

Sabbath School Lesson #7 – Defeat of the Assyrians – 6-12 February 2021

Christ is the defender of His people. This fact acknowledged king Hezekiah when he prayed: “O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth” (Isaiah 37:16). It is written of Hezekiah that “he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him” (2 Kings 18:16); “so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him” (verse 5). Yet this unswerving devotion did not procure for him immunity from foreign invasion. The attacks made on him, however, by the empire of Assyria, were not necessarily misfortunes. It is no hardship to sustain assault which can be easily repulsed, and since Hezekiah, in the hour of need, always sought help from the Lord, he was never left without defence. It is evident from the history that Jerusalem was more than once threatened by Assyria during Hezekiah’s reign, but there is no record of its falling into the hand of the Invader, although the other fenced cities of Judah were taken.

Sunday: Strings Attached – It was necessary for the sake of Assyria that that heathen people should receive the knowledge of the true God. The promise had been given to Israel: “All people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee” (Deuteronomy 28:10). The fulfilment of this promise depended upon their hearkening diligently to the voice of the Lord. The angels in heaven do this, and for that reason they excel in strength, and the commandments of the Lord are fulfilled in them (Psalm 103:20). The same attitude would have made Israel strong in the Lord and obedient to His voice. It would not have been necessary for them to go about calling attention to the fact that they were called by the name of the Lord. Everybody would see this for themselves. A man does not set his name to a cheque or document without being sure that he can meet the obligation that he is incurring, and in sending forth Israel under His own name the Lord had regard to what was due to the Name; He made every provision to ensure that they should live everything to the Name, and that no one should think less highly of that Name because it was borne by mortal men. “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise.” “Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God” (Isaiah 43:10, 21). “Hear and your soul shall live” (Isaiah 55:3). Had Israel only hearkened to God’s word to them, continually declaring His Name in His character, they would have lived the life that belonged to the Name; and Assyria, and all the other heathen; nations, though they had never seen Jehovah, would know all about Him through Israel. His people would have been His witnesses that He was God. For the lack of this witness, all the nations had made gods for themselves, and then Assyrians, having conquered all who met them in battle, concluded that their own gods were better and stronger than all others. Thus it became important to bring their false god, which was supposed to be greater than all other false gods, into conflict with the only true God; that it might be seen that there was but one true God, and that in learning this truth, the heathen might find life. “For this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God” (John 17:3). Since Assyria had gained pre-eminence over all other nations, and was watched by them all, the result of the conflict between the gods of Assyria and the God of Judah could not fail to become known to all the nations. It was by no means necessary, however; that the land of Judah should be invaded by the heathen, and that the knowledge of the true God should be proclaimed by means of siege and famine. There was a much better and easier way. The seed of Abraham was to be a blessing to all the families of the earth, and had they accepted the responsibility which the knowledge of a Saviour brought, to make the glad tidings known to all people, the same power which occasionally wrought marvellous deliverances for them in their own land, would have always attended their missionary labours in other lands, “to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (Romans 15:19).

Monday: Propaganda – God had exalted Assyria to be chief over the nations, giving into their hands all other kingdoms. In consequence of this no nation had been able to stand before them in battle. This continued success had filled them with pride, and they attributed their victories to their own strength. It became necessary therefore that they should learn their weakness, and know that all power was of God. The occasion for the lesson was

furnished by Sennacherib's invasion of Judah. He demanded that the city should submit to him, and warned them that their God was not able to deliver them from his hand. For this delusion on his part, Judah was partly to blame. He knew that they were relying to some extent on the king of Egypt, and, measuring his own strength with that of their ally, he felt confident of his own superiority. Naturally, he would feel that if the God of Judah was all powerful they would not trouble themselves about earthly alliances. Hearing that the king of Egypt was coming against him, he went off to crush Tirhakah, and wrote to Hezekiah warning him to trust no god that promised deliverance from Assyria's conquering army.

Tuesday: Shaken but Not Forsaken – Hezekiah knew what to do with the taunting message of Sennacherib, in which he boasted that he had overthrown all the nations, in spite of their gods, and said, "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee." He took the letter up into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord. It was a matter that concerned the Lord, for it declared that He was impotent as were the false gods. Hezekiah prayed, "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." The Lord was not slow to take up the case. He had put His name upon Israel, remembering that they were dust, and had no power in themselves to preserve its honour; for His purpose was that He and His people should be so closely identified, His strength being made perfect in their weakness, that the one Name would serve for both. Just as soon as they were willing to identify themselves with Him, so far from counting it presumption on their part, or throwing in their teeth the accusation that they only remembered Him when they got into insurmountable difficulties, He at once identifies Himself with them, and lo, they are as absolutely safe from Assyrian invaders as though they sat beside Him on the throne of universal dominion.

Wednesday: The Rest of the Story – To Hezekiah: "That which thou hast prayed I have heard" (2 Kings 20:5). To Sennacherib: "The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn!" (Isaiah 37:22). His rage was not against Judah but against God, and because he, being nothing, had presumed to exalt his voice against God, he was to be taught his weakness. "I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest" (29). Doubtless the message was conveyed in some way to Sennacherib, and with it would go the startling intelligence that the words of Jehovah were already made good, for "it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand" (36). Among these would be Rabshakeh, whose insolent, over-bearing spirit had made him a instrument to bear the scornful message of his master, for we read that the angel smote, "all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land" (2 Chronicles 32:31). Numerous inscriptions have been discovered where Assyria was located, and much additional information has been gleaned therefrom concerning the life of Sennacherib, but, so far as is known at present the "shame of face" in which he returned from Jerusalem was sufficiently deep to prevent his leaving behind him any record of this particular expedition. He reigned for twenty years after his return, but did not again attempt to invade the land of Judah. It must have been known through, out his wide dominions that there was one God at least before whom "the great king" had to confess himself powerless. A last testimony to the futility of serving idols was borne by his death, for it was while engaged in worshipping in the house of his god that two of his sons slew him with the sword.

Thursday: In Sickness and in Wealth – "There is no power but of God" (Romans 13:1). Therefore the servant of God is not to fear any of his enemies. "Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:13). All power in heaven and earth is given to Christ, and whoever bears His name need not fear the malice of the hosts of darkness. We may take for our encouragement God's words to Sennacherib, and laugh to scorn the efforts of Satan to destroy us, so long as we remember that we are without strength, but that God is the strength of our life, and He is mighty to save. Therefore "Rejoice always," and "be in nothing terrified by your adversaries" (Phil 1:28). The continual remembrance that God alone has power will keep us continually rejoicing over the fact that our adversaries have none. When we believe God we can laugh them all to scorn. "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad" (Psalm 34:2).