

# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

Luke Richardson/unsplash.com

Vol. # 770621 • June 2021 • [www.bridgesforpeace.com](http://www.bridgesforpeace.com)

# Be Holy

By Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer, *International President and CEO*  
Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®

**MY PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS** were brought up in an era when great revivals were sweeping across the United States. In large part, they sprang out of the Holiness Movement. Men and women with a deep hunger for God and His ways dedicated themselves to prayer and holy living. In the midst of their intensive prayer meetings, God's presence was experienced in amazing ways. These revivals in the early part of the 1900s deeply impacted the Christian world. The inward spiritual changes resulted in outward expressions of holy living. In my early years, this influence was still greatly felt. There was a great emphasis in our churches on the Scripture, prayer and holiness. Holiness was often spoken about in terms of what we should wear and other external behaviors. Unfortunately, it was possible to follow all the rules and look like a holy person without an inner holiness. Today, it seems that there isn't much emphasis on holiness, yet the Bible often describes God as holy and tells us to be holy as well.

The apostle Peter wrote, *"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'"* (1 Pet. 1:13–16).

The last phrase of this verse is a quote from the book of Leviticus: *"You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy"* (Lev. 19:2).

I would suggest that holiness is a matter that is important to God. The fact that it is emphasized both in the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) and the Writings of the Apostles (NT) is significant.



## Torah Portion Speaks

Every week, the Jewish world reads a portion of Scripture from the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) called the *parashat hashavua* (the portion of the week). Each portion has a name taken from the content of that portion. Exactly in the middle of the *Torah* in Leviticus 19 and 20 is a portion called Kedoshim, which means “holy.” Peter was quoting from this portion.

It is important to note that this portion was spoken to the entire congregation of all the sons of Israel. *“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy””* (Lev. 19:1b–2). This makes the point that all the individuals who comprise the congregation were to be holy, not just the priests. In the ancient world, every culture had priests who were expected to act in a certain way, but God made it very clear that all the Children of Israel were expected to be holy. Later in the portion we read, *“Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God”* (Lev. 20:7), and toward the end of the *Torah* portion it says, *“And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine”* (Lev. 20:26). Peter, speaking to the early Church, emphasized this too: *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Pet. 2:9).

## What is Holiness?

As I began to think and research, I found that there are a lot of opinions on the subject—in both the Christian and Jewish worlds.

## Jewish Thought

I heard a *Voice of Israel* radio program with three rabbis we know well—Rabbis Jeremy Gimpel, Ari Abramovitch and Tuly Weisz—as they discussed the meaning of holiness.

Rabbi Abramovitch said holiness was to be separate, distinct and elevated; that the natural should be elevated by the spiritual.

Rabbi Gimpel talked about his mentor, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who said that holiness is the sum total focused reality of God's attributes. He went on to say that we should emulate God's attributes in every area of life, which could vary according to the circumstances, which can call for mercy or justice.



Rabbi Weisz talked about Israel's first prime minister and an encounter with Jewish young people in 1944 before the founding of the State of Israel. David Ben-Gurion—who was not religious—nevertheless loved the Bible. He said:

“Ours was a tiny nation inhabiting a small country and there have been many tiny nations and many small countries, but ours was a tiny nation possessed of a great spirit, an inspired people that believed in its pioneering mission to all men and the mission that [has] been preached in the prophets of Israel. This people gave the world great and eternal moral truths and commandments. This people rose to prophetic visions of the unity of the creator with His creation, of the dignity and the worth of the individual, of social justice, universal peace and love. ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ This people was the first to prophecy about the end of days, the first to see the vision of a new human society” (Ben-Gurion 1944).

In the Kaufmann Kohler Jewish Theology, we find, “Holiness is the essence of all moral perfection.”

## Christian Thought

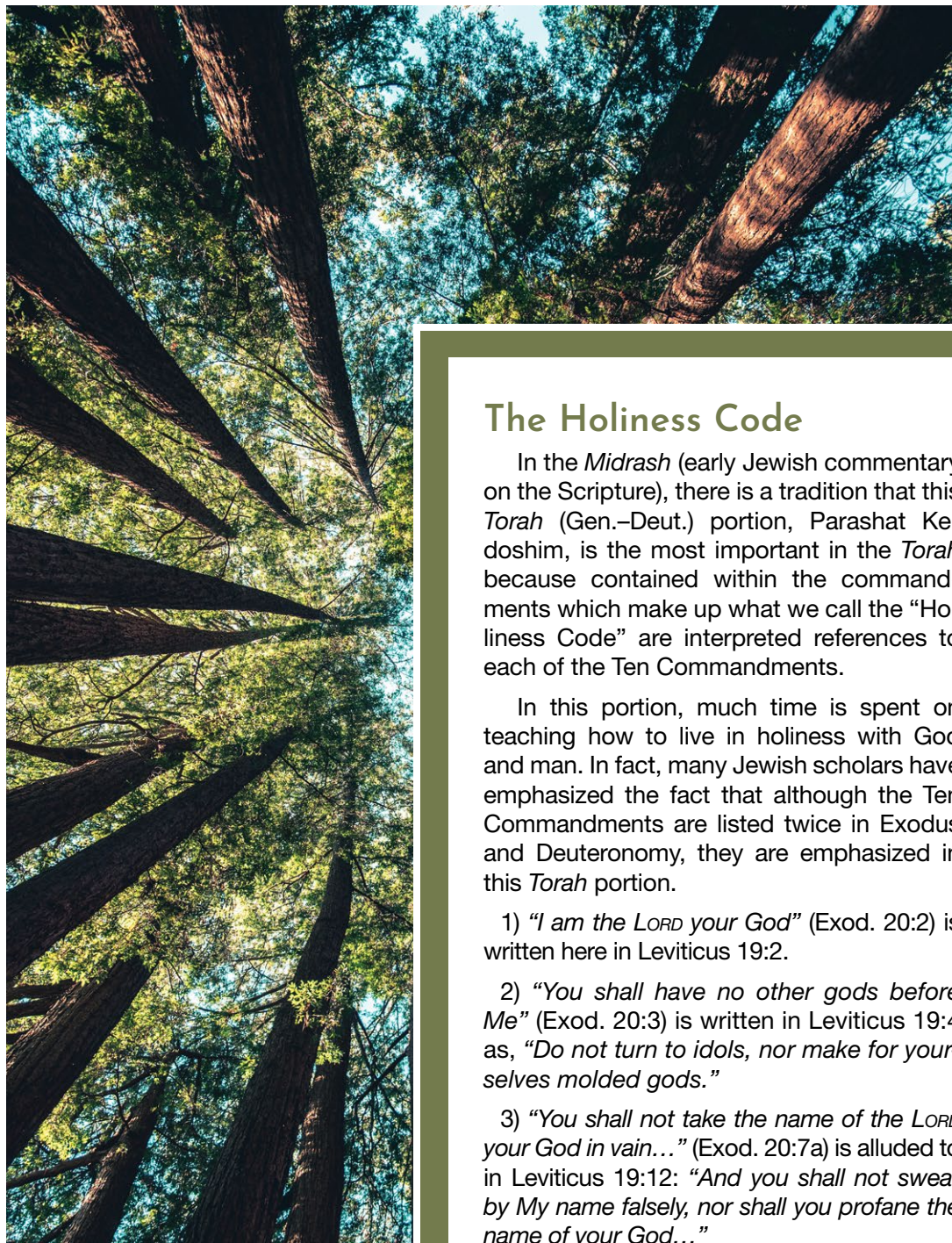
Oswald Chambers famously said, “Holiness, not happiness, is the chief end of man” (*My Utmost for His Highest*).

Richard Baxter, a Puritan, wrote that holiness is “nothing else but the habitual and predominant devotion and dedication of soul, and body, and life, and all that we have to God; and esteeming, and loving, and serving, and seeking Him, before all the pleasures and prosperity of the flesh” (*A Christian Directory*).

Dwight Moody argued that “It is a great deal better to live a holy life than to talk about it. We are told to let our light shine, and if it does we won’t need to tell anybody it does. The light will be its own witness. Lighthouses don’t ring bells and fire cannon to call attention to their shining—they just shine.”

## “I Am the LORD your God”

As I read and reread the portion, I was struck by the number of times we see the phrase “I am the LORD your God.” In fact, we find the personal name of God—YHWH—the tetragrammaton, 20 times in these two chapters. The first half of the Ten Commandments are all centered on our relationship with God.



## The Holiness Code

In the *Midrash* (early Jewish commentary on the Scripture), there is a tradition that this *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) portion, Parashat Kedoshim, is the most important in the *Torah* because contained within the commandments which make up what we call the “Holiness Code” are interpreted references to each of the Ten Commandments.

In this portion, much time is spent on teaching how to live in holiness with God and man. In fact, many Jewish scholars have emphasized the fact that although the Ten Commandments are listed twice in Exodus and Deuteronomy, they are emphasized in this *Torah* portion.

1) “I am the LORD your God” (Exod. 20:2) is written here in Leviticus 19:2.

2) “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exod. 20:3) is written in Leviticus 19:4 as, “Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods.”

3) “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...” (Exod. 20:7a) is alluded to in Leviticus 19:12: “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God...”

4) “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exod. 20:8) is written in Leviticus 19:3 as “Every one of you shall...keep My Sabbaths...”

5) “Honor your father and your mother...” (Exod. 20:12a) is written in Leviticus 19:3: “Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father...”

6) “You shall not murder” (Exod. 20:13) is written in Leviticus 19:16 as “nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor.”

7) “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod. 20:14) is written in Leviticus 20:10b as “The adulterer and adulteress, shall surely be put to death.”

8) “You shall not steal” (Exod. 20:15) is written in Leviticus 19:11 as, “You shall not steal...”

9) “You shall not bear false witness...” (Exod. 20:16) is written in Leviticus 19:16: “You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people...” (NASB).

10) “You shall not covet...” (Exod. 20:17) according to Jewish sources is covered by the verse which says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18).

## What Did Jesus (Yeshua) Say?

Peter is not the only one who quoted from (and validated) this Torah (Gen.–Deut.) portion. Jesus also quoted parts of it. What is Jesus’ attitude toward the commandments?

In Mark 10:17b–19, Jesus answers a question posed to Him: “‘Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?’ So Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not bear false witness,” “Do not defraud,” “Honor your father and mother.”’”

Jesus also summarized the Ten Commandments as the two greatest commandments (Mark 12, Matt. 22 and Luke 10). He said that we are to love God and love our neighbor. Think about it: if we love God, we will keep His commandments, a theme repeated more than once in the Writings of the Apostles (NT). If we love our neighbor, we will keep the commandments which relate to human relations. In the Matthew passage, Jesus says, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:40).



## Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

This verse first found in Leviticus 19:18 is a famous verse in both Jewish and Christian thought. Jesus called it the second most important commandment (Mark 12:31).

## Is Holiness for Today?

Holiness involves our relationship with a holy God and our righteous actions toward humans that He has created.

How can we ignore the clear statement of the Scripture saying, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2)? In Christianity we have tended to react like a swinging pendulum to what seems like overemphasis of issues. The early Holiness Movement in the US was clearly an inward reality—a powerful encounter with the Lord. The encounters were so meaningful and impacting that those involved were changed. The outward manifestation of holy living followed a vibrant encounter with the living God. In my generation, there was still an emphasis on holiness, but it seemed to be more along the lines of what a good Christian should or shouldn’t do, and not necessarily on the inward reality. As time went by, increasingly this idea of holiness was largely abandoned. Now it is rare to hear messages on holiness.

It seems clear to me that God is still holy, and still has a desire for His people to walk in His ways—His holy ways. Is just acting holy enough?



No! In order for us to be holy, we need an encounter with the living God. We need to know the One who calls Himself YHVH—the Great I AM. Together with His help, we can live a life that is holy, reflecting His nature to the world around us. Jesus (Yeshua) said, “*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:24). As followers of God, we need to search our hearts. Do we worship from our hearts in alignment with the Scriptures? Do we love God and love our neighbors? Are we committed to our holy God and to following Him in holiness? I’ve said enough. Now it is up to each of us to seek the answers to these questions in prayer.

---

## Bibliography

Baxter, Richard. *A Christian Directory, or, a Body of Practical Divinity and Cases of Conscience*. London: Printed for Richard Edwards, 1825.

Ben-Gurion, David. “The Imperatives of the Jewish Revolution.” Speech, Haifa, Israel, September 1944. [https://zionism-israel.com/hdoc/Ben-Gurion\\_Jewish\\_revolution.htm](https://zionism-israel.com/hdoc/Ben-Gurion_Jewish_revolution.htm).

Chambers, Oswald. *My Utmost for His Highest*. Dodd, Meade & Co, 1924.

Kohler, Kaufmann. *Jewish Theology, Systematically and Historically Considered*. Project Gutenberg, 2010.

*The Voice of Israel* radio station closed down in 2015. This reference refers to a program the author listened to while the station was on air.

Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

---

## TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

---

## Bridges for Peace—Offices

**Australia:** Tel: 07-5479-4229, [bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com)

**Canada:** Tel: 204-489-3697, Toll free: 855-489-3697, [info@bfpcan.org](mailto:info@bfpcan.org)

**Japan:** Tel: (81) 3-5969-9656, [bfp@bfpj.org](mailto:bfp@bfpj.org)

**New Zealand:** Tel: (64) 7-855-5262, [emather.nz@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:emather.nz@bridgesforpeace.com)

**South Africa:** Tel: 021-975-1941, [info@bridgesforpeace.co.za](mailto:info@bridgesforpeace.co.za)

**South Korea:** Tel: 070-8772-2014, [bfp@bfpkorea.com](mailto:bfp@bfpkorea.com)

**Spanish:** Tel: (52) 646-238-7206, [intl.spanish@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:intl.spanish@bridgesforpeace.com)

**Russia:** Tel: (7) 903-309-1849, [info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com)

**United Kingdom:** Tel: 165-673-9494, [ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com)

**United States:** Tel: 800-566-1998, [postmaster@bfpusa.org](mailto:postmaster@bfpusa.org)



---

## © COPYRIGHT POLICY:

Bridges for Peace holds the copyright on this material. We encourage pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people to use these articles for preaching and teaching, and we hereby grant permission for a limited number of copies for such educational purposes. However, any other reproduction or transmittal of this material in any form—including reprinting, republishing, recording or use with any information storage and retrieval system—requires written permission from BFP International.

**Bridges for Peace:** Christians supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews in Israel and around the world.

**International Headquarters**  
PO Box 1093, Jerusalem, Israel

Tel: (972) 2-624-5004

[intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com)

[www.bridgesforpeace.com](http://www.bridgesforpeace.com)

