

Short Studies in
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY



SANCTIFICATION

AS SET APART AND GROWING IN CHRIST

MARNY KÖSTENBERGER

“This short but careful, compelling, and comprehensive study accomplishes a great deal, exposing the reason for conflicting views about sanctification, examining the biblical terminology in context, and tracing the way the theme develops as God’s purpose for humanity is progressively disclosed in Scripture. Marny Köstenberger writes with great clarity, showing how a biblical-theological approach to this topic is both necessary and empowering for those who would lead a godly life.”

David G. Peterson, Emeritus Faculty, Moore Theological College; author, *Possessed by God*

“This book skillfully summarizes the whole Bible’s witness to a highly important doctrine and practical life reality. While readers may differ on particulars, the author builds on the compelling thesis: ‘Anyone desiring to grasp God’s work in, and call to, sanctification . . . must first come to terms with the glorious, matchless, and undefiled holiness of God.’ Study this book for help in understanding how God’s holiness pours into and out from the lives of his people through faith in Christ and the Spirit’s work.”

Robert W. Yarbrough, Professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

“The reality that God not only desires but is also at work to accomplish the sanctification of his people cannot be missed in the Bible. But why? And how? And when? In this short but significant book, Marny Köstenberger capably leads readers through Old Testament history, the first coming of the Holy One and his teaching on what holiness of heart looks like, and to the epistles of Paul and Peter and James, which press in the urgency as well as the Spirit’s sufficiency to make God’s people holy.”

Nancy Guthrie, author and teacher, Biblical Theology Workshop for Women

“Marny Köstenberger ably traces the biblical story of the holy God who graciously sanctifies his people for his praise. Sanctification comes at God’s initiative, continues by God’s power, and culminates in God’s glorious presence. Köstenberger explains how positional sanctification empowers believers’ progressive growth in holiness through participation in Christ, propelling us toward moral excellence, missional community, and meaningful relationships. I warmly recommend this book!”

Brian J. Tabb, Academic Dean and Professor of Biblical Studies, Bethlehem College and Seminary

“In this informative study, Marny Köstenberger provides an accessible introduction to the important, but often neglected, biblical concept of sanctification. Through a careful analysis of the books of the New Testament, this study offers an engaging exposition of how Jesus Christ bestows on his followers a holy status (positional sanctification) and empowers them to grow in holiness (progressive sanctification). Köstenberger’s discussion is especially helpful in addressing the practical implications of holiness for everyday life.”

T. Desmond Alexander, Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies, Union Theological College

“In this comprehensive yet concise treatment of sanctification, Marny Köstenberger masterfully handles the Scriptures to demonstrate that God’s call to holiness is clearly presented from Genesis to Revelation. Through careful historical, literary, and theological study, each page unpacks compelling truths that are essential for the individual and corporate Christian life as we await the return of Christ. Köstenberger reminds us that sanctification is not an end in itself; it is given by grace through faith to empower Christ followers to go to the nations. Her thoughtful applications are timeless, making this an essential resource for disciple makers in every cultural context around the world.”

Angie Brown, Associate Professor of Women’s Ministry, Gulf Theological Seminary, Dubai

“How is it that, throughout history, God takes fallen and broken individuals and makes them into a holy people set apart for himself? Marny Köstenberger takes us on a journey through the Scriptures, exploring both the language and the process of what theologians call the ‘doctrine of sanctification.’ Characterized by thorough research, this summarization of the author’s longtime study and love for the subject examines how and in what contexts God seeks to sanctify or ‘holify’ us, setting us apart for himself and his purposes in this life and the life to come. I am confident that this volume will be a welcome and worthy addition to the Short Studies in Biblical Theology series.”

Theresa Wigington Bowen, Host, Life Impact Ministries; Founder, A Candle in the Window Hospitality Network

Sanctification as Set Apart and Growing in Christ

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Sanctification as Set Apart and Growing in Christ

Marny Köstenberger

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*For my husband,
Andreas Johannes Köstenberger*

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Series Preface

Most of us tend to approach the Bible early on in our Christian lives as a vast, cavernous, and largely impenetrable book. We read the text piecemeal, finding golden nuggets of inspiration here and there, but remain unable to plug any given text meaningfully into the overarching storyline. Yet one of the great advances in evangelical biblical scholarship over the past few generations has been the recovery of biblical theology—that is, a renewed appreciation for the Bible as a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and ultimately Christ-centered narrative of God’s covenantal work in our world to redeem sinful humanity.

This renaissance of biblical theology is a blessing, yet little of it has been made available to the general Christian population. The purpose of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers. Each volume is written by a capable scholar or churchman who is consciously writing in a way that requires no prerequisite theological training of the reader. Instead, any thoughtful Christian disciple can track with and benefit from these books.

Each volume in this series takes a whole-Bible theme and traces it through Scripture. In this way readers not only learn about a given

theme but also are given a model for how to read the Bible as a coherent whole.

We have launched this series because we love the Bible, we love the church, and we long for the renewal of biblical theology in the academy to enliven the hearts and minds of Christ's disciples all around the world. As editors, we have found few discoveries more thrilling in life than that of seeing the whole Bible as a unified story of God's gracious acts of redemption, and indeed of seeing the whole Bible as ultimately about Jesus, as he himself testified (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

The ultimate goal of *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* is to magnify the Savior and to build up his church—magnifying the Savior through showing how the whole Bible points to him and his gracious rescue of helpless sinners; and building up the church by strengthening believers in their grasp of these life-giving truths.

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

Introduction

There is a great deal of confusion regarding the nature of sanctification today. In fact, as Steve Porter observes, “an in-depth understanding of spiritual progress has often been lacking within evangelicalism.”¹ He refers to church historian Richard Lovelace, who called this “the sanctification gap”—the chasm between people’s best intentions and their inadequate understanding of what the Scriptures teach on sanctification. According to Lovelace, evangelicalism, throughout its history, and in keeping with its Reformation heritage, has focused primarily on justification at conversion as well as on general doctrinal orthodoxy and activities such as church involvement, evangelism, and missions. As a result, the tendency within evangelicalism has often been to emphasize the *product* rather than the *process*—doing rather than being, and activity rather than character growth and spiritual development. Porter laments that “in the absence of a robust theology of sanctification, various erroneous models of spiritual growth have emerged that confuse and disillusion many.”²

1. Steve L. Porter, “Sanctification,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 734. See also Porter’s entry “Holiness, Sanctification,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 397–402.

2. Porter, “Sanctification,” 734–35.

The Language Gap

One reason for this sanctification gap may be the confusion caused by the translation of the Greek terms for “holiness” (*hagiasmos/hagiosunē/hagiotēs*) and “holy” (*hagios*) with *sanctificatio* and *sanctus* in the Latin Vulgate, which has led to the renderings “sanctification” and “saints” in many, if not most, of our English Bibles. Such renderings, in turn, open up possible connections with Roman Catholic theology and tradition, where “saints” are those who meet special qualifications for holiness. However, while believers doubtless display different levels of maturity, Scripture does not divide people into ordinary Christians and a special category of holy people. Instead, biblically speaking, holiness should set all believers apart from the world and to God. Therefore, to give but one example, it is potentially misleading for English translations to render the Greek term *hagioi* as “saints.” Rather, the word is better understood as designating all true believers as “holy ones” regardless of their level of spiritual maturity.

The Tradition Gap

A survey of the literature on sanctification reveals another barrier to understanding, namely, multiple and contradictory perspectives.³ This plethora of views is the result of varying hermeneutical approaches, views of Scripture, and traditions in different Christian groups or denominations. According to Wayne Grudem, perspectives range from Roman Catholic to Anglican/Episcopalian, Arminian (Wesleyan/Methodist), Baptist, Dispensational, Lutheran, Reformed (Presbyterian), and Renewal (Charismatic/Pentecostal).⁴

3. See, e.g., Don Alexander, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989); Melvin E. Dieter, Anthony A. Hoekema, Stanley M. Horton, J. Robertson McQuilkin, and John F. Walvoord, *Five Views on Sanctification*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

4. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 938–39. See also the resources on the various views in the “Further Reading” section at the end of this volume.

Over the centuries, various traditions formed around differing notions of holiness and sainthood, starting with the New Testament church and continuing through the patristic and medieval periods, and, significantly, the time of the Reformation.⁵ Some viewed sanctification primarily as a contemplative and ascetic exercise in the context of monastic spirituality; others conceived it primarily—if not exclusively—in terms of progressive transformation.⁶ Some have contended that perfection is achieved upon conversion,⁷ while others have argued that a new level of holiness is attained at a second experience of the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion, a phenomenon sometimes called “second blessing” or “entire sanctification.”

The Relevance Gap

A third and final obstacle to understanding sanctification, apart from linguistic confusion and multiple traditions, is apathy. Many people today simply do not care about holiness. The age in which we live is in many ways an irreligious and irreverent age. There is doubtless a “hole in our holiness”—to cite the aptly chosen title of Kevin DeYoung’s popular treatment of the topic—at least in part because the whole notion of holiness as being set apart for God and being wholly devoted to serve and worship him has fallen on hard times.⁸ For many, talking about holiness seems hopelessly antiquated. There is a demonstrable “relevance gap” in the effort of communicating the concept of holiness to those caught up in the pursuit of pleasure, worldly status, and possessions. Why care? And what is holiness

5. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.3.14 and 3.14.9, who defines sanctification as being “more and more consecrated to the Lord in true purity of life.”

6. See, e.g., Porter, “Sanctification,” 734.

7. Perfectionism is the belief that, once converted, believers have the ability to live sinlessly. On perfectionism, “second blessing,” and “entire sanctification,” see Laurence W. Wood, “The Wesleyan View,” in *Christian Spirituality*, 95–118.

8. Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

anyway? For others, a desire for purpose and transcendence leads to “legalism” of a more secular variety: vague spirituality, political tribalism, or even strict diets and exercise regimens fill in for true holiness. It seems we need to start from scratch in educating, and in some cases reeducating, even people in the church as to what holiness is and what the pursuit of it entails.

Starting from Scratch

Starting from scratch is exactly what I aim to do in the present volume. In fact, “start from scratch” is a good way to conceive of biblical theology. What is biblical theology?⁹ At its core, it is a way of studying a given topic in Scripture—in our case, sanctification—*on its own terms* and *in its own original context*. Rather than refracting our understanding of what Scripture teaches on sanctification through the Latin Vulgate or a particular faith tradition, I go back to the roots of our Christian faith—the Holy Scriptures—and set out to study the biblical teaching on holiness and sanctification historically, inductively, and, at least initially, descriptively.

That is, I do not start with our own contemporary context or questions—though application is our end goal—but trace how God’s people were instructed about holiness *historically*, first in the Old Testament (Israel) and subsequently in the New Testament (the church).

I do not start with an already set theological system or faith tradition and read Scripture through its lenses but attempt to infer and reconstruct the biblical teaching as much as possible by reading and interpreting the relevant texts in Scripture *inductively*.

Finally, I try to connect the dots between the relevant passages as they progressively unfold throughout Scripture and mutually inform

9. For a detailed discussion, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), chap. 1.

each other so as to construct a coherent whole—a “biblical theology of sanctification”—*descriptively* before moving on to apply it to our lives today. This is a considerable but not unmanageable task, as I hope to show in this short volume. I believe that such a biblical-theological approach will help avoid much of the confusion that has arisen and unfortunately has kept many from growing in holiness.

The Language of Sanctification

Scripture often uses multiple related words that contribute to its overall portrayal of a concept. For instance, we would be remiss to focus our attention exclusively on the meaning of the single word *sanctify* when there are descriptions of the *concept* of sanctification in Scripture in the form of other words and phrases even where the particular *sanctification* word group is not used.¹⁰ A biblical-theological survey of sanctification, then, commences with a simple word study but does not stop there. An initial immersion into relevant passages will help us absorb the intricacies of the doctrine of sanctification in the context of Scripture.

In this way, we will find bits and pieces of the entire biblical teaching communicated in ways that may be foreign to us in terms of their cultural and historical background and uniqueness. As with a closeup view of a painting’s details, we may not immediately perceive the overall picture, but we can nonetheless begin to examine the various colors and textures that make up the beauty of a given doctrine.¹¹ In the following chapters, as I begin to survey first the Old Testament, and

10. Andreas J. Köstenberger with Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2020), 516.

11. We will cull the meaning and definition of the relevant words from resources such as Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997); Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989); and Moisés Silva, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 11.

then the New, I will therefore survey the terminology that together helps us reconstruct the biblical concept of sanctification.

Getting Started

I cannot do much for those who simply do not care about the things of God—irreverence or irreligiousness. But I hope to do my small part in helping to alleviate lack of knowledge or confusion regarding the biblical teaching on sanctification and to stir those who feel in themselves a growing lethargy and desire to be awakened. A greater understanding of what God's word teaches about sanctification will, I trust, lead to a more confident and effective pursuit of holiness, resulting in holier individuals and a holier community of faith. In fact, as we will see, striving for greater holiness is not merely an individualistic quest but has an important relational dimension. What is more, not only is holiness lived out in community; it should also result in mission. With this, I begin where any proper investigation of a matter must necessarily take its point of departure—in the beginning.

Foundation

Creation and Covenant

The Bible is the divinely inspired account of God and his relationship with humanity. Genesis and Revelation are the bookends of the great library of Scripture that narrates the story reaching from God's *creation* of the universe and humanity to the new creation. Between these bookends, the Bible provides an account of humanity's fall and God's successive *covenants* with his people, climaxing in the new covenant through Jesus the Messiah.¹ Essentially, the story of God's relationship with humanity is bound up with *presence*: God created humans to live in his presence; they transgressed the Creator's command and consequently were expelled from his presence. In the tabernacle, later in the temple, and ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ, God manifested his presence. Those who trust in Christ are

1. On the series of biblical covenants, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

reconciled with God, receive the indwelling Holy Spirit, the “other helping presence” (John 14:16), and look forward to eternity spent in God’s presence. Being introduced to, and transformed by, the Spirit in the here and now so as to be made fit to live in the presence of God for all eternity is entering the realm of sanctification.

Old Testament Language of Sanctification

Before surveying the Old Testament teaching regarding sanctification, it will be profitable to examine the particular Hebrew words related to holiness. The concept of sanctification is most commonly expressed in the Old Testament through the *qadosh* word group, the Hebrew root word for *holy*, whether noun (“holiness”), adjective (“holy”), or verb (“to make holy, to sanctify”).² The noun *qōdesh*, “holiness,” has the general meaning “be holy, withheld from ordinary use, treated with special care, belonging to the sanctuary.” It typically designates “a holy person, thing, place, or time, something sacred, consecrated to God.” The term is most commonly found in Exodus 25–Numbers 10; 1–2 Chronicles; and Ezekiel 40–48.³

The core meaning is best discerned from key passages in Leviticus and later Ezekiel, which contrast what is holy with what is common or profane. Take Leviticus 10:10, for example: “You are to distinguish between the *holy* and the common, and between the unclean and the clean.”⁴ When used in conjunction with another noun, the noun functions like an adjective, as in “mountain of *holiness*,” that is, “*holy* mountain”: “But you who forsake the LORD, who forget my *holy mountain* . . .” (Isa. 65:11; cf. 58:13; 65:25). God is the source of

2. Jackie A. Naudé, “*qdš*” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 3.877–87. See also David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 3:237–49.

3. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.877–79.

4. See also Ezek. 22:26; 42:20; 44:23.

all holiness; thus the noun conveys “the essential nature that belongs to the sphere of God’s being or activity and that is distinct from the common or profane.”⁵

In fact, the term “can be used almost as a synonym of deity” where God is contrasted with his creatures.⁶ The expression “holy name,” for instance, is virtually synonymous with God: “My *holy name* I will make known in the midst of my people Israel” (Ezek. 39:7; cf. Amos 2:7). Because God is holy, he can deliver his people (Ex. 15:11) and can be trusted to keep his promises (Ps. 105:42). The idea of God’s holiness also conveys his moral perfection in contrast to all moral imperfection (Isa. 63:10–11). While holiness is clearly not an integral part of the world, it can operate within it,⁷ a reality which has important implications for our understanding of the New Testament call on believers to be in but not of the world.

The adjective *qadosh*, “holy,” indicates a dynamic quality rather than merely the “state of belonging to the realm of the divine.”⁸ It conveys a sense of moving people into the divine realm; while God is the source of all holiness, “human beings can participate in . . . sanctification.”⁹ In the vast majority of contexts, the adjective is used in conjunction with divine (1 Sam. 6:20; Isa. 43:3; Hab. 1:12) or human beings (Deut. 14:2; 26:19) and the sacrificial court (Ex. 29:31; Lev. 6:16, 26; 7:6; 10:13; 24:9; Ezek. 42:13).¹⁰ On the whole, the adjective conveys the sense that God, in his very essence, is holy and calls his people to be holy as well, identifying the standard by which they can attain holiness.¹¹ The word is also used in the title “the Holy One of Israel” or simply “the Holy One” (esp. in Isaiah; see, e.g., 43:15; 45:11).

5. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.879.

6. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.879.

7. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.879.

8. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.882.

9. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.881–82.

10. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.881.

11. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.882.

The related verb means “to make holy,” that is, to (literally) “holyfy” or “sanctify.” This term conveys the state of or transition toward holiness (i.e., consecration). Such consecration involves both entering into communion with the divine realm and being set apart from the worldly domain.¹² While some consider *separation from* the world to be the essential meaning of the verb, more likely separation is the prerequisite for living in accordance with, and being wholly *devoted to*, God’s special purposes.¹³ Some instances of the verb indicate that touching a holy object makes a person holy himself. Take Exodus 29:37, for example: “Whatever touches the altar shall become *holy*.”¹⁴

Another set of passages refers to the disregard for God’s holiness in the context of Israel’s disobedience, resulting in dishonor being brought to God’s name among the nations. Representative examples are found in Deuteronomy and Ezekiel: “Because you did not treat me as *holy* in the midst of the people of Israel . . .” (Deut. 32:51); “I will vindicate the *holiness* of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations” (Ezek. 36:23; cf. 38:23). Finally, a type of usage relates to people consecrating themselves to perform a sacred task or to be allowed to enter into God’s presence, at times after temporary defilement: “*Consecrate yourselves*, therefore, and be *holy*, for I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 20:7).¹⁵

The word *holy* in the Old Testament is connected with the overall depiction of, and call to, sanctification for God’s people. The basic, physical, literal use of the Hebrew word for holiness, *qōdeš*, refers to being “set apart” or “separate.”¹⁶ However, the more typical use of *holy*

12. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.885.

13. Naudé, “*qdš*,” *New International Dictionary*, 3.882.

14. See also Ex. 29:21; 30:29; Lev. 6:18, 27.

15. See also Ex. 19:22; Lev. 11:44; Num. 11:18; Josh. 3:5; 1 Sam. 16:5; 2 Sam. 11:4; 1 Chron. 15:12; 2 Chron. 5:11. In these examples, people must prepare themselves before they can meet a holy God and enter into his presence.

16. As Herman Bavinck notes, the root meaning is “to cut, separate” and “expresses the idea of being cut off and isolated.” *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, vol. 2., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 217.

in the Old Testament carries the connotation of religious and moral purity, God's desire for his creatures to be consecrated or devoted to him and thus fit to live in communion with him.¹⁷

The preceding survey of Hebrew words relating to holiness has set the broad parameters for our study of sanctification in the Old Testament. While biblical theology is more than word studies, this overview has laid a helpful foundation for the remainder of our study. Next, we will turn to the various concepts, time periods, and portions of the Old Testament pertaining to sanctification for a more in-depth investigation.

God's Eternal Holiness

Holiness is first and foremost a divine attribute. God alone is truly holy; there is none like him.¹⁸ The holiness of God is his very "name" (Isa. 57:15) and distinguishes him from his creation (1 Sam. 2:2). God's eternal holiness, and his work on behalf of his people to bring about a derivative holiness in them, is revealed in the Old Testament in a number of ways (cf. Lev. 19:2).¹⁹ The Old Testament depicts God in glowing terms as holy and glorious, whether in his self-descriptions, in pronouncements made about God by various Old Testament characters, or in narrative portions describing the words and works of God.

At the exodus, the song of Moses exults in God by asking, "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:11).

17. Cf. Peter J. Gentry, "Sizemore Lectures: No One Holy Like the Lord," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2013): 17–38; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 362–63.

18. See Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018).

19. The phrase "the Holy One" or "the Holy One of Israel" is found in Isaiah numerous times (see, e.g., Isa. 1:4; 12:6; 41:14; and esp. the throne room vision in Isa. 6:1–6); see also Ex. 3:5–6; 1 Sam. 2:2; and Ps. 99:2–3. Later, Peter calls Jesus "the Holy One of God" (John 6:69).

The psalmist writes, “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of *holiness*” (Ps. 29:2). The book of Isaiah is replete with God’s self-descriptions and others’ pronouncements regarding God’s unmatched holiness. In the throne room vision, the prophet sees angels crying, “*Holy, holy, holy* is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isa. 6:1–4). Later, he writes: “‘To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?’ says the *Holy One*” (Isa. 40:25; cf. 44:6–9); “For I am the LORD your God, the *Holy One* of Israel, your Savior” (Isa. 43:3); “I am the LORD, your *Holy One*, the Creator of Israel, your King” (Isa. 43:15); “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is *Holy*: ‘I dwell in the high and *holy* place’” (Isa. 57:15). The manifestation of the supremacy of God’s being and character is revealed in his holiness.²⁰

In these and other biblical portrayals of God, we see God characterized as replete with eternal glory and splendor. There is none like him, majestic and awesome, excellent in every way, high and lifted up, filling the earth with his glory. God is to be revered in awe, and all his works praise him. Nothing compares to him. As the Holy One, God is devoted to his people. He is Israel’s Redeemer, the first and the last. There is no other God besides him. He inhabits eternity. He is a rock. He is from everlasting. His splendor covers the heavens. As Jonathan Edwards writes:

Now God is infinitely holy, and infinitely exalted therein, above the holy angels and all creatures; there is not the least tincture of defilement or pollution in the Deity, but he is infinitely far above it; he is all pure light without mixture of darkness; he hates and abhors sin above all things, ‘tis what is

20. David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), 18.

contrary to his nature. This, his great holiness, has he made known to us by his justice, truth, and faithfulness in all his dispensations towards us, and by the pure holiness of his laws and commands.²¹

Anyone desiring to grasp God's work in, and call to, sanctification, therefore, must first come to terms with the glorious, matchless, and undefiled holiness of God.

Creation in the Image and Likeness of a Holy God

While God is majestic, sovereign, and holy, he enters into relationship with human beings and is devoted to them in love. We've already mentioned that God created humanity in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26–28). Though there are differing views on the exact meaning of humanity being God's "image," we understand that human beings, simply by being human, represent God and mediate his rule over his creation.²² The fact that we've been created in God's holy image, however, implies that we're created to reflect his holiness. God's image is related to what we *are*, and "imaging" is something we should *do*. Since there is no one like God, there are, even before the fall, creaturely limits to the holiness and glory that inheres and is being reflected through his image bearers. Nevertheless, as those created in God's image, the man and the woman are to reflect his glory and holiness both individually and in relation to one another.²³

21. Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1720–1723*, vol. 10, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 423–24.

22. For an analysis of Gen. 1:26–28, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 215–54.

23. Cf. Paul's portrayal of sanctification of the renewal of the image of God in us, using "image" language in Col. 3:10 ("renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator"); and Eph 4:24 ("the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"). On God's original design, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E. Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 23–41. On creation in God's image, see Richard J. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005); Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic,

God shares his holiness with his creatures in that the holiness that should characterize the people he created is imparted *to* them rather than being produced *by* them in their own strength.²⁴ Properly understood, therefore, holiness is God’s gift to the people he has made. It is the undeserved blessing bestowed on humanity by the Creator out of his abundant grace and goodness.²⁵ Not only do God’s holiness, majesty, and excellence frequently become the grounds of praise in Scripture (e.g., Isa. 43:21), his holiness also calls for imitation on the part of his image bearers so that they reflect his glory (e.g., Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; cf. Gen. 1:28).

Fall, Flood, Exodus, Covenants with Israel

God’s presence initially dwelt amongst the man and woman in the garden amid the perfect creation God had originally fashioned (Gen. 3:8). Having created them in his image for the purpose of ruling the earth for his glory, the Creator expressed a sense of completeness and satisfaction: “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). However, after the fall of humanity into sin and the ensuing breakdown of relationship—including the man’s and woman’s inability to fulfill their divinely ordained callings—humanity persisted in a state of rebellion against God, resulting in aberrations such as fratricide (Gen. 4:8), polygamy (4:19), and sexual immorality (Gen. 6:1–4). God indicated his abhorrence toward humanity’s sin by exacting judgment with the universal flood (Gen. 6–9). A remnant was given reprieve through a covenant established with Noah (Gen. 9:8–17), one in a series of covenants by

2015); John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015); and Peter J. Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 16–43.

24. Later, Peter would speak of believers becoming “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4).

25. Michael Allen, *Sanctification*, *New Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 88.

which God, by the promise of redemption, held out hope for people who feared him.

While originally having been created for a glorious and fulfilling relationship with God, humanity slid into sin and destruction. Throughout human history, this downfall was manifested in a variety of ways, including sexual immorality, corrupt worship, and irresponsible leadership.²⁶ And yet humanity's relationship with God awaited future redemption. Initially promised by God immediately following the fall—to be fulfilled in due course in the messianic “seed” (Gen. 3:15), and reiterated and further developed in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–6, 18; 18:18; 22:15–18)—divine deliverance was enacted at the exodus.²⁷ God brought his people out of Egyptian slavery into the promised land, gave them the law for obedience, and made the necessary provisions for sacrificial cleansing in case of disobedience (Ex. 12–30).

At the exodus, God “remembered” his covenant made originally with Abraham (Ex. 2:24). As a sign of his love and devotion, God established a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai in which he made provision for holy living to prepare the people of Israel to meet their God and to enjoy fellowship with him. After forty years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, God brought the nascent nation across the Jordan and led them to settle in the land promised to their ancestors; there, Joshua renewed the covenant (Josh. 8:30–35). The covenant served not only as a mechanism by which the people of Israel could be cleansed and their sins forgiven but also as a signpost to the righteousness and holiness of God as displayed amongst and through his people before the surrounding nations.

26. Andreas J. Köstenberger with David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 31–39.

27. On Gen. 3:15, see Paul Williamson and Rita Cefalu, eds., *The Seed of Promise: The Sufferings and Glory of the Messiah; Essays in Honor of T. Desmond Alexander* (Wilmore, KY: GlosaHouse, 2020).

Despite this promising beginning, however, Israel went on to reject the God of the covenant. God had demonstrated great love and tender concern in the manner in which he had provided redemption—taking his people by the hand and bringing them out of bondage (cf. Jer. 31:32)—yet his gracious covenant was rendered ineffective in accomplishing permanent deliverance. While the laws stipulated in the Mosaic covenant served as expressions of God's holy and righteous character, they remained external standards and regulations that were insufficient to effect heartfelt obedience. Not that the covenant was defective in and of itself; rather, God's people were unable to live by it as their hearts had not (yet) been spiritually transformed. This points to the fallenness of the human condition—including God's chosen people Israel—and the need for further divine provision to enable obedience.

Devotion as Entailment of Holiness

As a people created by God and for God—a people for his own possession—Israel was called to exhibit devotion to the God who had brought the nation out of Egypt and established a covenant with her. Thus holiness served as a key characteristic of the relationship between God and his people. In this way, there is a close connection between Moses's call in Exodus 3 (see esp. v. 5: “the place on which you are standing is holy ground”) and Israel's call in Exodus 19 that links God's manifestation of his holiness with his call for his people to pursue holiness as well. On a larger scale, the integral connection between God's own holiness and his call for his people to be holy at the exodus paves the way for the new exodus Jesus would launch through his death on the cross (cf. Mark 1:1–3; Luke 9:31).

Israel existed as a nation belonging to God. This went hand in hand with her consecration in that those who belonged to God were devoted loyally and exclusively to him. Israel was not only a royal

priesthood and holy nation but also God's personal treasure and possession (Ex. 19:5–6; applied to the church in 1 Pet. 2:9). This reflected the nature of the nation's intimate relationship with God and her calling from God—they were a mediatorial priesthood and kingdom in God's service and thus were to reflect his holiness.²⁸

The notions of consecration and devotion are therefore essential to understanding the term *holy*. As the Israelites' relationship with God was covenantal, it required faith and obedience. God's people were to be committed to him because God had committed himself to them. While God's election and call were undeserved and acts of sheer grace, God's people were nonetheless called to reciprocate by their devotion to God and obedience to him. In this regard, the law not only provided rules for human conduct but regulated people's relationship with God based on the way in which God had created humanity. The Ten Commandments thus do not only express moral principles but serve as “the foundation of true social justice and the basis of what it means to be a son or daughter of God, an Adamic figure—that is, truly and genuinely human.”²⁹

The Levitical Code and God's Standard of Holiness

In Leviticus the reader is introduced to the concept of holiness through a code that provides a framework for human conduct by consecrating individuals, places, and material objects for God.³⁰ The Levitical holiness code is regularly punctuated by God's calls for Israel to be holy: “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26). In Leviticus 20:26 God addresses Israel, saying, “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.” Here we see that Israel belongs

28. For a discussion of the phrase “kingdom of priests,” see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 356–62.

29. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 395.

30. Allen, *Sanctification*, 119.

solely to God and is thus expected to remain wholly and exclusively devoted to him.

God provided the Levitical code for his people Israel in order to instruct them to live in devotion to God and thus be distinct from the surrounding nations. God also provided a mechanism by which sacrifices could be offered for sin and forgiveness be mediated through the high priest. Such individuals were persons devoted exclusively to God's service. Living according to the Levitical holiness code—as mediated by the high priest devoted to God and his service—would make Israel fit for the holy God who dwelt in their midst. Since all of this was done at God's initiative, we can see a most gracious provision for Israel at a time when they were unable to maintain their relationship with the holy Creator God in and of themselves. Both the sacrificial system and the mediation offered by the high priest for the forgiveness of sins served the purpose of preparing people for a devoted relationship with God.

The instructions for holy living given by God in the Levitical code may be misconstrued as legalistic requirements to earn God's favor. However, this was not their purpose. Rather, God meant them for the good of his people, even though Israel proved incapable of keeping them.³¹ God's people were unable to maintain holy conduct that allowed them to experience God's presence continually amongst them. However, these instructions were not meant solely or even primarily to accentuate their failure and condemn them such that they could never meet with God again. Rather, God gave them the code as a gift to lead them back to him. Without the help and guidance provided in the Levitical instructions, the

31. As Meyer reminds us, even though “the law could not serve as the solution to our sin problem,” the “problem was not with the nature of the law but the nature of sinful humanity.” Jason C. Meyer, “The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 78.

people of Israel would remain indigent and ignorant about their way back to God.

David Peterson summarizes the Old Testament teaching on sanctification as follows: “In the final analysis, Israel’s task as a ‘holy nation’ was to sanctify the Lord before the nations by responding appropriately to him as the Holy One. God’s honor and the salvation of the nations were at stake here. As Israel pursued the path of holiness, God promised to bless her and make her a blessing to the nations.”³² Having been delivered from bondage in Egypt, God’s people were given a way to remain in the devoted relationship with God for which they had been created. Their failure to live up to the Levitical holiness code demonstrated that this kind of devoted relationship could not be accomplished by their own efforts. Thus the Old Testament description of their failure serves as a picture for people of all times to see their need for a Redeemer. This Redeemer was the Messiah, to be revealed when the time was right according to God’s plan (cf. Gal. 4:4).

God’s Continued Work to Restore Israel

God continued to work through the time of the judges to raise up leaders who would return the nation to faithfulness in his covenant. In the refrain lamenting this period in Israel’s history—“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6; 21:25)—we can see that God’s people experienced a serious moral and spiritual decline. The judges, who essentially served as national deliverers, did not succeed in bringing the people back to the holy ways of God.

During the united monarchy, God made a covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:12–13) that continued to express his faithfulness to his previous covenants. This covenant specified that the promised

32. Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 24.

offspring or “seed”—the Messiah—would be a descendant of David. After David’s death, Solomon built the temple as the place where God would manifest his holy presence. Yet, again, Israel failed to live according to the covenants God had established with the nation. After Solomon’s death, and because of his sin, the kingdom was divided; both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) faced increasing pressure under the Assyrians and Babylonians, respectively. This pressure would lead both parts of the kingdom to break covenant and succumb to idolatry. Thus, both Israel and Judah fell under the curse of the Mosaic covenant, which involved exile (Deut. 28:15–68; cf. 30:1, 19).

Exile from the promised land, in turn, marked God’s punishment for the nation’s disobedience toward the one who had delivered them from bondage, given them the law, and established a series of covenants to sustain their relationship with a righteous and holy God—Yahweh, who was both their Creator and their Redeemer. How does all of this connect to sanctification? This brief review of Israel’s history from creation to exodus and exile reveals as the constant theme Israel’s call and covenantal obligation to remain in right relationship with God. And yet, while God had graciously taken the initiative, his people failed to respond to his saving grace in trust and obedience.

The Temple: The Presence, Power, and Holiness of God

Throughout Israel’s history, God manifested his presence and glory amid his people in both the tabernacle and the temple. In essence, therefore, the story of humanity in general, and of Israel in particular, is accompanied by the continual manifestation of God’s relational presence amongst his people.³³ His glory, holiness, and power identified him as the Creator and Redeemer of Israel who called his people

33. See esp. J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019).

to enter into relationship with him. Following the exodus, the Israelites were engaged in constructing the tabernacle, a mobile sanctuary in which God would manifest himself on their journey.

The notion of God's people building a sanctuary for God to indwell first emerged in the aftermath of the exodus: "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Ex. 25:8). Soon thereafter, God provided specific instructions for Israel: "Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests" (Ex. 29:1). In that sanctuary, God would meet with the people of Israel, and this place was to be "sanctified" by God's glory; God would "consecrate" both the "tent of meeting" and the altar (Ex. 29:42–46; cf. Lev. 26:11–12).

Later, David's son Solomon was charged with building a more permanent place where God's presence would dwell. The construction of the temple by Solomon is recounted in great length in the book of 1 Kings (chaps. 5–6). At its completion, Solomon summoned Israel's elders and tribal heads to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:5): "And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD" (8:10–11).

Solomon stood by the altar and offered a solemn prayer of dedication (1 Kings 8:22–24). At this, the Lord told him, "I have *consecrated* this house that you have built, by *putting my name there forever*." God charged Solomon to walk closely with him. If he were to succumb to idolatry, God would cut Israel off from the land he had given them (1 Kings 9:1–7). These words proved to be ominously prescient, as Solomon did indeed fail to live a holy life, disobeying God—and Israel followed suit.

The prophet Ezekiel later described God's judgment upon Israel for her disobedience but then also his plan to gather a

believing remnant from exile (Ezek. 11:11–12; cf. 8:17). Yet when the prophet interceded, God responded to his people in exile, promising restoration:

I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. . . . And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezek. 11:17–20)

This promise began to be fulfilled when Cyrus, the Persian leader, defeated the Babylonians, enabling a remnant to return and rebuild the temple. The rebuilding of the temple is described in the book of Ezra (3:8, 11–12; 5:5; 6:14; cf. Hag. 1–2).³⁴ Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the second temple was completed. God had proven faithful even when Israel had been unfaithful and had restored his people from exile. Yet while the temple was rebuilt, it did not recover all of its former glory, nor did God's glory descend to take up residence in the temple once again.

The Second Temple period spans from the temple's reconstruction to its destruction in AD 70 by the Romans. We can draw a connection between God's glory filling the temple in the Old Testament and the church as God's new-covenant community in the New. Solomon's temple—the place where God's name and glory were to dwell—foreshadowed the Spirit-filling of believers, marking the community of those redeemed by Christ who receive the Spirit at

34. On Jesus as the new temple, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Jesus of the Gospels: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2020), 379–80.

conversion. The church is the restored people of God and the place where the Spirit corporately dwells.³⁵

New Covenant Foretold: The Coming Age of the Spirit

We've seen how God established a series of covenants with Noah, Abraham, and David and in the Mosaic covenant set forth his righteous and holy standards for his people while making provision for disobedience. While God's glory came to dwell amid Israel in the Solomonic temple, however, the nation failed to keep the covenant and thus incurred God's judgment in the form of exile from the promised land. It is at that time that exilic prophets such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah articulated the expectation of a new covenant that would replace the old.

In the last days, God's people would no longer profane his holy name among the nations as they had done prior to the exile. Instead, God would inscribe his law in people's hearts; he would be their God, and they his people. At that time, everyone would intimately know the Lord (Jer. 31:31–34). God would give his people a new heart and a new spirit; he would put his Spirit within them and cause them to walk in his statutes and obey his commandments (Ezek. 36:20–27). Then the nations, likewise, would know that God was the Lord who set Israel apart (Ezek. 37:23–28).

Later, we read in the same prophetic book, "My holy name I will make known in the midst of my people Israel, and I will not let my holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel" (Ezek. 39:7). God expressed his great love for his people and his ultimate desire for them to be fully cleansed from all uncleanness. He offered cleansing and the gift of a

35. Andreas J. Köstenberger, "What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 234.

new heart and declared that he would put his Spirit within them. In this way, he would cause his people to walk in his ways.

While making clear that the human heart is “desperately wicked and deceitful” (Jer. 17:9), Jeremiah also gives hope and provides an explanation as to the manner in which God’s people will be enabled to live holy lives in conjunction with the God who created them to be a people for himself. Jeremiah reveals how the new covenant will be superior to the old: God’s law will be written on people’s hearts—a reference to the indwelling Holy Spirit—and God will remember people’s sins no more. The forgiveness procured through the new covenant is both *definitive* and *complete*. Ezekiel and Jeremiah reveal the depth of Israel’s—and all humanity’s—sin problem as well as the depth of God’s coming provision.

Summary

God demonstrated his holiness and desire for his people to reflect his holiness in several ways in Old Testament times. He delivered them from bondage at the exodus. He established a covenant with them in order that they may “belong to him and to fulfill his purpose.”³⁶ He gave them the Levitical code to show them how to maintain purity and righteousness before a holy God. He dwelled in Israel’s midst, first in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

However, in view of Israel’s failure to keep the terms of the old covenant and to live up to the standard for holiness stipulated in it, exilic and postexilic prophets began to speak of a new covenant in which God would write his law on people’s hearts. God would give them a new heart and a new spirit—his own Spirit—who would cleanse, renew, transform, teach, and guide them.³⁷ In view of this prospect, the role of the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system

36. Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 27.

37. Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 27.

was only preparatory, as was the role of God's temporary dwelling places in the tabernacle and the first and second temples.³⁸

Already in the Old Testament, we see a developing picture of the holiness of God and his expectation that his people live holy lives before him. In this chapter, we've explored the way in which the Old Testament shines the spotlight on humanity's need to reflect God's glory and to be wholly devoted to him. We've also seen that the later prophets foresaw a time when God would establish a new covenant with his people. With this, we're ready to move on to the New Testament to learn how the coming of Jesus fulfilled Old Testament messianic expectations and how the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost to usher in the age of the Spirit.

38. Cf. Peter W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 315.