

Week 29: A King Experiences Deliverance
Isaiah 36-37
July 20/21

Summary & Goal:

We are nearing the end of the Divided Kingdom Era in our Chronological Bible Series, and this week's passage is from the book of Isaiah, which was written by its namesake, a significant prophet during that era. The book of Isaiah is one of several books in the Major Prophets, a collection of books in the Old Testament that groups together the prophetic books that are substantially lengthier than other prophetic books. While the book of Isaiah contains many stories and prophecies during the Divided Kingdom, we will be examining its recount of Assyria's daunting attempt to conquer Jerusalem in particular. In the following Scripture, we'll see a story of Israel's threat, battle, and deliverance; and through it, we'll see what—or rather, *Who*—gives us immense hope for the threats, battles, and deliverance that powerfully apply to our own stories as well.

Main Passages:

Isaiah 36-37

Session Outline:

1. The Threat (Isaiah 36:1-22)
2. The Battle (Isaiah 37:1-37)
3. The Deliverance (Isaiah 37:36-38)

Session in a Sentence:

If you are a child of God, God will fight your battles—proven first and foremost in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Scripture Overview:

This passage shows us a moment in history where the nation of Israel could have been blotted out entirely. The nation of Assyria is threatening to conquer their entire nation, and perhaps, destroy all the Israelite people. In fact, Assyria has taken a good portion of the kingdom already; they only stand at the outskirts of Jerusalem and taunt, mock, and revile against the Israelites and their God. Israel's king, Hezekiah, cries out to God asking Him to save Israel and the rest of the people who are enclosed within Jerusalem. Hezekiah appeals to God's promise of old, which he had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as the basis for why He should protect them from the Assyrians—so that people might know that the God of Israel is the true God. God answered Hezekiah's prayer, and an angel of the LORD went out that night and killed 185,000 that were encamped against Israel. Then the Assyrian king, King Sennacherib, retreated back to his hometown in Nineveh, where he was soon thereafter assassinated by his own sons.

Kingdom Connection:

God's kingdom will always stand—against any odds, any threat, and any circumstance. Even when King Sennacherib threatened to wipe out the entire nation of Israel, God worked a miracle of intervention to protect and provide for His people. This instance in Israel's kingdom history proves that God will uphold his covenant to His people—to send a Messiah through Israel who

will bless the whole world. In fact, this story mirrors another great story of redemption: the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the gospel, Jesus Christ would face a rather intimidating and formidable enemy that would surround Him all sides... as His own disciples abandoned Him, as the Jews rejected Him, and as the Gentiles encircled Him as He was nailed to a cross. And yet, the moment of the cross would stand not as a near defeat of the enemy, but as a powerful, miraculous intervention from God to save His people.

Missional Connection:

Theologian C.T. Studd once said, “If Christ be God and died for me, then there’s no sacrifice that’s too great for me to make for him.” Through the story, we see the lengths of intervention that God makes to save people who are on the brink of total disaster. In our world today, there are many people in our lives who are on the brink of eternal disaster if they do not claim Christ as LORD. We should emulate Hezekiah, who was stirred by a great need and interceded with a great prayer, as we seek to bring the lost into a kingdom of deliverance.

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Introduction:

We're working through our series, *52 Weeks: Know The Bible*, and we have now ventured into the Divided Kingdom Era, in which Israel has split into two 'divided' kingdoms, the Southern Kingdom (tribes of Benjamin and Judah) and the Northern Kingdom (the other 10 tribes). This is week 29, which means we are a little more than halfway through our yearlong series; and this week brings us to the book of Isaiah, namely, chapters 36-37. In this passage, we'll read of an account where the Assyrian Empire begins conquering Israel, starting in the Northern Kingdom and making its way to Israel's capital city and crowned jewel, Jerusalem, in the Southern Kingdom.

In the following story, we'll see how Assyria challenges Israel and its faith; and we'll see how this parallels and challenges our own as well.

In verse 1, we see that King Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, appoints a military general, Rabshakeh, to take Jerusalem. Here's how the story unfolds:

Isaiah 36: 1 Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. ² Then the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem.

⁴ Then the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: "What confidence is this in which you trust? ⁵ I say you speak of having plans and power for war; but they are mere words. Now in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me? ⁶ Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.

⁷ "But if you say to me, 'We trust in the LORD our God,' is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar'?" (Chronological Bible, pg. 898-899; July 20th)

Functional Faith

Although Rabshakeh is clearly an enemy, he makes 3 profound statements about the nature of real faith.

1. In verse 4, Rabshakeh challenges Israel, "What confidence is this in which you trust?" His statement of faith is a profound one because it gets to the heart of what we truly trust and depend on in life and faith. Many of us might identify as 'Christian' as a formal, religious label; but what do you truly trust and depend on functionally in day-to-day life, especially when the

circumstances begin to surround you on all sides? Rabshakeh identifies the heart of all true faith and trust—and he’s challenging the Israelites at the heart of their faith.

2. He also makes another statement about the nature of real faith in verse 5, “*Now in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?*” In other words, Rabshakeh recognizes that all faith is fundamentally a sharp decision; meaning, when you place your confidence and trust in one thing, you necessarily reject other things as your confidence and trust.

3. He makes another profound statement about faith in verse 6, “*You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.*” In other words, Rabshakeh essentially asserts that all false and weak ‘sources of confidence’ will pierce you.

Practical question for you: What do you really trust in life? What truly gives you confidence in your day-to-day life? What do you—not formally—but functionally lean on to support your hopes, satisfaction, feelings of security, and sense of self-worth? Is it financial security? Romance? The perfect family unit? Good looks? Living in the right neighborhood? Having your kids go to the right school? Comfort and luxury?

Rabshakeh profoundly asserts that if you have the wrong source of confidence, it will pierce you in life. Ironically, he’s implying that their ultimate source of confidence is the Assyrian empire—which will also fall in time. Only a ‘source of confidence’ that isn’t based on your human performance or your circumstance is a truly a source of confidence—and that is only found in the gospel. Putting your functional faith in ‘confidences’ outside of the gospel will, in fact, pierce you. But lasting functional faith can only be found in Jesus, whose love is unconditionally based on your performance and circumstance—and he proved it in how *he was pierced for you*.

Let’s see how Rabshakeh continues:

Isaiah 36: 8 Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses...

¹⁶ Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: ‘Make peace with me by a present and come out to me; and every one of you eat from his own vine and everyone from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern; ¹⁷ 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. (Chronological Bible, pg. 899; July 20th)

Compromised Faith

Do you see an interesting word in the word, ‘compromise’? It’s the word, ‘promise.’ Compromise always happens when there’s a tempting promise on the other side of your previous commitment. This is Rabshakeh’s approach entirely. He promises Israel security and wealth if they make a pledge to the Assyrian Empire. In other words, if Israel simply shifts their convictions and commitments to the authority of Assyria, then they’ll get what they want and be saved from any harm! Interestingly, this is also the approach of Satan to Adam and Eve in

Genesis 2 in the Garden of Eden; and it's also the approach of Satan to Jesus in Matthew 4 in the wilderness.

In all three scenarios, the enemy approaches not with overt darkness and destruction, but with covert lure and luxury. The enemy always approaches by offering fundamentally good things, just in the fundamentally wrong way. Rabshakeh offers peace, personal property, safety, provision, and abundance! Who wouldn't want those things? Of course, no one would turn those down. However, the issue is not those things in themselves. The issue is, are they your source of confidence for life? And if so, what will you *compromise* in order to get their *promise*?

There is certainly nothing wrong with having money and financial security; however, if financial security your ultimate, functional confidence, then you will compromise many things in order to get it—especially your financial relations with God.

There is certainly nothing wrong with romance and sexual satisfaction; however, if it is your ultimate, functional confidence, then you will compromise many things in order to get it—especially your sexual ethics and fellowship with God.

There is certainly nothing wrong with having a wonderful family unit; however, if it is your ultimate, functional confidence, then you will compromise many things in order to get it, however you define it—especially finding your ultimate security and satisfaction in God.

Practical question for you: What is your 'source of confidence'? What does that specific 'source of confidence' promise? How is it luring you to compromise in order to gain what it's promising?

In our culture today, Christians particularly encounter two different types of 'compromise,' and both are equally deadly.

- Intellectual compromise: Compromising the fundamental, doctrinal foundations of Christianity and integrating other beliefs for the sake of making 'peace'—either with our culture or with own worldview preferences.
- Existential compromise: Compromising our convictions in the sense that we hold true to the fundamental, doctrinal foundations of Christianity; yet, we compromise in our day-to-day lifestyle to make 'peace'—either to appease others or to alleviate our own personal situations.

It's interesting that Assyria didn't say 'be a bad person!' It just tempted Israel with *a new final authority*. It tempted them to compromise their convictions and commitments just to avoid conflict. And the same type of war is happening not only outside in our culture today, but also inside of our own hearts this very hour. This is the war of faith.

The question is, "What will truly deliver you in life? What will be your functional, day-to-day 'source of confidence,' *your salvation*?"

1. The Threat:

Difficult circumstances might threaten your commitments with compromise. However, circumstances are simply only circumstances. The main issue is not whether you will face difficulty, but how your faith will respond to it in the form of where you place your ultimate, functional confidence. How you respond to circumstances reveals your allegiance to who truly is your king—your true ‘source of confidence’ for life and happiness. This war of faith is a battle for the throne of your heart.

So, how did the Israelites respond to the threat?

Isaiah 36: 21 But they held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king’s commandment was, “Do not answer him.” ²² Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh. (Chronological Bible, pg. 900; July 20th)

They responded by obeying and deferring to their king, King Hezekiah. And here is where the prophet Isaiah steps in... Let’s now transition to chapter 37.

Isaiah 37: 6 And Isaiah said to them, “Thus you shall say to your master, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me.” ⁷ Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.” (Chronological Bible, pg. 901; July 21st)

God tells the people to not worry about their difficult circumstance; he will take care of them. In fact, more specifically, he will send a ‘spirit upon King Sennacherib, king of Assyria, such that he will hear a rumor, return to his homeland, and fall by the sword.

If I was King Hezekiah, I would be elated. This seemed like a sure sign of exactly how God would handle the battle for the Israelite people group. He would somehow plant a rumor in Sennacherib’s heart... have him return home... and be killed. So, the threat of an impending war would immediately go away, right?

Wrong.

What happens immediately after God promises this?

The King of Assyria doesn’t leave Israel alone; in fact, it’s quite the opposite. Sennacherib makes an all-out assault upon Jerusalem instead.

Isaiah 37: 10 “Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying: ‘Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, “Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.” ¹¹ Look! You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered?’ (Chronological Bible, pg. 901; July 21st)

God just gave a promise to save Israel; and immediately after his promise, the immediate circumstances seem to stand in direct opposition and in direct contrast to his promise! Was God lying? Can God be trusted? Where is the ‘source of confidence’ of Hezekiah and the Israelites? Will they choose to live by faith in God’s word and character or by sight in their circumstances?

Here’s what King Hezekiah prays in light of the following circumstances:

Isaiah 37: 15 Then Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, saying: ¹⁶ “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁷ Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. ¹⁸ Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, ¹⁹ and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men’s hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. ²⁰ Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD, You alone.” (Chronological Bible, pg. 901; July 21st)

Even though circumstances seemed to contradict God’s promise of salvation, Hezekiah’s source of confidence was that God would indeed defend His name, His kingdom, and His promise—in ways beyond Hezekiah’s own wisdom.

Hezekiah’s response, in a nutshell, is the essence of faith—a ‘source of confidence’ in God. It’s a humble, trusting recognition that God is God, above all of life’s circumstances—and that God will always work in ways for His own glory and for His own people. And many times, that will not look or play out exactly how we think it will or how it should. Rather, true, functional faith exercises humble confidence that trusts God will do what is right in any circumstance.

2. The Battle:

The main battle is primarily, therefore, a battle on the inside, not on the outside. We cannot change our circumstances. God is in absolute control of those circumstances. However, we are responsible for how we respond to the circumstances, and how we trust God in the midst of them, even when and especially when they don’t make sense.

So, after Hezekiah declares his trust in the LORD, what happens next?

Isaiah 37: 33 “Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria:

*‘He shall not come into this city,
Nor shoot an arrow there,
Nor come before it with shield,
Nor build a siege mound against it.
³⁴ By the way that he came,
By the same shall he return;*

*And he shall not come into this city,'
Says the LORD.
35 'For I will defend this city, to save it
For My own sake and for My servant David's sake.' "*

*36 Then the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000;
and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead.
(Chronological Bible, pg. 905; July 21st)*

There you have it. God fulfilled His promise to protect and to provide for Israel—and He did it in a way that they did not expect. The text literally says, “the Angel of the LORD,” came and killed 185,000 in the camps of Assyria. Many biblical scholars identify this ‘Angel of the LORD’ as Jesus Christ, pre-incarnate. In fact, this is the same ‘warrior angel’ who appears in the book of Joshua and overthrows Jericho. In both cases, this warrior acts *fully* on behalf of God and His people.

The Deliverance:

Jesus is the true king, the true source of confidence for God’s people in all of life’s circumstances—not because He always delivers us out all of our circumstances in the way that we prefer or think, but because He has delivered us from the greatest enemy against God and His people: Satan, sin, and death.

This story can tell us 2 things about God’s deliverance in our lives:

1) Eternal deliverance; 2) Daily deliverance.

Eternal Deliverance: God’s Way of Salvation

Hezekiah probably expected their circumstances to be handled (Sennacherib would die), and then they’d be free.

But God acted in reverse. Jesus would fight for them, and then their circumstances would free up (Sennacherib would die).

- The sequence of this pattern is the essence of the Christian life. We don’t fight and then God delivers. We don’t work for our salvation, and then God saves us.
- Rather, God fights for us... and He fulfills His promise... we don’t lift a finger, and we’re saved. We trust and obey Him—even when circumstances seem impossible. And by faith, we receive the promise of Jesus’ righteousness offered as a gift of grace.

Daily Deliverance: God’s Way of Faith

The story ends in an interesting way. Remember what God promised would happen to Sennacherib, King of Assyria?

Isaiah 37:37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh. 38 Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword...(Chronological Bible, pg. 905; July 21st)

In other words, King Sennacherib departed and returned home and lived in Nineveh. And as he was worshiping in the house of his god, his sons struck him down with the sword.

There are two things to consider about how this story wraps up.

1) The answer to the promise came *after* the protection and provision, not *before* it.

Hezekiah thought that God's promise that Sennacherib would be killed in his house would happen *before* the battle, not *after*. That seemed like the only logical choice. So, when it didn't happen... and the battle raged on... Hezekiah had two options: 1) Trust the promise of God against all odds and walk by faith; 2) Doubt the promise of God according to all odds, and therefore, walk by sight.

- God's promise came about in a different way than Hezekiah ever expected. God acted in reverse of what he thought and expected.
- In other words, God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways are higher than our ways! He has greater wisdom! Don't trust what you see; trust God's heart for you and His promise of the gospel declaration over you.
- Oftentimes, God puts us into positions that 'don't make sense' to us—precisely because He wants us to trust Him against all odds; that's faith in the WHO, not sight in the WHAT.
- And here's the thing—when you do that and take your hands off the need to always control—then you'll see him fight for you in your circumstances.
- “Well, I don't see him working!” Trust me, He is. If He can work and put a ‘rumor’ in someone else's heart to accomplish His purposes, He can do whatever He wants at will.
- John Piper: “God is always doing 1,000 things in your life, and you might be aware of 2-3 of them.”

I think the reason why God acts differently than we would expect is so that He could stretch our faith and not our sight. He puts us into precarious positions so that He can show off in front of our eyes, and our faith might increase.

2) The gods who were his ‘source of confidence,’ stabbed him in the back, and literally pierced him. Remember, it was said earlier in the passage that false gods, weak ‘sources of confidence’ through life will pierce you? Well, this exact thing, ironically and tragically, happens to King Sennacherib. He dies on the promise of his compromise.

This is a picture for all those who follow and worship and serve gods who are not the LORD. They will over-promise and under-deliver; they will keep you haughty and arrogant of others.

Conclusion

Pray Prayers That Reflect God's Heart

Hezekiah, “Save us *so that* you might be glorified.” Note, his prayer is for God's kingdom and fame, not his own. He's asking for a great result.

- Satan, the enemy, might be able to attack and mess up everything else in your life; but God will not allow him to touch “Jerusalem”, i.e. your salvation.
- When you obey, God will always protect you and provide for you; often times before the promise is fulfilled.
- Obedience might cost you in the short-term, but disobedience will always cost you more in the long-term.
- God answers Hezekiah’s prayer that honors God; “I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.” For the sake of the gospel, I will not let Jerusalem be destroyed.
- God sees the bigger picture and His desire is for us to be part of His picture, His promise, and His purpose.

Resources:

1. Archeological study on Sennacherib: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-biblical-archaeology-matters/>
2. CT Studd quote: <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/c-t-studd-gave-huge-inheritance-away-11630616.html>
3. Oswalt, John N. *NIV Application Study Bible: Isaiah*.