

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 37:21-38

Topic

The King of Assyria boasted he was more powerful than all the gods of the nations, but he would soon discover the LORD alone is God

Title

***“My God’s Better Than Your gods,
My God’s Better Than Yours
My God’s Better ‘Cause He Rules Over Nations
My God’s Better Than Yours”***

It was the only two-part episode in the original *Star Trek* series.

The Menagerie told the story of Captain Christopher Pike’s encounter with the Talosians - humanoid aliens with the power to create illusions indistinguishable from reality.

They kidnap Pike hoping he will mate with a beautiful woman, Vina, and produce a race of slaves who will reclaim the war-damaged surface of their planet, Talos IV.

Pike outsmarts them. Before he beams back to the USS Enterprise, Pike is shown that Vina’s beautiful appearance is an illusion. In reality she was severely injured in a crash and was terribly deformed. Vina elects to stay on the planet where she will continue in the illusion.

Fast forward a few years. Pike suffers an accident that leaves him a scarred head sticking out of a fully enclosed wheelchair. He can answer "Yes" or "No" with the aid of a device operated by his brainwaves. Mr. Spock risks his career to return Pike to Talos IV where he and Vina can be together enjoying the illusion of perfect health.

Pike looked upon Vina and did not see her true condition; He saw her as beautiful.

In verse twenty-two God is talking to the King of Assyria and says, "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, Has despised you, laughed you to scorn; The daughter of Jerusalem Has shaken *her* head behind your back!"

The LORD compares the Jews to a beautiful virgin who has the maturity to reject King Sennacherib of Assyria as a thoroughly unworthy suitor.

God looked upon the Jews and did not see them in their true condition; He saw them as beautiful, pure, and virginal.

In their case, *it was no illusion*. In response to King Hezekiah's repentance for himself and the nation the LORD cleansed them and restored them.

Concerning us, one commentator put it this way: "When we come to Jesus for salvation, we are made completely new. We are said to be 'in' Christ. We are reconciled with God and counted as righteous before Him. Rather than seeing our sinfulness, God sees the righteousness of His Son."

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Will Be The Object Of The World's Rage**, and **#2 You Are The Object Of The Lord's Rapture**.

#1 - You Will Be The Object Of The World's Rage (v21-29)

Unruly airline passengers, disorderly customers, enraged drivers - it's all on easily accessible video.

- The last time I was at the DMV there were notices posted about what will happen if you become unruly.
- At our veterinarian's office there are notices to remain calm lest you be asked to leave and never return.

Psalm 2 asks and answers, "Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed" (v1&2).

King Sennacherib was angry. Twice in these verses God mentioned his "rage" (v28&29). He is typical of both the anger of nations against God and of individual unbelievers who think themselves as their own 'gods.'

Let's get up to speed. The Assyrian army was camped outside the walls of Jerusalem. Their negotiator had urged them to surrender, mocking and ridiculing the idea the the LORD would deliver them. A second contact was made by a letter sent from Sennacherib to Hezekiah. It was full of boasting, bloviating, blathering, blustering, braggadocio, bravado, bragging, bullying, blithering, babbling, and blasphemy.

Hezekiah sent his team to see Isaiah and get the LORD's direction. He took Sennacherib's letter and spread it out before the LORD. He prayed, wearing sackcloth, indicating his repentance.

Isa 37:21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, Isa 37:22 this is the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, Has despised you, laughed you to scorn; The daughter of Jerusalem Has shaken *her* head behind your back!

We've talked about God's seemingly off-topic answers to prayer and queries. When Joshua asked the Angel of the Lord if He was for or against Israel in the battle for Jericho, He answered, "No."

In His typically wonderful way, the LORD's answer to Hezekiah was, "You are my beautiful virgin daughter."

If you think about it, that was an answer. It was the most incredible answer. Since God saw Judah that way, *of course He was going to intervene to keep His promises to them.*

We've all heard some variation of, "God always answers your prayers one of three ways: Yes, No, or Wait." That's not wrong. Better is to expect the Lord to answer with some articulation of His love for you, His mercy, His grace, and your future with Him.

Isa 37:23 "Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised *your* voice, And lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel.

Sennacherib did not make the blunder of getting involved in a land war in Asia. But he did err in thinking the God of Israel was another local deity, no different from the so-called 'gods' of the nations he had easily conquered.

Isa 37:24 By your servants you have reproached the Lord, And said, 'By the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, To the limits of Lebanon; I will cut down its tall cedars *And* its choice cypress trees; I will enter its farthest height, To its fruitful forest.

Isa 37:25 I have dug and drunk water, And with the soles of my feet I have dried up All the brooks of defense.'

Sennacherib was starting to see himself as what we would call a demigod:

- He pictured himself using all the best cedars of Lebanon to build his kingdom.
- He pictured himself stepping into the rivers associated with nations, e.g., the Nile, and absorbing their power.

Isa 37:26 "Did you not hear long ago *How* I made it, From ancient times that I formed it? Now I have brought it to pass, That you should be For crushing fortified cities *into* heaps of ruins.

Isa 37:27 Therefore their inhabitants *had* little power; They were dismayed and confounded; They were as the grass of the field And the green herb, As the grass on the housetops And grain blighted before it is grown.

Clubber Lang was a hungry-for-a-shot-at-the-title boxer. He accused Rocky of ducking a title fight with him, calling the champs opponents "chumps." Rocky's manager, Mick, reluctantly confirmed it.

The LORD told Sennacherib that all the nations he had defeated were chumps. Not only that, verse twenty-six establishes that the reason Assyria had been successful was because the LORD chose her at His discretion to discipline other nations.

Isa 37:28 "But I know your dwelling place, Your going out and your coming in, And your rage against Me.

Isa 37:29 Because your rage against Me and your tumult Have come up to My ears, Therefore I will put My hook in your nose And My bridle in your lips, And I will turn you back By the way which you came." '

Instead of being humbled that the LORD had chosen him to serve as His arm of discipline, Sennacherib turned against Him. His "rage" grew. God would deal with him.

The LORD describes His efforts to direct Sennacherib two ways: "A hook in the nose," and a "bridle" in his lips. It's what you would have seen from Heaven's point of view.

In the previous verses, Sennacherib heard a rumor and a spirit from the LORD troubled him. He thus returned to Nineveh. It is a picture for us of God's interventions into human history to accomplish the program of redeeming the human race.

God is over every nation. That does not mean nations have no free will or responsibility. I've referred to Jeremiah 18:7-10 many times in our studies in Isaiah. Jeremiah conveys that God's actions toward a nation or people are contingent on their behavior, implying that if they turn from evil, He may relent from harm, but if they do evil, He may reconsider blessings promised to them.

The Lord is coming to establish a physical, one thousand year rule over the nations. We call it the Millennium, or the Millennial Kingdom. We are premillennial, meaning the Lord will return before those thousand years.

Jesus is not currently ruling the way He will when He physically returns. For one thing, it is very obvious that the devil is not confined the way he will be during the Millennium. Nevertheless He is over the nations when it comes to furthering and fulfilling His plan of redeeming the human race and His creation.

Have you heard of the 'Romans Road to Salvation'? It is a set of verses from the Book of Romans that many believers share when witnessing.

Unbelievers can develop severe 'Romans road rage' against us.

#2 - You Are The Object Of The Lord's Rapture (v30-38)

"Rapture" is how we describe Jesus returning to take the Church home before the 7yr Time of Jacob's Trouble that is more commonly called the Great Tribulation.

Today we are using the word in its ordinary meaning, *ecstatic joy or delight; joyful ecstasy*. A variant is "enraptured," meaning *delight beyond measure*.

You are the delight of Jesus; He is enraptured *with you*.

Isa 37:30 "This *shall be* a sign to you: You shall eat this year such as grows of itself, And the second year what springs from the same; Also in the third year sow and reap, Plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them.

Life would get back to normal. Normal is good. The final line in *The Lord of the Rings*, uttered by Sam, is, "Well, I'm back." Back to normal.

Isa 37:31 And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah Shall again take root downward, And bear fruit upward.

Their most important growth would not be agricultural. It would be spiritual and individual. Their spiritual "roots" will go "downward" and deep, and they will bear much "fruit"

It's fun to play with the wording:

1. "If you're *rooted*, you'll be *fruited*."
2. "No root, no fruit."
3. "Take root, Bear fruit."
4. "If you're *root-n'*, you'll be *fruit-tootin'* "

Isa 37:32 For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, And those who escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

This verse seems out of context. The LORD has been describing the 8th century invasion of Assyria. In the next verse, thirty-three, He clearly continues to address the current situation. But in verse thirty-two the "remnant" is going "out" from "Mount Zion" to "escape."

We jump forward to a future time when a remnant of Jews will need to make a rapid escape from Jerusalem. Jesus told it this way:

Mat 24:15 "Therefore when you see the 'ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),

Mat 24:16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Mat 24:17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house.

Mat 24:18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

Mat 24:19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

Mat 24:20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

Mat 24:21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

In the Revelation we are told that at that future time, the devil will be cast down to earth and being "enraged" he seeks to exterminate the Jews (12:12-17). "Why do the nations rage?" They take on the likeness of the god of this world

For the space of one verse, Isaiah transports the Jews to their far-future, to the last 1260 days prior to the return of the King. At the very mid-point of the Tribulation, the antichrist reveals his intention to murder every Jew. God protects them - a remnant. At His return, "all Israel is saved."

Isa 37:33 "Therefore thus says 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 build a siege mound against it.

Isa 37:34 By the way that he came, By the same shall he return; And he shall not come into this city,' Says the LORD.

Isa 37:35 'For I will defend this city, to save it For My own sake and for My servant David's sake.' "

What does King David have to do with this? God made an unconditional covenant with David. God promised David and Israel that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David and the tribe of Judah and would establish a kingdom that would endure forever. The LORD's intervention in the 8th century kept this and the other covenants intact.

Isa 37:36 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.

The "Angel of the LORD" was an appearance of Jesus before His incarnation as the God-man.

My favorite non-explanation of what occurred is that there was an infestation of rats, carrying something like the Plague. They fatally bit the soldiers.

Could that be what happened? Sure. It's too bad we always think we need to have a natural explanation for the miraculous.

Isa 37:37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned *home*, and remained at Nineveh.

Isa 37:38 Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

What does Ararat suggest to you? It is the traditional resting place of Noah's Ark.

Get this: Rabbis have passed down a story that "Nisroch" is said to be derived from the Hebrew word "neser." "Neser" was the name given to a plank of wood discovered by Sennacherib on his return to Assyria. As the legend goes, the plank was originally part of Noah's Ark. Upon his return, Sennacherib worshiped it as an idol.

On her wedding day, quadriplegic Joni Eareckson felt terribly awkward. Her bridesmaids struggled to get her paralyzed body into her wedding gown. This is how she described it:

"No amount of corseting and binding my body gave me a perfect shape. The dress just didn't fit well. Then, as I was wheeling into the church, I glanced down and noticed that I'd accidentally run over the hem of my dress, leaving a greasy tire mark. My paralyzed hands couldn't hold the bouquet of daisies that lay off-center on my lap. And my chair, though decorated for the wedding, was still a big, clunky gray machine with belts, gears, and ball bearings. I certainly didn't feel like the picture-perfect bride in a bridal magazine.

"I inched my chair closer to the last pew to catch a glimpse of Ken in front. There he was, standing tall and stately in his formal attire. I saw him looking for me, craning his neck to look up the aisle. My face flushed, and I suddenly couldn't wait to be with him. I had seen my beloved. The love in Ken's face had washed away all my feelings of unworthiness. I was his pure and perfect bride."

Jesus is more than waiting for you:

- He is, right now, "[sanctifying] and [cleansing you] with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

- He is at any moment coming for you, to “present [you] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that [you] should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27).
- He will return with us. William MacDonald writes, “When He returns with you, amazed onlookers will gasp as they see what He has been able to do with such unpromising human beings!”

I once called the ‘Romans Road’ an on-ramp. It gets you onto the narrow way that is life. If you are not a believer, listen carefully to these directions to Heaven: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”