

The King of Ashur Threatens Yerushalayim ~ Part 1

Yesha'hayu 36:1-10

In my last post, we learn of **The Joy of the Redeemed** in **Yesha'hayu 35:1-10**. In this post, we learn **The King of Ashur Threatens Yerushalayim ~ Part 1** in **Yesha'yahu 36:1-10**.

The **Ashurim** had been swallowing up the territory between **Nineveh**, the capital city of **Ashur**, and **Yerushalayim**, the capital city of **Y'hudah**. They had already defeated **Isra'el's** ten northern tribes. With the **Ashurim** forces only ten miles from **Yerushalayim**, it looked as though **Yerushalayim**, a relatively small and weak city, would be defeated, as well. But **Adonai** had promised that He would bring about deliverance. And this is the story of that deliverance.

¹ It was in the fourteenth year of King Hizkiyahu that Sancheriv king of Ashur advanced against all the fortified cities of Y'hudah and captured them.

The **Ashurim** had defeated the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** in 722 BCE and put **Y'hudah** in a position where they had to pay an annual tribute to keep the **Ashurim** from attacking them. In 703 BCE **Sancheriv** succeeded his father **Sargon** on the throne of **Ashur**. Many nations, including **Y'hudah**, seized upon this succession in leadership as an opportunity to rebel against **Ashur**. After taking care of rebellions in other parts of his empire, **Sancheriv** turned his attention to **Y'hudah** in 701 BCE. He quickly took many of the smaller fortified cities on the way to **Yerushalayim**. For accounts of this confrontation, see 2 Kings 18-19 and 2 Chronicles 32.

Hizkiyahu, king of **Y'hudah**, was a very godly man. Being a man, he had the vulnerability and weakness common to all men. Earlier, he had tried to appease the **Ashurim** by stripping the gold and silver from the doors of the temple and giving it to **Sancheriv**. But he found the same thing that you and I see. That is, appeasing the devil never works because he always wants more.

² From Lakhish the king of Ashur sent Rav-Shakeh to Hizkiyahu in Yerushalayim with a large army. He positioned himself by the aqueduct from the Upper Pool, which is by the road to the Launderers' Field.

Lakhish was a critical garrison city about 30 miles west of **Yerushalayim**. It guarded the road that led to **Yerushalayim**. The king of **Ashur**, along with his armies, was still at **Lakhish** when he sent one of his chief officials, the **Rav-Shakeh** to present an ultimatum to **Yerushalayim**. **Rav-Shakeh** stood at the same place where **Yesha'yahu** had confronted Achaz at an earlier time (see Isaiah 7:3).

³ Elyakim, the son of Hilkiyahu, who was in charge of the household, Shevnah the general secretary and Yo'ach, the son of Asaf, the foreign minister, went out to meet him.

All three of these gentlemen were high ranking officials in Hizkiyahu's government.

⁴ Rav-Shakeh addressed them: "Tell Hizkiyahu: 'Here is what the great king, the king of Ashur, says: "What makes you so confident?" ⁵ I say: do mere words constitute strategy and strength for battle? In whom, then, are you trusting when you rebel against me like this?"

The purpose of the **Rav-Shakeh's** speech was to try to get **Hizkiyahu** to surrender. He questioned the basis of **Hizkiyahu's** refusal in attempting to undermine the foundations of his confidence. He first asked whether the people of **Y'hudah** were militarily prepared to counter the **Ashurim** threat.

⁶ Look! Relying on Egypt is like using a broken stick as a staff - when you lean on it, it punctures your hand. That's what Pharaoh king of Egypt is like for anyone who puts his trust in him.

Rav-Shakeh then undermined any confidence the nation of **Y'hudah** might have in **Egypt** as an ally. He used the metaphor of a splintered reed of a staff. A staff was something a person leaned on for support. However, this staff was made out of a reed that could not support a person's weight. Indeed, **Adonai** through **Yeshayahu** had been making the same point. **Egypt** was not an ally that could be trusted.

7 But if you tell me, 'We trust in Adonai our God,' then isn't He the one whose high places and altars Hizkiyahu has removed, telling Y'hudah and Yerushalayim, 'You must worship before this altar'?

Finally, **Rav-Shakeh** questioned whether **Adonai** would protect **Hizkiyahu**. Indeed, the removal of all altars except the one on **Mount Tziyon** conformed with the law of centralization in Deuteronomy 12. The alters **Hizkiyahu** removed were altars of false gods. **Rav-Shakeh's** argument shows that he did not understand the religion of **Y'hudah**. Therefore **Rav-Shakeh** was speaking ignorantly.

8 All right, then, make a wager with my lord, the king of Ashur: I will give you two thousand horses if you can find enough riders for them.

Rav-Shakeh then taunted **Y'hudah** by offering them 2,000 horses, suggesting that they could not find riders for them.

9 How then can you repulse even one of my master's lowest-ranked army officers? Yet you are relying on Egypt for chariots and riders! 10 Do you think I have come up to this land to destroy it without Adonai's approval? Adonai said to me, 'Go up against this land and destroy it!'" ~ Isaiah 36:1-10 (CJB)

Rav-Shakeh continues, saying, *"The Egyptians won't help you. The Lord won't help you. You can't even ride horses. And besides that, He sent us to destroy you."* His statement reflects ancient Near Eastern pagan theology. The **Ashurim** believed that the **God of Isra'el** was a real deity, though perhaps not a strong one. **Rav-Shakeh** claimed that **Y'hudah's God** had ordered the nation's destruction. **Adonai** did use foreign nations on occasion to punish His people, but in this case, **Rav-Shakeh** was wrong, as further developments of the confrontation between **Ashur** and **Isra'el** would indicate.

In my next post, we continue to learn that **The King of Ashur Threatens Yerushalayim~ Part 2** in **Yesha'yahu 36:11-22**.