

ISAIAH

Chapter 34

Judgment Against the Nations

Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! ² The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. ³ Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. ⁴ All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. ⁵ My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed. ⁶ The sword of the LORD is bathed in blood, it is covered with fat—the blood of lambs and goats, fat from the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in Edom. ⁷ And the wild oxen will fall with them, the bull calves and the great bulls. Their land will be drenched with blood, and the dust will be soaked with fat. ⁸ For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause. ⁹ Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! ¹⁰ It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again. ¹¹ The desert owl and screech owl will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation. ¹² Her nobles will have nothing there to be called a kingdom, all her princes will vanish away. ¹³ Thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles her strongholds. She will become a haunt for jackals, a home for owls. ¹⁴ Desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also repose and find for themselves places of rest. ¹⁵ The owl will nest there and lay eggs, she will hatch them, and care for her young under the shadow of her wings; there also the falcons will gather, each with its mate. ¹⁶ Look in the scroll of the LORD and read: None of these will be missing, not one will lack her mate. For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit will gather them together. ¹⁷ He allots their portions; his hand distributes them by measure. They will possess it forever and dwell there from generation to generation.

34:1–35:10 Chs. 34–35 conclude chs. 28–33 and comprise an eschatological section corresponding to chs. 24–27, which conclude chs. 13–23 (see note on 24:1–27:13). (CSB)

Chapters 34 and 35 belong together, forming an important conclusion to the first part of Isaiah's prophecy. They come at the end of the five "woes" of chapters 28-33 in the same way that chapters 24- to 27 came at the end of the ten oracles of chapters 13 to 23. Chapters 24 to 27 looked beyond to the end of time and are often called the Apocalypse of Isaiah. Chapters 34 and 35 also direct our attention to the end of time. Isaiah presents two contrasting pictures at the end of the section of "woes." Chapter 34 present the day of the Lord's vengeance, and in chapter 35 present the day when the glory of the Lord will be seen. (PBC)

34:1 COME NEAR ... LISTEN – This is a general admonition addressed to the Jews, whereby the prophet calls on them to hear the coming wrath and rage of God, as if to say: "You are about to hear great and terrifying things about the sword of the Lord." (Luther)

34:2 *angry ... wrath.* In the day of the Lord (see 2:11, 17, 20; 26:20–21 and notes). See also 13:3 and note; 13:13. (CSB)

God's anger is especially directed against those who have exalted themselves and destroyed others. (TLSB)

This is a general sword against Jews and Gentiles, because they held a general hatred against Christ and His Word. *Against all their host*, that is, their army and people. For every affair has its own host, as the heaven has its stars. Observe: In the Scriptures "host" denotes every kind of endeavor. Ovid says: "The love of study is a kind of host," and Job 7:1 says: "The life of man is warfare," that is, hard service. In short, every kind of endeavor or task, whatever endeavor and task you will. Those who in Hebrew are called its soldiers because they engage in it. So here "host," pursuing various endeavors—priesthoods, religions, etc.—denotes everything that was in opposition to the Word of God. (Luther)

host. Their armies and might. A battle against spiritual darkness and wickedness in realms that transcend the human and earthly realms. Cf Gn 3:15; Jb 1:6–12; 2:2–6; Eph 6:10–18; Col 2:13–15. (TLSB)

totally destroy. The kind of destruction the Canaanites had deserved. See NIV text note; see also v. 5; Jos 6:17. (CSB)

The Jews were put out and given over to physical slaughter as sheep of the slaughter. To put out is to destroy down to the foundation and beyond restoration. The Hebrew word is **דָּרְגוּ**. This is what happened to the Jews. (Luther)

slaughter. See 30:25 and note. (CSB)

34:3 *thrown out.* Not to have a proper burial was considered a disgrace (see 14:19 and note). (CSB)

Cf Ezk 39:1–16, when the Lord would defeat His enemy Gog of Magog (cf Rv 20:8). (TLSB)

This happened to the people of Jerusalem, that neither time nor place for burial was given them. “They will not be buried with appropriate rites.” According to Josephus, pestilence and stench arose from the unburied corpses. (Luther)

MOUNTAINS WILL BE SOAKED ... BLOOD – That is, there will be so great a supply of corpses that the mountains will become soaked with blood. (Luther)

34:4 stars ... dissolved. Disturbances in the heavens characterize the day of the Lord (see 13:10, 13 and notes; cf. Eze 32:7–8). (CSB)

The stars, here defiant toward God. The host or army of all the nations (v 2) is no match for the Lord of hosts. Heaven and earth will disintegrate at His command, just as He once ordered them into existence (13:9–10; 24:21, 23; 51:6; 2Pt 3:10). (TLSB)

Here you have a new Hebrew theme, which is difficult for Latins to understand. He calls the religion of the Jews the host of heaven. The religion of other nations is of the earth. In Daniel the priests and chief priests, the teachers and prophets themselves are called stars of heaven. As in Dan. 12:3, the prophet compares the prophets and teachers to the stars of heaven. He is speaking, however, concerning the destruction by the Romans, when the religion, worship, and priesthood were of no benefit to them without the hearing of the Word, but became rotten, had to fall into decay, and were transferred to the Gentiles. (Luther)

sky ... scroll ... starry host will fall. † Referred to in Mt 24:29 in connection with the second coming of Christ. (CSB)

The heavens will be rolled up as a scroll, never to be opened again. (TLSB)

their host shall fall. Battle encompasses all the heavenly bodies and extinguishes them. Cf Rv 8:12. (TLSB)

A *book*, that is, a scroll. For books and larger sheets were rolled up on a rod. So the sky that is stretched over the Jews in their smugness will be rolled up and hidden, and will clearly not be in use, as a rolled up scroll is no longer read. So also all their religious pomp will perish and be consigned to oblivion. The Jews do not now have a priesthood and a religion, but we Gentiles have them. (Luther)

withered leaves. Cf. 24:4; 40:7–8. (CSB)

These are very plain words that are spoken concerning the most holy nation of the Jews. They show that just as the most beautiful leaves fall in winter, so the

most excellent Levites, priests, and aristocrats have fallen and died. He calls them shoots of the vine and the fig tree, however, indicating that theirs is not a divinely made ingrafting into some splendid tree, and they were finally cut off because of unbelief, as we read in Rom. 11:20. (Luther)

34:5 *drunk its fill*. Cf. Eze 39:18–20. (CSB)

This is a Hebrew idiom. In Deuteronomy we read (Deut. 32:42): “My sword shall devour flesh,” and it is drunk with blood. The sword being drunk is an indication of a great slaughter, where the sword not only gets wet, but where it is drunk and drenched through and through. (Luther)

The “hard and great and strong sword” (27:1) of the Lord’s wrath is personified as a man drunk with fury. When it descends for judgment, it will execute the total destruction once declared on Jericho (Josh 6:21, 24). (TLSB)

Edom. Symbolic of all the enemies of God and his people, like Moab in 25:10–12. See note on 21:11. The Edomites were driven from their homeland by the Nabatean Arabs, perhaps as early as 500 B.C. (CSB)

It is this sword in heaven that will descend and devour all ungodly peoples. The Edomites attached themselves to the Jews, and so they were all likewise slain as by the wrath of God. (Luther)

PEOPLE I HAVE TOTALLY DOOMED – Some construe this as metonymy and understand it as referring Edom to a remnant people who were not of the Jewish people. My opinion: Idumea was allied with the Jews and suffered the same fate. (Luther)

The descendants of Esau, Jacob’s brother, are the symbol of continuous hostility to God’s people (see note, Ps 137:7; cf Ezk 25:12–14; Am 1:11–12). (TLSB)

34:6 God’s judgment is compared with the slaughter of sacrificial animals. Cf 30:33; Jer 46:10; 51:40; Ezk 39:17–20; Zep 1:7–8. (TLSB)

SWORD ... BATHED IN BLOOD – Perhaps the bloodshed and gory details disturb us. They should. God’s judgment will be brutal, thorough, and complete. God’s laws always terrifies the sinner. God’s judgment comes to people who have rejected Him, refused His gospel, and opposed believers. We are likely to think of God’s judgment in the abstract; Isaiah pictured it for us in concrete and brutal term. Edom is only a representative of all the other nations that oppose God and reject His gospel. One commentator offered this observation: “The blood-red sin of rebellion demands a blood-red punishment of judgment. (PBC)

fat. Considered the best part of the meat, and therefore offered to the Lord in the sacrifices (see Lev 3:9–11). (CSB)

lambs and goats. Symbolizing the people. (CSB)

sacrifice. Battles are often compared to sacrifices (see Jer 46:10; 50:27; Eze 39:17–19). (CSB)

That is, in that calamity a great carnage was made of aristocrats, princes, priests, and Levites. It was not the scum and defenseless people that perished, but the choicest segment of the nation fell. Some very important people are included in the destruction. This will be a new kind of destruction, not like the Babylonian one and like any other that has struck lowborn people, but here all the princes and chiefs have utterly perished. These are the ones called lambs and goats. That is to say, God will simply invade their kingdom. (Luther)

Portrayal of a bloody massacre, inflicted by the sword of divine justice, offends only those who refuse to believe that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Heb 10:3) (TLSB)

Bozrah. An important city of Edom and a shepherding center, it was located about 25 miles southeast of the southern end of the Dead Sea. The name means “grape-gathering” (cf. 63:1–3). (CSB)

Chief city of Edom, 20 mi SE of the southern end of the Salt Sea. (TLSB)

With a salty taunt he ridicules them in calling them a sacrifice, as if he were saying: “As the priests grew big and fat through the sacrifices and offerings and for these sacrifices skinned the people (as we read in Matt. 15:2 ff.), so I will kill you skinners of My people as though you were a sacrifice.” So it will happen to our skinners. *Bozrah* by metonymy is a name for Jerusalem, namely, a fortified city. *Edom*, that is, bloody. By metonymy either word fits the Jews, who were *Bozrah*, that is, in a superbly fortified city that withstood all enemies. Likewise *Edom*, that is, bloody, reddish, inclined toward bloodshed, headstrong, ruddy with wrath for slaughter and bloodshed. Thus by metonymy they are Bozrahites and Edomites. God will repay the priests for their butchery. *A great slaughter in the land of Edom*. There will be a heavy carnage. (Luther)

Edom. Region south of the Salt Sea. (TLSB)

34:7 *wild oxen ... great bulls*. Symbolizing the troops and/or leaders of the nations. *drenched with blood*. See v. 3. (CSB)

Might be a metaphor describing leaders or officers of Edom. (TLSB)

They will be brought low, they will be pulled down to the very dust—they who formerly were extremely puffed up, who were *unicorns*, namely, chief priests and princes and **דִּרְבָּנִים**, *young steers*, that is, the lusty young men. The men of power

in the city they call *unicorns and young steers*. אַבְיָרִים. This stands for men who are powerful, marvelous, and angelic. By comparison אַבְיָרִים denotes a beast of burden that is fat, well fed, and strong. So here the אַבְיָרִים, all the others, and the nobles will be cast down, since the entire kingdom will be laid waste. (Luther)

DUST WILL BE SOAKED WITH FAT – That is, the slaughter will be on so large a scale that the common people will not be considered out of respect for the aristocrats and princes who have been slain and whose blood fills the land. (Luther)

34:8 THE LORD – Isaiah used God’s special name in this verse – the Lord, the God of the covenant – and wrote that this Lord would bring judgment upon the earth. The Lord is responsible for this day of vengeance. This is the same Lord who called Abraham, delivered Israel from Egypt, gave her a land of her own, and protected His own through the centuries. He is the covenant-God, the God of free and faithful grace. The promises of grace that God issued are true and will not fail. The threat of judgment issued by the same God is just and true and will not fail. He is a God both of law and gospel. (PBC)

day of vengeance. See 35:4; 61:2. The Edomites opposed Israel at every opportunity (see 2Sa 8:13–14) and rejoiced when Jerusalem was destroyed (La 4:21; Ps 137:7). But Edom’s day would come (see 63:4). (CSB)

Though the wicked may for a time avoid the wages of sin, God has a date fixed when they will receive the due reward of their deeds (cf 2:12). God does not indulge in revenge as people do when they get even with an enemy. He acts as a judge who imposes the just penalty. In a court trial, He sees to it that Edom receives just recompense for offenses against Zion. (TLSB)

cause of Zion. The Lord’s motivation to judge Edom. He will do anything, even die, for the sake of His people (Mk 10:45). (TLSB)

This will happen because God wants to avenge the true Zion itself, that is, the church, which has not turned away from God to Edom, that is to say, they have not persecuted the Gospel. (Luther)

Isaiah pictured Zion’s cause as a lawsuit in court, as a legal dispute between two opposing parties. On one side was helpless Zion; on the other, the enemies of Zion. God took up the case of His people and brought it to a successful conclusion. While His people were helpless and weak, God would use His power to vindicate His people and punish those who persecuted them. All enemies of the gospel will feel the judgment of God. When those enemies are destroyed, then God’s people can enjoy the uninterrupted blessing of a loving and gracious God. (PBC)

34:9 *burning sulfur*.† Edom’s destruction is compared with the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Jer 49:17–18). (CSB)

Recalls destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Cf Jer 49:17–18. (TLSB)

This shows what will happen in Jerusalem after Jerusalem has been destroyed. The inhabitants await nothing but loneliness. The prophet has described the devastation of the kingdom and the priesthood. Now in figurative terms he depicts the city’s remaining appearance after the destruction. This, too, some desire to interpret as referring to the eternal fire. and that is possible; but we stay with the simple meaning. Formerly, in time of prosperity, it was called the river of God. Streams denote people. This river will be blood, and these streams will not be a large number of people but pitch, and its soil will be and turn into brimstone, as we read in Deuteronomy (Deut. 29:23): “The whole land brimstone and salt, and a burnt-out waste, unsown, and growing nothing.” This is a description of utter destruction, because the most offensive stench rises from this ungodly people like smoke from brimstone and pitch. *Forever and ever*, that is, they will be forsaken, they will be turned over to their own lusts, and there they will be consumed as if in pitch. They will no longer come to the truth of the Word and have a priesthood, as we see among the Jews today, who are in pitch and brimstone. That is to say, under a curse and about to be cursed, they do not want to hear the Word of the Gospel. (Luther)

The sulfur and smoke from a raging fire pictured here remind us of the fiery judgment God sent upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah wanted his readers to call to mind that judgment of God, but this one is a bit different. The fire that consumed those corrupt cities eventually burned itself out; this one will not. The fire of this judgment will not be quenched, and the smoke will rise up forever. We hear the echo of Isaiah in the words of John, “The smoke from her goes up for ever” (Revelation 19:3). (PBC)

34:10 *smoke ... forever*. Applied to Babylon in Rev 19:3 (see also Rev 14:10–11). (CSB)

God’s wrathful judgment burns continually against Edom. (TLSB)

lie desolate. See 13:20–22 and note; Mal 1:3–4. (CSB)

The same is said in chapter 5:6 above: My vineyard “shall not be pruned or hoed.” So here, in this land there will be no vinedresser, there will be neither teacher nor preacher. (Luther)

34:11 *desert owl ... screech owl ... great owl ... raven*. “Unclean” birds (see Dt 14:14–17). Such birds would also live in the ruins of Babylon (13:21) and Nineveh (Zep 2:14). (CSB)

Hbr words are rendered “without form and void” in Gn 1:2. Strikes a note of “anti-creation” and total destruction. Cf Jer 4:23. (TLSB)

These words compel us to refer this passage not to the fire of hell but to an earthly destruction, where such creatures generally live. *The hawk* is the bittern. *Porcupine*, or hedgehog. The *ibis* is an unclean bird, a native of Egypt and unknown to us. Such animals are untamed, wild, and living by themselves. By way of allegory the ungodly rabbis, who are generally accustomed to living in the wilderness, represent a wasteland forsaken by all prophets and teachers. This is what we see in the papacy today, where all its teachers are wild beasts, shouting wild and hostile words. Where Christ is not present, there is destitution, there is nothing but savage beasts. They screech and howl like hoot owls. They impart no sure and true teaching. (Luther)

chaos ... desolation. The Hebrew for these words is used in Ge 1:2 (see note there) to describe the earth in its “formless” and “empty” state (see also Jer 4:23 and note). (CSB)

בְּהוּ. In Gen. 1:2 we read: “The earth was תְּהוֹ וְבְהוּ, without form and void.” This is what he says here, but in inverse order. They will indeed build, but for destruction, while the inhabitants meanwhile are working to build it up. This is what we see today among the Jews, who are anxiously plying their trade as carpenters with plummet and line to preserve their teaching. But that plummet is without form and that line will be void, that is, all the endeavors of that people will be completely void and useless. They will sweat and toil in vain. (Luther)

PLUMP LINE – Normally used in construction. Here, however, the Lord uses it to measure Edom’s chaos and destruction (cf Is. 28:17) (TLSB)

34:12 NOBLES WILL HAVE NOTHING – They will be princes without territory, as the king of Lorraine calls himself King of Jerusalem; that is, the nobles will be called “No Kingdom There.” They will be known as “Lords of No Place.” The prophet ridicules their hope, by means of which they cling to the divine promises and await their fulfillment in vain. They say, “I shall have a kingdom there,” but there the prophet ridicules their hope, saying: “Yes, indeed, Lords of No Place!” (Luther)

Edom elected its rulers, but now there will be no one left to declare a king or kingdom. (TLSB)

34:13 *Thorns ... nettles.* Cf. 7:24–25. (CSB)

34:14 *Desert creatures ... hyenas.* See 13:21–22. (CSB)

We would call them martens. *Hyena*, or jackal. ד'יִּזְ are winged wild animals, ד'יִּזְ are ground animals. We could not arrive at the true meaning of these animals, for even in the German language they have various names. Nor can we learn the names of all things from a grammar. In any case, by means of these animals we are to understand the utter desolation of the land. (Luther)

wild goats. Sometimes connected with demons (see note on 13:21) (CSB)

night creatures. Outside the Bible a related Semitic word refers to a “night demon.” (CSB)

רְעִיָּשׁ is a goblin, or field demon. The word denotes a hairy creature, like fauns or satyrs, or what we Germans call “goblins,” like our house spirits, likenesses of men and of devils. *There shall the night hag alight*. I have translated it “porcupine.” They are witches and night hags who at night give suck to children and inflict injury on babies, as the prophet says, “Even the night hags give the breast” (Lam. 4:3). By allegory: All ungodly teachers are witches and night hags, goblins, who perplex us with false milk and teaching. They are male and female demons who cause nightmares; goblins, devils of all kinds that lie in wait for us during the night. (Luther)

The ESV has night “bird.” Word occurs only here. Perhaps the owl (v. 15), which frequents waste places. In rabbinic lore, it is the name of a female demon. (TLSB)

34:15 *owl ... falcons*. Ceremonially unclean (see v. 11 and note; Dt 14:13, 15–17). (CSB)

In a Greek proverb eggs denote “disciples.” The bad egg of a bad raven. So here the owl’s eggs are wild, destructive, and hermitic disciples, not tamed like chickens. Ungodly teachers will produce ungodly disciples. (Luther)

Birds of prey, emblems of wildness. (TLSB)

34:16 *scroll*. After the destruction of Edom, people will read this prophecy given by Isaiah. (CSB)

The ESV has “Book of the Lord.” Record of lives; described in Ps. 40:7; 139:16; Dn7:10; Mal 3:16; Rev 20:12. The Lord’s decision endures forever, and Scripture will enable future generations to compare prophecy and fulfillment. (TLSB)

these. The creatures just listed. (CSB)

NONE...WILL LACK HER MATE – Just as birds will be mated, so Isaiah’s prophecies and their fulfillment will be joined. (TLSB)

SPIRIT WILL GATHER THEM IN – The Spirit fulfills the judgments of God just as He watches over the smallest of His creatures. (TLSB)

34:17 *allots their portions.* God will give the creatures of vv. 11, 13–15 clear title to the land of Edom. (CSB)

That is, He Himself has thus set the limits for the unbelievers and those who oppose His Word, and their lot has already been predetermined. Their reward will follow in line with their work. Thou art righteous, O Lord, who dost retaliate for all things. Let those who refuse to listen to God, the truth, etc. listen to Satan and to lies. Those who will not hear their parents belong to the hangman.

THEY WILL POSSESS IT FOREVER – Those curses will be in effect forever, He will dwell before them always. While they wait for a blessing, a curse will come to them and stay with them, because God has cast such a lot for them, so that they may be despoiled and made desolate by ungodly teachers and monsters. Now the following chapter deals with the new kingdom of Christ. (Luther)

Ch 34 The Lord’s judgments on the nations will certainly be fulfilled. This includes His judgments about you and your family. Thanks be to God, our judge declares us “not guilty” on account of Christ. His sure Word of the Gospel saves us and makes us a new creation. • Lord, create in me respect for Your judgments and love for Your Book, which records my salvation through Jesus. Fulfill this Word of mercy for me and my family. Amen. (TLSB)