

July 9  
Lesson 6

# ISAIAH

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 66:18-23

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 6

## ISAIAH 6:1-8

<sup>1</sup> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup> “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”



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## KEY VERSE

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”—Isaiah 6:8*

## LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the circumstances of Isaiah’s call.
2. Explain Isaiah’s initial reaction to what he saw and heard at his call.
3. Write a letter of appreciation and encouragement to a missionary for answering the Lord’s call as he or she has.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Wash Up!

## B. Lesson Background

### I. So High ([Isaiah 6:1-3](#))

- A. Exalted Lord ([v. 1](#))
- B. Heralds of the Holy ([vv. 2, 3](#))

### II. So Unworthy ([Isaiah 6:4, 5](#))

- A. Overwhelming Scene ([v. 4](#))
- B. Overcome with Guilt ([v. 5](#))

### III. So Fitting ([Isaiah 6:6-8](#))

- A. Action and Result ([vv. 6, 7](#))  
*Destroyed? Tested? Purified?*
- B. Challenge and Acceptance ([v. 8](#))  
*Discerning God's Call*

## Conclusion

- A. Surprised by Holiness
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Wash Up!

What do you expect of a cook at your favorite restaurant? Should the person have experience as a cook, know the basics of food preparation, and follow recipes? Of course. But there is an even more basic expectation you have of your chef: clean hands!

Any business that deals with preparing food must be extremely conscientious about maintaining high standards of cleanliness. For example, no one would want to eat at a restaurant if news surfaced that a customer there found evidence that such standards had in some way been violated. In restrooms at restaurants, one will see the omnipresent sign that reads, "Employees must wash hands before returning to work."

Almost any job requires a person be qualified in some way to do it. But what qualifies a person to be a prophet of the Most High God? One might conclude that such a servant of God would need to meet a long list of qualifications. As we consider Isaiah's call to be a prophet, we may be surprised to learn that a standard that applied to him as a deliverer of spiritual food is similar to what we expect of those who prepare physical food: cleanliness. Let's review the call of this great prophet.

## B. Lesson Background

Isaiah received his call to be a prophet approximately 200 years after the nation of Israel separated into two kingdoms in 931 BC: Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom). Isaiah was living when the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, but his primary ministry was to the southern kingdom of Judah. (The kings mentioned in [Isaiah 1:1](#) are all kings of Judah.)

The life of Isaiah illustrates the wide range of circumstances in which a prophet of the Lord could find himself as he carried out his mission. He served the Lord during the reign of one of Judah's most wicked kings (Ahaz) as well as during the reign of one of Judah's best (Ahaz's godly son, Hezekiah). In fact, Isaiah's counsel guided Hezekiah during an Assyrian invasion that threatened the southern kingdom in 701 BC ([Isaiah 37:5-7, 21-35](#)). Hezekiah prayed to the Lord in trusting faith ([37:14-20](#)), and Judah was spared the onslaught that had befallen the northern kingdom of Israel 21 years earlier.

The fact that the call of Isaiah is not found until [Isaiah 6](#) causes some to wonder why it is not recorded closer to the book's beginning, as is the case with Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 1:4-19](#)) and Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 1:1-3:15](#)). Some suggest that Isaiah's call actually did precede his messages, but the account of the call is placed in chapter 6 to make a specific and important point. The messages in the first five chapters explain why a prophet like Isaiah was so desperately needed to confront God's people. The fifth chapter in particular elaborates on what has happened to a people originally called by God to be "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" ([Exodus 19:6](#)). [Isaiah 5](#) features a word picture of a vineyard to describe both the Lord's care for his people and his disappointment that they had not produced the desired crop ([Isaiah 5:1-7](#)).

A Jewish tradition says that Isaiah suffered a cruel death of martyrdom by being sawn in two during the wicked reign of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh. This incident may be referred to in [Hebrews 11:37](#).

## HOW TO SAY IT

Ahaz    *Ay-haz.*

Assyrians    *Uh-sear-e-unz.*

Azariah Az-uh-rye-uh.  
 Babel Bay-bul.  
 cherubim chair-uh-bim.  
 Elijah Ee-lye-juh.  
 Ezekiel Ee-zeek-ee-ul or Ee-zeek-yul.  
 Hezekiah Hez-ih-kye-uh.  
 hypocrisy hih-pah-kruh-see  
 Isaiah Eye-zay-uh.  
 Jeremiah Jair-uh-my-uh.  
 Judah Joo-duh.  
 leprosy leh-pruh-see.  
 Manasseh Muh-nass-uh.  
 seraphim sair-uh-fim.  
 Sinai Sigh-nye or Sigh-nay-eye.  
 Uzziah Uh-zye-uh.

## I. So High

(ISAIAH 6:1-3)

### A. Exalted Lord (v. 1)

#### <sup>1a</sup> In the year that king Uzziah died,

*The year that king Uzziah died* was 740 BC. He had been one of Judah's more godly kings. But he did not finish well because at one point he defiantly entered the temple to offer incense, an act reserved only for the priests. When he reacted angrily to the priests who confronted him, he was immediately stricken with leprosy and had to be quarantined for the remainder of his life ([2 Chronicles 26:16-21](#)).

Uzziah's reign was one of the longest during the divided monarchy, covering a span of 52 years (792-740 BC). Note that Uzziah is sometimes called Azariah ([2 Kings 14:21](#); [15:1](#)).

#### *What Do You Think?*

How should Christians react to transitions in political leadership, if at all? Why?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In the form and content of prayers
- In discussions with fellow believers
- In discussions with unbelievers

#### <sup>1b</sup> I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Deaths of national leaders are accompanied by varying degree of uncertainty about the future. What follows in our text shows that any such concerns are unnecessary regarding Judah's future. Judah's ultimate king is still in control, as Isaiah declares in the verse before us.

Some individuals in the Old Testament are privileged to see the Lord or a limited revelation of his glory ([Exodus 24:9-11](#); [33:17-23](#); etc.). The Lord himself determines to what extent and by what means he allows himself to be experienced by humans. In the case of the prophet Elijah, he came in "a gentle whisper" ([1 Kings 19:12](#)); in the case of Job, he presented himself "out of the storm" ([Job 38:1](#)). Isaiah's experience of the Lord is likely by means of a vision since the word *saw* is used.

The manner in which Isaiah sees the Lord is similar to John's description of one who is "sitting on" a throne ([Revelation 4:2](#)). John speaks of himself as being "in the Spirit" on that occasion; perhaps something akin to this occurred with Isaiah (note also Ezekiel's testimony in [Ezekiel 2:2](#); [3:12-15](#), where "the Spirit" can be understood as the Holy Spirit). The *train* refers to the hem of the Lord's robe (compare [Revelation 1:13](#)). The fact that it fills *the temple* conveys an image of the Lord's majesty and splendor.

It is difficult to say whether the temple Isaiah sees is the earthly temple of Solomon in Jerusalem or the heavenly temple. Clearly John's vision in Revelation is one of Heaven ([Revelation 4:1, 2](#)). In Isaiah's case, one should keep in mind how King Uzziah had violated the sanctity of the Jerusalem temple by offering incense when he was unauthorized to do so. Perhaps Isaiah's vision is of this earthly temple in order to show him (and in turn, the nation of Judah) that the Lord has not departed from the temple (contrast [Ezekiel 11:22, 23](#)).

## B. Heralds of the Holy (vv. 2, 3)

### 2a. Above him were seraphim,

*Seraphim* are mentioned in the Bible only here and in [verse 6](#) (see below). The term comes from a Hebrew word meaning “fiery.” For the seraphim to have such an appearance would certainly be fitting, since fire is indicative of God’s presence as noted in last week’s study of Moses and the burning bush ([Exodus 3:1-6](#); compare [Exodus 24:17](#); [Revelation 4:5](#)).

### 2b. each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

We are not told how many seraphim Isaiah sees, but we are told that each has *six wings*. This characteristic highlights another similarity to John’s vision where the four living creatures “around the throne” each have six wings ([Revelation 4:6-8](#)). The covering of both *faces* and *feet* may represent complete submission to the one seated on the throne. One might say that “from head to toe” the seraphim recognize his authority.

### 3a. And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;

The cry of the seraphim is similar to that of the four creatures in [Revelation 4:8](#). The threefold repetition of the word *holy* serves to emphasize that quality. The concept of holiness implies “separation” or “distinctiveness.” Such separation is primarily ethical or moral and only secondarily positional or geographical. This is why Isaiah becomes so distraught at being in the Lord’s presence ([v. 5](#), below); he knows how unholy, how sinful, he and his people are.

#### What Do You Think?

What are some ways to manifest personal holiness as befitting our holy God?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

As the holy temple of the church at worship

As the holy temple of the church meets needs

Other

### 3b. “the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Isaiah is seeing God’s glory in the temple (whether earthly or heavenly), but his glory cannot be confined to any structure. Solomon acknowledged this same truth at the dedication of the temple he constructed in Jerusalem: “The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!” ([1 Kings 8:27](#)).

*The whole earth*, God’s creation, is a testament to his glory. This theme is echoed often in Psalms (examples: [Psalms 8:1](#); [72:19](#)).

## II. So Unworthy

(ISAIAH 6:4, 5)

### A. Overwhelming Scene (v. 4)

#### 4. At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

Isaiah has heard the proclamation of God’s glory from the seraphim; now he begins to experience it in an intensely personal way. The shaking and the presence of smoke remind one of what the Israelites witnessed at Mount Sinai ([Exodus 19:18](#)). They were terrified by such a demonstration of holy power. The stage is set for Isaiah to express similar anxiety.

### B. Overcome with Guilt (v. 5)

#### 5. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

Just as the Israelites trembled at the presence of God at Mount Sinai ([Exodus 19:16](#)), Isaiah is overcome with a sense of his unworthiness to be in such sacred surroundings. His sense of feeling terribly out of place reminds us of how Adam and Eve attempted to hide from God after breaking his commandment ([Genesis 3:8](#)).

Isaiah finds himself gasping for breath in a spiritual sense. He is painfully aware of the immeasurable gap between himself and the holy God into whose presence he has been ushered. He knows he has no business seeing what he does. King Uzziah may have died, but Judah’s real and ultimate *King, the Lord Almighty*, still rules!

Isaiah’s mention of his *unclean lips* and the fact that he dwells *among a people of unclean lips* seems to focus on speech. Perhaps Isaiah

initially desired to join the seraphim in their praise of God, but now he realizes that to do so would be the height (or depth) of hypocrisy. How can holy words be spoken by an unholy person?

*What Do You Think?*

In what ways can and should we acknowledge our own accountability for having and being among “unclean lips”?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding sins of commission

Regarding sins of omission

In the previous chapter, the prophet pronounced a series of six woes on the people ([Isaiah 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22](#)) and then stated this indictment: “Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them” ([5:25](#)). Isaiah’s seventh *woe*, directed at himself in the verse before us, completes the sequence. (The number seven often represents “completeness” or “totality” in Scripture.) Perhaps he fears that the hand of the Lord will also be stretched angrily against him as well.

### III. So Fitting

([ISAIAH 6:6-8](#))

#### A. Action and Result ([vv. 6, 7](#))

**6. Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.**

As if in response to Isaiah’s admission in the previous verse, *one of the seraphim* goes into action on Isaiah’s behalf. The altar from which he takes a *live coal* possibly refers to the altar in the temple Solomon built. But an altar in a temple of the heavenly environs cannot be ruled out because an altar is present there as well ([Revelation 6:9](#)).

Isaiah must be watching the unfolding scene with great apprehension. Having just confessed his own sinful unworthiness, is he about to be punished?

**7. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”**

It is not unusual for prophetic visions to appeal to the senses. This helps the recipient understand that what is happening is real (compare [Jeremiah 1:9-13](#); [Ezekiel 1:4-28](#)). Regarding Isaiah, four of his five senses have informed his experience thus far. By sight he beholds the Lord ([Isaiah 6:1](#)); by hearing he perceives the declaration of the seraphim ([v. 3](#)); by sight and smell (assumed) he is aware of smoke ([v. 4](#)); and now touch comes into play.

We do not know if Isaiah feels any sting or pain from the red-hot coal that is touched to his *lips*. If so, it must be temporary, as the words *your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for* speak not of judgment, but of forgiveness.

The association of fire with the presence of God bears revisiting. While God is indeed a “consuming fire” ([Hebrews 12:29](#)), what Isaiah experiences is the fire of cleansing or purging, as fire removes impurities from metals (see [1 Peter 1:7](#)). Isaiah is not “ruined” as he had earlier feared ([Isaiah 6:5](#)). Instead, he has received a great work of grace.

#### ***DESTROYED? TESTED? PURIFIED?***

The horror of destruction by fire was realized to a massive degree in World War II. Germany was the first to firebomb cities, doing so in nighttime terror raids. Allied forces eventually did the same in return. The morality of the firebombings of Dresden, Tokyo, and other cities is still debated.

Fire changes things. Biblically, such changes can be seen in at least three contexts: judgmental destruction, testing, and purification. Judgmental fire is depicted throughout the Bible, from [Genesis 19:24](#) to [Revelation 20:14](#). Fiery testing is seen in [1 Corinthians 3:12-15](#) and [1 Peter 4:12](#). Purification by fire is described in [Numbers 31:22, 23](#).

Not infrequently, these concepts overlap. For example, testing and purification overlap in cases when the former results in the latter, as in [Zechariah 13:9](#). We also see overlap between testing and purification in today’s text as the prophet experienced a “live coal” placed on his lips. But the overlap seems to be in the reverse direction: purification came first; then the testing of Isaiah’s resolve came later as he preached judgment to a hostile audience that God foresaw would not listen ([Isaiah 6:9-13](#)). Since God states that fact *after* Isaiah accepted his call, we wonder if the man would have volunteered had he heard the prediction of “mission failure” first!

That question is relevant today, since Jesus described his own mission by quoting [Isaiah 6:9, 10](#) in [Matthew 13:14, 15](#). Before we “go” ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)), we must recognize our own sin and the need for having had it purified ([Hebrews 1:3](#)). But all our preparation will not equip us for the testing of sorrow that comes as we encounter cold, unrepentant hearts. We are Isaiah. —R. L. N.

*What Do You Think?*

What are some ways our church can audibly and visually stress the reality of sin taken away by Christ?

## Talking Points for Your Discussion

During baptisms

In observances of the Lord's Supper

Other

**B. Challenge and Acceptance (v. 8)****<sup>8a.</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"**

To this point, Isaiah has not heard the Lord speak—only the seraphim. Given what happens when they speak (see v. 4, above), what must Isaiah think will happen as the Lord himself does so? Elsewhere in Scripture *the voice of the Lord* produces utter terror in those who hear it ([Exodus 20:18, 19](#); [Deuteronomy 5:25](#)). It is described as "powerful" and "majestic," with awe-inducing results ([Psalm 29:4-9](#)).

Yet when Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord, the tone is not terrifying. Instead, the tone appears to be that of pleading for assistance. The Lord is fully aware of the "people of unclean lips" whom Isaiah has mentioned ([Isaiah 6:5](#)). He needs someone to go to them, so he asks *who will go for us?*

The use of the pronoun *us* is similar to the language used in the creation of human beings and in response to the building of the Tower of Babel ([Genesis 1:26](#); [11:6, 7](#)). The plural pronoun may refer to God plus the seraphim who have been present throughout Isaiah's vision. Or it may refer to the persons of the Trinity. It is interesting to consider how much Isaiah has to say about the persons of the Trinity in his prophetic messages (see [Isaiah 11:1-3](#); [32:15](#); [42:1](#); [44:3](#); [48:16](#); [52:13-53:12](#); [59:21](#); [61:1-4](#); [63:10-14](#)).

**DISCERNING GOD'S CALL**

Charles Spurgeon, the famous nineteenth-century preacher, had no formal theological education. Yet he preached to thousands every Sunday for more than 40 years!

How did God call him to such a task? Once when describing his call to ministry, Spurgeon said it was "an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work." Those who like neat logical categories may be unsatisfied with that description. They may desire to have the idea of God's calls examined in specific terms of form, content, etc.

Perhaps we may discern a more practical approach in the New Testament, where God's calls seem to come about as character and spiritual giftedness are observed. The first-century church chose "seven men ... known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" to serve in a certain capacity ([Acts 6:3-5](#)). Can we not conclude that they answered God's call to do so? Barnabas seems initially to have simply grown into his leadership role, having been recognized by others as a "son of encouragement" ([4:36](#)) who led by example ([4:37](#)) and spoke up on behalf of others ([9:27](#); compare [15:37-39](#)). These traits were evident before he was set apart for missionary travels by specific directive of the Holy Spirit ([13:2](#)).

Martin Luther was on target when he described his call as "God's voice heard by faith." When our aptitudes, spiritual gifts, circumstances, and opportunities come together, let us make sure we are not overlooking God's call. —C. R. B.

**<sup>8b.</sup> And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"**

Isaiah has just declared his own lips to be "unclean" (v. 5, above). But since these have now been touched by the live coal and purged (v. 7), he is free to speak words of commitment to service on behalf of the holy God: *Here am I. Send me!* Isaiah's unholiness came to be corrected through the cleansing action taken by one of the seraphim—but the prophet's own admission of unholiness had to come first.

It is interesting to contrast Moses' hesitant reaction of "Who am I?" in response to God's call ([Exodus 3:11](#)) with Isaiah's seeming eagerness to respond. Whereas Moses' reply could be summarized as "Why me?" Isaiah's may be restated as "Why *not* me?"

Consider how each man experienced a powerful, unforgettable demonstration of God's presence. Yet each reacted to God's call quite differently! Even so, God is able to take each man as he is and shape him into the man he needs to be. Both Moses and Isaiah learned an important lesson that is still true: in the Lord's training ground, surrender is the key to victory.

*What Do You Think?*

What should others see in Christians who claim to be answering God's call?

## Talking Points for Your Discussion

In use of our time

In use of money

In relationships

Other



**Visual for Lesson 6.** Point to this visual as you ask, “Who in your personal experience has responded to God’s call with Isaiah’s willingness?”

## Conclusion

### A. Surprised by Holiness

The edge that spiritual words are meant to possess can be dulled with misuse. Without thinking, we may utter insipid interjections such as “Holy mackerel!” We may refer to a misbehaving child as “a holy terror,” etc.

Isaiah’s vision of the holy God had an intensity that we will probably never experience in this earthly life. The intensity of his experience will be further diminished for us as we misuse the word *holy*. The holiness of God must be understood in an absolute sense. That understanding was what caused Isaiah to be utterly dismayed by his own lack of holiness.

To take a nonchalant view of one’s own unholiness probably indicates a failure to understand what it means to be holy. We know that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). Do we also know that God is “holy, holy, holy”?

### B. Prayer

Father, help us each day to examine ourselves for unholiness that may interfere with saying, “Here am I. Send me!” We pray this in the name of the Lord of all holiness. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

May Isaiah’s vision of a holy God leave us wholly committed to him.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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## Into the Lesson

Read the following pairs of jobs one at a time:

Organize a blood drive or hold a garage sale?

Help a friend balance a checkbook or help a friend with marriage problems?

Read to kids at the library or sit quietly with ill patients in the hospital?

Ask for a show of hands from students to indicate which of the two tasks in each pair of jobs they would feel more qualified to perform. You may ask volunteers to briefly explain their responses.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Alphabet Soup” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in pairs.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study saying, “Almost any job that we can consider takes a person qualified in some way to do it.”

What do you think qualifies a person to be a prophet of the most high God? When Isaiah was called to be a prophet, we get a glimpse as to what is required from a person assuming that role.

## Into the Word

Divide your class into three groups. Each group is to read its assigned portion of the text and summarize ideas from it as directed. The assignments and some anticipated responses follow.

*Group 1*—So High ([Isaiah 6:1-3](#)).

List ideas from these verses that show that God’s presence was overwhelming.

God is shown as being in an elevated position demonstrating his position of great power. He is so large that only the bottom part of his robe would fit in the massive temple. The fact that even the holiest of angels hid behind their own wings in his presence shows God’s great holiness. The voices of the seraphim heralding God’s presence both in his holy temple and in the world he created described God as being far beyond anything in this world.

*Group 2*—So Unworthy ([Isaiah 6:4, 5](#)).

List ideas from these verses that show that Isaiah felt unworthy and insignificant in God’s presence.

God’s presence was accompanied by smoke and the shaking of the temple to its very foundations. The feeling of being trapped in a fire and earthquake surely would have caused Isaiah to feel helpless. Knowing that a mere mortal had no right to stand before a holy God made Isaiah especially aware of his sinful state.

*Group 3*—So Fitting ([Isaiah 6:6-8](#)).

List ideas from these verses that show how a human being can be made right with God.

Fire is a common image in the Bible for judgment and cleansing. The idea of a hot coal on the lips would be painful. Only through this ordeal was Isaiah qualified to be God’s prophet.

Allow time for groups to explain their findings. Comment as necessary, referring to the commentary.

## Into Life

Say, “Today, the word *holy* is used so commonly that it’s lost some of its punch; but even at that time, *holy* was not strong enough to describe the scene revealed to Isaiah. As he witnessed the angels’ worship of the Lord, Isaiah went through fear, then guilt, and finally after his cleansing, worshipful answering of God’s call.”

Write the words *eyes*, *ears*, *nose*, *hands*, and *mouth* across the top of the board. Ask the class to brainstorm ways they might keep their respective *sense* clean, and ways they might worship God with it as well.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Keeping It Clean” activity from the reproducible page. Use the first part of the activity by soliciting answers from the class as a whole.

Challenge students to take the page home and consider the final questions throughout the week.