

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 10, Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

All right. So are you ready to dive into some seriously fascinating stuff today? Because we're about to take a deep dive into Isaiah chapters 19 through 21. Oh, I love these chapters.

They're packed with insight. They really are. And our focus is going to be this idea of why we shouldn't put our trust in nations.

It was something people struggled with back then. And honestly, it feels like we're still wrestling with that today. Absolutely.

Like how many times do we hear about putting our faith in political systems or economic structures? Right. Like those things are going to save us. But for this deep dive, we've got an incredible scholar to guide us.

Dr. John Oswalt. He is brilliant. Such a deep understanding of the Old Testament.

Okay. So before we get into the nitty-gritty, let's set the stage. Imagine you're back in ancient Judah.

A small nation trying to survive in a world of empires. Exactly. And Assyria, this massive superpower, is breathing down their necks.

They're desperate for an ally, and they're looking to Egypt. Makes sense. Right.

Egypt: pyramids, Pharaohs, the Nile. The whole nine yards. They seem invincible.

But here's where things get interesting. Isaiah is not buying this whole Egypt is our savior thing. Nope, not at all.

In fact, he lays out some pretty compelling reasons why putting your faith in Egypt or any nation, for that matter, is a recipe for disaster. So spill the beans. What are these reasons? Well, he starts with their religion, which is fascinating because Egypt was famous for its gods.

Thousands of them, right? You'd think with that many deities, they'd have all their bases covered. But despite this massive pantheon, Egypt was constantly dealing with internal conflicts, power struggles, all sorts of problems. So, like, having a God for everything didn't actually solve anything.

It makes you wonder, doesn't it? Like if all those gods couldn't keep things stable, what does that say about human attempts to create systems of control and security? That's a really good point. It's almost like Isaiah is saying, don't put your trust in things that humans create because they're always going to have limits. Yeah.

There's always going to be that element of human fallibility. Okay. So that's one reason why Isaiah warns Judah to stay away from Egypt, their messed-up religion.

What else does he point to? The Nile River. It was the lifeblood of Egypt. Their entire civilization depended on its predictable floods.

Yeah. Food, water, transportation. It all came from the Nile.

But Isaiah seems to have a problem with this too. He does. He basically says, don't get too comfortable because even the mighty Nile could be dried up.

And while we don't have historical evidence of that actually happening. It's a powerful metaphor, right? Absolutely. It's like he's highlighting the danger of putting all your trust in material abundance and assuming that nature will always cooperate.

It's like he's saying, don't get too cocky, folks. Just because things have always been a certain way doesn't mean they always will be. And that's a message that feels really relevant today, don't you think? Oh, totally.

Climate change, natural disasters. I mean, even something like the depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer, which Dr. Oswalt mentions in his lecture. All of these things show us that even with all our technology and planning, we're not ultimately in control.

Isaiah's warning from thousands of years ago is still echoing, reminding us that we're not as invincible as we might think we are. All right. So that's two strikes against Egypt.

Their messed-up religion and their over-reliance on the Nile. What's the final point that Isaiah brings up? This one's a bit more subtle. It's about Egypt's famous wisdom and leadership.

They were known for their wise counselors, their proverbs, their understanding of courtly life and all those complex power dynamics. Yeah. Even King Solomon, who was considered the wisest man alive, was drawn to Egypt's way of doing things.

But didn't he end up with his own messy court situation? It's like a case of with great wisdom comes great bureaucracy or something like that. Exactly. And that's kind of what Isaiah is getting at.

He's questioning the idea that even the most brilliant minds can grasp the full scope of God's plans. So he's not saying wisdom is bad, but that we can't rely on it completely. Right.

Human leadership, no matter how intelligent or capable, just can't offer that ultimate unshakable security. There are always limitations. It's a lesson we seem to keep having to relearn over and over throughout history.

And from this point, Isaiah's message takes a really interesting turn. He goes beyond just critiquing Egypt and starts talking about God's purpose in history. This bigger picture that's unfolding.

And he keeps using the phrase in that day, which is really significant. Right. It's like he's emphasizing that time from a biblical perspective isn't just this endless cycle.

It's linear. It's moving towards something. It's not just the same old, same old.

Every moment, every choice, every action is part of a bigger story. And that brings us to a really powerful story that Dr. Oswalt shares about a pastor named Ron Smith, who missed his flight to Kenya. Oh, I remember that one.

It's such a good example of how we can choose to see those moments that feel like just random bad luck as part of God's bigger plan. Exactly. Ron Smith was supposed to be speaking at this big gathering of pastors in Kenya, but then he gets delayed because of a passport issue.

Hours of delays, airport security, the whole nine yards. Talk about a travel nightmare. He was devastated to miss the event.

But as Dr. Oswalt points out, we have a choice. We can choose to see these kinds of situations as just random bad luck. Or we can choose to trust that even when things go haywire, God's working behind the scenes.

Exactly. And having that perspective is so crucial, especially when we're facing setbacks in our own lives. It's not about ignoring the difficulty or the pain, but it's about holding onto that belief that God can redeem even the most unexpected twists and turns.

It's about that trust that we're not just adrift in randomness. And, you know, speaking of things we can't always see, that brings us to the most dramatic part of Isaiah's message, a shocking prophecy about Egypt. You're talking about the naked prophet thing, right? Yeah.

Isaiah walked around naked for three years to deliver God's message. Talk about commitment. It's definitely a way to get people's attention.

But I think beyond the shock value, it speaks to just how much God cares, how urgent this message is. Absolutely. It's not just about judgment.

It's about something much deeper. God's deep, unwavering love for his people. I think it's similar to how parents sometimes have to discipline their children.

It's not because we enjoy seeing them struggle. We do it because we love them and we want what's best for them. And even though there are warnings about judgment and the consequences of misplaced trust, Isaiah's prophecy about Egypt actually points towards hope.

Yeah. There's a glimmer of light there. It's not all doom and gloom.

Because Isaiah says that ultimately Egypt will turn to God. There's this potential for redemption, even in the midst of judgment. But it's not just about a superficial change, right? No, this knowing of God that Isaiah talks about is about a complete transformation, a deep shift in how they live their lives.

And that's where things get really interesting for us today, because it makes you wonder, what are our modern-day Egyptians? What are those things that seem really powerful and tempting, but that might not be able to deliver on their promises? Are we looking to political systems or economic structures or even technological advancements for security and fulfillment? And can those things really give us what we're ultimately searching for? It's definitely something to think about. And speaking of things to think about, that brings us to another powerful empire that Isaiah turns his attention to. Babylon.

The name itself just evokes so much. Right. And the way Isaiah introduces this prophecy is brilliant.

He calls it the Burden of the Wilderness of the Sea, which is such a strange title. It's like clickbait for ancient scrolls. What's the message behind this seemingly contradictory phrase? I think Isaiah is using a bit of sarcasm here.

You know, like the wilderness is a place of barrenness and scarcity, but the sea is usually associated with vastness and abundance. So it's not that the sea is literally turning into a desert, but it's more that the things we often associate with the sea, like wealth and power. They're ultimately fleeting, like a mirage.

Exactly. And that sets the stage for his prophecy about Babylon's downfall. He uses incredibly vivid imagery and a powerful message of hope for those who find themselves caught in Babylon's grip.

And one of those images that really jumps out is that phrase, my threshed and winnowed one. Which, as Dr. Oswalt suggests, is actually addressed to the future Jewish exiles in Babylon. Yeah.

It's such a striking image. Threshing and winnowing separate the valuable grain from the worthless chaff, which speaks to the refining process that God's people go through. So even in the midst of Babylon's impending doom, there's this message of hope for those who remain faithful.

They're going to go through tough times. They'll be refined by fire, but ultimately they'll emerge stronger and more resilient. It's a message that resonates so deeply, even today, because we all go through those threshing moments, right? We all face those situations where we feel like we're being pushed to our limits.

But what Isaiah is reminding us is that there's a purpose to those difficult seasons. They're not just random acts of cruelty. They're opportunities for growth and transformation.

And speaking of those Jewish exiles, remember that cryptic passage about the watchman and the horseman? The one where the watchman cries out, fallen, fallen is Babylon. Oh yeah. Like it's a scene straight out of a movie.

We're right there with the watchman witnessing Babylon's destruction as people flee the city. And I think it reminds us that God's word, his prophecies, they're not just abstract concepts. They have real-world consequences.

They play out in history and directly impact the lives of real people. And it makes you wonder what those Jewish exiles felt when they heard those words. Fallen, fallen is Babylon.

Yeah. Can you imagine years of captivity? And then suddenly there's this glimmer of hope. It's a mix of relief, disbelief, maybe even a little bit of fear as they face the prospect of returning to their homeland after all those years.

It's a good reminder that even in the midst of upheaval and uncertainty, there's always that potential for restoration and renewal. And speaking of hope, Dr. Oswalt ends his lecture on such a beautiful note, connecting these prophecies about Egypt and Babylon to the ultimate hope we find in Christ. He even shares an Advent hymn that captures this theme perfectly.

Watchman, tell us of the night. Oh, I love that hymn. It uses that image of a watchman looking for signs of the coming dawn.

Which represents the arrival of the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promises. Like, yes, there's darkness, there's uncertainty, but there's also this incredible hope that's on the way. Exactly.

We all experience that night in our lives, right? The uncertainty, the longing, the searching for something more. But there's a light coming, that glory beaming star that guides us toward a brighter future. And that's where Isaiah's message, woven through these prophecies about Egypt and Babylon, ties in so beautifully with the message of the New Testament.

Because in Christ, we see that hope fulfilled. He is that light breaking through the darkness. He offers a path forward.

And as Dr. Oswalt so eloquently put it, It's a message that fills you with so much hope. Even when things feel really bleak, we've got this incredible love that's always there, always working for our good. It reminds us of God's faithfulness.

And it challenges us to look beyond our immediate circumstances, beyond those temporary Egypt's we might be tempted to put our trust in, to focus on the eternal realities of God's kingdom. It's like saying, okay, those things might offer some temporary comfort or security, but they're not the real deal. The real deal is found in God.

In his unwavering love and his promise to always be with us no matter what. And when we embrace that, when we shift our focus from the fleeting to the eternal, that's when we start to experience a different kind of freedom. It's a freedom that comes from knowing that we're anchored in something much bigger than ourselves.

Something that can never be shaken. And that's what we see throughout Isaiah. This call to let go of our Egypt's, to embrace the reality that the morning has come, of God's love and grace, and to step into the adventure of trusting him.

What an adventure it is. Not always easy, but definitely worth it. So as we wrap up this part of our deep dive, I think the question we should ask ourselves is, what Egypt's are we still holding onto? What are those things that we're tempted to put our trust in, even though they might ultimately let us down? Yeah, it's time to do some soul searching.

And maybe, just maybe, we'll discover that there's something much better waiting for us, something more reliable, more fulfilling, more freeing. I love that. It's like we're trading in our old rusty Egypts for a brand new shiny home.

Now that's an image I can get behind. So what do you say we continue this conversation next time? I'm in; there's so much more to uncover in these chapters. Perfect.

Until then, keep those Egypts in mind and start thinking about what it might look like to trade them in for something truly extraordinary. And something, or someone who will never let us down. See you next time.

See you then. No, I keep thinking about that image of being threshed and winnowed. It's such a powerful metaphor.

It doesn't exactly sound like a day at the spa, that's for sure. No, not really. It speaks to those tough times, those challenges that refine and purify our faith.

But it's interesting because it suggests that going through those tough times, those threshing experiences, can actually make us stronger, help us grow. Right. Like, haven't you ever gone through something really difficult and come out the other side feeling like, wow, I didn't think I could handle that?

Yeah. Like you've been tested by fire and somehow you came out even stronger. Exactly.

And I think that's what Isaiah is getting at here. He's saying that even though those experiences are painful. They serve a purpose.

Right. It's a refining process that God uses to shape us into something more resilient. It's like those Jewish exiles in Babylon.

Facing the daunting task of returning to their homeland after years in captivity. Talk about a fresh start. Yeah.

Can you imagine starting over, rebuilding your life, facing all that uncertainty? But Isaiah gives them this incredible message of hope. He's like, Hey, you've been through the fire.

You've been refined. You're ready for something new. And I think that message resonates with us today too, because we all face those threshing moments.

Those times when we feel pushed to our limits. But Isaiah is reminding us that those difficult seasons, they're not just random; there's a purpose, a refining process that can ultimately lead to growth and renewal. And, you know, speaking of those Jewish exiles and their journey back home.

Do you think that cryptic passage about the watchman and the horseman seeing those people fleeing the city as Babylon falls is like a glimpse of the prophecy coming true? It really does feel that way. Doesn't it? Like we're right there with the watchman witnessing the chaos and upheaval as people flee. It's a powerful reminder that God's word, his prophecies, they're not just abstract concepts.

They have real-world consequences. They impact real people's lives. And, you know, sometimes I think we can get so caught up in the theological details that we forget the human side of things.

Right. We forget that these prophecies were about real people, real empires, real struggles. Exactly.

And that's why they're so relevant for us today. Because even though the names and places may have changed, the human condition, the things we struggle with, the longing for hope and security, those things are timeless. Absolutely.

And that reminds me of that beautiful Advent hymn, Watchman, Tell Us the Night, that Dr. Oswalt shared. I love how he ties all of these ideas together with that hymn. He's acknowledging the darkness, the uncertainty, but he's also pointing to this incredible hope that's coming.

It's like that watchman looking out for the first signs of dawn, knowing that even in the darkest night, the light will break through. That's a powerful image. It speaks to that deep longing we all have for something more, something beyond the darkness and uncertainty that we experience in life.

And you know, that's where Isaiah's message connects so beautifully with the message of the New Testament. Because in Christ, we see the fulfillment of that hope. He is that light.

Breaking through the darkness. And as Dr. Oswalt so eloquently put it, morning has come. In Christ, that dawn has arrived.

And the light of God's love is shining bright for all of us. It's such a hopeful message. It reminds us that even when things feel really bleak, God's love is always there working for our good.

It challenges us to look beyond our immediate circumstances, beyond those temporary Egypts, and focus on the eternal realities of God's kingdom. Yeah. To shift our focus from the things that ultimately can't satisfy to the things that truly matter.

And when we do that, when we choose to put our trust in God instead of those flimsy, temporary things, we experience a whole new kind of freedom. A freedom that comes from knowing that we're not in control, that we don't have to be. That we're anchored in something so much bigger than ourselves, something that can't be shaken.

And I think that's a great place to pause and reflect for a bit. What are those things that we're holding onto, those Egypts that are keeping us from experiencing that true freedom? It's a question worth pondering for sure. Maybe next time we can delve deeper into how to let go of those things.

And really embrace the freedom and the hope that comes from trusting in God. I'm in. There's so much more to explore with this.

Okay. So last time we left off with this big question, right? How do we actually make that shift from putting our trust in the wrong places, those Egypts, and start really, truly relying on God? It's a tough one, isn't it? Like, it sounds good in theory, but... It's a lot harder to put into practice. It really is.

And I don't think there's a simple, one-size-fits-all answer. But a process, right? Yeah. A journey.

And I think it begins with taking a good, hard look at ourselves. Getting real honest. Exactly.

Like asking ourselves, what am I really holding onto? What am I afraid to let go of? Because those things, those are often our Egypts. The things we think are going to give us security or happiness or... Significance. Purpose, maybe.

And it could be anything, you know? Yeah. Like success or money or approval from others or even our own intelligence. Our own abilities.

We try to control things, and it backfires. And then comes the really hard part. Surrendering those things to God.

Admitting that we can't do it all on our own. That we need help. And that's where the freedom comes in, you know? When we finally let go.

It's counterintuitive, isn't it? It totally is. Like, we think holding on tighter makes us stronger, but... Actually the opposite. Yeah.

It's in that surrender, in that willingness to open our hands and say, okay, God, I trust you with this. That's when we start to experience true freedom. And it's a different kind of freedom, isn't it? It's not just about doing whatever we want.

No, it's about being free from the fear and anxiety that come with trying to control everything. It's about being anchored in something much bigger than ourselves, something much stronger. And that brings us back to that idea of morning has come, right? Even when we're going through tough times, even when things feel dark and uncertain.

We can hold onto the hope that God is working. That he's bringing something new out of the chaos. It's like that image of a potter molding clay.

The process can be messy and uncomfortable, but the end result is something beautiful. Yeah. God takes those broken pieces of our lives and creates something amazing.

And it all starts with trust. Trusting that he knows what he's doing. Trusting that he loves us, even when we mess up.

Trusting that he has a plan, even when we can't see it. It's such a simple idea, but it's so profound, isn't it? And it changes everything. It really does.

Our whole perspective shifts when we move from, I have to figure this out on my own, to God's got this. We're not alone. And that's the message we see throughout the Bible, especially in Isaiah.

Let go of your Egypts, those things you're clinging to, and embrace the hope, the freedom, the peace that come from trusting in God. Embrace the reality that the morning has come. Step into that adventure of trusting him with your whole life.

And wow, what an adventure it is. I think that's a perfect note to end on. Don't be afraid to let go.

Embrace the hope and the freedom that come with trusting in God. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive into Isaiah. We'll see you next time for another adventure.