

Tribulation Survival Guide

Jesus Explains The End of the World Luke 21:7-36

This message is one of 22 messages in the What's Next MP3 CD available at: www.dtbm.org .

For centuries, skeptics who deny God's Word is reliable and inspired—have pointed to one entire chapter of the Bible that describes an event that has never happened. That event is the prophesied end of the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world.

As you open with me to Luke 21 we are continuing our Tribulation Survival Guide. Christ's words to those during the deadliest hours earth has known. Note just one part of His message, verse 28.

Luke 21:28 Now **when these things begin to happen**, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

What things would we look for if we could see things that "begin" to happen?

May I suggest one very powerful prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled? There is an amazing chapter in God's Word that declares the complete destruction of a certain city, an unmistakable city, a clearly identified city named Damascus—that is a reminder of what is coming.

This morning turn your attention with me to Damascus. Start with me in Acts 9:2. Where was Paul headed the day God intercepted him? Damascus. He was on the Damascus Road that heads out from Jerusalem through a gate called even to this day-- the Damascus Gate. Now turn back in your Bibles to Isaiah 17.

What is the best known fact about the capital of the Middle Eastern land of Syria? This designation shows up in nearly every encyclopedia, magazine, and tour brochure:

*"The oldest **continuously** inhabited city in the world!"*

- Damascus was founded and settled by the ancient Arameans. Their language is still known to us as the language that Jesus spoke called "aramaic".
- The Arameans are descended from Aram: the son of Shem. Listen to Genesis 10:22: "*The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.*"
- Throughout history this city has been known as—DAMASCUS, DIMASHQ, and SHAM. That name of the city as "Sham" in ancient times actually refers to the fact

that as far as we know this is where "Shem" the eldest son of Noah because he chose to live there after the flood.¹

Damascus is an emerald green oasis set in the sands of the nearby semi-desert, of modern Syria. This morning over two million people awoke and began their day at work and play in this thriving, bustling city.

Yet God says that Damascus is going to be destroyed so completely, so severely, so violently—that it is going to become a ruinous heap and uninhabited!

Damascus is named 60 times in 55 verses in the King James Bible.

The first time we see it mentioned is in Genesis 14:15 when Abraham was rescuing his nephew Lot.

Genesis 14:15 He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

But as we just saw, the founders go all the way back to the Flood of Noah. Now turn with me to Isaiah 17. Isaiah wrote from 739-686 BC, and has an entire chapter about the destruction of this city called Damascus. When did he write? 8th and 7th century BC.

- *"The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap ... And behold at evening tide trouble; and before the morning he is not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us."* (Isaiah 17:1,14)

But if you look closely in our text, we see the prophet Isaiah declaring in chapter 17 the destruction of Damascus in "very strong, definitive language--regardless of translation.

KJV-*"Damascus is **taken away** from being a city, and it shall be a **ruinous heap.**"*

NKJV-*"Behold, Damascus **will cease** from being a city, And it will be a **ruinous heap.**"*

NASB-*"Behold, Damascus is about to be **removed** from being a city. And will become a **fallen ruin.**"*

NIV-*"See, Damascus **will no longer be** a city but will become a **heap of ruins.**"*

NLT-*"Look, Damascus **will disappear!** It will become a **heap of ruins.**"*

But what do travel brochures, books and news correspondents always say about Damascus? Damascus has a "claim to fame" which is, that it is *"the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world"*.

¹ <http://www.crystalinks.com/damascus.html>

A while back on *CNN Presents* (March 15, 2003) a program aired that was called "Lines in the Sand". The narrator was Shelia Macvicar, a CNN Senior International Correspondent, who took a trip to the Middle East to see how a war with Iraq would play in the Arab world. From the transcripts listen to the opinion of the world about this city:

"When you talk about civilization, Syrians like to remind you their capital Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, an old culture that has slowly started to embrace reform. For nearly 20 years, Syria has been on the U.S. State Department's list of state sponsors of terror and it has not yet made peace with Israel...."

Here's a few more ...

- ***"Located in a strategic gap commanding the Barada River and transdesert routes, Damascus has been inhabited since prehistoric times and is reputedly the oldest continuously occupied city in the world. There was a city on its site even before the time (c.2000 BC) of Abraham..."*** encyclopedia.com
- ***"Damascus is known to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. There is firm evidence that in the third millennium BC, Damascus was a population center of a civilization that was considerably prosperous and economically influential. The earliest reference to the city was found in the archaeological site of Ebla in 1975; where the word "Damaski" was found on one of the clay tablets. Some historians believe that the city actually dates back to the seventh millennium BC..."*** damascus online
- ***"Said to be the world's oldest inhabited city, Damascus today is a thriving modern capital. Three thousand years ago it was the capital of the Aramean Kingdom and was later conquered by Alexander the Great, when it became an important Greek city. It was also a major city of the Roman Empire and fell to the Muslims in 635A.D ..."*** arab.net
- ***"The capital and largest city of Syria, in the southwest part of the country. Inhabited since prehistoric times ..."*** dictionary.com
- ***"Damascus (Sham or Dimashq as we call it) has the reputation of being the oldest city in the world. More recent discoveries suggest that Damascus was first settled ca. 6,000 B.C. but some discoveries suggest that it is older than 8,000 B.C. but we don't know exactly who ruled Damascus at that time. An old story says that its name "Sham" was derived from "Shem" the eldest son of Noah because he chose to live there after the flood...."*** arabicnet
- ***"Damascus is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities, and reports run back at least 3,500 years. Many claim that Damascus is the oldest continued inhabited city in the world. While modern Damascus is a standard Middle Eastern city, it was famous for centuries, and often referred to as the "pearl of the East"...."*** lexicorient" ²

Jeremiah also writes about this city called Damascus in his inspired revelation from God between 627-567 BC. When was that? 7th and 6th century BC. This is what he says in chapter 49.

² <http://www.harpazo.net/Damascus.html>

- *“Damascus has grown feeble; She turns to flee, And fear has seized her. Anguish and sorrows have taken her like a woman in labor. 25 Why is the city of praise not deserted, the city of My joy? 26 Therefore her 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. 27 “I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, And it shall consume the palaces of Ben-Hadad.”* (Jeremiah 49:24-27)

Why all the details? Because secular writers, historians, fact finders are all in agreement—since ancient times (that is code for what we in the Bible would call “since the Flood of Noah”) Damascus has been continuously inhabited and has a record of it’s history.

Then God steps in and says, “Damascus is going to be burned, melted, destroyed, vacated, and completely destroyed into a heap of uninhabited ruins”. When did He say that? From the 8th century BC continuously until the 6th century BC. In all those centuries Damascus remained, thrived, sat as the caravan oasis at the convergence of the great trade routes of the ancient world. So when God warned of looming annihilation Damascus was there inhabited and prosperous.

Okay, so what has happened since? Here is the record from any encyclopedia or history book you can find. Continuous and even magnificent “history” of habitation and accomplishment every since God said it was going to be completely destroyed.

- The Persians and the Seleucids ruled over a great city there: King Nebuchadnezzar 572BC; Cyrus 538BC; Alexander 333BC
- The Romans and the Byzantines ruled over a great city there from 64 BC when Pompey conquered the region, through 395 AD when it joined the Eastern Empire and all the way to the Moslem conquest of 635 AD.
- The Omayyads ruled over a great city there from 635-750 AD as Khaled Ibn al-Walid annexed to Muslim empire where Damascus remained a great Moslem commercial and religious center until 1516 AD. (The Abbasids ruled over a great city there from 750-975 AD. The Fatimids ruled over a great city there from 975-1076 AD. The Seljuks and the Atabegs: 1076-1174 AD. The Ayyubids: 1174-1260 AD. The Memluks: 1260-1516 AD.)
- Finally the Ottoman Turks ruled over a great city of Damascus from 1516 -1918. And on we go to the present day nation of Syria.³

But Isaiah says that Damascus is going to be "Taken Away From Being a City.."

“Many who study Bible prophecy believe that one of the soon to be fulfilled events may be the destruction of Damascus as prophesied in Isaiah 17. Damascus is the capital of Syria. Syria is finding their way into the News Headlines more and more lately because of their extremely harsh stance against Israel, and the fact that Damascus is the home to numerous terrorist organizations, and because of the trouble they are stirring up in the Iraqi war. Suffice it to say, they are getting some attention. There are prophecies in God's Word concerning Damascus. The

³ <http://www.damascus-online.com/damascus.htm#Very%20Early%20History>

most obvious reason that we believe these prophecies are yet future, is because **Damascus exists!** It has *NEVER* ceased to be a city!"⁴

"The Oldest Continuously Inhabited City"

So with very little effort you can establish conclusively that Damascus has been a city for quite some time, and indeed remains as such today. And what a strategic city for today in history. Located just 30 miles from the Israeli border in the Golan Heights—Damascus is a tinderbox in a volatile region⁵.

Too Close for Comfort!

"For those of you who think this horrific event could not occur, brace yourselves. On at least one occasion it almost did ... On February 16, 2001 ... There was a combined American-British air raid against the Command/Control center in Iraq, 20 miles North of Baghdad. The intention was to pre-empt Saddam Hussein.

A few days later U.S. satellites pick up 6 Iraqi divisions moving westward, including ground-to-ground missiles with launching equipment. The U.S. intelligence community estimated they would be ready for launch by Thursday evening, February 22, 2001. Israel placed their security forces and the Northern Israeli towns on alert.

Syrian President Bashar Assad granted permission for these 6 Iraqi divisions to be deployed on the Syrian-Iraqi border. He gave the Hizballah an OK to unleash a long-range rocket attack against northern Israel. The U.S. and Israeli governments issued grave warnings to the Syrian government. There were also massive Palestinian terrorists attacks being programmed as a signal for regional flare-up. Yassir Arafat arranged his personal evacuation contingences to Baghdad.

A message was sent thru Tony Blair warning Iraq that Israel was preparing a preemptive strike: There would be Neutron bombs on 6 Iraqi divisions and Nuclear strikes on **Damascus** & Baghdad. The button was to be pushed at 7:30 PM Thursday Evening. Iraqi surface missiles remained stationary; 7:30 PM: everyone stands down ... *for the time being!*"⁶

But this time maybe Syria won't back down. Russia is their ally, Russian troops are installing the most advanced air defense system in the world around Damascus, the new missiles can strike within 40 feet of any spot in Israel—and probably all of Saddam's

⁴ <http://www.harpazo.net/Damascus.html>

⁵ According to the 1998 edition of the State Department's annual report, Patterns of Global Terrorism, Syria provides safe haven and logistical support to terrorists. Specifically, says Patterns 1998, **Damascus permits numerous terrorist groups -- headed by Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC)--to maintain their headquarters in Damascus** and Syria-controlled territory in Lebanon, and it allows Hizballah to receive military supplies via Syrian territory.... the Peace Encyclopedia: "**Syria, a fierce foe of Israel, hosts 10 radical Palestinian factions in its capital, Damascus.**" March 1, 2003 - Jerusalem Post. Damascus, the capital of Syria has been the attacker in three of the most deadly attacks of modern times upon Israel the nation. Syria attacked Israel in the 1948 War of Independence, again in the 1967 Six Day War, and most ominously—Syria nearly defeated Israel in the surprise attack of 1973 called the Yom Kippur War. Syria actually was winning until the USA flooded Israel with weaponry and support by a massive airlift. Now look at the unfulfilled warning to Damascus in Amos 1:3. Amos 1:3 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. Frequently referenced, is the above passage in Amos, concerning coming judgment on Damascus. Many are aware that Syria, has attacked Israel in 3 major wars since Israel became a nation again in 1948. Could it be that Syria, will actually attempt a 4th time to do great harm to Israel and in turn be dealt this extreme judgment from the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob?"

⁶ <http://www.harpazo.net/Damascus.html>

WMDs are in the area we call Syria. **Some of Israel's 400 atomic weapons may be used and Damascus may be melted in a whirlwind.** That is an 8th century BC description of a thermonuclear destruction if I ever heard one!

Because of Israel's nuclear attack on Damascus, it will become a pariah among the nations. Isaiah uses the imagery that its national status will become like an emaciated man. (Isaiah 17:4) He also describes the outbreak of intense criticism of Israel: "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!" (Isaiah 17:12 NIV).⁷

SYRIA RENEWS SOVIET-ERA ALLIANCE

"Just last month, after a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Syrian President Bashar Assad returned from Moscow with more than even he had dreamed of . . . Assad was able to bring his people the glad tidings that Syria and Russia were resuming the relationship Syria once had with the Soviet Union. **The Russians agreed to joint energy exploration , developing oil and gas resources in Syria, and construction of several pipelines including the Syrian portion of the Pan-Arab pipeline project.** (So now Russian military and commercial interests will be stationed in Syria.)

Syria's biological and chemical weapons capability are among the most advanced in the Middle East, and the acquisition of the Russian Iskander missile would give Damascus the ability to strike within 40 feet of a target anywhere in Israel.

Iskander's guidance system is significantly better than in previous Scud designs, and it is much better at avoiding Israeli air defenses than previous models.

And there is no effective defense against the new SAM anti-aircraft missile that could protect Israeli warplanes overflying Syrian airspace.

Leaving Israel with only the Sampson Option in the event of war.

The Sampson Option is drawn from the story of Sampson, who pulled down a temple on himself in order to kill his captors. And in any case, if the United States doesn't take action, the odds that Israel WILL are at least even. Although Israel refuses to confirm or deny it, the Dimona facility is believed to house at least four hundred nuclear warheads and Israel's declared 'Sampson Option' says that they will use them. Briefly stated, if Israel's existence is threatened, it will use whatever means necessary to retaliate, even if that retaliation means the destruction of Israel in the process.

The Bible says that Israel will survive, but Isaiah says that Damascus won't.

"The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and

⁷ <http://www.worthyinsights.com/features/war-with-syria.html>

it shall be a ruinous heap." (Isaiah 17:1)

Damascus is the oldest continuously-inhabited city in the world. To this point in history, it has never been 'taken away from being a city' and has never become the 'ruinous heap' foretold by Isaiah - so his prophecy remains, to this point, unfulfilled.

In addition, Ezekiel warns that Russia will, in the last days, ally itself to Persia [Iran] -- together with a grouping of other Islamic states, in an all-out invasion effort against Israel.

When Isaiah's vision of Damascus comes to pass, it is unlikely that Russia will sit idly by, particularly in light of the fact the only country more threatening to Israel's continued existence than Syria would be a nuclear Islamic Republic of Iran.

The alliance is in the process of being constructed before our eyes. The scenario that brings it all together is in the process of development. Bible prophecy has never been more relevant to current events than it is right now."⁸

So when God steps into our lives through His Word and says, "Damascus is going to be burned, melted, destroyed, vacated, and completely destroyed into a heap of uninhabited ruins". **That is one of those things that when you see it coming—you know that end is near!**

Back to Luke 21 where Jesus preaches a sermon about the End of the World.

Luke 21:20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.

8. SURVIVAL GUIDE: I will—Believe God's Word about the future!

Two powerful lessons:

1. Things are temporary—build for eternity.

Years ago someone put a poem on the wall of the McAuley Rescue Mission in New York City that captured the disjuncture between profession and practice:

Angels from their realms on high
Look down on us with wondering eye,
That where we are but passing guests,
We build such strong and solid nests;
But where we hope to dwell for aye [ever],
We scarce take heed one stone to lay.⁴

2. Life is fragile—live for your true home.

⁸ Adapted and quoted from The Omega Letter Intelligence Digest, Vol: 40 Issue: 27 - Thursday, January 27, 2005, Analysis: The Syria-Russian Alliance.

⁴ Quoted by Joseph Bayly, "Out of My Mind," *Eternity* (Sept., 1981): 57.

St. John of the Cross was right. "God is at home. We are in the far country."
And if we are at home in this world we need to be confronted once again with
the truth about the world.⁵

All of the magnificent buildings of Solomon, including the Temple are gone.

All of the wonderful buildings of Herod are rubble.

The Pyramids are crumbling, the Tower of Pisa is leaning . . . nothing on earth
ever lasts.

Jesus came to His disciples with an offer of something they could become a part
of that never ends. And that is what you and are doing this morning—
worshipping God, offering our lives in service to His Son, and loving one
another. Make this service your offering anew of your life to Christ's control.

5 5. Cf. Watchman Nee, *Love Not the World* (Fort Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1968), 9.