

God Sends

God calls His people to recognize and declare His sovereign purposes.

ISAIAH 6:1-13



20

Why does God call and then use believers to carry out His purposes?

Each branch of the U.S. military has some form of saying, “Never volunteer for anything.” However, when Isaiah had an encounter with the King, the Lord of the Armies, he quickly volunteered to take on the mission God had for him. That’s what happens when a person experiences what Isaiah did. The Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah in a vision, and in this vision Isaiah recognized his sin and need for a Savior. The Lord cleansed him of his sin and then called him to service. When the Lord reveals Himself to us and saves us from our sin, the proper and appropriate response is Isaiah’s response, “Here I am. Send me.”

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Isaiah concluded his introduction of the book with a song of indictment against the residents of Jerusalem and all the people of Judah, followed by six “woes” against these unfaithful people. The song is about Isaiah’s “loved one” who had a vineyard. This loved one worked hard to do everything he could to produce a productive vineyard. He expected a harvest of good grapes, but instead he got worthless grapes. Then, the Lord revealed He is the owner and vinedresser of the vineyard. He said He would remove everything He built as a protection for His vineyard and it would be laid waste as the Lord causes it to cease raining on it. The meaning of the song is the Lord’s vineyard in which He delighted is the people of Israel and Judah. He expected from them justice and righteousness, but all He saw was injustice, bloodshed, and cries of despair. Accordingly, these wicked people can expect divine judgment (Isa. 5:1-7).

Then Isaiah marshaled six woes against these unfaithful people. The word woe was spoken in times of mourning with the death of a loved one, expressing grief and bereavement. When the Lord’s prophets used this expression it was the foretelling of extreme divine judgment. Instead of being like the death angel of the first Passover in Egypt who passed them by, this time death was knocking at their door with no escape. The judgment of God is inevitable.

The sins that brought on these woes summarize God’s charges against His people: greed and socioeconomic oppression, careless carousing, spiritual blindness, the exploitation of others in the justice system, the perversion of morality, and the arrogance of thinking they are wiser than the Lord. Consequently, the Lord in His judgment would turn their sins back upon them (5:6-30).

ISAIAH 6:1-13

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the hem of his robe filled the temple. **2 Seraphim** **A** were standing above him; they each had six wings: with two they **covered their faces** **B**, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. **3** And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the **LORD of Armies** **C**; his glory fills the whole earth. **4** The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke. **5** Then I said: **Woe is me for I am ruined** **D** because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen **the King** **E**, the LORD of Armies. **6** Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. **7** He touched my mouth with it and said: Now that this has touched your lips, your iniquity is removed and your sin is atoned for. **8** Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking: Who should I send? Who will go for us? I said: Here I am. Send me. **9** And he replied: Go! **Say to these people** **F**: Keep listening, but do not understand; keep looking, but do not perceive. **10** Make the minds of these people dull; deafen their ears and blind their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their minds, turn back, and be healed. **11** Then I said, “Until when, Lord?” And he replied: Until cities lie in ruins without inhabitants, houses are without people, the land is ruined and desolate, **12** and the LORD drives the people far away, leaving great emptiness in the land. **13** Though a tenth will remain in the land, it will be burned again. Like the terebinth or the oak that leaves a stump when felled, the holy seed is the stump.

Passage Outline

God’s Glory
(Isa. 6:1-4)

God’s Forgiveness
(Isa. 6:5-7)

God’s Call
(Isa. 6:8-10)

God’s Persistence
(Isa. 6:11-13)

Key Words

- A. Literally “the burning ones,” Isaiah envisioned the seraphim as agents of God who prepared him to proclaim the Lord’s message to Judah.
- B. God’s holiness can’t be looked upon by His creation.
- C. This military phrase signifies God is actively warring against sin.
- D. As sinful humankind stands before Holy God, our sin becomes more evident (Gen. 3:7-8; Rom. 3:23).
- E. The King is God. Yet, it’s unthinkable to see God (Gen. 32:30; Ex. 19:21; 33:20; Judg. 13:22).
- F. They had ears and eyes that didn’t seem to work—for they continuously disregarded God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Isaiah described the scene of heaven revealed to him in a vision while in the temple. God's throne was encircled by angels declaring His holiness, a sound that shook the foundation of the temple.

DID YOU KNOW?: Isaiah 6 is the only place in the Bible that mentions the seraphim. Of all the angelic beings mentioned in the Bible, only the seraphim and cherubim (Ezek. 1:4-28) are described as having wings.

What should we learn about God in Isaiah's vision of God on His throne? How should God's holiness affect how we think about God and how we live for Him?

Isaiah's first response was, *Woe is me for I am ruined*. In other words, "I am about to die!" What is sure is that at the sight of God's throne, Isaiah became aware of his sin and unworthiness to be in the presence of God. Before Isaiah could faithfully serve the Lord by prophesying to a people who were unclean, he himself needed to be clean. So, no doubt at the bidding of the Lord, one of the seraphim took a glowing coal from the altar with tongs and touched Isaiah's lips as a way of cleansing Isaiah of his sin.

How should Isaiah's vision of God on His throne affect how we think about the holiness of God? What can we learn from Isaiah about God and ourselves when we stand before God to worship Him?

KEY DOCTRINE: Man Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God (Eph. 2:4).

Finally, God spoke and posed a question, asking who was willing to go on mission on His behalf. Isaiah's response was short and to the point: *Here I am. Send me*. He experienced the merciful and gracious cleansing of God from the penalty of his sin, which is death. In addition, because the Lord had forgiven him, Isaiah had a right standing before God. Consequently, Isaiah's quick reply was the only logical and appropriate one. God told Isaiah what his message would be, and He revealed to Isaiah what would result from his message.

Why is it important for believers who proclaim God's message to recognize that most who hear the message will not respond positively to it?

Isaiah asked the Lord how long he was to deliver God's message to people who were unwilling to repent. God directed Isaiah to deliver the message until His judgment was complete. God explained that He was going to use invaders to lay waste to Judah and take the survivors into foreign captivity. But God did not leave Isaiah hopeless; He pointed to a remnant who would return to God.

APPLY THE TEXT

- God is holy and chooses to reveal His glory to people.
- All humans are in need of God's forgiveness for sin.
- God invites willing followers to deliver His message to others.
- God's messengers are to be faithful throughout their lives regardless of the response.

God revealed His holiness to Isaiah in a vision. What does it mean to say God is holy, and what are various ways the Lord reveals He is holy?

As a group, read aloud Isaiah 6:8. Discuss how Isaiah's response to God's call upon his life is the logical and appropriate response for every believer. What might be said about a person who responds negatively to such a calling?

Why is it so important for believers to be faithful throughout their lives to God's commission to serve Him even when it can be difficult to do so?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: The Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah.

Read Isaiah 6:1-4, contemplating Isaiah's vision of God.

Isaiah's vision began with seeing the Lord. No one has seen God, yet the Lord graciously revealed Himself to Isaiah for the sake of His people. Isaiah saw the splendor of His majesty seated on a high and lofty throne, asserting Yahweh's power and authority over all creation. The Lord's robe filled the temple as His glory fills all the earth.

The seraphim, literally "the burning ones," are angelic beings who are heavenly attendants to the Lord. Isaiah witnessed them flying above the Lord with their three sets of wings, with one set covering their faces, one set covering their feet, and with one set they flew. Fire is often associated with the presence and glory of God. In reverence, submission, and awe for Yahweh, and because of the brilliance of His glory, these fiery heavenly beings covered themselves.

The sound of the seraphim calling out to one another shook the foundations of the doorways. The temple was filled with smoke that may have been from the altar in the temple. Smoke or a cloud is often associated with the presence of God and probably shielded Isaiah from seeing any more than his mortal eyes were able to bear.

What did you learn about God in Isaiah's vision of Him on His throne? How does God's holiness affect how you think about God and how you live for Him?

Day 2: We are unworthy of being in the presence of God.

Read Isaiah 6:5, considering Isaiah's response to seeing God.

Isaiah believed he was doomed to die—*ruined*. Perhaps God's statement to Moses in Exodus 33:20 flashed in his mind, "humans cannot see me and live." Isaiah gave three reasons for his response. The first reason is because he was overcome with the consciousness of his own sin and recognized he was unworthy to stand in God's presence. Isaiah knew he was completely unclean before God. He was unable to join the seraphim in praising God because his lips were unclean. The second reason for his response was because the nation of Judah was a sinful people too. In the middle of this overwhelming experience, Isaiah thought not only about his own situation but that of his people. The third reason for Isaiah's response was because he saw Almighty God arrayed in splendor and glory.

Describe an instance, situation, or circumstance in which God revealed His glory to you.

Day 3: God alone removes our iniquities.

Read Isaiah 6:6-7, underlining verse 7.

God sometimes used fire to purify something. (See Num. 31:22-23.) The purifying burning coal from the altar implies an acceptable sacrifice was made for Isaiah's forgiveness of sin and his reconciliation to God. Isaiah did nothing for himself. The removal of his iniquity and the atonement for Isaiah's sin was initiated and completed by the Lord. The removal of his sin meant that God's sense of justice was satisfied and Isaiah could now stand before God without fear. This is what the expression, *your sin is atoned for* meant. Isaiah's experience anticipated what the people of Judah needed done for their own iniquities to become the holy and blessed people God promised they would become in chapters 1-5. All of these actions anticipate the Lord Jesus Christ who is the one and only atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sin.

What can you learn from Isaiah about God and yourself when you stand before God to worship Him?

Day 4: Most will not respond to His message.

Read Isaiah 6:8-10, understanding the warning given.

Verse 9 contains the oddest message one could imagine God giving to His prophet. It seems as if God didn't want them to understand the message. However, the mention of *minds, ears, and eyes* taken together is a poetic way of saying the people were so spiritually blind and deaf that when Isaiah preached to them, what he said would be incomprehensible to them. In fact, Isaiah would speak with such simplicity that the people would ridicule him for it (Isa. 28:9-10). The only way they could understand was to have a change of heart. Their hearts were hardened in rebellion against God, and they would become even more hardened as they heard and rejected God's Word through His prophet. The Lord did not commission Isaiah for the purpose of confusing the people; God called Isaiah to clearly proclaim His message while realizing most would reject it. Therefore, they would be without excuse when God's judgment fell on them because through Isaiah the Lord was giving them one more opportunity to *turn back, and be healed*.

Why is it important for believers who proclaim God's message to recognize that most who hear the message will not respond positively to it?

Day 5: God's mercy and grace will shine.

Read Isaiah 6:11-13, noting God's plans.

With graphic language, the Lord painted a picture of *cities that lie in ruins without inhabitants* and land that is *ruined and desolate*, describing what He was going to cause to happen to Judah. Jeremiah later prophesied that this exile would last seventy years (Jer. 25:11; 29:10). Ezekiel prophesied that during that time God would purify His people (Ezek. 36:25). But God did not leave Isaiah hopeless; He pointed to a remnant who would return to God. A *tenth* of them would survive even though they too would suffer. The purifying burning would continue until only a *stump*, a *holy seed* would survive. Yet this holy seed was what would survive to spring forth as the holy and blessed people of God. Even though judgment must fall upon the wicked people of Judah because of God's justice, His mercy and grace would shine through as He would never completely eradicate His promise of salvation that would ultimately come through the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the first fruit of this holy seed promised to Abraham. (See Gen. 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:22-23.)

What do these verses teach you about God's character?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 6, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How does Isaiah's vision give us a sense of God's greatness? His holiness? His power?

What's the correlation between self-evaluation and forgiveness? Explain.

How do we hear God's voice today?



For additional context, read “The Life and Times of Uzziah,” available digitally in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.