

DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB

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Lessons: Isaiah 36 and 37

The Lord called Isaiah to be a prophet. He was told to go forth and warn the sons of Israel of the dangers that threatened if they did not repent of their wicked ways and return to the Lord.

Isaiah belonged to the southern kingdom. He prophesied to the kings of Judah, and for a time they listened to his words and obeyed the voice of the Lord. And so long as they did this, the Lord gave them protection. They were given victory in war against Rezin, King of Syria, and others who attacked them.

In the northern kingdom of Israel, however, it was different. They would not listen to the words of the Lord. They continued in idolatry and tried to make a league with the surrounding nations, that they might protect themselves from the advancing power of Assyria by their own strength. The result was that their kingdom was overthrown. The city of Samaria captured and destroyed by Sargon, King of Assyria, in the year 721. And the inhabitants of the land were carried away into captivity and scattered in foreign lands from which they never returned.

The people of Judah saw what had happened to the kingdom of Israel and its people. The danger was now very close to the kingdom of Judah. The Assyrians were right at their borders and the kingdom of Judah was cut off from any help. It seemed inevitable that Jerusalem would also be captured. For Sennacherib—who had come to the throne when his father Sargon died—decided to press the conquest farther and add the kingdom of Judah to his possessions.

Isaiah had been warned of this attack. And he promised the people of Jerusalem that if they remained true to the Lord He would save them from the hand of their enemies.

The Assyrian army approached. And while it was still some distance off subduing another city, Sennacherib sent messengers to Jerusalem to call upon them to surrender. The city gates were securely locked and the messengers could not enter the city. But they called to the guards up on the wall, saying that they had a message for King Hezekiah from Sennacherib. Hezekiah then sent three men to the top of the wall to talk with them. And they called upon the people of Jerusalem to surrender, saying that Sennacherib had a great army, and that no city was able to stand against his power. The kingdom of

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Israel had fallen, Samaria had been taken, and many other cities had been subdued. Wherever they had resisted, Sennacherib had punished them severely; but where they had surrendered without resistance he had been merciful. The messengers sent by Sennacherib told them not to believe what their prophets had said—not to believe that their Lord could protect them. They warned them not to wait until it was too late. They said that if they would surrender now Sennacherib would be kind to them.

All these things they said in the language of the Jews, and the officers of Hezekiah begged them to speak in the Assyrian language which the common soldiers could not understand, lest they become afraid. But to make them afraid was just what the messengers from Sennacherib wanted. And so they said it was to the people, to the common soldiers they wished to speak that they be not deceived by the council of their leaders. And they continued to relate all the victories that Sennacherib had won.

This only made the Jewish soldiers angry. They loved their king and they loved their country. Especially they loved the Lord, and they grieved to hear His name blasphemed. So they answered not a word.

When the messengers went away, Hezekiah rent his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord to ask Him what he should do. He had to find out through the prophet Isaiah, and Isaiah brought him a comforting answer from the Lord. “Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the King of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land.” Such was the message from the Lord.

So the inhabitants of Jerusalem took heart and prepared to defend the city against attack. But when Sennacherib saw that they were stubborn and intended to resist, he sent a letter to Hezekiah the King warning him not to fight. He promised him easy terms if he would surrender and threatened to raze the city to the ground and kill its inhabitants if they resisted. This was a serious decision for the king to make. He was responsible for the lives of his people. He would be at fault if they were slain when he had been given the chance to save them by surrendering. But he enquired again of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, and the answer was: “He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city saith the Lord.”

It seemed impossible that this promise would be fulfilled. The enemy was so strong. They had subdued cities stronger than Jerusalem. They were full of confidence because of all their victories. The Jews on the other hand began to

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be fearful. Some wanted to surrender. There was weakness and division within the walls. And yet they remained loyal to the king and to the Lord.

Then, even as the great army of the Assyrians was encamped before the city, before they were able to attack it, the Lord sent an angel through the camp, who killed 185,000 of the Assyrian soldiers in one night. So great was his loss that the king of Assyria was forced to give up the attack. He returned to his own country and was soon killed by his own sons who wanted to rule Assyria.

This story is a picture of how the Lord protects His Church if her people remain true to Him, and listen to the counsel of His Word. Remember this story that it may help you trust the Lord when all seems dark and failure imminent. Think of the Lord—His power, His mercy, and His Providence. Remain true to Him. He will guard and protect His Church, even as He guarded Jerusalem against Sennacherib.