God Calls Isaiah

Isaiah 6:1-8

BIBLE BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

The Setup

This passage describes God's call upon the life of Isaiah, yet it occurs in the sixth chapter of the book rather than at its beginning. From the earlier chapters, we learn that Judah's relationship with God was deplorable and that God's anger was burning against his people (Isaiah 5:25). We discover that Isaiah had a terribly difficult task ahead of him if he accepted God's call, because he would be preaching of God's displeasure and the coming destruction of Judah to a people who believed they were in line for God's blessings. These chapters also help to explain Isaiah's statement in today's passage that he lived "among a people of unclean lips."

The Holiness

In Isaiah 6:1-4, Isaiah describes the experience of witnessing the awesome holiness of God. In this passage, he attempts to describe a heavenly experience, but he has only earthly terms at his disposal. He says that the train of God's robe filled the spacious hall of the heavenly temple; this emphasizes the splendid magnificence of God's glory. Seraphs are a kind of angel not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. The Hebrew root word for seraph means "burn," which may be related to the seraphs' purity in serving God. Their cry of "holy, holy, holy" emphasizes God's indescribable holiness.

The Glory

The shaking of the doorposts and thresholds and the smoke that filled the temple also describe Isaiah's experience of God's glory and power. All of this likely reminded Isaiah's Hebrew listeners how God's voice shook the earth and terrified the people when God gave the law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18-19).

The Forgiveness

Isaiah knew that he was unclean and unworthy, but God prepared a cleansing for him. The burning coal was a symbol of both God's wrath and his forgiveness. The live coal didn't cleanse Isaiah; God did. Once his sin was forgiven, Isaiah demonstrated his faith in God by agreeing to serve God by speaking his message.

The Jesus Connection

Greater than a mere symbol of forgiveness like coal, God sent his Son, Jesus, to offer us forgiveness. It is through a relationship with Jesus that we have hope of one day being in God's holy presence.

How has God shown his holiness to you? How have you responded? Ask God to show himself to you more fully. You can write your prayer here.