



**Rabshakeh's PROPOP 4: Use Sarcasm to Discredit Leadership & Discourage the People;
PROPOP 5: Assert Divine Approval to Sell Your Agenda, Isa 36:10**

- 4) The Rabshakeh has used sarcasm to satirically discredit the military of Judah. The definition of this rhetorical device adds insight to the technique as a form of propaganda.

Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Revised by Henry Stuart Jones. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1584:

Σαρκαῶζω, sarkazō, (σάρξ, *sarx*: flesh) tear the flesh like dogs. **Σαρκασμός, sarkasmos**, mockery, sarcasm.

The Greek word *sarx* is translated “flesh” in English. The word *sarkazō* refers to the tearing of the flesh, e.g., by the attack of wild dogs. Figuratively, the Rabshakeh uses sarcasm as a verbal attack on the leadership of Judah in order to discredit them in the minds of the people who listen from the walls of Jerusalem.

Webster, Noah. *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. (New York: S. Converse, 1828. Reprint. San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1995), 2:63:

Sarcasm. A reproachful expression; a satirical remark or expression, uttered with some degree of scorn or contempt; a taunt; a gibe.

Our forefathers understood this word to mean an expression of reproach spoken in such a way the person addressed was insulted. The Rabshakeh taunts Hezekiah's delegation for Judah's lack of a cavalry and in doing so makes it clear to the citizens that they are at a grave disadvantage against the Assyrian army.

Morris, William (ed.). *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1971), 1152, 1470:

Sarcasm. A sharply mocking or contemptuous remark, typically utilizing statements or implications pointedly opposite or irrelevant to the underlying purport.

The Rabshakeh mocks Hezekiah by suggesting in a conditional sentence that he place a bet with Sennacherib. The Rabshakeh gives the apodosis or main clause first: “I will give you two thousand horses.” The delegation may have hurriedly assumed that some kind of arrangement might be possible instead of armed conflict.

But the Rabshakeh then hits them with the protasis or subordinate clause, “... if you are able on your part to set riders on them.”

The Assyrian implies that Hezekiah has riders which he knows the king does not possess but the proposal asserts that he does. This is a sarcastic way of stating the obvious in verse 9, “How can you turn away one of the least of my cavalry commanders?”

The Rabshakeh then drives the insult home by asking them if instead they intend to rely on the Egyptian army now in retreat back to Egypt?

Sarcastic.

Synonyms: *Sarcastic* and *ironic* both pertain to a form of expression in which meanings are conveyed obliquely. *Sarcasm* suggests open taunting or ridicule. *Satirical* refers to expression that seeks to expose wrong or folly to ridicule often by means of sarcasm or irony. (p. 1152)



Thus with the use of the conditional sentence the truth of Judah's circumstance is brought to light obliquely or by deliberate obscurity. This is sarcasm with satire for it exposes to the delegation and the people Judah's folly in first not having a cavalry of its own, secondly the ill-advised dependence on that of Egypt's, and finally the reality that Assyria has the best cavalry in the Middle East, mounted and ready to ride 25 miles down the road at Lachish.

Wit. Synonyms: *Sarcasm* is usually a form of wit intended to taunt, wound, or subject another to ridicule or contempt. *Irony* is often employed to point up mockingly the discrepancies between reality, with its shortcomings, and a more desirable state. (p. 1470)

It must also be noted that the Rabshakeh has a sense of humor. He didn't use sarcasm to reflect bitterness but to display generosity on the part of the king of Assyria. His sarcasm offered 2,000 horses but only if Judah could provide mounts.

This proposal mocks Hezekiah since it drew a sharp distinction between military preparedness in Assyria and Judah. The reality is that Judah is unprepared and this is made obvious by the Rabshakeh suggesting that if Judah had two thousand riders, he'd give them 2,000 horses.

Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 114:

Irony, a subtly humorous perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance. **Verbal irony** involves a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant, as in its crude form, sarcasm.

What was said implied that Judah could defend herself if she just had horses. What was meant was that she couldn't defend herself against even one of Sennacherib's junior officers even if she did have the horses.

- 5) The people of Judah were fully aware of the Assyrian army's reputation. It was well-trained, well-armed, and vicious. Assyria had the superior chariot and cavalry corps in all the Fertile Crescent. They had defeated the Egyptians whose chariot corps was enlisted by Judah as a means of protection from them. And Judah had no cavalry or horses nor riders to put upon them if they did.
- 6) **Propaganda Objective #4:** Through humiliation, the Rabshakeh discredits the leadership of Judah and its military in the minds of the people. Through sarcasm he demonstrates to the people that they are in an untenable situation from which their only option for escape is capitulation and surrender.

Isaiah 36:10 - And now without Jehovah's approval have I invaded this land to destroy it? Jehovah said to me, 'Invade this land and destroy it!'

- 1) The Rabshakeh now moves from sarcasm to lying. The Lord has not had a word to say to the Rabshakeh who is a heathen. Thus Assyria has not been directly instructed through any divine communications to Sennacherib or the Rabshakeh to attack Israel.
- 2) This is pure power politics through which the Rabshakeh seeks to propagandize for the purpose of instilling fear into the people who are assembled on the wall.
- 3) In verse 7 the Rabshakeh asserted that the people would not be able to depend on God for protection since Hezekiah had insulted Him by tearing down His sacred altars throughout Judah.
- 4) Now in verse 10 the Rabshakeh claims that the God of Israel is not only on the side of Assyria but that God Himself had instructed him to invade Judah.



- 5) The Rabshakeh as an unbeliever could not know or understand the doctrines that enable the believer to evaluate the will of God.
- 6) It is true that the permissive will of God allowed the Assyrian army to invade client nation Judah just as it had allowed it to do so into the Northern Kingdom under Shalmaneser V and Sargon II in 721 B.C.
- 7) In fact, idolatry had become so prevalent in Israel that the Father permitted the cycles of discipline to run their course and to remove the Northern Kingdom from history.
- 8) This was the course down which the Southern Kingdom was headed when Sennacherib decided upon his campaign through the Levant. Hezekiah was in reversionism and was about to die the sin unto death.
- 9) Further, in all probability, Judah would have suffered the fifth cycle when the Assyrian army arrived at Jerusalem. In fact, this is what the Rabshakeh assumes is about to occur.
- 10) Since he was under the impression that the gods of the Assyrian pantheon had sanctioned the campaign he concluded that the God of Israel must also approve of it as well.
- 11) Sometimes a blind pig finds an acorn. His rationale was a good piece of human viewpoint but he had no way of comprehending the power of rebound and revival.
- 12) When Hezekiah recovered his spiritual life through rebound he then went into action by fortifying Jerusalem and inspiring the people.
- 13) Where they were not functioning under the spiritual life of their dispensation before, the recovery of their king led to a national revival.
- 14) The Rabshakeh's analysis thus didn't hold water since the faith-rest drill had been restored as the spiritual life of the client nation.
- 15) Regardless, the Rabshakeh tries to terrorize both the leadership and the people with the assertion that Jehovah had personally informed him that the Assyrian army would be victorious over Judah.
- 16) God had done no such thing. Isaiah's prophecy had warned the people that the Assyrians would attack but this prophecy did not go so far as to reveal the outcome.
- 17) God through omniscience knew the eventual outcome but permitted the attack to occur. It served as a Wake-Up Call for the client nation to which Hezekiah and the people responded positively. His delegation sent from the palace to meet the Assyrian Secretary of State will prove to be another story.
- 18) In making his claim, the Rabshakeh violated the Third Commandment: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).
- 19) The Rabshakeh purposefully uses the name of the Lord for purely propaganda purposes in order to terrify a population he assumed had by now developed a guilt complex and thus become susceptible to the suggestion that they were deserving of divine punishment.



- 20) But God promised Hezekiah that He will deliver Judah from the Assyrians and Hezekiah had not only believed Him but successfully motivated the people to rebound and resume their spiritual lives.
- 21) Nevertheless, the Rabshakeh sought to override Hezekiah's influence by asserting that the God of Israel personally sponsored the invasion and defeat of Judah.
- 22) His implication to the people of Judah is, "Surrender, for it is God's will."
- 23) **Propaganda Objective #5:** Systematically remove all objects of faith and confidence from the people. Invoke the name of God to give validity to your assertions and to justify your actions.