
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XXIX : THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ASSYRIAN ARMY (36: 1-37:38)

General outline (from Young's *Isaiah*):

- I. The Crisis and the Messiah (1:1-12:6)
- II. The Theocracy and the Nations (13:1-39:8)
- III. True Deliverance is Found Not in Egypt but in the Lord (28:1-35:10)
- IV. The Connecting Bridge Between Chapters 1-35 and 40-66 (36-39)
 - A. The Conclusion of the Assyrian Period (36,37)
 - 1. Sennacherib: First Attempt of Man's Kingdom to Destroy God's Kingdom (36:1-22)
 - 2. The Failure of the First Attempt to Destroy the Kingdom of God (37:1-38)

“Chapters 1-35 have the Assyrian menace as their main historical setting; and, though many other nations are touched, the reader is never allowed for long to forget the dark shadow of that threat in the background. From the beginning of chapter 40, however, exile in Babylon forms the setting of his oracles. *These four chapters therefore provide a historical transition, chapters 36-37 looking back to Assyria and chapters 38-39 on to Babylon.*” [Grogan, Isaiah] “*Chapters 36-39 conclude the section relating to Assyria and the question of trust which that nation's presence on Judah's borders posed. They demonstrate that it is not necessary to revoke one's dependence on God and turn to human powers in order to survive. In this way they constitute a lived-out example of the truths taught in chs. 13-35. The nations of mankind are under God's hand; he is their ruler and those who trust in him need not, indeed, must not, bow down to those nations.*” [Oswalt, Isaiah] *This is not to deny the modern need for military defense; rather it is to remind us that our true trust is in the Lord, not military might.*

The Ultimatum (36:1-20)

<i>In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. Then the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. When the commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field, Eliakim son of Hilkiyah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of</i>	<i>Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them. And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field. Then came forth unto him Eliakim, Hilkiyah's son, which was over the house, and Shebna the</i>	<i>And it cometh to pass, in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, come up hath Sennacherib king of Asshur against all the fenced cities of Judah, and seizeth them. And the king of Asshur sendeth Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem, unto the king Hezekiah, with a heavy force, and he standeth by the conduit of the upper pool, in the highway of the fuller's field, and go forth unto him doth Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, who [is] over the house, and</i>
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Asaph the recorder went out to him. The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours? You say you have strategy and military strength — but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me? Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him. And if you say to me, "We are depending on the LORD our God" — isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship before this altar"? Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses — if you can put riders on them! How then can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen? Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this land without the LORD? The LORD himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.' " Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it. Don't speak to

scribe, and Joah, Asaph's son, the recorder. 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? 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? 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. 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? Now therefore give pledges, I pray thee, to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? And am I now come up without the LORD against this land to destroy it? the LORD said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it. Then said Eliakim and Shebna and Joah unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and speak not to us in the Jews' language, in the ears of

Shebna the scribe, and Joah son of Asaph, the remembrancer. And Rabshakeh saith unto them, 'Say ye, I pray you, unto Hezekiah, 'Thus said the great king, the king of Asshur, What [is] this confidence in which thou hast confided? I have said: Only, a word of the lips! counsel and might [are] for battle: now, on whom hast thou trusted, that thou hast rebelled against me? 'Lo, thou hast trusted on the staff of this broken reed — on Egypt — which a man leaneth on, and it hath gone into his hand, and pierced it — so [is] Pharaoh king of Egypt to all those trusting on him. 'And dost thou say unto me, Unto Jehovah our God we have trusted? is it not He, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath turned aside, and saith to Judah and to Jerusalem, Before this altar ye do bow yourselves? 'And now, negotiate, I pray thee, with my lord the king of Asshur, and I give to thee two thousand horses, if thou art able to put for thee riders on them. And how dost thou turn back the face of one captain of the least of the servants of my lord, and dost trust for thee on Egypt, for chariot and for horsemen? And now, without Jehovah have I come up against this land to destroy it? Jehovah said unto me, Go up unto this land, and thou hast destroyed it.' And Eliakim saith — and Shebna and Joah — unto Rabshakeh, 'Speak, we pray

us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall." But the commander replied, "Was it only to your master and you that my master sent me to say these things, and not to the men sitting on the wall — who, like you, will have to eat their own filth and drink their own urine?" Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you! Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, 'The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then every one of you will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your own — a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, 'The LORD will deliver us.' Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the

the people that are on the wall. But Rabshakeh said, Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you? 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. Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you. 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. Harken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me: and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern; Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. 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? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who are they among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of

thee, unto thy servants [in] Aramaean, for we are understanding; and do not speak unto us [in] Jewish, in the ears of the people who [are] on the wall.' And Rabshakeh saith, 'Unto thy lord, and unto thee, hath my lord sent me to speak these words? is it not for the men — those sitting on the wall to eat their own dung and to drink their own water with you?' And Rabshakeh standeth and calleth with a great voice [in] Jewish, and saith, 'Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Asshur: Thus said the king, Let not Hezekiah lift you up, for he is not able to deliver you; and let not Hezekiah make you trust unto Jehovah, saying, Jehovah doth certainly deliver us, this city is not given into the hand of the king of Asshur. 'Do not hearken unto Hezekiah, for thus said the king of Asshur, Make ye with me a blessing, and come out unto me, and eat ye each of his vine, and each of his fig-tree, and drink ye each the waters of his own well, till my coming in, and I have taken you unto a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards; lest Hezekiah doth persuade you, saying, Jehovah doth deliver us. Have the gods of the nations delivered each his land out of the hand of the king of Asshur? Where [are] the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where the gods of Sepharvaim, that they have delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among

LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand, that the LORD all the gods of these lands [are] my hand?" (NIV)
should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? (KJV)
they who have delivered their land out of my hand, that Jehovah doth deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" (YLT)

DIFFICULT DATING (v1) — ‘the 14th year of King Hezekiah’s reign’ poses a problem since Sennacherib’s attack cannot easily be dated prior to 701 BC which would be Hezekiah’s 24th or 25th year of reign. Several solutions have been suggested: (1) The sickness of ch 38 was in the 14th year of his reign and a later scribe made an error of the events occurring at the same time when they actually are two different times. There is no evidence to support this theory. (2) T. K. Cheyne in his book ‘*The Prophecies of Isaiah*’ believes this not to be the final attack of Sennacherib but rather an earlier attack by Sargon on Ashdod in 713/11 BC. Oswalt says this theory has gained no support. (3) E. R. Thiele in his book ‘*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*’ argues that 14 years is the only correct dating possible. Oswalt dismisses this due to the complexity involved in Thiele’s calculations. In support of Thiele’s theory and possibly identical is the theory of H. H. Rowley in his book ‘*Men of God*’ and K. A. Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell in their book ‘*OT Chronology*.’ These men argue for a co-regency of Ahaz and Hezekiah for 10 years. These events are in the 14th year of Hezekiah’s *sole* reign therefore. Motyer agrees with this theory. (4) The simplest solution according to Oswalt is to accept the 14 as an error for 24, both here and chap 38. “The simplest solution is to substitute ‘twenty-fourth’ for ‘fourteenth’ in this verse and its counterpart, 2 Kings 18-13. Conjectural emendation should be adopted only with great caution, but in this case it seems warranted. This was a simple slip for a scribe to make, as Young demonstrates, especially since in the ancient-pointed script the two words would have been even closer in appearance than in the later form.” [Grogan, Isaiah] *I personally find more comfort in Thiele’s theory than an ancient textual error.*

OVERVIEW — Sennacherib, king of Assyria had been on the throne for about four years by 701 BC. After the death of his father Sargon II, the last four years had been mainly used by putting down revolts. The east and south had been at least temporarily subdued and Assyria was ready to turn west. Sennacherib struck the coast at Sidon and from that point worked southward, capturing forty-six Judean cities and devouring every opponent until the Egyptian army made a stand at El Tekeh (about 20 miles west of Jerusalem). The Egyptians were quickly routed and Assyria advanced to Lachish to the south of Jerusalem, Judah’s last hope to stem the tide. This further advancement was probably done to better position themselves in the event of the Egyptians recovering and forming another attack while Assyria besieged Jerusalem (which is what they did according to 37:8).

ASSYRIAN ENVOY SENT FROM LACHISH TO JERUSALEM (v2) — As the siege of Lachish was drawing to a successful close (from the Assyrian perspective), Sennacherib judged the time right to put pressure on Hezekiah. Sennacherib sent his three highest officials: the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh, all three being Akkadian titles. From royal inscriptions from this period, the **Tartan** was second to the king in command of the army. The precise function of the other two titles are not as clear. The title **Rabsaris** has not been found in Akkadian documents so far but is most likely a high-ranking officer. If **Rabshakeh** may have been the king’s ‘chief cupbearer’, possibly his personal advisor. If so, this would explain why it is this person who makes

the representation instead of the Tartan. A parallel passage says *‘The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer and his field commander with a large army, from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem.’* (2 Kings 18:17).

THE WATERCOURSE OF THE UPPER POOL (v2) — *The Assyrian representatives (36:2) stood at the exact spot where Isaiah had urged Ahaz to be faithful (7:3).* Since water was precious during any siege, it was strategically symbolic to make the threat at that point. Note the obvious comparisons between Ahaz and Hezekiah:

<i>Ahaz</i>	<i>Hezekiah</i>
● ungodly father ● the Assyrian threat came about because Ahaz refused to trust the Lord despite Isaiah’s promptings — chap 7 ● Ahaz placed his faith in the Assyrians	● godly son ● Hezekiah’s response to the threat of Assyria was one of faith guided by Isaiah — chap 36,37 ● it was the Assyrians who now posed the threat to Hezekiah

HEZEKIAH’S REPRESENTATIVES (v3) — Hezekiah responds by sending three representatives. Note the confirmation of Isaiah’s earlier prophecy concerning the reversal of roles of Shebna and Eliakim (22:20-23). If the order of 2 Kings 18 is chronological, then Hezekiah must have been shocked to see the Assyrians at his gate: *‘In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. So Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: “I have done wrong. Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you demand of me.” The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace.’* (2 Kings 18:13-15). ***“Hezekiah had thought he had bought the Assyrians off with tribute, but there they stood, with all the calm arrogance of those who have absolute power on their side. They make right; they are not subservient to it. Or so it seems. If ever Isaiah’s preaching about the folly of human arrogance was faced with a direct challenge, this was it.”*** [Oswalt, Isaiah]

ASSYRIA’S FOUR POINTS — The Rabshakeh moves directly to the attack and bypasses any diplomatic niceties. Note as well that he bypasses the emissaries and addresses Hezekiah directly, pointedly refusing to call him king (v 4). ***“Clearly, this is not a request but an ultimatum.” “The Rab-shakeh was pressing for a quick solution. 37:9 shows that Sennacherib did not want a long war in western Palestine — maybe his position at home was not as yet totally secure. He makes his offer sound as attractive as possible: an unmolested present (v 16) and an agreeable future (v 17). He cannot hide the well-known Assyrian policy of deportation, but he does his best to sweeten the pill.”*** [Motyer, Isaiah]

- **Assyria questions Judah’s dependence upon Egypt**, a point Isaiah would agree with them upon (v 4-6, 8,9). This probably hit home hard after Egypt’s defeat at El Tekeh.
- **the Lord would not support Judah but rather has called Assyria to attack Hezekiah because Hezekiah had destroyed all the altars and high places (v 7,10).** Assyria’s knowledge of these events shows the great care in which foreign affairs were watched and recorded. This is ridiculous from a scriptural standpoint but entirely logical from the point of view of an idolater and polytheist. It is also likely Assyria knew substantial numbers of

Israelites were in agreement with Assyria's comments (Hos 2:5-10). Possibly this comment was given to touch a raw nerve and cause internal dissension among the Jews.

- **the Lord could not stop Assyria even if He wanted to (v 14,15,18-20)**. The move from 'your god called us to punish you' to 'even your god cannot stop us' was probably a tactical error on Assyria's part. The former appeal coincided with the Jewish belief that their God was sovereign and, as Isaiah would agree, had called Assyria there to punish with Jerusalem. If this had been pressed, this would have continued to unnerve the inhabitants of Jerusalem. But leaving that and turning to blaspheme the Lord would actually bring the Jews closer together.

- **if they surrender, Assyria will give them blessings their God and Hezekiah could not give (v 16,17)**. The promise is those inside the city could return to their own homes outside the city while awaiting deportation to an equally good land. A siege was a terrible experience and thousands of people from outlying areas would have crowded within the city for protection. Conditions would quickly become intolerable. While the enemies would be pounding away at the doors and walls, those inside would also be fighting starvation, disease and violence between brethren. The Assyrian offer to return home must have been like holding a cup of cold water in front of a man dying of thirst.

JUDAH'S ENVOYS UNNERVED (v11) — Whether Assyria was aware of this or not, the Judean envoys knew the Assyrian's comments about Egypt and God calling Assyria coincided with Isaiah's warnings that the Lord would punish Judah by the Assyrians. *"It appears that the Rabshakeh's final claim that the Assyrians were acting at God's command was so unsettling to the envoys that they requested the Assyrian officer to continue the parley in the diplomatic language of the day, Aramaic. But the Assyrian had not come to negotiate; he had come to destroy Jerusalem's will to resist."* [Oswalt, Isaiah] "Aramaic, ultimately to become the common language of Palestine, was at this time the lingua franca of the Fertile Crescent, used normally in diplomatic exchanges, but unintelligible to the mass of the people." [Grogan, Isaiah]

SHORT-SIGHTED 'TRUTHS' (v18-20) — In the argument, the Assyrians mentioned other gods could not stand before them, how could Judah's god? For an idolatrous polytheistic mind, these were undeniable 'truths'. But it was blasphemy when set alongside the Word of God. Likewise are many 'truths' thrown in the face of believers today:

"Lie and you won't get in trouble."

"You must cheat to get ahead. Everyone does it."

"What's wrong with pre-marital sex? Marriage is only a piece of paper."

"If you're going to be a winner, you must act like a winner. Be self-assertive, express yourself, dominate!"

In each of these popular worldly mindsets, an argument might be given to 'prove' the 'truth' of these statements. *But the long-term results prove the folly of these maxims. The Word of God is interested in the long-term, eternal consequences of choices, not the immediate gratification.*

The Response to the Challenge (36:21-37:7)

*But the people remained silent But they held their peace, and And they keep silent, and have
and said nothing in reply, answered him not a word: for not answered him a word, for a
because the king had the king's commandment was, command of the king is,*

commanded, "Do not answer him." Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went to Hezekiah, with their clothes torn, and told him what the field commander had said. When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD. He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives." When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master, 'This is what the LORD says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard — those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Listen! I am going to put a spirit in him so that when he hears a certain report, he will return to his

saying, Answer him not. Then came Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, that was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh. 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. 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. 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. 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. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. 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. 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

saying, 'Do not answer him.' And Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who [is] over the house, cometh in, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah son of Asaph, the remembrancer, unto Hezekiah with rent garments, and they declare to him the words of Rabshakeh. And it cometh to pass, at the king Hezekiah's hearing, that he rendeth his garments, and covereth himself with sackcloth, and entereth the house of Jehovah, and sendeth Eliakim, who [is] over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covering themselves with sackcloth, unto Isaiah son of Amoz the prophet, and they say unto him, 'Thus said Hezekiah, A day of distress, and rebuke, and despising, [is] this day; for come have sons unto the birth, and power there is not to bear. 'It may be Jehovah thy God doth hear the words of Rabshakeh with which the king of Asshur his lord hath sent him to reproach the living God, and hath decided concerning the words that Jehovah thy God hath heard, and thou hast lifted up prayer for the remnant that is found.' And the servants of king Hezekiah come in unto Isaiah, and Isaiah saith unto them, 'Thus do ye say unto your lord, Thus said Jehovah, Be not afraid because of the words that thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Asshur have reviled Me. Lo, I am giving in him a spirit, and he hath heard a

own country, and there I will sword in his own land. (KJV) have him cut down with the sword.’ ” (NIV)

report, and hath turned back unto his land, and I have caused him to fall by the sword in his land.’ (YLT)

TIME OF DECISION — *“These nine verses describe a critical moment in Judah’s history. What will she do at this time, stripped of all her allies, face-to-face with the crushing realities of which the Rabsheqeh has spoken? Shall she admit his irrefutable logic and confess that God is simply one more national god, helpless before the Assyrian might? Or will she in fact be driven deeper into the Lord’s embrace? Will she now admit the folly of her other trusts and, for the first time in a very long time, commit herself to God alone? Had she gone the first way, all succeeding human history would have been very much different.” [Oswalt, Isaiah] I don’t believe anyone can successfully bring together the paradox of man’s responsibility and God’s sovereignty, nor would any who knows me discount my acceptance in the sovereignty of God. But I fully believe the Lord brings each of us to critical moments in our lives to make choices, and how our relationship with the Lord develops depends much on what we make of those moments of decisions.*

HEZEKIAH’S RESPONSE — It is unknown to what extent Hezekiah was to blame for the dependence upon Egypt; note he is never mentioned when Isaiah rebukes Judah’s unbelief (28:14; 30:1; 31:1; 33:10,11). But as king, even if he disagreed with the actions supported by his subordinates, he could not escape some of the responsibility. Hezekiah responded to the Assyrian threat by:

- tearing his clothes and putting on sackcloth, the traditional sign of mourning and repentance – v 1
- he went personally to the house of God to pray – v 1
- he sent his envoys to Isaiah to plead for his intercession – v 2. No one could have been unaware of the irony of the situation: these national leaders had rebuked Isaiah for his words, *‘They say to the seers, See no more visions! and to the prophets, Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions.’* (Isa 30:10). But time had proven the Lord right and truth was vindicated.
- he confessed the failure of their political decisions, not only bringing the country into a helpless state before the conquering army but also under the reproach of God – v3.

THE ISSUE: HONORING THE LORD (v4) — Hezekiah’s greatest concern was not necessarily himself or even the nation but the glory of God. *“He is concerned that their actions have provided the vehicle whereby God’s name has been brought into contempt.... This is a principle of life: the believer who lives a slipshod life, refusing to trust God in any deep way, will bring reproach upon God in the eyes of the watching world. They will associate that believer’s defeats with inability on God’s part.” [Oswalt, Isaiah] The critical error on the Assyrian’s part was to equate the Lord with the gods of man, blaspheming the Lord.*

THE PROMISE OF DELIVERANCE (v6,7) — Isaiah gives no haughty expression of self-satisfaction because he was proved correct, but neither does he make overstatements of deliverance. The Lord merely gives a brief synopsis of what is to happen: *Sennacherib will hear a rumor causing him to return home, and upon arriving home he will be killed.*

The Royal Letter (37:8-13)

When the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah. Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was marching out to fight against him. When he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word: "Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, 'Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria.' Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my forefathers deliver them — the gods of Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar? Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, or of Hena or Ivvah?" (NIV)

So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. 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, 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. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? 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? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? (KJV)

And Rabshakeh turneth back and findeth the king of Asshur fighting against Libnah, for he hath heard that he hath journeyed from Lachish. And he heareth concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, saying, 'He hath come out to fight with thee;' and he heareth, and sendeth messengers unto Hezekiah, saying, 'Thus do ye speak unto Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God lift thee up in whom thou art trusting, saying, Jerusalem is not given into the hand of the king of Asshur. Lo, thou hast heard that which the kings of Asshur have done to all the lands — to devote them — and thou art delivered! Did the gods of the nations deliver them whom my fathers destroyed — Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the sons of Eden, who [are] in Telassar? Where [is] the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?' (YLT)

RABSHAQEH RETURNS TO SENNACHERIB — Rebshaqeh returns to Sennacherib although it is not exactly known why. Possibly they returned to consult with their master since Hezekiah gave them no response. Or they may have returned upon orders due to the Egyptians forming to attack Assyria. Note the Assyrians had fallen back from Lachish to Libnah, probably located 6-12 miles north of Lachish. Why they moved is not known either; possibly because Lachish had fallen and the Assyrians moved on to the outlying areas. Possibly also they relocated due to the Egyptians advancing and wanted Jerusalem on their flank rather than at their rear. Whether the Egyptians and the Assyrians ever fought again is not clear — there is no record of the account historically (of course if the Assyrians had suffered a setback at the hands of the Egyptians at this point, they would probably not have mentioned it).

SENNACHERIB'S LETTER — The Assyrian response was to send a letter to Judah in a further effort to make a quick end of the matter. Sennacherib changes the tone however; earlier it was

Hezekiah who was deceiving the nation, now it is God Himself who deceives Hezekiah! (note since Sennacherib is now appealing to Hezekiah, Hezekiah is given the courtesy of being called ‘king’) Obviously Sennacherib perceives the Lord as just another local deity (v12,13).

Hezekiah’s Prayer (37:14-20)

Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: “O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God.” (NIV)

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. And Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD, saying, 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. 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. Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, 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. 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. (KJV)

And Hezekiah taketh the letters out of the hand of the messengers, and readeth them, and Hezekiah goeth up to the house of Jehovah, and Hezekiah spreadeth it before Jehovah. And Hezekiah prayeth unto Jehovah, saying, ‘Jehovah of Hosts, God of Israel, inhabiting the cherubs, Thou [art] God Himself — Thyself alone — to all kingdoms of the earth, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth. Incline, O Jehovah, Thine ear, and hear; open, O Jehovah, Thine eyes and see; and hear Thou all the words of Sennacherib that he hath sent to reproach the living God. ‘Truly, O Jehovah, kings of Asshur have laid waste all the lands and their land, so as to put their gods into fire — for they [are] no gods, but work of the hands of man, wood and stone — and they destroy them. And now, Jehovah our God, save us from his hand, and all kingdoms of the earth do know that Thou [art] Jehovah, Thyself alone.’ (YLT)

PRAYER PRINCIPLES —

- ***even when our present condition is our own fault, we can still pray about it*** — note Hezekiah admits the present situation is due to his mismanagement but he confesses and pleads forgiveness (v 3)
- ***prayer is not necessary when the Word of the Lord is clear*** — note Hezekiah asks for Isaiah to pray (v 2-4) but Isaiah immediately answers without prayer (v 5-7). *A Christian does not need to pray concerning dating a non-Christian — God’s word is clear and prayer is only a means of finding an excuse.*

- ***prayer is an act of faith*** — prayer is meaningless without believing the Lord hears our prayers. This is not dependent upon emotion for we've all felt like our prayers 'bounce off the ceiling' at times. Hezekiah believed in his prayer because the Lord was alive, sovereign, the Creator of all things – but that flew in the face of all evidence! Hezekiah *saw* the Assyrians ready to destroy but faith *saw* the Lord.
- ***our prayers may be answered although we may not see the immediate results*** — the Lord told Hezekiah that He would take care of Assyria (v5-7) and immediately worked (v8,9). But Hezekiah may not have seen this — possibly all Hezekiah saw was another threat from Assyria. It required faith that the Lord was acting according to His word.
- ***Satan will deeply tempt our faith*** — another alternative is that Hezekiah did know of the Egyptian threat and had watched the Assyrian envoy depart. What a shock to see them return with even more arrogant words! It has been shown in recent years the effect of relaxing stress, then restoring stress has on people. Prisoners have broken by being treated well and having some of their freedoms restored only to have the harshest pressures restored and their freedoms removed again. The captive relaxed and could not then restore his resistance. Possibly the same was true of Hezekiah.
- ***prayer is not based on our righteousness nor mitigating circumstances but on the character of God*** — nowhere in his prayer (v16-20) does Hezekiah claim he deserves to be helped nor protests of his circumstances.
- ***prayer should be God-centered*** — Hezekiah's main concern was for the glory of God (v20). *Often our prayers is merely a list of our 'wants' rather than 'hallowed be Thy name' – 'let Your will be done on earth as in heaven'. "How often the outcome of our lives and our praying might be different if we focused first upon God's glory and upon his reputation, believing that all would be well with us if his name was well served (Matt 6:33). All too often our well-being is the end and God is only a means to that end."* [Oswalt, Isaiah]

Isaiah's Pronouncement (37:21-35)

Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is the word the LORD has spoken against him: The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises and mocks you. The Daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee. Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice

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: 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. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and

And Isaiah son of Amoz sendeth unto Hezekiah, saying, 'Thus said Jehovah, God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed unto me concerning Sennacherib king of Asshur — this [is] the word that Jehovah spake concerning him: Trampled on thee, laughed at thee, Hath the virgin daughter of Zion, Behind thee shaken the head hath the daughter of Jerusalem. Whom hast thou reproached and reviled? And against whom lifted up the voice? Yea, thou dost lift up on

and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel! By your messengers you have heaped insults on the Lord. And you have said, 'With my many chariots I have ascended the heights of the mountains, the utmost heights of Lebanon. I have cut down its tallest cedars, the choicest of its pines. I have reached its remotest heights, the finest of its forests. I have dug wells in foreign lands and drunk the water there. With the soles of my feet I have dried up all the streams of Egypt.' Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone. Their people, drained of power, are dismayed and put to shame. They are like plants in the field, like tender green shoots, like grass sprouting on the roof, scorched before it grows up. But I know where you stay and when you come and go and how you rage against me. Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came. This will be the sign for you, O Hezekiah: This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat

lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. 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. I have digged, and drunk water; and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of the besieged places. 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 shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps. 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. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. 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. And this shall be a sign unto thee, 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

high thine eyes Against the Holy One of Israel. By the hand of thy servants Thou hast reviled the Lord, and sayest: In the multitude of my chariots I have come up to a high place of hills, The sides of Lebanon, And I cut down the height of its cedars, The choice of its firs, And I enter the high place of its extremity, The forest of its Carmel. I — I have dug and drunk waters, And I dry up with the sole of my steps All floods of a bulwark. Hast thou not heard from afar? — it I did, From days of old — that I formed it. Now, I have brought it in, And it is to make desolate, Ruinous heaps — fenced cities, And their inhabitants are feeble-handed, They were broken down, and are dried up. They have been the herb of the field, And the greenness of the tender grass, Grass of the roofs, And blasted corn, before it hath risen up. And thy sitting down, and thy going out, And thy coming in, I have known, And thy anger towards Me. Because of thy anger towards Me, And thy noise — it came up into Mine ears, I have put My hook in thy nose, And My bridle in thy lips, And I have caused thee to turn back In the way in which thou camest. — And this to thee [is] the sign, Food of the year [is] self-sown grain, And in the second year the spontaneous growth, And in the third year, sow ye and reap, And plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. And it hath continued — the escaped Of the house of Judah

their fruit. Once more a remnant of the house of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city, declares the LORD. I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant! (NIV)

fruit thereof. And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward: For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. 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. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. (KJV)

that hath been left — To take root beneath, And it hath made fruit upward. For from Jerusalem goeth forth a remnant, And an escape from mount Zion, The zeal of Jehovah of Hosts doth this. Therefore, thus said Jehovah, Concerning the king of Asshur: He doth not come in unto this city, Nor doth he shoot there an arrow, Nor doth he come before it [with] shield, Nor doth he pour out against it a mount. In the way that he came, in it he turneth back, And unto this city he doth not come in, An affirmation of Jehovah, And I have covered over this city, To save it, for Mine own sake, And for the sake of David My servant.' (YLT)

THE FINAL WORD — Sennacherib had spoken to Hezekiah about the Lord, Hezekiah spoke to the Lord about Sennacherib, now the Lord speaks to Hezekiah concerning Sennacherib. It's the last account which matters. *“God has the final word on our nature and destiny. We may say what we wish about him; others may say what they wish about us; but it is what God says about you and me which is of ultimate importance.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

THE HELPLESS IS NOT HELPLESS WHILE THE LORD IS WITH THEM — The picture Isaiah presents in v22 is one of a prone maiden helpless before a swaggering rapist who in turn mocks her attacker. The Lord knew of Assyria's boasts (v23-25) and shocks Sennacherib by declaring all his victories are those which the Lord ordained (v26,27). Because of his arrogance and blasphemy, the Lord will turn Sennacherib back (v28,29). *“Therefore will I put my hook in thy nose* – This is a most striking expression, denoting the complete control which God had over the haughty monarch, and his ability to direct him as he pleased. The language is taken from the custom of putting a ring or hook in the nose of a wild animal for the purpose of governing and guiding it. The most violent animals may be thus completely governed, and this is often done with those animals that are fierce and untamable. The Arabs often pursue this course in regard to the camel; and thus have it under entire control. A similar image is used in respect to the king of Egypt (Ezek 29:4). The idea is, that God would control and govern the wild and ambitious spirit of the Assyrian, and that with infinite ease he could conduct him again to his own land.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

THE SIGN OF THE LORD'S DELIVERANCE — The sign given Hezekiah is not the sort which comes before the event in order to create faith but rather after the fact to demonstrate that the Lord indeed was the One to bring this to past. The sign was that during the present year the only grain which would grow was that which came up from seed spilled by accident. During the

next year only the plants which grew from the roots of the previous plants would be available. But during the third year life would return to normal with planting and harvesting. *“The general import of this saying is evidently that although the present state of siege had thoroughly disrupted the agricultural base of the economy, there would soon come a day when no trace of the Assyrian threat would remain.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] The best manner in which to explain this sign was that these events took place in the fall, the ‘first year’ when the only thing available was what gardeners call ‘volunteers’. The final deliverance however would not come in time for the next year’s planting meaning the only growth would be that from the previous year’s roots. But the next harvest would be normal, making the length of this prophecy possibly no longer than 15 months.

The Army of Assyria Destroyed (37:36-38)

Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning — there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king. (NIV)

Then the 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. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, 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. (KJV)

And a messenger of Jehovah goeth out, and smiteth in the camp of Asshur a hundred and eighty and five thousand; and [men] rise early in the morning, and lo, all of them [are] dead corpses. And journey, and go, and turn back doth Sennacherib king of Asshur, and dwelleth in Nineveh. And it cometh to pass, he is bowing himself in the house of Nisroch his god, and Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons have smitten him with the sword, and they have escaped to the land of Ararat, and Esar- Haddon his son reigneth in his stead. (YLT)

THE ASSYRIAN ARMY DESTROYED — There is nothing in this in these verses which indicate the Assyrian army was surrounding Jerusalem when the death angel worked; indeed the references in Isa 33:18 and Psalms 48 & 76 seem to indicate there was only a small brigade posted at Jerusalem that left when the main army was devastated. Herodotus makes a historical reference to this incident which speaks of a plague of mice when Assyria was at Pelusium at the edge of the Delta in Egypt, causing the army to return home. That area had a reputation for disease and perhaps the mice were symbolic of the pestilence which befell Assyria. Whether there is historical evidence of the event or not however, we accept the account as given by Isaiah and for the reasons stated by the Lord for the judgement.

THE DEATH OF SENNACHERIB — *“An interval of twenty years [681 BC] separates v. 37 and v. 38, but we get the impression that we are meant to understand Sennacherib's death as a further manifestation of divine judgment. His death at the hands of his own progeny is confirmed from Assyrian sources.... His death when at worship in a pagan shrine should be seen as further evidence of the main thesis of these two chapters that the God of Israel is the living and true God while all other deities are powerless.”* [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

“Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God.”

— Isaiah 37:20 NIV