

Allan MacRae: Isaiah 1-6: Lecture 07

Biblical Theological Seminary, 1976

Now I would like to be sure that everybody is in their right seat because I have one set of tests for the odd numbered seats and one for the even numbered seats. So you won't be distracted by whatever anybody is writing next to you.... I will give these out but I will tell you the first question so you can start immediately. The first question for students in odd numbered seats is to discuss Isaiah 4:1. The first for an even numbered seat is to discuss Micah 4:1. You see its 4:1 in both cases, but for even numbered seats its 4:1 in Micah; for odd numbered seats its 4:1 in Isaiah. And now I'll give you – I'll give you the rest of the questions.

Now as you see by the outline on the board, we are ready for Roman numeral 7. "Isaiah's call to service," which is the 6th chapter of Isaiah. Thus far we have noticed that most of the material goes under one of two headings. It is either rebuke for sin and declaration of coming punishment, or else it is comfort for the godly with promises of future blessing. Most everything thus far can be put under a heading of rebuke or blessing. Now, this 6th chapter is hard to put under either heading because it involves very great blessing for Isaiah but it involves a very great rebuke for the people as a whole. It really then should go under a different category. There is much discussion as to whether this is Isaiah's original call for service or whether it is a renewed call given later in his ministry. It's a rather silly thing to spend time arguing about this because there is absolutely no way that we can decide this. If it was given in the first chapter of Isaiah as we have Jeremiah's call in his first chapter and Ezekiel's call in his first chapter, nobody would question whether this is Isaiah's original call for service. As you read it, it certainly sounds like an original call for service. I think myself it's a good guess that it is, but one cannot rule out the possibility that after Isaiah had been serving the Lord

for some time he had a renewed call, which is described in this chapter here. These first 6 chapters, which we call part 1 of our course – of this particular course - are actually part one of the book of Isaiah. There is a sharp division between the end of chapter six and the beginning of chapter seven. Chapters seven to chapter 12 form a very definite unit separate from these first 6 chapters. I think a good argument can be made for these first 6 chapters being a sort of a summary of a great part of Isaiah's mission. Possibly written during his ministry or toward the end of it but placed at the beginning as a very proper introduction for the whole of his book.

The last chapter then in this section, which I am calling Roman numeral 7, "Isaiah's call for service," is one which I am not going to divide up by means of an outline. The divisions are quite obvious. It is a definite account of a series of events and we will look at these events and look at certain features about them. I don't think there is much to put on the board about it. It is one of the finest chapters in the book of Isaiah from the viewpoint of preaching.

One time in the seminary, we arranged to have this chapter be the subject of maybe a dozen continuous chapel messages, looking at various aspects of it. It is full of spiritual meaning. It is a tremendously vital chapter, for every Christian, I would say. But a great part of the lesson of it is quite obvious. There are comparatively few problems in it that we need to go into in a class of this type, though I do think we should take time to emphasize its great value in the Scripture and its great importance in your preaching and in your studies.

Now the chapter I put up there, hopefully you can see it, the screen doesn't seem to be quite as straight as usual. As I said, I don't care what version of the scripture you use in this class. Any version at all, in any language is fine, but if you use something other than the three most used among conservatives today--The King James, the New American Standard, and the NIV,--or if you use another one, or even if you use one of these, if any different reading arises in these or in another

version, I wish you would call our attention to it. It adds to the value of the course if some are comparing other versions.

Now lets begin with a strange statement. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord." Why didn't he say in 732 B.C. I saw the Lord? That would seem much more reasonable wouldn't it? A much easier way? But it is strange thing that this system we have of calling years by numbers only originated about 400 years after the time of Christ. Before that time there was one nation which got into the habit of using it. That was the nation of Syria where Seleucus, one of Alexander the Great's generals, had secured the largest portion of Alexander's empire after Alexander's death. And Seleucus had been in control in Babylon for a brief time, as governor, then been driven out and took service with Ptolemy, King of Egypt, and then he came back with Ptolemy's help to Babylon and reestablished himself there. He did this in 312 B.C. And for some reason they started numbering years in that region from the year when Seleucus came back to Syria, and that's the oldest known system of continuous numbers. That system was continued so long that in a Hebrew manuscript of the Old Testament, written say a thousand A.D., you will have the year often given as such and such a year of the Seleucid era; that is so many years after 312 B.C. when Seleucus went to Babylon. But the worst of it is, that often in making those manuscripts a hundred years seemed so long, that people wouldn't bother to put down the century, they would just say, "written in the year 54," and you don't know whether its 1454 years or 1354 or 1254 after Seleucus went to Babylon. But that is the first time that numbers were used that way. In Egypt they would often number by the reign of kings, and also as you know from the Old Testament, in they would say in such and such a reign, of such a king. And then you had a king like Uzziah, who was stricken with leprosy and had to turn over everything to his son Jotham, but we don't know what year it was when that happened . Somebody might say an event took place in the thirtieth year of Uzziah who reigned 52 years, and somebody else might say it was in the sixth year of Jotham. In Assyria they named the years after

particular officials: the first year was the year of the king, the second year was the year of the leading minister and so on. And if you reign say forty years they get down to fairly unimportant officers, getting a different man as the man for the year. In Rome they named them after the counsels. And you can see this became very complicated. The Seleucid era perhaps gave the idea to the monk named Dionysius sometime in the 5th century to name years from Christ's birth. He estimated when Christ was born. Dionysius thought he was in the 467th year after Christ was born and from then on we begin using BC and AD. But, he was somewhere between four and six years off by miscalculation. So our years are off by a few years but he has given us a wonderfully convenient system.

So Isaiah said in the year that Uzziah died, but when he mentioned it this way most interpreters think that he is not merely calling our attention to the time when this happened, and incidentally the time when it happened doesn't tell us whether this is the beginning of Isaiah's ministry or not. Isaiah ministered in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. And if his call came the year King Uzziah died that could be enough to justify putting the name Uzziah in with the other three kings giving you a very long period of time for Isaiah's ministry. But that doesn't prove whether this was his original call or a later call. But most interpreters think that his mentioning Uzziah's death is not merely a means of saying when this vision came, that it also points to the background to the general situation.

Uzziah had begun as a very godly king; a man who desired to do the will of God and a man whom God blessed. But as he succeeded in reigning as a very good and successful king for a time, the situation went to his head, as it so often does when a person is in a position of authority or a position of real power, and he began to consider himself as of greater importance than he was, and decided to take over control of the religious aspect of the nation. Theoretically, that is true even today in England. In England today, the Queen of England is, according to

her official title, the head of the church of England. And theoretically, nobody can ascend to any position in the church of England today except as the Queen appoints him. Actually, the church makes most of its decisions, but the prime minister may change it and put in whoever he wants in any position in the Church of England. The Prime Minister really controls, but that is done in the name of the Queen. And that was forbidden in the Old Testament. The rulers were civil rulers. They were supposed to protect the religious authority. But they were not themselves to assume leadership or make determinations in lieu of this matter. That was a distinctly separate matter. And legally church and state should be separate. That was one of Calvin's great stands: it was that church and state should be separate. And even though the leaders in the church in Geneva during this time were appointed from the counsel that were elected by the people as a political election and thus the state had great authority over it--Calvin didn't like that, but there was nothing he could do about it. Yet, Calvin insisted that the minister, along with these men, who were the leaders and in control of the church, that they should not be interfered with by the civil authority. Luther took the opposite attitude of that and Luther said, "What do we care who runs the church. Let the bishops keep on running it, just so they teach the gospel." And in other words, the bishops at this time were not teaching the gospel. And there was no way to make them. So in Denmark he began appointing new members to the clergy while often in Sweden the king appointed them, and eventually the situation had changed, but it remained in the Lutheran country that the state controlled the church. And to some extent it remains that way today in Germany and in the Scandinavian countries.

But this was forbidden in the Old Testament, and so King Uzziah, when he went beyond his authority as King and decided he would take over the religious life and went right into the temple and began to offer incense, which only the priest was supposed to do, we read in the books of Kings and Chronicles, how the

priest came in and rebuked him for it, and then he looked at him, and Uzziah's face had broken out with leprosy, and he hated how God had punished him in this way. So his face broke out with leprosy, and we read that he lived in his own house alone for the rest of his life. And how long that was, whether that was forty years or ten years or something like that, we don't know.

But it would seem likely that Isaiah would pass by the palace where Uzziah lived alone. Nobody dared go near it for fear of catching leprosy but as Isaiah would pass and perhaps see Uzziah's face at the window, it would suggest to Isaiah the wonderful start that this man made as he seemed to be such a wonderful man, so true in following the Lord, and then the way in which he departed from the Lord and the terrible way in which the Lord punished him. And so it is thought by most interpreters that Isaiah says this not merely to tell us when this vision of God came to him, but to show something of the background in Isaiah's mind when it happened. There would be a tragic feeling that he would have, to think of one who started out so wonderfully and who failed so miserably. When you look back as I can on a good many years of friends and Christian workers, one cannot avoid sometimes having similar feelings as you think of individuals who have started out and done wonderfully in the Lord, and then have fallen by the wayside, and it truly is amazing the number of terribly wonderful Christian leaders who have fallen into sin of one sort or another, and then fall away. It is awful, very shocking when we hear of individuals like this. And so Isaiah has in his mind a situation in which he was very conscious of the tragedy that is so common in human life, for he saw it in King Uzziah. Whether this vision came after Uzziah died or shortly before, we don't know, but at least Uzziah, in this vision, was very much in Isaiah's mind.

Isaiah says that he saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Now where was Isaiah when he had this vision? It immediately suggests that he was in the temple and he saw this in the temple. Certainly the temple is called God's house. God speaks of the temple as a place

where he would dwell, but he dwelt above the mercy seat, and the mercy seat was in the Holy of Holies, where the people could not reach him. Only the High Priest could reach him. And consequently, we are not at all sure whether he is referring to the earthly temple. Some claim that Isaiah, like Paul later on, was taken up to Heaven for three days. Paul says he saw things that were not lawful for a man to utter. It does not tell us of his experiences during those three days. But Paul had a marvelous experience, although we don't know how much entered into his Epistle and into his work with God. But here we have Isaiah giving this account of this experience. We often find the prophet had a great vision of God. But did he have this vision in the temple, or in the vision did he see a temple and imagine himself in it, and if so, was it the earthly temple or was it what the temple stood for? Was he lifted up to Heaven or did he see Heaven, and see God in an imaginary form because God does not have a human form. No man has seen God, but Isaiah saw something that represented God to him. There is no mention of a face, or of arms, or of other human features. Here it is the train of his robe Isaiah saw. It is the manifestation of God that filled the temple where Isaiah was or which Isaiah saw, whichever it was.

And above this train stood the seraphim. And this word "seraph" appears only in this chapter, nowhere else in the Bible. The word, which seems to be related to a verb that means "to burn," sometimes people translate as "the burning ones". Evidently they would be messengers of God, perhaps we could call them angels. At least they would be individuals who would be so bright that they would seem to be burning. They were God's emissaries in this vision of Isaiah. We do not have this word "seraph" anywhere else except as it occurs in this chapter.

We also have the word "cherubim," or "cherub" if you please, and by a most peculiar thing, as developed today, "cherub" has come to mean a little child, and we have pictures of cute little children, or usually you speak of somebody as

having this cherubic countenance, but actually the cherub seems to have been like an ox rather than like a human being. And the cherub is mentioned much more than the seraph in the Scriptures. But these two are mentioned, simply as a reminder to us, that in the spiritual world there is much that we do not know about. The material world today is known to have all sorts of things in it that people never dreamed of a hundred years ago. There are forces in the material world that scientists have discovered, that a hundred years ago were absolutely undreamed of, absolutely unknown, that are today referred to often in common ways. The great import; take something like electricity that is so important in the lives of all of us today and 300 years ago nobody ever dreamed of it. The idea that you could pick up a telephone and dial something and it rings a bell thousands of miles away, nobody could have imagined it. So if the material world is so far beyond what we could have imagined, think of the spiritual world, what that must be like. God has revealed certain things about it in the Scriptures, but there's an awful lot that we don't know about it, and this is all we know about the seraphim. They were messengers of God, they were instruments to do his will.

And he gives this peculiar description: "Each one had six wings. With 2 he covered his face, 2 of them covered his feet, and he used 2 of them to fly." He only needed 2 wings to fly, but he had 6. God provides for the needs of his servants. He gives us far more than we need to accomplish his will, and it's the covering the face before the majesty of God that's implied here and yet we have an intimate view of God. We know Jesus as we know our best friend, and yet we must always know that he is so great and so wonderful beyond what we can imagine, so we should know to show to him reverence, just as even the seraphim covered their faces in the presence of the Lord.

And one seraph cried to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." This statement "is full of his glory" is not an exact translation. The Hebrew word "full" is *ma'ale* but the word here is

malo. It is the same root, but it is a noun rather than an adjective. Literally it would be “The fullness of the whole earth is His glory.” Well everybody that I have looked into, every one of the varied sources that I have looked at translated this way “The whole earth is full of his glory.” But I can’t escape the feeling that it might be a little more literal to say that “the fullness of the whole earth is his glory” in other words that all of the wonderful things that we know of in the world, and all the wonderful things that are in the universe that God has made that we don’t know anything about, they are all a part of God’s glory. Now that is to say that I have not found anybody who else who expresses that thought, but it does seem to me that that would be a more literal translation in Hebrew. And there are plenty, the plenty places in the Bible that make us think that the earth is all of God's glory, I can’t help thinking that all of the marvelous universe is just a part of the wonderful glory of God who created it all.

And the post of the doors,--more literally the foundation of the walls--moved at the voice of him who cries. As the seraphim cries, the whole place shook. We read in Acts how when God spoke to the people that the building shook, or at least that was the feeling of Isaiah was this mighty force of God, like people have in the midst of an earthquake, that the world seems to just shake, and you feel how puny, how small is humanity and all of its people compared to the tremendous force of nature, and God of course is far greater than any of these.

Though I think we should take a look further into the chapter next week because I didn’t mention the assignment till I met you at the beginning. It’ll only take a second, we have already. It’s not a long assignment; this time you have already looked at chapters 56 and 57 and noted in them what parts were rebuke and what parts were blessing. All I’m asking that you do is just look over chapters 58 and 59 and divide them that way what is there in rebuke, what is there in this that is blessing, and what is in there in it that you don’t think belongs under either

category and that you would suggest another category. This is quite the brief assignment, but please turn that in by next Friday.

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MacRae: Isaiah 1-6 Lecture 7 Outline

7. Isaiah's call to service

A. Introduction

1. Review: so far chs. 1-5 under two topics
 - a. Rebuke for sin and coming punishment
 - b. Comfort of godly and promised blessing
2. Is this Isaiah's original call or a renewed call later in his ministry?
 - a. No way to know for sure
 - b. Jeremiah's and Ezkiel's call found in their first chapters
 - c. Perhaps original call is best option
3. Division between chapters 1-6 and 7-12 is definite

1-6 summary of Isaiah's mission
Written later and placed here as an introduction to the book
4. Isaiah 6 one of the finest chapters for preaching

B. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD"

1. Why didn't it say 732 B.C. I saw the LORD?
 - a. BC/AD system designed about 400 years after Christ
 - b. Before that the system was dated to when Seleucus, Alexander's general took control of Babylon (ca. 312 BC).
 - c. Old Testament manuscripts even used this Seleucus dating system till around 1000 AD but often they wouldn't put in the century
 - d. Egypt dated according to the king as did the OT
 - e. Rome used their counsels for dating
 - f. Dionysius around 467 AD developed the BC/AD system which has been so helpful
 - g. Dionysius missed Christ's birth by 4-5 years though
 - h. Point in Isaiah is not exactly the date when Isaiah's vision came but points to the general historical background
2. Uzziah as king
 - a. Initial a godly king
 - b. Situation went to his head
 - c. Separation of church and state
 1. England Queen or the prime minister in the Queen's name picks the head of the church of

England

2. Calvin in Geneva disagreed with the state's ability to choose clergy, argued for separation of church and state
 3. Luther had no problem with it so even till today in Germany and Scandinavian countries the state controls the church
 4. OT King was not to do priestly rituals: Uzziah offers incense resulting in his being smitten with leprosy
 5. After the leprosy it says Uzziah lived alone
 6. Tragic feeling one who started so well and failed. Many Christian leaders similar tragic pathway.
 7. Uzziah on his mind when he has this vision
- C. Isaiah saw LORD sitting on the throne, high and lifted up, and his train filling the temple
- a. Where was Isaiah when he had this vision?
Perhaps in the temple
 - b. Holy of Holies only the high priest could enter
 - c. Was it like Paul who was taken up into heaven for 3 days
 - d. Train filling the temple -- God's presence filling
 - e. Seraphim--only occurs here
 1. Root: burning ones
 2. Messengers of God hence --angels
 - f. Cherubim:
 1. Not little children
 2. Described as an ox looking
 3. So much we don't know of the spiritual world
 - a. Science discovering forces like electricity unknown before 300 years ago yet now we can take to someone on the other side of the planet.
 - g. Seraphim: 6 wings, 2 to fly, 2 to cover face, 2 cover feet--reverence before God
- D. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory"
1. Ma'ale word for full

- a. Most translate it "The whole earth is full of his glory"
 - b. Perhaps better: "the fullness of the whole earth is his glory"
 - c. Whole universe just part of God's wonderful glory of its creator
- E. Door posts--literally the foundation walls--shaking
- 1. In Acts when God speaks building shakes
 - 2. Mighty force of God--like earthquake--humans puny
- F. Assignment for next week: Look at Isaiah 58 and 59 divide them into rebuke and blessing sections