

CHAPTER 37

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 37

In this chapter are contained Hezekiah's message to Isaiah, desiring his prayer for him and his people, in this time of sore distress, (^{<2370>}Isaiah 37:1-5), the comforting and encouraging answer returned by the prophet to him, (^{<2376>}Isaiah 37:6,7), the king of Assyria's letter to Hezekiah, to terrify him into a surrender of the city of Jerusalem to him, (^{<2378>}Isaiah 37:8-13) which Hezekiah spread before the Lord, and prayed unto him for deliverance, (^{<2374>}Isaiah 37:14-20), upon which he received a gracious answer by the hand of the prophet, promising safety and deliverance to him, and destruction to the king of Assyria, of which a sign was given, (^{<2372>}Isaiah 37:21-35) and the chapter is closed with the slaughter of the Assyrian army by an angel, the flight of the king, and his death by the hands of his sons, (^{<2376>}Isaiah 37:36-38).

Ver. 1. *And it came to pass, when King Hezekiah heard it, &c.]* The report that his ministers made to him of the blasphemies and threatenings of Rabshakeh, the general of the Assyrian army:

that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth; the one because of the blasphemies he heard; the other cause of the destruction he and his people were threatened with:

and went into the house of the Lord; the temple, to pray to him there: he could have prayed in his own house, but he chose rather to go to the house of God, not so much on account of the holiness of the place, but because there the Lord promised, and was used to hear the prayers of his people, ^{<1029>}1 Kings 8:29,30 as also because it was more public, and would be known to the people, and set them an example to follow him in. Trouble should not keep persons from, but bring them to, the house of God; here the Lord is to be inquired of, here he is to be found; and from hence he sends deliverance and salvation to his people. Nothing is more proper than prayer in times of affliction; it is no ways unbecoming nor lessening the greatest king on earth to lay aside his royal robes, to humble himself before God, in a time of distress, and pray unto him. Hezekiah does not sit down

to consider Rabshakeh's speech, to take it in pieces, and give an answer to it, but he applies unto God.

Ver. 2. *And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, &c.]* Two of the commissioners sent to Rabshakeh, and who heard his insolence and blasphemy, and were capable of giving a full account of it, to Isaiah the prophet:

and the elders of the priests; as the chief of those that were concerned in civil affairs, so the chief of those that were employed in sacred things, were sent: this was a very honourable embassy; and it was showing great respect to the prophet, to send such personages to him:

covered with sackcloth; as the king himself was, following his example; and this is to be understood not of the elders of the priests only, but of Eliakim and Shebna also. These, so clad, were sent by the king

unto Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz; to give him an account of the present situation of affairs, of the distress he was in, and to desire his prayers: a very proper person to apply to, a prophet, one highly dear to God, and honoured by him, had near access unto him, and knew much of his mind.

Ver. 3. *And they said unto him, &c.]* The messengers to the prophet:

thus saith Hezekiah; this is the message he has sent us with; this is what he would have us lay before thee, and has given us in charge to say unto thee:

this day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy; it was a "day of trouble" to Hezekiah and his people, because it was a "day of rebuke", in which God rebuked them for their sins; or of "reproach and reviling", as the Targum and Septuagint, in which the Assyrians reviled and reproached both God and them; and especially because it was a "day of blasphemy" against God:

for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth; which is to be understood not of the reformation within themselves, happily begun and carried on, but now hindered from being brought to perfection, by the Assyrian army being so near them; nor of their attempt to cast off the Assyrian yoke, which was thought to be just upon finishing, but now despaired of, unless divine assistance be given; nor of their inability to punish the blasphemy that so much affected them; but of the

deplorable condition they were now in. Hezekiah compares himself and his people to a woman in travail, that has been some time in it, and the child is fallen down to the place of the breaking forth of children, as the word^{f694} used signifies, but unable to make its way, and she having neither strength to bear it, nor to bring it forth, nature being quite exhausted, and strength gone, through the many pains and throes endured: and just so it was even with him and his people, they were in the utmost pain and distress; they could not help themselves, nor could he help them; and therefore must perish, unless they had immediate assistance and relief. Jarchi interprets the children of the children of Israel, the children of God.

Ver. 4. *It may be the Lord thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, &c.]*

He had heard them; but the sense is, that it might be that he would take notice of them, and resent them in a public manner, and punish for them; and this is said, not as doubting and questioning whether he would or not, but as hoping and encouraging himself that he would: and it may be observed, that Hezekiah does not call the Lord “my God”, or “our God”, because he and his people were under the chastening hand of God for their sins, and were undeserving of such a relation; but “thy God”, whose prophet he was, whom he served, and to whom he was dear, and with whom he had an interest; and therefore it might be hoped his prayer to him would be heard and accepted, and that through his interposition God would be prevailed upon to take notice of the railing speech of Rabshakeh:

whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; who has life in and of himself, and is the fountain, author, and giver of life to all others; him he reproached by setting him on a level with the lifeless idols of the Gentiles:

and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard; reprove him for his words, take vengeance upon him, or punish him for the blasphemous words spoken by him against the Lord and in his hearing: to this sense is the Targum; and so the Syriac and Arabic versions:

wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left; lift up thy voice, thy hands, and thine heart, in prayer to God in heaven; pray earnestly and fervently for those that are left; the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the other ten having been carried captive some time ago; or the inhabitants of Jerusalem particularly, the defenced cities of Judah having been already taken by the Assyrian king. The fewness of the number that remained seems to be made use of as an argument for prayer in their favour. In times

of distress, men should not only pray for themselves, but get others to pray for them, and especially men of eminence in religion, who have nearness of access to God, and interest in him.

Ver. 5. *So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.*] And delivered the above message to him from the king: these servants are mentioned (^{237D}Isaiah 37:2). Musculus thinks that the third and fourth verses are the words of the king to the messengers, and not of the messengers to the prophet; and that the first clause of the “third” verse should be rendered, “that they might say unto him”, &c.; and having received their instructions, here is an account of their going to the prophet with them, which they delivered to him, and which it was not necessary to repeat. The Arabic version reads this verse in connection with the following, thus, “when the servants of King Hezekiah, came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them”, &c.

Ver. 6. *And Isaiah said unto them, thus shall you say unto your master,* &c.] Or, “your lord”^{f695}; King Hezekiah, whose ministers and messengers they were:

thus saith the Lord, be not afraid of the words thou hast heard; be not not terrified by them, they are but words, and no more, and will never become facts:

wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me; by representing him as no better than the gods of the Gentiles, and as unable to deliver out of the hands of the king of Assyria the city of Jerusalem, when he had said he would. The word^{f696} for “servants” signifies boys, lads, young men; so Rabshakeh and his two companions, Rabsaris and Tartan, are called, by way of contempt, they acting a weak and childish part as well as a wicked one.

Ver. 7. *Behold, I will send a blast upon him,* &c.] The king of Assyria; a pestilential one, as he afterwards did, which destroyed his army: or,

I will put a spirit into him^{f697}; a spirit of fear and dread, which will oblige him to desist from his purposes, and flee; though some interpret it only of an inclination, a will^{f698} in him, to return: it may be understood of an angel, a ministering spirit, and be rendered “I will send a spirit against him”; an angelic spirit, as he did, which cut off his army in one night:

and he shall hear a rumour; of the sudden and total destruction of his army; though some refer this to the rumour of the king of Ethiopia coming

out to make war against him, (^{2370b}Isaiah 37:9), but upon this he did not return to his own land, nor was he slain with the sword, as follows:

and return to his own land; as he did, immediately upon the slaughter of his army by the angel:

and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land: as he did, being slain by his own sons, (^{2375b}Isaiah 37:37,38).

Ver. 8. *So Rabshakeh returned*, &c.] To the king of Assyria his master, to give him an account how things went at Jerusalem, and that he could get no direct answer from the king of Judah, and to consult with him what was proper to be done in the present situation of things; leaving the army before Jerusalem, under the command of the other two generals. For that he should take the army with him does not seem reasonable, when Hezekiah and his people were in such a panic on account of it; besides, the king of Assyria's letters to Hezekiah clearly suppose the army to be still at Jerusalem, or his menacing letters would have signified nothing; and after this the destruction of the Assyrian army before Jerusalem is related:

and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah; a city in the tribe of Judah, (^{460b}Joshua 10:29 15:42), and lay nearer to Jerusalem than Lachish, where Rabshakeh left him; so that he seemed to be drawing his army towards that city, on which his heart was set. Josephus^{f699} makes him to be at this time besieging Pelusium, a city in Egypt, but wrongly; which has led some into a mistake that Libnah and Pelusium are the same:

for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish; where he was, when he sent him to Jerusalem, (^{2380b}Isaiah 36:2), having very probably taken it.

Ver. 9. *And he heard say concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia*, &c.] Not Rabshakeh, but the king of Assyria heard a rumour of this Ethiopian king coming out to war against him: his name, in Josephus^{f700}, is Tharsices; in the Septuagint version it is Tharaca; and by Africanus^{f701} he is called Taracus; and is the same, who, by Strabo^{f702}, out of Megasthenes, is named Tearcon the Ethiopian: the Ethiopia of which he was king was either the upper Ethiopia or that beyond Egypt; to which agrees the Arabic version, which calls him Tharatha king of the Abyssines; but others take it for Cush, or rather Ethiopia in the land of Midian, or Arabia, as Bochart; which lay nearer to Judea than the other Ethiopia. Now the report that was brought to the king of Assyria of him was,

he is come forth to make war with thee; not by assisting the Egyptians, as Josephus, but rather the Jews; or by making an irruption into the king of Assyria's country in his absence: this some think to be the rumour predicted, (²³¹⁷Isaiah 37:7)

and when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah; with terrifying letters, to frighten him into an immediate surrender of the city, that he might withdraw his army, and meet the king of Ethiopia with the greater force; and the rather he dispatched these messengers in all haste to Hezekiah, that his letters might reach him before he had knowledge of the king of Ethiopia, asking a diversion in his favour, which would encourage him to hold out the siege the longer: saying; as follows:

Ver. 10. *Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, &c.*] This was the direction, and these the instructions he gave to his messengers, in which he gives Hezekiah the title of king, and owns him to be king of Judah; which was more than Rabshakeh his servant would do:

let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee; than which, nothing could be more devilish and satanical, to represent the God of truth, that cannot lie, as a liar and deceiver: in this the king of Assyria outdid Rabshakeh himself; he had represented Hezekiah as an impostor and a deceiver of the people, and warns them against him as such; and here Sennacherib represents God himself as a deceiver, and cautions Hezekiah against trusting in him: nothing is more opposite to Satan and his instruments, than faith in God, and therefore they labour with all their might and main to weaken it; however, this testimony Hezekiah had from his enemy, that he was one that trusted in the Lord; and a greater character a man cannot well have:

saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria; and so the Lord had said it; (see ²³¹⁸Isaiah 38:6) and by some means or another Sennacherib had heard of it; and there was nothing he dreaded more than that Hezekiah should believe it, which would encourage him, he feared, to hold out the siege.

Ver. 11. *Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly, &c.*] He boasts of the achievements of himself and his ancestors, and of more than was true; and which, if it had been true, was more to their disgrace than honour, namely, utterly to destroy kingdoms, and their inhabitants, to gratify their lusts; but though

many had been destroyed by them, yet not all; not Ethiopia, whose king was come out to make war with him, and of whom he seems to be afraid; nor Egypt, which was in confederacy with Ethiopia; nor Judea, he was now invading; but this he said in a taunting way, to terrify Hezekiah:

and shalt thou be delivered? canst thou expect it? surely thou canst not. Is it probable? yea, is it possible thou shouldst be delivered? it is not; as sure as other lands have been destroyed, so sure shall thine.

Ver. 12. *Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, &c.]* They have not. But what then? is the God of Israel to be put upon a level with such dunghill gods? so Sennacherib reckoned him, as Rabshakeh before, in his name, (²³⁶⁸Isaiah 36:18-20):

as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezep, and the children of Eden, which were in Telassar. Gozan was the same, it may be, with the Gausanitis of Ptolemy^{f703} which he makes mention of in his description of Mesopotamia; and the rather, since Haran or Chapman was a city of Mesopotamia, (⁴⁰¹³Genesis 11:31 ^{447D}Acts 7:2,4) called by Ptolemy by the name of Carrae^{f704}; and who also, in the same place, makes mention of Rezep, under the name of Rhescipha; though he likewise speaks of another place in Palmyrene in Syria, called Rhaesapha^{f705}, which some think to be the place here intended. Eden was also in Mesopotamia, in the eastern part of which was the garden of Eden; and this Telassar, inhabited by the children of Eden, was a city in that country, which is by Ptolemy^{f706} called Thelda; though Hillerus^{f707} is of opinion that the city Thalatha is meant, which is placed^{f708} near the river Tigris, a river of paradise. A very learned^{f709} men is of opinion, that the Eden, Isaiah here speaks of, belongs either to Syria of Damascus, and to the Lebanon and Paneas from whence Jordan arose; or to Syro-Phoenicia, and the Mediterranean sea, which the name Thalassar shows, as if it was *ψαλασσα*, the Syrians being used to derive not a few of their words from the Greeks: and certain it is, that there is now a village called Eden on Mount Lebanon, which Thevenot^{f710} mentions; and another, near Damascus, Mr. Maundrell^{f711} speaks of; (see Amos 1:5) and Tyre in Phoenicia is called Eden, (²⁵⁸³Ezekiel 28:13).

Ver. 13. *Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, &c.]* The same, as some think, with the gods or idols of those places, (see Gill on "²³⁶⁹Isaiah 36:19"); though it may be the princes that ruled over those cities are meant, who were either slain, or become tributary to the king of Assyria. It is added,

Henah and Ivah: which some take to be the names of the gods or kings of Sepharvaim; but rather, since Sepharvaim is of the dual number, it was a double city, the river Euphrates passing between them; and these, as Musculus conjectures, were the names of them; or it may be, these were distinct cities from that, but what or where they were is not certain. Ptolemy makes mention of a place called Ingene, near Gausanitis or Gozan, supposed to be Henah; though others rather think it to be Ange, which he places in Arabia^{f712}, which I think is not so probable. Ivah perhaps is the same with Avah, in (~~12724~~ 2 Kings 17:24). The Targum does not take them for names or places, but translates them,

“hath he not removed them, and carried them captive?”

and so Jarchi’s note is,

“the king of Assyria hath moved and overthrown them, and destroyed them, and removed them out of their place;”

referring to the other cities.

Ver. 14. *And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it, &c.]* Or books^{f713}, in which the above things were written; and everyone of these he read, as Kimchi interprets it; though the Targum is,

“he took the letters from the hand of the messengers, and read one of them;”

that is, as Kimchi’s father explains it, in which was the blasphemy against God; this he read over carefully to himself, observed the contents of it, and then did with it as follows:

and Hezekiah went up unto the house of God; the temple, the outward court of it, further than that he could not go:

and spread it before the Lord; not to read it, as he had done, or to acquaint him with the contents of it, which he fully knew; but, as it chiefly regarded him, and affected his honour and glory, he laid it before him, that he might take notice of it, and vindicate himself, and avenge his own cause; he brought it as a proof of what he had to say to him in prayer, and to support him in his allegations, and as a means to quicken himself in the discharge of that duty.

Ver. 15. *And Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord, saying.*] He did not return railing for railing, but committed himself and his cause to him that judgeth righteously; he did not write an answer to the letter himself, but lays it before the Lord, and prays him to answer it, who was most principally reflected on in it.

Ver. 16. *O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubim, &c.*] Or, “the inhabitant of the cherubim”⁷¹⁴; which were over the mercy seat, the residence of the Shechinah, or Majesty of God, the symbol of the divine Presence in the holy of holies; a title which the God of Israel, the Lord of armies in heaven, and earth bears, and distinguishes him from all other gods, and which several titles carry in them arguments to strengthen faith in prayer; being “the Lord of hosts”, he was able to do whatsoever was desired, and more abundantly; being “the God of Israel”, their covenant God, it might be hoped and expected he would protect and defend them; and sitting “between the cherubim”, on the mercy seat, great encouragement might be had that he would be gracious and merciful, and hear and help:

thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; this is opposed to the conceit of Sennacherib, that he was only the God of the Jews, and had no concern with other kingdoms and nations; whereas all belong to him, and him only; they are all under his jurisdiction and dominion, and at his will and control:

thou hast made heaven and earth; and so has an indisputable right to the government of the whole world, and to the disposal of all things in it.

Ver. 17. *Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear, &c.*] The prayer which Hezekiah was now presenting to him, as also the reproach of the enemy:

open thine eyes, O Lord, and see; the letter he spread before him, and take notice of the blasphemies in it; and punish for them. Both these clauses are to be understood after the manner of men, and in a way becoming the being and perfections of God, to whom ears and eyes are not properly to be ascribed, and so likewise the bowing of the one, and the opening of the other; but both denote the gracious condescension of God, to take notice of things on earth, and vindicate the cause of his people, which is his own:

and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he hath sent to reproach the living God; the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions, understand it of the words which Sennacherib sent in the letter to reproach the Lord;

but in (¹²¹⁹¹⁶2 Kings 19:16), it is, “which hath sent him”; the messenger, Rabshakeh, or whoever was the person that brought the letter to Hezekiah. The Targum paraphrases the latter part thus,

“to reproach the people of the living God;”

both God and his people were reproached, and both carry in them arguments with the Lord to hear and avenge himself and them; and the king prays that he would “hear”, take notice of and observe all the words and give a proper answer, by inflicting just punishment.

Ver. 18. *Of a truth Lord, &c.*] This is a truth and will be readily owned what the king of Assyria has said that his ancestors have destroyed all lands, or at least have endeavoured to do it, and have had it in their hearts to do it:

the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries: or “all the lands and their land”^{f715}; the Targum is,

“all provinces and their lands;”

the countries and town and villages in them, or the chief cities and villages round about them.

Ver. 19. *And, have cast their gods into the fire. &c.*] And burnt them; and it may well be asked, where are they? (²³⁶⁹Isaiah 36:19):

for they were no gods, but the works of men’s hands, wood and stone; they were made of wood or of stone, and therefore could not be called gods; nor could they save the nations that worshipped them, nor themselves, from the fire:

therefore they have destroyed them; the Assyrian kings were able to do it, and did do it, because they were idols of wood or stone; but it did not therefore follow, that they were a match for the God of Israel, the true, and living God.

Ver. 20. *Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, &c.*] The hand of the king of Assyria. The Lord had promised that he would and Hezekiah believed he would; but he knew that for this he would be inquired of by him, and he pleads covenant interest, in him, and entreats for salvation upon that account, as well as for the reason following:

that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only; by doing that which other gods could not do; they could not save the nations that worshipped them from the hand of the Assyrians; if therefore the God of Israel saved his people from them, this would be a proof to all the world that he is God and there is none besides him.

Ver. 21. *Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, &c.*] Isaiah, by a spirit of prophecy, was made acquainted by the Lord both with the prayer of Hezekiah, and the Lord's answer to it; and therefore immediately sent to the king, who was either at the temple praying, or was returned to the palace, to let him know, the mind of the Lord in this matter. The Septuagint and Syriac versions render it, "and Isaiah the son of Amoz was sent to Hezekiah"; but this does not agree with the Hebrew text; Isaiah sent messengers to the king, and by them informed him what the Lord had said in answer to his prayer. Why he went not himself cannot be said:

thus saith the Lord God of Israel; Hezekiah had been praying to him under that title and character, (²³⁷¹⁶ Isaiah 37:16):

whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria: or, "what thou hast prayed", &c.^{f716}; the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, supply, "I have heard". It is bad for any to have the prayers of good men against them.

Ver. 22. *This is the word which the Lord hath spoken concerning him, &c.*] The sentence he has pronounced upon him, the punishment he has determined to inflict on him, in answer to Hezekiah's prayer against him:

the virgin, the daughter of Zion; hath despised thee; and laughed thee to scorn; that, is the inhabitants of Zion, particularly of the fort of Zion, called a "virgin", because it had never been forced, or taken and to show that it was a vain thing in Sennacherib to attempt it, as well as it would have been an injurious one, could he have accomplished it; since God, the Father of this virgin, would carefully keep her from such a rape; and he who was her husband to whom she was espoused as a chaste virgin, would defend and protect her; and the whole is designed to show the impotent malice of the king of Assyria; otherwise, at the time when these words were spoken, the daughter of Zion was in a fearful and trembling condition, and not in a laughing frame; but this declares what she might do now, and would do hereafter, for anything that he could do against her. The Targum paraphrases it,

“the kingdom of the congregation of Zion;”

the whole nation. Some restrain this to the inhabitants of the upper part of the city of Jerusalem, as what follows to those of the lower part:

the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee; or “after thee^{f717}”; by way of scorn and derision; that is when he fled; which shows, that though these things are spoken as if they were past, after the manner of the prophets, yet were to come, and would be when Sennacherib fled, upon the destruction of his army. Of this phrase, as expressive of scorn, (see ~~1927~~ Psalm 22:7 109:25 ~~2825~~ Lamentations 2:15). The Targum is, “the people that dwell in Jerusalem”, &c.

Ver. 23. *Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed?* &c.] A creature like thyself? no, but a God, and not one like the gods of the nations, the idols of wood and stone, but the living God:

and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice? alluding to Rabshakeh’s crying with a loud voice, (~~2363~~ Isaiah 36:13):

and lifted up thine eyes on high? as proud and haughty persons do, disdain to look upon those they treat with contempt:

even against the Holy One of Israel; that is, Israel’s God, and will protect him; “a Holy One”, and of purer eyes than to behold with pleasure such a proud blaspheming creature, and cannot look upon him but with indignation; for against such he sets himself; these he resists, pulls down, and destroys.

Ver. 24. *By thy servants hast thou reproached the Lord,* &c.] Particularly by Rabshakeh, and the other two that were with him, who, no doubt, assented to what he said; not content to reproach him himself, he set his servants to do it likewise; he made use of them as instruments, and even set them, as well as himself, above the Lord:

and hast said, by the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains; not only with his foot soldiers, but with his chariots, and a great number of them, he had travelled over hills and mountains, as Hannibal over the Alps, and was now upon the high mountains which were round about Jerusalem, and very near the mountain of the Lord’s house; of which Jarchi interprets the words:

to the sides of Lebanon; meaning either the mountain of Lebanon, which was on the borders of the land of Israel, famous for cedars and fir trees, later mentioned; or, the temple made of the wood of Lebanon, near which his army now lay; so the Targum and Jarchi understand it:

and I will cut down the tall cedars thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof; to make way for his army, and to support himself with materials for the siege; to make tents with for his soldiers to lie in, or wooden fortresses from whence to annoy the city. The cedars of Lebanon were very large and tall. Mr. Maundrell^{f718} says he measured one of the largest, and

“found it six and thirty feet and six inches thick; its branches spread a hundred and eleven feet; its trunk from the ground was about fifteen or sixteen feet, and then divided into five branches, each of which would make a large tree.”

Monsieur Thevenot^{f719} says, now there are no more nor less that, twenty three cedars on Mount Lebanon, great and small: or it may be, these metaphorically intend the princes, and nobles, and chief men of the Jewish nation, he threatens to destroy; so the Targum,

“and I will kill the most beautiful of their mighty ones, and the choicest of their princes:”

and I will enter into the height of his border; some think the tower of Lebanon, which stood on the east part of it towards Syria, is meant; but it seems rather to design Jerusalem, the metropolis of the nation, which he thought himself sure of entering into, and taking possession of; and this was what his heart was set upon; so the Targum,

and I will subdue the city of their strength; their strong city Jerusalem, in which they placed their strength:

and the forest of his Carmel: or “the forest and his fruitful field”^{f720}; the same city, which, for the number of its houses and inhabitants, was like a forest, and was Hezekiah’s fruitful field, where all his riches and treasure were. The Targum interprets it of his army,

“and I will consume the multitude of their army.”

Ver. 25. *I have digged, and drunk water, &c.*] In places where he came, and found no water for his army, he set his soldiers to work, to dig cisterns, as the Targum, or wells, so that they had water sufficient to drink;

in (¹²⁹²⁴2 Kings 19:24), it is “strange waters”, which were never known before:

and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of the besieged places; or, as the Targum,

“with the soles of the feet of the people that are with me;”

the Syriac version, “with the hoofs of my horses”: with which he trampled down banks of rivers, and pools, and cisterns of water; signifying the vast numbers of his soldiers, who could drink up a river, or carry it away with them, or could turn the streams of rivers that ran by the sides, or round about, cities besieged, and so hindered the carrying on of a siege, and the taking of the place; but he had ways and means very easily to drain them, and ford them; or to cut off all communication of the water from the besieged. Some render it, “I have dried up all the rivers of Egypt”^{f721}, as Kimchi, on (¹²⁹²⁴2 Kings 19:24), observes, and to be understood hyperbolically; (see ²³⁹¹⁶Isaiah 19:6), so Ben Melech observes.

Ver. 26. *Hast thou not heard long ago?* &c.] By report, by reading the history of ancient times, or by means of the prophets; these are the words of the Lord to Sennacherib. The Targum adds,

“what I did to Pharaoh king of Egypt;”

it follows:

how I have done it; and of ancient times that I have formed it? meaning either the decree in his own breast from all eternity, and which he had published by his prophets, of raising up him, this wicked prince, to be the scourge of nations; or by the “it” are meant the people of the Jews, God’s Israel, whom he had made, formed into a body politic, and into a church state, and had done great things for, in bringing them out of Egypt, leading them through the Red sea, providing for them, and protecting them in the wilderness, subduing nations under them, and settling them in the land of Canaan;

now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps^{f722}; which some render interrogatively,

now should I bring, it to be laid waste, and fenced cities to be ruinous heaps? that is, the people of the Jews, the city of Jerusalem, and other fenced cities? no, I will not: or the meaning is, that that decree, which he

had framed and formed in his own mind from all eternity, he was now bringing to pass; which was, that this king of Babylon should be a waster and destroyer of fortified cities, which he should reduce to heaps of ruin; wherefore he had no reason to vaunt as he had done, for he was only an instrument of executing the purposes and designs of God, though it was not in his heart, nor did he so mean.

Ver. 27. *Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, &c.*] Or, “short of hand”¹⁷²³; it was not in the power of their hands to help themselves, because the Lord took away their strength, having determined that they should be destroyed for their sins; otherwise it would not have been in the power of Sennacherib to have subdued them; this takes off greatly from the king of Assyria’s triumph, that they were a weak people, whom he had conquered, and were given up into his hands by the Lord, according to his purposes, or he had never been lord over them:

they were dismayed and confounded; not so much at the sight of Sennacherib’s army, but because the Lord had dispirited them, and took away their natural courage from them, so that they became an easy prey to him:

they were as the grass of the field: which has no strength to stand before the mower:

and as the green herb; which is easily cropped with the hand of man, or eaten by the beasts of the field:

as the grass on the housetops: which has no matter of root, and is dried up with the heat of the sun:

and as corn blasted before it be grown up; before it rises up into anything of a stalk, and much less into ears; so the Targum,

“which is blasted before it comes to be ears;”

all which represent the feeble condition of the people overcome by him; so that he had not so much to glory of, as having done mighty things.

Ver. 28. *But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, &c.*] Where he dwelt, what he did at home, his secret councils, cabals, contrivances, schemes and plans for the compassing of his ends, the subduing of kingdoms, and setting up an universal monarchy; and his going out of Babylon, his marches, and counter marches, and his entrance into

the land of Judea; there was not a motion made, or a step taken in the cabinet or camp, but what were known to the Lord; so the Targum,

“thy sitting in council, and thy going out abroad to make war, and thy coming into the land of Israel, are manifest before me:”

and thy rage against me; against his people, against the city that was called by his name, against the temple where he was worshipped, particularly against his servant Hezekiah, because he would not immediately deliver up the city to him. The Targum and Syriac versions render it, “before me”; and then the meaning is, “thy rage”, wrath and fury, “is before me”: or manifest to me; and which he could restrain at pleasure, as he promises to do in the next verse.

Ver. 29. *Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, &c.*] The rage which Sennacherib expressed both by Rabshakeh, and in his letter against Hezekiah and his people, is taken by the Lord as against himself; so great was his care of them, and concern for them; and indeed there was a great deal of blasphemy belched out against himself; and so the Syriac version renders the next word, translated “tumult”, “thy blasphemy”; though that may rather intend the blustering noise that Rabshakeh made, or the noise of the Assyrian army, the chariots and horsemen, and the multitude of the soldiers, which was not only heard by the Jews, and was terrible to them, but was taken notice of by the Lord, who had it in derision; hence he adds:

therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips; comparing Sennacherib to leviathan, or the great whale, or to some very large and unruly fish, not easily caught and managed; (see ^{}Job 41:1 ^{<E>}Ezekiel 29:3,4), or to a bear, or buffalo, in whose noses men put iron rings, and lead them about at pleasure; and also to a horse or mule, which are managed by the bit and bridle; signifying hereby the strength, fierceness, and fury of the Assyrian monarch, and the power of God to restrain him, which he could easily do:

and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest; from Jerusalem, the same way he came to it, to his own land again, and so he did, (^{}Isaiah 37:37).

Ver. 30. *And this shall be a sign unto thee, &c.*] Not to Sennacherib, but to Hezekiah; for here the Lord turns himself from the former, and directs his speech to the latter, in order to comfort him under the dreadful

apprehensions he had of the Assyrian monarch, and his army; assuring him of deliverance; giving him a sign or token of it, and which was a wonder, as the word sometimes signifies, and was no less marvellous than the deliverance itself:

ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself: and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof: all which was very wonderful; for whereas, either through the invasion of the land, and the siege of the city, they could not till their land as they had used to do, or what was upon it was destroyed or eaten up by the Assyrian army; and yet, through the wonderful providence of God, the earth of its own accord yielded that very year a sufficiency for them; and though the second year was, as it is thought, a sabbatical year, when the land had rest, and by the law was not to be tilled, yet it also produced of itself what was sufficient for their support; and then the third year being entirely free from the enemy, and all fears of his return, they go about their business as formerly, to sowing and reaping corn, and planting vineyards, and enjoying the fruit of their labours; all which falling out according to this prediction, must greatly confirm the mind of Hezekiah, and make him easy as to any future attempt upon him he might fear. The Vulgate Latin version renders the second clause, “ye shall eat apples the second year”; and so Symmachus, but without foundation.

Ver. 31. *And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah, &c.]* The few that escaped out of the cities of Judah, upon Sennacherib’s invasion of the land, and besieging and taking the fenced cities thereof, who fled to Jerusalem for safety; these were a type of the remnant, according to the election of grace, the few that are chosen of God, the special people redeemed by Christ, the little flock of his, the small number that enter in at the strait gate, and are saved; and who escape, not the fall of Adam, nor the imputation of his sin, nor the corruption of nature, nor the pollutions of the world in a state of nature; but who escape the vengeance of divine justice, the curse of a righteous law, wrath to come, and the damnation of hell; which is owing to the love of God, the covenant of his grace, the suretyship engagements of Christ, and his performance of them; these are the household of faith, God’s confessing and professing people, who are Jews inwardly, of whom there are but a few; of these it is said, they

shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. The Targum is,

“as a tree which sends forth its roots below, and lifts up its branches above.”

The sense is, that those people that fled from their own habitations to Jerusalem should return thither again upon the breaking up of the siege, and be firmly settled, and live peaceably and prosperously, abounding with all good things, which may be applied, mystically, to true believers taking root again in the love of God, which is a hidden root, and is the source of salvation, and all the blessings of it, and is in itself immovable; and though the saints are secured in it, and by it, and nothing can root them out of it, yet they are sometimes shaken with doubts and fears about their interest in it; when there is again a fresh taking root in it, and that is, when they have a strong and lively persuasion of it, which produces fruitfulness in the exercise of faith, hope, and love, and in Gospel obedience; and also to their taking root in Christ, who is as a root unto them, hidden, and out of sight to the world, mean and abject, yet the source of all happiness to the saints, who have a being in him, are born by him, and receive sap and nourishment from him; and though their faith of interest in him may be sometimes shaken, yet there is a fresh taking root by new acts of faith upon him, which produce fruitfulness; the fruits brought forth by such are good works, which spring from the seed of grace, are owing to divine goodness, to the dews of grace, are pleasant and acceptable to God through Christ, and profitable unto men; these are called the fruits of the Spirit, and of righteousness, and are meet for repentance, and are brought forth openly and publicly, which may be signified by being bore upwards.

Ver. 32. *For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant,* &c.] The Targum is,

“the rest of the righteous;”

the same as before; who, when the city should be free from the enemy, would go out of it, and return to their former settlements, in the several parts of Judea; a type of those who went out of Jerusalem with the Gospel of Christ, and spread it not only in Judea, but in the Gentile world:

and they that escape out of Mount Zion; the same persons, differently described; some of whom were in the city of Jerusalem, and others in the fort of Zion, but departed from hence when the siege was broke up. The Targum is,

“and the escaped of them that confirm the law out of Mount Zion;”

(see ^{211B}Isaiah 2:3):

the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this: his concern for his own honour and glory, and his great love to his people, shall engage him to perform all that is here promised and foretold. The Targum is,

“by the word of the Lord of hosts this shall be done.”

Ver. 33. *Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, &c.*] The issue of his expedition, and the fruitfulness of it; how vain his attempts would be, and how unsuccessful in this undertaking:

he shall not come into this city; shall not enter into it, and take possession of it, though so sure of it; or, “shall not come unto it^{f724}”; for some think he never was any nearer it than Libnah, from whence he sent his letters to Hezekiah, (^{231B}Isaiah 37:8, 9),

nor shoot an arrow there; neither he nor his archers, so as to annoy or kill anyone person in it:

nor come before it with shields; or, “with a shield”; that is, he himself with one; otherwise his army under Rabshakeh was before it with men armed with shields; or the sense is, he shall not prevent it, or seize upon it, with his shielded men:

nor cast a bank against it; raise a mount, in order to fix his batteries upon, and play his artillery from, and shoot his arrows in to greater advantage.

Ver. 34. *By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, &c.*] Without executing his designs on Jerusalem, or other places; he shall lose his labour, and make the best of his way to his own country, without turning to the right or left, in order to disturb other nations, and enlarge his kingdom, being quite dispirited and confounded by what he shall meet with:

and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord; or, unto this city, as before; which is repeated to confirm it, and to show the certainty of it.

Ver. 35. *For I will defend this city to save it, &c.*] Or, “shield it”; and if God will be the shield and protection of any place or people, they must needs be safe; who can hurt them?

For my own sake, and for my servant David's sake; not for the merits of the inhabitants of it, but for the sake of his own name and glory, who had

been blasphemed by the Assyrian monarch, and his general; and for the sake of his servant David, in whose seed he had promised the kingdom should be established; (see ^{<1072>}2 Samuel 7:12-16) and chiefly for the sake of the Messiah, David's son, and the Lord's servant, who was to spring from Hezekiah's race, and therefore must not be cut off.

Ver. 36. *Then the angel of the Lord went forth, &c.*] From heaven, at the command of the Lord, being one of his ministering spirits, sent forth by him, as for the protection of his people, so for the destruction of their enemies; this was the same night, either in which the Assyrian army sat down before Jerusalem, as say the Jews^{f725}; or, however the same night in which the message was sent to Hezekiah; (see ^{<1295>}2 Kings 19:35):

and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and fourscore and five thousand men: a prodigious slaughter indeed! which shows the power and strength of an angel. Josephus^{f726} says they were smitten with a pestilential disease; but other Jewish writers say it was by fire from heaven, which took away their lives, but did not consume their bodies, nor burn their clothes; but, be that as it will, destroyed they were:

and when they arose early in the morning: those of the army that survived; Sennacherib, and his servants about him; or Hezekiah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that were besieged:

behold, they were all dead corpses; the whole army, excepting a few; this may well be expressed with a note of admiration, "behold!" for a very wonderful thing it was.

Ver. 37. *So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went, and returned, &c.*] Being informed of the destruction of his army in this miraculous manner, he departed from the place where he was in all haste, fearing lest he himself should be destroyed in like manner; and having no forces to pursue his designs, or wherewith to make an attempt elsewhere, he made the best of his way at once into his own country, whither he returned with great shame and confusion:

and dwelt at Nineveh; the metropolis of his kingdom; (see ^{<0101>}Genesis 10:11,12).

Ver. 38. *And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, &c.*] Josephus says^{f727}, in his temple, called Arasce; but Nisroch was the name of his deity he worshipped; though who he was is

not certain. Jarchi says, in one of their expositions it is said to be רסן, “neser”, a plank of the ark of Noah; in Tobit 1:24 it is called his idol Dagon; according to Hillerus, the word signifies a prince; and with Vitranga, a king lifted up, or glorious, and whom he takes to be the Assyrian Belus, worshipped in the form and habit of Mars:

that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; the former of these had his name from an idol so called, (^{<173>}2 Kings 17:31), which signifies a glorious king; and the other may signify a prince of treasure. Josephus says they were his eldest sons; what should move them to be guilty of this parricide is not known. Jarchi says that he prayed to his god, and vowed, if he would deliver him, that he might not be slain, he would offer up his two sons to him, who standing by, and hearing him, therefore slew him; the reason given for it in the Apocrypha:

“And there passed not five and fifty days, before two of his sons killed him, and they fled into the mountains of Ararath; and Sarchedonus his son reigned in his stead; who appointed over his father’s accounts, and over all his affairs, Achiacharus my brother Anael’s son.” (Tobit 1:21)

According to Munster’s edition, is, that Sennacherib asked his counsellors and senators why the holy blessed God was so zealous for Israel and Jerusalem, that an angel destroyed the host of Pharaoh, and all the firstborn of Egypt, but the young men the Lord gave them, salvation was continually by their hands; and his wise men and counsellors answered him, that Abraham the father of Israel led forth his son to slay him, that the Lord his God might be propitious to him, and hence it is he is so zealous for his children, and has executed vengeance on thy servants; then, said the king, I will slay my sons; by this means, perhaps, he may be propitious to me, and help me; which word, when it came to Adrammelech and Sharezer, they laid in wait for him, and killed him with the sword at the time he went to pray before Dagon his god:

and they escaped into the land of Armenia; or “Ararat;” on the mountains of which the ark rested, (^{<173>}Genesis 8:4). Both the Septuagint version and Josephus say it was Armenia into which he escaped; and Jerom observes, that Ararat is a champaign country in Armenia, through which the river Araxes flows, at the foot of Mount Taurus, whither it is extended. The Targum calls it the land of Kardu; and the Syriac version the land of the

Keredeans, which also belonged to Armenia; in these mountainous places they might think themselves most safe:

and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead; whom Josephus calls Assarachoddas; and in Ptolemy's Caron he is named Assaradinus; the same, as some think, whom the Greeks call Sardanapalus; in the Apocrypha:

“And Achiacharus intreating for me, I returned to Nineve. Now Achiacharus was cupbearer, and keeper of the signet, and steward, and overseer of the accounts: and Sarchedonus appointed him next unto him: and he was my brother's son.” (Tobit 1:22)

he is called Sarchedon, which some take to be the same with Sargon, (~~2301~~ Isaiah 20:1).