

# IRAN SCENES

## Ecbatana ruins, Hamadan



Picture: Jeremy Thomas

As we have already seen, the capital of Medo-Persia followed the king on his annual tour of his realms. Ecbatana is at a higher altitude than either Babylon or Susa, and therefore served as the summer capital, being cooled by mountain breezes. The name Ecbatana means 'meeting place', and it was here that early tribes gathered, as the kingdom of the Medes took shape. Historians refer to the magnificent citadel built here, surrounded by seven concentric walls, each painted a different colour, the two innermost walls being plated in silver and gold. The modern city is called Hamadan, a corruption of its ancient name, but we may know it as Achmetha, mentioned in Scripture just once. Having returned from captivity under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and built the altar and foundation of the house of God, the Jews were prevented from progressing the work due to the interference of their adversaries. The site of God's temple was left as an abandoned building site for about fifteen years (Ezra 4:24), and work started again only with the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (5:1,2).

Word of the recommencement of the work reached the ears of the new king, Darius II, who was asked for a ruling by the governor Tatnai. Darius searched in the records of his predecessors and, under the good hand of God, found in the house of the scrolls, here at Ecbatana/Achmetha (6:2), a copy of the original decree of Cyrus authorising the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem and the return of the gold and silver vessels which the kings of Babylon had profaned (as recorded in Daniel 5, for example). The tables were turned, because not only were the Jews permitted to continue the building work, but their enemies were even obliged to see them supplied with the necessary materials. Thus the temple was finished, for God had "turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God" (v. 22).—*Jeremy Thomas*