

Esther 1:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,

Analysis

That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, This verse narrows the geographical focus from the empire's vast extent to its administrative center, Shushan (Hebrew Shushan, שׁוּשַׁן; Persian Susa). The phrase "sat on the throne" (shevet, שָׁבַת) indicates established rule, suggesting Ahasuerus had consolidated power after the typical succession struggles following Darius I's death.

Shushan served as one of the Persian Empire's royal capitals, along with Persepolis, Ecbatana, and Babylon. Kings moved seasonally between these cities, but Shushan's strategic location and magnificent palace complex made it particularly significant for administration and winter residence. The Hebrew distinguishes between "Shushan the palace" (birah, בִּירָה) and "Shushan the city" (v. 5), recognizing the citadel's separate identity from the surrounding metropolis.

The emphasis on throne and palace establishes the setting's opulence and power—the stage for divine drama. God's providence works through palace intrigue, royal protocol, and imperial politics. The seemingly incidental detail of location proves crucial: being "in Shushan the palace" positions Esther at the empire's power center, where her influence can save her people.

Historical Context

Archaeological excavations at Susa (modern Shush, Iran) have uncovered extensive remains of the Achaemenid palace complex described in Esther. French excavations (1884-1890) and subsequent digs revealed the royal palace (apadana), elaborate courtyards, throne room, and administrative buildings matching biblical descriptions. Glazed brick reliefs depicting Persian guards ("immortals") and architectural details confirm the book's accurate knowledge of Persian court life.

Susa's history extended back to 4200 BCE, making it one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Under Persian rule, it became a crucial administrative center where royal decrees were issued and imperial records kept. The discovery of the Code of Hammurabi at Susa demonstrates its long significance as a political center. Winter climate made Susa more comfortable than mountain capitals like Persepolis, explaining the king's presence there during the events of Esther.

The palace complex covered several acres and housed not only the king but also the royal harem, administrative officials, and guard contingents. This proximity facilitated the interactions described in Esther between the king, his officials, Esther, and Mordecai, who served at the king's gate.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How can believers discern whether their position in secular institutions is strategic providence or merely career ambition?
2. What does Esther's palace setting teach about Christian engagement with centers of political and cultural power?

3. How should we understand the relationship between divine sovereignty and human political structures?

Interlinear Text

בְּיָמֵי	הָיָה	כָּשֶׁ בָּתָן	הָמֶלֶךְ	אֲחַשְׁוֵר וְשׁ	עַל
That in those days	H1992	sat	when the king	Ahasuerus	H5921
H3117		H3427	H4428	H325	
כִּסֵּי	מַלְכוּתוֹ	אֲשֶׁר	בְּשׁוּשַׁן	הַבֵּיכָה:	
on the throne	of his kingdom	H834	which was in Shushan	the palace	
H3678	H4438		H7800	H1002	

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 1:1 (Parallel theme): The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,

2 Samuel 7:1 (Kingdom): And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies;

Daniel 8:2 (Parallel theme): And I saw in a vision; and it came to pass, when I saw, that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in a vision, and I was by the river of Ulai.