

Isaiah Chapter 17

“The burden of Damascus” refers to the capital city of Syria. This chapter is contemporaneous with (chapter 7), and predicts the downfall of the coalition between Syria and Ephraim. Tiglath-pileser of Assyria destroyed Damascus (in 732 B.C.), a fulfillment of this prophecy. Jacob shall be made thin refers to the famine that followed the devastation and deportation of the northern tribes by Sargon of Assyria (in 722. B.C.).

Isaiah 17:1 "The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from [being] a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap."

This city served as the capital of Aram, or Syria. Its location northeast of Mt. Hermon on the main land route between Mesopotamia and Egypt made it very influential. Its destruction by the Assyrians (in 732 B.C.), is the subject of this chapter.

This is just a prophecy from Isaiah that Damascus will be destroyed. Damascus was one of the earliest cities in the area. It was thought to be the earliest by many historians. The destruction will not be partial, but will be so terrible that nothing will be left of the city.

Isaiah 17:2 "The cities of Aroer [are] forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make [them] afraid."

Aram's or Syria's domain extended as far south as Aroer east of the Dead Sea, on the Arnon River (2 Kings 10:32-33).

The cities of Aroer are pretty hard to discover anything about. They were possibly, known by another name. We do know that they will be totally destroyed at some time after Isaiah gave this prophecy. In fact, there will be such destruction that no one will be living to protest the cows grazing there.

Isaiah 17:3 "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."

Ephraim: The northern 10 tribes, also known as “Israel”, joined with Syria as objects of this oracle. They formed an alliance with Syria to combat the Assyrians, but many of their cities fell victim to the campaign in which Syria fell (see verse 1). Remnant of Aram: Aram, or Syria, was to have a remnant, but not a kingdom left after the Assyrian onslaught.

It appears that Ephraim, Damascus, and Aroer were somehow thought of as a unit, perhaps, because they were all enemies of Jerusalem. Damascus must have had a remnant who rebuilt her.

Ephraim had been fortified, but it appears the fortress had been destroyed. We will find in later lessons, that God forgives Ephraim. Just as there was a remnant of Israel, there will be a remnant of Ephraim.

Isaiah 17:4 "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."

The waning of this glory pictured the judgment of God against the northern 10 tribes, descendants of Jacob.

"The glory of Jacob being made thin" just means there will be only a remnant left of Jacob's ancestors. Israel, as a whole, will not recover. The remnant will survive, but they will not have the greatness they were once known by.

Isaiah 17:5 "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."

In the valley of Rephaim, David won a great victory over the Philistines. The "valley of Rephaim" is also called the valley of the giants. It seems the "harvestman" has to do with the reaping of the people, or death. The "corn" spoken of is the Israelites.

As harvesters stripped bare that fertile valley west of Jerusalem, so God's judgment would leave nothing fruitful in the northern kingdom.

Isaiah 17:6 "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 LORD God of Israel."

This is just stating how small a percentage of the Israelites will be left. When a tree was shaken and beaten to get the fruit, the few that were left were not to be taken.

We learned in Leviticus that they were left for the widows, orphans, and strangers. This, however, is just explaining that most of them are killed. The order to leave the remnant was from the LORD God of Israel.

Two or three ... Four or five: God's judgment against Ephraim was to leave only sparse pieces of her original abundance of olives.

Isaiah 17:7 "At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel."

Those that are left are the ones who looked to God their Creator for safety. Their gratitude will be to the Holy One of Israel for saving them. They will be very aware that His grace is what saved them.

In the future, severe judgments are to awaken a remnant of Ephraim to their failure to depend on the Lord. Then they will repent.

Isaiah 17:8 "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."

Repentance is to lead to the forsaking of idolatry, which for so long beset the nation.

The awakening is to the fact that these false gods and idols made with human hands could not save them. The few that remain have realized their only hope is in God.

Isaiah 17:9 "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."

The cities will be totally destroyed. The tree is stripped clean except for the branches the remnant was on. Even the remnant will feel the desolation of the land from this great judgment of God.

Isaiah 17:10 "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:"

“Forgotten the God of thy salvation”: Failure to remember God had left Israel unprotected.

God is the "Rock" of their salvation. Jesus Christ is our Rock of salvation. The "slips", spoken of here, are the false doctrines the Israelites had planted. This is almost like what we are seeing today in our churches. Many of the new ideas on worship are for the pleasing of the fleshly sight of mankind.

"Strange slips", then, is speaking of bringing new doctrines into the church that the LORD is not pleased with. There is only one true doctrine, it is found in our Bible. Almost everything pleasant to the flesh of man is opposed to the Spirit. We must choose between flesh and spirit.

Isaiah 17:11 "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."

“Make thy plant to grow”: The prophet reminded his readers of the futility of trying to meet their needs without the Lord’s help.

It seems false doctrine grows faster than the truth. You can plant the seed of false doctrine, and it may even grow rapidly. It sometimes even spreads to other churches, but when harvest time comes, the plant the false doctrine has produced will be gathered up and destroyed.

This is the same as the wheat and the tares (in Matthew 13 beginning with verse 25).

Isaiah 17:12 "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!"

“Many people”: The prophet turned his attention to the coming armies of Judah’s enemies and pronounced a “woe” upon them.

There are two distinct meanings in this verse. In one instance, this is speaking of armies of many nations in a great battle. The second I believe is the true message we are to see in this. It is a civilization of many nations rushing to their own destruction.

There is a direct connection between the word "seas" and large numbers of people. Just as God saved a remnant of the physical house of Israel, He will save a remnant of the spiritual house of Israel.

Church, we must realize what we are doing, and get back into right fellowship with God. The Word of God should be our guide. Do not accept other teachings. I pray this woe is not to the present day church.

Isaiah 17:13 "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."

“But God shall rebuke them”: God’s rebuke put those enemies to flight.

This again, is probably speaking to the people who would be destroyed in battle. To me, this is speaking of our time when people are rushing to and fro. Many are following false gods. Worse than all of that, is the slack attitude of the church. God is Holy. We must walk holy before Him. These next Scriptures, in Jesus' Words, say it so well.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Do you go to church to be entertained? If you said yes, you might as well stay at home.

God wants a family who will reverence Him and desire fellowship with Him. True worship is repenting of our sins, accepting Jesus as our Savior and Lord, believing that the price for our sin was paid in full at Calvary by the shed blood of Jesus, and believing that He rose again.

Isaiah 17:14 "And behold at eveningtide 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."

When morning came, the invading force had disappeared. God protects His people.

God had always promised to bless those who bless Israel, and to curse those who curse Israel. This is no exception. To come against physical or spiritual Israel and their God, brings certain disaster.

Isaiah Chapter 17 Questions

1. What city does verse 1 say will be destroyed?
2. What happens to Aroer?
3. What does the cows grazing tell us?
4. What will happen to Ephraim?
5. Why were Ephraim, Damascus, and Aroer thought of as a unit?
6. What is meant by "the glory of Jacob being thin"?
7. Who had David won a victory over in the valley of Rephaim?
8. What is another name for the "valley of Rephaim"?
9. What does the "harvestman" have to do with?
10. Who is the "corn" in verse 5?
11. We learned in the study of _____ not to reap the last fruit.
12. Who was the gleaner left for?
13. Who was the remnant?
14. Why were they saved?
15. What will the remnant be aware of?
16. What had they awakened to about their idols?
17. Who had they forgotten?
18. Who is the "Rock" of our salvation?
19. The "slips" in verse 10 are what?
20. Things pleasant to the flesh of man are opposed to the _____.
21. Where do we find the parable of the wheat and tares?
22. What can be connected to "seas" in the spiritual sense?
23. The nations shall rush like the rushing of many _____.
24. Read Matthew 7:21-23.
25. Describe true worship.

26. God has always promised to bless whom?