

# Book of Isaiah



## Chapter 36

*Theme: Hezekiah and Assyria*

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## Chapter 36

### **Historical Parenthesis (Chapter 35-39)**

Narrative (parallels 2 Kings 18:9-21:16).

One Isaiah, but two different stylistic renderings, style will change drastically in Chapter 40. Plenty of evidence which shows the book to be of a unified design, clearly one Isaiah. 2 Chronicles 32-33 are also of this period.<sup>1</sup>

### **Historical Context**

Ahaz was a bad king; his successor was Hezekiah whom Isaiah served. In general, Hezekiah did well, in that he tore down the idols throughout the land and reestablished worship to the true living God in Jerusalem. This was misunderstood by his enemies. Hezekiah's anxiety comes from the imminent attack by the Assyrians, lead by Sennacherib. A major motivation in the battles of this day was the victory over foreign gods, proving conquering nation's god/idol was "better" than loser's god. Hezekiah had paid to be left alone, yet this was ignored by the Assyrians so Hezekiah turns to Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had come down like a flood from the north, taking everything in his wake. He had captured every nation and city that stood in his path, or they had capitulated to him. Flushed with victory, he appears with the Assyrian hosts before the walls of Jerusalem. He is surprised and puzzled that Hezekiah would attempt to resist him. He seeks for some explanation, as Hezekiah must have some secret weapon. Rab-shakeh, his representative, ridicules all known possibilities of aid. Arrogantly he demands unconditional surrender. The chapter closes with the terms and threats reported to Hezekiah.<sup>3</sup>

The historical material in these chapters concerns two events which are foundational to a proper understanding of Isaiah's theology and Judah's history. The first event (chaps. 36-37) concerns the Assyrian threat which God miraculously dissipated. This event climaxes Isaiah's argument in chapters 1-35. In those chapters he had argued that God brought the Assyrians into Judah as a punishment for Judah's sins and as a catalyst to turn them back to Him. However, he had prophesied that Jerusalem would not fall to the Assyrians and that God would miraculously destroy the Assyrian army because of their pride.

The second event (chaps. 38-39) concerned Hezekiah's breach of the covenant when he was delivered by God from death but then allowed pride to enter his heart. This event serves as a foundation for chapters 40-66 which speak of the deliverance from the Babylonian Captivity prophesied in 39:5-8.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

<sup>2</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

<sup>3</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>4</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The biblical account in Isaiah 36-39 is obviously a condensed account of many events that though contemporary were stretched out over a number of years with other events overlapping these as well.

It will take some thorough study of these events before one will conclude that the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib took place, not in the 14th year, but in the very last years of Hezekiah's 29 year reign, which began six years before the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE and ended about 698 BCE. The miracle of the sun dial recorded in Isaiah 38 added 15 years to Hezekiah's life. It occurred therefore in the 14th year of Hezekiah's 29 year reign. ( $29-15=14$ ). Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem probably took place after 701 BCE which would have been the 27th or 28th year of the reign of Hezekiah. Now read on to see why this has to be so.

The text seems to say that the siege took place in the 14th year of Hezekiah. (Isaiah 36:1ff) There is no hope at present of harmonizing the biblical chronology with the Assyrian historical sources if the 14th year of Hezekiah is coincident with the invasion of Sennacherib (during which the siege of Lachish, which just preceded the siege of Jerusalem,) took place. If the biblical account means that in the 14th year of Hezekiah Sennacherib sent Rab Shakah to announce the coming siege which followed shortly after, then there is a hopeless problem in the chronology.

However the siege of Jerusalem is not the beginning of the interaction of Assyrian kings which precipitated the events that are outlined in the biblical documents as being a part of this period. There is a lengthy preliminary period of appeasement of Assyria by Hezekiah and diplomacy which preceded the actual invasion. There is also a lengthy period of preparation for the inevitable attack on Jerusalem. It is in this light perhaps that the discrepancy may be answered. From the first attempt to subject Hezekiah to Assyrian oversight, until the invasion, followed by the siege, there are several years that had to transpire, perhaps enough to make up the discrepancy because the 14th year of Hezekiah is only 8 years after the fall of Samaria in 722 BC (2Ki 18:10) which would make the Bible chronology of these events begin in 716 or 715 BC. Rawlinson gives the years 714 or 713 BC and notes that Sargon was succeeded by Sennacherib, his son, in 705 and he did not invade Palestine until 701 BC. Hence this is at least 11 or 12 years after the 14th year of Hezekiah. The text in 2 Chronicles 32:1-9 indicates that many preparations, including the building of water courses, aqueducts and the Gihon to Siloam tunnel dug through solid rock, (see chapter 22) were started and completed before the siege because of the initial invasion of Sennacherib. The invasion in 701 BC that included the siege of Lachish is much too close to the siege of Jerusalem to have afforded time to complete the vast public works programs which Sennacherib's threats caused Hezekiah to put in motion. Thus, the preparations for the impending attack by the Assyrians occupied a lengthy period. of time<sup>5</sup>

This section demonstrates Hezekiah's commitment to God, but the next one (37:8-35) shows an even stronger commitment by the king to commit his own fate and the fate of his people to God. The present section stresses Assyrian pride and its result: divine judgment (cf. 10:15-19). Isaiah did not record Hezekiah's attempt to buy off Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:13-16), probably because he wanted to focus on the Judean king's good example of trusting God.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/36-39.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

**<sup>1</sup>Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them.**

Other cities of Judah fallen.

[**Now it came to pass ...**] This chapter begins the historical interlude between the two main sections of prophecies of Isaiah -- Isa. 1 -- Isa. 35 and Isa.40 -- 66. Isa. 36 -- 39 records the history of the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, king of Assyria (Isa. 36:1 -- Isa. 37:35), his defeat (Isa. 37:36-38), the sickness and recovery of Hezekiah (Isa. 38), and his folly (Isa. 39). Compare 2Ki. 18:13 -- 2Ki. 20:19.

[**fourteenth year**] This was eight years after Samaria had been destroyed and the ten tribes taken into Assyrian captivity (2Ki. 17; 18:10).

[**king Hezekiah**] See 2Ki. 18:1 -- 2Ki. 20:21; 2Chr. 29:1 -- 2Chr. 32:33.

[defenced cities of Judah, and took them] All cities except Jerusalem, which God delivered supernaturally (Isa. 37:7,33-38).<sup>7</sup>

You will recall that Isaiah began his prophetic ministry when King Uzziah died, and he continued it through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and now Hezekiah. Hezekiah was one of the five great kings of Judah. During the reigns of these five kings (Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah) revival came to the land of Judah. Hezekiah was actually a great king. 2Chronicles 29:1-2 tells us, "Hezekiah began to reign when he was five and twenty years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done."

Although Hezekiah was a good king, he exhibited weakness when he attempted to stave off the invasion of Jerusalem by bribing Sennacherib (see 2Kings 18:13-16). He stripped the gold and silver from the temple to meet the exorbitant demands of the king of Assyria. It was to no avail, however, as the army of Assyria was outside the gates of Jerusalem. Payment did not help at all. This policy was not something new then, and it is still with us. Our nation, since World War II, has followed a very weak policy. We have used the almighty dollar to try to buy friends throughout the world, and we don't have many friends today. You cannot get friends by buying them. Our problem is that we haven't learned who our real Friend is. He is the One to whom Hezekiah finally had to turn, the Lord God.<sup>8</sup>

**1-3** This attack occurred in 701 b.c. This was the 14th year of... Hezekiah's sole reign (cf. 2 Kings 18:13), which began in 715. Some scholars have proposed that Sennacherib (705-681) made several attacks against Jerusalem, but extrabiblical evidence does not seem to support that view. Sennacherib boasted of taking 46 walled villages in Judah. He went from the north along the coast defeating (among others) the towns of Aphek, Timnah, Ekron, and Lachish. Lachish was then his staging area for attacking a number of other towns. From Lachish he sent a large army against Jerusalem to surround it and to demand its surrender.

The Assyrian commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. Besides setting the stage geographically, that information has theological significance. Ahaz had faced the Aram-Israel challenge at that same place (Isa. 7:3). Isaiah had told Ahaz that he would not fall to his enemy, that the Lord would deliver him. But Ahaz had

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<sup>7</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>8</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

refused to believe the man of God. Now Hezekiah was also confronted with a message of deliverance from the same man of God. The geographic notation heightened the tension over the question of whether Hezekiah would respond positively to the Word of God. Eliakim... Shebna... and Joah (cf. 22:20; 36:11, 22; 37:2) were chosen to negotiate with the Assyrians. These men, in important positions, were trusted by Hezekiah.<sup>9</sup>

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah: This is about the years 700 B.C., during the reign of the godly King Hezekiah of Judah. The events of this chapter are also recorded in 2 Kings 18:13-27 and 2 Chronicles 32:1-19.

This begins a four-chapter section different than the prophecies recorded before or after. Isaiah 36, 37 describe the LORD's work against the Assyrian threat. Isaiah 38, 39 describe the response to the Babylonian threat.

"This is history at its best, not dull recital of statistics and dates but an account which enables us to sense the haughty arrogance of the Assyrian and the chilling clutch of despair at the hearts of the Israelites." (Cundall, cited in Grogan)

This Assyrian invasion has been the broad background for much of the Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah chapters 1 through 35. Now, Isaiah gives us a historical record of what happened during the time he prophesied about.

The Assyrian army swept down from the north, conquering Syria and Israel, as Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 8:3-4 and many other passages. The Assyrian army then came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them, as Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 7:16-17 and many other passages<sup>10</sup>

**<sup>2</sup>And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.**

"Rabshakeh" - not a name, but a title of the chief officer under the king of Assyria, sent to intimidate and request surrender from Judah.

Lachish - field capital (actually capital was Ninevah).<sup>11</sup>

**[Rabshakeh]** Rabshakeh, head of the cup bearers. He was sent to lead the Assyrian expedition against Jerusalem (Isa. 36:2-4, 11-22; 37:4-8; 2Ki. 18:17-37; 19:4-8).

**[stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field]** The same place Isaiah stood with Ahaz about 28 years before (Isa. 7:3).<sup>12</sup>

Rabbi: The word is used often of the Assyrian officials and is written as a separate word in the Hebrew text. It means "Great one." It is altogether an Assyrian appellation and was passed on to the Babylonians. After the Babylonian captivity it was appropriated by Jewish teachers who called themselves and others Rabbi or simply Rab when addressing the master teacher to whom

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<sup>9</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>

<sup>11</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

<sup>12</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

the label was given. The Hebrew is simply (Rab) as the names appear in the Hebrew text here and 2 Ki. 18:17. e.g. (Rab Saris and Rab Shekah)<sup>13</sup>

Sennacherib did not condescend to come personally, but instead he sent an army under Rabshakeh. They are parked now outside the gates of Jerusalem, and General Rabshakeh is attempting to put fear into the hearts of Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem so that they will surrender. Hezekiah sent out a delegation to meet with him.<sup>14</sup>

**<sup>3</sup>Then came forth unto him Eliakim, Hilkiah's son, which was over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, Asaph's son, the recorder.**

Eliakim and Shebna were sent out of the city to meet with the Assyrians.

Shebna, may not be the same as the Shebna of Isa 22:15.

Hezekiah sent forth this embassy of three to receive the terms offered by Sennacherib.<sup>15</sup>

**<sup>4</sup>And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?**

**[great king]** This was the customary title of the kings of the Assyrians and Persians.<sup>16</sup>

Rabshakeh arrogantly expresses surprise that Hezekiah would even dare resist, and he wants to know about the secret weapon in which Hezekiah trusts. He suggests first of all that it might be Egypt.<sup>17</sup>

**4-6** Chapter 19 describes Isaiah's prophecy of judgment upon Egypt, while chapters 30 and 31 pronounce woe on those from Judah who would ally themselves with Egypt in the face of Assyria's impending attack. Sennacherib of Assyria was taunting Judah for trusting in Egypt. Even the Assyrians knew that Egypt could not help Judah.<sup>18</sup>

**4-7** The field commander was the main Assyrian spokesman. According to 2 Kings 18:17 two other leading officials were with him. (The kjv and nasb translate "field commander" by "Rabshekah," as if the word were a proper name. This, however, is probably not correct.) As a representative of the Assyrian Empire, his words of mockery characterized the whole empire. In speaking for the Assyrian king the field commander asked the Jerusalemites whom they were depending on for victory (Isa. 36:4-5). To depend on Egypt would be like leaning on a splintered reed—it would do no good and would even be harmful. Amazingly this was what Isaiah had

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/36-39.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>15</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>16</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>17</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>18</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

been saying about Egypt. The odds were overwhelmingly against the people of Jerusalem who had no means of escape for thousands of enemy troops were surrounding them. The commander then said that it would be foolish to depend on God (v. 7). Apparently this commander had heard of Hezekiah's partial reforms (2 Kings 18; 2 Chron. 31) in which he had removed the high places, sites of worship on hills throughout Judah. The commander did not really understand the situation for he may have thought that Hezekiah was no longer depending on God since he had removed many altars from the land, leaving only one altar in Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup>

What is the confidence in which you trust? One of the great battles for Hezekiah during this time was the temptation to make a defensive alliance with Egypt, which seemed to be the only nation strong enough to protect Judah against the mighty Assyrians.

As a prophet, Isaiah did everything he could to discourage Hezekiah and the leaders of Judah from putting their trust in Egypt (Isaiah 19:11-17; Isa\_20:1-6; Isa\_30:1-7). The LORD wanted Judah to trust Him instead of Egypt.

In this sense, Rabshakeh is speaking the truth! God wanted Judah to have no confidence in Egypt at all. But Rabshakeh isn't doing it to bring Judah to a firm trust in the LORD God, who can and will deliver them from the Assyrians. He does it to completely demoralize Judah and drive them to despair.

Satan attacks us the same way! Often, even when he tells the truth ("You are such a rotten sinner!"), he never does it to lead us to a firm trust in the LORD our God ("Jesus died for sinners, so if I am a rotten sinner, Jesus died to forgive and free me!"). Instead, Satan's strategy - even if he tells us the truth - is always to demoralize us and drive us to despair.<sup>20</sup>

***<sup>5</sup>I say, sayest thou, (but they are but vain words) I have counsel and strength for war: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me?***

**[rebellest against me]** Hezekiah had rebelled against the king of Assyria by refusing to pay the tribute imposed upon Judah in the days of Ahaz (2Ki. 18:7). He had also trusted in Egypt for help against the Assyrians, but that country could not help him (Isa. 36:6; 30:1-5; 31:1-3).<sup>21</sup>

Hezekiah put great trust in Pharaoh's promise to help Israel against the Assyrians, but promises are only as good as the credibility of the person making them. It was Pharaoh's word against God's. How quickly we seek human advice when dealing with our problems while we neglect God's eternal promises. When choosing between God's Word and someone else's, whose will you believe?<sup>22</sup>

**8-10** To the commander, Jerusalem's only reasonable action was to surrender. Mockingly he even offered to give the Jews 2,000 horses if they could find riders for them to fight against him. But he claimed that even 2,000 could not fight off one Assyrian low-ranking officer. Finalizing his argument, the commander said that the Lord had ordered him to destroy Judah. This was meant to terrorize the people by making them think that God had actually turned against them.

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<sup>19</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>

<sup>21</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>22</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

Of course Isaiah had said that Jerusalem would not fall to the Assyrians, so the commander was wrong.<sup>23</sup>

**6Lo, 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.**

Bruised reed - loses its compressive strength and bends.  
Who do you trust?

[staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it] Egypt is here compared to a broken reed that can no longer be used as a staff or stave (Ezek. 29:6-7). As a reed would break if a man leaned heavily on it, so Egypt would be of no value if Judah leaned on the country's help.<sup>24</sup>

The Assyrian host was then on the way to Egypt to capture that kingdom and was incensed that Jerusalem blocked the way. The facts were that Hezekiah had hoped for help from Egypt as had Ahaz his father before him. But Hezekiah wouldn't get any help from Egypt -- Rab-shakeh was right about that.  
Then he suggests another possibility:<sup>25</sup>

You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt: Strangely, Rabshakeh could see the truth of Egypt's weakness better than many of the leaders of Judah could!  
"Egypt had made its one attempt to redeem its promises (Isaiah 28:14) and its army had been beaten at El Tekeh. The Rab-shakeh had himself seen this, but his words are more far-reaching and damaging, exposing the criminal stupidity of Judah's leaders: surely, he said, they knew that anyone who ever trusted Egypt suffered for it." (Motyer)<sup>26</sup>

**7But if thou say to me, We trust in the LORD our God: is it not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar?**

Rabshakeh is misinformed! Data is correct, yet interpretation is wrong. Hezekiah had torn down all the idols, groves, altars. They misunderstood and thought that he had torn down the field altars to force worship at Jerusalem. They didn't realize the difference in gods and God; thus they thought that the tearing down of altars had offended the gods they worshiped.<sup>27</sup>

The Assyrian king's chief of staff claimed that Hezekiah had insulted God by tearing down his altars and making the people worship only in Jerusalem. But Hezekiah's reform sought to eliminate idol worship (which occurred mainly on high hills) so that the people worshiped only

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<sup>23</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>24</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>25</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>

<sup>27</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

the true God. Either the Assyrians didn't know about the religion of the true God, or they wanted to deceive the people into thinking they had angered a powerful god.

In the same way, Satan tries to confuse or deceive us. People don't necessarily need to be sinful to be ineffective for God; they need only be confused about what God wants. To avoid Satan's deceit, study God's Word carefully and regularly. When you know what God says, you will not fall for Satan's lies.<sup>28</sup>

### **Three arrogant boasts of pagans here:**

1. You have no strength to fight. If I gave you 2,000 horses you wouldn't be able to put riders on them (Isa. 36:5,8).
2. Your trust in Egypt will be like a man leaning on a weak reed that will break (Isa. 36:6).
3. If you trust in the Lord your God, He won't help you, for He is the one who commanded us to come against you (Isa. 36:7,10). Isn't He the one Hezekiah has rebelled against by taking away His altars (Isa. 36:6)?

[is it not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar] Rabshakeh was ignorant of God's nature and what comprised true worship of Him. Hezekiah had removed the high places, destroying idolatry in Judah to a great extent, and had reestablished the true worship of Jehovah (2Ki. 18:4-7; 2Chr. 29:1 -- 2Chr. 31:21); but Rabshakeh mistook the removal of these idols for the removal of God's altars.<sup>29</sup>

Next Rab-shakeh asks, "Is it true that you are depending upon your God?" Here is where his lack of spiritual discernment gave him a wrong cue. He says, "Don't you know that Hezekiah had all the high places destroyed?" He thought the worship at the heathen altars out yonder on those hilltops was the same as the worship of the living God in Jerusalem. He thought Hezekiah had destroyed the worship of the people so that they had no gods to turn to.

Many people today have no spiritual discernment. Every now and then someone will write to me or say, "All churches are the same. They are all striving to get to the same place." These people are like old Rab-shakeh. They don't seem to know the difference. When they say that it does not make any difference what you believe as long as you are sincere, they contradict the words of our Lord. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Now the third possibility suggested by Rab-shakeh reveals the haughty attitude of the Assyrian:<sup>30</sup>

Is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away: Rabshakeh knew that King Hezekiah had implemented broad reforms in Judah, including the removal of the high places (2 Kings 18:3-4).

The high places were spots of "individual worship" which were prohibited by God's law (Leviticus 17:1-4). Israel was commanded to bring their sacrifices to the official center for sacrifice (the tabernacle or later, the temple). In the pagan world at that time, it was customary to

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<sup>28</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>29</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>30</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

offer sacrifice wherever one pleased - altars would customarily be built on high hills, in forested areas, or at other special places.

That practice may have been fine for the time of the patriarchs. But now, God regarded sacrifice at high places as an offense. Hezekiah did right when he took away the high places and the altars, demanding that people come to the temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifice.

This command runs completely contrary to the way most people come to God in our culture. For the most part, Americans have an entirely individualistic way of coming to God, where each person makes up their own rules about dealing with God as they see Him. In the book *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and his colleagues interview a young nurse named Sheila Larson, whom they describe as representing many Americans' experience and views on religion. Speaking about her own faith and how it operates in her life, she says: "I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It is 'Sheilaism.' Just my own little voice." This "pick-and-choose-as-I-go-along-according-to-my-inner-voice" approach is just like picking your own high place and altar to sacrifice to God the way you want to instead of the way God wants you to.<sup>31</sup>

**<sup>8</sup>Now therefore give pledges, I pray thee, to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them.**

Rabshakeh is speaking in Hebrew. Hezekiah's men wish he would speak in Aramaic so the men on the wall would not understand the remarks being made about the army (see v. 11-12).<sup>32</sup>

[give pledges, I pray thee, to my master the king of Assyria] Renew your vows to the king of Assyria and pay tribute. Submit to him and live in peace until we remove you to another land as good as this one (Isa. 36:8-12).

[I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them] Judah was belittled by the implication that they couldn't supply riders to 2,000 free horses.<sup>33</sup>

Give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria: This reminds us of Rabshakeh's whole strategy, which is to make Judah give up. This is the entire reason Rabshakeh is at the aqueduct, speaking to these leaders of Hezekiah's government. He had the vastly superior armies; he could have just attacked Jerusalem without this little speech. But Rabshakeh would prefer it if Judah would simply give up, out of fear, discouragement, or despair.

The enemy of our soul uses the exact same approach. Many of us picture Satan as "itching for a fight" with us. Really, Satan doesn't want to do battle with you. First of all, there is the strong chance you will win. Second of all, win or lose, the battle can draw you closer to the LORD. Thirdly, what the LORD does in your life through the battle can be a great blessing for other people. No, Satan would much rather not fight you at all! He would much rather try to talk you into giving up!

We see this exact strategy used against Jesus during His temptation in the wilderness. When Satan promised Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for Jesus' worship, Satan was

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>

<sup>32</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, [khouse.org](http://khouse.org)

<sup>33</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

trying to avoid the fight, and trying to talk Jesus into giving up (Luke 4:5-8). It didn't work with Jesus, and it shouldn't work with us.

I will give you two thousand horses - if you are able on your part to put riders on them! Here, Rabshakeh mocks Judah's weak army. He says, "Even if we helped you with 2,000 horses, it wouldn't do you any good." His basic message is, "We could beat you with one hand tied behind our backs!" (How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants).<sup>34</sup>

**<sup>9</sup>How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?**

[one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen] Why resist such a great king? I am only one of his captains (who could give you 2,000 horses if you had enough men to put on them), and I am but the least of many. If you cannot oppose me, how do you expect to oppose the entire Assyrian army? The word captain means a governor of a province (1Ki. 10:15; 2Ki. 18:24; Esther 8:9; 9:3; Jer. 51:23).<sup>35</sup>

There was the slim possibility that Hezekiah was depending on his own resources and manpower to defend Jerusalem; so Rab-shakeh offers to make things just about equal by giving Hezekiah two thousand horses! He, of course, is ridiculing them.

The fourth possibility suggested by Rab-shakeh is the most subtle of all:<sup>36</sup>

**<sup>10</sup>And am I now come up without the LORD against this land to destroy it? the LORD said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.**

[LORD said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it] God did put it into the hearts of the Assyrians to overthrow certain countries -- especially the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel (2Ki. 17) -- and to chasten Judah (Isa. 10:32-34), but He did not charge them to destroy Judah. Here they were overstepping their commission, and God was ready to defend Judah (Isa. 37:6-7,21-38).<sup>37</sup>

He suggests that Jehovah of Israel has sent the Assyrian against Jerusalem and that He is therefore on the side of the Assyrian.

It is interesting to note that in World War I the Germans thought God was with them, and we thought God was on our side. I doubt seriously that God was on either side. In this particular case the true God used the Assyrian to destroy His people, but He is not going to let the enemy take Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

Sennacherib continued his demoralization campaign by sending his chief of staff to try to convince the people of Judah that God had turned against them. The Assyrians hoped to convince the people of Judah to surrender without fighting. But Isaiah had already said that the

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.studyLight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>

<sup>35</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>36</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>37</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>38</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Assyrians would not destroy Jerusalem, so the people did not need to be afraid of them (10:24-27; 29:5-8).<sup>39</sup>

The LORD said to me, “Go up against this land, and destroy it.” This is the finishing blow of a brilliant attack. “Hezekiah, God told me to destroy you. I’m just doing His will, and there is nothing you can do to stop it, so you may as well surrender.”

Significantly, we can say that Rabshekah was partially correct! God was with him, and his attack on Judah fulfilled God’s prophesied plan! In conquering Syria, in conquering Israel, and in bringing Judah to the brink, the Assyrians did the will of God! God prophesied that all this would happen (Isaiah 8:3-4; Isa\_7:16-17 and many other passages in Isaiah). He allowed it to happen so His prophesied plan would be fulfilled.

However, we should never think that God tempted an innocent man with an evil plan. In fact, even though God predicted and planned this invasion of the Assyrians, Rabshakeh may have been lying indeed when he said, “The LORD said to me.” God did not have to do anything special to direct the bloodthirsty, conquest-hungry Assyrians to attack Syria, Israel, and Judah. He simply allowed the Assyrians to carry out the corrupt desires of their evil hearts. Therefore, the Assyrians could never excuse themselves by saying, “We were doing the LORD’s will!” even as Judas could never make that excuse regarding his wicked betrayal of Jesus.<sup>40</sup>

**11Then said Eliakim and Shebna and Joah unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and speak not to us in the Jews’ language, in the ears of the people that *are* on the wall.**

Hezekiah's ambassadors pleaded with these pagans not to speak in the language of the Jews on the wall, lest their resistance be weakened.

The word Jew began to be used about this time to denote the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through the 12 sons of Jacob. It was never used before Isaiah's time; the first use was in the reign of Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah (2Ki. 16:6). The next use is here when the request was made for the pagans not to speak in the Jews' language (Isa. 36:11; 2Ki. 18:26-28; 2Chr. 32:18). The word was used only one other time in the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2Samuel, 1 and 2Kings, and 1 and 2Chronicles (2Ki. 25:25). Thus it was used only 5 times in the first 14 books of the Bible. It is used eight times in Ezra (Ezra 4:12,23; 5:1,5; 6:7-14); then 11 Times in Nehemiah (Neh. 1:2; 2:16; 4:1-2,12; 5:1,8,17; 6:6; 13:23-24); and then 53 times in Esther (Esther 2:5 -- Esther 10:3). The term is used of Israel by the prophets -- twice in Isaiah (Isa. 36:11-13); then 10 times in Jeremiah (Jer. 32:12; 34:9; 38:19; 40:11-15; 41:3; 52:28-30); then 3 times by Daniel (Dan. 3:8,12; 5:13); and once by Zechariah (Zech. 8:23). In the N.T. the term is used 202 Times of Israel, including all 13 tribes.

[language] Their language was Hebrew.<sup>41</sup>

Now Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah ask Rab-shakeh to speak in the Syrian language. All this time he has been speaking so loudly in the Hebrew language that the soldiers on the walls of Jerusalem could hear. He was great at giving out propaganda; enemies always do that. He was yelling out

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<sup>39</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>

<sup>41</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

his ideas at the top of his voice so that the soldiers on the wall would get the word to the people in Jerusalem; he wanted to get it past these emissaries. Of course, their protest only caused Rabshakeh to talk a little louder.<sup>42</sup>

Aramaic was an international language at this time. See also 22:15-25 for Isaiah's prophecies concerning Eliakim and Shebna. Aramaic was the common language of diplomacy at the time, but the average Israelite could not speak it until the Exile.

**12But Rabshakeh said, Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?**

Rabshakeh wants the people to know that if they do not surrender they will be under siege. The strength of the wall was the main factor in a city's strength. A siege would seal a city for as long as it would take to starve out the people, the Romans would be prepared to camp around a city for 15-20 YEARS!

When Rabshakeh says, "That they may eat their own refuse and drink their own water" he is being literal and graphic, as sieges are horrible times for the people, forcing them to turn to cannibalism for survival!<sup>43</sup>

[eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?] Isaiah wasn't responsible for the language here; he was simply the historian who recorded what Rabshakeh said (2Ki. 18:27). The same attitude must be taken toward similar passages in the Bible (1Sam. 25:22,34; 1Ki. 14:10; 16:11; 21:21; 2Ki. 9:8). Customs, habits, and modes of expression differ throughout the world; what may be offensive in one place may not be in another. Instead of using euphemisms for such passages, the translators chose to retain the original expressions.<sup>44</sup>

Who will eat and drink their own waste with you: Rabshakeh is pointing forward to what conditions would be like in Jerusalem after an extended siege. He wanted this to gross out everyone who heard it, and magnify the sense of fear, discouragement, and despair.<sup>45</sup>

**13Then Rabshakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria.**

**13-20** Calling out to the people in Hebrew, the Assyrian commander urged them not to let Hezekiah deceive them into thinking the Lord would deliver them (vv. 13-15). Then the commander told the people that Sennacherib promised them prosperity in another land (vv. 16-17). Again the commander exhorted the people not to be deceived by Hezekiah (cf. vv. 13-15) for the gods of other nations had not been able to deliver them (vv. 18-20).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>43</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

<sup>44</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>

<sup>46</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

**14Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you.**

This appeal was to the people on the walls of Jerusalem, to weaken their resistance.

**15Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us: this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.**

**16Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me: and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern;**

Hear me and make an agreement with me by giving me a present; and you can enjoy your own homes until I come and take you away (Isa. 36:16-17).<sup>47</sup>

**17Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards.**

This plainly states the Assyrians' purpose to take Judah captive as they had already taken Ephraim (2Ki. 17).<sup>48</sup>

Sennacherib's representative tried yet another ploy to demoralize the people. He appealed to the starving city under siege by offering to take them to a land with plenty of food if they surrendered. The Assyrian policy for dealing with conquered nations was to resettle the inhabitants and then to move other conquered peoples into the recently conquered area. This provided manpower for their armies and prevented revolts in conquered territories.<sup>49</sup>

**18Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?**

Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Rabshakeh's speech was intended to destroy their trust in God. His message is simple, and cunning in its Satanic logic: "The gods of other nations have not been able to protect them against us. Your God is just like one of them, and can't protect you either."

For anyone who had the spiritual understanding to see it, Judah could have started planning the victory party right then. It is one thing to speak against Judah, its people and leaders. It was another thing all together to mock the LORD God of Israel this way, and count Him as "just another god."

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<sup>47</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>48</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>49</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

Typical of the work of the enemy of our souls, Rabshakeh was going well until he simply overstepped his bounds. There was no way God would let him off the hook for this one. He has offended the LORD God in a way he will soon regret.<sup>50</sup>

**19** *Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?*

[Samaria] Samaria, capital of the ten tribes, had already been taken captive (2Ki. 17).

Arrogantly Rab-shakeh boasts that none of the gods of other people have delivered them. Why should the Israelites expect Jehovah to deliver Jerusalem? He placed Jehovah on a par with heathen idols.<sup>51</sup>

Hamath and Arpad were in Aram. The location of Sepharvaim is uncertain but it may be near Hamath and Arpad. Hamath and Sepharvaim were two of the cities from which people were brought to repopulate Samaria after its fall (2 Kings 17:24). The commander also boasted that since Samaria was not helped by its god (it had fallen to Assyria 21 years earlier, 722 b.c.), why should the people of Jerusalem count on their God to protect them?<sup>52</sup>

**20** *Who are they among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?*

[LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand] Here Jehovah was classed with the idols of other nations. He was slandered, insulted, and thought to be as powerless as man-made images (Isa. 36:19-20). This is one of the reasons He took action against the Assyrians (Isa. 37:6-7,23-28).<sup>53</sup>

**19-20** The king's representative said that the gods of the other cities he had conquered had not been able to save their people, so how could the God of Jerusalem save them? The Lord was supposedly the God of Samaria (the northern kingdom), and it fell. But the Lord was the God of Samaria in name only because the people were not worshiping him. That is why prophets foretold the fall of Samaria. But for the Lord's own sake and for the sake of David, the Lord would rescue Jerusalem from the Assyrian army (37:35).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>

<sup>51</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>52</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>53</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>54</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

**21** But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.

Hezekiah's men were well instructed, they were to receive Rabshakeh, but not respond to his words. The Jews on the wall held their peace, being under the command of Hezekiah.

**21-22** Though no doubt terrified, the people followed Hezekiah's instructions not to answer the Assyrian spokesman's taunts. Eliakim... Shebna, and Joah (cf. vv. 3, 11) told Hezekiah what the... commander had said. They had torn their clothes, a sign of distress and/or mourning (cf. 37:1; Gen. 37:29; Josh. 7:6; 2 Kings 11:14; 19:1; 22:11; Es. 4:1; Job 1:20; 2:12).<sup>55</sup>

They didn't try to argue with Rabshakeh. Often, it is useless - if not dangerous - to try and match wits with this demonic logic. How much better to keep silent and trust God, instead of trying to win an argument!

"Silence is our best reply to the allegations and taunts of our foes. Be still, O persecuted soul! Hand over thy cause to God. It is useless to argue, even in many cases to give explanations. Be still, and commit thy cause to God." (Meyer)<sup>56</sup>

**22** Then came Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, that was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, to Hezekiah with *their* clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

[clothes rent] It was the custom for clothes to be torn in sorrow "...torn their cloths" - classic Jewish gesture of anguish (the first step towards sackcloth and ashes).

The messengers return to report these doleful words to Hezekiah.

"Clothes" speak of the dignity and glory of man. The saying is that clothes make the man. Well, "clothes rent" indicates humiliation and shame. This is a dejected and discouraged delegation that brings to Hezekiah the message from the king of Assyria.<sup>57</sup>

Came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn: Though they were silent, they were still deeply affected by this attack. It didn't just roll off their back as if it were nothing. They have the same experience Paul described in 2 Corinthians 4:8 to 2Co\_9:2 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. Thing were hard, but the battle was not lost yet!<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>

<sup>57</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-36.html>