

"Reaction to Attack"
Isaiah 36:1 – 37:38
Ellen Wong

We're familiar with how God can communicate with us. It could be through Scripture, guidance of the Holy Spirit, dreams, visions or through other people. It can also be through our conscience and circumstances of our lives. Well, the enemy can communicate with us also in various ways.

I had a student a year ago who revealed to me that he practiced black magic, and admitted that none of his neighbors liked him. I wonder why? He grew up going to church and his mother particularly was a strong believer. This young man knew Scripture and could recall it word for word much better than I could. The enemy even uses God's Word. In this lecture, we will look at how the enemy works, his tactics of deception, how he uses fear, intimidation, and even truth in the attempt to get what he wants. And we'll also examine how he wants us to "react to attacks" as opposed to how God wants us to react.

Let's look at what we've learned so far in previous chapters. The first segment (Isaiah 1 – 35) details God's impending judgment against ancient people for sin and idolatry. The second section of Isaiah, where we are now in our study, describes an unsuccessful invasion of Jerusalem that took place during King Hezekiah's rule; this runs from chapter 36 through chapter 39.

Who was Hezekiah? The name Hezekiah means "Yahweh strengthens" in Hebrew. It may also be translated as "Yahweh is my strength." (Wikipedia) "Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years". (2 Kings 18:2 and 2 Chronicles 29:1) His existence was supported by archaeological evidence, including the discovery of multiple bullae (clay seal impressions used to seal important documents) and Hezekiah's Tunnel mentioned in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles (2 Kings 20:20 and 2 Chronicles 32:30).

This lesson is paralleled in 2 Kings 18–19 and 2 Chronicles 32, sharing the same story of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah but differing in length, detail, and theological emphasis. While some may argue that the inconsistencies among Isaiah, Kings, and Chronicles show the Bible isn't reliable, others come to the opposite conclusion. Variations in witness testimony are often considered more believable than exact, verbatim agreement, since perfect consistency between multiple sources is unnatural and can suggest collusion. Human memory is imperfect, so differences naturally appear when retelling the same event as it is evident in the game of "telephone", a pastime where a secret message is whispered from person to person. How many of you have played this game? Isn't it amazing how the original message becomes so distorted by the time it reaches the last person, the end of the telephone line? Yet all three books agree on one central point: God rescued Jerusalem from the Assyrian siege, showing that trust in Him overcomes even the greatest threats.

Our chapters for this lesson revolve around King Hezekiah, the thirteenth king of Judah who was considered a good king primarily for his faithfulness to God because "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done." (2 Kings 18:3) His actual biological father was King Ahaz, a wicked king. He undid many of the actions of his father that

dishonored God. "He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles (which were wooden objects used to worship the Canaanite goddess). He even broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made.... (because it became an idol of worship)." (2 Kings 18:4)

The Assyrian army had swept through from the north conquering Syria and Israel as prophesied in Isaiah 8, "...the wealth of Damascus (Syria) and the plunder of Samaria (Israel) will be carried off by the king of Assyria." (v. 4b) They also attacked and captured the fortified cities of Judah as prophesied in verse 8 that they will also "sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck" referring to Jerusalem.

Next to Jerusalem, Lachish was the most important fortified city of Judah. Sennacherib had conquered that city and now had his eye on Jerusalem. He sent a large army from Lachish along with his field commander, Rabshakeh. "Rabshakeh" was a title, not a personal name. It originated from the Assyrian term rab-sak, meaning "chief officer." His role was to deliver a message to King Hezekiah. "The commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field." (v. 2b) When I first read this, I bypassed this information. But as I started my research, I thought to myself, "What is the significance of this Upper Pool and Washerman's Field"? In biblical times, the role of the washerman (also known as fuller) was an essential occupation, responsible for cleaning garments and textiles. This site was a well-known strategic area near Jerusalem's water supply (an aqueduct or pool) and was likely used for laundering. Other Bible translations refer to it by names such as Launderer's Field, Fuller's Field, or the Field of the Fullers (see BibleHub.com and BibleRef.com).

Ironically, this is the same place where Isaiah met King Ahaz (Hezekiah's father) in Isaiah 7. In verse 3 – 4, "...the Lord said to Isaiah, 'Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field'. Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart'" By placing the commander at the same location, the narrative directly contrasts Hezekiah's faithful trust (which we will see in Isaiah 37) with Ahaz's unbelief, showing God's sovereign control over history and His people's recurring tests of faith.

Three men came to meet the commander, Eliakim (the palace administrator), Shebna (the secretary), and Joah (the recorder). Back in Isaiah 22, Shebna (the secretary) oversaw the palace, but then he did wrong in the eyes of the Lord and was demoted. In verse 20-21a, the Lord said, "In that day, I will summon my servant, Eliakim, son of Hilkiah. I will clothe him with your robe (Shebna's robe) and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him." I can't help but wonder if Shebna had a smirky attitude snarling at Eliakim thinking, "you're wearing my robe." Or was he grateful that he still had a high serving position in the kingdom even if it's not where he would like to be. Don't we sometimes find ourselves in that same predicament?

Notice how the commander addressed the three men with a subtle insult. He starts with, "Tell Hezekiah", not "King Hezekiah." Using someone's title is a way of showing respect. My own family addresses relatives as Auntie Cindy, Cousin Susan, and Uncle Mark.

Rabshakeh began his speech with criticizing King Hezekiah's alliance with Egypt. "Look, I know you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it!" (v. 6a) Rabshakeh basically called him a fool for relying on Pharaoh.

Then he mocked Hezekiah by challenging his trust in God. He questioned why Hezekiah had removed the high places of worship if he expected divine help, implying that such obedience would anger God rather than save them. He tried to shake their faith by twisting the truth to encourage surrendering to Assyria using "demonic logic". We also saw this in Genesis 3:1 when the serpent "said to the woman (Eve), 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden"?'"" The verse highlights the Assyrian's misunderstanding of true worship and God's will, as Hezekiah's reforms were actually pleasing to the Lord, focusing worship on the Jerusalem temple. Don't we sometimes believe that our past sins have angered God and assume He won't forgive us, simply because we don't fully understand the forgiveness that comes from our Lord and Savior?

The commander continued with mockery, "Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses—if you can put riders on them!" This is what he's really saying, "You don't have a chance. Save face and just surrender now." The commander was implying that Hezekiah doesn't have the number of men nor the skills to defeat Assyria.

Now, why is the field commander doing this? They already conquered the fortified cities. Wouldn't it be easy for the Assyrian army to continue the battle and lay siege Jerusalem? But rather he uses **intimidation**. According to some, Satan doesn't want to do battle with us. He would rather we give up and lose hope. When hope is gone, the battle is already won. Just as anxiety and depression can cause paralysis in the loss of hope. However, going to battle could have three positive outcomes:

1. There is a strong chance we could win with the name of the Lord.
2. Win or lose, a battle can draw us closer to God.
3. What the Lord does through the battle can become a great blessing to others.

We discussed the benefits of battle, but there are times when avoiding it would be prudent. George Washington was not only American's first president but the victorious general of the American Revolution. He spent much of the war not fighting or advancing but running away especially when he knew he was in no position to win. Moses did the same thing when Edom denied passage through their country. "Since Edom refused to let them go through their territory, Israel turned away from them." (Numbers 20:21)

Rabshakeh then proceeded with his **intimidation** by making a claim of divine authority, saying, "The Lord himself told me to march against this country and destroy it" (v. 10b). He relied on one tactic after another, hoping that something would eventually succeed.

He then resorted to **fear**. First of all, he made sure all the people could hear and understand him by speaking Hebrew, even after Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah politely asked him to speak in Aramaic, a language the people did not understand. He proclaimed that all the people would "have to eat their own filth and drink their own urine" (v.12) if they didn't surrender.

Next, projecting **lies**. "Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you! Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord ..." (v. 14-15) He accused Hezekiah of deception when he himself was deceitful; that's called projecting. Satan works in a similar fashion. He can make us question whether God hears our prayers. Just because there is a delay doesn't mean it's a denial. (Pastor Jenny Reeves)

Rabshakeh continued with his deception by using **enticement**. "... Make peace with me and come out to me (Sennacherib). Then everyone of you will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your own—a land of grain and ..." yada yada. (v. 16-17) Doesn't that sound attractive? It's just like the devil to make the grass look greener on the other side of the fence. "If I just got that new car, landed the right job, or found my soulmate, I'd be happy."

The people would be far from being happy. Rabshakeh was really implementing a common practice by the Assyrians after they conquered a nation with resettling the people in faraway places to keep their spirits broken and their power weak. This was a form of "ethnic cleansing."

By this public announcement, not only was the commander instilling fear, but tried to rouse the crowd to put pressure on the king to surrender, maybe even to provoke a riot. It only takes one person to start a protest, and others will jump on board. There was a reporter who interviewed this college student about her views in what she was protesting. The young lady wasn't completely clear on what she was protesting.

I must give the people of Judah credit. They respected the king's request to stay silent, because Hezekiah knew he couldn't win militarily. I had a student this last semester who shared with me about another parent throwing insults at her during a meeting with the principal about their kids. My student said, "Her comments didn't make sense. She called me a racist which had nothing to do with the situation." My response to her was, you can't reason with "demonic logic". People who are outraged are looking for a fight. It might be prudent to cease and withdraw with silence.

How did Hezekiah's officials respond? Not only did they tear their clothes, but King Hezekiah tore his clothes and put on a sackcloth when he heard of all this. Sackcloth was a rough, uncomfortable fabric, usually made from goat's hair. People wore it to show deep sadness, mourning, or repentance, often accompanied with ashes on their heads as a sign of humility and sorrow. To picture how this felt, think about how annoying an itchy clothing tag is, but feeling that all over your body. Wearing sackcloth was a clear sign of mourning, much like wearing black to a funeral today.

King Hezekiah didn't gather his officials to discuss a game plan in defense, nor did he run to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to plea for help. He turned to prayer. He sent two of his officials and leading priests, all wearing sackcloth to see Isaiah the prophet. They hoped in hearing the mocking of the God of Judah that the Lord would defend Jerusalem for His name's sake. Hezekiah asked Isaiah to "pray for the remnant that still survive." (v. 4) Why did Hezekiah do this?

Mathew 18:20

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
We are called to pray in community.

Isaiah told Hezekiah not to fear. God was going to deliver Jerusalem by sending a spirit to cause Sennacherib to hear a rumor and return to Assyria. God had already planned the death of the king. They had been useful to God in bringing judgment to some nations like Israel in the north, but their usefulness was over and God was going to punish them for their pride.

When Sennacherib heard "the Cushite king of Egypt, was marching out to fight against him" (v.9b), he left Lachish and sent a threatening letter to King Hezekiah. It said, "don't depend on your god to deliver you." "Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my forefathers deliver them" (v. 12a)

Hezekiah took the letter and spread it out before the Lord as any child of God should do with such a letter.

An old preacher once received a letter with no sender or return address on the envelope. When he opened it, he saw a single piece of paper with only one word: "Fool!" He took it to the pulpit the next Sunday and said: "I received an unusual letter this week. Never before have I received a letter where the writer signed his name but forgot to write anything else."

With the letter laid out, he prayed to God, acknowledging His greatness. He said, "Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth..." (v. 16) He **praised** the Lord. Something we should do all day, every day, every chance we get, especially when we look up at the blue sky, when our vehicle starts, or when we're surrounded by loved ones. It's a reminder for us of the greatness of God. When we don't focus and praise God, we have a natural tendency to gravitate toward negative thoughts.

Hezekiah asked God to listen to Sennacherib's taunts and save Jerusalem so that all the people of the earth would know He was the only true God. He asked for deliverance so that God could be glorified. This is how God responded, "Because you have **prayed** to me concerning Sennacherib ..." (v. 21b), **prayed**; He promised to humble Assyria because their pride had gone too far. God, speaking to Sennacherib, said, "Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came." (v. 37:29) The Assyrians were known for putting hooks in the nose of their prisoners, and now God will put a hook in the Assyrian king.

When the Assyrian army was camped near Jerusalem preparing to make their attack, God sent an angel who killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib retreated and returned to Nineveh where he was later assassinated by his sons, just as Isaiah had prophesied in verse 7.

What is the takeaway for this lesson? When we were children, we relied on our parents, guardians, and adults for protection. As adults we tend to rely on our spouse/significant others and family and friends. But at some point, they will disappoint.

Hezekiah was an example of what we should do when we are under attack. Present and lay our request before the Lord in prayer. **1 Peter 5:7** Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

How should we pray like King Hezekiah?

1. Come with repentance
2. Praise the Lord
3. Gather in community with others
4. Ask that His Name be Gloried

Please stand as we sing in praise and I'll close in prayer.

Father, we humbly come before you. You are so merciful, gracious, and forgiving. Forgive us for our sins, the ones we are aware of and for those we are not. You are a good, good God. You came in human form to save all humankind. Thank you for your abundant love, a love that we can't even fathom. We come before you in community and ask that you hear our individual requests. As you answer our prayers may your name be glorified and may it draw us closer to you. Amen