

The Prophets

Lesson #17

Isaiah 36:1-39:8

Outline

I. **Denunciation (1:1-39:8)**

- A. Denunciation of Sennacherib (36:1-39:8).
 1. The taunt from Assyria (36:1-22).
 2. The truth from God (37:1-7).
 3. The threat from Assyria (37:8-35).
 4. The triumph over Assyria (37:36-38).
 5. The sickness of Hezekiah (38:1-22).
 6. The foolishness of Hezekiah (39:1-8).

Notes

Isaiah 36:1-22

- The emissaries sent by Sennacherib (36:1-3).
 - Sennacherib boasts that he sacked forty-six towns and villages in Judah, taking away 200,150 prisoners and much spoil.
 - Rabshakeh, Tartan and Rabsaris are not the names of individuals but represent three offices in the Assyrian army. It is interesting to note that Rabshakeh was standing on the very spot where Isaiah had told Ahaz not to fear the kings of Syria and Israel (7:3-4).
- Rabshakeh's defiant speech (36:4-10).
 - Rabshakeh shows a marvelous insight into Jewish faith and life as well as a rude and arrogant contempt for both.
 - Rabshakeh reminds Hezekiah that he has only two sources of strength, Egypt and God, both of them futile.
 - Rabshakeh, by contempt and ridicule, tries to break the spirit of Hezekiah and the people.
- The Jew's request (36:11-12).
 - For fear of weakening the soldiers' courage, Hezekiah's representatives do not want the soldiers and the others on the wall to understand what is being said.
 - Rabshakeh wants them to believe that to refuse submission would lead to a siege that would bring them to unbelievable depths of deprivation.
- Rabshakeh's second speech (36:13-20).
 - Rabshakeh seeks to undermine the people's confidence in and loyalty to their king by asserting that Hezekiah is deceiving them into thinking that he will be able to deliver them.

- He further urges them to make their peace with the king of Assyria. He appeals to the blessings of plenty as opposed to the famine of a siege.
- The report to Hezekiah (36:21-22).
 - The nation had been humiliated and their God insulted.
 - They would learn that God would care for them.

Isaiah 37:1-7

- Desperate because of the nation's condition and conscious of his need for divine help, he went into the house of God, a place of prayer and reflection.
- The nation's condition is like that of a woman who has come to the time of giving birth but does not have enough strength, a figure symbolizing great difficulty (cf. Hosea 13:13).
- Hezekiah prays that God will rebuke the words of Rabshakeh which He has heard. Hope rests only in God; there is no other source.
- When the embassy from the king arrives, Isaiah already has an answer from God. His name and character have been blasphemed, and He will handle the matter.

Isaiah 37:8-35

- Sennacherib's renewed effort to persuade Hezekiah (37:8-13).
 - Having heard that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, was coming to fight against him, Sennacherib intensified his efforts to persuade Hezekiah to give up the city into his hands.
 - Rabshakeh points out the weakness of Hezekiah's God, urging the king and his people not to let God deceive them, for Jerusalem will be taken. To make his letter more impressive, Sennacherib lists six additional cities whose gods were unable to save them from Assyrian destruction.
- Hezekiah's prayer before God (37:14-20).
 - The king's prayer to God is expressed in lofty, pure and devout language, with reverence and respect in every phrase.
 - Throughout the prayer the king manifests a firm trust in God and total dependence upon Him.
 - Although Hezekiah and the people have been humiliated and insulted, it is really God who has been mocked, scoffed and blasphemed. The honor of God is being taunted, and this is of deep concern to the king.
 - The prayer exalts God above all creation and heavenly beings, recognizes His eternal Godhood and reverently acknowledges the dependence of both king and people upon Him for salvation in this trying hour.

- An answer to Sennacherib (37:21-29).
 - Like a virgin, Jerusalem has not been defiled by Assyria. She now despises and laughs in scorn at her would-be seducer.
 - Sennacherib had defied the Lord with the arrogant boast of his inflated pride. No land of height had stood in his way; he overcame them all.
 - God made it clear that what had been done was of God's predetermined purpose and not by the king's power.
 - Nothing in the ruler's life is hidden from the eyes of God; God knows his every move, the entirety of his life and in particular his anger against God.
- A message of assurance to Hezekiah (37:30-35).
 - The "sign" does not involve a miracle, but assurance that by divine providence the people of Judah will have food until they can once again plant and harvest. When they can plant and harvest again, the Assyrian invasion will be over and Israel will no longer need to fear Assyria.
 - The remnant will return to their ruined homes, villages and lands to rebuild them. God gives assurance of their ability to succeed.
 - Isaiah had been preaching this message from the beginning, but before God could act, the people had to be brought to realize their need for his help.

Isaiah 37:36-38

- Two similar instances in Israel's history present parallels: 1) the death of the first born of the Egyptians (Exodus 12:23); and 2) the death of the seventy thousand following David's sin (2 Samuel 24:16).
- The remaining history of Sennacherib is related very briefly. Although twenty years elapsed before the king was murdered by two of his sons, Isaiah passes over the intervening period.
- The two sons who slew their father fled for refuge to the land of Ararat to the north. Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon ruled in his stead.

Isaiah 38:1-22

- Hezekiah's sickness and prayer (38:1-8).
 - To set one's house in order is to make a will or some other provision ensuring that one's affairs will be properly taken care of after death.
 - Hezekiah's plea is not based on self-righteousness, but on his life of faith. He had lived before God in truth and with a pure heart, always striving to do what was right in God's sight.
 - The reference to David and the reference in 2 Kings 20:6 make it clear that the promise to David is a part of God's motivation in saving Jerusalem.

- As a sign to Hezekiah, God caused the shadow to return ten steps or degrees on the sundial.
- Hezekiah's psalm of lamentation and thanksgiving (38:9-20).
 - The "cutting off of my years" is that time when Hezekiah should have been enjoying the prime of life and the excellency of his rule.
 - Like a shepherd's tent which is transferred from one place to another when the pasturage is consumed, so will Hezekiah's earthly dwelling, his life, be removed.
 - Though Hezekiah had hope, the message from God took away his hope; he was left crushed at the prospect of impending death.
 - Like one in a procession to the house of God, Hezekiah will walk humbly and solemnly all the days of his life because of the bitter memories of the sickness from which the Lord had delivered him.
 - With his life extended, the Assyrians defeated and true worship restored, Hezekiah's life could not be what it should be.
- Hezekiah's healing (38:21-22).
 - Many commentators and translations follow the account in 2 Kings, inserting these two verses between verses 6 and 7, where they logically belong.
 - The words of Isaiah and Hezekiah may have been recorded here to satisfy the reader's natural queries about the means of healing and the reason for the sign. Notice that Hezekiah is not criticized for asking for a sign.

Isaiah 39:1-8

- Prophet versus king (39:1-4).
 - Merodachbaladan is remembered as a clever and ambitious king and a bitter enemy of the Assyrian kings Sargon and Sennacherib.
 - Hezekiah had seemingly forgotten that it was God who had spared his life and the city, and that he had vowed to "go softly" all the days of his life.
 - As his forefather David had succumbed to the lust of the flesh, and Solomon had yielded to vanity and pomp, so Hezekiah yielded to flattery and pride. It appears that Hezekiah was trying to convince the embassies that he was a king worthy of high regard.
 - Without reserve Hezekiah admits to having shown the Babylonians all his treasures.
- The word of doom (39:5-8).
 - In the mind of Isaiah all such associations of God's people with the world are a rejection of dependence on the Lord and, therefore, sin.
 - Isaiah makes a first unmistakable reference to Babylon as the land of captivity in vs. 6.

- Not only will Hezekiah's treasured possessions be carried into Babylon, but also his descendants will be taken there and serve as eunuchs in the king's house.
- Hezekiah humbly submits to the will of God, grateful for any mercy shown him by the Lord.