

# **Isaiah**

## **Crisis of Leadership**

Lesson #2 for January 9, 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 6.

1. Chapter 6 of Isaiah starts out talking about the death of Uzziah, a king who had been a successful and powerful ruler over Judea for 52 years. But, the final days of Uzziah revealed his true nature. Read 2 Chronicles 26 to see what disaster overtook him.
2. There was a tremendous contrast between the lives of Uzziah, the powerful king, and Isaiah, the humble prophet. Uzziah lived the end of his life covered with leprosy because of his presumption; Isaiah ministered for many years with the blessings of God.

The death of Uzziah in about 740 B.C. marks a major crisis in the leadership of God's people. The death of any absolute ruler makes his or her country vulnerable during a transition of power. But Judah was in special danger, because Tiglath-pileser III had ascended the throne of Assyria a few years before, in 745 B.C., and immediately went on the warpath, which made his nation an invincible superpower that threatened the independent existence of all nations in the Near East. In this time of crisis, God encouraged Isaiah by showing the prophet that He was still in control.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, January 3.

3. The northern kingdom of Israel, just a few miles away, was deeply involved in fertility cult worship and sins of all kinds. During Isaiah's ministry, that kingdom fell to the Assyrians; the people of Israel were scattered to the winds, never to be heard from again.
4. Not only that issue in the northern kingdom, but also there was a crisis of leadership in Judah. The king of Judah who had been very strong and raised a powerful government, building up his military and expanding his territory, had become proud and went into the temple as if he could function as a priest. He was struck with leprosy and spent the rest of his life living alone in a house separated from everyone else.
5. In contrast to the story of Uzziah, we have the story of Isaiah. Uzziah had become proud and presumptuous. Although Isaiah was related to the king and a part of the royal family, he had his mind still attuned to the one true God and His holiness. Isaiah admitted his weakness and yearned for moral purity. He did not tell us about how his prophetic ministry began. But, it certainly took a huge leap in importance after he received a vision.
6. The condition of Uzziah's body with its leprosy clearly represented the moral condition of his people at that time. Uzziah probably died in 740 B.C. But, at that time of crisis and change in leadership in the government, Isaiah was shown a vision that he could not possibly have imagined himself. In vision, he was allowed to see into the most holy place where only the high priest was allowed to go. He beheld a vision of perfection and the glory of God. God was still in control! Did Isaiah see the heavenly temple or throne room?
7. How did Isaiah describe what he saw?

**Isaiah 6:1-4:** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting on his throne, high and exalted, and his robe filled the whole Temple. <sup>2</sup>Round him flaming creatures were standing, each of which had six wings. Each creature

covered its face with two wings, and its body with two, and used the other two for flying. <sup>3</sup>They were calling out to each other:

“Holy, holy, holy!

The LORD Almighty is holy!

His glory fills the world.”

<sup>4</sup> The sound of their voices made the foundation of the Temple shake, and the Temple itself was filled with smoke.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Isaiah 6:1-4). New York: American Bible Society.

8. How do you think you would have responded to a vision like this one of Isaiah? The seraphim surrounding the throne of God were calling out: “Holy, holy, holy!” *Seraphim* literally means “burning ones.” Remember that as a member of the royal family, Isaiah belong to the tribe of Judah and would not normally have been able to see inside the temple.

9. This was not the first time that God’s presence had manifested itself in the earthly temple.

**Exodus 40:34-38:** <sup>34</sup> Then the cloud covered the Tent and the dazzling light of the LORD’s presence filled it. <sup>35</sup> Because of this, Moses could not go into the Tent. <sup>36</sup> The Israelites moved their camp to another place only when the cloud lifted from the Tent. <sup>37</sup> As long as the cloud stayed there, they did not move their camp. <sup>38</sup> During all their wanderings they could see the cloud of the LORD’s presence over the Tent during the day and a fire burning above it during the night.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

10. Hundreds of years later when Solomon was dedicating that first great temple in Jerusalem, the one that Isaiah saw in vision, this is what happened:

**1 Kings 8:10-11:** <sup>10</sup> As the priests were leaving the Temple, it was suddenly filled with a cloud <sup>11</sup> shining with the dazzling light of the LORD’s presence, and they could not go back in to perform their duties.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

11. But, there is no record of any such infilling of the temple after the second temple was built.

And yet this was the building concerning which the Lord had declared by the prophet Haggai: “**The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.**” “I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.” Haggai 2:9, 7. **For centuries learned men have endeavored to show wherein the promise of God, given to Haggai, has been fulfilled; yet in the advent of Jesus of Nazareth, the Desire of all nations, who by His personal presence hallowed the precincts of the temple, many have steadfastly refused to see any special significance. Pride and unbelief have blinded their minds to the true meaning of the prophet’s words.**—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*<sup>\*</sup> 597.1.<sup>†</sup>

12. Isaiah was not the only one who received visions of God. Ezekiel, Daniel, and John also received such visions of God. On other occasions, Isaiah saw Satan.

**Ezekiel 1:26-28:** <sup>26</sup> Above the dome there was something that looked like a throne made of sapphire, and sitting on the throne was a figure that looked like a human being. <sup>27</sup> The figure seemed to be shining like bronze in the middle of a fire. It shone all over with a bright light <sup>28</sup> that had in it all the colours of the rainbow. This was the dazzling light that shows the presence of the LORD.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Daniel 7:9-10:** <sup>9</sup> While I was looking, thrones were put in place. One who had been living for ever sat down on one of the thrones. His clothes were white as snow, and his hair was like pure wool. His throne, mounted on fiery wheels, was blazing with fire, <sup>10</sup> and a stream of fire was pouring out from it. There were many thousands of people there to serve him, and millions of people stood before him. The court began its session, and the books were opened.—*Good News Bible*.\* [Would you want to give Him a hug?]<sup>‡</sup>

**Revelation 5:13-14:** <sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, in the world below, and in the sea—all living beings in the universe—and they were singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb,  
be praise and honor, glory and might,  
for ever and ever!”

<sup>14</sup> The four living creatures answered, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshipped.—*Good News Bible*.\*

As Isaiah beheld this revelation of the glory and majesty of his Lord, he was overwhelmed with a sense of the purity and holiness of God. How sharp the contrast between the matchless perfection of his Creator, and the sinful course of those who, with himself, had long been numbered among the chosen people of Israel and Judah!—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*\* 307.2.

13. **Isaiah had a tremendous vision of God in His glory and a contrasting vision of Satan and his goals.** (Isaiah 6:1-8; 14:4-15) Who else saw that contrast? See Ezekiel 1; 28:1-19. Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest and Satan accusing him. (Zechariah 3:1-5) Moses, the author of Job, saw something similar (Job 1; 2; 38-42) as did John. (Revelation 1; 12-14) What do these prophets who saw both God and Satan teach us about the issues that face us? These are great passages about the great controversy. What was Lucifer’s original position? What has he been primarily trying to accomplish since the very beginning of his rebellion? (See Isaiah 14:13-14; Matthew 4:8-9; and Revelation 13:5-8.)
14. In order to understand many things that happen in our world, it is essential to realize that we are in the midst of a great controversy between good and evil—between God and the Devil. We must also understand what that controversy is about. Satan wants to destroy God’s reputation so that we will no longer trust Him. Ultimately, Satan would like to take God’s place. By contrast, God understands that it is impossible to run a universe at peace unless everyone is convinced of the absolute necessity of **trust, love, and a humble willingness to listen. Furthermore, God is not willing to use force to get our cooperation.** Those who are not willing to do things God’s way—because they have not

fully recognized its superiority—cannot be allowed to be a part of His future kingdom. The Devil uses **deceit, force, lies, and every other evil device** to confuse and mislead people to get them to join his side. God only uses truth and love to win people to His side. People must be willing to take the time and effort necessary to carefully study and weigh the evidence on both sides and, then, have the courage to do what is right because it is right.

15. God could take everyone to heaven if He were willing to spend the rest of eternity serving as a universal policeman, running here and there, stopping all the fights and misunderstandings; or perhaps, He could put us all in solitary confinement cells so we could not hurt or annoy each other! But, that is not God's idea of heaven. **He wants a universe full of people who do what is right because it is right.** There will be no police or jail in the New Jerusalem. God refuses to run that kind of a government. **There will be peace and harmony and love because that is the way people who will be in heaven want things to be. That will be true atonement or "at-one-ment."**
16. Why do we need to understand the holiness of God? *Holiness*, both in Hebrew and Greek, is a word that suggests being separate; but, separate from what? Is it to separate us from the evil, sin, and corruption that have characterized our world since the days of Adam and Eve? God calls us to be a part of His kingdom which is very different and separate from the world in which we live now.
17. And what was Isaiah's response?

**Isaiah 6:5:** I said, "There is no hope for me! I am doomed because every word that passes my lips is sinful, and I live among a people whose every word is sinful. And yet, with my own eyes, I have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!"—*Good News Bible*.\*

18. How do you think you would have responded to a vision like that? It was clear to the Jewish people that only the high priest was allowed to enter the most holy place.

**Leviticus 16:2,12-13:** <sup>2</sup>He said, "Tell your brother Aaron that only at the proper time is he to go behind the curtain into the Most Holy Place, because that is where I appear in a cloud above the lid on the Covenant Box. If he disobeys, he will be killed...."

<sup>12</sup>He shall take a fire pan full of burning coals from the altar and two handfuls of fine incense and bring them into the Most Holy Place. <sup>13</sup>There in the LORD's presence he shall put the incense on the fire, and the smoke of the incense will hide the lid of the Covenant Box so that he will not see it and die.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Exodus 33:20:** <sup>20</sup> [The LORD said:] "I will not let you see my face, because no one can see me and stay alive."—*Good News Bible*.\*†

**Judges 6:22-23:** <sup>22</sup> Gideon then realized that it was the LORD's angel he had seen, and he said in terror, "Sovereign LORD! I have seen your angel face to face!"

<sup>23</sup> But the LORD said to him, "Peace. Don't be afraid. You will not die."—*Good News Bible*.\*

Standing, as it were, in the full light of the divine presence within the inner sanctuary, he [Isaiah] realized that if left to his own imperfection and

inefficiency, he would be utterly unable to accomplish the mission to which he had been called.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*\* 307.2-308.0.†

19. And what happened next? Why did that seraph take a live, burning coal from the altar to touch Isaiah's lips?

**Isaiah 6:6-7:** <sup>6</sup> Then one of the creatures flew down to me, carrying a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>He touched my lips with the burning coal and said, "This has touched your lips, and now your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven."—*Good News Bible*.\*

20. The touching of Isaiah's lips was not just a purification of Isaiah's words; Isaiah's entire life was to be committed to speaking the truth about God and living out that message in his own life. Could that happen to one of us?

21. We are reminded that Uzziah entered the temple where he was not allowed to go and tried to offer incense to God. The seraph in Isaiah's case took a coal from the altar and touched Isaiah's lips, suggesting that he would become like incense to God!

22. Isaiah was then ready to go forth to be sent by God to the people of Jerusalem. And we note Isaiah's response.

**Isaiah 6:8:** Then I heard the Lord say, "Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?"

I answered, "I will go! Send me!"—*Good News Bible*.\*

23. Can you think of other famous prophets from the Old Testament who had specific encounters with God which lifted their ministry to new levels, even after they had been prophets for some time? Consider Moses in Exodus 34 and Elijah in 1 Kings 19.

24. In the book of Hebrews, we are told that it is not just the high priest who is allowed to enter into the most holy place. Christians also can do so, in effect; our High Priest, Jesus Christ, invites us to join Him in presenting our cases to God.

**Hebrews 4:14-16:** <sup>14</sup> Let us, then, hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we have a great High Priest who has gone into the very presence of God—Jesus, the Son of God. <sup>15</sup>Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. <sup>16</sup>**Let us have confidence, then, and approach God's throne**, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

**Hebrews 10:19-23:** <sup>19</sup> **We have, then, my brothers and sisters, complete freedom to go into the Most Holy Place by means of the death of Jesus.**

<sup>20</sup>He opened for us a new way, a living way, through the curtain—that is, through his own body. <sup>21</sup>We have a great priest in charge of the house of God. <sup>22</sup>So let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, with hearts that have been purified from a guilty conscience and with bodies washed with clean water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold on firmly to the hope we profess, because we can trust God to keep his promise.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

25. And what qualified Jesus Christ to be our High Priest? Jesus serves not only as Priest, but also as a Sacrifice. Revelation 5:6 tells us that He was a victim of violence, being mutilated

in body and tried to the utmost by Satan as He died to show us the results of sin.

26. But, God knew, as Isaiah did not yet know, that his ministry would be a challenge. Most of the people to whom he would minister would ignore his messages.

**Isaiah 6:9-13:** <sup>9</sup> So he told me to go and give the people this message: “No matter how much you listen, you will not understand. No matter how much you look, you will not know what is happening.” <sup>10</sup> Then he said to me, “Make the minds of these people dull, their ears deaf, and their eyes blind, so that they cannot see or hear or understand. If they did, they might turn to me and be healed.” <sup>11</sup> I asked, “How long will it be like this, Lord?”

He answered, “Until the cities are ruined and empty—until the houses are uninhabited—until the land itself is a desolate waste. <sup>12</sup> I will send the people far away and make the whole land desolate. <sup>13</sup> Even if one person out of ten remains in the land, he too will be destroyed; he will be like the stump of an oak tree that has been cut down.” (The stump represents a new beginning for God’s people.)—*Good News Bible*.\*

27. Doesn’t that seem like a strange message to give to a prophet to encourage him? But, it is not that much different from what Jesus said to His followers.

**Matthew 13:13-15:** <sup>13</sup> [Jesus said:] “The reason I use parables in talking to them is that they look, but do not see, and they listen, but do not hear or understand. <sup>14</sup> So the prophecy of Isaiah applies to them:

‘This people will listen and listen, but not understand;  
they will look and look, but not see,

<sup>15</sup> because their minds are dull,  
and they have stopped up their ears  
and have closed their eyes.

Otherwise, their eyes would see,  
their ears would hear,  
their minds would understand,  
and they would turn to me, says God,  
and I would **heal** them.”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

28. And where did Jesus get that message? From those very words from Isaiah.
29. Although we know clearly from verses like 2 Peter 3:9 that God does not want anyone to perish but that all should come to repentance, He recognizes that the ideal will not happen. Nevertheless, He continues to appeal to us personally through the Holy Spirit and through His messengers, like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Jesus Christ.
30. It seems like many of the people in Isaiah’s day simply hardened their hearts instead of listening to Isaiah. Does God sometimes “harden” people’s hearts as well as encouraging them? How do we understand these words about Pharaoh?

**Exodus 9:34-10:2:** <sup>34</sup> But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the

thunder had ceased, **he sinned once more and hardened his heart**, he and his officials. <sup>35</sup> **So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened**, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

<sup>10:1</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “**Go to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials**, in order that I may show these signs of mine among them, <sup>2</sup> and that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I have made fools of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them—so that you may know that I am the LORD.”—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*.<sup>\*</sup> (1989). (Exodus 9:34–10:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.<sup>†</sup>

31. Clearly, Pharaoh chose to exercise his freedom to rebel against God. Notice that in these verses it says: “Pharaoh ... hardened his heart.... The heart of Pharaoh was hardened.... I [God] have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials.” (Exodus 9:34-10:1, *NRSV*<sup>\*†</sup>) **So, who was doing what? In Pharaoh’s case, God sent the plagues; each time Pharaoh responded in greater and greater rebellion.**

32. Does God ever send us messages to which we must respond in one way or another?

**1 Corinthians 10:13:** Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

Iniquitous practices had become so prevalent among all classes that the few who remained true to God were often tempted to lose heart and to give way to discouragement and despair. It seemed as if God’s purposes for Israel were about to fail and that the rebellious nation was to suffer a fate similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. [But, don’t forget Daniel and his friends!]

In the face of such conditions it is not surprising that when, during the last year of Uzziah’s reign, Isaiah was called to bear to Judah God’s messages of warning and reproof, he shrank from the responsibility. He well knew that he would encounter obstinate resistance. As he realized his own inability to meet the situation and thought of the stubbornness and unbelief of the people for whom he was to labor, **his task seemed hopeless**. Should he in despair relinquish his mission and leave Judah undisturbed to their idolatry? Were the gods of Nineveh to rule the earth in defiance of the God of heaven?—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*<sup>\*</sup> 306.2-307.0.<sup>†‡</sup> Compare 5T 749.2.

33. Is God still in charge of our world? Why is Satan called “the prince of this world”? And **if God is in charge, why do terrible things happen to innocent people?** Sin has terrible consequences, even for innocent people. The drunk who swerves across the road and collides with a group of Christians going to church, killing all of them, is just one example. But, we must remember that **God has a long-term plan for each one of us.**

**Isaiah 1:19-20:** <sup>19</sup> [The LORD said:] “If you will only obey me, you will eat the good things the land produces. <sup>20</sup>But if you defy me, you are doomed to die. I, the

LORD, have spoken.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

34. How should we as human beings respond when we are faced with corrupt government officials? Second Chronicles 26 tells us a story about Uzziah’s glorious career, ending in that terrible presumptuous act of entering the temple, resulting in leprosy. Uzziah had shown that he was a military strategist and quite capable of expanding his territory and of forming a well-equipped army, even inventing military technology. Material prosperity was common in his nation, and he became famous. But, his heart was corrupted. Do you think Uzziah repented of his sin and turned back to God during his days with leprosy?

The sin that resulted so disastrously to Uzziah was one of presumption. In violation of a plain command of Jehovah, that none but the descendants of Aaron should officiate as priests, the king entered the sanctuary “to burn incense upon the altar.”...

Uzziah was filled with wrath that he, the king, should be thus rebuked. But he was not permitted to profane the sanctuary against the united protest of those in authority. While standing there, in wrathful rebellion, he was suddenly smitten with a divine judgment. Leprosy appeared on his forehead. In dismay he fled, never again to enter the temple courts. Unto the day of his death, some years later, Uzziah remained a leper—a living example of the folly of departing from a plain “Thus saith the Lord.” Neither his exalted position nor his long life of service could be pleaded as an excuse for the presumptuous sin by which he marred the closing years of his reign, and brought upon himself the judgment of Heaven.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*\* 304.1-2.

35. If you are in a position of leadership in your church, has your experience been more like that of Uzziah? Or, more like that of Isaiah? Is it easy to recognize that God is still in charge in our world today? What evidence could you provide to support that conclusion?
36. Have you had an experience like that of Isaiah? Or, like the experience of Moses?

**Exodus 3:5-6:** <sup>5</sup> God said, “Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground. <sup>6</sup>I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” So Moses covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

© 2020, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. <sup>\*</sup>Electronic version. <sup>†</sup>Bold type is added. <sup>‡</sup>Text in brackets is added. <sup>§</sup>Italic type is in the source. [Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

Last Modified: December 6, 2020

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSSTG-Hart\Isaiah\SS-2-Isaiah-2021\_01\_09-Fin+.wpd