

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #25

Isaiah 17:1-14

We come now to the oracle concerning Damascus which is in Syria. Now specifically, there is much information here about the actual city of Damascus. As we have said, the noun “oracle” refers to a very negative prophetic message which is burdensome because God aims it against specific people.

Now Damascus was and still is the capital city of Aram (Syria). She had entered into an alignment with Israel the northern power. We may recall that both Israel’s king, Pekah, and Aram’s (Syria) king, Rezin, both went to take over Jerusalem but couldn’t do it (Isaiah 7:1). God made the prediction that within 65 years these areas would be shattered by the Assyrians (Isaiah 7:8), which they were (II Kings 15:29). Assyria defeated Aram (Syria) in 732 B.C. and Israel in 722 B.C.

However, as with all of these prophecies, there are things in them declared by God that have not yet occurred. There are things here that are soon to occur. What is actually predicted here is this:

DURING THE TRIBULATION THE CITIES IN SYRIA WILL BE DEVASTATED, INCLUDING DAMASCUS, BUT A REMNANT WILL SURVIVE WHO WILL END UP WORSHIPPING THE TRUE GOD OF ISRAEL.

Damascus is one city in the world that to this point has survived everything. She had lasted for many years, even though she has not been right with God. Damascus, if it were a person, would be the kind of person who lives a long life and seems to get along just fine in the world. This kind of person is somewhat religious and somewhat prosperous. What Damascus doesn’t realize, what this kind of person doesn’t realize, is that it will all change quickly.

Now there are five key prophetic predictions made in this text:

PROPHETIC PREDICTION #1 – During the Tribulation, the key cities of Syria will be abandoned. **17:1-3**

Damascus, which is the capital of Syria, is said to be “the oldest permanently inhabited city in the world” (*Grolier International Encyclopedia*, Vol. 18, p. 412). It is a city that has housed great political leaders like King David of Israel in Biblical times and Alexander the Great during the days between the Old Testament and the New Testament. **What God declares here is that this ancient city of Damascus will be destroyed and will become a fallen ruin (17:1).**

The cities of Aroer which could possibly be the area of northern Syria located near the border of Turkey or suburban areas which surround Damascus, although it has not really been identified, will become a place where flocks may lie down and no human will frighten them (17:2). **The point of this is that the entire country of Syria will be destroyed, cities and suburbs.**

As Dr. Ironside said this will all occur “in the last days when God will deal once more both with Israel and the nations” (*Isaiah*, p. 99).

In fact, any strong city in Ephraim (**verse 3**), which is central Israel, will disappear. Ephraim is a name of a tribe in Israel, it is the name of a city, it is the name of a mountain and it is the name of a man. Oftentimes the noun “Ephraim” was used to refer to the ten northern tribes of Israel (Hosea 4:16-17). **Now the reason why Ephraim is mentioned here is because when these prophecies are happening against Syria, there will also be a connection to Israel** . We may be absolutely certain that there will be an intimate link between things happening to Syria and Israel during the Tribulation.

Verse 3 reveals that Damascus will lose its political power which is an amazing prediction. Damascus has been a major headquarters of political power for centuries. It has never stopped being a city throughout history and all of the ravages of Middle East war. Damascus has been a headquarters for Muslim Arabs since 661 A.D. The people in this area speak Arabic and 85-90% of the people are Arabs. It has been estimated that 85% of all Syrians are Muslims. Damascus has a rich history of survival as an ancient city, but that will all change.

In the Tribulation, these Arabs are going to be destroyed and **verse 3** reveals that the remnant of Arabs who survive this will be like the glory of the sons of Israel. They will link themselves to the God of Israel and will reflect the glory of God.

PROPHETIC PREDICTION #2 – During the Tribulation, Israel will fade. **17:4-6**

Israel will become very thin. She will be hunted and reaped like a harvest. The Valley of Rephaim was a fertile area west of Jerusalem (Joshua 15:8; 18:16) where David twice defeated the Philistines (II Samuel 5:18-20, 22-25). It was a valley located to the west between Jerusalem and Bethlehem near modern day “Beth-shemesh.”

There can be no doubt that this is a reference to what will happen in the Tribulation during the time of Jacob’s trouble which is the final 3½ years. When the Tribulation begins, the Antichrist will enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and Israel will be seen as somewhat of a glorious nation. But all of that will change.

When Damascus is under attack, so will be Israel, which means all of this occurs about 3½ years into the Tribulation. During the Assyrian invasion of Syria, the Assyrians were stopped short of moving into Jerusalem. During the Tribulation, Jerusalem will be under siege. The city that will feature the temple will see its glory fade quickly. Israel will lose her glory and will be reduced to almost nothing. If you compare her to an olive tree, only two or three will be left. If you compare her to a fruitful tree only four or five will be left.

PROPHETIC PREDICTION #3 – During this part of the Tribulation, man will look to God .
17:7-8

The Tribulation will cause men to look to God. In the Hebrew text as well as in the Greek Septuagint, there is an article “the” before the noun “man.” What this means is that there will be specific men from Israel, from Damascus and from various parts of the world who will turn to God. I think the specific contextual reference here is to Arabs who are from Syria.

This becomes amazing to think that Arabs would come to the realizations described here. **The Tribulation will force the world to realize God is the One behind all of these troubles.** Now there are some amazing things to observe in these verses because they give us insight as to what people will know and think. There are three key realizations people will have:

(Realization #1) - Man will realize he needs to look for God his Maker . **17:7a**

It will take the horror of the Tribulation to finally get people to turn to God .

The Hebrew word “regard” which is used here and again in **verse 8** is one that means man will be looking for God and looking for anyone who can aid in finding God (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 841). The Hebrew word for “maker” means they are searching for the God, who not only made them, but also has fabricated all of the things happening in the world (Ibid., p. 657).

During the Tribulation even Arabs will be searching for truth about the real God, not their false God, Allah.

(Realization #2) - Man will look to see Jesus Christ who is God. **17:7b**

There are some amazing titles Isaiah uses for God in **Isaiah 17**. In **verse 3**, Isaiah calls God “the LORD of hosts ” (Jehovah Sabaoth). In **verse 6**, Isaiah calls God “the LORD, the God of Israel .” In **verse 7**, Isaiah calls God our “Maker” and “the Holy One of Israel.” In **verse 10**, Isaiah calls God “the God of your salvation .” In **verse 10**, Isaiah calls God “the rock of your refuge .” **All of these Divine Proper Nouns may be applied to Jesus Christ .** During the Tribulation, people will come to realize just exactly who Jesus Christ is. The Arab world, the Israeli world and the Gentile world will all reach the same conclusion. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord God. There has only been one Person who came to this earth who may be called the Holy one of Israel - Jesus Christ.

Many in the Tribulation will look to Jesus Christ, the Holy One of Israel. Many will realize that He is Israel’s King and Savior. We know that Jesus, Himself, predicted that He would not come again to Israel until every Jew cried out, “blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 23:39). There is coming a day when all will look for Jesus Christ to come and set up His kingdom.

There is coming a day in which all people of the world will reverence and worship Jesus Christ. You will never hear His name mocked and the only work man will have regard of is His work for them.

Jesus Christ is the One you need to turn to for your salvation and as your refuge. Whatever is happening to you right now is a wonderful time for you to turn to Him and depend on Him.

(Realization #3) - Man will have no regard for his works when it comes to a relationship with God. **17:8**

The “Asherim” and the “incense stands” mentioned in this verse were Asherah poles of wood that were dedicated to the Canaanite fertility goddess. As Dr. Oswalt said, “Recent archaeological discoveries have shown some apostate forms of *this* worship...” (*Isaiah*, p. 231). This kind of worship was sexually immoral.

Again the word for “regard” means that men will not look to their false systems of religion for salvation. This will be a time when men will realize that their man-made systems of religion cannot save them. Their altars and incense mean nothing. The Arab shrines, the Mormon temples, the Episcopalian and Catholic churches won’t mean a thing. All works systems of religion will be gone. All people will look to the grace of God and the work of Jesus Christ.

Think about a time when the Arab world denounces their own idolatrous Islamic religion as nothing more than an invention of their own hearts and hands. Isaiah says this will happen right in Damascus.

PROPHETIC PREDICTION #4 – During the Tribulation, Syria’s strong cities will be abandoned but nothing will flourish. **17:9-11**

One interpreter of Scripture asked, are we supposed to take these words literally? Absolutely! Syria is an Arab republic that is bordered by Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea. It has been said that Syria “is a modern state in an ancient land.” It sits in a strategic military position and this part of the world has been a key spot of political problems for Israel. There are six strong cities in Syria today. Six of its key cities are Latakia and Tartus, which sit on the Mediterranean; Aleppo, Hama and Homs which sit inland and, of course, Damascus which is the capital.

What Isaiah predicts here is that all of these key cities will be forsaken places. During the Tribulation the Arabs in this part of the world will abandon these cities

In **verse 10** we get specific revelatory information as to why God has permitted these things to happen to the Syrians. They had “forgotten” the God of their salvation and they didn’t even remember their refuge, the true God. There is a true God in whom salvation may be found for any in Syria, Israel or the United States. There is a God to whom a person or nation may turn. But they must have forgotten this.

I find it intriguing that there is a reference to “delightful plants” in **verse 10**, because agriculture has been the dominating force of Syria. Wheat and barley, vegetables, citrus fruits, olives, tobacco and sugar beets all grow in abundance. The number one export commodity is cotton. During the Tribulation it will not be plant crops that will be harvested, it will be a harvest of wrath.

These people became self-dependent and self-reliant, and they left God out. They became idolatrous. They turned away from the true God and they will reap what they have sown; they will reap “incurable pain” (**17:11**).

There is nothing that will lead to your spiritual destruction any quicker than you just forget about God for awhile. Just focus on you and forget about God and watch what happens. Just forget about church, just forget about the Bible, just forget to pray and see how quickly you deteriorate in your spiritual life. If you forget about God long enough, your end can be disastrous. You will be led to desperate sorrow and incurable pain.

Some have tried to forget about God all of their lives, but I can tell you this: There is coming a day when your whole relationship with God will become the key to your eternity and if you have not come to terms with God, you will experience eternal, incurable pain.

PROPHETIC PREDICTION #5 – During the Tribulation, all nations will experience God’s wrath . **17:12-14**

The Tribulation will not only be a terrible time for Syria but also for all nations of the world. Just like Assyria once swept into this part of the world, a far worse episode will hit again.

Nations will rush this part of the world during the Tribulation and ultimately they will become chaff. There will be terror the likes of which has never been seen. But God will quickly destroy them all.

Any political power who plunders Judah will be destroyed by God. Turn against Israel and the postscript to the power is “you are no more.”

PRACTICAL LESSONS:

- 1. A person could have a long existence, just like Damascus, and end in disaster.**
- 2. All people in the world will eventually honor Jesus Christ.**
- 3. All people in the world need to believe on Jesus Christ who is the only true God of salvation.**
- 4. Those who choose to forget about God will eventually experience incurable eternal pain.**