

Isaiah 6 Handout

The first five chapters of Isaiah served as a thematic introduction to the entire book. Many scholars believe however, that the sixth chapter of the book is not in chronological order. This chapter takes a major shift in tone and focuses on Isaiah's commission into service for the Lord. We have just spent five chapters talking about what Isaiah preached: the sin of God's people and the coming judgment because of it. Now we see why Isaiah preached it. Many believe that Isaiah put them this way to make a point. He's trying to show the answer to the question: How can the current corrupt, rebellious people, who have defied God's laws and ways, ever become the promised obedient people who will be a light to the nations? By placing chapter 6 where he does, Isaiah is holding up a model. Just as he was able to bring God's message to them, so by the same process, they could bring God's message to the world.

There are several other thoughts given for why this chapter is placed here:

- To show the source of Isaiah's authority - it comes from a direct vision of God's holiness and glory.
- To contrast God's holiness with Isaiah's sinfulness
- To show that God still seeks a messenger
- To model personal response to God's holiness
- To bridge the themes of judgment and hope

Verse 1

We get a time frame here in verse one. What is it? _____

This would put the year at about 740BC.

King Uzziah, also known as Azariah, was a good king of Judah overall. He began his reign when he was 16 and he reigned for 52 years. He led Judah in victories over the Philistines and other nations nearby. He was a strong king. God blessed him and his fame spread far and wide. However, his pride led to his downfall when he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense. He was struck with leprosy, isolating him until his death. After Uzziah died, the people are left to wonder about possible instability and feeling anxiety about the future of Judah.

At this time, Assyria was growing in strength and power, and the threat of invasion was real. Israel needed a strong king to lead them. However, Judah would sink lower and lower from which she would not rise.

Now Isaiah receives a vision of Israel's true king, who was more than capable of providing for His people.

Isaiah has a vision. Who did he see? _____

- High and exalted - showing His authority and superiority
- Seated on a throne
- The train of His robe filled the temple

God's majesty, supremacy and holiness are on display.

Verse 2-3

What was above Him? _____

This is the only explicit mention of them in the Bible. The term 'seraphim' comes from the

Hebrew word seraph which means “to burn” or “burning ones”. They are associated with fire and purification.

- Each had six wings
- Two of those wings covered their faces
- Two covered their feet
- With two they were flying
- They were calling to one another - “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is filled with His glory.”

It is thought that the seraphim cover their feet and faces as an act of humility and reverence before the Lord and because of the unapproachable glory of the one they were serving. These beings themselves were holy in that they are pure from evil. The Lord is holy because He is completely separate, not just from evil, but from every other created being.

The topic of their heavenly worship is the Lord’s indescribable holiness. In fact, the whole earth is filled with His glory.

Romans 1:20 makes it clear that creation reveals the existence and attributes of God. It says, *“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”*

We see the glory of God every day all around us, especially here where we live when we look at the mountains. Depending on the time of day or the weather, they can look completely different, but no less magnificent.

Habakkuk 2:14 gives a prediction about the future when it says, *“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”*

A.W. Towzer in his book Knowledge of the Holy says, *“We must not think of God as the highest in an ascending order of beings, starting with the single cell, and going on up from the fish to the bird to the animal to man to angel to cherub to God. God is as high above an archangel as above a caterpillar, for the gulf that separates the archangel from the caterpillar is but finite, while the gulf between God and the archangel is infinite.”*

Verse 4

What happened to the doorposts and thresholds at the sound of the Seraphim’s voices?

What filled the temple? _____

The praise of the seraphim was so powerful that it shook the heavenly temple. There was also smoke filling the place.

What details of Isaiah’s vision stand out to you most?

Verse 5

What is Isaiah's response to all of this? _____

At the sight of the Lord, Isaiah feels just how utterly sinful he is and acknowledges his hopeless condition. It has to be impossible to be in the presence of the Lord and not be convicted of our sin. Isaiah knows that his own sinful corruption cannot coexist with the God who has just been revealed to him.

What does Isaiah say about himself? _____

Unclean lips were evidence of an unclean heart (Matthew 12:34). Seeing God for who He is - high and exalted, the Lord Almighty, allows Isaiah to see himself for who he is and to accurately evaluate his condition.

Being in the presence of the Lord magnified just how unworthy Isaiah was. He feared he would be consumed. He was in the presence of such purity and felt how lacking he was. (Job 42:5-6; Dan. 10:14-17; Rev. 1:17) He had to first become aware of his own sin and uncleanness before he could worship God the way he should. Because his lips were unclean and he lived among men whose lips were unclean, he was unfit to praise or speak for God. But God, being the God of grace and mercy, doesn't destroy Isaiah. Instead, He does something about it.

Verses 6-7

What did one of the seraphim bring to Isaiah in his hand? _____

What did the seraphim do with it? _____

He then says that Isaiah's guilt has been taken away and his sin atoned for. The live coal symbolizes purification and forgiveness. God takes the initiative to cleanse Isaiah to make him fit to speak His words.

Four things we see about how this live coal atones for Isaiah's sin:

- The live coal comes from the altar, which symbolizes sacrifice and atonement.
 - In the OT atonement for sin was made through blood sacrifices that were offered on the altar (Leviticus 17:11).
 - The altar represents God's provision for forgiveness.
 - The live coal isn't magical – it is a symbol of the cleansing power of God that is embedded in the sacrificial system that He established.
- The live coal symbolizes purification
 - Fire in the Bible is a symbol of purification.
 - It burns away any impurities. In Isaiah's case, it specifically purified his unclean lips.
 - The touching of his lips shows that God is purifying the very instrument of his calling as a prophet—his speech.
- It was a divine act, not human effort
 - Isaiah didn't cleanse himself. A seraphim brings the coal from the altar to him, showing that it was all God's initiative, not anything that Isaiah did.
 - Isaiah's confession is met immediately with grace and cleansing from God.

- This act prepares Isaiah for his mission
 - Isaiah's guilt and sin needs to be removed before he can serve as God's messenger.
 - The coal is symbolic of a transformative encounter that gets him ready to begin his work for the Lord.

Verse 8

The Lord asks, "whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

What is Isaiah's response to this?

God would send someone, but that someone needed to be willing to go.

The order of the events that occurred in this passage is significant.

Notice the progression in Isaiah's experience here:

seeing → confessing → cleansing → sending

First, Isaiah sees the Lord high and exalted and the seraphim surrounding Him calling out "holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of His glory!" The sight before him is so overwhelming. God's holiness leads him to see his own sinfulness so clearly which leads to confession - "I am a man of unclean lips!" Next we see the seraphim provide God's provision for cleansing - a live coal from the altar is touched to Isaiah's lips. Lastly, we see God send Isaiah with a mission to fulfill.

I think it's really important for us to see this progression. If we don't clearly see God for who He is, then it can be difficult to see just how sinful we are. Without this step, we don't see our need for confession and to be cleansed.

Before we move on to the rest of the chapter I want to look at this whole experience that Isaiah just had. **What details of Isaiah's vision stand out to you most?**

If you had been in Isaiah's place, how do you think you would have responded?

Why do you think Isaiah responds so quickly: "Here am I! Send me!"?

In verses 9-13 we see the Lord proceed to give Isaiah specific instructions. We see what the prophet could expect in terms of his ministry (vs. 9-10), the historical-political situation (vs. 11-12), and the nation's survival (vs. 13).

Verses 9-10

We get an interesting mission that God gives to Isaiah. It's definitely not what you would expect Him to say. He basically tells him that his preaching will not lead to national revival, but rather to a hardening of their hearts.

Verse 9 - "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving."

Isaiah will proclaim the truth and the people will hear it, but they won't be able to grasp what is being said. As they are exposed to God's word over and over, their hearts will only become more unresponsive and therefore will only harden more. This shows us how rejecting God's truth again and again will lead to spiritual numbness.

Verse 10 - "Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

At first glance of verse 10, it sounds like God doesn't want His people to understand and repent. However, we know that's not true, because we clearly see throughout scripture that God wants His people to turn back to Him.

Isaiah 45:22 says, *"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."*

Ezekiel 33:11 says, *"Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'"*

So, verse 10 cannot mean that God enjoys keeping people blind and lost. Instead, I believe it shows what happens when people persistently reject the word of God. Their hearts become hard. We see the judgment coming on God's people comes after a continued rejection and not God's desire to withhold mercy. By the time that Isaiah came on the scene, Judah had already resisted God's warnings to turn back to Him for generations. When people continually hear the truth and reject it, their spiritual sensitivity dulls— similar to calloused skin that no longer feels pain.

The message itself becomes a tool that exposes and confirms the hardness, rather than turning them to repentance. We see here that God is giving them over to their own blindness. However, this isn't what God wants. He wants His people to repent and turn back and to bring healing to the nation. Their refusal to do so makes restoration impossible until judgment has run its course. That's the point where we are at now. Judgment has to come before restoration can take place.

We see three things from this verse:

- Human responsibility - God's people freely resist His word and close their eyes to the truth.
- Divine sovereignty - God allows their rejection to harden their hearts. Their willful blindness turns into a permanent condition.
- Purpose of judgment - The hardening of their hearts isn't the end goal. It is a step in the redefining process that will eventually lead to restoration.

It is interesting to note that this passage is quoted at least five times in the New Testament.

- In Matthew 13:14-15, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, Jesus uses it to explain why His parables conceal the truth from people who refuse to listen.
- In John 12:39-40— John says that the people's unbelief fulfills Isaiah's words.
- Acts 28:26-27 – Paul applies this passage to those who are rejecting the message of the gospel.

One thing we see in all of this is that God's word demands a response. We can hear, acknowledge and obey, or we can hear and reject. If we reject it long enough, our hearts will become dull to the point where we can no longer hear it correctly. In this way, spiritual dullness becomes a consequence of continued rejection.

Verses 11-13

What is Isaiah's question to the Lord about all of this? _____

How long should he continue to preach to a nation of people that continues to harden their hearts.

God's gives a response— Until:

- The cities lie in ruin and are without inhabitant
- Houses are left deserted
- Fields are ruined and ravaged
- Everyone has been sent far away
- The land is utterly forsaken

The Lord doesn't give Isaiah a definitive number of years. He does imply though that he should continue to preach until the full extent of God's judgment has been dealt out.

That is a horrible image of what is to happen, but it is the very thing that God warned them about long ago.

Deuteronomy 28:49-52 says, *"The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, 50 a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. 51 They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or olive oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. 52 They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the LORD your God is giving you."*

Verse 13 hints at another wave of judgment after the initial one has run its course. "And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste." After the initial wave of judgment, a remnant will remain. We see that total destruction has not taken place, but severe reduction has. "Again laid waste" suggests that God's judgment to purify the nation of all unfaithfulness will continue until it is completely cleansed.

What will be left in the end? _____

The holy seed will be the stump in the land.

The terebinth and oak are both types of trees that even after being cut down can sprout new growth out of their stump. This shows us that even after the "tenth" has been laid waste, a stump will remain for regrowth to take place.

Isaiah uses this image of a tree being cut down. The tree is the nation of Israel. Being cut down is God's judgment against them (specifically Judah). The stump is the remnant that

remains after judgment. The holy seed represents the new, purified life that will spring up from that remnant.

Verse 13 is a foreshadowing of the coming Messiah. Jesus is the true holy seed who will eventually come from this remnant of faithful people (from the line of David).

Some things we see from this chapter:

- ❖ God's holiness is supreme
 - It is clear from Isaiah's vision that the Lord is high and exalted and He has sovereign rule over all.
 - God's holiness is perfect and unmatched
 - God is majestic, pure and glorious
- ❖ Human sinfulness is exposed
 - In God's presence, our sin is clearly exposed
 - No one can stand righteous before God, apart from grace
- ❖ God's grace cleanses and restores
- ❖ Genuine transformation begins with seeing God's holiness, receiving His grace and responding in obedient faith.
- ❖ God's word always accomplishes something. It never returns empty.
- ❖ Even when God's message is rejected, His plans never waver.
- ❖ Success in ministry is not measured by results, but by faithfulness.
- ❖ God's judgment always serves His redemptive purpose.
- ❖ God's word reveals the true condition of the heart
- ❖ God's truth will heal those who humble themselves and harden those who resist.

Do you think it is possible to be a believer in Jesus Christ and saved by His blood, and have a hard heart?

Hebrews 3:12-13 says, *"See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."*

How do you think you would have felt had you been Isaiah knowing that your mission would not result in people turning towards God, but actually turning further away?

How do we stay faithful when we don't see quick results or positive responses, or in fact the results are discouraging?

How should seeing God's holiness affect the way we approach worship or pray and live today?

Personal Reflection:

Which part of Isaiah's journey speaks most to you right now?

What areas of your life would be revealed as "unclean" in the light of God's holiness?

Where do you feel God calling you right now to step out in obedience?

What holds you back from saying, "Here am I, send me"?

What might God be calling you to do in your own life or community right now?