



# Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

## Isaiah

### Part 46 Promises and Prayers (33:1-12)

• Assyria to be destroyed

• Zion will be saved & salvation proclaimed

**God's enemies are punished by their own sins returning to them**

We recall that the section in Isaiah 28–35 contains six oracles, each beginning with 'Ah . . .'. (The Hebrew hōi expresses emotion and feeling and is generally translated 'Ah!' or 'Alas!'.) Isaiah 33:1–35:10 is the last of the six. It unfolds as follows. Israel's enemy, Assyria, is to be destroyed<sup>1</sup>. Zion will be saved by its King<sup>2</sup>. The message of salvation may be proclaimed everywhere<sup>3</sup>. God's redeemed people may walk from wherever they are into a new Zion<sup>4</sup>.

1 33:1-12  
2 33:13-24  
3 34:1-17  
4 35:1-10

**God's enemies are punished by their own sins returning to them.** The prophet first addresses Assyria.

*<sup>1</sup>Ah, you destroyer,  
you who have not been yourself destroyed!  
You traitor,  
you who have not been betrayed!  
When you stop destroying,  
you will be destroyed;  
when you stop betraying,  
you will be betrayed.*

• Assyria will receive the same treatment it has been handing out to others

Assyria has been destroying other nations, betraying its promises. One day what they have been doing will come back to them. They will receive the same treatment they have been handing out towards others. It is a principle of God's judgement. What we hand out to others (whether mercy or severity) will eventually come back to us.

**We must turn promises into prayers**

**We must turn promises into prayers.** God is promising that the domination of Assyria over Israel and Judah will not last for ever. So Isaiah turns God's promise into a prayer.

• God promises that Assyria's domination will not last for ever

*<sup>2</sup>O Sovereign Lord, be gracious to us;  
we wait for you.  
Be their arm every morning*  
[Hebrew switches the viewpoint of 1st person and 3rd person much more than English does],  
*yes indeed, our salvation in time of distress.*

**The prophet visualizes the prayer being answered**

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*<sup>3</sup>At the sound of a multitude the peoples flee;  
when you rise up, the nations scatter.*

• Assyria's power will be utterly broken

At the moment Assyria is arrogant and cruel. The day will come when they are defeated and men rush in to grab what they can. God only has to stand up and Assyria's power will be utterly broken.

*<sup>4</sup>Your plunder is harvested as by young locusts;  
like a swarm of locusts men pounce on it.*

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*<sup>5</sup>Yahweh is exalted, for he dwells on high;  
he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness.*

Isaiah knows God! He knows what God is like. God rules from on high and has a habit of putting down enemies and saving his people. It is only a matter of

time before God will rescue his people when they are needy.

*<sup>6</sup>He will be the security of your times,  
a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge;  
the fear of Yahweh, that is his treasure.*

• God will act in judgement to protect His people

Although Assyria are threatening the people of Judah, Isaiah is confident that no one can touch God's people without his permission. In Isaiah 33:7–12, he describes in detail what it will be like when God acts in judgement to protect his people. At first they are in a situation where all hope is lost.

*<sup>7</sup>Look, their brave men cry aloud in the streets;  
the envoys of peace weep bitterly.  
<sup>8</sup>The highways are deserted,  
no travellers are on the roads.  
He has nullified the covenant,  
its witnesses are despised,  
no one is respected.*

• Sennacherib took the tribute-money, but broke the agreement and attacked Jerusalem

Isaiah refers to a time when Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, threatened to invade Jerusalem, but the Judeans came to an agreement by which, in return for a large sum of money, he promised not to invade Jerusalem. He took the tribute-money but broke the agreement, and proceeded to attack Jerusalem. The messengers who had been sent to arrange the agreement wept with distress. The witnesses to the agreement were disregarded; Sennacherib was a betrayer. Even the physical territory of Israel was in distress:

*<sup>9</sup>The land mourns and wastes away,  
Lebanon is ashamed and withers;  
Sharon is like the Arabah,  
and Bashan and Carmel drop their leaves.*

• God intervened

It was in precisely such a situation of extreme distress that God intervened.

*<sup>10</sup>'Now will I arise,' says Yahweh.  
'Now will I be exalted;  
now will I be lifted up.'*

God has a word to say to Sennacherib.

*<sup>11</sup>'You conceive chaff,  
you give birth to straw;  
your breath is a fire that consumes you.  
<sup>12</sup>The peoples will be burned as if to lime;  
like cut thornbushes they will be set ablaze.'*

• God defeated Sennacherib at the gates of Jerusalem

• God rules with patience and control

• He rewards righteousness and punishes sin

• Eventually the wicked are put down and the glory of God will become visible everywhere

Despite all his worldly power, God defeated Sennacherib at the very gates of Jerusalem. The fiery talk of Sennacherib would itself be explosive fuel which would burst into flame and Sennacherib would be destroyed. He would be turned back at the gates of Jerusalem, never to return again. The story is told more fully in Isaiah 36 and 37.

God has a habit of rescuing his people from their distresses even when they themselves are the ones who brought their own troubles upon themselves. This is the point of Isaiah 28–35. God is the managing director of the whole of world history. He rules with patient and steady control. His kingship is moral. He rewards righteousness; he punishes sin. Yet his control takes decades, even centuries in its outworking. Sometimes a powerful 'Assyria' rises up and becomes a superpower threatening the world. For decades or even centuries it rules with cruelty. It becomes a law in itself and regards no one else. It makes promises but breaks them instantly and no one can do anything about it. The people of God suffer. God's 'Israel' is reduced to fear and distress. Believing people begin to wonder what will happen to the kingdom of God.

But the point of these chapters is that God is still superintending history in the interests of his kingdom. It would be God who would bring a turnaround in Judah's troubles. God says: 'You who are far away, hear what I have done; you who are near, know my power!' <sup>1</sup>. Eventually the wicked are put down but the kingdom of God proceeds on its way, moving steadily to its destiny. The kingdom of God will proceed. The Saviour will come. All Sennacheribs will disappear. The glory of God will become visible everywhere.

33:13