

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 13, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Okay, did you know that a literal translation of Exodus 3:4-6 actually says God has a six-foot-long nose? I know, it sounds totally bizarre to modern ears. But in ancient Hebrew, the physical imagery they used was that when you get angry, your nose gets hot. So by that logic, having a really, really long nose means it takes a long time for the heat of that anger to reach the very end.

And it's actually a pretty vivid, fascinating metaphor for being deeply patient. So why in the world are we talking about giant noses? Well, Dr. John Oswalt points this out because it perfectly illustrates a massive debate when studying historical texts. Literal translation vs.

thought-for-thought translation. You see, a literal translation is absolutely fantastic for close analytical study, but you can see how it completely misses the cultural imagery, like the six-foot nose. A thought-for-thought translation, on the other hand, captures the actual intent and flow, translating that exact same phrase simply as, slow to anger.

To truly wrap our heads around complex ancient texts like the book of Isaiah, we really need both of these tools in our toolkit. Welcome to The Explainer. Today, we are diving deep into Dr. John Oswalt's analysis of Isaiah chapters 26 and 27.

We're going to look right past the ancient history to uncover the text's incredibly practical arguments about trust, wholeness, and ultimate redemption. Here is our quick roadmap for today. We'll be breaking down these profound chapters into four contrasting themes.

First, a tale of two cities. Second, the true meaning of Shalom. Third, taming the chaos.

And lastly, discipline vs. punishment. Alright, let's jump straight into section one, a tale of two cities, from Isaiah chapter 26.

So Isaiah draws this really stark, vivid contrast. On one side, you have the city of Earth. It's this lofty, arrogant metropolis built entirely on human oppression, pride, and strength.

It's essentially a giant metaphorical sandcastle that God is ultimately going to flatten. But on the exact opposite side, you have the secure city. It's a beautiful city of pure praise.

And what makes it so incredibly secure? Its unbreakable walls are quite literally constructed out of God's salvation. Let's move right into section two, the true meaning of Shalom, to see exactly what it takes to get inside that secure city. You don't just wander into the secure city by accident, right? Dr. Oswalt outlines four very distinct characteristics required of its residents, straight out of Isaiah's text.

Number one, you have to be righteous, meaning you're actively committed to doing what is right. Two, faithful, which just means you are totally reliable and true to your word. Three, you need a fixed focus, keeping your mind steadfastly locked on God.

And four, trust. And in this specific context, trust means confident anticipation. You're waiting for God to solve the problem without running ahead to try and fix it your own way.

Now, it's actually super interesting how easily we can fail at characteristic number three, that fixed focus. Dr. Oswald shares this tragic yet fascinating sports story about champion miler Jim Ryan. In one major race, Ryan was miles ahead, I mean, literally 30 or 40 yards in front of the guy in second place.

But as he came into the final stretch, he let his focus slip. He just took a quick look back over his shoulder to see how far ahead he was. And when he did, his toe caught the cinders, he tumbled head over heels, and despite having this massive lead, he finished third.

It beautifully but painfully illustrates how quickly our spiritual focus can be completely dissipated by modern distractions. The moment we look back, we lose the race. But if we maintain those four characteristics, the ultimate reward is shalom.

Now we're all pretty used to translating shalom as peace. But honestly, the English word peace is just way too small. It usually just means you aren't currently fighting with anyone.

But the Hebrew concept of shalom is massive. It means total, complete wholeness. It means being put perfectly together, taking all the chaotic, disparate, broken parts of your life and pulling them tightly together into one unified, powerful whole.

There is this incredible, dramatic quote that I think captures the gritty, real-world essence of this perfectly. Dick Berenzi, who was a redeemed former Navy Band member who had struggled horribly with alcoholism, prayed, Oh God, just gather up my life into one big snowball and hurl it at the target of Jesus. I mean, wow.

That is true shalom. It's not just sitting quietly in some serene garden. It's having the broken, scattered pieces of your real life unified into a single, unstoppable purpose.

So how do we even begin getting those broken pieces back together? That brings us to section three, taming the chaos and overcoming sin. Think about this. How does God defeat the sea monster of sin today? I know that sounds like a super strange question, but it's based on ancient Near Eastern mythology.

See, pagan Canaanite myths told these wild stories of a literal sea monster named Leviathan, who represented watery chaos and had to be violently defeated by the gods just to bring physical order to the universe. Well, Isaiah takes this incredibly familiar cultural myth and brilliantly flips it into a parable to ask a much deeper question. How does the true God defeat the dark, suffocating chaos of human sin to bring us the ultimate order of salvation? To show what God actively bringing order to the chaos of sin looks like in modern times, Dr. Oswald shares the gripping story of Olympic runner Louis Zamperini.

Back in 1943, Zamperini's WW2 bomber crashed into the Pacific. The guy survived an unbelievable 47 days adrift on a life raft, only to be captured and sent to a brutal POW camp, where he was mercilessly tortured. After the war, Louis was physically free, sure, but mentally he was completely trapped, haunted by severe PTSD, violent nightmares, and deep alcoholism.

His life was absolute, literal chaos. But then in 1950, he was dragged to a Billy Graham tent meeting by his wife, and he finally surrendered his chaos to God, finding absolute and immediate redemption. Zamperini's unbelievable journey, from a tortured, alcoholic veteran having nightmares of strangling his captors, to becoming a peaceful evangelist who spent his life helping youth, it highlights a really profound point from Dr. Oswalt's commentary.

God can miraculously step into our deepest, darkest chaos and impose redemptive order. He defeats our personal sea monsters. But what happens when we still face intense hardships as believers? That brings us to our final section: Discipline vs.

Punishment. The absolutely crucial point we have to understand here is the fundamental difference between discipline and punishment. Punishment is simply making you suffer because you did something wrong.

It's strictly retributive. Discipline, though, is radically different. Discipline is allowing you to face the consequences of your actions for a very specific purpose: to bring about vital growth.

Think of it like God's vineyard. He carefully prunes away the wild, bitter grapes from our lives, so the good ones can finally bear sweet fruit. Dr. Oswalt drives this home with a really memorable quote from a football coach.

If I'm yelling at you, there's hope for you. Start worrying when I stop yelling at you. I've given up on you.

God's discipline, even when it hurts, and we all know it does, is born out of profound love. It literally means he hasn't given up on us. In God's economy, destruction is never, ever his intended last word for his people.

As we wrap up this explainer, we do have to confront a pretty sobering lament from Isaiah. He cries out, we have accomplished no deliverance in the earth. Basically, Isaiah is saying that God's people were meant to be pregnant with deliverance for the entire world, but instead, they just gave birth to wine.

They completely failed to bring a clear, unmistakable deliverance to their neighbors. They became salt that lost its flavor, blending right in with the chaos of the world instead of actually curing it. Which leaves us with this final, vital question to think about.

Does your life radiate a deliverance that makes others desperately hungry for it? Think of someone like Mother Teresa, literally kneeling in the absolute filth and despair of the slums, yet remaining entirely untouched by that spiritual darkness. Our lives shouldn't just be about following a list of rules. We should radiate such a complete wholeness, such a profound shalom and deliverance from chaos, that when the world sees us, they don't feel judged.

They feel hungry. They should be able to look at our total wholeness and ask, how do I find that?