

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 37

ISAIAH

CHAPTER 37

Theme: "The LORD defends for His Own Sake!"

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 37:6-7 (KJV) "And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. 7 Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

INTRODUCTION

The narrative continues. The LORD would not allow His Name to be insulted and brought down in the eyes of any man.

In Isaiah 37, we will learn i) how to make a fervent and effectual prayer and ii) the accuracy of the prophetic genre.

Our LORD God is the one living and true God and beside Him there is none other. He has eyes that see into the very heart of every human being. He has ears that can hear every

uttered and unuttered word. He has hands that can take action according to His absolute and sovereign will. He has omnipresent feet that can go everywhere. There is no place in heaven or on earth or under the earth where He cannot be found!

When God's people come under the attack of wicked men, the LORD will intervene in ways that will leave the believers in no doubt that it is the LORD who has delivered them!

However when God's people sin repeatedly and refuse to repent, the LORD Himself will judge. He will use direct or indirect means like famines, droughts and Gentile nations to chastise them. In Isaiah 37, God used the former.

Hezekiah was a good king. He led a reform when he began his reign over Judah. He was the king who reigned in Judah when Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians and sent into exile. Now the Assyrians, fuelled by the madness of their new king, wanted to destroy Judah to enlarge their territory. They had already destroyed all the cities in Judah except for Jerusalem, the capital.

Surrounded by the Assyrians who were the greatest superpower in the region at the time, Judah faced impending annihilation. Judah did not assemble its armies nor did it turn to the Babylonians or the Egyptians for help. Instead Hezekiah, the king of Judah, turned to God. He put on sack cloth, humbled himself before God and prayed for His help to save Judah. He went to the LORD through Isaiah, the prophet of God. This was the right

move and the most powerful thing that Hezekiah could have done.

All servants of God must learn from the conduct of Hezekiah and Isaiah in this chapter.

OUTLINE

1. Kingly and godly response (vv.1-5);
2. Godly reply! (vv. 6-7);
3. The Blasphemous Letter! (vv. 8-13);
4. Kingly prayer (vv. 14-20);
5. Godly reply again! (vv. 21-35);
6. Prophecy fulfilled (vv. 36-38).

COMMENTARY

Kingly and godly response – 37:1-5

Eliakim, Shebna and Joah, the representatives of king Hezekiah, did the right thing by reporting immediately to him. It was now up to the king to respond.

The first reaction of the king was to rent his clothes, put on sackcloth and go to the house of the LORD (Solomon's Temple). The house of the LORD represented the presence of the LORD. Removal of kingly garments meant that he stood before God as a sinner saved by grace and not as a king. The sackcloth indicated his humility as he begged (not demand) for God's mercy, intervention and help.

Verse 2-3 – He sent the following people to see Isaiah the prophet -- Eliakim who was in charge

of his household and Shebna the scribe as well as the elders of the priests (probably the retired and senior priests who functioned as trainers and mentors to the younger priests). As they represented the king, they put on sackcloth as well. The serious and urgent nature of Judah's dilemma could be measured by Hezekiah's immediate actions in verses 1 and 2.

They said to Isaiah, **Isaiah 37:3** *"Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth."* The three nouns (trouble, rebuke and blasphemy) and the imagery of a mother giving birth captured precisely what was in Hezekiah's heart.

The noun "trouble" comes from the root "narrow". Hezekiah felt the tightness of being boxed in with nowhere to go and no one to turn to for help other than the LORD. The noun "rebuke" comes from the root "to correct" which means chastisement. Hezekiah felt that Judah was being beaten or punished. The noun "blasphemy" means "to show contempt and scorn." It demonstrated the insult and contempt of the Assyrians before the LORD because Judah was God's people.

The imagery "children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth" means that both the child and the mother are in mortal danger -- they need help to survive! The deliberate use of the plural "children" indicated that the people of God were in mortal danger. They were

desperate. Without the LORD's intervention, they would die!

Verse 4 – Continuing their request, they said that perhaps the LORD, Isaiah's God, might hear the words of Rab'sha-keh whom the king of Assyria hath sent to reproach (defame) the living God. Perhaps the LORD would reprove (rebuke - same word as in verse 3) the words which He had heard. They asked Isaiah to pray for them, the remnant that was left. (As Israel had already been destroyed eight years earlier, Judah was indeed the remnant.)

They deliberately addressed the LORD as Isaiah's God. This did not imply that the LORD was not their God. They wanted to remind Isaiah that, as the prophet, he was the LORD's representative. Therefore he had direct access to the LORD, which was not the case for the rest of the Israelites including the priests. They also appealed to the omniscience and omnipresence of the LORD. Surely He had heard the insulting words of Rab'sha-keh. Now they appealed to the LORD's omnipotence to help defend and deliver Judah from this evil.

Verse 5 – They had come to Isaiah because they needed him to make intercessory prayer on behalf of Judah and they wanted to uphold the glory of the Name of the LORD that Rab'sha-keh had blasphemed.

Godly reply! – 37:6-7

Isaiah answered immediately with a prophetic assurance. Invoking the name and authority of the LORD Isaiah said, "*Thus saith 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 rumour, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." These were not the words of Isaiah, the prophet but the very word of God.

They were assured by the LORD not to worry about what Rab'sha-keh had said. Words of powerful men have power to intimidate and put fear into the hearts of the listeners. Fear cripples and is an enemy of faith. It challenges the people's trust in the word of God.

The king of Assyria was very powerful. His might was visible from the great Assyrian army that numbered in the hundreds of thousands. They had encircled the city of Jerusalem. At any time, they could attack Jerusalem and Hezekiah and all the Jews would die!

Isaiah conveyed that Rab'sha-keh was a servant of the king of Assyria. Not mentioned but by implication, Hezekiah was the servant of the most High God. What was there to fear? The LORD said that He had heard the blasphemous words uttered against Him. What a wonderful assurance! The LORD had heard the scorn and insults. He would intervene and deal with these blasphemers.

Verse 7 – The LORD said that He would send a blast (wind) upon the king of Assyria. As we know, the wind can be felt but not seen. In other words, what the LORD was going to do to the king of Assyria would not be

visible to the naked eyes. The LORD would accomplish it at His will. The king of Assyria would not even know that it was the LORD's will while he was doing it.

The king of Assyria would hear a rumour (report or announcement) from someone which would cause him to stop his attack against Judah. He would return home to his own land. There at home, safe and secure, he would fall by the sword in his own land.

In short, this king of Assyria who had insulted the Name of the LORD and tried to destroy Judah would be assassinated in his own land. This prophecy would be a great assurance to Hezekiah!

Anyone who goes against the LORD will surely lose no matter how great he may appear.

The Blasphemous Letter! – 37:8-13

Rab'sha-keh left Jerusalem and went to meet his king. He found his king warring against Libnah. Libnah was a city located south of Judah and about 10 miles northwest of Lachish. Both Libnah and Lachish belonged to the tribe of Judah.

Apparently Sennacherib left Lachish to attack Libnah believing that it was an easier target than Jerusalem. It appeared that the city of Jerusalem was not going to surrender.

Verse 9 – Rab'sha-keh had heard that Tir'ha-kah, the king of Ethiopia, was coming to make war with the king of Assyria. It was likely that the king of Ethiopia and the king of Egypt had joined forces against the

king of Assyria. If Judah were to fall, Egypt would follow and then Ethiopia. It made good sense for Egypt to join forces with Ethiopia to fight against Assyria.

In haste to settle the problem of Jerusalem so that Assyria could focus on the Egyptians and Ethiopians, messengers were sent with more forceful threats than those of Rab'sha-keh in Isaiah 36.

Verse 10 – They were instructed to tell Hezekiah "*Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11 Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? 12 Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Telassar? 13 Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?*" They were very blatant and direct in their attempts to undermine Hezekiah's faith in the LORD. They told Hezekiah not to be deceived by God.

Verse 11 – The Assyrian threat was very real. The facts presented by Sennacherib were accurate. Hezekiah could not deny that the kings of Assyria (the plural kings point to the Assyrian Empire, not just the reign of Sennacherib) had utterly destroyed the lands ("cherem" — accursed and to be destroyed utterly). Shall Jerusalem be any different? This rhetorical question

was meant to instil fear in Hezekiah's heart and get him to surrender!

Verse 12 – The argument was based on facts. Did any of the gods succeed in fighting against the armies of the Assyrians? In other words, the Assyrians and Assyrian gods were invincible. Like the other gods, the God of Judah would also fall and be defeated!

Verse 13 – All these kings mentioned in verse 13 had tried, like Hezekiah, to fight against the Assyrians. All of them had been soundly defeated and destroyed by the Assyrians. Ar'phad – "A city of Syria, captured frequently by the Assyrians, and finally subjugated by Tiglath-pileser III in 740 BC, after a siege of two years." [ISBE, Swordsearcher 6.2]

Kingly prayer – 37:14-20

Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it. As before, he went to the house of the LORD and spread the letter before the LORD. There was no one to turn to but the LORD, a very present help in time of need.

Verse 15-20 – Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD. His prayer, "*O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. 17 Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. 18 Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their*

countries, 19 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. 20 Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only." This prayer has much to teach us about how to pray so that the LORD will answer. The main points of his prayer are:

- The Unique Nature of God – Hezekiah addressed God as O LORD of hosts, God of Israel. The unique name of the God of Judah was clearly distinguished from the rest of the gods of the other nations. The dwelling place of the LORD is in heaven amongst the cherubims. The LORD will forever be God. For He alone is God.
- The Omnipotence of God – He is not only the God of Judah but the God of all the earth. This means that God is in control of all the nations of the earth! The basis is that God is the One who makes the heaven and the earth. He is the Creator of the whole universe and earth. Who was the king of Assyria?
- Living Being is God – Hezekiah appealed to the ears and eyes of the LORD. These are anthropomorphic terms to describe the LORD as living and very much alive. The idols were dead but not the LORD. The LORD had seen and heard all the words of Sennacherib. How could

the LORD not do anything after what He had heard!

- The Name of God – These evil men and the king of Assyria had insulted the Name of the LORD. Hezekiah prayed for the LORD to intervene for His own Name sake. It was not for Hezekiah himself or the people of Judah.
- The Faith of the Believer – The faith of Hezekiah could be seen in the way he described the kings of Assyria and the gods of the other nations. Hezekiah was not moved by what the Assyrian kings had accomplished. He did not deny the facts for they were true but when these historical conquests were pitted against the LORD, they meant nothing at all. Hezekiah held on to his faith and trust in the LORD regardless of the Assyrians' past achievements. The gods that the Assyrians defeated were no gods for they were made from wood and stone and the works of men's hands. But the LORD is not like them!
- The Specific Cry for Deliverance – Hezekiah asked the LORD the God of Judah to save them from the hand of Sennacherib. His focus was on God and God's Name.
- The Glory of God – Hezekiah's concluding prayer was for the glory of God. He prayed that all the kingdoms of the earth might know that the God of Judah alone was the LORD, the covenantal making God. The

reputation of the LORD was at stake! Hezekiah pleaded for the glory of God to be made known. He did not ask for self preservation. There was nothing selfish about his request.

Godly reply again! – 37:21-35

The reply from the LORD was swift. The LORD sent Isaiah to be His spokesman. Isaiah told Hezekiah that the LORD had heard his prayer against Sennacherib the king of Assyria.

Verse 22 – Isaiah relayed what the LORD had spoken concerning Hezekiah. No man could prevent the very Word of God from becoming reality. The LORD said that "*The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.*" The virgin, the daughter of Zion was a wonderful way to describe Judah. It meant that Judah had not done anything wrong. She was pure like a virgin in the eyes of the LORD. She had despised Sennacherib. This was righteous hatred. It was purely for the glory of God that the prayer was made. Judah would laugh the king of Assyria to scorn. Judah would laugh at all the empty threats. Not only that, Judah would shake her head at the king of Assyria like a teacher shaking her head at a naughty student!

Verse 23 – Sennacherib must realize that he had reproached and blasphemed against the Holy One of Israel. Hezekiah was a king who belonged to the LORD. Insult against him was equivalent to insults against

the LORD Himself. Did Sennacherib know that he had exalted his voice and lifted his eyes on high against the Holy One of Israel? What a most comforting thought to know that as long as God's servants do the will of God in their lives, their enemies are God's enemies. The attacks of the enemies are in reality attacks against the LORD. The servants of God must remember this very important truth and pray accordingly like Hezekiah for the LORD's intervention.

Verse 24-25 – The details of the charges against Sennacherib by the LORD were elaborated through Isaiah. Sennacherib had reproached the LORD through his men. They did his bidding but the LORD held Sennacherib responsible even though the words were spoken by Rab'sha-keh. The words of Sennacherib were, *"By the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tall cedars thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof: and I will enter into the height of his border, and the forest of his Carmel. 25 I have digged, and drunk water; and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of the besieged places."* The verbs used here to describe the arrogance and might of Sennacherib were telling. He boasted of his power through his mighty chariots. He would come to the height of the mountains even to the sides of Lebanon and cut down the tall cedars thereof. This depicted the height of Sennacherib's arrogance as the forest of Lebanon was well known for her cedars. A person who could ride to the top and cut the trees at will

had to be someone very powerful and rich.

He would enter the forest of his Carmel. Barnes explains this verse well, "Here it means, as in that passage, a rich, fertile, and beautiful country. It is known that Lebanon was covered on the top, and far down the sides, with perpetual snow. But there was a region lying on its sides, between the snow and the base of the mountain, that was distinguished for fertility, and that was highly cultivated. This region produced grapes in abundance; and this cultivated part of the mountain, thick set with vines and trees, might be called a beautiful grove. This was doubtless the portion of Lebanon which is here intended. At a distance, this tract on the sides of Lebanon appeared doubtless as a thicket of shrubs and trees. The phrase 'garden-forest,' will probably express the sense of the passage. After leaving Baalbec, and approaching Lebanon, towering walnut trees, either singly or in groups, and a rich carpet of verdure, the offspring of numerous streams, give to this charming district the air of an English park, majestically bordered with snow-tipped mountains." [Barnes, *Swordsearcher* 6.2]

Sennacherib dug deep down and drank the water from the places at will till they were dried up. With the sole of his feet, he had dried up all the rivers of the besieged places. How could the sole of one's feet drink? This was an imagery that expressed the might and size of Sennacherib's armies. They were so huge that they drank up all the

rivers. Water was the life source of every country, more so in the Middle East. For Sennacherib to drink all the waters at will meant that no one could stop him and his armies from their conquests.

Verse 26 – This verse described the LORD's sovereignty over Sennacherib, his armies and his many conquests. The LORD revealed that it had always been the LORD who would decide which nation was the super power and did the conquering. No nation could rise to power without the LORD's approval. The LORD formed Assyria and the LORD was the One who allowed Assyria to enlarge her territories and have her victories over other nations. How could Sennacherib boast as if he did it on his own? It was the LORD who allowed him to destroy nations and turned them into ruinous heaps.

Verse 27 – Because the LORD gave power to the Assyrians to conquer and be victorious, they defeated their enemies with ease. Their enemies were dismayed and confounded because the LORD had made them so. They became as grass of the field, the green herb, the grass on the house tops and the corn. They were easily trampled upon and defeated by the Assyrians because the LORD had allowed it to happen.

Verse 28 – The LORD said that He knew the abode (dwelling place) of Sennacherib and his going out and coming in. This meant that there was no place where he could hide from the LORD. The LORD could "get him" anytime He wanted. Sennacherib's

every movement was known to Him. The LORD revealed His full knowledge of the movement of His enemies and the enemies of His servants. The LORD said that He was very much aware of Sennacherib's rage against Him. Hezekiah must be most comforted to hear these words from Isaiah.

The LORD KNOWS everything! He is aware of everything that happens in the life of His children and the dangers they face.

Verse 29 – Judgement time had come. Because of the rage and tumult (haughtiness) of Sennacherib against the LORD, he would be dealt with severely. The LORD said, "*therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.*" The phrase "I will put my hook in thy nose" described a slave being dragged by his master at will. This was how the LORD would treat the king of Assyria. The LORD's bridle would be in his lips and he would be turned to the LORD's bidding at will. The LORD would defeat the king of Assyria and turn him back the way he came. This meant that he would not conquer Judah.

Verse 30 – The attention of the LORD shifted very quickly from Sennacherib to Hezekiah. The LORD encouraged Hezekiah with a prophetic sign. He said, "*And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit*

thereof." Hezekiah would be safe and sound. He would live on what was grown in the land of Judah. In the second year, he would also live on what was grown in Judah. In the third year, he would grow and harvest more than before. In other words, Hezekiah would not only be victorious against the Assyrians but he would flourish. Hezekiah's personal safety and life in Judah would be a sign of the LORD's protection and presence in his life.

Verse 31 – The remnant of the house of Judah that escaped shall take root downward and bear fruit upward. This meant that the remnant not killed by the Assyrians would be safe in Judah. They would bear fruit in terms of children and good harvests.

Verse 32 – Out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant. This meant that they would be safe and free to travel outside of Jerusalem. They were not allowed to do so because the Assyrians had encircled them. The remnant was not a small number. Hezekiah had considered Judah as a remnant because of the destruction of Israel.

The *zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this*. This meant that the LORD would ensure that what He had stated regarding Sennacherib, Hezekiah and Judah would come to pass. The word for "zeal" is also the word for jealousy.

Verse 33 – In conclusion, Sennacherib shall not come into the city of Jerusalem. He would not shoot an arrow, not even a single one, into Jerusalem. He would not be able to come before it with shield which meant

that the Jews would not need to shoot any arrow or fight against him. The Jews would not need to cast a bank (mount) as there would be no attack at all. The safety of the Jews was emphasized by the LORD here. Hezekiah had nothing to fear.

Verse 34 – The king of Assyria shall return the same way that he came. He shall not come into the city of Jerusalem. The LORD assured Hezekiah that the city was safe. His prayer was answered and he had absolutely nothing to worry about.

Verse 35 – The LORD said that He would defend Jerusalem; to save it for His own sake and for David's (His servant) sake. He did it for His own glory and for David's sake which meant that the prophecies that He gave to David will be fulfilled. David's lineage will be preserved for the Messiah would come from the Davidic line.

Prophecy fulfilled – 37:36-38

Soon after the prophecy of the LORD was uttered, the Assyrian army was literally decimated. A total of 185,000 died instantly and the Jews did not need to lift a finger. The LORD did it all. The angel of the LORD (Jesus Christ) came and took the lives of the elite soldiers of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. They were all dead corpses!

Verse 37 – With this devastation and decimation of his elite armies, Sennacherib departed the same way he came just as the LORD had prophesied. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

Verse 38 – While he was worshipping in the house of his god Nis'-roch, his two sons (A-dram'melech and Sha-re'zer) smote him with the sword. He died. The two sons escaped into the land of Armenia. Sennacherib's other son, E'sar-hadd'don, reigned in his stead. The prophecy of the LORD was fulfilled to the letter.

- 2. Do you agree that, more often than not, our daily life is a matter of choosing between the perfect Word of God and the words of fallible men? Do you agree that the issue of VPP is a matter of choosing between the Word of God and the words of man? Please elaborate.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 37:1-7

TUESDAY: Isaiah 37:1-20

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 37:1-38

THURSDAY: Isaiah 37:1-38

FRIDAY: Isaiah 37:1-38.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Have you ever been afraid of the words of man in your life? Please share what someone said or did that made you afraid. How did you overcome that fear?

- 3. Would you be cowed into submission if someone threatened to sue unless you stop defending the perfect Bible doctrine of VPP? What about the threat of the loss of your job or imprisonment or the deaths of your family members? How would you deal with such threats?

- 4. What is the best motive to ask in prayer? Should this be the only motive for all prayers? If you were asked to pray for someone (a believer) who is sick in hospital, what would your prayer be like? If

you were asked to pray for the FEBC trial at this time, what would your prayer be like? Please elaborate.

5. Is it true that the sovereignty of God include power over His enemies and the enemies of His servants? If it is true, how does it help you to relate to the enemies in your life who try to hinder the work and word of God today? Please explain.

6. How many kinds of prophecies are there in the Bible? What kind/kinds of prophecies is/are found in Isaiah 37? Please explain.

7. What lessons have you learnt from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
