

2. What application may be made of God's attitude toward Edom in today's world of God-opposing human ideologies?
3. What application may be made in teaching today what God's Way is like from Isaiah's description of the Way in chapter 35?

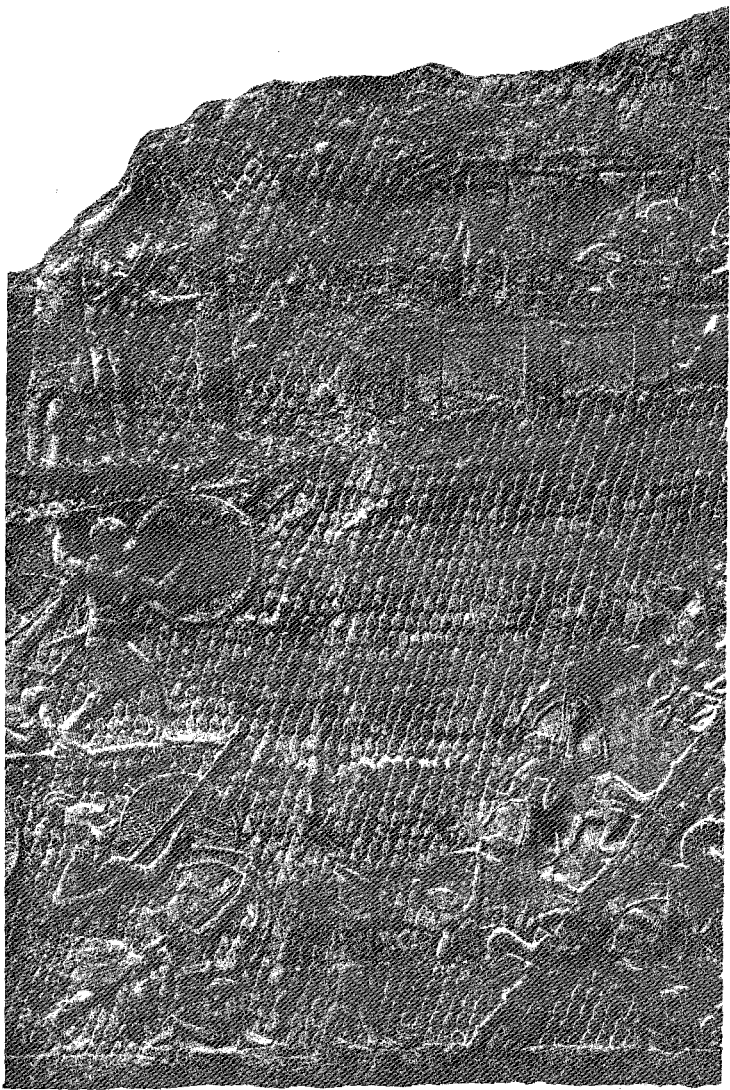
VI. CHASTENING THROUGH CAPTIVITY CHAPTERS 36 - 39

A. PRESSURE, CHAPTER 36

1. PREDICAMENT

TEXT: 36:1-12

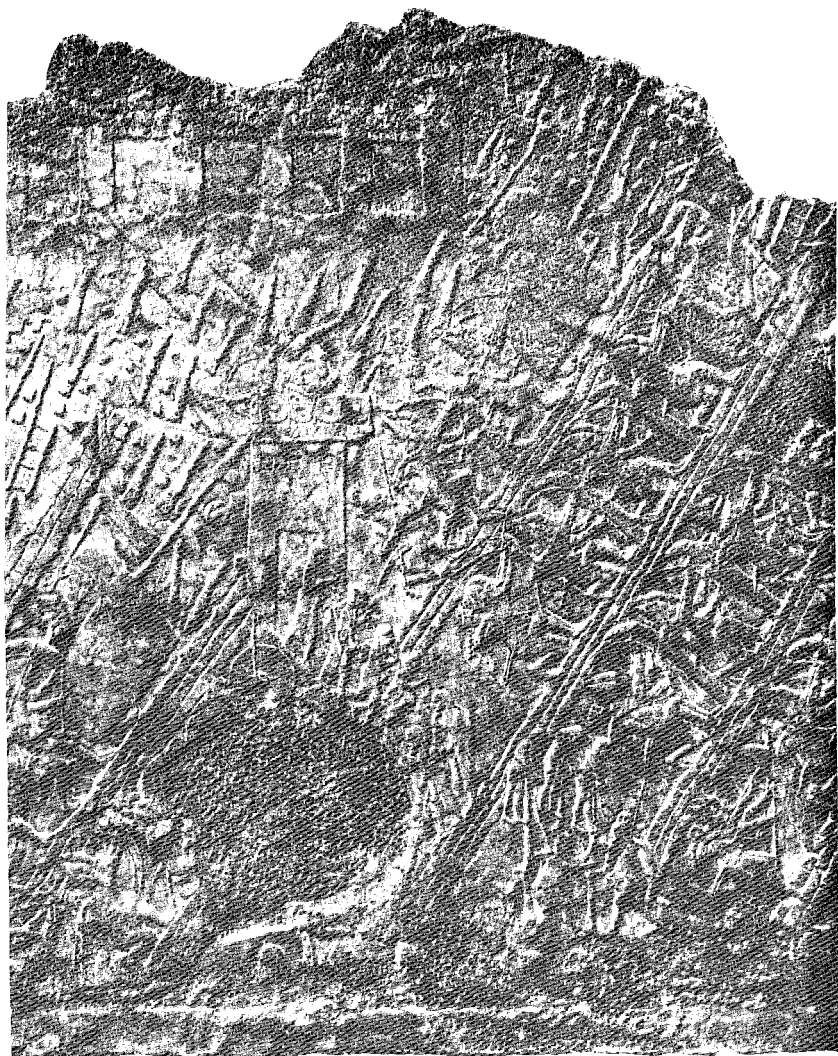
- 1 Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib, king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them.
- 2 And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.
- 3 Then came forth unto him Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder.
- 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 trusteth?
- 5 I say, thy counsel and strength for the war are but vain words: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou hast rebelled against me?
- 6 Behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon 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 on him.



"Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them" (II Kings 18:13).

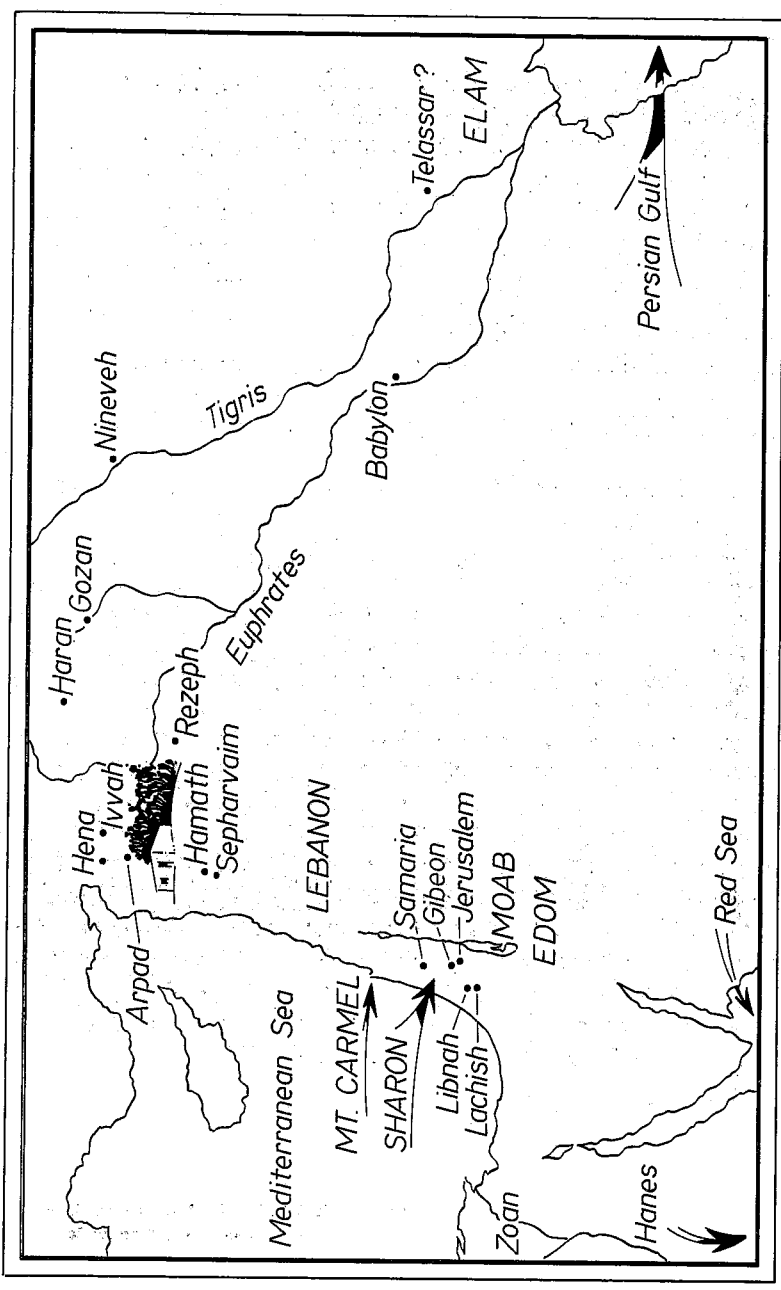
After more than two thousand five hundred years this relief from Nineveh reproduces for us the attack of Sennacherib's army upon the biblical city of Lachish, with overwhelming force and with all the techniques of war. The defenders fight desperately from the towers, protected by shields between the battlements—"like the tower of David, builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men" (Song of Solomon 4:4). They are shooting arrows, slinging stones or throwing them with their bare hands and hurling firebrands down upon the enemy.

FROM: THE BIBLE AS HISTORY IN PICTURES
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They wear pointed helmets like the Assyrians or close-fitting caps with chin- straps. Assyrian sappers have built a series of sloping brick ramps on which the siege- engines are pushed up the hillside against the fortress walls. The battering-rams are fitted with a long shaft in front, the purpose of which was to gouge stones out of the masonry. A soldier was posted in the front of the machine to keep throwing ladlefuls of water on the flying firebrands, thus preventing the flames from spreading. The archers advance under cover of the battering-rams. Behind them come the spearmen with large round shields. Captives, both men and women, are already leaving the city, passing three impaled victims.

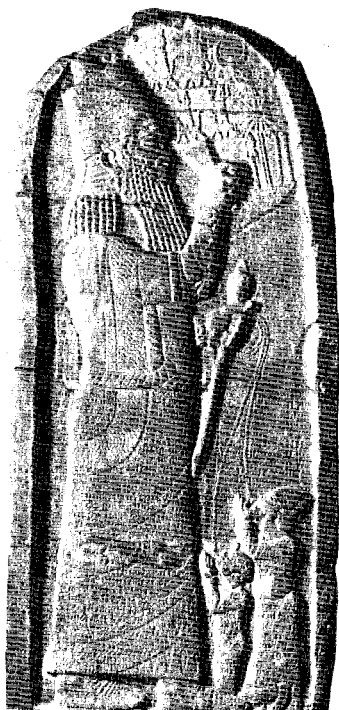
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"And it came to pass, as he (Sennacherib) was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword" (II Kings 19:37).

Sennacherib was assassinated in 681 B. C. These men formed part of the palace guard and private bodyguard of the great Assyrian monarch. They were obviously not very efficient.



"And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead" (II Kings 19:37).

This short matter of fact statement in the Bible is amplified by Esarhaddon himself, the son of Sennacherib, who succeeded the murdered king. He describes these turbulent days in Nineveh: "Disloyal aspirations overpowered my brothers . . . they rebelled. To seize the kingdom they killed Sennacherib. I became a raging lion, I was consumed with fury . . ." On this victory monument King Esarhaddon stands over two of his vanquished foes, Usanahuru, son of Taharka of Egypt (kneeling) and King Abdimilkutti of Sidon. He has these dwarf-like princes roped through the lips like wild beasts. "Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips . . ." (Isaiah 37:29).

- 7 But if thou say unto me, We trust in Jehovah our God: is not that he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar?
- 8 Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges 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.
- 9 How then canst 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?
- 10 And am I now come up without Jehovah against this land to destroy it? Jehovah said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.
- 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.
- 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, to eat their own dung, and to drink their own water with you?

QUERIES

- a. Who is "Rabshakeh"?
- b. At which altar did Hezekiah tell Judah to worship?
- c. Did Rabshakeh threaten Jerusalem by Jehovah's command?

PARAPHRASE

It was in the fourteenth year of the reign of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib, king of Assyria, made military expeditions against many of the fortified cities of Judah and conquered most of them. While he was occupied with the siege of Lachish, the king of Assyria sent his commander-in-chief with a great

number of troops to deliver an ultimatum to Hezekiah. When the king of Assyria's commander arrived at Jerusalem, he set up camp with his troops by the conduit of the upper pool along the road going down to the bleaching field. A trio of high officials from Hezekiah's court went out to where the Assyrian troops were to confer with their leader: Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, chief administrator; Shebna who was formerly chief administrator but now serving as a scribe; Joah, son of Asaph, an official chronicler, all went out to talk to the Rab-shakeh. The Assyrian official said to them, Go tell this Hezekiah that the great king of Assyria wants to know what kind of a fool he is for thinking the king of Egypt will help him? The great king of Assyria wishes to inform Hezekiah of the uselessness of his strategies and conferences on war. Who in the world will be able to help him now that he has rebelled against the great king of Assyria? Egypt is not just a useless ally, she is a dangerous one. She is like a broken but sharp stem of the reed—she will pierce your hand if you lean upon her. Now before you say to me, We are trusting in Jehovah our God, let me ask you, is not this the God Hezekiah defied by tearing down all the altars you people built to your God in the high places and groves and made everyone worship only at the altar in Jerusalem? My master, the king of Assyria, wants to make a wager with you—that you don't have 2000 cavalymen in your whole army. If you do, the king of Assyria will give you 2000 horses for them to ride on! Now with a tiny army like that, how do you propose to make war on even the smallest and worst section of my master's army? With so little to offer, how do you expect to get help from Egypt? Furthermore, do you think I have come here without the help of your own God, Jehovah. Let me tell you, your own God, Jehovah, spoke to me and told me to make war on this land and destroy it. Then the three Hebrew men representing king Hezekiah said, with much consternation in their voices, Speak, O Rab-shakeh, I beg you, in the Aramaic language; we understand it. Please do not continue to speak these threats in Hebrew because our countrymen there on the city's walls will hear and chaos will fill the

city. But the Rab-shakeh said, Do you think my master has sent me just to threaten Hezekiah? I was sent to threaten the whole Jewish nation and warn them they will suffer atrocious and inhuman degradations if they do not surrender. They will eat their own dung and drink their own urine if they force my master to war against them.

COMMENTS

v. 1-5 RABSHAKEH'S INQUIRY: This section of Isaiah is one of three different historical records of these events. The other two records are II Kings 18 and 19, and II Chronicles 32. These three records do not contradict, but supplement one another. Chronicles seems to be, in these events, as it is in so many other parallel events, a condensation of what actually took place because Chronicles is the "theological" view of the theocracy while Kings is the "historical" view.

One might wonder why Isaiah would insert an historical narrative squarely in the middle of a series of grandly soaring and majestic prophecies. Without doubt his purpose is to give *proof* of his prophetic call and mission. The rapid fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction concerning the deliverance of Jerusalem, the restoration of Hezekiah and the death of the Assyrian king would prove conclusively that he was sent from Jehovah and spoke Jehovah's word!

There is a minor problem with the year of Hezekiah's reign. The campaign of Sennacherib against the cities of Judah took place from 703 to 701 B.C. This would at first glance indicate Hezekiah's reign to begin about 717-715 B.C. According to II Kings 18:1-2 it began in the 3rd year of Hoshea of Israel and lasted for 29 years. Hoshea was king of Israel when Shalmanezar began his siege of that kingdom. That was in Hoshea's seventh year and Hezekiah's fourth. Three years later Hoshea was carried captive (cf. II Kings 18:9-10). Israel fell to Shalmanezar in 722-721 B.C. (II Kings 18:9ff). This means that Hezekiah began to reign six years before the downfall

of Samaria, i.e., 728-727 B.C. Edward J. Young submits the possibility of an early emendation to the Hebrew text—a slight change in one of the characters in a specific Hebrew word. Only a slight alteration could change the Hebrew word *'eseryis* (twenty-four) to *'esereh* (fourteen) and thus create the apparent discrepancy here. If this were the 24th year of Hezekiah's reign (703 B.C.) it would place the beginning of it 728-727 B.C. Young, however, offers no manuscript evidence for this possibility. Another possible explanation is that 703 B.C. may be noted as the fourteenth year in which Hezekiah was the sole ruler of Judah! It has been proven by ancient records uncovered by archaeologists that kings of antiquity often ruled a number of years in a *co-regency* with their aged father-kings. In other words, Hezekiah may have ruled the first 10-12 years *with* his father, and *without* his father from 717-715 B.C. for the next fourteen years. This would explain calling 703-701 B.C. Hezekiah's fourteenth year of rule. (see also, *Old Testament History*, Smith/Fields, College Press, p. 556-561).

The king of Assyria took 46 cities of Judah, as we have mentioned elsewhere. Now he, himself, is occupied with an assault upon Lachish, some 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem. The king sends his Rab-shakeh to inquire of Jerusalem's intentions toward his campaign of conquest in Judah. *Rab* means chief, and *shakeh* probably is a military officer. The Rab-shakeh was probably the emperor's *personal*, most trusted military commander much like the American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who may be depended upon for absolute allegiance to carry out very important military/political functions the President himself cannot attend to. When he spoke it was with direct and absolute authority from the king himself. To make his mission more ominously impressive, he came to Jerusalem with a "great" army.

Now Hezekiah had been busily restoring true and holy religion to Judah. He had been breaking down idolatrous altars, reinstating the Passover, rebelling against paying tribute to a pagan Assyrian empire, and defeating Philistine enemies, (II Kings 18:1-8; II Chron. 29-31). When the king

of Assyria came marching into Judah with his campaign of conquest, it appears Hezekiah had second thoughts about his refusal to pay tribute to Assyria and sent an apology to the king at Lachish (II Kings 18:13-16) and stripped the gold from the doors of the temple and took silver and gold from the treasury of the temple and the palace and gave it to the Assyrian emperor. What was Hezekiah's motive for such an apparent reversal of courage, faith and godliness being demonstrated by his unique and amazing religious reform? Perhaps he rationalized, The throne of David is in imminent danger of being overthrown and the House of David extinguished; I am old, my days are numbered, I have no child to succeed me and the king of Assyria must be placated awhile longer until a royal successor to David's throne is produced. Or, perhaps, Hezekiah, like many rulers, compromised his convictions simply from fear.

Lachish is approximately 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem (see Map #1) and would take the Rab-shakeh two days of marching, setting up camp at night, to reach Jerusalem. Upon arriving at Jerusalem the Assyrians probably set up their bivouac in the Kidron Valley or on the slope of the Mt. of Olives, eastward from the main gates of the city. Located there also is the Gihon Spring and the Upper Pool with its new secret conduit hewn out of solid rock by Hezekiah's workmen to hide Jerusalem's chief water supply from the Assyrians (cf. II Chron. 32:1-8). It was probably Hezekiah who first extended the wall to the western hill (known as Modern Zion). In 1970, Professor Nachman Avigad of Hebrew University unearthed a massive portion of ancient wall in the Jewish quarter of the Old City. This wall was 25 feet thick in some places and located opposite the Temple area (see Map #3). The reader may research this information in *The Biblical Archaeology Review*, September, 1975. Archaeologists date this wall in the late 8th century B.C. This is probably Hezekiah's "outer wall" of II Chronicles 32:5. Hezekiah's underground conduit (through which tourists can walk today) enabled the city successfully to withstand the Assyrian siege. A second unprotected earlier

conduit has been traced from Gihon Spring, directly southward, outside the walls of David's city, discharging its waters through a short tunnel behind a dam built across the mouth (lower end) of the Tyropoeon Valley. This was the Old Pool of Isaiah 22:11 and was the pool probably enlarged later by Hezekiah and called the "reservoir between the two walls" and was probably intended to take the overflow of his new conduit (see Map #3). Here by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field Ahaz had rejected the word of God and the promises of the true King and had turned to the Assyrians (cf. Isa. 7:3). Now, the Assyrians are here on this same spot, a terrifying, threatening consequence of the disobedience of the rulers of God's people.

Accompanying the Rab-shakeh were officers called "the Tartan and the Rab-saris" (II Kings 18:17) and upon their arrival at the "upper pool" they "called for the king" (II Kings 18:18). It was a calculated show of insolence and contempt for Hezekiah. But Hezekiah did not come in person. He was represented by Eliakim, Shebna and Joah. Eliakim has assumed the duties formerly assigned to Shebna, chief of the king's house (see our comments on ch. 22:20ff). Shebna has been demoted to scribe. What the Rab-shakeh has to say will be recorded.

It is interesting to note the Rab-shakeh always speaks of his own king with proper respect, calling him "the great king," but not once does he refer to Hezekiah as king. There is probably some psychological-warfare intended here as well as outright contempt. The Rab-shakeh's entire speech is masterfully, though rudely done.

The Assyrian begins by challenging the confidence of Judah. The Jews apparently had demonstrated a measure of military-political confidence in something. Perhaps Hezekiah's rebellion (II Kings 18:7) is referred to; perhaps Rab-shakeh knows of an alliance with Egypt—perhaps the Assyrian intelligence department has discovered such an alliance between Judah and Egypt. Whatever the case the Rab-shakeh is trying to destroy this "confidence" for he uses the word "trust" and

“rely” over and over in his speech. The Rab-shakeh also evidently knows something of the details of Hezekiah’s basis for confidence. He intimates that he knows even of the words (“counsel”) and the preparations (“strength”) the Jews have made to war against the Assyrians! He arrogantly classifies them as useless.

v. 6-12 **RABSHAKEH’S INTIMIDATION:** After a rhetorical question, the Rab-shakeh gives his own answer. Judah has trusted in Egypt which he characterizes as a “bruised reed.” Egypt was a land of reeds. For a man to try to lean on a reed was foolish, but to lean on a bruised reed was stupid. Isaiah has already characterized Egypt as “big mouth who does nothing” (30:7). King Hoshea of Israel had relied on Egypt for help against Assyria, but Egypt did not come to his aid (II Kings 17:4). Actually, to trust in Egypt caused nations to suffer worse disaster than if they had not relied upon her. So the figure of a man trying to lean on a bruised reed and having his hand pierced! Perhaps the battle of Eltekeh, between the allied armies of Egypt-Philistines and the Assyrians, had been fought already. Egypt was soundly defeated at this battle near Ekron, according to the annals of Sennacherib. So the Rab-shakeh makes his boast of the inferiority of Egypt.

Having cut the ground from under the Jews in respect to their cherished military alliance with Egypt, the Rab-shakeh turns his sarcasm upon their religious confidence. Implied is a certain knowledge among the Assyrians of the importance attached by the Jews to their worship and reliance on Jehovah. The Assyrian’s reference to Hezekiah’s reform manifests his misunderstanding of the One True God. Hezekiah caused to be “hewed down the Asherim” (II Kings 18:4-5; II Chron. 31:1) and the Nehushtan (the bronze serpent the people had begun to burn incense to). The altars he tore down were evidently Canaanitish places of worship along with some altars the Jews had made for themselves contrary to God’s command that He was to be worshipped in only one place. Yet, in spite of the truth of Hezekiah’s reform, the rank and file of the people of Judah had become so accustomed to worshipping in the high

places at the half-idolatrous altars, they were probably impressed with Rab-shakeh's argument that Jehovah was displeased with them.

The Assyrian commander's next form of intimidation is a dare. He dares the Jews to barter, negotiate (Heb. *'arav*), or, one might translate "make a wager" with the king of Assyria that they have 2000 men to ride war horses. If they can prove they have only that many, the king of Assyria will give them 2000 horses! The Rab-shakeh has no doubt already determined that Hezekiah does not have that many cavalymen. He then continues his tirade of contempt by boasting the Jews are unable to offer reasonable opposition to the *smallest* and least significant of *one* of Assyria's divisions of fighting-men. This would be as frightening as were the boasts and sabre-rattling of Adolph Hitler when he intimidated Neville Chamberlain in the 1930's.

Adding to the trepidation of the Jews would be the announcement of the Rab-shakeh that he had come up to Jerusalem with Jehovah's commission to destroy it. He represents Jehovah as speaking directly to him a command to go against Judah and destroy it! The Rab-shakeh's claim is interesting, to say the least. There are indications that Jehovah would "call" the Assyrians to chasten the Jews (Isa. 5:26ff; 7:18ff; 10:5ff; 28:11ff). God spoke to a number of pagan emperors through dreams, visions and prophets. We are more inclined to believe in this case, however, the Rab-shakeh is self-deceived and thinks he has been sent by the Hebrew God, or is deliberately lying to the Hebrews and received no call whatsoever. There is an inscription of Cyrus, king of Persia, claiming that the Babylonian god, Marduk (Bel), was with him in his conquests of Babylon. It was apparently a widely practiced bit of psychological-warfare among the ancients.

This so unnerved the Hebrew officials for fear his arguments would spread from the mouths of those upon the walls who were listening to the ears of all in the city, exaggerated with each telling, of course, they insist that the Rab-shakeh speak to them in *aramiyth*, Aramaic, and not in *yehudiyth*, Jewish.

Though Aramaic was the common language of diplomacy at this time, it is probable that most of the Jews could not understand it. After their captivity in Babylon they could only understand Aramaic and not Hebrew. The Hebrew language is called here "Jewish" after Judah since the northern kingdom has already gone into captivity and Judah is the only Hebrew nation left. The people of Judah may have been calling themselves *Yehudiyth* for a long time to distinguish themselves from the northern kingdom. It is interesting to note the Rab-shakeh knew the Hebrew language. He was not only the "chief" military man, a master psychologist and well versed in world affairs; he was also a linguist.

In verse 12 the Rab-shakeh makes it plain in the crudest and most humiliating language his purpose for coming to Jerusalem was not diplomacy but intimidation. He did not come to banter pleasantries and subterfuge with Hezekiah or his noblemen. He says bluntly his purpose was to intimidate the common people of the city, threatening them with the most degrading threats. He warns them in their own language they will eat their own dung and drink their own urine if they dare to go to war and resist the Assyrian conquest of their city. People besieged in ancient cities for three and four years in succession often resorted to atrocities such as this and worse for survival (see Josephus' account of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.).

The Rab-shakeh has thoroughly intimidated the populace. They have heard him ridicule their counsels for war as if he knew every move they were making; they have heard him ridicule their "dinky" army as if he knew how few soldiers they really had; they have heard him claim a divine commission from Jehovah for destroying their city; they have heard terrifying threats of human privation—all in their own language. And to impress them with his power to carry out his threats, he brought along a great number of troops. The Rab-shakeh is a skillful propagandist. He will make a psychological turn from intimidation to indulgence. He knows how to "psych" people.

QUIZ

1. What is the "fourteenth" year of Hezekiah's reign?
2. What had Hezekiah done, according to II Kings, to attempt to appease the king of Assyria?
3. Where, most likely, did the Rabshakeh set up camp upon his arrival at Jerusalem?
4. Name four different areas in which the Rabshakeh attempted to intimidate the people of Jerusalem.
5. Why did the Hebrew officials wish Rabshakeh to speak in Aramaic?
6. Evaluate the Rabshakeh's ability as a psychologist?

2. PROPOSITION

TEXT: 36:13-20

- 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.
- 14 Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to deliver you:
- 15 neither let Hezekiah make you trust in Jehovah, saying, Jehovah will surely deliver us; this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.
- 16 Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make your peace with me, 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;
- 17 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards.
- 18 Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, Jehovah will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?
- 19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out

of my hand?

20 Who are they among all the gods of these countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that Jehovah should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?

QUERIES

- a. Was Hezekiah trying to deceive the people?
- b. Why would the Assyrian king take them from their land?
- c. Why refer to the gods of other nations?

PARAPHRASE

Then the Assyrian commander-in-chief stepped forth and shouted loudly in the Hebrew language toward the people gathered on the city walls, Listen to the words of the greatest of all kings, the king of Assyria: Do not let Hezekiah's promises deceive you—nothing he can do will save you. Do not let Hezekiah deceive you by telling you to trust in your Jehovah—that He will save you—that He will not let this city be taken over by the king of Assyria. I repeat, do not listen to Hezekiah! You had better listen to this proposition from the king of Assyria: He says, Surrender on my terms, open the gates of the city and come out in peace and I will let each of you go ahead living on your own land, conducting your own business, prospering, until I have time to come and take you away to a land very similar to this one where you will find as much prosperity as you do here. My taking your city is inevitable. You will be much better off to surrender. Beware that you do not be fooled by Hezekiah's promise that your Jehovah will save you from me. The gods of no other nation have been able to deliver from the king of Assyria. Remember Hamath and Arpad? Their gods did not deliver them. Neither did Sepharvaim's gods and Samaria's gods. Of all the gods of these nations, which one has ever delivered them from my power?

Not a one! And do you think this god of yours can deliver Jerusalem from me? Do not be foolish!

COMMENTS

v. 13-15 **TAUNT:** The Assyrians were noted for their arrogant disregard of the most basic diplomatic etiquette. Their reputation was that of baseness, cruelty and insolence. Rabshakeh, asked to address his words in Aramaic to the representatives of King Hezekiah, insolently rises from his seat, steps forward (probably past the three Hebrew officials) and yells his taunt in the Hebrew language at the people gathered along the walls of the city of Jerusalem. His taunt is that Hezekiah does not know what he is talking about—that Hezekiah is leading the people down the path of deception. It is really an accusation that the people are being exploited by Hezekiah. It is interesting to note the emphatic repetition (4 times) of the Rabshakeh that the people not let Hezekiah deceive them. Evidently Hezekiah had impressed the people that Jehovah would deliver the city from the Assyrians. When Sennacherib first marched into Judah, Hezekiah sent a letter of apology for rebelling against him (see comments 36:1-12). Hezekiah even sent tribute to Lachish to Sennacherib. Isaiah must have convinced Hezekiah in the interval between Sennacherib's initial invasion and Rabshakeh's journey to Jerusalem that the Lord would indeed deliver Jerusalem. Hezekiah made an impassioned plea to the people (II Chron. 32:6-8), after redirecting the city's water supply and building new walls, that "there is one greater with us than with him." It appears the Assyrians had heard of this new courage of Hezekiah and his persuasion of the people. Rabshakeh's words must have indicated to the people that the Assyrians knew even about the passionate pleas Hezekiah made within the confines of their city walls! It would be disconcerting and frightening.

v. 16-17 **TEMPTATION:** The Rabshakeh applies the pressure of fleshly concern for physical well-being, innocent enough in

itself but idolatrous when it supercedes godliness as a first concern. He urges the people to think first of their stomachs. He promises that all will be well with them if they will surrender to the terms of the king of Assyria. The only sacrifice they will have to make, according to the Rabshakeh, is to be taken from their homeland. Even then, he promises, they will be taken to a land as fertile, productive and prosperous as their own. Rabshakeh does not specifically promise them they will participate as citizens or land-owners in the "new land." The fertility of Mesopotamia was, in some ways, greater than that of Palestine. And that was the catch! The appeal was fleshly. The temptation was casting physical survival against a spiritual birthright. It was the age-old temptation begun with Jacob and Esau and epitomized at Christ's temptation in the wilderness to turn stones into bread. The land of Palestine was more than mere physical sustenance to the Hebrews. It was the *covenant* land of their fathers. They were given this land by the mighty hand of Jehovah for a spiritual purpose. It was the land where the only altar to the One True God could be erected. If they, of their own deliberate choice, should surrender to be taken from the land, it would demonstrate their total disregard of their spiritual birthright. Later, when God removed them from their land, it was a graphic object lesson to the Jews that they had forfeited their spiritual legacy by sin and idolatry and no longer deserved to occupy the covenant land. The temptation was to weigh the invisible, ideal matters of faith against the visible, practical matters of the flesh. They were being tempted to think they were, after all, clinging to a religious illusion while they might deprive themselves of a present happiness.

The Hebrew people should have known the practice of pagan empires in transplanting people away from their homelands was not for the pleasure of the conquered people but for the security of the empire. It was a well known practice (cf. II Kings 18:11, etc.) and functioned well in keeping subjugated people from rebelling. Such a practice not only humiliated people and dispersed them widely but it also de-culturized them. They

tended to lose their national identity and thus any strong motivation for rebellion.

v. 18-20 TABULATION: Now Rabshakeh appeals to *seeming* facts of history. He tabulates all the victories the king of Assyria has had over the gods of the nations he has conquered. He begins by warning the Hebrew people not to let Hezekiah "sweet talk" them into depending upon their God. The Hebrew word translated *persuade* is *yasiyth* (from *suth*) meaning "to soothe." It is almost as if Rabshakeh warns the people that Hezekiah may be trying to soothingly seduce them by saying, Jehovah will deliver us. The gods of the nations appear to have been powerless against the great king of Assyria. When the power showdown came, none of the gods of the nations could deliver from the Assyrians. The gods of the nations now sat as trophies in the Assyrian pantheon of gods. In ancient thought, religion and political power were closely connected. If a city or a nation survived and maintained its sovereignty, it was because of the power of its national god; a nation's wanderings were accompanied by the wanderings of its gods, its victories accomplished by its gods, its defeats signs of the inferiority of its gods. If all the powerful gods of the many nations conquered by Assyria were proven powerless, what hope could the Hebrews hold that their God was any more powerful. This appeal to the power of paganism over Jehovah may seem strange to us but to the mind of the heathen, and from the heathen view of politics, religion and history, it was not strange. In fact, in some godless lands today, the same reasoning prevails. See Map #1 for the location of Hamath, Arpad and Sepharvaim.

QUIZ

1. How did Rabshakeh react to the request of the Hebrew officials to refrain from speaking so the people on the wall could hear?
2. What does the repeated warning of Rabshakeh that Hezekiah should not deceive the people about deliverance infer

- about Hezekiah's appeals to them?
3. Where is the record of Hezekiah's appeal to the people to trust God?
 4. What basic temptation did Rabshakeh hold out to the people to get them to surrender to Assyria's terms?
 5. Why did ancient empires transplant conquered peoples away from their homelands?
 6. What significance did Palestine have for the Jew besides a land to live on?
 7. Why did Rabshakeh refer to the pagan gods defeated by Assyria?

3. PATIENCE

TEXT: 36:21-22

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

QUERIES

- a. Why did the king command no answer be made?
- b. Why did the officials tear their clothing?

PARAPHRASE

But in the face of all these taunts and temptations, the people were silent, because King Hezekiah had ordered the people, Do not answer the Assyrian Rabshakeh. Then Eliakim, chief administrator, and Shebna, the royal scribe, and Joah,

the royal chronicler, returned to the presence of Hezekiah with their clothes ripped and torn as a sign of their grief and misery and told him all that had been said by the Rabshakeh.

COMMENTS

v. 21 SILENCE: The usual Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, is not in this sentence. The word is *yaheriyshu* and is translated "held their peace" but literally means "were dumb, silent," and is from the same root word which speaks of engraved sculpture. The idea probably is that the Hebrew officials stood before the Rabshakeh as silent as stone statues! Wise King Solomon said, "there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak . . ." (Eccl. 3:7). This was a time for silence. Hezekiah commanded it. The Hebrew word for command is *mitzvah*. The *bar-mitzvah* literally means "son of command" and is the ceremony observed for all Jewish boys at the age of 13 when they become "sons of responsibility." In this sentence it is the *mitzvah* of the *melek*; the command of the king. Hezekiah knew that any answer his representatives or his people might give about Jehovah delivering them would not convince the Assyrians to refrain from their threats and actions. It would only agitate them. There are times when "pearls and bread should not be cast before swine and dogs, lest they turn and rend you." There are times, in heated, emotional confrontations when answering taunt with taunt would inflame the situation out of control. Matthew Henry said, "It is sometimes prudent not to answer a fool according to his folly." Hezekiah and Isaiah had reason enough to make an answer to Rabshakeh that God would deliver them, but such an answer would hardly appease such an unreasonable braggart as Rabshakeh. Jesus, facing just such a brazen, foolish and ungodly man in Herod, "answered him not a word."

v. 22 SUFFERING: It was not easy for the Hebrew officials to keep silent. Their dismay and despair is demonstrated in the tearing of their clothing. The Jews tore their clothing when

they were sorrowful, penitent, distraught, confused and angry. All of these emotions may have been welling up within these men. One thing they knew, the Assyrians were powerful and had done all (and more) that the Rabshakeh recounted. What the future held for their city was unknown, as yet. The only alternative they had to the Rabshakeh's tabulation of Assyrian victories was faith in Jehovah. Often, the known is distinct and threatening; the unknown veiled and sometimes even more threatening. So we are often defeated by our own reasoning. Our problems seem insoluble to our thinking. But there is enough evidence of the power of God to deliver the faithful, the believer may have victory over every threat of the enemy.

QUIZ

1. How silent were the people?
2. Why did Hezekiah command them to keep silent?
3. How do we know it was a struggle for them to do so?

B. PERSEVERANCE, CHAPTER 37

1. THE PLEA

TEXT: 37:1-7

- 1 And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of Jehovah.
- 2 And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, unto Isaiah, the prophet the son of Amoz.
- 3 And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of contumely; for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.