

A HOLY VISION – MOTIVATION FOR A HARD MISSION

First, read this chapter several times (out loud if possible, even a whisper). As you read, remember this actually happened. Now ... walk into the mental picture you have drawn. “How do you feel, Isaiah?” The strains of your symphony falls on hallowed halls.

Finally, after five chapters, Isaiah tells us of his great moment of commissioning before the awesome glory of God. By contrast both Jeremiah and Ezekiel begin their books with their commissioning. Why do you think we find it here? Where does chapters 1-5 fit in?

It is an effective literary tool – a “flashback.” The events of 1:8 (Jerusalem besieged) happened 30 – 40 years after Isaiah’s ministry, dating the context of chapter 1 at the end of Isaiah’s life. Comparing 1:8 with chapters 2-5 we get the revelation of the overall tragic picture of what was and what could have been. Chapter 4:1 makes sense then, in the immediate time after Assyria sweeps through, there is the seeking for identity. What a tragedy for any society to miss out on what God has for them!

Isaiah’s sensory perception of God was total – he saw (v.1), heard (v.3), felt (‘thresholds shook’ v.4), smelt and tasted (“burning coal” v.6), all his senses were excited by the vision of the Lord upon His throne.

What did Isaiah see? Isaiah saw the transcendence of God Himself, the Lord – “high and lifted up” – His Holiness. Isaiah saw the garments of God – “the train of his robe filled the temple.” God accommodated Himself to Isaiah’s need to see, indicative of His character. Compare this with the picture of garments provided in Revelation 19:8 as “the righteous deeds of the saints.” Isaiah saw the Seraphim and does not say how many he saw, although Daniel (Dan.7:10) describes thousands upon thousands serving and ten thousand times ten thousand in the court of the Lord. The Seraphim covered their face – to reduce the impact of the brilliance of God? And they covered their feet – covering their finiteness before the Creator? Reader, please – be in awe.

How fitting that Paul reminded the men of Athens that “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands...”

What did Isaiah hear? “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” One day dear reader the earth will be filled with the knowledge of this, as Habakkuk (2:14) sounds forth: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

What did Isaiah do? He cried out in desperation, acknowledging his own lostness – “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” John on Patmos had a similar response. The Lord rescued Isaiah and John, unlike king Uzziah who in his pride and disobedience tried to force his way into the presence of the Lord, and whom the Lord struck with leprosy (you can read Uzziah’s story in 2 Chronicles 26).

Isaiah trusted God and obeyed by preaching the messages he was given, difficult though it was. The Apostle John quoted from Isaiah chapter 6 while referring to the Jews not believing on Jesus in John 12:40, but then added, “Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him” (John 12:41). Did Isaiah do so wittingly? That is, did Isaiah realize that he was also specifically speaking of Jesus the Christ? Certainly Isaiah realized how these words impacted his own time and situation, and Isaiah no doubt saw how some of the words given to him by the Lord were suited to a future kingdom, yet no doubt wondered about how all would be specifically fulfilled. Isaiah undoubtedly listened carefully and at times marveled at the unique and precious symphony entrusted to him.

This chapter immediately follows a wrong reaction to God’s word (5:24) and immediately precedes wrong reactions to God’s word in chapter 7. This points to the reaction of the people to Isaiah’s message – the job given to Isaiah.

What was Isaiah’s job? I see Isaiah full of hope when he readily offered to the Lord: “Here I am! Send me.” Then, we hear the pain in Isaiah’s question: “How long, O Lord?” when he learns that the hearts of the people will be hardened to the message that would otherwise impart life and healing. The Israelites in Isaiah’s day had already hardened their hearts against the Lord time and time again, running after selfish pursuits and false gods. The Lord in judgment on them had already begun giving them over to this chosen hardness of heart when Isaiah received his marching orders. The Lord describes this process in Romans 1: 18-32 concerning those who suppress the truth long enough.

It was for Isaiah as it is for us who belong to Jesus today, in that our Father God “...through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life...” (2 Corinthians 2: 14-16). God allowed for a national, corporate judgment, as the nation God had provided for time and again rebelled. What prophesied did take place. This does not mean individuals did not come. When the Apostle John quoted Isaiah in John 12:40 and described the nation’s continued corporate blindness, he also gave the record of John 12:42: individuals believed! And, from Matthew 13:15 we learn “their eyes *they* have closed...” The people

corporately chose to close their eyes. God was not overruling the natural tendency of their heart. There is none as blind as the one who chooses not to see.

It is not that we as humankind normally would believe, but that we normally wouldn't. Isaiah 64:6, 7 testifies of this general natural tendency: "...and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls upon your name." Our own wickedness keeps us from our Father God. If left to ourselves we cannot and do not turn. A person is lost because our own nature moves us away from a heart broken God. If saved, it is because of God's Grace – though He is not obligated. In Isaiah chapter 6 we see the dynamic where God has been showing His face for 700 years, and the time has come for Him not to. Yet, there are exceptions – some we know and many we do not – and prayerfully they include you, dear reader, and me.

Uzziah's death around 740 B.C. was a crisis year and a new chapter in Jewish history began. It was grace on grace on grace which now began darkness on darkness until the light of the Messiah dawned. The message will be extended to the Gentiles – and, as Luke declares in Acts 28:28, "they will listen." Though many will not.

The song I hear rises on a high note – there is hope! The chapter ends with: "The holy seed is its stump." Here, in this rather mysterious phrase there lies all the difference, and if we can understand and accept it, then our hearts can soar as we bow in awe before the provision of our Lord in His utter love and self-sacrifice.

A small number of godly exiles returning from Babylon would be the initial holy seed, but a baby born in Bethlehem would be the ultimate holy seed who would arise with "healing in His wings" from "the stump of Jesse" and one day stand among us and declare to the delight of those who would choose to hear: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

- Jim B.