

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 5, Audio Overview Podcast

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Welcome to another Deep Dive, and today we're going to be journeying back to 735 B.C. with the prophet Isaiah, specifically chapters 7 and 8. And I think it'll be helpful if our listeners can imagine a young King Ahaz of Judah facing a pretty terrifying situation. Israel and Syria are pressuring him into an alliance against the powerful Assyrian Empire. Yeah, the weight of that decision must have been just crushing.

The Assyrians were notorious for their ruthlessness. I mean, choosing the wrong side could mean total devastation for Judah. Absolutely.

And right in the heart of this crisis, God sends Isaiah with a message to Ahaz. And what I think is really interesting here is that it's not a straightforward military strategy or a call to arms. It's something much deeper, a challenge to trust in God's power and promises instead of panicking and making desperate alliances.

Absolutely. Isaiah's message hinges on that fundamental tension, God's sovereignty versus human free will. It's a concept that continues to fascinate and challenge us even today.

Yeah, no kidding. Thousands of years later. And that tension really comes to life in this encounter between Isaiah and Ahaz.

God tells Isaiah to meet Ahaz at a very specific spot, the conduit of the upper pool. Right. What I think is striking here is that 34 years later, the Assyrian army demands Jerusalem's surrender at that exact location.

Wow. It's like God subtly hinting, this place, this moment is significant. Watch how my plan unfolds.

It certainly sends chills down your spine, doesn't it? It really emphasizes the vastness of God's plan operating on a timeframe far beyond our human comprehension. And the drama doesn't stop there. God offers Ahaz a sign, any sign he desires, as grand as heaven or as deep as Sheol to prove his faithfulness.

Now for the ancient Hebrews, Sheol represented the realm of the dead, the ultimate unknown. It's almost like God is saying, "My power transcends even the boundaries of life and death. Ask for anything, and I'll show you I'm trustworthy."

Yet Ahaz declines. On the surface, his refusal to test God might sound pious, but if we dig a bit deeper, we see the fear lurking beneath this supposed piety. He had already secured a deal with Assyria and was terrified of jeopardizing it.

So he's putting his faith in human strategy rather than divine intervention. I wonder, was this a genuine act of faith or just a thinly veiled attempt to control the situation? It's certainly a question that resonates with us today. How often do we, like Ahaz, lean on our

own understanding, our own plans when faced with uncertainty? Do we truly surrender to God's will or are we just playing at faith while clinging to our perceived control? Right.

And even though Ahaz refuses the sign, God offers one anyway. This is where we encounter the famous prophecy about Immanuel. A maiden will conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Immanuel, a seemingly straightforward declaration, yet it reverberates through history.

With both a short-term and a long-term fulfillment. The short-term fulfillment is quite remarkable. Within 13 years, both Israel and Syria, the very nations that had Ahaz trembling in his sandals, were conquered by the Assyrians, exactly as Isaiah had foretold.

That short-term fulfillment is fascinating in itself. Yeah. But it makes you wonder what it would have been like to live in that time, to witness this seemingly impossible prophecy coming true.

Right. How might that have shaped their understanding of the long-term implications, the arrival of Jesus, the ultimate Immanuel? It is intriguing to imagine the ripple effect of that experience. Yeah.

Did they fully grasp the magnitude of what they were witnessing? Right. How did it alter their perception of God's power and his involvement in their lives? And speaking of prophecy and fulfillment, the story takes another fascinating turn. Isaiah has his own son, and the child's name is a prophecy in itself, Mahar Shalal Heshbaz.

Wow. Which literally means the spoil speeds, the prey hastens. Goodness gracious.

Can you imagine calling your child that today? It certainly wouldn't be a top pick for a baby name in the 21st century. No. But back then it was a powerful declaration, a stark reminder that the judgment against Israel and Syria would be swift and decisive.

And a very direct, in-your-face kind of prophecy, not subtle at all. Right. But amidst this warning, God also gives Isaiah a personal message.

Okay. Don't give in to the fear and anxiety that grips the people. It's fascinating how Isaiah portrays the people's mindset.

Yeah. They're obsessed with whispers of doom and conspiracy theories. Yeah.

They're grasping at straws, desperate for any semblance of control in a world that feels like it's falling apart. So much of that resonates with our own world today. Absolutely.

Constant negativity in the news cycle, anxieties around global events. It's easy to fall into the same trap of fear and worry. Absolutely.

But amidst this pervasive anxiety, Isaiah delivers a powerful antidote. What's that? The Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. In other words, shift your focus from the chaos to the one who holds all things together.

Right. The one who is ultimately in control. It's a call to choose faith over fear.

Yes. Trust over suspicion. To find our sanctuary, not in fleeting human strategies, but in the enduring power of God.

And that brings us to a crucial point in Isaiah's message. Okay. It's a message with two sides.

Right. God will be a sanctuary for those who trust in him. Okay.

But he will also be a snare to those who reject him. It's a powerful image, isn't it? Yeah. The contrast between finding safety in a sanctuary versus being trapped in a snare.

Right. And it speaks to something deeper. What we choose to put our faith in has profound consequences.

It shapes our lives for better or worse. This raises a vital question for all of us. Okay.

Where do we find our security? Yeah. Our own cleverness, our possessions, our social standing. Right.

Or do we dare to trust in something bigger? Yeah. Something more lasting. It's a question worth pondering.

What will you choose as your sanctuary? That idea of choosing our sanctuary really struck a chord with me. Yeah. You know, it's so easy to get caught up in the chaos of the world and forget where true security lies.

It's a constant battle, isn't it? Yeah. But Isaiah gives us this powerful reminder that trusting in anything other than God is like walking through a dense forest blindfolded. Yeah.

You're bound to stumble into a snare, trapped by your own choices. And those consequences, as we see with Ahaz, can be devastating. Yeah.

Not just for ourselves, but for those around us. You know, this isn't just about ancient kings and empires anymore. Right.

It's about recognizing those same patterns of fear and misplaced trust in our own lives. Absolutely. We may not face literal Assyrians.

Right. But we all encounter situations where fear tempts us to compromise our faith. Yeah.

To choose what seems safe over what we know is right. There's another, uh, subtle detail in Isaiah 7 that I find fascinating. Okay.

It's when God invites Ahaz to ask for a sign, deep as Sheol or high as heaven. It's not just hyperbole. Yeah.

It's this profound statement about the scope of God's power. You're right. That imagery is key.

By invoking Sheol, the realm of the dead, God is essentially saying, my power extends beyond what you can see, beyond even the boundaries of life and death. I hold the entire

universe in my hands. It's a powerful reminder that no matter how dire our circumstances may seem, we serve a God who is bigger than any challenge we face.

Right. And it connects beautifully with his concept of Emmanuel, God with us. Exactly.

It's not just this comforting phrase. It's a declaration of God's active presence, working in the midst of our struggles, even when we can't see it. And that brings us back to the idea of the short-term and long-term fulfillment of the Emmanuel prophecy.

It's not just a linear progression, is it? They're intertwined, each reflecting the other. I completely agree. Yeah.

The short-term fulfillment, the defeat of Ahaz's enemies, is a tangible, historical event, but it also points to something much greater, a foreshadowing of God's ultimate plan of redemption through Jesus. It's like God is saying, if I can deliver you from this immediate crisis, imagine what I can do in the grand scheme of things. Yeah.

It's a taste of his redemptive power, a glimpse of the victory that awaits those who trust in him. Speaking of trust, let's shift our focus to Isaiah's son, Marshal Al-Ashbaz, the boy with the unforgettable name. As we mentioned, his name is a prophecy in itself, a declaration that judgment is coming, but there's an intriguing detail in chapter eight that adds another layer to the story.

Okay. All ears. Tell me more.

Isaiah tells us he went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. God instructs him to name the child Marshal Al-Ashbaz. Now the identity of this prophetess is shrouded in mystery.

It's like a hidden puzzle within the larger narrative. Yeah. Is this Isaiah's wife, another woman known for her prophetic gifts? Right.

The text leaves it open to interpretation. That ambiguity is intriguing, isn't it? It invites us to delve deeper. To consider the various possibilities.

Yeah. But regardless of who she is, the focus remains on the child and the message he embodies. Right.

He's a living, breathing prophecy, a sign of God's power and judgment. It's a powerful image. Yeah.

This child with a name that practically shouts prophecy walking among them. Right. It underscores that God can work through anyone, even a child, to achieve his purposes.

And that theme of God's sovereignty weaves throughout these chapters. He's orchestrating events, weaving together seemingly disparate threads into a grand tapestry that we can only partially glimpse. But that tapestry takes a darker turn as we move further into chapter eight.

Okay. God warns Isaiah not to follow the path of the people who are consumed by fear and anxiety, convinced that the world is on the verge of collapse. Their fear is palpable.

They're resorting to mediums, necromancers, anyone who claims to have special knowledge, desperately seeking some kind of certainty in a world that feels chaotic and unpredictable. It's almost like they're so afraid of what's coming that they're turning away from the true source of hope and security. Exactly.

And Isaiah confronts this head-on. He challenges their misplaced trust, asking, should not a people inquire of their God? Right. Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? Wow.

It's a poignant question that resonates even today. It makes you pause and reflect: where do we turn when fear grips us? Yeah. Do we seek answers in the whispers of doubt and despair or do we turn to the one who holds the answers? Right.

The one who offers true peace. That's the choice we all face, isn't it? Yeah. Will we allow fear to dictate our actions or will we choose to anchor ourselves in God's unshakable truth? That choice between fear and faith, that's really at the heart of Isaiah's message.

Yeah. It's a choice with lasting consequences, as we see in his powerful contrast between a sanctuary and a snare. The imagery is striking, isn't it? A sanctuary, a place of safety, refuge and peace and a snare.

Yeah. A trap that entangles and restricts. It's a vivid metaphor for the spiritual reality we face.

Right. What we choose to believe, what we choose to build our lives on, ultimately determines our destiny. The people of Judah, as described in Chapter 8, seem to be caught in a snare of their own making.

Yeah. They're stumbling around in darkness, their hearts filled with anger and distrust, even towards God. It's a bleak picture, isn't it? They're described as greatly distressed and hungry, lashing out at their leaders, feeling abandoned and forgotten.

Yeah. It's a chilling reminder of what can happen when fear and cynicism take root in our hearts. It's not hard to see parallels in our own world today, is it? No, not at all.

So much division, so much negativity. Yeah. So many people searching for answers in all the wrong places.

It's a sobering thought. But even in the midst of this darkness, Isaiah offers a glimmer of hope. Okay.

He instructs his disciples to bind up the testimony, seal the teaching, to preserve God's truth for a future generation. They might be ready to hear it. It's a beautiful image, planting seeds of hope in barren ground, trusting that even in the darkest of times, God's truth will find a way to break through.

And that's where I want to leave our listeners today. Okay. With a sense of hope, a sense of possibility.

Yeah. Even when the world feels chaotic and uncertain, God's light is still shining. His truth is still available to those who seek it.

There's one last passage in chapter eight I want to revisit. Okay. It's the powerful declaration, the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy.

Right. The title, Lord of hosts, emphasizes God's power and authority, doesn't it? It does. Lord of hosts literally means Lord of armies.

Okay. It's a reminder that God is the ultimate commander. Right.

The one who holds all power in his hands. Yeah. And to regard him as holy means to acknowledge his supreme authority.

Yeah. To recognize that he is the one we should fear, the one we should trust above all else. It's a radical shift in perspective, isn't it? Yeah.

Instead of being ruled by our fears, our anxieties, our limited understanding, we're called to surrender to the one who knows all, sees all, and holds all things together. That's the essence of Isaiah's message. And it's a message that resonates deeply with our own lives.

Yeah. We've explored themes of trust, fear, faith, judgment, hope, and ultimately God's unwavering presence through it all. It's been an incredible journey through just two chapters of Isaiah.

It really has. But I feel like we've only scratched the surface. There's so much depth and richness to uncover.

As we wrap up this episode, I want to leave you with a question. Okay. Where do you find yourself standing today? Are you clinging to fear and anxiety? Yeah.

Or are you resting in the assurance that God is with you? Right. That he is your sanctuary in the midst of the storm? It's a question that each of us must answer. Yeah.

It's a question that can shape the course of our lives. Right. May you find peace and hope in the unshakable truth of God's word.

Thank you for joining us for this deep dive into the world of Isaiah. It's been my pleasure. Until next time, may you be blessed with courage, wisdom, and an unwavering trust in the God who holds you in the palm of his hand.