

The Lord who sanctifies. 11 August 2013. Bethesda Bible Teaching.

As you know, we are continuing our studies of some of the divine titles in the Old Testament, and the title I have been given for this morning's meditation is that of 'Jehovah Mekoddishkem'¹ ... The Lord who sanctifies'.

All in all, although in slightly different forms, this title appears ten times in the Old Testament,² and on each occasion, the title is used by God Himself of Himself.

My reading for this morning (which includes the first reference to our title) comes from Exodus chapter 31 ... verses 12 and 13 ... 'And the Lord said to Moses, "Speak ... to the children of Israel, saying, '...you shall keep my sabbath: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that *I am the Lord who sanctifies you*'."³

As most, if not all, of you know, the words translated 'to sanctify' in the Old and the New Testaments are closely related to the words rendered 'holy'. And, throughout the Bible, someone (or something) is 'holy', when he (or it) is 'set apart' and marked off as being different from all that is ordinary and common.

God Himself, for example, is 'holy' in that *He* is 'set apart' from the whole of creation. He alone is God, altogether unique, transcending everything He has made.

On occasions, '*the Lord who sanctifies*' is said to 'sanctify' *Himself*. This He did by exerting His almighty power and His sovereign rule, thereby compelling men to acknowledge His absolute supremacy – that He was truly 'set apart' from all others. For instance, He asserts in Ezekiel 38, 'I will magnify myself and sanctify myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations ... that I am the Lord'.^{4 5}

When the word 'sanctify' is used by God of anyone or of anything other than Himself, the idea is that of being 'set apart' as somehow being connected with Him, often as belonging to Him in some special way – of being consecrated to Him.

The first mention of the verb 'to sanctify' in the Bible comes at the beginning of Genesis 2: God blessed the seventh day, and *sanctified* it: because on it He rested from all His work which God had created and made'.⁶ According to our reading in Exodus 31, the observance of the weekly sabbath functioned as a 'sign' to the nation of Israel that He, the Lord, had 'set' them 'apart' from the other nations ... that they were enormously privileged in being marked out for Himself and for His service.

And as we read through the Old Testament, we find the word 'sanctify' used to refer to many persons and many things which the Lord 'set apart' to and for Himself.

For instance, God commanded concerning the firstborn in Israel (whether man or beast), 'Sanctify to me every firstborn ... it is mine'.⁷ And the same was true of *places*, such as Mount Sinai,⁸ of *structures*, such as the Tabernacle, together with its vessels⁹ and the altar¹⁰ and laver¹¹ etc., and of *persons*, such as the priests¹² and Levites¹³ in Israel. All of these are spoken of as being 'sanctified'.

But on several key occasions when God speaks of Himself as 'the Lord who sanctifies', He has in mind the nation of Israel in general.¹⁴ For example, the Lord told Moses in Leviticus 22, 'You shall not profane my holy name ... *I am the Lord who sanctifies you*, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God'.¹⁵ And just two chapters before – in chapter 20 – He told Moses to 'Say to the people of Israel, ... Sanctify yourselves ... and be holy ... *I am the Lord who sanctifies you* ... You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine'.¹⁶

Well, you can hardly miss it ... that *the Lord's* gracious act in 'sanctifying' the people to Himself carried with it profound practical implications for the way in which *they* were to behave ... that the difference which He made, in His grace, between them – the nation of Israel – and the nations around ... choosing them out of all the nations to be His own treasured and costly possession (as He expressed it on more than one occasion¹⁷) ... that the difference which He made between them and the nations around demanded in response that they adopt a very different lifestyle to that of those nations. 'You shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you', God said, 'You shall not walk in their statutes ... You shall ... keep my statutes, and walk in them'.¹⁸

That is, God's grace in setting them apart for Himself – in sanctifying them *positionally* (if I can put it that way) – required them to sanctify themselves *practically*, both by keeping themselves pure from the prevailing idolatry around, and by leading holy and consistent lives – including, in the context of that section of Leviticus, showing generosity to the poor and the stranger, being fair in their treatment of their servants, displaying compassion for the disabled and respect for the elderly, being marked by integrity and honesty ... in a word, as it says, by loving their neighbours as themselves.¹⁹

But it is not only in the Old Testament that the word 'sanctify' is used in more than one way. The same is true in the New Testament, although again always carrying the idea of being set apart.

We read twice, for example, of the Lord Jesus being 'sanctified' – of His being 'set apart'. First, in John 10 (verse 36) He spoke of Himself as '*Him whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world*'. In heaven, the Father had, that is, 'set' His Son 'apart' for His special mission and task – that of fulfilling the Father's will and purpose when 'in the world'.

And then in John 17, shortly before His suffering and death, He spoke in prayer of His 'sanctifying' Himself. With reference to His disciples, He prayed, 'Sanctify them by the truth: your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world; and for their sake *I sanctify myself*, that they also may be sanctified'.²⁰

If His disciples, having been sent *by Him* 'into the world', were to be set apart for the work which *they* were to do, first, He, having been sent *by the Father* 'into the world', must set *Himself* apart for the work which *He* was to do ... that of laying down His life in sacrifice for them.

And He 'sanctified' (He 'consecrated') Himself to the work of the cross, He said, '*for their sake*', '*for them*' ... reminding us of the words He had spoken only a short time before to His disciples, when in the Upper Room, 'This is my body which is given *for you* (*for your sake*)... This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out *for you* (*for your sake*)'.²¹

When the writers of the New Testament speak of believers being 'sanctified', very often they refer to our standing and position in Christ, rather than to our state and practice.

The apostle Paul, for example, spoke of the commission he had received from the risen and glorified Lord on the Damascus Road as being (metaphorically speaking) to open the eyes of the Gentiles, 'that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among *them that are sanctified by faith in me*'.²²

The set title for this morning is '*Jehovah Mekoddishkem*', and I believe firmly that, in the so-called 'Great Commission' which He gave to His disciples in Matthew 28, the Lord Jesus expanded and enlarged this, God's distinctive and personal name in the Old Testament – '*Jehovah*' – into '*the name* (the *one name*) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'.²³ That is, the Saviour identified *Him* who bore the 'glorious and awesome name, *Jehovah*' (as Moses once spoke of it) with the three Persons of the Godhead.

And, according to the New Testament, sanctification (spoken of in the Old Testament as the work of Jehovah Mekoddishkem) is said to be the work of all three.

Jude, for example, described believers as 'those who are called, *sanctified by God the Father*'.²⁴ Paul addressed his first epistle to the Corinthians to 'those *sanctified in Christ Jesus*, called to be saints'.²⁵ And Peter wrote to those who, he said, were 'elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in *sanctification of the Spirit*, to obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ'²⁶ – meaning, I take it, that they were brought by the sanctifying – by the separating – work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration both to shelter under that precious blood, and henceforth to walk in obedience to God and His truth.²⁷

With reference to our Lord Jesus, we might think of the statement of the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 2 of his epistle that 'both *He who sanctifies* and *those who are sanctified* are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren'.²⁸ And it would be difficult *not* to associate this description of our Lord Jesus as '*He who sanctifies*' with our set title for this morning, '*the Lord who sanctifies*'.

I quoted Paul's opening greeting to the Corinthians, in which he spoke of those 'sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints'²⁹ – 'called', that is, 'to be sanctified ones' – those whom God had set apart for Himself.

And we remember that the apostle addressed that greeting, he said, 'to the church of God which is in Corinth' of all places – to a church which, in that very epistle, he needed to rebuke for their carnality and spiritual immaturity³⁰ ... to a church which had brought no small discredit on the Lord's name.³¹ But, although the believers there had made slight progress indeed in terms of *practical* holiness, Paul could assure them that, even having in mind their shameful past history, '*such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*'.³²

This is what we might call '*positional* sanctification' ... that which is absolute and complete ... and is the present possession of every true believer in the Lord Jesus.

But I said earlier that the word 'sanctify' is used in more than one way, not only in the Old Testament, but in the New. And so it is.

For the New Testament speaks, not only of a sanctification which is *positional* and *absolute*, but of a sanctification which is *practical* and *progressive*.

I need do no more than refer to a few verses from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. First, from the beginning of chapter 4 ... 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality ... for God has not called us to uncleanness but to holiness'.³³ And then from the closing section of chapter 5 ... 'May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely ... may your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'.³⁴

The writer to the Hebrews also has something to say about practical sanctification. 'Pursue ... holiness', he urges his readers in chapter 12, 'without which no one shall see the Lord'.³⁵ But more often the writer focuses on sanctification as the believer's standing in Christ, secured for him or her by our Lord's finished work.

In chapter 10, the writer draws our attention to His – our Lord's – body. Having quoted words spoken prophetically by the Saviour in Psalm 40: 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God',³⁶ he – the writer – adds, 'By *which will* we have been *sanctified* through the offering of *the body* of Jesus Christ once for all'³⁷ – 'once for all' standing in marked contrast to the animal sacrifices repeated annually on the Jewish Day of Atonement.³⁸

As with all other animal sacrifices, these, the writer assured his readers, were now well and truly obsolete ... we could perhaps say that the cross was their 'sell-by' date, and that they had now long passed it!

And then, still with the Day of Atonement in the background, the writer notes in chapter 13 that on that day the carcasses of the sin offerings were burned *outside* the camp of Israel,³⁹ adding that 'therefore *Jesus* suffered *outside* the gate (of Jerusalem, that is) that He might *sanctify* the people by His own blood'.⁴⁰

We do well this morning to ponder afresh the writer's words, '*sanctified* through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ' and 'that He might *sanctify* the people by His own *blood*', and to underline especially the two phrases, 'the *body* of Jesus Christ' and 'His own *blood*'.

For these phrases bring us back to words we considered earlier – words spoken by the Lord Jesus in the Upper Room, when He took bread and a cup, saying of the bread, 'This is my *body* which is given for you', and of the cup, 'This ... is the new covenant in my *blood*, which is poured out for you'.

'If now, with eyes defiled and dim', we sang earlier, 'we see the signs but see not Him, Oh, may His love the scales displace, and bid us see Him face to face!'⁴¹

And as we take the bread and wine this morning, may we *each* hear *Him* – 'Jehovah Mekoddishkem' – 'the 'Lord who sanctifies' – may we *each* hear *Him* say to us personally, 'My body ... for *you* – my blood ... for *you*'.

Footnotes

¹ Pronunciation at ... <http://media.snunit.k12.il/kodeshm/mp3/t0320.mp3> ... 1:14 minutes.

² Spanning from its first occurrence in Exodus 31 to its last in Ezekiel 37 – seven of these ten references being found in chapters 20 to 22 of the book of Leviticus.

The ten references are :

Exodus 31:13

“... I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”

Leviticus 20:8

“... I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”

Leviticus 21:8

“... for I the LORD, who sanctifies you, am holy.”

Leviticus 21:15

“... for I am the LORD who sanctifies him.”

Leviticus 21:23

“... For I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”

Leviticus 22:9

“... I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”

Leviticus 22:16

“... for I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”

Leviticus 22:32

“... I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”

Ezekiel 20:12

“... I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”

Ezekiel 37:28

“And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel

³ Compare Ezek. 20. 12.

⁴ Ezek. 38. 23.

⁵ For their part, men are said to ‘sanctify’ Him when they give Him the honour due to His name, attributing to Him His true greatness and glory and making Him the sole object of their trust and reverential fear. So we read in Isaiah 8, ‘Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread’, and in Isaiah 29, ‘they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and stand in awe of the God of Israel’. Isa. 8. 13 (cf. 1 Pet. 3. 15); Isa. 29. 23..

⁶ Gen. 2. 3. This is the only occurrence of the word in the whole of the book of Genesis.

⁷ Exod. 13. 2.

⁸ Exod. 19. 23.

⁹ Exod. 30. 29.

¹⁰ Exod. 40. 10.

¹¹ Exod. 40. 11.

¹² Lev. 8. 30. Five of the occurrences of the title ‘the Lord who sanctifies’ are concerned with the priesthood; Lev. 21. 8, 15, 23; 22. 9, 16.

¹³ Num. 3. 12.

¹⁴ The references to ‘the Lord who sanctifies’ in Leviticus 21 and 22 have to do with the priesthood, indeed one of those references (Lev. 21. 15) is concerned with the High Priest.

¹⁵ Lev. 22. 32-33.

¹⁶ Lev. 20. 1-2, 7-8, 26.

¹⁷ Deut. 7. 6; 14. 2; 26. 18; cf. Exod. 19. 6, together with the note by Keil and Delitzsch.

¹⁸ Lev. 18. 3-4.

¹⁹ Lev. 19. 18. In a nutshell, God’s requirement that people of Israel ‘sanctify’ themselves – was based on the fact that they had become God’s possession by virtue of His ‘sanctifying’ them – of His setting them apart – from the pagan nations around. There could be no mistake; this call to holiness affected every department of their lives.

²⁰ John 17. 17-19. (See Westcott for the rendering ‘truly sanctified’.)

²¹ Luke 22. 19-20, and using the very same preposition. (The manuscript evidence for the ‘longer reading’ is overwhelming. The W&H arguments in favour of the ‘shorter reading as a ‘Western Non-interpolation’ are far from convincing.)

²² Acts 26. 18; cf. Acts 20. 32.

²³ Matt. 28. 19.

²⁴ Jude 1 – as in the KJV and NKJV.

²⁵ 1 Cor. 1. 2.

²⁶ 1 Pet. 1. 2. Compare, ‘God has chosen you from the beginning to salvation *in sanctification of the Spirit* and belief of the truth’, 2 Thess. 2. 13 – highlighting both the divine and the human aspects of the experience of salvation.

²⁷ Compare Paul’s words to the Corinthians concerning ‘Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption’, 1 Cor. 1. 30.

²⁸ Heb. 2. 11.

²⁹ 'Saints' is by far the most common New Testament description of believers outside of the Gospels, where the term 'disciples' is mainly used.

³⁰ 1 Cor. 3. 1-3.

³¹ 1 Cor. 5. 1; 6. 1, 6.

³² 1 Cor. 6. 11. The aorist tenses clearly pointing to a decisive moment in the past.

³³ In the short section between these quotations, the apostle prohibits all sexual intercourse outside of marriage. The Christian is not, as the heathen, to engage in sexual immorality with its associated lust and shame, and, in particular, he is not to defraud and take advantage of his brother by invading his marriage and having an immoral relationship with his wife. For, as Paul expresses it, 'God has ... called us ... to holiness'.

³⁴ 1 Thess. 5. 22-23. In the same vein, the apostle exhorted the Corinthian believers, in chapter 7 of his second epistle to them, 'let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness (bringing holiness to completion) in the fear of God', 2 Cor. 7. 1. I enjoyed reading a comment of Warren Wiersbe in his short commentary of the Book of Leviticus ('Be Holy'): "'We will stand and sing hymn 325", announced the worship leader, "'Take Time to Be Holy'. We will sing verses one and four". If I had been sitting with the congregation', Mr Wiersbe wrote, 'instead of on the platform, I might have laughed out loud. Imagine a Christian congregation singing "Take Time to Be Holy", and not even taking time to sing the entire song! If we can't take the time ... to sing a song about holiness, we're not likely to take time to devote ourselves to "perfecting holiness in the fear of God"'. (From 'Be Holy (Leviticus): Becoming "Set Apart" for God', by Warren W. Wiersbe, page 15.) Fair point, Mr Wiersbe!

³⁵ Heb. 12. 14. It hardly needs to be said that, in the New Testament as in the Old Testament, practical sanctification isn't an optional extra ... it is a requirement ... a necessity.

³⁶ Heb. 10. 7, 9; cf. Psa. 40. 7-8.

³⁷ Heb. 10. 10; cf. Heb. 10. 14.

³⁸ Which sacrifices served, as the writer noted, to remind God's people of their of sins every year, and not – as our Lord's offering of Himself – to remove the sins of God's people for ever.

³⁹ Lev. 16. 27.

⁴⁰ Heb. 13. 11-12.

⁴¹ Hymns of Light and Love, number 114. Written by C H Spurgeon.