

Sermon #58 — *Isaiah Series*

Title: **“THE BURDEN OF DAMASCUS”**

Text: Isaiah 17:1-14

Subject: *The Sure Triumph of the Woman’s Seed*

Date: Sunday Evening — August 26, 2018

Readings: *Mark Medley and Rex Bartley*

Introduction:

The title of my message is **“THE BURDEN OF DAMASCUS.”** You will find my text in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of Isaiah.

As you know, Syria has been in the news regularly for almost a decade. The barbaric cruelty the Assad government is known throughout the world.

As the implosion of Syria accelerates, religious prophecy gurus are in a frenzy, giving lectures, writing books, and raking in cash, as they tell us that Syria’s ruin is a sure sign of the end of the world.

- More than 110,000 Syrians have been killed by the use of chemical weapons in Damascus.
- More than two million Syrians have fled from their country.
- Another five million have been “internally displaced.” — They fled from their homes and

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villages because of the brutal violence but have not yet found a way to leave the country.

The country is steadily falling apart. Many presume that it will soon collapse.

NO SIGNS

Pointing to the 17th chapter of Isaiah, many look upon the current events in Syria as prophetic signs of the end of the world. — **Now, please understand me.**

- **I do not suggest that the glorious advent of our Lord Jesus Christ is not imminent.** — **It is!** We are to live every moment upon the tiptoe of faith, “*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:12). — “*Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed*” (Romans 13:11). — “*Behold, he cometh*” (Revelation 1:7).
- **But the Word of God never teaches us to look for signs of the end of time and never gives us signs of the end!** — The Bible teaches us to look for Christ, not for signs!

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- **There is not one thing that the Scriptures tell us must be fulfilled before Christ appears in his glory.** — *“Behold, he cometh!”*

FIRST COMING

You will never be prepared for Christ’s second coming until you know what he accomplished at his first coming. — That is the matter of importance.

- Who is he?
- Why did he come into this world?
- What did he accomplish?
- Where is he now?
- What is he doing there?

If a man ever finds out what happened in the Garden, what happened at Calvary, and how God saves sinners, he will have no reason to be terribly concerned about the prophetic delusions of men! — Now, let’s look at Isaiah 17 and see what God the Holy Ghost here tells us about **“THE BURDEN OF DAMASCUS”**

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(Isaiah 17:1-14) The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from *being* a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. (2) The cities of Aroer *are* forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid. (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 the LORD of hosts. (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 wax lean. (5) And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

Ephraim, Israel, and Jacob (the apostate Ten Northern Tribes of Israel) are included in this judgment.

(6) Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two *or* three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four *or* five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the

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LORD God of Israel. (7) At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. (8) And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect *that* which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.

(9) In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch, which they left because of the children of Israel: and there shall be desolation. (10) Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips: (11) In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: *but* the harvest *shall be* a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.

(12) Woe to the multitude of many people, *which* make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, *that* make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! (13) The nations shall

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rush like the rushing of many waters: but *God* shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. (14) 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.

A similar prophecy was given by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 49.

(Jeremiah 49:23-27) Concerning Damascus. Hamath is confounded, and Arpad: for they have heard evil tidings: they are fainthearted; *there is* sorrow on the sea; it cannot be quiet. (24) Damascus is waxed feeble, *and* turneth herself to flee, and fear hath seized on *her*: anguish and sorrows have taken her, as a woman in travail. (25) How is the city of praise not left, 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, saith the LORD of hosts. (27)

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And I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall consume the palaces of Benhadad.

60 TIMES

Damascus is the capital of Syria with some 1.6 million residents and a greater metropolitan area of about five million people. It is thought to be the oldest continuously inhabited city on the planet. The city of Damascus is mentioned 60 times in the Word of God.

- Damascus is first mentioned in in **Genesis 14:15**.

(Genesis 14:14-16) When Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained *servants*, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued *them* unto Dan. (15) And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which *is* on the left hand of Damascus. (16) And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot,

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and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

- Abraham’s servant, Eliezer, was from Damascus (**Genesis 15:2**).
- King David conquered Damascus and built garrisons for his troops in the conquered city (**2 Samuel:8**).
- In **2 Kings 5**, we read that Naaman the Syrian came to Elisha the prophet of God to be healed of leprosy. Initially, the proud Syrian was enraged when he was told to wash himself in the Jordan River, saying...

(2 Kings 5:12) *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.*

- In **Acts 9** Saul of Tarsus was headed from Jerusalem to Damascus to arrest followers of Christ, persecuting the church. It was on the road

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to Damascus that Saul received a saving revelation of Christ. Then he was led to Damascus where he fasted for three days in blindness, in the home of Judas on Straight Street. Ananias received a vision from the Lord Jesus telling him to go heal Saul of blindness. When he had done so, he baptized Saul. Immediately thereafter Saul began preaching the gospel to the Jews in Damascus. But soon he had to escape from Damascus because of threats against his life.

- The last time Damascus is mentioned in the New Testament is in **Galatians 1:17**. There Paul tells us he later returned to Damascus to preach the gospel.

Proposition: The Burden of Damascus given in Isaiah 17 is a message of divine judgment against that wicked city and nation, assuring us of the sure triumph of the woman’s Seed over the serpent’s seed, the sure triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ over Satan, the sure triumph of God’s church over all her foes.

Divisions: I want to show you four things in these

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fourteen verses.

1. The city of Damascus was brought to utter ruin under the judgment of God (vv.1-5).
2. Yet, in wrath the God of all grace remembered mercy and a chosen remnant was preserved and brought to repentance (vv. 6-8).
3. The cause of God’s judgment upon Damascus, Samaria, and the cities of Syria was Israel’s apostacy (vv. 9-11).
4. All our foes shall fall before us (vv. 12-14).

DAMASCUS RUINED

1st — **The city of Damascus was brought to utter ruin under the judgment of God** (vv. 1-5).

(Isaiah 17:1-5) The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from *being* a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. (2) The cities of Aroer *are* forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid. (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

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the children of Israel, saith the LORD of hosts. (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 wax lean. (5) And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

Isaiah tells us that Damascus would become an uninhabitable ruin. The great city of Syria would become a wasteland. **The great, noble city of the East was destroyed by Shalmaneser just five or six years after this prophecy.** Syria and Ephraim were confederate against Judah. Israel (The Northern Tribes) had embraced the idolatry of the heathen. Israel had become an apostate nation, an apostate church, though she still claimed Jehovah as her God! So the strong cities both of Syria and Israel were brought under judgment.

There was a time when the nation of Israel was great and flourishing. But those days were gone! Ichabod became her name. The glory had departed! Still, there was then and is now yet a

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remnant according to the election of grace
(Romans 11:5).

Read the Scriptures with care. The history of God’s church, as it is recorded in the Old Testament, is a history of divine faithfulness. **How often our God raised up wicked men and reprobate nations as instruments by which he chastened, purged, and preserved his church!**

- God’s eye is always upon his people.
- God’s purpose in all things is the salvation of his elect.
- He proved this over and over again in his use of the nations of the world in the Old Testament.

This is the way of the Lord our God. He raises up one nation and puts down another, making them instruments in his hand to humble his erring people and to lift them up by his grace. All the while preserving and saving his elect scattered among all nations. **Jacob is the Lord’s portion. And he will never lose Jacob, his chosen** (Isaiah 49:23; Amos 1:2; Zechariah 9:1)

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(Isaiah 49:22-23) Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and **they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.** (23) And **kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers:** they shall bow down to thee with *their* face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD: for **they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.**

(Amos 1:2) The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.

(Zechariah 9:1) The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus *shall be* the rest thereof: **when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD.**

A REMNANT GATHERED

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2nd — **Yet, in wrath the God of all grace remembered mercy and a chosen remnant was preserved and bought to repentance** (vv. 6-8).

(Isaiah 17:6-8) Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two *or* three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four *or* five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel. (7) **At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.** (8) And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect *that* which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.

In wrath God here remembers mercy toward an elect remnant. His elect appear to be such a few that they are compared to grapes left for the gleaning and a few olive berries in the tops and outmost branches of the tree.

- The most desolating judgments in this world are but warnings of the last judgment, which shall be

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universal and which none shall escape.

- In times of the greatest calamity some are kept safe.
- In times of the greatest degeneracy some are kept pure.

Illustration: *Believers in the Soviet Union*

Mercy was reserved in the midst of judgment for a remnant that must escape the common ruin of the kingdom of the ten Northern Tribes. Though the Assyrians took all the care they could that none should slip out of their net, God’s chosen were kept safe, “*sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ*” (Jude 1).

- **Thank God for his electing love** (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Ephesians 1:3-6).
- Thank God for his **preserving mercy** (Jude 1).
- Thank God for his **adorable providence** (Romans 8:28).
- Thank God for his **saving grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- Thank God for **Christ’s precious blood and**

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atonement by the blood (Galatians 3:13-14).

Here is the work and operation grace of God, the effectual operation of grace by God the Holy Ghost in chosen, redeemed sinners. When God calls, by his effectual call...

- Here is an obvious prophecy of this Gospel Age. — God still preserves his elect remnant unto the day of their calling. — “*At that day shall a man look to his Maker,*” the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 7; Isaiah 45:22).
- “*And his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel*” (v. 7).
- “*And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect that which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images*” (v. 8). — Saved sinners, looking to Christ by faith, repent of dead works, throw off the filthy rags of works righteousness, and leave the dark groves of will-worship idolatry!

AN APOSTATE CHURCH

3rd — **The cause of God’s judgment upon Damascus, Samaria, and the cities of Syria was Israel’s apostacy** (vv. 9-11).

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(Isaiah 17:9-11) In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch, which they left **because of the children of Israel**: and there shall be desolation. (10) **Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength**, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips: (11) In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: *but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.*

Why did this judgment come upon Damascus and Syria? It came because of Israel’s apostacy. It came because those people who professed to be Jehovah’s people, those who professed to be the church of God in their midst had become an apostate church. — *“Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength.”*

- He who is our God is the God of our salvation!
- He who is our Savior is the Rock of our strength!

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- An apostate church always brings the judgment of God (Romans 1:18-22).
- **But do not fail to observe that this judgment was also, indeed specifically, for the salvation of that elect remnant among the apostate people!**
- Come out of that apostate people. **Come out of Babylon, and the God of all grace will receive you still** (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

(2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1) Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? (15) And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? (16) And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (17) Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive

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you, (18) And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (7:1) Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Be warned, my brother, be warned, my sister. — When God’s Israel forsakes the Lord and forgets the Rock of her salvation, the sure consequence is chastisement and disappointment. The Lord withers her gourds and causes worms to grow out of the root of her most pleasant plants. At evening she finds trouble, and before the morning her comforts are gone. **There is nothing for our souls to rest upon or find joy in, but Christ. If he is not our delight, all our delights are delusions.**

ENEMIES FOILED

4th — **All our foes shall fall before us** (vv. 12-14). All our foes shall be foiled. All our spoilers shall be spoiled. All our robbers shall be robbed. All our captors shall become our captives!

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(Isaiah 17:12-14) Woe to the multitude of many people, *which* make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, *that* make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! (13) The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but *God* shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. (14) 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.**

These verses declare the doom of all who oppose, persecute, spoil, and rob the people of God. Everlasting ruin shall be their lot and portion.

- At Calvary (Colossians 2:13-15)
- In the New Birth (Matthew 12:29)
- In the Last Day

(Psalm 93:1-5) The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, *wherewith* he hath girded himself: the

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world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved. (2) Thy throne *is* established of old: thou *art* from everlasting. (3) The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. (4) The LORD on high *is* mightier than the noise of many waters, *yea, than* the mighty waves of the sea. (5) Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, forever.

(Psalm 2:1-12) Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? (2) The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, *saying*, (3) Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. (4) He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. (5) Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. (6) Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. (7) I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee. (8) Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine

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inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession. (9) Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. (10) Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. (11) Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. (12) Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish *from* the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all they that put their trust in him.

Those who seek to injure God’s church, God’s cause, and God’s gospel, all who oppose us and oppose our Savior labor only for their own ruin.

- The seed of the woman shall prevail over the seed of the serpent!
- Esau shall never injure, but only serve Jacob!
- The gates of hell shall fall before Christ and his church. — **Babylon must and shall soon fall** (Revelation 17-19).

(Revelation 17:1-6) And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, **Come hither; I**

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will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: (2) **With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.** (3) So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, **having seven heads and ten horns.** (4) And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: (5) And upon her forehead *was* a name written, **MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.** (6) And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

(Revelation 17:12-14) And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received

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no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. (13) **These have one mind**, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. (14) **These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them**: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and **they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful**.

(Revelation 17:17-18) For **God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will**, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, **until the words of God shall be fulfilled**. (18) And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

(Revelation 18:1-6) **And after these things** I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. (2) And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, **Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird**. (3)

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For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. (4) And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, **Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.** (5) For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. (6) **Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.**

(Revelation 18:20) **Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.**

(Revelation 18:23-24) And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were

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all nations deceived. (24) And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

(Revelation 19:1-6) **And after these things** I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: (2) For true and righteous *are* his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. (3) And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up forever and ever. (4) **And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.** (5) And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. (6) **And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.**

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The Burden of Damascus is God’s word of promise to his church.

- He will accomplish his purpose.
- He will save his people.
- No injury shall be done to his church.
- Victory is sure! — *“This is the portion of them that spoil us and the lot of them that rob us!”*

Illustration: *“Jesus is gonna win!”*

Amen.