

Ephraim United with Syria in Idolatry & Destruction

Isaiah 17:1-14

Halifax: 13 September 2009

Introduction:

I must say that when we first began this section of Isaiah on the woes to the nations, I was a little intimidated by it.

- I had preached from the first 12 chapters of Isaiah some years ago, but I had not gone on into this section of woes from chapter 13 to chapter 24.
- When you read through a section like this, it can seem pretty repetitious and redundant.
- My fear was that it might get rather tedious to go through the announcement of destruction upon one nation after another...
 - But as we have moved forward with this series,
 - I have been amazed at the tremendous variety that is actually to be found upon closer examination of each nation.
 - With Babylon, we saw a world power that seemed to be unstoppable that God would humble and bring down, all that His people might be restored.
 - With Philistia, we saw how a weak rival nation to God's people was instructed not to rejoice in Judah's downfall because God was going to bring Judah back with greater strength than ever.
 - With Moab, we saw the sorrow that our Lord has when He destroys an apostate nation that has become complacent in their apostasy.
 - And now, today, we come to look at an idolatrous pagan nation (Syria) that Israel (God's covenant people) had aligned themselves with,
 - and at how this alliance of God's people with idolaters also brings them into alliance with them for destruction in judgement.
- I am very impressed with how relevant Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Israel and Syria is for us in western Christendom today.
 - Let us consider what the Spirit has to say to us.
 - First of all,

I. See how the church (the visible church) joins itself to the idolatrous world.

A. The alliance between Syria and Ephraim is an example of such an alliance.

1. We learned about this alliance back in Isaiah 7.
 - Do you remember that?

- a. We found King Ahaz of Judah trembling in his boots because he learned that Syria was confederate with Ephraim...
 - This was no idle threat, for God had already used these nations individually to bring trouble upon Judah...
 - Now they had combined forces against Judah!
 - Ahaz was terrified!
 - As one who did not know the Lord,
 - Ahaz had already determined that, contrary to God's Word, he would turn to Assyria for help.
 - Isaiah came to him to tell him that the LORD had already purposed to wipe out Syria and Ephraim, and that he need not fear them.
 - The Lord even offered Ahaz a sign to confirm his word,
 - but wicked Ahaz did not want to have anything to do with the Lord, so he refused.
 - Isaiah therefore told him,
 - Isa 7:17: The LORD will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.
 - Judah's trouble would not come from Syria and Ephraim, but from the very nation Ahaz was turning to for help.
- b. Now in case you are a bit confused about all these nations and who they are and where they came from, let me take a few minutes to identify them.
 - 1) At this time (the 8th century BC), God's covenant people were divided.
 - As you probably know, they were made up of twelve tribes...all descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
 - But the ten tribes to the north of Jerusalem had revolted and formed themselves into a separate kingdom...
 - They went by the name of Israel, because they were made up of ten of the tribes of Israel.
 - They also went by the name of Ephraim because Ephraim was the principle tribe in their region.
 - Their capital was at Samaria.
 - Judah and Benjamin were the two tribes of the twelve that were in the South.
 - This southern portion of Israel went by the name of Judah because Judah was the principle tribe.

- This was where the house of David was,
 - and of course God had promised that the Messiah would come through the line of David.
- It is also where Mount Zion was,
 - the place where the temple stood and where the worship that God had appointed took place.
 - In fact, God had commanded that no sacrifice should be offered in any other place besides Jerusalem.
- When the division was first made between Israel and Judah in 930 BC (about 200 years before Isaiah),
 - the Lord had commanded Israel (the northern kingdom) to continue to worship at Mount Zion.
 - But their king, King Jeroboam, had rebelled against this.
 - He was afraid that if Israel were to worship in Judah, they might realign themselves with Judah and with the house of David.
 - So as a safeguard against this, he had built two altars for the worship of Jehovah—one at Dan and one at Bethel.
 - These altars were built to the LORD Jehovah,
 - They were not built to other gods.
 - In fact, Jeroboam had been careful to construct them without making an image of God.
 - At this time, it was the custom of the nations to make images of their gods seated upon calves as their thrones,
 - but Jeroboam, in acknowledgement that the LORD is invisible to us and is not to be represented by images,
 - had left the calves without an image upon them.
 - They were a throne for the invisible God, the LORD Jehovah.
 - But despite his carefulness, this worship was offensive to God and idolatrous because it was not sanctioned by God's Word.
 - God had not commanded His people to worship Him in this way, nor had He promised to meet them in this place.
 - All sacrifices were to be offered at the temple in Jerusalem!
 - Jeroboam could not presume to tell God to visit His people at these altars that God had not commanded!

- From this day forward, all the prophets spoke out strongly against what Jeroboam had done...
- He had plunged Israel into idolatry.

TRANS> So that is the history Judah and Ephraim—

- There was a very serious division between them in day of Isaiah...
 - so serious that Israel had aligned herself with the pagan nation of Syria with a view to destroying Judah!
 - And Judah, in response, was making an alliance with Assyria for protection!

2) Now let me tell you about Syria.

- Syria (also known as Aram) was a nation just to the North of Israel.
- The capital of Syria was Damascus.
 - And at the time Isaiah wrote this oracle, Ephraim was in this wicked alliance with Syria against Judah.
- This alliance was especially wicked because Syria was full of idolatry,
 - and Israel's alliance with them had drawn Israel into much more idolatry.
 - Often this idolatry was not in the form of worshipping other gods so much as it was in worshipping Jehovah in the way that Syria worshipped their gods.
 - In other words, it was the sin of Jeroboam enlarged.
 - The Lord was greatly angered by this alliance and this idolatry.

TRANS> So are you getting all this straight?

- There is Judah, the southern kingdom where the temple and house of David were...and where God was to be worshipped.
- There is Israel or Ephraim, the northern kingdom where the idolatrous altars to Jehovah were...
- And then there is Syria (whose capital was Damascus) which was an idolatrous pagan nation that Ephraim had aligned themselves with.

3) And now there is one other nation I ought to discuss...

- Assyria.
 - You must be careful not to confuse Assyria with Syria.
 - Assyria was the nation that everyone feared in the 8th century BC

- They were feared because of their power and their cruelty and their lust for world dominion.
 - By the time we get to chapter 17, Isaiah has already had a lot to say about Assyria and their future in his prophecy...
 - He has told us that the Lord is going to use them to chasten all the nations, and that they will even conquer most of Judah,
 - but the LORD will not allow them to enter Jerusalem.
 - He will intervene in a most remarkable way—
 - which of course, He did—in 701 BC.
 - I have spoken to you about that several times in previous sermons—
 - about how Assyria had surrounded Jerusalem, with all her boasting and taunts,
 - only to wake up in the morning and find 185,000 of her troops had been killed by the angel of the Lord.
 - But when Isaiah gave this prophecy in chapter 17, it was over 30 years before that destruction of Assyria.
 - In chapter 17, Isaiah is foretelling the destruction of Syria which occurred in 732 BC...
 - And he is foretelling Israel’s destruction which would come ten years later in 722 BC.
 - The oracle we are looking at today was written, of course, some time before 732—before either Israel or Syria were destroyed...
 - and it speaks prophetically about that coming destruction.
2. Now I mentioned before that the alliance of Syria and Israel is assumed in Isaiah 17—it might be better to say that it is the main concern of chapter 17!
- It is very interesting how Isaiah presents this alliance.
 - a. If you look at verse 1, you see that he begins with the words,
 - “The burden (or oracle) against Damascus.”
 - This is the way that Isaiah has begun the prophecies against Babylon, Philistia and Moab that we have already considered...
 - “The burden against Babylon...”
 - “The burden against Philistia...”
 - “The burden against Moab...”

- and now,
 - “the burden against Damascus,” which was the capital of Syria.
 - The text goes on talking about the destruction that is going to come upon Syria in the verses that follow...and mentions some of the cities.
- b. But I want you to notice what Isaiah does when you get to verse 3...
- All of the sudden, he starts talking about *Ephraim*...
 - He talks about Ephraim as if it were just another city or province of Syria!
 - He does not introduce a new oracle for Ephraim—
 - He just starts talking about the fortress of Ephraim and then he goes on to describe how Israel will be brought very low.
 - Isaiah’s inclusion of Israel in this way is very significant!
 - Isaiah is treating Israel as if they are just another province of Syria!
 - He is showing them that because of their alliance with Syria, they will fall like Syria.
 - As far as the Lord is concerned, Israel has become a part of this pagan idolatrous nation that He is going to destroy!
 - They were supposed to be a holy people to the Lord,
 - distinct from the other nations,
 - but they had lost their unique identity and were one with the idol worshipping world.
 - You will remember that God had warned His people when they came into the land not to mingle or intermarry with the pagan nations around them...
 - In Deut 7, He said:
 - Deut 7:1-6: "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to

serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

- But Israel had completely disobeyed this instruction and now, as God had said, they had turned away from the Lord to worship idols.

TRANS> In verse 7 and 8, Isaiah speaks of how the remnant of Israel will return to the Lord, but in doing so,

3. Isaiah speaks of the idolatry into which Israel had been drawn...

- In verse 8, he speaks of looking to the altars, the work of their own hands, and the wooden images and incense altars.
 - They had mixed the truth of God with the lies of idols!
 - That is what idolatry is—it is man's distortion of God that often becomes so distorted that God is no longer even recognisable.
- The wooden images that Israel trusted in were the Asherim!
 - These were images of trees that were set up to invoke Asherah,
 - the goddess that the Syrians and many other of the nations around Israel worshipped.
 - And Isaiah, by saying that Israel had built wooden images (Asherim) shows us that Israel had been drawn in to this pagan worship!

B. But before we get too critical of Israel, we need to see that the churches in the west have done the very same thing in our day!

- We need to be humbled!
1. The church has turned to idolatry in hopes of bringing God's presence and power near.
- A shrine is set up in hopes that God will meet us there...
 - An altar is built in hopes that God will be merciful to us there...
 - An image is set up in hopes that God will hear our prayers when we gather around that image, and will make Himself known to us there.

- Various practices are engaged in in the hope that God will bless us through them and make his grace and power known to us.
 - We build idols because we think that God needs our help in getting His grace and blessing to us.
2. Here is an example of this kind of idolatry as described by Jim Wilson, a leader in an emergent church called Westwinds:
- “At Westwinds, worship services are organic, earthy and multi-layered. They don't use a painting or a poem to illustrate a point, or a drama as an element of a progressive presentation; instead, they weave several layers into a multi-sensory experience. The music, the art, the lighting effects, the powerful monologues and visual props form a tapestry that prepares the congregation to meet God at the communion table.”
 - "Worship experiences are 'moment collections' that we design to increase the incidences of bumping into the presence of God,"
 - Martoia says. "We hope we are creating moments where people can't help but experience God." At a service a few months before, Westwinds served communion to break a week of fasting. Instead of highlighting Jesus' suffering on the cross, as they did at the Good Friday service, they focused on one of the Beatitudes, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6 NIV). That day's "moment collection" incorporated the smell of baking bread, the worshippers' own hunger pains, poetry readings, fast food commercials playing on television sets throughout the auditorium, art on the big screen, and music. The music included "Breathe," a song with lyrics acknowledging that Jesus is a Christian's daily bread and affirming that believers are desperate for Him. These elements didn't give a context for the pastor to preach his sermon; rather, they and the pastor's words created a "moment collection"—a context for Jesus to speak to His people.”
 - You see what is being done here!
 - Things that God never commanded are being brought into His worship to try to bring about an experience of God!
 - The problem is not that they want to experience God,
 - but they are taking it upon themselves to decide how to bring God and His blessing upon them.
 - This is the worship of Jeroboam.
3. And like Israel, we see more and more Christians being drawn into goddess worship...the worship of Asherah.
- a. We see many of our young people dabbling in so called white magic and Wicca in hopes of getting power.

- We see them using formulas to ward off evil spirits and to gain authority over them—
 - formulas and methods that God never authorised... that come out of the books of pagans.
 - I have a friend who laid hands on cows and marched around a farm saying prayers in an effort to ward off evil spirits from that farm.
 - The problem is not the desire to ward off evil spirits,
 - but that pagan methods are employed to help the Lord to do this!
- b. Because of the influence of goddess worship, we see the embracing of a feminised gospel in the church today.
- This feminised gospel does away with the cross because the cross is offensive...
 - It rejects doctrine and law and judgement and replaces these with experience and feelings and therapy.
 - We see sermons that place feelings over truth.
 - We see the proclaiming of feminism, environmentalism, and homosexuality instead of the gospel for sinners.
 - We see sentimental songs that barely mention the judgement of God replacing the Psalms that God has given us to sing in our Bibles.
 - Even the Trinity Hymnal has carefully edited many of the Psalms to take out the parts that seem offensive!
 - We see God's law supplanted by therapy...
 - I am amazed at how many Christians think a person who is suicidal needs therapy instead of repentance!
 - or that a person who is depressed and so not doing anything needs therapy when they rather need to repent of their selfishness, deny themselves, and start serving God.
 - We see musical performances to get the emotions going rather than simple congregational singing without instruments as God appointed for His church in the New Testament.
 - We see all sorts of ceremonies and services and dramas in place of the simple reading and proclamation of the Word along with the sacraments.
4. This is all done with breathless enthusiasm as something new, as the cutting edge of churches making Christ relevant, but it is not new at all...
- Douglas Van Dorn quoted this to his congregation and asked them who they thought had said this:

- “It’s not what we think but what we experience that is the important thing. My Christian feeling is conscious of a divine spirit indwelling me which is distinct from my reason. With my intellect I am a philosopher, but with my feelings quite a devout man, yea more than that, a Christian. The essence of religion is the feeling of absolute dependence on God.”
 - Who do you think this is? Does this not sound like a modern evangelical?
 - Well it’s not...
 - This is Frederick Schleiermacher who died in 1834.
 - He is sometimes called the father of liberalism.
 - Evangelicals are going down the very same path all over again.
 - Soon, they will be in the place the United Church is in today.
 - All because they wanted to help God to bless His church and make it grow, turning to the world for help.
5. My brothers and sisters, we need to listen to the John’s warning in the New Testament.
- We need to keep ourselves from idols!
 - We need to hear Paul when he tells us not to depart from the simplicity of Christ—as the Corinthians were doing when they imported pagan worship practices—
 - drunkenness, gluttonous feasting, sensuality, everyone with their own song, everyone with their own prophecy (lay preaching by those who have not been set apart to preach), women preachers, unintelligible tongues...
 - These were all pagan practices that the Corinthian church was turning too...
 - Some of these same things are being introduced into the church in our day.
 - And we do things associated with this just as the Corinthians did...
 - We neglect church discipline—for sexual immorality, for dishonouring of parents, for dishonesty, for refusing to reconcile with a brother...
 - And we reject doctrines that are hard for our society—the doctrine of Hell, the doctrine of God’s wrath, the doctrine of the virgin birth, the doctrine of a substitutionary atonement, and many others!

TRANS> Now you need to see where all of this leads—and so now secondly,

II. See what the outcome of the church’s alliance with the world is.

- A. First of all, we see that the church that shares in the world’s idolatry will share in the world’s destruction...the same judgement falls upon them as falls on the world.

1. This is clearly seen in our text.
 - Verse 1 tells us that Damascus will cease being a city...
 - and it will not merely become a village, but rather a ruinous heap.
 - Damascus was truly and great and glorious place, but all that glory will be lost.
 - Verse 2 says these important cities will become ghost towns—places where sheep are grazed with no one to make them afraid.
 - There won't be anyone around to bother the sheep.
 - But you see that the same is said of Israel...
 - The fortress of Ephraim will cease...
 - vs 4 says,
 - “The glory of Jacob will wane and the fatness will of his flesh will grow lean.”
 - They, who once were healthy and robust (though filled with idols) will become skin and bones...
 - as a man wasting away.
 - A pitiful picture of a slow and wasting destruction.

TRANS> As for Damascus, so for Ephraim.

2. Do you see how this happens?
 - The church looks at the world, they look at the art and the music and the success...
 - and they try to imitate the world—and usually it's a cheap imitation.
 - They put on their cheesy little concerts and they get all excited about self-esteem or preserving the environment—
 - usually about 10 years after the world does—
 - And for a little while,
 - all this is very exciting and the church seems to be making a lot of progress...
 - There is an increase in number,
 - There is an increase in enthusiasm,
 - There is a renewed vitality...
 - But the glory of every nation eventually fades into oblivion...
 - It leads to death instead of life...

- And so the church, by aligning itself with the world, fades into oblivion with the rest of the society.
 - It is like attaching yourself to a great ship that is rusting away and will eventually sink.
 - All these movements and all the excitement will pass away and only the truth will remain.
- Look at the liberal churches today!
 - Many of them enjoyed great success when they first turned to idols.
 - They built great buildings when they were first moving into idolatry!
 - They had their growth and their enthusiasm because what they were doing was so hip—it was so—with it—it was with the spirit of the age!
 - But now those churches are dead...
 - They are closing their doors and losing their members.
 - What appeared to be making them relevant was actually taking away the unique message that God has given to His people...
 - More and more, they begin to replace what God says with what the world says...
 - and soon there is no reason to have a church at all!
 - They completely lose their message!
 - They lose their reason to exist!
 - I mean, who but apostate Christians want to join a church that is going to simply repeat what the world is already telling them?
 - The church is where you are supposed to find the truth—not the same lies of the world that lead to destruction!

B. You see, the very idolatry that was meant to strengthen the church will actually be the cause of its destruction...

1. The churches that engage in idolatrous worship are gradually destroying themselves even as they think they are doing themselves a favour.
 - Each time they embrace another piece of paganism and toss out another article of their faith or another commandment of God,
 - they are actually making themselves redundant until at last they will have nothing to say to the world or to themselves.

- All this brings great harm to the church as a whole...
 - It is the church as a whole that is reduced to a tiny remnant...
 - It is the church as a whole that becomes like the emaciated skeleton in verse 4 or the harvested field of verse 5-6 in which almost nothing is left.
 - We are all part of the visible church, and we need to lament these sins as our sins.
 - We are witnessing the destruction of the church in the west!

- 2. In verse 10, Isaiah shows us what is the essence of the damage...
 - The LORD says that their ruin has come because they have forgotten the God of their salvation and have not been mindful of the Rock of their salvation.
 - Idolatry causes you to forget God! God as He truly is!

 - It is a disaster to forget God...
 - True religion is all about remembering God and bringing people to God to deal with Him!
 - It is about coming to the true God as He is,
 - not as we would have Him to be or pretend that He is.
 - Idolatry is about chipping away at what God has revealed of Himself until nothing is left...

 - And not only that, but true religion is also about coming to the true God as He has appointed...
 - When we gather for worship, we are coming to His meeting—
 - Jesus calls the church together and He sets the agenda.
 - If we take over, as the emergent church is doing, then it ceases to be **His** meeting and it becomes **our** meeting.
 - We end up at last coming to God on our terms instead of on His terms,
 - and that means that we really don't come to God at all.

 - Idolatrous worship starts out making small adjustments in the way God is approached...
 - and before long, it no longer even approaches Him through Christ as He is revealed in the gospel...
 - We come to suppose that we can approach God without Christ—based on our own inherent goodness or on His general acceptance

of everyone—or something else that has nothing to do with the truth.

- The Rock of our salvation is forgotten and then we have no salvation.
- The only true way to approach God is through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - We must come to God by looking to Him as the one who died on the cross to cleanse us from our sins.
 - This is what idolatry always changes—little by little—over time.
 - It dreams up other ways to approach God that really are not approaches to Him at all.

TRANS> So be warned about the deception of idolatry...

- It looks intelligent, it looks successful, it looks promising...
 - but in fact it separates us from our dear Lord Jesus Christ until at last we have forgotten Him and no longer trust in Him.
 - My brothers and sisters, keep yourselves from idols!
 - Do not join yourselves to Damascus or you will loose everything.
- But as with Isaiah's other prophecies,
 - amidst all the bad news there is good news...

III. See how the mercy God remains with His people.

- We saw in verses 4-6 that Israel is reduced to skin and bones and that she becomes like a field that has been thoroughly harvested so that almost nothing is left...

A. But there is mercy in all this because something **is** left!

1. Jacob is lean, but he is not completely destroyed!

- Israel is like a carefully harvested field, but as verse 6 says,
 - Isa 17:6: "yet gleaning grapes will be left in it like the shaking of the olive tree, two or three olives at the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in its most fruitful branches," says the Lord God of Israel.
- Notice how Isaiah uses God's name here...
 - When he spoke of the destruction of Damascus and of Ephraim's fortress, he called Him **the LORD of Hosts—Yahwah Sabaoth—or the LORD of armies**—the one who raises up and sends armies to do His work.
 - But now when he speaks of there being some who are left,
 - He calls Him **the LORD God of Israel**—the keeper and preserver of His people...

- They live and remain because He is their God.
2. This is always the way of the Lord with His people!
- There is always a remnant according to election.
 - Even in amidst the worst apostasy, He has His people.
 - Even when His judgement falls upon the entire church in a region, God is there with this remnant blessing them according to His faithful covenant mercy.
 - In the very day of destruction, they are found looking to their Maker, as it says in verse 7.
 - Isa 17:7: In that day a man will look to his Maker...
 - They are looking to Him as the One who made them a people to start with—He is their Maker in that sense—and they look to Him to keep them as a people now in the midst of all the destruction...
 - And whether they are carried to a foreign nation, left in the land, or killed, they know that God is with them to bless them and to keep them.
 - They are not dependent on the things that the idolaters among them are dependent on.
 - They are not deceived by the apparent success and security of idolatry.
 - And Isaiah adds in the second part of verse 7 concerning the remnant of Israel:
 - Isa 17:7-b: And his eyes will have respect for the Holy one of Israel...
 - They know Him as the God who will not tolerate other gods or idolatrous worship...
 - Their eyes are fixed on Him not only to trust Him, but also to be directed by Him.
 - Remember that Jeroboam looked to Jehovah, but he did not look to Him to be directed by Him in his worship.
 - The true remnant realises that they are servants who are to wait upon Him.
 - not to go their own way, but to find out what is pleasing to Him and to do it.
 - They know that He is holy and that they dare not approach Him on their own terms or in the idolatrous ways of their fellow-Israelites!

- And so verse 8 says that they do not look to the altars, the work of their own hands, or respect what their fingers have made.
 - They realise how absurd it is to do that!
 - How can they make a way to approach God when God is the one who has made them?
 - How can they make a way when God makes the way?
 - Do you see how absurd it is to go through life making up your own God?
 - or following after a God that others have made up?
 - How can a god that you make help you?
 - Do you remember how this very promise of a restored remnant was fulfilled years later in the days of Hezekiah?
 - Hezekiah sent runners throughout Israel (the Northern Kingdom) to invite them to come and celebrate the Passover at Jerusalem!
 - This was after the Northern Kingdom was no longer really a kingdom—it had fallen years before...
 - Many of the people in Israel laughed at the call of Hezekiah's messengers to go up to Jerusalem,
 - but there were also many who went—
 - These were the ones who looked to the LORD instead of to idols.
 - They had been humbled and now they were prepared to seek the LORD.
 - Isn't wonderful to see how God remembers His promise to His people...
 - even when He is punishing them?
 - He always preserves a people by His grace!
 - When the judgement came, it caused many of them to smarten up who had grown complacent, and to return to God.
 - We need to pray that God's judgement will do that today.
3. So what we have is God's destruction of idolaters at the same time that He extends His mercy to His elect people...
- I would like to illustrate this with the early church in the first three centuries.
 - In those early days, there were those who aligned themselves with the world—with Damascus if you will...

- They embraced the philosophy of the Greeks and incorporated some of the Greek practices into the church...
- We see that in its early stages with the Church at Corinth...
 - But when the Roman Empire fell, these churches fell with it.
 - They were, as it were, part of the idolatrous empire because they had immersed themselves in idolatry.
- But something really marvellous happened with those who had remained as a chaste virgin to Christ...
 - When Rome fell, these believers carried on.
 - The fall of the empire did not effect them so much because they were not dependent on the empire, but on the Lord.
 - They followed the Lord rather than world's agenda.
 - And so when Rome's conquerors came in, these faithful believers were not conquered because they had never entangled themselves with Rome.
 - Then Rome's conquerors, the Goths and Visigoths, ended up hearing the gospel from these Christians...
 - And they ended up turning to the Lord!
 - It was a marvellous thing!
 - The conquerors of the empire were conquered by the gospel!
 - This is what God will do for you if you are among those who look to Him.
 - Yes, His judgement will fall, our society will fall, but if you are in Christ, you will not fall when the idolaters fall.

TRANS> And this is not all!

- The last three verses also speak of His mercy to His people in another way...
- B. He shows mercy to us in that He destroys those who destroy us (if we are holding to Christ).
- Look at verses 12-14:
 - Isa 17:12-14: Woe to the multitude of many people Who make a noise like the roar of the seas, And to the rushing of nations That make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters; But God will rebuke them and they will flee far away, And be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, Like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. Then behold, at eventide, trouble! And before the morning, he is no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, And the lot of those who rob us.

1. This seems to be a very general statement to all of God's people, both to Judah and the faithful remnant of Israel.
 - a. You see that the nations to be destroyed are not specified here... as to which nations...
 - It is all of the nations that come against God's people...
 - It was Syria, who is destroyed,
 - It is the wicked among Israel who joined with them to attack Judah...
 - It is Assyria who would come up to Jerusalem and be stopped—not allowed to enter the city.
 - The nations are seen to be coming with a mighty roar like the surging sea,
 - making a lot of noise and with a menacing aspect...
 - like a hurricane!
 - There is a kind of build-up showing all the clamour and commotion they make...
 - But then in verse 13, it says that God simply rebukes them and they flee away...
 - They were a mighty, consolidated force,
 - but at His mere rebuke they are scattered in many directions.
 - They become like chaff that the wind scatters and like tumbleweeds that are blown haphazardly along—without order or purpose.
 - And in verse 14, they are seen at eventide posing a great threat...
 - This is exactly what Assyria did when they surrounded Jerusalem...
 - It says, “At eventide, trouble [a great threat!]!”
 - “And in the morning he is no more...”
 - He is gone!
 - The Assyrian was full of boasts and threats and calls to Judah to surrender in the evening...
 - And then the very next morning, Sennacherib awoke to find 185,000 dead troops for no apparent reason—
 - Suddenly he and all his boast and threats were gone!

TRANS> And so it shall be dear brothers and sisters!

- Do not be intimidated by the world that has forgotten God!

- b. Listen, the world can put up such a load fuss and look so intimidating!
 - But you do not ever need to fear them because God will be with us to deliver us!
 - The day is coming when He will judge the world in righteousness and they will suddenly be gone!
 - That is what will happen to all who try to attack God's people.
2. Notice that the people who are defended are simply called "us" by Isaiah.
- "us!"
 - Us who are holding fast to Him when Idolatry is all around us among the Gentiles who know not God.
- a. God is going to destroy all these great nations for "us!"
- because of His covenant and His purpose with "us."
 - Surely Isaiah refers to all of God's people, both from Israel and from Judah, who look to the Lord.
 - There will be all sorts of wars and commotions and things,
 - But in the end, they will meet with sudden destruction:
 - Isa 17:14: This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us."
 - This is what they will get.
 - How secure you are in His service!
 - How glad you should be to serve Him as a chaste virgin.
- b. But should this make you proud and arrogant toward the nations who attack you and toward the idolaters in the church who entice you?
- No, it should humble you and make you think of yourself as a debtor to them...
 - You have the upper hand—even when they are crushing you.
 - It is for you to pray for them and to reach out to them...
 - It is for you, even when your own brothers come against you, to know that they will not prevail—that God will deal with them.
 - Israel had come against Judah, but Israel would not prevail.
 - Just as God said, she would be cut off.
 - Idolatrous Israel had also come against the faithful remnant of Israel—but the idolaters would be cut off,

- and the remnant would be richly blessed and established forever.

c. So what ought you to do then?

- What is the conclusion?
- It is for you to hold fast to God and to His way, Jesus Christ—to keep yourself from idols.
 - Can't you see—idolatry destroys!
 - Christ saves!