

- ***READ Revelation 4:1-11*** There are some portions of Scripture that ought to leave us in a sense of awe when we take the time to truly contemplate what is being detailed by what is written. I find myself experiencing such a thing every time I read this particular text of **Revelation 4**. Take a moment to put yourself in the shoes of John as he is invited into this glorious throne scene that includes the descriptions of so many different precious stones. Imagine the 24 elders in their robes and crowns. See the lighting and thunder and the seven spirits of God. Look up and take in the four living creatures with their different forms and the continual song they sing of of *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come."* Turn back and see the living creations and the 24 elders falling down in worship before the throne and the one who sits upon it. Hear, again, their song. *"Our Lord and God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, beaus you have created all things, and by your will they exist and were created."* Oh to be able to see such a thing, and imagine how we would speak of it and describe it to others.
- The reality is that even if we did experience such a thing, we might not even be able to speak of it with others because we don't see Paul being able to do so after his presumed experience in the third heaven. (**II Corinthians 12:2-4**) Therefore, we will simply have to be content with reading of such experiences that people have had when coming before the throne of a holy God within the Bible. And even these experiences of visions cannot be considered true instances of men seeing God face to face since **John 1:18** plainly states that no man has ever seen God. As glorious as these experiences were, they still could not measure up to being face to face with God in all of His glory. These experiences simply allowed them to see some sort of representation of God.
- With that being said, John and Paul are not the only men blessed with such an opportunity to see this type of a vision for we see Isaiah experiencing his own throne scene in **Isaiah 6**. Within this text, Isaiah details for us concerning what he saw and experienced as he stood Before The Holy Lord Of Armies. We'll walk through the text and talk about some application points, but then I want to finish up by considering how all of what we see in this text ties into Jesus.

Isaiah 6 Vision Of The Lord

I. What Isaiah Sees & Experiences:

A. He sees the Lord seated on His throne, and the hem of His robe is filling the entire temple. (1)

1. For God to be seated on His high and lofty throne is certainly a show of great authority. This is John's understanding in the Revelation concerning those who sat on the thrones he observed in **Revelation 20:4**, *"Then I saw thrones, and the people seated on them who were given authority to judge."* The same idea can be seen in **Matthew 19:28** where Jesus tells His Apostles that they would be the earthly authority for His kingdom by sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
2. His glory is described as being so great that even just the hem or edging of His robe is enough to fill the entire temple.

B. Seraphim are flying around Him and proclaiming His holiness and glory. (2,3)

1. This is the only text in the Bible where we find seraphim mentioned, and we are not given too much in the way of details as to what they are. We can read that they are flying and have wings. They have faces and feet/a body that they cover with four out of their six wings. But that still doesn't what tell us what these beings are. The word seraphim is a plural form for the Hebrew word *saraph* which means snake or serpent, and then there is also a sense of something burning that goes along with this word. Therefore, we can probably has somewhat of an informed understanding that there seraphim were heavenly created beings that might have taken the form of flying fiery serpents. Further evidence can be found in **Isaiah 14:29** &

Isaiah 30:6 where the exact same word is translated as *"flying serpent."* This word is also closely related to the word used to describe the poisonous snakes that came against Israel in **Numbers 21:6** as a judgment of God against their lack of trust in Him.

2. And while all that is fun to think and speculate upon, the most important aspect of this text is to consider what it is that these beings are doing and recognize them in the most simple terms as being created heavily servants of God. As they are flying around the One seated on the throne, they are covering themselves up with one pair of wings because even their magnificent selfs cannot behold the true glory of God on His throne. They are then responding by calling to one another, *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies; His glory fills the whole earth."*
3. Other ways to understand their description of God is to pronounce Him as YHWH of Hosts, the Lord of Hosts, or simply the Mighty Lord, but this is such a monumental description that upon their proclaiming of it, the foundations of the temple were shaken and the temple began to fill with smoke. This filling of the temple with smoke is not given with an explanation, but it is possible that this smoke was a sign of the coming judgment of fire of God against His people before of their rebellion. Regardless of exactly the cause or purpose of the smoke, Isaiah took in everything with a sense of great fear and humility.

C. Isaiah states his unworthiness to be in God's presence. (4,5)

1. Although Isaiah was certainly not sinful to the degree of the nation of Judah as a whole, he is still filled with a great sense of unworthiness as he stood before this great throne of God and the heavenly beings. *"Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Armies."*
2. Most of what Isaiah says seems simple enough, but why is it that he specifically mentions the uncleanness of his lips and the lips of the people? It might be that he is using the same language that is associated with leprosy which is used as a metaphor for sin within the Old Testament times. We even use this when men preach about Naaman washing in the Jordan River in **II Kings 5** and how it is symbolic of our being washed in baptism for the removal of our sins. In **Leviticus 13:45,46**, the unclean leper was to cover up his lips and cry out, *"Unclean, unclean."* This might be what Isaiah is doing on behalf of himself and all the people of God who were as stained with sin especially when compared to the holiness of God.

D. He is purified when one of the seraphim touches a coal to his lips. (6,7)

1. Following Isaiah's pronouncement of his uncleanness, one of the seraphim takes a coal from the altar (presumably the altar of incense which was in the interior of the temple) and touches it to Isaiah's lips as it says, *"Now that this has touched your lips, your inquiry is removed and your sin is atoned for."*
2. We have made mention a number of times in our studies up to this point that God through Isaiah uses the imagery of fire as a purifying force. In this case, instead of it being used as judgment for sin...it is being used in a gracious way because of Isaiah's humility.

E. Isaiah is commissioned to go prophesy for the Lord. (8-13)

1. His humility and his purification then leads Isaiah to speak up once God finally speaks within this text. The Lord asks, *"Who should I send? Who will go for us?"* The understanding is that God needs a messenger who will go and prophesy to His people concerning their sin and the coming judgment if they refuse to repent.
2. Isaiah steps up to the plate and answers, *"Here I am. Send me."*, and that is exactly what the Lord was willing to do. However, you would expect for the Lord to send Isaiah out with great encouragement and hope that his prophetic ministry would go well, but instead He basically tells him that people won't listen to his message.

3. Isaiah responds to this rough news by asking what we would consider a pretty natural question. *"Until when, Lord?"* God's answer? *"Until cities lie in ruins without inhabitants, houses are without people, the land is ruined and desolate, and the Lord drives the people far away, leaving great emptiness in the land."* Isaiah was going to be busy in his role as a prophet of God until everything came to pass, and it surely would come to pass even during his lifetime in about 700BC. And yet, there is the final verse that gives God's prediction of the remnant that will remain through which the *"holy seed"* (Messiah) would come.

II. What We Learn:

A. God's holiness is perfect.

1. Just as no one has ever seen the true fullness of God, no one can truly comprehend the true holiness of God in its perfection. We might try to think of God's purity in terms of the innocence of a new born child, but that doesn't even compare because of the incredible power that God possesses as the Lord of Armies.
2. Further, consider who in this vision was having difficulty being in the presence of God. Firstly, heavenly beings were even in need of covering their faces and bodies in the face of such glory. They couldn't even take in the glory of God. Further, a man who would serve as a personal mouthpiece for God felt unworthy to stand before Him. God's holiness is simply overwhelming when we try to quantify it. We simply can't do such a thing because it is beyond our comprehension.

B. We are not worthy to stand before Him.

1. But what we ought to be able to comprehend is our unworthiness to be in the presence of such holiness that emanates from the one seated on such a high and lofty throne. I believe such an attitude is first seen in the Garden when Adam and Eve feel the need to hide from the presence of God because of their disobedience against Him. **(Genesis 3)**
2. It is also seen in the prayer that is offered up by Daniel in **Daniel 9:4-19** on behalf of the people and even himself which is incredible because we know of the great godly character that Daniel displayed all throughout the book that bears his name. Nonetheless, here is what is said in **verses 4-6**, *"I prayed to the Lord my God and **confessed**: Ah, Lord—the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps his gracious covenant with those who love him and keep his commands— **we have sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, and turned away from your commands and ordinances. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, leaders, fathers, and all the people of the land.**"*
3. Finally, I also think of Peter when Jesus tells him to again put down his net for a catch of fish even though they had worked hard all night and caught nothing. When they pull in this great catch that even causes them to sink, Peter falls, *"at Jesus's knees and said, 'Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord!'"* **(Luke 5:4-8)** May these attitudes be our attitudes when we consider the holiness of God and our own sinfulness.

C. He offers absolute cleansing.

1. If we have this proper understanding of our unworthiness before God then we have the best opportunity to truly appreciate the absolute cleansing that comes from God towards those who humble themselves before Him just as Isaiah did.
2. This reality should give such great hope to all who recognize their spiritually bankrupt nature. In fact, God states that it is those types of individuals who will come to have the kingdom of heaven. **(Matthew 5:3)** Yet, how can sinful people enter the kingdom of heaven? Surely it is through the forgiveness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, and that is really where all of this is leading to according to **Isaiah 6:13**...it is leading to Christ, and John the Gospel writer recognized this as being the case.

III. The Fullness Of The Isaiah 6 Vision Is Found In Jesus (John 12:37-41):

A. John applies Isaiah's prophecies to Jesus in John 12:37-41.

1. In what is a section that summarizes and concludes the first portion of John's Gospel (chapters 1-12), John identifies two Isaiaic texts that Jesus fulfilled in His ministry. The first is **Isaiah 53:1** concerning the fact that the people never would think that Jesus and His mission were the actual ways that God would go about redeeming His people. No way would people expect the Messiah to come out of Nazareth and give His own life for sinful people.
2. He then quotes **Isaiah 6:10** concerning how the people, even though they would see Jesus's actions and character, would not see with their eyes or believe with their hearts. They would be healed if they turned, but they would not because of the same reason Judah would be judged...pride and arrogance.

B. What will we do with the holy nature of Jesus, our sinfulness, and the cleansing He offers?

1. All of this is said by John leading up to the conclusion he drew that Isaiah's vision was actually one in which He saw Jesus and His glory. He draws the conclusion that Jesus Himself is deity just as YHWHY is, and that has tremendous implications to us.
2. Will we recognize the perfectly holy nature of Jesus? Will we listen to His teachings or will we harden our hearts and refuse to submit to His authority? If we are willing to submit to Him then we will experience the exact same thing that Isaiah did in his grand vision. We will find absolute cleansing for our sins and iniquities because of the atoning blood of Jesus.

We might think ourselves as getting the short end of the stick because we have never had a vision like Isaiah or seen Jesus in the flesh as many did during His day, but we should recognize that the same benefits available to them are available to us if we will acknowledge our need for mercy and forgiveness. God's patience had run out for those in Judah whom God was sending Isaiah to prophesy against, but we still have opportunity now to humble ourselves before Him. May that be our attitude, and may we experience the benefit of living, even this week, before the Holy Lord of Armies in purity and holiness.