



Isaiah 17

A Prophecy about Damascus ~ The Prooar of the Nations

Another chapter of Isaiah, another city destroyed because of it's unfaithfulness to God! It's the same story all over again: One of the nations that surround God's people, in this case Damascus, is rebuked because of the pride and arrogance they walk in towards Him. Maybe it all comes down to the simple fact that the Israelites had only one God and they had many. From the perspective of strength in numbers and battle resources, they likely did feel superior.

The God of Israel never really fights fair anyway. He never lacks resources, never fears evil, never worries, loses hope, and exceeds people's expectations at every turn. He is Yahweh, the one true God, the Great I Am, the Creator of Heaven and earth, and there is no one like Him!

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 17:1 An oracle concerning Damascus. Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city and will become a heap of ruins. ² The cities of Aroer are deserted; they will be for flocks, which will lie down, and none will make them afraid. ³ The fortress will disappear from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus; and the remnant of Syria will be like the glory of the children of Israel, declares the LORD of hosts.</p> <p>⁴ And in that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low, and the fat of his flesh will grow lean. ⁵ And it shall be as when the reaper gathers standing grain and his arm harvests the ears, and as when one gleans the ears of grain in the Valley of Rephaim. ⁶ Gleanings will be left in it, as when an olive tree is beaten—two or three berries in the top of the highest bough, four or five on the branches of a fruit tree, declares the LORD God of Israel.</p>	<p>a 17:2 Or “the towns of Aroer.” Aroer means “ruins.”</p> <p>b 17:3 Or “Ephraim.”</p> <p>c 17:3 Or “Aram.”</p> <p>d 17:5 Or “mighty men (Heb. rephaim).” Jesus’ life within us will soon reap a harvest of glory (James 3:18). Armloads (sons and daughters of power) of grain (spiritual harvest) will be seen in coming days through mighty men and women.</p> <p>e 17:6 Olives were harvested by shaking (Heb. “beating”) the tree. See Heb. 12:26.</p> <p>f 17:6 The Torah required farmers to leave some fruit behind for the poor and the stranger to glean. See Lev. 19:9–10. “Two or three” are sufficient for any need when they gather in agreement with Jesus. See Matt. 18:19–20. The uppermost branches point us to our heavenly life in the heavenly realm, “our glorious resurrection life” (Col. 3:1–5).</p> <p>g 17:6 Or “on her boughs, the many-branched one.” This points to the fruitful branches of Christ as he branches out through us and brings his fruit to the earth through yielded ones. See John 15:1–8. God appoints some to the “four or five” grace ministries appointed to “nurture and prepare all the holy believers” (Eph. 4:11–12).</p>	<p>Isaiah 17:1 This is God’s message for Damascus: “Behold, Damascus is gone! It is no longer a city, only a heap of rubble. ² Her ruins a will be abandoned—left for flocks to lie down in with nothing to fear. ³ Damascus will lose the power of its fortress, and the strongholds of the northern kingdom b will disappear. The remnant of Syria c will be like Israel—stripped of its glory,” says the Lord Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies.</p> <p>⁴ “On that day, the beautiful splendor of Jacob’s northern tribes will be brought low, and they will become like skin and bones.” ⁵ It will be as when a farmer harvests the standing grain and gathers armloads of grain, and as one gathers ears of grain in the Valley of Giants. d ⁶ Yet some gleanings will remain, as when an olive tree is shaken, e leaving two or three olives in the highest branches f and four or five on its fruitful branches,” g declares Lord Yahweh, the God of Israel.</p>

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Translation (TPT)	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>⁷ In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel. ⁸ He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, and he will not look on what his own fingers have made, either the Asherim or the altars of incense. ⁹ In that day their strong cities will be like the deserted places of the wooded heights and the hilltops, which they deserted because of the children of Israel, and there will be desolation.</p> <p>¹⁰ For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge; therefore, though you plant pleasant plants and sow the vine-branch of a stranger, ¹¹ though you make them grow on the day that you plant them, and make them blossom in the morning that you sow, yet the harvest will flee away in a day of grief and incurable pain.</p> <p>¹² Ah, the thunder of many peoples; they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations; they roar like the roaring of mighty waters! ¹³ The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm. ¹⁴ At evening time, behold, terror! Before morning, they are no more! This is the portion of those who loot us, and the lot of those who plunder us.</p>	<p>h 17:7 Or “At that time, the Adam (James 1:22–25) will look toward the Creator.”</p> <p>i 17:8 See Acts 17:18–34.</p> <p>j 17:8 Or “poles” or “goddesses (Heb. asherim).” Asherim (plural) have a specific pagan context of the Canaanite religions stretching back into Israel’s history. See Ex. 34:13–14.</p> <p>k 17:10 See Deut. 32:15.</p> <p>l 17:12 That is, the armies of Assyria. See Ps. 2:1–3.</p> <p>m 17:14 See John 10:10.</p>	<p>⁷ In that day, people will gaze toward their Creator, h and their eyes will look in faith toward the Holy One of Israel ⁸ They will not be infatuated with the religious altars their own hands crafted, nor by what their own fingers have made, i nor with their sacred groves j or altars of incense. ⁹ On that day their bustling cities will become deserted like those conquered by the Israelites—abandoned to thickets and undergrowth, it will all become desolate.</p> <p>¹⁰ For you have ignored and forgotten the God who saves you and have not remembered your Rock of Safety. k So what do you do? You cultivate your beautiful gardens and plant imported vines. ¹¹ Even if on the day you plant them they begin to grow, and even if immediately you see them bud, your harvest will wither away in a day of grief and agony.</p> <p>¹² Ah, the thunder of many people joining together! l They roar like the roar of the sea. Woe to the uproar of the many nations! They thunder like the crashing of ocean waves. ¹³ The nations are roaring like the roar of a massive waterfall, but when God rebukes them they disperse like chaff on the mountains, like a tumbleweed whirling in the wind. ¹⁴ In the evening—behold, sudden terror! Before the morning comes, they vanish! Such is the fate of those who plunder and try to rob us. m</p>

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY ~ John A. Martin

- DAMASCUS (17:1-11)

- **17:1-3.** The oracle (cf. comments on 13:1) in 17:1-11 was directed against Damascus, the capital city of Aram. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had allied with Aram (7:2) against the Assyrian threat. Here (17:1-11) Isaiah was again noting that Aram and Israel would be defeated by the Assyrians (cf. 8:4).

Damascus would become a heap of ruins, no longer a city. Since Aroer was a city in Moab, the words the cities of Aroer are difficult to understand. Some Septuagint (Greek) manuscripts read that Damascus and her cities will be “abandoned forever.” With the cities around Damascus deserted, animals will make the ruins their home (17:2). Both Ephraim, representing Israel, and Damascus, representing Aram (cf. 7:8), would be defeated (17:3). Assyria defeated Aram in 732 and Israel in 722.

- **17:4-6.** This is the first of three sections beginning with the phrase in that day. The others are verses 7-8 and verses 9-11. This refers to the time of God’s wrath on His enemies followed by His blessings showered on His people. In some passages, it has eschatological implications (referring to the Tribulation and the Millennium), but in others it refers only to the current situation. In verses 4, 7, 9 the phrase “in that day” refers to the situation mentioned repeatedly throughout the first portion of Isaiah—the invasion of Aram and Israel by the Assyrian army. Because of that invasion Israel would face difficulties, compared

to the fat of one's body wasting away (v. 4), and to the barren appearance of a field (v. 5) and an olive tree (v. 6) after harvest. The Valley of Rephaim (cf. Josh. 15:8; 18:16) was a fertile area west of Jerusalem where David had twice defeated the Philistines (2 Sam. 5:18-20, 22-25). As a few olives are left on an olive tree's higher branches, so a few people would be left, but most of them would be slaughtered.

- **17:7-8.** When Israel would be invaded by the Assyrians, God's people would look to their Maker to see the Holy One of Israel (cf. comments on 1:4). When faced with the terror and distress of warfare they would realize the inadequacy of worshiping idols. The altars were those set up to idolatrous gods, not to the true God. The Asherah poles were wooden symbols of Asherah, Canaanite fertility goddess and consort of Baal. In the Northern Kingdom of Israel, widely influenced by Baalism, were many Asherah-worshippers. But when under Assyrian attack, Israel would realize that only the Lord could deliver them.
- **17:9-11.** As a result of the judgment in that day (see comments on v. 4) Damascus and her strong cities would be [Vol. 1, p. 1065] abandoned and thickets and underbrush would grow. Because of her unfaithfulness to the true God and her having forgotten Him, her efforts at planting vines and getting a harvest (as if she were secure, in a time of peace) would be fruitless. The plants would be diseased and the people would be in pain.

- **THE LAND OF WHIRRING WINGS** (17:12-18:7)

- **17:12-14.** Many interpreters place verses 12-14 with the previous section. However, the fact that "Oh" is the same Hebrew word translated "woe" in 18:1 may indicate that 17:12-14 goes with chapter 18.

The raging ... nations (17:12; cf. Ps. 2:1) are said to be like the roar of surging waters. These peoples were the Assyrians, whom God was using to judge His people. Apparently the "nations" (pl.) means the particular nation which was the dominant power in its day, namely, Assyria. When God would punish (rebuke) them (the Assyrians), they would become like chaff (cf. Isa. 29:5), the light and useless part of grain which, when winnowed, blows away. How appropriate that though Assyria brought terror in the evening, the enemy would be gone before morning, for such was the case with the Assyrian army (37:36-37). Though the Assyrian soldiers had plundered many cities of Judah, 185,000 soldiers were slaughtered overnight.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was it about Damascus, in particular, that got under God's skin? Does God get "offended" at the behavior of people? What was the "line" they seemingly crossed with God that caused Him to choose to destroy them?
2. What might have been the line that was crossed by the Northern tribes of Israel that caused the Lord to allow the Assyrian army to defeat them? What could they have done to avoid that defeat?
3. As far as modern-day believers, is there a point at which God will move against us because of our actions? Where does God draw the line with us?

4. When it comes to your personal choices, are you aware of a personal “line” you simply cannot afford to cross? Many people think that God’s grace somehow helps them “deal” with their sin. How might they be thinking that works? What is the deception in their thinking?

5. What is the difference between sin, transgressions, and inequity? How might those differences effect they way we minister to people?