

# God Sends

God calls His people to recognize and declare His sovereign purposes.

## ISAIAH 6:1-13

**MEMORY VERSE:** ISAIAH 6:8

**STUDY** Isaiah 6:1-13, noting the different responses of Isaiah in this passage. Use Explore the Text on pages 25–29 to gain insight into Isaiah's responses. Reflect on the role God's character played in Isaiah's responses.

**CREATE** a teaching plan using the ideas on pages 30–32. Focus on helping the group consider how Isaiah's responses are expressed by believers today. Consider ways of using the Music Idea (p. 32) in the group time.

**GATHER** the following items:

- ☐ Extra Personal Study Guides (PSGs)

**Prepare to display:**

- ☐ **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Prophets of the Eighth Century*)

**Make copies of:**

- ☐ **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Isaiah Time Line*)

**CONSULT** the recent articles posted on the Groups Ministry blog ([LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry)). *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* and *QuickSource* are additional resources available for purchase from LifeWay.com.

**REINFORCE** the session by leading the group to create prayer lists comprised only of people who have yet to accept Christ. Find out more about this idea in *It Starts with Prayer* at [LifeWay.com/TrainingResources](http://LifeWay.com/TrainingResources).

## KEY DOCTRINE

### Man

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God (Eph. 2:4).

## FIRST THOUGHTS

Each branch of the U.S. military has some form of saying, “Never volunteer for anything.” However, when Isaiah had an encounter with the King, the Lord of the Armies, he quickly volunteered to take on the mission God had for him. That’s what happens when a person experiences what Isaiah did. The Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah in a vision, and in this vision Isaiah recognized his sin and need for a Savior. The Lord cleansed him of his sin and then called him to service. When the Lord reveals Himself to us and saves us from our sin, the proper and appropriate response is Isaiah’s response, “Here I am. Send me.”

(In PSG, p. 19) **Why does God call and then use believers to carry out His purposes?**

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## BIBLE SKILL

*Dig deeper into the meaning and usage of key words or phrases.*

Focus on the word *glory* in Isaiah 6:3. Look up the word in a Bible dictionary to discover its basic meaning. Use a concordance to find other uses of the term in the Scriptures. Scan the passages and make notes of any findings that help you better understand the term. What does the word and its usage reveal about the nature of God?

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## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### ISAIAH 5:1–6:13

Isaiah’s call to prophetic ministry doesn’t come until chapter 6. In other prophetic books, the call is given in the first chapter. (See Jer. 1; Ezek. 1.) While we are not given a clear reason, chapter 5 may give us a hint. Chapter 5 gives the story of God’s special vineyard. The vineyard in this case is an analogy for God’s care and investment in His chosen people, Israel.

The analogy shows us things from God’s perspective. The owner of the vineyard used the best materials and resources in setting up the vineyard and caring for it. The vines were good. The land was good. The protections for the vineyard from animals and pests were good. There was every reason to expect the vineyard to produce good grapes. Yet, this was not what was produced. Instead, the owner of the vineyard received bad fruit. It’s clear, then, that the fault could not be with the vineyard’s owner.

In the analogy, of course, the vineyard represents Israel and Judah. The picture is one of God giving them every opportunity for growth and a positive relationship with Him. What’s more, the analogy is no mere description of a business transaction gone wrong; this was a personal relationship. The first verse makes it clear that the song of the vineyard was a love song. The opportunities God had given came from His love for His people. This made the resulting crop of bad fruit that much more pitiful.

What does the bad fruit represent? In 5:8-12, we see that the people were only interested in their own benefit and had no concern for others. Such attitudes ran counter to the expectations of God, who wanted His people to seek Him first. In particular, God expected His people to practice justice and righteousness. Instead, He saw injustice and heard the cries of those who experienced injustice (v. 7).

The vineyard analogy also warned the people of the coming consequences. In verses 5-6, God declared that He would remove the vineyard's protections. Wild beasts would be allowed to come in and trample and rip apart the once beautiful vineyard. In other words, foreign nations would be the instruments of God's punishment on His people. These predators would come at the invitation of the owner of the vineyard (vv. 26-30). In a series of "woes," God clearly laid out the crimes for which His people were being punished. This ensured there would be no possibility of the people of Israel and Judah thinking God was defeated. Instead, it was made crystal clear that their defeat by the foreign nations was a sign of God's justice. The people of Israel and Judah had practiced injustice; as a result, they would receive justice through destruction and exile. It is this setting that provides the backdrop for the call of Isaiah in chapter 6. As we shall see, the call of a prophet is not usually a call to a pleasant or even productive ministry as we would define it.

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "The Life and Times of Uzziah," available digitally in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## GOD'S GLORY (ISA. 6:1-4)

### Verse 1

*In the year that King Uzziah died* tells us that Isaiah saw this vision in 740 BC. Uzziah had ushered in a time of prosperity for the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The country had extended its boundaries somewhat and the economy and general wealth of the people increased. This prosperity corresponded to a similar economic and territorial growth in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. However, Jeroboam had died three years prior to Uzziah, and the Northern Kingdom had begun to falter and fail. From the perspective of several of the prophets of the time, including Isaiah, this downturn was no surprise. Amos and Hosea, for example, had long pointed out the corrupt moral state of the people and how they had turned their backs on God in the midst of their prosperity. For Israel and Judah, there was a tendency to become self-reliant and morally lax during times when physical needs were met in full. As modern believers, we still face the same temptation.

**In what ways do you become complacent about your walk with God when things are going well?**

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Anytime there is a change in leadership, whether in a business or a country, there is some fear and a sense of insecurity among the people within. This was certainly the case after Uzziah's death. Therefore, the fact that Isaiah *saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne* was no doubt encouraging. Even though the king was dead and the Northern Kingdom was beginning to decline, God was still in charge.

## VERSE 1

<sup>1</sup> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the hem of his robe filled the temple.

The initial reader of Isaiah's vision may have been cautiously optimistic because of these words. Yet, chapters 1–5 justify caution for Israel and Judah; they are described as a failed vineyard. God had promised to destroy them as a result. Indeed, the growing threat of the Assyrian Empire should have been warning enough. God was in control, but this did not mean Israel and Judah were safe in their immorality and rebellion.

That ***the hem of his robe filled the temple*** is a way of stating that God's presence and glory filled the space in Isaiah's vision. The Hebrew word translated *temple* here can also mean palace, depending on the context. If the temple in Jerusalem was the site of Isaiah's vision, Isaiah would be standing in the holy of holies—a space forbidden to all people except the high priest who could only enter once a year. The holiness and restrictions on the holy of holies were not to be taken lightly. It seems unlikely that Isaiah was standing in the most sacred space of the temple, even in a vision. Additionally, the image of God on a throne indicates that the place was some sort of divine palace.

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## VERSE 2

<sup>2</sup> Seraphim were standing above him; they each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.

### Verse 2

Within the throne room were ***seraphim*** with ***six wings***. We do not know much about these creatures, and even their name is a bit of a mystery. The root word means “burn,” so the seraphim are sometimes called “the burning ones.” Whether this means they were bright and shining or there was some sort of heat that radiated from them is difficult to know.

Two sets of the wings were used to show deference to God. It was normal to cover one's feet and face in the presence of royalty in ancient Mesopotamia, so there is no reason to think this is any different. This expression of humility is especially appropriate considering that the seraphim ***were standing above him*** (God). Their posture indicated they were in no way above God. Rather, the image, reinforced by the next verse, is one of a choir standing behind the king as Isaiah enters the throne room.

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## VERSES 3-4

<sup>3</sup> And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies; his glory fills the whole earth. <sup>4</sup> The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke.

### Verses 3-4

Crying out to each other in what was no doubt a rhythmic pattern, the seraphim stated, ***Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies***. The triple statement (holy, holy, holy) is the superlative in the Hebrew language. In other words, the seraphim were not just declaring God holy; they were declaring God is the most holy being there is. The term *armies* is a military one and shows that God not only has His own heavenly army but is also in charge of all the armies of the world, whether they recognize that fact or not. Naturally, this included the Assyrians and was a foreshadowing of the judgment to come on Israel and Judah—as well as on Assyria itself.

Another way of translating the phrase ***his glory fills the whole earth*** is “the fullness of the earth is his glory.” This depicts creation as testifying to the glory of God by the very way He created it. There is a temptation to read the verse and think that somehow God's glory is filling the spaces of the earth, but instead the earth points to the amazing Creator.

Sometimes, God's presence shows up in a way that affects the surroundings, such as God's manifestation on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16-20),

God's presence filling the Tabernacle (Ex. 40), and even the angels singing at Christ's birth (Luke 2). Here in Isaiah 6, the awesome power of God caused even the heavenly realms to shake and fill with smoke. It is too easy for the people of God to forget the glory and awe-inspiring presence of their God. Isaiah and his audience were given a major reminder.

## GOD'S FORGIVENESS (ISA. 6:5-7)

### Verse 5

With the reminder of God's holiness and power right in front of him, Isaiah declared, **Woe is me for I am ruined**. The prophet's vision of God not only showed him the nature of God, but glaringly revealed Isaiah's sinful state.

By stating that he was ruined, Isaiah was indicating that he fully expected to die. There are instances in the Bible of encounters with God leading to death. (See Ex. 33:18-20.) In contrast to God's holiness, Isaiah was **a man of unclean lips**. *Lips* in this case represent what comes out of the heart and are a representation of the whole person, inside and out. In fact, Isaiah went on to state that he was unclean and his people were unclean as well. He knew his doom would be the doom of his people. A holy God and an unclean people cannot live together. This is the problem that has existed since the fall of humanity in the garden of Eden.

### Verses 6-7

In response to Isaiah's realization and fear, one of the seraphim flew to Isaiah with **a glowing coal** to purify the prophet. The coal was taken from an altar. In Solomon's temple, there were two altars—one for burnt offerings and one for incense. If the vision took place in the temple, then while the coal could come from either altar, the altar of incense was closer to the most holy place. If, however, the vision was set in some sort of palace, then there may have only been one altar. Either way, the key point is that the altar was representative of sacrifice and purification from sin. When applied to Isaiah's **lips**, the coal in some fashion purified the prophet for his task. He would be able to speak for God and with God, which was a major part of the prophetic office. Isaiah's **iniquity** was taken away, and his **sin** was **atoned for**. He would be able to stand in God's presence because of God's action on his behalf.

In this scene, we see a foreshadowing of the gospel, both in Isaiah's human need for atonement and removal of sin, as well as in God's grace. Sadly, at this point, Isaiah was the only one who was touched by the coal. He was the only one who realized his sin and his jeopardy as he stood in the presence of a holy God. The people of Israel and Judah remained ignorant of their sin and danger.

**What events or circumstances in your life led you to realize your need to be forgiven and atoned for?**

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### VERSE 5

<sup>5</sup> Then I said: Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies.

### VERSES 6-7

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. <sup>7</sup> He touched my mouth with it and said: Now that this has touched your lips, your iniquity is removed and your sin is atoned for.



## GOD'S CALL (ISA. 6:8-10)

### VERSE 8

<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking: Who should I send? Who will go for us? I said: Here I am. Send me.

### Verse 8

In this verse God spoke for the first time: **Who should I send? Who will go for us?** Interestingly, the first question uses the singular pronoun *I*, while the second uses the plural *us*. There are differing opinions as to whether the plural refers to the three persons of the godhead (the Trinity) or if it is just a royal plural of majesty. Either way, the question drew an eager response from Isaiah. Note the prophet's emotional state at this point in contrast to verse 5. In verse 5, Isaiah was in despair for his life because he recognized his sin before the holy God. Now, having experienced both the holiness and forgiveness of God, the prophet was eager to serve. After confession and forgiveness, the natural response is worship and service. Isaiah didn't wait to hear what task God had for him; he jumped at the opportunity to serve and called out, **Here I am. Send me.**

### VERSES 9-10

<sup>9</sup> And he replied: Go! Say to these people: Keep listening, but do not understand; keep looking, but do not perceive. <sup>10</sup> Make the minds of these people dull; deafen their ears and blind their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their minds, turn back, and be healed.

### Verses 9-10

Isaiah received his mission, and it was not a pleasant one. He was to tell the people to **keep listening** without really understanding. They would continue to see what was in front of them without really grasping its significance. Our parent and child analogy from Isaiah 1 comes to mind. A father asks a son to clean his room. When the child's room remains in a state of chaos, the father asks his son if he heard the instructions. If the son says *yes* but still makes no effort to clean the room, we can agree that he was not really listening to his father. Hearing did not lead to real understanding or obedience. In the same way, Isaiah would represent God's words to the people but they would make no effort to listen or change.

Verse 10 uses a pattern of **minds ... ears ... eyes** then **eyes ... ears ... minds** to show that Isaiah's mission was meant to show the hopelessness of the people's situation. The prophet's message would actually make the people tune him out. Even as repeated sin in our own lives can make us unresponsive to the Holy Spirit's conviction, so too would Isaiah's message harden his listeners' hearts. They were so used to ignoring God's requirements that no amount of reminding would stir them to change their ways. Then we get to an idea that seems shocking at first: this was the way God wanted it. He did not want the people to **turn back, and be healed.**

Why would the Lord want such a thing? Isn't the word of God supposed to change the hearts of His people? Isaiah's mission and God's stance here seem counterintuitive to us. If we dig a little deeper, though, there are four elements that explain this message.

First, God would have foreseen the response of the people. He knew they would not hear and repent. He was simply telling Isaiah what he could expect from his prophetic work.

Second, the word of God reveals the condition of the hearer. Even as bringing a light into a room will result in different reactions from different creatures based on their nature, so too does the hearing of God's word.

Third, as revealed in verse 9, the people had already made their choice. Just as Pharaoh's repeated rebellion against God led God to ordain him for

judgment, the people of Judah and Israel chose to rebel against the Lord time and time again. As a result, God condemned them to judgment.

Finally, there comes a point when sin must be paid for. God cannot and will not allow it to continue indefinitely. When that time comes, it is too late for repentance. Any repentance the people did make would have likely been superficial, and that was not what God wanted.

Jesus used Isaiah 6:9-10 in His teaching. He cited these verses in Matthew 13:14-15 while teaching the disciples about His use of parables. He told them that those who do not care enough to seek out the meaning behind the parables are like the ones Isaiah described who hear but do not really understand. Likewise, in John 12:40, Jesus cited a version of Isaiah 6:10 to explain the unbelief of many of the people. In Acts 28:26-27, verses 9-10 are again quoted as evidence of why many refused to believe Paul's message about Jesus.

**Does Isaiah's mission inspire you to share the gospel message with others? Why and in what ways?**

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## GOD'S PERSISTENCE (ISA. 6:11-13)

### Verses 11-13

Isaiah's eagerness to serve turned to something like discouragement or even despair. He asked, **"Until when, Lord?"** We can feel for the prophet at this point, for no one wants to continue a miserable task longer than they have to do so. It is also important to remember that the prophet loved his people. Having his message rejected and being isolated as a result would bring emotional pain.

While God's answer was not encouraging, neither was it completely without hope. He told Isaiah that almost complete destruction must happen before the punishment was complete. The description of a land **without inhabitants** and cities in **ruins** is stark and reflects the threats of destruction that God levels at the vineyard in chapter 5. Those who would survive the destruction of the land would be carried away in exile to complete the purification of the land. After these events, only **a tenth** of the former population would remain. That tenth will suffer yet more judgment. Yet, just when all seemed lost, God gave Isaiah cause for hope. He described the people of God as the **stump** of a felled oak tree. While it appeared dead, it still had life in it. From that stump, a seed of life would germinate. From a remnant, the people of God would be renewed.

**When have you found it difficult to remain faithful because there seems to be no hope of change? What enabled you to keep trusting God?**

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### VERSES 11-13

<sup>11</sup> Then I said, "Until when, Lord?" And he replied: Until cities lie in ruins without inhabitants, houses are without people, the land is ruined and desolate, <sup>12</sup> and the LORD drives the people far away, leaving great emptiness in the land. <sup>13</sup> Though a tenth will remain in the land, it will be burned again. Like the terebinth or the oak that leaves a stump when felled, the holy seed is the stump.

# LEAD **GROUP BIBLE STUDY**

## FOCUS ATTENTION

**RESPOND:** As the group arrives, direct them to share with a partner their responses to the following question:

***Identify an experience in your life that you just can't keep from telling others. How did that experience impact your life?*** After most have arrived, share your response to the question. Invite volunteers to share their responses as well.

**TRANSITION:** Read the first paragraph on page 19 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG) to help the group focus on life-altering experiences that include God. Explain that Isaiah shared about an experience that impacted his life greatly. Challenge the group to look for how Isaiah's encounter with God impacted his life.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**INTRODUCE:** Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Isaiah Time Line*). Note key events surrounding Isaiah's life, highlighting Uzziah's death. Call attention to Isaiah 6:1, and summarize information about Uzziah (PSG, p. 21). Review **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Prophets of the Eighth Century*) for further understanding of the timing and events surrounding Isaiah.

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**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read aloud **Isaiah 6:1-4**, as the group listens for ways God is described.

**RESPOND:** Invite volunteers to highlight the element in the passage that stands out most to them. Allow them to explain. Clarify as needed using information from the Leader Guide and your personal study.

**REVIEW:** Call attention to the repeating of the word "holy" in verse 3. Explain that the repeating of the word three times was

a Hebrew way of declaring something supreme. Direct the group to review the paragraph about the word "holy" on page 22 in the PSG. Highlight the last sentence of the paragraph, inviting the group to respond.

**ASK:** *How should God's holiness affect how we think about God and how we live for Him?* (PSG, p. 22)

**TRANSITION:** *Isaiah continues by sharing his response to what he witnessed.*

**PROPOSE:** Direct the group to read silently Isaiah 6:5, and prepare to describe Isaiah's response in one word. Allow volunteers to propose their chosen word (potential words: *fearful, humbled, repentant, honest*). Record words on a board. Allow the group to share about experiences when they encountered God and responded in a similar way.

**SEARCH:** Call attention to cross references listed with verse 5 included in a study Bible (potential references: Ex. 33:20; Isa. 59:3; Jer. 9:3-8). Assign the passages to volunteers, directing them to locate each one. Allow them read the passages aloud. Ask: ***How do these passages help us better understand Isaiah's response?***

**DISCUSS:** *What does Isaiah's response reveal about humanity? What was the importance of Isaiah declaring his sinfulness?*

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**READ:** As you read aloud **Isaiah 6:5-7**, call for the group to observe God's actions.

**EXAMINE:** Direct the group to read the comments under Verses 6-7 in the PSG (p. 24). Guide them to discuss with a partner the comments read. Challenge them to identify the sentence that gives them the most hope or assurance. Direct partners to discuss their responses to the



questions at the end of the comments for verses 6-7. After allowing for discussion, invite volunteers to share insights gained by reading and discussing the paragraph and questions. Emphasize that God took the initiative in forgiving Isaiah of his sin and that God takes the initiative in providing salvation to us through Jesus.

**TRANSITION:** *God broke the silence, posing a question to which Isaiah responded.*

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**READ:** Direct the group to read silently **Isaiah 6:8-10**, looking for Isaiah's response.

**CLARIFY:** Point the group to the PSG for insight into God's question and Isaiah's response in the comments on verse 8 (PSG, p. 25). Ask: ***How would you characterize Isaiah's response?***

**DISCUSS:** ***How is Isaiah's response connected to God granting him forgiveness? How is our willingness to share with others about Jesus connected to Him granting us forgiveness?***

**MINI-LECTURE:** Present a brief summary of the comments about verses 9-10. Emphasize that God called Isaiah to proclaim God's message clearly, regardless of the response.

**DISCUSS:** ***How has your response to the question on page 26 of the PSG changed as a result of today's discussion?***

**READ:** Comment that if we were told that people would not respond to us delivering God's message, we would most likely wonder how long we were to deliver that message. **Call for a volunteer to read **Isaiah 6:11-13****, directing the group to listen for God's answer to Isaiah.

**PROBE:** Invite volunteers to share responses they might have anticipated to Isaiah's question. Direct attention to the title given in the PSG for this section of the

passage (God's Persistence). Lead the group to discuss how God's persistence is seen in this passage. Focus on God continuing to offer salvation through faith in His Son. Encourage the group to be thankful that God is persistent in the pursuit of a relationship with His people.

## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

**REINFORCE:** Remind the group of the beginning activity (sharing life-defining moments). Lead them to discuss how this encounter with God was a life-defining moment for Isaiah. Invite volunteers to share how their encounters with Jesus were life-defining moments for them. Inform the group that you will be available following the group time to share with anyone who wants to know more about Jesus and His offer of forgiveness.

**REVIEW:** Call attention to the four statements under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 27). Challenge the group to select one statement they most needed to know or be reminded of. Direct them to record in the margin their reasons for selecting that statement, assuring them they won't be asked to share aloud. Challenge them to reflect each day this week on that statement.

**RESPOND:** Prior to the group time, select one of the question sets under Apply the Text. Lead the group to respond to the selected questions.

**PRAY:** Conclude the group time with prayer, thanking God for inviting His people to deliver His message. Ask that God help the group be faithful in delivering His message.

## OPTIONS

Consider these options to customize your group time. For additional questions, consult *QuickSource*. To use a current event to introduce or conclude the group time, go to [Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) (click on Weekly Adult Extra under the Resources drop-down menu).

### MUSIC

Secure a copy of “Holy, Holy, Holy,” by Reginald Heber. Before leading the group to sing the hymn, review the words. Lead the group to identify ways the lyrics are seen in Isaiah 6.

### VISUAL

***Gather art supplies.***

Provide art supplies, and invite the group to create images that represent what Isaiah saw in verses 1-4. Allow volunteers to explain their image and the symbolism they included.

### PROBLEM SOLVING

Verse 8 depicts the Trinity as dialoguing about who would deliver their message to the wayward Israelites. Place the group into smaller teams and direct each team to identify potential deliverers of God’s message and the pros and cons of each. Help the group understand that the person most qualified would be a person like the ones to whom the message was to be delivered who had discovered God’s forgiveness. Emphasize that God continues to use people like the ones He is seeking to save to deliver His message.

### PHYSICAL

***Gather tongs and a lump of charcoal.***

Display a lump of charcoal. Call on a volunteer and present him or her with tongs. Invite the volunteer to use the tongs to pick up the charcoal and then move around the room so each person can

get a closer look at the charcoal. Discuss the role the tongs and burning ember played in Isaiah 6 as the volunteer moves around the group.

### DRAMATIC PRESENTATION

Recruit two volunteers to play the role of the voice of God and Isaiah, reading the passage as a dialogue between the two. You may want to serve as the narrator, presenting verses 1-4 and calling on the rest of the group to function as seraphim, calling out to each other the words recorded in verse 3.

### COMPARISON

Direct the group to compare Isaiah’s encounter with God and Paul’s encounter recorded in Acts 9. Lead the group to discuss: *How are the accounts similar? How are they different? How does one encounter help us understand the other encounter? How do these compare to how we came to understand our need for Jesus?*

### RESEARCH

Pre-enlist a group member to prepare a presentation on the life of Uzziah. Direct the volunteer to consult a Bible dictionary and other sources for assistance. Encourage the person to include why Uzziah’s death was significant as a marker in time. Call for the volunteer to present his or her findings to the group.