

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 37:21-29, KING HEZEKIAH'S RESPONSE, PART 3

The next section of this chapter reveals the answer Yahweh sent to Hezekiah by means of the prophet, Isaiah. After the answer was revealed, a sign was predicted that would confirm the message. One of the things revealed in Yahweh's response is the control Yahweh was exercising over the entire ordeal; He is sovereign (v. 26). Kings and nations may think they are operating as independent nations, but God has a plan for history, and they are operating within the bounds of that plan.

Isaiah 37:21–22a ²¹Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent word to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, ²²this is the word that the LORD has spoken against him: ...

Yahweh did not speak directly to Hezekiah; He spoke to the king through His prophet, Isaiah. The prophet himself did not directly speak to the king either; instead, he sent a messenger with the Word of God. Presumably, the message was written, rather than verbally passed along, due to the detail in which it was given to Isaiah. It is probably not reasonable to expect a messenger to remember a detailed message such as this one word for word.

Earlier, Hezekiah prayed to the “LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,” and now the “LORD, the God of Israel” answered his petition. King Hezekiah did not need further revelation to know that Yahweh was the Creator God, the God of Israel; he already knew that as his prayer demonstrated. Israel as a nation is obviously an important element in this situation which emphasizes Yahweh's relationship with Israel. Remember, Israel is the only nation specifically and supernaturally created by Yahweh. Every other nation evolved out of the natural, specie specific propagation means pertaining to mankind, which is reproduction according to kind, and by means of geographic dispersion throughout the planet after the rebellion at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) when Yahweh placed certain people groups in specific geographic locations—but He did not specifically create the various world nations to be the people group in the particular location to which they were dispersed as He did with Israel. Yahweh has a special and unique relationship with Israel that must not be overlooked as so many Christians do today which usually takes the form of replacement theology and anti-Semitism.

Yahweh's response was the direct result of Hezekiah's prayer in the Temple: “because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria.” Hezekiah submitted himself to Yahweh and admitted his only hope for deliverance from the evil Assyrian nation was in Yahweh, not in himself, not in his advisors and their plans, not in his military, and not in alliances with pagan nations.

The first part of Yahweh's response to Hezekiah's prayer contains a rebuke for Sennacherib's pride and arrogance, and a condemnation of the blasphemy he directed at the God of Israel. It also suggests that the pagan king's plans to conquer Jerusalem will be thwarted.

Isaiah 37:22b ²²... “She has despised [בִּזְיוֹן] you and mocked [לְעֵג] you, The virgin daughter of Zion; She has shaken *her* head behind you, The daughter of Jerusalem!

What Sennacherib and Assyria have done to Jerusalem will be turned back on them when Yahweh defeats them and causes the Assyrian king to return to Assyria in defeat. The sense of this seems to be that Jerusalem, the unspoiled daughter of Zion, will be delivered and will therefore remain inviolate. “*Virgin* is used here in the sense of being untouched by the marauder. The Assyrian came intent on rape but his victim remains unharmed *because you have prayed*” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 228].

This should not be a surprise; we know that Assyria was not destined to completely conquer Judah because Yahweh and Isaiah already revealed that truth twice. Assyria was destined to punish Judah for disobedience and rebellion, but that nation was not destined to completely conquer and destroy the nation. Sadly, the kings of Judah would not learn their lesson by means of Yahweh's divine discipline enacted through Assyria; therefore, they would experience further discipline at the hands of Babylon a little over 100 years in the future.

Isaiah 10:5, 12 ⁵Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation ... ¹²So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *He will say*, “I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness.”

Isaiah 38:6 “I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city.”

Sennacherib and his envoys had mocked and despised Judah, Jerusalem, Hezekiah and Yahweh. In the end, it will be the Israelites who will be mocking and despising the Assyrian Army as it leaves the nation in shameful defeat at the hands of the God they had mocked and despised.

Despise, בִּזְיוֹן, means to show contempt and to despise referring to looking down on with contempt.

Mock, לְעֵג, means to mock or to deride referring to looking down on with contempt.

The shaking of the head “behind” or “after” you suggests that this is taking place as the defeated king leaves the area implying that his back is turned to them as he retreats. The NKJV reads “has shaken her head behind your back!” but it is more literal to interpret it as, “she shakes her head behind you” (LEB).

Yahweh asked three rhetorical questions concerning Sennacherib's disparaging remarks directed at the Holy One of Israel. Sennacherib used the same rhetorical tactic when presenting his arguments before the people at the wall (Is. 36:19-20). Yahweh is answering him in kind at this point in the narrative. “These questions interpret the attack of Sennacherib as primarily a theological challenge or battle against God, rather than merely a human military conflict against Judah's army. The spiritual implications of this

war are in fact far more fundamental to the outcome of the battle than the military strength of the two armies" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 624].

Isaiah 37:23 ²³"Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? And against whom have you raised [רָוַם] your voice And haughtily lifted [נָצַח] up your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel!

When directed against the one true God, reproach, treating with contempt, and blaspheming, reviling and speaking evil of, are truly terrible offenses. In fact, under the Mosaic Law, blasphemy was punishable by death (Lv. 24:16). Later, we will note that Sennacherib most likely did pay for this crime with his life when his sons murdered him 20 years after his humiliating defeat in Judah. In essence, he was ultimately, if not immediately, punished with death for the blasphemous words he spoke against Yahweh.

Raising the voice against Yahweh is also an act of defiance to God, because it represents the idea of rejection or defiance. Raise, רָוַם, means to be high, exalted, or proud. In this context, it describes the haughtiness and boastfulness of people which is especially egregious when that attitude is directed against God and designed to elevate man and to diminish God. The implication is that the person is making himself out to be more exalted than God, which is what Sennacherib and the Rabshakeh were doing at the wall. A loud, defiant voice was used there (Is. 36:13).

Lifting up the eyes is also an indication of pride and rebellion when directed against God. Lift, נָצַח, means to lift, to lift up, or to take up, but there is also an element of exaltation in the meaning of this word.

These same two words were used to describe Yahweh and His throne as lofty and exalted in Isaiah 6:1. When used of God, they are good words, but when used of man who is trying to exalt himself to be God, these words are quite negative in meaning which is the situation here in this verse.

The prophet then highlighted the sins of the arrogant Assyrian king which God found to be very offensive, not the least of which was scorning the name of the Lord and even denying the fact that He was the one true God.

Isaiah 37:24–25 ²⁴"Through your servants you have reproached [הָרַר] the Lord, And you have said, 'With my many [רַב] chariots I came up to the heights of the mountains, To the remotest parts of Lebanon; And I cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypresses. And I will go to its highest peak, its thickest forest. ²⁵I dug wells and drank waters, And with the sole of my feet I dried up All the rivers of Egypt.'

These verses reflect the esteem in which Assyrian kings thought of themselves and exalted themselves in their annals. Archaeological finds have identified inscriptions that are very similar to the words in these verses. This first-person style of braggadocio was quite common in the Assyrian royal courts.

We have already noted that the Assyrians simply thought of Yahweh as just another god in a pantheon of pagan gods, and they said so. While they apparently heard Isaiah's

prophecies that Assyria was going to be used as an instrument of God's divine discipline (Is. 7:17-18, 10:6-11, etc.), they ignored other prophecies that said Assyria would not conquer Judah (Is. 10:5, 12; 38:6).

We know that God Himself raised up Assyria to be the nation through which He would judge the Northern Kingdom and remove it from its place as an independent nation, and also to chastise the Southern Kingdom, but Assyria grew to exceed the mission for which it was raised up. The Assyrians thought they were the masters of their domain and of their fate, but Yahweh certainly had other ideas about that, and His solution to the problem would soon be revealed.

Besides the blasphemous words spoken about Yahweh to the people in Jerusalem through Sennacherib's messengers, the king himself had proudly elevated himself to god-like status. The root of paganism is the enthronement of the individual as his own god and that is clearly the situation with many pagan kings. Sennacherib, however, seemed to be exceptionally good at it. Reproach, *קָרַח*, means to treat with contempt, to mock, taunt, spurn, revile, vilify, scorn, defy, and reproach. It very specifically is used to identify the act of casting blame or scorn on someone. This word was used in connection with blasphemy in Isaiah 37:23. This is a strong word indicating no respect for the God of Israel, in fact, it indicates a state of mind that rejects the very notion that He is the Creator God. Obviously, Yahweh is quite displeased with the level of this king's disrespect and his outright rejection of Yahweh's identity as the only true God in existence.

The mention of chariots was an exclamation of the power wielded by the Assyrian Army. Chariots were not useful around Jerusalem in the hilly terrain, but they do represent the tremendous power the Assyrian Army fielded at that time. "Chariots, like tanks or jet fighters today, were the most prestigious arm of the military, and even though they were useful only in flatland fighting, it was still a point of honor with the Assyrians to take them everywhere they went, even over the most difficult terrain" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 661]. The Assyrians failed to take into account the fact that even their powerful chariots were useless against the power wielded by the omnipotent Creator God. The king bragged about the might of his army by referring to the multitude of chariots in his army. Many, *רַב*, means multitude, abundance, and greatness. In this context, it is a reference to the large number of chariots in the Assyrian Army. A multitude of chariots is related to the power the army was able to wield on the field of battle; an overwhelming number of chariots represents an overwhelming army. Several translations (KJV, NKJV, ASV, YLT) use the word "multitude" in this verse which in English, although "many" and "multitude" are synonyms, presents a more accurate understanding of what this word means because it paints a picture of a huge number of something in the English-speaking mind. English-speaking people frequently emphasize a very large number by repeating the word "many" as in "many, many" in order to paint the picture that the use of the word "multitude" paints. In other words, I think the use of the English word "multitude" is better in this context.

The Assyrian king thought that there was nothing that could prevent the accomplishment of any aggressive military action he took. From the lofty mountains of Lebanon, through the wastelands where water was scarce, and on to the Nile River delta, he thought he could overcome any obstacle. Apart from the power exercised by the only omnipotent

God, Sennacherib was probably quite correct in his assessment of the power of his army. Motyer claimed that Egyptian farmers used small irrigation channels that could be stopped by simply mounding some dirt in them with their feet, hence, the king's boastful claim that he could, in the same way, stop all the rivers of Egypt with the sole of his foot [Alec J. Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 228]. The king was obviously using this concept as a metaphor for his power, but whether this was an actual situation in terms of Egyptian agriculture or not, I was unable to verify.

Some theologians claim there is a textual issue in play here. The Assyrians never invaded Egypt even though they had desires to conquer that nation. This fact leads some theologians to claim the text is in error. In this textual theory, the word for Egypt, מִצְרַיִם (used in Isaiah in place of the more common מִצְרַיִם), is not in the text and is actually the word for rock, צוּר, and therefore "the rivers would be mountain rivers, an obstacle which the Assyrians frequently boasted of conquering" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 661, n. 15]. However, I could not find any evidence to support this textual theory. The word מִצְרַיִם is in the Masoretic text, which is the basis for the interpretation, and there is no reason, other than human pride which thinks the text could not be saying what it is saying, to change it. In the final analysis, since the king is using highly figurative language to claim god status, the difference is really unimportant. He is claiming to be able to accomplish God-like things which is blasphemy and an affront to the one true God who can actually accomplish these things.

Sennacherib is really claiming divine status. Reaching the heights and drying up the rivers are acts of God. Pagan kings could not do those kinds of things, of course, but they could deploy mighty armies to act on their behalf, and using those armies they could conquer and control vast territories and the people who inhabit them. "Although Sennacherib may try to take credit for some of the things his army did, these statements include much figurative language and the repetition of traditional royal hyperbolic phraseology. These are boasts that claim the king can do anything he wants and that he has already accomplished superhuman feats" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 625]. By claiming he was his own god and that he could do God-like supernatural things, this blasphemous king was unknowingly proclaiming himself worthy of God's divine judgment which is soon to follow.

"Sennacherib mentions different parts of the landscape in order to show the completeness of his power; heights of the mountains, the deserts, and the rivers. He speaks of the north (Lebanon) and the south (Egypt) to show how all-embracing his work was. And his description would have been filled with meaning for the people of Jerusalem. Before them stood a world conqueror" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 2:491].

The sovereignty of God is put on full display in the disclosure that what has been happening in Judah has been part of Yahweh's plan for the nation.

Isaiah 37:26–27 ²⁶"Have you not [הֲלוֹא] heard? Long ago [לְמִרְהוֹק] I did [עָשָׂה] it, From ancient times [מִיָּמֵי קִדְמָה] I planned [יָצַר] it. Now I have brought it to pass, That you should turn fortified

cities into ruinous heaps. ²⁷“Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength, They were dismayed [תַּתַּת] and put to shame [בוֹשׁ]; They were as the vegetation of the field and as the green herb, As grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up.

This rhetorical question, “Have you not heard?” was directed to the Assyrian, but it was also intended to provide Hezekiah with some understanding of what was happening around him. That should not have been necessary, because the Scriptures clearly foretold what was going to happen to the Israelites if and when they rebelled against God (Lv. 26; Dt. 28), yet, they did not know because they did not know their Scriptures—and what they knew, they rejected. “All should have heard concerning these things, for they were not esoteric matters to be learned only by long and laborious investigation. Rather, they had already been proclaimed by the prophets, and they were truths out in the open. They should have been heard. Included in the question also is an element of surprise that anyone could be ignorant of these well-known truths” [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 2:492].

The construction of this question also suggests that the Assyrian king did know some things about God's use of the nation for His purposes. Obviously, however, Sennacherib rejected what had already been made known. “The initial rhetorical question is syntactically structured to make it into an obvious statement. ‘Have you not heard,’ which begins with a negative question (hālô), actually means, ‘surely you have heard’ and you know these things are true. Certainly the king's intelligence gathering process has unearthed the theological claim that the God of Israel controls history with his plan.... The negative particle with the question marker הֲלֹ shows that something is ‘absolutely true,’ and the question ‘is it not’ is therefore ‘equivalent to surely it is’” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 625, 625 n. 130].

We know that Isaiah 10:5 specifically revealed that Assyria would be the rod of God's anger, that is, the pagan nation would be used to punish Israel and Judah. In Isaiah 14:24-27, Yahweh revealed that Assyria would be defeated in the land, and in Isaiah 37:33-34 and 38:6, it was revealed that Assyria would not conquer Jerusalem. The Assyrians knew all that, but they did not believe it. Knowing what the Word of God says and believing it to the point of then acting on it are two separate issues. Although King Sennacherib knew these things, they meant nothing to him, because he did not believe them. Furthermore, he did not believe that Yahweh was in fact the one true Creator God. To Sennacherib, Yahweh was just another tribal, pagan god who was inferior to his own pagan gods. Why then, should we think that he would believe and obey anything that came from the Lord through the prophet?

This pagan Assyrian king who was so full of himself would soon learn that he was not in complete control of everything he thought he controlled; Yahweh is in command of history—history that has been planned from the foundation of the world. That is an eternal truth that was true then and it is true now. God allows human free-will decision making within the parameters of His program for history, but all those things have been factored in, and everything works out in the end exactly as He plans for it to end.

“Long ago” and “from ancient times,” the words used here are synonyms used in parallel, indicate that God planned these things from eternity. Yahweh knew He was going to form Israel into a nation, He knew they were going to rebel, He knew He was going to impose His divine disciplinary program on the wayward nation, and He knew He was going to use Assyria, in this instance, at this time and place, to do it.

[From] long ago, לְמִרְחֹק, means distant, far, remote, and, in this context means long ago with the sense of referring to an old time which is itself a reference to past times or states of affairs, often in the distant past. Literally, this reads, “to from long ago.”

From ancient times, מִיְמֵי קֶדֶם, means front, east, aforetime or the ancient past, that which is before referring to an old time which is itself a reference to past times or states of affairs, often in the distant past. Literally, this reads, “from days ancient.”

Here are two other translations that are quite accurate:

... I have made it from days of primeval time, and I formed it ... (LEB).

... it I did, From days of old—that I formed it ... (YLT).

The grammatical construction concerning the personal pronoun used here, “I,” indicates that this is something that God, who is doing the speaking through the prophet, accomplished; He planned it, and He did it.

Did, עָשָׂה, means to do, to make, to labor or to work at anything, to create, and to prepare which refers to doing or acting in carrying out or performing an action or a course of action. It has the sense of performing an activity with a distinct purpose, a moral obligation, or a goal to accomplish. This verb is used in the perfect tense meaning it is completed action; Motyer calls it “a perfect of certainty: so settled was the plan that it could be spoken of as already accomplished” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 229]. This is not an uncommon occurrence concerning perfect verbs in the prophets, and we have already encountered this in Isaiah. I have referred to them as “prophetic perfects.”

Planned, יָצַר, means to form, to fashion, to shape, or to devise. It primarily refers to cutting or framing, but it is used in a variety of ways to refer to making something such as pottery, God’s creative works, forging metal, and so on. “Planned is the potter’s verb *yāšar*, ‘to mould, shape’” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 229].

God raised up Assyria for a purpose which was to be His agent for the imposition of divine discipline on both Israelite kingdoms, North and South. The Assyrians, of course, thought all they accomplished was the result of their own skill and power, but it was not; it was the result of God’s plan and purpose for history. “Brought it to pass: the plan as conceived in the divine mind (26ab) and moulded by his hands on the wheel of historical events (26c) is precisely what happened at the end (26d)” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 229].

Many theologians claim that Assyria knew God's plan for the nation and their role in God's plan, and they therefore should have acted accordingly, that is, with restraint and in accordance with God's desires and no more, but that is an unrealistic view. The Assyrians were used by God for His purposes, but they apparently had rejected whatever they learned from Isaiah's prophecies. As far as I know, the only pagan kings who knew God had plans for them and appropriately responded to the revelation they received were Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2, 4), and Cyrus the Persian (Is. 45:1-7). Assyria was simply another rebellious, pagan nation in the world who rejected God and His Word and operated according to the mores of Satan's world system. God would use them for the purposes He destined them to fulfill, and then they would be judged just as all the nations either have been or will be judged.

Here is Young's faulty view of the Assyrians and what he claims they should have known and done. "In God's hands the Assyrian was but an instrument, designed from old to carry out God's purposes of punishment toward His chosen people. It became the Assyrians therefore to act with great humility. Instead, they acted as though they had control of the entire situation and were doing according to their own will. In place of acknowledging the sacredness of their task and giving glory to God, they boasted as though all had been done in their own strength and by their own might. This was foolish, for they should have known of God's purposes" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 2:491-492]. Isn't that the story of fallen humanity? Don't all fallen, and even some saved, people and nations do that? Isn't the whole world system in rebellion against God? This is a very unrealistic point of view.

Young is correct that Assyria was to be an instrument for God's use and purposes, but it is not true they thoroughly knew that fact, accepted it, and understood the implications of it. They didn't even believe God was the one true God, and they certainly did not believe His Word. They almost certainly knew that Isaiah predicted they would invade Judah but not conquer Jerusalem, but we also know they had a low, inaccurate view of Yahweh and therefore did not believe what they were learning from the prophet's words. We also know that humility was not a hallmark of Assyria's national disposition; they believed they could defeat Judah and her God, Yahweh. They were doing what pagan, aggressive nations do, but, in this case, God was using that to accomplish His purposes at the same time. God knew from the beginning how this people would act within the boundaries of Satan's world system, and He designed His plan for history not only to accommodate their behavior, but to use it to further His divinely designed plan for history. Egypt was also part of the plan of God in the formation of Israel, but Egypt's rulers did not know that. The same may be said of Babylon, Greece, Rome, Germany, and the anti-Semitic world, but they all operate from the standpoint of the Satanic world system. They reject God's plans and purposes and operate according to Satan's plans and purposes, even though they are ultimately furthering God's plans for Israel and for world history. It all works together, but to suggest that pagan, God-rejecting, Satan-embracing, rebellious nations should operate in a godly manner according to only the purposes of God for history, is more than a bit naïve.

We have to remember that the world operates within the boundaries God has established for the conduct of Satan's world system. However, contrary to Calvinistic deterministic theology that claims God has sovereignly decreed everything that happens

down to the most minute detail, God does allow for free will decision making on the part of the world's nations and peoples. He who knows the end from the beginning uses that freedom to guide and direct the world to the ends He has established for history, sometimes a nation and a people more and sometimes less. In terms of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, and Germany, among many others, He has used them in extensive ways while other people and nations He has used to a lesser extent. Nevertheless, history is inexorably moving to the end God designed from the beginning whatever freedom nations and peoples have notwithstanding. Assyria played a big role in that plan.

“God shaped certain factors within history long ago, but there is no specific explanation of how Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem or Hezekiah's prayer fits into or is coordinated with this previously decided plan. This text is limited in what it claims; for example, it does not say that every detail of every person's life is pre-planned, it only states that Sennacherib's victories over his enemies were shaped into God plans years earlier, thus Sennacherib deserves no credit for turning cities into heaps of rubble and bringing great shame on people who wither like the grass. The truth is that it was God who planned it all and brought it all about. Thus Sennacherib actually received permission and authority to defeat other nations from God” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 1-39*, 625].

Assyria was destined to invade not only the Northern Kingdom to subdue it and remove it as an independent nation, but they were destined to invade Judah and impose Yahweh's divine disciplinary program on the people there, yet they would not be allowed to conquer the nation. That task would fall to Babylon just over 100 years later. They did, however, devastate greater Judah's land and people. They overran the nation and destroyed the fortified cities leaving only rubble behind. Unstated, but implied in verse 30, and according to the standard operating procedure of armies at the time, they also would have devastated the agricultural capabilities of the land both to sustain themselves during the invasion and to deprive the citizens of Judah necessary food and supplies.

In the face of the Assyrian onslaught, the people of Judah had no effective defense which dismayed and shamed them. The problem for Judah was not they had no defense whatsoever because Yahweh was their defense; the problem was they had rejected Him in favor of humanistic solutions to their security issues by joining with pagan nations in mutual self-defense pacts. In reality, these alliances were nothing more than suicide pacts. Judah's military was obviously not very strong and certainly incapable of withstanding the mighty Assyrian Army.

Dismay, *הָתַת*, means to be shattered, dismayed, discouraged, or even stronger, to be broken, shattered, filled with terror, and disheartened which is the meaning in this context. It refers to a feeling of discouragement, implying fear and terror, and/or panic and confusion, as an extension of shattering an object. We could relate it to circumstances that cause a person or a people group to be utterly demoralized.

Shame, *בוֹשׁ*, means to be ashamed, to be put to shame, or to act shamefully. It relates to humiliation, disgrace, and loss of hope.

The people of Judah were just like the grass that withers under a scorching sun and a suffocating, hot wind; they could not sustain nor defend themselves in the face of the Assyrian Army's attack. In the same way, grass growing in the dirt laid on a flat roofed house does not have the root system to sustain itself and grow to maturity in that hot, waterless environment. As a result, all the people could do was submit or die. The metaphor suggests that in the sight of the Assyrians and their king, other people, in this case the citizens of Judah, are of no more value than the plants that one harvests for one's own gain without regard for the people being victimized in the process. Even worse, this is a harvest that the Assyrians had no right to reap; the plants were not theirs to harvest. Having said that, however, this situation is different than other run-of-the-mill invasions were at that time; this was God ordained as a means to discipline His rebellious people which makes this an out-of-the-ordinary situation. In that sense, they had a God-given right to reap this harvest in Judea.

Next, Yahweh informed Sennacherib that his rants against God will not stand. He who is omniscient and omnipotent will foil the pagan king's plans and send him back to his land and to his ultimate fate. Of course, his failure to conquer Jerusalem is also part of the divine plan God laid out for Assyria in this situation.

Isaiah 37:28–29 ²⁸“But I know your sitting down And your going out and your coming in And your raging against Me. ²⁹“Because of your raging [רָגַזְתָּ] against Me And because your arrogance [שָׁאֲנָן] has come up to My ears, Therefore I will put My hook in your nose And My bridle in your lips, And I will turn you back by the way which you came.

God knows everything about this pagan king. He knows everything he does, and he knows everything he says, especially his raging words directed at Yahweh. Going out and coming in are an idiom expressing the fact that all a person's actions are known.

Rage, רָגַז, means to shake, to tremble, to agitate, to disturb, to rouse up, to rage, or to provoke. Everything this pagan king does is from the standpoint of total rebellion against God. This is really a pretty self-destructive thing to do, yet, in terms of application, the vast majority of the earth's people are in total rebellion against God, and the majority of them have no intention of doing anything else. The Assyrian king was not as out of step with the world system as we might think he was; he was just one of a long line of pagan kings in rebellion against God and in league with Satan. This king; however, was assigned a special role in the outworking of God's Kingdom program.

Arrogance was also a negative characteristic of this pagan king. Arrogance, שָׁאֲנָן, means arrogant, proud, and insolent. Again, this is also a characteristic of the God-hating world that is now run by Satan and his followers, at least to the extent allowed by God. This is nothing new. The difference here is that this pagan king has been singled out for a specific assignment on behalf of God.

Sennacherib's plans to conquer all of Judah, including Jerusalem, were going to fail, and he would be unwillingly sent back to Nineveh from which he came. Assyria was quite proud of its horses. A bridle is used to control a horse's movements and to direct its path. The hook in the nose was a very real implement used to control captives. A hook was put

in the nose and attached to a rope which was used to control people who were captives being moved about. In this case, this is a figurative use of the term; Sennacherib was not forcefully taken back to Nineveh. Instead, he returned there of his own volition, although being forced to do so, after his army was destroyed by the angel of the Lord. The text is silent concerning the extent of the casualties. We know that 185,000 Assyrian soldiers died, but we do not know whether or not that was the entire army (I suspect it was not), nor do we know whether the command staff, all or in part, survived to return to Nineveh with the king.