

## PERSIAN KINGS

### **Cyrus the Great (539-530 BC)**

Also called “Darius the Mede” in Daniel 5:31 where it says Darius the Mede conquered the Babylonians. Daniel 11:1 also refers to him by this name. He is referred to as King Darius in Daniel 6 where Daniel is thrown in with the lions. Darius appears to be a generic name that is translated as “holding firm the good”. Rulers in the ancient world had several names and many titles.

He was the founder of the Persian Empire under the Achaemenid dynasty. The empire expanded vastly, and eventually conquered most of Southwest Asia and much of Central Asia, from Israel and Turkey in the west to the Indus River in the east, to create the largest empire the world had yet seen. The dates of his reign above are just for those he ruled the Persian empire.

Cyrus built his empire by fighting and conquering first the Median Empire then Lydian Empire and the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Cyrus the Great respected the customs and religions of the lands he conquered. Aside from his own nation, Iran, Cyrus also left a lasting legacy on Jewish religion (through his Edict of Restoration), human rights, politics, and military strategy, as well as on both Eastern and Western civilizations.



### **Cambyses (529-522 BC)**

Best known as the Persian king to first conquer Egypt. He started the 27th Dynasty of Egypt and ruled Egypt for Persia before a brief period of independent Egyptian rule (30th Dynasty) which was followed the Persian reconquest (31st Dynasty) and the Greek conquest under Alexander the Great.



## BIBLE EVENTS

### **Daniel thrown into the lions den & Return of Jews to build the Temple**

After living through the Babylonian Empire from Nebuchadnezzar to Nabonidus' co-regent Belshazzar, Daniel sees the fall of Babylon and the beginning of the Persian Empire under Cyrus. Darius the Mede (Daniel 5:30-31) at this time was either Gubaru, the governor of Babylon under Cyrus the Great, or an alternate name for Cyrus himself.

In Daniel 6 he is thrown into the lions den and survives thanks to God's protection. Daniel would have been well over 80 years old at this point in time. This occurred mostly within the first three years of Cyrus' reign as the last vision of Daniel was given in the third year (536 BC) of Cyrus (Daniel 10:1). Daniel was given the vision of the Ram and Goat (about Persia and Greece), the 70 weeks prophecy and the prophecy of the King of the North v King of the South spanning 2500 years till Christ's return.

According to Josephus, the Jewish leaders, knowing the prophecies which spoke of Cyrus by name given through Isaiah 200 years earlier, showed it to Cyrus at a favourable opportunity. Cyrus was very impressed with the uncanny accuracy of the prophecy which spoke of how he would conquer Babylon (Isaiah 45:1-3) and he was motivated to fulfill the second part of the prophecy about rebuilding a Temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 44:28). He allowed the Jews who were captive in Babylon to go back and begin rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple (Ezra 1-3) around 539/538 BC. The Cyrus cylinder below records how he restored many temples in his day.



### **Stopping of work on the Temple**

After the initial decree by Cyrus the Great that allowed the Jews to return to the land of Israel and begin work on the Temple in Jerusalem, enemies of the Jews conspire to stop the work. They write to a king known as Artaxerxes (a generic title meaning “mighty king”) in Ezra 4 and succeed in having the work on the Temple stopped for a time. This probably occurred around 525 BC. Bible scholars believe this refers to an earlier king than the three Persian kings bearing that name. They agree that this king in Ezra 4 was likely to have been Cambyses, the successor of Cyrus the Great of Persia.



### Darius I (522-486 BC)

Upon the death of Cambyses, son and successor to Cyrus, Smerdis the Magian usurped the kingdom and was dethroned by seven Persian nobles from among whom Darius was selected to be king. After many rebellions and wars he succeeded in establishing himself firmly upon the throne. He reorganized and enlarged the Persian empire and is remembered for his unsuccessful conflict with Greece culminating at Marathon, and for his re-digging of the Suez Canal.

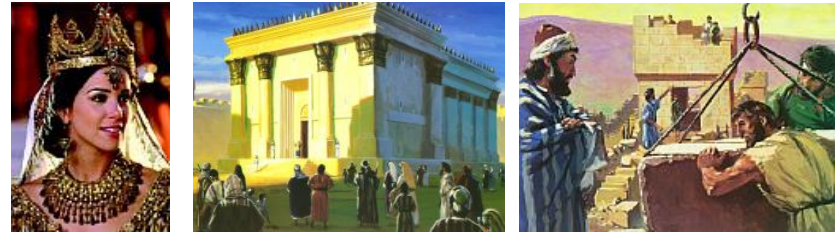
He is also known for commissioning the carving of the Behistun Rock inscription. This trilingual inscription (same text in Persian, Elamite and Babylonian) is the Persian equivalent to the Rosetta stone and lists Scythia as the 19<sup>th</sup> of 22 provinces. This was where many of the lost tribes of the House of Israel settled north of the Black Sea.



### Darius I marries Esther, Plot against Jews Thwarted, Completion of the Temple and Nehemiah leads group to Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem

In the Bible Darius is the king who enabled the Jews under Joshua and Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Zerubbabel was granted permission by Darius I to go up to Jerusalem and finish the building of the temple and was also made a governor of Jerusalem. He and Joshua, the high priest, led up a band of captives from Babylon to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the temple in the second year of Darius I and finished it four years later in 516 BC (Ezra 5-6). A few months later in 515 BC Darius I's 7<sup>th</sup> year (Artaxerxes of Ezra 7) the Temple is beautified with gold and precious elements.

Esther, a Jewess, was chosen as Darius I's queen after Vashti's lack of submission. After the Jews' enemies couldn't stop the Temple, a plot to destroy all the Jews by the evil Haman is thwarted. In Darius' 20<sup>th</sup> year (Nehemiah 1-2), Nehemiah is sent to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.



### Xerxes (485-465 BC)

Xerxes invaded Greece with a large army of more than 2,000,000 soldiers. Leonidas, with 700 Thebians and his famous 300 Spartans, arrested his progress at the narrow mountain pass of Thermopylae, before latter battles saw Persia conquer Greece. 1 Maccabees 12:5-23 shows a correspondence between the Jewish Maccabean leader and Arius, king of Sparta where they acknowledged the Spartans were kinsmen of the Jews. Steven Collins believes they were of the war-like tribe of Simeon.

Ultimately most of the remaining Persian army in the campaign retreated to put down a rebellion in Babylon following Xerxes destruction of the gold statue of Bel-Marduk and exalting Ahura Mazda, the supreme god of Zoroastrianism, a religion mostly tolerant of others, monotheistic and emphasising high morals but also teaching the eastern view of reincarnation.



### Xerxes prophesied to war against Greece

Xerxes reign and war against Greece is prophesied in Daniel 11:2 where we read: "Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia [Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius I]. And the fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece."

The prophecy then skips past the reigns of Artaxerxes I and the remaining Persian kings to the time of Alexander the Great when the Greeks would have their vengeance on Persia.



**Artaxerxes I (464-424 BC)**



**Darius II (423-405 BC)**



Darius II's reign is about when the prophet Malachi prophesied and wrote the last book of the Old Testament.

**Artaxerxes II (404-359 BC)**



The Bible is silent during the second and last century (decadent stage) of the Persian empire when the lesser Archaemenid kings from Artaxerxes II on ruled which was followed by Greek empire and then the Roman empire.

**Artaxerxes III (358-339 BC)**



Artaxerxes IV (338-336 BC)

Darius III (335-332 BC)



ALEXANDER THE GREAT OF GREECE (332-323 BC)  
(Greco-Macedonian empire)  
CONQUERS PERSIAN EMPIRE



Alexander prophesied to conquer Persian Empire

“The ram which you saw, having the two horns—*they are* the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat *is* the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that *is* between its eyes *is* the first king. As for the broken *horn* and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power” (Daniel 8:20-22).

This is a perfectly accurate prophecy of Alexander the Great defeating the Persians, then dying prematurely and his kingdom being divided up between his four generals.

