

# Scripture Lesson Text

**ISA. 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.

## NOTES

# Isaiah's Commission

Lesson Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

Related Scriptures: Exodus 33:12-20; Psalm 89:1-8; Matthew 17:1-7;  
Revelation 1:12-20

TIME: about 739 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Lord of the hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **THE PROPHET'S VISION— Isa. 6:1-4**

**The time of the vision (Isa. 6:1a).** Isaiah had his vision of the Lord's holiness "in the year that king Uzziah died." This time notation could refer to any time up to a year prior to Uzziah's death or a year after his death.

The vision occurred at a turning point in Judah's history. King Uzziah (also called Azariah) had a prosperous reign of fifty-two years (II Chr. 26:1-15).

However, becoming unduly proud of his accomplishments, Uzziah later in his reign usurped the place of the priests and tried to burn incense in the temple. The Lord struck him with leprosy, and he had to turn over his authority to Jotham, his son (II Chr. 26:16-21). Thus, the once-mighty king came to an ignominious end.

If we are to judge from the first five chapters of Isaiah (as well as from Micah, which was written a little later), the spiritual conditions in Judah were once again deplorable.

**The nature of the vision (Isa. 6:1b-2).** Isaiah reveals that he saw "the Lord." The Hebrew word here (*Adonai*) places emphasis on God's sovereignty and His power to carry out His will. However,

His covenant name, *Yahweh*, occurs in verses 3 and 5. Isaiah was no doubt impressed with the Lord's transcendent power in contrast to the fleeting and limited authority of earthly kings.

When Isaiah saw the Lord, he did not actually see His essence, for that is impossible (Ex. 33:20; John 1:18; I John 4:12). Perhaps he saw a humanlike form seated on a throne. The Gospel of John informs us that this was none other than Christ (12:37-41), appearing in His preincarnate glory.

The throne on which He sat was "high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1), and the train of His flowing robe filled the entire temple. Since this was a vision, the temple was probably not Solomon's temple. Rather, it was God's heavenly dwelling, where He was attended by heavenly beings (cf. Ezek. 1:26-28; Rev. 4:1-11).

Above the throne "stood the seraphims" (Isa. 6:2). Here the English plural ending is unnecessary, for "-im" is already the plural in Hebrew. This is the only explicit mention of seraphim in the Bible. They are evidently one of several categories of angels. The name comes from a Hebrew word that means "to burn," so they are probably bright and dazzling in appearance.

Isaiah saw the seraphim (whether

few or many we do not know) hovering above God's throne. They covered their faces and feet with their wings in reverence to Him. With the remaining two wings they flew, maintaining their position above the throne. Thus, Isaiah had a glimpse into the heavenly abode of God, where the glory of even the brightest creatures pales before His glory.

**The proclamation of God's holiness (Isa. 6:3-4).** The seraphim cried out to one another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." This probably means that two groups of angels spoke antiphonally to each other. The title they used was "the Lord of hosts," or "Yahweh of armies." It implies that the armies of heaven are constantly at His command.

The word "holy" means "completely set apart." God is separate from and transcendent over all His creation, both in His essence and in His moral purity. He cannot be compared with anything the human mind can conceive, and it is impossible for Him to tolerate sin.

Why did the seraphim repeat the word three times? The repetition may hint at the Trinity but was most likely used for emphasis, calling attention to the fullness of God's holiness.

But although He is totally unlike His creation, God has not separated Himself from it: "The whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). The Hebrew more literally reads, "The fullness of all the earth is His glory." This whole earth is the theater in which the splendor of His attributes is displayed. Those who dwell on it have ample opportunity to see this divine witness (Pss. 19:1-2; 24:1; Rom. 1:18-20).

The awesome scene before Isaiah was enhanced by physical manifestations. First, "the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried" (Isa. 6:4).

Second, the temple was filled with smoke. The presence of the Lord is

often associated with smoke, for He is "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). At Sinai, Israel saw a mountain that both smoked and quaked (Ex. 19:18). In this case the smoke may have risen from incense on an altar, for we know such an altar was part of Isaiah's vision (Isa. 6:6). Whatever its source, the accumulation of all that Isaiah had seen and heard left him awestruck and humbled.

### **THE PROPHET'S RESPONSE— Isa. 6:5-8**

**Acknowledging sin (Isa. 6:5).** The heavenly vision brought Isaiah to a devastating examination of himself, and he cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone." He who would be called to pronounce woes on others (cf. 10:1; 18:1; 31:1) had first to see himself in the same hopeless condition. To say that he was undone meant that he saw himself as cut off and doomed.

Isaiah was especially mortified that he was "a man of unclean lips," who lived "in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). He had just heard the seraphim proclaiming God's holiness, and he sensed he ought to be doing the same. But his sinfulness made him unfit to do so. His lips were unclean because his heart was unclean (cf. Matt. 15:18-20).

It is possible for us as God's people today to have unclean lips in God's sight. Through our lips we may bring forth filth, profanity, gossip, hatred, and lies. But even if we avoid these, our very prayers and expressions of worship may be unclean to Him because our hearts are insincere. And we may remain unaware of this because we have ignored the Bible, God's revelation of Himself. A mere glimpse of His holiness should bring us to our knees.

**Receiving cleansing (Isa. 6:6-7).** Isaiah expected to die because of his sin. But God had a better alternative—He would cleanse him and

make him useful in His service.

The Lord responded by sending one of the seraphim to cleanse him. He came to Isaiah carrying a burning coal that he had picked up from the altar with a pair of tongs. If this was indeed a piece of coal, it was not the mineral we know today but charcoal made from wood through a process of partial oxidation.

But the Hebrew word often refers to a hot stone. Such heated stones were used on the altar of incense.

The seraph placed the glowing stone on Isaiah's lips, since this was the part of his body that he confessed was unclean. The angel then declared, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isa. 6:7). This purging by fire was administered by a heavenly being whose name (*seraph*) meant "burning one." But the fire did not come from him; it was the holy fire taken from the incense altar of God.

Fire occurs often in Scripture as an agent of purification. Refiners of precious metals used fire to burn away dross and achieve purity in their products. So God's purification is likened to refinement by fire (cf. Isa. 1:25; 48:10; Mal. 3:2-3; I Pet. 1:6-7). Though fire is used as a symbol in these passages, it clearly implies that spiritual purification can be painful.

**Answering a call (Isa. 6:8).** Only after Isaiah had faced his sin and received cleansing did the Lord speak: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" God asked this question not because He did not know whom to send but because it would give Isaiah a chance to respond. More likely it is a hint of the plurality of Persons in the Godhead (cf. Gen. 1:26; 11:7). The Trinity, fully revealed in the New Testament, is foreshadowed here.

Isaiah's response to the call was immediate: "Here am I; send me" (Isa.

6:8). His readiness is remarkable. He had no idea what his mission would entail, and he did not wait to find out. He simply volunteered for whatever it would be. As it turned out, his task would be thankless. He would bring a divine message of judgment to a wayward people, and they would not repent (vss. 9-10). As a result, they would eventually be deported from their land (vss. 11-12).

Isaiah knew none of this when he accepted God's call. Yet he volunteered because he had experienced God's grace. A few moments before, he had expected to die for his sin. But now he was purified and accepted. After this, how could he *not* volunteer for God's service?

—Robert E. Wenger.

## QUESTIONS

1. When did Isaiah's vision occur?
2. How could Isaiah see God when we are told this is impossible?
3. What did the seraphim whom Isaiah saw look like?
4. The seraphim declared God to be holy. What does this mean?
5. What does it mean that the whole earth is full of God's glory? How does this affect our witness of God's existence (cf. Rom. 1:20)?
6. How did Isaiah react to his vision of the Lord?
7. What did Isaiah's unclean lips keep him from doing?
8. Is it possible to have unclean lips without realizing it? Explain.
9. How was Isaiah cleansed from sin and fitted for service?
10. How was Isaiah's ready response to God's call remarkable?

—Robert E. Wenger.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. In uncertain times, focus on God's sovereignty to find peace of mind (Isa. 6:1).
2. Fear not—God's holiness, His supreme attribute, controls all that He does (vss. 2-3).
3. The awesomeness of God is greater than words or even a picture can describe (vs. 4).
4. The more man understands God's holiness, the more he understands his own sinfulness (vs. 5).
5. God is always ready to forgive those who are ready to repent (Isa. 6:6-7; cf. I John 1:9).
6. Hearing God's call is one thing; heeding God's call is quite another (Isa. 6:8)! Do both.

—Don Kakavecoc.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How does focusing on God's majesty, sovereignty, and holiness help a believer stay calm and faithful in uncertain times (Pss. 56:3-4; 139:1-24; Isa. 41:10)?
2. How does the knowledge that all of God's attributes are controlled by His perfect holiness help us to trust and obey Him (Num. 23:19)?
3. What is our culture's view of sin? Why do you think these views are so prevalent (Rom. 1:18-23; I Cor. 2:14; II Cor. 4:4)?
4. What should be the Christian's view of sin (Isa. 6:3-7)?
5. What might keep us from hearing and/or answering the call of God (Matt. 8:18-22; I John 2:15-17)?

—Don Kakavecoc.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3).**

What do angels talk about among themselves? The angels in Isaiah's vision were calling each other's attention to the holiness of God.

Their words were simple but altogether profound: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts.” They were calling out to one another in praise of the One in whose presence they were privileged to minister. And in that awesome and glorious presence they could not help bursting forth continually in delight and praise.

We often equate holiness with sinlessness, and it certainly is that. But the seraphim were sinless beings themselves, and yet they focused all attention on the holiness of the Lord. This tells us that God's holiness is much more than merely being free from sin. He is holy in a way that even the holiest angels cannot come close to matching. Their holiness, in fact, is derived from Him, and they simply reflect it back.

Bound up in God's holiness is His glory. The seraphim proclaim, “the whole earth is full of his glory.” God's glory is something we cannot see in our present state. Moses received a glimpse of it (Ex. 33:18-23).

The whole earth is full of God's glory, but we are to a great degree insensible to it. But as Isaiah reveals elsewhere, one day “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (40:5). And then we will never tire of singing His praise!

—Kenneth Sponsler.