

Sanctification In The Old Testament

The Old Testament teaches that God sanctifies people (see Exodus 31:13, Leviticus 20:8, 21:8 and Ezekiel 20:12). Leviticus 20:8 says in part: “...*I am the Lord who sanctifies you.*”

Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2 and 14:21 refer to the fact that God sanctified the Israelites by His grace. Deuteronomy 7:6-8 says: “*For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*”

Because of His great love, mercy and perfect faithfulness to His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God separated the Israelites from the pagan idol-worshipping nations and dedicated the Israelites to Himself as His exclusive treasured possession to be used only for His glory and purposes. Also, God lovingly and mercifully provided the symbolic means through which the Israelites could be purified from their sins on the basis of Jesus’ future death. This symbolic means was the animal sacrifices commanded in the Mosaic Covenant and Law.

But note because God had sanctified them, He commanded them to live as sanctified people. This is seen in Moses’ following words in Deuteronomy 7:6 and 11: “*For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth...Therefore you shall keep the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.*”

Leviticus 20:7-8 relates the Israelites being holy in lifestyle to God’s gracious work in sanctifying them: “*Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the Lord who sanctifies you.*” Deuteronomy 26:18-19 and Numbers 15:39-41 are similar verses.

The Mosaic Law teaches that sanctified Israelites had to live sanctified lives. Therefore, sanctification by God under the Mosaic Covenant was supposed to result in the *fruit* of the Israelites obeying God’s commands recorded in the Mosaic Law. Leviticus 22:31-32 records God’s Words: “*Therefore you shall keep My commandments, and perform them: I am the Lord. You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. I am the Lord who sanctifies you.*”

The connection between holiness and separation from sin and uncleanness can be seen in Leviticus 20:26: “*And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.*” In this context, “*separated*” refers to being separated from the pagan idol-worshipping nations. God separated the Israelites from pagan nations so they could be dedicated or devoted to Him as His own exclusive purified possession.

The close association between holiness and being devoted to God is seen in Leviticus 27:21. This verse refers to a field as being both “*holy to the Lord*” and “*a devoted field*”.

Holy, special and unclean defiled uses of people or things

Another aspect of holiness referred to under the Mosaic Covenant was the difference between holy or special uses of people or things and unclean or polluted or defiled uses of the same. There are many mentions of such things in the Law of Moses. But note non-Israelite believers under the New Covenant are not under the Law of Moses and therefore do not have to obey all the specific Mosaic commands about uncleanness and pollution (see Acts 15:6-29).

Leviticus 8:15, 10:10, 16:19, 20:25-26, Ezekiel 22:26 and 44:23 show the close relationship between cleansing and some aspects of sanctification. Each of these passages use Hebrew words both for being clean or pure and for being sanctified or holy.

The Old Testament teaches that some purifications or cleansings were needed in preparation in order to meet with a holy, sinless God (see Exodus 19:10, Leviticus 22:3-7 and Numbers 19:13). This was to teach the Israelites that uncleanness separated them from God’s Presence.

God is totally pure (see Psalm 12:6 and Habakkuk 1:13). He cannot allow impure beings into His pure Presence until they are cleansed from their sins. Cleansing from sin is referred to in Leviticus 16:30, Job 35:3, Psalm 51:7, 51:10, Jeremiah 33:8, Ezekiel 36:25 and 37:23.

The ceremonies commanded in the Law of Moses in relation to cleansing related either to *blood sacrifices* (see Leviticus 12:8 and 16:19) or *washings with water*.¹

The Mosaic Law cleansing rituals which related to conception and birth emphasised the fact all human babies have sin passed on to them at conception. Leviticus 12:1-8 commands that mothers bring a lamb or two turtledoves or pigeons as a sin offering blood sacrifice to atone for the mother’s sin.

The importance of heart attitude

2 Chronicles 30:18-20 records godly King Hezekiah prayed that God would provide atonement for the sins of people from the various tribes of Israel who had not cleansed themselves according to Mosaic law rituals: “*For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, ‘May the good Lord provide atonement for everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.’ And the Lord listened to Hezekiah and healed the people.*”

¹ See Exodus 29:4, 30:17-21, 40:12, 40:30-32, Leviticus 6:27, 11:25, 11:28, 11:40, 13:6, 13:34, 13:54-55, 13:58, 14:8-9, 14:47, 15:1-27, 16:4, 16:24, 16:26, 16:28, 17:15-16, Numbers 8:7, 19:1-21, 31:24, Deuteronomy 21:6 and 23:11.

The above reveals God granted Hezekiah's prayer. But note Hezekiah prayed only about those whose hearts were sincerely seeking the Lord. He did not ask God to provide atonement for religious hypocrites.

Hypocritical, mere outward focus on cleansing and purity

Many Jewish religious leaders in Christ's time were more concerned about ritual purity or cleanliness in an *outward* sense than in obeying the more important teachings of the Law of Moses (see Matthew 15:1-2, 10:20 and 23:23-28).

John 18:28 records those who led Jesus to be tried by Governor Pilate were concerned they would be defiled by entering Pilate's temporary headquarters. These same hypocrites wanted Christ's death. Proverbs 30:12 refers to humans who think they are pure but are not: *"There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness."*

Bible Study Questions

1. Explain what the following verses mean in relation to sanctification in Old Testament times:
 - a) Leviticus 20:7-8
 - b) Deuteronomy 7:6-8 and 11
 - c) Leviticus 22:31-31
 - d) Leviticus 20:26
2. Explain what the Mosaic Covenant taught were the differences between holy or special uses of people or things and unclean or polluted uses of the same.
3. What does 2 Chronicles 30:18-20 teach us?