

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 9, Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Hey everybody, and welcome to another deep dive. It's great to be here today. We're going to be looking at Isaiah chapters 17 and 18.

Yeah, and they offer a really interesting perspective on trusting God right versus trusting in worldly powers. We've got a lecture from Dr. John Oswalt, and we're going to be using his lecture to kind of guide our deep dive today. One question these chapters really poke at is: What happens when God's people forget that he is their rock of refuge, and can roaring nations really be like chaff in the wind? It's a good question. And these chapters really do unpack that; they kind of lay bare that tension that we feel even today when things get shaky: where do we run for cover exactly? And speaking of shaky, right out of the gate? Isaiah lumps Damascus and Israel together for judgment, right, which is not the pairing you would expect.

What's the story there? Yeah, it's really interesting. It's a brilliant move by Isaiah to connect back to Ahaz's reign. And so you see these two nations ganging up on Judah, trying to force Ahaz into joining this anti-Syrian coalition. Oh, I see. So they're trying to tempt him to swap reliance on God for reliance on the military. Yeah, you know, a classic case of misplaced trust. So they're saying like, hey, the enemy of my enemy is my friend, but it seems like in this case playing that game leads them both astray.

Yeah, they both find themselves in trouble, and Dr. Oswalt doesn't really sugarcoat their fate. He uses that image of a field after harvest, right, where there are just a few olive berries left clinging to the branches. Yeah, it's not just about the severity of the judgment. It's about the thoroughness of the judgment. You know, imagine this once abundant field, and now it's stripped there. Yeah, that's how complete God's judgment will be but like you said there are a few berries left Which kind of hints that another idea is a is developing exactly the remnant the remnant Yeah, and that leads us into the next section, doesn't it? There's this shift in the text from poetry to prose Yeah, you're picking up on something really interesting almost as if Isaiah changes gears mid message Mm-hmm, and that's where we start hearing about the remnant waking up Yeah and the phrase in that day is really key because it signals we've jumped ahead in time Okay to a point where judgment has already happened right and something new is emerging The remnant stripped of all their comforts and their security are finally forced to turn back to God, and they recognize him for who he truly is Their maker the Holy One of Israel and this is where it gets really interesting because dr Oswalt points out this really powerful contrast that Isaiah draws The idols that people were putting their faith in their own creations Versus God the ultimate creator It's like Isaiah saying you're trusting in things that you built with your own two hands But have you forgotten the one who made your hands in the first place? It's a profound point. Yeah, and it really does beg the question: What are the idols that we cling to today? Yeah, you know, are we trusting in our bank accounts, right, our careers, our social status, our social media following, these things? Aren't bad in and of themselves, right, but they become idols when

they take the place of God in our lives. This makes me wonder: have you ever experienced, like, just a truly devastating event?

Yeah, you know, like a loss or a crisis. Yeah, that forced you to reevaluate what really matters. Absolutely. It sometimes seems like it takes a seismic event Yeah to remind us that God is the one true source of security What is it about the good times that makes us so prone to forgetting that I think it's just human nature We get comfortable we get complacent right but Isaiah doesn't let us off the hook he reminds us no matter how Powerful these roaring nations around us may seem They are nothing compared to God's quiet rebuke.

I love that image these nations raging like a stormy sea Yeah reduced to nothing but chaff in the wind It's powerful makes me think of that line from song to where God actually lasts right at the feudal schemes of the nation It is a good image So for us living in a world that's constantly bombarding us with anxieties uncertainties How do we tune into God's perspective and find that? unshakable peace that comes from knowing He's got this. Well, that's where chapter 18 takes us, and things get even more intriguing. Yeah, chapter 18. It's fascinating because it kind of breaks the mold.

Yeah, instead of the usual burden or Oracle intro, we get something different. Isaiah paints this picture of Cush, you know, that's Ethiopia for us modern folks, right, and it's described as a land of whirring wings. You know, messengers are flying back and forth; political wheels are turning. Oh, there's this real sense of frenetic energy. So it sounds like they're scrambling to forge Alliances, maybe even with Syria. Yeah, trying to secure their place in the world, exactly. It kind of reminds me of how nations today are constantly forming partnerships, negotiating treaties, playing the geopolitical chess game, always strategizing for more power, more influence.

Yeah, you got it. Dr Oswalt points out that at this time Cush actually ruled Egypt. Oh, so these envoys could have been shuttling between the two or maybe reaching out to Syria. Yeah, hoping to exploit rivalries to their advantage. Wow, you know, classic power politics even back then. So they're putting all their faith in human effort, human strategy, right? But then we get this incredible contrast of God observing all this frantic activity. Yeah, and he is completely unfazed. It's like he's saying I got this Yeah, talk about a power move the imagery Isaiah uses is so powerful You know God compares himself to the clear heat and sunshine Steady unwavering presence and then to a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest Oh, I see bringing refreshment and sustenance even when things are intense It's such a stark contrast to the chaos and maneuvering of the nation's.

Absolutely. It makes me think: how often do we get caught up in the whirlwind of our own lives? Yeah, work, relationships, to-do lists, and forget that God is at work for you even when we don't see it. He's moving; He's orchestrating it exactly. Yeah, it makes you wonder.

Are we trying to do God's work for him, relying on our own limited Strategies and plans, right, or are we willing to step back, trust his timing? Yeah, and allow him to work through us. That's such a good question. It really challenges me to examine my own heart. You know, am I trying to control outcomes, or am I truly surrendering to God's sovereignty? Because if these powerful nations are just pawns in his game, where does that leave me?

Right, and you know, it's really interesting: the final verses of chapter 18 bring right back to that central theme. Okay, trusting in God over worldly powers. Okay, and it's almost a surprising twist: those very nations that Kush was trying to manipulate- yeah- and to bring tribute to the Lord of hosts.

Oh, they're scheming, all their strategizing. It leads them right to God's doorstep. It's like their efforts backfired in the most amazing way. They were trying to secure their own power, but God used it to glorify himself.

Talk about a plot twist. Yeah, Dr. Oswalt points out that this is a recurring theme throughout Isaiah: nations under God's judgment.

Mm-hmm, but ultimately, nations worshipping God It's a message of hope, really, even when things look bleak, even when it seems like the world is spiraling out of control, right? We can trust that God is working out his purposes. So what does all this mean for us sitting here today? Yeah, how does understanding God's ultimate sovereignty change the way we look at the challenges we face, right? Both personally and as a society. That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? I think, yeah, I'm hanging on to every word you laid on me. What's the million-dollar answer? I think it boils down to this.

Yeah, we need to shift our focus. Okay, instead of getting swept up in all the roaring nations of our time, all the things that are screaming for our attention and anxiety. We need to fix our eyes on the God who's quietly, but powerfully, at work behind the scenes.

You know, it's a call to radical trust even when we don't see immediate results. Even when the world feels like it's spinning off its axis, that reminds me of what Dr. Oswalt said about the state of the church today, especially here in North America. Yeah, you know, declining attendance, cultural pushback. It can feel like we're losing ground fast, but maybe, just maybe, God is using this very situation to call us back to himself. That's right, to strip away our reliance on worldly strategies and political maneuvering and return to a place of utter dependence on his power. It's a fascinating thought, isn't it? Yeah, Dr. Oswalt draws this really striking parallel between ancient Judah and the modern church.

Judah, this tiny nation surrounded by these massive empires. Yet the prophets boldly proclaimed that one day all nations would worship the God of Israel. Talk about audacious faith. So maybe what we need today is that same kind of radical, against-all-odds faith? Absolutely, faith that clings to God's ultimate purpose even when things look bleak, right? Even when the world seems to be writing a different story altogether. Yeah, and it's not about being passive, right, sitting back and waiting for God to do everything. It's about actively aligning ourselves with his work. Okay, becoming willing instruments in his hands. Mm-hmm, but here's the key. We don't get to dictate how he accomplishes his purposes. It's like that idea Isaiah talks about- yeah, finding rest in God's quiet power.

That's it. It's not about inactivity. It's about finding our strength, our direction, our very being in him. You nailed it. It's about that deep-down confidence that he is working, even when we can't see it right, and being open to becoming part of his plan, even if it looks completely different than what we imagined. So if we were to boil down the message of Isaiah 17 and 18, mm-hmm, it seems like it's this No matter how loud the world gets.

Yeah, no matter how dire the circumstances, right? God is in control. He is our true security. Our ultimate hope is found not in clever strategies or human might but in trusting him, our rock of refuge. Yes, and finding rest in his quiet, unstoppable power. I'm going to set it better myself.

That's good. And one final thought: Okay, something that Dr. Oswalt really challenged us with.

How is God calling the church back to himself today? Away from the political maneuvering, the worldly methods, and back to a place of Radical dependence and simple obedience in a world where faith seems to be fading, and pressures are mounting. How can we become those beacons, those flags that draw others to the God who is always in control? Something to chew on this week. What did you say? Absolutely. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive into Isaiah 17 and 18 It's been a pleasure. Until next time, keep seeking keep questioning and keep diving deep