

Session 8

Isaiah 6:1-13 Session 8

Isaiah Oracle by Oracle / Dr. Randy White

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Session Purpose

To consider Isaiah's vision of the enthroned Lord, his cleansing, his commission, and the judgment that leaves a holy remnant.

Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up (vv.1-4)

- The vision of the throne (v. 1)
 - The Timing: The year of Uzziah's Death
 - * This was likely around 740/739 BC, at the close of Uzziah's fifty-two year reign (2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chron. 26:3, 23).
 - * Uzziah's death marked the end of a long, outwardly strong reign, but his final years were under judgment because of his pride and leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21). His son Jotham governed while Uzziah was isolated (2 Kings 15:5).
 - * The wider setting includes Assyria's growing power under Tiglath-pileser III, whose reign began in 745 BC; this pressure soon becomes central in Isaiah's ministry during Ahaz's reign (Isa. 7:1-17; 2 Kings 16:5-9).
 - The Vision: The Lord sitting on a throne
 - * While often understood to be God the Father, I think we can definitively take this to be God the Son, the second member of the Trinity, whom we now know as Jesus Christ.
- John 12:39-41 connects Isaiah's vision with Christ's glory, so a Christological reading is required.
- This is a case of the New Testament interpreting the Old Testament. Hermeneutically, we should first read the Old Testament in its own textual and historical context, because importing later ideas without textual warrant can become eisegesis. However, when the Scripture itself gives a definitive interpretation, we can rest on it. For example, Matthew identifies Hosea 11:1 as fulfilled in Christ (Matt. 2:15), Peter reads Psalm 16 as ultimately speaking of Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:25-32), Paul identifies the promised "seed" as Christ (Gal. 3:16), and Hebrews applies royal and divine Sonship texts to Christ (Heb. 1:5-13). These

examples do not erase the original Old Testament setting; they show that later inspired revelation can disclose the fuller divine intention of an earlier text. We should note that Isaiah himself may not have understood this in the full light of Christ's revelation. However, we do have that full revelation and are constrained to do so.

* Assumption to test: this is future, not present, because this is a physical description of Jesus on His throne.

· The Son does not currently occupy the future earthly Davidic throne in its public kingdom fullness. Note that "throne" should be taken in its Biblical, covenantal, Davidic sense (Acts 1:6), not in a "spiritual" sense. Some argue that passages such as Hebrews 1:8 require an eternal, pre-existent throne. Hebrews 1:8 says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever," and is applied to the Son. However, it quotes Psalm 45:6, which is a royal messianic psalm whose fullest fulfillment rests in the Messiah's reign. Furthermore, passages like Isaiah 9:7 use similar throne language and refer to the future increase of Messiah's government and peace on David's throne. Further, passages like Acts 2:30-36 say that God would raise up Christ "to sit on his throne," but the argument can be read as looking forward to the full Davidic reign rather than exhausting that reign in the present session.

· Since Christ is presently exalted at God's right hand (Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:30-36; Eph. 1:20-22; Heb. 1:3, 8), and He will also reign in the

future fullness of the kingdom on a throne (Luke 1:32-33; Matt. 25:31; Rev. 11:15), then Isaiah must be seeing the future, not the present.

· Only by *assuming* a present presence on the throne can Isaiah 6 be taken as such. Isaiah will be filled with many visions presented as "in the now" but are actually future. Examples of future realities spoken of with vivid immediacy include the child who "is born" and reigns on David's throne (Isa. 9:6-7), the coming righteous Branch and transformed creation (Isa. 11:1-10), Babylon's fall described prophetically before it happens (Isa. 13:1-22), and the Servant's suffering described in past-tense form before its fulfillment (Isa. 52:13-53:12). Isaiah absolutely "saw" this in the year that King Uzziah died, but he "saw" the future.

* Taking this as a vision of the future, it must then be a picture of the future millennial Temple, not the Temple in Isaiah's day.

• The vision surrounding the throne (vv. 2-4)
– Only in verses 2 and 6 do we have "seraphims" (KJV) explicitly mentioned.

* Isaiah 6 is the only passage where heavenly beings are explicitly called seraphim. The Hebrew word *saraph* is used elsewhere for "fiery" serpents (Num. 21:6, 8; Deut. 8:15) and for the "fiery flying serpent" (Isa. 14:29; 30:6), but those texts do not clearly describe the same heavenly beings as Isaiah 6.

* Other throne-room passages describe created heavenly beings near God's throne, especially cherubim or living creatures, but they are not called seraphim (Ezek. 1:5-14; Ezek. 10:1-22; Rev. 4:6-8).

- Revelation 4:8 is especially similar because the living creatures cry, “Holy, holy, holy,” but similarity of function does not prove they are the same class of being.
- * The seraphim are a particular class of created heavenly beings who, at least in this passage, are designed for worship and praise.
- * Assuming, as we do, a millennial temple, this implies the presence of seraphim on earth during the millennium.
- Note of caution: The seraphim prove the holiness and majesty of the enthroned Lord more directly than they prove the earthly location of the scene.
- The glory of the Lord in the temple was so strong that “the posts of the door moved.” This argues against a spiritual temple and for an actual temple structure in the vision; if it were only spiritual, the meaning of “the posts of the door” would need to be explained rather than assumed.

I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips (vv.5-8)

- “Then said I . . .” (v. 5). These words move us from the vision of glory to the present reality.
 - This is not explicit, but is a pattern of prophecy: future vision followed by recognition of present crisis.
 - * See, for example, Daniel receiving future visions and then being physically and spiritually overwhelmed in the present (Dan. 7:15, 28; 8:27; 10:7-11), Ezekiel seeing the glory of the Lord and falling on his face before receiving his commission (Ezek. 1:28-2:3), and John seeing the glorified Christ and falling as dead before being addressed in the present (Rev. 1:17-19).
 - * Even though the throne/temple scene is future, verse 5 is still Isaiah’s immediate response to what he saw. Isaiah’s response was real, and in the present.
 - * Isaiah’s response is built upon the fact that “. . . mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (v. 5).
 - Isaiah’s response on seeing the Lord’s glory was “woe is me.”
 - * Similar to Job abhorring himself after seeing the Lord’s majesty (Job 42:5-6), Peter confessing his sinfulness before Christ’s revealed power (Luke 5:8), and John falling as dead before the glorified Christ (Rev. 1:17).
- Verses 6-7 give a picture of Isaiah’s cleansing for his ministry.
 - We learn that in addition to six wings, the seraphim also have hands. Since there is no further description, we would assume hands like a man’s hands.
 - * Cherubim are described as having “the hands of a man” under their wings (Ezek. 1:8; 10:8, 21). Daniel also describes heavenly messengers touching him with a hand (Dan. 10:10, 16, 18).
 - * Thus the three categories of heavenly beings, Cherubim, Seraphim, and Angels are all said to have hands.
 - The “live coal” was removed with tongs, as would be expected. But was then taken “in his hand” (the hand of the seraph), which implies that seraphim must have physical abilities (related to touching of hot things) beyond normal human hands.
 - The live coal touched Isaiah’s lips, which would be tremendously painful and likely leave a scar, even with just a quick touch. However, this is not any indication that we should take the scene symbolically.
 - Upon being touched by the live coal, the

judicial decree was given, “thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”

- * It is interesting that this total removal of sin was simply a decree from the Lord, with the announcement by the seraph. Similar scenes of cleansing by divine declaration include Joshua the high priest having his iniquity removed and his filthy garments replaced (Zech. 3:1-5), David seeking cleansing from sin (Ps. 51:1-12), and Jesus pronouncing forgiveness directly (Mark 2:5-12; Luke 7:48-50).
- * If anything, this shows that the Lord **can** forgive sin and its consequences **at will**, which raises questions for popular presentations of “penal substitution” that make forgiveness sound mechanically impossible apart

from an immediate visible payment.

- Upon receiving this forgiveness, the Lord Himself gave the familiar call, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?,” followed by Isaiah’s willing response, “Here am I, send me.”
 - * The juxtaposition between “I” and “us” in verse 8 is interesting. It could be a reference to something Trinitarian, but could also be inclusive of the heavenly hosts.
 - The Trinitarian reading is theologically possible in light of fuller revelation, but the immediate context also includes the heavenly council. The text should probably be used as suggestive rather than conclusive Trinitarian proof.

Isaiah’s Great Commission (vv.9-10)

- Verses 9-10 are not at all a word of redemption, but a word of condemnation.
- The words are intentionally paradoxical and judicial. They clearly carry force beyond a bare command to hear sounds and see sights.
 - To say, in effect, “hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not,” is to announce that continued exposure to truth will become judgment for a people already resistant to the Lord.
 - It is an expression of the Lord’s anger: the same prophetic word that could have led to repentance will now harden those who refuse it.
 - The pleas of Isaiah will serve as a judicial hardening. But, under different circumstances (listening ears and an understanding heart), they could also serve as the plea of a willing Lord to provide them forgiveness.
- If they do “see with their eyes, and hear with their ears” they would “convert, and be healed” (v. 10).
 - This is the implicit *contingency* built into this passage, and, more broadly, into the book of Isaiah. **If Israel will listen and respond, the Lord would heal them.**
 - * See “Prophecy Reconsidered: A Biblical Case for Conditional Fulfillment” by Randy White, available at Dispensational Publishing House.
 - The Lord did not need “more evidence” before He could give a judicial decree. Being already fully guilty (“I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips,” v. 5), these words of hardening express the Lord’s frustration and continued plea with His people, much like Matthew 23:37-39.

Until the cities be wasted and the land utterly desolate (vv.11-13)

- Isaiah asks, “Lord, how long?” (v. 11). Presumably, “How long shall I plead with the people?”
- The response from the Lord was, in essence, “until the last man standing has gone down.”
 - Once again, this is painted in a picture of the Lord’s righteous judgment, but has embedded in it a message of grace: *God wants the warning to continue all the way to the bitter end.*
 - Even when the nation gets down to a tenth of what it was (v. 13), that tenth “shall be eaten.”
 - But even then a word of hope remains: the fallen nation will be like “a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them.”
 - * That is, even though there is nothing but a stump, there will still be life within.
- * The “holy seed” is the enduring substance within the stump, preserving the possibility of future life, even after this judgment.
 - This anticipates Isaiah’s later remnant and shoot imagery: a remnant shall return (Isa. 10:20-22), and a rod/shoot will come from the stem of Jesse (Isa. 11:1).
- In essence, the Lord is going to continue to plead with Israel, His chosen, even when the nation is reduced to a stump in the ground, because He has preserved life within that stump and can cause it to put forth a shoot and live again.