

**BEHOLD MY SERVANT**  
**A MESSIANIC STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF ISAIAH**  
**CHAPTERS 36 to 39**

**Outline of Isaiah Chapters 36:1 – 39:8**

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(An historical application of God's promised blessings to Judah)

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**Introduction to Isaiah Chapters 36-39**

Chapters 36-39 of Isaiah form a bridge between chapters 1-35: containing repetitive patterns of declarative messages of judgment followed by orations of salvation and chapters 40-66: containing exhortations of comfort including a redeeming King and resplendent kingdom. The great political concern of the people of God in chapters 1-35 was the overwhelming dread of the nation of Assyria. The great political concern of the people of God in chapters 40-66 is the prophecies of the rise of Babylon. The great spiritual burden of the people of God in chapters 1-35 was the need to trust God alone for protection and safety. The great spiritual blessing of the people of God in chapters 40-66 is the promise of the coming Servant of the Lord who will be their redeemer and lead them as their Messiah in the future millennial kingdom.

Two important themes are emphasized in chapters 36-39: (1) God can be completely trusted: the people of God need to have faith in Him; and (2) The nations who do not have faith in God will be destroyed by Him. A number of minor themes will be discussed in the notes of these chapters as the narrative proceeds.

Students of the Scripture should be astute to discern that chapters 38 and 39 historically come before chapters 36 and 37. The reasons for Isaiah positioning these chapters in this manner are not known but it can be suggested that the narrative culminating in the destruction of the Assyrian army is a fitting end to chapters 1-35. Also, the health issues and actions of Hezekiah resulting in the visit of the ambassadors from Babylon is a historically important introduction to chapters 40-66. The reasons for the understanding that chapters 36 and 37 actually come chronologically after chapters 38 and 39 are stated below.

## **1 Historical dating:**

King Hezekiah co-reigned with his father Ahaz from 729-716 B.C. Hezekiah ruled as the sole monarch from 715 B.C. Isaiah 36:1 states that it was in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib, king of Assyria seized all the fortified cities of Judah. The following verses record the planned assault by Assyria on Jerusalem as a continuing event. The year of the planned assault by Assyria on Jerusalem was therefore 701 B.C. Ancient records of this period also confirm this date. The events of chapters 36 and 37 happened in 701 B.C.

Isaiah 39:1-2 states that Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon had heard that Hezekiah was sick and had recovered. The Babylonian prince send letters and a present to King Hezekiah and the Judean king showed the ambassadors from Babylon all the treasures of the house of Hezekiah including his treasure house, armories and all the other treasures of Hezekiah's dominion. From historical records, it is known that Merodach-baladan ruled Babylon from 722-710 B.C. and again for a brief period in 704-703 B.C. Therefore, the events of chapters 38 and 39 of Isaiah had to have happened at least a few years prior to 701 B.C. See also Isaiah 38:6 which states that the deliverance of the city from the Assyrians by God is a future event.

## **2 The gold and silver of Hezekiah:**

When the ambassadors from Babylon visited Hezekiah, the King showed the Babylonians all of the treasures of the kingdom including the silver and the gold. They were in place and not removed. Isaiah 39:1-2. As recorded in 2 Kings 18:14-16, Sennacherib demanded three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold from Hezekiah as a payment as Hezekiah thought would be for the Assyrians to withdraw from Jerusalem. This unbelievable amount of payment would have equal to eleven tons of silver and one ton of gold. To complete this payment verse 16 of 2 Kings 18 states that Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors and doorposts of the temple and emptied all the silver that was in the house of the Lord. In spite of this enormous payment, Sennacherib did not withdraw from his assault on Jerusalem. This happened in 701 B.C. so therefore Hezekiah showed the ambassadors from Babylon all his treasures including the silver and gold before the treachery of Sennacherib occurred and before the events recorded in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37.

Gary V. Smith provides an extended discussion of the chronological dating of these chapters in his commentary, *Isaiah: Vol. 1*, pages 583 to 657. This discussion by Smith is very helpful to the understanding not only of the chronological issues but also of the major political concerns and theological considerations of these four chapters.

Chapters 36 and 37 of Isaiah have much in common with Isaiah chapters 7 and 8. In both narratives: (1) Judah was threatened by an enemy that appeared to be overwhelming to the people and king of the nation yet Jerusalem was not conquered: 7:1-2 and 36:1-2. (2) The place of the discussion was the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller's field: 7:3 and 36:2. (3) The king and people of Judah were deathly afraid of the threat from an invading army: 7:2 and 37:3. (4) The message from the prophet was the same: "do not be afraid:" 7:4 and 37:6. (5) The protection of God was offered to the King of Judah: 7:7-9 and 36:7; 37:21-35. (6) A sign was offered by God as a trust of His faithfulness to His word: 7:10-16 and 37:30-32 (7) The sign offered had elements of an immediate resolution and a messianic promise: 7:10-16 and 37:30-32. (8) God faithfully delivered Jerusalem from its enemies (8:4 and 37:36).

There are at least two issues where these narratives differ: (1) In chapter 7 King Ahaz refused to consider God's offer of a sign. In chapter 37 there is no discussion of Hezekiah refusing to consider the sign stated by God. (2) In chapter 7, there is no discussion of the Ahaz presenting a prayer to God to ask for God's help. In chapter 36, Hezekiah goes into the temple and prays for God's direct intervention and protection. If Ahaz had heeded the call of the prophet and trusted in the Lord, there likely would not have been a need for this second meeting at this place.

Isaiah's account of the threatened destruction of Jerusalem and God's supernatural intervention is complimented by the narrative recorded in 2 Kings 18:13 to 20:19 and 2 Chronicles 32:1-26. Some content in the account in 2 Kings is not recorded in Isaiah's narrative in chapters 36 and 37: ie: Hezekiah's payment of silver and gold to Sennacherib. This should not be a cause to doubt the historicity of Isaiah's narrative for Isaiah simply may have selected details of the story that were of importance to his accounting of the actions of God and of King Hezekiah. In the gospel accounts, Mark for instance records only two verses about the temptation of Jesus Christ while Matthew devotes eleven verses and Luke thirteen verses to this very important incident in the life of Christ. The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke often relate the same incident in the life of Christ but provide different but collaborative details. The accounts of the narrative of God's protection of Jerusalem, as recorded in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles and in Isaiah should be understood in a similar manner.

## **A: God Protects Judah from Assyria: Chapters 36-37**

### **1. The Invasion of Judah by Assyria: 36:1-22**

Prior to this climatic chapter about how God finally deals with the Assyrian threat, Isaiah had mentioned Assyria 21 times. In chapters 36 and 37 Assyria is mentioned 18 times. Isaiah only mentions Assyria once more after chapter 37 as an historical reference: Isaiah 52:4. Assyria is mentioned by Isaiah: 7:17, 18, 20; 8:4, 7; 10:5, 12, 24; 11:11, 16; 14: 25; 19:23, 24, 25; 20:1, 4, 6; 23:13; 27:13; 30:31; 31:8; 36:1, 2, 4, 8, 13, 15, 16, 18; 37:4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 18, 21, 33, 36, 37; 38:6 and 52:4. In contrast Babylon is mentioned by Isaiah 9 times up to and including chapter 39 and 4 times from chapters 40-66. From the evidence of occurrence of mention, it is clear that God intended to make a statement to the entire world about His direct involvement in the protection of Jerusalem from the assault of the Assyrians.

## Chapter 36

Three great deliverances of the people of God are recorded in the Old Testament. The first and greatest in importance was the exodus of the Jews from Egypt culminating in the Passover and then the mosaic covenant declared at Mount Sinai. The second is the protection of Jerusalem from the Assyrians and the third is the return of the Jews to Jerusalem from Babylon. There are many others but arguably these three are the most significant because they have the most content recorded about them. God protected His people from destruction not because they had done anything to deserve His intervention but because of the sake of His great name. As it was in the past so it will continue in the future as Ezekiel declares: “*Therefore tell the house of Israel, ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: I did not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations, wherever you went.’*” Ezekiel 36:22. See also Psalm 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11; Isaiah 48:9, 11; Jeremiah 14:21; Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22, 44; and Daniel 9:19.

**36:1** *In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.*

The armies of Sennacherib, king of Assyria seized all of the fortified cities of Judah in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s rule (701 B.C.). See above note on the chronological significance of chapters 36-39. Now a great army of Assyrians was amassing to lay siege to Jerusalem. The power and pride of the Assyrians was at its zenith during these years. Neither Egypt nor Babylon was strong enough to defend themselves against the military might of Sennacherib’s forces. What could King Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem hope to accomplish by resisting the onslaught of Assyria? Not only did the situation appear hopeless but in human terms it was hopeless. However, this was not a matter for humans to decide. God had already indicated His intentions in this matter. Isaiah 14:24-25; 31:8.

Thomas Constable comments on the claims of Sennacherib on the number of cities conquered in Judah:

The fourteenth year of Hezekiah was 701 B.C. 401 On an Assyrian record, Sennacherib claimed to have taken 46 cities of Judah during this campaign (cf. 2 Chron. 32:1). The record is on the Prism of Sennacherib, also called the Taylor Prism, now in the British Museum.402 (Note 401: See E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 118-54. [Note 402: See J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 288; or Young, 2:566-69, or Dyer, in *The Old ...*, p. 557, who reproduced Sennacherib’s translated description of his campaign into Palestine.] (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, Page 163).

**36:2** *The king of Assyria sent his chief commander from Lachish to Jerusalem to King Hezekiah with a large army. He stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway to the Clothes Washer’s field.*

Isaiah states in vs. 2, that the king of Assyria, Sennacherib sent “his chief commander” or Rabshakeh as translated in many English versions. See vs. 4. The literal meaning of Rabshakeh is “chief cup bearer” but this person likely had a more significant role as the king’s ambassador.

He certainly would have been a trusted servant of Sennacherib. In 2 Kings 18:17 it is recorded that Sennacherib also sent

Tartan (army commander) and Rab-saris (chief eunuch) along with Rabshakeh as the representatives of Assyria. Rabshakeh however was the chief spokesman for the Assyrians. Isaiah continues in vs. 2: *"He stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway to the Clothes Washer's field."* This was the same location that Isaiah had met with Hezekiah's father Ahaz 23 years earlier. See Isaiah 7:3. For more comparisons between this earlier meeting and the events in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37, see the above notes. It is likely that this location was chosen for its proximity to the walls of Jerusalem where both the Assyrians and the Judeans could easily talk to each other.

**36:3** *Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, who was in charge of the palace, Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder came out to him.*

Isaiah states the names of the Judean delegation. Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe and Joah the recorder came out to meet with Rabshakeh. In the notes of Isaiah 22: 15-25, a detailed explanation is given why Shebna was stripped of his position of head of the household and why Eliakim was elevated to this prestigious position in place of Shebna. The role of head of the household (of the king) may have been that of prime minister and represented the one who would have been the most trusted of King Hezekiah's servants.

**36:4-10** *Then Rabshakeh said to them, "Tell Hezekiah, This is what the great king, the king of Assyria says, 'What is the basis of your confidence?*

<sup>5</sup> *I tell you, your strategy and strength for the war are mere empty words. Now in whom are you trusting, that you have rebelled against me?*

<sup>6</sup> *Look, you are trusting in Egypt that staff is a broken reed, if someone leans on it, it will pierce his hand. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.*

<sup>7</sup> *But if you tell me, "We trust in the LORD our God." Isn't he the one, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has removed, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You must worship before this altar?'*

<sup>8</sup> *Now therefore, make a bet with my master the king of Assyria. I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able to find enough riders to put on them.*

<sup>9</sup> *How then can you repulse even one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust on Egypt for chariots and horsemen?*

<sup>10</sup> *In fact, did I come up against this land to destroy it without the LORD? The LORD told me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.'"*

In verses 4-10, Isaiah records the first oration of Rabshakeh to the Judean delegation. It is a speech filled with hubris boasting, misguided taunting and blasphemous lecturing. The main parts of his speech are:

- (1) The king of Assyria is a great king. vs. 4.

This title is an insult to King Hezekiah for nowhere in his speech or proclamation does Rabshakeh call Hezekiah a king. It also is an insult to the royal line of David and to God the true King of Israel. In the future, another king would have so much hubris to declare that he did things by the might of his power and for the glory of his majesty and was immediately humbled by God. Daniel 4:28-37

- (2) What is this confidence (their strategy and strength) you have and upon whom are you trusting? vs. 5

There was no recognition by the Assyrians that Israel and Judah were led by the only true God. By its negative implication, Rabshakeh is declaring that the Judeans are fools to trust in any one including God for their salvation.

- (3) It is folly to trust in Egypt for they can only hurt and not help Judah. vs.6

This statement was a stinging indictment of the foolishness of the Judeans to trust in Egypt for protection. It also confirmed the earlier declarations of Isaiah who warned the Judean leadership about their covenant with death in trusting the Egyptians. Isaiah 28:14-15.

- (4) By removing the high places and altars (outside of Jerusalem) and insisting that God be worshipped only in Jerusalem, Hezekiah has undermined the people's access to worship God and has given no reason to trust in God. vs. 7.

The Assyrians evidently had some knowledge of the actions of king Hezekiah in his early days as king when he removed the high places and altars (sacred pillars). 2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 31:1. They assumed that all peoples worship idols that represented a god. They had no concept of how the Lord, the Holy One of Israel was to be worshiped and therefore they perceived that Hezekiah was destroying the Judeans access to God and insulting God in the process. Therefore, how could Hezekiah rely on this God.

- (5) The Assyrians are willing to bargain with Hezekiah will provide him with two thousand horses if he could supply enough riders to sit upon them. vs. 8

This was a taunt and an insult to the Judeans. The Assyrians had earlier proven they could not be relied on to bargain with Hezekiah. 2 Kings 18:14-18. It was true that Hezekiah could not supply two thousand men from his military to mount the horses but the King knew the Assyrians were trying to intimidate him.

- (6) The folly of trusting in Egypt is repeated with a stunning statement that the Lord had told Rabshakeh and by implication king Sennacherib to come up against Judah and destroy it. Verses 9-10.

The blasphemous statement of the Assyrians would cut deep into the psyche of those in Jerusalem who were not trusting nor had faith in God. They would wonder if this statement were indeed true and fill them with even greater terror. However, for those who truly trusted in God within Jerusalem, it would be a sign that the Assyrians had overplayed their hand. The majority of the Judeans may have pondered which spokesman for God was to be trusted, the Assyrian pagan or the prophet Isaiah? God would soon provide the answer!

### **The Interruption:**

**36:11-12** *Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to the Assyrian commander, "Please speak, to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand it. Do not speak to us in the Judean language, in the ears of the people who are on the wall."*

<sup>12</sup> *But the Assyrian commander replied, "Has my master sent me to your master, and to you, to speak these words? Has he not sent me to those on the wall, who, like you, will end up eating their own excrement and drinking their own urine?"*

In these verses, Isaiah records that upon hearing the oration of Rabshakeh, the Judean delegation requested that he speak in Aramaic instead of the Hebrew language for there were many inhabitants of Jerusalem listening (implying that these listeners might spread fear among the people in the city). Rabshakeh immediately reacted to this request by a taunt to all who were listening by stating that all who were listening to him (in the Hebrew language) including the Judean delegation, would soon be forced to eat their own dung and drink their own urine. This was a threat that the food and water supplies to the city would be cut off and the inhabitants of the city would die due to starvation and thirst.

### **The Continuation:**

**36:13-20** *Then the Assyrian commander stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Judean language, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria.*

<sup>14</sup> *This is what the king says, 'Don't let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to rescue you.'*

<sup>15</sup> *Do not let Hezekiah trick you into trusting in the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will surely rescue us. This city will not fall into the hand of the king of Assyria.'*

<sup>16</sup> *Do not listen to Hezekiah. For this is what the king of Assyria says, 'Make peace with me and come out to me. Then everyone will eat from his own vine, and everyone from his own fig tree, and everyone will drink waters from his own cistern,*

<sup>17</sup> *until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards.*

<sup>18</sup> *Do not let Hezekiah mislead you, saying, "The LORD will rescue us." Has any of the gods of the nations been able to deliver his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?*

<sup>19</sup> *Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Did any of them deliver Samaria out of my hand?*

*<sup>20</sup> Who among all the gods of these countries, were able to deliver their country out of my hand? So how can the LORD deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"*

As recorded in verses 13 to 20, Rabshakeh continued his speech after the interruption by the delegation from King Hezekiah. This speech was undoubtedly a prepared lecture designed to strike terror into the hearts of all who were listening. Rabshakeh steps up the diatribe against Hezekiah. Rabshakeh still refused to call Hezekiah a king. The main aspects of this continued lecture are:

- (7) Rabshakeh called into question Hezekiah's and the Lord's ability to deliver the people of Jerusalem from the Assyrian assault led by king Sennacherib. Verses 13-15.

The Assyrian strategy was to drive doubt into the minds of the people of Jerusalem by stating that neither their earthly king nor their eternal God could deliver them from the great king of Assyria. This speech was in direct opposition to the teaching of Isaiah who for many years had toiled among the people of the city and the court of the king proclaiming that the only true God, the Holy One of Israel was their savior.

Now the impact of Isaiah's teaching was placed in jeopardy. To whom would the people and the king listen? To whom would they trust, the king of Assyria or the Lord of the Universe?

- (8) Rabshakeh called upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem to come out of the city and be the recipients of a promised blessing of eating safely from their own vine and fig tree and drink water from their own cistern. Later they would be taken to a land (like their own land) which was a land of grain, new wine, bread and vineyards. Verses 16-17.

It may have been tempting for many inside the walls of Jerusalem to heed the invitation of Rabshakeh. Times were harsh and the Assyrian advance into Judah effectively cut off access to the agricultural lands in the surrounding country side. The fact of the Assyrian strategy of displacement of captured peoples from their homeland to another land would have been common knowledge. They had done so to the peoples of Samaria about twenty-one years before. Rabshakeh tried to smooth over this reality by promising the people of Jerusalem another land which would be as rich in agriculture as their own. The heart of the matter, however is that God had promised the land of Israel to the forefathers of the Jewish people. It was Immanuel's land, Isaiah 8:8. God would not at this time allow His great city of Jerusalem to be captured by a pagan enemy. The city would one day be given over to foreign domination but this was not yet that day.

- (9) Rabshakeh completed his harangue against Hezekiah with a taunt that the God of the Judeans could not possibly save them. Rabshakeh stated that the gods of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim and Samaria did not deliver them from the hand of the Assyrians (my hand) and why should the Lord deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians (my hand). Verses 18-20.



With this last blasphemous blast, Rabshakeh concluded his oration. It was apparent that the Assyrians thought that all of the gods of the western edges of their empire were the same, powerless and impotent. They evidently did not understand that the true God, the Holy One of Israel could indeed allow his people to be taken into captivity and dispersed among pagan nations due to their gross idol worship and rebellion against Him. They likely did not have access to the writings of the prophets such as Isaiah and Hosea that explained why God would allow a foreign power to conquer the nation of Samaria. Isaiah 8:4 and Hosea 10:6. But their most glaring conceit was their assumption that the God of Hezekiah was as powerless as any idol. They would soon learn otherwise. Rabshakeh's own conceit and pride was evident in his words "from my hand" which he repeated twice as recorded in verses 19 and 20.

As recorded in verses 21 and 22, following the oration of Rabshakeh, the delegation from king Hezekiah, Eliakim, Shebna and Joah left the meeting with the Assyrians without any words of response as Hezekiah had ordered them and they came into the king's presence with their clothes torn, as a symbol of mourning and distress and told the king the words of Rabshakeh.

### **Isaiah Chapter 37:**

- 2 The Prophet is Summoned: 37:1-13
- 3 The King's Prayer: 37:14-20
- 4 The Response of God: 37:21-35
- 5 The Assyrian Army Destroyed: 37:36-38

### **2 The Prophet is Summoned: 37:1-13**

The next segment 37:1-13 of this dramatic narrative now involve the prophet Isaiah who faithfully recorded the events and orations of chapter 36 but remained behind the scenes although it is certain he would have had much to say in response to the Assyrian spokesman. In this segment, Hezekiah hears the words of the Assyrian Rabshakeh and then humbles himself by tearing his clothes and covering himself with sackcloth. He then proceeds into the temple and sends his servants to Isaiah with a message of great import. Isaiah responds to the message with words of comfort for Hezekiah and words of distress for the Assyrian king. King Sennacherib of Assyria sends a letter to Hezekiah with a final attempt at taunting the Judean king to not depend on God.

### **The Response of Hezekiah: 37:1-4**

**37:1-4** *When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.*

<sup>2</sup> *He sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, clothed with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz.*

<sup>3</sup> *They said to him, "This is what Hezekiah says, 'This day is a day of trouble, insults, and of disgrace. It is like when children are at the point of birth, but there is no strength left to deliver them.*

<sup>4</sup> *It may be the LORD your God will hear the words of the Assyrian commander, whom the king of Assyria his master has sent to defy the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. So lift up your prayer for the remnant that is still left here."*

In verses 1-4, the response of King Hezekiah to the verbal threats of the Assyrians is recorded. His first response, vs. 1, was to tear his clothes and cover himself with sackcloth as an outward demonstration of distress and mourning. He then entered the house of the Lord (the temple). Isaiah does not reveal what part of the temple was visited by Hezekiah. It is not often that the kings of Judah entered the temple. King Uzziah was likely the last king to do so and the results were disastrous as Uzziah went into the holy place to burn incense on the altar of incense. God punished Uzziah for his act of pride and disobedience by striking the king with leprosy while the kings had the incense censer in his hand. Uzziah would later die of this disease. 2 Chronicles 26:16-23. Uzziah's son Jotham did not enter the temple. 2 Chronicles 27:2. Jotham's grandson Hezekiah however was very much interested in the temple. In the early days of his reign he had the doors of the temple repaired and commanded the temple to be cleansed from past atrocities that had occurred there. He also reinstated the celebration of Passover including the Feast of Unleavened bread which brought great joy to the people of Jerusalem. Hezekiah also had the people remove and destroy all the pillars, Asherim, high places and altars devoted to idol worship in Judah and in the territories of Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh. Refer to 2 Chronicles 29-31 for the Biblical account of the religious reforms completed by Hezekiah.

Hezekiah's next act, vs. 2, was to send Eliakim, Shebna and the elders of the priests to *Isaiah the prophet*. This was the first mention in his prophecy that Isaiah is called the prophet. Although in 8:3, he calls his wife a prophetess. Isaiah is called a prophet in 2 Kings 19:2; 20:1, 11, 14; 2 Chronicles 26:22; 32:20 and 32. In Isaiah the reference to Isaiah as the prophet occurs here in 37:2 and 38:1 and 39:3. In the New Testament Isaiah is often referred to as the prophet: Matthew 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4; 4:17; John 1:23; 12:38; Acts 8:28, 30; and 28:25. Many other New Testament references to Isaiah just mention his name without the title of prophet.

The message from Hezekiah to Isaiah is recorded in verses 3-4. Hezekiah rightly states in vs. 3 that *"This is a day of trouble, insults and disgrace."* For Judah: (1) it was a day of trouble because of the threat of the Assyrians poised to conquer Jerusalem; (2) it was a day of insults (rebuke) for the failure of King Hezekiah and his court and the people of Jerusalem to listen to God's promise that He would destroy the Assyrian threat: (Isaiah 10:12-19; 14:24-27; 29:5-8; 30:27-33; 31:4-9); and (3) it was a day of disgrace (rejection): Hezekiah's payment of an exorbitant amount supposedly to guarantee that Assyria would not attack Jerusalem was a sham for Sennacherib took the money and rejected any promise of safety for Jerusalem. (2 Kings 18:14-17). For Assyria: (1) it was a day of trouble for their doom was earlier declared by God: (Isaiah 10:12-19; 14:24-27; 29:5-8; 30:27-33; 31:4-9); (2) it was a day of insults (rebuke) for God would surely rebuke Sennacherib and his leaders for blasphemy: (Isaiah 37:6); and (3) it was a day of disgrace (rejection) for God would reject any possible alleviation of the judgment to come on them.

It should be noted that the word translated “disgrace” in vs. 3, can also be translated “rejection” It is translated as “blasphemy” in the KJV and NKJV. The word “disgrace” is the Hebrew word *ne’asa* can be understood as either shame (disgrace) or spurn (blasphemy). Those who interpret Hebrew into English have grammatical reasons for understanding the word within its context and one interpreter may disagree with another as to its exact English translation. For example, in the DASV in the parallel account of this plea by Hezekiah, 2 Kings 19:3 it states: *“They said to him, ‘This is what Hezekiah says, ‘This is a day of trouble, insults and humiliation; like when children are ready to be born, but there is no strength to bring them out.’”* The NKJV for 2 Kings 19:3 states: *“And they said unto him, Thus says Hezekiah: This day is a day of trouble, and rebuke and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth.”*

The next words of Hezekiah, vs. 3: *“it is like when children are at the point of birth, but there is no strength left to deliver them.”* may better be applied to Jerusalem than Assyria. Hezekiah certainly had no doubt that Assyria had the strength to deliver complete destruction upon Jerusalem. It was Jerusalem who was weak and unable to defend itself from the fearsome Assyrians.

In vs. 4, Hezekiah, through his delegation to Isaiah asks the prophet to pray for the remnant of the people of God who are left and held captive in their own city. Hezekiah had prefaced this request for prayer by stating that it was likely (perhaps) that God had heard the reproachful words of Rabshakeh directed against God and that God would rebuke the Assyrians. Hezekiah describes God as *“the living God.”* Hezekiah certainly understood that the Holy One of Israel was a living God implying that He was the only living Divinity and the gods of the pagan nations were nothing by worthless idols. The title of God as “the living God” would be used again by Hezekiah in his prayer to God in the temple. (Isaiah 37:17). It is a major theme of Scripture and one so dramatically spoken of by Peter in response to Christ’s question: *“But who do you say that I am?”* <sup>16</sup> *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (Matthew 16:15-16).

### **The Decision of the Lord: 37:5-7**

**37:5-7** *So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.*

<sup>6</sup> *Then Isaiah said to them, “This is what you are to tell your master, ‘This is what the LORD says, Do not be afraid of the words that you have heard, by which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.*

<sup>7</sup> *Look, I will put a spirit in him, he will hear rumors, and will return to his own land. I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.”*

In verses 5-7, Isaiah receives the delegation and responds to the plea of Hezekiah delivered by the delegation to the prophet. Isaiah states in verses 6-7 that the Lord has said that they are not to be afraid of the blasphemous words from the servants of the king of Assyria. For God will put

within the Assyrian king a spirit from which he will hear rumors and will return to Assyria where he will be put to death by the sword. When a prophet, anointed by the Lord, uses the divine authoritative “*This is what the LORD says,*” not only should the listeners pay immediate attention, but they should know that whatever the Lord says will happen is an absolute certainty to happen. Isaiah uses this expression 38 times in his prophecy and three times in chapter 37.

As in earlier declarations by God, He begins his response in vs. 6 by the words, *do not be afraid*. See Isaiah 10:24 and 35:4. Isaiah would again address the people of Judah with these comforting words from God: Isaiah 40:9; 41: 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8; 51:7; 54:4, 14. God wants the people of Jerusalem to have no fear because of the blasphemous words from the “servants” (literally: “lads, boys or underlings”) of the king of Assyria.

The Lord declares in vs. 7 that He will put a spirit in Sennacherib and the king will hear a rumor and return to his own land where he will die “by the sword”. The fulfillment of this was soon to happen as verses 37 and 38 of this chapter testify. It is not stated what is meant by God putting a spirit on Sennacherib so that he heard a rumor. The rumor he heard was most likely the news of the mass death of his army, (vs. 36). Sennacherib, who was not with the army outside of Jerusalem, did return to Nineveh upon hearing of the death of his army (vs. 37) and twenty years later he was killed with a sword by two of his sons, (vs. 38). The timing of the death of Sennacherib is interesting to students of Scripture. Hezekiah did not live to hear about the death of his enemy Sennacherib. It needs to be remembered that Sennacherib was really the enemy of God and He alone determined the time for Sennacherib to die. It could be that God gave Sennacherib twenty years to contemplate what really happened at Jerusalem and repent of his blasphemy against the living God. However, Sennacherib was still worshipping a false god when he was killed and it is likely that he did not repent.

### **The Letter from Sennacherib: 37:8-13**

**37:8-13** *So the Assyrian commander returned, and found the king of Assyria attacking Libnah, for he heard that he had left Lachish.*

<sup>9</sup> *He heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, "He is come out to fight against you." When he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying,*

<sup>10</sup> *"This is what you will say to Hezekiah king of Judah, "Let not your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, 'Jerusalem will not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.'*

<sup>11</sup> *Look, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by totally destroying them, and do you really think that you will be rescued?*

<sup>12</sup> *Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my predecessors destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the children of Eden that were in Telassar?*

<sup>13</sup> *Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the kings of the cities of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Iwah?"*

Isaiah records in vs. 8 that Rabshakeh, after receiving no response from the Judean delegation, left Jerusalem and returned to his king who was now fighting against Libnah after his likely destruction of Lachish. Sennacherib heard that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia (Cush) , had led his army (from Egypt) to fight against the Assyrians, vs. 9. There are some issues mentioned in vs. 9 that need to be discussed. The term “king” as a title for Tirhakah has been debated among scholars of Old Testament History. Tirhakah was about twenty years of age when he led the Egyptian army against the Assyrians. He was not technically the king of Egypt but was the crown-prince and the Hebrew word for king, *melek* can have both meanings of king and prince. The reference to Tirhakah as king of Ethiopia (Cush) also needs an explanation. Egypt was being ruled by an Ethiopian dynasty and Tirhakah was the next king in line to rule Egypt. He became the sole ruler of Egypt in 690 B.C.

Why would the army of Egypt be advancing at this time to fight the Assyrians? They may have been keeping their part of an agreement they made with Hezekiah to provide protection for Jerusalem in the event of an attack by Assyria. This agreement is called a “covenant of death” in Isaiah 28:15. However, it is most likely that the Egyptians were not advancing at all and Sennacherib only heard gossip about the possibility. Egypt was no match for Assyria and there is no record of a battle between these nations in 701 B.C. Sennacherib, not wanting to begin a siege against Jerusalem at the same time as engaging an advancing army, sent a letter to Hezekiah in an attempt to hasten Hezekiah’s surrender.

Sennacherib in his letter to Hezekiah, as stated in verses 10-13, uses similar rhetoric to that recently delivered by Rabshakeh to Hezekiah, (Isaiah 36:4-20). In Sennacherib’s shorter written demand to Hezekiah, he warns Hezekiah not to depend on his God who had told Hezekiah, “*Jerusalem will not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria*”, vs. 10. It may be that the Assyrians had heard of the proclamations of Isaiah regarding the promises of God to protect the city of Jerusalem. Sennacherib, then listed a number of nations and cities that the Assyrians had captured and asked Hezekiah of the whereabouts of the kings that ruled over these places. Sennacherib demanded to know what made Hezekiah think he would be spared from the might of the Assyrians. The gravest comment made by Sennacherib was the insult to God, vs. 11, insinuating that just as the gods of the conquered nations were of no help so the God of Hezekiah would not protect Jerusalem. It was one thing to send a delegation to orally deliver threats to the Judean King, but now Hezekiah had a written threat from the king of Assyria. It was a letter Hezekiah could not afford to ignore.

### **3 The King’s Prayer: 37:14-20**

**37:14-20** *After Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; he went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it out before the LORD.*

<sup>15</sup> *Hezekiah prayed to the LORD,*

<sup>16</sup> *"O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, who sits enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made heaven and earth.*

<sup>17</sup> *Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear! Open your eyes, O LORD, and see! Hear all the words that Sennacherib has sent to defy the living God.*

<sup>18</sup> *It is true, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the countries and their land.*

<sup>19</sup> *They have thrown their gods into the fire, for they were no gods at all but only the work of human hands, merely wood and stone. Therefore the Assyrians have destroyed them.*

<sup>20</sup> *Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD."*

These verses record the prayer of Hezekiah in response to the letter he had received from king Sennacherib of Assyria. Hezekiah praises God as ruler creator of all the earth He then rehearses the urgency of the threat against Jerusalem by the Assyrians and asks God to deliver Jerusalem so that "*all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD.*" vs. 20.

Hezekiah took the letter received from Sennacherib and went up to the house of the Lord and spread the letter out as if to imply the Lord would read it Himself, vs. 14. This action by Hezekiah came after the declaration by Isaiah with the authoritative word of the Lord that Hezekiah was not to be afraid because the Lord would put events into place that would see Sennacherib return to his land where he would fall by the sword, vs. 7. However, Hezekiah knowing all this came directly to the Lord in prayer and pled for the direct intervention of God to protect the city. Hezekiah was now humbled completely. The only way out of this situation was to go to the One he should have consulted months before.

Hezekiah's prayer, although not a model of a repentant petition as was Daniel's prayer recorded in Daniel chapter 9, was nonetheless noteworthy for (1) its praise to God for His position as God alone of all the kingdoms of the earth and His creative act of the maker of heaven and earth, vs. 16; (2) its recognition of the blasphemy of Sennacherib and his reproach of the living God; and (3) its plea to God for deliverance so that all kingdoms of the earth may know that God alone is God. (the one true God of all the earth).

#### **4 The Response of God: 37:21-35**

Some may have been critical of Hezekiah for his direct petition of God for protection when the King already had God's authoritative word that He would not allow Sennacherib to approach Jerusalem but would soon sent the king of Assyria back to his own land where he would face death by the sword, vs. 7. However, this was not God's attitude.

**37:21** *Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'Because you have prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria,*

God began His response to Hezekiah's petition by stating, "*because you prayed.*" God thus acknowledges the value of the King's prayer. God often works in response to the prayers of his people. He often drives people to pray so He can respond to the praise of His great glory and act on behalf of the sake of the renown of His name.

Isaiah, as recorded in verses 22-35 declares God's lengthy response to the prayer of Hezekiah. It should be noted that in 2 Chronicles 32:20 it is stated that "*Because of this, King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz prayed and cried out to heaven.*" However, in Isaiah chapter 37, it is stated that it was God's response of Hezekiah's prayer that is given attention. It may be that Isaiah was humble enough not to mention his own prayers of petition to God. The response of God to the prayer of Hezekiah is a master's lesson in the methods of the Lord in dealing with those who threaten His beloved City and His chosen people. The inclusion of a sign, verses 30-32 is an unsought blessing from God that has immediate and future kingdom consequences. God completes this response with forceful and dramatic action, verses 36-38 He accomplishes what He said He would do. The whole earth must acknowledge that He alone is God.

### **The Sentence of God: 37:22-29**

**37:22** *this is the word which the LORD has spoken about him:*

*"The virgin daughter of Zion despises you and laughs at you.  
The daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head as you flee.*

God began His message which was addressed to king Sennacherib with a taunt about how the surrounded city will despise and mock the prideful Assyrian monarch. Thomas Constable comments:

"Assyria had mocked a "person" who was especially dear to the Lord, namely, His "virgin daughter," Jerusalem (cf. 1:8; 47:1). No foreign foe had penetrated Jerusalem, Thus Assyria had incurred His anger." (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 169).

**37:23** *Whom have you defied and insulted?*

*Against whom have you lifted your voice  
and arrogantly lifted up your eyes?  
Against the Holy One of Israel.*

The Lord demands from Sennacherib against whom had he reproached and blasphemed and against whom had he raised his eyes and haughtily (see Isaiah 10:12) lifted his voice? The answer comes immediately "*Against the Holy One of Israel?*" Isaiah had earlier recorded that He saw the Lord, lofty and exalted (high and lifted up in the KJV and NKJV). It was the Lord's sole right to be praised as the high and holy One. (See Motyer, *Isaiah*, page 228). Who did Sennacherib think he was demeaning and blaspheming by his statements that Isaiah had earlier recorded? Isaiah 36:4-20; 37:10-13.

**37:24-25** *By your servants have you defied the Lord, and have said,*

*"With my many chariots I have climbed to the mountains tops,  
to the remote parts of Lebanon.  
I cut down its tall cedars,  
and its choice cypresses.  
I have penetrated its remotest heights,  
its thickest forests.*

<sup>25</sup> *I dug and drank water,  
and with the sole of my feet  
I dried up all the rivers of Egypt.*

The Lord continues His address to Sennacherib by announcing that the Lord knew everything that the Assyrian king did and said. God repeated Sennacherib's words of boasting about conquering the heights of Lebanon, digging wells and drinking waters and most outrageously his claim that he dried up the rivers of Egypt with his feet. David L. Cooper comments:

A Glance at verses 24 and 25 shows that the purpose of the king of Assyria when he left his native land was to invade the innermost parts of Lebanon, that is, Syria and Palestine. The Lebanon Mountains were famous for their cedar and fir trees, together with their fruitful trees. Since the same mountain range continues through both countries, they were designated as Lebanon. Moreover, according to verse 25, Sennacherib purposed to go down into Egypt and to conquer it. This is seen in the words, "I have digged and drunk water, and with the sole of my feet will I dry up all the rivers of Egypt." It was his plan, which he considered as good as accomplished, to overrun the entire country of Egypt and to destroy its military power. (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly - December 1945).

**37:26-29** *Have you not heard how I have determined it long ago?*

*I planned it from ancient times.*

*Now I have brought it to pass,  
that you should crush fortified cities into piles of ruins.*

<sup>27</sup> *Therefore their inhabitants were powerless,  
they were dismayed and put to shame.*

*They were like the grass of the field,  
and like green plants,  
like the grass on the rooftops,  
scorched before it is grown up.*

<sup>28</sup> *But I know your sitting down,  
and your going out,  
and your coming in,  
and your raging against me.*

<sup>29</sup> *Because of your raging against me  
and your arrogance has reached my ears,  
therefore I will put my hook in your nose,  
and my bit in your mouth,  
and I will turn you back by the way that you came.*



God reveals that even the actions of Sennacherib were planned by God Himself. The word “planned” is a potter’s verb meaning to mold or shape. (See Motyer, Isaiah, page 229). God had from ancient times, prepared Sennacherib to be His instrument of divine retribution on the nations, cities, and agricultural lands that the Assyrian forces had destroyed. The places the Assyrians had so boastfully destroyed was accomplished without any acknowledgement of God’s direct participation and prior determination. In vs. 28, God revealed that He knew everything about Sennacherib even his sitting down, coming out and in and most importantly, Sennacherib’s rage against Him.

God, in vs. 29 completes his direct message to Sennacherib with a description of what He will do to the arrogant and raging king. Isaiah states that God has said that because of the raging words of Sennacherib and because his arrogance has filled God’s ears, God will put His hook into the nose of Sennacherib and His bit in the Assyrian king’s mouth and God will return this pagan king back by the way he came. God uses the language of the hunter of wild beasts who uses a cruel hook sunk into the nose to lead the captive animal at His will.

### **The Sign of God: 37:30-32**

**37:30-32** *This will be a sign for you, Hezekiah:*

*This year you will eat whatever grows by itself,  
and in the second year whatever springs up from that.  
In the third year you will sow,  
reap, plant vineyards,  
and eat its fruit.*

<sup>31</sup> *The remnant that escaped from the house of Judah  
will again take root below and bear fruit above.*

<sup>32</sup> *For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant,  
and out of Mount Zion a group of survivors.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

God, following His message to Sennacherib, gives a proclamation of hope to king Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. God introduces a sign to authenticate His word and to show that God will accomplish what He has proclaimed to His people. The *first* great sign in the prophecy of Isaiah is the sign given to the wicked king Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah. This first great sign, Isaiah 7:10-16 had an immediate fulfillment in the protection of Jerusalem from its enemies and a future messianic fulfillment concerning the virgin birth of the Messiah. The *second* great sign, Isaiah 19:19-24, is set entirely in the far future during the coming messianic kingdom. The *third* great sign, Isaiah 20:1-6 has its setting during the days of Isaiah’s ministry and refers to the punishment of Cush and Egypt. The *fourth* great sign, Isaiah 37:30-32 has an immediate fulfillment in the return of the agricultural bounty to the people of Jerusalem and a future fulfillment in the messianic kingdom when the remnant of the Lord will rise up. The Lord will preserve those He has chosen and will not allow the lineage of David to falter. The words, ‘*The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this,*’ relates this sign to the prophecy of the coming King in Isaiah 9:6-7 and to the Lord’s provision of salvation in Isaiah 59:17. (See Thomas Constable,

Isaiah, page 156). Chronologically, the fifth great sign, appears before the sign of Isaiah 37:30-32. In Isaiah 38:7-, and also in 2 Kings 20:8-11. The *fifth* great sign is the supernatural work of the Lord in causing the shadow of the stairway of Ahaz to go back ten steps. This sign had an immediate fulfillment to show to Hezekiah that he would be healed of his sickness. The *sixth* great sign, Isaiah 55:12-13, will have its fulfillment in the future messianic reign as will the *seventh* great sign, Isaiah 66:18-24. This short survey of the signs of God in Isaiah would not be complete without the marvelous comment from Isaiah in Isaiah 8:18: "*Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me! We are signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion.*" NKJV. God, as stated above in this short survey uses people, circumstances, future events and the movement of the sun to demonstrate His faithfulness to His word regarding His promises to His people.

### **The Solution of God: Isaiah 37:33-35**

**37:33-35** *"Therefore this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria:*

*He will not come to this city,  
or shoot an arrow here.*

*He will not come before it with shield,  
or cast up a siege ramp against it.*

<sup>34</sup> *By the same way that he came, he will leave,  
and he will not come into this city,"  
says 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."*

As a follow-up to God's word about the sign He will provide to fulfill the promises He has made to His people, God emphatically states His solution to the threat posed by Sennacherib and his army against the city of Jerusalem. God states concerning the king of Assyria, that he will not come to wage warfare against Jerusalem and he will leave the same way that he came (also vs. 29). Sennacherib was not in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. Isaiah 37:8. He would not come to the city nor take any military action against the city. The Lord then explains, vs. 35, why this will happen: "*For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake, and for the sake of my servant David.*" The Lord had made a covenant with His people involving the everlasting endurance of David's house (throne) and kingdom. 2 Samuel 7:8-17.

The work of God for the sake of His name is one of the most revealing aspects of God's motivation to perform His plans and purposes for the earth and particularly for His people. God states in vs. 35 that He will defend and save the city of Jerusalem for His own sake and for the sake of His servant David. A similar statement is seen in 2 Kings 19:34 and 20:6. Isaiah again records the statement of God regarding the reason for His actions in chapter 48.

*For my own sake,  
 for my own sake, I will do it.  
 For how can I allow my name to be profaned?  
 My glory I will not give to another.*  
 (Isaiah 48:11)

Isaiah makes similar statements in 42:8; 43:7; 43:25; 48:9 and 59:19. See similar statements in the Old Testament in: 2 Chronicles 6:32; Psalm 23:3; 25:11; 31:3; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11; Jeremiah 14:7, 21; 20:9, 14, 22, 44; Ezekiel 36:22; and Daniel 9:19. In the New Testament see: Matthew 19:29; Luke 6:22; 21:12; John 15:21; Acts 9:16; Romans 1:5; 1 John 2:12; 3 John vs. 7 and Revelation 2:3. A similar statement by God concerns the motivation for His works due to the glory of His name. In the Old Testament, see Psalm 79:9; 148:13; Isaiah 42:8; 43:7; 48:11, 59:19; and Jeremiah 14:21. In the New Testament see Luke 19:38.

Thomas Constable comments on verses 33-35:

“The Lord promised Hezekiah, in closing, that Sennacherib would not even besiege Jerusalem, let alone attack it, either from close range or from farther away. He would, instead, return to his own land the same way he came. On his prism, discovered by archaeologists, Sennacherib claimed to have shut Hezekiah up like a bird in a cage, but it was really Yahweh who protected Hezekiah. 415. Yahweh would defend Jerusalem and preserve it, not so much for the sake of Hezekiah and as a reward for his faith, but for the Lord's own reputation and for David's sake, to whom He had promised an everlasting dynasty, which culminated in Messiah. 416. [Note 415: See Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near . . .*, pp. 287-88. Note 416: See Avraham Gileadi, "The Davidic Covenant: A Theological Basis for Corporate Protection," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, pp. 157-63].” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 170).

## **5 The Assyrian Army Destroyed: 37:36-38**

**37:36-38** *Then the angel of LORD went out, and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. When they got up early in the morning, there were all dead bodies.*

<sup>37</sup> *So Sennacherib king of Assyria left, and went and returned home, and lived in Nineveh.*

<sup>38</sup> *As he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, killed him with the sword. They escaped into the land of Ararat. Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.*

In three short verses, 36-38, Isaiah records the destruction of the Assyrian army and the death of the king of Assyria. See also 2 Kings 19:35-37 and 2 Chronicles 32:20-21. The slaying of the Assyrian army by the angel of the Lord happened in 701 B.C. and the death of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria happened twenty years later. Isaiah had predicted the judgment of the Lord on Assyria many times as recorded in 10:12-19; 14:24-27; 29:5-8; 30:27-33; and 31:4-9. The means of the death of 185,000 in the Assyrian camp came supernaturally by the angel of the Lord.

There are many passages in the Old Testament describing actions by the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament including: Genesis 16:1-15: Hagar and the birth of Ishmael; Genesis 22:1-19: Abraham and the test of the sacrifice of Isaac; Exodus 3:1-6: Moses and the burning bush; Exodus 12:23-30: The death of the firstborn of Egypt; Numbers 22:22-35: Balaam and his donkey; Judges 2:1-5: The indictment against the sons of Israel; Judges 6:11-24: Gideon challenged; Judges 13:2-15: Encouragement of Samson's parents; 2 Samuel 24:15-17 and 1 Chronicles 21:7-30: The slaying of 70,000 Israelites due to the census ordered by David; 1 Kings 19:1-8: Elijah brought food and water; 2 Kings 1-1-16: Elijah calls down fire from heaven; Zechariah 1:7-21: The Rider among the Myrtle trees; Zechariah 3:1-10: The cleansing of Joshua the high priest. Other references are: Psalm 34:7; 35:5-6 and 103:20. In the New Testament the phrase "angel of the Lord" occurs in Matthew 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; 28:2; Luke 1:11; 2:9; John 5:4; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7, 11, 23; and Revelation 22:6.

The death of king Sennacherib is described in verses 36-37. Following the destruction of his army, the king left Judah and returned to Nineveh. Sennacherib did not bring any military action against Judah after this event. Twenty years after returning to his capital city, he was killed by two of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer. These sons struck the king down with a sword while he was worshipping his god, Nisroch. These sons escaped into the land of Ararat after killing their father. The death of the Assyrian army and of Sennacherib fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah: 10:12-19; 14:24-27; 29:5-8; 30:27-33; and 31:4-9.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah chapters 36-37  
God Protects His City and His Name:

The People of God Threatened: 36:1-22  
 ....The Promise of God Revealed: 37:1-13  
 .....The Prayer of a Humble King: 37:14-20  
 ....The Promise of God Revealed: 37:21-35  
 The People of God Saved: 37:36-38

### **B: The Illness and Healing of Hezekiah: Chapter 38**

Chapters 38 and 39 chronologically come before chapters 36 and 37. Refer to the notes on the introduction to chapters 36-39 for an explanation of the possible reasons why Isaiah may have put chapters 38 and 39 at the end of this great section of his prophetic writings. These two chapters close out Isaiah's account of Hezekiah's life and deal with two major events: (1) the illness and healing of the king: chapter 38 and (2) the foolishness of Hezekiah when entertaining the Babylonian ambassadors: chapter 39.

Chapter 38 of Isaiah should be read in conjunction with 2 Kings 20: 1-11 and 2 Chronicles 32:24-26. 2 Kings: 1-11 is a chronological record of these events and should be followed for a step by step account while the events as written by Isaiah are thematic. The account in 2 Chronicles 32:24-26 is a brief overview of these days. Some may question the accuracy of

Isaiah's version of these events in comparison to the account recorded in 2 Kings. It should be understood that these two written accounts are not contradictory but complimentary to each other. How the Isaiah account fits with that of 2 Kings will be stated in the notes for the relevant verses for Isaiah chapter 38.

#### Outline of Chapter 38

The King's Illness: 38:1

The King's Prayer: 38:2-3

The Lord's Promise: 38:4-6, 21

The Lord's Sign: 38:7-8, 22

The King's Response: 38:9-20

#### **The King's Illness: 38:1**

**38:1** *In those days Hezekiah became sick almost to death. Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "This is what the LORD says, 'Set your house in order; for you will die, and will not live.'"*

Prior to the threat by the Assyrians to destroy Jerusalem, chapters 36-37, Hezekiah became mortally ill. The timing of these days was likely 702 B.C. (See J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah, TOTC*, page 233, note 2). Isaiah visited Hezekiah, 38:1 and told him: *"This is what the LORD says, set your house in order; for you will die, and not live."* The statement of the authoritative "this is what the LORD says," would have been a devastating blow to Hezekiah. He knew it was a certainty and not just the opinion of the prophet. It is the sole prerogative of God to intervene with a life-threatening event just prior to a promised significant happening in the lives of those who serve Him. The command of God to Abraham to sacrifice the promised son, Genesis 22 is one example. Another is the attempt on the life of Moses by the Lord while Moses was on his way back to Egypt, Exodus 4:21-26 and another is the shipwreck of Paul while on his way to Rome following God's promise that Paul would witness at Rome, Acts 23:11 and 27:13-44.

God had promised that He would not allow the Assyrians to destroy Jerusalem: Isaiah: 31:4-9. Hezekiah was the ruling Davidic king and who was in the prime of his life and yet without an heir. Was God going to cut his life off so that he would not witness the miraculous work of God in the protection of Jerusalem and was their now to be no heir to continue the royal line of David on the throne of Judah? The authoritative "thus says the Lord" had been spoken. What hope did Hezekiah have of any future?

God desires complete trust, faithfulness and obedience from His servants. From the context of Isaiah chapter 38 it appears that God was giving Hezekiah an unspoken ultimatum. Hezekiah who had started his reign with faithful actions, 2 Kings 14:1-6, later failed to trust God when Jerusalem was threatened by the Assyrians. Hezekiah sent a delegation to Egypt, Isaiah 28:14-15; 30:1-17 seeking their help instead of going directly to the Lord in prayer. The Lord had given Hezekiah the proper course of action: *"In returning (repentance) and rest you will be delivered (saved), quietness and trust will be your strength, but you rejected it."* Isaiah 30:15. Isaiah had

repeatedly warned the leadership of Jerusalem (Isaiah chapters 13-33) not to trust in other nations for protection against the Assyrians but Hezekiah did not listen. Now was Hezekiah's time to listen!

The command of the Lord recorded in 38:1 for Hezekiah to "set your house in order" could be understood in many ways but the two most likely were (1) get your official business and political affairs and records ready for your removal and replacement and (2) prepare whatever may be necessary for a succession plan. This latter need would be most grievous to Hezekiah as he had no heir to succeed him. What was he to do?

### **The King's Prayer: 38:2-3**

**38:2-3** *Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the LORD.*

<sup>3</sup> *"Remember now, O LORD, I beg you, how I have walked before you faithfully and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." Then Hezekiah wept bitterly.*

Hezekiah faced with death finally took the Lord's advice, Isaiah 30:15 and prayed to the Lord with tears of bitterness. His prayer was short but to the point. He pleaded with the Lord to remember his faithful and wholehearted walk with God and obedience to Him by doing good. Isaiah who had delivered the grim news to Hezekiah had walked away before Hezekiah prayed.

### **The Lord's Promise: 38:4-6, 21**

**38:4-6 and 21:** *Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah,*

<sup>5</sup> *"Go, and say to Hezekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of David your father says, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. Look, I will add fifteen years to your life.*

<sup>6</sup> *I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city.'*

<sup>21</sup> *Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take an ointment of figs, and apply it to the boil, and he will recover."*

Before Isaiah had walked out of the middle court of the King's house, 2 Kings 20:4-5, the Lord instructed the prophet to return to the bedside of Hezekiah with a new message recorded in verses 5-6. The Lord's unspoken ultimatum had been met by Hezekiah. The prayer of Hezekiah may seem to be all too brief and without any obvious words of repentance. He may have had passages from the Law such as Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:33; 7:12-15; and 30:16 in mind when he reminded the Lord of his truthful walk and his good works. (See Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 172).

The parallel account in 2 Kings 20:3-6 adds more details to the response of God when He instructed Isaiah:

<sup>3</sup> *"Remember, O LORD, I entreat you, how I have walked before you in truth with a perfect heart, and have done what was good in your sight." Then Hezekiah wept bitterly.*

<sup>4</sup> *Before Isaiah had left the middle courtyard, the word of the LORD came to him, saying,*

<sup>5</sup> *"Go back, and tell Hezekiah the leader of my people, 'This is what the LORD says, the God of David your father, 'I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. I will heal you. In three days you will go up to the temple of the LORD.*

<sup>6</sup> *I will add fifteen years to your life and will rescue you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake.'"* (2 Kings 20:3-6).

God promises Hezekiah, whom He calls "*the leader of My people*" that the King would go up to the house of the Lord in three days thus indicating he would be healed in as little as three days. Also, God stated that He would add fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah. Historical records indicate that Hezekiah died in (about) 687 B.C. which suggests that the date of Isaiah chapter 38 was (about) 702 B.C. (See also Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, page 238, note 5).

The Lord answered more than Hezekiah's plea to live. God added that He would deliver the King and Jerusalem from the hand of the king of Assyria. 2 Kings 20: 6; Isaiah 38:6. In the account stated in 2 Kings 20:6, God gives the reason for the protection of Jerusalem. He stated, "I will defend this city for My own sake and for my servant David's sake." It was not for any good works performed by Hezekiah nor was it for the king's faith in God that motivated God to protect the city. God in His own righteous prerogative and purpose acted on behalf of His own sake (Psalm 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11; Isaiah 48:9, 11; Jeremiah 14:21; Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22, 44; Daniel 9:19) and for the sake of David his servant. God is a covenant keeping Sovereign who remembers His promises. He will keep his promise to David (2 Samuel 7:8-17). God still keeps this promise. David's greater son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will return to earth to reign on David's throne for a thousand years and then He will reign with His Father in heaven forever.

It is likely that verses 21-22 starting with "now Isaiah had said" should be inserted in between verses 6 and 7 of Isaiah chapter 38. Isaiah in vs. 21 gives instruction for the healing of Hezekiah. Also, 2 Kings 20:7 states, "*Bring here a fig poultice.*" *So they took and spread it on the boil, and he recovered.* Both Isaiah 38:21 and 2 Kings 20:7 do not reveal the nature of the boil or why applying the cake of figs would heal the king from his sickness. The figs may or may not have had any natural healing qualities. Perhaps the application of obedience on the part of Isaiah and the attendants to the King in following God's instructions was intended. See also the healing of the blind man by Jesus with an application of clay made by the spittle of Jesus. John 9:1-12.

### **The Lord's Sign: 38:7-8, 22**

**38:7-8 and 22** *"This will be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he has spoken:*

<sup>8</sup> *I will cause the shadow on the steps, which is gone down on the dial of Ahaz from the sun, to go backwards ten steps." So the sun went back ten steps on the dial on which it had gone down.*

<sup>22</sup> *Hezekiah also had asked, "What sign will confirm that I will go up to the house of the LORD?"*

The request of Hezekiah, vs. 22, "*What sign will confirm that I will go up to the house of the Lord?*" should also be inserted between verses 6 and 7 of Isaiah 38. Isaiah had declared the word of God that Hezekiah would go up to the house of the Lord on the third day, 2 Kings 20:5. Hezekiah requested a sign from God to confirm his healing, 2 Kings 20:8. Isaiah answered by giving Hezekiah a choice of the nature of the sign. "*This will be your sign from the LORD, that the LORD will in fact do the thing that he has promised. Do you want the shadow to go forward ten steps, or to go backward ten steps?*" 2 Kings 20:9. Hezekiah replied to Isaiah's question, in 2 Kings 20:10: "*It is simple for the shadow to lengthen ten steps (its natural progression during the day). Rather, let the shadow move backward ten steps.*" The place for the movement of the shadow was stated in 2 Kings 20:11. The sign to confirm the healing of Hezekiah was that the shadow of the sun would reverse itself (go back up) by the measurement of ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz. 2 Kings 20:11. It is not a coincidence that Ahaz's name is mentioned in connection with this sign. Ahaz, Hezekiah's father had been offered a sign by the Lord (through Isaiah), to confirm the protection of Judah from its enemies. The sign offered was vast in its extent, either in the depths of Sheol or in the heights of heaven. Ahaz in his pompous piety refused to ask for a sign and the Lord Himself gave the wondrous sign of the virgin birth of the coming Messiah. Isaiah 7:10-16.

In the Isaiah 38:7-8 account of this incident, Isaiah briefly states the outcome of his conversation with Hezekiah regarding the sign. The sign from the Lord, to confirm the healing of Hezekiah, was then completed and the sun did return ten steps on the sun dial. It is not revealed how God performed this reversal of the sun's shadow on these steps which may have been used as a type of sundial to record the passage of time during the daylight hours. God, who is the creator and ruler of the earth and the cosmos, can use His created spheres in any way He deems necessary to accomplish His purposes. Those who deny God as the great Intelligent One who designed the universe would scoff at the idea that the motion of the sun could be reversed or the movement of its shadow could be reversed (whatever God did to perform this sign). See also Joshua 10:12-14 for a similar incident where God overruled the motion of the sun.

### **The King's Response: 38:9-20**

**38:9** *The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, but had recovered from his sickness.*

Isaiah records the writings of king Hezekiah regarding the events of his fatal illness and healing. It has the form of a psalm or a song written after a dramatic and climatic event such as the first Song of Moses, Exodus 15:1-18 and Miriam's response, vs. 21 following the escape from Egypt. But it cannot be favorably compared to this song by Moses. Hezekiah's psalm or song describes his feelings about his mortal illness and his plea to God to allow him to be healed and live and his thankfulness to God for healing him. It is similar to a lament psalm full of emotion and self-centeredness. Hezekiah writes mostly about himself and how he felt about his sickness. Hezekiah



spends far too little time in thanking God for his healing and too much time rehearsing his bitterness about being ill. 2 Chronicles 32:25 aptly sums up Hezekiah's heart after receiving the sign from the Lord. *"But Hezekiah was not grateful for the benefit done to him, for his heart became arrogant. Therefore wrath came on him, Judah and Jerusalem."* This could also refer to Hezekiah's pride in showing all the wealth of the temple and the court to the ambassadors from Babylon.

**38:10-14** *I said, "In the prime of my days I must enter the gates of Sheol,  
I am deprived of the rest of my years."*

<sup>11</sup> *I said, "I will no longer see the LORD in the land of the living.  
I will no longer see human beings among the inhabitants of the world.*

<sup>12</sup> *My dwelling place is removed,  
and is carried away from me like a shepherd's tent.  
I have rolled up my life like a weaver,  
when he cuts me off like cloth from the loom.  
Day and night you make an end of me.*

<sup>13</sup> *I cry out until morning;  
he breaks all my bones like a lion.  
Day and night you make an end of me.*

<sup>14</sup> *Like a swallow or a crane, I squawk;  
I moan like a dove;  
my eyes are weary from looking upward.  
O Lord, I am oppressed, help me!*

Hezekiah discusses his feelings about being mortally ill. In vs. 15 he bemoans that he is about to enter Sheol when he was in the middle of his years. In vs. 16 he decries that he will no longer see the Lord in the land of the living nor will he see those who are living in his midst. In vs. 12, Hezekiah complains that his living is like a shepherd's tent that has been pulled up and removed (literally taken captive). Also in vs. 12 Hezekiah laments that his life was like a weaver who has been cut off from the loom and he bitterly adds, *"day and night you make an end of me."* In vs. 13 Hezekiah continues his rant about God's intrusion into his life. God is said to be like that of a lion who breaks all of Hezekiah's bones. The king then repeats his refrain: *"day and night you make an end of me."* In vs. 14, Hezekiah likens his condition to the twittering of a swallow or a crane and the moaning of a dove. Finally, after looking up to God (to the heights), the king states, *"O Lord, I am oppressed, help me!"* The tone of Hezekiah's lament, with his plea to the Lord to be his security, now becomes more positive and in the following verses he begins to acknowledge that the Lord's working in his life has had a positive and restorative purpose.

**38:15-16** *What can I say?  
For he has spoken to me,  
and he himself has done it.  
I will walk slowly all my years  
because of the bitterness of my soul.*

<sup>16</sup> *O Lord, by these things people live;  
 the life of my spirit is wholly bound up in these.  
 Restore me,  
 and let me live.*

Hezekiah asks, how should he spend the rest of his years, now that the Lord has healed him? The NKJV translates vs. 15: “*What shall I say? He has both spoken to me, And He Himself has done it. I shall walk carefully (humbly) all my years in the (because of) bitterness of my soul.*” The NKJV translation leads more smoothly into the next sentence as recorded in vs. 16 (NKJV): “*O Lord, by these things men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit; so you will restore me and make me live.*”

**38:17** *Look, this great bitterness was for my welfare,  
 but in love you have rescued my soul  
 from the pit of corruption;  
 you have thrown all my sins behind you.*

Hezekiah is very honest with the Lord. He recognizes the work of the Lord in bringing this great bitterness to him for it was a benefit to him. The Lord was working for his welfare in rescuing his soul. Hezekiah implies that this corrective action of the Lord in bringing his near fatal sickness resulted in the rescue of his soul from the “pit of corruption.” It is true that power corrupts and Hezekiah was agreeing with the Lord that he had become corrupt in his relationship with others and the Lord. The words, “*you have thrown all my sins behind you,*” lead to the climax in verses 18-20. Hezekiah recognizes rightly that God has not only healed him and added years to his life, but God also has forgiven him of his sins.

**38:18-19** *For Sheol cannot thank you,  
 death cannot praise you.  
 Those who go down into the pit  
 cannot hope for your faithfulness.*

<sup>19</sup> *The living, yes, the living,  
 they are the ones who praise you,  
 even as I do this day.  
 The father of children will make known your faithfulness.*

Therefore, (vs. 18), the king has been spared the dread of Sheol (contrast the lament of Hezekiah, vs. 10) also called the pit where no one can thank or praise God or hope to see the Lord’s faithfulness. Hezekiah continues this line of reasoning in vs. 19 by stating, “*the living are the ones who praise you, even as I do this day.*” As a living and ruling king in the line of David, Hezekiah acknowledges a higher and greater sovereign and gives Him thanks for preserving his life. Hezekiah now looks forward to having sons to whom the king will tell them about the faithfulness of the Lord.

**38:20** *The LORD is ready to save me.*

*Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments  
all the days of our life in the house of the LORD.*

Hezekiah likens his song to a joyful psalm where songs will be played on stringed instruments every day in the house of the Lord, because God will save (had preserved) his life. There is no record of whether or not Hezekiah kept this promise. In light of the words of 2 Chronicles 32:25 and his display of pride, recorded in Isaiah chapter 39, he may have forgotten this specific promise to God.

For comment on verse 21 see notes on verses 4-6 above.

For comment on verse 22 see notes on verses 7-8 above.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 38:

The King's Plight (sickness): 38:1

The King's Prayer (supplication): 38:2-3

The Lord's Promise (survival): 38:4-6, 21

The Lord's Prophecy (sign): 38:7-8, 22

The King's Psalm (song): 38:9-20

### **C: The Foolishness of Hezekiah: Chapter 39**

Introduction

Hezekiah (is) Flattered 39:1

Hezekiah's Folly 39:2

Hezekiah's Future 39:3-8

### **Introduction: Isaiah Chapter 39**

Chapter 39 describe an event that happened before the dramatic days of the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians recorded in chapters 36 and 37 and immediately after the sickness of Hezekiah recorded in chapter 38. God had just healed Hezekiah from a sickness that would have led to his death and He now was to test the king to as to his faithfulness and whether Hezekiah would really depend wholly on the Lord. The words of 2 Chronicles 32:31 provide an understanding of God's perspective: "*However when the envoys of the officials of Babylon sent to him to inquire of the incredible wonder that had been done in the land, God left him to test him in order to know all that was in his heart.*" After all that had recently happened to Hezekiah, Isaiah chapter 38, and following all that the prophet Isaiah had declared about trusting God rather than powerful nations for protection, Isaiah chapters 13-35, had Hezekiah learned to completely trust in God? The visit by the ambassadors to Hezekiah would soon answer this vital question. See also 2 Kings 20:12-19.

**Hezekiah (is) Flattered: 39:1**

39:1 *At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered.*

Vs. 1 begins with, “as that time” which places the events of chapter 39 just after chapter 38 and before chapters 36-37. See introduction to Chapters 36-39 for an explanation of the chronological order of these chapters. Hezekiah had recently been healed of a mortal illness, Isaiah chapter 38 and had humbled his great pride and had petitioned God for healing. Many others in the surrounding kingdoms had heard of the healing of Hezekiah and one of those was a powerful pagan monarch. The king of Babylon sent envoys to Hezekiah with letters and a gift.

Thomas Constable comments:

“The phrase "At that time" (cf. 38:1) anticipates a specially significant event and ties it to what preceded in chapter 38. As this verse explains, the events that follow happened after Hezekiah had recovered from his illness (38:5). This was most likely during the year 701 B.C. before Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem (chs. 36—37; cf. 38:6; 2 Kings 18:16).

"Merodach-baladan" (Cuneiform "Marduk-apal-iddina," lit. "the god Marduk has given a son") raised Babylon to a position from which it threatened and eventually overthrew Assyrian dominance in the ancient Near East (cf. 21:1-10). He was the first king of Babylon, and he led that nation during two periods: 721-710 B.C. and 703-702 B.C.

The historians vary in their dating of the ancient Near Eastern kings' reigns by a few years, but I believe the dates above are fairly accurate. In 710 B.C. Sargon, another Babylonian leader, ousted him, but in 702 B.C. the Assyrians defeated Merodach-baladan. After this defeat, he continued to foment revolt against Assyria in the Fertile Crescent. This seems to have been his motivation for cultivating Hezekiah's friendship by sending letters and a present when he heard of Hezekiah's recovery.<sup>429</sup>

"The miracle of the sundial (38:8) would have held special interest for the astronomy-minded Babylonians (2 Chr. 32:31)."<sup>430</sup> [Note 429: See Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 363. Note 430: *The Nelson....* p. 1171] (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 176-177).

The contents of the letters sent to Hezekiah are not known but they may have contained an intriguing temptation for Hezekiah to consider. These were fateful days for both the king of Babylon and the king of Judah. Assyria was advancing in conquest and both nations were threatened. One nation was expanding and growing in power and influence and the other was diminishing and becoming weaker. The letters may have contained an invitation to Hezekiah to join Merodach-Baladan in resisting the advance of the Assyrians. Hezekiah would have been greatly flattered to be asked for assistance from Babylon. See J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, TOTC, page 240. Along with the letters, the Babylonian ambassadors had sent a gift. It is not known what the gift was but along with the letters the gift may have been immediately tempting to join Babylon in their resistance against Assyria and more importantly, the alliance with Babylon

would provide protection for Judah if the Assyrians attacked this tiny nation. Perhaps this was the test that is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 32:31. How would Hezekiah respond to this test?

### **Hezekiah's Folly 39:2**

**39:2** *Hezekiah welcomed the envoys, and showed them the treasury, including the silver, gold, spices, and the precious oil, along with the whole armory, and everything found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his palace, or in his entire kingdom, that Hezekiah did not show them.*

Hezekiah's response to this test is recorded in vs. 2. Why would Hezekiah show the Babylonian ambassadors all of the treasures and armaments of his kingdom? Was it not to impress them that he, king of Judah, had great resources and he would be a worthy ally to support them in their resistance against the Assyrian armies. Hezekiah's great pride had surfaced and his humility, which was evident just a short time before this, chapter 38, was pushed to the background. 2 Chronicles 32:25 states this well: "*But Hezekiah was not grateful for the benefit done to him, for his heart became arrogant.*" The king should also have remembered Isaiah's warning about putting any hope in Babylon. Isaiah 13:1-22; 14:1-23 and 21:1-10.

### **Hezekiah's Future 39:3-8**

**39:3** *Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and asked him, "What did these men say?" Where did they come from?" Hezekiah replied, "They came from a far country to me, from Babylon."*

The news of the visit of the ambassadors from Babylon may not have been known by many in the kingdom of Judah but God also was aware and most certainly urged Isaiah to visit the king. It was not often that Isaiah personally visited Hezekiah. His first recorded visit to Hezekiah was when the king was ill and now, just a short time later the prophet directly confronts Hezekiah. Previously Isaiah had sent a message to the king: 2 Kings 19:20; Isaiah 37:6, 21. As recorded in vs. 3 of chapter 39, Isaiah asked Hezekiah, "*What did these men say? Where did they come from?*" Isaiah evidently either did not know the home country of these visitors or he was testing Hezekiah to see if the king would tell the truth. The answer to this question is important because if Isaiah really did not know, then God must have given the prophet an immediate revelation in response to the king's account of what he had shown to the Babylonians. If Isaiah had come prepared with a message from the Lord, then he was testing the king to discern his truthfulness. This latter suggestion may be implied from 2 Chronicles 32:21. However, the king did reply truthfully to Isaiah, vs.3: "*They came from a far country to me, from Babylon.*"

**39:4** *Then Isaiah asked, "What have they seen in your palace?" Hezekiah answered, "They have seen everything that is in my palace. There is nothing among my treasuries that I have not showed them."*

The king had no official reason to reveal his actions to Isaiah. The prophet did not hold any political position of authority in the kingdom or in the kings' court. Perhaps the reason Hezekiah did respond to Isaiah was that the king recognized that Isaiah was a true prophet and the only spokesman for God who was a much greater king than any earthly ruler. Hezekiah would also have had the recent events of his healing and Isaiah's role in this incident in mind when he replied to the prophet. However, Isaiah's earlier declarations would have been an irritant to Hezekiah and the king may have had a great personal dislike for Isaiah as did many of the kings of Israel and Judah towards the prophets of God.

**39:5-7:** Isaiah delivers a stunning prophecy and rebuke to Hezekiah. Isaiah declared: *"Hear the word of the Lord of hosts, Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon."*

The prophecy is a remarkable declaration of God's knowledge of future events. Many, who deny God's miraculous powers and foreknowledge, place the writing of these words far in the future, thus robbing them of any prophetic importance. However, there is nothing in the text that would obviously lead to such a conclusion. Isaiah had delivered many prophetic messages about Assyria's failure to conquer Jerusalem and other messages about the birth and ministry of the Messiah. To deny the foreknowledge of God would be to completely discredit the inspired Word of God and hold in disdain any prophetic writings of the Scripture. The student of Scripture must allow the words of God to stand for itself and let Scripture interpret Scripture. These questions must be asked: (1) under what authority, do those who are critics of God's word, and deny his supernatural powers, claim to make such allegations? (2) Who is the judge of God? (3) Shall God be put to the test? Isaiah answers these questions so dramatically in chapter 40:12-31. God also gives His great response recorded in Job chapters 38-41 and 42:7-9.

The prophetic declaration by Isaiah to Hezekiah, verses 5-7, has three major themes: (1) The first was the coming destruction of the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. This occurred in 586 B.C when Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army conquered Jerusalem and removed from it, its wealth and many prominent inhabitants including a young man with the Hebrew name of Daniel. Daniel 1:1-7. See also: 2 Kings 24:10-16; 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 and Jeremiah 39:1-10. The prophecy of Isaiah declared to Hezekiah was most likely in 702 B.C. and its fulfillment came in 586 B.C. which was 116 years later. This was only a short time in comparison to Isaiah's earlier prophecy regarding the virgin birth of Jesus Christ which as declared by Isaiah in 735 B.C. (2) The second major theme was the announcement that Hezekiah, would have male descendants. At this point, Hezekiah who knew he only had fifteen years to live (Isaiah 38:5) must have worried about the possibility of having an heir to assume the role of king on David's throne. Isaiah provides divine assurance that he indeed will have male descendants who will be kings over the nation of Judah. (3) The third major theme is that Hezekiah's descendants who would be among those taken to Babylon and would become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon. Daniel 1:1-10; 1:18-21; and 2:46-49.

**39:8** *Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my days."*

Hezekiah responded to the prophecy of Isaiah: *"The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good."* The spoken response from Hezekiah rightly acknowledged that the authority and prerogative of God was good. Also, it was good in the sense that the king was promised to have heirs who would reign as kings in Judah. However, the prophetic words were anything but good in respect to the future of Jerusalem. Because of the actions of Hezekiah, Jerusalem would be conquered, the reign of the kings of Judah on the throne of David would appear to come to an end and many would die a brutal death at the hands of the Babylonians. However, Hezekiah's thoughts, revealed by the inspiration of God, gives the underlying reason why the king could call this prophecy "good". Hezekiah reasoned, *"There will be peace and security in my days."*

The king's thoughts are certainly open to many interpretations. (1) Was he being self-centered and prideful in thinking that his remaining days would be peaceful? (2) Was he righteously concerned for the present safety of Jerusalem knowing that it would be spared from the assault of the Assyrians? (3) Was he thankful to God for sparing his life and promising that he would have sons to sit on the throne of David, ruling over Judah? We do not know Hezekiah's heart like God did. It appears at least on the outside that Hezekiah, failed the test God had given him. The closing verses of 2 Chronicles 32, verses 27-33 do provide some insight into the overall impact of Hezekiah on the kingdom of Judah:

<sup>27</sup> *Hezekiah was very rich and highly honor. He built treasuries for his silver, gold, precious stones, spices, shields, and for all kinds of valuable possessions.*

<sup>28</sup> *He also built store-houses for the harvest of grain, new wine and olive oil; as well as stalls for all kinds of cattle, and flocks in pens.*

<sup>29</sup> *He built cities and acquired flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him great wealth.*

<sup>30</sup> *This Hezekiah also stopped up the upper spring of the waters of the Gihon spring, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his endeavors.*

<sup>31</sup> *However when the envoys of the officials of Babylon sent to him to inquire of the incredible wonder that had been done in the land, God left him to test him in order to know all that was in his heart.*

<sup>32</sup> *Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his good deeds, they are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, in The Annals of the Kings of Judah and Israel.*

<sup>33</sup> *Hezekiah slept with his forefathers, and they buried him on the ascent of the tombs of the sons of David. All Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him at his death. Then Manasseh his son succeeded him as king.*

However, we decide about the account of Hezekiah and the ambassadors from Babylon, it would be worthwhile if we pondered what our response would have been had we been in his position and how would we have acted. Would we have passed the test of God?

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 39

Hezekiah (is) Flattered 39:1

Hezekiah's Folly 39:2

Hezekiah's Future 39:3-8