

A GODLY KING UNDER ATTACK
Isaiah 36, 37

Intro: This is the second main division of the prophecy of Isaiah--the historical part, chapters 36-39.

Chapters 36, 37 have to do with Assyria, and form a conclusion to chapters 1-35. Chapters 38, 39 have to do with Babylon, and form an introduction to chapters 40-66.

All four chapters have to do with Hezekiah, a godly king of Judah.

Chapters 36 and 37 are also found in 2 Kings 18, 19--which has a few additional details. For a divine evaluation of King Hezekiah, see 2 Kings 18:3-8. He obeyed the Lord. He trusted in the Lord. He sought to purify the worship of his people. There was no king so godly in Judah either before or after him. Consequently, the Lord blessed him. Cf. 2 Kings 18:7a,
And the Lord was with him,
and he prospered whithersoever he went forth . . .
This sounds like what was said of Joseph.

Now we would think that such a man as Hezekiah would have no trouble, that God would spare him from having any trouble with Assyria or anyone else. But such was not the case, nor is it now. The fact that we do the will of God causes our Enemy to rise up against us, and the Lord permits it for the blessing of His people, but most of all for His own glory.

Note the words in 2 Kings 18:7b, ". . . and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not." Hezekiah did not continue with the relationship that Ahaz his father had established with the Assyrians. See 2 Kings 16. Consequently this enraged the Assyrians!

Before dealing with Hezekiah, the Assyrians were successful in capturing Israel--and they were taken captive to Assyria. See 2 Kings 18:9-12. This was completed after 3 years in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign.

Eight years later it seems that Hezekiah compromised, and gave in to Sennacherib, giving him silver and gold from the house of the Lord, as well as others treasures from his own house.

But the compromise did not satisfy Sennacherib, and so he sent "a great host against Jerusalem" (2 Kings 18:17m). The rest of the account is given in Isaiah's prophecy.

The Assyrians were successful in taking "all the defenced cities of Judah" (Isa. 36:1), and then they were ready to take Jerusalem. As a result we find the following order of events:

- 1) Rabshakeh, through three of Hezekiah's men, sought to humiliate Hezekiah (36:4-10).
- 2) When Hezekiah's men appealed to Rabshakeh not to speak to them in Hebrew, but in Aramaic, so the people would not know what was going on, Rabshakeh shouted to the people in their own language to terrify them. See 36:11-22.
- 3) When Hezekiah heard about the trouble, he sent to Isaiah, asking Isaiah to pray for the remnant that was left. Obviously their forces were depleted, and Hezekiah felt more helpless than ever. See 37:1-5.
- 4) Isaiah sent back a message from the Lord Who promised to intervene for Hezekiah. See 37:6, 7.
- 5) Rabshakeh was not to be deterred, however, by this setback, and so he sent a letter to Hezekiah, repeating what he had said before. See 37:8-13.
- 6) This time Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord, spread the letter before the Lord, and prayed. See 37:14-20.
- 7) The Lord answered by Isaiah, promising to deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians. See 37:21-36.
- 8) The result was that Sennacherib was killed by two of his sons, and the Assyrian threat was over!

The question is: WHY DID THE LORD ORDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES FOR A KING WHO SOUGHT SO FAITHFULLY TO DO THE LORD'S WILL? Why do Christians today often run into trouble when they are seeking to please the Lord, to proclaim His Word, and to glorify His Name. The story of Hezekiah provides us with some very important answers.

If we were to give a simple answer, we would have to say that it was for the development of Hezekiah's spiritual life. It makes no difference how faithful a child of God may be, he can always be more faithful. Also he needs to be guarded against pride especially after he has seen the blessing of the Lord.

But let us consider the details.

I. THE LORD WANTED HEZEKIAH TO REALIZE ONE OF HIS CHIEF WEAKNESSES. Cf. 2 Kings 18:13-16.

How amazing that Hezekiah would do such a thing! But, you see, after Israel fell to Assyria, he had a new appreciation of Assyria's power.

The chapter seems to indicate that for 14 years Hezekiah had stood firmly against Assyria, and then he gave up! Remember that past victories do not guarantee that we will not fall!

The Lord often takes His people through humiliating experiences to strengthen their faith.

But notice a second thing.

II. THE LORD WANTED HEZEKIAH TO EXAMINE HIS FAITH VERY CAREFULLY.
Cf. Isa. 36:4-10.

Was he trusting in himself? What about Egypt--was he trusting in the Egyptians? Was he trusting in the Lord--really trusting in Him?

Rabshakeh said that the Lord had sent them. How did Hezekiah take that?

And when Rabshakeh began to talk to the people, he ridiculed what Hezekiah had said to his people about trusting the Lord. Our ministry is often thrown up in our faces, and what we have told ourselves, and the way we have advised our people, often seems so inadequate, and even foolish!

Was Hezekiah guilty of telling his people to trust in the Lord when he himself was not really trusting him.

God will bring us into circumstances where we will be forced to see that our faith is not what it should be.

A third thing:

III. THE LORD WANTED HEZEKIAH TO CONTINUE ON IN THE WORD AND IN PRAYER. Cf. Isa. 37:1-5.

This called for humiliation on Hezekiah's part.

Sending to Isaiah in those days was like turning to the Word of God today.

His request of Isaiah was that he pray!

What an honor he conferred upon Isaiah by turning to him. We are indeed fortunate if we know someone like Isaiah who has the ear of God.

Later on in 37:14-20 we see Hezekiah himself praying. So this was obviously a major reason for the threat that came to him and to Judah by the Assyrians. This is where the greatest of saints can grow careless. Let things begin to go well, as they had gone with Hezekiah, and we are inclined to neglect our times with the Lord (and the fervency of our calling upon God).

But then there is a fourth thing:

IV. THE LORD WANTED HEZEKIAH TO LEARN THAT HE DOES ANSWER PRAYER.

Twice there was prayer, and twice there was the promise of an answer. The answer did not come immediately, but Hezekiah

was left with the promise of God.

When the answer came, Hezekiah found that God did exactly what He had promised Hezekiah that he would do.

— In this connection, there is a fifth point:

V. THE LORD WANTED TO BRING HEZEKIAH TO THE PLACE WHERE HE WOULD BE CONCERNED PRIMARILY ABOUT THE GLORY OF GOD--not his own comfort, nor his people's safety, nor the preservation of Jerusalem, but GOD'S GLORY!

See how Hezekiah prayed in 37:20, and then see how the Lord answered in 37:35.

VI. THE LORD WANTED HEZEKIAH TO SEE THAT HE ALONE, THE LORD ALONE, WAS SUFFICIENT FOR THE SAFETY OF HIS PEOPLE. See 37:36, and then vv. 37, 38.

How amazing that this could happen to an army like the Assyrian army! But it did! "The angel of the Lord" killed 185,000 men. In other passages, the angel of the Lord is Christ--and that may very well be the case here!

Concl: Now it is one thing to see all of this in the life of Hezekiah, but it quite another thing to see that this may be the very reason that God has us where we are.

We, too, are in a battle. We are faced with an Enemy who, if he could, would wipe us from the earth. There is nothing that he would like better than to destroy this work. But he cannot!

However, is the Lord speaking to us about our lives, our faith, our prayers, our weaknesses, the way we may be compromising with men and with the world?

Are we as fervently seeking the Lord as we did three years ago? Are you praying as much? Are you praying from the heart like you did then? Is there as much delight now in the Word and in the doctrines of Scripture as there was then?

Oh, how our hearts need to be stirred up to lay hold of God, to plead with Him in humility and repentance until the blessing comes. God has raised us up for His glory. Let us lay aside every other purpose, and pray that His Name may be exalted among us, and that the world may know that He alone is God! Then, and only then, will the blessing come!