

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 36

ISAIAH

CHAPTER 36

Theme: "The Arguments that destroy Faith!"

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 36:21 (KJV) "But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not."

INTRODUCTION

We observed a switch from prophetic genre in Isaiah 35 to narrative writing in Isaiah 36. The content of this narrative is the taunt of Rab'sha-keh who was the envoy sent by the king of Assyria to intimidate Judah.

The northern kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed by the Assyrians in the year 722 B.C. Based upon 2Kings 18:10 and 18:13, there was a gap of 8 years between the fall of Samaria and this invasion of the Assyrian army led by Rab'sha-keh. This meant that the incident occurred in the year 714 B.C.

How did the Jews feel when taunted by Rab'sha-keh? What if their lives and those of their loved ones

depend on their response? Being helpless to respond would make the taunts even more unbearable. What if the aim of the taunts was to make them lose heart and stop believing in Christ?

As far as military might was concerned, they were out-matched and out-manoeuvred. The Assyrians had destroyed most of Judah except for the capital city, Jerusalem. The Jews realized that they had been cornered and that there was no escape.

They had only two options. The first was to surrender. The second was to hold on and trust the LORD. Rab'sha-keh was a master-ambassador for the king of Assyria. His arguments were extremely persuasive and were based upon very good logic. It was mostly true with a little bit of untruth thrown in to conceal the hidden agenda which was to psycho the Jews into capitulation. Only through capitulation to the Assyrians would they be able to survive!

Self-preservation is a very strong motive for compromise. The preservation of loved ones is an even stronger motivation! Rab'sha-keh used both of these motives. He tried to shake their faith and trust in the LORD and to betray their king.

It is probable that we have encountered similar persuasive taunts. We may even be the ones trying to convince others to do certain things. If that was the case, may our persuasion be Bible-based and always truthful. By all means, we should learn from the cunning logic of Rab'sha-keh but we

must not employ them. Let us be wise as serpents and harmless as doves – just as Christ had counselled His disciples.

OUTLINE

1. Setting the stage (vv.1-3);
2. The First Taunt (vv. 4-10);
3. The Second Taunt (vv. 11-21);
4. Setting the stage again (v. 22).

COMMENTARY

Setting the stage – 36:1-3

The timing of this incident was dated according to the year of Hezekiah's reign. The Bible recorded that it occurred when Hezekiah was into the 14th year of his reign. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, came up against all the cities of Judah. He succeeded in taking them all. The only remaining city was the capital city of Judah, Jerusalem.

Sennacherib sent Rab'sha-keh from Lachish to Jerusalem. He came with a great army. He stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field. According to International Standard Encyclopedia of the Bible, it is not possible to know with certainty where Lachish was located. Rab'sha-keh was there and he had been sent to Jerusalem by the king to close the final phase of their conquest of Judah.

Where was the location of this conduit in relation to the wall of the city? "Ben Melech thus describes the pool, conduit, and highway: 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." [John Gill's Commentary, Swordsearcher 6.2] This meant that Rab'sha-keh was so bold that he stood near the wall of Jerusalem as he taunted the Jews inside the city.

The men from inside the city wall were Eliakim (which means "God rises") the son of Kiliah who was the overseer of God's house, Shebna (which means "growth") the scribe, and Joah (which means "Jehovah's brother") the recorder. They were the mediators on behalf of the Jews and they would face Rab'sha-keh. They were the key men. But were they godly and courageous men?

The First Taunt – 36:4-10

The arguments of Rab'sha-keh to these men were summed up in verse 4. He said, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" Who have you placed your trust in? This will always be the challenge of every believer when they face trials for the

sake of Christ! It has not changed nor will it ever change.

Rab'sha-keh deliberately described his king as great so as to intimidate the Jews. He added that he had counsel and strength for war which meant that he had all the wise men to help him and the strength of the army to back their advice. He challenged the Jews by saying, "Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me?" His arguments were fourfold.

The first argument (verse 6) was to dissuade the Jews from putting their trust in the arm of the flesh. Assyria was to the north of Judah. Egypt was to the south of Judah. When the north was attacked, it would be natural to turn to the south for help. On the part of the country in the south (Egypt), self-preservation and personal interest would push for it to help Judah. Why? Egypt would not know whether Assyria would continue its path of conquest and march down to Egypt after destroying Judah.

The land bridge that linked Africa and the Assyrians was the narrow strip of land called the Land of Promise which Judah called home.

Rab'sha-keh called the Egyptians "the staff of this broken seed." The staff was a stick from the stem of the reed that could be used as a walking stick. He described the Egyptians as broken, that is, unable to help themselves. How could anyone expect help from a broken walking stick? It might break and pierce the hands holding it. In other words, Judah would only hurt itself if it were to trust

Egypt. Pharaoh was like that broken staff.

The second argument was to dissuade the Jews from trusting in the LORD (verse 7). Rab'sha-keh spoke to the Jewish representatives who stood on the wall looking down at him. He asked them how they would answer the following rhetorical question if they said that they trusted the LORD, "Is it not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship this altar?" This was where Rab'sha-keh stumbled badly. Like most unbelievers, he erroneously linked Hezekiah's cleansing (taking away the idols of Baal and Ashtoreth worship) of the Temple and the Land of Israel as the removal of the LORD! He thought that the LORD was weakened or completely removed from the presence of Judah. He did not understand the concept of the omnipresence of the LORD!

The third argument was to dissuade them from leaning on their own strength (verse 8). Rab'sha-keh poured contempt and scorn on the Jews. He taunted them by asking them to "give pledges", that is, to engage the king of Assyria and he would give them 2,000 horses provided that Hezekiah could find men to ride them. This meant that if the Jews decided to fight against Sennacherib, Rab'sha-keh would even supply them with horses on the condition that they could find riders to mount them. The implication was that the Jews did not even have 2,000 riders to fight against the mighty Assyrian charioteers and

horsemen! The army of the Jews was small and weak! This understanding was confirmed by what Rab'sha-keh said in **Isaiah 36:9** (KJV) "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?" The mockery continued. The Jews could not even turn away the face of one of Sennacherib's weakest captains. Their trust in the Egyptians for chariots and horsemen would not make any difference. Judah would surely fall to the Assyrians!

The fourth argument was the most cunning of all. Rab'sha-keh questioned whether they thought that he came without the permission and blessing of the LORD. He had the audacity to claim that he was sent by the LORD to destroy the land. What a great deception!

It was true that in the not too distant future, in the time of Jeremiah, the LORD would tell the Jews that He would send the Babylonians (Nebuchadnezzar was called the LORD's servant) to punish Judah. However, this was not the case here! Using the story that the God of the Jews had turned against the Jews, Rab'sha-keh hoped that he might succeed in discouraging the Jews. If the Jews did not know the will of God (God's Word), then they would fall to the deception of Rab'sha-keh.

The Second Taunt – 36:11-21

Rab'sha-keh's tauntings were interrupted by Eliakim, Shebna and Joah. They told him to speak to them in the Syrian language instead of

Hebrew. It was obvious that they did not want their men to be discouraged by Rab'sha-keh's words.

But the main purpose of Rab'sha-keh's taunting was to discourage the Jewish men. If possible he wanted them to rebel, remove Hezekiah and surrender to the king of Assyria! The attempt by the three men to stop Rab'sha-keh was pitiful.

Rab'sha-keh's reply was demeaning and insulting. He said, "Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? *hath he not sent me* to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?" The meaning was clear. Rab'sha-keh listened to no one but his king. His master had sent him to talk not only to Hezekiah and his representatives but also to the men that sat upon the wall.

As they were surrounded by the Assyrians, they would starve if they did not receive any help or relief. There would be great famine and shortage of water. These men who sat upon the wall would have to resort to eating their own dung and drinking their own piss together with E-li'a-ki'm, Sheb'na and Jo'ah. The ranting was meant to destroy their faith and trust in the LORD. The aim of projecting their bleak future was to cause them to make faithless decisions in the present.

Verse 13 – Then Rab'sha-keh stood and shouted in a loud voice in the Jewish language. He purposely ignored their request to speak in the Syrian language. He spoke even

louder so that all in Jerusalem could hear! He continued his tirade and once again declared that the words came from the great king of Assyria. This second taunt was a direct assault on Hezekiah and his words. Rab'sha-keh did not use conditional clauses like what he did previously in verses 6 to 10. This frontal assault was a direct call to the Jews to surrender.

Verse 14 – The first attack was on Hezekiah's ability to save. He told the Jews not to allow Hezekiah to deceive them into thinking that he could deliver them from the king of Assyria. He categorically stated (same strength as the Ten Commandments) that Hezekiah would not be able to deliver the Jews.

Rab'sha-keh was right -- Hezekiah had no power to deliver Judah. If Hezekiah were asked, he would probably agree. Judah was almost completely destroyed. Jerusalem was the only city left standing. The army and weapons of the Assyrians were by far more numerous and superior. However, Hezekiah was NOT the one who would deliver Judah. It was the LORD who would deliver! This was the problem with Rab'sha-keh's first argument.

Verse 15 -- Rab'sha-keh's second argument was on the ability of the LORD to save Judah! He told the Jews not to trust in the LORD. It was incredible that Rab'sha-keh dared to quote the name of the LORD so freely as if he knew Him. He counselled the Jews not to believe Hezekiah's words that Jerusalem would not fall into the hands of the king of Assyria.

If the Jews were godly, then the taunt of Rab'sha-keh would fail. But if they were ungodly and had little or no faith, then they would rebel against Hezekiah and Jerusalem would fall.

Verse 16 – The third argument focused on the people's response. Rab'sha-keh told them not to listen to Hezekiah. He bribed them with the thought of a new agreement. Under the new agreement with Rab'sha-keh, they would have plenty of food to eat and water to drink (from their own cistern). In comparison, if they were to listen to their king they would face starvation and ultimately death. An appeal to the stomach made a strong case for compliance and in this instance even betrayal. The three representatives of Hezekiah stood by helplessly as Rab'sha-keh reasoned very logically and convincingly that their hopes lay with the king of Assyria.

Verse 17 – To strengthen his case, Rab'sha-keh lured them with the hope of prosperity. If they were to surrender he would give them a new home like the one they had in Judah! It would be a land of corn, wine, bread and vineyards! He gambled on the people trading their soul and betraying their king for wealth and a better life.

It is the same today. Young men and women forgo the best years of their lives as they try their utmost to reap the material wealth available in this world. Some will sell their soul to obtain these.

Verse 18 – In his fourth argument, Rab'sha-keh told the Jews not to allow Hezekiah to persuade them otherwise. He said that Hezekiah would say, "The LORD will deliver us."

To this, Rab'sha-keh would counter, "Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?" Many nations had trusted in their gods to deliver them from the king of Assyria but these nations had all fallen. There had been no precedent of any deliverance. The Assyrians were invincible.

Verse 19 – Rab'sha-keh cited the names of some of the nations that had leaned on their respective gods for help. Using rhetorical questions, he asked, "Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim" and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?" The most recent and closest to Judah was Samaria. No nation had ever been delivered. Why would Judah be different?

God's people must never forget that they are different from the rest of the world. They must never reason or think like the world. They have the one living and true God as their Heavenly Father and God. Precedent must never come into the equation when it is a matter of obeying God's Word and exercising faith and trust!

Verse 20 -- Rab'sha-keh further challenged Judah on this question of precedent. He said, "*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?"

The fact that no nations had defeated Assyria was unsettling but the Jews must not allow this line of argument to destroy their faith and trust in the LORD. They must remember that Judah was different

from the rest of the world. Judah belonged to God.

This is why it is important that church leaders be men of faith, holiness and truth! Without these godly characteristics, they would capitulate and fall to the lure of the evil ones.

Verse 21 – Thank God that the people responded in great faith and trust in both their God and king. Hezekiah had prepared his people well. The cleansing of the nation of the idols in the past 14 years of his reign had placed the people in very good stead. They were not moved by Rab'sha-keh's taunts and arguments. Their reaction was one of silence. They held their peace and did not say a word. There was no way of reasoning with a man like Rab'sha-keh who was bent on destroying Judah. He wanted total surrender from the people. He would not soften his stance. He had orders from his king! Not saying a word was the best move. That was the order from their wise king Hezekiah. They obeyed him.

Setting the stage again – 36:22

The scene changed to Eliakim, Shebna and Joah reporting to their king. These were key men in Hezekiah's kingdom. They reported the truth with their clothes rent. The demeanour of these three men spoke volumes about the dire straits of Judah. The very existence of Judah and the work of God through Judah were under assault by the most powerful nation in that region at the time.

The reply and action of Hezekiah would continue in Isaiah 37.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 36:1-10

TUESDAY: Isaiah 36:11-22

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 36:1-22

THURSDAY: Isaiah 36:1-22

FRIDAY: Isaiah 36:1-22.

Discussion Questions

1. Believers today are challenged daily with "to whom do you trust". Do you agree with this statement? Please explain and cite examples if you agree.

2. Are you prone to lean on the arm of the flesh to get things done? What guide you in your decision making? Is it the Word of God or the fear of men? Please explain.

3. Who will you consult if someone comes and say to you that CPBPC is a bad church and that it is a waste of your time to attend the services? What will you do if he invites you to his church? Please elaborate.

4. Is it true to say that there are only two voices on earth -- the voice of God and the voice of man/Devil? Please explain.

5. Do you make decisions based upon what you think will happen in the future? Will you change your present decisions if you were told that the future will be bleak and dark? Please explain and cite some examples.

6. Is it true to say that the more you know someone, the easier it is to trust him? Is it true to say that the more you know God, the easier it is to trust Him? Please explain.

7. What lessons have you learnt from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
