

Isaiah 4-6 • "I saw the Lord, high and lifted up."

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Verse two begins with these words *"In that day."* Now I want to just tell you before we move on that phrase "in that day" that can refer to different things. And the only way we know what it refers to is by looking at the context. So if it's talking about judgment, we know that "in that day," we're talking about the "day of judgment" that is coming. But if it talks about something quite different than judgment, we know that day is talking about a different aspect of the day of the Lord, and that is what's going on here. You'll notice that it refers to very different things. And it says,

"In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious,"

I want you to notice those very descriptive words that are used, that tell us that this is not a day of judgment. This is rather a day of blessing. And why? Well, it's because of the subject of the passage. Did you notice the subject is "the branch." In fact, it's called, he's called *"the branch of the Lord."*

And you'll notice that the reason why it's going to be a great time of beautiful blessing and glorious blessing is because of the fruit that he bears. Notice it says there in the rest of that verse,

"and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel."

All right. So now we need to stop for just a moment, and we need to ask ourselves the question, what is, who is the *"branch of the Lord(?)"* Who's Isaiah referring to? Who is the Lord speaking about through this prophetic word? Well, by simply comparing other biblical passages and references that are given regarding this title, the branch, we know that this is the "Messiah" word. This is talking about Jesus Christ. And we deduce that from other passages.

Let me show you a couple. The first one is from the book of Jeremiah. And we'll put it up on the screen for you to take a look at. Look at this:

Jeremiah 23:5 (ESV)

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."

And this is all, this is known as a Messianic passage. And then also we have one in Zachariah I want to show you. It says,

Zechariah 3:8-9 (ESV)

Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of the land in a single day.

Wow. Those are some powerful prophetic passages speaking of Messiah as descendant of David, you'll notice there, who will bring blessing and justice and righteousness. Plus, through this Branch, the Lord speaks of, and promises to remove, the iniquity of the land in a day, in a single day.

Well, it's clearly talking about Messiah, Jesus Christ, our Lord. And by the way, the term "branch" is a fitting term for Messiah since he sprouted, if you will, from David's line, or if you will, from the stump of Jesse. In fact, this is not the last time that Isaiah is going to refer to the Messiah as the branch. As we look ahead to Isaiah chapter 11, check out this passage. It says,

Isaiah 11:1-2 (ESV)

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

So again, we see from these passages that Isaiah is writing about a time in history as we are back to Isaiah 4:2. And he's talking about a time when Jesus is going to return to the earth and establish his throne during what we call the Millennial Kingdom.

And we call it the Millennial Kingdom because the book of Revelation tells us there will be a period of time after the great tribulation. A period of 1,000 years when Jesus will rule and reign on the earth from Jerusalem. So because it's a 1,000 year period of time, we call it the millennium, or the Millennial Kingdom. That's what Isaiah is prophetically speaking of right here.

Now he goes on in verse three; and he says,

"³ And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, ⁴ when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning."

And so there will be a judgment that is going to take place during the great tribulation, particularly for the nation of Israel. And this "*spirit of burning*" that he refers to is always a reference to simply the "presence of the Lord." The presence of the Lord is always a fire. A fire that burns away the dross, if you will, and leaves only the things that are able to remain. And so notice what he goes on to say in verse five,

"⁵ Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and a smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; (Obviously very reminiscent, isn't it? Of the presence of the Lord as that presence was manifested to Israel during their time of wandering in the wilderness. And there he goes on to end verse five by saying,) for overall the glory, there will be a canopy. (And then he says in verse six:) ⁶ There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and the rain." (In other words, the Lord himself during that time, will be the protection of his people.)

Now that's a short chapter; chapter four is actually quite small.

As we get into chapter five here of the book of Isaiah, this is an interesting chapter. Because it comes to us in the form of a prophetic parable, or if you will, a song. And honestly, it's not that much unlike the Song of Solomon, except here we find in these verses, a picture of the house of Israel. And this is a parable that becomes a way for you and I to better understand how God saw the spiritual condition of Israel as a nation. And so it is all encompassed in this song. Notice how he says in verse one,

"¹ Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill."

² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines: he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes."

Now, for those of you who may be following along tonight in a different Bible translation than the one that I'm reading from, and by the way, I'm reading from the ESV, your Bible may have some different words there instead of wild grapes. The actual Hebrew is literally wild grapes, but a lot of people don't know what that means.

And so some of the biblical translations inserted text there that they thought would give a better understanding of that. And for example, the New American Standard Bible actually uses the words "worthless ones." And so the passage reads that he looked for good grapes, but he found worthless ones instead. The NIV translation says that, "he saw bad, only bad fruit." And yet this is talking about wild grapes, which I have personally never experienced.

I mean, I've experienced a sour grape or two in my time. But wild grapes are a different thing altogether. I looked it up, I did a little research on it, and I found out that wild grapes, or if you will, untended grapes, have a very bitter taste, and a somewhat foul odor that goes along with them as well. So, you see that this is an explanation of what God found among his people. Because he's going to explain in a few verses that the vineyard is Israel.

And so it says he expected to basically find good fruit when he looked. And he wanted to find things like obedience. He wanted to find a thankful attitude among these people. He wanted to find a worshipful attitude. He wanted to find service, kindness to others, and so forth. But instead, He looked at his vineyard and he found bad fruit. He found things like disobedience. He found rebellion. He found greed and he found idolatry in the place where the good fruit should have been.

And then God goes on in verse three to ask a rather pointed question. He says,

"³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judged between me and my vineyard.

⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? (In other words, in the parable, he's saying what more could I have done for this vineyard to ensure that it would be fruitful and bear good fruit. I mean, it tells us in the passage, the land was fertile. It tells us that the rocks were carefully removed from the field to give the plants plenty of room to grow. The vineyard was well cared for. And yet he says, when I look to it here at the end of verse four) *⁴ when I looked for it to yield grapes, (he says,) why did it yield wild grapes?"* (In other words, why did it yield bad fruit.)

And the question is being asked to the people of Judah so that they might take a moment for introspection to ask themselves, why did this happen? What is going on here?

The point that God is making is that the problem is not his. He's essentially saying that the failure of this vineyard is not because of any error in God's planning, or in God's provision, or in God's preparation. Everything was done so that it would grow and bear good fruit. So, he says, there was nothing but bad. So, all that's left now is to consider the consequences of the Lord finding only bad fruit. And he says in verse five,

"5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, (In other words, there won't be any care being taken) and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

And then if there's any doubt as to the interpretation of this parable or how it ought to be properly interpreted, God removes all doubt in the following verse. Verse seven:

7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!"

So, the whole parable is interesting and yet somehow strangely familiar to us, isn't it? Don't you see the connection of that event toward the end of the ministry of Jesus recorded for us in the gospels where Jesus was passing by a fig tree, do you remember? He went to the tree looking for fruit, and he found none. He cursed the fig tree saying, may you never bear fruit again, and we're told the fig tree withered from its root.

And I believe that story, and the one here in Isaiah essentially give the same message. That God is looking for fruit. God is looking for fruit among his people. The question is, is he finding any?

Verse 8:

"8 Woe to those who join house to house, and who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you who dwell alone in the midst of the land."

And so here he's kind of calling out the rich, the elite, the greedy among the people of Judah, who are buying up houses, and land, and making lots of money. And here's the message in verse nine:

"9 The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing; "Surely many houses shall be desolate,"

In other words, all these beautiful houses that are being built, taking up all the land, he says, they're going to be empty. He said, even these large and beautiful homes, they will be without inhabitant. So, the first thing the Lord is telling them here by this message in verse nine, is that they are going into captivity. And we know that captivity happened when the Babylonian army came and conquered the southern kingdom of Judah.

Secondly, he says in verse 10:

"10 For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, (and that's a measurement of liquid) and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah." (and he's saying here that because the land is going to be uncared for during that time, it will yield very little. So he says,)

11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them!

12 They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands."

So, the second woe that the Lord speaks through Isaiah, is directed at the party crowd. This is the group that lives for the next wild social gathering so that they can get drunk together. But these people, the Lord says, have no time to consider the Word of the Lord. They don't acknowledge the work of his hands.

13 Therefore (he says in verse 13) my people go into exile for lack of knowledge; their honored men go hungry, and their multitude is parched with thirst.

14 Therefore Sheol (and that's the grave) has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down, her revelers and he who exalts in her."

The fact of the matter is when the Babylonian army came and attacked, Jerusalem and broke through the walls, many, many, many people died. And the Lord is prophesying that right now. He says in verse 15,

"15 Man is humbled, and each one is brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are brought low.

16 But the Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.

17 Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, and nomads shall eat among the ruins of the rich.

In other words, he's saying that the busy cities that have been hustling and bustling with activity are going to become pasture lands during the time of the exile, because there's no one living in them. And so these nomads who just make their way through the country finding pasture land will come. And they will actually eat among the ruins of the city.

The next woe that the Lord pronounces through Isaiah goes like this in verse 18:

"18 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes,"

This is kind of an interesting idea here. But it's a word picture that the Lord is giving through Isaiah of wicked people who are literally hitched to sin, and who are dragging their guilt and their punishment behind them. It's a strange kind of a word picture.

Verse 19, he begins to speak of the things that these people say in their arrogance. They say things like:

"19 ... "Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel drawn near, and let it come, that we may know it!"

In other words, they're mocking and they're challenging the Lord God to step forth and do the things that the prophets had been saying that he was going to do. And this is really their way of saying, we don't believe a word of it. We don't believe any of this is going to happen. We don't believe anything that the prophets have said, so why doesn't God just step forth and do some of this stuff that he said he was going to do.

And then listen to this one, verse 20:

"20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isn't that well said. God is talking here about people in any given society, but he's talking specifically, of course, to the southern kingdom of Judah now.)

But he's really talking about what I believe is something that's very important to the Lord. And that is the blurring of moral lines. The lines of moral right and wrong to the point that they begin to find excuses for their sin. They do evil and they call it good, even though in their hearts they know that it's wrong. They call it good.

And their consciences, Paul tells us in the New Testament, (1 Timothy 4:2) become seared or calloused, if you will, as with a hot iron. And they claim that I was born this way, and that's my excuse. It's natural, they say, for me to do evil or to do what I do. They call evil good. And not only that, but they see what is good and they call it evil. So obviously this is describing a state of deep moral confusion that had come upon the land of Judah.

And it's something that is characterized here in the United States of America, and I know that it's also in the rest of the world. There is great, great, great moral confusion. And frankly, the only way we're ever going to get straightened out is through the Word of God. The Word of God is our plumb line of truth. It's the standard of rightness and morality. Man doesn't get to define morality. Only God can define it. And all man does is blur it. And that's what these passages are talking about here.

Verse 21. And this kind of goes along with the blurring of moral lines of distinction. He says,

"21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and shrewd in their own sight!" (He's talking about the height of human pride to consider my thoughts, my opinions, you know, my agenda, my wisdom to be the best, right? The only way to go. He says, "Woe to them.")

Verse 22:

"22 Woe to those who are heroes, (but not the kind of hero that you might think about. These people are heroes) at drinking wine, and (they are) valiant men in mixing strong drink,

23 who acquit the guilty for a bribe, (and deprive) the innocent of his right!"

Can you imagine someone who thinks that drinking a lot is something to be proud of as an accomplishment? The Lord says woe to that man.

"²⁴ Therefore, (verse 24) as the (tongues)(correction - tongue) of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossoms go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. (And that's the real issue right there, isn't it? That's what it comes down to; they have despised the Word of God.)

Verse 25, he says,

"²⁵ Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them, and the mountains quaked; and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. (But) For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still. (And that simply means his judgment is not fully satisfied.)

²⁶ He will raise a signal for nations far away, (And he's talking now about Babylon) and (he will) whistle for them from the ends of the earth; and behold, quickly speedily they come! (So he's telling the inhabitants of Judah now, that he's calling for a foreign nation to come. And to be, if you will, his spanking spoon to take the nation of Judah, the kingdom of Judah away from their very homes.)

He speaks now of the enemy that is coming in verse 27 through the end of the chapter, saying,

"²⁷ None is weary, (In other words, they don't grow tired.) none stumble, (He's talking about the enemy now) none slumbers or sleeps, not a waistband is loose, not a sandal strap broken;

²⁸ their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs seem like flint, and their wheels like the whirlwind.

²⁹ Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar; they growl and seize their prey; they carry it off, and none can rescue. (God is telling them now that they're going to be carried off, going into exile, and nobody's going to be able to stop it from happening.)

30 They will growl over it on (the) that day, like the growling of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds."

So, nothing fun or enjoyable about this coming judgment of the Lord that Isaiah is predicting that will come upon the southern kingdom of Judah.

Now, as we get into Isaiah chapter six, and this is the last chapter that we're going to look at this evening, we find the prophet is caught up into a holy vision of the throne of the Lord, God Almighty. And while there, the Lord is going to speak to Isaiah about the spiritual condition of the people of Israel and Judah.

But you'll notice here that Isaiah begins by dating the time of this vision. And this is the way they gave dates back in those days. He begins by saying,

"1 In the year that King Uzziah died..."

Now it's interesting to note that this was the first king during, or I should say, this is the king that was on the throne when Isaiah first began his prophetic ministry. That's probably the better way to put it.

And Uzziah, you might remember from your study of the kings of Judah, began his reign at the tender age of 16, and he ruled for a period of 52 years. Although, the latter part of his reign was spent in isolation because he became leprous. And his son actually shared a co-regency with him in the latter years of his reign.

But he says here, *"In the year that King Uzziah died, (he says) I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, (and what a wonderful picture that must have been, and he says, he was) high and lifted up; (If you will, exalted, okay, and that's what that means.) and the train of his robe filled the temple. (What a picture.)*

And you know, a good picture for you and I to think about with all the things that are going on in the world today. All of the things that could potentially cause us to become afraid or fearful. We need to remember that the Lord God is seated on his throne. He has not been ousted. He has not taken a vacation. He has not failed to be the Sovereign over all the world. He remains on the throne. *"...and (that's a good word in addition to being an incredible sight, can you imagine) the train of his robe filled the temple (where he was seated.)*

Verse two, we're told that:

² Above him stood the seraphim. (And these are angelic beings attending the throne of God.) (And) Each (of them, he says,) 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: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Can you imagine hearing angels calling to one another in the throne room of God Almighty crying out, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty? And by the way, I should probably pause for a moment to say that "holiness" is really the theme of the book of Isaiah. It is a recurring theme over and over again.

We're told here in verse four:

"⁴ (That) the foundations (correction- And the foundations) of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (What an awesome vision for Isaiah to behold. And now Isaiah responds in verse five:) ⁵ And (he said, he said)(correction - I said) "Woe is me! For I am lost; (Imagine that saying I'm lost) for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Isaiah is immediately struck with his own unworthiness, if you will, beholding the presence of the Lord God Almighty in the throne room of glory. And he is overwhelmed that he should even be there. He recognizes that he is disqualified from being there. And why? He says, "because I'm a man of unclean lips."

Isaiah was a man. He was a human being like you or me. And he had allowed things to pass his lips that were unclean. He had said things in his life that were unworthy of this, of the holiness of God, and he knew it. And he was instantly convicted by it.

And so he says, "*Woe is me!*" And you know the response of Isaiah that we see here in this chapter, is not at all uncommon. Whenever we find someone in the scripture, who is in the presence of the Lord, for example, when the Lord, you'll remember, appeared to Job at the very end of that book, Job said, "*I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" (Job 42:6 (ESV))

You'll remember that when Ezekiel saw the glory of God, he said, "I fell face down." (Ezekiel 1:28) When John saw the glorified Jesus, he writes in the book of Revelation, "when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:17)

And Daniel had perhaps the most profound reaction. He says, "I was left alone gazing at this great vision I had no strength left. My face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard Him speaking, and as I listened to Him, I fell into a deep sleep my face to the ground." (Daniel 10:8-9)

Then later on in that same chapter of Daniel, which is by the way, chapter 10, Daniel talks about the fact that He, the Lord, was speaking to him and he said, "I can't even breathe let alone respond to you." (Daniel 10:17) So pretty powerful reaction just to being in the presence of God.

Verse six says that,

"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. (This is incredible.) 7 And he touched my mouth and (he) said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." (And that word atoned for means covered, your sin is covered.)

Now I want you to remember, you might say, well, wouldn't Isaiah have been burned badly by a burning coal? You got to remember this is a vision that Isaiah is having. And so this would have a spiritual significance, not a physical one.

But this is also in keeping with one of the great themes that I've said of Isaiah of "holiness." The Lord does this work of forgiveness setting apart Isaiah, touching his mouth with this coal to prepare him for what is, as he will speak now in the future, prophetically. He says,

"8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (And by the way, Isaiah gives the best answer you can give.) (And) Then I said, "Here am I (correction - Here I am!) Send me." 9 And he said, "Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

10 Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Well, that kind of sums up Isaiah's ministry. And it's pretty crazy, similar to the ministry that Jeremiah was given. If you've read through the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah was told at the very beginning of his ministry God said, I've got a message for you, but the people are never going to listen. They're never going

to. They're never going to accept it. In fact, they will reject your message and they will reject you as the messenger.

Well, God was basically telling Isaiah here to give a message or to speak prophetically, if you will, to a people who would not respond. And the result of it would be to increase their guilt, to increase their blindness, to increase their deafness, to increase their dullness toward the Lord. In other words, the more they rejected, the more blind and dull and deaf they would become. And Isaiah is obviously taken aback by this. And he says in verse 11,

"¹¹ Then I said, "How long, O Lord? (He wants to know how long this condition is going to last among the people of Israel. And his response is,) he said: (correction - And he said:) "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste,

¹² and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land."

And so, God tells Isaiah in answer to his question, how long? How long is this going to be? He says, it's going to continue right up until they're carried off. They will not change. They will not repent. They will not turn to the Lord. They'll be carried off into exile.

Verse 13, he says,

"¹³ And though a tenth (and that means a portion, a remnant) remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump."

And so, Isaiah is told here that even though the population would be brought down to a very small remnant of people, God is actually promising here to preserve a group of Jews, which he calls here "a stump in the land," this remnant, this 10th, if you will. And from that stump He promises that more believers will come. And that remnant is a holy remnant. This is the believing remnant, if you will.

And so, as we end this chapter of Isaiah six, here's a question for you. Who did Isaiah see? Who did Isaiah see *"high and lifted up"* and seated on the throne of God? Sounds like a trick question, doesn't it? You would probably say, well, he saw God sitting on the throne of God. Who else would he see sitting on the throne of God?

Well, but I want you to listen to what the Apostle John said in his gospel account in the twelfth chapter. Look at this on the screen:

John 12:37-41 (ESV)

Though [Jesus] had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn and I would heal them." Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

Though [Jesus] had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: " Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (And by the way, that's a quote from a much later chapter in Isaiah that we'll get to eventually. But it goes on now; look at this:) Therefore, (John says) they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn and I would heal them." (And then look at this statement by John) Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

Who's the "he" and the "him" of those pronouns? John is saying that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus, the pre-incarnate Son of God seated on the throne of God. John is saying here that Isaiah saw His glory and wrote about Him.

So you see, that really wasn't such a trick question when I said, who did Isaiah see seated on the throne of God in heaven? It was Jesus, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, if you will, seated *"high and lifted up."*