



• **Damascus – where can it find security?**

The nations around Judah need salvation as much as Judah does itself. Now Isaiah refers to Damascus and the lessons that it must learn. The question being asked is: where is security to be found?

1. First Isaiah outlines a disastrous problem

1. First Isaiah outlines a disastrous problem. Like other pagan nations **Damascus, capital of Aram, faces destruction.** Isaiah predicts that it will soon be devastated.

• **Damascus will be devastated**

¹An oracle concerning Damascus. 'See, Damascus will no longer be a city but will become a heap of ruins. ²The cities of Aroer will be deserted and left to flocks, which will lie down, with no one to make them afraid.'

• **Aroer – presumably near Damascus**

Aroer was presumably the name of an area near Damascus but it is otherwise unknown (although there are others elsewhere that have the same name).

³The fortified city will disappear from Ephraim, and royal power from Damascus, the remnant of Aram will be like the glory of the Israelites' – it is an oracle of Yahweh.

• **Damascus and Ephraim were trying to help each other**

Damascus (capital of Syria also known as Aram) is mentioned in connection with Ephraim because the two countries were trying to help each other in resisting Assyria. Actually what will happen is that the glory of the two lands will fade together.

• **More detail about their demise**

The next eight verses⁴⁻¹¹ describe more fully how Ephraim and Damascus will be ruined.

4-11

The land will fade almost to nothing

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⁴In that day the glory of Jacob will fade; the fat of his body will waste away. ⁵It will be as when a reaper gathers the standing grain and harvests the grain with his arm. And it will be as when a man gleans heads of grain in the Valley of Rephaim. ⁶Yet some gleaning 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' — it is an oracle of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

• **The two countries will fade away like a person with a fatal disease**

The two countries will fade away like a person with a fatal disease. They will have very little left like the 'gleanings' collected by the poor after crops or trees have been harvested. The Valley of Rephaim, south of Jerusalem, was known as a place where the poor would go to collect the remains after the harvesters had done their work.

• **Few 'gleanings'**

The people would discover only Yahweh is trustworthy

The people would discover only Yahweh is trustworthy. For Ephraim and Damascus to put their hope in each other was useless. It would lead to some putting their trust in God instead.

• **Hope in each other useless**

*⁷In that day humankind will look to their Maker.
Their eye will look to the Holy One of Israel.
⁸No one will 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.*

The lesson learned by the remnant of Ephraim and Damascus would be that it is entirely useless to trust in nations that are disobeying the God who reveals himself in Jerusalem. The human race must learn that idolatry ('altars . . . Asherah poles . . . incense altars') is useless.

• Idolatry is useless

The land will inherit disaster because of its false religion

The land will inherit disaster because of its false religion. The Arameans and Ephraimites abandoned the personal God who saved Israel by the blood of the lamb, and they turned instead to the rituals of the fertility cults.

⁹In that day their fortified cities, which they left because of the Israelites, will be like places abandoned to thickets and undergrowth. And all will be desolation.

• Abandoned God and turned to the rituals of fertility cults

*¹⁰For you have forgotten the God of your salvation;
you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress.
Therefore, though you sow foreign seeds
and plant imported vines,*

*¹¹though 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 there will be a great harvest in the
day of inheritance!
Disease and incurable pain!*

• A lot of religious gardening in pagan cults

The reference to gardens is partly symbolic (you reap what you plant) but almost literal because there was a lot of religious gardening in the pagan cults of Isaiah's day. But it would all lead to disaster.

Next Isaiah points to a solution

Next Isaiah points to a solution. The threat of destruction, deterioration, disaster is not the end of the story. There is some good news to follow.

God is a God of great power

God is a God of great power. Isaiah describes the violence of the nations.

*¹²Oh, the raging of many nations!
They rage like the raging sea!
Oh, the uproar of the peoples!
They roar like the roaring of great waters!*

• Even when the nations are like a raging sea, God is still in control

He has in mind the Assyrians but it is a general principle also. This is what the nations are like. They are like the ever-roaring sea, ever crashing upon the land. But while the ocean waves roar, God is totally in control of the raging sea of nations.

*¹³Although 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.*

*¹⁴In the evening, there is terror!
By the morning there is nothing to be found!
This is the portion of those who loot us,
the lot of those who plunder us.*

• The power behind the events of world history belongs to God alone

The Assyrians devastated Damascus and Israel, but when God had let them have their way long enough, they too were devastated and within a few years there was nothing to be found of the Assyrians. The power was never theirs; the power behind the events of world history belongs to God alone.

God has purposes of salvation

• Isaiah refers to Ethiopia and Sudan

God has purposes of salvation. Isaiah refers to the most distant part of the world known to the people of Israel, Cush or ancient Nubia, the regions later known as Ethiopia or Sudan.

*¹Oh, the land of whirring wings
along the rivers of Cush,
²which sends envoys by sea
in papyrus boats over the water.
Go, swift messengers,
to a nation who are tall and healthy,
to a people feared, near and far,
to a mighty conquering nation
whose land is divided by rivers.*

• Still a tall people

To this day the Ethiopians and southern Sudanese are still a tall people.

*³All you people of the world,
you who live on the earth,
when a banner is raised on the mountains,
you will see it,
and when a trumpet sounds,
you will hear it.*

• Egypt's power to make itself heard was great

When the Assyrians were terrorizing the lands around Israel, the other superpower that might be invited as a protector was Egypt. At one stage it seems they sent messengers to every corner of their world, even to the upper Nile regions where the Nubian peoples were to be found. Their ability to send envoys up the Nile spoke much of their power to reach even the most inaccessible territories. Egypt's power to get itself heard in the lands to the south was great. 'You will see it . . . you will hear it', says Isaiah.

• Actually the power belongs to God

But power does not belong to Egypt; it belongs to God! God calmly looks on.

*⁴For this is what Yahweh says to me:
'I will remain quiet and will look on
from my dwelling place,
like the glowing heat that comes with light,
like the cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.'*

• God is sometimes very quiet

God is sometimes as quiet as the day-time warmth or as the morning dew. At times when he is hardly considered he is quietly present in his warmth or in his coolness. Just at the point when the nations of the world think they can step in to reap a harvest, God steps in instead.

• God steps in when least expected

*⁵For, before the harvest, when the blossom is gone
and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he will
cut off the shoots with pruning knives, and cut
down and take away the spreading branches.*

• God's harvest is sudden

So sudden is God's harvest, the world powers have no ability to harvest anything and what God has harvested is left to the animals.

*⁶They will all be left to the mountain birds of prey
and to the wild animals;
the birds will feed on them all summer, the wild animals all winter.*

• The distant nations turn to God

Instead of the distant nations trusting Egypt they look to Zion and trust instead in the God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*⁷At that time gifts will be brought to Yahweh Almighty
from a people tall and smooth-skinned,
from a people feared far and wide,
an aggressive nation of strange speech,*

*whose land is divided by rivers.
The gifts will be brought to Mount Zion,
the place of the Name of Yahweh Almighty.*

• **The Nubians turn to the Lord**

• **The only power that achieves salvation is the power of the living God and His Son**

The Nubians who were invited to join with Egypt instead join themselves to the Lord. Isaiah has proved the points he was making in connection with Damascus and Israel. Israel's salvation and Syria's rescue were not to be found in each other, not to be found in Egypt, but were to be found in looking to God alone. The point still stands. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ need turn to no worldly power, no worldly philosophy or ideology or management methods. The only power that achieves the purposes of salvation is the power of the living God and his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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