***The Ark of the Covenant

RV150-02***

Please open your Bibles to Revelation 11:19 through Revelation 12:2. Our subject is "Tribulation Personalities." This is segment number one.

We have found that the book of the Revelation reveals a series of divine judgments to be brought against the world of the antichrist during the seven-year tribulation period that he will be a prominent personality. We have this revelation in chapters 6 through 19 concerning this era of history, which is yet future. These judgments of God are described under three symbols. The first is a series of seven seals, and we have looked at those in detail. When you get to seal number seven, it breaks out into another series of judgments in the form of seven trumpets, and we have looked at those in detail as well. We have now come, in fact, to trumpet number seven. It has been blown, and as we will see in time, out of that will come another series of judgments called the seven bowls. These are bowls of the wrath of God which will now be poured out upon the world of the antichrist and the tribulation humanity.

However, before the bowl judgments evolve out of that seventh trumpet which is blown, there is inserted a set of parentheses to give some additional background information. The seals, the trumpets, and the bowls progress through the book chronologically, and they end up at the Second Coming of Christ. This is the beginning of the tribulation, and it goes on for the seven years, right down to the arrival of the Lord. So, these go chronologically, but periodically, God the Holy Spirit interrupts this chronological progression to give additional background information on what is taking place on the earth in order to prepare mankind for the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. Some of these things of preparation we will read about in the Bible. Some of these things of preparation you are reading about in your daily newspapers and hearing on nightly news. We are having before our very eyes the preparation for the things that the Bible itself reveals will be in existence when this powerful man rules the world.

There are two sets of parentheses. There is a small parentheses which goes from Revelation 10:1 through Revelation 11:14. Then there is a large parentheses which goes from Revelation 11:15 through Revelation 15:8. This is a very large parentheses of several chapters. We have begun this second large parentheses at Revelation 11:15. We have concluded verse 18, and now we begin with verse 19. Verse 19 actually should go with chapter 12. So, we're going to begin with verse 19, which now introduces us to further background information.

The first part of the large parentheses, which we looked at in verses 15-18, is actually a summary of what is going to be the result when the seven bowls are poured out. So, having presented to us this summary, in which the saints of God are thanking Him for finally moving into action; finally bringing the nations of the antichrist to their knees; finally recognizing that the people of God were right, and that the people of this world were wrong; and, finally, those who destroy the earth are going to be destroyed.

When I read that phrase, I could not help thinking of how many ways people destroy the earth, not the least of which is in financial capacity. Just think of all the financial capacity being destroyed in the Persian Gulf incident right now. Just think, if we had a little smidgen here at Berean Christian Academy, and in Berean church ministries, of the vast millions that are being destroyed in the insanity of the Persian Gulf, of all the good that could be done for humanity. This phrase alone is a very significant phrase. It indicates why we have to have somebody who can run this world as an absolute authority, and who will do it in absolute righteousness and justice. There's only one person that can do that, and that's Jesus Christ. When the world gets this beneficent dictator, the world is going to be straightened out.

It might be interesting for you to lie on your bed at night, as you try to fall asleep, and think of how the world is going to be changed once you don't have to ask Congress; once you don't have to ask the politicians; once you don't have to ask the vested interests; and, once you don't have to ask anybody except a God who knows it all, and who knows how to do it right, and who says, "Here's how it's going to be. Just imagine to your mind, as you drift off to sleep, how the world is going to be changed. You will see that it is all the places where the world is in agony now because it is totally disoriented from the Word of God. If people would listen to the Bible, things would get straightened out in good order in considerable degree, but it won't happen.

So, these verses, Revelation 11:15-18, are a preview of the reign of this dictator, Jesus Christ upon the face of the earth. Heaven rejoices. This reign will be forever and ever. It is going to be the direct result of these seven bowl judgments which are ready to be poured out.

**The Temple**

However, before he moves on in verse 19, God the Holy Spirit says, "Let me give you a little bit in the way of background information so that you'll have a little better perception of what is going on. Verse 19: "And the temple of God, which is in heaven, was opened." The word "temple" here is the Greek word "naos." There are two basic Greek words for "temple." They are both translated as "temple." The Greek word "naos" refers to the inner sanctuary of the temple rather than to the whole temple complex as such. This refers to the whole temple that is being viewed.

The temple (or, as it was originally called – in the form of the tabernacle) was surrounded by pillars around which was a cloth fence. There was an entrance. The priests operated within this area. They came to the altar of sacrifice, and they performed the various sacrificial rituals. Then they were to go into the temple area itself to minister in various ways. However, before they went in, this priest which, when he was inducted into the priesthood, was symbolically given a bath by the high priest in order to symbolize salvation. This was his total cleansing from sin – not really, in practice, but symbolically he was to be covered by the future blood of the Messiah.

However, when he went in to minister, God recognized and symbolized that there was a sin nature that keeps getting your hands and feet dirty. So, there was a laver filled with water, and the priest would wash his hands and wash his feet before he entered into the temple proper, in order to minister before the altar of incense; to keep the lamp stand lit; and, to change the shewbread. The 12 loaves of shewbread represented the 12 tribes of Israel. And of course, only the high priests went into the back one-third, and he could only go there once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

The temple itself was built upon this same pattern of the tabernacle. There was the altar of sacrifice and the labor for washing. Then there was a building which was divided into one-third and two-thirds. The front part was called the holy place. The priest went in there daily. They dealt with the lamp stands; they dealt with the table of shewbread; and, they dealt with the altar of incense which represented the prayers to God rising from the saints. Then there was the mercy seat.

What we read is that: "There was a temple of God in heaven, and it was opened." This word "temple" ("naos") refers to the whole thing inner sanctuary. So, the temple of God in Heaven is opened. The word "heaven" here refers to the third heaven where God himself dwells. What this Scripture is reminding us of is that there is a temple in heaven. The word may actually be used here to stress the contrast between another temple, which will be in existence in Jerusalem at this point in time in the tribulation period – the false temple. The Jews have rebuilt their temple. Now we are past the middle of the tribulation. The antichrist has double-crossed the Jews, and he has proceeded to persecute them, and to destroy them. And he has set his own image up in their temple to be worshiped as God.

The Mosaic tabernacle, and Solomon's temple later, which were on earth, were both a replica of a temple in heaven. Everything in this structure was a replica of the heavenly temple. We have that pointed out in Hebrews 8:5: "Who serve a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things." He is referring to what the priests do in the ritual on earth. They serve as a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things. This is just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle. He said, "For see that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain. Moses was specifically warned that he must build this temple exactly as per the plan that God gave him. There was no optional variance to be incorporated. Why not? Because it represented a temple in heaven. This was a mere replica on earth of what God had in heaven, and the procedures that were taking place there.

So, John observes the original temple in heaven. He is looking up, and he is experiencing at this point what Isaiah experienced and wrote about in Isaiah 6:1: "In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on the throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple." He is looking heavenward. He has a vision, and He says, "I see God sitting in His heavenly temple."

This same principle is again reiterated in Hebrews 8:2: "A minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." What's he talking about? The true tabernacle which God pitched is the one which is in heaven. The one that man pitched is the one on earth. But the earthly tabernacle is a duplicate of the heavenly one. And the earthly animal sacrifices symbolized the heavenly sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind.

Hebrews 9:23-24 point that out: "Therefore, it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens (the copy of the tabernacle and temple on earth of the true temple in Heaven) to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." On the earth, you went through ritual cleansing. You did it with the blood of animals of various kinds. Now he is saying that the heavenly temple needed a cleansing which had something more than just the blood of an animal.

Verse 24: "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." This is why we have good reason to believe that, when Mary found Jesus in the garden after His resurrection, she was so overjoyed that she was going to reach out and put her arms around Him, and He said, "Don't touch me, Mary. I have not yet arisen to My Father in heaven." The next time Jesus appears, He has no hesitancy of telling Thomas, "Go and touch My body. Put your finger here, and see if I don't have these wounds – that it is I, the one who was crucified, that is resurrected. Something has happened between those two moments, not too many hours apart.

On the basis of this verse in Hebrews, we have good reason to believe that Jesus Christ, between seeing and between seeing the other disciples, went into heaven, into the heavenly temple and walked into the innermost part where the ark of the covenant rested with the mercy seat on top, where the blood of the animals was sprinkled. And He walked into that innermost sanctuary with, not the blood of an animal, but the blood of the perfect Son of God, the God-man, whose blood now had cleansed the sin of the world away completely for everyone, so that sin is no longer an issue with God. It's still an issue with people who don't know better. They're always trying to improve their lives, and trying to make themselves behave better so that God will take them to heaven. Sin is covered. Sin is not the issue. The issue is your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Once you have entered the family of God through believing the gospel, then the issue becomes staying in the inner circle of temple fellowship. Sin is never an issue. It has all been covered. So, we have reason to believe that Christ walked into that heavenly temple, and now presented His blood, and that sealed forever the atonement for all mankind.

**The Ark of the Covenant**

So, John here is in a vision. He looks up in heaven, and there he sees the glorious temple of God. He is looking into the third heaven, the very dwelling place of God. Heaven is opened so that he can look into it. Then he sees something that really takes his breath. He sees the ark of the covenant appear in God's temple. The ark of the covenant refers to the promise that God made to Abraham. We call that the Abrahamic Covenant. You find it in Genesis 12:1-3, in which God said that He was going to create a mighty nation which would rule the nations of the world, and through which nation would come the Savior of all mankind, fulfilling the promise to Adam and Eve of Genesis 3:15, that through the seed of the woman would come someone who would destroy Satan himself. The ark of the covenant itself was a piece of furniture in the Jewish temple on the earth.

In the part of the temple called the holy place, there was at the end a heavy curtain (a veil) which separated the holy of holies from the holy place. When you walked in, you saw the lamp stand; you saw the table of shewbread; and, you saw the altar of incense from which the incense rose. Then there was a heavy curtain embroidered with beautiful portrayals of angels.

What John sees, however, is what's behind that curtain. What John sees is the ark of the covenant, on top of which is a golden lid which the Bible calls the mercy seat. In Exodus 25, this was the most sacred object in all of the temple, and it was never in human view. The only person that ever saw it was the high priest on Yom Kippur, when he walked around that curtain, and walked back there with the blood of animals sacrificed, first for himself (a bullock for himself), and then a goat for the people, and sprinkled the blood on this lid, the mercy seat, symbolically securing for another year forgiveness and protection for the people of Israel. This was the most sacred object in the temple. It represented the person of Jesus Christ Himself. It so represented the holiness of God that even if someone were innocently to touch it, he would immediately die.

When the tabernacle (the tent structure) had to be taken down and moved in their wilderness travels, the high priest had to go behind there; carefully take this veil of separation down; cover the ark; put an animal skin over that; and, then put a blue cloth on top of that. The polls were put through the sides of the ark of the covenant. Only then could the Kohathites, the division of the Levitical priests, walk in, and touch these poles, and carry the ark on their shoulders as they traveled. God would tolerate no disrespect for His Holiness and for His integrity.

You look at a country like ours today who thumbs its nose at the Ten Commandments of biblical morality. Then you look at this which represented that quality of God (His character); and, just to have treated this wooden box in an improper way was to bring death. What do you think God is going to do to a nation that has turned its back on His ways?

**The Hypostatic Union**

In Exodus 25:10, we have the instructions given to Moses concerning this box: "And they shall construct the ark of acacia wood, two-and-a-half cubits long, one-and-a-half cubits wide, and a-half cubit height." This was about four feet long, by two feet high, by two feet wide." "And you shall overlay it with pure gold inside and out. You shall overlay it. You shall make it a gold molding around it." This box of wood was to be overlaid with a veneer of pure gold. Since this box represented Jesus Christ, I think you can see the significance of the symbolism. The wood representing the humanity of Christ – the true humanity of a true human body; a true human soul; and, a true human spirit. And the gold, symbolic in Scripture of deity, represented the fact that this was also God.

This is what the Jews could not understand. They never grasped, in Jesus time, that the Old Testament had thought that when the Messiah came, He would be both God and man. When Jesus spoke of Himself by a title from the book of Daniel, "Son of Man," which represented the Messiah, and which represented deity, they could not connect how this human being, Jesus, could also call Himself God. They were outraged.

On one occasion, Jesus stumped the Pharisees when he quoted an Old Testament psalm, and He said, "How is it that David says, 'My Lord, the Lord, God in Heaven, says to My Lord." The word "Lord" means deity: "The God in Heaven says to My God, 'Sit down here on My throne, here in heaven, on My right hand.'" Jesus says, "To whom do you think He was speaking?" Well, they were smart enough to know that if God in heaven were talking to someone who was the Lord of David, it had to be a human being who was both God and man. They didn't want to believe it. They just went away silent and indignant that He had stumped them.

This box, with the gold representing the deity of Christ, and the wood representing His humanity.

The ark had rings on the side through which the poles were inserted. These were poles covered with gold with which the Levitical priest were to carry the ark en route. It was covered with a veil that had separated the holy place from the holy of holies, and covered with animal skin. Then the blue cloth was overlaid.

The ark was holy before God because it was a type of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, both in His humanity and in His duty. So, it was untouchable.

So, Moses goes on and says, "You shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles in the rings on the side of the ark to carry the ark with them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark. They shall not be removed from it once they are put in. And you shall put into the ark the testimony which I will give you." Something very important was to be found inside this box.

**Cherubim**

"You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold." This was the lid: "Two-and-a-half cubits long, and one-and-a-half cubits wide. You shall make two cherubim of gold. Make them hammered out" for the two ends of the mercy seat: "And make one cherubim at one end, one cherubim at the other end, and you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy at its two ends." This was a special category of angel – a special classification. There are not many cherubim angels that God made. The cherubim angels dealt specifically with guarding the holiness of God.

"And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings, facing one another. The faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat." Isn't that interesting? These who are to guard what represents the person of Jesus Christ Himself, the holiness of God, are looking down on the top of this mercy seat. Now, what is inside this box is what is significant in what these angels are looking at.

"And I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim, which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in the commandments for the sons of Israel."

**Shekinah Glory of God**

So, here was where the Shekinah glory of God dwelt. Well, I don't know what Aaron must have thought when he walked in that first time into the holy of holies, on that first day of atonement. He was carrying the blood of that animal. Because the holiness was such an issue, and a wrong move on his part would bring death. And with the death of the high priest, there was a major problem for the people and their access to God, for their own forgiveness, that they had bells put on the robe of the high priests. As long as they heard those bells tinkling in there, jingling along, they knew that he was alive and moving. If the bells stopped ringing, something had seriously gone wrong. But for Aaron to walk in there, it must have been awesome.

There was no light in this room except the light of the glory of God, and they could hear the voice of God speaking directly the commandments of God; the ways of God; the morality of God; and, the principles of life; all of which were then recorded in Scripture.

These two angels that were looking down on this mercy were looking down on three significant items that were contained in that box, which are recorded for us in Hebrews 9:1-5: "Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship in the earthly sanctuary. So, there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one in which were." He is referring here to the tabernacle. He's talking about the outer one. He's talking about the holy place in which there was a lamp stand; the table with the sacred bread; and, the altar of incense, which he doesn't mention here. And behind the second video, there was the tabernacle, which is called the holy of holies. In that one, there was the ark of the covenant: having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant. The altar of incense was on one side of the veil (the prayers of the people of God); and, on the other side of the veil was the ark of the covenant.

**The Contents of the Ark of the Covenant**

"Covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna." One of the things in it was a jar (a little pot) that held some of the manna. This symbolized Jesus Christ as the bread of eternal life. Also in the ark was Aaron's rod – that rod of Aaron, that burst forth into an almond bud (the dead stick that burst into life, representing resurrection through Jesus Christ, whom the ark represented. And the third item that was in there was the tables of the covenant, the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were recorded.

You can see the symbolism of this holiness. Here is this box representing Jesus Christ. Here are the holy Cherubim angels who are defenders of the honor of the holiness of God. Here they are looking down upon the mercy seat where God dwells, and inside, they look upon the absolute righteousness of God, as represented by the Ten Commandments, and the bread of life in Christ – the resurrection through those who eat that bread. This represented the standard of God which man would violate. And that violation was covered by the blood which was sprinkled on this mercy seat. So, as the angels symbolically looked through that mercy seat, they looked through the blood of Christ. It was a symbol of all that God was going to do for the Jewish people and all of humanity. The Shekinah glory was present on the mercy seat, and from this holy position, God spoke to them.

Because it was wholly, no one could look upon it, and no one could touch it. They couldn't even touch it in innocence, as Uzzah did when they were transporting the ark back to Jerusalem under David. He thought it was going to fall off the cart, and he reached to stabilize it, and he died on the spot. Only the high priest could deal with the ark, and only when he had sacrificed and covered himself with the blood of an animal. Then he came in, and Leviticus 16:14-15 tell us that he sprinkled that blood on the top of the ark. This symbolically indicated the atonement of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world.

Of course, all of this was fulfilled in time by Christ Himself on the cross of Calvary. Therefore, the final sacrifice for sin was made. The final payment for sin was made. That's the important thing to remember so that nothing more needed to be added to what Christ had done. This system of symbolic pictures was no longer needed.

That is why John looks up in heaven; he sees the temple of God (the original – the true temple); to his horror, he sees the camera of his eye focusing in on the inner holy of holies; and, of all things, he's looking upon the ark of the covenant. That was the kiss of death in times past. What is God telling us? He's telling us the same thing as when Jesus died on the cross and cried out to His Father, "Into Your hands I commit My Spirit," and He dropped His head in death as He gave up His life. Back here in the temple, the priests, who are going about their business, are horrified to see a tear begin at the very top, 15 feet up in the air, slowly, as if a finger were ripping it right down. Slowly, that thing comes down, and that curtain is ripped, and it flies apart. They're standing there dumbfounded, looking again on the ark of the covenant.

I think if I had have been in their place, I'd have said that: "Somebody up there is trying to tell us something down here, when something like that happens to that which God considered so holy." Here is the background such that John understood why he could look upon this object with impunity. Hebrews 7:26-27: "For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest (a high priest as Jesus), holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens, who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. Who do you think you are? You may think that you cannot be saved permanently. You may think that you have come up with a sin that God did not cover on the cross. Therefore, you must get yourself back into salvation. Do you see the blasphemy of those who teach that salvation is not secure, and that the eternal security of the believer in his faith in Christ does not keep in going to heaven? The sacrifice was offered once for all, for all the sins of the world. It was no offered by a priest like Aaron. Aaron had to first sacrifice for himself. Now he was covered. Then he could sacrifice for the people, to come into the holy of holies and sprinkle the blood. Jesus offered Himself. He didn't have to clear Himself with God first, because he was sinless.

Notice Hebrews 9:11-12: "But when Christ appeared as the high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands; that is to say, not of this creation." There we are – back on resurrection day again. Jesus entered some kind of a place that wasn't made with hands. What's he talking about? He's talking about the temple in heaven: "And not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." He walked into that holy of holies in the heavenly temple, and there he placed the certification of His blood. Whether he came with His actual blood or not, we don't know, but He came into there through His blood, and He certified on that altar that the sins of all mankind were now paid. Nobody had to go to hell. Everybody could go to heaven. They just had to do one thing. They had to accept this blood as their covering. They had to accept this Savior as their channel.

That's why the Bible calls Jesus the veil – "through the veil into heaven." What's he talking about? The Mormons have made that a crazy thing. Those of you who went to the temple with us here in Dallas, before they shut it down to we gentiles (we outsiders), they showed us that veil. What happens at that veil is that they're trying to show how they bring into eternal life through the veil. And what do they do? The person on one side meets the person on the other side: at five points, hand to hand; elbow to elbow; knee to knee; foot bone to foot bone; and whatever it is (five places). Then he reaches over and he jerks him through that curtain into the celestial room. And it is a magnificent room. What they're telling you is that the Mormons, through Joseph Smith, will bring you through the curtain into heaven. What a blasphemy!

The Bible talks about coming through the veil (through the curtain) but it says, "Jesus is the curtain that we come from through" – His sacrifice once for all. What an insult to God for the religious systems that keep telling people that they must prove themselves worthy, as Roman Catholicism does, before they can be benefited by the blood of Christ and the death of Christ!

Notice Hebrews 9:24-25: "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." There it is very explicit. The tabernacle and temple on the earth were copies of the real one in heaven. Jesus didn't go into this temple. He couldn't. He was born in the tribe of Judah. Only Levites could go into the earthly temple. Jesus never went into the temple proper. He was not qualified for that in His humanity. He went into the real one in heaven: "Nor was it that he should offer Himself then as the high priest enters the holy place year-by-year with blood not His own. There again it is stressing that He didn't have to have His sin covered. He had none.

Hebrews 10:10-12: "By this we will have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, and every priest stands daily, ministering and offering time-after-time the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God." And the writer of Hebrews points out that when the priests of the tabernacle and temple served God, they're always on their feet. But when Jesus served God, in terms of covering sin, He only had to do it once. From then on, He sat down, sharing here what is the throne of God. It is His mercy seat. The Bible indicates that that is the very throne of God. So, no more ritual animal sacrifices are needed.

When the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was completed, and God was satisfied for the covering of the sins of the world, this was indicated by the fact that the veil hiding the ark of the covenant from view was torn in two. We have this indicated in Matthew 27:50-51: "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His Spirit." You notice that He not only died spiritually, from 12:00 noon to 3 o'clock, crying out in agony, "My God, my God," addressing the Father and addressing the Holy Spirit: "Why have you forsaken me?" This was as the sins of the world poured out upon Him? But then, just before He dies, He addresses God again, and now, once more, He says, "Father," because He is back in fellowship. The spiritual death part has been paid, and now comes a physical death. And only when He dies physically, the temple veil is torn.

Do not be deceived by those who would tell you that Christ only needed to die spiritually for the sins of the world, and not physically. His physical death and His shedding blood were essential: "And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks split."

The ark of the covenant in the holy of holies in heaven is the place of divine judgment against the sinner. This was true before the death of Christ. The ark of the covenant, constituting the throne of God in heaven, was a place of judgment. But after the death of Christ, this same ark (this same throne of God) became the throne of grace. Notice Hebrews 4:14-16: "Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without a sin nature."

This writer is talking to Jewish Christians who are going back to the Old Testament rituals. And he's saying to them, "Why in the world are you doing that? Do you not understand how the symbolism has all been fulfilled by Christ?" Here was a high priest that understands temptation, but He has never sinned. You don't even have a sin nature. Verse 16: "Let us therefore draw nearer with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." What's he talking about? "Let us draw near to the ark of the covenant, to the heavenly throne of God."

To John, that is inconceivable. Yet there he is, looking into heaven itself, into the holy of holies, seeing the ark of the covenant. Notice in Hebrews 10:19: "Since, therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil that is His flesh." His body was essential for us to go through that veil into the holy of holies: "And since we have a Great Priest over the house of God, let us strong here with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience in our body washed with pure water." How do you do that? By confessing your own sins and washing yourself with pure water. What does pure water refer to here in Scripture? In the New Testament, it refers to doctrine? You wash yourself with doctrines of Scripture, and you clear your evil conscience with confession of your known sins.

**Attend Church Services**

Verse 23: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and to good deeds. Then that great verse, verse 25, which tells us how we are going to do this. It's a pity that some people aren't here today to hear verse 25 – to hear how you keep your conscience clean, and how you keep yourself clear with God. Verse 25: "Not forsaking our own assembling together." That means going to church: "As is the habit of some" who let other things interfere with attending church services: "But encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day dawning." And boy, if the day is ever dawning, it's dawning in our time.

**God's Holiness**

The Bible makes it clear that the source of divine judgment against unsaved centers is also the source of mercy to the saved. This same ark of the covenant, the source of divine judgment, is also the source of mercy. Both flow from the holy character of God. Remember that when we talk about holiness, holiness is made up of two things. Do you know what those two things are? The Bible so explicit. It doesn't use words like "holy," in order to make you think of a halo; eyes going upward; hands folded; and, a little aroma of incense. No. When it says that God is holy, it is very specific.

**Righteousness and Justice**

Psalm 97:2: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." Holiness is the absolute righteousness of God, and His perfect justice. God always does what is right, and God is always just – He's always fair. He can do no other. Therefore, both judgment and mercy flow from the ark of the covenant because it represents the holiness – the integrity of God.

When the tabernacle was all set up originally, Aaron got his priestly robes on, and everything was in place. The whole nation was standing by, and Aaron walked into the enclosure. People are at the door, watching and waiting. He walks up to the brazen altar, and he kills the animals; and pours out the blood; and, sets them on the altar. Then the people recoil with amazement, and with the thrill of what takes place. Leviticus 9:22: "And Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them." And he stepped down after making the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings. He had them laid out there: "And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. And when they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offerings, and the portion of the fat on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces."

They had a clear visual demonstration that God was up there; He was pleased with them; and, that He had created a system (until the Messiah Savior came) by which they could approach Him. They could not go into the holy of holies, but through their priests, they could reach God. This fire, which came down indicated that God was pleased with what they had done.

**Nadab and Abihu**

However, Aaron had two sons who were also priests, Nadab and Abihu, and they decided to insert a variation in the procedure of the fire. This fire was kept burning now. This was the fire which was to be used from this point on. It had been ignited by God Himself. In Leviticus 10:1-3, another fire appears. This fire is also from the ark of the covenant. The fire from God's presence lit Aaron's offering. Look what it does here.

Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective fire pans, and after putting their own fire in them." Do you see what it's talking about? They got out their little Boy Scout kits, and they started flicking the sparks off, and they had the little stuff that ignites lots. There is lots of that stuff lying around there in Palestine. Just like the kids in summer camp, they got this fire going. They blew upon it and fanned it. Now they had their fire, and they put the stuff on it. Now they got their fire plans. The fire is going, and they're going to use it in the offering.

"They placed incense on it, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them." They were going in to put incense on this altar to burn it, but the fire had to come from the altar of sacrifice – God's fire to burn that incense. They made their own.

Verse 2: "And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord." I'm not saying that Nadab and Abihu did not do this in sincerity. They thought, "Well, fire is fire." They were weak on doctrine. They had not fully understood what all this represented. You can imagine what Aaron must have felt like. Here, they were getting started, and two of his sons get killed in the process of serving before God. Fire that had ignited his offering from the holy of holies now comes down and kills his sons. The same God who brings mercy of salvation is the God who brings the wrath of his judgment upon the unbeliever. It all comes from the same place. It comes from the same holy character.

In verse 3, Moses had to give some doctrine to Aaron now: "Moses said to Aaron, 'It is what the Lord spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me, I will be treated as holy, and before all the people, I will be honored.' So, Aaron therefore kept silent." Moses says to his brother Aaron, "This is the doctrine that God has taught us. God is holy, and He will be treated as holy. You're not going to get away with thumbing your nose at Him. The United States is not going to get away with thumbing its nose at God's morality. God is going to be honored before all the world."

Aaron says, "You're right, I grieve for the sons, but they did a wrong thing. The treatment that the sinner receives from God is determined by his relationship to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, which was represented by the ark of the covenant. The nature of God is holiness, but His policy, I'm happy to say, in dealing with humanity is grace.

So, there is no access to God the Father and eternal life in heaven except through Jesus Christ, as represented by the ark of the covenant. And when John looked up and saw the ark, he knew why he was seeing it. It was because the price had been paid; God's justice had been satisfied; God had acted in perfect righteousness in using His Son to die for the sins of all mankind; therefore, the veil was torn; and, through the veil (which was the body of Christ), symbolically, we walk in to the very presence of God.

For you who are unbelievers, this is a throne of judgment. For us who are believers, never forget that it is a throne of grace. This is why John 14:6 is such a hard verse for most of mankind. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me." The only way you could get to God under the symbolism of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple was through the ark of the covenant. There is where God spoke. There is where God dealt with the people. If you did not approach Him on the basis of holiness, you dropped dead. The only way you can approach God today is through the One whom that ark represented, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, most of the world rejects Him, but that's why we understand the other statement that Jesus made: "That the gate into heaven is small, and the path into eternal life is narrow," because He is the gate, and He is the way. Then He says, "Most of the world will never find it. Most of mankind will never find it." You and I did, because you and I were chosen by Him to do that. Now you are His ambassador; you understand His Holiness; you know what people are bringing upon themselves; and, you know the judgment that awaits them.

Princess Stephanie of Monaco is grieved at the death of her husband in a boat racing accident. An interview with him before, in which the reporter asked, "Don't you think this is really a dangerous thing to do? Flying across the water at 125 miles an hour, especially with the waves, is an enormously unstable condition. Anybody who has ever water-skied knows how easy it is to get a ski trip snipped under a wave that's coming by, and find yourself thrown over. You can imagine what will happen to a high-powered boat at that speed if it gets hit in just the right way. The prince said, "No, life is short." Then I waited to hear what he was going to say next. He said something to the effect: "One must simply live it to the fullest." He didn't know how short it really was. I wonder if, in his Catholicism, he now feels that he made the best choice of how he invested his life, that went out just like that. I wonder how he feels now that he realizes that the ark of the covenant, the holy of holies, where he's now had to face God, is not a place of grace, but for him, has become a place of judgment.

This is the message that you and I have to make clear to people who are ignorant of spiritual truth, and of the God who is up there, but who has not been silent. We have to speak for Him.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1990

[**Back to the Revelation index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/revelation.htm)

[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)