

INITIATION INTO ISAIAH

by

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SECOND DIVISION

HISTORIC INTERLUDE (Prose) Chapter 36-39

We have come to the second major division of Isaiah. This section is unlike that which precedes it and that which follows it. This section leaves the high plateau of prophecy and drops down to the record of history. Even the form of language is different. It is couched in the form of prose rather than poetry. Why are these four chapters of an historical character wedged in between the two major divisions of this book? This is a reasonable question which requires investigation and rewards the honest inquirer.

There are several significant factors which are worthy of mention.

1. *Sacred and secular history are not the same.* Dr. Jennings states, "Divine history is never merely history, never simply a true account of past events." There are great spiritual truths couched in sacred history that are seen only by the eye of faith. The Holy Spirit must teach us the divine purpose in recording Scriptural history.

Let us note several suggestive reasons:

- (1) These incidents might seem trite to the average historian, who records great world movements; but events which concerned God's people were important according to the standards of heaven.
- (2) Actually these chapters note the transfer of power from Assyria to Babylon. Babylon was the real menace to God's people and was to begin the period designated by our Lord as "**the times of the Gentiles.**"
- (3) This section is a record of a son of David who was beset by enemies and who went down to the verge of death but was delivered and continued to reign. In this he foreshadows the great Son of David who was beset by enemies, delivered to death and was raised from the dead and who is coming again to reign, Hezekiah was only a man who walked in the ways of David, another weak man, Hezekiah lived to play the fool. Our Lord was greater than David and as the crucified and risen Son of God is made unto us "**wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption**" (I Corinthians 1:30). There are other great spiritual truths which we will note in the chapter outlines.

2. *The second significant factor in this historic section is that these particular events are recorded three times in the Scriptures—II Kings 18-19; II Chronicles 29-30; and here in Isaiah.*

The fact that the Holy Spirit saw fit to record them three times is in itself a matter of great importance. These records are not identical but similar. Some scholars think Isaiah is the author of all three or at least the one Kings. Surely the Spirit of God has some special truth for us here which should cause us not to hurry over these events as if they were of no great moment.

3. *Three significant and stupendous miracles are recorded in this brief section:*

- (1) The death angel slays 185,000 Assyrians (37:36-38).
- (2) The sun retreats 10 degrees on the sun dial of Ahaz (38:7-8).
- (3) God heals Hezekiah and extends his life fifteen years (38:1-5).

4. *This section opens with Assyria and closes with Babylon.* There are two important letters which Hezekiah received:

- (1) The first was from Assyria, which Hezekiah took directly to God in prayer; and God delivered His people (37:14).
- (2) The second letter was from the king of Babylon, which flattered Hezekiah and which he did not take to the Lord in prayer. As a result it led to the undoing of Judah (39:1-8).

OUTLINE:

1. **KING HEZEKIAH and the INVASION of Sennacherib, King of Assyria** (Chapter 36).
2. **KING HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER and the Destruction of the Assyrian Hosts** (Chapter 37).
3. **KING HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS, Prayer, and Healing** (Chapter 38).
4. **KING HEZEKIAH Played the FOOL** (Chapter 39).

Hasten, O Saviour, the time of Thy return! Delay not, lest the living give up their hopes; delay not, lest earth should grow like Hell and Thy Church be crumbled to dust. Oh, hasten that great resurrection day, when the graves that received but rottenness, and retain but dust, shall return Thee glorious stars and suns, Thy desolate Bride saith, Come. The whole creation saith, Come, even so come, Lord Jesus. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain, waiting for the revealing of the sons of God (Romans 8:19).

—Puritan Baxter

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THEME:

King Hezekiah and the invasions of Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

REMARKS:

There are three chapters in this section from the pages of sacred history:

1. **Hezekiah and Assyria**—Chapters 36-37.
2. **Hezekiah and a Boil**—Chapter 38.
3. **Hezekiah and Babylon**—Chapter 39.

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had come down like a flood from the North, taking everything in his wake, he had captured every nation and city that stood in his path or they had capitulated to him.

Flush with victory he appears with the Assyrian hosts before the walls of Jerusalem, he is surprised and puzzled that Hezekiah would attempt to resist him, he seeks for some explanation, as Hezekiah must have some secret weapon. Rabshakeh, his representative, ridicules all known possibilities of aid. Arrogantly he demands unconditional surrender.

The chapter closes with the terms and threats reported to Hezekiah.

This is a prophetic picture of a coming day when the enemy will have surrounded Jerusalem Again, no human help can deliver, as the enemy has come from North, East, South and West.

For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city (Zechariah 14:2).

They can look to no ally or human help. They are forced to look up.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth (Psalms 121:1-2).

Then the Greater Son of David will come forth to deliver them.

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south (Zechariah 14:4).

Also read Revelation 19:11-16.

OUTLINE:

1. **Sennacherib, King of Assyria, Captures the Cities of Judah and Comes to Jerusalem.**
Verses 1-3.
2. **Rabshakeh, Representative of Sennacherib, Demands the Surrender of Jerusalem.**
Verses 4-21
3. **The Representatives of Hezekiah Report to Him the Bitter Terms of the Assyrian.** Verse 22

COMMENT:

Verse 1—**Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them.**

Hezekiah was actually one of the five good kings of Judah who promoted revival.

1. Asa
2. Jehoshaphat
3. Joash
- 4, Hezekiah
5. Josiah

The record in Chronicles, which is written from God's view point, gives him a clean bill of spiritual health.

Hezekiah began to reign when he was five and twenty years old, and he reigned nine and twenty years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done (II Chronicles 29:1-2).

Nevertheless, he was a weak king, he attempted to stave off the invasion of Jerusalem by bribing Sennacherib (II Kings 18:13-16), Hezekiah had stripped the gold and silver from the temple to meet the exorbitant demands of the king of Assyria. It was to no avail, as the army of Assyria was outside the gates of Jerusalem.

Verse 2—**And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.**

Sennacherib did not condescend to come personally, but sent an army under Rabshakeh. Profane history lists three (3) generals, Tartan, Rabsaris, and Rabshakeh. Isaiah only records one, as it was he who made the demands upon Hezekiah. Rabshakeh means "*cup bearer.*" Surely he was forcing a bitter cup to the lips of the son of David.

Note where he stood, "**conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.**"

This is the exact spot that Isaiah had previously stood to encourage the heart of Ahaz, father of Hezekiah and to announce the virgin birth of Jesus (See note on Isaiah 7:3).

Verse 3—**Then came forth unto him Eliakim, Hilkiyah's son, which was over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, Asaph's son, the recorder.**

Hezekiah sent forth an embassy of three to receive the terms offered by Sennacherib.

Verse 4—And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?

Rabshakeh arrogantly expresses surprise that Hezekiah would dare resist, he wants to know the secret weapon in which Hezekiah trusts.

Verse 5—I say, sayest thou, (but they are but vain words) I have counsel and strength for war: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me?

He begins to deal with the possibilities that may have caused Hezekiah to resist and dismisses them as foolhardy. He mentions four possibilities that have given Hezekiah a false hope.

Verse 6—Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him.

The first one is the notion that Hezekiah might be looking to Egypt as a strong ally. Actually the Assyrian host was then on the way to Egypt to capture that kingdom and was incensed that Jerusalem blocked the way. The facts were that Hezekiah had hoped for help from Egypt even as Ahaz, his father, before him. The Assyrian calls Egypt a broken reed, which was true, as succeeding events proved and as Isaiah had warned.

Verse 7—But if thou say to me, We trust in the Lord our God: is it not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar?

The second source of help which Rabshakeh mentioned was the Lord. Here is where his lack of spiritual discernment gave him a wrong cue. The high places which Hezekiah had removed were immoral places of idolatry. There was only one place to worship—the temple in Jerusalem; there was only one approach to God—the altar on which a bloody sacrifice was made. The man of the world today says that all churches are good and that it does not make any difference what you believe just so you are sincere. This contradicts the words of our Lord.

Jesus saith unto him. I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

Verse 8—Now therefore give pledges, I pray thee, to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them.

Verse 9—How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?

The third possibility suggested by Rabshakeh reveals the haughty attitude of the Assyrian. There was the bare possibility that Hezekiah was depending on his own resources and manpower to defend the city.

This was so absurd that the Assyrian offered to furnish horses for 2,000 men if they could be found to mount the horses for battle. This was bitter satire. Equipment from Egypt, even if it arrived, would be of little help.

Verse 10—And am I now come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? The Lord said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.

The fourth reason is the most subtle of all. Rabshakeh suggests that the God of Israel has sent the Assyrian against Jerusalem and He is therefore on the side of the Assyrian.

Verse 11—Then said Eliakim and Shebna and Joah unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and speak not to us in the Jews' language, in the ears of the people that are on the wall.

All the time Rabshakeh has been speaking loudly in the Hebrew language so that the soldiers on the walls of Jerusalem could hear. This was done to the annoyance of the representatives of Hezekiah who suggest that he speak in the Syrian tongue which they understood.

Verse 12—But Rabshakeh said, Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?

Haughty Rabshakeh declines to do so, for he definitely is trying to destroy the morale of the army in Jerusalem.

Verse 13—Then Rabshakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria.

Now he turns to the people on the walls and addresses them in a proud and disdainful fashion.

Verse 14—Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you.

Verse 15—Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, The Lord will surely deliver us: this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.

He urges them not to trust in the Lord, his words are pragmatic and on the surface are inclined to cause fear.

Verse 16—Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me: and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern;

He now attempts to show that if they surrender without resisting that the king of Assyria is prepared to show mercy, his mercy is a cruel thing.

“ . . . the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Proverbs 12:10).

Verse 17—**Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards.**

The method of Assyria was to uproot a people and move them far from their homeland and there colonize them. This was a great morale destroyer. Russia has used this method since the revolution at World War I.

Verse 18—**Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The Lord will deliver us, hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?**

Verse 19—**Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?**

Verse 20—**Who are they among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?**

Arrogantly he boasts that none of the gods of other peoples have delivered them. Why should they expect the Lord to deliver Jerusalem? He placed God on the par with heathen idols.

Verse 21—**But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king’s commandment was, saying, Answer him not.**

The representatives of Hezekiah do not answer but hold their peace. They were instructed to proceed after this fashion. “Silence is golden.” It is the best answer when the enemy seeks to libel you.

Verse 22—**Then came Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, that was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.**

The messengers return to report these doleful words to Hezekiah. Clothes speak of the dignity and glory of man. The grass is clothed with the flower, and Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these. “Clothes rent” speak of humiliation and shame.

This chapter closes on the very dark and doleful note. This is not all the record.

“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” is basic and true but is not all the story.

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Romans 3:24-26).

COMING SUDDENLY

SUDDENLY God opened the clouds of heaven and broke up the fountains of the great deep, and the world that then was, perished in a flood.

SUDDENLY He came down upon the builders of the tower of Babel and scattered them with confusion of language.

SUDDENLY He rained fire and brimstone on the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them.

SUDDENLY the angelic host announced the glad tidings of peace and good will on earth at the advent of the Saviour (Luke 2:13, 14).

SUDDENLY that peace and good will will be taken from the earth at the Second Advent of that same Jesus, he whom men rejected and crucified, whom God raised from the dead, and seated at His own right hand, will come again.

SUDDENLY! like the lightning flash; as the twinkling of an eye; as the blast of a trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised, and the living shall be changed.

—J. W. Browning

~ end of chapter 36 ~

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