

Overcoming Enemy Invasion

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[0 : 01] Let's turn together now for a short time to the passage we read in 2 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles 32, and looking at the verses all the way down through 23, we're going to pick out some of the main features of this passage this morning.

Just at the outset, we should say that there's a very important connection between history and theology.

Anyone who reads their Bible seriously will very soon be aware of that. It's an aspect of the Bible's presentation of truth to us that it records history in association with the work of God in a spiritual way in salvation for His people.

In fact, God, as you know, has revealed Himself in history, what we call history, the unfolding events of human society all the way down through the generations. God's revelation of Himself has not been outside of that.

It's been within history, within the development of what we call history. And indeed, as you take history in itself, as you take what happens in the world down through the many generations, generations of the world, it's only by applying theology, by applying the teaching of the Bible, and theology, which is really the study of God, essentially, ultimately, it's only by taking that and applying it, or looking at history in the light of it, that you can really find a meaning and a purpose to history and to the unfolding of such events as you find in history.

[1 : 43] And that's why 2 Chronicles is itself such an important book, because it records history with a specific purpose. This was a book written later in the history of or the experience of the people of Israel, of Judah.

It was after they had come back from their exile in Babylon and were rebuilding the temple and rebuilding a community of faith in God in Jerusalem, that this particular scripture was actually formulated to actually encourage them in that work.

So that along with Nehemiah and Ezra and the prophets like Zechariah, who were prophesying at that time, this particular scripture would have been of very considerable importance in encouraging the people in the work they were doing at that time.

Because the books of Chronicles and of Kings as well are a reflection on their history that brings it into the situation that they then faced particularly.

And that's always important for ourselves, that we come to the Bible and to the books like Chronicles Chronicles that really are historical books in the sense they provide us with a history of what went on over these generations, so that we can extract from that principles that are applicable to where we are at today.

[3 : 13] That's what I want to try and do this morning, briefly from this passage, to extract from it the main principles that we have to apply to our circumstances, to our situation, and take from that.

things which are going to be essential for us to understand and apply in our day. Now that's one of the reasons that 2 Chronicles gives more space to Hezekiah than to any other king apart from David and Solomon.

Because Hezekiah was a great reformer, he actually took hold of the nation as few other kings did, so as to do away with idolatrous worship and to centralize the worship again at Jerusalem and also to, in other ways, bring improvements to the people.

So he was a great king and commemorated in that way, but in a way that shapes the thinking of later generations as they thought of themselves in relation to the same God that Hezekiah served and worshipped.

So the two things we're going to take from the passage and build a few points under there. First of all, Zannacharib's ambition. Zannacharib's ambition as the king of Assyria, who was then the great power or superpower in the world.

[4 : 31] Secondly, we'll see Hezekiah's action in response to Zannacharib's ambition. Now, Zannacharib's ambition is really stamped on the chapter right at the very beginning.

After these things, these things that are mentioned about Hezekiah previous chapters and the faithfulness of Hezekiah in these actions, Zannacharib, king of Assyria, came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities thinking to win them for himself.

And these are the critical words, thinking to win them for himself. This is an enemy of the people of Judah, of the king of Judah, of the God of Judah. And he's thinking to win this territory for himself.

Now, by this time, the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians. Remember that after Solomon died through the foolishness of his son Rehoboam, the kingdom divided into two and became the northern kingdom with its first king as Jeroboam I and a capital city at Samaria as a sort of rival to the southern kingdom of Judah with its capital at Jerusalem.

That's what lies behind this account because by that stage, by this stage, Israel, the northern kingdom had gone. The Assyrians had come and invaded and taken it over and they were in control.

[5 : 59] And now they're at the gates of Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah. and he is thinking Sennacherib is to win them for himself. That is crucial because in the theology of the book and in the theology of the Bible and in the way that we read about God taking his people out of Egypt and bringing them on to the promised land, this is God's land.

This is God's territory. This is the territory that God has given in covenant promise to his people. He has fulfilled his promise that he spoke of to Abraham and then later to Moses as he led the people out of Egypt.

That he would bring them out of that land of Egypt, out of tyranny, out of bondage, into a land that flows with milk and honey. This is God fulfilling his purpose, giving the land to his people.

And now Sennacherib wants to take it over for himself. The invaders have come to encamp in a way that seeks in their ambition to take over the territory that the people of Judah, that Hezekiah, and these covenant people of God associate with God's property.

It's his, he's given it in grant to his people. And that's what we too are facing in our own circumstances today.

[7 : 22] The enemy takes many forms. Enemy of the gospel takes many forms. It can be a religion or different religions. It can be secularist.

It can be completely non-religious and atheistic or humanistic. All the different forms in which you find enmity against the gospel and an ambition to take over the territory that the gospel presently occupies.

That's really what we're about. That's the principle, the first principle you extract from this passage. This is not just history telling us something about what happened in Hezekiah's day all these millennia ago.

It is that, but it's that to give shape to our thoughts and our minds and to apply to our present situation. Islam is in the news very much at the moment in our locality because, as you know, a mosque has been erected and opened, a small building, though it is.

It's nevertheless a meeting place for them. And as you know, probably I've given many interviews over the last few weeks in regard to that. And one of the things that I've stressed all along is that in the history of our church, we have given an important place to freedom of religion.

[8 : 35] Whatever religion it is, freedom of religion is important. We are not a persecuting church. We are not a people who do not value freedom of religion. That's what we value for Christianity. But freedom of religion does not mean acceptance or approval of the religion that freedom is given to.

The fact that we accept freedom of religion as a principle itself in our society does not mean that we see Islam as non-threatening to the gospel.

It's one of the major religions of the world. And whether it's localized as it is here or not, as I hope we'll see this evening in greater detail, it is in itself, in its central tenets, in its teaching of what is basic to it, it is at enmity with the gospel.

It is no friend of Jesus Christ. It's something that we regard as a challenge to the gospel. And we don't at all give freedom of religion in a way that would actually lead people to misunderstand what that is.

And we'll go into something of that in detail this evening. But here is something that you can say is applicable in these circumstances. Here is an enemy that's come against Judah, against the people of God, against the center of worship of the people of God, and they are camped there.

[9 : 59] But their intention is to take over that territory, to win them for himself. Second part of his ambition is to destroy morale amongst these people who are in Jerusalem.

That's his intention, to take over the territory for himself, but he's also doing it by, seeking to do it by destroying their morale. How do we actually see that?

You see it from verse 9 right through to verse 19. And his attempt to destroy their morale has two prongs to it, if you like, or it's a two-pronged approach or strategy.

First of all, he set about trying to undermine confidence in Hezekiah. Look at verses 9 to 12 where he focuses on Hezekiah and what Hezekiah has done.

He knows that Hezekiah has set about reforming the people and the practices of the people. And what he's saying is in verses 9 to 12 that he's actually misled the people.

[10 : 58] where he's saying, Thus says Sanacharib, On what are you trusting that you endure the siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst when he tells you the Lord our God will deliver us?

Has not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places? That's God's high places and God's altars and commanded Jerusalem and Judah before one altar you shall worship and on it you shall burn your sacrifices?

Now, you see, that's really twisting something into what could be interpreted as Hezekiah misleading the people. The high places that Hezekiah dealt with were places of worship that had become idolatrous outside of Jerusalem and the Lord's intention always was that his people in Jerusalem would have one center of worship there.

That's what his instruction was long before these days. and so what Sennacherib is trying to do is twisting what is true into something that is not.

Yes, he did destroy these high places. He did actually set about dismantling them but he did so in faithfulness to God. He did so because they were associated and were being used in the practice of idolatry and the people being led astray in that.

[12 : 21] In other words, his attack really focused on undermining confidence in the leadership of Hezekiah. You find the same in the New Testament.

You read through, for example, the first letter to the Corinthians that Paul wrote. You'll very soon find that there are certain people that he refers to though it doesn't specify their names or anything but they're set to undermine his ministry, to undermine his credibility, to undermine his authority and he mentions this.

And in chapter 9, for example, he sets about explaining why this is certainly not true about him. They're trying to undermine his authority, his ministry, his credibility.

And one of the things that we value about you and your prayers is that you pray for us in this regard. That you pray that the attacks of the enemy that seek to undermine the authority God has given us to preach his gospel, to be in the leadership of the church along with the elders of the congregation and our congregations.

Pray and continue to pray that as the enemy attacks in whatever form it takes, that we will not have our credibility undermined.

[13 : 42] That you will not give way to any suggestions that we are seeking to mislead you when we actually set before you the truth of the gospel. This is not what we're about, as you know very well.

But that's what they were doing. That's what he sought to do, to destroy morale among the people by undermining confidence in Hezekiah as a leader. But secondly, to undermine confidence in God himself.

You see, he went on to speak in verses 13 to 15, Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands?

Were the gods of the nations of those lands at all able to deliver their lands out of my hand? See, he's saying, look at the other nations around you.

Don't listen to Hezekiah, just look out at the other nations around you. Think of the gods of these nations that they faithfully served as they saw them as their gods. They're talking about, of course, of pagan nations around Israel, around Judah.

[14 : 47] Were their gods able to save them out of my hands, out of my hands as the power in the world, this king of Assyria? Were they able to stop me? Were they able to overcome my advances?

No. Therefore, why should you be so foolish as to think that your God is going to be any different? Now, therefore, don't let Hezekiah deceive or mislead you?

How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand? And, of course, in these verses, you find details there that show the contempt that was thrown at God as well as at Hezekiah.

An open contempt, shouts, the language that was used was the language of Judah so the people would understand it so that, if possible, they would actually come to be intimidated.

This was all very plausible and all very intimidating and a deliberate strategy to undermine confidence in their God. And that, too, is where we're at today.

[15 : 55] One of the ways in which the enemy attacks the gospel and you as the people of the gospel is not only to undermine or seek to undermine confidence in the leadership, confidence in the leadership of the church or of the congregation, but also confidence in your God.

Because the big mistake, of course, of Sennacherib and, indeed, of those who are attacking the gospel today and who want to really just see all religions as actually the same and no difference at all, the big mistake is that they think of God, our God, our saving God, our creator God, as just the same as the other gods.

We have already lost a great deal of territory to the enemy. We have lost it in the areas of education, of politics, in relation to the Lord's Day.

We have lost territory in terms of personal morality, in relationships, and redefinition of marriage. In that and many other ways, as you know very well, we have actually seen the enemy take over that territory once occupied by the gospel, once occupied by people who actually lived by the gospel, who promoted the gospel, as you still seek to do.

But the point is, the enemy has come and invaded and taken over so much of that territory. And it will be important to us in a minute to see how Hezekiah actually responded.

[17 : 37] But what he's really saying to us now, and it's a thought that's come into my own minds, if I'm honest, and I'm sure it's come into your mind as well, is that when you're really struggling to maintain the gospel, to advance the gospel, to encourage people to take up their defense of the gospel, to come and openly live for God, and be in this world for him, and for his kingdom, and for his glory, the enemy will say to you, you know you're in a losing battle, you should just give up.

There's no point to it anymore. So much of the territory has already gone. Just as it was for Hezekiah, the nations around, even the northern kingdom of Israel, they'd all fallen.

They're gone. They've been overtaken by the enemy. It's no longer the territory of God and of his people. They're under the might of Assyria.

But please never let that thought stay in your mind. That's what the enemy wants, that you give up, that you're demoralized, that you're intimidated, that you're frightened, or that you're simply coming to the conclusion, well, look, it's a losing battle.

So much is changing, even in our own day, with regard to how people live and relationships and the Lord's Day and everything else. What's the point of trying to struggle on seeking to maintain these principles and these values?

[19 : 07] Every point, because as we'll see in a minute, you need to just keep doing what God requires you to do. You may never see a change in your own lifetime.

That doesn't mean you give up. That doesn't mean you just simply say, well, just, let's just give it over to the enemy. That's really what he wants. Sennacherib's ambition to take over territory and to destroy morale, and to destroy morale by undermining confidence in their leader and undermining confidence in God, ultimately, as their God.

Let's see Hezekiah's action or reaction or response. He did three things, three things that are also applicable to our own circumstances. He strengthened the defenses of Jerusalem.

Secondly, he encouraged his people. And thirdly, he and Isaiah, who lived at the same time, prayed to God. These three things.

He strengthened the defenses. Look at the early part of the chapter there where they actually stopped the water that was going to be available to Sennacherib and to his army outside of Jerusalem.

[20 : 23] They stopped up all the springs in verse 4 and the brook that flowed through the land. Then he said in verse 5 to work resolutely and build up all the wall that was broken down and raised towers on it.

And outside it he built another wall. And then he also actually made weapons and shields in abundance. And he organized the army, he said, combat commanders over the people and gathered them together to him in the square.

He strengthened the defenses against Sennacherib. When you're facing invasion or the threat of invasion, when you're facing the possibility of the enemy coming to take over more territory that was once occupied by the gospel or by the church or by the people of God, what do you do?

Well, instead of giving up, you actually increase your commitment to the Bible, to Bible study, to fellowship, to worship, to serving the Lord. All the ways in which you can actually support and buttress and defend the gospel and advance the gospel, you actually increase in that.

And that applies to, as we'll see in a minute, to prayer as well. You increase in your commitment to prayer when the threat appears to be increasing from whatever source it is.

[21 : 42] and you increase in your efforts at outreach and at fellowship and in maintaining the unity of God's people. Let me say, if you're here today and maybe I've been thinking for some time about joining God's people when they come to the midweek meeting for prayer, it's not just for prayer, it's also for more in-depth Bible teaching as we seek to present that during these meetings.

Don't think that that's just for those who are absolutely sure that they're Christians. It's not for people who are absolutely assured of their salvation, though there may be some who are like that.

The prayer meeting or the midweek meeting is for all who are genuinely concerned and interested in serving God, in knowing more of God, in getting to know God's people more and in joining with them in a context of prayer and study of Bible teaching.

Why? So that we will be better positioned and better equipped and better endowed against the threat of invasion by whatever enemy it is we face. So I encourage you today, come to the midweek meeting.

Don't be afraid of what people might say in relation to that. If it's your concern to serve God, that's where you should be. And there is nothing more important, as we'll see next in a minute, that God's people get together to pray and to know Him better and to study His Word.

[23 : 15] That's what He did. He strengthened the defenses. Secondly, He encouraged the people as He gathered them together there. He spoke to them in verse 6, He spoke to them encouragingly, saying, Be strong and courageous.

Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are 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.

And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah. You see, what Hezekiah did was really take them back to basics, back to the basics of what they believed and of the God they served, the basic things of their religion and of their worship and of their relationship to God.

And he reminded them that however superior the enemy seemed to be, whether it's in terms of numbers or in terms of equipment or in terms of ability, actually, with us, as he says, is the Lord our God, the Lord of hosts, the Lord who actually intervened, as we'll see in a moment, to destroy the invasion of Sennacherib.

And that's what's true with us as well. That was Assyria's great mistake, that this God was just like the other gods, that he would fall before the might of Assyria like all the other gods did.

[25 : 00] And that's the problem with syncretizing religions. As many people today would say, well, your Christianity is fine, but it's no better than any other religion. You have to place it on the same level as Islam or Buddhism or whatever other religions people choose to follow.

There's little difference in the sense that they all ultimately lead the same way spiritually. No, they don't. It's not the same God. The God of Islam is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And with us, to give us encouragement, to give us confidence, is the Lord our God. There is no greater might, no greater power, no greater mind, no greater purpose than that of this God.

And I hope that what we're doing in seeking to preach the gospel to you regularly is itself a means of providing encouragement by God's grace and through God working through us.

Because that's really what our aim is. That's what the preaching of the gospel is about. I know there are other things as well as encouraging people through the preaching of the gospel and through gospel fellowship. But this is very much a primary or a priority with us.

[26 : 20] That in preaching the gospel, you are encouraged to serve the Lord. You are encouraged to be confident in this God. You are not discouraged by what you see around you.

By the threats and intimidation and the aspirations of all alternatives to the gospel. That you are encouraged rather to fall down before Jesus to accept Him as your Lord to be openly in His service.

That's what we are seeking in preaching the gospel. And that's what this passage is designed to bring to us. An encouragement as we seek to face all threats to the gospel to all ages.

So He strengthened the defenses. He encouraged His people. And our God does not get outdated. That's the argument, isn't it?

That because He's no different really to other gods. I was reading something recently where this silly idea about the God of Christianity just being a reflection of people's religious consciousness down through the years and therefore we've ended up with this God and with this Bible.

[27 : 30] That's what the enemy wants you to think. That's what the enemy wants you to see him as. Just no different to the other gods and therefore He becomes outdated and you've got to change things and you've got to change certain aspects of His character or of His word.

That's not our God. That's the voice of the enemy. He encouraged His people by bringing them to think properly about the God who was with them.

And thirdly he and Isaiah prayed. You see verse 20 Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet the son of Amos prayed because of this and cried to heaven.

Well it's a wonderful thing in the leadership of the church that you have people to support you in prayer. What a huge huge benefit it was to Hezekiah to have a man like Isaiah on his side.

Well what a fantastic and wonderful provision that was. And we're confident too because God has given us those who accompany us in the praying the praying of the church including yourselves and in the leadership of the church of the Kirk Session we pray to God.

[28 : 47] That's what Amos that's what Hezekiah and Isaiah the son of Amos did this great prophet. They prayed because of this and cried to heaven.

See the prayer was specific. This was not an entering in before God and just generalizing things in His presence. This was very specific because of this because of the threat because of the ambition of Sennacherib because of what he had said because of the message that they had received because of the attempt to undermine what did they do with it?

They went and prayed about it. They brought it before God and they were specific before God. That's what you and I have to do. That's why I'm saying earlier how important it is to pray for yourself yes but also to join with God's people in the prayer meetings of the church because that's what you learn from this.

They prayed to the Lord and you know Hezekiah was under no illusion that the threat was very real and he was aware that Sennacherib was presenting himself as the superpower.

Well he was a superpower in political terms in human terms but Hezekiah and Isaiah knew who the superpower was and that was God and they went and prayed to God and prayed in confidence that this God could actually save them and deliver them and show himself and he did because he sent an angel who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and he turned with shame of face Sennacherib did to his own land.

[30 : 29] We read elsewhere in Kings that 185,000 of Hezekiah of Sennacherib's army died on that occasion.

A lot of people who don't believe in the Bible and who ridicule the details that you find in the Bible will say well that's a bit far-fetched isn't it? Isn't that a bit far-fetched?

185,000 in one night killing being killed by an angel of the Lord that the Lord sent? Is it? Is it? Do you and I have the capacity to know what an angel sent on a specific purpose by the Lord is capable of?

Of course not. The Lord can do this by just lifting up his finger as it were and just saying that's what I want to come to pass that's what I'm decreeing therefore that's it let's do it.

That's what happened and you believe it because that's what God's Word says. All the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of Assyria he cut them off he killed them destroyed them so he returned with shame of face to his own land and then you read something quite remarkable some 20 years after this event as it happens according to other records when he was in the house of his God some of his own sons struck him down there with a sword.

[31 : 57] Now that's really interesting because here's the man who said can any of the gods of these nations prevent me and will your God prevent me from fulfilling my ambition?

And now the writer of Chronicles is saying look his God could not save himself because 20 years later one of his own sons killed him.

Where was his God? Where was his boast? That's the first thing. His own gods were futile. The second thing is because it's placed so closely to the prayer of Isaiah though it's 20 years afterwards it is in fact an answer to the prayer of Isaiah and Hezekiah or part of the answer.

Yes the Lord delivered them on that occasion and Sennacherib went back to his own house to his own place with shame with shame of face.

He was embarrassed but the prayer of Hezekiah and Isaiah was answered in the Lord's removal of Sennacherib altogether from the pages of Assyria.

[33 : 19] He made his end. You know when you pray to God you don't pray that people will be destroyed that's not what we're at. But remember when you're praying to the superpower that God is don't be surprised if He does amazing things.

And don't be surprised if He does amazing things 20 years after you've prayed about it. That's why I said at the beginning you may not see the answer to your prayer in your lifetime but don't let the enemy put you off saying it's not worth it.

You may be long gone and I may be long gone from the scene of time for our prayers for God to work in our midst abundantly are answered. May He do it in our generation.

May He do it soon. But may we be encouraged to keep strength in the defenses to encourage ourselves in the Lord and to keep praying and to consider prayer to the superpower as one of our greatest benefits.

Let's pray. Lord we pray that as we think of those issues and seek to apply them to ourselves and to our circumstances we pray for your help and through the help of your Spirit that we may advance not only in our knowledge of you but also in serving you and in maintaining your cause and seeking its promotion and advance.

[34 : 46] We give thanks that you are our God that you take us as your people and we pray Lord that you would hear us at this time and receive our worship for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's sing now in conclusion this time from Psalm 27.

Psalm 27 on page 236. We'll sing from the beginning the Lord's my light and saving health who shall make me dismayed.

We'll sing verses 1 to 4 from the beginning and tune this time as Jackson Lord's my light and saving health. The Lord's my light and saving health who shall make me dismayed.

My life's strength is the Lord of whom then shall I be afraid when us mine enemies and foes most wicked persons all to eat my flesh against me roads they stumbled and did fall.

Against me the one who stand come my heart yet fearless is though war against me rise I will be confident in this.

[36 : 56] One thing I of the Lord desire and will seek to obtain that all days of my life I be within God's house remain.

I'll go to the main door after the benediction. Now may grace and mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. Amen.

Amen. Amen.