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In That Day Their Strong Cities Will Be Abandoned 17: 9-14

In the day their strong cities will be abandoned DIG: Since Isra'el still worshiped the LORD (as well as other gods), what does it mean to have forgotten God? 17:10-11 refer to a pagan fertility rite whereby plants were force-bloomed in hopes of persuading the gods to bless the harvest. How will this practice backfire on Isra'el? What does the sailor's image of the raging sea and the desert image of the chaff and tumbleweed mean for the future of many nations? Where else have you seen Isra'el's powerful enemies so quickly cut down as they are here? How is this depicted in 10:28-34 and 37:36-38?

REFLECT: Compare 17:12-13 with Psalm 2:1-6. What truth about God emerges from these descriptions? How might that story, together with the image of 17:13, affect you as you face a world full of confusion and tumult raging around you (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ, to see link click Ff - Jesus Calms the Storm](#))? Are you going it alone? Or are you in the boat with Jesus?

In the midst of earth's struggles, it is sometimes hard to believe that **God** is really on the throne. For instance, suppose a modern-day **Isaiah** had stood up on the streets of London in the spring of 1942 and said that Germany and Japan, who at that moment ruled fully half of the world between them, would be completely powerless in just a little over three years. **He** would probably have been laughed to scorn. Yet he would have been completely correct. Despite the energy, intellect, and military power of those two great nations, they were swept away. **God** is the one reality who does not change or fade away. **He** is **the One** with whom we must come to terms.⁵⁴

As **Isaiah** had prophesied all along, the alliance of Syria and **Isra'el** would fail to conquer the southern kingdom of **Judah**. **Oh, the raging waters of many nations - they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples - they roar like the roaring of great waters (17:12)! These peoples were the Assyrians, whom God was using to discipline His people. Although ADONAI uses wicked nations for the purposes of disciplining His people,**

eventually, **the LORD** disciplines them as well.

Therefore, they would become **like chaff**, the light and useless part of the grain, which, when winnowed, blows away. **Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale (17:13)**. Although Assyria brought **terror in the evening**, the enemy would be **gone before morning**. Though Sennacherib and Assyria had plundered 46 cities of Judah, 185,000 soldiers were killed overnight **(37:36-38)**.

Through all of this, **ADONAI** will preserve a remnant and they will learn the lessons of destruction. They will recognize their own responsibility for the disaster and turn back to **the LORD**. They will recognize that **God** has not failed them, but their own efforts to save themselves certainly had.

This was the root cause of all their problems. **Isaiah** tells them: **You have forgotten God your Savior; you have not remembered the Rock your fortress (17:10a)**. He says you can make all the plans you want to, but they all will come to nothing. **Therefore, though you set out the finest plant and plant imported vines, though on the day you set them out, you make them grow, and on the morning when you plant them, you bring them to bud, yet the harvest will be as nothing in the day of disease and incurable pain (17:10b-11)**. No matter how successful you are at accomplishing goals in this life by your own sheer will, **the harvest** will be bitter if you avoid dependence on **the LORD**. Those accomplishments have a way of slipping through the fingers of people who leave **ADONAI** out of the equation. A life without **God** is a life of desolation.

The southern kingdom of **Judah** would not learn the lessons suffered by **her** sister **Isra'el** to the north. One hundred years later **Y'hudah** would find **herself** in the same situation. **God** says: **A cry is heard from the barren heights, the weeping and pleading of the people of God, because they have perverted their ways and have forgotten ADONAI Elohim. They confess the failure of idolatry to bring them salvation. Help did not come from the high hills and mountains where idolatry took place (Jeremiah 3:21-25)**. Later, **God** would say to **Y'hudah**, **"This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you, declared the LORD, because you have forgotten Me and trusted in false gods"** (Jeremiah 13:25).

In that day their strong cities, which they left because of the Israelites, will be like places abandoned to thickets and underbrush. And all will be desolation (17:9). Therefore, as a result of **the near historical judgment** in that day, **Y'hudah** and **her strong cities** would be **abandoned** and **thickets and underbrush** would grow. Because

of **her** unfaithfulness to the true **God** and **her forgetting Him**, **her** normal life of planting and harvesting would end. The harvest would be diseased and **the people** would be in **pain**.



In the theology of **Deuteronomy**, **remembering** and **forgetting** form a fundamental concept (**Deuteronomy** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy**, **to see link click [Bc - Do Not Forget](#)**). What is in view here is not *primarily* a mental activity, although that is part of it. Rather, remembering is a mental activity that results in certain kinds of behavior, and the absence of the behavior negates any claimed mental activity. **God** wants **His people** to recall **His** unique, never-to-be-repeated acts on **their** behalf with the result that **their** present actions will be in keeping with **His** character. If **their** present actions do not reflect **God's** character, then **they** do not truly remember what **He** has done. If **God** has touched my life, yet my life is no different, then what **He** has done has been lost to me (**First Cor 11:24-29; Gal 3:1-5**). Thus, **the Israelites** may well have continued to look to **ADONAI** as **their** national **God**. **They** probably continued to see **themselves** as being faithful to **Him** even while assimilating idolatry and paganism into **their** faith. But in fact, the significance of **the LORD's** acts on **Israel's** behalf was lost to **them**, as **their** manipulative attempts to make **themselves** secure demonstrated.⁵³

In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning they are gone (17:14a)! Although Assyria brought **terror** in **the evening**, the enemy would be **gone** before **morning**. Though Sennacherib and Assyria had plundered 46 cities of Judah, 185,000 soldiers were killed overnight (see **[Lo - Then the Angel of the LORD Put To Death a Hundred and Eighty Thousand Men in the Assyrian Camp](#)**).

The principle is at the end of this section. **This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us (17:14b)**. Although **Ha'Shem** uses wicked nations for the



purposes of disciplining **His** people, eventually, **the LORD** disciplines **them** also. **God** is in control of **the nations** and **He** will not permit **them** to obliterate **His people**. Despite **their** worldly power, **He** is **their Master**. One is reminded of the early colonial American flag with the coiled rattlesnake and the words, "Don't Tread on Me." To tread on **God's** people is to invite disaster on oneself.⁵⁵ There are more than a few who should remember that today!