

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 10, 6-min. Video Overview

Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's jump right into the text today. We're stepping back about 3,000 years to examine a massive geopolitical crisis in the ancient nation of Judah. But as we dig into chapters 19 through 21 of the book of Isaiah, and we'll be drawing heavily on the profound insights of Dr. John Oswalt here, we're going to see that this historical event is actually a timeless, incredibly relevant lesson on human nature.

We're really exploring where we place our security when everything around us starts shaking. So here's a question to kick things off. When the world is literally falling apart around you, who do you trust? Because Judah was facing this exact terrifying dilemma.

The brutal Assyrian war machine, the undisputed superpower of the day, was marching directly toward them. I mean, they were desperate. They needed an ally.

They needed someone or something to save them. And their eyes immediately turned to Okay, section one, the temptation of Egypt. Let's really dive into this.

Why did Judah look to Egypt as their ultimate geopolitical savior? Well, because Egypt was this absolute titan built on three massive pillars of worldly trust. First, their ancient religion. They were the most idolatrous people in the Near East.

They had a God for literally everything. Second, the Nile River, which was the absolute engine of their immense wealth. And third, their ancient courtly wisdom.

Egypt was viewed as the grandmother of civilization. To put that into perspective, when Abraham and Sarah visited Egypt, they practically took Taurus camels to see the pyramids because those pyramids were already 800 years old. So from a purely human perspective, leaning on Egypt made perfect sense.

Now, what's really fascinating here is the reality behind that first pillar: religion. Despite having thousands of gods, which is second only in history to Hinduism, by the way, Egypt's absolute monarchy actually had a huge track record of failing. During the first and second intermediate periods, their society totally collapsed into chaos and civil war, city literally fighting against city.

Isaiah points this out to remind Judah that ancient religion and human institutions without the true God simply cannot provide ultimate stability. So religion fails them. But what about the physical world? The Nile River was so predictable that you could stand with one foot in the dry desert and the other in a lush wheat field.

It was the breadbasket of the ancient world. Yet Isaiah prophesied the Nile drying up. And this just brilliantly illustrates our modern temptation to trust in the physical world.

Think about how completely discombobulated our society gets when nature fails. When a super storm hits, or we face a massive drought or a dust bowl, we rely on science and the abundance of nature to save us. But ultimately, nature will fail you.

Moving right along to section two, when nature and wisdom fail. So with nature and religion proving to be totally unreliable saviors, we have to look at the third pillar of worldly trust, human wisdom and political leadership. Surely the brilliant advisors of Egypt could figure a way out of this crisis, right? Well, the stark contrast between these two worldviews perfectly illustrates why human wisdom eventually crumbles.

The pagan view of time, the Egyptian worldview, was entirely circular. It was based on the predictable cycles of nature with really no overarching purpose other than day-to-day survival. But the biblical view of time is linear.

God has a specific purposeful plan for history, moving from a distinct beginning to a defined goal. Pagan wisdom just cannot comprehend a God who operates with surprises and a purposeful plan. And because of that, it is completely blind to what God is actually doing in the world.

And this brings us to an absolutely crucial point, captured perfectly in this quote from Dr. Oswald regarding our attitude toward political leaders and human wisdom. He says we should respect them, but don't rely on them. We honor our leaders, we respect the position, and we absolutely pray for them.

But we must never, ever expect them to ultimately save us. If you expect a politician to be your savior, you are basically condemning them to failure. Which leads us directly into section three, Isaiah's shocking object lesson.

Having dismantled the temptation of Egypt, God didn't just want to tell Judah that Egypt would fail. He wanted to physically show them. We read the shocking reality that for three whole years, Isaiah walked around stripped, likely in just a loincloth and barefoot.

It's an incredibly jarring image. I mean, why on earth would God demand something so humiliating and uncomfortable from his prophet? Well, the answer is that Isaiah was acting as a living, breathing visual aid for God. This is exactly how the Assyrians would eventually lead the Egyptians away as prisoners of war.

But notice why Isaiah was chosen for this task. He demonstrated radical availability. He chose obedience over his own personal pride.

Let's be honest, if you make yourself available to God, do not expect your pride to be massaged. Isaiah modeled true trust, trusting God's unexplained ways, even when it made absolutely zero sense to him in the moment. And history actually proved Isaiah's visual aid to be 100% accurate.

During this time, the king of the Philistine city of Ashdod led a revolt against Assyria. When things went south, he fled to Egypt seeking asylum. Now Egypt happily took him in, right up until Assyria threatened them.

Then Egypt immediately handed the king of Ashdod right over to his enemies. The lesson for Judah was undeniable. Worldly powers are unreliable.

Egypt will sell you out. Let's see how this builds as we pivot to section four, the fall of Babylon. Shifting gears to chapter 21, Isaiah moves his focus from Egypt to another great superpower that dominated the ancient mindset.

And he uses this fascinating, highly poetic title for Babylon here: the wilderness of the sea. It's an oxymoron. Honestly, it's pure sarcasm.

Babylon had massive wealth generated from sea trade along the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. They seemed to have this endless abundance. But Isaiah is pulling back the curtain here.

He's saying that if you look beneath the surface, all that wealth, all that abundance is nothing but a barren mirage. It's just tinsel. But then we get this profoundly beautiful theological insight in the text.

As Babylon faces its inevitable destruction by Elam and Media, the speaker in the text, which represents God's heart, is actually filled with anguish. God weeps over the destruction of this traitorous, violent empire. It's an amazing picture, much like a parent whose heart just breaks when they have to discipline a child.

God allows the consequences of Babylon's actions to fall, but he does so with a broken heart. So why even record the fall of Babylon here? Well, it was a message of hope for the future Judean exiles, whom Isaiah calls the threshed and winnowed ones. Imagine being in exile in Babylon, 150 years later, reading a scrap of this very scroll.

The message is crystal clear. Do not assimilate. Do not sell out your biblical faith to Babylonian culture.

It might look like the greatest, most powerful nation in the world right now, but it will fall. God's word is what will stand. All right, wrapping things up with section five, the true purpose of prophecy.

As we look at Isaiah predicting these massive events, we've got to firmly dispel a huge myth right here. Prophecy is not a timetable for the future. People have made absolute fortunes trying to map out modern events using biblical prophecy.

We've seen prophecy teachers predicting the end of the world for decades, constantly adjusting their math every time they get it wrong. The fact that human timetables have failed consistently for 2,000 years should really tell us we are misunderstanding the purpose of these texts entirely. So if it's not a timetable, what exactly is the point? There are two key reasons.

Number one, so we can live with absolute confidence right now, knowing that God knows the future. There are no surprises to him. And number two, so that when those prophecies are eventually fulfilled, our confidence in him is deepened and secured.

Knowing that God has an overarching plan means we can face the great unknown of tomorrow, not with paralyzing fear, but with genuine excitement about what God is going to do. Which brings us to our final thought today. Prophecy is simply an invitation to trust.

When the world is shaking, when the crisis is literally at your door, and your natural instinct is to run toward the nearest worldly solution, whether that's wealth, politicians, or human wisdom, remember Judah. We aren't called to map out the exact timeline of the future. We're just called to trust the one who holds it.

So when everything around you starts to shake, where are you placing your trust?