
ISAIAH 36–39 correspond also to 2 Kings 18 ff. (here represented by green) and 2 Chronicles 29 ff. (here represented by dark yellow). There are vast and very interesting details to be found on these historical chapters, but my object, for the present, is to present a very brief summary of only the most vital points.

Isaiah 36

After King Sennacherib conquered many of the cities of Israel, his forces came up against Jerusalem. Sennacherib sent an embassy to give a message to King Hezekiah. The message of these ambassadors included an offensive and blasphemous diatribe against the Lord. Also, a well-deserved ridicule of the Egyptian forces upon whom Judah liked to lean upon from time to time. Although, as we shall see in ISAIAH 38, Sennacherib was greatly defeated, it did not keep him back from his bragadocio against Judah.

Note: It is not as critical for us to make a careful comparison of where Kings and Chronicles coincide, instead, only where they may add something to our understanding of Isaiah. Therefore, we will note contributions by the one or by the other. Furthermore, I have generally passed over verses in both Kings and Chronicles where the text makes little difference to that which we find in Isaiah. For instance, in ISAIAH 36:3b we find "...Hilkiah's son, which was over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, Asaph's son, the recorder." The narrative in 2 Kings 18:18 changes the word order, yet says essentially the same: "...the son of Hilkiah, which [was] over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder." On the other hand, if a change of word may be instructive, even if the word has an identical meaning in both texts, this may be indicated. The green we will use for Kings is not to be confused by the changes agreed upon by both the Book of Mormon and the JST, made in teal. The Book of Mormon does not include any portions of these four chapters. Where there are JST corrections (ISAIAH 36:5; 37:17, 26, 32, 36; 38:14–17; 39:2), we will focus on the clarifications made by the JST. Furthermore, I see little value in making detailed comparisons between the *Biblia Hebraica* and the other ancient texts as we have done in the rest of the book. There may be occasional exceptions.

Historical background (based on 2 Kings 18 and 2 Chronicles 29–31): Hezekiah is the son of Ahaz (king of Judah) and of Abijah (or Abi). Hezekiah began to reign during the third year of the reign of Hoshea, son of Elah, king of Israel (Northern Kingdom). The Israelite civil war after the death of King Solomon led to the division of Holy Land into the northern ten tribes

and the southern two tribes. Hezekiah was 25 years old. It was said of Hezekiah that he trusted in the Lord, cleaved unto him, and kept the commandments. He was counted as being righteous in the sight of the Lord. Hezekiah cut down the groves and removed the altars from the high places and had them thrown into Brook Kidron, and even broke the brazen serpent that Moses had made, for the people had begun to worship it. In the very first month of his reign, Hezekiah began a thorough cleansing and repair of the House of the Lord for it had been neglected and defiled. He charged the Levites and Priests with the job of sanctifying themselves to serve in the sacred edifice. Hezekiah reminded the priesthood how much Judah had suffered and been punished as a consequence of her disobedience and admonished the people to re-establish their covenant with the Lord. When the Temple was cleansed and purified, all manner of offerings were prepared, including burnt offerings, sin offerings, thanks offerings, peace offerings, even singing and the playing of instruments. Full of thanksgiving many worshipped the Lord. When preparations were finished, letters were sent over all of Judah and Ephraim. These letters were an invitation to all to participate in a Passover, as had not been prepared and celebrated since the time of King David. It was a call for people to *return* to the true God of the fathers. When the people of Ephraim heard the invitation they *laughed to scorn*. The people of Judah were moved to humility. Hezekiah did seek the Lord *with all his heart, and prospered*. He was successful in restoring the borders, fought against the Philistines, and rebelled against the king of Assyria. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, besieged Samaria and after three years, took it. Ephraim was taken captive and carried away at that time.

vv. 1–10. Sennacherib sends an embassy to Hezekiah, the purpose of which was to intimidate the Judean King into submission. They came to the same conduit by the upper pool we were made familiar with when Isaiah met King Ahaz (ISAIAH 7:3). First, the embassy rightfully mocks Judah’s sometime dependence on Egypt. They then go on to offend the Living God. This is not unlike Satan’s darts, where he inserts some truths among falsehoods. The embassy falls into priestcraft when they dare speak in the name of the Lord without the authority to do so.

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.

* 2 Kings 18:13, Fenced.

** 2 Chronicles 32:1, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself.

NOW it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah. There is some debate about the year involved. I like what Delitzsch says: “But the task of pronouncing an infallible sentence upon them all we shall leave to those who know everything . . . advice which is good not only about dates but about what species of animals are meant in many instances.”

¶ [That] Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them.

Sennacherib was the son of King Shalmaneser of Assyria (Barnes, Gill). The *defenced* cities of Judah were those that were fortified. King Sennacherib seems to have been successful in conquering many of these fortified cities, except for Jerusalem. See notes on ISAIAH 8:8, “And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.” Compare also, with 2 Chronicles 32:1.

2 Kings 18:14–16

14 And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

15 And Hezekiah gave [him] all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house.
16 At that time did Hezekiah cut off [the gold from] the doors of the temple of the LORD, and [from] the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

We know from ISAIAH 36:2 (below), that Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was in Lachish. It is clear from portions of the 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles narratives, that while the king of Assyria laid siege in Lachish, he sent messengers to Jerusalem to demand that Hezekiah give in. In the verses, above, in 2 Kings 18:14–16, it seems that Hezekiah sent tribute (which tribute came from raiding the temple of the Lord) to Sennacherib and asked the Assyrian king for forgiveness for having rebelled against him. The expression, “return from me,” or שׁוּב מֵעָלַי, literally means *turn away from me*. That is, do not attack but go away from me, I will comply with those things you expect of me. We may safely suppose that these things happened before King Hezekiah made his full conversion to the Lord. “Poor Hezekiah! How weak was he to give up his Lord’s honor in the vain hope of peace!” says Jennings and then adds: “But how easy it is for us all to discern others’ weakness!” When King Hezekiah heard that Sennacherib was coming against Jerusalem—and was not turning away—despite the tribute he had sent, he did not waste any time to prepare, as seen in 2 Chronicles 32:2–8.

2 Chronicles 32:2–8

2 And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem,
3 He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which [were] without the city: and they did help him.

4 So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?

5 Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised [it] up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo [in] the city of

David, and made darts and shields in abundance.

6 And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying,
7 Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that [is] with him: for [there be] more with us than with him:
8 With him [is] an arm of flesh; but with us [is] the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested¹ themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

This waterway (2 Chronicles 32:3), also known as *Hezekiah's tunnel*, was used to protect the water supply. See notes under ISAIAH 22:9. I was not able to find the certain meaning for *zedah* [זֶדָה]² although the word *echo* has been suggested,³ as well as *overlap* and *fissure*.⁴

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.

* 2 Chronicles 32:9, Sennacherib king of Assyria.

** 2 Chronicles 32:9 [Speaking of Sennacherib], (but he [himself laid siege] against Lachish, and all his power with him,). 2 Kings 18:17, [The king of Assyria] sent Tartan and Rabсарis and Rabshakeh from Lachish.

*** 2 Kings 18:17, great host.

**** 2 Kings 18:17, And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood.

And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army. Some have suggested that אֶת־רַב־שָׁקֵהָ *Rabshakeh* is a

¹ Took comfort in.

² See the inscription in Hebrew in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 1901–1906, 11:340.

³ Haupt, Paul. *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 32:144. October 1915 – July 1916.

⁴ See W. F. Albright, “The Siloam Inscription,” in James B. Pritchard (editor), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1950), p. 321; and King, Philip J. and Lawrence E. Stager (2001), *Life in Biblical Israel*, p. 220.

title, rather than the name of an individual. Faussett has: “*Rab* is a title of authority, ‘chief-cup-bearer.’” ¶ *And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field* (see also ISAIAH 7:3, where Isaiah met Ahaz). Gill, leaning on Ben Melech has “The pool is a ditch, built with stone and lime, where rainwater was collected, or where they drew water from the fountain, and the waters were gathered into this pool; and there was in this pool a hole, which they stopped, until the time they pleased to fetch water, out of the pool: and the conduit was a ditch near to the pool, and they brought water out of the pool into the conduit, when they chose to drink, or wash garments: the highway was a way paved with stones, so that they could walk upon it in rainy days; and here they stood and washed their garments in the waters of the conduit, and in the field they spread them to the sun. This pool lay outside the city, yet just by the walls of it, which showed the daring insolence of Rabshakeh to come so very nigh, for he was in the hearing of the men upon the walls.” Delitzsch explains: “The fuller’s field (שִׂדְהָ כוֹבֵס) was situated, as we may assume with Robinson, Schultz, and Thenius, against Williams, Krafft, etc., on the western side of the city, where there is still an ‘upper pool’ of great antiquity (2 Chronicles 32:30). Near to this pool the fullers, i.e., the cleaners and thickeners of woollen fabrics, carried on their occupation (כוֹבֵס, from *Câbas*, related to *Câbash*, *subigere*, which bears the same relation to *râchatz* as *πλύνειν* to *λούειν*). Robinson and his companions saw some people washing clothes at the upper pool when they were there; and, for a considerable distance round, the surface of this favourite washing and bleaching place was covered with things spread out to bleach or dry. The road (מַסְלָה), which ran past this fuller's field, was the one which leads from the western gate to Joppa.” Faussett has, regarding the conduit: “An aqueduct from the pool or reservoir for the supply of the city. At the foot of Zion was Fount Siloah (ISAIAH 8:6; Nehemiah 3:15; John 9:7), called also Gihon, on the west of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32:30). Two pools were supplied from it, *the Upper*, or *Old* (ISAIAH 22:11), or *King's* (Nehemiah 2:14), and *the Lower* (ISAIAH 22:9), which received the superfluous waters of the upper. The upper pool is still to be seen, about seven hundred yards from the Jaffa gate. The highway leading to the fullers’ field, which was in a position near water for the purposes of washing, previous to drying and bleaching, the cloth, was probably alongside the aqueduct.”

3 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.

* 2 Kings 18:18, And when they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim.

✓ or, secretary

These three individuals came out, according to 2 Kings 18:18, because they were responding to Rabshakeh request to speak to King Hezekiah. There is some speculation as to whether Eliakim and Shebna are the same as mentioned in ISAIAH 22:15–25, although they have different job responsibilities here. The third man, Joah, seems to have been the historian or *historiographer* (Barnes, Gill).

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?*

* 2 Chronicles 32:10, Whereon do ye trust, that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem?

Rabshakeh must have been the main spokesman for the King of Assyria. In ISAIAH 10:8 we introduced the idea of the Assyrian and Babylonian boastings. King Sennacherib, as well as many of the kings who attacked Israel in the olden days, only told the part of the story—the part they wanted to tell. They often bragged about their exploits. Below is a sample of this type of braggadocio. Even in modern times, nations that attack Israel claim they are doing marvelously even when they have sustained heavy casualties—and are indeed losing the war (see 1967, מלחמת ששת הימים (Six Day War) / The Setback, النكسة). Sennacherib (704–681 BC, pp. 199–201, in Pritchard)⁵ boasted of the siege that he brought to pass upon Jerusalem at the time of Hezekiah. The saying, “He who laughs last laughs best” fits in well into this historical even, as we shall see. “As to Hezekiah the Jew,” boasted Sennacherib, “he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-) ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded

⁵ Pritchard, James B. (editor), *The Ancient Near East, Volume 1: Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Princeton University Press, 6th Paperback printing, 1973, pp. 199–201.

him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate. His towns which I had plundered, I took away from his country and gave them (over) to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Sillibel, king of Gaza. Thus I reduced his country, but I still increased the tribute and the *katru*—presents (due) to me (as his) overlord which I imposed (later) upon him beyond the former tribute, to be delivered annually. Hezekiah himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed and whose irregular and elite troops which he had brought into Jerusalem, his royal residence, in order to strengthen (it), had deserted him, did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 39 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony [This refers probably to stibnite, which might have been used as an eye paint (beside the cheaper and efficient substitute, burnt shells of almonds and soot). Stibium is easily reduced and the metal is sporadically attested in Mesopotamia since the Neo-Sumerian period], large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) with ivory, *nimedu* – chairs (inlaid) with ivory, elephant-hides, ebony-wood, boxwood (and) all kinds of valuable treasures, his (own) daughters, concubines, male and female musicians. In order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his (personal) messenger ... Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, sat upon a *nimedu* - throne and passed in review the booty (taken) from Lachish (*La-ki-su*).” Apparently King Hezekiah was not the only one to bring tribute: “[All the kings brought me] sumptuous gifts and ... kissed my feet ... [but] the king of Ashkelon, who did not bow to my yoke, I deported and sent to Assyria, his family-gods, himself, his wife, his children, his brothers, all the male descendants of his family ... [and the king of Ashkelon now] pulls the straps (of my yoke)!”

5 I say, [~~sayest thou~~], (~~but [they are but] vain words~~)[✓] thy words are but vain when thou sayest, [I have] counsel and strength for war.[✓] ✓ Now, on whom dost thou trust that thou rebellest against me?

✓ a word of lips

✓ ✓ or, but counsel and strength are for the war

I say, thy words are but vain when thou sayest, I have counsel and strength for war. These are the offensive words of Rabshakeh, or the chief cup-bearer speaking in vanity, but accusing King Hezekiah of acting in vanity. It is interesting that we often accuse others by attaching to them an extension of our own motives. Rabshakeh, then, is calling into question the possibility that Hezekiah could defend Jerusalem against the attacks of Assyria. ¶ *Now, on whom dost thou trust that thou*

rebelled against me? This is a question of the most vital importance. Who do we trust? Rabshakeh begins to ask the question in the most mocking of tones, as we see in the next two verses. He insults Hezekiah for trusting on the arm of Egypt as well as for trusting God.

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.

* 2 Kings 18:21, bruised.

Rabshakeh goes on to compare Egypt (or the flesh of man) to a broken reed. Anyone who leans on Egypt might as well lean on a broken reed so that it will go through the hand and pierce the flesh.

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?*

* 2 Kings 18:22, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?

Here is where Rabshakeh crosses the line. He could have insulted the strength of man, but now he offends the Holy One of Israel and mocks Him. Gill well explains regarding the altars of the high places: “The high places and altars which Hezekiah took away were the high places and altars of Heathen gods, of false deities, and not of the true God of Israel ... but Rabshakeh would make a crime of it, and, ignorantly supposing that these were the altars and high places of the God of Israel, would insinuate that the taking of these away must be displeasing to him, and consequently Hezekiah and his people could not hope for any protection from him, whom he had so highly affronted; but all this talk was the fruit of ignorance, as well as of malice.” ¶ *And said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar?* With the passing of time, and especially after the construction of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem, the *high places* (בָּמֹת) seem to no longer have been sanctioned for worship. The ISBE article on *High Place* as well as the LDS Bible Dictionary on *High Places* are quite instructive. While there are a number of ways that these passages can be understood, it is clear that the term *High Place* (בָּמֹת) over time increasingly took on the meaning of a place of idolatrous worship. Such idolatrous shrines

were constructed not only in the hills and mountains but also in the cities (2 Kings 17:9) and in the streets (Ezekiel 16:24). Micah spoke of Jerusalem and by implication the temple there, as a High Place: “What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem?” (Micah 1:5b). Even when the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing, the Savior chose to transform a mountain top (Mount of Transfiguration) into sacred ground: “And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them” (Mark 9:2). We also know that righteous Lehi offered sacrifices outside of the Jerusalem Temple when he traveled in the wilderness: “And it came to pass that when he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water. And it came to pass that *he built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God*” (1 Nephi 2:6–7, emphasis added). And again we read: “And it came to pass that they did rejoice exceedingly, and did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto the Lord; and they gave thanks unto the God of Israel” (1 Nephi 5:9, also 1 Nephi 7:22; Mosiah 2:3). We do not have a clear enough understanding of what was or not sanctioned from our Bible as we have it today. It seems that what Rabshakeh meant, in his insolent taunt, was that King Hezekiah was only offering sacrifice *before Jehovah*, and *not* before any of the other idol gods. Therefore, Rabshakeh insinuated, King Hezekiah could never be successful.

8 Now therefore give pledges, y 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.

* 2 Kings 18:23, lord.

✓ or, hostages

Now therefore give pledges, I pray thee, to my master the king of Assyria. YLT translates הַתְּעָרֵב as *negotiate*: “And now, negotiate, I pray thee, with my lord the king of Asshur.” So also Alexander, NASB & GNB (bargain), HCSB (deal), ERV (make agreement), ABP {LXX (⚡)} (mix), and LITV (exchange pledges). ¶ *And I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them.* The whole idea is a taunt, in which the Rabshakeh implies that Assyria could give Judah two thousand horses—but it would do Judah little good as they would not find enough horsemen who could ride them. Gill says: “Thus scoffing at him, as if he had not so many soldiers to

bring out against him; or so many men in his kingdom as had skill enough to ride a horse; in his bravado he signifies, that if he would come out and fight him, he would lend him so many horses, if he could put men upon them, to assist him; this he said as boasting of his master's strength and power, and in scorn and derision at Hezekiah's weakness."

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?

How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants. According to Barnes, Rabshakeh seems to be saying something like: "The most unimportant captain in the army of Assyria commands more horsemen than this, and how can you expect to oppose even him, much more how can you be able to resist all the mighty army of the Assyrians?"

The word used for Captain **רַב־צָבָא**, means *governor* (HAL). Barnes explains that a **צָבָא**: "denotes a prefect or governor of a province less than a satrap, an officer who was under the satrap, and subject to him." ¶ *And put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?* Once again, Hezekiah is being ridiculed for leaning on Egypt. Rawlinson explains: "Consciousness of the weakness, with which Rabshakeh had just reproached them, had led to their application to Egypt for a chariot and a cavalry force. Egypt was well able to furnish both, and had sent a large force of both to the help of Ekron a short time previously ('Eponym Canon,' p. 133, 11. 48–56). That force had, however, suffered defeat at the hands of Sennacherib."

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.

* 2 Kings 18:25, place.

Rabshakeh once again crosses the line of a normal taunt by now claiming that he is coming against Jerusalem and against Hezekiah under command from the Lord. This is a form of priestcraft. Faussett has: "A boastful inference from the past successes of Assyria, designed to influence the Jews to surrender; their *own* principles bound them to yield to Jehovah's will. He may have heard from partisans in Judah what Isaiah had foretold (ISAIAH 10:5–6)."

vv. 11–22. Hezekiah's servants ask the servants of Sennacherib to be more discreet and speak in the Aramaic language rather than in Hebrew—so all the onlookers would not have to hear what was being said. The servants of Sennacherib use this occasion to further mock Hezekiah, instead, and try and scare the people. In fact, they encourage a rebellion against Hezekiah by making promises to the people. Assyria seems to be asking for submission both in terms of tribute money as well as personal humiliation. The great provocation against the Lord included comparing Him to the idols of the heathen nations. The servants of Hezekiah say nothing more and repeat all that has been said in the ears of King Hezekiah.

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.

* 2 Kings 18:26, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah.

Eliakim, Shebna and Joah, who seem to have been listening attentively now cut into Rabshakeh's diatribe to make a request that he stop speaking in the tongue of the Jews (**לְשׂוֹן יְהוּדִים**, i.e., *Yehudit*, or Hebrew)—a language that the men on the wall could fully understand—and instead would speak in *Aramit*, or Aramaic⁶ (**לְשׂוֹן אֲרָמִית**). One gets the impression that especially the last comments made by the Rabshakeh were those that these leaders feared could negatively affect the men on the wall. Gill suggests, regarding who spoke to the Rabshakeh: "That is, one of them addressed him in the name of the rest; for the verb is singular; and what follows confirms it; perhaps Eliakim was the speaker." Gill suggests: "And as this speech of Eliakim's showed great submissiveness in praying and entreating Rabshakeh to speak to them in another language, and a mean⁷ abject spirit, in saying they were his servants, so a great degree of timorousness in them, and diffidence of the people, lest they should be terrified, and be for giving up the city at once into the hands of the enemy."

12 But Rabshakeh said, Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? [hath he] not [sent

⁶ Aramaic was the common language spoken at the time of Christ.

⁷ I.e., lowly.

me] to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?

These words of the Rabshakeh, are once again, very aggressive and offensive, something to the effect of “What, and you thought I was speaking on behalf of the King of Asshur just for the benefit of King Hezekiah? No, I am here to warn the men on the wall as well. Because we will encompass this city in such a tight siege that they—along with you—will have nothing more to drink than their own urine and nothing more to eat than their own dung.” I had the opportunity to speak to a former member of the Chilean cavalry, who had been under such difficult circumstances around the 1930s where indeed the only liquid available was their own urine, which most of the soldiers drank in a futile attempt to quench their thirst. As we follow the history of other sieges we hear of people who have boiled and eaten their own children for hunger (see for instance, the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, as told by Josephus; as well as 2 Kings 6:28–29, all of which was predicted in *Rain in Due Season*—see Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:56–57). In the Hebrew Scriptures in ISAIAH 36:12, a scribe tried to change the present words so they would not be so objectionable, such that instead of *urine* we have the *water between their legs*, **מימי רגליהם**. Barnes explains: “That the Masorettes in the Hebrew text have so pointed the words used, that in reading it the offensiveness would be considerably avoided. It is common in the Hebrew Scriptures, when a word is used in the text that is indelicate, to place another word in the margin ||, and the vowel-points that belong to the word in the margin || are applied to the word in the text, and the word in the margin || is thus commonly read. In accordance with this custom among the Jews, it is evident that more delicacy might have been observed by our translators in this, and in some other places of the Scriptures.” A similar complaint is voiced by Gill, who explains that such a translation “would have been more decent.” Certainly, the horrors of war are felt upon reading these words. Rawlinson says, “But the pride and arrogance of the Assyrians rendered them as careless of diplomatic etiquette as, at a later date, were the Romans (see Polybius, 29:11, Liv., 45:12).

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.

* 2 Chronicles 32:18, Then they cried with a loud voice in the Jews' speech unto the people of Jerusalem that [were] on the

wall, to affright them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city.

Then Rabshakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language. So instead, **בְּקוֹל-גָּדוֹל**, in a **great voice**, that is, loudly, Rabshakeh now speaks even louder to be heard by all, and in Hebrew. Gill has: “In which he spoke before; but now he raised up himself, and elevated his voice, and strained himself to the utmost, that all the people might hear, and that he might strike a terror into them, and stir them up to mutiny and rebellion, and oblige their governors to give up the city into the hands of the Assyrians; this use he made of the request of Hezekiah’s ministers, perceiving hereby their fears, and the disposition of the people.” Barnes says that in the word *stood* we have: “Indicating the posture of a man who intends to speak to them at a distance.” ¶ *And said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria.* Rabshakeh then goes on to give the message on behalf of King Sennacherib, King of Asshur, to Judah.

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

* 2 Kings 18:29, deliver you out of his hand.

Rabshakeh attempts to instill fear in the hearts of Judah by assuring them that King Hezekiah could never stand up to Assyria and would never be able to defend the people.

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.

* 2 Kings 18:30, and this.

* 2 Chronicles 32:11–15, Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst, saying, The LORD our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall worship before one altar, and burn incense upon it? Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of [other] lands? were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand? Who [was there] among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand? Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him: for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand?

Does not Satan, and his emissaries, also attempt to speak this way to us, telling us that the Lord God will not be able to deliver us? Not be able to save us? Does he not prey on our weakest points, our deepest fears in these matters? Satan not only knows us from our life history upon this earth, but also from the pre-existence. Let us bravely, valiantly trust in that God who gave us life. Nephi admonished us to hold on to the *iron rod*: “And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction. Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things” (1Nephi 15:24–25). ¶ One of Elder Gene R. Cook’s favorite scriptures on the power of prayer—which fits perfectly with our topic—is Alma 48:10–12: “Therefore we did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, yea, and also give us strength that we might retain our cities, and our lands, and our possessions, for the support of our people. Yea, and it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith, and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him. And we did take courage with our small force which we had received, and were fixed with a determination to conquer our enemies, and to maintain our lands, and our possessions, and our wives, and our children, and the cause of our liberty” (emphasis added). I see an admonition to prayer and scripture study mentioned often as a protection from personal apostasy. And other admonitions would include such things as following the Brethren, fighting pride, serving others, honoring our temple covenants, attending Church regularly and keeping the commandments, walking in all things as moved by the Spirit.

16 Hearken 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;

* 2 Kings 18:31, eat ye every man of his own vine.

✓ or, Seek my favour by a present

Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make [an agreement] with me [by] a present. The Targum (Ⓢ) renders it: “And hearken not unto Hezekiah; for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make peace (שלמה) with me, and come out to me” (Stenning, so also Pauli and Chilton). Barnes suggests: “The Hebrew is literally, ‘Make with me a blessing’ (ברכה). The idea of its being done ‘by a present,’ is not in the Hebrew text. The word ‘blessing’ here probably means the same as peace. ‘Make peace with me,’ perhaps because peace was regarded as a blessing; and perhaps the word is used with a reference to one of the significations of: בָּרַךְ, which is to kneel down, and this word may refer to their kneeling down; that is, to their offering allegiance to the king of Assyria.” ¶ The word בְּרִכָּה does appear as a gift or present in several scriptures, however, as pointed out by the third acceptance in Gesenius: “A gift, present, by which one signifies favour and good will, such as one offers with good wishes (Genesis 33:11; 1 Samuel 25:27; 30:26; 2 Kings 5:15),” although Gesenius himself prefers to translate it as *peace* in ISAIAH 36:16. Barnes also suggests that בָּרַךְ *kneeling*, seems to be an invitation by King Sennacherib to have Judah come and kneel before him. Certainly it is in line with the other aggressive comments made by the Rabshakeh. If Rabshakeh meant *peace*, perhaps this was said in a sarcastic tone. ¶ *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.* The expression, *come out to me* is one in which the Assyrian Rabshakeh is demanding the surrender of Jerusalem. Gill cleverly suggests the meaning of the Rabshakeh’s offer: “Forsake your king, throw off your allegiance to him, surrender yourselves and city to me.” Faussett explains: “Rab-shakeh tries to soften, in the eyes of the Jews, the well-known Assyrian policy of weakening the vanquished by deporting them to other lands (Genesis 47:21; 2 Kings 17:6).” ¶ The eating of the fruit and the drinking from their own cisterns represented the peace of being able to cultivate crops and partake of the same—as well as the absence of drought. It is put as a contraposition to “that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss” (ISAIAH 36:12b). Both the food and the plentiful water are in contrast to the abject desolation that would be brought about by a siege.

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.*

* 2 Kings 18:32, and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die.

Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land. As has been mentioned, Assyria had a general policy of moving the people they conquered around. This was a measure they used to place people into submission. With the use of the words “until I come” there is an implication here that this deportation would not happen right away. In essence, this is what happened to the Ten Tribes of Israel; they were deported by Assyria and moved to other lands where, with time, most would find it difficult to retain a national identity. Rawlinson says: “It was so much the usual policy of Assyria to remove to a new locality a conquered people, which had given them trouble, that Rabshakeh felt safe in assuming that the fate in store for the Jews, if they submitted themselves, was a transplantation . . . Rabshakeh tries to soften down the hardship of the lot before them by promises of a removal to a land equal in all respects to Palestine.” ¶ *A land of corn⁸ and wine, a land of bread and vineyards.* In *Rain in Due Season*, specific mention is made not only of vines, but also of oil: “Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit” (Deuteronomy 28:40). Also, on the positive side, if Israel was obedient, the promise in *Rain in Due Season* was: “And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely” (Leviticus 26:5).

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?

[Beware] lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. Rabshakeh, like a high-pressure salesperson, tells them that they should not even think of the possibility that Hezekiah’s God, even the Lord **Jehovah** (יהוה) could deliver Judah out of this bind.

¶ *Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?* Rabshakeh gives as proof of Jehovah’s impotence, the fact that so far none of the nations’ idolatrous gods had been able to withstand the king of Assyria. Rabshakeh puts the Holy One of Israel at the same level as the worthless *idols* or **לֹא אֱלֹהִים**, no-gods of the nations.

19 Where [are] the gods of Hamath and Arphad? where [are] the gods of

⁸ Not maize, but rather *grains* (see ISAIAH 17:5).

Sepharvaim?* and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?

* 2 Kings 18:34, Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?

The **לֹא אֱלֹהִים** of Syria or Mesopotamia and their impotence are mentioned here, in an effort to impress on the Judeans the strength of the king of Assyria. Delitzsch says: “Rabshakeh’s words in ISAIAH 36:18–20 are the same as those in ISAIAH 10:8–11.”

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?

* 2 Kings 18:35, countries / country.

If the **לֹא אֱלֹהִים** of these lands were impotent in stopping the king of Assyria, would not the God of Israel also be impotent to deliver Jerusalem—the thought is repeated for emphasis. Gill says: “Thus blasphemously setting the Lord God of Israel upon a level with the fictitious gods of the Gentiles; though these could not [deliver or save—GB], the Lord could, being the Lord God Almighty.”

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

* 2 Kings 18:36, the people.

It seems that these three Judean leaders had been instructed beforehand not to answer the emissaries of the king of Assyria, and they were obedient in this thing. The command was a wise one from Hezekiah, and his servants showed humility in obedience. Barnes says: “Hezekiah had commanded them not to answer. They were simply to hear what Rabshakeh had to propose, and to report to him, that he might decide on what course to pursue. It was a case also in which it was every way proper that they should be silent. There was so much insolence, self-confidence, blasphemy, the proposals were so degrading, and the claims were so arrogant, that it was not proper that they should enter into conference, or listen a moment to the terms proposed. Their minds also were so horror-stricken with the language of insolence and blasphemy, and their hearts so pained by the circumstances of the city, that they would not feel like replying to him. There are circumstances when it is proper to maintain a profound silence in the presence of revilers and blasphemers, and

when we *should withdraw from them, and go and spread the case before the Lord*. This was done here ISAIAH 37:1, and the result showed that this was the course of wisdom” (emphasis added). This reminds me of General Conference in Salt Lake City. The Brethren have asked those who attend General Conference not to engage the hecklers who stand outside—and who either profane those things that are most sacred to us, or dress as return missionaries, or in otherwise try and offend.

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.

After this disagreeable moment the three Jewish leaders return to King Hezekiah and rehearsed the blasphemous words they had heard from the Rabshakeh. They rent or tore their clothes in a sign of deep mourning and sadness. Barnes says: “The causes of their griefs were the insolence and arrogance of Rabshakeh; the proposal to surrender the city; the threatening of the siege on the one hand, and of the removal on the other, and the blasphemy of the name of their God, and the reproach of the king. All these things filled their hearts with grief, and they hastened to make report to Hezekiah.” Many mothers say, “If someone hurts me I will forgive it, but if they even as much as touch my children!” Tears run down my cheeks as I read these verses and write these thoughts. Insult the Lord, His Church, the Brethren, or desecrate those things which we hold most holy and I have feelings of great pain come over me.

9 September 2013
