

Notes on Isaiah 36—39

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Chapters 36–37

Satan is always attempting to unseat our confidence in God. In this account, everything seemed to be stacked against Jerusalem. Hezekiah was taunted about his false trust in Egypt. He was goaded concerning his demolition of false worship in the land; just how could they survive without these outward accoutrements of worship? His strategic weakness was pressed home. Then, the whole city was advised of their doom and a 'salvation' other than by God was offered.

What could Hezekiah do? His instruction had been 'Nothing', until the matter was brought before the Lord and the word of the Lord was sought. Hezekiah had heard the prophecy (in 33:11) in which their false trust of Assyria was called 'bringing nothing but chaff to birth'. Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'we should be bearing children but there is not strength to bring the child to birth' (37:3). He felt the impotence of his own faltering faith, but still trusted in God and asked him to notice that the living God had been mocked by their accuser. He was told not to fear. Further threats were made, but these, he brought to God. He thought now, not of his own strength or even of his own sins, but of the love of Yahweh for his people. Hezekiah was then given a sign of God's protection over Jerusalem (as his father Ahaz had received a sign twenty years before). He had the opportunity to trust in God and be established.

Isaiah records the demise of the Assyrian army, probably at a later time, and tells us that Sennacherib died without ever returning to Jerusalem.

See Luke 11:29 & 30, John 6:30–35.

Prayer

Father in your Son you have provided a hiding place for us and those who rely on him are safe. Yet, even so, we feel the stings of our enemy. We are vulnerable, and have indulged false trusts. Lord, you are our God, and the taunts made against us are made against you. Therefore, come to save us. We thank you for the signs of your presence among us, especially the sign of your Son Jesus Christ crucified and risen again. You have already given him up to death for us, and surely, with him, you will give us all things. Through Jesus Christ we give our thanks to you. Amen.

Chapters 38–39

Hezekiah's illness and subsequent entertaining of Babylon's envoys reveal the limits of this great man. Understandably, he did not want to die, though perhaps his greatness was not as great as he felt it was himself. The Lord was merciful and granted him additional time. God also made a promise that Hezekiah should have

heeded: that he and Jerusalem would be delivered from Assyria. Hezekiah was contrite, grateful and sure of living in God's greatness all his days.

However, when confronted with an opportunity of worldly greatness, a small power entertaining a great power, the promise of God for the nation, which had come to him with his healing, seemed not to be in mind and he gave unrestricted reception to Babylon. Did he think that his friendship there would be proof against the threat of Assyria? Hezekiah thought his action was harmless enough because Babylon was far away. He still did not fully understand the purpose of God to have his nation dependent on him alone. Nor did he understand the virulence of this world's powers in seeking to subvert the witness of God through his people or the purpose of God to bring his people to their inheritance. Hezekiah's self interest betrays us all. Not until the Christ came did the world have a leader whose interest was wholly that of his Father and his beloved people.

Prayer

Father, how shall we truly pray when our most fervent requests are those that touch our own flesh and our own future? Grant to us a sure faith in your Son, that, trusting only in him, you will yet work in us all your good pleasure. By your grace, we are sure that there will remain in the earth a true witness to your goodness and that we shall come to the goal you have promised. Thankyou too for your dear Spirit who prays truly within us with cries too deep to be uttered, and these too are heard as prayers of ours. Amen.