
“LET THE METAPHORS
SPEAK TO YOU”

An LDS Commentary on Isaiah

ANN N. MADSEN

Dedicated to those who live in the time about which Isaiah prophesied

Isaiah 33

Chapter 33 addresses the problems that we all face when someone has used their agency to change our lives. We often say that we would never have behaved like someone behaved against us. But this takes another view.

33:1

Woe to you, O destroyer,
You who have not been destroyed.
Woe to you, O traitor,
you who have not been betrayed.
When you stop destroying,
You will be destroyed.
When you stop betraying,
You will be betrayed.

Assyria might well be the destroyer mentioned here, which, when it had stopped destroying, would itself be destroyed.

33:2. A tender prayer follows.

O LORD, be gracious to us;
We long for you.
Be our strength *every* morning.

Mornings are the times when we want to feel capable and competent; yes, we long for hope in the day ahead. This refers back to the time of distress mentioned in 33:1 while describing the power of the LORD's voice when he rises up and the nations scatter and Isaiah returns to the promise that the LORD "will fill Zion" with justice and righteousness.

33:4. The NIV reads, "Your plunder, O nations, is harvested as by young locusts; like a swarm of locusts people pound on it." In ancient Israel, as today, a cloud of locusts can completely strip a field.

33:6. He will be the *sure foundation* for your times. The Hebrew for fear (*yir'ah*) includes the concepts of reverence, awe, and worship. This feeling acts as a key that unlocks (or is) "Zion's treasure," as it is rendered in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV). Authentic respect for the LORD is taught in the holy temple.

Then another break and the assertion is made that the "treaty is broken; its witnesses are despised."

33:9. "The land mourns and wastes away. Lebanon is ashamed and withers. Sharon is like the Arabah." The place-names mentioned by Isaiah represent the four most fertile regions near Jerusalem, all of which have been laid waste.

33:12. This is both a birth and a harvest metaphor. Thorn bushes are dry, brittle, and highly flammable. In Isaiah's time, chaff and straw were burned after the harvest.

33:14. The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless; and what are they afraid of? Who of us can dwell with a consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burnings? Interestingly enough, the answer: he who walks righteously and says what is right, who rejects gain and extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder, and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil.

33:16. This describes the man whose refuge will be the temple, and his bread and water call to mind sacramental covenants.

Compare verses 14–16 with the similar question and answer in Psalm 24:3–5: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." The righteous will dwell with God forever.

33:17. Your eyes will see the king in his beauty. See 1 John 3:2.

33:18. In the New International Version of the Bible, it reads, “In your thoughts you will ponder the former terror: ‘Where is the chief officer?’” Judah would be saved from the conquering power of Assyria (or Babylonia) and think back on a time when it was oppressed by Assyria’s (or Babylonia’s) officers. See Isaiah 18:2, 7.

33:20. This verse describes Zion and Jerusalem as a temporary tent or shelter (like Moses’s tent of meeting) that has been made into a permanent abode (like Solomon’s temple) by its secure stake. See Isaiah 54:2; 3 Nephi 22:2.

33:22. Note how Jehovah or the LORD is described as judge, lawgiver, and king, which results in His ability to offer us salvation.

33:24. Verses 23 and 24 speak of a time of abundance when no one living in Zion will be ill, and their sins will be forgiven.

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