

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 19

Isaiah 38-39

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 19, Isaiah 38-39, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt discusses Isaiah chapters 38 and 39, exploring the chronological uncertainty surrounding their placement within the book. The lecture centers on King Hezekiah's illness, his recovery, and subsequent interaction with the Babylonians. Oswalt analyzes Hezekiah's prayer and God's response, highlighting the complex interplay between divine sovereignty and human faith. He emphasizes the ongoing, messy nature of a relationship with God, contrasting Hezekiah's eventual failings with the ideal of a "whole heart" devoted to God. Finally, the lecture connects these events to the broader themes of trust in God and the coming Messiah.

2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 19 – 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_Session19.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided source, "Oswalt_Isaiah_EN_Session19.pdf":

Briefing Document: Isaiah Chapters 38-39

Source: Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 19 (Isa. 38-39)

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Introduction: This session focuses on Isaiah chapters 38 and 39, which Dr. Oswalt identifies as a "downer" compared to the preceding chapters. These chapters, while seemingly following the narrative of chapters 36-37 (the deliverance from Sennacherib), are likely out of chronological order. Oswalt posits that they occurred *before* the events of chapters 36-37, around 710 BC, rather than 701 BC. He explores the implications of this chronological discrepancy and delves into the character and actions of King Hezekiah.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Chronological Inconsistencies & Purposeful Arrangement:

- The timing of events in chapters 38-39 is debated. The mention of Merodach-Baladan, a Babylonian rebel, places the events possibly around 710 BC. This conflicts with Hezekiah's reign dates and the generally accepted timeline placing the Assyrian deliverance in 701 BC.
- Oswalt suggests that Isaiah deliberately placed these chapters out of chronological order for a specific purpose. He argues these events occurred before the deliverance from Sennacherib.
- The Bible gives conflicting dates for Hezekiah's lifespan, which complicates the dating and sequence of these events. There is no clear way to reconcile these dates.
- Oswalt states, *"If indeed they are out of order chronologically, then Isaiah has done this on purpose, and he has a reason for doing this..."*

1. God's Response and the Nature of Relationship:

- **God's Initial Pronouncement:** God initially tells Hezekiah, *"Set your house in order, for you shall die, you will not recover."* This pronouncement is presented with no qualification.

- **Implicit Qualification:** Despite the absolute pronouncement, God's word is not always "lockstep." There's an implied qualification, as God responds to Hezekiah's plea. This reflects a *relationship* between God and humanity, not simply a mechanical process of pronouncement and fulfillment.
- **Hezekiah's Plea:** Hezekiah doesn't repent in the traditional sense. Instead, he appeals to God based on his past faithfulness and good works: *"Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight."* (Isaiah 38:3)
- **God's Adjustability:** Oswalt highlights God's willingness to adjust and give in response to the individual within a relationship. This emphasizes God's care and involvement in the lives of people. He stresses, *"God is willing to adjust, God's willing to give in response to everything we are...he is not a force with a mask on."*

1. Hezekiah's "Walk" with God and its Significance:

- **"Walk Before God":** Oswalt emphasizes the concept of "walking before God," using the imagery of a sheep following a shepherd, rather than "walking with God." This underscores the idea of living a life directed by God, where God leads and the believer follows, like a sheep follows its shepherd.
- *"Wasn't a straight line...it's a journey"*
- **Truth and Faithfulness:** Hezekiah's walk is described as being "in truth" and "with a whole heart." In the Bible, truth is more about actions than words. Truthfulness is linked to faithfulness, reliability, and dependability.
- Oswalt states: *"...in the Bible, truth is Regularly something you do. It's not first of all something you say it's something you do that is to be true to someone to be faithful to them to be absolutely reliable..."*
- He argues that breaking faith is a "terrible offense to the God who is true."
- **"Whole Heart":** The concept of a "whole heart" (Hebrew word related to *shalom*, meaning to be complete, put together, undivided) is crucial. It signifies a heart entirely devoted to God, without division or reservation.
- Oswalt clarifies, *"...the central core of your person is All God's that's what it's saying and that's exciting Because clearly it is possible. God doesn't say Hezekiah you liar."*

- **Not Perfection, but Belonging:** Having a whole heart does not mean performing or understanding perfectly, but belonging entirely to God. This speaks to Christian perfection, not in performance, but in belonging.

1. Hezekiah's Mortality and its Implications:

- **Somber Reflection:** Hezekiah's response to his extended life is somber, focusing on his mortality and the inevitability of death. This contrasts with an expectation of joy and celebration following his healing.
- Oswalt states, *"...this is primarily a reflection on mortality."*
- Hezekiah reflects that his life is "plucked up" and that he will not see the Lord or look on man anymore.
- **Focus on Present Life:** Despite belief in heaven, this passage emphasizes the importance of living fully in the present, walking with God each day in fellowship. Hezekiah's experience is a reminder that life on earth is real and meaningful.
- Oswalt quoting CS Lewis *"Heaven begins now and hell begins now"*

1. Hezekiah's Pride and Missed Opportunity:

- **Babylonian Visit:** The Babylonians visit Hezekiah after hearing of his illness and recovery. This event is a significant development, given the long distance between Babylon and Jerusalem. The Babylonians see this as noteworthy and may have viewed it as an opportunity.
- **Hezekiah's Response:** Instead of giving God the glory, Hezekiah shows off his wealth and military might to the Babylonians. He becomes prideful and self-aggrandizing. This is a stark contrast to the humility and trust he showed during the Assyrian crisis.
- Oswalt notes *"He acted as though all the possessions were his instead of belonging to God."*
- **Missed Witness:** Hezekiah missed a major opportunity to declare the glory of God to the nations, as foretold in Isaiah 2.
- **Prophecy of Babylonian Captivity:** Isaiah prophesies that all of Hezekiah's treasures and even some of his descendants will be taken to Babylon, emphasizing that the Babylonian threat is more significant than the immediate Assyrian threat. This prophecy provides a segue to the later chapters of Isaiah (40-66), which address the exiles in Babylon.

1. Hezekiah as a Fallible Man, not the Messiah:

- **Good but Mortal:** While Hezekiah was a genuinely good and faithful man, he is not the Messiah. This contrasts with the promise of the Messiah in chapters 7-12. Hezekiah's fallibility and mortality underscore the need for a redeemer who transcends human limitations.
- **Trust as a Lifestyle:** Trust cannot be a single, crisis-driven event; it has to be a way of life.
- **Motivation for Trust:** The key question is what motivates us to a lifestyle of trust, beyond a single act of faith during a time of crisis. This question will be addressed in the following chapters (40-66).

Conclusion:

Chapters 38 and 39 of Isaiah, while seemingly a historical narrative, are a profound exploration of the relationship between God and humanity. They emphasize the importance of living a life of faithful obedience and wholehearted devotion to God, acknowledging that trust must be a lifestyle, not just a reaction to crises. The story of Hezekiah, both his faith and his fallibility, reminds us that even those who have experienced great faithfulness and success are not beyond the need for grace. Hezekiah's story ultimately points forward to the need for a perfect Messiah who is not constrained by human frailty, the promise for which is further developed in later chapters of Isaiah.

This briefing document should provide a comprehensive understanding of the key themes and ideas presented in Dr. Oswalt's session on Isaiah 38-39.

4. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 19, Isaiah 38-39

Isaiah Chapters 38-39 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the primary question surrounding the date of the events in Isaiah chapters 38 and 39, and what is the significance of this chronological debate?
2. According to Dr. Oswalt, what is the initial message God sends to Hezekiah in chapter 38, verse 1, and what makes it unusual?
3. What does Hezekiah emphasize in his prayer and response to God's message, and how does it differ from a traditional call to repentance?
4. Dr. Oswalt uses Genesis 17:1 to emphasize a specific idea. What is that idea and how does that relate to Hezekiah's description of his walk with God?
5. According to the lecture, what is the meaning of "truth" and "faithfulness" in the context of Hezekiah's description of his walk with God?
6. Explain the concept of a "whole heart" (shalamed) as described in the lecture, and how it relates to Christian perfection.
7. In Hezekiah's poem in chapter 38, what is the primary focus, and how does that relate to the theme of mortality in the passage?
8. Why did the Babylonians send envoys to Hezekiah, and what does this indicate about the political landscape of the time?
9. How does Hezekiah's response to the Babylonian envoys contrast with what the Lord expected of him, and what does it reveal about his character?
10. What is the significance of Isaiah's prophecy about the Babylonian exile in chapter 39, and how does it shift the focus from Assyria?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The main question is whether the events of chapters 38 and 39 occurred before or after the Assyrian crisis in chapters 36-37. The debate is significant because the dates conflict with known historical figures, and the order affects the narrative's message.

2. God tells Hezekiah to "set your house in order, for you shall die, you will not recover." It is unusual because it is a direct pronouncement of death without immediate qualification, although it changes.
3. Hezekiah emphasizes his past faithfulness and good actions in God's sight, rather than repenting for sin. His response highlights his relationship with God based on his past behavior and does not include a call to change his behavior in the present.
4. God tells Abram to "walk before me and be blameless," which emphasizes a continuous life of obedience. This idea is linked to Hezekiah's language of having "walked before you" in his appeal for healing.
5. In this context, truth and faithfulness are not just words, but actions that prove reliability. They refer to a life of dependability and commitment to God, and also to the idea that others should also find him reliable.
6. A "whole heart" (shalamed) is one that is undivided and completely devoted to God; it is unified. It is not perfect performance or understanding, but a heart that is completely God's and belongs entirely to him.
7. The primary focus of Hezekiah's poem is on his own mortality and the fact that his life will end. He acknowledges that even after healing he must still face death, reinforcing the theme that he is simply a mortal man.
8. The Babylonians sent envoys because they heard of Hezekiah's miraculous recovery from a terminal illness. This indicates the wide reach of the news and implies a politically motivated interest in Hezekiah's God.
9. Instead of using it as an opportunity to declare God's glory, Hezekiah shows the Babylonians his wealth and armaments. He acts pridefully as if his power came from himself, and not from God.
10. The prophecy about the Babylonian exile foreshadows a future crisis, shifting the focus from the immediate threat of Assyria to the coming threat of Babylon. This also serves to show that God is sovereign over history.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the chronological debate surrounding Isaiah 38-39 and how the ordering of these chapters might affect the interpretation of the text as a whole.
2. Analyze the ways in which Hezekiah's response to his impending death reveals both his faithfulness and his limitations, and how this relates to the broader theme of human mortality.
3. Compare and contrast Hezekiah's interaction with God in chapter 38 with his interaction with the Babylonian envoys in chapter 39, and discuss the significance of these different responses.
4. Explore the concept of "walking with God" as described in the lecture, and discuss how this relates to a life of faith, faithfulness, and commitment.
5. Examine how the events and prophecies in Isaiah 38-39 contribute to the overall message of the book, particularly in relation to the themes of trust, divine sovereignty, and human fallibility.

Glossary

Merodach Baladan: A Babylonian rebel who led multiple rebellions and is mentioned in Isaiah 39. He presents a dating problem for events in the book of Isaiah, as some historical records would not have him alive during the same time period.

Shalom: A Hebrew word that means more than simply "peace," it means to be put together, united, and made whole. It implies a sense of completeness and harmony.

Shalamed (heart): A heart that is put together, whole, and undivided in its devotion to God. This is the same root word as *shalom*.

Whole Heart: A heart fully devoted to God, without reservation or division. It signifies a state of complete belonging to God, not necessarily perfect performance, but absolute commitment.

Truth: In the biblical context, truth is more than just words; it refers to actions that prove reliability and faithfulness to others.

Faithfulness: To be dependable and reliable in one's commitment to God and to others.

Metaphorical Walk: The concept of walking in the Old and New Testaments is most frequently used as a metaphor for how one lives his life with God.

Self-Aggrandizement: The act of promoting oneself and one's own importance, often at the expense of others and without giving God the glory.

Messiah: The promised deliverer of the Jewish people, who will bring about God's kingdom on earth. In Isaiah 7-12, there are promises of the Messiah. In Isaiah 36-39, Hezekiah's shortcomings prove that he is not the Messiah. **Eunuchs:** Castrated men, often employed in royal courts. In Isaiah 39, it is prophesied that Hezekiah's descendants will be eunuchs in Babylon, so they will not carry on his line to the throne.

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 19, Isaiah 38-39, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Isaiah Chapters 38-39

1. **Why are chapters 38 and 39 considered a "downer" compared to the preceding chapters?**
2. While the preceding chapters showcase Isaiah's trust in God and deliverance from the Assyrians, chapters 38 and 39 present a shift. Chapter 38 deals with Hezekiah's mortal condition and a somber reflection on death despite receiving an extension of life, while chapter 39 shows Hezekiah's pride and vulnerability when he shows off his kingdom to Babylonian emissaries. This contrasts with the rising note of faith and victory in the prior chapters, creating a sense of unease.
3. **What is the chronological issue with the events in chapters 38 and 39, and what does this suggest about the structure of Isaiah?**
4. The events of chapters 38 and 39, particularly the visit of the Babylonian emissaries, are likely dated around 710 BC, about a decade before the events of chapters 36-37 which narrate the Assyrian threat in 701 BC. This suggests that the book of Isaiah is not organized strictly chronologically, and that Isaiah intentionally places these chapters out of order for a specific purpose. It is believed these are placed there to show the contrast of Hezekiah's faith during the Assyrian threat with his self-aggrandizement when visited by the Babylonians.
5. **Why did God tell Hezekiah he would die, and why did God later extend his life?**
6. God's initial declaration of Hezekiah's impending death was meant to get his attention and refocus his life. While there is no explicit repentance in Hezekiah's prayer, God responded to Hezekiah's plea based on his past faithfulness and a "whole heart" devoted to God. This illustrates that God's promises are not always a "lockstep" formula, but are part of a dynamic relationship where God responds to the individual's heart, faith, and obedience. God may have also had a better plan for Hezekiah, one that required him to be healed, as implied by the possibility that Judea would have been better off if he had died.

7. **What does it mean to "walk before God," and how does it relate to truth and faithfulness?**
8. To "walk before God" signifies a consistent, lifelong journey of faith and relationship with God, not a one-time event or achievement. It's an ongoing process of living in accordance with His ways and being receptive to His guidance. This walk is characterized by truth and faithfulness, which are not just about speaking truthfully, but about being reliable, dependable, and trustworthy in one's relationship with God and others. Truth and faithfulness create a wholeheartedness with God.
9. **What is meant by having a "whole heart," and how does it relate to perfection?**
10. Having a "whole heart" means that the core of one's being – the thoughts, feelings, and decisions – are entirely devoted to God, without division or reservation. This is not about performing perfectly or having a complete understanding, but about a singular, undivided commitment to God. It is a state of belonging entirely to Him.
11. **What is the significance of Hezekiah's poem (Isaiah 38:10-20), and why is its tone surprising?**
12. Hezekiah's poem is a somber reflection on mortality. Rather than exuberant joy after his healing, it primarily expresses his awareness of death and his temporary life extension. This tone is surprising because one might expect overwhelming gratitude, but it shows Hezekiah's human perspective and his struggle with mortality. The poem serves as a reminder that even those favored by God will eventually face death.
13. **What was the error in Hezekiah's response to the Babylonian emissaries, and what does this event foreshadow?**

Hezekiah showed off his wealth and power to the Babylonians instead of using the opportunity to glorify God, thus acting as if the blessings were his own and not God's. This was a failure to maintain a posture of dependence on and allegiance to God. This event foreshadows the future Babylonian exile and that ultimately, it was not Assyria, but Babylon that would bring about the eventual downfall of Judah and take it into exile. The story contrasts Hezekiah's pride with the future humility and trust that the exiles would need in order to be restored.

1. **What are the key lessons learned from Isaiah chapters 38 and 39 regarding trust, faith, and human limitations?**
2. Chapters 38 and 39 emphasize that faith and trust in God must be a lifelong practice, not just a one-time response to a crisis. Hezekiah, though generally good and faithful, was still mortal and fallible. This underscores that salvation cannot be achieved by human ability and that humanity will always have its limitations, even with faith. The focus moves to the question of what will motivate and make it possible to live a life of trust, which leads into the subsequent sections of Isaiah.