

Isaiah's Call and Ministry

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 2:1–5

Background Scripture: Isaiah 6:1–13; 7:1–7; 20:1–6; 38:1–22

Today's Scripture: Isaiah 6:1–8; 38:1–5

I. Commissioned by God

Isaiah 6:1–8

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord

saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

1a. *Uzziah* reigned as *king* of Judah for 52 years. We don't know the exact years of his reign, but one estimate gives the range of 792–740 BC.

1b. At least two possibilities exist regarding the setting of *the temple*. One possibility is that the setting is the earthly temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Another option is that Isaiah sees the heavenly temple. Regardless, the significance is that Isaiah sees the location where the enthroned Lord rules.

That Isaiah *saw the Lord* is echoed in John 12:41. This fact does not contradict Exodus 33:20 or John 1:18. What Isaiah sees is called a *theophany*, which is a manifestation of God, not God in his actual essence.

The Lord's position *seated on a throne* reveals him as the living heavenly King. Although the earthly King Uzziah has died, the Lord still reigns! The Lord's elevated position reflects the *exalted* nature of his being.

The expansive nature of the *train of his robe* is echoed in Revelation 1:13. Special garments marked the identity of significant figures, like priests or kings. However, the garment Isaiah sees is unlike any garment worn by a human. The size of

this garment *filled the temple*, leaving Isaiah incapable of giving further description.

2. The word *seraphim* is a transliteration (not a translation) of a Hebrew word. That's where a word in one language is brought over into another language simply by swapping the letters of the word in the original language into the letters that sound the same in the receptor language.

3a. The repetition of the word *holy* stresses its significance: the Lord's holiness is unparalleled!

The Hebrew adjective translated "holy" appears in 34 verses in Isaiah; clearly, it's a vital concept to the writer, implying "separation" or "distinctiveness." The Lord's holiness means that he is separate from his creation in that he is morally perfect.

The designation *Lord Almighty* or "Lord God Almighty" appears 291 times in the Old Testament, with about 75 percent of those occurring in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. As the timeline of history advances, God's power is increasingly stressed since the title reflects the Lord's power as king and commander of the heavenly armies (see 1 Samuel 4:4; Psalm 24:10; Isaiah 1:24; etc.).

3b. No human-made structure can confine the glory of God. Since *the whole earth* belongs to God as its creator, it cannot but help to reflect *his glory*.

4. The presence of *smoke* in Scripture is sometimes associated with the presence of God. The smoke in the context of the verse at hand brings to mind the cloud that "filled the temple of the Lord" in Solomon's time (1 Kings 8:10).

5. The expression *Woe to me!* reveals Isaiah's feeling of unworthiness to experience the sights and sounds before him. He knows his unholiness prevents him from being in the presence of a holy God, *the Lord Almighty*, even in a vision. The prophet confesses that his sin makes him

unclean. He also admits to living *among a people of unclean lips*, but this admission is not to shift the blame to excuse his own sinful condition. In acknowledging his own unholiness, he is taking personal responsibility for it.

6. In response to Isaiah's admission in the previous verse, *one of the seraphim* goes into action on the man's behalf. *The altar* from which the seraph takes *a live coal* refers possibly to the altar in the temple Solomon built (1 Kings 9:25). But an altar in a temple of the heavenly environs cannot be ruled out because an altar is present there as well (Revelation 6:9; 14:18; 16:7). Isaiah undoubtedly watches with great apprehension as the scene unfolds. Having just confessed his own sinful unworthiness, is he about to be punished?

7. We can only imagine the emotions that surge through Isaiah as he witnesses the seraph approaching with a burning coal. Three of Isaiah's five senses have informed his experience thus far. By sight he has beheld the Lord (Isaiah 6:1); by hearing he has perceived the declaration of the seraphim (6:3); by sight and (assumed) smell he is aware of smoke (6:4). Now the fourth sense, touch, comes into play. We do not know if Isaiah feels any sting or pain from the red-hot coal that touches his *mouth*. If so, it must be temporary, as the words *your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for* speak not of judgment but of forgiveness.

8a. First, the seraphim spoke (Isaiah 6:3). Then Isaiah spoke (6:5). Then one seraph spoke (6:7). Now, *the Lord* himself speaks by asking two questions. The first question deals with "sender action," and the second deals with "servant action." These are important questions because the Lord expects those who trust in him to be his hands and feet at times.

The first-person plural pronoun *us* is similar to the language used in account of

creation and in response to the building of the Tower of Babel. The plural pronoun may refer to the Lord and the seraphim who make up his heavenly counsel. Other commentators suggest that the plural pronoun may refer to the three persons of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah, however, is probably not mulling over such matters at this point; all he hears is the call for someone to *go* on the Lord's behalf. And he wastes no time in responding.

8b. Isaiah's once unclean lips are ready to serve on the Lord's behalf. He is willing to go wherever the Lord would *send* him.

II. Communication with a King

Isaiah 38:1–5

¹ In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, “This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.”

² Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³ “Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: ⁵ “Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.’”

1a. The events of Isaiah 38:1–5 occur sometime before the deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyrian invasion, described in Isaiah 36–37. This is based on Isaiah 38:6, which describes the rescue as a future promise. By this time, Isaiah's lengthy prophetic ministry was several decades old.

Hezekiah reigned as king of Judah from 715 to 686 BC. The king's diagnosis is untold.

1b. We do not know whether the ailing king sent for *the prophet Isaiah* or whether the Lord directed Isaiah to appear before the king. Either way, Isaiah's earlier proclamation, “Here I am. send me!” (Isaiah 6:8b), is consistent with his role as God's messenger.

The message Isaiah brings is not of his own but from *the Lord*. Two phrases repeat the same mortal warning: Hezekiah *will not recover* and is *going to die* and *not live*. Isaiah gives no promise of healing. Instead, he directs the king to *put his affairs in order*.

2. The prophet's somber message devastates *Hezekiah*. Perhaps the king is lying on his bed when he receives Isaiah's word. Turning *his face to the wall* may be an attempt to hide his reaction from others present or to focus on his prayer—or both.

3. Hezekiah has reason to claim that he had *done what is good*. As king of Judah, he has renovated the temple, overseen its purification, and restored worship practices there (2 Chronicles 29). He has removed artifacts of pagan worship throughout Judah (2 Kings 18:4).

4. The parallel account in 2 Kings 20:4 adds more detail. It describes how Isaiah departs after giving the message but has not gone far when *the Lord* directs him to give another *word* to the king.

5a. The declaration *this is what the Lord . . . says* indicates that the prophet's message is not his own. Instead, Isaiah brings it from the Lord.

5b. This message announces a reversal. The biblical record reveals that, at first, Hezekiah became prideful (2 Chronicles 32:24–25). But subsequent repentance paved the way for notable accomplishments (32:26–33).

Involvement Learning

Isaiah's Call and Ministry

Into the Lesson

How would you respond to one the following scenarios?

1. You are lost in a dark cave without a companion, weapon, or light. You hear a rumbling noise deep in the cave. The sound grows louder and seems to approach you. What would you do next?
2. You open your mailbox and discover an envelope containing a cashier's check written for \$10,000. The check is made out to you, but there is no personal information regarding the source of the check. What would you do next?

When we experience something extraordinary, our response may have a lasting and powerful effect. In today's study, consider how Isaiah responded to the extraordinary call of God.

Key Verse

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

Into the Word

Read Isaiah 6:1–8. Write down words or phrases from the text related to the below senses:

Sight: _____

Smell: _____

Hearing: _____

Touch _____

Read Isaiah 38:1–5 and decide whether each statement below is true or false. If the statement is false, rewrite it to make it true.

1. Isaiah spoke a word to King Manasseh.

2. The king rejected Isaiah's word and refused to turn to God in prayer.

3. The king requested that the Lord remember the good works of the king's ancestors.

4. Isaiah wept when he saw the response of the king.

5. The Lord promised to add five years to the life of the king.

Into Life

List ways to discern an authentic call of God from a mere felt need.

Thought to Remember

Respond to God's call!