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In That Day, The Glory of Jacob Will Fade

17: 1-8

In that day, the glory of Jacob will fade **DIG: Whereas the previous two prophecies were dated in 715 BC, this one refers to events in 735-732 BC when the northern kingdom of Isra'el was allied with Syria against Assyria (see Chapter 7). The capital city of Syria was Damascus. Comparing 17:1-3 with 7:4-9, what will be the future of Damascus and Isra'el (or Ephraim)? What do 17:7-8 and 10a imply about Isra'el's spiritual condition during this time (also see Second Kings 17:7-18).**

REFLECT: God is described as the Maker (17:7a), the Holy One of Isra'el (17:7b), the Savior (17:10a) and the Rock (17:10b). Which of these aspects do you tend to forget sometimes? Why? Instead, what do you find yourself trusting in? What practices can help you "remember" the LORD and live out your life accordingly?

After dealing with Judah's two southern neighbors, Philistia and Mo'ab, **Isaiah** now turns to address the two on the north, **Syria** and **Isra'el**. Although the **oracle** is addressed to **Damascus**, or **Syria**, the real intended audience after **17:3** is the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. The point here is that the refusal to rely upon **ADONAI** is pure foolishness that will result in destruction by the nations. Even so, **YHVH** is in control of the nations and **He** will not permit them to eliminate **His people**. Despite the raging of all the nations, **He** is **their Master**.

Damascus was one of the most strategic cities of the ancient world. It stood at the mouth of a natural funnel through which ran the only suitable road between Mesopotamia and Egypt. Mount Hermon stood north of the city, and south of it are a string of basalt plateaus. Both of these provided barriers to caravans passing through. Therefore, **Damascus** was far more important than other cities of the same size. **Isaiah**, however, declared that it would **become a heap of ruins**. By the time of his prophecies against Philistia and Moab, it had already come true because **the Assyrian** king Shalmaneser had conquered it in 732 BC.

Isaiah writes **an oracle concerning Damascus**, and says: **See, Damascus will no longer be a city but will become a heap of ruins (17:1)**. **Isaiah** starts out by dealing with the devastation of **Damascus** and **Ephraim**, or the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**.

Damascus will be destroyed first. **She** will become feeble. Panic will grip **her**; anguish and pain seize **her**. The town will be abandoned and **her** young men will die in the streets. **God** says that **He will set fire to the walls of Damascus** and **consume the fortress of Ben-Hadad**, the storm god of **the Syrians** (see the commentary on [Jeremiah](#), **to see link click Do - A Message Concerning Damascus**). **Amos** says that **God will break down the gate of Damascus** (**Amos 1:3-5**).

The cities of Aroer will be deserted and left to flocks, which will lie down, with no one to make them afraid (17:2). Aroer (Numbers 32:34) is in Gad, one of the tribes that made up **Ephraim**. The picture is that these **cities** were once thriving, but now are only good for the grazing of animals. However, **Damascus** fares better than Babylon because Babylon's land will not even be good for grazing. **The near historical prophecy for Syria would be that she would be invaded and destroyed by Assyria**. The prophet **Amos** tells us **the people of Aram (Syria) will go into exile (Amos 1:5)**.



The fortified city will disappear from Ephraim, and royal power from Damascus; the remnant of Aram will be like the glory of the Israelites, declares ADONAI-Tzva'ot (17:3 CJB). At the same time **the fortified city of Samaria will disappear from Ephraim**. The destruction of the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** comes only because of **her** alliance with **Syria** (with **her** capital city of **Damascus**) against the southern kingdom of **Judah**. **They** had become twins that could not be separated and together **they** would fall. Unbelieving **Ephraim** could not be helped by **Damascus**, or **Damascus** by unbelieving **Ephraim**. **Isaiah** says that **the remnant of Aram will be like the fading glory of the Israelites** (meaning the Northern Kingdom). **The glory of the LORD** had already departed from **Isra'el . . . she** was on the decline. As stated earlier (**7:8**), **the near historical prophecy for Isra'el** would be that **she** would not be a **people** within 65 years.

The Assyrian's dealt with captured people differently than most other ancient nations. Usually, conquering civilizations would take their prisoners into exile within their own country, as the Babylonians would eventually do with the southern kingdom of **Judah**. But **the Assyrians** did not do that. **They** would switch some of the captives to **their** capital and nation, but more importantly **they** would bring **their** own people into the conquered land, eventually intermarry with **them** and assimilate **them** (**Second Kings 17:24**). This is what **the Assyrians** did to the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. Eventually, **she would not be a people**. **She** would no longer be a Jewish nation, but a hybrid nation of **Assyrians** and Jews called Samaritans. The southern kingdom of **Judah** would despise them in the time of **Messiah** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gw - The Parable of the Good Samaritan**).

The main focus of this passage however, is on the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. **In that day the glory of Jacob**, or the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**, **will fade (17:4a)**. This is the first of three sections beginning with the phrase **in that day**. This refers to the time of **God's** blessings showered on **His** people. In some passages, it is a far eschatological prophecy, while in others it refers to the near historical. **17:4** and **8-9** refer to **the near historical**, while **17:7** refers to **the far eschatological**. **Isaiah** frequently uses this **near, far, near** motif.

As a result of the invasion **Jacob** would face difficulties. **Isaiah** uses three figures of speech to describe what will happen to **Isra'el** and **Syria**. The first is physical, and the second two are agricultural. All three stress the pitiful nature of what will be left of both of **them**, but especially **Isra'el**. First, **they** will be like **the fat of a man's body** wasting **away**. To depart from the way of faith means to be spiritually weakened.

Secondly, **they** will be like **a reaper** who **gathers the standing grain and harvests the grain with his arm - as when a man gleans heads of grain in the Valley of Rephaim (17:4b-5)**. **The Valley of Rephaim (Joshua 15:8, 18:16)** was a fertile area west of **Jerusalem** where David had twice defeated **the Philistines (Second Samuel 5:18-20 and 22-25)**. To depart from the way of faith makes the people of **God** vulnerable against external forces of destruction and leaves them with no evidence that they had ever existed.

Thirdly, the two countries will be like **an olive tree** after the harvest. **Yet some gleanings will remain, as when an olive tree is beaten, leaving two or three olives on the topmost branches, four or five on the fruitful boughs, declares ADONAI, the God of Israel (17:6)**. As a few **olives** are left on an olive tree's **branches**, so a few people would be left. Most of **them** would be slaughtered. **God** would expose the northern kingdom of

Isra'el as a spiritual fraud. **The glory** that **Jacob** had achieved was only through her own strength. Eventually, **her** arrogance would have to be replaced with humility.

*Although the oracle here is against **Syria** and **Isra'el**, **Isaiah** writes for the benefit of the southern kingdom of **Judah**. It is as if **he** is saying, "Learn a lesson from how **God** deals with these two nations." **Judah** need not fear her neighbors; it was **God** whom **she** should fear.*

The mixed race of **the Israelites** and **the Assyrians**, or **the Samaritans** as **they** came to be called, would not be a godly **people**. Of the nineteen kings of **Isra'el**, not one of **them** would serve **the Lord**. When **Isra'el** rebelled against Solomon's son, Rehoboam, the United Kingdom was split in two. Shortly thereafter, the ten northern tribes, lead by **their** new king Jeroboam, would start to depart from the will of **the Lord**. **God** could not bless **them** because, under the leadership of Jeroboam, **they** changed **the place of worship** from **Jerusalem** to Dan and Bethel, **they** changed **the time of worship** of the Feast of Sukkot from the seventh to the eighth month, **they** changed **the priests of worship** from Levites to all sorts of people; and **they** changed **the object of worship** from **God** to golden calves (**First Kings 12:26-33**). These were the causes of **her** destruction.

But because of the grace of **God**, there would be a remnant out of the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. When the true worshipers of **ADONAI** saw the perversion in **Isra'el**, they left and came back to Judah. There **they** were obedient to the worship of **the LORD** at the Temple. When **Assyria** came in and destroyed the northern Kingdom, a myth developed regarding "the ten lost tribes" of **Isra'el**. There are no lost tribes. Because of the worldwide dispersion after the fall of **Jerusalem** by the Romans in 70AD, Jews today have no idea what tribe **they** are from. But **God** knows. In the book of **Revelation**, **John** describes **144,000 Jews** from the twelve tribes of **Isra'el**. The term **Isra'el** used here is in a general sense. There are ten tribes from the northern Kingdom and two tribes from the southern Kingdom (**Revelation 7:1-8**). **God** knows who is in each tribe, and **He** knows the true remnant.

In **17:7** and **8** **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** contrasts the gods made with human **hands** with the **God** whose **hands** have made humans. **The Psalmist** wrote: **Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands (Psalm 119:73)**. This points out the folly of thinking that we can create a god in our own image, when in fact; we are **created** in the **image of God (Genesis 1:27)**. Anything that we have made cannot save us because it is not holy. Yet, sometimes when life is going well it seems like we can. When our lives fall apart; however, we are forced to look to the one who holds us in **His hands (Job 12:10; Isaiah 49:14-16, 62:3; Dani'el 5:23; John 10:27-30)**.⁵³

In that day men and women will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Isra'el (17:7). At the end of the Great Tribulation, **in the day**, there will be a national confession of sin, a plea for **the LORD** to return, and then the national regeneration of **Isra'el**, all twelve tribes. **ADONAI** says: **And I will pour out on the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and supplication. They will look upon Me, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Me as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Me as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day a fountain will be opened to the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity (Zechariah 12:10 and 13:1). This is the far eschatological prophecy concerning Isra'el.**

Verses 8 and 9 revert back to **the near historical prophecy**. When faced with certain destruction by **the Assyrians**, **Jacob** will realize the worthlessness of **their** idols. **They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands, and they will have no regard for the Asherah poles and the incense altars their fingers have made (17:8).** The altars were those set up to idolatrous gods, not the true **God**. **The Asherah poles** were wooden symbols of Asherah, Canaanite fertility goddess and wife of Ba'al. In the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**, greatly influenced by Ba'al worship, were many who worshiped him at **Asherah poles**. But when **the mighty Assyrians** attacked, they quickly realized that only **ADONAI** could deliver them.