



"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME"
ISAIAH 61:1

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

CHAPTERS 36-37

AND HIS NAME
WILL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER,
PRINCE OF
PEACE.
ISAIAH 9:6

Isaiah is called "The Book of Salvation." The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of the Lord" or "the Lord is salvation." Isaiah is the first book containing the writings of the prophets of the Bible. And the author, Isaiah, who is called the Prince of Prophets, shines above all the other writers and prophets of Scripture. His mastery of the language, his rich and vast vocabulary, and his poetic skill have earned him the title, "Shakespeare of the Bible." He was educated, distinguished, and privileged, yet remained a deeply spiritual man. He was committed to obedience over the long haul of his 55-60 year ministry as a prophet of God. He was a true patriot who loved his country and his people. Strong tradition suggests that he died a martyr's death under the reign of King Manasseh by being placed within the hollow of a tree trunk and sawed in two.

Isaiah's calling as a prophet was primarily to the nation of Judah (the southern kingdom) and to Jerusalem, urging the people to repent from their sins and return to God. He also foretold the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the Lord. Many of his prophecies predicted events that occurred in Isaiah's near future, yet at the same time they foretold the events of the distant future (such as the coming of the Messiah), and even some events still to come in the last days (such as the second coming of Christ).

In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler and King.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

Book of Isaiah

Summary of Chapter 36-37

Isaiah and Hezekiah. Chapters 36-37. Summary and Comments

Now the prophet turns to prose, and tells mere history. Remarkably, starting at 38:9 the text itself calls it a writing of King Hezekiah, which Isaiah must have incorporated.

Chapter 36: Assyria demands surrender

Note: The story here is in parallel with 2 Kings 18:13-37. Each account has details the other has not, and vice versa.

We gather from an inscription found at Nineveh that Sennacherib did not take Jerusalem. He boasted that he received tribute there, but does not say he took the city. Considering the boastfulness of such inscriptions, it is clear that he did not take Jerusalem.

So Sennacherib broke camp and left. He returned to Nineveh. Assyrian inscriptions say he reigned about another 20 years after this. For sacred history that point is not of importance. But after that when he was praying in the temple to an Assyrian god, named Nisroch (we do not know that name from other sources), two of his sons killed him. Another son, Esarhaddon (691-68) ascended the throne.

End of Chapters 36-37

When Sargon died in 705 a movement to shake off the yoke of Assyria broke out strongly. Sennacherib showed himself as strong as his father. He first defeated Chaldean King Merodach-Baladan, systematically devastated the territory of Chaldea in 703, and also struck nearby nations. Then he turned to the west against Eluli king of Tyre and Sidon. The king fled, his territory surrendered except for Tyre. Sennacherib left troops behind to press Tyre, and then he turned south. Fear and panic fell upon the people there. Many small city states came out and offered him gifts. Then Sennacherib invaded the Philistine land and struck Ashkalon and Ekron. South of Ekron, at Eltekeh he met an allied army of Philistines, Egyptians and Ethiopians. He won a victory although not a brilliant one there.

So the only rebel state that still defied him was Judah under Hezekiah. In the 14th year or Hezekiah, Sennacherib captured all the fortified cities of Judah.

Sennacherib then sent his field commander from Lachish to Hezekiah. The commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool. Eliakim son of Hilkiah, palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went to meet him.

The field commander (<rabshakeh>) said: Tell Hezekiah he is helpless. Egypt is only a splintered reed (lean on it and you get no support, but it may pierce you). He says that Hezekiah had stopped worship at the high places -- illegal shrines to Yahweh, and commanded worship only at the Jerusalem temple. The field commander did not understand that Hezekiah had done as God ordered.

The commander proposed a test of strength: Sennacherib would provide 2000 horses if Hezekiah could furnish their riders -- Hezekiah could not do that. He had that many men, but not all could fight on horseback. He had been depending on the chariots and horsemen from Egypt.

Then the commander said: Do not trust in your God --He has sent me to conquer you. He, since he spoke Hebrew, may have known the thought of Isaiah 10:5-6 where Isaiah spoke of Assyria as a the rod of God's anger. That was true in that God had sent Assyria to punish Judah. (Later Cyrus of Persia would also be in a similar position). Eliakim, Shebna and Joah who went to meet the commander spoke Aramaic as well as Hebrew. The two languages are related, but the differences such that a speaker of one would not understand the other language. Aramaic at that time was a sort of language of international diplomacy, so the chancery of both nations would know it. Assyrian was also a Semitic language, but again, too different for Hebrews to understand it.

The commander spoke Hebrew so he could frighten the people of Judah who were nearby. But they had been instructed not to answer him at all, and they did not reply.

The commander told them their god could not help them - look at the gods of other cities the Assyrians had taken: those gods could not help them. Most cities at that time had their own special god. If the city prospered, especially in war, the god was considered powerful; otherwise the city was defeated.

He also told them that if they did not surrender they would have to eat their own filth and drink their own urine. But the Assyrian army would have had a greater shortage of water in a siege than Jerusalem, which had a good supply (cf. 2 Chron 32:2-30 and 2 Kings 20:30. BAR of July-Aug. 1994, pp. 20-38 has a fine article on Hezekiah's tunnel which brought water into the city from the Gihon spring).

Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah went to Hezekiah and reported all that had happened.

Chapter 37. Isaiah's Predictions and their fulfillment

The first prediction is also found in 2 Kings 19:1-7.

Hezekiah rent his garments and put on sackcloth when he heard the message from the commander of Sennacherib. He went to the temple, and sent Eliakim, Shebna and the leading priests, in sackcloth, who reported what had happened to Isaiah.

When they came to Isaiah, he at once answered, and it seems he did not first pray: Tell Hezekiah not to be afraid of Assyria. God would put a spirit into Sennacherib such that when he hears a certain report, he will leave, go back to his own country, and there will be cut down with the sword.

Sennacherib had heard a report (2 Kings 19: 8-13) that Tirhakah, of Ethiopia was coming against him. So he decided to send messengers to King Hezekiah - he calls him king this time -to say: Do not let your god deceive you when he says: Jerusalem will not be handed over. You have heard what the Kings of Assyria did to other countries and their gods.

Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kings 19:14-19) took the message, and went again to the Temple, and spread out the letter before God there. He prayed earnestly for help, saying: Hear, Lord, the insult Sennacherib has sent against the Living God. Yes, Sennacherib has destroyed other cities, and their gods did not help. But they were not living Gods, as you are. Help us.

Then Isaiah (2 Kings 19:20-32) answered Hezekiah: God has spoken against Sennacherib thus: The Virgin Daughter of Zion - it means the virgin daughter that <is> Zion - despises and mocks Sennacherib, who has blasphemed against the Holy One of Israel. God asks Sennacherib: Have you not heard it? I ordained it long ago and now I bring it to pass. I know where you stand and when you come or go, and how you rage against me. Because of this insolence I will put a hook into your nose and a bit into your mouth, and I will cause you to go back the way you came. You will be like the grass that withers on the roof of houses (since not much soil was there, the growth could not stand long. Roofs of simple houses then were of logs and branches with some earth tamped on).

On the words "I have ordained it before it happened" cf. our comments on 10:7 above.

The divine message added: This will be a sign for Hezekiah: This year you will eat the crops that sprout by themselves, for you have not been able to plant. Similarly in the second year. But in the third year you should sow and reap and plant vineyards. A <remnant> of the house of Judah will take root and bear fruit, a remnant that will come out of Jerusalem. The zeal of the Almighty Lord will accomplish this.

It seems Sennacherib invaded shortly before the sowing season and stayed about a year, preventing sowing in the second year also. But he would be gone before the third year.

Therefore God said: He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow into it. He will return the way he came. God will defend the city and save it for His sake, and for the sake of David.

In 2 Kings 19:35-37 we learn that that night, apparently right after the prophecy of Isaiah, the angel of the Lord went out and slew 185, 000 of the men in the Assyrian camp. In the morning the survivors saw all the dead bodies.

Most likely a plague broke out in the camp of the Assyrians. Since it seems from 2 Kings 29:8 that Sennacherib himself was at Libnah, the plague may have hit chiefly there, or both there and in the army before Jerusalem. (Libnah is probably between Makkedah and Lachish near the Philistine border).