

Title: Isaiah Session 7: Isaiah Chapters 13 and 14

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt focuses on Isaiah chapters 13 and 14, introducing the section on "Lessons in Trust" (chapters 13–35) where God teaches His people not to rely on pagan nations. Dr. Oswalt outlines how the oracles against the nations begin with Babylon, symbolizing universal human pride, arrogance, and ultimate divine judgment. The session details the dramatic structure of the mocking lament in Chapter 14, where the prideful king is brought down from the heights of self-exaltation to the humiliation of Sheol and an unburied grave. Through these passages, the lecture highlights the futility of human self-deification and the enduring compassion of God toward His covenant people.

Outline

I. Introduction and Structural Placement

- **A. FAS Commercials and Opening Prayer**
 - 1. Practical appeal for volunteer services and donations to defray FAS expenses (lights, heat, coffee)
 - 2. Prayer of thanksgiving for Christ's voluntary humility and self-sacrifice to reveal the Father
 - 3. Supplication to resist pride, lay down lives for others, and apply the Book of Isaiah to life
- **B. "Lessons in Trust" (Chapters 13–35)**
 - 1. King Ahaz's failure to trust God in chapters 7–12 leads to the next major section
 - 2. This section acts as "programmed learning" to prepare the nation for their next exam
 - 3. Hezekiah takes the second trust exam in chapters 36–39
 - 4. Four sub-divisions: Chapters 13–23 (oracles against nations), 24–27, 28–33, and 34–35
- **C. Oracles Against the Nations in Biblical Prophecy**
 - 1. Presence of national oracles in all major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and specific minor prophets (Nahum, Obadiah)
 - 2. Structural variations: Ezekiel places them in the middle of his book after the fall of Jerusalem begins, transitioning to restoration

- 3. Isaiah's placement: Placed at the beginning of the trust lessons to warn Judah against trusting the nations, who are themselves under judgment and destined to worship Yahweh

II. The Oracle Against Babylon: Universal Judgment (Isaiah 13:1–16)

- **A. Geopolitical and Historical Context of Babylon**
 - 1. Babylon was not an active threat to Judah in Isaiah's immediate lifetime (735–701 BC) while under Assyrian hegemony
 - 2. Babylon represents the wealthiest, most sophisticated, and cosmopolitan center of the empire
 - 3. Babylon's historical role as Judah's ultimate destroyer (586 BC) and its constant attempts to recruit rebellion partners (which entangles Hezekiah in chapters 38–39)
- **B. The Universal Scope of the Language**
 - 1. Babylon is not explicitly named in the first 16 verses
 - 2. Language describes cosmic, universal devastation ("destroy the whole earth," stars and sun failing to give light)
 - 3. Establishing that the God of Israel is the sovereign Lord of the entire world, requiring faith when believers are a minority
- **C. The Sins Indicted: Pride, Arrogance, and Ruthlessness**
 - 1. Pride as the root of all sin: the attempt to declare "I am God" and refuse to bow down to any higher authority
 - 2. True self-respect versus pride: pride attempts to manufacture worth internally, while true self-respect is derived externally from being made in God's image and valued through Christ's death

III. The Desolation of Babylon and Divine Compassion (Isaiah 13:17–14:4)

- **A. The Instrument of Medes (13:17–19)**
 - 1. Historical role of the Medes (modern Iran) in first partnering with Babylon to overthrow Assyria (605 BC), and later partnering with Persia to overthrow Babylon (539 BC)
 - 2. Scholarly debates regarding predictive prophecy and Isaiah's authorship
- **B. Total Desolation and Scavenger Habitations (13:20–22)**
 - 1. Complete abandonment of the glorious city of Babylon, lost to history for 1,500 years until the late 1800s
 - 2. Graphic imagery of desert scavengers (hyenas, jackals, owls, ostriches) occupying the ruined palaces
- **C. The Insert of Grace and Compassion (14:1–4)**
 - 1. Structural placement: an oasis of hope reminding Judah that the nations they fear will ultimately serve them
 - 2. Trusting the worldly glory of the nations is futile because their significance equals zero, whereas God will compassionately restore His people from exile

IV. The Mocking Lament Against the King of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4–23)

- **A. Poetic Form and Sarcastic Tone**
 - 1. Written in the classic 3-2 "limping meter" of a Hebrew funeral lament
 - 2. Reverses the mournful expectations of a lament into a sarcastic song of celebration over the tyrant's death
- **B. Clarification on Satan and "Lucifer"**
 - 1. Critiquing the common interpretation that this text describes the fall of Satan
 - 2. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* popularized the name "Lucifer" from the Latin translation of verse 12
 - 3. The text primarily focuses on the fall of creaturely pride, represented by an earthly king, though it includes Satan as the ultimate exemplar of pride
- **C. The Four Stanzas of the Lament**
 - 1. Stanza 1: Earth Rejoices (14:4–8) — The land is at peace, and the cut-down forests of Lebanon sing because the destroyer is gone
 - 2. Stanza 2: Hell Welcomes (14:9–11) — Sheol is stirred up to meet the king; deceased world rulers mock his weakness, and his grand shroud is replaced by maggots and worms
 - 3. Stanza 3: Heaven Falls (14:12–14) — The "day-star, son of the dawn" is cast down; uses ancient Canaanite mythological language (like the upstart god seeking Baal's throne) to depict the hubris of wanting to be like the Most High
 - 4. Stanza 4: Earth Humiliates (14:15–21) — The king's body lies unburied and trampled on the battlefield, deprived of an honorable grave and cut off from offspring
- **D. The Theological Axiom**
 - 1. Exalting oneself inevitably results in humiliation, as humanity cannot compete with God
 - 2. Speculation on historical connections to the Assyrian Emperor Sargon, who was killed in battle in 705 BC

V. Oracles Against Assyria and Philistia (Isaiah 14:24–32)

- **A. Return to the Immediate Crisis**
 - 1. The focus shifts from the long-term enemy (Babylon) back to the present danger (Assyria)
 - 2. God's promise to break the Assyrian yoke on His land
- **B. Judgment on Nearby Neighbors**
 - 1. Oracle against Philistia warning them not to rejoice in the breaking of the rod, for a greater threat is coming
 - 2. Anticipating the coverage of Moab in the subsequent session