

The Historical Impact of Jewish Deportees; Daniel & Others Promotions in the Chaldean Government, Daniel to Governor of Babylonia Magi, Dan 2:48-49; Daniel Supersedes Babylonian Magi by Interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's Dream, Dan 4:6-9; the Promotion of Jehoiachin, 2 Kgs 23:28-29; 25:27-28; the Political Intrigues of Herod the Great

IX. Historical Impact of Jewish Deportees

Our examination of the dispersions of Jews from the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians (Sargon II), the Southern Kingdom by the Chaldeans (Nebuchadnezzar II), and Judea by the Macedonians (Alexander the Great), have revealed that over the course of seven centuries Jews from all twelve tribes of Israel were scattered over a large expanse of territory that stretched from the Euphrates River to the borders of present-day India.

Through the testimony of history, there is enough evidence to indicate the likelihood the Magi of the Persian and Parthian Empires were heavily populated by Jews. I present this evidence with the clear-eyed understanding that assumptions are made to draw this conclusion. Nevertheless, it is without question that tens of thousands of Jews were deported into this area on three major occasions and that the Bible identifies Jewish citizens of the Parthian Empire visiting Jerusalem.

In Acts 2:9 citizens of Parthia, Media, Elam, and Mesopotamia are present at Pentecost and are evangelized in their own native languages by Jews functioning under the gift of tongues.

The Parthian Empire was founded by the Arsacids, a tribe from an area east of the Caspian Sea. Arsaces I was their first ruler and subsequent kings in the Arsacid dynasty were called Arsacids. Two of the dynasty's most powerful rulers were Mithradates II (123-88 B.C.) and Phraates III (70-57 B.C.)

We have already noted that while in Babylon, Daniel was promoted to high offices in Babylon:

Daniel 2:48 - Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect [**governor**] over all the wise men [חֲכִימִים] **chakkim: Babylonian word for Magi**] of Babylon.

v. 49 - And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel was at the king's court [**equal to a justice on the Supreme Court**].

Daniel was from the tribe of Judah; he was granted extraordinary powers to foresee the future that resulted in a prophecy that foretold the timetable for the coming of Messiah. This ability was obviously granted by God but its accuracy impressed Nebuchadnezzar as is evidenced by his quote in:

Daniel 4:6 - "I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.

v. 6 - "So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men [**chakkim: Magi**] of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.



v. 7 - "Then the magicians [*chartom*: sorcerers], the conjurers [*ashaph*: those who practice divination], the Chaldeans [*kasday*: astrologers] and the diviners [*gezar*: soothsayers] came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me.

v. 8 - "But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying,

v. 9 - 'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.'"

Daniel immediately interpreted the dream for Nebuchadnezzar clearly demonstrating that he possessed the powers of the God of Israel Who was superior to the heathen idols worshipped by Nebuchadnezzar and his voodoo staff that obviously did not have a talent for oneiromancy: divination by means of dreams.

The formal address "chief of the magicians" reminds the reader that the king bestowed on Daniel the highest ranking office in the Chaldean State Department (Dan. 2:48). Nebuchadnezzar, even as an unbeliever, recognized that Daniel's power came from the supernatural source—God the Holy Spirit—and he added confidently "no mystery baffles you."¹

There are a number of books and articles that go so far as to assert that because of certain prophecies, such as Genesis 49:10, that there always has been and always will be a king of the Judaic-Davidic line ruling over the people of Israel. This assumption is taken so far as to declare that the Parthians and those that were Magi were Jews.

It is further asserted that beginning with Arsaces I, the kings of Parthia were Jews. This claim is made in a book by Steven M. Collins, *Parthia*:

This book will document that the Parthian Empire was formed and governed by Israelites who had been relocated into Asia. It also offers extensive evidence concerning Parthia's Israelite/Semitic origins. Parthia's kings were from the same Judaic dynasty as Israel's King David, and the city where the first Parthian King was crowned was named after Isaac, the son of Abraham.²

The justifications presented by Collins to draw this conclusion are from misapplication of several passages of Scripture, one of which claims that the dominant Jewish population of Parthia was comprised of deportees of ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom. However, the Messianic line runs through the tribe of Judah through Pharez \fā'-rez\ down to David which, along with those of the tribe of Benjamin, were the inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom, many of whom were deportees to Chaldea.

Nevertheless, as we have documented, there was a very significant presence of all twelve tribes in what became the Parthian Empire in 248 B.C.

¹ R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Daniel: Chapters One through Six*, 3d ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1996), 101.

² Steven M. Collins, *Parthia: The Forgotten Ancient "Superpower" and Its Role in Biblical History* (Royal Oak, MI: Bible Blessings, 2003), 2.



There were significant promotions into high governmental offices of Chaldea of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Another such promotion of note is that of Jehoiachin, who was one of the kings of Judah during Nebuchadnezzar's campaign against the Southern Kingdom.

2 Kings 23:28 - Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans—a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.

v. 29 - Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men of the land.

Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. and was succeeded by his son Awil-Marduk (Evil-Merodach in the Hebrew), who released Jehoiachin from prison and provided him with a regular allowance.³

2 Kings 25:27 - In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin from prison on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month.

v. 28 - He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived.

Jewish deportees of the Southern Kingdom were removed to Chaldea where they were promoted and advanced within the Empire's government and society.

I do not buy into the claim that the Parthian royal family, beginning with Arsaces I, was in the line of Judah, I do think it is highly likely that Jews of all twelve tribes were prominent within the Parthian population and that some of them had acquired standing in the Empire's government which includes the Magi, an extremely powerful house in the Parthian Senate:

The king was permanently advised by two councils, consisting of persons not of his own nomination, whom rights, conferred by birth or office, entitled to their seats. One of these was a family conclave (*councilium domesticum*), or assembly of the full-grown males of the Royal House; the other was a Senate comprising both the spiritual and the temporal chiefs of the nations, the Sophi, or 'Wise Men,' and the Magi, or 'Priests.'⁴ Together these two bodies constituted the Megistanes, the 'Nobles' or 'Great Men'—the privileged class which to a considerable extent checked and controlled the monarch.

The monarchy was elective, but only in the house of Arsacidae; and the concurrent vote of both councils was necessary in the appointment of a new king. When a king had been duly nominated by the two councils, the right of placing the diadem upon his head belonged to the Surena, the 'Field-Marshal,' or 'Commander in Chief of the Parthian armies.' The Megistanes further claimed and sometimes exercised the right of deposing a monarch whose conduct displeased them. (p. 85–86)

³ "Nebuchadnezzar," in *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 571.

⁴ "...the Council of the Parthians, according to Poseidonius \päs-a-dō'-nē-as), consists of two groups, one that of kinsmen, and the other that of wise men and Magi, from both of which groups the kings were appointed" (Strabo, *Geography*, trans., and eds. H. C. Hamilton and W. Falconer, [<http://old.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0198;query=chapter%3D%2338;layout=;loc=11.8.1>], 11.9.3).



After a king was once elected and firmly fixed upon the throne, his power appears to have been nearly despotic. At any rate he could put to death without trial whomever he chose; and adult members of the Royal House, who provoked the reigning monarch's jealousy, were constantly so treated. Probably it would have been more dangerous to arouse the fears of the 'Sophi' and 'Magi.' The latter especially were a powerful body, consisting of an organized hierarchy, which had come down from ancient times, and was feared and venerated by all classes of the people. Their numbers at the close of the Empire, counting adult males only, are reckoned at eighty thousand; they possessed considerable tracts of fertile land, and were the sole inhabitants of many large towns or villages, which they were permitted to govern as they pleased. The arbitrary power of the monarchs must, in practice, have been largely checked by the privileges of this numerous priestly caste.⁵ (pp. 86–87)

From these excerpts we learn that the Magi of Parthia were a powerful group of men whose reputation as the priesthood of the Empire was one of respect and veneration. The Megistanes, and especially the assembly of the Magi, had the power to check the decisions of the monarch and, if they thought necessary, to depose him.

The Parthian general Surenas's victory over Crassus at Carrhae (Turkey) in 53 B.C. and Augustus's defeat of Marc Antony at Actium, Greece, in 31 B.C. left Augustus as the first emperor of the Roman Empire. These two events led to the successful signing of a peace treaty between Rome and Parthia which established the Euphrates River as the border between the two powers, one which could not be crossed with impunity without proper diplomatic arrangements.

The king of Parthia was Phraates IV who sent four sons and grandsons on an excursion to Rome so he could prepare to pass the throne to his bastard son by Italian slave girl, Musa.

There is no doubt, knowing what we know about the Magi, that they saw danger in store for the Empire. By 4 B.C. the intrigues of Phraates IV had convinced the Magi that the Phraates dynasty threatened the future of Parthia.

XII. The Political Intrigues of Herod the Great

The Asmoneans \as-mo-nē'-ans\ was a priestly family in Palestine who were also called the Hasmonaeans or Maccabees. They were loyal to Jehovah and as a result they were in conflict with their Jewish brethren who were attracted to the paganizing influence of the Macedonians and Syrians.

In 126 B.C. a case of overenthusiastic evangelism set the stage for the political intrigue that continued in Palestine throughout the life of Christ when an Asmonean named John Hyrcanus \her-kā'-nus\ went to the south of Judah to the land of Edom on what proved to be an ill-fated missionary journey.

⁵ George Rawlinson, *The Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy or the Geography, History, and Antiquities of Parthia* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1872, repr., Charleston, SC: BiblioLife, nd), 85–87.



The Edomites pressed into the now empty lands on the South of Judah. West of the 'Arabah the country they occupied came to be known by the Greek name Idumaea, and the people as Idumaeans. In 126 B.C. the country was subdued by John Hyrcanus, who compelled the people to become Jews and to submit to circumcision. Antipater, governor of Idumaea, was made procurator of Judaea, Samaria and Galilee by Julius Caesar. He paved the way to the throne for his son Herod the Great.⁶

The Idumaeans were proselytized Jews but they were among the children of Esau, a branch of the Arabian bloodlines. Hyrcanus's "outreach" resulted in the Arabs becoming kings of the Jews.

Following the Idumaeans arrival in Judea, there developed two opposing political parties, the Hasmonaeen Jews led by Antigonus and the Idumaeans led by Antipater, an Arab and the father of Herod.

The reigning king of the Jews was Antigonus (80–37 B.C.) who was also the high priest and the last of the Hasmonaeen dynasty. He was installed in office by Parthians, who occupied Palestine in 40 B.C.

For three years, 40–37 B.C., Palestine was within the Parthian Empire and was ruled by a Jewish vassal king of the Parthians named Antigonus. At that time King Herod, Roman king of Judea, fled from the Parthians in fear of his life. While the Parthian-sponsored rule of Antigonus was brief, it was apparently popular with the Jews. When the Parthians withdrew across the Euphrates, Antigonus, with Jewish support, attempted to maintain himself as king of the Jews, but was defeated by Herod. Mark Antony, the Roman leader ordered Antigonus beheaded, and Josephus records that this was done to compel the Jews to accept the hated Herod as their king. Mark Antony afterward led a massive invasion of Parthia in 37–36 B.C., but his army was utterly defeated by the Parthians. (p. 126–27)

Parthia's victory over Mark Antony led to a long period of peace between Rome and Parthia, with the Euphrates River serving as the border between their two vast empires.

As long as the Caesars wanted peace with Parthia, Roman officials along Parthia's border, such as King Herod and Pontius Pilate, knew they risked their positions and lives if they entangled Rome in an unwanted war with Parthia.⁷ (p.127)

⁶ William Ewing, "Edom," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 2:900.

⁷ Steven M. Collins, *Parthia*, 126–27.

