

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes: Isaiah Chapter 36 - 37

4/23/14

Chapter 36 Study Notes

Sennacherib Threatens Jerusalem - Verses 1-22

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.² Then the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. When the commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer's Field,³ Eliakim son of Hilkiyah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to him.⁴ The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah: "This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours?⁵ You say you have counsel and might for war—but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me?⁶ Look, I know you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him.⁷ But if you say to me, "We are depending on the LORD our God"—isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship before this altar"?⁸ "Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses—if you can put riders on them!⁹ How then can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen^[a]?¹⁰ Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this land without the LORD? The LORD himself told me to march against this country and destroy it."

36:4-6 Chapter 19 describes Isaiah's prophecy of judgment upon Egypt, while chapters 30 and 31 pronounce woe on those from Judah who would ally themselves with Egypt in the face of Assyria's impending attack. Sennacherib of Assyria was taunting Judah for trusting in Egypt. Even the Assyrians knew that Egypt could not help Judah.

36:5 Hezekiah put great trust in Pharaoh's promise to help Israel against the Assyrians, but promises are only as good as the credibility of the person making them. It was Pharaoh's word against God's. How quickly we organize our lives around human advice when dealing with our problems while we neglect God's eternal promises. When choosing between God's word and someone else's, whose will you believe?

36:7 The Assyrian king's field commander (in Hebrew Rabshakeh) claimed that Hezekiah had insulted God by tearing down his altars and making the people worship only in Jerusalem. But Hezekiah's reform sought to eliminate idol worship (which occurred mainly on high hills) so that the people worshiped only the true God. Either the Assyrians didn't know about the religion of the true God, or they wanted to deceive the people into thinking they had angered a powerful god. In the same way, Satan tries to confuse or deceive us. People don't necessarily need to be ineffective for God; they need only be confused about what God wants. To avoid Satan's deceit, study God's Word carefully and regularly. When you know what God says, you will not fall for Satan's lies.

¹¹ Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall."
¹² But the commander replied, "Was it only to your master and you that my master sent me to say these things, and not to the people sitting on the wall—who, like you, will have to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine?" ¹³ Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! ¹⁴ This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you! ¹⁵ Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, '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. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then each of you will eat fruit from your own vine and fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, ¹⁷ until I come and take you to a land like your own—a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. ¹⁸ "Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, 'The LORD will deliver us.' Have the gods of any nations ever delivered their lands from the hand of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? ²⁰ Who of all the gods of these countries have been able to save their lands from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" ²¹ But the people remained silent and said nothing in reply, because the king had commanded, "Do not answer him." ²² Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went to Hezekiah, with their clothes torn, and told him what the field commander had said.

36:10 Sennacherib continued his demoralization campaign by sending his representative to try to convince the people of Judah that God had turned against them. The Assyrians hoped to convince the people of Judah to surrender without fighting. But Isaiah had already said that the Assyrians would not destroy Jerusalem, so the people did not need to be afraid of them (10:24-27; 29:5-8).

36:11 Aramaic was an international language at this time. See also 22:15-25 for Isaiah's prophecies concerning Eliakim and Shebna.

36:17 Sennacherib's representative tried yet another ploy to demoralize the people. He appealed to the starving city under siege by offering to take them to a land with plenty of food if they surrendered. The Assyrian policy for dealing with conquered nations was to resettle the inhabitants and then to move other conquered peoples into the recently conquered area. This provided manpower for their armies and prevented revolts in conquered territories.

36:19-20 The Assyrian king's representative said that the gods of the other cities he had conquered had not been able to save their people, so how could the God of Jerusalem save them? The Lord was supposedly the God of Samaria (the northern kingdom), and it fell. But the Lord was the God of Samaria in name only because the people were not worshipping him. That is why prophets foretold the fall of Samaria. But for the Lord's own sake and for the sake of David, the Lord would rescue Jerusalem from the Assyrian army (37:35).

Chapter 37 Study Notes

Jerusalem's Deliverance Foretold - Verses 1-13

37 When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD. ² He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. ³ They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the

moment of birth and there is no strength to deliver them.⁴ It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives."⁵ When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah,⁶ Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master, 'This is what the LORD says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.'⁷ Listen! When he hears a certain report, I will make him want to return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword."⁸ When the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah.⁹ Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the king of Cush,^[a] was marching out to fight against him. When he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word:¹⁰ "Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, 'Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria.'¹¹ Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered?¹² Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my predecessors deliver them—the gods of Gozan, Harran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar?¹³ Where is the king of Hamath or the king of Arpad? Where are the kings of Lair, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah?"

37:3 Judah is compared to a woman who is trying to give birth to a child but is too weak to deliver. When the situation seemed hopeless, Hezekiah didn't give up. Instead, he asked the prophet Isaiah to pray that God would help his people. No matter how bad your circumstances seem, don't despair. Turn to God.

37:4 Hezekiah did exactly what Isaiah had been calling the people to do (chapters 1-35). He turned to God and watched him come to Judah's aid. Turning to God means believing that God is there and that he is able to help us.

37:8-10 Although the answer to Hezekiah's prayer was already in motion because Tirhakah was poised to attack, Hezekiah did not know it. He persisted in prayer and faith even though he could not see the answer coming. When we pray, we must have faith that God has already prepared the best answer. Our task is to ask in faith and wait in humility.

Hezekiah's Prayer - Verses 14 - 20

¹⁴ Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD.¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD:¹⁶ "LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.¹⁷ Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.¹⁸ "It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands.¹⁹ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands.²⁰ Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD, are the only God."

37:16 Cherubim are mighty angelic beings. The phrase "enthroned between the cherubim" refers to the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant, which was kept in the Jerusalem temple. This is a description of God's holiness, power, and sovereignty.

Sennacherib's Fall - Verses 21-38

²¹ Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria,²² this is the word the LORD has spoken against him: "Virgin Daughter Zion despises and mocks you. Daughter Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee. ²³ Who is it you have ridiculed and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel! ²⁴ By your messengers you have ridiculed the Lord. And you have said, 'With my many chariots I have ascended the heights of the mountains, the utmost heights of Lebanon. I have cut down its tallest cedars, the choicest of its junipers. I have reached its remotest heights, the finest of its forests. ²⁵ I have dug wells in foreign lands and drunk the water there. With the soles of my feet I have dried up all the streams of Egypt.' ²⁶ "Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone. ²⁷ Their people, drained of power, are dismayed and put to shame. They are like plants in the field, like tender green shoots, like grass sprouting on the roof, scorched before it grows up. ²⁸ "But I know where you are and when you come and go and how you rage against me. ²⁹ Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came. ³⁰ "This will be the sign for you, Hezekiah: "This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ³¹ Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. ³² For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. ³³ "Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: "He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. ³⁴ By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city," declares the LORD. ³⁵ "I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!" ³⁶ Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! ³⁷ So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. ³⁸ One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisrok, his sons Adrammelek and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.

37:29 This was a common torture the Assyrians used on their captives. They were often led away with hooks in their noses or bits in their mouths to humiliate them. The Lord was threatening to do to the Assyrians what they had done to others.

37:35 God would defend Jerusalem for the sake of his own honor and for David's sake in remembrance of God's promise. The Assyrians had insulted God. They would not be his instrument to punish Jerusalem. What the people of Jerusalem could not possibly do, God would do for them. God is prepared to do the impossible if we trust him enough to ask.

37:38 The death of Sennacherib was prophesied by Isaiah in 10:12, 33-34 and in 37:7. His death is also recorded in 2 Kings 19.