

# ISAIAH

## ISAIAH 37:1-13, KING HEZEKIAH'S RESPONSE, PART 1

This chapter is a remarkable revelation of Yahweh's providential care for Israel. Without His intervention, the nation was doomed. However, we know that due to the nature of the unconditional covenants, Israel not only will survive, but Israel must survive. God's character guarantees it because God's promise is that Israel will not only survive, but the nation will thrive in the Messianic Kingdom. God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2); therefore, Israel must be saved to fulfill God's unconditional covenantal promises made to the nation. Immediately after the promise of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), God promised that Israel was going to exist as a nation forever.

Jeremiah 31:35–37 <sup>35</sup>Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: <sup>36</sup>"If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever." <sup>37</sup>Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done," declares the LORD.

Buksbazu commented on God's providential preservation of Judah in this instance. "This chapter relates one of the most dramatic episodes in the long history of Israel, and more specifically of Judah.... Next to the deliverance from Egypt, Sennacherib's calamity stands as a landmark of divine watchfulness over the destiny of Israel" [Victor Buksbazu, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*, 288].

"This episode reveals how the Hebrews reacted to Rabshakeh's message from Sennacherib. Their mourning, lamenting, and prayer for divine help were appropriate responses for believers in a time of distress and hopelessness. This kind of a crisis situation reveals what a person really believes. If the Hebrews thought that God could not deliver them, then they must either surrender to the stronger Assyrians or find some other nation that is willing to rescue them through military intervention. If they believe God can deliver his people in Jerusalem as Isaiah has repeatedly promised, then they must trust God to deliver them" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 607].

Once Hezekiah's delegation reported back to him bearing an alarming message and wearing torn clothing representing mourning and alarm, he began mourning as well. But instead of having a pity party and giving up, he went to Yahweh's house, the house of the living God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the God of the unconditional covenantal promises made to Israel. The king's appearance in the Temple represented his acknowledgement that, at that point, Yahweh was the nation's only hope. There was nowhere else to turn. The nation's defenses could not withstand the powerful Assyrian Army, mutual aid coalitions with pagan nations were of no use, and the pagan gods many people in Judah had been consorting with in the recent past were worthless. However, we should not think it was as though Hezekiah considered Yahweh

to be the last resort; he was a godly king, although not without his lapses in godly judgment, and he knew Yahweh was the first, the last, and the only help the nation had. In the biblical evaluation of his reign, he received the highest accolades a king could receive.

2 Kings 18:3 <sup>3</sup>He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done.

Isaiah 37:1 <sup>1</sup>And when King Hezekiah heard *it*, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth [קִשׁ] and entered the house of the LORD.

Tearing one's clothes and donning sackcloth were usually expressions of grief and mourning.

Sackcloth, קִשׁ, means a sack or sackcloth which refers to a strong, coarse, dark-colored clothing probably made of dark-colored goat hair or camel hair. It is poor quality material that is coarse and rough and uncomfortable to wear especially when worn next to the skin, because the rough texture was itchy. It was cheap and worn by shepherds, but it became primarily symbolic, as in this context, where it is used to refer to mourning, repentance, and humiliation. It was the proper outer wear for serious occasions, and its dark color made it suitable for the expression of grief and sadness.

Significantly, Hezekiah went to the Temple, where he presumably went to pray or to offer sacrifices or otherwise seek Yahweh's help in whatever manner was available, or all of the above. After that, the king sent two of the high-ranking men who already dealt with the Rabshakeh, Eliakim and Shebna, and the elders of the priests, the religious leaders, to Isaiah to consult with Yahweh's prophet. It was a sign of the respect Hezekiah had for Isaiah that he did not summon the prophet to appear before him, but he instead sent a delegation to meet with the prophet.

Some theologians believe Hezekiah was responding to the words Yahweh spoke to Solomon when the Temple was first dedicated. Solomon was told that the proper response to national sin was to return to God. The situation in which the nation found itself at the time in question in this Scripture certainly fit that scenario.

2 Chronicles 7:14 <sup>14</sup>and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. That is possible and it makes sense in this context, but the text does not reveal this.

Isaiah 37:2 <sup>2</sup>Then he sent Eliakim who was over the household with Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz.

Hezekiah sought out the one man he knew who heard directly from Yahweh and that was Isaiah, the prophet. Hezekiah realized that Isaiah would know the mind of Yahweh and therefore provide the king with wise, godly counsel. The king was also aware that he was seeking Yahweh and not simply seeking a man named Isaiah who was known as a prophet. Isaiah was the man of God during that time who could not only provide the king

with the truth of God, but he was the prophet who communicated with Yahweh and could petition Him to deliver the nation from death.

The men sent to Isaiah presented their petition to the prophet. The first thing they did was acknowledge the horrible predicament in which they found themselves.

Isaiah 37:3–4 <sup>3</sup>They said to him, “Thus says Hezekiah, ‘This day is a day of distress [צָרָה], rebuke [תּוֹכְחָה] and rejection [נִאֲצָה]; for children have come to birth [מִשְׁבֵּר], and there is no strength to deliver. <sup>4</sup>Perhaps the LORD your God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach [הָרָה] the living God, and will rebuke [יִכָּה] the words which the LORD your God has heard. Therefore, offer a prayer for the remnant [שְׁאֵרִית] that is left.’”

Distress, צָרָה, means need, distress, anguish, or anxiety, referring to distress as an oppressive state of physical, mental, social, or economic adversity. It is a situation or a time of extreme discomfort, an affliction for many different reasons. In this situation, the reason is divine discipline from Yahweh for disobedience and rebellion.

Rebuke, תּוֹכְחָה, means rebuke, punishment, chastisement, or correction. It has the sense of inflicting punishment, which is the context here.

Rejection, נִאֲצָה, means disgrace, contempt, reproach, humiliation, and shame referring to a state of dishonor that brings about embarrassment or rejection because of failure. It also refers to contumely which means insolent or insulting language or treatment.

These words describe a terrible state of affairs facing Judah at that moment in the nation's history, but these words also reveal why this was happening to them. Distress refers to the distressful oppressive state they were in that was due solely to their rebellion against Yahweh who Himself brought this state of affairs into being at this point in the nation's history. In response to the nation's rebellion, He used Assyria as His instrument of divine discipline. However, He also told them He was not going to allow Assyria to destroy Jerusalem (Is. 38:4-6), which was apparently a decision intended to get them to clearly see their state of rebellion and repent of it. They didn't do that, of course, and the next round of divine discipline at the hands of Babylon would not be stayed.

Rebuke describes the infliction of punishment for their rebellion and demonstrates that it was merited. Rejection refers to the public shame for their rebellion, which is evident here in the wearing of sackcloth in mourning. This word is better translated “disgrace” (HCSB, LEB, ESV, ISV). This shame also led Hezekiah to seek out the prophet of Yahweh to beseech Him to petition Yahweh for mercy and salvation.

“The opening words of Hezekiah's message to Isaiah are an abject admission of failure. Not only have his government's policies brought Judah into Assyria's contempt, as she lies helpless before the conqueror, they have also brought the country under reproach from God. All the foolishness of their attempts to strengthen themselves by cultivating outside help is now revealed for what Isaiah had always said it was—foolishness. Even more seriously, God himself has been brought into contempt” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 645].

Hezekiah used the metaphor of childbirth to describe what was happening to the nation. It is as though the baby has been delivered just to the point of emerging into the world, and there is no strength left to make the final push to get that baby born. Birth, מִשְׁבֵּר, means the cervical opening, i.e. the point of the female body where birth and visible life first occur. It is a way of referring to the instant in time when a baby is on the precipice of leaving the mother's womb and entering the world. The most accurate English translation of this clause reads, "... for children have come to the cervical opening ..." (LEB). This word is only used three times in the Bible, and one of them is the parallel passage to this verse in 2 Kings 19:3. The other is in Hosea 13:13.

"The emphatic word in the last clause is 'strength.' ... The metaphor pictures extreme distress, need, and suffering, and above all the fact that the intervention of extraordinary help is needed. In reality it is a cry of utter acknowledgment that God's help is required. If the womb does not open so that the child can be born, the child will die and probably the mother also. So, unless strength is at hand to deliver Judah, she too will perish" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 2:474].

The childbirth metaphor seems to acknowledge that all the plans the Israelites made to protect themselves were worthless, i.e., their plans could not be birthed or come into play, and they could do nothing to stave off disaster without the intervention of Yahweh.

Hezekiah referred to Yahweh as "the LORD your God" meaning Isaiah's God, which is an acknowledgment of the prophet's unique relationship with Yahweh. "... Isaiah stands in a peculiar relationship to God. He was God's mouthpiece, who spoke forth the words that God commanded him. Furthermore, he was a faithful servant of his God, whom he loved as 'the Holy One of Israel.' Hezekiah does not mean to imply that Yahweh is not his own God nor that He is no longer the God of the nation, but he does recognize that in a particular and unique sense, Yahweh is Isaiah's God. Perhaps too, his language implies that he and his people have not been as faithful to God as has Isaiah" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 2:474-475].

The Hebrew text does not read "the" living God. The grammatical construction is correctly understood as "a" living God. Of course, we know that Yahweh is "the" living God, but the words spoken by the Rabshakeh denigrated Yahweh by comparing Him to and deeming Him no more worthy or powerful than gods made of wood and stone. By using the indefinite article, "a," the king was emphasizing Yahweh's category of God, of which He is obviously the only member of the category, with the emphasis on "living" as opposed to the non-existent, one could say dead, pagan gods who are all in the nonliving category. Every English translation places the definite article into the text, but that might be missing the point Hezekiah was making.

"*The living God* is a striking example of the idiom of indefiniteness for the sake of emphasis: 'a living God'. The indefinite article throws all the emphasis forward onto the adjective. The Rab-shakeh has enumerated the idol gods of the heathen and of Samaria, but here is a God belonging to a different category of being, 'a living God' [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 225].

Hezekiah hoped that Yahweh would take offense at the contempt the Rabshakeh showed to the Holy One of Israel by mocking him and referring to Him as an impotent God just like all the other gods of wood and stone that Sennacherib and His Assyrian Army had conquered in the past leading up to this time.

Reproach, *קָרַח*, means to annoy, to taunt or mock, and to treat with contempt.

Rebuke, *יָכַח*, means to argue, to be found to be right, to decide, to adjudge. It has the sense of admonishing or warning forcefully as expressing strong disapproval. Rebuke, as it is used here, is a different Hebrew word than the word used in verse 3. Here the word refers to the hope that Yahweh would, in turn, treat the words of the Rabshakeh with contempt and strongly judge him for saying them. We will learn that Yahweh did much more than that; He was soon going to destroy much of the Assyrian Army that had invaded Judah and encircled Jerusalem. That is a rebuke!

Remnant, *שְׁאֵרִית*, means the remaining part, survivors, the remnant, and what is left over referring to the remainder of a person's descendants or of a citizenry. This is not a reference to the Jewish believing remnant; it is a reference to the survivors left in Judah who have sought refuge in Jerusalem alongside the citizens of the city. This group consists of both believing and unbelieving Israelites, with the focus of the text being on physical deliverance from the invading Assyrian Army.

Hezekiah's hope is that Yahweh will rise up in holy anger and avenge the blasphemous attack made on His name and on His holy character by the pagan emissary from Assyria. The king wanted Isaiah to pray to Yahweh for that outcome and therefore petition the Lord to deliver from death those Jews who were still alive.

The king's servants reported to Isaiah and delivered the message Hezekiah sent to the prophet who in turn revealed a very short, but comforting message to them to take back to the king.

Isaiah 37:5–7 <sup>5</sup>So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. <sup>6</sup>Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master, 'Thus says the LORD, "Do not be afraid [*יָרֵא*] because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants [*בָּנָי*; "boys"] of the king of Assyria have blasphemed [*קָדַח*] Me. <sup>7</sup>"Behold, I will put a spirit in him so that he will hear a rumor and return to his own land. And I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.'" ' "

Isaiah made it very clear to Hezekiah's servants that the word they were to take back to the king was not the prophet's word delivered to them out of his own mind, but the very Word of Yahweh Himself. "Thus says the LORD" should give the king a tremendous confidence boost when it is a favorable revelation coming from the mouth of God's prophet, Isaiah. Given the events immediately following this report, it is somewhat doubtful that Hezekiah received the boost in confidence he should have gotten from it, but we will see that he did not blindly press on trusting in his own power and strategy. Instead, he went to the Temple to seek the Lord (Is. 37:14-20), which is a positive response that has been noticeably lacking in Judah up to this point.

Through Isaiah, Yahweh counseled the king to not be afraid of the words spoken to his emissaries by the Rabshakeh. Yahweh acknowledged that the words spoken by the pagan spokesman were blasphemy.

Afraid, **יָרָא**, means to fear or to be afraid or scared of. It relates to fearing God in the sense that fear of Him causes people to be faithful and trustworthy for such fear constrains people to believe and to act in a moral manner. It may also carry the idea of respect as in God fearing. In this context, it is referring to being frightened about the impending Assyrian assault against Jerusalem.

Earlier, Isaiah delivered the same type of message to Hezekiah's father Ahaz in Isaiah 7:3-4 directing him to be unafraid and to rely on Yahweh to protect the king and his nation. Ahaz did not listen to Yahweh's prophet, but Hezekiah will listen to him.

Blasphemy, **הִגְדָּה**, means to revile or to blaspheme meaning to speak of in an irreverent or impious manner. It refers to the use of conscious verbal abuse of a person or of God, which, when used of God, constitutes blasphemy. In English, blasphemy is restricted to the irreverent or sacrilegious about God or sacred things, which is also the context in the Hebrew text before us. "The vb. carries profound negative connotations. It affirms the power of words to inflict emotional and spiritual pain, to ruin relationships, and to displease—even to anger—God... Openly and intentionally to oppose the people, the promises, or the person of God is to engage in blasphemy. The Assyrian message maligned the trustworthiness and hence the character, of Yahweh. To claim his favor flippantly and unjustly is not only foolish but fatal" [Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., s.v. "הִגְדָּה," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 1, 1:828-830].

Yahweh takes blasphemy seriously, and prohibiting it was part of the Mosaic Law. Committing blasphemy called for the imposition of the death penalty.

Leviticus 24:15–16 <sup>15</sup>"You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin. <sup>16</sup>'Moreover, the one who blasphemes [**נִקְבָּה**] the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.

Moses used a different Hebrew word in Leviticus that is translated blasphemy, **נִקְבָּה**, but it is a synonym to **הִגְדָּה** and means to speak of in an irreverent or impious manner. As part of the Mosaic Law, this was an offense not to be committed by the Israelites, but as Isaiah 37:6 reveals, God was no less offended when it was committed by pagans. We know that the blasphemy of the Rabshakeh resulted in the death of the Assyrian soldiers encamped in Judah, but whether or not the Assyrian spokesman was among the dead or not is unknown. King Sennacherib certainly paid with his life about 20 years later.

It is interesting to note that blasphemy is given as the reason for Sennacherib's upcoming defeat rather than his invasion of Judah. This is probably due to the fact that the invasion was done as part of God's divine disciplinary action against Judah for the nation's rebellion, but blasphemy went above and beyond anything Yahweh intended to happen.

The word Yahweh used to describe Sennacherib's messengers represents disrespect and contempt for them. Most translations read "the servants of the king of Assyria," but the text actually reads "the boys of the king of Assyria." The commonly used Hebrew word for servant is עֶבֶד. Boys, נַעַר, means boy, lad, or a youth at about the age of adolescence. It is as though Yahweh is saying, "They sent boys to do a man's job." Other theologians use words such as "flunkeys" or "houseboys" to characterize the use of this word. "God's contempt for the Assyrian blasphemy is seen in the uses of 'lads' or 'lackeys' for the Rabshakeh [sic] and the other officers. Human beings might be awed by their power and authority, but God was not particularly impressed. They were just errand boys for an overblown ego" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 647].

The message that was to be taken back to King Hezekiah had three parts to it. First, Yahweh was going to put a spirit into Sennacherib that would cause him to return to Assyria without conquering Jerusalem, or even mounting the siege against it. No one knows what this spirit was. We do know the Assyrian king did not leave Judah until after his army was killed by an angel of the Lord (Is. 37:37). Whatever the nature of this spirit, it was divinely imposed, it had the intended results according to the will of God, and it demonstrated Yahweh's complete, sovereign control over the situation.

Second, God would ensure that Sennacherib would hear a rumor that would pressure him to return to Nineveh. Again, the nature of this rumor was not disclosed.

Third, Sennacherib was going to die by the sword once he returned to his kingdom. That prophecy was fulfilled and recorded in Isaiah 37:38.

While it was not stated in Isaiah 37:6-7, and Isaiah did not include it as part of his message to Hezekiah at this point, the message implied that Jerusalem was not going to be conquered. This fact was confirmed later in Isaiah 37:38. "These three promises imply that Jerusalem will not be defeated, hence there is no need to fear. Nevertheless, the prophecy is about God's defeat of Sennacherib; it is not about his salvation of Jerusalem. This is an important lesson for God's people: God's plans and purposes are centered around the establishment of his honor and glory, not theirs" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 612].

Meanwhile, Sennacherib had left Lachish after completely securing that area and went to Libnah which was about ten miles to the north of Lachish. Presumably, this was a location that needed to be secured for the siege that was going to soon begin in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 37:8 <sup>8</sup>Then Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king had left Lachish.

The text does not reveal Hezekiah's answer to the Rabshakeh or that he even replied to the Assyrian messenger, but the message that Isaiah was not going to surrender must

have been clearly made, leading the Assyrian emissary to make plans to leave Jerusalem and report back to King Sennacherib at Lachish.

“A second source of hope [the first being Rabshakeh leaving Jerusalem] was the possibility of Egyptian help. At some point in this campaign Sennacherib received military intelligence that Tirhakeh was marching out of Egypt in his direction.... [I]t is not clear if this is just a rumor or if this was actually the time when the Egyptians did enter into military conflict with some Assyrian sources. No battle is reported and no victory is described in the biblical account, so the main intention of this verse is to suggest to the reader that there may still be some hope for Judah. Of course, as one soon discovers, basing hope for deliverance in the actions of Rabshakeh [for leaving Jerusalem] or Tirhakeh can be disappointing” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 614].

Smith assumed that Rabshakeh's departure meant that the Assyrian troops also departed Jerusalem at that time, but the text does not bear that assertion out. Militarily that makes no sense, because surrounding the city with troops was a necessary precursor to beginning the siege, and those troops were being used to keep people from entering or leaving the city.

Sennacherib then learned of an Egyptian threat on his southern flank.

Isaiah 37:9a <sup>9</sup>When he heard *them* say concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, “He has come out to fight against you,” ...

As the Rabshakeh left Jerusalem to return to King Sennacherib at Lachish, he found out that the Assyrian king had left Lachish to conquer Libnah. Then Sennacherib heard that the Egyptian Army was approaching him to do battle, presumably to honor their mutual aid pact with Judah. However, we could probably safely assume the Pharaoh was more interested in freeing Egypt from Assyrian domination in the region than he was in helping Judah out of any sense of upholding a covenant with the Jewish nation. Tirhakah was a Cushite who had seized the Egyptian throne to become Pharaoh; he was the third king of the twenty-fifth dynasty, also known as the Ethiopian Dynasty, reigning from 690-664 B.C. The Assyrian Army defeated the Egyptians who, except as a temporary diversion, were of no help to Judah. This battle took place in 701 B.C. which is eleven years before Tirhakah assumed the throne, and when this took place Tirhakah was possibly the commander of Egypt's forces, but was not yet the Pharaoh. “If NIV is correct in introducing a reference to *King of Egypt* here, it will be proleptic [prophetic] attribution of the title by which Tirhakah was later and better known” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 226]. Most commentators believe this to be an accurate understanding of how Tirhakah came to be called “king” in this verse. It was a common practice in ancient texts to refer to a person by a title they later acquired. The problem with this line of thought is that the NIV did not insert the word “king” into the text without justification. The original Hebrew text has מֶלֶךְ in the text which means “king.” Isaiah put this word in the text when he wrote it. Some people dispute the fact that this incident even took place because the Assyrians had just defeated Egypt's forces at El Tekeh before arriving at Jerusalem; therefore, Sennacherib was reacting to a rumor rather than to a fact. Another issue is that Assyrian records only report on the battle at El Tekeh, and



no mention is made of any battle with Egypt following that first one. However, the Bible indicates this was a historical event. The point to all this is that Egypt was not going to be an effective ally for Judah at this time.

Before Sennacherib responded to the Egyptian threat, he sent another message to Hezekiah conveying essentially the same information he earlier sent to Judah's king through the Rabshakeh.

Isaiah 37:9b–13 <sup>9</sup>... and when he heard *it* he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, <sup>10</sup>“Thus you shall say to Hezekiah king of Judah, ‘Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive [נִשְׁחָ] you, saying, “Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.” <sup>11</sup>Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, destroying [הָרַם] them completely. So will you be spared? <sup>12</sup>Did the gods of those nations which my fathers have destroyed [שָׁחַת] deliver them, even Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar? <sup>13</sup>Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, and of Hena and Ivvah?’”

No one really knows why Sennacherib found it necessary to send another message that is essentially the same message he already delivered to Hezekiah. My best guess is that he wanted to pressure Hezekiah into surrender making the conquest of Jerusalem an easy problem to solve without spending time and resources accomplishing that mission. Smith identified the options:

1. “Having heard from Rabshakeh that Hezekiah did not surrender, the Assyrian king may want to give one final opportunity for Hezekiah to change his mind.
2. Sennacherib may want to demonstrate to Hezekiah that the Egyptian threat will not deter the king from achieving his ultimate goal of defeating Jerusalem.
3. The king's personal letter carries official written notice to Hezekiah; this is not just a warning from Sennacherib's cupbearer.
4. Sennacherib may want to personally push the argument a little stronger than Rabshakeh did by undermining Hezekiah's own confidence in God, not just the confidence of a few troops on the city wall” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 614].

In the first message, the Rabshakeh told the people not to let Hezekiah deceive them by telling them that he, King Hezekiah, could save them, and the Assyrian envoy also told them not to allow Hezekiah to deceive them by telling them that Yahweh could save them. In this second message, Sennacherib attacks Yahweh's ability to save the Israelites by telling them not to be deceived by Yahweh into thinking that He could save them. In Yahweh's eyes, this is simply more blasphemy coming from the pen of a pagan king who will shortly figure out that Yahweh is, in fact, totally capable of saving the people who have placed their trust in Him. Referring to Yahweh, who cannot lie, as a deceiver is a serious affront to the one and only Creator God of the universe who alone is totally holy, righteous, and just.

Deceive, נִשְׁחָז, means to beguile, to cheat, to lead into error or to lead astray, to seduce, or to deceive referring to causing someone to believe an untruth. It refers to the use of deceptive methods or deceit to accomplish something. The deception is designed to pass for reality which makes it a lie. The form of this word is a verb stem that refers to causative action. In other words, Sennacherib accused Yahweh of causing the people to blindly trust in Him without any faith action on their part. This is, of course, the opposite of truth. Yahweh never forced any individual person, and He never forced Israel as a nation, to believe Him or to believe in Him. This is the same word used in Genesis 3:13 when Eve said, "The serpent deceived me ..." Satan's agent, Sennacherib, used deceit to separate the people of Judah from Yahweh just as Satan used deceit to separate man from God in the beginning. Satan is still using that very successful tactic today to keep people away from placing their faith in Christ Jesus. Ultimately, this is an attack on the veracity of God's Word.

The parallel passage in 2 Chronicles 32:15 adds the word mislead, סוּת, which means to incite, to entice, to urge, and to mislead referring to the stirring up of persons with the intention of getting them to deviate, to act with destructive, harmful purposes or results. It also refers to inciting people to be evil.

Together, these words reveal that Sennacherib was the true deceitful one. King Hezekiah was Yahweh's godly representative king at the time, and he spoke words of truth when he told the people that Yahweh was the only one who could save them (2 Chron. 32:8). Obviously, not everyone shut up in Jerusalem was a believer, but Hezekiah, the godly king, was going to lead the nation into trusting Yahweh to deliver them out of the hands of the Assyrian king. Yahweh was going to be proven true and Sennacherib was going to be proven to be the liar.

God cannot lie:

Numbers 23:19 <sup>19</sup>"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

Titus 1:2 <sup>2</sup>in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,

It is possible that Hezekiah had earlier replied to the Rabshakeh with a word from Yahweh which Hezekiah trusted, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria," and which may have prompted the retort from Sennacherib that the people should not be deceived by the word delivered to Hezekiah by the man of God, Isaiah. That came from somewhere; Sennacherib did not just make it up. There is no longer any talk about Hezekiah's reliance on his alliance with Egypt. Sennacherib was trying to shake Hezekiah's trust in Yahweh.

Destroy, הָרַם, (v. 11) means to put under the ban, to dedicate or devote, and to exterminate. It refers to giving something exclusively to God with the implication that it must be completely destroyed to avoid human use.

Destroy, *שָׁחַת*, (v. 12) means to ruin, to destroy, to annihilate referring to actions that completely destroy and irreparably damage.

These words refer to complete devastation of the areas Assyria conquered. Implied in the use of *הָרַם*, the ban, which is a term with theological meaning, is the superiority of the Assyrian gods over any and all other gods, including Yahweh. The Israelites shut up in Jerusalem were not unaware of this fact despite any deceitful, soothing words from Sennacherib and his spokesmen.

Sennacherib also believed that history is a reliable indication of a future in which the Assyrian Army is always victorious and the nations they target are always defeated. Tactically, that was a big mistake.

Isaiah 37:36 <sup>36</sup>Then the angel of the LORD went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead.

“Because Sennacherib does not know of a God who is master of history and can thus do unique things, he insists that the historical precedent is irrefutable. Judah is one more nation like all the rest which the Assyrians have destroyed. How can she alone be saved? Apart from the living God, his argumentation is sound. But that *apart from* is not a minor error; it is the one of earthshaking significance which human pride has been making since the dawn of time” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 650].

Geopolitically, it is also a big mistake to assume that Judah is just another nation among all the nations. We know that Israel is not counted among the nations and therefore occupies a unique place in world history.

Numbers 23:9 <sup>9</sup>“As I see him from the top of the rocks, And I look at him from the hills; Behold, a people *who dwells apart*, And will not be reckoned among the nations.

Finally, it is a big mistake to presume that Israel can ever be destroyed.

Jeremiah 31:35–37 <sup>35</sup>Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: <sup>36</sup>“If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the LORD, “Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.” <sup>37</sup>Thus says the LORD, “If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done,” declares the LORD.