

## WHAT TO DO WHEN THEY DEFY GOD

**36** In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. <sup>2</sup>Then the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. When the commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field, <sup>3</sup>Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, the palace administrator, Shebna, the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder, went out to meet him. <sup>4</sup>The field commander said to them, Tell Hezekiah, This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says, In what do you place your confidence? <sup>5</sup>I say that your counsel and your claim to have strength to wage war are only empty words. Now on whom are you depending, so that you are so bold as to rebel against me? <sup>6</sup>Listen. You are depending on a staff that is [nothing more than] a splintered reed; [namely, the nation of] Egypt. If a man leans upon that staff, it will pierce his hand and wound him—such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him. <sup>7</sup>But if you tell me, We are trusting in Jehovah our God. [I ask you,] Is not he the god whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, commanding Judah and Jerusalem, "You must [only] worship before this altar [in Jerusalem]?" <sup>8</sup>Now therefore, make a deal with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses—if you can supply riders for them. <sup>9</sup>How can you repel [even so much as] one officer of the least of my master's commanders, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen? <sup>10</sup>Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this land without [the help of] Jehovah? Jehovah commanded me, Attack this land and destroy it ...

**37** When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of Jehovah. <sup>2</sup>He sent Eliakim, the palace administrator, Shebna, the secretary, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. <sup>3</sup>And they said to him, This is what Hezekiah says, This is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace; it is like infants coming to the point of birth, but there is no strength to deliver them. <sup>4</sup>Perhaps Jehovah your God will take note of the words of the [Assyrian] field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to defy the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words that Jehovah your God has heard. Therefore, lift up your prayer for the remnant [of Judah] that is [still] left. <sup>5</sup>When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, <sup>6</sup>Isaiah said to them, This is what you shall report back to your master, This is what Jehovah says, Do not be afraid of the words you have heard, [the words] with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. <sup>7</sup>Listen! I am going to put a spirit into him that will cause him, when he hears a certain report, to return to his own country. Furthermore, I will cause him to be killed with the sword in his own country ... <sup>8</sup>Then the angel of Jehovah went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When [the Assyrians] got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! <sup>9</sup>So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew [from Jerusalem]. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. <sup>10</sup>[One day,] as he was worshipping in the temple of Nisroch his god, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer assassinated him with the sword; then they escaped to the land of Ararat. Esarhadon his son succeeded him as king. (Isa. 36:1-10; 37:1-7,36-38)

## Introduction

Consider this headline and article in “yesterday’s” newspaper:

ASSYRIAN ARMIES SURROUND CAPITOL, DEMAND UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

*Assyrian General Derides Jewish Religion, Cites Recent Triumphs*

JERUSALEM—“Neither King Hezekiah nor the LORD will be able to save this city,” so said the commander of the Assyrian forces in an interview held this morning at his field headquarters located one-half mile east of Jerusalem.

This top-ranking officer over Sennacherib’s Assyrian army urged the people of Jerusalem to give up the struggle and make unconditional surrender to the vastly superior forces that presently occupy the whole of the Jordan valley. Reputable news sources estimate that the Assyrians have amassed an army of some 200,000 against the Jewish capitol.

The Assyrian commander was further quoted as saying, “It is foolish for the people of Jerusalem to listen to Hezekiah when he says, ‘The LORD will deliver us.’ Look, have any of the gods of the nations been able to resist our armies? Not one! Now then, why does Hezekiah think that the LORD can successfully defend Jerusalem?”

The general went on to cite just some of the impressive victories the Assyrians have achieved in their remarkable march southward and westward, a march that originated in their homeland some twenty-seven months ago.

Seven times in chapter 37 the Assyrian commander’s speech is described as defying, blaspheming, and raging against the living God. Have you ever encountered men who have likewise defied the LORD and raged against Him? How are we to handle such a situation? What should we do if we should find our Lord and ourselves as Christians under such a barrage of abuse? What did Hezekiah do? As we consider his response, let us learn Three Things to Do When They Defy God.

### **I. Exercise a Holy Silence (Isa. 37:21)**

The superpower of Assyria had been aggressively expanding, advancing ever closer to the borders of Judah, posing a threat to the very existence of the little nation. Now we are told that in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib invaded Judah, destroying all of its fortifications (Isa. 36:1.) It was at this point that Hezekiah had sued for peace, seeking to buy off the Assyrians by robbing the temple of the LORD and depleting the national treasury:

*In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. <sup>14</sup>So Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have offended Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you demand of me." The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. <sup>15</sup>So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of Jehovah and in the treasuries of the royal palace. <sup>16</sup>At this time Hezekiah king of Judah stripped off the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of Jehovah, and gave it to the king of Assyria. (2 Kgs. 18:13-16)*

Hezekiah succeeded in securing a peace that lasted for several months. But now the Assyrians once more stand at the very gates of Jerusalem; and, accompanied by a great army, demand the unconditional surrender of the city (Isa. 36:2.)

The leading statesmen of Judah, headed by Eliakim, the palace administrator, are sent out to meet with the Assyrian commander (vs. 3.) The commander displays great rudeness and arrogance in addressing the Jewish delegation: *"The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah, This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says, In what do you place your confidence?"*" (vs. 4.) He then raises the question, "How dare you rebel against my master, the king of Assyria? What makes you confident of undertaking such a foolhardy venture?" (vs. 4b-5.)

In verses 6-7 the commander seeks to answer his own question. Does Hezekiah and the nation of Judah trust in Egypt? Egypt is no reliable staff to lean your weigh upon, Egypt is nothing more than a splintered reed; far from supporting you, it will bring you down in pain and despair. This, indeed, was a true analysis of Egypt, and of what happens when you put your trust in men rather than in the LORD. Then the commander goes on to inquire, Does Judah trust in the LORD? In verses 18-20 he goes on to disparage the LORD by foolishly equating Him with the idols of the world who were not able to deliver their people from the advancing Assyrians (vs. 18-19), and by arrogantly exalting human might as though it were able to combat and defeat the LORD Himself (vs. 20.)

Having addressed the Jewish leaders in the hearing of the common people, the commander now addresses the people themselves:

*Then the commander stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of the Jews, Pay attention to the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! <sup>14</sup>This is what the king says, Do not let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to deliver you. <sup>15</sup>And do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in Jehovah by telling you, Jehovah will certainly deliver us; this city will not be handed over to the king of Assyria. <sup>16</sup>Do not listen to Hezekiah; for this is what the king of Assyria says, Make peace with me and surrender to me. (Isa. 36:13-16)*

The Assyrian commander's words almost sound like the utterance of a prophet, as he blasphemously exalts the king of Assyria.

In the face of the Assyrian's defiance and blasphemy of the LORD, the Jews held their peace: *"they said nothing in reply"* (vs. 21a.) Their response of silence was in keeping with Hezekiah's instruction, who wisely commanded the people, *"Do not answer him."* (vs. 21b.) In the words of Ecclesiastes 3:7, *"there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak."*

There is a time when it is appropriate to speak out for the truth of God:

*Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup>As I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. (Acts 17:22-23)*

*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Pet. 3:15)*

There is also a time when it is appropriate to maintain a holy silence:

*The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. <sup>60</sup>But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward <sup>61</sup>and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" <sup>62</sup>Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" <sup>63</sup>But Jesus remained silent. (Matt. 26:59-63a)*

*When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. <sup>9</sup>He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. (Lk. 23:8-9)*

When should we speak out, and when should we maintain our silence? What is the Scriptural guideline?

When men are seeking the truth, or when men need to be confronted with the truth, it is appropriate and necessary to speak the truth—and to always do so in love. When Nicodemus came to Jesus, seeking the truth, Jesus spoke to him about the kingdom of God:

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup>This man came to [Jesus] at night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can*

*do these signs that you are doing, unless God is with him. <sup>3</sup>Jesus replied to him by saying, I tell you the truth, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (Jn. 3:1-3)*

On another occasion, the Lord Jesus publicly and vocally confronted the Pharisees with regard to their hypocrisy: *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to do so"* (Matt. 23:13.)

But when men are railing against the truth, refusing to consider the truth and eager to blaspheme the truth, then it is appropriate to maintain a holy silence; as the Lord Jesus instructs us in Matthew 7:6, *"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces."*

When men defy God—refusing to consider the truth, eager to blaspheme the truth—it is right to maintain a holy silence.

## **II. Take the Matter to the LORD in Prayer (Isa. 37:1-4,14-20)**

When the Assyrian commander's blasphemy was reported to Hezekiah, he was grieved: *"he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of Jehovah"* (Isa. 37:1.)

But rather than confront the Assyrian, who at this point would not have considered the truth but would have taken the opportunity to further blaspheme the God of heaven, Hezekiah took the matter to the LORD in prayer. He calls upon the prophet Isaiah to pray (vs. 4), and he himself engages in prayer.

In verses 14-20 we have recorded the prayer that Hezekiah offered up to the LORD at this time. He lays before the LORD the blasphemies that have been uttered against Him, namely, that the LORD is not able to save (vs. 10-11), and that the LORD is no greater than the idols of the nations (vs. 12.)

In direct contrast to the blasphemies of the Rabshakeh, Hezekiah affirms the truth: the LORD is the sovereign God over the nations and the personal God of His people, He is *"Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel"* (vs.15-16.) Hezekiah pleads with the LORD to take knowledge of the blasphemies uttered against His Name so as to act. At this point his prayer is similar to that of Moses, note Numbers 10:35, *"Rise up, O Jehovah! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you."* Hezekiah recognizes the connection between the blasphemy of God's name and the jeopardy of God's people (vs. 20.) the Lord Jesus makes the same connection: *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first ... <sup>20</sup>Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also"* (Jn. 15:18,20a.)

Hezekiah also recognizes the connection between the salvation of God's people and the glory of God's name (vs. 20b.) With regard to this, consider Rahab's testimony when the people of Israel prepared to conquer the Promised Land of Canaan,

*We have heard how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. <sup>11</sup>When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for Jehovah your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. (Josh. 2:10-11)*

When they defy God, take it to the LORD in prayer. Recognize that the LORD is the true and living God. Realize that He is our God and we are His people. Request Him to act for our sake, but above all for His Name's sake.

### **III. Place Your Confidence in God's Word (Isa. 37:5-7,21-35)**

The message the LORD communicates through Isaiah is as follows: *"This is what Jehovah says, 'Do not be afraid of **the words** you have heard'" (Isa. 37:6.) The description of the wicked is that *"their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth"* (Psl. 73:9.) They speak great things, but they do not have the ability to fulfill them. Samuel's mother, Hannah, proclaims to the proud and arrogant, *"Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for Jehovah is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed"* (1 Sam. 2:3.)*

The LORD assures His people that He will turn the blaspheming enemy away and cause him to fall by the sword; the fulfillment of this vow is recorded in Isaiah 37:37-38. We may also take note of the Psalmist's testimony,

*Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>2</sup>The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against Jehovah and against his Anointed One ... <sup>4</sup>The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. <sup>5</sup>Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath. (Psl. 2:1-2,4-5)*

The LORD goes on to promise that the day is coming when His people shall look upon the blasphemer with contempt and laugh him to scorn (vs. 22.) Once again we may also take note of the words of the Psalmist,

*Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. <sup>6</sup>The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, <sup>7</sup>Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold. (Psl. 52:5-7)*

The LORD reminds His people that He is in complete control. It was the LORD Himself who ordained that the Assyrian armies should be a victorious, all-conquering power (vs. 26.) The LORD is the One who made the Assyrian conquests possible (vs. 27.) The LORD is fully aware of every move the Assyrians make—and of the attitude they express against the God of Israel (vs. 28.) Now, because of his raging and his arrogance, the LORD shall turn the Assyrian around and send him back home in disgrace (vs. 29.)

The LORD assures His people that He will protect them and preserve them. Speaking to Hezekiah, He declares, *“This will be the sign for you, [O Hezekiah]: This year you will eat that which grows by itself”* (vs. 30a.) Here is the promise that the LORD will see to it that His people shall survive, and that the Assyrian’s dire warning recorded in Isaiah 36:12 shall not come to pass: *“... the commander replied, ‘Did my master [only] send me to your master and to you with this message? Has he not also sent me to the men who are sitting on top of the wall—who, together with you, will be forced to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?’”* This was the threat that the people of Jerusalem would be reduced to starvation because of the siege by the Assyrian army.

But the LORD also indicates that full deliverance and return to normalcy would come gradually—it would not be until the third year that the people could once again plant and reap their own harvest (vs. 30b.) Finally, *“the zeal of Jehovah of hosts”* is the guarantee that the LORD will preserve and deliver His people (vs. 32.)

When they defy God, let us put our confidence in His Word, knowing that the LORD is powerful to fulfill His Word and He shall in His time reduce the blasphemer to silence.

## **Conclusion**

Now consider the headline story in “today’s” newspaper:

**ASSYRIANS TURNED BACK, JERUSALEM STILL STANDING!**

*Invader Sustains Devastating Losses, Assyrian Survivors Retreat in Disarray*

JERUSALEM—Last night at approximately two a.m. local time, the angel of the LORD dealt a devastating blow to the Assyrian armies assembled around this capitol city. Reliable sources report the death toll to be 185,000.

The discovery of the bodies early this morning has left the remnants of this once great army panic-stricken and in disarray. The surviving officers have been forced to “reconsider” their present campaign against the Jewish capital.

Receiving reports of a further setback closer to home, King Sennacherib has departed this morning in order to return to Nineveh. He was not available for comment.

When we encounter those who would defy God and blaspheme His Name, let us remember and follow the godly example of King Hezekiah. Let us 1) Exercise a holy silence; 2) Take the matter to the LORD in prayer; and 3) Place your confidence in God's Word.