

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 23

Isaiah 47-48

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 23, Isaiah 47-48, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. John Oswalt's lecture analyzes Isaiah chapters 47 and 48, focusing on **God's judgment of Babylon** for its unjust treatment of Israel and **God's unwavering grace towards His chosen people**. The lecture emphasizes the contrast between Babylon's reliance on idolatry and false power and God's **supreme authority and redemptive power**. Oswalt highlights the importance of **true faith and obedience** to God, contrasting superficial religious observance with genuine devotion. He further illustrates **God's consistent message of hope and restoration** for Israel despite their suffering, promising future blessings and renewed relationship. The lecture concludes with a call to **attentive listening to God's word** in the midst of contemporary challenges.

2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 23 – 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_Session23.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from Dr. John Oswalt's teaching on Isaiah chapters 47 and 48:

Briefing Document: Dr. John Oswalt on Isaiah 47-48

Date: October 28, 2024

Subject: Analysis of Isaiah Chapters 47 and 48: Babylon's Fall and Israel's Redemption

Source: Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 23, Isa. 47-48 © 2024 John Oswalt and Ted Hildebrandt

Introduction:

This session focuses on Isaiah chapters 47 and 48, which conclude the section on "Grace Motive for Servanthood" (chapters 40-55). Oswalt emphasizes that God's grace is the basis for his people's chosen status and should motivate them to serve. These chapters address two key groups: Babylon and the people of God, examining their respective fates in light of Yahweh's sovereignty.

Main Themes & Key Ideas:

1. Babylon's Humiliation (Chapter 47):

- **False Foundation:** Babylon's power and throne are built on the false premise of their gods' power, which are ultimately "burdensome and ineffective". Their idolatry is the basis for their downfall: "the throne is built on sand, even quicksand."
- **Reversal of Fortune:** Babylon, portrayed as a queen, will be reduced to a slave, stripped of her dignity. This illustrates the theme that "Whenever we exalt ourselves, what is the inevitable result? Humiliation." This also ties into the common biblical theme, "Winners lose, losers win."
- **Vengeance vs. Revenge:** Oswalt differentiates between God's just "vengeance" for the mistreatment of his people, and the self-serving "revenge" that leads to a destructive cycle. He emphasizes that God's vengeance is just and will have a good outcome, whereas human revenge is always dangerous. God states, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay."

- **God's Attributes:** Verse 4 highlights three key attributes of God: Redeemer, Almighty (Lord of Hosts), and Holy One of Israel. These attributes emphasize God's power and will to save his people, and Babylon's arrogance in opposing Him. "Babylon has ranged herself against the Holy One. The Holy One who's given himself to Israel. That's pretty dangerous."
- **Babylon's Arrogance:** Babylon's downfall is tied to their self-proclamation: "I am and there is none beside me," an attribute that belongs only to God. This deep-seated arrogance, rooted in the fallen human condition, leads them to excessive cruelty and an inability to recognize God's authority. Oswalt notes, "You can't arrogate to yourself what belongs to God alone and survive." He connects this to the human tendency to view oneself as the center of the universe.
- **Magic and Control:** Babylon is also judged for its reliance on magic and sorcery, which are attempts to manipulate the world without personal commitment or accountability. "Power to manipulate and control...without any personal commitment."
- **Misplaced Wisdom:** Babylon's "wisdom and knowledge" (verse 10), focused on the occult, was ultimately destructive and led them astray. "You spent all your intellect on the wrong thing. How tragic." Their learning did not lead them to God, but to self-exaltation. Oswalt notes, "Learning becoming an end in itself by which I puff myself up and try to prove to you that I am and there's none beside me."
- **False Premise:** The chapter concludes by emphasizing that Babylon built its life on the false premise of their own importance and power, supported by their useless knowledge. They will be utterly defeated, as will all who oppose God.

1. **Israel's Redemption (Chapter 48):**

- **"Listen!":** The repeated use of words for "hearing" emphasizes God's desire for Israel to pay attention. "Listen to me. Listen to me. Pay attention to me. Hear what I'm saying." This highlights Israel's lack of attention and superficial relationship with God. Oswalt likens the situation to a parent having to repeatedly direct a child's attention.

- **Superficial Relationship:** Israel's relationship with God was superficial, based on lip service and past connections, rather than genuine faith. "They swear by the name of the Lord...but not in truth or right." They depended on their identity as Jews rather than a genuine relationship with God. This is likened to a superficial church identity, where one is a member in name only.
- **God's Character as the Basis of Grace:** God's grace is rooted in his character, not in Israel's behavior or repentance. "His grace is free. His grace is self-generated. His grace does not depend on anything we do." Oswalt shares the story of Moses interceding with God for the Israelites as an example.
- **Prophecies and Foreknowledge:** God predicted the events in advance, so the people would not attribute them to idols or their own actions. God's prophecies prove his unique power, which is a significant distinction between Him and false gods. "If I had not told you all this in advance, and it happened, you would say, hey, my idol that I manipulated did this for me."
- **God as Creator:** God is described as the "Creator," who does new things, unlike idols who are "made" and are part of the natural order, incapable of creating. "To create is to make something brand new that has never existed before." This is demonstrated through Cyrus's unexpected actions, ending the cycle of exile, which highlights God's ability to create new realities.
- **Divine Purpose:** God deferred his anger for his own sake, to express his character, not because of Israel's merit. "He did it for his own sake... as an expression of my own character, my own nature."
- **God's Declaration "I Am":** God reaffirms his sovereignty, declaring, "I am he" (Ani) - "I am first. I am last. And everything in between." This emphasizes that God is the ultimate authority, the creator and controller of everything.
- **Lost Opportunities:** God laments that Israel didn't follow his commands. Had they listened, their peace, righteousness, and descendants would have flourished. "Oh, that you had paid attention to my commandments." "Oh, that you had listened."
- **Call to Action:** Despite their past failures, God calls them to leave Babylon with joy and singing, not to settle down and assimilate. "Get ready to go home. Don't settle down. Don't become a good Babylonian." They should not give up their faith, but rather commit fully.

- **Relevance Today:** Oswalt concludes by drawing parallels to the contemporary situation of a declining church in North America, calling people to "listen" to God and be ready for his plans. He notes the shifting demographics in religious affiliation as an example of God's continuing activity in the world, and asks whether we will be paying attention.

Quotes:

- "Whenever we exalt ourselves, what is the inevitable result? Humiliation."
- "Winners lose, losers win."
- "Vengeance is mine. I will repay."
- "You can't arrogate to yourself what belongs to God alone and survive."
- "To create is to make something brand new that has never existed before."
- "I am first. I am last. And everything in between."
- "Oh, that you had paid attention to my commandments."
- "Get ready to go home. Don't settle down. Don't become a good Babylonian."

Conclusion:

Isaiah 47 and 48 contrast the fates of Babylon and Israel, highlighting God's justice and grace. Babylon's arrogance and self-reliance lead to its downfall, while God's chosen people, despite their failings, receive redemption based on God's character and his initiative. The call to "listen" and embrace true faith remains pertinent for believers today. The lesson is clear, we must place our trust in God, and not rely on our own power, wisdom, or self-importance. God is the only "I Am".

4. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 23, Isaiah 47-48

Isaiah Chapters 47-48 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Isaiah 47, what is the primary reason for Babylon's downfall?
2. What is the difference between vengeance and revenge, as discussed in the lecture?
3. Why does Isaiah 47:4 emphasize that God is the Redeemer, the Almighty, and the Holy One of Israel in this context?
4. How does Babylon's self-proclamation "I am and there is none beside me" relate to its downfall?
5. What does the image of the desolate woman who will have many children in Isaiah 54 symbolize in contrast to Babylon?
6. Why is magic or the occult so appealing to humans?
7. According to Isaiah 47, what are the limitations of human learning when it becomes an end in itself?
8. Why is the word "hear" or "listen" repeated so frequently in Isaiah 48?
9. What does Isaiah mean when he says Judah's relationship with God is superficial?
10. Why did God predict the future and do new things in advance, as described in Isaiah 48?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Babylon's downfall is primarily due to its reliance on powerless idols and the belief that its gods secure its throne. Because these gods are worthless, Babylon's foundation is built on sand.
2. Vengeance is the just punishment for sins committed against another that belongs to God, whereas revenge is a selfish attempt to pay back someone who has hurt you personally. Revenge often leads to an escalating cycle of harm.

3. The emphasis on these three titles (Redeemer, Almighty, Holy One) reminds the reader of God's power, holiness, and his commitment to rescuing his people. It highlights who is acting and that God's nature is in opposition to Babylon.
4. Babylon's claim, "I am, and there is none beside me," is a usurpation of God's unique title, revealing its arrogance and self-exaltation. This is the central reason for its fall.
5. The woman who was desolate and will have many children symbolizes God's promise to Israel that it will be restored, while Babylon will be destroyed. The image also shows God will expand his people far more than they could imagine.
6. Magic and the occult are appealing because they offer a perceived power to manipulate and control without any personal commitment. People turn to it when they are not satisfied with what they have.
7. Human learning, when it becomes an end in itself, cannot provide salvation or true comfort. It can also puff a person up, becoming a tool for self-exaltation rather than serving God.
8. The repeated use of "hear" or "listen" emphasizes the need for Israel to pay attention to God. It suggests that they have not been listening in the past and need to be attentive now to God's message and promises.
9. Isaiah means that Judah's relationship with God is superficial because they confess the Lord and call themselves by his name, but their actions and hearts do not align with God's truth. They were relying on their past and superficial connection to God.
10. God predicted the future and did new things in advance so that the people would not attribute it to their idols. This highlights that he is the true God. God does it for his own sake as an expression of his character.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the contrast between Babylon and Israel in Isaiah 47-48. How does this contrast reveal the nature of God and His relationship with His people?
2. Analyze the concept of "the fear of the Lord" as it is presented in the lecture. How does this "fear" affect one's relationship with God and others?

3. Explore the theme of idolatry in Isaiah 47-48. What are the different forms of idolatry that are discussed, and how does it lead to destruction?
4. How does the lecture describe the concept of grace and servanthood? How does God's grace motivate believers to serve Him?
5. Evaluate the importance of listening to God's word as seen in Isaiah 48. How might ignoring his word lead to consequences in an individual's life?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Babylon:** A powerful ancient city and empire that serves as a symbol of oppression and arrogance in the book of Isaiah.
- **Exile:** The state of being barred from one's native country or home, often as a result of political or religious reasons. In this context, refers to the captivity of the Israelites in Babylon.
- **Grace:** God's unmerited favor and love, not earned but freely given.
- **Idolatry:** The worship of idols, or anything that is not God and takes the place of God. It also refers to a reliance on things other than God for security.
- **Holy One of Israel:** A title for God emphasizing His unique and righteous character, and his covenant relationship with Israel.
- **Redeemer:** A title for God highlighting his role as the one who rescues and saves his people.
- **Vengeance:** The just punishment for sins committed against another that belongs to God.
- **Revenge:** A selfish attempt to pay back someone who has hurt you personally, usually in a cycle of escalating harm.
- **The Fear of the Lord:** A reverential respect and awe of God that acknowledges His holiness, power, and authority, resulting in a commitment to obedience and service.
- **Omen:** A sign or portent believed to indicate the future. It could be the shape of a sacrificial animal's liver, the position of the stars, or a flight of birds.
- **Superficial:** Appearing to be real or true only until one looks closer; shallow.

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 23, Isaiah 47-48, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Isaiah Chapters 47-48

- **Why is Babylon, depicted as a queen, destined to become a slave in Isaiah 47?**
- Babylon's downfall is rooted in its reliance on idolatry and the false belief that its gods are powerful and protective. These gods are ultimately ineffective and burdensome. Babylon's arrogance, stemming from a "I am, and there is none beside me" attitude (a claim that belongs solely to God), led to an excessive and merciless punishment of the Israelites. This self-exaltation, which mirrors the actions of fallen humanity, invariably leads to humiliation. Babylon's position, built on a foundation of false gods, is ultimately built on quicksand and destined to collapse.
- **What is the distinction between vengeance and revenge as discussed in Isaiah 47?**
- Vengeance, as portrayed in the text, is the rightful punishment of sins, administered by God. Revenge, on the other hand, is a selfish, personal act of retaliation driven by a desire to settle a score. It risks perpetuating a destructive cycle of violence where each act of retaliation leads to another, escalating the harm. Also, actions taken from a selfish motive are always dangerous because they come out of one's own need to build oneself up. If those acts fail, it tears down the person and if it succeeds, it leads to pride, neither of which is beneficial. God claims vengeance as his own, suggesting that humans should trust in His justice rather than taking matters into their own hands.

- **Why does Isaiah 47 include the phrase "The Redeemer, the Almighty, the Holy One of Israel" when discussing Babylon's fate?**
- The insertion of these titles is deliberate and has several purposes. It emphasizes the identity of the one who is bringing judgment upon Babylon. The title "Redeemer" signifies God's commitment to rescuing his people and that he is the one doing all of this. "Almighty" points to his complete power to act, and "Holy One of Israel" connects the action with his revealed character to Israel. This reinforces that Babylon is opposing the very God who has revealed Himself as the protector and deliverer of Israel, making their arrogance even more grievous. These attributes provide a basis for understanding that God's judgment isn't arbitrary, but rather a response to injustice and a demonstration of his power and holiness.
- **How does the concept of the "fear of the Lord" relate to God's expectations of his people in these chapters?**
- The "fear of the Lord," in the context of these chapters, is not about being afraid of punishment. Instead, it involves recognizing that God is the ultimate authority to whom we are all accountable for our actions, especially how we handle things he has entrusted to us. It's the recognition of His holiness and that he is a God of justice. This fear acts as a deterrent to selfish or abusive behavior because we understand that God will hold us responsible for our choices. Therefore, we ought to not do whatever we want to those placed in our hands. This is in contrast to Babylon's attitude of "I am and there is no other," where accountability to any higher power is denied. This recognition and accountability is desperately needed.

- **In Isaiah 47, what is the problem with Babylon's reliance on wisdom, knowledge, and magic?**
- Babylon's wisdom, knowledge, and magic are flawed because they are not grounded in the knowledge of the true God. These pursuits become ends in themselves, ways to gain power and control without personal commitment to God. They focused on how to manipulate the physical and spiritual world for self-benefit rather than seeking to learn how to serve God. Babylon's wisdom is a wisdom of occult, and its wisdom is what led them astray. Ultimately, despite their extensive learning and practices, their wisdom cannot save them from the consequences of their actions. Knowledge is good when used to better serve the Lord but knowledge becomes destructive when it puffs one up. Their learning was an end in itself by which they hoped to prove "I am, and there is none beside me". This shows that these pursuits are empty and can never fill the void that only God can.
- **What is the significance of the repeated use of "hear" or "listen" in Isaiah 48?**

The frequent use of the words "hear" or "listen" serves as a plea for Israel to pay attention to God's message. It highlights the fact that they have not truly been listening to God, despite their superficial connection to him and their reliance on past blessings. Their hearts are prone to give up hope and settle down, but God is calling them to "listen to me, listen to me" and get their attention back, especially considering some of the amazing things he wants to say. God calls them to stop their lip service and get serious about their faith. The repetition emphasizes their need to grasp what God is saying about His plans to deliver them from exile and that they are to not settle down or give up faith.

- **What is the main reason God is acting on behalf of Israel as explained in Isaiah 48?**
- God's motivation to act on behalf of Israel is not based on their righteousness or their repentance but on His own character and nature. God states "for my own sake". This signifies that his actions stem from his desire to be true to his promises, uphold his reputation, and reveal his glory, not because Israel deserved it. His grace is freely given and self-generated, not depending on anything humans can do. If he did not act, it would call his character into question. He had to act to be true to himself.

- **What new thing does God do to break the precedent of exile in Isaiah 48?**
- God created a new way of doing things in the form of Cyrus, the Persian emperor. For around 700 years, exile had been practiced by the Assyrians and Babylonians. God chose to break that long precedent, doing something "new", where Cyrus let all captive nations go home and funded the rebuilding of their temples. This highlights God's power to intervene in history and overturn human customs and traditions as he so chooses. This also shows that God is the Creator and he can create new things. This is not possible for any man-made gods. The new thing shows that God's redemptive power is active and ongoing.