

Woe is Me

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Isaiah 6:5-7 | December 18, 2022

INTRODUCTION

- Please take your copy of God's Word and turn to Isaiah chapter 6
- The last time I spoke we looked at the first 4 verses
- Today we are looking at verses 5-7
- So that we have a context of what Isaiah said in verses 5-7, I want to begin reading at verse 1
- Read [Isaiah 6](#).
- There are people today who claim to have seen God
- The only problem with this is they are living to tell about it
- Why do I say that?
- In the Bible, those who saw God said they were going to die or fell down like dead men
- This was true of Manoah and his wife after the angel of the LORD appeared to them and after they offered a burnt offering to the Lord
- They said in [Judges 13:20-22](#), "20 For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. 21 Now the angel of the Lord did not appear to Manoah or his wife again. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord. 22 So Manoah said to his wife, "We will surely die, for we have seen God.""
- The apostle John had the same response after seeing the resurrected Christ
- He said in [Revelation 1:17](#), "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,"
- Why did they react like this? Because the Bible says "no man has seen or can see" the Lord ([1 Timothy 6:16](#)) and live
- What then is going on in Isaiah chapter 6?
- Chapter one, verse one says it was a "vision"
- [2 Chronicles 32:32](#), "Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his deeds of devotion, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel."

- There had to be some kind of veiling for them to see the Lord because God dwells in “unapproachable light”
- [1 Timothy 6:15-16](#), “...He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.”
- God spoke to the prophets in visions and dreams
- [Numbers 12:6](#), “If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream.”
- Some have defined a vision as “the sight of things normally hidden from human eyes” (Harper’s Bible Dictionary)
- In [Acts 10:10](#), Luke describes Peter’s vision as a “trance” (ekstasis) which one lexicon describes as “a displacement of the mind from it’s ordinary state of self-possession” (MCEDONTW)
- In [Acts 10:19](#), when referring to the “trance,” Luke now employs the word “vision” (horama)
- The Greek word for “vision” is Horama and means “that which is seen” (EDNT), it’s “an appearance” (ANLEX). It’s used in [Matthew 17:9](#) to speak of Jesus’ transfiguration before Peter, James, and John
- Even though [Matthew 17:9](#) says this was a “vision,” they had the same response as Manoah, Isaiah and John
- After hearing “a voice out of the cloud... This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!
- Verse 6 says, “When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified”
- God used visions to communicate to His people in both the Old and New Testament (Carpenter)
- We said last time that the LORD (YHWH) John saw on the throne was a preincarnate appearance of Jesus
- [John 12:41](#), “These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.”
- So what is the message God was communicating to Isaiah?
- It’s found in verse 3, “...Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”
- This is a theme throughout the Bible
- To learn about God you start here
- Everything about God is defined by His holiness

- Moses discovered this in [Exodus 3:1-6](#) when he saw a “a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and...the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.” 4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” 6 He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”
- Moses and the children of Israel, later sang in [Exodus 15:11](#), “Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?”
- In [Leviticus 19:2](#), God told Moses to “Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’”
- The psalmist also declared God’s holiness:
 - [Psalm 71:22](#), “I will also praise You with a harp, Even Your truth, O my God; To You I will sing praises with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel.”
 - [Psalm 77:13](#), “Your way, O God, is holy; What god is great like our God?”
 - [Psalm 93:5](#), “Your testimonies are fully confirmed; Holiness befits Your house, O Lord, forevermore.”
 - [Psalm 99:1-5](#), “1 The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! 2 The Lord is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all the peoples. 3 Let them praise Your great and awesome name; Holy is He. 4The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. 5 Exalt the Lord our God And worship at His footstool; Holy is He.”
- We find the mention of God being holy in 27 OT books like Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah
- That’s just the Old Testament
- In the New Testament it’s mentioned in 19 books like the 4 Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, Jude and Revelation
- So 46 books in the Bible talk about God being holy
- **Last week, when we began our look at Isaiah chapter 6, we focused on the vision in verses 1-4
- We saw in 740 B.C. which was “the year of King Uzziah’s death”

- [2 Chronicles 26:16](#) tells us the cause of his death was pride which had caused him to be unfaithful to the Lord and act corruptly by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense
- After being opposed by Azariah the priest as well as eighty other priests of the Lord, Uzziah was enraged
- While being angry at the priest, leprosy broke out on his forehead and the priests hurried him out of the temple
- Verse 21 gives us his epithet
- It says, “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...”
- In the midst of this tragedy, Isaiah comes into the temple and he sees God on His throne
- Verses 1-4 begins with what he saw...
- This was...

I. The Vision (vv.1-4)

- Isaiah saw...
- The Lord sitting on a throne
- The throne was “high and lifted up” (v.1), which means it was greatly elevated
- The imagery here is taken from the practice of earthly kings
- We saw Solomon’s throne in [1 Kings 10:18-20](#) which had a grandeur greater than any earthly throne
- The “train of His robe” filled “the temple” (v.1)
- The “train” was the “hem or fringe of [his] robe” (MacArthur)
- The ground was covered by this splendid robe [and] there was...no room for anyone to stand (K&D)
- It literally “filled the temple”
- He also saw...
- Seraphim “above Him” (v.2)
- 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

· Isaiah said...

- They each had “six wings” (v.2)
- Two wings “covered his face” (v.2) as a sign of reverence
- Two wings “covered his feet” (v.2) as a sign of humility
- Two wings were used for “flying” (v.2) as a sign of willing service

· Then he heard one call out to another in antiphonal praise saying...

- “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory” (v.3)
- The word for LORD is YHWH which Theologians refer to it as the tetragrammaton
- The use of “holy” three times is for emphasis
- God is “thrice holy”
- To say the word *holy* twice in Hebrew is to describe someone as “most holy”
- To say the word *holy* three times intensifies the idea to the highest level
- In other words, the holiness of God is indescribable in human language
- To be holy means to be different, distant, or transcendent
- Thus the song of the seraphim is a constant refrain that the transcendence of God is indescribable (NIBC)
- We saw last time that the word “holy” speaks of transcendence
- Transcendence literally means “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
- He is called the “Holy One” in Isaiah thirty times to emphasize His separateness, and His otherness
- This seems to be the meaning when God says in [Hosea 11:9](#), “...I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst...”
- [Psalm 113:4](#), “The Lord is high above all nations; His glory is above the heavens.”
- [Psalm 99:2](#), “The Lord is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all the peoples.”

· When Isaiah heard this, verse 5 gives us his...

II. The Confession (v.5)

What do you say when you seen God?

“Then I said, “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.””

- This woe-oracle is an announcement of judgment
- It means “curse me,” “judge me,” “damn me,” “consign me to the pit”
- It signals disaster (Wildberger)
- Isaiah uses this word “woe” (Heb. oy, noun) 19 times in Isaiah
- He gives 6 woes in chapters 3-5
- This word often occurs with the preposition “to” with a first person pronoun (“me” or “us”) and follows to indicate despair (TWOT)
- Isaiah was so affected by this vision, that he expected immediate destruction (Calvin)
- That’s why he said, “For I am ruined”
- Some lexicons have rendered it “Woe to me! For I have been reduced to silence”
- John Calvin says, “In the Scriptures silence is often taken for death and those who have been buried are said to have been reduced to silence”
- He gives the reason for his despair in verse 5
- He says “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” (v.5)
- R.C. Sproul says, “His conviction is specific: he has unclean lips. The fact that others around him suffer from the same condition compounds his sin rather than alleviating it”
- Isaiah is not qualified to praise the King. His lips (the instruments of praise) are “unclean” because he has been contaminated by sin” (NET)
- If the lips are unclean, so is the heart (MacArthur)
- Job and Peter came to the same realization about themselves when confronted with the presence of the Lord
- Job said in [Job 42:6](#), “Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.”
- Peter said in [Luke 5:8](#), “...Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!”
- One commentator says, “There is something exceedingly affecting in this complaint. I am a man of unclean lips; I cannot say, Holy, holy, holy! which the seraphs exclaim. They are holy; I am not so: they see God, and live; I have seen him, and must die, because I am unholy. Only the pure in heart shall see God; and they only can live in his presence for ever, Reader, lay

this to heart; and instead of boasting of thy excellence, and trusting in thy might, or comforting thyself in thy comparative innocence, thou wilt also be dumb before him, because thou hast been a man of unclean lips, and because thou hast still an unclean heart” (Adam Clarke)

- J. Vernon McGee says, “The reaction of Isaiah to such a vision is revolutionary. He sees himself as he really is in the presence of God—undone. It reveals to him his condition. When he had seen God, he could see himself. The problem with many of us today is that we don’t walk in the light of the Word of God. If we did, we would see ourselves.”
- The point of conviction is to reveal the need for cleansing

· That’s found in verses 6-7...

III. The Cleansing (vv.6-7)

“6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. 7 He touched my mouth with it and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.””

· Notice the seraphim’s actions in response to Isaiah’s wretchedness

- Isaiah says one of the seraphim “flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs”
- Many are unsure where this is in relation to the temple
- The altar...is not described. The stress is on the purification necessary for approaching God” (Sproul)
- Some say this is the altar where burnt offerings were made, which would have been in the court of the priests, in front of the temple (Barnes)
- Others say this is “taken from the altar of incense” (MacArthur)
- This is obviously taken from the heavenly temple not the earthly one (MacArthur)
- If this is the altar for the burnt offering, it was to burn continuously according to [Leviticus 6:12-13](#), “12 ‘The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it. It shall not go out, but the priest shall burn wood on it every morning; and he shall lay out the burnt offering on it, and offer up in smoke the fat portions of the peace offerings on it. 13 ‘Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar; it is not to go out.”
- The “burning coal” was “emblematic of God’s purifying work” (MacArthur)
- Isaiah said in verse 7, “He touched my mouth with it”
- He brought it into contact with that part of him which the prophet had recognized (ver. 5) as the seat of impurity (Spence)

- Mesopotamian rituals often feature the purification of lips as symbolic of the purification of the person (IVPBBC OT)
- After the hot coal touched his lips, the seraphim said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven” (v.7)
- This purging gave “the prophet his right to speak” (WBC)
- He is no longer unclean
- He is now forgiven
- The word for “forgiven” (kapar) means “to make atonement; make amends, pardon, release, appease, forgive”
- Translations have struggled with this term...The same verb occurs in Akkadian ritual literature referring to “wiping” away ritual impurity and is used specifically in the purification of the mouth
- In one Old Babylonian prayer the diviner wipes his mouth with resin in preparation for appearing before the assembly of the gods
- In Babylonian incantation texts fire is commonly seen as a purifying element
- One incantation series is titled *Shurpu* (“burning”) and is concerned with removing ritual offense or uncleanness (IVPBBC OT)
- This cleansing was not for salvation but for spiritual service
- We cannot serve God if we’re entertaining sin
- Charles Spurgeon said, “You and your sins must separate, or you and your God will never come together.”
- Now that Isaiah has been cleansed, he can now come as [Hebrews 4:16](#) says “with confidence to the throne of grace, so that [he] may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
- This is now a man who is “above reproach” ([1 Tim.3:2](#))
- He is a man who has been tested by God coming through the refiners fire

CONCLUSION

- Today we examine men according to [1 Timothy 3](#) and [Titus 1](#).
- If the man of God is meeting these qualifications for ministry, he is a cleansed man, purged and ready for service
- He like Isaiah can say, “Here am I. Send Me!” ([Isa.6:8](#)).
- Does this passage describe your response to God?
- Before you say “yes,” listen to this quote from Alistair Begg:

- God is “holy, holy, holy. Therefore He doesn’t like the movies we watch. Therefore He is disgusted by some of our literature. Therefore His Spirit is driven within Him as He sees some of the things we as professing Christians have decided are fine for us as we make our way towards heaven”
- Now what is your answer?
- [2 Corinthians 7:1](#), “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”
- Since God is holy, you are to be holy
- [1 Peter 1:15](#), “but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;”
- Get a glimpse of God this morning
- See Him as the seraphim worship Him
- He is “Holy, Holy, Holy”
- “The whole earth is full of His glory”
- If you cannot see Him in this way this morning, maybe it’s because you are entertaining sin that has blinded you from this sight
- Like Isaiah, you need to confess your sin and turn to Him in humble repentance
- Do you know Jesus?
- Have you surrendered your life to Him?
- Has His work on the cross been applied to you?
- Repent and call on Him now as we pray
- Let’s pray