

Holy, Harmless, and Separate

Hebrews 7:26 (KJV) For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

What does it mean to be Holy? 'Holy' appears 644 times in 511 verses of the Bible, but what's its meaning?

We find that days, places, clothes, and perfumes can be holy:

Exodus 20:8 (KJV) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exodus 3:5 (KJV) And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

Exodus 26:34 (KJV) And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place.

Exodus 29:29 (KJV) And the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons' after him, to be anointed therein, and to be consecrated in them.

Exodus 30:25 (KJV) And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil.

Upon reading the scriptures pertaining holiness, I find that holy things are separate. Holy things are set aside for a specific purpose. The mercy seat is placed in a "holy place" because that place was reserved for the mercy seat. The clothes Aaron and his sons wore were holy because they were reserved for service in the temple. The bible even says that the holy ointment couldn't be used for anything other than service of the temple. Not only could the ointment not be used for anything else, but the recipe was reserved for special use as well. You were not allowed to make a batch of the ointment for any other purpose. You were not allowed to use the ointment as perfume or potpourri that made your house smell nice.

People are Holy

It isn't until Deuteronomy that we find people can be holy.

Deuteronomy 14:2 (KJV) For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.

This scripture is incredible. To the Egyptian slaves, this meant something no other religion at the time could offer; significance. Human life was cheap and people existed at the whim of deities. In parts of the Bible, children were burned alive in the worship of the false god 'Molech.' How could parents sacrifice their children? Life was cheap. In their minds, human beings existed only to serve the false gods.

But then God comes along and tells these slaves that they are holy; they have value. That they've been picked up and set aside for a special purpose. The people themselves are holy. What is their purpose? To serve God, of course, but also to take that service of God and carry it forward in time.

Before you could buy yeast at a supermarket, people would keep a little piece of dough in the house. Every day fresh bread was made using a little piece of dough left over from the previous batch. This dough, called the 'mother,' could be hundreds of years old. The yeast cultures are living things that must be fed a steady diet of water and flour to keep alive. Some sourdough manufacturers in San Francisco have documented that they are still using the same lactobacillus cultures that were carried across the US on wagon trains in the 19th century.

In the same way, the Israelites were chosen to carry the word of God forward from generation to generation. The Israelites were separated; they were set aside to be used by God for His purposes.

Today, we are holy. We are separated and set apart for God. We aren't made to be ordinary. Being baptized in Jesus' Name and filled with the Holy Spirit does something to a person that nothing else can.

Are you somehow different from the other people on the earth? No.
Are you made from the wood of an enchanted tree? No.

You are holy because of the purpose God has for you. You are holy because you have been set aside; you have been reserved for God's use. You started out as ordinary, but you have been made different.

God is Holy

Unlike us, God has always been holy. God is holy not because he's been set aside, but because he has always been apart. God created the universe, but he was not part of the universe. Even when God created the universe in Genesis, we can see that he was separate from it even at the very beginning.

Genesis 1:1 (KJV) In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

God existed before anything else. This is significant because there is no creation story for God Himself. There is no origin story that tries to define where God came from. All the other cultures that surrounded the Israelites had extensive creation stories that included the creation of the pantheon of gods before the creation of anything else. For these other cultures, their deities were created. For the Egyptians, the gods were created beings. They were born with many of the same frailties and failings of the human beings.

For example:

Ra was born from a blue lotus flower floating on the water called "Nu." The chief deity was created as part of creation. Ra gave birth, by himself, to Shu and Tefnut. Shu and Tefnut were grandparents to Osiris, Horus, Seth, Isis, and Nephthys. Horus and Seth hated each other so much that Seth killed Horus. Khnum formed humans on a potter's wheel. You can see that Egyptians created gods in their own image. They made deities that had emotions and feelings, but more importantly were a 'part' of creation. From their understanding, the universe existed and from the universe came gods and from the gods came people. Egyptians view people and the deities they worship as part of the same whole. The deities and people were both created, being part of the same universe.

To an Egyptian, the Pharaoh was Ra on earth. Ra needed a palace. Ra needed food. Ra needed pyramids. In every aspect, Ra was like any other human being. It was the job of the human servants to provide for the god Ra.

For the Israelites, talking to the Egyptians about God was a weird experience.

“When was your God created?” – “He always has.”

“What does God need from you?” – “Nothing; He provides for us.”

For the Babylonians, the universe consisted of pantheon of gods. One of the gods, Morduk, was assigned the task of destroying the dragon Tiamat. Morduk killed Tiamat by forcing a tornado down her throat. He then took her body and stretched one half out to make the sky and the other half he laid down to make the earth. The other deities were happy that the evil Tiamat had been destroyed, so they made Morduk the kings of all the other deities.

As a side note, you can see the name Morduk reflected in the name of Esther’s uncle Mordecai. The name Modecai in Akkadian means “servant of Morduk.” It is also a play on words, however, because to the Hebrew listener the word “ai” means “a place of destruction.” So, to the Hebrew listener Mordecai means, “Destroyer of Morduk.”

At this point, Morduk decided that the deities needed some minions to serve them. They voted and decided that Tiamat’s husband Kingu should be killed and used his blood used to form human beings.

So, in the Babylonian story, the Earth and the sky are made from the dead body of one deity while human beings are literally made from the body of a different deity.

Normally, I would not base a message on what is missing from the Bible, but in this case I think what the Bible does not say is at just as important as what it does say. For every other civilization that the Israelites encountered, their deities were created from the same raw material as the rest of the universe. Thus, their deities tended to have the same frailties and problems that humans have.

God, however, let it be known from the very beginning of the Bible in the very first verse that he is not part of Creation. He created the earth, but he is not part of the earth. He created humans, but his is not human. He created light with his spoken word, but he did not create light from anything else that existed. God started out the beginning of the book separate from everything else that occurs

within it. We are made human and we become holy, by separating ourselves for God's use. God starts out holy and separate at the very outset.

For the other deities around Israel, the humans were made to serve. The humans were made from the same stuff as the deities, because everyone and everything including the pantheon of gods were created from the same raw material. For us, we were created by God, but we do not share the same DNA as God. We exist as part of Creation; we are made from the dust of the Earth, but God is something else.

God is "other." God is "elsewhere." God is "separate." God is holy. But God wants to be with us. We are ordinary, but He is separate so God made us holy. He separated us from the rest of Creation. God did not create us to be His slaves. He does not separate us to make us even lower than we already are; he separated us to make us closer to Him. God made us holy – separated for his special use.

Holy Is Not Enough

The problem is that being holy wasn't enough. Being apart from the ordinary of Creation did not bring us close enough to God. There was still too large a gap between a holy people and a holy God. So, a holy God had to stop being holy; he needed to stop being separate. A holy God had to join ordinary Creation to fill the gap that still existed. A holy and separate God had to robe Himself in flesh and become part of Creation.

Hebrews 2:9-11 (KJV)

9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. **10** For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. **11** For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

God made the Israelites holy – separate and set apart for his use – in the desert after they left Egypt. But being holy was not enough. So, a holy and separate God made Himself ordinary to bring a holy people even closer to Him.

A place can be holy. Clothes can be holy. Perfume used to anoint the tabernacle can be holy. This platform is holy. This building is holy, because it has been set apart and reserved for a special purpose for the Lord. But that kind of holiness is not enough for us anymore. The Lord knew that simply setting us apart would not get us close enough to Him.

God sent the Holy Ghost to fill us and make us even holier than the people of Israel. The Holy Ghost can rest upon this platform, but the platform can never be filled with the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost can come into this building, but the building will never be filled with the Holy Ghost. Only you and I can be both holy and separate for the Lord, but also filled with the Holy Ghost. Only you and I can be both fully separated and empowered.

If you have been in this church and have felt the Holy Ghost resting upon you, but have not been filled with its power, come down to the altar and ask the Lord to fill you. You will know that you have been filled with the Holy Ghost, because you will speak in a language you do not understand. Being holy means that you have been set apart for the Lord in this world; being filled with the Holy Ghost means that you are prepared to be set apart for the Lord in the next as well.