

Isaiah 37:21-32

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/isa/isa-37/isaiah-3721-32/>

God responds to Hezekiah's petition through Isaiah the son of Amoz

In this passage, *Isaiah*, the prophet of Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and *Hezekiah*, relays a message from God to King *Hezekiah*. *Hezekiah* has turned to the Lord in prayer, petitioning Him for help after receiving threats from *Sennacherib, the king of Assyria* (Isaiah 37:14-20).

Sennacherib, king of Assyria (705-681 BC), sought to expand his empire, and Judah was on his list of kingdoms to conquer. The Assyrian Empire was a dominant force during the 8th and 7th centuries BC, renowned for its military prowess and brutal treatment of captured nations. The empire spanned from Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) to parts of Egypt ([See Map](#)).

Sometime after *Hezekiah* prayed to his God in verses Isaiah 37:17-20, God gives His answer to *Hezekiah* through the prophet *Isaiah*.

Since *Hezekiah's* prayer is immediately followed by *Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent word to Hezekiah* (v 21), it appears the answer came quickly.

Isaiah's message to *Hezekiah* begins *Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel* (v 21). The Hebrew term for *LORD* is "Yahweh," the covenant name of God. That name speaks of God's character and His relationship with His covenant people (Exodus 3:14, 34:6).

God says through *Isaiah*, *Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel*, "Because you have prayed to Me about *Sennacherib king of Assyria*, this is the word that the *LORD* has spoken against him" (vv 21, 22a).

God gives a specific reason for the answer being give *Hezekiah*: because *Hezekiah prayed* to God about *Sennacherib king of Assyria*, He would respond with a negative decree against *Sennacherib* and a positive answer for Judah.

The specific answer God gives *Hezekiah* follows:

Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is the word that the Lord [Yahweh] 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!"* (vv 21-22).

The titles *virgin daughter of Zion* and *daughter of Jerusalem* in verse 22 symbolizes the city of *Jerusalem*, and more importantly its inhabitants, the Jewish people. God's people are often

referred to with these feminine terms perhaps to showcase God's fatherly care for them as a beloved daughter. The terms *daughter of Zion* and *daughter of Jerusalem* occur about 35 times in the Old Testament. The prophet Zechariah uses both terms when prophesying the first advent of Jesus the Messiah.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
(Zechariah 9:9)

This prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled in what is often called the “triumphal entry” of Jesus. This occurred in Jerusalem, validating the interpretation that these terms refer to the Holy City. The gospel writer Matthew documented this fulfillment in Matthew 21:5.

So the picture beginning to be painted by Yahweh/God is that while Rabshakeh is mocking God and threatening Jerusalem, Jerusalem will have the last laugh and in the end mock Assyria. Isaiah uses the prophetic past tense here to indicate that the future event predicted is so certain that it is as though it has already occurred, saying *She* (Jerusalem) *has despised you and mocked you*. Rabshakeh mocked God, but God will mock his boss, *Sennacherib*.

God rebukes *Sennacherib*, reminding him that his actions and words of defiance are not just against Judah but against Yahweh Himself:

*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! (v 23)*

Hezekiah had pointed out to God that Assyria was taunting Him. Of course, God knows all, so this was not previously unknown to Him. But God deals with humans in relationship. And God answered Hezekiah because he prayed. In this instance, there is no indication that Hezekiah prayed for an extended time period. But God does say that His answer is specifically because Hezekiah prayed *about Sennacherib*. Isaiah continues:

Through your servants you have reproached the Lord (v 24).

This would specifically apply to Rabshakeh, who taunted Judah on multiple occasions. But even though Rabshakeh did the taunting, God puts the responsibility on the king, who authorized and deputized Rabshakeh. Now still speaking to Sennacherib, king of Assyria, Isaiah continues:

*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 (v 24).*

Sennacherib's arrogance is evident in his self-praise, claiming his military successes and conquests (such as cutting down Lebanon's *cedars* and drying up Egypt's rivers) were solely due to his power. Yet, God reminds Sennacherib that God had foreseen and orchestrated events long before they happened.

The mention of the heights of Lebanon refers to the famed mountains of Lebanon, known for their majestic cedars, a symbol of pride ([see image](#)). These same cedars were used by King Solomon to construct the first temple (2 Chronicle 2:16).

God continues to highlight *Sennacherib's* haughty mentality. Sennacherib says in his heart,

*“I dug wells and drank waters,
And with the sole of my feet I dried up
All the rivers of Egypt”* (v 25).

The *rivers of Egypt* alludes to all the canals and rivers in Egypt and not just the Nile itself. Most cities at that time were built near a river or water source. *Sennacherib* is saying in his heart that when he besieged all these areas that his army's consumption, as well as their cattle's consumption, along with the constant treading of their feet during the siege, had depleted the quantity and quality of the water there.

Now the tense shifts to first person, and God will speak, and show He alone controls human affairs.

God says, *“Have you not heard?
Long ago I did it,
From ancient times I planned it”* (v 26).

God declares he had planned for *Sennacherib* to conquer many *fortified cities* and turn them *into ruinous heaps*. God controls who is in power and all authority across the world (Romans 13:1). God lets Sennacherib know that he is simply an instrument in bringing about His plan.

In the fourth year of *Hezekiah's* reign over of Judah, *Assyria* had besieged Samaria. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. The siege and exile of Israel by *Assyria* transpired in 725-722 BC. *Assyria* trounced Samaria, ending a three-year siege. 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).

But this was part of God's plan. God judged Israel because she had broken the covenant/treaty to love her neighbor and instead sunk into the exploitative ways of pagan idolatry. This was pursuant to the terms of the covenant/treaty (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). God used Assyria as His instrument, for His purposes.

God continues and says:

*Now I have brought it to pass,
That you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps.
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 (vv 26b-27).*

Verse 27 paints a vivid picture of the desolation and hopelessness of the cities and their inhabitants that Sennacherib had conquered. They are likened to *vegetation of the field and as the green herb*. Vegetation is easily trampled—it puts up no resistance.

God also paints a picture of *grass on the housetops*. The word translated *housetops* can also be translated “roof.” Perhaps the idea is of grass growing through the mud mortar on the roof, without sufficient roots to withstand the heat. This picture might be of a people with little strength to resist an attack.

The picture of being quickly *scorched before it is grown up* might indicate Assyria’s ability to put victims under siege and defeat them in short order.

Now God assures *King Sennacherib* that He is watching and knows his every move:

*But I know your sitting down
And your going out and your coming in
And your raging against Me.
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 (vv 28-29).*

Sennacherib raged against every god of the nations that he conquered. But he did not expect that when he arrived in Judah, that the God of the people of Jerusalem was the One True God and was keen on saving His covenant people from the Assyrian onslaught.

God says that He will “*put My hook in your [Sennacherib’s] nose.*” This is a picture of an oxen with a nose ring to put him under control of the herdsman. God will completely control the fate of the Assyrian king. The same is said of Gog in the end time battle predicted in Ezekiel 38. God instead hooks the “jaws” of Gog rather than the “*nose*” of *King Sennacherib*:

“I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords.”
(Ezekiel 38:4)

The King of Assyria as a Prototype of the Antichrist

There are multiple pictures in scripture of the lawless one who will rule the world for Satan, called the beast in Daniel and Revelation. The Old Testament types or shadows of the “beast” are characters who use pompous words to blaspheme and curse Yahweh and his people. This would include Goliath (1 Samuel 17), Sennacherib king of Assyria here in Isaiah 37, and the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, who is prophesied of in the book of Daniel, and who set up the first

“abomination of desolation” by putting a statue of Zeus in the temple and sacrificing a pig on the altar. These all presage the ultimate antichrist at the end of the age, the man called the Beast.

This Beast is given:

“an arrogant mouth to blaspheme God, the Tabernacle, and His people.”
(Revelation 13:5)

Rabshekah is the mouthpiece for Sennacherib, King of Assyria, and might be a prototype of the False Prophet, who speaks on behalf of the Beast.

Isaiah also predicts a fiery demise for the king of Assyria in a place called Tophet that is kindled with the breath of God.

“For Tophet was established of old,
Yes, for the king [Of Assyria] it is prepared.
He has made it deep and large;
Its pyre is fire with much wood;
The breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone,
Kindles it.”
(Isaiah 30:33)

“Tophet” is another name for the Valley of Hinnom, a valley southwest of Jerusalem. It was the landfill and sewer of the city. A place of Molech worship, where babies were burned (Tophet means “drums” because they beat drums to drown out baby cries while being burned). In the New Testament “Tophet” is called “Gehenna” (Ge = valley, Henna = Hinnom). It is most often translated as “hell” in our Bibles. It is unfortunate that the translators tell us what they think the Valley of Hinnom represents in those verses rather than translating what it says.

Hinnom/Gehenna represents the consequence of sin, which is death. [To learn more, see our article on Gehenna.](#)

This prophecy from Isaiah 30:33 where the king of Assyria is burned in Tophet might be fulfilled in Revelation 19:20 where the Beast and False Prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire.

Micah 5:2-6 says the Messiah who is to be born in Bethlehem is destined to save Israel from a future Assyrian, making a link for future readers between the King of Assyria and end time Beast:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting.”
(Micah 5:2)

Skipping to verse 5:

“And this One [Messiah] shall be peace.
When the Assyrian comes into our land,
And when he treads in our palaces.”
(Micah 5:5a)

This passage from Micah predicts the Beast coming against Israel. He will be defeated by Jesus, as shown in Revelation 19 and Zechariah 14:1-5.

Skipping to verse 6b:

“Thus He [Jesus] shall deliver *us* from the Assyrian,
When he [the Assyrian] comes into our land
And when he treads within our borders.”
(Micah 5:6b)

This will occur at the end of a seven-year period called the “70th week of Daniel.” If you want to learn more about the 70th week of Daniel, [please see our commentary on Daniel 9:24-25](#).

This seven-year period begins with the signing of a treaty between Israel and the Beast. However, it seems that there will be only subtle signs that this is the treaty; it might not be known until the 3 ½ year mark that the “70 week clock” has restarted.

The first 3 ½ years of the treaty are apparently quite prosperous. Then the last 3 ½ years are called by the Bible “The Great Tribulation”—the worst times in the history of earth. If not shortened, the world would not survive (Matthew 24:22). It is at the end of this 3 ½ years that Jesus will return, and save Jerusalem again, just as He saved it in the time of Hezekiah (Zechariah 14:1-5; Revelation 19:11-16).

Now God directs His attention back to *Hezekiah* and says, “*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*” (v 30).

This implies that despite the Assyrian siege in which the invaders trampled, burned, and devastated any Jewish crops they came across, that the Judeans would still have a sufficient harvest and in *the third year* the crops will be back to normal.

God then compares the *remnant of Judah* who survive the siege to these same crops and states that they will be fruitful:

The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward and bear fruit upward (v 31). The picture is of crops, trees, and vegetation that are healthy and productive. A healthy tree has a healthy root system. The roots push *downward*, and create a firm foundation. Such a root system collects ample water and nutrients. The healthy root system produces fruit in the branches or on the stalks: *upward*. Judah will be like such healthy vegetation. Its economy will have a healthy foundation and it will produce healthy fruit.

For out of Jerusalem will go forth a remnant and out of Mount Zion survivors (v 32). As Hezekiah is hearing this answer to his prayer, prayed in Isaiah 37:15-20, Jerusalem is under

siege, with no hope other than deliverance from God. God's answer to Hezekiah's prayer, through the prophet Isaiah, is that there will be *survivors* from Jerusalem (*Mount Zion* being another name for Jerusalem). There will be a *remnant* of people to repopulate Judah.

God ends His proclamation against *King Sennacherib* with the statement, "*The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this*" (v 32)." Human *zeal* can accomplish great things. But such human *zeal* is nothing in comparison to the creator of the universe. When God has *zeal* towards something, it can be counted on that He will accomplish it. As stated elsewhere in Isaiah:

"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."
(Isaiah 55:11)

Archaeological evidence of *Sennacherib's* siege of *Jerusalem* was found in 1830 in modern-day Iraq. In these "Annals of *Sennacherib*" as they are called, a cuneiform prism referred to as "[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 the *Hezekiah* rebelled again *Sennacherib's* authority (Isaiah 36:5). Here is a translation of the relevant portion of the 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

²¹Then 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, ²²this is the word that the Lord has spoken against him:

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

**²³Whom 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!**

²⁴Through 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;
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And I will go to its highest peak, its thickest forest.**

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And with the sole of my feet I dried up
All the rivers of Egypt.’**

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second year what springs from the same, and in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards
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of Mount Zion survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” ’**