

## Isaiah Session 22: The Creator Who Redeems and Carries (Isaiah Chapters 44 through 46)

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### Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 44 through 46, examining the theological themes of the Holy Spirit's empowerment, the vanity of idolatry, and the supreme sovereignty of the Creator over history. Dr. Oswalt contrasts the helpless Babylonian idols, which must be carried as heavy burdens by weary beasts, with the living God who carries His people from the womb to gray hairs. The session also addresses God's sovereign raising of the Persian conqueror Cyrus to execute His redemptive plans, presenting a powerful case that salvation is initiated entirely by divine grace.

### Outline

#### I. Introduction and Structural Context

##### A. Welcome and Opening Prayer

1. Thanksgiving for the recurring life of spring returning from the death of winter.
2. Praising God for eternal life secured through the cross, empty tomb, and Pentecost.
3. Supplication for focus on important spiritual issues and allowing God to live in us.

##### B. Scheduling Adjustments

1. Identifying a one-week delay behind the original schedule.
2. Final cutoff date set as June 10th (last free Monday in summer).
3. Plan to cover chapters 47–48 next session, chapters 49–51 the following week, and chapters 52–53 thereafter.

##### C. Overarching Structure of Chapters 40–55

1. Theme of the division: "Grace, the motive and the means of salvation".
2. Grace serves as the sole motivator to live a lifestyle of continuous trust.
3. Subdivision: Chapter 40 (Introduction), Chapters 41–48 (Motive), and Chapters 49–55 (Means).

#### II. Prophecy of the Spirit and Identity (Isaiah 44:1–5)

##### A. The Fourth Reason Not to Fear (44:2–3)

1. Recap of the first three reasons not to fear: "I am with you", "I will help you", and "I have redeemed you".
2. The fourth reason: God's promise to pour water on the thirsty land and pour His Spirit out upon the offspring.
3. Implications of the Spirit's presence: providing strength, wisdom, and the enablement to live Christ's life.
4. The Holy Spirit acts as the true "Comforter" (encourager) who enables believers to stand in the face of temptation, accusation, and the enemy's voice.

#### B. Preserving the Offspring in Exile

1. Addressing the exiles' fear that their children would become pagan Babylonians and the nation would disappear.
2. God's promise guarantees spiritual continuity and survival.

#### C. The Result of the Spirit's Outpouring: Identity (44:5)

1. The Spirit enables a willing belonging and identification with Yahweh.
2. Bold declarations: writing "the Lord's" on one's hand and naming oneself Israel.
3. The perpetual biblical question: Who do you belong to, identify with, and allow to be King of your life? The Spirit enables us to resolve the battle of the will.

### III. The Case Against the Idols and the Sovereignty of Prophecy (Isaiah 44:6–8)

#### A. The Grand I Am and Three Royal Titles (44:6)

1. Yahweh declares: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no God."
2. Three additional titles: King of Israel (sole monarchy ruler), Israel's Redeemer (committed to deliver), and Lord of Hosts/Lord of Heaven's Armies (omnipotent).

#### B. The Test of Godhood: Predicting the Future (44:7)

1. God challenges other deities to predict future events before they happen.
2. Pagan gods cannot tell the future because they are part of the natural, circular system that only knows what it has always done.
3. Only the transcendent Creator who stands outside the creation system can declare brand-new things in advance.

#### C. Critique of Academic Naturalism

1. Modern Old Testament scholarship often denies predictive prophecy, claiming that the event must have happened before it was written.
2. The biblical text explicitly hangs God's unique godhood on His ability to predict the future.
3. The fifth reason not to fear (44:8): Knowing God holds the future frees us from anxiety and the need to construct a rigid chronological timetable.

### IV. The Vanity and Abomination of Idolatry (Isaiah 44:9–23)

#### A. Dripping Sarcasm: The Construction of an Idol (44:9–17)

1. Written in prose, presenting a vivid, sarcastic description of a blacksmith and a carpenter.

2. Using ordinary wood from a forest to burn for warmth, bake bread, roast meat, and then carving a god out of the residue to fall down and worship.

#### B. Idolatry as an Abomination

1. "Abomination" represents something disgusting to Yahweh because it violates His creation order.
2. The creation was designed to be used, cultivated, and developed—never to be worshiped.
3. Augustine's definition: "Idolatry is the use of that which should be worshiped, and the worship of that which should be used."
4. Idolatry represents an attempt to control our own lives and put trust in the works of our hands.

#### C. Remembrance and the Power to Transform (44:18–22)

1. Remembering that God is the Creator, Redeemer, and the One who will never forget His people.
2. God sweeps away transgressions like a cloud and sins like a mist.
3. Contrast with modern/pagan views: Modern naturalism claims human transformation is impossible because we are trapped by our environment, genes, and inheritance.
4. The Creator's power: Because God is the Creator, He is uniquely capable of breaking in to transform and redeem (e.g., the Russian soldier transformed from a drug dealer/thug in prison).

#### D. The Joy of Creation (44:23)

1. Creation itself bursts into song worshiping the Creator.
2. Connecting to Romans 8: The creation groans in anticipation of the redemption of God's children.
3. Connecting to Isaiah 42:10 (singing a new song) and the role of the ideal, obedient servant who makes our servanthood possible.

### V. God's Sovereign Use of Cyrus (Isaiah 44:24–45:8)

#### A. Rebuilding Jerusalem (44:25–26)

1. Validating God's predictions over the foolish wise men and diviners.
2. Overcoming double disbelief: the pre-exilic denial of captivity, and the exilic denial of return.

#### B. Naming Cyrus as the Deliverer (44:28–45:4)

1. God specifically names Cyrus of Persia 150 years in advance as His shepherd who will decree Jerusalem's rebuilding.
2. Cyrus is called God's "Messiah" or "Anointed".
3. Privileges granted to Cyrus: breaking down gates, subduing nations, stripping kings of ornaments, and receiving hidden treasures.
4. Divine intention: That Cyrus and the world may know Yahweh's name.

5. "I know your name, though you do not know mine." God operates through people who do not know Him.

#### C. Rejection of Dualism (45:5–8)

1. "I am Yahweh, and there is no other; besides me there is no God."
2. "I form light and create darkness, I make well-being (peace) and create calamity (evil)" (45:7).
3. Rejecting pagan dualism (Yin and Yang, independent good/evil forces).
4. Primary vs. secondary causation: While God is not the author of moral evil, He created a world where calamity can happen, and He alone is ultimately responsible for history.

#### VI. The Clay and the Potter (Isaiah 45:9–13)

##### A. Complaining about God's Methods

1. The people of Israel object to God using Cyrus, a pagan king, as their deliverer.
2. "Woe to him who strives with his Maker!"—a pot among earthen pots.

##### B. Dictating to the Creator

1. The absurdity of clay asking the potter "What are you making?" or claiming the work has no handles.
2. Human tendencies to try to instruct God on how He should deliver us (e.g., expecting a Hebrew baby in a basket on the Euphrates).
3. Confirming that God made the earth, stretched out the heavens, and stirred up Cyrus in righteousness.

#### VII. The Clear Purpose of the Hidden God (Isaiah 45:14–19)

##### A. The Conversion of the Nations (45:14–17)

1. Wealthy foreign nations (Egypt, Cush, Sabians) coming over in chains to bow down to Israel, recognizing "surely God is in you".
2. The paradox: "Truly you are a God who hides yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior."

##### B. I Have Not Spoken in Secret (45:18–19)

1. God did not create the world to be a chaos (tohu), but formed it to be inhabited.
2. He has spoken clearly, declaring what is right and true, rather than leaving humanity in the dark.
3. The Sears catalog anecdote: Distinguishing between superficial lip service to God's book and active study of His declared plans.

#### VIII. Carrying vs. Being Carried (Isaiah 45:20–46:7)

##### A. The Burden of Pagan Gods (46:1–2)

1. Bel (Baal) and Nebo (the preeminent gods of Babylon) bow down and stoop.
2. Their physical statues are loaded onto beasts and livestock as heavy, wearying burdens.
3. These gods cannot save the burden but themselves go into captivity.

#### B. The Support of the Living God (46:3–4)

1. Complete contrast: God has carried Israel from before their birth and from the womb.
2. Continual promise: "Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am He, and I will carry you... I have made, I will bear, I will carry and will save."
3. The stark choice: carry your gods or let your Maker carry you.

#### C. The Stuff We Make

1. Modern application: Being burdened down by the material goods and achievements we have made.
2. Bonhoeffer's definition: "You can only really own something that you can honestly see yourself as better off without. If I have to have it, it owns me."

### IX. Divine Swearing, Ultimate Allegiance, and Grace (Isaiah 46:8–13)

#### A. Swearing by Himself (46:9–11)

1. God swears by Himself (there being none higher) that His word will not return empty.
2. Declaring the end from the beginning, proving His counsel will stand.
3. Contrast of circular time (ancient snake eating its tail) with linear biblical history.

#### B. Every Knee Shall Bow (45:23)

1. God's decree that to Him every knee shall bow and every tongue swear allegiance.
2. Apostle Paul's use of this in Philippians 2: establishing that declaring "Jesus is Lord" means declaring "Jesus is Yahweh".

#### C. Salvation by Pure, Unmerited Grace (46:12–13)

1. God addresses the "stubborn of heart" and those "far from righteousness".
2. He brings His righteousness near independently of their repentance or faith.
3. Grace is entirely God-initiated; there is nothing humanity can do to deserve it (Romans 1–5 connection).
4. The Prodigal Father story (re-focusing the prodigal son parable on the father's prodigal love) and the ultimate extent of grace (entering the pigpen with us).