

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 4 Isaiah 6

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 4, Isaiah 6, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt **explains** Isaiah chapter 6, focusing on Isaiah's call and its **theological significance**. Oswalt **sets the context** by describing the political and religious climate of Judah and Israel in the 8th century BCE, highlighting the kingdoms' **decay and idolatry**. He then **interprets** Isaiah's vision of God's holiness, his own subsequent sense of unworthiness, and God's purifying action. Finally, Oswalt **discusses** the implications of Isaiah's response ("Here am I, send me") and its **relevance** to modern Christian ministry.

2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 4 – 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_Session04.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Isaiah 6: A Briefing Doc on Oswalt's Teachings

Main Theme:

Isaiah 6 details the prophet Isaiah's call to ministry, highlighting the themes of God's holiness, human sinfulness, the purifying power of God's grace, and the call to faithful service even in the face of rejection and hardship.

Most Important Ideas and Facts:

1. The Context of Isaiah's Call:

- Isaiah begins his ministry in a turbulent time (739 BC) marked by the impending Assyrian threat and the death of King Uzziah, a figure of stability for Judah.
- Oswalt emphasizes the significance of Uzziah's death: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord." This event signifies the removal of human reliance and the stark reality of Judah's vulnerability before God.

2. Isaiah's Vision of God:

- Isaiah's encounter with God in the Temple is characterized by awe-inspiring imagery: God's "hem... filled the temple", seraphim declaring "Holy, holy, holy", and the temple filling with smoke.
- Oswalt stresses that these images point to the transcendent and indescribable nature of God, a reality that defies human comprehension and control.
- Quote: "It is no accident that there is not one physical description of Jesus in the Gospels. We humans are inveterate idolaters."

3. The Reality of Sin and God's Grace:

- Isaiah's immediate reaction to God's holiness is a profound sense of uncleanness: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."
- Oswalt connects this to the human tendency to fall short of God's standard: "When we humans come in contact with the living God, the immediate recognition that comes to us is not finiteness, not mortality, but uncleanness."
- God's response is not condemnation but cleansing: a seraph touches Isaiah's lips with a burning coal from the altar, signifying purification and transformation.

- Quote: "The seraph did not come with a rose petal and sprinkle holy water on his lips. He came with fire."

4. The Costly Call to Service:

- God's call to Isaiah comes in the form of a question: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" This highlights the element of free will and the need for genuine commitment in serving God.
- Isaiah's response is immediate and unconditional: "Here am I! Send me."
- However, God's commission is a difficult one: to preach a message that will ultimately harden the hearts of his generation. This points to the costliness of faithful service and the reality of rejection.
- Quote: "God said, no, I want you to keep a message. I want you to preach a message. It's going to blind these people's eyes, deafen their ears, and harden their hearts. Lest they turn and be healed."

5. Hope in the Midst of Judgment:

- Despite the bleak outlook, God offers a glimmer of hope: "The holy seed is its stump." This points to the future restoration and the enduring faithfulness of God's promise.
- Oswalt concludes by emphasizing the impact of Isaiah's faithfulness: "And because he was faithful, we're here today."

Conclusion:

Oswalt's teaching on Isaiah 6 unpacks a powerful narrative of encounter, conviction, cleansing, and commitment. It underscores the challenging nature of God's call, the need for a deep experience of grace, and the ultimate triumph of God's purposes even in the face of human resistance.

4. Isaiah Study Guide: Session 4, Isaiah 6

Isaiah Chapter 6: A Vision of Holiness and Commission

Quiz

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

1. What is the significance of the date Isaiah provides in verse 1 ("In the year that King Uzziah died...")?
2. How does the description of God in Isaiah's vision (6:1) differ from the description of God in Exodus 24:10? What might this difference suggest about the nature of God?
3. What is the meaning of the seraphim covering their faces and feet in Isaiah's vision (6:2)?
4. What is the significance of the phrase "holy, holy, holy" in 6:3?
5. Why does Isaiah react with a sense of uncleanness upon seeing God (6:5)?
6. What is the symbolism of the burning coal used to cleanse Isaiah's lips (6:6-7)?
7. Why does God ask, "Whom shall I send?" rather than directly commissioning Isaiah (6:8)?
8. What is the nature of the message God calls Isaiah to preach (6:9-10)? What is the intended effect of this message on Isaiah's generation?
9. What is Isaiah's response to God's call (6:8,11)? What does this reveal about his character?
10. How does the imagery of the "holy seed" (6:13) offer a glimmer of hope within Isaiah's grim commission?

Answer Key

1. The date marks a turning point for Judah, as Uzziah's death removes a figure of stability and leadership amidst Assyrian threats. It emphasizes the historical context and the gravity of Isaiah's call.
2. Isaiah focuses on the overwhelming grandeur of God's robe filling the temple, while Exodus describes God's feet resting on a sapphire pavement. Both descriptions avoid physical depictions, emphasizing God's transcendence and the limitations of human language to capture His essence.

3. Covering faces signifies reverence and unworthiness to gaze upon God's holiness. Covering feet, often symbolic of the body, suggests a desire to shield even their physical selves from the divine presence.
4. The threefold repetition intensifies the proclamation of God's absolute holiness, highlighting His unique and utterly separate nature from all creation. It emphasizes the singular purity and perfection of God's character.
5. The contrast between God's holiness and human sinfulness evokes in Isaiah an awareness of his own impurity. The encounter with the divine exposes the moral chasm separating humanity from God, leading to a sense of unworthiness.
6. The burning coal symbolizes purification and transformation. Fire is often associated with God's refining presence, consuming impurity and shaping individuals for divine service. The coal, taken from the altar of sacrifice, may represent atonement and God's grace enabling Isaiah to speak His word.
7. God's open question allows Isaiah to freely choose to participate in the divine mission. It highlights the importance of willing obedience and personal commitment, inviting Isaiah into a partnership rather than imposing a command.
8. Isaiah is called to preach a message that will harden hearts and blind eyes, leading to further spiritual decline. This paradoxical outcome arises from the people's stubborn rejection of truth, highlighting their deep-seated resistance to God.
9. Isaiah responds with "Here am I, send me," demonstrating his wholehearted acceptance of God's difficult commission. Despite the daunting task and potential for rejection, Isaiah exhibits unwavering faith and a willingness to serve God regardless of the cost.
10. The image of the "holy seed" surviving as a stump offers hope for future restoration. Even amidst devastation, a remnant will endure, preserving the potential for renewal and the eventual fulfillment of God's promises.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the symbolic imagery of Isaiah's vision in chapter 6. How do these symbols contribute to the overall message of the chapter and Isaiah's understanding of God?
2. Explain the connection between Isaiah's personal experience of cleansing and his commission to preach a message that will ultimately harden the hearts of his

audience. What does this suggest about the role of the prophet and the nature of God's judgment?

3. Compare and contrast Isaiah's call narrative with the call narratives of other prophets in the Old Testament (e.g., Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). What common themes or unique elements emerge, and how do these differences illuminate the specific context and purpose of Isaiah's ministry?
4. Discuss the concept of God's holiness as presented in Isaiah chapter 6. How does this chapter contribute to the broader biblical understanding of God's distinct and transcendent nature?
5. Explore the implications of Isaiah's commission for contemporary Christians. What challenges and encouragements might Isaiah's experience offer to those who seek to faithfully serve God in a world often resistant to truth?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Seraphim:** Angelic beings of high rank, described as having six wings and surrounding God's throne. They represent God's power and holiness.
- **Holy:** Separateness, otherness, distinct from the ordinary and profane. It denotes God's unique and transcendent nature, characterized by absolute purity and moral perfection.
- **Glory:** The radiant manifestation of God's presence, power, and character. In Hebrew, it also denotes reality, significance, and solidity.
- **Unclean:** Morally and spiritually impure, separated from God. It highlights the chasm between human sinfulness and God's holiness.
- **Burning Coal:** A symbol of purification and transformation. Fire often represents God's refining presence, consuming impurity and preparing individuals for service.
- **Prophet:** An individual called by God to speak His message to the people, often challenging their behavior and proclaiming God's will.
- **Judgment:** God's righteous response to sin and rebellion. It can manifest as consequences for wrongdoing or as a process of refining and purifying individuals and nations.
- **Holy Seed:** A remnant of faithful believers who will endure even amidst judgment and destruction, preserving the hope for future restoration.

- **Commission:** A divinely appointed task or mission entrusted to an individual or group. It highlights the call to faithful obedience and service to God.

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 4, Isaiah 6, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

Isaiah Chapter 6 FAQ

1. What is the significance of the date given in Isaiah 6:1, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord"?

This date is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it historically validates Isaiah's experience, anchoring it to a specific point in time. Secondly, it emphasizes the removal of human leadership that Judah depended upon. Uzziah, despite his flaws, was seen as a stabilizing force. His death created a vacuum and a sense of vulnerability, especially with the Assyrian threat looming. This event prepared Isaiah, and Judah, to see the true King – Yahweh.

2. Why does Isaiah describe God only by "the hem of His robe" in his vision?

Isaiah's limited description highlights the overwhelming power and transcendence of God. Human language is inadequate to fully capture God's glory. Similar to the elders in Exodus 24:10 who saw only a pavement of sapphire stone under God's feet, Isaiah focuses on the hem of the robe filling the temple, emphasizing God's immense presence. This lack of physical description underscores the mystery and otherness of God, discouraging attempts to create a visual idol.

3. Why are the seraphim covering their faces and feet in Isaiah's vision?

The seraphim, angelic beings, cover their faces and feet as a gesture of humility and reverence in the presence of God's holiness. Covering their faces shows they are unworthy to look directly at God. Covering their feet, symbolic of their entire beings, further expresses their unworthiness before the divine. This act emphasizes the immense gap between the holiness of God and even the highest of heavenly beings.

4. What is the meaning of the phrase "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory"?

This declaration has profound implications. Firstly, it emphasizes the unique and absolute holiness of God, His "otherness." Secondly, it affirms that God's glory, His reality, significance, and solidity, are manifested throughout creation. Everything good reflects His character. This statement challenges the modern notion of inclusivity by declaring Yahweh as the sole source of true holiness and glory.

5. Why does Isaiah react with the exclamation, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips..."?

Isaiah's reaction stems from the stark contrast between God's holiness and human sinfulness. The encounter with God reveals the inherent uncleanness not just of Isaiah but of humanity as a whole. The focus on "unclean lips" likely relates to the prophet's role in speaking God's word. Recognizing his own and his people's unworthiness to communicate divine truth, Isaiah experiences a sense of despair and dissolution in God's presence.

6. What is the significance of the burning coal touching Isaiah's lips?

The burning coal represents the purifying and transformative power of God's grace. Fire, a symbol of God's presence and holiness, is used throughout Scripture to denote cleansing and refinement. The seraph using a burning coal to touch Isaiah's lips signifies the purging of his sin and the empowering for service. This act parallels the work of the Holy Spirit, who cleanses and empowers believers for God's work.

7. Why does God ask, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" instead of directly commissioning Isaiah?

God's indirect approach allows Isaiah to freely respond to the call. Having experienced God's grace and cleansing, Isaiah is given the opportunity to express his willingness to serve. This approach emphasizes the voluntary nature of true service, born out of gratitude and a transformed heart. God desires a committed servant, not one coerced into obedience.

8. What is the meaning of God's response to Isaiah's willingness to go, "Go and tell this people..." with the message that will harden their hearts?

God's message, though seemingly harsh, reveals the spiritual condition of the people. Their resistance to truth would lead to further hardening of their hearts, not because God desired it, but as a consequence of their own choices. This call challenges Isaiah to faithfulness in proclaiming God's truth even when it is met with rejection. Ultimately, Isaiah's obedience preserves God's word for future generations who will respond with faith.