

## **Iraq, Turkey And Iran Are Important Regions In The Bible**

'She (the church) who is in Babylon, who is chosen, sends you greetings' (1 Peter 5:13).

Babylon is in Iraq, and there was once a thriving early Christian church there. The people who live in the Middle East, Northern Africa and parts of Asia should be very proud of their ancient Biblical heritage. They would by necessity, be related to the ancient people who once lived in that area, thousands of years ago. We know the Jews were alive and well back then and still are, but the Medes, Persians, Babylonians and other peoples will all still be around somewhere. The Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian Empires, although all were in a similar area, included many countries, and some are significant in the Bible. The Empires included what is now Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Southern Europe, Asia, India, Ethiopia, Syria, Lebanon, the ancient land of Mesopotamia, Macedonia and other places mentioned in the scriptures, known by their ancient names. In the Bible, the first mention of these countries by their ancient names are Assyria (Syria) (Genesis 2:14), the Land of Shinar (Iraq) (Genesis 10:10), Canaan (Israel) (Genesis 10:18), Egypt (Genesis 12:10), Mesopotamia (Iraq and Iran) (Genesis 24:10), Lebanon (Deuteronomy 1:7), Babylon (Iraq) (Joshua 7:21), Medes (Iran) (2 Kings 17:6), Ethiopia (the land of Cush) (2 Kings 19:9), Persia (Iran) (2 Chronicles 36:20), India (Esther 1:1), Tubal (Turkey) (Isaiah 66:19), Macedonia (Greece) (Acts 16:9) and almost all of these settlements were named after the descendants of Noah. We read about many significant Biblical events that happened in that huge area.

Here are a few examples. The Garden of Eden was created in the area of what is now Southern Turkey, somewhere in the mountains, where the Euphrates, Tigris and two other rivers begin to flow down the mountains and around the nearby cities (Genesis 2:10 to 14). The Garden of Eden was not created on plains. We know that because the Bible clearly says the four rivers flowed out of the Garden, not into it. For the rivers to flow out of the Garden of Eden, the Garden had to be higher than where the rivers were flowing, or the rivers would have been flowing into, not out of, the Garden and it would have ended up a lake. If we look at an atlas, we can see exactly where the Euphrates begins. Genesis says the Garden was created where the Euphrates flowed from, so we can pinpoint where the Garden of Eden was originally created – in the mountains of what is now Southern Turkey. Everything would have been very different from the way it is today. There was no rain or snow in those ancient days, but the ground was watered by a mist every night (Genesis 2:6), so the mountains would have been beautiful and perfect, not freezing in winter as alps are today.

Mesopotamia which is now Iraq, was the cradle of civilization. Archaeology has shown that people started to cultivate the land in that area first, because that is where human life began once Adam and Eve were rejected from the Garden of Eden. The name Mesopotamia means 'Between Two Rivers' and those two rivers are the Euphrates and the Tigris.

Noah's Ark was built in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and then after the flood had subsided, the ark came to rest on Mount Ararat, and we know that is in Turkey close to the Armenian border (Genesis 8:4).

The Tower of Babel was built in a valley (or plain) in the land of Shinar, later called Babylon (Iraq) after the Tower of Babel. It was where the Lord confused the languages, and the people sounded like they were babbling (Genesis 11:1 to 9).

Abraham, then called Abram was born in the Ur of the Chaldees (Iraq), moved to Haran (Syria) then onto Canaan (Israel) (Genesis 11:31; 12:5 & 6).

Isaac's wife Rebekah was from Nahor (located in Iraq between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers (Genesis 24:10).

Jacob met Rachel in Haran (Syria) (Genesis 29:4 to 10).

Balaam was from Mesopotamia (Iraq) (Deuteronomy 23:4).

Nineveh was built by Nimrod (Genesis 10:11), and it had become a vast city by the time of Jonah (Jonah 3:2 & 3), which was circa 800 BC. A new Nineveh is still in Northern Iraq. It is possible that Jonah is buried there. Nineveh later became the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The King of Assyria lived at Nineveh (2 Kings 19:36). Eventually, ancient Nineveh was destroyed because of sin (Zephaniah 2:13).

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon, when during his reign in 605 BC he forced some Israelites to go to Babylon (Daniel 1:1, 3 & 6). Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael) and Abednego (Azariah) were put in the fiery furnace in Babylon, and were joined by the Angel of the Lord (Jesus) (Daniel 3:19 to 26).

In about 458 BC, Ezra and Nehemiah served kings of the Persian Empire (Ezra 7:1 & 6; Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1).

Queen Esther lived in Shushan (Esther 3:15), in the province of Elam (Daniel 8:2), modern day Iran.

The Word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel in the Land of the Chaldeans (where Abraham was born) in what is now Iraq (Ezekiel 1:3).

Belshazzar, another king of Babylon, saw a man's hand writing 'Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin' on a wall (Daniel 5:1 to 9 & 25).

Daniel was tossed into the lion's den in Babylon (Daniel 6:16 to 21).

The wise men who visited Jesus soon after He was born came from the east (Matthew 2:1 to 12). They could have been the descendants of the Jews who were forced into Babylon hundreds of years before, during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Many Jews returned to Jerusalem during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, but many stayed in Babylon. Their descendants are living there even to this day, and they know they are descended from the Jews who were forced there by Nebuchadnezzar.

King Jehoniah, son of King Josiah was born in Babylon (Matthew 1:11).

It was the Lord's will for the Jews to go to Babylon, because the exile was incorporated into the Jews lineage up to the time of Jesus our Messiah. 'So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the exile to Babylon; fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah; fourteen generations' (Matthew 1:17).

Mesopotamian Jews (Iraqi's), Elamites (Iranian's), Medes (Persians), Asians, Libyan's, Italians, Egyptians, Grecians, Arabian, Jews from Cyrene, Crete and many other places were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9 to 11).

As we saw in the opening scripture, Babylon had an important assembly in the days of the early church and Peter preached there (1 Peter 5:13).

The Assyrian Empire began about 745 BC, conquered Egypt in 670 BC, and ended in 612 BC when the capital Nineveh, was captured by the Babylonians and the Medes. The Assyrian Empire encompassed the area of what is now Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq and as far south as Egypt.

The Babylonian Empire had its capital in Babylon. That empire lasted from 690 BC soon after they had conquered Egypt, until 539 BC. It was much smaller than any of the other empires, taking in what is now Syria, Israel, the Mediterranean Sea, Iran, all of Iraq to about Kuwait.

The Persian Empire was by far the largest of these three empires; began to become powerful around 550 BC and lasted until 334 BC when it was broken up by Alexander the Great. The famous rivers Euphrates and the Tigris both run through what was the Persian Empire. The Persian Empire encompassed an extremely vast area, from the Mediterranean Sea, up to Macedonia, to Turkey, through the now-named Caspian Sea, possibly as far as Turkmenistan, down to India, across the Arabian Sea, taking in all the lands in between such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and as far south as Ethiopia (Esther 1:1; 8:9), back up through Libya and up to the Mediterranean Sea. Its capital was the citadel of Susa in the city of Shushan (Esther 3:15), in the province of Elam (Daniel 8:2) near modern day Shiraz in Iran.

The Grecian Empire was next, with twenty-two year old Alexander the Great as the ruler from about 334 BC until he died at the age of thirty-three after ruling for just twelve years. The Grecian Empire was broken up into four regions ruled by Alexander's successors; his son Alexander IV, Philip III, Antipater and Ptolemy.

Three hundred years later came the Roman Empire from 31 BC until its gradual decline and final collapse in the fourth century AD. It had been the largest empire the world had seen until the British Empire conquered one quarter of the world and brought Christianity and Christian principles to almost half the world via their missionaries; principles that were initially spread by the apostles then largely lost during the dark period of the spiritually 'dark' middle ages, then revitalised by Queen Victoria. It is sad that the strong Godly principles that Queen Victoria adhered to and the Godly laws she brought to the whole British Empire are once again in decline, resulting in the breakdown of marriage and society in general. It is so important that we obey God's instructions.

Although Israel, ancient Canaan is the nation most mentioned in the Bible, ancient Babylon, Shinar and Mesopotamia, now modern day Iraq is the second most mentioned nation, even before Egypt. Only Israel has more history and more prophecies than Iraq and other Middle Eastern nations. Almost all of the nations in the Middle East are mentioned in the Bible by their ancient names, and were places where Christian churches were founded by the apostles. Turkey was once a very blessed Christian nation. In the Book of Revelation we read about the seven churches the Apostle John was asked to write to; in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Of those seven churches, Ephesus, Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia were in Turkey, as was Galatia. Pergamos and Laodicea were in Greece. The Ephesian church was huge. The epistles written to the Romans in Italy; to the people of Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi and Colossae in Greece, were all significant churches.

Through those early churches, the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God was spread worldwide (Romans 1:8). The apostles worked very hard, in difficult circumstances to get the Gospel out to the people, beginning from Jerusalem, spreading to Ethiopia in Africa (Acts 8:27 to 39), Europe (most of the Book of Acts) and all of Asia. 'All the inhabitants of Asia, Jews as well as Gentiles, heard the Word of the Lord' (Acts 19:10). In this age of technology, sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is a lot easier, but just as important.

Amen and God bless you.

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