



(3) THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: ISAIAH 6

- Focus Idea: God's incredible majesty, astonishing power, and life-transforming holiness mark his a claim to lordship over the whole earth. Believers who understand and are impacted by these realities go forward to testify in his name and on his behalf.
- The Context: Bible scholars have identified sufficient thematic and stylistic reasons to think that Isaiah is a compendium written by several authors over a long span of time. Chapter 6 is firmly in the first section of the book; here the prophet's memoir of his early ministry is recorded. After some initial forays into preaching work (chapters 1-5), chapter 6 describes a vivid experience that Isaiah has of the exalted Lord. Following this experience of God's power, Isaiah begins preaching afresh. His subsequent proclamations reflect the transformative power of this vision.
- The Characters: Isaiah, son of Amoz, described in detail in other Core40 studies, was a temple leader and prophet in the late 8th and early 7th Centuries BCE. He had close connections with the royal house in Jerusalem and preached mostly to the southern kingdom of Judah.
- The Core: Christians believe that they have a message for the world. They are neither to be "of the world" nor to withdraw themselves from it; the gospel they carry must be proclaimed in difficult places and in challenging contexts in order to bring hope and joy to the ends of the earth.
- In Isaiah 6:8, the prophet of God volunteers to be a messenger for God. "Here am I; send me!" he declares. Even the certain fruitlessness of his preaching (vs. 9-10) will not dissuade Isaiah from serving as God's mouthpiece. Why is he so willing to embark on a career that will be so fraught with failure?
- The answer: Isaiah experienced the awesome and transcendent holiness of God. In the year that Uzziah, a powerful and successful ruler, died (vs. 1), Isaiah saw "*the King*" (vs. 5) on his throne. The Lord was "high and exalted" and the train of his robe "filled the temple" – a building whose dimensions were about 120 feet by 90 feet (vs. 1). God was attended by fiery seraphim, serpentine angels whose voices shook the foundations of the building (vs. 2-4).
- The repeated cry of these mighty beings resounds into contemporary Christian music. "Holy, holy, holy!" the seraphim said of God. "The whole earth is filled with his glory" (vs. 3).
- Isaiah lived in an age of petty idolatry. The gods of his neighbors were localized and small. Carved wooden gods were commonly placed on household tables and carried in pockets. These ancient deities were thought to control or supervise small regions or people groups.
- Prior to his experience in the temple, Isaiah himself might have thought his God to be limited. But his experience of the transcendent King entirely remapped this view. Isaiah witnessed a titanic God whose awesome power shook the earth. The Lord on the throne was above, beyond, and distinct from other gods and rulers. His majesty and holiness collapsed Isaiah on the spot; the prophet assumes that he will die because he has witnessed God's authority (vs. 5).
- But one of the seraphim touched Isaiah with a coal from the altar, symbolically taking away Isaiah's guilt. Instead of perishing, Isaiah was newly commissioned to go on God's behalf, witnessing to a planet already filled with God's glory.