

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 17
THE BOOK OF ISAIAH
CHAPTER 17**

Theme: “Alliances made by God’s people with Gentiles will always end in disaster!”

THEME VERSE

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

INTRODUCTION

Damascus and Israel made an alliance against their enemies. Both nations believed that they would be stronger than if they were alone. Damascus was the capital of Syria, Syria located to the north of Israel. Israel at this time was a divided kingdom made of ten tribes (less the tribes of Judah and Benjamin). For Gentile nations like Syria to make alliances with their neighbours was one thing but it was a sin for Israel, God’s nation. Gentile nations do not have the truth of God given to them. They were not expected to be spiritual nations and witnesses to a world in spiritual darkness. Nor could they even if they had wanted to. They can be politically strong and economically wealthy and God would not fault them.

These nations were measured with a different yardstick.

However, Israel was different. Her alliance with Syria was a reflection of her idolatrous nature. Israel was not to trust in the methods of man. She was not to employ anthropocentric methods for her national stability and prosperity. These must come from her faith and trust in the LORD who founded and gave to her, her name Israel (prince of God). To turn to man for protection and strength was to turn away from God. Her faults and sinful habits reflect on God’s character and nature. If Israel is idolatrous then God will be seen to be made of wood, stone gold or silver, the creations of man’s hands. When Israel leans on Gentile nations for strength then the LORD is seen as weak!

The alliance of Israel with Syria was a grievous sin. Both nations will be punished for their sins. Israel has done Syria a great injustice by making an alliance with her instead of being a godly witness to her. Such alliances gave credence to Syria’s many gods as if they are merely the same as the God of Israel who is the one living and true God, beside Him there is none other! This was the picture that Israel was to portray but she failed miserably and will have to be punished severely by the LORD.

OUTLINE

1. The Burden of Damascus (vv.1-5);
2. A Remnant is Preserved (vv.6-11);
3. Woe to the Multitudes (vv. 12-14);

COMMENTARY

The Burden of Damascus

Damascus, being the capital city, represents the whole of Syria. The LORD's attention turns to Israel's northern neighbour. The word "burden" means "doom." It is not a tribute or something good especially when it is the LORD who evaluates a Gentile nation. This judgement demonstrates the sovereignty of God over ALL Gentile nations. They will not be judged from Holy Scriptures as they do not have the Word of God but they will be judged simply because they have sinned. The basis for this is God's general revelation as revealed in Romans 1. The name used by God is the LORD of hosts (v.3), and the LORD God of Israel (v.6). It is the LORD who makes a covenant with His people Israel that will judge Syria!

The judgement of God was absolute and definitive. He declared that Damascus "is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap." The phrase "to take away" means "to pluck away." It is like pulling out the weed with all its roots. It is a permanent removal with no opportunity for growing again. The place where the city was located will become a ruinous heap. A ruinous heap refers to something fallen onto the ground and left to die. No life will come forth from the ground after the LORD is through with Damascus.

This happened soon after when the King of Assyria, Tiglathpileser ravaged and destroyed Damascus. The King of Judah, Ahaz, made an alliance with Syria's northern

neighbour, Assyria and paid him to attack Syria who made an alliance with Israel against Judah. (2 Kings 16:7-9) "So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I *am* thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent *it for* a present to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried *the people of it* captive to Kir, and slew Rezin." Such political intrigues were a shame to both Israel and Judah who were at war with one another! They both asked for help from Gentile nations to fight against one another!

The cites of Ar'o-er were mentioned here as being forsaken. Where is this place called Aroer? Albert Barnes's *Notes on the Bible* explains, "By "Aroer" here seems to be meant a tract or region of country pertaining to Damascus, in which were situated several cities. Grotius supposes that it was a tract of country in Syria which is called by Ptolemy "Aueira" - Αueira *Aueira*. Vitringa supposes that one part of Damascus is meant by this, as Damascus was divided by the river in the same manner that Babylon was. There were several cities of the name of "Aroer." One was on the river Arnon in the land of Moab. (Deuteronomy 2:36; 3:12; Joshua 12:3) Burckhardt found this city under the name of Aroer. There was

another city of this name further north, over against Rabbath-Ammon. (Joshua 13:25) There was a third city of this name in the tribe of Judah. (1 Samuel 30:28) Of the city of Araayr which Burckhardt visited, nothing is now remarkable but its entire desolation. Gesenius supposes ("Commentary in loc.") that the phrase 'the cities of Aroer' means the cities around about Aroer, and that were connected with it, similar to the phrase 'daughters of a city'. This city he supposes was near the river Arnon, within the limits of Moab, and that the prediction here was fulfilled by Tiglathpileser, when he carried away the inhabitants of Galilee, Gilead, and other places mentioned in 2 Kings 15:29. There can be no doubt that it was under the jurisdiction of Damascus." [From Swordsearcher 6.1]

The cities around Ar'o-er will be so devastated that grass will grow over them so that they shall become green pastures for flocks of sheep to graze! The place will be deserted so that even the timid and frightful sheep could lie down and no one will make them afraid! The very foundations of these cities will be covered by earth and all buildings thoroughly destroyed and green pastures would grow where they stood! It would appear as if these cities never existed!

Both nations, Ephraim (the strongest tribe to represent all of Israel) and Damascus (the capital city to represent all of Syria) would have the same ignoble end. The fortress - stronghold of Ephraim shall cease together with the kingdom of

Damascus and the remnant of Syria! The word for cease is the words for Sabbath which means "to take a rest!" This was declared by the LORD of hosts which emphasized the LORD's power and authority as the word "hosts" refers to "armies." Syria's end will be the same as Israel as she made an alliance with her. Syria will also receive the same punishment!

The glory of Jacob shall be made thin - feeble. She will have no glory left. The use of the old name Jacob instead of Israel is to highlight Israel's sins. Jacob means usurper which reminds Israel of the days when Jacob was not born again and still a sinner condemned. The fatness of Jacob shall wax lean — be emaciated. The picture of Israel's destruction is likened to a "harvestman gathereth the corn and reapeth the ears with his arm." This is a picture of total dominance by the Assyrians over the helplessness of Israel. The corn and the ears of the wheat are probably standing there helplessly as the strong arm of the man gathers at will however and whenever he likes.

This destruction is compared to one who was gathering ears in the valley of Reph'a-im (meaning giants) as the simile suggests. The place is called the valley of giants! Albert Barnes described the location of this valley as, "In passing from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, it lies on the left, and descends gradually to the southwest, until it contracts in that direction into a deeper and narrower valley, called Wady el-Werd, which unites further on with Wady Ahmed, and finds its way to

the Mediterranean. The plain extends nearly to Jerusalem, and is terminated by a slight rocky ridge forming the brow of the valley of Hinnom" (see Josephus, "Ant." vii. 4. 1; viii. 12. 4; also Robinson's "Bib. Researches," vol. i. pp. 323, 324)." [Bible Notes, Swordsearcher 6.1] This valley grew large and fruitful crops, according to John Gill's perspective. Perhaps it was because of this fruitfulness that it is called the valley of giants. The gatherers would gather at will in this large valley and do so very carefully that nothing be lost and wasted of the large and fruitful crops that the fertile land produced. They do a very thorough job in gathering. This will be the same manner in which the Assyrians would gather Israel, very thoroughly and completely where nothing would be left unscathed by her cruelty and devastation.

A Remnant is Preserved

Although Syria was to be punished like the Israelites she will not be preserved like Israel. Israel will be preserved by God with a remnant. Another agricultural picture is used to describe the remnant of Israel. When a person gleans grapes from his vineyard, some grapes would be left behind. Or like a man who is shaking an olive tree and two or three of the fruits would remain in the top of the uppermost bough or four or five in the outmost fruitful branches. This description of the remnant is very accurate. The reason is that God's plan of salvation through the nation of Israel is not complete yet. There are many prophecies of God to be fulfilled in Israel in the future such as the first

and second coming of Christ! When this generation of Israelites disobeyed the Word of God and refused the blessings that comes with obedience, then they will be punished by God for their sins. However, God's plan of salvation through His many prophetic promises will remain on track and they will all come to pass as God has prophesied. Not a single one of God's prophecies will be thwarted by the disobedience of sinful man as these prophecies depend only and entirely upon God's faithfulness for their fulfilment.

The use of the name "the LORD God of Israel" is significant here. The name the LORD (i.e. Jehovah) emphasizes the covenantal relationship. Israel does not deserve to be preserved with a remnant like the Syrians whom they have made an alliance with, however, the mercies of God via the covenantal relationship that He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the basis for the remnant. Israel was just as depraved as the Syrians. The LORD has plans for Israel as the nation that He designed for the salvation of mankind. This was the basis and not Israel's goodness. The use of the name God (i.e. Elohiym) emphasizes the power of God almighty. He has the right and the authority to do what He wants in judging disobedient Israel. However, He did not. Israel must not be arrogant but humble herself before the almighty God. He is not just anybody's God but Israel's God whom He has had a relationship with for centuries. It is based upon this same relationship that Israel is judged and found wanting and

punished, and also preserved with a remnant! The Name of God used here in the context of Israel's punishment and preservation is very significant!

When the remnant returns and is kept in Israel they will turn back to God her Maker. The Maker will be more with reference to the Maker of Israel rather than the Maker of heaven and earth. Their eyes shall respect the Holy One of Israel. This is a reference to the one living and true God. Conversely they will not look (i.e. "inspect or gaze") to the altars, the work of man's hands. The altars referred to here is not to the altar of burnt offering located in the Temple. Also the word for "altar" is in the plural and not the only altar of burnt offering placed outside the Temple, which is the only altar that the Israelites have access to. It also meant that Israel the northern kingdom of ten tribes will return to Jerusalem if they were to return to the LORD in proper worship. This is affirmed by the rest of verse 8 which describes that altars made by the hands and fingers of man. God called them groves and images! Idolatry will become a thing of the past when the remnant returns to the LORD. Such a return means that it must be on God's unchanging terms of holiness.

While the remnant turns back to the LORD, the LORD declares that in that day Ephraim's strong cities will be as a forsaken bough. These remnant will experience genuine repentance and turning to the LORD as they will not lean upon material prosperity as their basis for following the LORD. The strong cities will be a thing of the past.

The uppermost branch is left untouched probably because it was not reachable, representing the remnant of the children of Israel. This was a description of the remnant that was left behind whilst the cities were destroyed. There shall be desolation everywhere in the strong cities that Israel used to lean upon for confidence. They will now lean only on their LORD and not on the arm of their flesh!

The reason for this state of devastation was because Israel has forgotten the God of their salvation, and her origin, and how the LORD brought her out of Egypt and gave Israel a spiritual purpose and duty to the world in spiritual darkness. What a shame! Israel will not be left unpunished for her grievous failure and sin. The LORD blessed her with so much to succeed but she failed miserably with her idolatry and worldly alliances. Israel has not been mindful of the rock of her strength and source of existence — the LORD and His precious Word. Yet she has blatantly and despicably forgotten the LORD as if she gave birth to herself!

Therefore Israel shall plant pleasant plants and shall set (to sow) it with strange slips (a twig pruned). This is a figure to describe Israel where she shall live her life with much labour to make life luxurious but she shall be mixed with people from other nations. This describes the time of the Assyrian captivity. The Assyrians were fond of uprooting their enemies to other foreign cities that they had also captured. In this way, the inhabitants of the land would intermarry and lose

their identity. They would also begin syncretistic worship, soon lose their heritage and become loyal to the Assyrian kings. This was the origin of the Samaritans.

All the works of the hands of Israel will fail. No matter how hard and diligently they work. It will be to no avail. They make the plant to grow by their irrigation and in the morning make their seed to flourish by all sorts of protection and fertilisers but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow. Israel will fail miserably no how hard she tries as long as she does not return back to the LORD and follow His revealed way in Holy Scriptures.

Woe to the Multitudes

Woe is word that makes an ominous sound when uttered. The sound of the word is the meaning of it. The woe is upon the multitude of people. The identity of this multitude is deliberately left unknown. It could refer to the Assyrians or the Syrians! The point is that they will receive their just reward from the LORD for what they did to Israel. The multitude makes a noise like the sea which has a deep throaty sound, very ominous in its beckoning. It is loud and foreboding of something disastrous to come.

The deed of the multitude is that they marched very fast like a rushing of nations that devours anything that stands in its path. They make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters, moving with the destructive force of a tsunami! The rumbling noise of the rushing wave colliding with the shores with a thunderous bang aptly

describes the assault of God's enemies against God and His work. They will not succeed.

The nations (note plural) will rush like the rushing of many waters but God shall rebuke them. Man-power has the appearance of strength and other men are often awed by it. They seemed unstoppable and have the appearance of invincibility so much so that man described themselves as superpowers! This is utter foolishness. Puny man will never possess superpowers. They are nothing in the sight of God. The Bible here says that God would just simply rebuke them all. They are no match for God almighty. All God has to do is to open His mouth and His word alone can destroy all mankind and annihilate all of man's puny atomic missiles and power.

These nations shall flee afar and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like the rolling thing before the whirlwind. These are two vivid illustrations to describe the flight of these nations that dared to challenge God almighty. The word for 'flee; is to vanish away. To flee afar is to "vanish into the distance and never to be seen again!" The first picture is to be chased as the chaff of the mountains. Chaff is the husk of wheat and is very light and easily blown away on the plains. How much more in the mountains where the wind is very strong and blows from every direction! The chaff is driven at will in every direction according to the whims and fancies of the wind direction. The second illustration is to be chased like a rolling thing i.e. a dust cloud driven

by the whirlwind. A whirlwind is like a hurricane and has the force of a hurricane. Anything that stands in its path would be blown completely away never to be seen again! The nations are like these weightless nuisances in the chaff or dust cloud that are totally helpless and at the mercy of the powerful whirlwind.

Suddenly, the trouble will come in the evening and by morning it is gone. This is a perfect description of the destruction of the Assyrians when they attacked Judah. One moment they were boasting of their pomp and all powerful nation, that no other nation could stop their conquests. By the next morning, 185,000 of the elite Assyrian army would be killed overnight by the hand of God. This is described in 2 Kings 19:35-37. "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they *were* all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead." They have to flee immediately. The LORD assured Israel that the enemies of God will surely be punished. None will ever escape the LORD's judgement. It remains true today.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Joint ventures – are advantageous as one does not have to fend for the project alone. However, for the believer there is a danger as his principles of life and service are completely different from that of the non-believer. The believer wants to praise the LORD in all he does and so follow biblical principles very obediently as he knows his works are to praise God. But the non-believer has absolutely no desire to obey the Bible or indeed can he does not know God as his Lord and Saviour! The non-believer goes by the principle of self-interest first and always, whereas the believer is to praise the Lord Jesus Christ first and always!

Such joint ventures will never work. Hence the LORD warns the believer against such ventures by being separated from unbelievers in business ventures and marriage. When a believer enters into such a venture, not only will it not work, it is a sin on his part and blatant disobedience to God's Word. He has compromised his faith and will hurt himself and the partner he has made this covenant with. To enter into such a venture means to treat the non-believer as being on the same side as the believer in the spiritual sense. To depend on him for success in the venture is to say to him that his gods, or if he is an atheist who depends on self to succeed, is more powerful than Jesus Christ, or He is not powerful enough to help His own children, and he needs the help of other spiritual

beings! Such an instance led to the burden against Damascus.

The just punishment of God – God's people must remember that they have a spiritual purpose in all they do. Their very existence on earth has a different and eternal consequence. They can impact sinners for Christ thus turning them from Hell to Heaven. Israel's spiritual purpose was not completed. God has prophesied in Israel many truths that remain to be fulfilled. Until they are fulfilled according to His sovereign will, Israel will never be annihilated by anyone not even Satan. For anyone to be able to do that then he has to be greater and more powerful than God almighty! There is no one who is more powerful than God almighty!

However, the punishment on a Gentile nation which has no further spiritual significance once their purpose in God's plan is completed will soon cease to exist on the face of the earth! Syria and all Gentiles nations belong to this category. In today's context the same applies. The difference though is that the visible manifestation of God's grace and mercies no longer lies with the nation of Israel but with the local churches all over the world. It is not all local churches that the evil one has infiltrated to confuse and destroy so that they cease to function as godly witnesses but deceivers. However as long as Christ has not returned in glory there will remain local churches functioning in this regard the way Israel was supposed to do in OT times.

All nations will cease to exist once their purpose is fulfilled without exception. This is also true of the local church witness which will come to an end before the Great Tribulation begins, as the rapture would have taken place to bring all true believers into heaven! What remains would be the harlot church that the Bible speaks of in Revelation 17.

The death of the powers of nations

The powers of man are given by men. Man has no real power for as long as he dies his powers are temporary. He does not need to die actually for as he grows old and weak he relinquishes his power. Another younger person takes over and resumes to rule with the same power that his predecessor has just relinquished. The power is not inherent but passed on from man to man. Once the nation or organisation dies, the power dies too. Such powers are like the dew that appears in the morning and by noon time has disappeared. It appears again the next morning and then disappears again.

For man to possess real power he has to live forever, which he cannot without Christ! He dies in his sin and ends in Hell where he will be punished forever! God alone lives for eternity in heaven. He alone possesses real power for His power is eternal as He is eternal. His power is also unchanging as He is immutable. His power is all powerful because He is all powerful. His children are given certain amount of power by Him in the sense that they will judge angels and as heirs and co-heirs with Christ. This is the power that

believers are given in eternity. The power that the believer enjoys is in the power of the Word of God that the Holy Spirit will use to transform lives when the believer faithfully expounds and preaches it. This is the spiritual power that saves souls and helps believers mature to become more like Christ. The world does not have any real power nor can it give any real power! AMEN.

2. Will God turn the whole world into a ruinous heap? If so then how ought the believers to view this world they live in before they die? Please provide biblical support for your answer.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 17:1-5;

TUESDAY: Isaiah 17:6-14;

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 17:1-14;

THURSDAY: Isaiah 17:1-14;

FRIDAY: Isaiah 17:1-14.

3. Why should the believer not enter into business partnerships and marriage partnerships with non-believers? Please explain your answer.

Discussion Questions

1. Will God turn Singapore into a ruinous heap one day? What reason would you give for your answer?

4. What are the dangers of entering into the above-mentioned partnerships? Please explain your answer.

only in times of adversity? Please explain.

5. Why does God punish the believer and the non-believer differently, or does He? Please explain.

8. How does the practice of the doctrine of biblical separation a demonstration of love to non-believers? Please explain your answers.

6. Is the luxurious lifestyle an enemy to godly living? Please explain your answer.

9. Are you afraid of the powers of sinful men? Should Christians be afraid? Please explain.

7. Can believers turn to God in times of plenty (materially speaking) or

10. When a government threatens believers with incarceration if they believe in Christ would you cringe and give up the faith? Give reasons for your answer.

11. What kind of man's power are you most afraid of in your life today? How do you comfort yourself so that the powers that be do not cripple you from obeying God?

12. Why do people long to have power over other men? Do you long to have power over other men? Please give reasons for your answer.

13. What lessons can you learn from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
