

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

HEZEKIAH: ISAIAH 36-39



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Hezekiah: Isaiah 36-39
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Introduction to *Isaiah 36-39*

These four chapters provide an important bridge from the fervent and far-flung prophecies of chapters 7-35 into the amazing promises of chapters 40-66. Here, in two examples from the life of King Hezekiah, we see God in a more personal and powerful way, reminding us that His Word will not fail, and His remnant will not be lost.

God is the Lord of nations, events, and time. He is the God Who judges and the God Who saves and heals. And while men of faith may stumble and fall, God's Word will not. We can trust Him, and we will know His blessings if we do, even through the most difficult trials we may endure.

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1 Big Talker

Pray Psalm 52.9.

I will praise You forever,
Because You have done *it*;
And in the presence of Your saints
I will wait on Your name, for *it is* good.

Read Isaiah 36.1-22.

Reflect.

1. What is your impression of Sennacherib? Does he remind you of the devil in any ways? How do his words to Hezekiah mirror the way the devil tries to tempt us?
2. Put yourself in Hezekiah's shoes, looking out on the army of Assyria, and hearing these demands. How would you feel?

Meditate.

It is 701 BC. Seven years prior to the event described in this chapter, Assyria overwhelmed Syria and Israel, and carried the northern kingdom away into captivity. All that Isaiah had prophesied concerning Israel and Assyria came to pass, just as he said, and the people of Jerusalem had seen it happen. And now here were the Assyrians, at the very gate of Jerusalem (vv. 1-3).

So confident was Sennacherib, that he sent a missive back home to Nineveh claiming, "I have shut up Hezekiah the Judahite like a caged bird," which missive was promptly inscribed in the annals of the Assyrian kings, and can be seen today on a cuneiform hexagon, discovered in the ruins of Nineveh early in the last century.

Sennacherib was a big talker, and he would not take "No" for an answer. His mouthpiece, the Rabshakeh (probably a title), pressed Sennacherib's demands, moving from mocking the faith of the people of Jerusalem (vv. 4-9), to offending against God (v. 7), to promises of horses and the freedom that possessing them implied (vv. 8, 9). Sennacherib even claimed God had sent him to destroy Judah (v. 10). He would discover the hard way that he was sorely mistaken about this.

The Rabshakeh, standing outside the city walls, was speaking loudly in Hebrew. The leaders of Jerusalem asked him to speak in Aramaic, a cognate of Hebrew (and the second language in which the Old Testament is written), because the people inside would not be able to understand him, though the leaders would (v. 11). The Rabshakeh explodes in mocking, threats, and warnings, even denying God's power to rescue His people (vv. 13-20).

The leaders of Israel were forbidden to respond. Instead, they went to Hezekiah and reported on all the Assyrian had said (vv. 21, 22).

Prepare.

1. Sennacherib's offer to the people of Jerusalem might have been appealing to some. Why? Are we ever faced with such temptations today? Explain.
2. What was it about the Rabshakeh's demands that might have been tempting to Jerusalem's leaders? Why do you suppose Hezekiah forbade them from responding?

3. Push had come to shove for the people of Jerusalem. If you had been present in that situation, what would you have advised the king and his counselors?

All of the people remained silent and no one said anything to him, because they had accepted the instruction of the king not to respond to him. For because Hezekiah was a truly righteous man, acting in complete fidelity and with all counsel, he had asked that no response be made to the blaspheming Assyrian, lest it provoke him to even greater blasphemy. Hence it is written: "Do not ignite the coals of a sinner." We also read in the Psalms: "When the sinner stood against me, I was mute and I was humbled and I was silent concerning the good." And again, "Place a guard at my mouth, Lord, and a fortified door over my lips; do not incline my heart toward evil words." Jerome (347-420 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 11.36.11-21

Lord, whenever the devil comes to tempt me, help me to...

Pray Psalm 52.

How many different ways can you see that the wicked "boast in evil" and mock the goodness of God? Pray for lost people, that they might break free from all deception and lying and wickedness, and turn to the Lord. And pray for yourself, that in the midst of a wicked age like ours, you may bear fruit for the Lord and be faithful in your witness for Him.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 52 (*Warrington: Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words, both harsh and strong, with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, "Behold, what have we here?
Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire.

"But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!"

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

2 Clinging to the Promise

Pray Psalm 56.3, 4.

Whenever I am afraid,
I will trust in You.
In God (I will praise His word),
In God I have put my trust;
I will not fear.
What can flesh do to me?

Read Isaiah 37.1-7.

Reflect.

1. How would you assess Hezekiah's response to the Assyrian threat?
2. The Word of the Lord from Isaiah is reassuring. Does the Word always promise to deliver us out of our troubles?

Meditate.

Can you see how Hezekiah has been clinging to the promise of a remnant, which he has been hearing from Isaiah (v. 5)? He's calling on that promise even as he sends his men to Isaiah, that he might pray and intercede for the remnant, and deliver them from Sennacherib.

Wouldn't it be great if our civil authorities today had (a) this kind of faith in God's Word, and (b) the sense to seek God's help through the prayers of His appointed servants? Hezekiah in many ways provides a model for how government can fulfill its mandate to serve God for the good of the people (Rom. 13.1-4). Unlike the kings before him, Hezekiah did not turn to Egypt for deliverance. He heard the Word of the Lord from Isaiah, and he turned to that Word and the Lord's prophet, calling on God to do what He had promised.

We also notice Hezekiah's humility. He tore his clothes, a sign of repentance, and he went into the temple, to show himself before the Lord. Moreover, he didn't demand that God do what He had promised. Instead, he said, "It may be..." (Hebrew, *יִיָּאֵל*, "perhaps"). And he didn't assume that his prayers alone would suffice to realize the promised deliverance of God's remnant.

Isaiah didn't go into great detail about how Jerusalem would be delivered. He simply told the king not to be afraid, and trust that God would take care of the Big Talker, Sennacherib. We'll see how thorough God was in this shortly. What we do see in Isaiah's response is a bit of a glimpse into the way the world works: spiritual power is brought to bear against earthly hubris to accomplish divine promises and purposes (v. 7).

Prepare.

1. Sometimes, obedience to God is as much a matter of what we don't do as of what we actually do. How can you see that in Hezekiah's response to Sennacherib?
2. What "children" is Hezekiah speaking of in verse 3? In what sense are the promises of God His "children", waiting to be born?
3. Does God still use angels (spirits) in His work in the world today? Explain.

For the sake of royal worship, therefore, Hezekiah wrapped himself in sackcloth and, walking from his palace to the temple, sent

Eliakim, the high priest, Shebna, the scribe, and senior priests to the prophet Isaiah son of Amos, an act that must be attributed to the humility and prudence of the king. Jerome (347-420 AD), Commentary on Isaiah 11.37.1-7

Guide me in serving You this day, O Lord, that I might obey Your every command and...

Pray Psalm 56.

What challenges or trials are you facing today? Let this psalm guide you to face them in confidence and the strength of the Lord. Then renew your vows to follow and serve Him.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 56 (*Morecambe: Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart*)

Savior, be gracious, gracious unto me!
Weary, I seek the shelter of Your wings
Till trouble passes, till my sighings flee.
I seek the Lord Who for me does all things.

When I'm afraid I'll put my trust in You,
You, Lord, Whose everlasting Word I praise;
I will not fear what foes to me might do,
But will in faith to You my crying raise.

Wickedly how my foes distort my words;
Constant attacks and snares await my way.
Pour out Your wrath, consume them, mighty Lord!
Bring evil to its end, O Lord, I pray!

Lord, see my wand'rings, see my anxious tears!
Help me to trust and praise Your holy Word.
Gladly I know that when I call You hear;
I will not fear but trust in You, O Lord.

I will not fear what foes might do to me.
I give You thanks, my vows will I renew.
You have redeemed me, set my spirit free,
And ever in Your light I'll walk with You.

3 That All Kingdoms May Know

Pray Psalm 79.8, 9.

Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,
For we have been brought very low.
Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,
For Your name's sake!

Read Isaiah 37.8-20.

Reflect.

1. The tone of Sennacherib's communication with Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem has changed. In what way?
2. Ultimately, what is Hezekiah seeking in his prayer?

Meditate.

Sennacherib was clearly ticked off. He had to put his plans concerning Hezekiah on hold, to deal with Libnah and Ethiopia, which had come out against him (vv. 8, 9). But he didn't want Hezekiah to think this meant he was off the hook. He sent a stern missive to Hezekiah in which all the nice talk disappeared, and now his intentions were clear: Sennacherib meant to destroy Jerusalem (vv. 11, 12).

Hezekiah's response was just right. He took the letter to the temple and "spread it before the LORD" (v. 14). He must have read the letter in the Lord's hearing (v. 17), not because the Lord didn't know what was in it, but because Hezekiah wanted to put the whole matter into the Lord's hands. He wanted it off his shoulders and on to the Lord's, so he called on the Lord to hear and see the Big Talker's "reproach" of the living God.

In his prayer, Hezekiah acknowledged the greatness of God, and His sovereignty over all the earth (v. 15). He rehearsed the details of Sennacherib's threat (v. 17), and acknowledged the truth of what the Assyrian king asserted concerning his destruction of other nations and their gods (vv. 18, 19). But then he expressed his confidence in the Lord, called on Him to save His people, and – this is most important – to vindicate and manifest His Name to all the nations (v. 20).

God's works are always toward the honor of His Name. The sooner we learn this, the more effective will be our prayers, and the more we will guide and direct our own works – *all* our works – to bring Him praise and glory (1 Cor. 10.31).

Prepare.

1. What threats to our faith or practice do we as believers daily face? How should we prepare for these each day?
2. Hezekiah wants to be saved. He doesn't want Jerusalem to be destroyed – not on his watch, at least (cf. Is. 39.8). But he is concerned above all for the honor of God. How do you see that? How should Hezekiah's example instruct us?
3. What "gods" do people today trust in rather than the Lord our God? How should you pray for the lost people in your Personal Mission Field?

*Against the blasphemies of King Sennacherib, Hezekiah's customary armory failed. So he goes back to the temple and opens his letter before the Lord. Previously he was silent, for he did not dare to open his mouth in the temple for fear of the Lord, nor to pour out extemporaneous prayers to God. Now, however, because he has already heard Isaiah saying, "Do not be afraid of the words which you hear, with which the sons of the king of the Assyrians have blasphemed me," and so on, he beseeches the Lord boldly and claims that the Lord alone is the living God, through whom we understand idols to be images of the dead.. Jerome (347-420 AD), *Commentary on Isaiah 11.37.14-20**

Lord, today I will have many opportunities to honor Your Name. Help me to prepare for them, so that...

Pray Psalm 79.

Whatever troubles or oppresses us, and whatever vexes our churches, God is greater, and He can deliver. Offer your trials and challenges to the Lord in prayer.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 79 (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

O God the nations all Your inheritance have spoiled!
Your City have they ruined, Your temple they have soiled!
Your servants' bodies all to the birds of heav'n are thrown;
The flesh of all Your faithful the jaws of beasts now own.

The blood of faithful servants like water flows around;
And none are there Your saints to commit into the ground.
Our neighbors mock and scorn us: How long, O Lord, how long?
How long will You be angry and scorn our mournful song?

Pour out, O Lord, Your wrath on all who deny Your Name;
Who trust You not nor seek You, bring down to deepest shame!
For they have with great rancor Your precious saints devoured;
Lay waste their habitation at this late dreadful hour.

Why should the nations mock and say, "Where now is their God?"
Let there be known among them harsh vengeance for our blood!
Hear, Lord, our groans and sighing; preserve us by Your pow'r.
For we are fairly dying each day and hour by hour.

Reproach those who reproach us with judgment sevenfold!
Let thanks and praise to You by Your precious flock be told.
We are Your sheep, O Savior, we thank You all our days.
Look on us with Your favor as we declare Your praise.

4 Melted like Snow

Pray Psalm 146.1, 2.

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

While I live I will praise the LORD;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

Read Isaiah 37.21-38.

Reflect.

1. How many different ways had Sennacherib offended against God?
2. In the midst of wrath, God does not forget His remnant. What does He promise them?

Meditate.

It's not a good idea to reproach God, or to abuse His servants, or to violate His gifts and properties, or to neglect His Law. Sennacherib would learn this the hard way, as our passage for today makes clear.

In lieu of further exposition, I want to share a poem by George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), on the subject of this passage:

The Destruction of Sennacherib

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

And as a fitting conclusion to the Lord's anger, upon returning to Assyria from this inglorious defeat, Sennacherib was murdered by his own sons.

Prepare.

1. What do we learn from the demise of Sennacherib about the power of God?
2. Clearly, it's not a good idea to offend against the Lord. What should we learn from God's wrath against Sennacherib?
3. The going forth of a remnant from Jerusalem indicates the lifting of the siege. What does the remnant begin to do after that (vv. 30-32)? Does God still have a remnant today? What is their calling?

*The going forth is thus contrasted with the narrow limits within which the trembling Jews had been forced by the dread of enemies to confine themselves. Yet by this word he expresses not only liberty to go out, but the increase of the nation, which had been reduced to a small number. When not only was Judea again covered by a multitude of men, but from the remnant there sprung vast multitudes who were spread over the various countries of the world, this could not have been done, unless out of that small number the Lord had created not merely a single nation, but many nations. John Calvin (1509-1564 AD), *Commentary on Isaiah 37**

Lord, count me among Your faithful remnant, I pray, and let me go out today to...

Pray Psalm 146.

Thank God for the joy and hope He gives us, and for the justice, provision, and healing we have by His grace.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 146 (*Hallelujah! What a Savior: Man of Sorrows*)

Praise the Lord, my soul, give praise! While I live, His Name I'll raise,
and exalt Him all my days – God forever reigns in Zion!

Trust we not in prince or man – no salvation's in their hand.
Death shall take them, breath and plans – God forever reigns in Zion!

Blessed are they whose hope resides in the Lord, Christ at His side.
By Him heav'n and earth abide – God forever reigns in Zion!

He is faithful evermore; He gives justice to the poor,
Feeds the hungry from His store – God forever reigns in Zion!

Jesus sets the pris'ner free, heals blind eyes that they may see,
lifts those burdened painfully – God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best; wand'ers in His grace are blessed;
Needy ones in Him find rest – God forever reigns in Zion!

But the wicked who defame His eternal blessed Name,
Them He brings to ruin and shame – God forever reigns in Zion!

5 Lord of Time

Pray Psalm 90.13-15.

Return, O LORD!

How long?

And have compassion on Your servants.

Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy,

That we may rejoice and be glad all our days!

Make us glad according to the days *in which* You have afflicted us,

The years *in which* we have seen evil.

Read Isaiah 38.

Reflect.

1. This chapter is about time, and what governs it. How do you see that?

2. How would you compare Hezekiah's writing to what we've seen of Sennacherib's?

Meditate.

This is an extremely important chapter in the book of Isaiah. Everything Isaiah has been preaching and writing about has to do with events that happen *in time*. God speaks, and what happens *in time* obeys His Word and will.

We've already seen that to be the case with Israel, Syria, and especially with Sennacherib. God spoke through Isaiah to warn and comfort the people of Jerusalem, telling them the Assyrians would not come into their city. Then God acted – in a “glance” – to defeat Sennacherib and all his forces. He ordered and ruled the events in time just as He had said.

But Isaiah has spoken much more about what God will do in time to come, especially through the Babylonians, and what will become of His people and the remnant of the faithful. Beyond that, Isaiah will have much more to say about what God will do *in time* to fulfill His promises and purpose.

So in this chapter, God shows Isaiah, Hezekiah, and readers from every age that He is Lord not only of what happens *in time*, but of *time itself!*

What, after all, is time? It is the succession of moments in which we live. Every moment of time comes immediately from God. Each moment comes from Him, pristine and pure, though as it enters the realm of sinful creation, and comes into the hands of sinful men, it becomes tainted with that sinful condition, and thus needs to be redeemed (Eph. 5.15-17). We redeem time by making good use of it for the glory of God. Each moment of time, as we use it, returns to God as an offering and gift from our hands. Our desire must be to ensure that *all* our time is lived in the wisdom and for the glory of God.

And that, in essence, is what Hezekiah prays in verses 10-20. God grants Him 15 additional years of life. He is sovereign over time and everything in it, including life-threatening illnesses. Like Sennacherib, Hezekiah knows to write in his chronicles, events of importance in his life and reign. Unlike Sennacherib, he writes humbly, and in a prayer, to commit himself to making the most of the remaining time of his life. He celebrates the Lord, the Giver of time, and commits his remaining time afresh to the worship and service of the Lord.

Imagine how great the work of God in verses 7 and 8 must have been! Everything *in time*, and everything by

which we *measure time*, was not only stopped, but rolled back, so that God could demonstrate conclusively that whatever He spoke *of time* or *for time* or *in time* would surely come to pass. God did a ten-degrees rewind on the whole vast cosmos, just to give His people confidence in His Word.

And that Word is just as true for us today as it was for Hezekiah.

Prepare.

1. Meditate on Ephesians 5.15-17. What does it mean to “make the most of” or “redeem” the time God gives us?
2. Hezekiah wrote his prayer to make sure he would remember it and everyone else would, too. Can writing or journaling be an aid to growing in the Lord? Explain.
3. God healed Hezekiah, but mediately, not immediately. God does not always heal through miracles, but all healing is from the Lord. Explain.

At no time should one freely praise God more than when one has passed through afflictions. Nor again should one at any time give thanks more than when he finds rest from toil and temptations. As Hezekiah, when the Assyrians perished, praised the Lord and gave thanks, saying, “The Lord is my salvation, and I will not cease to bless you with harp all the days of my life, before the house of the Lord.” Athanasius (295-373 AD), Festal Letter 10.3

Thank You, Lord, for all the time of my life! Help me to make the most of that time today by...

Pray Psalm 90.

Thank God for the time of your life. Repent of any ways you have failed to honor God with your time, and seek His presence and power to help you make the most of all your time (Eph. 5.15-17).

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 90 (*Landas: My Faith Has Found a Resting Place*)

Lord, You have been our dwelling place from generations gone.
Before the mountains came to be, before the earth was born,
Before the worlds, and long before men on the earth first trod,
From everlasting long ago, O God, You are our God!

You turn men back to dust and say, “Return from whence you came!”
A thousand years are in Your sight like yesterday the same.
You sweep away our lives with ease, like grass that sprouts and dies.
Your wrath consumes us and we live dismayed amid our sighs.

You set our sins before Your face; our secret sins You know.
Our days decline in fury as we sigh to see them go.
And though we live for eighty years, yet hard and sad the time,
For soon it goes when Your great wrath consumes us in our prime.

Lord, teach us all our days to note that wisdom may be ours.
Return, O Lord, have pity on those servants who are Yours.
Each morning let Your love appear that we for joy may sing.
And make us glad for every day You us affliction bring.

Now let Your work to us appear; our children show Your might.
And let Your favor rest on us; show mercy in Your sight.
The work that You have given us, confirm, and to us show,

Hezekiah: Isaiah 36-39

That we Your chosen path may walk and in Your precepts go.

6 Puffed Up, Sucked In, Sunk

Pray Psalm 6.1-3.

O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger,
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.
Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I *am* weak;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.
My soul also is greatly troubled;
But You, O LORD—how long?

Read Isaiah 39.

Reflect.

1. How did Hezekiah's pride get the best of him in this situation?
2. How would you describe Hezekiah's attitude about the consequences of his actions?

Meditate.

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10.12). Hezekiah's healing went to his head. He must have become puffed up with thinking that he was just so special to God, and the gift from the King of Babylon only served to puff him more.

But Hezekiah mistook the reason for Merodach-Baladan's gift and the visit of his envoys. They weren't there to honor Hezekiah. They were casing the joint, to discover as much as they could about whether Jerusalem was a prize worth taking, and how much effort might be required to breach their defenses and reduce their military.

Hezekiah answered the first question resoundingly in the affirmative (v. 2), rendering the second question rhetorical. He had been sucked in on the bait of his pride, and Judah and Jerusalem would sink under the tsunami of Babylon's siege.

In confronting Hezekiah (vv. 5-7), Isaiah wasn't saying anything he hadn't already said. He merely informed the king that his actions had lit the slow fuse that would blow Jerusalem and its temple to smithereens. Hezekiah's response shows a heart grown suddenly cold and self-serving: "At least there will be peace and truth in my days" (v. 8).

How easy it is to tumble into self-serving, ego-satisfying ways. Take heed.

Prepare.

1. How can you know when you're being tempted to sin? What should you do then?
2. In a very real sense, we never sin alone. Our sins always have consequences for others. How can you see that in the case of Hezekiah?
3. Our actions in the present affect the generations that will succeed us. Should we care? Explain.

Often the care of government when undertaken distracts the heart in many different directions. The ruler finds himself unequal to the task of dealing with particular things when his mind becomes confused, having its attention diverted by so many different things.... When one, because of this, neglects the business of self-examination, that person does not even consider the losses it is

suffering or know how great they are. For neither did Hezekiah believe himself to be sinning when he showed to the strangers who came to him his storehouses of spices. Gregory the Great (540-604 AD), Pastoral Care 1.4

Keep me from pride, Lord! Keep me from self-serving ways! Guide me instead to...

Pray Psalm 6.

Listen as the Lord searches your soul. Let Him bring to light any sins. Confess and repent of them, and commit your day to the Lord.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 6 (*Lancashire: Lead On, O King Eternal*)

O Lord, do not rebuke me, nor chasten me in wrath;
Let graciousness and love be companions on my path.
I long to be restored, Lord; repentance is my song.
Receive my fainting word, Lord: How long, O Lord, how long?

My broken spirit rescue, O Lord, restore my soul!
No hope have I unless You return and make me whole.
O Lord, let lovingkindness prevail, or I shall die!
In death who shall Your Name bless? Who shall Your praises cry?

I weep, and weary sighing, by night pour forth my tears.
I cease not from my crying and tremble in my fears.
My foes array before You; they bring my soul to grief.
My wasting eyes implore You, Lord bring my soul relief!

Let all who sin delight in depart from me with haste.
My prayers have entered right in before my Savior's face.
My foes turn back in anguish; they are no longer there!
My enemies are vanquished, for God has heard my prayer!

7 Lessons from Hezekiah

Pray Psalm 81.1, 2.

Sing aloud to God our strength;
Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.
Raise a song and strike the timbrel,
The pleasant harp with the lute.

Review Isaiah chapters 36-39.

Reflect.

1. How would you describe the relationship between Hezekiah and Isaiah?
2. What can we learn from Hezekiah, both to emulate and to avoid?

Meditate.

Hezekiah was king for twenty-nine years. For all those years, Isaiah served as the Lord's prophet in Jerusalem, and he and Hezekiah seem to have had a fairly good relationship. These chapters focus on decisive moments in Hezekiah's reign: the defeat of Sennacherib and the visit of the Babylonian envoys. These two situations serve as a symbol of the people of God and the choices they have to make: between trusting the Lord and glorifying Him, and leaning on their own skills, wits, and resources. When they trust the Lord and heed His Word, He never fails. When they become more interested in themselves, they fall victim to pride and idolatry, and end up bringing the judgment of God on their heads.

Hezekiah's experience also serves, for the people of Israel, to exalt God and His Word and power, in ways that would encourage and prepare the remnant for what they would have to endure under the Babylonians. Hezekiah's prophesying, and God's works of victory and healing, laid a foundation for what will follow in chapters 40-66, which contain some of the most hopeful and inspiring promises in all of prophetic literature.

The challenge these chapters put before us can be phrased in a few questions: In the face of trials, threats, and tribulations, will we trust the Lord and His Word, or will we depend on our own best ideas and resources? Do we understand the power of prayer, and are we making the best possible use of this privilege? Will we confront sin in the Body of Christ, and repent of it in our own lives, or will we just blink at it and turn away? Are we going to live merely for ourselves in the present, or for God's Kingdom and the generations to come?

These questions need to be asked every day, remembering, as we do, the story of Hezekiah.

Prepare.

1. What happened to Hezekiah over the course of these chapters? Can what happened to Hezekiah happen to us? How can we guard against that?
2. Why was Isaiah able to remain faithful to the Lord, when many prophets and teachers had turned away from Him to court the favor of men? What can we learn from Isaiah about faithfulness?
3. What's your primary takeaway from Isaiah 36-39?

Often, when means are abundant and many things can be done for subordinates to admire, the mind exalts itself in thought. But in so doing, it also provokes the anger of the judge, even though the acts of iniquity may have not been overt. For the one who

judges us is within, as is that which is judged. When, then, in our hearts we transgress, what we are doing within ourselves is hidden from men. And yet in the eyes of the Judge we sin. Gregory the Great (540-604 AD), *Pastoral Care 1.4*

Help me, Lord, to keep Your promises before my mind, that I might always...

Pray Psalm 81.

Use this psalm to review God's work of bringing you to Himself. Plead with Him to open wide your mouth, so that you might feed on His Word and walk in all His ways today.

Sing to the Lord.

Psalm 81 (*St. Petersburg: My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*)

O sing for joy to Jesus our strength; to Jacob's great God shout joyfully at length!

And strike the drum, and offer a song; all instruments, your glad music prolong.

"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Let every kind of instrument play to celebrate God's deliverance today.

It is His statute and His command to worship and praise all over the land.

"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Declare His mercy, tell of His grace; our enemies flee the look of His face.

In mighty deeds strong witness He gave, and powerfully did His chosen ones save.

"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

God set us free from bondage to sin and graciously brought us near Him again;

He rescued us whenever we cried and often our faltering confidence tried:

"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

"Let no false gods among you be found; but scatter their altars over the ground.

Pursue not wealth, nor leisure nor fame, but worship the Savior's glorious Name:

O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

For You are God, Your Name is the Lord, who faithfully keeps His covenant Word,

Who rescued us from bondage and pride; our mouths He would fill, we open them wide.

"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

"My people would not listen to Me, but hardened their hearts most hideously;

I cursed them for their hard-hearted ways to wander in darkness all of their days:

O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Now let us all abandon our ways and listen to God, and offer Him praise!

Our foes He will so quickly subdue, extending His hand to save and renew.

"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Then even those despising the Lord would falsely obey and follow His Word;

In vain they seem to follow His way, yet judgment awaits on God's chosen day.

"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

The finest foods for us He will buy, and furnish us an abundant supply;

How sweet our lives can be in the Lord, when only we heed His glorious Word.

"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Hezekiah: Isaiah 36-39

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How many different ways in these chapters did God show His people that He could be trusted?
2. What was Isaiah's role in the midst of uncertain times and trying circumstances? Do you ever find yourself in such a role? What can you learn from Isaiah to help you?
3. Summarize Hezekiah's walk with the Lord from the beginning of chapter 36 to the end of chapter 39. What changed? How?
4. How should these chapters bolster our confidence in the power of God and the reliability of His Word?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Isaiah 36-39? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.