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## A Promise of Deliverance

### II Kings 19:20-37

**Intro:** chapters 18 & 19 record an important time in the history of the kingdom of Judah. Hezekiah has become king and by all accounts, he is a godly king and a successful ruler. He ushers in a real spiritual revival in Judah and his military exploits were on the same level as those of his ancestor David's. It was said of only David and Hezekiah that they were successful in war. Hezekiah's reign was a breath of fresh air for all in Judah who remained faithful to the Lord; those who endured all the royal scoundrels that came before Hezekiah. But, despite being a righteous and successful king, Hezekiah's reign was not without its problems. It seems that the largest thug of the region, the Assyrian Empire, was throwing its weight around, taking out one kingdom after another and they have finally found themselves at Hezekiah's front door, demanding that he give up and surrender Jerusalem to their control.

Sennacherib was the king of Assyria at that time and he was currently busy dealing with some other miscreants at another location so he sends envoys to Jerusalem to deliver a message to King Hezekiah. It was a harsh message full of threats (not idles ones either), mockery (of Judah's army) and hints of special spiritual revelation. When the king hears the message he is beside himself with grief. If 1 message wasn't bad enough, the Assyrian king send a letter to Hezekiah with more of the same. All of this was designed to discourage all of Judah and bring them to a point of despair so that they would give up without a fight. Sennacherib believed he was extending to Judah an offer that could not be refused. He thought he had Hezekiah over a barrel...but he didn't know Hezekiah's God.

Hezekiah did the right thing – he went to the house of God and laid the letter out before the Lord, allowing the king of Assyria to implicate himself with his own words of blasphemy against Yahweh, the Covenant God of Israel. Hezekiah then prayed like he had never prayed before. We mentioned last time that the idea that prayer changes things is not exactly accurate. The problem with that statement is that it puts the onus of power on the prayer when the only real power lies with the One to whom you are praying. Prayer doesn't change things but prayer lays hold of a God who changes things.

What would have happened had not Hezekiah prayed? I personally feel that Judah would still have been delivered but it's doubtful that Hezekiah would have seen it or participated in it. Prayer is important because God commands us to pray but we must never forget where the real power of prayer lies.

The first half of **ch19** constitutes King Hezekiah's prayer of desperation. The remainder of **ch19** records Yahweh's answer to the king's prayer; it's a promise of deliverance revealed through a rather lengthy, yet thorough, prophecy. The prophecy is divided into 3 sections: 1<sup>st</sup> deals with Assyrian arrogance, 2<sup>nd</sup> addresses Judean discouragement, 3<sup>rd</sup> concerns Judean fear.

**20-28** – Because you have prayed – Yahweh is responding to Hezekiah's prayer. We can play the what-if game all day long but the text clearly states that God's answer comes solely in response to the king's prayer of desperation. The real question we should be asking is: how many blessings, how many victories, how many souls saved for Jesus' glory lie unclaimed in heaven because the Lord's waiting to say, "Because you have prayed...I have answered."

**Vs21** begins with the normal prophetic preamble but there's a strong implication that we could add to the end of that phrase the warning: "so brace yourself." Isaiah's prophecy begins with the startling picture of Jerusalem (Zion) scorning the Assyrians! This is shocking because in this particular situation, Assyria is holding all the cards. All any Judean had to do was peek over the wall and they would see an ocean of Assyrian soldiers spread out all around the city. Some were probably tossing around a Frisbee or a group was playing a pickup game of flag football. They were relaxed and enjoying themselves because they KNEW Jerusalem couldn't offer any real resistance.

And yet, Yahweh says, in just a little while, Jerusalem will be doing all the laughing! Jerusalem will have nothing but contempt for Assyria as its decimated army skulks back to its miserable country. The idea here is that the Assyrians have come to ravish the daughter of Zion, the city of Jerusalem but Yahweh will not allow it. Jerusalem is pictured as a young girl rebuffing with contempt the unwelcomed advances of a mindless brute. And this is just for starters!

The rest of this part of the prophecy is spoken directly to Sennacherib, king of Assyria and it begins by specifying his sin (22). Who are you ridiculing and blaspheming? Or rather, “Do you know Who you are dealing with?” Clearly, not! The ridicule referred to is that of 18:30, 32b-35 and 19:10-13. It’s the ridicule that says Yahweh will not and cannot save Judah. It’s the ridicule that says nothing and no one can stop Assyria. Then Yahweh says He’s obviously been hearing Sennacherib’s words because He quotes his boasts back to him (23-24). Now, in the Nineveh Times-Herald I’m sure Sennacherib was quick to give his god Assur all the credit for his success but in his heart, he loved to exercise his egomania and fan the flames of his own god-complex. God can see what is in our hearts.

All Sennacherib is saying here is that he is unstoppable; that nothing has been or will be able to stand in his way; which is always a stupid thing to say. They said something similar about the Titanic. It was the largest movable man-made object in the history of the world at that time and they said it was so well built that not even God could sink it. Of course, God didn’t need to sink it because a simple iceberg took it out, on its maiden voyage no less, with the loss of 1500 lives. It’s never wise to presume that you know better than God.

Next, Yahweh replies to Sennacherib’s arrogance by exposing his ignorance (25-26). Haven’t you heard? Well, no, because when it comes to recognizing Yahweh, Sennacherib is as dumb as a bag of rocks. The king was filled with pride for all of his accomplishments but little did he know and never had he considered that it was the God of Judah Who was really in charge. It was Yahweh that had raised them up, He had made them victorious. Sennacherib believed he was God’s gift to the world when in fact he was merely God’s instrument of judgment against Israel and the other nations. Assyrian success had been fore-ordained by God so Sennacherib had no right to boast. He was only carrying out what God had long ago decided he should do. It’s the same for every world conqueror.

Yahweh’s had enough of Sennacherib’s rage and arrogance so He tells him He’s preparing his exile from Judah (27-28)! God says, “I know where you live, I know your routine...I know your sin.” There’s no hiding from God! But, because the Assyrians went too far in blaspheming the One who made all their success possible – God was going to hook them up and drag them

back to Nineveh. There's some irony here because history tells us Assyria knew a bit about putting hooks in noses and other such treatments. But the image in 28b implies that Sennacherib is a bulky beast who must be forced to do his owner's bidding by bit and bridle. This is a huge insult to go from self-made ruler of the world to stubborn mule, or worse: Yahweh's donkey.

**29-31** – In this section, Yahweh addresses the Judean elephant in the room: how will we eat? Because of Assyria's invasion, the land has been pillaged and the fields have gone untended. Its standard practice for an invading army to pilfer as much foodstuffs from the conquered territory as can be found. This is why black-eyed peas and corn bread is so popular in the South. When the Union armies began pushing into Southern territory during the Civil War, whatever foodstuffs they couldn't carry off they would destroy. But, they would always leave the black-eyed peas standing because they thought they were only fit to feed live stock. Judah is ecstatic over their soon deliverance but when Assyria is finally gone, how long will it take to restore the land, plant the crops and get a harvest?

The sign Isaiah gives is for the near future not the immediate present. While 3 calendar years are mentioned, only about 14-15 months are involved. Deliverance wouldn't come in time for fall planting so they would eat from the accidental growth that would spring up from the roots of the previous crops. They would eat of the same the next year but by the following fall, when the 3<sup>rd</sup> calendar year was beginning, normal life could resume. By the time the 3<sup>rd</sup> year came along and Judean farmers were planting their crops they would realize that Yahweh's word was coming to pass. Then they would know that Yahweh had been at work for them the entire time, not just for their survival but their basic provision as well. God can deal with the Assyrians at the gate and still provide our daily bread.

That's all well and good but at the time this prophecy was given, survival looked mighty unlikely, it seemed like a pipe dream. The Assyrians were still there, the food was getting scarce and the fields had not been worked. But Yahweh adds more to His promise (31). He knows His promise sounds laughable to those impressed by appearances - that's why He adds, "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this." Meaning: as impossible as it looks, you need to understand that Yahweh is in a passion about this and He will see it's done no matter what! The Lord of the harvest is in control. Yahweh's encouragement to His hopeless people is: you will survive and be provided

for and begin to prosper again.  
He would not permit His people to starve.

**32-34** – Isaiah then adds another assurance, one that was meant to quiet Jerusalem’s fear. God says Sennacherib will return to his own land before he can ever lay a finger on Jerusalem. He won’t enter the city or even shoot one arrow at it; his infantry will not advance on it with their shield nor will they build any siege mounds. Sennacherib will just go home! Why? “Because”, Isaiah says, “Yahweh is our Defender and Shield” (**34**)! He, not Sennacherib, will surround the city and save it for His own praise (sake) and for His own promises. “For My own sake” means God will reveal His supremacy in response to Assyrian blasphemy. “For...David’s sake” refers to His covenant, His promise to maintain David’s royal line until the new David appears (Messiah).

It’s hard for modern people to understand the ancient horror of the siege, when a city was surrounded by a hostile army and trapped into a slow, suffering starvation (Vicksburg, Stalingrad). King Hezekiah lived under the shadow of this very real threat but God’s promise through Isaiah assured them that not only would the Assyrians fail to capture the city, they wouldn’t even begin a siege. Yahweh would defend His people, His glory and His reputation! In the same way, God the Father defends and blesses us – not for our own sakes because we often deserve His judgment – but He does it for His own sake and for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. God defends and blesses us because He delights to do these things for His children. He does it because that’s just what He does!

In this prophecy, Yahweh not only blasts Assyria’s arrogance but He is careful to quiet His people’s fears. The latter is just as essential as the former and Yahweh doesn’t forget to do both. He deals with Sennacherib but never forgets the fears and tremblings of His people. He has a word for the reprobate but is always eager to console His church.

**35-37** – Wow! Simply and powerfully, Yahweh destroyed the unstoppable army of Assyria in one night! 185K died at the hand of the angel of the Lord. Against all odds, against every expectation except the expectation of faith, the Assyrian army was turned back without having even shot an arrow into Jerusalem. The unstoppable was stopped; the undefeated was defeated. Ironically, the Rabshakeh had boasted that 1 Assyrian junior officer was

stronger than 2000 Judean charioteers when in reality, when Yahweh wanted to wipe out 185K Assyrians, He only had to send 1 angel. This was a humiliating defeat for the Assyrians but it brought great glory to Yahweh and honor to Hezekiah.

Of course, this passage is not without its problems; not for the faithful reader, mind you, only for the higher critics. Some biblical scholars suffer a fit of hives any time a divine intervention appears in the text. Anything theological or miraculous seems immediately suspect to them. They're quick to assure us that this must have been a later addition thus saving us from a brush with the Angel of the Lord. But is this a valid perspective? Hardly, because 35-37 are the climax of both ch18 & 19!

Granted, Sennacherib's demise is a delayed climax but v36 is necessary in order to fulfill vs28 & 33 while v37 is necessary in order to fulfill v7. The fact that his death occurs some 20 years later is no skin off the Bible's nose. The writer merely intends to show the certainty of Yahweh's word. It will come to pass no matter how long it actually takes to come around. But, it's important to show that v7 is fulfilled – Yahweh's judgment doesn't just fall on the Assyrian army but it follows the blasphemer himself until it liquidates him – at the hands of his own children no less!

Sennacherib's gods were unable to give him victory over Jerusalem and they couldn't protect him from his own family in his own homeland!

But let's look at v35 again: it happened on a certain night... This is what the Bible aptly refers to as the terror of the night. How awful that night must have been in the Assyrian camp. Some have speculated that it was a type of dysentery that swept through the camp but I think it was similar to the 10<sup>th</sup> plague in Egypt – the death Angel passed over and those who weren't covered by the blood of the Lamb suffered the just punishment of their own sins. It was indeed a terror of the night.

This phrase is found in Ps 91:5. It's a promise from God for protection from the terror by night but He never promised to preserve the Assyrians from the terror of the night. Who does this promise apply to? V1 gives the specifics. Right away we are to understand that God has a secret place set aside for His own people and it is a place to be lived in! Those who dwell there abide (live) under the shadow of the Almighty, experiencing His protection, comfort and care. The phrase shadow of the Almighty is an expression which

implies a certain level of nearness. You need to walk pretty close to a companion if you would have their shadow fall on you.

Those who choose to dwell in this secret place (live intimately with God) will discover the greatness of His protection. God Himself will become a strong refuge and a mighty fortress for the believer; for those who put their faith and trust in Him. As the believer experiences the protection, comfort and care of God, they trust God all the more which allows them to know Him as God in an ever increasing degree. The more we trust God the more we experience His work in our lives, the more we trust Him.

This secret place of the Most High is a wonderful place to live and it comes with a lot of benefits but these benefits can't just be assumed – they must be appropriated. You must first come to Jesus Christ in repentance and receive forgiveness from sin and the blessing of new life and then, you must continue to press into that new life, to pursue the new relationship you have received with the Father through the work of Jesus Christ and discover the joy that comes from abiding under His shadow. You will never have to fear the terror of the night or any kind of destruction that could come in all kinds of circumstances. God has you covered by His shadow, and that removes all fear.

When you step back and look at the big picture revealed in [ch18-19](#) I would have to say that Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem paint a pretty pathetic picture. But, if we are honest, that's true of all God's people in every age. God's people have always been pretty pathetic but, if you assault them you will find their God is able to deliver them and – if you mock their God, watch out for the terror of the night. 😊