

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 14,

6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to The Explainer. Today, we're diving deep into Dr. John Oswalt's incredible analysis of Isaiah Chapters 28 and 29. We're talking massive geopolitical turmoil, intense internal corruption, and, you know, we're really going to decode exactly what all this meant for the ancient world and what it means for us today.

But before we get into the heavy historical stuff, we've got to talk about this. And no, the audio didn't just glitch on you. These are actually ancient Hebrew nonsense syllables.

Literally, it's baby talk. The prophet Isaiah used these bizarre sounds to mock the absolutely drunken leadership of his day. It was his way of instantly grabbing their attention, basically saying, look, since you guys are acting as if you can only handle baby food instead of actual wisdom, well, this is how I have to talk to you.

Talk about a sarcastic, absolutely brutal opener to a very serious warning. To see how this ancient political arrogance perfectly mirrors our own modern blind spots, we're going to navigate through five main parts of Dr. Oswalt's lecture. We've got the looming Assyrian threat, drunk on pride, agreements with death, the precious cornerstone, and finally, judgment is not the end.

All right, let's kick things off with part one, the looming Assyrian threat. So to really grasp the mounting pressure here, we need to rewind to 739 BC, which is the context for Isaiah chapter six. But the absolute game changer happens in 722 BC with the fall of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom.

After Samaria fell, Judah was totally, completely on its own. Imagine the utter panic. The brutal Assyrian border was suddenly sitting just six miles north of Jerusalem.

Six miles. And by 701 BC, which is the focus of the later chapters, that terror literally reaches a boiling point. The reason Judah was sweating bullets was geographic reality.

The Assyrian empire's ultimate prize wasn't actually Judah at all. It was Egypt. Egypt was the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

But to get there, the Assyrian war machine had to march straight down the coastal highway. This meant Judah was inevitably the next target on the chopping block, standing right in the path of the most ruthless military empire the ancient world had ever seen. It's absolutely crucial to understand the emotional weight of this moment.

In this climate of sheer terror, Isaiah repeatedly uses the Hebrew word for woe. Now, we usually think of woe as just a word of anger or a condemnation, but it's actually an archaic term that means alas. It expresses a profound, deep grief.

It's essentially the feeling of an impending funeral for folks who absolutely refuse to trust God in the face of certain doom. Which brings us to part two, drunk on pride. So instead of

turning to their faith during this massive crisis, the nation's leaders resorted to extreme arrogance and literal intoxication.

Isaiah draws this incredibly stark contrast between two very different crowns. On one side, you have the pathetic, fading party wreaths worn by the proud, drunk leaders of Ephraim. They were intoxicated on their own perceived brilliance, thinking they were the smartest guys in the room, while the whole nation was collapsing around them.

On the other side, you have the eternal, glorious crown of the Lord. The question Isaiah is basically asking is, which crown are you going to wear when the enemy is literally at the gates? Because when God comes as king wearing that glorious crown, he brings a very specific Hebrew concept, Mishpat. Mishpat is the divine, proper order established by God in human society and creation.

It's way more than just a legal justice system. It's the total restoration of the world to the exact way it was designed to function. God brings this true order to a society that drunken, foolish leaders have plunged into absolute chaos.

Moving on to part three, agreements with death. As that Assyrian threat kept growing, the leadership in Jerusalem scrambled for some kind of desperate solution. Isaiah calls these leaders scoffers, people who don't just do wrong, but who actively mock what is right.

They openly boasted, we have made an agreement with death. These rulers genuinely believe they had secured their safety through a cynical political treaty with Egypt, or as Dr. Oswalt notes, maybe even a literal pact with the Canaanite god of death, Mot. But Isaiah pulls back the curtain here.

He reveals this is just a fatal illusion. I mean, you can't ally with death to save your own life. Now, it's super easy to look back at ancient people and just shake our heads, right? But let's be honest, we've got our own modern false shelters.

Dr. Oswalt makes the point that just like the ancient Judeans, we often take false refuge in things like endless wealth, extreme materialism, gated communities, or massive military strength. We use all these things to shield ourselves from having to face reality. We make our own agreements with death whenever we rely on these illusions of safety instead of true goodness.

Next up is part four, the precious cornerstone. Against all these flimsy false solutions, God presents his ultimate alternative. So on one side, we've got human lies and false shelters, agreements with death that will absolutely collapse the second the storm hits.

But on the other side, God lays down a tested, precious cornerstone in Zion, a genuinely sure foundation. Dr. Oswalt quotes this beautifully: a trusting life won't topple. When your life is built on that unshakable cornerstone, you don't have to scramble or panic when the world inevitably starts falling apart.

To explain how this actually works, Isaiah uses this brilliant extended metaphor of an uneducated farmer. It goes like this. First, you plow the soil.

Second, you plant the seed at exactly the right time. And third, you harvest according to God's design. It's so simple, right? The proud, highly educated leaders in the capital completely missed what a simple farmer understands perfectly.

The world is literally made to operate in certain ways. Real human security only comes from aligning yourself with how God designed the universe to work, not by forcing your own arrogant plans. And that brings us to our final section, part five: judgment is not the end.

As we reach chapter 29 in the explainer, Isaiah's message takes this massive pivot. We shift from impending doom to a really profound promise of restoration. The key takeaway: judgment is never God's intended last word.

Dr. Oswalt emphasizes this heavily. Yes, the refining fire of judgment is indeed coming to Jerusalem because they straight up refuse to listen. But its ultimate purpose is always, always to lead the people back toward repentance, cleansing, and renewal.

God ultimately wants to heal them. But there is a catch here, and it's basically a diagnostic test for all of us. Are we offering lip service and habit or heart devotion and love? A crucial takeaway from chapter 29 is diagnosing our own spiritual lives.

Like, are we just going through the motions because of tradition? Are we drawing near with our mouths while our hearts are a million miles away? Or does our behavior actually flow from a genuine heartfelt devotion to the Lord? God isn't looking for empty religious habits. He is looking for a refined, truly devoted heart. Which brings us to our final question for today.

As you reflect on the timeless, honestly challenging wisdom of Isaiah, think about this. Are you building your life on fading party wreaths or on the tested cornerstone? When the geopolitical landscape shakes, or even when your own personal world feels like it's completely falling apart, what are you truly relying on? Don't settle for an agreement with death. Choose the cornerstone.

Thanks for joining me on this explainer, and I hope it leaves you with a lot to chew on.