

Freedom Way M.B.C. Bible Study Lesson #658

Date _____

Surrendering to Service (Prophet Isaiah)

Biblical Passage: Isaiah 6:1–8

Supporting Passages: Isaiah 6:9–13;
Revelation 4:1–8

Memory Verse: Isaiah 6:8

Biblical Truth: Isaiah's vision of God produced surrendered service.

Context: Once the kingdom of Israel divided after Solomon's reign, Israel continued through a cycle of sin and repentance. God would raise up prophets to proclaim truth—warnings—to His people. God revealed Himself to Isaiah in a dramatic call to ministry around 740 B.C., just before the destruction of Jerusalem in 722 B.C.

INVESTIGATION

The king that Isaiah loved for years had just died. As an anxious, sorrowful, and impure man, Isaiah went into the Temple to pray. There, the Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah as a holy God who could cleanse him of sin and give him a mission in life. He cleansed Isaiah and then issued a call for volunteers to serve. Isaiah boldly volunteered. Isaiah could accept God's call upon his life because he came to realize who God was and who he was: God was holy, and Isaiah was unclean. God could forgive Isaiah of his sin, but Isaiah could not cleanse himself.

The Lord commissioned Isaiah as a prophet in the year that King Uzziah died (approximately 740 B.C.). Isaiah's commission came in the form of a vision. Isaiah's view of the Lord was so grand that he saw the Lord seated on a throne, lifted up high, and exalted. The Lord's glory filled the place, and seraphs flew around crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty . . ." At the sound of the seraphs' voices, there was shaking, and the Temple filled with smoke. As the holiness of the Lord became more real to Isaiah, he saw himself as a person "ruined" and "of unclean lips." He saw himself as unfit even to praise the Lord.

Then the seraph placed a hot coal on his lips and cleansed him. Having been made clean, Isaiah heard the call of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" Isaiah answered the call: "Here am I. Send me!"

IMPORTANCE

This passage of Scripture paints a picture of God that teaches God Is. Isaiah's vision of God gives a precious record of who God is. Isaiah 6 opens by describing God as "high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple" (v. 1). Three times, the seraphim used the word *holy* to describe God, and they also called Him "the LORD Almighty" (v. 3). Further, they declared, "the whole earth is full of his glory" (v. 3). God is the one true, living God, seated on His throne, perfect in holiness and glory.

Enthroned in majesty, God showed Himself to Isaiah, cleansed him, and gave him a mission. Isaiah responded to God's holiness by admitting his guilt, and God took it away, showing His power to do what no other can. God is a God of holiness and forgiveness. By studying Isaiah's call, believers will understand more about God's holy, powerful, forgiving character.

This passage also touches on other key truths: The Bible is God's Word and People are God's Treasure.

INTERPRETATION

Isaiah 6:1–2 King Uzziah of Judah was a disease-ridden but influential king. He died around 740 B.C. Isaiah's call and commissioning as a prophet of the Lord took place this same year. Uzziah ruled the southern kingdom of Judah well for about 40 years. Isaiah grew up during the years of his reign. He had known no other king. The nation of Judah had known peace and prosperity during Uzziah's reign. The nation had not known such a peace since the days of Solomon just before the kingdom divided.

When Uzziah died, his people mourned him greatly and were filled with fear. The mighty Assyrian empire that lay far north of Judah had grown in power and stood poised and ready to invade. Conquering nations often saw a time of transition from one king to another as an excellent

opportunity to overtake another nation.

At such an uncertain time, Isaiah went to the Temple to worship. He probably felt anxious about the future and sorrowful due to the loss of his earthly king. But Isaiah had a surprising and wonderful experience in the Temple. He saw a heavenly King sitting on a throne. This king ruled eternally over heaven and earth. The size of the train of His robe that completely filled the Temple suggests the Lord's greatness.

God's attendants, or seraphim, were serving Him. The word *seraphim* can be translated "flaming ones." This is their only appearance in the Bible. They served here as members of God's divine court. Each creature had six wings. In the presence of a holy God the winged creatures covered themselves as a sign of reverence. With two wings the seraphim covered their faces. Two wings covered their feet. With two wings God's ministers flew. Their flight symbolized their readiness to serve.

Isaiah 6:3–4 Around the heavenly throne the seraphim sang praises to God's glory. They repeated the word *holy* three times. The word *holy* derives its meaning from a root word that means "to separate or cut off." To say God is holy is to say He is separate from humans and their sinfulness. He is morally pure. God is not distant from humanity, only different. The threefold repetition of the word *holy* emphasized the uniqueness of the God of Israel.

The seraphim looked down at the earth and saw that it reflected the glory of the Lord. Isaiah was completely immersed in the divine presence. Everywhere Isaiah turned he saw God's greatness, glory, and holiness. As a result of this experience, the holiness of God became one of the dominant themes of Isaiah's preaching. His favorite name for God was "Holy One of Israel."

The framework of the building shook at the sound of the voices of the seraphim, who were offering their praises. The smoke from burnt offerings and incense often filled the Temple. Now a cloud of smoke filled it. Smoke was necessary to provide cover for the priest as he entered the presence of the Lord in the inner Temple. Now the sinful prophet needed the smoke for cover as he entered the Lord's presence.

Isaiah 6:5 Isaiah began to ponder what he was experiencing. He realized he had no business in this holy setting. As he reflected on God's holiness, he became keenly aware and ashamed of his own sinfulness and that of his people. Although the prophet stood in the midst of the divine council, he was not a member. He was a member of the impure human race. Such realization led Isaiah to cry out, "Woe to me! I am ruined!" Isaiah may have believed he faced certain death for looking into the face of God. The phrase may also be translated "I am silenced." Isaiah knew he could not join in the holy choir due to his sinfulness.

To the ancient Hebrews, an unclean person was one who did not follow laws properly or who came into contact with some substance that made him or her unclean. Isaiah understood through his experience with the Lord here that cleanliness is not related to laws or rituals but to ethical living. That Isaiah and his contemporaries were people of unclean lips meant they were not morally pure. The prophet never realized the depth of his sin and defilement until he stood in the midst of God's holiness.

Isaiah 6:6–7 Although Isaiah deserved and may have expected judgment, God brought him cleansing and forgiveness. The Lord's special ministers turned to serve Isaiah. Since the prophet's lips were defiled, they had to be cleansed. One of the seraphim flew to Isaiah with a burning coal that he had taken from the altar using tongs. The holy altar was where animal sacrifices took place. Sacrifices were offered to take away the people's sins. When the creature touched Isaiah's lips with the coal, he declared that God had taken away the prophet's guilt and forgiven his sin. God took away Isaiah's guilt because Isaiah could not do it himself.

Isaiah had felt condemned because of his sin just moments earlier, but now he experienced forgiveness. The touch of God's holiness changed Isaiah. He was morally pure. Yet this was no painless experience. It took searing heat to purify the prophet and take away his sin.

Isaiah 6:8 What was the immediate effect of Isaiah's cleansing? He was fully accepted into the heavenly council to stand in God's presence. God now asked His holy council whom might He send out from them to go and serve in the world.

Isaiah's own cleansing made him aware of a world in need of God's forgiveness. Having been prepared for service, Isaiah boldly volunteered for service. "Here am I. Send me," he replied. Isaiah offered no excuses, as had Moses. He did not express inadequacy as had Jeremiah. Isaiah stepped up and volunteered for service before he even knew what the service involved! The Lord revealed the details of the assignment later.

prepares you to be used in His service. You then have an eagerness to do whatever the Lord wants you to do for Him. God can use you when you come humbly to Him in repentance.

Isaiah's response had a sense of urgency to it. He seemed concerned someone might get chosen ahead of him unless he volunteered quickly for the assignment. His experience with the holy God filled him with such an overwhelming sense of gratitude that he willingly placed his future completely in God's hands. Isaiah made himself available to the Lord to be used in any way the Lord saw fit.

IMPLICATIONS

Isaiah willingly volunteered to serve the Lord in any capacity. The process of spiritual development begins with discovering the faith and progresses to owning your faith. This passage has special implications for Owners. Once you realize how your faith affects your life, the next step is service. Isaiah's service flowed out of his knowledge of God and his personal experience with Him. God revealed Himself. Isaiah confessed his sins. God cleansed Isaiah. Then, Isaiah served God. His willingness to serve flowed out of a heart that knew God and had a personal experience with Him. It works the same way for believers today. The more we learn about God and own our faith, the more readily available we will be to serve God.

Preparation to serve the Lord involves an experience of the Lord's cleansing. When you worship the Lord, several important things occur. You become ashamed of your sinfulness, and you receive His forgiveness. You cannot be an effective servant without first admitting you are a sinner who can do nothing on your own about your sinful nature. Even after you enter a relationship with the Lord, you continue to sin at times. If you do not continually seek forgiveness of your sins, your spiritual lives will spiral downward. Failure to lead a consistent Christian life results in an ineffective or nonexistent ministry to the world. Your life should point people to Christ, not to confusion. God's cleansing your sin