

THE SURETY OF GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE VIOLENT OPPRESSORS AND BETRAYERS OF THIS EARTH

ISAIAH 33:01–14

Introduction

The earth is full of violent people, people who use extreme force to impose their wills and desires on others. Violence is always destructive, hurting people or property and causing pain. Violence attacks people, assaulting, abusing or coercing them. Violence is malicious and cruel, an act of unrestrained, brutal behaviour. And violence often results in serious injury or death.

This present Scripture is a strong warning to those who destroy and commit acts of violence. God's hand of judgment will without question fall upon them. The particular destroyer being addressed in this Scripture was Assyria, the nation that was ruled by King Sennacherib. Seeking to build a world empire, the Assyrians had invaded nation after nation, subjecting them under the rule of Assyrian domination. The Assyrians were a cruel, brutal, savage and vicious people with a reputation for violence and bloodshed. Using them as an example, the Lord describes the terrifying judgment that is to fall upon all the destroyers and the violent of earth. This is, *Woe — A Strong Warning to the Destroyer: A Message to All Who Commit Acts of Violence*, Isaiah 33:1-24.

1. The surety of God's judgment on the violent oppressors and betrayers of this earth (vv.1-14).
2. The surety of God's deliverance of the righteous: a picture of Messiah's kingdom (vv. 15-24).

Isaiah 33:01–14 The Surety of God's Judgment

God pronounces a strong warning — a *woe* — to those who deal treacherously with other people and nations, who are violent and who betray God's people. God's judgment is sure to fall on all who commit acts of cruelty and brutality, assaulting and attacking others. His judgment will fall also on all who betray His people. This is the clear teaching of this Scripture:

1. The pronouncement of God's Word is unquestionable. Destroyers and betrayers will reap exactly what they sow: they will be destroyed and betrayed. Who is the particular adversary to whom this *woe* is directed? Assyria. But keep in mind that Assyria represents all the evil, cruel nations and peoples of the earth. So the warning is directed equally to all who commit acts of violence and betrayal.

When the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib invaded Judah, King Hezekiah paid a huge ransom to buy off the Assyrians and secure peace with them. Sennacherib accepted

the ransom and withdrew his forces, but only temporarily. He later betrayed Hezekiah, broke the peace agreement, and invaded Judah again. He destroyed all the cities and laid siege to Jerusalem (see notes, 2 Kng 18:13-37). This cruel tyrant betrayed those who had trusted his promise of peace, and for that he would suffer the retribution of God.

Sennacherib would reap exactly what he had sown. Isaiah announced that he would be betrayed and suffer a violent death. And he did. Soon after Sennacherib withdrew his army and returned to Nineveh, two of his own sons betrayed and assassinated him (Isa. 37:37-38). The violent king who had betrayed and slaughtered so many reaped exactly what he had sown.

2. When Assyria launched its invasion of Judah, a small number of righteous believers began to cry out to the LORD for help (vv. 2-6). As the Assyrian army marched across Judah, conquering city after city, the situation looked more and more hopeless. Although Isaiah and the rest of the righteous continued to pray for deliverance, the Assyrian army marched right up to the gates of Jerusalem and set up a siege around the city that prevented anyone from escaping. The capital was doomed, and the Assyrians would treat its citizens just as brutally as they had the citizens of the other cities. They would either slaughter them or deport them to some foreign nation.

Despite the hopelessness of the situation, the true believers continued to seek the Lord for deliverance from their distress. Knowing that they were guilty of sin and undeserving of God's mercy, they nevertheless asked the LORD to shower His grace — His undeserved favour — upon them. They needed special strength to bear up under the daily strain and terror of the threatening Assyrians: thus day after day they asked the Lord to be their strength and their salvation. Isaiah listed three reasons why the small remnant of righteous believers should seek the Lord:

- a. The remnant of righteous believers should pray because of the Lord's power (v. 3). As the LORD God of the universe, He has the power to scatter any army who opposes Him or His people. All He has to do is speak, and the thunder of His voice will cause the enemy to flee for their lives. God's omnipotent power is far greater than the power of any man or nation. No matter how powerful a nation's military may be, the LORD can plunder, or strip it of its power as quickly as a swarm of locusts can strip a nation's crops. And that was exactly what happened to the Assyrian army when it besieged Jerusalem. The Lord Himself struck them. Thousands of them died; the rest retreated in panic and returned home. As the soldiers fled in terror from the hand of God's judgment, they abandoned all the wealth they had plundered. As a result, the surviving Jews swarmed down upon the Assyrian camp and recovered the wealth for themselves (see notes 2 Kng 19:14-37; Isa. 37:14-38).
- b. The remnant of righteous believers should pray because of the Lord's exaltation (vv. 5-6). The Lord is exalted in the splendour of His glory and majesty, in the blazing light

of His holiness. He is exalted far beyond what humans can imagine, higher than any creatures in any world or dimension of being. He lives in the spiritual world of heaven itself. Because of *who He is*, the day is coming when He will rule as Lord of the earth.

First, the Lord will establish His throne in Zion, the New Jerusalem, and He will rule on earth with justice and righteousness. Oppression, discrimination, greed, immorality — all acts of lawlessness and violence — will be erased throughout the world. Only the righteous will live on earth, and they will live in a world governed by God's laws. The Lord's justice and righteousness will reign on earth, for He is the exalted Lord of the universe.

Second, *in that day* the Lord Himself will be the stability of His people, the foundation upon which they stand. He Himself will be their salvation and security, wisdom and knowledge day by day. No longer will people lack understanding or be indecisive. No longer will they be ignorant of how they should live or of what steps they should take. They will be filled with the wisdom of God Himself and will know how to live and exactly what to do when problems confront them.

- c. The remnant of righteous believers should pray because of the source of God's blessings: the fear of the Lord (V. 6b). When people truly seek the Lord in prayer, they demonstrate a fear of the Lord. The word fear means reverence, a deep-seated trust that acknowledges the Lord as the only living and true God who can answer prayer. When people truly fear the LORD, they possess a wonderful treasure, for the fear of the LORD assures them of the presence of God Himself. When God is present with His people. He blesses them and guides their every step. Thus prayer was the key to the Jews' deliverance from the Assyrian threat.
3. Seeing into the future made Isaiah's heart heavy, for he saw the grim devastation the Assyrians would cause. Remember that God was allowing the Assyrian invasion because of the Jews' terrible sins and unbelief. Their peace treaty with Egypt crumbled, for it was an alliance with unbelievers (30:1-14). Isaiah says that Judah's soldiers and envoys would weep openly as the nation's cities fell. No doubt the diplomats who had carried on negotiations with the Assyrian ambassadors would be among the weeping envoys mentioned here (36:2-22).
4. Once the Assyrians launched their invasion of Judah, the highways would be deserted. Because of the danger, the people would be too afraid to travel. When Egypt broke the treaty with Judah, the people would despise their leaders for bringing this destruction upon them. The cruel Assyrians had no regard for human life and would slaughter thousands. Furthermore, they would deliberately ravage the land (v. 9). Once the Assyrian war machine struck, no matter where people looked, they would see only the sad, tragic spectacle of devastation. No longer would Lebanon be a land of beautiful mountains and forests, or Sharon a fertile land, or the fields of Bashan and Carmel fruitful. The Assyrian army would utterly devastate all these lands.

5. But the day of atrocities would come to an end, for the LORD Himself would execute judgment on the Assyrians (vv. 10-12). The violent *destroyer* and *betrayed* will be destroyed (see v. 1). Although Assyria had dreams of grandeur and plans for world conquest, their dreams and plans were nothing more than chaff. When the Lord rose against them, He would consume their dreams and plans as quickly as fire consumes straw. He would set the cruel Assyrians ablaze. Note this fact: God's judgment would be like an intense fire that would bum them until there was nothing left but lime, or dust and it would bum them as quickly as if He were burning cut, dried thorn-bushes. God's judgment upon the Assyrian army was just as Isaiah predicted, thorough and quick. During one night's time, probably within a few minutes, the angel of the LORD appeared in the Assyrian camp surrounding Jerusalem and slew 185,000 soldiers. When the surviving soldiers arose the next morning and saw all the dead bodies lying around, they fled for their lives, bewildered and terrified (37:36-37).

God's judgment is to teach a lesson (vv. 13-14), one that all people — both far and near — must heed. Throughout history the Lord's judgment has fallen upon the Assyrians, the Jews and other nations of the world for a very specific purpose: so they would acknowledge His power. The Lord is the Creator and Sovereign of the universe; therefore, all must acknowledge Him as the Lord God, the only living and true God. Even the sinners in Zion — the hypocrites who profess the Lord but live wickedly — must tremble in fear before Him. The Lord is a consuming fire (Isa. 10:17; Heb. 12:29); no person can stand in the presence of His blazing holiness. Therefore, God's presence and His coming judgment should terrify all hypocrites.

Thought 1. God's judgment is sure. It is definitely coming. Nothing can stop His hand of judgment from falling upon earth. His day of judgment is fixed, already determined and set. When that day and hour come, Christ will rend the skies above and strike this earth in judgment. Every one of us will face the wrath of God, and the Lord will be unwavering in executing judgment against us unless we have accepted His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and been forgiven our sins.

Mat 25:31-33, 41 *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left... Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”*

Luke 21:25-28 *“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

2 Th 1:7-8 *And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

2 Pet 3:7-10 *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*

Jude 1:14-15 *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."*

Rev 1:7 *Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. ■*