

In the History of Redemption we note this: The overriding message of Esther is the doctrine of God's sovereignty and providence. Although God is never mentioned in the book his presence is apparent in many circumstances: Mordecai "happened" to overhear the plot to kill the king (2:19-23), Esther "happened" to be queen at that time (4:14), the king's "timely" insomnia (6:1), etc. The book is a perfect illustration of James Russell Lowells' poem: "The Present Crisis"

Truth forever on the scaffold;
Wrong forever on the throne.
Yet that scaffold sways the future
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadows, keeping
Watch above His own.

The doctrine of the Lord's election of Israel as his covenant people is exemplified in Esther as well. He did not allow them to perish at the hands of their enemies but used even their circumstances to preserve them. There also seems to be a subtle argument concerning the futility of superstition. Haman's use of the lot to choose the date (3:7) and the actual circumstances of that day (7:10; 9:7-10) as well as the response of his wife and neighbors (6:12b-13) illustrate this argument.

Points of Question include the problem of why God is not mentioned in Esther. Is there any connection between this and the book's apparent emphasis on political intrigue and human intellect? How does the explanatory section (9:20-32) relate to the rest of the book either chronologically or logically? If the book is named for Esther, why does Mordecai seem to be the central character? Were there originally two versions of Esther (one Hebrew and one which we know through the Septuagint)? And why did Esther give two dinner parties?

In terms of archaeology, the palace of Xerxes I burned during the reign of his successor Artaxerxes I (464-423 BC). This may be the main reason for the lack of archaeological finds relating to the events of Esther. Excavations at Shushan (Susa) show the author of Esther most probably had firsthand information concerning the city and its palace. The city at one time covered five thousand acres and was divided into four administrative districts. Two of these appear to be mentioned in Esther: the royal city (the "citadel of Susa") and the commercial/residential district (the "city of Susa").

At one time it was suggested the king's decree would not have been written in the various languages of the provinces, but we now know the Persian kings were anxious to keep peace with their conquered territories and would have used this as one means of forestalling resentment against the regime. Each of the provinces would have been addressed in its own language or dialect even though the official language of Royal Aramaic would have been understood by nearly all citizens.

The origin of the word pur (3:7) was obscure for many years until it was linked with Akkadian puru which means "small stone" or "lot". Four-sided Persian dice have been found which have the values of one, two, five, and six.

A cuneiform text has been discovered which names a certain Marduka as a high official during the reign of Xerxes I. Some think that Mordecai is the Hebrew version of this name, but this conclusion is tentative. And this is from an era where the archaeology is still going on...who knows what may be produced next?