

Persia in Prophecy: Israel, Iran and the Rising Lion

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the name of a new military campaign— “Operation Rising Lion”—he wasn’t just choosing a phrase meant to inspire confidence or fear. He was invoking a legacy 2,500 years in the making, steeped in ancient prophecy, rich in historical irony, and burning with eschatological urgency.

The symbolism is intentional—and deeply spiritual.

For millennia, the lion has symbolized both Israel and Persia (modern-day Iran). From the tribal blessings of Judah to the imperial standards of ancient Persian kings, the lion has stood not only as a representation of strength but as a prophetic marker in the unfolding drama between God’s chosen people and the empires that rise and fall around them.

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Now, in a moment thick with prophetic resonance, Israel is once again entangled with Persia—but this time, the roles are reversed. And the stakes could not be higher.

The Lion and the Flag: A Nation’s Stolen Identity

Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran’s national flag bore the image of a lion, sword in hand, standing before a rising sun. It was not merely a political emblem—it was a cultural declaration. The lion represented Persian strength, dignity, and ancient imperial grandeur. For centuries, this lion connected the Iranian people to their pre-Islamic heritage, harkening back to the glory days of Cyrus the Great and the

mighty Achaemenid Empire.

But when the mullahs seized power, they erased the lion—both literally and metaphorically—from the Iranian identity. The new regime replaced the historic symbol with an Islamic emblem, suppressing Iran's rich cultural and religious diversity under a veil of theocratic authoritarianism. It wasn't just a change in iconography—it was a theft of national soul.

That's why the name "Operation Rising Lion," as explained by Mark Dubowitz of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, carries such power. It is not simply a military code; it is a message of restoration. It tells the Iranian people: Your lion can rise again. Your heritage is not forgotten. Your chains are not eternal.

"This isn't just about stopping nukes," said Dubowitz. "It's about helping Iranians reclaim their flag—and their country."

From Persia to Iran: A Name Strategically Changed

Up until the 20th century, the world knew the country as Persia—a name that conjured images of ancient empires, cultural sophistication, and biblical legacy. But that changed in 1935.

At the suggestion of German-educated Iranian diplomats, and encouraged by the Shah Reza Pahlavi, the government formally requested that foreign countries refer to the nation as Iran—a name derived from the word "Aryan", meaning "Land of the Aryans."

The move was partially an attempt to assert a new national identity, distancing the modern state from its imperial past and aligning it more closely with the pan-Aryan ideologies then rising in Europe. Influenced by Nazi racial theories, some within Iran's elite sought to forge a new image for the nation—one that emphasized ethnicity and nationalism over the ancient legacy of monarchy and religion.

Though "Iran" had always been the name used internally by Iranians themselves, "Persia" carried with it global recognition and esteem. The international change in name blurred that ancient identity and replaced it with a term that soon became politically and spiritually charged—especially after the 1979 revolution transformed Iran into a center of radical Islamic fundamentalism.

Today, for many Iranians and exiles, the name "Persia" evokes a longing for their true cultural roots—roots steeped not in theocracy, but in art, philosophy, tolerance, and even Biblical favor.

A Biblical Pattern: Israel and Persia

The historical and spiritual connection between Persia and Israel cannot be overstated.

In 539 B.C., after 70 years of Babylonian exile, it was King Cyrus of Persia who liberated the Jewish people and issued the decree to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4). The prophet Isaiah, writing more than a century earlier, had even named Cyrus in Scripture:

"This is what the Lord says... who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please'" (Isa. 44:26–28).

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Cyrus is the only non-Jew in the Bible referred to as “God’s anointed” (Isa. 45:1. Persia was not Israel’s enemy—it was Israel’s redeemer.

And now, in a profound reversal, it is Israel that may be positioned to help liberate Persia—from the grip of a brutal regime, from the oppression of radical theocracy, and perhaps from its own internal exile.

As Iranian dissident “Sadka” put it: “It was Persia that, after 50 years of Israelite exile, enabled the restoration of Israel in Jerusalem. Now, 2,500 years later, Israel—reborn—repays the favor with perfect symmetry. Persia’s great civilization will be restored, and its occupiers vanquished.”

The Lion in Scripture: Judah and Jesus

The lion is more than a national emblem; it is a spiritual signpost.

In Genesis 49:9, Jacob blesses his son Judah with the words:

“Judah is a lion’s cub... he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?”

This “lion of Judah” becomes a recurring prophetic thread throughout Scripture, ultimately pointing to Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

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In Revelation 5:5, heaven declares:

“Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered...”

Jesus is the ultimate Lion, the King who conquers sin, death and every earthly kingdom. His authority is not limited by borders or bloodlines. And in this season of rising lions, both political and prophetic, it is Christ, the Lion of Judah, who stands at the center of it all.

The Clash of Kingdoms: Spiritual and Political

The battle between Israel and Iran is not just geopolitical. It is spiritual.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is not merely a nation—it is a regime that has aligned itself against the purposes of God, against the freedom of its own people, and against the very nation that once called it friend.

Iran’s mullahs preach death to Israel, fund terror across the Middle East, and seek nuclear weapons not for defense—but for domination. Yet beneath the surface, millions of Iranians yearn for freedom. Underground churches are exploding. Revival is spreading. And the lion that was silenced in 1979 is stirring once more.

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