

General Comments on Isaiah 6-8

Chapters 6-8 pause from the prophetic to examine the historical, political, and social context of Isaiah's ministry. The prophetic themes of ch. 2-5 resume in ch. 9.

Isaiah's ministry did not occur in a vacuum. There was considerable political upheaval, war was all around them and invasion was imminent, the national religion and culture was adulterated by that of the Canaanites (cf. 2 Kings 16). These people lived in a complex society, just as we do today. And, so, the prophet of the Lord comes to tell them to rely on the Lord (cf. 7:4, 8:13) and return to the fundamentals (cf. 8:20).

Chapter 6 recounts Isaiah's call and commission by the Lord. The commission is largely to condemn those who refuse to see the hand and hear the word of the Lord. Chapter 7 reviews Isaiah's conflict with Ahaz, the idolatrous king of Judah at that time. Chapter 8 then castigates Israel for conspiring with Gentiles against Judah, and Judah for not relying on the Lord.

These chapters reveal Isaiah's relationship with the Lord, the leaders of Judah, and the people of Judah. They shed light on the political and social problems of the time, and the grim reality of the calling a prophet has when he ministers to a culture gone apostate. These chapters also give us considerable insight into what the man Isaiah was like.

Aside from the people addressed in the text, the doctrinal content of these three chapters is considerable. The overarching theme is that of punishment at the hands of the Gentiles (cf. 6:11-12, 7:17-20, 8:7-8) for failing to trust in the Lord (6:9-10, 7:10-13, 8:6), but the ultimate preservation of a remnant (6:13, 7:21-22, 8:11-17). Israel and Judah have rejected the Lord, choosing the arm of flesh instead. As such, the Lord strikes them with the arm of flesh and preserves the more righteous remnant which trusts in Him. Those who trust in the Lord are those who are spared.

Isaiah verbally warns of impending destruction while he and his family act as living witnesses of the prophecies (cf. 7:3, 7:14, 8:3, 8:18). That Isaiah and his family survive the devastation to act as living witnesses of the Lord's words holds them up as examples of the disciples whom the Lord does not turn His face away from (cf. 8:16-17).

The theological implications of the text are fully manifested in its messianic implications, which are made explicit in the connection of this text to that of 9:6-7. First and foremost, the general rejection of the Lord in favor of the world results in Israel and Judah's demise (8:14-15). Second, is the word of the Lord being incarnated in Isaiah, Shear-jashub, and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, who is later called Immanuel. Despite the

incarnation of the word of the Lord in living witnesses, Israel and Judah reject the witnesses and instead rely on the arm of flesh. This proves to be their undoing. The messianic context is used in subsequent NT quotations of portions of the present text (cf. Matt. 1:23).

General Comments on Isaiah 6

Note: This chapter appears in 2 Ne. 16.

This chapter reviews events surrounding Isaiah's call to be a prophet of the Lord. The calling is generally an unpleasant one, as he is to dumbfound the disbelievers with truth.

Isaiah's comments on the vision and his interaction with the angel show he is not setting himself above others for pride's sake or out of arrogance. Isaiah puts himself well below the Lord in his relating of the vision. He confesses he is unworthy to be the Lord's spokesman, and it is only by virtue of the sanctification of the Atonement he is made worthy and willing. Also note Isaiah makes no pretense whatsoever to elevate himself to the station of one like Moses who spoke with the Lord face to face, rather he chooses to emphasize his lowly and common nature.

Additionally, this chapter shows the Lord was communicating by revelation to His servants. It indicates Isaiah's message is inspired as he was specifically called of the Lord to minister in this capacity. This is significant because the book of Isaiah tends to be marginalized today as a heavily redacted historical text with multiple authors. Yet, here, Isaiah makes it plain he has seen the Lord, received a commission as a prophet, and his message is inspired. The author's testimony flatly contradicts the common contemporary approach to this book.

A number of the symbols employed here by Isaiah are also employed by Ezekiel in describing his encounter with the Merkabah, or the Chariot Throne of the Lord, in Ezek. 1, 10.

KJV Isai ah 6

1 IN the year that king Uzzi ah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did

JPS Isaiah 6

In the year that King Uzzi ah died, I beheld my Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; and the skirts of His robe filled the Temple. ²Seraphs stood in attendance on Him. Each of them had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his legs, and with two he would fly.

fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, [is] the LORD of hosts: the whole earth [is] full of his glory. 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 Then said I, 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 mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. 6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, [which] he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 And he laid [it] upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here [am] I; send me.

9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. 11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, 12 And the LORD have removed men far away, and [there be] a great forsaking in the midst of the land. 13 But yet in it [shall be] a tenth, and [it] shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance [is] in them, when they cast [their leaves: so] the holy seed [shall be] the substance thereof.

³And one would call to the other,
“Holy, holy, holy!
The LORD of Hosts!
His presence fills all the earth!”

⁴The doorposts would shake at the sound of the one who called, and the House kept filling with smoke. ⁵I cried,

“Woe is me; I am lost!
For I am a man of unclean lips
And I live among a people
Of unclean lips;
Yet my own eyes have beheld
The King LORD of Hosts.”

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew over to me with a live coal, which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷He touched it to my lips and declared,

“Now that this has touched your lips,
Your guilt shall depart
And your sin be purged away.”

⁸Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me.” ⁹And He said, “Go, say to that people:

‘Hear, indeed, but do not understand;
See, indeed, but do not grasp.’

¹⁰Dull that people’s mind,
Stop its ears,
And seal its eyes—
Lest, seeing with its eyes
And hearing with its ears,
It also grasp with its mind,
And repent and save itself.”

¹¹I asked, “How long, my Lord?” And He replied:

“Till towns lie waste without inhabitants
And houses without people,
And the ground lies waste and desolate—

¹²For the LORD will banish the population—
And deserted sites are many
In the midst of the land.

¹³“But while a tenth part yet remains in it, it shall repent. It shall be ravaged like the terebinth and the oak, of which stumps are left even when they are felled: its stump shall be a holy seed.”

Specific Comments on Isaiah 6

Note as the text develops the seraphim's words and actions sanctify Isaiah, but Isaiah's words and actions stupefy Israel. Isaiah is humbled by receiving the Spirit, while Israel rejects the inspired testimony of it's prophets. As such, the text can be arranged in a simple antithetical parallelism:

A - (v. 1-7) Isaiah sanctified by seraph

B - (v. 8-13) Israel stupefied by Isaiah

1 IN the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, [is] the LORD of hosts: the whole earth [is] full of his glory. 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

v1 "the year that King Uzziah died", approximately 740 B.C.

"a throne, high and lifted up", i.e., exalted. The Lord sits upon His great "merkabah", or chariot-throne, which rides upon the winds of heaven and is drawn by angels, cf. Ezek. 1.

"his train filled the Temple", the symbolism is one of condescension as well as exaltation. The Lord is high above men and earth, but condescends to meet man in the Temple. Thus, His lowest parts, or the bottom fringes of His robes are in the Temple. This necessarily implies the Lord's power and authority is in the Temple as that is where His presence on earth is. The reference to the robes can also be taken as an obscure allusion to the priestly garment, cp. 52:1, Exod. 28, D&C 113:7-8.

v2 "Seraphims", the Hebrew "sarap" is most literally interpreted "burning one" and is also translated as "fiery serpent" in the Exodus account where the fiery serpents are sent to torment Israel. Use of this term by Isaiah denotes a sanctified or purified condition of these beings, and differentiates them from messengers/angels.

"wings", or veils. These three pairs of wings represent the seraph's transcendent abilities to perform tasks impossible to man. The particular pairs of wings' abilities are translated in the JPS version as being 1) the ability to cover his face (veil his presence), 2) the ability to cover his legs (this has been variously interpreted as the ability to veil their location or that the "legs" is a euphemism and this pair of "wings" is a garment of modesty) and 3) the ability to fly or travel about in

ways superior to those employed by mortals.

In Paradise Lost John Milton considers having six wings rather than two to indicate these seraphs are exalted above other angelic messengers.

v3 "Holy, holy, holy!", in Hebrew a triple repeat is equivalent to the English "most", it is a superlative. Translated into colloquial English the seraphs would be saying "Most holy". This statement implies there is none holier than the Lord of Hosts.

"Lord of Hosts", this title as used by the Lord has martial implications as he is the Lord of the Hosts of Heavens and can therefore command them in combat, cf. 2 Kings 6:17. It is also an authority statement as the Hosts of Heaven endorsed and sustained the Lord as their Savior and Redeemer in the War in Heaven. He may exercise His authority as Lord of Hosts because the hosts of heaven sustain Him as leader.

"the whole earth [is] full of his glory", Gileadi interprets this phrase as "the consummation of all the earth is his glory". His reading is based on the interpretation of the Hebrew word "melo" as being a noun that means "fullness" or "consummation". His reading follows the meaning of Moses 1:39.

v4 "the posts of the door moved", an authority statement. That all of Creation trembles at the voice of Lord, or in this case His seraphic servant, is to say Creation recognizes it's master. That the doorposts are shaking indicates that even the most sturdy part of the buildings shook.

"filled with smoke", also variously translated "mist", implies the presence of the Lord, cf. Exod. 19:6, Exod. 40:34-35, Num. 9:15-23, Ezek. 10:4.

5 Then said I, 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 mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. 6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, [which] he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 And he laid [it] upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here [am] I; send me.

v5 "Woe, is me; for I am undone", the LDS Bible footnotes provides the interpretation that he, Isaiah, is "Overwhelmed by his own sins and the sins of his people." Gileadi provides a double interpretation based on the usage of the Hebrew word "nidmeti" which can be translated "ruined" or "destroyed"

suggesting Isaiah might be referring to the destruction of the carnal man in favor of the new "born again" man.

"unclean lips", the JPS footnotes on this phrase state "i.e., speaking impiety; cf. 9:16, and contrast 'pure of speech' in Zeph. 3:9." Isaiah shows himself to be akin to Israel in general terms in that he has failed to completely live up to the covenants he has made with the Lord. He reveals himself to be mortal and fallible, as is Israel. This also distinguishes him from the seraphs and the Lord in that he is corruptible and they are not.

Additionally there is something of a judgement motif as when Isaiah comes into the presence of the Lord he is struck by his own inferiority when compared to the perfection and virtue of Him. Isaiah counts himself unworthy to be the Lord's mouthpiece, cp. Jer. 1:9.

"mine eyes have seen the King", Isaiah references the tradition that if an unworthy person were to see the Lord, the Lord would destroy that individual, cp. Exod. 3:6, JST on Exod 33:20, Deut. 32:19-22. Isaiah again identifies himself as unworthy.

v6-10 Compare Jeremiah's similar interview with the Lord at his call to be a prophet where many similar symbols are employed, cf. Jer. 1:1-10.

v6 "then flew one...unto me", the seraph travels from the presence of the Lord down to Isaiah, a condescension symbol. Sanctification proceeds from the Lord to us via the Holy Spirit.

"live coal", a sanctification symbol, cp. 1:25.

v7 "touched thy lips", a prophet is the Lord's mouth on earth and is to speak the revelations given to him, cp. Jer. 1:9. The rest of the verse is a series of sanctification symbols.

v8 "Here am I; send me.", indicative of Isaiah's faith and his readiness to serve. But, consider that just a moment ago in v. 5 Isaiah considered himself unworthy. Why the quick change? Because Isaiah's faith, conviction, and thankfulness in his being forgiven and made worthy in v. 6 have changed his attitude entirely.

9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be

healed. 11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, 12 And the LORD have removed men far away, and [there be] a great forsaking in the midst of the land. 13 But yet in it [shall be] a tenth, and [it] shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance [is] in them, when they cast [their leaves: so] the holy seed [shall be] the substance thereof.

v9-10 Make the people accountable for their sins by informing them of their nature and they will harden their hearts rather than repent, cp. D&C 133:71-72. John quotes these two verses and states Jesus' ministry had the same effect on the Jews at that time, cf. John 12:39-41, also cp. Matt. 13:15, John 9:39-41, Acts 28:27, Romans 11:8. A similar theme appears in Deut. 29:3.

The theme is derivative of the Semitic tradition of gouging out the eyes of runaway servants and rebellious vassals, cf. Num. 16:14, 2 Kings 25:4-7, Jer. 39:4-7, Jer. 52:7-11. Israel is being rebellious, so blind them. The Lord's punishment is even greater as they are made deaf as well. Israel is consistently described as blind and deaf throughout the entire book of Isaiah, cp. 29:18, 35:5, 42:7, 42:16-19, 43:8, 56:10, 59:9-10.

The BofM account varies from the KJV:

KJV

And he said,
Go, and tell this people,
Hear ye indeed,
but understand not;
and see ye indeed,
but perceive not.

BofM

And he said:
Go and tell this people-
Hear ye indeed,
but they understood not;
and see ye indeed,
but they perceived not.

The BofM rendering shifts the responsibility for the lack of understanding to the listener where the KJV could be interpreted to say that understanding on the part of the listeners is precluded.

v10 "this people", the usage is derogatory, the Lord is not referring to them as "My people".

v11-13 Isaiah, probably surprised at the commission to render Israel guilty rather than helping them repent, asks the Lord "How long will this be?". The Lord's response is "Until the Day of the Lord", which is then described in v. 11-13.

The Day of the Lord is portrayed as a general collapse of society and a ravaging war that depopulate the land to a tenth of the previous numbers. Also compare Amos 5:3 where he presents a tenth as surviving the wars.

v13 The BofM rendering differs from the KJV in this verse, but not such that the reading changes.

"teil tree...oak", the survivors are compared to these particular trees because they have the ability to send up shoots from the trunk even if the tree is cut down to the stump.

"holy seed", the survivors are identified as a holy seed for the repopulating of Israel. To be among the survivors of the Day of the Lord, one must be holy.

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