

Assyria Destroyed

Isaiah 37

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BIBLE
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Isaiah 37:1-20 – King Hezekiah seeks the Lord (NIV)

When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord. ² He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. ³ They told him, “This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the moment of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. ⁴ It may be that the Lord your God will hear the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the Lord your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives.”

⁵ When King Hezekiah’s officials came to Isaiah, ⁶ Isaiah said to them, “Tell your master, ‘This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. ⁷ Listen! When he hears a certain report, I will make him want to return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword.’”

⁸ When the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah. ⁹ Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the king of Cush, was marching out to fight against him. When he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word: ¹⁰ “Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, ‘Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria.’ ¹¹ Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? ¹² Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my predecessors deliver them—the gods of Gozan, Harran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath or the king of Arpad? Where are the kings of Lair, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah?”

¹⁴ Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: ¹⁶ “Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and

earth. ¹⁷ Give ear, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God. ¹⁸ “It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands. ¹⁹ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. ²⁰ Now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Lord, are the only God.”

v1 – How did King Hezekiah respond to the report from his representatives on their meeting with Rabshakeh?

When King Hezekiah heard it...he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth: The tearing of clothes and the wearing of sackcloth (a rough, burlap-type material) were expressions of deep mourning, usually for the death of a loved one.

- Hezekiah took this report regarding Rabshakeh seriously, knowing how dedicated they were to the complete conquest of Jerusalem.

What do you think of Hezekiah’s reaction, proper or no?

Hezekiah’s initial reaction is good. He sees the situation for what it really is. Often, when we are in some kind of trial or difficulty, we handle it poorly because we don’t see the situation accurately. Jerusalem’s situation is desperate, and Hezekiah knows it.

Why should King Hezekiah humble himself at this point?

City after city has fallen to Sennacherib and deportees were already going into exile — and it is all Hezekiah’s fault! He had joined in the rebellion against God and was bewitched by Egyptian promises

- But even when a matter is our own fault, we can still pray about it. And the Lord can always be trusted to have mercy on His people.

Was King Hezekiah sincere in his humility?

And went into the house of the LORD: Hezekiah's second reaction was even better. He did not allow his mourning and grief to spin him into a rejection of the LORD's power and help. He knew this was a more necessary time than ever to seek the LORD.

What was the house of the Lord?

The temple. But he wouldn't have gone into the holy place itself, which was forbidden for all except priests. Hezekiah would have gone to the courts of the temple, to seek God in the place which was open to him as a man of Israel.

How would King Hezekiah have known not to go into the holy of holies in the temple?

A previous king of Judah, King Uzziah, saw his life tragically struck when he broke this command of the Lord to stay out of the holy place of the temple.

2 Chronicles 26:16 – *But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. In response, God struck Uzziah with leprosy, and he was an isolated leper until his death.*

v2 – How else do we know King Hezekiah was sincere in his humility?

Then he sent Eliakim...Shebna...and the elders of the priests...to Isaiah the prophet: The third thing Hezekiah did was also good. The king sought out the word of the LORD, given through the prophet of the LORD.

v3 – What did King Hezekiah want his representatives to tell the prophet Isaiah?

The children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth: Hezekiah told his messengers to tell Isaiah of the total calamity of the situation. This was a proverbial expression for a disaster — a woman so exhausted by labor that she could not complete the birth, so it was likely that both mother and child would die.

v4 – What was Hezekiah's hope?

It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh: Hezekiah knew that their only hope was that God would take offense at the blasphemies of Rabshakeh and rise up against him.

What did Hezekiah want Isaiah to pray for?

Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left: Hezekiah was saying, "Isaiah, pray for us. Our nation is devastated by this Assyrian invasion, and Jerusalem alone is left standing. Pray for the remnant that is left."

v5-6 – Did Hezekiah's men have to give their speech to Isaiah?

Maybe, maybe not... as a prophet, Isaiah just spoke what God told him to say and God already knew the message.

- We can be sure Isaiah did not take this lightly. The fate of the nation, and his entire credibility as a prophet, was riding on what he said.

How was Isaiah's credibility as a prophet on the line?

Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, was about to make a bold prediction. His prophecy would be entirely "provable." It would either happen or it would not happen; Isaiah would soon be known as a true prophet or a false prophet.

What did God want Hezekiah to know?

Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard:

Perhaps we can sense the gentlest rebuke in these words from the LORD... "Hezekiah, it is good for you to seek Me so passionately. But the words of the Rabshakeh are only words. Do not be afraid of them."

How might God's words have encouraged Hezekiah?

the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me:

Here, the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah, saying He had indeed heard the Rabshakeh's words. Now, God was taking it personally.

How did God denigrate the Rabshakeh?

The servants of the king of Assyria: Servants is a deliberately belittling expression, 'the king of Assyria's lads/flunkies'.

v7 – What did God promise to do about Assyria?

Surely I will send a spirit 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: Here, the LORD God assures Hezekiah that He will indeed deal with the Rabshakeh. He has heard his blasphemy and will bring judgment against him.

- Significantly, there is no mention of Jerusalem's deliverance or the defeat of the Assyrian army. God focuses this word against Rabshakeh personally.

v8 – How quickly did God fulfill his promise about Assyria?

Pretty quick... *Then the Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah:* The Rabshakeh left Jerusalem, and Hezekiah must have thought "Now he'll go back to his own land and be killed, just like God promised. Good riddance! Thank You Lord!"

v9 – What gave the Assyrian’s pause regarding taking Jerusalem?

The king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, “He has come out to make war with you”: While the Rabshakeh was away, the Assyrians learned that Egyptian troops (under an Ethiopian king) were advancing from the south. This would be the Egyptian intervention Assyria feared, and what Judah trusted in. But it would amount to nothing (Isaiah 20:1-6 and 30:1-7).

v10 – What was the Rabshakeh’s message to Hezekiah?

Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you: Rabshakeh is not in Jerusalem, but that didn’t stop him from trying to build fear, discouragement, and despair in King Hezekiah. He sent a letter to the king of Judah, hoping to defeat him from a distance.

v11 – What was the argument of the Rabshakeh?

That the Assyrian army had been victorious where ever they had gone so why would Jerusalem be any different?

v12-13 – How might Hezekiah been emboldened by the Rabshakeh comparing God to the gods of the nations?

In counting the LORD God of Israel among the gods of the nations, Rabshakeh blasphemes the LORD and invites judgment.

v14 – How did King Hezekiah respond to the Rabshakeh’s letter?

Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD: He took it to the house of the LORD (to the outer courts, not the holy place), and he spread it before the Lord. Hezekiah applied the principle...

1 Peter 5:7 – *casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*

v15-16 – How did King Hezekiah address the Lord?

O LORD of hosts: This title for our God essentially means, “LORD of armies.” Hezekiah was in a crisis that was primarily military in nature, so it made sense for him to address the LORD first according to the aspect of God’s nature that was most needful for him.

Why would Hezekiah use *the God of Israel* title for God?

This remembers that the LORD God was the covenant God of Israel, and that He should not forsake His people.

What was the significance of remembering that God is *the One who dwells between the cherubim*?

Here, Hezekiah sees the great majesty of God. Surely, the One who dwells between the cherubim would never allow Rabshakeh’s blasphemies to go unpunished.

What was the significance of pointing out that God is God alone?

If He is God, then what can He not do? If He is God, then what is beyond His control? Hezekiah realizes the most fundamental fact of all theology: God is God, and we are not! God is God, and Rabshakeh or the Assyrians are not!

What was the significance of remembering that God is the Creator?

In recognizing the LORD God as Creator, Hezekiah saw that the LORD had all power and all rights over every created thing.

- No doubt Hezekiah’s faith rose as he prayed this.

v17-20 – What did King Hezekiah want God to consider?

Hezekiah knew very well that the LORD did in fact hear and see the blasphemies of the Rabshakeh. He asked God to act upon what He has seen and heard, in faith that He will certainly act.

What was the contrast of the words of the Assyrian king with God’s words?

King Hezekiah draws the contrast between the living God and the false gods of the nations the Assyrians have already conquered. Those false gods *were not gods, but the work of men’s hands — wood and stone*, so they were not able to save them from the Assyrians.

- But Hezekiah prays confidently that the living God will save them, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD, You alone.

Isaiah 37:21-38 – God answers King Hezekiah (NIV)

²¹ Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, ²² this is the word the Lord has spoken against him:

“Virgin Daughter Zion despises and mocks you. Daughter Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee. ²³ Who is it you have ridiculed and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel! ²⁴ By your messengers you have ridiculed the Lord. And you have said, ‘With my many chariots I have ascended the heights of the mountains, the utmost heights of Lebanon. I have cut down its tallest cedars, the choicest of its junipers. I have reached its remotest heights, the finest of its forests. ²⁵ I have dug wells in foreign lands and drunk the water there. With the soles of my feet I have dried up all the streams of Egypt.’ ²⁶ “Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone. ²⁷ Their people, drained of power, are

dismayed and put to shame. They are like plants in the field, like tender green shoots, like grass sprouting on the roof, scorched before it grows up.²⁸ “But I know where you are and when you come and go and how you rage against me.”²⁹ Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.³⁰ “This will be the sign for you, Hezekiah: “This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third-year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit.”³¹ Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above.³² For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.³³ “Therefore this is what the Lord says concerning the king of Assyria: “He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it.”³⁴ By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city,” declares the Lord.³⁵ “I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!”³⁶ Then the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies!³⁷ So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.³⁸ One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisrok, his sons Adrammelek and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.

v21 – How did God answer Hezekiah’s prayer?

The glorious answer which fills the rest of the chapter came because Hezekiah prayed.

What if Hezekiah had not prayed?

Then there would have been no answer would have come, and God may have even allowed Jerusalem to be conquered. Hezekiah’s prayer really mattered.

- How many blessings, victories, souls saved for Jesus’ glory, lie unclaimed in heaven until the Lord can say, *because you have prayed to Me?*

v22 – What was the Lord’s Word to the Rabshakeh?

The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, laughed you to scorn: The idea is that the Assyrians have come to ravish the daughter of Zion, the city of Jerusalem. But God won’t allow it.

- Virgin is used here in the sense of being untouched by the marauder. The Assyrians were intent on rape but his victim remains unharmed because of prayer.

v23 – How did God rebuke the Rabshakeh?

The LORD, speaking through Isaiah, simply says to the Rabshakeh, “Do you know whom you are dealing with?” Rabshakeh obviously did not know.

Why would God speak to the Rabshakeh since Hezekiah was the recipient of the message?

This prophecy may have never reached the ears of the Rabshakeh. However, God has His ways... At the very least, this prophecy would have been hugely encouraging to Hezekiah and all of Judah, even if Rabshakeh never heard it on this earth.

v24-27 – What was the downfall of the Assyrians?

Here, the Lord describes the great pride the Assyrians had in their own conquests. But they forgot that the LORD was really in charge (*Now I have brought it to pass, that you should be for crushing fortified cities into heaps of ruins. Therefore their inhabitants had little power*).

- Even if the Assyrians didn’t know it, they owed their success to the LORD.

How are people in the world today making the same mistake of the Assyrians?

Are the advances of Western Civilization the result of human evolutionary progress or blessings from God to facilitate spreading the good news of His provision for eternal life? How you answer that question depends on your worldview.

v28 – What case did God have against the Assyrians?

God knew everything about Assyria and that they went too far in blaspheming the One who made all their success possible.

v29 – What would God do about the Assyrian’s rage against Him?

therefore I will put My hook in your nose...and I will turn you back by the way which you came. This was an especially dramatic statement, because this is exactly how the Assyrians would cruelly march those whom they forced to relocate out of their conquered lands. They would line up the captives, and drive a large fishhook through the lip or the nose of each captive, string them all together and march them. God said to Assyria, “I’m going to do the same thing to you.”

v30-31 – What would God do to the Assyrian agrarian economy?

You shall eat this year such as grows of itself: Their invasion of Judah prevented sowing in 702 B.C., but in 701 the people of Assyria would find sufficient growth to preserve life; in 700 there would still be enough through ‘chance growth’. Thus, the Lord would confirm that it was His hand that dispersed their threat.

v32 – What is the remnant that would go out of Jerusalem?

As much as the Assyrians would like to crush Jerusalem and Judah, they will not be able to. God will preserve His remnant.

v33-35 – What did God have to say about the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem?

He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there.... For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake: God plainly and clearly draws a line. Although the Assyrian army is poised to lay siege to Jerusalem, they won't. The king of Assyria will not come into this city, because God is defending it.

Why did God defend Jerusalem?

For My own sake. God will defend His own glory. He gave His Word to Judah that He'd defend them against the Assyrians and thus His credibility was at stake.

Is it up to us to defend the glory of the Lord?

It honors Him when we do but it really isn't necessary because God is more than able to defend His own glory.

Why would God defend Jerusalem for My servant David's sake?

King David had died almost 300 years before this, but God still honored His promise to David (2 Samuel 7:10-17). God would defend Jerusalem, not for the city's sake at all (Jerusalem deserved judgment)! But He does it for His own sake, and for the sake of David.

What is the application of this to our relationship to the Lord?

In the same way, God the Father defends and blesses us, not for our own sake — we often deserve His judgment! But He often does it for His own sake, and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

v36 – How did God deal with Assyria?

God destroys this mighty nation in one night. 185,000 died at the hand of the angel of the Lord. Against all odds, and against every expectation except the expectation of faith, the Assyrian army was turned back without having even shot an arrow into Jerusalem. The unstoppable was stopped, the undefeated was defeated.

v37 – What did Sennacherib, king of Assyria do?

Departed and went away: This was exactly as God said he would. But Sennacherib left still full of pride. After this retreat from Judah, Sennacherib commissioned a record, which is preserved in the spectacular Annals of

Sennacherib (the Taylor Prism), which can be seen in the British Museum...

"I attacked Hezekiah of Judah who had not subjected himself to me, and took forty-six fortresses, forts and small cities. I carried away captive 200,150 people, big and small, both male and female, a multitude of horses, young bulls, asses, camels, and oxen. Hezekiah himself I locked up in Jerusalem like a bird in its cage. I put up banks against the city. I separated his cities whose inhabitants I had taken prisoners from his realm and gave them to Mitiniti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Zilbel, king of Gaza and thus diminished his country. And I added another tax to the one imposed on him earlier."

This sounds like a modern day politician making his inglorious defeat sound like a great victory

v38 – What became of Sennacherib, king of Assyria?

Now it came to pass: Between Isaiah 37:37 and Isaiah 37:38, some 20 years passed. Perhaps Sennacherib thought he had escaped the judgment of God, but he hadn't. He met the bitter end of death at the end of swords held by his own sons.

An old Jewish legend says how Sennacherib's sons came to kill him... Sennacherib was troubled at how God seemed to bless the Jews so much and someone told him it was because Abraham had loved God so much that he was willing to sacrifice his son to the LORD. Sennacherib thought he would be even more favored by God by killing two of his sons in sacrifice to the LORD. But his two sons learned of the plan, and killed him first, thus fulfilling the word of the LORD.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- The enemies of God seek to discourage us, don't let them!
- When bad stuff happens, seek God's help!
- Remembering who God is gives us courage and confidence in prayer
- Our accomplishments are blessings from God, give Him the glory!
- God defends and blesses us, not for our own sake but for the sake of Jesus
- God keeps His promises, we can count on it!