

Day 1 – Introduction to the Text

Isaiah 6:1-13

As I studied Isaiah 6, I noticed that there are two issues scholars focus on in their interpretation of the chapter. First, scholars debate over whether this is Isaiah's initial commissioning by God or a re-commissioning by God for a new task. The second issue debated by scholars is whether or not verses 9-10 really mean what they appear to mean. In other words, is God really saying that His people will become spiritually deaf and blind leading to the hardening of their hearts through Isaiah's preaching?

First, in the grand scheme of the entire book, it does not matter whether this is Isaiah's initial commissioning or a re-commissioning by God for a new task. Isaiah 1:1 says that the entire book includes the "vision" Isaiah received. So whether the events in Chapter 6 took place before Chapter 1 or later does not matter all that much.

The second issue is a little more important. There will always be those who feel compelled to soften the blow of Scripture. As Gary Smith points out, "A. Davies believes it is rather unethical and unfair that 'God is judging Israel for their failure to do something that he himself had made impossible.' But this is not the case; God is judging them for their sin. The people had many opportunities to repent in the past when repentance was possible, so God is not unjust in punishing them at this point" (Smith, 195).

While interesting, I think focusing on these two issues distracts us from seeing Chapter 6 clearly—namely, we miss the glory and majesty of God. In the same year that one of the kings of Judah dies, Isaiah sees the true and eternal King, "the LORD of hosts" (v5). While Judah's kings sit on a throne in Jerusalem, the true King sits "on a throne, lofty and exalted" (v1). Not only that, but the true King fills the temple with the train of His robe and smoke (v1 and 4), as well as the whole earth with His glory (v3). Isaiah is so overwhelmed by the presence of God that he can't help but cry out, "Woe is me, for I am ruined!" (v5). Why? Because he recognizes his utter sinfulness in the light of the complete holiness of God. Isaiah's reaction is completely opposite of the people around him. Which is why his iniquity is removed and his sin forgiven (v7), while the people are turned over to judgment (vv11-12). Yet in the midst of judgment, God displays His mercy and grace (v13).

Scripture Memory: Isaiah 6:3

Day 2 – Observe the Text

Read Isaiah 6:1-13

1. When did Isaiah receive this vision? What did he see? (vv1-2)

2. What do the Seraphim call out to one another? What happened when they called out? (vv3-4)

3. What was Isaiah's reaction? (v5)

4. How did God remedy Isaiah's situation? (vv6-7)

5. What does God ask and how does Isaiah respond? (v8)

6. What does God commission Isaiah to do? (vv9-10)

7. What does Isaiah ask and how does God answer? (vv11-12)

8. In verse 13, what does God say will happen?

Day 3 – Interpret the Text

Read Isaiah 6:1-13 again

Verse 1: *I saw the Lord...* “The claim that Isaiah saw the Lord (6:1) does not contradict statements that it is impossible to see God (Gen 32:30; Exod 19:21; 33:20; Judg 13:22). The Bible refers to several people ‘seeing’ manifestations of God (Gen 16:9–13; 28:13–15; Exod 24:9–11; 34:5–10; 1 Kgs 22:19) that reveal various levels of his glory. Yet God is in reality an invisible Spirit of untold glory and majesty, so it is impossible for the human eye to behold the full manifestation of the essence of his divinity. This was a limited manifestation that was adapted to finite mental comprehension and human observation, probably in a vision” (Smith, 187).

Verse 2: *Seraphim stood above Him...* “The seraphs are bright creatures, for the word means ‘burning ones’; yet they hide their faces from the greater brightness and glory of the Lord” (Grogan, 507).

Verse 3: *Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts...* “The repetition of a word is a way of expressing a superlative idea in the Hebrew language (2 Kgs 25:15 ‘gold gold’). Thus the seraphs claim that God is completely, totally, absolutely, the holiest of the holy. Holiness is the essence of God’s nature and God himself is the supreme revelation of holiness” (Smith, 190).

Verse 4: *the temple was filling with smoke.* “The smoke or cloud (Exod 19:16–18; 1 Kgs 8:10–11) is traditionally associated with God’s appearance and serves the function of concealing the awesome majesty of God from human eyes” (Smith, 191).

Verse 5: “In the presence of God’s holiness Isaiah was not struck by his humanity or mortality, but by (a) his own impurity; (b) the uncleanness of the nation of Judah; and (c) the sight of the King, the Lord Almighty. Isaiah could not join the seraphs in praising God until his lips were purified.... Although ‘uncleanness’ (’ōy lî) is often used of ritual unworthiness to come into the presence of God, the later atonement of Isaiah (6:7) removes his guilt and sin, not just his ritual uncleanness. Thus the lips seem to represent the expressions of a sinful heart that is not pure” (191-192).

Verses 6-7: “When the seraph symbolically touched Isaiah’s lips, it announced that God ‘removed’ (sār) Isaiah’s guilt (an active verb) and that his sin ‘was atoned’ (tēkuppār) by God (a passive verb). God did not want Isaiah to misunderstand what was happening, so a clear explanation was provided to interpret the symbolic action. The removal of guilt indicates that the consequent punishment will not be exacted from Isaiah. This guilt can no longer keep Isaiah from God’s presence. The atonement means that God’s wrath and the sin that motivated it were satisfied and taken away, making renewed fellowship possible. Sin no longer separated God and Isaiah (cf. 59:1–2)” (193).

Verse 8: *who will go for Us?* “The plural ‘us’ is often linked theologically with v. 3 ... and interpreted in terms of the Trinity. It is an unusual phenomenon, found elsewhere in the OT only in Genesis (Ge 1:26; 11:7; cf. also Isa 41:21–23)” (Grogan, 508).

Verses 9-10: “The words of God to Isaiah are quoted in each of the Gospels (Mt 13:14–15; Mk 4:10–12; Lk 8:10; Jn 12:39–41) and twice by Paul (Ac 28:26–27; Ro 11:8). Each quotation is a comment on the rejection of God’s word in Christ. The references in the Synoptic Gospels are of particular interest; for they are all connected with the parable of the sower, which, like this present passage, anticipates widespread failure to make proper response to the word of God but which also, as here (v. 13), shows cause for hope. The holy seed of the vision finds its NT counterpart in the good soil of the parable” (509).

Verses 11-12: “It is better to see this question about ‘how long’ as Isaiah’s cry of dismay and lamentation (cf. similar terminology in other laments in Ps 74:10; 79:5) over the hopeless situation that lies ahead. Perhaps Isaiah is also wondering if there is any possibility of hope at some point after God’s judgment. This commission is not exactly what Isaiah had wanted to happen to himself or to God’s people in Judah, yet from earlier prophecies he knew about God’s intention to destroy Judah because of its pride (2:6–4:1), oppression, disrespect for God’s deeds, and mockery of God’s plans (5:1–30)” (Smith, 196-197).

Verse 13: “The illustration from nature introduces an element of hope. God has so ordered the plant kingdom that almost total destruction does not always extinguish life. Similarly, God has a continuing purpose of life for the remnant of his people” (Grogan, 510).

Day 4 – Apply the Text

Read Isaiah 6:1-13 one more time.

1. At what point in your life did you realize that you are a sinner? How did that realization make you feel?

2. What calling do you feel God has placed on your life?

3. God gave Isaiah the difficult task of preaching to people who would not listen to him. How has God tasked believers today in a similar way?

4. In Isaiah 6:11-13, God promises hope in the midst of destruction. How does God's grace help us to deal with the destruction of sin that we see in the world around us?

Day 5 – Implement the Text

Review and reflect on your study of the passage

1. The Apostle Peter exhorts all believers by saying “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY”” (1 Pet 1:15-16). What area(s) of your behavior do you still need to focus more on being holy?

2. If God is calling you to do something in your life, what do you plan to do about it?

Bibliography

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update.

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Sermon Notes