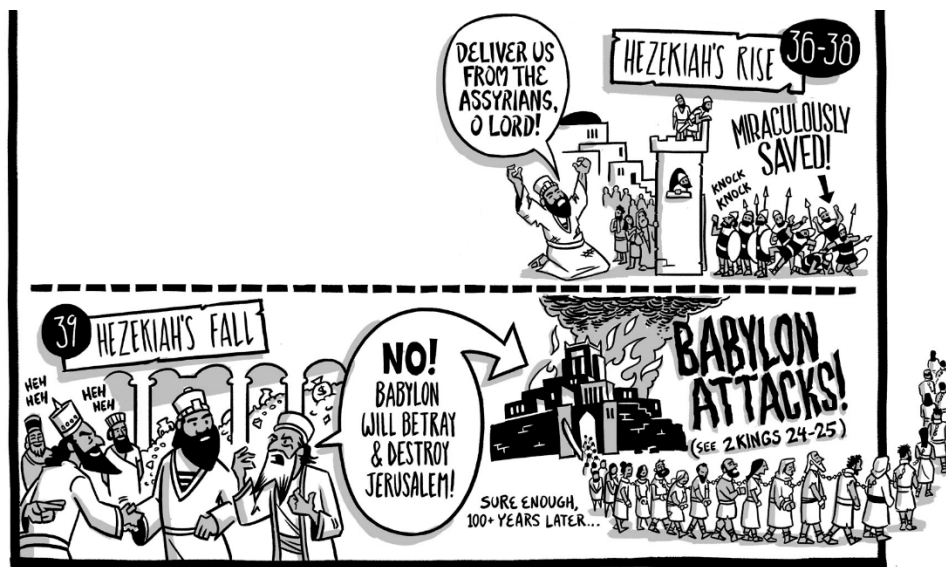


## Rel A 304 Reading Questions for Thursday, October 19

Isaiah 36–39

“When God Delivers, He Comes with Arms Full” [video], The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://youtu.be/OS2kMZu5Sds>.

Today we’re finishing up the final chapters in the first of the two major halves of Isaiah. These chapters present a narrative about the Rabshakeh’s taunts, Isaiah’s counsel, Hezekiah’s test of faith, and Jehovah’s rescue of the righteous remnant. They also tell the story of Hezekiah’s illness and recovery and his subsequent dealings with ambassadors from Babylon.



At this point you might be thinking, “Wait, this all sounds familiar ...” That’s because earlier in the semester you read 2 Kings 18–20, which is almost exactly the same as Isaiah 36–39. There are three schools of thought on how this happened:

- 1) Isaiah 36–39 was written first and was later incorporated into 2 Kings; or
- 2) 2 Kings 18–20 was written first and was later incorporated into Isaiah; or
- 3) an independent text about Hezekiah and Isaiah was written and was later incorporated into both 2 Kings and Isaiah.

Among scholars, the majority position is (2), with (1) considered the least likely option. That’s because these chapters are quite different from the rest of Isaiah but fit really well in 2 Kings. So the usual theory is that someone editing the book of Isaiah recognized that 2 Kings 18–20 was a great narrative illustration of the events Isaiah was prophesying and talking about, so that editor copied that narrative into the book of Isaiah.

Although 2 Kings 18–20 and Isaiah 36–39 are parallel, they’re not exactly the same. Here’s how these two versions of the Hezekiah story line up:

2 Kings 18:1–12	
2 Kings 18:13	Isaiah 36:1
2 Kings 18:14–16	
2 Kings 18:17–20:6	Isaiah 36:2–38:6
2 Kings 20:7–8	Isaiah 38:21–22 (out of order)
2 Kings 20:9–11	Isaiah 38:7–8
	Isaiah 38:9–20
2 Kings 20:12–19	Isaiah 39:1–8
2 Kings 20:20–21	

So, notice that the version in Isaiah skips most of the background about Hezekiah's reign and also skips the part where Hezekiah sends all the temple treasures to Sennacherib in hopes of paying his way out of the invasion. The Isaiah version jumps pretty quickly into the story of the Rabshakeh. The Isaiah version also adds twelve verses (Isaiah 38:9–20, containing Hezekiah's psalm of thanksgiving) that are not in the 2 Kings version.

1. Isaiah 36–39 is almost exactly the same as 2 Kings 18–20. Do most scholars think that 2 Kings 18–20 was written first and later copied into Isaiah, or that Isaiah 36–39 was written first and later copied into 2 Kings?

### **Assyria Destroys Most of Judah and Sieges Jerusalem (36:1–22)**

This section contains the propaganda speech by the Rabshakeh and is a lightly modified version of 2 Kings 18:13, 17–37.

2. Even if we go with the theory that Isaiah 36–39 were copied into the book of Isaiah from 2 Kings 18–20, these chapters contain important links to earlier chapters in Isaiah. One example is the connection between Isaiah 7:3 and Isaiah 36:2. In both passages, kings are given an important message regarding trusting Jehovah that is delivered at “the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.” That repeated phrase invites us to read these two stories in conversation with one another. Who is the king in Isaiah 7, and how did he react to the message? Who is the king in Isaiah 36, and how did he react to the message? What do you think we are supposed to learn by contrasting the reaction of each king?
3. In the Rabshakeh's speech on trust, he mocks the people of Judah because “thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him.” This taunt is found in the original version of this story from 2 Kings 18, but you can appreciate the weight of it

even better here in the book of Isaiah. Go back and skim through Isaiah's prophecies in Isaiah 19:1–15, Isaiah 20:1–6, Isaiah 30:1–7, and Isaiah 31:1–9. How does the Rabshakeh's assessment of Egyptian military aid compare to what Isaiah had been saying all along?

### **Hezekiah Receives Two Conflicting Messages (37:1–13)**

This section contains Isaiah's short prophecy of salvation and the Rabshakeh's letter of doom. It is a lightly modified version of 2 Kings 19:1–13.

4. In Hezekiah's petition to Isaiah, he asks Isaiah to "lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left." That line is in the original version of this story from 2 Kings 19, but placed here in the book of Isaiah it carries additional weight. In the context of the book of Isaiah, readers are more aware that the prophet had been warning for years that if Judah did not repent that they would be reduced to a remnant. According to Isaiah 6:13, what percentage of the people were expected to survive?

### **Hezekiah Chooses to Trust in God (37:14–20)**

This section describes Hezekiah's prayer in the temple and is a lightly modified version of 2 Kings 19:14–19.

### **Consequences of Hezekiah Choosing to Trust in God (37:21–35)**

This section contains Isaiah's long prophecy of salvation in response to Hezekiah's expression of faith. It is a lightly modified version of 2 Kings 19:20–34.

5. In Jehovah's long revelation to Isaiah, He promises that "the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward: for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion." That promise is in the original version of this story from 2 Kings 19, but you can appreciate the significance of it even better here in the book of Isaiah. Go back and skim through Isaiah's prophecies in Isaiah 4:2–6, Isaiah 6:13, Isaiah 10:20–23, and Isaiah 11:1–9. How do Isaiah's previous prophecies relate to what the Lord now promises Hezekiah?
6. Even if we go with the theory that Isaiah 36–39 were copied into the book of Isaiah from 2 Kings 18–20, these chapters contain important links to earlier chapters in Isaiah. One

example is the line shared by both Isaiah 9:7 (KJV “the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this”) and Isaiah 37:32 (KJV “the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this”—the KJV is slightly different but the Hebrew is exactly the same). That repeated phrase invites us to read these two stories in conversation with one another. Since Isaiah 37:22–35 contains Jehovah’s words to King Hezekiah, how do you think Isaiah 37:32 might help us figure out what’s going on in Isaiah 9:1–7?

### **Jehovah Saves the Remnant (37:36–38)**

This section describes Jehovah saving the righteous remnant and the fulfillment of the prophecy that Sennacherib would die by the sword in his own land. It is a lightly modified version of 2 Kings 19:35–37.

7. Isaiah 37 describes the angel of the Lord striking down the Assyrian soldiers. That report is in the original version of this story from 2 Kings 19, but you can appreciate the significance of it even better here in the book of Isaiah. Go back and skim through Isaiah’s prophecies in Isaiah 10:5–19, Isaiah 10:24–34, Isaiah 14:24–27, and Isaiah 30:27–33. How do Isaiah’s previous prophecies find fulfillment in what the Lord now does to the Assyrian army?

### **A Flashback to Hezekiah’s Earlier Illness (38:1–22)**

This section describes Hezekiah’s illness and recovery. Verses 9–20 is a new text not found in 2 Kings and contains Hezekiah’s psalm of thanksgiving for having been healed. Verses 1–6 are parallel to 2 Kings 20:1–6, but verses 4–6 read a bit differently, as do verses 7–8, which read differently than their parallel in 2 Kings 20:9–11. The strangest difference is that two verses, found in 2 Kings 20:7–8, not only read a bit differently, but they have been moved to the end of the story and now appear in Isaiah 38:21–22, rather than where you would expect them between Isaiah 38:6 and 38:7. This creates the rather odd situation that part of Hezekiah and Isaiah’s conversation before Hezekiah is healed unexpectedly appears at the end of the chapter after we read of Hezekiah’s gratitude that the healing has happened. English translations typically render the opening lines of Isaiah 38:21–22 with the English past participle (“had said”) in order to make this fit the context better, but the Hebrew actually reads the same as 2 Kings 20:7–8 (“said”). We are not sure how these two verses jumped to the end of the story like this, but one theory is that the original editor who copied 2 Kings 20:1–11 into Isaiah wanted to avoid having Hezekiah ask for a sign, so that editor skipped vv. 7–8. Later, someone copying Isaiah 38 noticed the two “missing” verses and decided to tack them onto the end of the chapter, where they remain to this day.

8. In Hezekiah's psalm, he expresses the great "bitterness of my soul" in vv. 10–16, and then reflects on his experience in vv. 17–20. In v. 17, Hezekiah says, "*hinneh leshalom mar-li mar*," which literally means, "Behold/indeed to/for peace/well-being bitterness to/for me bitterness." Here are some different translations into English:

KJV	"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness"
Class translation	"Surely it was for my own good that the bitterness was so bitter to me"
NIV	"Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish"
NET	"Look, the grief I experienced was for my benefit"
NRSVue	"Surely it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness"

What do you think of this idea? Have you ever had circumstances that were gut-wrenchingly awful when you experienced them, but later you could see some value in the experience? Why do you think God allows us to go through these bitter experiences?

### Hezekiah's Mistake Prefigures the Babylonian Exile (39:1–8)

This section describes Hezekiah's encounter with the ambassadors from Babylon and is a lightly modified version of 2 Kings 20:12–19.

Many scholars believe that this final part of Hezekiah's story may be the reason 2 Kings 18–20 was placed at this particular position in the book of Isaiah (in between Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 40). As you will recall, Isaiah 1–39 mostly deals with the Assyrian crises of the late 700s BC, such as the Syro-Ephramite War and Sennacherib's invasion. However, Isaiah 40–66 jump forward in time a good 150 years into the middle of the 500s BC, when the Jews are already in captivity in Babylon. Because 2 Kings 20 (and now Isaiah 39) ends with Isaiah prophesying about the Babylonian exile, the editor who copied 2 Kings 18–20 into the book of Isaiah may have seen this prophecy as providing a literary bridge from the first half of Isaiah into the second half of Isaiah. By arranging the stories in this order, you finish Isaiah 39 with a prophecy of exile in Babylon, and then right after that in Isaiah 40 you're reading about the exile itself. That's a really smooth transition that helps link together all these chapters set in two different time periods.

9. What's the connection between Isaiah 39 (copied from 2 Kings 20) and Isaiah 40? According to many Isaiah scholars, why did the editor who inserted 2 Kings 18–20 into the book of Isaiah decide to place these chapters at this spot in the book?
10. As we have seen in Isaiah 1–39, Isaiah spent years telling the people of Judah what was going to happen and what they needed to do to prepare. He predicted the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, the chaos that would engulf Egypt, the destruction of Moab, Jehovah's miraculous rescue of a righteous remnant in

Jerusalem, the murder of Sennacherib in his own land, and more. Most people did not listen to the Lord's prophet, and the consequences were grave. Latter-day Saints believe in a living prophet who speaks for Jehovah just like Isaiah did. Like Isaiah, President Russell M. Nelson prophesies both terrible and wonderful things. For example, [he taught](#), "In coming days, we will see the *greatest* manifestations of the Savior's power that the world has *ever* seen. Between now and the time He returns 'with power and great glory' [Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:36], He will bestow countless privileges, blessings, and miracles upon the faithful." Has President Nelson given any warnings, instructions, or predictions that have been significant to you? How has his counsel blessed your life, or what might you need to do to act on his counsel more fully?

**"When God Delivers, He Comes with Arms Full" [video], The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://youtu.be/OS2kMZu5Sds>.**

Isaiah 36–39 tells a story of deliverance. Most of us today don't need to be rescued from an invading army, but although our challenges happen on a smaller scale, they are no less important to us. This video shares one man's experience with God's power in our lives.