

Title: Isaiah Session 17: Isaiah Chapters 34 and 35

Author: Dr. John Oswalt

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 34 and 35, concluding the "Lessons in Trust" division of the book. Dr. Oswalt contrasts the devastating judgment of the worldly wilderness in chapter 34 with the glorious transformation of the desert into a garden in chapter 35. The session highlights how choosing to trust in the nations leads to chaos and self-destruction, whereas trusting in the Lord opens a holy highway of redemption and joy. Ultimately, the lecture emphasizes that waiting on God in active obedience and vulnerability is the true measure of trust.

Outline

I. Introduction and Structural Context

- **A. Opening and Housekeeping**
 - o **1.** Attendance reminder: First-timers must sign their names and emails on the sheets outside to receive schedule updates.
 - o **2.** Schedule notice: No session next week due to the Free Methodist Revival; sessions resume after that straight through to June.
- **B. Opening Prayer**
 - o **1.** Thanksgiving for God's unchanging nature and desire to bless His people.
 - o **2.** Confession of human changeability and request for the Holy Spirit's guidance to make the word vividly alive.
- **C. Structural Placement: The "Lessons in Trust" (Chapters 13–35)**
 - o **1.** "Trust is the basis of servanthood": The book's major division is bounded by "No Trust" (Chapters 7–12) and "Trust" (Chapters 36–39).
 - o **2.** Recap of preceding subdivisions:
 - **a.** Chapters 13–23: Do not trust the nations.
 - **b.** Chapters 24–27: Yahweh is the sovereign actor on the stage of history.
 - **c.** Chapters 28–33: Woe to those who will not wait (waiting as a synonym for trust).

- o 3. Chapters 34–35 serve as the dramatic, two-chapter conclusion representing the results of human choices.

II. Chapter 34: Universal Judgment and the Pitfalls of Self-Reliance

- **A. Universal Call to Judgment (34:1–4)**
 - o 1. God summons the nations and the entire earth to hear His indignation.
 - o 2. Poetic parallel with Chapter 13:1–16: Using cosmic-scale, dramatic language of slaughter, stench, and the rolling up of skies.
 - o 3. Enveloping significance: Re-emphasizing that both the nations and the whole world are liable to judgment.
- **B. The Host of Heaven and the Problem of Idolatry**
 - o 1. Threefold meaning of "host": physical stars, pagan gods, or the Lord's heavenly armies (angels).
 - o 2. Why God judges the "gods" of the pagans: Idolatry is the act of reducing divinity to our own model.
 - o 3. The tragedy of self-made gods: Creating gods in our own image results in entities that are arbitrary, inconsistent, and untrustworthy.
- **C. The Concept of Haram (Devoted to Destruction) (34:2)**
 - o 1. Definition: Something given over completely to God that cannot be used for any other purpose.
 - o 2. Context: Applied when corruption is so total that the object must be destroyed by God (e.g., the ban on Jericho's spoils).
 - o 3. The Gospel connection: Apart from Jesus Christ becoming the sacrifice in our place, humanity's only option is being devoted to destruction.
- **D. Focus on Edom as a Specific Example of Rebellion (34:5–10)**
 - o 1. General-to-specific transition: Just as Chapter 13 transitioned from universal judgment to Babylon, Chapter 34 focuses on Edom as a narrow-angle example of hostility.
 - o 2. Historical animosity:
 - a. Ancestral origins (Jacob and Esau).
 - b. Blocking Israel's passage through their land during the Exodus (refusing water and attempting to kill them).
 - c. Assisting the Babylonians in destroying Jerusalem and turning in Jewish escapees (detailed in Obadiah).
 - o 3. The law of the harvest: Edom was destroyed by Babylon and never returned from captivity, whereas Israel was restored (Malachi 1).
 - o 4. Symbolism of Edom: Represents active hostility and rebellion against God's saving plan.
- **E. Vengeance vs. Revenge (34:8)**

- o 1. Defining terms: Revenge is personal payback, whereas vengeance is a third-party repayment of justice on behalf of the helpless.
- o 2. Spiritual comfort: Knowing God administers justice frees believers from seeking personal revenge (e.g., David sparing Saul in the cave).
- o 3. The cycle of escalating revenge: The tragic Middle Eastern cycle of violence contrasted with the Christian command to love one's enemies.

III. The Overkill Imagery of Desolation and Chaos (34:9–17)

- A. Poetic Overkill
 - o 1. Detailed descriptions of pitch, brimstone, and unquenchable fire.
 - o 2. Contrast of animals: No domestic partners (dogs, cats, horses, cows) but an infestation of desert scavengers and beasts of prey (owls, ravens, jackals).
- B. The Theological Point: Reversing Creation
 - o 1. The imagery depicts a return to chaos, unproductiveness, and wilderness.
 - o 2. Reversing Adam and Eve's command to cultivate and husband the earth to reach its potential.
 - o 3. The consequence of self-reliance: Choosing to trust the nations results in a self-made wilderness.

IV. Chapter 35: The Transformation of the Wilderness into a Garden

- A. Contrast of the Two Worlds
 - o 1. Reversing Chapter 34's desolation: The wilderness, dry land, and desert will blossom and rejoice.
 - o 2. The gospel truth: We have all chosen a desert through sin; the question is whether we will let God turn our desert into a garden.
 - o 3. Transforming the "haunt of jackals" into a lush oasis of reeds and rushes.
- B. The Three Images of Fertility (35:2)
 - o 1. Lebanon: Symbol of the grandest forests.
 - o 2. Carmel: Symbol of high rainfall and lush vegetation.
 - o 3. Sharon: Symbol of rich, fertile plains.
- C. Seeing the Glory of the Lord
 - o 1. Redemption is characterized by being given eyes to see the glory of God that has been present all along.
 - o 2. The story of the twin twins (the pessimist and the optimist in the room of toys vs. manure): How we see things makes all the difference.
 - o 3. The reversal of the Chapter 6 judgment: The blind will see and the deaf will hear.

V. The Highway of Holiness (35:8–10)

- **A. Redemption as a Journey**
 - o 1. God's promise of a highway called "The Way of Holiness".
 - o 2. Walking with God: Genesis 17:1 parallel of walking before God to be made completed and perfect.
 - o 3. The accessibility of the highway: "Even a fool shall not go astray" (it is straight, clean, and safe from ravenous beasts).
- **B. The Ransomed of the Lord**
 - o 1. The ultimate grace of God: When we fall into the pits we dig ourselves by refusing to trust Him, He reaches down to buy us back.
 - o 2. Returning to Zion with singing, everlasting joy, and gladness, while sorrow and sighing flee away.
 - o 3. The simple root: God acts because He loves us and created us to be His children of love.

VI. Comparative Summary of Trust vs. Untrust

- **A. The Futility of Human Trust**
 - o 1. Worldly empires are on their way out and will betray those who rely on them.
 - o 2. Exalting humanity strips the universe of ultimate meaning, reducing life to a self-made mess.
 - o 3. Humanity is not worthless (it is worth the death of God's Son), but treating humanity as ultimate makes everything worthless.
- **B. The Definition of Trust**
 - o 1. Trust is vulnerability, active obedience, seeking God's word, and refusing to run ahead of Him.
 - o 2. Waiting on God as a prerequisite for winning the world (Acts 1 and 2 parallel: being ordered to wait in Jerusalem before receiving power).
- **C. The Definition of Untrust**
 - o 1. Arrogance, pride, selfishness, worry, impatience, and insisting on one's own timing and understanding.
 - o 2. Refusing to wait leads directly to the dark wilderness of Chapter 34.
 - o 3. Faith is learning to trust when we cannot see how "two and two fit together" in our lifetime (just as Isaiah did not see the fulfillment of his prophecies).