

Isaiah Chapters 36-37 – John Karmelich

1. We interrupt this study of Isaiah to tie it to "2nd Kings". If you've ever read through the books of 1st and 2nd Kings, it mostly gives a chapter or two at the most on each king that reigned in Israel before going on to the next one. Realize each chapter wasn't written during the time when each of them reigned. They weren't quoted live what was biblically worthy. "Kings" was written after all of them died. It's effectively a commentary on each king long after all of them ruled. It is as if we researched historical figures, and wrote what we considered the important aspects into a book. I bring that up here, as these two chapters in Isaiah we're covering is this lesson read as if they are a part of a historical collection like Kings.
2. Let me also start this lesson another way: It's as if Isaiah ends his running commentary on giving predictions about the future based on the way the Israelites were living at that time. This section is written as if Isaiah wanted a break from giving predictions, so he could tell us what's occurring in Jerusalem at that time. It's kind of like saying, "Yes I know I was called to explain God's plans for mankind through this book, but I needed to take a break for a few chapters in order to explain what I'm dealing with here and now."
3. OK, so Isaiah needs to explain life in Israel at that time. Even if it is a good historical commentary to read, as you love to say, what does any of this have to do with my life here and now? To start, it gives us an example of how we can praise God for helping us when a situation seems hopeless. I suspect most of us know what it's like to be in a situation where all looks hopeless. It's when we are staring at our life and thinking, "I don't know what to do next. My situation looks hopeless as I don't see a solution to this problem". Yes, that's the Israelites living around Isaiah were facing at this point in the book. They're literally facing the choice of either death or slavery as a large army was threatening their very existence. The point is things looked hopeless and that's usually when we ask God, "My situation looks hopeless here. I literally have no idea how to remedy the issues I am facing at this moment. God, I need You to intervene because I don't know what to do."
 - a) Personally, I find that God does His best work when we truly let go of our worries as if to say to Him, "It's Your problem, I don't know what else to do." It's usually when we do hit that point of surrender, that God does His best work, as that way He alone gets the credit for making things better.
 - b) That's what we have in these two chapters: A story of God intervening in the world of the Israelites in a time of true desperation. The point for you and me is times will come in our lives where we too feel like we don't see a solution to our problems. Of course we have to make the best decisions possible given the situation we face. At the same time we need to let go of worrying about it as if God's going to intervene His way on His timing to work it out for His glory. Think of the text in these two chapters as a model of how we should be praising God in advance for the good He's going to do in our lives.
 - c) One of the things one accepts about being a bible teacher, is it means God likes to put us in situations where we can relate to the text better. All I'm saying is I'm dealing with my own situation at this moment where I don't see a solution. The good news about writing down issues like this is I can then look back years later at how God got me through all of this and realize how He's been working in my life the entire time. Therefore, I'm going to praise Him in advance for providing comfort and relief through what I'm dealing with as I encourage you to also thank Him in advance for the good He wants to do in your life.
 - d) Therefore, as we read this historical narrative that goes on in Jerusalem around 700BC, the secret isn't to read it as interesting history. God wants us to read it to show us an example of how He can work in the toughest of situations and still work it out for His glory. Life is hard at times, and God wants to be the center of our lives so we glorify Him as He guides us through it all. Therefore, I'd like you to join me as I go through this historical narrative so we can each learn how to praise Him in advance for how He'll work in our lives.

4. With that speech out of my system, I can now spend a few moments to explain why Isaiah wants to include all of this historical text in the book. Let me tell you about the main characters in these chapters and what we're to learn from them:
 - a) This chapter includes dialogue from the Assyrian leaders. For those who haven't been in a study of Israel at this time, let me make this quick: There was an empire that ruled over most of the Middle East for about seven centuries called the Assyrian Empire. They were growing at this time by conquering more lands including much of Israel. God used them as an instrument of judgment against Israel because the Israelites had turned against Him. Therefore, the most merciful thing God can do sometimes is to allow our lives as we know it to end as we've stop doing what God's called us to do, which is to be a witness for Him.
 - i) The example here is we get some dialogue from the military leaders of this empire as they try to talk the Israelites into surrendering before they have to spend years performing a siege to literally starve the residents of Jerusalem into submission.
 - ii) We'll get a bunch of half-truths spoken by them. By the time they get to insulting the God of the Israelites, you know these guys are bad news. My point is we read of the Israelites being in an impossible situation where they don't see a solution.
 - b) Anyway, this empire had worked their way south and has destroyed the Northern Israel kingdom and were now threatening the Southern Kingdom where Isaiah lived and where a man named Hezekiah was the king at this moment. This king has some dialogue in this section of Isaiah and we learn how the king's life intersects with Isaiah in these chapters.
 - c) We also get some dialogue by Isaiah himself, as he describes this situation as God sees it. If nothing else, these chapters show us that Isaiah was respected as a spokesman for God as the king calls for Isaiah to personally state God's opinion about the problems Jerusalem was facing at this moment.
 - d) If you've been with me through Isaiah to date, I discuss every now and then about the fact that God wiped out 185,000 Assyrian soldiers when they were camped around Jerusalem. It is in these two chapters were this event is literally described and it takes place. Then we will read of the Assyrian leader going home where his sons kill him. My point is all of the text is a story of how God worked a great miracle to save Jerusalem when the leaders did seek God through their problems.
5. I can just hear you saying, "OK where's God when I've got my 185,000 problems staring me in the face?" The answer is He's still there. He wants us to go forward, making the best choices we can, given the situations we face, make decisions using biblical principals and trust that He's still there guiding us through all we're dealing with. If and when God chooses to destroy the 185,000 issues we face, is in effect His business. Our job is to honor Him based on how we live, use the time that He gives us to make a difference for Him and trust Him with the results. That is effectively what Isaiah is saying to the Israelite King as he faces his own impossible situation.
6. So what do you call this lesson? "Praising God in advance for what He's going to do." A habit we as Christians should develop is praising God not only for what He has done, but also for what He will do in the future. This is a lesson about being in a really tough spot in life, where we don't see a solution and instead of complaining about how tough life is, we thank God for His guidance as we go through our issues so we can glorify Him for helping us through those issues.
 - a) With that said, let's start on the text itself:
7. Chapter 36, Verse 1: In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.
 - a) Historical records show that this takes place around 701BC. Hezekiah was the king of the Southern Israelite kingdom. The Assyrians had already destroyed the Northern Israelite kingdom by this time. That army is working it's way south, and is "knocking on the door" of Jerusalem. They've finished conquered many of other towns in that Southern kingdom and now they're after the "big prize": Conquering Jerusalem as well as God's temple. We can see how this qualifies for the Israelites as a desperate situation with no solution in site.

8. Verse 2: Then the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. When the commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field,³ Eliakim son of Hilkiyah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to him.
- a) These verses say who the "players" are in the dialogue coming up. To explain, let me give a little background on kings and wars. In those days, kings didn't just sit at home while a head general lead an attack. Usually a king would be leading an army. Here the Assyrian king sends his top general to try to negotiate peace with the king of Jerusalem, Hezekiah.
 - b) What we have here is the Assyrian king wanted to save the trouble of having to perform a long and costly siege against Jerusalem by trying to talk the Israelites there into giving up. The king sends his top man to talk the Israelites into surrendering and he's greeted at the door by some of the top officials of the Israelite king.
 - c) Think of this exchange as the "Number 2 man of one side talking to the Number 2 man" of the other side. Yes it's more technical than that, but that's the idea here. I'm guessing that the king didn't go himself is he wasn't sure of the reaction he'd get. Therefore he sends his top guy to knock on the city gate door. The other names given here are the one's who met the king's general and that's where we're at in this point in the story.
 - d) I ask that you bear with me as we set up this story and hopefully we'll see later in the text how it's a model of God working through our own impossible situations.
9. Verse 4: The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah, " `This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours?⁵ You say you have strategy and military strength--but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me?
- a) So what we have here is a dialogue between the "#2 men" on both sides. The Assyrians are essentially saying, why don't you just give up now and save us both a lot of trouble? From there, the Assyrians are telling the Israelites why they don't stand a chance.
 - b) Let me more on to the next set of verses and hopefully it'll explain the situation better.
10. Verse 6: Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him.⁷ And if you say to me, "We are depending on the LORD our God"--isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship before this altar"?
- a) If you were with me through the last few lessons, you may recall that that the Israelites at that time wanted to go to Egypt for help and "bribe Egypt to bail them out". The Assyrian king's message is in effect, how can they help? Our army is so large, we can defeat them if that what's needed. The Assyrians did defeat Egypt later, but that's not part of this story.
 - b) Then the Assyrian general tries to talk the Israelites out of thinking they can depend upon God's help. It's amazing to realize how much the general knew of the true God as well as the fact that Jewish King Hezekiah ordered the removal of the "high places".
 - i) Time for a quick explanation on that one. If you read through 1st and 2nd Kings, there are references to the "high places". The short versions is the Israelites got too lazy to travel to Jerusalem to worship God so they made their own altars on a high place. It's the idea of feeling like you're getting closer to God by going "up high".
 - ii) One of the important ideas to grasp about God is we have to come to Him only on His terms, not ours. That's why the "high places" were forbidden. It's not that He is against us worshipping Him. It's the idea that He wants us to gather together as a community to collectively seek Him. That's why "high places" were forbidden.
 - c) That leads back to this dialogue by the Assyrian general. Notice the half truth being told here: The Israelites weren't being forbidden from seeking God, just from seeking Him any old way they felt like it. That fact alone is a wonderful lesson about how we're each called to seek Him collectively as well as individually on His terms, not ours.

- d) Anyway, what this general is trying to here is "Hey give up, the king won't let you live however you want to live, and there is no other group (such as Egypt) who can help you and you can't worship God any old way you feel like it, so why don't you save us all a lot of trouble, give up now and we can all be on our merry way?"
 - e) That's the demon's strategy with us as well: First they'll try to talk us into compromising our faith and turn from what God's called us to do. Then if that doesn't work, that's when the actual attacks come. That's why we see modeled in this text. With that idea stated, we still have the general making his best case why the Israelites should just give up:
11. Verse 8: " `Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses--if you can put riders on them!⁹ How then can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen?¹⁰ Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this land without the LORD? The LORD himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.' "
- a) When we get tempted, first comes the promise of something better than we already have: The general says, "Hey, you want horses, I can give you 2,000 horses assuming you know how to ride them." Then he tries, "You wanted to bribe Egypt for help by them providing you with a bunch of chariots and experienced horse riders? Don't you see the great size of an army parked in your driveway? What good will some imported chariots do against all of my experienced soldiers out here in the field?"
 - b) If nothing else, you can see how the general is painting the picture of how impossible this situation is to solve without giving up. That's Satan's strategy in a nutshell, "Hey just give up now as I'm far more powerful than you'll ever be!" That's correct. However, with God providing us with the power we need to make a difference for Him, all of these threats do not give demonic powers a victory. That's the secret behind battling such forces.
 - c) Finally we get the great lie of "God told me I'll win, so give up now!" A good lie will have a bit of truth mixed into it. Yes God was behind the Assyrian invasion into Israel as those living in the Northern Kingdom had grown so anti-God, the most merciful thing He could do was end their witness for Him. Did the Assyrians know all of this? Of course not, but they did defeat the Northern Kingdom by this time so they interpreted that as God telling them to defeat all of Israel including those who were still trusting in God.
 - d) In other words, the Assyrian general was saying, "Look how much of the land of Israel we have conquered to date: Isn't that a sign that God wants us to win?" The way we combat such attacks is by using God's word and living by His principals. My point is God called the Israelites to be a witness for Him, and if He desires that to continue He will in spite of any "army" staring us in the face! It's a classic case of making the best decisions we can as we trust God for the results.
 - e) With that said, we now get a response from the "Number 2 men" on the Israelite side:
12. Verse 11: Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall."
- a) I need to talk a little about languages here. The "home" language of the Assyrians was a dialogue that probably eventually became what is spoken in "Iraq" today. I don't know if the Assyrian general had a translator standing next to him, or if he learned Hebrew as he's probably been dealing with Israelites for the past few years as they're conquering the area. Either way, the general was able to communicate in Hebrew to the "#2 guys".
 - b) Also realize that the official "business language" of that day was Aramaic. It was that way for many a century. Aramaic was the language used by the common Jewish people by the time Jesus was there. Think of Aramaic as a "cousin" language of both Hebrew and Arabic and it allowed travelers through the Middle East to communicate with each other. Just as English is the business language of much of the world today, so Aramaic had that title for many a century in the Middle East back then.

- c) With that speech stated, realize that the Israelite leaders were scared of the speech given by the Assyrian general. They didn't want the "common people" to be afraid of what the general was saying. Therefore, they were asking the Assyrian to compromise by speaking in Aramaic as opposed to Hebrew. A way to tell when we're in serious trouble is when we desire to compromise with our enemies. It's like, "Talk to us in our secret language as we don't want to frighten everyone else. We're smarter than they are because we understand this other language, so please compromise with us so we don't scare them!"
 - d) With that said, it's time for the Assyrian general's response:
13. Verse 12: But the commander replied, "Was it only to your master and you that my master sent me to say these things, and not to the men sitting on the wall--who, like you, will have to eat their own filth and drink their own urine?"
- a) Remember what's the goal of the Assyrian general is, to scare the Israelites into giving up. That's why he says in effect, "I'm going to speak in the language they understand because I want to save us all the time and trouble of a long siege in which we all know you'll lose in the end." For those who know what a siege is, that's when an army surrounds a city as they literally starve it out. That's why the general uses such gross terms of eating our own filth (yes, it means what you think it means) and drinking our own urine!
 - b) Again, remember the point for you and me, is about trusting God in a tough situation so He can get the glory as we trust Him through whatever we're dealing with.
 - c) With that said, let's get back to the Assyrian general's plea to the Israelites:
14. Verse 13: Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! ¹⁴ This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you! ¹⁵ Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, 'The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'
- a) Remember that King Hezekiah himself is not in this scene. It's the Assyrian number two man talking out loud to the Israelite "number two men" so that the soldiers around them can hear what is being said. To paraphrase, "Your king can't save you as my king is much more powerful and we'll win this battle!"
 - b) I'm a big believer that God will never do for us what we can do for ourselves and He does not expect us to do what we can't do for ourselves. The great challenge in life is to discern the difference. The Israelites here were faced with what is an impossible situation to have to deal with. At the least, I give the Israelites credit for standing up for God when they're faced with tough situation. Meanwhile back to the general's rant:
15. Verse 16: "Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then every one of you will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own cistern, ¹⁷ until I come and take you to a land like your own--a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards.
- a) To paraphrase, "Surrendering isn't so bad. Yes we'll relocate you a long way from here as we separate you from each other so you won't rebel against us. Still we'll provide for you water to drink and other real estate like yours when you can grow food and survive."
 - b) I have to admit, this does remind me a lot of what the Muslim nations say to Israel today: We will give you the right to practice your religion elsewhere, you just can't have the land where you're standing right now. Through most of history the Muslims have let Israelites practice their religion as subject to them, but what they can't accept is the idea of a Jewish homeland. Hatred of the concept of an Israelite nation existing is nothing new. It's here in this text from 2,700 years ago as well as part of our lives today.
 - i) While the idea of a Christian homeland on earth was never taught by Jesus (as our home is in heaven) the persecution of those who trust in Jesus as God and he died for every sin we've ever committed has existed continually for 2,000 years. Why is it that so many get hostile toward Christians? I believe it is usually because others don't want to be around someone who believers were accountable to that God.

- ii) My point is our enemy always wants us to compromise with our faith. They can't stand the idea of us making a difference for Jesus and using our life for His glory. That's why pressure comes to change our lifestyle because many don't like the idea of us using our lives for God's glory. The point in these verses is that the enemies of the Jewish people were making false promises in order for them to just give up and avoid the cost of a long siege. Our spiritual enemies in one way or another do say to us, "Just come along with our plan for your life and stop spending our much time doing God's will and making a difference for Him".
 - iii) It's the danger of compromise with what the nonbelievers desire for our lives is the message behind the message here. In the meantime, we left the Israelite leaders in the middle of a lecture on compromise of their lifestyle:
16. Verse 18: "Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, 'The LORD will deliver us.' Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? ²⁰ Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"
- a) To paraphrase the Assyrian leaders, what makes you think you're so special? What about the gods of other lands, they didn't stop us from conquering their lands. What about over in the Northern Israelite kingdom, isn't that the Jewish god too? Yet, we were able to beat them into submission and at this point in history, the northern kingdom no longer existed. If you don't know Samaria was the capital of the Northern Israelite kingdom. So why do you think you're so special? To us Assyrians, you're just another "trophy on the wall that we're going to add to our collection", so you might as well accept our terms of surrender.
 - b) If we're ever in doubt about whether or not a person stands with God or against Him, all we have to do is give them a little time to hear them out. Once they started insulting the God of the bible, you know they've bragged beyond their own power.
 - c) The truth is God allowed this empire to come and go just as He allowed every other such empire to rise and fall. Despite all the death and destruction they caused, ultimately it is done for His glory. The way I view the world is if God created it, He has every right to do with it as He pleases, as it's His in the first place. Of course I accept the concept that we're living in a fallen world and evil must be fought.
17. Verse 21: But the people remained silent and said nothing in reply, because the king had commanded, "Do not answer him."
- a) If I was listening to these guys brag about their accomplishments and then start insulting the God of the Universe, personally, even if they had a big army parked around my house I would be silent too, as I fear God too much to know better than to mess with them. That is what the Israelites did here in Verse 21.
 - b) It's hard for most of us to understand the concept of living under a king. The idea is what ever the king commands, we must do. If the king tells the guards to be quiet, they remain quiet out of fear for their own lives let alone respect of the king. I don't know if these men guarding the door were God fearing men, but it's still obvious to them that these Assyrian leaders were insulting the God of the Universe.
 - c) In the meantime, it's time for the Israelite leaders listening to this, respond to this request to surrender.
18. Verse 22: Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went to Hezekiah, with their clothes torn, and told him what the field commander had said.
- a) Remember that this chapter is a dialogue between the "#2 men" on both sides of the issue of whether or not Jerusalem should surrender. Now that the Assyrians have finished their speech as well as insulted God it's time for the Jerusalem "#2 men" to go to King Hezekiah to report the incident. That's why these two chapters are best read together.

- b) Notice how the "#2 men on the Israel side" reacted to this news. They tore up what they were wearing, which was a sign of sorrow. So why wasn't the king here at this meeting? For starters the Assyrian delegation didn't make an appointment, but simply went to the front gate to make this speech. That's how all of this went down. As we start Chapter 37 we get to the King's reaction to their demands.
19. Chapter 37, Verse 1: When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD.
- a) I probably should give a little background on the temple that was in Jerusalem since it is mentioned here. There was never a permanent temple when the Israelites first came into that land. David himself wanted to build it, but God said no. His son King Solomon built the structure. By the time Hezekiah came on the scene a few hundred years later, it still is standing, but it's gone through periods of good and bad kings ruling there. We also need to understand, that it wasn't just a "room". There's a bunch of indoor rooms with a walled patio area next to it. An Israelite king wasn't allowed to go into the most holy area of this temple, but could get near enough to it to worship God there.
- b) The modern equivalent might be like a layman walking into church and having a seat in a front row area, but not go "back stage" or on the stage. King Hezekiah's well aware of the fact that this Assyrian Empire just told him, "Surrender or else", and heavily insulted God during their speech. For a king who feared God it'd be natural for that king to want to go get as close to God as he knew how to deal with this problem.
- c) Of course the king could pray anywhere. The point is he was scared for his future and he wanted to get close to God. That's why if we're really scared about something we may go to our local church as a way of showing we're willing to seek God's help in desperation.
- d) The king also performed the standard Middle East symbol of sorrow as he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth (an uncomfortable garment) as a sign of remorse and sorrow.
- e) This leads me back to the issue of what do we do when things look hopeless? We should bring the issue in God in prayer as if to say, "I don't know what to do here God, you're in charge of my life, and I know you're going to work here somehow as your reputation's on the line here." As I said in the introduction, God will do His best work when we let go of a situation, trust Him with the results and then best the best decision we can trusting that He is working things out His way and on His timing.
20. Verse 2: He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.
- a) It's time to remember a few facts about Isaiah himself. The text tells us he was respected as a prophet of God. We also get the idea he was a priest but not the "head guy". All I'm saying is Isaiah didn't hang out in the temple all day saying, "Here is what God says, now go deal with it". Isaiah had a life and had duties in his role as a priest and his life was also interrupted at times as God gave Isaiah messages to preach. Chapter 1 of this book stated that Isaiah lived during the reigns of several kings. All I'm saying is Isaiah wasn't writing this book "24-7", but wrote in spurts based on what God wanted him to do.
- b) I need you to keep all of that in mind as we read verse 2. Remember that Verse 1 just told us that King Hezekiah was in the temple praying for God's help. Here in Verse 2, the king says to a few of his "#2 men" to go find Isaiah since God called him to be a spokesman for Him to see what God has to say about this whole situation.
- c) The point is Hezekiah desperately wanted to know what God was going to do about all of this. For Hezekiah to seek out Isaiah is like saying, "I don't know what to do next. I know that there is a spokesman for God living here, so I'll ask him. So why did the king first go to "church" and not Isaiah? I suspect the king wanted to start this process by showing that he's willing to humble himself before God before seeking His help. That method is a good model for us on seeking His help: First we bring the problem to Him directly. Then it is a matter of doing what's logical. In Hezekiah's case it's seeking a godly man for help.

21. Verse 3: They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. ⁴ It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives."
- a) It may help to remember that we haven't heard from Isaiah himself yet. (Yes Isaiah wrote all of this, but Isaiah's recounting the back story here of how the king is approaching him.)
 - b) Anyway, this is the point in the story where Isaiah is first told of how the "#2 men" for the Assyrians threatened not only all the Israelites but God Himself.
 - c) It's kind of like saying, "Hey Isaiah old buddy, let us tell you how the Assyrians did insult God "to His face" and that they've got a large army parked all around our city starting the siege process to starve us all out. So since you're a spokesman for God, would you please tell us how God's going to react to all of this? Isaiah can you please pray for all of us and let us know what God wants all of us to do here?"
 - d) For people who aren't that religious, it's a natural reaction to turn to people who are much more religious than them to help in a religious matter. I've yet to meet a pastor, priest or a rabbi who wasn't swamped with people who desire their help during the tough moments of individual's lives. My point is that's the type of reaction we're reading about here.
 - e) Now comes the important part of the story, Isaiah's reaction to all of this:
22. Verse 5: When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, ⁶ Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master, `This is what the LORD says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard--those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. ⁷ Listen! I am going to put a spirit in him so that when he hears a certain report, he will return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword.' " ⁸ When the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah.
- a) A couple of things to keep in mind here: In the Middle East in those days, the king would not just sit on a throne making decisions. A king would lead an army into a battle. As we read of the "#2 men" on both sides, realize that the Assyrian king was also among all these soldiers surrounding Jerusalem. That Assyrian king sent his "#2 men" to propose what are his terms of surrender. That was the chapter long dialogue between the "#2 men" on both sides of the discussion. (Yes I was tempted to call this lesson, "What about the #2 men" as most of this lesson does focus on their dialogue going back and forth.)
 - b) The next thing we should know is that Isaiah is combining the historical facts of different events into a few verses. The point is the king did leave the battle here to go take on other issues closer to his home. However, much of the Assyrian army did camp near Jerusalem as if to begin the siege as soon as the king returns. The actual death of the Assyrian king is not going to take place for another 15 years. (The events of his death are recorded near the end of this chapter. It's also found in other historical records, much of which is found in the London Museum to this day. My point is archeological records confirms this story as it's told here.)
 - c) All of this leads me back to the Assyrian "#2 men". When they found out their king was not in their midst anymore, they withdrew from the siege to go work for their king. Yes that same army was going to come back to try to siege Jerusalem, but "not today". So if this isn't the end of Jerusalem's danger, why give all of these details? I believe it's to say to the Israelites, "God's in charge and knows history before it occurs. He knows today is not the day of Jerusalem's destruction. In fact all of "this" will occur first.
 - d) I could give you more details about where is Lachish and Libnah, but let's just say these are not Jerusalem, and the army left that area to go support their king.
 - e) The idea is, "You know that problem you are worried so much about? I (God) do have all of this under control. I know what the end will be of this story. All I'm asking of you (us) is to make the best biblically sound decisions we can and let Me work it all out My way."

23. Verse 9: Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was marching out to fight against him. When he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word: ¹⁰ "Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, 'Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria.'"
- a) In Verse 1 of the previous chapter, we were told that the Assyrian king was "Sennacherib".
 - b) Here in Chapter 37, Verse 9, we get the first dialogue by Sennacherib himself. One has to remember that messages didn't travel at internet speed in those days. By the time that the king of Israel heard back from this king, was probably a good delay since the previous set of verses dealing with the Assyrian army "moving out of Jerusalem's driveway" in order to go fight somewhere else. I admit I picture the Assyrian king Sennacherib using his best "Terminator" accent saying, "I'll be back baby!" in this speech here. What we actually have is the king saying effectively is, "For the moment I've got bigger fish to fry as I need to face the mighty Egyptian army first. However, once Egypt is defeated (which they were) then we'll be back to capture Jerusalem."
 - c) However, the Assyrian king couldn't resist insulting God while he was at it. He knew that Hezekiah was a "religious man" that trusted in God. Sennacherib wanted to use that fact to scare the Israelites into surrendering. He's saying, "Hey none of the other gods stopped us from defeating other places, so what makes you think your god is anything special?" I can almost see God laughing at such a boast.
 - d) Before I go any further, the Assyrian king is on a role here:
24. Verse 11: Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? ¹² Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my forefathers deliver them--the gods of Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, or of Hena or Ivvah?"
- a) Remember that is a handwritten message, and not a face-to-face conversation. The king is so proud of his empire's past victories, he starts recounting their war history to the leaders of Jerusalem. From Sennacherib's point of view, the Israelite God is just another deity that can't stop the Assyrian Empire from continuing its reign that's now lasted many hundreds of years. It's a tease to the Israelites as if to say, "Who do you think you Israelites are? We haven't lost yet and what makes you think you're so special"? Personally I'd hate to be in this guy's shoes on judgment day.
 - b) In the meantime's it's time to hear King Hezekiah's reaction to this letter:
25. Verse 14: Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: ¹⁶ "O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁷Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God.
- a) The short version is the king read the letter and then lays it out in the temple floor while he talks to God about that. Personally, I smile at this scene. Of course the king could just have the letter read to him and then the king makes a decision. Of course God knows the contents of the letter as it was written, let alone have it spread over the temple floor.
 - b) The point is King Hezekiah in a cute and dramatic fashion is saying, "Hey God, I have no idea what to do here. We're looking at what this emperor wrote and let's be honest he is insulting You as if You're just another deity to be conquered. Dear God, I'm truly in over my head and I don't know what to do here. Since I know you're not just another false god and I know you created the world, make it obvious to me what I should do here."
 - c) If you haven't figured it out by now, that's what God wants us to do as well. No we don't have to write our problems in a letter and bring them to our church. It does mean that we do pray about it and say, "Dear God, I know You care about me, so help me do what's the best thing I can do and make good decisions under the guide of your word."

- d) To state the obvious, most of the decisions we make are not biblical. Most of those tough decisions are just one's we have to make. Assuming we don't violate any biblical concept, God essentially says to us, pray for My guidance and then make the best decision we can. That's probably what Hezekiah thought as he laid out the letter on the floor of the temple.
- e) Anyway, Hezekiah isn't through talking yet, (typical politician) so let's read on:
26. Verse 18: "It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands. ¹⁹ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. ²⁰ Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God. "
- a) Essentially Hezekiah is reminding himself here that other gods are not really deities. He's also reminding himself that God can deliver Jerusalem out of this mess if He chooses. We have no right to demand anything of God, but we can ask, which is why we pray.
- b) I have to admit, I've always been fascinated with prayers in the bible that were answered. I like to look at the patterns to help my own life. One thing I've noticed about them is the emphasis is not on our predicament but on who God is and what He's capable of doing. It is not a matter of having God answer it because we demand it, it's only a matter of asking God to intervene if He desires to. In other words, it's up to Him, not us to act.
- c) Let's put it this way, if God didn't do anything here, all Isaiah can say is that He promised that the Messiah would rule the world one day from here. If it's God's will to destroy this place until then, we'll do our best to survive and accept His will.
- d) However, the good news is that God will intervene, which happens in the next verse.
27. Verse 21: Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, ²² this is the word the LORD has spoken against him: "The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises and mocks you. The Daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee. ²³ Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel!
- a) I would admit, if someone walked up to me and said God has a message for me, my first thought would be, what, has God lost my phone number? However, if I was praying for His help and someone who had no knowledge of that conversation with God suddenly is there with a message from God, I would listen and see if it was a biblically sound message or if it was a "nut job". Given the fact that Isaiah already had a reputation for speaking for God, I'd respect Isaiah's response. OK, now that we've established God is answering this prayer and God's answering through Isaiah, let's move on to what Isaiah actually says.
- b) First, Isaiah acknowledges that God is aware that Hezekiah prayed to him. However with that obvious statement made, the real point here is that God wants Hezekiah to realize He is pretty ticked off at Emperor Sennacherib. One thing we rarely think about is how much God really hates sin. To insult God's people is to insult what is His nature.
- c) I'm a big believer in loving what God loves and hating what He hates. I figure if I'm going to spend eternity with Him, I better learn to love what He loves and hate what He hates. It is as much a part of our relationship with Him as to express love to Him through prayer & worship as it is to hate sin. There is an old expression in Christianity is that a good sign of a mature believer is that such a believer really hates sin as much as he or she loves people. I don't think I've ever intentionally mocked God, but like I said earlier, I'd hate to be in the shoes of this emperor on judgment day. That leads back to this text: We're about to get a rare glimpse into how God really feels about those who insult Him down as well as insult those who trust in Him.
- i) That's why the text says, "The Daughter of Jerusalem (a cute nickname for those of us trusting in the God of the bible) despises and mocks you who insult Me. Those who trust in Me will shake their head in disgust at how you've fallen." We have to admit that even in the English, the intent here comes through loud and clear.

- d) The general tone here is do you have any idea who you're messing with here? Realize the reason for this speech is not so God can get this speech off His chest. It's so the king will realize how God feels about those who mock Him. It's also about the ultimate destiny of any person who refuses to acknowledge that He is "the" God. Let's put it this way even a man like the Assyrian emperor, must have known some Middle East history of how the Jewish nation did escape out of Egypt. Therefore even if the Assyrians didn't believe THE God is not their god, he must have understood how God's not to be messed with.
 - e) Like I said, even if no miracle was performed here, I'd still trust in His promises to me of a life with Him forever, because there is too much archeological and statistical evidence for me to deny that the God of the bible is "The" God and He's not to be messed with.
 - f) My point is whatever God decides to do in my life with whatever situation I'm facing, I'm still trusting in His promises to me for salvation as there is nothing I can do to earn it. All I can do is use my life for His glory, which is what He asks of His believers. Still, since He is on a roll here, we're about ten verses away from reading about a great miracle.
 - g) In the meantime, God's got a few more things to say about this man who hates Him.
28. Verse 24: By your messengers you have heaped insults on the Lord. And you have said, 'With my many chariots I have ascended the heights of the mountains, the utmost heights of Lebanon. I have cut down its tallest cedars, the choicest of its pines. I have reached its remotest heights, the finest of its forests. ²⁵ I have dug wells in foreign lands and drunk the water there. With the soles of my feet I have dried up all the streams of Egypt.'
- a) To paraphrase God speaking through Isaiah, "Who do you think you are? You think you are so great because of all those chariots you lead into battle? You think you're great due to the number of tree's you cut down to serve your purposes? You think you're great due to the fact you dug wells in foreign lands and defeated Egypt? Well I, God, would like to remind you who made all those things in the first place! Who do you think allowed you to even conquer all these places in the first place!"
 - b) Remember that Isaiah's speaking to King Hezekiah not the Assyrian king. The point is for Hezekiah to realize who's really in charge around here. Remember that Hezekiah went to the temple, as he was scared for the future. God's answer is in effect, "Hey, did you forgot who's really in charge over here?" The point of the answer to the prayer is to also to recall that God loves who He loves and hates those who hate Him. Such winners and losers are not always obvious in this lifetime, but trusting in God to guide our lives and trusting that Jesus is God and paid for every sin we've ever committed makes us winners no matter the outcome of whatever situation we face. Therefore, if God chooses to work here or not, the speech by Isaiah is reminding us "Who's really the winners and losers here despite what it is we have to face at any given moment.
 - c) Which leads back to the king's problems and your and my problems. Yes we still have to make the best decisions possible as if God won't do some great miracle. Still we can stop worrying about the results as we know who is and who isn't on God's "good list" based on how people act in life. That's the real point of this speech.
 - d) Meanwhile God's still on a role, and I interrupted.
29. Verse 26: "Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone. ²⁷ Their people, drained of power, are dismayed and put to shame. They are like plants in the field, like tender green shoots, like grass sprouting on the roof, scorched before it grows up. ²⁸ "But I know where you stay and when you come and go and how you rage against me.
- a) Keep in mind that the Assyrian Empire liked to clear out existing cities and bring them to nothing. That's what Verse 26 effectively states. Imagine if a large army has surrounded your city and you know that if they win, they separate the survivors from one another for the rest of their lives and bring your city to an end. The Assyrians did that to places. God is saying, "Since I am God, I am well aware of all that you've done."

- b) So if God is God, why would He allow all of that to happen? Even if we can't explain all of this murder, why would He allow it? If this life was all that there is, I admit, it's a very unfair place to live. However, if we live forever and we're judged based on what we have done with the time God's given us, then I trust Him to fairly judge based on what we do.
 - c) Time for another "so what"? If God allows all of that, why is He now just getting angry at the idea of this emperor insulting Him? First, it's not as if God gets in moods. It's the idea that He knows it's a waste of life to harm those He's called to be His witness. The point is we're seeing God act now, as He allows free will and sin to exist. Still God goes out of His way to make it as obvious as possible that He exists and He cares about those who desire to use their (our) lives for His glory. The point is God in His own way does interfere with our lives as to show the world He exists and He created us to use our time for His glory.
 - d) Therefore, as we face our own tragedies, we must remember He's still there, He still wants to guide us and He hates evil and desires us to hate evil, as much He desires we love Him.
 - e) Believe it or not, that concept describes the last few verses well.
30. Verse 29: Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.
- a) Historians report that when the Assyrians would take people captive, to embarrass them the captives would have to walk to their new locations with a fishhook in their nose and a bit (like the kind given to a horse to guide them) in their mouths. The Assyrians wanted to make the strong point that they're not to be messed with. The point here is God's going to punish them the same way they punished others. I don't know if that's part of a judgment day scenario or if that is how they suffered when their empire finally fell. What I do know is when that empire came to an end within a century, as the fairly nearby city of Babylon formed a new empire, they destroyed the Assyrian capital and literally destroyed that city to the ground the same way they destroyed other places. They did pay for their crimes as God said they would.
 - b) Meanwhile back to the Israelites:
31. Verse 30: "This will be the sign for you, O Hezekiah: "This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ³¹ Once more a remnant of the house of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. ³² For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.
- a) One of the things I've preached all through Isaiah is that most of the predictions given do have more than one fulfillment. Realize that's not always the case. Isaiah's predicting the retreat of the Assyrians here and obviously that only happened once. What will repeat in the "end times" is how armies will surround Jerusalem and once again, God will bring all of them to an end to save those He's called to be a witness for them.
 - b) Which leads back to this time era. Isaiah's predicting that despite the fact a large Assyrian army is still out there, and ruining the farm land around the city, the Israelites living there will be able to eat the crop that grows by itself for a few years and then new crops will be planted again. The idea is that Jerusalem will survive this siege not because they deserve it, not because they're better people than all the other places that the Assyrians conquered, but just to prove to that world that God rules over everything and He cares for those of us who've been called to be a witness for Him. Bottom line, this isn't Jerusalem's end in spite of that army surrounding that city.
 - c) Yes of course that city was destroyed a century later by the Babylonians and the Romans also destroyed it many centuries after that. The point is Jewish people exist to this day in spite of all of that, as whether they like it or not, they are still His chosen people. That's so we realize we're accountable to the God who separated them in the first place. Therefore God always leaves a believing remnant in spite of all the suffering they've had.

32. Verse 33: "Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: "He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. ³⁴ By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city," declares the LORD. ³⁵ "I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!"
- Imagine living in a city with high walls around it. You are well aware that outside of this city a large army is parked all around it, trying to starve you out. Now God states that no arrow will be shot over the wall into the city. No ramps will be built for an army to break down the wall or travel above it.
 - God's saying He's going to save that city, again not because the Israelites are better people than anyone else. God is going to do it because He promised that only the descendants of King David would rule there. Therefore His reputation is at stake here. Remember when Jerusalem was conquered later in history, no other kings ruled there. Even today, there is a president and congress as there will be no king over Jerusalem until "the" king comes to rule the world one day, who'll also be a descendant of David.
 - Gee, that may all be fine and dandy, but what about that army parked outside? Verse 36:
33. Verse 36: Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning--there were all the dead bodies!
- If you learn nothing else from this verse, you learn that angels aren't to be messed with.
 - When Jesus was on the cross, He stated that if it was God's will, He could call a legion of angels to help Him. My point is if one angel can kill 185,000, imagine the damage a legion of angels can do! (See Matthew 26:53 for this reference.)
 - Also realize that the size of this army was probably a little larger. This is just the number of people killed in one night. The historical records blame disease in the plants in the area but we know it was God who allowed it. So how do we know the exact number? I believe it's because the Israelites had to bury all of those bodies, so they were counted.
34. Verse 37: So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. ³⁸ One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.
- What is implied here is when the Assyrians were surrounding Jerusalem, their king was there when all of this happened. The point is this king saw how powerful the God of the Israelites was and still refused to acknowledge His power. It shows us that when people refuse to turn to God, even overwhelming evidence won't change it.
 - The epilogue to the story for the Assyrians is that the king went back to his home city, and two of his sons killed him. We don't know the reason why they killed him, but notice that the next king was a different son, which implies the murderers were punished for this.
35. Sorry I ran long on this. These two chapters go well together, and together they tell a great story of how God works for those willing to trust Him through the worse of situations. As I've stated throughout this lesson, it doesn't mean He'll always do a big miracle when we suffer in this life. It just means that God isn't to be messed with and He goes out of His way to prove to the world of who He is and that we're called to serve Him. It also means we use the time He's given us to make a difference for Him in spite of whatever else we have to deal with in this life.
36. On that positive note, I'll close in prayer: Heavenly Father, we can't explain why You allow us to go through all we have to deal with in this life. We accept that You exist and we're accountable to You with our lives. Thank You that we don't have to prove our worth to you. Instead You've called us to make a difference so that together we can glorify You in this world. Help us to rely upon Your power so we can make that difference for You. Guide us through whatever we have to deal with and may it all be used for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.