



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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Outline of the Book of Isaiah

I. Isaiah's Warning of Judgment on Israel (1-39)

A. Judgement and Hope for Jerusalem (1-12)

B. Judgement and Hope for the Nations (13-27)

C. True Deliverance Is Found, Not in Egypt, But in the Lord (28-35)

D. The Lessons of History (36-39)

II. The Promise of Future Hope in the New Jerusalem (40-66)

The Lessons of History (Isaiah 36-39)

- One of the major questions that Isaiah has raised is throughout the book is this: Will the people of God put their trust in the **LORD** or in **other nations**?
- **Isaiah 7-12** showed the foolishness of **Ahaz** as he put **his** trust in **Assyria**.
- **Isaiah 13-27** showed that God is LORD and judge of **all** the nations.
- **Isaiah 28-35** showed the foolishness of the spiritually blind **Jewish people** and their leaders as they put their trust in **Egypt**.

The Lessons of History (Isaiah 36-39)

- After these lessons in trust, the test as to whether to trust the LORD or the nations is administered once again, this time to King Hezekiah.
- **Isaiah 36-39** is not just a historical appendix – These chapters are the *climax* of the whole argument of the book up to this point.
- Isaiah has asserted over and over that God can be trusted.
- But is that all just rhetoric? Are they just words that have no historical significance?
- No! Everything the prophet has said is true. The only question is whether anyone is listening or not.

The Lessons of History (Isaiah 36-39)

- The text of Isaiah 36:1-39:8 is *nearly identical* to the text of 2 Kings 18:13-20:21 with only *slight* variations – the most significant ones being:
 - Hezekiah’s surrender to the King of Assyria appears *only* in 2 Kings 18:14-16.
 - Hezekiah’s prayer is *only* in Isaiah 38:10-20
 - Only 2 Kings 18:17 mentions that the “*commanding general*” also came to speak at the gate of Jerusalem.
- It is impossible to know for sure whether Isaiah borrowed from 2 Kings, or visa versa – or whether both are drawn from a third source.
- But, as we have observed before when similar questions arose – it really doesn’t matter since it is all given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

The Lessons of History (Isaiah 36-39)

- Isaiah 36-39 can be divided into *three* major sections:
 - Isaiah 36-37 – In the *first* section, Hezekiah, reduced to helplessness before Assyria, turns to God and Jerusalem is delivered.
 - Isaiah 38 – In the *second* section, Hezekiah is again helpless, this time with an illness. He again turns to God and is restored.
 - Isaiah 39 – In the *third* section, Hezekiah has the opportunity to give glory to **God** in the presence of Babylon, but instead falls prey to the temptation to parade his *own* glory, with the result that the coming captivity to Babylon is announced.

The Lessons of History (Isaiah 36-39)

- Today we will begin looking at the first section (Isaiah 36-37) which starts off with Hezekiah and the city of Jerusalem being faced with an Assyrian army camped outside the city gates.
- A group of Assyria's three highest officials steps forward, one of whom is identified as the "*chief adviser*" to the King of Assyria.
- Standing outside the city gates, he proceeds to address three delegates sent by Hezekiah along with a number of citizens listening in as they sit on the city wall.
- Our text today will be Isaiah 36:1-10 which I have entitled: **The Chief Adviser's First Speech: No Salvation in Faith!**

The Chief Adviser's First Speech: No Salvation in Faith! (36:1-10)

36:1 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, King Sennacherib of Assyria marched up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. ² The king of Assyria sent his chief adviser from Lachish to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem, along with a large army. The chief adviser stood at the conduit of the upper pool that is located on the road to the field where they wash and dry cloth. ³ Eliakim son of Hilkiah, the palace supervisor, accompanied by Shebna the scribe and Joah son of Asaph, the secretary, went out to meet him.

The Chief Adviser's First Speech: No Salvation in Faith! (36:1-10)

36:4 The chief adviser said to them, "Tell Hezekiah: 'This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: "What is your source of confidence?"⁵ Your claim to have a strategy and military strength is just empty talk. In whom are you trusting, that you would dare to rebel against me?'⁶ Look, you must be trusting in Egypt, that splintered reed staff. If someone leans on it for support, it punctures his hand and wounds him. That is what Pharaoh king of Egypt does to all who trust in him!⁷ Perhaps you will tell me, 'We are trusting in the LORD our God.' But Hezekiah is the one who eliminated his high places and altars and then told the people of Judah and Jerusalem, 'You must worship at this altar.'

The Chief Adviser's First Speech: No Salvation in Faith! (36:1-10)

*36:8 Now make a deal with my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you 2,000 horses, provided you can find enough riders for them.
9 Certainly you will not refuse one of my master's minor officials and trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen. 10 Furthermore it was by the command of the LORD that I marched up against this land to destroy it. The LORD told me, "March up against this land and destroy it!"*

36:1 *In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, King Sennacherib of Assyria marched up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.*

- The events described here in “*the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign*” occurred in 701 BC
- By this time, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had been on his throne for about four years.
- Those four years had largely been spent putting down a number of revolts that had occurred subsequent to the death of his father, Sargon II.
- When nations to the east and south had been dealt with in an at least temporary fashion, the Assyrian emperor was ready to turn to the West.
- There Hezekiah, emboldened by promises of Egyptian aid and perhaps also by Babylonian encouragement, was spearheading a revolt against Assyria in the small states west and south of Samaria.

^{36:1} *In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, **King Sennacherib of Assyria** marched up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.*

- The Assyrian army struck first at the city of Sidon
- From that point it worked its way southward, devouring opponent after opponent until the Egyptian army finally made a stand about twenty miles west of Jerusalem.
- There Isaiah's prophecies concerning the foolishness of dependence upon Egypt (20:1-6; 30:1-5; 31:1-3) proved ***painfully*** true.
- The Egyptians were ***routed*** and the Assyrians continued on to Lachish, Judah's last hope for stemming the tide.
- Once Lachish's fate was sure, Jerusalem would have no choice but to surrender, much as does the chess player who has lost his last rook.

Sennacherib's Route to Jerusalem



^{36:2} *The king of Assyria sent his chief adviser from Lachish to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem, along with a large army. The chief adviser stood at the conduit of the upper pool that is located on the road to the field where they wash and dry cloth.*

- As the siege of “*Lachish*” was drawing to a successful close (from an Assyrian perspective), Sennacherib decided that it was time to put pressure on the now isolated King Hezekiah.
- The account in 2 Kings tells us that he sent his **three** highest officials, “*his commanding general, the chief eunuch, and the chief adviser*”, with a substantial military force to demand Hezekiah’s surrender (2 Kings 18:17).
- The “*chief adviser*” may have been the king’s personal advisor (cf. Nehemiah’s position, Neh 1:11).
- If so, this would explain why it is **this** person who speaks, and not the “*commanding general*”.

^{36:2} *The king of Assyria sent his chief adviser from Lachish to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem, along with a large army. The chief adviser stood at **the conduit of the upper pool** that is located on the road to the field where they wash and dry cloth.*

- *“The conduit of the upper pool”* is the place where Isaiah met Ahaz as he was surveying *his* defenses (Isaiah 7:3).
- Now the representatives of the Assyrian horde which Isaiah foretold (Isaiah 7:17-19) are standing on this very same spot!
- Given the preciousness of water in any siege, the decision of the Assyrians to make their threat at that point may have had a symbolic purpose as well.

^{36:3} *Eliakim* son of Hilkiah, *the palace supervisor*, accompanied by *Shebna the scribe* and *Joah* son of Asaph, the secretary, went out to meet him.

- Three Judean officers were sent out to meet the enemy.
- None of these were a military men; they all came from the civilian side of the royal cabinet.
- It is interesting to note that this verse confirms one part of Isaiah's prophecy concerning "*Shebna*" and "*Eliakim*" (22:20-23), for Eliakim is now "*the palace supervisor*", while Shebna has been demoted to the lower position of "*scribe*".
- The third official, "*Joah*", seems to have had the position of intermediary between king and people.

36:4 *The chief adviser* said to them, “Tell **Hezekiah**: ‘This is what the **great king, the king of Assyria**, says: “What is your source of **confidence**?’”

- Without any diplomatic niceties, the “*chief adviser*” gets right to the point.
- He bluntly bypasses the Judean emissaries and addresses himself to “*Hezekiah*”, whom he *refuses* to call king.
- Clearly, this is not a *request* but an *ultimatum*.
- The chief adviser’s refusal acknowledge Hezekiah as *king* stems from his belief that Hezekiah’s kingship is *nothing* in comparison to the splendor of “*the great king... of Assyria*”
- How could a “nobody” *dare* to stand up to one who contained in himself the splendor of all earthly authority?
- In essence, the “*chief adviser’s*” blunt opening question is “What on earth gives you the “*confidence*” to make such an obviously foolish and rash decision, Hezekiah?”

36:5 *Your claim to have a strategy and military strength is just **empty talk**. In whom are you trusting, that you would dare to rebel against me?*

- In essence, the “*chief adviser*” is saying here is that when it comes to war, “*empty talk*” will not get the job done – but that’s really all you have, Hezekiah!
- You have risked the wrath of Assyria while having no support at all.
- The Assyrian proceeds to show why he believes that *any* argument which might be given to justify their rebellion against Assyria is just a bunch of hot air.

^{36:6} *Look, you must be trusting in **Egypt**, that **splintered reed staff**. If someone leans on it for support, it punctures his hand and wounds him. That is what Pharaoh king of Egypt does to all who trust in him!*

- His first argument is meant to undermine any confidence they might have in “*Egypt*” coming to their aid.
- His description of Egypt is similar to descriptions given by Isaiah himself:
 - *Egypt will not be able to do a thing... at that time the Egyptians will be like women. They will tremble and fear... (19:15-16)*
 - *Egypt is totally incapable of helping (30:7)*
- He says that Egypt is a “*splintered reed staff*” which not only *can't help* the one who leans on it, but is actually *hazardous* to anyone who tries to do so.

^{36:6} **Look, you must be trusting in Egypt, that splintered reed staff. If someone leans on it for support, it punctures his hand and wounds him. That is what Pharaoh king of Egypt does to all who trust in him!**

- As their forefathers had once trusted Assyria, their worst enemy, to defeat Syria and Ephraim, so this generation trusted in Egypt, which had neither strength nor Judah's best interests at heart.
- Sometimes it is only our enemies who see the true folly of our behavior.
- The people who refused to receive the godly instruction of *Isaiah* are now forced to listen to the *same* instruction from the boastful lips of their *enemy*.

^{36:7} Perhaps you will tell me, 'We are **trusting in the LORD** our God.' But Hezekiah is the one who eliminated his high places and altars and then told the people of Judah and Jerusalem, 'You must worship at this altar.'

- Before proceeding further with his attack on their trust in Egypt, the chief adviser apparently feels it necessary to demolish the hope of **another** group of hearers who might dismiss his remarks about Egypt by saying that they are "**trusting in the LORD**".
- To them his response shows the care with which the Assyria kept track of events in countries under their dominion.
- Hezekiah's destruction of the worship centers outside Jerusalem must have seemed like a colossal blunder to the idolatrous and polytheistic Assyrians.

36:7 Perhaps you will tell me, 'We are trusting in the LORD our God.' But Hezekiah is the one who eliminated his high places and altars and then told the people of Judah and Jerusalem, 'You must worship at this altar.'

- For them, the more places at which their god was worshiped, the more chance they had of getting their god to listen to them.
- To limit the worship to one place could only lessen its power and possibly infuriate their god.
- It is likely that the Assyrians also knew that a substantial number of Israelites felt the same way.

^{36:7} *Perhaps you will tell me, 'We are trusting in the LORD our God.' But Hezekiah is the one who eliminated his high places and altars and then told the people of Judah and Jerusalem, 'You must worship at this altar.'*

- Even years later, during the ministry of Jeremiah, many Judeans will **still** regret being prevented from sacrificing to their false gods:
 - *We will not listen to what you claim the Lord has spoken to us! Instead we will do everything we vowed we would do. We will sacrifice and pour out drink offerings to the goddess called the Queen of Heaven just as we and our ancestors, our kings, and our leaders previously did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well off, and had no troubles. But ever since we stopped sacrificing and pouring out drink offerings to the Queen of Heaven, we have been in great need. Our people have died in wars or of starvation. (Jer 44:16-18)*
- So the Assyrian officer's confident assertion probably touched a raw nerve of doubt with many of the people.

36:8 Now make a deal with my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you 2,000 horses, provided you can find enough riders for them. ⁹ Certainly you will not refuse one of my master's minor officials and trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen.

- Having put any alternate views in doubt, the challenger now returns to the Egyptian question.
- Little Judah had never had the wealth or the manpower to assemble a significant army of chariots and cavalry.
- The Assyrian knows this, and offers, with sneering sarcasm, to meet the Judeans halfway.

^{36:8} *Now make a deal with my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you **2,000 horses**, provided you can find enough riders for them. ⁹ Certainly you will not refuse one of my master's minor officials and trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen.*

- The Assyrians are so powerful, they can afford to give Judah “**2,000 horses**” and still easily conquer the little Palestinian country.
- Judah could not even put trained riders on their **own** horses, so what good is it to ask for Egyptian help?
- The fact is, with or without Egypt's aid, Judah is not strong enough to defy even the **lowest** of Sennacherib's underlings, **let alone** the great king himself.

^{36:10} *Furthermore it was by the command of the LORD that I marched up against this land to destroy it. The LORD told me, "March up against this land and destroy it!"*

- It isn't just Assyria's *strength* which will destroy Judah; it is her own God's will!
- It is not particularly surprising that the chief adviser would say this.
- Other evidence from the ancient Near East shows that it was not unusual for a conqueror to claim that his conquest was made possible because the god of those who had been defeated had joined the side of the conqueror.

^{36:10} *Furthermore it was by the command of the LORD that I marched up against this land to destroy it. The LORD told me, "March up against this land and destroy it!"*

- We don't know for sure whether the Assyrians were aware of Isaiah's claim that God would use the Assyrians to punish his people:
 - *So look, **the Lord is bringing** up against [these people] **the king of Assyria** and all his majestic power. (8:7)*
 - ***Beware, Assyria**, the club I use to vent my anger, a cudgel with which I angrily punish... **I ordered him to attack the people with whom I was angry**, to take plunder and to carry away loot, to trample them down like dirt in the streets. (10:5-6)*
- But the **Jews** were aware, and the chief adviser's echoing of the prophet's words must have given them a feeling of utter hopelessness.

Next Time

I plan to look at the Chief Adviser's *second* speech in **Isaiah 36:11-22** where he *directly* addresses the people sitting on the wall.

Class Discussion Time



Class Discussion Time

- Today we have seen an enemy of God “getting in the face” of the citizens of Jerusalem and ridiculing them with seemingly irrefutable arguments, sneering sarcasm, and great confidence.
- Have you ever been placed in a situation like this in your Christian life – or maybe seen other Christians subjected to such an attack?
- If so, tell us what you saw and how you think it went versus maybe how you *wish* it might have gone.