

Hezekiah's Faith
Isaiah 36-37

Turn to Isaiah 38 please. Our story is Isaiah 36-37, but we'll begin in Isaiah 38.

This is a story about faith, king Hezekiah's faith in God. Hezekiah shows us here what faith in God looks like. He's an example of faith in a frightening situation, and how a faithful person acts when they are afraid.

Isaiah 36-37 and 38-39. There are two Hezekiah stories in Isaiah, God rescuing Hezekiah from the Assyrians, in Isa 36-37, and God healing Hezekiah's illness, in Isa 38-39.

What you need to know about these two stories is that although they happened about the same time, the second story actually happened first. God healed Hezekiah, chs 38-39, a year or two before God rescued Jerusalem from the Assyrians.

This brings up two more questions: How do we know this, how do we know that God healed Isaiah before he saved Jerusalem from the Assyrians? And second, why did Isaiah tell these in reverse order to what they actually happened?

First, how do we know that Hezekiah was healed *before* the Assyrians attacked Judah? Let's read Isa 38:1-6 to answer that.

In those days [that means "around the same time"] Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." 2 Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, 3 "Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully, and with wholehearted devotion, and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: 5 "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer, and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.

Hezekiah wanted one thing, God promised two: Hezekiah will get 15 more years of life, and God will protect Hezekiah and Jerusalem from the Assyrians.

Take a close look at 38:6 - *I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.* Think about this. Why would God say that if he has just finished rescuing Hezekiah and Jerusalem from the king of Assyria? It doesn't make sense. Unless?

Unless what? Unless this happened BEFORE the Assyrians to Judah. When we read 38:6, it sounds like God healed Hezekiah and made this promise *before* the Assyrians attacked. The healing story happened *before* the Sennacherib story.

But if Hezekiah's healing happened *before* Assyrians came to Judah, then why would Isaiah tell them backwards? And the answer is: because of how the two stories end.

The first story, Isaiah 36-37 ends by God rescuing Jerusalem from the Assyrians. The second story ends with God predicting that the Babylonians would conquer Jerusalem. And that is the order in which these things happened. God rescued Jlm from the Assyrians about the year 700 BC, and the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem about one hundred years later.

Let's take a break here, if you want to ask questions about this. Questions so far?

Sennacherib Threatens Jerusalem - Isaiah 36

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. 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 Launderer's Field, 3 Eliakim son of Hilkiyah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to him. 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 counsel and might for war—but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me? 6 Look, I know you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him. 7 But 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"?"

[V4 - On what is Hezekiah basing his confidence? Answer in ch 38: *This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer, Hezekiah, and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.*] God made Hezekiah a promise, and Hez counted on that.

36:8 *"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."* ["The Lord told me to do this." People have been saying that wrongly for a long time.]

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.” 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 people sitting on the wall—who, like you, will have to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine?”

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.’”

Humanly, the situation is impossible. Jerusalem will certainly be conquered by the Assyrians. There is no doubt about this. But Hezekiah keeps saying, we are going to trust in the Lord.

16 “Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then each of you will eat fruit from your own vine and fig tree and drink water from your 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.

18 “Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, ‘The Lord will deliver us.’ Have the gods of any nations ever delivered their lands 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 have been able to save their lands from me? How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand?” 21 But the people remained silent and said nothing in reply, because the king had commanded, “Do not answer him.”

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. 37:1 When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord.

This is so wonderful. What does faith in God look like? 37:1 *When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord.*

When Hezekiah talked to the people, he spoke with confidence in the Lord. He told the Jews, we will trust in the Lord, the Lord said he will deliver us and he certainly will deliver us. Hezekiah was famous for this policy, even Assyrian field commander knew all about it, and mocked it.

But he and his inner circle of advisors were terrified of the Assyrians. His council tore their clothes, showing great distress, and told Hezekiah what the field commander said. Hezekiah tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went into the temple of the Lord. He went to pray, to tell God.

37:2 *Hezekiah sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. 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 moment of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. 4 It may be, Isaiah, 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, Isaiah, pray for the remnant that still survives.”

Hezekiah went to the temple of the Lord to pray. And he sent his advisors to the prophet Isaiah to ask for prayer: *pray for the remnant that still survives.*

Hezekiah was a man of faith. He's scared silly. Faith means he takes his fear to the Lord, and he keeps living in the Lord's ways. He takes his fear to the Lord, and he keeps living in God's ways.

In Isaiah 7, Hezekiah's father Ahaz was also afraid of foreign kings. Ahaz and his people were shaken with fear, it says there, like trees are shaken by the wind. Ahaz was not a man of faith, and was not interested in God's help. Hezekiah was certainly a man of faith, and completely depended on God's help.

Where Hezekiah and his people any less afraid than Ahaz and his people? No. All terrified. Did Hezekiah feel confident in God, because he trusted in God? Sure doesn't seem like it. Hezekiah spoke to the people as if he was confident, but privately, in 37:1-4, he and his advisors are desperately afraid. How does he show his faith?

He keeps taking the problem to God, and he keeps honouring God in all he does.

37:5 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! When he hears a certain report, I will make him want to return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword.”

If we go back about 25 years, Isaiah had a very similar conversation with Ahaz, Hezekiah's father. Ahaz was afraid.

When Isaiah said to Ahaz, “be careful to stay still, do not lose heart, if you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all,” Isaiah was NOT telling Ahaz to feel better, to feel more confidence in God. Isaiah was saying, “Ahaz, you make sure you live like someone who trusts and honours God, you honours God in your actions. You are ready to do something that shows you don't trust God. You are ready to make a foolish treaty with the Assyrians. Don't do that. God will save you from the kings you fear. Trust God. There's a lot at stake, Ahaz.” Is 7:4-9

Ahaz did not put his trust in God. Now, twenty-five years later, Isaiah has the same talk with the Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz. *37:5 This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard. I will take care of Sennacherib, Hezekiah.*

37:9 Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the king of Cush, 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 given into the hands of the king of Assyria.’ 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 predecessors deliver them—the gods of Gozan, Harran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar? 13 Where is the king of Hamath or the king of Arpad? Where are the kings of Lair, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah?” 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.

I love v14. This is so perfect. Hezekiah gets this letter, and reads it, and it's a horrible letter. So he goes up to the temple, and opens it there, shows God the letter, and prays to God.

15 And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: 16 “Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. 17 Give ear, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.

God answered this prayer, and God gives three reasons for saving Jerusalem:

One. 37:21 - *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...*

Two and three - 37:35 “*I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!*”

God says, I will save this city for three reasons: 1st, because you prayed, Hezekiah; 2nd, for my own sake, to protect my honour and my good name; and 3rd, because I promised David that I would do things like this for his descendants.

Here is how the story ends: God defends Jerusalem from the Assyrians and Sennacherib.

37:36 *Then the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! 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 Nisrok, his sons Adrammelek and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.*

So, let's talk about fear and faith, using this story as an example. But first we will talk about God. God's glory fills the whole earth. God is not caught off guard by any of these frightening things. *In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ... my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.* Is6.

God knew about the kings that frightened Ahaz and Jerusalem, in Is 7. It was all under control.

In Isa 37 (vv21-29) God speaks to Sennacherib, the king of the Assyrians. The Assyrians were the superpower of the day, great armies, cruel and vicious and brutal, even more so than most. What does God say to Sennacherib about Assyrian power? *“Have you not heard, Sennacherib? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it, and now I have brought it to pass, that you turn everyone’s fortified cities into piles of stone.”*

People, all this stuff is in God’s hands. In Isaiah 8, God warned Isaiah directly: *Do not fear what this people fears, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.* Isaiah’s response: *I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face. I will put my trust in him.* Is 8:12-13,17

Was Isaiah afraid when he said he would trust God, afraid of what would happen in Judah? Certainly. He can’t stop that. But he can wait for the Lord, he can put his trust in God.

Being afraid and living fearfully are two different things in the Bible. Living fearfully means the thing we fear has more control over our lives than God does. Living by faith means that we give God control of our lives rather than the things we fear.

Trust God is not how we feel. The question is, whose power guides our life? God, or the fearful thing? When God says, “don’t be afraid, trust me,” he saying, “do not let that fear steer your life, you put your trust in me and live in my ways.” We can trust God and live in his ways *while we are terrified of the Assyrians.* Hezekiah did exactly that, and God loved him for it.

For Hezekiah, this included regularly going to God to pray, desperate and despairing prayers. That’s part of putting our trust in him. Scared as he was, there’s no doubt from this story on whom Hezekiah depended. Kings says Hezekiah trusted in the Lord. *He held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him.* THAT is great faith, often done by fearful people.

[Here’s a minor note on parents and children: The father of Hezekiah was Ahaz. The father of Ahaz was Jotham. *Jotham did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.* 1Kgs15. The son of righteous Jotham? *“Ahaz did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord.”* 1Kg16

The son of unrighteous Ahaz? *Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him(= faith); he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses.* 1Kg18

The son of exemplary Hezekiah? *Manasseh did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites....Manasseh led the people astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites.* 1Kg21 Jotham did what was right, his son Ahaz did wrong, his son Hezekiah was the best ever, his son Manasseh was the worst ever. Parents have much influence on their children, but that’s not the whole story.]

Amen.