

Series: Isaiah

Lesson # 35

Title: Fruit in the Bough

Scripture: Isaiah 17

Date: 7-19-09

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Princeton, New Jersey

The Lord sends Isaiah to prophecy of the ruin of Syria. Damascus was the chief city in Syria and it is mentioned here because this is what would happen to the whole kingdom.

Isaiah 17: 1: The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. 2: The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid.

The LORD had not sent his word into Syria. Syria was a Gentile, heathen nation, full of idolatry. Damascus is "taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap." The cities of Aroer--cities near Syria--those cities are forsaken.

Isaiah 17: 3: The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the LORD of hosts.

The LORD *had* sent his word to Ephraim. These are the sons of Jacob, the sons of Abraham. They had the word of the LORD God.

Yet, Ephraim departed, separated themselves from their kinsman in Judah and made an alliance with Syria and went to war against Judah. Ephraim saw the powerful Syrians and thought that they could oppose any adversary if they joined in with Syria. They thought they had made a wise alliance because they prospered for a time. But the LORD of hosts says their fortress shall cease. This burden of Damascus is the burden of Ephraim as well because Syria had become their head, now.

Isaiah 17: 4: And in that day it shall come to pass, *that* the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean. 5: And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

Jacob, Ephraim, Israel had been more in number than the sand of the sea--this was the glory of Jacob. And also, Syria in whom they put their hope. The LORD God says their glory "shall be made thin."

They had prospered in a time of plenty--they are described as fat, a wealthy nation glorious to behold because of their union with Syria. But now the Lord says "the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean."

The valley of Rephaim was called the valley of giants. The corn grew tall and plenteous. He compares the vain glory of Jacob to that of the tall corn in the valley of Rephaim. But a large field of corn does not make the harvestmen turn back, it makes the harvestman go at with more zeal. Even though Syria and Ephraim were many in number, they would be cut down like a field of corn.

Isaiah 17: 9: In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch, which they left because of the children of Israel: and there shall be desolation.

This is a comparison to something the LORD did a long time before this: in the day the children of Israel entered Canaan, the inhabitants of those cities fled because the LORD drove them out.

Joshua 23:10: One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he *it is* that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you.

Now the LORD says when the enemy approaches, the Israelites, though more in number, shall run like those nations did back then.

Deuteronomy 32:30 How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?

Why all this desolation at the hand of the LORD God?

Isaiah 17: 10: Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the Rock of thy strength,

All these evils came to them because they despised "the God of their salvation" the "Rock of their strength."

V10:...therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips: 11: In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: *but* the harvest *shall be* a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.

I. ALL MEN ARE SINNERS---NO DIFFERENCE IN JEW OR GENTILE

We need to understand who this is speaking of in verses 3 and 4 of our text. You are familiar with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The LORD changed Jacob's name to Israel. Jacob had 12 sons. The nation of Israel originally consisted of 12 tribes, each named after those 12 sons-- Ephraim, Gad, Reuben, etc.

But ten tribes, along with half of the tribe of Benjamin revolted way back when Jeroboam was king. They left Jerusalem, set up an altar elsewhere, made themselves priests who were not Levites, separated themselves from Judah and the other half of the tribe of Benjamin.

When we read Ephraim, Israel and Jacob here it means those 10.5 tribes.

Now, if there were ever a nation who could know God, believe on God and worship God by their own strength, by a mere outward recognition of God, then Israel should have been able to do so. Their fathers had been delivered from Egypt by God; God fed them in the wilderness; God delivered them into Canaan; God had given them the law and the prophets; they had every advantage that men can have.

They had the law? They had the prophets? They had Moses? They had the word of the LORD? When the LORD delivered Israel into Canaan he said this:

Leviticus 18: 1: And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2: Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God. 3: After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. 4: Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I *am* the LORD your God. 5: Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I *am* the LORD....28: That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that *were* before you.

Romans 3: 1: What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit *is there* of circumcision? 2: Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

But we find the Israelites joining in the same sinfulness and idolatry as the Syrians who did not even have the word of God. After all that the Lord did for them outwardly they looked to their own wisdom, looked to Syria for strength, set up idols and groves and worshipped right alongside the Syrians, worshipped the works of their own hands, and they truly thought they were the children of God in all this.

What is God teaching us?

Romans 3: 9: What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; 10: As it is written, There is

none righteous, no, not one: 11: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12: They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. 13: Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips: 14: Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness: 15: Their feet *are* swift to shed blood: 16: Destruction and misery *are* in their ways: 17: And the way of peace have they not known: 18: There is no fear of God before their eyes. 19: Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20: Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

The law can tell a man he is defiled, but the law can not save. Not because there is any weakness in the law of God, but because the defilement is in us.

You have the word of God, read it. You have a place to hear the gospel, hear it. You young people have godly parents, heed their instruction. But in all--cast yourselves on the mercy of God. Ask God to give you an understanding of who Christ is. Ask God to grant you repentance and faith. No amount of outward advantage will do. We are sinners in need of mercy and grace!

II. GOD SAVES BY GRACE ALONE.

Isaiah 17: 6: Yet...

If we could just enter into the grace that is included in that one word, YET! Verse 6 to verse 8 is a parenthesis in the middle of sin and judgment. If you lifted it out, there would be no holiness for any, no grace for any, no redemption for any, and no salvation for any. That is where we would all be were it not for this word "YET."

Isaiah 17: 6: Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two *or* three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four *or* five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel.

ELECTING GRACE

In Israel, there would be a few of these desperately depraved sinners whom God would spare, a very small remnant would be spared. And of that remnant that was spared, they were rebelling against God just as much as those who were destroyed. The only reason that remnant was spared is because thus saith the LORD God of Israel-YET!

Isaiah 1: 9: Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, *and* we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

Romans 9: 6: Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8: That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

V7: In Isaac shall thy children be called.

Galatians 3:16: Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

You see, the Bough--the Uppermost Bough, the Fruitful Branch--in whom God's true fruit is spared from the striker, is Christ Jesus the Righteous Branch (Jer 23: 5; 33: 15; Zec 3: 8.)

III. GODS SAVES BY SOVEREIGN, IRRESISTABLE GRACE.

Isaiah 17: 7: At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. 8: And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect *that* which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.

At that day, the day of divine visitation, shall a man look. The remnant would have never looked had God not taken away all else. Has he taken away your fortress! Has God frustrated all your vain alliances! Has he made you to behold what you are in yourself!

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

The Maker, the Holy One of Israel, is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 54:5: For thy Maker *is* thine husband; the LORD of hosts *is* his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

Isaiah 17: 1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2: The same was in the beginning with God. 3: All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

As long as we linger we have respect unto ourselves. We sanctify ourselves--view ourselves as mighty--exalt ourselves--think ourselves holy! But in the day of the LORD's power...his eyes shall have respect to the HOLY ONE of ISRAEL.

Isaiah 17: 8: And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect *that* which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.

4. This is repentance...

- LOOK AWAY FROM YOURSELVES
- LOOK AWAY FROM YOUR ALTARS
- LOOK AWAY FROM THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS
- HAVE NO MORE RESPECT FOR THAT WHICH YOUR FINGERS HAVE MADE
- LOOK AWAY FROM YOUR GROVES AND YOUR IMAGINATIONS

5. This is faith...LOOK TO CHRIST!

Isaiah 45: 22: Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else. 23: I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. 24: Surely, shall *one* say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: *even* to him shall *men* come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. 25: In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.

IV. GOD GRACE SAVES ABSOLUTELY

Isaiah 17: 1: The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from *being* a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. 2: The cities of Aroer *are* forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid. 3: The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim,

This prophecy points to the days when the gospel departed from Israel came unto the Gentiles. The LORD God says here through Isaiah that he would overthrow natural Israel, and he would have churches in these Gentile lands because his Israel is made up of both Jew and Gentile. Read it again:

V2: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid. 3: The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim,

Isaiah 5: 16: But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness. 17: Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.

Isaiah 7: 21: And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep; 22: And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk *that* they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land. 23: And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall *even* be for briers and thorns.

Zephaniah 2:6: And the sea coast shall be dwellings *and* cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks.

We know how the various kings entered Syria and this prophecy had some fulfillment in those days. But when do we see this prophecy truly begin to come to pass.

Acts 11: 19: Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

Where is Phenice? Remember the syro-phenician woman whom the Lord saved? Near Syria--*The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid.* Where is Cyprus? On the shores of Syria--*the cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid.* Where is Antioch? Smack-dab in Syria--believers were first called Christians in Antioch.

Acts 11: 20: And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21: And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord

Zephaniah 2:6: And the sea coast shall be dwellings *and* cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks.

The Lord gave those cities to his flocks, to lie down (to rest in Christ), and none shall make them afraid. He said they would be cottages for shepherds and folds for flocks. The Lord said butter and honey shall everyone eat that is left in that land. Shepherds like the apostle Paul, feeding the butter and honey of the gospel of Christ, to the folds of flocks--his churches into which the Great Shepherd gathers his lambs. And none can make them afraid--they are safe in Christ the Lord.

GOD SAVES BY GRACE...ELECTING GRACE, IRRISTABLE GRACE, BRINGING THE CHILDREN HE HAS EVERLASTINGLY LOVED TO REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE...AND GOD SAVES ABSOLUTELY!

Our Lord has a remnant scattered in all the nations--but the Lord is moving every king's heart, he raises nations and brings nations down, lifts up kings and brings kings down, sends times of plenty and times of great famine, the LORD of hosts is his name! All to provide for his people scattered throughout the various parts of the world.

Isaiah 45: 11: Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command

ye me. 12: I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, *even* my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. 13: I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts....16: They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together *that are* makers of idols. 17: *But* Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.

- Turn from your flesh it will not stand.
- Trust Christ alone and find sweet rest.
- Remember that we have but one weapon!

2 Corinthians 10: 3: For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5: Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;