

Title: Isaiah Session 2: The Contrast Between What Is and What Will Be (Isaiah 2:1–4:1)

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Session: Session 2

Source: Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Pride, Leadership, Judgment, Mishpat, Torah, Meaninglessness, Humiliation, Isaiah

Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt examines Isaiah 2:1 through 4:1, focusing on the sharp contrast between "what will be" in God's ideal future and "what is" in Judah's current state. The session explores the supreme authority of God's instruction, the true meaning of biblical judgment as the restoration of divine order, and the destructive nature of human pride. Dr. Oswalt details how exalting wealth, military power, and human leadership inevitably results in failure, societal collapse, and ultimate humiliation. Through these prophetic indictments, the lecture warns that relying on human self-exaltation leads to profound meaninglessness, urging believers to seek significance in relationship with God.

Outline

I. Introduction and Structural Context

A. Introduction to the Session

1. Lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covering Isaiah chapters 2 and 3 (specifically Isaiah 2:1 through 4:1)
2. Opening prayer emphasizing the desire to know God by walking with Him
3. Materials: distribution of study guides and handouts

B. The Purpose of Chapters 1–5 as the Introduction to Isaiah

1. Introduction lays out the problem of "what is" versus "what will be" (or "what should be")
2. Tension: How can the present reality of corruption become the glorious future God promises?
3. Microcosm in Chapter 1: The righteous city became a prostitute, but God promises to restore her as the city of righteousness
4. Chapters 2 and 3 set up this contrast with specific prophecies of future glory followed by current failure

C. The Chapter Division Discrepancy

1. The chapter division should not be between 3:26 and 4:1, but rather between 4:1 and 4:2
2. The division covers Isaiah 2:1 through 4:1
3. Anecdote of the monk marking chapter divisions while riding a donkey

4. Other example of misaligned chapter division: Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12

II. The Vision of Future Glory (Isaiah 2:1–5 — "What Will Be")

A. Isaiah's Self-Identification

1. Verse 1: "This is what Isaiah, son of Amos, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem"
2. One of only two places in the book where Isaiah names himself (the other being chapter 1:1)
3. Purposes of identification: validation of the vision, reinforcing his name ("Yahweh will save"), establishing historical setting

B. Relationship to Micah 4:1–4

1. Verses 2–4 are a word-for-word repetition of Micah 4:1–4
2. Theories of origin: Isaiah originated it, or both prophets used a common national statement under divine inspiration

C. The Mountain of the Lord (Isaiah 2:2)

1. In the ancient world, mountains were considered the dwelling places of the gods
2. Temple mount established as the highest of mountains symbolizes God's supreme authority, not a literal geological change
3. The "God of Jacob" refers to all twelve tribes of Israel rather than just the tribe of Judah, reflecting what Jacob was and what he became

D. The Nature of Salvation and Torah (Isaiah 2:3)

1. Divine teaching: "He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths"
2. Salvation is not a static position, but an active walk and movement toward godliness/holiness
3. Definition of "Torah": means "instruction" or "instruction manual," not merely a negative, limiting law
4. Genesis 17:1 parallel: Abram commanded to "walk before me and be perfect" (meaning completed, brought to its designed purpose, not infallible)

E. Divine Judgment and Order (Isaiah 2:4)

1. "He will judge between the nations"
2. Hebrew word for judge/judgment is based on the consonants S-P-T (Shaphat), meaning "order"
3. Judges (like Samson) are restorers of God's order, not courtroom figures in robes
4. "Mishpat" refers to judgment, blueprint, or custom—the divine order by which things are built and lived
5. Restoration of order brings peace: swords beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, cessation of war and training for war

F. Appeal to Israel (Isaiah 2:5)

1. "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord"
2. If Gentiles will seek God's Torah, the house of Jacob should walk in His ways now
3. Theme of light and dark introduced, which runs through the book

III. The Present Reality of Pride (Isaiah 2:6–22 — "What Is")

A. The Shocking Transition (Isaiah 2:6)

1. Complete contrast: "You, Yahweh, have abandoned your people, the descendants of Jacob"
2. Central theme of Isaiah 2:6–4:1: the sin of pride and human self-exaltation

B. The State of Being "Full" of Evil (Isaiah 2:6–8)

1. Full of superstitions and magic from the East
2. Full of silver and gold (money/wealth)
3. Full of horses and chariots (military hardware, equivalent to modern main battle tanks)
4. Full of idols

C. The Result of Self-Exaltation (Isaiah 2:9–11)

1. Arrogance leads to the opposite of what is intended: people are brought low and humbled
2. Isaiah's prayer: "don't forgive them"
3. Arrogant eyes humbled; "The Lord alone will be exalted"

D. The Day of the Lord Against Pride (Isaiah 2:12–18)

1. The Lord has a day against everything proud and lofty
2. Poetic symbols of human pride:
 - a. Cedars of Lebanon and oaks of Bashan (trees as recurring symbols of pride vs. fruitfulness)
 - b. Mountains and hills
 - c. Fortifications and high walls
 - d. Ships of Tarshish (the great sailing ships of the sea)

E. The Humiliation of Idolatry (Isaiah 2:19–21)

1. People fleeing to caves and holes in the ground from the dread/fearful presence and majesty of the Lord
2. Throwing silver and gold idols to the moles and bats
3. Moles and bats are unclean animals; throwing idols there shows total abandonment of pagan cleanness rituals
4. Explanation of pagan cosmos and sympathetic magic (e.g., temple prostitution to manipulate rain)

F. Stop Trusting in Humans (Isaiah 2:22)

1. "Stop trusting in mere humans who have but a breath in their nostrils"
2. Making humanity the measure of all things makes the world meaningless
3. Connection to modern existentialism and postmodernism (denial of absolute truth, creating arbitrary meaning in a meaningless universe)

IV. The Failure of Human Leadership (Isaiah 3:1–15)

A. The Stanzas of Leadership (Verses 1–5, 6–8, 9–15)

1. Central theme: the degradation of human leadership

2. Exalting human leaders to solve ultimate problems condemns them to failure

B. The Stripping of Leadership and Society (Isaiah 3:1–5)

1. God removes all forms of supply and support from Jerusalem and Judah
2. Removal of key societal figures: heroes, warriors, judges, prophets, diviners, elders, captains, counselors, and skilled craftsmen
3. Result: youths and children rule, leading to social oppression, chaos, and rebellion of the young against the old

C. The Refusal to Lead (Isaiah 3:6–8)

1. Graphic illustration: a man asks his brother to lead simply because he has a cloak ("take charge of this heap of ruins")
2. The brother refuses, declaring he has no food, clothing, or remedy
3. Reason: Jerusalem staggers and Judah is falling due to words and deeds against the Lord

D. Humility vs. Exaltation (Luke 14:11 Parallel)

1. Paradox: "all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted"
2. Humbling ourselves allows God to empty us so He can come in and exalt us by His grace

E. The Law of the Harvest: Sowing and Reaping (Isaiah 3:9–15)

1. The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom
2. The meaning of "Woe" (Hebrew oy, or oy vey): a word of deep sorrow, regret, or lament (like the archaic "alas"), not vindictive anger
3. Sowing unfaithfulness yields unfaithfulness; sowing righteousness yields good fruit
4. God's judgment against the elders and leaders who have ruined His vineyard and crushed the poor
5. The appropriate attitude toward leaders: respect and pray for them, but do not expect them to do what only God can do

V. The Judgment of Self-Adornment and Humiliation (Isaiah 3:16–4:1)

A. Indictment of the Haughty Women (Isaiah 3:16–17)

1. The women of Zion described as haughty, flirting, strutting, and jingling ankle ornaments
2. Judgment: God will bring sores on their heads and make their scalps bald
3. Symbolism of "daughters of Zion": while referring literally to the women, "daughter of Zion" (singular) represents the nation, suggesting this judgment applies symbolically to all of Zion (men and women) who exalt themselves

B. The Catalog of Vanity (Isaiah 3:18–23)

1. A detailed list of 21 luxurious items snatched away by the Lord (bangles, headbands, crescent necklaces, earrings, bracelets, veils, etc.)
2. Purpose of the detailed list (overkill): symbolizes stripping the nation naked, removing every adornment they hide behind, and exposing the fullness of material "stuff" used to fill lives

3. Modern parallel: storage units as a growth industry to hold excess material goods that fail to provide real significance

C. The Great Reversal (Isaiah 3:24–4:1)

1. Five stark contrasts of humiliation:
 - a. Stench instead of sweet fragrance
 - b. A rope instead of a sash
 - c. Baldness instead of well-dressed hair
 - d. Sackcloth instead of fine clothing
 - e. Branding instead of beauty
2. The slaughter of men: warriors falling by the sword, leaving the gates of Zion in mourning
3. The ultimate humiliation (Isaiah 4:1): seven women grasping one man, begging only for his name to take away their social disgrace, willing to provide their own food and clothing

D. Closing Prayer and Application

1. Thanksgiving for God's patience, long-suffering, and slowness to anger
2. Application: finding the true meaning of life in a relationship with God rather than the "junk" and material clutter of the world