

Can we trust the Bible's historical accuracy when it mentions a Jew named Mordecai in Esther?



***“The book is a free composition, not a historical document”—Catholic Commentary***

***“The only character known to history is Ashasuerus”—Catholic Commentary***

Is Mordecai in Esther historically accurate?

**“Now there was at the citadel in Susa a Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, when Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled”—Esther 2:5,6 NASB**

Critics looking for historical inaccuracies in the Bible, and Esther in particular, often cite the above scriptures as “evidence.” They assert that the Bible, in [Esther 2:5,6](#), Mordecai is the one who had been carried off into exile with Jeconiah (**“Jehoiachin”** in [2 Kings 24:8-14](#)). If this were so, then Mordecai would have been at least about 120 years old when Esther became queen, which would be virtually impossible.

According to the Bible, Mordecai worked as an administrator, possibly an accountant, for the Persian government, in the citadel of Susa ([Esther 2:19,21; 3:3](#)). The Persepolis tablets, Persian cuneiform, found in the ruins of the treasury, date back to the time of Xerxes I (Ashereurus). These are in the Elamite language and several mention Marduka, who served as a royal scribe at the palace of Shushan. One tablet describes Marduk as a translator, which fits the Bible's description of Mordecai, who served in the court of Ahasureus (Xerxes I), and who spoke at least two languages.

The Hebrew text of **Esther 2:6**, actually begins with a relative pronoun, **asher**, therefore the immediate antecedent of **“who”** in **Esther 2:6**, in fact, is **“Kish”**, not **“Mordecai”**. So the pronoun **“who”** is actually referring to **“Kish”**, Mordecai’s great-grandfather, as the one who was taken into Babylonian captivity. This fact is borne out by the following translation:

**“At that time there was a Jewish man in the fortress of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and was a descendent of Kish and Shimei. His family had been among those who, with, King Jehoichin of Judah, had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar”—Esther 2:5,6 NLT**

Critics also claim that it is highly improbable that a Jewish man, such as Mordecai could have attained to such a high position within the Medo-Persian Empire. However, the name Mordecai actually does represent an authentic personal name from this time period, appearing in Aramaic documents as **Mrdk** and in cuneiform tablets as Mar-du-uk-ka or **Mar-duk-ka**.

The historicity of the Biblical Mordecai receives possible confirmation from cuneiform texts dating from the last years of Darius I or the early years of Ahasuerus/Xerxes I. In the 1930’s, archaeologists working on the ruins of the Persian kings winter Palace at Persepolis (near the city of Shiraz in Iran today) excavated thousands of official records in the form of clay tablets. These are known as the Persepolis Administrative Archives, or simply as the Persepolis Texts. These can be seen today at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. These tablets confirm that there was an official with the name of Mordecai during the reign of Ahasuerus.

At least one tablet mentions a certain government official named Marduk in the context of a list of payments made to Persian officials and their retainers. The tablet had been a part of a collection belonging to Lord Amherst of Hackney, England, and at his death, bought by the German Vanderasiatische Museum in Berlin. The German archaeologist Arthur Ungnad first noted the reference to Marduka, and suggested such in an article published in 1941, with the

complete text being published in 1960.

This text, although not 100% conclusive, at the very least, confirms the existence of a Persian royal official named Marduk Mordecai, and agrees in principle with the Biblical portrayal of Mordecai in Esther, who is depicted as a Persian royal official **“sitting at the king’s gate” (Esther 2:19; 5:13; 6:10)**, and later invested with broad administrative authority. **“The king took off his signet ring . . . and gave it to Mordecai” (Esther 8:2)**. Robert Gordis, writing in his book: **“Religion: Wisdom and History in the Book of Esther” [1981]**, states: ***“That there were two officials with the same name at the same time in the same place is scarcely likely.”***