

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 15,

6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to this explainer. Today, we're diving into a fascinating ancient geopolitical crisis that reveals a timeless truth about human nature. We're going to look at our tendency to panic and the absolutely transformative power of waiting.

We'll be drawing heavily on Dr. John Oswalt's insights into the book of Isaiah to explore what actually happens when the world feels like it's completely collapsing around us. So let's start by putting ourselves right in the shoes of Judah's leaders. Imagine looking out from your city walls.

There is an imminent threat of total destruction from the ruthless Assyrian Empire, which is this brutal military machine that has literally crushed everyone in its path. You are desperately searching for a lifeline; your family, your children, your entire civilization is on the line. If an unstoppable army was marching toward your city, who would you trust? To really grasp the terrifying historical stakes of the late eighth century BC, we have to look at the timeline.

In 710 BC, Assyria systematically defeats the neighboring kingdoms. Fast forward to 705 BC, and the Assyrian army is actively campaigning down the coast, just annihilating cities. By 700 BC, their ultimate target is Egypt.

And the massive problem for Judah is that they are situated right up in the hills behind the Assyrian army, putting them smack in the middle of a warpath. Faced with this terrifying crisis, Judah's leaders absolutely panic. Picture this desperate hidden political maneuvering.

They sneak down into some basement chancellery room to forge a secret backroom deal with Egypt. They're whispering, swearing each other to secrecy, desperately trying to keep the prophet Isaiah from finding out. But as Dr. Oswalt points out, the narrative irony is just brilliant.

As soon as they walk out the door, there stands Isaiah basically saying, hi guys, their desperate secret was really no secret at all. Now look at the sheer cost of this Egyptian alliance because the Assyrian army was blocking the easy coastal road. Judah's emissaries had to haul their precious tribute right through the treacherous Negev wilderness.

We're talking about traveling the Negev on donkeys, facing the threat of the lion and lioness, the danger of the deadly Adder, and, get this, attacks from the flying serpents- yes, flying serpents. It's the ultimate terrible road trip. It really highlights the sheer absurdity of their plan, pouring their national treasure into a dangerous feudal solution. But let's pause here for a second.

What was the fatal flaw in Judah's plan? Was the alliance fundamentally bad just because Egypt was a pagan nation? Was it purely a military miscalculation? You know, it's super easy for us to sit back in comfort and judge these ancient people, but when danger is on every

side, we all scramble for the nearest life raft, right? So what made this specific political alliance so deeply offensive to their creator? Well, the crucial point is really simple. They didn't ask God. That is the core of their failure.

God could have potentially used Egypt to defend them. After all, he later used Cyrus who wasn't a believer either. But the issue was they made up their minds and took things entirely into their own hands without seeking divine counsel.

They acted as if they were the potter and God was just the clay they could mold to fit their own geopolitical schemes. There's a profound quote from Dr. Oswald that hits the nail on the head. He says, shame is the result of a failed trust.

This isn't just about mere embarrassment. It's about total disgrace. When you put your ultimate faith in worldly resources, whether that's an ancient Egyptian alliance or modern equivalents like wealth and status, and they inevitably fail you, you are left in collapse.

Relying on things that literally cannot produce what they claim to produce always ends in disaster. And there's a deep, deep irony here. You have these smart, highly educated political advisors who think they know all the sophisticated ins and outs of international diplomacy.

But the text describes them as rebellious children and highlights their complete rejection of truth. They are acting like stubborn, lying kids who think they are so wise and have it all figured out, but they absolutely refuse to listen to their father's instruction. So what exactly are they refusing to hear? The Torah.

Often we hear the word law and think of something that constricts us or just ruins our fun. But the Hebrew word Torah actually means instruction. It's not restrictive law.

It's loving instruction on how we are designed to live so that life actually works. God, isn't trying to limit their options. He is providing the ultimate instruction manual for human flourishing.

As Dr. Oswald notes, we can learn complex algebra, but we stubbornly ignore basic instructions for our own wellbeing. The leaders' panic ran so deep that they actually demanded their prophets stop talking about reality. They essentially said, shut up about the Holy One of Israel.

Just prophesy smooth things to us. Give us comforting illusions because they despise the hard truth. They decided to place their entire national trust in oppression and perverseness, just relying on the false comforting security of Egypt.

Instead, Isaiah responds to this absolute demand for illusions with a terrifying, vivid architectural metaphor. He tells them that because they have despised the word of the Lord, their iniquity is going to be like a breach in a high wall bulging outward. They really thought they were building a strong defense, but their sin and reliance on worldly power was just creating massive hidden structural damage that was completely bound to give way.

Isaiah brilliantly combines two metaphors here to make his point. First, you have the bulging wall, which represents a slow, agonizing, hidden buildup of looming consequences. You know, it's coming down.

You just don't know exactly when, but then when it finally falls, it's compared to the Potter's vessel. Sudden, unfixable, total shattering in an instant, a complete collapse into a thousand pieces, leaving not even a tiny fragment big enough to scoop a drop of water. The contrast between the two approaches is incredibly sharp.

Look at Judah's frantic solution, loud, panic-driven military preparations involving fast horses, Egyptian chariots, the ultimate cavalry weapons of the day, and all those secret meetings. Now compare that to God's solution: quietness, rest, and the gentle whisper of the Spirit. He promises that in quietness and in trust will be their strength, but their response in Hebrew was a stubborn *lo*, meaning no; they insisted on fleeing on those fast horses.

And this brings us to a stunning narrative twist. Because Judah flat out refused to wait for God, the text reveals that the Lord will wait to show mercy. God will wait for them.

Dr. Oswalt compares this to a loving parent who must step back and let their child reap the painful results of their own choices. He essentially has to let them run completely out of their own resources before they are finally ready to receive his grace. Which teaches us something vital about this whole idea of waiting.

Waiting is putting feet to trust. It is not passively sitting on your hands or just doing nothing while your world burns down around you. No, waiting on the Lord is an active, deliberate, daily choice to seek his direction before moving forward.

It's about stepping away from the noise, quieting the 40 different voices in our heads, and creating space to hear that gentle whisper, but hey, the narrative doesn't end in destruction. It pivots to this incredible promise of restoration and a holy festival. God tells them that if they trust him, he will provide rain for their seed and literal springs of water, even up on the mountaintops, and when the Assyrian threat is finally dealt with, it won't be a terrifying war zone for Judah.

It will be celebrated like a joyous, holy religious festival in the night, complete with songs, gladness of heart, and beautiful music. This beautiful promise revolves around a very rich Hebrew word, *Pakad*. Now in our English Bibles, it's often translated as to visit, but it means so much more than that.

Pakad means to visit, judge, bless, enumerate, or appoint. Think of it as a personal inspection by the commanding general. The text paints this picture of God stepping in, effectively saying, okay, stop the panic.

The general would like to visit you, and he will personally straighten this whole mess out. When the Lord of heaven's armies descends, his action is absolutely decisive. God is described as a fierce lion protecting Mount Zion, completely undaunted by the shouting and noise of the Assyrian shepherds.

The text reminds Judah of a stark reality. The Egyptians are merely men, not God. Their fast horses are just flesh, not spirit.

It is a powerful reminder that the terrifying forces of this world are absolutely nothing compared to the protective presence of God. So as we wrap up this explainer today, I want to leave you with this final provocative thought. Think about your own life.

When the inevitable crises hit and the pressure mounts, do you instinctively rush for the chariots? Or do you have the courage to wait, quiet your soul, and listen for the gentle whisper? Thanks so much for joining me, and keep seeking that quiet strength.