



In the days of Hezekiah the King, Sennacherib sent his armies into Israel to destroy her cities and make off with the spoils of her people. Hezekiah, who had repented in ashes and sackcloth of past failures to honor the God of Israel, and was given promises of God's intervention against the Assyrian hordes. As the armies of Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem with the spears gleaming and armor rattling, the Lord intervened with a mighty hand. The full account can be read in 2 Kings 18:13-19:37, but below I have posted the concluding verses:

AND it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand (one hundred and eighty five thousand): and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. ³⁶ So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. ³⁷ And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead. (2 Kings 19:35-37)

I believe that poetic verse is often more effective in making a permanent impression upon young minds than simple literary dialogue.

The poem below appeared in the 1903 edition of Jones Elementary Reader for Fifth Grade. The story of Sennacharib's destruction is told in verse by the great, George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824). Here is the story extracted from the book with only changes in format made for this devotion:

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824) was one of the great English poets. His best work may be ranked with what is most worthy of admiration in English literature.

Note — Sennacherib was a king of Assyria who invaded Judea during the reign of Hezekiah. According to the Bible story, the Jewish king and his prophet Isaiah implored divine favor to save them from coming under the Assyrian yoke. The "Angel of the Lord" smote the invading army so that one hundred and eighty-five thousand died in a single night. Sennacherib himself returned to his home in safety, but was killed by his sons 681 BC. (See 2 Kings 18. 19., and Isaiah 37)

Byron's poem is said to be the finest sacred lyric in the English language. Its strength and simplicity are remarkable.

The Destruction of Sennacherib

*The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold,
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.*

*Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.*

*For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast.
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still.*

*And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.*

*And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.*

*And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail.
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal,
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!*

Explanatory footnote for student:

Ashur: Assyria — Ba'al: the chief god of the idolaters.

Foreigner: To the Jews all other races were Gentiles.