

The Good Word

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MIRACULOUS VICTORIES AGAINST INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS

BY DR. SERAPHIM STEGER

There have been a number of times in the history of the Old and New Testament Church when the people of God faced insurmountable odds of survival against their enemies and turned to the LORD, to the Theotokos the Queen of Heaven, or to the Saints in prayer when there was no one else to turn to -- and, behold, they were miraculously delivered from their enemies. In this issue we will look at 5 such miracles.

1. THE DELIVERANCE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FROM BONDAGE IN EGYPT UNDER PHARAOH

The first spectacular and miraculous deliverance was when the children of Israel, after exiting Egypt, were trapped between Migdol and the Red Sea with Pharaoh and his army in hot pursuit. There the mighty hand of the LORD delivered them through the depths of the Red Sea on dry land, while Pharaoh and his army were drowned in its depths as the walls of water collapsed down upon them:

Exodus 14:13 (KJV) And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. 14 The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. 15 And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: 16 But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. 17 And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get Me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. 18 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. 19 And the Angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: 20 And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. 21 And Moses

stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 22 And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 23 And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24 And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, 25 And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians. 26 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. 27 And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28 And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. 29 But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. 31 And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses ...



FRESCO FROM THE CATACOMB OF VIA LATINA. 4TH CENTURY AD. ROME:
MOSES AND THE ISRAELITES HAVING CROSSED THE RED SEA, WHILE PHARAOH AND HIS ARMY ARE SHOWN DROWING

Exodus 15:1 Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. 2 The LORD is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God,

and I will exalt Him. 3 The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is His name. 4 Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea. 5 The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone. 6 Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: Thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. 7 And in the greatness of thine excellency Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee: Thou sentest forth Thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. 8 And with the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea. 9 The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. 10 Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters. 11 Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? 12 Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. 13 Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.

2. THE DELIVERANCE OF JERUSALEM AND KING HEZEKIAH OF JUDAH FROM KING SENNARACHIB OF ASSYRIA

A second spectacular, lesser known, but equally as miraculous deliverance occurred in Judah during the 29 year reign (c.716-687 BC) of her righteous King Hezekiah. In 725 BC the Assyrian King Shalmaneser V attacked King Hoshea of the Northern Kingdom of Israel for conspiring with Egypt against him and failing to pay his annual tribute (cf. *4 Kingdoms 17:1-4*). After 3 years Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II, conquered Israel's capital, Samaria, and according to his own records, deported 27,280 of her people into exile in Assyria and Media, thus ending Israel's rebellion.¹

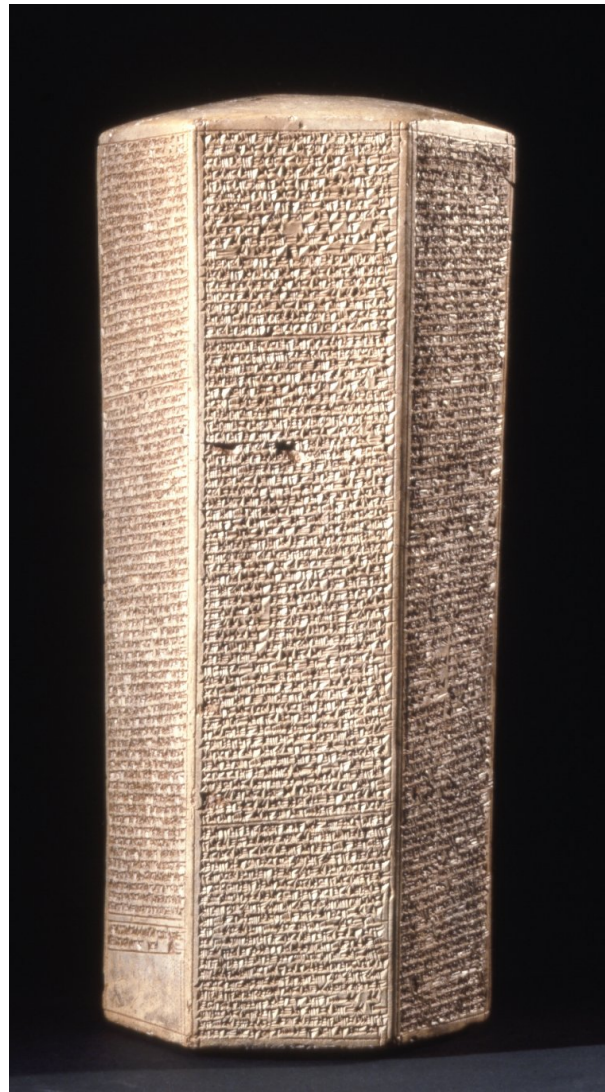
In 701 BC Sargon's successor King Sennacherib, laid siege to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Having conquered all the other walled cities of Judah and deported their citizens throughout his empire, he then set his sights on Jerusalem, and especially on King Hezekiah who had rebelled against him. Hezekiah and all Jerusalem soon found themselves surrounded by more than 185,000 soldiers highly experienced in siege warfare, who boasted superior weaponry and military tactics.² Consequently, Jerusalem and her king found

1. Translation of the Nimrud Prism, D & E in K Lawson Younger, Jr, *The Fall of Samaria in the Light of Recent Research*, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Vol 61, No. 3, July 1999, pp. 469-470.

2. Of note, "... the Assyrian army excelled at siege warfare, and was probably the first force to carry a separate corps of engineers ... Assault was their principal tactic against the heavily fortified cities of the Near East. They developed a great variety of methods for breaching enemy walls: "combat engineers" were employed to undermine walls or to light fires underneath wooden gates, and ramps were thrown up to allow men to go over the ramparts or to attempt a breach on the upper section of walls where it was the least thick. Mobile ladders allowed attackers to cross moats and quickly assault

themselves facing the same dire fate as did Samaria two decades earlier and as did the rest of Judah just weeks before.

An Assyrian record of these wars against Judea and many other kingdoms was discovered in 1830 by British Colonel Robert Taylor in the ruins of Ninevah.



THE HEXAGONAL CLAY "TAYLOR" PRISM WRITTEN IN CUNEIFORM

There, he uncovered a clay hexagonal prism, now known as the *Taylor Prism*, bearing cuneiform writing in the Akkadian language. These were translated in 1851 in Persia by Sir Henry Rawlinson while he was working there for the British Museum. He found it to contain the *Annals of Sennacherib*. This clay cylinder, and two more like it, the *Oriental Institute Prism* and

any point in defenses. These operations were covered by masses of archers, who were the core of the infantry. But the pride of the Assyrian siege train were their engines. These were multistoried wooden towers with four wheels and a turret on top and one, or at times two, battering rams at the base." Joshua J. Mark, *Assyria*, *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, 10 April 2018, <https://www.ancient.eu/assyria/>

the *Jerusalem Prism* are now believed to have been created c. 691 BC. The following is the translation of the section which is dedicated to Sennacherib's campaign against Judea, Jerusalem, and Hezekiah:

“As for Hezekiah, the Jew, who did not submit to my yoke, 46 of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small cities in the neighborhood, which were without number, I besieged and took (those cities) by leveling with battering rams and by bringing up siege engines, by attacking and storming on foot, by mines, tunnels and breaches. I brought away from them and counted as spoil 200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle, and sheep, without number. **Himself [Hezekiah], like a bird in a cage, I shut up in Jerusalem his royal city. I surrounded him with earthworks in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate.** His towns which I had plundered, I took away from his country and gave them (over) to Mitinti king of Ashdod, Padi king of Ekron, and Sillibel king of Gaza. Thus **I reduced his country, but I still increased the tribute and the “katru” presents (due) to me (as his) overlord, which I imposed (later) upon him beyond the former tribute, to be delivered annually.** Hezekiah himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed and whose irregular and elite troops (which he had brought into Jerusalem, his royal residence, in order to strengthen it) had deserted him, did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) with ivory, *nîmedu*-chairs (inlaid) with ivory, elephant-hides, ebony-wood, box-wood (and) all kinds of valuable treasures, his (own) daughters, concubines, male and female musicians. In order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his (personal) messenger.”³

That's the “official” story from the Assyrian side. Interestingly, Sennacherib never mentions having conquered Jerusalem -- the only city which he failed to conquer! Why was that? The answer is found in the *Old Testament* accounts of King Hezekiah's miraculous deliverance found in 2 *Paraleipomenon/Chronicles* 32, 4 *Kings/2 Kings* 18-20, and *Isaiah* 36-37:

2 *Chronicles/Paraleipomenon* (KJV) 32:1 *After these things, [restoring the proper worship of the LORD] and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself. 2 And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem, 3 He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him. 4 So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook [the spring of Gihon] that ran*

3. From the *Oriental Institute Prism of Sennacherib*, which contains--as does the so-called *Taylor Prism* (cf. Rawlinson, Vol. I. Pls. 37-42)--the final edition of D.D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (OIP, II. Chicago, 1924). Translation: *ibid.*, and Luckenbill, AR, II, §§233 ff, online at <http://people.bethel.edu/~pferris/historicalhidden/HistSynopsisLinks/sennacheribinscription.htm>


*through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water? 5 Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo⁴ in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance. 6 And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying, 7 **Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. 8 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 rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. 9 After this did Sennacherib king of Assyria send his servants to Jerusalem, (but he himself laid siege against Lachish, and all his power with him,) unto*



ASSYRIAN RELIEF OF THE SIEGE OF LACHISH BY SENNACHERIB IN 701 BC IMMEDIATELY BEFORE HIS ADVANCE ON JERUSALEM, BRITISH MUSEUM

Hezekiah king of Judah, and unto all Judah that were at Jerusalem, saying, 10 Thus saith Sennacherib king of Assyria, Whereon do ye trust, that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem? 11 Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst, saying, The LORD our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 12 Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall worship before one altar, and burn incense upon it? 13 Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands [in] any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand? 14 Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand? 15 Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him: for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand? 16 And his servants spake yet more against the LORD God, and against his servant Hezekiah. 17 He wrote also letters to

4. The *millu* was the man-made fill between the summits of Mt. Ophel and Mt. Zion upon which Solomon's Temple platform was built.



rail on the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of mine hand. 18 Then they cried with a loud voice in the Jews' speech unto the people of Jerusalem that were on the wall, to affright them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city. 19 And they spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man. 20 And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven. 21 And the LORD sent an angel, which cut off 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. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword. 22 Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side.

... 2 Kings/4 Kingdoms (KJV) 20:20 And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city,⁵ are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? ...

Isaiah (KJV) 36:1 Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defended cities of Judah, and took them. ... 4 And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? 5 I say, sayest thou, (but they are but vain words) I have counsel and strength for war: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? 6 Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him. 7 But if thou say to me, We trust in the LORD our God: is it not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar? ... 10 And am I now come up without the LORD⁶ against this land to destroy it? The LORD⁶ said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it ... 13 Then Rabshakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. 14 Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you. 15 Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us: this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. 16 Hearken not to Hezekiah: ... 18 Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim? And have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? 20 Who

5. The conduit is Hezekiah's tunnel hewn out of the solid rock of Mt. Zion, which brought water from the spring of Gihon, the only source of fresh water in Jerusalem, from its source inside the base of Mt. Zion (also accessible in the Kidron Valley) to within the city walls.

6. Hebrew: יהוה = Yahweh, Jehovah, the God of Israel!

are they among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? 21 But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.

Isaiah 37:1 And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. 2 And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth, unto Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. 3 And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. 4 It may be the LORD thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God, and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left. 5 So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. 6 And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. 7 Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. 8 So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. 9 And he heard say concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He is come forth to make war with thee. And when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, 10 Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11 Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? 12 Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Telassar?¹ 3 Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? 14 And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. 15 And Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD, saying, 16 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. 17 Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. 18 Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, 19 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. 20 Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even Thou only. 21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria: 22 This is the word

which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. 23 Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. 24 By thy servants hast thou reproached the LORD, and hast said, By the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tall cedars thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof: and I will enter into the height of his border, and the forest of his Carmel. 25 I have digged, and drunk water; and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of the besieged places. 26 Hast thou not heard long ago, how I have done it; and of ancient times, that I have formed it? Now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldst be to lay waste defended cities into ruinous heaps. 27 Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded: they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the housetops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up. 28 But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. 29 Because thy rage against Me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest. 30 And this shall be a sign unto thee [Hezekiah], Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof.⁷ 31 And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward: 32 For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion⁸: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. 33 Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. 34 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. 35 For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. 36 Then the⁹ angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. 37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. 38 And it came to pass [20 years later in 681 BC], as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

Thus, Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled: Sennacherib

7. The LORD is proclaiming to Hezekiah a Year of Jubilee, the year of release, the Sabbath of Sabbath years, i.e., salvation and redemption -- a type of the consummation, of the 8th Age, of the Kingdom of Heaven. The LORD, their Kinsman Redeemer will save them (cf. Leviticus 25 & 27).

8. LXX Thompson: For they of Jerusalem shall be left and they of mount Zion shall be saved. LXX NETS: because from Ierusalem shall be those who are left, and from Mount Zion those who are saved.

9. LXX lit. an angel of the LORD: Καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἄγγελος Κυρίου. MT lit. an angel of the LORD: וַיֵּלֶךְ מַלְאָכִי אֱלֹהִים.

and his army never fired an arrow, never constructed earthen ramps/banks, and never moved their siege towers against Jerusalem. Rather, Sennacherib left -- never to return, leaving behind 185,000 corpses -- slain by an angel of the LORD - a miracle of miracles!

3. DELIVERANCE OF THESSALONIKI FROM A MULTITUDE OF AVARS AND SLAVS BY ST. DEMETRIOS IN AD 586

In September 586 AD a multitude of one hundred thousand Avars¹⁰ and Slavs began attacking Thessaloniki, a city whose patron saint, the Holy and Great Martyr Demetrios, had promised to defend. What follows is an account of the miraculous delivery of Thessaloniki from these malicious barbarian hordes:



FRESCO OF ST. DEMETRIOS BY MANUEL PANSELINOS IN THE CHURCH OF PROTATON ON MOUNT ATHOS (CIRCA 1290AD)

"As a deadly wreath they encircled the city and not a piece of land could be seen where a barbarian did not step. It was worth it to see that instead of dirt or grass or trees were the heads of opponents from one side to the next, and they were even [bobbing their heads in unison to demonstrate] they were against us for the inevitable aftermath of death," writes the author of the *Miracles [of Saint Demetrios]*.

The situation was tragic as there had been a famine that decimated the population of the city, and this sudden

10. The Avars were originally nomadic horse warriors, the next after the Huns, to sweep off the Great Eurasian Steppe and build an empire in central Europe, the Avar Kaganate in AD 567. While negotiating with Emperor Heraclius beneath the walls of Constantinople in 617, the Avars launched a surprise attack. While they were unable to capture the city centre they pillaged the suburbs of the city and took 270,000 captives. Payments in gold and goods to the Avars reached the record sum of 200,000 *solidi* [4.5 gram solid gold coins] shortly before 626, when they staged another unsuccessful attack.

appearance of enemies shut out of the walls of the city many men who were out in the fields harvesting. Worse, most of the elite of the guard happened to have gone along with the prefect to other parts for public affairs.

The enemies installed the machinery for the siege, iron rams and huge stone throwers, and they began firing stones, or we could say entire mountains, and the arrows of the archers fell like wintry flakes, so that none of the defenders of the wall could return fire without danger and see what was happening outside. The Thessalonians were conquered by despair, as there was absolutely no human means to save them. Their only refuge was prayer and the supplications to their Saint to entreat on their behalf to God. And surely, Saint Demetrios interfered with specific incidents in various stages of the siege.

On the seventh day of the siege the enemy prepared the final assault, hoping that the severity of the raid would terrorize and repulse from the ramparts the defenders. The author himself was found at the eastern wall (near today's street Ethnikes Amynes). Let us give him the floor to say more:

“And though we were dominated by formidable fear for the fate that awaited us, suddenly, around the eighth hour of that same day, all together the barbarians that had encircled the city, left running with barbaric screams towards the hills abandoning their tents together with all their belongings. And such was their panic that overtook them, that some left unarmed and without robes. Then, after waiting around three hours in the surrounding mountains ... they came down again at the setting of the sun to their tents and began, by the providence of the Athlete, to strip one another of their weapons with the result that many of them were injured and fell dead. Then, after spending the night in complete silence, unlike the previous ones, and as it began to dawn, ... among the countless multitude not one could be seen.”



FRESCO OF SAINT DEMETRIOS RIDING A WHITE HORSE IN THE PATRON NICHE OF THE CHURCH OF ST. DEMETRIOS IN BOBOSHEVO, BULGARIA, PAINTED CIRCA 1488

What happened? The Thessalonians did not know. Neither did the author, who was not misled to speak about apparitions and things that he himself had not seen. At this point, we could say that in a certain “modern” way, there is a change in the narration of the text and we read the description of the same event from the side of the invaders, for some of them the next day defected and sought refuge in the city.

Conversations with their officials reported that after yesterday's offense they were sure that even now the army remained hidden in the city, because at the eighth hour the [city] gates opened and they were attacked by a man of many weapons with an army of followers, so they all panicked and ran to the mountains waiting there until dark when the army returned to the city. Then all the besiegers decided that at the next dawn the army will again set out against them.

When the Thessalonians asked the fugitives whom they saw at the head of the army, they responded: “A man fire-blond and brilliantly arrayed with a white robe, on a white horse,” indicating to all the familiar image of Saint Demetrios, which today survives in mosaic. Shedding tears of joy and elation throughout the city, [the Thessalonians] remitted hymns to the Athlete Saint and offered thanksgiving to God from deep within their souls.”¹¹

4. THE DELIVERANCE OF MOSCOW FROM TAMERLANE AND THE MONGOLS BY THE THEOTOKOS

When the Mongol general Tamerlane¹² was threatening Moscow, the whole population of Moscow began praying and processing with the icon of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos. Suddenly, the Queen of Heaven herself, with a host of angels, appeared in a divine vision to Tamerlane threatening him and his Tartar hordes with destruction should they dare to attack. In great fear Tamerlane and the Tartar horde withdrew. As a result the Russian Church has commemorated this divine victory with an annual feast on August 25 to the *Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God*:

In 1395, Tamerlane with his Tartar horde approached Moscow. Christians had only one hope—in God's help. The Grand Duke of Moscow, Vasiliy Dmitrievich, requested that the [Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God] be carried from Vladimir to Moscow. The procession from Klyazma took ten days. People stood on their knees all along the road upon which the procession passed, and, stretching out their hands, begged: “O Mother of God, save the Russian Land!” The city of Moscow waited solemnly for the Vladimir Icon. All the city's clergy took part in the procession. The Duke's family, boyars, and common Moscovites came outside the city walls to (the) Kuchkovo fields to meet and accompany the icon to

11. John Sanidopoulos, *A Study of The Miracles of Saint Demetrios*, at Mystagogy Resource Center at <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2013/10/a-study-of-miracles-of-saint-demetrios.html>. This article is based on 3 collections of the miracles of St. Demetrios: the first originally compiled by Archbishop John after AD 600, a second anonymous collection from c. AD 680, and a third later collection from which the 14th miracle is reproduced here. These are available in critical editions with the original Greek and with a modern Greek translation with commentary and published in 1979 and the 1990s respectively. See link above for details.

12. Tamerlane (Persian) or Timur (AD 1336-1405) was a Turco-Mongol conqueror, the founder of the Timurid Empire in Persia and Central Asia, and the first ruler in the Timurid dynasty. Because he was not a descendant of Ghengis Khan, he didn't call himself a *khan*, but *Amir* (General). He was a muslim and called himself the “*Sword of Islam*.” A great and brutal military tactician, he sought to reclaim for Islam all the lost lands formerly occupied by all the khans.

the Dormition Cathedral in the Kremlin.

This was on August 26. Later, a chronicler wrote, “The whole city came out to meet the Icon.” The Metropolitan, the Grand Duke, “men and women, youths and maidens, children and babes, orphans and widows, the little with the great came out with crosses and icons, with Psalms and spiritual hymns; everyone was in tears, and no person could be found who did not pray fervently with sighs and tears.”



ICON OF THE VLADIMIR MOTHER OF GOD

The Theotokos heard the prayers of those who had faith in her. At the same time when people were meeting the icon on banks of the Moscow River, Tamerlane lay sleeping in his tent. He saw a vision – saintly hierarchs with golden staffs descending from a high mountain, and a radiant Lady in the air above them, surrounded by unspeakable rays of purest light. A countless multitude of Angels with fiery swords encircled Her... Tamerlane woke up in fear. All the Tartar wise men, elders and fortunetellers explained that the Woman whom he had seen in the vision was the protectress of the Orthodox, the Mother of God, and that her power is invincible. After this, the “*Iron Lane*,” as Tamerlane was called, ordered his horde to retreat. “Both the Tartars and the Russians were astonished by this.” The chronicler continued, “Tamerlane fled, pursued by the might of the Most Pure Virgin!”

The grateful Muscovites built the Sretensky Monastery on the site of the meeting of the miracle-working icon which took place on August 26, 1395, “that the great works of God may never be forgotten.” After remaining for 242 years near the Klyazma River, the Vladimir Icon of Theotokos was taken

to Moscow and placed in the Kremlin Dormition Cathedral. Thanks to its grace-filled protection, Moscow was spared in 1408 from Khan Edigey, in 1451 from the Nogay prince, Mazovshi, and in 1459 from his father Khan Sedi-Ahmet.¹³

5. THE MIRACULOUS APPEARANCE OF THE MOTHER OF GOD AT POCHAEV, WHICH SAVED THE MONASTERY FROM THE ASSAULT OF THE TATARS AND TURKS

In our 5th miraculous delivery the Theotokos, at the intercessions of St. Job in Heaven (AD 1551-1651), the faithful of Pochaev were rescued from their enemies in 1675:



THE POCHAEV ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD WITHOUT ITS PROTECTIVE SILVER AND JEWELLED COVERING

The Pochaev Icon of the Mother of God is among the most venerable sacred items of the Orthodox Church. Located at the Dormition Cathedral, Pochaev, Ukraine, the icon is renowned throughout the Slavic world and is venerated by Orthodox Christians throughout the world. Christians of other confessions also come to venerate the wonderworking image of the Most Holy Theotokos, together with the Orthodox. The wonderworking icon has been kept at the Pochaev Lavra, an ancient bastion of Orthodoxy, for about 400 years ... The miracles which issued forth from the holy icon are numerous and are testified to in the monastery books with the signatures of the faithful who have been delivered from unclean spirits, liberated from captivity, and sinners brought to their senses.

The celebration in honor of the Pochaev Icon of the Mother of God on July 23 was established in memory of the deliverance of the Dormition Lavra monastery from a Turkish siege on July 20-23, 1675.

In the summer of 1675 during the Zbarazhsk War with the

13. Vladimir Icon of the Theotokos, <http://pravoslavie.ru/7424.html>

THE GOOD WORD

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Turks, in the reign of the Polish King Jan Sobesski (1674-96), regiments composed of Tatars under the command of Khan Nurreidin, via Vishnevets, fell upon the Pochaev monastery, surrounding it on three sides. The weak monastery walls and its stone buildings did not offer much defense against a siege. The Igumen Joseph Dobromirsky urged the brethren and lay people to pray to their heavenly intercessors: the Most Holy Theotokos and St. Job of Pochaev.

The monks and the laypeople prayed fervently, prostrating themselves before the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God and the reliquary with the relics of St Job. At sunrise on the morning of July 23, as the Tatars were planning an assault on the monastery, the Igumen ordered an Akathist to the Theotokos to be sung. At the opening words, 'O Queen of the Heavenly Hosts,' the Most Holy Theotokos suddenly appeared over the church, in an unfurled gleaming-white maphorion [veil], with angels holding unsheathed swords. St Job stood beside the Mother of God, bowing to Her and beseeching Her to defend the monastery.

The Tatars believed the heavenly army was a vision, and in confusion they began to shoot arrows at the Most Holy Theotokos and St Job, but the arrows fell backwards and wounded those who shot them. Terror seized the enemy. In a flight of panic and without looking, they trampled upon and killed each other. The defenders of the monastery attempted pursuit and took many prisoners. Some of the prisoners afterwards accepted the Christian Faith and remained at the monastery thereafter.¹⁴

CONCLUSIONS:

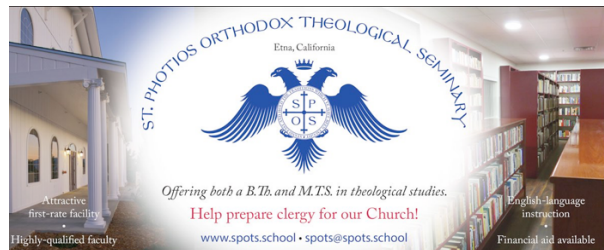
In these five examples of miraculous deliverances from insurmountable hordes of adversaries, the people

14. Icon of the Mother of God of Pochaev and Her Miraculous Intercession, Jul 23/Aug 5, at <http://orthochristian.com/95953.html>

of God, both before and after the-incarnation of Christ, were delivered by the hand of the LORD (or His servants) in response to their unwavering faith, prayers, and total dependence on Him as their only means of salvation. These examples are worthy of remembrance. However, in our next two issues we will look at two circumstances where Divine help was not forthcoming:

- (1) the Islamic conquest of Thessaloniki in AD 904 by Leo of Tripoli, a muslim pirate (and convert from Orthodoxy), and
- (2) the siege and conquest of Constantinople in AD 1453 by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II during the reign of Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos.

The latter occurred only 15 years after the Council of Florence and Farrara (1438-9) in which Constantinople had proposed union with Rome -- a betrayal of the True Orthodox faith. Both of these examples of Islamic Jihad and conquest have important spiritual lessons for all of us.



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