

Title: Isaiah Session 6: Isaiah Chapters 9 through 12

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 9 through 12, focusing on the powerful transition from the darkness of judgment to the light of messianic hope. The session explores the promise of the child Messiah who brings end to warfare, contrasting this with the structured poetic indictment of the northern kingdom's arrogance and pride. Dr. Oswalt details God's use of Assyria as an instrument of temporary judgment that will eventually face its own destruction. Finally, the lecture describes the emergence of the Messiah as a branch from the stump of Jesse, concluding with a hymn of absolute trust in God's salvation.

Outline

I. Introduction and Structural Context

A. Focus on Isaiah Chapters 9 through 12

1. Lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covering Isaiah 9:1 through 12:6.
2. Opening prayer emphasizing knowing God's will and purpose through Jesus Christ.

B. The Overarching Theme of Division 2 (Chapters 7–12)

1. Theme of 'No Trust' exemplified by King Ahaz's refusal to trust God.
2. The promise of hope as God's intended last word, transitioning from thick darkness (end of Chapter 8) to the light of hope (Chapter 9).
3. The real issue is spiritual and theological, centered on Judah's relation to God and His Torah rather than military or political alliances.

II. The Light of the Child Messiah (Isaiah 9:1–7)

A. The Location of the Hope (9:1-2)

1. The northernmost tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to experience Assyrian destruction and darkness.
2. God's light is sent directly to this same dark region (Galilee of the nations), where Jesus' primary earthly ministry was conducted.

B. The Elimination of Warfare (9:4-5)

1. The promise is the elimination of warfare and instruments of war rather than defeating enemies with superior military force.

C. The Sign of a Child (9:6)

1. God chooses weakness, foolishness, and vulnerability (a child) to confound worldly power and wisdom.
2. Primary names of the child (Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace) reveal that He is not Hezekiah but the divine Messiah.
3. His kingdom is eternal, and His salvation is established through pure divine grace independently of human effort.

III. The Poem of God's Raised Hand Against Arrogance (Isaiah 9:8–10:4)

A. Structural Outline of the Poem

1. A carefully structured poem from 9:8 to 10:4 composed of four stanzas.
2. Each stanza concludes with the same haunting refrain: 'For all this his anger is not turned away, his hand is stretched out still' (symbolizing a raised fist of judgment).

B. The Four Indictments of Israel's Collapse

1. Arrogance of Heart (9:8-12): Saying in pride that although bricks have fallen, they will rebuild with dressed stone and cedars, ignoring divine warning.
2. Exaltation of False Human Leaders (9:13-17): Rulers who are puffed up and lead the people astray, while the nation relies on human solutions instead of God.
3. Violence and Cruelty (9:18-21): Complete societal disintegration where 'Manasseh devours Ephraim and Ephraim Manasseh' in tribal infighting against Judah.
4. Oppression and Lack of Justice (10:1-4): Enacting unjust laws and robbing the poor, widows, and fatherless of their rights.

C. The Underlying Theological Issue

1. The sequential decay: claiming humanity is the answer to everything leads to exalting human leaders, which results in violence, cruelty, and systemic oppression.
2. The core question is always: 'What are you going to do about God and His Torah (instructions)?'

IV. Assyria as God's Unknowing Instrument of Judgment (Isaiah 10:5–34)

A. The Sovereign Rod of Anger (10:5-15)

1. Assyria is defined merely as the rod of God's anger and an axe in His hand used to punish a hypocritical nation.
2. God can use a highly wicked group to temporarily punish a relatively better group, yet the wicked group remains fully accountable to His moral law.

3. Assyria's delusion of self-glorification: they believe they are winning by their own hand, looting nations like gathering eggs from a helpless bird's nest.

B. The Judgment of the Forest of Pride (10:16-19)

1. Trees in Isaiah symbolize either abundance/fruitfulness or arrogance/pride/power.
2. God will take His axe to the great Assyrian forest of pride, reducing its trees to so few that a child could count and record them.

C. The Comfort and Return of the Remnant (10:20-27)

1. The remnant will return and rely truly on the Lord instead of relying on Assyria, the very empire that struck them.
2. God commands His people: 'do not be afraid' because He is in ultimate control of history and their future.

D. The Inevitability and Sudden Halt of the Enemy Army (10:28-34)

1. A graphic literary picture of the Assyrian army marching south through specific local towns (Migran, Mikmas, Geba, Rama, Gibeah, Nob) straight toward Jerusalem.
2. The enemy halts at Nob, shaking his fist at Jerusalem, representing seemingly absolute and inescapable defeat.
3. The Lord of Heaven's armies suddenly lops the boughs with terrifying power, bringing the high and lofty low right before Jerusalem.

V. The Shoot from the Stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1–16)

A. The Power of Weakness (11:1)

1. Contrast with the grand felled forest of Assyria: God's solution is a helpless, tiny green shoot emerging from the burned-out stump of Jesse.
2. The choice of 'Jesse' (a simple farmer) instead of 'David' (the mighty king) highlights weakness, and serves as a direct slap against the house of David's false reliance on political lineages.

B. The Character of the Messiah (11:2-5)

1. He is filled completely with the Spirit of the Lord (wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord), ruling in divine power rather than human flesh.
2. He judges not by physical appearances but with righteousness and equity for the poor and meek.
3. He strikes the earth with 'the rod of his mouth,' representing the absolute and ultimate power of His word.

C. The Restoration of Cosmic Peace (11:6-9)

1. Graphic illustrations of natural enemies dwelling together in peace (the wolf with the lamb, the leopard with the goat, and the lion eating straw).

2. The final elimination of conflict, competition, and violence on God's holy mountain as the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

D. The Messianic Banner and Highway (11:10-16)

1. The Root of Jesse is set up as a banner (flag or ensign) to gather the scattered and banished remnant from the ends of the earth.
2. God provides an open highway from Assyria and Egypt for the returning remnant, mirroring the original Exodus from Egypt.

VI. The Hymn of Salvation and Trust (Isaiah 12:1–6)

A. The Reaping of Divine Grace

1. Although God was angry because of rebellion, His anger is turned away to bring comfort and encouragement.
2. Confession of faith: 'God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid,' quoting the song of Moses from the Red Sea.

B. The Mission of the Cleansed

1. With joy, the people will draw water from the wells of salvation, sharing God's deeds among all nations.
2. The culmination of Israel's purpose: they are cleansed (Chapter 4) to fulfill their global mission (Chapter 2) of proclaiming God's glory.
3. The transcendent yet immanent reality of God: 'for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.'