

An Example of God’s Literary Beauty Through His Prophets

While the Bible is seen as a work by human authors superintended by the Holy Spirit, less apparent are those subtle details that exhibit the literary beauty of God Himself. A sublime example arises when one observes why Daniel describes the conqueror of the Babylonian Empire as “Darius the Mede” in his first year of reign (Dan 5:31; throughout Dan 6; 9:1; 11:1) and then “Cyrus the Persian” thereafter (Dan 6:28; 10:1).

It is not apparent unless one studies the prophecies of Darius and Cyrus in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and observes their fulfillment through the eyes of Daniel.

For some context, examine the background and political environment of each prophet.

Prophet	Political Environment
<p>Isaiah (prophesized approximately 740-701 B.C.): prophet of the Southern Kingdom under the Judahite kings of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.</p> <p>Isaiah witnesses the rise in Assyria’s power under Tiglath-pileser, the fall of the Northern Kingdom by Shalmaneser V, and the deportation of thousands of Jews.</p>	<p>The Middle East was dominated by the Assyrian Empire during which Babylon was a vassal state.</p> <p>The forces of Tiglath-pileser (reigned 745-727 B.C.) invaded Israel during 734-732 B.C. (2 Ki 15:29) and took three tribes (Reubenites, Gadites, the half tribe of Manasseh) into captivity (1 Chron 5:26). He also conquered Babylon and took the throne name of Pul (2 Ki 15:19; 1 Chron 5:26).</p> <p>Under Assyria’s next king Shalmaneser V (reigned 727-722 B.C.), the capital of the Northern Kingdom, Samaria, was besieged, and the Northern Kingdom fell in 722 B.C.</p>
<p>Jeremiah (prophesized approximately 627-582 B.C.): prophet of the Southern Kingdom under the Judahite kings of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, which was roughly the final 50 years of Judah.</p> <p>Jeremiah witnesses the rise of Babylon, the fall of the Southern Kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar, and the three deportations of thousands of Jews.</p>	<p>Under weak leadership, the Assyrian Empire lost territory and by 626 B.C., the Chaldean Nabopolassar won independence for Babylon, ushering in the Neo-Babylonian period. Assyria’s capital Ninevah would fall in 612 B.C., and Babylon would be recognized as the world’s dominant power by defeating the Assyrian remnant and Egypt at Carchemish in 605 B.C.</p>
<p>Daniel (prophesized approximately 605-538 B.C.): prophet while in Babylon and exiled in the first deportation of Judah. He prophesized to the Gentile kings of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Cyrus the Great.</p> <p>Daniel would prophesize of the fall of the Babylonian Empire, witness its fulfillment and serve under the succeeding Achaemenid Empire of Cyrus the Great.</p>	<p>Nebuchadnezzar forced Judah to become a vassal state in 605 B.C. and Daniel was a part of the first deportation.</p> <p>597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar puts down king Jehoiakim’s rebellion, and a second deportation results.</p> <p>586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem and the Temple in response to king Zedekiah’s rebellion and a third deportation takes place.</p> <p>539 B.C. Belshazzar, grandson to Nebuchadnezzar, is killed, and Cyrus the Great conquers the Babylonian Empire.</p>

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Isaiah and Jeremiah prophetically portrayed Darius the Mede as the conqueror and destroyer of the Chaldean kingdom (Isa 13:17; Jer 51:11, 28).

Behold, I am going to stir up the **Medes** against them,
Who will not value silver or take pleasure in gold. (Isa 13:17)

Sharpen the arrows, fill the quivers!
The Lord has aroused the spirit of the **kings of the Medes**,
Because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it;
For it is the vengeance of the Lord, vengeance for His temple. (Jer 51:11)

Consecrate the nations against her,
The **kings of the Medes**,
Their governors and all their prefects,
And every land of their dominion. (Jer 51:28)

Isaiah prophetically portrayed Cyrus the Persian as the liberator for the Judean kingdom from exile (Isa 44:28-45:4).

"It is I who says of **Cyrus**, 'He is My shepherd!
And he will perform all My desire.'
And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,'
And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" (Isa 44:28)

Thus says the Lord to **Cyrus** His anointed,
Whom I have taken by the right hand,
To subdue nations before him
And to loose the loins of kings;
To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:
"I will go before you and make the rough places smooth;
I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars.
"I will give you the treasures of darkness
And hidden wealth of secret places,
So that you may know that it is I,
The Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.
"For the sake of Jacob My servant,
And Israel My chosen one,
I have also called you by your name;
I have given you a title of honor
Though you have not known Me. (Isa 45:1-4)

Isaiah prophesizes that Cyrus was the chosen one of God: 1) God will hold his hand, 2) God calls him "My shepherd" [for the Jews], 3) God will give him kingdoms and wealth, 4) he will be given honor, 5) and he will do God's pleasure in rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple.

As he interprets the handwriting on the wall, Daniel prophetically announces the fall of the Babylonian Empire to the Medes and Persians (Dan 5:13-31), and he names the conqueror of the Babylonian Empire as "Darius the Mede."

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Now this is the inscription that was written out: "MENĒ, MENĒ, TEKĒL, UPHARSIN." This is the interpretation of the message: "MENĒ"—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. "TEKĒL"—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. "PERĒS"—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the **Medes** and Persians. (Dan 5:25-28)

So Darius the **Mede** received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two. (Dan 5:31).

Instead of being a personal name, Darius is a royal appellation for Persian kings just as Pharaoh is the royal appellation for Egyptian kings.

As a throne name, Darius was a name used by several Persian kings.

As son to his father Cambyses I, king of Ashan, a capital city in the Elamite kingdom, Cyrus II (the Great) was the prince of Anshan and of royal Persian blood.

As son to his mother Mandane, daughter of Astyages the king of Media, Cyrus was of royal Median blood.

In his ascension, Cyrus became the king of Persia. When he rebelled against Media and took his grandfather Astyages prisoner, Cyrus the Great became the king of Media.

Daniel's reference to "Darius the Mede" reflects the increasing dominance of Cyrus II (the Great), from former prince of Ashan to king of Media as conqueror of the Babylonian Empire. To learn more about the identity of Darius the Mede, see the article: What Year is This? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/12End/DanielWhatYearIsThis.aspx.

As Cyrus II (the Great) consolidates his control over Babylon in his first year, Daniel calls him "Darius."

"In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent" was used to date the time Daniel observed Jeremiah's prophecy of the exile lasting 70 years (Dan 9:1).

"In the first year of Darius the Mede" was referenced by an angel (Gabriel?) to indicate when angelic protection and encouragement of Cyrus II (the Great) was initiated.

Throughout Daniel 6, Darius was used to indicate the ruling actions of Cyrus II (the Great) that led up to Daniel being cast into the lions' den. With Daniel's deliverance by God, Cyrus II (the Great) proclaims the greatness of Daniel's God (Dan 6:25-28). It is at this moment that the conqueror of the Chaldeans, Darius, becomes the liberator of God's people named Cyrus the Persian.

So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. (Dan 6:28)

After Cyrus II's (the Great) proclamation, the process of repatriating the Jews begins and Isaiah's prophecy starts to be fulfilled. From this point on, as liberator of his people's captivity, Daniel refers to Cyrus II (the Great) as "Cyrus the Persian" (Dan 6:28; 10:1).

The use of Cyrus' name is significant and stipulated by God Himself "for the sake of Jacob."

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So that you may know that it is I,
The Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.
For the sake of Jacob My servant,
And Israel My chosen one,
I have also called you by your name;
I have given you a title of honor
Though you have not known Me. (Isa 45:3-4)

As Ezra rebuilds the Temple, he makes several references to Cyrus II (the Great) and his proclamation, which is questioned and reaffirmed in the course of subsequent Persian kings of the Achaemenid Empire.

The initial proclamation by Cyrus II (the Great):

Now in the first year of **Cyrus king of Persia**, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: "Thus says **Cyrus king of Persia**, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! 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. Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.'" (Ezra 1:1-4)

In subsequent references to the proclamation, Ezra would invoke Cyrus' personal name.

"Cyrus king of Persia" (2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:7-8; 3:7; 4:3-5)

"Cyrus king of Babylon" (Ezra 5:13-17)

"King Cyrus" (Ezra 6:3-5)

As Ezra records the subsequent succession of kings that took place after Cyrus II (the Great) in Cambyses II, Psuedo-Smerdis, and Darius Hystaspes (the Great), the proclamation permitting the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple was never revoked despite the efforts of people who were against the Jews (Ezra 4:5-7).

References:

1. Law GR, *Identification of Darius the Mede*, Pfafftown: Ready Scribe Press (2010).
2. Shea W, "Darius the Mede in his Persian-Babylonian Setting," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29, (3) (1991): 244.