

GOOD NEWS
for the unsaved
WORLD!

(#168)
Learning from Old Testament holiness (2)

1

HOLINESS in the Old Testament

It's not only about *judgment*... it's about *joy*!

- Israel's choices sometimes made the judgment aspect more visible. In the end, their sin led to judgment and exile.
- But that's not the end of the story. The prophets tell us about a future day, in which the joy of holiness will *fill* not only the land of Israel... but also the whole earth!

2

What do we learn about HOLINESS in the Old Testament?
A LOT!
(This is where the early church learned about holiness.)

⇒ We can learn from direct statements, instructions and examples.

- The people of Israel faced the same types of temptations as we do.
 - ✓ We can learn from their *bad* example (and do the *opposite*)
 - ✓ We can learn from the examples of godly people, as they responded to the circumstances of life.
- Some things may teach us about the *nature* of holiness; others may teach us *obligations* we must obey, or *principles* we can apply to life.

⇒ We will be looking at a short overview of what the Old Testament teaches us.

3

I want you to **remember** what the holy prophets **said long ago** and what our Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles.
2 Peter 3:2 (NLT)

- In our overview, we will include a few Scripture passages. (The rest you can find on your own!)
- We will divide our overview into four sections, based on the four sections of the Old Testament. (Each of them has a somewhat different focus.)

For **everything that was written in the past** was **written to teach us**, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.
Romans 15:4 (NIV)

4

★ **HOLINESS IN THE LAW** ★

These books set the foundation for understanding holiness. Because of this, they cover *many* issues.

⇒ God's very nature *defines* holiness.

- We humans – created in the "image of God" – are to reflect God's nature in the created realm. *But we have chosen evil, instead.*

⇒ In these 5 books of Law, we are re-introduced to holiness.

- Here, we learn the standard for holiness, as well as its principles, applied in the context of life. (The *context* of life may change; but the *principles* remain the same.)

⇒ *God* is the foundation of holiness. But in these books, the *sanctuary* ("holy place," the tabernacle) receives the greater emphasis (as far as being associated with the word "holy").

- WHY? It's *not* because of the *building*; but because it is the place where *the Living God* would choose to make his presence known.

5

✓ **GOD** – the *standard* of holiness.

Who is like you among the gods, O LORD—glorious in **holiness**, awesome in splendor, performing great wonders?
Exodus 15:11 (NLT)

- His name is holy, and we dare not profane [= dishonor, shame] it.

You must not profane my **holy** name; I must be treated as **holy** among the Israelites.
Leviticus 22:32a (CSB)

⇒ Next time you misuse God's name, or "indulge" in sinful conduct... consider this verse ... and ask yourself:

"Did God tell *Israel*, 'Don't do it,' and then tell *me*, 'It's OK to do it?'"

6

- God will prove himself holy, no matter what people do.

"Among those who approach me I will be proved **holy**; in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

Leviticus 10:3b (NIV)
- The God who is holy is the source of *our* holiness.

I, the LORD, am **holy**, and I make you **holy**.

Leviticus 21:8b (NLT)
- At the same time, the "human responsibility" dimension is also present. We must "consecrate ourselves" – i.e., we must *pursue* holiness.

For I am the LORD your God, so you must **consecrate** yourselves and be **holy** because I am **holy**.

Leviticus 11:44a (CSB)

7

- ✓ The "sanctuary" (**TABERNACLE**) – the place where God would reside. And *because* of this, everything about the tabernacle would be holy – including:
 - Its design (by God) and its construction.
 - The items in it; the people who would serve in it.
 - The sacrifices that would be made there.

⇒ Many of these things teach us the significance of what Christ did on the cross, for our salvation. (We already focused on this issue.)

⇒ The sacrifices were for the good of the people, not because God "needed" them.

- ⇒ **The sanctuaries of the nations** were designed by humans, and were for dead gods invented by humans.
- ⇒ **The sanctuaries of Israel** were designed by God (except for the 2nd temple), and were for the Living God who created all things.

8

- ✓ The obligation of **PEOPLE** to be holy.
 - We must be holy, because God is holy. (In this context, the command is applied to Israel; but all people have this obligation.)

TO ISRAEL

Be **holy** because I, the LORD your God, am **holy**.

Leviticus 19:2b (CSB)

= OLD Testament

TO ALL WHO WANT TO SURVIVE THE COMING JUDGMENT DAY.

But as the one who called you is **holy**, you also are to be **holy** in all your conduct; for it is written, Be **holy**, because I am **holy**.

1 Peter 1:15-16 (CSB)

= NEW Testament

⇒ We were made in God's "image." When we are *not* holy, it's the same as a denial and rejection of the God who's image we bear – the God who's image we were created to reflect.

9

- Israel was given the opportunity (as a nation) to be God's holy and chosen possession in a world that hates God.

'Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure ... And you will be my kingdom of priests, my **holy** nation.'

Exodus 19:5a, 6a (NLT)

I have separated you from other nations to be my own special people. So you must be **holy** because I am the LORD, and I am **holy**.

Leviticus 20:26 (ERV)

⇒ Though Israel – as a nation – rejected that calling, and turned to the ways of the world, God still has a people – individuals – who are willing to pursue holiness. Under the New Covenant, we call those people the "church." (This applies to the *genuine* church, not the fakes.)

... for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a **holy** nation, God's very own possession.

1 Peter 2:9b (NLT)

10

- ✓ The various **OFFERINGS** (gifts to God) and **FEASTS** (national assemblies/celebrations). All of them were holy; each with a special purpose.

- ✓ The **SABBATH** and its significance.
 - One day in seven set apart from the other days.
 - The purpose was to set aside ("consecrate" or "make holy") time each week, to redirect one's focus.
 - The Jews also had other sabbaths – every 7th year and every 50th year. Each had a purpose; *all of them were holy*.

11

- ❖ The basis for the Sabbath command was two-fold:
 - Because of creation – Exodus 20:11.
 - Because of redemption – Deuteronomy 5:15. (In Israel's context the people were *physically* redeemed out of slavery in Egypt.)
- ❖ This command applied to *all* people, including workers. Even work animals were to benefit from it – Deuteronomy 5:14.

⇒ In the early church, the Jews tended to set aside Saturday (the 7th day of creation), and the Gentiles tended to set aside Sunday (the day of Jesus' resurrection).

⇒ We live in a world that does not honor God. There may be situations where people are forced to work on those days; and they will have to look for other opportunities to set aside time for God.

12

✓ **A VARIETY OF LAWS** that *teach* what it means to be holy: The Ten Commandments applied to life.

- These cover many issues, and include moral, civil, and ceremonial laws, all collected together (since life isn't divided into compartments).
- One such group of regulations is found in Leviticus 17-27. This passage is sometimes called the "Holiness Code."

⇒ Some applications of the Ten Commandments will be based on the *context* in which the people lived. We may need to apply the basic principles to a *different* context.

⇒ We may find some of these regulations difficult to understand, because we live in a different culture. To complicate matters, the world has also *distorted* some concepts, so that our initial reaction – without further study – is to misunderstand them.

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⇒ Even under the *New Covenant*, these commands and regulations have value. The ceremonial regulations are not valid under this covenant – though we can learn from them. But there is much more in these five books of the Law, than just ceremonial regulations!

⇒ Over-all, these instructions were from God, and Moses could describe their value in these words:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me,

Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?

And what other nation is so great as to have such **righteous decrees and laws** as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deuteronomy 4:5a, 6-8 (NIV)

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★ HOLINESS IN THE HISTORY BOOKS ★



These books record Israel's victories and failures in the pursuit of holiness – mostly failures and judgment. In all this, God's holiness never changes.

↳ Moses warned the people of two options: pursue holiness, or abandon holiness. Holiness would tend to bring blessing; sin would lead to destruction. (See Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 32.)

- Israel's choices proved that this warning was prophetic. They chose sin and were destroyed.
- *But Moses also told them about a future repentance and restoration.* It's still future – only being *partly* fulfilled when the people returned from exile. But it's going to happen ... and *it will happen under the New Covenant (which means it will be genuine)!*

15

✓ The holiness of **GOD**. He is holy; he is God; he has not changed.

- Nothing compares to him – he is greater than all creation.

There is no one **holy** like the LORD.
There is no one besides you!
And there is no rock like our God.
1 Samuel 2:2 (CSB)

- Because of this, he is worthy of our boasting and our worship.

Glory [= boast] in his **holy** name; ...
Worship the Lord in the splendor of his **holiness**.
1 Chronicles 16:10a, 29b (NIV)

In the history section of the Old Testament, the concept of "holiness" is more often used of Solomon's temple (which was built at this time, and replaced the tabernacle) and everything associated with the temple. Like the tabernacle, the "holiness" wasn't due to the building, but to the God who resided in the temple's Most Holy Place.

16

✓ The **TEMPLE** that Solomon built (based on God's instructions), and everything related to it.

- It was holy because it would be the place where the glory of God would reside – even though the *fullness* of God is greater than all of creation.

"But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"
2 Chronicles 6:18 (NIV)

- After Israel's judgment, the *rebuilt* temple would not have this honor, because the glory of God was no longer present. *But it would have a different honor: Jesus would be there!*

Does it not seem to you like nothing?
'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty."
Haggai 2:3b, 9 (NIV)

17

★ HOLINESS IN THE WISDOM BOOKS ★



Here, we focus on living a holy life. (Most of these verses are from the Psalms, because the other books focus on other specific issues.)

↳ The main focus is on God and his holiness – with an emphasis on *fellowship* with God.

- The sanctuary and the "holy mountain" are frequently mentioned; but only because that is the place where the glory of God resided (i.e., in the Most Holy Place).
- Today, God is still present among his people, but not in a physical location. God has never been restricted to such a location!

TODAY, WE ARE TOLD: "Where two or three have come together in my name, I am there among them."
Matthew 18:20 (GW)

18

✓ The holy **God** – and his people's interaction with him.

- Recognizing God's holiness: Many references to God as the "holy one" and to "his holy name."

Your ways, God, are **holy**.
What god is as great as our God? [None!]
Psalm 77:13 (NIV)

My mouth will praise the LORD.
Let all who live praise his **holy** name forever!
Psalm 145:21 (NET)

- God's habitation is in *heaven*; yet he interacts with people on earth.

God rules the nations.
He sits upon his **holy** throne.
Psalm 47:8 (GW)

19

- A desire to be near the *temple* – i.e., the place where God is present.

I bow before your **holy** Temple as I worship.
I praise your name for your unfailing love and faithfulness;
for your promises are backed
by all the honor of your name.
Psalm 138:2 (NLT)

- There are also references to Jerusalem (and the location of the temple) as being God's holy dwelling on *earth*.



⇒ The Psalms show us that holiness is not just a matter of learning. It's a matter of living!

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★ **HOLINESS IN THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS** ★



Here, we find encouragements and warnings. These books have a variety of themes, depending on the circumstances in which they wrote.

⇒ These books were written at various times before, during and after Israel's exile. The prophets directed the people toward the holy God. But the people were, more often than not, unwilling to pay attention.

- Judgment had to come. But the prophets looked forward to the future, when God would restore the people, the temple, and the land.
- All three of these concepts (especially the temple and the land) have a strong emphasis in the prophets; but the greatest emphasis is on the God who would do these things.

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✓ **GOD**, the one who must judge... but who also restores:

- No matter what Israel does, God will continue to show himself as holy – even if he has to prove it by way of judgment (which is not his desired way).

But the LORD of Armies is exalted by his justice,
and the **holy** God demonstrates his **holiness** through his righteousness.
Isaiah 5:16 (CSB)

- He is the "Holy One of Israel." Isaiah uses this phrase more than anyone else – especially in the context of Israel's future restoration.

BEFORE THEIR JUDGMENT

They have abandoned the LORD;
they have despised the **Holy** One of Israel;
they have turned their backs on him.
Isaiah 1:4b (CSB)

AFTER THEIR REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION

"Cry out and sing, citizen of Zion,
for the **Holy** One of Israel is among you
in his greatness."
Isaiah 12:6 (CSB)

22

- God dwells in his holy habitation (heaven); yet he is willing to interact with people. (This implies that people must have the right attitude!)

"Let all humanity be silent before the LORD,
from his **holy** dwelling he has roused himself."
Zechariah 2:13 (CSB)

- Israel *profaned* God's holy name; but will do so no more. All peoples (Israel and the other nations) will recognize God's holiness.

I will honor the **holiness** of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations—the name you have profaned among them. The nations will know that I am the LORD—this is the declaration of the Lord GOD—when I demonstrate my **holiness** through you in their sight.
Ezekiel 36:23 (CSB)

23

✓ The **TEMPLE**. Three temples are mentioned in the prophets:

- (1st) Solomon's temple:** Though the temple is *holy*, the people do not treat it that way. In the end, the temple that Solomon built is destroyed, and the nation is destroyed by Babylon. Before its destruction, the glory of God departed from the temple.
- (2nd) The temple that was rebuilt by Zerubbabel:** Very little is said about it. [This is the temple mentioned in the New Testament, which Herod enlarged.]
- (3rd) A future temple:** Ezekiel writes extensively about this future *holy* temple. The glory of God will return to this temple.

✓ **RESTORATION:** Israel's future repentance and return to their God.

- In the future: Israel, as a nation, will return to God. At that time, they will be holy.

And they will be called the **Holy** People,
the LORD's Redeemed; ...
Isaiah 62:12a (CSB)

24

- ✓ The **LAND**: Israel, the city of Jerusalem, and the "mountain/hill of the Lord" (= the temple mount and/or Jerusalem): in the future, *all* of these will be holy – not just in name, but *for real!*
- Some passages describe the destruction of these areas, the result of Israel's sin and rebellion.
 - But the greater emphasis is *future-oriented*: The time when Israel will be restored. (This coincides with the third temple, described by Ezekiel.)

Then you will know
that I am the LORD your God,
who dwells in Zion, my **holy** mountain.
Jerusalem will be **holy**,
and foreigners will never overrun it again.
Joel 3:17 (CSB)

There's *more* to the story than just what happens to *Israel*.
This time of restoration and blessing will affect *the entire world!*

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→ When these things
happen to *Israel*, it will affect
what happens *everywhere!*

... and *all the ends of the earth* shall see
the salvation of our God.
Isaiah 52:10b (ESV)

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my **holy** mountain;
*for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.*
Isaiah 11:6-9 (ESV)

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What does all this mean to us?

- ⇒ If holiness *isn't* important to you, then these things probably don't have much meaning.

You may even have an attitude of superiority:
"I'm not as sinful as they were!"

It is true that Israel was often extremely sinful. And perhaps, by God's grace, some of us aren't as bad... at least in the ways we tend to evaluate ourselves.

In reality, *every* generation has such an attitude. *Every* generation can find someone that they think is worse than they ... just like the Jews did in Jesus' day... the Jews who killed him.

'If we had lived at the time of our ancestors,
we would not have helped to murder the prophets.'
Matthew 23:30b (GW)

27

Let's pursue something *better*, and make it *our* **MISSION** this week!

- ⇒ If *your goal is to follow Jesus* – which includes the pursuit of holiness – then there is much to be gained by what we discover in the *Old Testament!*

→ And there is so much more to discover in the
Old Testament, than *just* the topic of holiness!

Sanctify them [= "make them holy"] by the truth; your **word** is truth.
John 17:17 (CSB)

When Jesus prayed this, the only "word" was the *Old Testament*,
(along with his words, which had not yet been put into written form).

Make this prayer of Jesus *your goal* for your life!

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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