

ISAIAH 37 A DAY OF PRAYER AND A DAY OF DELIVERANCE

This chapter contains a continuation of the historical narrative that was commenced in the previous chapter. After Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah had told King Hezekiah the words of Rabshakeh, he went to the Temple with expressions of great grief, and spread the cause of his distress before the Lord (verse 1). He sent a delegation of men to the prophet Isaiah in order to ask his counsel, as well as to beg for his prayers in this time of general distress (verses 2-5). Isaiah replied that Hezekiah should not be afraid of the Assyrian braggart who was outside the city walls, for he would soon be destroyed (verses 6-7). Rabshakeh returned to his master Sennacherib (verse 8), but that monarch heard rumors that King Tirhakah of Ethiopia was preparing to make war upon him; so he sent another embassy to Hezekiah, with substantially the same message as Rabshakeh's, to induce him to surrender (verses 9-13). Hezekiah read the letter which Sennacherib sent; and he went again to the Temple, where he spread the letter before Jehovah (verse 14). His prayer is recorded for us (verses 15-20), and Isaiah conveyed back to him the Lord's answer to this prayer. Through the prophet, the Lord reproved the pride and arrogance of Sennacherib; and He gave Hezekiah the assurance that Jerusalem would be safe, and that the Assyrians would be destroyed (verses 21-35). And before the chapter closes, we see the fulfillment of the prophet's words! The army of the Assyrians was destroyed by the Angel of the Lord, and the proud King Sennacherib himself was murdered (verses 36-38) – a rather ironic ending to the narrative; for Hezekiah's God defended him and preserved his city from the enemy, while Sennacherib's "god" couldn't even defend his worshiper in his own temple!

Let us consider some of the practical lessons that this chapter drives home to our souls. One of these lessons is that the best way to baffle the malicious intentions that our enemies plot against us is to be driven by them to God and our duty. Rabshakeh intended to frighten Hezekiah away from the Lord, but it turned out that he only succeeded in frightening him to draw *closer* to the Lord. It is a good thing when a day of trouble becomes a day of prayer. In fact, when we are in the midst of our deepest troubles, we should be the most earnest in prayer. Hezekiah's case was like that of a child about to be born, when the mother does not have enough strength to give birth to him (verse 3); but it was in this dire emergency that prayer came to the rescue. When we meet with the greatest difficulties, that is the time to stir up not only ourselves, but others also,

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Hezekiah reacts to Rabshakeh's words by asking Isaiah for prayers – verses 1-5
- ❖ The prophet sends him an encouraging reply from God – verses 6-7
- ❖ Sennacherib's blasphemous letter to Hezekiah drives him to prayer – verses 8-20
- ❖ God assures Hezekiah that things would soon take a happy turn – verses 21-35
- ❖ Sennacherib's army is struck dead, and he himself is murdered – verses 36-38

to take hold on our God! Prayer is the midwife of mercy, who helps to bring her forth to birth. In all our troubles, we may spread them all out before the Lord, in prayer and supplication. Let us not forget the liberty of access that we have to the heavenly throne of grace, as well as the liberty of speech that we may exercise before that throne! These are the unspeakable privileges of the Lord's people at all times, but especially in times of distress and danger. Hezekiah spread Sennacherib's blasphemous letter before the Lord; but he did not endeavor to make any complaints against that wicked man, except those which were grounded in his own handwriting (verse 17). God invites His praying people to be humbly free with Him, and to leave all their concerns with Him. When we are afraid of people who are indeed great destroyers, we may humbly but boldly appeal to God as our great Savior!

Those who patiently receive messages of terror from men, and prayerfully send messages of faith to God, may expect to also receive messages of grace and peace from Him for their comfort – even when they are most cast down. In Jehovah's name, Isaiah sent a long answer to Hezekiah's prayer, so that he might take comfort in the knowledge that his prayer had been heard. God is His people's bountiful Benefactor, as well as their powerful Protector; He is both a sun and a shield to those who trust in Him. Jerusalem would indeed be defended (verse 35); the besiegers would not come into it. In fact, they would be defeated before they even began the siege (verse 33). But this was not all! The Lord also promised to return in mercy to His people, and to do them good. The prophet told Hezekiah that the land of Judah would be more than ordinarily fruitful, so that their losses would be abundantly made up; they would not feel any of the ill effects from the enemies' destruction of the country, or from their forced absence from their farms.

In conclusion, let us observe that there is no possibility of standing before the judgments of God. The greatest army cannot stand before them. The Angel of the Lord, in one night, can strike a vast army of men and lay them dead on the spot; and such was the case here (verse 36). In an instant, 185,000 brave soldiers were turned into that same number of dead corpses. The "great king of Assyria" looked very weak indeed when he was forced to return – not only with shame and defeat, but also with terror and fear! And yet he was made to look even weaker when his own sons sacrificed him to his own idol. Many prophecies were fulfilled in this Providential deliverance of Hezekiah and his people, and this should encourage us; for those same prophecies and promises of gracious preservation are intended to be assurances of the safety of all who trust in Jesus. He Who has delivered His people in the past still delivers them now!

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for promising to sustain and defend us! Help us to imitate Hezekiah's example of prayer, and to throw ourselves entirely upon Your strong arm of protection. Amen.

