

# Bible Stories

## ISAIAH'S COMMISSION

Isaiah 6:8

April 29, 2023

Times were good in Judah. Uzziah sat on the throne and the nation prospered.

Judah – as a territory – was at its largest during his reign because he was so successful:

- He was victorious against the Philistines and the Arabians and received tribute from the Ammonites.
- Judah expanded westward with settlements in Philistia and the country was fortified.
- Land was reclaimed by water conservation
- Jerusalem's walls were reconstructed, towers were added and machines constructed to shoot arrows and hurl large stones
- The army was reorganized and reequipped.
- Uzziah loved the soil and personally engaged in agricultural pursuits.

Looks can be deceiving, however.

- Assyria was on the rise and Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC) was terrorizing most of the ancient near east. Uzziah was a leader in the resistance against Assyria, which meant Judah was in Tiglath-pileser's crosshairs.
- Judah's king might have worshipped God, but her leadership did not. The people practiced witchcraft, worshipped idols, burned their children in Molech's fire and exploited the poor. They still considered themselves "**God's chosen people**," but were that in name only, because they had, in fact, rejected both God and the Covenant. – see 2 Kings 17:7-23 and 21:1-7

God brought charges against His people:

- **Isaiah 1:2-20** - Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For Yahweh has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken Yahweh; they have spurned the **Holy One of Israel** and turned their backs on him..... <sup>11</sup> "The multitude of your sacrifices -- what are they to me?" says Yahweh. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations -- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. "Come now, let us reason together," says Yahweh. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

Yahweh loved His people and desperately wanted to save them, but to Isaiah, the task seemed hopeless. After all, they had not responded to his efforts so far.

One day he was standing in the portico of the temple. He knew what Yahweh wanted him to do and he knew what it would cost and he wasn't at all sure that he wanted to continue doing it.

What happened next can only be described as mind-altering – listen:

- **Isaiah 6:1-8** - In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

Isaiah was in the very presence of the Creator of the Universe!!! How did he react? "**Woe is me!! I am destroyed**," he cried as he dropped to his knees

Never before had he felt his own sin as keenly as he did at that moment. Not only that, he felt the oppression of the collective sins of Judah - the "**chosen**," who had **WILLINGLY** and **WILLFULLY** turned their backs on Yahweh.

One of the remarkable facets of God's grace and mercy is what happened next. He did not leave Isaiah weighed down in his sin.

One of the seraph's flew to the altar and removed a live coal with a pair of tongs. He then flew to Isaiah, touched his mouth and said, ***"This has touched your lips and has removed your guilt. Your sin no longer legally exists."***

Isaiah now stood before Yahweh as if he had never sinned.

Judah's guilt, however, had not been removed and it was in that moment that Isaiah really understood his calling: to warn, to plead, to prophesy on behalf of Yahweh – before it was too late. To get the people to return from the edge of the cliff and experience the life changing forgiveness that he, himself, had just experienced.

As Isaiah stood in the presence of Yahweh, it began to dawn on him that there was a conversation going on between the members of the Godhead, ***"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"***

It's almost as if they had forgotten he was there and were on to the next thing in their appointment book.

Glory revealed – check

Sins forgiven – check

Now..... who will go and reveal all this to Judah?

Isaiah, who just moments before had wondered if he really wanted to do what Yahweh was asking him to do, raised his hand and in a Horshack moment, cried, ***"ooh, ooh, ooh, pick me, pick me.... I'll go!"***

For the next 60 years Isaiah was a bold and courageous voice for God. He preached the messages God gave him and was met with mockery and rejection, but his voice never faltered and his message never changed. After all he had been in the very presence of God!!!

- **Psalm 118:6** - The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

### **What do we do with this story?**

**SDA Bible Commentary** says that because of their sins, the professed people of God had forfeited divine protection and it seemed to be only a matter of time before Judah would be overwhelmed.

In other words, the dangers from without were not as serious as the dangers from within. It was the apostasy of Judah, not so much the threat of invasion that was driving the message of Isaiah. Their need was not for physical deliverance, but for a national rejection of their current way of life.

However, it's not easy telling people what they don't want to hear. It's not easy being rejected, mocked and ridiculed. It's not easy standing alone.

But when Isaiah came face to face with the God of the Universe, he had a transformational experience and he couldn't keep it to himself.

God's passion became Isaiah's passion. He became sold-out to the plans and purposes of God.

Just as with the story of Elijah, the thing I like most in this story is not what Isaiah did, but what God did.

- Elijah – the weary old soldier needed a gentle voice – he got the gentle whisper of God.
- Isaiah – the young reluctant soldier needed to see what he was being asked to fight for – he got a front row seat to the majesty and glory of God and experienced personal forgiveness – the same forgiveness God was so anxious to extend to His people.

And then He let Isaiah decide.

God revealed His glory and removed Isaiah's guilt and yet, He still gave Isaiah the choice to accept the call or not.

I'm going to climb on my soapbox for a minute..... If you claim to be a Christ follower and yet, in the same breath, declare it your right to make people believe what you want them to believe, or that ***"God has called Christians to exercise dominion over all areas of American society,"*** you are **NOT** a Christ follower – I don't care what claims of Christianity you make.

Do not be misled by the far-right's ***"Christian"*** agenda. Jesus would have never led such a movement. His position was always crystal clear – This is who I am and this is what I have to offer. Come and join me on the journey. Period full stop.

God will never use coercive tactics to get a person to do what He wants them to do – that’s Satan’s M.O. – even if such tactics are used by people who claim Christianity.

We have been extended the same offer: This is who I am. This is what I’m about. This is what I have to offer. Come and join me on the journey.

You decide.