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Prison Ministry

**Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition Chapter 30 – "Deliverance From Assyria"

In a time of grave national peril, when the hosts of Assyria were invading the land of Judah and it seemed as if nothing could save Jerusalem from utter destruction, Hezekiah rallied the forces of his realm to resist with unfailing courage their heathen oppressors and to trust in the power of Jehovah to deliver. "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him," Hezekiah exhorted the men of Judah; "for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles." 2 Chronicles 32:7, 8.

It was not without reason that Hezekiah could speak with certainty of the outcome. The boastful Assyrian, while used by God for a season as the rod of His anger for the punishment of the nations, was not always to prevail. See Isaiah 10:5. "Be not afraid of the Assyrian," had been the message of the Lord through Isaiah some years before to those that dwelt in Zion; "for yet a very little while, . . . and the Lord of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and as His rod was upon the sea, so shall He lift it up after the manner of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing." Verses 24-27.

In another prophetic message, given "in the year that King Ahaz died," the prophet had declared: "The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in My land, and upon My mountains tread him underfoot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" Isaiah 14:28, 24-27.

The power of the oppressor was to be broken. Yet Hezekiah, in the earlier years of his reign, had continued to pay tribute to Assyria, in harmony with the agreement entered into by Ahaz. Meanwhile the king had taken "counsel with his princes and his mighty men," and had done everything possible for the defense of his kingdom. He had made sure of a bountiful supply of water within the walls of Jerusalem, while without the city there should be a scarcity. "Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance. And he set captains of war over the people." 2 Chronicles 32:3, 5, 6. Nothing had been left undone that could be done in preparation for a siege.

At the time of Hezekiah's accession to the throne of Judah, the Assyrians had already carried captive a large number of the children of Israel from the northern kingdom; and a few years after he had begun to reign, and while he was still strengthening the defenses of Jerusalem, the Assyrians besieged and captured Samaria and scattered the ten tribes among the many provinces of the Assyrian realm. The borders of Judah were only a few miles distant, with Jerusalem less than fifty miles away; and the rich spoils to be found within the temple would tempt the enemy to return.

But the king of Judah had determined to do his part in preparing to resist the enemy; and, having accomplished all that human ingenuity and energy could do, he had assembled his forces and had exhorted them to be of good courage. "Great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee" had been the message of the prophet Isaiah to Judah; and the king with unwavering faith now declared, "With us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles." Isaiah 12:6; 2 Chronicles 32:8.

Nothing more quickly inspires faith than the exercise of faith. The king of Judah had prepared for the coming storm; and now, confident that the prophecy against the Assyrians would be fulfilled, he stayed his soul upon God. "And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah." 2 Chronicles 32:8. What though the armies of Assyria, fresh from the conquest of the greatest nations of earth, and triumphant over Samaria in Israel, should now turn their forces against Judah? What though they should boast, "As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" Isaiah 10:10, 11. Judah had nothing to fear; for their trust was in Jehovah.

The long-expected crisis finally came. The forces of Assyria, advancing from triumph to triumph, appeared in Judea. Confident of victory, the leaders divided their forces into two armies, one of which was to meet the Egyptian army to the southward, while the other was to besiege Jerusalem.

Judah's only hope was now in God. All possible help from Egypt had been cut off, and no other nations were near to lend a friendly hand.

The Assyrian officers, sure of the strength of their disciplined forces, arranged for a conference with the chief men of Judah, during which they insolently demanded the surrender of the city. This demand was accompanied by blasphemous revilings against the God of the Hebrews. Because of the weakness and apostasy of Israel and Judah, the name of God was no longer feared among the nations, but had become a subject for continual reproach. See Isaiah 52:5.

"Speak ye now to Hezekiah," said Rabshakeh, one of Sennacherib's chief officers, "Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Thou sayest, (but they are but vain words,) I have counsel and strength for the war. Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me?" 2 Kings 18:19, 20.

The officers were conferring outside the gates of the city, but within the hearing of the sentries on the wall; and as the representatives of the Assyrian king loudly urged their proposals upon the chief men of Judah, they were requested to speak in the Syrian rather than the Jewish language, in order that those upon the wall might not have knowledge of the proceedings of the conference. Rabshakeh, scorning this suggestion, lifted his voice still higher, and, continuing to speak in the Jewish language, said:

"Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you. Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, The Lord will surely deliver us: this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.

"Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me: and eat ye everyone of his vine, and everyone of his fig tree, and drink ye everyone the waters of his own cistern; until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards.

"Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The Lord will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who are they among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" Isaiah 36:13-20.

To these taunts the children of Judah "answered him not a word." The conference was at an end. The Jewish representatives returned to Hezekiah "with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh." Verses 21, 22. The king, upon learning of the blasphemous challenge, "rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord." 2 Kings 19:1.

A messenger was dispatched to Isaiah to inform him of the outcome of the conference. "This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy," was the word the king sent. "It may be the Lord thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left." Verses 3, 4.

"For this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to Heaven." 2 Chronicles 32:20.

God answered the prayers of His servants. To Isaiah was given the message for Hezekiah: "Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." 2 Kings 19:6, 7. {PK 354.4}

The Assyrian representatives, after taking leave of the chief men of Judah, communicated direct with their king, who was with the division of his army guarding the approach from Egypt. Upon hearing the report, Sennacherib wrote "letters to rail on the Lord God of Israel, and to speak against Him, saying, As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver His people out of mine hand." 2 Chronicles 32:17.

The boastful threat was accompanied by the message: "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?" 2 Kings 19:10-13.

When the king of Judah received the taunting letter, he took it into the temple and "spread it before the Lord" and prayed with strong faith for help from heaven, that the nations of earth might know that the God of the Hebrews still lived and reigned. Verse 14. The honor of Jehovah was at stake; He alone could bring deliverance.

"O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims," Hezekiah pleaded, "Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; Thou hast made heaven and earth. Lord, bow down Thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, Thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech Thee, save Thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord God, even Thou only." 2 Kings 19:15-19.

"Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock;

Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up Thy strength,

And come and save us. Turn us again, O God,

And cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

"O Lord God of hosts,

How long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?

Thou feedest them with the bread of tears;

And givest them tears to drink in great measure.

Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbors:

And our enemies laugh among themselves.

Turn us again, O God of hosts,

And cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

"Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt:

Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.

Thou preparedst room before it,

And didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

The hills were covered with the shadow of it,

And the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.

She sent out her boughs unto the sea,

And her branches unto the river.

"Why hast Thou then broken down her hedges,

So that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?

The boar out of the wood doth waste it,

And the wild beast of the field doth devour it.

Return, we beseech Thee, O God of hosts:

Look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine;

And the vineyard which Thy right hand hath planted,

And the branch that Thou madest strong for Thyself. . . .

"Quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name.

Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts,

Cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." Psalm 80.

Hezekiah's pleadings in behalf of Judah and of the honor of their Supreme Ruler were in harmony with the mind of God. Solomon, in his benediction at the dedication of the temple, had prayed the Lord to maintain "the cause of His people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else." 1 Kings 8:59, 60. Especially was the Lord to show favor when, in times of war or of oppression by an army, the chief men of Israel should enter the house of prayer and plead for deliverance. Verses 33, 34.

Hezekiah was not left without hope. Isaiah sent to him, saying, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. This is the word that the Lord hath spoken concerning him:

"The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.

"Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. By thy messengers thou hast reproached the Lord, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon, and will cut down the tall cedar trees thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof: and I will enter into the lodgings of his borders, and into the forest of his Carmel. I have digged and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places.

"Hast thou not heard long ago how I have done it, and of ancient times that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the housetops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up.

"But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against Me. Because thy rage against Me and thy tumult is come up into Mine ears, therefore I will put My hook in thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest." 2 Kings 19:20-28.

The land of Judah had been laid waste by the army of occupation, but God had promised to provide miraculously for the needs of the people. To Hezekiah came the message: "This shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof. And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of Mount Zion: the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this

"Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city, to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake." Verses 29-34.

That very night deliverance came. "The angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand." Verse 35. "All the mighty men of valor, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria," were slain. 2 Chronicles 32:21.

Tidings of this terrible judgment upon the army that had been sent to take Jerusalem, soon reached Sennacherib, who was still guarding the approach to Judea from Egypt. Stricken with fear, the Assyrian king hasted to depart and "returned with shame of face to his own land." Verse 21. But he had not long to reign. In harmony with the prophecy that had been uttered concerning his sudden end, he was assassinated by those of his own home, "and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead." Isaiah 37:38.

The God of the Hebrews had prevailed over the proud Assyrian. The honor of Jehovah was vindicated in the eyes of the surrounding nations. In Jerusalem the hearts of the people were filled with holy joy. Their earnest entreaties for deliverance had been mingled with confession of sin and with many tears. In their great need they had trusted wholly in the power of God to save, and He had not failed them. Now the temple courts resounded with songs of solemn praise.

"In Judah is God known: His name is great in Israel.

In Salem also is His tabernacle, And His dwelling place in Zion.

There brake He the arrows of the bow,

The shield, and the sword, and the battle.

"Thou art more glorious and excellent Than the mountains of prey.

The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep:

And none of the men of might have found their hands.

At Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob,

Both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep.

"Thou, even Thou, art to be feared:

And who may stand in Thy sight when once Thou art angry?

Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven;

The earth feared, and was still, When God arose to judgment,

To save all the meek of the earth.

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee:

The remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain.

Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God:

Let all that be round about Him bring presents unto Him that ought to be feared.

He shall cut off the spirit of princes:

He is terrible to the kings of the earth."

Psalm 76.

The rise and fall of the Assyrian Empire is rich in lessons for the nations of earth today. Inspiration has likened the glory of Assyria at the height of her prosperity to a noble tree in the garden of God, towering above the surrounding trees.

"The Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. . . . Under his shadow dwelt all great nations. Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches: for his root was by great waters. The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him: the fir trees were not like his boughs, and the chestnut trees were not like his branches; nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty. . . . All the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him." Ezekiel 31:3-9.

But the rulers of Assyria, instead of using their unusual blessings for the benefit of mankind, became the scourge of many lands. Merciless, with no thought of God or their fellow men, they pursued the fixed policy of causing all nations to acknowledge the supremacy of the gods of Nineveh, whom they exalted above the Most High. God had sent Jonah to them with a message of warning, and for a season they humbled themselves before the Lord of hosts and sought forgiveness. But soon they turned again to idol worship and to the conquest of the world.

The prophet Nahum, in his arraignment of the evildoers in Nineveh, exclaimed:

"Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery;

The prey departeth not;

"The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels,

And of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots.

The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear:

And there is a multitude of slain. . . .

"Behold, I am against thee,

Saith the Lord of hosts."

Nahum 3:1-5.

With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account remains open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. Mercy no longer pleads in their behalf.

"The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at Him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at His presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before His indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him." Nahum 1:3-6.

It was thus that Nineveh, "the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me," became a desolation, "empty, and void, and waste," "the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid." Zephaniah 2:15; Nahum 2:10, 11.

Looking forward to the time when the pride of Assyria should be brought low, Zephaniah prophesied of Nineveh: "Flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for He shall uncover the cedar work." Zephaniah 2:14.

Great was the glory of the Assyrian realm; great was its downfall. The prophet Ezekiel, carrying farther the figure of a noble cedar tree, plainly foretold the fall of Assyria because of its pride and cruelty. He declared:

"Thus saith the Lord God; . . . He hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height; I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen; he shall surely deal with him: I have driven him out for his wickedness. And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off, and have left him: upon the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him. Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain, and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches: to the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves for their height. . . .

"Thus saith the Lord God; In the day when he went down to the grave I caused a mourning: . . . and all the trees of the field fainted for him. I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall." Ezekiel 31:10-16.

The pride of Assyria and its fall are to serve as an object lesson to the end of time. Of the nations of earth today who in arrogance and pride array themselves against Him, God inquires, "To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth." Verse 18.

"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him. But with an overrunning flood He will make an utter end" of all who endeavor to exalt themselves above the Most High. Nahum 1:7, 8.

"The pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart away." Zechariah 10:11. This is true not only of the nations that arrayed themselves against God in ancient times, but also of nations today who fail of fulfilling the divine purpose. In the day of final awards, when the righteous Judge of all the earth shall "sift the nations" (Isaiah 30:28), and those that have kept the truth shall be permitted to enter the City of God, heaven's arches will ring with the triumphant songs of the redeemed. "Ye shall have a song," the prophet declares, "as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One of Israel. And the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard. . . . Through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod. And in every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which the Lord shall lay upon him, it shall be with tabrets and harps." Verses 29-32.

Next Mailing: **Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition Chapter 31 - Hope for the Heathen