

“Don’t Take Your Eyes Off Iran” by Jon Ikin

The Iranian F-4 Phantom took off on its mission to bomb ISIS positions with little concern that it was going to pass through US patrolled airspace. The warplane would have been tracked on the radar screens at Al-Udeid airbase in Qatar, the military hub which serves as America’s HQ against the Islamic terrorists. At any moment USAF jets could have been scrambled to bring the aircraft down, but this time there was no concern. When it comes to ISIS it seems that we are fighting a common enemy. But does that really mean my enemy’s enemy is now my friend? Can we suddenly relax our vigil regarding Iran? Hardly. As Benjamin Netanyahu said to the US Congress: *“Don’t be fooled. The battle between Iran and ISIS doesn’t turn Iran into a friend of America. Iran and ISIS are competing for the crown of militant Islam. One calls itself the Islamic Republic. The other calls itself the Islamic State. Both want to impose a militant Islamic empire first on the region and then on the entire world. They just disagree among themselves who will be the ruler of that empire.”* The people applauded, and rightly so. Iran is still - and will continue to be - a threat to both regional and global security, despite the recent negotiations. *But God will deal with her.* How can we be so sure? Because of Bible prophecy.

Jeremiah 49:34-39

A significant but overlooked prophecy about Iran comes in the 49th chapter of Jeremiah. It is basically a bad news prophecy for Elam (Iran), which makes it a good news prophecy for Israel in the last days. Being found at the close of several chapters dealing with Gentile nations who are going to be attacked by Babylon, this final message is different from the rest. For a start it has a date, which none of the others have. Verse 34 says: **“The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet against Elam, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah...”** This was 596 BC, about a decade before the fall of Jerusalem¹. By recording this prophecy’s date Jeremiah may be saying that it came at a different time to the others. But a more significant issue regards its fulfilment. *“Of Elam nothing can be said with any certainty,”* wrote George Campbell-Morgan, and similar sentiments are echoed by other commentators. Although some make brave and complicated attempts to find a fulfilment,

none of them are very convincing. The case for future fulfilment is a good one – especially since v39 talks about, **“the latter days”**. In fact some prophecy teachers suggest that we could even be looking here at, *“an imminent event.”* If so, we need an urgent understanding of what the Lord says He will do to Iran, according to this revelation. There are no less than four astonishing things revealed here:

1. GOD WILL DEMOLISH THEIR WEAPONS (v35)

The prophecy begins with a scorching threat of Divine destruction. **“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the foremost of their might.’” (v35)** The Elamites were skilled archers (Isaiah 22:6), causing even the Romans to dread the poisoned arrows of the Parthians, their later kin. And today's Iran is no different. The only thing that has changed is the size and power of the arrows.

A Pentagon assessment released in July 2013 identified Iran along with China and North Korea as three nations which, within a decade, would all be capable of firing nuclear missiles that could reach even America. A key phrase used in the report notes that the countries are *“aggressively developing nuclear missiles.”* Analysts from the Defence National Air and Space Intelligence Centre (NASIC) in America who produced the 2013 *BALLISTIC AND CRUISE MISSILE THREAT ASSESSMENT* believe that Iran is set to test launch an ICBM in the very near future - a real threat for Israel when coupled with her uranium enrichment program. Benjamin Netanyahu has said *“the preeminent terrorist state of our time should not have access to the vast nuclear capability that will ultimately give them nuclear weapons.”* But unfortunately this prophecy seems to suggest that there will be no disarmament of Iran's **“bow,”** and casts serious doubts on all the recent negotiations. It will continue to be what Jeremiah called, **“the foremost of their might.”**

As James Robbins, a senior fellow in national security affairs at the American Foreign Policy Council has pointed out, *“If North Korea could develop and test a nuclear weapon, even under a stringent arms control regime, why can't Iran also build a bomb under a far less ample nuclear deal?”* The answer is obvious: they can, and they will. Sanctions didn't hurt the Iranian regime as much as the people, seeing that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) run the

black market. And when you are the main transshipment point for heroin to Europe, not to mention one of the world's main suppliers of that black gold they call oil, one can still make a reasonable living. Enough to finish the job before the West realise that it's too late to try and get the nuclear genie back in the bottle. "*On the nuclear issue*" said Ayatollah Ali Khameni back in 2014, "*the United States and European colonialist countries gathered and applied their entire efforts to bring the Islamic Republic to its knees but they could not, and they will not.*"

But here's the good news: the Lord God of heaven will destroy their weapons. As Jeremiah put it, "**I will break the bow of Elam.**" Just as it was with ancient Babylon so will it be with modern Elam: "Every one of their bows is broken; for the LORD is the God of recompense, He will surely repay" (Jer.51:56).

Exactly how it will happen remains to be seen, but there is an interesting suggestion drawn from the Hebrew word, "break," in this text. It is the word SHABAR, which apparently means, 'to shiver' (Youngs Analytical Concordance). It is a different word to the term for crushing (HARAS – Jer.45:4); or dashing in pieces (NAPHATS – Jer.51:20); or breaking down (NATHATS – Jer.52:14); and seems to suggest *shaking* to destruction. How interesting then that the Bushehr nuclear facility is constructed upon a site where three tectonic plates converge. As Bill Sallus comments, "*It is a disaster waiting to happen.*" If a major quake strikes the old Elamite area of Iran, it could well be the means of breaking their bow. But however it happens we can rest assured that God will demolish their weapons at some point in the prophetic future. We only pray that it will be before any of them are deployed.

2. GOD WILL DISMAY THEIR ARMIES (v36-37)

The next part of the prophecy turns from the *shattering* of Iran's weapons to the *scattering* of her troops. The Lord says: "**...I will scatter them...I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies...**" in v36-37. At the moment Iran fields about 545,000 active personnel in its armed forces, not including the huge numbers of reserve forces, or her proxy armies in other countries. They also have a number of internal divisions such as the Basij, a voluntary force

committed to the supreme leader, Khomeini, taking their orders through the IRGC. Most recently, since the 2010 *Stuxnet* cyber attack on her facility at Natanz (thought to be the work of Israel's Unit 8200), they have concentrated more on cyberwarfare. This includes the unofficial hacker group called The Iranian Cyber Army (ICA) loyal to the supreme leader, and poised ready to hack on command. *"In the cyber-war, we will definitely be the winner,"* boasted a member of Iran's parliament. Experts conclude that Iran must have bought in outside help to raise their capability to what it currently is. So put it down in your notes that Iran has quite an army by any description - all fuelled by Islamic fervour. *"The purest joy in Islam,"* said former Ayatollah Khomeini, *"is to kill and be killed for God."*

But Jeremiah assures us that such an army will be no match for the God of Israel. **"Against Elam I will bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and scatter them toward all those winds..."** says v36. The "four winds" is a prophetic term for the forces of judgment which speed their way from different global directions (see Dan.7:2; 8:8; Rev.7:1). Basically, it's going to be tornado season for Iran. The Lord is going to send them one storm of military conflict after another in the last days. As Matthew Henry put it, *"The four winds shall be brought upon them; the storm shall come sometimes from one point and sometimes from another."* International relations will break down. War will follow war as the regime's forces are reduced to almost nothing. And the result will be humiliating: eventually Iran's military will decide to 'strategically withdraw' into other countries. As Jeremiah says, **"There shall be no nations where the outcasts of Elam will not go. For I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies and before those who seek their life. I will bring disaster upon them, My fierce anger,"** says the Lord; **'And I will send the sword after them until I have consumed them.'** (v36-37). Even when they have fled overseas, like the Nazis who Israel have continued to track down, they will all be found and 'consumed' by God's wrath.

In fact, Ezekiel tells us that the coming judgment against Elam will be so great that it will continue beyond this life into eternity. Listen to what he said: **"There is Elam and all her multitude, all around her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who have gone down uncircumcised to the lower parts of the earth, who caused their terror in the land of the living; Now they bear**

their shame with those who go down to the Pit..." (Ezekiel 32:24). Truly it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb.10:31). Let us make sure we all know Christ as our Saviour lest we join their ranks in eternity.

3. GOD WILL DESTROY THEIR LEADERS (v38)

Jeremiah's radical revelation now turns to the leadership of Iran in v38: **"I will set My throne in Elam, and will destroy from there the king and the princes," says the LORD." (v38).** Bible commentator Matthew Henry, though taking an historical view, believes this verse speaks of a regime change: *"Their princes shall be destroyed and the government quite changed,"* he said. In other words, 'the powers that be,' will soon become, 'the powers that once were,' when the Lord comes to reign in the ancient land of Elam. John McTernan adds this to the discussion: *"This is an astonishing verse! This is the only nation other than Israel, where God states He is going to set up His throne! It is clear from many Scriptures that God is going to set up His throne in His holy temple in Jerusalem. It appears that this verse is indicating that God's authority will be over Elam..."* Bill Sallus concurs: *"...Jerusalem (Jer.3:17) and Elam (49:38) are the only two earthly locations identified in Scripture for the future establishment of the Lord's throne."*

What an amazing prophecy! It forces us to ask the question, when will this take place? The answer is, ultimately in the Messianic Kingdom, when the Lord Jesus reigns as King of kings, right here on earth (Zech.14:9). In that day He will be honoured as the true King over all the world, even Iran. This should be disturbing news for the leadership of Iran because, as the verse also states, *they themselves will be destroyed.* To some this may come as a surprise. The current president of Iran, Hassan Rouhani (born Hassan Feridoun, but he changed his name earlier in life to avoid the Shah's secret police) is generally thought to be, *"a relative moderate,"* who can be warmly received. *E'tedal,* or *"moderation"* in Persian, was his campaign message when running for office. But like the antichrist who is to come, he merely appears to be a man of peace. Remember, this is the same man who called Israel a "wound" in 2013, who leads the no.1 state sponsor of terrorism, and who continues to hold many Christians in prison for their faith. *"We have freedom of expression,"* said one Iranian, *"just not freedom after expression."* This former cleric, top

nuclear negotiator, and former deputy speaker of the Iranian parliament – who got his PhD in law from Glasgow Caledonian University, no less – may seem like a calm, likeable moderate, but he is in fact a political confidence man. His charm offensive fools the world, but not the true God. *Judgment is coming to Iran's leadership.* In fact, when Rouhani visited America in 2013, Christian author and former White House aide Joel Rosenberg sent him an open letter explaining the Gospel, including this very prophecy of Jeremiah 49, calling him to repent. *“When will this judgment come?”* wrote Rosenberg, *“I cannot say for certain. But in the name of Jesus Christ, I urge you to take these and all the Scriptures to heart. I implore you embrace God's love, repent of your sins, and receive Christ as Saviour and Lord by faith. More Iranians have left Islam and come to faith in Christ since 1979 than at any time in the last 14 centuries. More than one million Iranian Muslims have become Christians in the last three decades. I pray that you will become one of them...”* We hope that the president of Iran, along with all our readers – Iranian or otherwise, will take those loving words to heart and act on them. The true King is coming, ready or not.

4. GOD WILL DELIVER THE PEOPLE (V39)

The final verse of this prophecy declares, **“But it shall come to pass in the latter days: I will bring back the captives of Elam,” says the LORD.** (v39). The commentators mostly apply this text to the day of Pentecost because we are told that there were people from Elam present (Acts 2:9). However, a closer look at the text shows that it was chiefly *Jews from the diaspora* who were being referred to (v5), hence Peter's addressing the crowd as, “Men of Judea,” (v14) and “Men of Israel,” (v22). Surely it would be a very disappointing fulfilment if this restoration of captives was referring only to a few Gentiles from Elam who may have possibly been at Jerusalem for Pentecost! Besides, when the Lord said He would **“bring back the captives of Elam,”** the natural reading of the text suggests that they would return to Elam, not Jerusalem.

A better explanation is found in an article by Bill Sallus: *“Jeremiah's last two verses present the exiles of Jeremiah 49:36 with great news. Iranians, who accept Christ in advance of His second coming, will be returned from global exile into the restored fortunes of their historic homeland in Elam.”* This is an interpretation which fits both the text and also the times. At the moment,

“Iran – the world’s only theocracy, with 76 million residents – has the fastest-growing evangelical Christian population on the planet, according to the latest edition of Operation World’s manual,” writes journalist Troy Anderson. *“In fact, more Persians have come to Christ in the 35 [now 36] years since the Islamic Revolution than in the prior 1,400 years combined – and most of these conversions have occurred in the past decade, as an estimated 62 million Iranians have gained access to the Gospel message through satellite TV broadcasts.”* This is also borne out by the laments of Shi’ite cleric, Hasan Mohammadi from the Ministry of Education: *“On average, every day, 50 Iranian girls and boys secretly convert to Christian denominations in our country.”* (British Church Newspaper 28/10/05). Hallelujah! It seems that the Holy Spirit is reaching Iranians in a special way at this time. And Jeremiah’s closing verse is a note of eschatological hope for them in the midst of this prophecy of judgment. One day their land will be under the rule of King Jesus (v38) and they will have freedom to worship Him without fear of reprisal. No wonder it is reported that this prophecy is one which is being zealously studied by Iranian believers in our own day.

Conclusion

When missionary Henry Martyn (1781-1812) was translating the Bible into Persian, he may have wondered how or when these words regarding Iran would be fulfilled. Today, however, we can see more clearly than ever the reality of their fulfilment. Let us take these words to heart and be driven to our knees. The greatest weapon for the Middle East conflict is in the possession of our readers: *prayer*. Like Esther before us, let us take up our role and intercede for both the people of Israel and Iran seeing that we live in *“such a time as this”* (Est.4:14).

(Article written July 2015)

¹ This also means that Jeremiah wrote about Elam before Ezekiel's Gog & Magog prophecy was given (Ezk.38-39).

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