

Isaiah 17-18 Handout

Last week's chapters 15-16 contained Isaiah's oracle against the nation of Moab and the coming devastation. Isaiah himself mourns over their suffering, showing God's compassion even toward an enemy nation. Moab was urged to seek refuge in Judah and to submit to the king in Zion, where a righteous throne will be established. However, Moab refuses because of pride. Their prayers to their idols will fail and within three years the nation will face destruction.

In chapter 17 we are going to see an oracle against Damascus and Israel. These nations will be brought down by God because of their pride, idolatry and because they forgot their Maker and relied on idols, politics, and military strength rather than on the Lord.

Chapter 18 shifts to an oracle against Cush (Ethiopia). God warns Judah not to trust in Cush's power. Instead, He will handle the nation Himself, and we will see that Cush will ultimately come to honor the Lord.

Verses 1-3

What will Damascus become? _____

Damascus will lose its status as a city and become a heap of ruins.

Damascus was the capital city of Aram/Syria. It had been a powerful city in the ancient world. The cities of Aroer refers to towns on the Aram/Israel border.

What will happen to these cities? _____

The surrounding towns will be abandoned.

Who is going to share the same fate? _____

Both of these nations will be brought low together. They will share the same fate. They will both lose their power and glory and be left in ruins under God's judgment.

There is a little bit of hope in verse three.

What will be left in Aram? _____

However, the survivors will be reduced to the same weakened condition that Israel is about to experience.

Do you remember what the connection is between these two nations?

They were allies. They trusted in one another and in military power rather than the Lord (Isaiah 7-8). Their shared rebellion will lead to a shared fate. Both of these nations will be held accountable before God.

Verses 4-6

We now shift to Israel.

What's going to happen to Israel's glory? _____

What imagery is used to depict what Israel will look like? _____

Even after harvesting a crop whether grain or olives, there are always a few that remain. It will be the same with Israel. There will be a small remnant that will remain.

Verses 7-8

What are people going to do *in that day*? _____

In their distress, people will finally look to the Lord. These verses are showing a future day when Israel will not look to their idols any more. They will once again turn their worship to God alone. We see here that suffering strips away false trust and true repentance can take place. Remember, that is what all of this is about: God bringing His people back to Himself through repentance and restoration.

Verses 9-11

Verse 9 is referring to how Israel's cities will be as empty as the Canaanite cities were when the Israelites first entered the Promised Land. Many of the Canaanite strongholds were destroyed or abandoned.

We get the reason again for their judgment (vs 10). What is it? _____

Judgment is coming because of spiritual forgetfulness and self-reliance.

The end of verse 10 and then verse 11 show the futility of human effort. Even though they will plant the best vines and plants and tend to them with care, their crops will fail. It says, "the harvest will be as nothing".

This is a warning against self-sufficiency. They are looking for economic security and prosperity, yet continue to not depend on the Lord. They still haven't learned that true security comes from God alone.

In these first 11 verses, we get various names for God. These names and titles of God are not just decorative. They function as pointers or clues to guide people toward Him, and to explain why judgment happens, who controls it and what Israel has forgotten. Isaiah is being very deliberate here.

- Lord Almighty (vs.3) or Lord of Hosts
 - Meaning Yahweh, the covenant name for God.
 - This name emphasizes absolute sovereignty over military power.
- The God of Israel (vs.6)
 - Shows relationship
- Maker (vs.7)
 - Creator language
 - Personal, relational
 - Isaiah is contrasting what Israel made vs Who made Israel
 - You cannot trust what you create more than the One who created you.
- The Holy One of Israel (vs.7)
 - Holy —> morally pure, set apart, uncompromising
 - Israel —> uniquely bound to Israel by a covenant

- God your Savior (vs.10) or The God of your Salvation
 - God as deliverer, rescuer, redeemer
 - Israel forgot the God who saved them
 - They replaced Him with all kinds of other things
 - Judgment is coming not because God failed to save, but because they forgot who saved them.
- Rock (vs.10)
 - Shows stability, permanence and protection
 - Shows refuge —> safety in chaos
 - Contrasts the difference between false security and true security
 - What you trust becomes your refuge — and false refuges crumble.

Verses 12-14

What do the nations rage and roar like?

What happens to the people when God rebukes them?

So we need not be afraid of the roaring nations because they will soon be gone. Isaiah is trying to get the people to focus beyond what is currently happening and onto God. The nations may plan to plunder and loot, but they are not in control, God is. These verses show us who clearly rules the world and whose purposes will be accomplished in the end.

Listen to what Psalms 2:1-6 says.

*“Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?*

2 *The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,*

3 *“Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”*

4 *The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.*

5 *He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*

6 *“I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain.”*

Psalm 2:1-6 declares that God's king and rule cannot be resisted, and Isaiah 17 shows this truth worked out in history as proud nations and alliances collapse when they forget God.

Some themes we see from chapter 17:

- False security will fail
 - Alliances, military might, wealth and idols cannot save.
- Judgment and mercy coexist
 - God disciplines severely, but still preserves a remnant.

- Forgetting God leads to emptiness
 - When people trust what they have built rather than the God who saves, they lose both.
- God is sovereign over the nations
 - The final word doesn't belong to the raging nations, but to the Lord of hosts.

Isaiah 18

This chapter is an oracle concerning the nation of Cush. This oracle looks a bit different than the ones we've looked at thus far. It is more quiet, restrained and reflective.

Verses 1-2

In Hebrew, the phrase '*land of whirring wings*' is a poetic description that can be understood in different ways. Many see this phrase as referring to Cush's natural environment.

Cush is referring to the region south of Egypt in what would be modern day Sudan/Ethiopia. The area was dominated by great rivers including the Nile and its tributaries. It had marshlands and floodplains with swarms of insects, especially locusts and flies. The phrase 'whirring wings' brings to mind buzzing, or the humming sound of insects. So it was seen as a land alive with constant motion and noise, highlighting its power, remoteness and activity.

In verse 2 we learn several things about this people group:

- send envoys by sea in papyrus boats.
 - Papyrus boats were light and fast and were used on the Nile River and along the Red Sea.
 - This shows that Cush was engaged in long-distance diplomacy, very capable and active. They were not a passive nation.
- Swift messengers
 - shows their speed and strategic coordination
 - They were moving quickly to be a part of controlling and planning world events.
- Tall, smooth-skinned
 - The people of this area were seen as impressive, physically striking as well as being feared and powerful.
- Feared far and wide
- Aggressive nation
- Strange speech
- Land is divided by rivers
 - Cush's territory was shaped and protected by great rivers (the Nile system) which implies natural defense, wealth and stability.
 - Cush appeared secure, dominant and untouchable.



Verse 3

We see God's call to the nations.

What will be raised on the mountains? _____

What will sound? _____

These are both military signals suggesting a divine act rather than human diplomacy.

God is summoning the nations of the earth to see what He is about to do, so pay attention!

Verse 4

What does God say He will do? _____

Where will He look on from? _____

This is not indifference, but deliberate patience. This reminds us how God often works unseen and unhurried, even when the nations are restless. Isaiah is reminding us that just because something doesn't draw much attention doesn't mean it is powerless. He uses two comparisons to make his point: the sun and the dew. Both of these are simply present and inescapable, just like God.

Verses 5-6

These two verses use agriculture to describe God's decisive judgment that comes at exactly the right time, especially against proud nations that appear strong and secure.

What does it say God will do just before the fruit ripens? _____

He will cut down and take away the spreading branches. It will be left for the birds and wild animals to feed on. This shows how before human plans can mature, God will intervene.

Notice how this happens right when success seems imminent (right before the harvest). Just when nations believe their plans are about to succeed, God steps in and stops them.

We see from verses 5-6 that God is never rushed or threatened and He allows nations to rise — to a point, and that apparent prosperity is not divine approval.

Verse 7

What will the people of Cush do according to this verse? _____

Cush will acknowledge the Lord. This once feared nation will become worshippers of God. We see here that God's purposes include drawing the nations to Himself, not just judging them.

Verse 7 marks a crucial turning point in the chapter – from judgment to repentant recognition of God.

Some things we see from chapter 18:

- God's sovereign timing
 - God is NEVER late or rushed.
 - His silence is intentional, not powerless.
- Human power is temporary
 - Even strong, feared nations flourish only until God says "enough."
- Judgment can lead to worship
 - This chapter ends not in destruction, but in submission and honor being given to the Lord.

The big takeaway is that God governs world events quietly, precisely and for His glory. In the end, even powerful nations are meant to recognize and worship Him.

When we look at these two chapters side by side we see some huge contrasts.

| Aspect | Isaiah 17: Damascus / Israel | Isaiah 18: Cush / Ethiopia |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Type of Pride / Trust | Military alliances, fortified cities, political schemes | False confidence, perceived invincibility, distance from God's covenant people |
| Method of Judgment | Military defeat, collapse of cities, political downfall | Warning of future subjugation and humiliation; less immediate physical destruction |
| Timing / Fulfillment | Immediate; Assyria conquers 732 BC (Damascus) | Delayed; serves as a warning, gradual exposure of pride |
| Reason for God's Method | Immediate threats required swift correction to protect His people | Distant nation; method humbles false security gradually, showing God's universal authority |
| Theological Lesson | Human schemes and military power are fragile; God protects His covenant plan | Distance or perceived security does not protect from God; pride is exposed through patience and warning |
| Application | Trust in God over human alliances or strength | Recognize God's sovereignty over all nations, near or far; do not rely on false security |

What do you see as some of the major differences between the oracles on these two nations?

Where do you see the danger of forgetting God while still being outwardly successful (Isa 17:10–11)?

How do you personally respond when God seems silent, as in Isaiah 18:4?

What does it look like to trust God's timing rather than rushing to secure outcomes ourselves?

Practical Steps to Keep Trust Rooted in God

1) Pray Before You Plan

Practice: Begin decisions with prayer, not strategy. **Why:** Reorders trust—God is consulted first.

2) Name Your Dependencies

Practice: Honestly name what you're tempted to rely on (experience, money, reputation).

Why: Unspoken trusts become invisible idols.

3) Practice Specific Gratitude

Practice: Thank God concretely for outcomes. **Why:** Gratitude credits God as the source, not the system.

4) Keep Rhythms of Dependence

Practice: Sabbath, fasting, silence. **Why:** Interrupts productivity and reminds us we are not in control.

5) Measure Faithfulness, Not Just Fruitfulness

Practice: Ask, “Was I obedient?” before “Did it work?” **Why:** God values faithfulness before results.

6) Invite God into the Process

Practice: Pray through the middle, not just the start or finish. **Why:** Prevents using God as a stamp or rescue plan.

7) Hold Plans with Open Hands

Practice: Verbally surrender outcomes to God. **Why:** Keeps success from becoming an idol.

8) Stay Anchored in Scripture

Practice: Let God's Word define success. **Why:** Scripture recalibrates values when culture rewards growth alone.

9) Let Loss or Delay Draw You Toward God

Practice: Ask what God is inviting you to see in setbacks. **Why:** Discipline can lead to renewed worship (Isa 17:7).

10) Confess the Illusion of Control

Practice: Regular confession of self-reliance. **Why:** Confession dismantles pride before it hardens.