



# *God Listens*

God hears the prayers of His people and acts to fulfill His purposes for them.

## **ISAIAH 37:14-20,30-35**

Most people are familiar with the saying, “If you want something done, do it yourself.” The statement usually comes to mind when you have asked someone to do something, only to be let down. People sometimes approach God in this way, thinking it’s better to take matters into their own hands than to trust God with the situation. Such thinking is not only arrogant but also wrong. Recognizing one’s inadequacy and seeking God’s help is a sign of wisdom. Hezekiah realized this truth when he was confronted with a crisis.

**Share about a time when you needed someone else to help you. What made you turn to that person for help?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **ISAIAH 34:1–39:8**

Isaiah 34:1–39:8 contains two sections. Chapters 34–35 are climactic, describing the culmination of the six woes of God’s universal judgment and the blessing God has in store for those who belong to Him. Next, chapters 36–39 focus on three significant events that happened in the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah.

Isaiah’s description of judgment on the nations contains cataclysmic imagery to display God’s omnipotence and wrath (chap. 34). All of creation will be affected. Isaiah singled out Edom as representative of what would happen to the nations. The Edomites had a history of taking advantage of Judah when vulnerable. Therefore, the Lord “has a day of vengeance, a time of paying back Edom for its hostility against Zion” (34:8). This message once again proved God’s faithfulness to keep His promise to curse anyone who treats His people with contempt (Gen. 12:3).

In contrast to His plans for the nations, God’s plans for His people are good (Isa. 35). He will turn the dry, wilderness lands of Judah into well-watered, lush lands that will surpass the most fertile lands in the region (35:1–2). As a result, the people of God will witness His salvation. Eyes that were blind will be opened, and ears that were deaf will be unstopped (35:5). Jesus alluded to this passage to reveal to John the Baptist that He is the Messiah (Matt. 11:2–6). Isaiah prophesied that the people of God will travel the “Holy Way” in the joyous return to Zion (35:8–10).

Isaiah 36–39 serves as a historical bridge to transition from the first section of Isaiah to its final section. Here, Isaiah turned his attention to three events in the life of Hezekiah that are also recorded in 2 Kings 18–20: (1) the miraculous defeat of the Assyrians who invaded Judah and laid siege on Jerusalem (Isa. 36–37); (2) Hezekiah’s life threatening illness, his plea for God’s healing, and God’s promise to add fifteen years to his life (Isa. 38); and (3) Hezekiah’s prideful act of showing the treasures of Jerusalem to envoys representing the king of Babylon, Merodach-baladan (Isa. 39). These events are not in chronological order, but they serve to show that even the most godly of the people, such as Hezekiah, failed in their commitment to the Lord in spite of God’s goodness to them. The Lord dispensed of the Assyrian threat, but Babylonian exile would be inescapable for Judah.

As you read Isaiah 37:14-20,30-35, what does the Lord reveal concerning the prayers of His people?

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## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### **THE REQUEST** (ISA. 37:14-20)

<sup>14</sup> Hezekiah took the letter from the messengers' hands, read it, then went up to the LORD's temple and spread it out before the LORD. <sup>15</sup> Then Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: <sup>16</sup> LORD of Armies, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you are God—you alone—of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. <sup>17</sup> Listen closely, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see. Hear all the words that Sennacherib has sent to mock the living God. <sup>18</sup> LORD, it is true that the kings of Assyria have devastated all these countries and their lands. <sup>19</sup> They have thrown their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but made from wood and stone by human hands. So they have destroyed them. <sup>20</sup> Now, LORD our God, save us from his power so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD, are God—you alone.

#### **VERSE 14**

The verses leading up to verse 14 set the stage for Hezekiah's prayer requesting the Lord's deliverance. In chapter 36, the Assyrian king's royal spokesman addressed Hezekiah's administrative leaders at the same place Isaiah confronted King Ahaz about trusting the Assyrians. That decision led to Judah's present predicament. The spokesman's goal was to dishearten Jerusalem's inhabitants and intimidate Hezekiah so that he would surrender the city without a fight. A siege would be time consuming and costly for the Assyrians, even if they were confident of victory. The royal spokesman questioned Hezekiah's military strength, the dependability of Judah's Egyptian allies, and God's faithfulness to Judah as well as His ability to defeat the Assyrians (36:8-20).

The report Hezekiah received from his officials of the royal spokesman's message terrified him. He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went to the temple. Additionally, he sent a message to Isaiah asking the prophet to pray to the Lord for help. Isaiah replied, saying the Lord heard the Assyrian king's spokesman and would deal with the Assyrians. Hezekiah must not be afraid (37:6). However, Assyria's king, Sennacherib, sent a letter to Hezekiah stating that the gods of other cities he conquered were unable to save their people, and Hezekiah's God would not be able to rescue him either.

When Hezekiah received and read this letter, he **went up to the LORD's temple and spread it out before the LORD**. Hezekiah's response was the response every child of God should have when faced with what appears to be an unsurmountable crisis; he took it to the Lord. Though God did not need Hezekiah to show Him the letter, Hezekiah asked God, "Do you see what Sennacherib had the audacity to write?" Hezekiah's actions displayed his faith in God as well as his passion for the glory of God.

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary for background.*

Read articles about Sennacherib in a Bible dictionary. Read some of the Bible passages listed in the article to gain a more complete picture of this king. What accomplishments did you discover that may have contributed to Sennacherib's feelings of invincibility? How might his traits and accomplishments have influenced Hezekiah to seek God's help?

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**VERSES 15-16**

Commenting on the fact that Hezekiah **prayed to the LORD** in this situation might seem unnecessary. After all, one might surmise that anyone in Hezekiah's situation would turn to the Lord in prayer. However, the vast majority of Israel and Judah's kings were self-willed and independent.

How much people pray to the Lord indicates how much they recognize their own inadequacy and need for Him. True humility means trusting in God. Equally important, Hezekiah's turning to the Lord in prayer was not only an act of humility but also of wisdom. In fact, Proverbs 11:2 teaches that "with humility comes wisdom." Unlike foolish kings who relied on their own logic, alliances with other nations, and impressive military resources, Hezekiah trusted in the only One who could save him—the Lord.

**What might keep a person from turning to God first? How does the urgency of a situation impact who a person turns to for help?**

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Hezekiah began his prayer by calling God the *LORD of Armies*. He recognized that God fights for His people. The Lord was the true leader of all of Israel's armies as well as His heavenly hosts. The *cherubim* were the powerful angelic figures carved out of olive wood and covered in gold that spread their wings over the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies in the temple. The mercy seat represented God's throne and the manifest presence of God with His people. Thus, Hezekiah recognized the Lord was with His people. Moreover, Hezekiah maintained that as Creator, God alone has complete sovereignty and power over all the nations to do with them whatever He pleases. What Hezekiah said about the Lord served to remind the beleaguered king of the reality of who God is. Prayer does not inform God of anything. What prayer does is remind us of what we already know, adjusting our hearts and heads to be in line with whom God is and what He is doing.

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### **KEY DOCTRINE: *God***

There is one and only one living and true God (Jer. 10:10).

### **VERSES 17-20**

Hezekiah's use of five imperatives in verse 17 demonstrates the urgency of the situation. Hezekiah was asking God to act in a way that demonstrated He knew what had transpired. Notice Hezekiah's

motivation. Referencing the letter he had spread out before him, he was appalled that Sennacherib had mocked *the living God*. Hezekiah's first and foremost concern was not his personal well-being or the security of his people but the glory of God. Sennacherib thought that the Lord was weak like the other gods who failed to defend their peoples when the Assyrians conquered their cities. But Hezekiah knew the truth. The Lord is *the living God*.

Hezekiah acknowledged the truth of what Sennacherib asserted in his letter concerning his conquests, even though Sennacherib exaggerated claiming to have brought "all the countries" under submission (v. 11). The Assyrians had at least conquered all of the countries Sennacherib mentioned by name and devastated the inhabitants and lands of those countries. In addition, when the Assyrian kings seized the nations in the region, they burned up the gods of those nations. The flames destroyed and consumed their idols of *wood and stone*. This was the Assyrians' way of communicating that their god, Ashur, was greater than the gods of these other nations. These conquests were not just national issues (one nation opposing another) or only political in nature (one ruler against another), but they were also theological (one patron god against the Lord God). The conquests were understood to be as much a battle between gods as they were between armies on the ground.

Hezekiah faced the brutal reality of his situation. His faith in God did not become clouded with foolish notions that everything was fine. He also knew that Sennacherib actually did not defeat any gods because the Lord is the one and only God. Sennacherib overestimated his accomplishments and underestimated the Lord. The Assyrian monarch thought Yahweh was just another god, but Hezekiah knew better.

Hezekiah's honest assessment of all that had transpired—of his present predicament and of everyone involved—led to his petition in verse 20. The word *now* carries the idea of "based upon all that has transpired and everything I have brought before You." Sennacherib had conquered many nations and now threatened to seize Jerusalem. This heathen king had the audacity to challenge Yahweh. Therefore, Hezekiah prayed that the Lord would save His people from this juggernaut so that all the nations might know that He is God and that there is no other. Hezekiah realized that this moment of Judah's extreme inadequacy and vulnerability was the perfect opportunity for the Lord to glorify Himself before the nations. The glory of God was Hezekiah's primary concern.

## What does Hezekiah's prayer teach about priorities when praying to God?

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### DID YOU KNOW?

When King Hezekiah became seriously ill, he prayed that God would intervene. God answered by adding fifteen more years to Hezekiah's life (Isa. 38:1-6).

### THE SIGN (ISA. 37:30-32)

<sup>30</sup> **“This will be the sign for you: This year you will eat what grows on its own, and in the second year what grows from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit.**

<sup>31</sup> **The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward and bear fruit upward. <sup>32</sup> For a remnant will go out from Jerusalem, and survivors from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.’**

### VERSES 30-32

Upon promising that He would frustrate Sennacherib's plans and make him return home, the Lord promised Hezekiah that He would restore Judah. Hezekiah would know this by a *sign*. The sign would be that in two full years the land of Judah would be completely restored. No doubt, Sennacherib waged war on the actual land of Judah when he invaded. This was a common practice of warfare in the ancient Near East, leaving a conquered enemy weak and vulnerable for years to follow. However, God promised that the people would not do without and that after two years everything would be back to normal. God called upon Hezekiah to trust Him as the two years passed.

**How important is expressing trust when praying to God? How does trusting in God's promises affect the mindset of believers when praying?**

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## THE ANSWER (ISA. 37:33-35)

<sup>33</sup> “Therefore, this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria: He will not enter this city, shoot an arrow here, come before it with a shield, or build up a siege ramp against it. <sup>34</sup> He will go back the way he came, and he will not enter this city. This is the LORD’s declaration. <sup>35</sup> I will defend this city and rescue it for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.”

### VERSES 33-35

God promised to defend Jerusalem without a single *arrow* being shot, without a single infantry charge, and without even a single *siege ramp* against the city. Not only would the Assyrians fail to enter the city, they would not even get the opportunity to attack the city. Before Sennacherib could lift a finger against Jerusalem, the angel of the Lord went out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians in the middle of the night. God answered Hezekiah’s prayer. The Lord saved His people and received all the glory by how He did it. Devastated by his losses, Sennacherib did just as Isaiah prophesied and fled back home only to be assassinated by two of his sons.

The Lord does not always deliver His people from physical crises as He delivered the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. However, the people of God may be assured they have the security of His presence in crises. They can trust in God’s love, power, and wisdom as He ultimately does what is best for them and for His glory. Sometimes the Lord’s salvation comes by eliminating a difficulty; at other times He delivers believers as they go through the crisis. (See Heb. 11, especially vv. 35-40.)

The Lord gave Hezekiah two reasons He would save Jerusalem. First, He would do it for His own sake, meaning He would save Jerusalem for the sake of His reputation. Fundamentally, God’s purpose for His people is to use them as instruments of His glory and to make Himself known in all the earth. Second, the Lord would save Jerusalem to keep His promise to David to establish his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16). This promise to Hezekiah was ultimately fulfilled in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**What do verses 33-35 convey about the purposes and character of God?**

## APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can approach God with bold requests because of who God is.
- God calls on believers to trust Him as He responds to our prayers according to His will and purpose.
- God responds to our prayers in ways that demonstrate His power and are in accordance with His plans.

**What situations have you hesitated to take to God in prayer recently? Take time to boldly approach Him, following Hezekiah's lead. Record your thoughts after having done so.**

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**Review your recent prayer requests. How do you need to adjust your requests so that the requests reflect God's purposes?**

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**As a group, discuss God's commitment to His reputation and to keeping His promises. What affects should these divine commitments have on believers and the life of your group? Hold each other accountable for memorizing Isaiah 37:35 this week.**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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