

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 21

Isaiah 42-43

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 21, Isaiah 42-43, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This is a transcript of a lecture by Dr. John Oswalt on Isaiah chapters 42 and 43. **The lecture focuses on God's relationship with Israel**, exploring themes of **God's grace, judgment, and redemption**. Oswalt discusses the concept of **God's servant**, contrasting the nation of Israel's role as a servant with the role of a future, more significant servant. He also **examines God's challenges to pagan idols**, highlighting God's unique ability to predict the future. Finally, the lecture emphasizes **the importance of genuine faith and obedience over mere ritualistic acts**.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 21 – 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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on21.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. John Oswalt's teaching on Isaiah chapters 42 and 43:

Briefing Document: Dr. John Oswalt on Isaiah 42-43

Overall Theme: The overarching theme is the demonstration of God's grace, power, and unique ability to save and redeem His people, Israel, despite their unfaithfulness and the seeming triumph of their enemies. This section emphasizes God's sovereignty, his unique nature as the Holy One of Israel, and the distinction between the true God and the powerless idols of the nations. It also introduces the idea of two "servants": Israel, and a Messianic figure.

Key Concepts and Ideas:

- **God's Grace and Chosenness:**
 - Despite the exile, God emphasizes that Israel is still his chosen people and servant. He reiterates: "But you, Israel, my servant, have Jacob whom I have chosen... you are my servant; I have chosen you and not cast you off." (Isaiah 41:8-9)
 - Oswalt emphasizes that the exile is not intended as final destruction, but as a means of refinement, comparing it to the burning coal that cleansed Isaiah.
 - The motive for God's action is grace, not merit on the part of Israel. "Grace, the motive and the means of salvation." (Oswalt)
- **The Purpose of Servanthood:**
 - The purpose of servanthood is not simply to receive blessings, but to be a vehicle for God's purposes. In Isaiah 42, a servant with a different mission than national Israel is introduced.
 - This servant is tasked with bringing forth "Mishpat" (divine order, justice, not just legal equity) to the earth. "He will faithfully bring forth Mishpat." (Isaiah 42:3)
 - This servant will be a "covenant to the people and a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6), implying a role beyond the scope of national Israel. Oswalt explicitly connects this servant to the messianic figure discussed in Isaiah 61.
 - Oswalt contrasts the servant in Isaiah 42 with Israel as a servant in the surrounding chapters: "All of those references except this one [Isaiah 42] are

clearly to the nation. And what they talk about is the benefits of being God's servant... Every one of them except this one, which doesn't say a word about benefits but says everything about the mission."

- **The Powerlessness of Idols:**

- God challenges the idols of the nations to prove their divinity, emphasizing their inability to predict the future.
- The challenge involves asking them to "Tell us the former things, or declare to us the things to come. Do good or do harm." (Isaiah 41:22-23). The point being, they cannot do either because they are simply personified forces of the cosmos.
- Oswalt connects the idols' powerlessness to a "pagan worldview" that assumes a meaningless existence with no purpose, stating that "Life came from nowhere, and it's going nowhere, so enjoy the trip with the maximum of comfort, pleasure, and security."
- This challenge highlights that true deity must exist outside the cosmos to have predictive power and offer true purpose.
- He notes that while pagan gods made predictions, they were vague, unlike the specific prophecies of God, such as the exile in Babylon, by name.

- **God's Sovereignty Over Exile:**

- God asserts that He orchestrated Israel's exile, not the strength of Babylon, saying, "Babylon didn't take you into exile. I sent you into exile."
- This emphasizes His complete control over history and assures that He can just as easily bring them back.
- The exile is shown to not be evidence of God's defeat but His judgement in the service of his goals to refine them.

- **God as Redeemer & the "Holy One of Israel":**

- God repeatedly calls himself the "Holy One of Israel," emphasizing His unique, transcendent nature and ability to redeem. The repetition "reinforces", "expands", and underscores his "role in our salvation."
- This title links His holiness with His covenant with Israel, and he is the only Holy One.

- God's redemption is highlighted as a work of grace, not earned by Israel's merit. "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions. Why? For my own sake." (Isaiah 43:25)
- **New Things and God's Unpredictability:**
 - God declares "Behold, I am doing a new thing" (Isaiah 43:19), signaling that He operates outside of human expectations and patterns.
 - While He remains consistent in His character, He is not predictable in His actions, and humans tend to remember *how* God acted in the past, but not *who* God is. "God is always consistent, but he is never predictable." (Oswalt)
 - This idea is tied to the praise for God's "delivering servant" and his "new song" because of it.
- **Israel as Witnesses:**
 - Israel is chosen to be witnesses of God's power and character, not merely through verbal testimony, but through the transformative effect of God's work in their lives.
 - The call to witness in this context isn't to go "grab somebody by the necktie and say, do you know Jesus", but to be an "unmistakable evidence there's something different about you."
 - They are to testify to what God has done in their lives. The evidence is in their unique life.
- **The Problem of Empty Ritual:**
 - God chastises Israel for their empty ritualism, emphasizing that He desires genuine repentance and relationship, not just formal sacrifices.
 - "You did not call on me, O Jacob, but you've been weary of me, O Israel... but you burdened me with your sins." (Isaiah 43:22, 24). They focused on outward acts while continuing in sin, a problem that Oswalt connects to both Catholicism and "Protestantism."
 - This critique emphasizes that salvation comes through God's initiative and grace, not human efforts to earn favor.

Quotes of Note:

- "Judgment is never God's intended last word."
- "Grace, the motive and the means of salvation."
- "Far from casting you off, I've chosen you to be my special servant."
- "Mishpat means much more than legal equity. It means God's divine order for life."
- "Babylon didn't take you into exile. I sent you into exile."
- "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions. Why? For my own sake."
- "God is always consistent, but he is never predictable."

Implications:

- The main idea of this passage is the sovereignty of God and his plan for his people. God is in charge of history, and his purposes will prevail.
- The passage calls for a deeper understanding of God's grace, urging believers to move beyond external rituals towards a true, heart-felt relationship with Him.
- It reveals that God's deliverance is not limited to past historical patterns.
- It challenges believers to see the transformative power of God in their lives and to recognize that they are to be witnesses to that power by simply living transformed lives.

This briefing document should give you a solid overview of the main points in Dr. Oswalt's teaching on Isaiah 42-43. It highlights the major themes, key ideas, and provides supporting quotes.

4. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 21, Isaiah 42-43

Isaiah Chapters 42-43 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Oswalt, what was the intended purpose of the exile for the Israelites?
2. What does Oswalt suggest is the key motivator for making trust a way of life?
3. What two things does God say about Israel's relationship to the nations in Isaiah 41:11-16?
4. What is the significance of the phrase "The Holy One of Israel," and why does it appear repeatedly in this context?
5. What is the mission of the servant described in Isaiah 42:1-4? How does it differ from the nation of Israel's role as servant?
6. According to Oswalt, what is the significance of God stating he has "put my Spirit upon him" in reference to the Servant?
7. According to Oswalt, what does the song of praise in Isaiah 42:10-13 signify?
8. What does God mean when he says in Isaiah 43:18, "Remember not the former things?" What is he asking the Israelites to do?
9. How does Oswalt interpret God's statement in Isaiah 43:24 that the Israelites had not given him their sacrifices when they were in fact giving them?
10. How does Oswalt describe the phrase "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake?"

Quiz Answer Key

1. The exile was intended to refine the Israelites, not to destroy them. Oswalt draws a parallel to Isaiah's purification with the burning coal, emphasizing that God uses suffering for purification.
2. Oswalt suggests that grace is the key motivator for making trust a way of life. He notes God's grace is demonstrated by choosing them even when they felt abandoned and choosing them as servants when they felt they were cast off.

3. God states that the nations seeking to destroy Israel will disappear, but also that God will use Israel to judge the nations. This reveals a prophetic theme of God's ultimate justice.
4. The phrase "The Holy One of Israel" emphasizes God's unique holiness, his power, and his covenant relationship with Israel. It is repeated to highlight that God is the only holy one who has the capacity to deliver and save.
5. The servant's mission is to restore God's Mishpat (divine order) on earth, acting as a covenant to the people and a light to the nations. Unlike the nation of Israel, this servant does not receive benefits but fulfills a mission.
6. According to Oswalt, the statement "I have put my spirit upon him" connects the servant described in Isaiah 42 to Isaiah 61. He understands this to be the Spirit of the Lord empowering the servant for a divine mission of justice, liberation, and healing.
7. The song of praise is a response to the revelation of God's delivering servant, a cause for joy that extends geographically around the world. It signifies universal recognition of God's redemptive plan.
8. God is not telling them to forget the past entirely, but rather to remember the nature and character of God demonstrated in past events, but not to anticipate God will act exactly the same way in the future. God is doing a "new thing" that requires fresh openness to his work.
9. Oswalt interprets this as God saying their hearts were not in their sacrifices. They were offering them as a mere ritual while still living in sin, suggesting that God desires genuine repentance rather than empty ritual.
10. Oswalt uses this phrase as an example of salvation through grace, not by works. He suggests that God's forgiveness and redemptive act are for God's own sake, motivated by his character not by our actions.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the different roles of "servant" presented in Isaiah 41-43. How does the understanding of "servant" shift from the nation of Israel to an individual figure, and what does this transition reveal about God's plan for redemption?
2. Discuss the concept of "Mishpat" as it is presented in Isaiah 42. What does it encompass, and how does the servant's mission of bringing forth Mishpat reflect the nature of God's justice?

3. Explore the function of the "cases against the idols" in Isaiah 41-43. How do these passages challenge the pagan worldview of the time and emphasize the uniqueness and power of Yahweh?
4. Examine the tension between God's past actions (like the Exodus) and his "new thing" in Isaiah 43. How does this tension reflect God's consistency and unpredictability?
5. Oswalt states, "God is always consistent, but he is never predictable." Using the passages in Isaiah 42-43 as a guide, analyze what this claim means in practice and how this should impact our understanding of God and our relationship with him.

Glossary of Key Terms

Exile: The forced removal of a population from their native land, particularly referring to the Israelites' displacement from their homeland to Babylon.

Grace: Unmerited favor and love from God, which, in this context, is the motivation and means of salvation.

Holy One of Israel: A title for God emphasizing his unique holiness, transcendence, and his covenant relationship with Israel.

Idols: Representations of false gods; in this text, the idols of Babylon. God uses the idols and their lack of power to represent his own power and his place above all other "gods."

Mishpat: A Hebrew term meaning more than just legal equity or justice; it encompasses God's divine order for all of life, including retribution, and balancing the books.

Redeemer: A title for God, signifying his ability and willingness to deliver his people from captivity, both physical and spiritual.

Servant: A figure with a specific mission or purpose; in Isaiah, this term refers both to the nation of Israel and a specific individual servant tasked with bringing salvation.

Torah: The Law of God, often referring to the first five books of the Old Testament; can also refer to God's instructions and teachings in general.

Witness: Someone who provides evidence or testimony; in this context, referring to the Israelites who, through their lives, should testify to the power and character of God.

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 21, Isaiah 42-43, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Isaiah 42-43

1. **Why does God repeatedly emphasize that Israel is his "servant" and "chosen" despite their exile?** Dr. Oswalt explains that God's judgment, such as the exile, is never his final intention. It's meant to refine, not destroy, Israel. God reiterates their special status as "my servant," "my chosen," and "the offspring of Abraham, my friend," to emphasize his grace and ongoing commitment to them despite their circumstances. The exile was meant to purify them, much like the burning coal that refined Isaiah, not to cast them off permanently. This grace is meant to motivate them to make trust in God a consistent way of life.
2. **What does it mean when God says, "I am with you" and "I will help you," and how does that relate to Israel's servanthood?** These phrases highlight God's active participation in their lives, moving beyond simply dictating or criticizing. God's presence (I am with you) and active assistance (I will help you) signify that he wants them to be involved in the process of their restoration and fulfilling their role as servants, but ultimately, He is the one accomplishing it. This demonstrates a relationship of partnership and not merely passive obedience.
3. **Why is the phrase "the Holy One of Israel" repeated so frequently in this section of Isaiah?** The repetition of "the Holy One of Israel" underscores God's unique and transcendent nature, emphasizing that He is distinct from the false gods of the nations and possesses unmatched power and authority. It reinforces that He is the Redeemer of Israel, underscoring that this powerful and holy being has willingly covenanted Himself to them for the purpose of salvation for the world. It also serves as a reminder of the required holiness of his people.
4. **What is the significance of God's case against the idols in Isaiah 41-46, particularly in the context of predicting the future?** God challenges the idols to prove their divinity by predicting future events, which they cannot do. This serves to demonstrate that they are not divine, but simply personified forces of the cosmos without purpose or understanding of the origin and destiny of the world. Only God, who is outside of and the creator of the cosmos, can predict the future, because He is not bound by it. The specific predictions of exile to Babylon and return by Cyrus are used to illustrate God's power over history.

5. **How does Isaiah 42 introduce the idea of two different servants?** Isaiah 42 introduces a new servant whose role is primarily about mission, specifically to bring "Mishpat," or God's divine order, to the earth and be a covenant to the people and a light to the nations, rather than the benefits of servanthood that are associated with the nation of Israel. This servant, unlike Israel, does not receive benefits but instead fulfills a mission of restoration and covenant making. This hints at a messianic figure distinct from the nation.
6. **What is meant by the "new thing" God is doing, and why does he tell Israel to "forget the former things?"** God's "new thing" refers to his ability to act in unprecedented ways, breaking free from past patterns. While God wants the people to remember His character as displayed in the Exodus, He doesn't want them to become confined by the specific way in which that deliverance occurred. He's going to do it differently this time. The "new thing" demonstrates God's consistency of character but unpredictability in methods.
7. **According to Isaiah 43:8-13, what is Israel's role as "witnesses" of God?** Israel is called to be God's witnesses, not primarily through evangelism, but through their lives and the ways they are being transformed by their relationship with God. Their existence and testimony serve as evidence that God is real and that He does what he says he will do, showing the world how God works in people's lives. They act as tangible proof of God's transformative power. It is not a testimony that requires words as much as a life that is different from the world around them.
8. **What is the meaning of God saying he blots out transgressions "for my own sake" and how does this reflect salvation by grace?** This phrase emphasizes that God's forgiveness is not based on human merit or actions, like sacrifices, but is an act of grace rooted in His own character and purpose. God blots out transgressions for his own sake, not because of any worthiness on the part of the people. This points to salvation as a free gift from God, which requires an obedient response to the grace offered, and not a means of manipulating God.