

ISAIAH 6 | *Isaiah's Vision and Call*

Isaiah's Vision

1 In the year that King Uzziah died¹ I saw the Lord (אֲדֹנָי) 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

Isaiah's Sin Atoned For

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 (עֲוֹן) is taken away, and your sin (חַטָּאת) atoned (כִּפַּר)⁹ for.

Isaiah's Call

8 And I heard the voice of the Lord (אֲדֹנָי) saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?¹⁰ Then I said, Here I am! Send me (הֲנִי שְׁלֹחֲנִי).¹¹ 9 And he said, Go, and say to this people

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 *God's Holiness*.

⁴ See *God's Glory*.

⁵ **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*.

¹⁰ **Ge 1:26** 26 Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. See *Trinity*.

¹¹ God posts a job notice, and Isaiah responds.

[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. 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.¹⁴

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. **1 Ti 2:4** 4 [God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

¹⁴ See *Remnant of Israel*.

Commentary

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. Isaiah's Vision (Is 6:1-[]).

- a. **Is 6:1-5** 1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord (יהוה) sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 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 (קדוש קדוש קדוש) is Yahweh of hosts (יהוה צבאות). Filling all the earth is his glory (כבוד)! 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: Woe is me! For I am destroyed (דמה), 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, Yahweh of hosts!
- b. Uzziah's death (740 bc) means the end of Judah's golden age. Assyria is coming!
 - (1) Uzziah was a very good king who reigned 52 years over Judah (2 Ch 26:3).
 - (a) "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).
 - (b) Uzziah's son and grandson, Jotham and Ahaz, will have to deal with resurgent Assyria (Tiglath-pileser began to rule in 745 bc), but they lack Uzziah's kingly qualities.
 - (c) When good human kings pass on, the great King is still rules. He is the one in whom humanity must trust.
 - (d) The West is nearing the end of its Judaeo-Christian golden age. With anxiety and uncertainty on the rise, the Church needs a theophany like this one—a fresh vision of God as the holy, glorious King
- c. Seraphs are angels who guard God's holiness and lead worship of him.
 - (1) Is 6 is the only time seraphim are mentioned in the Bible.

- (2) Seraphim are angelic beings present in the heavenly court of Yahweh. They have six wings and hover about his throne.
- (3) The four living creatures of Re 4 are likely seraphim:
 - (a) **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!
 - (4) We don't see the seraphim today, but one day we will.
- d. God is the holy and glorious King.
 - (1) 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.
 - (2) The repetition of the word *שׁוֹדֵךְ* 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).
 - (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).
 - (3) 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).
 - (4) I experienced a sort of personal theophany as I finished Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* at Starbucks in Shanghai. Have you experienced something similar?
 - (5) Perhaps above anything else, we need a renewed vision of God's holiness.
 - (a) See A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*.
- e. God's glory and holiness is too much for sinful man to behold.
 - (1) Isaiah experience the power of God's holiness is overwhelmed.
 - (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) One reason 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.
 - (a) 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.

- (b) **1 Jn 1:5** 5 God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.
- (c) **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.
- f. Quite possibly, Isaiah was seeing Jesus, not God the Father.
 - (1) **Jn 12:37-41** 37 Though [Jesus] had done so many signs before [the Jewish people], they still did not believe in him, 38 so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 39 Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, 40 He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them. 41 Isaiah said these things because he saw his [Jesus'] glory and spoke of him.

3. Isaiah's Sin Atoned For (Is 6:6-7).

- 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 (עוֹן) is taken away, and your sin (חַטָּאת) atoned (כָּפַר) for.
- b. Guilt and sin must be removed if Isaiah is to serve God with clean lips.
 - (1) The burning coal is likely taken from the altar of burnt offering (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.
- c. So it is in every age. God uses purified men and women to proclaim his message in every generation.
 - (1) **Ps 51:7-13** 7 Purge me [David] with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ...9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ...12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
 - (2) **Jn 13:8-10** 8 Peter said to [Jesus], You shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no share [in ministry] with me. 9 Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head! 10 Jesus said to him, The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.
- d. Have our lips become dirty? Have we lost the power to speak for God because of impurity in our lives? In what ways do we need to get right with God so that we may regain the purity and power we need as God's servant-communicators today?

4. Isaiah's Call (Is 6:8-13).

- a. **Is 6:8-13** 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord (יְהוָה) saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am! Send me (הֲנַנִּי שְׁלַחֵנִי). 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. 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. 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. 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.
- b. The three persons of the Trinity delight to take counsel together.
 - (1) Plurality in the Godhead is hinted at here.
 - (2) **Ge 1:26** 26 Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.
- c. God looks for men and women in every generation to send as his messengers.
 - (1) With his sin atoned for, Isaiah is now able to view the “now hiring” notice on God’s job board and respond with his application: “Here am I. Send me!”
 - (2) Only a select few will accept God’s call.
 - (a) **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.
 - (b) **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.
 - (3) God is looking for godly men and women who will speak for him today.
 - (a) 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.
 - (4) See “The Fellowship of the Unashamed.”
- d. A view of God’s holiness prepares us to speak confidently to men.
 - (1) Isaiah’s theophany prepares him to proclaim his unpopular message without fear. The vision he receives changes the course of his life. For the next 60 years, he will never forget the vision of God on his throne. When times get tough, when he feels like quitting, he will remember this call, in the year that Uzziah died.
- e. The prophet’s job is to be so clear in his message that listeners are forced to make a decision for or against God.
 - (1) God tells Isaiah at the outset that his ministry will be largely unsuccessful. Did Isaiah have second thoughts about saying, “Send me”? His job is to be biblically truthful, not politically correct. Judah’s majority will reject his message, and their hearts will become more hardened as a result of his ministry.
 - (2) John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and many others followed this pattern.
 - (3) Sending prophets is God’s way of warning a nation before final doom occurs. The doom is inevitable. It’s only a matter of time.

- (4) We are successful as God's messengers today when we make the gospel message so crystal clear, that our listeners are forced to move one step toward God or one 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.
- f. When God's messengers speak, the hearts of the majority will be hardened.
- (1) Isaiah is a young man when he receives this call. He faces a lifetime—decades—of opposition and unpopularity. The rest of his life, he will be one of the most hated men in Jerusalem.
- (2) This happened with Jesus, Paul, and many others.
- (a) **Mt 13:13-14** 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....
- (b) **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....
- (3) It will happen with us as well. Are we prepared to be rejected by the majority? Who will take up the hardening ministry today in New Zealand?
- (a) **2 Ti 3:1-5** 1 Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.
- (b) **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.
- (4) The pattern will continue in the Tribulation.
- (a) **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.
- g. The offer of salvation is truly open for all to whom God's messengers speak (v. 10).
- (1) Through Isaiah, God wants the people of Judah to see, hear, understand, turn, and be healed (v. 10).
- (2) This is what God wants for all people in every age.
- (a) **Ro 10:14-17** 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Messiah.
- (b) **1 Ti 2:4** 4 [God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
- (3) God wants to use us to communicate the gospel message to people so that they may see, hear, understand, turn, and be healed (v. 10).
- h. The hearts of most will be hardened, but a remnant will survive (v. 13).

- (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.
- (2) It is from this stump that the branch of Yahweh will spring forth.
 - (a) **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.
- (3) There is a remnant of believers from every nation that will survive God's future wrath.
 - (a) It is the job of the remnant to maintain loyalty to God and not give up.