Dealing with the Enemy

Isaiah 36-37

The book of Isaiah is divided into three sections:

- CONDEMNATION (1-35). Prophesies of God's judgment (Burdens / woes).
- CHRONICLE (36-39). A parenthetical account of the confrontation between the King of Assyria, Sennacherib, and King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. Hezekiah's relationship to the prophet Isaiah is emphasized. This section also includes Hezekiah's sickness, prayer, healing, and his foolishness. [These same events are recorded in 2 Kings 18-20 and 2 Chronicles 29-32.]
- 3. **COMFORT** (40-66). God prepares His people for the coming judgment in advance.
- ▶ In this lesson we will focus on Isaiah 36 and 37. In these two chapters we learn how to deal with the enemy's tactics. Hezekiah dealt with the same kind of troubles we all face—We have our own Rab-shakeh's and Sennacherib's we must deal with.

First, notice...

- I. The inevitable ATTACK (Isaiah 36).
 - Things were going well in Judah for 14 years under Hezekiah—Revival (2 Kings 18:3-7).
 - ➡ Trouble appeared on the horizon. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, focused his cross-hairs on Jerusalem (vs. 1-2). Sennacherib is a type of the devil/antichrist.
 - ⇒ Be assured—Satan will attack anyone who seeks to live for God.
 - A. THE INVINCIBLE SOLDIERS (vs. 1-3). An undefeated army. Nations were terrified by Assyria's massive army (about 200,000 soldiers). Entire populations would often commit suicide rather than fight because they knew the brutality and cruelty of the Assyrian soldiers.
 - B. THE INTIMIDATING STRATEGY (vs. 4-20).
 - ➡The threats of Rab-shakeh are the same tactics Satan uses today (2 Cor. 2:11).

- 1. Cast DOUBT—Attack the foundation of FAITH (36:4).
 - a) He seeks to make you doubt and shake your confidence and trust in the Lord and His Word. Notice how he bases his threats around the word "trust" (vs. 4-7).
 - b) Good question: "On whom dost thou trust?" (v. 5). Are you trusting Egypt (the world)? Or, are you really trusting the Lord? Does your life show you are trusting God?
 - v. 7—Rab-shakeh misinterprets Hezekiah of tearing down Jehovah's altars. Hezekiah REPAIRED the Lord's altars and destroyed altars of false gods (2 Chron. 29:3; 31:1; cf. 2 Kings 18:3-7)! Typical of the unsaved who misinterpret our actions.
- 2. Use RIDICULE (vs. 8-9). Scorn the military power of Judah. Seeks to demoralize Judah's army.
 - a) He offered 2,000 horses knowing full well they were not able to provide enough trained soldiers to ride them.
 - b) He mocks, "You can't even stand up to one of the lowest ranking captains of Sennacherib (v. 9). In common English—"You can't fight your way out of wet paper bag!"
- 3. Speak LIES (v. 10).
 - a) Although God prophesied He would use Assyria to afflict Judah (Isa. 7:17-20), God never specifically *told* Sennacherib to destroy Judah (cf. 2 Kings 19:6, 22).
 - b) Just because someone claims to be speaking for God, doesn't mean He really is. We've seen this before (1 Kings 13:18; 22:11 cf. Ezek. 13:7; 22:27-28).
- 4. Create DISCOURAGEMENT (vs. 11-15). Discouragement is one of Satan's most effective tactics.
 - a) Rab-shakeh's message: "You may as well surrender! Resistance is futile." NOTE (v. 12): A siege would cut off supplies and starve the people out.
 - b) Crude and vulgar language is designed to discourage and intimidate (v. 12).

- c) Divide the people by driving a "wedge" between the people and Hezekiah (vs. 14-16).
 - "Don't believe Hezekiah. He's deceiving you." A typical ploy of Satan—"Pay no attention to the preacher or your parents. They don't know what they are talking about."
- 5. Offer to NEGOTIATE (v. 16). He seeks to bargain with you and come to an AGREEMENT. You cannot play "Let's Make A Deal." with Satan and win! He has the deck stacked against you!
- Spread PROPAGANDA (vs. 11-12, 17-20). Rab-shakeh spoke so the people could hear and understand his propaganda. [Information designed to promote and mislead people into accepting a bias point of view.] Satan used propaganda in Genesis 3:1-5.
 - a) False promise of better living conditions (v. 17). He tried to convince them that serving Sennacherib (the devil) is better than serving God.
 - b) Claimed to be stronger than Jehovah (vs. 18-20). Satan whispers, "Jesus cannot help you."
 - c) Rab-shakeh made a big mistake by comparing Jehovah to the false gods of the heathen (vs. 19-20). Rab-shakeh challenged the might of Jehovah (v. 20b). Not a smart thing to do!
- **B.** THE INHIBITING OF SPEECH (vs. 21-22). They would not dignify Rab-shakeh's lies with a response (Prov. 26:4). They chose to obey the King's command!
 - This is the first step in dealing with the devil—Refuse to answer (v. 21). To argue with Satan is a losing proposition.
 - Michael, the archangel, had more sense than to argue with Satan (Jude 9). It's always best to keep the Lord between you and Satan.
 - Don't answer Satan's accusations! The only safe way to answer the devil is with Scripture (Mt. 4:1-10).

Now notice...

- II. The invincible ANSWER (Isaiah 37 cf. 2 Kings 19).
 - A. Hezekiah's **PLEA** of *desperation* (vs. 1-5).
 - → Hezekiah responds to Rab-shakeh threats in humility and lamentation (v. 1). We should be grieved today when we hear the world defy and blaspheme God.
 - 1. He *came* to the right PLACE. Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord. Unfortunately, when troubles come into some people's lives, they stay away from church.
 - 2. He *called* the obvious PERSON. Hezekiah sends for the prophet Isaiah. He should have done this when Sennacherib first came against Judah in. So often the preacher is the last one to be called in a crisis.
 - 3. He *confessed* the apparent PROBLEM. Hezekiah recognizes Judah has no strength to win against Assyria's army (v. 3).
 - 4. He *counted* on a distinct POSSIBILITY. Hezekiah believes Assyria's reproach of God will prompt Isaiah to pray for God to intervene (v. 4).
 - B. Isaiah's **PROPHECY** of *deliverance* (vs. 6-7).
 - 1. The ADMONITION not to fear.
 - The ASSURANCE of Sennacherib's defeat (v. 7). God was going to "blow him away" ("blast"). In essence, God was telling Hezekiah—"Don't worry. I've got this!"
 - C. Rab-shekeh's PROPAGANDA of destain (vs. 8:13).
 - ▶ Psychological warfare Rab-shakeh sends his messengers with a letter to convince Hezekiah that Judah didn't have a chance. They might as well surrender.
 - 1. This is still Satan's main attack on Christians. He will tempt you to think there is too much going against you—Financial issues... family problems... failing health... society is falling apart. He will try to get you to believe your situation is hopeless and you might as well give up!

- 2. This was Job's situation (Job 13:15). If Satan can shake your trust in God he has won a major victory in your life.
- D. Hezekiah's **PRAYER** of *dependance* (vs. 14-20).
 - → Hezekiah takes the matter to God in prayer (Ps. 50:15 cf. Isa. 37:3). He takes Rab-shakeh's letter to God's house and spreads it out before the Lord—"Lord, look what they are saying about You! Your reputation is being challenged." (v. 17).

The spreading Rab-shakeh's letter before the Lord was a physical demonstration of casting his burden upon the Lord (Ps. 55:22). jjj

- Hezekiah's prayer is a commendable model.
- A comparison of Hezekiah's two prayers in Isaiah 37 teach us four elements of effective praying. Notice the shift in Hezekiah's first prayer (37:3-4) to his second prayer (37:15-20).
 - a) Exalt the Character of God. Hezekiah's prayer turned from his crisis to God's character. It is always best to begin your prayer by praising God's character, not by pleading your cause.
 - b) Express your Confidence in God. Hezekiah's first prayer centered on his troubles. But he makes no mention of trouble in his second prayer—His second prayer focuses on his trust.
 - c) Explain your Concern for God's honor. Hezekiah was more concerned about God's character than his current condition. God's reputation was more important than his rescue.
 - d) Entrust your Circumstance to God (v. 20). Make your request known unto God—"SAVE US."
- ➡ Hezekiah's prayer ends where it began—The exaltation of God (v. 16—"...thou are THE God, even thou alone" / v. 20 —"...thou art THE Lord, even thou only.")
- 1. The INVOCATION to <u>hear</u> (vs. 15-16a).

- a) God is Accessible.
- b) God is **Awesome** (unequalled). "Thou art <u>THE</u> God..." (v. 16) as opposed to "gods" (v. 12; cf. 1 Cor. 8:5-6).

The proof that God is God alone is seen in His CREATION—He made everything (John 1:3). When God confronts a man regarding the reality of His being, He points to His physical creation (v. 26; Ps. 19:1; Acts 14:15; 17:22-30; Rom. 1:19-20; Isa. 40:12, 21, 26; Jer. 10:8-12).

Therefore, the world's first attack on the reality of God is an attack on Him as the CREATOR. The world believes in evolution. If the world can convince you evolution is true, it can undermine your faith in the reality of God and the truthfulness of the Bible.

- c) God is Able.
- 2. The COMPLAINT to <u>heed</u> (v. 16b-19).
 - Notice the verbs in verse 17—"Incline thine ear... open thine eyes... hear all the words..."
 - Three truths:
 - a) The Kings of Assyria have defeated every nation and burned their "gods."
 - b) Their "gods" were not real gods. (That makes a big difference!)
 - c) But Assyria has yet to come against the true God (v. 20)!
- 3. The MOTIVATION to *honor* (v. 20b). Why should God answer your prayer?
 - Hezekiah was not praying selfishly for his own benefit. He was concerned about the honor and glory of God (cf. 1 Sam. 17:26, 46). Sennacherib already defeated numerous false gods. Hezekiah did not want the reputation of God to be classified with those loser gods (cf. v. 16).
- E. Isaiah's **PROCLAMATION** of *defense* (vs. 21-34).

- ➡ God heard his prayer. The Lord did not answer Hezekiah's prayer directly. He sent His answer through Isaiah. Sometimes God's answer to prayer will come from a second party. That is why it is important to remain in constant fellowship with God's people and pay attention to the preaching. God may send His answer in a sermon or through a testimony.
- Sennacherib's arrogance (vs. 21-29). The words are aimed at Sennacherib. Hezekiah's prayer was "AGAINST" Sennacherib (v. 21)!
 - v. 22—The Preacher's Commentary (WordSearch):
 "Jerusalem is like a virgin who defies a rapist, laughs him to scorn, and wags her head in pity as he slinks away."
 - v. 23—Basically, God tells Sennacherib, "Who do you think you are? Don't realize who you are talking about???"
 - v. 29—The Preacher's Commentary (WordSearch): When conquered people were deported hooks were put in their noses and bridles in their lips. Easily controlled by their captors and permanently marked as slaves, the hook and bridle symbolized their disgrace. To this day, a "hook in the nose" and "a bit in the teeth" are negative colloquialisms connoting control and submission.
- 2. Sign of provision (vs. 30-31). Directed at Hezekiah and Judah. The Assyrian army had devastated the land. Since Jerusalem had been under siege a long time, food supplies were short and no crops were planted. God promised they would have food to eat until they could reap a new harvest.
 - APPLICATION (v. 31): As you sink your roots deep in God's Word, spiritual fruit will spring upward.
- 3. Assurance of **defense** (vs. 32-34). Sennacherib will not come to Jerusalem... not shoot one arrow or come with a shield... nor throw up a single embankment against it. He will be utterly humiliated.

- v. 35—God will defend Jerusalem NOT for Hezekiah's sake, but for HIS OWN SAKE and "David's sake." God will protect His reputation against all His adversaries (cf. Ezek. 36:22-23)!
- F. God's **PROTECTION** from *defeat* (vs. 36-38).
 - God came to the rescue. The people on that day saw what only God could do.
 - v. 36—The angel killed the 185,000 Assyrians, possibly with a pestilence (cf. 1 Chron. 21:9-14, 27).
 - v. 36—"dead corpses." The word "corpse" originally meant a "human body," whether living or dead (corps, as in Marine Corps—a body of troops).
 - v. 37—Notice the series of verbs indicating the speed of Sennacherib's retreat: "departed ... went ... returned ... dwelt"
 - Sennacherib was assassinated by his own sons (v. 38). Ironic!

SUMMATION: Lord Byron's poem *The Destruction of Sennacherib:*

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold, And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold; And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea, When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide, But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride; And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf, And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale, With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail: And the tents were all silent, the banners alone, The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord.