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Iran and Israel at War (Part 1)

By

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The 'Iran War' seems to be taking the majority of the news media's attention right now, so I thought it might be helpful to Christians to get some background about Iran from the Bible. I'll address the subject from history, the prophetic Word, and from Christian history to the present day. My hope is that it will give you and other Christians a better understanding about what's happening.

20th Century Iran (A Brief History)

Search the Bible for the name 'Iran' and you will not find it. However, that does not mean Iran is not featured in the Bible. That's because of a change from the ancient name 'Persia' to the modern name 'Iran' almost a hundred years ago. Reza Kahn Pahlavi helped lead a military coup in 1921 and served as Minister of War and Prime Minister. He built enough political power with the Iranian Parliament (Majles) to depose Ahmad Shah, the last monarch of the Qajar Dynasty. The parliament elected Pahlavi as the new Shah in 1925. That began the Pahlavi Dynasty. He asked the international community to use the endonym 'Iran ('Land of the Aryans) in 1935 and continued as Shah until 1941. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi succeeded his father and ruled Iran until 1979. His government was overthrown after months of civil unrest. Pahlavi escaped and travelled to several countries until he sought medical treatment in the United States. He died there in 1980, just 18 months after losing power.

The new government became known as the 'Islamic Republic of Iran.' It was ruled by 'Supreme Leader' Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. As 'Supreme Leader,' Khomeini returned Iran to the Shia sect of Islam. Khomeini believed in 'Twelver Shi'ism,' which is the same sect as the current Mayor of New York. You can read more about [Twelver Shi'ism](#) in an article I wrote in August of 2025. Khomeini used the religious titles of 'Ayatollah' and 'Imam.' Khomeini ruled for ten years until he died from a heart attack with other medical complications. The 'Assembly of Experts for Leadership, (Majles-e Khobregān-e Rahbarī),' a group of senior Shia Muslim clerics (Mujtahids), selected 'Ali Khamenei' to succeed Khomeini as the Supreme Leader in 1989. Khamenei was President of Iran from 1981-1989 before becoming Supreme Ruler. Khamenei ruled Iran until he was killed in an air strike on February 28, 2026. The Assembly of Experts selected Khamenei's son Mojtaba Khamenei as Supreme Leader to succeed his father.

Pre-20th Century Iran (A Brief History)



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According to the Bible's 'Table of Nations' in Genesis 10, Elam was a son of Shem and grandson of Noah. Elam was also the brother of Arphaxad, who was a direct ancestor of Abraham. Elam's other brothers included Asshur, Lud, and Aram.

Many historians believe that the descendants of Elam traveled eastward after the 'confusion of languages' in Babel (Genesis 11). They believe Elam's family settled in the western and southwestern part of what we know today as Iran. Interestingly, the next time we see the name Elam in the Bible is in Genesis 14 when King Chedorlaomer of Elam and other kings from Mesopotamia attacked kings in what is now part of Israel and the surrounding area. The reason for the attack was that the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (Zoar) rebelled against King Chedorlaomer after serving him for twelve years. Chedorlaomer and his fellow kings and their armies were victorious in battle, but made the mistake of kidnapping Abraham's nephew Lot and his family who lived in Sodom. Abraham took three hundred and eighteen trained servants and attacked Chedorlaomer and the other kings and their armies at night and defeated them. Abraham brought back all the stolen goods, along with Lot and his family.

This was the first 'war' recorded in the Bible. It included the King of Elam (later known as Iran), and Abraham who was the grandfather of Jacob (who God renamed Israel). Abraham's defeat of Elam's king was about four-thousand years ago. Think about that for a minute. This war we're watching on TV and the Internet is not new. The weapons of war are new, but the combatants are not. They've been at it for millennia.

Here's a quick look at the empires and dynasties that preceded what we now know as today's nation of Iran. Click on the links to learn more about each one.

- [Elam](#)
- [Median Dynasty](#)
- [Persian Empire](#)
- [Macedonian Empire](#)
- [Selucid Empire](#)
- [Parthian Empire](#)
- [Sasanian Empire](#)
- [Islamic Conquest of Persia](#)

- Timurid Empire
- Safavid Dynasty
- Qajar Dynasty
- Pahlavi Dynasty (Iran)
- Islamic Republic of Iran

Religion

Zoroastrianism was the primary religion of Persia for hundreds of years until Islam slowly took its place with the majority of the population. Islam came to Persia through military conquest, but the process of changing from Zoroastrianism to Islam took a couple of hundred years. The country was majority Muslim by the 11th century AD. Shia Islam became the official religion during the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1736 AD). This is significant because the country had been primarily Sunni Islam before then.

The Safavids lost power and the nation experienced a time of anarchy until Agha Mohammad Khan became Shah in 1796. The Qajar Dynasty ended in 1925 when the Pahlavi Dynasty began.

After the Safavids fell from power, Iran fell into a period of anarchy as rival leaders fought for power. The emerging victor was Agha Mohammad Khan who was formally crowned Shah in 1796 in the Mughan plain (around 60 years after his predecessor Nader Shah of the Safavid dynasty has been crowned in the same place). The Qajar dynasty lasted more than 100 years and ended in 1925. Even though Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was a Shia Muslim by birth, he attempted to secularize and westernize Iran. That upset many of the strongly religious Shia Muslims in Iran, leading to Pahlavi's downfall.

Islam is the second largest religion in the world with almost two billion followers. About 85% of Muslims are Sunni; 15% are Shia. While they worship the same God, follow the Quran, and observe the Five Pillars, they do have some differences. Those include the succession of power after the death of Muhammad, leadership authority, some religious practices and legal beliefs, and the countries where they are a majority. Most Shias live in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and parts of Lebanon.

Next Time

I'll look at Biblical Prophecies Concerning Iran (Elam) in the next part of my new series, Iran and Israel at War.

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