

Holy and Profane: No Big Deal?

by Thom Ernst

According to Three Dog Night's popular song "Joy to the World," Jeremiah was a bullfrog; but, in Old Testament times he was a contemporary and fellow captive of Ezekiel. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were taken into captivity by the Babylonians when Jerusalem was destroyed in approximately 586 B.C. As a Priest, Ezekiel and fellow captives had to have wrestled with the question as to why God would abandon His city and allow it to be destroyed by the evil Babylonians, especially since He had promised David that His name and presence would be linked with Jerusalem forever. Now, less than 500 years later Jerusalem is in ruins, and her people are living in captivity in Babylon. The resounding question was "Why?" Why would God allow that? Why hadn't God protected His city? Why had God seemingly reneged on His promise to King David and reiterated to his son King Solomon? Why? Gracious as He is, He often answers those anguished, soul-rending cries. He answered His people through Ezekiel. He gave detailed reasons why He had allowed the Babylonians the power to destroy His temple. One of the most significant is found in Ezekiel 22:26 – "Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the profane; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them."

"Holy" means set apart and "profane" means common. Those priests were mixing them up – so much so that there was no discernable difference between the Sabbath (the weekly holy day) and any other day. We've seen the same melding of days in our own generation. Fifty plus years ago, Sunday used to be set apart, even in the secular world, with "Blue Laws." Blue Laws prohibited commercial activity on Sunday. Today, other than a portion of the population who go to church, Sunday is really no different than any other day. Even those church-goers' frequent establishments that a few years ago were closed due to Blue Laws. Sunday used to be holy – it was a day set apart for the worship of God, government and secular society respected that. Keeping one day out of seven holy was one of God's Commandments in His famous list of ten - number four to be exact: "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it Holy." The Jewish people and especially the priests of Ezekiel's time failed to "remember" that. Instead, they allowed the Holy Sabbath to segue into another common weekday. The result was that God was no longer seen as the Almighty. His accomplishments in protecting and providing for His people were forgotten. His devastating the armies of Israel's enemies was forgotten. Forgotten that is until Babylonia appeared on the scene and started wreaking havoc in God's Holy city. Then the people started remembering. In various wars, soldiers call that "foxhole religion." When the bullets are flying and your life's 172 grains away from meeting your Maker, then you begin to remember things you heard, things you were taught and you begin to "believe;" but, for the majority of your life you've never distinguished between the holy and the profane – there's been no difference – big deal! Right?

To God, treating his Commandments and ultimately Him as an aside, or as common is a big deal; and, Israel in 586 B.C. was finding out firsthand how big a deal that actually was. God brought judgment because the priests no longer taught the people how to distinguish between what is holy and what is common. When they mixed them up to the degree that there were no longer distinguishing characteristics between the two then their view of God and His holiness deteriorated also and soon He was just another god.

And we wonder why America is in travail today: Economic woes. Military ineffectiveness. Foreign policy fiascoes. Immigration problems. Racial tensions. Moral depravity. A short time ago, a pastor of one of the nation's largest churches was being interviewed as to why Evangelicals were flocking to support Trump. His answer went something like this: "In a recent poll, the question was asked of Evangelicals 'which candidate most reflects your moral values' – Trump was at the bottom of that field of candidates. Then the question was asked 'which candidate most reflects your belief that he will bring security to America and turn around the economy?' Trump was at the top of that list." This pastor's implication was that security and a strong economy trumped (no pun intended) moral values. While this is not an endorsement for a specific candidate, it is an indictment against church-goers who do not hold morality in higher esteem than economics or personal safety. The irony here is that God promised provision for the latter two if His people concentrated on the former.

Holy? Common? Or no big deal? It's always our choice.