

CHAPTER  
**4**

Section 2

LITERATURE SELECTION

# “The Destruction of Sennacherib”

by George Gordon, Lord Byron

*In this poem, English poet George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824) retells the Biblical story in II Kings 19:35. In this story, Assyria’s King Sennacherib suddenly loses his army while leading an attack on Jerusalem. What images or sensory details in the poem help you picture what happens?*

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 for ever 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!

George Gordon, Lord Byron, “The Destruction of Sennacherib.” Reprinted in X. J. Kennedy, *An Introduction to Poetry* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966), 152–153.

## Research Options

1. **Comparing and Contrasting** Look up and read the Bible story of Sennacherib in II Kings 19:35. Then discuss with a small group of classmates similarities and differences between the two versions of the story.
2. **Clarifying** Research the following allusions in the poem: Galilee in line 4, Ashur in line 21, and Baal in line 22. Then share your findings with classmates.