

Sargon II (722 B.C.), potentates of Assyria. Moab, after the Assyrian conquests, became a wasteland, inhabited by nomadic tribes of desert-people. It remains so to this day. A very small remnant of Moabite people mixed with other nomadic peoples of that area and became the progenitors of those nomadic tribes inhabiting that deserted area today. God keeps His word!

QUIZ

1. How far back in the past had Jehovah declared Moab's doom?
2. Approximately when did Isaiah write this precise prediction?
3. What happened, eventually, to the Moabites?

- CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

2. DAMASCUS

a. COALITION

TEXT: 17:1-6

- 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 And the fortress 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 Jehovah of hosts.
- 4 And it shall come to pass in that day, 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 standing grain, and his arm reapeth the ears; yea, it shall be as when one gleaneth ears in the valley of Rephaim.
- 6 Yet there shall be left therein gleanings, as the shaking of an olive-tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost

bough, four or five in the outmost branches of a fruitful tree, saith Jehovah, the God of Israel.

QUERIES

- a. Why does Isaiah pronounce judgment on Ephraim (Israel) along with Damascus?
- b. What relationship did Damascus have to Jehovah?

PARAPHRASE

This is God's pronouncement concerning Damascus, capital of Syria: Behold, Damascus is no longer to be a city. It is destined to become a heap of ruins! Even the cities of Aroer, lying between Israel and Syria, are destined for desolation. They will be so completely deserted that sheep will pasture in their ruins lying quiet and unafraid with no people to chase them away. The combined power of the Israel-Damascus coalition will end. The supposed glory of this godless coalition will fade like that of Israel when she rejected Jehovah. Israel's one-time glory will be a thing of the past, even as a wasting disease may cut down the fatness of a healthy man until he has withered away to skin and bones. Nothing will be left of these two nations. They will be so thoroughly consumed by God's judgment they will be like a wheat field where the reaper is followed by the gleaners picking up every scrap left behind. They will be like the olive tree that is shaken and has its branches beaten with sticks to gather every berry.

COMMENTS

v. 1-3 ALLIANCE ANNULED: Damascus was founded some 2,200 years before Christ by Uz, a grandson of Shem (Josh. 1:6; 4:1ff). It is the capital of Syria. Its 2,000 ft. elevation gives it

a delightful climate. Caravan routes from the east, west and south crossed in the city, carrying treasures of silks, perfumes, carpets, and foods. It has always been strategic both militarily and economically. In Isaiah's day, Damascus (Syria) and Israel (the northern kingdom of the Jews) had formed an alliance to go to war against Judah. Ahaz, king of Judah, made an alliance with Assyria (see our comments on Isaiah 7). Isaiah had earlier (ch. 7) predicted the downfall of the Syria-Israel coalition. Now the prophet repeats God's judgment upon it. After the Assyrian conquest of Syria and Israel, Damascus was of little importance until 635 A.D. when it became the seat of the Mohammedan world. It really has never regained the prominence or power it had in the days of Isaiah. The "cities of Aroer" were cities in the far northern reaches of the territory of Israel. They formed a sort of "buffer zone" between Israel and Syria. This is Isaiah's announcement that Israel would be invaded by the same forces about to occupy Damascus. The entire territory of these two nations allied against God's remnant (Judah) was to be made so desolate that sheep would pasture in the ruins of their cities and fortresses. There would be no people in these lands to scare the sheep away.

V. 4-6 AFTERMATH OF THE ATTACK: After the destructive forces of God's judgment have done their work, the glory of these two nations, especially Israel, will be only a shadow and skeleton of its former self. It will vanish as the fatness of a man leaves him when he is wasting away with an incurable disease. All that will be left of the two will be one or two scattered, left-over, insignificant survivors. These two nations will be "picked clean" and left barren like a field gleaned, etc.

QUIZ

1. How old was the city of Damascus?
2. What was the alliance between Damascus and Israel for in Isaiah's time?
3. To what extent was Damascus doomed?

b. CRISIS

TEXT: 17:7-8

7 In that day shall men look unto their Maker, and their eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.

8 And they shall not look to the altars, the work of their hands; neither shall they have respect to that which their fingers have made, either the Asherim, or the sun-images.

QUERIES

- a. What prompted this contrition by men?
- b. What were the "sun-images"?

PARAPHRASE

When God's judgment begins to fall, men will turn and look for their Maker, and they will suddenly learn to fear the Holy One of Israel. They will no longer seek help from their idols and pagan altars which they made with their own hands. They will renounce their Asherim and sun-images.

COMMENTS

v. 7-8 REFORMATION: Man is prone to disregard God and turn to the gods of his own making when he is prosperous and relatively secure from his enemies. But when calamity or crisis comes man cries out for Supernatural aid. Someone has said, "There are no atheists in foxholes." When men have to face something about to overwhelm them and beyond their own powers to resolve they usually seek their Maker. This is not always repentance in the true sense of the word. Sometimes it is only reformation. This is what occurred in the case of most of the

Jews. They simply reformed some of their behavioral patterns. They reformed by ceasing to do obeisance to statues. But they did not experience real repentance. There is a difference between reformation and repentance. Repentance involves a change of mind, a change of values, as well as changed conduct. Most of the Jews did not really repent—they simply reformed. When they returned from their captivities they made idols of their superholiness. Their new idols were those of Jewish ancestry and Pharisaic self-righteousness. It is true, however, that the Jews were absolutely and thoroughly cured of image-worship. They had fallen into the depths of image-worship at this point in their history (Cf. II Kings 16:10ff). "Asherim" were sacred pillars (much like totem poles) of the pagan "groves" (garden places where pagans gathered to worship idols and engage in lewd, sexual rites of worship). Sun-images were statues of the Phoenician goddess. Her worship was as lewd as that of Baal, with whom she was associated by the pagans.

QUIZ

1. Why were men moved to look unto their Maker?
2. What is the difference between reformation and repentance?
3. How do we know the Jews did not (for the most part) repent?
4. What were the Asherim and sun-images they were worshipping?

c. COLLAPSE

TEXT: 17:9-11

- 9 In that day shall their strong cities be as the forsaken places in the wood and on the mountain top, which were forsaken from before the children of Israel; and it shall be a desolation
- 10 For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength; therefore thou plantest pleasant plants, and settest it with strange slips:

11 in the day of thy planting thou hedgest it in, and in the morning thou makest thy seed to blossom; but the harvest fleeth away in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.

QUERIES

- a. What were the "forsaken places in the wood," etc.?
- b. How does the harvest "flee away" in the day of grief?

PARAPHRASE

In that day the well fortified cities where they might think to find refuge from disaster will be useless ruins. Their cities will be like the old, ruined fortresses left behind by the Canaanites when Israel occupied the land. The reason for the collapse of your security is that you have forsaken the true God of your salvation and have not given attention to the Rock upon whom alone it is safe to stand. Although you plant your gardens to your pagan images and tender them the most meticulous care and protection, and although they produce blossoms of loveliness, they will not bring you deliverance. What little satisfaction you may have will disappear suddenly and absolutely in the desperate days of judgment to come.

COMMENTS

v. 9-10a FORTRESSES: "In that day—" when the Damascus-Israel coalition collapses, Israel's defenses and great fortified cities will be as useless as those ruins of the old Canaanite cities still visible in the "woods" and on "mountain tops" in Isaiah's day. When will men learn they can never build any fortress (physical, philosophical or psychological) that God cannot overwhelm and reduce to ruins? Men try to fortify themselves with things or ideas against God's invasion of their selfish goals and

aims. Unless a man surrenders to God's conquest of his heart, man's citadels are inevitably reduced to ruin and the man himself incarcerated in a prison-hell of his own choosing.

v. 10b-11 FLOWERS: The reference to planting "pleasant plants," and setting "strange slips," probably refers to what some ancient writers called little "Adonis gardens." They were little gardens of flower pots or baskets with pleasant plants and slips growing in them in adoration of the Greek Adonis cult. The women of Damascus and Israel were giving these pagan gardens of idolatry their most careful and tender attention. It is suggested they may have been doing this to bring about some magical, mystical resurrection of the dead Baal (who during the dry season had "died"). They even used hothouse-plant methods to promote quick growth and sprouting. They may also have been appeasing the gods of fertility in order to magically insure a good crop at harvest time. Whatever their reasons, Jehovah, through His prophet, predicts that they will not reap what they expect. What they expect to harvest will never materialize. Instead they shall reap days of grief and desperate sorrow.

QUIZ

1. What "day" is referred to in verse 9?
2. What is the comparison used to illustrate the desolation of Israel's cities?
3. Are there other "fortresses" man builds to isolate himself from God besides of stone and wood? What are they?
4. What are the references to "plantings" and "slips"?
5. What is to be the consequence of Israel's idolatry?

d. CHAOS

TEXT: 17:12-14

- 12 Ah, the uproar of many peoples, that roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rushing of nations, that rush like the rushing of mighty waters!
- 13 The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters; but he shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like the whirling dust before the storm.
- 14 At eventide behold, terror; and before the morning they are not. This is the portion of them that despoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.

QUERIES

- a. Why does Isaiah break into his train of thought with this "ah"?
- b. Who are the "nations" roaring like rushing waters?

PARAPHRASE

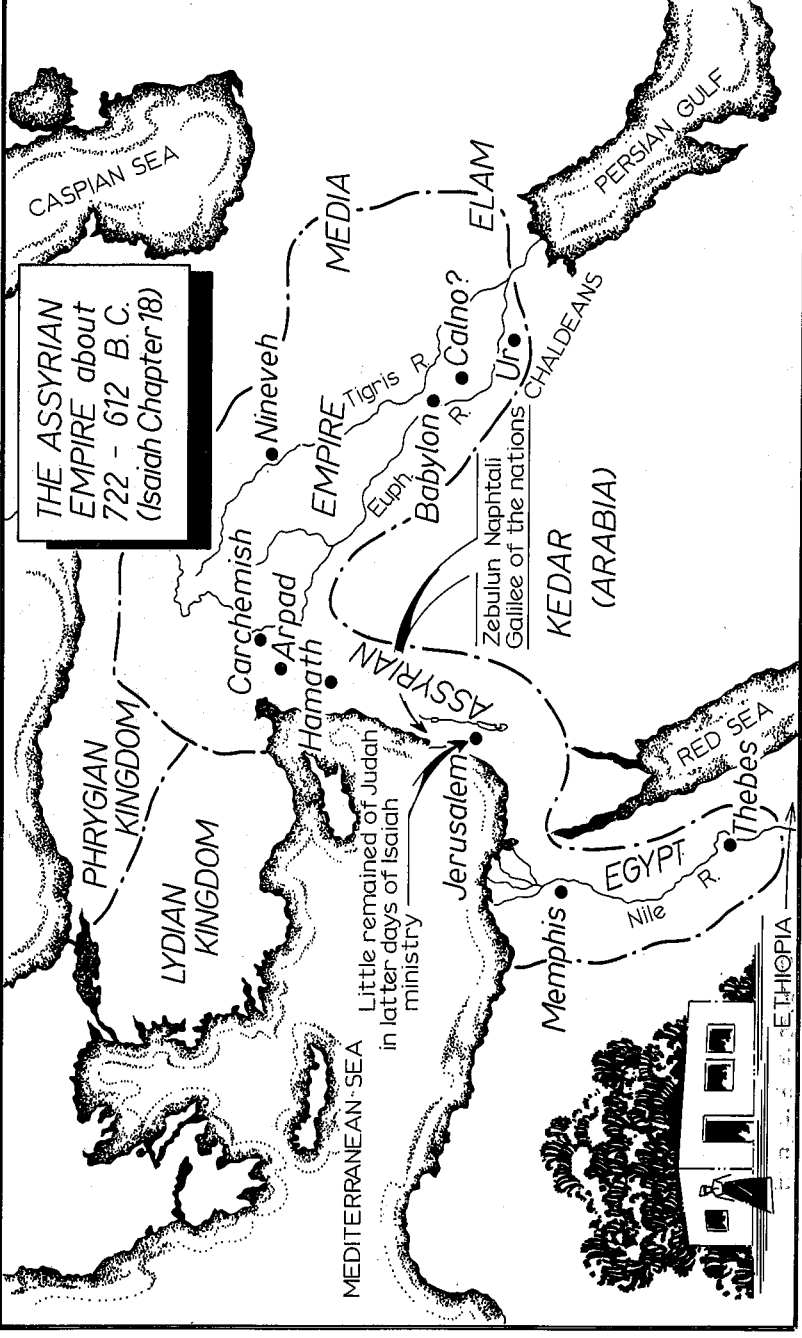
Ah, permit me to pause and tell you of the defeat of the enemies of God's elect. I see multitudes and multitudes of peoples rushing upon God's elect to consume them. They roar with a deafening ferocity, like the roar of the pounding sea. But God will rebuke them and silence their roaring. He will defeat them and they will flee, scattered like chaff by the wind, like whirling dust is blown by a storm. The fear of God's elect as they stand before their enemies will be over in a very short time. Almost overnight they will know deliverance, and their enemies defeated. This is the destiny of those who plunder and destroy the people of God.

COMMENTS

v. 12-13a **THE BATTLE:** This is rather like a soliloquy by Isaiah. He is talking as if to himself. It is a predictive pause. Its initial fulfillment probably occurred at the onrushing tide of Assyrians as they invaded first Syria, then Israel, then Judah, in the days of Isaiah, Hezekiah and Sennacherib. Jerusalem was surrounded and besieged. Jehovah's angel slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night and the Assyrians left in defeat. However, it is our judgment that the soliloquy finds its ultimate fulfillment in the victory God wrought at the death and resurrection of Christ. No greater battle was or ever will be fought than the battle between heaven and hell when Christ came to earth to conquer sin in the flesh. That night in Gethsemane the destiny of righteousness, justice and mercy hung in the balance. That struggle of Jesus with Himself and with the devil's temptations was the ultimate struggle between the forces of God and the forces of the devil. When sinful men (agents of Satan) crucified the Son of God, they calculated they had defeated God's attempt to regain His rule over men. What more could Satan do in his warfare against God! We believe the historical event at Calvary and the Empty Tomb is what the prophets (Joel, Ezekiel, Zechariah) are predicting with their highly figurative (and literally impossible) great battles between God and the nations (valley of Jehoshaphat; Gog and Magog, etc.). One, great, complete, decisive victory of God over His enemies and the enemies of His people is predicted.

v. 13b-14 **THE VICTORY:** Psalms 2:1-6 depicts the "nations" raging against God. But God defeats them through His Son. Daniel's interpretation of the great image seen by Nebuchadnezzar has the "stone" (God's kingdom) crushing the four great empires of man into dust and the wind blowing them away! Colossians 2:15 tells us that the atoning death of Christ was the moment when God "*disarmed* the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, *triumphing* over them in him." Hebrews 2:14-18 tells us that Jesus' substitutionary death "destroyed him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and

THE ASSYRIAN
EMPIRE about
722 - 612 B.C.
(Isaiah Chapter 18)



Little remained of Judah
in latter days of Isaiah
ministry

ETHIOPIA



"In the days of Pekah king of Israel, came Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria ..." (II Kings 15:29).

An Assyrian artist has given us on a relief this portrait of the fierce and inexorable Tiglath-Pileser III. It comes from his ancient capital at Nimrud. When this terrifying monarch, the real founder of the Assyrian Empire, ascended the throne in 745 B. C. it was the beginning of the end for the northern kingdom of Israel.

FROM: THE BIBLE AS HISTORY IN PICTURES
By Werner Keller - Wm. Morrow Co.

delivered all those who through *fear* of death were subject to lifelong bondage” etc. So you see, God has rebuked His enemies, He has defeated them and scattered them and, like whirling dust before a storm, they are no longer to be feared. What God has actually accomplished (victory) and what we appropriate by faith and obedience, awaits only the consummation at the end of time.

QUIZ

1. What is probably the initial fulfillment of these verses?
2. What is their ultimate fulfillment?

C. INCESSANT EGYPTIANS - CHAPTERS 18-20

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1. ETHIOPIA

TEXT: 18:1-7

- 1 Ah, the land of the rustling of wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia;
- 2 that sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of papyrus upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people terrible from their beginning onward, a nation that meteth out and treadeth down, whose land the rivers divide!
- 3 All ye inhabitants of the world, and ye dwellers on the earth; when an ensign is lifted up on the mountains, see ye; and when the trumpet is blown, hear ye.
- 4 For thus hath Jehovah said unto me, I will be still, and I will behold in my dwelling-place, like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.
- 5 For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the