

DISTRACTED BY THE CATS

A Devotional Meditation on Yitro (Jethro)

Exodus 18:1-20:26; Isaiah 6:1-7:5, 9:6-7, 56:6-7

Mark 11:15-17; John 17:1-24; 1 Peter 2:1-12

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Is there anything more inspiring than ascending the Temple Mount in Jerusalem with the most dangerous man in the Middle East? Rabbi Yehuda Glick fits that description because he believes the promises of the God of Israel and translates his belief into action. He expects God to come through on His promise to make His Temple a house of prayer for all nations. He is not sitting back waiting on God to move, but exercising his responsibility to be part of the fulfillment of prophecy. That's why he leads groups up to holy mountain, and why he is gracious and friendly to everyone, including the Israeli police who escort him, and the Muslim security officers who watch him like a hawk. Rabbi Glick even greets Muslim maintenance staff on the Temple Mount in Arabic. After all, how can a person be respectful of God without being respectful of others?



What if you're on the holiest ground on earth, but there's a cat? (Photo: The Barking Fox, Temple Mount, Jerusalem, July 28, 2023.)

Rabbi Glick could explain this in words, but it's more powerful to experience him teaching it by example. His words are very helpful, though, such as his explanation of why he did not approach the site of the Temple, where the Dome of the Rock now stands. That site is a few steps higher than the rest of the Temple Mount, and Jews do not go up there. It's a matter of *halachah*, or Jewish customary practice based on Torah. Even though there is no Temple, that site is still hallowed because it is where the holy altar stood, and beyond that the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. To go there requires ritual cleansing as specified in Torah, but for now it's impossible to fulfill that requirement. Therefore, Jews refrain from entering that holy space. The rabbi said that we, as Christians, were not obligated to observe the same restriction as Jews. Even so, everyone in our group chose to stay with him and not tread on the holy ground.

Except one young fellow. It just so happened that one of the cats that wander around the Temple Mount had flopped in a sunny spot atop a low rock wall, and this lad could not resist the urge to step just beyond the dividing line and pet the little animal. It's only natural that a boy of eight would do such a thing. At his age, instruction on the distinction between the holy and the common was just beginning, and whatever understanding he had was forgotten in the presence of a friendly cat.

Aren't we all like that young lad? Even if we do understand a little about holiness, we are quick to forget it in the busyness of life, or when something enticing captures our attention. That's why instruction about holiness fills God's Word from beginning to end. He gives unambiguous instruction at Mount Sinai, saying that He had brought Israel to

Himself so that they could keep His covenant and be His special treasure among all the nations of the earth. That's how Israel became a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. Rabbi Glick's instruction on the Temple Mount demonstrates how that holy status of Israel has never changed. So how is it that we who are adopted into that same holy nation by virtue of God's grace and our faith in Messiah Yeshua have such a vague understanding of holiness?

It may be that we think of holiness as an outdated ancient concept that has no application to Christians. That can't be correct, considering how Yeshua prayed for His followers:

Make them holy in the truth. Your word is truth. Just as You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I make Myself holy, so that they also may be made holy in truth.

John 17:17-19 TLV

Our Messiah's prayer is enough reason for us to investigate the question of holiness, and we might as well start in the same place our Hebrew ancestors did: at Mount Sinai. God began His instructions on holiness by having Moses set a boundary around the mountain to keep the people from coming up on the holy ground and into His Presence unprepared. The lesson is that God is set apart from His creation, making Him holy. Since He is holy, and since He chose Israel to be His holy nation, then Israel is to be set apart and different from all other nations. That means everyone identified as part of Israel, both the native born and the adopted, or naturalized, foreigners, are set apart and different from all other human beings. They should act differently, speak differently, dress differently, and eat differently, all because they are called out from the nations to be God's special treasure.

How are God's special people to act? That's what He taught us in His Ten Commandments. He started by explaining more about His holiness – that He alone is the God Who redeemed Israel out of bondage, and therefore they should not regard anything or anyone other than Him as God. His people should respect His Name, meaning they should respect His identity, and the identity of everyone on whom He places His Name – even if they don't exactly agree with us on things like doctrine and politics. That goes back to something God promised Abraham: that He would bless those who bless him, and curse those who curse him, all because God had chosen Abraham and his descendants to be His special people.

How to treat people is another lesson in holiness. The Ten Commandments tell us to honor our parents. He doesn't specify honor only to those parents who nurture and love their children, so we can infer that even neglectful parents should be honored. Our parents are holy to us, even though we did not choose them. They occupy a special place in our life that no other human being can occupy. It's easy to accept that when our fathers and mothers are kind, loving people, but it's hard and complicated when they are something else. So how does a person holy to God deal with such relationships?

When we begin to think in this way, we see how holiness applies to all the other commandments. Life is holy because God made it, and that is why we do not end another person's life without proper cause. Sexuality is holy because it is the means of fulfilling God's command to be fruitful and multiply, and His ideal of man and wife becoming one

flesh. Therefore, any sexual act outside of God's established parameters is a violation of holiness. Property is holy to the owner, so we should respect that by not taking what is not ours. Neither should we lie about another person, because doing so violates the holiness of their identity. To avoid even the temptation of violating someone's holy boundaries, we should refrain from coveting what they have. By inference, that means even our thought lives are holy, or should be.

This is how we learn the difference between the holy and the common, or profane. That's a priestly function, which explains what God intends by calling us to be a kingdom of priests. Fulfilling that calling requires constant devotion, attention, and humility, because even a momentary lapse might find us distracted by the cats.