

Isaiah Session 11: Judah and Tyre/Sidon (Isaiah Chapters 22 and 23)

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 22 and 23, focusing on the last two oracles against the nations—Judah and Tyre/Sidon. The session highlights that Judah (the "Valley of Vision") must not trust in its own material preparations, illustrated by King Hezekiah's water tunnel and defensive fortifications, but must consult their Maker. Dr. Oswalt unpacks the failure of self-indulgent leaders like Shebna compared to the faithful Eliakim, while also examining how the destruction of the wealthy Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon defiles human pride. Ultimately, the lecture reinforces that all human endeavors apart from God are zeros, and that true security lies in quiet faithfulness to His sovereign purpose.

Outline

I. Introduction and Theological Framework of Chapters 13–35

A. Opening Prayer

1. Reflecting on Christ's entry into a tragic, broken world.
2. Prayer for the Holy Spirit to empower holy living.

B. "Lessons in Trust" Context

1. Trust is the absolute prerequisite for servanthood; a nation cannot serve a God they do not trust.
2. If we do not trust God, we will always be hedging our bets and cannot serve Him.

C. Review of Prior Oracles Against the Nations

1. Chapters 13–14: Do not trust the glory of the nations (Babylon as the symbol of human power).
2. Chapters 15–16: Do not trust the pride of the nations (Moab).
3. Chapters 17–18: Do not trust the political scheming of the nations (Syria, Israel, Cush).
4. Chapters 19–20: Do not trust the religion, resources, and wisdom of the nations (Egypt).
5. Chapter 21: Do not trust the commerce and trade of the nations.

6. The mathematical metaphor: multiplying zero (human glory, pride, schemes, wisdom, commerce) still yields zero.

II. Chapter 22: The Oracle Concerning the Valley of Vision (Judah)

A. The Identity of the Nation

1. Sarcastic title: "The Valley of Vision".
2. The subject is Judah itself, illustrating that they must not trust themselves.

B. Meaning of "Valley of Vision"

1. "Valley" refers to short-sightedness: looking at the immediate, short-term view instead of the mountaintop long view.
2. Sarcasm: they think they see so much but in fact see almost nothing.

C. The Context of Jubilation

1. Historical background: 701 BC Assyrian crisis where Sennacherib captured 46 strong Judean cities, leaving only Lachish and Jerusalem.
2. Possible triggers for rejoicing:
 - a. Trust in Egypt seemed to pay off when the Egyptians marched out, forcing the Rabshakeh to withdraw to meet them.
 - b. The supernatural destruction of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night outside Jerusalem.
3. The tragedy of the celebration: rejoicing that Jerusalem survived ("woo-hoo, we're alive!") while the rest of the country is decimated and dead.

D. Isaiah's Refusal to Join the Party

1. Isaiah stands on the mountaintop and sees the long-term view: the eventual destruction of Jerusalem 150 years later by Babylon.
2. Isaiah's weeping: "Don't labor to comfort me concerning the destruction of the daughter of my people."
3. The contrast between delusional, escape-oriented worldly joy and realistic, peaceful Christian joy grounded in relationship with God.

E. The Lord God of Hosts

1. The title "Lord God of hosts" (Yahweh of heaven's armies) occurs repeatedly (verses 5, 12, 14, 15, 25).
2. "Hosts" refers to the stars, which pagans worshiped as gods; Isaiah asserts that all these hosts belong to Yahweh and do His bidding.

F. Material Reliance without God: Hezekiah's Preparations

1. Verses 8–11 describe Hezekiah's extensive defensive efforts:
 - a. Looking to the weapons in the House of the Forest (Solomon's cedar-column armory).

- b. Repairing breaches in the walls of the City of David.
 - c. Tearing down houses against the wall to fortify them (using rubble between double walls to absorb battering ram shocks).
 - d. Digging Hezekiah's tunnel to collect the waters of the lower pool.
2. The moral failing: Hezekiah did all the material preparations but "did not look to his maker" or consult God.
 3. Bible's reliable history: It presents no "gold-plated heroes" (except Jesus); even good kings like Hezekiah exhibit serious spiritual flaws.

G. The Sin Unto Death

1. Verses 12–14: God's severe indictment: "Surely this iniquity will not be atoned for you till you die."
2. The nature of this sin: Deliberately blinding oneself, refusing to repent, and shouting "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."
3. Smashing the receiver: Analogous to breaking a radio receiver so that one can no longer hear the music of the Holy Spirit.
4. Spiritual caution: If someone is afraid they have committed the unpardonable sin, they haven't; it is when a person simply does not care that they are in danger.

III. Graphic Illustration: Shebna versus Eliakim (Isaiah 22:15–25)

A. Shebna's Pride and Downfall

1. Shebna, the prime minister/steward of the household, is self-indulgently supervising the building of his own luxurious tomb.
2. Prophetic judgment: He will not die in his fancy tomb but will be taken hostage and die in a foreign land.

B. Eliakim's Elevation

1. Eliakim, God's servant, is elevated to Shebna's place.
2. This is fulfilled within three or four years: by Chapter 36, Eliakim is prime minister and Shebna is reduced to secretary.

C. The Peg in a Secure Place

1. Eliakim is fastened like a peg in a secure place, with the honor of his father's house hung on him.
2. Inevitable failure of human success: Eventually, the peg gives way, it is cut down, and the load falls.
3. Spiritual lesson: Human success is never guaranteed, even when doing God's work faithfully. We are called to be faithful and leave outcomes to God.

IV. Chapter 23: The Oracle Concerning Tyre and Sidon

A. Geographic and Historical Context of Phoenicia

1. Tyre and Sidon were powerful twin port cities north of Israel.
2. Geography: Nestled against the steep Lebanon Mountains, making land travel difficult but seafaring highly advantageous.
3. They controlled seaborne commerce in the eastern Mediterranean (Phoenicians).
4. Carthage (in modern Tunisia) was a Phoenician colony that fought Rome (Hannibal was Phoenician).

B. Partnership with Egypt

1. Egypt had massive grain and gold but lacked timber and was poor at shipping.
2. Tyre and Sidon served as Egypt's shipping and commercial partners.

C. The News of Tyre's Fall

1. Ships of Tarshish (Spain) returning home receive the shocking news that Tyre is destroyed.
2. The news spreads panic across the Mediterranean rim, from Cyprus to Egypt.

D. The Purpose of Tyre's Destruction

1. Verse 9: "The Lord of hosts has purposed it to defile the pompous pride of all glory to dishonor all the honored of the earth."
2. The final "zero" in the equation: Don't trust the wealth of the nations.
3. God is the only one who is to be honored. Every attempt at self-exaltation against God is doomed.
4. History is controlled by God's plan and purpose, not by chance or geopolitical power.

V. Contemporary Application and the Remnant of Truth

A. Defining the Modern Parallel of Israel

1. The parallel is the global Church, not any modern political state.
2. Micah and Isaiah's castigation of corrupt leadership (political, prophet, priest) serves as a warning to religious leaders.

B. Perennial Wisdom and the Remnant

1. "Sophia Perennis": The thread of truth that runs through history.
2. While the majority of the culture may engage in idol worship, God preserves a faithful minority (remnant) representing this thread of truth.
3. History is not a straight-line upward progress, but cycles of high points and declines (Sinai -> Samuel -> David -> Exile).