

# Major Prophets

## *Courageous Ambassadors for God*

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## [ ILLUMINATE ]

FRIENDS BIBLE STUDY

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Isaiah's Call

- 1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.
- 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.
- 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."
- 4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.
- 5 And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"
- 6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.
- 7 The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."
- 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"
- 9 And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.'
- 10 Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed."
- 11 Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate;
- 12 until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.
- 13 Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

# Focus on the Word

by Krista Burdine

## Beyond the Selected Text

- 2 Chronicles 26
- Psalm 72
- Exodus 3:2-6
- John 12:40-41
- Acts 28:25-28
- 2 Samuel 7:16
- Isaiah 11:1

## ☉ Introduction

As Israel was on the verge of national disgrace and dissolution, the opening narrative of chapters 1–5 sets the tone for the message of Isaiah. A few words here and there reveal the slender possibility of redemption and restoration. Though the landscape appears bleak and the people exist with little hope, the prophet hints at a magnificent act of the Lord (4:5) that will bring the nation back to its roots as a protected treasure of the almighty God.

Against the backdrop of this despairing scene, the prophet Isaiah now introduces the moment when he was drawn into the narrative through an utterly overwhelming vision of meeting God the King in all his holiness. This vision serves as Isaiah's authority to speak to his discouraged countrymen and women.

This week we put ourselves in the prophet's shoes by considering and visualizing what Isaiah saw. We will attempt to identify similar moments which may have occurred in our own lives and recognize areas that God might be calling us to action in our contemporary narrative.

## ◎ Isaiah 6:1-5

### *The Vision*

What would you do if you suddenly found yourself swept from an ordinary moment into the very presence of God? We don't know exactly how old Isaiah was when he received this vision calling him to ministry, but we know it happened about 740 BC. We believe his ministry continued for about forty-four years.

Isaiah was a devout Jew from Jerusalem who probably woke up and had a normal breakfast like every other morning. Then his life was changed forever through a sudden, searing vision of God Almighty in his throne room. The King of all sits exalted on a throne to demonstrate his position. The throne is in a temple which demonstrates his place in the lives of the Jewish people. The King sits surrounded by seraphim (six-winged angels). This place is so holy that even the seraphim do not need to look at the Lord, as evidenced by the covering of their eyes.

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts,” Isaiah hears (v. 3). In Hebrew, repetition shows emphasis. Each iteration of this word modifies the one after it: God is so holy that even his holiness is holy, and this super-ultra-holy nature is the glory that fills the earth.

Imagine an earthquake rumbling with growing intensity, causing doors to tremble. This shaking demonstrates a normal human reaction to God's presence—and probably reflects how Isaiah is feeling. But now smoke begins to fill the temple, obscuring the view of the throne and evoking separation between God and the Jewish people.

“Woe is me!” (v. 5a). Isaiah clearly understands the message. By their unholy behavior, God's people have become cut off from God's presence. Isaiah immediately recognizes that he himself is one of them—an equal partner in the separation from God's presence, fully aware of the loss of fellowship.

### Questions to Consider

#### Isaiah 6:1-5

- Try to imagine what Isaiah was doing on the day he received this vision. Was he surprised in the middle of lunch, or awakened from a nap, or interrupted while praying?
- Have you ever felt God speaking to you in a more tangible way than other times? Write about your experience, so you have it as a record.

## ☉ Isaiah 6:6-8

### *The Call*

At this point, Isaiah has been completely overwhelmed through all his senses. He sees the glory of the Lord, feels the shaking of the temple, hears the seraphim declaring the Lord's holiness. When Isaiah smells smoke, he comprehends the situation fully and feels compelled to confess his inadequacy with his lips. Having identified himself as a member of the unholy nation of Israel, Isaiah claims no initiative or ownership in what happens next: he is merely the undeserving recipient of a holy, gracious gift.

After God the King uses smoke to demonstrate Israel's separation, God sends one of the seraphim with a burning ember to touch the man's lips. Why the lips? Isaiah has just confessed with words how unworthy he knew himself to be, and this purifying fire addresses Isaiah exactly where he feels most inadequate. The angel's pronouncement explains the miracle that as soon as his lips were touched, he has been forgiven from the sin that made him unworthy.

Suddenly, Isaiah finds himself restored to communion and able to hear the Lord speak clearly. Having been made right so that he could be in God's presence, the smoke no longer separates him from the holiness of the throne room. Now he speaks with the Lord in a private audience.

"Whom shall I send?" (v. 8). Adding wonder and amazement to this overwhelming experience of loss followed by restoration, the King now engages Isaiah in a conversation! Since Isaiah is the sole member of the audience, he probably feels the question keenly pointed at him. Isaiah may feel utterly inadequate to stand there in this moment, yet he still has the courage to respond, "I'm here, send me to do whatever you are looking for!"

### **Isaiah 6:6-8**

- Identify the life-changing moment in this passage. What was Isaiah's role in participating in that moment?
- First Isaiah shared in his people's loss of relationship; then he experienced personal reconciliation; finally he volunteered for the mission, presumably to bring his people out of the lost relationship and into reconciliation. What kind of approach might God use to call you to a mission?

### **Isaiah 6:9-13**

- We often measure our success with our calling in terms of lives that have been changed. How would it affect living out your faith if God told you from the beginning that you would not see lives changed?
- This vision offers hope for restoration of God's people even though all appears lost. Where do you need hope today?

## ◎ Isaiah 6:9-13

### *The Challenge*

Now that Isaiah has accepted the call, he receives the specifics. And surely what he hears horrifies him. “Tell them they won’t listen to me any more,” the King says. And for good measure, he seems to tell Isaiah to deliberately send them grave warnings about their future in such a way that they can’t possibly understand. Such an action appears bizarre and rather opposite the usual purpose of a prophet, if one believes biblical prophecy serves as a warning to motivate people to change their present behavior.

Yet if we look at the way Isaiah implements this direction through his writings, these words are more a statement of fact rather than a direction for how to proceed in his calling. Basically, Isaiah learns simultaneously that he has a call to ministry and that nobody will listen to him. Bravely, the prophet responds to this challenge by dedicating himself to the painstaking task of addressing God’s people simply, like children. We see evidence of systematic arguments using plain speech throughout the book of Isaiah. For his pains, Isaiah receives criticism throughout his ministry for speaking in overly plain language (cf. Isaiah 28:9-10).

History shows that Isaiah is up to the challenge, but at this moment he has only one question: How long will this time of punishments last? After hearing about all the failings and the punishments that will befall his nation, the prophet clings to the hope that his nation will experience eventual restoration at the hands of a “holy seed,” which we now understand to be the promised Messiah. Just like Isaiah was cleansed from his unholy lips to enjoy restored communion with God, Israel will also have a moment of restoration.

## ◎ Living Out Isaiah 6:1-13

If you haven’t already done so, think about the most life-changing encounter you have had with God. It may have been your conversion, a momentous call to life ministry, or a more everyday epiphany. Write the experience with as much detail as possible, including your resulting commitment of action. Keep that record close to you as a means of determining your course of action when big decisions come up. Pray for the courage to continue following God’s call to the best of your ability.

# Friendly Perspective

by Dan McCracken

The beginning of my career in printing/publishing/communications was not a *calling*. It was an after-school job when I was entering my junior year of high school. I worked for the local newspaper in eastern Oregon for five years and then moved to Newberg, Oregon, where I worked part-time at Barclay Press and was a student at George Fox College (now University).

I can't identify when my job at Barclay Press became a calling. I never saw seraphs. There was never a coal taken from the altar that touched my lips. I don't recall a specific time when I told God, "Here am I; send me!" But I gradually came to understand that my place of Christian service was in publishing. I think it's important to

recognize the people I observed during my early days at Barclay Press who exhibited a contagious dedication and passion for ministry through the printed word. Four of those people would be Harlow Ankeny, Dick Eichenberger, Jack Willcuts, and Arthur Roberts.

I'll come back to my experience, but I want to interject a word about *calling*.

I want to highlight the fact that we as Friends understand that all Christ followers are called into ministry. All our vocations are honoring to God. We try not to segregate careers into sacred and secular categories. It is not just pastors and missionaries who are called.

Butchers and bakers, cooks and carpenters, and farmers and flight attendants, machinists and miners, teachers and truck drivers, welders and waitresses—all can do their work as an integral part of living out obedience to Christ.