

Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #37
 5/16/2007

The Judgment of God, The Great Tribulation, The Great Day of God's Wrath
Chapter Fifteen - An Explanatory Prelude to The Bowl Judgments
The Last Series of Judgments, The End of The Tribulation Period

Verse four begins with the question “**Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?**” and is quickly answered. “**For thou, only thou art holy.**”

The primary reason the **fear of God** is seldom mentioned today, and even more rarely emphasized, is that man has de-emphasized and lost the sense of the holiness of God. Many Bible-believing people grieve over the departure of the presentation of the Ten Commandments from the public square, particularly from the public schools. Church going people complain that our society has become secularized and our culture debased and corrupt. Indeed, there is much to grieve over.

If we, who are church-going, Bible-believing people, will simply look within ourselves we may discover the reason for this spiritual and cultural decay in our land. We have so minimized and neglected a focus on the holiness, “**the otherness,**” of God and “church,” that even conservative, Bible-believing churches have become secularized and far too much like the culture in which the church is immersed. Such a culture knows little or nothing about the holiness of God and certainly has little or no fear of God.

Replacing the emphasis on the holiness of God and the purity of His Person and Word with the opinions and culture of men is not new. Jesus indicated that this compromising of God's holiness and Word was a problem predating His time when He addressed the religious leaders of His day and quoted from Isaiah: “***This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men***” (Mathew 15:8-9). The substitution of man's word in the place of God's Word is not new. What does seem to be new is the almost torrential effort on the part of today's churches to become so much like the world that the ungodly feel at home when they decide to attend church. The brazenness of this has even been described by some “church-growth experts” as making “church so that it doesn't feel like church to the unchurched.” Of course, the “**otherness of God**” — the holiness of God — must be totally left out of such a place. It is reasonable to conclude that our holy God has no place in or association with such a religious atmosphere or “worship service.” Just as Jesus condemned such hypocrisy in the first century He condemns it today.

The passage before us in Revelation fifteen began by describing a worship scene in heaven that emphasizes the holiness of God. After describing that scene in verses one through three, the question is asked, “**Who shall not fear thee, O Lord and glorify thy name?**” Then verse four is concluded by telling us that “**all nations shall come and worship before thee for thy judgments (righteous acts) are made manifest.**” The statement looks for-

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ward to the millennial kingdom and even into eternity (Isaiah 66:22-23). Since the worship of God here on this earth is patterned after things in heaven (Hebrews 8:5; 9:24; 10:1), it is reasonable to assume that worship today to be acceptable to God should reproduce what we are told happens in heaven.

Only when one understands this relationship can one comprehend what we are told in verse five, the descriptions which accompany it and the horrible judgments which follow in Chapter sixteen, the **Bowl Judgments**.

5 And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:

John looked and saw something that prompted him to use an unusual phrase to describe what grabbed his attention. Of course, God's Holy Spirit selected the very words which John used (2 Peter 1:20-21; Timothy 3:16) since He wanted something very special to be emphasized. The phrase is so unusual that many commentators seem to ignore it. The phrase takes our mind back to the book of Exodus, to the time that God called Moses to go up on Mt. Sinai where He gave specific instructions about how His people were to worship Him and relate to Him.

The people were only two months removed from Egypt, the land where the descendants of Jacob had spent four centuries, most of that time as slaves immersed in the paganism of that land. The ignorance of the God of their fathers was so overwhelming that it had even been necessary for Moses to ask God what His name was when God first called out to him (Exodus 3:13). Not only did they not know God, they did not know what He was like. After sending the plagues upon Pharaoh — with which the **Bowl Judgments** have a strong likeness — God had set the people free from bondage through His miraculous deeds and brought them to the foot of the same mountain where He had spoken to Moses out of the burning bush.

Exodus 19:18-25 describes the awesome way God introduced Himself to these descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, a people who had not known or worshipped Him for centuries. Smoke covered the mountain. God spoke to all of the people and told them that if they disrespected His holiness and touched the mountain He would kill them. The very first truth which God revealed and emphasized about Himself was that He is holy, He is not like anything or anyone else. No man would be allowed to approach Him or treat Him like they approached or treated anything or anyone else.

To more fully explain His holiness and His **“otherness”** God called Moses up the mountain to give him detailed instructions regarding how the people were to worship Him and how they were to live. Reflecting His own holy

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nature these instructions and commandments were different from anything else that anyone had in this world (Deuteronomy 4:7-8). These instructions were holy because they came from a holy God and prescribed the way God's people could approach Him. No other people had ever heard God speak to them and reveal Himself to them in such a way (Deuteronomy 4:32-35).

Furthermore, God condensed the eternal truths of heaven into ten simple statements to guide man in how to relate both to Him and to each other in a manner that would be acceptable to Him. While God dictated to Moses and the other writers of holy Scripture the very words which they wrote, God, Himself, with His own finger, wrote these ten statements on tablets of stone and gave them to Moses for the people (Exodus 31:18; 32:15-16; Deuteronomy 4:13; 5:22; 9:10). This makes these ten statements unique, holy, other than anything else in this world. When God first gave them to Moses He called them **"two tables of testimony"** (Ex. 31:18) and used this term frequently, more than any other, because these ten statements are **"testimonies, or a witness"** to the **"otherness," the holiness, the uniqueness of God.**

In addition, God further emphasized the importance of this **"testimony"** by telling Moses to build an **"ark,"** a wooden box in which the tablets were to be placed (Exodus 25:10-22). The lid of the **"ark"** was to be called **"the mercy seat"** and this **"ark"** containing **"the testimony"** was such a symbol of God's holy person that this would be the place where He would meet with man. Among other detailed instructions regarding the sacredness of this **"testimony"** God told Moses to construct a tent called a **"tabernacle"** in which the **"ark"** was to be kept (Exodus 26) and in the very center of this **"tabernacle"** was a separate little space behind a very heavy curtain which was called the **"temple"** or **"Holy of Holies."**

The Israelites didn't learn or accept what God taught them about His holiness. While Moses went up on the mountain to meet with God for forty days and receive His instructions for the people, the people reverted to the paganism of Egypt and tried to integrate the worship of Jehovah with the worship of the pagan gods from Egypt. Disrespecting the holiness of God, they used the same music (Exodus 19:18) and the same outward expressions, a golden calf, they had practiced in worshipping the gods of Egypt. Their rejection of His holiness so provoked His wrath that God rejected them and had them destroyed.

When Moses was coming down from the mountain, carrying the **"two tablets of testimony which God had carved with His own finger"** and heard the pagan music of the idolaters, he threw the tablets down in his anger and broke them (Exodus 32:18-19).

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All of this in the Old Testament, concerning **“the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony,”** was patterned after the real thing in heaven and that is what John says he sees in verse five. That is the basis for this judgment of God being so horrible. In a way it is like a volcano erupting after centuries of patience and longsuffering as God had been the object of the disrespect, the rejection, the utter shameless treatment He had been receiving from sinful and rebellious man.

God's holiness has been trampled under foot by the perverted arrogance of Christ-rejecting, Satan-loving man. The next three verses present a condensed prelude of the fullness of the wrath of God erupting forth from the true Holy of Holies in heaven.

6 And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

7 And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.

The **“seven angels” “having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles”** are to receive the **“vials full of the wrath of God”** which will deservedly be poured out upon this unholy world. The **“temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God”** just as the mountain was in Exodus nineteen.

It is the power and might of a holy God being used to assert God's righteous and just judgment upon men who have rejected His grace and mercy. It will be indescribably awful.