

# ISAIAH

## Chapter 37

### *Hezekiah Seeks Isaiah's Help*

As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD. 2 And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz. 3 They said to him, “Thus says Hezekiah, ‘This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. 4 It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.’” 5 When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, 6 Isaiah said to them, “Say to your master, ‘Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the young men of the king of Assyria have reviled me. 7 Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.’” 8 The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. 9 Now the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, “He has set out to fight against you.” And when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, 10 “Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: ‘Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11 Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered? 12 Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? 13 Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?’”

37:1–2 Like Elisha (2Ki 6:12), the prophet Isaiah was the “secret weapon” and most powerful ally of the king of Judah. (TLSB)

37:1 *clothes ... sackcloth.* The depth of his grief and distress being shown by the fact that he wrapped himself in the vestments of mourning. (Kretzmann)

*house of the Lord.* Designated as a place of prayer by Solomon (see 1Ki 8:33). The Assyrian references to Hezekiah’s dependence on the Lord (36:7, 15, 18) were true. (CSB)

The temple court, where God would hear prayers of distress (1Ki 8:27–30). (TLSB)

Seeking help in the place in which God had promised to hear the prayers of His faithful people, 1 Kings 8, 29. (Kretzmann)

37:2 *senior priests.* A committee of priests selected on account of their age and experience. (Kretzmann)

High priest and leaders of priestly families. (TLSB)

*Isaiah son of Amoz.* Isaiah and some other prophets were Jerusalem “insiders” and seem to have acted as counselors (formally or informally) to the royal house. Isaiah may have been a priest. (TLSB)

**37:3** *day of distress.* This is where he confesses plainly that he has altogether given up and is wavering in his faith, as if he were saying: “Already the day of distress and rebuke and of blasphemy is here.” He does not say “a day of deliverance and counsel.” The oxen are standing before the mountain. These are clearly the words of a despairing king. (Luther)

*point of birth.* An even more vivid description than that of the pains of childbirth. (CSB)

That is, mother and child are doomed. The king is in utter despair. But note where the despairing king turns. He joins the prophet and asks him to pray for him. This is the power of despair that it does not permit a man to pray. For a despairing man cannot pray. Therefore he pleads for the intercession of others: “Pray for me.” Such is Satan’s attack by outside forces. Inside, in the city Satan was a sifter, who drove the people to despair, as Peter experienced at the hand of Satan, the sifter (Luke 22:31). In short: No one, not even the holiest one, can be saved from that cunning of Satan’s except by God’s grace alone. And God alone sees him, as He showed Peter. No one can escape his siftings. May God protect us from him! (Luther)

Judah is like a baby who must be delivered, but there is no strength to do so. Hezekiah realizes that the city’s salvation will not be by his might or power, but by the Lord. (TLSB)

**37:4** *mock.* The Hebrew is translated “insult” in vv. 17, 23–24. (CSB)

*remnant.* Jerusalem was left almost alone. (CSB)

Hezekiah asked Isaiah, God’s prophet, to pray for the remnant that still survived. The idea of a remnant is prominent in the message of Isaiah. Already in the first chapter Isaiah wrote, “Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege. Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah” (vv 8, 9). In chapters 10 and 11, Isaiah again referred to the remnant. Perhaps Hezekiah had these references in mind. If he did, he must have thought of the people in Jerusalem as the remnant, since the other fortified cities were all captured. On the other hand, Hezekiah may not have had these passages in mind at all, and he was merely referring to the remaining population of Jerusalem as the remnant that has survived the attack of the Assyrians. (PBC)

The full explanation of what Isaiah meant by the remnant will emerge in the second part of his prophecy. Isaiah will explain that the remnant would be the faithful whom God brought back from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and reestablish Judah. The returning remnant was a vital part of God’s plan to bring the Savior into the world, who was to be born an heir of David and come from David’s city, Bethlehem. (PBC)

**37:5** *servants...came to* – Now there was no longer any counsel, hope, or encouragement. Then came the prophet bringing counsel, hope, life, and encouragement. (Luther)

**37:6** *Do not be afraid.* It is as if he were saying by way of disparagement: “So far these are just empty words. Do not be afraid of Satan. But the words of Rabshakeh are poisonous and they soften up the spirit. Listen to My words. They are not empty but very powerful.” (Luther)

In every crisis of faith, believers need to hear these words. They were not words that Isaiah spoke to the officials just to make them feel better or to bolster their courage. They were the words of the Lord – the God of free and faithful grace. He would stand behind them, and because of that, there was nothing to fear, even if everything looked dark and hopeless. Psalm 46 captures the same thought. (PBC)

*young men* – literally, “the youths,” a disparaging designation characterizing their empty boasting. (Kretzmann)

The Lord’s people may have reverently feared Sennacherib’s messengers. The Lord regards them as boys or lackeys. (TLSB)

*have reviled me* - This is wonderful comfort. The Lord wants to relieve you of those revilings. He will take charge Himself and repay them. (Luther)

**37:7** *spirit*. Perhaps a compulsion or a disposition (cf. 1Ch 5:26). (CSB)

This is magnificent irony against Assyria, as if to say: “That king is so haughty that he is lifted up to heaven itself. Just wait, I will give him a spirit, namely a cowardly one.” By way of contrast he says: “He has a headstrong and exceedingly proud spirit; it shall be turned into an exceedingly humble and downcast spirit.” (Luther)

*rumor*. He shall hear something, thunder or some such thing, by which I will cast him down. I will do it by a sound alone and will draw no sword.” This is the most potent kind of irony. It is as if God were saying: “I will put him to flight by a sound alone, and I want to ruin his extremely haughty victory and triumph by one rumor.” The vehemence of these words is remarkable. He does not say “with outstretched hand and strong arm,” but he says: “I will overthrow this most powerful king entirely by means of a rumor, simply by means of a little thing he hears. As you heard above: By thunder, lightning, and haft He has overthrown his army in such a way that he will soon flee to his own country. Therefore note the tremendous power of consoling in the Holy Spirit, who comforts and helps us in the greatest dangers, when human reason has no means of help, as happened to Israel at the Red Sea. They had the sea before them, the enemy behind them, and they were hemmed in by mountains on both sides. Yet God saved them; and if He had not parted the sea, He could have moved the mountains or transported the people high up in the air. So here it pleased God to overthrow such a king with one sound and thunder, though He could have overthrown him in countless other ways. Therefore the one task of the godly is to trust in God and His Word, in all trials and hopeless situations to rely on God, who can very easily save us. Let us put away our reason, hope, counsel, and power. Since these cannot save us, let us take refuge with God; He will deliver us. Such examples must be exploited for our faith. The king, who had been living in extreme despair, is now like one reborn because of the prophet’s comfort. (Luther)

*Return...cut down with the sword*. This is even more disgraceful, as if to say: “I do not want to consider him worthy of being killed by foreigners in a strange land. Rather, he will have to be slain and destroyed in his own country, where he should have been safest.” (Luther)

**37:8** *Lachish*. Seen as a city of refuge, but now attacked by Sennacherib. (TLSB)

Which he had captured meanwhile. He was forced by the king of Ethiopia to leave Jerusalem; and when that king had been put to flight, the Rabshakeh came back to Jerusalem. Then he sent the city a letter full of blasphemies for the purpose of putting it to shame. (Luther)

*Libnah*. About 10 miles from Lachish. This move seems to have been made because Sennacherib felt it to be more necessary at the moment to have Libnah under control should the Ethiopian forces come up to encounter him. (Leupold)

**37:9** *Tirhakah, the Cushite king*.† The ruling Pharaoh’s general and brother, who later became king in his own right. (CSB)

The report that Tirhakah was marching out to fight against Sennacherib was not the report Isaiah had promised. This report only strengthened Sennacherib's resolve to conquer Jerusalem. He wanted to end this campaign quickly. His message to Hezekiah was more of the same rhetoric. New names are added to the list of people the Assyrian kings had defeated. (PBC)

**37:10** *God...deceive.* His attempt to intimidate the inhabitants of Jerusalem having failed, Sennacherib hoped to influence Hezekiah himself and cause him to yield. (Kretzmann)

**37:12** *Gozan.* A city in northern Mesopotamia to which some of the Israelites had been deported by the Assyrians (see 2Ki 17:6). (CSB)

*Haran.* A city west of Gozan where Abraham lived for a number of years.(CSB)

*Rezeph.* A city between Haran and the Euphrates River. (CSB)

*Eden.* The state of Bit Adini, located between the Euphrates and Balikh rivers. (CSB)

Read about them in the books of the Kings (2 Kings 19:12). In this letter that he had written he endeavors to frighten them. But Hezekiah, somewhat refreshed by words of comfort, now dares to pray to the Lord, when earlier in his despair he did not dare to pray. Now, as one reborn, he dares not only to pray but also to refute the written blasphemies. He is strong again, though not completely restored; yet his faith is constantly growing, as his very beautiful prayer shows. You must now ponder it with spiritual discernment. He argues confidently: The gods of the Gentiles were not gods. But our God is the only one, and He is exceedingly powerful. We, too, can say this. (Luther)

**37:1–13** Isaiah announces the Lord will rescue Jerusalem, and news comes that the king of Cush is approaching the Assyrians' southern flank. Even today, the Lord answers our prayers and guides the roles of leaders, all for the good of His people. Though troubles surround you, know that the Lord has them flanked and surrounded. • Lord, grant us faithful leaders who respect Your Word and seek counsel with the godly. Move the course of history for the sake of Your Church. Amen. (TLSB)

*Hezekiah's Prayer for Deliverance*

**14 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. 15 And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: 16 "O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. 17 Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. 18 Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, 19 and have cast their gods into the fire. For they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. 20 So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD."**

**37:14** *letter* – Together with the news that Lachish had fallen, the letter from Sennacherib brought a new wave of fear to Hezekiah. But he again did what a believer must do. He turned to the Lord and prayed. Hezekiah expressed a deep faith in the Lord. (PBC)

While the Rabshakeh shouts outside the walls, Isaiah responds quietly with a private letter. (TLSB)

*house of the Lord.* Hezekiah returns to the temple court, a place to pray and to receive the Lord's messages. (TLSB)

*spread it before.* Contrast the hypocritical spreading out of hands to pray in 1:15. (CSB)

Before the holy place, Hezekiah demonstrates trust that Isaiah's words are from God and will be fulfilled. (TLSB)

**37:16** *made heaven and earth.* The role of God as Creator is emphasized also in 40:26, 28; 42:5; 45:12. (CSB)

The Lord alone reigns over the whole earth and all its inhabitants, a key theme in Isaiah. (TLSB)

**37:17** *incline your ear ... open your eyes.* Cf. Solomon's prayer in 1Ki 8:52; 2Ch 6:40. (CSB)

In the gesture of close attention. (Kretzmann)

*mock the living God.* This is a most excellent prayer. First there is faith in God itself. Faith calls upon God alone. Now the king sets forth a specific concern, namely the enemy Sennacherib. (Luther)

**37:18** *kings Assyria have laid waste* – Here he indeed grants the major premise. It is true, he has conquered many nations. But it does not follow that he can deliver me. You must say thus: "It is true, Satan is the prince of this world and is more powerful than the weak Christ Himself. But I deny the conclusion, because this foolish and weak God is wiser and stronger than all. He can deliver me and all the rest, because He is enthroned above the cherubim." (Luther)

**37:19** Cf 44:9–20; Dt 4:28; 28:36, 64; 29:17; Ezk 20:32 for descriptions of other gods as nothing more than "wood and stone." (TLSB)

*work of men's hands* – It is as if he were saying: "If you call our God the work of men's hands, as are the cherubim and the worship of God, you, Assyria, also have a god, and he is much more the work of men's hands, because your god also has temples and wood and stone. Our God, however, has a temple and places of worship in accordance with His own prophet. He says in Exodus (Ex. 20:24): 'In every place where I cause My name to be remembered,' wherever I shall have commanded, there you will find Me." (Luther)

**37:20** *save us from his hand* – that is, "Hallowed be Thy name." Note, then, that God's victory consists in this, that first we conquer the enemies in our own hearts so that we may drive out the enemy, Satan, the sifter of faith. When by the power of faith in the heart we shall have conquered our enemies and are sure about God's mercy, then despair will leave us, then the comforts and counsels will very easily follow. This is the gist of this passage. For it is characteristic of faith that in our desperation it kills all our own resources and then through the external Word comforts and strengthens and renews us. (Luther)

*you alone are the Lord.* The prayer is short but pregnant with spirit, strongly fortified by faith. Ardent and ready for the battle through the Word, it seeks only the glory of God, not its own advantage. It is as if he were saying: "I do not pray for my own sake, but that Thy name alone be hallowed, so that Thou mayest not seem weak, etc., as Thou art slandered by the ungodly." We have heard the prayer of this most godly king, in which it shines forth how much faith, sincerity, and ardor there was in that king. (Luther)

**37:14–20** In prayer at the temple, Hezekiah contrasts the idols of the nations with the one true God. We, too, worship and pray with undivided devotion and remember to proclaim the Lord's Word before the nations. The Lord will hear your prayer as surely as He heard Hezekiah's. • O Lord, make known to all

nations the greatness of Your power and the gentleness of Your mercy, demonstrated in the ministry of Your Son, our King. Amen. (TLSB)

*Sennacherib's Fall*

**21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, 22 this is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him:**

**"She despises you, she scorns you—  
the virgin daughter of Zion;  
she wags her head behind you—  
the daughter of Jerusalem.**

**23 "Whom have you mocked and reviled?  
Against whom have you raised your voice  
and lifted your eyes to the heights?  
Against the Holy One of Israel!**

**24 By your servants you have mocked the Lord,  
and you have said, With my many chariots  
I have gone up the heights of the mountains,  
to the far recesses of Lebanon,  
to cut down its tallest cedars,  
its choicest cypresses,  
to come to its remotest height,  
its most fruitful forest.**

**25 I dug wells  
and drank waters,  
to dry up with the sole of my foot  
all the streams of Egypt.**

**26 "Have you not heard  
that I determined it long ago?  
I planned from days of old  
what now I bring to pass,  
that you should make fortified cities  
crash into heaps of ruins,**

**27 while their inhabitants, shorn of strength,  
are dismayed and confounded,  
and have become like plants of the field  
and like tender grass,  
like grass on the housetops,  
blighted before it is grown.**

**28 "I know your sitting down  
and your going out and coming in,  
and your raging against me.**

**29 Because you have raged against me  
and your complacency has come to my ears,  
I will put my hook in your nose  
and my bit in your mouth,  
and I will turn you back on the way  
by which you came.'**

**30 “And this shall be the sign for you: this year you shall eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from that. Then in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. 31 And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. 32 For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.**

**33 “Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. 34 By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. 35 For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.”**

**36 And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. 37 Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh. 38 And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword. And after they escaped into the land of Ararat, Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.**

**37:21** *sent to Hezrkiah* – The answer to the prayer follows soon for the purpose of strengthening faith. Such passages must be noted for the strengthening of our faith. Let us be absolutely sure that we shall soon be heard when we pray properly. For without being asked, Isaiah comes on God’s part and answers: “God is more quick to hear than we are to pray.” Therefore let a man learn to trust God, and let us regard our prayers as completely firm. So Ecclesiasticus says (Ecclus. 18:23): “Before you pray, prepare your soul so that you may not tempt God.” But to prepare the spirit is to act in true faith. This preparation is not hypocritical. True preparation is a difficult matter, but it is not artificially generated by uncertain thoughts. I know that the prayer of a godly man is true and difficult. When such a man is in any trial, he does not play at prayer, but he prays with serious and sincere feelings. For such a man false pretenses certainly pass away. In fact he prays with very great fervor, not like the idle monks. You should, therefore, learn this word “Amen,” which means that you should know for certain that you have been heard, as James says (James 1:6): “Let him ask in faith, with no doubting,” as if to say: “I have asked this of my Lord in my trials; this I know, and I have the conviction that I have been heard.” This is what it means to say Amen. This answer comes for the reason that (1) we have been commanded by God to pray; (2) we have God’s promise that He will hear us; (3) we have a formula for praying from Christ Himself and in the Psalter. For these three reasons it is necessary for us to pray. We rely, however, on God, who has commanded, promised, and dictated the prayer to us. No wonder that our sacrificing priests pray so coldly. They do not rely on these three reasons, but rest their prayer on their own intentions, speculations, and merits. (Luther)

*because you have prayed* – that is, your prayer has been heard. So be it. Now the promise follows. (Luther)

**37:22** *Virgin Daughter of Zion*. A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. (CSB)

God answered Hezekiah through His prophet Isaiah. The response taunts Sennacherib in much the same way he had taunted Hezekiah. The taunt would not come from powerful military commanders but from “the Virgin Daughter of Zion” and “the Daughter of Jerusalem” women. Those who were powerless in ancient warfare would despise and mock the mighty Assyrian forces. Isaiah was clear about the reason for this. The Assyrians had insulted and blasphemed the Holy One of Israel, and Sennacherib’s messengers had heaped insults on the Lord. (PBC)

Jerusalem with its inhabitants, as representing the Church of God. (Kretzmann)

*wags her head.* A gesture of mocking (see Ps 22:7; 44:14). (CSB)

These are hard words. He is speaking of the future as of the present; he is speaking about a defeated Sennacherib, who is still the victor. He utters and cites the words of those who despise King Sennacherib. Does he perhaps believe them? There are three things: to despise in the mind, to scorn with words, and to wag the head. How can one show greater contempt? This makes use of Ps. 2:1 f. Therefore they might believe themselves to be victors, although they see nothing but the opposite, namely, themselves as defeated and him as the victor. Therefore we must cling by faith to these words alone, while the state of affairs, however contrary it may be, is disregarded. This is faith that is confident in the dark and that in the midst of contrary things and affairs rests on the Word alone. Just so, the conscience tormented by the Law, by hell, by sin, and by Satan ought to cling to the bare Word. “Take heart, My son, your sins are forgiven” (Matt. 9:2). So here, at the height of the assault the king believes the Word. *The virgin despises you*, although she was sitting in the midst of events that were contrary to that very Word. This is the supreme exertion of the heart and the mind that is placed in the midst of death. This is the nature of faith. Therefore take note of this efficacy of faith, so that in all tribulations we may embrace the bare Word, however much everything appears to be opposed to it. This is what *she despises you* means. The faith of the godly is such, however, that it grows and increases day by day. It is not some fixed aptitude in the mind, but it is a spirit that wavers and falls and rises, as happened in the case of the king. First his faith went to ruin, but now it shines again and is revived by a new promise. This is what “The righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith” (Rom. 1:17) means. We must through little bits of faith arrive at a general and complete faith and grow daily. (Luther)

**37:23** *lifted ... to heights.* Assyria’s great pride had been condemned earlier. (CSB)

This is mockery. They are the words of a spirit and a faith speaking of a very certain future event. They are, however, words of irony against a defeated king, as if to say: “Milord king, now you know against whom you have fought. Now you have seen Him whom you formerly blasphemed, against whom you lifted up your eyes, namely, against the Holy One of Israel. Now look at the One whom you regarded as nothing before.” (Luther)

*Holy One of Israel.* A designation of the God of Israel characteristic of Isaiah (see 1:4 and note). (CSB)

This is a Hebrew idiom, because God dwelled in the midst of the people of Israel by Word, worship, and religion. So Christ is the Holy One of the church, dwelling in the church, sanctifying and protecting it. (Luther)

**37:24–25** Sennacherib boasts that he has overcome every obstacle in earth, mountains, deserts, and rivers, turning it all to his advantage. God reminds him that He has created all and has foreseen Sennacherib’s every step. (TLSB)

**37:24** *many chariots.* See 36:8 and note. (CSB)

*ascended the heights.* Cf. the words of the king of Babylon in 14:13–14. *Lebanon.* See 33:9; 35:2 and notes. (CSB)

*cut down ... cedars.* For many centuries the kings of Mesopotamia had used the cedars of Lebanon in their royal buildings (cf. 1Ki 5:8–10). (CSB)

These are threatening words. “I have climbed Lebanon and passed through its border up to its cultivated field, and beyond this I have cut down the choicest trees. I did all this with no one offering me any



resistance and everything lay open to me.” This is a voice full of boasting. We can easily understand what Mount Lebanon means. I apply it allegorically to Jerusalem itself, whose temple had been built out of materials from Lebanon. It is as if he were saying: “King Hezekiah, you see that you are something in this city, but I will easily take it by storm and destroy it.” (Luther)

**37:25** *dug wells.* Desert lands could not stop him. (CSB)

That is, where water was lacking, he had his men provide it, and where streams hindered his progress, he had but to call upon the resources at his command and the waters were diverted. Over against this proud boasting of the Assyrian concerning his own might the prophet explains that he was but the tool in the hands of God. (Kretzmann)

*dried up...all the streams.* The branches of the Nile were no obstacle either. This boast was almost a claim to deity. (CSB)

I have so taken control of the land that I have drunk water everywhere.” But because of the drought water is very dear in that area. “Because of my exceeding power I drank even before they drank.” This must be understood entirely in an allegorical manner, as though he were saying: “With my great army I have completely worn out everything, yes, I even dried it up with the sole of my feet.” That is, “I am so powerful that I do not need a sword. I have completely crushed them under my feet.” (Luther)

**37:26** *I determined it long ago* – God reminds the king of His miracles, as though He were saying: “You, O king, have not heard what wonderful things I did to destroy the nations, wonders that are well known to all.” Therefore, by means of examples from the past the prophet mocks the boastful king, as if to say: “It is nothing unusual or new for Me to kill a king, because I have killed many before.” He reproves him for not having heard these things. “Just wait, now you are going to hear it.” *Long ago*, that is, in the past. “This is an easy trick for Me.” *I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass.* The import of these words is spiritual, as if God were saying: “What you are now assuming for yourself, I have already planned it and fulfilled it a long time ago, and therefore what you are doing now you are doing because I manage it and will it. O king, do not be proud of your strength, because I have done this in you before. For this reason I have hardened you, to demonstrate My glory in you. I have ordained it like this a long time ago. That is to say, before you thought about it and wanted to do it, I did it. You are My threshing chariot and My weapons with which I shall accomplish this.” *Have you not heard* me and other prophets as we foretold this? “I planned this concerning you before you existed, and thus I have determined concerning you.” Note this, therefore, with regard to our rulers. When they want to plan something according to their own counsel, they ruin it. But to those who are not presumptuous but leave it in God’s care their undertaking succeeds. (Luther)

Not only does the Lord know all that Sennacherib said to Hezekiah and his people, the Lord planned it (cf 14:26-27). God’s foreknowledge is meant to humble proud Sennacherib because he thought he was acting independently. The Formula of Concord says, “He foresees and foreknows everything that is or will be, that is happening or will happen, whether it is good or bad. For all things, whether they are past or future, are clear and present before God.” (T LSB)

*heaps of ruins.* Assyria had been God’s tool of judgment against the nations (see 10:5–6). (CSB)

That is, “this is what you are doing now.” It is like a heap of stones, of cities destroyed. (Luther)

**37:27** Though Sennacherib seems to have reduced his enemies to fragile grass, God has allowed this. The Lord views all people as grass (40:6–8). (T LSB)

*shorn of strength* – This is a Hebrew idiom. *Short of hand* means weak. Thus God very easily shortens those who are to be destroyed. Those who strive to accomplish something with their power and industry soon perish. (Luther)

*are dismayed* – that is, the confidence of their heart is also snatched away from them; they are deprived of their strength and courage. Being confounded easily follows from this. “This is My work, not yours, O king of Assyria.” (Luther)

*like plants of the field* – Namely, these cities. These are excellent comparisons. It is as if God were saying: “I have dealt with these cities as with grass. These cities are to Me like grass and plants that wither very quickly, even though they have the best farmers.” For the glory and power of the whole world are compared to plant and grass. So Christ in Matt. 6:29–30 compares all glory of the flesh to a flower, as Isaiah does below in ch. 40:6: “All flesh is grass.” In short: All glory, power, and splendor are before God like flowers and hay on the roof. Let this comfort the godly so that they are not disheartened by the mask of the ungodly tyrants. For their power is doomed, like hay. (Luther)

*grass ... on the housetops*. Roofs in the Near East were flat. (CSB)

*before it is grown* – You see that all the lofty plans, schemes, and endeavors of the world wither away very quickly. For all their powers are nothing but dried straw in the sight of God. “But you, O king, who have overpowered so many cities, have not done it, but you are My scythe with which I have cut this hay.” (Luther)

**37:28** *I know your sitting down* – He turns the speech toward the proud and presumptuous king, as if to say: “you, king, think that you have done it alone. But you shall find out what I have done because I know your dwelling place.” The ungodly say, however: “There is no God, He does not know, He does not see,” and in their excessive smugness they always think they have God on their side. “You regard Me as a foolish God, but rest assured, O king, I will show you who I am.” “I know where you live, namely, in Babylon. I have seen your going out and your coming in, I have watched the equipment of your army from the beginning.” (Luther)

*your ragingf against me* – You have offended not the people but Me, indeed you are touching the apple of My eye (Zech. 2:8).” *Your arrogance*, a smugness that has arisen from too much abundance, an arrogance that is securely proud and lifted up because of excessive power and presumption. This is what we see in the papists and Duke George, who rail against one who speaks about God. (Luther)

**37:29** *your complacency*. Self-secure attitude. (TLSB)

*hook in your nose*. The Assyrians often led away captives by tying ropes to rings placed in their noses. (CSB)

This is figurative language taken from the handling of wild animals. “Assyria is a bear to Me, and to control him I need chain and hook.” Thus you see here that as we are in God’s supreme care, so that the hairs of our head are numbered (Matt. 10:30), so also it very easily comes to pass that the enemies of the godly are destroyed, because they always rise up and dare great things. Yet they do not advance, because men of blood shall not live half their days, since their end is hay and a blossom. We experience this with regard to our tyrants. Therefore we must take note of this comfort, so that we rely on God against those who attack us. Thus God here strengthens, by means of mimicking words against Assyria, a king who is wavering in his faith. Therefore apply yourselves to faith, which is the chief matter of Scripture, and strengthen your spirits by faith. (Luther)

*bit.* Tools used to control animals and slaves. (TLSB)

So that he must submit, though unwillingly. (Kretzmann)

**37:30** *sign.* The Lord now speaks a promise to Hezekiah. (TLSB)

We shall simply remain with the historical sense. Many have referred this text to demons. Note: Signs are always added for the confirmation of the Word. So also here. Among the signs are some of the past, some of the future. Those that happen after faith seem foolish. But then both kinds confirm the Word. *This year eat.* “In the first year you must eat that grain that was trodden down in the straw by the Assyrian army. These grain fields ought to give you an ample supply. I will feed you by a miracle, so that you will be amply satisfied with the crushed grain. This is the first sign. The second sign is in the second year. You must eat those seeds that were trodden down in the former year and come up spontaneously this year.” This is the mercy and kindness of God, who makes a double gain out of one loss, so that the second year may provide enough without the work of threshing of the previous year. The third sign follows in the third year. All the broken grapevines have by a miracle produced so much wine that it is enough. The grapes have grown spontaneously without trimming the vines. It is as if he were saying: “The Assyrians have trampled the grain. This is good. Now you do not have to thresh it. The grain has remained in the field. Now you do not have to sow it.” Thus by this miracle and sign God strengthens them, because the sign is of the future, indicating what should happen after the king has been defeated, and after they had faith. This is so because when God’s miracles are performed, they are understood by none but the godly. The ungodly indeed disparage all of God’s miracles and say that they happened by chance. They attribute them to some essential and formal causes, as the mathematicians do. (Luther)

*what grows by itself.* Volunteer harvest, caused by seed dropped during the previous harvest. People had not been able to plant and harvest as usual because of war. Conditions would give way in the third year. Isaiah prophesies hardship and hope. (TLSB)

*second ... third year.* Probably the second year was to begin shortly, so the total time was less than 36 months. Another three-year sign was given in 20:3. (CSB)

The difficulty with the Assyrian invasion would not disappear quickly. For two years Judah would suffer because of the invasion, but in the third year things would return to normal. (PBC)

For the Assyrian invasion had not only destroyed the harvest of the last year, but had also made it impossible to put out the new crop; **and in the third year**, that is, about one year after the present prophecy. (Kretzmann)

People had not been able to plant and harvest as usual because of war. Conditions would give way in the third year. Isaiah prophesies hardship and hope. (TLSB)

*plant vineyards and eat.* The response to Assyria’s proposal in 36:16 (see note there). (CSB)

**37:31** *remnant.* People in Jerusalem. The Assyrians would have deported people captured earlier, during the battles at Lachish and Libnah. (TLSB)

*take root ... bear fruit.* This is the Hebrew way of saying what we term “the surviving remnant.” That is, the kingdom of Judah had been uprooted completely; there was only a remnant in that city. He draws an analogy from a tree, where many trees are cut down and hardly any strong shoots remain. So he says here: “Do not look at the great destruction but look at the little root.” There is a similar passage in the eighth chapter of Zechariah, where he says concerning the destroyed city of Jerusalem: “If there is one

stone, I will cause it to be rebuilt, so that boys and girls and women may play and dance there” (cf. Zech. 8:5). “Do not despair.” (Luther)

*Root downward* I understand to mean the energy of faith that is hidden and not visible before the world. Therefore beware of clumsy and commonplace allegories. This is the summary of Scripture: It is the work of the Law to humble according to history, externally and internally, physically and spiritually. It is the work of the Gospel to console, externally and internally, physically and spiritually. What our predecessors have experienced according to history externally and physically, this we experience according to our history internally and spiritually. That is, Jerusalem, which is now cut down and made desolate, is not altogether destroyed and hopeless, because it still has roots untouched whence the roots sprout forth. However, he calls the king and the few little upright people the *root downward*, because they had no outward appearance; yet from this root the most beautiful trees, girls, boys, and many inhabitants are to come forth. Therefore do not lose heart in view of the city’s remnant. For the most damaged of all physical things can be mended and restored again. Stay with the grammatical and historical sense. The downward growth of the root means that the city has no form and appearance. The sprouting again means that this almost completely destroyed city is repaired again. Allegorically we can refer it to the conscience, killed and revived, but not to the monastic humility. Beware of allegories. However, this is the comfort, that we do not despair in matters that to the flesh appear impossible to restore. (Luther)

**37:32** *out of Jerusalem* – That is, the remnant of the house of David. They will not only have a restoration but also the freest safety in carrying on their affairs, in going out and coming in, that is, in ruling and performing all human works and transactions.

*The ze the Lord.* Here he gives the reason in opposition to the objection of some who say, “You, O prophet, are deranged for saying that a great kingdom will come into being out of a little remnant. Are you having hallucinations? Who is going to do this?” This is the way the flesh speaks. He answers: “Not your strength and your planning, but *the zeal of the Lord*,” that is, a friendly jealousy, a wrathful love, as I interpret this word. It is the exceedingly earnest passion of zeal. (Luther)

**37:33** *siege mound.* To help the invaders bring up battering rams and scale the walls (see 2Sa 20:15). (CSB)

Such mounds were found by archaeologists at Lachish. (TLSB)

These are promises of future safety. Because the king of Assyria was now besieging the city, they were looking for nothing else than a cloud of spears and a very swift entrance. Against this hopelessness of the people the prophet offers them consolation. (Luther)

**37:34** *way that he came...shall return* – It is absurd to the flesh that they should believe themselves to be safe in the midst of the moment of need, as they saw the army outside before the city. This is the nature of faith and of the Word of God, that we cling to the Word without anything else and rely on faith in the midst of death and life. We must not look at the shattered and weak walls, all of which are nothing against this faith in the Word. Where there is no defense, where they are forsaken without cover, walls and weapons are nothing, and they stand abandoned. Now comes their wall and weapon. (Luther)

*he shall not come into this city* – that is the wall that protects the city. This is an example also of the triumph of faith, which is not apparent to the eyes by any kind of argument. By this faith in words they were able to withstand the tyrant and king in the midst of their needs. These four small and wretched words are the power of God, protecting the city and people from two hundred thousand men. Let these not be powerless and insignificant words, as Zwingli says. Thus by the Word alone we are protected against the tyranny of Satan and of death. (Luther)

**37:35** *defend this city...save it for my own sake* – Sennacherib would not even shoot an arrow into the city. God would defend Jerusalem, but not because it deserved to be saved and not because Hezekiah was such a good and faithful king. God would save Jerusalem purely because of His grace, “for my sake.” That is, God would save Jerusalem just because He is God and is gracious. Isaiah had identified the many sins of Jerusalem and its people in the first part of his prophecy. Later history would reveal a continued unfaithfulness and perversion among the people. But by grace, God would deliver Jerusalem here. (PBC)

*sake of my servant David.* God granted that salvation and victory not for the sake of their merits but for His own sake and for the sake of David, His servant. God opposes merits. He comforts us that we shall receive all things gratis for the sake of His promise. Because He promised that He would dwell here in the temple, for the sake of this promise He protected that city. Even if we are righteous and upright in the eyes of the world, yet before God we are sinners who cry, “Forgive us our trespasses.” *For the sake of David.* Although David was righteous before the world and before God by faith, yet this protection was provided not for the sake of his merits but for the sake of the compact and covenant which God made with His servant David. There is therefore no mediator and intercessor between God and us. Nor is David a mediator here (as some dream), but God defended them for the sake of His covenant and grace and for the sake of His promise to David. (Luther)

**37:36** *the angel of the LORD... struck down.* Cf. the striking down of the firstborn in Egypt (Ex 12:12) and the angel’s sword poised against Jerusalem (2Sa 24:16). The Greek historian Herodotus attributed this destruction to a bubonic plague. The death of these soldiers fulfills the prophecies of 10:33–34; 30:31; 31:8. (CSB)

Though until now the king had boasted in grand and sublime words. This is the reason. When the prophets are busy encouraging, comforting, and strengthening, they use a great number of words, but in a matter of fact they use very few. The Holy Spirit’s activity is more concerned with perfecting and strengthening our feelings and faith than with the matter itself and with the story, Historians and poets might have described this slaughter with very ponderous and great words in the tragic manner: How from various directions a tempest had rushed in, haft from here, lightning from there, thunder from another direction, etc., as the prophet had often called to mind above in his admonitions. So also the destruction of Sodom is very tersely described (Gen. 19:24): “Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire,” where you may be sure there was a very severe storm. The task of the prophets is more deeply involved in comforting the mind and faith and strengthening them with an abundance of words, but the event itself they report in a few words. Whoever has been touched by the inclination of faith will not need detailed descriptions of the story. In his own spirit he will spout forth the mighty works of God in that slaughter, and from a single word he will derive a large commentary. *He slew in the camp*, where there were many nobles, *one hundred and eighty-five thousand*. How dreadful it would be to see five or six corpses. What do you think this vast slaughter was like? Even if the Assyrian had been made of iron he could not but despair. If I had a hundred mouths and a hundred tongues, I could not say it. I leave it to your thoughts, so that henceforth you may believe that your God cares for you. (Luther)

**37:37** *departed.* Sennacherib was leading the siege at Libnah. (TLSB)

*Nineveh.* The capital of Assyria. (CSB)

He is a fugitive, he has no thought of restoring his army by military plans. There is nothing but fear and flight. Even if he had had a thousand Hectors, his affairs would have collapsed. Take note, therefore, how quickly God suppresses the pride of the flesh by means of the supreme disgrace. (Luther)

Across the Tigris River from modern Mosul (Iraq). The city had been revived by Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) and Sargon II, who made it his capital. Sennacherib (704–681 BC) made it the capital of the Assyrian Empire. (TLSB)

**37:38** *Nisroch*. Lit, “great eagle,” describing the idol’s form. The name is otherwise unknown; it may be the Assyrian name for the god Marduk, creator and chief god in Babylonian mythology. (TLSB)

*worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god*. Hezekiah had gone to the Lord’s temple and gained strength (vv. 1, 14). Twenty years later (681 B.C.) Sennacherib went to the temple of his god and was killed. (CSB)

Coup in 681 BC. Events are confirmed by Assyrian and Babylonian chronicles. (TLSB)

This is the consequence of the whole tragedy. It is a pitiful tale. It is reported that as Sennacherib fled and prayed to his own gods and asked his priests how he could avenge himself, he received the answer that by offering his son Abraham had won the grace of the people of the Jews in the sight of God, so that they prospered as they did. The priests are then said to have exhorted the king to sacrifice his own son, too, and to surpass Abraham with his piety. Then the king wished to surpass Abraham by his piety, and he desired to sacrifice two sons, *Adrammelech and Sharezer*. When the sons found out about this, they massacred the father himself. This is what the Hebrew writers report, and it may well be true, but it must not be taught as an article of faith. The sacrifice of children according to the rite of Abraham crept far and wide into all nations, both Gentiles and Jews. Reason, that most stupid ape under the control of Satan, has followed this example according to the outward act without faith and without God’s command. This is in fact idolatry before God, although it glittered in their eyes as the supreme work of piety. Against this idolatry all prophets have cried out, and David laments that the land was polluted with the blood of the children sacrificed to God (Ps. 106:37–38). This aping nature and reason everywhere imitates God. So here it is believable that this king in despair of weapons adopted this religion. Beware of the examples of the saints and do not become like apes. The prophet, however, in historical manner simply records the most shameful death of the king, the one who had lost his army, his glory, and his courage and was finally massacred by his own sons, the one who wanted to kill the children of God. This is a just judgment of God. A similar most wretched slaughter will befall our tyrants. This is the most wretched and shameful death of Sennacherib, who was not killed in the field by plundering foreigners, but was most wretchedly done to death in his own court by his own sons while he was practicing his religion. This is an example for all blasphemers, who will perish by this and like examples, who in their madness blaspheme that God is foolish and weak. As this slaughter was brought about by Isaiah, who achieved this through his faith and through the encouragement given to the people through the Word, therefore this example deserves to be added to the others in Heb. 11:14 ff, Isaiah was a great man; yet you should never read anything about his works but much about his most fervent word and faith, as you see here. (Luther).

*Ararat*. Urartu, north of Assyria in Armenia. (CSB)

Region in northern Turkey. (TLSB)

*Esarhaddon*. Reigned 681–669. See Ezr 4:2.(CSB)

**37:21–38** Isaiah prophesies that the Lord will rescue Judah amid hardship. Today, the Lord will not always grant you immediate relief from difficulty. He might use hardship to chasten and to teach. Take comfort in the wisdom of His ways. He demonstrated His zeal for you in the sufferings of Jesus for your redemption. • Faithful Jesus, grant me patience and teach me wisdom, that I may glean what is good in hard times and sow Your bounty in fruitful times. Amen. (TLSB)