

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER SIX

THE PROPHET'S CLEANSING AND COMMISSION

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged” (verses 1-7).

ISAIAH here goes back over the years and tells us how he was brought into the knowledge of cleansing from sin, and how he heard and responded to the call of God to be His messenger to a rebellious and gainsaying people.

It is always of interest when one is privileged to get a personal and intimate account of the revelation of God to a human soul. In this chapter Isaiah lets us into the secret of his wonderful power and equipment for service. He takes us into the sanctuary, shows us how the Lord was revealed to him, and lets us know the circumstances of his call to the prophetic office. This was the real starting point of his effective ministry. We know from chapter 1:1, that he began to witness for God in the days of King Uzziah. As the experience recorded here took place in the year King Uzziah died, it may be that it was subsequent to the prophetic testimony which we have been considering already but, as suggested before, there seems to be no proof of this, for it may have been during the last year of Uzziah that Isaiah began his ministry, and that he is here telling us of his original call to the prophetic office.

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 or salvation by grace and the enduement of the Holy Spirit. So, while it seems unlikely, there is still the possibility that the stirring message of chapters one to five was proclaimed before the revelation of the divine holiness and of Isaiah's own corrupt heart had come to him as narrated here. But it seems more probable that after he had recorded his burden of the preceding chapters, he then undertook to tell the story of his own meeting with God and his divine commission as God's messenger to the people of his day.

This was not, as some would have it, Isaiah's "second blessing." It was rather a part of God's dealings with him in order that he might be prepared to give out the Word to others because of knowing for himself the reality of having to do with God.

He tells us, "**In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.**" That word "also" is significant. Was it a sight of God that brought the leprosy out on Uzziah's forehead? The same God revealed Himself to Isaiah while he was attending a service in the Temple at Jerusalem; however, it was not in judgment but in grace that He showed Himself as the infinitely Holy One. Others may have thronged the temple courts at this time, but none but Isaiah saw the glorious vision. In an ecstatic state he became blind to all about him, but his awakened intelligence was fully occupied with the glory that had been revealed to him.

Above the throne he beheld the seraphim, an order of angels apparently, each with six wings. We may drop the "s" from the word "**seraphims**" as the *im* is the Hebrew plural. These glorious beings seem to be messengers of grace, as distinguished from the cherubim, who speak rather of righteousness and judgment.

They cried one to another, "**Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.**" It is an ascription of praise and adoration to the Triune God, whose glory is manifested in all creation.

As the song of worship sounded forth, the very posts of the doors were moved and the house was filled with the fragrant smoke of the burning incense. Strange that inanimate pillars should thus be moved while the hearts of men remained obdurate and motionless! But one man there was who did respond and that in a very definite way.

Isaiah cried, "**Woe is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.**" The effect of beholding God is to make one realize his own unworthiness and the corruption of his own heart. Isaiah saw himself in the light of the Lord's infinite holiness. It is ever thus when man is brought consciously into the presence of God.

- When Job saw the Lord, he cried, **“I repent in dust and ashes.”**
- When Simon recognized in Jesus the Creator of the fish of the sea, he fell at His feet and cried, **“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”**

And so with our prophet. When he saw himself in the light of the holiness of God, he at once acknowledged his own sinfulness; and moreover, he recognized the fact that he was surrounded by men, who, like himself, were of unclean lips: for **“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”**

In response to Isaiah’s confession, we read, **“Then new one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand.”** He had taken the live coal with the tongs from off the altar. It was the altar of sacrifice, which prefigured the Cross. That live coal told of the fire of judgment having burned itself out upon the offering. The representative of the grace of God to needy men flew swiftly to tell of His saving favor, based upon the atoning sacrifice. With two of their wings the seraphim hid their faces as they worshiped the infinitely Holy One. With two they covered their beautiful feet, and with two they hastened forth in loving service. The Cherubim are said to have four wings (Ezekiel 1:6). The **“living creatures”** of Ezekiel 1 are identified as the **“cherubim”** in chapter ten. May not the six wings of the seraphim tell us how mercy rejoiceth against judgment (James 2:13)?

As the coal touched his lips, Isaiah heard the comforting words, **“Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”** The divinely-sent messenger proclaimed the good news of redemption and purification from sin through Him whose one offering was pictured in the sacrifice of the altar.

We would re-emphasize the fact that it was from the altar of burnt offering the coal was taken, not from the golden altar, where only incense was burned. That live coal was witness of the fire, ever burning, which was never to go out (Leviticus 6:13). It constantly foreshadowed the work of the Cross. Through that sacrifice alone could iniquity be purged and sin be put away (Hebrews 9:13, 14).

“Also I heard the voice of the LORD, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof” (verses 8-13).

Following the assurance of forgiveness and cleansing came the call for service. The voice of the Lord was heard crying, **“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”** In response to this Isaiah exclaimed, **“Here am I; send me.”**

“Who Will Go for us?”

It has pleased God to commit the declaration of His truth to men rather than to angels. He is still calling for consecrated men and women to carry the offer of salvation and the warning of judgment to a lost world. Such must know for themselves the cleansing power of the blood of Christ if they would give effective testimony to those still in their sins.

The prophet was commissioned to **“Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.”**

Even though the Word seemed to have no other effect than to harden them in their sins and rebellion, Isaiah was to proclaim the message faithfully.

The servant of God is responsible to the Lord Himself. Having received his commission, he is to go forth in the name of the One who sends him, declaring the message committed to him. The results must be left with God. Whether men hear or whether they forbear (Ezekiel 2:3-5), he who proclaims the Word faithfully has delivered his soul.

The Apostle Paul entered into this when he spoke of being a sweet savor of Christ unto God both in them that are saved and in them that perish (II Corinthians 2:15). God is honored when His truth is preached, no matter what attitude the hearers take toward it, and that Word will not return void, but will accomplish the divine purpose (Isaiah 55:11).

Faced with the solemn responsibility of proclaiming so unpopular a message, Isaiah cried, **“Lord, how long?”** It takes special faith and obedience to continue to preach to an unheeding people who are only hardened by the Word instead of being softened by it. The Lord’s answer was that the message must be proclaimed until there were none left to hear.

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