

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text
Isaiah 37:1-20

Topic
The LORD sends a spirit to influence King Sennacherib of Assyria to return home to Nineveh

Title
***"Fearful Days are Gone, He's-a-Goin' Home,
Sennacherib Just-a Wrote Me a Letter"***

Bud Light took a beating over its decision to partner with trans influencer Dylan Mulvaney.

It is one of the more dramatic examples of the phenomena that is *Cancel Culture*. One definition of it explains, "Cancel Culture refers to the popular practice of withdrawing support for (thereby *canceling*) public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive. Cancel Culture is generally discussed as being performed on social media in the form of group shaming."

It may be a recent social media phenomena but Cancel Culture got its start 6000 years ago in the Garden of Eden.

The devil came to our parents and challenged God's Word. He accusingly asked, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' " He answered his own accusation, saying, "God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Adam and Eve didn't know the extent of their disobedience, but it was an attempt to cancel God and be like Him. Instead they became more like the devil.

King Sennacherib of Assyria wrote a letter to King Hezekiah of Judah. The pagan king announced his intention to 'cancel' the Jews.

The LORD intervened in a big way. Hezekiah exercised a simple faith in the LORD. We're going to call it, *Conquer Culture*.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 The Devil Wants To Cancel You,** and **#2 The Lord Wants To Conquer-ize You.**

#1 - The Devil Wants To Cancel You (v1-13)

The devil is acknowledged as the god of this world. As if that isn't bad enough, we see evidence in the Bible that 1/3 of created angels threw in with him in his rebellion against God. He is aided & abetted by "principalities... powers... the rulers of the darkness of this age... [and] spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*," (Ephesians 6:12).

Previously in Isaiah... The Assyrian army marched to Jerusalem, destroying 46 outlying cities along their way. They surrounded the city with 185,000 of the most savage, barbaric warriors ever fielded. A spokesman for the King of Assyria, titled "the Rabshakeh," had parleyed with representatives of King Hezekiah of Judah. The Assyrian taunted, ridiculed, mocked, and in every way possible belittled the Jews and any trust they might put in God.

Believers in Jesus Christ are constantly besieged. Human wisdom in the form of religions, philosophies, politics, and psychologies continue to announce the supposed cancellation of biblical Christianity.

King Hezekiah's representatives returned and reported to him what had occurred.

Isa 37:1 And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard *it*, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.

- The tearing of clothing is an outward representation of the rending of your heart.
- Sackcloth was a type of cloth made of black goat's hair that was thick, rough, and coarse material.



I came across a 2022 article in which the author said, "I believe that it is time to revive this ancient practice of wearing sackcloth." He went on to suggest a way we can do it:

"One way to begin with wearing sackcloth is to cut out a small square of sackcloth and attach it to your clothing with a safety pin, much in the way that small ribbons have been worn at different times to raise awareness."

What do you think?

Isa 37:2 Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz.

Isa 37:3 And they said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah: 'This day is a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but *there* is no strength to bring them forth.

They sought out God's prophet. Remember when US presidents sought out Billy Graham? From Harry Truman to Barack Obama - 12 presidents, spanning an almost unbelievable 67yrs. He warned of judgment if we failed to repent as a nation.

He had an anointing. It is troubling that there was no one to take up his 'mantle' (so to speak). President Trump's spiritual advisor was Paula White, a woman pastor who teaches the health & wealth false gospel. That troubles me.

If God did not intervene against Assyria, it would constitute a failed birth. It's more than an illustration. In the Book of the Revelation, there is a terrifying scene in which a great red dragon seeks to devour a child that was to be born. The child is born and caught-up to Heaven. The woman flees into the wilderness where she is kept safe for the next 3½yrs, despite the dragon's best efforts to murder her (12:1-6).

The Bible identifies the dragon as Satan; the woman as the nation of Israel; her child as Jesus; the 3½yrs as the last half of the Great Tribulation. Satan will try one more time to exterminate every Jew. God preserves His remnant. When that time ends, and Jesus returns, all Israel who survives will be saved.

If the 8th century Jews fell to Assyria, the future birth depicted in the Revelation would be in jeopardy.

Isa 37:4 It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of *the* Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will

rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. Therefore lift up *your* prayer for the remnant that is left.' "

Don't make too much of Hezekiah identifying the LORD as "your God." He was saved. "Your God" acknowledges the truth that Isaiah had been faithful for many decades, while the Jews were stiff-necked idol worshippers.

God *always* acts to spare a "remnant" of Jews. National, ethnic Israel is central to human history and a future Kingdom of God on the Earth.

Isa 37:5 So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.

Isa 37:6 And Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master, 'Thus says the LORD: "Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me.

"Do not fear," or "fear not," or "do not be afraid" occur a lot in the Bible. It ought to become easier & easier for us to believe it.

Everyone knows the famous presidential encouragement, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Is that true? It sounds like something the Sphinx would say in the film, *Mystery Men*.

Jesus gave us His bottom line on fear when He said, "Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into Hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!" (Luke 12:5). If you are not in Christ, you should lose control of your muscles and bodily functions at the prospect of an eternity of conscious torment in the Lake of Fire.

Isa 37:7 Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

God sent a spirit:

1. First, the spirit did not possess him. It influenced him.
2. Second, this was a war-time secret operation that the LORD green lit.

How many films have you seen, or documentaries, about wartime secret missions that trick the enemy? There's one out now, *Operation Mincemeat*. It depicts the successful British WWII deception operation disguising the 1943 Allied invasion of Sicily.

Isa 37:8 Then *the* Rabshakeh returned [home], and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he heard that he had departed from Lachish.

Isa 37:9 And the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, "He has come out to make war with you." So when he heard *it*, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying,

Isa 37:10 "Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria."

Isa 37:11 Look! You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered?

Isa 37:12 Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed, Gozan and Haran and Rezeph, and the people of Eden who *were* in Telassar?

Isa 37:13 Where *is* the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?' "

Sennacherib's return to Nineveh was a sign to Judah that God's prophecy of Jerusalem's safety was trustworthy.

I 'd bet most of us have received a letter that troubled us deeply:

• Maybe it was a notice of Eviction or Foreclosure.

- Maybe it was a proverbial 'pink slip' in your paycheck, informing you that your employment was terminated.
- Maybe you were served with divorce papers.
- Maybe it was your medical test results, confirming a terminal diagnosis.

Have you ever used the designation, *In care of*? It means you are sending the letter or package to an addressee that is accepting it for someone else. People often use the abbreviation c/o.

These types of letters are addressed to Jesus c/o His followers.

They are attacks on Him - on His character, on His nature. The enemy wants to get at Him through you. Times I have faith, if I receive, say, a pink slip, I immediately go to the Lord and say, "This is for You!"

Cast your cares upon Jesus, because He cares for you.

#2 - The Lord Will Conquer-ize You (v14-20)

Read verse thirty-six. "Then the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when *people* arose early in the morning, there were the corpses - all dead" (v36).

That's some successful Conquer Culture!

If you are saved in Christ, the apostle Paul proclaimed, "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). Wow! I'm a conqueror. Gene the Conqueror.

But what are "all these things" I conquer?

Paul listed "Tribulation... distress... persecution... famine... nakedness... peril, or sword? As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER" (8:35-36).

These things, and others like them, are not conquered by avoidance. They are conquered by acceptance. Paul wrote about a severe trial, calling it a thorn in his flesh. When God told Paul it was His Will for him, Paul enjoyed the Lord's enabling to have joy and testify of His everlasting love. That's why I coined the word, conquered. I don't conquer apart from God's empowering & enabling. I am rendered a conqueror, made one, by Jesus.

Take the case of the first Church Age martyr, Stephen the Deacon. As rocks pelted his body, "he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:59-60).

Stephen acted like a believer. He could because he received the Holy Spirit's permanent indwelling when he believed.

We have, too! (More on that in a minute)

Isa 37:14 And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.

He put on his best sackcloth, then took it to the Temple and said, "LORD, this came *in care of* me for You!"

Isa 37:15 Then Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, saying:

Isa 37:16 "O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, *the One* who dwells *between* the cherubim, You *are* God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

Hezekiah reminds us that God dwelt with His nation - His glory that is - in the Holy of Holies. The Ark of the Covenant was there, with a lid called the Mercy Seat. Cherubim were carved into the lid, one on each end.

Isa 37:17 Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God.

King Hezekiah reinforces the truth that this was really against God - on the "living God."

The people who persecute Christians are doing it to Jesus. He's not on earth right now; we are. Its open season on believers.

Every enemy in a movie worth his or her salt at some point jeopardizes the people that the hero loves. You are so beloved of the Lord Jesus that the devil trains his weapons on you.

Isa 37:18 Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands,

Isa 37:19 and have cast their gods into the fire; for they *were* not gods, but the work of men's hands - wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them.

The Assyrian's made it a point to enter the temple or holy place of their enemies and burn the idols that represented the gods of those cultures they had cancelled.

The real power in Judah was the living God. The real power in any nation ought to be the living God.

Isa 37:20 Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You *are* the LORD, You alone."

History is headed toward a time described this way by a mighty angel in the Revelation: "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (11:15).

Speaking of nations... In the future Kingdom, and in eternity, *there will continue to be identifiable "nations."*

- In Revelation 12:5 we are told Jesus will "rule all **nations**."
- In Revelation 15:4 we are told "all **nations** shall come and worship" Jesus.
- In Revelation 21:4 we read about the "**nations** of those who are saved."
- In Revelation 22:2 we read, "In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the **nations**."

I just began reading a book on the future Kingdom & eternity by Michael Vlach (rhymes with block). He is a well-respected conservative dispensational professor. He writes: "In addition to the individual and spiritual, God is working to restore every area of creation. And eternal life is **embodied existence on a restored earth** where God's people live and thrive in His presence and experience vibrant social and cultural interactions with each other."

We will be talking more about this as we go on in Isaiah.

How are we conquer-ized? On the Day of Pentecost after Jesus rose from the dead, He sent the Church a promised gift. He sent them the permanent indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. It is one of the promises of the New Covenant God made with the nation of Israel. Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all mention the New Covenant. Ezekiel says it promises a new heart, a new spirit, and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

If the permanent indwelling of God the Holy Spirit was a future promise to Israel, then Israelites in the OT did not have the experience His permanent indwelling. You don't promise a future blessing if everyone already has access to it.

When Israel's leaders rejected their Messiah, the New Covenant promises to them were put on hold. Mean time, the Church has begun to partake of the promises. We do not replace or supersede Israel in doing so. They will enter into the New Covenant blessings as well, in the future.

There is an episode in the Book of Acts in which the apostle Paul encounters some disciples of John the Baptist. He can sense that something is not quite right about them. He issues this challenge question: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (19:2). They "believed," and were thus saved by grace through faith, *but they had not received the permanent indwelling of God the Holy Spirit*. Paul "laid hands on them, [and] the Holy Spirit came upon them" (v6).

The Gospel is always the same: You are saved by grace through faith; not by works. But it is crystal clear that the Holy Spirit's operation in the world is not always the same.

Why is this important? It is not simply important, it is vital. When you & I believed, we *received the permanent indwelling of God the Holy Spirit*. We are thereby *enabled* and *empowered* by Him to obey God.

I mentioned Stephen. The Bible says that he had the "face of an angel" as he was being persecuted and martyred. You can't make 'angel face.' It isn't make-up. It comes from within, from the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Stephen was no more, no less, saintly than any other believer. Since the Holy Spirit is a Person, not a force, *you have Him in the same measure as Stephen*.

Think on this: At the time of his martyrdom Stephen had walked with Jesus for only 4yrs.

Don't be discouraged. Even Paul said he had not attained, but he was pressing forward.

R. A. Torrey wrote, "If we think of the Holy Spirit only as an impersonal power or influence, then our thought will constantly be, 'How can I get hold of and use the Holy Spirit?' But if we think of Him in the biblical way as a divine Person, infinitely wise, infinitely holy, infinitely tender, then our thought will constantly be, 'How can the Holy Spirit get hold of and use me?'"