

HOME STUDY

No man
cometh unto
the **FATHER**
but by
ME

John 14:6

Winter Quarter

December | January | February 2025-26

Large-Print Edition

Home Study

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Holiness as a Way of Life

BLAKE HENRIQUES

In our age of moral relativism, which holds that anything goes so long as no one is hurting anyone else, the biblical assertion that human sin has consequences is not a popular one. Ever since the Garden of Eden, the gravest consequence of human sin has been death (Gen. 2:17; 3:3, 19).

Sin separates us from God through death because God is holy. In the Old and New Testaments, holiness indicates separateness from everything else, which is often described as profane (common). Holy things and people are given a special distinction by God. However, that distinction is not meant to serve the holy thing or person. The continuous pattern we see throughout the Bible is that things or people are set apart for the purpose of service (ministry) to the wider world.

What makes Christianity distinct from all the other religions in the world is that God Himself sets this pattern of holiness-for-service and follows it Himself, even to death (Mark 10:45). In fact, throughout the next twelve weeks, we will see two major themes about God's character held in constant tension. On the one hand, God's holiness requires perfection. But on the other, God uses His status as the perfectly Holy One to make a way for His unholy people to be in His holy presence.

Our lessons will be divided into three units, each covering four lessons. In

unit 1 (lessons 1 through 4), we will discuss God's holy presence in the stories of Moses and Isaiah. In lesson 1, we will look at the story of Moses interceding for the people of Israel in the desert just after the Lord had vowed to destroy them for worshipping the golden calf. But God listened to Moses, particularly when he reminded God of the promises He made to His people—to be with them and to accompany them into the Promised Land, Canaan.

Later, when Moses made the audacious request to see God's glory, He graciously made a way for Moses to be in His holy presence without dying. In lesson 2, this pattern of the Lord making a way for His people to come into His presence continues with the erecting of the tabernacle—a mobile temple that would serve as the Lord's temporary dwelling place in the desert.

In lessons 3 and 4, we will turn our attention to the prophet Isaiah, who lived many centuries later, when the divided Kingdom of Israel lived under the threat of invasion by Assyria. In lesson 3, we will see how the poem of Isaiah 9, commonly read at Christmas, is a far-reaching promise of the Holy Son who would crush all injustice and establish God's kingdom (just rule) over the whole earth. In lesson 4, Isaiah shows us that our holiness requires fixing our eyes on the Lord, the only God, rather than on idols (images of gods created by human hands).

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In unit 2 (lessons 5 through 8), we will focus specifically on the holy sanctuary that was to be the central place where God's presence dwelled and where God's people were to gather to worship Him. The New Testament is clear that the holy place where God's presence dwells today is in the body of Christ, the church—all of us gathered together in the name of the Lord (Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).

In this group of lessons, we will visit particular moments in the history and development of God's sanctuary. First, in lesson 5, we will see Jesus pouring out God's holy wrath upon Herod's unholy temple. In doing so, He was inaugurating the transition from God dwelling in a physical temple building to Him dwelling in the temple of Jesus' body (John 2:21).

In lesson 6, we will look back to the story of King David after he finally brought the ark of the covenant—the seat of God's holy presence in the tabernacle—to rest in a temporary tent. We will listen as the Levites (the priestly tribe of Israel), under David's direction, sing a song praising the glorious Lord for His judgment—the future time when He will set everything that is wrong in the world right.

We will transition back to Isaiah's story in lesson 7, specifically to the narrative of his call to ministry. Isaiah had a vision of the Lord's glory and feared for his life because he was unclean (unholy). Yet the Lord made a way for him to stand in His holy presence—not only to stand but also to serve with great faith and perseverance, even when his entire ministry was guaranteed to look like a dismal failure.

In lesson 8, we will learn one of the many songs that were sung in the temple. Psalm 113 will show us what our Holy God's decision to call us His servants looks like for us on a practical level.

In unit 3, we will shift our focus to God's holy expectation for His people. Although imperfect now, one day



God's people will be perfectly sinless. In lesson 9, we will come to the climactic moment when King Solomon had finally built the long-awaited temple. He asked the Lord, the covenant-keeping God, always to hear and to remember His people, especially when they repented of their sins and prayed for His forgiveness in (or toward) the temple.

In lesson 10, we will look back to one of the most foundational passages in the entire Old Testament. Leviticus 19 connects the command to love our neighbor as ourselves with God's holiness and ours. Lesson 11, from the apostle Peter's first letter, builds directly off this passage in Leviticus, showing us what it means to live a holy life while enduring suffering for the sake of Christ.

Finally, lesson 12 looks at the letter to the Hebrews. It exhorts us to fix our eyes on the only person who lived a perfectly holy life: Jesus. The author of Hebrews exhorts us to live out our holiness primarily in relationship to one another in the body of Christ.

Holiness is not an out-of-date doctrine today. It impinges on everything we do every day. But we are not called to an endless to-do list but to a life founded utterly on God's love and grace. God has made the way through Jesus for you to live in His holy presence. Will you join Him?

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

EX. 33:12 And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight.

13 Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation *is* thy people.

14 And he said, My presence shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest.

15 And he said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me*, carry us not up hence.

16 For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? *is it* not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that *are* upon the face of the earth.

17 And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also

that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

18 And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

19 And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

20 And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

21 And the LORD said, Behold, *there is* a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:

22 And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:

23 And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

NOTES

The Glory of the Lord

Lesson Text: Exodus 33:12-23

Related Scriptures: Exodus 19:7-25; 33:1-11; 34:29-35;
2 Corinthians 3:7-18; Psalm 103:6-14

TIME: 1446 B.C.

PLACE: Mount Sinai

GOLDEN TEXT—“And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20).

Lesson Exposition

The book of Exodus is a story of God’s faithfulness in the face of Israel’s repeated sinfulness. After God delivered Israel from Egypt, Israel traveled for two or three months before arriving at the foot of Mount Sinai in the Arabian desert (19:1). Here Moses impresses upon us the lethal threat of the Lord’s holy presence as He descended on Mount Sinai. It is here that the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments (chap. 20) and the rest of the law (chaps. 21-23; 25-30).

The emphasis throughout is on the exactness with which Israel was to follow the Lord’s directions; His purity requires absolute perfection. The penalty for violation was, in the worst instances, death (cf. 28:33-35, 43). In fact, in preparation for His terrifying descent onto Sinai, the Lord had Moses create barriers around the site so that no human or animal could touch the mountain, lest they be consumed (19:9-14, 21-25).

While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law, the people began to doubt that he was going to come back (32:1). They pressured Moses’ older brother, Aaron, to create a visible idol for them to worship: the golden calf

(vss. 1-6). When Moses returned, he was so angry that he threw down the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written and shattered them (vs. 19).

In Exodus 33, the Lord told Moses that He no longer intended to accompany Israel to the Promised Land because of their relentless refusal to follow Him (vss. 1-3). The people mourned (vss. 4-6), and Moses met with the Lord at the tabernacle to intercede for them (vss. 7-11). We are told here just how special the Lord’s relationship with Moses was—they spoke with each other as friends (vs. 11). All this background is essential for understanding the conversation that Moses had with the Lord in our passage.

APPEALING TO THE LORD AND HIS REPUTATION—Ex. 33:12-17

One of the most important passages in Exodus recounts how the Lord called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt and into Canaan (chap. 3). At the burning bush, the Lord promised Moses that He would be with them (vs. 12). What we see in chapter 33, then, is a tragic reversal: if Israel went to Canaan, it would now have to be

without the Lord, because otherwise His holiness would consume them (vs. 3). In verses 12-16, Moses shows us His deep, personal knowledge of the Lord's character—especially His concern for His reputation among the watching nations as Israel's faithful God.

Moses appeals to the Lord to remember His promise (Ex. 33:12-13).

Moses quoted the Lord's promise to accompany His people back to Him. While the earlier chapter never records the exact words, "I know thee by name," when Moses was at the burning bush, the Lord called him by name as he approached (3:4). So Moses knew instantly that this God who had summoned him knew everything there was to know about him.

More than that, God told Moses, "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (vs. 8). Moses now remembered that when the Lord had called him, He said He would take Israel to Canaan Himself. In chapter 33, Moses refused to let Him go back on His promise.

Moses stood on what God had promised. He almost pleaded with God, saying, "If I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now the way, that I may know thee that I may find grace in thy sight" (vs. 13). In this verse, we see this reminder for us: be encouraged that the Lord never goes back on His promises to us in His Word. Yet it sometimes *seems* to us that He is doing so, and at those times we can appeal to Him in prayer and remind Him that He has given us His favor. The word "favor" is the exact same word for God's "grace." Behind the term is the truth that God chose His people before we ever chose Him (cf. vs. 19).

So if God appears to be deserting us, we can remind Him that He was the one who first chose us as His children. He took on the responsibility of providing for us as well as guarding and comforting us with His presence. What amazing grace that He doesn't chide us for impertinence but allows us to express our concerns to Him this way!

The Lord responds (Ex. 33:14).

Sometimes it is easy for us to brush off truisms like "prayer changes things." However, the Lord's response here shows us that this is in fact the case! If you are perplexed at the Lord's behavior in any matter, pray and trust that He will respond, and never give up in praying.

Not only did the Lord affirm that He would go with the Israelites, but He also added a new and comforting promise beyond what Moses asked for: "I will give thee rest." If you remember how Israel's story plays out over the course of the Old Testament, you know that their "rest" in Canaan was periodic at best and nonexistent at worst. They eventually went into exile because of their unrelenting sin, which could not exist in God's holy presence.

Because God has removed the barrier of sin between us and Him through Jesus' sacrifice, we are promised future, permanent rest in God's holy, comforting presence (Heb. 4:1, 8-9). We serve a God who sees our weariness and firmly promises to abolish our exhaustion forever.

Moses appeals to the Lord's reputation (Ex. 33:15-17). Moses clearly was not satisfied with the Lord's terse reply that He would go with them (vs. 14). In the original language, the words "with thee" are not present; they are implied but not stated. Moses needed the Lord to confirm that He had heard him clearly. He reiter-

ated Israel's need to have the Lord's presence with them if they were to set out for Canaan at all. He did not want to go without God (vs. 15).

Moses pointed out that if Israel went up to Canaan without the Lord, the Lord's desertion of them would be evident to the surrounding nations (vs. 16). The Lord's glory was of paramount importance for Him (cf. Ps. 46:10), and it was the very reason why He demanded such stringently regulated patterns of worship in the tabernacle (Ex. 25—30).

If you are in a season of doubting the Lord's promises in His Word, you too can remind Him in prayer that if He abandons you, His glorious reputation is at stake! You can remind the Lord of His promises to His people. The Lord reiterated to Moses that He would in fact accompany Israel to Canaan, but He did it in a much more comforting and satisfying way. This time He repeated Moses' words back to him.

HOPING TO SEE THE LORD'S GLORY—Ex. 33:18-23

Moses' request (Ex. 33:18-20). Moses now asked to see the Lord's glorious presence. Given that his concern in the previous verses was about the Lord's refusal to allow His "presence" to go with them, we can understand why he would ask for further confirmation of that promise. Nevertheless, the Lord's response and qualifications in verses 19-23 show us just how bold Moses' petition was. The Lord told Moses that he could not see His glory, because no human can see the Lord's unmitigated glory and live (vs. 20).

The Lord's provision (Ex. 33:21-23). Even so, we see again in verses 21-23 how the Lord's promises to His people stand in counterpoint to His deadly glory. As happens time and

time again in Scripture, the Lord made a way for an imperfect person to stand in His holy presence. He is a gracious God who loves His people. He told Moses that He would press his face into a cleft in the rock face with His hand, then release him so that He could see the Lord's back after He passed by.

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection and the indwelling of God's own Spirit in us, we have uninhibited access to our Heavenly Father. This is far more than Moses ever dreamed of doing! We can enter God's presence with boldness as His children (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 10:19-20). If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you can take refuge in your Heavenly Father's presence and speak with Him face to face. What a blessing it is to know and be known by Him!

—Blake Henriques

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should wait for God's presence before moving forward in major endeavors (Ex. 33:12; cf. vs. 15).
2. Remembering God's promises can be very helpful in prayer (vs. 13).
3. God promises us permanent rest in His presence (Ex. 33:14; cf. Heb. 4:1, 8-9).
4. God will remember His promises; His reputation would be tarnished if He did not fulfill them (Ex. 33:15-16).
5. Be consistent in prayer, for God responds when we pray (vs. 17)!
6. Moses' desire to see God's glory should be our desire as well (vs. 18).
7. God made a better way for us to stand in His presence than He did for Moses (Ex. 33:19-23; cf. Rom. 5:1-2)!

—Blake Henriques

FOR DAILY MEDITATION

MONDAY, Dec. 1. Deut. 5:22-29.

God's glory at Sinai. The Israelites heard God's voice and were so frightened that they thought they might die if they heard it again, so they asked Moses to go near to God and hear all that He would speak. Whatever Moses relayed to them, they would do. Their posture of reverent fear pleased God. He wanted them to listen and to obey His commandments so that it would go well with them and their descendants. It pleases God when we listen to His voice and obey His commands.

TUESDAY, Dec. 2. Ex. 33:1-6.

Unable to live in God's presence. Sometimes the truth hurts. God refused to accompany His chosen stiff-necked people after they made a golden calf to worship. He did provide an angel, and He fought off their enemies, but He withdrew His own dear presence so that they would not be destroyed. Our holy God is an all-consuming fire who will not bless disloyalty.

WEDNESDAY, Dec. 3. Ps. 85:1-9.

Revive us again. The psalmist recalled God's favor on the land and extolled God's forgiveness of sin. God withdrew His wrath and turned from His anger to restore and revive His people. Remembering God's steadfast love, the psalmist requested God to do the same for his generation so that they might hear His words and rejoice in God, their salvation. May we remember God's steadfast love and call on Him to revive us so that we too can hear His words and rejoice in His salvation.

THURSDAY, Dec. 4. Ps. 27:1-14.

Living in God's presence. We can be confident and not fear because the Almighty Creator saves, sustains, and

shields us. He covers us and keeps us safe from enemies. David asked God for one thing. He wanted to live close to the Lord, to dwell in God's house so that he could seek His face and gaze on His beauty. Is that what you want too?

FRIDAY, Dec. 5. Ex. 34:29-35.

God's glory reflected. The forty days and nights Moses spent fasting and communing with the Most High God changed him. Everyone noticed his radiant face after he descended Mount Sinai—everyone, that is, but Moses. He had been wholly focused on the Holy One, listening to His commands. We may not climb a Mount Sinai as Moses did, but we too will reflect God's glory when we spend time in His presence and focus on Him.

SATURDAY, Dec. 6. 2 Cor. 3:7-18.

God's glory unveiled. When Moses met God at Mount Sinai, his face shone with God's glory. That encounter introduced the law—a law that was glorious but could not come close to the glory of the righteousness revealed in Christ by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings freedom. The Lord Jesus removes the veil so that believers can see Him and His glory. As we gaze on Jesus, we are transformed and conformed to His image.

SUNDAY, Dec. 7. Ex. 33:12-23.

Beholding God's glory. Moses had experienced intimacy with God when he fasted on Mount Sinai (cf. 34:28). He knew God's presence and goodness, but he wanted more. He wanted to see God in all His glory. God showed Moses more, but He did not show him the fullness of His glory because Moses would not have been able to endure it. Often, like Moses, we do not realize the weight of what we are asking. One day, we will see His full glory when we see Jesus face to face.

—Lynda Kopacz