

- God responds once again to Hezekiah’s faithful turning toward him, changing even what the prophet Isaiah foretold.

*What do you think of God turning back the sundial by ten steps to prove to Hezekiah that he was healed? What would you like God to do to show you that something you’ve prayed for has been answered?*

### Chapter 39: Celebrating Hezekiah’s Healing

- Kings of neighboring countries sent envoys with gifts to Hezekiah, hearing that he had been sick and then recovered. He welcomed them gladly.
- READ: 39: 2: Hezekiah shows off his riches
- But Isaiah has a different view—commentary says when Hezekiah welcomes the envoy he is making alliances against Assyria, beginning to depend once again not on God but on strategic partners for his kingdom’s safety.
- Isaiah tells Hezekiah that over time many of his riches—and even some of his sons—will be carried away to Babylon.
- The chapter ends with Hezekiah accepting this word and submitting to God’s will for the future, whatever it may hold.

~ \* ~ \* ~ \* DISCUSSION QUESTIONS \* ~ \* ~ \* ~

1. *The Rabshakeh to me represents the voice of doubt: Don’t rely on God to solve that problem, it says. Do you hear that voice in your own circumstances, undercutting your trust in God? What do you do when you hear it?*
2. *This story also involves bullying and deceit. How do these chapters suggest we should respond to those threats (individually or as a nation)?*

Welcome, Friends! to

## “The Book of Isaiah”

*A ten-week class exploring the Book of Isaiah and its relevance to our faith and practice today.*



Michelangelo’s “Isaiah” from the Sistine Chapel, Vatican City

WEEK 7: Ch 36-39

## Background for this Section

- Isaiah Chapters 36-39 are said to be a “historical interlude” between the two major parts of Isaiah (“The Assyrian Period” and “the Babylonian Period.”)
- These four chapters are the only four in the book of Isaiah that are written as prose; the rest are poetry.
- Richard Foster’s commentary says, “This material probably looks back to the experiences and utterances of Isaiah, near the end of his prophetic career, during a crisis in Jerusalem in 701 BC under King Hezekiah.”
- The question, “On whom do we depend?” is central to these chapters (and perhaps, one could argue, to all of Isaiah).

## Chapter 36: Assyria’s Threats to Jerusalem

- Rabshakeh was sent by the King of Assyria with a great army to deliver a mocking, challenging message to King Hezekiah.
- READ: 36:4-5
- READ 36: 8-10. He taunts the men of Judah and tries to fool them into thinking God is on his side.
- In 36:11, Hezekiah’s men asked the Rabshakeh to speak to them in Aramaic, which they understand, but he insists on speaking in Hebrew.
- Why not speak in Hebrew? Here’s what Ellicott’s commentary says: “The king’s officers, knowing the “little faith” of their people, are not, perhaps, without misgivings of their own. Might not the townsmen, listening eagerly on the wall, recognise in Rabshakeh’s words an echo of Isaiah’s, and lose courage, as feeling that they were fighting against the God who was chastising them? The Syrian or Aramaic was a common ground for the ambassadors on both sides, as being the language of commerce and diplomacy. Rabshakeh, it would seem, could speak three languages, Assyrian, Syrian, and

Hebrew; Hezekiah’s ministers the two latter; the “people on the wall” only the last.”

- READ: 36: 13-20. The Rabshakeh turns Isaiah’s own words against them, co-opting God’s promise of restoration.
- Hezekiah’s men seek to be faithful, keeping silent and not responding, as the king had asked. They tore (“rent”) their clothes as a show of mourning and shock.

*The ripping of garments was meant to show horror at Rabshakeh’s blasphemies, and the act also signifies deep mourning. Have there been items in the news lately that make you want to “rent your garments”? What do you do instead?*

## Chapter 37: Isaiah’s Counsel

- READ 37:5-7.
- Isaiah invites the king to have trust and confidence in God, even in the face of this immense threat.
- Next Hezekiah receives another taunting message from the king, and he has a different response. Instead of sending human ambassadors out to speak with the messenger of the enemy, he turned to God.
- READ 37: 15-20.
- In response to Hezekiah’s prayer, God promises to protect them from Assyria.
- READ 37: 30-35

## Chapter 38: Hezekiah’s Illness

- At the beginning of Ch 38, we hear that Hezekiah became sick to the point of death. Isaiah came to him and told him to “set his house in order” for he was going to die.
- But Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed: READ 38:3-8