

Is. 17:1 The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from *being* a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.

Damascus is the capital of Syria. It is known as the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. The Bible first mentions it in Genesis 14:15 in reference to Abraham's rescue of Lot.

Isaiah is prophesying that Damascus will one day no longer be a city; it will become like a pile of garbage. This prophecy is yet to be fulfilled.

History tells us that Damascus was captured by Assyria, to which most commentators seem to reference this passage, but Assyria only captured it and took the people as prisoners; they didn't destroy it.

2Kings 16:9 And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.

Their policy was to repopulate their prisoners elsewhere in the empire and bring new inhabitants into conquered territory.

Is. 17:2 The cities of Aroer *are* forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid.

Aroer must have been one of the major cities of Syria, and the "cities" around it sort of like the suburbs, smaller towns. This verse seems to indicate that these cities will become a place where only flocks and herds of animals will find rest without fear as a result of the destruction of Damascus.

Is. 17:3 The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the LORD of hosts.

When I looked up Ephraim, it was defined as including Samaria and most of what is today's West Bank. We learned in chapter 7 that Ephraim was in league with Syria. Thus, those dependent on an alliance with Syria would also suffer the repercussions of the fall of Damascus, the seat of government for Syria. Isn't it interesting to note that the PLO is in direct alliance with Syria and Hezbollah today? To be "as the glory of the children of Israel" was not a good thing since Israel at the time of this prophecy was in a position of rebellion against God and not in a position of blessing (which is again their position today). Isaiah emphasizes that the coming destruction is to come about as purposed by the "Lord of hosts."

This event is also described in Jeremiah 49:23-27 and Zechariah 9:1-7. When I read through these sections, there seemed to be a connection with the destruction of Damascus to Tyre and Zidon. These cities were located in what is today known as Lebanon. This event will bring sorrow to Ashkelon, Gaza, and Ekron (an area that includes the Gaza strip, the land occupied by the Palestinians today, and the area just north of the strip on the coast); these were all Philistine cities of

Old Testament times. Zechariah 9:5 seems to indicate that this will destroy all hope for a Palestinian state.

Zechariah 9:5 Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited.

“ashamed” = disappointed, wither away

From that point on there will be no recognized “king” of Gaza. Ashkelon, a city on the coast of the Mediterranean just north of the Gaza strip, will not be inhabited after this.

Zechariah also seems to indicate that the Palestinians/Syrians who survive this war will eventually turn to God in faith and repentance.

Zechariah 9:5-7 Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite.

All of this adds to the prophecy given by Isaiah in this chapter.

Is. 17:4 And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean.

Is. 17:5 And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

Is. 17:6 Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel.

“In that day” = the day when Damascus is no longer a city and becomes a ruinous heap

I hadn't considered this before, but it seems that the destruction of Damascus will also impact today's Ephraim, which includes the “Palestinians” and the West Bank as well as northern Israel. Again there is a ray of hope in the message—there will be a remnant left. I wonder if this remnant is a reference to the Jewish settlers in that area.

Maybe it includes them, but Isaiah will tell us in chapter 19 about a time when Egypt, Israel and Assyria are all at peace with one another and in a relationship of blessing before God; that will be in the time when Jesus is on the throne in Jerusalem. Assyria would include Syria, but also much more.

Isaiah 19:23-25 In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall

serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

Note: As I am doing this update, world attention is directed toward the rebellion in Syria attempting to overthrow the government of Bashar Assad. Egypt has just experienced the second overthrow of its government in as many years. These rebellions were ignited by one man's self-immolation in Tunisia in December 2010 in response to government tyranny. That act fueled a great uprising among the desperately oppressed people and ignited similar responses in neighboring nations. I believe that the radical Muslim groups that envision the rebirth of an Islamic Caliphate have taken advantage of events and are working to continue the overthrow of leaders that do not share their vision. Wikipedia reveals the stated goal of the Muslim Brotherhood as follows: "Allah is our objective; the Quran is our law, the Prophet is our leader; Jihad is our way; and death for the sake of Allah is the highest of our aspirations."

Is. 17:7 At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.

Evidently, this destruction will cause the people of this area to acknowledge God, their Creator, with respect for Him as the God of Israel.

Is. 17:8 And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect *that* which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.

After this destruction men will not be looking to their false gods or idols of their own making for deliverance. It will be obvious that they cannot defeat the God of Israel.

Is. 17:9 In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch, which they left because of the children of Israel: and there shall be desolation.

As I continued to meditate on this verse, I came to the conclusion that the strong (fortified for defense) cities of Syria/Ephraim will be devastated/laid to waste due to action on the part of Israel. In other words, Israel would be the means through which this prophecy is fulfilled.

If this understanding is correct, then it would seem that something occurs that causes Israel to strike back decisively destroying Damascus in the process. Having a great interest in the study of prophecy, I believe this destruction will precede the attack of the forces of Gog identified in Ezekiel 38. It is the only explanation that makes sense to me in light of the fact that many of the nations surrounding Israel are not included as part of Gog's coalition. There is another coalition in scripture, however, identified in Psalm 83 that seems to provide an answer to this puzzle. The people groups listed there directly correspond to

many of the very nations most directly impacted by the current Islamic uprising. Only the future will reveal how this eventually plays out.

Is. 17:10 Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips:

Is. 17:11 In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: *but* the harvest *shall be* a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.

We have to remember that Isaiah is prophesying to the people of Judah even as he declares these woes concerning other nations. Here he is rebuking God's people for their rebellion against Him. He is telling them that in spite of all their plans and efforts toward security and prosperity, they will only reap grief and sorrow as long as they "forget God."

I compare that to Israel today. It has really grown in power and productivity in its relatively short time of existence as a nation, but continues to face terror and attack that results in grief and sorrow despite their accomplishments. Why? Because they have "forgotten God."

Is. 17:12 Woe to the multitude of many people, *which* make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, *that* make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!

Is. 17:13 The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but *God* shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.

Is. 17:14 And behold at eveningtide trouble; *and* before the morning he *is* not. This *is* the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.

"noise" = to make a loud sound...by implication, to be in great commotion or tumult, to rage

"rushing" = uproar...by implication, destruction

"rebuke" = To check, silence, or put down, with reproof; to restrain by expression of disapprobation.

All of a sudden Isaiah turns his address to an unnamed multitude of people and nations. Evidently, Israel's action has provoked quite an outrage in the nations of the world. As we see in the words defined above, *noise* and *rushing* refer to great commotion, rage, and uproar. Evidently, God intervenes to rebuke them. I had to go to Webster since the Hebrew gave no further insight on the word *rebuke*. It's interesting that *rebuke* involves action resulting from the spoken word. We know that God's word always accomplishes His purpose. I'm not sure what method He uses, but God speaks the word and the nations flee in the face of a mighty force of wind. (Wind is invisible but its effect is visible and powerful.)

Isaiah affirms as a representative of God's people that this will always be God's reaction against those who try to spoil/rob/destroy/take for prey the nation or people of Israel. This is another affirmation of God's promise to Abraham.

Genesis 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

The wording in the last verse jumped out to me this time through in connection with Gog's attack.

*Ezekiel 38:10–12 Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, **To take a spoil, and to take a prey....***

If my conclusion in the previous section is correct, it could reference the ultimate attack of Gog and his allies (primarily Moslem) after Israel has achieved victory over her surrounding neighbors—the coalition referenced in Psalm 83. Events of recent days (as of 12/16) indicate that Israel's "victory" over her Arab neighbors may be one of political alliance against the actions of common enemies—specifically Iran (supported by Russia) and ISIS.

Ezekiel tells us that Gog is forced to take action he didn't really want to take.

*Ezekiel 38:3–4 And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, **and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth....***

If I am correct in determining that Gog represents the demonic force behind the leader of Russia, this makes logical sense. Russia has made great investment for port access to the Mediterranean as well as many other significant economic investments to ally themselves with the Muslim world surrounding Israel. Of primary importance is its Mediterranean naval base for the Black Sea located in Syria.

Ezekiel goes on to tell us that it is God that effects the defeat of Gog and his armies; it is His rebuke that causes them to turn on one another and disposes of them like chaff in the wind (v13). In fact, The Creator will exercise His power and authority over nature to accomplish His purposes.

*Ezekiel 38:18–23 "And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face. **For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel;** So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my*

mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man's sword shall be against his brother. And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD."

Again, only the future will reveal the truth.