**Historical Setting for Esther**

By Arlen Chitwood

The events seen throughout the book of Esther occurred in the southern part of the country known today as Iran. “Iran” is a name of more recent origin. The country was known as “Persia” prior to 1935, reflecting on the racial identity and history of the people inhabiting the land — descendants of the ancient Persians.

Though the people inhabiting this land during modern times are of Persian descent, which carries all the way back to the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians during Ahasuerus and Esther’s day, the name change in 1935 reflected another racial characteristic of the Persian people — that of *Aryan* descent. The name *Iran* is derived from “Aryan,” a reference back to the Aryan tribes in that part of the world (as distinguished from the Middle East Semitic tribes); and the Aryan tribes would include the descendants of the ancient Medes and Persians, among other tribes in that region.

Iran today though only covers a small part of the kingdom as it existed during Ahasuerus and Esther’s day in the book ofEsther. The kingdom during that day extended all the way from India west to Ethiopia (Esther 1:1). It was the world kingdom of that day, represented by the breast and arms of silver on Daniel’s image in Daniel 2:32, 39.

This kingdom, represented by the breast and arms of silver, was a dual kingdom — the Medo-Persian kingdom — throughout the time of its existence as the center of world power (from about 538 B.C. to about 330 B.C.). This was the kingdom that conquered Babylon (the kingdom that conquered the world power represented by the head of gold on Daniel’s image); and the Medo-Persian Empire formed the kingdom that, in turn, was conquered slightly over two hundred years later, in Babylon, by Alexander the Great and his armies (which then brought into existence the third part of Daniel’s image, that represented by the belly and thighs of brass [*cf.* Daniel 2:32, 39; 8:3-8].

The Medes were *the dominant power* the dominant power.

(Following the Medo-Persian kingdom being depicted by the second part of the image in Daniel 2, this dual kingdom was later depicted in the book through a bear raising itself up *on one side* [Daniel 7:5], which is subsequently explained by the horns on a ram in the next chapter. The ram had *two high horns* [representing “*the kings of Media and Persia*” (*cf*. Daniel 8:3, 20)], “*but one was* *higher than the other*, *and* *the higher* [the king of Persia] *came up last*” [Daniel 8:3].)

The Persian kingdom had become the dominant power long before the time of Ahasuerus’ reign, as seen at the beginning of the book of Esther. Note that this world power is referred to as that of “*Persia and Media*” at this time (*i.e*., Persia mentioned first, in accord with the power-structure of the kingdom [Esther 1:3; *cf*. Esther 1:18-19]). And the time of his reign — several generations following the captivity under Nebuchadnezzar (Esther2:5-6) — would be in complete accord with the probable identity of Ahasuerus (a title or family name, similar to “Herod” in the gospel accounts). Ahasuerus in Esther was probably Xerxes (the son of Darius in Daniel 5:31), who ruled the Medo-Persian Empire during the years 486-465 B.C.

(There is one exception to Persia being mentioned before Media in the book of Esther, and that occurs in Esther10 where mention is made of “*the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia*” (Esther 10:2). However, it would only naturally follow that Media should be mentioned first when this book was referenced, for this book contained records dating back to the time when Media rather than Persia was the dominant power. In this respect, attention was called to the original title or way in which the book was known, not to the present status of power among the two nations forming the kingdom.)

Thus, the book of Esther has to do with the most powerful of all the kings on earth ruling over the world empire of that day. In conjunction with his reign, his queen is brought to the forefront different places throughout the book. And the queen is brought to the forefront in this manner for a revealed reason, set forth and established in an unchangeable fashion in chapter one of the book.

This is the setting for the book of Esther, a book fraught with types and meaning.

(Reference the book [Esther by Arlen Chitwood](http://www.lampbroadcast.org/Books/Esther.pdf) for a more detailed account of these events. Also see the [Haman, in the book Esther](http://www.koffeekupkandor.com/gods-word-also-too.php#Haman, in the book Esther) in my website.)

[Bible One - Arlen Chitwood's Esther, Ch. 1, Historical Setting for Esther](http://bibleone.net/Esther_01.htm)