

Isaiah 37:33-38

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/isa/isa-37/isaiah-3733-38/>

The Lord declares His intention to save Jerusalem without a battle. The Assyrians suffer a great slaughter at the hand of the angel of the Lord.

After condemning *Sennacherib the king of Assyria's* arrogance in Isaiah 37:26-29, God will now conclude His pronouncement against the Assyrian king and his campaign to conquer Judah's capital city of Jerusalem. God says through Isaiah the Prophet,

“Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, ‘He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield, or throw up a siege ramp against it’ (v 33).

God declares to Hezekiah that the *king of Assyria* will leave before he gets to the point of putting up a *siege ramp*. A *siege ramp* was used to breach the walls of a city. To see an image of the *siege ramp* of Masada built by the Romans in 73ad, [Click Here](#). Once the wall was breached, the invading soldiers would enter and fight those inside. God says the Assyrians will *not come to this city or shoot an arrow there*.

At the point in time this is all occurring, Sennacherib is at Libnah, another town in Judah, conquering it. Hezekiah is now being told that the Assyrian army will never even make it to Jerusalem before turning away.

‘By the way that he came, by the same he will return, and he will not come to this city,’ declares the Lord (v 34).

The Assyrian army will march right back to its home country, and will not come to Jerusalem.

‘For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake’ (v 35).

Hezekiah's prayer was for God to redeem Judah, that all the nations might know that He alone is God (Isaiah 37:20). God answers the prayer as prayed, that He will defend Jerusalem *for My own sake*. But God also adds *and for My servant David's sake*. God's love and promises for those who love Him passes down for many generations (Romans 11:28-29).

God declares there will be no humans fighting in this battle. He will provide a complete deliverance for His people. The text implies that God honors Hezekiah's faithful trust in Him by saving him with this great miracle (Isaiah 37:21). The New Testament, in Hebrews, says,

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”
(Hebrews 11:6)

Our story is a good example of God rewarding Hezekiah for diligently seeking Him. Hebrews 11 is called the “Hall of Faith” and is where many Old Testament saints are honored for their

complete trust in Yahweh their God. And although King Hezekiah is not listed there, he surely exhibited faith in God during this Assyrian siege. The Pauline Author of the Book of Hebrews admits he would not have enough time to write about every Old Testament saint who exhibited immense faith in God:

“And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.”
(Hebrews 11:32)

By saying He will *defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake*, God may be referring to the covenant He made with King *David*:

“Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.”
(2 Samuel 7:16)

Hezekiah was a King in David's lineage and therefore a partaker in that covenant. By saving Hezekiah, God was saving the lineage that eventually led to Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1, 9-10). It will be through Jesus that God's promise to David will be fully realized.

Finally, after giving His people time to seek Him through this time of suffering, God completes His deliverance:

Then the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead (v. 36).

The *angel of the Lord* is mentioned many times in scripture without use of a proper noun. Another way to translate this from Hebrew is “messenger of the Yahweh.” The first occurrence of *the angel of the Lord* seems to be Genesis 16:7, where Hagar is visited while sitting beside a spring of water. Many believe that this *angel of the Lord* who appears at various points in the Old Testament is special among the angels. Or possibly a preincarnate Jesus Christ.

This entire episode in Isaiah 36-37 is likely a type or foreshadowing of the end time battle when Christ returns. We know from prophecy that when Jesus returns, armies will once again be gathered to besiege Jerusalem. They will be gathered in the plains of Megiddo, also known as Armageddon (Revelation 16:13). They will then descend on Jerusalem, and wreak havoc on it (Zechariah 14:1-2; Matthew 24:15-22). But Jesus will return with His saints and strike those nations with the Word of His mouth and deliver Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:3, Revelation 19:15).

The King of Assyria as a Prototype of The Beast

There are multiple pictures of the lawless one, the Beast predicted in Daniel and Revelation. The Old Testament types or shadows of the Beast are characters who use pompous words to blaspheme and curse Yahweh and His people. This would include Goliath (1 Samuel 17), Sennacherib king of Assyria, and Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek ruler who was prophesied about in the book of Daniel, and who set up the first “abomination of desolation” by putting a statue of Zeus in the temple and sacrificing a pig on the altar. These all presage the ultimate Beast and antichrist at the end of the age.

This Beast is given:

“an arrogant mouth to blaspheme God, the Tabernacle, and His people.”
(Revelation 13:5)

Rabshakeh, as the mouthpiece for Sennacherib, might be a prototype of the False Prophet, who speaks on behalf of the “Beast.”

Isaiah also predicts a fiery demise for the king of Assyria in a place called Tophet that is kindled with the breath of God:

“For Tophet was established of old,
Yes, for the king [Of Assyria] it is prepared.
He has made it deep and large;
Its pyre is fire with much wood;
The breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone,
Kindles it.”
(Isaiah 30:33)

“Tophet” is another name for the Valley of Hinnom, a valley southwest of Jerusalem. It was the landfill and sewer for the city. A place of Molech worship, where babies were burned (Tophet means “drums” because they would beat drums to drown out baby cries while being burned). In the New Testament “Tophet” is called “Gehenna” (Ge = valley, Henna = Hinnom). It is most often translated as “hell” in our Bibles. It is unfortunate that the translators tell us what they think the Valley of represents in those verses rather than translating what it says. Hinnom/Gehenna represents the consequence of sin, which is death.

[To learn more see our article on Gehenna.](#)

This prophecy from Isaiah 30:33 where the king of Assyria is burned in Tophet might be fulfilled in Revelation 19:20 where the Beast and False Prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire.

Micah 5:2-6 says the Messiah who is to be born in Bethlehem is destined to save Israel from a future Assyrian, making a link for future readers between the King of Assyria and end time Beast:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting.”
(Micah 5:2)

Skipping to verse 5:

“And this One [Messiah] shall be peace.
When the Assyrian comes into our land,

And when he treads in our palaces.”
(Micah 5:5a)

This is the Beast, coming against Israel. He will be defeated by Jesus, as shown in the book of Revelation.

Skipping to verse 6b:

“Thus He [Jesus] shall deliver us from the Assyrian,
When he [the Assyrian] comes into our land
And when he treads within our borders.”
(Micah 5:6b)

The “Assyrian” likely refers to Sennacherib as a type of the Beast, who will be a world leader with power to crush any in his way.

This will occur at the end of a seven-year period, the “70th week of Daniel.” [To learn more, please see our commentary on Daniel 9:24-25.](#)

This seven-year period begins with the signing of a treaty between Israel and the beast. However it seems that there will be only subtle signs that this is the treaty; it might not be known until the 3 ½ year mark. The first 3 ½ years of the treaty are apparently quite prosperous. Then the last 3 ½ years are called by the Bible “The Great Tribulation”—the worst times in the history of earth. If not shortened, the world would not survive (Matthew 24:22). It is at the end of this 3 ½ years that Jesus will return, and save Jerusalem AGAIN, just as He saved it in the time of Hezekiah.

Upon seeing such a great devastation upon his military by *the angel of the Lord, Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh*, the capital city of Assyria (v 37).

Many times in the Old Testament, God required the Israelites to bear up arms and fight against their enemies with His help. Other times, God wishing to show His glory and power to the Israelites as well as the surrounding nations, provides a supernatural victory without human involvement. This is one such story. Another occurred during the reign of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 20:15-17).

Sennacherib’s end was as ruthless and cruel as the deaths he had caused for countless others; he was assassinated by his own sons:

It came about as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat and Esarhaddon his son became king in his place (v. 38).

Despite many of the Assyrian gods being known to us today from archaeology, the name *Nisroch* is unattested in Assyrian sources. Some scholars think that *Nisroch* is a scribal mistake in which the name Nimrod became *Nisroch*. Jewish tradition holds that King Nimrod proclaimed himself to be a deity was worshipped by the Assyrians and became associated with the pagan god Jupiter.

Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon's reign is well written about in Assyrian tablets. Reigning from 681 BC to his death in 669, *Esarhaddon* increased his father's kingdom to beyond Egypt. During his reign, the Assyrian empire was the largest empire ever recorded.

Archaeological evidence of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem was found in 1830 in modern-day Iraq. In these "Annals of *Sennacherib*" as they are called, a cuneiform prism referred to as "[The Jerusalem Prism](#)" describe these events from the Assyrian perspective. Besides describing the siege and naming *Hezekiah* as a ruler of Judah who paid tributes to *Sennacherib*, this Assyrian document agrees with the Bible in stopping short of saying that Jerusalem was conquered, and by stating the *Hezekiah* rebelled against Sennacherib's authority (Isaiah 36:5). Here is a translation of the relevant portion of Assyrian text:

"As for the king of Judah, *Hezekiah*, who had not submitted to my authority, I besieged and captured forty-six of his fortified cities, along with many smaller towns, taken in battle with my battering rams...I took as plunder 200,150 people, both small and great, male and female, along with a great number of animals including horses, mules, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. As for *Hezekiah*, I shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem. I then constructed a series of fortresses around him, and I did not allow anyone to come out of the city gates. His towns which I captured I gave to Mitinti, king of Ashdod; Padi, ruler of Ekron; and Silli-bel, king of Gaza."
(Jerusalem Prism)

Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell in 612 BC. After its fall, Babylon rose to power. So Judah was never again threatened by Assyria. It became a vassal state of Babylon. However, its leaders decided to trust in Egypt, against God's direction. As a result, Babylon besieged Jerusalem and sent it into exile between 605 and 586 BC.

We read of Nineveh in the Book of Jonah. Jonah the prophet did not want to go to Nineveh and preach repentance, lest God grant them mercy. This story provides a good indication of why Jonah held this attitude. The Assyrians were oppressive, fierce, and cruel, crushing all in their wake. But what lifts itself up in pride, God brings low, and what humbles itself under the mighty hand of God, He lifts up (1 Peter 5:5-6).

Biblical Text

³³"Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, 'He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield, or throw up a siege ramp against it. ³⁴By the way that he came, by the same he will return, and he will not come to this city,' declares the Lord. ³⁵'For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.' " ³⁶**Then the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead. ³⁷So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh. ³⁸It came about as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place.**