As many scholars have noted, Psalm 22\(^1\) developed into a locus of exegetical controversy between Jews and Christians during Late Antiquity.\(^2\) This paper will discuss the Jewish anti-Christian polemical identification of Psalm 22 with Esther and the Purim narrative.

Earlier scholarship exploring this connection suffers from at least one critical limitation. The insightful studies by Betinna,\(^3\) Dorival,\(^4\) Menn,\(^5\) and Tkacz,\(^6\) are focused on Midrash Tehillim, a midrashic compilation redacted by the eleventh-century.\(^7\) Although it is partly true, as some of these studies mention,

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1. Psalm 22 in the Masoretic text is equivalent to Psalm 21 in the LXX. I will refer to this Psalm using the MT chapter and verse number.
3. Wellmann, *Von David, Königin Ester und Christus*.
7. On the late nature and date of Midrash Tehillim see the opinions of Zunz and Albeck in Leopold Zunz, *Homilies in Israel and their Historical Development* (trans. H. Albeck; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1947), 131–132. While Midrash Tehillim mostly quotes Palestinian Amoraic we must be cautious with statements by named sages that do not have clear precedent in earlier rabbinic literature. Late midrash tends to be more pseudepigraphic than early midrash. See Myron Lerner, “The Works of Aggaic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim,” in *The Literature of the Sages. Second Part: Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature* (CRINT 3b; ed. S. Safra; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2006), 152. For the most recent discussion, which examines the range of opinions,
that “the Midrash on Psalms, like ‘all other Midrashim,’ is believed to contain mainly material that ‘goes back to the Talmudic period,’” scholars cannot with any degree of methodological rigor identify, contextualize, and sort out the traditions that actually date to the Talmudic period from those produced or heavily reworked by a later redactor. Thus far, *Midrash Tehillim* lacks the detailed text, source, form and redaction critical analyses performed on other compilations of rabbinic literature. An anonymous statement or a named tradition unparalleled in actual late antique rabbinic literature cannot be taken as early. *Midrash Tehillim’s* popularity results from two factors: an English translation, and its lemmatic sequence that comments on nearly every verse of a psalm. Scholars who privilege this late text fail to examine in detail earlier material found in rabbinic literature that links Esther and Purim to Psalm 22.

This chapter will part from previous scholarship by discussing every early rabbinic source that connects Psalm 22 with Esther and the Purim narrative. These texts attest to the rise of a Jewish Passion counter-narrative featuring Esther simultaneously as a type and countertype of Christ. While earlier studies have discussed the existence of this polemic, none have examined its earliest instantiations and development. This chapter will demonstrate that the rabbinic construction of the Purim story into an anti-Christian counter narrative began in the third century, earlier than scholars have previously recognized, and grew throughout Late Antiquity. This chapter will also situate this counter-narrative in its late antique setting, reading it alongside other Jewish and non-Jewish sources that depict the celebration of Purim and the use of the book of Esther as Jewish anti-Christian polemic.

1  **Psalm 22 in the New Testament and Early Christianity**

In order to understand the content and context of Jewish counter-narratives involving Psalm 22, we must explore the psalm’s importance to early Christian...