

יתרו

Isaiah

6:1-7:6; 9:5-6

Part 1

Isaiah, a member of the royal household in Jerusalem, preached for some forty years during the second half of the 8th century B.C.E. At that time, according to the prophet, idolatry was rampant; the upper classes lived in ostentatious luxury; and the God of the Covenant was all but forgotten by large masses of the people.

The sidrah contains the revelation at Sinai, an event that was witnessed by the entire people of Israel. Similarly, the haftarah brings us the personal revelation of God to Isaiah, which began his prophetic career.

6:1] In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw my Liege seated on a throne, high and exalted, with a robe whose train filled the temple. 2] Seraphim stood about, each with six wings—two covering the face, two covering the body, and two to fly with. 3] And each called to the other:

“Holy, holy, holy is the God of heaven’s hosts, whose Presence fills all the earth!”

4] At the sound of the call, the foundations shook and the temple filled with smoke.

5] “Woe is me!” said I, “I am lost; for I am a man of impure lips, and I live among a people of impure lips, yet these eyes of mine have seen the Sovereign, the God of heaven’s hosts.”

6] But one of the seraphim flew over to me with a live coal, which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7] He touched my lips with it, saying:

6:1] *In the year that King Uzziah died.* Most likely sometime between 742 and 733 B.C.E. One can assume that Isaiah wrote this section in his later years, as an autobiographical recollection.

Filled. This verb is repeated in verses 3 and 4.

2] *Seraphim stood about.* The prophet perceives angelic creatures who were attending the Eternal.

3] *Holy, holy, holy.* In the Bible, the root קדש (*k-d-sh*) refers to a visceral or emotive experience of the divine, especially in connection with the sanctuary. | Later, in rabbinic Hebrew, the same root comes to mean “to set aside, to be apart,” as in *kiddushin* (“nuptials”).

ו] בְּשֵׁנֵת-מוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ עֲזַיָּהוּ וְאַרְאָה אֶת-
אֲדֹנָי יֹשֵׁב עַל-בֶּסֶט רָם וְנוֹשֵׂא וְשׂוּלְיוֹ
מְלֵאִים אֶת-הַהֵיכָל: 2 שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים |
מִמַּעַל לֹו שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפַיִם שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפַיִם לְאֶחָד
בְּשֵׁתַיִם | יְכַסֶּה פָּנָיו וּבְשֵׁתַיִם יְכַסֶּה רַגְלָיו
וּבְשֵׁתַיִם יְעוֹפֵף: 3 וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל-זֶה וְאָמַר
קָדוֹשׁ | קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
מְלֵא כָל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ:

4 וַיִּנְעֻוּ אֲמוֹת הַסָּפִיִּם מִקּוֹל הַקּוֹרֵא וְהַבֵּית
יִמְלֵא עָשָׁן:

5 וְאָמַר אֲוִי-לִי כִי-נִדְמִיתִי
כִּי אִישׁ טְמֵא-שִׁפְתָיִם אָנֹכִי
וּבְתוֹךְ עַם-טְמֵא שִׁפְתַיִם אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב

כִּי אֶת-הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת רָאוּ עֵינָי: [6
וַיַּעַף אֵלַי אֶחָד מִן-הַשְּׂרָפִים וּבִידוֹ רִצְפָּה
בְּמִלְקָתָיוֹם לָקַח מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: 7 וַיַּגַּע עַל-
פִּי וַיֹּאמֶר

Presence. In the Tanach, כְּבוֹד (*kavod*) often describes the [radiant] glory of God.

4] *The foundations shook.* This, says Rashi, was an earthquake that (according to the Tanach) occurred during Uzziah’s reign.

5] *Impure lips.* A metaphor for speech and its misuse. (Compare Exod. 6:12; haftarah with Shof’tim, Isa. 52:1.)

Have seen the Sovereign. Isaiah thus feels he is doomed. Compare Exod. 24:10-11; 33:20; Num. 12:8.

6] *Live coal.* A metaphor: God’s challenge was like a burning coal.

Part 2

"Now that this has touched your lips,
your guilt is gone,
your sin is wiped clean."

הנה נגע זה על-שפתיה
וסר עונך
וחטאתך תכפר:

8] Then I heard the voice of my Liege saying,
"Whom shall I send? Who shall go on Our behalf?"
And I said, "Here I am; send me." 9] God said:
"Go and tell this people:

8 ואשמע את-קול אדני אמר את-מי
אשלח ומי ילך-לנו ואמר הנני שלחני:

Hear again and again—but without understand-
ing;

9 ויאמר לך ואמרת לעם הזה
שמעו שמועו ואל-תבינו
וראו ראו ואל-תדעו:

Look again and again—but without perceiving.

10 השמו לב-העם הזה

10] Dull this people's mind,

ואזניו הכבד ועיניו השע

stop its ears and cloud its eyes,

פן-יראה בעיניו

or it may see with its eyes;

ובאזניו ישמע

and hear with its ears

ולבבו יבין

and understand with its mind;

and return [to Me], and be healed."

ושב והפא לו:

11] "My Liege," said I, "how long?" And God said,
"Till cities are desolate, without people,
and houses are empty,
and the land is an utter desolation."

11 ואמר עד-מתי אדני ויאמר
עד אשר אם-שאו ערים מאין יושב
ובתים מאין אדם

12] For the Eternal will drive the people far away,
and many places in the land shall be abandoned.

והארמה תשאה שממה:

13] And even when a tenth of the people is left,
in its turn it shall be burned off like an oak or

12 ורחק יהיה את-האדם

ורבה העזובה בקרב הארץ:

terebinth,

13 ועוד בה עשריה

cut down, yet leaving a stump,

ושבה והיתה לבער כאלה וכאלון

a stump that shall be a holy seed.

אשר בשלכת מצבת בם

נרע קדש מצבתה:

7:1] When Ahaz son of Jotham, grandson of
Uzziah, ruled Judah, Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah

ויהי בימי אהז בן-יותם בן-עוזיהו מלך
יהודה עלה רצין מלך-ארם ופקח בן-

8] *Send me.* Isaiah volunteers without hesitation
(compare Moses, Exod. 3:1-4:18); his willingness
contrasts ironically with God's objective to dull
the people's minds against hearing his message.

used in the story of Moses, so here—as a warning
that the prophet's task will be frustrating.

9] *Hear again and again—but without understand-
ing.* A parallel to the story of Moses confronting
Pharaoh, whose previous crimes rendered him in-
capable of heeding (see pp. 366 ff.): Here too, Isaiah
must speak to the people, although his very rebuke
will harden them against God's word (v. 10).

11] *How long?* The language of lamentation, re-
vealing the anguish of preaching to people who hear
one's sounds but not their meaning.

10] *Stop.* Just as the word כבד (*kabbed*, harden) is

13] *Oak . . . stump.* The tree is the nation of Israel,
but from the stump that remains—the righteous
among the people—a new nation will rise. This is
the only hope held out by the prophet.

7:1-6] A historical vignette, related to the previous
verses by the thematic link between the "stump" of