

READING PLAN WEEK 6 for The Epic of Eden – Isaiah
Hezekiah and the “Poster Child” of Biblical Archaeology

Word from the Author: The early years of Judah’s King Hezekiah’s reign are marked by economic successes, rapid demographic growth, patronage of the arts, and an exceptional alliance with the priesthood resulting in unprecedented religious reform. Hezekiah is portrayed throughout the Bible as a reformer and a hero, a portrait that comes to us animated by more material culture than any other single event in biblical history.

Day #1: Read Isaiah 36. This is a high intensity scene as Sennacherib (sun-ACK-a-rib) the new king of Assyria continues his campaign to overtake Israel’s territories. We see him, through his mouthpiece Rabshakeh mounting what can best be described as psychological warfare. Pay close attention to the words of ridicule uttered at Hezekiah’s representatives and, indeed, his onlooking people. If you were one of Judah’s citizens hearing this, how would you be affected? Look especially in verses 13-20 and the “do not” phrases of Assyria’s leader, uttered in the language of Judah’s people. If you were standing there, would you be able to respond (or not) as the people did?

Day #2: In our last session, we looked carefully at Ahaz, a decidedly faithless king of the Northern kingdom who, though aware of Yahweh’s promises of protection and providence, chose to follow bad counsel - and his people suffered the consequences. Here, in the face of a most intimidating challenge, Hezekiah makes quite a different choice. For a compelling comparison of the two contrasting experiences, the following reading is recommended; **Isaiah 7** for Ahaz’s situation; for Hezekiah’s situation, **Isaiah 36 (which you read on Day 1) and 37**. When you read these, compare and contrast a) the king’s situation, b) Isaiah’s word on the matter, c) the king’s response, and, finally, d) God’s response.

Day #3: Read (again, if you read it on Day 2) Isaiah 37:10-20. In some ways, Rabshakeh is correct in observing the fate of the nations conquered (and their associated gods and kings). In these verses, Rabshakeh reiterates his daunting words and points to Assyria’s overwhelming success in their conquests to date. Hezekiah takes a decidedly bold action in response. Focusing on the actual object of Rabshakeh’s ridicule, Yahweh himself, he takes the matter to Yahweh through Isaiah, His prophet. Why does Hezekiah want Yahweh to deliver Judah (see verse 20)?

This week’s reflection question: Throughout the centuries what has made the Jews and the Christians the target of abuse is that we have dared to announce that our God is the only God. Of all the things we might affirm as Christians, this is the bedrock, our anchor. Even today, this is actually martyr territory. As you reflect on this week’s reading plan, give thought to the ways the world and the enemy of our souls challenges us to abandon that core tenet of our faith; the first commandment (“You shall have no other gods before me”). Have a quick look at the very familiar words of the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 4:12) and encourage your heart and soul to be not just affirmed, but refreshed, in this indelible truth. In whom does our faith rest?

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