

Isaiah Part 4: I saw the Lord...

Isaiah 6

King Uzziah

“In the year that King Uzziah died” (v 1) – King Uzziah of Judah had a long and distinguished reign, as described in 2 Chronicles 26 and 2 Kings 15 v 1 to 7 (where ‘Uzziah’ is called ‘Azariah’). Uzziah began his reign when he was only 16 years old, and he reigned for 52 years. Overall, he was a good king: “He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done” (2 Kings 15 v 3); “He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper” (2 Chronicles 26 v 5).

Uzziah also led Israel in military victories over the Philistines and other neighbouring nations, and he was a strong king. Uzziah was an energetic builder, planner, and general: “His fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong” (2 Chronicles 26 v 8). But Uzziah’s life ended tragically: “But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God...” (2 Chronicles 26 v 16). As a result, God struck Uzziah with leprosy, and he was an isolated leper until his death. Isaiah had great reason to be discouraged and disillusioned at the death of King Uzziah, because a great king had passed away, and because his life ended tragically. Where was God in all this?

Isaiah’s vision of the Lord (verses 1 to 7)

- What did Isaiah’s vision of God in his glory teach him (a) about the character of God; and (b) about himself and his needs? What does this passage teach us about the seriousness of sin, and about God’s provision for cleansing, forgiveness and preparation for mission? See overleaf for a comparison of seraphim and other throne room angels...

Isaiah was not alone in seeing God’s throne (verse 1): almost everyone in the Bible who had a vision of heaven, or was taken to heaven, spoke of God’s throne. The prophet Michaiah saw God’s throne (1 Kings 22 v 19); Job saw God’s throne (Job 26 v 9); David saw God’s throne (Psalm 9 v 4); the Sons of Korah saw God’s throne (Psalm 45 v 6; Psalm 47 v 8); Ethan the Ezrahite saw God’s throne (Psalm 89 v 14); Jeremiah saw God’s throne (Lamentations 5 v 19); Ezekiel saw God’s throne (Ezekiel 1 v 26; 10 v 1); Daniel saw God’s throne (Daniel 7 v 9); and the Apostle John saw God’s throne (Revelation 4 v 2) – God’s throne is specifically mentioned more than 35 times in the Book of Revelation. Isaiah’s deep sense of unworthiness (v 5) is consistent with the experience of other godly men in the presence of God: Job (42 v 5, 6), Daniel (10 v 15 to 17), Peter (Luke 5 v 8) and John (Revelation 1 v 17) all had similar experiences.

Isaiah’s commission from the Lord (verses 8 to 13)

- In what ways did God prepare Isaiah for his mission of bringing God’s message to his own people? What was Isaiah’s response (v 8)? Consider the message itself (v 9, 10) – what does it tell us about the inevitable consequences of rejecting God and refusing to believe in him?

Isaiah’s core message (v 9, 10) is quoted by Jesus in all four gospels: see Matthew 13 v 14, 15; Mark 4 v 10 to 12; Luke 8 v 10; John 12 v 36 to 41; and by Paul in Acts 28 v 25 to 27. In the John 12 passage, the people of Israel *would not believe* (v 37) though they had seen the signs Jesus did as evidence for his divinity; therefore, they *could not believe* (v 39) because their hearts became hard and their eyes blind; moreover, God declared they *should not believe* (v 39) because they had despised his grace...

- “How long, O Lord” (v 11) – this is a reasonable question from anyone given such a difficult mission. Do you think God gives Isaiah any cause hope (v 11 to 13)? But what do you think the last ‘throw-away line’ by Isaiah means: “The holy seed is its stump”?

Throne Room Angels

<i>Seraphim</i> : שָׂרָפִים = ‘burning ones’	<i>Cherubim</i> : כְּרֻבִים = ‘angelic beings’	<i>Zoa</i> : ζῴα = ‘living creatures’
Isaiah 6 v 2, 3, 6, 7	Ezekiel 1 v 5, 6, 10, 11 Ezekiel 10 v 13 to 15 includes: <i>Ophanim</i> : אֹפַנִּים = ‘wheels’	Revelation 4 v 6 to 8
<p><i>Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:</i></p> <p><i>“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”</i></p> <p><i>⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”</i></p>	<p><i>“And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, ⁶ but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings... ¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. ¹¹ Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies...</i></p> <p><i>“As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing “the whirling wheels.” ¹⁴ And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was a human face, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. ¹⁵ And the cherubim mounted up. These were the living creatures that I saw by the Chebar canal...</i></p>	<p><i>And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,</i></p> <p><i>“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”</i></p>
<i>Seraph</i> occurs 9 times in 7 verses in the Hebrew concordance of the King James Version of the Bible.	<i>Cherub</i> occurs 91 times in 66 verses in the Hebrew concordance of the King James Version of the Bible.	<i>Zo'on</i> occurs 23 times in 20 verses in the Hebrew concordance of the King James Version of the Bible.
<i>Seraphim</i> is also the word used for the ‘fiery serpents’ and the ‘bronze serpent’ (Numbers 21 v 6 to 9).	When Adam was driven from the Eden, the <i>cherubim</i> guarded the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3 v 24).	In Ezekiel 1, the <i>cherubim</i> are described as <i>chayot</i> : חַיִּוֹת = ‘living creatures’ (translated as ζῴα, <i>zoa</i> , in the Septuagint).
	Moses was instructed to make two golden <i>cherubim</i> with wings outstretched over the mercy seat on top of the ark of testimony (Exodus 25 v 17 to 22).	
	Satan is described as ‘an anointed guardian <i>cherub</i> ’ before his fall (Ezekiel 28 v 14 to 17).	

Prayer – Lord, we are awed and humbled as we catch a glimpse of your presence and your throne of glory. With the seraphim, we say ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of your glory!’ Lord, you send each one of us on a mission – to share your message of truth and love, to help those in need, to love our neighbours as ourselves. Help us to say, with Isaiah, ‘Lord, here am I, send me’. Send us out into the world in the power of your Spirit to live and work for your praise and glory. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.