

When will Damascus be destroyed?

Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city in recorded history dating back four thousand years to the time of Abraham (Genesis 14:15). It is Syria's capital, housing about four million people in or around its metropolitan areas. It is a strategic target for Israel because every known terrorist organization has a hub or headquarters located there. God's Word declares that Damascus will be destroyed in the Last Days. Will this occur before, during, or toward the end of the seven year Tribulation period?

Isaiah 17:1, 9: "The burden against Damascus. 'Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap.' ... **In that day** his strong cities will be as a forsaken bough and an uppermost branch, which they left because of the children of Israel; and there will be desolation."

In the Bible, the expression "in that day" usually refers to "the Day of the Lord" – a common phrase for the Last Days and specifically the Tribulation period.¹ Sometimes though the expression "in that day" or "the Day of the Lord" encompasses the period from Israel's end times re-gathering and extends all the way to the end of the Millennium (Isaiah 11; Micah 4; etc.). Therefore we need to look for additional clues to see if Scripture reveals the timing of Damascus's destruction.

Isaiah 17:4 provides this insight: "In that day it shall come to pass that **the glory of Jacob (Israel) will wane (diminish)**, and the fatness of his flesh grow lean."

We know from several passages that Israel will be very strong and prosperous at the beginning of the Tribulation period (Ezekiel 38; Zechariah 12; Micah 4:11-13). It is not until the final 3 ½ years of the Tribulation that Israel will diminish (Matthew 24:15-22; Daniel 7:25; 9:26; 11:36-45; Zechariah 14; etc.). Of course if "in that day" is just a general expression for the Last Days, then the Holy Spirit may be giving us a panoramic picture of the entire period. However if "in that day" refers specifically to the time when Israel weakens, then Damascus may be forsaken during the final 3 ½ year period. This would place the destruction of Damascus during the final 3 ½ period – either when Antichrist attacks the king of the North (Daniel 11:40), or at the very end during Armageddon (Revelation 16:13-16) when Christ returns.

¹ The expression "in that day" is used in the Bible over 50 times to indicate the Last Days, the Day of the Lord, and the time of judgment. Here are some examples: Isaiah 2:11, 17, 20; 4:1, 2; 10:20; 11:11; 12:1; 24:21; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1, 2, 12, 13; 28:5; 52:6; Jeremiah 30:8; Ezekiel 38:19; 39:11; Hosea 2:16, 18, 21; Joel 3:18; Amos 8:3, 9, 13; Obadiah 1:8; Micah 4:6; 5:10; 7:11, 12; Zephaniah 3:11, 16; Zechariah 2:11; 3:10; 9:16; 12:3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11; 13:1, 2, 4; 14:4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 20, 21; Matthew 7:22; Luke 10:12; 17:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; etc.

On the other hand, Isaiah 17:9 explains that Damascus will be destroyed “**because of the children of Israel.**” This would certainly place Damascus’s destruction either before the Tribulation or during the first half when Israel is still militarily strong.

Jeremiah 49:26-27 provides this insight: “‘Therefore her (Damascus’s) young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be cut off in that day,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall consume the palaces of Ben-Hadad.’”

Jeremiah uses the same expression “in that day.” If this refers specifically to the seven year Tribulation period, then Jeremiah’s prophecy also suggests the destruction of Damascus during the Great Tribulation rather than before it.

However, Jeremiah adds this provocative clue: “**There is trouble on the sea**... Damascus has grown feeble” (Jeremiah 49:23-24). “There is trouble on the sea” is an interesting expression when we consider that Israel has never had a significant naval presence until our generation. But today, for the first time in history, Israel has both nuclear weapons and submarines positioned in the Mediterranean capable of turning Damascus into “a ruinous heap” in one day. Further, in 2007 “Israeli officials vowed to wipe Syria off the map if it is attacked with chemical weapons.”²

Combine this insight with Isaiah’s reference to quick destruction: “**Then behold, at eventide, trouble! And before morning, he is no more**” (Isaiah 17:14), and nuclear weapons appear to be in view here. If this refers to Damascus,³ then this would indicate Israel will be forced to use its nuclear arsenal against this terrorist regime. It also indicates Israel will deal with Damascus before the seven year peace covenant is confirmed (Daniel 9:27).

Amos 1:3-5 adds additional insight: “Thus says the LORD: ‘**For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four,** I will not turn away its punishment, Because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, Which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad. I will also break the gate bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the scepter from Beth Eden. The people of Syria shall go captive to Kir,’ Says the LORD.”

Since the reestablishment of Israel in 1948, the fledgling nation has been attacked by Arab/Muslim armies in three major wars (War of Independence in 1948, Six-Day War in 1967, and Yom Kippur War in 1973) and several smaller wars. In each of the three major battles, Syria was an offender – violently attacking Israel to take over her land and destroy the Jews. God declares Damascus will be punished on the fourth transgression. This could very well point to the Psalm 83 war – which appears imminent and almost certainly prior to the Tribulation.

² http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/2007/09/19/2007-09-19_israel_to_syria_use_chem_weapons_well_w.html
accessed 2/15/2011

³ It may refer to the nations in general and Damascus in particular. Read Isaiah chapter 17 for context.

Interestingly, in Amos the Lord does not say that Damascus is utterly destroyed, but that God will send fire into the house of Hazael, break the gate bar (power) of Damascus, cut off some of the inhabitants, destroy the king and/or rulers, and they will go captive to Kir (in Jordan likely).

Syria is one of the ten threatening nations/groups in Psalm 83 (v. 8 – Assyria encompassed much of present day Syria). Furthermore during the Psalm 83 war part of Syria, Jordan, southern Lebanon and Gaza will be annexed (Obadiah 1; Ezekiel 39:11). Therefore it is possible Israel will set up detention camps in Jordan for those who survive the Psalm 83 war. Amos's passage would place at least a partial destruction of Damascus during the Psalm 83 war.

More clues are found in Zechariah 9:1-2, 8: “The burden of the word of the LORD against the land of Hadrach, And Damascus its resting place (For the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the LORD); Also against Hamath, which borders on it, and against Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise. . . . I will camp around My house (Jerusalem) because of the army, because of him who passes by and him who returns. No more shall an oppressor pass through them (Israel), for now I have seen with My eyes.”

In this passage we are told “No more shall an oppressor pass through them (Israel), for now I have seen with My eyes.” This will only happen when Jesus returns to the Mount of Olives suggesting that Damascus may not be utterly destroyed until Armageddon. However Zechariah 9 may simply provide a broad scope prophetic picture of the last days.

Taking all the clues together, here is one possible scenario: Damascus and the surrounding terrorist organizations will be brought to their knees, with many killed and many survivors placed in detention camps during and after the Psalm 83 campaign. Damascus may not be completely destroyed at this time, but significantly subdued (their power broken).

Though Damascus is not specifically listed in the Magog Invasion, we are told that “many people are with” Gog, the leader of Magog, and they come “from the far north” (Ezekiel 38:6). Therefore it is possible that Damascus – which is north of Israel – will be a staging area for the Magog coalition. God says He will rain down fire on Gog, “on his troops, and on the many people who are with him” (Ezekiel 38:22; 39:6). So it is possible that whatever is left of Damascus will be utterly destroyed during the Magog Invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and 39.

There are two final possibilities. Syria may be part of the king of the North's army that battles Antichrist (Daniel 11:40-45). Or it may be destroyed at the very end – during Armageddon (Revelation 16:14; 19:11-21).

Personally, I believe the scriptural clues indicate that Damascus will likely be destroyed by nuclear weapons, or at least greatly humbled and subdued, during the Psalm 83 War. If any remnant remains, they will be destroyed during the Magog Invasion.

Rather than Syria, the king of the North listed in Daniel 11:40-45 may refer to one of the ten kings of the Tribulation and his region (Daniel 7:24).

Though we should not be dogmatic concerning the exact timing, we know Damascus will be destroyed in these Last Days.⁴ May this fact and God's repeated warnings cause all those who would threaten His people to repent and trust Christ while there is still time.

In the midst of these tragic events, there is good news: "In that day a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 17:7), and "In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria— a blessing in the midst of the land" (Isaiah 19:24).

Many will be saved! May we as believers be praying for the people of the Middle East and warning whosoever to trust in Jesus Christ as Creator, Lord, and Savior while there is still time.

⁴ For a timeline of key Last Days events refer to: <http://www.eternal-productions.org/PDFS/Time%20Line%20-%20Key%20events%20from%20Rapture%20to%20Second%20Coming.pdf>