

# THE KINGS – THE DECREES – THE PROPHECIES

## Introduction

Gabriel gave Daniel a timed restoration prophecy, recorded in Daniel 9, to enlighten God's people. It was to **begin** with a "**decree**" (*dabar*) (future to **when** the prophecy was presented) to restore Jerusalem, its walls and its streets (9:25). Since the theme of Daniel 8 through 12 is spiritual restoration, it **will** be shown that "spiritual metaphors" are intimated in most of the imagery, beginning with the city of Shushan (8:1-2) through this decree, to Michael "standing up" (12:1). The weight of evidence suggests that the "restore and build" decree refers to the re-establishment of covenant ties between God and His people. That finding reflects the conclusions of this document.

There are many regnal "timing points" and associated events that help us establish when that decree began. As we will see, they are instructive links for "Daniel's people" to respond to the probation mandates of the 490 years. In turn, that will reveal why the "rebuilding" and "restoration" represent God's kingdom and not a physical city. That will help in our search for a sympathetic decree. First, let's look at the first king of Medo-Persia who was in power when the prophecy of Daniel 9 was given.

## Darius the Mede

Daniel regards Darius as responsible for the Babylonian conquest and its first Medo-Persian ruler (Daniel 5:31, 6:25). Many cuneiform texts from that era refer to a Babylonian "provincial government" and kingdom leaders with names such as Gubaru, Ugbaru and Gobryas, especially in the Nabonidus Chronicles.<sup>1</sup>

There has been much debate regarding how the many names tie to Cyrus, a leader who "delivers" the Jewish people at the end of the 70 years. How do they differ from Darius the Mede? Are they referring to Cyrus, the King of Medo-Persia?

We have adopted the work of Whitcomb as the most accurate because it coincides with numerous historical references going back to the 1800's.<sup>2</sup> It also agrees with expositor White and the Scriptural account.

We will build on his analysis, but first will note the position of White in 1907:

"Daniel's prayer in behalf of his people, as recorded in the ninth chapter, **was** 'in the first year of **Darius' the Mede**. Darius was favored of heaven; for in the first year of his reign the angel Gabriel 'stood up to confirm and to strengthen him. [Daniel 11:1]' It was this king who, early in the establishment of the Medo-Persian empire, 'set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these three presidents; of whom

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<sup>1</sup> Shea, William H.; *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 7/1 (Spring 1996), pp.1-20.

<sup>2</sup> Whitcomb, John C.; *Daniel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985) and *Darius the Mede (The Historical Chronology of Daniel)*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1959).

Daniel was first.... This Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.”<sup>3</sup>

“The year that Cyrus **succeeded** Darius the Mede to the throne of Medo-Persia marked the completion of seventy years since the first company of Hebrews had been carried captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, who was familiar with the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah regarding the duration of the captivity, and with the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the restoration by decree of Cyrus, was still living, and was occupying a position of leading responsibility in the Medo-Persian court. His faith in these prophecies led him to plead with God in behalf of his people. And now, when the time came for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt, God moved upon Cyrus as his agent to discern the prophecies concerning himself, and to grant the Jewish people their liberty. And furthermore, Cyrus furnished them the necessary facilities for rebuilding the temple of the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

Whitcomb concludes that Gubaru is the only individual who could be Darius the Mede. He also notes that Gubaru and Ugbaru were two different individuals who were interchangeably referred to in cuneiform tablets as Gubryas. He shows that Ugbaru died within weeks of Babylon’s fall (p. 24). Gubaru lived on as Darius the Mede.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Babylonian Chronicles, Gubaru was born to Ahasuerus the Mede and appointed by Cyrus as governor over Babylon. Governors over large areas were often called kings. One example was Belshazzar. He was actually a “fill-in leader” for his father Nabonidus, who was elsewhere worshiping a pagan god. Darius, noted in the Nabonidus Chronicles,<sup>6</sup> as an appointee of Cyrus,<sup>7</sup> began to “reign” immediately at Babylon’s fall.

Gubaru entered Babylon with Cyrus on October 13, 539 B.C. Gubaru – Darius the Mede – appointed 120 satraps or provincial governors. Daniel was one of three over these satraps. There are many ancient historical records that note that Cyrus was the Babylonian “conqueror” (Herodotus, Xenophor, Berosus, Isaiah 45:1, II Chronicles 35:20-23).<sup>8</sup> But Darius the Mede was its first “provincial” governor (likely over the Mesopotamia area).

### **Decree One: From Darius, in Support of God’s People**

Darius was the one who threw Daniel into the lions’ den. When he found him alive the next day, *“Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. **I make a decree**, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions”* (Daniel 6:25-27).

From the study of those ancient tablets and several historical records one can develop this timing picture:

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<sup>3</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, March 21, 1907 (emphasis added).

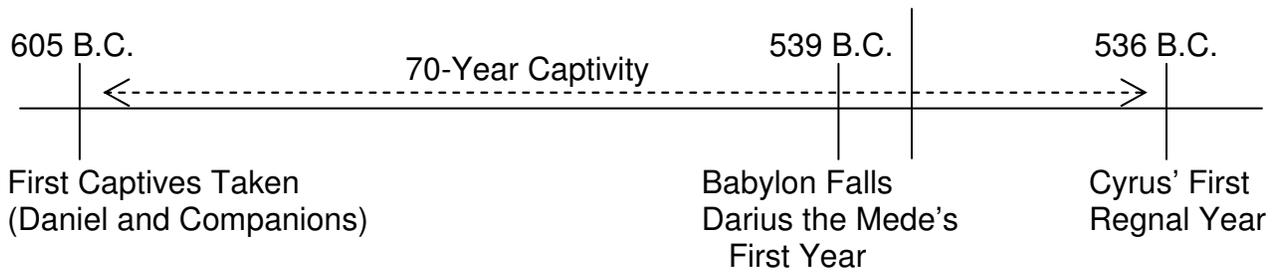
<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, March 28, 1907 (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> Whitcomb, *op. cit.*, *Darius the Mede*, pp. 10-16.

<sup>6</sup> Ford, J. Massingberde; *The Anchor Bible* (Doubleday, New York), 1975, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>8</sup> Whitcomb, *op. cit.*, *Darius the Mede*.



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The period of 70 years (605–536 B.C.) began with the conquest of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. It ended in 536 B.C. by Cyrus' decree in his first regnal year (II Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezekiel 1:1-4, 6:3-5), fulfilling prophecy (Isaiah 13:1-2, 45:13). This is the well-known time referred to in Daniel 9:2 and predicted in Jeremiah 25:11-12.

The decree of Darius the Mede was a law throughout the Medo-Persian Empire and was given under inspiration.

- Mankind was to recognize Daniel's God as living and steadfast.
- His kingdom will be forever.
- His rulership will never end.
- He works signs and wonders in heaven and earth.
- Tremble and fear before this God.

It was a secular mandate to be spiritual. It was an overview of the everlasting covenant! This is not at variance with the implied directive that Gabriel prophesied (9:25). But the people were still in stipulated captivity, making its implementation compromised. God invites a willful response to repent, which leads to an eternal state of righteousness. Such a corporate revival still lay in the future. The "forever" divine kingdom was "in anticipation" within Darius' **prophetic decree**.

It is important to note a typological concept within prophecy. The compass directions have symbolic meaning. East equates with deliverance. Cyrus comes from the east to deliver Babylon and to help God's people to "come out." When Jesus comes, He approaches planet earth from the east. The "decree" of restoration and deliverance from earthlings is anticipated to come from the east (Daniel 11:44a). Most scholars assume that the decree (*dabar*) that God's people must anticipate is from one of the *eastern* Persian kings! Since there are only four Persian kings mentioned within the Bible restoration prophecy, it must be one of these (Ezra 4:5-7). Any scrutiny into which decree God is referring to should at least tentatively draw on those four "eastern" kings. Darius was named to introduce this "time" for these Danelic messages. His decree underscores the spiritual imagery God is teaching in anticipation of these prophetic treasures.

<sup>9</sup> Waterhouse, S. Douglas; *Why Was Darius the Mede Expunged from History?* (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology, Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, Andrews University, 1997), pp.173-189.

## Decree Two: From God, on Behalf of God's People

*"At the beginning of thy supplications the **commandment** came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision"* (Daniel 9:23).

Many scholars have concluded that this "commandment" or divine decree is mentioned only to create an awareness that **this** decree (*dabar*) is what Gabriel brought to Daniel from God, fulfilling 9:25.<sup>10</sup> The reasoning is based on:

1. Daniel 9:23: "at the beginning of your supplications the **word** [*dabar*] went forth."
2. Then Daniel 9:25 says: "from the going forth of the **word** [*dabar*]."

The assumption is made that the decree represents "the key" revelation **from God** through Gabriel. Thus, the 490 years must begin at the time of Darius the Mede (539–537 B.C.) when Daniel prayed.

Resistance to this understanding comes from many: "vs 25 surely refers to a different proclamation: the word vs 23 introduces – the whole of vv 24-27 – does not focus on the building of a restored Jerusalem. The term [*dabar* in vs 23] is one for a solemn royal proclamation (e.g., Esther 1:19), and thus, not for the proclamation of Yahweh (e.g., Isaiah 2:3, 45:23, 48:30, 51:4, 53:11; Ezekiel 33:30)." "To restore and build [vs 25] is a rich and suggestive phrase that combines references to the restoring of the community and the rebuilding of the city" [literal or symbolic]<sup>11</sup> by an earth-bound leader.

In support of a deliverance mandate from the "word" of Yahweh to Daniel, is God's promise to Jeremiah!

1. *"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"* (Jeremiah 29:10).
2. Moreover, in Jeremiah 29:14 God promises: *"And **I will be found** of you, saith the LORD: and **I will turn** away your captivity, and **I will gather** you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive."*
3. In Jeremiah 30:18 a similar phrase is used in parallel with the *"city shall be rebuilt."* *"Thus saith the LORD; Behold, **I will bring again** the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof.... And ye shall be my people, and **I will be your God**"* (Jeremiah 30:18, 22).

In keeping with Daniel's prayer, his pleas are underscored by the anticipated completion of these promises. Before the exile, God promised that Daniel's prayer would be answered. The covenant bonding would resume within the context of an independent people. But, there is a

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<sup>10</sup> Collins, John J.; *Daniel* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN – 1993), pp. 354-355.

<sup>11</sup> Goldingay, John E.; *Daniel – Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 30 (Word Books, Publisher – Dallas, TX), p. pp. 260-261.

difference between the decrees that ended the 70-year captivity and the restoration decree which brings in everlasting righteousness. Was Gabriel's Daniel 9 visit reiterating a restoration promise, "the" decree to restore? It is impossible because the message was conditional!

Let's look at Cyrus, the next "king."

### **Cyrus the Great**

When Cyrus became emperor of the Persian province of Anshan, approximately 558 B.C., the area was subject to the Medes. His career was punctuated with many military conquests. This led to his being called the "king of the four corners of the world."<sup>12</sup> His form of centralized government was known as a model for peace and fairness to its subjects (referred to as the Achaemenid Dynasty).<sup>13</sup>

The Median Empire was ruled by Cyrus' own grandfather, King Astyages, when he came to power in Anshan. In 553 B.C. Cyrus led a revolt against that Median Empire, conquering it in 549 B.C.<sup>14</sup>

Cyrus assumed the title "King of Persia," but not of Medo-Persia, in 546 B.C. He would first conquer the Lydian Empire, then the Babylonian Empire, where Bible history/prophecy enters the scene.

In 540 B.C.<sup>15</sup> Cyrus moved into the Mesopotamia area and fought the battle of Opis. Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father, the actual king of Babylon, had sought to thwart an attack on the capital city, Babylon. But the Babylonian army was routed. Gubaru (a Median general – Darius the Mede) joined Cyrus, and they marched together on Babylon. On October 13, 539 B.C. the city fell (Daniel 5:30-31).

Many historical documents claim this as Cyrus' "first year," when he then decreed that Daniel's people could return to Jerusalem. That, however, would be shy of the divine sentence of 70 years in Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 29:10). This is where Darius the Mede, in Babylonian rule, noted in a previous section, guides our understanding and correlates the Biblical regnal events.

In that night (October 13, 539 B.C.) Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans was slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom (Daniel 5:30-31).

In the Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus calls himself "King of Babylon, King of Sumer and Akkad, King of the four corners of the world." He was the supreme ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire. But from the Biblical perspective, the king over Babylon had lordship over the Jewish people until Darius' death. That is the interpretive key to guide us.

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<sup>12</sup> Xenophon, *Anabasis* I. IX; see also M.A. Dandamaev "Cyrus II," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.  
<http://www.iranica.com/articles/cyrus-iii>

<sup>13</sup> Schmitt, *Achaemenid Dynasty* (i. The clan and dynasty). <http://www.iranica.com/articles/achaemenid-dynasty>

<sup>14</sup> Briant, Pierre; *From Cyrus to Alexander* (Eisenbrauns, 2006), pp. 31-33.  
[http://www.eisenbrauns.com/ECOM/\\_2ZR1BFSSRP.htm](http://www.eisenbrauns.com/ECOM/_2ZR1BFSSRP.htm)

<sup>15</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus\\_the\\_Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus_the_Great)

It appears as though Cyrus' ascension year directly over Babylon was 537 B.C. and his first regnal year was 536 B.C.<sup>16</sup>

It was in that year – the 70<sup>th</sup> for the Jewish people – that Cyrus issued the next decree.

### **Decree Three: From Cyrus, in Support of God's People**

“Religious policy of Cyrus is well documented in Babylonian texts as well as Jewish sources. Cyrus initiated a general policy that can be described as a policy of permitting religious freedom throughout his vast empire. He brought peace to the Babylonians and is said to have kept his army away from the temples and restored the statues of the Babylonian gods to their sanctuaries.” Another example of his religious sympathy, as evidenced by the Cyrus Cylinder (see below), was his kind treatment of the Jews during their remaining exile in Babylon. The Jewish Bible's Ketuvim ends in Second Chronicles with the decree of Cyrus, which returned the exiles to the Promised Land from Babylon along with a commission to rebuild the temple.

“Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth hath Yahweh, the god of heaven, given me; and He hath charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all His people – may Yahweh, his god, be with him – let him go there.’ (2 Chronicles 36:23; cf. Ezra 1:1-4).”<sup>17</sup>

*“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a **proclamation** throughout all his kingdom, and **put it also in writing**” (Ezra 1:1).*

This edict is reproduced in the book of Ezra, chapter 6:

*“In the first year of King Cyrus, Cyrus the king issued a **decree**: ‘Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the temple, the place where sacrifices are offered, be rebuilt and let its foundations be retained, its height being 60 cubits and its width 60 cubits; with three layers of huge stones and one layer of timbers. And let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. ‘Also let the gold and silver utensils of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be returned and brought to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; and you shall put them in the house of God.’” (Ezra 6:3-5).*

This decree brought the 70-year captivity to an end. God's Spirit moved on Cyrus:

“The year that Cyrus succeeded Darius the Mede to the throne of Medo-Persia marked the completion of seventy years since the first company of Hebrews had been carried captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, who was familiar with the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah regarding the duration of the captivity, and with the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the restoration by decree of Cyrus, was still living, and was occupying a position of leading responsibility in the Medo-Persian court. His faith in these prophecies led him to

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<sup>16</sup> [www.biblestudents.net/library/firstyearofcyrus.pdf](http://www.biblestudents.net/library/firstyearofcyrus.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus\\_the\\_Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus_the_Great)

plead with God in behalf of his people. And now, when the time came for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt, God moved upon Cyrus as his agent to discern the prophecies concerning himself, and to grant the Jewish people their liberty. And furthermore, Cyrus furnished them the necessary facilities for rebuilding the temple of the Lord.”<sup>18</sup>

Though the recorded decree involves the temple, **prophecy affirms** that **Cyrus would be the king who would help rebuild Jerusalem**. Clearly, those returning would need a place to reside.

*“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. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else.... I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: **he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts**” (Isaiah 45:1-6, 13).*

Josephus also connects Cyrus' command with the rebuilding of both the temple and the city, as prophesied by Isaiah.<sup>19</sup>

This decree became effective in the seventh month of Cyrus' first regnal year (536 B.C.) (Ezra 6:3). If the Danelic decree of 490 years commenced then, Messiah the Prince and His anointing work would have been in ~53 B.C., known historically to be too early. That means 9:25 is dealing with another issue than the physical city.

How can we know further that it was not Cyrus who fulfilled 9:25? In the first year of Darius the Mede, Daniel 11 records four Persian kings that would arise, supplementing the prophecies of Daniel 7–9. Historically, the reigns of Darius and Cyrus were **concurrent**. But from a Babylonian and Biblical perspective Darius was **first**; then two to three years later, Cyrus. We can then understand the list of those Medo-Persian kings pertaining to the end of the captivity and after! *“Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia”* (Daniel 11:2b). Who were these four key kings future to Darius the Mede? Cyrus, Darius I, Xerxes I and Artaxerxes I (specifically named in Ezra). The Biblical focus **is on the fourth** and last Medo-Persian king, Artaxerxes I (the transition ruler between Persia and Greece – 10:20).

- This prophecy was given during Darius the Mede's reign. Thus, these kings would be future to then.
- Daniel 11:2-20 introduces future earthly kings of Biblical significance.

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<sup>18</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, March 28, 1907.

<sup>19</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, 11:1-18, quoted in Steinmann, p. 468.

- Verse 2 tells of three kings “yet” to come. That is a distinct bloc that most concur represents Cyrus, Darius I, Xerxes I and then a fourth (Daniel 11:2), Artaxerxes I (cf. Ezra 4:6, 6:14).
- Verse 2 isolates the fourth king as someone who uses his riches for power and is against Greece.
- Xerxes I (the third king) was known to attack Greece, and became the catalyst for Alexander the Great’s military ventures. But Artaxerxes I provided riches to the enemies of the Athenians to undermine that government, which created weakness in the administration of Grecian areas.

There is an interesting “king” that ends this Daniel 11 list, and which also ends the key kingdom leaders during the 490-year period.

- *“Then shall stand up in his estate a raiser of taxes in the glory of the kingdom: but within few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle”* (Daniel 11:20).
- This is Caesar Augustus, who brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-6). He was the first ruler of the Roman Empire (63–14 B.C.).
- The tax decree was issued between 6 and 4 B.C., making the 490-year prophecy reach at least till then, to the birth of Christ. But the prophecy goes to the anointing and Cross of Messiah the Prince. That would then be 30 years after this time.
- Intriguing – Cyrus could not be that king. He went back too far. It would need to be in the time of that fourth king – Artaxerxes I (465–425 B.C.)!

Cyrus’ decree addressed the physical assets with honor to the Jewish God. The next two Biblically unnamed Persian kings had no direct interest in that theocracy (Cambyses – 529–522 B.C. and Smerdis – 522–521 B.C.), thus are not on that list. Then comes Darius I.

#### **Decree Four: From Darius I, in Support of God’s People** (not Darius the Mede)

From Cyrus through Darius I (521–485 B.C.), adversaries did much to delay and thwart the building of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:5). As the work of rebuilding the temple began under counsel of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1), local governors demanded, *“Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?”* (Ezra 5:3). That led to a communiqué to Darius I with a request to search the historical documents. That was done, and in a palace in the old Median Empire, Cyrus’ record (decree) was found.

That led to another **decree** in favor of God’s people to finish the temple (likely 520 B.C.).

- *“Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place ... I Darius have made a **decree**; let it be done with speed”* (Ezra 6:7, 12b).
- cf. Nehemiah 12:22, Haggai 1:1
- The temple was finished in 516 B.C. under Darius I.

Thousands of the Jewish people have already been in Jerusalem now for over 20 years.

Isaiah had said that Cyrus would not only deliver God's people, but the cities of Judah would be rebuilt (Isaiah 44:26). Before the work on the temple began, *the people were* inhabiting the cities!: *"And when the seventh month was come, and **the children of Israel were in the cities**, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.... And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.... From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid"* (Ezra 3:1, 3-4a, 6).

This is confirmed further by Haggai at the time the temple foundation was laid. *"Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, **to dwell in your ceiled houses**, and this house lie waste? ... Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.... Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house"* (Haggai 1:3-4, 7, 9b).

Daniel 9:25 notes that the decree is to *"restore and build Jerusalem."* The decree of Cyrus, recorded in Ezra, is only for the temple. But, it is assumed that the 50,000 who returned would establish homes upon his permission – as God had decreed.

Darius I's decree only affirmed the prior orders of Cyrus.

### **Decree Five: From Xerxes I in Support of God's People**

Xerxes I – Ahasuerus (487–466 B. C.) was the famous king who married the Jewess Esther. He was one of the key kings mentioned in Ezra 4:5-7. Xerxes I's first interest lay in the restoration of Susa and the completion of the royal palace. It had been destroyed by Ashurbanapal in 639 B.C. The story of Esther enters in 484–483 B.C. The fall of the previous queen, Vashti, may have occurred at a feast celebrating the completion of the new palace.

Many incorrectly consider him the "fourth king" of Daniel 11, who was against Greece because of his military exploits against that country. But – was he a king who would fulfill Daniel 9:25?

Xerxes I was a warrior initially suppressing revolts in Egypt, then Babylon.<sup>20</sup> He later attacked Greece in 480 B.C. for their interference with a major revolt in the province of Ionia, Asia Minor, in 498 B.C., and later helped to defeat an Athenian army in the battle of the Marathon, also in Asia Minor. The Greeks were humiliated, and resentment against the Medo-Persian Empire mounted. Artaxerxes I, the next king, reinforced this feeling by undermining the Athenian government so severely that it was preoccupied with civil unrest. He used his riches to bribe the internal enemies to oppose those leaders, just as Daniel 11:2 noted of the fourth king.

The story of Esther begins in the third year of Xerxes I's reign (484–483 B.C.). At this time the king reigned over 127 provinces. Following the dramatic encounter with Haman, and his death, Xerxes issued a **decree** to the Jews of the empire to "slay their enemies." The Bible says, *"And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them"* (Esther 9:3). That decree and

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<sup>20</sup> Ghirshman, R.; *Iran*, p. 191, as quoted in Wikipedia.

the action of the Jews led to the death of over 75,000 individuals considered enemies of Esther's nationality.

God's people were once again in great favor throughout the Medo-Persian Empire. Yet few returned to their homeland until King Artaxerxes I succeeded Xerxes I.

Thus, the decrees of Xerxes I did not fulfill the restoration requirements of the Danelic prophecy. They were protective, secular documents that dealt directly with the Jewish right to exist as a Jewish people – regardless of location.

### **Decree Six: From Artaxerxes I – Restore Theocracy**

See the article "The Decree to Restore and Build."<sup>21</sup> (Appendix II). For details of the various Medo-Persian kings and decrees, see Appendix III.

Xerxes I, or King Ahasuerus of Esther's time, was murdered in 465 B.C. His son, Artaxerxes I, took his place after much violence. His ascension year was 465–464 B.C. Tishri 1 of 464 B.C. was the onset of his first regnal year.

The seventh year – a timing noted in Ezra 7:8 – would be 458–457 B.C. The Persian capital had been in Persepolis with a palace in Susa, along the Ulai River. Artaxerxes I moved the capital to Babylon. That is where he became friends with Ezra. In that special relationship, Ezra requested that the Jewish people be permitted to return to their homeland to worship and to re-establish life. Clearly, God's Spirit moved on Artaxerxes' heart. *"And the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him"* (Ezra 7:6).

Ezra was a scribe and priest (Ezra 7:12). There were also unique leadership/administrative skills in Ezra that were recognized by Artaxerxes. He not only permitted him to lead a pilgrimage to Palestine but appointed him as provincial governor of the land east of Jordan (assumed from the phrase "beyond the river" – Ezra 7:25). Life and death power was given to him. He also was provided freedom to appoint magistrates and judges.

This unique power was legally conveyed by a decree ("I make a **decree**" – Ezra 7:13 and "I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, do make a **decree**" – Ezra 7:21).

The decree was in the fall of 458 B.C. at Atonement [that would help to establish the onset of the 2300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14 (Atonement language)] – also, for the *mareh* vision of Daniel 9. That would make it possible for Ezra to leave the next spring and arrive five months later in Palestine in 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:9).

Artaxerxes I's decree stands alone among all the decrees. It is a directive to re-establish a theocracy – civil/religious – with God at its head. There is no provision in that document for the restoration of physical assets. Many scholars have commented on this. But – the view that Daniel 9:25 is a buildup of physical assets has confused the elevated understanding of returning to God.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://endtimeissues.com/Articles/Article304-Decree%20to%20Restore%20and%20Build.html>

It is fairly well established that the temple was completed in 516 B.C. by Darius I, as we have noted above (Ezra 5:15, 6:8-12). That brings us to a provocative issue. 516 B.C. was long before Artaxerxes came on the scene. Yet, the Bible clearly shows that he issued one of the decrees to **build** and **finish** the temple. What “decree” or “commandment” would Artaxerxes I issue to embellish or make ready “that temple”?

That **is** an issue many scholars recognize, but they fail to move beyond “the question.” **If** the temple is already completed in Artaxerxes’ day, then his decree has **nothing** to do with its *physical structure*, per se. If the commencement of the 70 *Shemita* cycle mandate (490 years) is to **restore** and **build** the city, street (singular) and walls, it is either a physical mandate that Cyrus long ago ordered (as God had predicted) **or** it represents a spiritual metaphor for Artaxerxes I. Since Artaxerxes must also be tied to a decree related to the temple (Ezra 6:14), could that possibly be part of a spiritual mandate of Daniel 9:25 also?! Could this all be totally spiritual?

The “*house of God*” “*which is at Jerusalem*” (Ezra 6:12, 14) was “*builded and finished*” according to the commandment of God and according to the commandment or decree of:

Cyrus’ decree – physical restoration (temple and cities)

Darius I’s decree – physical restoration (finished temple)

Artaxerxes I – decree related to spiritual restoration, **providing implements for the temple worship**. To accomplish this, the vessels of the temple were returned with funds to purchase sacrificial animals plus wheat, wine and oil for the various ordinances (Ezra 7:13-26). In addition, he mandated a return to the worship of God. That completed the needs of the temple, finishing its restoration.

It now takes a secular king to re-establish the theocracy, set Ezra in a position for a revival and establish consequences for disobedience:

*“Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?” (7:23).*

*“And thou, Ezra” (7:25)*

*“And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment” (7:26).*

In the setting of **covenant restoration** in Daniel 9, no decree matches that of Artaxerxes I. No letter/decree or law after this time has any tangible association to the deliverance theme of Daniel 9. Ezra was a revivalist; his authority came from God and was facilitated by Artaxerxes I. This is the decree that fulfills Daniel 9:25, detailed shortly in this narrative. He is the “fourth” king of Daniel 11:2, once again revealing the precision of Biblical prophecy.

### **Decree Seven: Artaxerxes I – Rebuild Wall**

*“And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.... And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy*

*servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.... Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (Nehemiah 2:1, 5-8, 17-18).*

These were not formal decrees but "letters of accommodation." Contrary to a common interpretation, though it notes that "Jerusalem lieth in waste," the need to build and restore involved **only** the gates and walls. In verses 17 and 18 the "reproach" (*herpa* – H) or scorn against the city would be removed when they were restored.

The view that these letters from Artaxerxes I was the decree to "restore and build" Jerusalem of Daniel 9:25 is widespread. It began with the publishing of Sir Robert Anderson's theories in the book, *The Coming Prince*, in 1895 (London). In 1978 Harold Hoehner, Ph.D., Dallas Theological Seminary, published *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, bringing "corrections" to Anderson's original work.

Based on Hoehner's work, the "decree" that begins the Daniel 9 prophecy was issued on Nisan 1 (March 5), 444 B.C. This date has been challenged by Bob Pickle.<sup>22</sup> Anderson and Hoehner mix 360-day years with solar years. In addition, the basis of the 70 weeks of years is the Sabbatical year system mandated in Leviticus 25, ignored by Hoehner and Anderson.

"In that system, agricultural pursuits were to be put on hold every seventh year. Israel was explicitly told that if they did not let the land rest in that seventh year, the land would become desolate and they would be taken captive. The length of time of desolation and captivity would correspond to the number of sabbatical years that they had not kept (Lev. 26: 34, 35).

"Jeremiah later specified that the Jews would be captives in Babylon for 70 years (Jer. 29:10), and this 70 years of desolation is explicitly said by the writer of 2 Chronicles to correspond to the number of sabbatical years that had not been kept (36:21). Therefore, Daniel's reference to 70 years of desolation in Daniel 9:2 implies a time period of 490 years, for that is the precise number of years in 70 sabbatical cycles.

"It is apparent, then, that Daniel 9 begins with a reference to 490 years or 70 sabbatical cycles, and ends with a reference to 490 years or 70 sabbatical cycles. It therefore behooves us, if at all possible, to make our calculations of Daniel's 70 weeks align with actual sabbatical cycles."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.pickle-publishing.com/papers/harold-hoehner-70-weeks.htm#alt>

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus, the 444 B.C. theory places the crucifixion at Nissan 14, 33 A.D. It is true that on that date there was a full moon on Friday (intercalated method), but that cannot be the crucifixion date because it is based upon faulty calculations, using a 360-day year.

*“Yea, also I continued **in the work of this wall**, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work.... So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days”* (Nehemiah 5:16, 6:15). The focus of this 445–444 B.C. decree was on the protective gates and walls.

If this was a decree to restore a theocracy or a city, how could all be accomplished in 52 days “to cease the reproach of the enemies” of God’s people?

The only decree that fulfills the purpose of Daniel 9 is related to Artaxerxes I’s first proclamation of Ezra 7.

### **Focusing Deeper on that Spiritual Restoration Issue**

#### **Times of Uncertainty**

During the second year of Darius I’s reign, Zechariah was given amazing visions and messages from God. Many Jews had returned to Canaan following Cyrus’ decree. But again apostasy was quickly rampant. Zechariah was a Levite born in Babylon (Nehemiah 12:1, 16) and had administrative and spiritual interest in his people.

- *“Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto thee”* (Zechariah 1:3) (written ~520 B.C.).
- *“Turn ye now from your evil ways.”*

Then the “*angel of the Lord*” asked the “*Lord of hosts*” a question:

- *“How long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah?”* (Zechariah 1:12).
- The “*Lord of hosts*” answered, *“I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy”* (Zechariah 1:14).
- *“The Lord shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem”* (Zechariah 1:17; cf. 2:12).
- This is amazing. The people of captivity had returned to unmitigated apostasy. Yet God is prophetically conveying a spirit of mercy and restoration. That 490 years of mercy given to David would not change!

Verse 14 above is a beautiful embellishment of this, regarding God’s people.

- Jerusalem is a metaphor for His people.
- He will judge and restore it spiritually again.
- The jealousy for Zion (God’s dwelling place with His people) and Jerusalem (His people) represent a spiritual restoration totally unrelated to buildings, walls and streets.

This is further emphasized by the additional story of Joshua (the high priest), Satan and that Angel of the Lord:

- “*I will clothe thee with a change of raiment*” (Zechariah 3:4).
- “All who have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of the Saviour. Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. His word is pledged: ‘Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.’ Isaiah 27:5.”<sup>24</sup>
- “As the people of God afflict their souls before Him, pleading for purity of heart, the command is given, ‘Take away the filthy garments,’ and the encouraging words are spoken, ‘Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.’ Zechariah 3:4. The spotless robe of Christ's righteousness is placed upon the tried, tempted, faithful children of God. The despised remnant are clothed in glorious apparel, nevermore to be defiled by the corruptions of the world. Their names are retained in the Lamb's book of life, enrolled among the faithful of all ages. They have resisted the wiles of the deceiver; they have not been turned from their loyalty by the dragon's roar. Now they are eternally secure from the tempter's devices. Their sins are transferred to the originator of sin. A ‘fair miter’ is set upon their heads.”<sup>25</sup>
- At a time when the cities were being restored and the temple foundation being laid, God's key messages to Zechariah related to spiritual restoration and rebuilding. **That** is the forward-moving, pivotal issue in these prophecies!

Also, we must reflect on the imagery of spiritual restoration seen in Daniel's prayer before he is approached by Gabriel (Daniel 9:4-19).

- Since Gabriel came in response to this prayer
- The prayer contains what Gabriel is answering!

Again, the desolation of the land and the bondage of the people related to their rebellion against the Sabbatical year (II Chronicles 36:21).

- That year symbolized a time when everyone was “one” (just like in the heavenly Canaan) – spiritually restored.
- The land belonged to God.
- During this year, the land and people rested from all distractions, labor and secular activity.
- The focus was the “Lord of hosts.”

Now – with their apostasy having been punished and the work on the physical assets proceeding, what must be changed or restored to deal with this “new rebellion”?

- Did Israel need walls, streets and buildings?

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<sup>24</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 587.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 591.

- They needed the Lord.
- They needed a true, spiritual revival and a setting to once again worship.

As Daniel's prayer progresses, he sees the spiritual restoration as paramount.

- **"Thy** city Jerusalem, **thy** holy mountain" (vss 16-17)
- **"Thy** city which is called by **thy** name" (vs 18)
- **"Thy** city and **thy** people are called by **thy** name" (vs 19)
- "Supplication ... in behalf of the holy mountain (vs 20) of **my God**"

In Daniel 9:11-14 "us" represents "Jerusalem" – God's people.

### **The Spiritual Decree!**

Approximately 73 years after Zerubbabel and Joshua brought back to Judah the first wave of Jewish people:

- Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) came to the throne.
- This was the era of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Artaxerxes was acquainted with these men and "talked freely regarding the power of the God of heaven and the divine purpose in restoring the Jews to Jerusalem."<sup>26</sup>

- Artaxerxes I gave a Biblically oriented decree (Ezra 7:12-28).
- There is **nothing** in it that articulates buildings, streets or walls.
- It is a beautiful invitation and directive to **re-establish the theocracy in Jerusalem.**

*"Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?"* (Ezra 7:23).

This decree and Ezra's leadership led to a great revival in Israel.

- It was given in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7).
- Nehemiah, a contemporary of Ezra (Nehemiah 8:1, 9), noted that the year was calculated as a fall-to-fall period (Nehemiah 1:1, 2:1).

Again, archeological and astronomical data show that Artaxerxes came to power in the fall of 464 B.C.

- His seventh year would be 458-457 B.C.

Once revival was underway:

- Ezra went about dealing with ruins still obvious in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:11-16).
- It was during this time that the western governors of the empire wrote to Artaxerxes.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 608.

- That “they are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations” (vs 12) (clearly a dishonest report from enemies).
- Then, impulsively, Artaxerxes decreed that this **city** not be rebuilt (vs 21) “until a decree is made by me.”
- This reveals that the original decree in 458 B.C. did **not** include building the city structure!

This rebuilding was likely in 456 B.C.

- BUT – that is not the issue in Gabriel’s prophecy (Daniel 9).
- The restoration of “Jerusalem” is the re-establishment of the theocracy of God’s people (commensurate with Daniel’s prayer) [“to build” (*banah*) can refer to the restoration of God’s people (Jeremiah 12:14-16)].

What is the street (plaza) and wall (moat)?

- The wall (moat) is symbolic for something firmly decided (cf. Isaiah 10:23).
- The street (plaza or square) refers to the center of the city. This suggests that all the people of God will have firmly centered their loyalty on Him.

The damage later against the walls and gate by the Samaritans led Nehemiah, cupbearer of Artaxerxes I, to go to Jerusalem to repair the wall and gates (Nehemiah 1:3, 2:3). That work took only a little over a month to complete. The restoration of the city itself was **not** his object.

Daniel 8–12 contains elevated spiritual metaphors, rich divine imperatives, prophetic imagery of war between good and evil and God’s final deliverance of mankind from sin. That is the understanding God desires us to see within the context of the decree in 9:25 – Artaxerxes I from several vantage points.

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