

**GOOD NEWS**  
for the unsaved  
WORLD!

(#167)  
Learning from Old Testament holiness (1)

**★ HOLINESS ★**

As with all words, there can be a range of meanings.

- ⇒ The context helps us to determine the meaning. (If the context is ambiguous, we can at least narrow down the options.)
- ⇒ It may be referring to God, people, things, a special place, etc.

Here are some of the concepts that may be included in the concept of "holiness." (It will be different in different passages.)

- ⇒ **MAKING A DISTINCTION:** Being set apart or separated. This may be for a special purpose or in preparation for something.
- ⇒ **HAVING A GOD-FOCUS:** Devoted to the only uncreated God, being in a special covenantal relationship with him, with the goal of being like him in moral purity.
- ⇒ It may be a verb (consecrate, make holy, sanctify); a noun (holiness, sanctification); a place (sanctuary); etc.

**THE EARLY CHURCH STUDIED THE OLD TESTAMENT TO LEARN WHAT IT MEANT TO BE "HOLY."**

- ① The apostles used the Old Testament.
  - ⇒ The New Testament message and the Good News did not *cancel* the Old Testament, but *fulfilled* what it said: Through Jesus, the New Covenant – which the prophets eagerly looked forward to – has arrived!
- ② The apostles taught the early church how to use the Old Testament. They were to pay attention to:
  - ⇒ Direct statements (what it says) – commands, instructions, promises, etc.
  - ⇒ Examples and symbolism.

These things happened to them as **examples** for us...  
1 Corinthians 10:11a (NLT)

- ③ They sometimes *quoted* Old Testament passages that mentioned "holiness."
 

For the Scriptures say, "You must be **holy** because I am **holy**."  
1 Peter 1:16 (NLT); quoting Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7.
- ④ But more often, they *taught* Old Testament Scripture, because its over-all message is about holiness.
  - ⇒ The *Old* Covenant message showed people what they needed to do, but *it couldn't change their hearts*. (That wasn't its purpose.)
  - ⇒ Through Jesus, the *New* Covenant *does* change hearts. What Israel did not attain in the past can now be attained by all who follow Jesus.

For the law never made anything perfect. But now we have confidence in a better hope, through which we draw near to God.  
Hebrews 7:19 (NLT)

**LAST TIME: WE LOOKED AT SOME OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES THAT MANY PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO IGNORE...**

These passages are **warnings** about the serious consequences of sin.

We need to know about such passages, because:

- (1) They are true.
- (2) Our **lack** of holiness tends to lead us into the same types of sins that they committed – such as:
  - ✓ Carelessness.    ✓ Compromise.    ✓ Ignorance.
  - ✓ Attempting to accomplish good through sinful means.
- (3) There are also many false teachers who downplay these matters – and some *deliberately* try to suppress (or distort) what they say!

THESE PASSAGES SHOWED US (by principle and example) that:  
**Holiness is incompatible with even the "smallest" sin.**

- ❖ It could be fatal, if it involved approaching the actual presence of God (who was located above the ark of the covenant).
- ❖ Even when *not* fatal, and *not* involving the presence of God, violations of God's holiness could have life-long consequences.

*Though God's visible presence is not currently residing at a specific location on earth (having left the temple, as Ezekiel described), these events **teach** us about the seriousness of holiness. They teach us what our attitude should be.*

... without **holiness** no one will see the Lord.  
Hebrews 12:14b (NIV)

Even so ...

**★ We also need to consider the passages that are NOT warnings. ★**

Or we will become guilty of promoting the sin of "half truth," just like the false teachers do.

**WHEN WE LEARN ABOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES, WE LEARN ABOUT WHAT CHRIST DID FOR US.**

That is why many "sacrifice concepts" are connected to what he did. EXAMPLES:

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.  
Romans 3:25a (NIV)

In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.  
Colossians 1:14 (CSB)

We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.  
The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.  
Hebrews 13:10-12 (NIV)

**THE ULTIMATE RESULT: PEOPLE ARE "MADE HOLY."**

**What Jesus did is connected to the Old Covenant requirements.**

- Jesus has fulfilled all those requirements that allow access to God. And he's done so in a tabernacle that is greater than the one that was in Israel.

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that he might now appear in the presence of God for us.  
Hebrews 9:24 (CSB)

**THE TABERNACLE / TEMPLE IN ISRAEL.**

- He also became our sin — which meant that he had to be killed. He was the sacrifice for our sin. He was our substitute.  
... the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God ...  
Hebrews 9:14b (CSB)

**HIGH PRIEST, IN THE MOST HOLY PLACE.**

**THE PASSOVER SACRIFICE.**

**What Jesus did is superior to what the Old Covenant priests could do.**

- Jesus paid in full the penalty for our sin. This means he doesn't have to repeat it... ever.

He is not like those other priests. They had to offer sacrifices every day, first for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus doesn't need to do that. He offered only one sacrifice for all time. He offered himself.  
Hebrews 7:27 (ERV)

**THE OLD COVENANT PRIESTS.**

- Since the sin is fully paid for, Jesus cannot stay dead! Sin is the reason for death... and he has no more sin to be dead for.

**JESUS, THE NEW COVENANT PRIEST.**

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.  
Acts 2:24 (NIV)

**THE OLD COVENANT SACRIFICES COULD NEVER ACCOMPLISH THIS PAYMENT.**

**WHAT HE DID IS EVEN GREATER THAN THAT!**

- Since it was our sin that was being paid for, we can share in Jesus' new (eternal) life!

... God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.  
He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
2 Thessalonians 2:13a-14 (NIV)

**THE SPIRIT ENABLES US TO BECOME HOLY.**

- God will do what is necessary to make sure that we qualify!  
God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.  
Hebrews 12:10b (NIV)

**THAT'S THE GOOD NEWS!**

**THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS "BEING HOLY."**

(The focus of this discipline is "construction," not "punishment.")

**UNDER THE OLD COVENANT, THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF HOLINESS**  
(or being "set apart" for a special purpose).

- ✓ **SPIRITUAL / MORAL holiness.**  
This was required of all.
- ✓ **CEREMONIAL holiness.**  
Some regulations were required of all; others applied only to a few (such as those who serve at the temple).

**We have the same obligations today.**

**Today, we are under a different covenant; so we have no obligation to do these. But we can still learn from them.**

**SPIRITUAL AND CEREMONIAL HOLINESS ARE TWO DIFFERENT ISSUES!**

- ✓ A person can perform ceremonial rituals and still be unsaved.
- ✓ Saved Jews would want to obey the ceremonial requirements that were applicable to them — not because they loved rituals, but because they loved God.

**THERE WERE TWO TYPES OF CEREMONIAL HOLINESS.**

**THE FIRST TYPE** involved the daily practices of the Jewish people. These requirements were given to them because they had been chosen ("set apart") to be the people of God.

- ✓ Some of the practices may seem strange to us; but they were given in order to teach (or be a reminder of) the difference between holy and common, clean and unclean. (They would also provide a "picture" of those differences for non-Jews to see.)
- ✓ These various practices were required by the Jews, but were optional for Gentiles who chose to follow the God of the Bible.

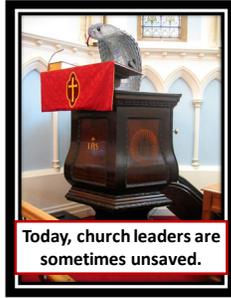
**THE SECOND TYPE** involved matters related to the temple activities.

- ✓ Only the priests (and in some situations, the Levites) were allowed to have this type of holiness (= being "set apart" for this specific purpose). All others were to avoid this holiness.
- ✓ *This does not mean that the priests were always saved!*

**BOTH ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN DONE BY UNSAVED PEOPLE.**



Back then, temple leaders were sometimes unsaved.



Today, church leaders are sometimes unsaved.

[Jerusalem's destruction] happened because of the sins of her prophets and the sins of her priests, ...  
Lamentations 4:13a (NLT)

THE PEOPLE FOLLOWED THEIR EXAMPLE.

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**HOW DID THE PRIESTS GET THIS RESPONSIBILITY THAT NO ONE ELSE WAS ALLOWED TO HAVE?**

It's NOT that they were more deserving or more spiritual than the rest!

It has its roots in what God did during the first Passover.

God killed all the firstborn males of Egypt – whether human or livestock – but he "passed over" the Jews who had placed the blood of a lamb on the door frames of their houses. (Exodus 12-13; the earlier chapters provide the context.)

God did not kill the firstborn males in Israel. Instead, they would belong to him.

Initially, God took the Levites and their animals, in place of the firstborn males of the other tribes of Israel. (Numbers 3:11-51.)

After that, ceremonially clean animals would need to be sacrificed; unclean animals, as well as humans, would need to be redeemed.

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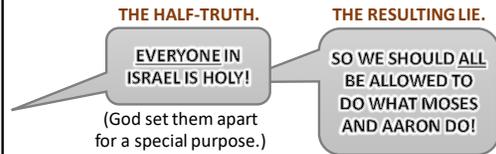
**THIS "PRIESTLY" HOLINESS WAS A TYPE OF CEREMONIAL HOLINESS that most of the Jews were required to avoid.**

- ✓ This has to do with the activities related to the *temple*. It involved dealing with sin and access to God.
- ✓ There were good reasons for the people to not want this type of ceremonial holiness (or to try to perform temple activities).
  - **If it was a deliberate act** (such as, attempting to usurp the role of a priest), there could be severe consequences – sometimes even death (as we saw last time).  
Even if a person wasn't trying to get near to the ark of the covenant itself (above which the Glory of God resided), there could still be serious consequences.
  - **If it was accidental** (such as, unplanned contact with something that was holy), it would severely limit one's ability to fulfil normal day-to-day duties (at least for a while).

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**EXAMPLE: Korah and his followers. (This was a deliberate act.)**

Korah and his followers took a half-truth and ignored the other half... to their own destruction. (You can read about it in Numbers 16.)



(This lie influenced the thinking of many others – see vs. 41+.)



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... the ground suddenly split open beneath them. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed the men, along with their households and all their followers who were standing with them, and everything they owned. So they went down alive into the grave, along with all their belongings. The earth closed over them, and they all vanished from among the people of Israel.

All the people around them fled when they heard their screams. "The earth will swallow us, too!" they cried.

Numbers 16:31b–34 (NLT)

250 others had joined them and were burning incense to the Lord, in defiance to the Lord's instructions.

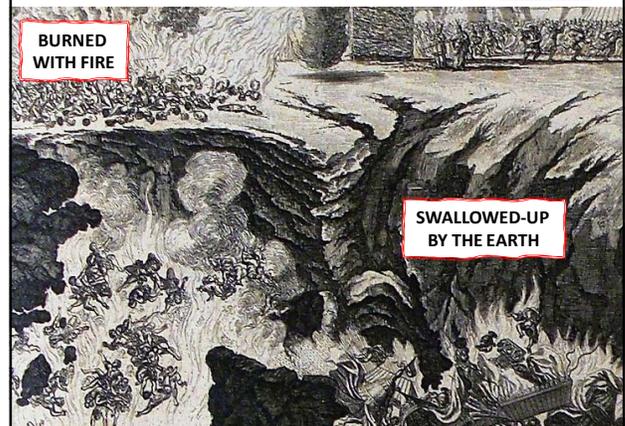
Then fire blazed forth from the LORD and burned up the 250 men who were offering incense.

Numbers 16:35 (NLT)

Since the incense burners had been used before the Lord, they were holy (v. 36-40) and the metal was used to overlay the altar.

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**THE RESULT OF PEOPLE TRYING TO BE "HOLY" WHEN THEY SHOULDN'T.**



**EXAMPLE: King Uzziah.**  
**(This was a deliberate act.)**

God enabled Uzziah to become a powerful and famous king. Then the king became proud, and decided to take over the role of a priest.

**STOP! ONLY PRIESTS CAN DO THAT!**

**I'LL DO WHAT I WANT!**



King Uzziah tried to burn incense in the temple – an activity which only priests were set apart ("made holy") for.

Eighty-one Levites confronted him, and he responded with anger.

**THE END RESULT**

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Uzziah ... became angry. While he was ranting and raving at the priests, a skin disease appeared on his forehead right there in front of the priests in the LORD's temple near the incense altar.

When Azariah the high priest and the other priests looked at him, there was a skin disease on his forehead. They hurried him out of there; even the king himself wanted to leave quickly because the LORD had afflicted him.

King Uzziah suffered from a skin disease until the day he died.

2 Chronicles 26:19-21a (NET)

God judged him with a serious skin disease (traditionally called "leprosy," but its exact nature is unknown).

**RESULT:** He would have to live in seclusion, excluded from the temple, for the rest of his life.

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**Avoiding an "accidental" attainment of this holiness.**

Avoiding it was so important, that God even gave the priests instructions that would *protect* the people from *accidently* getting it!

**THE NEED TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS:**

When [the priests] return to the outer courtyard where the people are, they must take off the clothes they wear while ministering to me.

They must leave them in the sacred rooms and put on other clothes so they do not endanger anyone by transmitting holiness to them through this clothing.

Ezekiel 44:19 (NLT)

★ This obviously is NOT the type of holiness that God requires of all people! ★

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**What about Jesus?**

- So much of what Jesus did on the cross has parallels to what happened in the sanctuary.
- He performed the duties of a *high priest*. But he was from the tribe of Judah. He was not a Levite, nor a descendant of Aaron. Even so, he did not violate this "holiness" limitation!
- The book of Hebrews explains that, with the change in covenants, there was a *change in the priesthood*. Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron.
- This was foretold in a Messianic psalm:

The LORD makes this promise on oath and will not revoke it: "You are an eternal priest after the pattern of Melchizedek."

Psalm 110:4 (NET)

- He also ministered in the *heavenly* temple.
- You can read more about this in the book of Hebrews.

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**This week's mission!**

We can learn a lot from the temple activities, as well as from the regulations related to those activities.

The New Testament refers back to them many times!

**PERTAINING TO THE O.T. SACRIFICES AND JESUS ...**

Learn about what Jesus did for us... and rejoice in it!

★ Our **holiness** and **sanctification** are directly related to what he did! ★

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**Credits**

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