

Holy Is His Name

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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After giving birth to her son Samuel, Hannah prayed, "No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God." 1 Samuel 2:2. David sang, "You are holy, Who inhabit the praises of Israel." Psalm 22:3. "The LORD is great in Zion, and He is high above all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name--He is holy. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool, for He is holy." Psalm 99:3-5. In Isaiah's vision he heard attendants at God's throne cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" Isaiah 6:3. "This is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.'" Leviticus 10:3. One of the most prominent attributes of our great and awesome God is His holiness.

"Holy" means sacred or consecrated, regarded as worthy of worship or veneration. The Old Testament word in Hebrew *qodesh* has as its primary concept the notion of "separate," being "set apart" for special use. The New Testament word *hagios* has a similar meaning. The word "holy" contains the idea of absence of anything evil or defiled; it is that which is absolutely pure and uncontaminated, not tainted by sin.

We learn something about the quality of holiness from the encounter of mortal man with the presence of a holy God. Isaiah was conducted in vision into the throne room of Jehovah, where he saw the heavenly Monarch high and lifted up, where attendants sang, "holy, holy, holy." What was the prophet's (that is, the "preacher's") response? "Then said I, 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.'" Isaiah 6:5. He became acutely aware of God's holiness. What was Peter's response after the miraculous catch of fish nearly sank his boat? "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!'" Luke 5:8.

God is holy and everything associated with God is holy; it was on "holy ground" that God met Moses at the burning bush. This is the first time we find the word "holy" in the Bible. "Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb (another name for Sinai), the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked and behold, the bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.' So 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.' Then He said, 'Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.'" Exodus 34:1-5.

Why was the ground holy? Was the dirt there intrinsically any different than the other dirt? It was because God's presence was there. Moments before, it was a common patch of wilderness, but when invested with God's presence, it became special; it became holy. *When anything becomes invested with God's presence, it changes from common to holy.* The seventh day of the week could be viewed as being no different than any other day of the week. But it is different, because God has put His presence into it, making it holy time.

The wilderness tabernacle and later the temple with their holy and most holy places, the altar and articles of furniture and utensils, sacrifices, anointing oil, tithes, offerings, priests and their garments were all "holy." The priest wore a "holy crown," or turban, which bore the golden plate inscribed by the words "Holiness to the LORD." The entire nation of Israel was to be a holy nation. Today, we are to be a "holy priesthood, a holy nation;" "holy and without blame before Him in love." I Peter 2:5, 9; Ephesians 1:4. Interestingly, there are 168 appearances of the word "holy" just in the four books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Altogether in the Bible (New King James Version) there are 576 usages of the word "holy." The word "holiness" appears another 38 times.

Confusing the common with that which was holy was a capital crime, as evidenced in the tragic story of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron who used unconsecrated, unholy fire in the sacred service. One of the assignments of the priests was to "teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." Ezekiel 44:23.

The Bible identifies His law as being holy (Romans 7:12), the Sabbath as being holy (Exodus 20:8-11), His covenant as being holy (Luke 1:72) and His calling as sacred. Paul writes, He has "saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began." II Timothy 1:9.

His abode in heaven is holy (Psalm 11:4; 20:6) and His city the New Jerusalem is the "holy city." Those who minister before Him in heaven, the angels, are "holy ones." Daniel 8:13; Mark 8:38. On earth His "hill" (Jerusalem; Psalm 3:4) was holy. In the vision given to the prophet Ezekiel he was told, "the whole area surrounding the mountaintop is most holy." Ezekiel 43:12. The entire territory of Israel was holy, His "holy border." Psalm 78:54.

Those whom He commissioned to speak for Him, the prophets, were holy. "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:21; Mark 6:20; Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21). That which they wrote was called the Holy Scriptures (Romans 1:20; II Timothy 3:15). Those whom He has called are to be holy people. "As He Who

called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'" I Peter 1:15, 16.

His name is holy. One of the more frequently used names for God is the "holy One of Israel," a term found 38 times in the Bible and particularly emphasized by Isaiah, being employed by that prophet 29 times. In David's time, when the ark was restored into its place in the tabernacle, he said, "Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; talk of all His wondrous works! Glory in His holy name; let the heart of those rejoice who seek the LORD!" I Chronicles 16:10. "Sing praises, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name!" Psalm 30:4. "My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever." Psalm 145:21. "For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit.'" Isaiah 57:15.

The name of God must be revered and spoken with awe and respect. It is shameful to hear when His sacred name is uttered with no consciousness of its greatness and solemnity. When the name of the Lord is mentioned, holy angels, who excel in strength, veil their faces in reverence. We should never take that sacred and holy name upon our lips without being conscious as to what we are saying. Never should His name be spoken in disrespect. Even those words that don't go all the way to blasphemy, but come dangerously close to His name should be avoided, such as "gosh," "golly," (those are abbreviated terms for the name "God") "jeeppers," "gee," or "gee whiz," (which are shortened forms of the name "Jesus"). We would do well to stay as far away from the disrespectful usage of God's holy name as possible.

It would be well for us to consider the respect given to the name of God by those who copied the Scriptures. When the Sacred Writings were copied and the next word in the text was the name of God, the scribe would set down his quill, rise and wash his hands, pick up a separate writing instrument and reverently inscribe the name of the Lord. In some Jewish traditions, so sacred was the name of the Lord, that they didn't even write His name, instead substituting the phrase "the Name." Anyone reading the Scripture, or hearing the reading of the Bible, would know to Whom that referred.

We need to be more conscious of the awesomeness of our God. He is the Creator. He is the eternal Omniscient One. He is more awesome than the noontime sun. When He speaks, stars and planets come into existence. His power is unlimited. His love is without measure. Can you imagine the glory and awesomeness of such a divine Being? We, as creatures, have the unspeakable privilege of ascribing glory to our God. Honor is due His name.

It is wrong for mortal man to assume those titles and ascriptions which rightfully belong only to the Holy One. It has become common for ministers to be referred to as "Reverend," or "Right Reverend." Sometimes pastors are colloquially referred to with the abbreviated title "Rev." But is this proper for humans to do? What does the word "reverend" mean, and to Whom in Scripture does it apply? You can see within the word itself the word "revere." What does that mean? It means to "worship." One who bears the title of "reverend" is claiming to be someone worthy of

worship. Since when is sinful man entitled to bear the lofty title of “reverend”? What does the Bible say? “Holy and reverend is His name.” Psalm 111:9 KJV. The NKJV says, “Holy and awesome is His name.” It may be that one who uses the term that way is not consciously thinking, “I am worthy of worship,” but nevertheless, that’s what the word means.

We need to be conscious of His presence in His house. Remember that in the story of Moses at the burning bush, God invested a small piece of wilderness with His presence and it became “holy ground,” making it appropriate for Moses to remove his sandals, which was an expression of reverence and respect. Before, it was just a piece of desert, no different than any other. But when God’s presence came, it became holy ground. In a similar way, this building, our beautiful Valley Center SDA Church, at one time was only an ordinary piece of ground, a place of sage and brush. In one of the ironies of life, I was pastor here when this very property was purchased and steps were taken to apply for the various permits needed to build.

Then grading was completed and concrete was poured, studs were raised and drywall was hung. Some of you were here to witness all of this. I’m holding a newspaper article dated February 7, 1985 with a picture of the church in its framing stage. Then it was finished and the building was consecrated for worship. At that point, it became special. It became “holy ground.”

In a similar way, in the wilderness gold was donated and fashioned by Bezaleel and Aholiab. Cloth was given and woven into curtains and veils. Wood was offered and shaped into boards and articles of furniture. Things that had been common were procured and prepared for the tabernacle. The time then came when God’s presence enveloped the sanctuary and that which had been common before became holy. Shekinah glory enveloped the inner compartment, spilling over to the other chamber. When the high priest entered, it was with sanctify and awe. He was entering the Presence of the Almighty, the Holy One of Israel. It was the same regarding the material collected by David in anticipation of the temple built by his son Solomon.

The very same respect and reverence shown by Moses at the bush, the same attitude of awe shown regarding the wilderness sanctuary and then the temple Solomon built we should demonstrate in our worship of the Divine. Is it really possible to imagine Aaron entering the tabernacle with its gold shimmering walls, with the glow of the glory of God visible beyond the curtain and engaging in trivial or everyday conversation with a fellow priest as they trimmed the wicks of the golden lamp stand or replaced the loaves on the table of showbread, called the “bread of the Presence”? Would they not have been fully conscious that they were in the presence of the Awesome God of the universe?

Has God changed any in the ensuing centuries? Has His holiness deteriorated since the time of Moses or David? Has His Majesty declined since the brightness and glory shown forth from the tabernacle? Should our reverence and respect be any different than that of Aaron’s on that day when the cloud of Shekinah glory brightened the tabernacle?

Here at Valley Center we do pretty well in observing reverence for God in the sanctuary, but I believe we can do even better. I know I need to be reminded of the sacredness of God's sanctuary, how we should "behave in the house of God," as we are told in I Timothy 3:15. We have something to learn from our neighbors. A few weeks ago one of our members and I visited the Mormon church just across the street from us. We had been out knocking on doors and becoming acquainted with those who live in our community and at one home we met a fine gentleman who happens to be one of the leaders in the Mormon faith. He invited us to come and visit their church, proposing that he would come and visit our church.

So it was that we went to his church about a month ago. We were impressed as to the reverence observed in their church service. There was no common "chit-chatting." Everyone observed quiet decorum and gave respectful attention. Should we do less? What about our Catholic friends? If you've visited a Catholic Church service, probably (at least when I've been at a Catholic service this was true) you noticed sanctity and reverence. Inside the sanctuary, if any talking was done (other than that given from the pulpit), it was done with quiet whispers and held to a minimum. We can learn from others on this matter. Should we who believe God has given us truth for these times come behind and fall short on the matter of reverence in His sanctuary?

I don't believe that when we fail in this regard it is intentional. It is primarily due to carelessness and thoughtlessness. But carelessness can be costly. When I first had an interest in woodworking tools, a good friend and teacher, Dr. Leslie Hardinge, a master woodworker himself, endeavored to impress on my mind the necessity of being careful. He cited evidence that the number one cause of accidents in the workshop was carelessness, thoughtlessness. It's when the mind wanders and is not intent on the matter at hand that accidents are most likely to happen.

He asked me to get paper and pencil; he wanted me to do some calculating. Holding up a router, a woodworking tool that spins a cutter at high speed, he told me to write down how many revolutions per minute the bit turned. I looked at the tool and found that this particular router boasted 25,000 rpm. But each time it makes one revolution, the cutter is cutting twice, because the bit has two sides. So every minute there are 50,000 cuts made. Every second (50,000 divided by 60) there will have been 833.3 cuts made.

He proposed the following: Suppose that you are super fast. You have the fastest reflexes of anyone in the world. However, because of carelessness, your finger is placed in a position where it shouldn't be, where the cutting bit is spinning. But you are so quick and because your reflexes are so responsive, you are able to remove your finger in 1/10 of a second. Too late! You've already been cut 83 times! Carelessness can be costly. I've been blessed to be able to work with power tools for 40 years with little mishap, partly because anytime I approach a router, shaper, jointer or table saw, it is with deep respect.

In His house, we should cultivate respect and awe. If we don't it is because we are being careless and thoughtless; we are not purposefully conscious of God's presence. When we enter the doors, we should do so as if we are in the very presence of the Lord. That's what we've prayed for, isn't

it? That God would meet with us in His house? Idle chatter and loud talking should be left outside. "The LORD is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." Habakkuk 2:20.

We should therefore purposefully be conscious that we are entering the divine presence when we are in this sanctuary. It would be well if we tried to imagine, to the best of our ability, Aaron approaching the Most Holy Place with its Shekinah brightness. Can you conceive of anything but the most reverent attitude being displayed in the presence of God's glory? If we could but visualize the presence of God and His holy angels, it would not be difficult to conduct ourselves in a reverent manner.

We should also remember that the doors that separate the sanctuary from the foyer are not sound proof. When entering the foyer, be mindful that loud talking will also be heard by those in the sanctuary. It is natural to want to greet others in church. Fellowship is part of the Christian experience. We are not saying that worship should be stiff and unduly formal, absent of warmth and friendliness. Not at all. But we should be mindful that our first priority is the reverent and respectful worship of our awesome God.

Our God is an awesome God! He is worthy of praise and honor. Let us demonstrate that we are aware of His Majesty and Greatness by proper reverence in the house that bears His holy name.