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A Commentary on Isaiah 17: Concerning the War Between Israel and Hamas

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All Scriptures are quoted from the 1889 Darby Bible. A literal translation of the Old Testament (1890) and the New Testament (1884), by John Nelson Darby

Isaiah 17

Isa 17:1 The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.

Isa 17:2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks; and they shall lie down and there shall be none to make them afraid.

Isa 17:3 The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith Jehovah of hosts.

Isa 17:4 And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall become lean.

Isa 17:5 And it shall be as when the reaper gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; yea, it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

Isa 17:6 And a gleaning shall be left in it, as at the shaking of an olive-tree: two, three berries above, in the tree-top; four, five in its fruitful boughs, saith Jehovah, the God of Israel.

Isa 17:7 In that day shall man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have regard to the Holy One of Israel.

Isa 17:8 And he will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, nor have

regard to what his fingers have made, neither the Asherahs nor the sun-images.

Isa 17:9 In that day shall his strong cities be as the forsaken tract in the woodland, and the mountain-top which they forsook before the children of Israel; and there shall be desolation.

Isa 17:10 For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength; therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plantations, and shalt set them with foreign slips:

Isa 17:11 in the day of thy planting wilt thou make them to grow, and on the morrow wilt thou make thy seed to flourish; but the harvest will flee in the day of taking possession, and the sorrow will be incurable.

Isa 17:12 Ha! a tumult of many peoples! they make a noise as the noise of the seas; – and the rushing of nations! they rush as the rushing of mighty waters.

Isa 17:13 The nations rush as the rushing of many waters; but he will rebuke them, and they shall flee far away, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a whirling of dust before the whirlwind:

Isa 17:14 behold, at eventide, trouble; before the morning they are not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.

The Book of Isaiah was written before the Israelites were reestablished in the land of Canaan thousands of years ago. However, most of the prophecies in the Book of Isaiah are related to the Israelites and the hostile nations around them during the final days. Immediately following Isaiah chapters 11 and 12, which are prophecies about the coming of Christ, Isaiah chapters 13 to 24 are prophecies about the hostile nations surrounding Israel and Israel itself during the final days, from before the End Times to after the End Times. Therefore, Isaiah 17 is a prophecy that will be fulfilled in the last days.

Isaiah 17 consists of 14 verses with the title "An Oracle Concerning Damascus." However, only the first three verses are about Damascus; the remaining verses talk about Israel and the nations attacking Israel. Many biblical scholars believe that Isaiah 17 was fulfilled in 732 BCE, when the king of Assyria attacked Damascus at the request of Ahaz, the king of Judah (II Kings 16:9). However, the destruction of Damascus did not happen, and the city continues to exist to

this day.

Additionally, Isaiah 14 was written at the end of the reign of King Ahaz, around 715 BCE (Isaiah 14:28). Thus, at least Isaiah 17 was written around 715 BCE, which is 17 years after the Assyrian Empire attacked Damascus. Therefore, Isaiah 17 cannot be a prophecy about the Assyrian attack on Damascus in 732 BCE. It is considered by some to be a prophecy yet to be fulfilled. Consequently, it might be fulfilled in the coming days, especially if the current conflict between Israel and Hamas escalates, resembling the predicted war in Psalm 83 [1].



Illustrative Map of the Positions of the Ten Nations Participating in the War Described in Psalm 83

Source: <https://preachingfromthebible.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Psalm83Map.jpg>

Looking at the illustrative map of the positions where the ten nations will unite and attack Israel in the war described in Psalm 83, we can see the following:

- Assyria includes the countries of Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Turkey today.
- The people of Hagarites, Ammon, Moab, and Edom all belong to the present-day kingdom of Jordan.
- Ishmael belongs to present-day Saudi Arabia.
- Gebal and Tyre belong to Lebanon today.
- Philistia belongs to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank today.
- Amalek belongs to Egypt today.

Damascus is the capital of Syria. Currently, Israel continues to airstrike military bases around Damascus, where Iran stores weapons to support the Hezbollah terrorist group in Lebanon. Syria also occasionally shells into Israeli territory.

In the current situation, the conflict between Israel and Hamas could turn into the war described in Psalm 83 at any time. In that scenario, Syria is likely to directly participate, and it's possible that Syria will suddenly use chemical weapons to attack Israel, causing significant casualties. This could lead to Israel responding with strategic weapons such as nuclear warheads or nuclear bombs to destroy the capital, Damascus. The destruction of Damascus would serve as a warning, compelling the remaining participating nations to surrender to Israel.

If Isaiah 17 is a prophecy about the latter part of the war described in Psalm 83, then we can understand this segment as follows:

Isa 17:1 The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.

The noun "burden" (H4853) carries the dual meaning of both physical carrying or bearing a heavy load and prophetic utterance. Therefore, "the burden of Damascus" signifies both a prophecy concerning Damascus and the hardships that will befall it.

The statement "It shall be a ruinous heap" conveys a complete collapse, rendering it unusable.

Damascus is not only one of the oldest cities but also the longest-standing capital in the world. It was established shortly after the Great Flood. The first mention of Damascus in the Bible is in Genesis 14:15. Damascus is also the

homeland of Abraham's faithful steward (Genesis 15:2). The Apostle Paul encountered the Lord Jesus on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. Currently, Damascus is the capital of Syria, with a population of about 2.1 million people. Including its surrounding areas, the population exceeds five million. Israel would only need a relatively small bomb like the U.S. B61-13 to destroy Damascus [2].

Verses 2 and 3 might imply a sudden use of missiles with chemical warheads by Syria, attacking various locations in Israeli territory and causing widespread destruction. Consequently, Israel would respond by using nuclear bombs or missiles with nuclear warheads on the capital of Syria.

Isa 17:2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks; and they shall lie down and there shall be none to make them afraid.

Isa 17:3 The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith Jehovah of hosts.

"The cities of Aroer" are cities located to the south of Israel. These cities are mentioned in Deuteronomy 2:36 and Joshua 13:16. In this prophecy, they represent the southern territory of Israel. After the inhabitants of those places died, leaving no remaining population, the cities became desolate, turning into places for wild animals to roam freely. This situation is also prophesied in Isaiah 27:10: *"For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation abandoned and forsaken like a wilderness; there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume its boughs."*

"Ephraim" represents the northern territory of Israel, which was part of the former Kingdom of Israel. The fortifications of Ephraim are important military bases in the northern part of Israel. These military bases will also be attacked with chemical weapons and destroyed.

The kingdom of Damascus refers to the country of Syria. The phrase "The kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel" implies that the people of Israel will triumph over the people of Syria.

From verse 1 to verse 3, there is the first oracle of the Almighty with the title "Jehovah of hosts." The title "Jehovah of hosts" means "Jehovah is the Lord of all armies" in this context, emphasizing that God is the one who holds power over all military forces. He is the one who allows victories and defeats to occur.

Isa 17:4 And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall

be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall become lean.

"In that day" refers to the day marking the end of the war described in Psalm 83. Even though Israel emerges victorious, gaining significant portions of the enemies' territories, the human cost to Israel is considerable. The casualties among the people and soldiers of Israel due to chemical weapons could reach several million, resulting in many cities becoming desolate after the war. This is what is meant by "the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall become lean," indicating a significant reduction in the strength and prosperity of Israel.

Isa 17:5 And it shall be as when the reaper gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; yea, it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

The event of Syria massacring the people of Israel from the north to the south using missiles with chemical warheads occurs as effortlessly as a harvester reaps crops or a person gathers wheat in the fertile fields of Rephaim. Rephaim is a lush valley located to the south of Jerusalem.

Isa 17:6 And a gleanings shall be left in it, as at the shaking of an olive-tree: two, three berries above, in the tree-top; four, five in its fruitful boughs, saith Jehovah, the God of Israel.

The survivors among the people of Israel in the areas attacked with chemical weapons are very few, akin to the few remaining olives on the tree when it is shaken for the ripe fruit to fall and be harvested. Perhaps these survivors are people who are far from the central explosions or those equipped with gas masks.

From verse 4 to verse 6, there is the second oracle of the Almighty with the title "The Lord God" to emphasize the event. He is the God of Israel. He fulfills His promise by punishing them severely for their sins but still preserves them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Isa 17:7 In that day shall man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have regard to the Holy One of Israel.

"In that day" refers to the day marking the end of the war described in Psalm 83. The term "man" is used to refer to the people of Israel.

Up to the present, even though the people of Israel have experienced the restoration of their nation for over 75 years, it is merely a physical rebirth of the nation. Spiritually, they are still living in sin, except for a few who embrace the

Gospel and a small number who steadfastly hold onto their faith in God, following the teachings of the Old Testament. However, at the conclusion of the war described in Psalm 83, with significant losses, the people of Israel will earnestly seek God.

Isa 17:8 And he will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, nor have regard to what his fingers have made, neither the Asherahs nor the sun-images.

"The altars" symbolize what the people of Israel rely on, the things made by their own hands, such as military strength, economy, and technology. After the war described in Psalm 83, they will no longer look to their own achievements or their own products that they thought could protect them.

Asherahs is the goddess of wealth and happiness worshiped by the Canaanite nations. "The Asherahs" in this prophecy may represent the people of Israel relying on the agreements between Israel and the Arab Muslim nations, which promise peace and prosperity.

"The sun-images" are places of worship for the sun, seeing the sun as a divine entity. This phrase may symbolize the people of Israel relying on science and technology.

In other words, the people of Israel have idolized many things, relying on them instead of relying on the Almighty God.

Isa 17:9 In that day shall his strong cities be as the forsaken tract in the woodland, and the mountain-top which they forsook before the children of Israel; and there shall be desolation.

On the day marking the end of the war described in Psalm 83, the military bases of Israel will be deserted. A symbolic mountain-top representing the centers of power in Israel will also be abandoned as the authorities seek refuge in hiding places. Israel can still control its missiles containing nuclear warheads. The Israeli forces that are advancing into the territories of the adversaries remain in those places. However, many cities and military bases on Israeli soil are left desolate due to casualties from Syria's chemical weapons.

Isa 17:10 For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength; therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plantations, and shalt set them with foreign slips:

The reason why the people of Israel win the war described in Psalm 83 but suffer heavy losses is that they rely on themselves, treaties, various weapons,

and intellectual knowledge of science and technology rather than relying on God.

"Plant pleasant plantations" refers to the people of Israel putting in place programs and plans and equipping themselves with what they consider favorable. They believe these will bring them peace and prosperity.

"Set them with foreign slips" is the people of Israel incorporating into their programs and plans the best ideas and equipping themselves with the latest weapons from Western countries. Like a gardener planting in their garden the grapevines cut from famous vineyards from afar.

Isa 17:11 in the day of thy planting wilt thou make them to grow, and on the morrow wilt thou make thy seed to flourish; but the harvest will flee in the day of taking possession, and the sorrow will be incurable.

The people of Israel carefully protect all their equipment and defensive capabilities, making everything ready for any situation. They believe that they will achieve a glorious victory if war breaks out. They are like gardeners, doing everything necessary to ensure a good harvest when the season comes. However, in reality, they achieve victory in a state of exhaustion and tragedy. Victory through their own strength does not bring the deserved glory, unlike the victories achieved by the power of God that they have experienced many times in the past.

Isa 17:12 Ha! a tumult of many peoples! they make a noise as the noise of the seas; --and the rushing of nations! they rush as the rushing of mighty waters.

Isa 17:13 The nations rush as the rushing of many waters; but he will rebuke them, and they shall flee far away, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a whirling of dust before the whirlwind:

From verse 12 to verse 14, there is a prophecy about the nations uniting to attack Israel, but they will be defeated by God himself. Many nations join together with the common purpose of destroying Israel. Perhaps the ten Islamic nations concentrate their forces to flood into the territory of Israel from all four directions, right after Syria launches missiles with chemical warheads into Israeli territory. However, at that time, God might use natural disasters to thwart them. Earthquakes could occur. Massive storms could happen. Epidemics could break out. There could even be a rain of hail mixed with fire from the sky falling upon them.

*Isa 17:14 behold, at eventide, trouble; before the morning they are not.
This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.*

Simultaneously, as God uses natural disasters to halt the advance of the coalition of Islamic nations, Israel decides to use nuclear bombs or nuclear warheads to destroy Damascus, the capital of Syria. All of this takes place in the evening as it transitions into a new day. The occurrence of natural disasters in the evening further adds to the confusion among the opposing forces against Israel. By dawn, Damascus had become a heap of ruins, and the entire military force of the nations attacking Israel had been completely annihilated. The Israeli army, advancing on enemy territory, will occupy parts of the enemy's land. Israel will seize control of the oil fields and arrange nuclear warheads to guard them to compel nations worldwide to sit down for negotiations. If the world comes to attack Israel, it will destroy all oil wells with nuclear warheads.

The countries worldwide will have to accept Israel's conditions to sign agreements with Israel so they can continue using oil from the oil fields it has occupied. Israel will still occupy parts of the enemy's land. Israel will continue to guard the oil fields with nuclear warheads. At that time, it will be the first time Israel fully possesses the portions of land that God promised them. It will also be the first time Israel lives in a state without the need for fortified walls for protection. This will be the situation in Israel when the war, according to Ezekiel 38–39, takes place shortly afterward. In that war, Russia and Turkey will form an alliance to attack Israel.

*Eze 38:11 and thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages;
I will come to them that are in quiet, that dwell in safety, all of them
dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates,*

We hope that the war according to Psalm 83 will occur before Christ takes the Church out of the world. Because when the Church witnesses the destruction of Damascus, many lukewarm people in the Church will awaken. And that will also be a good opportunity for the Church to preach the Gospel one last time to the world.

May the Word of God sanctify and strengthen us. May the love, grace, and righteousness of the triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, cover each and every one of us. Amen!

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Note

[1] <https://preachingfromthebible.net/076-a-commentary-on-psalm-83/>

[2] <https://youtu.be/xvHFTEcql8>