

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 1, Isa. 1

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This is Dr. John Oswalt and his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session number one, Isaiah chapter one. Well, I think it's close enough.

My, my, it's wonderful to see all of you, a number of former friends, I won't say old friends and a number of new folks. So glad to have you here and looking forward to a great time together during this coming year. As we pray, I've been informed that there's a person in special need here in town who is being prayed for, especially at seven o'clock, so we'll want to remember that situation.

Let's pray together. Father, we come to you again, thanking you for your word. Thank you that you have revealed yourself and your nature and your purposes, your purposes for us.

Thank you that you have inspired people with your truth to give to us. Thank you that you've not left us to grope in the dark, wondering what we're here for, what life is about, what matters. Thank you, Lord, that you've shown us that.

Forgive us, Lord, that we know it so well and do it so little. Have mercy upon us. Help us, Lord, to be not only hearers of the word but doers as well.

We pray for that special situation at this moment. Pray for those who are praying, and pray that your power might be unleashed in the situation and that the person may indeed experience your deliverance. Thank you, Lord, for your knowledge of all of our special situations that we bring here tonight.

In a crowd as large as this, there are a myriad of concerns, and we lay them all before you, knowing that you know them, and knowing at the same time that you've invited us to tell you our needs. So we do that, Lord. We pray for your blessing upon our study.

Thank you for your blessing during the past 18 months or so, and now we come again, confessing our absolute need for you. We need your Holy Spirit to come and make sense of this old, old book, so rich and yet so complicated. Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you are here, more eager to open its truth to us than we even are to know it.

Thank you. Bless me as I speak. Bless those who listen, and grant that together we may be more like you because we've spent this time together this evening.

In your name, amen. I'm going to pass around a clipboard that has a place for you to sign your name and your address and your email. That would mean that we here at

FAS could do targeted emails for folks who are interested, so please be sure that your name and email address at least are on this clipboard before you leave this evening.

Then the FAS staff have asked me to remind you of the symposium that is Thursday morning. There's a poster there at the side of the room. This fellow, Oswald, is speaking.

I can't recommend him very highly, but you might want to come and find out what heretical things he might say. So that's on Thursday morning, followed by lunch, and you're cordially invited to that. The schedule, I emphasize, is tentative.

This fall, my schedule is kind of complicated, so we will meet for the next three weeks after this one. Then we'll break on October 8th, when God willing and Delta permitting, Karen and I will be in Romania. Then we'll meet for three weeks, October 15th, 22nd, and 29th, and then not for three weeks.

On the 5th, we have the Fall Renewal Conference here, and you may want to partake of that. And then on the 12th and the 19th, I will be away. Then after that, four weeks, the last week of November, the first three weeks of December, then a break in January, and then we'll pick it up January 20th, excuse me, the end of December and the early part of January.

We'll pick it up in January, and then hopefully, except for March 4th, we can be every Monday night. So please stick this in your Bible. It'll be on the FAS website as well, and if changes need to be made, we'll let you know.

All right, we're talking about the book of Isaiah, and the plan is basically roughly two chapters per session from now until June, and that will get us through this book. Isaiah is often called the Prince of the Prophets. Part of the reason for that is there's some suggestion that he might have been a member of the royal family.

He has such easy access to the kings that there's been some suggestion that there might be a connection there. But more than that, Isaiah is the Prince of the Prophets because this book is a more complete compendium of biblical theology than any other book in the Bible. I've often said to students, if somebody said to you, I'm going to take away 65 of your Bible books, which one do you want me to leave? I say, tell them, Isaiah.

Because there's more New Testament in Isaiah than any other Old Testament book, and obviously there's more Old Testament than any New Testament book. But this great book in many, many ways sums up Old Testament teaching on many, many different subjects. Excuse me, biblical teaching on many, many different subjects.

And so we in this time together will only be able to scrape the surface of the riches that are here. There is truly no bottom to this book. And it's exciting for me to be able to study it with you because I know that you're going to be getting insights that will be exciting to you.

You have a brief outline. This is just sort of a road map for you as we proceed. I'll say a little bit more about this as we get into tonight's study on Chapter 1. But you'll notice that word servanthood showing up again and again.

I believe that in Chapters 1 to 5, the introduction, the problem of servanthood is revealed to us. As I said, we'll talk a little more about that in a moment. Then in Chapter 6, we see the call to servanthood.

And indeed, I believe this is the solution to the problem that is laid out in Chapters 1 to 5. Israel is called to be God's servant to the world as Isaiah was called to be God's servant to Israel. And so you begin then with the basic issue of whether can God be trusted. You're never going to serve somebody you don't trust. We talked about this as we talked about Genesis.

The fundamental issue of life is will I trust God? Will I put my weight down on Him? Is He worthy of my trust? Will He betray my trust? Can I trust Him? If I can trust Him, then I can lay aside my royal robes and put on the towel of the servant because I know that I'm safe in His hands. So, Chapters 7 to 39 are dealing with that question of the trustworthiness of God. There is a revelation of God here like Isaiah experienced in Chapter 6. Then in Chapters 40 to 53, the question is if you know you can trust Him, that's one thing.

But what will motivate you to trust Him? And Isaiah reveals that it is grace. God's grace will move us to trust Him. But then the question arises, how can sinful human beings ever be servants of the Holy God? And the answer again is grace.

The servant will be the means, the gracious means by which we can become His servants. And finally, then in Chapters 56 to 66, does grace mean that righteousness doesn't matter? And the answer is a resounding, it surely doesn't. Rather, grace is the means by which the righteousness of God can be revealed in the life of the servant.

So that's a very quick overview of the way in which I see the book holding together. And you can sort of keep that again in your Bible as sort of a road map, where are we now? And hopefully, that will be of some help to you. Lots of times people say to me, I just don't understand the Old Testament.

And I say I understand. Because God chose to do something odd in the Bible. I've told you before, the other holy books of the world are composed of statements by God or God's spokesperson.

Just bare statements there. If you read the Quran, that's what it is. If you read Buddhist writings, that's what it is.

If you read Hindu writings, that's what it is. Just these bare pronouncements. God chose to do something different.

God chose to reveal His truth in the context of time and space. He chose to reveal Himself in relationship with a particular people. That's not an accident.

That's not an accident. God is not about making bare pronouncements. God is about relating to His creatures.

And so, that means that we need to understand something about these people. Something about their space. Something about their time.

If we're to understand what's going on. If you walk down the street and pick up a letter, you don't know who wrote it. You don't know who it was written to.

Chances are it will make very little sense. But if in fact, as you begin to read, you discover that letter was written by your grandfather to your grandmother. When he was in Europe in the First World War.

It will make a lot more sense. And that's true with the Old Testament especially. It's true with the New too.

But we can kid ourselves with the New Testament that you really don't need to know that stuff and you can still understand it. Well, yes you can. But you can understand it a whole lot better if you know who it's written to.

Who was writing? What was the situation? Where they were writing? and so forth.

But in the Old Testament, you just pretty well can't escape that. You've got to know. So, what about this book? It was written almost certainly between 739 BC and 701 BC.

I didn't put down the place here. In Judah. The southern half of Solomon's Old Kingdom.

739 to 701. Now, what's the situation? And this is covered here on this background sheet. This book is very odd.

Because the latter part of it. Chapters 40 to 66 are addressed to people in the distant future from Isaiah's own lifetime. Now, other prophets talk about people and situations in the future.

This is the only one where the prophet talks to people in the future. And that has caused a lot of scholars to say, well then, obviously, Isaiah didn't write those chapters. You can't talk to people 150 years in the future.

Well, not unless you're talking for God. That might make a difference. I think it does.

The book says it was written by Isaiah. And that's good enough for me. But, first of all, chapters 1 to 39 were written to people in Isaiah's own lifetime.

Now, look at your map for a moment, please. What is happening during Isaiah's lifetime? The empire of Assyria. See it up here on the right center? It's where the Kurds live today.

The Kurds pride themselves on being the descendants of the Assyrians. And everybody agrees with them. The Assyrians were building a world empire.

They had already conquered Babylon, down to the southeast. They had already conquered what is today Armenia and eastern Turkey, up to the north. They had already conquered the lands straight west of them, out to the Mediterranean.

And now, during this time period, 739 to 701, they are embarking on their last climactic century of empire. And they are headed for their ultimate goal, which is Egypt. If they could control Babylon, Egypt, and the connector between them, they would have a stranglehold on world trade.

War has always been about trade. And it was then as well. But they had one problem.

Between their empire, at the moment, and Egypt, stood this narrow Canaanite strip. This strip of land, between the Mediterranean on the west and the Arabian desert on the east, only about 100 miles wide. And all the trade of the world funneled through there.

This is how Solomon could become so, if I may say it, obscenely rich. He had the only toll booth on I-75 between Port Huron and Miami. So, if the Assyrians are going to get to Egypt, they've got to walk over several of these eight little nations.

They've got to conquer Syria, with its capital at Damascus. And it's awfully important that you keep that clear in your mind. Assyria is the great world empire.

Syria is a small country here, with its capital at Damascus. Two different things. Two entirely different things.

So, they've got to conquer Syria. They've got to conquer Israel. They've got to conquer Philistia.

That's where the Great Highway runs. And it would be a good idea if they took out Judah at the same time. Otherwise, they're sitting up on their hill in a position to take potshots at them.

Along the way, there are some other countries. There is Tyre and Sidon. Wealthy, wealthy Phoenicians controlling the shipping on the Mediterranean.

There is Ammon, Moab and Edom. So these are in the way. And the Assyrians are coming.

In 722, Israel fell. From 710 to 700, the Philistine cities fell. In 701, the Assyrians tried to take out Judah.

Conquered every city except Jerusalem. But they didn't conquer Jerusalem. We'll talk about that.

Ammon, Moab, and Edom also fell in the next 25 years or so. So, this is the situation that Isaiah is dealing with. This terrific, terrific imperial pressure coming from the north.

And all that is involved with that. Now, when we come to the end of chapter 39, Jerusalem has been delivered. Hezekiah has not been slaughtered as the Assyrians normally did to rebel kings.

But Isaiah tells him the day is coming when God is not going to deliver Jerusalem. In fact, he is going to deliver Jerusalem to Babylon. Wait a minute.

Assyria is the world empire. Where does Babylon come into this thing? Well, Assyria in its growth was much like a balloon. It was a military dictatorship.

If the dictator was strong, the empire expanded. If the dictator was weak, the empire contracted. But over about 300 years, there was a succession of ultimately stronger dictators.

And so the balloon would contract and expand. And finally, it reached its greatest point of expansion, about 650, when they finally did conquer Egypt. And within 45 years, Assyria ceased to exist.

The balloon expanded and expanded and expanded and... Pop! And it was gone. It was conquered by a coalition of the Babylonians. And it's not on this map, but you can write it in there above Assyria to the right of Kawa.

The Medes. They lived in the mountain chain that runs from northwest to southeast along the Tigris River. Fearsome warriors.

And the Babylonians and the Medes allied together and defeated the Assyrians in 605. As you see there on the sheet, King Jehoiakim of Judah accepted the Babylonian overlordship. But then, shortly after, he revolted.

And Nebuchadnezzar came and conquered the city in 598 and put Jehoiakim's brother, Zedekiah, on the throne. Well, Zedekiah, he was a politico if there ever was a politico. He ruled by poll.

Whatever was the popular thing of the day, that's what he was for. And ultimately, the popular thing of the day was a revolt against Babylon, and he did. And in 586, Jerusalem was destroyed.

The leadership were either killed or taken into captivity. And a military governor was put on the throne. Despair.

Total despair. God has been defeated. It's all over.

And Isaiah, writing by inspiration, says, no, no, no, it's not true. You have been punished, that's for sure. But that does not mean that God has been defeated.

I said you were going to go into captivity. You denied it. You're in captivity, aren't you? I now say I'm going to deliver you from captivity.

The Assyrians had been practicing captivity since about 900. So for 400 years, people have been taken into captivity. Nobody ever went home that we know of.

So when the prophets say you're going to go home, the people say you're nuts. Number one, we're not going to go into captivity. And number two, if we do, we'll never come home again.

And the prophets say you will go into captivity and you will come home. Guess what? The prophets were right. In 539, the Medes jumped ship and joined with the Persians.

On your map there, that would be where, well, you see it there, Persia, modern Iran. And the Persians, with the assistance of the Medes, destroyed Babylon. And they said any captive people that want to can go home.

We only know of one, the Jews. And I think the reason is because they were ready. Some of them said, you know what? Those prophets were right when they said we would go into captivity.

Maybe they're going to be right when they say we'll go home. We're not going to become assimilated to the Babylonians. They kept their identity.

And sure enough, they went home. So that's 40 to 55. Now, there's less agreement on the time frame of 56 to 66.

But most scholars think that Isaiah is here addressing the situation after the people returned. They returned in 539 in a great flurry of excitement. Whoa, we're going to rebuild the temple.

And when they started to rebuild the temple, they realized that what they were building was not going to be better than Solomon's temple which had been burned down. It was going to be worse. And they immediately got discouraged.

And Isaiah is speaking to them when he says, if you will, if you will choose to live for God in righteousness, your light will dawn. You will become what you were intended to be. A lantern out of which the flame of God can shine on the world.

And that's what chapters 56 to 66 are about. So, it appears that Isaiah is addressing two situations in the future. One, about 550 people are in exile and discouraged.

And the other, maybe around 500, when the people have returned and are discouraged. And he is then, in the total sweep of the book, giving us a very, very comprehensive picture of who God is and what he wants to do in the world. You can read the comments on the structure there, where I deal a little bit more with why speak to people in the future.

Okay, that's a very, very hasty overview of the book. But just to give you some sense of where we're going and what's happening, do you have questions before we look at chapter one? Jeremiah is just when Babylon is conquering Judah and finally the fall. So, Jeremiah is roughly 630 to 580.

So, he has the very, very unfortunate task of telling these people, Jerusalem is going to fall. And they're saying, you're crazy, Jerusalem can't fall. Where's God going to sleep if somebody burns his house down? Jeremiah says that's the problem.

You don't understand, God doesn't need a house to sleep in. So, and he is saying, very unpopularly, look, Babylon is God's instrument. Surrender.

How would that have gone down in 1980 if some preacher had said, Russia is God's instrument. Just surrender. He probably would have ended up like Jeremiah did in a cistern.

And in the end, then, Jeremiah is proven right. Yes, another question. Yes.

Very much so, yes. It used to be said there were three Isaiahs. One who wrote chapters 1 to 39 in the 700s.

One who wrote 40 to 55 in the 500s. And one who wrote 56 to 66 in the 400s. Nobody believes that today.

It would still be argued that maybe one person wrote 40 to 55. He's the great anonymous prophet of the exile. How interesting.

The greatest Israelite prophet and we have no idea who, what, or where. But beyond that, the theory now is multiple authorship. Isaiah of Jerusalem may have written four or five chapters, a book smaller than Amos.

But somehow or other, he sparked a process that went on for 400 years in which people wrote and rewrote and added and so on and so forth. And finally, somewhere around 350, the book was finished. Now that's an improvement on 40 years ago when it was often said the book wasn't finished until 150 BC.

But my position is, when was the last time you saw a great literary masterpiece written by a committee meeting for 400 years? You know what a camel is. It's a horse designed by a committee. Now, I'm alone.

You're looking at a dinosaur here. It's interesting to see evangelicals knuckling under on this thing. It's disturbing, I may say.

But there's where it is. More and more people are unable to believe that God could have given Isaiah a message for people 150 years in the future. Now obviously that's mind-boggling.

I think it's meant to be mind-boggling. But so it is. Yes? Is that harder to believe than that Jesus would come after all of the Old Testament was lived? No, I don't think it is.

The tragedy is most people who would accept multiple authorship would not believe that Jesus was prophesied. People found stuff after the fact. Because prophecy is impossible.

Nobody can tell the future. Where it appears that there is prophecy, actually it had already happened and the data is rewritten to make it appear like somebody knew it in advance. That's a fundamental issue underlying all of modern Old Testament thinking.

Prophecy is impossible. This is just sort of an observation, but in looking at Isaiah in the direction that he is taking here, it seems to me that Isaiah is a book that we can call a work in progress because of his prophecies that have come true. And then we're looking at the final restoration and we get to the latter part of the book.

So, it's still happening. Yeah, I think I wouldn't say a work in process, but I would say it is a work that is being revealed in process. Its meaning is being revealed in the process.

I would certainly go there. All right, let's look at chapter 1. I'm sorry we'll not be able to look at this in anything like the detail that's on this sheet, but I wanted to go ahead and do it for future reference. Most scholars believe that chapters 1 to 5 are intended to be understood as an introduction.

Probably at least chapters 1 through 6 are not in chronological order. Some people say, well, you know, Wesley preached before he was saved. Maybe Isaiah wrote a prophecy before he was called.

I don't think so. I think, in fact, these five chapters are taken from various points in his ministry and they've been collected here on purpose. And we'll talk about that purpose as we go along here.

Now, you obviously don't have time to read chapters 1 to 5 at this moment as I'm directing you to there. So let me lay out for you a strange characteristic of these chapters. We'll leave chapter 1 aside for the moment.

But you have your Bible there. Look at chapter 2 verses 1 to 5. Would you say that's positive or negative? It's positive, yes, very positive. All the nations are going to come to Jerusalem to learn God's Torah.

But then comes chapter 2 verses 6. We'll be looking at this next week. So, I don't want to spend a lot of time here. But I'll simply tell you it's very negative.

2 verses 6 to 4 verses 1. And we can say it another way. Here is hope. And here is judgment.

Now look at chapter 4 verses 2 through 6. Negative or positive? Positive, yeah, again. The nation is going to be cleansed. They're going to be pure and holy.

There's going to be a canopy over them. Kind of reminiscent of the Exodus. And then I'll tell you chapter 5 verses 1 to 30 is once again very negative.

Judgment is coming. So, we have this interesting alternation. It can be called interchange.

Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. On the one hand, they are under judgment. God is going to destroy them.

They are God's vineyard and all they produce is bitter grapes and God is going to tear it up. And yet, Israel is going to be pure and holy. The place to which all nations are going to come to learn God's purposes.

And we say, huh? How? How can this Israel become that Israel? And that's what chapter 6 is about. So, in one sense, the introduction is 1 to 5 and 6. And then the next section is 6 and 7 to 12. One of the features of the book of Isaiah is these kinds of transitions where it's hard to figure out is this segment the end of the previous one or the beginning of the following one? And the answer is yes.

It's both and. And that seems to be the case here. So that's what's going on in these opening chapters.

Now, with that said, I want us to look at chapter 1. Notice the language used in verse 1. The what of Isaiah? Vision. Which he what? Saw. What does that convey to you? Pictures.

Why not the message that he heard? We're going to see the word over in chapter 2, verse 1, but we're going to have seen it still. So why not the message that he heard? What do you think? Okay, it's a picture. What's the difference between a picture and a message? It's worth a thousand words.

A picture is more engaging, more involving. You can stand back and say, oh yeah, there's the message. It is something that is cognitive.

It's something that is rational. It's something that's intellectual. Not a vision.

A vision is involving. And that's typical of the prophets. The prophets are not merely mouthpieces.

They're not merely hearing a divine word and spitting it out again. That may be true of pagan prophecy, but it's not true of Israelite prophecy. They are passionately involved in what's going on here.

The vision which he saw. Hear, oh heavens, and give ear, oh earth, for the Lord has spoken. Now why is he calling the heavens and the earth to hear? They are witnesses.

This is a court case. Heaven and earth are the jury. Now why would heaven and earth be a good jury? They're God's creations.

Look at the next part of verse 2. Children have I reared and brought up, but they have what? Rebelled against me. Now I ask you again, why would heaven and earth be a good jury in this court case? Because they're obedient. They don't rebel.

Heaven and earth are neutral. They do what God says. They obey his commands.

The sun does not say, I think I'll come up in the south today. Doesn't happen. Now go on to verse 3. People ask me my favorite verse in the Bible, and I say, well, whichever one I read last.

But this one I love. The ox knows its owner. The donkey its master's crib.

But Israel does not know. My people do not understand. And I'll put that in the living Oswald version.

Israel is dumber than a jackass. Here again is nature. Oxen and asses are indeed rebellious from time to time.

But they are smart enough to know where the manager is. Israel is not that smart. Wow.

Look at the very last verse of the book. Chapter 66, verse 24. They will go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have... What? Rebelled.

Same word. Verse 2 of chapter 1, 66 of 24. Now, what is the difference between disobedience and rebellion? Stubborn determination.

Stubborn determination. Disobedience can be accidental. Rebellion cannot be.

Yes? Disobedience can still be recognized. Yes. Hebrew has three words that relate to our failure before God.

One word is translated as sin. We've talked about this before. But as I've said before, repetition is the soul of education.

In case you didn't get that, repetition is the soul of education. Sin. This is the most neutral one.

It means to miss a target. You can do it unintentionally or you can do it intentionally. It's the most general.

The second word is unfortunately translated with an archaic English word. We don't have, interestingly, a good equivalent in modern English. This refers to twistedness.

That inner twistedness which causes us to miss the target. And the third word is the one we're dealing with here. Rebellion or transgression.

To deny any limit. So, Isaiah is right at the outset saying, I'm going to call heaven and earth. I'm going to use the donkey and the ox.

And I'm going to say, my people have denied that I have any right to put a limit on them. Oh, America, America. So, back to chapter one.

Verse four describes some of the further effects of rebellion. People, a sinful nation. There's the first word.

Laden with iniquity. There's the second word. Offspring of evildoers.

That's another word. Children who deal corruptly. They have forsaken the Lord.

They have despised the Holy One of Israel. They are utterly estranged. Do you think God's trying to make a point? This is pretty serious.

Verses five through eight, then, are a figurative way of expressing the results.

Number one in verses five and six, you have the picture of somebody who's been beaten up. Bruised, wounded, bleeding, not bandaged.

And God is saying, why would you want that? Again, as I've said in various ways in our studies, this is not an arbitrary God saying, if you do that, I'm going to beat you to a pulp. This is, if you live in defiance of God's ways, there are tragic results. You jump off a tall building, you will hit the sidewalk.

God says, why would you want to be beaten up? And then in verse eight, again, a lovely picture. And one of the characteristics of this book is it's loaded with all of these lovely figures of speech to try to make the point. The daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a shack in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

I mentioned in the background here, Israelite villages were not built in the middle of good farmland, like we do with our houses and barns. The villages are built on the edge of the farmland. And everybody lives together, partly for protection, partly for community.

And then you walk out to your field. But in time of harvest, you can't spare travel time. So, you build a shack out in your field and the whole family goes out there and camps.

Sort of like a camp meeting. And they would live in that shack until harvest is over. And then winter comes and the shack is falling down.

God says that's what you're like. You're like a shack out in the middle of a cucumber field in the winter, falling apart. Why would you do that? Why would you choose that? In verse nine, we have the second of two very important terms for God that appear in this chapter and that will appear throughout the book.

The Lord of hosts. Now, if you've got a New International Version, it says the Lord Almighty. That's not a bad translation.

But again, it misses this wonderful metaphor. What hosts are we talking about? We're talking about heaven's armies. He is the Lord of heaven's armies.

The New Living Translation got it right. He's the one who has all the hosts of heaven at his command. That's what Jesus was talking about in the garden.

Peter, put your sword away. Don't you understand? I could call a million angels if I wanted to get out of this. This is what I came for.

By the way, that's one of the reasons why I don't like the movie The Passion very well. Jesus was not dragged off as sort of a helpless, passive something. He went intentionally.

I came for this hour, Peter. Put it away. What did he just say to Peter? He just said, I'm Yahweh.

I've got all of heaven's armies at my control. Now, this phrase is a favorite of the prophets. The prophets love to say, you're all impressed with Assyria's armies, aren't you? We know the one who has all the armies of heaven at his fingertips.

Why would you be so scared of them? That's number one, Lord of hosts, Lord Almighty, Lord of heaven's armies. Number two has already occurred in verse four. They have despised the Holy One of Israel.

That title appears 31 times in the Bible. One of them is the Holy One of Jacob, which is in Isaiah. 31 times.

Guess how many of them occur in Isaiah? 26. And one of those is in Kings, which is a duplicate of the Isaiah passage. So, there are really only four other places, two in Jeremiah, and two in the Psalms.

All the rest are in Isaiah, the Holy One of Israel. I have to believe that the reason is because of Isaiah's experience. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Israel.

And that becomes Isaiah's favorite term. Now remember, we sometimes invest holy with a whole bunch of stuff. What it means is the absolutely other one, the one like whom there is no other.

And that means there's only one holy character. We've talked about this before. As long as you're here, I'll say it again.

In the pagan world, holy had no moral meaning at all. It couldn't because there are good gods and bad gods. There are clean gods and unclean gods.

And they're all, quote, holy. The Hebrews say, give me a break. Those things aren't holy.

You made it out of a log, for pity's sake. You melted down your gold coins to cover up the log and make it look nice. You're going to call that other? No.

We've met one who is other. He's not the wind, he's not the moon, he's not the stars, he's other. And that means there's only one holy character, his.

And the good news is, his character is love, justice, righteousness, truth, goodness. That's the good news. Wouldn't it be horrible if the one holy being in the universe was a monster? Holy would mean cruel.

Holy would mean filthy. Holy means what it means in the English language. Interestingly, Webster says spiritual excellence.

That's not bad. Holy means what it means in the English language because that's the character of the holy one. And Isaiah says you have despised him.

Now, despise in Hebrew doesn't have the emotional loading that it has in English. It simply means to consider worthless. The one transcendent lord of the universe, you consider is not worth your time.

So, holy one of Israel, lord of hosts, or lord almighty, or lord of heaven's armies, those two titles are very important ones. All right, quickly, moving on. That's one to nine.

Now, at the very end of verse nine, Isaiah just lays it on with a trowel. If the lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah. Woo-hoo! Oh, we're God's people.

We're not like those wicked people from Sodom and Gomorrah. Then Isaiah says, you want a bat? Now, look at verse 10. It gets better.

Hear the word of the lord, you rulers of Sodom. Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah. There's an example of that transitioning that I was talking about.

Verse nine is the end of the first stanza. Verse 10 is the beginning of the second stanza. And we're tying the two together.

Now, for 35 years, I have challenged seminarians to use verses 11 and 12 and 13 as a call to worship some Sunday morning. I don't think they've ever done it. What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the lord? I've had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts.

I don't delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who required this of you, this trampling of my courts? Isn't that great? Good morning. Who the heck asked you to come in here? Bring no more vain offerings, incense, and abomination to me.

New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations. And here's the bottom line right here. I cannot endure iniquity and solemnness anyway.

Yeah. Now I ask here, why is God so upset with a ritual when he commanded it in Leviticus? And the answer is, ritual is intended to be symbolic of our heart condition. The real indicator of our heart condition is how we treat one another, especially those who can't repay us.

God says I hate iniquity, twistedness, and solemn assembly. Your new moons, your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They become a burden to me.

I'm weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I'll hide my eyes from you. Whoa.

I think what's going on here is verses one to nine have detailed a problem. So, what's the solution? Oh, the solution is more religiosity. And God says, no.

What is the solution? Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil.

Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression.

Bring justice to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause. Yeah.

Now again, over and over again in the prophets, you're going to see ritual being attacked. This is not because they don't believe in ritual. It's because they don't believe in iniquity and solemn assembly.

If the ritual, if the religious behavior is indeed symbolic of our true heart condition as demonstrated in our behavior, then God finds our religious behavior a sweet smell in his nostrils. But the issue is, is it symbolic of my life? Live like the devil for six days and go to church on the seventh day and you're going to hear the quiet sound of God vomiting in the background. You hear God saying to our Sunday morning assemblies, I wish you'd just go home.

I wish you'd just shut the doors on this place. I'm sick of it. So, verse 18, come now let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they'll be as white as snow. Though they're red like crimson, they'll become like wool. If you're willing and obedient, you will eat the good of the land.

If you refuse and rebel, you will be eaten by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Again, our time is flying away here.

This is not to say that we make ourselves clean by our obedience. You've got to be so careful that you read any given verse in the light of the whole Bible. Later on in chapter 64, the people are going to say through the mouth of Isaiah, our righteousness is like filthy rags.

No, our righteousness does not make us clean. But our righteousness will show that we have accepted the free forgiving grace of God. That's the issue.

Okay. Verse 21 and following. Look at the contrasts in these verses.

The faithful city, full of justice, has become a whore. Righteousness lodged in her, now murderers. Silver, dross.

Best wine, mixed water. Princes, rebels. This is what you were supposed to be and this is what you are.

Therefore, in verse 24, the Lord declares the Lord of hosts, the mighty one of Israel. Here's the third title. Holy one of Israel, Lord of heaven's armies, the mighty one of Israel.

I will get relief from my enemies. Surely one of the most frightening verses in the Bible. Who are the enemies here? God's people.

I will turn my hand against you. I will smelt away your dross as with lye. I'll remove all your alloy.

Stop right there. Ah, okay. We are now God's enemies and God just wants to destroy us and remove us from the face of the earth.

Wrong. Read the next verse. That's the most important principle in Bible study.

Read the next verse. And I will restore your judges as at the first, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward, you will be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.

One of the key themes of this book is judgment is not God's intended last word. Rather, judgment is to lead to cleansing and redemption. Now that was very, very hard for the people to believe as it's hard for us to believe.

They thought the choice was between deliverance and judgment. And they wanted to hear a prophet say, hey, we're not going to be judged. We're going to be delivered.

But for this bunch, the only hope of deliverance was through judgment. If this bunch was simply forgiven, the rot would have gone on and we would not know of them or have this book today. So, it's not a question of judgment or deliverance.

It's a question of continued rot or restoration through judgment. But I say it again, judgment is never God's intended last word. It might be his last word, but that's up to us.

Zion will be redeemed by justice. Those in her who repent by righteousness. But rebels and sinners will be broken together.

Do you see the back and forth here? Hypocritical religion, true religion. The faithful city has become a whore. You will be called the faithful city.

Chapter one in many ways is the whole chapters one to five in miniature. But now look how the chapter ends and with this, we're done. But rebels and sinners.

When you're doing Bible study, look for connectors. But is a sign of contrast. Not this, but that.

Therefore, or for, or since are a sign of cause and effect. Because of this, therefore that will happen. So, these connective words are very significant in seeing what's going on.

So here we have a contrast, but rebels and sinners. There are rebels again, will be broken together. Those who forsake the Lord will be consumed.

They will be ashamed of the oaks that you desired. They'll blush for the gardens you've chosen. You'll be like an oak whose leaf withers, like a garden without water.

The strong will become tender. His works a spark. Both of them will burn up together with none to quench them.

One of the recurring themes running right through the book is trees. Pagans in the Near East tended to worship trees because they were not that common. So you find a nice strong tree.

Well, obviously that thing has some divine power about it. It can give you stability. It can give you life.

So, you worship trees. And Isaiah says, the oaks that you desire, the gardens you've chosen, trees are used in both ways in the book. On the one hand, when they symbolize human pride and power, they're going to be all cut-down.

On the other hand, when they symbolize the life that God can give to those who are cut down and broken, then God will make you like a tree. So, it's used both ways. And as we go through the book, I'll be calling your attention to this, the use of trees.

Highways is another image that runs through the book that is used in primarily positive ways. But trees and highways are two, and there are four or five others that crop up again and again throughout the book. Interestingly, those who believe in multiple authorship say, isn't it interesting? They have studied the masters so well that they even reproduce his images.

Okay. Now, this last paragraph, again, is a feature of Isaiah. When he has a great positive promise like what you see in verses 26 and 27, he's not going to let you say, oh, gee, I guess there's no problem, isn't there? He's going to bring you crashing back to the present.

Yes, God has good news for the future. Yes, God has wonderful promises, but not unless you repent. Good news, but not unless you repent.

Again and again, you'll find that happening in the book. He's not going to let us hide behind these wonderful promises. Oh, everything's going to be fine in the end, so it doesn't matter how I live.

Isaiah says, oh, yes, it does. Let's pray. Father, thank you for this great book.

Thank you for these dear friends and their interest. I pray that you'll help us as we study, help us to grasp some of the truth that is here for our lives. In your name, we pray, amen.

Thank you so much. This is Dr. John Oswalt and his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session number one, Isaiah chapter one.