

Isaiah Chapter 6- John Karmelich

Title: How to handle the weird parts of the Bible!

For the first five chapters of Isaiah, he is essentially insulting his fellow Israelites for not living as God called them to live! In Chapter 6, Isaiah switches gears, to give a strange vision he has of the throne of God. As I read this, I thought, "Isaiah, stop eating spicy food before bed!" Isaiah saw God sitting on a throne in the middle of the most holy spot in the temple. Isaiah was standing there watching. There are also some angelic creatures (plural) flying over God's head. One of the creatures took a hot coal from a fire that burns at that temple and placed that coal on Isaiah's tongue. He did not say, "That's hot, or why did you do that?" That strange act allowed him to speak out in God's presence. I'd argue that coal thing represents what Jesus' sacrifice did for us! As the coal represents God taking care of our sins so we can speak to Him directly! Then God asks "the room": Who'll go preach to Israel that they're blowing it big time? (Paraphrasing of course!) I suspect Isaiah was nervous and intimidated seeing this. Isaiah said in effect, "God, if it's ok with you I'll volunteer!" As we study this book, we'll see how Isaiah suffered for volunteering! After the hot coal treatment, God told Isaiah that the Israelites won't believe you, and He will temporarily end Israel as a nation for not listening! He's saying He does not want them to have any excuses for not knowing why I'm (God's) doing this, so get going!

There are only 13 verses in this chapter! As you can tell by that opening paragraph there's a lot to deal with! The challenge of course is to ponder, "Why does God want us to know all this ancient history as well as this strange vision?" Hopefully that's why we're here and I'll do my best to explain all of this in this lesson. OK then, here we go!

I remember when I taught this a decade ago. What I pondered is why would God who knows all things need a throne room, let alone dressed the way the text is describing? What occurred to me is this is just a vision for Isaiah's sake. Grant it, Jesus after His resurrection is fully God and fully man and heaven's a timeless place, so it could be where God the Son will reign. One of the things I think about is heaven must be a place where we humans can exist for eternity! Does that mean there's atmosphere there? It's an unanswered biblical question. Revelation speaks of us eating there and I suspect the food disappears so there's no digestive system in heaven. Bottom line, we must accept that Isaiah saw a vision of God's throne. "It is what it is", and I'll discuss some of the details in this lesson!

The next thing I pondered is "why now"? Why didn't Isaiah start his book describing how God did call him to be a witness for Him? Most likely in terms of "time" this vision pre-dates the first five chapters. All I can figure is Isaiah wanted to open the book saying to the Israelites "Here's why you're blowing it so badly!" Then he probably pondered, people might wonder if I'm really a prophet, so I'll share what I saw when God called me!" Anyway, there's my most likely background for this strange chapter. Time to discuss it directly!

As I've made clear by now there's no transition from the previous chapter. Isaiah says he got this vision the year King Uzziah died. (About 740 BC). Uzziah was a (Southern) Israelite king, who is spoken of well in "Kings and Chronicles" (except he messed up badly near the end of his 52-year reign). Anyway, that reference is a time marker. Again, this is a vision of God in His throne room. I don't know if this is what we'll see in the next life! We'll have to wait until we get there to find that out! Isaiah says that the throne is elevated, as God (I believe it's Jesus) was sitting there wearing a robe with a long train (like a

wedding dress with a long train and the length of it is roughly how this looked). It's what kings wore in those days! I'd argue it's a way Isaiah would recognize a powerful king!

The next thing Isaiah focuses on is flying angels above the king. Some translations say, "Seraphim" as the book of Ezekiel said there are flying "cherubim". Some scholars argue they're the same, and others say each are different. Cherubim are mentioned in Ezekiel who lived 100 years later! One can google the debate if they're the same. I've heard both arguments and I think each are separate creatures! We'll find out in heaven. Anyway, we don't know how many were in the room, but the text says they had six wings, two to cover their faces, two to cover their feet and the last two were to fly! Isaiah must be able to see their feet to know that! Commentators argue that God's so holy, the creatures can't look at Him! Holiness just means separated for a specific purpose. What is implied is: God's so perfect, we can't see Him as He is, without being cleansed of our sins! Speaking of which: Isaiah received a hot coal from a fire that burns before God's altar. The coal was so hot, the Seraphim had a tong to touch it! That act is a way of saying God cleansed Isaiah of his sins! As I said Isaiah didn't say, "that's hot", but just took it and thus began the conversation between God and Isaiah!

Meanwhile we're not done with the Seraphim. Besides describing their six wings. I suspect the two for feet covering refers to the ancient tradition that servants went barefoot. (Remember Moses had to take off his sandals in God's presence in Exodus!) Anyway, these flying creatures spoke about God as being Holy (repeated 3 times, "trinity"?) and that in effect He's "large and in-charge, deal with it!" That leads to the act of the hot coal on Isaiah's tongue.

Next God asked the question, "Who will proclaim my message of "You're blowing it big time?" Yes, I realize God knew the answer in advance but asked the question, so Isaiah's readers got the point he was called to be a prophet! In Verse 8 God said, "Who will go for US?" That's a reference to the TRINITY as the Seraphim were servants! Bottom line, Isaiah volunteered!

The rest of the chapter in effect is the bad news! God says from Verse 8 to the end of the chapter, all of Isaiah's efforts in effect will be a waste of time, as the Israelites will not listen! This is here so Isaiah is able to say, "I know the Israelites won't believe me, but God wants to make it clear those He calls don't have the excuse that they didn't know better!" I've always liked the argument that in order to go to hell, one must in effect "step over Jesus" to get there! I realize not all people get that chance, but most get a single or many opportunities or have access to a Bible, so there is no excuse! Obviously, God's calling believers to use our lives as a witness for Him. We must realize that like Isaiah, most people are going to hear the Gospel message but it never sinks in! It isn't the job of Christians to convert people! We're called to be a witness for Him. As I learned many years ago, "Without God, we can't! Without us God won't!" That just means God choses to work through people to lead others to Him! It becomes obvious as we read the New Testament and read of the conversions. By the way, in John's Gospel (12:41), Jesus said Isaiah spoke of Him, and I suspect this chapter is one example of that!

Bottom line God says the land of Israel will be destroyed as the Israelites failed to be a witness for Him and that came true as the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom in Isaiah's lifetime and the South one about 100 years later. Isaiah will later discuss the Babylonians who conquered the South Kingdom in his book. That empire didn't exist when Isaiah wrote this. Meanwhile this chapter states after all the destruction to come, even those who survive will get wiped out in a "second wave"! The point for us is just as God called Isaiah to be a witness to those people, He calls us to be a witness to those around us! Of course, we don't have to wear a sandwich board or necessarily move to a different place. One of the things we should pray about is asking God how He calls us to live as a witness for Him. In effect that's the reason we're to know why Isaiah got this strange vision.

Oh this 13-verse chapter ends with a "ray of hope"! One of the many titles associated with the Messiah is a tree stump! The idea is if one cuts down a tree, part of it remains and the tree can rise again! What all that means is His plan to rule the world from Israel will go through despite their failure to live as He desires! If we fail to be a witness for Jesus and ignore His will, His plan will still go forward. It's only us who can suffer if we fail to live as He desires!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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