

Look to Your Maker, the Holy One of Israel – *Isaiah 17-18*

Introduction –Burdens upon Damascus, Israel and the land of Cush, all blend together in a lesson for Judah and any faithful remnant, any who are willing to trust in and wait on the Lord. Will you trust in the rocks of your strong cities and forget the Rock of your salvation (17:9-10)? But there is another question to consider in the passage of judgment and hope. Will you see the crushing judgment of God only, or will you also look to Your Maker and see the merciful gathering of all nations to the Throne of Grace (17:7, 18:7)?

A Failed Alliance (17:1-3) – Since the beginning of Isaiah, the threat to Judah has been the anti-Assyrian alliance of Israel and Syria. We saw the “Immanuel” sign given to Ahaz was a promise of Israel/Syria’s soon demise (Isaiah 7) and here it is mentioned again. But these chapters seem to emphasize less of a particular time frame and instead the spiritual themes which should be understood in all times. God will move upon Damascus and the city will become a heap, unfit for humanity (vv1-2). This will occur in Ephraim (Israel) as well (v3a). But the last two lines of v3 express the unexpected reality of hope (as will vv6-7).

Fading Glory, and Yet...(17:4-11) – Speaking of the fading glory of Israel, but speaking to Judah (hence the reference to the Valley of Rephaim), the prophet describes the destruction of Israel/Syria in terms of a wasting sickness (v4) and a thorough reaping (v5). And yet, there will be the gleaning fruit left, a small remnant – a remnant of Jew and Gentile (v6). A man (“Adam,” possibly emphasizing both Jew and Gentile) will look to his Maker and know Him to be the Holy One of Israel (v7). God is our Maker; you do not fashion God like those who fashion idols. You do not construct our ways to approach God (false altars, wooden images, strange incense); you follow the ways God has given (v8). Yet, “*in that day*” those who did not look to the only God of salvation will find their fortified cities desolate, and their attempts to save themselves by means of “*foreign seedlings*” will have been turned to a “*heap of ruin*” (vv9-11).

The Saving Rebuke of God (17:12-14) – It is hard not to see the events of 745-701BC in this poetry, especially the miraculous saving of Jerusalem from the hand of Assyria, but Isaiah is not mentioning this by name as he emphasizes the universal principles involved in facing the threats of world empires. The “*roar of the seas*” often is a picture of wicked Gentile nations (v12), but God rebukes them like wind blowing chaff off a heap (v13) and they are gone (v14).

Nations to the South as Well (18:1-) – Historically, the Cushite king mastered Egypt in 715BC and sent promises of help to all nations who would join in an anti-Assyrian alliance (vv1-2). Instead of the frenzy of diplomacy, another banner is raised that “*all the inhabitants of the world*” will see and hear, because, while the enemy appears so strong, the LORD is actually resting, waiting for the fruit to reach its perfect time before harvesting (vv3-6). Finally, this promise: real peace will come when these nations come and pay homage to the LORD of armies at Mount Zion (v7).

All Kinds of Allusions – These chapters are in the middle of a long chain of rebukes and oracles against the nations (chs 13-23) and so there is no clear conclusion – but a host of allusions to the mighty power of God over all nations and for any in every nation who will call on Him. Piling one upon another –

A Remnant from Syria (Mark 7:24-30) – What is this story of the healing of the daughter of a Syrian woman? Jesus is identifying Himself with prophecies like Isaiah 17:3.

Rebuking the Raging Seas (Luke 8:22-25) – What is this story of Jesus rebuking the sea? Jesus is identifying Himself with Isaiah 17:13.

An Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) – What is this story of Philip converting the Ethiopian eunuch? Jesus is identifying Himself with Isaiah 18:7. And we see in 17-18 the flow of the promise of the witness of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and all Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Then, it was just a remnant; after Christ rises from the dead, the flow of all nations to His throne begins.

Look to Your Maker, the Holy One of Israel – There were specific, historical events, but the charge is universal and worldwide. First, there is only One Maker, only one Holy One, and only one Israel or people of God. You are not allowed to make your own peculiar idols nor create your own ways to approach God. He comes to us by means of His Word and sacrament. We come to Him only in the name of Jesus, the Holy One. Second, our temptation is always to forget the God of our salvation, the God Who is saving (17:10, cf. Psalm 78:11, 42). Partly this is because God sometimes appears to be resting and waiting, not moving and answering. But this is because He is actively waiting until just the right time, as with the birth of Jesus, (Gal 4:4), or as He is lifted up before all men (John 12:32). Finally, we are called to look to the Sovereign Maker and Redeemer of the world with faith that sees His worldwide dominion manifest through the preaching of the Gospel (Psalm 72:8-15).