

IN RESPONSE – ISAIAH SIX, CHRIST, AND COMFORT, PART ONE

by Dennis Prutow

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We are taking a brief excursion into Isaiah 6. Space does not permit a comprehensive exposition of this text. My purpose is narrow and twofold. On one hand we explore Christ in the text. On the other hand, we explore the uses of Isaiah 6:9 and 10 in the New Testament. As we do so, we see Jesus Christ is God and King. We must worship and serve Him. Isaiah 6:1-13 reads as follows:

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven." Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed." Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, houses are without people and the land is utterly desolate, the Lord has removed

men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, and it will again be subject to burning, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump."

Isaiah saw the Lord. "He whom Isaiah sees is the Lord ('*adonai*), the God who is able to carry out His purposes."¹ This is a vision of the Lord in majesty and power. The Lord sits on a throne. It is the throne of His rule. He is the Sovereign. It is the throne of judgment. The Sovereign Lord is the Judge of all. The Lord is lofty and exalted. His robe fills the temple.

In the vision, Isaiah is in the temple. Whether he is actually in the temple in Jerusalem does not appear certain. Isaiah is in the throne room of the Almighty. It is likely the heavenly Jerusalem, the divine temple, and the throne of the majesty on high that Isaiah sees in a vision.

Who is this Majestic One? The apostle John explains. Jesus Christ raised Lazarus from the dead. The miracle was a great sign attesting Jesus to be the Messiah. Many believed. When Jesus entered Jerusalem some days later, crowds worshipped Him. Many others, including the Chief Priests and the Pharisees, were incensed. They sought to put both Lazarus and Jesus to death (John 11:57 and 12:10). John speaks of Jesus and the unbelief of those opposing Him. "Though He had performed so many signs before them, *yet* they were not believing in Him." John indicates this rejection of Jesus carries out the prophecy of Isaiah 53:1. "*This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: 'LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?'"* (John 12:37-38). Isaiah 53 is a well-known prophecy concerning Jesus Christ. Certain men and women believe and trust in Christ. Others reject Him.

Why? Again, John answers.

For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 'HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARD-

ENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM.'" These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him (John 12:39-40).

John quotes the prophet; this time it is Isaiah 6:10. He also indicates the vision seen by Isaiah and recorded in chapter 6 is a vision of Christ. Isaiah "saw His glory." A. T. Robertson comments. "Isaiah with spiritual vision saw the glory of the Messiah and spoke (*ελαλησεν*) of him, John says, whatever modern critics may think or say."²

E. J. Young concurs. "Calvin rightly remarks that 'John tells us that it was Christ (John 12:41), and justly, for God never revealed himself to the Fathers but in his eternal Word and only begotten Son.'"³ The Second Person of the Trinity is the bridge between the eternal and temporal. We meet God in and through Him (1 Timothy 2:5). Christ is God, the Creator (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16). Christ is God speaking through the prophets and speaking to us in Scripture (1 Peter 1:10-11). Christ is God in human form affecting redemption (John 1:14, 2 Corinthians 5:19). Christ is the covenant of Jehovah (Isaiah 42:6). He is the light of Jehovah (Isaiah 49:6, Acts 13:46-47, John 8:12). Conformity to the image of Christ in sanctification means taking on the moral likeness of God (Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15 and 3:10). The judgment of God is the judgment of Christ (Romans 14:10, 2 Corinthians 5:10). When we enter glory and meet our Maker and Creator, we come face to face with Christ (1 John 3:2). Jesus Christ is God.

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² A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), 5:232.

³ Young.

¹ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 1:237.

IN RESPONSE – ISAIAH SIX, CHRIST, AND COMFORT, PART TWO

by Dennis Prutow

Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Isaiah and commissioned him to preach the gospel to the ancient Jewish covenant community. Keil and Delitzsch agrees. “But John, in his gospel, is bold enough to say that it was Jesus whose glory Isaiah saw (John xii. 41). And truly so, for the incarnation of God is the truth embodied in all the scriptural anthropomorphisms, and the name of Jesus is the manifest mystery of the name of Jehovah.”¹

Matthew Henry also concurs.

Isaiah saw not *Jehovah*—the essence of God (no man has seen that, or can see it), but *Adonai*—his dominion. He saw the Lord Jesus; so this vision is explained (John 12:41), that Isaiah now saw Christ’s glory and spoke of him, which is an incontestable proof of the divinity of our Savior. He it is who when, after his resurrection, he sat down on the right hand of God, did but sit down where he was before.²

From his commentary on John 12:41, Matthew Henry adds,

The vision which the prophet there had of the *glory of God* is here said to be his *seeing the glory* of Jesus Christ: He *saw his glory*. Jesus Christ therefore is equal in power and glory with the Father, and his praises are equally celebrated. Christ had a glory *before the foundation of the world*, and Esaias saw this.³

William Hendriksen adds these words from the perspective of John’s gospel.

Isaiah, in the glorious vision recorded in the same chapter from which the quotation was taken (chapter 6, verses 1-5 the vision; verses 9 and 10 the quoted words), saw the glory, the transcendent majesty (not restricted to but certainly including the moral quality of *holiness*) of the Lord Jesus Christ (in whom the glory of Jehovah reflects itself) and was conscious of the fact he was speaking of *him*, he

did not criticize or protest, but recorded faithfully what he had seen and heard.⁴

Isaiah 6 displays King Jesus. He *is* the sovereign Lord. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). He is the eternal Judge. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Our Lord is attended by glorious beings, Seraphim. We do not know their number. These angelic beings call out to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” The three-fold expression of praise indicates the superlative. He is *the* most holy being. The Hebrew “signifies the entirety of the divine perfection which separates God from His creation. God is the Creator who exists in absolute independence of the creature.”⁵ This is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26).

Physical manifestations of power accompany the vision of Christ’s glory. “The foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke” (Isaiah 6:4). This reminds us of the desert scene at Horeb. “Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently” (Exodus 19:18). The earth shook when Christ breathed His last on the cross. “Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:54). John’s vision of the temple in Revelation 15:8 records a similar awesome sight. “And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power.” “It is a scene of incomparable majesty.”⁶

Isaiah responds, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). With Isaiah, we shrink before the majesty and holiness of Christ. We are in good company.

The disciples fished with no results. Following the directions of Jesus, “they enclosed a great quantity of fish.... [W]hen Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, ‘Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’” (Luke 5:6, 8). A view of the majesty of Christ evokes a sense of sinfulness. John responded to a vision of Christ in a similar manner. “When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades’” (Revelation 1:17-18).

The way to forgiveness is the path of conviction, of recognition of sin and sinfulness, and of repentance. Conviction includes a healthy fear of the consequences of sin. Isaiah knew he was a dead man. Paul’s experience was the same. “I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died” (Romans 7:9). Isaiah’s conviction arose out of the utter contrast of his own life with that of the majesty and holiness of Christ.

“Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven’” (Isaiah 6:6-7). “The action of the seraph in touching the coal to the lips of Isaiah symbolized the fact, the necessary propitiatory sacrifice having been made, his sins were forgiven.”⁷ Jesus Christ dispenses forgiveness. The angels are His ministering spirits.

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¹ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, James Martin, trans., 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 1:190.

² *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (Nutley, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 4:38.

³ *Ibid.*, 5:1084-1085.

⁴ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 2:213.

⁵ Young, 242-243.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

IN RESPONSE – ISAIAH SIX, CHRIST, AND COMFORT, PART THREE

by Dennis Prutow

Having received cleansing, Isaiah reports, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Isaiah 6:8). Why does the Lord speak of Himself in the plural? “Let us not fear to acknowledge that here is an adumbration of the doctrine of the Trinity which in the New Testament receives its fuller revelation.”¹ Jesus Christ asks His question representing the blessed Trinity.

I am rather favorable to the opinion that this passage points to Three Persons in the Godhead, just as we elsewhere read, “Let us create man in our likeness” (Gen. i. 26.) For God talks with himself, and in the plural number; and unquestionably he now holds a consultation with his eternal Wisdom and his eternal Power, that is, with the Son and the Holy Spirit.²

Isaiah’s spontaneous response is simple, “Send me.” Isaiah has little understanding of his mission. The words of Christ’s commission are startling.

Go, and tell this people: “Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.” Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed (Isaiah 6:9-10).

Judah with Jerusalem was rebellious. She was to enter bondage as her brothers in Israel had already been taken into captivity. The problem was similar to that experienced by Moses.

Israel wandered in the wilderness manifesting hardness of heart in all manner of grumbling and complaining. When Moses brought the people to the verge of Jordan in preparation to enter the Promised Land proper, he reviewed God’s covenant.

Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his ser-

vants and all his land; the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear” (Deuteronomy 29:2-4).

Why did the people continue in rebellion and grumbling? They were sinners. They were, in their hearts, disinclined to love and enjoy God. Moses’ judgment was clear. God did not overturn their sinful and evil desires. “The Lord has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.” A saving understanding of the word of God comes from God alone.

So it was in Judah in the time of Isaiah. God was confirming this. Go and preach, Isaiah. Know this. The original indictment stands. “An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master’s manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand” (Isaiah 1:3). Without the intervention of grace, the pervasive sickness of sin will persist. “Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick And the whole heart is faint” (Isaiah 1:5).

The gospels take the words of Christ to Isaiah and apply them to the earthly ministry of the Savior. Jesus concludes the parable of the sower with the call, “He who has ears, let him hear” (Matthew 13:9, Mark 4:9, Luke 8:8). Consider Deuteronomy 29:4 once again.

The disciples questioned Jesus. “Why do you speak to them in parables?” (Matthew 13:10, Compare Mark 4:10 and Luke 8:9). “Jesus answered them, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted’” (Matthew 13:11, Compare Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10). Jesus reiterates the predestinarian note he previously struck in public prayer. “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight” (Matthew 11:25-26).

The parables veil the truth to those without eyes to see and ears to hear. As Jesus goes on to say, “Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they

do not hear, nor do they understand” (Matthew 13:13). Christ very specifically applies Isaiah 6:9 to those rejecting His earthly ministry. “In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE’” (Matthew 13:14, Compare Mark 4:12 and Luke 8:10). The Jewish opposition contemporary to the earthly ministry of Christ is completing the obstinacy of earlier generations. “Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers” (Matthew 23:32). Christ, the Sovereign Lord, spoke the words to Isaiah in the great vision recorded in Isaiah 6. Christ, the Sovereign Lord, applies these words to His detractors during earthly service.

Matthew 13:14-15 quotes both Isaiah 6:9 and Isaiah 6:10.

In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, “YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.”

Speaking to the disciples, Jesus adds, “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear” (Matthew 13:16). The disciples were privileged. God opened their eyes to see and their ears to hear (Deuteronomy 29:4). In addition, they experienced the blessing of living in the time of the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah. “For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:17). This is the note of comfort and consolation applicable to true Israel, to believers, today. God opens their eyes. They live in times of fulfillment.

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¹ Young, 254.

² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, William Pringle, trans., 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1: 213.

IN RESPONSE – ISAIAH SIX, CHRIST, AND COMFORT, PART FOUR

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There is an additional quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the New Testament. Paul defended Christianity before the leading Jews in Rome. Acts 28:23-28,

When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, 'The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying,

GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen.'

The Jewish leaders who would not hearken to the gospel of the kingdom were children of their fathers. Paul says the words of Isaiah, the record of the vision in Isaiah 6 and the words of Christ recorded in that portion, are words of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 6:9-10 applies to the children as well as their fathers. "It is a solemn dirge of the doom of the Jews for their rejection of the Messiah foreseen so long ago by Isaiah."¹

The rejection of the gospel of the kingdom in the time of Isaiah, during the earthly ministry of Christ, and in the ministry of Paul is the same. The judgment is the same. We may extend the application.

The rejection of the gospel of the kingdom in the time of Isaiah, during the earthly ministry of Christ, in the ministry of Paul, and in our day is the same. The words given to Isaiah by Christ in a revelation of Himself and later applied to Jewish recalcitrants apply to those who reject the gospel today. In like manner, gentiles who received the gospel in the days of Paul, to whom Isaiah's words did not apply, foreshadowed the reception of the gospel by future gentiles.

In like manner, the deportation of Judah came as Christ predicted through Isaiah (Isaiah 6:12). The destruction of Jerusalem also took place as Christ predicted (Matthew 23:38). Final judgment shall also come upon the world rejecting the Savior (Matthew 25:41).

How long do the principles of Isaiah 6:9-10 hold. Isaiah asked and received an answer from the Lord. "Then I said, 'Lord, how long?' And He answered, 'Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, houses are without people and the land is utterly desolate'" (Isaiah 6:11). Desolation came in the deportation and exile of Judah and in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. It shall come in the Judgment.

Yet, a "holy seed" will remain (Isaiah 6:13). Isaiah "means the elect, who would be preserved by the free mercy of God, and thus would survive the captivity."² "God's blessed purposes were those of salvation, and although judgment must come upon the chosen people in blow after blow, nevertheless no judgment would utterly wipe out the nation until the promises were fulfilled in Christ."³ Isaiah 1:9 introduced this aspect of the prophet's message. "Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:9).

This is the comfort and consolation. In the words of Jesus, "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear" (Matthew 13:16). Those who do hear, and see, and understand are the elect of God.

With this brief view of Isaiah 6, here is an overview. The holy and majestic

Christ attended by angels, an earthquake, and a veil of smoke, appears to Isaiah. The very presence of the Most Holy One convicts Isaiah of his own depravity. A seraph takes a hot stone from the altar of incense to cleanse Isaiah's lips.

Isaiah hears Messiah's call to service. He freely volunteers. Christ's commission seems wholly negative. Preach. Close eyes, ears, and hearts. How long? Until devastation is complete. But God preserves a holy seed for Himself.

The oft-quoted verses of Isaiah 6:9-10 are the ones least quoted by us. "He said, 'Go, and tell this people: "Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand." Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed.'"

Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Lord. He reveals His majesty to us throughout Scripture. He has sent many, like Isaiah, to preach. Thus our Lord sows His word in human hearts when and how He sees fit. Born sinners, we naturally shrink from Him and from His word. Positive reception of the words of Christ depends upon His gracious work in opening eyes, ears, and hearts. This work of His will continue until the end of time and Final Judgment. We are absolutely dependent upon the Sovereign Lord. We are at His mercy. Our response? "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). Forgiveness comes from His hand, at His time, on the basis of free grace.

If we do have eyes to see Jesus, ears to hear His word, and hearts to understand and love His gospel, we are recipients of grace. If we do see, hear, and understand, we return and fall before the throne of King Jesus. The Lord of glory says to us, "Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear" (Matthew 13:16). We receive assurance from the lips of the King. We are part of His holy seed. He has extended mercy, grace, and love *to us*. He numbers us among His own. We are His. 'In Response' is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 2001 by Dennis Prutow.

¹ Robertson, 3:489.

² Calvin, 225.

³ Young, 265.