

CHAPTER 37

In this chapter we have a further repetition of the story which we had before in the book of Kings concerning Sennacherib. In the foregoing chapter we had him conquering and threatening to conquer. In this chapter we have him falling, and at last fallen, in answer to prayer, and in fulfillment of many of the prophecies which we have met with in the foregoing chapters. Here we have,

- I. Hezekiah's pious reception of Rabshakeh's impious discourse (v. 1).
- II. The gracious message he sent to Isaiah to desire his prayers (v. 2-5).
- III. The encouraging answer which Isaiah sent to him from God, assuring him that God would plead his cause against the king of Assyria (v. 6, 7).
- IV. An abusive letter which the king of Assyria sent to Hezekiah, to the same purport with Rabshakeh's speech (v. 8-13).
- V. Hezekiah's humble prayer to God upon the receipt of this letter (v. 14-20).
- VI. The further full answer which God sent him by Isaiah, promising him that his affairs should shortly take a happy turn, that the storm should blow over and every thing should appear bright and serene (v. 21-35).
- VII. The immediate accomplishment of this prophecy in the ruin of his army (v. 36) and the murder of himself (v. 37, 38). All this was largely opened, 2Ki. 19.

ISA. 37: 1-7

We may observe here,

1. That the best way to baffle the malicious designs of our enemies against us is to be driven by them to God and to our duty and so to fetch meat out of the eater. Rabshakeh intended to frighten Hezekiah from the Lord, but it proves that he frightens him to the Lord. The wind, instead of forcing the traveller's coat from him, makes him wrap it the closer about him. The more Rabshakeh reproaches God the more Hezekiah studies to honour him, by rending his clothes for the dishonour done to him and attending in his sanctuary to know his mind.
2. That it well becomes great men to desire the prayers of good men and good ministers. Hezekiah sent messengers, and honourable ones, those of the first rank, to Isaiah, to desire his prayers, remembering how much his prophecies of late had plainly looked towards the events of the present day, in dependence upon which, it is probable, he doubted not but that the issue would be comfortable, yet he would have it to be so in answer to prayer: *This is a day of trouble*, therefore let it be a day of prayer.

3. When we are most at a plunge we should be most earnest in prayer: Now that the *children are brought to the birth*, but *there is not strength to bring forth*, now let prayer come, and help at a dead lift. When pains are most strong let prayers be most lively; and, when we meet with the greatest difficulties, then is a time to stir up not ourselves only, but others also, to take hold on God. Prayer is the midwife of mercy, that helps to bring it forth.

4. It is an encouragement to pray though we have but some hopes of mercy (v. 4): *It may be the Lord thy God will hear; who knows but he will return and repent?* The *it may be* of the prospect of the haven of blessings should quicken us with double diligence to ply the oar of prayer.

5. When there is a remnant left, and but a remnant, it concerns us to lift up a prayer for that remnant, v. 4. The prayer that reaches heaven must be lifted up by a strong faith, earnest desires, and a direct intention to the glory of God, all which should be quickened when we come to the last stake.

6. Those that have made God their enemy we have no reason to be afraid of, for they are marked for ruin; and, though they may hiss, they cannot hurt. Rabshakeh has blasphemed God, and therefore let not Hezekiah be afraid of him, v. 6. He has made God a party to the cause by his invectives, and therefore judgment will certainly be given against him. God will certainly plead his own cause.

7. Sinners' fears are but prefaces to their falls. He shall *hear the rumour* of the slaughter of his army, which shall oblige him to retire to his own land, and there he shall be slain, v. 7. The terrors that pursue him shall bring him at last to the *king of terrors*, Job. 18:11, 14. The curses that come upon sinners shall overtake them.

ISA. 37: 8-20

We may observe here,

1. That, if God give us inward satisfaction in his promise, this may confirm us in our silently bearing reproaches. God answered Hezekiah, but it does not appear that he, after deliberation, sent any answer to Rabshakeh; but, God having taken the work into his own hands, he quietly left the matter with him. *So Rabshakeh returned* to the king his master for fresh instructions.

2. Those that delight in war shall have enough of it. Sennacherib, without provocation given to him or warning given by him, went forth to war against Judah; and now with as little ceremony the king of Ethiopia goes forth to war

against him, v. 9. Those that are quarrelsome may expect to be quarrelled with; and God sometimes checks the rage of his enemies by giving it a powerful diversion.

3. It is bad to talk proudly and profanely, but it is worse to write so, for this argues more deliberation and design, and what is written spreads further, lasts longer, and does the more mischief. Atheism and irreligion, written, will certainly be reckoned for another day.

4. Great successes often harden sinners' hearts in their sinful ways and make them the more daring. Because the kings of Assyria have destroyed all lands (though, in fact, they were but a few that fell within their reach), therefore they doubt not but to destroy God's land; because the gods of the nations were unable to help they conclude the God of Israel is so; because the idolatrous kings of Hamath and Arphad became an easy prey to them therefore they doubt not but to destroy God's land; because the idolatrous kings of Hamath and Arphad became an easy prey to them therefore the religious reforming king of Judah must needs be so too. Thus is this proud man ripened for ruin by the sunshine of prosperity.

5. Liberty of access to the throne of grace, and liberty of speech there, are the unspeakable privilege of the Lord's people at all times, especially in times of distress and danger. Hezekiah took Sennacherib's letter, and spread it before the Lord, not designing to make any complaints against him but those grounded upon his own handwriting. Let the thing speak itself; here it is in black and white: *Open thy eyes, O Lord! and see.* God allows his praying people to be humbly free with him, to utter all their words, as Jephthah did, before him, to spread the letter, whether of a friend or an enemy, before him, and leave the contents, the concern of it, with him.

6. The great and fundamental principles of our religion, applied by faith and improved in prayer, will be of sovereign use to us in our particular exigencies and distresses, whatever they are; to them therefore we must have recourse, and abide by them; so Hezekiah did here. He encouraged himself with this, that the God of Israel is *the Lord of hosts*, of all hosts, of the hosts of Israel, to animate him, of the hosts of their enemies, to dispirit and restrain them, — that he is God *alone*, and there is none that can stand in competition with him, — that he is the *God of all the kingdoms of the earth*, and disposes of them all as he pleases; for he made heaven and earth, and therefore both can do any thing and does every thing.

7. When we are afraid of men that are great destroyers we may with humble boldness appeal to God as the great Saviour. They have indeed destroyed the nations, who had thrown themselves out of the protection of the true God by

worshipping false gods, but the Lord, the God alone, is our God, our King, our lawgiver, and he will save us, who is *the Saviour of those that believe*.

8. We have enough to take hold of, in our wrestling with God by prayer, if we can but plead that his glory is interested in our case, that his name will be profaned if we are run down and glorified if we are relieved. Thence therefore will our most prevailing pleas be drawn: “Do it for thy glory’s sake.”

ISA. 37:21-38

We may here observe,

1. That those who receive messages of terror from men with patience, and send messages of faith to God by prayer, may expect messages of grace and peace from God for their comfort, even when they are most cast down. Isaiah sent a long answer to Hezekiah’s prayer in God’s name, sent it in writing (for it was too long to be sent by word of mouth), and sent it by way of return to his prayer, relation being thereunto had: “*Whereas thou hast prayed to me*, know, for thy comfort, that thy prayer is heard.” Isaiah might have referred him to the prophecies he had delivered (particularly that *ch.* 10) and bid him pick out an answer from thence; but, that he might have abundant consolation, a message is sent him on purpose. The correspondence between earth and heaven is never let fall on God’s side.

2. Those who magnify themselves, especially who magnify themselves against God and his people, do really vilify themselves, and made themselves contemptible, in the eyes of all wise men: “*The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised Sennacherib*, and all his impotent malice and menaces; she knows that, while she preserves her integrity, she is sure of the divine protection, and that though the enemy may bark he cannot bite. All his threats are a jest; it is all but *brutum fulmen — a mere flash*,”

3. Those who abuse the people of God affront God himself; and he takes what is said and done against them as said and done against himself: “*Whom hast thou reproached? Even the Holy One of Israel*, whom thou hast therefore reproached because he is a Holy One.” And it aggravated the indignity Sennacherib did to God that he not only reproached him himself, but set his servants on to do the same: *By thy servants*, the abjects, *thou hast reproached me*.

4. Those who boast of themselves and their own achievements reflect upon God and his providence: “*Thou hast said, I have digged, and drunk water; I have done mighty feats*, and will do more; and wilt not own that *I have done it*,” v.

24-26. The most active men are no more than God makes them, and God makes them no more than of old he designed to make them: *“What I have formed of ancient times, in an eternal counsel, now have I brought to pass”* (for God does all according to the counsel of his will), *“that thou shouldst be to lay waste defenced cities; it is therefore intolerable arrogance to make it thy own doing.”*

5. All the malice, and all the motions and projects, of the church’s enemies, are under the cognizance and check of the church’s God. Sennacherib was active and quick, here, and there, and every where, but God knew his going out and coming in, and had always an eye upon him, v. 28. And that was not all; he had a hand upon him too, a strict hand, a strong hand, *a hook in his nose and a bridle in his lips*, with which, though he was very headstrong and unruly, he could and would *turn him back by the way which he came*, v. 29. *Hitherto he shall come and no further*. God had signed Sennacherib’s commission against Judah (Isa. 10: 6); here he supersedes it. He has frightened them, but he must not hurt them, and therefore is discharged from going any further; nay, his commitment is here signed, by which he is clapped up, to answer for what he had done beyond his commission.

6. God is his people’s bountiful benefactor, as well as their powerful protector, both a sun and a shield to those that trust in him. Jerusalem shall be defended (v. 35), the besiegers shall not come into it, no, nor come before it with any regular attack, but they shall be routed before they begin the siege, v. 33. But this is not all; God will return in mercy to his people, and will do them good. Their land shall be more than ordinarily fruitful, so that their losses shall be abundantly repaired; they shall not feel any of the ill effects either of the enemies’ wasting the country or of their own being taken off from husbandry. But the earth, as at first, shall bring forth of itself, and they shall live and live plentifully upon its spontaneous productions. The blessing of the Lord can, when he pleases, make rich without the hand of the diligent. And let them not think that the desolations of their country would excuse them from observing the sabbatical year, which happened (as it should seem) the year after, and when they were not to plough or sow; no, though they had not now their usual stock beforehand for that year, yet they must religiously observe it, and depend upon God to provide for them. God must be trusted in the way of duty.

7. There is no standing before the judgments of God when they come with commission.

(1.) The greatest numbers cannot stand before them: one angel shall, in one night, lay a vast army of men dead upon the spot, when God commissions him so to do, v. 36. Here are 185,000 brave soldiers in an instant turned into so many dead corpses. Many think the 76th Psalm was penned upon occasion of

this defeat, where from *the spoiling of the stout-hearted*, and sending them to sleep their long sleep (v. 5), it is inferred that God is *more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey* (v. 4), and that *he, even he, is to be feared*, v. 7. Angels are employed, more than we are aware of, as ministers of God's justice, to punish the pride and break the power of wicked men.

(2.) The greatest men cannot stand before them: *The great king, the king of Assyria*, looks very little when he is forced to return, not only with shame, because he cannot accomplish what he had projected with so much assurance, but with terror and fear, lest the angel that had destroyed his army should destroy him; yet he is made to look less when his own sons, who should have guarded him, sacrificed him to his idol, whose protection he sought, v. 37, 38. God can quickly stop their breath who *breathe out threatenings and slaughter* against his people, and will do it when they have filled up the measure of their iniquity; and *the Lord is known by these judgments which he executes*, known to be a God that resists the proud. Many prophecies were fulfilled in this providence, which should encourage us, as far as they look further, and are designed as common and general assurances of the safety of the church and of all that trust in God, to depend upon God for the accomplishment of them. He that has delivered does and will deliver. Lord, forgive our enemies; but, *so let all thy enemies perish, O Lord!*