

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 14: Hezekiah, Sennacherib, and the Lord's Deliverance -- Isaiah 36:1-37:38

It is the worst day of King Hezekiah's life. The Assyrian army, the most feared military machine in the world, has already swallowed up forty-six fortified cities of Judah, and now its forces stand outside Jerusalem. Sennacherib, the great king of Assyria, has sent a high official with a large army to demand surrender. The walls of the city are lined with anxious faces. Mothers hold children. Soldiers grip spears with sweating hands. And a loud, confident voice begins to shout up at them in their own language, designed so that every ordinary person on the wall can hear and lose heart.

These two chapters, Isaiah 36 and 37, are some of the most dramatic narrative in the whole book, and they sit here for a reason. For chapter after chapter Isaiah has been insisting that the Lord alone is God, that trusting Egypt or any human power is folly, and that God rules over every nation. Now all of that gets tested in real time. The Assyrian spokesman, the Rabshakeh, stands at the wall and argues, point by point, that trusting in the Lord is the foolish move. He is, in effect, preaching a sermon against faith. And the question the whole episode poses is the question of the book: will God's people trust the Lord when the threat is at the gate?

Watch what Hezekiah does, because it is the model the chapter wants us to see. He does not bluster. He does not surrender. When the threatening letter comes, he goes up to the house of the Lord and spreads it out before God and prays. He takes the threat to the only One who can do anything about it. And then God answers through Isaiah with a word of such confidence that you can feel the ground shift: the proud Assyrian who mocked the living God has gone too far, and he will go home the way he came, with an arrow not even shot into the city.

This story is about more than ancient siege warfare. It is about what we do with the threats and taunts that line up against our faith, the voices that tell us trusting God is naive, that we had better rely on something we can see. It is about a God who hears mockery and does not ignore it, who defends His own name, who delivers His people in a way that leaves no doubt about whose hand did it. And it is an invitation to learn Hezekiah's habit: when the letter comes, spread it before the Lord.

Group Discussion: Read Isaiah 36:13-20 aloud, the Rabshakeh's speech from the wall. As a group, identify the specific arguments he uses to undermine the people's trust in the Lord. Which of those same arguments do you still hear today, dressed in modern clothes, aimed at shaking the faith of God's people?

Personal Reflection: When Hezekiah received the threatening letter, he went up to the house of the Lord and spread it out before God (37:14). What is the threatening letter in your life right now, the worry you keep rereading, and what would it look like this week to actually spread it before the Lord instead of carrying it alone?

Read Isaiah 36:1–37:38

Study Questions

1. In Isaiah 36:4–7 the Rabshakeh asks, “On what do you rest this trust of yours?” and mocks reliance on Egypt and on the Lord. What does his question reveal about the way the enemy of our souls still works to expose and ridicule the object of our trust?
2. The Rabshakeh tried to separate the people from their king and their God by speaking directly to those on the wall (36:11–13). When have you felt the pressure to abandon what you believe because someone made faith sound foolish in front of others, and how did you respond?
3. In Isaiah 36:18–20 the Rabshakeh argues that since the gods of other nations could not deliver them from Assyria, the Lord cannot either. What is the fatal flaw in lumping the living God together with the lifeless idols of the nations?
4. Hezekiah’s officials came to him with their clothes torn (36:22), shaken by what they had heard. When the threats of life leave you rattled, who do you turn to first, and what does that choice say about where your confidence really rests?
5. In Isaiah 37:1 Hezekiah responds to the crisis by tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth, and going into the house of the Lord. What does it teach us that a king’s first strategic move in a national emergency is to go to worship and prayer rather than to the war room?

6. Isaiah sent Hezekiah a word from God: "Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard" (37:6). What words have you heard recently that you need to deliberately bring under the authority of God's reassuring word rather than letting them rule your fears?
7. In Isaiah 37:14-20 Hezekiah spreads the letter before the Lord and prays, asking God to save "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD." Why does Hezekiah ground his appeal in God's glory and reputation rather than merely in his own rescue, and what does that teach us about prayer?
8. Hezekiah's prayer honestly admits that the Assyrians really have destroyed many nations and their gods (37:18-19); he does not pretend the threat is small. How does naming the real size of a threat before God, rather than minimizing it, actually strengthen rather than weaken faith?
9. In Isaiah 37:21-29 God answers that Sennacherib has mocked and reviled the Holy One of Israel, that the king's rise to power was God's doing all along, and that He will turn him back the way he came. Then the angel of the Lord strikes the Assyrian camp (37:36-38). How does this whole account display the absolute sovereignty of God over every kingdom and vindicate those who trust in Him, and how does it expose the folly of mocking God?
10. Sennacherib went home defeated and was later struck down by his own sons while worshiping his god (37:37-38). Looking at your own life, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is teaching you to answer threats and taunts the way Hezekiah did, by taking them to God in prayer instead of fighting them in your own strength.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 2 Kings 18–19, the parallel account of the same siege with additional detail on Hezekiah's earlier tribute to Assyria; 2 Chronicles 32, another retelling that highlights Hezekiah's preparations and God's deliverance; Psalm 46, God is our refuge and strength, very likely reflecting on this very deliverance of Jerusalem; Daniel 4:34–37, the proud pagan king forced to confess that the Most High rules the kingdoms of men, the same lesson Sennacherib refused to learn; Acts 12:21–23, Herod struck down for accepting glory due to God, a New Testament echo of the danger of exalting oneself against the Lord.

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