

Jerusalem's Deliverance from the Threat of Assyria

Isaiah 36-37

Isaiah 36:1-3 - *"Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. ² Then the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And he stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field. ³ And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came out to him."*

Background Notes

The fourteenth year of King Hezekiah of Judah (v1) was 701 BC, the date of the well-known invasion of Judah by King Sennacherib of Assyria. Israel, the northern kingdom, fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Now Sennacherib and his armies were making their move on Judah, the southern kingdom. Assyrian records excavated at Nineveh claimed that Sennacherib took 46 cities of Judah during this campaign. *"The Rabshakeh"* (v2) was probably a military or political title for "general" or "field commander." He met with a trusted delegation from King Hezekiah to discuss terms of possible surrender.

Doctrinal Points

1. God may test His people with threats from the enemy.

Isaiah 36:4-22 - *"Then the Rabshakeh said to them, 'Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: 'What confidence is this in which you trust? ⁵ I say you speak of having plans and power for war; but they are mere words. Now in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me? ⁶ Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. ⁷ 'But if you say to me, 'We trust in the Lord our God,' is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar?'" ⁸ Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses—if you are able on your part to put riders on them! ⁹ How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? ¹⁰ Have I now come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? The Lord said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.'" ¹¹ Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; and do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who are on the wall." ¹² But the Rabshakeh said, "Has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you?"*

¹³ Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew, and said, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! ¹⁴ Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you; ¹⁵ nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, "The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'" ¹⁶ Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make peace with me by a present and come out to me; and every one of you eat from his own vine and every one from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern; ¹⁷ until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. ¹⁸ Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, "The Lord will deliver us." Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? ²⁰ Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" ²¹ But they held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, "Do not answer him." ²² Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

Verse 21 is a remarkable testimony of the honor and respect the people had for King Hezekiah. They didn't answer one word to the Rabshakeh, because the king had commanded, "Do not answer him." Would we have been as submissive at a time like this? How easy and (seemingly) logical to capitulate to the enemy's threats!

- a. *Egypt is too weak to help you* (v4-6).
- b. *Your God won't help you because Hezekiah has torn down his altars on the high places* (v7). The Rabshekah didn't know that altars to the Lord on the high places were against God's Law. Sacrifices were to take place **only** at the Temple in Jerusalem.
- c. *If you surrender, Sennacherib will give you 2000 horses*. Of course you don't have enough men to ride on them (v8-9). (Note the sarcasm.)
- d. *Your God told me to come up and destroy your land* (v10).
- e. *We're speaking in plain Hebrew so everyone understands they're doomed* (v11-12).
- f. *King Hezekiah is deceiving you* (v13-17).
- g. *Look at our record. **No one** has been able to defeat the Assyrian armies* (v18-20)!

Quite an impressive list of threats - and quite a test for God's people. And **God allowed it!** God may allow the enemy of our souls to make impressive threats against us, but God allows these threats - as a test of our faith, and to strengthen our trust in Him. Under good King Hezekiah's leadership, Israel passed this great test of faith. The people stood firm. What about us? God may test His people with threats from the enemy.

2. God can deliver His people from the clutches of the enemy.

Isaiah 37:1-29 - "And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. ² Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. ³ And they said to him, "Thus says

Hezekiah: *'This day is a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth. ⁴ It may be that the Lord your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard. Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.'* ⁵ So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. ⁶ And Isaiah said to them, *"Thus you shall say to your master, 'Thus says the Lord: "Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me.⁷ Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'"*

⁸ Then the Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he heard that he had departed from Lachish. ⁹ And the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, *"He has come out to make war with you."* So when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰ *"Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria."* ¹¹ Look! You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered? ¹² Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed, Gozan and Haran and Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?"

¹⁴ And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. ¹⁵ Then Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, saying: ¹⁶ *"O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.¹⁷ Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. ¹⁸ Truly, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, ¹⁹ and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. ²⁰ Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord, You alone."* ²¹ Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, *"Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria ²² this is the word which the Lord has spoken concerning him: "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, laughed you to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head behind your back! ²³ "Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice, and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel! ²⁴ By your servants you have reproached the Lord, and said, 'By the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the limits of Lebanon; I will cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypress trees; I will enter its farthest height, to its fruitful forest. ²⁵ I have dug and drunk water, and with the soles of my feet I have dried up all the brooks of defense.'*

²⁶ *"Did you not hear long ago how I made it, from ancient times that I formed it? Now I have brought it to pass, that you should be for crushing fortified cities into heaps of ruins.*

²⁷ *Therefore their inhabitants had little power. They were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field and the green herb, as the grass on the housetops and grain blighted before it is grown. ²⁸ "But I know your dwelling place, your going out and your coming in, and your rage against Me. ²⁹ Because your rage against Me and your tumult have come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came."*

The Assyrians would be stopped because they had despised and mocked the God of Israel (v20-23). The Assyrians claimed their victories were by their own strength (v24-25) – but they didn't know that their success was under the sovereign will of God (v26-28). Because of their arrogance, the Assyrians would return home empty handed (v29).

In verses 30-35, God gave a sign to Hezekiah and the faithful people in Judah. **Jerusalem would not be taken!** Not even an arrow would be shot into the city, and within three years, conditions would go back to normal with planting and harvesting. *“This shall be a sign to you: you shall eat this year such as grows of itself, and the second year what springs from the same; also in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them.”* ³¹ *And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.*³² *For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and those who escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.* ³³ *“Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: ‘He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it.’* ³⁴ *By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city,’ says the Lord.* ³⁵ *‘For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.’”*

This all came true in a great miracle: *“Then the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh”* (v36-37). This miracle is recorded three times in the Bible, and in “Sennacherib’s Prism,” excavated at Nineveh. God miraculously delivered Jerusalem out of the clutches of the enemy.

Can God still do this today? Of course He can! No matter what kind of threat or trap Satan sets for us, our response should be simply to trust the Lord as King Hezekiah did.

Practical Application

Wait - and watch for the enemy’s strategy to backfire

God loves to allow enemy strategies to backfire. Isaiah 37:38 is an example: *“Now it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that his sons struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.* Sennacherib said that no god was able to deliver any of the nations he conquered. How ironic! His own god couldn't deliver him! His sons killed him while he was “worshipping” in the temple of his god. The enemy strategy backfired!

We too can see the enemy’s strategy backfire - if we are willing to wait and watch. For example, evangelical churches and ministries may actually get “free advertising” when the liberal press attacks them! **So wait - and watch - for the enemy’s strategy to backfire!**