

The Book of Isaiah
Chapter 6

Introduction: This chapter, strategically placed, narrates Isaiah’s call or commission to serve as a prophet of the Lord, while also providing a model for true worship—revelation and response.

- A. The STRATEGIC placement of Isaiah’s call has created much debate.
1. How can we explain the prophetic oracles in chapters 1-5 in relationship to his call in chapter 6?
 - a. Pre-call ministry? Unlikely.
 - b. Later addition or editing? Doubtful.
 - c. Editor’s purposeful arrangement? Likely.
 2. Contextual explanation for the placement of the call narrative.
 - a. Isaiah as editor is attempting to paint a picture of Judah’s condition at the time of his call (1:2-4).
 - b. Oracles likely follow call but placed before for context—not chronological order
 3. Biblical explanation for the placement of the call narrative.
 - a. Isaiah is not alone (see Amos 7:14-15)
 - b. Message is of greater value than messenger

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: 16 The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; 17 but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. Philippians 1:15-18 NKJV

- c. Call narrative possibly arranged around the use of “woe” in chapters 5 and 6 (will discuss later).

4. Theological explanation for the placement of the call narrative.
 - a. Placement of call centers around the “unclean lips” metaphor (6:5)
 - b. Isaiah’s personal experience with the Lord becomes the model for rebellious and corrupt Israel (Chapters 1-5)
 - c. Just as Isaiah (a man of unclean lips) was enabled to bear God’s message to his people, so, by the same process, Israel (people of unclean lips) will be enabled to bear God’s message to the world.

- B. The call of God to specific prophetic ministry was often dramatic in nature and reserved for unique purposes.
 1. Moses (Exodus 3:1-10)
 2. Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-14)
 3. Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-9)
 4. Jonah (Jonah 1:17; 3:1-4)
 5. Paul (Acts 9:1-19)

NOTE: In all occurrences, God’s call is initiated by God revealing himself in a dramatic fashion.

Let’s unpack Isaiah’s unique call recorded in Isaiah 6.

I. Isaiah’s Vision of the Lord

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" 4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. Isaiah 6:1-4 NKJV

- A. Context of Vision: “In the year of King Uzziah’s death...” (6:1)
 1. Date: Around 740 BC (18 years before the north is destroyed)
 2. Isaiah’s childhood likely saw peace and stillness on the political front
 3. Uzziah did right in the sight of God—did not destroy high places (reigned 52 years; 2 Kings 15:2; 2 Chronicles 26:1-5)
 4. Under Uzziah, Judah was prosperous and successful

READ: 2 Chronicles 26:5-15

5. Pride brought leprosy, separation, and loneliness while son Jotham was over house.
6. At Uzziah's death, Judah's hopeless situation emerged with the efforts of TP III of Assyria
7. Isaiah's vision under these military conditions was a reorienting of his moral compass—the king is dead, who is the king in the world anyway? (Isaiah 6:5b)

APPLICATION: Our seemingly hopeless conditions and circumstances do not change or alter the steadfast character of God—He still remains on the throne.

B. What did Isaiah see and hear?

1. Some form (by grace) of the Lord
 - a. Christophany (picture of Christ)? Possible

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" 14 So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" 15 Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so. Joshua 5:13-15 NKJV

- b. No description of physical appearance

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. John 1:18 NKJV

- c. Saw the MAJESTY of God (robe, throne, attendants)
 - d. Saw the SOVEREIGNTY of God

- Sits on a throne
- In a seat of authority and power
- High and exalted

e. Saw the TRANSCENDENCE of God (exaltation of Israel's Great God)—

"O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Isaiah 37:16 NKJV

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. 23 He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless. 24 Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble. 25 "To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of His power; Not one is missing. Isaiah 40:21-26 NKJV

For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Isaiah 57:15 NKJV

f. Saw the GREATNESS and MAGNITUDE of God

“Train of His robe filled the temple” (6:16)

QUESTIONS—If the train (hem) filled the temple, how big was the throne and the one sitting on the throne?

ANSWER: Words are incapable of describing God's greatness—no higher than hem (Exodus 24:9-10)

APPLICATION: We cannot and must not describe God in terms of the created world—He is above and beyond His creation. The majesty, sovereignty, and greatness of God is often lost in our culture.

g. Saw SERAPHIM (seraph)

NOTE: Only biblical passage that heavenly beings are called “seraphs”.

— Seraph= “burning ones” (bright creatures)

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- In a servant’s position waiting on seated master
- In reality, Isaiah will experience their “burning” or “purging” ministry (6:6-7)
- Covered eyes (receive what He says), covered feet (only follow God’s path)
- Significance of fire (symbol of God—torch in Genesis 3, bush in Exodus 3, fire on Sinai, fire consuming Elijah’s sacrifice)=destructive yet cleansing (about encounter with God)

h. Heard the Seraphim proclaim the holiness of the Lord (6:3)

- Threefold expression of holiness (stress holiness of Heavenly King/Trinity emphasis)
- Encountered the holiness of God (theme in Isaiah) “Holy One of Israel” (25 times)

i. Encountered the immanence (closeness) of the Lord

- “Full” or “Fill” (6:1, 3, 4)
- Transcendence and immanence in balance

Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!"
Isaiah 12:6 NKJV

- Temple and whole earth is full of His glory

“Holiness is God’s hidden glory; glory is God’s all-present holiness” (Alec Motyer)

APPLICATION: God’s glory is revealed in the Incarnation when Word becomes flesh and dwells among us (John 1:14) making relationship with the Holy One possible.

NOTE: 6:4 the shaking of the earth is a symbol of divine presence (Exodus 19:18; Acts 4:31) and cloud forbids him from seeing God.

II. Isaiah’s First Response

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So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because 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, The Lord of hosts." Isaiah 6:5 NKJV

A. Isaiah's recognition of his own sinful condition

"Woe is me, for I am ruined!"

1. Time spent in the presence of God exposes our faults, shame, and our sin.

a. Adam and Eve in the Garden—hid from God

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:25 NKJV

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. 8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." Genesis 3:7-10 NKJV

b. David prays for God to expose any hurtful way

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting. Psalms 139:23-24 NKJV

c. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to examine themselves before communion

NOTE: Many deny the existence of a Supreme creator because they don't want to be held accountable.

2. Time spent in the presence of God takes our eyes off of the condition around us and causes us to look inward first.

a. "Woe" is me ('oy vs hoy)—5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22

b. Pointing out specks when you have a plank

APPLICATION: "In order to be an effective channel for God's penetrating word, the power of that word must be felt in the person's own conscience."

- c. Necessary encounter for Isaiah to be a successful mouthpiece for God
- d. Perspective shift—he too is unclean among an unclean people.

B. Isaiah receives a glimpse of hope

- 1. National darkness plagued Israel, God’s people (5:30)
- 2. Solution?

“For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts”

III. The Cleansing of Isaiah

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged." Isaiah 6:6-7 NKJV

A. God initiates (2-3, 4-5) the cleansing of Isaiah

- 1. Seraphim (instructed by God) flew with live coal to Isaiah
- 2. Is this not what God does in salvation? God is the initiator!

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10 NKJV

B. The significance of the burning coal from the altar (6)

- 1. Altar in the Old Testament was often a “place of meeting and transformation” between humanity and the Divine (Genesis 28)
- 2. Altar in the Old Testament was the place where God accepted and was satisfied by blood sacrifice—atonement and forgiveness.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.' Leviticus 17:11 NKJV

- 3. Just as Isaiah’s lips could only be purified by fire (6), so could they only be purified through fire.
- 4. To be a conduit of His of His righteousness, we must ourselves be purified by fire.

5. Fire as a symbol of God implies that Isaiah has a real encounter with Yahweh (Isaiah 33:14)

QUESTION: Would it have been appropriate for Isaiah to declare judgment if he had not himself experienced it with God's cleansing?

IV. Isaiah's Response to God's Call

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah 6:8 NKJV

- A. Now hears the "Lord's" voice—nearness and immanence—(ff. v. 1,3) seeking a willing servant
- B. Full revelation of God's character—"us"—Trinitarian language (Genesis 1:26)
- C. Isaiah willingly offers to be God's vehicle
- D. Our culture diminishes and ignores the full revelation of God putting our desires in front of God's call—it's the transcendent, holy, purging, immanent God that produces faithful obedience.

V. The Content and Length of Isaiah's Commission

And He said, "Go, and tell 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 shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed." 11 Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate, 12 The Lord has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. Isaiah 6:9-12 NKJV

- A. Judgment (9-12) and hope (13) theme emerges
- B. The message of his commission
 1. Odd preacher's content
 2. Prophetic content—will preach the word with simplicity, but will reject, refuse the simple word to a point where the heart is hardened.
 3. Preacher's Dilemma: If resistance to truth, teach again, but risk of continual rejection and hardness of heart.
 4. People rejected word (5:24) and Ahaz refused to listen to word (7-11)
 5. Passage quoted in Synoptic Gospels connection to parable of sower (Matthew 13:14-15)

NOTE: Several centuries of resisting, rejecting and refusing prophetic word will lead to exile.

- C. The length of his prophetic ministry (11-12)
 - 1. Assyrians will not bring this devastation on Jerusalem
 - 2. Babylonians become key players (586 BC)
 - 3. Alerted to fact but not timing

VI. A Hope of a Remnant

But yet a tenth will be in it, And will return and be for consuming, As a terebinth tree or as an oak, Whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump."
Isaiah 6:13 NKJV

NOTE: Judgment/Hope theme

- A. Despite their rejection of the word and devastation, God still brings forth a remnant—"seed"
- B. More judgment to come (v. 6-7 with v. 13)
- C. Seed reference to promise given to Abraham (Genesis 15)

Conclusion: The message of Isaiah's call today

- A. The need to give heed to the full character of God.
 - 1. Transcendence—not a part of but above creation (high and exalted) in our worship and conversation
 - 2. Sovereignty—ruler on throne, in charge
 - 3. Greatness/magnitude—His glory fills the earth
 - 4. Holiness—He is totally other; sin can't dwell
 - 5. Immanence—near/hear voice
- B. We should long for an encounter with the Holiness of God where our faults are exposed
 - 1. Examine ourselves daily
 - 2. Long to be formed into His character
- C. Develop a greater and more concrete understanding of God's grace—not cheap grace

1. God's not just a "good buddy" He is the majestic, Holy One
2. God owes us nothing
3. We deserve death; He has given us life

- D. The only means of restoring sinful humanity to Holy God is the suffering servant (53)
- E. Develop an appreciation for God's cleansing, purging, and forgiving power—demands a worthy response
- F. Know that God is the initiator—reveals self—and we respond—this is worship
- G. God did not purge us to be idle, he longs for us to be the vehicle by which hope is communicated

1. Isaiah's encounter with the Holy God prepared him to be God's mouthpiece
2. Am I idle or on the go? Do I need to encounter the holiness of God?

- H. God is faithful to His promises

1. Not complete devastation
2. Hope remains
3. Seed will come forth