

THE MINISTRY OF ISAIAH

1

Daily Bible Readings			
M	Sept. 1	Mark 1:1–8	God Sends a Messenger
T	Sept. 2	Isa. 7:1–7	God Defends the Chosen People
W	Sept. 3	Isa. 20:1–6	God Warns of Coming Disaster
Th	Sept. 4	Matt. 11:1–6	God Fulfills God’s Promises
F	Sept. 5	Matt. 11:7–15	God Works through Unexpected Vessels
Sa	Sept. 6	Ps. 145:1–12	God Is Gracious and Merciful

MAIN IDEA

At a pivotal point in Israel’s history, God calls Isaiah to deliver a message that leads to political stability and health for King Hezekiah and Jerusalem.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 6:1–13; 7:1–7; 20:1–6; 38:1–22

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!” (Isa. 6:8)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Reflect on lesson 1, “The Ministry of Isaiah” (Participant’s Book, p. 1).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of Isaiah’s ministry and King Hezekiah by reading the background Scripture.
- Provide Bibles, Participant’s Books, Worship Leaflets for lesson 1, name tags, paper, pens, newsprint, and markers. Obtain an internet-connected device.
- Obtain a white pillar candle, as well as a means to light it.
- Steps 3–6 include a variety of lesson activity options; select those that appeal to participants.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Greet participants and provide name tags. Invite participants to imagine the presence of God showing up in your worship space. What might God look like? How might they respond to God's physical presence among them?
- Distribute Bibles, Participant's Books, and Worship Leaflets for lesson 1.
- Formulate and get consensus on some simple ground rules for the study (for example, welcoming diverse points of view, maintaining confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Light the white candle, noting that it is a tangible reminder of the presence of the risen Christ.
- Encourage participants to settle into silence.
- Invite volunteers to lead portions of Morning Prayer from the Worship Leaflet, beginning with the Opening Sentences and ending after the Hymn.

Teaching Tip
<p>Some Christians view Isaiah 6:1–8 as an expression of true worship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isaiah is moved to join the worshiping cries of the seraphim (<i>call to worship</i>).• He confesses his and the people's uncleanness (<i>individual and corporate confession</i>).• YHWH asks who will go for "us" (the members of the heavenly council; some Christians interpret "us" as the Trinity). Isaiah responds, "Here am I; send me" (<i>God's call and human response</i>).• The message (vv. 9–13) Isaiah was to deliver was startling and terrible, declaring the people too far gone to listen to God's word or to obey (a <i>message from God</i>).

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 6:1–8; 38:4–5

6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty, and the hem of his robe filled the temple.

²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said,

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And I said, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph touched my mouth with it and said, “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

38:4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: ⁵“Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.”

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 2

- Read Isaiah 6:1–8; 38:4–5. Have participants identify what occurred in these texts to make Isaiah qualified to be God's prophet. Meditate on Isaiah's response to God and identify examples of Isaiah's humility.
- Option: Read Isaiah 6:1–13; 7:1–7; 20:1–6; 38:1–22. Have participants identify and compare the different tasks that Isaiah carried out as God's prophet. Challenge them to identify contemporary prophets. How do their messages and ways of communicating compare to Isaiah's?
- Option: Read Isaiah 6:1–13; 7:1–7; 20:1–6; 38:1–22. Distribute paper and pens. Invite participants to create a monologue for Isaiah expressing what he might think and feel as he looks back over his life.

4. An Incredible Experience

Participant's Book, p. 2

- For an overview of Isaiah 1–39, show the YouTube video “Book of Isaiah Summary: A Complete Animated Overview (Part 1)” (bit.ly/TPWIsaiahSummary, 8:10). You may choose to show up to 3:42 for Isaiah’s vision in the temple. In 700 BCE, during the time of Isaiah, why did Israel need a prophet?
- Show the YouTube video “How to Read the 15 Prophetic Books in the Bible” (bit.ly/TPWRead15PropheticBooks, 5:17). Identify the different stages in the roles and responsibilities of Israel’s prophets. What in Isaiah’s ministry displays these prophetic roles and responsibilities?
- Provide newsprint and markers. Have participants refer to Scripture Notes to create a timeline of significant kings, prophets, places, and events that preceded Isaiah’s call. Discuss how these global events affected the people to whom Isaiah was sent to deliver God’s message. Consider how a burned stump offers hope.
- Challenge participants to identify a worship experience that has made a significant impact in their life. Invite volunteers to talk about the worship experience and its meaning to them.

5. Made Ready for Service

Participant's Book, p. 4

- Discuss how Isaiah’s preparation for service to God included emotions ranging from awe, enthusiasm, confession, and pain. How did his experiences prepare him for the unique service God called him to?
- Hezekiah learned from God through the process of sickness and healing.
 1. How did these experiences prepare Hezekiah for faithfulness and service to God?
 2. How has God used suffering to encourage growth?
 3. Does God cause sickness for God’s own ends, or is growth a by-product of sickness and healing? Why?
- Use an internet-connected device to access Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Invite participants to take turns reading aloud the letter.
 1. How does King act as a moral compass in this letter?
 2. What experiences prepared King for his prophetic messaging?
 3. How does God prepare people today to deliver messages of warning and of hope?
- When have you felt called to serve God in a particular way? How did this call come to you? What experiences have prepared you to respond to God’s call?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 5

- Invite participants to picture themselves as Isaiah. Discuss these questions:
 1. How do you feel about encountering God in-person?
 2. How do you feel about being asked by God to go to the people and speak for God?
- Support and pray for one another in hearing the call of God through the worship practices of your congregation.
- Distribute paper and pens. Invite participants to write an account of their personal redemption story. Encourage them to think about how God might use their story to set other people free. Conclude by praying that their lives may show the reality of God's deliverance.
- Encourage participants to choose an area where they feel there is injustice. Have them work together to identify the injustice and determine why the situation is unjust. Develop a plan to address or resolve the issue.
- One role the prophets played in the Old Testament was to hold the government accountable for what is morally right. Ask the participants to select a social issue (poverty, global warming, racism) and write letters to their local government officials urging them to give this issue their attention and do what is right.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet, and enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of Morning Prayer.
- Begin with the Prayer of the Day, pray the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Bless and challenge participants as they leave, saying, "(Name), God has heard your prayer; God has seen your tears; God blesses you."
- Extinguish the candle.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.

1. In the eighth century BCE, King Uzziah (Judah, the Southern Kingdom) and King Jeroboam II (Israel, Northern Kingdom) reigned during great but unequal prosperity. Amos (North) and Isaiah (South) criticized the concomitant social abuses contemporaneously. Isaiah's career spanned the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Amos, and Hezekiah.

2. Isaiah's call occurred in the year Uzziah died (ca. 740 BCE). His vision opens his eyes to YHWH's heavenly temple. The vision probably took place in Solomon's Temple at the entrance (curtain, "the hem of his robe") to the holy of holies, which housed the ark of the covenant, the throne of God (see 1 Kgs. 8:6–8). The six-winged seraphs cover their eyes and "feet" (nakedness), for no one can look upon the Lord and live or enter the presence of God unclothed.
3. Isaiah 7 is set during the Syro-Ephraimite War (734–733 BCE); cf. 2 Kings 16:1–20. Syria and Israel (Ephraim) are in league against Judah, and Judah's King Ahaz is afraid. Unwilling to trust in God's protection, he seeks an alliance with Assyria, which will result in Judah becoming a vassal state of the Assyrian empire.
4. God's sign to Ahaz (Isa. 7:14): by the time a child ("God with us," perhaps Isaiah or Ahaz's child) born to an already pregnant woman (not "virgin") is fully weaned, the threat from Syria and Israel will dissipate (v. 16). However, the king of Assyria will bring violence and destruction (vv. 17–20).
5. Isaiah 20 recounts the advance of Sargon of Assyria on Judah after defeating Israel (Samaria, the Northern Kingdom) in ca. 711 BCE. YHWH instructs Isaiah to perform a prophetic act ("a sign and a portent") as a warning to King Hezekiah and Judah against entering an alliance with Egypt and Ethiopia (who will find themselves naked and enslaved) against Assyria.

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Encouraging them to write Isaiah 6:8 on an index card and tape it to their bathroom mirrors. Read the verse every day, committing it to memory. Throughout the day, listen for signs of God's call.
2. Inviting them to recall the most joyous moments they have experienced. Find ways to memorialize and celebrate these moments.