



# 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)

A. The Deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria (36-37)

B. Hezekiah's Sickness and Recovery (38)

C. A Visit From the Envoys of Babylon (39)

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

# The Deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria (36-37)

- This section unfolds as follows:
  - The Assyrian Chief Adviser Addresses Hezekiah Through His Envoys (36:1-10)
  - The Assyrian Chief Adviser Appeals to the People of Jerusalem Sitting on the Wall (36:11-20)
  - Reactions to the Assyrian Ultimatum (36:21-37:7)
  - The King of Assyria's Letter to Hezekiah (37:8-13)
  - Hezekiah's Prayer (37:14-20)
  - The LORD's Response to the Prayer of Hezekiah (37:21-35)
  - The LORD Destroys the Assyrian Army (37:36-38)

# Reactions to the Assyrian Ultimatum (36:21-37:7)

- Isaiah now gives us the response to the Assyrian ultimatum:
  - First on the part of the people (36:21)
  - Then from the royal officials (36:22)
  - Next from the king (37:1-4)
  - And finally from Isaiah himself on behalf of the LORD (37:5-7)

# Reactions to the Assyrian Ultimatum (36:21-37:7)

*36:21 They were silent and did not respond, for the king had ordered, “Don’t respond to him.”*

*22 Eliakim son of Hilkiah, the palace supervisor, accompanied by Shebna the scribe and Joah son of Asaph, the secretary, went to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and reported to him what the chief adviser had said. <sup>37:1</sup>*

*When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went to the LORD’s temple.*

# Reactions to the Assyrian Ultimatum (36:21-37:7)

*37:2 Eliakim the palace supervisor, Shebna the scribe, and the leading priests, clothed in sackcloth, sent this message to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz: <sup>3</sup> “This is what Hezekiah says: ‘This is a day of distress, [rebuke], and humiliation, as when a baby is ready to leave the birth canal but the mother lacks the strength to push it through. <sup>4</sup> Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all these things the chief adviser has spoken on behalf of his master, the king of Assyria, who sent him to taunt the living God. When the LORD your God hears, perhaps he will punish him for the things he has said. So pray for this remnant that remains.’”*

# Reactions to the Assyrian Ultimatum (36:21-37:7)

*37:5 When King Hezekiah's servants came to Isaiah, <sup>6</sup> Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master this: 'This is what the LORD has said: "Don't be afraid because of the things you have heard—these insults the king of Assyria's servants have hurled against me. <sup>7</sup> Look, I will take control of his mind; he will receive a report and return to his own land. I will cut him down with a sword in his own land.'"*

36:21 ***They were silent** and did not respond, for the king had ordered, “Don’t respond to him.”*

- If the chief adviser had been anticipating that his speech would cause the immediate collapse of morale in Jerusalem, he was to be disappointed.
- When it says “***They were silent***” we’re not told whom “*they*” refers to.
- From the context in Isaiah, it would *appear* to be the courtiers, but 2 Kings 18:36 makes it clear that the *people as a whole* were silent: “***The people were silent and did not respond, for the king had ordered, “Don’t respond to him.”***”



36:21 *They were silent and did not respond, for the king had ordered, "Don't respond to him."*

- By respecting his order to remain silent, the people demonstrated their ***loyalty*** to Hezekiah in these trying circumstances.
- ***Inwardly*** the chief adviser's speech may have made them less sure about their trust in their king and their God, but ***outwardly*** they would show no sign of that.
- Hezekiah's ***foresight*** in issuing such instructions show that he ***anticipated*** that such an appeal would be made by the Assyrians to the rank and file members of the community.

<sup>36:22</sup> *Eliakim son of Hilkiah, the palace supervisor, accompanied by Shebna the scribe and Joah son of Asaph, the secretary, went to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and reported to him what the chief adviser had said.*

- Once the courtiers were out of sight of the chief adviser, they torn their clothes out of personal bewilderment and as a public sign of distress and grief.
- Being pious men, their anxiety would have been intensified by the **arrogant attitude** of their enemy towards the LORD.
- Still, they had their duty to do, and so with heavy hearts they reported what had occurred to Hezekiah.
- It was then up to the **king** to decide what the nation would do in these dire circumstances.

37:1 *When King Hezekiah heard this, he **tore his clothes, put on sackcloth**, and went to the LORD's temple.*

- Hezekiah showed that he *shared* the dismay of his envoys, and he too “*tore his clothes*”.
- In fact, he went even *further* and “*put on sackcloth*”, a coarse fabric worn next to the skin as a sign of mourning or repentance for sin.
- Hezekiah recognized that, as king, he was *ultimately* responsible for the disaster that had befallen the nation.
- By dressing in this way and then going to the temple, he was publicly *confessing* that he had misdirected the people.
- Though Hezekiah had a genuine trust in the LORD, his desire to be free from Assyrian domination had led him to shape his foreign policy without regard to the LORD and the advice that he gave through Isaiah.

<sup>37:1</sup> *When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and **went to the LORD's temple.***

- But now with genuine grief and humiliation Hezekiah turns in repentance to the LORD, who alone could help in such dire straits.
- We are not told exactly what he did when he “*went to the LORD's temple*”, but he no doubt offered sacrifice for his sin and brought the nation's situation before God in prayer, asking for divine intervention.
- Perhaps something like Solomon expressed it in his prayer of dedication for the temple: “*Respond to the request of your servant and your people Israel for this place. Hear from inside your heavenly dwelling place and respond favorably.*” (1 Kings 8:30)

<sup>37:2</sup> *Eliakim* the palace supervisor, *Shebna* the scribe, and *the leading priests, clothed in sackcloth*, sent this message to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz:

- In his desire for divine guidance Hezekiah also sent a high ranking group to Isaiah to seek his assistance.
- Note this is in *marked contrast* to Ahaz's reaction to the crisis that *he* faced.
- In *that* situation, it was *Isaiah* who had to seek out the *king* (7:3).
- The civil advisers, "*Eliakim*" and "*Shebna*", had of course, been involved in meeting with the chief adviser, and they were joined by a group of "*leading priests*".
- The fact that they came to Isaiah "*clothed in sackcloth*" indicates the utter desperation of the Jerusalem establishment and the bankruptcy of the policies that the ruling elite had favored.

<sup>37:3</sup> “This is what Hezekiah says: ‘This is a day of **distress**, [**rebuke**], **and humiliation**, as when a baby is ready to leave the birth canal but the mother lacks the strength to push it through.’

- The envoys then relayed King Hezekiah’s message to the Isaiah.
- In his message, Hezekiah sums up the nation’s predicament using **three** words:
  - “**distress**” which describes a situation of **external** danger that results in **internal** anxiety.
  - “[**rebuke**]” points to the LORD’s **displeasure** with the conduct of Judah and her king.
  - “**humiliation**” because they had formerly enjoyed divine favor, but now their forgetfulness of the LORD and their failure to honor him has resulted in the LORD’s **rejection** of them.

<sup>37:3</sup> *“This is what Hezekiah says: ‘This is a day of distress, [rebuke], and humiliation, as when a baby is ready to leave the birth canal but the mother lacks the strength to push it through.’*

- This description makes very clear that Hezekiah realizes that this is more than just a political and military crisis.
- At root, it was a crisis of *faith*.
- It also shows that the king’s *primary* concern was not for his own future, but that of his people.
- He uses a proverbial saying to compare their situation to that of a woman about to give birth but who lacks strength for delivery.
- It is a picture of a life-threatening crisis that requires immediate assistance.

<sup>37:3</sup> *“This is what Hezekiah says: ‘This is a day of distress, [rebuke], and humiliation, as when a baby is ready to leave the birth canal but the mother lacks the strength to push it through.*”

- The nation is faced with a situation that it does not have the resources to cope with, and it is a state of affairs that requires immediate intervention.
- Ruin and death stare them in the face.
- Prayer and confession of their sin is not enough.
- The situation requires diving action because they are *utterly helpless*.



37:4 **Perhaps** the LORD your God will hear all these things the chief adviser has spoken on behalf of his master, the king of Assyria, who sent him to taunt the living God. When the LORD your God hears, **perhaps** he will punish him for the things he has said. So pray for this remnant that remains.”

- “**Perhaps**” – Hezekiah realizes that he is in no position to demand **anything** from God.
- Not just because God is sovereign and Hezekiah is a mere creature, but also because, up to this point, Hezekiah has not led the nation to trust God as he should have.
- None of this is to deny the biblical witness that Hezekiah was a good king. (e.g. 2 Chron 31:20)
- Probably it was his tender heart which **led** him to this kind of repentance. (It is hard to see Ahaz doing **anything** like this.)
- But it is to say that even **good** men have “feet of clay”.

<sup>37:4</sup> **Perhaps** the LORD your **God will hear** all these things the chief adviser has spoken on behalf of his master, the king of Assyria, who sent him to taunt the living God. When **the LORD your God hears**, perhaps he will punish him for the things he has said. So pray for this remnant that remains.

- “*Perhaps... God will hear*”. The issue here is not **awareness**, but **action**.
- As the latter part of the verse indicates, the king has no doubt that God “heard” the Assyrian’s blasphemous words.
- The issue is whether God will choose to **take action** against Assyria for this particular affront.
- Will the Judge “*hear*” the case?
- Hezekiah prays that he will!

<sup>37:4</sup> *Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all these things the chief adviser has spoken on behalf of his master, the king of Assyria, who sent him to taunt the living God. When the LORD your God hears, perhaps he will punish him for the things he has said. So pray for this remnant that remains.*

- It is of great significance that both here and in the next incident, Hezekiah's greatest concern is the honor of God.
- This is surely a testimony to the essential greatness of Hezekiah's heart.
- He is not first concerned with his or his nation's survival.
- He is chiefly concerned that their actions have provided the vehicle whereby God's name has been brought into contempt.
- Furthermore, he **knows** that if the nation put make God's glory their highest priority, then they **will** survive.
- It was the putting of their own survival **ahead** of God's glory which had gotten them **into** this situation.

<sup>37:4</sup> Perhaps the LORD **your God** will hear all these things the chief adviser has spoken on behalf of his master, the king of Assyria, who sent him to taunt the living God. When the LORD your God hears, perhaps he will punish him for the things he has said. So pray for this remnant that remains.

- When Hezekiah speaks of “**your God**”, he is not denying that he has personal relationship with the LORD.
- Isaiah not only stands in a closer relationship with God by virtue of his office as **prophet**, but by his obedience he has **maintained** that relationship in a way that the king and his advisers have **not**.
- The king is aware that, from one perspective at least, had God been truly his, as he claimed, he would have been more careful of God’s honor.
- So here, in shame, Hezekiah testifies that if God **does** help them it will **not** be because he, the king, has some special claim upon God.

<sup>37:4</sup> Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all these things the chief adviser has spoken on behalf of his master, the king of Assyria, who sent him to taunt **the living God**. **When the LORD your God hears, perhaps he will punish him for the things he has said.** So pray for this remnant that remains.

- However Hezekiah knows the LORD is “*the living God*” who is not dependent upon his creatures for life, but has life in himself and imparts it to others.
- That’s the difference between the LORD and an idol: he can *respond* to what happens on earth.
- And what has happened is that the LORD has been openly ridiculed and defiantly mocked by the Assyrian king through his representative in a way that is reminiscent of the taunting of Goliath, the Philistine champion (1 Sam 17:26,36).
- It is Hezekiah’s prayer that the Assyrians will be appropriately punished for their arrogant boasts.

<sup>37:4</sup> *Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all these things the chief adviser has spoken on behalf of his master, the king of Assyria, who sent him to taunt the living God. When the LORD your God hears, perhaps he will punish him for the things he has said. **So pray for this remnant that remains.***

- The king then requests that Isaiah to “*pray for this **remnant that remains***”.
- His focus here is on the slaughter that has already taken place throughout the land, and the fact that only a small portion is left alive in Jerusalem.

<sup>37:5</sup> *When King Hezekiah's servants came to Isaiah, <sup>6</sup> Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master this: 'This is what the LORD has said: "**Don't be afraid because of the things you have heard**—these insults the king of Assyria's servants have hurled against me.*

- Despite the prevailing atmosphere of turmoil and despair, Isaiah responds with calm deliberation and points the king to the promises of God.
- Isaiah's advice to Hezekiah is the same advice he had given to Ahaz (cf. Isaiah 7:4): "*Don't be afraid.*"
- In other words, the magnitude of the human threat is really not the issue.
- Whether it be the neighboring countries or the emperor of the world, God is greater, and that being so, we do not need to live in fear.
- So, although *Hezekiah* was concerned as to whether God would "*hear*" the blasphemy, *God* was concerned that Hezekiah had "*heard*" it and become frightened.

<sup>37:7</sup> *Look, I will take control of his mind; he will **receive a report** and **return to his own land**. I will cut him down with a sword in his own land.*

- “*Look*” directs attention *away* from Assyrian behavior and *to* the LORD’s control of events.
- The LORD will intervene by directing the mind of the king of Assyria to respond to events in whatever way the LORD desires.
- It is predicted here that Sennacherib will “*receive a report*” – either an intelligence briefing produced by his spies or else just a rumor.
- But the news is going to induce him to “*return to his own land*”.



37:7 *Look, I will take control of his mind; he will receive a report and return to his own land. I will cut him down with a sword in his own land.*

- Although the next two verses (Isaiah 37:8-9) will tell that Sennacherib heard reports about the advance of the Egyptians, that does not seem to be what is referred to here.
- Because in response to *that* report, the Assyrians advanced to meet them, rather than retreating home ("*to his own land*").
- Nor is this a reference to the disaster that would later strike the Assyrian army.
- However, at some point the emperor will receive reports regarding the situation in some other part of his troubled empire, possibly Assyria itself, and at *that* point will consider it prudent to return home.

<sup>37:7</sup> *Look, I will take control of his mind; he will receive a report and return to his own land. **I will cut him down with a sword in his own land.***

- Furthermore, the LORD announces that Sennacherib will be cut down “*with a sword in his own land.*”
- He will not die of natural causes or, like his father, while conducting a military campaign in foreign territory.
- But the LORD will control events so that the emperor will meet a violent end where he would *least* expect it – in the seeming security of his own land (cf. 37:38).
- The fact that twenty years or more would elapse before this would occur is not mentioned here.
- What *Hezekiah* needed to grasp was that Sennacherib’s end would be dictated by the **LORD**.

# Next Time

I plan to look at a follow-up letter that the king of Assyria sent to Hezekiah and the prayer that Hezekiah prayed after receiving that letter – **Isaiah 37:8-20**.

# Class Discussion Time



# Class Discussion Time

- Imagine what it was like to be in Hezekiah's shoes. He is faced with a terrifying situation to which there seems to be no solution.
- He has the additional difficulty of knowing that, at least in part, he brought this situation on himself and on the nation.
- To his credit, he recognizes his transgression, and confesses the hand of God at work in the circumstances of the land.
- *More importantly he has been stirred once more to a right appreciation of the honor and majesty due the Lord, is concerned at the blasphemous words of his adversary, as well as the good of the remnant left in the land. Belatedly – but not too late – he has recovered his senses spiritually.*  
(John Mackey)
- Have you ever been faced with a crisis in your Christian life (perhaps one of your own making) to which there seemed to be no solution? How did you respond? What was the outcome?

# Class Discussion Time

- We see in today's text examples that show how outwardly demonstrative the ancient Jewish culture was when they had strong feelings of grief, anxiety, and/or fear.
- It seems to me that, in our culture, we tend not to have such outward demonstrations of emotion. Am I right about that? If so, is that a **good** thing?
- In our culture, how **do** we outwardly demonstrate strong feelings of this nature?