

## ISAIAH — LESSON SEVEN

### ISAIAH 6

#### The Vision and Call of Isaiah

#### Vv. 1-5 – Isaiah’s Vision of the Lord

This is a brief but significant chapter. Webb makes the same point more eloquently saying that chapter 6 “towers like a majestic peak over the surrounding terrain and is clearly of central importance for the message of the book.”<sup>1</sup> It records the call that Isaiah had to be God’s prophet and messenger. Much has been written about why it appears here rather than at the book’s beginning. As usual, when no reasons are given and no facts are stated, speculation disguised as scholarship abounds. Since Isaiah did not tell us and now cannot tell us, we shall remain silent on the matter and proceed to discuss that which the chapter says. The dates for Uzziah’s death range widely from 748-734 B.C. Most place it around 739-740. As we have learned, Uzziah’s reign was one of peace and prosperity. He was, for the most part, a good king, having “veered off” at the end that caused him to be afflicted with leprosy. It was in the year of Uzziah’s death that Isaiah was startled by a vision from God.<sup>2</sup> While Isaiah does not tell us where he was when the vision came, most picture him in the temple at worship. That is certainly where a man of Isaiah’s character would spend a great deal of time. Some suggest that it had to be the temple because Isaiah writes that God’s throne filled

---

1. Webb, Barry G., *The Message of Isaiah*, p. 58.

2. Isaiah’s language here is very clear and precise. Accordingly, it was more than historical interest that led Isaiah to be very precise about the date that he was writing. But why would he be so interested in unequivocally revealing the year of his vision. Is it any more than baggage in a very significant moment in his life? Since Isaiah does not say we can do no more than postulate. Could it be that with the death of Uzziah that an important period in the history of Judah had ended and another had begun? Jotham was not a strong king and we know that Ahaz had a strong attraction for Assyria. Had his covenant with Assyria already begun? If so, Judah was doomed. Could this account for the instruction that God gave Isaiah about the message that he was to preach?

the temple in v. 1. However the Hebrew word translated temple can also mean “palace.” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, #964. God is seen as sitting upon a throne which you find in a palace.

Which is it – temple or palace?<sup>3</sup> If Isaiah’s location had been important God would have told us. He didn’t. My OPINION is that it makes no difference, but I “lean” toward the Temple. Some equate the smoke mentioned with the Shekinah,<sup>4</sup> which is associated with the Temple. Wherever he was, he was transported by vision into the very presence of God, beholding him in his glory. John was familiar with the passage, having written, “These things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory; and he spake of him [Jesus]” (12:41). By the time of Uzziah’s death, Judah had fallen from the early peace and prosperity of his reign. Its glory had departed (see 1 Sam. 4:21-22).

Immediately after telling us the time of the vision Isaiah says, “I saw the Lord.” Based on this language Hailey takes the position that the one on the throne must have been Jesus since “no man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). However, Isaiah saw God in a vision, not directly. After checking 15-20 commentaries and all of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, I found some others who took that position. Most seemed to discuss “seeing the Lord” and pass on. Chrysostom, one of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, had a lengthy discourse in *Homilies on the Gospel According to St. John*, Homily 15:

“No man hath seen God at any time.” By what connection of thought does the Apostle come to say this? After showing the exceeding greatness of the gifts of Christ, and the infinite difference between them and those ministered by Moses, he would add the reasonable cause of the difference. Moses, as being a servant, was minister of lower things, but Christ being Lord and King, and the King’s Son, brought to us things far greater, being ever with the Father, and beholding Him continually;

---

3. Of course, it could have been a “house” as well if all of the possibilities mentioned are to be considered. (v. 4).

4. A Hebrew word from the root ‘to dwell’ that is translated as the ‘Presence’ of God. *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*.

wherefore He saith, "No man hath seen God at any time." What then shall we answer to the most mighty of voice, Esaias, when he says, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up" (Isa. vi. 1); and to John himself testifying of Him, that "he said these things when he had seen His glory"? (c. xii. 41.) What also to Ezekiel? for he too beheld Him sitting above the Cherubim. (Ezek. i. and x.) What to Daniel? for he too saith, "The Ancient of days did sit" (Dan. vii. 9.) What to Moses himself, saying, "Show me Thy Glory, that I may see Thee so as to know Thee." (Ex. xxxiii. 13, Ex. xxxiii 13 partly from LXX.) And Jacob took his name from this very thing, being called "Israel"; for Israel is "one that sees God." And others have seen him. How then saith John, "No man hath seen God at any time"? It is to declare, that all these were instances of (His) condescension, not the vision of the Essence itself unveiled. For had they seen the very Nature, they would not have beheld It under different forms, since that is simple, without form, or parts, or bounding lines. It sits not, nor stands, nor walks: these things belong all to bodies. But how He Is, He only knoweth. And this He hath declared by a certain prophet, saying, "I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes by the hands of the prophets" (Hos. xii. 10), that is, "I have condescended, I have not appeared as I really was." For since His Son was about to appear in very flesh, He prepared them from old time to behold the substance of God, as far as it was possible for them to see It; but what God really is, not only have not the prophets seen, but not even angels nor archangels. If you ask them, you shall not hear them answering anything concerning His Essence, but sending up, "Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, good will towards men." (Luke ii. 14.) If you desire to learn something from Cherubim or Seraphim, you shall hear the mystic song of His Holiness, and that "heaven and earth are full of His glory." (Isa. vi. 3.) If you enquire of the higher powers, you shall but find that their one work is the praise of God. "Praise ye Him," saith David, "all His hosts." (Ps. cxlviii. 2.) But the Son only Beholds Him, and the Holy Ghost. How can any created nature even see the Uncreated? If we are absolutely unable

clearly to discern any incorporeal power whatsoever, even though created, as has been often proved in the case of angels, much less can we discern the Essence which is incorporeal and uncreated. Wherefore Paul saith, "Whom no man hath seen, nor can see." (1 Tim. vi. 16.) Does then this special attribute belong to the Father only, not to the Son? Away with the thought. It belongs also to the Son; and to show that it does so, hear Paul declaring this point, and saying, that He "is the Image of the invisible God." (Col. i. 15.) Now if He be the Image of the Invisible, He must be invisible Himself, for otherwise He would not be an "image." And wonder not that Paul saith in another place, "God was manifested in the Flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16); because the manifestation took place by means of the flesh, not according to (His) Essence. Besides, Paul shows that He is invisible, not only to men, but also to the powers above, for after saying, "was manifested in the Flesh," he adds, "was seen of angels."

[2.] So that even to angels He then became visible, when He put on the Flesh; but before that time they did not so behold Him, because even to them His Essence was invisible.<sup>5</sup>

The bottom line here is that Isaiah "saw the Lord." The Hebrew word used is *Adonai*. In vv. 3 and 5 the word *Yahweh* is used. It may be that the majority of commentators speak of seeing God, apparently meaning the Father, without considering who is meant. On the other hand, it could be that they did not comment on it because they either thought that all readers would understand that it was Christ or that it made no difference whether it was a particular member of the Godhead or the entire Trinity. The best commentary on scripture is the scripture itself. John 12:41<sup>6</sup> at least alludes to this passage and applies the passage to Jesus. That is highly persuasive. However, the fact is that even if Isaiah was seeing the preincarnate Christ<sup>7</sup> he was still seeing God

---

5. There is much more to this Homily if you care to read it in its entirety.

6. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.

7. In his commentary on Isaiah, Edward J. Young, almost in passing, "quotes John Calvin as saying that Isaiah saw "the Christ (John 12:41), and justly, for God never revealed himself to the

and all that that term implies because “in him dwell[ed] the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). Thus, to see him is to see the Father (John 14:9). Thus, if Isaiah “saw” God in the sense of John 1:18 then he did that which 1 Tim. 6:16 says man cannot do. We can conclude that “seeing” God in a vision does not fall within the parameters of John 1:18 or 1 Tim. 6:16.

Isaiah saw God sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. The throne signifies 1) the majesty of Deity who created the world and all that in it is, and 2) the fact that he is King and that, as King he is powerful enough to rule in the affairs of men and to render judgment upon them and that he is now ready to do so. His majesty is not only shown by the high throne upon which he sits, but also by his train that filled the temple or palace and the seraphim<sup>8</sup> stood above him. The term is plural so there were two or more. One cried unto another, “Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is

---

Fathers but in his eternal Word and only begotten Son.” I have never checked the validity of that statement but I have no reason to doubt it.

8. **Seraphim.** The only mention of these celestial beings in Scripture is in the early vision of Isaiah (Isa. 6). The seraphim (, plural, incorrectly rendered in the AV as ‘seraphims’) were associated with cherubim and ophanim in the task of guarding the divine throne. The heavenly beings seen by Isaiah were human in form, but had six wings, a pair to shield their faces, another to conceal their feet and a third for flight. These seraphim were stationed above the throne of God, and appear to have led in divine worship. One chanted a refrain which Isaiah recorded: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’

....

If the noun be derived from Heb. *sārap* ‘to burn up’, the seraphim may be agents of purification by fire, as Is. 6. indicates.

full of his glory.”<sup>9</sup> There was a simultaneous shaking of the thresholds where he stood<sup>10</sup> along with a filling of the “house” with smoke. While it may have been that the smoke just helped create the majesty of the scene, its similarity to Rev. 15:8 is striking: “And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and none was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished.” Thus, as with the seven bowls of wrath, the smoke may symbolize the wrath

---

9. This may imply that there was only one crying the praise, but it seems odd that one would be silent if they are worshipping creatures. It could be that there were more and that they were all singing to one another. Most commentators seem to agree that the singing was antiphonal. The numbers suggested tend to larger rather than smaller, although some of the Early Church Fathers said that there were only two.

Albert Barnes has a cogent comment: “Heb. ‘This cried to this.’ That is, they cried to each other in alternate responses. One cried ‘Holy;’ the second repeated it; then the third; and then they probably united in the grand chorus, ‘Full is all the earth of his glory.’ This was an ancient mode of singing or recitative among the Hebrews, see Ex. Xv. 20, 21, where Miriam is represented as going before in the dance with a timbrel, and the other females as following her, and *answering*, or responding to her.”

Keil & Delitzsch in their *Commentary on the Old Testament* say of the seraphim: This is the only passage in the Scriptures in which the seraphim are mentioned. According to the orthodox view, which originated with Dionysius the Areopagite, they stand at the head of the nine choirs of angels, the first rank consisting of *seraphim*, *cherubim*, and *throni*. And this is not without support, if we compare the cherubim mentioned in Ezekiel, which carried the chariot of the divine throne; whereas here the seraphim are said to surround the seat on which the Lord was enthroned. In any case, the seraphim and cherubim were heavenly beings of different kinds; and there is no weight in the attempts made by Hendewerk and Stickel to prove that they are one and the same. And certainly the name *serpahim* does not signify merely spirits as such, but even, if not the highest of all, yet a distinct order from the rest; for the Scriptures really teach that there are gradations in rank in the hierarchy of heaven. Nor were they mere symbols or fanciful images, as Hävernicks imagines, but real spiritual beings, who visibly appeared to the prophet, and that in a form corresponding to their own supersensuous being, and to the design of the whole transaction. Whilst these seraphim hovered above on both sides of Him that sat upon the throne, and therefore formed two opposite choirs, each ranged in a semicircle, they presented antiphonal worship to Him that sat upon the throne.

10. Some speculate that the shaking was caused by the cries but that is not a necessary conclusion.

that God was fixing to pour out on a rebellious people.

## **Vv. 6-7 – The Consecration of the Prophet**

Isaiah is overwhelmed by his seeing the Lord, the King, Jehovah of hosts and by how he sees himself in the presence of the Lord. He confesses himself to be a sinner and declares that he is a man of unclean lips and that he lives in the midst of a people of unclean lips. His cry of “Woe is me” and his declaration that he is undone reveals his fear of absolute failure and ruin. His declaration of unclean lips confesses a heart problem. Lips speaks of words and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). How could the Holy One of Israel deal with a man who had just confessed unholiness? The truth is that he could not unless the problem was cured. Thus God, through his seraphim, went into action. One of the seraphim flew down to Isaiah with a live coal taken from the alter<sup>11</sup> and with it touched Isaiah’s lips. Having done so, he declared that Isaiah’s iniquity was taken away and his sin forgiven.

## **Vv. 8-13 – The Prophet’s Commission from Jehovah**

Isaiah has been forgiven, but God had more in mind. He did not appear to Isaiah just for forgiving him; that could have been accomplished through the sacrificial system. God wanted a prophet and he had chosen Isaiah. The seraphim’s song was over. The voice of God, speaking for the first time in the vision, broke the silence: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” God could have but he did not give a command. He wanted a prophet who wanted to serve. He wanted a prophet who was not coerced, but committed. Isaiah was ready to be just that prophet; “Here am I; send me.”

In verses 9 and 10 Isaiah receives his charge. He is to go to “this people.” God no longer calls them “my people.” The message that Isaiah is to preach is that “this people” hear but do not understand; they see but they do not perceive. Isaiah is to make the people fat, their ears heavy, and their eyes shut lest they hear, understand,

---

11. The presence of an altar is argued as evidence that this event occurred in the temple. It is persuasive but not conclusive. After all, this is part of the vision and Isaiah was transported in the vision to the presence of God upon his throne. There was no throne in the temple.

see, and turn again and be healed.

Why would God commission Isaiah to preach a message that would harden and not convert? One need only go back to the opening chapters to learn the reason. The time for repentance was over; judgment had come. The people did not understand. They had a head and heart problem. There was no cure to be found in continuing in their way of life. Isaiah's message was one of judgment. Is this not still the way of God – “8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: 9 *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: 12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:8-12).

Another possibility is that if Isaiah had preached a “pleasant message” with no condemnation of the unholy life that characterized Judah, the people would have paid no more attention to him than they did to the false prophets who preached exactly the same message. Worse yet, most likely we would never have heard of this Isaiah. Isaiah's message at least called them to repentance and let them know that repentance was needed. After that call the next step was up to the hearers. Isaiah could not and God would not make them repent involuntarily.

But if they had such hard hearts that they would not repent, why preach to them at all? Never forget throughout our study that God had left himself a remnant<sup>12</sup> (1:9; Rom. 9:27). God never loses sight of those who hear his voice and do his will. If you do not believe that just read the closing verses of this chapter. Isaiah has one question – how long am I to proclaim this message? The answer is to continue not until Isaiah drops, but until Judah drops – until cities be waste without inhabitant, houses without man,

---

12. In the American Standard Version only Jeremiah (18) exceeds Isaiah (17) in the use of the word *remnant*.



the land becomes utterly waste, Jehovah have removed men far away, and the forsaken places be many in the midst of the land. Two words describe Judah's coming condition – desolation and deportation. BUT DON'T OVERLOOK THE LAST VERSE!!! It begins with more destruction. If there is a tenth left it shall also in turn be eaten up. It may be reduced to a tenth of a tenth. But just like a terebinth or an oak that is felled leaves a stump, SO THE HOLY SEED IS THE STOCK THEREOF. "As Alexander<sup>13</sup> said, "However frequently the people may seem to be destroyed, there shall still be a surviving remnant, and however frequently that very remnant may appear to perish, there shall still be a remnant of the remnant left, and this indestructible residuum shall be the holy seed, the true church . . ." (Rom. 11:5).

What can we learn from all of this? Could it be that we, like the people of Judah, believe that the solution to all of our problems is in ourselves? As long as I can solve all of my problems, I am the King and God is the servant. Perhaps that is the reason that we have reduced God to nothing more than a "friend" and not a very close one at that. He is welcome into our lives as long as we have nothing else to do and nowhere else to go. Let one such opportunity arise and God is dropped down several steps on the ladder. Surely he will be happy with the crumbs that fall from our tables.

God's grace has become something that he owes us. He has no right to demand or command that we do anything to receive his grace. Just recently a church somewhere had the audacity to picket a house of ill repute that set up shop close to its building. In response some of the "ladies of the night" put on their skimpiest bikinis and picketed the church on a Sunday morn. One of them was interviewed. Her comment (paraphrased) was along the line that she was a Christian and believed in Jesus though she did not believe what the church was teaching. She added that none of that had anything to do with whether or not she was going to heaven. Ridiculous you say? Unbiblical and unscriptural you say? The question we need to ask is not what is wrong with that woman, but are we doing the same thing in a different way? Are we living in

---

13. Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, quoted by Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*.

a manner that says the way we live has nothing to do with whether we go to heaven? Are we speaking in a manner that says our words have nothing to do with justification or condemnation (Matt. 12:37)?

We have declared ourselves as pretty good people and God just has to know that we mess up at least once in a while and at most pretty often. What we need is what one writer called “the blazing holiness of God.” We are not dealing with a “friend” or “buddy.” We are dealing with the God who is greater than the whole universe, the creator of that universe, and the controller of it all. We need to come into his holy presence where sin cannot even exist. We need to understand that he owes us nothing and has no obligation to do anything for us. How then, do we even think that there is the slightest hint of a suggestion of a possibility that God will accept much of our worship today when most of it is about us and whether we will “feel good” during and after it. Most of it seems to be mechanical instead of thoughtful. The old motto “Swing and sway with Sammy Kaye” has been replaced with “Swing and sway with Jehovah.” Instead of lifting up an anthem of praise to God we want to give him a round of applause and what we want is more important than what he wants. Can we say that our worship is thoughtful when we sing a song that says of the Roman soldiers, “They sacrificed the Son of God.” If ever a falsehood was sung that is it. What scripture says of the Romans was in Peter’s Pentecost sermon: “him [Jesus], being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye [the Jews] by the hand of lawless men [Roman officials and soldiers] did crucify and slay.” Does that sound like God considered it a Roman sacrifice? If we thought about it would we not know that God himself offered the sacrifice of his Son by delivering up his lamb (Rom. 8:32; John 1:29). No man took Jesus life; he laid it down himself (John 10:15-18; 1 John 3:16). It was then God the Son who by that blood entered into the heavenly Holy Place having obtained redemption for us. While you may dismiss this as hypercriticism from your teacher and just pass it by, you would do better to ask, “What does God think when we give Roman soldiers credit for what he did for us through and by the Son?” But did not God make the sacrifice by using the Romans just as he used the Assyrians and Babylonians to punish his people? God certainly used the Romans, but not to punish Jesus who knew no sin and deserved no punishment. The Jews sacrificial lambs were

sacrificially slain in connection with the sins of Judah, but they were not punished. Neither were the people or priests punished for slaughtering the lamb. Additionally, if that analogy is used then remember that God then punished the Assyrians and Babylonians because of their iniquity. If the Roman officials and soldiers were offering a sacrifice would they not then be free from punishment?

What I am seeking to do is to impress upon us that worship is not a thoughtless mechanical act. It is not to please us it is to please God. It is not to make us feel good unless offering up praise and thanksgiving to God makes us feel good. We don't play with children; we don't text message on our phones; we don't saunter the aisles. We concentrate on one thing; we think about one thing; we do our best to see that our worship is without spot or blemish, the very best that we can make it both individually and congregationally. We have no right and no basis to think that God will be pleased with anything less.