

## SUSA

### *Capital City of the Persian Empire (Now Iraq)*

In the 600 years between 900 and 300 BC, the people of Israel and Judah were conquered by three powerful nations from the east.

**THE ASSYRIANS**—They became a constant threat to Israel and Judah from about 750 BC. Carved stone panels found in the Assyrian capital show that they had a well-equipped army. They worshipped a god called Ashur. Another goddess was Ishtar, the goddess of war and love, and a temple to her was at Ninevah, the capital city. They were very sadistic and practiced horrible methods of torture for their enemies. These are the people that the prophet Jonah was called to preach repentance to!

**THE BABYLONIANS** – In 612 BC they captured Ninevah and began to conquer the Assyrian empire. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar soon ruled Judah, but when that area became rebellious, he ordered the temple in Jerusalem to be destroyed (586 BC). At this time many of the Jews were forced to live in exile in Babylon. They had a large temple in Babylon dedicated to their god Marduk. The prophet Jeremiah had the painful job of prophesying the divine judgment on Judah. Daniel was one of the captives taken to Babylon.

**THE PERSIANS** – Babylonia's glory only lasted until 539 BC when Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, invaded the country and attacked the capital city. Cyrus controlled an empire that stretched over 3000 miles. He divided it into 20 provinces (ironically Syria and Israel were together in one province!). He made the Persian Empire rich by avoiding war, allowing exiles to return to their homelands and allowing his subjects to continue their own worship. After 50 years, less than half of the people of Judah returned to Jerusalem. The rest chose to stay in Persia. These are the Jewish subjects of our story today. The Empire lasted for about 200 years until its conquest by Alexander the Great of Greece in 330 BC. And that was followed by the Roman Empire.

**XERXES, KING OF PERSIA** – Xerxes, also known as Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther, had three capital cities of which Susa was one. Shushan was his winter palace in Susa. He began his reign in 486 BC, succeeding his father Darius. He inherited a vast and well-organized empire. Many ruins have been found of Shushan, including the King's gate. The King's gate is mentioned 12 x in the book of Esther.

*Bibliography for this page's content is at bottom of next page "Book of Esther:"*