

The vision of God

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[0 : 0 0] fat and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

And I said, How long, O Lord? And he said, Until the cities lie waste without inhabitant, the houses without men, and the land is utterly desolate, and the Lord removes men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land, and though a tent remain in it, it will be burned again like a terebrinth or an oak, whose stump remains standing when it is felled.

The holy seed is its stump. Men, may the Lord bless to us that reading. May it be to his praise and to his glory. So looking at this, the first question we could ask ourselves is, Who is Isaiah?

Isaiah was actually part of the royal family. The opening verse tells us that he was the son of Amoz, and Amoz was the brother of the previous king, Amaziah.

And if you read the book of Isaiah, you see that Isaiah clearly has access to the palace, because he's allowed to go in and out, and speak to this king and that king, and it gives this advice and that advice, and nobody says, Why are you there?

[1 : 4 2] He's part of the royal family. The second thing that happened with Isaiah is he had a very long prophetic ministry lasting some 60 years, from BC 758 to 698.

He had contemporaries. These were Hosea, Micah, and Zephaniah. Although he was part of the royal family, and he was certainly somebody of privilege, the fact is that, in respect of that, he faced challenges.

During the reign of Uzziah, it was the death of this seemingly godly king. During the reign of Jotham, it was the prosperity of the nation at the expense of faith in their familiar god.

During the reign of Ahaz, it was the policy of that king to worship foreign gods. And during the reign of Hezekiah, it was the policy of that king to forge relationships with Egypt.

And in chapters like Isaiah 31, he says, Why do you go down to Egypt for help? Are not the Egyptians men and not God?

[3 : 0 3] So there are challenges. And there are challenges to us. And that's why I think we can probably learn from this. Now, I've got three things I want to say about it.

The first thing is the timing of the vision. And we get that from verse 1. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

In terms of history, this was B.C. 735. You can read about Uzziah and what he got up to, the king. In 2 Kings 15, 1-7.

But filled out a bit more in 2 Chronicles 26, 1-23. Now, the first thing that Uzziah did was the right thing to do.

He placed his trust in the God of his fathers. So we read 2 Chronicles 25. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord according to all that his father Amaziah had done.

[4 : 14] And he set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of the Lord. And as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper.

From the Old Testament, you can read that the perennial enemies of the people of Israel and the people of Judah were the Philistines.

And Uzziah took concrete steps to do something about this. And he actually subdued the Philistines. And in 2 Chronicles 26, we read, So the principal city of the Philistines was Gath.

They had coastal defenses in Jabni. And Ashdod lay in the center of the city, of the land. So what is being said is, he brought them under subjection, so they weren't the perennial enemy anymore.

And because of this, we are told that his fame spread abroad, even to the border of Egypt. That's what the Egyptians were talking about.

[5 : 44] How good this man was. And then we find that he also turned his attention to the city of Jerusalem. He built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the angle, and fortified them.

In other words, he defended Jerusalem from attacks on all sides, the northeast, the southwest, and the east.

Then, taking this a step further, in Jerusalem he made engines invented by skillful men to be on towers and corners, to shoot arrows and great stones.

And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped till he was strong. So if we turn our attention to the youthful Isaiah at this point, he looks at all this and thinks about the promises that God has made in the past about this nation, and he sees that great things are happening.

But there's a remark in verse 15, till he was strong. When he was strong, he grew proud to his destruction, for he was false to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.

[7 : 15] There's no note of when this took place. It might have been on the annual day of atonement, or it might have been on a daily feast day. What is certain is that the high priest Azariah and 80 others went in to stop him doing this.

Why did he do this? Why did he break with the law as revealed in the book of Leviticus? We don't have an answer to that. What we do have is the fact that he was furious to be confronted with the priests.

He had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out in his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord by the altar, of incense.

And so an examination took place, and what happened was he fled from the scene and dwelt in a separate house as was fitting for lepers and was never seen again until the day of his death.

So what's happening? The world is starting to crumble. What's happening? In Judea at this point.

[8 : 37] Where is the country going? The godly king has perished. And so the resolve of Isaiah is clearly to go into the temple of the Lord and see what God has to say about it.

Would that people would do that today. We're told that people are very anxious at the way things are going in the world. In the last week, we have heard that the president of Haiti has been assassinated.

No doubt people there are thinking, what on earth is actually going on? So, let's look at the content of this vision.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Now, the most important words in that text are, I saw the Lord.

I've just said that Isaiah had contemplated the great success which had taken place under the reign of Uzziah.

[9 : 56] To sum up, Philistines conquered, Jerusalem rebuilt and strengthened, the temple functioning well. But now, this man has been struck with leprosy.

This godly king has died. What a shock that must have been. And so, he goes into the temple. Now, if we were reading the authorised version on this particular verse, you would see that it says, I saw also the Lord.

I saw the destruction of Uzziah's reign. I saw things coming to an end I never envisaged would happen.

I saw the failure of the people. I saw the Lord. That's the significance. And he sees there six angels called the Seraphim.

Now, their name comes from the Hebrew verb Sarath, which means to be involved in flame. And that's what they're like. They're involved in flame because they are the guardians of the holiness of God.

[11 : 22] And it is they who cry out, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And there's a response.

The foundations of the threshold shook. The voice of him who called and the whole place was filled with smoke. So there is a response to the presence of God.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

Woe is me. I am lost. I've seen the holiness of God. What is the impact of all this?

I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. And so Isaiah has a confession to make. What about us today?

[12 : 40] Where are we? We are in the house of God. And Jesus said of it, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.

Do we see the holiness and the otherness of God by the risen Jesus being present in our midst?

A confession. What's the value of this confession? We turn to Psalm 32. And this is David speaking.

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away all day long. for day and night your hand was heavy upon me.

My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. And so he goes on, I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not hide my iniquity.

[13 : 52] I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and then you did forgive the guilt of my sin. And what's he saying here in this psalm?

He's saying that because I did not confess my sin, I was in a state of illness. Now I want to turn your attention to something we get in the New Testament.

And this has to do with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. I received from the Lord what I delivered to you, the Lord Jesus and the same night he was betrayed took bread.

I'm going some further verses down. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.

Let a man examine himself, let a person examine themselves and so let them eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

[15 : 11] And this is the verse this is why many among you are weak and ill and some have died prematurely.

You see, confession isn't just for the moment of conversion. It's for every day of your life. And the longer you're on the Christian road, the more you're aware of your own sinfulness and the absolute holiness of God.

And your response to it has to be, forgive me, I've sinned. This moment, then flew one of the seraphim, that's one of these burning angels, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken from tongs from the altar.

Now what is this burning coal? Well, the best way of understanding it is it's an ember from the sacrifice of the sin offering.

And so it's ideally suited to perform this action of cleansing. He touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sin forgiven.

[16 : 34] And we don't need a burning ember. What we need is a relationship with the living Jesus.

And then the world changes because your own sinfulness is transformed into the glory of who he is.

we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. There's an action in Peter's, Jesus' words to Peter which is very similar.

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail and when you have turned again strengthen your brothers.

What Jesus was saying to Peter was you're going to have a profound experience. Yes, you're going to fail. You're going to deny me three times.

[17 : 48] But following that you're going to have a wonderful experience. And so great will that experience be you'll be able to do something for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

That is true of you and me. Purpose of the vision is a thought point. The year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and his train filled the temple.

And so the purpose of the vision comes in this phrase in verse 8. 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.

What kind of message has he got? He's got a message of mercy but he's also got a message of judgment. Listen to this verse 9 and 10.

Go and say to this people hear and hear but do not understand. See and see but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat and their eyes heavy and shut their eyes.

[19 : 10] Lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed. Now that is actually an appeal. when you think of it first of all it appears that what's being said here is that the ministry of Isaiah will fail because he's speaking to people and they're not going to be responding.

But that's only part of it. What is really being talked about here is the people's inability because of their sin to respond to God's word.

Now he gives in the very first chapter of the book verses five and six a description of what he thinks is wrong with the people.

Why will you still be smitten that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds.

They are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil. Now what's being talked about in that verse is he is saying that the condition of the people is if they were afflicted with leprosy.

[20 : 33] That's what's being talked about there. And you can find regulations about the discernment of leprosy and should it recover how you can be reinstated in the community in Leviticus 13 and 14.

It is the case that in ancient Israel there was no remedy or prescription by which the people could be healed. And that is why Jesus comes across in the New Testament as somebody who's very different.

threatened by not only did he cleanse lepers, he actually touched them. He got down beside them in their condition.

And in London, there is outside trade union congress house, there's a statue. statue. And the statue is of one man bending down to help another man up.

It's the symbol of the trade union movement. It's also the symbol of the incarnation. Because Christ came down and identified himself with us and got down in the dirt beside us.

[21 : 58] And we're called to do the same thing. So now he makes an appeal. 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. It's an evangelical appeal. Come and the situation can change.

But supposing the people will not listen. Then there is a message of judgment. I said, how long, O Lord?

And he said, until cities lie waste without inhabitants and houses without men. The land is utterly desolate and the Lord removes men far away. And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

That is a message of judgment. judgment. And we today, we are able to offer a message of mercy.

[23 : 02] Come now and let us reason together. But it's equally true to say that the individuals who will not respond to that generous offer are facing nothing less than the judgment of God, from which there is no appeal.

So at the end of the gospel of Mark, Jesus said this, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.

He believes and who is baptized will be saved. He who does not believe will be condemned. And so the thrust of this vision of Isaiah for us can be summed up like this.

Take the goal of that Mark 16 verse and get it into your own soul. Get the goal of the gospel within you.

Be evangelizing. Be stretching out the offer of mercy. I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send?

[24 : 19] who will go for us? Amen. We'll sing further, the God of this city. Gracious and eternal God, we certainly believe what we have sung.

Greater things have yet to be done. And we put ourselves at your disposal and ask that you would direct us, bless us, and use us to your own glory.

In Jesus' name, Amen.