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Isaiah 36 - 39



Isaiah - Steve Gregg

Chapters 36-39 of Isaiah focus on historical narratives about King Hezekiah's rule and his encounters with the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who threatened to conquer Jerusalem. Despite taunts and warnings from the Assyrian king, Hezekiah maintained his trust in Yahweh and ultimately repelled the invasion. These chapters also highlight the importance of seeking accurate counsel and knowledge when making important decisions.

Transcript

Chapter 40 Isaiah 36-39 okay we come to the section in Isaiah that is transitional between the first major division of the book and the other major part. In our introduction to Isaiah we made much of the fact that chapters 40 through 66 are so different in character and in subject matter from the earlier portion of Isaiah that many scholars have sought to demonstrate a different authorship. That is what is sometimes called the Book of Comfort.

Isaiah chapters 40-66 is generally referred to by the scholars as the Book of Comfort because it begins with the words, Comfort ye my people, and also it is a book of salvation. It is a book of deliverance and redemption. Whereas the first 39 chapters are largely focused on judgment.

Judgment on Israel, judgment on Judah, judgment on pagan nations. Mostly severity in the first 39 chapters and then mostly comfort and salvation in the latter 27 chapters. The division is actually fairly stark and we talked in our introduction about some of the things that make the two sections quite different.

However, some things join them as well including some very common Isaianic terms, vocabulary that is not really used elsewhere in the scripture very much and which is woven through the entire Book of Isaiah, both the first and the second sections. Also the fact that the New Testament both parts of Isaiah as having a common author. So the traditional view is that Isaiah wrote all 66 books.

I believe that the evidence is very much in favor of that despite tremendous shift in

focus at chapter 40. However, we are not yet at chapter 40. We are at chapter 36.

But chapter 36-39 which fills the space from where we have last left off and where chapter 40 begins, these four chapters are different than any other chapters in Isaiah in that they are simple historical narrative. Isaiah is largely a book of prophetic oracles and visions and God speaking words of judgment or comfort to the people directly in the first person. But chapters 36, 37, 38, and 39 are all simply narrating stories and these stories are also found in other books of the Old Testament.

For example, the chapters before us are found in 2 Kings 18-19. Previous to this, the historical information we were given was focused on the time of King Ahaz in Judah. And the Assyrian threat was always present.

But part of the time there was a more immediate threat from Aram or Syria and Ephraim or Israel which had joined together to threaten Ahaz. And that was the threat in some of the earlier chapters. But we have now come to the time of Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz.

And we come dip into the story here at the point that you would find in 2 Kings 18-19. And at this point, Hezekiah is threatened by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. Now, Sennacherib had come to power in 705 BC.

Since then, four years have passed. When Sennacherib came to power in Assyria, he was met with rebellion from many of his subject peoples. His predecessors in Assyria had conquered much of the region relevant to the Bible story.

And Sennacherib came to power, many of these regions that had been under the Assyrian rule rebelled. One of the most significant of which was Babylon. And so Sennacherib had to spend a couple of years subduing the rebellion in Babylon, which he did.

After that, he found that some of the nations in the Middle East down in the region of Israel had rebelled also. And we know there was this confederacy that included Syria and the Philistines and Moab and even Egypt in some measure that were trying to join together against the Assyrian rule and Tyre also. And so prior to the opening of this chapter, Sennacherib has defeated the rebellion in Babylon.

He has come down south and west to Tyre. He's conquered Tyre. He has conquered the Philistines.

And he's also conquered a region south of Jerusalem. Egypt didn't show up much. Egypt was asked to come, even paid to come, but they didn't show up and do much.

But there was one intervention that Egypt did make in the south. And Sennacherib met Egypt down there and defeated them too. And he was at Lachish at the time this story opened.

Sennacherib was at Lachish. This is 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem. And therefore he's defeated all the powers around Jerusalem.

And there's no reason for him not to subdue Jerusalem and just make a holistic defeat of everything in the area. And so Hezekiah, who's the king in Jerusalem, is resisting. And Sennacherib from Lachish sends his field officer, his field commander, Rabshakeh.

Actually, Rabshakeh is not a proper name. It's a title. It's an Assyrian title.

It refers to the chief officer of the armies in the field. And so this is where we open the story. It says, it came to pass in the 14th year of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.

Then the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And he stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field. This is exactly the same location that Ahaz had been at when Isaiah approached him and gave him the sign of the virgin child.

This was the place where the Rabshakeh stood, outside the city apparently, calling for officials in the city to come out and negotiate a surrender. Rather than just attacking without negotiation, Rabshakeh wanted to see if he could get a surrender and make an easy end of it. There had been a lot of fighting.

The Assyrians had fought many armies and defeated them. Probably had lost a lot of men. They were probably battle-weary.

Would have just as soon had a surrender as have to fight. But they were ready to fight if necessary to conquer Jerusalem. And before they did so, they had wiped out something like 46 Judean cities.

I forget if it's 43 or 46, but an inscription that Sennacherib left that has been found by archaeologists boasts of having, and names, 46, I believe it is, cities of Judah that he had conquered at this time. And that's what verse 1 mentions. He came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.

And now only Jerusalem really was left. Lankesh to the south was now defeated. And so the Rabshakeh comes up to Jerusalem to try to see if he can persuade Hezekiah or Jerusalem to surrender.

And it says in verse 3, And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came out to him. Now we've encountered the names of Eliakim and Shebna before. Back in chapter 22 of Isaiah, there was a prophecy about how Shebna would be thrust out of office and die in exile.

And that Eliakim would be then given his office, which was over the house. This prophecy

has at least partially been fulfilled at this time because Eliakim is now over the house. He is now in the position that Shebna was in, in Isaiah 22.

But Shebna has not been thrust out entirely. He's been demoted. He's now simply a scribe.

This may have, however, been the first step down for Shebna. And we don't know how he eventually died, but the prophecy suggested in Isaiah 22 that Shebna would die in exile. That has not yet happened, but that's certainly no reason to believe it did not later happen.

So these two men and one other are sent out to negotiate with the Rabbi Sheka. They are obviously emissaries of the king Hezekiah. I point out that of these three men, again, Shebna is the only one whose parentage is not mentioned.

Eliakim is the son of Hilkiah. And Joah is the son of Asaph, meaning that these men are clearly Jewish. They have Jewish parentage.

Shebna, in all the references to Shebna, including chapter 22, his parentage is not mentioned and many have thought that's a suggestion that he had no Jewish lineage and was perhaps a Gentile who had found his way into a position in Hezekiah's government. We know very little about him. However, they were sent out to negotiate with the Rabbi Sheka outside the walls.

Then the Rabbi Sheka said to them, say now to Hezekiah, thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, what confidence is this in which you trust? I say you speak of having counsel and strength for war, but they're vain words. Now, in whom do you trust that you rebel against me? 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.

These charges against Pharaoh were true. Egypt was not a reliable staff to lean upon. It's like leaning on a reed, but there's a hidden crack that when you lean on it, it breaks and there's a sharp point on the lower part and your hand goes, because you're leaning on it, it punctures your hand.

He said that's what it's like leaning on Egypt. You're going to just injure yourself leaning on Egypt, and that apparently is true. That's the same thing Isaiah had said.

Verse 7, but if you say to me, we trust in Yahweh 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. Now, therefore, I urge you give a pledge to me or to my master, the king of Assyria, and I will give you 2,000 horses if you are able on your part to put riders on them. Now, here he's kind of taunting them saying, I don't know if you've got 2,000 men who come out here on horseback.

I'll provide the horses. You want to fight? I suppose you guys are short on military might here, so I'll even provide the horses. You just find some riders for us.

I mean, he's taunting them that even if I provide the military machinery for your side, I'm not sure you've got the manpower, and even if you do, I'm ready to take you on, even with one hand tied behind my back, more or less is what he's got in mind there. Now, his statement that you shouldn't trust in Egypt because Egypt can't be trusted is followed by you shouldn't trust in Yahweh. Now, it's very possible that the Rabbi Sheikah had had spies in Jerusalem who had informed him that there was Isaiah and maybe a few others in the city who were telling Hezekiah to trust in Yahweh.

There was the pro-Egypt party, and there was the pro-Yahweh party, and there was a pro-Assyria party, too, and apparently Hezekiah, who was a better king than his predecessors, was tending to lean in the direction of trusting Yahweh, though he wasn't fully committed to that yet. He was at least resisting the other parties, and Isaiah seemingly had his ear. Rabbi Sheikah must have known this and said, listen, if you're thinking about trusting in Yahweh, you can put that out of your mind right now, because Yahweh probably isn't on your side.

Haven't you taken down his high places where he's worshipped? And in making the statement, the Rabbi Sheikah obviously shows that he's not quite thoroughly informed about the religion of Israel. He assumes that Israel, like other nations, worships their God at these high places. In fact, the high places were places where the Canaanites worshipped their gods in Israel before Joshua conquered the land, and very seldom were those high places fully torn down.

Even in times of revival, or at least in times of better kings, many times we are told in the book of Kings, this man was a good king. He followed in the ways of David, except he didn't take down the high places. Only two kings, I believe, took down the high places, if I remember correctly.

One was Hezekiah, and the other was Josiah. So Hezekiah was actually more fervent in his loyalty to Yahweh than most kings, even the better kings had been, in that he did go to these high places, these shrines where the Canaanites had worshipped their false gods, and where the Jews in their more apostate times also worshipped deities. Hezekiah just removed those high places so it wouldn't be done anymore.

That was actually a good thing. That was a thing that very few kings were good enough to do. Rabbi Sheikah didn't understand that Yahweh was offended by the high places.

He just saw Hezekiah removing the shrines of worship in various places in Judah. He thought, Yahweh is not going to be happy with that, is he? You think Yahweh is going to help you? Isn't that His high places you've been removing? So here we see that although Rabbi Sheikah is correctly informed about Egypt, he's very ill-informed about Yahweh

and whether Yahweh is on Hezekiah's side or not. Yahweh actually was on Hezekiah's side, though Rabbi Sheikah thought, how could he be when you're removing those high places? He says, I'll give you 2,000 horses if you've got the riders and we can engage.

But verse 9 says, how then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? That is to say, your whole army couldn't drive off one of my captains, presumably one of my captains with his troops. You don't have a chance even if we give you the 2,000 horses and you can find riders, you won't be able to repel even one of my divisions. Have I now come up without Yahweh against this land to destroy it? Yahweh said to me, go up against this land and destroy it.

Now this was no doubt an outright lie. I don't think that Rabbi Sheikah claimed to know anything about Yahweh really, but it was a very demoralizing bluff. If the people of Judah, who were not real strong in faith anyway, who tended to be somewhat syncretistic and tended to mix the religion of Yahweh with other religions, and even Hezekiah being a good king, didn't have much experience trusting Yahweh in crisis, for Rabbi Sheikah to say, you know what, this Yahweh you're trusting, he's the one who told me to come here and destroy you.

Now the problem with that is, that might be believable. Not that the Rabbi Sheikah was correct, he hadn't gotten an oracle from God, or had he? Had he heard of Isaiah's prophecies? Because it's possible that he's actually referring to things Isaiah had said, because Isaiah had told Judah that God was going to put a hook in the jaw of Assyria and bring them down against Judah, and that they were going to devastate the cities of Judah. And there were some of Isaiah's prophecies that said that the Assyrians would wipe out Jerusalem too, which we have to understand to be conditional.

But Rabbi Sheikah might have seen them as unconditional, like Yahweh is the one who's commissioned me to come down here, doesn't your own prophet Isaiah say something like that? Now I don't know if he's referring to Isaiah's prophecies, or if he's just lying outright, but he's mistaken, because he seems to think that God has destined that Jerusalem must fall to the Assyrians. And if in so far as Isaiah had said anything along those lines, that was conditional, and we see that to be true. Just like Jonah's prophecies about Nineveh falling in 40 days was conditional, and although the conditions weren't stated when Jonah preached it, the prophecy was proven to be conditional, because when the people repented, God changed his policy toward Nineveh at that time.

Likewise, he would do in Jerusalem. But there is a sense in which Rabbi Sheikah's words could have been informed by intelligence that had come out of Jerusalem to him, that there was a prophet in there saying that Assyria was going to come and destroy Jerusalem. And he might be alluding that saying, isn't it Yahweh that sent me here? You could trust Yahweh to protect you when he sent me here to destroy you.

That would be confusing and demoralizing for the people trying to trust in Yahweh, who again, were not really very good at it anyway. In verse 11, then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah, the son of said to the Rabbi Sheikah, please speak to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand it, and do not speak to us in the Hebrew in the hearing of the people who are on the wall. In other words, we're bilingual.

We can understand you speak in your own diplomatic language. We don't want the people on the wall listening in. They only know Hebrew.

So let's don't talk. You don't talk Hebrew. Talk Aramaic and we'll negotiate in that language.

But the Rabbi Sheikah said, has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you? What he means is, if I besiege you for a long period of time, you're gonna run out of food. You'll be eating anything you get your hands on. Actually, he says that the new King James has cleaned this up a little bit.

I believe the, I think the King James says, someone have the King James here? I think it says they'll eat their dung and drink their piss. Yeah. So since, that's right.

They'll eat their dung and drink their piss. And so the new King James has euphemized this somewhat and said they'll eat their own wastes. The idea here is, Rabbi Sheikah is saying, listen, these people on the wall have every right to hear what they're up against.

They're the ones who are going to be starving to death because of Hezekiah's resistance. They're the ones who are gonna have to eat their own dung. If Hezekiah doesn't surrender, why should they not be apprised of what we're negotiating here? Let them decide.

Now, of course, the idea was his words were truly intimidating words. And if the people on the wall were hearing those words in their own hearts, they might be losing confidence. Even if Hezekiah was going to trust Yahweh, not everyone in the city would necessarily personally do so.

And it could raise a rebellion inside the city against Hezekiah's policies as they're hearing Rabbi Sheikah make these threats that the people on the wall who are listening might turn against Hezekiah because of the fear of what Rabbi Sheikah is talking about. And he says, then the Rabbi Sheikah stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew, the language of the people on the wall, and said, hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus says the king, do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you.

Nor let Hezekiah make you trust in Yahweh, saying Yahweh will surely deliver us. This city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. He says, 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 every one from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards.

Now, of course, what he's saying here is, of course, if you surrender me, I'm going to take you out of the country. But if you come out immediately, I'll let you stay on your farms for a while, and the time will come back, I'll take you to another nice place to be. You know, I'll take you away to my country as exiles, but it's not bad.

You can raise crops there too. In other words, what do you want to do? Eat your dung and drink your piss, or do you want to farm your land and eat your figs and your grapes? And then later go off into exile, when I come back to gather you up and take you off. But even there, it won't be that different.

And so, he's being realistic. I'm not pretending I won't take you into exile. Of course I will.

I mean, that's what happens when you surrender. You go into exile. But is it really that bad compared to what you're going to have if you resist? Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, Yahweh will deliver us.

Has anyone of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sefer Ve'em? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? Samaria was, of course, Israel's capital to the north. Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand? Now, this is pretty persuasive stuff, except for people who know God. If you don't really know God, if God is just sort of your national religion by tradition, and you don't know that He's a real God, and that He's different than all the other gods.

And you know, there's a lot of people, by the way, raised in Christian families. I've heard them say that, you know, well, we're raised Christian, but if we were born in India, we'd be Hindus. You know, if we were born in Tibet, we'd be Buddhists.

So, why should we think that being Christian is more valid? Just because it's our national religion, or our traditional religion of our family. These people don't know God. They just think, well, aren't all gods pretty much the same? And, I mean, Christianity is the God of this land, and of my family, and if I was somewhere else, I'd just as validly have another religious system.

That's pretty much how people often do think. But they only think that way if they don't know God. Anyone who knows God knows that the comparison of God to any other

religious system is absurd, because He's a real God.

This is something that Hezekiah brings out in his prayer in the next chapter. He says, God, it's true, the Assyrians did wipe out these other nations, and their gods couldn't help them. He says, but they're not gods.

They're wood and stone, but you're the real God. And so, I mean, this is something that anyone who knows God would recognize, but Rabshika is appealing to a bunch of people on the wall who probably, many of them, don't know God personally. This is a nation, Judah, that's been mostly apostate from God most of its history.

So they've got a good king. They've got a guy who's, you know, he's trusting God now, but the people's tendency is not that way. And so, I would imagine this argument would probably ring true with many of the people on the wall.

You know, come to think of it, our king's saying our God's going to save us, but what happened to the gods of all these other nations that Assyria conquered? Why didn't they save them? What makes us think that our God's any different? And yet, although some of the people on the wall may have had their faith shaken somewhat, we don't read of them reacting in rebellion against Hezekiah, but rather they obeyed Hezekiah. Verse 21 says, but they held their peace and answered him not a word, for the king's commandment was, do not answer him. So they had to listen to him because they had to watch the walls, and he could shout to them and give these intimidating speeches, but they were told not to answer, so they didn't.

Then Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the house, Shebna, the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of Rabshicah. Now, their clothes torn, of course, means that they were grieved. A Hebrew who was expressing extreme grief or lamentation, maybe the loss of a loved one, or maybe repentance, grief over their sins, would tear their clothes.

It was a means of showing grief, and apparently they were terrified of what Rabshicah had said, and they were anticipating the city's probably going to fall to this guy, and they were expressing their grief and their mourning already by tearing their clothes, own clothes, and going back to the city in that condition. The story, of course, continues. Chapter 37, And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord.

Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna, the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. And they said to 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.

Now, the children have come to birth, but there's no strength to bring them forth may be

figurative, or it may actually be literal. It may be saying that the people are so hungry from the siege, it's possible the food supplies were already depleted, which is why Rabshicah could predict that they'll be eating their own waste, that even women who are giving birth, they come to the point where they're in labor, but they just don't have the physical strength to push. There's just, you know, the babies are getting caught in the birth canal, because everyone's so, there's no strength.

They're starving. This would be given as sort of an extreme example of the effects of famine, that even the women can't deliver their babies. It may be that Yahweh your God will hear the words of Rabshicah, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to reproach the living God, and will reprove the words which the Lord your God has heard.

Therefore, lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left. Now, Yahweh is referred to as Isaiah's God. This is a message from Hezekiah saying, maybe the Lord your God, Yahweh your God, will hear your prayer.

Well, Hezekiah is not disowning Yahweh, but perhaps he is not as confident that Yahweh is close to him as he is to the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah has clearly got the reputation of being Yahweh's spokesman and Yahweh's man, and since Yahweh hasn't delivered the nation, it's possible that Hezekiah is not yet sure that Yahweh is planning to deliver, that Yahweh really is on his side. He's on Isaiah's side.

Isaiah, you pray. Your God may hear. But, you know, although Hezekiah is holding out against the pro-Egypt and the pro-Assyria parties, and trying to side with Isaiah, I think Hezekiah is finding a hard time being firm in his resolve, and he's not so sure that he could refer to Yahweh as his God in the same sense, or with the same confidence that he is Isaiah's God.

Isaiah is much more unwavering in his faith, and so he says, would you pray for us, because we are in a lot of trouble. Verse 5, So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah, and Isaiah said to them, Thus shall you say to your master, Thus says the Lord, Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me with. 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.

So the Rabbi Sheikah returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libna. Now, he had heard that he had departed from Lachish. Lachish was 30 miles from Jerusalem.

Libna was about 10 miles north of Lachish, and therefore closer to Jerusalem. Sennacherib was moving closer, and Hezekiah had not yet surrendered. It's not clear why Rabbi Sheikah went and connected with Sennacherib.

Perhaps because there was no surrender, he wanted to consult with his king, who is only

now only 20 miles away, and therefore could be more easily consulted, to find out, well, shall we wage an all-out assault? Should we wait, starve him out? I mean, it's possible. We don't know, but Rabbi Sheikah might have gone to see Sennacherib in order to get some kind of a approval for one strategy or another against Jerusalem, which was being obstinate from their point of view. Anyway, verse 9, the king heard concerning Terhaka, the king of Ethiopia.

It says, he has come to make war with you. So when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah, king of Judah, saying, Do not let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you, saying, Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Look, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands by utterly destroying them, and will you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed? Gozan, and Haran, and Rezepth, and the people of Eden, who were at Telesar? Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sefer Vayim, Hena, and Iva? Now, this apparently was Rabbi Sheikah's parting shot, as he was actually going to engage this Ethiopian king that was apparently coming up to resist Assyria, and had to be gone down and defeated, and Rabbi Sheikah probably joined Sennacherib in that battle, and in doing so, withdrew from Jerusalem, and he was afraid that Hezekiah would be encouraged to see them go.

Like, oh look, Yahweh has delivered us. The Rabbi Sheikah has left, and Rabbi Sheikah is saying, no, don't count on that. I'll be back.

Don't think your God is delivering you. I'll be gone for a little while, but don't get encouraged in the meantime, because your God can't deliver you any more than these other gods have delivered their cities, and Hezekiah received the letter. This apparently came to him in a written form from Rabbi Sheikah.

Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, that's of course the temple, and spread it before the Lord. It's kind of an interesting gesture. He says, okay God, you live here at the temple.

I'm going to go to your house. I'm going to open the letter and let you read it, let you see the contents of this threat. This is your problem.

Then Hezekiah prayed to the Lord saying, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, the one who dwells between the cherubim, meaning over the mercy seat, you are God, you alone of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear.

Open your eyes, O Lord, and see, and hear all the words of Sennacherib, who is sent to reproach the living God. Truly, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, 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 have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you are alone. So this was Hezekiah's resistance to Assyria and to all the other counselors in Jerusalem telling him to trust anyone but Yahweh.

He got this threat in writing, he took it directly to the Lord, to the house of God, spread it out before God and made this appeal, expressing his confidence that God was not like the other gods and he could save them. Notice how he begins his prayer. He says, you're the God who dwells between the cherubim, alone of all the kingdoms of the earth.

You're not like the gods of the other kingdoms. He mentions that God is the one who created heaven and earth. You know, when you're asking for intervention from God, it's good to remember that the God you're talking to is the one who created the heavens and the earth.

You know, everything else you might ask him to do is a very small project for him. And it may seem like a big one to you, but when you remember that God made the heavens and the earth, suddenly the project you're asking him to set his hand to doesn't seem so formidable. And so many times the prayers of godly men in the Bible begin with this, God, you're the one who made everything.

You're the one who rules the nations. You know, I mean, in other words, affirming that, you know, what I'm asking you to do is really kind of a modest request compared to the things you've already done and the things that you've shown your power in. And verse 21, then Isaiah, the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah saying, thus says the Lord God of Israel, because you have prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, this is the word which the Lord has spoken concerning him.

The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, laughed you to scorn. The daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head behind your back. Now here's a big, tough bully coming against Jerusalem.

And Jerusalem's like a weak little girl, a young virgin, seemingly very vulnerable, seemingly one who could not resist, but she's thumbing her nose at the threat. He doesn't say God's man of war, Judah, stands against you, you boastful fool. But he says, this little girl called Jerusalem is mocking you, scorning you.

And perhaps even the reason for calling Jerusalem a virgin at this point is to show that she remains unviolated. As if Assyria is like a rapist coming to violate Jerusalem, but Jerusalem remains untouched, remains unviolated. She has not succumbed to the violent attacks actually upon her.

She's still the virgin and she's still laughing, mocking at him. Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted up your eyes on

high? Against the Holy One of Israel. By your servants you have reproached the Lord and said, by the multitude of my chariots, I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the limits of Lebanon.

I will cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypress trees. I will enter its farthest height and its fruitful forest, to its fruitful forest. I have dug and drunk water, and with the soles of my feet, I've dried up all the brooks of defense.

Did you not hear long ago, God says to Sennacherib, how I made it from the ancient times that I formed it? Now I have brought it to pass that you should be for crushing fortified cities into heaps of ruins. Therefore their inhabitants had little power. They were dismayed and confounded.

They were as the grass of the field and as the green herb, as the grass of the housetops and as the grain blighted before it is grown. But I know your dwelling place. You're going out and you're coming in and your rage against me, because your rage against me and your tumult have come up to my ears.

Therefore I will put my hook in your nose and my bridle in your lips and I will turn you back by the way which you came. Now in verses 26 and 27, God is saying, yeah you did conquer the other nations. It was not your God that gave you that victory, it was me.

Had you not heard that I declared it? Isaiah's prophecies had been given that said that Assyria would conquer these nations. All you have to do is read chapters 13 through 23 and see that Isaiah had predicted that the Assyrians would conquer Egypt and Philistia and Moab and Tyre. All these nations that have been done.

He says now haven't you heard that? That I said it from ancient times? I do this, this is my doing. However you have boasted against me and I know where you sleep. Just remember that.

I'm watching you. I know your dwelling place. I know when you leave home and when you get home again.

I know where your kids go to school. You are definitely at my mercy and I'm going to put a hook in your nose and take you back to where you came from. Now the hook in the nose is actually what the Assyrians did to their captives when they take them off into captivity.

They'd take them off with hooks through their noses in many cases. So God says I'm going to treat you as you treat your own captives. You're my captive.

I'm taking you into exile back into your own country. Of course Isaiah had told Hezekiah through the messengers that Sennacherib would die in his own land and he did. Now verse 30, this shall be a sign to you.

You shall eat this year such as grows of itself and the second year what springs from the same. Also in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them and the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward for out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant and those who escape from Mount Zion and the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Now this little segment verses 30 through 32 could be addressed to Assyria as the previous section or he may be now speaking to Hezekiah, the message to Hezekiah and the Jews.

Certainly it is a message of hope to Jerusalem. The remnant who have escaped from Judah, verse 31, will sprout again. They are not going down at this time.

Now verse 30 where it says you shall eat this year such as grows of itself could possibly be saying that the Assyrians will but I think it's more likely this is now addressed to the Jews that they haven't planted any crops because they've been under siege. They're not going to be able to harvest plants that they've planted but they can just eat whatever grows of itself. Every time there's a harvest there's of course wheat that falls to the ground.

The poor can glean it but individual kernels remain on the ground and would take root and grow and he's saying you know you're not going to have any harvest right away here because of the siege but it's going to get better each year. This year and next year you'll probably be just eating what grows by itself but in third year you're going to sow and reap and so he's basically saying of course this year you're not going to harvest and you're not going to be able to harvest next year either because apparently judging by the time that it'll be before the Assyrians are taken away I don't know what the time frame was but he's saying it'll be the third year before you're harvesting crops again but that's in the foreseeable future. That is the hopeful prospect of the future.

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 a shield nor build a siege mound against it by the way that he came by the same he shall return and he shall not come into this city says the Lord for I will defend this city to save it for my own sake and for my servant David's sake. So there won't even be a war here there won't even be a shot fired. Assyria is you know threatening to conquer but they won't even shoot a single arrow into the city they will be driven back to their home.

That's quite a risky prophecy for a prophet to make not yet knowing how this is going to pan out. Of course the next verse tells us exactly how it did pan out but but Isaiah would only know this by revelation because one could argue that God will save the city but they might see it as him saving the city even in the midst of a fierce battle but never breaches the walls but he says they're not even gonna fight here. They won't even really come with a threatening shield or siege works they won't get that far against us and verse 36 then the angel of the Lord went out and killed in the camp of the Assyrians

185,000 and when the people arose early in the morning there were the corpses all dead as corpses generally are.

So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away returned home and remained at Nineveh. Now it came to pass as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god that Adramelech and Shurizer his sons actually struck him down with the sword and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Ezerhaddon his son reigned in his place.

So Sennacherib was killed in his own homeland but he withdrew from Jerusalem because something really spooky happened. One night 185,000 of his troops woke up dead the next morning. Actually they didn't wake up but some people did wake up and found them dead and that was spooky kind of hard to explain.

C.S. Lewis has made reference to Herodotus's account of this. I have not read Herodotus but from what I read of C.S. Lewis apparently Herodotus spoke about this and said that it was mice among the Assyrians that came and ate chewed the bow strings of their bows and disabled their armies so they left. C.S. Lewis was talking about the differences that people give depending on their worldview.

Somebody who's a secularist would have to attribute this victory to mice or to some other natural cause whereas someone who believes in a supernatural cause like an angel going out and doing it. He says you know between the two I'll go with the angels because we don't know enough about angels to know that they don't do this kind of thing but we know enough about mice to know that they don't do that kind of thing. So he says given the choice between the mice and the angels the open-minded man would go with the angel.

Herodotus the historian must have recorded something about this account too about Assyria's laying off of Jerusalem and moving back to his land. Now chapters 38 and 39 the remaining part of this section are still about Hezekiah and take place during the reign of Hezekiah and Isaiah plays in this story too. Isaiah the final portion of his ministry was during the judging from chapter 1 verse 1 of Isaiah so that Isaiah did not live to the Babylonian period.

However in this story an event happens in Hezekiah's life that brings the Babylonian threat into view only prophetically but this becomes a transition to the next section of Isaiah from chapter 40 on where the Babylonian period is taken for granted. In chapters 40 through 27 through 66 those 27 chapters it's no longer Assyria. Assyria is no longer in the picture Babylon is and the conquest of Babylon by the Persians by Cyrus is the scenario.

So that the first section of Isaiah is concerned with the Assyrian threat the latter division of Isaiah with the Babylonian threat and this historical interlude seems to transition between the two. First chapters 36 and 37 are about the Assyrian threat and how that

was resolved we just read it. Chapters 38 and 39 set up a prophecy for a future Babylonian threat and it's with that that this section closes and then chapter 40 will presuppose that era.

But in chapter 38 in those days Hezekiah was sick and near death and Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz went to him and said to him thus says Yahweh set your house in order for you shall die and not live. Now notice there's no condition stage just you're gonna die you're not gonna live. However this is again an instance where prayer changes things.

Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall and prayed to the Lord and said remember O Lord I pray how I have walked before you in truth and with a loyal heart and I have done what is good in your sight and Hezekiah wept bitterly. Now frankly that seems a little wimpy to me. I mean everybody dies if a man's been sick for a while he told well this is how you're gonna die what's what's the weeping about.

But it's not so much that he was wimpy and afraid of death I think is more that he would die at this point childless which would be somewhat tragic for any man in Israel to die childless and have nothing to leave no one to leave his goods to but more importantly for a king he'd have no son to be heir of his throne. The next king if Hezekiah died at this point would have to be some other relative of his maybe a cousin or a brother or something but he'd much rather that he had a son to leave on the throne I'm sure most kings that would be what their desire would be. At this point in time Hezekiah had no son and that may be that what he sees as so tragic about him dying at this point not so much that he just is afraid to die but that this is not a good time for him or maybe from for the nation as far as he's concerned.

Of course if God is the one who's decreed it he should have figured that God knows what's best and as it turns out God does answer Hezekiah's prayer and gives him an extension of his life but it does not work out for the good of the nation as we shall see. So the word of the Lord came to Isaiah saying go and say to Hezekiah thus says the Lord the God of David your father I have heard your prayer I have seen your tears I will add to your days 15 years I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria and I will defend this city now by the way this story I believe happens chronologically earlier than the story we just read because God has not yet delivered them from Assyria as he did in chapter 37 Assyria came no more after that so this story is apparently chronologically earlier but why is it said later I believe Isaiah's arrangement is on purpose again to bring the focus of the reader to the Babylonian period which is what comes up at the end of this story so it transitions by deliverance from Assyria to a future captivity in Babylon by telling these stories in the reverse order of their actual occurrence and so it says in verse 7 and this is the sign to you from the Lord that the Lord will do this thing that he has spoken behold I will bring the shadow on the sundial which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz 10 degrees backward so the sun returned 10 degrees on that dial by which it had gone down now this miracle was a

sign to Hezekiah that he was going to extend his life God's going to extend his life 15 more years of course this miracle has been explained various ways for the sun for the shadow on a sundial to go backward 10 degrees would seemingly require for the sun to go backward in the sky and to stop its uh its westward movement and pause and go east a short distance to set the the shadow back and then resume its westward course most people find this to be an absurd suggestion uh not only because most people don't believe that God can do miracles but also they say even if he could do this miracle what would that do to the surface of the earth the earth is spinning at the rate of a thousand miles an hour at the equator now if you slam on the brakes on a car that's going a thousand miles an hour or for that matter a hundred miles an hour you slam on the brakes everything in the car is going to go through the windshield if it's going 10 times that fast a thousand miles an hour and it just stops and goes backward it's like throwing a car into reverse at a thousand miles an hour you know it's going to jerk everything off every mountain's going to fall every every building's going to fall people are going to be flying off the surface of the earth it's ridiculous they say to suggest that God could do this now of course those who say that do not realize that a God who had the power to actually stop the earth from spinning and set it backward a few degrees would also have enough power to take care of all the details you know it is entirely uh if God did this if God did set the earth back 10 degrees if he did turn the earth back that way then uh well then he's got powers that are unlimited which is in fact what the bible tells us about him and that unlimited power could also allow to hold everything in its proper place on the earth's surface as necessary i don't know if that's what we're to understand the bible does not say that the sun went backward it says the shadow went backward and it may well be that God supernaturally blocked the sun uh and and made the shadow go backward some i mean maybe there's a cloud that covered part of the sun and and or something like that it is not necessarily said that we that a miracle occurred of such magnitude as this as the earth stopping moving it could have that'd be one way that got to make the shadow go backward but to make the shadow go backward might require much less intrusive intervention than that and even if it was seemingly a natural cause for example a cloud cover or something that made the shadow go over the sundown the fact that it was predicted and then happened is what would be important after all you might see those clouds in the sky and say i think that's the shadow is going to be over the sundown but how many degrees can you can you predict how many degrees uh in other words i do not minimize God's miracle working power and as far as that goes if he turned if he made the earth go backward shortly it's good with me i don't care i don't have any problem whatsoever with that any more than i have problem with any of the miracles in the bible it's just that the bible doesn't say a miracle happened it just says the shadow went backward many things can make a shadow move and therefore we're not told exactly how it was and i don't think it's um absolutely necessary to suggest it says this i think i mean it says the sun returned but i believe it means that the light of the sun the shadow on the dial went backward although if we take it quite literally the sun would have to move and of course it's not the sun moving anyway we're using

figurative language here when we talk about the sun moving we're really talking about the earth moving and the sun appears to move so this mention of the sun going backward would be phenomenal language anyway so it's hard to know exactly what happened here but if someone says i think the wording requires that the earth stopped and went backward i say i've got no problem with it i've never had a problem with that i'm just saying that there are other suggestions that might uh might answer this explain how it happened um because he says in verse eight the shadow on the sundial will be brought back but it does say by the end of the verse the sun returned 10 degrees but it could mean the sun's light on the sundial returned 10 degrees so it's hard to know exactly how to understand that this is the writing of hezekiah king of judah when he had been sick and recovered from his sickness now the rest of chapter is simply his prayer of celebration of recovery and by the way um it says in verse 21 isaiah had said let them take a lump of figs and apply it as a poultice on the boil and he shall recover so we are told at the end after we've told about his recovery that isaiah had actually intervened with some kind of a folk remedy uh a fig poultice of some kind uh put on the boils that caused it to recover and hezekiah had said what is the sign that i should go up to the house of the lord and the sign was the backward motion sundial now we are almost out of time so we can't read his long prayer it's it's it's like a psalm um and it's basically him celebrating god's deliverance and his uh his healing but chapter 39 which is only eight verses long picks up at the after his healing it says at that time merodach baladan the son of baladan king of babylon sent letters and a present to hezekiah for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered the sickness was apparently uh well known and very severe and that a man would recover from it would seem to be impossible and his recovery is seen to be so notable that as far away as babylon he's receiving congratulations for so amazing a recovery and hezekiah was pleased with them these messengers from babylon and showed them the house of his treasures the silver and gold the spices and precious ointment and all his armory all that was found among his treasures apparently somewhat proud of all that he had it doesn't mention his pride but it's hard to know exactly what motivated him other than than that to show off all that he had which is apparently a lot there was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that hezekiah did not show them then isaiah the prophet went to king hezekiah and said to him what did these men say and from where did they come to you and hezekiah said they came to me from a far country from babylon and isaiah said what have they seen in your house so hezekiah answered they have seen all that is in my house there is nothing among my treasures that i've not shown them then isaiah said to hezekiah hear the word of the lord of hosts behold the days are coming when all that is in your house and what your fathers have accumulated until this day shall be carried to babylon and nothing shall be left says the lord and they shall take away some of your sons who descend from you whom you will beget and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of babylon by the way if this was uttered before the previous story um well i should just say this this isaiah doesn't actually indicate how many sons babel or hezekiah will beget he says some of your sons that you will beget will be carried away but hezekiah actually only

had one son manasseh and he wasn't uh the one that is here referred to he's talking about much later his descendants the word sons here would mean his your descendants will be carried away because it was actually 100 years after this that it occurred then hezekiah said to isaiah the word of the lord which you have spoken is good for he said probably under his breath at least there will be peace and truth in my days uh in other words you made a prediction that my sons my descendants will be carried in babylon but that obviously doesn't involve me that's a good word now it is not said that this babylonian exile will come upon him because of him showing all these treasures there's just a correspondence she showed him all the treasures they're going to take all the treasures it may be that it was wrong for his guy to show them the treasures or it may have just been the occasion for isaiah to see a corresponding thing all those treasures will be carried away the thing is israel did or judah did go into babylon captivity because of the sins of manasseh and manasseh was the child that was born in this 15 years of grace or extension that god gave to hezekiah if hezekiah had not recovered from his sickness if he had died as god announced initially then manasseh would not have been born and he would not have been as he turned out to be the worst king the most pagan king and the longest reigning king that judah ever had and later when babylon captured judah and carried them away although it was generations after manasseh's time the prophets say god sent them into babylon because of the sins of manasseh and although there was revival after the time of manasseh in the time of josiah it was not enough to undo all the damage manasseh had done so here if hezekiah had died at this point we don't know what course jewish history would take but because he asked god for extension god gave it to him three years later he had this baby manasseh when manasseh was 12 hezekiah died the 15 years ran out and manasseh at age 12 becomes king and destroys the nation spiritually and politically and brings upon the nation although it didn't happen in manasseh's day either but yet brought upon the nation the conditions that led to the babylonian exile so this prediction of the babylonian exile comes upon the occasion of hezekiah being healed of a sickness which should have taken him out which should have taken him home but god often answers our prayers even when they're not good for us and and in this case god had already revealed his will hezekiah asked god to make an exception for him and god gave him his request but no doubt god knew very well it was not going to be good but god sometimes gives them their request and with it leanness of soul it says in the psalms and therefore it would appear that god had a perfect will for hezekiah and that was to die 15 years earlier god permitted him to live longer at his request we could call that god's permissive will but obviously god's perfect will would have been better for the nation and for hezekiah no doubt than than for him to ask for an exception to be made when god has decreed something it's best just to submit to his decree rather than to ask him to change and make exceptions in your own case and this case was a bad move for hezekiah he didn't suffer for it as he said oh the word is good it's not gonna happen in my day but it wasn't good for his sons i can't quite understand the mentality of a father who would say as long as things are good for me i don't care if my kids go into captivity i'd much rather

say take me into captivity let my sons go free you know i can't imagine someone taking comfort in the fact that his sons are going to you know be lose battle and be led away into captivity to foreign land because of something i did but hezekiah though he was a decent fellow and a man who was loyal to yahweh he obviously was somewhat selfish and as i suppose everyone is and that is reflected in his attitude about that word that's cool at least in my day it'll be a piece of time and so we come to the end of chapter 39 the end of this major division our next session will get us into the book of comfort in chapter 40