

Isaiah was the greatest and most prolific of the writing prophets. His message was fearless and uncompromising. He called out both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms for their sins against their God.¹ He warned that their moral and spiritual decline would lead to devastating defeat at the hands of their enemies. They would lose possession of the Land God had given them.²

The Prophet lived to see his prediction come to pass in the Northern Kingdom. The Assyrians vanquished Samaria in 722 BC and carried many of the Israelites away into exile. His warnings to the Judahites were fulfilled still later, when the Babylonians destroyed the Southern Kingdom in 586 BC, a century or more after Isaiah's death.

What was the secret of Isaiah's greatness? From whence did his strength and courage come? How was he able to speak (and write) with such arresting authority?

Isaiah himself answers those questions for us. It's all here in Chapter 6, where we learn about his seminal encounter with the Holy One of Israel and how it changed his life forever.



King Uzziah
Rembrandt van Rijn



ISAIAH'S CONTRITION (vv. 1–5)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.

Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one cried to 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 were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

So I said: "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 my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

Isaiah had a vision of the exalted, heavenly Lord. There are differences of opinion among commentators about whether this vision marked Isaiah's inaugural call as a prophet, or merely indicated a new stage in his ministry.³ In any case, he experienced on this occasion a vivid and overwhelming vision of the Lord (Heb., *Adonai*), who was sitting on His throne, "high and lifted up" (v. 1). This heavenly Figure was attended by heavenly creatures called *seraphim* (lit., "burning ones"), who are evidently associated with service and worship in Heaven (v. 2). This is the only place in the Bible where these impressive creatures are mentioned.⁴

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God Is Both Near and Far Away

We cannot help noticing both divine transcendence and immanence here. The Lord is “high and lifted up,” on His throne in Heaven (transcendence); but at the same time, He’s down here, too (immanence)—“the whole earth is full of His glory.”

This is a reminder that He is never too far above and beyond us to know and care for us down here. He is both near and far away—wherever and whatever we need Him to be.

Isaiah’s Fear of Disintegration

When Isaiah saw the Lord, his immediate response was one of humility and contrition. Faced with Infinity, this eighth-century Jewish preacher was overwhelmed. Standing in the presence of the Holy One of Israel, he felt like the atoms and molecules of his body might fall apart and melt away into nothingness (v. 5).⁵

Isaiah could just as easily have said, “Lord, have You noticed how badly Your people have been acting? Aren’t You glad I’m not like them?” But he didn’t say that. There’s not a shred of self-righteousness in this man. In the true spirit of a godly prophet, he identifies with his errant Jewish brethren—and he intercedes for them.

He cries out, “Woe is me” (v. 5). Then he says he is “undone” (lit., dissolved) because he is “a man of unclean lips,” like his Judean brethren, who are also “a people of unclean lips.” Why the reference to the lips? It could signify the fact that the lips are the gateway to the mouth—and the mouth speaks what is in the heart: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). The peoples’ mouth problem is really more of a heart problem.

Isaiah’s authority rests on the fact that he has heard from God. He’s not a self-styled, self-anointed “prophet” like some people we see in today’s religious world who covet titles and position. He has “seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” He is about to be commissioned as a messenger for this King.

One King Replaces Another

John Oswalt, a well-regarded interpreter of Isaiah, wonders if there’s a theological (rather than a merely historical) reason for Isaiah identifying the Lord here as an exalted “king.” His thinking has to do with the fact that Isaiah says this vision came to him “in the year that King Uzziah died.” The commentator explains the possible connection:

Judah had known no king like Uzziah since the time of Solomon. He had been an efficient administrator and an able military leader. Under his leadership Judah had grown in every way (2 Chr. 26:1–15). He had been a true king. How easy it must have been to focus one’s hopes and trust upon a king like that. What will happen, then, when such a king dies, and coupled with that death there comes the recognition that a resurgent Assyria is pushing nearer and nearer? In moments like that it is easy to see the futility of any hope but an ultimate one. No earthly king could help Judah in that hour.⁶

This, then, may well be Isaiah’s reminder that even though the great and godly King Uzziah had died,⁷ Israel still had a King—and that King is the LORD God himself. During this perilous time when Judah was being threatened by hostile neighbors, she was not alone. She was not without a king, if only she would return to Him in repentance and faith.



Isaiah: An unpopular Prophet

With sixty-six chapters of the OT to his credit, Isaiah was the most prolific of the writing prophets. According to Jewish tradition, he was from a royal family, and was well-educated and well-connected. Isaiah served in an advisory capacity in the courts of four Judean kings—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He could have taken it easy and enjoyed a life of leisure and privilege. Instead, he chose to follow God’s calling as a prophet. His prophecies ran the gamut from immediate warnings about Assyria and Babylon invading and destroying Israel and Judah (in 722 and 586 BC, respectively), to far-sighted Messianic prophecies about the eventual arrival of Israel’s true King and His Triumphant Entry and Crucifixion in AD 30, and still later, after His Resurrection, His earthly Messianic Kingdom.

To many, Isaiah’s characterization of the Messiah as a “Servant-King” seems like a contradiction. How could Yeshua (Jesus) be hailed as Israel’s Messianic King and then be crucified just a short time later? Isaiah explains that before the King reigns on the earth, He must first deal with humanity’s sin problem (64:6). After all, the prospect of the Messiah ruling over a world that still suffers in spiritual darkness misses the whole point. Before things could be someday restored to their pristine, pre-Fall condition, there was a sin-debt to be paid. It couldn’t be ignored or glossed over. That’s why, in Chapter 53, the Prophet portrays the Messiah as the LORD’s Suffering Servant, who was “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities” (v. 5). Dying in our place, He paid that debt for us.

But in Isaiah’s immediate 8th century BC setting, his fearless and uncompromising message for Israel and the Jewish people was clear: Judgment was coming if they didn’t mend their ways!

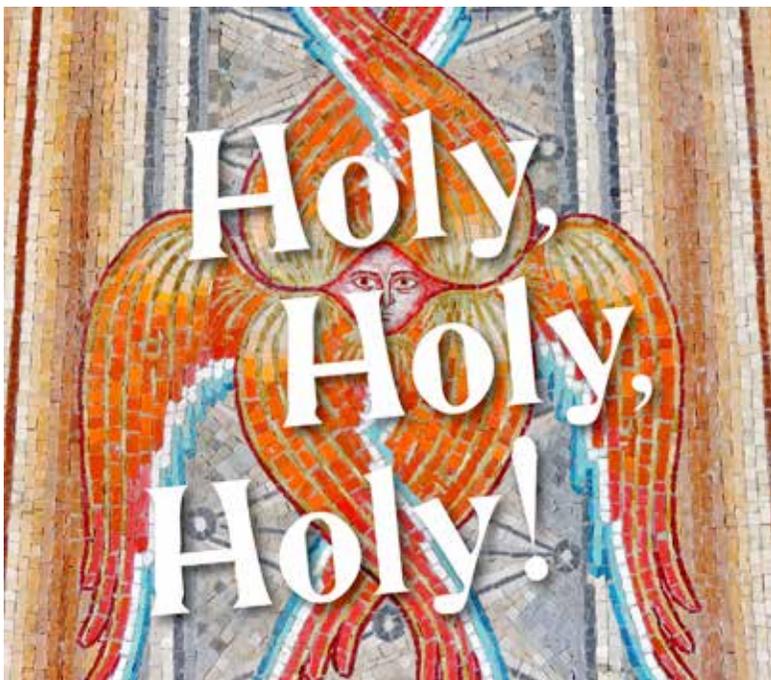
Alas, sinful nation,
A people laden with iniquity,
A brood of evildoers,
Children who are corrupters!
They have forsaken the LORD,
They have provoked to anger
The Holy One of Israel,
They have turned away backward
(1:4).

Does God Literally Wear Robes?

John Calvin, the great reformer, suggests that this vision of God needn't be taken literally in all its aspects. Rather, some things in this passage may very well be anthropomorphic; that is, they help present God in terms that humans can understand.⁸ We shouldn't necessarily envision God as sitting on a throne in Heaven wearing flowing robes like an earthly king. Here's Calvin's reasoning:

People ask how Isaiah could see God, who is spirit (see John 4:24) and therefore cannot be seen with physical eyes. But we should be aware that when God showed himself to the fathers, he never appeared as he actually is, but in such a way that human understanding could receive it. Isaiah, therefore, was shown such a form as enabled him to perceive God's inconceivable majesty, according to his capacity. Thus he attributes to God a throne, a robe, and a bodily appearance.⁹

Calvin also has a word of caution for commentators who see the Trinity in Isaiah's threefold affirmation "holy, holy, holy" (v. 3). The Reformer writes: "'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.' The ancients quoted this passage when they wanted to prove there are three persons in the one essence of the Godhead. I do not disagree with their opinion, but if I had to argue with heretics, I would choose stronger evidence."¹⁰



More likely, the repetitive "holies" are an intensive expression meant to emphasize the Lord's holy and righteous character. Holiness is the "set-apartness" that progressively conforms us to the image of the Messiah: *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord* (Heb. 12:14).

One reason Isaiah considers himself "undone" (lit., dis-integrated) is that his "eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts" (v. 5). The Torah says that no one can have an unfiltered view of God in all His glory and live to talk about it (Ex. 33:20). Such a divine-human encounter would be deadly, like someone reaching out and touching the surface of the sun. However, the Lord has ways of shielding some people, under certain circumstances, and giving them a partial glimpse of Himself—like He did for Hagar (Gen. 16:13), Moses (Ex. 24:9–11), Isaiah, and others.¹¹

ISAIAH'S CONSECRATION (vv. 6–8)

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

And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged."

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

Here God is about to consecrate Isaiah to be His prophet and special envoy to His people. But first, there's a reckoning. As commentator Geoffrey Grogan rightly observes, "To serve God, Isaiah needed to be a clean instrument."¹² Sometimes God's people wonder why He isn't using and blessing them anymore—and the reason may be that they've become dirty vessels. Isaiah understood this and was willing to undergo the cleansing process.

Cleansing from Sin

Isaiah's consecration and cleansing from sin is signified here by the angel touching his lips with "a live coal . . . from the altar." For Isaiah, the result here is that his "iniquity is taken away" and his sin is "purged."

Note that the coal was still on fire ("live") and came from the sacrificial altar. In biblical times, live coals were taken into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement as part of the ritual sacrifice (Lev. 16:12). The coal's cleansing effect, then, was the result of a sacrifice. God is the ultimate realist. He will not ignore sin and pretend that everything is all right when it's not. Sin demands a sacrifice because it creates a deficit in our standing with God—a sin-debt, if you will. That debt cannot simply be ignored without rupturing the very fabric of the universe. It must be paid. The OT sacrifices, of course, pointed forward to the ultimate Sacrifice of God's Son on Mount Calvary (Heb. 10:10), where He paid that debt on our behalf (Mark 10:45).

God as a Uni-plurality

The Lord declares His intention to send a messenger—a kingly envoy—to the wayward people of Israel and Judah. They are, after all, in a precarious position because they are surrounded by powerful and aggressive enemies who want to destroy them. So, the Lord asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" That plural pronoun "Us" stands out here. It's seen by some as a possible reference to God's trinity or essential plurality. Again, Grogan observes:

The plural "Us" is . . . an unusual phenomenon, found elsewhere in the OT only in Genesis (1:26; 11:7). Many modern scholars have taken it to be a reference to a council of heavenly beings. There are, of course, many biblical passages that picture God surrounded by the heavenly hosts. Not one of these, however (unless, of course, the present passage is an exception), suggests that he, the omniscient and all-wise God, called on them for advice or even identified them with him in some way in his utterance. What a pagan king may have attributed to "the decree of the watchers" (Dan 4:17 KJV, but note the way NIV renders this), Daniel called "the decree of the Most High" (Dan 4:24). In a context that speaks both of waters and mountains (and so of nature) and of nations (and so, by implication, also of history), the Lord refutes the notion that he consulted others (40:13–14). The plural, therefore, suggests either the divine majesty or that fullness of his being that was to find its ultimate theological expression in the doctrine of the Trinity.¹³

ISAIAH'S COMMISSION (vv. 9–10)

And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

"Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed."

The Prophet's two-fold task is to "go" and "tell" (v. 9). The two actions are complementary. Before we can TELL, we must first GO to where the people are. Someone has aptly observed that the word "Gospel" begins with GO. The Great Commission is the Lord's command to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The going and the telling are both part of Isaiah's commission. We, like Isaiah, have been called to do both.

Does Judah Have a Choice?

Some five-point, Calvinistic commentators interpret these two verses in a deterministic sense. That is, they say the people are being ordered by God to "keep on hearing" without understanding and to "keep on seeing" without perceiving. In other words, this is what God *wants* them to do because it is His sovereign purpose to bring judgment down on Judea via King Nebuchadnezzar.

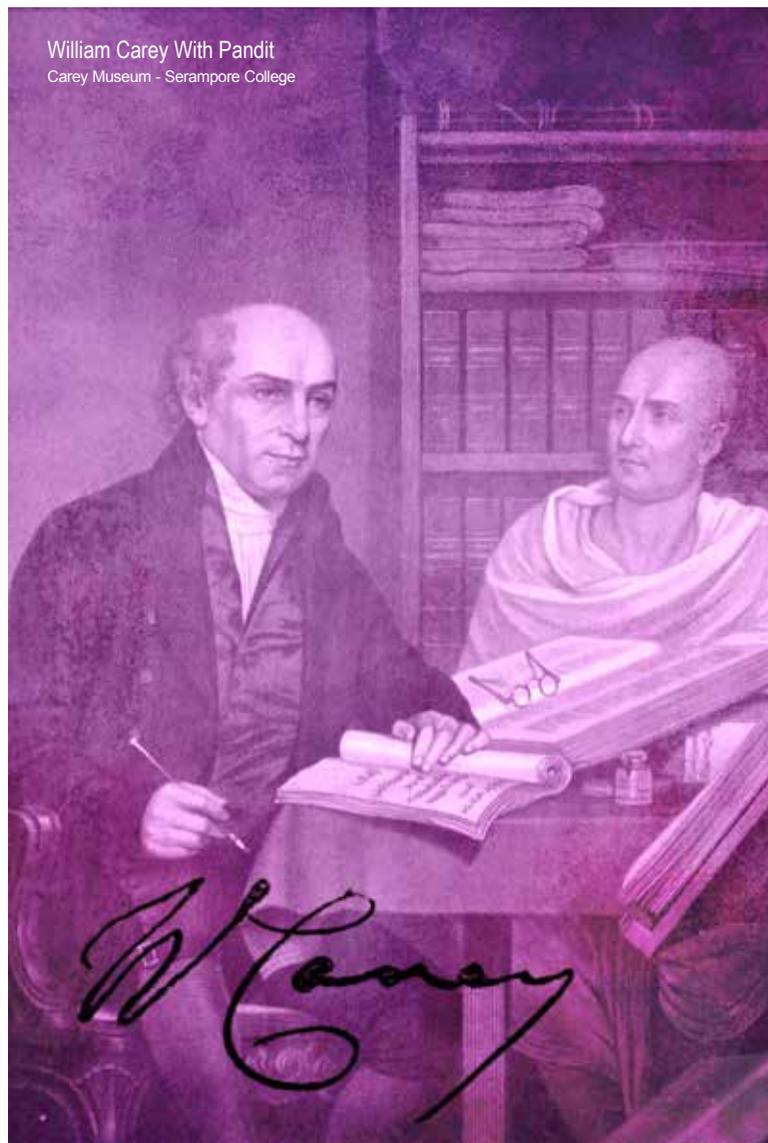
If that's the case, there is no opportunity here for the people to get their hearts right with God. The outcome has already been predetermined. These Calvinists base their view, in part, on the fact that the Hebrew verbs here are negative commands—like God is commanding the people *not* to understand and *not* to perceive what God is telling them. However, Graham Ogden takes issue with this deterministic approach:

For this verse we recommend that translators be careful not to give the impression that Isaiah is told by God to make it impossible for the people to understand what he is saying and so be saved. In many cases, however, only a footnote will be able to bring out the deeper meaning of this text. A fairly literal translation by itself may shock the readers. The footnote may read as follows: "The LORD is not telling Isaiah to preach in such a way that the people will become obstinate and thus fail to change their ways. Rather, he is telling Isaiah to preach, although he knows that this preaching will result in more and more obstinacy, thereby making it impossible for the listeners to be saved."¹⁴

Here, then, was the situation. The people had a two-fold problem: hearing but not understanding and seeing but not perceiving. As time passed, this must have been an increasing source of irritation for Isaiah (as it is for all Gospel preachers). The more he preached to the people and warned them of impending judgment, the more they descended into a destructive spiral of debauchery and idolatry.

One would think that the Judahites would have changed their ways once they saw how Isaiah's prophecy about the destruction and captivity of the Northern Kingdom was fulfilled in 722 BC. However, all indications are that they were unfazed. Maybe they thought what had happened to their brothers and sisters in the north couldn't happen to them in the south. So, Isaiah's message was ignored. But he was faithful and kept doing his job anyway.

The lesson here is that success isn't always measured quantitatively. We're reminded of the story of William Carey, the father of modern Protestant missions, who labored faithfully in India for seven full years before he won his first convert.¹⁵ He stayed the course for all that time before he saw any fruit. Our responsibility, then, is to be faithful even when measurable results aren't yet evident. How many of us would be willing to labor for seven long years before there were any visible results? How many of us would last for even one year? We should remember that God often has different standards of measurement (and standards of success) than the world does.



God tells the Prophet to preach His message even though his words are destined to fall on deaf ears. The lack of positive response didn't make Isaiah a failure. On the contrary, he was a success because he did exactly what God had called him to do. He conveyed God's message faithfully. The lack of acceptance wasn't on him. It was on the people to whom he was preaching.

The negative commands in the original Hebrew aren't determinative. They're a sort of divine *taunt*. God is mocking the people for their stubbornness and rebellion. He's telling them to go ahead and have it their way—that is, "Just keep on being deaf and blind to My commands, and then you'll suffer the consequences." And in the end, that's what happened. But it was the people's fault, not God's.

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF ISAIAH?



LIBERAL-CRITICAL SCHOLARS HAVE LONG THEORIZED that Isaiah didn't write large portions of the biblical book that bears his name. *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), for example, declares that the Prophet Isaiah may have written much of Chapters 1 to 39 (Proto-Isaiah), but Chapters 40–66 (Deutero-Isaiah) were "composed at the end of the Babylonian exile and during the early postexilic period," nearly two centuries later, by someone else (p. 782).

Nonetheless, there are compelling reasons to accept the traditional view that Isaiah wrote the entire Book.

First, Isaiah's division reflects two different emphases rather than two different authors. The first section (Chapters 1–39) consists of the Prophet's admonitions to recalcitrant Israel (the Northern Kingdom, or Samaria) during their struggles against Assyrian aggression. (Assyria ultimately destroyed Samaria in 722 BC.) The last section (Chapters 40–66) is addressed to the Judahites who would someday be forced into exile by the invading Babylonians. The Prophet foresaw the destruction that would occur in 586 BC, more than a century after his death.

Second, roughly 25 unique words and terms are spread throughout *both* sections of the book—again suggesting a unified authorship. One such term is the "Holy One of Israel," which occurs a total of 26 times in Isaiah's 66 chapters—12 times in the first section and 14 times in the last section. In the other 863 chapters of the OT, the term "Holy One of Israel" occurs only six times. Note: That's 26 times in 66 chapters (Isaiah) as opposed to 6 times in 863 chapters (the rest of the OT). Other terms are similarly uniform throughout Isaiah.

Third, Jesus himself attributed this book to Isaiah (e.g., Matt. 13:14; 15:17; John 1:23).

Fourth, the NT writer Luke ascribed both sections of the book to Isaiah (Luke 3:4–6; Acts 8:27–33).

Fifth, the Apostle Paul quoted from both major divisions of the book and ascribed all of it to Isaiah (Rom. 9:20–29; 10:16, 20; 15:12).

Sixth, John the Baptizer agreed that Isaiah wrote this Book (John 1:22–23).

Seventh, the Apostle John attributed both major divisions of the Book (Chapters 1–39 and 40–66) to the Prophet Isaiah (John 12:37–41).

Eighth, several common themes weave their way through the entire, unified Book of Isaiah—e.g., Jerusalem as a "holy mountain" (11:9; 27:13; 30:29; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25; 66:20), a Mideast "highway" in the Eschaton (11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 62:10), and "fire" as an emblem of judgment (4:4; 10:16–17; 26:11; 27:4; 29:6; 30:30; 31:9; 47:14; 65:5; 66:15–16, 24).

Finally, we needn't assume that Isaiah wrote the entire book at one time. The work was more likely spread out over his roughly 40 years of ministry, which could account for differences in writing style. Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), for example, employed one style early in his career (when he was a journalist in Hannibal, Missouri) and another later, when he became a world-renowned storyteller.

ISAIAH'S CLARIFICATION (vv. 11–13)

Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate,

The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

But yet a tenth will be in it, And will return and be for consuming, As a terebinth tree or as an oak, Whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump."

God doesn't mind us asking questions. In fact, He welcomes our questions! He invites us to sit down with Him and analyze the challenges and decisions that lie before us: "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD (Isa. 1:18a).

In this instance, Isaiah's question was about the timeframe for his upcoming mission. As humans, we're big on timeframes, aren't we? When we ask the Lord to do something, we want Him to do it *now*. And if it's not going to be now, we want to know *when*. Waiting on the Lord is one of the hardest things for us to do. Yet He tells us, *Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!* (Psalm 27:14).

"Lord, How Long?"

Isaiah wanted to know how long his mission would last. God explained that the terminus of the mission would be when final judgment had fallen on the Southern Kingdom and the Land had been left "utterly desolate." The mission didn't end, then, when Isaiah died. His prophecies about Judah's demise weren't fulfilled until a century or more after his death during the reign of the evil King Manasseh. We should all take steps to see that our life's work continues after we're gone. Isaiah certainly did!

"Until the cities are laid waste and . . . the land is utterly desolate" (v. 11). These ominous words, of course, anticipate the eventual Babylonian Captivity in 586 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar's armies would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, and take thousands of Judeans captive to Babylon—long after Isaiah had died.

Note Verse 13, however. The end here is not really "the" end. Motyer explains:

Will divine judgment, then, have the last word for the people with whom Isaiah identified himself (5)? In Isaiah's case the "Burning One" approached carrying fire (6) and it must have seemed to Isaiah that his end had come; but the voice said "atoned" (7). So here the tree lies *cut down*; but the divine voice says "the holy seed" (lit. "the seed of holiness its stump"). Noting how this half-verse forms an inclusio with [verse] 1a (the dying king . . . the fallen tree), the implication is that the people who carry the promise of the Messiah carry thereby the guarantee of continuing until he comes.¹⁶

This brings clarity to Isaiah's question: "How long, Lord?" How long will this frustrating situation (that is, Isaiah preaching and the Judahites ignoring him) continue? It will continue until judgment falls on Judah in 586 BC and the people are carried away to Babylon.



OUTLINE—ISAIAH 6

I. Isaiah's Contrition (vv. 1–5)

- A. A heavenly vision (vv. 1–4)
 - 1. God's exalted position (v. 1)
 - 2. Angelic attendants (v. 2)
 - 3. Transcendence and immanence (v. 3)
- B. Isaiah's response (v. 5)
 - 1. He identifies with his people, who are "unclean"
 - 2. But all is not lost—the Prophet has seen God

II. His Consecration (vv. 6–8)

- A. The coal from the altar (v. 6)
- B. The burning of the Prophet's mouth (v. 7)
- C. The Lord's question and Isaiah's answer (v. 8)

III. His Commission (vv. 9–10)

- A. His two-fold task (v. 9)
 - 1. "Go"
 - 2. "Tell"
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 - 1. Hearing but not understanding
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- C. The predictable result: failure (v. 10)

IV. His Clarification (vv. 11–13)

- A. Question: How much longer can this continue? (v. 11)
- B. Answer: Until God's judgment is complete (vv. 11–12)
- C. Clarity even in judgment: The "stump," the indestructible "Seed" (v. 13)

NEW

FORSAKING ISRAEL
HOW IT HAPPENED AND WHY IT MATTERS

WOT Contributors By:
Shepherds Theological Seminary Faculty
Editor: Larry D. Pettigrew
Foreword: Erwin Lutzer

How is it that Israel has become so forsaken in the history of the church, and why does this matter today? With a mastery of the subject matter, the faculty of Shepherds Theological Seminary guide readers through the history of how the Christian church has been forsaking Israel from the time of the church fathers, to Augustine, and the Reformation, and then provide biblical and theological reasons to explain why forsaking Israel is so contrary to the message of the Bible itself.

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Not the End—Yet

When judgment falls on Judah at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, it won't be the end of the story. Far from it! Throughout Israel's history, even in her darkest days, there has always been a faithful remnant. The Apostle Paul mentions the remnant in Romans 11:2–5, and Isaiah alludes to the remnant as the “tenth” in Verse 13.

The Babylonian Captivity, then, wasn't the end. In retrospect, we know that God's plan continued and reached an important milestone when the Messiah was born, lived, died, and was resurrected in the first century. History will reach yet another zenith someday when He returns and intervenes supernaturally in the course of human history (Rev. 19:11–16).

Throughout the Book of Isaiah (44 times in 66 chapters), the Prophet uses the phrase “in that Day” (Heb., *baYom haHu*, ביום ההוא) to point us to the end-time Day of the LORD (e.g., 2:11–20; 10:20, 27). It's not a literal day, but rather a prolonged period of sweeping, seismic judgment as the LORD intervenes supernaturally in human history (2:12; 13:6, 9; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18–20; Obad. 1:15; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5). The phrase “in that Day” highlights the positive aspects of the great and fearful Day of the LORD. Yes, the Day of the LORD will be a time of fear and awe—but ultimately, it's also a Day of joy and victory when God's people will be blessed and God himself will be exalted and acknowledged by the nations (2:2–5; 11:10ff).¹⁷

The Indestructible Stump

Chapter 6 closes with these enigmatic words: “So the holy seed [shall be] its stump.” The word “stump” (Heb., *מצבת*; *matsebet*) points us to the imagery of a tree. When a tree is burned down, what's left is its smoldering stock or stump. A stump can be exceedingly difficult to remove, even with modern equipment, so it can remain in place for generations. Very often, the stump of an older tree will eventually sprout and give birth to a new tree. This is especially true of the terebinth, oak, and olive trees that grow in Israel.

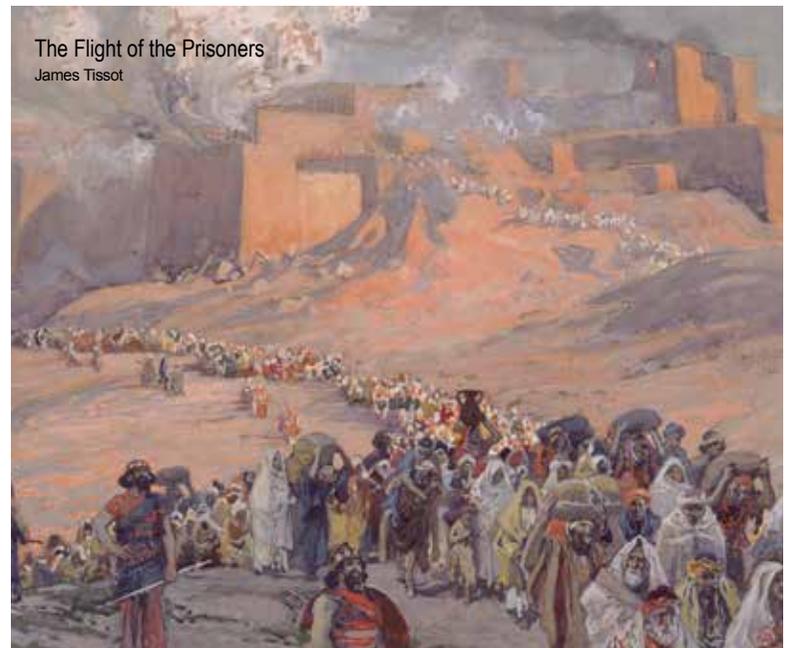
When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, they razed virtually the entire city, including trees and other vegetation. However, archaeologists tell us that some of the olive trees in modern-day Israel are descended from trees that were destroyed by the Romans in the first century. The stumps and roots survived and sprouted future generations of trees.¹⁸



Botanists in Israel believe the al-Badawi tree in the village of Al-Walaja, near Bethlehem, may be 4,000 years old.



Eric Nagle



The Flight of the Prisoners
James Tissot

John Goldingay explains the significance of the stump in this passage:

If [the Judahites] do not turn, the warnings will come true. But the good news for the people living after the coming catastrophe described in Isaiah 6:11–13 and onwards is that judgment is not Yahweh's last word. The final verse in the chapter notes that even when the tree has been felled and burned, there is still a stump from which there can be new growth. This introduces another major theme of Isaiah: the holy remnant who will survive.¹⁹

God Is Always with Us

This one, humble man, Isaiah, responded to God's call—and it changed his life forever. Every Hebrew word that he wrote in this Book was inspired by God. Each letter and syllable is there by design. It is no mere coincidence that the famous Immanuel Prophecy (7:10–25) follows closely on the heels of Chapter 6. It says, in part, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (v. 14).

Both long- and short-term fulfillments are conflated in this section of Isaiah—a common phenomenon in the prophetic Scriptures. The Stump in Chapter 6, then, represents that holy line of remnant survivors that culminates in the Messiah, the Seed (Descendant) of David, who (centuries later) would be born of the Virgin Mary (Gal. 3:16, 19).

The name Immanuel, then, finds its fullest expression in the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., *HaAdon Yeshua haMashiach*). Figuratively speaking, He stands at the head of a long procession of remnant survivors who came from Isaiah's indestructible “stump” (6:13). He is truly “God with Us” in every meaningful sense (Matt. 1:22–23). He “tabernacled” with us here on earth for 33 or so years (John 1:14). Then He ascended back to Heaven—and someday He will return for us (14:3). He is, unmistakably and most assuredly, our Immanuel.

Spurgeon, with his unmatched eloquence, makes this connection with Immanuel:

**WHEN STORMS OF SORROW TOSS MY SOUL:
WHEN WAVES OF CARE AROUND ME ROLL:
WHEN COMFORTS SINK, WHEN JOYS SHALL FLEE:
WHEN HOPELESS GRIEFS SHALL GAPE FOR ME,
ONE WORD THE TEMPEST'S RAGE SHALL QUELL—
THAT WORD, THY NAME, IMMANUEL.**

**WHEN HELL ENRAGED LIFTS UP HER ROAR,
WHEN SATAN STOPS MY PATH BEFORE,
WHEN FIENDS REJOICE AND WAIT MY END,
WHEN LEGION'D HOSTS THEIR ARROWS SEND:
FEAR NOT MY SOUL, BUT HURL AT HELL
THY BATTLE-CRY, IMMANUEL.**

C.H. SPURGEON (AGE 18)²⁰



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¹ Shortly after the death of King Solomon in 931 BC, his united kingdom fell into disarray and broke up into two smaller kingdoms—the Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) in the north and the Kingdom of Judah (with its capital city of Jerusalem) in the south.

² As we have pointed out many times, there's an important distinction to be made here between Israel's *ownership* and her *possession* of the Land. They are two different concepts. *Ownership* is unconditional (based on the Abrahamic Covenant); but *possession* is conditioned on obedience (per the terms of the conditional Sinai Covenant). Israel still owns the Land even when she doesn't possess it. For more information about this distinction between ownership and possession, see page 7 in our July–August 2020 issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 170.

⁴ G.W. Bromiley, “Angel,” in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 60.

⁵ The Hebrew word that's translated “undone” (*damah*; דמה) literally means “to cease to exist” (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon*).

⁶ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 177.

⁷ Uzziah had been a great and godly king until near the end of his reign, when he became proud and arrogant (2 Chron. 26:16).

⁸ Since conservatives tend to be literalists, some critics say we're being inconsistent when we don't take everything in Scripture literally. However, our following a literal-historical hermeneutic doesn't mean we don't recognize symbols or figures of speech when we run across them. When Scripture says, for example, that mountains will someday “break out in singing” (Isa. 49:13), we recognize the literary device employed in that image (personification). It doesn't mean that mountains will literally sing.

⁹ John Calvin, *Isaiah—Crossway Classic Commentaries* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 60.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Today, if we want to know what God looks like, we can read the Gospels and gaze upon Yeshua (Jesus): *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation* (Col. 1:15).

¹² Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein, vol. 6. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 55.

¹³ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴ Graham S. Ogden and Jan Sterk, *A Handbook on Isaiah*, ed. Paul Clarke, et al., vol. 1 & 2, United Bible Societies' Handbooks (Reading, UK: United Bible Societies, 2011), 198–216.

¹⁵ “In December 1800, after seven years of missionary labor, Carey baptized his first convert, Krishna Pal, and two months later, he published his first Bengali New Testament” (Zane Pratt, David Sills, and Jeff Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* [Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014], 118).

¹⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 84.

¹⁷ Some Messianic commentators say that “the Day of the LORD” is another term for the end-time, seven-year Tribulation Period (see “A Dispensational Israelology,” Chapter 10 in Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* [San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2013]). Others, however, include the thousand-year Millennium, making the duration of the eschatological Day of the LORD at least 1,007 years.

¹⁸ See Naomi Tupper, “Gethsemane Olive Trees Among World's Oldest,” *Olive Oil Times*, October 30, 2012, at oliveoiltimes.com.

¹⁹ John Goldingay, “Isaiah's Call (Isa 6),” on the *Bible Odyssey Passages* blogsite at bibleodyssey.org.

²⁰ *The Sword and the Trowel*, ed. C.H. Spurgeon (London: Metropolitan Tabernacle, 1869), 556.

Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger



Miracles

Michelle Beadle, CJFM Southeast representative (New Orleans), shares that before she evacuated New Orleans ahead of Hurricane Ida, she prayed: “God, please send your angels to surround my home so it won’t be damaged in the hurricane. I know you are all powerful. Please use this to witness to those who do not know you in this neighborhood.” A Jewish neighbor who stayed during the storm offered to take pictures of Michelle’s house for her. She told Michelle that her house was in the best condition of any in the neighborhood. Michelle then asked her, “Would you be interested in hearing why that is the case?” She said yes, and Michelle shared with her what she had prayed. Michelle writes: “As a result, she asked me to pray for her, and those prayers were fulfilled as well. I thank God that He is using this as a witness to His power and might.”

Postcards and Conversations

CJFM representatives Larry and Deb Dubin (Florida) have prayed and found creative ways to share the Gospel during these difficult and challenging times. In order to do an evangelistic outreach at a local university, Larry created a postcard handout with a simple question on the front: “May I ask you a question? Who do you think Yeshua (Jesus) is?” It was followed up by six choices: The Jewish Messiah; the Gentile Christ; G-d in the Flesh; Prophet, Priest, and King; All of these; None of These. Larry’s observations are as follow: (1) Students read the front and back of the postcard within 4-7 seconds, (2) Most students did not deposit the card in the nearby trash can, (3) Some of the students stopped and talked about those questions, (4) A Gentile follower of Jesus wanted more information to share her faith with her Jewish roommate.

However, a different approach was needed for the mature, unsaved community in Florida. For the past 12 months, Larry has been communicating and participating in conversation circle discussions. He is now known as a “Jew who follows Jesus.” Weekly, the Lord has blessed him with venues to speak with at least 25 Jewish and Gentile unbelievers who regularly attend these conversation groups.

In the meantime, Deb is active in a weekly Zoom synagogue discussion group. Their most recent topic was the idea of sin, (considering the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot). Deb has been a participant in this group for five years and is thankful that she is welcome for who she is and what she believes. Most do not see themselves as sinners, claiming, “I don’t sin.” However, when it was Deb’s turn, she had the opportunity to clarify what sin literally means—anything that is contrary to the law or will of God. That led to further discussion about God and what it means to be “religious” as opposed to “spiritual.” Deb was blessed when a member of the group, in closing, told her, “It was a very interesting conversation, very thought-provoking, and I learned a lot.” Please pray for the salvation of everyone in Deb’s synagogue group.

Indoors and Outdoors

Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation (Las Vegas), received a call from a woman, “K,” who told him that her husband was in the hospital dying, and he wanted to talk with a rabbi. Apparently, K, who is Catholic, was attempting to reach a Messianic Pastor/Rabbi for her Jewish husband. Before Rich could even say “shalom,” he heard somebody in the background yell: “I’m scared to die!” Rich then told them that his wife had reached the right rabbi! He proceeded to share the Good News of Yeshua with “H” over the phone. He gratefully prayed to receive his Jewish Messiah, not wanting to face the God of Israel alone, who he knew was a holy, righteous, and true God and would righteously judge his sins. He now understood that Yeshua had died for his sins and forgiven him. When Richard visited H a few days later, he was in hospice and comatose. Rich prayed over him, thanking the Lord for his salvation. That night, H was home with the Lord. H’s son texted Rich, thanking him for all that he had done for his father, who was at peace now and in a better place. Rich responded by telling him he agreed because his father received Yeshua as his Lord, Savior, and Messiah. H’s son never responded to that text. Rich asks that we “pray for the salvation of H’s family and for the Lord to heal their hurts.”

Since the shutdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Rich and his group of volunteers (which includes his wife, Oanh) take regular walks around the neighborhood, the park, and a nearby lake. They have encountered numerous opportunities to share the Gospel message. Recently, two young ladies at the lake and a young woman at the park placed their trust in Jesus. Please pray for their spiritual growth in the Lord.

Surprise Blessings

Diann Parkas, CJFM Northeast representative (New Jersey), was thrilled that six unbelievers, five of whom are Jewish, attended her Messianic Sukkot celebration. However, what really surprised her was that in the process of inviting Jewish people she knew, one person who was unable to attend expressed an interest in attending Diann’s online Bible study on the book of Matthew. Please pray that all of these individuals would come to a saving faith in the Messiah of Israel, Jesus!

Diann is also learning about creating Gospel opportunities on the fly and is finding that starting a conversation with someone is not that hard. All she did was comment on the beautiful plant in a woman’s shopping cart, which led to a lengthy conversation with the woman, who is a former Catholic and has been ill. Diann prayed for her and heard about her family. Her husband had recently asked for a Bible, but she was unable to locate one in the house. Since Diann has extra Bibles at her house, they exchanged contact information. Please pray that she and her husband will indeed read the Bible and be born again.

Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *Is it true that there's a way to present the Good News of Messiah to a Jewish person without referring to the New Testament? Seems like that information could come in handy when witnessing to our Jewish friends and family members.*

ANSWER: Yes, it's true. Below, you'll see THE ISAIAH WAY TO HEAVEN. It presents the Good News of Messiah Yeshua utilizing only verses from the Book of Isaiah, accompanied by other, confirming passages in the Jewish *Tanakh*.

We also have a useful tract that might interest you. It's entitled "Lovingkindness (טון)—Better Than Life!" We've sent out literally thousands of these pocket-sized booklets

over the past twenty years or so. It was designed originally by our former director of missions, Barry Berger, who is with the Lord in Heaven now, featuring the Hebrew word *chesed* ("lovingkindness" or "faithful love") in the title. People like to use this little booklet in witnessing because it includes an overview of the Messianic prophecy in Daniel 9—and shows how that epic chapter helps us identify the Messiah. Just call our OrderLine at 1-800-926-5397 or email us at info@cjfm.org and ask for the "Lovingkindness" booklet. We'll be happy to send you a free and post-paid copy to share with a Jewish friend or family member. You can also write to us at: CJF Ministries, PO Box 345, San Antonio, TX 78292-0345.

THE ISAIAH WAY TO HEAVEN[©]

(**Bold type** in Scripture citations indicates emphasis added.)

1. GOD LOVES US AND WANTS OUR LIVES TO BE FILLED WITH BLESSINGS AND PURPOSE.

Isaiah 41:10: "**Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.**"

Psalms 16:11: You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; **at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

2. HOWEVER, WE ARE SEPARATED FROM HIM BY OUR SIN. WE ARE SINNERS BY NATURE AND BY WILL.

Isaiah 64:6: But we are all like an unclean thing, and **all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags**; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Jeremiah 17:9: "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?**"

3. THE RESULT OF SIN IS SEPARATION FROM GOD, LOSS OF BLESSINGS, AND, ULTIMATELY, SPIRITUAL DEATH FOREVER

Isaiah 59:2: But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and **your sins have hidden His face from you**, so that He will not hear.

Ezekiel 18:4: "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; **the soul who sins shall die.**"

4. GOD HAS PROVIDED, THROUGH HIS SON, THE ONLY WAY TO BRIDGE THAT GULF OF SEPARATION.

Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "**Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.**"

Isaiah 30:21: Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "**This is the way (haDerech, הדרך), walk in it,**" whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.

Isaiah 43:11: "**I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior.**"

Isaiah 53:4-5: **Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows**; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. **But [the Man of Sorrows] was wounded for our transgressions**, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Leviticus 17:11: "**For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.**"

5. RIGHT NOW, YOU CAN PLACE YOUR FAITH IN THE LORD YESHUA THE MESSIAH AND RECEIVE HIS FREE GIFT OF SALVATION.

Isaiah 12:3: Therefore **with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.**

Isaiah 50:9-10: "**Surely the Lord GOD will help Me; Who is he who will condemn Me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; the moth will eat them up. Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon his God.**"

Habakkuk 2:4: "Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; **but the just shall live by his faith.**"

Zechariah 3:1, 8: Then he showed me **Joshua** [i.e., Yeshua; cp. Ezra 2:2, Neh. 7:7] **the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD**, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. . . . You and your companions who sit before you . . . are a wondrous sign; for behold, **I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH** [i.e., the Messiah; Isa. 11:1].

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