

Topic/Subject: ***In that Day all of Damascus will be Desolate***

Scripture: **Isaiah 17: 1-14**

Facilitator: Deacon Keven Wright

I. Biblical Focus/Introduction.

By its title, this prophecy should relate only to Damascus, but it is full of concern for Samaria and the Israelites who joined the Syrians to fight against Judah. It was delivered probably soon after the prophecies of the seventh and eighth chapters, at the beginning of Ahaz's reign, and fulfilled by Tiglath-Pileser's invasion of Damascus. The results of his invasion where the people were carried off into captivity to Kir (Kings 16:9), overrunning a significant portion of Israel and carrying many Israelites to Assyria.

II. The Lesson: In that Day, All of Damascus will be Desolate

1. vv. 1- 3.

Today's text is a treasure trove of historical context and similes typical in prophetic writing during this period. The first six verses, which focus on Damascus, are believed to be part of the Syro-Ephramite crisis (735 -732), a time when Syria (with its capital in Damascus) and Israel or Ephraim (with its capital in Samaria) formed an alliance to attack Judah. This oracle, comprising two brief prophecies about Damascus and Israel, is thought to have been spoken by Isaiah sometime before the Assyrian army enslaved Damascus in 732 BC. The imagery of deserted ruins, where animals can rest undisturbed, is reminiscent of a previous chapter but is shorter and more abrupt, emphasizing the suddenness and urgency of the message and its immediate relevance.

The fortress (verse 3) likely refers to the Syrian capital, Damascus, the instigator of the ill-fated Syro-Ephraimite plan (7:5). The prophecy foretells a common fate for what remains of Syria (the remnant) and Israel (the glory). It's worth noting that the word 'remnant' (in Hebrew shear, as in Shearjashub) is used in a positive

context here, indicating the surviving portion of the nation. Similarly, 'glory' refers to the esteemed or prosperous part of the nation. However, both will be brought low, emphasizing the impending judgment.

Damascus was the most extensive and flagrant of all idolaters. In Damascus, there were three hundred and sixty-five streets; on each street, there was an idol. Each idol had its peculiar day of worship, so each idol was worshiped throughout the year.

2. vv. 4 - 6.

In the second half of this prophecy, fill out and explain the full importance of the first. Although entitled "An oracle concerning Damascus," the prophecy as a whole is more interested in Israel. After an introductory formula, "in that day," lining the two parts, "the glory of Jacob" takes up a phrase from the preceding verse, and the rest of the prophecy is consistent with the 'remnant' idea with which the previous section ended. In verse 4, we are probably meant to imagine Jacob, the prosperous old father of Joseph and his brothers, reduced to skin and bone, stripped of his fine clothing (glory), and clad with the garment of a pauper - a vivid metaphor for the downfall of Israel. (TV show Schitt's Creek)

The same similes in verses 5 and 6 are no less compelling. A shorter version of the same appears in chapter 24:13. A cornfield after the reaper has finished with it, an olive grove after all but a few olives on the top branches have been harvested - that is what Israel will look like when the Assyrians have finished with it.

1. The word gather means to destroy, as in Zeph: 1:1-2 (swept away) and Ezekiel 34:29 (consumed).
2. The beating of the olive trees has violent overtones: the same word is used when falling trees in chapter 10:34.
3. The Valley of Rephaim was the scene of one of David's victories (II Samuel 5:17-25) a few miles south of Jerusalem, but it could be taken to mean "Valley of the Dead."

The last word of the prophecy points remorseful at Ephraim and the house of Joseph, another name for the Northern Kingdom. Joseph is a fruitful bough. Such is

the word of judgment from the Lord God of Israel. Damascus was addressed by the "Lord of Hosts."

3. vv. 7-8.

"In that day" introduces an additional prophecy in the text, unlike the preceding ones, reflecting a somewhat different situation. The attack on idolatry is more typical in the later chapters of Isaiah, where the leap of faith from polytheism (worship of multiple gods) to monotheism (worship of one god) involves denial of the very existence of gods other than God. Where "the Holy One of Israel" is identified as the maker of all things, then idols and "the work of men's hands are nothing."

According to Jewish law, traceable back to Josiah (late 7th century), no altar was permitted apart from the one outside the door of the Temple of Solomon at Jerusalem. This law also applied to the alters at Bethel, Samaria, Gilgal, and the other ancient sanctuaries in the Northern Kingdoms, criticized in this verse. Asherim (Asherah poles) were trees or wooden objects set up at many sacred sites in ancient Israel, often alongside a standing stone or pillar (Judges 6:25-32). In the Canaanite religion, the wooden object, sometimes carved, stood for the male god Baal, and the wooden object, called by her name, for Sherah, the mother goddess, consort of EL, father of gods.

Little is known about these gods, but we can gather this from Habakkuk 2:19: Woe (judgment is coming) to him who says to the wooden image, "Awake!" and to the speechless stone, "Arise!" And that is your teacher? Look, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and no breath is inside it.

The Holy One of Israel created all things; therefore, worship him; anything other than worshiping him is blasphemous and absurd. As the Moabites turned to Jerusalem for help in their time of need (Isiah 16:1), "in that day," the people of Ephraim will turn to the Holy One of Israel, and the people of God will again be one.

4. vv. 9 - 11.

However, verses 9-11 take that hope away. Their strong cities will be deserted, and their land will be devastated because they forgot the God of Israel. Verses 1 -6 raise

the hopes, and verses 9-11 dash them, making the "day of grief and incurable pain" even more bitter. The Hivites and Amorites were in the land of Canaan before the Israelites arrived (Joshua 9:1-2), and their ruined and abandoned cities, because of the arrival of the Israelites, provided a cautionary parallel. If you continue to worship idols like these people, that is what will happen to you, too.

Because they had forgotten God, turned away from him, and worshiped these other gods, God allowed his judgment to use Assyria as his tool to destroy Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel with its capital, Samaria. Yet, though Assyria is used as a tool of God's judgment, God turned his word against Assyria.

5. vv.12 - 14.

Verse 12 begins with a prophetic introduction, "Woe to the concerned mighty and fabulous nations Assyria, although it is not mentioned, but it is Assyria that God used to punish Israel. The passage exults the unique supremacy of Zion (17:14) and triumphantly alludes to the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 BC while it looks forward to its enemies joining Moab.

The connection to Assyria is unmistakable in the prophecy, but in verse 14, the picture of mighty water sweeping into Judah and swirling around the city of Jerusalem; however, the stilling of the tempest at the "rebuke" of God goes far beyond the authority of the sea (Psalm 104:5-9). He did the same at the Red Sea. The defeat of the Assyrians was only one manifestation of the power of the Creator of Heaven and Earth. This is a frequent theme, "Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as the dust on the scales."

Chaff is also a popular simile, applied to Assyria in a close parallel in Isaiah 29:5-8 and to Israel's enemies in general. You shall thresh the mountain, crush them, and make the hills like chaff." In Psalms and wisdom literature, the image is widened to include mankind in transitory as moths; "between morning and evening, they are destroyed. (Job 4:19-20) Israel's history has much to tell us about God's dealings with humanity, not just Israel and her ancient near-eastern neighbors, but we as believers today.

III. Summary of 2 Kings 18 & 2 Kings 19

God will wipe them out. In the evening, they will be there, but in the morning, they will not be there. Now, here is a hint at the destruction of the Assyrians. The Assyrians did come. They conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Moab, and Ashdod. They even conquered Ashdod and went down to Egypt and Ethiopia.

Nonetheless, they did not conquer Judah. Here is Judah; as the Assyrians arrived, Hezekiah was the king, and Isaiah was his counselor, saying, "Hey, don't worry about the Assyrians. They are not going to conquer us. Don't be scared. God is going to stand for us. You don't have to fight this battle. This is God's battle. He is going to stand up and fight for us."

Hezekiah was busy building the tunnel from the spring of Gihon over the pool of Siloam to bring water into the city so that they would have water when the Assyrians invaded and cut the city off. Isaiah encouraged the king to trust the Lord and that God would deliver them. The Assyrians brought their invading army against Jerusalem, and they were making all kinds of threats. Sennacherib wrote in a letter to Hezekiah, where is the God of the Samaritans? Where is the God of the Syrians? Where is the God of the Egyptians? We wiped them all out. Don't let Hezekiah lead you into a false trust of your God, saying our God will deliver us. What God can deliver them from the Assyrians?"

Hezekiah took the letter and spread it out before the Lord; he wept. He said, "God, look what they are saying. Look at what they are doing." An angel of the Lord went through the Assyrians' camp, and one night, he wiped out 185,000 men. When the Israelites woke in the morning and looked over the wall to see their enemies, there was nothing but corpses on the ground.