

# IRAN SCENES

## Earthquake-proofing, Shiraz



Picture: Jeremy Thomas

Shiraz has been inhabited since at least the time of Biblical Medo-Persia, and even became capital of the Iranian Empire for a time. It may be familiar to us as the source of a variety of grape from which wine of the same name is made, and the city was once famed for the production of wine. Grapes are still grown here; but, with the consumption of alcohol in Iran now strictly forbidden to all Muslims, bottles of Shiraz are not likely to be in ready supply!

Shiraz is still one of Iran's major cities, with a population of more than a million and a reputation as a place of learning, culture and sophistication. It was the birthplace of the celebrated fourteenth-century poet Hafez, sometimes described as Persia's answer to William Shakespeare. He remains very influential; there is a saying that every home in Iran must have two things: the Quran and a copy of Hafez; and some families still make decisions by opening Hafez' writings at random and seeing what 'guidance' results.

The monuments in Shiraz include the elaborately-decorated Nasir ol-Molk mosque. Iran lies in an earthquake zone; we've seen evidence of volcanic activity in this series, and there is currently talk of moving the Iranian capital away from Teheran, given the likelihood of major seismic activity one day. The reason for the high survival rate of Shiraz' buildings is the use of earthquake-proofing. Courses of bricks have been replaced by wooden beams, which absorb some of the shock of an earthquake, affording a degree of protection. A similar feature was incorporated into Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, where the surrounding side chambers "rested on the house with timber of cedar" (1 Kgs. 6:10). But in the purpose of God a different kind of earthquake is coming, "such as was not since men were upon the earth" (Rev. 16:18), when the nations of the earth come into judgement for their deeds. This is the "earthquake" we all do well to protect against while we have opportunity.

—Jeremy Thomas