

Isaiah Chapter 37

Verses 1-13: Horrified by the demand of the Assyrians, Hezekiah “rent his clothes” (a sign of mourning), went into “the house of the Lord” (the temple), and sent for “Isaiah the prophet.” Recognizing that “this is a day of trouble,” the king went to “prayer” for the “remnant” of survivors within the besieged city. When Isaiah arrived, he spoke with great confidence, promising a miraculous deliverance by the Lord, who will send a “blast” (ruach, “spirit”), upon the invaders.

Thus, God promised to send a spirit of confusion upon the invaders by means of a “rumor” (report), of the advance of the Egyptians led by “Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia,” who was the most famous king of Egypt’s Twenty-fifth Dynasty. This may also explain why Sennacherib himself did not come to Jerusalem to demand its surrender.

Isaiah 37:1 "And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard [it], that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD."

“Rent ... Sackcloth”: A reaction that symbolized Hezekiah’s grief, repentance and contrition. The nation was to repent and the king was to lead the way.

“House of the Lord”: God designated the temple as His “house of prayer” (56:7; Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46), so it was the proper place to go to confess sins and seek forgiveness (Psalm 73:16-17).

In the last lesson, the 3 messengers had come back from meeting with the Assyrian with bad news. The Assyrians were threatening to take Judah.

When Hezekiah hears this bad news, he immediately goes into mourning. He tears his regular clothes from himself, and puts on sackcloth, the garment of mourning. He went to the temple to pray to the LORD.

Isaiah 37:2 "And he sent Eliakim, who [was] over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth, unto Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz."

These priests were senior religious leaders in Israel.

Again, Hezekiah sends these men to speak to the prophet, Isaiah, for him. They are all dressed in mourning clothes as well. Hezekiah was a humble man and probably sent them, thinking himself unworthy to speak directly to the prophet, Isaiah.

Hezekiah had great respect for the prophet of God, Isaiah.

Isaiah 37:3 "And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day [is] a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and [there is] not strength to bring forth."

“Come to birth ... not strength”: Hezekiah compared his dilemma with a mother in labor unable to deliver her child. Jerusalem had to be delivered, but he was helpless to make it happen.

The worst mistake Hezekiah had made, was putting his faith in Egypt for help. He was truly a servant of God however. Hezekiah felt in his heart this was a judgment of God against the land of Judah.

It appears that Hezekiah is saying that the words Rab-shakeh had spoken of the Lord were blasphemy. The statement about the birth above, is saying they are in trouble and cannot get themselves out of it.

Isaiah 37:4 "It may be the LORD thy God will hear the words of Rab-shakeh, 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."

“Reproach the living God”: Hezekiah received a report of Rab-shakeh’s belittling of the Lord by equating Him with other gods and points out the distinction between God who is living and gods who are lifeless and helpless (40:18-20; 46:5-7).

“Remnant that is left”: Only Jerusalem remained unconquered. Hezekiah asked Isaiah’s prayer for the city.

Hezekiah is pleading for Isaiah to pray to God for them. He reminds Isaiah that Rab-shakeh had spoken in error about God. Hezekiah says that the attack is against God's character, as well as against God's people.

Isaiah 37:5 "So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah."

The men Hezekiah sent, bring the message to Isaiah, as they had been commanded.

Isaiah 37:6 "And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me."

Isaiah is speaking in behalf of God here. He tells these messengers to tell Hezekiah not to be afraid. God has heard the statements the Assyrian made against God.

This is the same assurance Isaiah had given Ahaz (in 7:4).

Isaiah 37:7 "Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

This “blast” means a spirit. The Lord promised to incline Sennacherib’s attitude in such a way that he would leave Jerusalem unharmed and return home.

The blast that God puts on him will break his will to fight and he will return to Assyria. This rumor is started to get his mind on things at home. Perhaps, he heard someone was attacking his homeland, we do not know. He did believe it, and went back to Assyria.

It appears he will not be safe there. He will be driven through by a sword later and die.

Isaiah 37:8 "So Rab-shakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish."

This man who had insulted Hezekiah in every way he could, now knows that his own country is at war. Sennacherib had conquered Lachish, Nineveh, and Babylon.

After conquering Lachish, Sennacherib moved on to this smaller town to the North of Lachish.

Now he was fighting with Libnah. All of these were on the direct course to Egypt.

Isaiah 37:9 "And he heard say concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He is come forth to make war with thee. And when he heard [it], he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying,"

Ethiopia is another name for Cush. Tirhakah did not become king of Cush, or Ethiopia and Egypt (until 11 years after the 701 B.C. siege), so Isaiah’s use of the “king” anticipates his future title.

At that moment however, he represented a threat to Sennacherib from the South that caused him to renew his call for Jerusalem’s surrender to the North.

This Tirhakah was king of what is modern Ethiopia, and went on to be ruler in Egypt. It seems that Hezekiah had made his agreement with Tirhakah. The attack by him to help Hezekiah was not a real threat to Sennacherib, but rather a diversion.

Rab-shakeh immediately sends a message to Hezekiah about this.

Verses 10-13: The king of Assyria sent messengers to summarize the arguments given in Rabshakeh’s ultimatum (of 36:4-19).

Isaiah 37:10 "Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria."

The accusation of deception was first against Hezekiah (36:14), then against the Lord.

This insulting remark he makes is not just to Hezekiah, but to God as well. He is, in a sense, calling God a liar. It is a dangerous thing for anyone to boast against God.

Verses 11-13: The threat repeats the thrust of (36:18-20).

Isaiah 37:11 "Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered?"

The monuments these Assyrians left show that their intention was to rule the known world. They believed the false god Asshur was on their side, and they would win.

Isaiah 37:12-13 "Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, [as] Gozan, and Haran, and Rezepth, 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?"

The conquered cities mentioned here lay between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq).

The gods of the nations they had defeated were not the true God. They had no power to help them. They are now coming against the One True God, the God of Israel.

Verses 14-32: Hezekiah took the "letter" into the temple and "spread it before the Lord" as an act of his utter dependence upon God. In his prayer, he acknowledges that the "Lord of hosts" is the "God of Israel" who dwells "between the cherubim," where His glory was manifested on the Ark of the Covenant. In response to Hezekiah's prayer, God promises a divine reprieve of continued national prosperity when Judah will "take root downward, and bear fruit upward".

Isaiah 37:14 "And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD."

"House of the Lord": Godly Hezekiah returned to the house of the Lord as he should have, in contrast to Ahaz, who in a similar crisis refused even to ask for a sign from the Lord (7:11-12).

God already knew about the letter, but Hezekiah is not aware of that fact. He takes the letter to the temple and shows it to God. This in a sense, is just bringing God's attention to the matter.

It was very important for Hezekiah to come to show the letter to God. It shows that Hezekiah has faith in God to punish them for this.

Isaiah 37:15-16 "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."

In this, Hezekiah states his unfailing belief in God. Notice "the God". This shows that Hezekiah believes in no other God. In the tabernacle in the wilderness and in the temple in Jerusalem, God's presence was in the Holy of Holies. In fact, the presence was over the mercy seat. He even recognizes the fact that God created the earth and all that is in it.

The Egyptians, at this time, believed in something very similar to what we call evolution. Sennacherib believed each country had its own god. The Hebrews believed in One God. This statement lets God know that Hezekiah has not picked up the beliefs of the Egyptians.

Isaiah 37:17 "Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God."

“Hear ... see ... hear”: In contrast to the gods of other nations (Psalm 115:4-7), the God of Israel heard and saw all.

Hezekiah realizes that his only hope is in God. In the physical sense, Hezekiah cannot win. He reminds God that this Sennacherib is not only threatening him, but God as well. He is actually ridiculing the God of Hezekiah.

We will see in the next lesson just how dangerous it is to come against the Living God.

Isaiah Chapter 37 Questions

1. What effect did the message Hezekiah received have on him?
2. What was the bad news?
3. What is the garment of mourning?
4. What prophet of God did Hezekiah send the message to?
5. What was the worst mistake Hezekiah had made?
6. What did Hezekiah believe in his heart this attack was?
7. Who had the Assyrians sent to bring their message?
8. What does Hezekiah want Isaiah to do?
9. What encouragement did Isaiah give to Hezekiah?

10. What will God send upon the Assyrians?
11. What will cause the Assyrians to leave for their own country?
12. What did Rab-shakeh find when he got home?
13. What 3 places had Sennacherib already conquered?
14. Where was Tirhakah king?
15. What does he call Hezekiah's God in verse 10?
16. What had Assyria done to the other countries around them?
17. What was Assyria's intention?
18. Who does he mention that they have already destroyed?
19. What was the difference in their god and Judah's God?
20. What did Hezekiah do with the threatening letter?
21. What does this show that Hezekiah has?
22. What is Hezekiah stating in his prayer?
23. Where had God's presence been in the temple?
24. What did the Egyptians believe at this time?
25. Hezekiah had not picked up the beliefs of the _____.
26. What will we learn in the next lesson?