

ISAIAH 6

Isaiah's Call

Isaiah's Vision of God as King

1 In the year that King Uzziah died¹ I saw the Lord (יְהוָה) sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.² 2 Seraphim were standing above him. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said:

Holy, holy, holy (קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ)³ is Yahweh of hosts (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת). Filling all the earth is his glory (כְּבוֹד)!⁴

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.⁵ 5 And I said:

Woe⁶ is me! For I am destroyed (דָּמָה), for I am a man of dirty lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of dirty lips, for my eyes have seen the King,⁷ Yahweh of hosts!⁸

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said:

Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt (עוֹן) is taken away, and your sin (חַטָּאת) atoned (כִּפֶּר) for.⁹

¹ **2 Ch 26:23** 23 Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the burial field that belonged to the kings, for they said, He is a leper. And Jotham his son reigned in his place.

² The eternal, divine king is being compared to the temporal, human king.

³ See *The Holiness of God*.

⁴ See *The Glory of God*.

⁵ Earthquakes and smoke indicate God's presence. **Ex 20:18** 18 When all the people [Israel] saw the thunder, the flashes of lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off.

⁶ In the previous chapter, Isaiah pronounced six woes upon Judah. Now he is under a woe.

⁷ See *God as King*.

⁸ This was a very good response from Isaiah. He understands who he is before the holy God.

⁹ See *Atonement*.

Isaiah Called to Harden Judah

8 And I heard the voice of the Lord (יְהוָה) saying,

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?¹⁰

Then I said,

Here I am! Send me (הֲבֵנִי שְׁלֵחֵנִי).¹¹

9 And he said,

Go, and say to this people [Judah]:

Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.¹²

10 Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.¹³

11 Then I said,

How long, Lord (יְהוָה)?

And he said:

Until cities lie waste without inhabitant and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, 12 and Yahweh (יְהוָה) removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.¹⁴ 13 And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.¹⁵

¹⁰ Plurality in the Godhead is hinted at. **Ge 1:26** 26 Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. See *The Trinity*.

¹¹ God posts a job notice, and Isaiah responds.

¹² Isaiah's message is mainly a negative one. His is not to be the seeker-sensitive approach.

¹³ To go from unbelief to faith in Jesus, the process is always the same: see, hear, understand, turn, and be healed. God's desire is for Israel to believe in the coming Messiah and be justified for eternal life. **1 Ti 2:4** 4 [God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

¹⁴ See *The Exile of Israel*.

¹⁵ See *The Remnant of Israel*.

Biblical Worldview

1. Isaiah at a Glance.

- a. Is 6 is a hinge chapter between Is 1-5 and Is 7-12 (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:173).
- b. The primary message of Is 1-5 has been:
 - (1) Israel has completely failed to keep her obligations under the Mosaic covenant. God is unable to bless the nations through her.
 - (2) As a result, Israel will be severely disciplined as a nation. Most Jews won't make it. Only a remnant will survive.
 - (3) Nevertheless, there will come a time when Zion will become the center of God's worldwide blessing. God will ultimately bless the nations through Israel.
 - (4) The question is, how will this come about?
- c. It is difficult to tell whether Is 1-5 happened chronologically before or after Is 6.
 - (1) Was Isaiah already engaged in a prophetic ministry prior to the vision he receives in Is 6?
 - (2) Or was this the start of his ministry, with Is 1-5 happening chronologically afterward?

2. Uzziah's death (740 bc) signifies the end of Judah's golden age. Assyria is coming!

- a. **Is 6:1** 1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord (יְהוָה) sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.
 - (1) Uzziah had been a very good king, reigning 52 years over Judah (2 Ch 26:3).
 - (a) **2 Ch 26:23** 23 Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the burial field that belonged to the kings, for they said, He is a leper. And Jotham his son reigned in his place.
 - (b) "Judah had known no king like Uzziah since the time of Solomon. He had been an efficient administrator and an able military leader. Under his leadership Judah had grown in every way (2 Chr. 26:1-15). ...What will happen, then, when such a king dies, and coupled with that death there comes the recognition that a resurgent Assyria is pushing nearer and nearer?" (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:177).
 - (2) The next two kings, Jotham and Ahaz, will have to deal with resurgent Assyria (Tiglath-pileser began to reign in 745 bc), but they lack the kingly qualities of their father/grandfather. Anxiety is on the rise in Judah.
 - (3) The timing shows that God is making a statement here. When good human kings die and leave their thrones to mediocre or even bad kings, nevertheless, the great King is still on his throne. He is the one in whom humanity must put its trust. Isaiah and Judah are to put their trust in the heavenly King, not in an earthly king, as good as that earthly king may be.
- b. The Western world, including New Zealand, is coming to the end of its Judeo-Christian golden age. With anxiety and uncertainty on the rise in the West, the Church in the West needs a theophany like the one Isaiah receives in this chapter as—a fresh vision of God as King in all his glory and holiness.

3. Seraphs are angels who guard God's holiness and lead worship of him.

- a. **Is 6:2** 2 Seraphim were standing above him. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.
 - (1) Is 6 is the only time seraphim are mentioned in the Bible.
 - (2) “שרף” signifies... glowing, burning, or the glowing one, the burning one.”
 - (3) Seraphim are angelic beings present in the heavenly court of Yahweh. They have six wings and hover about his throne.
- b. The four living creatures of Re 4 are likely seraphim:
 - (1) **Re 4:6-8** 6 Around [God's] throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: 7 the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. 8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!
- c. We don't see the seraphim today, but one day we will. It will be our privilege to worship and serve God with the seraphim for all eternity.

4. God is a holy and glorious King.

- a. **Is 6:3** 3 And one called to another and said: Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts. Filling all the earth is his glory! 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.
 - (1) The repetition of the word קדוש indicates God is as holy as holy could be.
 - (a) “He is the thrice holy, the holiest of all. He is *the* holy one. ... This is the function of the threefold *holy*, the trisagion. It is the strongest form of the superlative in Hebrew” (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 181).
 - (2) Notice Isaiah's experience is rational, as indicated by the verbal element.
 - (a) “The significance of the verbal element here ought not to be overlooked. The content of this experience is not merely numinous, emotive, and nonrational. Had God only wished to convey his otherness to Isaiah, that could have been done without words. But here the cognitive and rational element is introduced, providing one more indication that revelation does not come merely through raw experience, but also through divinely given cognitive interpretation of that experience” (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 180).
- b. God's holiness is his “distinctiveness from all other things.” He is “terrifyingly” other in essence but also in character. He is “ethically pure, absolutely upright, utterly true” (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 180).
- c. In my life, I experienced a sort of personal theophany as I finished Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* at Starbucks in Shanghai. In my mind's eye, I saw a very bright light, too bright to look at directly, and a flood of love for people came over me. It's only happened once, but I haven't forgotten it.
 - (1) Has anyone experienced something similar?
- d. Perhaps above anything else, the New Zealand church needs a renewed vision of God's holiness and glory.
 - (1) See A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*.

5. God's glory and holiness is too much for sinful man to behold.

- a. **Is 6:5** 5 And I said: Woe is me! For I am destroyed, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts!
 - (1) Isaiah sees, hears, and feels the power of God's holiness and glory and is overwhelmed. The text doesn't say Isaiah dropped to his knees, but likely he did.
 - (2) In Is 3-5, Isaiah pronounced eight woes on the wicked people of Judah. Now he pronounces a woe upon himself. He is sinner, too, and cannot stand before God without atonement. He and all the people around him have unclean lips.
 - (3) Notice Isaiah gives no description of God himself. There are details about what surrounds God—his throne, his robe, the seraphim—but of God there is no description. How can you describe God himself? He is beyond description.
- b. One of the primary reasons God remains invisible to us is because, in our current state, we lack the spiritual, moral, and physical capacity to view him as he is. See *God as Light*.
 - (1) Have you ever tried to gaze directly at the sun for several seconds in the heat of the day? That's a perfect representation of God's glory and holiness. God is not the sun, of course. But just as we cannot gaze directly at the sun without blinding ourselves, so we cannot gaze directly at God without blinding ourselves. God is white hot in his holiness.
 - (2) **Ac 22:6-11** 6 As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? ... 11 And because I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.
 - (3) **1 Jn 1:5** 5 God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6. God takes the initiative to provide atonement for his servants.

- a. **Is 6:6-7** 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.
 - (1) Given the context, the burning coal is likely taken from the altar of burnt offering, where sin and guilt were atoned for through the shed blood of an animal (see Le 1-7).
 - (2) The seraph, as God's servant, carries out the atonement ceremony.
 - (3) The burning coal touches Isaiah's mouth and lips, signifying that this is an atonement particularly related to Isaiah's ministry as a prophet who speaks.
 - (4) This is likely not the moment of Isaiah's justification, which probably happened earlier in Isaiah's life. This is the moment when Isaiah, already a believer, is called for a special task—to be God's prophetic voice at this important period in Judah's history.
 - (5) Guilt and sin must be removed if Isaiah is to serve God with clean lips.
- b. So it is in every age. God uses purified prophets/apostles/preachers to proclaim his message in every generation.
 - (1) If we want to serve as God's spokesmen in our day, we must have:
 - (a) A high view of God;

- (b) A high view of our sin;
 - (c) A high view of our atonement; and
 - (d) A high view of our mission as spokespersons for God.
- c. Have your lips become dirty? Have you lost the power to speak for God because of impurity in your life? In what way do we need to get right with God so that we regain the purity and power we need as God's servant-communicators today.

7. God is looking for a corps of godly men and women who will answer today's call to discipleship.

- a. **Is 6:8** 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord (יהוה) saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am! Send me.
 - (1) With his sin atoned for, Isaiah is not able to view the "now hiring" notice on God's job board. He responds with those famous words: "Here am I. Send me!"
- b. This is the call of discipleship, taken up by all the prophets and apostles of old.
 - (1) **Lk 18:28-30** 28 Peter said: Look, we have left our own homes and followed you. 29 And [Jesus] said to them: Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house, wife, brothers, parents, or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.
 - (2) **Ac 20:24** 24 I [Paul] do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
- c. The theophany prepares the prophet to proclaim his unpopular message from God without fear of man.
 - (1) Isaiah has a vision of God that changes the course of his life. For the next 60 or so years, he will never forget this vision of God's glory and holiness. When times get tough, when he feels like quitting, he will remember this call in the year that Uzziah died.
- d. God wants believers today to answer the call of courageous discipleship.
 - (1) New Zealand needs a corps of young men and women motivated, trained, equipped, and disciplined to communicate God's message to this generation with boldness, conviction, and courage.
 - (2) Read "The Fellowship of the Unashamed."

8. The prophet's job is to be so clear in his message that listeners are forced to make a decision for or against God.

- a. **Is 6:9-10** 9 And he said, Go, and say to this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive. 10 Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.
 - (1) God tells Isaiah at the outset that his ministry will be largely unsuccessful. Did Isaiah have second thoughts about saying, "Send me"?
 - (2) His job is to be biblically truthful, not politically correct. Judah's majority will reject his message, the their hearts will become more and more dull.
- b. Today, the evangelist or preacher is successful when he makes the gospel message so crystal clear, that every listener must move a step toward God or a step away from

God. When we see a negative response to the gospel message (provided that message is accurate), we should take comfort in the fact we have done our job.

Negative Response	Positive Response
Hear, but do not understand.	See with their eyes.
See, but do not perceive.	Hear with their ears.
Dull hearts.	Understand with their hearts.
Heavy ears.	Turn.
Blind eyes.	Be healed.

- c. Isaiah's hardening ministry foreshadows the hardening ministry of Jesus and Paul.
- (1) Jesus.
 - (a) **Mt 13:10-14** 10 The disciples came and said to [Jesus], Why do you speak to [the Jewish crowds] in parables? 11 And he answered them, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled....
 - (2) Paul.
 - (a) **Ac 28:24-25** 24 Some [Jews in Rome] were convinced by what [Paul] said, but others disbelieved. 25 And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet....
- d. As Jesus' second coming approaches, the Church likewise has a hardening ministry. We are told in numerous passages that the end of the Church age will be characterized by a general hardening of the heart against God.
- (1) **1 Ti 4:1** 1 The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.
 - (2) **2 Ti 3:1-5** 1 Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.
 - (3) **2 Pe 3:3-4** 3 Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.
- e. The two witnesses of Re 11 will also have a hardening ministry.

(1) **Re 11:3-4** 3 I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

f. Who will take up the hardening ministry today in New Zealand?

9. For those who answer the call to a ministry of hardening, there is no going back.

a. **Is 6:11-12** 11 Then I said, How long, Lord (יְהוָה)? And he said: Until cities lie waste without inhabitant and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, 12 and Yahweh (יְהוָה) removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

(1) Isaiah is a young man when he receives this call. He faces a lifetime—decades—of opposition and unpopularity. For the next 60 years or so, he will be one of the most hated men in Jerusalem.

(2) Isaiah will die about 75 years before the first deportation of Jews to Babylon (605 bc). So he will not actually live to see what God describes in vv. 11-12.

b. Sending prophets is God's way of warning a society before final doom occurs. The doom is inevitable. It's only a matter of time.

10. Most people in Judah will be hardened and judged, but a remnant will survive.

a. **Is 6:13** 13 And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.

(1) Judah's population will be diminished by war and deportation, and then it will be burned again. Only a stump, the holy seed, the remnant of Israel, will be left.

b. It is from this stump that the branch of Yahweh will spring forth.

(1) **Is 4:2-4** 2 In that day the branch [Messiah] of Yahweh shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel. 3 And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, 4 when Yahweh shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.

c. After God disciplines and purifies the nation Israel, all Israel will have clean hearts and pure lips. This happens under the New Covenant.

(1) **Is 59:21** 21 As for me, this is my covenant with them, says Yahweh. My Spirit that is upon you [remnant of Israel], and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, out of the mouth of your seed, or out of the mouth of your children's seed, says Yahweh, from this time forth and forevermore.

d. Believers of every nation are like the remnant of Israel. We are small number, but we believe in the coming Messiah. We await his reign upon the earth and maintain loyalty to him.

Notes