

Scenes of Syria

1. Damascus

This month we start a new series of scenes from Bible lands. We'll visit sites specifically mentioned in the Scriptures, and other places of general interest to Bible readers. We begin with the city of Damascus, capital of the Syrian Arab Republic. Damascus is now a congested, modern city of five million inhabitants, yet it competes with Jericho for the title of oldest continually inhabited city in the world. It may also be the place with the longest recorded history in Biblical terms, being inhabited in the days of Abraham yet still referred to in New Testament epistles.

From Hobah, north of Damascus, Abraham rescued Lot (Gen. 14:15) after he had been kidnapped in battle, and Damascus was home to Abraham's trusted servant Eliezer (15:2), who was expected to inherit his master's wealth so long as Abraham remained childless. Damascus is mentioned frequently during the reigns of David and successive Hebrew kings, being the capital of the kingdom of the Arameans (AV Syrians). It was visited by Elisha (2 Kgs. 8:7), and at times was even incorporated into the

kingdoms of Israel and Judah (14:28). Here King Ahaz met Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, after the latter had exiled its inhabitants (2 Kgs. 16); and the Damascenes were used by God in judgement on Judah in the days leading towards its overthrow.

Not surprisingly, given these fluctuating relations with God's people, Damascus is the subject of a number of Old Testament prophecies. But we remember it perhaps best of all as the place to which Saul of Tarsus was travelling, carrying letters of authority from the high priest to persecute believers of "the Way" in the city (Acts 9:2, RV), when the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision and changed the course of his life forever.

The sunset photograph is taken from Mount Qasioun to the northwest of the city (incidentally, regarded by Muslims as the location of Cain's murder of Abel). We'll spend some time in Damascus, God willing, before exploring the rest of Syria.

—Jeremy Thomas