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INTRODUCTION

This study guide will be most helpful if you work through it slowly with an open Bible, looking up all the references. Grab some friends and do it together!



1	Holiness is a biblical word that means “unique, set apart.”
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קדוש

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HEBREW QADOSH

HOLINESS

ἅγιος

- - -
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GREEK HAGIOS

The first two things called “holy” in the Bible are:

1ST

THE SABBATH DAY

God “sanctifies” it (makes it holy by setting it apart) as a day of rest from all work to enjoy the goodness of creation.

GENESIS 2:3

2ND

**THE “HOLY GROUND”
AROUND THE
BURNING BUSH OF
GOD’S PRESENCE**

God’s presence is so powerful and unique that it makes the area surrounding his presence set apart as well.

EXODUS 3:1-6

IN BOTH CASES THE HOLINESS OF THESE THINGS IS HONORED BY TREATING THEM WITH SPECIAL CARE, NOT DOING ACTIVITIES ON THEM THAT ARE DONE ELSEWHERE.

In the rest of the Bible all kinds of things can be holy:

PEOPLE

LEVITICUS 8:1-10

PLACES

EZEKIEL 42:13

THINGS

EXODUS 40:1-10

TIME

LEVITICUS 23:1-2

2

People, places, and things are considered “holy” because they have a close relationship to God, who is the source and definition of holiness.

God’s holiness is a way of talking about God’s character and nature as the most unique, powerful, beautiful, and good being in all the universe:

*“There is no one holy like the LORD;
there is no one besides you.”*

1 SAMUEL 2:2:

1

God is called “holy” for the first time in Exodus 15:11

READ THE ENTIRE
POEM TO GET THE
BIG IDEA

2

God’s holiness is connected to his unique role as the creator and author of all life and beauty.

ISAIAH 6:3; 17:7;
43:15; 54:5; 55:5

3

God’s holiness is also connected to his character as the source of all moral goodness and purity

LEVITICUS 11:44

ISRAEL’S SIN IS OFTEN CONTRASTED WITH
GOD’S HOLINESS: SEE JEREMIAH 51:5; PSALM
78:41

3

God's holiness is so pure and good that it poses a paradox for humans living in a world ruined by sin.

A

His power and purity is the source of all life and sustains our existence.

ISAIAH 6:3

B

But his power and purity can become dangerous to mortal humans corrupted by sin: This paradox is seen most clearly in the dangerous goodness of God's presence living in Israel's midst in the tabernacle and temple

1

The temple had to be kept separate from all types of "impurity" that would defile God's holy presence

LEVITICUS 11-15

2

Only holy priests were allowed into God's direct presence in the temple, and even they were in danger if they didn't honor God's holiness.

LEVITICUS 9-10



4

However, Isaiah the prophet had a strange vision where he was in the temple (where he didn't belong!) and in the direct presence of God.

ISAIAH 6

A

He is terrified for his life because of his moral impurity ("unclean lips")

ISAIAH 6:5

B

Instead of being destroyed, God has a burning, holy coal taken from his presence and applied to Isaiah's lips (ouch!)

ISAIAH 6:6

C

Instead of the temple becoming contaminated by Isaiah's impurity, the opposite happens: God's holiness transfers to Isaiah and erases his sin and impurity.

ISAIAH 6:7

THIS IS UNEXPECTED TO SAY THE LEAST! THE IMPLICATIONS OF ISAIAH'S VISION ARE HUGE. PERHAPS GOD DOESN'T NEED TO BE PROTECTED BY THE IMPURITY OUR SIN, MAYBE IT'S THE OTHER WAY AROUND. MAYBE IT'S OUR SIN THAT IS ENDANGERED BY GOD'S HOLINESS.

5

Ezekiel's vision contains another important contribution to this theme.

ISAIAH 47

A

Ezekiel's vision of a new temple is part of his larger vision of how God will restore his covenant people after their sin and covenant failure: In Ezekiel 8-11 God's presence leaves the temple after it's defiled by Israel's idolatry and sin.

EZEKIEL 8-11

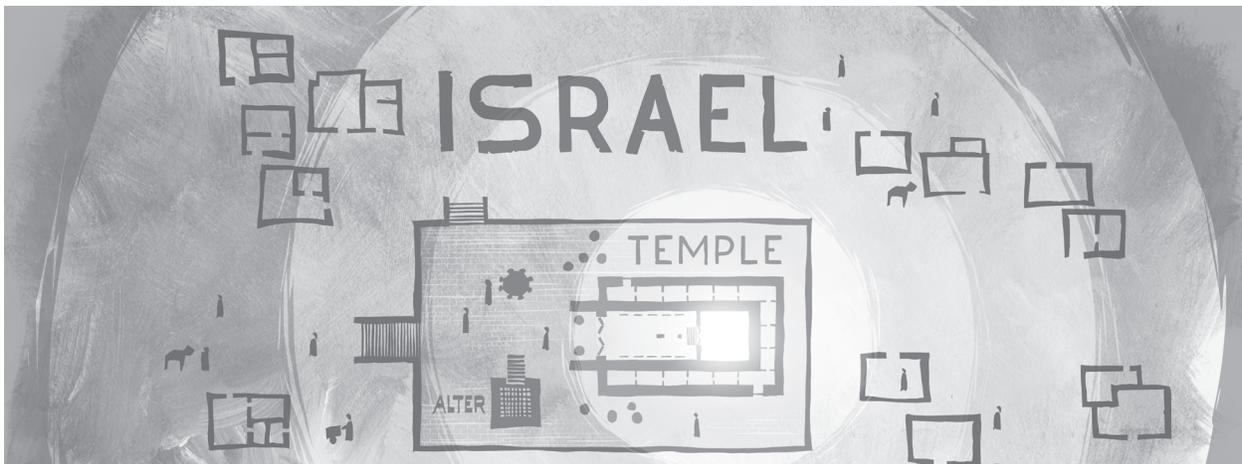
B

Ezekiel envisions a new temple (chs. 40-47) in a new land (ch. 48) with a new covenant people (chs.36-37).

C

This temple needs to be honored as holy space, but at the same time, Ezekiel's vision about the river flowing out of the temple makes it clear that God's life-giving holiness will one day flow out of the temple into the world creating all kinds of new life

EZEKIEL 47:7-12.



6

When Jesus arrives on the scene announcing the arrival of God's kingdom, he seems to identify and move towards people who were considered 'unclean' and unfit to enter God's presence in the temple.

A

Jesus' contact with the leper (Matthew 8:1-4), the bleeding woman (Matthew 9:20-23), the dead boy (Luke 7:11-17) should have made him "unclean," but instead his holiness and purity transfers to them, healing and restoring their bodies.

B

Jesus declared that people are not made impure by anything that touches or enters their bodies, but rather by the moral corruption and selfishness that comes out of their minds and hearts.

MARK 7:14-23

C

Jesus claimed that he was the new temple, the place where God's holiness meets people in their sin and uncleanness: He offered forgiveness of sins apart from the temple and said his death was a sacrifice that covered for the sin of others.

MATTHEW 9:1-8
MATTHEW 26:26-29



7

Jesus established the community of his followers as a new temple, where God's holiness meets with his people and changes them forever.

A

After his resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 resembles the entrance of God's holy presence into the temple.

ACTS 2:1-4

COMPARE THE IMAGES OF CLOUD, FIRE AND GLORY IN EXODUS 40:34, LEVITICUS 9:23-24, AND 2 CHRONICLES 7:1 WITH THE IMAGE OF FIRE IN ACTS 2:1-4

B

The apostles argued that the community of Jesus' people are a new temple, and so are called to be holy like priests, set apart from showing the world the grace and mercy of God.

*1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17;
EPHESIANS 2:19-22;
1 PETER 2:4-5, 9-10*

C

Jesus also used the image of Ezekiel's temple-river to describe any person who trusts in him: the Spirit will make that person a holy source of God's own life that spreads to others:

JOHN 7:37-39

D

The story of the Bible concludes with John's vision of the new creation, where Ezekiel's river is flowing out of God's presence creating a new garden of Eden-city where his people are with him forever.

REVELATION 21-22

**DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

1

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “holy”? How does its biblical meaning differ from our cultural meaning?

2

How is holiness rooted in an understanding of God’s character? How is God’s holiness both good and dangerous at the same time?

3

What is the significance of Isaiah’s vision in comparison to the tabernacle/temple system established by Leviticus? How does his vision reveals God’s heart for people who are unclean?

4

How does this help you understand the importance of the kind of people that Jesus would heal? What kind of impact would these healings have had in the Jewish culture of Jesus’ time?

5

Read 1 Peter 2:1-10: How do all the images of temple, holiness, priests, and the church come together? What does this reveal about God’s holiness? How does this raise the bar of holiness for a follower of Jesus?

1 PETER 2:1-10

