

## Keep the Congregation Holy

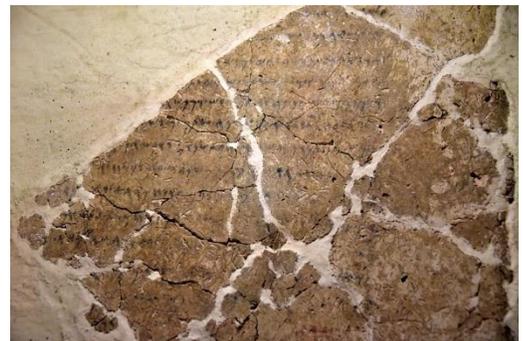
*For the LORD your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you. (Deuteronomy 23:14)*

### Congregational Holiness

You were designed to flourish in the community of believers—in the church. But churches are composed of sinful humans, so they can disappoint us, fail us, and hurt us. How can sinful people come together to form a holy community? When Jesus returns, the church will be perfected by Him. But even now, we can become holy if we follow the Scriptures. Here's how.

### Keep the Congregation Holy (Deut. 23:1-25)

- **Deut. 23:1. Emasculated.** In light of Isa. 56:4-5 and Acts 8:26f, this may have only referred to eunuchs who served idols; cf., Deut. 14:1. **Assembly.** A reference to various gatherings, not a blanket exclusion from living in Israel (cf., 1:16; 10:18-19).
- **23:2-8. Forbidden marriage.** Children of illegal marriages were prohibited; but it is not clear which marriages are intended. Deut. 7:1-4 forbids Canaanite marriage, but Jesus was a descendent of the Canaanite \_\_\_\_\_ (Matt. 1:5). **Ammonite or Moabite.** Both were perennial enemies of Israel. But the life of Ruth the Moabite suggests that, if they identified as Israelites, the ban was lifted (see Ruth 1:16 and Isa. 56:3); after all, Jesus was a descendent of the Moabite Ruth. **Balaam.** See Numbers 22-23. **Edomite.** Edom (aka, Esau) was the brother of Jacob (aka Israel).
- **23:9-14.** The laws in this section appear only to apply to military encampments. **Impure.** The Israelites were not to compromise their holiness even when away at war. **Holy.** Bodily functions can be symbolic of spiritual purity, so God expects the Israelites to practice physical cleanness as a symbol of spiritual cleanness. \_\_\_\_\_ was a symbol of holiness. **Moves.** Perhaps a



*Deir Alla Inscription from Jordan, c. 9th century B.C. This inscription mentions Balaam, son of Beor (www.worldhistory.org/image/10089)*



*The Transjordan nations of Ammon, Moab, and Edom (www.wikiwand.com/en/Transjordan\_in\_the\_Bible)*

reference to the ark, which accompanied Israel in times of war.

- **23:15-16. Refuge.** Israel was to protect runaway slaves—perhaps only meaning foreign slaves. Compare with the Babylonian Hammurabi Law code (18<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), in which those who harbored fugitive slaves were to be put to death.
- **23:17-18. Prostitute.** Worship of idols often involved prostitution, which God considers detestable.
- **23:19-20. Interest.** Comparing this text with Lev. 25:37 and Exod. 22:25, it is possible that the prohibition only refers to predatory interest, and not to contractual business arrangements.
- **23:21-23. Vow.** We freely enter into vows, but once we do, we must \_\_\_\_\_.
- **23:24-25. Eat.** If passing through someone else's vineyard or garden, one could eat, but not gather food. This provision highlights Bedouin hospitality to strangers, which is still practiced today.

## Steps towards Holiness

- Love the church and \_\_\_\_\_. You were not designed to stand alone. You need the church, and the church needs you. (John 13:34; 1 Pet. 1:22; Rom. 10:12)
- Keep the church's standards high, but accept people where they are and love them up to those standards. Such love prevents us from becoming either \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_. (Heb. 3:13; Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Pet. 4:8)
- Encourage one another. Encouragement may be the single most powerful tool you have. To build an encouraging community, \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13)
- Be open hearted in our gatherings. Our Sunday gatherings are like a \_\_\_\_\_ before the big game. (Heb. 10:24-25; Col. 3:16)
- Keep disciple-making the main thing. Don't be distracted by other missions or battles. The only battle that matters is the battle \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 6:10ff. Mark 8:36)



A NB small group with members from 6 different states. Make your small group your spiritual family. (Patton)

### Thinking about Holiness

The early 20th century philosopher of religion, Rodolf Otto, famously defined holiness as the experience of “the numinous”—that which is fully separate from the ordinary. The holy, Otto explained, is a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (a fearful and fascinating mystery). Anthropologist Mircea Eliade describes holiness as the ordering of one’s life and the life of the community around this experience of the numinous. Religion is nothing other than perceiving holiness and then attempting to live consistent with it.

In the Bible, we learn that God is the source of all holiness, and His holiness is defined as the sum total of His powers and perfections. “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One (Isa. 40:25). “There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God” (1 Sam. 2:1-2). God’s holiness is sometimes associated with fire, terror, majesty, wrath, destruction, and judgment. But it also possesses an *ethical and moral* dimension. God is not only set apart; God does what is right.

God has woven this ethical and moral rightness into the very fabric of the universe. For that reason, the creation was holy at its birth. It is only our sin that stained creation, rendering it unholy.

As the people of God, our calling is to allow God’s Spirit to restore in us the holy order of the creation. We are to live holy lives, because that’s how we were designed to live. “I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy” (Lev.11:45). To honor God’s holiness, we must live consistent with the holy order that God built into the creation. “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” (Heb. 12:14)

*Answers: Rahab, hygiene, keep our word, make it a priority, legalistic, licentious, join a small group, pep rally, souls of people*