

How Did We Get to be Holy?

Turn to Deuteronomy 7. Our first Scripture will come from Deuteronomy 7. How did we get to be holy? That's what we'll answer today, and the answer comes from Moses.

Marilyn and I laughed at the sermon title. Talk about a question that no one is asking! How did we get to be holy? That is not the burning question in very many minds. But here's why I go after things like that. Our minds are full of our own story, our challenges and worries and joys, and our questions. People have always been like this.

And here's the thing: God responds by telling us the big story again. The Bible is always retelling the same big story in different ways. God thinks that reminding us of the big story is the best way to guide and encourage us in our little stories. If we're going to get messages from the Bible, we're going to spend a lot of time learning about the big story. That's why I'm speaking on "how did we get to be holy?"

I hope you noticed that I put this in the past tense. If we are God's children, we are holy, it is a done deal. Because we are holy, God calls us to live holy lives, and we don't always do well at that, but we're called to live holy lives because God already made us holy.

The old fashioned word for being holy is "saints." That's what the King James Bible calls us, and some translations still use "saints." "Saints" means "holy people," and it is used of us about 60x in the NT Letters. And it is used of some believers with sketchy lives, big spiritual problems in their lives, but they are still "saints" without any doubt. So, how did we get to be holy? How did we get to be saints?

I'll begin with an illustration. I have here a cup here holding lots of pens and pencils. I'm going to pick some of these. I'll take a short pencil, and a long pencil, and a skinny pen, and a red pen, and a real old pen, and one or two more.

So I've picked these ones, I have them in my hand, and now I'm putting them in my pocket. These pens and pencils are mine, I'm taking these and keeping them.

I did two things with the cup of pens and pencils. I picked some, and then I made those ones mine. When God does that with people, they become holy. The reason you and I are holy people is that God did with us what I just did with the pens and pencils in my pocket.

Now we will read four short Scriptures, all from Moses.

1, Deuteronomy 7:6 - *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*

Moses said this to the Israelites, and the NT tells us this is the same for us. We are holy to the Lord, we are God's holy people. How did that happen? First, the Lord our God has chosen us out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. First, God made a selection.

Second, God did this so that we would be his people, his treasured possession. God made us his, and he keeps us close to his heart. Do you have pens that you treasure? I have a few I'd be sorry to lose, and though I'm embarrassed to say so, I did not bring them here in the cup today, because who knows what might happen.

I have other possessions that I try not to treasure too much. Do you have any treasured possessions? Probably something you'd be sorry to lose. God chose us out of all the peoples on earth to belong to him, and we are his treasure. His choosing, and his ownership, makes us holy.

2, Exodus 19:4-6 You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

The Deuteronomy verse before this was what Moses spoke to Israel at the end of their 40 years in the wilderness. Exodus and Leviticus come at the beginning. Israel travelled about 3 months after crossing the Red Sea to get to Mt Sinai. There they made the covenant with God, and there they made the tabernacle. They were there about 9 months.

So these words from Exodus come just about as soon as they got to Mt Sinai, three months after they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea.

"You've seen what I did to your enemies, and how I carried you on eagles wings and brought you to myself." From God, all that was free, but now they have a choice to make. Becoming God's holy people does not happen without our choice. So God offered them covenant. "I will be your God, and you will be my people. Are you in, or out?"

God does not explain what happens if they say "no," but he explains what happens if they say "yes." *Out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'*

They will end up being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That's two different ways of saying the same thing. As far as lifestyle goes, there was still a lot of unholiness in that group. So what exactly made them a holy nation?

One, God separated them from the rest. God physically took them out of Egypt, carried them on eagle's wings, and brought them to Mt Sinai.

Two, he won't just leave them there, he will make them his treasured possession. If they agree to be his people, that will happen, then they will be his kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

We are saints, we are God's holy people, because God separated us from the rest, and he made us his own, his treasured possession. That is how we got to be saints, God's holy people. It's very good.

3, Leviticus 20:26 - *You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.*

The last half of this verse says the same thing over again: *I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.* That's what God did for us: he set us apart from the rest, and he made us his own. That's what makes us holy people, and that why he urges us to live holy lives.

There's a lot of separation going on here. God separate us from the rest, God made a distinction between us and the rest. As a result, we go through life making distinctions between clean and unclean, between right and wrong. We are not of the world, but we are still in the world, so we ourselves choose what is right, and what is clean, and avoid what is wrong and unclean. We do with our lives what God did with us.

"Remember you did not choose me, no I have chosen you." That's a line in the song we sang last Sunday, and it comes from John 15. Jesus said pretty much those exact words to his followers. "You have not chosen me, I have chosen you and appointed you to bear fruit. And this is my command: love each other."

4, Leviticus 22:32-33 - *Do not profane my holy name, for I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am the Lord, who made you holy and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord.*

I the Lord who made you holy. By that point, Israel had made the Exodus covenant with God. God himself had made them holy. How did he do that? God brought them out of Egypt to be their God. God brought them out of Egypt to make them his own. God brought us out of Egypt to make us his own, and to be our God, and we are now his treasured possession.

These sentences just say the same thing in different words. Those people needed to know that they were holy people, and how they got that way, and we need to know that we are holy people, and how we got that way.

God's Choice and Human Free Will

Believers generally end up in one of two camps on this question. Some of us think that God choosing us is what decides if we come to faith or not. People are not quite puppets, but a little bit we are just puppets. We just do what God decided we would do.

The other camp believes that it is up to us, humans have a free will, we choose God or we don't. In this camp, God's does not matter that much, it becomes something like he knew ahead of time what we would do, but he is not the decider, we are the deciders.

The thing is, there are many Scriptures to support both sides of this. Of that there is no doubt. So I urge you to avoid either of these options. Do your best to let both be true.

When I was in high school, a man in our church taught us this way: we are all going down life's road, and we come to an open gate with a big sign on the top: "Eternal life: whosoever will may enter." We stand out side and look at that, and we and the others around us talk about it and wonder if we should go in or not. Some keep going, and some of us enter the gate.

We walk through the gate, and look back at the sign on the top, and it says something different on the inside. On the inside it says, "You were chosen before the foundation of the earth." We think, "is that right? That's not what it said on the outside." So we step back to make sure what it said on the outside.

Yes, we were right, it says, "Eternal life: whosoever will may enter." But on the inside it says, "You were chosen before the foundation of the world." They are both entirely true.

In Exodus 19 God said to Israel, "If you will be my people, I will be your God," and it was a real choice. They could say yes or they could say no. They chose yes.

And later God says to them, *You are a holy people, because the Lord your God made you holy. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*

So when the Bible says we have a real choice to make, and it counts, the Bible means that just like it sounds, and I will teach that with full conviction. These Scriptures for the most part emphasize God's choice, so that's how we will take this.

This is why God's People live Differently

For Moses, knowing how we became holy leads to God's people living different than those around them. And it is the same for us now. The NT says all this. God chose us out of all the peoples, and made us his own, so we live differently than all the peoples. We live as his treasured possession should live, and he tells us how to do that.

This is a Great Encouragement – Enjoy it and Praise God

I'm speaking on this also for your enjoyment. God is giving us encouragement in this. These are not easy times for most of us, but that's not the whole story.

The troubles are the little story, being God's holy people, his treasured possession, is our big story. The best thing that could happen to anyone on earth has happened to us: God chose us and made us his treasure. It is all his, but it is not all his treasure. We are his treasure.

Moses used these truths to encourage holy living, and the Psalms use these truths to praise God, to thank him and worship him, because this was such good news.

God chose us out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. We are not our own, we were bought with a price. It cost him a great deal to own us, but he paid with the death of his Son, and now we are his. And that is how we got to be "saints," "holy people." Amen.

PRAYER: O God, you made us and you chose us out of all the peoples, and you paid for us. We are your holy nation, your kingdom of priests, your treasured possession. We are the people of your pasture, and the sheep of your hand. We thank you with joy and gladness. We praise you from the bottom of our hearts. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May God himself, the God of peace, make us holy through and through. May our whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls us is faithful and he will do it. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.