

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #51

Isaiah 36:1–37:5

There is a powerful promise God makes to His people in Psalm 50:15 - “and call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you ...” Troubled times are wonderful times to call to God for help and watch Him work.

The book of Isaiah is a book that makes some amazing futuristic predictions, most of which to this very day have not been fulfilled. There are predictions concerning Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and all the nations of the world. There are incredible predictions concerning what God intends to do to this world in the Great Tribulation, specially pour out His ferocious wrath. There are almost unbelievable predictions about what God will do to Jerusalem and the Promised Land. He will turn it into the most glorious lush place on the face of this earth. These are amazing predictions. But one question might be raised and that question is this - what evidence may we offer that proves that God literally will do this?

The answer is found in this historical parenthesis or interlude that occurs in **Isaiah chapters 36-39. These chapters form their own separate unit in the book of Isaiah.** Always remember everything in history is sovereignly controlled by God and we can learn some great lessons about God in history. This story is so critical, that what is recorded in **Isaiah 36-39** are almost duplicates of what is recorded in II Kings 18:13–21:26 and II Chronicles 32-33.

All throughout this book, Isaiah has been informing Judah that one day all of her enemies will be destroyed by God. The big threat against her at the time Isaiah lived was the Assyrians. What God does is show Judah and Jerusalem that He literally keeps His word and He does so right with their biggest threat - Assyria. Assyria took charge of northern Israel in 722 B.C. and she was a constant threat to Judah. Thirty years before these events, Isaiah predicted that one day Assyria would come against Judah to take over her land (Isaiah 8:5-8) but that God would intervene and destroy them. He alluded to this time and time again (Isaiah 10:12-19; 14:24-25; 30:28-31; 31:8). So in all reality, this is all part of a fulfillment of the sovereign plan of God.

The main point of this is to show His people that:

GOD PERMITS THREATENING THINGS TO COME INTO THE LIVES OF HIS PEOPLE TO PROVE TO THEM THAT HIS WORD IS TRUE AND THAT HE LITERALLY WILL DELIVER THEM WHEN THEY TURN TO HIM AND TRUST HIM.

One powerful Biblical proof of this is what He did to Assyria. We may remember that Isaiah began his prophetic ministry in the year that King Uzziah died (Isaiah 6:1). He ministered through the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). During the reign of Hezekiah, Judah had turned back to God and to a reverence of His Word (II Chron. 29:1-2). Hezekiah restored temple worship, he destroyed idols and he taught the people to trust God. Now they faced their biggest threat - Assyria.

The text breaks down nicely into six historical parts:

HISTORICAL PART #1 – The literal physical threat of the Assyrian army. **36:1-3**

Hezekiah began his reign about 715 B.C. and fourteen years later, in 701 B.C., Sennacherib started moving against all the fortified and fenced in cities in Judah and he sent his key military commander, Rabshakeh, who had just taken Lachish a city in north Judah about 30 miles away from Jerusalem, and a large army to go to Jerusalem to persuade them to surrender (**36:1-2**). Actually, according to II Kings 18:17 he sent two other leaders with him, Rabsaris and Tartan. But Rabshakeh was the bigmouthed bully. It would appear that his primary responsibility was to first threaten and persuade Jerusalem, not first to occupy Jerusalem. Naturally, had they surrendered, there would be no further need to move in with force.

According to **verse 2**, he stopped at the upper aqueduct of water, which was exactly the same spot where Isaiah told Ahaz (Hezekiah's father) that he had nothing to fear when Aram and Israel had challenged them (Isaiah 7:3). In Ahaz' case, he refused to believe Isaiah and God, so now Hezekiah would be faced with exactly the same choice at exactly the same spot.

According to **verse 3**, Eliakim and Shebna and Joah were trusted men of Hezekiah and he sent them out to try to see what these Assyrians wanted. According to the parallel account given in II Kings 18, Hezekiah sent these men to give him some money so they would leave him and his people alone. What Hezekiah was trying to do was to buy his way out of this jam. But it didn't work and the Assyrians were not about to negotiate a peace treaty with Israel. Sometimes even the most spiritual of men do some stupid and bizarre things.

This happens today in the world of politics. Our political leaders try to buy friends with their economic dealings and sanctions. If God's own people aren't careful, they can fall into a worldly mindset that says if we get in trouble we will just buy our way out of it. Sometimes God permits us to get into a pressured situation so we will turn to Him for help.

This threat was not a surprise to God for He was the One who predicted it and also predicted what He intended to do about it. There is no threat that hits you that is unknown to God.

HISTORICAL PART #2 – The literal verbal mockery of the Assyrian army. **36:4-10**

Rabshakeh was an arrogant, rude, insulting man. You will notice in **verse 4** that he doesn't even have the decency to call Hezekiah king, but he refers to Sennacherib as "the great king, the king of Assyria." He is subtly attacking the leadership ability of Hezekiah and he ridicules the idea that these people had developed such a confidence in God (**36:4**). **In fact, you will notice that the words "confidence" and "rely" and "trust" (all from the Hebrew "batach") occur seven times (vv. 4, 5, 6 (twice), 7, 9, 15). Rabshakeh is trying to undermine the faith of God's people.** He does not want God's people trusting in God. **Hezekiah had led God's people to a theology that said we trust God and Rabshakeh was trying to demolish their faith.** This was something the world hadn't seen too much of - God's people depending on God. It was Hezekiah who had led the way for this kind of theology. What a novel idea.

Sennacherib's field commander, Rabshakeh, actually started mocking the fact that Hezekiah was leading this nation to trust in God and dare rebel against him (v. 5). He told them that his counsel was nothing but empty words, with no strength or substance. He wanted to know if they relied on a broken down reed like those found in Egypt (v. 6). He is basically saying, what are you going to fight us with, crushed reeds?

Then he mocked, did they rely on God when they had already torn down their altars all throughout Judah and Jerusalem (v. 7). In fact, he so mocked them, he said we will give you 2000 horses, if you can find 2000 riders (v. 8). What he didn't realize is that tearing down those altars pleased God. In fact, the tearing down of the altars proved that Judah believed the Word of God and trusted in God.

He went a step further and said that God had told the Assyrians to go and destroy Judah (v. 10). He was basically saying - we have the numbers and we have the weapons and we have God on our side. Fact is, God had permitted Judah to be overtaken because she refused to turn to Him, and now Jerusalem is being threatened with this message, **you have no one on earth and no one in heaven in whom you may trust for deliverance.**

The Word of God teaches us that we walk by faith and not by sight (II Corinthians 5:7). God wants His people trusting in Him no matter what they see or no matter how intimidating the circumstances. Big impressive numbers and intimidations mean nothing.

This kind of religious insanity is still prevalent today. For example, the Arab Muslims say God is on their side when, in all reality, they have no relationship with the God of the Bible. Many churches argue, from their large numbers and big budgets, that God is on their side when nothing could be further from the truth. That is precisely what Rabshakeh was doing and saying. He was mocking God.

HISTORICAL PART #3 – The verbal response from Hezekiah's commanders. **36:11**

Now the commanders realized this was serious business, so they asked that negotiations be conducted in the Aramaic language. They did this very politely. To this point, he had been loudly speaking in Hebrew and they requested that he use Aramaic language. The real reason for this is because these three did not want the people to hear what was taking place so that their morale would be broken.

These Jewish leaders figured that if they heard the threats, they would be intimidated and would be tempted to surrender and not trust in God.

HISTORICAL PART #4 – The arrogant response of Rabshakeh. **36:12-20**

When Rabshakeh heard this request (v. 12), he intentionally and arrogantly stood and cried out in a very loud voice so all the people could hear him in Hebrew. He wants everyone to hear him and his purpose is to get the people to turn against God and Hezekiah. He said I didn't come here for your master; I came here for my master.

He said I want all the men to hear what I have to say because they will be soon eating their own dung and drinking their own urine. He started threatening them:

(Message #1) - You had better listen to the words of the king of Assyria . **36:13**

You had better not trust in God's Word, but you had better trust in our word. This is the cry of the satanic world today. Do not trust the Word of God; trust in the humanistic words of men. Don't believe God created humans in His image; believe some nut who says you evolved from an ape. Don't believe God created the heavens and the earth; believe they were created by a big cosmic bang. Don't believe only Jesus Christ can save you from your sins; believe you can get to heaven by your works.

(Message #2) - You had better not listen to the deceptive words of Hezekiah . **36:14**

Hezekiah is out to deceive you. Hezekiah was one of the only men on earth who was not out to deceive them. He was a straight shooter of the truth of God.

This is how Satan works today. Don't listen to the Word of God; listen to the voice of the synod. Don't believe God's Word; believe in the denomination.

(Message #3) - You had better not let Hezekiah convince you that God will deliver you.
36:15

Do not let Hezekiah convince you to trust in God because God cannot deliver you. This message to totally trust in God for salvation is the only true message, and this world tries to get you to believe a lie. You had better not trust only in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins, but trust our religion. Trust our baptism, trust our catechism, trust our confession. You better not let anyone convince you to trust only in God to save you.

(Message #4) - You had better make peace with us and you will have plenty . **36:16**

If you make an alliance with us - you'll have plenty to eat and drink and you'll enjoy your land. This satanic philosophy says follow us and we'll give you a good, prosperous life. This is what Satan did to Jesus when he tried to tempt Him - "I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world if You will fall down and worship me." Give in and you'll have pleasure and plenty. If you just give in, you'll enjoy the good life.

(Message #5) - You had better make peace and we will take you to a blessed land . **36:17**

If you make peace with us, we will take you to a land filled with grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. If you will surrender, you'll have a better life than you have now.

(Message #6) - You had better not follow Hezekiah's advice to trust Jehovah. **36:18a**

Hezekiah is misleading you.

(Message #7) - You had better realize that we destroyed all nations who trusted in any god.
36:18b-20

He is threatening them by saying - people have tried trusting in their “gods” before and we Assyrians have destroyed them all. We defeated all the nations who depended on their false gods like Hamath, Arpad and Sepharvaim.

HISTORICAL PART #5 – The quiet right response of the people of Judah. **36:21-22**

The people obeyed Hezekiah and did not answer one word. There are times when you are in the presence of an arrogant person who does not know God or the Word of God that the best thing you can do is keep silent. There was nothing any could say that would change his mind.

The three leaders went to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and they told him exactly the words of the Assyrian commander.

HISTORICAL PART #6 – Hezekiah sends his servants to consult with Isaiah . **37:1-4**

There is no grammatical interruption between chapter 36 and 37. Hezekiah is faced with two options - you either place your hope in this world or you place your hope in God. It has been well said that “a crisis does not make a person; it shows what a person is made of.” Hezekiah was about to face the three greatest crisis situations of his own life: 1) Threat of the Assyrians; 2) Threat of his own pending death; 3) Threat of Babylonians.

Hezekiah immediately took two actions when he was faced with this threat. These are two actions any should take.

(Action #1) - He went to the house of the Lord. **37:1**

Hezekiah immediately humbled himself and went to the temple of Jehovah to pray and seek His will. Godly kings would often go to the temple to pray and that is what Hezekiah did.

When you have a leader who will humble himself before God and will pray about things before God, you have a good leader.

(Action #2) - He sent his leaders to find Isaiah . **37:2**

By this time, Isaiah was an old, old man. He had faithfully served God for many years. Hezekiah was crushed and the only man in the world that he knew who truly knew God and His Word was Isaiah.

Hezekiah not only prayed, but he sought out the one man who knew God’s Word and could figure out God’s will. Hezekiah wanted to know God’s Word and will and he was a smart enough king to know he needed a man of God who knew God’s Word and will better than him.

When the men first got to Isaiah they said, we don't have the strength to deliver ourselves (v. 3), we need your help and we need your God.

It is interesting that when these leaders go to Isaiah, they refer to God as "your" God not their God (v. 4). Obviously they knew that Isaiah had a special connection to God they did not have. Isaiah was God's man who could unravel God's Word and these people are acknowledging that.

What they asked Isaiah to do was to pray that the "living God" would rebuke the arrogant words of Rabshakeh and deliver a remnant. They knew about the "remnant theology" of Isaiah and so they figured Isaiah could pray for the remnant who would be left after Assyria had demolished them.

God will always do what He says in regard to His people and there will be times in His people's lives when He will permit various things, even threats, to hit His people to prove this point. Those are the moments when God's people need to believe God and cry out to Him. God will always care for His own and by faith His own need to believe that.