



# ISAIAH 36

## TWO KINGS

As the first half of Isaiah comes to a close, the Assyrian army is pressing in on Judah. The Assyrians were convinced that they were invincible and that the God of Israel was no different from any other gods they had overcome on their westward march. So in 36:1-37:4 Isaiah stressed the pride of the Assyrians, and that their arrogance would result in God’s judging them (cf. 10:15-19). The response from Hezekiah’s army is less than enthusiastic. God has told them repeatedly that he is planning to win this battle, but they were still looking for a way of escape other than the one Yahweh had provided.

| English Standard (ESV)  | Passion Notes  | Passion Translation (TPT)  |
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| <p>Isaiah 36:1 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. <sup>2</sup> And the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem, with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field. <sup>3</sup> And there came out to him Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> And the Rabshakeh said to them, “Say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours?’</p> | <p><b>a</b> 36 Chs. 36–39 form the conclusion of the first part of the book of Isaiah. They contain the accounts of three historical events, each surrounding the influence of the prophet Isaiah during the reign of Israel’s King Hezekiah. This section of Isaiah is frequently called “the Volume of Hezekiah” since he is mentioned thirty-five times in these four chapters. Chs. 36–37 detail the unsuccessful efforts of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, to take possession of Jerusalem by threats and intimidation. Ch. 38 details Hezekiah’s sickness and miracle of divine healing. Ch. 39 gives us the account of Hezekiah’s sin of pride in showing all his wealth to the Babylonian emissaries.</p> <p><b>b</b> 36:1 This would be approximately 701 BC. Hezekiah means “strengthened of Yah, captured by Yah, Yah has made firm, power of Yah.” The prophets who lived during his reign included Isaiah, Micah, and Nahum. He ascended Judah’s throne at the age of twenty-five and reigned a total of twenty-nine years. He was considered to be a godly king and released the greatest period of restoration in Israel’s history. He repaired the doors of the temple, cleansed it, and made atonement for the altar. He consecrated the priesthood, ordered the observance of the Feast of Passover, and removed idolatry from the land. He supported the priesthood through tithes and offerings, and the nation prospered. He was buried with great honor in the sepulchers of the sons of David. See 2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chron. 29–32.</p> <p><b>c</b> 36:1 Sennacherib means “the thorn laid waste.”</p> <p><b>d</b> 36:2 Or “Rabshakeh,” a possible title of a military official.</p> <p><b>e</b> 36:2 Or “Fuller’s Field,” where cloth was washed and bleached. In Mark 9:3, the Greek text uses the phrase “whiter than any fuller can make them.” See also Isa. 7:3; Mal. 3:1–3.</p> <p><b>f</b> 36:2 This was possibly Hezekiah’s “tunnel.”</p> | <p><b>Two Kings a</b></p> <p>Isaiah 36:1 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s reign, <b>b</b> Sennacherib, <b>c</b> king of Assyria, attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and conquered them. <sup>2</sup> After defeating Lachish, Sennacherib sent his chief commander <b>d</b> with his massive army from there to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. He took up a position on the road to the Washerman’s Field, <b>e</b> at the end of the aqueduct where it empties into the upper pool. <b>f</b> <sup>3</sup> And coming out to meet him were three officials of the king: Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, the palace administrator; Shebna, the scribe; and Joah, son of Asaph, the secretary.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> Sennacherib’s commander said to them, “Tell Hezekiah, this is what the exalted king, the king of Assyria, says: ‘What makes you so confident?’</p> |

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| <p><sup>5</sup> Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me? <sup>6</sup> Behold, you are trusting in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. <sup>7</sup> But if you say to me, “We trust in the LORD our God,” is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, “You shall worship before this altar”? <sup>8</sup> Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. <sup>9</sup> How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master’s servants, when you trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? <sup>10</sup> Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, “Go up against this land and destroy it.””</p> <p><sup>11</sup> Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, “Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it. Do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall.” <sup>12</sup> But the Rabshakeh said, “Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the men sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?”</p> <p><sup>13</sup> Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah: “Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! <sup>14</sup> Thus says the king: ‘Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. <sup>15</sup> Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD by saying, “The LORD will surely deliver us. This city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.” <sup>16</sup> Do not listen to Hezekiah. For thus says the king of Assyria: Make your peace with me and come out to me. Then each one of you will eat of his own vine, and each one of his own fig tree, and each one of you will drink the water of 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 wine, a land of bread and vineyards. <sup>18</sup> Beware lest Hezekiah mislead you by saying, “The LORD will deliver us.” Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? <sup>19</sup> Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?”</p> | <p><b>g</b> 36:19 This is modern Hama, a city of west central Syria.</p> <p><b>h</b> 36:19 Or “Arpad,” an ancient city of northwestern Syria.</p> | <p><sup>5</sup> You think you have a strategy and defensive might, but mere words are no match for my army! In whom are you trusting for help that you rebel against me? <sup>6</sup> I know—you are relying on Egypt, that broken staff full of splinters. If anyone leans on it, it will pierce his hand. Pharaoh himself, king of Egypt, is like that splintered staff to those who put their trust in him! But you tell me that you are trusting in Yahweh, your God. For Hezekiah went around destroying every sacred altar from the land. Didn’t he insist that Judah and Jerusalem had to worship only at this altar in your temple? <sup>8</sup> Now it’s time to make a deal with my master, the king of Assyria. I will give you two thousand horses if you’re able to come up with as many men to ride them. <sup>9</sup> You’re no match against even one officer of the least of my master’s officials! Why put your confidence in Egypt’s chariots and horsemen? <sup>10</sup> What’s more, do you really think I’ve marched against this land to destroy it on my own without Yahweh’s approval?”</p> <p><sup>11</sup> Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah replied, “Please speak to us, your servants, in Aramaic, for we understand it. Don’t speak to us in Hebrew, for the people on the wall are listening to us, and they will overhear our conversation.” <sup>12</sup> But the commander answered them, “Do you think I came to deliver this message from my master only to you and your king? It is also meant for the men sitting there on the wall to hear! They are the ones who will eat their own excrement and drink their own urine!”</p> <p><sup>13</sup> So the commander stood and shouted out in a loud voice in Hebrew to the men listening on the wall, “Hear the words of the great King Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, <sup>14</sup> for he has sent me with these words: ‘Don’t let Hezekiah mislead you, for there is nothing he can do to save you. <sup>15</sup> Don’t be deceived when he tries to persuade you to trust in Yahweh, saying to you, “Yahweh will come to our rescue and our city will not be handed over to the king of Assyria.” <sup>16</sup> Don’t listen to Hezekiah, for the king of Assyria says to you, “Make your peace with me and surrender so that you may continue to eat from your own grapes and figs and drink the water from your own cisterns <sup>17</sup> until I come and take you away to a land like your own. It is a good land of grain and wine, bread and vineyards.” <sup>18</sup> Don’t be deceived by Hezekiah’s empty words when he says to you, “Yahweh will save us.” Has any god ever saved a nation from the mighty hand of the king of Assyria? <sup>19</sup> Where were the gods of Hamath <b>g</b> and Arphad? <b>h</b> Where were the gods of Sepharvaim?”</p> |

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| <p><sup>20</sup> Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" <sup>21</sup> But they were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, "Do not answer him." <sup>22</sup> Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.</p> |                           | <p><sup>20</sup> Where is there a god that could save its people from my mighty hand?" <sup>21</sup> But they were silent, and no one answered him a word, for King Hezekiah had ordered them, "Do not answer him." <sup>22</sup> So the three officials of Hezekiah—Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, the palace administrator; Shebna, the scribe; and Joah, son of Asaph the secretary—came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn as a sign of despair and reported what the Assyrian commander had said.</p> |

## BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY

JOHN A. MARTIN

### - GOD'S SUPERIORITY TO ASSYRIA (CHAPS. 36-37)

Probably these chapters were written before the similar accounts in 2 Kings 18-19 and 2 Chronicles 32:1-23. Isaiah wanted to portray Hezekiah as one who believed in God and who was miraculously delivered from the Assyrian threat by a sovereign act of God. The point of these chapters is that God can and does fulfill His Word to His people. He had told them on a number of occasions that the Assyrians would be defeated; now that promise was fulfilled.

- **Sennacherib's threatening of Jerusalem** (36:1-37:4)

- **The Setting**

- 36:1-3. This attack occurred in 701 B.C. This was the 14th year of ... Hezekiah's sole reign (cf. 2 Kings 18:13), which began in 715. Some scholars have proposed that Sennacherib (705-681) made several attacks against Jerusalem, but extrabiblical evidence does not seem to support that view. Sennacherib boasted of taking 46 walled villages in Judah. He went from the north along the coast defeating (among others) the towns of Aphek, Timnah, Ekron, and Lachish. Lachish was then his staging area for attacking a number of other towns. From Lachish he sent a large army against Jerusalem to surround it and to demand its surrender.
- The Assyrian commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. Besides setting the stage geographically, that information has theological significance. Ahaz had faced the Aram-Israel challenge at that same place (Isa. 7:3). Isaiah had told Ahaz that he would not fall to his enemy, that the Lord would deliver him. But Ahaz had refused to believe the man of God. Now Hezekiah was also confronted with a message of deliverance from the same man of God. The geographic notation heightened the tension over the question of whether Hezekiah would respond positively to the Word of God. Eliakim ... Shebna ... and Joah (cf. 22:20; 36:11, 22; 37:2) were chosen to negotiate with the Assyrians. These men, in important positions, were trusted by Hezekiah.

- **The Commander's Mockery** (36:4-10).

- 36:4-7. The field commander was the main Assyrian spokesman. According to 2 Kings 18:17 two other leading officials were with him. (The KJV and NASB translate “field commander” by “Rabshekah,” as if the word were a proper name. This, however, is probably not correct.) As a representative of the Assyrian Empire, his words of mockery characterized the whole empire. In speaking for the Assyrian king the field commander asked the Jerusalemites whom they were depending on for victory (Isa. 36:4-5). To depend on Egypt would be like leaning on a splintered reed—it would do no good and would even be harmful. Amazingly this was [Vol. 1, p. 1087] what Isaiah had been saying about Egypt. The odds were overwhelmingly against the people of Jerusalem who had no means of escape for thousands of enemy troops were surrounding them.
- The commander then said that it would be foolish to depend on God (v. 7). Apparently this commander had heard of Hezekiah’s partial reforms (2 Kings 18; 2 Chron. 31) in which he had removed the high places, sites of worship on hills throughout Judah. The commander did not really understand the situation for he may have thought that Hezekiah was no longer depending on God since he had removed many altars from the land, leaving only one altar in Jerusalem.
- 36:8-10. To the commander, Jerusalem’s only reasonable action was to surrender. Mockingly he even offered to give the Jews 2,000 horses if they could find riders for them to fight against him. But he claimed that even 2,000 could not fight off one Assyrian low-ranking officer. Finalizing his argument, the commander said that the LORD had ordered him to destroy Judah. This was meant to terrorize the people by making them think that God had actually turned against them. Of course Isaiah had said that Jerusalem would not fall to the Assyrians, so the commander was wrong.
- **The Commander’s Challenge** (36:11-20).
  - **36:11-12.** Realizing the seriousness of their situation the three Judahite negotiators (cf. v. 3) requested that the negotiations be carried on in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. Aramaic, a major diplomatic language in that day, is similar to Hebrew. But it is different enough that many of the common people would have had difficulty understanding negotiations spoken in it. The three leaders were concerned that panic would spread throughout the city if the people heard the Assyrian’s demands in Hebrew. However, the commander refused because he said he was sent to speak to every Jew in earshot, not just to these three. Confident of an Assyrian victory, he said the Jerusalemites would be forced to eat and drink their own body waste to survive in the siege.
  - **36:13-20.** Calling out to the people in Hebrew, the Assyrian commander urged them not to let Hezekiah deceive them into thinking the LORD would deliver them (vv. 13-15). Then the commander told the people that Sennacherib promised them prosperity in another land (vv. 16-17). Again the commander exhorted the people not to be deceived by Hezekiah (cf. vv. 13-15) for the gods of other nations had not been able to deliver them (vv. 18-20).
  - Hamath and Arpad were in Aram. The location of Sepharvaim is uncertain but it may be near Hamath and Arpad. Hamath and Sepharvaim were two of the cities from which people were brought to repopulate Samaria after its fall (2 Kings 17:24). The commander also boasted that since Samaria was not helped by its god (it had fallen to Assyria 21 years earlier, 722 B.C.), why should the people of Jerusalem count on their God to protect them?

- **The People's Response** (36:21-22)

- **36:21-22.** Though no doubt terrified, the people followed Hezekiah's instructions not to answer the Assyrian spokesman's taunts. Eliakim ... Shebna, and Joah (cf. vv. 3, 11) told Hezekiah what the ... commander had said. They had torn their clothes, a sign of distress and/or mourning (cf. 37:1; Gen. 37:29; Josh. 7:6; 2 Kings 11:14; 19:1; 22:11; Es. 4:1; Job 1:20; 2:12).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think God ALWAYS has a "Plan A?" If not, how do you think he approaches his plans for us? Do you think there are times when he lets us call the shots in regards to *his plans*?
2. Think of God's "Plan A" as a parent might look at working with their child. Are there times when you let your children call the shots no matter what the cost, even failure? Explain your approach to letting people "learn from their mistakes."
3. What's your "Plan A" for 2020?
4. Are there people in your life who you feel depend upon you to make their "Plan A" a reality? What's your approach to supporting them in their pursuits?
5. Do you feel the significant people in your life "get you?" How can you help them understand how you think, make plans and work out those plans so they can begin to support you more effectively? What would be the first thing you would share with them? What questions would you encourage them to ask YOU to help them understand you better?