

Isaiah Series Part 11

Chapter 36

“When the World Mocks Our Faith”
God’s People are tested by fear

Introduction

The human heart knows what it feels like to be surrounded — to face situations where fear and faith collide.

Perhaps it's the voice of the doctor with bad news, the critic who mocks your convictions, or the culture that scoffs at your faith in Christ.

In Isaiah 36, Judah stands at that very crossroads. The mighty Assyrian Empire, led by King Sennacherib, has swept across the landscape like a storm, leaving devastation in its wake. Forty-six cities of Judah have already fallen. Only Jerusalem remains — small, vulnerable, and trembling.

Setting the Stage: History and Context

A. The Historical Crisis

Assyrian Invasion (701 B.C.) – Sennacherib of Assyria invades Judah after conquering the fortified cities (2 Kings 18:13).

Hezekiah's Reform – Hezekiah had trusted in the Lord, removing idols and reforming worship (2 Kings 18:1–6).

Political Background – Judah had briefly joined an anti-Assyrian coalition with Egypt and others, contrary to Isaiah's warnings (cf. Isa. 30–31).

Spiritual Background – This confrontation reveals whether Hezekiah's faith is political strategy or genuine trust in Yahweh.

Setting the Stage: History and Context

B. The Key Figures

Hezekiah – King of Judah, symbol of faith under pressure.

Sennacherib – King of Assyria, representing worldly arrogance and power.

Rabshakeh – The Assyrian field commander (title, not a name); spokesman for propaganda and intimidation.

Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah – Royal officials sent to meet the Assyrian envoy, reflecting the king's anxiety and diplomacy.

Setting the Stage: History and Context

Discussion Point:

How does the political fear of Assyria mirror the church's temptation to trust in worldly alliances rather than divine faithfulness?

The Voice of Intimidation: Rabshakeh's Speech (36:2-20)

A. The Psychological Warfare of Words (vv. 2–10)

Rabshakeh stands **by the conduit of the upper pool**—the very place Isaiah once met Ahaz (Isa. 7:3)—a deliberate echo showing a test of faith two generations later (Motyer). He mocks Judah's confidence, saying: "What is this confidence that you have?" (v. 4) "On whom do you rely?" (v. 5)

False Options Offered:

Trust in Egypt – "That broken reed" (v. 6).

Trust in God – Twisted argument: since Hezekiah removed the high places, he offended God (v. 7).

Oswalt notes: *The enemy often uses half-truths to undermine full obedience.*

The Voice of Intimidation: Rabshakeh's Speech (36:2-20)

B. The Public Appeal to Fear (vv. 11–20)

Rabshakeh switches from diplomacy to **psychological intimidation**, shouting in Hebrew so the people can hear (v. 11–13).

Promises of False Security:

“Make peace with me ... and eat your own vine and fig tree” (v. 16).

“Do not let Hezekiah deceive you” (v. 14).

He blasphemes by comparing Yahweh to the gods of other nations (vv. 18–20).

Motyer observes: The Assyrian propaganda seeks to “redefine reality” — a world without the living God.

The Voice of Intimidation: Rabshakeh's Speech (36:2-20)

Discussion Point:

How do the “voices” of our culture today echo Rabshakeh—questioning God’s power, offering comfort through compromise, and ridiculing covenant faith?



The Response of Faith: Silence and Obedience (36:21-22)

A. The People's Silence (v. 21)

“But they were silent and answered him not, for the king's command was, ‘Do not answer him.’”

This restraint marks faith's maturity—**trusting God to defend His name**, not human argument.

Oswalt: *Hezekiah's silence is the silence of faith, the pause before prayer.*

The Response of Faith: Silence and Obedience (36:21-22)

B. The Messengers' Distress (v. 22)

- The officials tear their clothes—a sign of mourning and recognition of blasphemy.
- Their report to Hezekiah sets the stage for Isaiah 37, where **Hezekiah turns to the Lord**.

Discussion Point:

When faced with ridicule or fear, do we react defensively or retreat prayerfully? How does silence sometimes become an act of faith?

Theological Reflection

- **Faith Tested in Crisis** – God allows His people's trust to be tested in the same place where faith once failed (compare Ahaz in Isa. 7).
- **The Power of Words** – The battle of faith is often fought through rhetoric, ideology, and persuasion.
- **The Nature of Trust** – Hezekiah models dependence on divine deliverance, not alliances or arguments.
- **God's Sovereignty Over Nations** – The chapter builds toward Yahweh's vindication in Isaiah 37

Conclusion

The chapter ends, not with victory, but with silence. Hezekiah's officials return to the king with torn clothes, and the people keep quiet before the taunts of the Assyrian general.

Sometimes faith's greatest act of courage is not what we say, but what we refuse to say. The people's silence is not defeat — it's discipline. It is the calm before prayer, the hush before heaven speaks.

Hezekiah will soon lay this insult before the Lord in the temple (37:14), and the same God who once silenced Pharaoh will again silence Sennacherib.