



# Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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# Isaiah's Vision of the Lord (Isaiah 6:1-8)

<sup>1</sup> *In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord seated on a high, elevated throne. The hem of his robe filled the temple.* <sup>2</sup> *Seraphs stood over him; each one had six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and they used the remaining two to fly.* <sup>3</sup> *They called out to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven's Armies! His majestic splendor fills the entire earth!"* <sup>4</sup> *The sound of their voices shook the door frames, and the temple was filled with smoke.*

# Isaiah's Vision of the Lord (Isaiah 6:1-8)

<sup>5</sup> I said, "Woe to me! I am destroyed, for my lips are contaminated by sin, and I live among people whose lips are contaminated by sin. My eyes have seen the king, the LORD of Heaven's Armies." <sup>6</sup> But then one of the seraphs flew toward me. In his hand was a hot coal he had taken from the altar with tongs. <sup>7</sup> He touched my mouth with it and said, "Look, this coal has touched your lips. Your evil is removed; your sin is forgiven." <sup>8</sup> I heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom will I send? Who will go on our behalf?" I answered, "Here I am, send me!"

*(New English Translation)*

# Recap of What Sproul Told Us About Isaiah 6:1-3

- “*In the year of King Uzziah’s death*”, Isaiah saw a vision of “*the Lord*” – **Adonai**, the sovereign one – seated on his heavenly throne.
- Uzziah, who had reigned for over fifty years, had been one of the better kings of Judah.
- And though he had faltered spiritually at the end of his reign, his death still came as a shock and disappointment to Isaiah and the people of Judah.
- Now, in **contrast** to the death of a sovereign **earthly** king, Isaiah saw what the New Testament suggests was a preincarnate glimpse of Christ Himself seated in full majesty on his throne (John 12:41).

# Recap of What Sproul Told Us About Isaiah 6:1-3

- In ancient days the clothing of monarchs was a measure of their status.
- Therefore the Lord's flowing robe that Isaiah saw filling the temple was visual demonstration of his high majestic status.
- The seraphim were especially created by God to serve Him day and night in His immediate presence.
- Their need to have extra wings to cover their faces in God's presence, and their repeated proclamation of God as "*Holy, holy, holy*", demonstrate the majesty, transcendence, and holiness of God.



<sup>4</sup> *The sound of [the seraphim's] voices shook the door frames, and the temple was filled with smoke.*

- Here Isaiah tells us that as the seraphim fly back and forth about the throne singing to one another of God's incomparable glory, the sound of their voices causes the "*door frames*" to shake.
- Why the "*door frames*" should be singled out is unclear.
- Perhaps Isaiah was aware of *this* shaking because he was standing (or prostrated) in the doorway.
- At any rate, the hymn was thunderous, rocking the great building to its foundations.
- All the while the sanctuary was filling with smoke.
- Probably this should be understood as the smoke of incense, in which case *smell* is added to sight and sound as the sensory elements of Isaiah's experience.

<sup>5</sup> [Isaiah said], “**Woe to me! I am destroyed, for my lips are contaminated by sin, and I live among people whose lips are contaminated by sin. My eyes have seen the king, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.**”

- Up to this point, Isaiah has been made aware of the awesome holiness of God, but **now** he has suddenly and brutally become aware of his own **lack** of holiness.
- Isaiah, who has been pronouncing woe upon **others**, must **now** pronounce woe upon **himself!**
- Furthermore, every member of the nation of Judah where Isaiah will serve as God’s prophet must **also** come to recognize their sinful condition before God.
- Hearing a prophetic announcement is not enough. The people must recognize their own **unworthiness**.
- Such a realization cannot help but produce **despair**.

<sup>5</sup> [Isaiah said], “Woe to me! I am destroyed, for **my lips are contaminated by sin, and I live among people whose lips are contaminated by sin.** My eyes have seen the king, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”

- Isaiah’s vision of the majesty, transcendence, and holiness of God causes him to realize that he and the people of Judah to whom he ministers have “**lips**” that “**are contaminated by sin**”. Why?
- Because it is through their “**lips**” that they **express** the sinful thoughts of their **hearts** which do **not** belong to God.
- That which God belongs to God must be **pure** and **uncontaminated**.
- Therefore, it is not just a **purification of the lips** that is needed.
- Nor is it mere **ritual** purification that is needed.
- In some way, sin and iniquity must be removed if Isaiah (and his people) are ever to serve God with clean lips.



**6** *But then one of the seraphs flew toward me. In his hand was a hot coal he had taken from the altar with tongs.* **7** *He touched my mouth with it and said, “Look, this coal has touched your lips. Your evil is removed; your sin is forgiven.”*

- This verse speaks of the depths of God’s **grace**.
- Isaiah does not plead for mercy, nor does he make great vows of what he will do if only God will deliver him.
- It would seem that that **Isaiah** considers his case to be **hopeless**.
- “*But then one of the seraphs flew toward me*”, more than likely by the command of God.
- God does not reveal himself to Isaiah in order to **destroy** him, but rather to **redeem** him.

***6 But then one of the seraphs flew toward me. In his hand was a hot coal he had taken from the altar with tongs. 7 He touched my mouth with it and said, "Look, this coal has touched your lips. Your evil is removed; your sin is forgiven."***

- Notice that the initiative has been on God's part all along:
  - Revealing (verses 2-3),
  - Excluding and Condemning (4-5)
- And now here God sends the seraph to the one he has chosen to save.

<sup>6</sup> *But then one of the seraphs flew toward me. In his hand was a **hot coal** he had taken from the altar with tongs. <sup>7</sup> He touched my mouth with it and said, “Look, this coal has touched your lips. Your evil is removed; your sin is forgiven.”*

- In the Old Testament fire is *usually* not a *cleansing* agent but is symbolic of the *wrath* of God (Gen 3:24; Num 11:1-3) and his *unapproachable holiness* (Exod 3:2-6; 19:18-25):
  - *When the people complained, it displeased the Lord. When the Lord heard it, his anger burned, and so **the fire of the Lord burned among them** and consumed some of the outer parts of the camp. When the people cried to Moses, he prayed to the Lord, and **the fire** died out. (Num 11:1-2)*
  - *Now Mount Sinai was completely covered with smoke because the Lord had descended on it **in fire**, and its smoke went up like the smoke of a great furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently... The Lord said to Moses, “Go down and **solemnly warn the people, lest they force their way through to the Lord to look, and many of them perish.**” (Exod 19:18, 21)*

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- But here, the “*hot coal*” which was brought to Isaiah was fire “*taken from the altar*”.
- The perpetual fire (Lev 6:12-13) on the “*altar*” went beyond symbolizing divine wrath, for the altar was the place where the holy God accepted and was satisfied by blood sacrifice (Lev 17:11).
- The “*altar*” symbolizes the ideas of atonement, propitiation and satisfaction required by God and of the forgiveness, cleansing and reconciliation needed by his people.
- All this is achieved through substitutionary sacrifice and is brought to Isaiah, encapsulated in the single symbol of the live coal.

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- The touching of Isaiah’s lips with a live coal demonstrates how God ministers to the sinner at the point that he confesses his spiritual need (cf. verse 5).
- The effect is *instantaneous*.
- In the Hebrew grammar, the two verbs, “*touched your lips*” and “*your evil is removed*”, are *simultaneous* – as soon as the one happened the other happened also.
- Isaiah contributes *nothing*; *all* of Isaiah’s deliverance is of **God** – “*this coal has touched your lips. Your evil is removed*”.
- A comprehensive work of dealing with sin takes place.

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- Isaiah confesses what he *knows* (that his lips are contaminated by sin) but God deals with his:
  - “*evil*” – the inner reality of the deviant nature
  - “*sin*” – the specific instances of his shortcoming.
- God deals with our sin through the payment of a price.
- The Hebrew verb (*kippēr*) translated here as “*forgiven*” means “to pay a ransom”, the price which justice requires.



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- God covers our guilt out of out of mercy and *grace*.
- But his doing this is not so much the pardon of a father, but the releasing by a judge.
- Just as we might speak of a sum of money as sufficient to “cover” a debt, so *kipper* (translated here as “*forgiven*”) is the payment of whatever divine justice sees is needed in order to cover the sinner’s debt: the death of a *substitutionary sacrifice* on the altar.

<sup>8</sup> *I heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom will I send? Who will go on our behalf?" I answered, "Here I am, send me!"*

- And then, while his the flesh of his lips is still sizzling, Isaiah hears the voice of Adonai, "*Whom will I send? Who will go on our behalf?*"
- And notice Isaiah *doesn't* say, "Here I am over here," indicating his *location*, but "*Here am I, send me!*"
- *That's* how people respond when their lips have been cleansed by a Holy God.
- *That's* how people respond when a divine and supernatural life has invaded their souls and quickened them from spiritual death to spiritual life.

# Isaiah's Commission from the Lord (Isaiah 6:9-13)

<sup>9</sup> [The Lord] said, "Go and tell these people: 'Listen continually, but don't understand. Look continually, but don't perceive.'<sup>10</sup> Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed."<sup>11</sup> I replied, "How long, Lord?" He said, "Until cities are in ruins and unpopulated, and houses are uninhabited, and the land is ruined and devastated,<sup>12</sup> and the LORD has sent the people off to a distant place, and the very heart of the land is completely abandoned.<sup>13</sup> Even if only a tenth of the people remain in the land, it will again be destroyed, like one of the large sacred trees or an Asherah pole, when a sacred pillar on a high place is thrown down. That sacred pillar symbolizes the special chosen family."

*(New English Translation)*

<sup>9</sup> [The Lord] said, “Go and tell these people: “**Listen continually, but don’t understand. Look continually, but don’t perceive.**”<sup>10</sup> **Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed.”**

- Isaiah’s message (verse 9) and his task (verse 10) constitute, at first sight, the oddest commission ever given to a prophet: to tell people **not** to understand and to effect heart-hardening and spiritual blindness!
- There is, however, **no way** to evade the **plain meaning** of these verses.
- Verse 9 speaks of both the **outer** faculties (hearing, seeing) and the **inner** ones (understanding/‘discerning’, perceiving/‘knowing’).
- Verse 10 gives a comprehensive list of the perceiving senses (heart, ears, and eyes,) thus emphasizing a **total** inability of the people to comprehend.

<sup>9</sup> [The Lord] said, “Go and tell these people: “Listen continually, but don’t understand. Look continually, but don’t perceive.’<sup>10</sup> Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed.”

- The repeated use of these verses in the New Testament is an **additional** reason to be concerned that we interpret them correctly :
  - *For this reason I [Jesus] speak to them in parables: Although they see they do not see, and although they hear they do not hear nor do they understand. And concerning them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “You will listen carefully yet will never understand, you will look closely yet will never comprehend. For the heart of this people has become dull; they are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, so that they would not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.”* (Mat 13:13-15)

<sup>9</sup> [The LORD] said, “Go and tell these people: “Listen continually, but don’t understand. Look continually, but don’t perceive.’<sup>10</sup> Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed.”

- The repeated use of these verses in the New Testament is an **additional** reason to be concerned that we interpret them correctly:
  - *When [Jesus] was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. He said to them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those outside, everything is in parables, **“so that although they look they may look but not see, and although they hear they may hear but not understand, so they may not repent and be forgiven.”*** (Mark 4:1-12, cf. Luke 8:9-10)



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- The repeated use of these verses in the New Testament is an **additional** reason to be concerned that we interpret them correctly:
  - *Although Jesus had performed so many miraculous signs before them, they still refused to believe in him, so that the word of the prophet Isaiah would be fulfilled. He said, “Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” For this reason they could not believe because again **Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn to me, and I would heal them.”** Isaiah said these things because he saw Christ’s glory and spoke about him.* (John 12:37-41)

<sup>9</sup> [The LORD] said, “Go and tell these people: “Listen continually, but don’t understand. Look continually, but don’t perceive.’<sup>10</sup> Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed.”

- The repeated use of these verses in the New Testament is an **additional** reason to be concerned that we interpret them correctly:
  - Paul made one last statement: **“The Holy Spirit spoke rightly to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘Go to this people and say, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will never understand, and you will keep on looking, but will never perceive.’ For the heart of this people has become dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, so that they would not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”** (Acts 28:25b-27)

<sup>9</sup> [The LORD] said, “Go and tell these people: “Listen continually, but don’t understand. Look continually, but don’t perceive.’<sup>10</sup> Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed.”

- How did *Isaiah* obey these words?
- According to the criticism levelled at him in 28:9-10, Isaiah taught with such simplicity and clarity that the sophisticates of his day scorned him as fit only to conduct a kindergarten.
- The book of Isaiah, as it has come to us, bears all the marks of a plain, systematic, reasoned approach.
- It is clear that Isaiah did not understand his commission as one to blind people by the *obscurity* or *complexity* of message.

<sup>9</sup> *[The LORD] said, “Go and tell these people: “Listen continually, but don’t understand. Look continually, but don’t perceive.’* <sup>10</sup> *Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed.”*

- Isaiah, in fact, faced the preacher’s dilemma: if hearers are resistant to the truth, the only recourse is to tell them the truth yet again, more clearly than before.
- But to do this is to expose them to the risk of rejecting the truth yet again and, therefore, of increased hardness of heart.
- It could even be that the next rejection will prove to be the point at which the heart is hardened beyond recovery.
- The human eye cannot see this point in advance; it comes and goes unnoticed.
- But the all-sovereign God both knows it and appoints it as he presides in perfect justice over the psychological processes he created (cf. Ex. 4:21).

<sup>9</sup> *[The LORD] said, “Go and tell these people: “Listen continually, but don’t understand. Look continually, but don’t perceive.’* <sup>10</sup> *Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed.”*

- Isaiah’s task was to bring the Lord’s word with fresh, even unparalleled clarity, but in their response people would reach the point of no return.
- The imperatives of these verses must, therefore, be seen as expressing the inevitable outcome of Isaiah’s ministry.
- And, of course, this is exactly how things turned out for Judah, as is made clear in chapters 7-11.

***<sup>11</sup> I replied, “How long, Lord?” He said, “Until cities are in ruins and unpopulated, and houses are uninhabited, and the land is ruined and devastated, <sup>12</sup> and the LORD has sent the people off to a distant place, and the very heart of the land is completely abandoned.***

- Isaiah asks, “How will things go and what will be the end?”.
- The Lord predicts the cities and land will be devastated and emptied (11), and the people will be deported (12).
- Isaiah is left with no illusions about what is going to happen.
- Soon he will learn that the Assyrians would not be the agent in this as far as Jerusalem was concerned and eventually too the ultimate agent will be revealed to him.
- But here, at the outset of his ministry, he already knows the end: a colossal tragedy proceeding from a single cause – the people heard and refused the word of the Lord.



<sup>13</sup> *Even if only a tenth of the people remain in the land, it will again be destroyed, like one of the large sacred trees or an Asherah pole, when a sacred pillar on a high place is thrown down. That sacred pillar symbolizes the special chosen family.”*

- The translation given here in the NET Bible, is an ***allowable*** way of translating this text.
- But, the vast majority of other translations have translated this text ***differently***.
- After studying this passage, I have come to the conclusion that, given the context of this passage, the translators of the NET Bible are mistaken in the way they have chosen to translate this text.
- Thus, for ease of understanding, I am going to use the NLT to explain what I think this verse is saying.

<sup>13</sup> *If even a tenth-- a remnant-- survive, it will be invaded again and burned. But as a terebinth or oak tree leaves a stump when it is cut down, so Israel's stump will be a holy seed." (NLT)*

- Here the Lord offers a faint, but sure, ray of hope.
- Yes, the desolation will be complete. Not even a tenth part will remain.
- The nation will be like a forest whose stumps are burned after the trees are cut down.
- Yet even from such blasted stumps a shoot can burst forth. So it will be for Judah (cf. 10:33; 11:1).
- Utter desolation is sure, but that desolation is not the end.
- There will be offspring holy to the Lord, for the Lord is not finished with Israel.

<sup>13</sup> *If even a tenth-- a remnant-- survive, it will be invaded again and burned. But as a terebinth or oak tree leaves a stump when it is cut down, so Israel's stump will be a holy seed." (NLT)*

- God's promise to Abraham to bless the nations through his offspring is not to be forgotten (cf. 49: 19, 32).
- In this sense, the chapter is much like the book of Amos, which, while filled with judgment, nonetheless ends on a hopeful note.
- This is not to deny or in any way to mitigate the force of the judgment, but it is to say that in God's overall purposes judgment is never his last word.

# Next Time

I plan to cover Isaiah 7:10-17 which talks about The Sign of Immanuel.

# Class Discussion Time





# \*Class Discussion Time

- Some people find it strange and even disturbing that God would say to Isaiah:
  - *Go and tell these people: “Listen continually, but don’t understand. Look continually, but don’t perceive.’ Make the hearts of these people calloused; make their ears deaf and their eyes blind. **Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, their hearts might understand and they might repent and be healed.”***
- After today’s lesson, do you think you could explain this verse?



# \*Class Discussion Time

- Do you think that you would be able to use Isaiah 6:9-10 in combination with John 12:37-41 to show a Jehovah's witness that Jesus is Jehovah?
  - *Although Jesus had performed so many miraculous signs before them, they still refused to believe in him, so that the word of the prophet Isaiah would be fulfilled. He said, "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe because again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn to me, and I would heal them." Isaiah said these things because he saw Christ's glory and spoke about him. (John 12:37-41)*