

## Lesson 11

### Isaiah 17:1 – 18:7

#### Warnings to Syria, Israel and Ethiopia

**Memory verse:** “If my people would only listen to me, if Israel would only follow my ways,”  
Psalms 81:13 (NIV)

Damascus is one of the great cities of the ancient world, and the capital of the ancient nation of Syria. Syria is positioned to the immediate north-east of Israel, and the northern tribes, around the Sea of Galilee, had constant contact and interaction with Syria. Damascus was one of the most beautiful cities of the ancient world, but the coming Assyrian judgment would reduce it to a heap of ruins.

As is often the case, the northern kingdom of Israel is referred to by its dominant tribe, Ephraim. At this time, Israel and Syria were closely aligned against Judah. Since they are such close friends, God will announce His judgment against Ephraim, against Israel, at the same time He speaks to Syria! 2 Kings 15:29 and 16:9 describe the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Even though the prophecy is addressed to Damascus, it focuses quickly on Israel (17:4). It is probably a mosaic composition alluding to events that happened over many years of Isaiah's ministry that the prophet pieced together under divine inspiration. As in all these prophecies, Isaiah's interest was not primarily in the course of events as such but the issues to which these events gave expression. Israel, as well as the other nations addressed in these prophecies, refused to depend on God and trusted in man for protection. That is why they received a heavy message (burden) from the Lord.

When judgment came, the people of Israel realized that their idols could not save them; so they turned to the Lord for help, but it was too late (Prov. 1:20–33). The nation was sick with sin and beyond recovery. Once the wind began to blow and the floods began to rise, the nation was without hope. In 722 BC, Assyria conquered, and the kingdom of Israel was no more.

Chapter 18 is one of the most obscure in Scripture, though more of it probably was understood by those for whose use it was first intended, than by us now. In the days of Isaiah, Ethiopia was a major world power, ruling Egypt and a chief rival to Assyria. Since Judah was caught in the middle between this conflict, it might make sense for Judah to align herself with Ethiopia against Assyria. The original text has “Cush,” a land that covers the area now occupied by Ethiopia, the Sudan, and Somalia. Isaiah called it “a land of whirring wings” (Is. 18:1 NIV), not only because of the insects that infested the land, but also because of the frantic diplomatic activity going on as the nation sought alliances to protect them from Assyria. He pictures the ambassadors in their light, swift boats, going to the African nations for help.

Happy are those who take warning by His judgment on others, and hasten to join Him and His people. Once again, like Israel of old, people today trust the gods they have made instead of the God who made them; these include the false gods of pleasure, wealth, military might, scientific achievement, and even “religious experience.”

**Scripture reading:** Isaiah Chapter 17:7- 18:7

Things to learn: 1) Devastations of rebellious nations. 2) Reasons for God's judgment. 3) God is in control.

#### Discussion Questions:

Q1. Syria and Israel were allied in their opposition to both Assyria and Judah (7:1–2), so the prophet spoke to both in one message. Explain the images used by Isaiah to describe the fall of Syria and Israel in chapter 17.

Q2. What were the reasons given by Isaiah for God's judgment in chapter 17 against Syria and Israel and the intended results from it?

Q3. How much do we know about Ethiopia in the days of Isaiah and God's warnings in chapter 18 which we can apply today?