

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 27

Isaiah 56-57

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 27, Isaiah 56-57, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This is a lecture by Dr. John Oswalt on Isaiah 56-57, focusing on the post-exilic Jewish community's spiritual state. Oswalt argues that many Jews believed their salvation was solely due to their heritage, neglecting righteous behavior. He examines the chiasmic structure of Isaiah 56-66, highlighting a central theme of the Messiah enabling righteous living for global unity. The lecture analyzes the inclusion of foreigners and eunuchs in God's covenant, contrasting this with the hypocrisy of some Jewish leaders. Finally, Oswalt emphasizes the importance of a contrite heart and genuine love for God, rather than a transactional relationship, as essential for true salvation.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 27 – 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_Session27.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Briefing Doc: Isaiah Chapters 56-57 by Dr. John Oswalt

Main Themes:

- **God's ultimate intention is for all nations to be included in His worship.** This is demonstrated through the acceptance of eunuchs and foreigners who keep the covenant and the vision of a temple as a house of prayer for all people.
- **True righteousness stems from a heart transformed by grace, not from birthright or external rituals.** The Israelites' misplaced pride in their lineage and their pagan-like approach to God are condemned.
- **A contrite and humble heart is the key to a relationship with God.** Only through acknowledging our helplessness and dependence on God can we experience true healing and restoration.

Important Ideas and Facts:

- Chapters 56-66 form a chiasm, a literary structure where the beginning and end parallel each other, culminating in the central theme of the Messiah in Chapter 61.
- The chiasm emphasizes that the Messiah's coming is not just about rescuing the Israelites but about enabling them to live righteous lives, fulfilling God's plan for all nations to see His glory.
- The inclusion of eunuchs and foreigners in worship signifies a shift from physical rituals to a focus on genuine covenant keeping based on love and obedience.
- Dr. Oswalt challenges the notion that grace negates righteous living, arguing that true salvation should lead to a transformed life characterized by "mishpat" (justice and righteousness).
- He exposes the dangers of "paganism" within Christianity, where faith becomes a transactional tool to manipulate God for personal gain rather than an expression of love and trust.
- God's intended last word is always healing and restoration, but those who persist in wickedness will not experience shalom.

- Dr. Oswalt highlights the danger of pride and self-sufficiency, emphasizing that only through acknowledging our need for God can we receive His grace and experience true peace.

Quotes:

- "If grace is the motive for servanthood, it's also the means of servanthood."
- "Keep my covenant. What does it mean to keep God's covenant for you, for me, today?"
- "A life of mishpat justice and righteousness is the logical conclusion of salvation by grace."
- "What does paganism look like in evangelical North American Protestantism?"
- "Two people doing the same thing are not necessarily doing the same thing. This one's praying, that one's praying. That one's praying for love, that one's praying to get. They're not doing the same thing. It's where your heart is."
- "Thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy... I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly, to revive the heart of the contrite."
- "Exalt yourself, be humiliated. Not humiliate yourself, but take a right conception of yourself and allow him to lift you up to sit on the throne beside him."
- "God's intended last word is never destruction. It may be his last word, but that's up to us. His intended last word is healing and restoration."
- "Peace, shalom, shalom to the far and to the near says the Lord, and I will heal him."

This briefing doc captures the essence of Dr. John Oswalt's lecture on Isaiah 56-57, highlighting the call for genuine heart transformation and a life of righteousness fueled by God's grace, ultimately leading to the fulfillment of His plan for all nations to experience His glory.

4. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 27, Isaiah 56-57

Isaiah 56-57: A Study Guide

Quiz

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

1. Who are the two groups addressed in Isaiah 56:1-8, and why is their inclusion significant?
2. According to Isaiah 56:1, what should be the response to God's forthcoming salvation?
3. What is the ultimate purpose of the Judeans and their temple as described in Isaiah 56:7-8?
4. In Isaiah 56:9-12, who is being criticized and for what reason?
5. What explanation is offered in Isaiah 57:1-2 for the death of righteous people?
6. How does God describe the heritage of the returned Jews in Isaiah 57:3, and what is the implication of this description?
7. What does Isaiah identify as the primary characteristic of paganism?
8. According to Isaiah 57:14-21, what is the pathway to reaching God?
9. What does Isaiah 57:15 reveal about the nature of God and his dwelling place?
10. How does Isaiah 57:19-21 address the doctrine of universalism?

Answer Key

1. The two groups addressed are foreigners and eunuchs. Their inclusion is significant because they were previously excluded from worship, highlighting God's expanding inclusivity and the importance of righteous behavior over lineage.
2. The appropriate response to God's forthcoming salvation is to uphold justice and practice righteousness. This emphasizes that salvation by grace should lead to a transformed life, not an excuse for continued sin.
3. The ultimate purpose of the Judeans and their temple is to become a house of prayer for all nations, signifying God's desire for universal worship and the breaking down of barriers between people.

4. The criticism in Isaiah 56:9-12 is directed at the leaders of the people, including religious leaders and potentially civil authorities. They are condemned for their self-serving behavior and failure to guide the people towards righteousness.
5. The death of righteous people is explained as a form of divine mercy, sparing them from the coming calamity and the consequences of the people's wickedness. This challenges the common perception of God's fairness in dealing with suffering.
6. God describes the heritage of the returned Jews as the sons of an adulteress, referencing the unfaithfulness of their ancestors. This challenges their pride in lineage and emphasizes that true heritage is found in faithfulness to God, not mere bloodline.
7. Paganism is characterized by the attempt to manipulate God through religious practices to fulfill personal desires. This highlights the transactional nature of pagan worship in contrast to genuine relationship with God.
8. The pathway to reaching God is through a contrite heart and humility, acknowledging human weakness and dependence on God. This contrasts with self-righteousness and pride, which hinder access to God.
9. Isaiah 57:15 reveals that God, though high and lifted up, also dwells with those who are contrite and lowly in spirit. This demonstrates God's accessibility and his willingness to meet individuals in their brokenness.
10. Isaiah 57:19-21 refutes universalism by stating that those who persist in wickedness will not experience peace or healing from God. This underlines the importance of choosing righteousness and accepting God's offer of salvation.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the significance of the inclusion of foreigners and eunuchs in Isaiah 56. How does this challenge the traditional understanding of belonging and covenant in the Old Testament?
2. Explore the concept of "keeping the covenant" as presented in Isaiah 56. How does this apply to contemporary Christian life?
3. Discuss the different understandings of "justice" in Isaiah 56-57. How does this concept relate to social justice and ethical living for Christians today?

4. Compare and contrast the characteristics of paganism and genuine faith as described in Isaiah 56-57. How can Christians guard against falling into paganistic patterns of thought and behavior?
5. Analyze the imagery of God dwelling with the contrite and lowly in spirit in Isaiah 57:15. What does this reveal about the nature of God and his relationship with humanity?

Glossary of Key Terms

Chiasm: A literary structure where elements mirror each other in reverse order, creating a central point of emphasis.

Covenant: A binding agreement between God and his people, outlining their responsibilities and God's promises.

Eunuch: A castrated male, often serving in royal courts. They were excluded from certain aspects of Israelite religious life according to Deuteronomy.

Foreigner: A person from a nation other than Israel, often considered outside the covenant community.

Grace: God's unmerited favor and love extended to humanity, offering forgiveness and salvation.

Idolatry: The worship of gods other than Yahweh, often involving images or practices contrary to God's commands.

Justice (Mishpat): A broad concept encompassing legal fairness, equity, and God's divine order for life.

Paganism: A system of beliefs and practices centered on deities other than the God of the Bible, often characterized by attempts to manipulate the divine.

Righteousness: Right living and behavior aligned with God's character and commands.

Shalom: Hebrew word for peace, encompassing wholeness, well-being, and right relationship with God.

Temple: The central place of worship for the Israelites, symbolizing God's presence among his people.

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 27, Isaiah 56-57, Biblealearning.org (BeL)

Isaiah Chapters 56-57 FAQ

1. Why are foreigners and eunuchs now accepted in God's worship when they were previously excluded in Deuteronomy?

While Deuteronomy excluded foreigners and eunuchs from worship, Isaiah 56 welcomes them, emphasizing God's acceptance of all who keep His covenant. This apparent contradiction is best understood as a pedagogical approach in the Old Testament. Early instructions often presented concepts in stark terms for clarity and emphasis. Deuteronomy highlighted God's creation of a whole people, discouraging bodily manipulation to gain acceptance. As understanding matured, the focus shifted to spiritual wholeness, leading to the inclusion expressed in Isaiah.

2. What is the ultimate purpose of the Judean people and their temple?

Isaiah emphasizes that the temple is not exclusive to the Judeans but intended as a "house of prayer for all nations." God desires all nations to come and see His glory, aligning with Isaiah's earlier vision of the earth filled with God's glory (Isaiah 6). This theme of universal inclusion is further echoed in Isaiah 66, where people from all nations and tongues will gather to worship God.

3. How does Isaiah connect salvation with the pursuit of justice and righteousness?

Isaiah 56:1 highlights a critical point: "Keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come and my deliverance will be revealed." This verse underscores that salvation by grace motivates righteous living. True believers, grateful for God's grace, naturally express their gratitude through just and righteous actions. This reinforces Paul's message in the New Testament: salvation should lead to a transformed life.

4. Why does Isaiah condemn the religious leaders of the returned exiles?

Isaiah criticizes the religious leaders—the watchmen, dogs, and shepherds—for their self-serving behavior. He compares their practices to paganism, implying that their outward adherence to religious rituals lacks genuine heart transformation. This condemnation echoes Isaiah's earlier critiques of corrupt leadership and highlights the ongoing struggle for true spiritual revival.

5. What is paganism, and how does it manifest in contemporary Christianity?

Paganism is characterized by attempting to manipulate God through religious acts to fulfill personal desires. It reduces faith to a transactional system focused on personal gain. This mindset manifests in modern Christianity through practices like:

- Tithing solely to receive financial blessings in return.
- Expecting God to answer every prayer regardless of His will.
- Attributing church attendance or condemnation of others to personal righteousness.
- Engaging in spiritual disciplines solely to gain God's favor for specific outcomes.

6. How does Isaiah describe the path to a genuine relationship with God?

Isaiah 57:15 beautifully portrays the path to God: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, to revive the heart of the contrite." True connection with God begins with humility and acknowledging our need for Him. When we abandon pride and self-sufficiency, God's presence fills our hearts, reviving and transforming us.

7. What is the significance of God's statement, "Peace, peace to the far and to the near," and how does it relate to the wicked?

God's declaration of peace, or *shalom*, signifies His desire for complete well-being and restoration for all people. However, true peace is only attainable for those who acknowledge their need for healing and accept God's grace. Those who persist in wickedness, living as if there is no God, cannot experience this genuine *shalom*.

8. What is the central theme running through Isaiah chapters 56-57, and how does it connect to the broader message of the book?

The central theme revolves around the contrast between God's universal desire for all people to come to Him and the reality of human sinfulness hindering that goal. This tension echoes the book's overall message: God's longing to redeem and restore His people, despite their continual rebellion. The solution, as Isaiah consistently emphasizes, lies in repentance, humility, and a genuine heart transformation that leads to just and righteous living.