

Isaiah 37:1-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/isa/isa-37/isaiah-371-7/>

King Hezekiah sends a delegation to Isaiah the prophet for advice and to seek the Lord's direction during this seemingly hopeless turn of events.

Isaiah 36 ended with King Hezekiah's advisors reporting the "words of Rabshakeh" the representative of the king of Assyria. Rabshakeh had offered Judah the choice between surrendering and being exiled or being destroyed.

Hezekiah was king of Judah from 715 to 686 BC. He is a king of whom it was said, "he [*Hezekiah*] did what *was* good, right and true before the LORD his God" (2 Chronicles 31:20). In the fourth year of *Hezekiah* being king of Judah, *Assyria* came to besiege Samaria.

Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, therefore the northern kingdom was often called by the name of its capital: *Samaria*. The Samaritans of the New Testament were a mixture of remaining Israelites in the northern kingdom who intermarried with Assyrians and other foreign immigrants (2 Kings 17:24). They were despised by the Jews from Judah all the way into New Testament times.

At this point in history (Isaiah 37) Assyria was the most powerful empire in the world.

We will see in this episode that Judah will be delivered from imminent destruction by Assyria. Judah will not fall until after the death of *Hezekiah*. Judah did not fall to Assyria, but to Babylon, which arose as a dominant empire over Assyria.

At the time of Hezekiah, the siege, conquest, and exile of the northern kingdom of Israel by *Assyria* had already transpired, having occurred in 725-722 BC. *Assyria* had trounced Samaria after conducting a three-year siege. Therefore the demise of Judah's northern neighbor was a fresh memory to the Judeans. The northern kingdom's "ten lost tribes" of Israel, as they are now called, never returned (except perhaps since 1948 AD in our modern era).

However, during the time of Hezekiah, the siege of Judah by Assyria was averted. God delivered Judah through His miraculous power. In the fourteenth year of *King Hezekiah*, Sennacherib *king of Assyria* came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them as it had Samaria seven years earlier. At the time of this story, all that remained unconquered of Judah was its capital city, Jerusalem.

But unlike the case of Israel/Samaria, God intervened and saved the southern kingdom of Judah from falling to Assyria. Assyria had already taken every fortified city in Judah but one: Jerusalem (Isaiah 36:1). A mere seven years after *Hezekiah* watched Israel/Samaria be destroyed, *Assyria* was now at his doorstep. This was, in part, because *Hezekiah* rebelled against the *king of Assyria* by not paying tribute or taxes (2 Kings 18:7).

2 Kings 18:13 through 2 Kings 19:37 is almost a word-for-word equivalent to Isaiah 36:1 through Isaiah 37:38. The fact that this story appears three times might indicate its prophetic importance.

The Isaiah version omits the part where *Hezekiah* submits to Sennacherib, *king of Assyria*, and commits to paying tribute money, making up back payments (2 Kings 18:14-16). Sennacherib assessed what might have been an impossible sum, but *Hezekiah* paid it by stripping the temple of gold and taking the articles out of the temple. *Sennacherib* apparently said “Wow, they were able to pay it, wonder how much more is in there?” and sieged the city anyway. Lying is not new in politics.

The Isaiah version skips this part. It paints *Hezekiah* in a more positive light. This might be because Jewish tradition looks at *Hezekiah* as a messianic type, which is a perspective offered by Isaiah. Some rabbis believed the messiah would bear the name *Hezekiah*. If so, this picture of *Hezekiah* would likely be of Jesus in His first advent, where He is the obedient servant who depends on His Father in all ways (John 5:19, 30).

Chapter 36 ended with *Hezekiah*’s advisors providing to him a report of the *Rabshakeh*’s propaganda-filled message. *Hezekiah* reacts with grief. *And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord* (v 1). Tearing one’s *clothes* and wearing *sackcloth* was an ancient response to hardship or calamity.

By entering the *house of the Lord*, *Hezekiah* is seeking out his most trusted advisor, Yahweh, the Suzerain-protector of Israel. The text will later imply that God honors *Hezekiah*’s faithful trusting of Him by saving him with a great miracle (Isaiah 37:21). The New Testament in Hebrews says,

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”
(Hebrews 11:6)

Our story is a good example of God rewarding *Hezekiah* for diligently seeking Him.

Hezekiah’s advisors—*Eliakim* the son of *Hilkiah*, *Shebna* the scribe, and *Joah* the son of *Asaph*—also tore their *clothes* in response to *Rabshakeh*’s speech (Isaiah 36:22).

It is interesting that in an oracle called “The Valley of Vision” in Isaiah 22, *Shebna* and *Eliakim* are mentioned by name. Isaiah 22 contains a positive word for *Eliakim* and a negative one for *Shebna*, who seems to have exalted himself to lofty positions.

As Jesus states in Matthew 23:12, “whoever exalts himself shall be humbled.”

In Isaiah 22:19 God says about *Shebna* “I will depose you from your office, And I will pull you down from your station.” God brought *Shebna* low for honoring himself by building a tomb and amassing chariots.

Next, *Hezekiah*, in an effort to petition and gain counsel from God 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* (v 2).

This was a wise decision by *Hezekiah* to ask *Isaiah* to intercede for Judah. A *king* who did not trust in *Yahweh*, his covenant God, might have trusted in his own power or perhaps the power of a strong neighbor such as Egypt. But *Hezekiah's* faith persuaded him to seek the Lord. He seeks the Lord through the prophet of the Lord, *Isaiah*.

When the entourage arrived, *they said to Isaiah, "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* (v3).

To say that "*children have come to birth, and there is no strength to deliver*" is an analogy of a mother that has a child ready to be born and she does not have the strength to push the child out. The analogy applies to Israel, they are helpless in the face of the overwhelming force of the Assyrian Empire.

Hezekiah's ambassadors are saying that Judah is in desperate times and has no strength to resist Assyria. *Hezekiah's* servants continue saying to *Isaiah*, *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* (v 4). The advisors suggest to *Isaiah* that Assyria has taunted God, so perhaps God would hear and fight for Judah. They continued, *Therefore, offer a prayer for the remnant that is left* (v 4).

Hezekiah's servants suggest that while Judah has no strength to resist Assyria, perhaps the Lord God of Israel will *hear the words of Rabshakeh*, the representative of the Assyrian emperor, who spoke words of *reproach* against the *living God*, and fight on Judah's behalf. *Hezekiah's* advisors request that *Isaiah offer a prayer for the remnant that is left* after the substantial Assyrian advance.

In this case the *remnant* refers to the last part of Judah that has not been conquered. This is an apt picture of how the term *remnant* is often used in scripture. The term *remnant* is a recurring one in the Bible. It often refers to a small portion of God's chosen people who continue to be faithful to *Yahweh*, the God of Israel's covenant/treaty. The term *remnant* is often used to refer to a subset of people that are faithful to God.

The Apostle Paul speaks of a remnant of Israel in Romans 11. Paul recalls the story of *Elijah* from 1 Kings 19:18,

"God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about *Elijah*, how he pleads with God against Israel?

"Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS,
THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS,
AND I ALONE AM LEFT,
AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE."

But what is the divine response to him?

"I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED

THE KNEE TO BAAL.”

In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

(Romans 11:2-6)

Paul also speaks of a remnant of Israel, quoting Isaiah 10:22:

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel,
“THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL
BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA,
IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED.”

(Romans 9:27)

This story of God’s deliverance of the small number of remaining people is likely a picture of the end times, when Jerusalem will be surrounded and overwhelmed. This story of Hezekiah might foreshadow the prophesy in Zechariah 14:1-5, where Jerusalem is surrounded, then miraculously rescued. This might be why this episode is chronicled three times in scripture, here in Isaiah, as well as in 2 Kings 18-19 and 2 Chronicles 32.

It also seems likely that the prophecy in Micah 5 indicates that this episode presents a picture of the end times attack and redemption of Jerusalem:

“This One will be our peace.
When the Assyrian invades our land,
When he tramples on our citadels,
Then we will raise against him
Seven shepherds and eight leaders of men.”

(Micah 5:5)

The “One” spoken of in Micah 5:5 refers to “One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel” that is from “Bethlehem” (Micah 5:2). This prophecy was understood by the Jews to refer to the messiah, as is confirmed in the New Testament (Matthew 2:5). The New Testament also documents that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy. However, Jesus has not yet fulfilled the deliverance predicted in Zechariah 14:1-5—that is yet to come (as of 2023).

The “Assyrian” that “invades our land” might refer to a world empire that is like unto the Assyrian Empire at the time of Hezekiah. It could be that the Rabshekah foreshadows the false prophet, and the Assyrian emperor foreshadows the beast predicted as the leaders of a world alliance in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

[To see our commentary on the Book of Daniel, click here.](#)

[To see our commentary on the Book of Revelation, click here.](#)

Next the Bible says, *So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah* (v 5). This seems to serve as an ending of their petition to Isaiah, along the lines of “So that is what Hezekiah’s diplomats had to say to Isaiah.”

Next, *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” (v 6).

This is exactly what Hezekiah hoped for, having said to his advisors in verse 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. As Hezekiah hoped, Isaiah assures his advisors not to fear the blasphemous words of Rabshakeh. Blaspheming Yahweh was one of the most serious forms of disobedience recorded in scripture and was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16). Blasphemous speech will be one of the signs of the beast during the second half of the tribulation.*

“There was given to [the beast] a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months [3.5 years] was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name [Yahweh] and His tabernacle, *that is, those who dwell in heaven.*”
(Revelation 13:5-6)

The Assyrian king appears to be a type or foreshadowing of the end-time beast, and his mouthpiece *Rabshakeh* a type of the false prophet, who will speak on his behalf (Revelation 19:20). Other types of the antichrist are scattered throughout history. Examples might include Goliath, who blasphemed by swearing by false gods and defying the armies of the living God (1 Samuel 17:26, 43) as well as the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes who desecrated the temple as part of an effort to eliminate Judaism ([see commentary on Daniel 8:9-14](#)).

Isaiah the prophet continues and says, “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” (v. 7).

This came to pass as *Isaiah* declared. The Assyrian king Sennacherib was assassinated soon after this prediction. Written evidence of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem was found in an archeological dig in 1830 in modern-day Iraq. In these “Annals of Sennacherib” as they are called, a cuneiform prism called [“The Jerusalem Prism”](#) describe these events from the Assyrian perspective.

Besides describing the siege and naming *Hezekiah* as a ruler of Judah who paid tributes to Sennacherib, this Assyrian document agrees with the Bible in stopping short of saying that Jerusalem was conquered, and by stating that *Hezekiah* rebelled against Sennacherib’s authority (Isaiah 36:5). The following is a translation of the relevant portion of Assyrian text:

"As for the king of Judah, *Hezekiah*, who had not submitted to my authority, I besieged and captured forty-six of his fortified cities, along with many smaller towns, taken in battle with my battering rams...I took as plunder 200,150 people, both small and great, male and female, along with a great number of animals including horses, mules, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. As for *Hezekiah*, I shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem. I then constructed a series of fortresses around him, and I did not allow anyone to come out of the city gates. His towns which I captured I gave to Mitinti, king

of Ashdod; Padi, ruler of Ekron; and Silli-bel, king of Gaza."
(Jerusalem Prism)

Biblical Text

¹And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord. ²Then 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. ³They 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. ⁴Perhaps 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.' " ⁵So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. ⁶Isaiah 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. ⁷Behold, 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." ' "