



God Sends

God calls His people to recognize and declare His sovereign purposes.

ISAIAH 6:1-13

Each branch of the U.S. military has some form of saying, “Never volunteer for anything.” However, when Isaiah had an encounter with the King—the LORD of Armies—he quickly volunteered to take on the mission God had for him. That’s what happens when a person experiences what Isaiah did. The Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah in a vision, and in this vision Isaiah recognized his sin and need for a Savior. The Lord cleansed him of his sin and then called him to service. When the Lord reveals Himself to us and saves us from our sin, the proper and appropriate response is Isaiah’s response, “Here I am. Send me.”

Why does God call and then use believers to carry out His purposes?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

ISAIAH 5:1–6:13

Isaiah concluded his introduction of the book with a song of indictment against the people, followed by six “woes.” The song is about Isaiah’s “loved one” who had a vineyard. This loved one worked hard to have a productive vineyard. He expected a harvest of good grapes but instead got worthless grapes. Then the Lord revealed He was the owner and vinedresser of the vineyard. He said He would remove everything He built as a protection for His vineyard, and it would be laid waste as He caused the rain to cease. The Lord’s vineyard in which He delighted was the people of Israel and Judah. He expected from them justice and righteousness, but all He saw was injustice, bloodshed, and cries of despair. Accordingly, these wicked people could expect divine judgment (Isa. 5:1-7).

Isaiah marshaled six woes against these unfaithful people. The word *woe* was spoken in times of mourning over the death of a loved one, expressing grief and bereavement. The prophets used this expression to foretell divine judgment. The sins that brought on these woes included greed and socioeconomic oppression, carousing, spiritual blindness, the exploitation of others, the perversion of morality, and the arrogance of thinking they were wiser than the Lord. Consequently, the Lord would turn their sins back upon themselves. Those who greedily accumulated wealth at the expense of others would become desolate. Those who were gluttons and drunks would die of hunger and thirst. Those who taunted the Lord to hurry up would quickly experience His judgment, and those who exchanged darkness for light and light for darkness would experience darkness and distress, the light being obscured by clouds of judgment (5:6-30).

It is after this climactic ending to Isaiah’s introduction in chapters 1–5 that Isaiah described how the Lord called him and what the content of his message would be to God’s covenant people (6:1-13).

As you read Isaiah 6:1-13, how would you describe the connection between how one sees God and how one responds to God?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GOD'S GLORY (ISA. 6:1-4)

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the hem of his robe filled the temple.

² Seraphim were standing above him; they each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies; his glory fills the whole earth. ⁴ The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke.

VERSE 1

Isaiah described the scene of heaven revealed to him in a vision while in the temple. God's throne was encircled by angels declaring His holiness, a sound that shook the foundation of the temple. But before beginning his description of what he saw, Isaiah recorded that he had the vision in the year of King Uzziah's death, which was in 740 BC.

Uzziah, who was also called Azariah, began his reign over Judah in 792 BC as a fairly good king who did "what was right in the LORD's sight," with the exception of failing to remove the high places (2 Kings 15:3-4). So the people continued worshiping at the high places. It was a time of economic boom and military strength.

Even though God had given Judah a good king and blessed the people with good things during Uzziah's reign, they still continued their corrupt practices. It was time for God to call His messenger, Isaiah, and announce His displeasure with them.

Isaiah's vision began with a vision of the Lord. No one has seen God, yet the Lord graciously revealed Himself in a vision to Isaiah for the sake of His people. Isaiah saw the splendor of His majesty **seated on a high and lofty throne**, asserting Yahweh's power and authority over all creation. The Lord's **robe filled the temple** as His glory fills all the earth.

VERSE 2

The **seraphim**, literally "the burning ones," are angelic beings who are heavenly attendants to the Lord. Isaiah witnessed them flying above the Lord with their three sets of **wings**, with one

set covering their faces, one set covering their feet, and with one set they flew. Fire is often associated with the presence and glory of God. In reverence, submission, and awe for Yahweh, and because of the brilliance of His glory, these fiery heavenly beings covered themselves.

DID YOU KNOW?

Isaiah 6 is the only place in the Bible that mentions the seraphim. Of all the angelic beings mentioned in the Bible, only the seraphim and cherubim (Ezek. 1:4-28) are described as having wings.

VERSES 3-4

The way Hebrew expresses the superlative—the supreme and extreme surpassing all others—is to repeat something three times. (Compare Rev. 4:8.) So in the strongest way possible, the seraphim were declaring God’s holiness. They were not just declaring God holy; they were declaring God is the most holy being there is.

To proclaim God is *holy* is to proclaim His divine perfection, unlike anything in creation. We are created beings; He is the Creator. Therefore, God is unique. All of creation is dependent on Him, while He is completely independent of His creation. God is infinitely superior to all of His creation and holy in all of His attributes. To say God is *holy, holy, holy* is to say He alone is to be honored above all else, because He is above all else and His *glory fills the whole earth*.

The sound of the seraphim calling out to one another shook *the foundations of the doorways*. The temple was *filled with smoke* that may have been from the altar in the temple. Smoke or a cloud is often associated with the presence of God and probably shielded Isaiah from seeing any more than his mortal eyes were able to bear.

What should we learn about God in Isaiah’s vision of God on His throne? How should God’s holiness affect how we think about God and how we live for Him?

BIBLE SKILL: *Dig deeper into the meaning and usage of key words or phrases.*

Focus on the word *glory* in Isaiah 6:3. Look up the word in a Bible dictionary to discover its basic meaning. Use a concordance to find other uses of the term in the Scriptures. Scan the passages and make notes of any findings that help you better understand the term. What does the word and its usage reveal about the nature of God?

GOD'S FORGIVENESS (ISA. 6:5-7)

⁵ Then I said: Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies. ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷ He touched my mouth with it and said: Now that this has touched your lips, your iniquity is removed and your sin is atoned for.

VERSE 5

Isaiah's first response was, *Woe is me for I am ruined*. In other words, "I am about to die!" The word *woe* is associated with mourning a death or warning of impending death. The word *ruined* comes from a Hebrew verb meaning "to be silenced" and was often associated with the silence of death. Isaiah believed he was doomed to die. Perhaps God's statement to Moses in Exodus 33:20 flashed in his mind, "humans cannot see me and live." What is sure is that at the sight of God's throne, Isaiah became aware of his sin and unworthiness to be in God's presence. Others have had similar responses. When Job saw God, he responded, "I reject my words and am sorry for them; I am dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Similarly, when Peter first met Jesus and witnessed His awesome power, he fell to his knees and said, "Go away from me, because I'm a sinful man, Lord" (Luke 5:8).

Isaiah gave three reasons for his response. The first was that he was overcome with the consciousness of his own sin and recognized

he was unworthy to stand in God's presence. Isaiah knew he was *unclean* before God. He was unable to join the seraphim in praising God because his lips were unclean. The second reason for his response was that Judah was a sinful people too. In this overwhelming experience, Isaiah thought not only about his own situation but that of his *people*. The third reason for Isaiah's response was that he saw Almighty God arrayed in splendor and glory.

VERSES 6-7

Before Isaiah could faithfully serve the Lord by prophesying to a people who were unclean, he himself needed to be clean. So, no doubt at the bidding of the Lord, one of the seraphim took a glowing coal from the altar with tongs and touched Isaiah's lips as a way of cleansing Isaiah of his sin.

God sometimes used fire to purify. The purifying burning coal from the altar implies an acceptable sacrifice was made for Isaiah's forgiveness of sin and his reconciliation to God. Isaiah did nothing for himself. The removal of his iniquity and the atonement for Isaiah's sin was initiated and completed by the Lord. The removal of Isaiah's sin meant God's sense of justice was satisfied, and the prophet could now stand before God without fear. This is what the expression, *your sin is atoned for* meant. Isaiah's experience anticipated what the people of Judah needed done for their own iniquities to become the holy and blessed people God promised they would become in chapters 1-5. All of these actions anticipate Jesus, who is the one and only atoning Sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sin.

How should Isaiah's vision of God on His throne affect how we think about the holiness of God? What can we learn from Isaiah about God and ourselves when we stand before God to worship Him?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God (Eph. 2:4).

GOD'S CALL (ISA. 6:8-10)

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking: Who should I send? Who will go for us? I said: Here I am. Send me. ⁹ And he replied: Go! Say to these people: Keep listening, but do not understand; keep looking, but do not perceive. ¹⁰ Make the minds of these people dull; deafen their ears and blind their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their minds, turn back, and be healed.

VERSE 8

Finally, God spoke and posed a question, asking who was willing to go on mission on His behalf. The New Testament references this passage to Jesus and the Holy Spirit (John 12:40-41; Acts 28:25-26). Therefore, the “us” in *who will go for us* is likely the self-consultation of God within the Trinity and more than just an expression of a plural of majesty. The Lord’s questions to Isaiah reveal He is a God on mission. His mission is to save all who will repent of their sin and by faith turn to Him.

Isaiah’s response was short and to the point: *Here I am. Send me*. He experienced the merciful and gracious cleansing of God from the penalty of his sin, which is death. In addition, because the Lord had forgiven him, Isaiah had a right standing before God. Consequently, Isaiah’s quick reply was the only logical and appropriate one.

VERSES 9-10

In verse 9, God told Isaiah what his message would be, and in verse 10 revealed to Isaiah what would result from his message. Verse 9 contains the oddest message one could imagine God giving to His prophet. It seems as if God didn’t want them to understand the message. However, the mention of *minds, ears, and eyes* taken together is a poetic way of saying the people were so spiritually blind and deaf that when Isaiah preached to them, what he said would be incomprehensible to them. In fact, Isaiah would speak with such simplicity that the people would ridicule him for it (Isa. 28:9-10). The only way they could understand was to have a change of heart. Their hearts were hardened in rebellion against God, and they would become even more hardened as they heard and rejected God’s word through His prophet. The Lord did not

commission Isaiah for the purpose of confusing the people; God called Isaiah to proclaim His message while realizing most would reject it. Therefore, they would be without excuse when God's judgment fell on them because the Lord was giving them one more opportunity *to turn back, and be healed*.

Why is it important for believers who proclaim God's message to recognize that most who hear the message will not respond positively to it?

GOD'S PERSISTENCE (ISA. 6:11-13)

¹¹ Then I said, "Until when, Lord?" And he replied: Until cities lie in ruins without inhabitants, houses are without people, the land is ruined and desolate, ¹² and the LORD drives the people far away, leaving great emptiness in the land. ¹³ Though a tenth will remain in the land, it will be burned again. Like the terebinth or the oak that leaves a stump when felled, the holy seed is the stump.

VERSES 11-13

Isaiah asked the Lord how long he was to deliver God's message to people who were unwilling to repent. God directed him to deliver the message until His judgment was complete. The Lord painted a picture of *cities that lie in ruins without inhabitants* and a land that is *ruined and desolate*. He was going to use invaders to lay waste to Judah and take the survivors into captivity. Jeremiah later prophesied that this exile would last seventy years (Jer. 25:11; 29:10). Ezekiel prophesied that during that time God would purify His people (Ezek. 36:25).

But God did not leave Isaiah hopeless; He pointed to a remnant who would return to Him. A *tenth* would survive, though they too would suffer. The purifying would continue until only a *stump*, a *holy seed* would remain. Yet this holy seed was what would spring forth as the holy people of God. Even though judgment must fall upon the sinful people of Judah because of God's justice, His grace would shine through as He would never eradicate His promise of salvation that would ultimately come through Jesus, who was the first fruit of this holy seed promised to Abraham. (See Gen. 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:22-23.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- God is holy and chooses to reveal His glory to people.
- All humans are in need of God’s forgiveness for sin.
- God invites willing followers to deliver His message to others.
- God’s messengers are to be faithful throughout their lives regardless of the response.

God revealed His holiness to Isaiah in a vision. What does it mean to say God is holy, and what are various ways the Lord reveals He is holy?

As a group, read aloud Isaiah 6:8. Discuss how Isaiah’s response to God’s call upon his life is the logical and appropriate response for every believer. What might be said about a person who responds negatively to such a calling?

Why is it so important for believers to be faithful throughout their lives to God’s commission to serve Him even when it can be difficult to do so?

PRAYER NEEDS
