



★ **Cyrus the Great: Conqueror, Liberator, Anointed One**

Stephen Dando-Collins

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For myriad reasons, King Cyrus II, founder of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, is one of the most compelling figures of ancient history. Stephen Dando-Collins's expert biography, *Cyrus the Great*, combines ancient and modern sources for its excellent retelling of the Persian leader's life and accomplishments.

Cyrus was an expert military tactician who conquered the Medes, Lydians, and Babylonians, in the process creating the largest empire of his time. He's just as well known for running that diverse empire with respect for minority rights, human rights, and religious tolerance, and for being the only non-Jewish figure named a messiah in the Bible after ending the Jewish exile in Babylon. His story has always been told with a mix of history and mythology, most often drawing on sources from outside of Persia.

Cyrus the Great reads like a novel, with the Persian king's life shared as an engaging narrative. It begins with the legend of his grandfather's dreams predicting that he'd be overthrown by Cyrus, his decree that Cyrus be killed, and the would-be killer saving the boy's life and raising him. The story proceeds through Cyrus's numerous military setbacks and triumphs, through which he came to take over Babylon, and continues up to the competing narratives about his death.

When sources disagree about details, the book explains those differences, treating the agreed-upon information as part of the story. The ruler's legacy is covered in detail, from the actions of his sons to how he is remembered in biblical tradition. Important context is provided, highlighting the stories of former and contemporary figures to explain why Cyrus stands out in history.

Cyrus the Great is a comprehensive biography that treats an important piece of history as the gripping story that it is.

JEFF FLEISCHER (July / August 2020)

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