



### **End of an era...**

Nasa's 30 year space shuttle programme has come to an historic end, with the final mission being performed by the space craft, Atlantis.

The first shuttle mission was in 1981 and since then there have been 135 missions in total (33 for Atlantis).

Atlantis docked with the International Space Station (ISS) on Sunday 10 July, and is spending several days there before its return to Earth (scheduled for 20 July), when it will join the other shuttles in Nasa's fleet in retirement. It has taken essential supplies to the ISS, including more than 3.5 tonnes of food, other supplies and spare parts, designed to sustain the station for the next year.

As Atlantis approached, the naval bell on the ISS chimed to greet the shuttle.

*"Welcome to the International Space Station, for the last time,"* ISS astronaut Ronald Garan said.

For many people watching around the world the finality of this sentence struck a chord. It was a reminder that the space shuttle missions are finally coming to an end, with much ongoing discussion and speculation about what will happen now.

Nasa has had to work hard to counter the notion that the end of the shuttle means the end of human spaceflight. (Once they have retired all the shuttles, Nasa will be relying on robotic spacecraft from private companies to make cargo runs to the ISS.)

However, they intend to use resources diverted from the shuttles to build a capsule capable of going to deep-space locations such as asteroids and Mars.

While some people are sad that the space programme has finally come to an end, Nasa see it as making way for something new; creating exciting opportunities to develop, explore and grow.

This is something that many of BibleLands' partners experience at this time of year – pupils at schools across the Middle East are coming to the end of their school years and looking to the future, having to leave the security of school and venture out onto new paths.

Change is always hard, but it provides the opportunity to grow, develop and make way for something new.

In Egypt, St Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS) runs an education programme, mainly for Sudanese refugees. Sayyid Malik, who sat his senior exams earlier this year, became the first St Andrew's student to be accepted to university when he gained a place to study comparative religion at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. This is immensely exciting for StARS but also for Sayyid himself – something he never would have envisioned when he left Sudan; his education in Egypt providing him with the chance to move into new opportunities, and ultimately provide a better life for himself and his family.

The Arab Evangelical School in Hebron have recently held their graduation ceremony and many positive comments were received about the school. The principal of the school told us, *"Naturally we are gratified by the favourable responses of these people. But at the same time we realize that the impression we make on our audience on that one day is insignificant compared to the lasting impact of 35 graduates who carry with them a clear understanding of the Christian faith into their community. And if you multiply that impact by 57 (the number of years we have existed in Hebron) you get a sense of the magnitude of the school's legacy. Let us pray then that the Lord will use the influence of our school in Hebron for his glory."*

Join with us in praying for each pupil who will be leaving school this summer, and trusting that their next steps will provide opportunities and paths that they never dreamed of.

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