

# Does Isaiah 17 Prophecy the Imminent Destruction of Damascus?

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*“Behold, Damascus is about to be removed from being a city, and it will become a fallen ruin.” (Isaiah 17:1)*

Every time there is any kind of military action taken against the Syrian regime I am inundated with e-mails asking me if I think Isaiah’s oracle concerning Damascus is about to be fulfilled. It is certainly understandable that many students of Scripture are looking to Isaiah 17 and asking if its fulfillment could be imminent. If we simply examine the actual text a bit more carefully however, then we will see that what Isaiah describes is not something that is imminent. Let’s consider the actual text of Isaiah 17 to examine what it really says:

*“The oracle concerning Damascus. “Behold, Damascus is about to be removed from being a city and will become a fallen ruin. The cities of Aroer are forsaken; They will be for flocks to lie down in, and there will be no one to frighten them.... sovereignty [will disappear] from Damascus and the remnant of Aram.” (Isaiah 17:1-3)*

According to the text, there are a few things that this judgment will bring about. All of them must be taken into consideration. First, Damascus will be removed from being a city as well as all of “Aram.” Aram speaks of the greater region of southern Syria. Second, “the cities of Aroer” will be so adversely affected by the Isaiah 17 judgment, that they will become “forsaken,” or void of human inhabitants. Aroer is a reference to the region of northern modern day Jordan. It includes the capital city of Amman. Third, “Ephraim,” will also become virtually desolate:

*“The fortified city will disappear from Ephraim... Now in that day the glory of Jacob will fade, and the fatness of his flesh will become lean... Yet gleanings will be left in it like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives on the topmost bough, four or five on the branches of a fruitful tree,” declares the LORD, the God of Israel... In that day their strong cities will be like forsaken places in the forest, Or like branches which*

*they abandoned before the sons of Israel; and the land will be a desolation.” (Isaiah 17:3-7)*

“Ephraim” is a term that speaks of the ancient northern kingdom of Israel, or simply the Galilee and all of northern Israel today. Beyond northern Israel, the text also clear says that, “in that day” the “glory of Jacob will fade.” Jacob of course, is simply a reference to all of Israel. So Israel’s glory will fade to the point of being sparsely populated. Isaiah likens Israel to the fields after harvest. He then says that Israel’s, “strong cities will be like forsaken places in the forest”. Yet despite the fact that the prophecy speaks not only of the destruction of Damascus, but also of a major desolation of Jordan and virtually all of Israel, in none of the popular discussions of this text does anyone ever bring attention to anything other than Syria and Damascus. It is as if they read only the first verse and ignore the remainder of the passage.

In conclusion then, this passage is not speaking of an imminent attack of Damascus. Isaiah 17 is simply one piece of the larger section of Isaiah’s prophecy (chapters 13-23) which speaks of judgment not only against Israel, but all of her adversarial Gentile neighbors. When will all of this occur? If one examines this larger portion of Isaiah’s prophecy in its proper context, rather pulling out a single verse here or there, then it is clear that its ultimate context is the Day of the LORD, the judgment against the nations, and the return of Jesus. On this point, Dr. Tommy Ice very rightly states:

It appears to be an event that will occur at the end of the seven-year tribulation as the Lord not only judges and destroy Damascus, but all of Israel’s historic enemies that surround her. If one examines the broader context of Isaiah 17 and take account of the section where it is located, it becomes clear that it is a section in which the Lord prophesizes (*sic*) judgment upon all the Gentile nations that have opposed Israel. This will all happen at the end of the tribulation in conjunction with the second coming of Christ to the earth.