

Buzz King  
[buzz@BuzzKing.com](mailto:buzz@BuzzKing.com)  
BuzzKing.com  
303 437 7419

### **Isaiah 6:1–8, New Living Translation**

*It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. <sup>2</sup>Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup>They were calling out to each other,*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven’s Armies!  
The whole earth is filled with his glory!”*

*<sup>4</sup>Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke.*

*<sup>5</sup>Then I said, “It’s all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.”*

*<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>He touched my lips with it and said, “See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.”*

*<sup>8</sup>Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?”*

*I said, “Here I am. Send me.”*

### **Spiritual ears.**

Before I tell you the following story about myself, let me say that I have never been arrested, never committed any violent crime, have never even had a traffic ticket. I was a straight A student all the way through school, never got into trouble in or out of school – and I was a totally boring follow-the-rules Christian

kid. Well, most of time I was a follow-the-rules kid. Here is the story. I had a rather short boy scout career. I made it all the way to Tenderfoot. I earned one merit badge, horsemanship, believe it or not. They took us to a stable where we were all supposed to learn how to saddle a horse, get the reins on it, get up on the thing, and then the big part was to make the horse march around and do stuff in a ring. It all looked pretty intimidating to me, so I asked the owner of the ranch if he had a horse that would be nice and compliant and could do all the riding stuff by itself. He grinned, winked at me, and then said that when he handed out horses, he would give me his horse. I passed the test in a flash and while the other kids slaved in the hot sun with their stubborn horses, I sat in the shade and drank lemonade. But that's not the story I want to tell. Here is the real story.

When I was growing up in Oxnard, California, in Ventura County, near the beach, in a wonderful place that I loved, a large apartment complex was being built near me. It consisted of perhaps ten or twelve buildings, each with exterior steel and cement external staircases, and each building had three floors. I loved to hang around construction sites, and I spent a lot of time at the site of these apartment buildings while they were going up. They had to blast through some rock to build a couple of them, and that was a lot of fun to watch. One Sunday afternoon, as I was wandering through the piles of lumber, the windows stacked and ready to be

installed, and the roofing materials piled on large palettes, I came across what I instantly realized was dynamite. Now, I only stole one stick. Just one. I knew enough to steal a blasting cap, as well. And as it turned out, I had a great opportunity to make use of the stick of dynamite – at a scout jamboree that I was going to the next week. I chose a time when almost everyone was off on a hike, made sure that the area was clear, and then I blew up a dirt hillside. It was fantastic. That was also the end of my boy scout career. One of the scoutmasters who talked to me as I was being dishonorably discharged said something interesting. He told me that he knew that I thought I was doing it safely, that I was being careful not to hurt anyone. But did I know that if anyone had been even close to the hillside, I could have damaged their hearing? I was far away when I set off the dynamite, but suppose someone had been closer? “If anyone had been closer than you, but not right on the hillside, would you have set off the dynamite anyway?” he asked. I said yes. He said, “that’s why kids don’t play with dynamite. You’re not old enough to think of everything. You could have deafened a boy.” I said I understand. And I did.

Let’s look at our passage. It’s from the book of Isaiah. He was one of the great Prophets. We know very little about his personal life. His name means “Yahweh - or God - gives salvation”. Isaiah served as a prophet in Judah, the

southern part of Israel, which includes Jerusalem. He prophesized between 742 and 687 B.C. Judah was under the domination of Assyria. The northern part of Israel was no longer even minimally independent and was owned by Assyria.

When he spoke for God, Isaiah spoke about having faith in God, about the rewards of living by God's laws – and about the dangers of disobeying them. One thing to remember about prophets is that they often answer to a majestic, very literal call from God. That's what our passage is about. Isaiah tells us what happened when he was asked by God to answer the call of God. Here is an abridged form:

*It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. God was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple.<sup>2</sup> Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings.<sup>3</sup> They were calling out to each other,*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven's Armies!  
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*I said, “Here I am. Send me.”*

Isaiah actually heard an audible voice – the voice of God. In most of the other instances of Old Testament prophets being called to speak for God, to be God's intermediary between God and the People of God, the prophet initially hesitates,

sometimes even trying to refuse. They are filled with awe and fear - and want to run away. But not Isaiah. He does not hesitate. He instantly responds: "Here I am. Send me." These have become very famous biblical words. Isaiah was a prophet during an extremely trying time for the Israelites. The massive empire of Assyria was rapidly expanding, overrunning the land that God had given to the People of God. Isaiah is there to tell his people that God is punishing them for having become corrupt and no longer living moral, ethical lives. Isaiah, by the way, was very concerned with social justice, with everyone in a society being treated with dignity and respect, something that the Israelites had forgotten.

All of us would be very excited to hear the voice of God the way that Isaiah heard it – clear and loud - and literal. We are not so lucky. It is God's grace within us that acts as the voice of God. That is what we must listen to. Isaiah only needed his physical ears. We need to pay attention to our spiritual ears.

This is my best advice on how to open up your spiritual ears. 1. The way to start is to pull yourself away from whatever in life is making your spiritual ears deaf. Leave your TV, your computer, your cell phone, whatever physical things are yelling at you. The louder the voice in your physical ears, the harder it is for your spiritual ears to hear. 2. Next, ask yourself what you would like to change about yourself to make yourself a better, deeper, truer Christian. Often, it's the

way that you think about certain people or certain classes of people. It can be envy about the things that other people have in life. It can be bitterness about things you don't have. It could be arrogance over your success or wealth. Don't try to fix it. Don't sit there and wallow in guilt. Just acknowledge what it is that you should change. This makes you humble. It allows you to expose yourself to God by making yourself vulnerable spiritually. 3. Next, think about God, about how amazing it is that we have a creator whom we can hear. We don't run around ignorant of God. As believers, we are thankful for scripture and for the legacy of faith in our culture that tells us that there truly is a God who cares about us, wants the best for us, and is waiting to hold us forever. Focus on just how beautiful God is. 4. Next, talk to God. You can use your physical voice. Or you can use your spiritual voice. You don't even have to use words. You can just calmly focus on how much you want God to speak to you, to guide you, to bless you, to walk with you every step through life. 5. If there is something that has been truly bothering you about life, now is the time to bring it to God. Don't tell God you want a new car. But please do tell God if you feel a raw, agonizing anxiety, if your spouse or child is sick, if you are facing financial ruin, or a dangerous illness, or a spouse who wants to leave. Ask God to please intercede and do whatever is best for you as a believer in the long run. Let God decide what

is best. If you also feel particularly blessed, perhaps by healthy children, a secure and nurturing home, a crisis that has passed, now is the time to offer your thanks to God. 6. Finally, just remain quiet and listen. I cannot tell you how many times you might have to connect with God before you will be sure your spiritual ears are indeed working – but sooner or later, they will open up - and you will hear the voice of God. That voice will be louder than a dynamite blast.

The only person in my family who ever learned that I got kicked out of the boy scouts, rather than deciding to quit on my own, was my father. When I told him, he said I should thank God that I did not harm anyone. He asked me if I would ever do anything like that again. I said no, and I said I was particularly thankful that I didn't damage anyone's hearing – because I had indeed not thought about that danger at all. Here is something very important: Be respectful of other people's spiritual ears. Help your fellow believers develop their spiritual hearing. One thing you can do is find someone to pray with. It might be most comfortable if it is your spouse or another close relative. It might be most comfortable if it is someone to whom you are not at all related. Don't feel you have to get down on your knees, close your eyes, fold your hands and mumble the kinds of stuff you have heard in the past about our almighty God, gracious redeemer, and blessed savior. You can just use simple language. Pray with

another person. Consider talking to that person about how much you want to open your spiritual ears. Tell each other how you hear God, or how you are hoping to hear God. Perhaps you *do* want to sit down in a quiet place and close your eyes and pray back and forth, with each of you taking turns offering thanks to God and asking God to step into your life in a more obvious fashion.

The important thing is that you never stop trying to use your spiritual ears and that you never grow frustrated if you don't feel your spiritual ears have good hearing. God sometimes talks in a way other than what we might expect. Trust God to speak to you in the best way possible. Above all else, remember that God is always looking for people to speak for God. We are all prophets in the sense that we are all representatives of God in a world filled with cruelty and pain and hatred. One thing you can do when you pray is tell God that you are ready, that you are there to speak for God. This is something very good to say to God: "*Here I am. Send me.*" Please pray with me.

*God, help me clear the spiritual earwax out of my spiritual ears. Help me hear your voice. Help me offer myself up as a follower of Jesus Christ, as someone who lives with empathy and kindness, as someone who wants the very best for all of your children. God, you made me in your image – and that means that I do have spiritual ears. Help me use them! AMEN.*