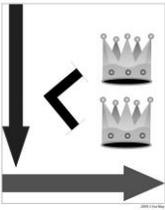


Week Twenty-nine: A King Experiences Deliverance - Isaiah 36-37



Overview

One theme that develops throughout God's Word is the surety of consequences for sin. The LORD through Moses warns Israel to guard against persistent disobedience by stating its consequences. "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything," God says, "therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in

thirst, in

nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you. The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance They shall besiege you at all your gates" (Deut. 28:47-50a, 52a). Though the people know these words, they ignore them to their own destruction. Both Israel and Judah face the consequences of their disobedience. King after king tastes the bitterness of defeat in battle and the burden of famine and pestilence for sin.

One bright light that shines amidst the string of compromising and idolatrous kings of both nations is the Judean king Hezekiah. Contrary to his predecessors, he humbles himself before the LORD and experiences great deliverance. Today's lesson demonstrates God's mercy on a humble king and nation.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will identify ways the enemy seeks to discredit faith in God, and God's willingness and power to act on behalf of those who trust in Him.

Key Truths

God raises up and uses enemies to get the attention of His people so that they will cry out to Him.

The enemy often thinks that he has unlimited power to do what he will, but in reality he can only do what the LORD permits; his hands are tied by the LORD.

People need leaders who will not acquiesce to the enemy in fear but will humble themselves and seek the LORD. God often works in the enemy's camp to disorient them and then defeat them.

Lesson Outline

1. Assyrian Arrogance - Isaiah 36:1-22

The Assyrians are notorious for their cruelty: they displace nations, rip open pregnant women, and practice unspeakable atrocities; one Assyrian ruler boasted that he had flayed nobles alive, burned 3000 people, and cut off noses, ears, and hands of soldiers. He even spoke of burning maidens as a holocaust. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, sweeps across Northern Israel and into the territory of Judah, capturing fortified cities along the way. At each victory his arrogance toward God grows. He sends the

Rabshakeh (possibly "Governor") with a great army, surrounds Jerusalem, and seeks to intimidate King Hezekiah and all of Jerusalem by asking, "In whom do you trust, that you rebel against me" (36:5)?

- He brags that no god of any people (including Judah's God) has been able to thwart him and his army (7, 18-20).
- He taunts them by flaunting their inability to fill the saddles of 2,000 horses with fighting men (8).
- He misrepresents God by stating that the LORD Himself told him to destroy Judah (10).
- He attempts to create fear in the hearts of those on the wall: "Has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you?" (12).
- He speaks loudly and in Hebrew to the residents of Jerusalem to cause them to question Hezekiah's leadership: "Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you; nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' . . . Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, 'The LORD will deliver us'" (14-15, 18).

2. Hezekiah's Humility - Isaiah 37:1-37

Hezekiah responds to the Rabshakeh's words not with foolish words of his own, but with a proper attitude to God before the people. Knowing Assyrian cruelty, he sees his own need as well as the nation's peril, and calls upon the living God.

- He tears his clothes, covers himself with sackcloth, and enters the temple (1)
- He sends sackcloth-clad priests to Isaiah the prophet to request prayer, and he expresses hope that God will rebuke the Rabshakeh for his brash words (2-5)
- In response, Isaiah addresses His fears and gives a promise of victory (6-7)

The Rabshakeh continues his threatening, trying Hezekiah's faith in God again. This time he writes a letter (8-13). Hezekiah returns immediately to the temple and prays to the LORD. Hezekiah recognizes four truths in his prayer:

- The God of Israel is the creator God, and He rules over all kingdoms of the earth (16)
- God hears the taunts of the enemy (17)
- The power of the enemy is real, but that power has only been displayed against gods that “were not gods” (18-19).
- Salvation comes from the LORD, and the people of the world take notice when God intervenes on behalf of His people; God’s ultimate purpose in every deliverance is to let the nations of the world know that He alone is the LORD (20).

Isaiah sends Hezekiah a faith-building rebuke to the Assyrians in response to Hezekiah’s prayer to the LORD (22-35). God promises to defend the nation for His own sake and for His servant David’s sake (35).

3. Divine Deliverance - Isaiah 37:36-38

The Angel of the LORD (the pre-incarnate Christ) strikes in one night and kills 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. He comes to defend His people and to protect the line of David. Shamed by this great defeat, Sennacherib king of Assyria returns to Nineveh, where he is struck down by his sons as he worships in the house of his god.

Application - What does this lesson teach about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?
The enemy seeks to wreck the faith of God-followers by suggesting that God will not, and can not, deliver them.

The enemy speaks in the vernacular to give himself credibility and to deceive God’s people.

Sometimes the LORD allows the enemy to continue his taunts to His people so that they will exercise faith and appropriate the promises He has given.

God employs unusual measures to take care of the enemy, on behalf of those who humble themselves before God and trust in Him.

Summary

God speaks by allowing enemies to attack and defy Israel’s faith so that they will seek Him. God speaks by His prophet to give assurance of His presence and power.

God acts by giving promises and intervening on behalf of His people to defeat the enemy.

God reveals His power over the enemy by establishing limits to the harm that they can do.

Discussion Questions

Why does God allow evil people to taunt His children? Why doesn’t He just kill them immediately?

How did Hezekiah respond when his faith was threatened? How do Christians respond today when their faith is threatened?

Philip Yancey says, "Faith is believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse."¹ How does Hezekiah's faith reflect this truth?

¹ Philip Yancey, "Back Page," *Christianity Today*, March 2005