

# HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

## ISAIAH 6:1-7

Isaiah's Vision of the Lord

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*6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”*

*<sup>4</sup>And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”*

*<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup>And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”* ESV

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Introduction

I love that hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy” written by Reginald Heber (1783-1826) and John B. Dykes (1823-1876)

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty,” read Reginald Heber's widow. Among her dead husband's papers, she found the words of one of the most powerful and beautiful hymns ever written. But years would pass before the lines took their place in worship services around the world.

In 1861, a publisher rediscovered the words. He asked John Bacchus Dykes to furnish him with a tune. It made sense for him to turn to John who had a natural aptitude for music (he graduated with a music master that same year). John had been a church organist since he was ten-years-old and was co-founder and president of the Cambridge University Musical Society.

John accepted the words. Within thirty minutes he wrote the tune "Nicea," which carried the praise of the Trinity to Christians everywhere.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christianity.com, John Dykes Composer of “Holy, Holy, Holy”

There are only two places where we see the expression in the Bible, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Isaiah 6:3 and the Apostle John’s praise and worship of God found in Revelation 4:8. There are subtle differences:

*Isaiah 6:3 - Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*

*Revelation 4:8 – Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!*

Heavenly creatures are uttering the words in worship of God in both cases. In Isaiah’s testimony it is the Seraphim, angelic creatures who call “*to another and say, Holy, holy, holy.*” In John’s Revelation, it is the four living creatures who “*day and night they never cease to say Holy, holy, holy.*”

*Holy* in the Hebrew is “qadowsh” (kaw-doshe’) and in most cases indicates something that is “sacred ceremonially or morally.” In general, holy means “to be set apart.”

Leviticus 11:44-45; as well as many other places, God proclaims “*...ye shall be holy; for I am holy:*”

Twenty-four times in the Old Testament, holy is used in reference to Tabernacle or Temple, “*in the holy place.*”

Holy can be applied to; “being consecrated or singled out”, “those things that are given in offering to God”, “the holiness of a place (Tabernacle or Temple, etc.)”, “to be removed from common use”, and “the faithful”

The moral attribute of God is His holiness.

One does not define God. Similarly, the idea of holiness is at once understandable and elusive. Nevertheless, there is not term equal to the fullness inherent in holiness. All of heaven’s hosts, Israel, and the church ascribe praise to a holy God because that idea sets him apart from everything else (Exod. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). Holiness is what God is. Holiness also comprises his plan for his people.<sup>2</sup>

With that in mind, let us begin our look at Isaiah 6:1-7 and Isaiah’s call to be a prophet for God.

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**6:1** *In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*

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Isaiah identifies the time in which he is writing and called to speak for God to "this people."

*In the year that King Uzziah died* – Thiele identifies King Uzziah’s death from leprosy at 740-739 B.C. Uzziah was the king over Judah at the same time that Jeroboam II was king in Israel. His reign brought about national prosperity. King Uzziah was probably the last great king over the southern kingdom of Judah. F. Delitzsch says, “The national glory of Israel died out too with King Uzziah and has never been recovered to this day.”

The outlook for the nation of Judah was bleak. In contrast to Isaiah’s mood and the condition of the Southern Kingdom, is the throne room of God.

The true King over all the world is still on the throne: The Lord is “*sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*” God is on the throne and I believe it would be good to be reminded that God is still on the throne today!

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<sup>2</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Elwell, W. A. (1996). In *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Isaiah's vision of the throne room is awe inspiring. He sees the "*Lord sitting on a throne*" - "*Adonai*" is the "royal title" of God. Adonai is always explained as the plural of majesty. In the Bible, it is only used to refer to God. Historically, the Jews stepped away from using the Tetragrammaton during the Hellenistic period and replaced YHWH with "Adonai" in their speaking about God and in their prayers.

Each of these symbols—the title Lord, the throne, the lofty position, and the all-encompassing robe—reinforced His sovereignty over all of the universe, over all its kings, over all of their nations, and over all peoples, including the chosen children of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

These symbols point to the sovereignty of God, however, sovereignty is not the focus of Isaiah in chapter six. The moral character of God is His Holiness.

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<sup>2</sup> *Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*

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*Above him stood the seraphim* – This is the only mention of the Seraphim. They are associated with fiery serpents and are supernatural, angelic beings having the ability to fly. The Hebrew name means “the burning ones.”

...*Above him stood* does not necessarily mean that they were higher than the God seated on His throne, rather it means that they stand before or between the spectator and the Lord that is high and lifted up. Standing also doesn't mean that they are not hovering before God and the spectator; “and with two wings he flew.”

...*each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew* - These winged creatures are standing in the presence of the Lord in the throne room. In humility, the Seraphim cover their face and feet before God. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

Since this is the only place in scripture where seraphim are identified, I think it would be safe to say that these creatures relate to the holiness of Adonai.

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<sup>3</sup> *And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”*

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The Seraphim *called* to one another – We should not think that there were merely two seraphim. There could have been more than two and possibly it could mean there were two groups or choirs of seraphim.

*Holy* – Holiness when implied to God's nature, indicates His absolute moral purity, in this case above His creation of *the whole earth*. As we have discussed, the Lord's central characteristic is ascribed as His holiness. His holiness is the opposite of man with our sinful nature, impurity and lustful desires of our hearts. To define holy is very simple; holy = God.

Isaiah's favorite superlative of God is His holiness. 25 times, Isaiah identifies God as “*the Holy One of Israel*.”

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<sup>3</sup> McKenna, D., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1993). *Isaiah 1–39* (Vol. 17, pp. 106–107). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.

“*Holy, holy, holy*” – in Jewish writing, the repeating of a word or thought is a way of expressing the importance of the word. For example, when speaking about the place that God dwelt in the Tabernacle or the Temple, it is referred to the “Holy of Holies” or *the Most Holy Place* (1 Kings 8:6).

(McKenna & Ogilvie, 1993) write: “Holy, Holy, Holy.” No other attribute is so praised. Angels do not sing, “Love, Love, Love” or “Justice, Justice, Justice”—they only sing “Holy, Holy, Holy.”<sup>4</sup>

There are many suggestions on why the seraphim repeated “holy” three times.

- It is used to show the trinity, three persons in one, the Godhead; as in saying Holy is the Father, Holy is the Son, Holy is the Spirit
- Repeating “holy” three times is presenting the “perfection” of God...three is one of the signs of perfection in the Scriptures.
- Repeating “holy” three times strengthens and deepens the superlative of how Holy God is.
- Repeating “holy” three times increases the claim that God is wholly, entirely, and unquestionably the holiest of the holy!
- Repeating “holy” three times: “Holy is He who created us.” “Holy is He who redeemed us.” “Holy is he who sanctifies us.”

...*is the Lord of hosts* – “Yahweh Sabaoth”, The Lord of the Heavenly Armies. It is also written as “Lord Almighty.” His army is unseen to the human eye:

When the king of Syria brought his troops to fight with Israel, Elisha’s servant was afraid by the massive array of military might that the Syrian’s brought. Lets pick up the story found in 2 Kings:

*2 Kings 6:15-17* 15When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" 16He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (ESV)

Jehovah Sabaoth is in charge of the hosts of heaven. Perhaps when the odds are stacked against us we could respond like David, “Whom shall I fear?”

*Psalms 27:1* A Psalm of David. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

...*the whole earth is full of his glory* – The seraphim include the creation of the earth when describing the glory of God. Oh how a beautiful sunset or sunrise can take our breath away. The sun breaking through the clouds after a storm brings hope and beauty. Yes the world is filled with His glory.

#### Conclusion

It is God’s holy and glorious presence in which our holiness begins. The Lord proclaims His holiness to Moses:

*Leviticus 19:1-2* 1And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

“Be ye holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16).

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<sup>4</sup> McKenna, D., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1993). *Isaiah 1–39* (Vol. 17, p. 107). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.

This may come as a surprise to some, but this is not a request...it is a command from God.

*2 Corinthians 7:1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*

Church, do we look at God as being Holy? How do we picture God in our minds?

Shouldn't we be looking at the LORD of HOSTS, beholding His Holiness?

OH, this morning, can we worship God in the beauty of his holiness? (Psalms 29:2)

David understood that God was Holy and that he was worthy to be praised.

Worship the LORD today as you listen as I read the 27<sup>th</sup> Psalm.

*1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

*2 When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.*

*3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.*

*4 One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.*

*5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.*

*6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.*

*7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!*

*8 You have said, "Seek my face."*

*My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek."*

*9 Hide not your face from me.*

*Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help.*

*Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!*

*10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in.*

*11 Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.*

*12 Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.*

*13 I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!*

*14 Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*