

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 20, Audio Overview Podcast

Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everyone. We're diving into Isaiah chapters 40 and 41 this week. Wow.

Yeah. Buckle up. It's, uh, it's where the book kind of takes a major turn, and we'll be using a lecture from Dr. John Oswalt, a pretty big name in Old Testament studies, to guide us through it.

Oh yeah. He's great. Now these chapters really dig into some big questions.

A lot of us wrestle with. Absolutely. Like how can we find hope when things are tough? How does God's power show up when we feel weak? Yeah, some heavy stuff.

Whether you're looking for spiritual guidance, fascinated by ancient history, or just love stories about bouncing back, this deep dive has something for everyone. For sure. So one of the first things that jumps out about these chapters is the time jump.

Yeah. It's like, whoa, what just happened? Yeah. It goes from events around 700 BC to about 560 BC.

Wow. It's like fast-forwarding through history. Centuries.

So now Isaiah is speaking to a future audience, the Israelites living in exile. And it makes you wonder, how could Isaiah even speak to people so far in the future? Right. Like, could he really know what would happen that far ahead? That's where the idea of divine inspiration gets really interesting.

Yeah. That's a big one. Now, Dr. Oswalt believes Isaiah wrote the whole book.

He's a big proponent of single authorship. Yeah. But he does acknowledge that there's debate about whether there were multiple authors involved.

There are some pretty strong arguments on both sides, actually. But even with that debate, the message is still so relevant to us today, no matter who penned it. Totally.

And the tone changes so dramatically in these chapters. We go from warnings and judgment to comfort and encouragement. Yeah.

It's a big shift. Okay. Let's talk about comfort for a second.

Okay. Dr. Oswalt makes a good point that in Isaiah 40.1, comfort doesn't just mean feeling all warm and fuzzy. It's more like being encouraged or fortified.

It's like a deeper kind of comfort, right? It's about finding strength to face reality, not just pretending it's not there. Exactly. Think of the Holy Spirit, often called the comforter, the one who empowers us to navigate those tough situations.

It makes me think about times when I felt completely overwhelmed and how my faith helped me push through. It wasn't about ignoring the problem, but finding the strength to deal with it. That's a great way to put it.

So how does this apply to the Israelites in exile? I mean, they're literally in exile far from their homeland. Imagine yourself in their shoes. You're feeling abandoned by God.

You're questioning his power against the mighty Babylonians. You're probably wondering, how could this happen to us? We're God's chosen people. Dr. Oswalt really highlights these feelings of discouragement and doubt, and they're feelings a lot of us can relate to.

Totally. I mean, we've all felt let down at some point, maybe even questioned if God is really there. Absolutely.

So how does God respond to these Israelites who are feeling lost and forgotten? It's the big question. Well, he doesn't just sit around and wait for them to come crawling back. He takes the initiative.

He goes to them. Isaiah 40.3 to 5 uses this really powerful image of God preparing a way in the wilderness, making a straight path for his people. That's beautiful imagery, isn't that kind of foreshadowing John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus? Exactly.

It's this beautiful reminder that God is always working, even when we can't see it, to draw us closer to him. He bridges the gap between our weakness and his power. Powerful stuff.

Just like he did for the Israelites, he offers us comfort and hope through Christ. That's amazing. So even when we feel lost in our own wilderness, God's already working to make a way for us.

That's a great takeaway. Then Isaiah 40.6 to 8, bam, hits us with this stark analogy. All flesh is grass.

Ooh, yeah. It's temporary and fading, but God's word lasts forever. It's a powerful juxtaposition, right? We're fragile, but the truth and promises in scripture, those are eternal.

It really makes you think about what truly lasts. We all face our own mortality, but God's word offers something enduring, something we can hold on to. It's an anchor.

But, you know, the exiles were really doubting God's power. I mean, could he really deliver them from this impossible situation? It's a valid question. It's a huge empire, Babylon.

And God responds in Isaiah 40.1, 1 to 4, 6 with these amazing rhetorical questions. It's like he's saying, look at the cosmos. I created all of this.

You think I can't handle Babylon? He's basically showing off his creative power, his sovereignty, a little bit of divine flexing. Maybe he's in control of the universe, even the gods of other nations. Dr. Oswald points out this fascinating detail here.

Even thousands of years ago, people worshipped the stars as deities. Yeah. And even today, we still call Venus the morning star, just like they did in ancient Sumeria.

Wow, that's interesting. It's a testament to the enduring power of these beliefs. But the point is, God is above it all.

He's ultimately in control. So back to the exiles' question. Will he actually deliver them? The million-dollar question.

That's one we often ask ourselves too, right? Right time. We're facing our own challenges. We know God can do it, but will he do it for me? For us.

In verse 27, the exiles express this feeling of God being hidden or indifferent to their suffering. They're essentially saying, okay, God, we get it. You're powerful.

But where are you now? Yeah. It's like, hello. Little help over here.

It's that human struggle of feeling distant from God when we need him the most. So how does God respond to that very human cry for help? Well, in verses 28 and 31, he counters this feeling of abandonment with a powerful reassurance. He reminds them of his everlasting nature and his unfailing care for those who trust in him.

It's about placing our trust and expectations in God, even when we don't understand his plan. It's a tough one. Dr. Oswald uses this word waiting, which I find really interesting.

Yeah. What do you think he means by that? It's like actively choosing to place our hope in God. It's not passive.

It's a decision. Right. It's like you're putting all your weight on him.

And then there's that beautiful imagery in verse 31, soaring with eagles, running with champions, but also walking with the turkeys, walking with the turkeys. I love that one. Right.

Me too. But it makes such a good point. Faith isn't just about those mountaintop experiences.

It's about those everyday moments of faithfulness. Even when we feel a little bit like a turkey, like a turkey ourselves, just slogging through, but the good news is we don't have to do it alone. We have God's help.

Yeah. And that leads us perfectly into Isaiah 41, where God makes this bold claim. He says he's raising up Cyrus, a Persian king, to conquer Babylon and set his people free.

And he tells Israel, do not fear, for I am with you. Powerful stuff. It's this amazing promise of deliverance, but it's not passive.

I like that you pointed that out. He doesn't tell them to sit back and relax. He says, I will help you.

Yeah. Which implies this partnership, like we have a role to play. That's a good word, partnership.

It's not a one-sided rescue mission, you know? And it makes me think about what that partnership looks like in my own life. Me too. What does it look like to partner with God in the midst of our struggles? It's a great question.

So God reassures them. He promises to help them. Then in verses 14 and 20, he gives them even more reasons not to be afraid.

And he calls them a worm, which doesn't sound super complimentary at first, actually kind of insulting. A little bit. Yeah.

Hey, worm. But it's this powerful metaphor. Think about a tiny worm burrowing through the earth, creating something new.

Okay. I see. God saying, even though you feel weak and insignificant, I'm going to use you to accomplish great things.

That's a good word picture. What a powerful reminder that our perspective isn't always God's perspective. That's for sure.

And then he goes on to describe this incredible transformation. He'll turn their wilderness into a garden, a place of abundance and beauty. Wow.

He's painting this picture of restoration and hope, even in the midst of their exile. He's good at that. It reminds me of how God can bring beauty from ashes.

He can take our most difficult experiences and use them for good. Absolutely. And the promise of restoration isn't just physical.

He promises that the deaf will hear and the blind will see. It's a picture of healing and wholeness, both physically and spiritually. It sounds like God is promising to make all things new.

So he's reassured them, promised to help them, given them reasons not to be afraid. What happens next? Well, now he challenges them. In verses 21 to 29, he's essentially saying, okay, let's hear what your idols have to say.

What can they offer you? It's a brilliant rhetorical strategy. He's kind of calling their bluff, right? Forcing them to face the reality of what they've been putting their trust in. Exactly.

He's exposing the emptiness of their false gods, highlighting their inability to provide real hope or deliverance. He contrasts their silence with his own powerful actions. Showing the difference between the true God and idols.

Yeah. It's like he's saying, you've put your trust in things that can't even speak, let alone deliver you. But I am the living God, and I'm here to help.

You put your trust in the wrong horse. So how did the exiles respond to this challenge? Well, that leads us to the climax of this section. In verse 29, God declares, behold, they are all a delusion.

Their works are nothing. Their metal images are empty wind. Wow.

He doesn't hold back. It's a total takedown of idolatry. He's calling them back to himself, the only true source of hope and salvation.

But how exactly does he plan to deliver them? Are we about to find out? Yes. In a dramatic turn, God reveals his plan in verse 30. He says, I have raised up one from the North, and he shall come from the rising of the sun.

He shall call on my name. This is a reference to Cyrus, the Persian king who will conquer Babylon and set God's people free. Wow.

That's a very specific prediction. It is. It makes you wonder if the Israelites were even paying attention at this point.

I think so, because God's really showcasing his sovereignty and foreknowledge here. He knows what's going to happen before it even takes place. And he's using Cyrus, a pagan king, as an instrument to accomplish his purposes.

It's incredible, right? It's incredible. It's a reminder that God works in mysterious ways, often using unexpected people and circumstances to bring about his will. He's full of surprises.

So we've seen God's comfort, his power, his faithfulness, and now his sovereignty on full display. He's orchestrating events, even using a foreign king to deliver his people. It begs the question.

What's the question? How will they respond? Will they finally trust in God's promises, or will they continue to cling to their doubts and fears? Yeah, we'll have to find out. And it's interesting how God doesn't just tell Israel, don't be afraid. He gives them specific reasons why.

Yeah. He reminds them that they are his chosen people, his servants. Like, look, I know you haven't been perfect, but you're still mine.

I chose you, and I'm not giving up on you. Right. And that must have been incredibly reassuring for the Israelites to hear.

I mean, wouldn't you still be freaked out? They're in exile. Oh, for sure. So he gives them five reasons why they shouldn't fear.

The first one in verse 10 is so simple, but so profound. What is it? I am with you. Powerful.

And it echoes that powerful name from Isaiah chapter seven, Emmanuel, which means God with us. It's amazing how much weight that short phrase carries. No matter what we face, God is right there with us.

But what about the very real threat of their enemies? I mean, those guys are terrifying. Right. And in verses 11 and 12, God assures them that their enemies will be defeated, scattered so completely they won't even be able to find them.

Wow. That's reassuring. And he says it's because he himself is going to help them.

This is where I love how God doesn't just offer a passive deliverance. He gets involved. He actively participates in the process.

He says, I will help you. Which implies this partnership. It's not a one-sided rescue mission.

Right. We have a role to play. And it makes me think, what does that partnership look like in my own life? What does it look like to partner with God in the midst of my own struggles? That's a good question for all of us to consider.

So God reassures them, promises to help them. And then in verses 14 and 20, he gives them even more reasons not to be afraid. And he calls them a worm.

Which, yeah, doesn't sound very complimentary at first. A little insulting, actually. Kind of like, hey, worm.

Yeah. But Dr. Oswald points out that it's actually this powerful metaphor. Think about a tiny worm burrowing through the earth, creating something new.

Okay. I see where he's going with this. God is saying, even though you feel weak and insignificant, I'm going to use you to accomplish great things.

That's a really cool way to look at it. What a reminder that our perspective isn't always God's perspective. Totally.

And then he goes on to describe this incredible transformation. He'll turn their wilderness into a garden, a place of abundance and beauty. Wow.

He's painting this picture of restoration and hope, even in the midst of their exile. He's good at that. It reminds me of how God can bring beauty from ashes.

He can take our most difficult experiences and use them for good. Absolutely. And the promise of restoration isn't just physical either.

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It sounds like God is promising to make all things new. He is. So he's reassured them, promised to help them, given them reasons not to be afraid.

What happens next? Well, now he challenges them. In verses 21 and 29, he's essentially saying, okay, let's hear what your idols have to say; what can they offer you? It's a brilliant rhetorical strategy. He's kind of calling their bluff, right? Forcing them to face the reality of what they've been putting their trust in.

Exactly. He's exposing the emptiness of their false gods, highlighting their inability to provide real hope or deliverance. He contrasts their silence with his own powerful actions, you know.

Showing the difference between the true God and idols. Yeah. It's like he's saying, you've put your trust in things that can't even speak, let alone deliver you, but I'm the living God, and I'm here to help.

You put your trust in the wrong horse. So how do the exiles respond to this challenge? Well, that leads us to the climax of this section. In verse 29, God declares, behold, they are all a delusion.

Their works are nothing. Their metal images are empty wind. It's a total takedown of idolatry.

Wow. He has a hold back. Nope.

He's calling them back to himself, the only true source of hope and salvation. But how exactly does he plan to deliver them? Are we about to find out? Yes. In a dramatic turn, God reveals his plan.

In verse 30, he says, I have raised up one from the North, and he shall come from the rising of the sun. He shall call on my name. This is a reference to Cyrus, the Persian king who will conquer Babylon and set God's people free.

Wow. That's a very specific prediction. Very specific.

It makes you wonder if the Israelites were even paying attention at this point. I think so, because God's really showcasing his sovereignty and foreknowledge here. He knows what's going to happen before it even takes place.

And he's using Cyrus, a pagan king, as an instrument to accomplish his purposes. It's incredible, right? It's incredible. It's a reminder that God works in mysterious ways, often using unexpected people and circumstances to bring about his will.

He's full of surprises. So we've seen God's comfort, his power, his faithfulness, and now his sovereignty on full display. He's orchestrating events, even using a foreign king to deliver his people.

It begs the question. What's the question? How will they respond? Will they finally trust in God's promises or will they continue to cling to their doubts and fears? Well, Isaiah 41 ends with this powerful image of God's victory over these idols. He's like, let them bring forth their witnesses that they may be justified, or let them hear and say it is true.

But the idols are silent, of course. Totally silent. No power, no voice, no way to answer.

It's such a stark contrast to a living God who has spoken so clearly and powerfully throughout these chapters. It makes you wonder why anyone would ever put their trust in something they can't even speak. Right.

And then God says in verse 26, who declared it from the beginning that we might know and beforehand that we might say he is right. He's challenging his people to acknowledge his sovereignty, his ability to predict the future. Like I told you, this was going to happen.

I'm in control and you can trust my promises. It's like he's putting his track record on the table. Exactly.

But even with all of that, it can still be so hard to let go of our fear and doubt, can it? I know I struggle with that. Oh, absolutely. Doubt and fear are just part of being human.

They are. But God doesn't leave us to struggle alone. He offers comfort.

He offers strength. He reminds us of his presence and his power. And that brings us to the heart of the message.

In the final verses of Isaiah 41, God gives his people a specific reason not to be afraid. He says, fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

It's just this incredible promise of support and deliverance. That's beautiful. It makes me think about how often we try to carry our burdens alone when God is right there offering to help.

It's so easy to forget that. We get caught up in our struggles, and we forget that we don't have to go through them alone. We don't.

God is with us, offering his strength and guidance every step of the way. Every step. So as we wrap up this deep dive into Isaiah 40 and 41, what can we take away from all of this? What does it mean for us today? Well, I think the biggest takeaway is that no matter what challenges we face, no matter how hopeless things may seem, God is with us.

He is powerful, he's faithful, and he's working to bring about his purposes. We can find comfort and strength in his promises. And we can trust him to guide us through our own wilderness experiences, to lead us to a place of hope and restoration.

He'll get us there. Isaiah 40.31 tells us those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. So as you go about your week, I want to leave you with this question.

What does renewing your strength look like in your life right now? What weary steps might God be calling you to take, knowing you don't have to take them alone? And remember, keep exploring Isaiah. It's a great book. It's a book full of hope and encouragement for all who seek God's guidance and strength.

Thanks for joining us on this deep dive. See you next time.