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The name Mordecai: Summary

Meaning

Of Marduk, Of Bitter Oppression

Etymology

From the name Marduk, in turn (jocularly) from (1) the adjective מר (*mar*), bitter, and (2) the adjective דך (*dak*), crushed or oppressed.

Related names

- Via מר (*mar*): [Evil-merodach](#), [Imrah](#), [Jambres](#), [Mamre](#), [Mara](#), [Marah](#), [Maranatha](#), [Marduk](#), [Maria](#), [Maroth](#), [Martha](#), [Mary](#), [Meraiah](#), [Meraioth](#), [Merari](#), [Merodach-baladan](#), [Merom](#), [Meronothite](#), [Miriam](#), [Moriah](#), [Smyrna](#)
- Via דך (*dak*): [Berodach-baladan](#)

The name Mordecai in the Bible

It's not clear how many separate men named Mordecai there are in the Bible, but most onomasticons and commentaries list two:

- The heroic uncle of [Esther](#) and son of [Jair](#), son of [Shimei](#), son of [Kish](#) of [Benjamin](#) (Esther 2:5). According to the Book of Esther, this Mordecai and his niece Esther managed to not only avert a holocaust, but also to convert the king to [Judaism](#) and occupy the most important political positions in the empire; Esther as queen and Mordecai as second-to-the-king (Esther 10:2).
- A man of unspecified genealogy who joined the second wave of return from exile led by [Zerubbabel](#) (Ezra 2:2, Nehemiah 7:7).

These two Mordecais are obviously contemporaries of each other, but it appears that Esther's Mordecai operated slightly later than the second return. This would mean that there are two of them, or else that after his trip with Zerubbabel, Mordecai went back to [Persia](#). This is not unthinkable as for instance letters, especially important ones, were hand-carried by runners (Esther 3:13) or emissaries (Jeremiah 29:3, 2 Kings 20:12). A correspondence between the restorers of [Jerusalem](#) and the royal court in Persia is preserved in Ezra 4-5, and from Esther 9:20 we learn that Mordecai was a record keeper and epistler.

Much more likely, however, is that neither Mordecai the returnee nor Mordecai the hero were human individuals the way we presently understand human individuality. There is quite a bit of extra-Biblical literature left from that period and that area, but no one other than the author of Esther mentions a substantial upheaval related to Jews or a substantial change in policies or even the dramatic fall from grace of [Haman](#) and the instatement of the Jew Mordecai as second-to-the-king.

Here at [Abarim Publications](#) we hold that the story told in the Book of Esther is not a report on political history but a report on theological history (just like the rest of the Bible is). Within Persia's base religion there was considerable diversity, easily as much as there was within Judaism in the first century AD. We're guessing that Mordecai stood for a school of thought within Persia's theocratic structure, which searched for Truth much rather than religious compliance or nationalism (see our article on the name Haman).

It's doubtful (or frankly: highly unlikely) that the political government of Persia abruptly abandoned the worship of their national deities and converted to Judaism (as some commentators derive from Daniel 4:2-3 and 4:34-37). It seems much more plausible that the stories of Esther and [Daniel](#) convey Persia's quest for Truth; an endeavor which brought that particular Persian school in direct alignment with [Yahwistic](#) Jews. It also, per definition, annulled the need of either to revert to the religious expressions of the other.

Etymology and meaning of the name Mordecai

The name Mordecai could be regarded as an adjective based on the name Marduk, who was the principle deity of [Babylon](#). Following that assumption would render Mordecai the meaning of **Mardukish**, or **Pertaining To Marduk**, or **Belonging To Marduk**.

For a full discussion on the etymology and meaning of both Mordecai and Marduk, please see our article on Marduk. The name Marduk is obviously not [Hebrew](#), but can be constructed from Hebrew elements to represent a few telling meanings. One way to see the name Marduk is to derive the first part from the verb מרר (*marar*), meaning to be strong or bitter:

Excerpted from: Abarim Publications' Biblical Dictionary

מרר

The verb מרר (*marar*) means to be strong or bitter and can be used to describe tastes and smells, and hard or difficult situations. Most definitively, this word occurs in the test of adultery (Numbers 5:18-27), where a suspected woman is made to drink "bitter waters". If she was innocent, her husband's suspicions would be lifted, and she would conceive. This obviously ties into the nativity story.

Adjectives מר (*mar*) and מרירי (*meriri*) mean bitter. Nouns מרור (*maror*) and מרורה (*merora*) refer to any bitter thing, the former specifically to a certain bitter herb, and the latter to gall or poison.

Noun מררה (*merera*) also means gal. Nouns מרה (*morra*), מרה (*mora*), מרירות (*merirut*), ממר (*memer*), ממרור (*mamror*) and תמרור (*tamrur*) mean bitterness. The latter noun is spelled identical to the noun תמרור (*tamrur*), meaning marker or sign post, from the root תמר (*tamar*), meaning to be stiff or erect.

And speaking of such, the nouns מר (*mor*) and מור (*mor*) mean myrrh, a bitter and fragrant spice that was originally used to mark the tabernacle, but which came to be used to proclaim, olfactorily, the consummation of marriage. Hence, despite its links to words that mostly describe hardship, myrrh oil was known as the "oil of joy."

Verb מרה (*marā*) means to be contentious or rebellious, particularly against God. Noun מרי (*meri*) means rebellion.

The verb מור (*mor*) means to change. Perhaps the connection between the previous is coincidental but perhaps these words are indeed linked, as change is often reaction to bitterness or opposition. The noun תמורה (*temura*) means exchange.

The second part could then be drawn from the adjective דַּךְ (*dak*), meaning crushing. The difference between Marduk and Mordecai, namely the final *yod*, could then be ascribed not to an adjective but to the noun דָּכִי (*doki*), meaning a crushing. This noun occurs only in Psalm 93:3, where the ever changing sea pounds at the firmly established throne of YHWH:

Excerpted from: Abarim Publications' Biblical Dictionary

דָּכָךְ

The root דָּכָךְ (*dakak*) means to break, crush or pulverize, either literally (of bones) or figuratively (of will or morale). Adjective דָּךְ (*dak*) means crushed or broken.

Verb דָּכָא' (*daka'*) also means to crush but emphasizes the effects (i.e. to be crushed). Adjective דָּכָא (*dakka'*) means crushed or contrite. Noun דָּכָא (*dakka'*) means dust or fine rubble.

Verb דָּכָה (*daka*) is a by-form of the previous and means the same. Noun דָּכִי (*doki*) means a crushing.

Verb דָּוָךְ (*duk*) means to grind down (of manna into paste). Noun מְדָכָה (*medoka*) describes the result: a paste or mash.

Mordecai in Persepolis Texts: the Marduka Tablet

In his wonderful article *The Quest For The Historical Mordecai*, emeritus professor David J.A. Clines reviews the discovery of the name Marduka on a cuneiform tablet (Amherst 258) found in Persepolis, and the subsequent discussion on whether Marduka could be the Mordecai of the Book of Esther (most scholars appear to cheer at the possibility, but professor Clines is less enthused and that for compelling reasons).

Here at Abarim Publications we are less concerned with the historical veracity of Biblical characters and events because it seems to us that the Bible writers weren't. To us it seems that the characters of the Bible are often based on historical figures, but they always serve the greater discussion on how Truth came to the world. Or in the words of professor Clines: For what, we may ask, would a kernel of truth look like?

The tablet reveals that Marduka was a *sipir*; a scribe or high ranking administrative functionary, probably stationed not in [Susa](#) but in Borsippa. The Book of Esther tells that Mordecai resided in Susa and enjoyed daily access to the court of the king's heavily guarded harem (Esther 2:11), and that he sat in the king's gate (the place of official business; 2:19, 2:21).

A few other instances of the name Marduka have been found on contemporary artifacts from Persia (kept in the Oriental Institute Museum in Chicago) but at best they reveal that Marduka was as common a name as, say, the name [Jesus](#) would be in first century [Palestine](#).

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