

"And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: 'O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made heaven and earth!' (Isaiah 37:15-16)

Last week Isaiah, in Isaiah 36, pulled another "switcheroo"! Moving from the eschatological to the historic! From the "then and there" to the "here and now"! Addressing the immediate crisis for Hezekiah and all the people of Jerusalem! Dealing with the threat from Sennacherib and the Assyrians! Who had already ravished the rest of Judah, with Rabshakeh now standing by the conduit of the upper pool just outside the walls of Jerusalem, taunting Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem--asking where their confidence was, and on whom they relied, that they dared to rebel against the "great king of Assyria! And if it was the Lord their God who they were trusting, he argued, it would be to no avail, because it was He who had called them to go up against the land of Judah and destroy it!

Then he spoke directly to the devastated people gathered by the wall, speaking in the Hebrew language they could understand (rather than in the Aramaic language of diplomacy), telling them not to let Hezekiah deceive them into believing that he, or his God, was able to deliver them from the hand of the king of Assyria! After all, he asked, had the gods of the other nations delivered them from the hand of the king? Make peace with us, he said, and come live "in a land of bread and vineyards, where each of you will be able to drink of the waters of your own cisterns"! And his rantings and ravings continued!

So how would Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem respond? Hezekiah had instructed his officials who were down by the conduit not to answer Rabshakeh, and they returned to him "with their clothes torn and told him the words of Rabshakeh"!

Isaiah 37:1 says that "when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord"! (Wiesbe says, "humbling himself before the Lord and seeking His face"!)

Then (verse 2 says) he sent Eliakim and Shebna (two of his officials who had been down by conduit), along with the elders of the priests, to Isaiah, wondering whether "the Lord your God would rebuke the words of Rabshakeh which his master, Sennacherib, had sent," and asking him also to "offer a prayer for the remnant which is left"!

Verse 6 indicates that Isaiah responded immediately, telling Hezekiah that he should "not fear because of the words that he had heard" because the Lord said that He would "put a spirit in him (Sennacherib) so that he will hear a rumor and return to his own land where he will fall by a sword"! (God had already revealed to him, in Isaiah 14:24-27 and elsewhere, that He would deliver them from the Assyrians!)

Verses 8-13 say that Rabshakeh then returned to Lachish and found that Sennacherib was fighting against Libnah, a smaller town north of Lachish, and "had heard (a rumor, would you believe) that Tirkakah, king of Cush was coming out to fight against them," and so sent messengers to Hezekiah once again, reiterating (perhaps in desperation) that he should not let your God, in whom you trust, deceive him, saying that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria..." and noting again what he had done in destroying all the lands, with their gods not able to deliver them!

Verse 14 says, "Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers, read it, and returned to the house of the Lord, and spread it out before the Lord!" His prayer is one of the greatest in all of Scripture (and one for us to emulate)!

"O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim; You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and listen to all the words of Sennacherib, who sent them (his messengers) to reproach the living God! Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have devastated all the countries and their lands, and have cast their gods into fire, for they they were wood and stone. So they have destroyed them! Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, Lord, are God!" Wow!

(Motyer writes: "Like all true prayer, Hezekiah's is preoccupied with God: who He is (verse 16); His honor (verse 17); His uniqueness (verses 18-19); and the revelation of His glory to the world (verse 20). The heart of prayer is not its petitionary content but the acknowledgment of God!")

(Constable notes that the prayer is saturated with biblical theology and is not unlike the prayer of the church, in Acts 4:24-31, where--after hearing the message of Peter and John, after their release from prison, they "lifted their voices to God with one accord and prayed..."! You gotta read it!)

God heard the prayer of Hezekiah! And verse 21 says that "because Hezekiah prayed to Him about Sennacherib...this is the word that the Lord has spoken against him" (in verses 21-29)--among other things, "for despising and mocking the virgin daughter of Zion... for his reproach and blasphemy...and haughtily lifting up his eyes against the Holy One of Israel! Have you not heard (that) long ago I did it, from ancient time I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps" (Sennacherib proudly thought that her own might was responsible for the victories she had gained and that she controlled her destiny! She considered herself omnipotent rather than acknowledging the omnipotence of Yahweh!)

"But I know your sitting down and your going out and your coming in, and your raging against Me, and because your arrogance has come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose and bridle your lips, and turn you back by the way which you came!" Wow!

And, in verses 33-34, "He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there...or throw up a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came, by the same way he will return... declares the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake!"

You know how it happened! Verses 36-38 say, "Then the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead! So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home...And it came about as he was worshiping in the house of his god, that two of his sons killed him!" (Constable notes the irony of Sennacherib's assassination while worshiping in the temple of his god, whereas it was while Hezekiah was worshiping the true God in His temple in Jerusalem that God moved to spare Hezekiah's life!)

Meanwhile, back in verses 29-30, God provided a sign that He would provide for His people! For two years the Assyrian seizure made normal agriculture impossible, yet the land "of itself" would produce enough for the people until in the third year, after the Assyrians had been driven away, when the people would be able to resume their normal planting and harvesting!

And, in verses 31-32, what happens for the land is figurative of what will happen for the people! A "remnant" will be preserved and "take root and bear fruit"--and "go forth out of Jerusalem"! The Lord will keep His promise to preserve a people for Himself and bring a Savior to the world to sit on the throne of David!

This passage is a reminder of the importance of going to the Lord in prayer, and Hezekiah helps show us how to do it!

II Chronicles 7:14 says, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and forgive their sin and heal their land!"

Don't wait for a crisis to pray!

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