

Isaiah Chapters 36-37 Summary - John Karmelich

Title: Trusting God when everything is falling apart!

Most of us have had moments in our lives when we're convinced "the sky's falling" and we don't know what to do next! As most of us know well, life is about trusting God, praying for His guidance, then it is a matter of making the best decision we can after praying about it! In these chapters, Isaiah's writing about a major empire (back then) who was "knocking on Jerusalem's door" saying, surrender or else! I figure the Israelite king tried everything he could think of then out of desperation he asked Isaiah to see if God can help! In this text the Israelite king refers to God as "your god" to Isaiah. Later that king will refer to God as OUR god, when he prayed for help. He responds by killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who were surrounding Jerusalem at that moment (in Chapter 37) and the threat was gone!

To state the obvious God rarely reacts to us in such a dramatic fashion. Usually, we must deal with the problem and watch and see how God and the situation plays out! Yes, we think about whatever sin we are guilty of and confess it! Yes, we try various solutions. The Israelite king prior to going to Isaiah is guilty of trying to bribe the Assyrians and to put it simply they're still knocking on the door demanding a full surrender! This army (the Assyrians) was famous for attacking cities, taking prisoners and they'd put fishhooks in prisoners' mouths, then separating families so they can't unite against them! Historical records show some cities committed suicide rather than surrender! We could be thinking our problems are bad, but trust me, they can always be worse! Okay, too bad for them, that occurred 2,700 years ago, what about what I'm dealing with? When people hit me up for money, I state the truth that I don't do it as part of this ministry. I like quoting Psalm 37:25, in which David states he never saw a righteous man (those trusting in Jesus for their salvation) forsaken or their children begging for bread! When I am "hit up", I encourage them to pray for solutions and state that I believe God called me to preach and I'm not running a financial ministry. OK off my soapbox and time to get back how we can relate to Isaiah!

Of course, we still have problems to deal with. God's rarely going to wipe out our problems in one big effort like we see here. Usually, the first thing God wants us to realize is that He's aware of what we're dealing with, and He wants to guide us through it! As I learned many years ago, God rarely solves our problems but usually provides a "lifeline" to get us through it! As we study this part of the Bible, don't look for a grand miracle (in effect the big one in Chapter 37 did not make a difference as that kingdom still is wiped out a century later) but for His guidance and ask God what He desires we learn from that. With all that out of my system, time to discuss the details!

The first thing to realize about these chapters and 38-39 is they're different in tone from Isaiah to date! These two chapters are almost identical to 2nd Kings 18. Many scholars think Isaiah wrote that part of "2nd Kings" given its similarity! These four chapters are a transition from the first 35, that focused on "Woe is Israel for failing to live as God desires" to Chapters 40 onward, that focuses on life after Jesus returns! (I know my Jewish readers disagree, but we'll accept that!) The text of Chapter 36 is mostly a speech given by a top general of the Assyrian army to those in Jerusalem demanding their surrender or suffer the same fate of the other places they conquered. Part of the Southern Israel Kingdom already is conquered at this point. Now the Jerusalem king and his citizens were getting a surrender now demand or else message! My point is Chapter 36 isn't a continuation of Chapter 35. It focuses on what is going on in Isaiah's life near the end of King Hezekiah's reign! It is included to show the king is trusting God through a horrible time and how God guided him through that!

Chapter 36 introduces us to a bunch of new characters. This includes top people in Jerusalem under the king (who was not present) and a top general for the Assyrian Empire. In essence the general wanted a surrender to save the time and trouble of conquering that city! Keep in mind conquering was more than taking loot and prisoners, it was also about saying "Our god is superior to yours since we're conquering you!" The general lists a bunch of foreign gods and even the fact they conquered the Northern Israelite Kingdom. He was also misinformed as Hezekiah removed places the Israelites worshipped false deities as God instructed worship for the Israelites at the temple only! The top Israelites listened to that speech by the Assyrian leader and asked that general to please speak in Aramaic (the international language of the area). They asked the general not to speak in Hebrew. (Jesus spoke in Aramaic as Hebrew language died after the Southern Kingdom got conquered by the Babylonians about a century later!). In short, it was a case of facing a serious threat of being wiped out! The Assyrian general was saying, "Your lives will be far better if you just surrender now!" This is biblical as the lesson is about what to do when the bottom is falling out of our lives. The Israelite leaders went to their king in sorrow. Hezekiah's response to the Assyrian threat is most of Chapter 37!

Hezekiah deserves credit for turning to God at this point. In 2nd Kings 18, it says Hezekiah already did try to bribe that emperor. Let's just say the emperor was soon "knocking on the door again, demanding surrender as the bribe's been spent!" King Hezekiah went to the temple to pray and sent a delegation to Isaiah saying in effect, help! God responds in Verse 5 saying in effect, I am God, so I know everything already! Don't worry, the Assyrian king will hear a rumor of another attack. God also said that king is going to die in his own land. (His own sons killed him twenty years later, but I am getting ahead of the story!) The Assyrian leader left for a bit to deal with another threat and left a message for Hezekiah in effect, "I'll be back!" That king gave another of his speeches that "our god is better than yours" so don't get too excited that we Assyrians left for the time being!

The really good news (that we can apply) is Hezekiah took that letter and spread it out on the floor for God to see! I know that wasn't necessary for God to get the point. For Hezekiah, that was the point of total surrender of his will to God. Of course that's what He wants for us! Once Hezekiah fully trusted in God, let's just say God got on the warpath against the Assyrian leader! Before I discuss all that, let's apply this to us: God's not going to wipe out our problems instantly like He did here! I know we must pray for guidance, ask for His help, and make the best decisions we're able to make given our situation! The key is the principle of total surrender of our will to His. I have seen God work great things in lives of many people when we agree to totally surrender! Meanwhile time for us to finish the story:

In effect God's saying to the Assyrians, "Do you have any idea who you are messing with?" I know all things and if I say it's not My will for you to conquer Jerusalem, it won't happen so deal with it!" Then we get a 10 verse "rant" to say in effect don't mess with God! Then just to prove to Hezekiah God says what He means, God says your kingdom will be able to eat for the next two years what grows by itself. In Year 3, you will plant again. The Assyrians won't even fire a single arrow over the Jerusalem walls! God is saying He's not saving Jerusalem due to their goodness, but for His sake as He wants the Israelites to be a witness for Him and also due to the promise of David's descendants (Hezekiah included) would rule there in effect till God says so.

Verse 36 states (repeated in 2nd Kings 19:35) in one night, a single angel wiped out 185,000 Assyrian soldiers! I wonder how the Israelites knew the number and best guess is they had to bury all them and which lead to the body count. Verse 37 mentions the Assyrian king being killed by two of his sons. It occurred about 20 years later (as I mentioned earlier) according to historical records.

Okay that's that! The important lesson is about our willingness to surrender our will to God's and trust He is working in our lives even when we don't know what'll happen next! The next two chapters tell a different story before we start in the final section of the book (Chapters 40-66). Thanks for reading!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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