

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 14, Audio Overview Podcast

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Get ready because we're about to jump right into the world of the Prophet Isaiah. Oh yeah, we're going to be looking at chapters 28 and 29. Okay, and we're going to be unpacking a lot of stuff: his warnings, the incredible imagery that he uses, and ultimately his message of hope during a really, really tense time for the people of Judah.

Yeah, you know, it's interesting because we're kind of dropped right into a moment of serious crisis here. Yeah, it's around 722 BC, and the northern kingdom of Israel, also known as Ephraim, has just been conquered by the Assyrian Empire. You can just imagine the fear and uncertainty in Judah, the southern kingdom, as they're watching this major superpower closing in. Yeah, so Isaiah is speaking to a nation. That's basically staring down the barrel of a gun, right? And he doesn't really sugarcoat things, does he? No, he doesn't he uses that word Whoa a lot, but it's not just about God's anger or anything.

It's more like a wake-up people Exactly you're headed for disaster if you don't change course, yeah, he's like that friend You know who's trying to shake you awake from a bad dream and the imagery he uses is just so vivid Yeah, right out of the gate in Isaiah twenty eight point one We get this woe to the pride crown to the drunkards of Ephraim whose glorious beauty is a fading flower Okay, so that image of a fading flower. I mean, that's powerful. Oh, yeah, it's like all their beauty, their strength. It's all an illusion. But what about those drunkards of Ephraim? I mean, he's talking about like literal drunkenness or is there something more to that? Yeah, I think he's using drunkenness on a couple different levels.

Okay. Yeah, sure. There might have been literal partying and excess going on, you know, right, but it's also a metaphor, I think, for the spiritual state of Ephraim's leaders. Interesting. They're intoxicated by their own pride their arrogance They think they're invincible, you know, so just like someone who's had a few too many drinks exactly Yeah, they're blind to the danger that they're actually in so they're just so caught up in their own little world They can't see the bigger picture exactly and I think that's something we can all relate to even today.

Oh, for sure. What are those things in our lives that can make us? Drunk so to speak right those things that kind of distort our perception and keep us from seeing things clearly It could be anything right success power fear even yeah, it's easy to get caught up in those things and lose sight of what really matters Absolutely, but then Isaiah tasted a step further he does he talks about God using foreign enemies to shake things up to get people's attention Calls them a people of strange lips. Yeah, it's like he's saying that sometimes God uses the things that we fear the most Well things that seem so foreign and strange to us to actually wake us up from our complacency So like the Assyrians back then were kind of a wake-up call for Israel Yeah, exactly and throughout history, you know, God has used different nations or conflicts to get our attention That's a good point. It makes you think what those wake-up calls might be for us today. Yeah, we often resist change even when it's for our own good.

That's true. And Isaiah doesn't let you go off the hook either. No, he doesn't. Yeah, it's like he's saying, hey, you guys don't think you're any better than your northern neighbors, right? If you don't learn from their mistakes, you're going to suffer the same consequences. Exactly, and it's interesting because there's actually a clear chronological shift in the text here as he pivots to Judah. It's like he's saying, remember what happened to them.

Don't make the same mistakes. Okay, and then he introduces this word, scoffer. Okay, and it's more than just someone who, you know, does wrong. It's someone who mocks what's right.

So they're really delighting in and rejecting the truth. Yes, exactly. Huh? They think they're so clever. Mm-hmm, but Isaiah sees right through them. Yeah, and what's really interesting is that he connects this whole scoffing attitude to this Reliance on false security, right? He says they make deals with death, which is a pretty intense image.

Yeah, and that can be interpreted in a couple of ways. So I could refer to, you know, worshiping false gods, which a lot of the surrounding nations did, but it could also just be a metaphor for putting their trust in things that can't ultimately save them. So, like, military alliances, exactly political maneuvering. It's like they're building their house on sand, thinking it will hold up against the storm, and don't we still see that today? Yeah, yeah, I mean we put our faith in so many things that can't ultimately deliver: money, power, technology, right? We tell ourselves these lies to feel secure, right? But Isaiah is saying it's all an illusion. It is, so it's like we need a reality check.

We do so what's the alternative? Yeah, what does Isaiah offer instead of this false sense of security? Well, he points to a tested stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation laid in Zion. Okay, this is from Isaiah 28.16 gotcha. This is a really powerful image, and it's definitely foreshadowing Jesus. Oh, wow. It's saying that true security, true stability comes from building our lives on God's truth, on his promises. So instead of, you know, running around panicking, trying to find solutions on our own, we need to actually ground ourselves in something solid, something Unshakeable.

Yeah, and then I love how Isaiah uses this amazing analogy about farming. Yeah, to illustrate this point, it's like he's saying, look, even a simple farmer understands how the world works. It's so brilliant in Isaiah 28:2- 3, 29.

Okay, he goes into detail about all the steps, you know, the plowing, the planting, the harvesting, right? He shows how the farmer works with the natural order of things the seasons the soil Right, there's just inherent wisdom and understanding those rhythms and he contrasts that with the so-called wisdom of Judah's leaders Yeah, it's like he's saying you guys think you're so sophisticated, but you've lost touch with basic truth Yeah, how often do we try to force things in our own lives right instead of trusting God's timing in his design? Whether it's relationships, work, or our own personal goals. We often think we know better. Yeah, we do.

It's a humbling thought. It really makes you think about the areas in your own life where you might be trying to force things instead of surrendering to God's way of doing things. For sure, what would it look like to actually embrace that farmers' wisdom and align ourselves with the natural rhythms of God's creation? That's the question, isn't it? It's like letting go of

control and trusting that God knows what he's doing, and then Isaiah wraps up chapter 28 with this beautiful reminder: Oh, yeah, this also comes from the Lord of hosts, who is? Wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom Isaiah twenty eight point two nine. Yeah, so good. He's like, folks, if you want true wisdom, if you want to live a life that flourishes, look to the one who knows how it all works. Exactly, but then in chapter 29 he shifts gears a bit. Yeah, and he introduces this mysterious figure called Ariel. Right.

Most scholars think Ariel is actually a symbolic name for Jerusalem. Okay, and what's really striking here is that Isaiah portrays the people as being spiritually asleep. Oh, wow They're so caught up in their own little world that they can't even understand the message that God's trying to send them It's like they're sleepwalking through life Oblivious to the danger that they're in and then in Isaiah Twenty nine point one three. Okay, he delivers one of those lines that's often quoted but not always fully understood.

Oh, yeah, he says These people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men it's about Outward religion versus genuine faith. Yeah, and it's something we all need to examine in our own lives for sure. Absolutely Yeah, it's so easy to fall into that trap of you know, just going through the motions Oh, yeah, I have all the right words, but not that genuine a hard connection with God Mm-hmm, and then in Isaiah twenty nine point one five, okay We see another one of those woes this time aimed at people who are trying to hide their plans from God, right? It's like they think they can outsmart the creator of the universe.

It's almost comical, isn't it? It really is. Isaiah compares their scheming to a potter shaping clay. Wow, he's essentially saying, you think you're in control, but you're the clay, and God is the potter. He shapes us according to his purpose. Even when we resist. I mean, he really lays it out there. He does listen to this: Shall the thing made say to its maker?

He did not make me, or shall the pot say to the potter? He has no understanding. Isaiah twenty-nine point one scene, right? That's a powerful one. Yeah, it makes you question how much we actually surrender to God's will, right, versus how much we're trying to control everything ourselves. It definitely challenges our perception of control, doesn't it? It does are we really willing to acknowledge our dependence on God even when it feels uncomfortable that age-old struggle You know between human pride and surrendering to a higher power because let's face it We like to be in the driver's seat We do but Isaiah seems to be saying that clinging to that illusion of control is ultimately what leads to our downfall But just when you think it's all doom and gloom right Isaiah shifts gears and he offers this glimmer of hope He does he starts talking about a time when the deaf will hear a blind will see yes He speaks of the humble rejoicing in the Holy One of Israel right while the ruthless are put to shame It's like a breath of fresh air. Yeah, a glimpse of the future where God's justice and righteousness actually prevail. It's a message of hope, especially for those who have been marginalized or oppressed, absolutely, but it's also a cautionary message for those who have gotten comfortable in their wickedness. Oh, yeah Isaiah doesn't shy away from saying that God's judgment will fall on the arrogant right and those who exploit others Yeah, it's that classic blend of warning and promise that we see so often in Isaiah's prophecies And as we move into chapter 30, okay He really zeroes in on those who are putting their trust in human strength Instead of relying on God right specifically.

He calls out those who are making alliances with Egypt, hoping that Egypt will save them from the Assyrian threat. They're basically saying, we'll put our trust in horses and chariots, in military might and political strategy, but Isaiah sees right through their misguided faith. Oh, yeah He calls them rebellious children who refuse to listen to God's voice And the way he describes their stubbornness is both humorous and insightful it is he compares them to like Stubborn donkeys who shake their heads and refuse to budge It's such a vivid image and I think it speaks to that deeper human tendency to rely on our own limited Understanding right instead of surrendering to God's wisdom and guidance. So it's not just about foreign alliances. It's about that universal struggle between human pride and divine sovereignty. Mm-hmm. We want to be the masters of our own destiny, we do, but Isaiah is reminding us that we're not truly equipped to handle all of life's complexities on our own, exactly.

We need God's help, his wisdom, and his strength. We do, and Isaiah makes it very clear that there are consequences for choosing to go our own way. Yeah, he talks about God's anger burning like fire. Mm-hmm, consuming the wicked. It's a pretty intense picture It is of judgment and destruction, but even in the midst of these warnings, right? Isaiah doesn't abandon that message of hope. No, he doesn't; he speaks about a time when God will heal.

Yeah, his people restore their fortunes and bring them back from exile. It's a beautiful reminder that even when we make mistakes, yeah, God's love remains steadfast. He disciplines us.

Yeah, but he never abandons us. That's right. And then in chapter 31 He circles back to that theme of misplaced trust in Egypt He describes the Egyptians as men and not God right their horses as flesh and not spirit He's basically saying you're putting your faith in things that are weak and finite Wow You're building your house on a foundation that can't actually withstand the storms of life And then there's this powerful image of the Egyptians and their allies all perishing together God stretches out his hand The helper will stumble and he who has helped will fall and they will all perish together. I say at 31.3 Yeah, it really drives home the futility of relying on human strength It's a stark reminder that when God acts right all of our carefully laid plans can crumble in an instant We like to think we're in control we do but Isaiah is calling us back to that fundamental truth Yeah that we are utterly dependent on God for everything our very breath our strength everything Yeah, and when we try to live apart from him, right when we reject His wisdom and guidance.

Mm-hmm. We set ourselves up for failure. We do, but the good news is, yeah, Isaiah doesn't leave us in despair.

No, he offers a way back to God, a path to healing and restoration. He speaks of a time when God will pour out his Spirit on his people, right when they will turn from their idols and embrace the true. It's a future where justice and righteousness flow like an unstoppable river. What a vision it is. It's so beautiful. But then, as we move into chapter 32, okay, the focus shifts a bit. Right, Isaiah begins describing the qualities of a righteous leader, someone who leads with wisdom, justice, and compassion. It's like he's offering a blueprint for what true leadership actually looks like a stark contrast to the corrupt and Self-serving leaders who had led the people astray and He uses some really powerful imagery to describe this ideal leader Oh, yeah a hiding place from the wind a shelter from the storm like streams of

water in a dry place Like the shade of a great rock in a weary land Isaiah 32 point two it paints such a comforting picture It does a leader who provides safety security and refreshment for those under their care.

Mm-hmm. And Isaiah doesn't stop there. No, no, he also describes the people who will flourish under this kind of leadership. Yeah, he talks about them being discerning. Mm-hmm, understanding the difference between right and wrong, right being generous, compassionate, and committed to justice.

It's like a ripple effect when the right kind of leadership is in place The entire society is transformed people begin to live differently treat each other differently and the whole community thrives Wow But then just when you think things are looking up right Isaiah throws in a curveball he does he warns about this coming judgment It's a time when the city will be abandoned and the land will lie desolate It's a reminder that even when things seem to be moving in the right direction There can be setbacks Wow that God's ways are not always our ways his plans can unfold in some unexpected ways We do and his timing can be unpredictable too. Absolutely, but even in the midst of this judgment, right? Isaiah doesn't let go of hope. No, he speaks of a time when the wilderness will blossom When the desert will rejoice and bloom it's an incredible testament to God's power to bring life out of death Yeah to restore what has been broken no matter how bleak things may seem God is always at work and His purposes will ultimately prevail they will and as we're approaching the end of chapter 32, okay There's this fascinating section.

Yeah, Isaiah seems to be envisioning a future where women play a significant role in shaping society. He describes them as wise, discerning, and courageous, speaking out against injustice and advocating for the poor and marginalized. Quite remarkable, especially considering the historical context. Yeah, where women were often relegated to the background. Yeah, it's a glimpse into a future where women are leaders, influencers, and agents of change. It's a powerful challenge for us today as we continue to strive for gender equality and create spaces where women's voices and leadership are truly valued. That's right. Yeah, it really is amazing to see how Isaiah challenges those norms, you know, of his time, mm-hmm, and points towards a future where women are empowered, right, and their voices are heard. Talk about a visionary he was, and then as we move into chapter 33, okay, we encounter another Whoa.

Mm-hmm, but this time it's directed at the destroyer, right? Probably referring to these Syrians here. Yeah, most likely, and Isaiah doesn't hold back at all in his condemnation of their brutality and their violence. No, he doesn't. He calls them out for their total disregard for human life. Mm-hmm, and you can almost feel the righteous anger in his words. Oh, yeah, you really can, and it's interesting how he describes the consequences of their actions. He says When you have ceased to destroy, you will be destroyed, and when you have finished ravaging, you will be ravaged Isaiah 33:1.

Yeah, it speaks to this cyclical nature of violence, doesn't it? It does. What goes around comes around, right? Those who live by the sword die by the sword. It creates this whole spiral of destruction that is so hard to break free from. It can, but then Isaiah turns his attention to God. Okay, and describes him as a refuge yes, a stronghold, a place of safety. Yeah, amidst all the chaos and uncertainty, He reminds us that even when the world feels

like it's falling apart, right? God is constant. God is the one true source of hope and stability, and then we get this incredible picture of Jerusalem transformed.

Oh, yeah, it's beautiful. He talks about the lame leaping like deer and the tongue of the mute singing for joy, Isaiah 35:6. It's this vision of a world where the brokenness of humanity is healed and met whole. It's a reminder that God's ultimate plan is not destruction, right but redemption. Yeah, he wants to heal us, restore us and bring us back into a right relationship with himself and with each other, but he also makes it clear that this transformation, right? It's not going to happen overnight. No, it requires us to turn from our wicked ways, to repent and embrace his forgiveness in new life. That's right, and that leads us to a passage in chapter 33 that feels particularly relevant for us today. Oh, yeah, Isaiah really emphasizes the importance of discernment- being able to tell the difference between Truth and falsehood, especially in our world where we're just constantly bombarded with information. It is hard to know what to believe sometimes. How do we develop that discernment, that ability to see through all the noise and find the truth? Isaiah says we need to keep our focus on God, seeking his wisdom and his guidance. When we align ourselves with the source of all truth, we start to see the world differently. We're not as easily swayed by empty promises, or, you know, narratives that just don't ring true, right? We develop a deeper understanding of what really matters. So if we had to sum up the message of Isaiah chapters 28 and 29, what would you say it is? I think for me it's all about true security. Okay, it's not about relying on our own human strength, right, or political maneuvering or material possessions, even, right? It's about that deep abiding trust in the God who is both our judge and our Savior. He challenges us to wake up from our spiritual slumber, to confront the lies that we tell ourselves, right, and to embrace that truth that sets us free. That's good.

And he reminds us that even when we make mistakes, right, even when we choose to go our own way, God's love never fails. It doesn't. Well, this has been an incredible deep dive. Yes, thank you so much for walking us through these powerful and timely chapters from Isaiah.

It's been a pleasure. We hope this has challenged and encouraged you, and that it sparked a deeper desire in your heart to seek true security and lasting hope in the one true God. That's the goal.