

ZECHARIAH: RETURN

HOLINESS

Reading(s): Zechariah 14:20

1. Depending on the version of the Bible the first or second mention of the word 'holy' occurs when Moses is before the burning bush and God tells him to remove his shoes for he is on holy ground (Exodus 3:5).

2. The phrase, "Holiness unto the Lord", is found in only two books of the Old Testament, in the second book, Exodus, and in the second to the last book, Zechariah.

In Exodus it is inscribed on the gold plate, which hangs on the high priest's forehead, and in Zechariah it is found inscribed on the bells of the horses in Jerusalem (14:20). Verse 21 goes on to say that every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord. In other words, everything will be holy in that day, sometime in the future, after the Lord returns to conquer the nations.

We do not see this yet. Everything down to the least significant is not holy. In fact, the Lord is working in us, His sons to make us holy. Once that is accomplished all else will follow.

3. The Bible declares that without holiness we will not see the Lord.

4. What is terrifying and yet beautiful at the same time? Holiness! In our sins and weakness we draw back at the thought of God's holiness. That is understandable for it shows up our sin and condemns us. At the same time the Bible tells us that his holiness is beautiful! We enjoy beautiful things, all of us do. Let us see His holiness in its beauty and let us enjoy it to the full, enjoying God to the full!

The beauty of the Pennine Alps reminds me of the beauty of God's holiness. They are majestic and capped with dazzling white snow. As Jonathan McRostie and I drove into the valley that opened out on Lake Geneva, the French Alps towered up into the sky before us. To the left and in the distance could be seen even higher peaks, called the "teeth of the south". The first glimpse of these colossal rocks slapped up against the back of my brain and left me momentarily paralysed. Good job it didn't last long; I was driving! Maybe it was the thought that the very next day I would be travelling up through those valleys on our way through the Great St. Bernard tunnel. The pass was closed. With my fear of heights, any thought of going over the pass would have produced a mutiny.

From a distance the snow was beautiful; up close it was blinding. My dark sunglasses saved the day. Beautiful snow and blinding snow illustrate two things about God's holiness. It is beautiful in its glory and blinding in its terror. That's why Moses feared at the sight of the Lord in the burning bush.

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5. Exodus 15:13 Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people [which] thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided [them] in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.

God's purpose in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt was not limited to freeing them from slavery there, but included bringing them into His holy habitation. They were coming out of the house of Egypt and into God's house.

Of course this implied God's rule over them, but how much better His benevolent rule than the harsh treatment they received in Egypt. Whenever you are tempted to think the Christian life is tough, and it is, just remember the awful slavery of our sinful habits, and remember Matthew 11:28-30.

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (KJV)

Many will remember the vision Isaiah had of the Lord high and lifted up, his train filling the temple! The seraphs cried out, "Holy, Holy, Holy!"

There is one thing to remember about God's holy house. The way in to God's house was carefully guarded. Only the priests of the tribe of Levi could go in to minister. The most holy place, God's special quarters, was off limits except to the high priest who could only enter once a year.

The vision at the end of Zechariah seems to speak of a different situation. Holiness is everywhere and all have direct access to the Lord.

Paul tells the Roman Christians that they are called to be saints, or holy people. First they are called to belong to Jesus Christ, then they are called to be saints.

Jack Rendel

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