

# IRAN SCENES

## Gate of All Nations, Persepolis



Picture: Jeremy Thomas

This gateway was built by King Xerxes I (Biblical Ahasuerus) as a ceremonial entrance to a colonnaded court where foreign visitors would assemble to pay their respects to the Persian king. Xerxes' name is carved on the gateway in three languages, and other inscriptions call for respect for the nations that made up the Medo-Persian Empire, reflecting its tolerance of other cultures and religions. It was this which contributed (on a purely human level) to Cyrus' willingness to allow the exiled Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild God's temple (Ezra 1).

The large figures on each side of the gateway are called lamassus, and were adopted by Medo-Persia from earlier cultures. Indeed, anyone visiting the British Museum in London may be familiar with these figures in their Assyrian guise. They have the body of a lion, the wings of an eagle, the legs of a bull and the head of a man, and these parts stand for the four signs of an ancient zodiac, depicting the four 'corners' of the sky and therefore corresponding to the four points of the compass—again signifying a welcome for nations from all parts of the earth. One is reminded, too, that the same four creatures make up the Biblical cherubim.

It is interesting to see the influence of other, older cultures on ancient Persian remains, and this serves as a reminder that Medo-Persia is only one of a sequence of nations in some Bible prophecies—notably the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 and the four beasts in Daniel 7. Perhaps Daniel's winged lion (7:4) looked something like this. Nations come and go, sometimes suddenly, as when Babylon fell to Medo-Persia in one night (5:30,31). But it takes longer than that for an entire culture to disappear, and the component parts of Nebuchadnezzar's statue being "broken to pieces *together*" suggests that the influence of each one may still be felt when the kingdom of men is replaced by the Kingdom of God.—*Jeremy Thomas*