

Isaiah

Isa 6:1-8

SS Lesson for 07/09/2017

Devotional Scripture: 1 Sam 3:1-10

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews the vision given and the call of God received by **Isaiah**. The **study's aim** is to illustrate that God often calls to special service those who have already shown themselves faithful. The **study's application** is to teach that we can best prepare for a call from God by having a walk of faith and obedience.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Isa 6:8

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."

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Though this is one of the better-known chapters in the Book of Isaiah, at least three problems in it have caused debate among Bible students.

The first problem concerns the chronological relationship of chapter 6, which records God's call of Isaiah, to the preceding five chapters on judgment and deliverance. Did Isaiah minister for a period of time before being commissioned, or is this chapter out of order chronologically but in order logically? Some have argued that since the vision occurred "in the year that King Uzziah died" (v. 1) Isaiah must have had some previous ministry (chaps. 1-5) since he is said to have ministered *during* the reign of Uzziah (1:1). It can be countered, however, that Isaiah saw this vision anytime up to 12 months before the king's death. In that sense then his vision was "in" Uzziah's reign. It is possible, as some suggest, that Isaiah, seeing the sinful condition of the nation (chaps. 1-5), set himself apart from that nation until he saw the vision of God and then realized that he too was part of the sin problem. He also was "a man of unclean lips" (6:5). On the other hand it is possible that the vision and commissioning of chapter 6 came *before* he delivered the messages in chapters 1-5 and that he recorded this experience here as a fitting logical climax to the stinging indictment in those chapters. Chapter 6 emphasizes the extreme depravity of the nation, contrasting it with God's holiness. Here Isaiah also emphasized that the people lacked spiritual insight and would not turn from their sinful condition. A second problem pertains to whom Isaiah saw. Isaiah "saw the LORD" (v. 1), whom he called "the LORD Almighty" (v. 3) and "the King, the LORD Almighty" (v. 5). Because the Apostle John wrote that Isaiah "saw Jesus' glory" (John 12:41), Isaiah may have seen the preincarnate Christ, who because of His deity is the Lord. The prophet did not see the very essence of God for no man can see Him (Ex. 33:18; John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 4:12) since He is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17). But there was no problem in Isaiah's seeing God in a vision or a theophany, much as did Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:3-28), Daniel (Dan. 7:2, 9-10), and others. A third problem is related to the fact that Isaiah's vision was in the temple (Isa. 6:1). Was Isaiah there because he was a priest? Jeremiah was the son of a priest (Jer. 1:1) and Ezekiel was a priest (Ezek. 1:3), but the Book of Isaiah says nothing about Isaiah being of priestly lineage. If he were not carrying out priestly duties he may have been a worshiper there when he saw the heavenly vision. Or perhaps he, like Ezekiel (Ezek. 8:1-4), was not physically in the temple but was transported there in a vision.

6:1. Since Isaiah ministered during **King Uzziah's** reign (1:1) Isaiah's vision of God **in the year... Uzziah died** would have occurred within the 12 calendar months before or after the king's death in 739 B.C. If the vision occurred *before* Isaiah began his ministry then obviously the vision was before the king's death. However, if the vision came sometime *after* the prophet's ministry started then Isaiah could have seen the vision within the calendar year (739 B.C.) either shortly before or shortly after the king died. This time notation points to a contrast between the human king and the divine King (v. 5), God Himself and to some contrasts between Uzziah and Isaiah. In Uzziah's long (52-year), prosperous reign (2 Chron. 26:1-15) many people were away from the Lord and involved in sin (2 Kings 15:1-4; **Uzziah** is also called Azariah). By contrast, God is holy (Isa. 6:3). In pride, Uzziah disobediently entered the temple (insensitive to the sin involved) and was struck with leprosy which made him ceremonially unclean (2 Chron. 26:16-20). Isaiah, however, was sensitive to sin, for he stated that he and his people were spiritually unclean (Isa. 6:5). Though Uzziah was excluded from the temple (2 Chron. 26:21) Isaiah was not. Three things struck Isaiah about God: He was **seated on a throne**, He was **high and exalted**, and **the train of His robe filled the temple**. In the most holy place of the temple in Jerusalem, God's glory was evident between the cherubim on the atonement cover over the ark of the covenant. Therefore some Israelites may have erroneously thought that God was fairly small. However, Solomon, in his dedicatory prayer for the new temple, had stated that no temple could contain God and that in fact even the heavens could not contain Him (1 Kings 8:27). Therefore Isaiah did not see God on the ark of the covenant, but on a throne. Almost 150 years later Ezekiel had a similar experience. He envisioned God being borne along on a great chariot throne by living creatures called cherubim (Ezek. 1). To Isaiah, the throne emphasized that **the Lord** is indeed the true King of Israel. God's being "high and exalted" symbolized His position before the nation. The people were wanting God to work on their behalf (Isa. 5:19) but He *was* doing so, as evidenced by His lofty position among them. The Lord's long robe speaks of His royalty and majesty. His being in the temple suggests that though He hates mere religiosity (1:11-15) He still wanted the nation to be involved in the temple worship. The temple and the temple sacrifices pictured the righteous dealings of the sovereign God with His covenant people.

6:2-4. Seraphs, angelic beings who were **above** the Lord, are referred to in the Scriptures only here. "Seraphs" is from *sārap*, which means "to burn," possibly suggesting that they were ardent in their zeal for the Lord. It is also noteworthy that one of the seraphs took a *burning* coal to Isaiah (v. 6). They had **six wings** (the four living creatures Ezekiel saw each had four wings, Ezek. 1:5, 11). Covering **their faces** with **two wings** indicates their humility before God. Their covering **their feet** with **two** other wings may denote service to God, and their **flying** may speak of their ongoing activity in proclaiming God's holiness and glory. In **calling to one another** the seraphs, whose number is not given, were proclaiming that **the LORD Almighty is holy**. The threefold repetition of the word **holy** suggests supreme or complete holiness. This threefold occurrence does not suggest the Trinity, as some have supposed. The Trinity is supported in other ways (e.g., see Isa. 6:8). Repeating a word three times for emphasis is common in the Old Testament (e.g., Jer. 22:29; Ezek. 21:27). The seraphs also proclaimed that **His glory** fills the **earth** (cf. Num. 14:21) much as His robe filled the temple. By contrast the people of Judah were unholy (cf. Isa. 5; 6:5) though they were supposed to be a holy people (Ex. 22:31; Deut. 7:6). As the seraphs cried out, Isaiah saw **the temple** shake and then it **was filled with smoke** (Isa. 6:4). The **thresholds** (cf. Amos 9:1) were large foundation stones on which **the doorposts** stood. The shaking (cf. Ex. 19:18) suggested the awesome presence and power of God. The smoke was probably the cloud of glory which Isaiah's ancestors had seen in the wilderness (Ex. 13:21; 16:10) and which the priests in Solomon's day had viewed in the dedicated temple (1 Kings 8:10-13).

6:5. This vision of God's majesty, holiness, and glory made Isaiah realize that he was a sinner. When Ezekiel saw God's glory he too responded with humility. (Cf. the responses of Job, Job 42:5-6; Peter, Luke 5:8; and the Apostle John, Rev. 1:17.) Isaiah had pronounced woes (threats of judgment) on the nation (Isa. 5:8-23), but now by saying **Woe to me!** (cf. 24:16) he realized *he* was subject to judgment. This was because he was unclean. When seen next to the purity of God's holiness, the impurity of human sin is all the more evident. The prophet's **unclean lips** probably symbolized his attitudes and actions as well as his words, for a person's words reflect his thinking and relate to his actions. Interestingly Isaiah identified with his people who also were sinful (**a people of unclean lips**).

6:6-7. Realizing his impurity, Isaiah was cleansed by God, through the intermediary work of **one of the seraphs**. It is fitting that a seraph (perhaps meaning a "burning one") **touched** Isaiah's **lips** with a hot **coal... from the altar**, either the altar of burnt offering, on which a fire was always burning (Lev. 6:12), or the altar of incense where incense was burned each morning and evening (Ex. 30:1, 7-8). This symbolic action signified the removal of the prophet's **guilt** and his **sin**. Of course this is what the entire nation

needed. The Judahites needed to respond as Isaiah did, acknowledging their need of cleansing from sin. But unlike the prophet, most members of the nation refused to admit they had a spiritual need. Though they, through the priests, burned sacrifices at the temple, their lives needed the purifying action of God's "fire" of cleansing.

6:8. The rest of this chapter deals with the message Isaiah was to preach to Judah. Significantly he was not called to service till he had been cleansed. After hearing the seraph's words (vv. 3, 7) he then **heard the Lord's voice**. God asked, **Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?** The word "Us" in reference to God hints at the Trinity (cf. "Us" in Gen. 1:26; 11:7). This doctrine, though not explicit in the Old Testament, is implicit for God is the same God in both Testaments. The question "Who will go?" does not mean God did not know or that He only *hoped* someone would respond. He asked the question to give Isaiah, now cleansed, an opportunity for service. The prophet knew that the entire nation needed the same kind of awareness of God and cleansing of sin he had received. So he responded that he would willingly serve **the Lord (Here am I)**.

6:9-10. Probably Isaiah, responding as he did in verse 8, thought that his serving the Lord would result in the nation's cleansing. However, the Lord told him his message would *not* result in much spiritual response. The people had not listened before and they would not listen now. The Lord did not delight in judging His people, but discipline was necessary because of their disobedience. In fact the **people**, on hearing Isaiah's message, would become even more hardened against the Lord. Interestingly six of the seven lines in verse 10 are in a chiasm: **heart... ears... eyes** are mentioned in lines 1-3, and in lines 4-6 they are reversed: **eyes... ears... hearts**. This is a common arrangement of material in the Old Testament. Possibly this pattern emphasizes the "eyes," mentioned in the middle. Jesus quoted part of this verse to explain that Israel in His day *could* not believe because they *would* not believe (see John 12:40).

6:11-13. Isaiah's response to the message implies that he was ready to speak whatever God wanted him to say. Yet he wondered **how long** he would have to go on delivering a message of judgment to which the people would be callous. The **Lord** answered that Isaiah was to proclaim the message **until** His judgment came, that is, till the Babylonian Exile actually occurred and the people were deported from **the land** (v. 12), thus leaving their ruined **cities** and **fields** (v. 11). Though Isaiah did not live that long, God meant he should keep on preaching even if he did live to see Judah's downfall. The **tenth** that remained **in the land** (v. 13) refers to the poor who were left in Judah by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:14). But most of them were laid waste (Jer. 41:10-18; 43:4-7). Isaiah, perhaps discouraged by such a negative response and terrible results, was then assured by **the LORD** that not all was lost. A remnant would be left. God compared that remnant to **stumps of terebinth and oak** trees. From this stump or **holy seed** of a believing remnant would come others who would believe. Though Judah's population would be almost totally wiped out or exiled, God promised to preserve a small number of believers **in the land**.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Isaiah 6 records Isaiah's vision of the Lord and the prophet's response to it. We often label this chapter the call of Isaiah. However, the Lord simply asked a question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" and Isaiah volunteered. Isaiah's ready response is instructive, especially in light of what preceded it. Isaiah's willingness to go wherever the Lord sent him was based on what he saw and experienced in the Lord's presence. In the vision he saw the majesty and holiness of the Lord on His throne. The seraphim who attended Him proclaimed His holiness and declared that the "whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). Isaiah also saw his own sinfulness. Even a glimpse of God's holiness makes us painfully aware of our own sin. When Peter, against all the rules of fishing, followed Jesus' advice and caught an overwhelming number of fish, he suddenly was struck by the Lord's holiness and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Isaiah felt the same way when he saw the holiness of God, and he said, "Woe is me!" (Isa. 6:5). However, Isaiah also saw something else in his vision. He saw the Lord symbolically cleansing him of his sin. The assurance of God's forgiveness, particularly in light of Isaiah's sinfulness, led to his willing response. Isaiah was not "coerced into service; rather, his will makes its ready response a grateful reaction to God's forgiving grace" (Barker and Kohlenberger, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged*, Zondervan). Isaiah's answer to the question of the Triune God ("us") was, "Here am I; send me." He did not wait to see whether anyone else would step forward. No other response to the holy God who had forgiven him was acceptable. A man named Simon wanted to "serve" the Lord because of the power and authority he saw wielded by the apostles. His attitude brought a severe rebuke from Peter and a call for repentance (Acts 8:18-24). Paul spoke of insincere men who were motivated by envy and strife to preach Christ (Phil. 1:15-16). Sadly, as we have discovered in our own day, there are those who

proclaim themselves servants of Christ but are motivated by money, power, and prestige. They are not true messengers of Christ but rather manipulators of people. Isaiah was offered none of these things. In fact, the Lord went on to tell Isaiah his message would be met with hard-hearted rejection (Isa. 6:9-10). Isaiah, however, did not waver in his commitment to proclaim God's message. He was motivated purely by gratitude for God's mercy and grace, and so it should be for us. We are not to wait for a divinely given vision to call us into God's service. We have the completed Word of God today, and it calls all of us to serve the Lord and take His message of salvation to the world. That same Word reveals to us the holiness of God, our own sinfulness, and the forgiveness we can experience through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That knowledge alone should motivate us to stand up and say voluntarily, "Here am I; send me. Send me wherever You want. I want no reward but the reward of knowing I am pleasing You."

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

What do you expect of a cook at your favorite restaurant? Should the person have experience as a cook, know the basics of food preparation, and follow recipes? Of course. But there is an even more basic expectation you have of your chef: clean hands! Any business that deals with preparing food must be extremely conscientious about maintaining high standards of cleanliness. For example, no one would want to eat at a restaurant if news surfaced that a customer there found evidence that such standards had in some way been violated. In restrooms at restaurants, one will see the omnipresent sign that reads, "Employees must wash hands before returning to work." Almost any job requires a person be qualified in some way to do it. But what qualifies a person to be a prophet of the Most High God? One might conclude that such a servant of God would need to meet a long list of qualifications. As we consider Isaiah's call to be a prophet, we may be surprised to learn that a standard that applied to him as a deliverer of spiritual food is similar to what we expect of those who prepare physical food: cleanliness. Let's review the call of this great prophet.

Isaiah received his call to be a prophet approximately 200 years after the nation of Israel separated into two kingdoms in 931 BC: Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom). Isaiah was living when the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, but his primary ministry was to the southern kingdom of Judah. (The kings mentioned in Isaiah 1:1 are all kings of Judah.) The life of Isaiah illustrates the wide range of circumstances in which a prophet of the Lord could find himself as he carried out his mission. He served the Lord during the reign of one of Judah's most wicked kings (Ahaz) as well as during the reign of one of Judah's best (Ahaz's godly son, Hezekiah). In fact, Isaiah's counsel guided Hezekiah during an Assyrian invasion that threatened the southern kingdom in 701 BC (Isaiah 37:5-7, 21-35). Hezekiah prayed to the Lord in trusting faith (37:14-20), and Judah was spared the onslaught that had befallen the northern kingdom of Israel 21 years earlier. The fact that the call of Isaiah is not found until Isaiah 6 causes some to wonder why it is not recorded closer to the book's beginning, as is the case with Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-19) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1-3:15). Some suggest that Isaiah's call actually did precede his messages, but the account of the call is placed in chapter 6 to make a specific and important point. The messages in the first five chapters explain why a prophet like Isaiah was so desperately needed to confront God's people. The fifth chapter in particular elaborates on what has happened to a people originally called by God to be "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Isaiah 5 features a word picture of a vineyard to describe both the Lord's care for his people and his disappointment that they had not produced the desired crop (Isaiah 5:1-7). A Jewish tradition says that Isaiah suffered a cruel death of martyrdom by being sawn in two during the wicked reign of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh. This incident may be referred to in Hebrews 11:37.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Isaiah's Vision (Isa 6:1-4)

- 1 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 *{seraphs}*; 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.

Majesty of God (1)

God is majestic because nothing can contain Him (I King 8:27)

"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!

God is majestic because there is nowhere we can go from His presence (Ps 139:7-10)

7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

God is majestic because there is no one or thing like Him (Exod 15:11)

"Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

God is majestic because of His great power and strength (Eph 1:18-21)

18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

God is majestic because He is worthy and deserves it (Rev 4:8-11)

8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." 9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Praise of God (2-4)

God must be praised because of His acts of power and greatness (Ps 150:1-6)

1 Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. 2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. 3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, 4 praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, 5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. 6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

God must be praised because of His righteousness (Ps 7:17)

I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

God must be praised because He counsels and instructs us (Ps 16:7)

I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.

God must be praised because He is our rock, fortress and deliverer (Ps 18:2-3)

2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. 3 I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

God must be praised because He lives (Ps 18:46)

The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior!

God must be praised because of His mercy (Ps 28:6-7)

6 Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard my cry for mercy. 7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.

God must be praised because it is fitting (Ps 33:1-4)

1 Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. 2 Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. 3 Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. 4 For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.

God must be praised because He is our hope (Ps 42:5)

5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Commentary on Seraphs

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

This is the only place in the Bible where *seraphs* are mentioned. (While there are similarities between the seraphs and the “beasts” described in Revelation 4:6-8, the latter are never called *seraphs*.) Apparently they had human form except that *each* one had *six wings*. *Two* of these *wings* were used to cover *their faces* (perhaps to protect the seraphs from beholding the glory of God) and *two* to cover *their feet*. The third pair of wings was used so that the seraphs could fly. The primary function of the seraphs appears to have been to praise God and to serve as his messengers. The term *seraphs* comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to burn”; thus the seraphs were the “burning ones.” Some see that as suggestive of their role as purifying agents, as in verses 6 and 7.

From the International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia

A plural word occurring only in (Isa 6:2) ff-- Isaiah's vision of Yahweh. The origin of the term in Hebrew is uncertain. Saraph in (Num 21:6; Isa 14:29), etc., signifies a fiery serpent. Seraphim are in Jewish theology connected with cherubim and ophanim as the three highest orders of attendants on Yahweh, and are superior to the angels who are messengers sent on various errands.

From the Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament

According to the orthodox view, which originated with Dionysius the Areopagite, they stand at the head of the nine choirs of angels, the first rank consisting of seraphim, cherubim, and throni. And this is not without support, if we compare the cherubim mentioned in Ezekiel, which carried the chariot of the divine throne; whereas here the seraphim are said to surround the seat on which the Lord was enthroned. In any case, the seraphim and cherubim were heavenly beings of different kinds; and there is no weight in the attempts made by Hendewerk and Stickel to prove that they are one and the same. And certainly the name seraphim does not signify merely spirits as such, but even, if not the highest of all, yet a distinct order from the rest; for the Scriptures really teach that there are gradations in rank in the hierarchy of heaven. Nor were they mere symbols or fanciful images, as Hävernick imagines, but real spiritual beings, who visibly

appeared to the prophet, and that in a form corresponding to their own supersensuous being, and to the design of the whole transaction. While these seraphim hovered above on both sides of Him that sat upon the throne, and therefore formed two opposite choirs, each ranged in a semicircle, they presented antiphonal worship to Him that sat upon the throne.

Isaiah's Call to Service (Isa 6:5-8)

5 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."

6 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."

8 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."

Recognition of unworthiness (5)

Recognizing the sin in our life makes us unworthy (Luke 5:8)

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

Recognizing that we have put others before God makes us unworthy (Matt 10:37-38)

37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Recognizing that we have preferred earthly thing instead of God makes us unworthy (Matt 22:8)

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.

Recognizing that we may have rejected God makes us unworthy (Acts 13:46)

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.

Cleansing by God (6-7)

Cleansed by shedding of Jesus blood (Heb 9:22)

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Cleansing of acts that lead to death (Heb 9:13-14)

13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Cleansed by coming near to God (James 4:8)

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Cleansed by focusing on and doing righteousness (Isa 1:16-17)

6 wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, 17 learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Cleansed by the word of God (1 Tim 4:5)

for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Cleansed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Cleansed by our heart being sprinkled by God through faith (Heb 10:22)

let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Cleansed by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14)

I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

The appropriate response (8)

Making ourselves available (Here I am)

Available by first giving ourselves to God (2 Cor 8:5)

And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Available by submitting to God (2 Chron 30:8)

Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; submit to the LORD. Come to the sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you.

Available by offering ourselves to God as an instrument of righteousness (Rom 6:13)

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Available by living to the Lord because we belong to Him (Rom 14:8)

If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Available by honoring God with our body (1 Cor 6:19-20)

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

Becoming a living sacrifice and servant of God (Send me)

By offering our whole self to God (Rom 12:1)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.

By being renewed daily inwardly (2 Cor 4:16)

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

By continually offering to God a fruit of the lips which should be a sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15)

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-the fruit of lips that confess his name.

By being a living stone in the spiritually house of God (1 Peter 2:5)

you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

By being a slave of righteousness (Rom 6:16)

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Allen Ross

I. Revelation: The revelation of the glory of the LORD (6:1-5)

A. The LORD reveals His glory (1-4).

Verse 1 begins the report of the heavenly vision in the year that King Uzziah died. Several points from the Hebrew text need to be noted here. The first would be the use of the verb “saw” (*wa'er'eh* from *ra'ah*); this is not the word for the “seer” of visions, but the ordinary word “to see” or look at something. This suggests Isaiah is very much awake and physically observing this sight.

The object of the sight is “the Lord”—*'adonay*, and not the personal name Yahweh (which would be rendered “LORD”). The term signifies lord or master, the sovereign. The term “sitting” (*yoshev* from *yashav*) when used of God is an anthropomorphism; it means “rule,” that is, sit enthroned above. The word “throne” is actually used here; in other passages it must be understood.

The exalted nature of the Lord is presented to us with “high” (*ram* from *rum*) and “lifted up” (*w'nissa'* from *nasa'*). The physical description of His location, part of the anthropomorphic vision, is also symbolic of His nature as the “Highest”—an expression often used in the Bible for absolute sovereignty. The symbol of sovereignty, “his train,” completely fills the temple. Such is the dominance of the Lord of Glory.

Verse 2 introduces the angels. The term for angels in this order is *seraphim* (from *saraph*, “to burn”—“are they not all flames of fire?”). These are attending (literally, “standing about/over him”) the LORD as ministering servants. Their description focuses on their wings (Hebrew uses a distributive construction: “six wings, six wings to [each] one); each angel had six wings. Two covered the angel’s face—such is the nature of God that even angels blush to look at Him—two covered their bodily parts (probably a euphemism, feet meaning their central body), and with two they flew. The vision is similar to Ezekiel’s on Ezekiel 1.

Verse 3 reports what they cried continually to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of Armies; the whole earth is full of His glory!” This line needs a lot of attention. It is the central and turning point of the passage (as well as a prominent part in liturgy).

The word for “holy” is *qadosh* (s.v. *qadash*). A study of this word shows that it means “distinct, unique, set apart.” It does not mean “righteous”; but we use the word “righteous as well as all the other attributes to explain what holy means (i.e., in what way is God distinct from us, from angels, from pagan gods?). The description of God as holy is a major theme in the Book of Isaiah. If I may simplify it, it means there is no one like the LORD in the universe. The threefold use of the term is a Hebrew way of expressing the superlative degree—He is incomparably holy. This *trisagion* (as it is called, Greek for thrice holy) may harmonize with the later and full revelation of the tri-unity of the Godhead (see Isa. 48:12ff.); but it does not in itself teach the trinity.

The expression “Yahweh of Armies” must be understood. The armies are all armies—earthly or heavenly. They are all at His disposal. The use of this epithet usually introduces a judgment theme.

The other key word in here is “glory” (*kavod* from *kavad*). The basic idea of this word has to do with “weight, being heavy”; metaphorically this becomes “be important.” To describe God as glorious, if I may run the risk of oversimplification again, means that He is the most important person in the universe. The physical manifestation of His presence, the “glory of the LORD,” is metonymical for Him Himself. The words of the angels assert that the whole earth is filled with the evidence that Yahweh is the sovereign God of the universe. Isaiah’s vision concludes with the note in verse 4 of the effects of the Presence—the place shook, and was filled with smoke. This imagery is drawn from Mount Sinai and the Sanctuary.

B. The vision convicts God’s servant of sin (5).

Verse 5 gives the typical response of one who sees such a scene—struck with the knowledge of one’s own sinfulness. “Woe is me.” Hebrew “woe” (‘*oy*) is a wail of lamentation. It is an expression that cries out of distress, that all is lost, that grief will overtake; there is nothing that can be done.

The key word in here is “unclean” (*tame*). The better that you know the Book of Leviticus the better you will understand this. It comes from the temple liturgy and ritual. To be “unclean” need not mean “sinful”; but it does mean off limits, out of bounds, unacceptable in the presence of God because of physical, earthy nature and contaminations. The focus is on the lips (here a metonymy of cause)—what he talks about is perhaps good, clean, and normal; but it is not as holy as the angels’ speech was. Question: What will we talk about in the presence of the LORD? How will our conversations change? The Bible has so much to say about speech, how it is a window to the heart. Isaiah, and the nation, are not fit to enter the Presence of the LORD—their speech betrays greater problems.

This is a critical section. Isaiah is probably the finest in the land. People often compare themselves with others and come out looking fine. The standard, however, is the glory of the LORD. There is an old saying: If you have never caught sight (literally or figuratively) of the Sublime, you have never really seen yourself.

II. Sanctification: The acknowledgment of sinfulness brings complete forgiveness (6:6,7).

The next stage in the preparation of God’s servant is sanctification, sanctification that was inspired by the vision of the glory of the LORD. What is described in verses 6 and 7 is a symbolic act; it signifies that the sin was removed. We know this is symbolic because never in the sanctuary was sin removed by searing the lips with a coal from the altar. What reality there was to this we may only surmise—it is unlikely that an angel actually took a coal and touched his lips. This is a heavenly scene and the heavenly correspondent to the coals is meant; the coals were the instrument of consuming the sacrifices that became the sin offering. The point is that the prophet was cleansed by direct divine intervention. The focus is on the lips because they represented the sinfulness of the prophet. The prophet was cleansed; the people, however, had yet to hear the word, confess, and be cleansed.

The meaning of this act is clear from the end of verse 7: “your iniquity has been removed, your sin atoned.” The term “iniquity” here probably includes all three of the categories of meaning it has—sin, guilt, and the punishment for the sin. The critical word to define here is “atoned” (*kuppār* from *kipper*). A careful study of this word and its usage will reveal the meanings of “expiate, pacify, atone.” There is a homonym—exactly the same spelling of the root—that means “cover over.” Unfortunately, in many studies and many sermons the two have not been kept as separate words, and the idea that atonement only covers over and does not expiate has become popular. No. The sins were removed; the person was forgiven. The point here is that Isaiah’s sins were forgiven; God will not bring them up again. (The only thing that Old Testament believers did not know, and could not know, was who would ultimately pay for these sins, since they repeated sacrifices. But God knew, and on the basis of that perfect sacrifice [which, by the way, was from before the foundation of the world] He could guarantee forgiveness. They had His word on it).

III. Dedication: The removal of sin enables obedience to the call of God (6:8).

Verse 8 records the commission of the prophet in response to the Word of God. The first verb is fraught with significance: “Then I heard” (*wa’eshma* from *shama*). The conjunction is a “*waw* consecutive” that expresses the sequence: this hearing follows the preceding sanctification almost with a “so that” or “and then.” A valid point can be made that one cannot “hear” the call of God until there is sanctification. Once one is forgiven and walking with Him, one can hear His voice through His word. One has to be on speaking terms with God.

The parallelism of the word of the Lord (not LORD) is forceful: “Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?” The call passages in the Bible all use the verb “send”; it expresses divine authentication and enablement for the mission, usually accompanied by the divine Presence. Unless the Lord sends, one cannot go with any authority.

For discussions of “for us” you can go back to the several treatments in the commentaries, and back to Genesis. It has been interpreted to mean the Lord and the angels, which is possible; it has also been taken as a plural of majesty for the Godhead that allows for the later full revelation of the nature of God.

Isaiah’s response? “Here am I, send me.” You probably will not have the time to do much with this, since the other parts are so important. And that is fine since this is easily understood. But “here am I” is a bold break-through response: “Look—me!” And then the verb is repeated, “send me.” Not “I will go.” That would be presumptuous. But “send me,” an imperative, is a request for the divine authority that goes with the mission.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-how-sovereign-lord-god-prepares-his-servants-isaiah-61-13>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The edge that spiritual words are meant to possess can be dulled with misuse. Without thinking, we may utter insipid interjections such as “Holy mackerel!” We may refer to a misbehaving child as “a holy terror,” etc.

Isaiah’s vision of the holy God had an intensity that we will probably never experience in this earthly life. The intensity of his experience will be further diminished for us as we misuse the word holy. The holiness of God must be understood in an absolute sense. That understanding was what caused Isaiah to be utterly dismayed by his own lack of holiness. To take a nonchalant view of one’s own unholiness probably indicates a failure to understand what it means to be holy. We know that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). Do we also know that God is “holy, holy, holy”?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. God is sovereign over all creation (Isa. 6:1)
2. God is holy, and He should be exalted and praised simply because He is God (vss. 2-4)
3. When we are unclean and come into the presence of God, our response should be one of repentance (vs. 5)
4. God provides the means of our cleansing (vs. 6)
5. The forgiveness of God purges us of our sins and iniquities (vs. 7)
6. God calls whomever He pleases. We must be willing to serve Him (vs. 8)