

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 6, Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Okay, ready to dive deep into Isaiah today, chapters 9 through 12. Sounds good. We've got excerpts from lectures by Dr. John Oswalt to unpack.

You're a pretty engaging teacher, yeah. Think Assyrian intrigue, a bit of biblical prophecy, and a whole lot of hope. A great combination.

Right. So Dr. Oswalt starts by, you know, really highlighting that shift from the kind of gloom and doom of chapter 8 to the hope that just bursts forth in chapter 9. It's a powerful transition. Yeah.

Yeah. It's like a reminder, even when things seem bleak, God always has the last word. And that word is hope.

Absolutely. And that hope, that hope isn't just some abstract idea. No, not at all.

It's embodied, right, in this promise of a child. Who's going to come and bring an end to war and usher in like this era of peace. And this is where the idea of the Messiah comes in.

The Messiah, right. For those who may not know, the Messiah is that promised deliverer and king in Jewish tradition. Right.

And prophesied to bring about a reign of peace and justice. Okay. So Messiah.

But here's where it gets really, really interesting. Okay. Dr. Oswalt points out that this Messiah is not, you know, some Incredible Hulk-like figure.

Right. Coming in and smashing the enemy. Right.

It's a child. What do you think about that? Kind of an unexpected twist, right? It definitely challenges how we usually picture power and deliverance. Yeah.

And this gets to what Dr. Oswalt calls the real issue. Oh, interesting. That Israel was facing at the time, you see.

It wasn't just Assyria. That was the threat. Right.

Right. But the question of how people, you know, how would they respond to God and his teachings? He even asks this really thought-provoking question to his listeners. How would you react, he says.

If I said that, like, a current geopolitical challenge was actually God's instrument of judgment. It makes you think, right? Yeah. It really does.

It makes you look around and think, how do I see God working in the world? Even when it seems like, you know, things are chaotic and kind of painful. Exactly. Yeah.

And it also brings up this whole role of Assyria in the story. Oh, definitely. Because on the one hand, they're portrayed as, like, God's instrument of judgment against Israel.

But on the other hand, they become a target. Yes. They become targets of God's judgment themselves.

Like, whoa. It's this fascinating dynamic you see throughout history, actually. Yeah.

You've got this powerful nation, right? Yeah. Used to bring about change, but then also facing consequences. It's like they're both the hammer and the anvil at the same time.

Exactly. Then Dr. Oswalt, he takes us deeper into this whole idea of hope coming from this unexpected source. He describes the coming Messiah as a shoot from the stump of Jesse.

I love that image. Powerful, right? Yeah. The Hebrew word for stump there, *netser*, it implies something seemingly dead, like it's insignificant.

And then it unexpectedly bursts forth with this new life. Like it's over. And then it's not.

It's a sprout coming from something that looks totally finished. I mean, that's powerful. So it raises the question, why Jesse? Why not David? I mean, David was, like, the most famous king.

Well, Dr. Oswalt, he offers a few possibilities. Okay. So Jesse was David's father.

Okay. Right. So maybe he represents something, like, even more foundational than the Davidic dynasty.

It could also be like this subtle critique, you know, of those who put their faith in human lineage. Yeah. Instead of, like, trusting in God's promise.

Instead of trusting in God, yeah. What stands out to you in that? It's like God working through the unexpected is seemingly insignificant. Right.

How often do we overlook the stumps in our own lives? You know, those areas that seem, like, barren or hopeless. Hmm. That's a good point.

It's a reminder to pay attention to the subtle ways God might be working. Yeah. You know, those places we wouldn't expect.

Yeah. And this unexpected hope, it connects to how this Messiah will rule, you know, not through military might, but through righteousness, through equity and his weapon. It's not a sword or spear.

It's the rod of his mouth, the power of his word. It's like he's saying true power lies in speaking truth and justice. And that's not just a concept confined to the Bible, right? Absolutely not.

The word holds a lot of significance, I think, across lots of spiritual traditions. Absolutely. Whether it's spoken, written, or even unspoken, there's this inherent power there to shape reality, to create, to transform.

Just think about how a single word can uplift someone or crush their hopes. The power of language is profound. And in this passage, I mean, we see the Messiah's words being this force for healing, for restoration, bringing about this, like, transformed world where enemies coexist peacefully.

And this is where Isaiah's imagery really takes off. Ooh, tell me about it. Wolves living with lambs, lions eating straw alongside oxen, a child leading a leopard.

It's like, what, straight out of a fairy tale, right? It is. It's a glimpse into this world that's completely healed, where harmony's been restored, and not just among humans, but throughout all creation. Wow.

And this transformation, it's directly linked. Yes, to the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord. It's key.

Dr. Oswalt admits he can't wait to see this new earth. Makes you wonder. Makes you wonder.

Yeah. What would it be like to experience that kind of peace and unity, to see creation just flourishing in its fullness? It sparks the imagination. Yeah.

It gives us this glimpse of the incredible potential that's there within creation, waiting to be unlocked. Waiting to be unlocked. And this brings us to this idea of the Messiah as a banner for the nations.

Another powerful image. It is. Right.

Flags, banners. They always hold such significance, culturally, emotionally. They evoke identity, belonging.

They inspire action. And to picture the Messiah as a banner, it makes this powerful statement about his ability to unite people from all nations. Under a common purpose, under one banner.

Exactly. You know, earlier in Isaiah, we saw God using a banner as a signal for judgment, calling enemy nations to destroy Israel. But here, it's different.

The Messiah is a banner. Isaiah himself becomes the banner, calling all nations, not for judgment, but to come and experience God's glory. So it's like he's transforming this symbol of destruction into a beacon of hope.

Exactly. Right? Drawing people in out of the darkness. And what's interesting is this section also touches on the return of the Jewish people to their land.

Yeah. Something Isaiah couldn't have fully foreseen. It's remarkable, isn't it? To see this seemingly impossible event unfolding over millennia.

A real-life fulfillment of prophecy. It makes you wonder, you know, what other seemingly impossible things might be in store? Where might we see God's hand at work in these unexpected ways? It definitely adds a whole new dimension to the idea that God works in mysterious ways. Speaking of working in mysterious ways, Dr. Oswalt then shifts our attention to chapter 12, which is this beautiful hymn, a hymn of thanksgiving for God's deliverance.

Chapter 12, it's such a powerful expression of trust in God's power and salvation. It feels like the emotional climax of this whole section, you know, moving from darkness and judgment to this outpouring of gratitude and hope. Gratitude and hope, yeah.

And within this song of praise, Dr. Oswalt points out the mention of wells of salvation. Wells of salvation. And he asks his listeners, what are those sources of strength and hope in your life? That's a good question for all of us, isn't it? What do we draw on when we need encouragement or a reminder of God's faithfulness? What are our wells of salvation? Yeah.

It's a crucial question, I think, because the chapter ends with this, like, call to action. Okay. You know, urging people to make God's deeds known among the peoples.

Make it known. We're not just called to receive God's blessing. Right.

We're called to share them with the world. Yeah. And that ties back beautifully to the Messiah as a banner for the nations.

Absolutely. It's not just about individual salvation, but about inviting everyone to experience the knowledge and glory of God. It's about participating in God's redemptive plan for all of creation.

Wow. And this brings us back to Dr. Oswalt's point about Assyria being both an instrument and a target of judgment. He even asks his audience, suppose I were to say that's what Islam is for us as Christian America.

How would you respond to that? That is, that's a loaded question. And I think it's important to approach such comparisons with sensitivity and nuance. Right.

I mean, Dr. Oswalt is speaking to a specific audience within a specific historical context. So it's, it's crucial to avoid, you know, making direct equivalences or drawing simplistic conclusions. And it's also worth noting that even calling America a Christian nation is, it's debatable.

Right. We're a nation with a lot of Christians. Right.

But that doesn't necessarily mean we're operating according to God's will or purpose. Exactly. And Dr. Oswalt cautions against assuming that any particular group or nation is automatically God's instrument of judgment.

Yeah. It's a complex issue. Yeah.

No easy answers. But he does make the point that God can use and does use a worse group to punish a better group. Right.

As he did with the Babylonians and Habakkuk. That's, that's a sobering thought. It is.

Yeah. And it challenges us to look beyond our immediate circumstances and how God might be working in the world, even through events that seem, well, unjust or tragic. It's that whole God's ways are not our ways thing.

Yeah. We can't always understand his plans, but we can't, we can trust that he's ultimately working for good. And I think that's where the idea of confidence comes in.

Confidence. Okay. The confidence that Dr. Oswalt mentions.

It's not about knowing all the answers. Yeah. It's about trusting in God's sovereignty, in his goodness.

Even when things are difficult, uncertain. It's like that verse Dr. Oswalt quotes from Isaiah. Don't be afraid.

Yeah. Easier said than done sometimes. Right? But a powerful reminder nonetheless.

And he paints this really vivid picture of the Assyrian army advancing on Jerusalem, describing it with a sense of urgency, you know, inevitability. It's like they're unstoppable. Yeah.

But then, just as they're about to strike, God intervenes, cuts them down like trees in a forest. What a dramatic illustration of God's power, you know, to overcome even the most formidable enemies. Yeah.

And it highlights the contrast between the perceived reality of the situation, right? In this case, the overwhelming power of the Assyrian army versus the ultimate reality, which is that God is in control. It reminds me of that saying: we're not fighting against flesh and blood. Yeah.

But against spiritual forces. Yeah. It's easy to get caught up in the earthly battles.

But ultimately, the spiritual battle is the one that matters most. And to win that battle requires a shift in perspective, I think. Yeah.

You know, a recognition that God is the ultimate source of strength, of hope. It brings us back to that image of the shoot from the stump of Jesse, doesn't it? Hope springing from an unexpected, a seemingly insignificant source. Dr. Oswalt even compares it to God's solution for cosmic evil.

A 15-year-old virgin who's pregnant? A refugee girl. Wow. Talk about unexpected.

Right. It's this powerful reminder that God often works through the weak, the marginalized. It defies human expectations, defies logic.

And then he asked that question again. Oh, yeah. Why Jesse? Why not David? Why Jesse? Right.

He's inviting us to consider the deeper implications, the layers of meaning in the text. He throws out a few possibilities, like Jesse representing something more foundational than the Davidic dynasty, or maybe a subtle critique of those who put their faith in human lineage. Instead of God's promise.

Rather than God's promise. It's fascinating to consider those different layers. And it highlights the richness of scripture, right? The complexity.

Absolutely. Inviting us to engage with the text on multiple levels. Like a treasure hunt.

Yeah. You know, every detail, every word choice, it can point us to a deeper understanding. Of God and his plan.

Exactly. Yeah. And this leads us to the emphasis on the Spirit in chapter 11.

Dr. Oswalt points out how the Messiah is filled with the Spirit of the Lord. Wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. It's like this blueprint for righteous leadership, isn't it? Yeah.

It's not based on brute force or manipulation. No. But on wisdom and compassion guided by the Spirit.

Yeah. He highlights the contrast between how most kings rule with their swords and scepters, and how the Messiah will rule with the rod of his mouth, the power of the word. It's a reminder that true power isn't about domination or control, but about speaking truth and justice into being.

Exactly. And it brings us back to that incredible image of the transformed world. Where predators and prey live together in peace.

Predators and prey. Wow. Dr. Oswalt even quotes C.S. Lewis here, who points out that a lion can't actually chew grass.

So it's not meant to be taken literally. Right. It's this metaphor for the profound transformation that will take place when God's reign of peace is fully established.

When God's reign of peace is fully established, wow. And that transformation, it's directly linked to the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord. Right.

It's a beautiful vision. A world healed, restored, where knowledge of God leads to true peace and harmony. And what's so compelling about this whole section of Isaiah is it's not just about judgment and doom.

Right. It's about this hope that shines even brighter in the darkness. It's a promise of a future transformed by God's grace.

And it invites us to consider where we place our trust. Do we trust in human solutions or in the God who holds all things in his hands? That's a good question. It really makes you think about what it means to live in that knowledge of the Lord.

It's not just about intellectual assent. Right. It's about a deep, transformative understanding that shapes everything.

Yeah. Your whole worldview. Yeah.

And that's where Dr. Oswalt's comparison of Assyria to modern-day challenges gets really interesting. He's not saying that any particular group or nation is inherently evil or destined for judgment. Right.

But he is challenging us to think about how God might be using even difficult or seemingly negative events. For God's purposes. It's like that idea of judgment for the sake of refinement, right? Sometimes we need to go through the fire to come out stronger on the other side.

Exactly. And he even suggests that events like 9-11 might have been a way for God to get our attention, to shake us out of complacency, to force us to confront our priorities. It's definitely a perspective that challenges the usual way of thinking about things, about world events.

And I think it's important to remember that Dr. Oswalt's speaking from a place of faith, not trying to offer a simplistic explanation for complex geopolitical issues. He's inviting us to consider the possibility that God is at work, even in the midst of chaos and suffering. And to trust that he's ultimately working for good.

And that trust, that trust is what allows us to face the future. With confidence. Right.

Even when things seem uncertain. Even scary. Absolutely.

And I love how he connects this back to the Messiah as a banner for the nations. It's not just about escaping judgment. It's about being drawn into something greater, into a community united by the knowledge and love of God.

It's like this beacon of hope, drawing us towards a future filled with peace, justice and understanding. Yeah. That's powerful.

Isaiah managed to weave together these really profound images and ideas. We've got judgment and hope and powerful empires. And then seemingly insignificant shoots all pointing towards this big vision, a transformed world.

It really is captivating. And Dr. Oswalt's lecture really brings those themes to life. And he makes us think about how they're relevant for our own lives.

Absolutely. Remember earlier, we were talking about Assyria being both like an instrument and a target of God's judgment. Well, Dr. Oswalt makes this interesting comparison.

He asks his listeners, how would you respond if I suggested that Islam plays a similar role for America today? It's a thought-provoking question, and I think one that requires really careful consideration. For sure. And it's crucial to remember, Dr. Oswalt is speaking to a specific audience.

Right. Within a particular historical context. Yeah.

And we need to be cautious about drawing direct parallels or making sweeping generalizations. Absolutely. The world's complex, and understanding God's purposes is a lifelong journey.

It is, yeah. But Dr. Oswalt's point, I think, is to challenge our assumptions and to encourage us to look deeper. He's not suggesting that any specific group or nation is inherently evil or destined for judgment.

Right. He's inviting us to consider how God might be using even difficult or seemingly negative events. Right.

To accomplish his purposes. Yeah. It's about recognizing that God's ways are often higher than our ways and that he can bring good out of even the most challenging situations.

Exactly. It's like that refining fire that we talked about earlier. Sometimes we need to go through those intense experiences to come out stronger and more aligned with God's will.

And thinking back to that image, the Assyrian army advancing on Jerusalem, I mean, they seemed unstoppable. Yeah. But then just when all hope seems lost, God intervenes.

Dr. Oswalt describes it so vividly, doesn't he? He does. He paints this picture of this seemingly invincible force being cut down like trees in a forest. It's this powerful reminder that God's power can overcome even the most formidable enemies.

Yeah. It's like he's saying, you know, don't be afraid, I've got this. And that brings us back to that idea of confidence, you know, the kind of confidence that comes from knowing that God is ultimately in control, even when things look bleak.

That's the kind of confidence that we're invited to cultivate. Not a naive optimism, you know, that ignores the realities of the world. But a deep-seated trust in God's sovereignty and goodness, even when we don't fully understand his plans.

It's like the difference between, you know, trying to navigate a stormy sea in a flimsy raft and knowing you've got this solid anchor holding you firm. That's a great analogy. And that anchor, that source of our confidence, it's rooted in the knowledge of God, you know, this deep transformative understanding that shapes our whole worldview.

It's not just about knowing facts about God. It's about experiencing his presence, his love in a tangible way. Yeah.

It's about allowing that knowledge to shape our thoughts, our actions, our relationships. And speaking of relationships, remember that incredible vision, a transformed world where predators and prey live together in peace. It's such a striking image.

And Dr. Oswalt makes this interesting point about it. He quotes C.S. Lewis, you know, who points out that a lion can't actually chew grass. It's a good point.

Yeah. So it's not meant to be taken literally. Right.

It's not about animals suddenly changing their diets. Right. It's about this fundamental transformation of hearts and minds, a world where violence and animosity are replaced with peace and harmony.

And this transformation, as Isaiah emphasizes, is directly linked to the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord. Right. Yeah.

Imagine a world where everyone knows and understands God as he truly is. It's a breathtaking vision. And it makes me wonder what role we can play in bringing it about. How can we be agents of peace and reconciliation in a world that so desperately needs it? It's a question worth pondering, for sure.

And it ties back to that call to action that we talked about earlier, to make God's deeds known among the peoples. To make it known. Yeah.

It's not enough to simply experience God's love and grace for ourselves. We're called to share it with others, to become beacons of hope in a world that often feels, well, dark and uncertain. And how do we do that? Well, perhaps we can, you know, look to the Messiah as our model.

Remember how Isaiah describes him? He's filled with wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. It's like this blueprint for righteous leadership. Yeah.

A, a model for how we can live and interact with others. Yeah. It's about leading with wisdom and compassion, speaking truth with boldness, and acting with justice and mercy.

It's about reflecting God's character in all that we do. And it's about recognizing that true power. It doesn't come from domination or control.

It comes from surrendering to God's will and allowing his spirit to work through us. This reminds me of that powerful image, you know, of the Messiah wielding the rod of his mouth, using the power of his words to bring about justice, to bring about righteousness. It's this reminder that our words have incredible power and we're called to use them for good.

Our words can build up, or they can tear down; you know, they can encourage, or they can discourage. They can bring healing or, or inflict pain. And they can point people towards the hope and the truth found in God's word.

It's a responsibility we should never take lightly. No. As, as we delve deeper into Isaiah, we, we see how God's word, it's this, this source of comfort, of guidance, of inspiration.

Challenges us, convicts us, and ultimately leads us towards a deeper understanding of who God is and what he desires for our lives. Yeah. And it's, it's through engaging with God's word, I think, that we can, we can begin to grasp the depth of his love and the, the vastness of his plans.

Yeah. It's, it's in those moments of quiet reflection, you know, when, when we open our hearts and minds to God's truth, that we discover the true meaning of the knowledge of the Lord. Yeah.

And it's through that knowledge that we find the strength to face life's challenges, the hope to persevere through difficult times, and the wisdom to navigate a world that often feels confusing and chaotic. Isaiah reminds us that even in the midst of darkness and uncertainty, God's light is always shining and his love is always available to those who seek him. And it's through immersing ourselves in his word, in the stories and prophecies of those who came before us, that we discover the richness, the depth of his grace.

And that's what makes studying the Bible so, so rewarding. Right? It's, it's like digging for buried treasure, you know; each verse holds the potential to unlock these new insights and deepen our understanding of God's character. And as we've seen in Isaiah chapters 9 through 12, those insights, you know, they can challenge our assumptions.

They can expand our horizons. Yeah. And, and ultimately lead us towards a life of, of greater purpose.

Yeah. A meaning. It's a, it's a journey of discovery.

It is. And it's one that we're, we're invited to embark on together. And as we, as we continue this deep dive into Isaiah, let's, let's keep our hearts and minds open.

Yeah. You know, to the unexpected ways God might be speaking to us, revealing his truth and, and guiding us towards a future filled with hope and transformation. We've covered a lot of ground in Isaiah chapters 9 through 12, from like the edge of doom to a totally different world, a transformed world.

It's quite a journey. It is. It is.

And Dr. Oswalt, he, he helps us connect all these pieces, like the fall of Assyria and then the Messiah coming. Right. And, and he asks this question about how God uses nations for his purposes.

He even brings up a modern example, asking, how would you feel if I said Islam was God's instrument of judgment on America today? It's a statement that definitely pushes buttons, and it's important to keep in mind the context. He's talking to a specific audience and, and challenging them to think about their assumptions. And it, it sparked a lot of discussion, you know, about how we understand God's actions in the world, especially when those actions involve, you know, suffering or conflict.

It goes back to that idea we keep coming back to. God's ways aren't our ways. Right.

We don't always, we don't always get it, you know, why he allows certain things to happen. But even when we don't understand, we can, we can choose to trust in his goodness, in his sovereignty, like in Habakkuk, where God uses the Babylonians, a nation even more ruthless than Israel, to bring judgment. It's a, it's a reminder that God can, can use anyone, anything to, to accomplish his purposes.

Sometimes he even uses what we might see as bad to bring about good. And that can be hard to accept, especially when we're the ones going through the bad. It can.

Yeah. Maybe that's where faith comes in. It's, it's choosing to trust.

Yeah. Even when we don't have the whole picture. And remembering that his plan, it's not just about me or you, it's about all of creation.

That's why that vision in Isaiah 11 of the world transformed is so powerful. It's like this glimpse of what that redemption could look like. A world where lions and lambs are together, where peace is everywhere, and the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth.

That's beautiful. It really is. So how do we get there? From all the brokenness, all the fighting we see, to that harmonious future.

Well, Isaiah points to the Messiah as the one who will bring in this new era. He's that shoot from the stump of Jesse, a figure who seems small, but will change everything through righteousness and justice. And remember how Dr. Oswalt kept saying this Messiah won't rule with an army, but through the power of his word; that's so different from how most rulers do things.

It is. It makes us think differently about what power and leadership really are. True power, the way Isaiah shows it, is not about being in charge or controlling people.

It's about speaking truth and being just, leading with wisdom and compassion. And it's about, you know, surrendering to God's will, letting his spirit guide us, shape what we say, what we do. The Messiah in Isaiah 11 is filled with the spirit of the Lord: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord.

Those qualities, they're like a blueprint, not just for how to lead, but for how to live. And those qualities, they're not just about being smart or strong. They're about character, you know, building up those good things inside us that, that reflect God.

It's a reminder that real change, it has to start within us. As we let God's Spirit work, we become more like the Messiah. We show his love, his peace, his justice to everyone around us.

That's how we become part of that bigger story of redemption. We're not just sitting back and receiving God's grace. We're actually involved in fixing things and making things right.

And it all starts with knowing the Lord deeply, not just facts, but really understanding him, experiencing his love, his power, and his faithfulness. Like those wells of salvation Dr. Oswalt talked about, we need to find those places in our own lives, places where we can be close to

God, feel his presence, be filled with his spirit. And from those wells, we can share that living water that keeps us going.

It spills over to others. We become like these channels for God's grace, shining his light in a world that really needs it. So we've gone from darkness to light, judgment to hope.

We've seen tiny shoots grow into a picture of a world made new by God. And it all comes down to this. Where do you put your trust? In the power of nations that come and go, or in the God who doesn't change, who holds everything in his hands.

That's a question that will affect how you see everything, how you deal with tough times, how you live out what you're meant to do. Isaiah is calling us to do something. He's inviting us to be part of something much bigger than ourselves, to work with God, to heal and restore everything.

And it all starts with just seeking him. With everything you've got, reading his word, letting his spirit change you from the inside out. That's the kind of deep dive that can really change everything.