

Isaiah – Chapter 33

Now I Will Arise

Isaiah 33:2, 10, 14-15, 17, 22 – O LORD, be gracious to us; we have waited for You. Be their strength every morning, our salvation also in the time of distress. ... “Now I will arise,” says the LORD, “Now I will be exalted, now I will be lifted up.” ... “Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?” He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity. ... Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will behold a far-distant land. ... For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; He will save us.

Context

Chapter 33 is the sixth and final woe of the section that began at 28:1. The first five fell on Judah and Israel: on the crown of Ephraim (28:1), on Ariel (29:1), on those who hide their plans from the LORD (29:15), on the rebellious children who go down to Egypt (30:1), and on those who rely on horses (31:1). The sixth is turned outward. “Woe to you, O destroyer” (33:1) is spoken against the one who has been devouring the people of the first five, and with it the lawsuit (*riv*) that has been prosecuting Jerusalem turns to prosecute Jerusalem’s enemy.

The historical background is the crisis of 701 BC, and it must be kept in view because the chapter is painted in its colors. Hezekiah bought peace from Sennacherib with three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold, stripping even the doors of the temple to pay it (2 Kings 18:14-16). Sennacherib took the tribute and sent the Rabshakeh with a great army to Jerusalem anyway (2 Kings 18:17). Hezekiah’s envoys came back from the conduit of the upper pool with their clothes torn (36:22). A treaty paid for and then broken, ambassadors weeping, highways emptied by an invading army: 33:7–9 had its likeness in that year.

Chapters 31 through 33 are read as a unit in which Assyria stands in for the final enemy. Chapter 31 named Assyria and returned to the near deliverance in its closing verses (31:8–9). Chapter 33 never names Assyria at all. The chapter carries no “in that day” marker, and its placement is fixed instead by its content: a King seen in His beauty (33:17), a tent whose stakes are never pulled up (33:20), and a people with no sickness and no unforgiven iniquity (33:24). None of these was true of Jerusalem after 701 BC, and the city fell to Babylon in 586 BC. The chapter is the distress of the final Remnant in Jacob’s Trouble and the arrival of the kingdom, and the events of 701 BC stand beside it as a parallel.

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Structure of the Chapters

Isaiah 33 unfolds in five movements, turning on the LORD's threefold "now" at verse 10:

- 1: The woe on the destroyer (*hoy shoded*). The treacherous one who has destroyed without being destroyed is told his end.
- 2–6: The Remnant's prayer (*qivvinu*, "we have waited"). The waiting people ask for grace in the time of distress and confess the LORD exalted on high.
- 7–12: Collapse and the LORD's rising (*attah aqum*, "now I will arise"). The covenant is broken, the land withers, and the LORD rises to consume His enemies.
- 13–16: Who can live with the fire (*mi yagur lanu*). Sinners in Zion tremble; the one who walks righteously dwells on the heights.
- 17–24: The King and the city that is never moved (*melek beyofyo*, "the King in His beauty"). The oppressor is a memory, Zion is a tent never struck, and the LORD is judge, lawgiver, and king.

Verse 10 is the spine of the chapter. Everything before it is the Remnant's distress and the enemy's triumph; everything after it is the LORD's fire and the King's reign. The prayer of verse 2 is answered by the "now" of verse 10.

Exposition

The Woe on the Destroyer (1)

The verbs are *shadad*, to devastate, and *bagad*, to deal treacherously, and they are the pair Isaiah uses for a predatory power. The same pair described the Medes and Elamites coming down on Babylon (21:2), and it returned in the Little Apocalypse when the prophet cried, "Woe to me! The treacherous deal treacherously" (24:16).

The destroyer is not named, but the chapter itself identifies him. He is the one who "has broken the covenant" (33:8). Daniel records the same figure: a prince who "will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering," until "a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate" (Daniel 9:27). He is the king who "will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god" (Daniel 11:36), and the covenant he breaks is the covenant with death that the LORD had already declared annulled (28:15, 18). Sennacherib, who took Hezekiah's tribute and marched on Jerusalem anyway, is the foreshadowing the beast.

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The Remnant's Prayer (2–6)

“O LORD, be gracious to us; we have waited for You. Be their strength every morning, Our salvation also in the time of distress (Isaiah 33:2).” This is the prayer of the final Remnant, and it answers the hinge of chapter 30. There the LORD waited on high “to be gracious to you” (30:18); here the Remnant asks for exactly that grace, using the same verb, *chanan*. The verb of waiting here is *qavah*, the word of 25:9 (“this is the LORD for whom we have waited”) and 26:8 (“we have waited for You eagerly”). The phrase “the time of distress” (*et tsarah*) names the hour. Jeremiah calls it “the time of Jacob’s distress, but he will be saved from it” (Jeremiah 30:7), and Daniel calls it “a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time” (Daniel 12:1). The Remnant prays through Jacob’s Trouble and asks for strength one morning at a time.

“At the sound of the tumult peoples flee; at the lifting up of Yourself nations disperse” (33:3). The prayer already sees the answer. The spoil of the nations is stripped as locusts strip a field (33:4). Then the confession: “The LORD is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness” (33:5). The LORD’s dwelling is *shochen marom*, “He dwells on high,” and the phrase should be noted, because it will return in verse 16. “And He will be the stability of your times, a wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is his treasure” (33:6). Isaiah speaks to the Remnant. The stability, the salvation (*yeshuot*), and the wisdom all belong to the Zion of the kingdom, and the treasure of the righteous man in that day is the fear of the LORD, not the silver that bought a broken treaty.

Collapse and the LORD’s Rising (7–12)

“Behold, their brave men cry in the streets, the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly. The highways are desolate, the traveler has ceased, he has broken the covenant, he has despised the cities, he has no regard for man” (33:7–8). This is Tribulation Jerusalem painted in the colors of 701 BC. Hezekiah’s envoys did weep and the roads of Judah were emptied, but the covenant broken here is the covenant broken in the middle of the week (Daniel 9:27), and the ambassadors of peace are the ones who trusted it. Paul describes the same moment: “While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

“The land mourns and pines away, Lebanon is shamed and withers; Sharon is like a desert plain, and Bashan and Carmel lose their foliage” (33:9). The four names are the most fertile places of the land: the cedars of the north, the coastal plain, the oak and pasture country across the Jordan, and the wooded ridge by the sea. They are real places in the real land, as Lebanon was in 29:17, and every one of them fails. This is the same collapse Habakkuk faced when the fig tree did not blossom and the stalls were empty (Habakkuk 3:17).

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“Now I will arise,” says the LORD, “Now I will be exalted, now I will be lifted up” (33:10). The word “now” (*attah*) is said three times, and it is the answer to the prayer of verse 2. The Remnant waited; the LORD rises. The verse also answers the destroyer. The king of Daniel 11:36 exalted himself; here the LORD says, “now I will be exalted,” and the exaltation belongs to Him alone, as the book promised from its opening chapters: “the LORD alone will be exalted in that day” (2:11, 17). The rising is the turning point of the whole chapter.

“You have conceived chaff, you will give birth to stubble; My breath will consume you like a fire. The peoples will be burned to lime, like cut thorns which are burned in the fire” (33:11–12). The enemy’s own plans are his destruction. He conceived chaff, and chaff burns. The breath of the LORD is the fire, as it was in 30:33, and the nations gathered against Zion are burned as completely as limestone in a kiln.

Who Can Live with the Fire (13–16)

“You who are far away, hear what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge My might. Sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling has seized the godless. ‘Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?’” (33:13–14). The fire that consumed the nations now stands in Zion itself, and the sinners inside the city see that it is not only for the enemy. The phrase “consuming fire” (*esh ochelah*) is the phrase of Deuteronomy 4:24: “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” This is not hell. The fire is the LORD Himself in His holiness. In Jacob’s Trouble and at the Messiah’s coming it breaks out as fury on His enemies and on the godless in Zion.

The question in verse 14 must be read carefully. The verb is *gur*, to live as a guest or sojourner, and the question is the same one asked in Psalm 15:1, “O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?” The burning is called *moqde olam*, “continual burning.” The word *olam* belongs to the fire, not to the one who stands in it. The fire is everlasting; the burning is not. What endures forever is the LORD who burns, and those who walk uprightly live in that fire unconsumed. Moses saw the pattern at the bush that “was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2).

“He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity, he who rejects unjust gain and shakes his hands so that they hold no bribe; he who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil” (33:15). The answer is given as conduct, in the form of the entrance psalms (Psalm 15:2–5; 24:3–4). This is behavioral righteousness, and it must be kept distinct from positional righteousness. Positional righteousness is right standing before God by faith alone. Behavioral righteousness is obedience, and in Jacob’s Trouble, under the Law, the one who enters the kingdom as a living man must have both. The Lord Jesus said the same to Israel: “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20), and “the one who

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endures to the end, he will be saved” (Matthew 24:13). Habakkuk drew the same line between the proud soul and “the righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). The righteous man is declared righteous by faith and keeps living by that faith while the vision tarries.

“He will dwell on the heights, his refuge will be the impregnable rock; his bread will be given him, his water will be sure” (33:16). Verse 5 said the LORD “dwells on high” (*shochen marom*); verse 16 says the righteous man “will dwell on the heights” (*meromim yishkon*). The verb and the root are the same, reversed. The one who can live with the consuming fire ends up living where God lives. The provision of bread and water belongs to the time of distress itself, before the King is seen in verse 17. It is the preservation of the Remnant through the second half of the week, when the woman flees “into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Revelation 12:6).

The King and the City That Is Never Moved (17–24)

“Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will behold a far-distant land” (33:17). In 701 BC the king in Jerusalem was Hezekiah in sackcloth (37:1). The King of verse 17 is the Messiah, the King who reigns in righteousness (32:1). Isaiah had said in the year Uzziah died, “my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (6:5); here the Remnant is promised the same sight. The “far-distant land” is the land stretched to its promised borders, seen from Zion with nothing hostile in it.

“Your heart will meditate on terror: ‘Where is he who counts? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?’ You will no longer see a fierce people, a people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends, of a stammering tongue which no one understands” (33:18–19). The officials of the oppressor are remembered and gone: the scribe who counted, the one who weighed out the tribute, the officer who surveyed the walls for the siege. The foreign tongue of 28:11, the stammering lips through which the LORD spoke judgment, is no longer heard in the city.

Paul echoes the line when he asks, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?” (1 Corinthians 1:20). That is an echo of the words.

“Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, an undisturbed habitation, a tent which will not be folded; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its cords be torn apart” (33:20). The city whose feasts were kept by rote in 29:1 is again the city of the appointed feasts (*moed*), where the nations will go up year after year to keep the Feast of Booths (Zechariah 14:16). The “undisturbed habitation” (*naveh sha’anan*) is the “peaceful habitation” of 32:18. The image is a tent, which is the most temporary of

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dwelling, and this one is never struck. It is the tent of Psalm 15:1, where the one who walks righteously abides.

“But there the majestic One, the LORD, will be for us a place of rivers and wide canals on which no boat with oars will go, and on which no mighty ship will pass” (33:21). Jerusalem has no river. Babylon had the Euphrates, Nineveh the Tigris, Egypt the Nile, and each river was both a supply and a defense. Here the LORD Himself is the river and the moat, and no enemy fleet can come up it. The land will be reshaped at the Return: the Mount of Olives split, living waters flowing from Jerusalem east and west, and the land around the city made a plain (Zechariah 14:4, 8, 10), with a river going out from the house of the LORD (Ezekiel 47:1–12). The rivers are literal, and the verse teaches that the city is safe because the LORD is its defense.

“For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; He will save us” (33:22). The three offices that Israel divided among judges, prophet, and kings are gathered in one Person. Here the King of verse 17 and the LORD exalted on high of verse 5 are seen to be one, “and the LORD will be king over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9).

“Your tackle hangs slack; it cannot hold the base of its mast firmly, nor spread out the sail. Then the prey of an abundant spoil will be divided; the lame will take the plunder” (33:23). The ship figure continues from verse 21. The rigging belongs either to Zion, a vessel too crippled to sail, or to the enemy’s ship that dared the LORD’s waters, and the text does not settle it. The point is settled either way: the victory is so wholly the LORD’s that the lame carry off the spoil.

“And no resident will say, ‘I am sick’; the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity” (33:24). The chapter ends on the New Covenant: “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). The absence of sickness is said of people in natural bodies, for the glorified could not be sick. These are the Remnant who lived with the consuming fire and entered the kingdom as living men.

The foreshortening must be stated plainly. The events of 701 BC are not a peak in this chapter; they are a parallel. The peaks are the covenant broken in the middle of the week, the LORD rising against the destroyer, and the King seen in the kingdom, and from Isaiah’s vantage they stand as one scene. The New Testament supplies the valleys: the seven years of Daniel’s Seventieth Week divided at the midpoint (Revelation 12:6, 14), the Return of the King (Revelation 19:11–16), and the thousand years of His reign (Revelation 20:4). Behind all of it lies the whole Church age, which the prophet did not see.

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Synthesis with All of Scripture

The Prophets. Within Isaiah, the destroyer and the treacherous one of 33:1 use the vocabulary of 21:2 and 24:16; the broken covenant of 33:8 is the covenant with death annulled in 28:15, 18; the grace asked in 33:2 is the grace the LORD waits to give in 30:18; the waiting of 33:2 is the waiting of 25:9 and 26:8; the LORD exalted in 33:5, 10 is the LORD alone exalted of 2:11, 17; the King seen in 33:17 is the King Isaiah saw in 6:5 and the King who reigns in righteousness in 32:1; the stammering tongue of 33:19 is the tongue of 28:11; the undisturbed habitation of 33:20 is the peaceful habitation of 32:18; and the stakes and cords of the tent anticipate 54:2.

Among the other prophets, Daniel supplies the covenant made and broken in the middle of the week (Daniel 9:27), the king who exalts himself (Daniel 11:36), and the time of distress (Daniel 12:1). Jeremiah names the same hour “the time of Jacob’s distress” (Jeremiah 30:7) and gives the forgiveness of 33:24 as the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:34). Habakkuk waited for the same kind of day: “though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come” (Habakkuk 2:3); “I must wait quietly for the day of distress” (Habakkuk 3:16); “yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:18). Habakkuk and Isaiah 33 share the posture of waiting through distress; Habakkuk is not the fulfillment of this chapter. Zechariah records the reshaping of the land and the living waters (Zechariah 14:4, 8, 10), the LORD as king over all the earth (Zechariah 14:9), and the nations keeping the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:16). Ezekiel gives the river from the house of the LORD (Ezekiel 47:1–12).

Jesus. The Lord set the terms of entry into the kingdom for Israel in the language of verse 15: “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). In the Olivet Discourse He placed the Remnant in the same hour as 33:2: “the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

Revelation. The bread given and the water sure of 33:16 are the provision of the woman in the wilderness, “nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent” (Revelation 12:14). The King seen in His beauty and the LORD who rises are the Rider on the white horse whose name is “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16), and the kingdom that follows is the thousand-year reign (Revelation 20:4).

The Apostolic Letters. The ambassadors of peace who weep in 33:7 are those who said “Peace and safety!” before sudden destruction came (1 Thessalonians 5:3). The consuming fire of 33:14 is the fire of Hebrews 12:29: “for our God is a consuming fire.” Paul’s “Where is the scribe?” (1 Corinthians 1:20) is an echo of 33:18.

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Hermeneutic Checkpoints

Content fixes the setting when no marker is given. Chapter 33 has no “in that day.” The King seen in His beauty, the tent never struck, and a people with no sickness and no unforgiven iniquity place the chapter in Jacob’s Trouble and the kingdom.

One prophecy, one referent. The destroyer of verse 1 is the covenant-breaker of Daniel 9:27. Sennacherib is the foreshadowing, and the events of 701 BC are a parallel.

Keep the two programs distinct. Verse 15 is the entry requirement for Israel’s Remnant in Jacob’s Trouble, under the Law: positional righteousness by faith and behavioral righteousness in obedience. It is not an entrance requirement laid on the Church, which is not in view in this chapter.

The consuming fire is the LORD. The fire of verse 14 is not hell. It is the LORD in His holiness, fury to His enemies and a dwelling to the upright. The word “continual” belongs to the fire, not to anyone burned in it.

Echo is not fulfillment. Paul’s use of 33:18 in 1 Corinthians 1:20 borrows Isaiah’s words for a new argument. It does not claim that the prophecy has come to pass, and it is kept in Synthesis, as James 3:18 was with 32:17.

Tying the Threads Together

The Messianic Hope. The Hope in this chapter is the King seen. The prophet saw the King in the temple (6:5); the Remnant who waited through the time of distress will see the King in His beauty (33:17). He is the LORD who says, “now I will arise” (33:10), and in verse 22 He is judge, lawgiver, and king in one Person. The chapter that began with a destroyer exalting himself ends with the true King exalted, and the Remnant under His rule.

The Motif of the City. The city of man in 32:19 was laid utterly low; Zion in 33:20 is a tent whose stakes are never pulled up and whose cords are never torn. The city that bought a broken treaty with its temple gold becomes the city of the appointed feasts, defended by rivers no warship can sail because the LORD Himself is its defense, and inhabited by people who are forgiven and are never sick.

The Holy One of Israel. The Holy One is seen as fire. He dwells on high and fills Zion with justice and righteousness (33:5); He rises and is exalted when the destroyer has done his worst (33:10); His breath consumes the nations like thorns (33:12); and His presence is the consuming fire that sinners in Zion cannot endure and the upright live in unconsumed (33:14–16). The One who dwells on high brings the righteous to dwell on the heights with Him, and there He is their judge, their lawgiver, and their king.