

they were sorrowful, penitent, distraught, confused and angry. All of these emotions may have been welling up within these men. One thing they knew, the Assyrians were powerful and had done all (and more) that the Rabshakeh recounted. What the future held for their city was unknown, as yet. The only alternative they had to the Rabshakeh's tabulation of Assyrian victories was faith in Jehovah. Often, the known is distinct and threatening; the unknown veiled and sometimes even more threatening. So we are often defeated by our own reasoning. Our problems seem insoluble to our thinking. But there is enough evidence of the power of God to deliver the faithful, the believer may have victory over every threat of the enemy.

QUIZ

1. How silent were the people?
2. Why did Hezekiah command them to keep silent?
3. How do we know it was a struggle for them to do so?

B. PERSEVERANCE, CHAPTER 37

1. THE PLEA

TEXT: 37:1-7

- 1 And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of Jehovah.
- 2 And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, unto Isaiah, the prophet the son of Amoz.
- 3 And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of contumely; for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.

- 4 It may be Jehovah thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to defy the living God, and will rebuke the words which Jehovah thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left.
- 5 So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah.
- 6 And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith Jehovah, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.
- 7 Behold, I will put a spirit in him, and he shall hear tidings, and shall return unto his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.

QUERIES

- a. What is a "day of contumely"?
- b. Why say, "children are come to the birth . . ." etc.?
- c. When did the king of Assyria return to his own land?

PARAPHRASE

When King Hezekiah listened to the report of the men sent to meet with Rabshakeh, he tore his robes indicating his anguish of soul, put on camel's-hair clothing indicating his penitence and went into the Temple to humble himself before the Lord. Just before doing this he had sent Eliakim, his chief administrator, and Shebna, his royal scribe, and the chief priests—all in camel's-hair clothing of humility—to Isaiah, the prophet of God, son of Amoz. They were sent to Isaiah with this message from King Hezekiah: This is a day of distress and anguish, punishment and rebuke, reproach and rejection from the Lord—it is a day from which only a miracle can deliver us like a day when children are ready to be born but the mothers' wombs will not open! So I am hoping, Isaiah,

your God will take note of the defiant, insulting words of the Rabshakeh, who was sent by the king of Assyria for that very purpose and will punish him for the words He has heard the Rabshakeh speak. So pray, Isaiah, for those of us remaining, as many as we can find. So, they came to Isaiah with this message. And this was Isaiah's reply to them: Say this to Hezekiah, your master; Jehovah's word is, Do not be afraid of the threats and insults of the men sent by the king of Assyria, because I will dispose the king of Assyria to leave Judah through a report that will come to him from his homeland that he is needed back there at once, and he will return to his own land, and he will eventually die a violent death by the hand of his own people.

COMMENTS

v. 1-5 WORSHIP: It is significant that Hezekiah, upon hearing the report of Rabshakeh's scoffing intimidation and insulting blasphemy of Jehovah, turned immediately to worship God in penitence and sent to get God's word from God's prophet. Happy is any nation whose ruler turns in penitence to worship Jehovah and seek His word in national crises. It was a Hebrew custom in times of great stress and turmoil, sorrow and remorse to both rend the clothing and put on sackcloth (cf. Gen. 27:34; II Sam. 3:31; I Kings 21:27; Esther 4:1, etc.). In addition to all this Hezekiah went into the Temple (the house of the Lord) undoubtedly to pray. He did not pray to have the Lord's will revealed directly to himself—for that he sent to the messenger of God, Isaiah. His prayer was probably one of penitence.

Not only did Hezekiah devote himself to penitence and seeking the Lord's will, but he instructed his officials to do so also. Most political potentates are accustomed to depend too much on their own power and expertise and consult God's spokesmen only on matters of morality and religion. Many potentates have made that mistake (Saul, Ahaz, Zedekiah,

Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, the Caesars, ad infinitum). Then he sent them to Isaiah. He did not order Isaiah to come to him, as many rulers would have done. Respecting God's prophet shows Hezekiah's deep reverence for God! There was no question in Hezekiah's mind who was the King of the Universe—Jehovah. This is true worship, acknowledging God's sovereignty and seeking His will.

King Hezekiah sends Isaiah his analysis of the current political-military crisis. It is dark and foreboding. The following Hebrew words are used by Hezekiah to describe the situation: *tzar* (trouble, anguish, distress, oppression); *thokekhah* (rebuke, correction, punishment); *natzah* (contumely, contempt, blasphemy). It was a day so dire and catastrophic that it was like a woman in labor struggling to give birth and her womb will not open to deliver. Unless some extraordinary help is forthcoming death will be the result. Hezekiah realizes Judah is at this critical juncture.

Hezekiah's "It may be Jehovah . . . will hear" is like the "Who knows whether he will not turn and repent . . ." of Joel 2:14 and Jonah 3:9, etc. It is not a guess! It is an expression of hope that God will intervene based upon known deeds of God in the past (see our comments, *Minor Prophets*, College Press, pg. 176, 249, 250, 251). Hezekiah's description of the day, trouble, rebuke, contempt, indicates his persuasion that their circumstances were by the permissive will of God to correct them for their trouble, rebuke and contempt of God. Their circumstances were designed to bring them back to God and Hezekiah was one of the first to recognize and admit it. It is no wonder God compared Hezekiah to David—after God's own heart.

So, the good king commits the defiance of the Rab-shakeh to the Living God who is being defied. The Hebrew word translated defy is *lekharek* and means literally to reproach and blaspheme—to insult and scoff at. Hezekiah requests Isaiah to pray for the *shariyth* (remnant) that is *nimetzaah* (findable, or remaining). Apparently the king is referring to besieged Jerusalem as all that is left of Judah. So Hezekiah's servants

brought his request to Isaiah.

v. 6-7 **WORD:** Isaiah's answer is authoritative, direct and simple. It is as simple as Thus saith the Lord. The answer is simple but the application of it (be not afraid) may be difficult in view of the present circumstances. This is where man's faith is put to the test. If faith fails then he is by his own choice not of the nature fit to companion with God. Isaiah told Ahaz (7:4) not to fear the enemies of the covenant people earlier, but Ahaz failed in faith.

The Lord promises, through Isaiah, to "put a spirit" in the king of Assyria. The Hebrew word is *ruakh* which is usually translated spirit but literally means breath or wind. It is sometimes translated mind (Ezek. 11:5; 20:32) and sometimes means an emotion (Prov. 29:11; Gen. 26:35). Just how God "puts a spirit, mind, emotion, disposition" in a pagan ruler to return to his homeland when he seems of a mind to do something other must remain one of the mysteries of the Infinite and Omnipotent God. We are told in other places of such action by God (Isa. 10:5-19; 44:28—45:6; Jer. 51:20-23; II Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). God is capable of speaking to pagan rulers in dreams and visions (as He did to Nebuchadnezzar) or stirring up their spirits (as He did to Cyrus). It does not appear that God gave Sennacherib a vision. He heard something from his own land that caused him to return, and 20 years later he was violently slain by his own sons. We will document this event in later comments. It should be noted here Isaiah does not predict Sennacherib's death immediately upon his arrival back in Assyria. It is not the prophet's purpose to predict all the details—only those which are essential to Hezekiah's trust in the Lord.

QUIZ

1. Why did Hezekiah rend his clothes and put on sackcloth?
2. How drastic had the political-military situation of Judah become?

3. What is the "remnant" that is left?
4. What is the character of Isaiah's reply?
5. How did God put a "spirit" in the king of Assyria?
6. Why did the king of Assyria return to his own land?

2. THE POTENTATE

TEXT: 37:8-13

- 8 So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah; for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish.
- 9 And he heard say concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopa, He is come out to fight against thee. And when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying,
- 10 Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.
- 11 Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered?
- 12 Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my fathers have destroyed, Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden that were in Talassar?
- 13 Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivvah?

QUERIES

- a. Why is Tirhakah attacking the Assyrian forces?
- b. Who were the children of Eden?

PARAPHRASE

So the Assyrian army general left Jerusalem and returned to his king. But he found his king waging war on Libnah, having already departed from Lachish. Then the king of Assyria received an intelligence report that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, was marching toward southern Palestine to fight against him. Immediately, the king of Assyria sent messengers with a warning to Hezekiah, saying to him, Do not be fooled with any oracle from your God that Jerusalem will be delivered from my hand—if you trust in your God you will be deceived. Let me remind you that the reports of Assyrian destruction and victory over all the world are not exaggerated. Now, what makes you think you will be delivered? None of the gods of the different peoples of the world, such as those of Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, or the gods of territories like Beth-eden or Telassar, have been able to deliver them from Assyrian conquest—do you think yours shall deliver you? Where are the kings of nations like Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? They are gone—dethroned by the mighty Assyrian king.

COMMENTS

V. 8-9 **WARY WARRIOR:** The Assyrian army commander (the Rabshakeh) left Jerusalem and went directly to Libnah, 10 and 12 miles north of Lachish and 25 miles west (and a little south) of Jerusalem. Libnah and Lachish were cities along the "Gaza strip" and were strategic military positions on the Egyptian frontier. The king of Assyria probably felt he had secured Lachish and now he must secure Libnah since he apparently had received word that an Egyptian force was marching toward his deployed troops in Palestine.

Now Tirhakah was not yet king of Egypt. He was nephew of the man (Shabaka 715-701 B.C.) who was then king of Egypt. It appears from ancient records that Tirhakah was

approximately 20 years of age at the time of Sennacherib's (701 B.C.) expedition into Judah. He would be old enough, since he was royalty, to be put in charge of a military force. Tirhakah's brother (Shabataka 701-689 B.C.) was the Pharaoh after Shabaka and then Tirhakah became Pharaoh (689-664 B.C.). Edward J. Young thinks Tirhakah is proleptically called king. That is, Isaiah, writing some years after these events occurred, when Tirhakah was in fact king, calls him king in an event that took place before he was king. This is not unusual. Daniel calls Nebuchadnezzar "king of Babylon" proleptically in Daniel 1:1. Tirhakah was the third and last Pharaoh of the 25th Ethiopian dynasty. His Ethiopian kingdom was quite Egyptian in character. Sennacherib was successful against Tirhakah, but the mysterious loss of Assyrian troops forced Sennacherib back to Assyria. Tirhakah enjoyed a respite from the Assyrian threat for some years, but was defeated by Esarhaddon and later by Assurbanipal. He was driven south where he retained rule of that portion of Egypt.

Sennacherib apparently associated Tirhakah's show of force with Hezekiah's refusal to surrender to Rabshakeh. He evidently assumed the Egyptians were in collusion with the Hebrews and they were coming to rescue Jerusalem from Assyrian conquest. So the Assyrian king sent a written (37:14) message to Hezekiah.

V. 10-13 WRITTEN WARNING: Verse 10 makes it appear as if the Assyrians have spies within the very chambers of King Hezekiah. It almost seems as if the Assyrians knew the very words Isaiah spoke in reply to Hezekiah's request (37:5-6). Here the Assyrian messengers are told to "speak" the message to Hezekiah. In 37:14 Hezekiah takes a "letter" from the messengers and reads it. Perhaps the messengers read the letter to Hezekiah upon their arrival and then he took it from their hand and read it for himself. The message from Sennacherib was a warning. It intended to remind Hezekiah of current political history. It was common knowledge in the world at that time of the ruthless, overwhelming, destructive power of the Assyrians and the extensiveness of their conquests.

They had conquered or at least dominated the whole Asia Minor-Mesopotamian-Palestinian area. Sufficient power to resist the Assyrians could not be found anywhere in the world! Cities and territories which had existed for centuries were swiftly conquered. Famous kings and potentates had been deposed and taken captive and either killed or deported into slavery. Whole cities and areas had been repopulated with Mesopotamian immigrants. The political, cultural, racial face of the inhabited world was being drastically changed. And does little, weak, religiously-oriented Judah think it can stand against a military machine like Assyria?

Some of the cities and territories listed have been located by the archaeologists and historians. Some are still lost in the sands and dust of antiquity. The reader may refer to Map #1 for locations of those known and those conjecturally placed. Beth-eden is the Eden referred to in verse 12. Since many leading scholars and archaeologists believe the Garden of Eden was in Mesopotamia (Greek for "between the rivers"), Beth-eden may very well have retained its name from the Garden of Eden. William F. Albright, renowned archaeologist and scholar of antiquity says, "Archaeological research has thus established beyond doubt that there is no focus of civilization in the earth that can begin to compete in antiquity and activity with the basin of the Eastern Mediterranean and the region immediately to the east of it. . . ." (Tigris-Euphrates, Mesopotamian area). Very ancient clay tablets with "creation accounts" written on them have been discovered in that general area. Ur and Haran are cities directly associated with Abraham. Telassar was probably a territory near the region of ancient Elam (Media).

The imposing, overwhelming, seemingly omnipotent power of the Assyrian Empire (and other ancient world empires) was beyond anything, comparatively speaking, modern geopolitics has ever experienced. No empire has completely ruled the known world since Rome. None was ever as cruel and terrifying as the Assyrian. Hezekiah could not take Assyrian threats lightly! These threats were extremely critical tests

of the faith of the Judeans. So Hezekiah did the only thing he could do—he took it to the Lord!

QUIZ

1. Why would the king of Assyria want to conquer Libnah?
2. Why may we conjecture that the king of Assyria suspected a collusion between Tirhakah and Hezekiah?
3. Why would it seem the Assyrians had spies in the Hebrew palace?
4. Why would the king of Assyria remind the Hebrews of current world events?
5. Could the Eden of verse 12 have any association with the Garden of Eden in Genesis? Why?
6. Why could Hezekiah not take lightly these threats of Assyria?

3. THE PRAYER

TEXT: 37:14-20

- 14 And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up unto the house of Jehovah, and spread it before Jehovah.
- 15 And Hezekiah prayed unto Jehovah, saying,
- 16 O Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, that sittest above the cherubim, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.
- 17 Incline thine ear, O Jehovah, and hear; open thine eyes, O Jehovah, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, who hath sent to defy the living God.
- 18 Of a truth, Jehovah, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the countries, and their land,
- 19 and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them.

20 Now therefore, O Jehovah our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art Jehovah, even thou only.

QUERIES

- a. Why spread the letter before Jehovah?
- b. Why say God sits above the cherubim?
- c. Why cast the nation's gods into the fire?

PARAPHRASE

Hezekiah took the letter from the Assyrian messengers and read it for himself. Then, taking it to the Temple, he presented it before the Lord and prayed, saying, O Lord of hosts, Great God of Israel enthroned upon Thy Mercy Seat here in this Thy Temple, Thou art the Only God, King of all kingdoms, and Omnipotent Creator of the universe. Please turn Thine ears to hear my pleas and direct Thine eyes, O Lord, to see what I have to present to Thee. See, Lord, this letter of Sennacherib; it is a mocking defiance of Thy sovereignty. Admittedly, Lord, the kings of Assyria have conquered and destroyed all those peoples listed in the letter. Yes, they have thrown their gods into the fire and proved they were not gods at all but just pieces of wood and stone carved into images by men's hands. Of course, men can destroy gods like those. In view of this, my prayer to Thee, O Living God, is that Thou wilt save us so that all the world may know that Thou art the Only God:

COMMENTS

v. 14-16 PRAISE: Unlike Ahaz, when threatened by the Syrian-Israeli coalition, who went to the king of Assyria for help (see comments on Isa. 7:10-16), Hezekiah turned

immediately to the Lord for help from his enemies. Hezekiah did not spread the letter before the Lord because he believed God would not know what it said had he not taken it to the Temple. His concept of God was not that of mysticism or paganism, as his prayer demonstrates. Hezekiah believed in a God who was omnipotent and omniscient.

Hezekiah's prayer ranks alongside the great prayers of the Bible as a model men today would do well to follow. It is brief, compared to the grand prayer of Daniel (ch. 9), but equally as reverent and believing. All praying should begin and end with *praise* to God. Jesus taught, "Pray this way, Our Father, who art in heaven, *hallowed* be thy name. . . ." The holiness, majesty, righteousness, faithfulness, and sovereignty of God should be our *first* concern in prayer or evangelism or worship. Our salvation, our blessedness, our development into His nature all depends upon who He is—not upon what we are or what we want. Of course, we cannot be saved or blessed unless we want it, but we could want it forever and never have it if God is not Who He Is. Too much prayer is focused on petition and not enough on praise. Too much asking has a tendency to make our wants sovereign. Let us *first* pray, "Thy kingdom come, *thy* will be done, on earth just like it is in heaven. . . ."

The cherubim were the angel-like figures with wings, one on each end of the ark of the covenant, within the Holy of Holies in the Temple. They hovered over the "mercy seat" and were symbols to represent the place where God's presence dwelt. Hezekiah, of course, did not think his God was a provincial God like those of the pagans, restricted to houses made with hands. He was merely reiterating his belief that Jehovah God was present where God said He would be—in His Temple. He was affirming his faith that God was with the nation in their extremity.

v. 17-19 PETITION: Hezekiah refers to God anthropomorphically. That is, he refers to God as having human attributes (ears, eyes, etc.). This is true of both Old and New Testaments. Human attributes are the highest forms or symbols within

man's experience by which he may express nonexperienced attributes! Anthropomorphism is an attempt to express the non-rational aspects of God's being in terms of the rational. Biblical anthropomorphism is quite different from pagan concepts of their gods. The anthropomorphism of pagan religions describes their gods in forms of man and animals, trees, stars, or even a mixture of elements. To regard Jehovah God solely as Absolute Being or The Great Unknown is to refer to *him* or *it*, but if man is ever to think of God as personal, one with whom he can fellowship, man must think of God as *Thou*, and man can only conceive of *Thou* in anthropomorphic symbols. Hezekiah is praying, not to an Idea, but to a Person.

Note also Hezekiah's preciseness in prayer. He does not pray a generalized prayer for delivery from a general enemy. He prays the Lord to take action on the very words of Sennacherib. Specific prayer for a specific need. But what is the need? Hezekiah focuses on the fact that Sennacherib has defied the living God. The primary need, as Hezekiah sees it, is not physical deliverance but vindication of the sovereignty of Jehovah God (see v. 20). Hezekiah is well aware of the power of Assyria. He is a realist and no foolish optimist. The kings of Assyria have done all they brag about. They have laid waste the major portion of the inhabited world. They have even wreaked havoc and desolation in their own land (Mesopotamia) (cf. Isa. 14:20). This characterizes the Assyrians as a people thriving on war and desolation. They cared not that their warlike nature brought destitution even to their own land! One concept thoroughly established by the Assyrian conquests was the demonstration that the gods of all the nations conquered by them were *not* gods at all. When the Assyrians conquered a nation they took that nation's gods (idols and images) and threw them into the fire and burned (wood and metal and stone) and melted them. The Assyrians proved that the gods of other nations were powerless. But what about the gods of the Assyrians?

v. 20 PURPOSE: Hezekiah's primary purpose was not for himself, not even for his country, but for the glory of God.

Hezekiah is concerned for the honor of God. He prays that the power, sovereignty and uniqueness of Jehovah be vindicated before the eyes of the world. He is not willing that Jehovah be considered just another one of the provincial gods of the nations. God repeats over and over in the Old Testament that He acts for "his own sake," and the men of faith in the Old Testament always prayed that God would act for "his own name's sake" (cf. II Sam. 7:21; I Kings 8:41; II Chron. 6:32; Psa. 6:4; 31:16; 23:3; 31:3; 25:7, 11; 44:26; 79:9; 106:8; 115:1; 143:11; Isa. 37:35; 42:21; 45:4; 48:9, 11; Jer. 14:7, 21; Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22, 44; 36:22; Dan. 9:17, 19). This is the most important concept of the Bible. All of man's hopes in this world or the next rest upon the vindication of the Absoluteness of God's Person. Our every motive, desire, aim, prayer, action and concern must be that God will first act for His own sake. If His Word is not verified and confirmed and established, we are lost! *The faith*, once for all delivered to the saints, is the veracity, sovereignty, mercy, faithfulness, holiness of God as demonstrated and manifested in the Incarnate Son of God, who was Immanuel, "God with us." (see special study, "The Faith Once Delivered For All Time," p. 248.)

QUIZ

1. How does Hezekiah's reaction when threatened by enemies compare with the reaction of Ahaz (Isa. 7)?
2. Why is Hezekiah's prayer great?
3. What is anthropomorphism and why is it necessary when speaking of God?
4. How does Hezekiah express his realism about Assyria?
5. What is the primary purpose of Hezekiah's prayer?
6. Why is this purpose so important in our relationship to God?

4. THE PRONOUNCEMENT

TEXT: 37:21-35

- 21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying,
Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Whereas thou hast
prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria,
- 22 this is the word which Jehovah hath spoken concerning him:
The virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed
thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her
head at thee.
- 23 Whom hast thou defied and blasphemed? and against whom
hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted up thine eyes on high?
even against the Holy One of Israel.
- 24 By thy servants hast thou defied the Lord, and hast said,
With the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the
height of the mountains, to the innermost parts of Lebanon;
and I will cut down the fall cedars thereof, and the choice
fir-trees thereof; and I will enter into its farthest height,
the forest of its fruitful field.
- 25 I have digged and drunk water, and with the sole of my feet
will I dry up all the rivers of Egypt.
- 26 Hast thou not heard how I have done it long ago, and
formed it of ancient times? now have I brought it to pass,
that it should be thine to lay waste fortified cities into
ruinous heaps.
- 27 Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were
dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the
field, as the green herb, as the grass on the housetops, and
as a field of grain before it is grown up.
- 28 But I know thy sitting down, and thy going out, and thy
coming in, and thy raging against me.
- 29 Because of thy raging against me, and because thine ar-
rogancy is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my
hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn
thee back by the way by which thou camest.
- 30 And this shall be the sign unto thee: ye shall eat this year

that which groweth of itself, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof.

- 31 And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.
- 32 For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of mount Zion they shall escape: the zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.
- 33 Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against it.
- 34 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come unto this city, saith Jehovah.
- 35 For I will defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

QUERIES

- a. When did Jerusalem laugh Assyria to scorn?
- b. What hook will God put in the nose of Assyria?
- c. Did the king of Assyria come to Jerusalem or not?

PARAPHRASE

Immediately Isaiah sent this message to Hezekiah: This is what Jehovah, the God of Israel says: In answer to your prayer to Me concerning Sennacherib, king of Assyria, this is the Word of Jehovah about Sennacherib: The untouchable daughter of Zion laughs and scorns you despicable Assyrians. Jerusalem shows her disdain of you by a shake of her head. Who do you Assyrians think you are defying and mocking? At whom are you railing with your loud boasting and haughtiness? You are defying the Holy One of Israel! You have sent your aides to threaten the Lord, and they have boasted, We have come over

the great mountains of Lebanon with thousands of my chariots and have plundered every nation in my path of its treasures. We have taken whatever we wanted from any nation. We have conquered and occupied many nations and dug wells for our occupation forces. Egypt with its Nile River is no obstacle to me—I simply walk across it as if it were dry land. How is it you do not know that it was I, The Holy One of Israel, who decreed all of this long ago? How is it you do not acknowledge that you do what you do only by My permissive will? I have allowed you to have all this power to devastate nations and cities. This is the only reason other nations have had no power against you. This is why they were as helpless as grass and tender plants before you and as dead and used-up as the dead grass on a thatched roof. I, the Lord God, know everything you do. I know when you sit down, when you go out, when you come in, and I know every word of defiance you have uttered against me. Now because of your arrogance and challenge to My sovereignty, manifested by your intimidations toward My people, I will lead you in humility and docility back to where you came from like a bull is led with a ring in its nose or a horse is led with a bit in its mouth. And I will prove that I, The Holy One of Israel, am delivering this city by giving this sign to My people: Before the year is over the Assyrians will be gone. The time will again come when you will reap abundantly from the fruits of your toil and your enemy will not plunder your fields. It will not be immediately. It is too late now to plant your crops for this year. You will harvest first only that which comes up from volunteer seed. The next year will be about the same, due to the devastation of the land by the enemy. But in the third year you will once again sow and reap good crops from this land. Those of you who are left in Judah will be firmly established in your land again without interference from foreign occupation, and you will flourish as a nation again. For I, the Lord, have purposed to always preserve, small though it may be, a Messianic people for Myself. And because I am very zealous to fulfill My Messianic covenant, I will deliver Jerusalem from the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria

will not be allowed by Jehovah to make war on Jerusalem. In fact, he will not even come to the city, but he will return to his own land by the same route he entered Palestine. I, even I, will defend this city and save it for the vindication of My Name and to fulfill the promise I made to David.

COMMENTS

V. 21-25 DEFIANCE: Perhaps some of the details of what transpired between Hezekiah and Isaiah are omitted. Perhaps Isaiah was informed in writing or by messenger of Hezekiah's prayer. Or, perhaps God began to answer Hezekiah's prayer even as Hezekiah was praying! (cf. Dan. 9:20-23). The Lord knows our hearts and minds better than we—He is able to answer our prayer before we ask. Whatever the case, the Lord answered in a propositional, verbal message, through a messenger, Isaiah. Hezekiah was not left to try to discern the Lord's answer through a mystical feeling or through a providential "fleece."

The expression, virgin (Heb. *bethulath*) daughter of Zion, is probably to symbolize Jerusalem's untouchableness by the Assyrian king who desires to ravish the city. Virgin is sometimes used to symbolize faithfulness. It is also used to symbolize covenant relationship between Israel and God. Amos speaks of Israel's (the northern kingdom) unfaithfulness and covenant-breaking as a "fallen virgin's" behavior (Amos 5:1-2; see also Ezek. 16:1ff). Perhaps all of this, untouchableness, faithfulness and covenant relationship, are involved in the figure virgin here. The point may be that Jerusalem, for its persistent refusal to prostitute itself to the Assyrian intimidations and dogged determination to trust faithfully in God, is being despised by its antagonists. But God promises the reversal of that. Soon, very soon, Assyria the despiser will be despised. God's promise is so certain it may be predicted as having already occurred! The proud, arrogant, powerful Assyrian king will soon return to his own land, his boasting unfulfilled, to die by assassination.

For shaking of the head as a gesture of scorn, see Psa. 22:7; 109:25; Mt. 27:39.

The question of verse 23 is rhetorical. God is not asking for information, He is challenging the arrogance of Assyria. The king of Assyria, through the servants he sent to Hezekiah, has defied the Sovereign God of the universe. Sennacherib is being warned that he is not dealing with a god of wood or stone, a provincial god of man's making. This is Almighty God, the Only True God. This is The God who holds *all* kings and potentates mentally and morally responsible to Himself, whether they acknowledge him or not (cf. Amos, ch. 2-3; Isaiah, ch. 13-23; Jeremiah ch. 46-51; Ezekiel, ch. 26-32; Daniel, ch. 1-6, etc.). Even in the New Testament, rulers and men of *all* nations are declared morally responsible to the Sovereign God, whether they believe in Him or not (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; 2:1-29; etc.).

The Assyrian monarch boasted that nothing could stand in his way if he decided to march with his army. Not even the mountains of Lebanon (a range of mountains 20 miles long, with two of its peaks rising to over 9000 feet, and remaining snow-capped the year round) could stop him. The mountains of Lebanon formed a formidable natural barrier against invasion of Palestine. To go over the mountains was the only alternative to going across the Arabian desert for those Mesopotamian nations who wished to conquer Palestine. Chariots are made for flat open country. To move an army of chariots over forest-laden, snow-capped mountains 10,000 feet in altitude, would be no small task. But Sennacherib did it and considered such a feat proof that he could conquer any land or people he wished. Egypt's Nile River would not stop him—he would go across that as if he were walking on dry land. Hezekiah's God would not stop him—he boasted—he considered himself god of the world! Nothing could stand in his way. If it were mountains, he would cross over them; if it were the absence of water, he would dig wells and sustain his army; if it were the presence of waters, he would bridge them and take his armies across. He considered himself sovereign

over all circumstances and persons. That is blasphemy!

v. 26-29 **DOWNFALL:** How could the king of Assyria have heard of the predetermined plan of God to use him to "waste fortified cities"? Perhaps God is saying, has it never occurred to you through conscience or common sense that there is Someone greater than you controlling circumstances and lives. There is abundant evidence that God spoke or revealed His will to the ancients, including pagan rulers, in direct ways. He spoke to the Assyrians once through Jonah, the prophet. He spoke to others through dreams, visions, and prophets (cf. Dan. 1-6). He also spoke of His eternal power and deity through nature (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; Acts 14:14-18; 17:22-29, etc.). Whatever the case, the Assyrian nation had plenty of proof (through Jonah's demonstration of the sovereignty of Jehovah and through nature) that man does not control circumstances or destiny. God uses governments and nations as tools to carry out His sovereign purposes (cf. Jer. 27:5-7; Daniel, ch. 7-12; Rom. 13:1-7; Rev. ch. 1-22; Isa. 10:5-34, etc.). That the Assyrian monarch did not recognize the certainty of a Higher Power directing history, in light of all the evidence, indicates his pride overcame conscience and common sense. In other words, his unbelief was deliberate and moral. (See Special Study, Unbelief Is Deliberate, pg. 99). It was God who gave other nations into the hand of the Assyrian. They fell because God permitted it. It was the height of moral perversity for Assyria to think they controlled the world. There are men today who think by their scientific expertise (atomic or nuclear physics; genetic restructuring; space exploration) they are approaching the ability to control circumstances and destiny. That is just as intellectually dishonest and morally perverse as Sennacherib's boasting.

Whatever the king of Assyria does is not outside the knowledge of God. God knows Sennacherib's "sitting down, and going out, and coming in," (cf. Psa. 11:4; 44:20-21; 139:1-12; Jer. 12:3; 17:9-10). God knows man's thoughts and deeds (Jn. 2:23-25; Mk. 9:33-35; Lk. 9:46-48; Mt. 25:31-46). God knows when arrogant men rage against Him and He deals with

them in His own good time (cf. Dan. 4-6). The Lord declares He will put a *khakhiy* (a hook for animal's noses) in the Assyrian's nose and a *mitheggiy* (a bridle for animals) in the Assyrian's mouth and turn him back to his own land.

The arrogancy that blasphemes must be dealt with by the Sovereign God. When a human ruler attempts usurpation of Divine sovereignty he must be brought low. God must show that He is still sovereign, so He will interverie through supernatural and providential actions to humiliate the Assyrian braggart and lead him around where God would have him to be. There are *bas reliefs* in ancient Assyrian monuments depicting prisoners being led by ropes attached to rings in their noses. God will put His own "ring" in Sennacherib's nose and lead him (slaying 185,000 soldiers, and a rumor from Nineveh that he should come home).

v. 30-35 DELIVERANCE: One must not forget that God's central purpose in the Assyrian downfall was the deliverance of His faithful remnant and the fulfillment of His redemptive plan in them. God uses the wicked schemes of wicked men as tools to work out His redemptive purpose. When God's people became so wicked they needed chastening, He allowed the cruel Assyrians to bring them back to dependence upon Him. Now that Hezekiah has led the nation in a turning back to God, He will punish the arrogant boasting of the Assyrian (cf. Isa. 10:5-34) as further evidence of His power to fulfill His redemptive program.

Isaiah is predicting a complete removal of the Assyrians from the land of Palestine—not just a temporary let-up of the siege of Jerusalem. The massiveness of the Assyrian army, its need to live off the land it occupied and its complete disregard for life or property would have brought unparalleled devastation to the agricultural and economic situation of Palestine! The Assyrians had conquered 46 cities of Judah and had ravaged the whole land except Jerusalem. He had been there for more than a year. But Isaiah predicts the Assyrian will be gone and as soon as can be expected, the people left in Judah will be reaping and harvesting their own crops again. There will be

no miraculous, immediate restoration of the agricultural-economic prosperity. For the immediate year and the one following the people will suffer the effects of the Assyrian devastation of their land; that is, they will eat from crops produced by volunteer seed for the first two years. There would not be enough harvest for two years to provide seed for a full sowing. But the third year would see agriculture returned to its normal processes. That would signify to them God had delivered them from the Assyrian.

The *remnant* will be saved. God has always carried out His work with a "left-over" segment of mankind. The cosmic work of redemption has always been trusted to a minority. It will not be any different when God closes the historical, human part of this work. The New Testament indicates the way that leads to life is "strait and narrow" and few will find it. The majority will be found, at any time, on the broad way that leads to destruction. Great men like Isaiah and Hezekiah were able to persuade a few to trust God and make themselves available to Him that He might bring the Messiah into the world. The *remnant* of this faithful few can be traced throughout the Old Testament right up to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The zeal (*kineath*, in Hebrew) of the Lord will accomplish this (see comments on Isa. 9:7). The Lord is jealous for His own work and His own people. He is jealous for His own sovereignty, so He will not let the king of Assyria carry out his boast to ravage Jerusalem. In fact, God will not even permit the king of Assyria to come to the city. No siege mound will be built up surrounding Jerusalem by the Assyrians. God is going to save it to vindicate His own power and fulfill His promise to David (II Sam. 7:12, etc.). This is quite a prediction by Isaiah in view of the fact that the Assyrians at that moment controlled all of Palestine except the immediate city of Jerusalem! But if God is for us, who can be against us?! (cf. Rom. 8:28-39).

QUIZ

1. What does the use of the term "virgin" mean in reference to Jerusalem?
2. Why does God ask Sennacherib who he thinks he is raging against?
3. How would God expect the king of Assyria to hear of His sovereignty?
4. Why did God have to put a "hook" in the nose of the Assyrian?
5. What is the sign that God had delivered Palestine from the Assyrians?

5. THE PHENOMENON

TEXT: 37:36-38

- 36 And the angel of Jehovah went forth, and smote in the camps of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.
- 37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.
- 38 And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead.

QUERIES

- a. How did the angel of the Lord kill so many?
- b. Why did Sennacherib's sons kill him?

PARAPHRASE

That night the angel of the Lord went out to the camp of the Assyrian army and killed 185,000 warriors. When those who were still alive awakened in the morning they beheld the terrible sight of all the dead bodies strewn throughout their camp. Then Sennacherib, king of Assyria, set out to leave and he went immediately, returning to his own country, Nineveh. A number of years later, while he was worshipping in the temple of Nisroch his god, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer assassinated him with their swords. They escaped into the land of Ararat, and Esar-haddon, another of Sennacherib's sons became king.

COMMENTS

v. 36-37 DEPARTURE: This epilogue is an historical record of the fulfillment of all of Isaiah's prophecies of the failure of the Assyrian empire to destroy the covenant people of God. The only possible way God could carry out His promise to deliver Jerusalem and Palestine from the Assyrian was by supernatural intervention (either directly or indirectly through providence). It is a matter of record (see also II Kings 19:35-37, and II Chronicles 32:20-23), that God intervened supernaturally and directly. An angel (Heb. *maleak*) of Jehovah (Heb. *Yahweh*) went into the Assyrian army camp and killed 185,000 soldiers. The account in II Kings 19 records that the slaying took place the same night Sennacherib's message of arrogant blasphemy was delivered to Hezekiah. How would the angel of the Lord perform such a herculean task? This event reminds the Bible student of the destroying angel of Exodus 12:12-23 and II Samuel 24:1-16. The ministry of angels is spectacular and comprehensive in the Biblical record (see our special study, "The Mystery and Ministry of Angels," commentary on Daniel, College Press, p. 387-404.) One angel had the power to restrain Persia and Greece (cf.

Dan. 10:15-21). One angel has the power to harm a third of the earth (Revelation 8 & 9). God is able to make His angels wind and fire (Heb. 1:7), and sends them forth as "ministering spirits to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation" (Heb. 1:14). Angels do not necessarily have to take human form to do God's service. They may serve in any form, wind, fire, disease, pestilence, war, famine, or whatever suits God's purposes. We simply do not know how the angel of the Lord smote 185,000 men in one night. The Hebrew verb *yaceh* generally means to smite with a disease. America suffered approximately 50,000 war deaths in the more than two years of war in Korea. There were over 55,000 American soldiers slain in the over ten years of war in Viet Nam. With all man's modern technology and massive destructive powers 185,000 dead in a single night still seems a staggering number.

The annals of King Sennacherib make no mention of a disaster to his troops in Palestine. However, there is an interesting tradition preserved by Herodotus (II, 141) which relates that Sennacherib, "king of the Assyrians and the Arabians," led a great army against Egypt. This military move seems to have been subsequent to the subjugation of Philistia and Judea, and to have been a final stroke to secure one of the ultimate objects of his expedition—the conquest of Egypt. The tradition states that the Egyptian army was made up of "traders, artisans, and merchants, and that in great fear they encamped at Pelusium, within range of the enemy (Assyrians)." The Assyrian's camp was completely overrun by an army of field mice, which gnawed apart all of their leather trappings, such as bowstrings, quivers, and shield-straps. On the next morning with only fragments of weapons, the Assyrian troops were routed, put to flight, and many of them slain. This tradition probably has some basis in fact and is an echo of some calamity to the Assyrian army. Some have suggested the mice may have carried bubonic plague, which is both swift and deadly in its working. When Sennacherib and the remainder of his army awoke in the morning the scene must have stunned them. Death on such a massive, sudden scale would cause first,

dumbfoundedness, then fear, then, perhaps, chaos. The Hebrew language is forceful—"and behold! all of them, corpses, dead ones!" What else could Sennacherib conclude but that a Power greater than he and his army had visited during the night. This great catastrophe had happened so unexpectedly, so silently, so suddenly. No one had awakened during the night when it was happening. This was no place for Sennacherib. He would not dare go boasting to Hezekiah now. He had never before suffered such an inglorious defeat. So he left Judea. His departure is stated in the Hebrew language in short, rapid terms, "And he set out, and he went, and he returned to Nineveh."

Although Sennacherib subjugated the entire eastern coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, carried off a vast amount of booty, and levied tribute on the conquered cities and provinces, there is no hint in his records during the remaining 20 years of his reign that he ever again visited this territory. Nor does the Babylonian chronicler of this period mention any such campaign. It seems that some specter haunted his memory and chilled his ambition regarding the final conquest of Egypt.

V. 38 DEATH: Sennacherib lived another 20 years after he left Judea. Then one day as he was worshipping in the temple of his god, Nisroch (which Edward J. Young thinks is an intentional corruption of Marduk), he is slain by two of his sons who apparently are attempting an insurrection. Sennacherib's son, Esar-haddon, in an inscription found by archaeologists at the Dog River near Beirut, Lebanon, tells of this event (see our comments, *Isaiah*, Vol. I, pg. 189-190). Hezekiah worshipped his God and Jehovah delivered him from his enemies. Sennacherib worshipped his god and found not deliverance but assassination. The two assassins did not gain the throne. They had to flee for their own lives to the land of Ararat (modern Armenia). Esar-haddon, another son of Sennacherib, succeeded to the throne of Assyria, eventually restored the city of Babylon, conquered Egypt, imported foreigners into Samaria, forced Manasseh (Hezekiah's son) to pay heavy tribute to help build Esar-haddon's palace in

ISAIAH

Nineveh, and extended the Assyrian empire to its greatest power. In a second Egyptian campaign, Esar-haddon died and his son, the famous Assurbanipal, the one who built the great library from which archaeologists get most of their Assyrian artifacts, succeeded him.

QUIZ

1. Where else in the Bible does God use angels to kill people?
2. What form may angels take to do their work of killing?
3. What tradition from antiquity may be a parallel to the Biblical account of the slaughter of the Assyrian army?
4. How did Sennacherib come to his end?

SPECIAL STUDY

THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED FOR ALL TIME

by

Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTION

I. JUDE IS A MOST NEGLECTED EPISTLE OF THE N.T.

- A. Because it is brief.
- B. Because its language is different than most of the N.T.
- C. Because the circumstances calling for its writing are obscure.
- D. Many preachers have preached from vs. 3 but few have left it in its own context when they used it.

II. JUDE IS A MOST RELEVANT EPISTLE OF THE N.T. FOR TODAY.