A few months ago, I had an opportunity to go to war-ravaged Damascus, Syria - even though I was warned not to go. It had been many years since I visited the great city, the only foreign site that ever caused me some consternation while I was there. I called a friend of mine in town, a Muslim and a native of Damascus, and asked him for his advice about going. His response, “Your chances of leaving there alive are slim! Don’t go!”

One cannot be a student of the Bible and not have at least some interest or curiosity about Damascus. The city is very old, some say at least 4,000 years old! In scripture we go back to the time of the patriarchs to learn the basic time of origin - somewhere early in the Middle Bronze Age (2100-1550 B.C). Although it has been a long time since I was actually in the city, I have been able to visually trace the western outskirts on clear days from the perspective of Mount Hermon’s heights. Located in southwestern Syria, just a few miles northeast of the great mountain, the city today is the center of about 2.6 million people in the metro area. It lies only about 50 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea (the land in between is Lebanon).

Damascus in the Old Testament

We first read in Scripture of Damascus in Genesis 14:14-16, And 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 (just north) of Damascus. [16] And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

The second reference we find of Damascus is in the next chapter, Genesis 15:2, And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?

For those who use Bibles other than the King James, you will often find the name of Syria given as Aram. It was named thus due to the people who lived in the region at the time -
the Aramaeans. Damascus is mentioned 56 times in the New American Standard Bible.

The first violence between the Israelites and the people of Aram (Syria) is found in 2 Samuel 8:3-13 (Living Bible) He also destroyed the forces of King Hadadezer (son of Rehob) of Zobah in a battle at the Euphrates River, for Hadadezer had attempted to regain his power. [4] David captured seventeen hundred cavalry and twenty thousand infantry; then he lamed all of the chariot horses except for one hundred teams. [5] He also slaughtered twenty-two thousand Syrians from Damascus when they came to help Hadadezer. [6] David placed several army garrisons in Damascus, and the Syrians became David's subjects and brought him annual tribute money. So the Lord gave him victories wherever he turned. [7] David brought the gold shields to Jerusalem which King Hadadezer's officers had used. [8] He also carried back to Jerusalem a very large amount of bronze from Hadadezer's cities of Betah and Berothai.

[9] When King Toi of Hamath heard about David's victory over the army of Hadadezer, [10] he sent his son Joram to congratulate him, for Hadadezer and Toi were enemies. He gave David presents made from silver, gold, and bronze. [11] David dedicated all of these to the Lord, along with the silver and gold he had taken from Syria, Moab, Ammon, the Philistines, Amalek, and King Hadadezer.

[12] [13] So David became very famous. After his return he destroyed eighteen thousand Edomites at the Valley of Salt,

From that time on, Damascus was under total control of Israelite Kings David and Solomon until such time as Syria gained sufficient strength to mount military counter-offensives. The impetus behind Syria's gaining strength was the civil war (the breaking away of Israel from Judah (after Solomon's death). FOR THE NEXT TWO HUNDRED YEARS, HE PEOPLE OF SYRIA WOULD BE IMPLACABLE ENEMIES ISRAEL AND GOD.

Damascus in the New Testament

Most Christians are aware that Damascus came under Roman rule, along with most of the Middle East, several hundred years before Christ. In 64 B.C. the Roman general Pompey annexed the western part of Syria. The Romans occupied Damascus and subsequently incorporated it into the league of ten cities known as “the Decapolis.” Some scholars suggest that Herod the Great controlled this part of Syria as well as Israel. The “Pax Romana,” the “Rome Rule,” made it safe for Jews to live under Rome's protection in Syria. The spread of Christianity included Damascus where a colony of believers lived. Saul, who early in his adult life hated Christianity, sought to arrest those believers and made his way to Damascus for that purpose. He had a life-changing encounter enroute, however:
Acts 9:3-9  (New Living Testament)

As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven
suddenly beamed down upon him! [4] He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying
to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"
[5] "Who are you, sir?" Saul asked.
And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! [6] Now get up
and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do."
[7] The men with Saul stood speechless with surprise, for they heard the sound of
someone's voice, but they saw no one! [8] As Saul picked himself up off the ground,
he found that he was blind. [9] So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus.
He remained there blind for three days. And all that time he went without food and
water.

There is no further reference to Damascus in the New Testament; however, we know
from history that Damascus became a center of Christianity and remained so until the
city was captured by the Islamic armies in AD 639. Islam was forced upon the
citizens there, as it has been in so many parts of the world. It remains Islamic to this
day.

The Current Civil War in Syria

Following WWII, in 1946, the French pulled out of Damascus and Syria became an
independent nation. Since 1970, the nation has been ruled by the Assad family. In that
year Hafez al-Assad became the president and ruled until his death in 2000. Since then,
his son Bashar al-Assad (born in 1965) has ruled the country ruthlessly.

Bashar grew up, quiet and reserved, in the shadow of his more dynamic and outgoing
brother, Bassel. He was pursuing his education as a medical student but in 1994 Bassel
was killed in a car wreck. Bashar then was pulled out of his medical goals and enrolled in
a military academy near Damascus. He was made a colonel in just five years and served
as a consultant to his father.

The father died in 2000 and ten days later, Bashar was appointed president after an
alleged referendum (in which Bashar received 97%). He promised government reforms.
However, he soon linked with Russia in efforts to revive the terrible economy there and
turned his back on freedom and democracy. He made clear from the outset his fierce
opposition to Israel and its existence. Through the years, Bashar has suppressed all
opposition to his administration. In 2011, social media sites such as YouTube and
Facebook were blocked. Human rights groups have reported that political opponents are
routinely tortured, imprisoned and killed.

In 2011, protests began demanding political reforms, a reinstatement of civil rights and major changes in the government. In May of that year, the Syrian military cracked down violently. Since 2011, many countries have called for the president’s resignation. By June of 2012, the uprisings had escalated into all out insurrection. It is believed that tens of thousands of Syrians have died at the hands of their own government. In August of 2013 Assad came under fire from world leaders for using chemical weapons against civilians.

In the meantime, Assemblies of God missions leaders are preparing for the very day that we can send in Spirit-anointed missionaries in the effort called “Live-dead.” Our own church, First Assembly, is already prepared to take a major role in that effort.

THE COMING DESTRUCTION OF DAMASCUS
Isaiah 17

The Bible makes it very clear that all will not continue in Damascus as has been the case. Scriptural prophecies foretell a series of cataclysmic events will take place, one of which is the disappearance of Damascus as one of the premiere cities in the world.

Amazing, for Damascus is one of the oldest continuously-inhabited cities on earth with probably 5,000 years of history. The prophet Isaiah wrote that Damascus will cease to be a city and will be destroyed by God.

Isaiah 17:1-3 NLT
This message came to me concerning Damascus:
"Look, Damascus will disappear! It will become a heap of ruins. [2] The cities of Aroer will be deserted. Sheep will graze in the streets and lie down unafraid. There will be no one to chase them away. [3] The fortified cities of Israel will also be destroyed, and the power of Damascus will end. The few left in Aram will share the fate of Israel's departed glory," says the Lord Almighty.

The city of Damascus will become a heap of ruins, utterly destroyed. Not much, if anything, will remain there. It will be devoid of human life and will become a den for all manner of wildlife in the absence of humans to shoo them away.
Israel does not escape divine wrath either for many of the fortified cities in northern Israel will be destroyed:

Isaiah 17:4-6  (NLT)
"In that day the glory of Israel will be very dim, for poverty will stalk the land. [5] Israel will be abandoned like the grainfields in the valley of Rephaim after the harvest. [6] Only a few of its people will be left, like the stray olives left on the tree after the harvest. Only two or three remain in the highest branches, four or five out on the tips of the limbs. Yes, Israel will be stripped bare of people," says the Lord, the God of Israel."

We know from Ezekiel’s prophecies and those of Revelation that the world will be evangelized by 144,000 divinely-protected Jews during the Tribulation. What turns them spiritually?

Isaiah 17:7-8  NLT
Then at last the people will think of their Creator and have respect for the Holy One of Israel. [8] They will no longer ask their idols for help or worship what their own hands have made. They will never again bow down to their Asherah poles or burn incense on the altars they built.

When Does This Destruction Occur?

When Isaiah gave this prophecy, he was describing the coming of the Messiah to this earth through “the times of the end of the Gentile period” to the end of the Tribulation period. Joel Roserberg wrote, “In Isaiah 13 to 24, the Lord speaks directly to the future of Gentile nations near or surrounding Israel. These are events that will take place just before the Tribulation or during the Tribulation, and come to complete fulfillment on or about the Day of the Lord (the literal, physical Second Coming of Christ. Generally speaking, the text (Isa. 17) indicates that as Damascus will face judgment and be destroyed, so a certain geographical area - presumably close to or related to Damascus - will also face judgment and become “deserted” and desolate.”

It should be noted here that some distinguished Bible scholars believe the prophecy regarding Damascus has already been fulfilled. However, history notes that Damascus has never in history been utterly destroyed and uninhabitable. To the contrary it is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

Bottom line: this prophecy of the destruction of Damascus could occur during the Tribulation or near the end of the Tribulation. Fact is, this could happen in our own
lifetime as end time events are now shaping up so fast.

So What Are You And I Supposed To Do About It?

• Strengthen and encourage the Syrian Christians to be strong and courageous in standing for Christ, proclaiming the Gospel, making disciples, preaching the Word, shepherding the flock, loving their neighbors, loving their enemies, praying and caring for the needy and suffering in the name of Jesus.

• Care for hungry, thirsty, sick, suffering refugees fleeing from Damascus and Syria.

• Educate and mobilize more Christians around the world to pray for the people of Damascus and to love them in the name of Jesus while there is still time.

• Remember that one day we will stand face-to-face before our Lord Jesus Christ and give an account for what we did, or didn’t do, in light of these biblical prophecies.

It should be noted here that First Assembly has adopted Damascus as one of the key cities to be reached through the “Live-Dead” project. Even now there are scores of top-flight missionaries being trained in a Muslim city to invade Damascus - and some are venturing in even now. We are underwriting this project through First Assembly’s missions program. Anyone wishing to give should send the funds to First Assembly Missions - the Damascus Project.

What’s the point? Is there hope for these people? Yes! Isaiah 19:23-25

In that day Egypt and Assyria will be connected by a highway. The Egyptians and Assyrians will move freely between their lands, and they will worship the same God. [24] And Israel will be their ally. The three will be together, and Israel will be a blessing to them. [25] For the Lord Almighty will say, "Blessed be Egypt, my people. Blessed be Assyria, the land I have made. Blessed be Israel, my special possession!"

When Jesus died on the Cross of Calvary, He died for all people, including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, – you name them. We have the responsibility of getting the Gospel to all people, telling them and showing them the love of Christ Jesus.

Vladimir Putin And The Demise Of Russia
Several years ago, Darlene and I were among the several thousand who gathered at the University Fieldhouse to hear a speech by Mikhail Gorbachev, former President of the Soviet Union. We were privileged to sit quite close so we could observe the man carefully. He and former U.S. President Ronald Reagan worked closely together to bring about “detente,” a peaceful relationship between our two countries. No shots were fired, no bombs dropped. I myself made three journeys across Russia from Siberia to St. Petersburg and Darlene made one. “Detente” opened the door for great evangelism and, as a result, hundreds of churches were opened across that massive land.

The situation made me question some of my previous teachings on “God and Magog,” which I had identified as Russia and taught that the Bible labeled Russia an arch-enemy of Israel in the last days. I wondered, “Where did I miss the boat on this?” Then Vladimir Putin came along and served as the Russia leader from 2000-to-2008 and was then “re-elected” in 2012. He has made it clear that he is no friend of the United States or Israel and such scriptures as Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39 came sharply back into focus.

Scripture teaches that in the last days, there will be four power sectors on earth:

- The King OfThe North – Russia, or Gog/Magog
- The King of the South – N. Africa, Islamic nations
- The King of the West – Antichrist (Europe and America)
- The Kings of the East - the billions in Asia

In the center of these four powerhousees is the tiny nation of Israel, the size of New Jersey. One could pluck up Israel from the Middle East and plunk it down into Lake Erie with some room left over.

The recollection of Jews into Israel from all over the world, and the establishment of the State of Israel in May of 1948, is a prophetic fulfillment miracle.

Ezekiel 36:24-29

For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. [25] Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. [26] A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. [28] And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. [29] I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you.

7
In the next two chapters of Ezekiel (38 and 39), God made it clear that the “dry bones” were the remnant of His people the Jews, scattered all over the world by forced exiles, the Holocaust and hatred of the race. He promised that the “dry bones” would be restored into living, vibrant beings and that they were “the whole house of Israel.”

We have seen this miracle in our lifetime! But we are seeing once again renewed hostility toward the Jews, especially in Western Europe and in Muslim nations. The Bible teaches that in the last days, there would be a massive attack on Israel, and it would be led by God/Magog and a host of nations:

Ezekiel 38:1-9

And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, [2] Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, [3] And say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: [4] And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: [5] Persia (Iran), Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: [6] Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee. [7] Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them. [8] After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought
forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. [9] Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee.

*** Gog was king of the land of Magog and chief ruler over Rosh, Meschech and Tubal in Genesis 10:2.
*** Persia is Iran
*** Ethiopia and Libya are north African Muslim nations
*** Gomer and Togarmah are parts of Europe hostile even now to Israel

Ezekiel 38:11 is an eye-opener (it is God’s speaking to the invading armies): And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates,

Why is Israel “unwalled” - unarmed? Because the nation will have bought into Antichrist’s peace pitch: Rev. 6:1-2 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. [2] And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. He appears “arrow-less.” But his intentions are clear: to conquer.

Chapter 38 of Ezekiel also informs us that the nations will turn a deaf ear to the pleas of Israel for help. Have we not done that before? Did any nations rush to Germany or Poland to liberate the death camps in the early ’40's? No! Not even the U.S. It is argued that no one knew what was happening behind those sinister walls. A visit on your own to any of those camps will belie that argument.

So what happens to Israel when the attack comes? Ezekiel 39:1-13 (Living Bible)

"Son of dust, prophesy this also against Gog. Tell him:
" 'I stand against you, Gog, leader of Meshech and Tubal. [2] I will turn you and drive you toward the mountains of Israel, bringing you from the distant north. And I will destroy 85 percent of your army in the mountains. [3] I will knock your weapons from your hands and leave you helpless. [4] You and all your vast armies will die upon the mountains. I will give you to the vultures and wild animals to devour you. [5] You will never reach the cities—you will fall upon the open fields; for I have spoken, the Lord God says. [6] And I will rain down fire on Magog and on all your allies who live safely on the coasts, and they shall know I am the Lord.
[7] "Thus I will make known my holy name among my people Israel; I will not let it be mocked at anymore. And the nations, too, shall know I am the Lord, the
Holy One of Israel. [8] That day of judgment will come; everything will happen just as I have declared it.

[9] "The people of the cities of Israel will go out and pick up your shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, javelins and spears, to use for fuel—enough to last them seven years. [10] For seven years they will need nothing else for their fires. They won't cut wood from the fields or forests, for these weapons will give them all they need. They will use the possessions of those who abused them.

[11] "And I will make a vast graveyard for Gog and his armies in the Valley of the Travelers, east of the Dead Sea. It will block the path of the travelers. There Gog and all his armies will be buried. And they will change the name of the place to 'The Valley of Gog's Army.' [12] It will take seven months for the people of Israel to bury the bodies. [13] Everyone in Israel will help, for it will be a glorious victory for Israel on that day when I demonstrate my glory, says the Lord.

** Verses 9 and 10 interest me greatly for I read that if the nuclear power used for our U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean could be harnessed for peaceful purposes, it would heat and light every home in Israel for .....seven years.

I believe that it is out of this marvelous victory, totally accomplished by God, that the revival in Israel will be triggered, out of which come the 144,000 sealed witnesses of Revelation 7.

Next Week: DANIEL PROPHECIES THE EXACT DAY OF CHRIST’S TRIUMPHANT ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM - 600 YEARS BEFORE THE FACT!