



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 6:1-13

"The Holy Seed, the Stump in the Land"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we turn to Thee again with anticipation as we consider a portion from the word of God. We are grateful that we're able to do this. And we thank Thee for the power of the word of God. We thank Thee for the clarity of its teaching. And we thank Thee for the relevance of it as it pertains to us individually and to the purposes and plans that Thou hast devised for this universe of which we are a part.

And we thank Thee for the magnificence of all that Thou hast considered in the omniscient wisdom of our triune God as we think of the plan of the ages and of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and the blessings that poured out upon the people of God. We give Thee thanks. We are grateful Lord. We pray that we may understand more fully, more intimately and therefore serve Thee in a way that will be more pleasing to Thee. We ask Lord that Thou will be with us in this time together as we study a portion again from the word of God. Give direction and guidance in all of our thoughts we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well tonight we're turning to the 6th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah where we have in the concluding verses of this 6th chapter another remarkable, even

though it is a somewhat difficult prophecy. The subject for tonight is taken from that 13th verse, and the subject is, "The Holy Seed, the Stump in the Land." Now that's a very strange title, of course, "The Holy Seed, the Stump in the Land." But if you're reading the New International Version or the New American Standard Bible, you will see, of course, the place from which the title is taken. So let's turn to Isaiah chapter 6, and I think it will be good for me to read through the 13 verses. And we will give a general treatment of the opening part of the 6th chapter. But when we come to verse 11, 12, and 13 we'll try to relate it to Messianic prophecy which we have been studying.

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a

great forsaking in the midst of the land. But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof."

Now, that last verse is a very difficult verse in the Hebrew text. And not only have different renderings been given to it by Hebrew students, but there have been even attempts on the part of Hebrew scholars, due to its difficulty, to modify the text. Now, when I say modify the text or alter the text I don't mean in the utterly bad sense of just seeing plainly what the text says and not being happy about it and trying to change it. But changing it in order to make it more intelligible thinking that perhaps in the transmission of the text from the days of Isaiah down to the earliest manuscripts, say the Kumron manuscripts. And on into the present years of the Lord on up to even the 9th century quite a few changes may have occurred in the text, and so consequently thinking that perhaps a scribe has made an error here or there. And since there are some Hebrew words that are very close to other words in form, perhaps they thought that they could make it plainer by suggesting a word that Isaiah probably wrote in an attempt to make more sense out of it.

Now, such changes in the text are generally not too acceptable to orthodox men, although they realize the textual criticism is a legitimate thing. We don't have the original text of any ancient writing. And we don't have the original text of any ancient Old or New Testament writing, and so we have to use textual criticism. Now, assuming that the text that we have, the so called Masoretic text is the text that Isaiah wrote, now we're going to render it in a couple of different ways. And I'm just going to read the translation of the New American Standard Bible, and the translation of the New International Version. And if you should have one or the other of them or the King James Version, as I have before me, just notice there are certain things that are true in all of these renderings, and there are some things that are different.

So verse 13 in the New American Standard Bible reads this way, "Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, and it will again be subject to burning, like a terebinth," that's the name of a tree. The Authorized Version has a tiel tree. "A terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is felled." Well now you can see a man cutting down an oak tree and the stump or the trunk is left. And the final line of the New American Standard Bible, "The holy seed is its stump." Now, the New International Version, again, a translation made by orthodox men, reads this way, " And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land." Now, that I'd like for you to remember, "The holy seed will be the stump in the land."

Well, let's drop that for just a moment and come back to the beginning of the prophecy. Now this 6th chapter of the Book of Isaiah is one of the most remarkable revelations of the grace of God in the Old Testament. It is a remarkable unfolding of the grace of God to the Prophet Isaiah, and it's a remarkable unfolding of grace to the nation. Because remember Isaiah has already told us in the prophecy of Isaiah that Judah and Israel are not very pleasing to the Lord at the present time. They have departed from him. They are a backslidden group of people, and this remarkable 13th verse portrays for them in spite of their disobedience, a great future. And so it is a manifestation of the grace of God not only to the prophet in the forgiveness of his sins, but a manifestation of the grace of God to the nation.

Alexander McLaren, one of the great English expositors of the word of God has called Isaiah chapter 6 the "making of a prophet." And another British expositor has referred to it as the vision and the voice. It gives us Isaiah's story of his cleansing, of his call to the ministry as a prophet. And it gives us an unfolding of the particular commission that he had. And in this sense one might ask the question, well why did he wait until the 6th chapter to tell us about his call and his commission? Would it not have been more normal for him to begin his prophecy by speaking of his call and his

commission? And evidently the reason for that is simply this, that the prophet, as he thought about the ministry that he had been given by God, and as he ministered the word of God, and as he saw the response that he was getting, which was negative. People were not responsive to his ministry. They heard him, but instead of responding they seemed to be coming more and more hardened to the truths that he was propounding.

It caused him to go back and think over again his call to the ministry. Because one might think that if a person has been called to the ministry of the word of God by God, that he should be very successful, successful in the sense that many people should respond to the message and that a great group of people should grow up in the knowledge of the word of God. But Isaiah was not finding that to be true, and so it, as he is prophesying it, and he sees the response, he goes back in his own thinking and thinks again over the foundation of his call, reminding himself as well as, ultimately his readers, that when God commissioned him as a prophet he commissioned him to have a rather humanly speaking unsuccessful ministry of the word of God; very successful from God's standpoint, but unsuccessful so far as outward results and numbers are concerned.

Now, that is of course important for us too, because it makes very plain to us the fact that the sense of the blessing of God falling upon a ministry does not necessarily involve growth in numbers. People are inclined to think if we do not have growth in numbers, then something is the matter. Well, that is just not true to the word of God. The important thing is the faithfulness of the ministry as it is compared with the message found in the word of God and the devotion and dedication and stewardship of what God has given to us to proclaim. After all, in the final analysis the results are the final product of the working of the Holy Spirit. And if there is no working of the Holy Spirit or little working of the Holy Spirit, well then we should bow to that and be perfectly happy about it. If there is a great working, of course that is wonderful. But it is not always true.

I've been reading a biography of a man who labored for over fifty years in the land of Scotland. It's a rather large biography of over five hundred pages, and the print's

not that big either. It's really an account of his diary. And Kenneth McCray was a Free Church of Scotland minister and a head pastor at several places in Scotland, the longest one on the island of Lewis at the largest town Stonaway, a town of about five or six thousand people. He had a very successful ministry from the standpoint of its influence in the Free Church of Scotland, but so far as the ministry in the outward sense there was not all that response to his preaching. But he was a very faithful man. His diary reads remarkably you read day after day of his own soul searching, his anxiety to grow in grace, and to preach the word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit must have been a very exceedingly earnest man. And yet there was no unusual outward growth in responsiveness among the people of that island and also in Scotland itself. He lived in the days when the influence of the word of God was declining in the land of Scotland, and it is declined even more to the present time.

Well, we read in opening part of Isaiah 6 of the vision that the prophet had. I'm sure that most of you have read this before, because it's a well known chapter. Remember this, that Isaiah was a young man when this took place and probably no more than twenty-five years of age, for about fifty years after this he prophesied. As he says in the opening verses, prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem and the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah kings of Judah. So he was an exceedingly young man. And he's now looking back and describing what was happening when he was called to the ministry. He said that "In the year that king Uzziah died" that's the occasion.

Now, this is a date that tells us not only when a certain thing took place, but why he had this vision. Because if you will think about it for a moment you will see how appropriate it was for Isaiah the great prophet, probably the greatest prophet that Israel every had, outside our Lord, and John the Baptist, Isaiah had this great ministry. And here at the beginning of it he has this great vision. He had grown up and the only king he had known to this time was Uzziah. Uzziah was a great king. He was a man who had extended the influence of Israel in a remarkable way. I think in our study a few Tuesdays

ago I made reference to 2 Chronicles chapter 26 in which the chronicler describes Uzziah's brain in this way. "And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal." In other words, he built up the military power of Jerusalem and Judah. "And his name spread far abroad, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong." So he had unusual ministry. He was wonderfully helped by the Lord God and became strong.

"But," the chronicler says, "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense." In other words, he did something that only the priests were supposed to do. He intruded into the priestly office. They remonstrated with him, but he still did it. But even though forty or eighty of them remonstrated with him he continued to burn the incense, and while he was talking with them leprosy came on his forehead. And he spent the remainder of his days, ten years about, in a leper's house.

Now, he finally had died and Isaiah says, "In the year that king Uzziah died." Isaiah had seen then a great a rule come to an end. Uzziah, the Lord his strength or the Lord, yes the Lord his strength. He was also called, incidentally, Azzariah, or the Lord his helper. So here is a great king, Yahweh his strength, Yahweh his helper. And now he has died and Israel is left without their great king. What would you do when you're a man of God when the nation which had been so dependant upon this great man loses that man of God? Well, the man of God should go into the sanctuary of God and pray about it. And evidently Isaiah had gone into the temple because of the death of Uzziah. And so while he is there he has this magnificent vision.

Now, there are two features about this vision that are important. First, of course, the fact that he saw also the Lord. In other words, Isaiah must have been something of a hero worshipper. And the hero worship now passes and instead of the earthly king of Judah, Uzziah, Isaiah through this magnificent vision sees Yahweh come into view. The

scepter may fall from the earthly king, but not from the king who lives in heaven. And when the earthly props are swept away, he appears.

That, it seems, is one of the points that Isaiah wants to make. When "in the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne." Sometimes, you know, the things that happen to us are the things that enable us to see things that we never would have seen otherwise. You often see people frost glass. In fact something like that over there, although that is not frosted glass. Now, that glass is prepared in such a way that the light can come in but you cannot see out. Now if one of those panes over there were to be broken, then you could see out. And often we construct things about us so that we're unable to see, but then things happen and these props that we have are swept away, and then we really see things as they are. It's like looking out of your house at night when it's black, dark outside. But then in the morning when the sun comes you can see. Then of course if you have trees in your yard with lots of leaves, and you don't like to rake leaves at all, and the fall comes and you see all of these leaves just coming down like a blanket, you tend to look at that and say, "Ah, that's two or three days work. I can see it all out there now." And you long for a great wind to come down the street, which will just take those leaves up and deposit them on somebody else's yard. That will be very nice, wouldn't it?

It is true, though, that when the leaves fall then you are able to see better. And so evidently God wanted his prophet to see some things that were more important than he had been seeing. And so Uzziah dies and Isaiah sees the Lord sitting upon a throne. And furthermore he sees him high and lifted up, his train filled the temple, and he sees about the throne the seraphim. Now, he doesn't describe all the details of the seraphim. He says simply each one had six wings, with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet and with two they did fly. The seraphim, of course, were angelic beings and the word seraphim really means literally "burners." Seraph in Hebrew means "to burn." And so seraphim, it is a plural name, the Authorized Version renders it

seraphims, but that's like saying womens for women. And it should have been simply seraphim. Burners, what is suggested by this is the fact that there is nothing cold near the Lord God. And their attitude is such that they are characterized by reverence, and they're characterized by activity. They are evidently angelic beings who do hang around the throne, whether for protection or for other reasons. Of course, we do not know all of them.

But we read that "One cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." Now this three-fold repetition of the term holy, called the *trisagion*, because *hagios* in Greek is the word that means holy. And so this *tris* means three, three times. So the *trisagion*, that's a well known expression in Christian literature, the *triagion* is the three fold pronouncement of the holiness of God. Now, what is intended by this fundamentally is to express the difference between the Lord God and men. He is utterly separate from men. And so holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. There is no failure in him. He is the holy God and he does not die like Uzziah the great King. He lives on. And no doubt one of the reasons that Isaiah is given this magnificent description of the Lord God is to impress upon him the fact that we should not loose our sense of awe and Godly fear. And in the circumstances of life, when troubles come, we should remember that he is the ultimately holy one and he may be counted upon. And furthermore, he is very displeased with our sin. So three times we read, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts."

Some have said the reason for this thrice repetition of holy is because we have here an indication of the fact that God is a Trinitarian God. Well we can say at least this is in harmony with it. But there does not seem to be a real clear direct statement of that. It may be that what lies back of this on the part of the seraphim is holy is the Father. Holy is the Son. Holy is Holy Spirit. And thinking about the three persons of the Godhead, they may have said what they said, "Holy, holy, holy." We do read in verse 8, "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Notice, "Who will go for us" not for me, but for us. So we have indication here of plurality in the Godhead. And it just might be that the *triagion*, when we get to heaven we will discover, has reference to the three persons that subsist in the one Godhead.

Well, at this point Isaiah is tremendously impressed by the holiness of God, and as he comes to see God in his holiness he thinks of his own unholiness. And so in the 5th verse we read, "Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Now the grace of God is seen here in this remarkable vision of the glory of God, which the prophet has been enabled to look upon. But we can see the grace of God also in his confession and his forgiveness. And notice, and I think this is important, we see ourselves when we see God. And when Israel is given this tremendous vision of the Lord God it is then that he comes to a deeper understanding of himself. And so in the presence of the holy God, he senses his own unholiness. There is probably nothing that leads us to a deeper and more realistic sense of our sin than to live in the presence of God.

You can look at the history of the great saints of the Bible, and you will see that. You will find Job, for example, when the sense of the nature and being of God comes to him, then he expresses, of course, his own sense of failure. Listen to what Job says in 42nd chapter in the 5th and 6th verses of his book. And I'll read these verses. I'm sure they are familiar with most of you. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." And then remember Peter in the boat. When Peter first objected and said he had fished all night and he didn't think it was a very good idea to launch out into the deep in the middle of the day and try to catch fish when he had spent the whole night in the shallows where you ought to catch fish, and he had not caught a thing.

But finally he said, "Nevertheless at thy word I will launch out." And he did, and of course he enclosed a great multitude of fish, so much that the boat began to sink. And

realizing that he was not simply in a boat with Jesus of Nazareth but with the Lord God Jehovah, of course he falls down before our Lord and says, "Depart from me oh Lord, for I am a sinful man." So the sight of the Lord is the thing that leads the saints of God to the sense of their own unworthiness. And this is a truth that one sees all through the Bible and even in the last book of the Bible when John saw the Lord he says, "I fell at his feet as dead, and he laid his right hand upon me saying unto me, "Fear not. I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead. And behold I am alive forevermore. Amen. And have the keys of hell and death." So the prophet is given an understanding of the holiness of God through the vision of God and given an understanding also of his own unholiness and his need of forgiveness.

Well, I think that anyone who considers this will, and then considers easy going evangelicalism will sense that there is a great deal of difference between the mood of evangelicalism today and the mood of the Prophet Isaiah. Evangelicalism today has no clear sense of the Lord God, and the result of that is that they also have no clear sense of the holiness of God and of the demands of holiness that he makes upon his saints. It is one of the failures of evangelicalism today that what we see is very superficial, shallow forms of Christianity. And it is the lack of the vision of God and the sense of the holiness of God that has led to that. Evangelicalism is characterized by three of the besetting sins of religious people, and the first of these is callousness in worship. It's so easy after we've become Christians, and after we've been Christians for a little while to come in the church, and to come in the meetings of the assembly, and they have become, because of our familiarity with them, just a meeting that we must endure. There is a sense of callousness, a sense of unreality that characterizes us so often. And let us not think for one moment that I'm looking around and trying to criticize others. That is not true. That is true of us. I am quite sure that is true of Believers Chapel. I hope it is not so true that we shall come under the disciplinary judgment of God, but it something for us to think about, callousness in worship.

And contentment with mere form, ah we sit down and we really don't think too much about what is being done or said in our meetings. When we sing we think of other things. When the preacher preaches we think of other things. When the word of God is being read our minds are on our businesses or on our friends, or on the things that we have to do, and the result we're content with mere form. We have been to church and we have satisfied our responsibilities before the Lord God. But most of all, we are so easily satisfied with carelessness in our spiritual lives. There is only one correction that is worthwhile, and it is that which Isaiah speaks of here. It is the vision of the Lord God, and the voice of the *trisagion*. The impression that comes upon us through the Holy Spirit of the holiness of God and the justice of God and the righteousness of God, and the unholiness and unrighteousness and need that we as individual have.

We even have today in evangelicalism the view that if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ it really doesn't make a whole lot of difference what kind of life you live. Isn't that sad? It was true in Paul's day. He had to write the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans to counteract that kind of teaching. In Epistle to the Galatians he tries to counteract the same thing. But the idea that a person can believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and that it can have no effect upon his life is not a teaching of the word of God. We do not want to say at all that our salvation is dependent upon how we live, because our salvation is dependant upon the act of faith which comes from the gift of God. But that gift of God will so transform an individual's being he becomes a new creature. And he cannot help but manifest the new life. In other words, there has to be evidence of the reality of saving grace. We cannot see it necessarily, but there has to be that evidence, and that evidence may come in many different ways. I, of course, would not be able to in any way express how it should be seen. It may not be seen by us at all, but it must be there. There must be a change. And when we insist upon evidence we are not by any manner or means suggesting that that's the foundation of our salvation. It rests upon faith and faith alone in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was speaking last year with one of the faculty members of Grace Theological Seminary, the seminary that I often go up and teach a course in the summer time for a couple of weeks. And I asked the faculty members what they thought about this idea that seemed to be gaining some credence in evangelicalism that a person can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and there can be no evidence whatsoever of that act of faith, and yet there can be real salvation. And in fact, some even contend that a person can actually believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and then become an unbeliever and go to heaven anyway, an impossible kind of thing, but nevertheless it's widely being taught these days right here in Dallas as well as in other places too.

Well, I was interested in the response of the faculty member. He said, "One of our faculty members at the seminary says, when the question of the necessity of works as evidence of salvation is mentioned, some say once saved, always saved. And it doesn't make any difference how you live. But every Grace faculty member says 'Once saved, always saved, and it makes a heaven or hell difference how you live.'" And what he was trying to say was this, that it's true once saved always saved. But those who have been saved once and for all will manifest that change of life in a daily change of life as well. One of the students said, "Could we say once saved, always saved, and it makes a judgment seat of Christ difference how you live?" Well that wouldn't be bad either, because it too expresses the fact that if we truly believe there will be some evidence of that transaction.

Well so, Isaiah has seen the Lord and as a result he's seen himself in a new way. And at this point obviously he senses his own condition. And so one of the seraphim, having a live coal in his hand which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar, flew to him, and laid the coal upon his mouth and said, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Now, of course, Isaiah was already a believer, and so what we have to do here with is restoration. Evidently Isaiah had drifted a bit from the communion that he had with the Lord God or at least he had not the sense

of communion that he should have had. And so the seraph flew to him, and he was restored. I'd like for you to notice this, and we cannot spend much time on it, but he had a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. Now that is designed to express the idea that restoration comes through the judgment of sin which took place at the sacrifice. And of course, the sacrifice looks on to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, because it is his work on Calvary's cross, dying under the judgment for sin, by which we have the forgiveness of sins and also the restoration of the fellowship. The abiding principle of blessing through sacrifice is taught here, indirectly then, by the fact that the seraph takes the coal from off the altar and puts it on his lips and says, "Your iniquity has been taken away, your sin has been cleansed."

Now comes the commission. "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, "Go." I have a friend, he was from Mississippi. Now you Mississippians, if there are any here you'll pardon me for saying this, but this is the kind of outline of this 6th chapter that goes over well in Mississippi among the preachers that I know. He pointed out that in verse 5 Isaiah says, "Woe is me." And in verse 7 the seraph said, "Lo, this has touched thy lips." And now the Lord God says in verse 9, "Go." And he suggested that this is a chapter that may be divided into three parts, and the three parts of the chapter and the outline are woe, lo, and go. And that everything is summed up in that, woe, lo, go. Well, of course, there is stress on the fact that the word woe speaks of our sin, lo speaks of our cleansing, and go speaks of the commission that we all have. Of course, Isaiah's speaking about his commission as a prophet. But the same kind of thing transpires in the lives of all of us.

The call is described right after the cleansing and there is a very close connection between them. We read, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." But he has just been cleansed by the seraph and by the coal from off the altar. One can sense in this, it seems to me, the fact that the sense of redeeming love is

the greatest motivation for Christian service and Christian ministry that one could possibly have. God seeks volunteers. There are no pressed men in his army. The previous experiences made Isaiah quick to hear the call of the Lord, and he was willing to respond to it by what had happened to him. If we take the motive power of redemption from sin out of Christianity as one of the great teachers has said, "You break its main spring so that the clock will only tick when it is shaken." I like that. Because the greatest motive, power in Christianity is the sense of the forgiveness of our sins through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when a Christian realizes what God has done for him through Christ that's the greatest motive that there can exist for effective, dedicated service of the Lord God. And if that does not touch our hearts properly nothing will. We don't serve the Lord out a sense of legalism. We serve the Lord out of the sense of freedom that has come to us through the forgiveness of our sins and the fact that we have been redeemed through the blood of Christ, that we are the sons of God, that we have a glorious destiny before us. It is out of gratitude and appreciation that we serve the Lord God. So it is striking, and I think very fitting, that right after he had been cleansed, when the call comes he says, "Here am I, send me."

Now the kind of sending, of course, that he anticipated is probably sending with perhaps a little bit of glory involved in it. And he discovers that to be sent by the Lord God doesn't necessarily mean outward success. And the message that he to proclaim must have shocked Isaiah, because when he said, "Here am I, send me." Then the content of his commission is given in verses 9 and 10. And listen to it. The Lord says, "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." Isaiah, "Make the heart of this people fat," that is dull; make them fat, "and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Some individuals are sent that men may believe. But some are sent that men may hear and not believe. And Isaiah is one of them. In other words, he was sent to give a message of judgment.

That's very unpalatable to us naturally. But you see he is speaking to individuals who have for a long time turned away from the Lord God. For years now Israel had been disobedient. Over and over again he has sought to minister to them. He had sent prophets to them over and over again. There have been little responses here and there, but the nation as a whole, Judah and Isaiah as a whole as well, they have turned from the Lord God, and there times a time, a time when nations reach a point where divine retribution does come.

Now, I know you've read the Bible a good bit, but do you know this text is cited in the New Testament in several very significant places. In fact it might be good for you, if you have some time tonight and you go home and sit by your fire like I'm going to do, because I've already set the wood in my fire. And I'm going sit down and look at it, and I hope I won't go to sleep. I want to finish that book of Kenneth McCray. But get your Bible out and just look out Isaiah chapter 6 in the New Testament and you'll discover this. First of all, you'll discover that at the critical point in our Lord's ministry, when Israel after he has healed a man very significantly they've said, "This man casts out demons by Beelzebub." In other words, when he's performed his might Messianic miracle they say he's done it by means of demonic power. In effect they've said, "We don't want the Son of God, we want the opposite." And then remember when John writes his gospel, when after he has presented the seven signs he said, "Thou he had done so many miracles among them, yet they didn't believe." Just as Isaiah said, and John cites Isaiah chapter 6, and the Apostle Paul in the last chapter of the Book of Acts, when he preached the gospel in Rome, and a few responded and the mass turned away from him, he said, "Well did the Holy Spirit say through Isaiah," and he cites this passage. So there comes a time when divine retribution is the things that God must justly bring to the people to whom the word of God has come.

Now, I would suggest to you that that often happens in individual Christian churches. Now let us remember, of course, that a person who has believed in the Lord

Jesus Christ genuinely is child a God forever. What we're speaking about is divine retribution on collective groups, the nation Israel in Isaiah's day, the generation to which our Lord ministered, and then the generation to which the Apostle Paul ministered. He spoke of the generation, each of those men did. He didn't say, "Never is it said that an individual who truly believes may be exposed to divine retribution." But it may happen collectively. And of course, that is what is going to happen in the last days of the history of the church upon the earth. Because the history of the church, and all the apostles agree, that the last days of the church will be characterized by apostasy. Read 2 Peter, read 2 Thessalonians, read 2 Timothy, all those second epistles, they all stress that, that in the last days there will come a turning away from the Lord.

Now, I'm going to say something that's a little speculative because I'm not sure I can prove this. But it seems to me that this also happens to individual churches. Because the word of God is preached and proclaimed and there is a responsiveness to the word of God. And then as the years go by what we were talking about callousness, contentment with mere form, carelessness in life, and soon the whole body is effected. And result is a general indifference among the people of God, carelessness in spiritual life that leads to lethargy. And finally to a hardening of our minds and hearts and soon when the preachers preach not much is being heard.

Now Isaiah had a ministry like that. So he was told to go and tell this people, "Hear ye indeed, but understand not." Now Isaiah did exactly what I think I would have done in the 11th verse in the conclusion. He says, "Lord, how long? How long do I have to do this?" And the answer comes, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land." In other words, Israel had no hope that through his ministry there would be a change.

And then finally in the 13th verse he says, and I'm going to read again from the New American Standard Bible, 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." And what I suggest to you is Isaiah's "How long?" is answered in this way. What God says to him is Isaiah, you're going to have to preach your message and the result will be that the Lord is going to remove men in the midst of this land faraway, and there's going to be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. Isaiah's not given the details of this. We know that afterwards there came the exile. In 722 Israel was sent off into captivity. And then later on around the end of the 6th century before Christ, then of course there was the captivity of Judah as well. So they were sent far off in disciplinary action; so from Isaiah's day to 70 AD. I suggest that Isaiah is talking about two judgments here. First of all, from his own day to 70 AD when Israel would be scattered to the four corners of the earth, but then from 70 AD to the Second Advent there is also, this also is spoken of by Isaiah. He says, "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return." In other words, after the exile there'll be a few who will come back. But it shall be eaten as a teal tree and as an oak whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves." Or as the New American Standard Bible says, "Like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is fell." In other words, when the captivity is over and Israel comes back, Judah comes back to the land, then from that time on to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus we can expect another forsaking. And we know, of course, they were scattered to the four corners of the earth in 70 AD where they are now.

But that last statement is a word of hope. And he says, "The holy seed is its stump." You see, he likens Israel to an oak or a terebinth tree. They are cut down in judgment and they are sent to the four corners of the earth, but the stump is still there. Now the stump refers to the remnant of true believers. In Romans chapter 11, in verse 5, "Even in this present day," Paul says, "there is a remnant." A remnant of Jewish believers according to the election of grace. So you know, they thought evidently what some people tend to think today. I grew up in a Presbyterian church, as long as I was in a Presbyterian church unsaved, I don't think I ever heard and evangelistic message. I don't

deny that the men who were in the pulpit were at times Christians. But they all spoke to me and to others as if we were already Christians. And they based our Christianity on the fact that we had been sprinkled as children and then later on had said that we wanted to join the church. And so we had joined the church. That's the way you do it in the Presbyterian church, you know.

When you have children, you baptize them. Now, they're not made Christians by that. Presbyterian have more intelligence than that in the study of the Scriptures. But they mean that to indicate that the children belong to the covenant of grace. Outwardly, and it's outward, of course in many places it's come to be inward and taken to be equal to salvation. But I didn't grow up in that kind of church. Outwardly I came under the protection of the covenant of grace. And that at a particular time in you adult life, 12, 13, 14, 18 when you believed in Christ then you would come to the elders and say, "I have believed in Christ. I want to join the church." And then you would joining on profession of faith. You would not be re-baptized but you would be joined on profession of faith.

Now, there's very little wrong with that if it were truly carried out that way. Of course, as you know, I do believe that a person should be immersed when he believes. And I do think that the Bible teaches believers baptism rather than infant baptism. But if a person truly comes to faith in Christ and makes his acknowledgement of it before the church leaders, then one can say a little bit, one can say about that at least there is some reality there that means something. But of course, what often happens is it becomes simply a matter of form. And so a young person, when he reaches a certain age his parents say, "Don't you think you ought to join the church." And so they go to the elders and they join the church. And there's no conversion experience at all. And so the reality is not there.

Now when Isaiah speaks here of his day to 70 AD he's talking about the exile and how Israel is to come back. But at 70 AD they are scattered to the four corners of the earth but he says, "The holy seed is its stump." There was, even in the midst of Israel's

departure from the Lord and Judah's departure from the Lord, a small remnant of true believers. One can see them as our Lord ministers and there gather around him true believers. There was Simeon. There was Anna. There was Mary. There was Joseph. There was John the Baptist and the converts of John the Baptist. But the nation as a whole had departed from the Lord.

Now in the days of the Apostle Paul, as Paul preached, again there was just a remnant. He said, "It's a remnant." And so finally in 70 AD in disciplinary judgment God dispersed the nation to the four corners of the earth. So they were thinking like my Presbyterian friends think, we are the recipients of the covenants, the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and don't you know, you Gentiles that those are unconditional covenants. Yahweh is our God. And that's true. And furthermore they would say, "Not only is Yahweh our God, but you Gentiles can only be blessed if you become one of us." And that was true. If you read the New Testament that's what the apostle said. The Gentiles were without God, without hope, because they didn't have any covenants. The covenants belonged to the nation Israel. We can only be blessed to the time of Christ through faith and becoming a part of Israel. That's what Gentiles did. So they were very confident of God's special love for them. But they became people who trusted in the outward without the inner reality. And that is what happens in our Protestant churches today, in our New Testament churches. We say, "Ah, the new covenant is our covenant, and God has blessed the Presbyterian church, or the Baptist church, or whatever church it might be. And if we join this church, this is a New Testament church, we have the truth in our church. But they don't have it individually. But there is no hope for an individual who doesn't have the reality of salvation in Christ.

So the prophet said, "The nation will go into exile. They will come back. It will be a tenth," he says. There should be a tenth portion in it and it should again be subject to burning like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is felled. God in 70 AD cut the oak tree down and scattered Israel to the four corners of the earth, but the

stump was there. And Isaiah says "the holy seed is the stump." The holy seed is the remnant of true believers. The blessing of God is always for believers, for those who have the reality. And that's what Isaiah's saying.

And finally, and this is very important, I stop with this. He said the holy seed, now it doesn't take anyone who is a student of the Bible long to think seed, ah that goes all the way back to Genesis 3 and verse 15 for there God prophesied that there would come the seed of the woman. And through the seed of the woman the serpent's head would be crushed and redemption should come. And then later Abram was told, "In your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." And it turns out that Abram's seed is ultimately Jesus Christ. He's the seed. There is a holy seed of individuals who have believed in him. But they are united to him and they become part of the holy seed. And so the prophecies of God are prophecies that pertain only to the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we've seen in chapter 4, verse 2 that our Lord was called the Branch. And now in this prophecy here we have the trunk referred to; this holy seed is its stump, the trunk. And then later on in chapter 11 the prophet will say, and we'll look at this before long, "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." This is the figure by which Isaiah is being taught the Messianic unfolding of the plan of God. Ultimately, of course, he is the servant of Jehovah. And he is the leader and rallying person of the remnant of the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well our time is up. I've gone too long. So we'll save the questions for after Christmas. Next Tuesday remember we will not meet. Next Tuesday and then the Tuesday after that. But then the first Tuesday in January, which will be January, I think, the third we will meet again. And then we will look at Isaiah chapter 7. In the meantime be looking at that great Messianic prophecy of the virgin born Son. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

“The Holy Seed, the Stump in the Land” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word and for Thy truth and we are so grateful to Thee for these unfolding of the beginnings of the plan of God. Now worked out in such detail as we have seen Israel scattered to the four corners of the earth, and yet a remnant of believing Israelites and many Gentiles incorporated into Abram's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we sense, Lord, that Thou art, in Thy omnipotent power...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]