

BIBLE AND HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT IRAN

by David Hocking

Many of our listeners and readers have asked questions about Iran and what we should know about this important and strategic country in our world. The earliest history we have deals with ELAM. At the time of Abraham (about 4000 years ago—Genesis 14) we learn of a confederacy of nations that appears to have as its leader a man named Chedorlaomer who is stated to be the “king of Elam.” In a battle with the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham and his 318 trained men pursued them and rescued Lot.

The prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 21:2) mentions Elam and seems to imply a relationship with ancient Media (the Medes). The prophet Jeremiah also refers to Elam in Jeremiah 49:34–39 and refers to their coming destruction as a nation. The dating of this prophecy is at the time of Zedekiah, king of Judah. It perhaps occurred by the domination of Babylon who also destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The interesting Biblical fact of prophecy in Jeremiah 49:39 is this: “But it shall come to pass in the latter days, that I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the LORD.” It is quite possible that this is a reference to the future Day of the Lord.

In the 7th century B.C. a small kingdom was established at Parsumash under Achaemenes whose name is used by history in describing the first Persian dynasty. The son of Achaemenes was a man named Teispes (675–640 B.C.), and apparently his kingdom was dominated by the Medes. After he was given his freedom from the control of the Medes, history records that the weakness of Elam allowed him to gain control of the province of Parsa (modern Fars). It was the Assyrians under Ashurbanipal that put an end to the nation of Elam.

The son of Teispes was Cyrus I who came in contact with the Assyrians as the leader of the Persians. The son of Cyrus I was Cambyses who married the daughter of the Median king Astyges. Their son of Cyrus I was Cambyses who married the daughter of the Median king Astyges. Their son was Cyrus II, known in history as Cyrus the Great (559–530 B.C.), the first great and dominant king of ancient Persia. Cyrus II also conquered the Medes, and defeated his grandfather Astyges, and made the Median capital of Ecbatana his own capital. Cyrus also invaded Asia Minor and defeated Croesus, king of Lydia. He also captured Babylon in 539 B.C. (the official date of the fall of the Babylonian Empire) with little resistance.

The son of Cyrus II was Cambyses II (529–522 B.C.) who conquered Egypt. Cambyses II was succeeded by Darius I, known as Darius the Great (522–486 B.C.) and as Darius Hystaspes (his father was one of the satraps of the Persian Empire). Darius created 20 satrapies (provinces) in order to administrate effectively the growing strength of the Persian Empire. Darius I also moved the capital from Pasagadae to Persepolis. He was a follower of Zoroaster and a worshiper of Ahura Mazda (also followed by Xerxes and Artaxerxes of Biblical history). This is the same king mentioned in the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. The Temple project was completed by the Jews in 516 B.C. during his reign.

Darius I was succeeded by his son Xerxes (485–465 B.C.). An inscription at Persepolis lists the nations under his control. He is also the same King Ahashuerus mentioned in the Book of Ester. Following his reign, Artaxerxes Longimanus I came to power (465–424 B.C.) and it was in the 20th year of his reign that the decree to restore the wall of Jerusalem was given to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:1).

According to Daniel 9:24–27 that decree to restore the wall was the beginning of a “countdown” to the coming of the Messiah—the prophecy known as the 70 weeks.” But, it was not “weeks” but rather “years” to which the Hebrew word for “seven” was pointing. A prophetic year of 360 days (lunar calendar) multiplied by 483 years brings us to 173, 880 days from the decree to Artaxerxes Longimanus I until the Messiah would come. Two tragic events are mentioned by Daniel that would take place before the final 70th “seven” would begin: the Messiah would be “cut off” and the city and the sanctuary” of Jerusalem would be destroyed. We are still waiting for the beginning of the 70th “seven”—known to Bible students as the coming Day of the Lord (mentioned 25 times in the Bible) or the Tribulation Period (Matthew 24:21–22).

After the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus I, Darius II came to power (423–405 B.C.) followed by Artaxerxes Mnemon II (404–359 B.C.), Artaxerxes Ochus III (358–338 B.C.), Arses (337–336 B.C.), and Darius III (335–331 B.C.), whose armies were defeated by Alexander the Great in 333 B.C. Upon the death of Alexander in 323 B.C., Persia came under the control of one of Alexander’s generals (Seleucus). According to Daniel 11 there was continual conflict between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies (another general who was given Egypt) over the Land of Israel, a fact that is still remembered by Iran today.

Bible students are quite aware of the presence of Persia in the battle that attacks the Land of Israel (Ezekiel 38–39). Persia seems to be the lead country in that attack (at least they are mentioned first in the list).

This amazing empire of the past continued to be known by the name Persia until 1935 A.D. when its name was changed to Iran. The official modern language of Iran is Persian or Pharsi, an indo-European language written in Arabic characters.

In 1979 A.D. Iran experienced what history calls “The Islamic Revolution.” Shiite Muslims took over the country and installed Sharia Law. Although many Arabs live in parts of the country, Iran is NOT an Arab state. Their connection and support with Arabs is completely based upon the religion of Islam. In many cases throughout the history of Islam, Iran has been a powerful force to oppose the Sunni Muslims of Saudi Arabia who control the holy sites of Islam at Mecca and Median. Iran also experienced eight years of war with its western neighbor Iraq when Saddam Hussein, a Sunni, was in power. Many Shiite Muslims from Iran have populated the southern regions of Iraq and now have become a powerful force in the elected Parliament of Iraq. Historically and traditionally, Iran believes that Iraq belongs to them as well as many other countries in the Middle East (including Israel). They desire the glory of the former Persian Empire (one of the largest empires of history in terms of geography) to be restored.

It should be obvious that Iran (primarily because of oil) is now a major player in the world both politically, economically, and militarily. They are the main suppliers of weapons to Islamic terrorists throughout the Middle East. Most of their weaponry has been made possible by Russia, China, and North Korea.

The Nation of Israel faces serious challenges from the leadership of Iran and its continual threats. The LORD GOD of ISRAEL hears them all and Biblical prophecy will include Iran among all the nations of the world that come against Israel. They will suffer defeat at the hands of the returning Messiah, our blessed Lord Yeshua!