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What does it mean that God is Holy, Holy, Holy (Ken Walston – Kenna Outreach Ministries)

The phrase "Holy, Holy, Holy" appears twice in the Bible, once in the Old Testament (Isaiah 6:3) and once in the New Testament (Revelation 4:8). Both times, the phrase is sung by heavenly creatures (Seraphim), and both times it occurs in the vision of a man who was transported to the Throne of God: first by the prophet Isaiah and then by the Apostle John. Before addressing the three-fold repetition of God's Holiness, it is important to understand what exactly is meant by God's Holiness, He is Holy (*Kadosh*).

The Holiness of God is the most difficult of all God's attributes to explain, partly because it is one of His essential attributes that is not shared inherently by man. We are created in God's image, and we can share many of His attributes, to a much lesser extent of course—love, hope, faithfulness, mercy etc., but some of God's attributes, such as omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, will never be shared by His created beings. Similarly, Holiness is not something that we will possess as an inherent part of our nature; we only share in Holiness with our relationship to Yeshua ADONAI. It is an *imputed* Holiness. Only in Yeshua do we "become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God's Holiness is what separates Him from all other beings, what makes Him separate and distinct from everything else. God's Holiness is more than just His perfection or sinless purity; it is the essence of His "otherness," His Transcendence. God's Holiness embodies the mystery of His Awesomeness and causes us to gaze in wonder at Him as we begin to comprehend just a little of His Majesty.

Isaiah was a firsthand witness of God's Holiness in his vision described in Isaiah 6. Even though Isaiah was a prophet of God and a righteous man, his reaction to the vision of God's Holiness was to be aware of his own sinfulness and to despair for his life (Isaiah 6:5). Even the angels in God's presence, those who were crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty," covered their faces and front covering with four of their six wings. Covering their face and front denotes the reverence and awe inspired by the immediate presence of God (Exodus 3:4-5). The Seraphim stood covered, as if concealing themselves in recognition of their inability to stand in the presence of the Holy One, but only reflect His Glory; and if the pure and Holy Seraphim exhibit such reverence in the presence of YAHWEH (**IAM**-*Ehyeh*), with what profound awe should we, polluted and sinful creatures, presume to draw near to Him! The reverence shown to God by the angels should remind us of our own presumption when we rush thoughtlessly and irreverently into His Presence, as we often do because we do not understand His Holiness.

John's vision of the Throne of God in Revelation 4 was similar to that of Isaiah. Again, there were living creatures (Seraphim) around the throne loudly crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty" (Revelation 4:8) in reverence and awe of the Holy One. John goes on to describe these creatures giving Glory and Honor and Reverence to God continually around His throne. Interestingly, John's reaction to the vision of God on His Throne is different from Isaiah's. There is no record of John falling down in terror and awareness of his own sinful state, perhaps because John had already encountered the risen Yeshua at the beginning of his vision (Revelation 1:17). Yeshua had placed His hand upon John and told him not to be afraid. In the same way, we can approach the Throne of Grace if we have the hand of Yeshua upon us in the form of His Righteousness, exchanged for our sin at the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21).

But why the three-fold repetition “Holy, Holy, Holy”, (called the *Trihagion*)? The repetition of a name or an expression three times was quite common among the Jews. In Jeremiah 7:4, the Jews are represented by the prophet as saying, “The temple of the Lord” three times, expressing their intense confidence in their own worship, even though it was hypocritical and corrupt. Jeremiah 22:29,Ezekiel 21:27, and 2 Samuel 18:33 contain similar three-fold expressions of intensity. Therefore, when the angels around the throne sing or cry to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy”, they are expressing with force and passion the truth of the Supreme Holiness of God, that essential characteristic which expresses His Awesome and Majestic Nature.

In addition, the *Trihagion* expresses the Triune Nature of God, the three Personages of the Godhead, each equal in Holiness and Majesty. Yeshua ADONAI is the Holy One who would not “see decay” in the grave, but would be resurrected to be exalted at the right hand of God (Acts 2:26;13:33-35). Yeshua is the “Holy and Righteous One” (Acts 3:14) whose death on the cross allows us to stand before the throne of our Holy God unashamed. The third Personage of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit—by His very name denotes the importance of Holiness in the essence of the Godhead.

Finally, the two visions of the Seraphim around the throne crying, “Holy, Holy, Holy”, clearly indicates that God is the same in both Testaments. Often, we think of the God of the Old Testament as a God of Wrath; and the God of the New Testament as a God of Love. But Isaiah and John present a unified picture of our Holy, Majestic, Awesome God who does not change (Malachi 3:6), who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8), and “with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning” (James 1:17). God’s Holiness is Eternal, just as He is Eternal and Holy!