

The Holiness of God



SABBATH—JANUARY 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Genesis 2:3; Job 42:5, 6; Luke 5:1–11; Luke 4:31–36; Isaiah 6:1–3; Revelation 4:8, 9.

MEMORY VERSE: “Honor the Lord our God. Worship at his holy mountain. The Lord our God is holy” (Psalm 99:9, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: The Bible gives much attention to God's holiness. What does this holiness tell us about God? What does it mean to the plan of salvation?

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT BELIEFS THAT ALL BIBLE WRITERS ACCEPT AS TRUE IS THAT THE GOD OF HEAVEN EXISTS (LIVES). None of the writers ever shows any doubt about that. None tries to prove it. That God is in heaven is a truth that we accept without question too.

What we do find in the 66 books of the Bible are many examples of what God is like and how He works with fallen humans whom He wants to save.

This week's lesson is about one part of God's nature (who God is) that is very important in the Bible. That part is God's holiness. God is love, yes. And, yes, God asks us to call Him “Father.” And, yes, God is patient, forgiving, and caring.

But, according to the Bible, it is very important for us to understand that God is holy. Both the Old and New Testaments show how a knowledge of God's holiness helps us to understand who He is. This theme of holiness appears all through the Bible in one way or another.

But what does it mean when we say that God is holy? How does the Bible describe His holiness? And how do we, as unholy humans, worship a God like this?

SUNDAY—JANUARY 29**“IT IS WRITTEN”
(Jeremiah 7:1–13)**

Even a quick study of church history makes it clear that it is very easy, even for us, to develop our own ideas about God. And it is also easy to worship these ideas instead of God Himself, as He is shown in the Bible. As Voltaire, a famous French thinker, joked, “If God has made us in His image, we have returned the favor.”—Adapted. We may not even know that we have an unclear or false understanding of God.

So, we must return to the Bible and compare¹ our thinking about God with what is taught there. And this study must include both Testaments. This is because in both Testaments the Lord has spoken to us. This point is important because some have argued that the God in the New Testament is different from the One in the Old. That is not a position that Seventh-day Adventists accept. And the Bible does not teach that.

According to Jeremiah 7:1–13, what same words do the Old Testament prophets (spokespersons for God) use over and over again?

Thousands of times prophets of the Old Testament use the words, “thus says the Lord.” This should remind us that prophets are not just speaking for God but that God is speaking for Himself through the prophets.

1. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

At the same time, the New Testament is filled with quotes from the Old Testament. In fact, all the teachings about God in the New Testament are very closely connected with (related to) the Old. For example, how can you separate the sacrifice of Jesus from the entire system of sacrifice in the Old Testament? How many times did Jesus and the New Testament writers use Old Testament verses to support their arguments and points? The whole New Testament is based on that of the Old. There is no good reason for separating the New Testament from the Old. The whole Bible (both Old and New Testaments) is inspired by the Lord (2 Timothy 3:16).

Read Matthew 4:4; Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Mark 7:6; John 12:14, 15; Acts 13:33; Romans 3:10; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 1:16; and 1 Corinthians 5:7. How do these verses help us to understand the connection between the New Testament and the Old? What do these verses tell us about what Jesus and the New Testament writers thought of the Old Testament?

Mark Twain once said that it is not the parts of the Bible that he does not understand that bother him. It is the parts that he does understand. Who does not find parts of the Bible bothersome? **Given what the Bible says about itself (2 Timothy 3:16), how should we deal with the parts that we do not understand? (Read also 1 Corinthians 13:12.)**



Prophets are not just speaking for God, but God is speaking for Himself through the prophets.

MONDAY—JANUARY 30

TO BE SET APART (Genesis 2:3)

According to Genesis 2:3, when is the first time that the understanding of “holiness” (from the same root often translated as “sanctified”)² is mentioned in the Bible? How important is the fact that the first thing thought of as holy in the Bible is time?

This verse gives us our first understanding of holiness. It shows that time is “set apart” from that which is around it. The seventh day itself, when we think about its length, is no different from any other 24-hour, sunset-to-sunset period. So, what makes it different? God declared it “holy.” He set it apart from the rest of the week.

The Hebrew word in this verse for “sanctified” means to “make holy” or to “declare holy.” Holiness, then, suggests that something is special about

whatever is “holy.” Or, it is something that is set apart from what is not holy.

In part, this idea should help us to understand the holiness of God. God is set apart from anything else in creation. He is so far above and beyond anything that we truly can understand or do. To be holy is to be different in a special way, as with the seventh-day Sabbath.

How do Exodus 15:11; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 86:8–10; Psalm 99:1–3; and Isaiah 40:25 help us to understand the holiness of God?

This idea of holiness should help us to better understand the separation between a God who is holy and all humans who are sinners. God is separate from us because He is the Creator and we are the created, and because we are all sinners. All this should help us to better understand what Christ has done for us.



God set the seventh day apart from the rest of the week.

2. sanctified—to be set apart and made holy.

We are made in the image of God, but what are the ways in which we are very different from Him? How do these differences help us to understand our need of a Savior? Make a list of those differences and bring them to class on Sabbath.

TUESDAY—JANUARY 31

TO REPENT IN DUST AND ASHES (Job 42:5, 6)

Job has gone through much suffering at the hand of Satan. Then he cries out to God, “My ears had heard about you. But now my own eyes have seen you. So I hate myself. I’m [I am] really sorry for what I said about you. That’s [that is] why I am sitting in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5, 6, NIV). What do Job’s words tell us about how different God’s holiness is from human sinfulness? Job tells us what he feels about his experience. In what ways do Job’s feelings preach the gospel?

The Bible is full of many stories of people experiencing God’s holiness.

For example, God kindly sent the prophet Ezekiel to the people of Israel (even though they were held in prison in Babylon as a result of their unfaithfulness). But Ezekiel also experienced the awful holiness of God. What happened? (Ezekiel 1:28).

Jacob had to run away from home after lying to his father, Isaac, and twin brother, Esau. What did Jacob

say after his night vision of the ladder to heaven and of God speaking to Him? (Genesis 28:16, 17).

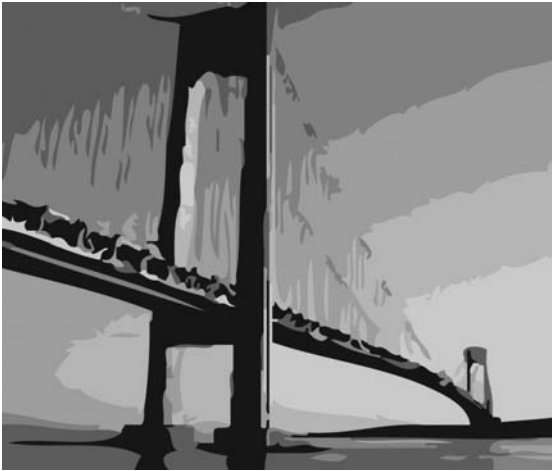
While Israel remained encamped at Sinai, the Lord again came down in the cloud upon the mountain and appeared in front of Moses. How did Moses act? (Exodus 34:8).

And Daniel, another prophet during the same time of Babylonian control over Israel, received visions from God while he served as a high government leader.

Daniel is often told that he is loved in heaven. How did Daniel act when he received a vision of God in Daniel 10:5–8? So, why do you think he acted as he did in these verses?

These men were faithful, godly, and righteous (holy). They were prophets. But in God’s presence they felt fear, they trembled, and they worshiped Him. No doubt that was because they felt their own unworthiness (not deserved) and sinfulness in front of the holiness of God. In their own way, these verses hint at the need of a Savior, a Substitute, Someone to bridge the separation between a Holy God and fallen, sinful people like ourselves. Thanks to the Lord, we have that bridge in Jesus.

Imagine yourself having almost the same experience as one of these men mentioned above. How do you suppose you would act, and why?



Jesus is our bridge between our fallen sinful world and a Holy God.

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 1

DEPART FROM ME! (Luke 5:1–11)

In the Old Testament we find a record of how humans act toward a God who is holy. All their actions are the same: fear, trembling, and worship. But what about in the New? Some modern Christians argue that the Old Testament gives an old-fashioned picture of God, a God who is harsh and who gets angry easily. They argue that when Jesus comes in the New Testament, He is now the God of grace³ and love. But we know that this is a false view of the Bible and of a God who never changes.

What do the New Testament writers teach us about God’s holiness? For example, read Luke 5:1–11. How does this verse show that the Old and New Testaments teach the same thing about the holiness of God?

These men toiled (worked hard) unsuccessfully all night as fishermen. But Jesus did the miracle of catching fish for His hard-working disciples (followers). After this happened, the normal thing for His disciples to have done would have been to show thanks for the miracle. But Peter did something quite different. His action was much like those people of the Old Testament who faced the Lord.

“But Peter quickly forgot the fish, boats, and nets. This miracle, more than any other which Peter had witnessed, was a great show of God’s power. In Jesus, Peter saw One who held all nature under His control. Jesus’ godly power made Peter realize his own unholiness. He felt ashamed of his unbelief. He quickly understood that Jesus was the God who came down to earth to save him and other sinners. He loved his Master so much that he felt unclean before His pure soul. While Peter’s companions were gathering in the fish from the net, he fell at the Savior’s feet, saying, ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ ”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 246.

Why does Peter have these feelings? It is because we are not in the Garden of Eden anymore. There, Adam and Eve welcomed God’s presence in the cool of the evening. But this closeness quickly changed after the Fall, when the couple ran and hid. Not much more has changed since then. This action has remained

3. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

the same throughout Bible history. Whenever a human faces the living God, he or she always experiences the horror of finally understanding how deep and terrible his or her sinfulness is.

When was the last time that you understood how truly sinful you are? What is your only hope, and why?



Peter fell at the Savior's feet and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man!"

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 2

WHEN DEMONS SPEAK (Luke 4:31–36)

What testimony (witness) is given in Luke 4:31–36 about the holiness of Christ? What is important about who gave that testimony, as well? What lessons can we learn from this story about God's holiness?

Demons, who are fallen (sinful) angels, remember who Jesus really is. No matter how nasty, hateful, and rebellious (against God) they are,

they still have to admit that Jesus is holy. Notice, too, that they feared in this verse that He was going to destroy them. Why were they so fearful? It must be that, so full of sin, even demons still feel fear in the face of God's holiness. They fear God in much the same way that sinful humans do.

In the last book of the Bible, John describes receiving a vision from God. Read Revelation 1:12–17. John is known as the apostle who had the best understanding of the love of God. But he acts the same way as others did in the Old Testament when he faces the Holy God.

Moreover, a vision of how heavenly people worship God in the heavenly sanctuary (house of God) shows much the same picture that Isaiah described many hundred years earlier in a vision (read Isaiah 6:1–3).

According to Revelation 4:8, 9, what did John hear the heavenly people around the throne saying?

God is love, and all heavenly people worship Him. But we read that, around the heavenly throne of God, the worship is not "God is love, love, love." And the heavenly people do not cry out "God is good, good, good." Instead, day and night these creatures sing "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." This is because all of heaven is involved in the ministry (work done for God) of God's love and salvation to this world. So, those who stand around the throne of God day and night praise the holiness of God. As sinless beings, they show

deep respect for His holiness. But they do not hide in fear of it, as fallen humans do.

In all the human experiences with God, as shown in the Bible, one never finds a suggestion that God is frightening. Instead, what we find is that, in the bright light of His holiness, human beings finally understand themselves as sinners. And that is scary. In the Bible, when people truly face the God of heaven, we find no hand clapping, backslapping, and lighthearted singing. Instead, there is humble, personal repentance (sorrow for sin). Each person understands and admits his or her personal guilt and does it without any excuses or pointing to the faults of anyone else. How different our words, our lives, and our actions would be if we were aware of God's presence and holiness all the time!

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 3

ADDITIONAL STUDY: As Christ stands before the crowd in the temple, “the confusion [noise] quiets down. The sound of traffic and bargaining stops. The silence becomes painful. A sense of awe [respectful fear] overpowers the crowd. It is as if they were facing God's judgment to answer for their actions. Looking upon Christ, they see His godly power flash through His human form. The Majesty of heaven [Jesus] stands as the Judge will stand at the last day . . . with the same power to read the soul. His eye looks over the crowd, studying every person. His

form seems to rise above them with godly power. Heavenly light shines from His face. He speaks, and His clear, ringing voice (the same voice that upon Mount Sinai announced the law that priests and rulers now break) is heard throughout the temple: ‘Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!’ (John 2:16, NIV).

“Slowly walking down the steps, and raising a whip, He orders the sellers to leave the temple. With an anger that He has never before shown, Jesus overthrows the tables of the money-changers. . . . None dares to question His authority. . . . Jesus does not strike them with the whip, but in His hand that whip seems terrible as a flaming sword. Officers of the temple, priests, sellers, and cattle traders, with their sheep and oxen, rush from the place. Their only thought is to escape from His angry presence.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 158.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, go over your answer to Monday's last question. What are the big differences between us and a holy God? What are the ways in which some of those differences can be removed, if any?
- ② Given what we have studied this week, why are self-righteousness and self-satisfaction about one's own spiritual condition very dangerous?
- ③ Think about someone you know

who is “holy.” Perhaps he or she is someone who seems to be upright, honest, pure, and so forth. Or he or she is someone quite “set apart” from most people. How do you feel about this person? Does he or she make you feel good or bad, and why?

SUMMARY: It might be much nicer to pay attention to God’s love instead of

His holiness. But that would be twisting the truth. We need to face God’s holiness until we tremble before Him. Understanding God’s holiness and our terrible sinfulness is important in helping us to understand what Jesus’ cleansing sacrifice really means. It also helps us to understand why this sacrifice was so necessary and why it had to cost so much.