

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

October 2010

Holy, Holy, Holy



...And they were calling to one another: “holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3). The song [of the seraphim] is the repetition of a single word - *holy*. Three times the word is sung in succession, giving the earth its most august anthem. The song is called the *Trisagion*, which means simply the “three times holy.”

The significance of the repetition of the word *holy* can be easily missed. It represents a peculiar literary device found in Hebrew forms of literature, especially in poetry...

The Old Testament Jew also had different techniques to indicate emphasis. One such device was the method of repetition. We see Jesus’ use of repetition with the words “Tru-

ly, truly, I say unto you” (NASB). Here the double use of *truly* was a sign that what He was about to say was of crucial importance.

... On a handful of occasions the Bible repeats something to the third degree. To mention something three times in succession is to elevate it to the superlative degree, to attach to it emphasis of superimportance. For example, the dreadful judgment of God is declared in the book of Revelation by the eagle who cried in midair with a loud voice: “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth” (Rev. 8:13) Or we hear it in the mocking sarcasm of Jeremiah’s temple speech when he chided the people for calling out in hypocrisy, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!” (Jer. 7:4).

Only once in sacred Scripture is an attribute of God elevated to the third degree. ... The Bible says that God is holy, holy, holy. Not that He is merely holy, or even holy, holy. ... The Bible never says that God is love, love, love; or

mercy, mercy, mercy; or wrath, wrath, wrath; or justice, justice, justice. It does say that He is holy, holy, holy, that the whole earth is full of His glory.

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. (Isa. 6:4)

A recent survey of people who used to be church members revealed that the main reason they stopped going to church was that they found it boring. It is difficult for many people to find worship a thrilling and moving experience. We note here, when God appeared in the temple, the doors and the thresholds were moved. The inert matter of doorposts, the inanimate thresholds, the wood and metal that could neither hear nor speak had the good sense to be moved by the presence of God. The literal meaning of the text is that they were shaken. They began to quake where they stood.

[Continued on reverse side]

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[Continued on reverse side]



“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” (Isa. 6:5)

The doors of the temple were not the only things that were shaking. The thing that quaked the most in the building was the body of Isaiah. When he saw the living God, the reigning monarch of the universe displayed before his eyes in all His holiness, Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me!”

... It is rare that we hear people today use the word *woe*. Since this word is old-fashioned and archaic, some modern translators have preferred to substitute another word in its place. That is a serious mistake. The word *woe* is a crucial biblical word that we cannot afford to ignore. It has a special meaning. ...

The full force of Isaiah’s exclamation must be seen against the background of a special form of speech found in the Bible. When

prophets announced their messages, the most frequent form the divine utterances took was the *oracle*. The oracles were announcements from God; they could be good news or bad news. ...

On the lips of a prophet the word *woe* is an announcement of doom. In the Bible, cities are doomed, nations are doomed, individuals are doomed - all by uttering the oracle of woe.

Isaiah’s use of *woe* was extraordinary. When he saw the Lord, he pronounced the judgment of God upon himself. “Woe to me!” he cried, calling down the curse of God, the utter anathema of judgment and doom upon his own head. ...

Immediately following the curse of doom, Isaiah cried, “I am ruined.” I prefer the older translation that read, “For I am undone.” ...

To be undone means to come apart at the seams, to be unraveled. What Isaiah was expressing is what modern psychologists describe as the experience of personal disintegration. To disintegrate means exactly what the word suggests, *dis integrate*. To integrate something is to

put pieces together into a unified whole. ... The word *integrity* comes from this root, suggesting a person whose life is whole or wholesome...

If ever there was a man of integrity, it was Isaiah. ... He was considered by his contemporaries as the most righteous man in the nation. He was respected as a paragon of virtue.

Then he caught one sudden glimpse of a holy God. ... As long as Isaiah could compare himself to other mortals, he was able to sustain a lofty opinion of his own character. The instant he measured himself by the ultimate standard, he was destroyed - morally and spiritually annihilated. He was undone. He came apart. His sense of integrity collapsed.

... In the flash of the moment Isaiah had a new and radical understanding of sin. He saw that it was pervasive, in himself and in everyone else. ...

... He saw the holiness of God. For the first time in his life Isaiah really understood who God was.

[Taken from *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul, 1998, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois]



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