

Isaiah Session 13: Isaiah Chapters 26 and 27

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Keywords

Isaiah, Song, Trust, Shalom, Leviathan, Chaos, Vineyard, Discipline, Resurrection, Louis Zamperini

Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 26 and 27, emphasizing the themes of singing, trust, and divine restoration. Dr. Oswalt outlines the contrast between the secure city of God and the prideful, flattened city of earth, identifying four key characteristics of citizens in God's city: righteousness, keeping faith, steadfastness, and trust. The session also addresses the ancient Near Eastern Leviathan myth as an allusion to God's ultimate power over the chaos of sin, illustrated by the powerful modern story of Louis Zamperini's transformation. Ultimately, the lecture highlights how God's loving discipline of His vineyard is designed for fruitful restoration rather than permanent destruction.

Outline

I. Introduction and Structural Placement

A. Opening Prayer and Session Overview

1. Thanksgiving for creation, rain, and the written word of God.
2. Confession of human complaining and a request for divine discernment.

B. Discussion on Bible Translations

1. Distinction between the New Living Translation (NLT) and literal translations.
2. NLT is ideal for reading broad sections to get a feel for the flow.
3. Literal translations (e.g., ESV) are necessary for verse-by-verse and section-by-section study.
4. Explaining that no translation is purely literal, utilizing the idiom of a "long nose" for patience in Exodus 34:6.

C. Review of the Sovereign Framework of Isaiah

1. Positioning within Chapters 7–39: "Trust is the basis of servanthood".
2. Positioning within Chapters 13–35: "Lessons in Trust".
3. Transition from particular national oracles (Chapters 13–23) to a general treatment of God's universal Lordship (Chapters 24–27).
4. God as the sovereign actor in history rather than a mere reactor.
5. Chapter 24 summary of cosmic judgment and Chapter 25 feast of salvation on the holy mountain.

6. Doctrine of hell and the limits of universalism: God will not save anyone against their own will, as illustrated by C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce* and the pride of Moab.

II. Isaiah Chapter 26: The Song of the Secure City

A. The Theme of Song and Contrast of Cities (Verses 1–2)

1. Contrast between the flattened city of earth and the strong city of God.
2. The walls of God's city are salvation, providing absolute security.

B. The Nature of True Security (Verses 1–4)

1. Contrast between eternal security and eternal insecurity.
2. True security is relational: nothing can take us out of God's hand except our own prideful choices (the marriage relationship analogy).

C. Four Characteristics of the Citizens of God's City (Verses 2–3)

1. Righteousness: Commitment to doing what is right regardless of advantage.
2. Keeping Faith: Relational reliability, dependability, and truth in action.
3. Steadfastness of Mind: Fixed focus on God, preventing dissipation (the miler Jim Ryan and the apostle Paul in Philippians as examples of maintaining focus on the finish line).
4. Trust: Reliance on God.

D. The Result of True Trust (Verses 3–4)

1. Experiencing Shalom, shalom (translated as perfect peace).
2. Shalom represents wholeness, integration, and being put together rather than merely the absence of conflict.
3. Peace is a consequence of meeting the conditions of steadfast focus and trust.

E. The Level Path of the Righteous (Verses 5–9)

1. God exalts Himself by laying the lofty city low.
2. The path of the righteous is made straight and level by God, who acts as a great earthmover.
3. Waiting on God as an expression of confident, expectant trust rather than passivity or running ahead of Him.
4. Seeking God's "Name" (character and reputation) above all else.

F. The Indictment of Complacency and the Need for Judgment (Verses 9–11)

1. When favor is shown to the wicked, they fail to learn righteousness.
2. America as a modern example of material abundance leading to spiritual complacency and false entitlement rather than righteousness.
3. The necessity of divine judgment as a corrective wake-up call.

G. Israel's Inability versus Divine Salvation (Verses 12–19)

1. Acknowledging that all accomplishments in a believer's life are ultimately God's work.
2. The confession of failure: Israel's self-reliance only "gave birth to wind," failing to bring deliverance.
3. The promise of the resurrection: Your dead shall live, their bodies will rise, evoking songs of joy.

4. Discussion on the historical antiquity of resurrection theology (dating back to Isaiah in 700 BC).

III. Isaiah Chapter 27: Overcoming Chaos and Nurturing the Vineyard

A. The Leviathan Allusion and the Chaos of Sin (Verse 1)

1. Ancient Near Eastern origins myths (Canaanite and Mesopotamian) depicted gods battling watery chaos monsters (e.g., Leviathan).
2. The biblical writers do not adopt the myth but allude to it to demonstrate God's power.
3. Contrast: Pagans sought order in nature, whereas the Bible uses chaos imagery to depict God's redemption of humanity from the chaos of sin (e.g., the Red Sea crossing).

B. Practical Illustration: The Story of Louis Zamperini

1. The historical background of Zamperini as an Olympic runner, WWII bombardier, and prisoner of war.
2. The post-war descent into trauma, rage, flashbacks, and severe alcoholism.
3. His conversion at Billy Graham's 1950 Los Angeles crusade and immediate deliverance from psychological torment.
4. The theological point: God effortlessly transforms the deep chaos of sin into beautiful spiritual order.

C. The Song of the Pleasant Vineyard (Verses 2–6)

1. Contrasted with the tragic vineyard of Chapter 5 that yielded only bitter, wild grapes.
2. Yahweh is the constant keeper, protector, and waterer of His vineyard, guarding it day and night.
3. God invites His enemies to lay hold of His protection and make peace with Him.

D. The Nature of Divine Discipline (Verses 7–13)

1. God disciplines those He loves (quoting Hebrews 12).
2. Distinction between punishment (retribution causing suffering) and discipline (loving allowance of consequences to bring about restoration).
3. Destruction is never God's intended last word; His final purpose is to clear away dross and wild vines so the good vines can bear fruit.
4. Closing prayer: Thankfulness for the transformation from chaos into the order of salvation.