

Title: Isaiah Session 18: Trust, Yes But (Isaiah Chapters 36 and 37)

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 36 and 37, detailing the historical climax of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC. The session explores the psychological warfare of the Rabshakeh, who attempts to undermine King Hezekiah's trust in God, Egypt, and Judah's own military defenses. Dr. Oswalt outlines Hezekiah's righteous response of self-humiliation, repentance, and prayer, which stands in stark contrast to his father Ahaz's previous refusal to trust. Ultimately, the lecture highlights God's sovereign deliverance of Jerusalem through the supernatural decimation of the Assyrian army, proving that Yahweh alone is the living Creator of the universe.

Outline

I. Introduction and Structural Context

- **Opening and Prayer:** A prayer of rejoicing in God's presence as the author of our lives, thanking Him for abundant life through Christ and asking the Holy Spirit to apply the Word to our hearts.
- **Review of the Overarching Structure of Isaiah:**
 1. Chapters 1-6: The Call to Servanthood. The first five chapters present the problem of a rebellious, broken nation, and Chapter 6 offers the call of Isaiah as the theological solution.
 2. Chapters 7-39: Trust as the absolute basis of servanthood.
 3. Chapters 7-12: The 'No Trust' scenario under King Ahaz and its implications.
 4. Chapters 13-35: 'Lessons in Trust' (programmed learning emphasizing: do not trust the nations or human power, but trust God).
 5. Chapters 36-39: 'Trust, Yes But' (historical testing envelope for the lessons learned).

II. Geopolitical and Historical Setting of the Assyrian Siege (~701 BC)

- **The Envelope Location:** The Rabshakeh stands at the exact same physical spot (the conduit of the upper pool) where Isaiah challenged Ahaz to trust God 35 years prior (~735 BC), acting as a literary envelope highlighting the results of trust.
- **The Consequence of Ahaz's Unbelief:** Because Ahaz put his trust in Assyria, Isaiah's past warning is fulfilled: the Assyrian army floods the land 'up to the neck' (nose).

- **The Geopolitical Conquest:**

1. Assyria's ultimate goal is Egypt; they march down the coast road through Philistia.
2. To secure their rear and protect supply lines from Judean raids, the Assyrians must mop up Judah.
3. Sennacherib captures 46 fortified cities in Judah, leaving only two remaining: Lachish (under siege) and Jerusalem.
4. The cost of a siege: Keeping an army in place year-round is highly expensive. The Assyrians send the Rabshakeh (third in command) to negotiate a cost-free surrender.

III. The Rabshakeh's Speech and Psychological Warfare (Isaiah 36)

- **The Central Theme of Trust:** The words for 'trust' appear nine times (six explicit occurrences) in the Rabshakeh's speech, defining the central theological crisis.
- **The Five False Trusts Ridiculed by the Rabshakeh:**
 1. Egypt: Described as a splintered reed that will pierce and stab the hand of any man who leans on it.
 2. Strategic and military power: Dismissed as 'mere words' that cannot win a war.
 3. Yahweh: The Rabshakeh falsely claims Yahweh is angry because Hezekiah tore down His high places/local churches. Dr. Oswalt explains that local high places promoted regionalized worship (e.g., 'Yahweh of Wilmore' vs. 'Yahweh of Nicholasville'), which Deuteronomy forbids. Hezekiah did exactly the right thing, but the Assyrians do not understand biblical religion.
 4. Cavalry/Hardware: He mockingly offers to give Hezekiah 2,000 horses if Judah can even find enough riders for them.
 5. Divine mandate: He claims that Yahweh Himself commanded Assyria to march and destroy Jerusalem.
- **The Language of Siege:** Judah's advisors beg the Rabshakeh to speak in Aramaic (the diplomatic language/lingua franca), but he refuses and shouts in Hebrew to terrorize the people on the wall, warning of the graphic horrors of prolonged siege (eating dung and drinking urine).
- **The Strategy of Demoralization:**
 1. He never refers to Hezekiah as 'King,' only as 'Hezekiah,' while exalting Sennacherib as 'the great king.'
 2. He promises a false paradise under Assyrian exile where everyone has their own vine and fig tree.
- **The Ultimate Blasphemy:** He claims that no god has ever delivered their land from Assyria. Pointing to Samaria's golden bulls, he reduces Yahweh to just another helpless local idol, framing the conflict as a duel between the Assyrian emperor and Jerusalem's God.

IV. Hezekiah's Repentance and Prophecy of Deliverance (Isaiah 37:1-20)

- **Hezekiah's Model Response to Crisis:**
 1. Humbles himself (tearing clothes and putting on sackcloth).
 2. Enters the house of the Lord to pray.
 3. Consults with God's prophet, Isaiah. (Note: Shebna has been demoted to secretary, and Eliakim is now prime minister, exactly as Chapter 22 prophesied).

- **The Metaphor of the Birth Crisis:** 'Children have come to the point of birth and there's no strength to bring them forth'—representing complete human helplessness requiring supernatural salvation.
- **The Living God vs. Dead Idols:** The pagan gods are lifeless because they are made by human hands; whatever we construct to save ourselves will fail. Only the 'I Am' is the self-existent Living God who hears, sees, and acts.
- **Isaiah's Prophetic Reassurance:** Isaiah tells Hezekiah not to fear the 'boys' (young men) of the Assyrian king. God will put a spirit in him so he hears a rumor and returns to his own land, where he will fall by the sword. (Fulfillment: 19 years later, Sennacherib is assassinated by his own sons in the temple of his god).
- **Hezekiah's Prayer in the Temple:** Hezekiah spreads the threatening letter before Yahweh, addressing Him as the 'Lord of Hosts' (ruler of heaven's armies) and 'God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim.'
- **The Correct Motivation:** He does not pray for rescue because Judah deserves it, but 'so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are Lord,' matching the global mission of Chapter 2.

V. The Exaltation of Yahweh and Supernatural Deliverance (Isaiah 37:21-38)

- **The Mockery of the Virgin Daughter of Zion:** The helpless virgin daughter of Jerusalem mocks the giant invader because her protector is the Holy One of Israel. God promises to put a hook in Sennacherib's nose and a bit in his mouth to drag him back.
- **The Ultimate Sin:** Haughtiness, pride, and human self-exaltation. Attempting to lower God and elevate the creature results in profound meaninglessness.
- **The Sovereign Mix:** The mystery of human free will and divine sovereignty. The Assyrians are not puppets, yet their free choices conform perfectly to God's eternal plans determined 'long ago' (Chapter 14 parallel).
- **The Supernatural Deliverance:**
 1. The Angel of the Lord kills 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in their camp in a single night.
 2. Sennacherib retreats immediately to Nineveh and never campaigns in the West again.
- **Historical Corroboration (Sennacherib's Annals):** Sennacherib's own surviving stone annals boast of shutting up Hezekiah 'like a bird in a cage' but conspicuously fail to claim the capture of Jerusalem, confirming the biblical narrative.
- **Climax of Trust:** Chapters 36 and 37 represent the absolute climax of chapters 1–37, proving that Yahweh can be fully trusted—not just through massive power, but through His willingness to lay down His own life for us on the cross.