
Isaiah

Isaiah, This Is Your Calling ~ Part 1

Chapter 6:1-4

Did Isaiah get his calling after the first five chapters of this book? Or, is there some other reason for the placement of this chapter here? We'll talk about that in a moment. But there is no question God can act for His own glory even through individuals who don't yet know Him.

*"It is true that many servants of God have preached to others before having a clear, definite experience with the Lord for themselves. John Wesley is a case in point. He tells us in his **Journal**, that while in Georgia he learned that he who came to America to convert the Indians, had never been converted himself. It is true that in later years he doubted whether he had diagnosed his own case aright, but he certainly preached to others for several years before he had that heart-warming experience in London when he knew definitely that he was born of God. And one could tell of many others, even D. L. Moody among them, who began to preach before having the clear understanding of salvation by grace and the endowment of the Holy Spirit."*¹

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Introduction: The presence of this chapter between Chapters 5 and 6 creates an interesting question. Why here? There are basically two approaches to dealing with it. Both views have support from godly scholars and for that reason I don't hold a strong opinion, although I lean towards the latter. But as we'll see in a moment, it doesn't matter which approach we take.

The first position, held by Calvin and Barnes among others, states that the vision was received by Isaiah after he was already functioning as a prophet. Its purpose was to confirm to a greater extent the depth of his calling and the ongoing importance of carrying out his office.

The support for this view directs us to the apostles who originally were limited to Judah for their ministry. But their roles were reconfirmed after the resurrection when they received greater ministries, ones that eventually spread throughout the world. So this approach would have the vision placed here as an introduction to a specific mission.

¹ Ironside, H. A., Isaiah, Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., Neptune, NJ, 1952, p. 37.

The second approach we're considering is held by Young, McGee, Ironside, and Buksbazen, among others. It states the vision actually occurred as part of Isaiah's original call and therefore corresponds to calls given to other prophets. There is a logic to the flow of the material. The first five chapters present the substance of Isaiah's message. Next he presents the substance of his calling to reinforce the authority of what has previously been shared. This would also reinforce the validity of what was to come.

Finally, the chapter can be seen as a hinge. It is a conclusion to the first section, Chapters 1-5 and an introduction to the next, Chapters 7-15. But, in any case, the material can be understood within its own context regardless of how one approaches it. Though this double purpose does help in understanding its general function. The most important point is how this vision effected Isaiah's view of his calling. Oswalt states:

*"The vision which 6:1-8 reports was clearly fundamental to the entire course of Isaiah's ministry and to the shape of his book. The glory, the majesty, the holiness, and the righteousness of God became the ruling concepts of his ministry. Furthermore, it is this experience which explains Isaiah's contempt for, and horror of, any kind of national or individual life which did not pay adequate attention to the one God."*²

Verse 1a: Isaiah does give us adequate information to date the vision by placing it during the year King Uzziah died. (Some Rabbinical scholars believe this was actually a reference to him being stricken with leprosy, which was to be considered dead.) This occurred in 740 B.C. The NIV Study Bible notes:

*"Isaiah's commission probably preceded his preaching ministry; the account was postponed to serve as a climax to the opening series of oracles and to provide warrant for the shocking announcements of judgment they contain. The people had mocked the "Holy One of Israel" (5:19), and now he has commissioned Isaiah to call them to account. Uzziah reigned from 792 to 740 and was a godly and powerful king. When he insisted on burning incense in the temple, however, he was struck with leprosy and remained leprous until his death (2Ch 26:16-21)."*³

"But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God."

Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him.

King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house—leprous, and excluded from the temple of the LORD. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land" (2 Chronicles 26:16-21).

² Oswalt, John N., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, "The Book of Isaiah," In Two Volumes, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1986, p. 176.

³ NIV Study Bible Notes, Zondervan Interactive Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1999

Verse 1b: What may have happened here is with the death of Uzziah, Isaiah goes to the Temple to turn speak with God concerning what to expect for Judah. There in the midst of the Temple he is allowed to experience this vision of God's majesty and glory.

And so, Isaiah has one of those unique experiences of seeing a manifestation of God and His presence in heaven. This is obviously a Theophany, but it isn't necessarily a Christophany. Note, this isn't to say it isn't a Christophany, but that it doesn't have to be. God had manifested Himself to men on a number of occasions although scripture is clear that one cannot see God, obviously meaning the Father or the Holy Spirit.

“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.” ... “God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen” (John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:15-16).

God did appear to Abraham though on the plains of Mamre. This was a Christophany.

“The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by” (Genesis 18:1-3).

So was God's appearance to Jacob when He wrestled him.

“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

The man asked him, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”

Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.”

But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”” (Genesis 32:24-30).

On the other hand God's manifestation to Moses in the “burning bush,” and to Israel in general as the “Shekinah Glory,” was a Theophany.

Of course the greatest manifestation of God is not a Theophany or a Christophany, it is the incarnation. While we see the pre-incarnate Christ in some of the above mentioned manifestations, the incarnation wasn't a manifestation, it was God taking on human form through the virgin birth.

“... but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7).

The best argument for believing that Isaiah saw the pre-incarnate Christ is made by the apostle John when he said:

“Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him” (John 12:41).

And so Isaiah sees the throne of heaven, a manifestation of the power of God. He sees the Lord’s presence in heaven. This is *Adonai*, the God who is able to carry out His purposes. And what is seen here is a throne, a throne also seen by Ezekiel and John.

“Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.” ... “After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne” (Ezekiel 1:26-28; Revelation 4:1-3).

The throne is said to be in the temple. It would seem this is the heavenly temple. But the distinction between the heavenly and earthly become meaningless in the context of a vision. And because it is a vision, therefore what is being seen is symbolic, a way of giving Isaiah a taste of God and His power and authority. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to take this too literally. But the reason the vision takes place in the temple setting should be obvious. For the people of Judah, and for that matter Israel, would expect to hear God’s messages from the Temple, or as Solomon stated:

“Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive” (1 Kings 8:30).

Verses 2-3: The vision is to convey the glory and majesty of God by showing the glory and majesty of His surroundings. And here we find the Seraphim. This is the only time in scripture we find them mentioned. Should we take them as actual beings or symbols? Well, considering we find other angels elsewhere, we should see them as actual. They are individuals, personal, spiritual beings because they have faces, feet and hands. They speak and have a moral concept.

They serve a different function from Cherubim as well as having physical differences such as four wings. Keep in mind that even angels are described to picture their functions. Does this

mean this is the actual appearance or the way they are portrayed in the vision for Isaiah's sake? I don't know and again, I'm not sure it matters.

The Cherubim in the temple were guards of God's holiness. Here the Seraphim serve as God's attendants round the throne. Their name means burning which may relate to their purity in the service of God. Dr. McGee sees a bit more here:

*"Seraph means 'to burn.' It is the word used in connection with the sin offerings and judgment. ... The seraphim search out sin, ... The seraphim in Isaiah's vision are protecting the holiness of God."*⁴

The fact these beings are identified with sin and judgment seems appropriate because of Isaiah's condemnation of Judah for her sins, and warning of God's coming judgments. A vision of God's glory isn't necessarily reassuring, depending on how one is walking, whether in obedience, or rebellion.

They flew to perform God's service. They were in a hovering position so they could be prepared for instant service. The Hebrew is in the imperfect verb form, meaning their service is one of continual action. And the most important part of their service is praising God.

Isaiah hears them calling out Holy, Holy, Holy as a praise of God. Three times they cry Holy. This can either be to emphasize the majesty of God, or it can be a passing reference to the Tri-unity of God. Grogan notes:

"The trisagion, or threefold ascription of holiness (cf. Rev 4:8), has been interpreted in reference to the Trinity since the early fathers. Cautious commentators, including Calvin, are inclined to play this down somewhat. He says (in loc.), 'The ancients quoted this passage when they wished to prove that there are three persons in one essence of the Godhead. I do not disagree with their opinion; but if I had to contend with heretics, I would rather choose to employ stronger proofs.' It is best for us simply to say that—in the fuller light of the NT—we can see the appropriateness of this threefold expression, which also places added stress on the holiness of the heavenly King. We go to the NT for clear trinitarian teaching and to the OT for hints of it.

"Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.'" (Revelation 4:8).

Verse 4: The very doors of the temple were shaken by the praises of the angels.

*"The effect upon the Temple ... was like the eruption of a volcano; the foundations of the thresholds of the Temple shook and 'the house filled with smoke.'"*⁵

While the smoke here may be the incense of prayers offered up, there is no question that God often manifests His presence in earthquakes

"Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain

⁴ McGee, J. Vernon, Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, Vol. 3, "Isaiah," Thomas Nelson Inc., Nashville, TN 1982, p. 208.

⁵ Buksbazen, Victor, The Prophet Isaiah, In Two Volumes, The Spearhead Press, Collingswood, NJ, 1971, p. 39.

trembled violently” ... “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Exodus 19:18; Acts 4:31).

and smoke.

“ As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses” (Exodus 33:9).

But the ultimate manifestation of God and His glory is found in the incarnation.

“ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete” (1 John 1:1-4).

Conclusion: Throughout scripture we find God’s glory presented. We know how the unbeliever will respond, with a combination of fear, anger, and rebellion. But of more concern is how will the saint of God respond when presented with God’s glory? And that is what we will consider next time.

But for now let us remember our lives are to be similar to the Seraphim in that they are to be carried out in a spirit and works of praise. We should be living our praise of God on a daily basis. Our walk should echo the words ...

*Holy, holy, holy!
Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning
our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and mighty
God in three Persons,
blessed Trinity!*

*Holy, holy, holy!
through the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man
Thy glory may not see;
Only Thou art holy
there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in pow’r
in love and purity.*

*Holy, holy, holy!
all the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns
around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim
falling down before Thee,
Which wert and art and
ever more shalt be.*

*Holy, holy, holy!
Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name
in earth and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy!
merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons
blessed Trinity! ⁶*

⁶⁶ Heber, Reginald, *The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration*. “Holy, Holy, Holy,” Word Music, Waco, TX, 1986, #262.

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Introduction:

II The Time: Verse 1a: *(2 Chronicles 26:16-21)*

Verse 1b: *(John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:15-16; Genesis 18:1-3, 32:24-30; Philippians 2:7; John 12:41; Ezekiel 1:26-28; Revelation 4:1-3; 1 Kings 8:30)*

Verses 2-3:
(Revelation 4:8)

Verse 4:
(Exodus 19:18; Acts 4:31; Exodus 33:9; 1 John 1:1-4)

Conclusion:

Personal Application: This week focus on praising God through both your words and your deeds.

Prayer for the Week: Lord, I lift Your name on high. Lord, I praise You. Holy, holy holy, Lord I praise Your Name. And I pray in Your Son's Name. Amen.