

Verse 1 and verse 3 are the only verses in the chapter which actually speak of Damascus. Verse 3 begins with a statement that Ephraim will lose its fortification, then makes two references to the destruction of Damascus and Syria, and finally returns to the similar fate of the glory of the children of Israel. These two nations which have bound themselves together in an alliance to overthrow Judah are themselves to be overwhelmed.

Verses 4 and 5 continue to predict the dire fate of the Northern Kingdom. The figure of a harvester reaping grain is used to picture the devastation which is to come to Israel. We know that this happened when the Assyrian army attacked the Northern Kingdom and carried away most of its people into exile.

The second section, verses 6-8, describes the remnant of grace. The Northern Kingdom is not to be entirely destroyed. There is to remain a gleaning of righteous people. Verse 6 vividly pictures in agricultural figures the few remaining "boughs" which the Lord will preserve. Although the ten tribes went off into captivity, this was not the end of them. They were a part of the nation of Israel which God had set aside for His own purposes. When the Jews returned from exile, members of the northern tribes were with them. The New Testament refers to individuals living in Jerusalem as members of some of these tribes (Luke 2:36; Acts 26:7). The idea of "ten lost tribes" is only a myth. After the exile they were blended with the people of the southern Kingdom.

Our present chapter deals almost entirely with the northern Kingdom. Verses 7 and 8 clearly predict that many of its people will turn to God. They will cease to look to the altars they have made, but will look to the Holy One of Israel.

The denunciation in verse 8 is not merely against the worship of false gods, forbidden in the first commandment. It is also a denunciation of false worship, forbidden in the second commandment. The golden calves were in some way supposed to represent the actual God of Israel; they were not meant to be a representation of false gods. But they were the work of men's hands and could not properly represent the invisible Creator of the universe. There is great danger when