

# OpenTheo

## November 20th: Isaiah 33 & Luke 4:31-44

November 19, 2021



### Alastair Roberts

The treacherous destroyer betrayed and destroyed. Jesus in Capernaum.

My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here:

<https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

If you are interested in supporting this project, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes:

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Isaiah chapter 33. is gathered as the caterpillar gathers, as locusts leap, it is leapt upon. The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high.

He will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and He will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. The fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure. Behold their heroes cry in the streets, the envoys of peace weep bitterly, the highways lie waste, the traveller ceases, covenants are broken, cities are despised, there is no regard for man, the land mourns and languishes, Lebanon is confounded and withers away, Sharon is like a desert, and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves.

Now I will arise, says the Lord, now I will lift myself up, now I will be exalted. You conceive chaff, you give birth to stubble, your breath is a fire that will consume you, and the peoples will be as if burned to lime, like thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire. Here, you who are far off, what I have done, and you who are near, acknowledge my might.

The sinners in Zion are afraid, trembling has seized the godless. Who among us can

dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings? He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from looking on evil, he will dwell on the heights, his place of defence will be the fortresses of rocks, his bread will be given him, his water will be sure, your eyes will behold the king in his beauty, they will see a land that stretches afar, your heart will muse on the terror. Where is he who counted? Where is he who weighed the tribute? Where is he who counted the towers? You will see no more the insolent people, the people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend, stammering in a tongue that you cannot understand.

Behold Zion, the city of our appointed feasts, your eyes will see Jerusalem, an untroubled habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its cords be broken. But there the Lord in majesty will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams, where no galley with oars can go, nor majestic ship can pass. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king, he will save us.

Your cords hang loose, they cannot hold the mast firm in its place or keep the sail spread out, then prey and spoil in abundance will be divided, even the lame will take the prey, and no inhabitant will say, I am sick, the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity. Continuing to address Judah in the period prior to 701 BC, Isaiah speaks a word of hope into their increasingly dire situation. Gary Smith suggests that the context of this chapter might be the Assyrians breaking an agreement that was made when King Hezekiah paid tribute to them, something described in 2 Kings chapter 18 verses 14-16.

And Hezekiah king of Judah sent the king of Assyria, Lachish, saying, I have done wrong, withdraw from me, whatever you impose on me I will bear. And the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold, and Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord and from the doorpost that Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Reneging on this earlier treaty, Sennacherib apparently decided that he would settle for nothing less than Judah's unconditional surrender and so he came up against Jerusalem. Naturally, the people of Judah were desperate and despairing. All hope of deliverance or escape seemed lost.

It is not certain that this is the context of chapter 33, although it seems to be the most plausible possibility. Judah's plight is grim and yet the Lord declares that he will reverse it, defeating the Assyrians and granting them security. Smith suggests that the prophecy might have been delivered in response to Hezekiah leading the people in repentance and in seeking the Lord's faith in their crisis.

The words of Isaiah take the form of a woe oracle, which we should probably see as ironic in character. Assyria, which given the wider context of these prophecies, is almost certainly the object of this oracle, is characterised as a destroyer and a traitor. Assyria's brutality and destructive power was well known in the ancient world.

It was a cruel empire that maintained its rule in large measure through terrorising its enemies, through mass executions, torture and making public spectacles of all who would oppose them. Over a century earlier, for instance, Assyrian kings described flaying rebels and covering city walls with their skins. There are Assyrian reliefs from a palace in Nineveh in the British Museum which depict Assyrians forcing defeated nobles to grind the exhumed bodies of their ancestors.

Those cities that did not immediately surrender to them could expect mass slaughter, cruel and creative tortures and the most gruesome public spectacles. Assyria was also treacherous, quite prepared not to honour agreements when they considered them inconvenient, as we see in the case of Sennacherib's attack upon Jerusalem even after Hezekiah's sending of tribute. Assyria would itself face the sort of treatment with which it had treated others, being destroyed and betrayed.

Those who lived by the sword and by treachery would die by the sword and by treachery. Perhaps just when they thought that they were secure, when they had put their predation on other nations to one side and were enjoying their ill-gotten gains, they would suffer the same fate that they had inflicted upon others. Judah, however, perhaps in part because all other recourse and support was stripped from them, would turn to the Lord for his help.

Hezekiah's prayer to the Lord in this moment of crisis is recorded for us in chapter 37 verses 16-20. O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear. Open your eyes, O Lord, and see, and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire.

For they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the Lord.

While the people's turning to the Lord would be far from perfect, occurring only after other options had failed them, deliverance and restoration would follow from it. Verses 2-6 describe the coming of God as the warrior king against the foes of his distressed people, acting on behalf of the oppressed, bringing low and scattering the mighty, and spoiling their goods. The ultimate throne is not that of brutal empires like Assyria, but

the Lord, who is enthroned in the heavens above all proud earthly powers.

It is in the Lord that the hope of Zion is to be found, not in Egypt, not in shrewd foreign policy, not in treaties with treacherous and cruel powers. All of the goods that Jerusalem so desperately longs for in its time of crisis, stability, deliverance, guidance, counsel and insight, are found in the Lord and will be enjoyed by those who look to him within it. To a nation that lives by sight it is difficult to recognize, but the true strength and treasure of Zion is not found in vast armies of horses and chariots, in powerful international allies, mighty fortifications and walls, and vast treasure houses full of gold and silver, but in the Lord himself, being enjoyed by all who fear and trust him.

Verses 7-9 describe the devastated people, perhaps when they heard the news that Sennacherib was coming up against Jerusalem, even after they thought that their sending of tribute would appease him. All are abject, struck with the most terrible despair and foreboding, every glimmer of hope extinguished. With their sense of abandonment and hopelessness, normal life and commerce ceases.

Trust has been betrayed. The word translated cities in the ESV of verse 8 might be better understood as a reference to witnesses, a parallel to the breaking of covenants. The most fruitful regions of the land are now barren.

The Lord's voice, however, breaks through the darkness of the nation's plight. At the moment of the people's greatest despair, he would act and prove his sovereignty. With a threefold now, the Lord heralds the reversal of the situation that he would accomplish.

The treacherous destroyer fancies himself immune in his power, conceiving his works to be immune to judgment. Yet they are like chaff and stubble, like refuse to be burned. Indeed, it would be the destroyer's own fiery breath that would ignite the fire in which it would be burned.

All the peoples would be destroyed by the fire like thorns. Those peoples might be the other nations around Judah in whom they have been tempted to put their trust, along with Assyria itself. The Lord would, as we see in many other parts of scripture, reveal his mighty arm before the nations.

When this occurred, it would not only be seen by nations far off, but also by peoples nearer to home, within Judah and in Jerusalem itself. Chapter 31, verse 9 described the Lord as the one whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem. As the power and justice of the Lord was displayed, sinners in Jerusalem would suddenly realise the seriousness of being in a city in the midst of which the living God dwelt.

Earlier, in response to the theophany at the time of his commission in chapter 6, Isaiah had cried out in despair at his realisation of his own uncleanness before the thrice holy Lord. Now the sinners in Zion would have a similar experience, as the true might and

holiness of the Lord dawned upon them. Who can live in the presence of such a God? As John Oswald observes, the response of the prophet to the sinner's question, who among us can dwell with the consuming fire, recalls the language of passages such as Psalm 24, verses 3-5.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully, he will receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Integrity of heart and action, fleeing from evil and injustice, and commitment to the path of righteousness, is that which marks out those who will dwell in the presence of the Lord, and enjoy his blessings. The Lord will provide for and protect the righteous, but the wicked will be judged.

What will the consequences of the Lord's action on behalf of his people be? Verses 17-24 describe them. The image here, as Oswald argues, likely combines elements of an eschatological and a historical vision. The king in view in verse 17, he maintains, is almost certainly the Lord himself, the true King of Israel.

This would seem to be supported, he argues, by verse 22 of the chapter. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King, he will save us. Brother Charles adopts a different line of interpretation, suggesting that we read the reference to the king in relation to the description of the righteous king in chapter 32, which in verse 1 read, Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice.

However, he refrains from identifying the king with Hezekiah in particular. Such an identification, he argues, would be an unwarranted historicisation of the text. The text is rather a more general declaration of the hope of Israel.

The expression, a king in his beauty, is a description of the righteous king's glory, splendour and majesty, who will rule over an expansive realm, which King Hezekiah most definitely did not. Charles is certainly correct in his resistance to pitting messianic readings of such texts against readings that focus on the Lord's sovereignty. Within the theology of Isaiah there is no breach between these things.

The sovereignty of the Lord will be displayed through the deliverance wrought by his anointed one. Perhaps we should read this as a depiction of the ideal king, as the typological reality of which the smallest glimpse is seen in figures like Hezekiah. This ideal king is also a way in which we see the awaited one, in whom the full realisation of the hopes of Israel would come.

In the days of this king's rule, Israel would look back on the current crisis, marvelling at the way in which a disaster that had seemed to represent the final end of the nation and of them as a people, had vanished so completely into the past, leaving little lingering trace of the great fear and upheaval that it had involved. Rather, Jerusalem would be

established like an immovable tent. The imagery here is surprising.

This is an image suggesting vulnerability, not a vision of a city with great fortifications and impregnable walls, but a stable tent, like a permanent tabernacle. However, the vulnerability of Jerusalem merely serves to underline the great measure of its security. The tent of Jerusalem would be untroubled, despite its weakness, because its security and safety lies in the Lord who has established it.

Part of Jerusalem's weakness was found in its lack of a secure water supply to withstand a great siege. However, the Lord is like a broad river and streams for His city, yet impassable for the warships of their foes. The true judge, king and lawgiver of Zion is the Lord Himself.

The trust of the people of the Lord does not ultimately rest in the power of a human king, but in the God of heaven and earth. Verse 23 is difficult to interpret. To whom is the description with which it opens referring? Is it a picture of Judah like a ship in disarray? Oswald suggests that we read the verse as a contrast between Judah's current and their future state, after the Lord has acted on their behalf.

Also, what is the underlying metaphor here? Gary Smith points out that the terms used here don't typically refer to rigging, masts and sails. Besides, that sort of maritime imagery is not common in scripture. Rather, they are more usually used to refer to standards, banners and flagstuffs.

He understands the imagery here as Isaiah's depiction of the deserted Assyrian camp. John Watts also questions the common interpretation of this verse as employing a metaphor of boats and ships. In his understanding, the meaning is that the apportionments or lots of land in Judah are released and Assyria is powerless to secure the pedestal of their standards or raise their flags over them.

They are powerless to reassert their sovereignty in the land once more. The land will be reallocated, with even the weakest receiving a good portion. The result of the Lord's deliverance would be the healing of the people and the land, and it would manifest the Lord's forgiveness of all of their sins.

A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which the fact that the Lord was the true High King in Jerusalem was displayed in Judah's life and worship? How were they to understand the relationship between the Davidic King and the Lord in this regard? Luke chapter 4 verses 31-44 And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, Be silent, and come out of him.

And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having

done him no harm. And they were all amazed and said to one another, What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out. And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her.

And immediately she rose and began to serve them. Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, You are the Son of God! But he rebuked them, and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.

And when it was day he departed and went into a desolate place, and the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them. But he said to them, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose. And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

After Jesus has been rejected by his hometown of Nazareth in Luke 4, he goes to Capernaum, which would be the base for his earliest mission. Accounts of this Sabbath are also found in Matthew and Mark, and the rest of this chapter recounts a series of great works that Jesus performed on this Sabbath morning, afternoon, and evening. He begins by teaching in the synagogue in a way that is seen as remarkable for its authority.

He isn't just delivering an opinion, or expressing some viewpoint, or even just teaching. He himself is bringing the truth and the claim of God to bear upon people in a way that is remarkable. He demonstrates the authority of his word of teaching, but also demonstrates his powerful word of exorcism.

He casts out the demon who testifies to his true identity as the Holy One of God. Again, this probably has some priestly connotations. He has both authority and power, and that power is seen in the relationship to the evil spirits.

Having faced the devil in the wilderness, he now faces demons in the synagogue. The devil's forces are occupying the heart of Israel's places of worship, threatening to render them a desolate place. We don't see demons much in the Old Testament.

They are largely associated with the wilderness and abandoned locations in places like Isaiah 13, verse 21, or 34, verse 13-14, and then also we see this in Luke 11, verse 24. Widespread demonic possession is not the norm, but Jesus performs exorcisms wherever he goes. And maybe we could relate this to the story of David and Saul.

After David has been anointed by God's spirit, a distressing spirit troubles Saul, and

David has to minister to him. As Christ is anointed by the spirit, he plays a similar role for Israel. He causes the distressing spirits to depart from the people, and as a result of his work, his fame spreads throughout the region.

But as we go through the gospel, we see that the crowds don't really understand what his mission involves. The synagogue exorcism is followed by the healing of Simon's mother-in-law, and it's interesting that we find a reference to Simon here without any previous introduction. Luke seems to presume that Simon will already be known to his readers, and at various other points in his gospel, he is presuming some prior knowledge on the part of his reader.

Simon's wife is spoken of here, even if only to mention that she has a mother. As Jesus seems to have stayed in this house, she was probably one of the women who helped support his ministry. Such women were mentioned in Luke chapter 8, verses 1-3.

Later on, in 1 Corinthians 9-5, we're told that she accompanied Peter as a fellow worker. Jesus is someone who heals both in public and in private. It's likely that Jesus stayed in the house with Simon and Andrew and their extended family, and it's worth considering the sort of family structure of the society he's ministering within.

It may help us better to understand the challenge that he presented at certain points. We might have another window into the familial life of the context in the story of Jesus being lost in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph go with Jesus, but Jesus can be lost for quite a long time.

They presume he's with the others. There is presumably a large extended family and lots of friends and others traveling with them, and we should presume that Jesus would have spent a lot of time with this extended network of people, and also that many of his disciples seem to have been drawn from such an extended network, having relations to Jesus and also to each other. Luke speaks of Simon's mother-in-law's fever as something like a form of possession.

It afflicts her. Jesus rebukes it, and it leaves her, and then she begins to serve him. If Jesus, as it seems, made Peter's house in Capernaum a base of his operations, Simon's mother-in-law would probably have been his primary hostess, with all of the honour that that implied.

Jesus does all these things on the Sabbath, and there doesn't seem to be any conflict about this fact at this point. Later on, people come to him in the evening as the sun's going down and as the new day is beginning, and he heals many. He forbids the demons to speak, because they know him.

Jesus often discourages people from talking about healings and deliverances, and also silences demons. However, there are occasions when Jesus displays his work more



openly. The purpose of the secrecy seems to exceed merely a concern to avoid excessive attention from authorities.

The disciples and the demons have a knowledge about Jesus' mission and identity, for which the time has not yet come for more public disclosure. Part of the purpose of the secrecy is that it avoids the great openness to misunderstanding that a revelation of his identity before its proper time would allow for. Prior to his death and resurrection, a revelation of the fact that he is the son of God, that he is the Messiah, would lead to him being made king or something like that, which would undermine the purpose of his mission, drawing him away from the path of the cross.

Only when the cross and the resurrection have occurred can it truly be understood what it means that Jesus is the Christ. This chapter ends with Jesus leaving Capernaum secretly to go to a desolate place and continue his mission elsewhere, when he ends up going down to the synagogues of Judea and preaching there too. A question to consider, how might we get a clearer idea of what Jesus is doing in this passage and from his statement in verses 18 to 19 of this chapter?