

## Damascus—Ancient City that Falsifies Preterism?

by Don K. Preston

This article appeared in the 2022 Spring issue of *Fulfilled!* Magazine

A radio host recently “refuted” preterism by claiming that it has not answer for Isaiah 17:1

*“An oracle concerning Damascus. Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city and will become a heap of ruins.”* (Isaiah 17:1, ESV)

The host stated that this has never occurred, and Damascus is still a city today. God is not a liar, therefore preterism cannot be true.

---

**What follows is a** brief response to this objection based on and employing the information from a longer response written by Gary DeMar of American Vision, in Powder Springs, GA, in 2013. Events in the Middle East had stirred up eschatological speculation once again. I had actually begun to write an article on Isaiah 17 when I discovered that Gary’s article. After reading it, I realized that I could not add a lot to it, so I divided DeMar’s excellent longer article into separate installments, which are all on my website, [www.donkpreston.com](http://www.donkpreston.com). I urge the reader to go there and read the entirety of DeMar’s excellent information.

As DeMar noted, it seems that every time some major disruption takes place in the Middle East, the so-called prophecy experts go into overdrive, claiming “the end is near.” Yet, time after time, they are proven wrong, so they go silent until the next “crisis,” when they once again assure us that the end is upon us. DeMar noted in 2013 that some of the “experts” were claiming that in a mere “matter of months,” the end would come! Sadly, when their “prophecies” fail, they ignore those failures and expect their audiences to not remember their failed predictions.

DeMar documents Dispensational writers who claim that Isaiah 17 has never been fulfilled:

Joel C. Rosenberg: “These prophecies have not yet been fulfilled. Damascus is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth. It has been attacked, besieged, and conquered. But Damascus has never been completely destroyed and left uninhabited. Yet that is exactly what the Bible says will happen.”

“Jan Markell, founder and director of Minnesota-based Olive Tree Ministries, says the Syrians’ use of chemical weapons makes her think about Isaiah 17, which foretells the complete destruction of Damascus, which hasn’t happened in thousands of years.”

Harry Bultema: “The judgment that will strike Damascus is that it will be no longer a city but a ruinous heap. This prediction has yet to be completely fulfilled, for in Jeremiah’s day it was a flourishing city, and even today is said to be the oldest city in the world (cf. Genesis 15:2 where Damascus is already mentioned). According to II Kings 16:9 Tiglath-pileser captured it and killed its king Rezin; but he did not make it a heap.” (Harry Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishers, 1981, 184<sup>1</sup>).

Thomas Ice: “Most commentators contend that Isaiah 17:1–3 was fulfilled in 732 b.c. at the conquest of Tiglath-pileser.” (For example, Peter A. Steveson, *A Commentary on Isaiah* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2003), 142. See also, John D. W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, rev. ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005, 293<sup>1</sup>). However, Tiglath-pileser did not totally destroy the city, but merely captured it, as has happened numerous times throughout its history.

Britt Gillette: “In the very near future, Damascus will once again play a major role in human events. The prophet Isaiah provides us with God’s commentary on a future conflict between Damascus and Israel, and in so doing, he reveals certain prophecies which have been partially fulfilled in the past. However, the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 17 remains in the future.”

Interestingly, however, DeMar also documents that some leading Dispensationalists realize that Damascus was destroyed in fulfillment of Isaiah 17. He cites several including Charles Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon: Sign of the End Times*, 1991):

Isaiah 17 predicted the destruction of the city, along with the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel. . . . Damascus was captured by Assyrians in 732 BC and the northern kingdom of Israel fell when the capital city of Samaria was captured by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

And 100 years later, the prophet Jeremiah also predicted the fall of Damascus, which had been rebuilt, he added. “His message was fulfilled when the city was captured by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.”

Dispensational author Mark Hitchcock agrees that the Damascus prophecy has been fulfilled. Hitchcock offers this commentary:

“I believe it makes more sense to hold that Isaiah 17 was fulfilled in the eighth century BC when both Damascus, the capital of Syria, and Samaria, the capital of Israel, were hammered by the Assyrians. In that conquest, both Damascus and Samaria were destroyed, just as Isaiah 17 predicts. According to history, Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC) pushed vigorously to the west, and in 734 the Assyrians advanced and laid siege to Damascus, which fell two years later in 732.” (Mark Hitchcock, *Middle East Burning: Is the Spreading Unrest as Sign of the End Times?* Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2012, 176<sup>1</sup>).

DeMar does note that Hitchcock couldn't leave well enough alone. At the end of the chapter he writes,

“Having said that, I do believe that events today in Syria point toward the fulfillment of biblical prophecies that have not yet come to pass.” He claims that “the stage is being set for a Middle East peace treaty prophesied in Daniel 9:27.” (Hitchcock, *Middle East Burning*, 178).

*The Apologetics Study Bible* also admits that the Assyrians defeated and destroyed Damascus:

“Damascus continued to be a city in the OT era (Ezek 27:18), the NT (Ac 9:19-27), and today. This does not negate Isaiah's prophecy, which referred to the destruction of Damascus as the powerful capital of Syria during the Syro-Ephraimite War. His words were consistent with his prophecy about the fall of Damascus in 7:7-8 and 8:4, and his announcement that Assyria defeated Damascus and exiled its inhabitants to Kir (2 Kings 16:9). After many years in ruin, it later became a small city in the Assyrian province of Hamath. Isaiah was not claiming that it would remain a ruin for all time” (Gary Smith, “Isaiah,” *The Apologetics Study Bible*, gen. ed. Ted Cabal, Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007, 1015, note on 17:1 ).

The point here is that when the objector claims that Damascus was not destroyed in fulfillment of Isaiah 17, his claim is disputed - and refuted - by noted Dispensationalists.

The Bible Dictionaries—many could be cited—clearly contradict the Dispensational claims.

*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. I, p. 854: “Damascus had now lost its political importance, and for more than two centuries we have only one or two inconsiderable references to it. It is mentioned in an inscription of Sargon (722–705 BC) as having taken part in an unsuccessful insurrection along with Hamath and Arpad. There are incidental references to it in Jer 49:23 ff and Ezek 27:18; 47:16 ff.”

*Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 649: “[T]he city's doom was predicted by Isaiah (8:4; 17:1), Amos (1:3–5), and Jeremiah (49:23–27). Rejecting God, Ahaz of Judah turned for protection to an alliance with the Assyrians, whom he bribed with the temple treasure. The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III ('Pul') agreed and marched against the Syro-Israelite confederation. After defeating Israel he attacked Damascus, plundered the city, deported the population, and replaced them with foreigners from other captured lands. Damascus was no longer an independent city-state. . . . The kingdom of Damascus brought to an end, the city was destroyed, the inhabitants carried captive into Assyria . . . .”

*William Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. I, p. 582: “Under Ahaz it was taken by Tiglath-pileser, (2 Kings 16:7, 8, 9) the kingdom of Damascus brought to an end, and the city itself destroyed, the inhabitants being carried captive into Assyria. (2 Kings 16:9); comp. Isaiah 7:8 and Amos 1:5.

Afterwards it passed successively under the dominion of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, Romans and Saracens, and was at last captured by the Turks in 1516 A.D.”

“The conquest of Damascus by Tiglath-Pileser III (733-732 BC) is the final result of the Assyrian intervention against the anti-Assyrian coalition of Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel against Ahaz of Judah. Rezin and Pekah tried to capture Jerusalem, capital city of the kingdom of Judah, but they failed (about 735–734 BC). Tiglath-Pileser III came to the aid of Ahaz of Judah, who promptly asked for the help of the Assyrian king. He finally destroyed the power of Damascus, by besieging the city, forcing king Rezin to surrender, as well as by conquering the whole region once under the control of Damascus. Rezin of Damascus died during the siege, according to the Bible (II Kings 16:9). After the conquest by Tiglath-Pileser III, Damascus was no longer the capital of the independent and rich kingdom of Aram.”

In addition to these highly respected sources, one could add a long list of commentators—all futurists—who nonetheless affirm that Isaiah 17 was fulfilled in the Assyrian invasion and destruction of Damascus in the reign of Israelite king Pekah. Among them are Adam Clark, Jamison, Fawcett, and Brown, and others.

The undeniable fact is that Damascus was utterly destroyed in fulfillment of what was predicted in Isaiah 17. The destroyer himself —Tiglath-pileser — said so in his personal Annals (cited in the Bible Dictionaries):

“I took 800 people together with their property, their cattle (and) their sheep as spoil. I took 750 captives of the cities of Kurussa (and) Sama (as well as) 550 captives from the city of Metuna as spoil. I destroyed 591 cities from the 16 districts of Damascus like ruins from the Flood.”

Note that just as Isaiah said Damascus would be made a “mound,” Pileser said he made Damascus a ruin of destruction. In fact, his reference of “like ruins from the flood” is highly suggestive. In spite of the historical and biblical sources that testify to the destruction of Damascus at the hands of the Assyrians, one website tries to negate the extent of that destruction by claiming: “He simply attacked the city and enslaved its people” (<http://www.end-times-bible-prophecy.com/the-coming-destruction-of-damascus.html>). There was no “simply attacked the city”—he destroyed the city, *turned it to ruins*, and carried the inhabitants into captivity.

The biblical evidence is more than clear. In 2 Kings 16:9 we find this testimony: “So the king of Assyria heeded him; for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin.” Furthermore, in Jeremiah 49:23, Jeremiah the prophet looks *back* on the taking of Damascus—*not to the future*. So, according to inspiration, Damascus was destroyed, utterly, totally, at the hands of Tiglath-Pileser.

There is a critical fact to consider. In biblical prophecy, when a prophet foretold the destruction of a given nation, kingdom, or city, what they had in view was the city, nation, or kingdom that existed *at that time*. They were not looking centuries beyond that limited horizon, even though we as Westerners tend to impose that concept onto the texts. What was in view was the utter destruction of the entity that was, at that time, the enemy of God's people to such an extent that they no longer posed a threat.

There is an aspect of Isaiah 17 that is often ignored by the prophecy "experts." Isaiah is emphatic that *Israel would be destroyed in the same campaign that destroyed Damascus*:

*"The fortress also will cease from Ephraim,  
The kingdom from Damascus,  
And the remnant of Syria;  
They will be as the glory of the children of Israel,"  
Says the Lord of hosts.  
"In that day it shall come to pass  
That the glory of Jacob will wane,  
And the fatness of his flesh grow lean."*

Do the Dispensationalists posit the imminent destruction of Israel at the soon coming desolation of Damascus? *No, they do not!* (We should note that a couple of those cited above do admit this, however, they never develop it. And there is no room in their paradigm for it). Yet, if they are going to claim that Damascus is about to be totally destroyed today, then textually they must likewise predict the *imminent total destruction of Israel at the same time!* But of course, none of the fear mongers of the day would dare claim that Israel is about to be totally destroyed. That would destroy their entire paradigm. They are vested in the claim that the restoration of Israel in 1948 constituted the "Super Sign of the End" per Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, Hal Lindsey and a host of other so called prophecy experts. See my *Israel 1948: Countdown to No Where*, for a thorough refutation of the claims about 1948.

In light of the historical and biblical testimony concerning the destruction of Damascus, fully accomplished in 732 BC, we have every right to say, *Objection Overruled!* Isaiah 17 was fulfilled.

(For brevity I have not addressed some of the "answers" given by the Dispensationalists to avoid the power of the facts presented here. It is claimed that the word "forever" does not match the eighth century destruction since Damascus is a very large city today. As noted, they often disparage the extent of the destruction mentioned in the historical and biblical texts—even the chronicles of Tiglath-Pileser himself! They offer other objections also. See DeMar's longer article in which he addresses all of the major objections more than thoroughly. His entire article is found on my website: [www.donkpreston.com](http://www.donkpreston.com)). ✚

<sup>1</sup>. See more at:

<http://americanvision.org/9371/isaiah-17-damascus-bible-prophecy-has-been-fulfilled/#sthash.cCnT3f9B.dpuf>