

“The speech is so persuasive precisely because it contains so much that is true. But its basic premise is false: namely, that the Lord has forsaken Judah, and therefore that trust in him is futile. It is always Satan’s way to make us think that God has abandoned us, and to use logic woven from half-truths to convince us of it” (Webb 1996: 149).

“As noted above, this speech directly challenges all that Isaiah had said. God is *not* the sovereign; righteousness will *not* prevail; it is the nations of man with whom all must come to terms” (Oswalt 1986: 634).

“This is a war of words, between the word of the Assyrian monarch and the word of God” (Oswalt 1986: 634).

v10 “It is likely that the Assyrians knew from their intelligence work something about the general content of the sermons of the prophet Isaiah, just as the Babylonians knew about the prophecies of Jeremiah (Jer 39:11–40:6)” (Smith 2007: 600).

vv16-17 “Rabshakeh...describes the future using positive images of a good life not much different from their present life. This misrepresentation appears much more appealing than staying in Jerusalem and eating their own excrement. In effect, Sennacherib (not God) becomes the only one who can “deliver” the people of Judah from their present difficult situation. ... If God cannot fulfill his promises, giving the people peace and a land flowing with milk and honey, grain and vineyards, at least the Hebrews can be assured that Sennacherib will do this” (Smith 2007: 605).

v18 “The idea that politicians might lie to their constituency to keep themselves in office is not new to the twenty-first century” (Smith 604).

“Sennacherib has made the serious mistake of equating God with the useless pagan wood and stone gods of these other nations, lifting Sennacherib up above all the gods of the nations” (Smith 2007: 606).

“Although many people today would never say these kinds of things about God because it might seem to be a little too irreverent, they too have limited the power of God in their thinking and by their actions they raise questions about his ability to save” (Smith 2007: 606).

SOURCES CITED

John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, NICOT, 1986.
Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, New American Commentary, 2007.
Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, The Bible Speaks Today, 1996.

ISAIAH 36: ASSYRIAN ATTACK TESTS FAITH

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

- I. Facing judgment by Assyria, the nation is called to trust the Lord (1–35)
 - A. Judah’s sin requires exile, but a remnant will return (1–12)
 - B. The nations will be judged, and therefore they should not be trusted (13–23)
 - C. The Lord will rule over the earth and redeem his people (24–27)
 - D. The Holy One of Israel will replace faithless rulers with a righteous king (28–35)
- II. Facing Assyria and Babylon, Hezekiah wavers in his trust in the Lord (36–39)
 - A. Hezekiah’s faith is tested by the Assyrian attack (36)**
 - B. Hezekiah trusts the Lord and is delivered from the enemy (37)
 - C. Hezekiah’s faith is tested by a fatal illness (38)
 - D. Hezekiah fails to trust the Lord and will be delivered to the enemy (39)
- III. Facing exile by Babylon, the nation is called to trust the Lord (40–66)

Relationship of Isaiah 36–39 to Isaiah 1–35:

“Chapters 36–39 conclude the section relating to Assyria and the question of trust which that nation’s presence on Judah’s borders posed. They demonstrate that it is not necessary to revoke one’s dependence on God and turn to human powers in order to survive. In this way they constitute a lived-out example of the truths taught in chs. 13–35. The nations of mankind are under God’s hand; he is their ruler and those who trust in him need not, indeed, must not, bow down to those nations” (Oswalt 1986: 629).

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 36

I. Setting (36:1-3)

II. Speech of Assyrian commander (36:4-10)

- A. You are foolish to trust others to save you (36:4-5)
- B. You are foolish to trust Egypt to save you (36:6)
- C. You are foolish to trust the Lord (36:7)
- D. You have no hope (36:8-9)
- E. The Lord commanded me to conquer you (36:10)

III. Request of Israelite officials (36:11-12)

- A. Israelites: Please speak so the people do not understand (36:11)
- B. Assyrians: The people need to hear so they know what is at stake (36:12)

IV. Second speech of Assyrian commander (36:13-20)

- A. Do not allow Hezekiah to persuade you to trust the Lord (36:13-15)
- B. Trust the Assyrians (36:16-17)
- C. Do not allow Hezekiah to persuade you to trust the Lord (36:18-20)

V. Response of Israelite people and officials (36:21-22)

- A. People are silent in obedience to king (36:21)
- B. Officials tear clothes and report to king (36:22)

TWO TESTS OF FAITH: AHAZ AND HEZEKIAH

In 735, Ahaz (Hezekiah's father) was being attacked by two minor powers. Isaiah met him at the aqueduct to encourage him to trust God. He refused, sought Assyria's help instead, and was promised exile (Isa 7).

In 701, Hezekiah was being attacked by Assyria (the result of his father's failure). The Assyrian commander came to the aqueduct to discourage him from trusting God. Hezekiah trusted the Lord and was delivered (Isa 36-37).

"Both stories have (a) an army attacking Jerusalem; (b) important events happening at the upper pool; (c) the king receiving a "fear not" oracle; (d) a sign is promised; (e) the city of Jerusalem is spared; and (f) promises that the "zeal of the Lord will do this" (Smith 2007: 586n12).

"It is because of Ahaz's refusal to trust in that place that the Rabshakeh would stand there (8:5-8). Furthermore, it is not just any nation which threatens to engulf Hezekiah, but Assyria, the very nation Ahaz chose to trust in place of God. Thus we have two kings of Judah, father and son, both threatened with imminent destruction so far as they know, both recognizing the inadequacy of their own strength. But there the similarity [631] ceases. Faced with a considerably less destructive threat, Ahaz chose to trust his worst enemy rather than God. He would not put God to the test. On the other hand, Hezekiah did put God on his mettle and God demonstrated that he was indeed master of the nations" (Oswalt 1986: 630-31).

NOTES

"Ironically, it was the Assyrian invader who put the issue most succinctly: *On whom are you depending?* (36:5). It is a question which the book of Isaiah forces us to ponder again and again, and with good reason, for our response to it will determine the whole shape of our lives" (Webb 147).

"The overwhelming emphasis on these dialogues and speeches suggests that these chapters are far more interested in the political-theological views of the combatants than in providing an extensive blow-by-blow historical account of what happened on each day of the attack" (Smith 2007: 587).

"This speech is a classic study in the Satanic art of sowing doubt and unbelief through subtly twisting the truth" (Webb 1996: 148).