

Numerical Features of the Book of Esther

A New Approach to its Structural Design

Please read the [General Introduction](#)

The text of the Book of Esther

The so-called 'Additions to Esther,' to be found in the Greek versions, have no counterpart in the Hebrew Masoretic text. They are therefore left out of consideration. For basic information about the Additions, see C.A. Moore, "Esther, Additions to", in: *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, II, 1992, 626-633, and S.W. Crawford, "The Book of Esther," in: *The New Interpreter's Bible*, III, 1999, 945-972.

During our joint project on the Megilloth, Duane Christensen and I (private communications in 2002) concluded that there are in Esther two corrections that deserve the qualification 'necessary'. In 5:4b, we deleted the word הַיּוֹם, 'today', as superfluous, being also absent in a number of Hebrew manuscripts and in the Syriac Version (see BHS), and in 6:8b we deleted the word וְאֵשֶׁר, 'and which', for the same reason.

Much to our surprise, these two corrections revealed a most spectacular compositional formula of the book: **3043** (179x17) words in total, with **1802** (106x17) before, and **1241** (73x17) after 'atnach'.

However, despite this enticing formula, new insights, especially regarding the numerical features of the speeches by the dramatis personae, as shall be demonstrated further below, convinced me that I should strictly keep to MT. My experience with the logotechnical analysis of biblical texts has led on my part to a deeper understanding of their structural design and aroused in me a greater appreciation of the literary craftsmanship of the biblical writers. Inevitably this evoked in me a great measure of restraint when it comes to emending MT: corrections should be limited to what is absolutely necessary, and the corrections proposed above are not really necessary.

See the paragraph 'A Reassessment of Current Literary and Textual Criticism' on page 10 of the [General Introduction](#), and my article "Textual Criticism: A Plea for Utmost Restraint." (Academia).

In comparison with Qoheleth and the Song of Songs, the architecture of Esther is simple and lucid, because, like the book of Ruth, it is a story that is structured by clear-cut, logically arranged episodes. Despite this, remarkably enough, there is still no general consensus among commentators about the precise delineation of its constituent parts. In my opinion, this is mainly because scholars do not always take the layout markers seriously. By taking them duly into account in combination with the numerical features of the text, the various episodes in the story can be identified more accurately and the structural design of the book can be ascertained with a great measure of certainty.

On the whole I strictly kept to the seams indicated by the layout markers, except for two instances where the contents strongly suggest seams delimiting 6,1-14, and 8,1-17 (in the table marked by []).

The evaluation and dating of the Book of Esther

From ancient times up until our own time rabbis and Biblical scholars have expressed doubts about the canonicity, integrity, and moral quality of the book of Esther. This is not the place to go deeper into this; all I can say is that such scepticism is totally unfounded and only shows that Esther is the most misapprehended book of the Hebrew Bible. Having analysed and studied the book from a new perspective, I have come to the conclusion that it is a high-grade, meticulously designed story dealing with the serious subject of the perennial threat of genocide of the Jews and their ultimate survival. Esther is definitely more than a story explaining the origin of the Feast of Purim. It speaks volumes that for the great medieval Jewish scholar Maimonides Esther ranked as second only to the Torah. Therefore, it is high time for a reassessment of the essence of the book.

Over the years scholars have racked their brains in trying to date the book, which is supposed to stem at various dates from the late Persian era up until the early Roman era. In this respect, the fact that no trace of Esther has been found at Qumran may shed unexpected new light on the coming into existence of the book. As far as I know, this hard fact has never been taken into consideration as a criterion for dating the book, but, in my opinion, it may be used as a *terminus a quo* to determine the *earliest possible* date.

It all depends on the view one has of the provenance of the Dead Sea Scrolls. For those who adhere to the traditional, widely accepted interpretation by which they are associated with the Jewish sect of the Essenes, supposed to have inhabited Qumran, no conclusions can be drawn regarding a date from the absence of Esther. However, for those who follow, like I do, the interpretation by Norman Golb and others that the documents are remnants of archives in Jerusalem which were brought there into safety before and during the Roman siege in 70 C.E., the absence of Esther provides indisputable factual evidence that the book did not yet exist at the time. It is as simple as that. The more precise dating is a matter for further research.

For a recent discussion of the issue, see Norman Golb's article, "On the Origin of the Dead Sea Scrolls" (2009): http://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/jerusalem_origin_dss.pdf. See also his book, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls? The Search for the Secret of Qumran* (New York: Scribner, 1995).

Detailed outline based on layout markers, content, and numerical features

§1 (1,1-9) Ahasuerus's copious banquets for all his servants: S	9 vs; 132 w.
§2 (1,10-15) The queen refuses to obey the king's command: S	6 vs; 101 w.
§3 (1,16-22) By royal order Vashti is deposed: P	7 vs; 138 w.
§4 (2,1-4) The search among the virgins for a new queen: S	4 vs; 69 w.
§5 (2,5-20) Esther is chosen solely because of her beauty: S	16 vs; 326 w.
§6 (2,21-23) Mordecai uncovers a plot against the king: P	3 vs; 43 w.
§7 (3,1-7) Haman clashes with Mordecai and plans genocide on the Jews: S	7 vs; 132 w.
§8 (3,8-15) Haman persuades the king to issue an edict of genocide: P	8 vs; 171 w.
§9 (4,1-12) Esther learns about Haman's plan and decides to act: S	12 vs; 204 (12x17) w.
§10 (4,13-17) Mordecai and Esther join forces on behalf of the Jews: S	5 vs; 81 w.
§11 (5,1-2) Esther presents herself to the king in the palace: S	2 vs; 48 w.
§12 (5,3-14) Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet: P	12 vs; 217 w.
§13 (6,1-14) Mordecai is honoured for having saved the king's life: []	14 vs; 263 w.
§14 (7,1-4) Esther appeals to the king for her people: S	4 vs; 64
§15 (7,5-8) Esther informs the king about Haman: S	4 vs; 83 187 (11x17) w.
§16 (7,9-10) Haman is hanged on the gallows meant for Mordecai: P	2 vs; 40
§17 (8,1-2) The king rewards Esther and Mordecai: P	2 vs; 38+
§18 (8,3-6) Esther's plea to have Haman's decree revoked: S	17 4 vs; 81/119 (7x17) w.
§19 (8,7-14) The king agrees to have a new decree written: P	8 vs; 173 w.
§20 (8,15-17) Mordecai appears in full ornate in public and the Jews rejoice: []	3 vs; 51 (3x17) w.
§21 (9,1-4) The crucial turning point: the thirteenth day of Adar: P	4 vs; 82 w.
§22 (9,5-11) The slaughter in Susa and the death of Haman's ten sons: S	7 vs; 61 w.
§23 (9,12-19) The slaughter in the provinces and the feast on 14 Adar: P	8 vs; 159+
§24 (9,20-28) Mordecai informs the Jews and institutes the Feast of Purim: S	9 vs; 181/340 (20x17) w.
§25 (9,29-32) Esther confirms this second letter concerning Purim: P	4 vs; 61 w.
§26 (10,1-3) Conclusion: an encomium for Ahasuerus and Mordecai: Col.	3 vs; 46 w.
§§1-26 (1,1-10,3) The book as a whole 167 vs; 3045 words.	

Observation 1 From a numerical point of view, special attention has been paid to Chapter 7 (§§14-16), the vital passage dealing with Esther's intervention on behalf of her people, which led to the death of Haman: the **187** words divide into **119 (7x17)** before *'atnach*, and **68 (4x17)** after *'atnach*.

Observation 2 Other vital passages that stand out are Chapter 8 with **17** verses, §9 (4,1-12) with **204 (12x17)** words, §§17-18 (8,1-6) with **119 (7x17)** words, §20 (8,15-17) with **51 (3x17)** words, and §§23-24 (9,12-28) with **340 (20x17)** words.

For a more complete overview, see the list at the bottom of the table with countings.

Fourteen views on the structural design of the book of Esther

H. BARDTKE (*Das Buch Esther*, in: KAT XVII/4-5, 1963): *Twenty-one parts.*

- 1,1-9 Die Feste im Palast zu Susa
- 1,10-22 Die Verstoßung der Königin Vashti
- 2,1-10 Der Aufstieg Esthers zur Königinwürde
- 2,21-23 Mardochai deckt einen Anschlag auf Ahasveros auf
- 3,1-7 Der Günstling Haman plant die Ausrottung aller Juden
- 3,8-15 Der Vernichtungsbeschluß und seine Verkündung
- 4,1-17 Esthers Entschluß, für ihr Volk einzutreten
- 5,1-8 Das erste Gastmahl bei der Königin Esther
- 5,9-14 Der Günstling Haman auf der Höhe des Glücks
- 6,1-13 Die Belohnung Mardochais, angeordnet durch den König
- 6,14-7,4 Das zweite Gastmahl und Esthers Eintreten für ihr Volk
- 7,5-10 Hamans Sturz und Ende
- 8,1-2 Mardochais Erhöhung
- 8,3-6 Esther bittet erneut für ihr Volk
- 8,7-14 Der Gegenerlaß zur Errettung der Juden
- 8,15-17 Der Jubel der Juden über die glückliche Wendung
- 9,1-10 Die erste Vergeltung
- 9,11-19 Die zweite Vergeltung
- 9,20-28 Mardochais Purim-Ordnung
- 9,29-32 Esthers Purim-Ordnung
- 10,1-3 Bericht über die Aufzeichnung der Taten des Ahasveros und des Mardochais.

E. WÜRTHWEIN (*Die fünf Megilloth: Ruth, Das Hohelied, Esther*, in: HAT 18, 1969, 165-196): *Twenty-three parts.*

Exposition 1,1-2,23

- 1,1-9 König Ahasveros' Glück und Herrlichkeit
- 1,10-15 Königin Vashti's Weigerung
- 1,16-22 Königin Vashtis Verstossung
- 2,1-4 König Ahasveros'neue Ehe
- 2,5-7 Esther tritt auf
- 2,8-14 Die Brautschau
- 2,15-20 Esthers Erhöhung
- 2,21-23 Mordechai als Lebensretter des Königs

Die Haupthandlung 3,1-9,19

- 3,1-6 Hamans Erhöhung und sein Konflikt mit Mordochai
- 3,7-15 Die Organisation der Judenverfolgung
- 4,1-17 Mordochais Rettungsplan
- 5,1-8 Esther bei König Ahasveros
- 5,9-14 Hamans Hochmut vor dem Fall
- 6,1-13 Eines Königs schlaflose Nacht und die Folgen
- 6,14-7,10 Hamans Sturz
- 8,1-8 Esther nochmals bei König Ahasveros
- 8,9-14 Die Abwehrzurüstung der Juden
- 8,15-17 Mordochais und seiner Gemeinde Glück und Sieg
- 9,1-10 Die Rachetag vom 13. Adar
- 9,11-19 Der 14. und 15. Adar
- Der Schluß des Esther-Buches 9,20-10,3
- 9,20-28 Der Purimverordnung Mordochais
- 9,29-32 Die Ergänzung der Purimordnung durch Esther
- 10,1-3 Mordochais Größe.

G. GERLEMAN (*Esther*, in: BKAT XXI, 1973): *Thirteen parts.*

- 1,1-22 Das königliche Gastmahl in Susa und the Verstoßung der Königin Vashti
- 2,1-20 Die Erhebung Esthers zur Königin
- 2,21-23 Mardochais Entdeckung einer Verschwörung
- 3,1-15 Hamans Erhebung und seine judenfeindlichen Pläne

4,1-17 Mardochois Trauer und Gespräch mit Esther
 5,1-8 Esthers Audienz beim König und das erste Gastmahl bei Esther
 5,9-14 Hamans Selbstruhm und Rachsucht
 6,1-13 Mardochois Belohnung
 6,14-8,2 Hamans Sturz und Mardochois Erhöhung
 8,3-17 Der Erlaß zugunsten der Juden
 9,1-19 Triumph und Rache der Juden
 9,20-32 Die Purim-Ordnung Mardochois und ihre Bestätigung durch Esther
 10,1-3 Schlußbetrachtung.

J.A. LOADER (*Das Hohelied / Klagelieder / Das Buch Ester*, in: ATD 16/2, 1992, 198-280): *Fourteen 'chapters'*.

1. Kapitel 1,1-22 Königin Waschti wird abgesetzt
 2. Kapitel 2,1-20 Ester wird Königin
 3. Kapitel 2,21-23 Mordechai rettet dem König das Leben
 4. Kapitel 3,1-7 Der erste Konflikt zwischen Haman und Mordechai
 5. Kapitel 3,8-15 Ein Sieg für Haman
 6. Kapitel 4,1-17 Erste Reaktionen der Hauptpersonen
 7. Kapitel 5,1-8 Ester wird aktiv
 8. Kapitel 5,9-14 Der zweite Konflikt zwischen Mordechai und Haman
 9. Kapitel 6,1-13 Mordechois Triumph
 10. Kapitel 6,14-8,2 Die Lösung
 11. Kapitel 8,3-17 Das Geschick der Juden wird gewendet
 12. Kapitel 9,1-19 Die große Wendung wird durchgesetzt
 13. Kapitel 9,20-32 Die Einsetzung des Purimfestes
 14. Kapitel 10,1-3 Mordechois Glanz.

F.W. BUSH (*Ruth, Esther*, in: WBC 9, 1996): *Ten Acts and sixteen subdivisions*.

Act 1. 1,1-2,23 Introduction and setting: Esther becomes queen of Persia

Scene 1. 1,1-22 The deposing of queen Vasti

Scene 2. 2,1-18 Esther becomes queen

Scene 3. 2,19-23 Mordecai uncovers a plot

Act 2. 3,1-15 The crisis: Haman's plot to destroy the Jews

Scene 1. 3,1-6 Haman decides to destroy the Jews

Scene 2. 3,7-15 Haman sets a plan in motion to annihilate the Jews

Act 3. 4,1-17 Mordecai's stratagem: Esther must consent to appeal to the king

Scene 1. 4,1-3 Mordecai and all the Jews lament over Haman's edict

Scene 2. 4,4-17 At Mordecai's command Esther consents to appeal to the king

Act 4. 5,1-8 Esther begins her appeal: she invites the king and Haman to a banquet

Scene 1. 5,1-5a Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet

Scene 2. 5,5b-8 Esther again invites the king and Haman to a banquet

Act 5. 5,9-6,14 Haman's stratagem backfires: he is humiliated by Mordecai

Scene 1. 5,9-14 Haman's hubris: his wife and his friends persuade him to ask the king to hang Mordecai

Scene 2. 6,1-11 Haman's humiliation: The king commands him to honor Mordecai

Scene 3. 6,12-14 Haman's end: his wife and his friends predict his downfall

Act 6. 7,1-10 Esther makes her appeal

Act 7. 8,1-17 Esther appeals again to the king: she and Haman counters Haman's plot

Scene 1. 8,1-8 Esther and Mordecai acquire authority to issue a counterdecree

Scene 2. 8,9-17 Mordecai issues the counterdecree

Act 8. 9,1-5 The Jews are victorious: they put all their enemies to the sword

Act 9. 9,6-32 The festival of Purim is instituted: Mordecai, Esther and the Jewish community set its dates and establish its character

Scene 1. 9,6-19 The events that occasion the celebration of Purim over two days

Scene 2. 9,20-32 Mordecai, Esther, and the Jewish community set the dates of Purim and commit themselves to its perpetual celebration

Act 10. 10,1-3 Epilogue: an encomium on Mordecai.

J.D. LEVENSON (*Esther*, in: Old Testament Library, 1997): *Ten main parts and sixteen subdivisions*.

I. 1,1-2,20 A new queen is chosen

1. 1,1-9 Three royal banquets

2. 1,10-12 Vashtis's refusal
3. 1,13-22 The cabinet meets in emergency session
4. 2,1-4 The search for Miss Persia
5. 2,5-7 A Jewish exile and his comely cousin
6. 2,8-20 Esther wins the beauty contest

II. 2,21-23 Mordecai and Esther save the king's life

III. 3,1-15 Genocide decreed against the Jews

1. 3,1-6 Mordecai's refusal
2. 3,7-11 Haman hatches his plot
3. 3,12-13 The edict of genocide is issued
4. 3,14-15 The edict of genocide is issued (continued)

IV. 4,1-17 Mordecai persuades Esther to intercede with the king

1. 4,1-11 Esther's ignorance and resistance
2. 4,12-17 Esther accepts her providential role

V. 5,1-14 Esther approaches the king and asks for two banquets

1. 5,1-8 The king grants her requests
2. 5,9-14 Haman's joy turns to rage again

VI. 1,1-14 A patriot is honored and an egomaniac is disgraced

VII. 7,1-10 The climactic banquet

VIII. 8,1-17 Esther's renewed plea brings results

1. 8,1-8 The queen persuades Ahasuerus to act
2. 8,9-12 A new edict is issued

The text of the edict (1-24)

1. 8,13-14 A new edict is issued (continued)
2. 8,15-17 The exaltation of Mordecai and the happiness of the Jews

IX. 9,1-32 The fateful three days

1. 9,1-19 Battle is joined – and renewed
2. 9,20-32 Purim instituted, confirmed, and reconfirmed

X. 10,1-3 The greatness of Ahasuerus and Mordecai.

E. HUWILER (*The Song of Songs*, in: New International Biblical Commentary, 1999): *Eight paragraphs.*

§1 1,1-6 Opening matters

§2 1,7-2,7 The lovers together

§3 2,8-17 Hope and invitation

§4 3,1-11 Dream and vision

§5 4,1-5,1 Admiration and invitation

§6 5,2-6,3 Dream and search

§7 6,4-8,4 Admiration and desire

§8 8,5-14 Loose ends.

C.M. BECHTEL (*Esther*, in: Interpretation, 2002): *Chapter arrangement.*

L. DAY (*Esther*, in: Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, 2005): *Eleven parts.*

1,1-8 Ahasuerus's royal parties

1,9-2,4 Vashti's refusal

2,5-20 Esther becomes queen

2,21-3,15 Mordecai versus Haman

4,1-17 Esther and Mordecai's conversation

5,1-8 Esther approaches and hosts

5,9-6,14 Conversation with Haman

7,1-8,2 Esther's revelation

8,3-17 Esther pleads, Mordecai writes

9,1-19 The Jews attack their enemies

9,20-10,3 The establishment of Purim.

J. CARRUTHERS (*Esther Through the Centuries*, in: Blackwell Bible Commentaries, 2008): *Eleven parts.*

1,1-9; 1,10-22; 2,1-7; 2,8-23; 3,1-15; 4,1-14; 4,15-17; 5, 6, 7-8, 9-10.

H. BARDTKE (*Das Buch Esther*, in: KAT XVII/4-5, 1963): *Thirteen parts*.

- 1,1-9 Die Feste im Palast zu Susa
- 1,10-22 Die Verstoßung der Königin Vashti
- 2,1-10 Der Aufstieg Esthers zur Königinwürde
- 2,21-23 Mardochai deckt einen Anschlag auf Ahasveros auf
- 3,1-7 Der Günstling Haman plant die Ausrottung aller Juden
- 3,8-15 Der Vernichtungsbeschluß und seine Verkündung
- 4,1-17 Esthers Entschluß, für ihr Volk einzutreten
- 5,1-8 Das erste Gastmahl bei der Königin Esther
- 5,9-14 Der Günstling Haman auf der Höhe des Glücks
- 6,1-13 Die Belohnung Mardochais, angeordnet durch den König
- 6,14-7,4 Das zweite Gastmahl und Esthers Eintreten für ihr Volk
- 7,5-10 Hamans Sturz und Ende
- 8,1-2 Mardochais Erhöhung
- 8,3-6 Esther bittet erneut für ihr Volk
- 8,7-14 Der Gegenerlaß zur Errettung der Juden
- 8,15-17 Der Jubel der Juden über die glückliche Wendung
- 9,1-10 Die erste Vergeltung
- 9,11-19 Die zweite Vergeltung
- 9,20-28 Mardochais Purim-Ordnung
- 9,29-32 Esthers Purim-Ordnung
- 10,1-3 Bericht über die Aufzeichnung der Taten des Ahasveros und des Mardochais.

W. DOMMERSHAUSEN (*Ester*, in: Die Neue Echter Bibel, 1980): *Three main parts with twenty subdivisions*.

1,1-2,23 DIE ERHEBUNG ESTERS ZUR KÖNIGIN

- 1,1-9 Das Mahl im Königspalast
- 1,10-22 Die Verstoßung der Königin Washti
- 2,1-4 Der Entschluß des Königs
- 2,5-14 Ester am königlichen Hof
- 2,15-20 Esters Erhebung
- 2,21-23 Die Aufdeckung einer Verschwörung
- 3,1-15 HAMANS ANSCHLAG GEGEN DIE JUDEN**
- 3,1-6 Der Racheplan
- 3,7-11 Der Ausrottungsplan
- 23,12-15 Der Erlaß
- 4,1-17 Esters Vermittlung
- 5,1-4 Die Audienz beim König
- 5,5-8 Die Einladung zum Festmahl bei Ester
- 5,9-14 Hamans Racheplan gegen Mordechai
- 6,1-14 Die Erhöhung Mordechais
- 7,1-10 Hamans Ende
- 8,1-10,3 DIE RETTUNG DER JUDEN**
- 8,1-6 Mordechais Erhöhung und Esters erneute Bitte
- 8,7-17 Der Erlaß zum Schutz der Juden
- 9,1-19 Der Siegestag der Juden
- 9,20-32 Die Einführung des Purimfestes
- 10,1-3 Der Bericht über die Taten des Artaxerxes und die Stellung Mordechais.

S.W. CRAWFORD (*The Book of Esther*, in: The New Interpreter's Bible, III, 1999, 855-941): *Seven main parts with twenty-six subdivisions*.

I. 1,1-22 The deposition of queen Vashti

- A. 1,1-9 Introduction to the court of Susa
- B. 1,10-22 The downfall of Vashti

II. 2,1-23 Esther becomes queen

- A. 2,1-4 The search for a new queen
- B. 2,5-7 The introduction of Esther and Mordecai
- C. 2,8-18 Esther is chosen queen
- D. 2,19-23 Mordecai discovers the Eunuchs' plot

III. 3,1-15 Haman's plot to destroy the Jews

- A. 3,1-6 Conflict between Mordecai and Haman
- B. 3,7-11 Haman's plot
- C. 3,12-15 Haman's plot is carried out

IV. 4,1-17 Mordecai turns to Esther

- A. 4,1-3 Mordecai's reaction to Esther
- B. 4,4-17 Dialogue between Esther and Mordecai

V. 5,1-8,2 Haman's plans are thwarted

- A. 5,1-8 Esther acts: The first banquet
- B. 5,9-14 Haman builds a gallows for Mordecai
- C. 6,1-11 Haman's humiliation
- D. 6,12-13 Haman is warned by his advisers
- E. 6,14-7,10 Esther's second banquet
- F. 8,1-2 Esther's triumph

VI. 8,3-17 The undoing of Haman's plot

- A. 8,3-8 Esther petitions the king
- B. 8,9-14 Mordecai writes an edict
- C. 8,15-17 Mordecai's appearance

VII. 9,1-10,3 The battles of Adar and the festival of Purim

- A. 9,1-5 The first battle
- B. 9,6-10 The battle in Susa
- C. 9,11-15 The fourteenth of Adar
- D. 9,16-19 The Jews celebrate
- E. 9,20-32 The letters of Purim
- F. 10,1-3 Appendix concerning Mordecai.

D.A. DORSEY, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, Baker Academic, 1999, 162-164: *Thirteen episodes, primarily arranged in a chronologically linear pattern.*

a 1,1-22 King's proud feast

- king deposes Queen Vashti
- letters sent throughout empire

b 2,1-18 Esther becomes queen

- king gives feast in her honor
- gives gifts

c 2,19-23 King's life is saved

- those plotting to kill the king are killed

d 3,1-4,3 Haman's plot: Haman convinces the king to send royal edicts to kill the Jews

- Haman to destroy: "if it please the king, let it be written"
- destroy, kill, and annihilate Jews; plunder their goods
- edict in all languages, sealed with king's signet, sent by couriers
- ends: Susa distressed at edict; Mordecai dresses in sackcloth

e 4,4-17 Mordecai learns of Haman's plot and money involved; appeals to Esther to risk all**f 5,1-14 Esther invites king and Haman** to her first banquet

- Haman builds gallows to hang Mordecai
- King asks Esther: "What is your petition?"
- "it will be given you, even up to my kingdom"

g 6,1-14 TURNING POINT: Haman's fortunes turn; he honors Mordecai the Jew**f' 7,1-10 Esther invites king and Haman to second banquet**

- Haman hanged on gallows he built for Mordecai
- king asks Esther: "What is your petition?"
- it will be given you, even up to half my kingdom

e' 8,1-2 Mordecai and Esther given Haman's estate*

d' 8,3-17 Haman's plot foiled: Esther convinces king to send second royal edict to allow Jews to kill enemies on Adar 13.

- Esther to king: "if it please the king... let it be written"
- destroy, kill, and annihilate enemies; plunder their goods

- edict in all languages, sealed with king's signet, sent by couriers
 - ends: Susa rejoices at edict; Mordecai dresses royally, joy
- c' 9,1-10 Jews' lives are saved**
- those plotting to kill Jews are killed
- b' Esther wins second day for Jews in Susa**
- another feast day instituted because of Esther (annual feast will perpetually honor Esther)
 - giving of gifts
- a' 9,20-10,3 Jews' Feast of Purim**
- king promotes Mordecai
 - letters sent throughout empire.
- * Unit e' is an admittedly weak match of unit e.

Quantitative structural analysis of the book of Esther

It cannot be excluded that some of the multiples of **17** and **26** are due to coincidence.

Vs.	Text	Words	Let.	Sum words	P/S	Structural design
1	Es. 1,1	13	57	13		<p>§1 Ahasuerus's copious banquets for all his servants <u>1,1</u> The setting: in the days of Ahasuerus.</p> <p><u>1,2-9</u> The king's banquet in Susa for all his servants lasting for seven days: 119 words.</p>
2	Es. 1,2	11	47	24		
3	Es. 1,3	15	66	39		
4	Es. 1,4	14	59	53		
5	Es. 1,5	20	85	73		
6	Es. 1,6	21	79	94		
7	Es. 1,7	11	46	105		
8	Es. 1,8	16	53	121		
9	Es. 1,9	11	46	132	S	
9	1,1-9	132	538	132		
10	Es. 1,10	21	95	153		<p>§2 The queen refuses to obey the king's command <u>1,11</u> Queen Vashti expected to come in full ornate: 17 words.</p> <p><u>1,14-15</u> The king consults his seven princes: 34 words.</p>
11	Es. 1,11	17	69	170		
12	Es. 1,12	15	62	185		
13	Es. 1,13	14	51	199		
14	Es. 1,14	19+	81	218		
15	Es. 1,15	15/34 (2x17)	57	233	S	
6	1,10-15	101	415	101		
16	Es. 1,16	24	93	257		<p>§3 By royal order Vashti is deposed <u>1,18</u> There will be disrespect and discord among the grand ladies of Persia and Media: 17 words.</p>
17	Es. 1,17	21	87	278		
18	Es. 1,18	17	65	295		
19	Es. 1,19	27	109	322		
20	Es. 1,20	18	71	340		
21	Es. 1,21	9	41	349		
22	Es. 1,22	22	87	371	P	
7	1,16-22	138	553	138		
23	Es. 2,1	17	63	388		<p>§4 The search among the virgins for a new queen <u>2,1</u> The king remembers Vashti and what she did: 17. The paragraph is sealed by 17 and 52 words.</p>
24	Es. 2,2	10	49	398		
25	Es. 2,3	28	114	426		
26	Es. 2,4	14	57	440/69	S	
4	2,1-4	69	283	69		
27	Es. 2,5	15	55	455		<p>§5 Esther is chosen solely because of her beauty <u>2,15</u> Esther finds favour in the eyes of all who see her: 34 w.</p>
28	Es. 2,6	16	66	471		
29	Es. 2,7	25	85	496		
30	Es. 2,8	24	86	520		
31	Es. 2,9	27	113	547		
32	Es. 2,10	14	48	561		
33	Es. 2,11	16	59	577		
34	Es. 2,12	30	123	607		
35	Es. 2,13	18	60	625		
36	Es. 2,14	29	99	654		
37	Es. 2,15	34	114	688		

38	Es. 2,16	16		66	704		2,16-20 The king falls in love and crowns her: 78 words.
39	Es. 2,17	19		78	723		
40	Es. 2,18	17	78 (3x26)	69	740		2,18 The king gives a great banquet to honour her: 17 words.
41	Es. 2,19	7		33	747		2,19-20 Esther's ethnicity and kin are unknown: 26 words.
42	Es. 2,20	19		74	766	S	
16	2,5-20	326		1228	326		
43	Es. 2,21	19		78	785		§6 Mordecai uncovers a plot against the king
44	Es. 2,22	11		50	796		
45	Es. 2,23	13		54	809	P	
3	2,21-23	43		182	43		182 (7x26) letters.
46	Es. 3,1	20		77	829		§7 Haman clashes with Mordecai and plans genocide
47	Es. 3,2	19	52 (2x26)	73	848		3,1-3 The royal servants wonder why Mordecai refuses to bow down and do obeisance to Haman: 52 words.
48	Es. 3,3	13		52	861		
49	Es. 3,4	20		81	881		
50	Es. 3,5	11		40	892		
51	Es. 3,6	24		94	916		
52	Es. 3,7	25		98	941	S	
7	3,1-7	132		515	132		
53	Es. 3,8	27		110	968		§8 Haman persuades the king to issue an edict of genocide
54	Es. 3,9	19		70	987		
55	Es. 3,10	13		52	1000		
56	Es. 3,11	11		44	1011		
57	Es. 3,12	40		163	1051		
58	Es. 3,13	31	85 (5x17)	121	1082		3,12-14 The royal secretaries write an edict which is sealed with the king's signet and transcribed: 85 words.
59	Es. 3,14	14		59	1096		
60	Es. 3,15	16		73	1112	P	
8	3,8-15	171		692	171		
61	Es. 4,1	20		77	1132		§9 Esther learns about Haman's plan and decides to act
62	Es. 4,2	13	52 (2x26)	43	1145		
63	Es. 4,3	19		78	1164		4,1-3 Mordecai and the Jews mourn in sackcloth: 52 words.
64	Es. 4,4	19		90	1183		
65	Es. 4,5	17		64	1200		4,5 Esther sends a messenger to Mordecai: 17 words.
66	Es. 4,6	11		38	1211		
67	Es. 4,7	19		70	1230		
68	Es. 4,8	26		101	1256		4,8 Mordecai sends Esther a copy of the decree: 26 words.
69	Es. 4,9	7		28	1263		
70	Es. 4,10	6		26	1269		The paragraph is highlighted and sealed by 204 words.
71	Es. 4,11	42		153	1311		
72	Es. 4,12	5		22	1316	S	
12	4,1-12	204 (12x17)		790	204 (12x17)		
73	Es. 4,13	13		54	1329		§10 Mordecai and Esther join forces on behalf of the Jews
74	Es. 4,14	23		91	1352		
75	Es. 4,15	5		21	1357		
76	Es. 4,16	32		122	1389		
77	Es. 4,17	8		32	1397/81	S	
5	4,13-17	81		320	81		
78	Es. 5,1	24		101	1421		§11 Esther presents herself to the king in the palace
79	Es. 5,2	24		99	1445	S	
2	5,1-2	48		200	48		
80	Es. 5,3	14		50	1459		§12 The consequences of Esther invitation for Haman
81	Es. 5,4	15		53	1474		
82	Es. 5,5	17		62	1491		5,5 The king and Haman go to dine with Esther: 17 words.
83	Es. 5,6	15		60	1506		
84	Es. 5,7	5+		24	1511		
85	Es. 5,8	27+		98	1538		
86	Es. 5,9	23+		80	1561		
87	Es. 5,10	12+		46	1573		5,7-14 A second invitation; Haman plans to hang Mordecai: 156 words.
88	Es. 5,11	20+		70	1593		

89	Es. 5,12	23+	76	1616		
90	Es. 5,13	16+	54	1632		
91	Es. 5,14	30/156 (6x26)	109	1662/217	P	
12	5,3-14	217	782	217		782 (46x17) letters.
92	Es. 6,1	16	70	1678		§13 Mordecai is honoured for having saved the king's life
93	Es. 6,2	19 52 (2x26)	76	1697		
94	Es. 6,3	17	66	1714		6,1-3 The king learns that Mordecai has never been honoured for having saved his life: 52 words.
95	Es. 6,4	20	73	1734		
96	Es. 6,5	11	44	1745		
97	Es. 6,6	22	84	1767		
98	Es. 6,7	9	32	1776		
99	Es. 6,8	17	64	1793		6,8 Haman's proposal that the man to be honoured should be clothed with the king's robe and ride on the king's horse: 17 w.
100	Es. 6,9	30	124	1823		
101	Es. 6,10	24	89	1847		
102	Es. 6,11	21	86	1868		
103	Es. 6,12	12	43	1880		
104	Es. 6,13	30 78 (3x26)	115	1910		6,11-14 Haman honours Mordecai as the king had ordered him to do and realizes that he is in great danger: 78 words.
105	Es. 6,14	15	62	1925	[]	
14	6,1-14	263	1028	263		
106	Es. 7,1	7	28	1932		§14 During the meal, Esther appeals to the king for the Jews
107	Es. 7,2	20	79	1952		
108	Es. 7,3	19	75	1971		
109	Es. 7,4	18	79	1989	S	
4	7,1-4	64	261	64		
110	Es. 7,5	17	63	2006		§15 Esther informs the king about Haman
111	Es. 7,6	13	51	2019		7,5 "Esther, who is this man?": 17 words.
112	Es. 7,7	23	84	2042		The number 83 happens to be the numerical value of the name Ahasuerus (1+8+21+6+20+6+21=83).
113	Es. 7,8	30	108	2072	S	
4	7,5-8	83	306	83		
114	Es. 7,9	29	107	2101		§16 Haman is hanged on the gallows meant for Mordecai
115	Es. 7,10	11	40	2112	P	
2	7,9-10	40	147	40		7,1-10 is sealed by 714 (42x17) letters and 187 words.
10	7,1-10	187 (11x17)	714	187 (11x17)		7,1-10 Esther tells the king about Haman: 187 (11x17) words.
116	Es. 8,1	22	85	2134		§17 The king rewards Esther and Mordecai
117	Es. 8,2	16	61	2150	P	
2	8,1-2	38	146	38		
118	Es. 8,3	22	90	2172		§18 Esther's plea to have Haman's decree revoked
119	Es. 8,4	11	45	2183		
120	Es. 8,5	34	133	2217		8,5 Esther asks the king to recall Haman's letters: 34 words.
121	Es. 8,6	14	60	2231	S	
4	8,3-6	81	328	81		8,1-6 (§§18-19) highlighted and sealed by 119 words.
6	8,1-6	119 (7x17)	474	119 (7x17)		
122	Es. 8,7	21	87	2252		§19 The king agrees to have a new decree written
123	Es. 8,8	22	91	2274		
124	Es. 8,9	43	193	2317		
125	Es. 8,10	17	82	2334		8,9-14 The Mordecai decree is issued in Susa : 130 words and 578 (34x17) letters.
126	Es. 8,11	26 130 (5x26)	101	2360		
127	Es. 8,12	14	56	2374		
128	Es. 8,13	17	81	2391		8,13 The decree is to be issued in every province and the Jews have to be ready to avenge themselves: 17 words.
129	Es. 8,14	13	65	2404	P	
8	8,7-14	173	756	173		
130	Es. 8,15	18	82	2422		§20 Mordecai appears in full ornate and the Jews rejoice
131	Es. 8,16	6	28	2428		
132	Es. 8,17	27	115	2455	[]	The paragraph is highlighted and sealed by 51 words.
3	8,15-17	51 (3x17)	225	51 (3x17)		
17	8,1-17	343	1455	343		8,1-17 is highlighted and sealed by 17 verses.

133	Es. 9,1	<u>30</u>	123	2485		§21 The crucial turning point: the thirteenth day of Adar 9,1-2 The Jews get mastery over their enemies: 51 words. 9,3 The king's officials helped them: 17 words. Until this point 136 (8x17) verses.	
134	Es. 9,2	<u>21</u> 51 (3x17)	87	2506			
135	Es. 9,3	<u>17</u>	80	2523			
136	Es. 9,4	14	58	2537	P		
7	9,1-4	82	348	82			
137	Es. 9,5	<u>11</u>	53	2548		§22 The slaughter in Susa and the death of Haman's ten sons 9,5-10 The Jews kill five hundred men in Susa and also the ten sons of Haman (altogether 510 men!): 52 words.	
138	Es. 9,6	<u>8</u>	36	2556			
139	Es. 9,7	<u>6</u> 52 (2x26)	26	2562			
140	Es. 9,8	<u>6</u>	25	2568			
141	Es. 9,9	<u>8</u>	32	2576			
142	Es. 9,10	<u>13</u>	47	2589			
143	Es. 9,11	9	39	2598	S		
7	9,5-11	61	258	61			
144	Es. 9,12	29	116	2627		§23 The slaughter in the provinces and the feast on 14 Adar 9,13-19 All this happened as a result of Esther's petition to the king, who issued a special decree in Susa: 130 words.	
145	Es. 9,13	<u>22</u>	78	2649			
146	Es. 9,14	<u>12</u>	45	2661			
147	Es. 9,15	<u>20</u>	80	2681			
148	Es. 9,16	<u>21</u> 130 (5x26)	91	2702			
149	Es. 9,17	<u>14</u>	52	2716			
150	Es. 9,18	<u>19</u>	77	2735			
151	Es. 9,19	<u>22</u>	92	2757	P		
8	9,12-19	159	631	159			
152	Es. 9,20	<u>17</u>	81	2774			§24 Mordecai informs the Jews and institutes Feast of Purim 9,20 Mordecai sends letters to all the Jews: 17 words. 9,22 The days of sorrow must be days of feasting: 26 words.
153	Es. 9,21	<u>18</u>	63	2792			
154	Es. 9,22	<u>26</u>	119	2818			
155	Es. 9,23	<u>11</u>	44	2829			
156	Es. 9,24	<u>18</u>	72	2847			
157	Es. 9,25	<u>21</u>	76	2868			
158	Es. 9,26	<u>23</u>	74	2891			
159	Es. 9,27	<u>23</u>	95	2914			
160	Es. 9,28	<u>24</u>	110	2938	S		
9	9,20-28	181	734	181			
161	Es. 9,29	<u>16</u>	66	2954		§25 Esther confirms Mordecai's second letter about Purim The paragraph is sealed by 260 letters.	
162	Es. 9,30	<u>15</u>	65	2969			
163	Es. 9,31	<u>22</u>	95	2991			
164	Es. 9,32	<u>8</u>	34	2999	P		
4	9,29-32	61	260	61			
35	8,15-9,32	595 (35x17)	2456	595 (35x17)			
165	Es. 10,1	<u>8</u>	28	3007		§26 Conclusion: an encomium for Ahasuerus and Mordecai	
166	Es. 10,2	<u>20</u>	81	3027			
167	Es. 10,3	<u>18</u>	77	3045	Col.		
3	10,1-3	46	186	46			
167	1,1-10,3	3045	12122	3045			

Crucial passages highlighted by the two divine name numbers

A considerable number of obviously crucial passages are underlined and emphasized by the numbers **17** and **26** woven into the fabric of the text. In line with the function of these numbers to express the presence of God in the events recounted, the purpose of the author/redactor was evidently to put a religious stamp upon the book. This means that the numerical features of the book provide incontrovertible evidence that it was consciously conceived as a religious writing and that God is present in the story, where he is not visualized onstage but behind the scenes. This makes Esther into a book with latent theology.

Therefore, we should not draw conclusions regarding the religious quality of the book of Esther from the absence of God's name. This also goes of course for the Song of Songs and the Book of Qoheleth.

Here are the highlighted passages:

1. The king's feasts for his officials from the provinces and the people in Susa (1,2-9): **119** (7x**17**) words.
2. Queen Vashti is expected to come in full ornate to the palace (1,11): **17** words.
3. The king consults his seven princes about Vashti's behaviour (1,14-15): **34** (2x**17**) words.
4. There will be disrespect and discord among the ladies of Persia and Media (1,18): **17** words.
5. The search among the virgins for a new queen (2,1-4): **17 + 52** (2x**26**) words.
6. Esther finds favour in the eyes of all who see her (2,15): **34** (2x**17**) words.
7. The king falls in love with her and crowns her (2,16-20): **78** (3x**26**) words.
8. The king gives a great banquet to honour her (2,18): **17** words.
9. Esther's ethnicity and kin are kept secret (2,19-20): **26** words.
10. The royal servants wonder why Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman (3,1-3): **52** (2x**26**) words.
11. The royal secretaries write an edict which is sealed and transcribed (3,12-14): **85** (5x**17**) words.
12. Mordecai and the Jews mourn in sackcloth (4,1-3): **52** (2x**26**) words.
13. Esther sends a messenger to Mordecai to find out what is going on (4,5): **17** words.
14. Mordecai sends Esther a copy of the decree for the destruction of the Jews (4,8): **26** words.
15. Esther learns about Haman's plan and decides to act (4,1-12): **204** (12x**17**) words.
16. The king and Haman go to dine with Esther (5,5): **17** words.
17. A second invitation from Esther; Haman plans to hang Mordecai (5,7-14): **156** (6x**26**) words.
18. The king learns that Mordecai was not honoured for what he did (6,1-3): **52** (2x**26**) words.
19. Haman's proposal that the man to be honoured must be dressed as a king (6,8): **17** words.
20. Haman honours Mordecai and realizes that he is in great danger (6,11-14): **78** (3x**26**) words.
21. The king wants to know: "Esther, who is this man?" (7,5): **17** words.
22. Esther tells the king about him, and the consequences for Haman (7,1-10): **187** (11x**17**) words.
23. Esther asks the king to recall Haman's letters (8,5): **34** (2x**17**) words.
24. Esther and Mordecai rewarded; she asks the king to revoke the decree (8,1-6): **119** (7x**17**) words.
25. The Mordecai decree is issued in Susa (8,9-14): **130** (5x**26**) words.
26. The decree is to be issued and the Jews have to be ready to avenge themselves (8,13): **17** words.
27. Mordecai appears in full ornate and the Jews rejoice (8,15-17): **51** (3x**17**) words.
28. The Jews get mastery over their enemies (9,1-2): **51** (3x**17**) words.
29. All the king's officials helped them, for they were in awe of Mordecai: **17** words.
30. In Susa the Jews kill **500** men and the **10** sons of Haman [**510** (30x**17**)] (9,5-10): **52** (2x**26**) words.
31. All this happened after the king has issued a special decree in Susa (9,13-19): **130** (5x**26**) words.
32. Mordecai sends letters to all the Jews in the provinces (9,20): **17** words.
33. The days of sorrow must be days of feasting (9,22): **26** words.
34. The turning point in the Jews' history and the institution of Purim (8,15-9,32): **595** (35x**17**) words.

Interestingly, the word **המלך**, 'the king', occurs no less than **182** (7x**26**) times.

Another striking feature is that Mordecai speaks only 31 words, while no less than 222 are attributed to Esther. On the other hand, the name of Mordecai (the doer par excellence) appears 58 times while the name of Esther (the chief spokesperson) occurs 55 times. Both of them are important in their own way.

When it comes to Ahasuerus and Mordecai, we have a different situation (Eikelenboom): while the name of Mordecai appears **58** (2x**29**) times, Ahasuerus (spelled in three different ways: **אחשורוש** / **אחשורש** / **אחשוריש**) occurs only **29** times (1,1(2x).2.9.10.15.16.17.19; 2,1.12.16.21; 3,1.6.7.8.12; 6,2; 7,5; 8,1.7.10.12; 9,2.20.30; 10,1.3). This signifies that Mordecai is twice as important in the story as King Ahasuerus himself!

The significance of the numbers **127** (provinces of the empire: 1,1; 8,9 and 9,30) and **180** (days: 1,4) and the dates is a matter of further study.

The words spoken by the dramatis personae in the story (MT)

As in the Song of Songs, particular attention has been paid to the wording of the speeches in Esther, in this case, in an even more sophisticated way, as shown in the table below. Generally speaking, the speeches can easily be delineated, but King Ahasuerus's very first speech, nested inside 1,13-15, is problematic. All modern commentaries and translations I could lay my hands on take 1,15 forthrightly in its entirety as the king's words. *"According to the law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus conveyed by the eunuchs?"* However, it is highly improbable, if not totally out of the question, that the king would refer to himself in the rather bombastic way in 1,15b. Therefore, 1,15b must be ascribed to the narrator, as in the case of 1,13b-14, and the king's words limited to 1,15a. That is to say, the king speaks 5 words, not 15.

This is how the passage is structured:

1,13a: The introduction to the king's speech (delimited by *'atnach*): *"And the king said to the wise men who knew the times of judgement:"*

1,13b-14: Particulars provided by the narrator about the wise men, to be marked off by brackets: [*"It was his custom to consult all who were expert in law and usage. Those close to the king were....."*].

1,15a: The king's question (delimited by *'atnach*): *"What does the law require to be done with Queen Vashti?"*

1,15b: The narrator explains what the reason is behind the king's question, to be marked off by brackets: [*"It is because she has not obeyed the command of King Ahasuerus conveyed to her by the eunuchs."*].

I owe this crucial insight to Klaas Eikelenboom, who also discovered that Pieter Oussoren's *Naardense Bijbel*, 2004, correctly limits the king's words to 1,15a.

The table with the 39 speeches in Esther, to be found on the next full page, was compiled by Klaas Eikelenboom. Most significantly, there are altogether **153** (9x17) words in the introductory formulae and **780** (30x26) in the speeches. I owe thanks to him for this and his constructive remarks and observations, and also for having checked my text.

For more striking features of the speeches, see Observations 3-9 below.

Sp.	Verse(s)	Speaker	Addressee	Intro	Words	Sum w.	comment
1	1,13~15a	Ahasuerus	Seven wise men	5	5	5	
2	1,16-20	Memucan	Ahasuerus & princes	5	102	107	
3	2,2-4a	(Seven) Servants	Ahasuerus	4	42	149	
4	3,3	Other Servants	Mordecai	7	6	155	
5	3,8-9	Haman	Ahasuerus	4	42	197	
6	3,11	Ahasuerus	Haman	3	8	205	
7	4,10-11	Esther	Hatach > Mordecai	6	42	247	
8	4,13-14	Mordecai > Mess.	Esther	5	31	278	
9	4,15-16	Esther > Mess.	Mordecai	5	32	310	
10	5,3	Ahasuerus	Esther	3	11	321	
11	5,4	Esther	Ahasuerus	2	13	334	
12	5,5a	Ahasuerus	Servants	2	7	341	
13	5,6	Ahasuerus	Esther	5	10	351	
14	5,7-8	Esther	Ahasuerus	3	29	380	
15	5,12-13	Haman	H's friends & Zeresh	2	37	417	
16	5,14	Zeresh & H's friends	Haman	6	18	435	
17	6,3a	Ahasuerus	Servants	2	7	442	Anything done
18	6,3b	Servants	Ahasuerus	4	4	446	for Mordecai?
19	6,4a	Ahasuerus	Servants	2	2	448	
20	6,5a	servants	Ahasuerus	4	4	452	
21	6,5b	Ahasuerus	Servants	2	1	453	
22	6,6a	Ahasuerus	Haman	3	7	460	
23	6,6b	Haman (thought)	Haman (thought)	3	7	467	
24	6,7-9	Haman	Ahasuerus	4	52	519	
25	6,10	Ahasuerus	Haman	3	21	540	
26	6,11b	Haman	The City	2	7	547	
27	6,13	H's wise m & Zeresh	Haman	5	15	562	
28	7,2	Ahasuerus	Esther	8	12	574	
29	7,3-4	Esther	Ahasuerus	4	33	607	
30	7,5	Ahasuerus	Esther	6	11	618	
31	7,6	Esther	Ahasuerus	2	6	624	Haman is
32	7,8	Ahasuerus	Ahasuerus	2	6	630	exposed.
33	7,9a	Harbonah	Ahasuerus	7	18	648	
34	7,9b	Ahasuerus	Servants	2	2	650	Hang him!
35	8,4b-6	Esther	Ahasuerus	6	47	697	
36	8,7-8	Ahasuerus	Esther & Mordecai	7	36	733	
37	9,12	Ahasuerus	Esther	4	25	758	
38	9,13	Esther	Ahasuerus	2	20	778	
39	9,14	Ahasuerus	Servants	2	2	780	
39			Totals:	153	780		

Observation 3 The extensive speech (2 in 1,16-20) by Memucan stands out by its **102 (6x17) words**.

Observation 4 The king's two speeches (12 and 13) in which he lends his ear to Esther's invitation and her request (5,5a and 5,6), have altogether **17 words**.

Observation 5 Haman's extensive answer to the king's question what should be done to a man whom the king would want to honour (Speech 24 in 6,7-9) is made up of **52 (2x26) words**.

Observation 6 Most significantly, the introductory formulae have altogether **153 (9x17) words**, while the 39 speeches have altogether **780 (30x26) words**.

Observation 7 The **17** speeches up until the king's question to his servants (Speech 17 in 6,3a), whether something has ever been done to honour Mordecai, have altogether **442 (17x26) words**. This speech constitutes a crucial turning point in the lives of Mordecai and Haman.

Observation 8 Esther's crucial answer to the king, in which she exposes Haman as a ruthless enemy and a wicked man (31 in 7,6), constitutes the definitive turning point in the life of Haman. Up until this point the 31 speeches have altogether **624 (24x26) words**.

Observation 9 The king's terse command to hang Haman (Speech 34 in 7,9b) signifies the end of Haman's life. Up until this point the **34** speeches have altogether **650 (25x26) words**.

All this demonstrates the meticulous care with which the speeches have numerically been formulated. These features strongly suggest that MT should be maintained in the form it has come to us.