

2 Kings 19:8-13

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Now, well into the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, we will see God begin to orchestrate events that will accomplish His will.

In the beginning of the Israelite conquest of Canaan, Joshua conquered *Lachish* and *Libnah* when he led the Israelite armies against the Canaanites and other nations in the Promised Land (Joshua 10:29-35).

This episode in Isaiah 37 began by telling us that Sennacherib king of Assyria had seized the cities of Judah, and the king had dispatched his instrument Rabshakeh to Jerusalem from *Lachish* (2 Kings 18:17). We now read about the *King of Assyria fighting against Libnah* after he had apparently subjugated *Lachish*. Apparently, Sennacherib had moved on to *Libnah*.

Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king had left Lachish (v 8).

In spite of Assyria's vast military superiority, God had promised through Isaiah that Judah would be spared through God's intervention (2 Kings 19:6-7). One of God's ways of accomplishing His will for *Hezekiah* and His people was to cause a new military front to open between *Assyria* and the Kingdom of *Cush*. Rabshakeh had left Jerusalem to reconnect with King Sennacherib, and now hears news from the south.

Rabshakeh heard them say concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, "He has come out to fight against you," (v 9).

Cush was a kingdom south of Judah ([See Map](#)). Its territory roughly covered the modern country of Sudan, and, at the time of *Tirhakah's* reign, Egypt. So for *Cush* to move *to fight against* Assyria would be to move north toward Jerusalem. This might create a possible ally for Judah to withstand Assyria.

After hearing this report, *Rabshakeh* reignited his propaganda campaign to demoralize the Jews and head off the possibility that this positive news would reach the ears of the inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, which would cause them to find hope and continue to resist. But interestingly, Rabshakeh does not counter the news by telling Judah not to hope in Cush. Rather, he counters by telling those in Jerusalem not to put their hope in God.

Rabshakeh sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus you shall say to Hezekiah king of Judah, 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria"' (v 10).

Israel/Judah was known to worship and trust in the Lord God. So it would be likely that *Rabshakeh* would presume that a positive word about Cush would be a sign of deliverance from Yahweh, as promised through Isaiah the prophet (2 Kings 19:6-7). There are likely satanic spiritual forces at work to bolster the side of Assyria as there are forces of the Lord God on the

side of Judah. Satan is and was a liar from the beginning, so propaganda and misinformation are part of his standard arsenal (John 8:44).

From the perspective of the spiritual battle, *Rabshakeh* seems to be strategically casting doubt on Isaiah's prediction. This is a pattern for Satan's strategy of deception. In the very first instance where we see Satan deceive, his first act is to cast doubt on God's promise to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-3). It would stand to reason that *Rabshakeh*, as a type of the false prophet who is to come (Revelation 13:11-15), would follow this satanic pattern.

From the standpoint of military practicalities, Rabshakeh's inference is that Cush showing up will not be sufficient to overcome the mighty Assyrian Empire. *Rabshakeh* continues his propaganda message to Judah, warning them not to have hope in God, saying,

“Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, destroying them completely. So will you be spared? Did the gods of those nations which my fathers have destroyed deliver them, even Gozan and Haran and Rezep and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar?” (vv 11-12).

Rabshakeh now points to major Assyrian victories, which likely would have been known in Judah, to make the point that the gods of those nations did not spare them from destruction by Assyria. In saying this, Rabshakeh is defying the God of Israel.

The sons of Eden may refer to the same *Eden* as in Ezekiel 27:23. *Gozan and Haran and Rezep* seem to be locations in Mesopotamia ([See Map](#)). What all these locations have in common, by implication, is that they had all been *destroyed* by Assyria. Rabshakeh had previously offered a temporary peace and eventual exile of Jerusalem's inhabitants if they would surrender (2 Kings 18:31-32). Rabshakeh is trying to get an easy victory through this information war rather than having to expend military resources. But this is also in some sense a manifestation of a spiritual war.

Rabshakeh continues and says, *“Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, and of Hena and Ivvah?”* (v 13).

The inferred answer to this rhetorical question is “they are destroyed.” Rabshakeh desires to exile Judah's inhabitants, likely to use as slaves, and import new peoples as they had done in the northern kingdom of Israel/Samaria (2 Kings 17:24).

Later in 2 Kings 19:17-18, *Hezekiah* is praying to Yahweh and acknowledges that “Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have devastated all the countries and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men's hands, wood and stone.” This confirms that the examples given by Rabshakeh are legitimate.

Rabshakeh is obviously trained in propaganda delivery. Jewish tradition holds that he was also a Jew who defected to *Assyria* and became an enemy of his own people. It appears from the prior chapter that *Rabshakeh* could speak fluent Hebrew (2 Kings 18:26-27).

To paraphrase, *Rabshakeh* tells *Hezekiah* “Don’t think this slight delay is your deliverance. Don’t think this is from your God.” Given the events here, it would seem reasonable to infer that *Rabshakeh* has some sort of spy network inside the city that is informing him.

Rabshakeh might be a forerunner of the false prophet, spokesman to the king of Assyria who prefigures the ruler called “the Beast” in Daniel and Revelation. In the last days, the Beast will rule the earth on behalf of Satan. It seems he will have the same great power as the king of Assyria, as stated in Micah 5:5:

“This One [Jesus] will be *our* peace.
When the Assyrian invades our land,
When he tramples on our citadels,
Then we will raise against him
Seven shepherds and eight leaders of men.”

This story from 2 Kings 18-19, and Micah’s prophecy of Israel’s deliverance from invasion, might be prophecies of the end of the age, when the nations will descend upon Jerusalem as described in Zechariah 14 where God once again miraculously intervenes for Jerusalem:

“For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.”
(Zechariah 14:2-3)

Archaeological evidence of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem was found in 1830 in modern-day Iraq. In these “Annals of Sennacherib,” as they are called, a cuneiform prism known as [“The Jerusalem Prism”](#) describe these events from the Assyrian perspective.

Besides describing the siege and naming *Hezekiah* as a ruler of Judah who paid tributes to Sennacherib, this Assyrian document agrees with the Bible. It stops short of saying that Jerusalem was conquered. It also confirms the biblical narrative by stating that *Hezekiah* rebelled against Sennacherib’s authority (Isaiah 36:5). Here is a translation of the relevant portion of Assyrian text:

“As for the king of Judah, *Hezekiah*, who had not submitted to my authority, I besieged and captured forty-six of his fortified cities, along with many smaller towns, taken in battle with my battering rams...I took as plunder 200,150 people, both small and great, male and female, along with a great number of animals including horses, mules, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. As for *Hezekiah*, I shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem. I then constructed a series of fortresses around him, and I did not allow anyone to come out of the city gates. His towns which I captured I gave to Mitinti, king of Ashdod; Padi, ruler of Ekron; and Silli-bel, king of Gaza.”
(Jerusalem Prism)

Biblical Text

⁸ Then Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. ⁹ When he heard them say concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, “Behold, he has come out to fight against you,” he sent messengers again to Hezekiah saying, ¹⁰ “Thus you shall say to Hezekiah king of Judah, ‘Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you saying, “Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.” ¹¹ Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, destroying them completely. So will you be spared? ¹² Did the gods of those nations which my fathers destroyed deliver them, even Gozan and Haran and Rezep and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, and of Hena and Ivvah?’”