

## Isaiah 37-39

- Tonight we finish First Isaiah and the story of Hezekiah
  - At the end of 36, the Assyrian commander has made his threats against Hezekiah's representatives
    - He declares that the city will be emptied of its people
    - And he induces a panicked silence among the city
  - Now the scene moves to Hezekiah himself

[Is. 37:1](#) ¶ And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the LORD.

[Is. 37:2](#) Then he sent Eliakim who was over the household with Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz.

[Is. 37:3](#) They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of distress, rebuke and rejection; for children have come to birth, and there is no strength to deliver.

[Is. 37:4](#) 'Perhaps the LORD your God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. Therefore, offer a prayer for the remnant that is left.'"

[Is. 37:5](#) ¶ So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.

[Is. 37:6](#) Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master, 'Thus says the LORD, 'Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me.

[Is. 37:7](#) 'Behold, I will put a spirit in him so that he will hear a rumor and return to his own land. And I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.'"

- As Hezekiah hears the news from the wall, he realizes the hopelessness of the situation
  - His plans to rely on Egypt to repel the Assyrians have obviously failed
  - And now the Assyrians are knocking on Jerusalem's walls in anger for Israel's rebellion
    - As a show of mourning and distress, he tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth, a rough materials intended to reflect mourning
  - Then he sends his diplomatic representatives to Isaiah

- Remember, Isaiah was the one who warned the nation not to seek an alliance with Egypt or else it would come back against them
- So Hezekiah now seems to be ready to admit his mistake and seek Isaiah's counsel and the Lord's mercy
- Hezekiah describes the day as a day of distress, rebuke and rejection
  - The rebuke and rejection refers to God's apparent rebuke of Hezekiah and rejection of the people in their disobedience
  - So we could call his words a statement of repentance
- Hezekiah asks Isaiah to seek the Lord's mercy
  - But not on the basis of the nation's merit
  - But on God's willingness to defend His own honor before the Assyrians
- Isaiah replies that God has a plan, so don't be afraid
  - God will send a spirit to the king of Assyria, causing him to think that there is a rebellion back home
    - Here we see clear evidence of God molding the thoughts and desires of men to suit His purposes
  - When the king hears this report, he will return to his land and die by the sword

[Is. 37:8](#) ¶ Then Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king had left Lachish.

[Is. 37:9](#) When he heard them say concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, "He has come out to fight against you," and when he heard it he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying,

[Is. 37:10](#) "Thus you shall say to Hezekiah king of Judah, 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'"

[Is. 37:11](#) 'Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, destroying them completely. So will you be spared?

[Is. 37:12](#) 'Did the gods of those nations which my fathers have destroyed deliver them, even Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar?

[Is. 37:13](#) 'Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, and of Hena and Ivvah?'"

- Rabshekah, the commander of the army, has to return to the King of Assyria empty handed
  - He wasn't able to persuade the city of Jerusalem to surrender
    - Jerusalem was a major city with some of the best defenses in the world
    - So the Assyrians didn't look forward to a siege of the city
  - Rabshekah finds the king of Assyria fighting in the Shephelah
    - Libnah was about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem
    - Lachish was about 7.5 miles further southwest
      - So the King has already defeated Lachish and was in the process of defeating Libnah when he receives Rabshekah
  - Then in verse 9 we see the moment when the king hears a rumor that draws him away from the battle at Jerusalem
    - Tirhakah, the king of Ethiopia is preparing to attack Nineveh necessitating Sennacherib's return to defend the city
      - There is no such attack coming, and 20 years later the king is assassinated in his temple as he prayed to his pagan god
- Meanwhile, as he prepares to leave for Nineveh, Sennacherib writes his own letter to Hezekiah attempting to gain his surrender
  - This letter carried by Rabshekah conveys much the same story as before
    - The other nations stood no chance of stopping the Assyrian armies
      - Their gods did them no good
      - So why should the Jewish God be any different?
        - He says that their God is deceiving them into believing they will survive

[Is. 37:14](#) ¶ Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD.

[Is. 37:15](#) Hezekiah prayed to the LORD saying,

[Is. 37:16](#) "O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

[Is. 37:17](#) "Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to all the words of Sennacherib, who sent them to reproach the living God.

[Is. 37:18](#) "Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have devastated all the countries and their lands,

[Is. 37:19](#) and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. So they have destroyed them.

[Is. 37:20](#) "Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, LORD, are God."

- Now to one of the most iconic scenes in all of Scripture
  - Many people who have never read Isaiah and no little else about Hezekiah has heard the account of how he takes this letter and spreads it out before the Lord
    - I dare say many Christians have probably repeated this scene in some form as they spread out an over due bill, or a medical report or some other bad news
      - Praying to the Lord for His protection or provision
  - But before we turn Hezekiah's actions into a ritual, let's examine the specifics of what he does and why
    - First, he goes to the house of the Lord, which would be the temple
      - His point is to seek the Lord, and in that day the Lord was found in the temple
      - He spreads the letter out and seeks the Lord's intervention
    - It's worth noting that this is what both His father and he himself should have done in the first place
      - Instead, they both sought their own counsel without ever seeking the Lord's
      - Now finally Hezekiah turns to the Lord
    - So the first thing to note about Hezekiah's approach is that he goes before the Lord seeking His counsel and intervention

- The second thing is Hezekiah's prayer is a prayer of repentance, not merely petition
- In Isaiah's day, the Jewish people were under judgment first because an earlier leader, Ahaz, had rejected Isaiah's word from God concerning the Assyrians
  - And now they were under an even greater judgment because the present leader, Hezekiah, had entered into the covenant with Egypt
    - Rather than relying on the Lord
    - He compounded the errors of his father
  - But remember this entire story fortells the story of the Jews in the time of Tribulation
    - The Jewish people are already in a state of judgment because their leaders rejected God's prophet, the Christ, in an earlier day
    - In place of God's prophet, they listened to their corrupt leaders who called Jesus demon-possessed
  - Later in Tribulation, the Jews will compound this error by entering into the covenant with the enemy
    - And this will bring upon them the Tribulation judgments
- But there is another parallel building here as well
  - And we see the beginning of it here in this scene with Hezekiah
    - When the pressure of this greater judgment has it's full effect, the leader returns to the Lord
      - And in his repentant confession he retreats from the mistakes of his day and of his father's day
  - In v.16, Hezekiah says that God is God alone, above everything created
    - Then Hezekiah asks God to incline His ear to listen to the blasphemous words of the king of Assyria
      - The king was able to destroy so many other nations and the gods because those gods were not real
      - But this only made the opportunity all the better for the God of Israel

- The world would see that all the false gods had failed but the one true God could then be seen to succeed
- So Hezekiah calls for the Lord to hear his cry
  - This moment mirrors a similar moment in the future instance
    - The Jews call upon the name of Christ in the last day of Tribulation
    - Leading to His return
- God promised this outcome to Israel even back in His Law

[Lev. 26:40](#) ¶ If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me —

[Lev. 26:41](#) I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies — or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity,

[Lev. 26:42](#) then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.

- The call of the Jewish nation isn't merely one of their own mistakes, but it also acknowledges the mistakes of the "forefathers"
  - Much like the scene recorded in Zech 12 at the moment that the Jews in Jerusalem call upon the name of the Lord in their distress

[Zech. 12:10](#) ¶ "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

- Remember, these Jews are living many millennia after the death of Jesus
  - Yet their national confessions includes looking back at a past error committed by their forefathers and confessing that sin
    - Even though they themselves played no direct role in the error

- The parallel is easy to see...the final moment of confession includes a confession of their sins and the sins of their forefathers when they committed a similar offense against God
- For the final proof, consider the words of the confession spoken by the Tribulation Jews under siege in Jerusalem, captured in Psalm 79 & 80

[Psa. 79:5](#) How long, O LORD? Will You be angry forever?

Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

[Psa. 79:6](#) Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You,  
And upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Your name.

[Psa. 79:7](#) For they have devoured Jacob  
And laid waste his habitation.

[Psa. 79:8](#) ¶ Do not remember the iniquities of our forefathers against us;  
Let Your compassion come quickly to meet us,  
For we are brought very low.

[Psa. 79:9](#) Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name;  
And deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake.

- Notice that these Jews are under God's jealous anger
  - And they ask the Lord to pour His anger out against the nations that seek to destroy them
  - And they ask Him not to remember the sins of their forefathers
  - And to bring compassion instead
- And ultimately they ask for salvation and for Him to forgive their sins and deliver them
  - These are the words spoken by the Tribulation Jews which bring Christ back to rescue them
  - This is the national confession God described in Leviticus when He said that the nation could be saved in a future day
- In this moment in Isaiah, the same kind of comprehensive confession is happening
  - This is another link between the events of Hezekiah and the events of the future Israel in Tribulation
  - So Hezekiah's model in this famous scene is one of approaching God and declaring repentance
  - Followed by a call for God to defend His name and honor

- Now we get the response from God

[Is. 37:21](#) ¶ Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent word to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria,

[Is. 37:22](#) this is the word that the LORD has spoken against him:

"She has despised you and mocked you,  
The virgin daughter of Zion;  
She has shaken her head behind you,  
The daughter of Jerusalem!

[Is. 37:23](#) "Whom have you reproached and blasphemed?  
And against whom have you raised your voice  
And haughtily lifted up your eyes?  
Against the Holy One of Israel!

[Is. 37:24](#) "Through your servants you have reproached the Lord,  
And you have said, 'With my many chariots I came up to the heights of the mountains,  
To the remotest parts of Lebanon;  
And I cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypresses.  
And I will go to its highest peak, its thickest forest.

[Is. 37:25](#) 'I dug wells and drank waters,  
And with the sole of my feet I dried up  
All the rivers of Egypt.'

[Is. 37:26](#) " Have you not heard?  
Long ago I did it,  
From ancient times I planned it.  
Now I have brought it to pass,  
That you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps.

[Is. 37:27](#) "Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength,  
They were dismayed and put to shame;  
They were as the vegetation of the field and as the green herb,  
As grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up.

[Is. 37:28](#) "But I know your sitting down  
And your going out and your coming in  
And your raging against Me.

[Is. 37:29](#) "Because of your raging against Me  
And because your arrogance has come up to My ears,  
Therefore I will put My hook in your nose  
And My bridle in your lips,  
And I will turn you back by the way which you came.

[Is. 37:30](#) ¶ "Then this shall be the sign for you: you will eat this year what grows of itself, in the second year what springs from the same, and in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

[Is. 37:31](#) "The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward and bear fruit upward.

[Is. 37:32](#) "For out of Jerusalem will go forth a remnant and out of Mount Zion survivors. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."

[Is. 37:33](#) ¶ "Therefore, thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, 'He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield, or throw up a siege ramp against it.

[Is. 37:34](#) 'By the way that he came, by the same he will return, and he will not come to this city,' declares the LORD.

[Is. 37:35](#) 'For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'"

- God answered Hezekiah through Isaiah, the same way God tried to instruct Hezekiah the first time
  - The king's plans to take Israel will fail
    - Jerusalem will laugh at him ultimately
  - And he will fail because of his pride in assuming he was the one accomplishing all his military victories
    - Isaiah lists the many things that the king had taken credit for, when in reality, God was accomplishing the work through Assyria
  - In fact, God says in v.26 that He had purposed it from ancient times
    - From the beginning, even
  - So God says in v.29 that He will bring punishment upon Assyria
    - And they will return defeated
- In verse 30, Isaiah gives Judah a sign of confidence in God's word
  - The Jews are eating what grew on it's own this year and will do the same next year
    - Because the Assyrian invasion disrupted planting in the fields
      - And they will still need to eat what grew on it's own next year because this year's opportunity to plant was already gone
      - But in the third year, they could expect to plant and reap a harvest
      - Meaning life would return to normal

- In v.32, He promises that Israel will go forth from Zion under the Lord's protection
  - God promises that the king will not even begin his attack on the city
  - He will return the way he came and God will defend the city Himself for the sake of His servant David's sake
    - The reference to David means that God's promise that the throne of David would always have someone seated on it wouldn't fail
      - Until God's Son could arrive and assume the role of King, the throne of David would remain in Jerusalem

[Is. 37:36](#) ¶ Then the angel of the LORD went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead.

[Is. 37:37](#) So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh.

[Is. 37:38](#) It came about as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place.

- Now we see the events we've touched upon several times in the chapters leading up to this point
  - The Lord Himself destroys the army of Assyria
  - This happens after Sennacherib has departed to defend the rumored attack by Ethiopia
    - While he's gone, his army is wiped out
    - Based on the writings of the ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, the army was wiped out by bubonic plague spread by an invading horde of mice that descended upon the army in its camp
- With chapter 37 concluded, Isaiah now moves backward in time by a few months or years to present a prologue to these events
  - And in these two chapters, Isaiah creates a transition to Second Isaiah

- The restoration of Israel under Hezekiah is only temporary, as 38 & 39 will show
  - Leaving the reader wondering what can God do to finally bring Israel into the promises of restoration and glory

[Is. 38:1](#) ¶ In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'"

[Is. 38:2](#) Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, [Is. 38:3](#) and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

- The opening phrase "in those days" moves the narrative out of the immediate moment of Assyria's siege of Jerusalem but leaves it in about the same time
  - Hezekiah dies in 686 BC, and in this chapter we'll see that Hezekiah is told he will live 15 more years
    - So this would have happened in 701 BC
    - The Assyrian siege of Jerusalem also occurred in 701 BC
    - Bible scholars believe that chapters 38-39 occurred a few months prior to the events of chapters 36-37
  - Hezekiah is dying and God declares through Isaiah that this illness will kill Hezekiah
    - Set your house in order meant to create a will and assign a successor because at this point he has not children
  - After Isaiah leaves, Hezekiah prays to God for mercy
    - And the basis for his appeal is his own godly walk with God
    - 2Chron as it relates this same story affirms Hezekiah's self-assessment, that he was a man who walked closely with God even more so than his father David.

[Is. 38:4](#) ¶ Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying,

[Is. 38:5](#) "Go and say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, 'I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.

[Is. 38:6](#) "I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city.'"

[Is. 38:7](#) ¶ “This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that He has spoken:

[Is. 38:8](#) “Behold, I will cause the shadow on the stairway, which has gone down with the sun on the stairway of Ahaz, to go back ten steps.” So the sun’s shadow went back ten steps on the stairway on which it had gone down.

- The Lord’s response is couched in terms of David
  - He is the God of your father David
  - This designation tells us that the Lord is answering Hezekiah’s prayer on the basis of His promises to David never to leave the throne of David empty
    - For in those 15 years, Hezekiah will have sons and the line of David will be continued
      - Hezekiah’s son was 12 when he began ruling and Hezekiah died the year after
      - So the son was born after this moment
    - God also includes the promise to spare the city from Assyria
      - This gives further evidence that God’s purpose in acting is for the sake of David, the city and ultimately His Son’s future as King
  - But what does it say that God said one thing and then changed after Hezekiah prayed?
    - It seems similar to the way God prompted Abraham to pray after disclosing the fate of Sodom in Gen 18
    - Why did God let Hezekiah know that he would die? The only logical answer is so that Hezekiah would pray and seek God’s mercy
      - Mercy that He already intended to grant for the sake of David
      - Much like He granted Abraham the opportunity to pray for the Lot to be spared, which was always to be God’s plan
- Then God offers Hezekiah the opportunity to seek a sign of God’s faithfulness

- Remember that Hezekiah's father Ahaz was given a similar opportunity to ask for a sign, but he hypocritically refused to ask for one
  - God then gave him a sign against him
- We see the offer of a sign in 2Kings:

[2Kings 20:8](#) ¶ Now Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD the third day?"

[2Kings 20:9](#) Isaiah said, " This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten steps or go back ten steps?"

[2Kings 20:10](#) So Hezekiah answered, "It is easy for the shadow to decline ten steps; no, but let the shadow turn backward ten steps."

[2Kings 20:11](#) Isaiah the prophet cried to the LORD, and He brought the shadow on the stairway back ten steps by which it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.

- So in response to his request, God moves the shadow backward
  - Which prompts Hezekiah himself to speak in the text
  - The remaining verses are a psalm recounting the experience

[Is. 38:9](#) ¶ A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery:

[Is. 38:10](#) I said, " In the middle of my life  
I am to enter the gates of Sheol;  
I am to be deprived of the rest of my years."

[Is. 38:11](#) I said, "I will not see the LORD,  
The LORD in the land of the living;  
I will look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world.

[Is. 38:12](#) "Like a shepherd's tent my dwelling is pulled up and removed from me;  
As a weaver I rolled up my life.  
He cuts me off from the loom;  
From day until night You make an end of me.

[Is. 38:13](#) "I composed my soul until morning.  
Like a lion — so He breaks all my bones,  
From day until night You make an end of me.

[Is. 38:14](#) " Like a swallow, like a crane, so I twitter;  
I moan like a dove;  
My eyes look wistfully to the heights;  
O Lord, I am oppressed, be my security.

[Is. 38:15](#) ¶ " What shall I say?  
For He has spoken to me, and He Himself has done it;  
I will wander about all my years because of the bitterness of my soul.

[Is. 38:16](#) "O Lord, by these things men live,  
And in all these is the life of my spirit;  
O restore me to health and let me live!

[Is. 38:17](#) "Lo, for my own welfare I had great bitterness;  
It is You who has kept my soul from the pit of nothingness,  
For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

[Is. 38:18](#) "For Sheol cannot thank You,  
Death cannot praise You;  
Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your faithfulness.

[Is. 38:19](#) "It is the living who give thanks to You, as I do today;  
A father tells his sons about Your faithfulness.

[Is. 38:20](#) "The LORD will surely save me;  
So we will play my songs on stringed instruments  
All the days of our life at the house of the LORD."

[Is. 38:21](#) ¶ Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may recover."

[Is. 38:22](#) Then Hezekiah had said, "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?"

- Chiasitic structure
  - It begins with reference to the gates of Sheol and sorrow at the prospect of shortened days (v. 10),
  - And it ends with reference to the house of the Lord and joy at the prospect of lengthened days (v. 20).
  - The king began by referring to the land of the living being exchanged for the departed (v. 11)
  - And he ended with reference to the land of the departed exchanged for the land of the living (vv. 18-19).
  - In the middle, he contrasted God's hostility (vv. 12-14) with His restoration (vv. 15-17).
  - Hezekiah described his condition first (vv. 9-14), and then he praised God for His mercy (vv. 15- 20).

[Is. 39:1](#) ¶ At that time Merodach-baladan son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered.

[Is. 39:2](#) Hezekiah was pleased, and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil and his whole armory and all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

[Is. 39:3](#) Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, "What did these men say, and from where have they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon."

[Is. 39:4](#) He said, "What have they seen in your house?" So Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them."

[Is. 39:5](#) ¶ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts,

[Is. 39:6](#) 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the LORD.

[Is. 39:7](#) 'And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"

[Is. 39:8](#) Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "For there will be peace and truth in my days."

- Commentary available on MP3 recording...