

Isaiah 37:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.

Analysis

And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.

This verse records Hezekiah's response to Assyria's blasphemous threats delivered by the Rabshakeh (36:4-20). The king's actions demonstrate exemplary godly leadership in crisis. "Rent his clothes" (vayiqra beyadav, וַיִּקְרַע בְּגָדָיו) was a traditional sign of grief, distress, or horror at blasphemy—appropriate given Rabshakeh's mockery of God.

"Covered himself with sackcloth" (vayekhas saq, וַיִּכְסֵּה שֵׂק, וַיִּכְסֵּה שֵׂק) indicates deep mourning and humiliation before God. Sackcloth, coarse goat or camel hair cloth, was worn during times of repentance, mourning, or desperate prayer (Genesis 37:34; Joel 1:13; Jonah 3:5-8). Hezekiah's donning sackcloth showed he recognized the crisis transcended military strategy—this was fundamentally a spiritual battle requiring divine intervention.

Most significantly, he "went into the house of the LORD" (vayabo beit YHWH, וַיָּבֹא בֵּית־יְהוָה)—the Temple in Jerusalem. Rather than immediately convening war councils or sending ambassadors, Hezekiah's first response was worship and prayer. This models appropriate crisis management: acknowledge the severity (torn clothes), humble yourself (sackcloth), and seek God first (Temple). The narrative continues with Hezekiah spreading Rabshakeh's threatening letter before the LORD in prayer (37:14-20), demonstrating faith that God defends His

own glory. God's dramatic deliverance follows (37:36), vindicating Hezekiah's faith. Christ similarly teaches prioritizing God's kingdom in every crisis (Matthew 6:33).

Historical Context

This event occurred in 701 BC during Assyria's invasion of Judah under Sennacherib. The Assyrian Prism (discovered in Nineveh, now in the British Museum) confirms Sennacherib's campaign: "As for Hezekiah the Judahite, who did not submit to my yoke, I besieged 46 of his fortified cities... I took out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female... Himself I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem." Assyrian reliefs depict the siege of Lachish, Judah's second-largest city.

Hezekiah had rebelled against Assyria (2 Kings 18:7) after paying tribute for years. When Sennacherib invaded, Hezekiah initially tried appeasement, stripping Temple and palace treasures to pay tribute (2 Kings 18:14-16). But Assyria demanded unconditional surrender and blasphemously mocked Yahweh, comparing Him to defeated gods of other nations. This pushed the crisis beyond political into spiritual realms—God's honor was at stake.

Hezekiah's resort to prayer contrasts with his father Ahaz, who faced a similar crisis but trusted Assyria rather than God (2 Kings 16:7-9; Isaiah 7:1-13). Hezekiah's faith bore fruit: God sent one angel who destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (37:36). Sennacherib retreated and was later assassinated by his sons (37:38). This miraculous deliverance became a defining moment in Judah's history, demonstrating that God fights for those who trust Him (2 Chronicles 32:7-8).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does Hezekiah's immediate response to crisis teach about proper priorities when facing overwhelming challenges?
2. How can believers today practice the principle of taking problems directly to God before pursuing human solutions?
3. What role does humility (symbolized by sackcloth) play in effective prayer, especially in national or community crises?
4. How does Hezekiah's faith contrast with his father Ahaz's reliance on political alliances, and what lessons apply today?
5. In what ways does this historical deliverance foreshadow God's ultimate deliverance through Christ from sin and death?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּהְיֶה י'	כָּשָׁמָּה עַ	הָמָּה לֶךְ	חֲזָקִי הוּ	וַיִּקְרַב עַ	אֶת
H1961	heard	And it came to pass when king	Hezekiah	it that he rent	H853
	H8085	H4428	H2396	H7167	
בְּגָדָיו	וַיִּתְּכֵהוּ	בַּשָּׂק	וַיֵּבֶ אֶ	בֵּית	
his clothes	and covered	himself with sackcloth	and went	into the house	
H899	H3680	H8242	H935	H1004	
יְהוָה:					
of the LORD					
H3068					