

# A Problem of Leadership



## SABBATH—APRIL 3

**LEADERS TO TRUST.** One of Confucius's<sup>1</sup> disciples asked him what would make a good government. Confucius answered: "Sufficient [enough] food, sufficient weapons, and the confidence [trust] of the common people."

The disciple then asked, "But suppose you had to remove one of those three, which would you remove?"

Confucius said, "Weapons."

Stubbornly, his disciple asked again, "Suppose you had to remove one of the two that are left, which would you choose to let go?"

Confucius answered, "Food. Because from old times, most people have been hungry one time or another. But people who do not trust their rulers any more are lost."

People want strong leaders they can trust. When a soldier was signing up for a second tour (term) of duty, the army recruiter<sup>2</sup> asked why he wanted to join again. The soldier said, "I tried life outside the army, but there are no leaders out there."

This week, we will look at Judah's problem with leadership and the sad results that followed.

**A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** What spiritual dangers come with success? What happened to Isaiah to help prepare him for his ministry (work)? What does it mean that God "hardens" people's hearts?

**MEMORY VERSE:** "In the year that King Uzziah<sup>3</sup> died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting on the throne, high and exalted [greatly honored], and his robe filled the whole Temple" (Isaiah 6:1, TEV).

<sup>1</sup>Confucius—a famous Chinese philosopher (thinker) who lived many years ago.

<sup>2</sup>recruiter—a person who is responsible for signing up people to join the army or navy.

<sup>3</sup>Uzziah—Judah's tenth king.

SUNDAY—APRIL 4

**THE KING IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE KING! (Isaiah 6:1).**

**Isaiah 6:1 talks about the death of Uzziah. Read 2 Chronicles 26 and then explain why King Uzziah's death was so important.**

There are many ways to think about the death of King Uzziah:

1. Uzziah's rule was long and successful. But when he became strong, he became proud, and his pride destroyed him (2 Chronicles 26:16). Uzziah tried to offer incense in the temple (2 Chronicles 26:16). The priests rightly stopped him because he did not come from the priestly line of Aaron (2 Chronicles 26:18). But the king became angry. God quickly struck him with leprosy.<sup>4</sup> Uzziah had this leprosy until the day he died. "He lived in a separate house leprous [as a leper], and excluded<sup>5</sup> from the temple of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 26:21, NIV). How strange that Isaiah saw a vision of the pure, eternal<sup>6</sup> God as King in His temple in the same year that the sinful human King Uzziah died.

2. There is a big difference between Uzziah and Isaiah. Uzziah reached for holiness because he was proud. So Uzziah became unclean in God's eyes, and was cut off from holiness. But,

Isaiah humbly admitted his weakness and asked for spiritual purity, which he received (Isaiah 6:5-7). Like the tax collector in Jesus' parable,<sup>7</sup> Isaiah was made righteous (holy): "For everyone who makes himself great will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be made great" (Luke 18:14, TEV).



3. Uzziah's body was unclean with leprosy. Uzziah's people were unclean with sin. Read Isaiah 1:6.

4. Uzziah's death in about 740 B.C. caused a problem in the leadership of God's people. The death of any strong ruler makes his/her country weak during the change of power. But Judah was in special danger because

<sup>4</sup>leprosy—a terrible disease that destroys human tissue piece by piece until death comes.

<sup>5</sup>excluded—ordered to stay out.

<sup>6</sup>eternal—without beginning or end; lasting forever.

<sup>7</sup>parable—a simple story that teaches a moral or spiritual lesson.

Tiglath-pileser III<sup>8</sup> had taken over the throne of Assyria in 745 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III quickly went to war and made his nation a great superpower. The rapid (fast) rise of Assyria became a growing threat to all nations in the Near East. But God encouraged Isaiah by showing the prophet He was still in control.

**Read 2 Chronicles 26:16. In what ways does each one of us face the same problem? How can thinking about the Cross protect us from our pride?**

### MONDAY—APRIL 5

#### “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY” (Isaiah 6:1-4).

What is happening in Isaiah 6:1-4? The king dies during great political trouble. The Assyrians are on the warpath. This could have been a bad time for Isaiah. But while having a vision, Isaiah saw God on His throne. Isaiah heard the music of shining seraphim (“flaming angels”) calling out, “Holy, holy, holy,” and felt the floor shaking under him. He watched as smoke filled the temple. It must have been a very impressive experience. Isaiah now knew God was in control, no matter what happened on earth.

**Why would God want Isaiah to**

**see Him on His throne in the temple? (Read Exodus 25:8; Exodus 40:34-38.)**

In Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7:9-10, Revelation 4, and Revelation 5, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John were in exile<sup>9</sup> when they received their visions. The same as Isaiah, they needed special comfort and encouragement. They needed to know God was still in control, even though their world was falling apart. Daniel and Ezekiel were prisoners in a pagan (non-Christian) nation (Babylon) that had destroyed their own nation. John had been sent to a lonely island by pagan Rome. These visions gave Ezekiel, Daniel, and John what they needed to stay faithful, even during a terrible time.

John’s description of God’s temple in heaven is close to what Isaiah saw. Read Revelation 4:8.

Isaiah’s vision shows that God’s great holiness is a major part of His message. God is a holy God. He requires holiness of His people. God will give this holiness to His people if they will repent,<sup>10</sup> and surrender to Him in faith and obedience.

**Remember how God was able to support you and your faith during difficult times. What have you learned from these times that you could share with other people?**

<sup>8</sup>Tiglath-pileser III—a strong king of Assyria.

<sup>9</sup>in exile—forced to live somewhere away from home.

<sup>10</sup>repent—to say you are sorry for your sins and that you want to stop sinning.

TUESDAY—APRIL 6

### A NEW PERSONALITY (Isaiah 6:5-7).

Only the high priest could stand in front of God in the Holy of Holies<sup>11</sup> on the Day of Atonement.<sup>12</sup> He stood in front of a protective smokescreen of incense so he would not die (Leviticus 16:2, 12, 13). Isaiah saw God, even though he was not the high priest and he was not burning incense! The temple was filled with smoke (Isaiah 6:4). This reminds us of the cloud in which God's glory appeared on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:2). Isaiah was so shocked, he thought he



**The High Priest in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.**

would die (read Exodus 33:20; Judges 6:22, 23). He cried out with a confession<sup>13</sup> of his sins and the sins of his people (Isaiah 6:5). This reminds us of the high priest's confession on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:21). Isaiah then saw heavenly beings worship God. Afterward, he understood that the worship offered by these heavenly beings was so much better than the worship offered by sinners.

**Why did the seraph (six-winged angel) use a burning coal from the altar to cleanse Isaiah's lips (Isaiah 6:6, 7)?**

The seraph explained that the prophet's guilt and sins were removed by the burning coal. Lips mean the sinful words spoken in the past and the entire person who speaks sinful words (Matthew 12:33-37). After being made spiritually pure, Isaiah now could offer pure praise to God.

Fire is a cleansing agent. It burns away impure things (Numbers 31:23). But the seraph used a coal from the special, holy fire of the altar. God Himself had lit that fire, which was always kept burning (Leviticus 6:12). So the seraph made Isaiah both holy and pure.

In worship at the temple, the main reason for taking a coal from the altar was to light incense. Read Leviticus 16:12, 13. The high priest was to take

<sup>11</sup>Holy of Holies—the most holy room of the two-room earthly sanctuary.

<sup>12</sup>Day of Atonement—a yearly ceremony when the earthly sanctuary was cleansed. The ceremony symbolized cleansing from sin and a renewed relationship with God.

<sup>13</sup>confession—to say that you have sinned.

a censer<sup>14</sup> full of coals from the altar and use it to light incense. But in Isaiah 6, the seraph puts the coal upon Isaiah instead of upon the incense. Uzziah wanted to offer incense. But Isaiah became like incense! Holy fire lights incense to spread a holy smell through God's sanctuary/temple. In the same way, the burning coal lights up Isaiah so he can spread a holy message through Judah. This is why in Isaiah 6:8-13, God sends Isaiah to His people.



A censer.

**Read Isaiah's answer to the vision of God in Isaiah 6:5. How do we see**

**his answering as an example of the problem of sinful people living in a universe created by a holy God? Why was Jesus' sacrifice on the cross the only answer to this problem?**

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 7

**GOD'S COMMAND (Isaiah 6:8).**

Read Isaiah 6:8. After Isaiah was made pure, he quickly accepted God's call to be His prophet. Using New Testament words, Isaiah would have been called an *apostle*. The word *apostle* means "one who is sent."

Many prophetic books begin with the prophet explaining how he received the call to be a prophet of God. (Read Jeremiah 1:4-10; Ezekiel 1-3.) But the book of Isaiah does not begin this way. This may be because Isaiah must already have been called to be a prophet before the events<sup>15</sup> of Isaiah 6. The Bible does show that a meeting with God can encourage a prophet even after beginning his work (Exodus 34; 1 Kings 19). Chapters 1-5 of Isaiah show what Judah was like when God first called Isaiah. Afterward, God encouraged Isaiah with a vision. God also told Isaiah again that He supported Isaiah's work as His prophet.

**God encouraged Isaiah. What do the following verses tell us about God's temple being a place of encouragement? Psalm 73:17; Hebrews**

<sup>14</sup>censer—a container for holding incense.

<sup>15</sup>events—things that happen.

**4:14-16; Hebrews 10:19-23; Revelation 5.**



**“I always stay close to you, and you hold me by the hand” (Psalm 73:23,TEV).**

God’s temple reflects His glory and power. But the temple also is a place where weak and sinful people such as ourselves can find protection and safety. We can be encouraged to know that God is working to save us through Jesus, our High Priest.

John also saw Jesus as a sacrificial lamb which had just been killed (Revelation 5:6). This was not a pretty sight. The description shows that Jesus was raised from the dead and had gone to heaven. But He continually carries the

Cross event with Him. Jesus is still lifted up in order to pull all people toward Himself at His altar.

**How have you found encouragement by entering God’s heavenly temple by faith in prayer? Hebrews 4:16 invites you to boldly go to God’s throne to “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Suppose someone were to ask how you have found grace and mercy<sup>16</sup> in your time of need. How would you answer?**

**THURSDAY—APRIL 8**

**A STRANGE APPEAL  
(Isaiah 6:9-13).**

**What strange message did God tell Isaiah to give to the people? Isaiah 6:9, 10. Why would God give the people such a strange message?**

Jesus pointed to Isaiah 6:9-13 to explain why He taught in parables (Matthew 13:13-15).

God does not want anyone to be destroyed by sin (2 Peter 3:9). This explains why He sent Isaiah to the people of Judah and Jesus to the world. God’s desire is not to destroy people but to save them for eternity.<sup>17</sup> Some people will accept God’s invitations. Other people will become more stubborn in their refusal to accept God. But God keeps inviting them in order to give them

<sup>16</sup>mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

<sup>17</sup>eternity—life without end.

more and more opportunities to repent. But if people continue to refuse God, they will become hard-hearted. God's many invitations lead to the hardening of their hearts. God really wants His invitations to soften people's hearts. His love toward us never changes. Our individual answer to God's love depends on what each one of us chooses.



**Jesus wants us to accept His invitations to choose Him.**

The work of a minister (Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or even Jesus) is to keep inviting people to accept God even if people refuse to accept Him. God said to Ezekiel: "Whether those rebels [people who refuse to accept] listen to you or not, they will know that a prophet has been among them" (Ezekiel 2:5, TEV). God's work and His servant's work is to give people a fair choice so they will have plenty of warning about what will happen if they do not choose God (Ezekiel 3:16-21).

### **How do we understand God's work in hardening Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21)?**

Exodus 4:21 is the first of nine times when God said He would harden Pharaoh's heart. But there were also nine times when Pharaoh hardened his own heart (for example, read Exodus 8:15, 32; Exodus 9:34).

We know Pharaoh was free to choose or reject God, because he would not have been able to harden his own heart. God might harden Pharaoh's heart, but God started the events that led Pharaoh to choose. Pharaoh chose to refuse the signs God had given him. If Pharaoh had been open to those signs, his heart would have been softened.

**Have you ever felt a hardening of your heart to the Holy Spirit? If your answer is yes, think about why you hardened your heart. What can we do so our hearts do not become hardened? 1 Corinthians 10:13.**

### **FRIDAY—APRIL 9**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** "Sinful practices had become very common in Israel among all classes of people. The few people who remained true to God were often tempted to give up. It looked as if God's purpose for Israel would fail and Israel would suffer almost the same end as Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Life was the same in Judah during the last year of Uzziah's rule. So we

should not be surprised that Isaiah was afraid to give the people God's message of warning. He knew the people would be stubborn. He knew they would not believe God's message. He felt hopeless. He felt he could not deliver God's message. . . .

"That is when Isaiah received the vision of God on His throne and the angels worshipping Him."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 306, 307. That vision gave Isaiah the strength to give God's message to Judah.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. If someone were to ask you to show that God is in control, what would you say?
2. Does Isaiah 1:19, 20 mean that in this life only good things are supposed to happen to God's faithful people and only bad things are to

happen to people who rebel? Explain your answer. Also read Job 1; Job 2; Psalm 37; Psalm 73. We say that our God is a God of love. Then why do good people suffer?

3. Why are there so many connections to the Day of Atonement in Isaiah 6? To help you answer, think about the fact that on the Day of Atonement, God made His people pure by cleansing His loyal people from sin (Leviticus 16:30) and by removing those people who were not loyal (Leviticus 23:29-30).

**SUMMARY:** King Uzziah's death left Israel without a strong leader. So God gave Isaiah a glorious vision of Himself as the supreme Leader of the universe. Isaiah was afraid he would not be able to deliver God's message to the people. So God encouraged Isaiah with a vision of His holiness.