

A Trek Through Isaiah 15 - 17:1 - 18:7

Bruce Pike

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Oracle of Damascus: God's People in the World 17:1 – 18:7

	One-world Government	Davidic Monarchy	Collective Security and Self-sufficiency	The People of God	Triumphant End
1	13:1 – 14:27 Oracle of Babylon	14:28-32 Oracle of Philistia	15:1 - 16:13 Oracle of Moab	17:1 – 18:7 Oracle of Damascus	19:1 – 20:6 Oracle of Egypt

- Fourth oracle in the first series
- Q: Where is true security. A: The people of God, in the world, now chasing idols, one day will be holy to Yahweh.
- Here speaking of the northern kingdom.
- To meet the Assyrian threat Pekah king of Israel allied with Aram.
- Isaiah calls this the oracle of Damascus since Israel was submerged under more powerful Aram.
- Even though they had the promises of God they looked to alliances for security.
- They reversed the intended order: they sought security from the Gentiles rather than opening the way for them to true security in Yahweh.
- Their experience teaches that to go to the world for salvation means being caught up in the world's destruction.

Structure

- Specific situation: Israel and Aram 17:1-11
- Big picture: God's people in history 17:12 - 18:7
 - Principles 17:12-14
 - An example: alliance with Egypt 18:1-7

Specific situation: Israel & Aram 17:1-11

- Israel's alliance with Aram, and its result

Two Nations: Aram and Ephraim 17:1-3

Isaiah 17:1–3 (LSB)

1The oracle concerning Damascus. "Behold, Damascus is about to be removed from being a city And will become a fallen ruin.

2"The cities of Aroer are forsaken; They will be for flocks, and they will lie down in them; And there will be no one to cause them to tremble.

3"And the fortified city will cease from Ephraim, And sovereignty from Damascus And the remnant of Aram; They will be like the glory of the sons of Israel," Declares Yahweh of hosts.

- V1 Damascus. Capital of Aram (northeast of Israel). First since Aram was preeminent in the alliance.
- V2 Aroer. Only known is in Gad. Isaiah looks back and forth across both allies.
- flocks, they will lie down. Since uninhabited.
- V3 the fortified city will cease from Ephraim. Israel would lose the ability to defend herself.
- V3 sovereignty from Damascus. Aram would no longer be a nation.
- V3 Remnant...glory.
 - Two possible interpretations
 - Isaiah may be speaking ironically: both will be devastated. "glory" refers to what Ephraim might have been.
 - Isaiah may be speaking of a future hope: Both Israel and Syria will have a remnant who will look to Yahweh. Looking forward to 18:7 the Gentile hope

Destruction for Israel 17:4-6

Isaiah 17:4–6 (LSB)

4 Now it will be in that day, that the glory of Jacob will wane, And the fatness of his flesh will become lean.

5 And it will be even like the reaper gathering the standing grain, As his arm harvests the ears of grain, Or it will be like one gleaning ears of grain In the valley of Rephaim.

6 Yet gleanings will remain in it like the shaking of an olive tree, Two or three olives on the topmost branch, Four or five on the twigs of a fruitful tree, Declares Yahweh, the God of Israel.

- V4 Jacob. Ten northern tribes.
- V4 glory...will wane. Proud but now humbled.
- Three metaphors
 - V4 the fat of his flesh will grow lean.
 - Metaphor of wasting sickness
 - Was fat and healthy, now wasted away.
 - V5 reaper gathers ...one gleanings.
 - Metaphor of harvesting grain
 - Was a field of ripe grain, now only a few gleanings left.
 - V6 when an olive tree is beaten
 - Metaphor of harvesting olives
 - Mats were spread on the ground under the tree.
 - Men beat the branches of the tree to make the fruit fall.
 - Was a tree full of ripe fruit, now only a few olives left on the branches.
- The picture
 - A people chosen by God.
 - Departed into disobedience and apostasy.
 - The day of the Lord: pride humbled, sinners destroyed.
 - A believing remnant preserved
- V6 declares Yahweh, the God of Israel
 - Guarantee.

The holy remnant 17:7-8

Isaiah 17:7–8 (LSB)

7In that day man will have regard for his Maker And his eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel.

8He will not have regard for the altars, the work of his hands, Nor will he look to that which his fingers have made, Even the Asherim and incense stands.

- Man.
 - Mankind. View widens to all nations
 - Describing the remnant.
- will have regard for his Maker
 - Acknowledge Him as God
- nor will he look to that which his fingers have made
 - Look: A fixed gaze. Dependence.
 - No longer depending on idols

A silent witness 17:9

Isaiah 17:9 (LSB)

9In that day their strong cities will be like forsaken places in the forest, Or like branches which they forsook before the sons of Israel; And the land will be a desolation.

- strong cities. Of both Aram and Ephraim.
- Forsaken places. Ruins of pre-Israel civilization abandoned during the conquest of Canaan by Joshua.
- Note the irony
 - Around them are the ruins of fortresses abandoned during the conquest of Canaan by Joshua.
 - When Israel first came to Canaan, the Canaanites depended on their strong cities to protect them from the invaders. But their fortifications were of no use against Yahweh.
 - Josh 3 the Jordan River was cut off so that Israel could cross on dry ground.
 - Josh 6 the walls of Jericho fell down, leaving the city open for conquest.
 - Josh 10 southern Canaan conquered
 - Josh 11 northern Canaan conquered
 - Josh 12 lists 31 kings defeated by Israel
 - But Israel forgot their God
 - Jdg 2:10 And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know Yahweh or the work that he had done for Israel.
 - Now Ephraim will not trust Yahweh. They are depending on the same kind of fortifications that their fathers had seen Yahweh destroy.

The reason why 17:10-11

Isaiah 17:10–11 (LSB)

10For you have forgotten the God of your salvation And have not remembered the rock of your strong defense. Therefore you plant delightful plants And set them with vine branches of a strange god.

11In the day that you plant it you carefully fence it in, And in the morning you cause your seed to flourish; But the harvest will be a heap In a day of sickliness and incurable pain.

- Note the reasoned argument of the prophet: root cause, present action, outcome
- V10a Root cause:
 - You have forgotten ...not remembered.
 - The failure of the people
 - In their own history they had seen the truth.
 - They chose to forget: to turn away to falsehood and futility.
 - True faith is keeping hold of truths once delivered.
 - The faithfulness of God
 - God of your salvation.
 - Past and continuing: chosen in Abraham, brought out of Egypt, settled in the promised land, going to glory.
 - Better than man-made fortresses.
 - Rock of your strong defense
 - Both security and provision.
 - As Ex 17 water from the rock.
- V11 Present action
 - Metaphor of a garden.
 - Chosen plants
 - Delightful.
 - In appearance.
 - As Gen 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.
 - Of a strange god. Not of their God.
 - Cultivation
 - Plant...carefully fence in... cause to flourish.
 - All from man's efforts.
 - Outcome
 - Will. A certainty.
 - Harvest will be a heap.
 - A harvest is obtained, but it is futile: no benefit.
 - a day of sickliness and incurable pain
 - Sudden, very uncomfortable, no relief.
 - Who will do this? Yahweh. He is jealous of them; will not let them flourish without Him.

Big picture: God's people in history 17:12 - 18:7

Principles 17:12-14

Isaiah 17:12-14 (LSB)

12Alas, the uproar of many peoples Who roar like the roaring of the seas, And the rumbling of nations Who rumble on like the rumbling of mighty waters!

13The nations rumble on like the rumbling of many waters, But He will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, And be pursued like chaff in the mountains before the wind, Or like whirling dust before a whirlwind.

14At evening time, behold, there is terror! Before morning they are no more. Such will be the portion of those who pillage us And the lot of those who plunder us.

- Isaiah steps back to look at God's people in history.
- V12-13 The nations gather
 - the uproar of many peoples Who roar like the roaring of the seas
 - The unbelieving nations gather
 - Metaphor of a stormy sea: great and mighty, thundering and roaring.
 - But He will rebuke them.
 - Yahweh, the Lord of history
 - they will flee
 - The mighty army flees far away
 - Now the metaphors are chaff in the wind and whirling dust.
- V14 The nations are defeated
 - Speaking of the coming defeat of Assyria:
 - In the evening: terror at the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem
 - Before morning: the army destroyed.
 - Assurance of security:
 - Such will be the portion...
- Principles
 - Yahweh is the Lord of history
 - He protects His people

Example: alliance with Egypt 18:1-7

- Isaiah applies the historical principles of 17:12-14 to a scenario: Egyptian envoys sent to Jerusalem to propose an alliance against Assyria.

Historical context 18:1-2a

Isaiah 18:1-2 (LSB)

1Alas, O land of whirring wings Which lies beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,

2Which sends envoys by the sea, Even in papyrus vessels on the surface of the waters.

- V1 land of whirring wings Which lies beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.
 - Ethiopia.
 - Refers to Egypt and nations south: Cush, Ethiopia
 - Subject to Egypt early in its history.
 - Gained independence around 1000 BC.
 - By Isaiah's time had conquered most of Egypt.
 - whirring wings
 - Either flying insects or sailing ships on the river
 - Rivers
 - The Nile and its tributaries.
- V2 Envoys by the sea
 - Egypt sought to create an anti-Assyrian alliance among the Palestinian states.

Reply to the envoys 18:2b

Isaiah 18:2 (LSB)

2...Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, To a people feared far and wide, A powerful and oppressive nation Whose land the rivers divide.

- Go, swift messengers. Here is how Isaiah would respond to the Egyptian envoys: by making them Yahweh's messengers.
- To a nation...whose land the rivers divide. Egypt/Cush/Ethiopia. Sending them back to where they came from.

Call to the world 18:3

Isaiah 18:3 (LSB)

3All you inhabitants of the world and dwellers on earth, As soon as a standard is raised on the mountains, you will see it, And as soon as the trumpet is blown, you will hear it.

- All you inhabitants of the world.
 - The message is for all nations
- As soon as. The message is certain.
- a standard is raised on the mountains...the trumpet is blown. Visible and audible to all.
- You will see it! You will hear it! Urgent call to pay attention.

The message 18:4-7

Isaiah 18:4–7 (LSB)

4For thus Yahweh has told me, “I will look from My dwelling place quietly Like dazzling heat in the sunshine, Like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.”

5For before the harvest, as soon as the bud blossoms And the flower becomes a ripening grape, Then He will cut off the sprigs with pruning knives And remove and cut away the spreading branches.

6They will be left together for mountain birds of prey, And for the beasts of the earth; And the birds of prey will spend the summer feeding on them, And all the beasts of the earth will spend harvest time on them.

7At that time a gift of homage will be brought to Yahweh of hosts From a people tall and smooth, Even from a people feared far and wide, A powerful and oppressive nation, Whose land the rivers divide— To the place of the name of Yahweh of hosts, even Mount Zion.

- V4 The Lord of history
 - Yahweh oversees history quietly and calmly.
 - He is everywhere, as the heat and the dew.
- V5-6 The outcome for the nations
 - Metaphor of the vineyard.
 - The vines blossom, the grapes form and ripen. Appears to be a bumper crop.
 - But just before the harvest, Yahweh intervenes. He cuts off all the branches.
 - The cut branches with their fruit are left in a pile for the birds and beasts to feed on.
 - Depicts what will happen to the nations who attack God’s people
 - Birds...beasts. Feeding on the dead of a great battle.
 - Near-term fulfillment in the defeat of Assyria.
 - Eventual fulfillment in the end times.
- V7 The Gentile remnant
 - A gift of homage. Genuine worship.
 - From a people. Gentiles. The same people who disregarded Him before.
 - To the place of the name of Yahweh of hosts, even Mount Zion.
 - Jerusalem, the place where Yahweh is.
 - Then His name will be truly known to the Gentiles.

Application

- Look at 17:10-11

10 For you have forgotten the God of your salvation And have not remembered the rock of your strong defense. Therefore you plant delightful plants And set them with vine branches of a strange god.

11 In the day that you plant it you carefully fence it in, And in the morning you cause your seed to flourish; But the harvest will be a heap In a day of sickness and incurable pain.

- The people forgot Yahweh, planted delightful plants of a strange god. Protected and cared for them them, so that they flourished. The harvest was a worthless heap, with sickness and incurable pain
- What are some “delightful plants” planted, protected, cared for that we have seen?
What was the outcome?
 - Extramarital affairs brought down church leaders, broke up marriages, caused people to leave the church.
 - Putting work first caused separation/divorce, prevented people from coming to church

References

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