
Damascus

DAMASCUS

by Dr. Glenn Carnagey

1. The city's name has been Damascus from about 1500 BC until the present.

Egyptian inscriptions speak of TI-MAS-KU and SA-RA-MAS-KI between the 1500's and 1200's BC.

The Arab name is DIMASHK ESH-SHAM or "DIMASHK of the Left". The meaning of DIMASHK or Damascus is unknown, but the ESH-SHAM means "the Left" and is to be compared to YEMEN or "The Right".

2. The city is located in the NW corner of the Ghuta, a fertile plain about 2300 feet above sea level, East of Mt. Hermon.

The Eastern part of the Ghuta, east of the city, is called the "Meadow Land" of Damascus, the EL-MERJ. The River Barada (Abana) flows through Damascus and waters the plains beyond the city.

A few miles south of the city the river NAHR EL-AWAJ flows through the plain as well. It is surrounded on three sides by barren hills and on the east beyond the GHUTA by the desert. The city is marked by fountains and streams, orchards and fields, especially in the spring.

In Arabic literature Damascus is described as an earthly paradise.

The Barada River is the lifeblood of the city, coming out of the hills in a narrow gorge, it spreads out into many streams through the Ghuta and loses itself into the desert, where it vanishes in the marshes.

Its beauty can only be appreciated if seen from the desert point of view, and especially in the spring when its fruit trees bloom. (Apricot, pomegranates, walnuts and many others.

3. The Structure of the City.

The main part of the city runs east to west along the south bank of the river.

A long street called the Meidan stretches along the southern part of the city, passing beyond the city wall and terminating at the BAWWABET ALLAH ("The gate of God"), which is the starting-point of the annual HAJ, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

In the Greek and Roman period, a long colonnaded street ran through the city. (Acts 9:11) DERB EL-MUSTAKIM.

- Archaeologists have uncovered parts of the Street Called Straight

- It runs from east to west with the Jewish Quarter on the South and the Christian quarter on the North.

- On the West end of town the street ends in the SUK EL- MIDHATIYEH, a bazaar built by MIDHAT PASHA, north of which is the Moslem quarter of the city, in which are the citadel and the Great Mosque.

Part of the city wall has been preserved with a foundation going back to Roman times, with Arab rebuilding above it.

Biblical sites pointed out to the tourist are spurious.

- Traditional site of Paul's escape over the wall in a basket. II Cor 11:33; Acts 9:25

- NAAMAN's House. II Kings 5:1ff

4. Industry associated with Damascus.

It always was famous for its textile industry, from which the English word "Damask" is taken.

In the Middle Ages it was famous for the "Damascus blades" of the time of the Crusaders.

Timur (Tamerlane), the son of Genghis Khan, took the city and ended its armament production by carrying its armorers off to Samerkand, but the city went right on after 1399 AD.

5. Early History of the City of Damascus.

The earliest reference to it in Scripture is Genesis 15:2, in which Abraham complains that this "Son of possession", BEN MESHEQ, ELIEZER, the DAMESHEQ (Damascus), will "inherit his house."

This would indicate a date for the city of, at the oldest, 1800 BC.

Eliezer the Damascusite was from Damascus and the city name would thus mean something on the order of "The one who possesses or has possessions." (Based on Aram. relative pronoun DIY + MESHEQ).

The city is mentioned one additional time during Abraham's time, in Genesis 14:15, where Abraham is said to have pursued the four kings of Mesopotamia "as far as Hobah, which is on the left hand (North) of DAMASCUS."

6. Damascus during the time of David.

Damascus allied itself with neighboring Aramaean cities against David. II Sam 8:5ff

The center of Aramaic power during David's time was Zobah, whose king Hadadezer, was executed by David after the defeat of the allied army.

Unfortunately, Rezon, ben Eliada, an officer in Hadadezer's army escaped and built an army of bandits and ultimately seized the city of Damascus, where he ruled as king and built a powerful kingdom. I Kings 11:23ff

Rezon continued to be a thorn in the side of Solomon. I K 11:25.

7. The Aramaean Kingdom. (950-732 BC).

Rezon may or may not be identical with Biblical Hezion, who fathered Tab-rimmon, Who in turn fathered Ben-hadad. I K 15:18

Ben-hadad (BIR-IDRI) is the first king after Rezon of whom we have any first-hand knowledge, when he became the nemesis of Ahab.

He played Israel against Judah beautifully to the detriment of both.

- ASA hired him with a bribe to attack Israel to relieve him. I K 15:18ff

- Either the above Ben-Hadad I or his successor, Ben-Hadad II, defeated Omri of Israel, annexed several Israelite cities, and secured the right to have Aramaic "streets" or Bazaars in Samaria, in about 880 BC.

Ben-Hadad II, then, campaigned incessantly against Israel.

(1) Scripture account of his campaigns against the Jews is found in I Kings 20:22.

(2) He won the first encounter, but later lost twice to Ahab.

(3) He became a prisoner of Ahab after the Battle of Aphek, but was treated with great consideration by Ahab.

(4) Ahab demanded only the return of his cities and the reciprocal right of setting up "Streets" in Damascus as penalty.

(5) Primary enemy was Assyria, who under Shalmaneser III, attacked a coalition of 10 states including Israel & Damascus at the Battle of Qarqar in 854 BC, though the battle was a draw, neither side winning a decisive victory.

(6) The Assyrians attacked Ben-Hadad twice more, in 842 and 846, with no more decisive results than at Qarqar.

(7) With the death of Ahab at Ramoth-Gilead the only threat to Damascus other than Assyria was ended.

In about 844 BC Hazael murdered Ben-Hadad and usurped the throne.

(1) He was attacked by the Assyrians in 842 and 839, again without any decisive outcome.

(2) From then until about 810 BC, the Assyrians stayed home, allowing the Aramaeans a free hand against the Jews.

In 803 BC, Mari' (Ben-Hadad III, Son of Hazael) was forced to become a vassal of Ramman-Nirari III of Assyria. II K 13:3

This allowed tremendous expansion of Israel under Jeroboam II.

The Assyrians attacked Damascus again in 773 BC Tiglath-Pileser III, (745-727 BC) campaigned in the West often, bringing about the payment of tribute by Rezin in 738 BC

Rezin joined with Pekah of Israel to force Judah into an anti-Assyrian coalition. II K 15:37; 16:5; Isaiah 7.

In 734 BC the Assyrians advanced and placed Damascus under siege, taking the city in 732 BC. Rezin was executed and the city was destroyed.

8. Subsequent to its destruction by the Assyrians, the city lost most of its prominence and is only incidentally mentioned during the remainder of the OT. Jer. 49:23ff; Ezek 27:18; 47:16.

9. After the Persians took over, the city regained its prosperity, though not its command position.

10. When the Seleucid kingdom of Syria was established in 301BC, its capitol city was Antioch on the coast, and the center of power shifted west to the seacoast from the interior.

11. In 111 BC the Syrian kingdom was divided, and Antiochus Cyzicenus became king of Coele-Syria (Transjordan), and made Damascus his capitol.

- His successors, Demetrius Eucaerus and Antiochus Dionysus, had problems including wars with the Parthians and with Alexander Jannaeus of the Judahite Hasmonean line as well as with Aretas, the Nabatean, who took Damascus in 85 BC.

- Tigranes, the Armenian, ruled thereafter until the Romans took the city under Pompey in 64BC.

12. Under Roman Rule its history is obscure, but the Nabateans seem to have gained control of Damascus for long periods of time.

- Roman coins indicate that the Romans held it from 31 BC to 33 AD.

- Aretas IV, king of Nabatea held it and appointed an ETHNARCH to rule the city after this. II Cor 11:32

- Under NERO it reverted back to Roman rule.

13. During the Christian era it played a minor role in history, though it is obvious that Paul's

association with the city at his conversion drew some attention to the site. Acts 9:1-25

- All the NT references to it are to be related to that conversion.

- Under the Emperor of the early Byzantine period the city continued to be an unimportant city, second to Antioch.

- Passed out of Christian control to the Arabs in 634 AD.

- Damascus has been a Moslem city ever since.

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