

The Prophecy of Isaiah
The Lord Rescues His People

Isaiah chapters 36-39 are a historical link between chapters 1-35 and 40-46. They recount the campaign of Sennacherib against Jerusalem and how God responded to the Assyrian threat. The king of Judah was Hezekiah who came to the throne when he was 25 years old. Hezekiah ruled for 29 years.

When Hezekiah became king the nation was given over to pagan practices. Worship involved prostitution and child sacrifice associated with idolatry. Considering the moral condition of the time it is noteworthy that Hezekiah tried to reform the nation to please God.

Overall, Hezekiah appeared to trust in God; chapters 36-38 reveal his strong faith, but chapter 39 reveals a weakness in his faith.

The Assyrian Siege of Jerusalem

Isaiah 36:1-22

Hezekiah had reigned over Judah for 14 years when Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah in 701 B.C. Every city in its path was destroyed; just as Isaiah had prophesied. [36:1]

As the Assyrian army was taking Lachish, a fortified town about 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem, Sennacherib was so confident of success that he dispatched a large contingent of his army up to Jerusalem. [36:2]

Judah's capital had an elaborate system of aqueducts to supply spring water from the mountains to a reservoir called the "Upper Pool," which was due east of the city wall. The commander of the Assyrian army stopped at the aqueduct near where the women went to wash their clothes. [Cf. 7:3]

Three of Hezekiah's highest officials came out of Jerusalem to hear the Assyrian field commander deliver a message from Sennacherib. The taunt in verse 4 could have as well been asked by one of God's own prophets, "... On what do you rest this trust of yours?" [36:3-6]

Although the Assyrian's were God's instrument to punish Judah, they did not know the True God. You can see the commander's ignorance when he said that Judah had betrayed God by destroying the high places and altars, where the idolatrous practices were observed. [36:7]

Typical of many unbelievers, while having no faith of their own, they pretend to critique the beliefs of others. The Assyrian commander warned them that neither Egypt nor the God of Israel would rescue the people of Jerusalem. [36:6-9]

God had used the Assyrians to overrun Judah, but God specifically promised to spare Jerusalem.

Hezekiah advised the people not to answer the taunts of the enemy. Hezekiah's officials tore their clothes and reported to Hezekiah all that had been said. [36:10-22]

The Lord's Triumph

Isaiah 37:1-38

When Hezekiah received the report, he likewise tore his clothes and put on sackcloth as a sign of sorrow. He then went to the temple to pray. Prayer is always a wise first response to trouble. The second thing he did was to seek godly counsel. At this time Hezekiah's faith is in the Lord. [37:1-4]

Isaiah's reply was heartening; don't worry. [37:5-6]

God will upset Sennacherib with rumors about circumstances at home. Sennacherib will return to Assyria where he will die by the sword. [37:7]

The Lord created the events that caused Sennacherib to go home. But Sennacherib boasted that he would be back and that Jerusalem would be as powerless as the other nations that he had crushed. [37:8-13]

Hezekiah prays and Isaiah gives him assurance of a favorable answer. [37:14-35]

Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in an amazing manner when the Lord sent a destroying angel to the Assyrian camp, killing 185,000 men in one night. After this, a devastated Sennacherib could only return with his weakened army to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. There he was assassinated by two of his sons ... all according to prophecy. [37:36-38]

2 Kings 19:35-20:1

³⁵ And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. ³⁶ Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. ³⁷ And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

Hezekiah's Healing

Isaiah 38:1-8

Since God's promise to deliver Hezekiah from the Assyrians was given during his illness that illness must have occurred before the lifting of the siege described in chapters 36 and 37. [38:6]

At least part of Hezekiah's problem was a boil. [38:21]

Isaiah told Hezekiah that he would soon die from his illness and that he should get his affairs in order. As far as we know Hezekiah had no son that would allow a smooth transition of power.

Hezekiah prayed and God sent Isaiah to the king with a two-part answer:

- 1) God would grant Hezekiah another 15 years of life;
- 2) God would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians.

Isaiah said his prophecy would be confirmed with a sign: "God will make a shadow cast by the sun to go back down the ten steps it had gone up on the stairway [dial] of Ahaz. Apparently this would have been a westward facing stairway on which the setting sun would cause a shadow to rise.

As a note, on a sunny afternoon the sun shines in my den and casts a shadow on the wall behind the TV. It is interesting to watch the shadow move up the wall as the sun goes down.

How this phenomenon was accomplished has been the subject of much debate and the scoffers ridicule it as they do other such accounts in the Bible.

The Lord could have refracted the sun's rays in some way. It doesn't seem likely that the earth's rotation was reversed due to the effects of momentum resulting from stopping movement in one direction and reversing direction and then back again. However the Lord did it, I will be content to just believe that it happened and leave it as a mystery.

Hezekiah's Hymn

Isaiah 38:9-22

Hezekiah wrote a hymn of praise in two stanzas.

First he focuses on his illness and near death experience. [38:10-14]

Then he focuses on his healing and deliverance by the Lord. [38:15-22]

Hezekiah laments that he would die in the prime of his life.
He would have been in his late thirties.

Hezekiah uses a couple of figures of speech to describe how easy it would have been for God to end his life. How easy it is for a shepherd to take down his tent when he wants to move on. When a weaver finishes a piece of cloth he can roll up the loom by simply snipping off a few threads. [38:12]

Think about how tenuous life is.

James 1:9-11

⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

1 Peter 1:22-25

²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for

"All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever."

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Hezekiah is about gone and can only cry out, "O Lord, come to my aid!" [38:14]

Now Hezekiah is speechless in his relief. He has been snatched from the brink of death at the very last moment. [38:15]

Some time after recovering from his illness envoys from Merodach-baladan are sent from Babylon to Jerusalem. The good wishes on his recovery were a pretext for a diplomatic matter. The Babylonian king wanted Hezekiah to join forces with him against Assyria.

Hezekiah gave the envoys a hearty reception and then foolishly shows them all of the treasures of his kingdom. A generation later the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem and removed all of the treasures.

God promised to protect Judah as long as she trusted in Him. Hezekiah violated this covenant by forming a military alliance with the Babylonians.

When Isaiah heard about the foreigners visiting Hezekiah, went to interrogate him to learn how much he had betrayed his people. At first Hezekiah was vague in his answers but he finally admitted that the envoys had seen everything in the royal palace and the storehouses.

Isaiah declared that a day would come when everything in the palace would be taken away by the Babylonians. Hezekiah's descendants would be taken away from Judah and serve the pagan king.

This prophecy was fulfilled within 100 years.