
ESTHER AND MORDECAI

In the very first passage of the book of Esther we are introduced to a controversial king by the name of Ahasuerus. Controversial because historians argue over which ruler this actually was.

You see the name Ahasuerus seems to have been used in the Bible for a couple of different kings.

The first one is mentioned in Daniel 9:1 where Ahasuerus is listed as the father of Darius the Mede. This Darius the Mede is believed to be the ruler the historian Xenophon records as Cyaxares II (also recorded as Gubaru or Gobyras). His father's name was Astyages. Therefore Astyages is one of the possible candidates for King Ahasuerus mentioned in Esther.

And if one interprets Esther 2:5-6 as meaning Mordecai was the one taken captive by Jehoiachin, as some believe, which happened in 597 B.C., then Astyages fits this king very well since Esther 1:3 states that the events happened in the king's third year. The third year in which Astyages ruled would have been around 583 B.C., just fifteen years after Mordecai's captivity.

In regards to his name, the Greek historian Ctesias around 400 B.C. calls Astyages 'Astuigas', and the Babylonian rendering of his name is **Ištu megu**. 'Astyages' means 'sacker of cities' in Greek.

And since **Ištu** sounds very similar to Esther, it may be possible that one of Astyages' queens would have been known as Queen **Ištu**.

A reference to a son of a man named Marduka is also mentioned on an artifact found in Babylonian records which dates to the first year of Cyrus, and the first year of Darius the Mede who was governing in Babylon right after its fall.

This Marduka's name is similar in pronunciation to Mordecai, The artifact reads:

" . . . In the ascension year of Cyrus . . . Nergalsumibni son of Marduka (Mordecai?) . . . this tablet was written in the presence of Baurese the judge . . . Gobyras , Governor of Babylon . . ."

But there are a couple of problems with identifying Astyages as being the king and this Marduka as being Mordecai as mentioned in Esther.

First of all it is stated in verse 1 of Esther that the empire of Ahasuerus stretched from India to Ethiopia, something the empire of Astyages was not known to encompass. The empire it seems wasn't expanded into Ethiopia until the time of Cambyses around 525 B.C. .

Secondly, if one interprets Esther 2:6 as saying it was Mordecai's great grandfather Kish, and not Mordecai, who was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar along with King Jehoiachin in 597 B.C., it would be highly unlikely that Mordecai would have been alive at the time of Astyages.

The other king who some historians believe to be the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther is the Persian king Xerxes. He is referred to in Ezra 4:4-7. During this time the enemies of Israel hired counselors to bring false accusations to the ears of the different Persian kings. They are listed, at least as it seems, in chronological dating order. First to Cyrus, then to Darius, then to Ahasuerus, then to Artaxerxes. The Persian king who ruled between Darius and Artaxerxes was King Xerxes.

The interesting thing about Xerxes was that he did indeed rule from India to Ethiopia and this is verified from an inscription from the Persian ruler himself which states: "King Xerxes says: . . . "the countries of which I was king apart from Persia. I had lordship over them. They bore me tribute. What was said to them by me, that they did. My law, that

upheld them: Media, Elam . . . India . . . Nubians (Ethiopia)."

In the beginning of the book Esther, Ahasuerus invited all the rulers of his kingdom to come to the city of Shushan (Susa) to behold Persia's glorious palace.

This palace was constructed mainly by his father Darius who brought the best craftsman from all the nations under his rule to build it. One of Darius's inscriptions reveals its majesty:

"This palace which I built at Susa, from afar its furnishings were brought. . . The cedar timber from the mountains of Lebanon. The Assyrians brought it to Babylon; from Babylon the Carians and the Ionians brought it to Susa. . . The gold was brought from Sardis and from Bactria . . The precious stones were brought . .

The silver and the ebony were brought from Egypt. The ornamentation with which the wall was adorned came from Ionia. The ivory which was carved here was brought from Ethiopia . . . The stone columns were brought from Elam. The stone-cutters were Ionians and Sardians.

The goldsmiths were Medes and Egyptians. The men who fashioned the wood were Sardians and Egyptians. The men who made the baked bricks were Babylonians. The men who adorned the walls were Medes and Egyptians.

Darius the King says: At Susa a very excellent work was ordered and a very excellent work was accomplished"

An inscription from Xerxes says that He carried on the work at Susa after his father's death. It states "Much that is beautiful that my father Darius built ... I added to and erected additional construction."

Another inscription from Susa states: "King Xerxes says: I built this palace after I became King"



ANCIENT SUSA.

To get an idea of how magnificent Susa was, when Alexander the Great destroyed the city later on in history, the historian Plutarch accounted that the wealth taken from Susa amounted to 40,000 talents of coined money and other furniture and untold wealth. And just as much was found at Persepolis as found in Susa. He also wrote that it took ten thousand pairs of mules and five thousand camels just to carry away its wealth.

Another historian, Diodorus Siculus, said that the treasuries at Susa included 40,000 talents of silver along with 9,000 talents of Gold darics.

Xerxes also had a grandfather by the name of Hystapes also known as Vishtaspa. This Vishtaspa did have some ruling authority under Cyrus, as well as alongside his son Darius who was the father of Xerxes. And the interesting thing about his name is that it sounds very similar to Vashti, the disobedient queen mentioned in the book of Esther. Could Vashti of the book of Esther be referring to the Queen of Vishtaspa? Not much is known about Vishtaspa's wife. But Vishtaspa's death along with one of his wives is recorded in history as follows:

"Darius ordered a tomb to be built for himself in a two-peaked mountain, but when he desired to go and see it he was dissuaded by the soothsayers and

his parents. The latter, however, were anxious to make the ascent to it, but the priests who were dragging them up, being frightened at the sight of some snakes, let go the ropes and they fell and were dashed to pieces. Darius was greatly grieved and ordered the heads of the forty men who were responsible to be cut off."

It may be possible that Xerxes married Vishtaspa's daughter, in other words princess Vishtaspa. But this is only speculation.

As to records of Mordecai and Esther the ancient historian Ctesias may record them in his writings as follow:

"Darius was succeeded by his son Xerxes . . . His other confidential advisers were the aged Mardonius and Matacas (Mordecai?) the eunuch".



Ctesias continues: "Xerxes married Amestris [am-ESTR-is](Esther?). . . Xerxes, then crossed over into Asia and advanced towards Sardes, dispatched Megabyzus (his son-in-law) to plunder the temple at Delphi. On his refusing to go, the eunuch Matacas (Mordecai?) was sent in his place, to insult Apollo and plunder the temple. Having carried out his orders he returned to Xerxes, who had arrived in Persia from Babylon."

There are other Persian artifacts that may indeed refer to Mordecai as well. They are known as the Persepolis Treasury Tablets documented by the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute.

The first artifact is dated to the 32nd year of Darius, just four years before Xerxes begins his rule. It states:

" . . . In the 32nd year . . . Hipirukka wrote, the receipt from Marduukka he received" (Marduukka being very similar in pronunciation to Mordecai)

The second artifact is dated to the 7th year of Xerxes, just four years after the account in Esther. It states:

". . . woodworkers and relief makers Mardukanasir sent" (Again, the first part of this name "Marduka" sounds very similar in pronunciation to Mordecai)

The third possible name which is found on a variety of different Persian tablets which are dated to the third year of Xerxes, the exact year of the Esther narrative is "Irdakaia". And on one of these tablets, two other men mentioned in Esther 1:14, Tarchish and Meres may also be listed. The Inscription reads:

". . . Tarkauish (Tarchish?) says . . . silver to workman . . . earning wages at Parsa, whom Mauis (Meres?) Is responsible . . . Laborers at the column-ed hall . . .3rd year (of Xerxes) . . .Receipt from Irdakaia (Mordecai?)

Another letter written in the 6th year of Xerxes may also mention Carcas, a servant of Xerxes, mentioned in Esther 1:10. It states:

". . . silver to them give . . .whom Mauis (Meres?) Is responsible . . . Of the columned hall . . . 6th year (of Xerxes) a sealed order has been given. Karkiis (Carcas?) wrote, the receipt of which Irdakaia (Mordecai?) he received."

As to Esther, both the historians Herodotus and Ctesias record that the queen of Xerxes was

named Amestris (am-ESTR-is) which contains the word Esther. And both historians record that she held great power and influence during her husbands Xerxes as well as her son's Artaxerxes reign. For example, Ctesias records that Amestris was given authority by the king a few times which allowed her to give orders to execute and punish the enemies of her family. For example she commanded that the men captured in battle responsible for killing her son Achaemenides were to be executed. She also had the man responsible for killing her grandson executed.

This is similar in fashion to her actions in Esther 9:13 where she asks the king that the ten sons of her enemy Haman who tried to exterminate her people should be hanged.

According to Ctesias she also interceded to spare the life of her innocent son in-law Megabyzus who had saved her son Artaxerxes from being mauled by a lion. Similar once again in fashion to her intercession with king Xerxes to save her people from an edict by the king that would have destroyed them all.

WHO WILL INTERCEDE FOR YOU WHEN YOU SIN AGAINST GOD?

"If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?". 1 Samuel 2:25 (NKJV)

Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Romans 8:34 (NKJV)

My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. . . Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:11-12 (NKJV)

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Jesus Christ), since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 7:25 (NKJV)

Sources:

The Holy Bible, Author: The Lord God

Scripture taken from the New King James Version unless noted.

Astyages ruled from 585-550 BC. (According to the Greek historian Herodotus.) In order to fit the book of Esther which takes place in the third year of Ahasuerus, if Astyages was the king it would be 583 B.C.

Astyages - Akkadian name - Istumegu

<http://www.livius.org/as-at/astyages/astyages.htm>

Josephus - The Essential Writings by Paul Maier

pg 115 The Historian Josephus states that Astyages was the father of Darius the Mede. Jewish Antiquities X.249

Xenophon's Cyropaedia states that Cyaxares II followed Astyages to the throne of Media and whose brother was Mandane. He was the uncle of Cyrus, and he cooperated with Cyrus to conquer Babylon. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyaxares_II

Neo-Babylonian Texts in the Oriental Institute Collection by David B. Weisberg. The University of Chicago. Oriental Institute Publications. Volume 122, Text 38. Mentions Nergalsumibni son of Marduka (Mordecai?) Who lived in the first year of Cyrus and Darius the Mede

<http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/PUB/SRC/OIP/122/OIP122.pdf>

Archaemenid Royal Inscription XPh from Persepolis

Known as the "Daiva Inscription" Archaeological Museum Tehran Inscription from Xerxes stating he ruled to the borders of Ethiopia and India. <http://www.livius.org/aa-ac/achaemenians/XPh.html>

Archaemenid Royal Inscription Xsc from Susa

"King Xerxes says: I built this palace after I became King"

<http://www.livius.org/aa-ac/achaemenians/XSc.html>

Ctesias Persica #19 - Photius recorded an excerpt from Ctesias Persica #19 where Darius parents died visiting his tomb being carved into a mountainside. They died approx 495 B.C. Darius father's name was Hystapes also known as Vishtaspa.

Persepolis Treasury Tablets by George C. Cameron- The University of Chicago. Oriental Institute Publications. Volume LXV (65) <http://oi.uchicago.edu/pdf/oip65.pdf>

oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/PUB/SRC/OIP/65/OIP65.html

pg 10-11 Account of Susa's wealth captured by Alexander the Great as recorded by Plutarch - Alexander 36-37 Loeb & Diodorus Siculus XVII. 66

pg 16 Account of Xerxes continuing the building projects

Note 104 pg 13 History of Herodotus III - Herodotus IX, 107 f

Herodotus stated that the Persian kings divided their year between Babylon, Susa, Ecbatanna (probably Persepolis as well in the case of Xerxes.)

pg 83-84 (Text 1) mentions a man named Marduukka (Mordecai?) In the 32nd year of Darius of Persia

pg.125-127 (Text 25) Mentions “. . . woodworkers and relief makers Marduka-nasir (Mordecai?) sent” Dated to the 7th year of Xerxes.

pg.110-112 (Text 15) Mentions “. . . Tarkauish (Tarchish?) says . . . silver to workman . . . earning wages at Parsa, whom Mauis (Meres?) . . . laborers at the columned hall . . . 3rd year (of Xerxes) . . . Receipt from Irdakaia (Mordecai?)

pg.120-123 (Text 22) “. . . silver to them give . . . whom Mauis (Meres?) is responsible . . . Of the columned hall . . . 6th year (of Xerxes) a sealed order has been given. Karkaiis (Carcas?) wrote, the receipt of Irdakaia (Mordecai?) he received.”

Photius Excerpt of Ctesias - Persica 1 (24-32)

Mention of Matabacas (Mordecai?) And Xerxes wife Amestris (am-ESTR-is) Esther?

http://www.livius.org/ct-cz/ctesias/photius_persica2.html

Illustration -Xerxes Coin

The Book of History a History of All Nations From the Earliest Times to the Present (Volume V The Near East The Hebrew Peoples, Persia, Arabia, Asia Minor, Heroic Age of Islam, Egypt, V The Near East) (1915) Copyright by The Grolier Society. Printed by The Colonial Press, Boston, Mass, U.S.A.

Illustration - Ancient site of Susa

History of the World Vol. 1 (1909) Author: Ridpath, J. C.

Publisher: Jones Brothers Publishing Co.

Illustration- Persian King with armor bearer and advisor

Library of Universal History Vol 01 (1898)

Author: Clare, Israel Smith - Publisher: Union Book Co

Notes:

If Kish was taken captive to Babylon at lets say 20 years of age in 597 B.C. at the time of Jehoiachin's captivity. Lets say at age 30 he became the father of Shimei (587 B.C.), Lets assume Shimei became the father of Jair at age 30 (557 B.C.), and Jair fathered Mordecai at age 30 (527 B.C.) Then in the third year of Xerxes 484 B.C. Mordecai would have been around 43 years of age. Speculating the same for Artaxerxes the first whose third year of reign was 463B.C., Mordecai would have been 64 years old. Speculating the same for Artaxerxes II, whose third year was 402 B.C. Mordecai would have been 125 years old which means he was probably dead by this time. If Mordecai's ancestors averaged fathering sons in the line lets say at the age of 25 then Mordecai would have been 58 at the time of Xerxes and 79 at the time of Artaxerxes. So it appears that Xerxes is the most reasonable candidate if these assumptions are true

Some believe Artaxerxes I was the Ahasuerus of Esther, for example Josephus in his Antiquities of the Jews as well as the Greek Septuagint identifies him as Artaxerxes. The problem with this is that Ezra 4:6-7 clearly distinguishes that Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes are two different kings, and their names are spelled differently in Hebrew.

Some believe that Artaxerxes II was also known as Ahasuerus

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artaxerxes_II_of_Persia

But there a couple of problems with this view, First in order for Mordecai to have been alive at this time, his great grandfather, grandfather, and father all had to have been in their fifties at the time their sons were born and Mordecai would have been advanced in years at the time of the book of Esther.

Secondly, Egypt led a successful revolt against Persia and became independent in 405 BC, therefore it is highly unlikely Artaxerxes II whose third year would have been 403 B.C. could have made the claim his borders extended to Ethiopia as Esther 1:3 states. Although he did build a palace at Susa as found on the following inscription.:

A2Sd - Inscription on Column base from Susa states:

'I am Artaxerxes, the great king, the kings' king, king of all nations, king of this world, the son of king Darius, the Achaemenid. King Artaxerxes says: By the grace of Ahuramazda, I built this palace, which I have built in my lifetime as a pleasant retreat"

<http://www.livius.org/aa-ac/achaemenians/A2Sd.html>