

A People Under Judgment Isaiah 17:1-14

Our text is Isaiah chapter 17. We're looking at the whole chapter this morning. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, as we come now to hear the reading of your word, I ask, Father, that you would give us open ears, open eyes, obedient and submissive hearts, that we would receive your word with faith, that we would obey, that we would love you as we should. I ask, Father, you would help me as I speak. Please help us all as we listen. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah chapter 17: “¹ An oracle concerning Damascus. Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city and will become a heap of ruins. ² The cities of Aroer are deserted; they will be for flocks, which will lie down, and none will make them afraid. ³ The fortress will disappear from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus; and the remnant of Syria will be like the glory of the children of Israel, declares the LORD of hosts. ⁴ And in that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low, and the fat of his flesh will grow lean. ⁵ And it shall be as when the reaper gathers standing grain and his arm harvests the ears, and as when one gleanes the ears of grain in the Valley of Rephaim. ⁶ Gleanings will be left in it, as when an olive tree is beaten—two or three berries in the top of the highest bough, four or five on the branches of a fruit tree, declares the LORD God of Israel.

“⁷ In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel. ⁸ He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, and he will not look on what his own fingers have made, either the Asherim or the altars of incense.

“⁹ In that day their strong cities will be like the deserted places of the wooded heights and the hilltops, which they deserted because of the children of Israel, and there will be desolation.

“¹⁰ For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge; therefore, though you plant pleasant plants and sow the vine-branch of a stranger, ¹¹ though you make them grow on the day that you plant them, and make them blossom in the morning that you sow, yet the harvest will flee away in a day of grief and incurable pain.

“¹² Ah, the thunder of many peoples; they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations; they roar like the roaring of mighty waters! ¹³ The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm. ¹⁴ At evening time, behold, terror! Before morning, they are no more! This is the portion of those who loot us, and the lot of those who plunder us.” Amen.

It's hard to pick a single theme from this morning's text, but there are certainly some very relevant things here. I think you'd have to start off with, ***Be Careful Who Your Friends Are***. When we're looking here at the start of chapter 17, verses 1 to 6, we see that Isaiah pronounces a judgment against Damascus, Damascus being the major city of Syria. He also speaks of the cities of Aroer, which were apparently a district, or an area, of Syria.

To understand what's happening there, you need just to quickly turn back to Isaiah chapter 7, and look at the first two verses. Isaiah chapter 7, starting at verse 1: “¹ In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. ² When the house of David was told, ‘Syria is in league with Ephraim,’ the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.”

Now once again, do you remember what was going on there? You had a great and dangerous kingdom to the sort of northeast of Judah, called Assyria. And there were smaller kingdoms between Jerusalem and Assyria. Those smaller kingdoms were the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the kingdom of the Syrians, and to the west along the coast, there were the Philistines.

The two kingdoms to the north, the Syrians and the Ephraimites, or Northern Israel, wanted to form a three-way alliance with Judah, in the hope that they could fight against Assyria, that dangerous kingdom further north. And they tried to force Judah's hand by forming an alliance between themselves. Syria, and the Northern Kingdom tried to force Judah's hand into this three-way alliance by attacking Jerusalem. They struck fear, as it said in Isaiah chapter 7, into the hearts of the people of Judah.

Here in Isaiah chapter 17, you see, then, that Isaiah prophesies of a judgment that's going to fall upon that nation of Syria. But by verse 3, he's speaking of Ephraim. He starts speaking of Damascus, he starts speaking of Syria, and then with barely a change in tone or rhythm, he moves immediately to Ephraim and Jacob. In other words, they formed an alliance with a pagan nation, they turned against the people of their own blood—they turned against that Southern Kingdom of Judah; therefore, they are going to come under the same judgment as the pagan nation with whom they had formed their alliance.

Be careful who your friends are. Be careful who you strike up an alliance with. Be careful who you associate with. That's good advice for nations; that's good advice for churches; that's good advice for each and every individual in the world. It's in First Corinthians chapter 15 that Paul gives the warning that “bad company corrupts good morals.” These people who are supposedly the people of God have struck up unwise alliances. They've gone directly against the commandment of God. Turn to Deuteronomy chapter 7, and let's just read verses 1 to 5. Now these are the commandments that Moses gave the nation, the people of Israel, as they were heading into the Promised Land. Starting at verse 1:

“⁷ ‘When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, ² and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. *You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.* ³ You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. ⁵ But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire.”

Note—and I put some emphasis on it—looking back there in verse 2: “You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.” It can’t be much clearer, can it? Don’t form alliances with those nations that surround you. Don’t form alliances with those nations that are pressing into the Promised Land. You shall not form a covenant with them. That’s actually the repetition of a commandment given earlier in the book of Exodus, chapter 23:32, much to the same effect: Do not form any covenant with the nations around you.

What’s happened? They formed a covenant, and though they be the people of God, they have lined themselves up with a pagan nation, and they’re going to come under exactly the same judgment as the nation with whom they formed an alliance. So in verses 1 to 6, as I’ve said, the subtitle that I’ve given it is, “Be Careful Who Your Friends Are.” Be careful whom you make alliance with.

We read in Second Kings chapter 17 what the result of all this was. What was the result? They were destroyed. They were carried off. The Northern Kingdom was never re-established. There was never again a nation that you could call Ephraim, or Israel. The Northern Kingdom was destroyed. They corrupted the nation, or the people of God.

You know, think of how many New Testament warnings there are. We read from First Corinthians chapter 10: Don’t share in idolatry. Don’t share in pagan worship. Paul’s argued and shown that the religion of these pagans was the worship of demons back at verse 20: “I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.” And he says in verse 21: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.”

²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.” What does He mean there, when He says, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord”? Well, our minds should go to the communion meal. But what is that “cup”? What is that “meal”? That communion meal is a covenant meal. And so what Paul is actually saying is, “You cannot celebrate the covenant of the Lord, and at the same time be celebrating the covenant of pagan worship.” Paul is saying that worship is a covenant relationship, that those who are worshipping demons are drinking of the cup of demons; they are in covenant with Satan. He’s saying, “You can’t be in a covenant with one and then with the other—God and the demons, God and the evil god and the fallen spirits. You just can’t do it that way. There is no compromise.” And those who think that there is a compromise are not worshippers of the true and the living God.

I’ll point out another passage from the apostle Paul. Move forward into Second Corinthians chapter 6. Now most of us know this, and we think of this in the context of marriage, but I actually think that it’s going deeper than just simply marriage. It most certainly applies to the idea of marriage, but I think it applies to a wider scope than marriages.

Second Corinthians 6, verse 14: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as

God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.’”

Form no partnership with the things of evil. “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.” I think that, yes, it applies to marriage, but it also applies, for example, in business. Don’t go into a business partnership with those who are unbelievers. Don’t tie yourself contractually, don’t tie yourself with some kind of yoke, some kind of commitment.

The idea behind “yoked” is that you’re pulling a plough. It’s suggesting that there’s a common purpose, common work to be done—two animals pulling a plough. Don’t be one of those animals pulling that plough, if the other one pulling the plough is not a fellow believer. Don’t dedicate your life to something. And so, obviously, it applies to marriage. Marriage is the union of a man and woman, dedicated to serving God, dedicated to raising up godly offspring, dedicated to glorifying God. It also applies to a broader range of things than just simply marriage.

The people of the Northern Kingdom were unequally yoked. And what’s the result of this? Well, Damascus will cease to be city and becomes a heap of ruins, back in Isaiah chapter 17: “² The cities of Aroer are deserted; they will be for flocks, which will lie down, and none will make them afraid.” I think that’s actually a bit of a reference back to the theme that Isaiah has been developing. When that day comes—and this is a passage rich in references to that day—the people of God will rest in peace. They will enter into the rest of the Lord.

Continuing reading: “³ The fortress will disappear from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus; and the remnant of Syria will be like the glory of the children of Israel, declares the LORD of hosts.” What does He mean there? Well, He’s saying that the Northern Kingdom of Israel has lost its glory. What would its glory have been? Its glory was the true worship of the living God. Its glory was its covenant relationship with the living God. It’s lost its glory. The glory’s gone. It’s now a nothing. The fortress disappears from Ephraim, the kingdom from Damascus. The glory of the children of Israel is gone—speaking of that Northern Kingdom.

Verse 4: “And in that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low, and the fat of his flesh will grow lean.”—famine; suffering; the loss of blessings. What was God’s promise to the people as they went into the Holy Land? “Land flowing with milk and honey. Keep my commandments, keep my laws, keep my statutes. Your harvests will not fail. Your cattle won’t even lose their calves. You’ll be fertile. You’ll be blessed with an abundance of food.”

But now, this disobedience, this idolatry, this joining with a foreign nation brings about what? Starvation. “The fat of his flesh will grow lean.”⁵ And it shall be as when the reaper gathers standing grain and his arm harvests the ears, and as when one gleanes the ears of grain in the Valley of Rephaim.⁶ Gleanings will be left in it, as when an olive tree is beaten—two or three berries in the top of the highest bough, four or five on the branches of a fruit tree, declares the LORD God of Israel.”

So when this judgment falls, what will be left? Not much. Just a little. You know, you go into a field after the harvest has been through, even today with our mechanical harvesting, and you'll see wheat that's fallen on the ground. You'll see some of the crop didn't make it into the silo. You'll see that there's just a little bit left. And God's saying that's what Israel's going to be like. That's what the Northern Kingdom's going to like. There's going to be almost nothing left.

Although Isaiah doesn't use the word, he's used the phrase, "In that day," back at verse . And we should already be aware as we've worked forward in this passage that "in that day" means something. Remember all the things that are going to happen "in that day." In that day there'll be salvation. In that day, there'll be judgment. In that day, there'll be blessing. In that day, there'll be destruction. In that day, people will be gathered in. In that day, people will be rejected. In that day. In that day.

He's already used the phrase "in that day," and I think that he's just hinting at the fact that these gleanings that are left are some of the faithful remnant he's been promising in earlier parts of the book. So let's move on to the second part.

A subtitle of our next section, verses 7 to 9, is *The Promise of a Faithful Remnant*—in that day. So you see, it links verses 4 to 6 with verses 7 to 9. They're both "in that day" passages. Verses 4 to 6 tell us that in that day, there'll be judgment, and very little left. Verses 7 to 9 tell us again about "in that day."

⁷ In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel. ⁸ He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, and he will not look on what his own fingers have made, either the Asherim or the altars of incense. ⁹ In that day their strong cities will be like the deserted places of the wooded heights and the hilltops, which they deserted because of the children of Israel, and there will be desolation."

And so in that day, in that day when judgment falls, you've still got some who look to their Maker. You've got some you look upon the Holy One of Israel. You've got a remnant. God's judgment is going to come, and it's going to be like a harvester. There's going to be nothing left in the field but straw. But in that day, there are going to be some who look upon their Maker. There are going to be some whose eyes will look upon the Holy One of Israel. And we should remember that phrase, "the Holy One of Israel." It gets used at least twenty-five times in the book of Isaiah.

Turn back to Isaiah chapter 10, verses 20 to 22. You hear the "in that day." ²⁰ In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. ²¹ A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. ²² For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. ²³ For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth." Notice the things that I want you to see, looking at verse 20: "In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth."

Now just turn back to Isaiah chapter 17. Hear the similarity in verse 7: “In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel.” And so you see, even as Isaiah does prophesy the judgment that’s coming, he prophesies also the salvation of a faithful remnant. In that day, there will be a remnant. They will be faithful. They will repent.

And so that’s why we went through earlier those couple of long readings from Second Kings and Second Chronicles. What happened? Well, in Second Kings, we read in chapter 17 how the Northern Kingdom of Israel was carried off into captivity. What happened in Second Chronicles chapters 29 and 30? We read of how King Hezekiah sent letters out to the remnant that remained. Remember he sent a call out into that Northern Kingdom: “Come back! Come back and worship the Lord God in truth! Come back! Celebrate the Passover with us. Come back to the presence of the Lord and the worship that He has consecrated forever.”

And what happened? It says some laughed him to scorn, but it also says some heard the call and they came back. A remnant returned. They came back. They came back, and they worshipped the living God. It sounds very much like Second Chronicles chapters 29 and 30, that a great revival is underway, doesn’t it? People called back into the worship of the living God.

In that day there’s also the judgment. ⁹“In that day their strong cities will be like the deserted places of the wooded heights and the hilltops, which they deserted because of the children of Israel, and there will be desolation.” Now that’s sort of a reference back, once again, to the time when Israel took possession of the Promised Land, and when they were obedient, the peoples of the land fled from before them. They were conquering territory and taking land. And it’s referring back to there, and it’s saying that it’s going to be like that again.

So once again, you get “in that day” prophecy, this hint—just a hint that’s pointing back to Exodus and God’s people coming out of slavery into His promises. It’s just a gentle little hint, you know, and there’s not to be too much made of that. But it’s a theme. Isaiah keeps picking up these themes, and keeps weaving them into the things that he prophesies.

Let’s have a look at the next part. Verses 10 to 11. A subtitle: ***Apart from God, All Labours Are Futile***. Apart from God, all of our efforts are futile. Verse 10: “For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge.” They have forgotten their God. They’ve turned away from God.

Just turn quickly to Psalm 106, from verse 19: “They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image.” Now that’s the incident with Aaron, while Moses was up the Mountain. Verse 20: “They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. ²¹ They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, ²² wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea. ²³ Therefore he said he would destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them.”

They forgot their God. How did they forget their God? They turned to the worship a metal image. The image of what? A calf. Think about what happened in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. We’ve studied these things before. If you remember the series on Josiah, what happened? As soon as the kingdoms were divided, as soon as the Northern Kingdom was set up,

two golden calves were erected, one at the southern end, one at the northern end. They forgot, exactly as the people forgot the God who had rescued them. They forgot God, their Salvation.

Looking at Isaiah chapter 17, verse 10: “For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge.” They’ve turned their back on God. Once again, you get a similar theme coming up in the book of Revelation. The church at Ephesus—what were they told to do? Turn there to Revelation chapter 2, starting at verse 1. Jesus is speaking:

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. ²“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.””

Remember! “Remember therefore from where you have fallen.” What had they forgotten? They had forgotten that though they were in all respects a strong church, serving the Lord faithfully, they had forgotten the God who was their Saviour. They had forgotten to love the Lord Jesus Christ as they should. He was to be their first love, their greatest love, and they had forgotten. And the Lord says to them, “Remember! Come back! Remember!” And these people have forgotten.

Let’s keep reading back in Isaiah chapter 17, verse 10: “Therefore, though you plant pleasant plants and sow the vine-branch of a stranger, ¹¹ though you make them grow on the day that you plant them, and make them blossom in the morning that you sow, yet the harvest will flee away in a day of grief and incurable pain.”

Now what’s that saying? It’s kind of setting up an imaginary circumstance, because you don’t plant a plant and have it blossom on the day that you plant it, and that’s what it’s suggesting. What he’s saying is, “Look, if you could get the very best vine branches from around the world; if you could get the very best plantings to produce grapes from around the world, and with all the care possible you plant them in the best place possible, and they take so well that they blossom the day you plant them—you’re still not going to get a harvest. It doesn’t matter what you try to do, you’re not going to get a harvest from this crop. You’re not going to get what you seek for.” Why not? “Because you’ve forgotten God. You’ve forgotten the God who planted you in the land, and therefore, the things that you plant will not produce.”

Remember back earlier in Isaiah, Isaiah describes the people as God’s vineyard. And God says, “I set it up. I set it up so perfectly. I found some fertile soil, I took the rocks and the stones out of the soil. I set up a fence around the vineyard. I set up a watchtower. I did all that could be done—everything that could be done. I planted that vineyard, expecting good wine, good grapes, and what did I get? Bitterness. A bitter harvest. A horrible set of grapes. Bad stuff.”

And God's saying to them, "I planted you, and all I got from you was rubbish. Now you think that you could plant the best vines in the world and get the best grapes in the world? No. It doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way. You produce a sour crop for me, I'll take your crop from you." That's what Isaiah's saying here. Nothing that they do is going to work for them. Everything that they try is going to fail. Why? Because they're trying to work apart from the blessing of God. They've turned their back on God, they've turned their back on the faithfulness in the promises, they've become unfaithful, they're getting no benefit for their labours, and they think if they try just a little bit harder—"If I try just a little bit harder."

It's a picture of the world today, isn't it? Every politician thinks they've got some solution. They all think they've got some way of solving the problems of humanity, don't they? You know, "Trust me. I've got a plan. Trust me. Vote for me. I've got a plan. I'm going to make this work, if we just put the plan in place. If you just give the government enough power. If you just obey enough rules. If we just walk and work hard enough, it'll all come good, and everything will go right, and we'll all be rich, and we'll all be satisfied, and everybody'll be happy, if you just follow my plan." And what does God say? "You have forgotten the God of your salvation. And you can plant as you like, you can farm as you like, and you can sow as you desire. You will not reap the harvest that you are expecting."

All these plans of humanity, all these foolish ideas of man, all these things that are set up in rebellion against God's way, against God's will—this idea that somehow or other if we can just cast off all moral restraint, we'll be happy—we'll be happy, everyone will be happy if they just do whatever they feel like doing, whenever they feel like doing it. What do they get? Nothing. Who's happy? Nobody.

I don't live in a happy world at this moment. I look around this world, and I don't actually see too many happy people. I see some in the church, but, you know—do you read the papers, or do you read the Internet news? Do you see what's happening? Where are the happy kids in our schools? A lot of them aren't happy, either. Their families are falling apart. They've got no happiness, because they've got no boundaries, they've got no foundation, they've got no structure, they've got no one expressing true love towards them. And they're not happy.

I say it again—Why is it so attractive to get drunk? 'Cause while you're drunk, you're not thinking. Your mind's not turning these things over. You're just being drunk and stupid. Why is it so attractive to get stoned? Exactly the same reason—you're not thinking. Why is it so attractive to live in a world of fantasy? You just don't want to think. 'Cause you're not happy. They've forgotten the God of their salvation. And so everything they try to do fails.

In the covenantal curses in Deuteronomy chapter 28, that's what God said. "Disobey me, and though you go out into the fields sowing much, you will reap little. Nothing will come in for you." And Isaiah picks up that theme of God's judgments.

The subtitle I've given to verses 12 to 14 is, *The Fate of the Nations*. Let's read: "¹² Ah, the thunder of many peoples; they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations; they roar like the roaring of mighty waters! ¹³ The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before

the wind and whirling dust before the storm. ¹⁴ At evening time, behold, terror! Before morning, they are no more! This is the portion of those who loot us, and the lot of those who plunder us.”

So what’s Isaiah speaking of there? Well first of all, he’s speaking of the fact that God is going to punish these nations that are troubling His people. God is going to punish these people that are attacking His covenant people, His faithful ones, His faithful remnant. God is going to act in judgment. Look at the picture of the nations. What does Isaiah say of the nations? They’re like the storm-tossed sea. “They thunder like the thundering of the sea...They roar like the roaring of mighty waters! The nations roar like...many waters.”

These pictures are picked up in the book of Revelation. The Apostle John, in the book of Revelation, in his apocalyptic vision in Revelation, speaks of things that are happening concerning the waters. Let’s turn there—Revelation, chapter 13, verse 1:

“¹ And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.”

We’ll stop there—the beast rising out of the sea; the Antichrist; that picture, or that summary of all the evil that is in the world, that rises up in rebellion against God. Where does the beast rise up from? The sea. The Antichrist, the Evil One—the dragon gives him his power, so he’s empowered by Satan. And the dragon enthrones him and gives him all the authority that the dragon can give him at the end of verse 2. The Evil One—rising up from the sea. And the sea is the peoples, the nations who hate God, the nations in their rebellion.

Move on to Revelation chapter 17, verse 1: “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.’ ³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.” We’ll just stop there.

“The great prostitute, who is seated on many waters.” Now what’s this a picture of? Well, I think all the commentators are pretty much agreed that this is the Babylonian religion of beast worship, the religion of corruption. It’s a great religious grouping. And where is this prostitute seated? On many waters—the same place the beast came from. The same place from which the beast comes, from which the unclean religion comes from. The beast and the great prostitute come from the same place—the waters, the churned up waters.

Move on down to verse 15: “¹⁵ And the angel said to me, ‘The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.’” The waters that you see are peoples, multitudes and nations and languages. You see where the beast comes from, and you see where this evil, unclean religion comes from—out of the waters. Think of what Isaiah says: The thunder of many peoples, thundering like the thundering of the sea, roaring like might waters; the roaring of many waters.

But let's read on to part of the end here—Revelation chapter 21, verse 1: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” Once again, I'll just say, let's not argue about whether this is literal or not. Just understand the theme that is being picked up in the book of Revelation.

That sea, from which came the rebellion, from which came the beast, from which came the prostitute—in the new heavens and the new earth, that unclean sea, that gathering of rebellious nations—they're not there anymore. They're gone. There's no basis for rebellion. There's no rebellious peoples, there's nowhere for Satan to do his work. In the new heavens and the new earth, all that is evil is gone.

So I'm not thinking that it is literal. I'm thinking that it's more figurative. But argue about that any other day. I think you understand the point I'm trying to make. The sea is gone. That place where the beast came from, that place where the great prostitute came from—they're not there in the new heavens and the new earth. They're not there in God's new creation, where His saints dwell for all eternity. No. God has rebuked the waters.

Now turn back to Isaiah chapter 17, verse 13: “The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he,” God, “will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm.” Now “chaff” is another word worth picking up—Psalm 1, verse 4. We'll start from the beginning of the Psalm—the way of the righteous, the blessed man, and the wicked. Psalm 1:

“¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” The wicked, like chaff that the wind drives away.

Now turn in your New Testament to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 3—the preaching of John the Baptist. Let's start at verse 1: “¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

“⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

“⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’”

for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

“¹¹ ‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’”

The chaff—the destruction of the chaff, the judgment of God. I’ve deliberately taken us, in interpreting this passage, from a local prophecy concerning the people of Judah at the time that Isaiah spoke, or in their very near future, and I’ve deliberately tried to develop the themes out and through and into the New Testament. Why? Because there was a fulfillment. We read about it. Remember earlier, we read in Second Kings and Second Chronicles, there was a fulfillment. God’s judgment fell upon His unfaithful people. And then through the ministry of Hezekiah, God granted revival and called a remnant out of that destroyed nation to come back to the worship of true and the living God.

And yet, the thing is, we have these themes that appear, even in a prophecy that speaks of something that definitely happened in that place and in that time. These themes keep reappearing through Scripture, on and into the future, the idea of “that day”—that day of visitation, that day of salvation, that day of judgment; the idea of the saving of a remnant; the rebuking of the waters.

The many nations that are unclean and that rise up in rebellion against God—we find that theme in the book of Revelation, looking towards the end of all things, the end of this age and the beginning of the new age. And there we find that God puts the sea in its place, so to speak, using the sea figuratively or metaphorically—the sea being the place from which rebellion arose.

And we see in the preaching of John the Baptist that John saw the beginning of *our* age—you might want to call it the gospel age or the New Covenant age, the preaching of the gospel, the church—John saw the beginning of our age as the gathering of the wheat into the barn and the destruction of the chaff. All these themes keep moving forward through Scripture. So, often you find that something has a local and a particular application, but then the themes that are shown develop into full-blown apocalyptic visions in the New Testament.

We’ll just close off now with verse 14, Isaiah’s word of comfort. This is Isaiah speaking to the people of God: “¹⁴ At evening time, behold, terror!” At evening time, behold terror! It looks bad. It looks like destruction is coming. It looks like nothing good is going to happen. “Before morning, they are no more!” Before morning, they are no more.

These rebellious nations that are the unclean waters of people rebelling against God—at evening time, no hope. The sun comes up in the morning. They’re gone. They are no more. The day will come. The day will come when God will rescue His people and cast judgment upon the nations. He will do as He must do. He will separate His people out. He is preparing even now to receive His people into the new heavens and the new earth. It’s all in the hands of God.

Looking at the last part of verse 14, “This is the portion,” says Isaiah, “of those who loot us, and the lot of those who plunder us.”

The church seems a very small and feeble thing, doesn't it? It seems like a nothing. It seems a very small and feeble thing in the world. It seems that the influence of God's people is nothing. It seems that we count for nothing. We're laughed at, we're ridiculed, our ideas are out-of-date, we don't understand—modern science. We don't understand this, that, and the other. They look at us as fools. What's their portion? In the morning—“They are no more.” In the morning, they're finished, they're gone.

You know that phrase—every time I hear it, I just sort of laugh—“We're on the right side of history.” Oh, yeah? You think. You think you're on the right side of history? The right side of history is the side that clings to the living God. The right side of history is the side of history that worships the living God in obedience. Those who hate God, those who hate God's law, those who would plunder God's people—they're not on the right side of history. They're on the path to destruction. Before morning, they are no more. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do once again thank you for your word. We thank you that you have shown us so many things in Scripture. We thank you that you have blessed us with the writings of the prophets and the apostles.

Father, I pray that we would remember these things, that we would dwell upon these things, that we would turn your word over in our mind, that we would obey. That we, through doing this, would love you more and that we would serve you as we should. I pray that we, your people, would be your obedient people, a light in this world. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.