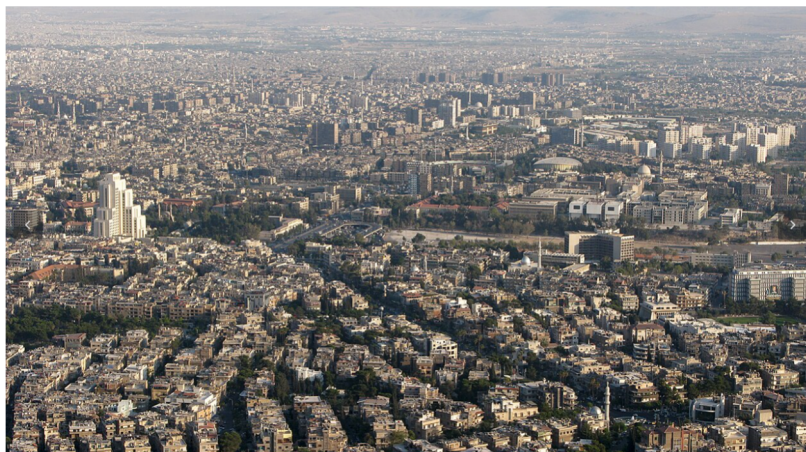


Isaiah 17

We are continuing in Isaiah's judgements against the nations. This chapter addresses ancient Syria and Assyria. These are both brutal nations whom God's people had no business making alliances with. Is it wise to pay off the neighborhood bully to make him your friend? Not really.

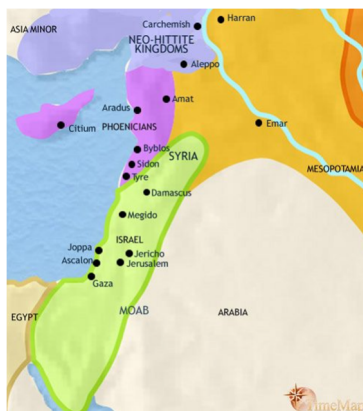
Read Isaiah 17:1-3: This chapter is God's *hit piece* against ancient Syria and Assyria. They were hubs of power and intimidation. It also explains some complicated relationships between these nations. The nation Syria's capital is Damascus. Damascus is the oldest continually occupied city in the world. What we call Syria, in English, was known as Aram, inhabited by Arameans. Assyria is modern Iraq. Assyria conquered Syria in 732 BC and destroyed Damascus. The text does not say that it would be in ruins *forever* or never re-inhabited. Today, 1.4 million people live there.



The divided kingdom of Judah and Israel had periods of war; and also of alliance against each other, with Syria acting as both an invader and an ally to either party at times.

⁴ Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶ "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it." ⁷ Yet this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ⁸ "It will not take place, it will not happen, ⁹ for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. ⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all." (Isaiah 7)

Syria captured the trans-Jordan areas of Israel against King Jehoash.



Aram/Syria became subjected to Assyria. After 732 BC, the regional control over Israel belonged to Assyria, not Syria.



The Assyrians invaded the northern 10 tribes of Israel in 587 BC and carried them away as captives.



These verses (for some reason) tie the fall of Damascus to events in Aroer, which is way over in Jordan. In other words, what is being described here is how Assyria came up westward from Iraq and conquered Damascus, Syria, and the rest of Syria's cities, including the control of Israeli captured territories east of the Jordan River. Likewise Syria's forts in northern Israel fell with the whole package.



It must have seemed to be a relief the children of Israel to see Syria sacked; but unfortunately the replacement was a much stronger nation, Assyria.

Isaiah 14:29 appears to be directly applicable here.

"Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent." (KJV)

The symbolic application fits the historical context:

- The "rod that smote thee" = Syria (the enemy that had been afflicting the Palestinians/Hebrews)

- The destroyed serpent = Syria's power broken
- The fiery flying serpent = A worse, more formidable enemy rising in its place (Assyria)

The passage essentially warns: "Don't celebrate that your oppressor is gone—something far more dangerous is coming." The progression from a regular serpent to a **fiery flying serpent** emphasizes that the new threat would be more devastating and harder to escape (it flies, it burns).

This would fit the historical pattern where:

1. Syria had been a recurring threat to Judah/Israel
2. Then Assyria emerged as the dominant imperial power in the region, posing a vastly greater existential threat
3. Eventually Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel

So yes, **Isaiah 14:29** with its serpent-to-fiery-flying-serpent imagery appears to be exactly the reference you were thinking of—it captures that grim irony of trading one enemy for a far worse one.

Read Isaiah 17:4-11: When we read prophecy there seems to be a blending of near term fulfillment and distant fulfillment. The immediate context of Isaiah is about how rebellious Judah was being corrected for sinful behavior. More specifically, God used the surrounding and distant nations to oppress his people to wake them up to the spiritual realities that had escaped them. The Babylonian sieges and invasions on Jerusalem are often spliced into descriptions of the future-still tribulation. It is like a giant potter's wheel. As mankind, we re-experience the same judgements as long as we repeat the same patterns of behavior.

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.¹⁰ Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

¹¹ No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them. (Ecclesiastes 1)

Are these verses specifically describing the Babylonian invasion or the yet-coming worldwide tribulation? They cannot be describing the Babylonian invasion on

Judah, because the Jews did not repent and turn to God. The Jews who survive the Time of Jacob's Trouble in the Great Tribulation will all be born again...but most will be killed in that horrific refining process.

The children of Israel and the Jews have had their populations chopped down severely over and over and over. In theory there could have been as many descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as there are people in India or China, if it was not for the untold numbers of time throughout history that their people were destroyed. Like Noah, God is committed to keep the reduction and refining process going until there is a faithful remnant of Abraham.

Ezekiel tells us that over 2/3's of the Jews would be destroyed before going into Babylonian captivity.

"Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair. ² When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of the hair inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter a third to the wind. For I will pursue them with drawn sword. ³ But take a few hairs and tuck them away in the folds of your garment. ⁴ Again, take a few of these and throw them into the fire and burn them up. A fire will spread from there to all Israel. (Ezekiel 5)

Zechariah states that over 2/3's of the Jews will die in the Great Tribulation.

In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. ⁹ This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'" (Zechariah 13:8-9)

How literally should we interpret these verses regarding the elimination of Jews in the tribulation? The foregoing verses tell us about a 2/3 loss as a minimum. The analogy of the percentage of olives remaining after an olive tree is harvested is used here. Commercial olive production statistics tell us that the percentage of olives remaining after the trees are shaken and vibra-harvested are 5-10-%. This puts a new perspective to what is called an unshakable faith.



²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” ²⁷ The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our “God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12)

Let’s step away from the plight of the Jews and compare the effects of the worldwide population during the tribulation. Is God picking on his people to push them to salvation, or are they in the same boat as the whole world?

To make an estimate on how many people in the world will die from famine, war, plague, pestilence and wild animal attacks depends if you use a percentage of the declining balance or if you go back to a percentage of the earth from the onset. For starters, here is the elimination of the first 25% of the world population:

⁷ When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” ⁸ I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth. (Revelation 6:7-8)

Next, the solar flares will wipe out 1/3 of the earth.

⁷ The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. (Revelation 8:7)

Next, comes the invasion of the Chinese army :

¹⁵ And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶ The number of the mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number. ¹⁷ The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. ¹⁸ A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. ¹⁹ The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. (Revelation 9)

If we assume that this death percentage is not a declining balance, you are left with a world population of less than 9%!!! Otherwise 1/3 is left. It is amazing how many beatings are required to dislodge our false gods and false hopes. It is breathtaking when you do the math. Does this sound like an exaggeration to you? Here is the resulting description:

See, the Lord is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants— ² it will be the same for priest as for people, for the master as for his servant, for the mistress as for her servant, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor. ³ The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The Lord has spoken this word. ⁴ The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth. ⁵ The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. ⁶ Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left. (Isaiah 24)

Read Isaiah 17:12-14: Here is a snippet of the Great Tribulation, to underscore the worldwide quest towards antisemitism as it falls under demonic influence. God will have to supernaturally save them again.

² “I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. ³ On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. ⁴ On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness,” declares the Lord. “I will keep a watchful eye over Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations. ⁵ Then the clans of Judah will say in their hearts, ‘The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord Almighty is their God.’⁶ “On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume all the surrounding peoples right and left, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place. (Zechariah 12)

The goal is not to scare us to death. The goal is to make sure that you are on the right side of history. Take your next step towards Christ.