

We have been studying the prophecies of Isaiah to the people of Judah, many of which have been pointing to the events in these two chapters we are looking at today. There is a similar account in 2Kings 18. I'll briefly summarize what had previously taken place. Judah and the surrounding nations were subjugated to Assyria. When a new Assyrian king rose to power under some turmoil, the vassal nations rebelled. Hezekiah, king of Judah, believed the prophecies of Isaiah which told of God's deliverance from Assyria (Isaiah 10:26), so he too rebelled. All the other nations were subjugated again by warfare, Judah being one of the last to be attacked. Forty-two walled cities of Judah had fallen and only Jerusalem remained.<sup>1</sup> Hezekiah tried to pay off the king of Assyria, but the king took the money and reneged on his agreement and continued the siege (2Kings 18:15-16). This is where our passage begins.

*<sup>1</sup> In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. <sup>2a</sup> And the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem, with a great army.* Isaiah 36:1-2a Lachish was just to the south of Jerusalem, and was one of the last strongholds between the Assyrian army and Jerusalem. There is a great deal of archeological information on the attack on Lachish. Ostraca, pieces of pottery with carbon inscriptions, have been found in the ruins. One of them tells of not being

able to see the signal fire of Azekah. Jeremiah 34:7 tells us that Lachish and Azekah were two of the last cities to fall to Sennacherib. This was most likely written at the same time the Rabshakeh was sent to demand Hezekiah's surrender. Azekah had fallen and the conquest of Lachish was concluding. A relief of the battle was found in Assyria and is now in the British Museum.

Hezekiah's lack of faith in God is seen in his sending the temple gold and silver to buy off King Sennacherib. It failed to spare them from the siege. Hezekiah's attempt to buy Egypt's help had failed too (Isaiah 30:4-5). Now he had no choice but to trust God. When the money fails, I guess there is nothing left to do but trust God. How sad is that! "I guess we'll just have to trust the Lord." Why is that the last resort? Why don't we start with trusting God? Isaiah prophesied that it would be to their shame that Judah looked to Egypt (Isaiah 30:3). It was, and the Rabshakeh called them on it. *<sup>6</sup> Behold, you are trusting in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.* Isaiah 36:6

The world loves to point out our lack of faith and remind us how our trust in man has failed us. But what the world is saying is that we should trust a different man. The Rabshakeh (a title of representative of the king) went on to ask them to trust him (Jeremiah 17:5). God's message is we

**Commented [PW4]: Jeremiah 34:7 (ESV)**  
<sup>7</sup> when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah, for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained.

**Commented [PW1]: Isaiah 10:26 (ESV)**  
<sup>26</sup> And the LORD of hosts will wield against them a whip, as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb. And his staff will be over the sea, and he will lift it as he did in Egypt.

**Commented [PW5]: Isaiah 30:4-5 (ESV)**  
<sup>4</sup> For though his officials are at Zoan and his envoys reach Hanes,  
<sup>5</sup> everyone comes to shame through a people that cannot profit them, that brings neither help nor profit, but shame and disgrace."

**Commented [PW2]:** According to the Taylor Prism

**Commented [PW3]: 2 Kings 18:15-16 (ESV)**  
<sup>15</sup> And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house.  
<sup>16</sup> At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD and from the doorposts that Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria.

**Commented [PW6]: Isaiah 30:3 (ESV)**  
<sup>3</sup> Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation.

**Commented [PW7]: Jeremiah 17:5 (ESV)**  
<sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD.

should trust in God and look to Him alone to guide us (Proverbs 3:5).

What the Rabshakeh went on to say showed that he misinterpreted his intelligence. <sup>7</sup> *But if you say to me, "We trust in the LORD our God," is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, "You shall worship before this altar"?* Isaiah 36:7 Hezekiah was one of the few kings that had the spiritual conviction to remove the high places where other gods were worshiped (2Kings 18:4). He even destroyed the bronze serpent Moses had made because people had been worshiping it (Numbers 21:9). The Rabshakeh thought this was limiting the worship of YHWH, but on the contrary, it was refining the worship of YHWH and doing what God had commanded.

The Rabshakeh told Hezekiah and everyone on the walls that it is no use to look to YHWH. No other gods were able to withstand the assault of the Assyrians. Then the Rabshakeh said it was YHWH that told Assyria to destroy these lands. <sup>10</sup> *Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land and destroy it.*" Isaiah 36:10

The enemy of our soul works in partial truths. God did use Assyria to bring judgment to the nations and to most of Judah, but that isn't the whole story. God was preserving a remnant in Jerusalem from which would come the Savior.

Consider this half-truth. "You are a sinner and a failure." Yes, but that isn't the whole story. The rest of the story is that I have a

mighty Savior who has a plan for my life and wants me to spend eternity with Him (Jeremiah 29:11). Hezekiah could have said, "You know, the guy is right. God gave them the power to destroy those nations and most of our cities and now we're next." But that is not what God promised earlier. **Beware of the devil's half-truths** (John 8:44). Always respond to your doubts with what God has declared. He has the final say!

The enemy of our soul also likes to use faulty logic. <sup>19</sup> *Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? <sup>20</sup> Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"* Isaiah 36:19-20 The Rabshakeh was telling the people that YHWH was no more able to protect them than the gods of other nations. But wait a minute! Didn't he just say YHWH sent him? One minute he says YHWH is his power and the next that YHWH is unable to defend them against the power of Assyria.

He is saying that the God of Israel is no greater than any other god. Just because Assyria defeated the other nations does not mean they can defeat YHWH. Israel has a long history of God delivering them from nations that appeared to be more powerful. This was really Assyria's undoing. You don't mock the holy One of Israel and get away with it (Psalm 74:22).

We should also notice that the Rabshakeh tried to discourage the people along with the king. He spoke in their language so everyone could hear. But Hezekiah had

**Commented [PW8]: Proverbs 3:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

**Commented [PW11]: Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

**Commented [PW12]: John 8:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

**Commented [PW9]: 2 Kings 18:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).

**Commented [PW10]: Numbers 21:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

**Commented [PW13]: Psalm 74:22 (NIV)**

<sup>22</sup> Rise up, O God, and defend your cause; remember how fools mock you all day long.

given them a godly word of wisdom. Don't answer. <sup>21</sup> *But they were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, "Do not answer him."* Isaiah 36:21 The best way to keep from losing an argument with the devil is to not consider him worthy of a response. Unless you have word from God, be silent. You can resist the devil by ignoring him.

Hezekiah's representatives tore their clothes as a sign of grief and took the message to him. <sup>1</sup> *As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD.* <sup>2</sup> *And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz.* Isaiah 37:1-2 What do you think God may have done if Hezekiah did this before sending money to the Egyptians and then to the Assyrians? We'll never know, but it would have spoken loudly of Hezekiah's faith in the words of the prophet and the power of God to be true to His Word. Where will you turn first when difficulty comes into your life (Luke 1:79)? Will you look to the Lord and His Word or to your bank account?

Hezekiah has finally done the right thing. Even though it was his last resort, God will still honor it. Don't think that because you waited to the last second to pray that God will not hear you. It may be that God allowed you to be in that situation so you would finally look to Him. In that age the prophet was the voice of God. Today we turn to the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We can also ask godly people who know the Scriptures for

counsel (Proverbs 11:14). They told Isaiah, <sup>4</sup> *It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.*" Isaiah 37:4 In other words, "I sure hope God heard what that guy said, because if He did, those of us who are left will be saved."

Hezekiah's torn robes and sackcloth tell us he was repentant as he should have been. Though he had removed the idols, the people had not really turned back to YHWH. It would be as if only Phoenix survived and the rest of the cities of Arizona were destroyed. We'd be in mourning for all those who died, but we'd also wonder how great our sin was that God would judge us so severely. The churches would surely be filled. I think these servants of the king were hoping that God would judge Assyria for the Rabshakeh's words, because there was little sign of citywide repentance in Jerusalem.

<sup>5</sup> *When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah,* <sup>6</sup> *Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, 'Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the young men of the king of Assyria have reviled me.* <sup>7</sup> *Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.'*" Isaiah 37:5-7 Sennacherib did hear that the king of Cush had come against him and so Sennacherib put off the siege of Jerusalem. He sent a

**Commented [PW15]: Proverbs 11:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

**Commented [PW14]: Luke 1:79 (ESV)**

<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

message to Hezekiah. <sup>10</sup> *"Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.* Isaiah 37:10 The message went on to remind him of all the other nations that were conquered and assured him Assyria would return to take Jerusalem. Once again, Hezekiah made the right choice, even though it may have been the only alternative. He took the message to the LORD.

Hezekiah prayed a short but to the point prayer. Remembering that Sennacherib represents Satan's attempt to stop the salvation of men, let's stand and say this prayer together. <sup>16</sup> *"O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.* <sup>17</sup> *Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God.* <sup>18</sup> *Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands,* <sup>19</sup> *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 were destroyed.* <sup>20</sup> *So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD."* Isaiah 37:16-20 God alone is the creator and Lord over all the earth. Hezekiah first acknowledged the greatness of God. That would have reassured his own heart. Then he acknowledged that God had allowed Assyria to conquer all the other nations (Isaiah 14:24). He acknowledged what

was true in the letter. But he also recognized what wasn't true. Those nations did not have real gods. Their gods were nothing. He asked God to look at how Assyria was mocking the one true God, and asked that God deal with them to show the world that YHWH alone is God in all the earth. He didn't plead their own righteousness. He didn't even bring up past promises. He asked for God to reveal His greatness in the earth. That kind of prayer is powerful, because God's heart is to make Himself known to mankind.

That is why God sent Jesus. He was revealing Himself and His great love for us (John 12:45). He was showing us that He is just but loving, holy but merciful. He won't compromise with sin, but He would in love provide a way to be forgiven if we would come to Him and recognize how desperately we need the salvation He offers us (Acts 16:31).

As we have seen in chapter 33, this battle is a preview of Jesus the Divine Warrior going into battle for our souls on the cross of Calvary. This prayer is a prayer of salvation. We aren't saved just for our sakes. We are saved because God is showing the world that He is the one true God and desires that we come to Him in faith. He is showing the world that the gods of fame, fortune, and pleasure are no gods at all (Jeremiah 14:10). Only He can deliver us from the lie that those things will save us or bring any meaning to our lives.

God sent an answer to the prayer in the form of a poem through Isaiah. It began by saying that God was going to deal with Assyria because Hezekiah prayed. I

**Commented [PW17]: John 12:45 (ESV)**

<sup>45</sup> And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.

**Commented [PW18]: Acts 16:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

**Commented [PW19]: Jeremiah 10:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them.

**Commented [PW16]: Isaiah 14:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> The LORD of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand,

wonder what would happen if our national leaders humbled themselves and prayed this kind of a prayer regarding radical Islam? Perhaps God would hear their prayer, not because our nation was repentant, but because they prayed that the world would know that He alone is God. Unfortunately, many of our leaders don't know that essential truth.

God's answer basically said that Sennacherib had mocked the wrong God. He was so lifted up in pride that, though he said YHWH sent him, he took full credit for all his victories. It was God who let him defeat his enemies and God who would now defeat him (1Corinthians 10:12). God was going to put a hook in his nose and pull him back to Nineveh.

*<sup>33</sup> "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. <sup>34</sup> By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. <sup>35</sup> For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."* Isaiah 37:33-35 And that is what happened. Sennacherib returned with his army to lay siege on Jerusalem, but before he could attack, the angel of the LORD slew 185,000 warriors. Sennacherib departed with what remained of his army and was killed by his sons as he worshiped his god. Now whose god could not deliver? How ironic! For "David's sake" refers to the promise to David that a descendant would reign on his throne forever (1Chronicles 22:10).

Before his death Sennacherib had a prism made that told of his victories. He named city after city that he conquered, and then wrote that he "shut up Hezekiah like a bird in a cage." This artifact is known as the **Taylor Prism**. It, too, is in the British Museum. Like the Egyptians' war records, he didn't tell of his loss of men or why he did not conquer Jerusalem. After all, it was written to commemorate his victories, not tell of his defeats.

Hezekiah's prayer was answered. The chronicler recorded, *<sup>23</sup> And many brought gifts to the LORD to Jerusalem and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward.* 2Chronicles 32:23 This was Jerusalem's chance to share with the world the message of the one true Creator of heaven and earth (Psalm 9:11).

Can we pray that God will do such amazing things that the world will see He is the one true God? Not only can we, but we should be constantly. The events of the end-times are filled with just such wonders. The wonder of your transformed life is the same message. How could you change from a selfish individual to being wholly devoted to God and serving others in love? Only God can transform a heart! It is a sign that God is just as powerfully active in the world today. He has won the greatest battle, the battle for our souls. The Divine Warrior has conquered hell and offers new life to all who, in the desperation we saw in Hezekiah, trust solely in Him (Psalm 34:5).

**Commented [PW20]: 1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

**Commented [PW22]: Psalm 9:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds!

**Commented [PW23]: Psalm 34:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

**Commented [PW21]: 1 Chronicles 22:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.'

#### Questions

- 1 Review the political background.
- 2 What false hopes did Hezekiah trust?
- 3 Have you heard Rabshakeh's message?
- 4 What was Rabshakeh's contradiction?
- 5 How do we respond to a liar?
- 6 Where do you turn first in difficulty?
- 7 What did the messengers hope?
- 8 What was the promise?
- 9 What was the fulfillment?
- 10 What is the archeological verification of this account?
- 11 What can we apply from the account?