

The Book of the Prophet ISAIAH

Chapter 17

Theme: God destroyed the confederation of Israel (Ephraim) and Syria by Assyria, then He destroyed it.

Outline:

- 1-5 Syria and Ephraim Taken By Assyria
- 6-8 A Small, Saved Remnant to Repent
- 9-11 Israel's Idolatry Brought Judgment
- 12-14 Assyria Judged Divinely by God

Preparatory Reading: Isaiah 7-8; Isaiah 10; Isaiah 37.

Related Links:

- A. *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah (outline)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/pdf/isaiah-introduction.pdf>.
- B. *Overview of O.T. Prophets (slides)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/pdf/old-testament-prophets-slides.pdf>.
- C. *Chronological Table and Notes for Prophets* ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/pdf/prophets-table-with-notes.pdf>.
- D. *The Prophets of God (sermon outline)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/pdf/prophets-of-god.pdf>.
- E. *Interpreting Bible Prophecies (slides)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/pdf/prophecy-interpretation.pdf>.
- F. *Exposition of Isaiah 7 (for fear of confederation)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/pdf/isaiah-7.pdf>.

Introduction:

- A. This section of Isaiah, chapters 13-34 (or other end points depending on view) are national warnings.
 - 1. In the center of the world in God's eye was Mt. Zion, the joy of the whole earth; He would protect.
 - 2. Other nations, from Libya to Persia, would be judged for hurting His people and/or rejecting Him.
 - 3. These chapters need not be in the order of when they were delivered or when they were fulfilled.
 - 4. For example, chapters 13-14 were prophecies of Media/Persia crushing Babylon 200 years away.
 - 5. For example, chapters 15-16 describe Babylonians crushing Moab about 100 years away (Jer 48).
 - 6. For example, chapter 17 has Assyria taking Syria and Samaria while Ahaz then Hezekiah reigned.
 - 7. There is no problem to think of Isaiah's international prophecies being collected, collated, and combined together in this section without much regard to date of prophecy or fulfillment (Pr 25:1).
 - 8. However, we trust God's providence for chapter divisions and these chapters being in the book.
- B. We know we are saved Gentiles at a great distance of 2700 years and 6300 miles from these events.
 - 1. Therefore we must emphasize lessons of the chapters rather than the specifics of cities and nations.
 - 2. There is much of the sovereignty of God throughout these chapters and His rule over all nations.
 - 3. There is much comfort for the people of God that He will avenge them and destroy their enemies.
 - 4. There is much warning about all kind of sins from idolatry to civil injustice to pride to adultery.
 - 5. There is an exaltation of God's kingdom by His church as the center and purpose of the universe.
 - 6. See the end of this outline document for a list of practical lessons derived from the prophecy here.
- C. This chapter unites Syria and Israel, confederates against Judah, and complementary in false religion.
 - 1. Ephraim was the name of a predominant tribe of the ten, so Israel of ten tribes was called Ephraim.
 - 2. This confederation against Judah was a matter of great fear early in the reign of Ahaz (Is 7:1-16).
 - 3. Though it is called the burden of Damascus, more of the prophecy is against Ephraim than Syria.
 - 4. God had rejected Israel in many respects compared to His chosen tribe Judah and place Jerusalem.
 - 5. Ahaz of Judah certainly did not help his cause by desire for the gods of Damascus (II Chron 28:23).

- D. David and others had crushed the Syrians of Damascus in the past (II Samuel 8:5-6,13; 10:6-19; etc.).
- E. Other prophets prophesied of God's judgment against Damascus and Syria (Jer 49:23-27; Am 1:3-5).
- F. The final lesson is 17:14 ... "us" must be Judah ... Mt. Zion ... O Immanuel ... because of the anointing!
 - 1. Isaiah is the one prophesying, and his ministry was to comfort Judah and warn her many enemies.
 - 2. They answered ambassadors about the welfare of Judah ... *the LORD hath founded Zion* (Is 14:32).
 - 3. This is *because of the anointing* which was attached to Mt. Zion, Jerusalem, and Judah (Is 10:27).
 - 4. This is sufficiently true and weighty that the land of Judah could be called, *O Immanuel* (Is 8:8).

***** *Syria and Ephraim Taken By Assyria – Verses 1-5* *****

1 The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.

- A. The burden of Damascus = God's judgment prophesied against Syrians, a common use.
 - 1. Jeremiah used other words – *Concerning Damascus ... it is feeble* (Jer 49:23-27).
 - 2. Note Babylon (Is 13:1), Philistia (Is 14:28-32), Moab (Is 15:1), Egypt (Is 19:1), Babylon (Is 21:1), Edom (Is 21:11), Arabia (Is 21:13), valley of vision (Is 22:1), Tyre (Is 23:1), beasts of the south (Is 30:6,27).
 - 3. And Nineveh (Nah 1:1), Phoenicia (Zech 9:1), Israel (Zech 12:1), Israel (Mal 1:1).
 - 4. God hated the Jews for mocking prophecies (*burdens*) of judgment (Jer 23:33-40).
 - 5. They were a *burden* to the prophets to deliver but especially to those being judged.
 - 6. Every reader should humble Himself before the warnings of scripture and repent.
- B. Though only Damascus of Syria is mentioned here, yet God assigns Ephraim (Is 17:3).
- C. Isaiah had identified Damascus as the capital of Syria and throne of Rezin (Isaiah 7:8).
 - 1. He took Damascus with the Assyrians of Tiglathpileser (II Kings 16:9; Is 8:4; 10:9).
 - 2. Thus prophecies were fulfilled and the enemy of Judah was taken out of the way.
 - 3. However, for their use of association with Assyria, God punished Judah (Is 8:8-12).
- D. Damascus was not utterly ruined like Babylon, thus Paul's city – 15 times (Acts 9:1-2).
- E. Damascus exists today as capital of Syria with a metropolitan population of 3 million.

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

- A. A region of Syria assigned to Reuben and Gad when taking Canaan (Deut 2:36; 3:12).
- B. When Tiglathpileser defeated Syria (II Kgs 16:9), he took them captive (I Chr 5:26).
 - 1. Therefore, the land was stripped of inhabitants, allowing for the flocks to take over.
 - 2. The land was deserted for a while, but would recover as it is today, unlike Babylon.

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.*

- A. God counted Ephraim (ten tribes of Israel) and Syria as united nations, for they were.
 - 1. The confederacy would not work, for the strength of Ephraim (Samaria) would end.
 - 2. The kingdom of Rezin in Damascus, capital of Syria, would be destroyed to ruin.
 - 3. Some of Israel were carried away by Tiglathpileser before Israel fell (II Kgs 15:29).
 - 4. Syria was destroyed first when Tiglathpileser obeyed Ahaz to do it (II Kgs 16:5-9).
 - 5. Ephraim (ten tribes) was destroyed not much later by Shalmaneser (II Kgs 18:9-11).
 - 5. The time between these two events was about 20 years, about 660 B.C. to 640 B.C.
 - 6. The remaining remnant of Syrians would be pitiful and weak just like the ten tribes.
- B. The great reduction of the associated nations occurred by the desolation of each nation.
- C. Syria would end up glorious like Israel – not glorious at all – for God had reduced them.
 - 1. Note that the nations and their ruin are in reverse order from the actual destruction.
 - 2. Here is inspired irony – the remnant of the Syrians would not have glory, like Israel.
 - 3. For the comparison is gleaned glory, which is no glory at all compared to harvest.
 - 4. Either way the glory of Syria would be reduced to that of Israel – little to no glory.
 - 5. Think about Michal’s irony about David’s glory when dancing for God (II Sa 6:20).
 - 6. Think about Elijah’s irony about Baal when he ignored cries for help (I Kings 18:27).
 - 7. Irony is a powerful figure of speech; it occurs in the Bible for power and instruction.
 - 8. More about irony in the Bible (pgs. 44-47) ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/pdf/figures-of-speech.pdf>

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.*

- A. When God had reduced both Syria and Israel, the ten tribes would be thin and lean.
 - 1. Some were taken captive by Tiglathpileser and then all defeated by Shalmaneser.
 - 2. The king of Assyria deported the Israelites and imported pagans to replace them.
 - 3. So thorough was the eventual result that God said they were no people (Isaiah 7:8).
 - 4. When a nation is reduced to no longer be a people, how much glory do they have?
- B. Fat in the Bible is often used to represent prosperity and luxury, which was now gone.
- C. Jacob = Israel = ten tribes, for that is the context and Jacob was the true father of Israel.
 - 1. Synonyms and connections like this are part of reading the Bible. Reader beware.
 - 2. Observe that in two verses the ten tribes are *Ephraim*, *children of Israel*, and *Jacob*.

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.*

- A. Assyria by Shalmaneser took Israel captive like a farmer a field, leaving only a gleaned.
 - 1. From great national prosperity and fatness, it would now be thin and lean (Is 17:4).

2. Assyria was the harvestman and corn gatherer, taking the great majority of produce.
 3. All that would be left in such a case would be intentional or accidental gleanings.
 4. This sense is gathered from the verse before and verse after, meaning great scarcity.
 5. Leaving a small amount intentionally for gleaners was a rule of God's people only.
- B. In truth, by God's prophecy, what remained could not be called a people (Isaiah 7:8).

***** *A Small, Saved Remnant to Repent – Verses 6-8* *****

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.

- A. God left a few Israelites there, just like farmers leave some intentionally or accidentally.
1. A farmer that harvests a vineyard or olive orchard considers any remains immaterial.
 2. Thus God can speak of desolation of Israel and no longer a people with a few left.
 3. If God left a tenth of Judah as His remnant, this would have been well less than 1%.
- B. As certain as the judgment by the LORD of hosts earlier (Is 17:3), so also the mercy.
1. Note that God was the LORD God *of hosts* earlier (Is 17:3) but now *of Israel*. Mercy!
 2. Note that God would be the Holy One *of Israel* in the next verse for Israel's comfort.

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

- A. The day limited here is the land of Israel falling to Shalmaneser and being taken away.
- B. With this very great punishment, the few left would repent and look to the God of Israel.
1. From idolatry of their golden calves in Bethel and Samaria, they would respect God.
 2. It is a shame God our Father must crush us in order to get us to fully respect Him.
 3. David knew the value of affliction, which God gave for his sins (Ps 119:67,71,75).
 4. But if that is what it takes, then wise men will either accept it and/or even ask for it.
- C. In the day of adversity consider; if you are guilty of any sins, repent and seek His face.

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.

- A. With the vast majority of the nation taken captive far away, the idolaters would repent.
- B. It is a shame that God must crush idolaters in order for them to consider their great folly.
1. Rebellion against their God had brought a great judgment of blindness (Is 44:9-20).
 2. When men do not submit to God and give thanks, He rewires them (Rom 1:18-27).
 3. Judah and Ephraim would learn to hate their idols (Is 2:17-21; 30:22; 31:7; Hos 4:8).
 4. Without grace men will not hate idols (Is 46:1-2; 21:9; 41:5-7; Ex 12:12; I Sam 5:3)

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.

- A. Isaiah continued to describe the very small remnant like gleaning leftovers (Is 17:4-6).
- B. But here, the analogy is pruning or cutting a tree and leaving a singular bough or branch.
- C. The situation overall would be of desolation, but there would be a very small remnant.
 - 1. The strong cities, not weak cities, would be reduced to immaterial, worthless ruins.
 - 2. This is nothing compared to God recovering Judah from Babylon. No comparison!
 - 3. This mercy, though to Ephraim, less valuable than Judah, is election (Is 6:11-13).
 - 4. Other references to desolation leave a few (Isaiah 24:6,13; 28:1-5; Amos 3:11-15).
- D. Why were some left? Because God's mercy even to Israel, though severely restrained.
 - 1. This would not be described as a tenth at all (Is 6:13), for gleaning is but immaterial.
 - 2. It is not necessary to make *they* the Canaanites leaving the cities due to Israel possessing the land, creating a comparison of desolation and desertion (Lev 18:28).
- E. After the section about the remnant (Is 17:6-8), Isaiah explained the cause of desolation.

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:

- A. The general picture entering this verse is desolation – clearly stated before this (Is 17:9).
- B. The dependent clause by *because* leads us to the consequences and results of idolatry.
 - 1. Never forget your God or to be mindful of Him, no matter what distracts in your life.
 - 2. Never forget the cause and effect nature of our religion – you reap what you sow.
 - 3. You will reap judgment for sowing sin; you will not reap wealth by sowing diligence.
 - 4. See warnings by Haggai and Malachi of diligence cursed (Hag 1:5-11; Mal 3:7-12).
 - 5. If you forget God that saved you by His Son or neglect His great love, you will lose!
 - 6. Paul warned Jews with irremediable judgment for letting things slip (Heb 2:1-4).
 - 7. If you mind earthly things instead of God, you are a belly worshipper (Phil 3:18-19).
- C. Their creativity and diligence seeking agricultural prosperity would not work due to sin.
 - 1. Their creativity was identifying pleasant/profitable plants for successful agriculture.
 - 2. Their creativity was to identify foreign and new slips (shoots) to widen their produce.
- D. Their diligence is described in the next verse, but it would not work to their prosperity.

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.

- A. Though industriously seeking prosperity by using various dayparts, Israel would fail.
- B. The end result of their agriculture would be a heap, but it would not bring happiness.
 - 1. A great harvest usually brings happy celebration (Ps 4:7; Acts 14:17; I Sam 25:36).
 - 2. But who cares about a heap of produce for enemies to eat and you to leave in grief?
 - 3. God had warned by Moses of this very thing happening for sin (Lev 26:16; etc.).

***** Assyria Judged Divinely by God – Verses 12-14 *****

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!

- A. This prophecy is separate from what went before – that of Ahaz and this of Hezekiah.
 - 1. The confederacy of Ephraim and Syria occurred in the reign of Ahaz the idolater.
 - 2. The overthrow of Samaria by Shalmaneser occurred in the 4-6 years of Hezekiah.
 - 3. The invasion by Sennacherib that took the fenced cities was in the 14th of Hezekiah.
- B. The expressions here are obviously a great army being mustered together of nations.
 - 1. This language has been used for great armies (Is 5:26; 8:7-8; 13:4-5; 18:3; Jer 51:27).
 - 2. It could be mustering of armies of Ephraim and Syria against Hezekiah and Judah.
 - 3. But due to the fourteenth verse here (Is 17:14), we rather assign it to Sennacherib.
 - 4. But due to the context here of the ruin of Syria and Ephraim, we assume Assyria.

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.

- A. God had through Isaiah already described the Assyrians as a great river (Isaiah 8:7-8).
- B. A great international force – think United Nations – God would rebuke and chase away.
 - 1. Did God issue a rebuke to Assyria that chased them away? He most certainly did.
 - 2. God's rebuke of Sennacherib is both extensive and repeated (Isaiah 10; 37; etc., etc.)
 - 3. He chose terminology of the virgin daughter of Zion mocking this eligible bachelor!
 - 4. Did they flee far off? How far is it from Jerusalem to Nineveh? About 700 miles!
 - 5. They would flee with an invisible force driving them away ... the angel of the LORD.
 - 6. The Virgin Daughter of Zion (slides) ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/pdf/ virgin-daughter-of-zion.pdf>.

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.

- A. Hezekiah, before the morning after, was greatly troubled by Sennacherib's vile letter.
- B. In the morning they were all dead corpses. Sometime during the night the army died.
- C. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us. A great axiom.
- D. The timing and warning of this prophecy – Sennacherib – leads into the next chapter.

Lessons to be Learned from this Chapter

1. God will defend His people and those that love Him by sacrificing others in their place.
2. God can take away your glory and strength and associations that appear quite invincible.
3. He can reduce you until you are immaterial by any measure – total vanity and worthless.
4. Affliction is to bring about repentance, so to avoid affliction repent now before too late.
5. Look to God; respect Him; be mindful of Him; minding earthly things is belly worship.
6. Look not to yourself or respect the work of your hands; it is a damning, inferior choice.
7. Do not forget God or slight your unspeakable salvation for the soap bubbles of this life.
8. Creativity and diligence will not work to your satisfaction if you allow any compromise.
9. No matter how great the combined power of men, God's rebuke chases them like weeds.
10. God can change fortunes and health or any other aspect of a man in one night or faster.
11. If you are a citizen of Zion, actively so, like Hezekiah in Judah, God will avenge you.