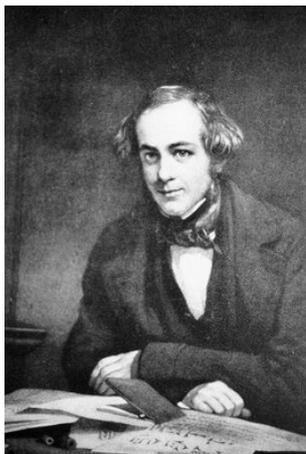
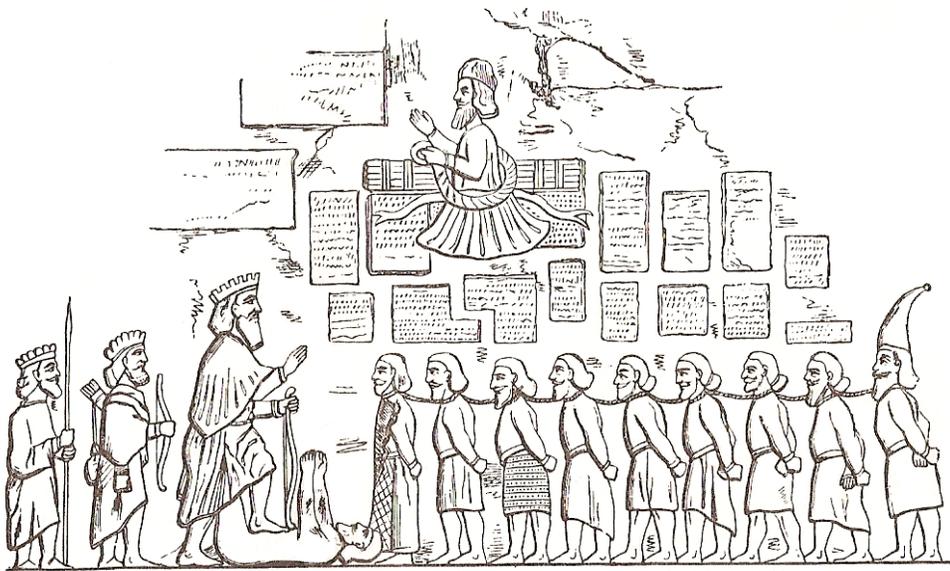


✧ EZRA & ESTHER - LESSON 3 ✧

The Behistun Inscription



By far the longest and most informative text from the Old Persian era is Darius' trilingual (Old Persian, Akkadian, and Elamite) inscription at Behistun, twenty miles east of Kermanshah on the key route that led from Mesopotamia to the Iranian plateau. There, in about 518 B.C., Darius carved a monumental record of his rise to power and his suppression of numerous revolts. As one could get to only about a hundred feet below the monument, travelers could not really grasp its significance. Persian Muslims held that it represented a teacher beating his pupils; Persian Christians thought that it portrayed Christ and his twelve disciples. The relief actually features figures of a spearbearer, a bowbearer, then Darius treading on the figure of the pretender Gaumata, followed by nine other bound rebels, including a Scythian with a pointed hat (who was added later). Hovering over the prisoners is a divine winged figure, representing the god Ahura Mazda.



Darius is depicted as life-size (five feet, eight inches), while his servants and enemies are represented on a diminutive scale. To the left of the figures is the Akkadian (*i.e.*, the Semitic language used by the Babylonians), and to the right is the first Elamite version. Elamite is the language of the region of Susa, which was used for bureaucratic purposes. There is a second Elamite version below to the left. Just under the figures is the Old Persian version. We owe the full decipherment of Old Persian and ultimately all the cuneiform scripts to the perseverance and courage of Englishman Henry Rawlinson (shown left), who from 1835 to 1847 succeeded in copying almost all of the Behistun inscription, often working in total disregard of his life and limb. By 1847 Rawlinson had correctly identified all but two of the thirty-seven syllables of the Old Persian script.