

Darius the Mede

In October, 539 BC, the Babylonian empire fell before Cyrus and the Medo-Persian empire. Nabonidus and his co-regent son Belshazzar were the last kings of Babylonian empire. The Bible (in Daniel 5:30–31) maintains that Darius the Mede received the kingdom. However, the name “Darius the Mede” is not mentioned in other ancient writings we have from this time period. Skeptics conclude that Darius the Mede was a fictional character and that this obvious error shows the historical inaccuracy of the Bible. However, just as at one time the only reference we had of a figure named Belshazzar was in the Bible, later historical findings exonerated the truthfulness of the Bible. Keeping this in mind, we should not be too quick to accept their conclusion that the Bible is historical inaccurate.

So is there any historical evidence of Darius the Mede? When Babylon fell as Belshazzar feasted in October, 539BC, Cyrus was not leading the Persian army just outside the Babylonian gates. The city was taken without a fight by a man named Ugbaru. Cyrus appointed this man as king of Babylon, but he died in November, 538 BC, ruling for just one year as king.



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Can king Darius in the book of Daniel be this Ugbaru?

- Darius is said to be a Mede (Dan 5:31). We know from historical records that Ugbaru was the former governor of Gutium, a region of Media. He is also called a Mede by other ancient historians.
- Darius is said to be around 62 years old when he received the kingdom (Dan 5:31). While we do not know the exact age of Ugbaru, scholars estimate that he was around 60 years old when he was given governance over Babylon by Cyrus.
- If you notice in Daniel, Darius the Mede is only mentioned during the first year of his reign, he is never said to reign more than one year (Dan 5:30–6:1,8, 9:1, 10:1). Ugbaru died just after reigning in Babylon for one year. He was replaced by Cyrus's son Cambyses.
- Darius is called king (Dan 6:9). While Ugbaru's reign lasted just one year, his successor, Cambyses was called King of Babylon even though he was a subordinate under his father Cyrus, King of the Persians. From this, it is likely Ugbaru had this same title.
- It was common for rulers to have multiple names in ancient Babylonia and Persia. For example, Daniel is also called Belteshazzar. According to some historians, the name Ugbaru should be in fact Ubaruš "who has well-formed shoulders (in Elamite)" and this king likely received the throne name Dârayavahuš (Darius) "who maintains the good." (Another example, Xerxes (Greek) or Ahasuerus (Aramaic) or Xšayaršâ (Median/Persian) all refer to the same person.)

From these parallels it is completely plausible, if not most probable, that Darius the Mede in Daniel was in fact the same person as Ugbaru mentioned in Persian writings. The Scriptures again demonstrate their veracity when tested and we can expect, as more is discovered about the ancient world of the Babylonians and Persians, that the Bible again will be exonerated as accurate and truthful. Of course, Christians, following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, have always known this.