

# BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY

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## Daniel: Historical & Chronological Comments (V)

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### 10. King **Belshazzar** and the Rest of Babylonian Chronology

Nebuchadnezzar reigned 43 years. 2 Kings **25:27** tells us that in the 37th year of **Jehoiachin's** exile was the first year of **Evil-merodach**, son of Nebuchadnezzar. **Evil-merodach's Jehoiachin** was taken in Nebuchadnezzar's 8th year. This was the first year of his exile. If we count 36 more years, we come to the "44th" year of Nebuchadnezzar, which is therefore the first year of **Evil-merodach**.

From what we can tell, Nebuchadnezzar died around October 8, 562 BC. This would be right at the end of his 43th year by Jewish reckoning, and mid-way through his 43rd year by Babylonian reckoning.

**Jehoiachin** was released on the 27th & y of the 12th month, which means in the spring of 561 BC. This was just a day or two before the turn of the religious year, just two weeks before Passover. Also, since the Babylonian kings came to the throne in the spring, **Jehoiachin's** release and elevation over all the other kings probably coincided with the official coronation ceremonies for **Evil-merodach**.

By Biblical reckoning, **Evil-merodach's** first year had begun six months earlier, in the fall. Thus, on both Biblical and Babylonian dating systems, **Evil-merodach**

exalted **Jehoiachin** "in the year that he became king" (2 Ki. **25:27**). Similarly, Jeremiah **52:31** says that **Evil-merodach** lifted up the head of **Jehoiachin** "in the year of his reign." The Hebrews phrasing is, however, ambiguous enough to accommodate either the meaning of first year or accession year, so if it turns out that **Evil-merodach** succeeded to the throne later in 562 BC, it would not matter.

Ancient historians say that **Evil-Merodach** was slain in a palace coup in early August 560 BC, and was succeeded by **Neriglissar**, his brother-in-law who had married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. Whether **Neriglissar** was involved in the coup or simply was made king afterwards we do not know. And, though it is often speculated to be the case, we don't know if this **Neriglissar** is one of the two Nergal-sharezer's of Jeremiah **39:3** & 13, one of whom is @ prince and the other a "rabmag."

**Neriglissar** ruled from 560-556 BC. In late April or early May of 556 BC, he died and was succeeded by his son, **Labashi-marduk**, a youth who was assassinated after 9 months. Thus, in the spring of 555 BC, **Nabonidus** became king. **Belshazzar** was his son.

The following table provides a graphic overview of this history:

563 BC

2nd Quarter: Nebuchadnezzar 42B.

4th Quarter: Nebuchadnezzar 43J. **Jehoiachin's** 36th year of bondage.

562 BC

2nd Quarter: Nebuchadnezzar 43B

3rd Quarter: Nebuchadnezzar dies in early October. Accession of **Evil-merodach**.

4th Quarter: **Evil-merodach** 1J. **Jehoiachin's** 37th year of bondage.

561 BC

*1st Quarter:* right at the end, **Jehoiachin** is elevated, probably as part of the Babylonian accession ceremonies for **Evil-Merodach**.

*2nd Quarter:* **Evil-merodach 1B**

*4th Quarter:* **Evil-merodach 2J**

560 BC

*2nd Quarter:* **Evil-merodach 2B**

*3rd Quarter:* **Evil-merodach** slain in August. Accession of **Neriglissar**.

*4th Quarter:* **Neriglissar 1J**

559 BC

*2nd Quarter:* **Neriglissar 1B**

*4th Quarter:* **Neriglissar 2J**

558 BC

*2nd Quarter:* **Neriglissar 2B**

*4th Quarter:* **Neriglissar 3J**

557 BC

*2nd Quarter:* **Neriglissar 3B**

*4th Quarter:* **Neriglissar 4J**

556 BC

*2nd Quarter:* **Neriglissar 4B**. Death of **Neriglissar**. Accession of **Labashi-marduk**.

*4th Quarter:* **Labashi-marduk 1J**

555 BC

*1st Quarter:* Assassination of Labashi-marduk. Accession of **Nabonidus**.

*2nd Quarter:* **Nabonidus 1B**.

*4th Quarter:* **Nabonidus 1J**.

**Nabonidus** offended the Babylonians during his reign, because he much preferred the moon-god Sin over the Babylonian chief god **Marduk**. Either in the 3rd or 6th year of **his** reign, **Nabonidus** moved his palace from Babylon 500 miles away to the Arabian peninsula at **Tema**. He was apparently there for ten years. During this time, the annual New Year festival in Babylon could not be held. When Cyrus eventually marched on Babylon, the Babylonians welcomed him.

**Nabonidus** associated his son **Belshazzar** with him in various documents and inscriptions, but **did** not make him co-ruler. All the same, scholars deduce that **Belshazzar** ruled in Babylon during the ten or so years that his father was in semi-retirement at **Tema**. Thus, the 1st and 3rd years of **Belshazzar** mentioned in Daniel probably are to be dated during this period.

In September and October of 539 BC, Cyrus marched on **Babylonia** and defeated **Nabonidus**, who fled. **Belshazzar**, left in the city of Babylon as ruler, evidently decided to rally the city by proclaiming himself king. The feast described in Daniel 5, which was conducted the very night the city fell, looks very much like an accession feast. With the city about to fall, it is not credible to suggest that **Belshazzar** was just having a party. Rather, we find a thousand nobles in attendance, as well as the “queen,” and

we also find that the treasure of Yahweh’s house (and doubtless those of other gods as well) were brought out; use of these vessels would provide a ceremonial demonstration of the superiority of Babylon’s gods. At the same time, **Belshazzar** offered Daniel the position of “third” in the kingdom, which means that **Nabonidus** was still regarded as alive somewhere, his whereabouts being unknown after he was forced to flee the battlefield. Thus, **Belshazzar** was not usurping his father’s rule, but making himself a co-regent so as to be able to deal with the emergency.

The “queen” speaks to **Belshazzar** with authority, and speaks of Nebuchadnezzar as his “father.” Thus, it has reasonably been suggested that the queen is **Belshazzar’s** mother, the wife of **Nabonidus**, and that she was a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, even though **Nabonidus** was a “usurper,” **Belshazzar** would be a grandson of **Belshazzar**.

Babylon fell in 539 BC on October 12, which is the 16th day of **Tishri**, the seventh month. In the Biblical calendar, this is the second day of the Feast of **Tabernacles**. Since this event happened after the first of the month, this year would be, from the Biblical standpoint, an accession year for Cyrus, and his first year would commence in the fall of 538 BC. [Details of these years from

William H. Shea, "Darius the Mede in His **Persian-Babylonian Setting**," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29 (1991): 235-257. On the setting of **Belshazzar's** feast,

see Shea, "**Nabonidus, Belshazzar**, and the Book of Daniel: An Update," *AUSS* 20 (1982) :133-149.]

#### 551 BC

2nd Quarter: **Nabonidus** 4B. Perhaps during **this** year, **Belshazzar** becomes vice-king; vision of **Daniel** 7.  
**4th Quarter: Nabonidus** 4J. **Belshazzar** 1J (?).

#### 550 BC

2nd Quarter: **Nabonidus** 5B.  
**4th Quarter: Nabonidus** 5J. **Belshazzar** 2J (?).

#### 549 BC

2nd Quarter: **Nabonidus** 6B.  
**4th Quarter: Nabonidus** 6J. **Belshazzar** 3J (?). **Vision** of **Daniel** 8.

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#### 539 BC

2nd **Quarter: Nabonidus** 17B  
**4th Quarter: Nabonidus** 17J. Immediately **Nabonidus** flees, **Belshazzar** proclaims himself co-regent. The city falls. **Ugbaru** runs the city for 17 days, then turns it over to **Cyrus/Darius**, so that Darius the **Mede** "received" the kingdom. 8 days later **Ugbaru**, the governor, dies. New governor needed. Daniel is most favored **candidate**. Events of Daniel 6. "Accession **year**" of Cym (Darius the **Mede**), age 62, begins.

#### 538 BC

2nd **Quarter: Cyrus** 1P (Persian). **Cambyes** becomes co-regent with Cyrus of Babylon.  
**4th Quarter: Cyrus** 1J. At the beginning of the quarter, Daniel's calculations lead him to the prayer of Daniel 9. At end of quarter, **Cambyes** is removed as "king of Babylon," and Gabriel strengthens Cym (Dan. 11:1). **This** is the beginning of the 70 weeks of years, and thus also of the 7 weeks of years. Jubilee Year.

### 11. The Identity of Darius the Mede

**Who was Darius the Mede?** This question has vexed interpreters since the beginning of the Christian era. It is simplest to say that Darius the Mede is just another **name/title** for Cyrus the Persian, and to **read** Daniel 6:28 as follows: "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, even [not "and"] in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." **This** interpretation, which is perfectly coordinate with the **Hebrew/Aramaic** of the text, **solves all problems** very neatly, and it is the solution I have adopted.

Older commentaries assume that Darius the **Mede** was the Median emperor Astyages, grandfather of Cyrus, who was conquered by Cyrus but in a friendly fashion. It is assumed that Cyrus allowed Darius/Astyages to take Babylon and rule it for a time before taking over himself. Or, it is assumed that **Cyaxares** II, son of **Astyages** and uncle of Cyrus, is in view. This man, many older commentators say, ruled Babylon for two years, finishing out the 70 years of Babylonian captivity, before Cyrus took over and issued his famous decree.

Now it is true that the **Medes** had a great empire to the east of Babylon, and that they had friendly intercourse with both Babylon and Persia. Amytis, daughter of Astyages, was a wife of Nebuchadnezzar; indeed, Nebuchadnezzar built the famous **hanging gardens** for her.

Mandane, another daughter of **Astyages**, married the Persian king **Cambyes** I and became the mother of Cym the Great. Thus, the hypothesis that **Cyrus** was working closely with his Median relatives in conquering Babylon, and would leave one of them temporarily in power over the city, is a possibility. There is, however, no evidence in any of the classical sources or recovered chronicles to suggest that either of these kings went to Babylon, was **present at the sack of the city, and ruled there for a time**. Thus, this hypothesis is built on sheer, totally unsupported speculation.

Some have suggested that **Cambyes** II, son of **Cyrus**, who was indeed left behind to rule Babylon **while** Cym made other conquests, is Darius the **Mede**. There are two problems with this. First, Darius was 62 years old, which is too old for a son of Cyrus at this time. Second, all evidence indicates that Cambyes hated the Jews and blocked the building of the Temple, which does not square with Darius's affection for Daniel and his proclamation of the supremacy of the God of Israel in Daniel 6.

In 1881, Babelon advanced the view that Darius the Mede was **Gubaru**, the governor of Babylon during the early Persian era. This theory was strengthened and given classical form by John C. **Whitcomb** in 1959. **Whitcomb, Darius the Mede** (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed).

Recent discoveries have introduced several problems with this theory. First, **references** to **Gubaru** as governor of Babylon do not appear until the 4th year of **Cyrus**, and continue to the 5th year of **Cambyses**. The general that took the city of Babylon was also named **Gubaru**, but he died three weeks **after** the conquest of the city. It **appears** that- a confusion between **these** two men **lies** behind the idea that **Gubaru** the Governor took charge of Babylon immediately after it was taken. Second, newly available cuneiform evidence **makes** it clear that **Cambyses** became vice-ruler in charge of Babylon only a few months after the **conquest**. It is impossible that there should be a **third ruler**, also called "king." Moreover, if **Gubaru** were governor of Babylon, under **Cambyses**, who was under Cyrus, then what was the post Daniel was **being** considered for in Daniel 6? It seems clear that Daniel was **being** considered for the post of governor of Babylon! On the problems with the **Gubaru** identification, see **William H. Shea**, "Darius the **Mede**: An Update," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20 (1982):229-247. (This article is not Shea's **latest** word on the Darius problem; see below.)

With all other candidates eliminated, and Cambysea evidently secure as vice-ruler, the only viable **candidate** left appears to be Cyrus **himself**. This identification has been ably argued by **William H. Shea**, "Darius the Mede in **his** Persian-Babylonian **Setting**," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29 (1991):235-257.

**Daniel 9:1** says that Cyrus/Darius was of Median **ancestry and was son** of **Ahasuerus**. Shea has shown that the Hebrew "**Ahasuerus**" is likely synonymous with the Greek "**Cyaxeres**," both **corruptions** of the **Persian/Median** "**Uwaxshtra**." The reference is to Cyaxeres I, **great-grandfather** of Cyrus the Great.

Since the **Medes** preceded the Persians, and were culturally **dominant** over them, we are not **surprised** to read of the "laws of the **Medes** and Persians" in Daniel 6. Initially at least, the **Medes** predominated over the Persians, culturally, in the empire of the Persians.

If this be the case, that Darius is **Cyrus**, what happens to the **70 years** of Babylonian captivity? As **I** shall argue later, when we come to Daniel 9, the 70 years are actually of Babylonian dominance, and begin with the first year of **Jehoiakim**.

Darius/Cyrus is said to **be** 62 years old when he received the kingdom from God (Dan. **5:31**). It seems to me that this notice is to be **connected** with the 62 weeks of years in Daniel **9:25**. Though they are not parallel in detail, there is a topological **connection** between the 70 years of Babylonian dominance and the 70 weeks of years of world-imperial dominance.

Now we can ask the question: Why doesn't Daniel simply call **him** Cyrus the Persian to start with? Shea has suggested some **practical**, historical reasons why "Darius the **Mede**" might have been the most appropriate title for **Cyrus** at this point in time. ("Darius" is a title.) Biblically speaking, I think we can answer the question by noting that Isaiah **13:17** and Jeremiah 51:11 & 28 **predict** that Babylon will be destroyed by the **Medes**. Why don't these passages **predict** that Babylon will be destroyed by the Persians? Because in Isaiah's day, Persia hardly existed and such a **prediction** would have made no sense. By the time of Jeremiah, a reference to Persia could have been understood, but Jeremiah wanted to link with Isaiah's prophecy, so he spoke of the **Medes**. And since Persia had joined with Media, and the Medes were culturally more ancient and dominant until the time of Cyrus himself, a **prediction** of Median conquest is entirely accurate. Thus, when Cyrus conquered Babylon, in fulfillment of prophecy he did so as "Darius the Mede." Cyrus was a transitional figure; it was **Cyrus** himself who brought about the transfer of emphasis from the **Medes** to the Persians, so that the "**Medes** and Persians" in Daniel 6 became the "Persians and **Medes**" by the time of **Esther**. With this transition in mind, and with the Biblical prophecy as background, we can understand why the vision of Daniel 10-12 is dated in the 3rd year of Cyrus (10:1), yet refers back to the 1st year of Darius (11:1), even though these were the same person.

James I of England was originally **James VI** of Scotland, and after becoming king of England, he continued to be James VI of Scotland. It would be appropriate to write that on such and such a **date**, James VI of Scotland ascended the English throne; later on one would refer to him as James I of England, that being his higher title.