

Light

...on a New World

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Cover picture: Autumn Colours



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Iran: nuclear power for peace?

ONCE AGAIN THE Middle East is headline news with the recent war in Lebanon. Much of the news coming from this region has focussed on Israel and Iran. The stated aim of the Iranian President, is that Israel must be 'wiped off the map'. His claims that the Holocaust was a 'myth' drew further international condemnation.

Iran is also determined to become a nuclear power, a desire that is causing great concern particularly in Israel and the U.S.A. In February 1993 it was announced that deposits of uranium had been discovered in Iran for the first time. In view of this Iran made the decision to begin mining and processing its own uranium for its nuclear power programme. Although Iran's stated aim is to build 20 nuclear power stations in as many years to meet its growing energy demands, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher in Washington noted that this ambitious and costly pursuit of a complete nuclear fuel cycle only made sense if the intent was to support a nuclear weapons programme.

Then at the beginning of 2006 scientists in Iran announced that they had made an important breakthrough in their attempts to develop nuclear power. The scientists' work means Iran can now begin building its nuclear power stations and may in future be able to make nuclear weapons. However, the Iranian President insists that he only plans to use Iran's nuclear technology in a peaceful way and has resisted all efforts by the U.N. to persuade his country to cease its nuclear ambitions.



Iran's nuclear facilities

The concern that Iran might gain a nuclear arsenal within a few years has prompted a call for sanctions to be agreed by the U.N., with a view to putting pressure upon the country to renounce its nuclear ambitions. However the threat of sanctions may not be sufficient to deter Iran from continuing with its nuclear programme and military options may need to be considered.

In April this year a report in the New Yorker magazine suggested that the Pentagon was stepping up plans for a possible air strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. The Washington Post also reported that the U.S.A. may be considering military action, although stating that no attack was likely in the short term. However this report was denied by American government sources.

There are also rumours that Israel is understandably concerned, given the anti-Semitic rhetoric coming from Tehran and will not stand by and allow Iran to become armed with nuclear missiles. In December 2005 military sources revealed that Israel's armed forces were ordered by prime minister Ariel Sharon to be ready by the end of March for possible strikes on secret uranium enrichment sites in Iran. This order came after Israeli intelligence warned the government that Iran was operating uranium enrichment facilities, that although believed to be small were concealed in civilian locations.

Then in February 2006 NBC Newsweek reported:

‘As scary as the idea may sound, the Israelis may not be bluffing. Their defence experts display no doubt whatsoever that Israel's Air Force can cripple Iran's nuclear program if necessary. The trick they say, is to go after the system's weak spots. “You need to

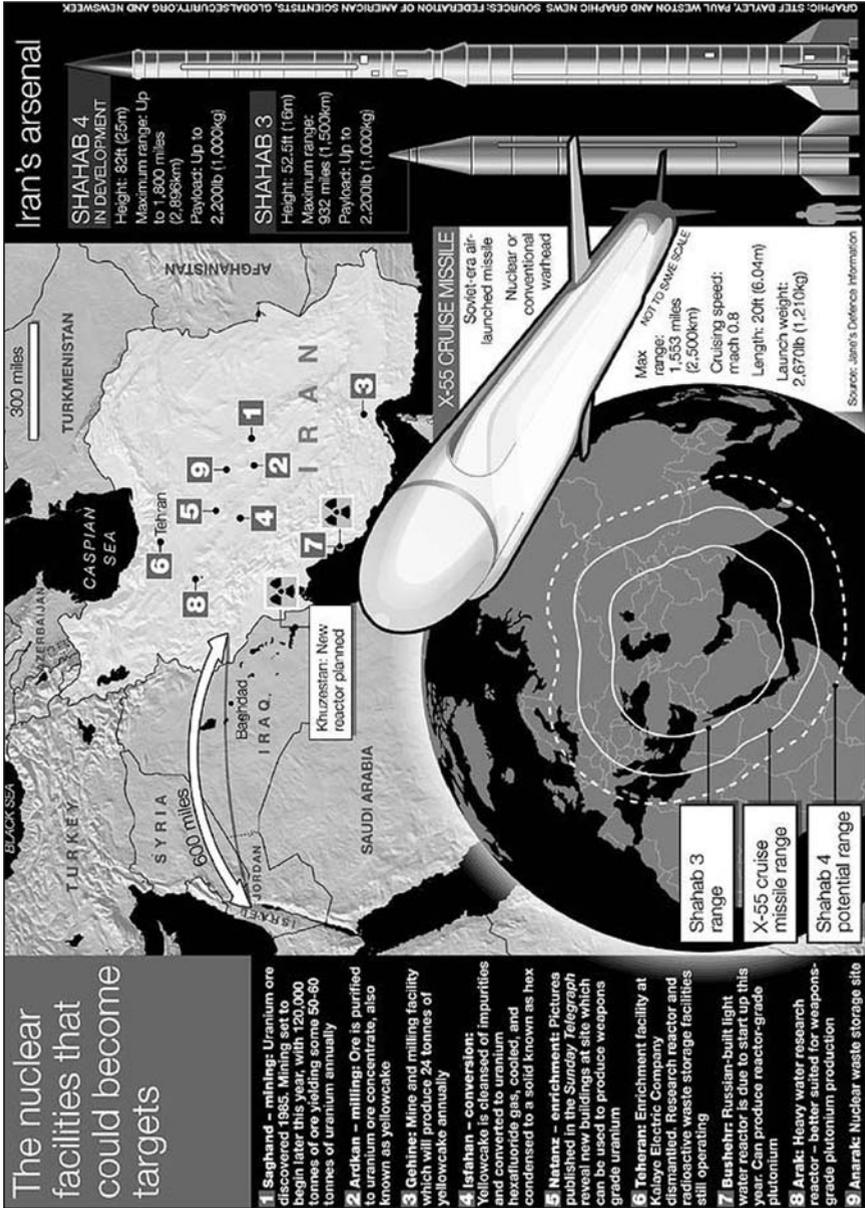
identify the bottlenecks,” says a senior Israeli military source, asking not to be named for security reasons. “There are not very many. If you take them out, then you really undermine the project.” Shlomo Brom, a former Israeli armed forces chief of strategic planning, says the destruction of two or three key facilities would probably suffice. He singles out the Natanz uranium-enrichment complex and the conversion plant at Esfahan as critical.’

These events serve to illustrate the fragile nature of peace in the Middle East and the impact this volatile region has upon world stability. A striking example of the volatile nature of the Middle East came when Hezbollah crossed the border, attacked Israeli soldiers and abducted two soldiers as hostages to be used in a prisoner exchange. Israel responded to increasing attacks by Hezbollah and the abduction of its soldiers by attacking Hezbollah positions in Lebanon. This was met with a barrage of rockets from Hezbollah who have fired well over 3,000 rockets into northern Israel. The death toll at the time of writing this article stands at around 1,000 Lebanese and 400 Israelis.



Hezbollah Militants

Hezbollah is an organisation founded in 1982 by a group of Muslim clerics. This terrorist group has the stated aim of destroying the State of Israel, arguing that Israel has no right to exist because it has been established on Muslim lands. Hezbollah has from its inception been supported by Iran, which provides the faction with considerable financial support and arms. The escalating war has underlined the extent of the armaments supplied to Hezbollah by Iran and some



reports indicate that up to 1,000 Iranian Revolutionary Guards are currently helping Hezbollah. It has been suggested that Iran instigated this conflict to divert attention from its nuclear ambitions and is fighting a war by proxy. It remains to be seen if America or the U.N. succeed in curtailing Iran's nuclear ambitions, or if Iran will succeed in driving Israel off the world map.

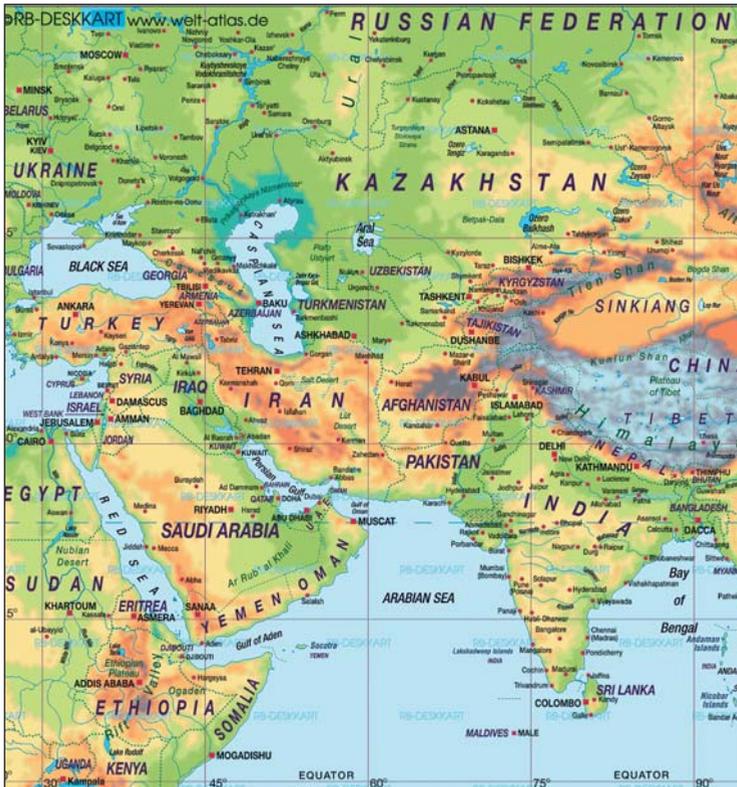
The increasingly instability in the world does not bode well for the future. Is the world heading inexorably towards global confrontation and possible nuclear war? Will America or the U.N. succeed in curtailing Iran's nuclear ambitions, or will Iran succeed in driving Israel off the world map?

The Bible alone has the answer to these questions for it contains prophecies which tell us what will happen in the not so distant future. Before we explore these we first need to look at a little history to set the scene and help explain the current situation in the Middle East. Modern day Iran was originally known as Persia. The country has long been known as Iran (land of the Aryans) by its people. However for centuries it has been called Persia by Europeans, primarily because of the writings of Greek historians.

In the Bible we find Iran referred to by the name Persia and the prophecies regarding Persia give an interesting insight into what the future holds for this country that seeks the destruction of the State of Israel - whose land and people were chosen by God to be the nucleus of His kingdom on earth.

Persia is an ancient adversary of Israel and history records how this nation defeated ancient Babylon (now in Iraq) which included the land of Israel in their empire. The Bible tells us that the Babylonian king called Nebuchadnezzar had previously invaded the land of Israel and deported the Jews to Babylon. When the Persians conquered Babylon, the Persian king Cyrus made a decree that allowed the Jews to return to their own land - Palestine or Israel as it is called today.

Now coupled with increasing anxiety regarding modern day Iran's nuclear ambitions, is the closer relationship developing between Russia



Map of the Middle East

and Iran. Since 2001, Russia has been helping Iran build a nuclear power station and in an attempt to seek a compromise to the current situation, offered to process all of Iran’s uranium. Currently Iran is resisting this offer, but if world pressure pushes Iran into accepting this compromise, it could defuse the current crisis and bring Iran into an even closer relationship with Russia by making it dependent on Russia to supply its energy needs.

The time prior to the return of Jesus Christ is often referred to in the Bible as the *‘latter days’* or *‘latter years’*. Concerning these *‘latter years’* the prophet Ezekiel wrote: *‘...the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of*

Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal' [Ezekiel 38.1-3].

The identification of the various names in this prophecy lead us to conclude that the invading power will be a confederacy of nations led by Russia. (For further information on this topic see the special issue entitled Light on Bible Prophecy – volume 19.3). Ezekiel speaks of how this power will come down against the land of Israel from *'the far North'* [Ezekiel 38.15].

'In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely.'

[Ezekiel 38.8]

The restoration of the Jews back to their own land has been a modern day sign of the power of God revealed in the earth and a fulfilment of His word spoken so long ago.

Ezekiel gives a list of nations who will form an alliance with Russia, a power which in the latter days is described as having many people associated with her. Ezekiel prophesied: *'Prepare yourself and be ready, you and all your companies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them.'* [Ezekiel 38. 7]

Russia is to be a *'guard'* or defender of the nations associated with her. Ezekiel gives a list of those confederate nations: *'Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet.'* [Ezekiel 38.5]. These nations are today recognised as being Islamic nations and are implacable enemies of Israel. The Bible describes the confederacy that will attack Israel in these words:

'.. you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army. You will

come up against my people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against my land, so that the nations may know me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes.' [Ezekiel 38.15,16]

So this great invasion will arise out of the far North, sweeping down into the land and devastating the nation of Israel. It is at this time that half the city of Jerusalem will be taken and the nation will be in great distress [Zechariah 14.2]. However, in this time of dire need Israel will finally cease trusting in their own strength and turn back to the God of their fathers for help. Ezekiel records God will respond to their pleas for deliverance, for it is His land and they are His people.

'...it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,' says the Lord GOD, 'that my fury will show in my face...And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. 'Thus I will magnify myself and sanctify myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.' [Ezekiel 38.18, 22-23]

This intervention by God in human affairs will affect the whole world. The nations will be forced to recognise His hand and power at work in the earth. The purpose of God is to destroy the kingdoms of men and set up His glorious Kingdom upon the earth [Daniel 2.44]. The nations will resist, but in the end it will be futile for as we read in the Psalms: *'Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against his Anointed...He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision. Then he shall speak to them in his wrath, And distress them in his deep displeasure: 'Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion.'* [Psalm 2.1-6]

The Lord Jesus will return as God's appointed King, the Prince of Peace and Zion (Jerusalem) will be his capital city. From there he will reign over the whole earth, dispensing justice and Divine law, and bringing all nations into subjection to his Father. No more will nation rise up against nation to go to war, but it will be a time of true and lasting world-wide peace when the earth is filled with the glory of God. (See also *Psalm 48.2; Isaiah 9.6,7; Jeremiah 3.17; Micah 4.2; Zechariah 14.16*).

From a human perspective there seems no solution to the continual cycle of terrorism, war and misery that grows ever more menacing. The trouble in Middle Eastern countries fuelled by Iran and her Arab neighbours is not confined to these countries alone, but terrorism affects many nations of the world. Bible students expect such things to get much worse before they get better. Jesus spoke of these last days prior to his return in these words:

'...on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; 'men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth.' [Luke 21.25-26]

Fear will fill the earth as mankind views the death and destruction that is beyond his ability to control. However, in contrast, Bible students can look beyond the time of trouble that precedes the establishment of the Kingdom of God and look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who faithfully live out their lives now and trust Him, will be given everlasting life in the Kingdom age to come.

So the choice is yours, you can live out a brief life hoping that the world will get better and that man will not destroy himself. Alternatively you can believe and trust the Word of God, take refuge in the Lord Jesus and find true life in His coming Kingdom. We urge you to make the right choice whilst there is still time!

Andy Peel
Northampton, England

A SELECTION OF CHRISTADELPHIAN BELIEFS

- ❖ **There is only one God the Creator**
- ❖ **Jesus Christ is the Son of God**
- ❖ **The Holy Spirit is the power of God**
- ❖ **The Bible is the inspired Word of God**
- ❖ **Man is mortal and dies because of sin**
- ❖ **Bodily resurrection is the true hope of believers**
- ❖ **Salvation is only possible through Jesus**
- ❖ **Belief and baptism are essential for salvation**
- ❖ **There is only one true Gospel**
- ❖ **The Gospel was preached to Abraham**
- ❖ **Abraham's descendants the Jews, are God's witnesses**
- ❖ **The Kingdom of Israel was the Kingdom of God in the past**
- ❖ **Jesus will return to re-establish the Kingdom of God on earth**

What did Jesus mean?

‘Seek first the kingdom of God’

THE TITLE OF this article is found in the teaching of Jesus known as ‘The Sermon on the Mount’. Jesus had just began his ministry to the Jews and the hallmark of his message was apparent immediately. ‘Repent’ he said, *‘for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’* [Matthew 4.17]; then he proceeded to call his disciples. Their reaction was to follow him without delay and join his mission of preaching the Gospel. Having gathered his disciples *‘Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people’* [Matthew 4.23].

There was no doubt that Jesus was a unique preacher. His appeal to the people would have been dramatic with his ability to heal, but more than this was the force of the message that he spoke. For many years the Jews had not only experienced the hard rule of their Roman overlords in secular affairs but their national religion had been turned into a burden of rituals by the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus focused on this particularly in his address to the people when he told them about the kingdom of God and how they should conduct their lives in order to inherit it.

Truly it was a special message. Rather than resisting the heavy hand of the Romans by organising a national rebellion, he told them to break free from the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and look instead for another kingdom yet to be revealed. This was the true hope of Israel and yet we read that when Jesus had finished speaking *‘the people were astonished at his teaching’* [Matthew 7.28]. Even though it was a future kingdom, Jesus was insistent that no time was to be lost in preparing for

it. He taught that a personal, inner transformation was the key to the inheritance of the kingdom and that the process had to begin at once.

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

There are many references in the ‘Sermon’ to ‘*heaven*’ and yet it is clear that Jesus meant ‘the Kingdom’ to be understood in a literal form on the earth. This is emphasised in the model prayer of Jesus known as ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ [Matthew 6.9-13]. This tells us that the kingdom was a heavenly kingdom which would be established on the earth and also that it would be in the future.

The literal nature of the kingdom is proved also by its literal existence in the past as the national constitution of the nation of Israel. The first indications of this are found in the first book of the Bible. We read there that the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were promised an inheritance of land as a reward for their faithfulness to God [Genesis 12.7; 17.8]. Although those patriarchs became wealthy by the standards of their time, they never actually possessed any land - it is a promise which still awaits fulfilment in the future.

There are many other references to this future time in both Old and New Testaments. For example, in Psalm 72 there is a wonderful word picture of a time of peace and plenty under the wise rule of God’s appointed king. This is confirmed by the prophet Isaiah (read Isaiah chapters 11 and 41). It is important to notice the consistent references to the type of people who would be in the kingdom of God. They would be similar to the God-fearing patriarchs of old, who had no interest in human kingdoms. This is made very plain in the prophecy of Daniel who said in his summary of human history that God would intervene in human affairs: *‘And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people (i.e. human rulers); it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever’* [Daniel 2.44].

THE KINGDOM IN OUR HEARTS

A view held by some, is that the kingdom exists now in the hearts of believers. The basis of this idea is the teaching of Jesus: *'For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you'* [Luke 17.21]. However, Jesus was at that time rebuking the Pharisees, because they failed to understand the reality of Jesus' teaching that the kingdom was yet future and that **the one in their very midst**, would be the king ruling over it.

There is however a sense in which the kingdom **is** within us and this is when we truly seek it above any other form of ambition or desire. The believer must have **faith** - a conviction that the kingdom will come and that God is able to bring the faithful to places in it. This prospect is very much in the believer's heart. The Bible tells us about many men and women in the past who had faith. Of Abraham and the patriarchs we read *'truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them'* [Hebrews 11.15,16]. Again it says of Moses that he esteemed *'the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible'* [Hebrews 11.26,27].

SEEK FIRST

There is no doubt that Abraham, Moses and Daniel, together with many others, looked for God's kingdom from heaven more than anything else. They were prepared to give up everything this life had to offer in order to attain it. The object of Jesus' sermon was to enable the people of his day to view the kingdom in the same way. With the prospect before them as described in the words of the Psalms and the Old Testament prophets, there was, and still is, every reason to do so.

However sometimes there are pressing reasons for not seeking the kingdom first. For some, the present life is filled with good things and

the anticipation that they will continue. In addition, those in positions of honour and authority would not lightly give them up. On one occasion Jesus encountered a man who appeared sincere and receptive to the concept of eternal life in the kingdom of God. It seemed also that he conscientiously followed the requirements of the Jewish law. He said *“All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?”* Jesus said to him, *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”* It proved too big a price, for it says that *‘he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions’* [Matthew 19.20-22].

For others, the present life is a continual struggle to survive. Long hours of work are needed just to provide for the basic necessities of life. Jesus had an answer to this problem too; and so much of his time and attention was taken up with teaching people with pressures like these. They were the ones most likely to respond to the Gospel message rather than those already satisfied with their present situation. Jesus said to them: *“...do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ Or, ‘What shall we drink?’ or, ‘what shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek **first** the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things...”* [Matthew 6.31-33].

BEING READY FOR THE KINGDOM

Jesus said that not only should the believers seek the kingdom above all present concerns, but it involves seeking *his righteousness* too. Sometime after the sermon on the mount, Jesus elaborated on the subject to his disciples, saying: *‘...seek the kingdom of God, and all these things (i.e. the things that people spend so much time and effort providing for) shall be added to you...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; And you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately’* [Luke 12.31,34-36].

The need for preparation was constantly underlined in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus told many parables about the kingdom of God. Two in particular describe the type of person who truly seeks the kingdom. He said '*...the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field*' [Matthew 13.44]. What a contrast to the rich Pharisee who was unable to give up his present possessions and prospects! Again Jesus said '*the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it*' [Matthew 13.45].

In short, nothing can compare to the glory and value of the kingdom. Not only is it worth seeking first, but it is worth giving up every kind of present pursuit in order to attain it. That is what the patriarchs did, leaving their homes, cities and even their old way of life, for the prospect of a better life to come. That too must be the approach of every true follower of Jesus. We must forget the concerns of our own lives, confident that God will continue to provide for us while we look for the kingdom.

THE PRIVILEGE OF INHERITANCE

A little later during the ministry of Jesus, the disciples had grown accustomed to the concept of the kingdom. They had already made their decision to follow Jesus and given up their previous occupations while they followed Jesus and assisted him in preaching the Gospel. They are in a sense forerunners of all the believers. But then came another form of temptation. On one occasion they came to Jesus and asked, '*Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*' [Matthew 18.1] as if that should be of serious concern to them. Later Peter asked '*see, we have left all and followed you. Therefore what shall we have?*' [Matthew 19.27]

Jesus answered those questions with a lesson in humility. Places of honour will exist in the kingdom but they are the gift of God and cannot be earned as a reward for great deeds. First of all, he said '*unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter*

the kingdom of heaven [Matthew 18.3]. He meant that they must retain the acceptance and trust which they showed when Jesus first called them.

In another parable he likened the kingdom to a man who had a vineyard and who went out at various times of the day to find workers. Some spent all day labouring in the heat; while others came later and only worked a little time. However they all received the same wages [Matthew 20.1-16]. Those who had arrived first expected more for their efforts than those who came last. But the kingdom is not like this. Firstly, it is God who rewards according to his wisdom and secondly, those who truly seek the kingdom will be overjoyed with the grace of God in giving them the opportunity to be in the kingdom. The privilege of serving God, the Lord of the vineyard, will be reward enough. Jesus had in fact dealt with those concerns in the Sermon on the Mount as well. Amongst other qualities he highlighted these:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit' (i.e. not those who are proud and competitive) *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* [Matthew 5.3].

'Blessed are the meek', (such as Moses, who doubted his ability to do the work God asked him to do) *for they shall inherit the earth* [Matthew 5.5].

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, (and there have always been those who have suffered for their faith) *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* [Matthew 5.10].

These are all things which teach and encourage us if we also wish to inherit the kingdom of God. There is a wonderful future ahead in the world which God has prepared for those who seek it above all else. The important question is - are you prepared to give it your first priority?

Alan Wharton
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Bible Characters

Moses

'NO-ONE HAS EVER shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel' [Deuteronomy 34.12 NIV].



These words of Scripture tell us about the prophet and leader of a people whose great ancestor was Abraham, who exercised an inspiring influence over the Jewish people for much of their history. Nearly 1500 years after his death religious teachers were uncompromising in their convictions: *'we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke unto Moses'* [John 9.28,29].

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

Moses was born at a critical time. Alarmed at the explosive birth rate among the Israelites living in Egypt and anticipating a possible threat of uprising within his kingdom [Exodus 1. 9,10], the Egyptian king instituted an oppressive work regime which culminated with a particularly horrific edict: *'Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive'* [Exodus 1.22].

Moses' parents had two older children, a daughter Miriam who was about twelve and Aaron who was three years old. When Moses was born, his parents took a huge risk in concealing him from view, for his mother perceived something rather special about her newborn son. *'Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'* [Romans 10.17]. There is a strong hint that the God of Israel had communicated with Jochabed, Moses' mother: *'By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months of his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command'* [Hebrews 11.23].

Jochabed and Amram, believed what God had revealed to them. Their newborn son was a child with a destiny to fulfil. When he was three months old his mother had to accept that it was no longer possible to hide her son from view. She devised a daring plan. Constructing an ark of papyrus and coating its outer surface with bitumen and asphalt Jochabed placed her infant inside and she hid the tiny ark among reeds close to the river bank where the daughter of Pharaoh regularly bathed. Miriam was instructed by her mother to keep watch from a distance and immediately report what might befall her baby brother.

IN PHARAOH'S COURT

The Egyptian princess together with her royal maids soon saw the ark among the reeds. When she heard the three month old baby crying *'she had compassion on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children"'* [Exodus 2.6]. The princess had no sympathy with her father's pitiless policies of infanticide. Miriam came forward and offered to find a Hebrew nurse to wean the child and the princess instantly accepted. Jochabed, the child's mother was summoned and the princess commanded her to take the child and nurse it. When the child was fully weaned Pharaoh's daughter adopted him as her son. She gave him the name Moses, because as she said, *'I drew him out of the water'* [Exodus 2.10]. From that moment Moses became a royal prince and an heir to the throne of Egypt.

For the first forty years of his life, *'Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds'* [Acts 7.22]. Moses also received instruction from his mother and in the early formative years of his life he would learn that his destiny was not in the royal court of Egypt. He and his fellow Hebrews were children of the covenant which the God of Israel had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses would have been familiar with God's reassuring words to Jacob: *'I am God...do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there...and I will also surely bring you up again'* [Genesis 46.3,4].

NEW LIFE AS AN EXILE

At forty years of age Moses made a momentous decision; he rejected his royal status [Acts 7.23, Hebrews 11.24]. He left the Egyptian court and visited his fellow Israelites who were in subjection to their Egyptian overseers. The moment had come for Moses to commit himself to the role God had ordained for him, *'for he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand'* [Acts 7.25]. Disdaining the life of a privileged adopted son of a royal princess, Moses chose to share the oppressive living conditions of his fellows in order to prepare them for rebellion against their taskmasters and to make the journey as a united people to the promised land of the covenant [Hebrews 11.25].

Moses soon witnessed an example of Egyptian bullying. One of his brethren, a fellow Hebrew, was physically assaulted by an Egyptian. Moses intervened and taking care that no-one was in the vicinity avenged his abused brother by murdering the Egyptian and then burying the corpse in the sand. Moses believed that this act of vengeance against oppression would show his brethren that he had come to deliver them from bondage, *'but they did not understand.'*[Acts 7.25].

The Egyptian Pharaoh would most certainly have learned about Moses' decision to turn his back on the royal court. Pharaoh sensed political motives. He commanded that Moses be arrested and tried for

treason, but Moses fled from Egypt, travelling eastwards across the wilderness of Paran until he reached Midian on the eastern side of the Red Sea, a journey of about two hundred miles.

Moses must have pondered why he had been rejected by his own people and for forty years he remained far away from his Hebrew brethren. His faith and belief in his divinely ordained role as deliverer of the covenant people began to fade. The Exodus narrative reveals nothing of Moses' sojourn in Midian until his marriage to Zipporah, daughter of Jethro, a Midianite and the birth of his two sons. By this time he was in his late seventies. Moses took employment as a shepherd working for his father-in-law.

ANGELIC VISITATION

At Horeb while watching the flocks in pasture lands just west of the Red Sea he witnessed an angel of the Lord appearing to him in a flame of fire. Moses was both mentally and spiritually quite unprepared for what he heard. *'Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt'* [Exodus 3.10]. But Moses could not forget that both his own people and the Egyptians had despised him.

The angel tried to reassure him – *'I will certainly be with you'* [Exodus 3.12]. Moses was unconvinced. He demanded to know the meaning of the name Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so that he might convince the Israelites of his authority to deliver them from slavery. The angel replied *'I AM WHO I AM'*. Although the patriarchs had called upon the name Yahweh, its meaning was unknown to them. Now for the first time Israel were to understand their unique role as the manifestation of their God.

The name Yahweh expresses the sense – *'I will become whatsoever I please'* or more precisely – *'I will become whatsoever I may become'*. [Rotheram, J.B. *The Emphasised Bible* (1902) p.26]. This amazing revelation to Moses of the name of Israel's God, the God of Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob, opened before him the whole purpose of the Almighty, that He would manifest Himself in His chosen people.

Moses continued to struggle against the Lord – *‘But suppose they will not believe me, or listen to my voice: suppose they say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you’ [Exodus 4.1].* The angel of the Lord countered his protest – *‘I will be your mouth, and teach you what you shall say’.* Moses was not pleading humility, this was not meekness, nor was it an unwillingness to believe in his considerable abilities. This was rebelliousness and the Lord angrily agreed to Moses’ request that his older brother, Aaron, should present the case for Israel’s release from bondage before Pharaoh. With this assurance Moses reluctantly made arrangements with his father-in-law to return to Egypt.

RETURN TO EGYPT

Moses took his wife and two young sons and set them upon a donkey to take the long journey through the wild country of Paran back to Egypt. But Moses was in a sullen mood. Having been rejected by his people he had no desire to have anything more to do with them. He had not circumcised his younger son, so, when the family stopped at a lodging house the Lord met Moses and sought to kill him. His wife Zipporah was enraged. Taking a sharp flint she circumcised her younger son, a procedure for which she clearly had little sympathy.

This was the turning point for Moses. He now saw clearly what the Lord had revealed to his parents at the time of his birth eighty years before, that he was to be the instrument of Divine will. Naming his younger son Eliezer [Exodus 18.4] – meaning *‘my God is my helper’* he felt an awakening of that spiritual and mental urge which had motivated him forty years before.

JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND

As God promised, Aaron spoke all the words which He had rehearsed with Moses. Moses, at his elder brother’s side, stood in Pharaoh’s presence and witnessed firsthand the awesome power of the

Almighty God of Israel. He quickly recovered his mental and spiritual energies to become the inspiring leader of God's chosen people. Throughout all the plagues which affected the Egyptian people, Moses and Aaron were addressed by the Lord, almost as equals, but after the last plague Moses took the decisive lead and became the deliverer and the prophet for Israel.

It was Moses who led the way after the spectacular crossing of the Red Sea and through the wilds of the Sinai peninsula. Despite the awesome display of Divine power, the Israelites still demonstrated a reluctance to put their full trust in Moses' leadership. On the shores of the Red Sea he had to cope with an undercurrent of discontent. This mood later reared its head with the incident of the golden calf, the rebellion led by Korah, and the completely unjustified criticism levelled against him by his older sister and brother. Yet Moses resolved these hostile threats to his authority with patience and appeals to the Lord for guidance.

Moses' qualities as a leader were shown not only in the route by which he guided the people but also by his highly successful military campaigns which saw the defeats of two powerful kings, Sihon and Og. His leadership skills were obvious but it was his character as a prophet which receive particular emphasis in both Old and New Testaments of Holy Scripture. God declared concerning Moses – *'He is faithful in all mine house: with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches'* [Numbers 12.7,8 RV].

MOSES THE LAWGIVER

It was the Law, given to Moses over a period of forty days on the mountain of Sinai, to which the people were commanded to commit themselves wholeheartedly, a system of divinely ordained statutes which were to have a far reaching significance. Jesus teaching in the Jerusalem temple reminded his fellow Jews – *'Did not Moses give you the law?'* [John 7.19].

It was Moses who oversaw the construction of the tabernacle, its consecration and the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests. Following its completion and erection on the first day of the first month of the second year after the deliverance of the nation from Egypt. Moses commanded the Israelites that a celebration of the Passover feast should be commemorated on the fourteenth day of that first month, as a memorial of their deliverance from servitude.

THE LAND OF PROMISE

On the first day of the second month God commanded Moses, in preparation for conquering the land of Canaan, the land covenanted by God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to number all males over the age of twenty who were to make themselves available for military activities. Moses was approaching the climax of his divinely ordained mission, to bring Israel, the covenant people, into the land of promise.

Yet again Moses' authority was challenged by his brethren. Twelve men of Israel, one from each tribe, were chosen to make a thorough search of the entire land. After forty days ten of them brought back a disheartening report on what they found. Demoralised, the Israelites were provoked to anger and Moses was faced with an outright rebellion. They gave no credence to the favourable accounts given by Joshua and Caleb. Threatened by the Lord with pestilence and rejection for their abject lack of faith, the Israelites were only saved by Moses' pleas on their behalf, but the nation was condemned to remain in the Sinai peninsula for a further thirty eight years until every male over the age of twenty had died [*Deuteronomy 2.14*]. *'Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly' [Numbers 14.39].*

On the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year after their escape from Egypt, Moses began his farewell address to his people. One hundred and twenty years old, he rehearsed before all Israel the Law which had been written out and deposited in the ark of the testimony. Having for a second time brought the nation to the

threshold of the covenant land, he himself, through an impetuous act of carelessness was not to enter. Psalm 106, a poetic account of Israel's rebelliousness and God's mercies succinctly records that *'they rebelled against his spirit, so that he spoke rashly with his lips'* [Psalm 106.33]. Moses' impetuosity denied him his ultimate ambition: *'you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them'* [Numbers 20.12].

THE LAST WORDS OF MOSES

Moses' last words to his people as he prepared for his ascent from the plains of Moab to the summit of Mount Nebo from where the Lord showed him the entire land which He had sworn to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to their seed, were: *'Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, The shield of your help, and the sword of your majesty!'* [Deuteronomy 33.29].

This remarkable man, the divinely inspired author of the first five books of the Old Testament, died at the age of one hundred and twenty – *'his eyes were not dim nor his natural vigour abated'* [Deuteronomy 34.7]. He died in faith having seen the covenant land, in full confidence that he would see the glory of the promised Messiah, that glory which was glimpsed momentarily in the vision of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain where also Moses and Elijah were seen talking with him. Moses was truly a man of faith, patience and godliness.

'Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant ... but Christ as a son over his own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end' [Hebrews 3.5-6]. The diligence Moses showed in his commitment as leader of God's people remains an example for all to hold fast the faithful word of sound doctrine.

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Birds of the Bible

The Ostrich

THE HEBREW NAME for the Ostrich is – ‘bath hai-ya-anah’. The name, is generally thought to mean, ‘daughter of the greedy one’ and the plural, ‘daughter of the barren ground or desert place’. Under the Mosaic Law the Ostrich was regarded as unclean. *‘And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten...the ostrich...’* [Leviticus 11.13,16].

The Ostrich is the largest of all living birds. Its full height when it stands is over 2.13 metres (7 ft) tall. Male birds usually weigh about 79.5 kg (175 lbs), larger ones as much as 136 kg (300 lbs). By contrast the females are much smaller and consequently weigh a lot less. The only other birds anywhere near the size of the Ostrich are the Emu and the Rhea of the southern hemisphere.

The head of the Ostrich is rather small in relation to its body size; it is flat with very large eyes. The bird’s neck is long and very flexible and like its long powerful legs, completely bare of feathers. The sleek black and white plumage of the cock bird is quite splendid compared with the dull grey-brown colours of the hen. Ostrich feathers are still in great demand today as was the case in ancient times. Ostrich plumes graced ancient royal courts and were widely used as fans. The finest example is the ivory handled fan of Ostrich feathers that was found in the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamen is on display in the National Museum at Cairo. The Bible makes mention of the beauty of the Ostrich plumes in these words found in the book of Job: *‘The wings of the ostrich wave proudly’* [Job 39. 13].

Besides being the largest bird, it has two other remarkable features. Firstly, it only has two toes on each foot, one of them equipped with a claw-like hoof that becomes a dangerous weapon of defence if the bird has to defend itself. Secondly, it is completely flightless, lacking the tiny hook-like filaments that cling together and give the feathers of flying birds the resistance to air that makes flight possible.



Unlike the Stork renowned for its fidelity to one mate, the Ostrich is often polygamous. Again in contrast to the Stork and other kinds of bird, which build nests in the top of trees or on tall rocks, the Ostrich merely scoops out a shallow depression in the ground and here she lays as many as 25 large eggs. Other eggs are laid at random near to the nest, however these eggs that may appear to be abandoned, are actually a food source for its young in the event of a possible shortage of food.

The male bird warms the nest during the night and the hen incubates it by day, however she is known to leave the nest unattended for long periods when the sun is particularly hot. At these times the eggs, though very thick-shelled, which protects from extreme heat, are quite vulnerable to damage or despoiling by animals or humans. This practice is viewed as negligent and a cruel disregard for the safety of its young. *'For she leaves her eggs on the ground, and warms them in the dust; She forgets that a foot may crush them, or that a wild beast may break them. She treats her young harshly, as though they were not hers; Her labour is in vain, without concern.'* [Job.39.14-16]

The prophet Jeremiah uses this seeming lack of care or concern by



the hen ostrich, to compare with and condemn the attitude of the Israelites, *'But the daughter of my people has become cruel, like ostriches in the wilderness'* [Lamentations 4.3].

The male assumes almost all the care of the young while the hens go off together. Although Ostriches are powerful birds they will leave the nest and young if they sense approaching danger. They will however try to divert the attention of any enemies from the nest, by setting off at high speed,

up to 65kmh (40mph), flapping their wings as they go; this great turn of speed is compared to the horse and his rider. *'When she lifts herself on high, she scorns the horse and its rider'* [Job 39. 18].

Some opinions and stories about Ostriches are exaggerated and unfair and some just completely false. For example, the phrase about people 'burying their heads in the sand,' is thought to come from a habit of the ostrich, to hide its head in the sand when in danger, but it doesn't actually do that, it does run round in circles and put its head in bushes and lays its head and neck on the ground. In other words it does behave rather strangely and is described in Scripture as lacking in sense and short of wisdom. *'Because God deprived her of wisdom, and did not endow her with understanding'* [Job. 39.17].

Even admitting this deficiency, many scientists are puzzled and still do not understand its other peculiarities. For example the Ostrich has a bladder which is characteristic of mammals, but not possessed by any other kind of bird, also it has large black eyelashes used to protect the eyes from blowing sand. Because of these unusual features scientists

tend to regard the bird as a very primitive species of bird.

The Ostrich is omnivorous, eating a wide variety of food that includes grass, fruits, small mammals, birds, snakes and lizards as well as pebbles which it uses as an aid to digestion. This very varied diet is not surprising when one considers that the all-wise Creator designed this bird to inhabit and survive in deserts and wasteland areas.

Ancient peoples referred to the Ostrich as the ‘Camel bird’ (Latin name ‘*Struthio camelus*’), because it has the ability to withstand long periods without water like the Camel, being suited to solitary barren wasteland.

In Bible prophecy, this feature is used, along with similar wasteland creatures like the Jackal, to represent desert life and depict the ruinous desolation brought about by God’s righteous judgements on His enemies. Examples of this are the prophecies against Babylon and other nations. *‘For it is the day of the LORD’s vengeance, the year of recompence for the cause of Zion...From generation to generation it shall lie waste;...thorns shall come up in its palaces...It shall be a habitation of jackals, a courtyard for ostriches. The wild beasts of the desert’ [Isaiah 34.8,10, 13,14].*

These prophecies in the Bible that include references to the Ostrich, also testify to the power and might of God to bring great nations and empires to nothing and leave their once proud cities as dwelling places for wild animals like the Ostrich.

‘O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your riches’ [*Psalm 104. 24*].

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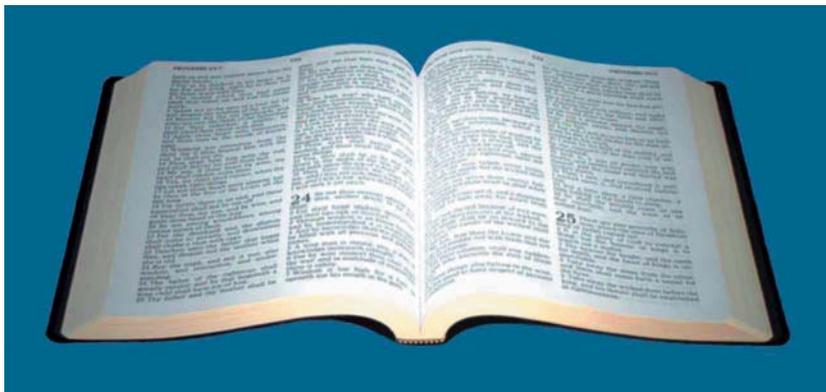
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