

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 9

Isaiah 17-18

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 9, Isaiah 17-18, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This is a transcript of a Bible study lecture by Dr. John Oswalt on Isaiah chapters 17 and 18. **Oswalt interprets these chapters as warnings against misplaced trust in worldly powers, emphasizing the importance of faith in God's judgment and ultimate triumph.** He connects the historical context of ancient Israel's reliance on alliances with contemporary issues facing the church, **urging listeners to prioritize spiritual focus over worldly solutions and methods.** The lecture uses repeated themes, contrasts, and cause-and-effect analysis to unpack the meaning of the text, **illustrating the consequences of forgetting God and the importance of trusting in His plan.** Finally, Oswalt applies the lessons to the challenges of contemporary society, highlighting the need for faith and perspective in the face of worldly anxieties.

2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 9 – 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
on09.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from Dr. Oswalt's lecture on Isaiah 17-18:

Briefing Document: Dr. John Oswalt on Isaiah 17-18

Date: October 29, 2024 (Based on source file name) **Source:** Excerpts from "Oswalt_Isaiah_EN_Session09.pdf" **Presenter:** Dr. John Oswalt

I. Overview and Context

- **Goal of the Study:** Dr. Oswalt aims to provide a roadmap for understanding the book of Isaiah as a cohesive whole, rather than a collection of isolated chapters. He emphasizes that understanding the structure and interconnectedness of the book is essential. He states, "One of my goals for you...is that you'll have a sense of how this big book fits together."
- **Key Recurring Themes:**
- **Repetition is Key:** Oswalt highlights the importance of recognizing repeated themes and words, stating, "Repetition is the soul of education." He encourages students to pay attention to these repetitions as they indicate key points the author is emphasizing.
- **Trust in Yahweh:** Chapters 7-39 emphasize the need for trust in God. This section discusses how the failure to trust God leads to negative consequences, while trusting him is the basis of true servanthood. Oswalt argues, "The bottom line really is, can you and I trust Yahweh? Can we trust the I Am? Can we put our weight down on Him?"
- **Consequences of Choices:** Oswalt stresses that God's judgment is not arbitrary but a consequence of choices, specifically the choice to forget or reject God.
- **God's Perspective:** He continually points to the importance of seeing situations and circumstances from God's perspective, not through the lens of human power.
- **Structure of Isaiah:**
- **Chapters 1-6:** The call to servanthood, highlighting the problem of Israel's sin and the promise of redemption. It uses Isaiah's call as a model for the nation.
- **Chapters 7-39:** Focuses on the theme of trust, broken into three sections:

- **Chapters 7-12:** King Ahaz's challenge to trust God.
- **Lessons in Trust:** Reasons to trust God rather than human power.
- **Chapters 13-23:** Judgment oracles against nations, beginning with Babylon and narrowing to Assyria, Philistines, Moabites, and now, Syria and Israel.
- **Chapters 40-66:** This section is not explicitly discussed in this lecture excerpt.
- **Current Focus: Chapters 17 and 18:** Oswalt explains that chapters 17 and 18 are part of the "judgment oracles against the nations" section of Isaiah.

II. Detailed Breakdown of Isaiah 17 & 18

- **Isaiah 17: Damascus & Ephraim (Israel) (17:1-3):** The oracle begins with a focus on Damascus, but quickly includes Ephraim (Israel). Oswalt notes that these two nations are considered together because they were allies who attacked Judah, causing Ahaz to trust Assyria, highlighting the folly of trusting human power.
- **Focus on Israel (17:4-6):** The focus shifts to Israel, possibly because Judah was more likely to trust or fear their northern brother. Oswalt illustrates the coming judgment as a harvest where only a small remnant will be left, comparing it to "when the reaper gathers standing grain... as when one gleans the ears of grain" and "as when an olive tree is beaten, two or three berries in the top."
- **A Shift in Tone (17:7-8):** This section shifts to prose, suggesting a possible different time of writing or speaking. This section talks about a day when the people will wake up and look to God and stop trusting in idols, recognizing him as the "Maker, the Holy One of Israel." He argues that, "holiness at the bottom is God's absolute otherness... They're going to wake up, and they're going to say, guess what? I didn't make myself."
- **Canaanite Cities (17:9):** The strong cities of Israel will become like the deserted places of the Canaanites, suggesting a reversal of roles.
- **Forgetting God (17:10-11):** The destruction of Israel is a consequence of forgetting God, the "rock of their refuge." Oswalt explains how the Hebrew concept of remembering involves both mental awareness and obedience, stating "to remember God...is to obey. If you remember who God is, and you remember what He's done for you, what are you going to do? You're going to do what He wants." He further argues that forgetting God, in a Hebraic sense, is to disobey God, "to forget God is to disobey."

- He also uses a metaphor for the rock of refuge as a safe space during times of threat, noting “the rock of your refuge...a place of defense... a place of protection.”
- **The Consequences are Not Arbitrary (17:11):** The text emphasizes that God's judgment isn't arbitrary; it's a natural consequence of choices that deviate from God's design, likening it to the natural consequences of not watering plants.
- **Contrast: Noise and Silence (17:12-14):** The loud, thundering, and roaring nations are contrasted with God's quietness and ultimately their disappearance. Oswalt states, “Here are these mighty nations that we are tempted to fear and to trust. God says, get your perspective right. They are dust. They are chaff.” He connects this to the idea in Psalm 2, where God laughs at the nations, and the idea that “weeping endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”
- **Isaiah 18:Lack of 'Oracle' Designation (18:1):** Chapter 18 notably lacks the typical “oracle” or “burden” designation, unlike surrounding chapters.
- **Cush & Ambassadors (18:1-2):** The chapter begins with a description of the land of Cush, south of Egypt, sending ambassadors to a powerful nation. This may refer to Egypt, ruled by Ethiopians at the time, sending envoys to Mesopotamia.
- **God's Signal (18:3):** God raises a signal (nes - a flag) on the mountains, calling the world to pay attention. This ‘nes’ is a recurring symbol in Isaiah, often connected to the Messiah.
- **God's Quiet Observation (18:4):** God's response is one of quiet observation, “I will remain quiet and look on from my dwelling place.” This underscores that while nations are active and noisy, God is calmly in control. Oswalt points out how this relates to the need for stillness and rest in God, contrasting it with the temptation to frantic activity.
- **Harvest Analogy (18:5-6):** The image of a harvest where the nations are cut off with pruning hooks and left for birds and beasts is a strong visual of God's judgment, also connecting it to the previous images of a harvest and gleaned field in Isaiah 17.
- **Tribute to the Lord (18:7):** The chapter concludes with a vision of the same people bringing tribute to the Lord, showing the ultimate subjection of nations to God. This echoes the theme throughout Isaiah that the nations are under God's judgment and one day will worship Him.

III. Application and Relevance to the Present Day

- **The Church and the World:** Oswalt applies the principles in these chapters to the church in the 21st century, urging the audience to consider how these issues apply to them, not just to the ancient Judeans. He specifically discusses avoiding reliance on worldly methods in ministry and political action. He states, "I'm a little anxious that it [using worldly methods] is beginning to trust the world's methods to do God's work...I just think it's dangerous."
- **Trusting God over Institutions:** Oswalt emphasizes trusting God's ways over trusting in institutions (even political structures), especially in times of perceived decline or trouble.
- **Need for Quietness:** He encourages rest in God, rather than frantic activity, to address problems, stating, "God's weakness is stronger than the strength of the world...in quietness and rest is your salvation, but you would not."
- **Focus on God's Perspective:** Oswalt argues that, particularly for evangelicals, there is a need to focus on God's perspective. He states, "rather than telling God how he needs to save his church, we need to listen to God as to how he intends to do it."
- **Avoiding Demonization:** The lecture stresses the need to avoid demonizing others, especially those with different political views, which can hinder the church's ability to express love.

IV. Key Quotes

- "Repetition is the soul of education."
- "The bottom line really is, can you and I trust Yahweh? Can we trust the I Am? Can we put our weight down on Him?"
- "Holiness at the bottom is God's absolute otherness."
- "to remember God...is to obey. If you remember who God is, and you remember what He's done for you, what are you going to do? You're going to do what He wants."
- "to forget God is to disobey."
- "I will remain quiet and look on from my dwelling place."

- “God's weakness is stronger than the strength of the world...in quietness and rest is your salvation, but you would not.”
- “rather than telling God how he needs to save his church, we need to listen to God as to how he intends to do it.”

V. Conclusion

Dr. Oswalt's lecture presents Isaiah 17-18 as a powerful message about God's sovereignty over nations and the need for God's people to trust Him alone. The lecture challenges listeners to examine their own reliance on the world's systems and to prioritize God's perspective in all areas of life. The recurring themes of trust, remembrance, consequences, and God's ultimate control provide a timeless framework for understanding both the ancient context and the present day.

4. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 9, Isaiah 17-18

Isaiah Study Guide: Chapters 17-18

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. In the context of Isaiah, what is the significance of repetition as a literary device and why does Oswalt emphasize it?
2. How does the concept of "trust" function as a key theme in Isaiah, according to Oswalt?
3. What was the historical context surrounding King Ahaz's decision to trust Assyria instead of God, and how does Isaiah interpret this event?
4. How does Oswalt interpret the symbolic significance of Babylon in the book of Isaiah?
5. What is the specific judgment that is being pronounced upon both Damascus and Ephraim in Isaiah 17, and why are these two nations grouped together in this context?
6. What is the metaphorical significance of the descriptions in Isaiah 17:5-6 about the harvest and olive tree, and what do these images convey about the fate of Israel?
7. According to Oswalt, how does the "day" in Isaiah 17:7-8 signify a turning point for the people of Israel?
8. Explain the relationship between remembering and obeying God, and how does it connect to the concept of forgetting God, as discussed by Oswalt?
9. In Isaiah 17:12-14, what is the main contrast that is emphasized, and what does it illustrate about the relationship between God and the nations?
10. What is the significance of the "signal flag" (nes) in Isaiah 18, and how does it relate to God's actions and purposes?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Repetition is a crucial literary device in Isaiah, signaling to the reader what the author wants to emphasize. Oswalt stresses this as, "repetition is the soul of education," and to highlight key themes and points of emphasis within the text.

2. Trust is presented as the basis of servanthood and essential to a right relationship with God. According to Oswalt, the failure to trust God is the root of many problems, tracing back to the Garden of Eden where humanity chose to take care of itself instead of trusting God.
3. King Ahaz was challenged to trust God when Israel and Syria attacked Judah, yet he opted to trust Assyria for deliverance. Isaiah interprets this as a sign of distrust in God and a lack of faith, leading to negative consequences.
4. Oswalt interprets Babylon as symbolic of human pride and the pursuit of power and glory. He argues it is representative of any creature that exalts itself to the place of God and is, therefore, doomed to fall.
5. In Isaiah 17, a judgment is being pronounced on both Damascus and Ephraim for their alliance against Judah and for turning away from God. They are grouped because of their historical alliance and their shared lack of faith.
6. The images of a harvested field and an olive tree with few remaining berries represent the devastating judgment that is to befall Israel. These images also signify the small remnant that will remain after the judgment.
7. The "day" in Isaiah 17:7-8 marks a pivotal moment when the people of Israel, after experiencing the consequences of their actions, will turn their eyes to their maker and turn away from their idols. This turning is to reestablish relationship.
8. Oswalt connects remembering God with obeying Him, suggesting that a true memory of God leads to active obedience. Forgetting God, on the other hand, is not just a mental lapse but is demonstrated by disobedience and a turning away from God's ways.
9. The main contrast in Isaiah 17:12-14 is between the powerful roaring of the nations and God's quiet, decisive action. This contrast illustrates the ultimate power and sovereignty of God and the fleeting nature of the nations' earthly power.
10. The "signal flag" (nes) symbolizes God's sovereignty and his call for the nations to pay attention. It is a message that the nations should not be trusted or feared because God is supreme and will bring all things to his desired end.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the tension between trusting God and trusting in human power, using examples from Isaiah 17-18 and applying these concepts to the modern Christian experience.
2. Analyze the concept of "remembering God" in the context of Isaiah, and explore how this relates to the broader themes of faith, obedience, and judgment in the book.
3. How does Isaiah's use of metaphors and imagery in chapters 17-18 contribute to the overall message of judgment and hope, and what role do these literary devices play in conveying God's message?
4. Compare and contrast the themes of judgment and grace as they are presented in Isaiah 17-18, exploring how both concepts function in relation to the nation of Israel and the other nations.
5. Examine the relevance of Isaiah 17-18 to contemporary societal and political issues, particularly concerning the relationship between faith and secular power, and discuss practical implications for the modern church.

Glossary

Ahaz: King of Judah who chose to trust Assyria over God when threatened by Israel and Syria.

Assyria: A major Mesopotamian empire, viewed as both a threat and a tool of God's judgment in Isaiah.

Babylon: In Isaiah, it represents human pride and the desire for power, symbolizing any nation that exalts itself above God.

Cush: Refers to the region of ancient Ethiopia, the southern boundary of the known world.

Damascus: The capital of Syria, often allied with the northern kingdom of Israel.

Ephraim: Refers to the northern kingdom of Israel, often in opposition to Judah, the southern kingdom.

Idols: Anything that people create and worship instead of their maker, the true God.

Isaiah: The prophet who delivers the oracles in the book of Isaiah.

Jesse: The father of King David, from whose line the Messiah is prophesied to come.

Judgment Oracles: Prophetic messages of condemnation and punishment from God against nations or individuals.

Nes: (Hebrew) Meaning a signal flag, banner, or ensign, often used to call people together or to mark a significant event.

Remnant: A small group of people who remain after a time of judgment, carrying the hope for future restoration.

Rock of Refuge: A metaphor for God as a place of safety, protection, and stability.

Servanthood: A key concept in Isaiah, where the nation of Israel, and individuals, are called to be servants of God, bearing his message to the world.

Synonymous Thoughts: A key characteristic of Hebrew poetry where two lines express the same idea using different words.

Trust: A central theme in Isaiah emphasizing the importance of having faith in God rather than in human power or nations.

Yahweh: The personal name of God in the Old Testament, "I Am."

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 9, Isaiah 17-18, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Isaiah 17-18

- **What is the main focus of Isaiah 17-18, and how does it fit within the larger book of Isaiah?**
- Isaiah 17-18 are part of a larger section (chapters 13-23) focusing on judgment against various nations. These chapters specifically address Damascus (Syria) and Israel, highlighting their interconnectedness in their rebellion and subsequent judgment. More broadly in Isaiah, this section follows chapters emphasizing the need to trust God (chapters 7-12) and serves as a warning against trusting in human power or alliances. The structure of Isaiah is meant to show a roadmap that moves from the call to service, through a period of testing and a call to trust, and ultimately to the consequences of not trusting God, to a future hope.
- **Why are Damascus (Syria) and Israel judged together in Isaiah 17?**
- Damascus (Syria) and Israel (Ephraim) are judged together because they were allies who threatened Judah and caused King Ahaz to seek help from Assyria, illustrating the danger of trusting in human alliances instead of God. This alliance also represents the temptation to rely on others rather than on God's provision. By judging them together, God demonstrates the futility of their combined power.
- **What does the imagery of the harvested field and the few remaining olives in Isaiah 17:5-6 represent?**
- The images of a harvested field with only a few stalks of grain left and an olive tree with only a few olives on the highest branches symbolize the severe judgment and decimation that will come upon Israel. It represents a drastic reduction in population, leaving only a small remnant after the divine judgment. It communicates the thoroughness of the judgment and the smallness of the survivors, suggesting a devastating loss.
- **What is the significance of the phrase "In that day" which appears in Isaiah 17:7 and 17:9?**
- The phrase "in that day" refers to a future time of judgment and ultimately, solution or restoration. It signifies a turning point where the current state of affairs will change dramatically and people will come to recognize and rely on

God, although it might be a result of the consequences of ignoring God. It highlights a period of divine intervention that will lead to a new reality for God's people after a time of difficulty and correction.

- **How is the concept of "forgetting God" portrayed in Isaiah 17:10-11, and what does it imply about the relationship between memory and obedience?**
- "Forgetting God" in Isaiah is not merely a mental lapse but a failure to live according to God's commands. In Hebrew thought, mental activity and real activity are inseparable, meaning to "remember God" is to obey Him. Therefore, to "forget God" is to live in disobedience and not acknowledge God's role as a protector and provider. It suggests that actions are the true measure of whether someone truly remembers God.
- **What is the main point of the contrast between the thundering nations and God's quiet observation in Isaiah 17:12-14 and 18:4?**
- The contrast between the roaring, thundering nations and God's quiet observation emphasizes God's sovereignty and power over earthly nations. Despite the nations' arrogance and power, they are ultimately temporary and powerless compared to the eternal God. God's seeming inactivity is not weakness but a position of power, indicating that He controls all events and is not threatened by human opposition. The nations' roaring is like chaff on the wind – loud but ultimately empty.
- **What does the imagery of the "land of whirring wings" in Isaiah 18:1 and the messengers from Cush in 18:2 represent?**
- The "land of whirring wings" represents the area south of Egypt, particularly Ethiopia (Cush), which was known for its buzzing insects. The messengers from Cush are envoys representing the nations that were tempted to trust in alliances as opposed to God. The buzzing can suggest a kind of frantic activity which contrasts to God's calm control. The messengers further represent the tendency of nations to rely on human diplomacy and power rather than seeking divine guidance.

- **What practical applications can be drawn from Isaiah 17-18 for the church today?**
- Isaiah 17-18 serves as a warning to the church against trusting in the world's methods or political systems, or in our own power. It urges believers to rely on God's power and sovereignty, remain centered on God, and not be overwhelmed by fear or a need to control situations. Just as God's weakness is stronger than the world's strength, we should prioritize quietness, rest and trust in God's plan. Additionally, this text cautions against the tendency to politicize faith issues and warns against demonizing others, instead promoting an approach of love and dependence on God. Ultimately, the church should be more focused on glorifying God and trusting in His victory, instead of being focused on earthly means.