

# PERSIANS

IN THE BIBLE



By Allyn Huntzinger

# **PERSIANS IN THE BIBLE**

**Revised and Updated January, 2004**

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**Persians in the Bible**

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by Allyn Huntzinger

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Global Commission, Inc.  
P.O. Box 454  
Woodstock, GA 30188  
[GCI@pobox.com](mailto:GCI@pobox.com)  
[www.peopleteams.org/psw](http://www.peopleteams.org/psw)

## FOREWORD

Did you realize that the country of Iran and the Iranian people are mentioned constantly in the Christian's Bible? Four of the first kings of Persia: Cyrus, Darius, Khashayarshah, and Ardashir are mentioned many times. Iran was one of the early nations God chose to carry out His holy will.

Iran, known as Persia in the Bible, is the land of the famous Bible people Esther and Daniel! Also, the Bible tells us that this nation was established by God to deliver the Jewish people from Babylonian captivity. The king who allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem was Persia's first monarch, King Cyrus. In fact, his name, life and deeds were foretold by the prophet Isaiah 150 years before His birth.

The Old Testament (commonly referred to as the "torat") mentions other Persian kings. King Darius was a contemporary of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Queen Esther and her husband, Khashayarshah, reigned over the Persian Kingdom which spanned from India to Ethiopia. King Ardashir gave Nehemiah permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city walls. Persians not only recognize these people as biblical characters but also, as part of their own history. Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah were people of high esteem who lived in the Iranian Empire as God-fearing citizens.

Iranians are mentioned again in the New Testament (commonly referred to as the "injl"). Persians were present at the Feast of Pentecost which was celebrated forty days after the ascension of Jesus to heaven. They heard Peter's spirit-filled sermon, repented of their sins, and accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Church history confirms Persia's role in the spread of the gospel message throughout Asia. An Iranian missionary named Alopen arrived in China in 635 A.D. to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Because of his ministry there was a strong Christian church in central China for several hundred years.

I had the privilege of working in Iran from 1962-1978 along with my fellow workers through International Missions (now named Christar). Together we ministered doing evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. We conducted a Bible correspondence course ministry in the Persian language as well. An English-speaking expatriate fellowship, Tehran Bible Church, was organized in the 1960's. I was pastor of that church for several years. Since most of the foreign Christians in Iran never connected present day Iran with biblical Persia, several times I taught a special three-month Sunday school class called, "Iran and the Bible." Eventually, I was asked to put my class notes into booklet form and in 1977 Iran and the Bible was born.

Recently I was asked to update this booklet. Many chapters have been revised, new material has been added and the material pertaining to expatriates living in Tehran has been eliminated. The English updated version was printed in May 2001 and has the new title, "Persians in the Bible". In 2002 and 2003 I rewrote some sections for translation into Persian so my booklet would be suitable for my Persian friends, both Christian and non-Christian.

I would like to point out to my Persian Christian friends that God is stirring up new interest in the spiritual needs of Persian people. May this booklet increase your appreciation for how God used Persians in the past, excite you about what God is doing in the present and incite you to pray for what He will do in the near future. You, too, can be a part of God's work! May your appreciation become a passion to pray for other Iranians and burden you to seek other ways to be involved. My desire is that many Persian Christians will read this booklet and gain a deeper understanding of God's working in their nation and in the lives of individuals like Esther and Daniel. My prayer is for them to desire to be like these godly believers. Only this generation of Persian believers holds the key to spreading the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the current 67 million Persians in Iran and the four or five million scattered throughout the world.

I would like to mention to my Iranian friends who are not Christians that the Christian's Bible is not a Western book. It was written in the Middle East in places such as Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Much of the ending part of the Old Testament occurs during the rule of four different Persian kings. As you read about this ancient Persian history I trust you will discover the joy of knowing God in a personal way through Jesus Christ. In times of great trouble it was Jesus that said, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'" Matthew 11:28-30

The sections from the Bible listed in the book are from the Standard Farsi translation of 1895 A.D. In situations where old words or phrases are used, modern Persian will be used instead. Also, some of the verses used may be from the Commentary translation of the Bible published in 1995 A.D. or today's Persian version of the New Testament first published in 1976 A.D. The Commentary translation of the Bible can be found at [www.gospelcom.net/ibs/bibles/farsi/](http://www.gospelcom.net/ibs/bibles/farsi/). When sections from the Bible are quoted, first the name of one of the 66 books of the Bible will be given, second, a number will be given which tells the chapter where it is found, and the third, the number of the verse or verses will be given showing the exact section where God's word is found. These numbers were not given in the original inspiration by God but were added later to help believers find different sections of the books quickly.

I would like to give special thanks to my wife, Diane. When I proposed to her, she knew that her acceptance included a commitment to serve our Lord Jesus Christ together in Iran. We studied the Farsi language our first two years in Iran and then ministered together while raising a family of three children who were all born in Iran. In addition, she has helped bring this booklet to you, rewriting many of my scattered thoughts--making them clearer, more precise and understandable.

Also, Nancy Maurer, in the English version, has given valuable advice and corrections as a copy editor on selected chapters. I appreciate Christar, the organization where I work, for allowing some of the secretarial time, especially Judy Butler's, to be used in revising this manuscript. Finally, I would like to thank the many churches and individual supporters, who with their prayers and finances have faithfully supported us over these many years enabling us to minister to Persians.

I would like to thank Persian World Outreach (PWO) for overseeing the translation and the formatting of this book into Farsi. Their organization will be a key factor in helping to reach Iranians with the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, discipling them, and helping to see local

Iranian churches formed. See [www.persianwo.org](http://www.persianwo.org) for more information about their valuable work.

My heart's concern is for the spiritual needs of Persian people around the world continues. If I can help you or your church in reaching Persians or becoming informed about ministries among them, please let me know. You may contact me at [Al@imi.org](mailto:Al@imi.org) or [Allyn@pastors.com](mailto:Allyn@pastors.com). Or you may write to Allyn Huntzinger, c/o Christar, P.O. Box 14866, Reading, PA 19612.

You will notice that you are free to photocopy any or all sections in this booklet to give to friends or others. The author receives no money from the sale of this booklet, but all monies received are used for further printing of 'Persians in the Bible.' Feel free to send portions of this book to Iranian friends around the world, including Iran. Credit should be given that this section is from 'Persians in the Bible.' Also, if you would like this book in PDF Adobe or Microsoft Word 97 format or Word Perfect format (except for a few illustrations), e-mail Allyn at [Al@imi.org](mailto:Al@imi.org) and I will send the book as an e-mail attachment after you specify which format you want. The contents of this book in English are on the [www.farsinet.com/persiansinbible/](http://www.farsinet.com/persiansinbible/) web site, and can be downloaded. This Farsi translation should also be available on the same website in the near future.

My prayer is that this booklet will be used to bring honor and glory to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Allyn Huntzinger  
January, 2004

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# CHAPTER ONE

## A MONARCHY IS BORN

### INTRODUCTION

What a privilege to be called an Iranian! How many other nations in the world today can claim that they are old as Iran with its 2,500 years of history. If you remember back in 1973, key Iranians met with international leaders in the ancient historical city of Persepolis to celebrate 2500 years of Iranian history which began with its first king, Cyrus the Great.

Look at the countries north of Iran such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. These present day countries have less than 10 years of current political history. It seems like new nations are being formed almost every year. Yet the country of Iran formed over 2500 years ago still exists today! What has made the difference? Could it be the hand of God? The prophet Isaiah in the Bible tells us that God established this country in order to accomplish God's purposes. The Old Testament tells about the history of the Jewish people. The darkest times in their history are recorded in the last parts of the Old Testament when Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians first, and then by the Babylonian empire. As you look at some of the details you'll see how important Iran was in God's plan.

#### A. ISRAEL TAKEN CAPTIVE

The Assyrians were descendants of Ashur, Shem's second son and Noah's grandson (Genesis 10:22). Assyria's Kingdom was vast and powerful, reaching throughout all the Middle East.

1. We learn in Isaiah 10:5-6 that God established the Assyrian Empire in order to punish Israel for its sins.

“Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.”

- a. The Assyrians took the 10 northern tribes of Israel into captivity probably around 722 B.C. Notice that some Jewish people were settled among the Medes in the current country of Persia.

“In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes.” 2 Kings 17:6

- b. About 22 years later, an Assyrian King named Sennacherib tried to overtake Jerusalem and Judah and failed (2 Kings 18:19; Isaiah 36-38). Judah later surrendered to Assyria in 682 B.C. and its people were eventually carried off into Babylonian exile.
- c. Today there are some 35,000 Assyrians, many nominal Christians, still living in Iran. They are descendants of the Assyrian Empire. We will



discuss them later in another chapter.

2. God later raised up another kingdom called Babylon. Under King Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonians captured the remaining Jewish people and took them to Babylon.

‘He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord’s temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God’s temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its Sabbath rest; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.’  
2 Chronicles 36:17-21

3. God raised up the Persian empire to punish and conquer the Babylonian empire. The prophet Jeremiah in chapter 29 verses 10 and 11 we find written, “This is what the Lord says when seventy years are completed for Babylon I’ll come back to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.” Israel was held captive for 70 years by the Babylonian empire, but was freed by the Persian empire. The great miracle about this is that the prophet Isaiah looked 150 years into the future and named the very king who would be head of this new empire, Cyrus the Great. Just think, if you lived back 150 years ago around 1850, could you have predicted the name of the leader of Iran today, or of India or Japan or United States? The Bible, God’s holy book, gives accurate details about the future because it is written by the prophets and others exactly as God told them. Let’s look more closely at Cyrus the Great.

## **B. GOD RAISES UP A KING**

God’s instrument, Cyrus, came to power sometime around 550 B.C. They called him ‘Cyrus the Great.’ Read about him in Isaiah 41:2-3; 44:28; 45:3; 45:13; 46:10-11; 48:14-15.

1. The name, ‘Cyrus,’ in the Persian language is Korrush and sounds similar to the original Hebrew in the Old Testament. Hundreds of years after his death, Korrush continues to be remembered in Iran. For years the largest department store was named after him along with many hotels. The two main streets running through the center of Tehran toward the northern mountains were called Korrush-e-kabir, Cyrus the Great. After the overthrow of the shah and the establishment of the Islamic government, many of these names were changed. However, some Iranians still give their boys the name of Korrush.
2. Notice the titles God gave to Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28; 45:1; 41:2

“Who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, ‘Let it be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Let its foundations be laid.’” Isaiah 44:28

“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.” Isaiah 45:1

**Cyrus is called my Shepherd and my anointed one.**

3. Look at the job description God gave Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28; 45:13; 48:14-15:

- a. To free the captive Jews
- b. To help rebuild Jerusalem
- c. To cause the foundations of the temple to be laid
- d. To punish Babylon

4. Why would God use a Gentile king to deliver Israel?

“I am the Lord and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is none other.” Isaiah 45:5-6

Again in verses 21 and 22 of that same chapter the Lord declares that He is the only God and refers to himself as righteous and a Savior. Only God can truly save. Yet we see that He uses a foreign king in order to show His sovereignty over all things.

“Declare what is to be, present it— let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.” Isaiah 45:21-22

5. The religion in Iran during the time of Cyrus was Zoroastrianism. The belief that light was good and dark was evil was part of this religion. The prophet Isaiah said, “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.” Isaiah 45:7 when God gave his revelation to Isaiah, He emphasized that he was the God in control even creating light and darkness and all of creation.

6. What promises did God give to Cyrus? There are many outlined in Isaiah 45: 1-3. He would hold Cyrus’ right hand, demonstrating His bestowal of power. He would subdue nations before opened gates, make crooked places straight, and break gates of bronze and iron. Cyrus overtook three of the four great empires of

the world in his day. One of them was Media—which was absorbed into Persia and became Medo-Persia. God gave Cyrus the “treasures of darkness,” probably referring to the riches of the Kingdom of Lydia, which Cyrus conquered prior to invading Babylon. The fables about King Midas may be rooted in the land of Lydia and her historical King Croesus.

### C. CYRUS COMPLETES HIS JOB DESCRIPTION

A person who has a job usually has a job description so he knows what his responsibilities are. Cyrus’ job description was fourfold:

1. **Cyrus freed the Jewish people to return to their homeland.** Isaiah 45:13 tells us that he was appointed to this specific task, but not for a price or a reward. (See chapter 6, [How Did Five Persian Kings get in our Bible](#), for further details). History also accounts for a job well done. A fifth grade Persian history book which the author read in Iran has a picture of Cyrus standing before a group of Jewish people who had been freed from the Babylonians. It says: “By the order of Cyrus, the Jews who were captive became free and were able to return to their own holy city of Jerusalem.” The Jewish people were allowed to take gold and silver back with them and Cyrus even returned the gold and silver the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had stolen seventy years earlier.

Contrast this with the return of Jewish people to Israel from the USSR in the 1950s and 60s. Even though they were allowed to return, they had to pay a large fee in order to leave Russia. They had to leave all their assets such as real estate behind in the USSR. Their migration cost them a great amount of money. Just the opposite was true in Cyrus’ time. He helped the Jews who returned to Jerusalem financially.

2. **Cyrus enabled the rebuilding of Jerusalem as predicted in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:13.** With his blessing over 42,000 Jews returned to the city of Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls and fortify Jerusalem once more.

“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says; “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may the Lord his God be with him and let him go up.” Ezra 1:2

3. **Cyrus helped to rebuild the temple foundation.** We can see in II Chronicles 36:23 Cyrus acknowledges that God had specifically appointed him for the task. However, remember from Isaiah 44:28 that only the temple foundation would be laid. The Book of Ezra tells the story of Israel’s enthusiasm in laying the foundation and the subsequent discouragement they received from the surrounding nations. The work would not be finished until 50 years later, under the leadership of the prophet Haggai.

4. **Cyrus punished Babylon.** In Isaiah 48:14-15 he is referred to as “the Lord’s chosen ally” who carried out His purpose against Babylon. Historical legends

have arisen about his massive victory over the Babylonian empire. One claims that Cyrus secretly diverted the Euphrates River, which runs through the middle of the Babylonian capital, so that his army could march through the riverbed by night and capture the city.

#### **D. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

1. Biblical perspective helps us appreciate Iran as a nation better. Unlike other empires which God raised up in order to punish Israel, such as Assyria and Babylon, Iran was used to deliver the Jewish people. While many other nations were destroyed after their interactions with Israel, Iran has remained as a nation for over 2,500 years.
2. How can you tell if a holy book is from God? One test is whether or not it tells about the future accurately with clear details. Notice how the Bible easily passes this test in dating the 70 years of captivity of the Jews in the Babylonian empire as well as in naming King Cyrus the great as the one to free the Jews, and predicting the raising up of the Persian empire. What God has promised He's shown He can do. Another way the Bible shows it is a book from God is that people can find hope, joy, and eternal life by reading it.
3. The Bible is not a western book which came from America or Europe! It was written in the Middle-East with its entire background occurring in Egypt, Iran, and other countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

#### **E. DIG DEEPER**

1. Study Isaiah 40-48 and describe how God punished Israel for its sin and then raised up a deliverer or savior in Cyrus (41:2, 25; 44:28; 45:1-13; 46:11, and 48:14-15). Can you find parallels and references in these passages to a coming Savior from sin, the Messiah, Jesus Christ?
2. Some critics of the Bible deny the supernatural accounts of Scripture. They often are called liberals. They deny that prophets could predict the future accurately. Why do you think they would wrongly claim that more than one person named Isaiah wrote the Book of Isaiah?
3. As a believer in Jesus Christ what job description has God given you? How well are you accomplishing the work God wants you to do?
4. The Bible, God's holy book, can tell the future in history accurately. Can you not trust him for your own future? Do you want to have the hope of eternal life and
5. live forever in the presence of God? Why not believe God's promise in the Bible and put your trust in Jesus Christ who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

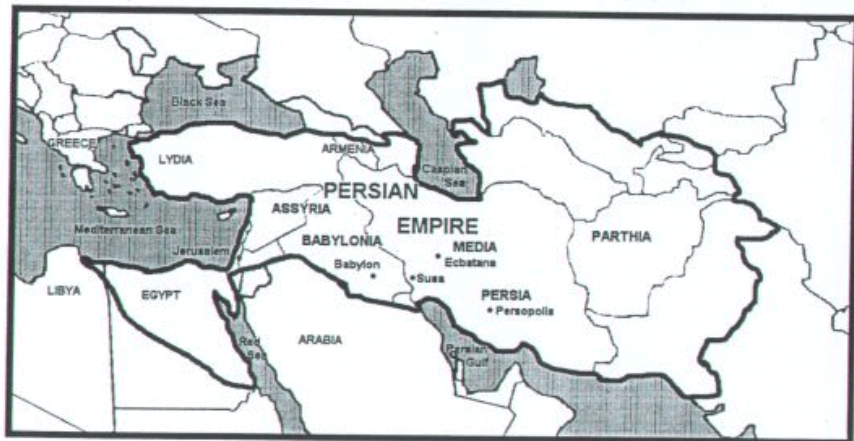


This is a picture from a  
 in Iran. The title under the  
 order of Cyrus, the Jews

to return to their own holy city in Jerusalem.”

1977 6<sup>th</sup> grade history book  
 picture says that “by the  
 became free and were able

PERSIAN EMPIRE 500 B.C.



## CHAPTER TWO

### DANIEL OVERCOMES CULTURE SHOCK

#### A. MORE THAN A LION TAMER

When Christians hear about the prophet Daniel, most of us remember the story of how he was thrown into a den of lions for refusing to bow down before the king and to worship anyone but God. Because of his love and faithfulness to God, we know that he was miraculously spared. In fact, any Christian working in a secular environment may sometimes feel as though he is in the middle of a lion's den. Let's take a look at how Daniel remained faithful and consequently served as a vibrant witness, not only to the Babylonians but also the Persians who would later rule the empire. In fact, near Sushan the palace in Sush, in present day Iran, there is a mosque which claims to have the bones of the prophet Daniel. Of course, we as Christians do not look at tombs with bones of dead prophets, but rather to the living God to love, serve, and worship.

1. Daniel was captured in Jerusalem and taken to Babylon. We learn that Nebuchadnezzar took captives from Israel to Babylon three different times.
  - a. In 604 B.C. during Jehoiakim's reign at which time Daniel was taken. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god." Daniel 1:1-2
  - b. In 597 B.C. during Jehoiachin's reign (II Chronicles 36:9-10)
  - c. In 586 B.C. during Zedekiah's reign (II Chronicles 36:18-21)
2. How long did Daniel serve God in Babylon and Persia? We know that Daniel was an honored public servant throughout the reign of the kings of Babylon and at least into the third year of the reign of Cyrus --all told, a span of more than 70 years.

"And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus." Daniel 1:21

"In the third year of Cyrus, King of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision." Daniel 10:1

#### B. FACING TEMPTATION

Culture shock is what refugees and those who move to a new country get when they are faced

with the stressful changes of living in a different society. Fatigue, depression, and despair are a few of the symptoms that can overtake someone living as a foreigner. Chapter one of the Book of Daniel clues us into the pressures Daniel faced in the Babylonian culture. How are some of the examples below similar to the pressures faced by people today especially refugees, who move to different countries? Do Christians working and living in their own secular society face any similar pressures and feel like foreigners because of their faith?

1. Functioning as a Jew in the secular Gentile world, especially as a refugee was not easy. God's law commanded His people to live apart from the world and, as mentioned, prescribed dietary restrictions on foods which were clean and unclean.
2. Seeing Jerusalem destroyed and God's people taken captive must have tempted young Daniel to doubt the power and promises of his God. He must have questioned God about why Babylon was allowed to conquer Jerusalem.
3. Adjusting to captivity and new responsibilities in a strange land was thrust upon Daniel while only a teenager.
4. Surviving required learning the Babylonian culture and language which were influenced by their beliefs in foreign gods.
5. Serving the king was mandatory—Daniel's only option was to live in the royal palace and study hard.
6. Being given a new Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, which means "prince or protector of Bel," in place of his own name which means "God is my judge," must have made Daniel feel as though he was losing part of his identity. From now on he would be known by the name of a false god.
7. Being tempted to compromise put his faith to the test.

### **C. HOW DANIEL RESPONDED**

#### **1. Daniel trusted in God.**

Daniel was a young, privileged Israeli noble when he and others were taken captive. They had to travel the 400 miles from Jerusalem to Babylon. They probably walked the distance, perhaps going hungry. They may have been mocked by the Babylonians. Some might have died along the way. What hope was there for prisoners of a heathen nation? Daniel was chosen to be one of the few who would study the Babylonian culture in order to serve in the king's palace. God had a plan for Daniel.

"Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the

Babylonians.” Daniel 1:3-4.

2. **Daniel committed himself to pleasing God.**

Daniel 1:8 says, “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.” Daniel would not eat the rich food from the king’s table, probably because it did not meet the dietary standards prescribed in God’s law and was unclean. Wisely, he did so without causing offense, asking an official to test his health over a period of days and see if he would not be stronger simply eating vegetables and water. God honored Daniel’s commitment and consequently, the unclean food was no longer served to all of the captive Israeli men in the palace.

“So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.” Daniel 1:16

3. **Daniel lived with integrity.**

Daniel became an honored public official whose service survived the transition of an empire. He successfully served kings across cultures, from Babylonian to Median and Persian. In the trials of his first three years of study and throughout the next several decades, God sustained Daniel as he lived out his faith with integrity of character.

a. He was a man of prayer.

“Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.” Daniel 2:17-18

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.” Daniel 6:10

“So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands.” Daniel 9:3-4

“At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.” Daniel 10:2-3

b. He was righteous and godly. Daniel 1:8; 6:4-5

“But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.” Daniel 1:8



“At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.” Daniel 6:4-5

- c. He was sociable with other people:

Believers

“Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.” Daniel 1:6-7

Unbelievers

“Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel.” Daniel 1:9

4. **He was an excellent student.**

“The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.” Daniel 1:19-20

- a. He was flexible, accepting his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, even though it was the name of a Babylonian god, and learning a new language.
- b. He was humble, acknowledging that God was the source of his knowledge and wisdom.

“To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. Daniel 1:17

“During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven.” Daniel 2:19

5. **He was bold even to king Nebuchadnezzar.**

“Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.” Daniel 4:27

**D. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

Chapters 2-6 of Daniel reveal how God has worked beyond the borders of Israel, particularly in the Babylonian and Persian Empires. How are these principles still applicable in the modern world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Chapter 2 - God sets up and destroys governments and will replace them with His own.

Chapter 3 - God gives deliverance from government religious persecution.

Chapter 4 - God is in control of governments.

Chapter 5 - God will judge evil in government levels.

Chapter 6 - God will deliver believers from the plots of unbelievers so the whole world will know of His glory. This is what was written after Daniel was delivered from the den of lions:

“I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.”  
Daniel 6:26-27

#### **E. DIG DEEPER**

1. Use the model of Daniel’s adjustment to Babylon to help you to understand the challenges faced by an immigrant to a foreign country. Perhaps God will give you an opportunity this week to help a person who has arrived in a new land recently. Some of the readers of this book have had to leave Iran and are now living in new countries. How can some of the principles of Daniel’s adjustment to a new country and culture help you to adjust to your new country?
2. Carefully read Daniel 1-6. These chapters were chosen by a group of godly Christian politicians who were leaders in one country to study how to serve God within the context of a political office. What points do you think the group may have discussed?
3. In what way were Daniel’s 70 years of political life unusual? Can you find any record of him taking bribes, lying, stealing, or using his political office to his own advantage to persecute others? A true follower of God will lead a godly life in his business and in his home, not just in the place of worship.
4. How might the way Daniel adjusted to his new situation in Babylon help you if you and your family had to move to a new city away from friends and your home church?

## CHAPTER THREE

### FROM VISIONS TO HISTORY: THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL

Who would conquer this new Persian empire whose first king was Cyrus? A young king lay dying in Babylon. His attendants whisper softly to themselves. Has he been poisoned? Will he die? Many doubt it. Only ten years before, King Alexander of Greece crossed the Hellespont River in Asia Minor and threw a spear of defiance deep into the soil of the Persian Empire. In little more than three years, the strongholds of Persia collapsed under Alexander's sword, and the course of the world was changed forever. But the king who was declared a god proved only to be human. Alexander the Great died without an heir, and his massive empire was divided between four of his generals.

This is world history. Yet some 200 years before the events, the Prophet Daniel foretold them. Inspired by God, Daniel wrote an accurate prediction of history. Jesus Christ placed confidence in the truth of this prophet's predictions (Matthew 24:15), and so can we. While most Biblical prophecies await fulfillment, we'll study three passages which have been fulfilled either partially or fully. Maps are included in this book to show the extent of the Babylonian and Persian empires during the time of Daniel as well as the future Greek empire.

#### A. A RAM AND A GOAT

According to world history, sometime around the sixth century B.C. the world was divided into four great empires; Egypt, Media, Lydia, and Babylon. Let's take a look at Daniel's dream about a ram and goat and learn something about history at the same time from Daniel chapter 8.

1. Daniel saw the details of this prophecy in a vision while he was in the palace in Shushan (Susa), located in west-central present-day Iran.
2. Verses 3 and 4 describe a ram with two horns, one of which eventually grows longer than the other. God tells the meaning of this vision in verse 20: "the two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia."

"I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as he charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great." Daniel 8:3-4

"The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia." Daniel 8:20

- a. Remember in chapter one of this study we learned about Cyrus, the Persian King, and that he was mentioned in the Old Testament. He

subjected the Median Empire to Persia's Dynasty and it became Medo-Persia. This was the land in which Daniel was thrown into the lion's den because the law of the Medes and Persians could not be broken.

- b. Medes, the weaker kingdom, is represented by the shorter horn on the ram. Persia, the stronger kingdom, is the other horn which grew longer.
3. In Daniel 8:5-8 Daniel sees a shaggy goat, with a prominent horn, coming from the West. It shattered the two horns of the ram and then trampled it. The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off and four other horns grew in its place.

Do you recognize this historical account? Let's read God's interpretation of the meaning of the goat and ram - "the shaggy goat is the king of Greece and the large horn between his eyes is the first king." Daniel 8:21. This king was Alexander the Great. He came from the West, the country of Greece, and almost like a speeding bullet conquered Turkey before crossing the Hellespont River which separated West from East, Greece from Persia. He is remembered as the man who sat down and cried because there were no more kingdoms for him to conquer. And yet when he was little more than 30 years old, he died and his kingdom was divided into four parts, each controlled by a general. This explains the meaning of the four horns.

## B. THE GOLDEN STATUE

He may have been the ruler of the most splendid kingdom on earth, but for one inexplicable dream King Nebuchadnezzar was deeply troubled and lost sleep. He threatened to kill all the wise men in Babylon for want of an answer. In fact he was so desperate, he required the interpreter to first describe the dream before interpreting it. With so many lives on the line, including his own, Daniel stepped out in faith and inquired of the Lord who enabled him to tell the dream.

"You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth." Daniel 2:31-35

1. Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar required the wise men to first describe his dream before interpreting it? How was Daniel able to do what the other wise men could not?
2. Let's review the biblical imagery of the dream along with what it represents:

- a. The statue was enormous, bright, and terrifying.
  - b. It had a golden head representing King Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian Empire.
  - c. It's arms and breast were of silver, representing an inferior kingdom that would come after.
  - d. Bronze thighs and belly marked the third successive kingdom to rule the earth.
  - e. A fourth kingdom with legs of iron would then come, crushing all the other kingdoms. This kingdom, however, had feet mixed of iron and clay (because its people were also mixed and not united).
  - f. A stone which was not cut by human hands smashed the image:
    1. It crushed its feet of mixed iron and clay.
    2. The statue crumbled, its respective parts fell to the floor and became like chaff in the wind.
    3. The stone became a great mountain and filled the entire earth.
3. Notice the interpretation God gives through Daniel 2:36-45. Daniel states that the golden head was Nebuchadnezzar. Most all Bible believing scholars agree that the kingdoms represented by the parts of the body of silver, bronze, and iron and clay were the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires.

It is beyond the scope of this study to adequately discuss the iron legs and iron and clay feet which were smashed by the stone. However, many theologians believe that these represent the Roman Empire at the time of Christ, as well as a future revived Roman Empire in the end times. The revived Empire will be smashed as all human government is abolished when Jesus Christ, the Stone, sets up His own Kingdom and then, as many Christians believe, he begins His millennial reign of 1000 years on earth.

### **C. FOUR BEASTS FROM THE SEA**

It was Daniel's turn to be deeply troubled by a dream. During the reign of Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Daniel had a dream about a lion, bear, leopard, and another fearsome beast. Read Daniel 7:1-28. The angel Gabriel interpreted the meaning of the animals for Daniel: they reflected the kingdoms of the earth.

1. The first beast was a lion. Remember that in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the various parts of the statue represented Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire. Comparatively in Daniel's dream, Babylon was the lion with eagle wings (Other references to Babylon as a lion and an eagle are found in

Jeremiah 4:7 and Ezekiel 17:3.)

2. The second beast, was a bear which was raised up on one side. The imagery is similar to Daniel's ram and goat vision—the ram, having two horns, one longer than the other. This was Medo-Persia, Persia being the stronger part of the kingdom. The bear ate “much flesh” and had three ribs in its mouth. Compare this imagery with the quick and violent Persian takeovers of Media, Lydia, and Babylon.

“And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and eat your fill of flesh!’” Daniel 7:5

3. The third beast, the leopard, is Greece. Note the four heads of the leopard, reminiscent of the four horns that grew from Daniel's shaggy goat and, of course, Alexander's four succeeding generals who split Alexander's kingdom when he died..

“After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.” Daniel 4:6

4. The fourth beast (Daniel 7:7), perhaps too terrible to name, crushed everything in its path. In comparison with Nebuchadnezzar's dream, it is the Roman Empire. We read that its ten horns represent ten kings and that three of those horns were uprooted when another little but very powerful horn grew out. The little powerful horn, we learn will persecute the saints and speak against God (Daniel 7:21-25). Many believe this will be a person who will be the anti-Christ who will rule over the revived Roman Empire.

#### **D. PERSEPOLIS REMEMBERS**

Three dreams, each was a forewarning to Daniel of things to come. Golden Babylon, the lion, was overtaken by the silver dynasty of Persia, the bear. In turn Persia was overthrown by the bronze Greek, Alexander the Great, the leopard. And certainly the Greek Empire was crushed by a fourth kingdom—Rome. Most of this is now history, its memories resident within the remains of the ancient ruins of Persepolis.

On the Staircase of the Apadana (the reception palace) at Takht-Tamshid are pictures representing 23 of the various countries which became subject to the Persian Empire. One of the 23 images is of the empire of Babylonia. Gold, silver, cloth, and a bison are pictured being paid as tribute to the Persian king. Persepolis with its palace and treasures was destroyed when Alexander the Great and his Greek army burned the city. Nevertheless, traces of the Babylonian, Persian, and Greek kingdoms can each be found among the ruins.

#### **E. DIG DEEPER**

1. How can God's power to predict governments and kingdoms in the Book of Daniel such as the coming of the Greek empire under Alexander the Great be a

comfort to us as we face uncertain political changes in this world?

2. How can this section help you in praying for Christians who are being persecuted by government officials in such countries as Sudan, Turkmenistan or China?
3. If you have time, study the overall prophecies of Daniel. Why is there such a strong emphasis on the future history of the non-Jewish nations (the Gentiles)?
4. Why do liberal theologians who believe the Bible was not inspired by God deny that Daniel wrote the Book of Daniel, claiming someone wrote these chapters several hundred years later and used the name of Daniel?



For Persian Empire map see end of chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE WORLD'S MOST ACCURATE HISTORY BOOK

The Bible is God's book to mankind written to show man his sin and his need of a savior. It tells about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for man's sin and how one can personally know, worship, and talk with God as well as have the promise of eternal life. The Bible, God's book, is totally accurate when it speaks about history. Looking at the book of the prophet Daniel will help us understand more about how accurate God's word is.

#### A. THE BIBLE AND HISTORY

1. When you think about the Bible and what it declares about itself, which verses come to your mind? Possibly II Timothy 3:16, ". . .all scripture is God-breathed . . ." or II Peter 1:21. "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (NIV).

Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:35 where he says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

These Scriptures assure us that the Bible is trustworthy, calling it God's Word more than 3,000 times. Jesus referred to the people and occurrences of the Old Testament, not as metaphors but actual historical figures and events.

2. Below is a partial list of people, nations, places, and events recorded in Daniel. The names underlined in the list below are mentioned in secular Persian history as well as in Bible history as recorded in the Book of Daniel.

#### People

Jehoiakim	1:1
<u>Nebuchadnezzar</u>	1:1
Ashpenaz	1:3
Daniel (Belteshazzar)	1:6-7
Hananiah (Shadrach)	1:6-7
Mishael (Meshach)	1:6-7
Azariah (Abed-nego)	1:6-7
<u>Cyrus</u>	1:21
Arioah	2:14
<u>Belshazzar</u>	5:1
<u>Darius the Mede</u>	5:31
Jeremiah	9:2

#### Nations

<u>Babylon</u>	1:1
<u>Medes (Media)</u>	5:31
<u>Medes-Persians</u>	8:20
<u>Greece</u>	8:21

#### Events

<u>Jerusalem besieged</u>	1:1-3
Humbling of Nebuchadnezzar	2:1-48
King's dream	2:1-49
Nebuchadnezzar	



image of gold 3:1-8

**Places**

<u>Jerusalem</u>	1:1
<u>Judah</u>	1:1
<u>Babylonia</u>	1:1
Plain of Dura	3:1
<u>Susa (Shushan)</u>	8:2
<u>Elam</u>	8:2
<u>Tigris River</u>	10:4

Nebuchadnezzar	
fiery furnace	3:13-30
Feast with Belshazzar	5:1-30
<u>Fall of Babylon</u>	5:25-31
Daniel in den of lions	6:1-24
Darius' proclamation	6:25-28

3. What are some reasons why secular history studied today might not be accurate and why Bible history sometimes disagrees with secular history?
- a. Terrain, such as rivers and coast lands, as well as climate change over time. Likewise demographics change. Cities grow or disappear.
    - 1) In the past, Tehran, like many other Middle Eastern cities, was surrounded by walls. Twelve gates provided access in and out of the city. Over the years the walls and gates were destroyed. Yet sections of Tehran were still named after the gates that once protected them: the "Gates of Shimeran" and the "Gate of the Government." People were reminded of their history using names like these.
    - 2) Most names of cities whether in the States or abroad have historical references which may or may no longer be valid. I live near a town in Pennsylvania called "Sinking Spring" because at one time, the spring that ran through it was sinking into the ground. Apparently the spring sunk and disappeared a long time ago, but the name Sinking Spring still stands.
    - 3) I have a friend who lives on a street called Oceanview. The name of the street is a lie because the ocean is over 10 miles away and you can not see the ocean. Perhaps archeologists digging 500 years ago and finding the name of that street would conclude that the ocean must have been within a hundred meters of that home.
  - b. Names of people and places change in translating from one language to another. In Iran, for instance, people call one country in Europe Alman. The Germans themselves call their country, Deutschland. The Americans call it Germany.
  - c. Historical perspectives change depending on who gives the history. Present day Russia and China, for example, have purged much of their ancient and some of their modern history. Furthermore, different countries emphasize their own historical perspectives. England and America give

two very different historical viewpoints concerning the American Revolutionary War. In American history books it is called a fight for freedom while history books in England call it a rebellion.

- d. Information is not always available. Manuscripts disintegrate with time. Records are lost or destroyed in wars. Many records in ancient times were kept through oral tradition for lack of writing material and technology.
- e. God's focus in Scripture is the redemptive history of mankind. In the Old Testament this redemption focuses on the nation of Israel, and later it broadens to all peoples through the Messiah in the New Testament. While the Bible is not intended to be a history book, we can count on the fact that the history within it is accurate because it is God's truth.

## **B. THE BIBLE AND SECULAR HISTORY**

- 1. When secular history conflicts with the biblical record, sometimes new discoveries confirm secular history was wrong. As we will see, the Bible is already complete—but historical records continue to change. Read Daniel 5.
  - a. The biblical account for the fall of Babylon is, as follows: King Belshazzar, successor to Nebuchadnezzar, had a wild, drunken party during which he saw a hand writing a message on a wall. Shaken to the core with fear, he promised that any man who could give an interpretation would inherit the third highest position in his kingdom. But none of his wise men could discern the message. Daniel was brought in and he gave the proper interpretation: the reign of Belshazzar had come to an end and the Babylonian Kingdom would be given to the Medes and Persians. King Belshazzar was so pleased to get an answer that he had Daniel clothed in purple with a golden chain placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. But that very night Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62.
  - b. Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, secular historians claimed that King Belshazzar of Daniel 5 never existed. Secular historical fact stated that a man named Nabonidus was the king when Babylon was conquered by Cyrus and that, in fact, Nabonidus was never killed in the conquest; but was given a lifelong pension when his city was conquered.
  - c. Archaeological discoveries of ancient clay tablets, however, at the end of the 19th century revealed some additional facts. Nabonidus was king of Babylon, but in his later years he shared his power with a co-regent and son, Belshazzar. Other tablets record commercial contracts which were established through the taking of oaths in the name of the reigning king. The oaths name both Nabonidus and Belshazzar.

In recent years research by R. Dougherty, late professor of Assyriology at Yale University, shows that Nabonidus spent most of the latter years of his

reign in Arabia and left Belshazzar in Babylon to rule the country. Do you see why Daniel only was offered the third highest position in the kingdom? Belshazzar already held second place. Although history concedes to biblical truth concerning Belshazzar, most scholars deny the biblical account of Darius the Mede who succeeded him.

“Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” Daniel 5:16

“Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” Daniel 5:29

2. Archeology may never clear up all the discrepancies between secular history and the Bible. Liberal scholars and historians today, for example, often laugh at the account of Daniel and the lion’s den because among its cast of characters is King Darius the Mede. Historical records reveal that a Persian King named Darius who actually reigned 18 years after Cyrus conquered Babylon and therefore, was not a contemporary of Daniel.

However, note how accurately the Bible describes Darius the Mede in Daniel 5:31. He was 62 years old (Daniel 5:31) when he was made king over the kingdom (Daniel 9:1). Who was this Darius the Mede if he was not the famous future king of Iran and why the discrepancy? There are a few possible explanations

- a. A few say that Darius the Mede and King Cyrus mentioned in the Bible actually are the same person with two titles, based on an interpretation of Daniel 6:28 which states:

“So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

- b. Others say that Darius the Mede was a conquering general of Babylon under Cyrus’ direction or Cyaxerxes, a Median king, who after being conquered by Cyrus joined his campaign.
- c. The most reasonable explanation is that Darius was referred to by another name, Gubaru, whom Cyrus appointed to rule Babylon. Information about Gubaru, a historical governor appointed to rule over Babylon, is found in the Behistun inscription (outside of Baktaran or the old city name of Kermanshah) Nabonidus Chronicle, Contenau Texts, Pohl Texts, and Tremayne Texts. (For further detailed research and study see J.C.

Whitcomb’s 83 page book, Darius the Mede. The Presbyterians and Reformed Publishing Company 1963.)

## **C. CONCLUSION**

A good interpretative principle in studying the Scripture is, “when the Bible makes good sense, seek no other sense.” Although the Bible is a book of salvation and knowing God, its history is accurate! Praise the Lord that the archeologists are finding new facts constantly which confirm Bible history. However, the foundation of our faith in God’s Word is that which Christ Himself stated, “Thy Word is truth.”

## **D. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

Do you believe the Bible is true historically? We have said that while the Bible is complete, always accurate, history is not. How does understanding that fact help as you face discrepancies between the Bible and secular history?

## **E. DIG DEEPER**

1. How did Jesus Christ in the gospels refer to Old Testament people and events? Were they historical or merely literary teaching tools? Make a list of all the people and events in the Old Testament mentioned by Jesus and note how He refers to them. For example, he talks about Adam and Eve as real people and that the flood at the time of Noah actually happened.
2. How would you deal with a person who says he has a different way of interpreting the Old Testament? Just the spiritual meaning of things like Daniel in the lions’ den, the flood of Noah, etc. are important to such a person. Whether or not they happened historically really doesn’t matter. How would you show them that these events are actual historical ones?

## CHAPTER 5

### WOW, WHAT POWERFUL PRAYERS FROM PERSIA!

Have you noticed what powerful prayers Daniel prayed even in his old age? Remaining actively employed for more than 70 years as a high political official in the Babylonian and then Persian courts, Daniel prayed three times a day before an open window facing Jerusalem. When political rivals targeted his prayer life, he continued to boldly profess his faith in the living God! Read Daniel 6. Daniel 8:2 tells about Daniel's vision where he is in the place of Susa in the province of Elam.

#### A. MORE THAN DELIVERANCE FROM A LION'S DEN!

Daniel's success as a political advisor attracted the envy of his colleagues, who consequently wanted to get rid of him. Unable to find fault in his professional integrity or aptitude, they decided to use his faith against him. Consequently, they flattered King Darius the Mede into issuing a 30-day decree that anyone who prays to anyone except the King will be thrown into a den of lions.

This didn't deter Daniel. He continued to pray on his knees toward Jerusalem before open windows three times a day giving thanks to God just as he had done before.

‘Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.’ Daniel 6:10

Daniel's enemies' trick worked. Daniel was seen praying and sentenced to the lion's den because the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be broken. We know that God miraculously delivered Daniel. But take note of the final result of Daniel's obedience to God:

#### **Darius issued this declaration after Daniel was freed:**

‘I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heaven and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.’ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” Daniel 6:26-28

Who heard this decree? The Persian Empire stretched from Egypt through the Middle East and Pakistan to parts of India and Central Asia. This territory includes the present day countries of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of Kazakstan and India. Hundreds of people groups, speaking hundreds of languages read what Darius wrote. Because of Daniel's prayers, the 10/40 Window of that day knew that Daniel's living God rescues, performs signs and wonders, and has an everlasting dominion.

## **B. COULD SATAN HINDER DANIEL'S PRAYER FOR PERSIA?**

In Daniel chapter 10, we read about an elderly Daniel in his third year of service to King Cyrus of Persia. We learn he had a great burden. He fasted and prayed for three weeks not knowing if his prayers were being heard. A reply came from heaven, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the King of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come" (Daniel 10:12-14).

A heavenly spiritual battle took place between God's forces and Satan which delayed Daniel's answer from God for twenty-one days. Notice that the demon under Satan's power was called the prince of the Persian Kingdom. The same chapter describes another battle with the prince of Greece. Evidently, Satan puts different demonic powers over various countries or people groups to hold them in darkness so they won't come to know the truth.

Satan will use any means possible to hinder prayers, especially those concerning bringing knowledge of the gospel to unreached nations and peoples. Satan has always opposed God's work in Persia, but like the prayers of Daniel, the intercession of God's people today can help produce God's victory with Persians coming to Christ. Please take the challenge below!

## **C. PERSONAL APPLICATION**

Dear Christian friends, in chapter 2 we read about Daniel as a teenager, praying for God's wisdom. This same Daniel in his eighties still fasted and prayed for God's work to be done among his own people, the Jews, and all the people of the Persian Empire.

Dare to be a like Daniel! Many of our prayers are for our family, friends, and our physical needs only. We neglect to pray for many other needs. Use the prayer guide which follows and pray for the needs of Iran just like Daniel did.

### Iran Requests

1. Pray for the persecuted Persian believers to have endurance and to be able to show the love of Christ to those who oppress them.
2. Pray for the reopening of the United Bible Society in Tehran. What a blessing it would be to have the Scriptures readily available again in Iran.
3. Pray that the new believers will learn to listen to God by reading the Word and applying it.
4. Some believers do not have a fellowship to attend. Pray that they will get encouragement from radio broadcasts, Scripture portions, or other Christian literature.
5. Pray for a massive people movement among the 5,000,000 Luri tribal people of southwest

Iran with many coming to trust in Christ.

6. Pray that some living outside of Iran who have come to Christ might desire to return to reach their own relatives, as well as reach out to others. This could include visits, or returning permanently to Iran. Pray that they might be bold in proclaiming their faith in Jesus Christ.
7. Pray that President Khatami and others in the Islamic Iranian government will lead the country with wisdom. The Bible tells us to pray for those in authority so that Christian believers may lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.
8. Pray that believers will stand firm in their walk with God at home, work, and school and be able to testify wisely about their faith in Jesus Christ.
9. Along the Caspian Sea live almost 3,000,000 Mazanderani people who have yet to hear the Gospel. Pray for someone to reach out to these people.
10. Pray that the Persian radio signals into Iran will meet no interference and that the programs will come in clearly. Pray that programs in the mother tongue of the Kurdish, Manzarain etc people groups will be started, too.
11. Muslim background believers cannot attend the churches still remaining in Iran. This makes it difficult for new believers to grow. Pray for the Spirit of God to help them in their new-found faith.
12. Numerous churches and fellowships of Iranians meet outside of Iran throughout Europe, the U.S., Canada, Australia, and parts of Asia. Pray for the pastors and leaders as they reach out to dispersed Iranians.
13. Pray for the 65% of the population of Iran which is under 25 years of age. Minds need to be captured with the cause of Christ. New, creative ideas are needed.
14. Pray for more translating and publishing of Christian literature for Iranians.
15. Pray for those Persian-speaking people living in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, often in dire circumstances. The radio programs and literature could help them find the way.
16. Pray that Persian students, studying the Word in several Bible schools outside of Iran, would be prepared to teach others.
17. Pray that the message of salvation shared by missionaries and others will fall on fertile soil among Iranians who live outside of Iran.
18. Among the large people groups of Iran are 1,000,000 Kurds, located in northwest Iran. Pray for many to hear and believe and then witness to their own people both in Iran as well as in Iraq and Turkey.
19. Pray for the doors of Iran to open so that Christian workers, including Persians, might

again be able to go in and give out the message.

20. Pray that fear of discovery might not deter the home groups from meeting together in some cities.
21. Pray for consistency and character development for new believers who are being disciplined.
22. Pray for the protection of pastors in Iran as they struggle to lead their flocks in spite of all the restrictions on the Christian faith from the government.
23. Pray that Assyrian and Armenian church members would truly know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and give a good witness to the surrounding Persian population.
24. Pray that “freedom of worship” would be the rule in Iran. Islamic government officials say there is freedom for all to worship, but that is not true for the Muslim background believer.
25. Pray that God would raise up a mighty army of prayer warriors for the Persian-speaking world. Perhaps you should be one of them.
26. Pray for those who have heard the Word of God today in Iran and are pondering the claims of Christ. May they say “yes” to Him.
27. Pray that pastors and leaders in Iran would not continue to leave the country. It is hard to stay, but they are desperately needed.
28. Pray that the 50-60 unreached people groups in Iran will have an opportunity to hear the gospel in their mother tongue.
29. Pray for Iranian believers who are seeking believing mates. This can be difficult and frustrating. Pray for patience and the willingness to wait on the Lord.
30. Pray for radio listeners to understand the message and respond and for those who produce the programs to do so with clarity and simplicity. Pray for the finances to continue this broadcasting.
31. Pray for those godly pastors who still minister in Iran in spite of government repression, that they will preach the Word boldly, yet with wisdom from God.

I challenge you to pray for each of these requests for one month. If God leads you to continue praying, please feel free to tear this section out of the booklet or make a photocopy for your private prayers.

Check out <[www.bethany.com.internet/profiles/c\\_code/iran](http://www.bethany.com.internet/profiles/c_code/iran)> for prayer lists on the 46 different unreached people groups listed. Your prayers, like Daniel’s, might open the way for those unreached people to know that God’s dominion mentioned in Daniel 6 applies to them. Another web site with prayer requests for the Persian World is <[www.peopleteams.org/psw/prayer](http://www.peopleteams.org/psw/prayer)>



Another web site which gives current prayer requests for Persians is <[www.farsinet.com/pwo](http://www.farsinet.com/pwo)>  
God can use your prayers to reach Persians!



This is the supposed tomb of Daniel, that is located several miles from Sushan the palace.  
However Daniel is not in this tomb! He has joined believers in heaven to worship the Jesus  
Christ, the Messiah.

## CHAPTER 6

### HOW DID FIVE PERSIAN KINGS GET IN OUR BIBLE?

As we have learned already, some of Israel's history is intermingled with that of Persia. Between the end of the Babylonian captivity and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the Jewish people were under the authority of Persian kings and their history was dated by the reigns of those kings, since Israel no longer had kings. In fact, the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were written in the early part of the Persian Kingdom, giving us a glimpse of Persian-Israeli relations. In order to understand the background of these books, we will do a quick survey of Persian history. A note of caution is in order: it is important to remember, as we discussed in Chapter 4, "The World's Most Accurate History Book", that names change over time and in translation from one language to another. The following are some of the early Persian kings:

<u>Date B.C.</u>	<u>Secular Persian Name</u>	<u>English Historical Name</u>	<u>English Biblical Name</u>	<u>Scripture Reference</u>
539-530	Korrush	Cyrus	Cyrus	Isaiah 45-Daniel; Ezra 1-3
530-521	Cambujieh	Cambyses	Ahasureus (KJ) Xerxes (NIV)	Ezra 4:6
521 B.C.	Berooyeh Dorougi (liar)	Pseudo Smerdis	Artaxerxes	Ezra 4:7-23
521-486	Darous	Darius the Great	Darius	Ezra 5,6
486-465	Khashayarshah	Xerxes	Ahasureus (KJ) Xerxes (NIV)	Esther 1-10
464-423	Ardashir Deraz Dast(long hand)	Artaxerxes I	Artaxerxes	Nehemiah 1-13; Ezra 7-10

There were 3 Persian kings named Ardashir. Ardashir Deraz Dast ruled from 464 BC to 423 BC, Ardashir the Second from 403 BC to 359 BC, and Ardashir the Third from 358 BC to 337 BC.

**Note: The standard translation of the Persian Old Testament which was translated around 100 years ago had the word Akhshurosh from old Persian for Khashayarshah and the word Artahshasta from old Persian for Ardashir. We will use the name Khashayarshah and Ardashir as the kings' names in this and other chapters. Let's look at these kings in more detail:**

1. Cyrus the Great was the founder of the Medo-Persian Empire, conquering the Median, Lydian, and Babylonian kingdoms. A gracious liberator, he permitted the conquered nations to worship their own gods. He was benevolent toward captive people who had suffered under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar and his

successors. With his blessing and financial assistance, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. See chapter one for more information.

2. Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, was his father's successor. He was given the task of conquering Egypt which he did after he assumed the throne following his father's death. Persian history says that on the way home from his conquest, Cambyses heard that someone pretending to be his brother, Smerdis, had taken the throne. Cambyses died on his return trip. His biblical name is Akhshurosh (Ezra 4:6), not to be confused with Khashayarshah, the husband of Queen Esther. (See Section B in this chapter for more comments.)
3. Pseudo Smerdis, the traditional imposter, ruled for several months. He gained a large following by remitting future taxes for three years throughout the empire. (Has politics changed much in the last 2500 years?) However, Darius kept the loyalty of the Persian army and eventually captured and killed Pseudo Smerdis and claimed the throne. Note that Pseudo Smerdis' biblical name is probably Artahshasta (Ezra 4:7-23), not to be confused with the Ardashir who would reign more than half a century later. (See Section B in this chapter for more comments.)
4. After killing Pseudo Smerdis, Darius defeated nine kings in nineteen local uprisings in two years. These victories are recorded in the famous Behistun inscription, a rock carving located about 30 miles from the Persian city of Bakhtaran (formerly Kermanshah) in west-central Iran. Darius began the great work of building the palace complex at Takhe Tamshid, located 30 miles north of Shiraz. The main hall has the inscription, "I am Darius, great king, king of kings, king of lands--who constructed this palace." Darius was a good organizer, who established an efficient postal system. In fact, the United States postal slogan is of Persian heritage. The saying, "Neither rain nor snow nor sleet nor hail shall stop the appointed couriers from accomplishing their tasks," originated from King Darius. Darius was only partially successful at keeping the encroaching Greek Empire at bay. (Ezra chapters 5 and 6)
5. Khashayarshah was Darius' son. He continued the war against the Greeks and the building at Persepolis. The Bible states that Khashayarshah (Akhshurosh) was the husband of Esther. Note that his biblical name is Ahasureus, not to be confused with Cambyses.
6. Ardashir was the son of Khashayarshah. He also continued in the building project at Takhe Tamshid. The Scriptures say that he gave Ezra permission to take more Jewish people back to Jerusalem and gave Nehemiah permission to return to rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah chapters 1-13 and Ezra chapters 7-10).

#### **A. RETURN OF THE JEWS WITH CYRUS' PERMISSION**

1. The prophet Jeremiah predicted that the Jews, because of rebellion against God, would be taken captive for 70 years and then would return to their own land. These prophecies are found in Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10; and Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-13. Chapter one, [A Monarchy Is Born](#), describes the Kingdom of Persia and more specifically, the person through whom God would fulfill these prophecies, Cyrus the Great, who

helped the Jews return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. See the Scriptural

fulfillment of those prophecies in Ezra 1:1-4 and II Chronicles 36:22-23. Jeremiah 29:10 states:

“This is what the Lord says; “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.”

2. We see that God was merciful in giving extra benefits to the Jews through Cyrus as he let them return to Israel. They were to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:4), return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5), and receive financial aid from the Jews who remained in Babylon (Ezra 1:4). Cyrus himself gave gold and silver (Ezra 1:7-11). In contrast, consider the Jewish people who left the former Soviet Union to migrate to Israel in the 1960' s. They were not permitted to take any of their fortunes with them and were forced to pay exorbitant exit taxes to the Russian government. They were despised totally by the Russians who let them leave.
3. There were 42,360 Jews with servants who left Babylon to return to Israel (Ezra 2:64).
4. When the Jews returned to Jerusalem, they built an altar to offer sacrifices according to the Law of Moses first. Then they began to build the temple. When they were able to lay the foundation of the temple, they had a celebration. (See Ezra 3:1-13.)

## **B. TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION STOPPED BY ORDER OF A PERSIAN KING**

The completion of the temple foundation was met with the sound of trumpets and shouts of joy. (There was also weeping by the older priests and family heads, whose memory of the original temple and its loss probably brought contrition.) Looking in from the outside were the surrounding Gentile peoples living in Samaria who suddenly demanded a part in the fun. When the heads of Israel refused, they appealed to the Persian authority and had the building stopped. Read Ezra Chapter 4.

1. Who are these Persian Kings to whom the Samaritans appealed (Ezra 4:6-7)? The Persian Standard Version names Akhshurosh and Artahshasta while the Persian Commentary Version translates the names as Khashayarshah and Ardashir. Two schools of thought prevail:
  - a. The Persian Commentary translation maintain that these Gentile appeals to these two kings are out of chronological order, from a later time period than that covered in the rest of Ezra 4. In this case, they would have been set in the text to show that the problems between the Jews and the Gentiles continued beyond the era of Darius. Therefore, the Persian Commentary translation used the names Khashayarshah and Ardashir in Ezra 4:6-7 would then match up with the same kings mentioned in Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah, and Esther.

- b. Others, myself included, however, believe the wording of the 1900 Persian Standard translation that the “Akhshurosh” of Ezra 4:6 refers to Cambyses, Cyrus’ son, and Artahshasta in Ezra 4:7-23 refers to Berooyeh Dorougi. Several reasons support this theory. First, it follows the chronological order of the kings. Second, the action taken by “Akhshurosh” in stopping the building of the temple is consistent with the character and political orientation of Pseudo Smerdis. Further, some historians believe that the names Akhshurosh and Artahshasta were general titles for kings, such as “Pharaoh” and “Shah” or “His Majesty” and that they were not specific names. (See Ezra and Nehemiah by C. Lyck, pages 28-31). For example, the birth name of the last king of Iran who was overthrown in 1978 was “Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.” However few, particularly in the West, knew him by any other name than “Shah,” which means “king” in Persian. There were hundreds of kings in Persian history from Cyrus to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi who were all called the “Shah.”
2. Why didn’t the Jews let the local Samaritan residents help them build the temple? Since the people who offered to help were not true worshipers of God, the Jews did not want to mix the truth with the false. Only God’s people could participate in building the temple, the place where they would worship God.
3. Unfortunately, King Cyrus died before the temple was built. When refused by the Jewish people to help build the temple, the Samaritans made accusations about the Jews to King Cambyses. Afterwards, they sent a slanderous letter of complaint about the Jews to King Berooyeh Dorougi (See 1b) asking that he stop the building of the temple. Berooyeh Dorougi possibly hoping to secure further political alliances, accepted the petition and revoked the decree of Cyrus to build the temple. Construction stopped. Imagine how discouraging it must have been to look day after day at a bare foundation and partial skeleton of the building of your God and yet have no hope of ever being allowed to finish. Review Ezra 4:17-24

### **C. COMPLETION OF THE WORK ON THE TEMPLE UNDER DARIUS.**

1. God brought hope with the prophet Haggai. Haggai 1:1 states, “In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.” His entire book was written to encourage the Jewish people to complete the temple. Haggai 1:8 declares, “Are you living in fancy paneled houses while God’s house remains in ruins. You prosper like a hole in your pocket. You never seem to have much money. It never seems to meet all your needs. It is because you neglected God’s house.” Read the Book of Haggai as well as Ezra 5:1-2.
2. Once again, Israel’s enemies objected to the renewed construction of the temple and sent a report to the new king, Darius, hoping he would order a stop to the construction work. Instead, as we find recorded in Ezra 5:2 to 6:18, King Darius searched the archives of Cyrus’ records and found Cyrus’ original decree, which stated that the Jewish people had permission to return to Israel, rebuild the temple, and receive funding from the king’s funds. Consequently, the temple was finished

thereafter. Darius' search was made in the city of Ecbatana (Persian Commentary translation), also known as Achmetha (Persian Standard translation), a city in west-central Iran which has the present-day name of Hamadan. Because of its cool climate Hamadan was the summer palace of the early kings. Not long after I arrived in Iran in 1962, my first daughter was born in Hamadan.)

#### **D. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

1. Make a list of the spiritual lessons we can learn from the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the temple, and the opposition? Just as many godly Jewish people returned to their home country and Jerusalem, have you thought about returning to Iran to share the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ?
2. In Ezra 3:1-13 we learned that when the Jewish people returned to Jerusalem, they first built an altar to offer sacrifices. As a refugee going to a new country or starting a new job, how can you put spiritual things first?
3. We learned at the end of Ezra, chapter 4 that the Jewish people refused the help of the Gentiles in the building of the temple for the sake of purity, not wanting to mingle what was sacred with pagan influence. They paid a price for their decision. For what principles or beliefs would you be willing to pay a price?

#### **D. DIG DEEPER**

How do the complaints of the letters in Ezra 4:7-16 and Ezra 5:6-17 along with the replies in Ezra 4:17-22; 6:6-12 remind you of the Persian culture?

#### **E. FINAL THOUGHTS**

There is a span of 50 years between the last verses of Ezra 6 and the first verse of Ezra 7. During this time, the events in the Book of Esther took place. We see that God was working among the Jews who remained in Iran and Babylon after Cyrus' decree.

Hamadan (formerly Ecbatana in Bible times) claims to have the tombs of Esther and Mordecai. At the time of the Revolution in 1978 there were approximately 90,000 Jews in Iran, many of whom traced their roots to the Babylonian captivity. Even though many Jewish people fled the country during and after the Revolution in 1978, some remained. One estimate says there were 30,000 Jewish people in Iran in 2000.

Here are the ruins of Persopolis. The city was destroyed by Alexander the Great when he conquered Iran. Kingdoms come and go but the Kingdom of God lasts forever.



## CHAPTER 7

### ESTHER - PERSIAN QUEEN

Did you realize that one book in the Bible has a Persian name? It is the book named Esther. Do you know how Esther became queen? The king had a big party. Although we don't know for sure why Queen Vashti refused to join her husband, Khashayarshah, and his guests, her disobedience and subsequent divorce changed the lives of perhaps hundreds of young women throughout the provinces of Persia, particularly a young Jewish orphan named Esther whose beauty and demeanor won the heart of a king. The true story of Esther shows us how God uses faithful individuals to deliver His people from ruin.

#### A. THE PERSIAN SETTING

1. Khashayarshah (Ahasureus in Persian Standard translation) who reigned from 486 to 465 B.C. His description in Esther 1:1 is made with particular distinction, inferring that there must have been more than one Khashayarshah since he is titled as the king who ruled over 127 provinces. Contrast this with the text in Ezra 4:6, which as mentioned before, the author believes refers to Cambujieh.
2. Notice the breadth of the Persian Empire, stretching through 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia.
3. Shushan, the Palace, was located near the Iranian city of Shush which is near Andimeshk north of Ahwaz in southwest Iran.
4. Some commentators believe the banquet described in Esther 1 was given to gain the support of the local governors and military leaders for military campaigns against the encroaching Greek Empire. Others believe the banquet happened after Khashayarshah lost the battles, giving himself over to "wine, women, and song."
5. Although Khashayarshah led unsuccessful campaigns against the Greeks, he left the modern sporting world with a legacy - the marathon. Historical tradition holds that when the Persians were defeated in battle, a Greek soldier ran the distance from the town of Marathon to Athens to proclaim the Greek victory. During the 1908 Olympic Games, the run was commemorated with a foot race from the royal castle at Windsor to the Olympic stadium—a distance of 26.2 miles. Today marathons are run all over the world.

#### B. THE CROWNING OF ESTHER

1. Queen Vashti was divorced and dethroned since she would not obey the king's command to show her beauty (Esther 1:10-22).
2. Esther's Jewish name was Hadasseh (Esther 2:7). Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah. This girl, who had the Persian name of Esther, was lovely in form and features, Mordecai had cared for her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.
3. The name "Esther" is Persian.

- a. The name 'Ishtar,'the goddess of Babylonia and Assyria, is a form of Esther.
  - b. Esther is Persian for the star Venus.
  - c. The English word "star" is of Persian and Assyrian background, derived from the same root consonants "š", "t" and "r" as Esther.
4. Like a modern beauty contest, the royal search for a new queen had winners and losers, but the losers of Khashayarshah's pageant would never go home. To lose the king's contest meant living a life of seclusion with the rest of the women in the king's harem.
  5. Would you have liked having your daughter snatched away by the king's command to satisfy his whims? Imagine Mordecai's anguish. He was raising Esther who had lost her parents. Mordecai, her cousin, told Esther not to reveal that she was a Jew, probably to shield her from anti-Jewish feelings.

### C. THE WORK OF ESTHER IN FREEING THE JEWS

As we look at the highlights of this familiar story we will see God's working in the Palace of Shushan. I once led two tours of different groups of English-speaking expatriates from Tehran Bible Church to Shushan the palace. The ruins have provided rich digging for archeologists over many years. The palace gate, the throne room, and the probable banquet hall are displayed. Standing there one can picture Mordecai sitting at the gate, King Khashayarshah sitting on the throne, and Esther pleading for her people before him or hosting several banquets with the king and Haman.

1. Notice that Haman was willing to pay 10,000 talents of silver (\$20,000,000) to kill the Jews (Esther 3:9-15). I'm sure he expected to be paid back plus make a great profit from the bounty he would receive by destroying the Jews and taking their riches from them including the gold and silver previously given to the Jewish people by Cyrus.
2. Esther was told that God could use her to save the Jews, "And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)
3. Notice the miracle of God's timing in working out His purposes!
  - a. Mordecai, Esther's cousin, overheard a plot to kill the king. He informed him and saved the king's life, but he was not rewarded initially(Esther 2:21-23).
  - b. The king had insomnia, and instead of calling for a doctor or perhaps a minstrel to entertain him, he decided to read memorandums about his own kingdom (Esther 6:1).
  - c. In reading he was reminded that Mordecai discovered a plot to kill him and questioned whether or not Mordecai had been rewarded (Esther 6:1-3).
  - d. Haman arrived early in court and had the king's permission to kill all the Jews, which would have included his enemy, Mordecai. Can you imagine how shocked he was when the king asked him to honor Mordecai for saving his life (Esther 6:4-11)?
  - e. Imagine how pained Haman was to lead Mordecai throughout the city on a white



horse proclaiming that this is a man whom the king honors! Imagine how Haman felt about his reputation.

- f. God gave Esther wisdom in having two banquets. The first was to prompt the king once again to ask for her request. But after a pleasing evening well-hosted and served by his Queen, the King promised to grant Esther's request even before he heard what it was. Having won her king's favor, Esther then invited him and Haman to the second banquet, where she would plead on behalf of her people and herself and expose the wicked plot of Haman to kill all Jews. Consequently, he was hung on his own gallows ( Esther 5:7-12, 6:14, 7:1-8, and 7:9-10)

“Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, “A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up for the king.” The king said, “Hang him on it!” So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.” Esther 7:9-10

4. The same swift courier post (set up by the previous king Darius), which spread the command to kill the Jews throughout all the provinces of the kingdom also dispatched the second decree, which saved them (Esther 3:12-15; 8:9-14).
5. Read chapters 5 and 8 of Esther and observe the events as they take place. It is a great picture of God's plan of salvation for mankind.
  - a. All the Jews were condemned to die because of Haman's decree, of which King Khashayarshah had previously approved (Esther 5:3, 12, 15). Comparatively, all of mankind is under the condemnation of death because of sin.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” John 3:18
  - b. Esther had compassion for her people, who were condemned and made a great personal sacrifice to save them. Likewise Jesus died for the sins of the world. Those who do not perish and are not condemned will have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17
  - c. Because “no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked” ( Esther 8:8), the king wrote another decree, giving the Jews the right to defend themselves—providing a way of salvation without revoking his first decree. Similarly, because mankind is sinful and the wages of sin are death, God provided his son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty and replace our sins with His righteousness.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” II Corinthians 5:21

- d. The king’s command was translated into all 127 languages of the provinces of Persia from India to Ethiopia so that all the different people would hear it in their own language, not just in Persian (Esther 8: 9-10). The Gospel which tells the good news that we are made righteous through Christ’s death and not by our good works must be translated for every ethnic group.
- e. The king’s command immediately was distributed in the best and quickest means possible, which meant using the best horses in the royal stables (Esther 8:10-14). Today the best means available should be used to spread the good news of Jesus Christ such as radio, television, the internet, mass media, and especially, through personal witness. The riders of these fast horses did not delay or stop by the oasis to lounge for awhile, but as the Scriptures say they were “spurred on by the king’s command”. (Esther 8:14) All true Christians should be motivated to obey the command given by the King of Kings (Jesus Christ) to disciple all nations (ethnic groups). Perhaps God has blessed you so that in addition to Farsi, you know other languages spoken in Iran. Would God have you to take the good news of Salvation in Jesus in that language? We should be spurred on with all haste to spread the good news.

“The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king’s command. And the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa.” Esther 8:14

- 6. In Esther 8:17 it is recorded, “In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people under other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.” Esther and Mordecai wanted the Jews saved from the destruction plotted by wicked Haman. In the process, many others, including Persians, became followers of the one true God, thus inheriting the hope of the coming Messiah, who would pay for their sins. In the Old Testament provisions were given for non-Jews to become followers of the true God.
- 7. The feast of Purim was instituted to commemorate the Jews’ deliverance. It is still celebrated today by Jews during the first week in February. A triangular-shaped cake, symbolizing Haman’s hat is eaten. Jewish children perform plays depicting the life of Esther. With every mention of Haman’s name, a trumpet is blown to symbolically blot it out.

#### **D. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

- 1. How can God use you this week to minister spiritually to Farsi-speaking people and to others whose languages you know? This month? This year?
- 2. Has God put you in a special situation similar to Esther’s? Mordecai told Esther, “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that

you have come to the royal position for such a time as this?” Esther 4:14 Does God have a special job for you? Will you obey God and do what he wants to do in your life?

**E. DIG DEEPER**

1. How does Haman’s downfall illustrate Proverbs 29:23, “The bigger they are, the harder they fall?”
2. I Peter 5:5 states, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” If you are having problems in your Christian life, or with other people you might ask God if you have a proud spirit, like Haman.

## CHAPTER 8

### PERSIAN KINGS SEND EZRA AND NEHEMIAH TO JERUSALEM

What's a temple without a priest, or a crew without a foreman? Certainly the temple had priests and the work projects of Jerusalem had overseers before Ezra or Nehemiah came on the scene. The stories of these two uniquely gifted men, however, are stories that commemorate a new era in the rebuilding of the city of God.

Ezra was a priest who led a group of Jewish families to Jerusalem with permission of Ardashir. This was the second exodus out of Babylon. Under Cyrus more than 42,000 Jews had returned to rebuild the city and the temple, which was finally completed in 515 B.C. That was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius and is recorded in Ezra 6:16. In the Book of Ezra there is a span of thirty-seven years between Ezra 6:24 and Ezra 7:1. We know that Darius reigned over the Persian Kingdom for about 50 years before he was succeeded by his son, Khashayarshah, the husband of Queen Esther in 465 B.C. We also know that within this time span Queen Esther and her cousin, Mordecai, saved the Jewish people who remained in Persia. Among them was Ezra. Then King Ardashir came to the throne.

Ezra went to Jerusalem in the seventh year of the reign of Ardashir (Ezra 7:1-7). Our lesson will cover Persia and the Jews' return to Palestine.

#### A. THE KING'S BLESSING

1. Notice the favor Ardashir gave Ezra!
  - a. All Jews desiring so could return to Jerusalem.  
"Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who wish to go to Jerusalem with you, may go." (Ezra 7:13)
  - b. Ardashir gave gifts of gold and silver.  
"Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem." (Ezra 7:15-16)
  - c. Grants of silver, wheat, wine, oil, and salt were made available (Ezra 7:21-22).
  - d. Tax exemption was given to religious workers. (In the United States ministers' housing allowances are not subject to federal tax. I wonder if this was based on the old Bible principle in Nehemiah: tax exemption for religious workers.)  
"You are also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants or other workers at this house of God." (Ezra 7:24)

- e. There was religious freedom for those who taught God's Word.  
 "And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them." (Ezra 7:25)
2. Notice the good reputation Ezra and the Jews had concerning their relationship with the government and king. (Ezra 6:10; 7:23) God's people, the Jews, were known as people who prayed for the political rulers of the land. Both King Darius and King Ardashir asked the Jews to pray for them. We as Christians are exhorted to pray for kings as well as for all who are in authority. "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." (I Timothy 2:1-2) Do you pray for the government leaders of Iran, the government leaders of the country where you are now living, and even those governments that may persecute Christians in authority over you even if you disagree with their policies and morals? We are asked to pray in I Timothy, so that we as believers "may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Ezra had a bold faith. He not only trusted God for safety, but publicly declared to King Ardashir that he did not need a king's escort to protect the people and the stuff they were carrying. He told the king, "the gracious hand of our God is to everyone that looks to Him, but His great anger is against all who forsake Him." (Ezra 8:22)

## **B. EZRA, A MAN WITH A MISSION**

1. Ezra was a son of a priest, who could trace his ancestry back to Aaron, the first high priest. He was a scribe in the law of Moses. One Bible dictionary says, "It would seem probable that Ezra held a position in Persia similar to the Secretary of State for Jewish Affairs. His task was to enforce uniform observance of the Jewish law, and to this end he had authority to make appointments within the Jewish State".  
 "This Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given." (Ezra 7:6)
2. Ezra's goal in life was threefold. In Ezra 7:10, first, he prepared his heart to seek the Lord. Second, he desired to do God's will; and third, he taught it to others. What an example for us!
3. The list of Jewish families returning numbers 1,495 people, probably heads of families. This means that about 7,000 people returned as compared to the 42,360 who returned more than 80 years earlier under Cyrus' decree in Ezra 1:64.
4. Notice that the trip took four months (Ezra 7:9). This gives us a rough idea of how long the Magi (wise men) took 500 years later when they visited the new-born Savior, Jesus. (Ezra's travels probably took longer since his was with a large group of over 7,000 people as compared to the small group of Magi.)
5. Notice how Ezra and his group prepared for the journey (Ezra 8:21-23). God's people fasted, prayed, and asked for God's blessing. They publicly proclaimed that they were trusting in God to deliver them. Ezra did not ask King Ardashir for soldiers for

protection.

6. Notice the recurring phrase, “the gracious hand of our God,” showing that God’s grace was the source of their blessings (Ezra 7:6,9,28; 8:18,22).

### **C. NEHEMIAH, FROM CUP-BEARER TO FOREMAN**

Nehemiah, under King Ardashir, traveled from Persia to Jerusalem five years after Ezra returned (Ezra 7:7; Nehemiah 2:1) in order to oversee construction of the walls around Jerusalem. We will examine the portion of the book of Nehemiah which relates to Persia.

1. Nehemiah made his request to King Ardashir in the Citadel of Susa (Nehemiah 1:1). (Susa is most commonly known as Shushan the Palace. This city is located in southwestern Iran near Andimeshk. It is the same city where Queen Esther pleaded for her countrymen, the Jews, to be saved from annihilation.
2. Nehemiah was a government official whose initial responsibility was “cupbearer” to the king (Nehemiah 1:1). He tasted the food and drinks for King Ardashir to make sure nothing was poisoned. Nehemiah must have been highly trusted. Perhaps his status as a Jew qualified him more highly than another who might have a motive to overthrow the king.
3. Nehemiah was later appointed by Ardashir to be governor of Judah (Nehemiah 5:14; 8:9; 10:1; 13:6).

### **D. THE BURDEN OF NEHEMIAH**

1. Usually, God gives us burdens based on information. Nehemiah probably rejoiced when nearly 7,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem under Ezra. He became burdened when he heard that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down, the gates still burned from fire, and that his people were in great trouble and disgrace.

“Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” (Nehemiah 1:2-3)

2. Nehemiah was a man of prayer. Notice that throughout the Book of Nehemiah, he prayed both long and short prayers. He trusted God to work through him (Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4; 5:19; 6-9; 6:14). Evidently, Nehemiah prayed four months before he mentioned his concerns to the king. (The period from the month of Chislev to Nisan was four months--Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1).
3. Have you thought about why Jerusalem needed walls and gates? Modern cities don’t have them. Walls protected people from invading enemies and wild animals. In addition to security, walls helped nurture a common identity. Gates provided a way to regulate those entering and leaving the city. Most villages in Iran today still have walls around them. Tehran, Iran, though now a modern city, retains landmarks of the

past: “gate to Gazvin,” the “gate to Shemiran,” and the “gate to Dolate.” In early times Tehran had a wall around it with twelve different gates.

4. Some might think Nehemiah was being presumptuous when he asked for timber from the king’s forest to build the gates and walls as well as soldiers to protect him. No, Nehemiah was not presumptuous. He had spent months in prayer. His confidence was not in his ability to make a request, but in the God who heard his prayer.

## **E. A GLIMPSE AT THE REST OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The first few sentences in most of the prophetic books usually say, “The words of so and so in the days of king....” (See Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 1:1-3; Ezekiel 1:1-3; Hosea 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1). These were the current kings of Israel during the time of the prophets. However, the last prophets listed in the Old Testament were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who were often called post-captivity prophets. They brought messages from God to the Jewish people after they were freed from the Babylonian captivity by Cyrus and had returned to Palestine. Notice that, these books are no longer dated by the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah, but the by the reign of the Persian King, Darius.

“In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.” (Haggai 1:1)

“In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo.” (Zechariah 1:1)

## **F. MAKING A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

1. Think about how God prepared three individuals in Persia for His service. For Esther (see Chapter 7), God used circumstances. For Ezra, He used his life goal and background of being brought up in a religious family. For Nehemiah, He used his god-given gift of administration and leadership. How has God been preparing you? Are you cooperating with God’s work in your life? Perhaps like Nehemiah, God may use you to bring your Iranian family and friends to salvation.
2. Part of maintaining our spiritual lives is learning about what concerns God - that His glory would be known and that He would be worshiped by all peoples. Perhaps God has led you to this booklet to pray for His work among Iranians, including ethnic groups in Iran which have never heard the gospel. Other ways to become involved include giving money to help fund radio broadcasts going into Iran and perhaps taking Bibles, New Testaments and literature into Iran to share the good news about salvation in Jesus Christ when you visit your family and friends. You could even fax, e-mail, or telephone portions of the Bible, or chapters from books like this.
3. How would you compare Nehemiah and Ezra? Ezra and Nehemiah were both men of God, but each was led differently. For instance, Ezra did not want king Ardashir’s protection on the journey yet Nehemiah, accepted the protection of the king’s soldiers (Ezra 8:21-23 and Nehemiah 2:9). However, this was not an indication that Ezra trusted God more than Nehemiah. The Bible states that “the hand of God” was on both

Ezra and Nehemiah. Further, we can learn something from the differences in the faith approaches of both men.

- a. As fallible humans, we sometimes try to make formulas out of the procedures that godly men use to accomplish great things. Nehemiah differed from Ezra in how he got things done—yet, his prayer life was indicative of his trust in God. While the Word, character, and will of God never change, the methods of serving Him and applying Scriptural principles may vary for different Christians, churches, and cultures.
- b. God calls people to serve in different functions. Ezra was the religious leader. He did the preaching in Nehemiah 8 and a great revival took place. Nehemiah was the administrator. He understood how to motivate men and the walls of Jerusalem were built.

## F. DIG DEEPER

1. Often Nehemiah is cited as an example of a man who used modern management and leadership principles to build the wall. Make a list of these principles and how they would apply in a business situation today. What relationship do you see between Nehemiah's administrative ability and his prayer life?
2. Those of you who have the gift of administration may relate to a classic book entitled, Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership by Cyril J. Barber, published by the Loreinez Publication House. It is out of print, but copies usually can be found on the internet. As an administrator, I have appreciated the biblical principles and their application as they related to my area of ministry.



Nehemiah and Ezra would have climbed this stairway many times when they went to the winter palace in Persopolis. The engravings on the wall are representing over 30 different nations bring tribute to the Persian king.



## CHAPTER 9

### WHY IS ELAM SO SIGNIFICANT? (CITADEL OF SUSA - CAPITAL OF ELAM)

Shushan the palace (the Citadel of Susa) located near Andimesk is mentioned 19 times in Esther, as well as in Nehemiah 1:1 and Daniel 8:2. Not only was Shushan the ancient capital of the Elamite empire, but became the capital of the Medo-Persian Empire after Cyrus conquered Babylon. Evidently, Hamadan (Ecbatana) which was located in cool central Iran was the summer capital while Persepolis (Takht-e-Jamshid - 20 miles north of Shiraz) was the ceremonial capital for events such as the Persian New Year.

#### A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ELAM AND SUSA (SHUSH, SHUSHAN)

Shushan was located 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf east of the Tigris River in Steppe country which is a continuation of the southern Mesopotamian plain. Three names are used for the one city - Shushan in the Bible, Susa in secular history, and Shush in present day Iran. Elam was the area around Shushan. Excavations at Shushan indicate that the city was occupied from 4000 BC to 1200 AD. It was the capital of a small kingdom made up of hill peoples with various successes and failures. The Elamite power was checked by Hammurabi of Babylon (1792 -1750 BC). (This was the king who designed the "Code of Hammurabi", a famous legal code, which incidently, was found in the ruins at Shushan in 1902.)

From 1650 to 1175 BC, Elam and Babylon as well were under the rule of the Kassites from Luristan. Following this Elam was established as its own kingdom for a while. Then various nations such as the Assyria under kings Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, and Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar attacked and conquered Elam. Next it became part of the Medo-Persian Empire with a main palace located in Shushan. The other capital at Takhte Tamshid has carved inscriptions on the northern stairway of the audience palace (Apanda) showing Mede, Persian, and Elamite soldiers guarding the Persian throne. Also, Elamite inscriptions are found along with Persian inscriptions.

Tradition dating back to 1170 AD places the tomb of Daniel at Shushan. However, we are not sure whether or not Daniel was actually at Shushan since the reference to Daniel at Shushan in Daniel 8:2 was a vision.

"In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal."

Recent Jewish tradition states that in the early centuries the Jews in Shushan argued about Daniel's grave. The Jews who lived on the side of the river where Daniel's grave was located were wealthy, but the ones on the other side of the river were poor. To stop the arguing, the placing of the bier of Daniel was alternated each year from one side of the river to the other. Finally, the Persian king had the bier suspended from chains precisely in the middle of the bridge spanning the river.

I was told that the present-day area around Shushan is a potential agricultural miracle. If this area could be irrigated it could become one of the most productive in the world. Two crops of sugar cane alone can be grown a year. Remember, this is at the eastern tip of the old fertile crescent.

## **B. BIBLICAL HISTORY OF ELAM**

1. Elam was one of the sons of Shem, the son of Noah. Therefore Noah was the grandfather of Elam. (Genesis 10:22)  
    “The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arphazad, Lud and Aram.”
2. Abraham delivered his nephew Lot from Chedorlamer, King of Elam, after he was captured by him. (Genesis 14)
3. The Assyrian king brought in some Elamite settlers to replace the rebellious Jews of the 10 northern tribes who were taken captive. (Ezra 4:9)
4. God judged Elam, probably using Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. (Jeremiah 49:34-37; Ezekiel 32:24-25)
5. The Medes with Elam’s help took over the Babylonian Empire. (Isaiah 21:2-10) Also, compare this with Isaiah 22:1-6.

## **C. PROPHECY ABOUT ELAM**

1. Isaiah 11:10-16 gives a prophecy about God reclaiming Israel. Verse 10 tells us that the root of Jesse (Jesus the Messiah) will stand as a banner for all the peoples and the nations who will rally to Him. Verse 11 states, “in that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to reclaim a remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, lower Egypt, upper Egypt, Cush, Elam, Babylonia, Hamath and from the islands of the sea.” Then verse 12 talks about gathering the exiles of Israel. Those holding the belief that Jesus Christ will return to the earth to rule for 1000 years (the millennium) believe this passage refers to Jewish people scattered in different nations who have returned to Israel during the past several decades and are returning to Israel now. Did you notice that one of the countries God reclaimed a remnant from is Elam?
2. There is another prophecy concerning Elam found in Jeremiah 49:35-39. In verse 35 the Lord says, “See, I will break the bow of Elam.” The Elamites were long famous as bowmen (Jeremiah 50:9 and Isaiah 22:6). In the standard Farsi translation we read verse 38 and 39, “For there shall come to pass, in the latter days, I’ll bring in the captivity of Elam, saith the Lord.” This is similar to the translation in the King James English version. However, in the Farsi commentary version verses 38 and 39 reads, “Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in the days to come declares the Lord.” The rest of the passage tells about God’s judgement against Elam and God scattering its exiles to many nations because of His anger. Is this passage referring to past historical events or events which are yet to happen?
  - a. In general, this historical event is interpreted as having taken place already. (Note that in addition to Jeremiah 49:39, this phrase, “I will restore the fortunes”, is found in Jeremiah 48:47 in reference to Moab and in 49:6 in reference to the

Ammonites.) The Elam and the Babylon empires were conquered by the Medo-Persian empire under king Cyrus who replaced the Elamite king and set his throne in Elam (Jeremiah 49:38). Thus, Elam became another conquered country under Cyrus' rule showing this prophecy was fulfilled already. The phrase, "latter days" is used in connection with the fortunes of Elam, not people returning to Elam. As mentioned previously, Elam was once a prosperous agriculture area. Now it is desolate, but in the latter days it will become an area of fortune again with a great agriculture harvest. I can remember being in Iran in the 1970' s and talking with an agriculture expert who had surveyed the land. He said that with irrigation this area could become one of the greatest distribution centers of agriculture in the world. This is yet to happen, "in the days to come", for the fortunes of Elam.

- b. Another interpretation emphasizes the "latter days" with the events of this prophecy yet to happen. Some Iranian believers have seen how God has been working among Persians during these "latter days." In 1977 there were approximately 250 Persian Muslim background Christian believers only. By the year 2000, this number increased drastically to more than 27,500. To them this is fulfillment of the prophecy in the "latter days" and bringing again the "captivity of Elam." Keeping in mind that Elam is part of present-day Iran, some Iranians say verses 35 and 36 refer to the Islamic revolution of 1978 which caused Iran to become an Islamic republic with new political and economic policies. As a result, many Iranians left Iran scattering all over the world. In 1999 there were about 53,500 Iranians living in Australia, 110,000 in Germany, 80,000 in England, 120,000 in Canada, 1,380,000 in USA, 250,000 in Iraq, 100,000 in Kuwait, 140,000 in Pakistan, 800,000 in Turkey, 350,000 in the Gulf States and some in other countries as well. One Christian organization, Iranian Christians International, is in contact with Persian believers in more than 30 countries. (See Chapter 18, [Where are Persians Living Today](#), for more details.)

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: "See, I will break the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might. I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four quarters of the heavens; I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where Elam's exiles do not go. I will shatter Elam before their foes, before those who seek their lives; I will bring disaster upon them, even my fierce anger," declares the Lord. "I will pursue them with the sword until I have made an end of them. I will set my throne in Elam and destroy her king and officials," declares the Lord. "Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in days to come," declares the Lord." Jeremiah 49:35-39

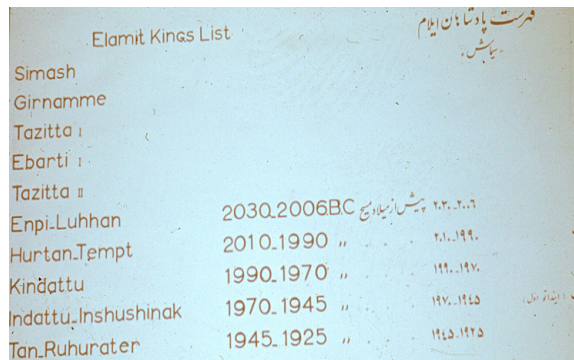
This interpretation says verse 38 took place when the 2,500 years of continuous monarchy in Iran came to an end with the overthrowing of Reza Shah Pahlavi in January, 1979. Iranian believers have the future hope that this present regime will end with God removing the Islamic rulers thus ending His judgement on Elam completely and then restoring the captivity of Elam in the "latter days" as mentioned in verse 39. At that time many believing Persians will return to their

country of Iran. Several Iranian Christian organizations have Jeremiah 49:39 written on their stationary. To them this prophecy has not been fulfilled yet. They see the promise of Deuteronomy 30:1-10 not only applying to the Jewish people returning to Israel, but also the returning of Iranians to their own country.

- c. Other Iranians hold to both interpretations mentioned. Yes, Elam was punished and a new throne was set in place under Cyrus. However, this passage has a double fulfillment. It refers to past history as well as God’s working among the Persian people in the future. They base this view on other passages of scripture where a prophecy primarily about Israel in the ‘latter days’ was fulfilled literally already and yet has a future prophecy fulfillment, also.

**D. DIG DEEPER**

1. Why is the prophecy of Jeremiah 49:35-39 concerning Elam rarely mentioned in current popular books written in English and the European languages about prophecy of the latter days and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ?
2. What do you personally believe about the second coming of Christ? Are you ready for the return of our Savior, Jesus Christ?



A picture from the Haft Topch Museum in Central Iran that features the kings and history of Iran. This museum is located about 25 miles from Shushan.

## CHAPTER 10

### FAR REACHING EFFECTS OF PENTECOST: PERSIAN MISSIONARIES TO ASIA

Most Christians are fairly familiar with the missionary expansion of the Western world. The Book of Acts tells us that the Apostle Paul took the gospel of our Savior to Crete, Turkey, and Rome. Through the centuries Christianity spread throughout Europe and later America. Today we think of non-Christian people mostly living within the 10/40 Window, that vast region of the world that spans across North Africa, the Middle East, and into East Asia. However, in the early centuries of the Church, the gospel had a strong influence in Egypt and North Africa. It also spread eastward throughout the Middle East in Iran and even into parts of Asia such as China. Remember, God so loved the world! Let's take a look at how He worked through the nation of Iran to help spread His good news.

Remember we discussed the Magi (wise men) mentioned in Matthew 2 (Christmas Customs Chapter 13). They had come from the East to worship Christ. Let's take a look at who else came from the East to worship. Read Acts 2: 1-9.

#### A. WHY WERE PERSIAN JEWS AT JERUSALEM?

Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit came down upon the believers. In Acts 2:5 we see that God-fearing Jews had come to Jerusalem from every nation. "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." Why were Jews from various parts of the world in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost? God, in Deuteronomy 16:16 commanded male Jews to go to Jerusalem for the religion feasts. One of these feasts was the Feast of Weeks or Feast of Harvest when the first fruits of the crops were offered to the Lord 50 days after the Unleavened Bread (Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Leviticus 23:15-21). In the New Testament it is called Pentecost, which in Greek, means fiftieth. They were to go to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover and the feast of Tabernacles, too.

#### B. WHAT HAPPENED ON PENTECOST?

1. According to Acts 2:6-9, notice the languages that the disciples of Jesus spoke?

"When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia."

2. The Elamite, Parthian, Medes, were descendants from people such as Ezra, Esther, Daniel and Nehemiah or perhaps they were Persians who became Jews during the time of Esther (Esther 8:17). They had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. The first

three language groups in Acts 2:9 are of Persian origin. Parthians from Pars came from

a region now known as the province of Fars in southern Iran (the Parthian Dynasty ruled in Iran from 124 B.C. to 224 A.D.). The Medes (remember the Medo-Persian Empire) came from central Iran; and the Elamites came from what is now southwestern Iran, where the former ancient capital city of Shushan is located.(See Chapter 9)

3. We learn from Acts 2:41 that on the day of Pentecost some 3,000 people accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah, Son of God, and their Savior. They were saved and baptized. “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” It’s not unrealistic to believe that some of these were Persian Jews, who soon returned to Persia as baptized Christians!

### **C. THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL IN IRAN AFTER PENTECOST**

Church history tells us how the gospel was spread further in Iran. Tradition says that Andrew went north to the Black and Caspian Sea areas. Matthew, in turn, went among the Parthians.

Christianity in Iran prospered in the early centuries, particularly under some of the kings of the Sassian Dynasty (224-642 A.D.). An early center for Christianity under King Shahpur I (240-272 A.D.) was the city of Shush, where Daniel saw his visions and Nehemiah served the king’s cup. Some believe that many of the Christians of Shush were Roman soldiers, along with a bishop, taken captive in successful battles waged against the Roman Empire.

Early in the fourth century, Shahpur II began persecuting Christians, whom he believed were politically tied to the Roman Empire. He strongly promoted Zoroastrianism as the national religion, and about 16,000 Christians died. The ruins of early churches have been found in areas around the Persian Gulf.

By the sixth century, the Church had expanded vastly throughout the area we know today as the unreached 10/40 Window. A traveler observed that Christianity had been preached among the Bactians, Huns, Persians, Medes, Elamites, Persarmenians, and Indians and that, the Church had spread from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea. But the East was not immune to the struggles of doctrine and identity that plagued the early Church fathers.

The teachings of a man named Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, were brought before the Church Council of Aphesis in 431 A.D. Nestorius taught that Christ had two separate natures or personalities, one human and one divine. One of his arguing points was that church liturgy should not refer to Mary as the “Mother of God” but rather “Mother of Christ.” The Council, however, concluded that indeed Christ was simultaneously fully God and fully human and thus declared Nestorius’ teaching wrong. Nestorius fled eastward, influencing the theological schools of the day. Slowly, his teaching infiltrated the Persian Church, which developed a similar hierarchy to the Roman Church. Instead of a Pope, it had a Patriarch with more limited powers. Assyrian Persian Christians today detest the term “Nestorian” and prefer other references, such as “Church of the East.”

### **D. MISSIONARY OUTREACH OF THE PERSIAN CHURCH**

Christianity in Iran was comprised mainly of the Syrian minority, known for its involvement in commerce. These Persian merchants were active in spreading the faith, as they traveled abroad and

traded with pagan peoples. The famous church historian, Latourette, said, "Christians in the Sassanian and Abassid realms were more active as missionaries than were Christians from any other land from the 5th to 16th centuries in which civil rulers were non-Christians." Notice the amazing results:

1. Churches, Christians, and bishops existed in all lands surrounding Iran.
2. Central Asia from the Caspian Sea to China was said to be predominantly Christian for two centuries.
3. In Singanfu, China, a large stone monument dated from 781 A.D. lists Persian and Chinese names along with a creed similar to the Apostles' Creed.
4. The Mar Thomas Church in South India, traditionally linked to the Apostle Thomas, has been traced by some to the influence of the Persian church's evangelism of southern India.
5. Persian outreach has impacted areas of Tibet, Vietnam, Korea, and possibly Japan.
6. Marco Polo mentioned the Christian communities which he encountered in his famous travels from Italy through the Middle East and central Asia to China in the 1200's.

The Arab influence over the Persian Empire beginning in the mid seventh century was slow yet permeating. With it came the dilution of the Persian Church. Under Muslim invaders from Arabia, the first persecutions were against the followers of the state religion which was replaced by Islam. Christians at times were even a protected minority.

## **E. THE DECLINE OF THE PERSIAN CHURCH**

Persecution against the Church eventually came in varying degrees from local and state leaders. Extra taxes were demanded of Christians. Conversion from Islam was prohibited. The cross was banned from public display. The 13th century invasion of Genghis Khan and his Mongol raiders almost eliminated the dying church from the face of Persia. Only a remnant survived, fleeing to the western mountains of Iran. Why did the Persian Church fail?

1. A perception arose that the truly spiritual people were those who lived in monasteries, separated from the world.
2. The Syriac language rather than vernacular Persian was the official language of the Persian Church.
3. The religious hierarchy of patriarchs and bishops drained the strength of the Church.
4. Doctrinal error weakened Church integrity.
5. Church fervor for dynamic witness was lost.

6. The Church could not remain politically loyal to the state.
7. Church standards were being compromised.
8. The cross could not be displayed.
9. Muslim men could marry Christians, but Christian men could not marry Muslims.

## **F. THE SINGANFU STONE**

The Anglican Church of St. Simon in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz houses a replica of the famous stone tablet of Singanfu, the former capital of China. The stone was discovered in 1623 A.D. This stone tablet was carved around 781 A.D. and is nine feet high, three and ½ feet wide, and one foot thick. It has some 1900 Chinese characters and 700 Syrian names with Chinese translations. (Exact replicas are also found in the Lateran Museum in Rome and Mount Koya in Japan.)

The stone records Persian and Chinese Christian activities following the arrival of the Persian missionary, Alopen, at the Court of the Emperor in 635 A.D. According to the Stone, the Emperor built a monastery for Alopen and 21 monks. (Alopen was his Chinese name. His Persian name was possibly Abraham or Yabh-allaha.) He was warmly received by the Chinese emperor Tai-tsung. Alopen was declared to be a highly virtuous man by the emperor who investigated “the way”. The emperor was convinced by his good character and truthfulness and gave orders for the propagation of his faith as well as translation of some of the scriptures into the Chinese language. In 1638 the first Christian church was built in the capital Changan which claimed to be the largest city in the world at that time. In the following years there is a record of at least eleven other such churches but there may have been many more. A reference which might have been exaggerated, states that there was a church in every district area of China which means there were 368 churches. Different Persian and Chinese documents show that these Chinese followers believed in the basic Christian doctrines such as original sin, the substitutionary atonement, the virgin birth, the cross, the Ten Commandments, repentance from eternal punishment, and salvation by faith not works. They knew they must be subject to governing authorities, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for widows and orphans.

The title of the stone was “A Monument Commemorating the Propagation of the Tachin (Syrian) Luminous Religion in China”. The entire English translation can be found at [www.jacobs-source.net/hesterian\\_stone\\_translation.html](http://www.jacobs-source.net/hesterian_stone_translation.html). Listed below is a poetic rendering of one section of the Stone:

One Holy Person of the Trinity, the Christ of God,  
the light of heaven and earth,  
As man appeared among the sons of men;  
concealed His glorious majesty and worth,  
The angels in the world above rejoiced:  
the vault of heaven rang with joy and mirth  
To shepherds watching in the fields at night  
they brought the tidings of His Holy birth



From a pure virgin by Divine command  
appeared the light that lighteneth man's days.  
A brilliant star proclaimed the glad event:  
in the far heaven shone its ardent blaze.  
The Persian Magi saw the effulgent star,

illuminating the sky like solar rays.  
Towards Bethlehem with joyful steps they sped  
to offer Him their precious gifts and praise.

Because of Persian missionaries, China received witness of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ for several centuries. Few hundred years after the Singanfu stone was inscribed the Christian community in China disappeared. Some probable reasons for this were the persecution of the church and possible religious, theological, mythology, and political problems. The book, A History of Christianity in Asia, volume I by Samuel Hugh Moffett gives the detailed historical background along with some sources.

#### **G. FURTHER RESOURCES ON PERSIA IN THE BIBLE AND CHURCH HISTORY:**

Pakizegi, Zarin Behravesih. History of the Christian in Iran. Wheaton, IL: William Carey Publishers. This book gives a history of the Persian Church from its ancient roots until today. Chapter 15 Persecuted for Christ in Persia: Past and Present tells of Christian martyrs under the Islamic republic from 1980 -1995. Orders may be obtained through Dr. Behzad Pakizegi, P.O. Box 600476, San Diego, CA 92160 or Phone: 610-283-0880.

Waterfield, Robin E. Christians in Persia. London: George Allen D Union LTD, 1973. This book provides a continuous narrative of Christians in Iran from the second century A.D. until 1970. Details are given of the rise and fall of the early Persian Church as well as later Roman Catholic and Protestant missionary ventures among Persians in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Yamauchi, Edwin M. Persia in the Bible. Grand Rapids: Baker Back House, 1990. A scholarly guide to the historical background of the Middle East and particularly Persia, Yamauchi's book contains over 100 photos along with archaeological information. This is an indispensable guide to understanding the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah.

Moffett, Samuel H. A History of Christianity in Asia volume I from the beginning to 1500 AD San Francisco: Harpor 1991. This scholarly 560 page book gives great details about this little known section of church history. Almost half of the book refers to the early Persian Christian church.

#### **H. MAKING A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

1. God has used Persian Christian believers in the past to evangelize much of Asia. If you are a Persian Christian believer and part of a Farsi speaking church, maybe God will give you and your church a burden and desire to spread the good news of Jesus Christ in places such as Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Languages such as Tajik, Dari,

and Hazai are very similar to the Farsi language. Are you willing to pray and reach out to the many different ethnic groups in Iran?

## CHAPTER 11

### STRATEGIC ROLE OF PERSIA IN FUTURE PROPHECY

Did you realize that Iran is mentioned in the Bible in connection with the events which will happen at the end of the world? Many of these events center around Israel when many nations of the world unite to try to eliminate Israel. Are you ready if these different catastrophic events should happen suddenly? Ezekiel chapter 37 refers to a valley full of “dry bones”. The prophet Ezekiel asked the Lord, “Can these bones live?” Then these bones were joined together. They had tendons put on them and then flesh covered with skin. Finally, breath is put into them and they come to life. The Lord gives the prophet an explanation, “I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back to their own land.” (Ezekiel 37:21) Even though prophecy was fulfilled when Israel was restored and became an official nation in 1948, the Jewish people are still like dry bones spiritually. One day God will put His spirit in them and “they will be my people and I will be their God.” (Ezekiel 37:23)

The restoration of the nation of Israel is described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Other nations are mentioned as well with Persia being eminent among them. That is why this future event is included.

#### A. HOW IS ISRAEL’S CONDITION DESCRIBED IN EZEKIEL 38?

1. They have been gathered from many nations and live in safety. (Ezekiel 38:8)
2. They are secure living in walled villages with no bars or gates. They think they are safe from all enemies. (Ezekiel 38:11)

#### B. WHAT MAJOR EVENT WILL TAKE PLACE AND WHERE DOES THE INVASION COMES FROM?

1. There will be an invasion of Israel.  
“After many days you will be called to arms. In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them live in safety.” (Ezekiel 38:8)
2. The invasion of a great army comes from the north. (Ezekiel 38:15)

#### C. WHICH COUNTRIES MAKE UP THIS INVADING ARMY?

1. Most of the nations which existed in the time of Ezekiel have ancient names. This makes it hard to identify those which have modern names now. Most evangelical commentators identify them as follows:

- a. Gog - land of Magog. (Ezekiel 38:2) Magog was the second son of Japheth (Genesis 10:1,2) and evidently, what formerly would be called the southern area of the USSR. The chief prince (Rosh) Meshech and Tubal are parts of the USSR.
  - b. Persia - present-day Iran. (Ezekiel 38:5) This is the only nation whose identity is agreed on by 100% of the commentaries, since its ancient name is still the same name today.
  - c. Cush (Ezekiel 38:5) - This is either the present day region south of Egypt, present day Ethiopia, or refers to the region of east central Babylonia. Libya - present day Libya, or the region south or southeast of Cush, or present day Syria, or Iraq.
  - d. Gomer - evidently, Germany. (Ezekiel 38:6)
  - e. (Beth Togarmah - Turkey, Armenia, or central Asia. (Ezekiel 38:6)
2. Many other nations join those countries listed above.

**D. WHAT ARE SOME OTHER PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE REFERRED TO BY MOST COMMENTARIES WHICH DESCRIBE THIS ATTACK ON ISRAEL? MANY CALL THIS THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON.**

1. King of South (Daniel 11:25-44)
2. King of the East (Rev. 16:12)
3. A confederation of ten nations evidently from the west (Daniel 7:23-26; Revelation 13:1-3; 17:8-14)

**E. HOW DOES THIS ARMY OF THE NORTH COME AGAINST ISRAEL? (EZEKIEL 38)**

1. It will descend like a storm. (Ezekiel 38:9)
2. It will plunder and loot a defenseless land. (Ezekiel 38:12)
3. It will come upon horses (literal horses, or is this a symbol to show it is a mighty force?) (Ezekiel 38:15)

**F. WHAT IS THE OUTCOME OF THE BATTLE?**

1. God is against Gog and the other nations including Persia.  
 “Son of man, set your face against God, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal; prophesy against him.” (Ezekiel 38:2)  
  
 “Son of man, prophesy against God and say: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against you, O God, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.” (Ezekiel 39:1)
2. God’s zeal and fiery wrath are directed against the nations.  
 “In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel.” (Ezekiel 38:19)

3. There are great natural disasters including an earthquake, rain, a hailstorm, and burning sulfur.  
 “The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man’s sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him.” (Ezekiel 38:20-22)
4. It takes months to bury the dead.  
 “For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land. All the people of the land will bury them, and the day I am glorified will be a memorable day for them, declares the Sovereign Lord.” (Ezekiel 39:12-13)
5. The nations are completely defeated.  
 “On the mountains of Israel you will fall, you and all your troops and the nations with you. I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals. You will fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord.” (Ezekiel 39:4-5)
6. The war materials will be burned for fuel for seven years.  
 “Then those who live in the towns of Israel will go out and use the weapons for fuel and burn them up –the small and large shields, the bows and arrows, the war clubs and spears. For seven years they will use them for fuel.” (Ezekiel 39:9)

**G. WHEN DOES THIS BATTLE TAKE PLACE?**

1. Latter days, last days. (Ezekiel 38:8,14,16)
2. Many equate this judgement of the nations with Armageddon. (Revelation 16:16)

**H. IN CONNECTION WITH THE EVENTS OF THE LAST DAYS WHERE DOES THIS BATTLE FIT IN?**

1. For those who hold a pre-millennial theological position there are five possibilities:
  - a. Before the rapture of the church.
  - b. Middle of the seven-year tribulation.
  - c. End of the seven-year tribulation when the Lord comes with His saints to rule.
  - d. Beginning of the millennium.
  - e. End of millennium.
2. Considering all the facts, the author who holds theologically to the pre-tribulation rapture of the Church followed by seven years of tribulation on the earth feels that this battle will be in the middle of the tribulation for the following reasons:
  - a. Israel is dwelling in its own land (Ezekiel 38:8).

- b. The Jews are in peace, secure possibly from the promise of the beast or anti-Christ giving guarantees. (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 13:1-10).
- c. The times called latter or last days refer to the times of tribulation, the seven years when God deals with His people Israel again.
- d. If one interprets Daniel 11:41 as referring to the occupation of the land of Palestine by the beast, then this invasion causes him to break his covenant with Israel.
- e. Passages like Revelation 7:4-17 show that many Jews and Gentiles will be saved during the tribulation period. Ezekiel 38:23; 39:21-22 mention how this event was used for the spiritual salvation of many, too.
- f. In Revelation 19:20 we are told that the Lord will deal specifically with the beast and false prophet at His coming. Evidently, the king of the North (or the Assyrian as he is called sometimes in Isaiah 30:31-33; 31:8,9; Micah 5:5) must have been judged already.

## **I. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

1. What should a Christian's attitude be as he studies prophecy, and sees signs of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ? Look at Daniel's example in Daniel 9:1-19 when the prophecy concerning the 70 years' captivity was fulfilled and King Cyrus permitted the Jews return to Jerusalem. Notice how he fasted, prayed, confessed sin, and trusted in God's great mercy as he saw fulfilled prophecy!
2. In light of the knowledge that the world may be involved in a global conflict, what responsibility do we have to spread the good news of the gospel now?
3. The prophecies concerning the establishment of the Persian Empire under King Cyrus have been fulfilled. The many prophecies concerning Jesus Christ such as the city where he would be born, his virgin birth, and his death by crucifixion were also predicted hundreds of years before they happened in the Bible. Are you ready to believe that the Bible is the holy book sent from God?

## CHAPTER 12

### UNDERSTANDING BIBLE CUSTOMS THROUGH PERSIAN CULTURE

Those of you who were born and raised in Iran already know of most of the customs mentioned in this chapter. However, those of you who were born outside of Iran or left Iran as a child may not realize that many of the customs and aspects of living in the Bible are clearly seen in Iran. As a person coming from outside the Persian culture and living in Iran from 1962-1978 it helped me tremendously in understanding different parts of the scriptures.

Let's look at some aspects of the culture:

#### THE HOME

##### A. THE ROOF

1. Is the roof of the place where you are living flat and does your house have a wall around it? In Deuteronomy 22:8 God was interested in safety and commanded that a low wall (parapet) be built on the flat roof so that no one would be guilty of bloodshed if someone fell off the roof. Since most of the roofs of the houses in Iran were flat, they had walls on the outer edges.
2. Is grass growing on your roof? (Psalm 129:6; Isaiah 37:27). Seed falls on the flat mud village roofs in Iran, sprouts, and is green for a short season until the hot summer sun scorches it. God's enemies may prosper at first, but they soon are scorched and wither away.
3. Is your roof leaking? (Proverbs 19:13; 27:15) The constant dripping of water is compared to a quarrelsome wife.
4. How do you spend your time on your roof? In Acts 10:9 Peter prayed on the roof. However, in II Samuel 11:2 David commits adultery in his heart by watching Bathsheba bathe on her roof.
5. Do you need an extra bedroom? The roof is a good place to put extra guests in the summer. (I Samuel 9:25-27) In Tehran and many other cities many people sleep on the roof or the balcony in the summer to catch the cool breezes coming from the Alborz mountains to the north. I can remember sleeping many nights on balconies and occasionally on roofs during our time in Iran.

##### B. OTHER SECTIONS OF THE HOUSE

1. Christ used the upper room for his Last Supper. (Luke 22:7-14) In a culture where hospitality is important, a special room is often set aside for guests even when the living quarters are tight. Frequently, this was a room upstairs in a home. In previous

American culture they had a “parlor room” which was set aside for a meal with guests. However this is rarely true today.

2. Jesus tells a story in Luke 11:5-8 about a traveler arriving at a friend's house at midnight asking for bread. Did the people in this parable live in one room? (Luke 11:5-7) A census in the 1970's showed that at that time 40 percent of Iranians in Tehran lived in one room.
3. Thieves can break through mud walls. (Matthew 6:19) The walls in the villages in Iran are still made with mud.
4. When we first arrived in Iran we were told to make sure to sit in the chairs closest to the door when we visited in a home where people were gathered. Then the host might ask us to move up to a place further away from the door. The place farthest from the door would be the place of honor. Of course, there is much polite talk about whether or not one should move up. Luke 14:7-11 talks about the religious leaders in Jesus' time going into a room and immediately sitting farthest from the door in the chief place of honor. Jesus warned these leaders that this showed their pride and that they would be humbled if someone more important came into the room and they were forced to go to a less important seat. Some feel that the most important seat was the farthest one from the door because one would not be bothered by cold breezes coming in through the door in cold weather or people walking in front as they came into the room.

## C. FOOD AND BUYING

### 1. BARGAINING

- a. What is it worth? (Proverbs 20:14) People in most countries in the world including Iran bargain over prices. The buyer generally knows the accepted price, but the buyer and seller argue back and forth until they come to a fair price. In the American culture the only accepted time to bargain is when we buy something at a garage sale or purchase a new house.
- b. In many parts of the world such as Iran the rich are expected to pay more for a product than the poor. Being an American, it was hard for me to understand that bargaining and paying a higher price is acceptable. I tried to buy some cloth one time and went to many different stores in Tehran to find out what was the accepted price. One store tried to charge me almost double the price for the cloth I wanted. I drove away in my car thinking that shop keeper must be dishonest because he wanted double the price from me since I was a Westerner. After driving several miles, I realized that I had left my briefcase there. That same briefcase had the passports and work permits of several of my friends as well as some blank checks and savings account information. With great fear I returned to the shop which I thought was “dishonest”. I asked the shop keeper, “Did you see my briefcase?” The man said, “Oh yes. I kept it here.” He gave it to me. To my great joy as I looked inside everything was there. I was so happy that I wanted to give him a reward, but he said, “No. I felt obligated to protect your property because it was in my shop. I am an honest man.” Bargaining is a way of enjoyment and life in

many countries. You find instances of this even in the Bible.

- c. Did Abraham bargain in a subtle way when he bought a burial plot for Sarah? (Genesis. 23:3-16) At first glance the negotiations between Abraham and Evron, the Hittite, seem like a normal conversation with Evron being very generous in offering to give the land away. However, that was not the case.

Abraham talked to the Hittite in a general way telling him that he needed a burial plot for the dead. The Hittite responded in a polite way telling him, "Pick whichever tomb you want". Abraham already had his eye on the piece of land he wanted and asked Evron to sell him the cave of Machpelah at the end of his field. When Abraham asked the price of the burial site, Evron replied, "Not only will I give you the cave but I will also give you the field". Then in front of witnesses he said, "But the land is worth 400 shekels of silver and why should that hold us up?" Abraham took the hint and paid 400 shekels of silver according to the coinage standard set by the merchants.

Recent archaeological discoveries which revealed prices of land in the area show that Abraham really paid a very high price for the burial site since he needed to bury Sarah and was desperate. Also, according to some ancient records, since he owned the field and the trees as well as the cave he was responsible for paying the taxes due on the land. If he had just purchased the cave he would not have had to pay taxes. Did Abraham get taken?

#### **D. FOOD AND WATER**

1. Bread is the "staff of life". (Matthew 6:11; John 6:35) How true this is for the poor in Iran who survive by eating the nourishing bread sold at a cheap price because of the government's subsidy.
2. When bread is first cooked it is hot and delicious. One of the joys of living in Iran was having fresh baked bread at almost every meal. Baking of bread in villages over hot coals has continued for 1000's of years. (I Kings 19:6)
3. Sometimes in Iran when a Christian visited a home or even a restaurant as a courtesy he would be served a meal. However, since Christians are considered to be "unclean", his dishes would be ceremonially washed or even broken after he left. Jesus in his teachings said that he has fulfilled the Old Testament laws about clean and unclean food. No longer are there clean and unclean food. Rather people are unclean because of the bad things coming from their hearts such as bad thoughts of sexual immorality, lying, and stealing.

"After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.") He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander,



arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”  
(Mark 7:17-23)

## **E. EATING**

1. Wash your hands! Have someone pour water over them. (2 Kings 3:11)
  - a. In some of the villages I visited in the Kermanshan area water was very precious. There were irrigation ditches being supplied by pumped water from the river. Each farmer was allowed to have one hour’s worth of water to help irrigate his crops. There was a person responsible to stop the water after an hour and direct it to another irrigation ditch for another farmer to get his water. I was told that there are more fights and court cases over water rights than any other legal matter because water was so precious. This helps one understand the meaning of Proverbs 21:1 which states, “The king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.” The word “watercourse” really means irrigation ditches. God is the one who is in control of governments. He can control kings, presidents, dictators, and religious rulers so that the final result will be for his own honor and glory, just as water can be directed in the irrigation ditches.

## **F. HOSPITALITY**

1. Compel your guests to attend! (Luke 14:23; Acts 16:15) How important it is for Iranians to have guests and how honored they are when guests visit! There is a popular saying that “a guest is a gift of God.”
2. Each place at a banquet table shows a person’s position. (Matthew 22:8-14; Luke 14:7-11; Matthew 23:6) Usually, the head of the table was the highest position and the closest seat to the door the lowest one. As a guest in a Persian home you would sit in the lowest position close to the door until asked to move to a different seat.
3. A Persian proverb states, “A guest is a gift of God.” (Genesis 18:1; Romans 12:13) The word hospitality literally means “love to strangers.” (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8) It was an important requirement for all Christians and especially, the church leaders to be hospitable. If you are a church leader, are you willing to have guests, especially Christian workers, in your home?
4. After spending our first five years in Iran, my wife and I returned to her home city, Ventnor, New Jersey. Around lunch time we went to visit her pastor. He is a man my wife and I have greatly respected. He was the one who presented the good news of salvation when my wife Diane accepted Jesus as her Savior at the age of 11. Also, he was the one who married us. Over the years he prayed for us faithfully, wrote notes, and prayed for our Iranian friends. He set an example of a godly and holy life through his entire 94 years until he died in October 2001 and is now with his Savior in heaven. In spite of all of this background, he was still an American and did many things the American way. When we arrived at his house about noontime, the dear brother said, “Allyn and Diane, it’s so good to see you. Welcome back. Excuse me but we are eating lunch right now. Could you come back in an hour?” That is American culture. We went back in an hour and enjoyed the fellowship together. However, in Iran if a

friend or even a stranger came to your house at meal time you would immediately invite him in. If there was not enough food you would run out and buy more food for him.

5. Suppose you were on an interstate highway in Germany or America and had a flat tire with no spare tire. What would you do? One time in Iran our family traveled from Tehran past Ghom on our way to Isfahan. On a lonely stretch of highway I had a flat tire and when I looked in my car trunk the spare was flat as well. We were about 50 miles from a city where a flat could be repaired. It was hot and my wife and my three children were in the car. What could I do? Knowing Persian hospitality, I flagged down the next car and asked the driver if I could borrow his spare tire. He said that I could and waited while I put his spare tire on my car. We both drove to the next city where I had both of my flats repaired and gave him back his tire. Interestingly enough, just the opposite had happened to me several weeks before. On my return trip to visit believers in Semman. I was stopped by someone who asked to borrow my spare tire. It was good to be in a country where people helped each other, even strangers.

## CHAPTER 13

### A PERSIAN PERSPECTIVE ON CHRISTMAS

Since you are reading this book in Farsi you probably understand the customs and life in the Middle East and have a knowledge of the rich background of Iranian culture and history. You are able to understand the story of the birth of Jesus Christ and the Christian celebration at Christmas more than those who live in the western world. Originally, God gave the prophets all the words he wanted in the Old Testament in Hebrew and the ones in the New Testament in Greek. However, in translating words into another language such as English, German, or Japanese, it is often hard to translate a word or concept to give the true meaning of a custom. As we look at the Christmas story there are some different things listed below which you might want to share with an English speaking friend. You can go to the web site at <[www.farsinet.com/persiansinbible/](http://www.farsinet.com/persiansinbible/)> and download this section in English which was my original writing and pass it on to your English speaking friend around Christmas time. Even though I made some changes before this section was translated into Farsi, the text is the same basically.

#### A. MARY - HER RELATION TO JOSEPH

1. Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:27 in the English translations state that Mary was pledged to be married (NIV) or espoused (King James) or betrothed (NASV) or engaged to be married (LB) to Joseph. The problem with any English translation is that there is no word in English which can be used to translate accurately Mary's relationship to Joseph.
2. In the West usually there are three steps in a relationship - first friendship, then engagement and then marriage. The engagement is entered into by both the man and woman, but can be broken by just one of the parties involved. This can cause bad feelings for the one who is 'jilted'. In some cases both parties agree to break the engagement. Marriage is the time when the two become husband and wife legally and go and live together. The marriage can be broken only by legal proceedings called a divorce.
3. Usually the three steps in Iranian culture are engagement, aghd, and marriage.
  - a. ENGAGEMENT (namzad) can be arranged by the parents for their children at an early age or later on when they are in their teens or early twenties. Nowadays in modern Iran there are a few who get engaged independently on their own or the girl may be allowed to have "veto" privilege. An engagement can be broken but this is rare, since it is hard on one's "abru" (reputation) especially, for the girl because some would think of her as being "second hand."
  - b. AGHD is the legal ceremony with the Mullah (a religious Muslim leader). Usually, a government official comes to register this event or the couple might go

to the registration office. Since it is both a legal religious and government contract, various conditions are written down such as the dowry amount which is the amount given to the parents, the amount which will be paid if there is a divorce, etc.. Once an “aghd” takes place, it can be broken only by legal proceedings such as a divorce. The couple does not live together until after the next step, the marriage, which may be right away or after several years. Often the couple cannot live together until the man saves enough money to set up the house, finish his military service, or finish his education. This is probably the relationship Joseph had with Mary since Joseph wanted to divorce Mary privately when he heard about her expecting a baby.

- c. **MARRIAGE (Arusi)** - is the secular celebration with a meal, party, or a series of parties. Customs vary in different parts of Iran, but after this celebration the couple live together for the first time. Usually, it is important on the wedding night for the bride to prove she was a virgin. According to custom, in order to protect marriage the wife must be a virgin at the time of marriage. This principle comes from the Bible in Deuteronomy 22:13-22. Here the scripture states that after a man marries and then slanders his wife saying that she was not a virgin when he married her, the mother and father were to bring proof that she was a virgin to the town elders. If the elders accepted the proof the man would be fined 100 shekels of silver for bringing false charges against his wife. However, if the man’s charges that the woman had sexual relations before marriage were true, according to the law, as found in verse 21, she was to be stoned to death. After the angel appeared to Joseph, the Bible says, “Joseph took unto him his wife, and knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son.” Joseph never had sexual relations with Mary until after Jesus was born.

## **B. MARY- A VIRGIN**

Isaiah 7:14 predicted that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. The Gospels tell of the angel Gabriel visiting the virgin Mary. Matthew 1:23 and Luke 1:34 confirm that Mary was a virgin.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14)

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” – which means, “God with us.” (Matthew 1:23)

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34)

1. In Persian there are three words which could have the meaning of the English word “virgin”.
  - a. Bakereh which is an Arabic derivation now used in Christian religious terms. This word for virgin is used in the official Persian translation of the Bible.
  - b. Dokhtar which means a daughter or a girl or a virgin. When this word is used in

talking about a girl, it is assumed automatically in the Middle East that the girl is a virgin since she isn't married yet, that is, unless some negative word is added. This word is used in the new Persian translation. In the Persian to English Khayam Dictionary in the month of Mehr 1341 "dokhtar" is translated into English as "a girl" and "a virgin."

- c. Doosheeze - is the word used for "Miss" and means a maiden or a virgin. An English teacher in a Persian school related that some of her students didn't want to be called a "Khanom" which means lady, but rather a "doosheeze." In the Persian to English Khayam Dictionary "doosheeze" is translated into English "a maiden" and a "virgin."
2. As one looks in the Persian to Persian or Persian to English dictionaries these three words are interchangeable in their meaning of virgin. You see, in the Middle East an unmarried girl is assumed to be a virgin and so, words pertaining to Miss and girl can be for a virgin as well. The words for virginity - dohktari, doosheezege, and bakereh - have basically the same meaning. The Greek culture around the New Testament time was quite different. There was much sexual immorality. Because of this the Greeks had a specific word for virgin, another word for daughter, and another for unmarried woman. Unfortunately, because of the influence of Western morals and the basic sinfulness of man, some of these standards are beginning to break down in Iranian society today.
3. Therefore, any translator translating the Scriptures into English would have no choice but to use the word virgin in Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; and Luke 1:27, to convey the proper meaning to the English reader. Using young woman, as some translations have, is at best a translation from one who does not understand the culture of the Bible and Middle East, or at worst from someone who is putting his liberal theological prejudice into his translation. For other aspects of the virgin birth, see standard works such as J. Gresham Machen's, The Virgin Birth of Christ.

### C. THE TRIP TO BETHLEHEM (Luke 2:1-6)

1. **Why did Mary go with Joseph to register in Bethlehem for the Roman census when she was so close to delivering her baby?** Perhaps women had to be present personally to register, or she wanted to be away from her home city and the gossip, or she wanted to be with her husband, Joseph.
2. **Did Mary ride a donkey to Bethlehem?** Almost every picture of this event in the West shows Mary riding on a donkey and Joseph leading the donkey. The scripture is silent on this point. Even if they did have a donkey would Mary have ridden on it or would it have been used to carry basic household furnishings, Joseph's carpenter tools, and bedding? Their journey took at least three days. Maybe they had several donkeys or perhaps they both walked leading the donkey carrying the heavy load.

### D. THE MANGER SCENE (Luke 2:7)

1. **Was the lodging in the stable free?** Many years ago I watched a Christmas play put on by Iranian Christians. In this scene Joseph and the innkeeper haggled over the price

of using the stable because it was a better place to stay, since it was private.

2. **Was the stable really better than the inn?** Probably there were no private rooms in the inn except for the wealthy. Joseph and Mary were poor common people. Many travelers slept in the same room and most of them were men. If you were a woman would you like a room full of men observe the birth of your first child? How could the shepherds have come in the middle of the night to see the baby if it had been born in a crowded inn room? They would not have been able to. Also, if they had been in the inn with men traveling far from home, there were probably prostitutes, swearing, and much sexual immorality.
3. **Was the stable clean? Have you ever been in a stable?** I'm sure Mary and Joseph did the best they could to provide a healthy environment.
4. **What are swaddling clothes (King James, cloth in NIV)?** If you were born in Iran, were you wrapped in swaddling clothes? Some children who are born in Iran today are wrapped tightly in these special clothes. Sometimes only the feet are wrapped. In the villages often the arms are bound initially, too. Two of our daughters who were born in the Persian Maternity Hospital in Tehran in 1965 and 1970 had their feet and legs bound while they were in the hospital.

#### **E. THE SHEPHERDS (Luke 2:8-20)**

Shepherds in Iran have one of the lowest paid professions. Often they watch sheep and goats which belong to someone else, and many of them are very poor. However, God saw fit to give the good news of the Savior's birth to shepherds. They probably felt at ease at the stable when they visited the baby Jesus. Jesus was born for all classes of men.

#### **F. THE NAMING OF JESUS ON THE EIGHTH DAY (Luke 2:21 Cf. 1:59-65)**

In Iran occasionally the child is named on a later day such as the eighth day. It was on the eighth day that John the Baptist was named. When I asked an Iranian friend why they do this, he replied that many babies die in infancy and so, why waste a good name! Let several days pass and then name the child to make sure he will live. Also, the name Jesus had a meaning – Savior. In Iran almost all personal names have meanings.

#### **G. THE WISE MEN OR MAGI (Matthew 2:1-12)**

1. **Who were the Magi or wise men?** Magi, the Greek word, is derived from a Persian word which meant a caste of wise men specializing in astrology (study of the stars), medicine, and natural science. During this time Zoroastrianism was the national Persian religion and there was much emphasis on the study of the heavens.
2. **Where did the Magi come from?** The Bible says they came from the east. The present-day countries of Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Iran are east of Jerusalem. Three Iranian cities called Saveh, Hamadan, and Reziyah each claim that the wise men originated there.
3. **How did they know the star was a sign?** There could be several reasons. They could

have been curious to find out what the star meant, but who would take a long trip just out of curiosity? Perhaps God in His sovereignty revealed this to them so there would be Gentiles (non- Jews) acknowledging the birth of the Savior. Perhaps they learned about the star through the witness of the scattered Jews who remained in Iran after the others returned from the Babylonian captivity. They may have talked about their hope of the Messiah, especially Daniel's prophecies like Daniel 9, which gives the approximate date of the coming and death of the promised Messiah or a prophecy like Numbers 24:17. "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel."

4. **Why was Herod troubled at the coming of the Magi?** Of course, he was afraid when he heard they were looking for the king of the Jews. Did you think that he might have thought about a possible future political alliance between the kingdoms of Armenia and the Persian Empire which were on the edges of the Roman Empire?
5. **Have you thought about the "humbling" act of the Magi?** Just think, these distinguished men after they gave their gifts, worshiped a tiny baby of a different nationality in a poor home! Have you dedicated your time, money and spiritual gifts to serve and worship our Lord Jesus? Matthew 2:11 says they came into the house which Joseph evidently rented in Bethlehem after the initial birth in a stable. Joseph probably worked at his trade as a carpenter to support his family. Some feel that Christ may have been as old as two years since King Herod ordered all babies two years and younger to be killed. How big was the house? During the 1975 census taken in Tehran, 40 percent of the population still lived in one-room houses, 30 percent in two rooms, and 30 percent in three rooms or more.

## H. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Think of the beauty of the Christmas story and its uniqueness - a Roman census, manger, shepherds, virgin birth, poverty, magi. It must be God-given for man never would have been able to invent such a story!
2. Do you just know the facts of the Christmas story? Have you personally accepted this Jesus Christ as your own Savior? The word "Jesus" means Savior. That name was given because he would save his people from their sins.

## CHAPTER 14

### PRESENCE OF CHRISTIAN GROUPS IN PERSIA FROM 30 A.D. TILL NOW

In Chapter 10, Far Reaching Effects of Pentecost: Persian Missionaries, we mentioned the early church which began after Persian Jews who accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah, on the Day of Pentecost returned to Iran. On the day of Pentecost the disciple, Peter, preached giving many examples from the Old Testament of the promises of the Messiah to come. Finally, in Acts 2:36-37, he said, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?" Although the church peaked and then declined, there are still about 35,000 ethnic Assyrians today who live in Iran and trace their roots back to the early Christian church in Iran.

The largest group of current professing Christians in Iran today is made up of about 190,000 Armenians. This is an ethnical group of people, not to be confused with the doctrinal teaching imitated by Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) called Arminianism which opposed some of the doctrines of Calvinism in Europe.

#### A. THE ARMENIANS

The Armenian people's last names end with a "yan" or "ian" usually. Their origin is traced back to the country of Armenia, an area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Previously, Armenia was a province of the USSR, but now it is a separate country. During its early history it was the first country in the world to embrace Christianity officially.

There has been a strong Christian witness in Armenia since the first century. Gregory, the Illuminator, as he was called, was from the royal family. After he became a Christian he persuaded King Tirdat to accept Christianity around 300 AD. From then on, the king and nobles supported Christianity. Pagan shrines were transformed into churches and there were conversions "en masse." Some call this a "people's movement." Harold W. Cook in his book, Historical Patterns of Church Growth, published by Moody Press refers to this movement as one of five "people's movements" picked from significant movements throughout church history where entire groups of people became Christians. Around 400 AD, the Bible was translated into the Armenian language.

Now almost 1,700 years later Armenians continue to profess Christianity. However, much of their Christianity is centered in Armenian nationalism along with a nominal acceptance of Christian truths. Such a rapid wholesale conversion of so many at one time must have been superficial, but slowly Christian beliefs, customs, and traditions were passed on to the people.

Situated between the Persian and Roman Empires, Armenia became a buffer zone invaded different times by both empires. The Armenians struggled to keep their own national identity and consequently, did not have much of a missionary outreach. Later on they were invaded by the Turks and Mongols and were attacked by various Islamic forces.



In 1604, the king of Iran, Shah Abbas, who ruled over Armenia forced masses of Armenian people to leave Armenia and go to Iran. About 120,000 settled near the Caspian Sea and around Tabriz. About 75,000 settled on the south bank of the River Zayandehrud near Isfahan. They built a settlement called New Julfa which is still an Armenian section of Isfahan today. There were many craftsmen and tradesmen among the Armenians which is why the Shah Abbas wanted them in his kingdom.

According to the book, Christians in Persia, in 1629 King Shah Abbas passed a law that any Christian who became a Muslim could claim the property of any of his relations back to at least four generations. Many Christians denounced their faith (one estimate said 50,000), but only a few of these were Armenians. One persecution after another swept over the Armenian church.

The final great persecution of the Armenians occurred during World War I in the northwest corner of Iran when the Armenians and the Assyrians were caught between the forces of the Russians and the Turks. The Muslim Turks and Kurds literally slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Christians. Many fled from this area to central and southern Iran for safety.

Today 3,378,000 Armenians live in Armenia which formerly was part of Russia. Older Armenians living in Iran and other countries often desire to return their homeland to die. The Patriarch of the Armenian Orthodox Church (Gregorian) lives in Armenia.

## **B. MISSIONARY HISTORY AND OUTREACH TO IRAN BEFORE THE 20TH CENTURY**

### **1. Roman Catholics**

The Roman Catholics were the first to send missionaries to minister to the nominal Christian communities of the Armenians and Assyrians since they had some similarities in doctrine and organization. These Eastern churches always had contact with the Church of Rome and by the 1300's a minority among these Christians claimed allegiance to Rome.

During the 1600's there was a resurgence of missionary activity. Today among the 160,000 Armenians in Iran most are still part of the Armenian Apostolic Church, called the Gregorian Church, but about 2000 claim to be part of the Armenian Catholic Church.

The Catholics were more successful in their work among the Assyrians. The Assyrian Church of the East claims a membership of 13,500 families while the Assyrians Catholics claim about 14,000 communicant members.

### **2. Church of England**

Henry Martyn, a godly young Anglican priest, sailed from England to India in the early 1800' s. While there he did translation work in some of the languages including Persian. Later he traveled to the city of Shiraz in Iran to finish translating the Persian New Testament and presented a copy to Fath-Ali Shah in Tehran in 1811. Martyn died in Turkey on his way home to England when he was in his early 30's. He had fulfilled his own motto, "Let me burn out for God."

The Church of England ministered in the southern part of Iran mainly in cities such as Isfahan, Shiraz, Kerman, and Ahwaz. Their missionaries concentrated on reaching the Muslims and Jews. The Church of England in Iran belongs to the Near East Council of Churches and through its connection with the Anglicans is a member of the World Council of Churches.

### **3. Presbyterian Church**

The first missionaries under the American Board of Commissioners (Presbyterian and Congregational Churches) went to Iran in 1832. Originally, they worked among the Assyrians in Rezayieh hoping to promote a spiritual awakening among these nominal Christians. However, when a revival took place with some of the nominal Christians being born again, these believers were forced to leave the ancient church. As a result, the Evangelical Church came into existence in 1855. The Presbyterians limited their work to the northern part of the country in such cities as Tabriz, Rezayieh, Tehran, Hamadan, Kermanshah, Rasht, and Mashad.

In 1978 there were 18 congregations and 12 ordained ministers with a membership of 2,897 in the Iranian Synod of which 55 percent were Assyrians, 21 percent were Armenians, and 24 percent were Jews and Muslims converted to Christianity. Originally, the Presbyteries were formed in different geographical areas, but recently, were reorganized according to language groups. In addition, the Presbyterians started various schools which were nationalized later on. The church is a member of the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Near East Council of Churches.

### **4. Other Christian Outreaches in Iran**

In giving just a few highlights of some of the other outreaches in Iran, I would like to mention Dr. Sa'eed born in 1863. He was a Persian physician from a Kurdish background who accepted Christ in Iran, went to Europe to receive further education, particularly in the area of eye care, and then returned to Iran. He served Christ faithfully until he died in 1942. His witness to all Iranians and his godly life was well-known to all. His life story has been written in Farsi and English in the book "Beloved Physician". It can be ordered from [www.farsinet.com/ici](http://www.farsinet.com/ici) or [www.farsinet.com/pwo](http://www.farsinet.com/pwo).

Various charismatic groups from Sweden and later the United States have ministered in Iran. There are Assembly of God churches scattered in many of the major cities in Iran with their own bishops and pastors. During the past years several of their leaders have been martyred for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Other interdenominational agencies, such as Campus Crusade, International Missions (Christar), Child Evangelism, Operational Mobilization, and others labored faithfully over the years in Iran, too. The Southern Baptists missions in Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution were primarily among the ex-patriots English speaking community. An exerted outreach to the Jewish population of Iran dates back to the early 1800' s. For more information, refer to a book written by Mrs. Pakizegi entitled History of the Christians in Iran. This gives a full history of the Christian church in Iran.

## C. HISTORY OF THE PERSIAN TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Kenneth J. Thomas and his article, ‘History of the Persian Translation of the Bible’, which was published in Encyclopedia Iranica. This article gives a list of translations from the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the present day Iran.

For example, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century a Christian leader John Chrysostom around AD 391 wrote, ‘the doctrines of Christ had been translated into the languages of the Syrians, Egyptians, the Indians, Persians, and the Ethiopians.’ Also, in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century some ancient documents, Psalms 94-99, and Psalms 119-136 were written in the ancient Pahlavi script which has been translated from the Syriac.

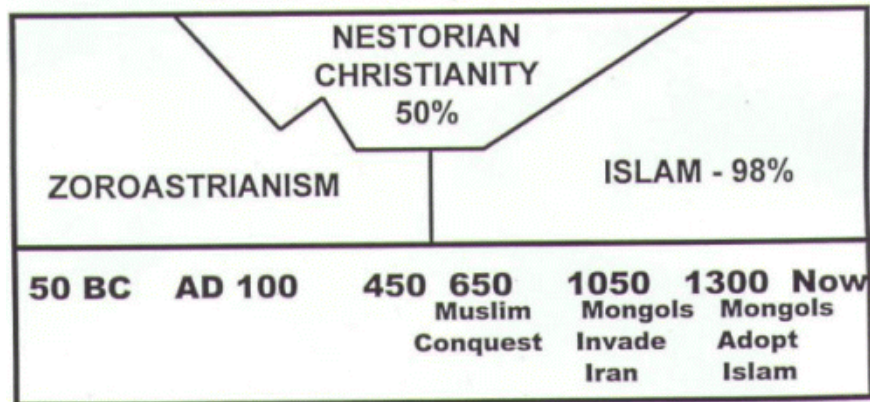
The article by Dr. Thomas gives a detailed list of the many translations completed through the centuries. For example, in 1814 the New Testament was translated by Henry Martin, chaplain of the Eastern India Company, with the help of Mirza Sayd Ali Khan of Shiraz and was published in St. Petersburg by the Russian Bible Society in 1814.

The current Bible translations in use in Iran today are:

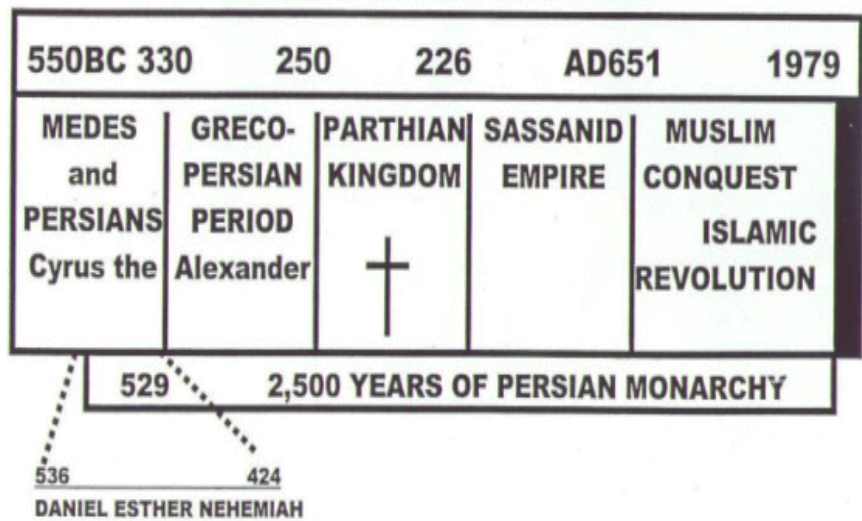
1. The Standard Bible translation which was translated from Hebrew and Greek with revisions was first printed in 1895 and published by the British Foreign Bible Society. Recently, in 1996 it was reprinted by Elam Ministries for better reading through modern typesetting since in the original edition the ‘kaf’ and the ‘gaf’ could not be distinguished. Punctuation marks, section headings and cross-references were included, too.
2. In 1976 the New Testament, Today’s English Version, was translated into modern Persian from the Greek text.. It was published in Tehran by the Bible Society of Iran.
3. Using the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, a new commentary edition of the New Testament was printed in 1979 and the entire Bible in 1995 by the International Bible Society.

Currently, several translating projects are in process to produce a clear, accurate and up-to-date Farsi translation.

**RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE PERSIANS**



**POLITICAL HISTORY OF PERSIANS**



## CHAPTER 15

### PERSECUTED FOR CHRIST IN PERSIA: PAST AND PRESENT

Persecution - physical abuse, no, that's not for me! However, read this verse. "Or it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him." (Philippians 1:29) Suffering for the Persian church in Iran is part of the normal Christian life of the believers. That's right, those who live in the western world might be subject to verbal abuse occasionally because of their faith, but that's nothing compared to what believers in most of the world face when they are abused verbally, physically, and even martyred.

#### A. HERE IS THE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE!

Jesus, in the Beatitudes, said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil things against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in Heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets which were before you." (Matthew 5:11, 12)

Hebrews 11 is known as the great chapter of faith and tells us that by faith Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and others saw great miracles wrought by God as they served and followed Him and as God delivered them. However, have you ever noticed the last part of the chapter beginning at verse 35? It says, "Others were tortured and refused to be released so that they might be in a better resurrection. Some faced jeers, flogging, while others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they were put to death by the sword. They went around in sheep skins and goat skins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the ground."

Why does God allow such persecution? A vibrant church such as the Persian church is often purified by intense persecution. When Christians are persecuted to the point of martyrdom, God uses this to bring others to himself. Old Testament people who were martyred include Abel (Genesis 4:8) and Zechariah (2 Chronicles 20:22, Matthew 23:35). If we look in the New Testament we find the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:57-60). Peter had a marvelous escape from prison as he was helped by angels (Acts 12). However, in the same chapter James, the brother of John, was put to death by King Herod. God's purpose was accomplished for both of them. Revelation 7:9-14 tells us about a multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language who came out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes white with the blood of the lamb.

#### B. PERSECUTION OF PERSIAN BELIEVERS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Robin E. Wakefield in his book, Christians in Persia, on pages 19 and 21 gives examples of how the Persian believers were persecuted in the early centuries.

"In 340 the Persian king Shapur informed church leaders they must pay the taxes they collect from Christians." When the Christian leader Simon Bar Sabbae refused. "He was summoned to the court and given a final chance to agree. He again refused saying: 'I am no tax-collector but a shepherd of the Lord's flock.' On Good Friday, 17 April 341, he and about 100 other Christians,

including many clergy and some monks and nuns, were put to death. The long martyrdom of the Persian Christians had begun. This persecution lasted for almost forty years with scarcely any remission, and was borne with remarkable fortitude.”

In the year 440 under the reign of King Yezdgerd II Wakefield writes, “On 24 and 25 August 446 Christians from a number of provinces, including the bishops, senior clergy and many members of distinguished families, were collected at Karka (modern Kirkuk) and put to death. They met their martyrdom with great courage. The way in which one of the Christian women, Shirin, and her two sons met their death so touched the King’s officer in charge of the proceedings that he too confessed faith in Christ and on 25 September was himself crucified. The next year saw the death of the famous martyr, Pethion, who had been a notable evangelist in Western Persia. He had many followers among the important families of the area, including a high-ranking military officer and the chief of police of Shahin. Eventually he was imprisoned and after being tortured for several days was beheaded and his head was exposed on the Royal Road near Kholwan. The persecution extended to Jews and Armenians and was so fierce that it has remained in the minds of Christians up to the present day. The little Christian community in Kirkuk still gathers together year by year to celebrate the faith and courage of their martyred forebearers.”

### **C. ARE PERSIAN BELIEVERS PERSECUTED TODAY?**

Unfortunately persecution is intense and severe. Some of the church leaders in Iran have been martyred because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Rev. Hossein Soodmand, an Assembly of God pastor in Meshed, Iran, was tortured, abused, and hung on December 3, 1990. Bishop Haik Hossepian-Mehr, the General Superintendent of the Assembly of God Church and first president of the Council of Protestant Churches in Iran, disappeared January 19, 1994 shortly after defending another believer named Mehdi Dibaj, and his body was found a few weeks later. The son of the Anglican Bishop Deghanni, was also killed. Tataous Mikaelian, the previous head of the Persian Bible Society till it was disbanded by the government, took over as the next president of the council of Protestant Churches and disappeared on June 29, 1994. His body was found a few days later.

If you are interested in more details, see the book, [History of the Christian Church](#), by Pakizegi or look at [www.farsinet.com/dibaj](http://www.farsinet.com/dibaj). Or more information about Christian persecution around the world, including Iran contact:

Voice of the Martyrs, PO Box 443 Bartlesville, OK 74005; Telephone 918-337-8015

[www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com)

World Evangelical Defender PO box WEF Wheaton, IL 60189; Telephone 630-668-0440

[www.worldangelical.org](http://www.worldangelical.org)

### **D. THE TESTIMONY OF MEHDI DIBAJ**

Mehdi Dibaj, an evangelist in Iran, was martyred in 1994. Our family knew Mehdi and his wife personally. They spent their first night of their honeymoon in our home. Later we were invited to visit them in northern Iran to give them Bible lessons. Actually, Mehdi could have taught me because he had such a deep love for the Lord Jesus Christ and a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.

How would you like to live in a solitary confinement in a 9 x 9 foot cell? In 1985 Mehdi was

falsely accused and put in jail for over eight years, three of which he lived in such solitary confinement in a 9x9 foot cell. Mehdi was charged with apostasy. His crime was leaving the Islamic religion to become a Christian. How are you living your Christian life? Is there enough evidence to charge you for being a Christian? During his formal court hearing on December 3, 1993, in Sari, Iran, Mehdi was his own lawyer. Here are a few excerpts from his Christ honoring defense:

‘I have been charged with apostasy! The invisible God who knows our hearts has given assurance to us, as Christians, that we are not among the apostates who will perish but among the believers who will have eternal life. In Islamic Law (Shariat’ ), an apostate is one who does not believe in God, the prophets or the resurrection of the dead, We Christians believe in all three!

They say ‘You were a Muslim and you have become a Christian.’ This is not so. For many years I had no religion. After searching and studying I accepted God’ s call and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to receive eternal life. People choose their religion but a Christian is chosen by Christ. He says, ‘You have not chosen me but I have chosen you...’

The love of Jesus has filled all my being and I feel the warmth of His love in every part of my body. God, who is my glory and honor and protector, has put his seal of approval upon me through His unsparing blessings and miracles.

This test of faith is a clear example. The good and kind God reproves and punishes all those whom He loves. He tests them in preparation for heaven. The God of Daniel, who protected his friends in the fiery furnace, has protected me for nine years in prison. And all the bad happenings have turned out for our good and gain, so much so that I am filled to overflowing with joy and thankfulness.”

Yes, Mehdi was found guilty of apostasy and was sentenced to death by the Islamic court. Yet, worldwide public opinion intervened on his behalf causing his sentence to be delayed temporarily. He was threatened and released. However, six months later Mehdi disappeared and his body was discovered several days later. His picture and complete written testimony in English and Persian, as well as his spoken testimony which he gave after his temporary release from jail can be found at [www.farsinet.com/dibaj](http://www.farsinet.com/dibaj).

## **E. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

Dear reader, “Are you willing even if you live a peaceful and quiet life to die for the Lord Jesus?” Perhaps a more important question is, “Are you willing to live for the Lord Jesus in the midst of a hostile and wicked world and publicly proclaim your love for Jesus Christ and serve him no matter what the cost?”

Some might ask, “Why would people ever believe in Christ, knowing they might be excommunicated from their family, considered to be traitors by their government and hunted down by religious authorities who could harass, persecute, and even kill them?” I learned the answer from the following experience.

At a Persian Bible Conference near Toronto in 1996 I talked to an Iranian who had fled from Iran to go to Pakistan, came to believe Christ as the only way of salvation, and later migrated to

Canada. This believer had suffered much for his faith and wanted to show me why. He pointed to a quote in a book by John Piper called Let the Nations be Glad. “You cannot show the preciousness of a person by being happy with his gifts. Ingratitude will certainly prove that the giver is not loved. But gratitude for the gifts does not prove that the giver is precious. What proves that the giver is precious is that glad-hearted readiness to leave all his gifts to be with him.” To this Persian believer knowing the giver Jesus Christ personally as the Son of God and his Savior as well as being able to live in Christ’s presence, was worth everything including persecution and the loss of friends, family means of living, and his country. Reader, “How much is Jesus Christ worth to you?”



Mehdi Dibaj

In Loving Memory  
February 12, 1994

Bishop Haik Hovsepien  
اسقف هايك هوسپيان  
Հայկ Եպիսկոպոս Յովսէփեան

 A black and white photograph of Bishop Haik Hovsepien, wearing glasses and a dark clerical robe, standing behind a podium with a microphone.
 

1945-1994

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13  
 “محبتی بزرگتر از این نیست که کسی جان خود را فدای دوستان خود کند.” انجیل یوحنا ۱۵:۱۳  
 «Էն ով նրանից աւելի մեծ սէր չունի, որ մէկն իր անձը դնէ իր բարեկամների համար: (Յովհաննէս 15:13)»



## CHAPTER 16

### PERSIANS ARE EAGERLY RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL TODAY

Recently, I received a letter from a Persian pastor in Australia. He said that the Iranians are the most open of the Muslim groups living there and that ten Iranians were baptized at his Persian speaking church last Easter. This pastor was saved in Turkey in 1990 when he was living there as a refugee. Truly, the openness of Persians is worldwide. One web site ([www.farsinet.com/icc](http://www.farsinet.com/icc)) currently lists over 50 Persian fellowships with 20 different groups located in California, some in 16 other states in the USA, and many others in Canada, Europe, Australia, and a few other countries.

There are many incidents of how God is working in the Washington, D.C. area. Let me tell you about one. A Christian who works with Iranians there read a newspaper article about a Persian mother who was injured in an automobile accident and her daughter was killed. Even though this worker had no contact with her, he and his wife prayed that God would work somehow to His own glory because of the accident. About eight months later, to their surprise, this woman walked into the Persian Fellowship holding high a Bible and proclaimed her faith in Christ. The accident had driven her to despair with no hope and no idea where to turn. At the same time, a relative on the west coast sent her the Scriptures and told her that it was the only place she could find hope. Praise God that through reading the scriptures, she put her personal trust in Jesus Christ alone as her Savior. God led her to see a special TV message sponsored by the Persian church and she found out there were other Persian believers nearby. She remains a faithful Christian to this day!

A missionary friend who visited Europe in the fall of 2000 wanted to meet the brother of an Iranian believer in the States whom he had heard professed faith in Christ. How amazed he was when he met him to find another Iranian with him who had come to Christ along with his wife through telephone calls from a Christian sister in Canada. This couple had been discipled by means of the telephone as well. Now this new believer who owns a store where he sells Iranian food and handicrafts, gives out Persian scripture portions to all those who desire them. Gathering around the kitchen table with him and his wife, the missionary and others sang Iranian praise songs which they had never heard. Tears of joy streamed down their cheeks as they shared in singing praises to Jesus. Surely, God is at work among the Iranians!

Iranian Christians International, an organization which specializes in working with Iranian refugees and has a pulse on the Iranian world, estimates that before the Islamic revolution of 1978 there were possibly 200 - 300 born-again Iranian believers which came from a Muslim background. Notice the phenomenal growth since then!

Year	Number of Muslim Background Believers
1978	200-300
1990	8,000
1994	18,000
1999	27,500
2003	30,000

These numbers include Muslim background believers in Iran, as well as those living outside the country. In addition, if the number of born again believers from other minorities such as Armenian and Assyrian are included, then the figures given for 1990 through 1999 can be doubled. However, this is just the beginning of God's work among the 67,702,000 reported population in Iran in 2000, and the estimated 3,912,500 Iranian diaspora worldwide. (See chapter 18, Where are Persians Living Today, for more details!)

Note: The various ethnic groups and populations listed are estimates and other sources might list them differently. For example, World Christian Encyclopedia, Oxford Press 2001, gives different populations of some groups, adds other language groups, and combines some. What is really important though, is that these different people need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ in their own language.

Christian radio programs are broadcast into Iran from several different places. Mail sent in response to these programs often doesn't get through, since mail is censored and destroyed. Yet in particular the spiritual interest among young people in response to these broadcasts is staggering! Also, there are Bible institutes and other opportunities for Iranians to receive training in their own language outside of Iran. Some Iranians are enrolled in Bible schools in the country where they reside studying in another language.

However, there is still much work to do! Some think Iran is made up of just one ethnic group, the Farsi-speaking Persians. This is not true. Farsi was used as the educational language of Iran, but there are many different ethnic background groups in Iran as well. The following is a list of different ethnic groups with a population of 100,000 or more as listened in the prayer files of [www.bethany.com/internet/profiles/c-code/Iran](http://www.bethany.com/internet/profiles/c-code/Iran) as estimated for the year 2000:.

Name	Population	Christians	Scriptures	Jesus film	radio	Location in Iran
Luri	5,369,499	a few	portions	no	no	South Western
Mazanderani	3,198,000	less 1%	none	no	no	North Central
Gilaki	2,452,300	less 1%	portions	yes	yes	North Central
Iranian Arab	1,088,900	less 1%	yes	yes	yes	South
Qashqai	1,045,000	a few	portions	no	no	South Central
Khorasani Tur	839,500	a few	none	no	no	North Eastern
Southern Kurd	746,500	less 1%	portions	yes	no	North Central
Southern Baluch	588,900	a few	NT	yes	yes	South Eastern
Northern Kurd	317,800	less 1%	NT	yes	no	North Western
Mussulman Tat	179,100	a few	none	no	no	North Western

All people are precious in God's sight, even one. Due to lack of space, I will list briefly the other people groups which are less than 100,000. There are the Afghan Persian, Afshari, Aimaq Jamshidi, Aimaq Timuri, Balkan Rom Gypsy, Baluch Western, Brahui, Dom Gypsy, Gilaki, Gujarati Gurani, Hazara, Herki, Karakalpak, Karingani, Khorasani Turk., Parsee, Western Pashtun, Punjabi, Shikaki, Tadjik, Talysh, Mussulman Tat, Urdu Speakers, and Vafsi. Who will be concerned for their spiritual condition?

Note: The scriptures, Jesus film, and 18 hours weekly of radio broadcasts are available in Farsi. Most people in Iran know this language as a second language in which they received their

schooling, but it is the mother tongue which speaks to the heart and emotions. An effort is being made now to translate the Scriptures and the JESUS video into many of these languages and as well as produce radio broadcasts to reach some of these people.

Here is a sample letter from one of the thousand of listeners to the radio broadcasts:

“Accept my warmest love and sincerity. I hope that the day of the coming of the only Savior of this wicked world, the Lord Jesus Christ, will come as soon as possible. I long to see all of us together as you help me go forward in faith. I received your letter, including the answers to my questions. You should know that I am very happy. I thank God for you...Through your direction I am following the way of salvation, and my hoping this contact will last forever.”

Here’s a joke I have told to many of my Iranian friends: “When a person speaks two languages, what is he called? ‘Bi-lingual,’ he will answer. When a person speaks three languages what is he called? After thinking for awhile he will reply, ‘tri-lingual.’ What about a person who speaks only one language? He will answer, ‘mono-lingual’ or ‘I don’t know.’ My response is ‘you’re wrong. It’s an American.’”

Of course, everybody laughs because in America most think English is the only language they need to know. Only those who have come from another country like yourself know two, three, four or even five languages and are fluent in all of them. It is possible to hear the good news of Jesus in a language other than your mother-tongue and believe and trust in Jesus as the only way of salvation. However, usually your mother-tongue is the language of emotion and spiritual understanding for you. Shouldn’t every person in the world and especially those in Iran, have a chance to hear the good news of Jesus in their mother-language? Perhaps God can use your knowledge of other languages in addition to Farsi in witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear reader, I challenge you to ask God to burden you for one these groups. Go into the web site mentioned earlier in this chapter, or ask a friend to do it for you. You can get a picture of these people, prayer requests, and more information. Then pray regularly for their salvation. Perhaps later you will discover other people, churches, and even missionaries burdened for the same unreached people group.



## CHAPTER 17

### HOW CAN I WITNESS TO MY PERSIAN FRIEND?

I was not sure if I should include this chapter in the Farsi translation of my booklet. However, since many of you have English speaking friends who love the Iranian people or desire to witness to them, I decided to include this chapter. You can go to the web site at [www.farsinet.com/persiansinbible](http://www.farsinet.com/persiansinbible) and download the English translation of this chapter for your English speaking friend, or you can e-mail me directly at [al@imi.org](mailto:al@imi.org) and ask for the chapter or the entire book to be sent to you in the English language. I will be happy to do this for you by internet or send you a hard copy.

Sharing Christ across cultures presents some challenges, one of which is language. Your Persian friend may speak English, but how well can he read it? Fortunately, Christian literature and several Bible translations have been published in the Persian language. (Note: Persians call their language Farsi but, for our purposes, ‘Persian’ will be used.) Some organizations which sell these materials can be good resources for you in other ways as you befriend and share Christ with your Persian friends. Following are the answers to some questions you may have along with contact information for the resources mentioned above.

#### 1. Where can I find appropriate materials in English or Persian to give to a friend?

- a. Multi-Language Media Inc. <[www.multilanguage.com](http://www.multilanguage.com)> sells Christian books, Bibles, Scripture portions, and several videos including the JESUS film in Persian. More than 25 books on understanding Islam and witnessing to Muslims are available in English. Literature is available in some 45 languages, including Persian. Scripture translations can be obtained in 90 languages and the JESUS film, in 300 languages. You can also contact them via regular mail: PO Box 301 Ephrata, PA 17522 or by telephone: 717-738-0582.
- b. Iranian Christians International <[www.farsinet.com/ici](http://www.farsinet.com/ici)> has an exhaustive list of books, discipleship material for new believers, music tapes, and messages in Persian as well as other related material for English-speaking people. The organization also helps Iranian refugees settle in other countries and keeps up-to-date on the persecution of Christians and other groups by the Islamic government. Contact them at P.O. Box 25607 Colorado Springs, CO 80936 or telephone: 719-596-0010. Also, Persian World Outreach at <[www.farsinet.com/pwo](http://www.farsinet.com/pwo)> has a similar list of books and materials. Contact them at Persian World Outreach, Inc. PO Box 62, Quinton, NJ 08072.
- c. Some of the Persian Churches listed on <[www.farsinet.com/icc/](http://www.farsinet.com/icc/)> offer a free Bible or New Testament in the Persian language (Farsi) for those who request them. Also, the paraphrased edition of the Bible can be found at [www.gospelcom.net/ibs/bibles/farsi/](http://www.gospelcom.net/ibs/bibles/farsi/) and sections downloaded and printed.
- d. You could give a New Testament, JESUS film, or appropriate literature as a Christmas present to show the true meaning of Christmas.

- e. Many Persians think that the Bible is a western book. Sharing what you have learned in Persians in the Bible such as some facts about their famous kings, Cyrus and Darius, will amaze them. It might peak their curiosity enough to want to see the scripture passages in the Bible which refer to these Persian kings.
- f. There are recorded radio broadcasts in Farsi at [www.radioneda.com](http://www.radioneda.com) that continually updates it's broadcast selections. Broadcasts, messages and other information can be found at these active Persian church sites. Some examples are [www.iranchurch.com](http://www.iranchurch.com) and [www.kalamekhoda.com](http://www.kalamekhoda.com)

## **2. To which church should I take my Persian friend?**

- a. If your friend is willing, take him to your home church. Although the service will be quite unusual and different for your friend, he may be curious about your church's worship style, singing, preaching of the Word of God, and the joy and friendliness of the Christian believers. After the church service, ask your friend what he enjoyed. Ask about what he didn't understand and what things he disliked.
- b. There are now 42 Persian fellowships in the USA and Canada are listed on the Internet at <[www.farsinet.com/icc/](http://www.farsinet.com/icc/)>. If you live near a Persian-speaking church, take your friend to a service. He might be amazed to find that thousands of born-again believers have turned to Christ from the Islamic religion. California alone has about 20 groups. The web site above also lists Persian churches in Europe, Thailand, Korea, Australia, and other parts of the world where Iranians have immigrated.

## **3. How can I learn about the beliefs of Persian Muslims?**

You can purchase literature about Islam from the sites mentioned previously. Most Iranians are from the Shiite branch of Islam, which differs from the major Sunni branch concerning the successor of the prophet Mohammed. Your friend may be a very devout Muslim or a very nominal one who doesn't know many of the teachings of his own religion. The core beliefs of Islam center on the performance of certain good works in order to attain salvation before Allah, rather than a simple trust in God who has provided salvation in Christ already.

## **4. How do I answer my friend's questions about Christianity?**

Why do you have three gods? How can God have a son? Isn't Jesus only a prophet? How can salvation be by faith alone? Why would God allow a holy prophet to be crucified? Hasn't your holy book, the Bible, been corrupted and replaced with our book, the Koran? Why did the Christian Crusaders war against Muslims and kill them? Who does Jerusalem belong to? These are the kind of questions you may be hearing from your Muslim friend. The web site <[www.answering-islam.org](http://www.answering-islam.org)> is an excellent resource to help you understand how to answer your friend's questions.

Never let your interactions turn into argument. Remember that your Persian friend will probably feel obligated to defend the Islamic faith. When his curiosity turns into objection, you may feel more comfortable giving him literature in Persian or English or referring him

to a web site to help answer his questions. He might be more receptive to the gospel by reading a book or getting information from a web site.

**5. Where can I find testimonies of Persians who have come to Christ?**

- a. Before you testify about Persians coming to Christ, look in the mirror! Your testimony might be a more significant influence to bring your Iranian friend to Christ.
- b. The web site <[www.farsinet.com/dibaj](http://www.farsinet.com/dibaj)> has a written verbal testimony of Medhi Dibaj. Because he was a believer in Jesus Christ, Mehdi spent eight years in jail and was brought to trial finally in Sari, Iran, in December 1993. He was charged formally with apostasy for leaving his Islamic faith. After being found guilty by the court, he was released temporarily, only to be martyred a few months later. (See chapter 15 Persecuted for Christ in Persia: Past and Present.) Several messages on cassette tape by Mehdi Dibaj which he preached before his martyrdom can be bought at <[www.persianwo.org](http://www.persianwo.org)>
- c. If you want to hear live testimonies of Persian Muslims coming to Christ, take your friend to a Persian church or a Persian Bible conference. Persian believers are different from American believers. They don't have to be pushed to give a half-minute testimony of their salvation in Christ before a church or group. Most Iranians have such a great joy when they accept Christ that they cannot contain themselves. Their testimony might be fifteen or twenty minutes or even longer.

**6. Where can I find Persian Christian music?**

Contrary to Islam which has no praise music, Persian Christianity offers a variety of praise and worship music. The web site <[www.farsinet.com/ici](http://www.farsinet.com/ici)> or <[www.farsinet.com/pwo](http://www.farsinet.com/pwo)> provides a list of recorded music as well as songs that can be downloaded from the internet. There are many Persian Christians who are using their musical talent for our Lord Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER 18

### WHERE ARE PERSIANS LIVING TODAY?

It is hard to give an accurate figure of how many Iranians live outside of Iran. Some are in other countries illegally, and are not counted. Some are included with other ethnic groups. However, let me give you the best statistics I have. The following are statistics reported by Iranian Christians International:

#### IRANIAN DIASPORA IN THE U.S. (1998)

Los Angeles and Southern California	550,000
Bay Area and Northern California	200,000
Washington, D.C. Area (including Maryland and Virginia)	120,000
Texas	100,000
Houston	35,000
Dallas	20,000
Other Texas locations	45,000
New York City and vicinity	80,000
Chicago	20,000
Scattered elsewhere*	280,000
Total	<u>1,350,000</u>

Iranians residing in the U.S. hold a variety of white and blue collar jobs. It is fairly well known that many Iranians in northern California are involved in the computer industry and many in southern California are involved in retailing and consumer services. Also, there are many Iranian professionals such as lawyers, doctors, dentists, and engineers. There are no statistics given according to occupations.

\*Cities in this group with more than 4,000 Iranians are Denver, Seattle, Portland (Oregon), Atlanta, Detroit and Oklahoma City.

#### **DEMOGRAPHIC ESTIMATES OF IRANIANS LIVING IN THE U.S.**

	<u>U.S. Breakdown By Visa Status</u>	
	<u>Before 1979 Iran Revolution</u>	<u>After 1979 Iranian Revolution</u>
Students	75,000	5,000
Immigrants and Their Families	175,000	1,280,000
Refugees* (Immigrants and Visitors)		50,000
Out of Status		10,000
Visitors Visa		5,000
Total	<u>250,000</u>	<u>1,350,000</u>

\*The U.S. government's official count of Iranian refugees admitted annually is 3,000-4,000.

## U.S. BREAKDOWN BY RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Armenian & Assyrian	135,000	10
Baha'i	135,000	10
Jewish	67,500	5
Muslim	1,012,500	75

There seems to be pockets of Iranians from particular religious backgrounds in certain areas of the country:

Armenian	Southern California
Assyrian	Chicago and San Jose areas
Baha'i	Unsubstantiated, but possibly in Illinois, where there is a Baha'i mosque, and New York, where there is a Baha'i refugee organization.
Jewish	Southern California and New York areas
Muslim	Southern and Northern California, Texas and Washington, D.C.

## IRANIAN DIASPORA WORLDWIDE (1999)

Afghanistan	20,000	Norway	6,000
Australia	53,500	Pakistan	140,000
Austria	15,000	Philippines, Korea & Japan	30,000
Belgium	8,000	South Africa	10,000
Canada	120,000	Spain & Portugal	15,000
China	10,000	Sweden	20,000
Cyprus	5,000	Switzerland	6,000
Denmark	10,000	Syria	50,000
Eastern Europe	30,000	The Netherlands	10,000
Egypt & N. Africa	20,000	The Commonwealth of	
Finland	2,000	Independent States (CIS)	60,000
France	62,000	Turkey	800,000
Germany	110,000	United Arab Emirates, Bahrain	
Greece	20,000	& Other Gulf States	350,000
India	60,000	United Kingdom	80,000
Iraq	250,000	United States of America	1,350,000
Israel	30,000	Central & South America &	
Kuwait	100,000	& Other Parts of the world	30,000
Lebanon	30,000		
		Total	3,912,500

Although we have been talking about Muslim background believers, there are people with other religions who have fled from Iran because of religious persecution, too. The estimate of those having diaspora due to religious persecutions are noted below:

## IRANIAN DIASPORA DUE TO RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION



Bahai's	200,000
Armenians (Nominal & Evangelical Christians)	100,000
Assyrians (Nominal & Evangelical Christians)	30,000
Jews	30,000
Zoroastrians and other Non- Muslim Minorities	10,000
Muslim Converts to Christianity	13,000
Sunni Muslims, Sufis & Other Muslims	25,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>408,000 persons</b>

If we compare the total estimated Iranian Diaspora of 3,912,500 in 1999 with the figure 408,000, we see that about 10% left because of religious persecution while living in Iran or fear of being persecuted if they would return.

#### Interesting Facts About Iran:

According to World Christian Encyclopedia, the population of Iran in the year 2000 was 67,702,000. Those under 15 years of age made up 36% of the population and 62% were urban dwellers. The adult literacy for males was listed as 78% and 65% for females. There are over 2,000,000 refugees from other countries living in Iran, particularly from Afghanistan.

This encyclopedia lists 96% of the population in Iran as Muslim, 3% Zoroastrian, 0.5% Bahai, and 0.5% Christian. Of the Christian population of 363,000, 87% are Armenian or Syrian in background and the remaining 47,000 include both Protestants and Roman Catholics.

The cities with estimated populations over 500,000 are:

Abadan	643,000
Ahwaz (Ahvaz)	1,018,000
Bakhtaran (Kermanshah)	949,000
Esfahan (Isfahan)	2,644,000
Mashhad (Meshed)	2,378,000
Q.M. (Qum, Ghom)	795,000
Shiraz	1,113,000
Tabriz	1,624,000
Tehran (Teheran)	7,380,000



## CHAPTER 19

### TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SMALL GROUPS

Dear teacher or Pastor:

There is more than ample material to cover a three month schedule using the following guide:

Lesson 1 - Chapter 1	A Monarchy is Born
Lesson 2 - Chapter 2	Daniel Overcomes Culture Shock
Lesson 3 - Chapter 3	From Visions to History: The Prophecies of Daniel
Lesson 4 - Chapter 4	The World's Most Accurate History Book
Lesson 5 - Chapter 5	Wow, What Powerful Prayers from Persia!
Lesson 6 - Chapter 6	How Did Five Persian Kings Get in Our Bible?
Lesson 7 - Chapter 7	Queen Esther, Persian or Jewish?
Lesson 8 - Chapter 8	Persian Kings Send Ezra and Nehemiah to Jerusalem
Lesson 9 - Chapter 9	Why Is Elam So Significant?
Lesson 10 - Chapter 10	Far Reaching Effects of Pentecost: Persian Missionaries to Asia
Lesson 11 - Chapter 11	Strategic Role of Persia in Future Prophecy
Lesson 12 - Chapter 12	Understanding Bible Customs through Persian Culture
Lesson 13 - Chapter 13	A Persian Prospective on Christmas

If you think the material does not cover enough for any lesson, you can substitute from the teachings in the supplementary chapters. Feel free to substitute one of the supplementary chapters for one of the chapters listed above as you show the class how God has worked in the past and how He is working in the present among the Persians. Notice that in chapter 5, I have suggested a radical lesson plan with most of the lesson being devoted to prayer for the Persian world.

For small group leaders there is a variety of different subjects to discuss. I suggest using at least half of the material from chapters 1-13, which have the biblical content. Several of your lesson-group discussions can be applied to what is happening among Iranians today using the three other chapters. Be sure to use the Personal Application and Dig Deeper sections.

Please note that the Bible translation usually used when verses are quoted in this booklet is the Standard Persian translation. Be sure also to use some of the Farsi translations in modern Persia.

My prayer is that you and your students will rejoice as you gain a deeper understanding of God's work through the Persian people as revealed in Scripture. What's more I hope that you will be encouraged to pray with passion for what God will do in the future for you, for Iran and the Iranian people worldwide.

## CHAPTER 20

### A PERSONAL WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

#### Dear Farsi-speaking Reader:

As you read this book and the Bible verses to which it referred, did you notice that God prepared different Iranian people to know Him personally? Do you remember that God called Cyrus by his name? Do you remember how Esther was chosen in unusual circumstances to come to the kingdom “for such a time as this?” Do you remember uncompromising Daniel and how he purposed in his heart not to defile himself but rather to serve the living God?

You can know God in a personal way, too. For a moment, put yourself in the place of those religious Iranians (Parthians, Medes, and Elamites) who were in Jerusalem after Jesus died and rose again. Acts 2:22-23 and 36 tell us that Peter stood up to preach to the crowd, **“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth, was a man accredited by God to by miracles wonders and signs, which God did among you through him as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you but God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him on the cross ... Therefore let all the house of Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.”**

Three thousand were convicted of their sins that day and asked what they should do to be saved. They understood the Biblical truth in the verse from Romans 6:23, **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord,”** and asked Jesus Christ to be their Savior and Lord. Yes, Jesus was crucified, paid the penalty for their sins and ours, and rose again. They believed what Peter preached and were converted. Many Iranians came to know God in a personal way that day and went back to Iran as born-again believers to tell others this good news.

Now many years later in this 21<sup>st</sup> century you can still call upon this same Lord and ask him to forgive your sins and to be saved. All we need to do is to have forgiveness of sins and assurance of eternal life is to thank Jesus Christ, thank Him for dying for you on the cross and taking the penalty for your sin, and then by faith receive Him as your Savior. Have you done this? If so, then you know God in a personal way, too. Then have you acknowledged Him as your Lord? Remember Esther, Daniel, and those first-century Iranian Christians had a vital relationship with God. Have you dared to be like them?

My desire is that all those who read this book will be like those people of faith who lived in Iran. If you would like more information about knowing God personally, please contact me at the address or web site given in the preface.

Allyn Huntzinger