

Darius the Mede

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(See [History](#).)
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In the book of Daniel a king named **Darius the Mede** is mentioned, in 5:31 and 11:1, **simply called Darius in 9:1** and throughout chapter 6. However, unlike all of the other rulers mentioned in the book (Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Cyrus), no such king can be identified with that name in extra-biblical sources. Other Babylonian and Persian kings from the same period are mentioned in other books of the Bible, and every one of them can also be identified in extra-biblical sources, and even their years of rule are apparently quite solid, and these match the sequence of events given in the Bible quite well. (See the names in **red** on the [main chart](#) in the table of ***Kings of Babylon, Media and Persia*** starting around 650 B.C.)¹

Now of course there are three well-known kings named Darius in Persian history, as shown in the table, but all of these reigned *after* Cyrus, not before. And what complicates the question even more is that extra-biblical sources indicate that it was Cyrus who overthrew Belshazzar, leaving no room for Darius the Mede in between the two.

Before I saw the need to write this article I had mainly followed F. LaGard Smith's [The Narrated Bible](#) on this question, as I have in most of my chronology. He gives the reigning years of Darius the Mede as 542 to 539, and states: "Darius the Mede will have control of the nation for about three years before he sees his own writing on the wall, as it were, and virtually hands Babylonia over to the ascending Persian Empire." I had long assumed that he had some evidence for this, but I recently did an extensive search to find out what he based this statement on, and I can find nothing about any three-year period or about the details of a handover to Cyrus, either in or outside of the Bible.

The [Wikipedia article](#) suggests 6 possibilities for who Darius the Mede might have been, but only 3 are possibilities if we accept the reliability of the Bible:

1. [Gubaru \(Gobryas\)](#). According to J. C. Whitcomb in the [Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible](#), "It seems quite probable that Darius the Mede was another name for Gubaru, the governor under Cyrus who appointed sub-governors in Babylonia immediately after its conquest ("Nabonidus Chronicle," ANET, 306; cf. Dan. 6:1). This same Gubaru (not to be confused with Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, the general under Cyrus who conquered Babylon and died three weeks later, according to the Nabonidus Chronicle) is frequently mentioned in cuneiform documents during the following fourteen years as "Governor of Babylon and the Region Beyond the River" (i.e., the entire Fertile Crescent). Gubaru thus ruled over the vast and populous territories of Babylonia, Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine..." He also says, "Darius the Mede was born in the year 601/600, for at the fall of Babylon in 539 he was sixty-two (Dan. 5:31)." (Text also available [here](#), though without proper attribution.)

2. [Cyaxares II](#). According to a [doctoral dissertation upholding this view](#), "The view that Darius the Mede is the man identified by Xenophon as Cyaxares II was once the dominant view among commentators on the book of Daniel, but was virtually abandoned after Akkadian inscriptions that supported Herodotus were discovered in the late nineteenth century. There is more extra-biblical evidence in support of the identification of Darius the Mede with Cyaxares II than the attention currently given to this thesis would suggest". It also says, "The thesis of this dissertation is that Cyrus shared power with a Median king until about two years after the fall of Babylon. This king is called Cyaxares (II) by the Greek historian Xenophon, but is known by his throne name Darius in the book of Daniel. Cyrus did not make a hostile conquest of Media, did not dethrone the last Median king, and did not become the highest regent in the Medo-Persian Empire until after the fall of Babylon. Xenophon's detailed account agrees remarkably well with the book of Daniel, and can claim surprising support from a number of other ancient sources." However, he still puts the fall of Babylon at 539, not 542. The same author gives further information [here](#).

3. Another name for [Cyrus](#) the Great himself! A surprising number of conservative, Bible-believing sources hold this position, including George Law's 277-page work [Identification of Darius the Mede](#) (see in particular pages 168 and 171), Sydney Greidanus's [Preaching Christ from Daniel: Foundations for Expository Sermons](#) (see bottom of page 169 and footnote 79), and [this page](#). The idea is that Daniel 6:28, which reads "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian", should actually be read "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, *that is*, in the reign of Cyrus the Persian," a usage of what is called the "*wāw explicativum*", one of the common uses of the Hebrew prefix ו (this letter is named *wāw*), whose basic meaning is

“and”. (See the texts cited for a full explanation of this idea.) One surprising evidence for this theory is that Cyrus was born around 598-600 B.C., so he was right around 62 years old when he conquered Babylon in 539, the age given for Darius in Daniel 5:31.

All three of these positions place the conquest of Babylon by the Medes or Persians in 539, so again no support of Smith’s timeline. (Smith suggests that Gubaru is the best candidate, but disagrees with Whitcomb’s chronology.) And 1 and 3 place Darius and Cyrus as both beginning their rule in 539. For this reason I have changed my timeline accordingly. As to which position I prefer, I really couldn’t say, though I perhaps find number 3 the most convincing and number 2 the least convincing (in spite of the fact that I had considered it the most convincing before!). In any case, I have still kept Darius and Cyrus separate because I am not sure, and the first two are certainly possibilities.

¹ There is some uncertainty about whether “[Darius the Persian](#)” in Nehemiah 12:22 is Darius II or Darius III, but otherwise [all of the other Babylonian or Persian kings mentioned in the Bible](#) can be identified with a fair amount of certainty. Two of these are known under different names in the Bible than elsewhere, [Cambyses II](#) as “[Ahasuerus/Xerxes](#)” in Ezra 4:6 and [Gaumata/Pseudo-Smerdis](#) as “[Artaxerxes](#)” in Ezra 4:7-23 and 6:14, but given their chronology in relation to the other kings there is really no doubt.

The regnal numbers shown in the chart, as in [Artaxerxes I](#), [Artaxerxes II](#), etc., are never found in the extra-biblical sources, but are simply the numbers used by modern historians to keep track of them. Actually it seems that several of these names, e.g. Ahasuerus/Xerxes and Artaxerxes, and perhaps also Darius, were probably more titles than distinguishing names, as is suggested by the biblical use of the first two (mentioned above) before the supposed first use of them in the extra-biblical sources.

The names Ahasuerus and Xerxes are actually the same name, not two names for the same king. [The former is Hebrew](#) and the [latter Greek](#). [They are both derived from the Old Persian Xšayārša](#), as the link provided for Xerxes I around 480 [B.C.](#) shows.