

Isaiah in the Temple

Bible Background • [ISAIAH 6](#)
Printed Text • [ISAIAH 6:1–8](#)
Devotional Reading • [ISAIAH 66:18–23](#)

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE the circumstances of Isaiah’s call and his reaction to it; ARTICULATE Isaiah’s emotions as he reacted to his call; and ANSWER God’s call to service.

In Focus

A man of few words, Fred was quiet at work. He never went out to lunch with his other coworkers and rarely left his desk. He clocked in at 9 a.m. and clocked out at 5 p.m.

One day, a big meeting was called. Most people thought more layoffs were coming. The meeting was to inform the workers that one of the supervisors was retiring and her position was open. Everyone assumed that the office superstar Corey was going to get the position. Days went by and no word came about who was getting promoted.

The following week, another meeting was called to announce the newest supervisor to the company. To everyone’s surprise, including his own, Fred was named the new supervisor. Everyone was shocked! As Fred was announced, he wondered to himself, Why me? What have I done to receive this promotion? The CEO stated, “Most of you are probably wondering, why Fred of all people? We chose Fred because of his work ethic and his timeliness. He is very knowledgeable and thorough with his reports. He will be a strong leader.”

Some will see potential in us when others or even ourselves do not. In today’s lesson, we will learn that God saw the potential in Isaiah to be a leader and called him into service. Has someone ever seen potential in you and challenged you to a specific task?

Keep in Mind

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me” ([Isaiah 6:8](#)).

KJV

[Isaiah 6:1](#) In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

3 And one cried unto 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 moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 Then said I, 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 mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:

7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

NLT

Isaiah 6:1 It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple.

2 Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.

3 They were calling out to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven’s Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!”

4 Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke.

5 Then I said, “It’s all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.”

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.

7 He touched my lips with it and said, “See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.”

8 Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?” I said, “Here I am. Send me.”

The People, Places, and Times

Judah and Israel. During the time when Isaiah was called to serve as a prophet (around 740 BC), the nations of Judah and Israel were being disobedient to God, living lives displeasing to Him. These nations worshiped idols and depended on the “power” and abilities of sorcerers and magicians, while turning their back on God and forgetting all He had done for their ancestors. The Lord used warnings of judgment to help lead His people to repentance, salvation, and dependence on Him.

Prophets. God handpicked this unique group of people to be His messengers. Prophets were considered to be God’s special representatives. They confronted the leaders during periods of disobedience (cf. 2 Samuel 12—Nathan confronting David) and verbally warned God’s people when they were disobedient. Prophets were not the most popular people because of their

message, but were respected due to their closeness to God. The prophet's message was used to help God's people get back in line with Him and give them hope for reconciliation.

Background

Throughout biblical history, God's people have been inconsistent in their allegiance to Him. Whether creating golden images for idol worship, taking His love and mercy for granted, or constantly complaining, His people had a history of disobedience to God. During the time when God made Isaiah a prophet, the same pattern continued. In God's eyes, Judah and Israel had broken a covenant agreement with Him. They did this by oppressing the poor, worshiping pagan idols, and turning to sorcerers and magicians. As a result, God sent words of judgment to His people to explain their sins against Him. If they continued to defy God or break their contract with Him, destruction of the two nations would result.

Since God loved His people and continued to have mercy for them, He continued to give hope. God told His people that He would be with them and still deliver them from their enemies if they would repent of their sins. God had so much mercy for His people that He called a person to give these warnings: Isaiah, one of their own. Through the calling of Isaiah as a prophet, God used someone the people could relate to to portray a message of repentance, salvation, and caution. God handpicked Isaiah to give the people a choice of continuing to break their covenant or repairing the breach.

At-A-Glance

1. A God Experience ([Isaiah 6:1–4](#)^L)
2. Isaiah's Response (v. 5)
3. God's Response (vv. 6–7)
4. Isaiah's Commitment (v. 8)

In Depth

1. A God Experience ([Isaiah 6:1–4](#)^L)

Isaiah explains in detail an experience he had with God. Isaiah saw God in His rightful place, sitting on a throne, representing God's position as king and ruler of all. In Isaiah's experience with God, he saw God in fitting attire for his position of ruler: a robe. Isaiah then notices beings called seraphim, which served as helpers for God. Isaiah saw firsthand that God uses others to fulfill His purpose. These seraphim displayed how Isaiah should approach a holy God, covering their face and feet in His presence as a sign of respect and lowliness. The seraphim also approached God with a spirit of worship (v. 3). When in the presence of God, we must worship Him with all we have like the seraphim and not hold anything back. Isaiah's God experience prepared him for his ^[L]_[SEP]ultimate calling.

2. Isaiah's Response (v. 5)

Once Isaiah has an experience with God, he then does what we should do—respond. His response has several components—fear, confession, and admiration. As followers of God, we should have a healthy fear (reverence or respect) of Him. Isaiah was so in awe with God's presence, that he thought it was the end for him (“Woe is me! for I am undone,” ^[L]_[SEP]Isaiah

responds).

Isaiah then confessed himself as a sinful man with filthy or unclean lips. He realized that since he was in God's presence, he should confess and repent for anything displeasing to Him. He responded in admiration for being able to experience God's presence even in his current condition. We must remember to respond when we are in God's presence.

3. God's Response (vv. 6–7)

When Isaiah responded to God by accentuating all his faults, God exhibits to him what He wants for Israel and Judah: forgiveness. God uses the seraphim (His helpers) to repair Isaiah's condition, using a burning coal to touch the location of his iniquity: his mouth. Through this act, God symbolically prepared Isaiah for his assignment. God will always prepare you for an assignment He gives. In this symbolic preparation, God is transforming Isaiah, and He will transform us so we can be prepared for the task at hand.

As God prepares and transforms Isaiah, He gives Isaiah the experience of forgiveness (v. 7). God removes any guilt Isaiah may feel so he can freely operate in his calling. As God calls us to work for Him, we cannot allow anything to stand in the way, including our own guilt. God will respond to us when we respond to Him.

4. Isaiah's Commitment (v. 8)

After God prepares and forgives Isaiah, He then asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah now makes a commitment to God to accept His assignment. Isaiah could have easily ignored the question and refused to accept God's call, but he gave of himself for God to use however necessary.

Isaiah remembered his God experience and interaction. He remembered that God forgave him and honored him with His presence. So in return, Isaiah becomes committed to God by accepting His calling. Commitment to God is giving yourself to Him for His use. No matter what God calls us to do—and it won't always be pleasant (cf. [Isaiah 6:9–13](#)^L)—we, like Isaiah, have to say, "Here am I. Send me!"

Search the Scriptures

1. What did the seraphim use to touch Isaiah's lips ([Isaiah 6:6](#)^L)?
2. What did Isaiah say when God was looking for a messenger (v. 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

It is very easy for us to get so wrapped up in what we believe we cannot do that we ignore God's assignment for our lives. How can we operate in the assignment He gives us?

Lesson in Our Society

Many people say they are ready to go to new levels in different areas of their life. But when given the opportunity to do so, they do not want to go through necessary challenges to get there. When Isaiah faced God, he could have ignored what God asked him to do, but because he responded and made a commitment to God, he was one of the greatest prophets in history.

Make It Happen

Isaiah stepped up to try to help his people avoid destruction. What can you do in your community to step up and make a difference?

More Light on the Text

Isaiah 6:1–8^L

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

As a nation, Israel turned its back on God and His requirements for His chosen people. The king, having been struck by God with leprosy, was now dead after living in alienation from the people and from God ([2 Chronicles 26:18–21](#)^L). The people were so enmeshed in sin that the nation's prophets had been unable to guide them away. Isaiah must have felt like a failure, fearfully standing alone in the highest heaven awaiting what was sure to be punishment from his holy Father.

For years Israel had traveled a path of its own choosing and was now in spiritual and moral darkness. The king had helped the people's departure from God. Now that leader was dead. A righteous God would be justified in pronouncing the same judgment of death upon the rebellious nation and all of its inhabitants. This was Isaiah's state of mind as he stood observing God upon His "throne" (Heb. kicce', **kis-SAY**), "high" (Heb. rum, **ROOM**) and "lifted up" (Heb. nasa', **naw-SAW**). The Holy of Holies in the Temple was considered to be God's throne room. To see God as "high and lifted up" carries the sense that He is exalted. In the ancient Near East, kings' thrones were set atop a series of steps. So it is natural for Isaiah to see God the divine king in the same way. A temple was thought to be the connection between God's heavenly house and earth; in this case, it connects His heavenly throne and earth. As that connection point, some of the throne room spills over to the Temple. But what spills over? Just the "train" (Heb. shul, **SHOOL**), which is the long back section of a gown or robe. This is enough to fill up the entire Temple because God is that big and grand.

2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

The scene is all the more frightening to Isaiah as he sees the "seraphims" (Heb. serafim, **seh-rah-FEEM**, literally "the burning ones") standing in God's presence worshiping and serving Him. The Hebrew word used for God's messengers places an emphasis on the fact that God is utterly holy. The seraphim must appear to Isaiah like living fire, standing above the throne waiting to serve God. With one pair of wings ("twain"), the seraphim cover their eyes lest they peer into the divine, and with another pair, they cover their feet in humble acknowledgment that they stand upon holy ground. Isaiah now sees himself all the more clearly as an unclean creature, dwelling amid unclean and rebellious humanity.

3 And one cried unto 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 moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled ^{[[SEP]]}with smoke.

Every utterance of the seraphs confirms for Isaiah that God is "holy" (Heb. kadosh, **kah-DOASH**). God is utterly transcendent, so far above and distinct from His created beings that none is truly worthy to be in His presence. God's holiness is central to His identity. Some scholars argue that it is His primary attribute that permeates all of the others (such as love,

sovereignty, omnipotence, etc.). Amid those characteristics of God, His “glory” (Heb. kavod, **kah-VODE**) fills the whole earth, making it impossible to escape His presence. The scene must have been overwhelming and frightening, as not only were the seraphim proclaiming God’s holiness and glory but also the Temple itself shook. Then there was smoke, which may be analogous to the Shekinah cloud that represented God’s presence with the Israelites in the desert ([Exodus 40:38](#)^L). Shekinah is from the Hebrew word for dwelling and refers specifically to the cloud of God’s presence that followed the Israelites through the wilderness. The smoke itself is representative of God’s presence with the people.

What a predicament for Isaiah, who by this time must have felt that his death was imminent. No explanation was necessary for why he should die. Isaiah’s presence, in the midst of such holiness, was sufficient for him to convict himself. As if to confirm Isaiah’s sense of God’s awesome power and mystery, smoke filled the chamber and once more concealed Him from Isaiah’s sight.

5 Then said I, 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 mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah gives voice to what he was feeling. The word “woe” in Hebrew is ’oy (**O-ee**) and stands for a passionate cry of grief or despair. It’s the same as the familiar Jewish expression “oy.” Seeing all that transpires around him, Isaiah declares himself and his people guilty before God and prepares for his death. He was “undone” (Heb. damah, **dah-MAH**), on the verge of perishing in the face of this revelation of God. Faced with the unfiltered experience of God’s holiness, Isaiah recognized his own sinfulness with equal clarity.

6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

A seraph heads in his direction, and like any awestruck human being, Isaiah may have felt that it was about to carry out God’s judgment against him. Isaiah still had not realized the depth of God’s commitment to His chosen people, Israel. The nation had broken faith with the living God, but He did not break faith with them.

From the midst of the cloud-filled chamber, Isaiah is only able to see a seraph use a pair of tongs and remove a burning coal from the altar. The being then proceeds toward Isaiah with the coal and presses it against his mouth. For the first time, Isaiah realizes what it feels to be fully cleansed of all sin and shame. The text here refers not only to “sin” (Heb. khatta’t, **khot-TOT**) but also “iniquity” (Heb. ‘avon, **ah-VONE**), which refers to depravity, perversity, and guilt from sin. Rather than the expected punishment, God has pardoned Isaiah. Rather than a deserved death (eternal separation from the living God), Isaiah is given life and begins to experience God’s love in a way he has never understood before. He is truly and completely loved.

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

With the sin and shame removed, Isaiah heard God speak. Isaiah heard God inquire who would be His servant to go and carry out the mission and message He had for His covenant people. Isaiah answered the call. In accepting God’s call to be a prophet to the nation, Isaiah understood that he was committing to represent God’s holy authority and love on earth. His task would be to guide the people and their leaders into right relationship with God. Isaiah’s experience with God

and the burning coal from the altar helped the prophet recognize that He was not interested in exacting punishment on His rebellious people, but in purging the nation of the sin that separated God from His people. Isaiah committed himself to the proclamation of this message and would spend the rest of his life in this missionary enterprise.

In embracing this call from God, Isaiah would live the rest of his life set apart from the people he was to serve. The price for accepting God's assignment was loneliness and isolation. From this point on, everything in the prophet's life took a subordinate position to God's mission. Because of the vision of God's glory, Isaiah willingly paid this price.

Say It Correctly

Seraphim. **SAIR**-uh-feem.

Twain. **TWANE**.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Reign of King Uzziah

([2 Chronicles 26:1–10](#)^L, [15](#)^L)

TUESDAY

True Worship in Action

([Isaiah 58:6–12](#)^L)

WEDNESDAY

Holiness Befits God's House

(Psalm 93)

THURSDAY

Gentiles Will Hear the Good News

([Acts 28:23–29](#)^L)

FRIDAY

Perfect Your Holiness Living

([2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1](#)^L)

SATURDAY

Practice Holiness While Waiting

([2 Peter 3:11–16](#)^L)

SUNDAY

Isaiah in the Temple

([Isaiah 6:1–8](#)^L)