

Isaiah Session 8: Don't Trust the Nations (Isaiah 14:24–16:14)

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 14 through 16, continuing the "Lessons in Trust" division spanning chapters 13 to 35. The session transitions from the symbolic universal judgment of Babylon to the specific historical threats faced by Judah in Isaiah's own day, including Assyria, Philistia, and Moab. Dr. Oswalt unpacks key theological concepts, such as the unique covenantal meaning of the Hebrew word Hesed and the restoration of divine order through Mishpat, promising a future righteous king in the humble "tent of David." Ultimately, the lecture highlights how pride leads to the inevitable destruction of these nations, reinforcing the central message that true security is found in God alone rather than worldly alliances.

Outline

- **I. Introduction and Structural Placement (Chapters 13–35)**
 - A. Opening Prayer and Session Background
 - 1. Thanksgiving for the voluntary humility of Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the beauty and order of creation.
 - 2. Commemoration of Asbury University, Asbury Seminary, and the Francis Asbury Society in Wilmore, Kentucky.
 - B. "Lessons in Trust" Framework
 - 1. King Ahaz's failure to trust God in Chapters 7–12 prompts this diagnostic section on the necessity of faith.
 - 2. Chapter 6 stands as the book's structural blueprint: demonstrating human inability, a transcendent vision of God, a realistic vision of self, and cleansing grace.
 - 3. Chapters 13–23 serve as a unified warning: do not place ultimate security in human alliances or foreign nations.
 - C. The Transition from Wide-Angle to Narrow-Angle
 - 1. Babylon functions as the wide-angle, cosmic symbol of human glory, self-deification, and inevitable downfall.
 - 2. Chapters 14:24 to 17:11 transition to a narrow-angle view, focusing on the specific localized nations that threatened Judah during Isaiah's career (Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Israel).

- **II. The Concrete Mesopotamian Threat: Assyria (Isaiah 14:24–27)**

- A. The Literary Absence of "Oracle" (Burden)
 - 1. Unlike Babylon (13:1) and Philistia (14:28), Chapter 14:24 introduces the message against Assyria without a formal "Oracle" heading.
 - 2. Indicates that Assyria is the immediate, historical embodiment of the Mesopotamian superpower represented universally by Babylon.
- B. Divine Sovereignty and the Vocabulary of Purpose
 - 1. The repetition of the words "purposed" and "planned" (five and six times) emphasizes that history is fully controlled by God.
 - 2. God actively orchestrates international movements to discipline His people and maneuver them to a place of absolute dependence on Him.
- C. The Absolute Promise of Deliverance (14:25)
 - 1. God promises to break the Assyrian in His land and trample him on His mountains, removing their heavy burden from Judah's shoulders.
 - 2. Fulfilled historically in Chapter 37:36–38, where Sennacherib's army of 185,000 is supernaturally decimated in a single night outside Jerusalem.
- D. The Raised Fist vs. the Outstretched Hand
 - 1. The stretched-out hand (14:26–27) mirrors the raised fist of judgment seen in 10:4 ("his hand is stretched out still").
 - 2. In contrast, this same divine hand is rolled up as an arm of redemption in the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

- **III. The Oracle Against Philistia (Isaiah 14:28–32)**

- A. Historical Context and Date
 - 1. Received in the year King Ahaz died (approximately 716 BC).
 - 2. Philistia was a constant geopolitical threat, persistently encroaching upon Judah's lowlands.
- B. Warning Against False Rejoicing
 - 1. Philistia is warned not to celebrate the death of the Judean king ("the rod that struck you is broken").
 - 2. A far deadlier threat (an adder or flying fiery serpent) will arise to bring total famine and destruction.
- C. Divergent Destinies: Philistia vs. Judah
 - 1. Philistia faces complete eradication and famine (the Philistine people have ceased to exist as a distinct ethnic group).
 - 2. Judah is promised refuge: "The Lord has founded Zion, and in her, the afflicted of his people will find refuge."
 - 3. Political Application: George Washington's historical warning to avoid entangling alliances reflects this biblical prohibition against relying on temporary nations.

- **IV. The Oracle Against Moab: Refugee Tears and Bitter Waters (Isaiah 15:1–9)**
 - A. The Intimate yet Hostile Relationship
 - 1. Moab and Judah shared a tenuous relationship, marked by centuries of hostility interspersed with guarded friendship (e.g., Ruth).
 - 2. Geographically located on the east side of the Dead Sea, historically encroaching upon Reuben's allotment.
 - B. The Overwhelming Tone of Grief
 - 1. The poem is characterized by wailing, weeping, crying out, and melting in tears.
 - 2. The literary progression of cities moves from north to south, mapping the path of Moabite refugees fleeing the incoming Assyrian armies along the King's Highway.
 - 3. Refugees desperately flee with their meager possessions, prompting theological reflections on the vanity of material accumulation (parallel to the horrors of the European Thirty Years' War).
 - C. Extreme Desolation (15:9)
 - 1. The waters of Dibon run red with the blood of the slaughtered.
 - 2. A "lion" is promised to pursue and devour even the surviving remnant that attempts to escape to the south.
- **V. The Outcasts' Plea and the Humble Throne (Isaiah 16:1–5)**
 - A. Seeking Refuge in Mount Zion
 - 1. Fleeing Moabites send tribute ("a lamb") from Sela in the desert to the ruler on Mount Zion.
 - 2. Comparing Moabite daughters to scattered birds at the fords of the Arnon, begging Judah's ruler for shelter and justice.
 - B. The Threefold Character of the Messianic King (16:5)
 - 1. A throne will be established in steadfast love (Hesed) — the passionate, unmerited, covenantal devotion of a superior to an inferior.
 - 2. He will rule with faithfulness and truth (emeth), demonstrating relational reliability.
 - 3. The King will actively administer Mishpat (divine order) and execute swift righteousness (Tzedakah).
 - C. The Significance of the "Tent of David"
 - 1. The ruler sits in the "tent" of David rather than a majestic palace or house (echoing Amos 9:11).
 - 2. Symbolizes a lack of worldly royal trappings, emphasizing humility, mobility, and accessibility (foreshadowed by Christ's birth in a stable).
- **VI. The Pride of Moab and the Weeping Creator (Isaiah 16:6–14)**
 - A. The Pride and Falsehood of Moab (16:6)
 - 1. Moab's excessive pride, arrogance, and insolence are thoroughly denounced.

- 2. Self-exaltation against God is self-defeating, illustrated by a fist punching through glass—the resulting wound is a natural consequence of the cosmic design.
- B. Silenced Joy and the Metaphor of the Vine (16:7–10)
 - 1. Moab's flourishing economy, symbolized by thriving vineyards, is utterly ruined.
 - 2. Near Eastern wine, traditionally a source of harvest joy and laughter, is cut off; the shouting of the grape-treaders is completely silenced.
- C. The Divine Expression of Grief (16:9–11)
 - 1. The intense use of first-person pronouns ("I weep," "my inner parts moan like a lyre") reveals deep mourning over Moab.
 - 2. Demonstrates either the prophet's personal sorrow for a close neighbor or God's own grief for His creatures (descended from Lot).
- D. The Futility of Idolatry and the Prophetic Clock (16:12–14)
 - 1. Moab exhausts itself in prayer at high places to gods that cannot deliver (such as Bangalore's elephant goddess makers).
 - 2. Specific predictive prophecy: "In three years, like the years of a hired worker," Moab's glory will be brought low.
 - 3. Proves that Yahweh stands outside the cycles of nature, controlling the exact timing of future history.
- **VII. Contemporary Application and the Church**
 - A. Distinguishing Israel from Modern Nations
 - 1. Ancient Israel finds its true one-to-one equivalent in the global Church, not any modern political state.
 - 2. Warning against "civil religion" where the Church allows itself to be pocketed by worldly power brokers.
 - B. The Pitfall of Enforced Morality
 - 1. Attempting to enforce Christian morality on a secular or pagan nation (such as the historical failure of Prohibition) can generate societal backlash and unintended criminal elements.
 - 2. The Church must depend strictly on God for its ultimate security, rather than the temporary levers of human political power.