

# Persian Empire

The first five kings of the Persian Empire after the fall of Babylon in 539 BC were:

Cyrus (539-529 BC) - Issued Decree allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem (538 BC)

Cambyses (529-522 BC) - son of Cyrus

Smerdis (522 BC)

Darius I Hystapsis (522-486 BC) – Issued Decree allowing work on the Temple to continue.

Xerxes I (485-465 BC) – Married Esther

Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464-424 BC) – Made decree to Ezra 458BC and allowed Nehemiah to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (445 BC)

## **Cyrus the Great (c. 590 – 529 BC)**



King of Iran (from 559 BC)

King over Medes (550 BC)

Founder of the Persian Empire

Cyrus was influenced by the teachings of Zoroaster  
Zoroastrianism became the religion of Persia.

### **Cyrus took Babylon in October 539 BC.**

Herodotus explains that the Persians entered Babylon by diverting the waters of the Euphrates into a canal. The water level dropped to the height of a man's thigh. The Persian army was then able to enter the city. Cyrus arrested Nabonidus and took the titles King of Babylon, Sumer, and Akkad.

**Cyrus (c. 590 – 529 BC)**

**Ezra 1:1-8**

**Charter of the Rights of Nations (538 BC)**

Inscribed on a 10 inch clay cylinder in cuneiform. Discovered by Assyrian archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam during excavations in Babylon between 1879-82.



British Museum

**Cyrus Cylinder**  
**Decree of Cyrus 538 BC**



British Museum

I am Kurash [ "Cyrus" ], King of the World, Great King, Legitimate King, King of Babilani, King of Kiengir and Akkade, King of the four rims of the earth, Son of Kanbujiya, Great King, King of Hakhamanish, Grandson of Kurash, Great king, King of Hakhamanish, descendant of Chishpish, Great king, King of Hakhamanish, of a family which always exercised kingship; whose rule Bel and Nebo love, whom they want as king to please their hearts.

When I entered Babilani as a friend and when I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord, induced the magnanimous inhabitants of Babilani to love me, and I was daily endeavoring to worship him....

As to the region from as far as Assura and Susa, Akkade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-turnu, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, I returned to these sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which used to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. **I also gathered all their former inhabitants and returned them to their habitations.** Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Kiengir and Akkade whom Nabonidus had brought into Babilani to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their former temples, the places which make them happy.

**Cyrus is mentioned by name by Isaiah**

**This prophecy of Isaiah is dated c.700BC**

**Isaiah 44:28-45:3**

‘That saith of **Cyrus**, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to **Cyrus**, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;

I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron:

And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.’

**Cyrus was very happy when he was shown the prophecy of Isaiah**

**Ezra 1:2-3**

‘Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and **he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.**

Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that *is* in Jerusalem.’

## **Jeremiah's 70 year captivity**

### **Jeremiah 25:11-12**

‘And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.’

### **Jeremiah 29:10**

‘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.’

## **Timeline**

**First exiles taken to Babylon in 606 BC**

**Second exiles taken 597 BC**

**Jerusalem destroyed 586-5 BC**

**Decree of Cyrus 538 BC**

**First exiles return to Jerusalem 536 BC**

**Work on Temple stops 534 BC**

**Work on Temple commences 520 BC**

**Decree of Darius 519BC**

**Temple completed 516-5 BC**

## **Darius the Great (521 – 486 BC)**

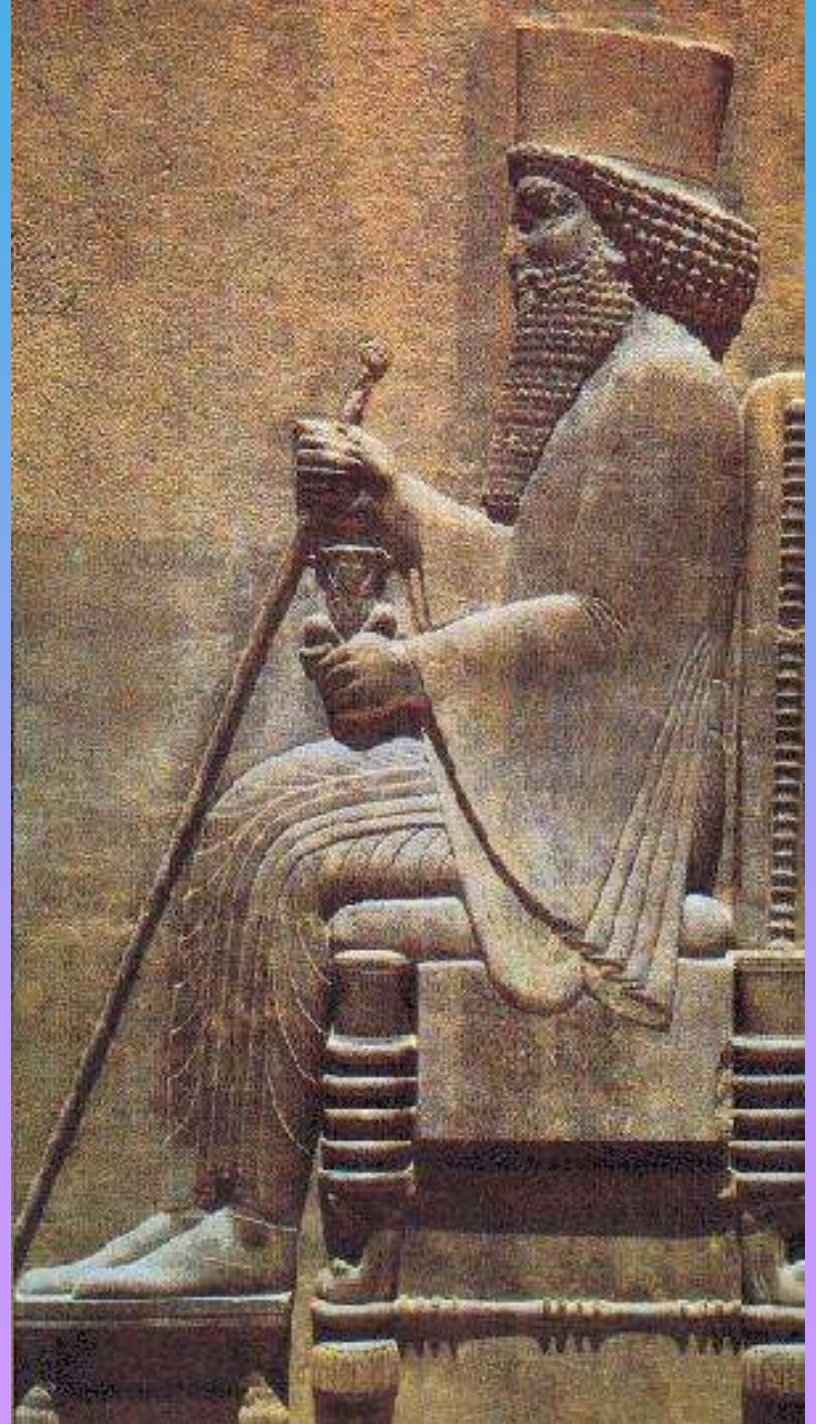
### **The decree of Darius (Ezra 6: 1-12)**

When Darius found the roll with the decree of Cyrus giving the Jews permission to build the Temple. He provided the means for the Jews to complete building the Temple in Jerusalem.

'The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.' Proverbs 21:1

Darius holding the royal sceptre.

Location: Apadana Palace,  
Persepolis, Iran (Persia)





**Sphinx Darius**

**Location: Louvre**

## **Dedication of the Second Temple (Ezra 6:15-22)**

Text: Ezra 6:22

Introduction: Dedicated the temple with joy

The work on the Second Temple was completed on the 3rd of Adar in the 6th year of Darius the King (March 516-5 BC)

1. Authorised by the word of the King. God gave them authority to complete the work by turning the heart of the King of Assyria unto them (6:22b)
2. Empowerment to work. God strengthened them to complete the work in building the House of God (6:22c)
3. Joyful worship. The Feast of Unleavened bread is kept with joy (6:22a).

# **Rebuilding of the Temple**

The authorisation of the King

Decree of Cyrus 538 BC

Decree of Darius 519 BC

1. The authority of the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 5:13)
  - Exiles allowed to return
  - Work on the temple began (536 BC)
  - Work on the temple stops (534 BC) – opposition
  - Work begins – preaching of Haggai and Zechariah (520 BC)
2. The authority of the decree of Darius (Ezra 6:7) 519 BC  
Temple completed (516-515 BC)

## 2. Good leadership - To strengthen their hand in the work of the House of God (6:22c)

The preaching of the prophets Zechariah and Haggai (5:1) – start building

- Zerubbabel responds

Strengthened by the good leadership of Zerubbabel (5:2) – work began

- The elders refuse to stop

Strengthened by the good leadership of the elders (5:5) – work continued

- The authority to build is recognised

The Jews cannot be stopped. Darius recognises the right of the Jews to build their temple.

### 3. The House of the Lord is characterised by sanctification and joy. (Ezra 6:21-22)

Passover could only be kept by those who

- Separated from the world.

Kept themselves from the filthiness of the heathen of the land (Ezra 6:21a)

- Had a heart to seek the Lord.

Sought after the Lord God of Israel (6:21b)

- The result - joyfulness

The Lord made them joyful so that they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread with joy (6:22a)

# Mordecai and Queen Esther

Esther was the Jewish wife of Ahaseurus also called Xerxes (485 – 465 BC)



## Xerxes (485 – 465 BC)

Also called Ahasuerus

King who married Esther.

'And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, *with* words of peace and truth,'  
(Esther 9:30)

Peace and truth must go hand in hand.



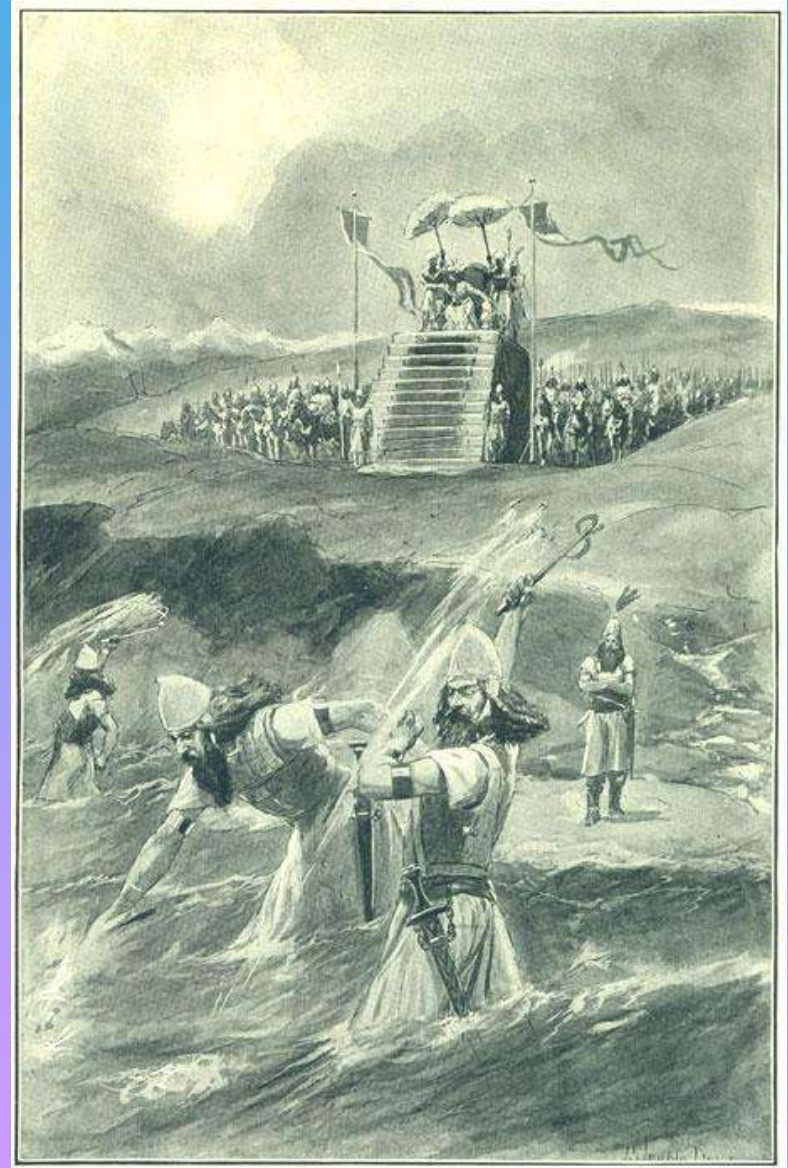
Coin of Xerxes (Ahasuerus)

## Esther approaches Ahasuerus (Xerxes)



## Herodotus Book 7

Xerxes punished the sea with lashes when his attempt to bridge the Hellespont failed through a storm.



**Artaxerxes I (464 – 423 BC)** Esther was married to his father.

**458 BC** Decree to Ezra allowing Jews to return and restore Jerusalem

**445 BC** Allowed Nehemiah to build wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah left Persia in 20th year of reign of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:1)

**433 BC** Nehemiah returned to Persia in the 32nd year (Nehemiah 13:6)

**c.425 BC** Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem again (Nehemiah 13:6)

# **Facing Opposition**

## **Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem**

### Lessons from Nehemiah

1. Introduction: Given a great responsibility
2. Despised 2:19-20
3. Ridiculed 4:1-6
4. Threatened 4:7-9
5. Discouraged 4:10
6. Extortion 5:1-13
7. Compromise 6:1-4
8. Slandered 6:5-9
9. Treachery 6:10-14
10. Conclusion: Enemy Disheartened, Faithfulness honoured, God is glorified.

# The Elephantine Papyri

Collection of ancient Jewish manuscripts

Dated from 5th century BC

Jewish community in Elephantine, Egypt. An island in the Nile by the border of Nubia – border fortress.

Papyri written in Hieratic, Demotic, Aramaic, Greek, Latin and Coptic.



## **Elephantine papyrus No.30**

'Petition to Governor of Judea'

November 21, 406 BC (20 Marcheswan, Darius 17).

**Darius II (Reigned 423 BC – 404 BC).**

1. Document shows that Bigvai had replaced Nehemiah as governor of Jerusalem by 410 BC.
2. Document mentions Sanballat (Nehemiah 2:19)
3. Document mentions The High Priest Jehohanan (Nehemiah 6:18; 12:23)