

We Trust In The LORD

Our passage begins a section of four historical chapters (Isaiah 36-39) that supply a link between the first and second parts of Isaiah's prophecy. These chapters are almost identical to passages in 2 Kings 18-20 and rather than being prophetic relate to incidents in the life of Hezekiah, king of Judah. The first two chapters conclude Isaiah's references to Assyria which had long been the dominant military power in the region. The latter two signal the beginning of a new series of prophecies concerning the Babylonian Empire. These prophecies provide Isaiah's readers with still grander views of the coming Messiah and the glory and power of God in salvation.

Facing Assyria

Chapter 36 tells of a military campaign against defended cities of Judah by Sennacherib, king of Assyria. Before bringing up his whole army to besiege Jerusalem Sennacherib sends a message to Hezekiah offering terms of surrender to the city. The message is brought by an officer known as Rabshakeh. Actually, Rabshakeh, seems to be a title rather than a personal name and our chapter is largely an account of this official's speech to three of Hezekiah's representatives and the inhabitants of Jerusalem who were listening from the city wall. In his speech Rabshakeh railed against Hezekiah and Hezekiah's God.

The pride of might

Sennacherib's message to Hezekiah by Rabshakeh is threatening. Sennacherib is coming up to Jerusalem to humiliate and destroy it and Rabshakeh's speech and his vocabulary is arrogant and disrespectful. It is as though he says, 'Who do you think you are to stand against such a great power as Assyria?' and 'Who do you imagine is going to come and deliver you when King Sennacherib comes against you?' Interestingly, the speech is made in the Jews' own language. It is designed to cause unrest among the people and stir up disloyalty against Hezekiah from within, to the end the city might be lost and the kingdom of Judah destroyed.

Rabshakeh's subtlety

Actually, as well as being able to speak Hebrew, Rabshakeh appears to have considerable awareness of the Jewish religion and a broad knowledge of Hezekiah's reforming zeal and commitment to the worship of Yahweh, the Lord God. Rabshakeh's approach, while rough and rude, is also subtle and well-informed. His is no simple 'surrender or die' alternative. It is a deviously crafted and reasoned argument against keeping faith with God and against trusting Hezekiah, and by extension Isaiah, men God had given to His people for their spiritual peace and wellbeing.

Who will you trust?

Rabshakeh mocks Judah's physical defences and declares there is no point in trusting in human strength or such help as an alliance with Egypt. Pharaoh is a broken reed, he argues, that will bear no weight but rather will pierce the hand of any who lean on him. He offers carrots as well as sticks, thousands of horses and the prospect of peace, stability and ease, at least for a while, even mimicking the Lord's own words concerning sitting under vines and fig trees; all the while setting Sennacherib up in God's place.

An attack against the faith

It is when Rabshakeh asks the people of Jerusalem whether they will really trust in the Lord to protect and deliver them from Sennacherib that the full force of his diabolical reasoning comes to the fore. Here is a man who has done his homework concerning both Hezekiah's faith and his reforms to return the people to the true worship of God. He criticises Hezekiah then blasphemes the Lord. So insightful, piercing and barbed are Rabshakeh's remarks that some Jewish writers suspect him of having been an apostate Jew.

Satan's long strategy

We are reminded in this passage how subtle can be the hindrances placed before the Lord's people and how logical and rational can appear the temptations set up by the devil and his advocates to stumble and draw away Christ's little ones from trusting in their Saviour. Paul warns that Satan can appear as an angel of light, surely a warning to us all to be careful, clear-minded and judicious in assessing what we hear and who we listen to concerning spiritual matters. Rabshakeh even claims to come from the Lord and Christ's enemies still claim to be doing the Lord's work, freely using

our vocabulary and speaking the language of Zion. The most deceptive counterfeit looks, sounds and presents itself like the real thing.

Keeping the faith

Perhaps the lasting lesson from this passage is to see how the Lord's people are often walled up, hard pressed and made helpless in this world except for the Lord. Does not the Lord bring His church and people into such straits in order to prove our faith and grow our dependence on Him? As Hezekiah looked around the city of Jerusalem he saw the old, the young, the weak and delicate and he knew their lives were in great danger from a vicious foe. Where could Hezekiah go but to the Lord? May we, like Hezekiah in his day, and Peter after him, learn to say, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.'

Amen

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