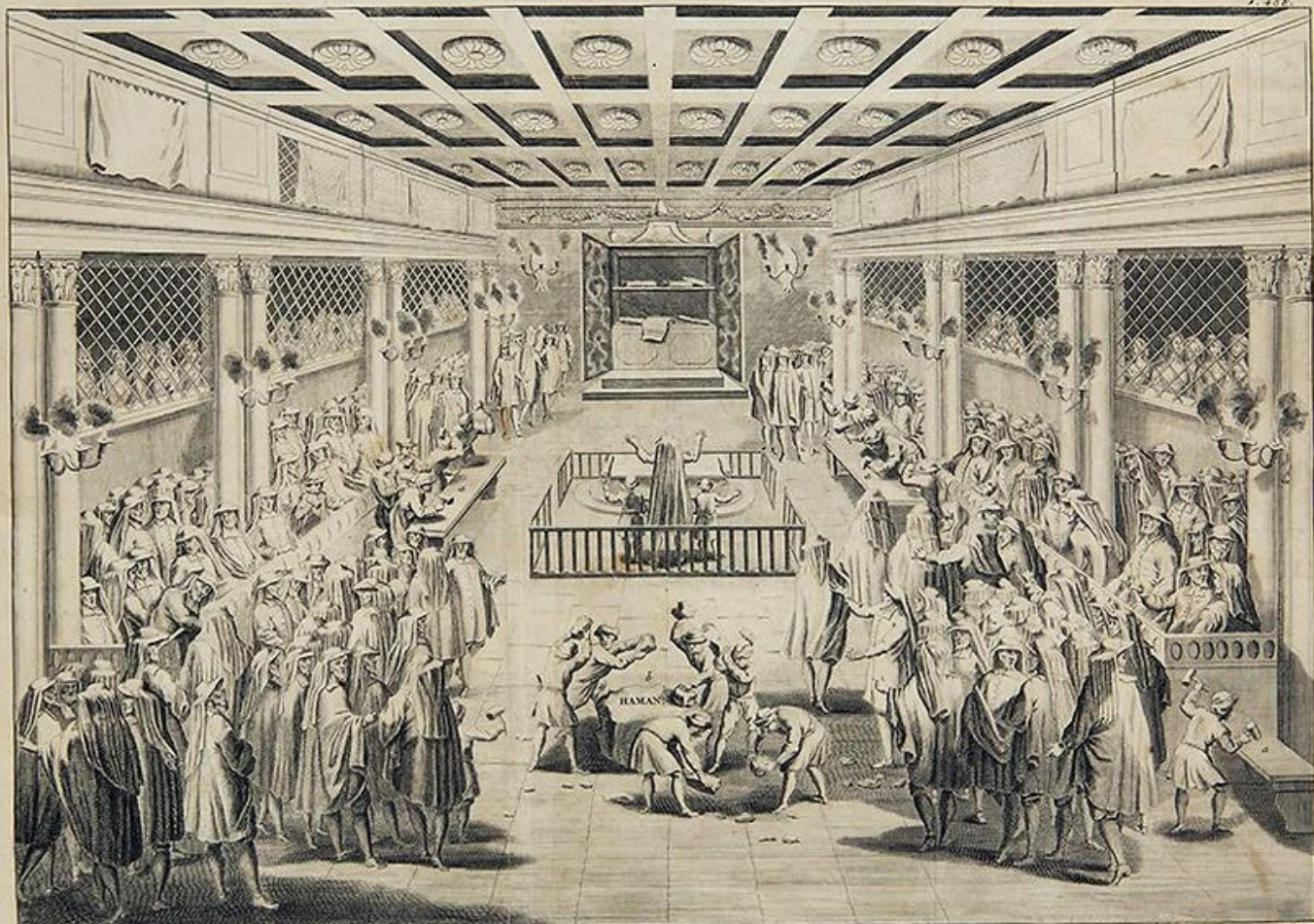


- The Seudah (festive meal).





The Jewish Feast of Purim in Amsterdam, 1712.



a. Children striking the fencer with mallets and making a dreadful noise as often say names of Haman was performed.

THE CEREMONIES OF THE FEAST OF LOTS. Esther chap. ix.

b. The Stone which was placed formerly at the entrance of the Synagogue, which Haman's name written upon it, which they break to give to the Jews.

J. Galt. Vol. II. P.

The Ceremonies of the Feast of Lots, 1764 engraving.



„Das Purim Fest“ by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, 1876.

The Valentine Family celebrates Purim, Germany, 1924.





Purim at Jewish School, Soest, Germany, 1929.

Purim in Ahavah Orphanage in Berlin, 1930.





"Purim in Fez, Morocco," photo by M Bouhsira, c. 1955.

Purim in Tel Aviv, 2012



The Sydney Morning Herald

INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

David Hilton, in fancy dress according to Purim tradition, reads the Story of Esther scroll in Sydney's Great Synagogue, 2010.



