

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 20

Isaiah 40-41

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 20, Isaiah 40-41, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. John Oswalt's lecture covers Isaiah chapters 40-41, focusing on the themes of **God's grace, the motivation for trust**, and the **means of salvation**. He **discusses the authorship** of Isaiah, suggesting a single author inspired by the Holy Spirit, and **analyzes key passages** to show how God's comfort and unwavering presence provide hope to the exiled Israelites. Oswalt **interprets verses related to God's power and sovereignty** to counter the despair and idolatry of the exiles. The lecture also touches upon the **historical context and theological implications** of these chapters.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 20 – 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).



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on20.mp3

3. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 20, Isaiah 40-41

Isaiah 40-41: Encouragement for the Exiles

Short Answer Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is the main theme of Isaiah 40-55, and how does it relate to the earlier sections of the book?
2. Why does Oswalt argue that “comfort” is not an accurate translation in Isaiah 40:1, and what is a more appropriate translation?
3. What are the three key questions the exiles are likely to be asking, according to Oswalt?
4. How does Isaiah 40:3-5 prefigure the coming of Christ?
5. Explain the significance of the imagery of “grass” and “the word of the Lord” in Isaiah 40:6-8.
6. What is a rhetorical question, and how are they used in Isaiah 40:12-26?
7. Explain the significance of the phrase “a drop in the bucket” in the context of Isaiah 40:15.
8. What is Isaiah's point in comparing God to idols in Isaiah 40:18-20?
9. How does Isaiah 40:22 demonstrate God's power and knowledge even in the ancient world's understanding?
10. What is the significance of the phrase “I will help you” in Isaiah 41:13?

Answer Key

1. The main theme of Isaiah 40-55 is grace, which serves as the motive and means for servanthood. This section builds on the earlier themes of servanthood and trust, demonstrating how God's grace empowers his people to trust and serve him.
2. Oswalt argues that “comfort” in modern English suggests a passive sense of soothing, while the Hebrew word conveys a stronger sense of encouragement and strengthening. A more appropriate translation would be “encourage.”

3. The exiles are likely to ask: Does God want to deliver us? Can God deliver us? And will God deliver us? These questions reflect their doubts and despair in the face of exile.
4. Isaiah 40:3-5 refers to preparing a way in the wilderness for God's coming, which John the Baptist later applies to the coming of Christ. This passage foreshadows the ultimate revelation of God's grace in the incarnation of Jesus.
5. The imagery of "grass" highlights the fragility and fleeting nature of human life, including the power of Babylon. However, "the word of the Lord" stands forever, signifying God's enduring power and faithfulness that transcends human limitations.
6. A rhetorical question is a question asked to make a point rather than to elicit an answer. Isaiah 40:12-26 uses a series of rhetorical questions to emphasize God's unique power and sovereignty, contrasting it with the limitations of human understanding and the impotence of idols.
7. "A drop in the bucket" illustrates the insignificance of the nations in comparison to God's vast power. It underscores the futility of trusting in worldly powers and emphasizes the need to place faith in God alone.
8. Isaiah compares God to idols to highlight the absurdity of worshipping created things over the Creator. The idols are crafted by humans and powerless, while God is the sovereign ruler of the universe.
9. Isaiah 40:22 describes God sitting above the circle of the earth, demonstrating his transcendent perspective and knowledge. This image conveys God's comprehensive understanding of the world and his ability to oversee all events.
10. "I will help you" emphasizes God's active participation in Israel's restoration. It assures them that they are not alone in their struggles and that God will empower them to overcome their challenges.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the different ways Isaiah 40 encourages the exiled Israelites. Discuss the role of imagery, rhetorical questions, and theological pronouncements in conveying hope and comfort.
2. Compare and contrast God's portrayal in Isaiah 40-41 with the portrayal of the idols and the nations. What specific qualities distinguish Yahweh from other powers?
3. Explain the concept of God's grace as presented in Isaiah 40-41. How does this understanding of grace inform the exiles' understanding of their situation and their future?
4. Discuss the relationship between trust and servanthood in Isaiah, considering the insights from both the earlier sections (1-39) and these chapters (40-41). How does God's grace empower his people for faithful service?
5. Reflect on the significance of Isaiah 40-41 for contemporary Christians. How do these chapters speak to experiences of discouragement, doubt, and the need for God's empowering presence?

Glossary of Key Terms

Comfort (in Isaiah 40:1): In the original Hebrew, it conveys a sense of encouragement and strengthening, rather than mere emotional soothing.

Rhetorical Question: A question asked to make a point rather than to elicit an answer.

Coastlands/Islands: In the context of Isaiah, they symbolize the farthest reaches of the earth, signifying a global scope.

Host of Heaven: A term often used to refer to the stars, which were sometimes associated with deities in ancient cultures.

I Am He: A divine declaration of self-existence and uniqueness. It resonates with Jesus's "I am" pronouncements in the New Testament.

Servant: A title applied to Israel, highlighting their calling to represent God's purposes in the world.

Chosen: Emphasizes God's deliberate selection of Israel for a special relationship and purpose.

Emmanuel: A Hebrew name meaning "God with us," signifying God's presence and involvement with his people.

Cyrus: The Persian king who conquered Babylon and allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem.

Idol: A crafted image representing a deity, often made of wood, metal, or stone. Isaiah contrasts the powerlessness of idols with the sovereignty of the true God.

4. Briefing Document

Briefing Document: Isaiah 40-41 (Dr. John Oswalt)

Source: Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 20, Isa. 40-41

Main Themes:

- **God's Trustworthiness:** The session emphasizes God's unwavering trustworthiness, even in the face of exile and despair. He delivered Israel from Assyria (chapters 36-39) and will deliver them again from Babylon.
- **God's Grace:** God's free, unlimited, and undeserved grace motivates trust and provides the means for servanthood. This grace is not an excuse to ignore sin, but rather a powerful force that overcomes its consequences.
- **Comfort and Encouragement:** God calls for His people to be encouraged and fortified, not merely comforted with "warm fuzzies." This encouragement comes from knowing that God is with them, understands their struggles, and offers real strength.

Most Important Ideas/Facts:

1. Structure and Authorship:

- Chapters 40-55 mark a shift in time frame and focus on grace as the motivation for serving God.
- Dr. Oswalt argues for the single authorship of Isaiah, citing the consistent theology, lack of historical detail in later chapters, and the power of the literary composition.

1. Addressing Exile Discouragement:

- God understands the exile's feelings of hopelessness, disillusionment, and the perception of God's defeat.
- Key questions they grapple with: Does God *want* to deliver us? *Can* He deliver us? *Will* He deliver us?

1. God's Power and Sovereignty:

- Powerful imagery of God's control over creation: "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?" (40:12)

- God holds the cosmos in His hand: "It is he who sits above the circle of the earth...the whole earth is like a drop from a bucket" (40:22)
- The nations are like grass, fleeting and insignificant compared to the eternal word of God (40:6-8).

1. **Reasons Not to Fear:**

- **God's Presence:** "Fear not, for I am with you" (41:10). Echoes the promise of Emmanuel, "God with us," from earlier chapters.
- **God's Help:** "I will help you" (41:13). God doesn't leave us to struggle alone; He offers active assistance and partnership.

1. **The Servant and the Chosen:**

- God reaffirms His covenant relationship: "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen" (41:8).
- This reassurance combats the fear that God has abandoned them due to their sin.

Key Quotes:

- "Encourage my people. Encourage my people...Speak to the heart of Jerusalem." (40:1-2)
- "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord stands forever." (40:8)
- "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you... Yahweh is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth." (40:28)
- "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (40:31)

Important Points for Reflection:

- How do these chapters encourage you in times of personal difficulty or disillusionment?
- What does it mean for God to be our helper in daily life?
- How can we cultivate the attitude of "confident expectation" rather than "disillusioned discouragement" as we wait on the Lord?

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 20, Isaiah 40-41, Biblealearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Isaiah 40-41

What is the main message of Isaiah 40-41?

These chapters mark a shift in Isaiah's prophecy, focusing on comforting and encouraging the exiled Israelites in Babylon. The core message is that despite their despair and the seemingly overwhelming power of Babylon, God has not abandoned them. He is a powerful and compassionate God who desires to deliver His people and restore them to their land.

Why are the exiles in need of encouragement?

The Babylonian exile was a traumatic experience for the Israelites. They were forcefully removed from their homeland, their temple was destroyed, and their national identity shattered. This led to feelings of hopelessness, questioning God's power and even His desire to save them.

How does God address the exiles' feelings of abandonment and doubt?

God reminds the exiles of His unwavering power and His intimate knowledge of their suffering. He emphasizes His creative power, comparing Himself to the vastness of the cosmos and the insignificance of idols. He also assures them that He has chosen them and will not abandon them, promising to be with them and to help them through their trials.

Who is Cyrus and what is his role in God's plan?

Cyrus was the king of Persia, a nation located east of Babylon. God raised up Cyrus as an instrument of His will to conquer Babylon and liberate the Israelite exiles. Through Cyrus, God demonstrates His sovereign control over history and His faithfulness to His promises.

What are the reasons God gives the exiles for not fearing?

God provides five reasons for the exiles to have hope and cast away their fear:

1. **God is with them:** He reminds them of His constant presence and support, echoing the promise of Emmanuel ("God with us").
2. **God has a firm grip on the situation:** He assures them of His power to help and sustain them, offering strength to the weary and fainthearted.

3. **God will restore them to their land:** He paints a picture of a future where they will return to their homeland and rebuild their lives.
4. **God's word stands forever:** Unlike the fleeting power of empires, God's promises are eternal and unbreakable.
5. **God's grace is sufficient:** He reminds them that His grace is the source of their hope and that even in their weakness, He offers strength and guidance.

What is the significance of the phrase "I am He"?

The Hebrew phrase "Ani Hu" ("I am He") used in Isaiah 41:4 resonates with the divine name "Yahweh" and emphasizes God's self-existence and uniqueness. It's a powerful declaration of His absolute sovereignty and His unwavering presence throughout history. This phrase later becomes the basis for Jesus' self-identification as "I am" in the Gospels, connecting God's promises in Isaiah to their fulfillment in Christ.

How does the imagery of grass and flowers contribute to the message of hope?

Isaiah compares human life, including the powerful Babylonian empire, to the fleeting nature of grass and flowers. While empires fade and human strength withers, God's word remains eternal and unwavering. This imagery provides a stark contrast between the temporary nature of earthly powers and the enduring nature of God's promises.

What is the call to action for the discouraged exiles?

God calls the exiles to trust in Him and wait with confident expectation for His deliverance. He encourages them to rely on His strength and persevere through their hardships, knowing that He will ultimately bring them back to their land and restore their fortunes.