

The Assyrian Crisis

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[0:00] Many years earlier, where there was another crisis and another king, King Ahaz. And Isaiah, in chapter 7, verse 3, goes to meet Ahaz.

! The Lord said to Isaiah, go out, you and your son, Shia, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool on the road to the washerman's field, the same place. And where Ahaz remarkably failed to exercise any faith, and more the consequences of that, Hezekiah, in this later incident, very commendably, does exercise faith, as we shall see. But you've got a contrast, really, between the failure those years ago and somebody who genuinely does believe in the incident in front of us.

The story of the threat has got sort of two stages to it. And in chapter 37, verse 8, after having approached once and come up to the wall and spoken to the officials, and the officials say, we do have an official diplomatic language. It's called Aramaic. Perhaps you could kindly speak in Aramaic, because all the other people don't understand Aramaic. And the field commander says, well, actually, when there's a siege, they're the people who aren't going to have anything to eat. They're the people who are going to endure disgusting conditions.

So if you don't mind, I'm going to speak to them in a language they can understand. And, of course, he sends his chilling message so that everybody can hear it and be frightened by it. In verse 8, the field commander hears some news about his king with the army down the road, as it were, and he goes off to find what's happening there. And Sennacherib, verse 9, has received a report that Tir-ha-kar, the Kushite king of Egypt, is coming out to fight against him. You'll realize that in those days, they didn't have mobile phones, GPS, radar, any of those things. It would be somebody on a horse, presumably, come and said, I think I saw an army over there. I thought I'd better come and tell you. So the plans change. And as the plans change, Sennacherib sends this message to Hezekiah, don't think you've, don't think it's all over. Don't take any encouragement from this temporary release of pressure because I'm coming back and I'll get you.

So that's what's happening. So it's twice that Hezekiah responds. And the second time, we get the more detailed report back from Isaiah of what the Lord says.

[3:25] So here are some questions for us to think about, if we may and if we can. Question one, what is the argument and reasons put forward by the field commander?

What is, I mean, he's using what would be called persuasive speech. He's trying to persuade them to give up. What arguments does he use? He says things that are aimed to be persuasive. What persuasion does he use? And what makes it intimidating? And can you see any things in what he says that actually don't work because he's got it wrong? Can you see anything like that? So that's question one.

Question two is about Hezekiah. So that was about the field commander. Question two is about Hezekiah. How does he respond to this threat? He responds twice in the first part of chapter 37. And then in the prayer in verses 14 to 20. And particularly the prayer, which is a wonderful prayer. What are the things in it that make it powerful? In what way are those powerful things that he says? Then let's think about what God says in reply. So that's verses 22 to 35.

So there's a powerful word that comes back from God through the prophet Isaiah. So my question for us to think about is what does God promise he will do? And what are his motivations for doing so? And I think we could probably ask also, yeah, there's more things that he says in that reply. If we can draw out what are the points of that. And then finally, verses 36 to 38 is the end of the story. We've had two chapters building up to it. But we only get two verses about how it all, no, three verses about how it all ends up.

[5:56] Why do you think the verses are so brief? Is there anything that we can learn from that? Okay, those are the questions. The first question is about the field commander and his speech. The second one is about Hezekiah's response. The third one is about God's reply. And the fourth question, why are those final verses so short? Right, that's my thought on what to do. Does that make sense?

Yes. Yes, thank you very much. Beforehand, we've done it, different groups start in different places, but I think probably everybody, we need to work through those in order, don't we? Otherwise, it doesn't make sense. I think that's probably right.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. And again, we ask that you would show us wonderful things out of your word. Please grant that we shouldn't go away without having felt the force of your word and having some sense of the way that this impacts us in our own lives day by day.

Amen. Okay, would you like to find a few people to discuss those with? Thank you very much. Need to move chairs. He was pretty intimidating, wasn't he? And what did you think were the intimidating?

What made it so intimidating, did you think? Anybody? Yeah. Yes. And it's a sort of half-truth, isn't it? Because God is sovereign and God did send Assyria as the rod of his anger, but he had mistaken God's intention for Jerusalem at that time.

[8:12] The evil one does his propaganda on all of us, doesn't he? And he does things like this. He'll just tell us, well, you know, you're sunk. You're not going to get out of this. Nobody else gets out of it. You're not going to get out of it. Do you think being a Christian makes any difference? Absolutely not. And all sorts of things like that. So it's worth noting that that's the way the adversary, our adversary, that's the sort of tactics he uses. What did you think about Hezekiah's prayer? Did you like that prayer? I thought it was very, very impressive, isn't it? Anybody just give us one thing that struck them or their group about that prayer? Yes, the bit where it says, give ear, O Lord, open your eyes and see. So in our group, we were saying that's a very bold thing to say.

Yes, it's the idols who have painted eyes but can't see anything and painted ears but can't hear anything. The living God sees and hears and knows and his hands can do stuff.

Yeah, that's right. Yes, yes. Because the assumption by the field commander is all gods are, they have their own little bit of territory and their own little agenda and they're fairly weak and fallible and the king of Assyria can just smash them down whenever he wants and it's the same with the God of Israel. And Hezekiah's prayer is really saying, we know, Lord, you're not like any of those other gods. You are the maker of heaven and earth. You are the almighty. You're enthroned, what does it say, enthroned between the cherubim. You are the God and will you hear and see and assert and show that you are this God? Of course, we still pray that prayer today, don't we? We say, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. That's a really right prayer to pray. May God's name be hallowed. May people realize that you are great and greatly to be praised. And did any particular thing strike anybody from God's reply as through the prophet Isaiah?

He knew what was going to happen. That's right. It's the bit in verse 26, have you not heard long ago I ordained it in days of old I planned it. So that's breathtaking, isn't it? That God is not taken by surprise. All of this is part of his plan. Very sobering for us to realize that nothing happens outside God's plan. I mean, when the central heating doesn't work or when the car gets a puncture or the washing machine spills its load all over the floor, we think, oh, we're totally taken by surprise. But God embraces all things big and small in his plan. And yeah, that's quite something.

I have a little theory why the last verses are so brief. I don't know whether anybody else had any thoughts on that. Yeah, go on then. Aaron?

[12:03] Aaron? Aaron? Yeah. Say that again.

Yeah.

Yeah. Like a battlefield, isn't it? Yeah.

yeah yeah I didn't get that last God delivers his his own plan yeah I think this I would go along with that yes yes yes that's right yes yes it is it is my theory is that we've had all this prayer and prophecies is going to happen and it happens what else do you think would happen what else would God do I do remember a long time ago when our church had an ongoing crisis about we had

all sorts of crises about whether we would continue in this building there was a hole in the roof and we weren't sure whether we would be able to stay here and I I think I remember Steve praying about this and saying Lord please hear our prayers please answer us so that when we look back people will say I wonder what all the fuss was about and of course we do look back and most people here have no idea that there was a big hole in the roof and we might look back and say what was all the fuss about but it we ought to remember that God does answer prayer in remarkable ways so that took us about seven minutes just to review that that's great if you'd like to if you're prepared to to stay in your groups till shall we say five past eight and pray together and then we're finished so we won't sing anymore that's that's done thank you very much so please pray on for the next ten minutes or so thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you