

# The Message of the Old Testament

## Session 3 A Book about God – He is Holy and He makes Choices

### He is Holy

Isaiah frequently spoke of Him as **the Holy One of Israel**. In his vision in the temple Isaiah saw the One the seraphim worshipped as “**Holy, Holy, Holy**”, Isaiah 6: 3. There is no other “attribute” of God described in this threefold way (the Hebrew way of designating the superlative). It is a revelation of who God is in His very essence. **He is totally different**, in a category of one, beyond imagination or description. **Unless He reveals Himself we cannot know Him**, Job 11: 7.

**Genesis 1 defines holiness.** There is an initial state of **chaos** (mixed up). At each stage of creation there is also a separation of things into **distinct categories**, (light/darkness, earth/sky, land/sea, different creatures, male/female).

Many of the subsequent regulations in Israel were designed to keep apart things that should not mix – clean/unclean, sacred/profane, **holy/unholy**. **It is very dangerous to mix these categories**, Exodus 19: 21-25, Numbers 3: 4.

**A major function of the Levitical law was to keep them apart.**

**The outward form of God’s holiness is His glory, often in the form of fire or brilliant light**, Exodus 3: 2-6, Ezek. 1: 4, 13-14, 26-28.

The typical human response is a sense of awe, reverential fear, and worship.

The fear of the LORD was considered to be the very essence of wisdom, living before Him in the world of which He is the Creator, Psalm 111: 10, Proverbs 9: 10, Ecclesiastes 12: 13.

### Current relevance:

- **Ecclesiastes describes the folly and vanity of living “under the sun” rather than before the eyes of God. It explains much of our present predicament.**
- **How much does a sense of awe pervade our corporate worship?**
- **Would your life be significantly different if you had a greater appreciation of the holiness of God?**

### He makes choices.

**God’s initial choice was to make the universe and the world that exists**, in contrast to the “anthropic principle” favoured by some scientists with a humanist world view.

On the other hand we should not expect to find in Genesis 1 a description of the physical mechanisms of the “how” of creation – it is neither a page from a science textbook nor a piece of descriptive journalism.

**God chose Abraham and his descendents through Isaac and Jacob**, Gen. 12: 1-3, Joshua 24: 2-4 (and c.f. v4 with Romans 9: 10-13), Acts 7: 2-3. Israel is a chosen people, **an elect nation** before God in a sense that is not the case for any other people group (notwithstanding the claims of some Ulster Protestants, Boers etc!), Numbers 23: 9, Isaiah 43: 1-4, Hosea 11: 1, 8, Jer. 31: 1-6.

The choice was **not on the basis of any inherent superiority on their part**, Deut. 7: 7-8. It is **permanent**; they cannot escape from their destiny even if they try, Ezek. 20: 31-33, (assimilation has not worked – even among the nations they remain distinct).

Being chosen is experienced as a burden or a blessing, depending on the response at any particular point in time, Amos 3:2.

**God does not have to explain or justify His choices**, even if they seem arbitrary to us – **He is God!** Zech. 2: 8.

God gave **the land of Israel** to Abraham and his descendents as **an everlasting possession**, Gen. 17: 7-8, 48: 3-4, although the right to enjoy it depended on their faithfulness in any given generation, Lev. 18: 24-28 and Ezek. 36: 16-19.

**The prophets wrote about restoration of Israel and Judah to the land** from all parts of the earth, Jeremiah 31 and Ezek. 36-37, and of a conflict at the end of time, centered on Jerusalem, preceding the coming of the Messiah, Joel 3, Zech. 12: 1 – 13: 1, 14 :1-21.

They also predict that Israel will recognize and turn to Jesus, the One they have pierced, Zech. 12: 10-14.

**There are also positive statements about the destiny of neighbouring nations**, Isaiah 19: 23-25, and the final blessing of the nations as they recognize the God of Israel and come up to Jerusalem to worship Him, Micah 4: 1-7, Zech. 14: 16-21.

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## Current relevance:

- **The sovereignty of God cuts across our self determination and the mood of our culture. How do you respond?**
- **Christians tend to spiritualize and claim the positive statements about Israel in the OT and describe the Church as the “New Israel” (replacement theology). The literal curses are left for Israel!**
- **If God could revoke His promises to Israel what assurance can I have that He would not do the same with me?**
- **How should we relate to Jewish people and to the nation of Israel and the situation in the Middle East?**