

CHAPTER 9

WHY IS ELAM SO SIGNIFICANT? (CITADEL OF SUSA - CAPITAL OF ELAM)

Shushan the palace (the Citadel of Susa) located near Andimesk is mentioned 19 times in Esther, as well as in Nehemiah 1:1 and Daniel 8:2. Not only was Shushan the ancient capital of the Elamite empire, but became the capital of the Medo-Persian Empire after Cyrus conquered Babylon. Evidently, Hamadan (Ecbatana) which was located in cool central Iran was the summer capital while Persepolis (Takht-e-Jamshid - 20 miles north of Shiraz) was the ceremonial capital for events such as the Persian New Year.

A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ELAM AND SUSA (SHUSH, SHUSHAN)

Shushan was located 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf east of the Tigris River in Steppe country which is a continuation of the southern Mesopotamian plain. Three names are used for the one city - Shushan in the Bible, Susa in secular history, and Shush in present day Iran. Elam was the area around Shushan. Excavations at Shushan indicate that the city was occupied from 4000 BC to 1200 AD. It was the capital of a small kingdom made up of hill peoples with various successes and failures. The Elamite power was checked by Hammurabi of Babylon (1792 -1750 BC). (This was the king who designed the "Code of Hammurabi", a famous legal code, which incidently, was found in the ruins at Shushan in 1902.)

From 1650 to 1175 BC, Elam and Babylon as well were under the rule of the Kassites from Luristan. Following this Elam was established as its own kingdom for a while. Then various nations such as the Assyria under kings Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, and Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar attacked and conquered Elam. Next it became part of the Medo-Persian Empire with a main palace located in Shushan. The other capital at Takhte Tamshid has carved inscriptions on the northern stairway of the audience palace (Apanda) showing Mede, Persian, and Elamite soldiers guarding the Persian throne. Also, Elamite inscriptions are found along with Persian inscriptions.

Tradition dating back to 1170 AD places the tomb of Daniel at Shushan. However, we are not sure whether or not Daniel was actually at Shushan since the reference to Daniel at Shushan in Daniel 8:2 was a vision.

"In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal."

Recent Jewish tradition states that in the early centuries the Jews in Shushan argued about Daniel's grave. The Jews who lived on the side of the river where Daniel's grave was located were wealthy, but the ones on the other side of the river were poor. To stop the arguing, the placing of the bier of Daniel was alternated each year from one side of the river to the other. Finally, the Persian king had the bier suspended from chains precisely in the middle of the bridge spanning the river.

I was told that the present-day area around Shushan is a potential agricultural miracle. If this area could be irrigated it could become one of the most productive in the world. Two crops of sugar cane alone can be grown a year. Remember, this is at the eastern tip of the old fertile crescent.

B. BIBLICAL HISTORY OF ELAM

1. (Genesis 10:22) Elam was one of the sons of Shem, the son of Noah. Therefore Noah was the grandfather of Elam.
“The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arphazad, Lud and Aram.”
2. (Genesis 14) Abraham delivered his nephew Lot from Chedorlamer, King of Elam, after he was captured by him.
3. (Ezra 4:9) The Assyrian king brought in some Elamite settlers to replace the rebellious Jews of the 10 northern tribes who were taken captive.
4. (Jeremiah 49:34-37; Ezekiel 32:24-25) God judged Elam, probably using Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar.
5. (Isaiah 21:2-10) The Medes with Elam’s help took over the Babylonian Empire. Also, compare this with Isaiah 22:1-6.

C. PROPHECY ABOUT ELAM

1. Isaiah 11:10-16 gives a prophecy about God reclaiming Israel. Verse 10 tells us that the root of Jesse (Jesus the Messiah) will stand as a banner for all the peoples and the nations who will rally to Him. Verse 11 states, “in that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to reclaim a remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, lower Egypt, upper Egypt, Cush, Elam, Babylonia, Hamath and from the islands of the sea.” Then verse 12 talks about gathering the exiles of Israel. Those holding the belief that Jesus Christ will return to the earth to rule for 1000 years (the millennium) believe this passage refers to Jewish people scattered in different nations who have returned to Israel during the past several decades and are returning to Israel now. Did you notice that one of the countries God reclaimed a remnant from is Elam?
2. There is another prophecy concerning Elam found in Jeremiah 49:35-39. In verse 35 the Lord says, “See, I will break the bow of Elam.” The Elamites were long famous as bowmen (Jeremiah 50:9 and Isaiah 22:6). In the standard Farsi translation we read verse 38 and 39, “For there shall come to pass, in the latter days, I’ll bring in the captivity of Elam, saith the Lord.” This is similar to the translation in the King James English version. However, in the Farsi commentary version verses 38 and 39 reads, “Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in the days to come declares the Lord.” The rest of the passage tells about God’s judgment

against Elam and God scattering its exiles to many nations because of His anger. Is this passage referring to past historical events or events which are yet to happen?

a. In general, this historical event is interpreted as having taken place already. (Note that in addition to Jeremiah 49:39, this phrase, “I will restore the fortunes”, is found in Jeremiah 48:47 in reference to Moab and in 49:6 in reference to the Ammonites.) The Elam and the Babylon empires were conquered by the Medo-Persian empire under king Cyrus who replaced the Elamite king and set his throne in Elam (Jeremiah 49:38). Thus, Elam became another conquered country under Cyrus’ rule showing this prophecy was fulfilled already. The phrase, “latter days” is used in connection with the fortunes of Elam, not people returning to Elam. As mentioned previously, Elam was once a prosperous agriculture area. Now it is desolate, but in the latter days it will become an area of fortune again with a great agriculture harvest. I can remember being in Iran in the 1970's and talking with an agriculture expert who had surveyed the land. He said that with irrigation this area could become one of the greatest distribution centers of agriculture in the world. This is yet to happen, “in the days to come”, for the fortunes of Elam.

a. Another interpretation emphasizes the “latter days” with the events of this prophecy yet to happen. Some Iranian believers have seen how God has been working among Persians during these “latter days.” In 1977 there were approximately 250 Persian Muslim background Christian believers only. By the year 2000, this number increased drastically to more than 27,500. To them this is fulfillment of the prophecy in the “latter days” and bringing again the “captivity of Elam.” Keeping in mind that Elam is part of present-day Iran, some Iranians say verses 35 and 36 refer to the Islamic revolution of 1978 which caused Iran to become an Islamic republic with new political and economic policies. As a result, many Iranians left Iran scattering all over the world. In 1999 there were about 53,500 Iranians living in Australia, 110,000 in Germany, 80,000 in England, 120,000 in Canada, 1,380,000 in USA, 250,000 in Iraq, 100,000 in Kuwait, 140,000 in Pakistan, 800,000 in Turkey, 350,000 in the Gulf States and some in other countries as well. One Christian organization, Iranian Christians International, is in contact with Persian believers in more than 30 countries. (See Chapter 18, Where are Persians Living Today, for more details.)

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: “See, I will break the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might. I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four quarters of the heavens; I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where Elam’s exiles do not go. I will shatter Elam before their foes, before those who seek their lives; I will bring disaster upon them, even my fierce anger,” declares the Lord. “I will pursue them with the sword until I have made an end of them. I will set my throne in Elam and

destroy her king and officials,” declares the Lord. “Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in days to come,” declares the Lord.”
Jeremiah 49:35-39

This interpretation says verse 38 took place when the 2,500 years of continuous monarchy in Iran came to an end with the overthrowing of Reza Shah Pahlavi in January, 1979. Iranian believers have the future hope that this present regime will end with God removing the Islamic rulers thus ending His judgement on Elam completely and then restoring the captivity of Elam in the “latter days” as mentioned in verse 39. At that time many believing Persians will return to their country of Iran. Several Iranian Christian organizations have Jeremiah 49:39 written on their stationary. To them this prophecy has not been fulfilled yet. They see the promise of Deuteronomy 30:1-10 not only applying to the Jewish people returning to Israel, but also the returning of Iranians to their own country.

- b. Other Iranians hold to both interpretations mentioned. Yes, Elam was punished and a new throne was set in place under Cyrus. However, this passage has a double fulfillment. It refers to past history as well as God’s working among the Persian people in the future. They base this view on other passages of scripture where a prophecy primarily about Israel in the “latter days” was fulfilled literally already and yet has a future prophecy fulfillment, also.

D. DIG DEEPER

1. Why is the prophecy of Jeremiah 49:35-39 concerning Elam rarely mentioned in current popular books written in English and the European languages about prophecy of the latter days and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ?
2. What do you personally believe about the second coming of Christ? Are you ready for the return of our Savior, Jesus Christ?