

## Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 1

### Isaiah 1

#### Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

#### 1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 1, Isaiah 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This text is a transcript of the first session of Dr. John Oswalt's teaching series on the Book of Isaiah. **The lecture focuses on Isaiah chapter one**, exploring themes of **Israel's rebellion against God**, the importance of **trusting God's trustworthiness**, and the **nature of God's holiness**. Dr. Oswalt also provides a **structural overview of the entire book of Isaiah**, highlighting its unique literary features and **debates surrounding its authorship and time period**. Finally, he **interprets Isaiah's use of imagery and symbolism**, particularly regarding trees and the concept of judgment leading to restoration.

**2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Isaiah).**



**Oswalt\_Isaiah\_Sessi  
on01.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. John Oswalt's teaching on Isaiah, Session 1:

#### **Briefing Document: Dr. John Oswalt on Isaiah, Session 1**

**Date:** October 10, 2024 (Implied)

**Source:** Excerpts from "Oswalt\_Isaiah\_EN\_Session01.pdf"

**Overview:** This document summarizes Dr. John Oswalt's lecture on Isaiah chapter 1, which is part of a broader series on the book of Isaiah. The lecture covers the book's overarching themes, historical context, and detailed analysis of the first chapter, highlighting key concepts like servanthood, the trustworthiness of God, rebellion, and the nature of true worship.

#### **I. Introduction and Context:**

- **Welcome & Logistics:** Oswalt begins with a warm welcome and logistical announcements. He notes a special prayer need and encourages attendees to sign a clipboard for email updates. He also details the schedule of lectures, including breaks for travel.
- **Isaiah - "Prince of the Prophets":** Oswalt labels Isaiah the "Prince of the Prophets" because it contains "a more complete compendium of biblical theology than any other book in the Bible." He suggests it is the one book to keep if all others were taken.
- *Quote: "Because there's more New Testament in Isaiah than any other Old Testament book, and obviously there's more Old Testament than any New Testament book. But this great book in many, many ways sums up Old Testament teaching on many, many different subjects."*
- **Purpose of the Series:** The series aims to explore the depths of Isaiah, recognizing it is a text with "no bottom." Oswalt encourages insights from the group.
- **Book's Structure (Roadmap):** Oswalt provides a structural overview of Isaiah, noting recurring themes of servanthood, the trustworthiness of God, grace, and righteousness.
- **Chapters 1-5:** Introduction – the problem of servanthood.
- **Chapter 6:** The call to servanthood.

- **Chapters 7-39:** Focus on the trustworthiness of God.
- **Chapters 40-55:** God's grace as the motivation to trust Him, and the servant as the means of grace.
- **Chapters 56-66:** Grace does not negate the need for righteousness, grace as the means of revealing God's righteousness.
- Quote: *"The fundamental issue of life is will I trust God? Will I put my weight down on Him? Is He worthy of my trust? Will He betray my trust? Can I trust Him? If I can trust Him, then I can lay aside my royal robes and put on the towel of the servant because I know that I'm safe in His hands."*
- **God's Revelation Through Time and Space:** Oswalt emphasizes God's choice to reveal truth in a specific historical and cultural context, not just through bare statements like other holy books. The meaning and impact is tied to the particular people, space, and time.
- Quote: *"God chose to reveal His truth in the context of time and space. He chose to reveal Himself in relationship with a particular people. That's not an accident...God is not about making bare pronouncements. God is about relating to His creatures."*
- **Historical Setting:** The book was written between 739 BC and 701 BC in Judah. The Assyrian Empire was the major power of the time. He explains the Assyrian's expansion and its impact on the region. The goal was to conquer Egypt and control world trade. The lecture detailed the fall of surrounding nations like Israel, Philistia, and later, the attempted conquest of Judah. He also touches on the rise of Babylon, the Babylonian exile of the Judeans, and their eventual return.
- **Future Audience:** Oswalt notes the unique nature of Isaiah, where parts are addressed to people in the future. He refutes the idea that this necessarily means multiple authors, asserting the authority of the book's claim of single authorship. He argues that talking to people 150 years in the future is mind-boggling and "meant to be mind-boggling."
- **Multiple Authorship Debate:** Oswalt addresses the scholarly debate around multiple authorship of Isaiah. He critiques the idea that the book was written by committee over 400 years. He asserts that the complexity of the text does not require multiple authors, and that many modern scholars are unwilling to believe God could give a prophet a message for people in the future.

- Quote: *"It's interesting to see evangelicals knuckling under on this thing. It's disturbing, I may say. But there's where it is. More and more people are unable to believe that God could have given Isaiah a message for people 150 years in the future."*
- **Prophecy:** He notes that some would claim prophecy is not possible, and that if an apparent prophecy comes true, it was written after the event and then rewritten to look like the prophecy came first. He refutes this view.

## II. Analysis of Isaiah Chapter 1:

- **Vision vs. Message:** Oswalt highlights that Isaiah received a "vision," not just a "message," emphasizing that the prophetic experience is engaging and involving, not merely cognitive.
- Quote: *"A vision is involving. And that's typical of the prophets. The prophets are not merely mouthpieces. They're not merely hearing a divine word and spitting it out again. That may be true of pagan prophecy, but it's not true of Israelite prophecy. They are passionately involved in what's going on here."*
- **Court Case Imagery:** The chapter opens with a court case. Heaven and Earth are called to be the jury, testifying that they are obedient, unlike Israel.
- Quote: *"Hear, oh heavens, and give ear, oh earth, for the Lord has spoken... Now why would heaven and earth be a good jury? Because they're obedient. They don't rebel."*
- **Rebellion as a Key Issue:** Oswalt stresses the word "rebelled," which is a recurring theme. He distinguishes it from "disobedience" (missing the mark) and "twistedness," defining rebellion as a willful denial of God's limits. He uses the ox and donkey as an example of animals who are smarter than Israel since they at least recognize their owners/masters, while Israel does not recognize God.
- Quote: *"The ox knows its owner. The donkey its master's crib. But Israel does not know. My people do not understand...Israel is dumber than a jackass."*
- **Consequences of Rebellion:** The chapter details the consequences of rebellion, including being likened to a beaten-up person, a lonely shack in a cucumber field, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- **Key Titles of God:** Oswalt emphasizes two critical titles for God in this chapter:

- **Lord of Hosts (Lord Almighty):** He highlights the importance of understanding that this title refers to God's command over heaven's armies and that the prophets use this title to juxtapose it with earthly armies.
- Quote: *"We know the one who has all the armies of heaven at his fingertips. Why would you be so scared of them?"*
- **The Holy One of Israel:** Oswalt explains this title's repeated usage in Isaiah, emphasizing its meaning of "absolutely other," distinct from pagan gods and tied to God's moral perfection.
- Quote: *"...the one like whom there is no other... And that means there's only one holy character... And the good news is, his character is love, justice, righteousness, truth, goodness."*
- **Critique of Empty Ritual:** Oswalt discusses God's rejection of hollow ritual, highlighting that rituals are meant to symbolize a genuine heart condition. God detests ritualism that isn't matched by justice and righteousness.
- Quote: *"The real indicator of our heart condition is how we treat one another, especially those who can't repay us... Live like the devil for six days and go to church on the seventh day and you're going to hear the quiet sound of God vomiting in the background."*
- **Call to True Worship:** God's solution is not more religious activity, but repentance. This involves seeking justice, correcting oppression, caring for the fatherless and the widow.
- Quote: *"Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause."*
- **God's Invitation to Reason:** Oswalt highlights God's invitation to reason together, which emphasizes that forgiveness is possible through repentance. While they cannot make themselves clean, repentance shows that they have accepted God's free forgiveness.
- **Judgment as Cleansing:** Oswalt emphasizes judgment is not God's final word, but rather it is a path to cleansing and redemption.
- Quote: *"One of the key themes of this book is judgment is not God's intended last word. Rather, judgment is to lead to cleansing and redemption."*

- **Contrast: The City's State:** The city, once faithful, is now compared to a whore; princes are now rebels; silver is now dross, best wine is mixed with water. These are all images that highlight the contrast between the city's true calling and its current state.
- **The Mighty One of Israel:** A third title of God is noted here, which is another title alongside holy one of Israel and Lord of Hosts.
- **Restoration Through Judgment:** Despite the call to judgment, Oswalt highlights that God will restore the city if they turn to him.
- **Hypocritical vs. True Religion:** The chapter contrasts hypocritical religion with true religion, with true religion marked by genuine repentance. This contrast is highlighted when God compares the future “faithful city” with the city currently described as a “whore.”
- **Trees as Symbols:** Oswalt mentions that "trees" are a recurring image in the book, used both positively (to represent life given by God) and negatively (to symbolize human pride and power).
- *Quote: "Pagans in the Near East tended to worship trees because they were not that common...Isaiah says, the oaks that you desire, the gardens you've chosen, trees are used in both ways in the book. On the one hand, when they symbolize human pride and power, they're going to be all cut-down. On the other hand, when they symbolize the life that God can give to those who are cut down and broken, then God will make you like a tree."*
- **Connectors:** Oswalt urges the audience to observe connectors like “but”, “therefore”, “since,” because those connectors show relationships in the text.
- **Repentance:** Oswalt argues that the good news that Isaiah preaches is always tied to repentance. The wonderful promises that are given cannot be achieved without it.

### III. Conclusion

Dr. Oswalt's session provides a comprehensive overview of Isaiah's key themes and introduces a detailed analysis of the first chapter. The lecture emphasizes the significance of context, the nature of rebellion, the call to true worship, and the hope of redemption through God's grace, and the role of repentance in reconciliation with God. He emphasizes the need to trust God, and he argues that if we trust Him, then we can trust his plan. He ends the session with prayer.

## 4. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 1, Isaiah 1

### Isaiah Study Guide: Session 1

#### Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Why is Isaiah often called the "Prince of the Prophets"?
2. According to Oswalt, what is the fundamental issue of life that is explored in Isaiah?
3. What is significant about God choosing to reveal His truth in the context of time and space?
4. What historical empire is the primary backdrop for the first part of the book of Isaiah (chapters 1-39)?
5. How did the Assyrian empire ultimately fall?
6. What is the situation of the people addressed in Isaiah chapters 40-55, and how does the message address this situation?
7. What is the overall message in Isaiah 56-66 and what is the situation of the audience that is being addressed?
8. What does it mean for God to call the heavens and the earth as witnesses?
9. Explain the difference between disobedience and rebellion, according to Oswalt's lecture.
10. Why is God upset with rituals in Isaiah chapter one?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. Isaiah is often called the "Prince of the Prophets" because his book is considered a more complete compendium of biblical theology than any other book in the Bible. It sums up Old Testament teaching on many subjects and contains a great deal of New Testament material as well.
2. According to Oswalt, the fundamental issue of life is whether one will trust God. This is the foundation for servanthood, and the book of Isaiah explores whether God is worthy of our trust and if we can rely on his promises.

3. God chose to reveal His truth in the context of time and space because He is not about making bare pronouncements, but about relating to His creatures. This means understanding the historical context, the culture, and the specific circumstances of the people the message was originally intended for,
4. The primary backdrop for the first part of Isaiah is the rise of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians were expanding their territory, posing a major threat to Judah and surrounding nations which shapes the historical context of the book.
5. The Assyrian empire was ultimately conquered by a coalition of the Babylonians and the Medes. Their expansion was like a balloon: they expanded and became weaker and then popped, and ceased to exist.
6. Isaiah 40-55 is addressed to people in exile in Babylon, after the destruction of Jerusalem, and they are deeply discouraged by their situation. These chapters promise deliverance and return from exile, showing God's faithfulness despite their circumstances.
7. Isaiah 56-66 is addressed to people who have returned to Jerusalem, and they are struggling to rebuild their lives and the temple. This section addresses the question of whether grace means that righteousness does not matter, and it also focuses on how God's righteousness can be revealed in the lives of the servants and the importance of living righteously.
8. God calls the heavens and the earth as witnesses to emphasize that the divine court case against Israel is a cosmic matter. They are the jury of the court, as they are obedient to God, in stark contrast to Israel's rebellion and disobedience.
9. Disobedience is a failure to follow a rule or direction and can be accidental, whereas rebellion is a deliberate and stubborn rejection of God's authority and boundaries. It is a conscious denial of limits, not just a simple mistake.
10. God is upset with rituals in Isaiah chapter one because they have become empty and hypocritical, not reflecting the people's true heart condition or their commitment to justice and righteousness. Instead of being an act of true worship, the rituals were only an outward show devoid of love for God and their neighbors, and therefore, are meaningless and even offensive.



## Essay Questions

1. Explore the significance of the "servanthood" theme in Isaiah, as explained by Oswalt, and how it relates to the concept of trust in God. Consider the role of grace in enabling sinful human beings to become God's servants.
2. Discuss the historical and political context of Isaiah's prophecies, particularly focusing on the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. Explain how this context influences Isaiah's message and its relevance to the people of Judah.
3. Analyze Oswalt's interpretation of the structure of the book of Isaiah, particularly the alternating positive and negative tones in chapters 1-5. How does this structure contribute to the overall message of the book?
4. Examine the importance of the titles for God used in Isaiah, specifically "Lord of Hosts," and "the Holy One of Israel." What do these titles reveal about God's character and his relationship with his people?
5. Discuss Isaiah's critique of ritualistic religion in chapter 1, and the specific behaviors that God desires. How does Isaiah connect religious practices with social justice and right living?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Servanthood:** The role of Israel as God's servant to the world, and individuals as servants to God, requiring trust in God's authority, grace, and righteousness.
- **Assyria:** An ancient empire that posed a significant threat to Judah during Isaiah's time, their expansion is the main backdrop for much of the first part of the book of Isaiah (ch.1-39).
- **Babylon:** An ancient city and later empire that succeeded Assyria, who took Judah into captivity and is prominent in chapters 40-55 of Isaiah.
- **Medes:** A people group living east of Babylon who joined with the Babylonians to conquer the Assyrians. They would later join with the Persians to conquer the Babylonians.
- **The Holy One of Israel:** A unique title for God used throughout Isaiah, emphasizing God's absolute otherness, moral purity, and unique nature.

- **Lord of Hosts:** A title for God emphasizing his supreme power as the commander of heaven's armies, highlighting His ability to control and overcome earthly powers.
- **Disobedience:** The failure to follow a rule or direction, often accidentally, is less severe than rebellion.
- **Rebellion:** The deliberate and stubborn rejection of God's authority and boundaries, it is a denial of the limits that God sets for us.
- **Iniquity:** A term indicating twistedness, moral corruption, or sin; used to express the people's wrongdoing.
- **Exile:** The state of being banished from one's native country or home, specifically referring to the Babylonian exile of the people of Judah.
- **Prophecy:** A message or communication believed to be from God, often concerning future events and/or circumstances.
- **Vision:** A symbolic and engaging experience that conveys a message from God.
- **Righteousness:** Actions and attitudes that are morally correct, aligning with God's standards, and also a gift from God, expressed in human life through grace.
- **Grace:** God's unmerited favor and kindness, as a free gift that allows human beings to become servants of God.
- **Ritual:** Religious practices meant to be symbolic of the true condition of our hearts, but become problematic when practiced without genuine faith and justice.

## 5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 1, Isaiah 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions on Isaiah 1 based on Dr. John Oswalt's Lecture:

1. **Why is Isaiah called the Prince of the Prophets?** Isaiah is referred to as the Prince of the Prophets because his book contains a more complete compendium of biblical theology than any other book in the Bible. It is considered a summary of Old Testament teaching, with a significant presence of both Old and New Testament themes. There is also some suggestion that Isaiah had a royal connection, but his theological contributions are the primary reason for the title.
2. **What is the overarching structure of the book of Isaiah, according to Dr. Oswalt?** Dr. Oswalt outlines the book of Isaiah in terms of themes: Chapters 1-5 introduce the problem of servanthood, focusing on whether God can be trusted. Chapter 6 is about the call to servanthood. Chapters 7-39 deal with the trustworthiness of God. Chapters 40-53 explore God's grace as the motivation for trust and also how sinful people can become servants. Finally, chapters 56-66 discuss how grace enables the righteousness of God to be seen in the servant. The concept of servanthood and its implications are a recurring theme.
3. **Why is it important to understand the historical context of the book of Isaiah?** The book of Isaiah was written between 739 BC and 701 BC in Judah, during a time when the Assyrian empire was expanding. This context is crucial because the book addresses the political and social realities of the time, including the threat of Assyrian conquest. Understanding this historical backdrop helps to make sense of the messages and warnings in the book. The latter part of Isaiah speaks to exiles in Babylon, so we need to understand that historical context as well.
4. **What is significant about the word "vision" in Isaiah 1:1?** The fact that Isaiah's message is introduced as a "vision" rather than a message that he "heard" suggests that his experiences were more than just cognitive or rational. A vision is more engaging and involving, indicating that the prophets are passionately invested in what they are conveying. They are not just mouthpieces of God but actively participating in and emotionally connected to the message.

5. **Why does Isaiah call on the heavens and the earth to hear his message in Isaiah 1:2?** The heavens and the earth are called upon to hear as witnesses in a court case. They are presented as a jury who are creations of God that are obedient and thus serve as a contrast to the rebellious people of Israel. Their consistent obedience highlights the rebellious nature of Israel.
6. **What is the difference between "disobedience" and "rebellion" according to Dr. Oswalt's explanation of Isaiah 1?** Disobedience can be unintentional or accidental, like missing a target. Rebellion, on the other hand, is a deliberate denial of any limits set by God. It signifies a stubborn determination to go against God's will. Isaiah emphasizes that Israel's actions are not just acts of disobedience but outright rebellion, showing a deep-seated rejection of God's authority.
7. **Why does God express such strong disapproval of sacrifices and rituals in Isaiah 1?** God's disapproval of sacrifices and rituals stems from the fact that they have become divorced from genuine heart condition and corresponding actions. These rituals, while commanded in the past, were intended to be symbolic of one's relationship with God. When performed without sincere repentance and a commitment to justice and righteousness, especially towards those who cannot repay, they become meaningless and even offensive to God. Hypocritical religious observance is seen as an abomination to God.
8. **What does Isaiah teach us about the relationship between judgment and redemption?** Isaiah makes it clear that judgment is not God's final word; instead, it is a necessary step towards cleansing and redemption. While the people of Israel may have felt that it was either judgment *or* deliverance, Isaiah asserts that the only hope for true deliverance comes through judgment. This judgment serves to correct their behavior and ultimately leads to restoration and transformation. The message is not just of doom and destruction but of hope and renewal through divine intervention.