

“Here Am I! Send Me”: The Prophet Isaiah



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Lev. 16:30, 17:11, Isa. 6: 1–10, 49:6, Jer. 3:22, Matt. 28:18–20, Heb. 1:2.*

Memory Text: “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.’ ” (*Isaiah 6:8, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Isaiah was a powerful eighth-century prophet who spoke out against sin and corruption, championed justice and righteousness, and prophesied the coming of the Messiah. What parallels can we find for ourselves today?

A central part of Isaiah’s mission was to reform the southern kingdom of Judah. He spoke out against sin and corruption and the nation’s rebellion against God.

But Isaiah’s mission extended further than just reform within Judah. He envisioned a day when Judah’s mission would be to represent God to the world. Judah was not to remain inward-looking; it had a mission to all other nations. Isaiah quotes God as saying, “‘I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.’ ” (*Isa. 42:6, NIV*).

This large vision of mission extending to the whole world was lost sight of in following years. Not until Jesus’ own ministry, and the ministry of the apostles in the book of Acts, do we see this vision of the gospel to all the world put into action, a vision that we are called to be part of in our day and age, as well.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.*

Woe Is Me!

Read Isaiah 6:1–6. What was happening to Isaiah?

God transports Isaiah through vision into the heavenly throne room, where he sees God Himself seated on a throne, “high and lifted up” (*Isa. 6:1*).

In his vision of God’s throne room, Isaiah is treated to an amazing spectacle. He sees the train of God’s robe filling the temple and six-winged flying beings called seraphim. He hears them calling to each other in praise to God. Their voices must have been powerful, because they caused the doorposts to shake and the temple was filled with smoke.

Compare Isaiah’s vision with these others who had an experience of seeing God. What was the common reaction? What important lesson can we take from these reactions about ourselves and our relationship to our Creator? *Exod. 20:18, 19; Judg. 13:22; Job 42:5, 6; Rev. 1:17.*

In response to his vision of “the King, the Lord of hosts,” Isaiah cries out, “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” (*Isa. 6:5, NIV*).

Damah, the Hebrew word for undone, means “cut off” or “finished.” The King James Version also translates the word as “perish” (*Ps. 49:12, 20*) and as “destroyed” (*Hos. 4:6*). This word indicates that the experience totally devastated Isaiah. The vision of God helped Isaiah understand what he, himself, was really like in contrast to his Maker.

What was it about seeing God that caused this reaction? How does this help us understand why Jesus came in human flesh to reveal to us what God is really like?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Isaiah 6:8*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: The parallels between Isaiah’s time and message and our own contemporary message.

Feel: The need to experience the same sense of awe and cleansing as did Isaiah. (See Lev. 16:30.)

Do: Resolve to seek this cleansing and response of God’s call to you and the class members.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Seeing God (*Isa. 6:1–10*)

A We have studied about how various biblical people were “called.” Is there anything unique about Isaiah’s call?

B Monday’s lesson says that this experience affected “all of Isaiah’s senses.” Discuss with the class what that means.

II. Cleansing + Call (*Isa. 6:8*)

Tuesday’s lesson points out that Isaiah answers the call *before* he got an assignment. Discuss the significance of this with the class. What does it have to do with us?

III. Tough Assignment (*Isa. 6:8*)

A Why did Isaiah need to go through this experience recounted in Isaiah 6? He was already a priest and religious leader.

B Ask the class how they feel about God calling a person to such an unpromising situation as Isaiah’s.

C What does the phrase “a light to the Gentiles” (*Isa. 49:6*) have to do with us?

► **Summary:** The prophet Isaiah accepted a mission from God that was unpopular. And yet, through his ministry, lives were changed, and the power of his words is still felt today.

Thy Sin Is Purged

Isaiah's encounter with the Divine is an extraordinary occasion. He describes it as an experience that affects all his senses: He sees the six-winged seraph and God on His throne; he hears the seraphims' thundering voices; he smells the smoke in the temple; and he feels and tastes the live coal the seraphim places on his lips (*Isa. 6:1–6*).

As we saw in yesterday's lesson, after this experience of seeing God, Isaiah is overcome by his own unworthiness.

Indeed, his utterance in Isaiah 6:5 is a confession of his sin and that of his people.

Why the emphasis on “unclean lips”? Was Isaiah's and his people's only sin that of what they spoke? What might that have been a symbol of? See also *Prov. 13:3, Matt. 12:37, Luke 6:45*.

As soon as Isaiah confesses, a seraphim takes a live coal from the heavenly altar, flies with it to Isaiah, and touches it to his lips.

Read Isaiah 6:6, 7. What happens here? What is symbolized by this act? What message can we take from this for ourselves?

In and of himself, Isaiah, a man of unclean lips, has nothing to offer God. But through the work of the Lord Himself, Isaiah's sin is purged. The Hebrew word translated purged comes from the root *qaphar*, commonly translated in the Old Testament as “atone” or “atonement” (see *Exod. 29:36, 30:10, Lev. 16:30, 17:11*). The point is that Isaiah, without divine intervention, without his sin being purged or covered (*qaphar has also been understood to mean covered; see Gen. 6:14*) would not have been able to do anything for the Lord. He had to be made right with God first; only then could the Lord use him.

What things in your own life are standing in the way of God's being able to use you? What must you submit to in order to have your sin purged?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Have you ever experienced a dramatic change in perspective? In 1543, astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus published a theory that would transform how humans viewed themselves and their place in the universe. Copernicus used mathematics and astronomical studies to disprove the belief that the earth was the center of the universe, around which all planets and stars orbited. Instead, he argued, the earth is just one of a number of planets that travel around the sun. Today we know that earth is an infinitesimal speck in the vast, unfathomably huge universe. But for the religious and intellectual leaders of the sixteenth century, Copernicus had advanced an unwelcome theory that required a shocking change in perspective. It was not something easy for people to grasp, and it took awhile before his position became accepted. Old and set ideas are not easy for anyone to give up, no matter how wrong they are!

Radical changes in perspective are rarely comfortable. In Isaiah 6 the prophet encounters the unfathomable vastness of God's majesty, and it becomes a defining moment in his life; his perspective of God, himself, and his mission changes in an instant. Have we also had an encounter with God? Take a few moments to consider how our knowledge of God changes our perspective, priorities, and understanding of our place in the universe. Think about how our views, as Adventists, radically differ from those who believe that we live in a godless universe and that our existence here is purely by chance!

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Uncertain Times

Under the 52-year reign of King Uzziah, the kingdom of Judah flourished politically and economically. But the later years set the stage for Judah's decline into captivity (*2 Chron. 26:16*). At the time of Isaiah's vision, the kingdom was also becoming increasingly vulnerable to the military aggression of its neighbors.

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“Here Am I! Send Me”

When Isaiah hears the call from God, he immediately responds, “Here am I! Send me” (*Isa. 6:8*). Notice that Isaiah answers the call before he knows the details of the assignment (*see also Heb. 11:8*).

Isaiah does not respond because he believes he has the necessary gifts and talents or because he knows that he will do a good job. And he does not respond because it is a task that appeals to him (he does not even know what the task is). Isaiah responds because he knows that although he is unworthy, God is worthy. Although he is powerless, God is all-powerful. Although it may not be a mission he would have chosen for himself, it is a mission God has chosen.

Read the Great Commission to go and teach all nations—perhaps the most important commission in all of Scripture (*Matt. 28:18–20*). Read carefully the first part of this commission. Why is this an important section that we must not overlook?

The “therefore” is critical. The only reason we can go and teach all nations is because we go in the power of the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth. If we had only our own strength, we could not go. If we relied on our own skills, we could not go. Our mission is fired by Jesus, who owns “all authority” (*NIV*) or “all power” (*KJV*) in the universe (*see Acts 17:28, Heb. 1:2, Col. 1:16*).

If we are willing, God gives us the power we need to accomplish the mission He gives us. He purifies Isaiah’s unclean lips (*Isa. 6:7*); He gives Mary the Holy Spirit and “‘the power of the Most High’” (*Luke 1:35, NIV*); Jesus prays for Peter (*Luke 22:32*); He anoints Saul with the Holy Spirit (*Acts 9:17, 18*); He puts words in Jeremiah’s mouth (*Jer. 1:9*). Should we expect any less for ourselves, now at this crucial time in earth’s history?

What, if anything, is holding you back from doing more for the Lord? What changes must you make? How can you learn to rely on God’s power and not your own gifts, whatever they are?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: Isaiah’s encounter with God comes at a time of personal and national insecurity. Why is uncertainty so often a catalyst for personal re-examination? How does God work through these events to connect with us?

II. A New Perspective: Of God *(Review Isa. 6:1–4 with your class.)*

The terrifying grandeur of Isaiah’s vision reveals a God with incomparable power and majesty. The imagery emphasizes God’s absolute transcendence, His holiness.

Consider This: Why did the angels cry “holy” and not “love” or “salvation”? Could it be that “holiness” defines every other part of God’s character: His love is a holy love; His power is a holy power? How does this influence our understanding of God?

“When perils encompass God’s people . . . God calls them to look up to Him, seated on His throne and directing in the affairs of heaven and earth, in order that they may take hope and courage.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 128.

III. A New Perspective: Of Self *(Review Isa. 6:5–7 with your class.)*

Consider This: Why does the angel touch Isaiah’s mouth to represent his redemption? Why are the lips, tongue, or mouth so often used as symbols in Scripture to indicate the state of the heart (*Prov. 12:13, 14; Matt. 15:8–10; James 3:6*)?

Isaiah’s reaction to the holiness of God is an overwhelming sense of his own unworthiness. Review encounters others have had with their Creator (*1 Kings 19:11–13, Dan. 4:28–37, Matt. 28:5–10, Acts 9:3–9*).

Consider This: How do these encounters differ—either in the way God presents Himself or in an individual’s reactions? What circumstances do you think contribute to these differences?

IV. A New Perspective: Of Mission

A. Motivation for Mission

In Isaiah 6:8, God asks, “Whom shall I send?” Did He really have no one in mind? In asking the question, God provides space for Isaiah to

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Isaiah's Call

Read God's commission to Isaiah (*Isa. 6:9, 10*). How are we to understand what God was telling Isaiah here?

Most translations of the Bible, including the King James Version, make these verses sound as if God is purposely aiming to dull the people's hearts and minds. Yet, if you read the texts carefully, you can see a bit of sarcasm, a bit of irony, in them. Why would God—who otherwise is constantly pleading with His people to listen to Him, to understand Him, to open their hearts to Him, to know Him, to look to Him, to return to Him, and to be healed by Him—say what He was saying unless He meant something else?

Read the following texts. How are we to understand them in light of the texts we have just seen?

Deut. 30:6

Prov. 2:5

Jer. 3:22

Jer. 4:1

All through the Bible, God was calling His people to listen, to obey, to return to Him, to be healed by Him. And yet, as we know, many did not listen. Thus, what seems to be happening here is that God is simply stating how the people will respond to Isaiah; He is not saying what He wants to happen or what He will cause to happen. As the people continually reject Isaiah's warnings, their hearts naturally harden. But this does not mean that Isaiah or God wanted this result. On the contrary, the whole Bible is a call of God to people to do all the things Isaiah said to do; as we know, however, many did not.

What about us today? How different are we from the folk in Isaiah's time? And though, perhaps, there is not much we can do about others, what about ourselves, individually? How can we make sure we do not fall into the same spiritual trap as those depicted in Isaiah?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

respond with a willing, eager heart.

Consider This: Isaiah volunteers before he even knows his assignment. Why? What sets apart those who undertake God’s work willingly from those who are reluctant (*Ps. 51:12, 13; Mark 5:18–20*)?

“Those who are the partakers of the grace of Christ will be ready to make any sacrifice, that others for whom He died may share the heavenly gift. They will do all they can to make the world better for their stay in it. This spirit is the sure outgrowth of a soul truly converted.”
—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 78.

B. A Pointless Mission? (*Review Isa. 6:9, 10 with your class.*)

God’s description of Isaiah’s mission sounds like a recipe for frustration—to preach to those who will refuse to understand or accept his message.

Consider This: What is the point of Isaiah’s mission if its outcome is already known? How should we define success in mission today? Should it be by the number of baptisms or churches established?

Isaiah was not the only one who preached to those who refused to listen. Ask someone in the class to read John 12:37–41 to see how Isaiah’s experience is explicitly echoed in the ministry of Jesus.

► **STEP 3—Practice**

Thought Questions:

- 1 Could the stubbornness of Judah (*Isa. 6:9, 10*) have parallels within our own churches? Is there a danger that those who have grown up with the gospel become resistant to its power? What “spiritual symptoms” could indicate calloused hearts and dull ears?

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A Light to the Gentiles

Isaiah’s mission was far larger than just reforming Judah. He also cast a vision of Jerusalem as a light on a hill, a witness to all nations about the one true God, and His commandments: “the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established . . . and all nations will stream to it” (*Isa. 2:2*).

How do we, as Adventists, understand our role in the outreach to the world? See *Rev. 14:6*.

Read Isaiah 42:6, 7. What role does God call Judah to play? How do we see ourselves in that role today?

Read Isaiah 49:6. What does this have to do with us, as Seventh-day Adventists?

It was not until the late 1860s that the Seventh-day Adventist Church realized it had a mission to foreign lands. Early Adventists had assumed the gospel commission extended only to the various people groups within North America. America was a multicultural society, and early Adventists thought they were reaching out to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people right there at home. Arthur Spalding suggests that it was a “comforting rationalization” for the early Adventist Church to assume that its mission was only to North America. —Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1962), vol. 2, p. 193.

But it was not long before the young church realized that its vision was too limited, and it launched out and began establishing the church in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Pacific, and all over the world, a work that we, individually, can be a part of, one way or another.

What are ways you, or even your local church, could be more involved in outreach, in bringing “salvation unto the ends of the earth” (*Acts 13:47*)?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

2 Read the following two quotes to your class:

“You were born to win, but to be a winner, you must plan to win, prepare to win, and expect to win.”—Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar, “Developing and Maintaining the Right Attitude,” Dec. 11, 2006.

“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all’ ” (*Mark 9:35, NIV*).

Society says that humility is not the path to success. Yet, Isaiah had to see himself as he really was—hopelessly sinful, a failure—before God could use him. Discuss the tension between these different definitions of success. Divide into groups and ask each group to list the attributes of a “successful” follower of Christ. How do these attributes help us in our mission to share Christ with others?

► STEP 4—Apply

The basis of mission is a true understanding of God and His grace. It depends on an encounter with God that changes our perceptions and priorities.

Consider This: This week, how can we open ourselves more fully to an experience with God? Offer the following suggestions and ask class members to add their own ideas.

- Consider moments when you have strongly sensed God’s presence and majesty. Choose a time and place this week to deliberately focus on who God is and what He has done in your life.
- Choose a favorite hymn or psalm that portrays God’s majesty and love. Say the words out loud as a prayer and ask God for a deeper understanding of His will for your life.
- Take time each day to pray, “Here am I, send me!” Whether it’s speaking a word of encouragement, offering practical help, or talking about your faith, be alert to God’s call to mission.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Call of Isaiah,” pp. 303–310, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“This assurance of the final fulfillment of God’s purpose brought courage to the heart of Isaiah. What though earthly powers array themselves against Judah? What though the Lord’s messenger meet with opposition and resistance? Isaiah had seen the King, the Lord of hosts; he had heard the song of the seraphim, ‘The whole earth is full of his glory’ (verse 3); he had the promise that the messages of Jehovah to backsliding Judah would be accompanied by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit; and the prophet was nerved for the work before him. Throughout his long and arduous mission he carried with him the memory of this vision. For sixty years or more he stood before the children of Judah as a prophet of hope, waxing bolder and still bolder in his predictions of the future triumph of the church.”—Ellen G. White, “The Call of Isaiah,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 11, 1915.

“The exhortations of the prophet to Judah to behold the living God, and to accept His gracious offers, were not in vain. There were some who gave earnest heed, and who turned from their idols to the worship of Jehovah. They learned to see in their Maker love and mercy and tender compassion. And in the dark days that were to come in the history of Judah, when only a remnant were to be left in the land, the prophet’s words were to continue bearing fruit in decided reformation. ‘At that day,’ declared Isaiah, ‘shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.’ Isaiah 17:7, 8.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 320.

Discussion Questions:

1 Why is a prophet never popular? Imagine if Isaiah came back to life and functioned as a prophet to the Adventist Church. What do you think he would have to say? Would his message have changed? What about our views toward Ellen G. White? Are many of us, perhaps, doing the same thing to her that many in Israel did to their own prophets? Discuss.

2 Just what role do we have in the worldwide mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? How do we balance our own local needs, our own local outreach, with the divine call to spread this message to the world? How can we be faithful to both callings?

Summary: The prophet Isaiah accepted a mission from God that was unpopular and, in many ways, unrewarding. It was also a mission that ended with his being sawn in half. And yet, through his ministry, lives were changed—and the power of his words is still felt today.