

# The Awesome God

by Dr Peter Masters

**T**HREE THOUSAND years ago an outstanding king pointed out the way to know God, saying – ‘Stand in awe!’\*

But what is awe? I remember a teenage boy who went to see the Niagara Falls and was overwhelmed by the power of that mighty cascade of water. Riveted to the spot, he really felt its danger and magnificence. He went down to the lower shelf to view the falling




water from behind, and could not stop talking about it for days. That’s awe.

Young people attending a first funeral will often feel very deeply the seriousness and finality of death, sensing its eternal implications. That’s awe.

Camping as a youth on the Isle of Wight, I wandered out on to the Culver Cliff late one night in noisy conversation with a group of friends. Suddenly, a terrific bolt of lightening tore across the water of the Channel, and a massive storm developed about a mile away, causing even the cliff to tremble. Normally boisterous, we sat and watched for an hour, subdued into total silence. That’s awe.



To seek God we must begin by being in awe at *ourselves*, asking, Who am I? The fact is, we are of immense significance because we possess eternal souls, and with 

\* King David in Psalm 4 verse 4.

these we have the potential for communion with God. We are far above the animals, and to underestimate ourselves is the greatest possible miscalculation.

Unlike animals, we have the power of reason and a moral conscience. We have the ability to love in a far, far more sophisticated way than animals, and we are capable of tremendous creativity.

We have command of language, and an instinct of eternity. We are highly privileged beings, and we have the responsibility that goes with this status.

In short, we are a thousand miles higher than the animal kingdom, and it is imperative that we recognise this and throw out of our minds trivial, unworthy ideas about what it is to be human. For the sake of our souls, we must stop, think, and stand in awe at ourselves.

I recently read about a man – a captain of industry – who had an experience early in life that illustrates awe. His parents died in an air raid in World War II when he was barely two. His father had been well off, and his will set up a trust for the boy's education. As a boarder at school he was a carefree, cheerful lad who took nothing particularly seriously, until at sixteen he was called to see the solicitors who handled his trust.

A lawyer sat him down and told him that at the age of eighteen he would inherit a huge fortune. He was deeply shocked, having no idea that his father had been so rich and successful. Catching the train back to school, he arrived in his dormitory later that night. When his friends saw him, they thought he must have been involved in an accident, because he was as white as a sheet.

For several days he spoke little, because a question was continually going round in his head, 'Who am I?' Amazed to discover his wealth, a strange weight of responsibility descended on him. If only we could gain this kind of awe when we realise that we are made by God with eternal souls and the potential to know Him!

The next vital part of seeking God is to stand in awe of *Him*, and to grasp Who He is. If we were to go to see the queen, we would not look for her in a hut, but in her palace, and we must look for a sight of God in His revelation – the Bible. We are taught there that He is infinite, eternal, all-powerful and all-knowing.

We worry about global warming, especially when we hear that the greatest British ecologist, Professor James Lovelock, insists that London and





Liverpool will be under the sea inside 100 years, maybe 50. What is the truth about all this? Man may guess and speculate, but God alone knows exactly what will develop, because He is sovereign and knows all that has ever happened, and all that will happen.

If only we could sense His power and invincibility, we would respect Him more. But we must also realise that He is holy and perfect, hating evil, and absolutely firm in His justice and punishment of sin. However, He is also loving and merciful, ready to forgive all who abandon their indifference to Him, and trust in the Saviour He has sent.

God is one, and yet mysteriously, He is three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The second person of the Trinity, Christ the Son, has come into this world to redeem lost souls. It is well known that Christ assumed a human body and personality to become both God and man in order to be a Saviour for lost mankind. He lived

a perfect life, and then allowed Himself to be arrested and executed on a cross, where He paid an incomprehensible price for our salvation. God the Father laid upon Him all the guilt of all those who would trust in Him, and punished Him in their place. He suffered an indescribable, eternal punishment, somehow compressed into the space of a few hours, making an atonement for lost and sinful people.

Should we not 'stand in awe' at such a Saviour! We need to see God's plan of salvation so clearly that we become amazed at His lovingkindness, and overwhelmed with awe.

But to have God's forgiveness we also need to 'stand in awe' in another sense. We need to see our sinful and condemned condition in the sight of a holy God, and to be subdued and even scared about it. We need to realise that we are marked men and women, because God knows all about our sins and the state of our hearts. We have offended Him, broken His laws, and lived for ourselves, despising Him and setting Him aside. Therefore we are condemned by Him so that we cannot be helped by Him in this present life, and we must

forfeit eternal happiness in the next. If only we could be awed by these things, so that we feel our desperate need of forgiveness, then we would sincerely ask Him for blessing.

‘Stand in awe,’ said David, adding, ‘and be still!’ Don’t go on the run from God, offended at being called a condemned sinner, but be amazed that Christ should die on the cross to take the punishment for your rebellion, lies, pride, greed, unbelief, selfishness, and all your other sins. Forgiveness and new life are offered freely to all who turn to Christ repenting of their past lives, and trusting in what He has done to atone for sin.

So, we must stand in awe at ourselves, and how we are made. Most of all, we must stand in awe of God, thinking of Who He is, and of what Christ has done for us. And we must be awed in the sense of being subdued and scared at the realisation of our sin and its consequences.

No one has ever been converted without this kind of ‘awe’ causing them to turn to the Lord. Then, when God hears our prayer, we feel a new kind of awe, the awe of surprise and amazement, because we find a new life, new attitudes, new happiness, and a new experience of communion with God. When we know Him and His answer to our prayer, we become over-awed at the reality of conversion.

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