

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 26

Isaiah 54-55

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 26, Isaiah 54-55, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. John Oswalt's lecture on Isaiah 54-55 focuses on God's unconditional grace and its implications for exiled Israelites. **He interprets** the imagery of barrenness and fruitfulness as representing God's promise of restoration and abundant life. **Oswalt emphasizes** the multifaceted nature of God, highlighting His roles as Maker, Husband, Redeemer, and Holy One of Israel. **The lecture further explores** the concept of God's covenant of peace, emphasizing its significance in achieving complete reconciliation and *shalom*. **Finally**, it connects the themes of righteousness, deliverance, and the enduring nature of God's love and compassion.

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 26 – 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
on26.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. John Oswalt's teaching on Isaiah 54-55:

Briefing Document: Isaiah 54-55

Source: Excerpts from "Oswalt_Isaiah_EN_Session26.pdf"

Date: October 16, 2024

Overview: This session focuses on Isaiah 54 and 55, which Dr. Oswalt interprets as the conclusion of a larger section (chapters 40-55) concerning God's grace and its implications for servanthood. He contrasts the previous chapters' focus on *anticipation* of deliverance with these chapters' *invitation* to participate in the blessings made possible by the Servant (referring to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53). The core message revolves around God's abundant grace, everlasting love, and the transformation it brings, both to the individual and to the nation of Israel. Oswalt emphasizes the themes of fruitfulness, restoration, righteousness, and the nature of God's covenant.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Transition from Anticipation to Invitation:

- Isaiah 49-52 focused on Yahweh's encouragement to believe in deliverance. Chapters 54-55 transition to an *invitation* to receive the blessings of that deliverance.
- Oswalt states, "So then, what we see is this anticipation in 49 to 52, 12, and then the revelation in 52, 13 to 53, 12, and now the invitation in 54 to 55."
- The basis of this transition is the work of the Servant, making forgiveness and free grace possible.

1. Fruitfulness and Restoration:

- God promises to reverse Zion's barrenness and desolation, ensuring its future growth and prosperity. This is a direct counter to the fear of extinction prevalent during the exile.
- Quote: "The children of the desolate will be more than the children of her who is married... You will spread abroad to the right, to the left."

- This promise echoes God's promise to Abraham to have descendants as numerous as the stars.
- This also speaks to God's ability to make the impossible possible.

1. **Overcoming Shame and Trust:**

- The shame of the exile and past failures will be forgotten, highlighting the restorative power of God's grace.
- Quote: "You'll forget the shame of the past, of your youth, of your widowhood, of being stripped of your nation and your possessions."
- Shame, according to Oswalt, comes when what you have trusted fails you. God's faithfulness is a response to that kind of shame.

1. **Multiple Facets of God's Character:**

- God is presented with multiple titles, each highlighting different aspects of His nature: Maker, Lord Almighty, Husband, Redeemer, and Holy One of Israel, and God of the Whole Earth.
- These titles emphasize God's knowledge of us, his power, his intimate relationship with us, his obligation to us, and his transcendent nature.
- Oswalt contrasts the image of God as a distant judge with that of an intimate "husband."
- "For too many of us, the primary way we think about God is the one who's sitting in heaven saying you could do better... He's your husband."

1. **God's Love and Anger:**

- God's anger is presented as temporary and motivated by love. His love, specifically *hesed* (steadfast love, covenantal faithfulness), is described as His essential, unchanging quality.
- Quote: "God gets angry, but he is love. God gets angry, but he is love. Love is the essential quality of his character, unchanging and forever."
- He cites Psalm 30:5, emphasizing that "His anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime."
- *Hesed* is linked with compassion (RHM, related to womb and tenderness) – emphasizing God's deep, intimate feelings toward His people.

1. **Covenant of Peace (Shalom):**

- God's promise of a "covenant of peace" (shalom) means not merely the absence of conflict but also wholeness, total reconciliation, and restoration.
- Oswalt uses examples like Phineas in Numbers 25:12, Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26 and Romans 5:1, 10 to show the implications of shalom in the OT and NT.
- This covenant of peace establishes a right relationship between God and His people.

1. **Precious Stones and Righteousness:**

- The description of Zion's rebuilding with precious stones signifies its beauty, value, and enduring nature. It also relates to the priest's breastplate with twelve precious stones.
- The people are described as "established in righteousness," which becomes a focal point for discussion about the nature of righteousness in both Luther and Wesley's interpretation.
- Luther's discovery of imputed righteousness (being *counted* righteous through Christ) is highlighted, but is said to be incomplete by itself. Wesley's understanding of *enabled* righteousness (being empowered to *live* righteously through Christ) is presented as a necessary addition.
- There's an important critique of contemporary evangelicalism for neglecting the practical implications of righteousness, evidenced by the lack of distinction between believers and non-believers. "And George Barna says there is no difference no measurable difference between the lifestyle of the lost and the lifestyle of the born again. And I say that is a horrible, horrible thing."
- Oswalt emphasizes a living relationship with God as essential for true righteousness.

1. **Righteousness and Vindication:**

- The righteousness described in Isaiah 40-55 includes God's action in delivering his people and God's expectation that they will live rightly, a two sided aspect of his righteousness.
- The word "vindication" (sometimes used in translations) misses this duality, focusing too heavily on God's action while neglecting the expectation of righteous living.

- "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness from me...the word is two sided."

1. **Free Sustenance and Everlasting Covenant:**

- In Isaiah 55, God invites all to freely receive sustenance (wine, milk, bread), symbolizing the basics of life and salvation.
- The offer of an "everlasting covenant" is compared to the covenant with David, highlighting its eternal nature and guaranteed blessings.
- God's *hesed* is again emphasized as the foundation of this covenant.

1. **Witnesses and Leaders:**

- God's people are called to be witnesses, their lives becoming evidence of God's truth, distinctly different from those around them.
- They are also called to be leaders, drawing others to God through the glory with which He has endowed them, which is not an ephemeral glory but a substantial, real, and significant glory.
- This is described as a fulfillment of Isaiah 2:2-5, when nations will flow to Zion.
- Oswalt warns against "play acting" in the Christian life, where people learn the motions without genuine spiritual depth and connection to God.

1. **Finding God and God's Ways:**

- There is a crucial moment to respond to God's invitation, a time when He is near and can be found. "There is a moment when he can be found. There is a moment while he is near. Don't miss it."
- Rejection can lead to a loss of sensitivity to God's grace.
- God's thoughts and ways are beyond human comprehension, and while humans cannot do *hesed* as God does it, the Holy Spirit enables us to love in the same *way*.
- Oswalt contrasts human attempts to *earn* redemption with God's method of grace, the acceptance that the only thing we can do is receive what the servant offers.

1. **God's Word and Transformation:**

- God's word will accomplish its purpose, bringing transformation, which is illustrated by Louis Zamperini's story.
- Redeemed lives are the proof that God is God, making a name for Him and providing an "everlasting sign."

Quotes

- "The children of the desolate will be more than the children of her who is married."
- "You'll forget the shame of the past, of your youth, of your widowhood, of being stripped of your nation and your possessions."
- "For too many of us, the primary way we think about God is the one who's sitting in heaven saying you could do better... He's your husband."
- "God gets angry, but he is love. God gets angry, but he is love. Love is the essential quality of his character, unchanging and forever."
- "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness from me...the word is two sided."
- "There is a moment when he can be found. There is a moment while he is near. Don't miss it."
- "And George Barna says there is no difference no measurable difference between the lifestyle of the lost and the lifestyle of the born again. And I say that is a horrible, horrible thing."

Conclusion:

Dr. Oswalt presents Isaiah 54-55 as a powerful declaration of God's grace, love, and faithfulness toward his people. It's a section that transitions from anticipation to invitation, highlighting the work of the Servant as the basis for this offer. The themes of restoration, righteousness, and reconciliation are explored through rich imagery, historical examples, and deep theological reflection. Oswalt invites his audience to embrace this gift of grace and live out the reality of their redemption. He does this by warning against play-acting and stressing that both imputed and enabled righteousness are important. This righteousness is meant to be the sign that God is God.

This briefing document should provide a comprehensive understanding of the key ideas and theological points raised in the provided material.

4. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 26, Isaiah 54-55

Isaiah 54-55 Study Guide

Quiz

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

1. What is the primary shift in tone between Isaiah 49-52 and Isaiah 54-55, as described in the lecture?
2. How does God's promise of fruitfulness to the "barren one" in Isaiah 54 relate to the fears of the exiles?
3. What does Dr. Oswalt say is the ultimate shame in the Old Testament? How does God's promise in Isaiah 54:4 address this shame?
4. Name three of the five terms for God listed in Isaiah 54:5 and explain what each term conveys about God's relationship to His people?
5. According to the lecture, what is the essential quality of God's character, even in the midst of his anger, and how does this relate to his love for his people?
6. What is the significance of the Hebrew word *hesed*, and how is it connected to the idea of compassion?
7. What is the "covenant of peace" offered by God, and how is it more than simply the absence of conflict?
8. What is the significance of the precious stones used to describe the rebuilt city in Isaiah 54:11-12?
9. How does the lecture explain the dual nature of "righteousness" in Isaiah 54:17, moving beyond just "vindication"?
10. According to the lecture, what does God offer freely in Isaiah 55, and why is this significant for the exiles?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The tone shifts from anticipation of deliverance in chapters 49-52 to an invitation to participate in that deliverance in chapters 54-55. The focus moves from the promise of what God *will do* to an invitation to receive what has already been accomplished.

2. The exiles feared being eliminated as a culture and people. God's promise of fruitfulness contrasts their current "barren" state and assures them they will not only survive but thrive and expand.
3. The ultimate shame is when something you trust fails you. God's promise to end shame means that they will forget the shame of the past, including the shame of exile and abandonment, because he will restore them.
4. Three terms are: **Maker** - God is their creator, knowing them intimately; **Lord of Heaven's Armies** - God has unmatched power, offering them protection; **Husband** - God has a close, covenantal bond with his people, offering protection and love.
5. The essential quality of God's character is love, which is unchanging and eternal. God gets angry because he loves his people and is saddened when they corrupt their lives, demonstrating that anger stems from love, not a lack of it.
6. *Hesed* is a Hebrew word that means steadfast love or covenant loyalty, and it is derived from a word meaning "womb." It speaks to God's deep, tender care and concern for His people, almost like the feelings of a mother for her child.
7. The covenant of peace is total reconciliation with God, not just the absence of conflict. It's the restoration of a broken relationship that is made whole and complete through God.
8. The precious stones represent the great value, beauty, and endurance of God's people and the city, highlighting how precious they are to him. It also connects them to the priestly garments and the temple, alluding to a renewed center of worship.
9. The lecture explains that righteousness is not only God's act of deliverance, but also the new way of life he expects of his people. It is a two-sided concept, and "vindication" only encompasses one side by missing the expectation of changed behavior that comes through deliverance.
10. God offers sustenance – wine, milk, and bread – freely to all who come to him. These basic life necessities are offered without price to illustrate the generosity of God and his ability to provide.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Respond to each of the following questions in a well-organized essay format, drawing from the lecture and supporting your answers with specific examples.

1. Explore the significance of the "Servant" figure in Isaiah 40-55, focusing on how the Servant's actions make God's grace possible. Analyze how this concept of the Servant is central to understanding the invitation found in chapters 54 and 55.
2. Discuss the multiple facets of God's character as revealed in Isaiah 54:5 (Maker, Lord of Heaven's Armies, Husband, Redeemer, Holy One of Israel, God of the Whole Earth). Explain how understanding these different aspects of God's nature provides comfort and assurance to the exiled people of Israel, and consider how these same aspects are applicable to a modern context.
3. The lecture emphasizes that God's anger is temporary while His love is eternal. Analyze the implications of this idea using examples from the lecture and verses from the scripture (such as Psalm 30:5). Discuss how an understanding of the nature of God's anger and compassion impacts our own understanding of redemption and forgiveness.
4. Explain the concept of the "covenant of peace," exploring how it is presented in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Romans. Detail how this covenant offers not just an end to conflict but a profound reconciliation between God and his people.
5. Examine the dual understanding of "righteousness" as it is presented in the lecture, exploring how it relates to both God's act of deliverance and a new way of living for God's people. Consider the implications of this dual understanding of righteousness for modern Christians.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Grace:** Undeserved favor; God's free and unmerited gift of love and salvation. In the context of Isaiah 40-55, grace is the motivation for God's servanthood and redemption of his people.
- **Servant (capital S):** Refers to the specific servant figure in Isaiah, particularly in chapters 52-53, whose suffering and sacrifice makes redemption possible for others. Dr. Oswalt emphasizes that God's forgiveness and grace flow through the suffering of this particular servant.
- **Hesed:** A Hebrew word that conveys God's steadfast love, covenant loyalty, and deep compassion. Rooted in the word for womb, it suggests a tender, nurturing love that is both faithful and unwavering.
- **Shalom:** A Hebrew word often translated as "peace," but which signifies wholeness, completeness, and well-being. It implies a state of harmony and reconciliation, not merely the absence of conflict.
- **Covenant of Peace:** God's promise of complete reconciliation and shalom with His people. It is not just an end to conflict, but a deep, intimate connection and relationship with God.
- **Righteousness:** In the context of Isaiah, this word has a dual meaning. It refers both to God's righteous act of delivering his people and to the new way of living that he expects his people to have through his grace.
- **Vindication:** The act of being cleared of accusation or suspicion, or being justified. The lecture notes that using this word only conveys part of the meaning in the context of the text, which also stresses the new way of living.
- **Glory:** In the Old Testament, this term signifies solidity, significance, and reality; it's not just ephemeral or passing. God's glory is the manifestation of his reality and weight, that he desires to share with his people, enabling them to be a witness to him.
- **Barrenness:** In Isaiah 54, this figure symbolizes Israel's state of exile, loss, and hopelessness. God's promise to the "barren one" to have more children than the married woman directly counters this sense of despair.

Redeemer: One who buys back or ransoms; a term used to describe God's role in rescuing his people from exile and sin. This term also emphasizes God's obligation to his people, like a close relative who will take responsibility for a family member.

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 26, Isaiah 54-55, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Isaiah 54-55

- What is the primary shift in focus between Isaiah 49-52:12 and chapters 54-55?**
 The earlier chapters emphasize Yahweh's encouragement and promise of deliverance to the exiles. Chapters 54-55, in contrast, focus on the invitation to the delivered to partake in the blessings that are now theirs. The tone shifts from anticipation of rescue to the reality of deliverance and the subsequent call to participate in God's grace. This shift is made possible by the work of the Servant highlighted in chapter 53.
- How does the imagery of the barren woman relate to the exiles in Isaiah 54?**
 The exiles felt like a barren woman, a widow without hope of future generations, symbolizing their perceived end as a people. God's promise that the children of the desolate will be more numerous than those of the married woman reverses this sense of hopelessness. This imagery assures the exiles that they will not be eliminated; instead, they will multiply and spread across the world, fulfilling God's covenant with Abraham.
- What does it mean that God is described as the exiles' "maker," "Lord Almighty," "husband," "redeemer," and "Holy One of Israel"? These five titles reveal God's multifaceted relationship with his people. As the *Maker*, He knows their origins and existence. As the *Lord Almighty*, He is all-powerful, assuring them of His protection. As their *Husband*, He establishes the closest bond, demonstrating intimacy and care. As their *Redeemer*, He has an obligation to restore them. Finally, as the *Holy One of Israel*, He is the transcendent one worthy of worship, who chooses to be intimately involved with His people. These names counter the exiles' shame, and fear, and assure them of God's character.**
- How does Isaiah 54:7-8 describe the relationship between God's anger and his compassion?** God's anger is portrayed as temporary and a result of his love for his people. It's an expression of his deep care and his frustration with their corruption and rejection of his covenant. In contrast, his compassion, described by the Hebrew word 'hesed,' is portrayed as eternal and unwavering. This emphasizes that love is the essential quality of his character, which motivates both his anger and his compassion.

- **What is the "covenant of peace" God offers, and how is it described in different parts of the Bible?** The "covenant of peace" is more than just an absence of conflict; it represents total reconciliation and *shalom* (wholeness) with God. This idea is established in various places. In Numbers 25, God promises Phineas a covenant of peace for his zealous obedience. In Ezekiel 34 and 37, a covenant of peace is linked to Israel's restoration and leadership under David. And in Romans 5:1-10, the covenant of peace comes through Jesus Christ. It involves being brought back into right relationship with God, encompassing complete restoration, and is not just an armistice, but genuine reconciliation.
- **What is the significance of the precious stones in the description of the restored city in Isaiah 54:11-12?** The precious stones symbolize the beauty, value, and endurance of God's people and the new city. They are reminders of the priestly garments with twelve jewels each representing the twelve tribes of Israel, implying that the restored community will be a beautiful and valued center of God's presence in the world. It also speaks to the lavish and costly nature of their redemption, and how highly God regards them.
- **What is meant by the statement in Isaiah 54:17 that "their righteousness is from me", and how does it contrast with the translation "their vindication from me"?** The original Hebrew points to God's righteousness being the source of both their *deliverance* and their new way of living. "Vindication," while correct, only captures one side of that reality; that God will ultimately deliver and vindicate His people from their enemies. The passage implies that God is not only going to declare them righteous but expects them to live righteously. Their righteousness is rooted in their relationship with Him.
- **What is God inviting people to come and receive in Isaiah 55, and what does it mean for them?** God is inviting people to come and receive sustenance for free: water, wine, milk, and bread. This is both literal, addressing the physical needs of the exiles, and symbolic. The use of wine and bread as the basics of life parallels Jesus' use of the same in communion. It also offers an everlasting covenant like that given to David, which has implications of being a witness of God's character, leading nations, and sharing in His glory. Furthermore, the invitation to seek God "while He may be found" (vs 6), signifies the importance of responding to the opportunity for relationship with Him, as there are moments where his nearness and conviction are acute. This new reality should lead to a life that reflects God's character to a watching world.