

Because You Prayed...

Part I

By Mary Kane

I can't tell how strongly I feel about the importance of today's lesson. I believe that what God has to show us from His Holy Word this day will be life changing for many people—not because of the skill of this writer, but because of the wisdom, sovereignty and brilliance of Our Heavenly Father and His Holy Word.

As I was doing my Bible study this week, I ran across an Old Testament passage in Isaiah that I had read many times before. When I was younger in my walk with God, I used to worry that I would lose my love for His Word—that I would learn everything possible from a passage of Scripture and that it would become mundane to me. But the wisdom of God is vastly infinite and the “unfolding” of His Word is continuous! Praise God we can always approach our quiet time with God with expectation and excitement because His Word never returns to Him void—it always accomplishes what He wills. As I read the passage in Isaiah again, God showed me something that I had never noticed in previous readings. I felt God speak loudly into my soul, with a critical message for me personally, from His Holy Word. I had goose bumps in my spirit as I read these words from Isaiah 37:21, “...because you have prayed to me...”

(Today's reading is lengthy but important to understanding the context of our study. Please don't skip it!)

Please read Isaiah 36 and 37.

Assyria was “built on the western bank of the Tigris River. The Assyrians were cruel and ferocious in war, keen traders, stern disciplinarians and where religion was concerned, intense and intolerant” (*BLB*). The Assyrians were known for their ruthless, brutal treatment of their enemies, often impaling their victims on spiked poles. They also carried out burnings and beheadings. At the height of their power, the Assyrians were feared by all their enemies. In 722 B.C., Assyria defeated the northern kingdom, Israel, and carried away thousands of Israelites to exile. Israel thus became a province of the Assyrian Empire. Sennacherib was king of the infamous Assyrian Empire from 705-681 B.C. In 701, when Tyre and Sidon refused to pay

tribute to Assyria, Sennacherib attacked the Phoenician Coast. Sidon along with many other coastal cities was captured. During this bloody campaign any city that refused to submit and pay tribute to the king of Assyria was destroyed. After finishing off the Egyptians, Sennacherib turned his sites and focused on Judah. In all, 46 cities in Judah fell to the Assyrians. Finally, Sennacherib marched on Jerusalem.

For today's study, we will focus on Isaiah 37:10-22. Please read these verses now.

Please record your impressions of Sennacherib.

King Sennacherib was a very shrewd man. He not only engaged his enemy in physical warfare, but in psychological warfare as well.

How did Sennacherib seek to undermine Hezekiah and the nation of Israel?

He immediately tried to dishonor the trustworthiness of God. This was no new trick of the enemy; he's been using it for thousands of years.

Please turn to Genesis and read 3:1-5. In a sentence, please summarize how the enemy was able to tempt Eve.

He was able to convince Eve that God was not trustworthy and that she should trust the wisdom of her own heart instead.

Please turn back to Isaiah 37. What was the second strategic move of the enemy according to verse 11?

He tried to shift Hezekiah's focus from the power of God to the power of Sennacherib.

Now please read verse 12 and record battle strategy number three.

Sennacherib endeavored to discredit the sovereignty of God.

Now list all the strategies in the space provided:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Notice how the king of Assyria attempted to claim these same attributes for himself; that his word was trustworthy, that the destiny of the Hebrew people lay in his hands and that he alone was powerful. The enemy will always try to imitate the Almighty.

At this stage of your life is the enemy of our souls trying to use any of these tactics against you?

Hezekiah had a very critical choice to make, and the fate of his nation hung in the balance. While Sennacherib was threatening Hezekiah physically, the battle was really being waged mentally—in the mind of Hezekiah. Would he walk by faith or by sight? The King of Israel had to choose whose voice he would listen to—the voice of the enemy, who was speaking through Sennacherib or the voice of God, who was speaking through Isaiah. And we have the exact same choice to make every time we face a crisis. Whom will we allow to speak into our lives?

Verse 14 was in actuality the turning point in this conflict between Hezekiah and Sennacherib; there was a reversal of destiny that was brought about by one small act. With one seemingly insignificant yet crucial decision, the King of Assyria was doomed. Before a single sword was drawn, the battle was already over.

Please read verses 14 and 15 again and write down what Hezekiah chose to do with the letter he received that changed the destiny of nations and empires.

The NKJV reads "... and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord..."

The words *went up* are *'alah* in Hebrew which means "to ascend, to lift, to offer." It can also mean to increase in strength. In order to enter the temple of Yahweh, Hezekiah had to literally "ascend" to get to the temple as the temple was built on Mount Moriah. The Hebrew people sang Songs of Ascent, Psalms 120-134, when traveling to Jerusalem for certain feast days. As Hezekiah "ascended" to meet with the Lord about this crisis, he was becoming stronger. Whenever we draw near to God and spend time in His Presence, we are strengthened by the power of His Spirit.

I love it that Hezekiah took the letter from Sennacherib's representative and immediately ran to show his Father. There is no evidence in the text to suggest that Hezekiah sought counsel or consolation from any other source. And after he ran and spread the letter before his Father, Hezekiah *prayed* to the Lord. First, Hezekiah *told* God about the letter; then he *asked* God to act upon the letter. The Hebrew word for *prayed* used in this verse is *palal* which means to pray, to intercede, to make supplication. In this case prayer was made in particular for God to protect Israel from an enemy. The king of Israel left the crisis with God for Him to resolve according to His perfect will. Hezekiah did not give any credence to the words of the enemy; he didn't turn to foreign alliances for protection or try to compromise to appease the enemy. Hezekiah did what he should have according to scripture; he stood on the Word of God and waited for God to move.

Now, please write a short summary of each of the following verses:

Verse 16:

Verse 17:

Verse 18:

Verse 19:

Verse 20:

Finally, we come to my favorite verse in Isaiah chapter 37!

Please write verse 21 in the space below.

What is the most important phrase in this verse?

The words "...because you have prayed to Me..." are profoundly significant!

What happened because Hezekiah chose to take his problem to God in prayer (Isaiah 37: 22-29)?

The Hebrew word for *because* used in this verse is '*aher* which is a conjunction. It is used to show a connection between two parts of a sentence. A cause and effect relationship between *prayer* of Hezekiah and the movements of God was indicated. *Because* Hezekiah chose to pray, *because* of the 130 words spoken in prayer by the King Hezekiah in verses 16-20, the nation of Israel was saved, the lives of thousands of Hebrew people were spared, the armies of Sennacherib were decimated, and the king of Assyria was killed. Stop and ponder this for a moment.

How important was this one little short prayer?

Perhaps we would have expected Hezekiah to have spent hours in prayer, somehow proving himself worthy of being heard by Yahweh. How long did it take Hezekiah to present his prayer before Yahweh? I timed myself to see how long it would take me to read aloud Hezekiah's prayer—45 seconds. I think Hezekiah did not have time to

spend hours in prayer; Sennacherib was waiting at the gates ready to attack. The point is Hezekiah prayed- he did not rally the troops, sound an alarm or grab his sword. Before meeting his worst enemy Hezekiah took time to pray. Do you have 45 seconds to invest in prayer? Think of what could happen...

Because _____ (fill in your name) prayed to God:

The United States ...

I was finally able to...

My husband and I...

That thing I've prayed for, for so long...

My children were...

Are you beginning to realize how profoundly our prayers or lack thereof affect the destiny of our lives, our families and our homelands? God in His infinite wisdom has decided that some things will only happen when people intercede by prayer. Can we really afford not to pray?

We will finish up our study on this section of scripture in the next lesson. Until then, please spend some time in prayer!

"The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."
James 5:16

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