

# Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 25

## Isaiah 52-53

### Resources from NotebookLM

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

#### 1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 25, Isaiah 52-53, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. John Oswalt's lecture analyzes Isaiah 52-53, focusing on the **suffering servant**. He contrasts the servant's initial humiliation and rejection with their ultimate exaltation, emphasizing the **theological paradox** of God's power manifested in weakness. Oswalt interprets the servant's suffering as vicarious atonement for humanity's sins, highlighting the **two-sided nature of salvation**, requiring both divine initiative and human response. The lecture also explores the literary structure of Isaiah 53, noting its poetic design and examining specific verses to explain their meaning and significance within the larger context. Finally, the lecture concludes with a prayer of gratitude and a call to emulate the servant's selfless sacrifice.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 25 – 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  
on25.mp3

### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from Dr. Oswald's lecture on Isaiah 52-53:

#### **Briefing Document: Dr. John Oswald on Isaiah 52-53**

**Date:** October 29, 2024 (Based on source) **Source:** Excerpts from "Oswald\_Isaiah\_EN\_Session25.pdf" **Subject:** Analysis of Isaiah Chapters 52 and 53, with emphasis on themes of redemption, the nature of God, and the suffering servant.

**Introduction:** Dr. Oswald's session focuses on Isaiah 52 and 53, emphasizing the intertwined themes of God's deliverance and the nature of the "suffering servant." He stresses that these chapters are not primarily about deliverance from Babylon, but rather about a deeper spiritual redemption. Oswald challenges listeners to reconsider their understanding of God's character and how salvation is enacted through both divine initiative and human response.

#### **Key Themes and Ideas:**

##### 1. **God's Character and Deliverance:**

- **God's Initiative:** Oswald highlights God's active role in redemption. He did not "sell" his people to creditors but allowed them to be "on the market," meaning he is free to redeem them without needing to pay a price (metaphorical language, not a literal sale).
- **Quote:** "And God is saying, no, I didn't get anything for selling you. And I don't have to pay anybody to buy you back."
- **Experiential Knowledge of God:** The people will not just know God's name (Yahweh) intellectually but will experience his character—his grace and power.
- **Quote:** "They will know what kind of a God I am... they're going to experience my character... They will know that I am not constrained by anything in creation... And you're going to know that."
- **God's Unconstrained Power:** God is not limited by creation but is the "I AM," the only one who can truly claim that title, demonstrating his power to deliver.
- **God is not a transactional deity:** God's redemption does not require Him to make a payment.

- **God's Arm Revealed:** God reveals his "arm," symbolizing his strength and power, not just for Israel but for the entire world. This is portrayed with anticipation and excitement rather than calm reflection.
- **Quote:** "The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see."

#### 1. **The Two-Sided Nature of Salvation:**

- **God Comes To Us:** God takes the initiative to come to his people in their helplessness.
- **Quote:** "There is nothing we can do of our own strength, of our own energy, of our own intelligence to somehow get to God. That's what Jesus said, meant when he said, no one can go up into heaven to bring God down. God has to come on his own into our world."
- **We Must Respond:** Salvation is not passive; we must actively "go out" from our sins to meet God's offer.
- **Quote:** "God must come to us, but when he comes, we have to leave our sins and go out to meet him. Salvation is always two-sided."
- **God's Vanguard and Rear Guard:** God leads and protects his people, going before and behind them, a picture akin to the pillar of cloud and fire in the desert.
- **Quote:** "The Lord will be your vanguard and the God of Israel will be your rear guard."

#### 1. **The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12):**

- **Careful Structure:** Oswalt emphasizes that Isaiah 52:13 is the start of a carefully crafted poem. The chapter division between 52 and 53 is erroneous and obscures the unified structure.
- **Triumph and Suffering:** The poem is framed by the triumph of the servant (52:13 and 53:12). The poem moves from this to depict the servant's suffering and then returns to this triumph.
- **Quote:** "Here we are in the first verse, 52, 13. And the last verse, 53, 12. And we're talking about the triumph of the servant... beginning and ending with triumph."

- **Contrasting Expectations:** The servant's appearance was not what was expected of a savior; he was marred, not handsome.
- **Quote:** "His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance, his form beyond that of the children of mankind. Wait a minute. Wait a minute. This is not what we expected our savior to look like. He's supposed to be handsome."
- **The servant's success is described in terms of wisdom, prosperity, and ultimate success:****Quote:** "Another meaning is to prosper, although not in the exclusively financial way that we tend to think of in English. And that leads us to the third meaning, which I think is the correct meaning here, and that is to succeed."
- **Rejection and Despised:** The servant was despised, considered worthless and not worthy of attention. This is contrasted with the idea of a "costume drum major" expected to lead a triumphal parade.
- **Quote:** "To despise in Hebrew means to not think of, to consider worthless. He's not worth my time."
- **Bearing Others' Burdens:** The servant bore the griefs, sorrows, transgressions, and iniquities of others, not because he deserved it, but because it was a necessary part of his redemptive work.
- **"Sprinkle" vs. "Startle":** Oswalt argues that the word translated as "sprinkle" in 52:15 likely means "startle" in the original Hebrew, based on parallelism and grammatical context.
- **Injustice and Humility:** The servant faced oppression, judgment, and an unjust death, even being buried with the wicked, yet remained silent and defenseless like a lamb.
- **Quote:** "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep that before its shearers is silent."
- **God's "Gladness":** Oswalt interprets the phrase "It made God glad to crush him" (53:10) as a reflection of God's painful but necessary choice to allow the servant's suffering for the sake of redemption, similar to the bridge tender's decision to sacrifice his son for the greater good.
- **Quote:** "But God shut his ears for us. That's how it could make him glad because he knew. He knew what the cost would produce."

- **Offering For Sin:** He interprets verse 10 as the people offering Jesus to the Father as an atonement for sins.
- **Triumph Through Suffering:** Despite suffering, the servant will succeed, see his offspring, and prolong his days, bearing the iniquities of many and interceding for transgressors.

#### 1. **Practical Application:**

- **Following Jesus' Footsteps:** Christians are called to follow Jesus' example by laying aside their own "royal robes" and rights. They should focus on serving and trusting in God's plan for them.
- **Recognizing God's Power in Weakness:** God's power is not found in human strength or worldly displays, but in his ability to absorb evil and return love. This is a central lesson of the suffering servant.
- **Quote:** "God's weakness. His weakness is greater than any human strength. His power is in his ability to take into himself all the evil the world can ever produce and give back love."

**Conclusion:** Dr. Oswalt's lecture provides a deep and nuanced look into the complexities of Isaiah 52-53, emphasizing the interconnectedness of God's deliverance, the nature of salvation, and the suffering and triumph of the servant. He challenges his audience to consider that deliverance is not just a political reality but a personal and spiritual transformation rooted in an encounter with a God who is both powerful and compassionate. The suffering servant passage calls into question typical expectations of power, instead of highlighting the power of humility and self-sacrifice.

## 4. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 25, Isaiah 52-53

### Isaiah 52-53 Study Guide

#### Short Answer Quiz

1. According to Oswalt, what is the primary issue that needs to be dealt with in Isaiah 49-51, even beyond the issue of returning to Jerusalem?
2. How does Isaiah 52:1 contrast with Isaiah 51:9 regarding who needs to "wake up?" What does this change suggest?
3. Explain the core theme of the book of Isaiah as represented by the contrasting actions of Babylon and Jerusalem in chapters 47 and 52.
4. What does God mean when he says, "my people will know my name" in Isaiah 52:6, according to Oswalt?
5. What is the significance of the imagery of a messenger bringing good news in Isaiah 52:7-12, and how does this relate to the idea of salvation?
6. According to Oswalt, what is the meaning of God "baring his arm" in Isaiah 52:10?
7. Why is the division between Isaiah 52 and 53 considered problematic, and how is chapter 52:13 connected to chapter 53?
8. Describe the two contrasting images of the servant presented in Isaiah 52:13-15 and Isaiah 53:1-3, and what do these images suggest about the nature of the Messiah?
9. How does Oswalt interpret Isaiah 53:10 where it says, "it made God glad to crush him?"
10. In Isaiah 53:11-12, what does it mean to make Christ's life "an offering for sin?"

#### Answer Key

1. Beyond the physical return to Jerusalem, the primary issue is the people's alienation from God and the need for them to become the servants of the Lord as promised, demonstrating God's character.
2. In 51:9, the arm of the Lord is told to wake up, while in 52:1, Jerusalem is told to wake up. This shift suggests that God has not forgotten them; rather, they must prepare themselves to receive Him.

3. The theme is that pride and self-exaltation will lead to humiliation (Babylon), but voluntary humility and trust in God will lead to exaltation (Jerusalem), a pattern throughout the book.
4. Knowing God's name is not just head knowledge, but an experiential understanding of God's character, grace, and power as the one who says "I am," demonstrating His unconstrained nature.
5. The messenger brings news of victory, indicating that salvation is not achieved through human strength but through God's intervention. Salvation is described in terms of God's arrival as a powerful and victorious force.
6. God "baring his arm" signifies His readiness to act with strength and power to deliver and save His people, just as He had promised.
7. The division is problematic because 52:13 begins a new section of poetic stanzas that continues through the entirety of chapter 53; it's a single, designed literary unit about the suffering servant.
8. Isaiah 52:13-15 depicts the servant as exalted and successful, while Isaiah 53:1-3 presents the servant as despised, rejected, and lacking in beauty. These contrasting images suggest the unexpected, humble nature of the Messiah, who would suffer before being glorified.
9. Oswalt interprets the phrase as God's willingness to allow His son to suffer for the sake of humanity's salvation, knowing the good that would come from it, akin to the bride tender who sacrificed his son to save many.
10. Oswalt explains that it means that people offer Christ's sacrifice to God the Father on their behalf to be found righteous.

## Essay Questions

1. Explore the concept of "knowing" God's name in Isaiah 52:6, as discussed by Oswalt. How does this differ from simply knowing about God? What implications does this have for the relationship between God and His people?
2. Discuss the role and significance of the messenger in Isaiah 52:7-12. How does the imagery of the messenger relate to the larger themes of salvation and deliverance in the book of Isaiah?
3. Analyze the contrasting depictions of the servant in Isaiah 52:13-15 and 53:1-3. What is the purpose of presenting these seemingly contradictory images, and what do they reveal about the nature of God's plan for salvation?
4. How does the concept of substitutionary atonement, as presented in Isaiah 53:4-6, relate to the idea of God's justice and mercy? What does Oswalt's explanation of these verses reveal about the relationship between suffering and redemption?
5. Examine Oswalt's argument that Isaiah 52:11-12 presents a "synergy of salvation," that requires both God's intervention and human participation. How does this concept challenge common assumptions about the nature of salvation?



## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Righteous Remnant:** The faithful people of God who remain after a period of judgment or exile; a theme throughout Isaiah.
- **Servant of the Lord:** A key figure in Isaiah, presented in various passages, who is a chosen agent of God's will, often associated with suffering and redemption.
- **Yahweh:** The personal name of God in Hebrew, often translated as "LORD" in English Bibles. It is associated with the idea of God as the self-existent one.
- **Shalom:** A Hebrew word that conveys the idea of wholeness, well-being, peace, and completeness, extending beyond the mere absence of conflict.
- **Evangelist:** One who proclaims good news. Oswalt connects this term to the Greek translation of the phrase, "brings good news" in Isaiah 52:7.
- **Bared his arm:** A metaphor for God revealing his power and strength to deliver and save his people.
- **Metaphorical Language:** Language that uses symbolic or imaginative comparisons to convey meaning, often found in prophetic texts like Isaiah.
- **Parallelism:** A literary device in Hebrew poetry where lines or phrases are structured in a way that corresponds to each other in meaning. Often synonymous or antithetical ideas are placed beside each other in lines.
- **Substitutionary Atonement:** The theological concept that Christ's suffering and death served as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of humanity.
- **Iniquity:** A term with the idea of twistedness or perversion of what is right, often used in the Bible to describe the nature of sin.
- **Sheepliness:** A term used by Oswalt to describe the single-mindedness of sheep, and in the context of Christ, the mild defenselessness which he submitted to his persecutors.

## 5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 25, Isaiah 52-53, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ on Isaiah 52-53

- **Why does Isaiah emphasize that God did not sell His people for a price?**
- Isaiah emphasizes that God did not sell His people for a price to highlight that their redemption is not contingent on paying off a debt or creditor. Instead, their exile and suffering resulted from their own choices and alienation from God. This underscores the freedom of God to deliver them and that no external force compels God to take them back or requires a payment for their return. The language of selling is metaphorical, designed to demonstrate that God can take them back for nothing because He did not receive anything for their exile.
- **What does it mean for God's people to "know His name" in this context?**
- Knowing God's name goes beyond simply knowing the word "Yahweh." It signifies experiencing and understanding His character. God's people will come to know Him intimately through His actions, witnessing firsthand His grace, power, and unwavering commitment to them. It is a knowledge that comes from experience, seeing that He is not constrained by the idols or powers of this world. They will understand His power to deliver and His gracious nature. They will also know Him as "I Am," the only one who can make that claim.
- **What is the significance of the messenger with "beautiful feet" bringing good news?**
- The image of the messenger bringing good news is significant for its timing and impact. The messenger arrives in a city under siege, bringing news of victory. This signifies the salvation and hope that God is bringing to His people. The message is not only about a battle won but about God's reign and return to Zion. The messenger and message convey that God has not abandoned His people and is coming to deliver them Himself. It creates excitement and wonder, and it is a picture of God's promise fulfilled and a future secure.

- **Why is the coming of God described as necessary for salvation?**
- The text emphasizes that salvation is not something that humans can achieve on their own. God must come down to meet them in their state of helplessness and hopelessness. The people under siege can't save themselves, and likewise, people cannot reach God through their own effort. This is why God must "bare His arm" to actively bring deliverance, and it is the core reason that the coming of Jesus is necessary, because he comes to us in our helplessness.
- **What does it mean for God's people to "go out" in relation to salvation?**
- Salvation is not a passive reception but a dynamic interaction. While God must come to us, we must also actively leave our sins and reach out to receive His grace. It's a two-sided approach where we are not merely passive recipients but active participants who get up and move in response to the salvation being offered. It demonstrates the synergy between God's initiative and our response, highlighting that God does not force salvation, but He requires us to accept it.
- **How does Isaiah 52:13-53:12 depict the suffering servant?**
- This section depicts the suffering servant through a series of contrasting images. The passage begins with exaltation (52:13), and closes with triumph (53:12). However, in the middle the servant is presented as despised and rejected, without beauty or majesty. His suffering is described as being a man of sorrows, bearing grief, being smitten by God, wounded for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities. He is likened to a lamb led to the slaughter, silent before his shearers, unjustly treated and buried with the wicked. This paradoxically shows that he achieves triumph through suffering. The contrast highlights that the salvation of God comes through a figure that the world wouldn't expect and through methods that the world scorns.
- **Why was the servant's appearance so marred and unlike what was expected?**
- The marred appearance of the servant is intentional. It contradicts the expectation that a savior would be handsome and powerful. This disfigurement emphasizes his human vulnerability and solidarity with the suffering and broken. It also challenges preconceptions of what a savior looks like, demonstrating that salvation comes through sacrifice and not worldly grandeur. This marred appearance shows that the servant truly bears the griefs and sorrows of others.

- **How does God's "gladness" in crushing the servant relate to salvation?**
- God's "gladness" in crushing the servant (53:10) is a difficult concept. It doesn't mean God takes pleasure in suffering itself. Instead, it signifies the ultimate good and salvation that is achieved through the suffering of the servant. The illustration of the bridge tender sacrificing his son to save many emphasizes that the suffering was not arbitrary but had a necessary, greater purpose. The sacrifice of the servant, though devastating, ultimately allows God's people to offer his life as a sacrifice for their sins, which they must choose to do, leading to his and their vindication. The suffering leads to the salvation of all those who would accept it.