

The table gives the biblical titles of foreign kings from **604-331 B.C.**¹⁵⁹ Ezra 1:1 matches Dan. 6:28. The Isaiah prophecy applies the surname “Cyrus” to all the Persian kings (Isaiah 45:4, 14).

Mordecai and Esther

The Jews, who were exiled to Babylon received new names which often became the family surnames. Family members had to use these names in the course of public business. This practice is explicitly referred to in Nehemiah 12:13ff with respect to the priestly families. Also, whether the surname was of idolatrous derivation or not depends on the circumstance, family rank, and dispositions of the officials involved.

The Mordecai of Esther is also a family name. The scripture says, “Now in Shushan the palace there was a man of Judah, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; 6 who was exiled from Jerusalem with the exile which had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.”¹⁶⁰ In many cases, the family name was obtained from the Babylonian name given to the initial deportee. Such is the likely the case of the Mordecai Family, clearly derived from a Babylonian deity. It is also equally clear that no pious Jew would ever take such a surname as a personal name.¹⁶¹ These names were given to the exiles by the Babylonians, a practice applied to Daniel and his friends (cf. Daniel 1:7).¹⁶² Furthermore, “Mordecai” referred to a Babylonian deity, and not Persian showing that it was obtained in the Babylonian period.

Now Jeconiah was exiled in **597 B.C.** But the Mordecai of the book of Esther lived in the time of Xerxes, specifically in **473 B.C.** when this Mordecai was appointed Prime Minister. This was **124** years after the exile. There is a Mordecai listed in the list of officials who returned with Zerubbabel in **529 B.C.**¹⁶³ But that Mordecai could not be the Mordecai

¹⁵⁹ The bible omits Neriglissar, Nabonidus, Xerxes II, Darius Nothus, Artaxerxes III, and Arses. Pseudo-Smerdis is only barely alluded to in Daniel's count of 4 kings.

¹⁶⁰ Esther 2:5, My translation. Perhaps, “or who was in exile” would capture the sense better. The Hebrew “who was exiled” is a passive hofal. It refers to this Mordecai as being in a state of exile from Jerusalem, the city of his fathers, and not being the one who was initially exiled. The status “exile” stuck to even those born afterward in the exile. The notation of “from Jerusalem with the exile which had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah” is important, because it was the skilled class of Jerusalem that was then exiled, which the kings of Babylon and Persia kept near them and gave them rank because of their skills in administration. Among the Jews they were known as the people who were exiled from Jerusalem.

¹⁶¹ “Mordecai is a pagan name that reflects the name of the Babylonian deity Marduk ... many Jews of the period had two names, one for secular use and the other for use especially within the Jewish community. Mordecai's Jewish name is not recorded in the biblical text” (NET Bible 254.86, Esther 2:6, note 16).

¹⁶² No doubt, the Babylonian court treated the names they gave as personal when addressing Daniel and his friends; however, in private they used their own names, and would never own up in their hearts to the pagan names. Moreover, the pagan names would only be used when they had to use them, just like surnames. Later this may have caused pious Jews to pre-empt the naming process by adopting Chaldee names on their own for surname use that could pass as Chaldee without being idolatrous.

¹⁶³ Ezra 2:2; Nehemiah 7:7.

in the book of Esther.¹⁶⁴ This shows that “Mordecai” is really the Mordecai family surname, and not just one Mordecai.

The Mordecai's had gained rank in both the Persian Empire and the Jewish community by the time Cyrus released the exiles in 529. The Mordecai Family¹⁶⁵ was exiled at the time of Jeconiah along with the other artisan exiles of Jerusalem. These were the first to prosper and build a name for themselves in the exile. The Mordecai of Esther was one of the descendants of this family who held positions in the administration of Xerxes.¹⁶⁶

The Ezra Family

That *Ezra* was the family surname of priests there can be no doubt. Nehemiah 12:13 names the personal head of Ezra in the days of the high priest Joiakim son of Jeshua, “Of Ezra: Meshullam.” Do not confuse this Ezra Family surname with Ezra the scribe. The famous scribe and reformer was from the family of Seraiah. But recognition that Ezra was also a surname of another family prevents us from wrongly confusing the Ezra who returned under Zerubbabel with Ezra the scribe.

Notice the list of priestly families that returned with Zerubbabel in the text below. These are all family names, except for the Davidic prince (Zerubbabel) and the High priest (Jeshua).

KJV Nehemiah 12:1 Now these *are* the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: **Seraiah**, **Jeremiah**, **Ezra**, 12:2 **Amariah**, **Malluch**, Hattush, 12:3 **Shechaniah**, Rehum, **Meremoth**, 12:4 **Iddo**, **Ginnetho**, **Abijah**, 12:5 **Miamin**, **Maadiah**, **Bilgah**, 12:6 **Shemaiah**, and **Joiarib**, **Jedaiah**, 12:7 **Sallu**, **Amok**, **Hilkiah**, **Jedaiah**.

Now notice that 20 of the family names listed in vss. 1-7 are all repeated in vs. 12-21. The corresponding names are color coded for easier matching. The following verses contain the same list, only this time a personal name is associated with each family name as the representative of that family during the priesthood of Joiakim.

KJV Nehemiah 12:10 And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada, 12:11 And Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan begat Jaddua. 12:12 And in the days of Joiakim were priests, the chief of the fathers:¹⁶⁷ **of Seraiah**, Meraiah; **of Jeremiah**, Hananiah; 12:13 **Of Ezra**, Meshullam; **of Amariah**, Jehohanan; 12:14 **Of Melicu**, Jonathan; **of Shebaniah**, Joseph; 12:15 Of Harim, Adna; **of Meraioth**, Helkai; 12:16 **Of Iddo**, Zechariah; **of Ginnethon**, Meshullam; 12:17 **Of Abijah**, Zichri; **of Miniamin**, **of Moadiah**, Piltai; 12:18 **Of Bilgah**, Shammua; **of Shemaiah**, Jehonathan; 12:19 And **of Joiarib**, Mattenai; **of Jedaiah**, Uzzi;

¹⁶⁴ “Ahasuerus” ruled over “India” (Esther 1:1). India was not part of the Persian Empire in 529 B.C. This shows that the Mordecai who returned with Zerubbabel is not the same as the one in Esther.

¹⁶⁵ I refer to them anachronistically.

¹⁶⁶ “That Mordecai is *sitting at the kings' gate* apparently means that he was a high-ranking government official. It was at the city gate where important business was transacted” (NET Bible 254.86, Esther 2:19, note 21).

¹⁶⁷ The phrase “chief of the fathers” means the clan representative.