

- Rabshakeh confused God's sovereignty with God's approval. He interpreted God's providence according to his own purposes and then claimed divine authority for that interpretation. This is why we must test spiritual claims by Scripture (1 John 4:1). Success does not necessarily prove divine approval, and difficulty does not necessarily prove divine rejection. Our confidence must rest on what God has actually said, not on what our circumstances seem to say or on someone's claim about what God has said.

(iv) *Dread – Spreading Fear Among the People, 36:11–12*

- Rabshakeh refuses the officials' request to speak in Aramaic and instead speaks publicly in the Jews' language so that the people on the wall can hear him (vv11–13). He deliberately spreads fear among ordinary citizens. He describes the horrors of a siege and warns them of starvation and suffering (v12). He presents surrender as the only sensible way to avoid suffering.
- Fear can paralyse faith. It does not always cause us to reject God openly; sometimes it simply makes us too afraid to obey. Peter warns: *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Pet 5:8). Fear can cause us to hesitate, compromise, or abandon what we know God has commanded. Isaiah gives us the proper response: *"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid"* (12:2). Faith does not deny danger. It refuses to let fear become our master (2 Tim 1:7). Fear focuses on what might happen; faith rests on what God has said.

(v) *Doubt – Undermining Leadership and Faith, 36:13–17*

- Rabshakeh now attacks the people's confidence in both Hezekiah and God. First, he presents the king of Assyria as powerful and credible while portraying Hezekiah as deceptive. He says, *"Let not Hezekiah deceive you"* (v14), portraying Hezekiah as giving false hope. Second, he directly attacks their trust in God: *"Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD"* (v15). This reveals the real target of his speech. He does not merely want Judah to distrust Hezekiah; he wants them to stop trusting the LORD. Third, he presents surrender as the practical and sensible choice. He promises that they can enjoy their own vine, fig tree, and cistern (v16). But the promise of comfort concealed deportation (v17; 2 Kgs 17:6, 24).

Assyria's Threats Against Jerusalem (36:1–22)

- The Book of Isaiah divides broadly into 2 sections. Chapters 1–35 focus on Judah's sin, the threat of Assyria, and the LORD's power to deliver His people. Chapters 40–66 look ahead to Babylon, the exile, and God's promises of restoration. Isaiah 36–39 serve as a historical and theological bridge between these 2 sections. It looks both backward, confirming God's Word concerning Assyria, and forward, anticipating Babylon and the exile.
- The events of Isaiah 36–39 parallel 2 Kings 18–20 and 2 Chronicles 32, but Isaiah records them with a prophetic purpose. The central message is that the LORD rules over nations, keeps His promises, and calls His people to trust Him. Chapters 36–37 focus on the Assyrian crisis and the LORD's deliverance of Jerusalem, while chapters 38–39 reveal Hezekiah's weakness and point forward to the coming Babylonian captivity. Assyria is the immediate crisis, Babylon the looming future, and God's sovereignty the unifying theme.
- Isaiah 36 records the Assyrian invasion during Hezekiah's reign. Jerusalem was threatened by the great military power of Assyria. But the real battle was spiritual. It presents a confrontation between faith and unbelief, human pride and divine sovereignty, and the living God and false gods. The real question was not how strong Assyria was, but whether the LORD was able and faithful to save His people.

1. The Assyrian Threat – Jerusalem Surrounded (36:1–3)

- Isaiah begins: *"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"* (v1). Around 701 BC, Judah faced the greatest crisis of Hezekiah's reign—the invasion by Assyria. Hezekiah had sought to honour the LORD and had removed idolatry (2 Kgs 18:3–6), yet obedience to God did not exempt Judah from severe trial. Faith does not exempt us from trials; it teaches us where to turn when trials come. Assyria had already conquered northern Israel (722 BC) and was now sweeping through Judah. The danger was genuine. Yet the greatness of the enemy does not determine the outcome; the greatness of God does.
- V2 brings the danger directly to Jerusalem: *"And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army."* Lachish was a major fortified city southwest of Jerusalem and its fall demonstrated that Assyria was no longer a distant threat. Jerusalem

was now directly in its sights. The words *"with a great army"* emphasize the overwhelming military force standing against Jerusalem. Judah had repeatedly been warned not to place its confidence in human strength or foreign alliances. Now the crisis would reveal whether the people truly believed what God had said through His prophet.

- Rabshakeh was a title for a high-ranking Assyrian official and spokesman. He came not merely to fight but to break the confidence of the people before the battle began. Significantly, he stood *"by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field."* Years earlier, Isaiah had called upon Ahaz to trust the LORD (7:3–9). The fundamental issue had not changed: will God's people trust the LORD or will they trust human strength?
- Three officials—Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah—came out to meet Rabshakeh (v3). Humanly speaking, the contrast could not be greater: Assyria had a great army; Judah appeared helpless. But the real confrontation was not ultimately between Assyria and Judah, but between the claims of the Assyrian king and the promises of the LORD. The decisive question was not how great the enemy was, but how great the LORD was.

2. Assyria's Taunts – Faith Under Attack (36:4–20)

- Rabshakeh begins a carefully planned psychological & spiritual attack to destroy Judah's confidence in Hezekiah and, ultimately, in the LORD. His methods illustrate strategies Satan repeatedly uses against God's people.

(i) Distortion – Twisting the Truth, 36:4–7

- Rabshakeh begins with an arrogant declaration: *"Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria"* (v4a), deliberately contrasting the greatness of the Assyrian king with the apparent weakness of Hezekiah. Rabshakeh asks, *"What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?"* (v4b), challenging the basis of Judah's confidence and mocking Hezekiah's ability to resist Assyria. He accuses Hezekiah of trusting in *"vain words"* (v5). He then attacks Judah's dependence upon Egypt: *"Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt"* (v6). In this, Rabshakeh was partly correct. Egypt was an unreliable source of security, just as Isaiah had already warned (30:1–7; 31:1–3). But he took a true statement and used it to lead Judah toward a false conclusion: Egypt cannot save you, therefore you have no one else to trust. He also falsely claimed that Hezekiah had offended the LORD by removing the high places (v7).

- Rabshakeh illustrates a dangerous form of deception: taking something true and giving it a false interpretation. The serpent used deception in Genesis 3:1, and Satan misapplied Scripture when tempting Christ (Matt 4:5–7). The danger is not only believing an obvious lie, but believing a true statement that has been given a false interpretation. The first strategy exposed in Rabshakeh's speech is therefore distortion—taking something true, twisting its meaning, and using it to undermine confidence in God. The best protection against deception is the truth—the whole truth.

(ii) Intimidation – Pressuring Judah to Give Up, 36:8–9

- Rabshakeh intensifies his attack through mockery and intimidation. His objective is to convince Judah to surrender. Rabshakeh offers Judah two thousand horses, knowing that they do not have enough riders for them (v8). He mocks their military weakness: *"How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants?"* (v9). He magnifies Assyria's strength, minimizes Judah's strength, mocks their weakness, and pressures them to surrender. This resembles Goliath's intimidation of Israel (1 Sam 17:8–24). In both cases, the enemy sought to win the battle in the minds of God's people before the battle itself was fought.
- Satan does not always need to make us reject God openly; he may simply try to discourage us until we stop trusting God and give up. Yet Scripture says: *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong"* (1 Cor 16:13; cf Jas 4:7). Faith acknowledges our weakness but refuses to make our weakness the measure of what God can do. The question is not, "Am I strong enough?" but, "Is God faithful enough?" We do not measure what God can do by the size of the enemy, but by the greatness of God.

(iii) Deception – Claiming Divine Authority, 36:10

- Rabshakeh makes an astonishing claim: *"The LORD said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it"* (v10). He claims that God Himself had commanded Assyria to destroy Jerusalem. If this were true, surrender would appear to be obedience to God. God had indeed used Assyria as *"the rod of mine anger"* (10:5–6), but this did not mean Assyria had His approval. Isaiah 10:7 makes the distinction clear: *"Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so."* Assyria had its own sinful ambitions of conquest and destruction. God would later punish the proud king of Assyria (10:12).