



Isaiah

God gave Isaiah the difficult task of preaching profound biblical truth to a people who would completely ignore it. But this does not mean that Isaiah's words were wasted because they are a blessing to us today. In this series, we will learn from Isaiah's message about our God, who is a righteous king and an irreplaceable sovereign judge. Yet the very same God is a suffering servant who comforts us in our times of need and provides Hope to the nations.

WEEK TWO

Our God cannot be replaced

Message Passage: Isaiah 31:1-3 & Isaiah 36:1-17

Small Group Passage: Isaiah 37:1-4 & 14-20

TEACHING AND VIDEO NOTES

The book of Isaiah, like so many of the prophetic books, is full of rebukes. God sends a prophet to rebuke his people, Israel, for a specific sin pattern. For example, Isaiah rebuked Israel for worshiping wooden idols (Is 44:9). When we read that, it is hard for us to relate or apply that to our lives because, well, there are no carved wooden gods in our homes. **But be careful because the sin of idolatry, replacing God with something or someone, takes many forms.** While the appearance of idolatry may differ, the consequences are the same; replacing God with something or someone else will leave us vulnerable, broken, and condemned.

Isaiah 31:1-3 *Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help,
who rely on horses,
who trust in the multitude of their chariots
and in the great strength of their horsemen,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel,
or seek help from the LORD.*

2 *Yet he too is wise and can bring disaster;
he does not take back his words.*

*He will rise up against that wicked nation,
against those who help evildoers.*

3 *But the Egyptians are mere mortals and not God;
their horses are flesh and not spirit.
When the LORD stretches out his hand,
those who help will stumble,
those who are helped will fall;
all will perish together.*

Around the late 8th century B.C. Judah, the southern tribes, faced the growing threat of the Assyrian Empire to the North, a powerful military force that was conquering the region. What was their solution? Trust in God? No. Obviously, they would make a shaky alliance with Egypt. Do you see the irony? In the Exodus account, we see Israel, then a slave people, being delivered from Egypt. God had proven for all the world to see that he was far greater than Egypt through the ten plagues (Ex 7-10). So much so that when God's people left Egypt, they were throwing gold and riches at the feet of the Jews so they would leave faster (Ex 12:35-36).

So why on earth would Israel rely on Egypt in this time of need? Why would they refuse to trust in God? For the exact same reason(s) that we do today.

1. **They trusted what they could see and touch!** They trusted in Egyptian horsemen (vs 1) because they could see them and touch them. Likewise, we want to trust in something that we can see.
2. **Foreign alliances were what they knew!** During King Ahab's reign (874–853 B.C.) Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon. This marriage functioned as a foreign alliance. This brought economic opportunities but also Baal worship, which led to massive spiritual corruption (see 1 Kings 16:30–33).
3. **Trusting in God meant they would have to deal with their own rebellion!** God is described as the "Holy One of Israel." That is exactly what God is: Holy. He calls us to be holy. Because of this, we will try to replace God just so we don't have to come face-to-face with our own sin.

I do not doubt that our problems are different from theirs, but our solutions—trusting in so many other things rather than God — are exactly the same.

"What do you trust in above all else?" "What do you say because this is true, I am going to be okay?" That is your idol. That is your God.

In the 14th year of King Hezekiah (701 BC), King Sennacherib of Assyria attacked Judah's fortified cities and captured them. The Assyrian field commander (the Rabshakeh) came from Lachish to Jerusalem to confront Hezekiah. Three of Hezekiah's officials went out to meet the Assyrian envoy.

Isaiah 36:4-6a *The field commander said to them (the govt officials), “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...*

This field commander knew exactly what Hezekiah had done. The world knew who and what Israel had placed their trust in for this crisis. The reality is that even when we think it is a secret that we are relying on ourselves, money, or whatever it may be to see us through, it is not a secret. We know it, God knows it, and more often than we realize, the world knows it.

Isaiah 36:6b *...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.*

They are all splintered reeds! Whatever we replace God with to trust in times of crisis is always a splintered reed! Some may take longer to fail than others, but they all fail in the end.

Isaiah 36:7 *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”?*

Trust in God is ultimately a matter of worship. You see, worshiping God is us responding to and remembering his greatness, his holiness, and glory. When we stop worshiping God, we will inevitably stop trusting in Him as well. Why? Because all we are left with is seeing our own failures and circumstances.

Isaiah 36:14-15 *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.’*

If you are going to trust God in times of trouble and trust in him alone, you are going to have to learn to silence the voices telling you not to.

Isaiah 36:16-17 *“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.*

Once again, the irony hurts! What was his offer? 'Don't trust in Egypt or Yahweh. Instead, trust in me.' The commander of the army that had left a path of death and destruction from Nineveh to Jerusalem. Don't take the bait. Don't believe the lie.

Segway to Small Group: What we are about to see next is a beautiful example of what we are to do when we realize we have placed our faith and trust in all the wrong things. King Hezekiah realized before it was too late what he had to do. Tonight in small group, we are going to learn from him.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When we are in crisis, what do we far too often turn to and trust in rather than trusting in God alone?

READ: Isaiah 37:1-7

2. When King Hezekiah was confronted with the reality that he had refused to trust in God, he repented of his sin and then ran directly into the temple. This is a great example for us. When confronted with our wrongs, we repent and run to God. This is what we should do. The question is: what do we do more commonly? Or to put it another way, when confronted with our sin, what are we tempted to do instead of confessing and running to God?

Leader Note: Adam and Eve are examples of what everybody naturally does when confronted with sin. First, we hide from our mistakes and from God (Gen 3:7-9). Second, we blame someone or something for our sinful mistakes (Gen 3:11-13). Do either of these responses help? No! Only a response like that of King Hezekiah's leads us back to what we need, the arms of a merciful God who is waiting for us.

3. King Hezekiah was a man of authority as the king of Judea; it would have been easy for him to hold onto his pride and refuse to admit his wrong, as is the norm for many in roles of authority. The opposite is true for Sennacherib and his envoy, and it cost them dearly. What should this teach us about the danger of pride?

Leader Note: Sennacherib's envoy had expressed himself in very similar terms: 'This is what the king says ...' (36:13). But now a greater king has spoken. It is not just Hezekiah or the people of Judah that Sennacherib has demeaned, but the living God (4, 6), and in so doing he over-reached himself. Isaiah saw very clearly that pride is the worst of all sins (2:11, 17). It is the purest form of defiance possible; it is ousting God from the throne of our lives and putting ourselves in his place (14:12-15). It is the sin of

Adam and Eve, and before them of Satan himself.¹³ It is the primal sin from which all others grow. And it was especially, in this case, the sin of the king of Assyria, the 'great king' (36:13; 37:23). Isaiah had spoken in 10:12 of 'the wilful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes' and declared God's intention to punish.¹

READ: Isaiah 37:14-20

4. What sticks out to you about Hezekiah's prayer?
5. Vs 16 - Hezekiah declared in his prayer that, "you (Yahweh) alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth." They were no longer empty words as Hezekiah was finally leading and living as if these words were true. What does it look like for us today to live as if God alone is the Lord of our lives, and he is irreplaceable?
6. Vs 19 - Hezekiah pointed out that the idols of other nations had not saved them. They were nothing more than wood. What idols do we commonly use today to rely on in times of need rather than God alone? How do those idols fail us in times of need?

PRAYER TIME

DISMISS

¹ Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 150.