

# MID-EAST e-NEWS

An electronic journal of the Middle East, for those who want to be informed.

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<http://www.morethantourists.com>

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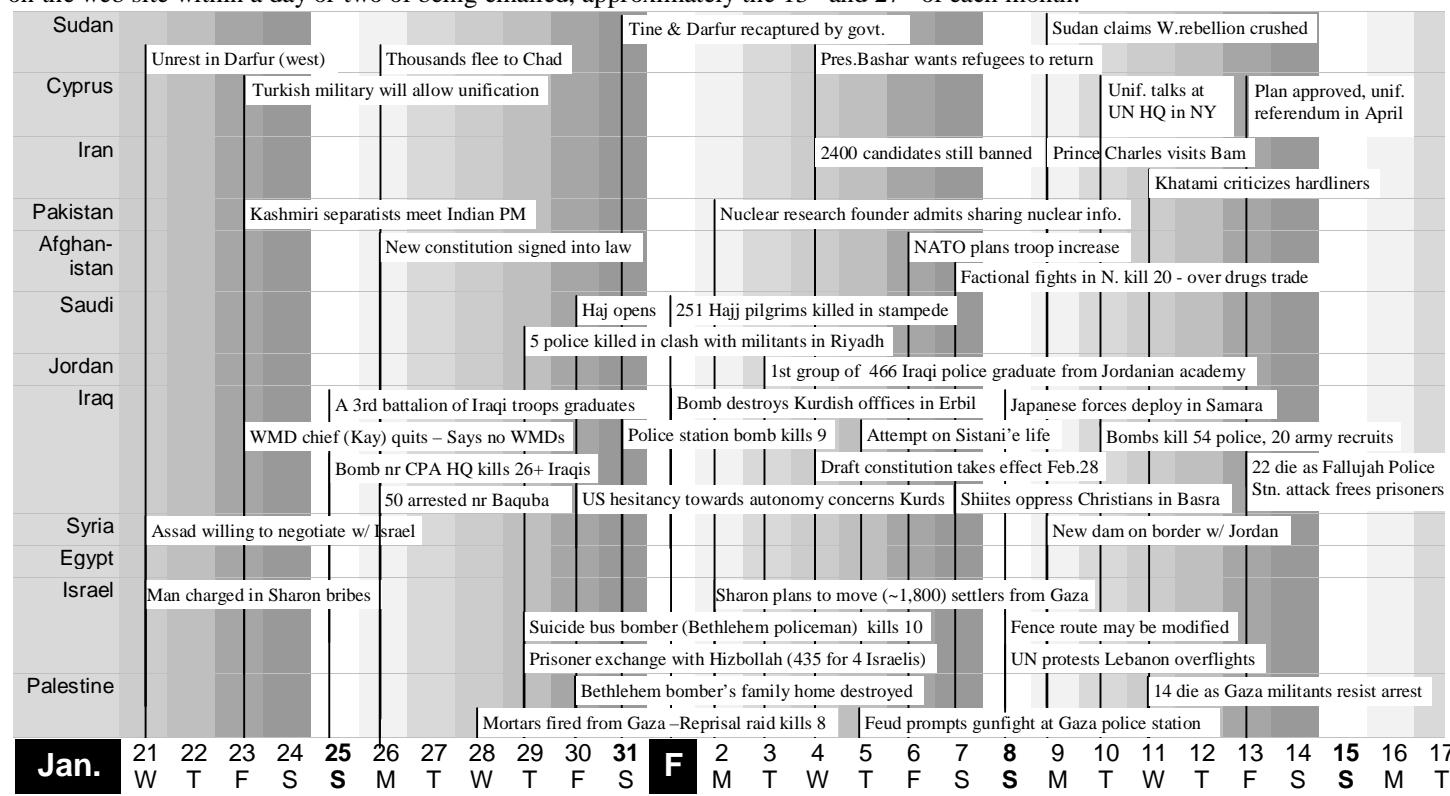
## Welcome

We experienced a series of 5 earth tremors during the afternoon of Dec. 30<sup>th</sup>. (I was walking home from school, and heard, rather than felt, the rumble. When we heard it again we couldn't figure out what was causing the noise – perhaps blasting somewhere). We were left in no such doubt on Wednesday of this week. Working upstairs in school, the building distinctly shook, and – there being no sign of an 18-wheeler having run into the building – we realized that most of us had experienced our first strong earthquake.

We evacuated, convincing the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> grade class that this was not put on purely for their benefit, just because they were studying earthquakes at the time. It was about 4.5 or 5 on the Richter scale. I was not as enthusiastic about returning to the building as I had been to leave. Perhaps I really ought to have backed up the computers already!

I think I told you about the taxi driver who spent hours hunting down my wife's purse after it was mislaid in another taxi while we were in Jerusalem over the Christmas break. Today some friends reminded us of why we love it so much, living here in Jordan. Arriving back in the country, after the drive from the airport, their key broke in the lock of their apartment. Hesitant to call their landlord at 2am, their taxi driver realized their predicament and invited them to his own house. Exhausted, they willingly accepted his offer, were welcomed into his home, and benefited from a few hours' sleep. In the morning they contacted their landlord and, once the lock was fixed, were driven home by their new friend. Welcome to Jordan!

e-NEWS marks a milestone this month with the previous issues now being available on the internet. If you want to obtain a copy of previous issues, or let a friend know about its availability, you can type the following address into your web browser: <http://www.morethantourists.com>, and click on the e-NEWS link. In future weeks you will also find other information about Jordan and the Middle East, but the impetus behind this project has been the number of people who request back issues of the newsletter, and a few who cannot receive attachments by email. e-NEWS will continue to be distributed by e-mail twice a month, and will be posted on the web site within a day or two of being emailed, approximately the 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of each month.



## Word of Mouth (and Print)...

### News Sampler from Iraq:

We have joyfully seen salvation come to the Kurdish bricklayer and painter who work for me renovating schools. In his own words the bricklayer tells that the Holy Spirit is doing something inside of him. Indeed as we started work in a new village this past week and I stood talking with the village leaders, instead of just standing there waiting for orders, the bricklayer began interacting with the kids who had gathered around. It seems he now has another and much higher calling. What a sight it was to see him reach out to those children. Making this all the more remarkable is that the village where we are now working is Arab! It is amazing to see what happens to a man when the living God gets hold of him.

A US soldier: "*I was surprised to see how giving the Iraqi people were. Although we are Americans and they don't make much money, they often make sure we don't leave their houses empty-handed, and bring us gifts. I wouldn't mind staying here if I knew I could go home once in a while.*" (AFP, printed in Lebanon Daily Star, Feb 3, '04)

Iraqi oil production is expected to reach pre-war levels of 2.8 million barrels per day by the end of March. Currently they are at 2.3m barrels/day.

*The trains are running from Baghdad, having been able to restart their service soon after the war. A 750 ID ticket (about \$.40 – yes, that is a decimal point you see!) is valid for a journey to the suburbs, to Ramadi, or the full 350km (1-hour) journey to Qusayba. Basra is a 550km journey, and will cost 1,000 ID (about \$.50)*

### Another Worldview – No Comment.

Proclaiming the just-completed Hajj a 'great success' Interior Minister Prince Nayef said that the 251 who perished on Sunday (1<sup>st</sup> Feb.) had "met their fate because their place and time of death has been decided the moment they were born." (Jordan Times, Feb. 5, '04)

An Iraqi insurgent from Fallujah talks about his religion: "*The clerics called for resistance and jihad against the Americans... We responded because we love our religion and we love our clerics.*" The inspiration for resistance came from the mosques. His cell was led by Abdel Qader Al-Saad, a cleric...who fought with Islamic militants against Russian forces in Chechnya. (LDS, Feb 14, '04)

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Remember, you can now retrieve any of the previous issues at this web site: <http://www.morethantourists.com/e-news>

Contact information: [pkclark@pmbx.net](mailto:pkclark@pmbx.net)

## Arabs in the Bible (1)

Arabs generally identify themselves as descendants of Abraham, just as the Israelites do. Their ancestry is mixed, however, as we find from biblical accounts. The first mention of Arabs in the Bible occurs during the time of King Solomon. Arabs are a *geographical race* made up of a number of *local races*. Local racial characteristics differ, but can be observed in different communities. The word "Arab" refers typically to the nomadic tribes of the Arabian desert.

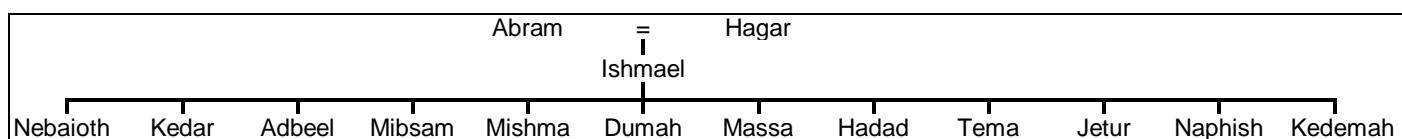
The word "Arab" apparently originated with the Arameans who lived East of the Euphrates. The people who lived in the deserts west of the Euphrates were called *Arab*, which in Aramaic simply means "west". Later the word became associated with the desert people wherever they lived.

**Hagar** - Abram's first son, Ishmael, was the child of his wife's Egyptian maid servant, Hagar.

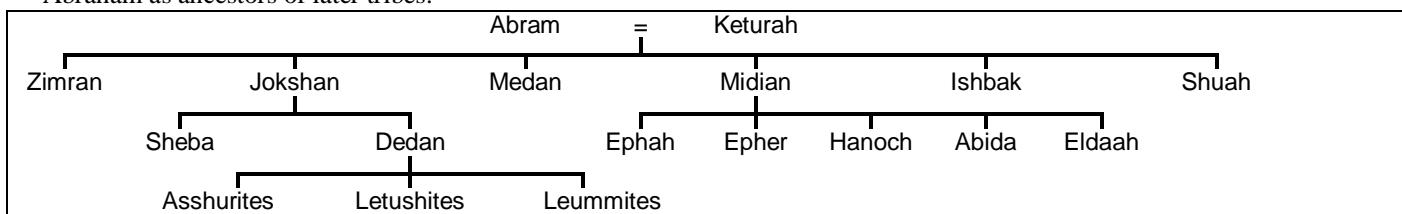
When Hagar was mistreated by Sarai she fled from her. The angel of the Lord spoke to Hagar "near a spring in the desert" and Hagar told him why she was fleeing. Hagar received a promise from the angel: "*Go back to your mistress and submit to her. I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.*" Genesis 16:9-10

The angel also told her to name her son Ishmael ("God hears") and that "*everyone's hand will be against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.*" (Genesis 16:12).

When Isaac was weaned Hagar and Ishmael were sent away from Abram's family. Living in the desert, in the area east of the Negev, Ishmael became an archer. His mother found him an Egyptian wife and Genesis 25:12-18 lists his descendants:



**Keturah** - After Sarah died, Abraham took another wife. Her children are also listed, and Genesis 25 identifies these children of Abraham as ancestors of later tribes:



The well at Teyma (Biblical Tema) in Saudi Arabia

While he was still living, Abraham gave gifts to these sons and "*sent them away from his son Isaac, to the land of the east.*" (Gen. 25:6)

**Esau** - Other descendants of Abraham were the sons of Esau. Esau had married two Hittite wives (Gen. 26:34), later marrying into Ishmael's family (Gen. 28:9). His descendants are listed in Genesis 36. The family of Seir (after whom Mt. Seir is named) is included since this was a family into which Esau married. The Edomite kingdom stretched across the Arabah, with - as Genesis 36:31 reminds us - "*kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned.*"

**Lot** - The Moabites and Ammonites that descended from Lot's daughters have also been assimilated into the Arabian tribes that have occupied the lands east of the Jordan. Because of Assyrian captivity, at the same time as that of Israel, few of these tribes would have been left in the area.

**Other Historical Records** - Some Arabic names have been found in texts as old as 853 BC. These inscriptions are written accounts of wars between Assyria and nomadic tribes of the Arabian desert. Possibly the earliest "Arab" whose name has been found is Gundubu, who led an army against Shalmaneser III in 853 BC. Another inscription from approximately 717 BC records Sargon III as having defeated the people of Thamud, Ibadidi, Marsimani, and Ephah - "desert dwelling Arabs". One of Keturah's sons was Ephah.

(Next issue: Solomon and after)

In the Bible the term used for Arabs before the time of Solomon was probably "Ishmaelites". Though the descendants of Ishmael were a minority in the area, they were more probably more familiar to the Israelites - descendants of Abraham through Isaac. Some examples from the Old Testament follow:

- The Ishmaelites who bought Joseph from his brothers, selling him in Egypt, were also called Midianites in the same chapter. Genesis 37
- It was the Moabite king, Balak, who tried to get Balaam to prophecy against the Israelites as they traveled north through Moab, on the last part of their journey to the Promised Land. Numbers 22-24
- The "children of Moab" were associated with the Midianites in leading Israel astray during their time in the wilderness. Numbers 25
- The Lord instructed Moses to destroy the Midianites as almost his final act before dying on Mount Nebo. Five kings of Midian are listed, as well as Balaam, the prophet who was willing to prophecy against the Israelites for money. Numbers 31
- When the Israelites of Gideon's time were oppressed by the Midianites, he led his 300 men against them, routing their entire army. When Gideon requests a portion of the booty - rather than becoming their king - we are told that "(It was the custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings.)" Judges 6-8 (8:24)

## Afghanistan

*The story of Afghanistan over the centuries is the story of the rise of Pashtun control in the region.*

When the Islamic conquest reached Afghanistan in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century it was just the latest in a succession of religious conquests to exert control of the region. As early as 2000BC the region had been settled by Aryan nomads, and was known as Aryana. Under the control of the Persians from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC, after Alexander the Great's conquest its control was disputed between the Seleucids (who were also contesting the Egyptian Ptolemies for control of Jordan) and the Bactrians.

Before the Taliban many Buddhist shrines could be seen, particularly on the pilgrimage route from India to Balkh.

The Khushans took political control in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, and by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century their Buddhist religion had exerted its spiritual control over the people. The ethnic mix was compounded by the 4<sup>th</sup> century invasion by the White Huns, of Turkmen origin. From then on the region developed a mixture of Buddhist and Hindu faiths.

### MOSLEM CONQUEST

After the Arab invasion of the 7<sup>th</sup> century it took three more centuries, and the establishment in Ghazni of a strong dynasty, before the region that we now call Afghanistan became Islamic. The Ghaznavids culture was destroyed by Genghis Khan's invasion. Tamerlane occupied Afghanistan in the late 1300s, leaving it under the control of his sons. A final Mongol invasion was led in 1504 by Babar, who



Tamerlane's sons established their capital in Herat. The fort was built by Alexander.

Mosques still can be seen that predate the Mongol invasion, particularly in Herat, Ghazni and Mazar-e-Sharif.

moved on to India to found the Moghul empire. Until the late 1700s Persians and Moghuls wrestled for control; the Persians in Herat, Moghuls in Kabul, with Kandahar frequently changing hands.

Afghanistan as we know it began to form when a Pashtun leader, Ahmad Shah (from the Abdali tribe) took control of Kandahar in 1747. Accepted as Shah by an early Loya Jirga, he extended his control as far as Kashmir and northern Persia.

The "great game" of the 1800s, between Britain and Russia, resulted in Britain controlling Afghan foreign affairs from 1880, drawing a border between it and British India, called the Durand Line. This is now the border with Pakistan. The Emir of Afghanistan from 1880, Abd-ar-Rahman Khan, strengthened Pashtun control of the country. His grandson, Amanullah, initiated a successful war of independence from Britain in 1919.

Amanullah then tried to introduce modern reforms that sound familiar today: giving up the burka, introducing western clothing. In 1929 he fled the country when his reforms produced revolts, and in 1930 a relative, Muhammad Nadir Shah, restored order and became king. He was assassinated in 1933 and his son, Muhammad Zahir, succeeded him.

Muhammad Daud, a relative of the king, became Prime Minister in 1953. He encouraged the involvement of the USSR

in developing the country. He was dismissed by the king in 1963 after antagonizing Pakistan by calling for self-determination for the Pathans (Pashtuns) of northern Pakistan. In 1973 the King

Having been absent from the country for 30 years, King Muhammad Zahir Shah returned in 2003 and is assisting in its reconstruction.

had to flee when Daud led a coup against the monarchy. A republic was declared, but his dictatorship alienated the tribes as well as left-wing groups. These groups, Khalq and Parcham (see E-NEWS 10) united to oppose Daud in 1976.

### SOVIET OCCUPATION & CIVIL WAR

Daud was overthrown by left-wing military officers in 1978, being replaced by Noor Muhammad Taraki. Both being Khalq members, he and his deputy, Hafizullah Amin, began a purge of the Parcham groups, which again disturbed the tribal leaders. Violence led to the assassination of Taraki in 1979, and the deterioration of order led to the Soviet invasion of December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1979. They executed

As many as 1.3 million people may have perished in the war against Soviet occupation.

Amin and installed Babrak Karmal, a Parcham, as president.

The tribal leaders resisted the Soviet invasion and began to receive US military aid. Due to the conflict, millions of people were displaced, either within the country, or to neighboring states, especially Pakistan. In the 1980s two mujahedin (resistance) groups were formed; the Pashtun-dominated Taliban in 1985, and an Iranian-based group in 1987. In 1987 the Soviets replaced Karmal with Muhammad Najibullah, another Parcham, but Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR had already begun the process of withdrawing Soviet troops from Afghanistan. This was completed in 1989, but the civil war continued, now against the Soviet-supported central government. The tribal rebels, in the Peshawar region, were still supported by the US and Pakistan. Attacks on Jalalabad, and an attempted coup in 1990 were unsuccessful. In 1992 the US and USSR agreed to cease all aid to the rebels and the government.

The rebels closed in, and the government fell. Three groups united to form a new government: Peshawar-based rebels, forces under Gen. Abdul Rashi Dostum (an Uzbek), and those under Ahmed Shah Masoud (a Tajik). A Tajik, Burhanuddin Rabbani, became president, and attempted to prevent the Pashtuns regaining dominance in Afghan politics. In reaction to this the Taliban, still supported by Pakistan, expanded from the south, moving towards Herat and Kabul. When they took Kabul in 1996 the president, Rabbani, fled and joined Dostum's forces. The northern tribes, having resisted the Soviets and the Najibullah government, were now aligned against the Taliban.

Allied with the Taliban was the Saudi native, Osama Bin Laden. When attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were traced to his followers the US launched cruise missiles against his training camps in Afghanistan. After the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the US went to war and removed the Taliban government of Afghanistan, replacing it with a U.S.-

A new constitution was approved in January 2004, but some serious disputes remain about the strong role of the president.

backed government, led by Mohammad Karzai, a Pashtun, advised by the last king, Muhammad Zahir Shah.