

Because of the language here it's obvious this prophecy was only partially fulfilled when the Assyrians defeated the Arameans and overran their capital, Damascus, in 732 BC. This was only one of the times the city of Damascus has been conquered. Throughout its history Damascus has been conquered by the Israelites (1000 BC), the Assyrians (732 BC), the Babylonians (606 BC), the Persians (530 BC), the Greeks (330 BC), the Nabateans (85 BC), the Romans (63 BC), the Byzantines (634 AD), the Mamelukes (1250 AD) and the Ottoman Turks (1516 AD). But the city itself has always survived and is now claimed to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world with a 5,000 year history. Its current population is close to 2 million, yet **Isaiah 17:1** indicates that it will one day cease to exist.

Some believe the phrase "cities of Aroer" refers to Aramean territory east of the Jordan River around the Arnon River, which flows into the Dead Sea in southern Jordan. However, the Jewish Encyclopedia claims that this phrase in **Isaiah 17:2** is probably translated incorrectly because the geographical distance from Damascus is too great. While they say it's possible that there may have been another Aroer near Damascus, it is more likely that the passage should be rendered "*the cities thereof shall be forsaken.*" If that's the correct translation, it would include the Hezbollah stronghold in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon,

which was part of Aramean territory in Isaiah's time, and is in a direct line between Beirut and Damascus.

The fortified city will disappear from Ephraim, and royal power from Damascus; the remnant of Aram will be like the glory of the Israelites," declares the LORD Almighty. "In that day the glory of Jacob will fade; the fat of his body will waste away. It will be as when a reaper gathers the standing grain and harvests the grain with his arm- as when a man glean heads of grain in the Valley of Re-phaim.(Isaiah 17:3-5)

This segment speaks of the defeat of Damascus in 732 BC and the destruction of Samaria 10 years later (722 BC). Damascus continued to exist as part of the Assyrian Empire and is still here today, but the ruins of Samaria are just now being excavated out of the sandy soil of Israel. The systematic relocation of the ruling classes to the far reaches of the Assyrian Empire is also in view here, symbolized by the fat of Jacob's body wasting away. This was standard Assyrian policy to reduce the likelihood of subsequent rebellion among their conquered peoples. Jacob and Ephraim are alternate names for the Northern Kingdom, and Samaria was its capital.

Yet some gleanings will remain, as when an olive tree is beaten, leaving two or three olives on the topmost branches, four or five on the

fruitful boughs," declares the LORD, the God of Israel. (Isaiah 17:6)

Not all the people were dispersed. Farmers were left behind to tend the crops and protect the harvest for their new rulers. They were joined by refugees from other parts of Assyria and their combined descendants were known as the Samaritans in the time of Jesus. (A quick reading of **2 Chronicles 11:16** shows that all the faithful from the 10 northern tribes moved south at the time of the civil war that divided the nation after King Solomon's death 150 years earlier. From then on, all 12 tribes were represented in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, so the 10 tribes from the North weren't totally lost. The Lord has always preserved a believing remnant from all the Tribes of Israel.)

In that day men will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands, and they will have no regard for the Asherah poles and the incense altars their fingers have made. In that day their strong cities, which they left because of the Israelites, will be like places abandoned to thickets and undergrowth. And all will be desolation. (Isaiah 17:7-9)

There is simply no reason to believe that the Assyrians turned to God following their conquest of Aram and Israel. And far from

abandoning their cities because of the Israelites, it was the Israelites who were defeated and dispersed. I think the phrase "because of the Israelites" tells us the yet future attack on Damascus causing the destruction and abandonment of Syrian cities, will come from Israel, not someone else, and will result in the eventual return of the survivors to their God is a much more likely fulfilment. And it could happen soon.

You have forgotten God your Saviour; you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress. Therefore, though you set out the finest plants and plant imported vines, though on the day you set them out, you make them grow, and on the morning when you plant them, you bring them to bud, yet the harvest will be as nothing in the day of disease and incurable pain. (Isaiah 17:10-11)

Oh, the raging of many nations- they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples- they roar like the roaring of great waters! Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us. (Isaiah 17:12-14)

Assyria's King Sennacherib brought his armies almost literally to the gates of Jerusalem, so close his commanders were within speaking distance of the Jewish defenders. On the night before they were to attack, the Lord sent His angel into the Assyrian camp on Mt. Scopus to slaughter 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Before dawn they had packed up and fled, ending 44 years of conquest. **(Isaiah 37:36-38)**

This time in Israel's history so parallels the Jewish view of the End Times that Sennacherib is seen by them as a type of the anti-Christ, while Hezekiah, Judah's king at the time, models the Messiah. But notice that Isaiah speaks of many nations raging against God's people, not just Assyria, leading us once again to consider Sennacherib's defeat to be a partial fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy.

The phrase "rushing of many waters" is often used to describe the sound of loud voices and today many nations are stirred up. The cry of anti-Israeli sentiment can be heard around the globe. The various Middle East "peace" conferences have pretty much left Israel standing alone against all but irresistible pressure to negotiate away its very existence. Because of the current turmoil in Syria and the arrival of so many Muslim extremists there, the whole Middle East could soon erupt in flames.

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(Written by Jack Kelley)

An Oracle against Damascus

In the past couple of years it has become even clearer that Isaiah's prophecy of the destruction of Damascus will soon come to fulfilment, perhaps being part of the **Psalms 83** scenario I've written about. If so, it would explain why Syria is not included among the coalition of Moslem nations who will gather against Israel in the Battle of **Ezekiel 38**. Let's review what God had Isaiah say about this.

An Oracle Concerning Damascus:

“Look, the city of Damascus will disappear! It will become a heap of ruins. The towns of Aroer will be deserted. Flocks will graze in the streets and lie down undisturbed, with no one to chase them away. The fortified towns of Israel will also be destroyed, and the royal power of Damascus will end. (Isaiah 17:1-3)