

# From Persia to Iran

## A Walk through the History of Israel's Archenemy



By: Rev. Patrick Verbeten, *National Director, BFP United States*  
Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®

**NO MATTER WHEN** in the timeline of history you pick up this teaching letter, the significance of Iran will be relevant. Whether you look to the ancient writings of the Hebrew Scriptures or scroll through today's headlines, you'll find that Iran continues to impact nations and, in some ways, your life. In His sovereignty, God has used the nation of Iran in many ways to further His glory and fame throughout the world. Biblically speaking, modern-day Iran is known as ancient Persia. Let's dive in and see what the Bible says about Persia.

## The Persian Empire in the Bible

The name Persia is mentioned 29 times in the Bible, primarily in the books of Daniel, Ezra, Esther and Ezekiel. These mentions refer either to the Persian Empire itself or to Persian kings. The Bible remains a main source text for what we know about the Persian Empire. The Cyrus Cylinder, written in cuneiform script and now housed in the British Museum, affirms its historical relevance.

Let's take a look at the biblical timeline for the nation of Persia from its inception through to the Book of Nehemiah.

### Around 2350–2000 BC: Post-flood Settlements

Descendants of Noah settle in the region that will become Persia, establishing early kingdoms like Elam (Gen. 10:22).

### Around 2000–1500 BC: Elam in the Patriarchal Era (Gen. 14)

Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, leads an alliance against Sodom and Gomorrah, capturing Abraham's nephew, Lot, marking the first biblical mention of a ruler from the region.

### Around 700–600 BC: Elamite Influence and Assyrian Domination

Elam alternates between conflict and alliance with Assyria, influencing Israel's history.

### 625–550 BC: Rise of Media and Persia

Persia emerges as a kingdom under Cyrus II, eventually allying with Media.

### 539 BC: Cyrus Conquers Babylon

Cyrus II captures Babylon, fulfilling biblical prophecy and allowing Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4).

### 538–516 BC: Reconstruction of the Temple

Jewish exiles return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra and rebuild the Temple with support from the Persian kings.

### 486–465 BC: Xerxes I Reigns (Esther 1–10)

The story of Esther unfolds during Xerxes I's rule, highlighting God's providence for His people in Persia.

### 445 BC: Nehemiah Returns to Jerusalem (Neh. 1–6)

Nehemiah, serving under Artaxerxes I, is granted permission to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

## Significance of Persia in the Biblical Narratives

Now that we've brushed up on ancient Persian history, let's take a look at the significance of this timeline. In biblical times, most of the interactions the Jewish people had with Persia were either positive or had a positive outcome. As you read through this timeline, you may have recalled the biblical narrative of King Cyrus allowing the Jewish people to return home after 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

This victorious account is not a creative work of fiction. Some 150 years before the events took place, the prophet Isaiah had much to say about how God would use King Cyrus (44 and 45). In fact, the prophet highlights God's own description of the future king of Persia, "*He is My shepherd*" and points out that Cyrus would fulfill God's purposes, including rebuilding Jerusalem and laying the foundation of the Temple (44:28). God also refers to King Cyrus as anointed "*to subdue nations*" (Isa. 45:1a). This prophecy speaks of the Persian king overthrowing Babylon, thus paving the way for the Jewish people to return to their homeland.

One of the key leaders in the Jewish homecoming was Ezra, a priest from the line of Aaron. Ezra used finances and resources provided by the king of Persia to lead the people back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. He was deeply committed to the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), and he led the Jewish people in a spiritual renewal.

The above timeline also mentions the story of Esther, which took place entirely in Persia. In this story, God used an unlikely person to bring salvation to her people. King Xerxes, the king of Persia, took bad advice from evil Haman and made a decree that all the

Jewish people should be annihilated. It's important to note that in the time of Esther, many Jewish people were living in the Persian Empire. When Esther's cousin and guardian, Mordecai, heard about Haman's plan, he enlisted her to appeal to the king on behalf of the Jewish people. Esther showed courage and obedience to her God as she boldly approached the king of Persia, seeking deliverance for her people. To this day, the Jewish people remember this event that took place in Persia as they celebrate the feast of *Purim*, aptly named the Feast of Esther.



That brings us to Nehemiah. I've heard many leadership teachings based on the Book of Nehemiah, and I would suggest there's much we can learn from this God-fearing cupbearer. With permission, authority and financial backing from the king, Nehemiah left his role in Persia to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Yet God used Nehemiah's leadership to rebuild much more than walls. He built community and inspired confession and repentance among the Jewish people.

## Daniel's Influence and Prophecies in Persia

The Book of Daniel is filled with many prophecies pertaining to Persia. First, I'd like to remind you that Daniel was a God-fearing man who prayed facing Jerusalem, in spite of King Darius's decree.

King Darius was the Persian king before Cyrus, during the transition from the Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire. When Daniel prayed to a God other than Darius, he was thrown into a lions' den. Yet when the king found Daniel unharmed by the lions, he made a new decree, and the God of Israel was proclaimed throughout the empire.

*“I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.’ So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian,”* (Dan. 6:26–28 ESV).



## Persia in End-Time Prophecies

I wonder if knowledge of the events in Daniel's life had some effect on King Cyrus and his dealings with the Jewish people when he rose to power.

Although many of Daniel's prophecies which deal with Persia—including the four beasts (Dan. 7:1–6), the ram and the goat (Dan. 8:1–8, 20–22), the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24–27) and the kings of Persia (Dan. 10:1–3, 12:1)—are often connected to modern-day Iran, it is likely that the majority of these prophecies have already been fulfilled. Biblical theologian John F. Walvoord put it this way: “The great empires of Babylon, Medo–Persia, Greece and Rome were predicted by Daniel, and their rise and fall are recorded in history. The accuracy of these predictions is one of the strongest evidences for the divine inspiration of the Bible.”

We see that God is faithful to His Word, revealing what would happen to the Persian nation through His prophets, Isaiah and

Daniel. But what about prophecies that are not yet fulfilled? We read in Ezekiel 38:2–6 (ESV), “*Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him and say, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. And I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armor, a great host, all of them with buckler and shield, wielding swords. Persia, Cush, and Put are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all his hordes; Beth-togarmah from the uttermost parts of the north with all his hordes—many peoples are with you.*”

Ezekiel’s prophecy in chapters 38 and 39, which mentions Persia among the nations that will attack Israel, is often understood to refer to future events that have not yet occurred. This indicates that the roles of these nations, including Persia, remain to be fulfilled in the end times.

According to author and Bible teacher Mark Hitchcock, “The prophecy in Ezekiel speaks of a coalition of nations that will come against Israel in the last days. A fair question to ask now is, are we seeing this in our day? The early church father Augustine of Hippo said this about prophecy: ‘Prophecies are not given to us so that we may know what is to happen in the future, but that we may have a guide in the present.’”

Well-known English Orthodox rabbi, philosopher, theologian, and author, the late Lord Jonathan Sacks, said the following about Ezekiel’s prophecy: “In the vision of Ezekiel, we see not only a confrontation of nations, but a struggle for the soul of humanity. The forces of evil, led by Gog and including Persia, are opposed to the covenantal community that stands for justice and morality.”

As we observe the world around us, we see new coalitions of nations, including Persia, trying to establish new currencies and a new order in the world. We also see opposition to justice and morality. It is not unrealistic or sensational for us to ask the question: Are we living in the days that Ezekiel prophesied? And if we are, how should we live?

I have often heard Bridges for Peace International President Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer discuss this prophecy. Her advice is as follows. “This is one of the questions I have been asking the Lord.

We observe the signs of the times all around us; what response should we have? Instead of engaging in doctrinal arguments, sensationalism or speculation, we should simply stay the course.”

## From the Apostles Until Today

The apostle Thomas is credited with bringing the Gospel to the Persian Empire. Christianity flourished in that region until approximately AD 600. The Persian Empire is also credited with bringing the Gospel to China. Muslim forces conquered Persia by the mid-seventh century, but it took several centuries for Islam to become the dominant religion across the region.

It’s interesting to note that, while the majority of the Persian people are Muslim, they are not Arab. Persians and Arabs have unique identities, with different languages, cultural histories and ethnic origins. Iran, as a predominantly Persian country, is distinct from its Arab neighbors in the Middle East.

It is also interesting that the German government of the 1930s indirectly influenced the country’s name change from “Persia” to “Iran.” The reasoning behind this shift was based on Iran’s historical identity. “Iran” means “land of the Aryans” in Persian, and the term reflects the country’s heritage and the origins of its people.

Until recently, both Jews and Christians in Iran experienced a period of relative freedom under the Pahlavi dynasty, which allowed for cultural and religious freedom of expression. However, the Islamic Revolution in 1979 brought increased restrictions, prompting many from both communities to emigrate. Despite these challenges, a small but resilient Jewish community remains, while the Christian faith endures through the Armenian and Assyrian communities and a growing number of underground churches led by Iranian converts.

Iran today is known as the archenemy of Israel and the largest state sponsor of terror in the world. Before my deep dive into the history of Iran and Persia, my image of the country was indeed one of malevolence, power and control. However, Ephesians 6:12 exhorts, *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* The biblical narrative of Persia, its people and its rulers clearly

show the sovereign hand of God using them as an instrument to bless His people and spread His name over all the earth. I am encouraged today to pray for the people of Iran, as many in this culture have been brainwashed to believe in a false religion. I know that, at the end of days, God will judge the earth according to how the nations treated Israel (Joel 3:12, Matt. 25:31–46). My prayer for the Persian people is that they will see through the darkness and wickedness to fall in love with the God of Israel.

---

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Brimmer, Rebecca J. "Signs of the Times." *Bridges for Peace*. <https://www.bridgesforpeace.com/letter/signs-of-the-times/>.

Hitchcock, Mark. *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2017.

Sacks, Jonathan. *The Koren Sacks Rosh Hashanah Machzor*. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2012.

Walvoord, John F. *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971.

---

Scripture from the New King James Version

---

#### TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Nevi'im* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

## Bridges for Peace—Offices

**Australia:** Tel: 07-5479-4229, [bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com)

**Canada:** Tel: 204-489-3697, Toll free: 855-489-3697, [info@bfpkan.org](mailto:info@bfpkan.org)

**Japan:** Tel: (81) 3-5969-9656, [bfp@bfpj.org](mailto:bfp@bfpj.org)

**New Zealand:** Tel: (64) 7-855-5262, [bfp.nz@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:bfp.nz@bridgesforpeace.com)

**South Africa:** Tel: 021-975-1941, [info@bridgesforpeace.co.za](mailto:info@bridgesforpeace.co.za)

**South Korea:** Tel: 070-8772-2014, [bfp@bfpkorea.com](mailto:bfp@bfpkorea.com)

**Spanish:** Tel: (52) 646-238-7206, [intl.spanish@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:intl.spanish@bridgesforpeace.com)

**Russia:** Tel: (7) 903-309-1849, [info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com)

**United Kingdom:** Tel: 165-673-9494, [ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com)

**United States:** Tel: 800-566-1998, [postmaster@bfpusa.org](mailto:postmaster@bfpusa.org)



*A higher standard.  
A higher purpose.*

---

#### © COPYRIGHT POLICY:

Bridges for Peace holds the copyright on this material. We encourage pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people to use these articles for preaching and teaching, and we hereby grant permission for a limited number of copies for such educational purposes. However, any other reproduction or transmittal of this material in any form—including reprinting, republishing, recording or use with any information storage and retrieval system—requires written permission from BFP International.

**Bridges for Peace:** Christians supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews in Israel and around the world.

#### International Headquarters

PO Box 1093, Jerusalem, Israel

Tel: (972) 2-624-5004

[intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com)

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

