
ISAIAH 17: 1 The burden of Damascus: "Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap.

Judgments of God upon Damascus, Isa 17:1-3; and upon Israel, Isa 17:4-6. Good effects of these judgments on the small remnant or gleaning that should escape them, Isa 17:7, Isa 17:8. The same judgments represented in other but stronger terms, and imputed to irreligion and neglect of God, Isa 17:9-11. The remaining verses are a distinct prophecy, a beautiful detached piece, worked up with the greatest elegance, sublimity, and propriety; and forming a noble description of the formidable invasion and sudden overthrow of Sennacherib, exactly suitable to the event, Isa 17:12-14.

This prophecy by its title should relate only to Damascus; but it full as much concerns, and more largely treats of, the kingdom of Samaria and the Israelites, confederated with Damascus and the Syrians against the kingdom of Judah. It was delivered probably soon after the prophecies of the seventh and eighth chapters, in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz; and was fulfilled by Tiglath-pileser's taking Damascus, and carrying the people captives to Kir, (2Kgs 16:9), and overrunning great part of the kingdom of Israel, and carrying a great number of the Israelites also captives to Assyria; and still more fully in regard to Israel, by the conquest of the kingdom, and the captivity of the people, effected a few years after by Shalmaneser. - L.

Verse 1

The burden of Damascus - Which is, according to the common version, The cities of Aroer are forsaken. It has already been observed by the learned prelate that the prophecy, as it relates to Damascus, was executed in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, probably about the third year. If we credit Midrash, the Damascenes were the most extensive and flagrant of all idolaters. "There were in Damascus three hundred and sixty-five streets, in each of these was an idol, and each idol had his peculiar day of worship; so that the whole were worshipped in the course of the year." This, or any thing like this, was a sufficient reason for this city's destruction.

A ruinous heap - For מְעִי mei, "a ruinous heap," the Septuagint reads לְעִי lei, "for a ruin," the Vulgate כְּעִי kei, "as a ruin." I follow the former.

ISAIAH 17: 2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken. They will be for flocks, which shall lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.

Verse 2

The cities of Aroer are forsaken "The cities are deserted for ever" - What has Aroer on the river Arnon to do with Damascus? and if there be another Aroer on the northern border of the tribe of Gad, as Reland seems to think there might be, this is not much more to the purpose. Besides, the cities of Aroer, if Aroer itself is a city, makes no good sense. The Septuagint, for עֲרֹעֵר aroer, read עֲדֵי עַד adey ad, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, for ever, or for a long duration. The Chaldee takes the word for a verb from עָרָה arah, translating it חֲרְבוּ cherebu, devastabuntur, "they shall be wasted." The Syriac read אֲדוּעִיר adoeir. So that the reading is very doubtful. I follow the Septuagint as making the plainest sense.

ISAIAH 17: 3 The fortress shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria. They will be as the glory of the children of Israel," says the LORD of Armies.

Verse 3

The remnant of Syria "The pride of Syria" - For שאר shear, "remnant," Houbigant reads שאת seeth, "pride," answering, as the sentence seems evidently to require, to כבוד cabod, "the glory of Israel." The conjecture is so very probable that I venture to follow it.

As the glory - בכבוד bichbod, "In the glory," is the reading of eight MSS., and ten editions.

ISAIAH 17: 4 "It will happen in that day that the glory of Jacob will be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh will become lean.

Verse 4

In that day - That is, says Kimchi, the time when the ten tribes of Israel, which were the glory of Jacob, should be carried into captivity.

ISAIAH 17: 5 It will be like when the harvester gathers the wheat, and his arm reaps the grain. Yes, it will be like when one gleanes grain in the valley of Rephaim.

Verse 5

As when the harvestman gathereth "As when one gathereth" - That is, the king of Assyria shall sweep away the whole body of the people, as the reaper strippeth off the whole crop of corn; and the remnant shall be no more in proportion than the scattered ears left to the gleaner. The valley of Rephaim near Jerusalem was celebrated for its plentiful harvest; it is here used poetically for any fruitful country. One MS., and one ancient edition, has באסף beesoph, "In gathering," instead of כאסף keesoph, "AS the gathering."

ISAIAH 17: 6 Yet gleanings will be left there, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outermost branches of a fruitful tree," says the LORD, the God of Israel.

ISAIAH 17: 7 In that day, people will look to their Maker, and their eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel.

ISAIAH 17: 8 They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands; neither shall they respect that which their fingers have made, either the Asherah poles, or the incense altars.

Verse 8

The altars, the work of his hands "The altars dedicated to the work of his hands" - The construction of the words, and the meaning of the sentence, in this place are not obvious; all the ancient Versions, and most of the modern, have mistaken it. The word מעשה maaseh, "the work," stands in regimine with מזבחות mizbechoth, "altars," not in opposition to it; it means the, altars of the work of their hand; that is of the idols, which are the work of their hands. Thus Kimchi has explained it, and Le Clerc has followed him.

ISAIAH 17: 9 In that day, their strong cities will be like the forsaken places in the woods and on the mountain top, which were forsaken from before the children of Israel; and it will be a desolation.

Verse 9

As a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch "the Hivites and the Amorites" - החרש והאמיר - hachosh v'haamir. No one has ever yet been able to make any tolerable sense of these words. The translation of the Septuagint has happily preserved what seems to be the true reading of the text, as it stood in the copies of their time; though the words are now transposed, either in the text or in their Version; οἱ Ἀμαρρῆαιοι καὶ οἱ Εὐαῖοι, "the Amorites and the Hivites." It is remarkable that many commentators, who never thought of admitting the reading of the Septuagint, understand the passage as referring to that very event which their Version expresses; so that it is plain that nothing can be more suitable to the context. "My father," says Bishop Lowth, "saw the necessity of admitting this variation at a time when it was not usual to make so free with the Hebrew text." Mr. Parkhurst is not satisfied with the prelate's adoption of the reading of the Septuagint, "the Hivites and the Amorites." He thinks the difficult words should be thus rendered; he takes the whole verse: "And his fortified cities shall be like the leaving, or what is left כעזובת caazubath, of or in a ploughed field, החרש hachosh, or on a branch which they leave coram, before, the children of Israel." Which he considers a plain reference to the Mosaic laws relative to the not gleaning of their ploughed fields, vineyards, and oliveyards, but leaving עזב ozeb, somewhat of the fruits, for the poor of the land; Lev 9:9, Lev 9:10; Deu 24:19-21, in the Hebrew. I fear that the text is taken by storm on both interpretations. One MS. has כל ערי col arey, "all the cities;" and instead of החלש hachalash, "of the branch," six MSS. have החדש hachodesh, "of the month." But this is probably a mistake.

ISAIAH 17: 10 For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not remembered the rock of your strength. Therefore you plant pleasant plants, and set out foreign seedlings.

Verse 10

Strange slips "Shoots from a foreign soil" - The pleasant plants, and shoots from a foreign soil, are allegorical expressions for strange and idolatrous worship; vicious and abominable practices connected with it; reliance on human aid, and on alliances entered into with the neighboring nations, especially Egypt; to all which the Israelites were greatly addicted, and in their expectations from which they should be grievously disappointed.

ISAIAH 17: 11 In the day of your planting, you hedge it in. In the morning, you make your seed blossom, but the harvest flees away in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.

ISAIAH 17: 12 Ah, the uproar of many peoples, who roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rushing of nations, that rush like the rushing of mighty waters!

Verse 12

Wo to the multitude - The three last verses of this chapter seem to have no relation to the foregoing prophecy, to which they are joined. It is a beautiful piece, standing singly and by itself; for neither has it any connection with what follows: whether it stands in its right place, or not, I cannot say. It is a noble description of the formidable invasion and the sudden overthrow of Sennacherib; which is intimated in the strongest terms and the most expressive images, exactly suitable to the event.

Like the rushing of mighty waters! - Five words, three at the end of the twelfth verse, and two at the beginning of the thirteenth, are omitted in eight MSS., with the Syriac; that is, in effect, the repetition contained in the first line of Isa 17:13 in this translation, is not made. After having observed that it is equally easy to account for the omission of these words by a transcriber if they are genuine, or their insertion if they are not genuine, occasioned by his carrying his eye backwards to the word **לאממ** leammim, or forwards to **ישאון** yashaon, I shall leave it to the reader's judgment to determine whether they are genuine or not. Instead of **כהמות** cahamoth, "as the roaring," five MSS. and the Vulgate have **כהמון** kehamon, "as the multitude."

ISAIAH 17: 13 The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters: but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far off, and will be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like the whirling dust before the storm.

ISAIAH 17: 14 At evening, behold, terror! Before the morning, they are no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us.

Verse 14

He is not "He is no more" - For **איננו** einennu ten MSS. of Dr. Kennicott's, (three ancient), ten of De Rossi's, and two editions, and the Septuagint, Syriac, Chaldee, Vulgate, and Arabic, have **ואיננו** veeineno. This particle, authenticated by so many good vouchers, restores the sentence to its true poetical form, implying a repetition of some part of the parallel line preceding, thus: - "At the season of evening, behold terror!

Before the morning, and [behold] he is no more!"

That spoil us - For **שוינו** shoseynu, them that spoil us, fifteen MSS., one edition, and the Syriac have **שוסנו** shosenu, him that spoileth us. And for **לבוזינו** lebozeyenu, them that rob us, six MSS. and the Syriac have **לבוזנו** lebozenu, him that robbeth us: and these readings make the place answer better to Sennacherib, according to Lowth's conjecture. Though God may permit the wicked to prevail for a time against his people, yet in the end those shall be overthrown, and the glory of the Lord shall shine brightly on them that fear him; for the earth shall be subdued, and the universe filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen!