

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 Asshur, 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

- a. 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 acknowledge 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 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."