

Isaiah Lesson 36

Isaiah Chapter 36

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Introduction: Last week, the focus of chapter 35 was portraying the wonderful blessings which will come upon the land of Israel in the Millennium. This chapter describes the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, king of Assyria. Record is made of one of his top generals, a man by the name of Rabshekah. He was sent to Jerusalem to threaten and intimidate Hezekiah causing him to surrender. From verse 2 to the end of the chapter, the text is almost identical to that of II Kings 18:17-37.

I. Sennacherib Invades Judah

Isa 36:1 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.

Throughout the book of Isaiah up to this point, the threat of invasion by Assyria has remained to be an event that would eventually come to pass. In earlier chapters, Isaiah makes it very clear that God would send the Assyrians against Judah, allowing them to chasten His rebellious, backslidden, sinful people. For the first time, the invasion is recorded, not as prophecy but as history.

The king in Judah was Hezekiah and the time was the fourteenth year of his reign. It is thought that this was at about B.C. 710. The king of Assyria was Sennacherib. He invaded from the north and proceeded to capture the various outlying cities of Judah, including the fortified (defenced) cities. The only portion of Judah he did not capture was Jerusalem. Sensing the weakness of Jerusalem, Sennacherib determined to now take it as well. He would then have control of the entire land of Israel.

Isa 36:2 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.

Isa 36:3 Then came forth unto him Eliakim, Hilkiyah's son, which was over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, Asaph's son, the recorder.

Sennacherib sent armies under the leadership of three of his chief generals named Tartan and Rabsaris and Rabshakeh. It may be that Rabshakeh was the overall commander because he was the spokesman of the three.

- (1) Sennacherib remained at Lachish, still besieging it.
- (2) Reference is made to what today is called Hezekiah's tunnel, here called the conduit of the upper pool (in Jerusalem).
- (3) This was a tunnel carved through a hillside of Jerusalem to furnish water during attack against the city.

Although the Assyrian forces positioned at the upper pool thereof, they evidently were unaware of the secret tunnel which channeled water into the city. In so surrounding the upper pool, they may have thought that they had seized control of the water supply to Jerusalem. The 3 Assyrian generals remained outside the walls of Jerusalem and called for King Hezekiah to come to them.

The insolence and audacity of the Assyrian generals is apparent in placing themselves directly outside the wall of Jerusalem and demanding to speak to the king thereof. Rather than face such indignity, Hezekiah sent out officers of his cabinet to the wall of the city to hear the Assyrian demands. He sent Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder.

Isa 36:4 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?

Isa 36:5 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?

Isa 36:6 Lo, 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.

Isa 36:7 But 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?

The Assyrian general Rabshakeh who spoke for King Sennacherib clearly sought to intimidate his Jewish foe. He mocked the military strength of Jerusalem. Hezekiah evidently had entered a military alliance with Egypt for mutual aide. However, Rabshakeh mocked any help which might come from Egypt. He

likened the Egyptians to a broken reed along the Nile River which if one leaned upon would put splinters into his hand.

The Assyrian general ridiculed any help which Hezekiah might receive from Egypt. Rabshakeh sought to ridicule any reliance upon Jehovah God. He had heard of the removal of the alters and the high places. However, he completely misunderstood what Hezekiah had done in removing the high places from Judah. Rabshakeh assumed that there was trouble between Jehovah and those that remained free in Judah. He thought the removal of the high places was an affront to Jehovah when in fact, it was God's will.

Isa 36:8 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.

Isa 36:9 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?

Isa 36:10 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.

The Assyrian general continued to mock and seek to intimidate Hezekiah. He sought to receive a pledge from Hezekiah that he would submit himself to Sennacherib. He mockingly offered Hezekiah 2,000 horses to put his forces upon to ride and surrender to the king of Assyria. Afterwards, he scoffed that Hezekiah probably did not have that many men who could handle a horse.

Rabshakeh further mocked Hezekiah by asking how his feeble forces (even with Egyptian intervention) could withstand even one regiment of the mighty Assyrian army. In his efforts to intimidate, he brazenly claimed to be coming against Judah with the permission and blessing of Jehovah, the God of Israel.

Rabshakeh outright lied claiming that God had directed the Assyrians to attack and destroy Judah and Jerusalem. It is one thing to seek to intimidate, but it is another to blatantly lie in God's name.

II. Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah Request Rabshakeh Speak in Syrian

Isa 36:11 Then 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.

Isa 36:12 But 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?

Isa 36:13 Then 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.

Isa 36:14 Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you.

Isa 36:15 Neither 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.

Rabshakeh evidently knew Hebrew and so he made his intimidating, mocking speech therein. The Jewish officials upon the wall (Eliakim and Shebna and Joah) requested that he rather speak to them in the Syrian language. They clearly were concerned about the common people of the city being demoralized by the intimidating threats being made in their own language. Rabshakeh knew what he was doing. He was speaking in Hebrew precisely to attempt to demoralize the city.

Rabshakeh therefore became even more intimidating by using the coarse threats of a siege. He intimated that Sennacherib had sent him to not only threaten Hezekiah, but his subordinates as well. He warned that they would soon be eating and drinking their own excrement as the starvation of a siege overcame them.

The Assyrian general pompously stood and spoke at the top of his voice in Hebrew, "Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand." warning the inhabitants of Jerusalem that their king, Hezekiah, would not be able to deliver them from the Assyrians. The arrogant Assyrian warned the inhabitants of Jerusalem to not trust Jehovah for deliverance. He intimated that even Jehovah could not deliver them from the might of the Assyrian army. In his insolence, Rabshakeh had just sown the seeds of his own destruction. To claim that even Jehovah could not defeat him was a sure-fire way to bring the wrath of the Lord down on them. That is exactly what would happen shortly thereafter.

Isa 36:16 Harken 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;

Isa 36:17 Until 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.

Isa 36:18 Beware 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?

Isa 36:19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?

Isa 36:20 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?

Isa 36:21 But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.

Isa 36:22 Then came Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, 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.

The impudent Assyrian general made the inhabitants of Jerusalem an offer. No mercy was offered to Hezekiah, but Rabshakeh sought to incite surrender amongst the people of Jerusalem by offering them amnesty if they would surrender. What he had in mind was to deport them to Assyria even as had been done to the northern ten tribes. He sought to entice their surrender by painting the description of their captivity in glowing terms.

They would be allowed to stay home and go on as nothing happened until it was time to be deported. When they were deported, they would be given homes and plenty to eat. If they overthrew Hezekiah, they would be shown mercy by the Assyrians. If not, they would die. Rabshakeh repeatedly warned them not to listen to Hezekiah when he claimed that Jehovah God would deliver them.

The foolish Assyrian general then made another blasphemous blunder. He asked the people of Jerusalem, Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? This arrogant Assyrian therefore equated the Almighty God of Israel with the pagan deities of the surrounding nations. It was utter blasphemy. As the Assyrians had crushed neighboring countries, Rabshakeh impudently asked, where were the gods of those places? Could they deliver from the power of the mighty Assyrian army? Well, of course, those pagan idols had no power in any event. But, Rabshakeh had sealed his doom by implying the Jehovah God was no better than them.

He asked, if the pagan idols of the various nations which Assyria had conquered could not deliver from the power of Sennacherib, how could Jehovah deliver them? That was a big mistake to equate the power of Jehovah to the impotent gods of the pagan nations around. Rabshakeh had sealed his own fate by challenging Jehovah. Hezekiah had wisely instructed his people to keep their mouths shut. They were not to reply to the taunts from below. They accordingly held their peace.

The three officials sent by Hezekiah to listen to the taunts of Rabshakeh, therefore, returned to their king in despair with their clothes rent. They accordingly repeated to the king the ominous threats and derision that Rabshakeh had made. The next chapter will record Hezekiah's response to this grave threat.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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