

Holy is the Lord

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Isaiah 6:1–4 | December 4, 2022

INTRODUCTION

- Last Sunday I talked about How to Love God
- This week I want to talk about why that is important
- To do that I want to invite you to take God’s Word and turn to Isaiah chapter 6
- As we begin the Christmas season, we are going to hear what people truly believe about God about Christ and about the Holy Spirit
- So today I want us to see how God is presented in the Bible
- The Bible is our authority not man or tradition
- Read [Isaiah 6](#).
- The book of Isaiah is one of the most significant books in the Old Testament
- Its title is taken from its author whose name means “The LORD is salvation”
- It’s similar to Joshua, Elisha, and Jesus
- Isaiah is quoted directly in the New Testament over 65 times, far more than any other Old Testament prophet (MacArthur)
- It is also mentioned by name over 20 times (MacArthur)
- The book of Isaiah was written by Isaiah the son of Amoz (1:1)
- His ministry extended some 60 years from 739 to about 681 B.C. (Richards)
- In other Old Testament books we see God’s power and righteousness like in Exodus
- We see His justice in the Book of Judges
- But in Isaiah the veil of history is pulled aside and we see God directly in all His glory
- Just like the veil is removed in [Job 1-2](#), it is removed in Isaiah chapter 6
- Isaiah spoke out to Judah during the critical years of the Assyrian expansion, when the Northern Kingdom, Israel, was destroyed (Richards)
- After 52 years of prosperity, the king is dead
- Judgment is imminent

- Isaiah comes into the temple
- And in a vision He sees God on His throne
- Notice the time of the vision in verse 1
- Isaiah says, “in the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw the LORD”

LESSON

I. The Vision (vv.1-4)

- The time (v.1)
 - “In the year of King Uzziah’s death”
 - This was in 740 B.C. (NET Bible)
 - Isaiah’s ministry began in the last year of Uzziah’s life (FSB)
 - Just a footnote: Uzziah was also known as Azariah
 - [2 Kings 15:7](#), “And Azariah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and Jotham his son became king in his place.”
 - [2 Chronicles 26:22-23](#), “22 Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first to last, the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, has written. 23 So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the grave which belonged to the kings, for they said, “He is a leper.” And Jotham his son became king in his place.”
 - He ascended to the throne when he was 16 years old and reigned for 52 years
 - In the past fifty-two years the United States has witnessed the administrations of Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan. But many people in Jerusalem lived their entire lives under the reign of King Uzziah (Sproul)
- The occasion
 - is the death of Uzziah
 - The question not answered in verse 1 is the cause of his death
 - What caused it?
 - › It was...
 - Uzziah’s sin
 - [2 Chronicles 26:16](#) attributes it to pride
 - As we have seen on other occasions, pride brings down kings and kingdoms (Remember Nebuchadnezzar who was made like an animal until he recognized “that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes” [Dan.4:25](#))

> [2 Chronicles 26:16-22](#) records what happened when it says...

2 Chronicles 26:16–22 NASB95

¹⁶ But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.

¹⁷ Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men.

¹⁸ They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, “It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God.”

¹⁹ But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense.

²⁰ Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he *was* leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him.

²¹ King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son *was* over the king’s house judging the people of the land.

²² Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first to last, the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, has written.

- Uzziah’s death is attributed to the consequences of his sin
 - His epithet was not about his amazing accomplishments like developing Judah into a strong commercial and military state
 - Or making a port for commerce on the Red sea
 - Or the construction of walls, towers, and fortifications
 - Or that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord
 - [2 Chronicles 26:5](#), “He continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding through the vision of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him.”
 - [2 Chronicles 26:8-10](#), “8 The Ammonites also gave tribute to Uzziah, and his fame extended to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong. 9 Moreover, Uzziah built

towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and at the Valley Gate and at the corner buttress and fortified them. 10 He built towers in the wilderness and hewed many cisterns, for he had much livestock, both in the lowland and in the plain. He also had plowmen and vinedressers in the hill country and the fertile fields, for he loved the soil.”

- [2 Chronicles 26:13-15](#), “13 Under their direction was an elite army of 307,500, who could wage war with great power, to help the king against the enemy. 14 Moreover, Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows and sling stones. 15 In Jerusalem he made engines of war invented by skillful men to be on the towers and on the corners for the purpose of shooting arrows and great stones. Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong.”
- That was his downfall and in spite of all his accomplishments, he is only remembered as “a leper”

2 Chronicles 26:23 NASB95

²³ So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the grave which belonged to the kings, for they said, “He is a leper.” And Jotham his son became king in his place.

> We now see...

- Isaiah’s vision (vv.1-4)

> He begins by saying...

- He “saw the Lord” (v.1)
 - [1 Timothy 6:16](#) says “no man has seen or can see” the Lord
 - God told Moses in [Exodus 33:20](#), “you cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”
 - But he was allowed to see “the form of the LORD” ([Num.12:8](#))
 - That’s why the apostle John said in [John 1:18](#), “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”
 - Philip asked Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us” ([John 14:8](#))
 - Jesus responds by saying in [John 14:9](#), “...Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”
- What Isaiah saw was a theophany
- This was a visible manifestation of God
- According to [John 12:41](#) the One He saw sitting on the throne was Jesus
- [John 12:35-41](#), “35 So **Jesus** said to them, “For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you;

he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. 36 “While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.” These things [Jesus](#) spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them. 37 But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of [Isaiah](#) the prophet which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” ([Isa.53:1](#); [Rom.10:16](#)) 39 For this reason they could not believe, for [Isaiah](#) said again, 40 “He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.” ([Isa.6:10](#)) 41 These things [Isaiah](#) said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.”

- Jesus said in [John 12:45](#), “He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me.”
- The Hebrew word for “Lord” is adonai which means “sovereign master”
- It’s also used in verses 8, 11
- According to [Isaiah 1:1](#) this is a vision
 - “The vision of [Isaiah](#) the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.”
- It’s similar to a vision by Micaiah in [1 Kings 22:19](#), “Micaiah said, “Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left.”
- It’s also similar to John’s vision in [Revelation 4:1-11](#).
- Scripture reveals that God’s coming is often accompanied with earthquakes, smoke, fire, and lightning
 - Prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments, [Exodus 19:18](#), “Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.”
 - After the giving of the Ten Commandments, [Exodus 20:18](#), “All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance.”
- › **Other Scripture says...**
 - [Ps.50:3](#), “...Fire devours before Him, And it is very tempestuous around Him.”
 - [Psalm 97:2](#), “Clouds and thick darkness surround Him...”
- › **Isaiah says he saw the Lord (Jesus)...**
 - “sitting on a throne”

- This speaks of sovereignty
- This is in heaven where God rules
- He rules both heaven and earth from His throne
- Regardless of the status of the earthly king, God is always “sitting on His throne” ruling heaven and earth

› **Isaiah describes His throne as being...**

- “lofty and exalted”
 - That means “the throne was greatly elevated” (MacArthur)
 - The imagery here is taken from the practice of earthly kings
 - Elaborate thrones were affected by the great monarchs of Egypt and Assyria (Lepsius, ‘Deutmäler,’ pt. iii. pls. 2, 76, 100, 121; Layard, ‘Nineveh and Babylon,’ p. 150)
 - Solomon’s throne was perhaps even grander than any of these - [1 Kings 10:18–20](#), “18 Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with refined gold. 19 There were six steps to the throne and a round top to the throne at its rear, and arms on each side of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arms. 20 Twelve lions were standing there on the six steps on the one side and on the other; nothing like it was made for any other kingdom.”
 - It was placed at the summit of “six steps” so that its occupant was “high and lifted up” above all his [attendants] (Spence)

› **Besides seeing God on His throne, Isaiah also saw...**

- “the train of His robe filling the temple”
 - This refers to the “hem or fringe of [his] robe” (MacArthur)
 - Flowing robes were commonly worn by great monarchs (Spence)
 - Isaiah saw the all-filling robe of the indescribable One (K&D)
 - The ground was covered by this splendid robe [and] there was...no room for anyone to stand (K&D)
 - It “filled the temple”

› **Isaiah also describes in verses 2-3 what else he saw...**

- He saw “seraphim” (vv.2-3)
 - Seraphim are only mentioned here and in verse 6
 - They are angels created by God

- The Hebrew word seraph literally means “burning ones”
- This suggests a fiery appearance
- The TEV and CEV translates them as “flaming creatures”
- The NCV translates them as “heavenly creatures of fire”

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia SERAPHIM

In Egypt there have been found eagle-lion-shaped figures guarding a grave, to which is applied the name seraf.

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia SERAPHIM

Seraphim are in Jewish theology connected with cherubim and ophanim as the three highest orders of attendants on Yahweh, and are superior to the angels who are messengers sent on various errands.

The NET Bible First Edition Notes Notes for 6:2

Elsewhere in the OT the word “seraph” refers to poisonous snakes (Num 21:6; Deut 8:15; Isa 14:29; 30:6). Perhaps they were called “burning ones” because of their appearance or the effect of their venomous bites, which would cause a victim to burn up with fever. It is possible that the seraphs seen by Isaiah were at least partially serpentine in appearance. Though it might seem strange for a snake-like creature to have wings, two of the texts where “seraphs” are snakes describe them as “flying” (Isa 14:29; 30:6), perhaps referring to their darting movements.

› **J. Vernon McGee says the word seraph is**

Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee The Vision of the Lord Seen by Isaiah

the word used in connection with the sin offerings and judgment. Apparently the seraphim are in contrast to the cherubim. The seraphim search out sin, and the cherubim protect the holiness of God.

- Seraphim bear a similarity to the 4 living creatures of [Revelation 4:6](#), which in turn resemble the cherubim of [Ezekiel 10:1](#) (MacArthur)
- The Bible mentions Angels 296 times
- Each time they are mentioned, they appear as “intelligent, moral, and spiritual beings created by God who worship Him and carry out His will” (LST)
- [Hebrews 1:14](#), “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?”

› **Isaiah continues by saying...**

- They “stood above Him”
 - The preposition *Above* renders a Hebrew term that literally indicates a position that is higher than something else. Although most English translations use the preposition “above,” it is also possible to say “around” in this context (Ogden)

- The LXX renders it “round about Him” (Barnes)

› **Next Isaiah says...**

- They had “six wings”
 - This is literally “six wings six wings to each” (Ogden)

The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition) Chapter 6
Representations of angelic creatures with six wings have been discovered in the Near East by archaeologists.

› **Isaiah tells us what the wings are used for...**

- “with two he covered his face”
 - This was a sign of reverence (Beeke)
 - It was also because they dared not gaze directly at God’s glory (MacArthur)

Faithlife Study Bible Chapter 6

In Ezek 1, the cherubim fly with two wings and cover their bodies with the other two. The seraphim cover their bodies with four wings and fly with two.

- “with two he covered his feet”
 - This was a sign of humility (Beeke)

The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes, Vols. I–VI Chapter 6
By the feet the Hebrews mean all the lower parts of the body. But the people of the East generally wearing long robes, reaching to the ground, and covering the lower parts of the body down to the feet, it may hence have been thought want of respect and decency to appear in public and on solemn occasions with even the feet themselves uncovered.
- “with two he flew”
 - This was a sign of willing service (Beeke)
 - Here it is to praise Him (Sproul)

- They also “called out to another” (v.3)
 - They said, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory”
 - We do not know how many seraphs Isaiah saw (it was more than one)
 - But he heard them speaking to each other in antiphonal praise
 - What were they saying? “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory”
 - The 3-fold repetition is for emphasis - God is thrice holy

- It is also the strongest sort of superlative (Sproul)
- It is the only one of God's attributes that is repeated this way. Nothing is as holy as God (Sproul)
- This is also called the trihagion which means "three times holy" (Sproul)
- The 4 living creatures also utter the trihagion in [Revelation 4:8](#).
- Holiness is the very excellency of the divine nature (Pink)
- It is the most significant of all of God's attributes (MacArthur)
- When the angels worship in heaven, they do not say, "Eternal, eternal, eternal," or "Faithful, faithful, faithful," or "Wise, wise, wise," or "Mighty, mighty, mighty." They say, "Holy, Holy, Holy."
- God is "the Holy One of Israel" ([Isaiah 47:4](#))
- He is "Holy God" ([1 Sam.6:20](#)), "Holy Father" ([Jn.17:11](#))
- [1 Chronicles 16:10](#) says to "Glory in His holy name"
- Since this is the most significant of all of God's attributes, what is it?
- Before we look at the definition of holiness, we need to understand "that any attempt to define [the] 'holiness' of God is, as A.W. Tozer states, "fraught with potential flaw and error"
- The reason is because no one can adequately explain it
- All we can do is compare it to ourselves and that causes major "flaw and error"
- We are unholy and God is holy
- But what does that mean?
- Before the Fall, Ecclesiastes 7:29 says, "that God made men upright"
- But his being "upright" is not comparable to God being upright or holy because Solomon went on to say that man "sought out many devices"
- In other words, when man was created in the image of God, he was not given the same uprightness that God possesses. He was created with the potential for sin
- In describing God, James says in [James 1:13](#) that God "cannot be tempted by evil"
- That literally means He is "untemptable"
- [Psalm 5:4](#) says, "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You."
- So we must understand first that this is the fundamental difference between man and God

- Next we need to understand the difficulty that is involved in defining the holiness of God

› R.C. Sproul says...

The Holiness of God Chapter Three: The Fearful Mystery

The difficulties involved in defining holiness are vast. There is so much to holiness and it is so foreign to us that the task seems almost impossible. There is a very real sense in which the word holy is a foreign word. But even when we run up against foreign words there is always the hope that a foreign language dictionary can rescue us by providing a clear translation. The problem we face, however, is that the word holy is foreign to all languages. No dictionary is adequate to the task.

Our problem with definition is made more difficult by the fact that in the Bible the word holy is used in more than one way. There is a sense in which the Bible uses holy in a way that is very closely related to God's goodness. It has been customary to define holy as "purity, free from every stain, wholly perfect and immaculate in every detail."

Purity is the first word most of us think of when we hear the word holy. To be sure, the Bible does use the word this way. But the idea of purity or of moral perfection is at best the secondary meaning of the term in the Bible.

- What then is the meaning of the term?
- The root meaning of the Hebrew noun 'holiness' (qodes) and the adjective 'holy' (qados) comes from a word that means 'to cut' or 'to separate,' and thus to be distinct from and set apart.
- That the term did not originally refer to ethical purity is seen from its use in describing prostitutes who were 'set apart' or 'devoted' to pagan deities such as Baal and Asherah (see [Gen. 38:21](#); [Hosea 4:14](#)).
- Donald Bloesch points out that 'in Israel's history holiness could be applied to nonpersonal things, places and even pagan gods (cf. [Dan. 4:8,9](#); [5:11](#)). The ground around the burning bush is holy ([Ex. 3:5](#)) as are the temple ([Is. 64:11](#); [Jon. 2:4](#); [Hab. 2:20](#)), days ([Ex. 20:8](#); [Deut. 5:12](#); [Is. 58:13](#)), utensils ([1 Chron. 9:29](#)), garments ([Ex. 29:21](#); [Lev. 16:4](#)), food ([1 Sam. 21:4](#); [Neh. 7:65](#)), oil ([Ex. 30:25,31](#); [Num. 35:25](#); [Ps. 89:20](#)) and offerings ([2 Chron. 35:13](#); [Ezek. 42:13](#)) (God the Almighty, 138).
- The point is that God is separate from everyone and everything else
- He alone is Creator
- He is altogether and wholly other, both in his character and his deeds
- He is transcendentally different from and greater than all his creatures in every conceivable respect

- To put it in common terms, ‘God is in a class all by himself’ (Dr. Sam Storms, <http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article.asp?id=237>).
- Holiness is not primarily a reference to moral or ethical purity.
- It is a reference to transcendence
- The word transcendence means literally “to climb across”
- It is defined as “exceeding usual limits”
- To transcend is to rise above something, to go above and beyond a certain limit
- When we speak of the transcendence of God we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us
- It tries to get at His supreme and absolute greatness
- The word is used to describe God’s relationship to the world
- He is higher than the world
- He has absolute power over the world
- The world has no power over Him
- Transcendence describes God in His consuming majesty. His exalted holiness
- It points to the infinite distance that separates Him from every creature
- He is an infinite cut above everything else (Sproul)
- No wonder [Exodus 15:11](#) asks, “Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?”

› **R.C. Sproul says...**

The Holiness of God Transcendence

When we use the word holy to describe God, we face another problem. We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is a spirit, that He knows everything, that He is loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on. The tendency is to add the idea of the holy to this long list of attributes as one attribute among many. But when the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute. On the contrary, God is called holy in a general sense. The word is used as a synonym for his deity. That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us that His love is holy love, his justice is holy justice, his mercy is holy mercy, his knowledge is holy knowledge, his spirit is holy spirit.

- [Psalm 77:13](#), “Your way, O God, is holy; What god is great like our God?”

› **What else did John see in the temple?**

- Verse 4 says, “And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke”

Isaiah (Vol. I) Chapter 6

The shout of the seraphs shook the very foundations on which the thresholds of the gates of heaven rested

> **John Calvin said...**

Isaiah CHAPTER 6

if inanimate and dumb creatures are moved, what ought we to do, who feel, smell, taste, and understand, for no other purpose than that we may obey his word in a holy and reverent manner?

Remember, as Earl Radmacher said...

Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary Commentary

If even the doorposts of the heavenly temple shook in response to God’s holiness, how much more will the whole earth (v. 3) shake when the Lord visits it (Matt. 24:29, 30)

Since the context of the first 5 chapters is Israel’s sin, “For they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts and despised His the word of the Holy One of Israel” (5:24), God responds in holy anger

· **Isaiah says also in verse 4 “the temple was filling with smoke. That is the...**

Isaiah (Vol. I) Chapter 6

sign of the presence of God, as in ch. 4:5; but more often it indicates his presence in anger or judgment (see Exod. 19:18; 20:18; Rev. 15:8).

CONCLUSION

- From what we have seen this morning in verses 1-4, we must understand that “without holiness no one will see the Lord” ([Hebrews 12:14](#)) because nothing unholy can appear in His sight
- Until God gives you His righteousness by faith ([Phil.3:9](#)), you are unholy, clothed in “filthy rags” ([Isa.64:6](#))
- What can you do?
- The only thing you can do is come to Christ, who is perfect righteousness
- He alone can wash away your sin
- John the Baptist said in [John 1:29](#), “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
- [Galatians 1:4](#) says that Jesus “gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father”
- He took what you and I deserved—judgment—the wrath of God because of our sin

- You need to be like the tax collector who humbled himself and said, “God be merciful to me, the sinner” ([Luke 18:13](#))
- You do not want to be like the Pharisee who was praying to himself and comparing himself to others and to the tax collector and refused to humble himself ([Luke 18:11](#))
- Jesus said when comparing the two that the tax collector who humbled himself, “went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”” ([Luke 18:14](#))
- If we had a true understanding of what Isaiah described in this text, we all would be on our faces before God crying out for mercy
- Even John the Apostle “fell at His feet like a dead man” ([Rev.1:17](#))
- We should be in awe of God—in awe of His holiness
- We need to have the same response Isaiah had after seeing this glorious vision
- He said in verse 5, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts”
- We will study what all that means the next time we’re together looking at this text
- But first hear what he just said: “Woe is me, for I am ruined!”
- When we are exposed to the presence of God we come apart
- We pronounce judgment on ourselves (“Woe is me”)
- Why? Because in seeing how holy God is, you see how unholy you are and you can do nothing but fall helpless before Him
- Every time we’re here I emphasize the great need of the sinner to know Christ—who He is and what He did on the cross
- Without the two you cannot know Him in a salvific way
- The same is true today
- God is Holy, Holy, Holy
- The only right response is to come to Christ and be made holy by faith in Jesus
- That also means, as we come to the Lord’s table, you must examine yourselves to see whether you be in the faith ([2 Cor.13:5](#))...and examining your motives in partaking in the Lord’s Supper
- Jesus said we are to “do this in remembrance of [Him]” ([1 Cor.11:24](#)) and each time we do this “we’re proclaiming the Lord’s death until He comes” ([1 Cor.11:26](#))
- Let’s go to Him now as we pray
- Let’s pray