

## **Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 17, 6-min. Video Overview**

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to the explainer. Today, we're diving into lessons in trust, ruin and redemption in Isaiah 34 and 35. We're going to be unpacking some really fascinating teachings from Dr. John Oswalt on these two chapters, specifically looking at the ultimate real-world consequences of who we actually choose to rely on.

Let's get right into it. So where do you put your trust? I mean, that is the foundational question echoing through this entire study. Think about it.

What actually happens to our world and to our personal lives when we choose to trust infallible humanity or, you know, our own clever strategies and political nations versus actually waiting on the Lord? Well, as Dr. Oswalt points out, Isaiah is essentially laying out the incredibly stark results of those two very different choices. To really bring this home, Dr. Oswalt brilliantly sets up this dramatic contrast. It's literally a tale of two chapters.

On one side, you've got chapter 34, the wilderness. This vividly describes the devastating problem of self-reliance, basically a world turned into a barren wasteland. And then on the exact opposite side, chapter 35, the garden.

This presents the blooming, joyful solution of God's redemption, where that same desert is completely transformed into a lush garden. To give us a picture of this universal destruction, the text zooms in specifically on Edom. Geographically, Edom was just a small neighboring nation sitting just south of the Dead Sea, but historically, oh man, they famously blocked Israel's journey to the promised land.

Later on, they even helped the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem and literally laughed at Israel's downfall. Because of that awful track record, Edom becomes the ultimate towering symbol for any nation or really any person who actively blocks God's plan of love and shows outright hostility toward the Lord. Now, a crucial point here is understanding the sheer severity of this judgment.

And that brings us to a somewhat terrifying, but absolutely essential Hebrew concept called harem. So harem describes something given over wholly to God for destruction, simply because its corruption has become total. It's not just some random act of slaughter.

No, it's this profound idea that a world completely hostile to God has become so entirely corrupt that it essentially becomes its own sacrifice. We literally forfeit ourselves into the hands of God when we completely reject him. And Isaiah uses some incredibly heavy, almost overkill imagery to make us feel the sheer weight of that judgment.

I mean, listen to this. The mountains shall flow with their blood. All the hosts of heaven shall rot away.

Okay. That sounds incredibly dark, right? But Dr. Oswalt notes that this is just Isaiah's way of showing us exactly what a world totally devoid of God's order actually looks like in reality.

See, when we choose to trust the nations instead of God, we are basically inviting a wilderness of chaos straight into our life.

Look at the consequences of a world without God. It's total desolation. The imagery Isaiah uses doesn't have any helpful domestic animals like cows or horses.

Instead, it's an environment completely unfit for human survival. Scavengers are the only inhabitants. Only jackals and animals of prey are roaming free.

It is totally unproductive. Quite literally, it's nature run amok. It's the absolute undoing of creation.

But right here is a profound turning point in the text, and it's something we desperately need to untangle. It's the difference between revenge and vengeance. So revenge is just the human cycle of retaliation, right? You know, you hurt me, so I'm going to hurt you back.

And the cycle just escalates until everything is destroyed. We're just trying to get our own back. Vengeance, however, in the biblical sense is entirely different.

It is trusting God's justice. It's trusting him to balance the books for what someone else did in his own time and in his exact own way. And you know what? Letting God handle vengeance brings this immense sense of freedom.

Dr. Oswald points to the incredible example of David hiding out in the cave with King Saul. So Saul had been literally hunting David down to kill him. Suddenly David has this perfect opportunity to strike his own manner, even whispering, Hey, God has delivered your enemy right to you.

But David, he outright refuses to take his own revenge. He leaves it entirely in God's hands. When we step back and let God balance the books, we find true freedom because we're finally released from that exhausting burden of having to play God ourselves, and that exact freedom paves the way for a glorious shift in chapter 35; the entire tone pivots from complete ruin to absolute redemption.

Isaiah says the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad. And what's so incredible here is the direct verbal connection back to the previous chapter. The exact same desolate places that were just haunts for jackals and wild scavengers.

They are miraculously transformed into joyful, watery places full of reeds and rushes. To really paint this vivid picture of redemption, Isaiah uses the lush geography of Lebanon, Mount Carmel, and the plain of Sharon back then. These were ancient universally understood images of rich, vibrant fertility, and the message here is incredibly powerful.

God's redemption. Isn't just about him preserving a nice garden that already exists. No, it's about his power to take our personal deserts.

You know, those massive messes we've made through our own total lack of trust and miraculously turn them into fruitful gardens. Okay. But how do we actually experience this transformation in real life? It really is a matter of perspective.

Dr. Oswald shares this humorous, but honestly highly effective anecdote about a psychiatrist treating twin boys to explain this perfectly. So one boy was an absolute pessimist, right? Always looking at the downside, and the other was an absolute optimist. The doctor decides to try a sort of shock therapy experiment by putting them in highly contrasting rooms, just to challenge their natural ways of seeing the world.

First, they put the pessimistic boy in a room packed wall to wall with every wonderful toy you could possibly imagine. A couple of hours later, they open the door fully expecting this kid to be absolutely thrilled. Instead, they find him sitting right in the middle of all these amazing toys, just crying his eyes out.

When they ask him what's wrong, he just wails, somebody's going to come and take all these toys away from me. Meanwhile, they had put the optimistic twin in a room entirely filled with horse manure. Yeah.

So when they walk down the hall to check on him, they don't hear any crying. Actually, they hear cheerful whistling. They opened the door to find the boy happily shoveling the manure as fast as he possibly can.

Utterly confused, they ask him what in the world he is doing. He just grins at them and says, man, with all this horse manure, there's got to be a pony in here somewhere. The whole point of that story is that how you see things makes absolutely all the difference.

Dr. Oswald points out that to be truly redeemed is to be given new eyes to see. The glory of the Lord has been there all along filling the entire earth, but stuck in our own self-reliance, we are so often totally blind to it. Redemption is what allows us to see God's hand at work.

Even when we feel like we're standing waist deep in a rut full of manure, it literally gives us the ability to see his glory shining through in our absolute darkest hours. And you know, this redemption, it isn't just some sudden magical destination; it's an ongoing journey. Isaiah calls it the highway of holiness.

It's a smooth, straight path right into the heart of God's character. It is totally free from those ravenous beasts of the wilderness that we created. And who actually gets to walk on this highway? The ransomed.

Even when we've fallen headfirst into the pit, we dug with our very own hands. Just by refusing to trust him, God reaches down, buys us back, and sets our feet right on the safe, incredible journey of relationship. But make no mistake, walking this highway requires a massive shift in our posture.

As Dr. Oswald so profoundly puts it, trust looks like vulnerability. Untrust? Well, that looks like pride, worry, and that very human instinct to just control everything ourselves. Trusting the Lord actually means refusing to run ahead of God.

It means having the courage to sit down and wait for his timing and his understanding, which, let's be honest, leaves us feeling incredibly vulnerable. So as we wrap up this explainer, the ultimate question for you to take away is simply this: will you wait on the Lord? We've seen the chaotic wilderness that comes from our own self-reliance, and we've

seen the blooming, beautiful garden that comes from his redemption. We know for a fact that God is ready right now to reach into our mess and set us on that highway of holiness.

But the choice is completely yours. Will you let go of your need to control, embrace that terrifying vulnerability, and truly wait on the Lord?