

# Understanding the Medo-Persian Kings

*It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out. (Proverbs 25:2)*

## Introduction

Upon studying the [angelic beings](#) in the book of Daniel earlier this year, I became engrossed with understanding the identity of the Medo-Persian kings mentioned there and in the book of Ezra versus the commonly accepted secular historical chronology. This side trail became a highway and led to other interesting discoveries. It turns out that have this background also enlightens some of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. I hope that this teaching will be a blessing to your understanding of the word of God.

## God Names “Cyrus”

We must start with Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Cyrus.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish, who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited,’ and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins’; who says to the deep, ‘Be dry; I will dry up your rivers’; who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know

me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.

"Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout; I the LORD have created it.

"Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'? Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'With what are you in labor?'"

Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: "Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands? I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward," says the LORD of hosts.

Thus says the LORD: "The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours; they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will plead with you, saying: 'Surely God is in you, and there is no other, no god besides him.'" (Isaiah 44:24 - 45:14)

In this prophecy, the Lord declared that Cyrus would be His instrument for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the laying of the foundation of the temple there, and the setting of the Jewish exiles in Babylon free to return. God made it clear that He is the Lord, the Creator who commands heaven and earth and there is no other. His plan was to "equip" Cyrus and stir him up to carry out His righteous works. Notably in this, the Lord "says to the deep, 'Be dry; I will dry up your rivers.'" This was apparently fulfilled when Cyrus the Great diverted some of the flow of the Euphrates river so that his soldiers could infiltrate Babylon at night by wading the river which normally would have been too deep. It seems that God gave Cyrus this idea to fulfill His word because it was His plan to raise him to power to accomplish His will. Cyrus was able to conquer Babylon, sitting behind enormous walls, without a battle.

The Lord went on to say, “The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours; they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you.” Unbeknown to many Bible commentators, *this verse provides the essential link to reconciling the Bible to historical timelines for the Persian Empire*. Cyrus the Great did not conquer Egypt, his son Cambyses did in 525 BC. The common view is that the Isaiah 44:24 to 45:14 passage refers exclusively to Cyrus the Great, however, this is incorrect. It refers to “Cyrus” which was a dynastic title of the Persian kings. It is a royal title like Caesar, Czar, or Pharaoh. In *The Scroll of Biblical Chronology*, Daniel Gregg mentioned that the throne name “Cyrus” is derived from the Elamite word for *shepherd*. God said concerning Cyrus, “I name you, though you do not know me” and “He is my *shepherd*, and he shall fulfill all my purpose”. When He said, “I *name* you,” the Hebrew word, translated here in English as “name,” is *kanah* which means “to title, surname, to be surnamed, give an epithet or cognomen, give a flattering title.” God thus gave the title “Cyrus” to the dynasty. The Isaiah prophecy is not just to Cyrus the Great but also to his son Cambyses and the royal family that ruled under the title Cyrus. Cyrus the Great was also called *Cyrus the Elder* by the Greeks. It is also worth noting here that Cyrus the Great was not the first Cyrus in their line of the Persian Achaemenidae family. History records his grandfather’s name or title as also being Cyrus.

This distinction of “Cyrus” referring more broadly to the royal throne is important because it reconciles God’s promise of seventy years of exile in Babylon for the Jews to Isaiah’s prophecy here. Jeremiah had prophesied:

“For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.” (29:10)

This is a poor translation that should read “at Babylon” instead of “for Babylon.” This error most likely stems from the ignorance that there is a difference between the seventy years of exile for the Jews and the seventy years of Babylonian rule, *three and one-half which still remain*. The King James Version translates this verse as follows:

For thus saith the LORD. That after seventy years be accomplished *at Babylon* I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. (29:10; emphasis mine)

The King James translation is correct because the context of the 29th chapter of Jeremiah is God disciplining His people *not* God judging Babylon.

Furthermore, the last chapter of 2 Chronicles provides this important note:

He [King Nebuchadnezzar] took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, *until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.* (2 Chronicles 36:20–21; emphasis mine)

Jeremiah sent his letter to the Jews in Babylon announcing the seventy years of exile “after King Jeconiah [also called Jehoiachin] ... had departed from Jerusalem” (29:2) so 597 BC. marked the beginning of the seventy year exile. Ezekiel’s writing also implied that that deportation of Jehoiachin marked the beginning of the exile (see 1:1–2). Why did God make it seventy years? Because the Jews had not observed the [Sabbath Year](#) seventy times after settling in the promised land. The land was to rest in the Sabbath year so God was going to give it seventy years of rest to make up for this, “until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths.” *Gregg’s chronology has the seventieth Sabbatical year that Israel did not observe falling in 598 B.C.* and he provides an amazingly detailed calculation and explanation for this that further validates the accuracy and completeness of his overall chronological work. The exile began the following year and ended seventy years later in 529 BC when Cyrus the Great’s son, Cambyses, who also carried the throne name Cyrus, issued the decree.

Ezra recorded the following:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, *that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled*, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.” (1:1–3; emphasis mine)

Secular history has taken Ezra’s record here and incorrectly assumed that, “Cyrus king of Persia,” was a reference to Cyrus the Great. It is not. It is a reference to his son and the first year of his reign was exactly seventy years after Jeremiah’s prophecy “that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled.” The word of the LORD is always precise.

The mistake that is typically made by Bible teachers is to assume that after Cyrus the Great took Babylon in 539 BC that God moved him to issue the decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem because Babylon's seventy years was up. However, Nebuchadnezzar's first siege against Jerusalem, the subsequent vassalage of King Jehoiakim, and the first deportation of Jews to Babylon was in 605 BC Jeremiah *specifically* noted that this was the first year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign and also the beginning of the seventy year clock for Babylon's rule *over the nations*:

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son Josiah, king of Judah (*that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon*), which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. ...

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, *my servant*, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and *these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years*. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, *making the land an everlasting waste*. I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands."

Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them."

So I took the cup from the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it: [after naming Judah and the surrounding nations] ... all the kings of the north, far and near, one after another, and all the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth. And after them the king of Babylon shall drink. (25:1-3, 8-17, 26; emphasis mine)

God called King Nebuchadnezzar “my servant” as he was His instrument for judgement. God declared that He would make the land of Babylon “an everlasting waste.” This has not happened yet. When Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon he set his son Cambyses in authority there and even gave him the title, “king of Babylon,” reserving “king of lands” for himself. Far from becoming an everlasting waste, Babylon remained part of an important satrapy in the Persian Empire. Much like the 50th and 51st chapters of Jeremiah, the 25th chapter includes some verses concerning Babylon that are an example of [the law of double reference](#). Babylon’s remaining three and one-half years will be completed in alignment with the final three and one-half years of the great tribulation as revealed to Daniel (9:27) and as foreseen in the 18th chapter of the Revelation of Jesus Christ which describes the eventual destruction of Babylon.

Cyrus the Great died in 530 BC. It had to have been Cambyses in 529 BC *in the first year of his reign* under the title, “Cyrus king of Persia,” who issued the decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. This was immediately after the Jews had completed their seventy year exile which began in 597 BC.

It is helpful to understand that Cambyses was an established man when Cyrus the Great took Babylon and was involved in his leadership circle. It was the general practice of Cyrus the Great to support the religious activities of the people they conquered. This may have been discussed by Cyrus the Great and his son prior to it finally happening. Furthermore, it is possible that it was actually Cyrus the Great’s idea but just did not get carried out until 529 BC when the seventy years were completed for the Jewish exiles.

## **Identity of Darius the Mede**

The next mystery we need to uncover is the identity of Darius the Mede in the book of Daniel. Here is the description that we are given regarding the fall of Babylon and the rise of the Medes and Persians, picking up from Daniel’s account of the handwriting on the wall:

“Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.



That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.” ...

And the king [Darius] commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. ...

Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel ...

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius *and the reign of Cyrus the Persian*. (5:24–6:5, 24a, 25–26a, 28)

Secular history tends to emphasize the “Persian” Empire ruling after the Babylonian Empire, however, the Bible emphasizes that it was the Medes and Persians. When Daniel interpreted the word “PERES” on the wall, he declared, “your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes *and* Persians.” Secular history says the Persian Empire rose to prominence after Babylon fell, but, in reality, the Medo-Persian Empire rose to prominence. Elsewhere, in one of Daniel’s visions, the Medo-Persian rule was symbolized by a ram with “two horns, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last” (8:3b). It was really the Medo-Persian Empire, but Persian power increased as time passed. The Holy Spirit consistently emphasized this joint rule and it has implications for understanding the identity of Darius the Mede.

In *History of the Persian Empire*, Albert T. Olmstead provided the following insight concerning the relationship of the Medes and Persians:

[after Cyrus took Ecbatana] Media ceased to be an independent nation and became the first [Persian] satrapy, Mada. Nevertheless, the close relationship between Persians and Medes was never forgotten. Plundered Ecbatana remained a favorite royal residence. Medes were honored equally with Persians; they were employed in high office and were chosen to lead Persian armies. *Foreigners spoke regularly of the Medes and Persians; when they used a single term, it was “the Mede.”* (emphasis mine)

My view is that the Darius the Mede of Daniel was actually Cyrus the Great and Darius was actually a royal title, confirmed by the fact that the Persian empire would later have a Darius I, Darius II, etc. Cyrus the Great’s father was the Persian king Cambyses I but his mother was Mandane, the daughter of the Median king, Astyages. He was a descendent of both the Medes and Persians. Daniel, a foreigner, referring to him as Darius “the Mede” fits Olmsted’s description.

Both Isaiah (13:17) and Jeremiah (51:11) had prophesied that the Lord was going to stir up the Medes against Babylon, however, absent some interaction of the Law of Double Reference here, *these prophecies have yet to be fulfilled*. A proof of this fact is that in Daniel’s time Babylon was given to the Medes *and Persians* not just the Medes. The Isaiah and Jeremiah prophecies make no mention of the Persians. Nevertheless, the expectation of Daniel, who we know at least read Jeremiah (see Daniel 9:2), and the broader Jewish community in Babylon was that the Medes were going to conquer Babylon. Daniel may have referred to Darius (Cyrus the Great) as the Mede to emphasize what he mistook as a fulfilled prophecy.

Perhaps the most amazing piece of evidence for the identity of Darius the Mede being Cyrus the Great is the fact that Daniel, writing through the Holy Spirit, specifically referred to him “being about sixty-two years old.” Cyrus the Great was sixty-two when he conquered Babylon.

At least several ancient Jewish writings reveal the perspective that Jews commonly equated Darius with Cyrus (the Great). In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, the Jewish historian Josephus provided the following account:

And this is the end of the posterity of king Nebuchadnezzar, as history informs us; but when Babylon was taken by Darius, and when he, with his kinsman Cyrus, had put an end to the dominion of the Babylonians, he was sixty-two years old. He was the son of Astyages, and had another name among the Greeks. Moreover, he took Daniel the prophet, and carried him with him into Media, and honored him very greatly, and kept him with him; for he was one of the three presidents whom he set over his three hundred and sixty provinces, for into so many did Darius part them.



Josephus mentioned here that Darius “had another name among the Greeks,” which may have been Cyrus, the name he is referred to in our secular history. Josephus’ reference here to “his kinsman Cyrus,” may have been a reference to Cambyses, the son of Cyrus the Great, who later appears in Daniel under that same royal title.

It is worth noting that verse 11:1 of Daniel in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), has “Cyrus” instead of the “Darius the Mede” that appears in our modern versions. Darius the Mede is also referred to as Cyrus in other ancient Jewish non-Biblical works, however, I find these accounts to be somewhat fanciful and unreliable to the point that I will not mention them here in presenting my *Biblical* case that Darius the Mede is Cyrus the Great.

Daniel told us that this Darius the Mede “received the kingdom” and he “set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials.” The aramaic word, translated here in English as “received,” is *qēbal*, which means “to acquire, to take, to receive.” The King James Version (KJV) and the New International Version (NIV) both translate it “took.” The point is that the fall of Babylon led to Cyrus the Great taking control of a then firmly established Medo-Persian Empire. Attempts have been made to identify Darius the Mede as a subordinate of Cyrus the Great or as some other subordinate who was put in charge of the Babylonian satrap, however, Daniel’s description makes it clear that this Darius ruled over the *entire* Medo-Persian empire and he was the one doing the subordinating. Furthermore, there is no reference at all to Babylon in the sixth chapter of Daniel. These events most likely took place at Ecbatana (see Ezra 6:2), the Median capital where Cyrus the Great was known to have had his headquarters. Darius’ plan to set Daniel “over the whole kingdom” was in fact what triggered the famous lion’s den incident. After God delivered Daniel “from the power of the lions”, Darius wrote his royal decree to “all the people, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth” which is perhaps the most convincing evidence that he ruled over the entire empire and was indeed Cyrus the Great.

Finally, the last verse of the sixth chapter of Daniel tells us that “Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” In 1957, the archaeologist and Assyriologist [Donald J. Wiseman](#), a Christian Biblical scholar, [proposed](#) that this verse could also be translated:

So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Several Bible versions, most notably the NIV, have footnoted this verse offering this alternative translation for consideration. My inclination here though is to simply assume that the Bible is telling us that Daniel prospered during the reign of Cyrus the Great

(Darius) and his son Cambyses (Cyrus the Persian). Daniel may also have referred to Cyrus the Great as Darius the Mede to differentiate him from his son who issued the decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

### Further Implications for the Book of Daniel

Daniel left us one other important passage concerning Darius that must be addressed:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. (Daniel 9:1–2)

The structure of Daniel’s writing here must be observed. He emphasized that Babylon fell to a Median conqueror because Jeremiah had prophesied the following:

“Sharpen the arrows! Take up the shields! The LORD has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance for his temple. (51:11)

However, Daniel was likely expecting this to happen after seventy years because Jeremiah had also prophesied to “all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem (25:2)”:

This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their inquiry, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste." (25:11–12)

Taken together, Daniel was likely expecting the Medes to conquer Babylon after seventy years, after which the desolation of Jerusalem would end.

Daniel’s description was translated in the ESV, “was made king,” however the original Hebrew word *malak* simply means, “to reign, to be king.” Daniel specified that it was the first year that Darius the Mede reigned over the Chaldeans (i.e., Babylonia) to denote that it was the first year that Babylon was out of power. Bible commentators proposing that Darius the Mede was a subordinate of Cyrus the Great who only ruled over Babylon will use this verse to try to support their theory, however, they overlook the significance of why Daniel mentioned Babylon here.

The Hebrew word *chorbah* which means “a place laid waste, ruins, a desolation” is the same word that appears both in Daniel 9:2 translated in English as “desolations” and Jeremiah 25:11 translated in English as “a ruin and a waste.” The point is that Daniel had reviewed Jeremiah’s prophecies and understood that seventy years were to pass under Babylonian rule. He may have been trying to reconcile what was going on once Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon without a battle and without doing any harm to the city. It had not been a full seventy years under Babylonian rule and he probably knew this because he had been there the entire sixty-seven and one-half years since Nebuchadnezzar first besieged Jerusalem in the first year of his reign. Furthermore, Babylon was far from an everlasting waste as it simply was just incorporated into the greater Medo-Persian Empire. After comprehending from Jeremiah that the desolations of Jerusalem would end after seventy years of Babylonian rule, Daniel sought the Lord “by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes” and this culminated in the angel Gabriel arriving him to make him understand that *the desolations for Jerusalem were not over yet* and finally stating that:

“he [the antichrist] shall make a strong covenant with many for one week [i.e., seven years], and for half of the week [i.e., three and one-half years] he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” (Daniel 9:27)

If Daniel thought Babylon still had three and one-half years remaining, he may have made the connection that it was going to rise to power again at the very end—for the last half of the final week (seven years). Gabriel did not specify this though. The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ has made this clear for us by confirming that the beast (antichrist) will be “allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months [three and one-half years]” (13:5) and “the nations ... will trample the holy city for forty-two months” (11:2). Babylon’s future and final rise to power must correspond with the antichrist putting “an end to sacrifice and offering” in another Jewish temple that is yet to be built.

We can thus see that the focus of Daniel in 9:1–2 was reconciling the end of the desolations of Jerusalem which is the very reason why he mentioned (1) a king of Median descent, (2) “the realm of the Chaldeans” (Babylonia), and (3) Jeremiah’s prophecies. He was by no means implying that Darius the Mede only ruled over Babylon, thus not allowing for him to be one and the same as Cyrus the Great.

Daniel also mentioned that Darius was the “son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede.” Ahasuerus is likely either a royal title or variant spelling of the name of Cyrus the Great’s Median great-grandfather Cyaxares who, [according to Britannica](#), *transformed the Medes*

*into a regional power.* As part of an alliance with Babylon, he also led the Median army in the destruction of Nineveh and overthrow of the Assyrian empire.

## **A Definitive Answer From Heaven**

Daniel's final (recorded) heavenly encounter came during "the third year of Cyrus king of Persia" (10:1). Notably, for our purposes here, the angel told him:

"And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him."

"And now I will show you the truth. Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece." (11:1–2)

This angel "stood up to confirm and strengthen" Cyrus the Great (Darius the Mede) to fulfill the word of the Lord through Isaiah regarding the Cyrus dynasty.

It is interesting to note that the context of the angel's account clearly equivocates Darius the Mede to a ruler of the entire Media-Persian empire and not just Babylon as some Bible commentators have argued.

The angel's account provides us with a definitive timeline that can be used to verify that Darius the Mede was indeed the Cyrus the Great of secular history. The fourth king that the angel referred to, who was to "become strong through his riches," was Xerxes (Ahasuerus in Esther) who launched a massive invasion of European Greece. Working backward from Xerxes, we can see that there were three kings between Xerxes and the one that was in power at the time of this angelic visitation given that the angel said, "three more kings shall arise in Persia." The three kings prior to Xerxes, in reverse chronological order, were Darius, Smerdis, and Cambyses. This would mean that king in power at the time of visitation was Cyrus the Great—the Darius the Mede that this angel "stood up to confirm and strengthen" in the first year of his reign. Recall that this verse (11:1) in Septuagint version of the Old Testament has "Cyrus" instead of the "Darius the Mede." Following this logic, the "Cyrus king of Persia" that Daniel referred to as being king at the time of this visitation would have been the same Darius the Mede.

It is my view that the Septuagint translation is the proper one and Daniel purposely meant to refer to Darius the Mede as Cyrus (the Great) at this point. It is also possible that there was a royal title change that led to a transition from Darius to Cyrus. Daniel was in close confidence with the king. Recall, "the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."

Darius may also have come to saving faith, considering his decree: “for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end ...” Darius may have even received the prophecies of Isaiah from Daniel and changed his title to Cyrus to align with God’s perspective. This concept also gives credence to Wiseman’s view that Daniel 6:28 could be translated:

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius *even* the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Is there a Biblical explanation for why Daniel would have started referring to him at this point as Cyrus king of Persia instead of Darius the Mede as he previously did? Yes, there is. After the visitation of Gabriel (chapter 9), Daniel may have realized that the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Great was not the same destruction of Babylon at the hands of the Medes that Jeremiah had prophesied. This discovery may have led him to begin referring to Darius as Cyrus in his writings.

Pondering this, I put myself in Daniel’s shoes—assuming I knew the prophecies of Isaiah concerning Cyrus and those of Jeremiah about Babylon being destroyed after seventy years (from the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign)—longing for the end of the desolation of Jerusalem. The handwriting on the wall and the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Great who had Median descent would have had me thinking that the Babylon prophecy was fulfilled. After Gabriel’s second visitation, I probably still would not have understood that Babylon had three and one-half years remaining and would have continued seeking the Lord for proper understanding on the seventy years of Babylon. When I finally reached the seventieth year my anticipation would have been intense.

*The third year of Cyrus the Great was that seventieth year and also the context for Daniel’s last two chapters.* Notably, Daniel wrote:

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. ...

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks, I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold [Daniel saw a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ]. (10:1, 2–5a)

*Daniel may have been fasting because, in his mind, the seventy years of desolation for Jerusalem were about to end.*

Another possibility to consider here is that this third year of “Cyrus king of Persia” was actually the third year of Cambyses reigning under the title of Cyrus. Daniel may have referred to Cyrus the Great as Darius the Mede to denote the fact that Cambyses was actually the Cyrus who gave the decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. In this case, the angel’s reference to the “fourth” king would have to be interpreted as the fourth when starting with Cambyses (see outline below).

Before we move on to Ezra, here is that timeline that we established so far through our examination of the book of Daniel:

	<u>Secular Name</u>	<u>Biblical Name</u>
539 - 530 BC	Cyrus the Great	Darius the Mede
530 - 522 BC	Cambyses	Cyrus
522 BC	Smerdis	<i>not mentioned</i>
522 - 486 BC	Darius I	Darius
486 - 465 BC	Xerxes	Ahasuerus

## **Ezra**

The book of Ezra begins with the proclamation of Cyrus king of Persia which would have been Cambyses, the son of Cyrus the Great and his successor, ruling under the same title in 528 BC:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” (1:1–4)

The Lord stirring up the spirit of Cyrus (Cambyses) may have been the fruit of the angel who visited Daniel returning “to fight against the prince of Persia.” More plainly, there may have been an angelic assault against the demonic Persian principality to clear the path for the Lord to move Cyrus on Israel’s behalf.



Isaiah never prophesied that the Lord would give the Cyrus dynasty “all the kingdoms of the earth” which leads me to believe that the Lord somehow made this known to Cambyses. Cambyses may even have been a believer who had a relationship with the Lord. Isaiah’s prophecy included the following:

I have stirred him [Cyrus] up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward," says the LORD of hosts.

Thus says the LORD: “The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabean, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours; they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will plead with you, saying: ”Surely God is in you, and there is no other, no god besides him.” (45:13–14)

Two things are noteworthy here. First, Cambyses invaded Egypt in 525 BC. This was three years *after* issuing the proclamation which followed the chronology of Isaiah’s prophecy. The Lord making known to Cambyses that He had given him all the kingdoms of the earth may have inspired him to go after Egypt and Northeastern Africa. Second, Isaiah prophesied that the Africans would say to him, “Surely God is in you,” a statement that could imply that he knew the Lord.

These points together suggest that Cambyses may have embraced the royal title of Cyrus as his destiny in fulfilling God’s will, having his understanding of Isaiah possibly aided by Daniel.

Ezra recorded: “when the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man in Jerusalem” (3:1). The seventh month, Tishri, begins a new Hebrew Sabbath year. The people were thus returned to Jerusalem at the beginning of the Sabbath year in 528 BC. This was exactly seventy years after they were exiled to Jerusalem under King Jeconiah in 598 BC, immediately after the completion of the seventieth Sabbatical year in which they had not rested the land.

Ezra provided more chronology of the Persian kings as he described the saga of the Jews trying to rebuild the temple:

Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

In the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam and Mithredath and Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia. ...

Then, when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their associates, they went in haste to the Jews at Jerusalem and by force and power made them cease. Then the work on the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped, and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. (4:4–7; 23–24)

Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra ... came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. (7:1a, 8)

Just as Isaiah had prophesied (44:28), only the foundation of the temple would be built during the reign of Cyrus. Ezra does not mention Smerdis, seemingly because his reign was so short, and then names the succeeding kings Darius, Ahasuerus, Artaxerxes, Darius, and Artaxerxes throughout his account which matches the Darius I, Xerxes, Artaxerxes I, Darius II, and Artaxerxes II of secular history.

### The Final Chronological Product

Finally, here is a chronological comparison of the Medo-Persian kings in the Bible with the Persian kings as typically referenced by secular history:

	<u>Secular Name</u>	<u>Biblical Name</u>
539 - 530 BC	Cyrus the Great	Darius the Mede
530 - 522 BC	Cambyses	Cyrus
522 BC	Smerdis	<i>not mentioned</i>
522 - 486 BC	Darius I	Darius
486 - 465 BC	Xerxes	Ahasuerus
465 - 423 BC	Artaxerxes I	Artaxerxes
423 - 404 BC	Darius II	Darius
404 - 358 BC	Artaxerxes II	Artaxerxes

I hope this study proves to be a helpful reference for readers who read and study the related books in the future.