

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 8, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to the explainer. So glad you're joining us today because we're going to unpack some absolutely fascinating history and theology. We're diving right into Dr. John Oswalt's incredible lecture on the book of Isaiah, specifically honing in on chapters 14 through 16.

And, you know, at the very heart of this analysis is a core timeless dilemma. Think of it like the ultimate trust fall. It's this massive temptation we all face to rely on human geopolitical powers, military might, and, you know, these temporary alliances, instead of just trusting in a completely sovereign God. It's a struggle that totally defined the ancient world.

But as we're going to see, it still resonates super loudly today. So to get a really good grasp on all of this, here's our roadmap. We're going to cover first the lesson in trust.

Second, the Assyrian threat. Third, the fall of Philistia; fourth, the weeping for Moab; fifth, the tent of David; and finally, trusting God over nations. Let's get right into it. Section one, the lesson in trust.

Going back to the classroom to really set the stage here. We actually have to look back at King Ahaz of Judah. He faced this massive test of faith and, well, frankly, he failed.

He completely refused to trust God during a moment of extreme geopolitical crisis. So what happens is, Isaiah chapters 13 through 35 act as this kind of divine reset; it's basically God saying, all right, timeout, let's go back to the classroom and look at the actual reasons why you should trust me. We're shifting our focus from the wide-angle, highly symbolic view of humanity's pride, which was represented by Babylon, right down to the very specific local, literally on the border threats that Judah was facing.

And this brings up a fundamental question, right? Who do you trust when disaster strikes? Think about it. When your security is threatened, maybe the economy shifts or literally an enemy is at the gates, where does your security lie? Judah was in a state of absolute extreme geopolitical instability. Now, human nature tells us to look around, find the biggest, strongest guy in the room, and hide behind him, right? But Isaiah is stepping up to challenge that very instinct.

So the absolutely crucial point is distilled right here into one simple command: do not trust the nations. Literally do not trust the nations. That is the central overarching thesis of this entire block of Isaiah.

God's direct admonition to Judah is to just stop looking to human empires with all their supposed glory and splendor and pretension to save them. And why? Well, because these nations are deeply flawed. They are completely temporary and ultimately they're subject to God's judgment themselves.

Moving on to section two, the Assyrian threat, the illusion of power. Let's jump into our first specific case study to really see how this plays out on the ground. At the time, Assyria was this terrifying Mesopotamian monster of an empire.

They were an absolutely overwhelming military force. Just sweeping down and consuming everything in their path literally. For Judah, this wasn't some abstract concept.

This was the present physical reality of utter destruction. But here's where Isaiah provides a massive contrast. He contrasts Assyria's illusion of absolute power with the overarching, unstoppable plan of God.

Notice the intense repetition in the text here. God explicitly says, as I have planned, so shall it be. As I have purposed, so shall it stand.

In fact, the words purposed and planned are repeated five or six times in just a really short section of chapter 14. So what's the core message? God is telling the terrified people of Judah, look, Assyria is in my hands. No matter how incredibly mighty they seem, Assyria is merely a tool fulfilling God's purposes.

God's fist is raised. And if you set your purposes against his, well, you're going to run straight into a brick wall. And you know, history gives us a brilliant illustration of exactly what happens when a superpower hits that divine brick wall.

185,000. Let that sink in. That is the staggering number of Assyrian soldiers who were struck down overnight by the angel of the Lord when they besieged Jerusalem.

Up until that moment, Assyria had taken literally every other fortress. It really looked like it was all over for Judah. Game over.

But in a single night, this so-called invincible army was decimated. The Assyrian king, Sennacherib, simply packed up whatever was left and went home. It's just incredible historical proof that the biggest human empires are absolutely no match for the stretched-out hand of God.

All right, section three, the fall of Philistia, the false opportunity. Let's transition over to our second case study. We're moving Southwest right down to the Mediterranean coast.

And here we find Philistia. Now the Philistines and the Judeans, they were historic bitter enemies. They were just constantly fighting over the lowlands between the coast and the hill country.

So when a Judean king died, most likely King Ahaz, Philistia saw this as a massive golden opportunity. They rejoiced. They honestly thought the rod that had been striking them was finally broken.

But Isaiah steps right in and basically says, hold on, not so fast. He outlines two starkly different fates here. Philistia's future is totally sealed, and it is a grim one of famine, destruction, and death.

And honestly, historically, this proved a hundred percent true. The Philistines do not even exist as a people today. In sharp contrast, Judah's future is one where the Lord has founded Zion, making it a secure refuge for the afflicted of his people.

So the big takeaway: trusting in a doomed nation or getting all excited over these false temporary political opportunities- it's a complete trap. Destruction is never God's final word for his people, but for nations built purely on pride, it absolutely is. Now for section four, the weeping for Moab, the futility of wealth.

We're shifting East now, straight across the Dead Sea over to Moab. Now Judah and Moab had a very complex kind of on-again, off-again relationship. Sometimes they were totally hostile, but other times they shared this sort of guarded friendship.

Because of that dynamic, Judah might actually be highly inclined to turn to Moab for help, maybe try to form an alliance, but Isaiah dedicates an entire chapter to showing exactly why relying on Moab is just utterly futile. See, Moab is about to face a completely devastating invasion coming straight down from the North. And Isaiah paints this deeply empathetic, intensely vivid picture of the sheer terror they're facing.

The poem is just dominated by grief. He describes these desperate refugees fleeing southward, literally weeping and wailing, crying out in pure terror as their cities fall. Dr. Oswald actually compares this scene to those haunting historical photographs of refugees fleeing Northern France toward Paris during World War II.

You know the ones: the roads are just absolutely lined with abandoned baby buggies, dressers, cars, just left behind. In their frantic panic to escape the oncoming army, the Moabites are literally dropping all of their accumulated abundance on the side of the road. Which brings us to this incredibly profound, really sobering quote.

There are no pockets in shrouds. The Moabites had spent their entire lives acquiring wealth, building up their stuff. Yet the moment true disaster strikes, it all just ends up abandoned by the brook of the willows.

It really highlights the ultimate futility of dedicating your life to just accumulating stuff. When the world crumbles around you, your possessions absolutely can't save you. It kind of forces us to ask ourselves, right? What does it actually mean for us to hold the things of this world lightly? And then to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Yahweh is truly God, Isaiah drops this chilling, hyper-specific prediction.

He says that in exactly three years, counted as meticulously as a hired worker checking off the days on a contract, Moab's glory will be entirely gone. You see, God is not caught up in the endless repeating cycles of human history. He stands entirely outside of them.

When he says something is going to happen, it happens. Period. So this completely shatters any remaining argument for Judah to put their trust in Moab.

It's just not an option. This brings us to section five, the tent of David, the ultimate refuge. So think about it.

If you can't trust the massive military might of Assyria and you can't trust the opportunistic Philistines or even your wealthy neighbors over in Moab, where on earth do you turn? Well, Isaiah pivots away from all these failing, prideful nations and points to the ultimate alternative, the Messianic King. And what's really interesting here is that this King doesn't rule from some grand sprawling palace or an impenetrable fortress. No, he rules from the tent of David.

A tent. It's impermanent. It's incredibly humble.

It totally lacks all those shiny, impressive trappings of human kingship. And that signifies that this ruler's power comes entirely from his character, not his architecture. So let's take a look at the character of this King.

We'll start with a quick, fascinating linguistic deep dive. His throne is established in Chesed. Now, this is essentially an untranslatable Hebrew word.

English Bibles try their best. They use words like loving kindness or mercy or grace. But what it really truly means is the passionate, undying devotion of a superior to an inferior, especially when it is completely undeserved.

We're talking about a radical, entirely self-giving love that defines this unique King's throne. Next up, we have the concept of Mishpat. Now this is often translated as justice or judgment, but Mishpat goes way, way beyond just mere legal equity in a courtroom setting.

It's actually the active process of restoring God's divine order to life. Because let's face it, a world full of injustice is simply a world that is totally out of order. So this Messianic King in the tent of David steps in to actively restore the world back to the exact way God originally intended it to be.

Let's just map this all out really clearly. Think of this as the ultimate Messianic profile. His rule is completely defined by Chesed, that radical self-giving love, by faithfulness, meaning he is entirely true to his promises and relationship, by Mishpat, actively restoring divine order, and by righteousness, which is unfailingly doing what is right all the time.

When you compare this stunning profile to the pride, the greed, and the violence of all those surrounding nations we just talked about, wow, the choice becomes crystal clear: you don't put your trust in fragile human institutions; you put your trust in the King whose very nature is steadfast love and absolute truth. And that leads us to our final section, section six, trusting God over nations, the modern parallel. So let's bring this ancient text right up to the 21st century, because guess what? Human nature really hasn't changed at all.

We still face the exact same temptations today. We're constantly tempted to rely on political power brokers or military alliances or economic wealth to somehow secure our future. It's funny, George Washington famously warned the newly formed United States to avoid entangling alliances, even though historically an alliance with the French was absolutely critical to the survival of the American Revolution.

Washington's gut instinct was still to warn the nation against trusting foreign powers, and Dr. Oswald points out that this instinct aligns just beautifully with the biblical mandate

we've been looking at. Because time and time again, trusting in the nations ultimately leads to compromise, deep disappointment, and shared destruction. And this brings us to a really critical clarifying point about how we actually apply all of this today.

If we're looking around for a modern equivalent to ancient Israel or Judah, Dr. Oswald is quick to point out that for Christians today, the one-for-one equivalent is not some modern nation state; it's actually the church. So the urgent message of Isaiah for us today is that the church absolutely must not depend on the nations of humanity or any human power brokers for that matter, for its security. Aligning way too closely with temporary earthly political power, it just leads straight to spiritual disaster, exactly like it did back in ancient times.

Which leaves us right here with this final overarching question to ponder as we wrap up. Who do we trust? Seriously, when the geopolitical landscape shifts beneath our feet, when disaster looms on the horizon, are we going to put our faith in these temporary failing structures of human power, or are we placing our ultimate unshakable security in the steadfast sovereign hands of God? I really hope this explainer has given you some incredible historical context and a whole lot to think about today. Thank you so much for joining me for this conversation, and as always, keep learning.