

## **When Distress Showed Up during King Hezekiah**

### **Isaiah 36:1-22**

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#### **I. Historical & Biblical Context**

- A. What should we do when we are overwhelmed? How should we cope with situations we cannot resolve or handle? This chapter really reminds us of the necessity of studying, retaining and relying on God by trusting in Him. The goal of our enemy is to make us feel helpless when facing dire circumstances. The Assyrian army swept down from the north, conquering Syria and Israel (Is. 8:3-4). This was about the year 700 B.C., during the reign of the godly king Hezekiah of Judah.
- B. The king of Assyria was not contented with taking Israel; he wanted Judah also. He had also taken the fortified cities of Judah as well, and what was left was Jerusalem. Seven years after Hezekiah had watched Samaria fall, Assyria was now at his doorstep. In an early biblical passage, Hezekiah agreed to pay a tribute to the Assyrian King. He exhausted the silver and gold in the treasure of his own house and the house of the LORD. However, Hezekiah's payment to Sennacherib did not deter the Assyrians from their determination to conquer Jerusalem. Hezekiah mistakenly trusted in wealth and treaties to see him through his crisis rather than putting his trust in the LORD.

#### **II. When Distress Showed Up during King Hezekiah**

1. **vv. 1-2.** King Sennacherib sent three of his top officials to Judah in an effort to intimidate the people into surrendering. They stopped at the aqueduct outside Jerusalem, the city crucial water supply which would be Jerusalem's lifeline in a siege attack. Rabshakeh seemed to be in complete command of the situation. This was the very place where Isaiah had confronted Ahaz, Hezekiah's father after Ahaz too had refused to trust the LORD.

These officials were accompanied by a large army (2 Kings 18:17). Upon the arrival of the officials in Jerusalem, three of Hezekiah's officials went out to meet them. The three Assyrian officers used a plan of psychological warfare by ridiculing Hezekiah's dependence upon the LORD. Instead of the king coming to speak to Hezekiah, he sent his officials. It 's very important for Christians to understand that God does not want His people to live In fear.. It is not within our power to remove threats, but we can meet them with faith.

2. **vv. 4-6.** One of the great battles for Hezekiah during this time was the temptation to make an alliance with Egypt, the only nation strong enough to protect Judah against the Assyrians. Isaiah did everything he could to discourage Hezekiah and the leaders of Judah from putting their trust in Egypt (Is. 19:11-17, 20:1-6; 30:1-7) The LORD wanted Judah to trust Him instead of Egypt.. "What confidence is this in which you trust" (V. 4)? In a sense, Rabshakeh was speaking the truth. God wanted Judah to have no confidence in Egypt. Instead, his statement was made to completely demoralize Judah and drive them to despair. Rabshakeh could see the truth of Egypt's weakness better than many of the leaders of Judah. Judah's leaders knew that anyone who ever trusted Egypt suffered for it.
3. **vv. 8-9.** Rabshakeh anticipated the response of Judah's leaders, and he knew that Hezekiah had implemented broad reforms in Judah, including the removal of the high places, destroying the altar of Baal (2 Kings 18:3-4) . The high places were spots for individual worship that was prohibited by the LORD's law (Lev. 17:1-4? God regarded sacrifice at high places as an offense. Israel was commanded to bring their sacrifices to the official center for sacrifice, the tabernacle or temple. 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. "Is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away (V. 7)? Rabshakeh thought Hezekiah's reforms really displeased God so he should not expect help from the LORD God of Israel. If Hezekiah was not careful the comments of Rabshakeh might start to make sense when it was really demonic logic. "Give

a pledge to my master the king of Assyrian” (V. 8). Rabshakeh’s strategy was to make Judah give up out of fear, discouragement or despair. He mocked Judah’s weak army when he said, “I will give you two thousand horses-if you are able on your part to put riders on them” (V. 8). Even if we provided you with 2,000 horses, it would not do you any good.

4. **vv. 10-12.** Rabshakeh told the Judean officials that God was on the side of the Assyrian army. Like all good deception, it would have been easy for Hezekiah and his men to believe this lie. After all, hadn’t the Assyrians been wildly successful? Surely, God must be on their side. He further stated that God sent the army to destroy the land. In conquering Israel and bringing Judah to the brink, the Assyrians did the will of God. God prophesied that all this would happen in Isaiah 8:3-4; 7:16-17. God allowed it to happen so His prophesied plan would be fulfilled.

Fearful that the words of Rabshakeh would make the common people panic, the Jewish representatives requested that Rabshakeh speak to them in the Syrian language (Aramaic) instead of the Jewish language (Judean or Hebrew). However, Rabshakeh did not care if the common citizens of Jerusalem heard his words. The more fear, discouragement and despair he could spread the better. He pointed to what conditions would be like during an extended siege in Jerusalem, that they would eat their own dung or waste and drink their own urine.

5. **vv. 13-20.** Rabshakeh’s speech was designed to build fear and unbelief in God’s people, to make surrender attractive, to glorify the enemy facing God’s people and to make God’s people doubt their leaders. When the Assyrians conquered a people, they forcibly resettled them in faraway places to break their spirit and weaken their power. He pointed out that the gods of other nations had not been able to protect them against the onslaught of the Assyrian army and neither could their LORD God! It was one thing to speak against Judah, its people and leaders. It was another thing altogether to mock the LORD God of Israel and label Him as just another god. Rabshakeh offended the LORD in a way he will later regret.

6. **vv. 21-22**. The officials of Hezekiah did not argue or respond to Rabshakeh's words. It would be useless to try to match wits with his demonic logic. Most times it is better to keep silent and trust the LORD. In this matter, King Hezekiah was wise enough to make this command, and his officials and the people were wise enough to obey him. Even though they were silent, they were still deeply affected by Rabshakeh's words.

### **III. Conclusion**

Real faith and trust are dependent upon God. Never negotiate with demonic beings or listen to demonic logic.