***The Tent of Testimony

RV196-02***

We now turn in our Bibles to a new section of the Revelation – Revelation 15:5-8. Our subject is "Seven Angels with Seven Plagues." This is segment number one.

This section of Revelation will bring to a close the interruption of the chronological progression of tribulation events which was begun back in Revelation 11:15. That began what we call the set of large parentheses. It goes all the way through the end of Revelation chapter 15. This set of large parentheses is in contrast to what we refer to as the set of small parentheses, which is Revelation 10:1 through Revelation 11:14, which comes immediately before the blowing of the seventh trumpet.

**The Bowl Judgments**

These sets of parentheses interrupt the chronological progression of the events of the tribulation. Those chronological events are to be found in the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls. Periodically, God the Holy Spirit interrupts that sequence in order to give us some background information on things that are taking place in the tribulation against which these judgments of God are being executed. The consequence of the bowl judgments, which we will soon begin in chapter 16, is summarized at the beginning of this large set of parentheses back in Revelation 11:15-19. I think it would be well for us to reread that as a frame of reference for what is coming in these bowl judgments.

In Revelation 11:15, we read, "And the seventh angel sounded, and there arose loud voices in heaven saying, 'The seventh angel sounds his trumpet." And out of that seventh trumpet now come these seven bowls. But before the seven bowls arrive, here we have a summary of what the result will be when all those bowls are poured out: "The kingdom of the world (because it is one kingdom at that time, under antichrist) has become the kingdom of our Lord (the Millennial Kingdom of God and of His Christ), and He will reign forever and ever." There shall be no end (as his mother Mary was told) to His kingdom on this earth: "And the 24 elders (who represent the church in heaven), who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worship God, saying, 'We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who is, and who was, because You have taken Your great power and did begin to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came. And the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Your bond servants, the prophets, and to the saints, and to those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroyed the earth.'"

These bowl judgments are going to bring about the final collapse of human society under the judgment of God. The church in heaven is praising God that that event has finally arrived.

Then verse 19 says, "The temple of God, which is in heaven, was opened. And the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple. And there were flashes of lightning, and sounds and peals of thunder, and an earthquake, and the great hailstorm." Here, heaven is opened; the holy of holies is seen; and, lo and behold, all men can look upon the ark of the covenant – that most sacred object representing the Lord Jesus Christ, because God has been propitiated. Now comes these lightning flashes, thunder, and hailstorms – these events in nature signifying the judgment of God about to break in its final rage upon the tribulation world.

So, these bowl judgments are the completion of the expression of the wrath of God, and we believe that they will occur in the final weeks of the tribulation era. It'll be down near the very end. We don't have any signal of a time period, as we do for the seals and the trumpets. They're pegged at so many years: halfway through; three-and-a-half years; two months; and, so on. But this is simply near the end, and they occur one after another, like somebody with a huge metal hammer pounding on an anvil as mankind is now completely shattered. He is now exposed: what his liberalism; what his humanism; what his secularism; and, what his arrogance has amounted to, as God comes in and finally exercise His rage. God is enraged at all of that now, but He holds back until sin has had its full expression.

So, the bowls will be the final expression of the full wrath of God against the evil world of the antichrist.

So, in Revelation 15:5-6, we have the angelic executors – those who are going to carry out this divine mission. And first of all, there appears again to us the tabernacle of God in heaven: "After these things" indicates the next thing in the order of events in John's vision. It refers now to the completion of a concert which has been given by the tribulation martyr choir, celebrating their victory over the antichrist who killed them. They have performed "The Song of Moses," which was sung at the Red Sea. And they have added to that "The Song of the Lamb," honoring the divine attributes of Jesus Christ, the King who will soon reign over the earth, following the collapse of the antichrist.

John says, "After these things (that he has listened to and observed of this heavenly choir), I looked." He turns, and this term in the Bible, "I looked," indicates that something dramatically new is going to be introduced. We repeatedly have this, "I looked." In the King James Version, it was translated, "I looked and behold." Something dramatically new is being indicated. Here the scene shifts from the heavenly choir to seven angels who are about to turn loose the final plagues of God on all of mankind.

**The Temple**

What John sees is the temple. I have to show you the word for "temple" here because it is an important word: the "naos." This word "naos" does not refer to the Old Testament tabernacle as a whole, with its surrounding courtyard. We have a different Greek word that talks about the whole tabernacle, with its fence and its courtyard, and all the surroundings. That is "hieron." Therefore, this word is a limited word. The "naos" is only part of the "hieron."

**The Holy of Holies**

This word specifically refers to the sacred enclosure, or the sanctuary, that we call the holy of holies in the temple proper. It is the innermost shrine. The holy of holies is the place where God had put the most important object of the Old Testament tabernacle furniture, the prototype of Jesus Christ, in the ark of the covenant.

**The Tabernacle**

The picture, therefore, is something like this: You had the tabernacle tent. It was surrounded by an enclosure wall. It had a courtyard in between, and there was only one entrance into that area. "Hieron" is referring to the whole thing. But when it uses this particular word, "naos," then it is speaking only of the back one-third which forms the holy of holies of that tabernacle tent. John says, "After these things, I looked, and the temple" (or better translated: "the sanctuary" – "the holy of holies" of the tabernacle. The word for tabernacle is the Greek word "skene." The word "skene" means "a tent," because that's what the tabernacle was. It was a tent-like structure. It was made up of cloth and animal skins; and, a structure of polls to support it. It was a portable center of worship. The plan for this tabernacle, we learned from Scripture, was given to Moses directly by God. It was patterned after the tabernacle which God has in heaven.

Please note Exodus 25:40: God says to Moses, "And see that you make them (all the items in the furniture of the tabernacle) after the pattern for them which was shown to you on the mountain." Moses was not told just to construct these things on his own. He was not told to simply design something to meet the purpose. God gave them exact specifications and exact plans.

Also notice Hebrews 9:23-24, where we read, "Therefore, it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these" – the rituals, the ceremony, and the blood. He is saying that the tabernacle was a copy of the true tabernacle in heaven: "But the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." Here you had animal sacrifices in order to perform the cleansing and ceremonies. But in heaven, that temple required a better sacrifice for the cleansing of sin: namely, the blood of Christ.

Verse 24: "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands (this earthly tent), a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." This tent was a mere copy of the true tabernacle in heaven. And when Christ presented Himself and His sacrifice for our justification, He did do it down here like the priests did, with animal sacrifices, but He went to the true temple, the true tabernacle, which is in heaven.

So, this tabernacle was made up of these animal skins and of the cloth, and it was able to be transported from place to place, and that's exactly what was done with it. It was transported for the 40 years that they wandered in the wilderness, and it was in existence and used for the first part of the stay, for the first few years, in the Promised Land.

Numbers 1:50-51 indicate this portable structure: "But you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its furnishings, and over all that belongs to it. They shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall also care for it. They shall also camp around the tabernacle. When this was set up, the Levites, which were the priestly tribe, were all around the tabernacle. The other tribes were appointed north, south, east, and west locations around the tabernacle, which was the center of every campground.

Verse 51 says that when the tabernacle is to set out, the Levites will take it down: "And when the tabernacle encamps, the Levites shall set it up. But the layman who comes near shall be put to death." If anyone else except a Levite of the priestly tribe dare to touch any of these objects of the tabernacle, in either taking it down or setting it up, it meant instant death. These were all holy objects, because they all represented, in one way or another, the person and the work of Christ. And this was a beautiful, magnificent visual aid that God created for the Jewish people.

Please notice Numbers 1:53: "But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the sons of Israel. So, the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the testimony." The Levites were sort of a guard around the enclosure to keep the civilians out.

In time, we came to the reign of King Solomon. Solomon built a magnificent, permanent structure in the form of the temple in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. It was a luxurious replacement for the old tabernacle tent. The tabernacle precinct, as we have shown you, was surrounded by this fence with one entrance into the courtyard. And between the entrance and the tabernacle, where the priest went into minister, was this brazen altar. On this altar were performed the animal sacrifices. This brazen altar, as you came in, was the first thing you encountered, which immediately testified to the fact that a blood sacrifice was necessary to bear the penalty of death in place of the sinner, if you were going to approach God, who dwelt here in the holy of holies, the back part of this tent, in the most sacred part with the ark of the covenant.

So, immediately it was clear to the Jews: "You do not approach God except through a payment for sin, which is death." That penalty symbolically was paid by those animal sacrifices. It, of course, pictured the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, who, on the cross, as the sinless one, would substitute in death for the sinner, to enable him to enter into the presence of God.

So, the priest who was going to minister, and the people who wished to approach God through the priest, had their sacrifices here, symbolically covering their moral guilt. Then they could go forward to minister and to approach God within the tabernacle.

After you went past the altar of sacrifice, you came to this laver, which is a large container of water for the ceremonial washing of the priest's hands and feet before they entered to minister into the tabernacle itself. This represented eternal fellowship. This is the outer circle of eternal fellowship. Christ died for our sins. We are secure. Our sins are washed away. We are secure in Him. But as we go through life, we take on that contamination from the world system of our daily sin, because our sin nature is still there. Therefore, before we go to serve God in whatever service we are called to, we must use the confession of known sins. The laver represented the principle of 1 John 1:9. And the priest symbolically said, "I know that in my position I am perfect before God, because I had to sacrifice here for my sins. But I know that in my experience, I fall short, and I symbolize that by washing my hands and my feet, so that I know that I am still a sinner, even as by the grace of God, I been provided salvation and eternal life as I go to minister before god.

The tabernacle tent itself was divided into two main sections. Two-thirds of it was devoted to what is called the holy place. The back one-third was devoted to what is called the holy of holies. Here again, on the east side (and this one entrance always faced toward the east, you came first to the altar of sacrifice, and then to the laver. This was a courtyard area around the enclosure of the fence. And through this entrance, the priests who were authorized came to minister in the holy place.

**The Tabernacle Furniture**

The furniture in the holy place we have identified for us in Hebrews 9:2. Each piece of furniture was spiritually significant, again with the person and work of Christ: "For there was a tabernacle prepared (the outer one – the outer room), in which were the lamp stand, the table of the sacred bread (the shewbread), which is called the holy place." There was also the altar of incense, which is not mentioned here in this verse. Also, the table is actually a reference here to this altar of incense, and then the sacred bread. This is called the holy place.

This contained a candelabra here of seven stems which illuminated the room. That's all the illumination that was in this room. The oil had to be prepared in a very special way. All of that had special significance to God. This symbolized Jesus Christ as the light of the world, and it symbolized also serving God by the light of doctrine – not serving God by the light of your sin nature, but serving God by His illumination through His revelation. All spiritual enlightenment comes from God via doctrine alone. The Bible is the source book.

This also contained the altar of incense, on which incense was burned from coals brought from the altar of sacrifice. And this burning incense created smoke, which rose up, and symbolized the prayers of believers rising up to God.

It also contained the table of shortbread on which were 12 loaves symbolizing Jesus Christ as the bread of eternal life for those who trust in Him for salvation. The loaves also represented, of course, the 12 tribes of Israel.

When we come to the holy place, the furniture in that is identified in Hebrews 9:3-5. At this point was a heavy veil that separated the two areas. Behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle, or an area, which is called the holy of holies. It had a golden altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant, covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna and Arron's rod, which budded, and the tables of the covenant. Above it were cherubim of glory, overshadowing the mercy seat. Out of these things, we cannot now speak in detail.

Behind, there was a second veil, and a tabernacle called the holy of holies, having a golden altar of incense. This can be a little confusing. The golden altar of incense was on one side of that veil. What he's doing here is describing what was on the other side of the veil. The veil was his frame of reference here.

On the curtain of the holy place were woven pictures (images) of angels. And here you had the altar of incense, the table of shortbread, and the seven-stemmed candelabra.

So, within the holy of holies was the most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle. It was called the ark of the covenant. It was a chest-like structure covered entirely with gold. On the top of it, there was a lid which would open. And on this lid were two statues of cherubim angels facing one another, and looking downward toward the lid of the ark. This lid was called the mercy seat and it was, in effect, the throne of God. Above the seat there glowed a brilliant light, dazzling to behold, which represented the glory of god, and it signified the presence of God. Thus it was called by the Jews the "Shekinah" glory. The word "Shekinah" means presence. So, the "Shekinah" glory is the glory of His presence.

What an honor this was to the Jewish people! What a dramatic presentation and confirmation of the presence of God! No other nation on the face of the earth has ever had such a demonstration of the presence of the Creator God among them. The Jews knew that God was there, because behind that curtain in the holy of holies, there was brilliant light. It was the light of the glory of god that illuminated that whole room.

We observe here in Revelation that this sanctuary of the tabernacle is the holy of holies of the tabernacle of testimony. Here we have a specific identification. The word "testimony" is "marturion." "Marturion" refers to a revelation from God. It is a reference to the ark of the covenant. The ark was a testimony, and that's why the tabernacle was a testimony. Why was it called a testimony? Because the ark was a testimony, on the one hand to the sinfulness, and to the mercy of God in saving grace.

**The Objects in the Ark of the Covenant**

Inside of the ark of the covenant, there were three objects which testified to the sinfulness of man.

**The Two Tables of Stone**

First of all, there were the two tables of stone on which God had inscribed with His finger the Ten Commandments. This was His moral code. These, in fact, are the principles of human freedom. No nation should willingly and publicly violate the moral code of God. The Ten Commandments are reiterated in the New Testament, except for the one about the Sabbath day being holy. That was a special one, for Israel only. Any nation who does that willingly and deliberately, in the light of knowledge, will be destroyed. Historically, that has always happened.

In Exodus 31:18, we read, "And when He had finished speaking with him (God finished speaking with Moses) on Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony: tablets of stone written by the finger of God."

Then go over to Exodus 32:15: "Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of testimony in His hand: tablets which were written on both sides. They were written on one side and the other. And the tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing, engraved on the tablets." So, when we want to talk about a moral code, you see very clearly that what is right and what is wrong has to be determined by the Creator God. You cannot determine the moral code by the 51% majority of your society. Only God determines what is right and wrong. When people today like to say, "You're just trying to push your religion down my throat," what they are saying is, "You're trying to force God's viewpoint down my throat. You're trying to impose on all of society what God says – that the basis of human law is the basis of His law, the moral code."

You can see why the United States is an enormous trouble. You can see why you are living in the most exciting period of human history. You see why, in a few weeks, you are going to see, before your very eyes, a dramatic declaration from the Creator God of what His next move is going to be. In one way, there will be, as in the case of Jonah, the signal that the judgment of God has been pulled back. In the other case, there will be the signal that the judgment of God is now moving into high gear. It is a dramatic time in which to live. One of the reasons for that is because this country has thumbed its nose at the moral code of God – this which He wrote with His own finger upon the tables of stone, and which were so significantly important to human existence in the devil's world, that they were put into the most sacred object of the tabernacle, within the box of the ark of the covenant.

A man is morally guilty before God. He is doomed to hell because he falls short of God's absolute righteousness as declared by the moral standard of the code of God written on these tablets of stone. The Jews consistently violated this standard, and that's why they were destroyed, finally, and dispersed as a nation.

**A Pot of Manna**

The second thing within this box as a testimony was a pot of manna. This was the food that God had sent to feed the Jews in the wilderness. It's quite easy to see how the two tablets of stone are an illustration of the sinfulness of man. Everything in this box was an illustration of the sinfulness of man. It's a little harder to think about the manna as an illustration of the sinfulness of man, until you understand the background upon which the manna came to them.

Please notice Numbers 11:4-6: "And the rabble (those who were bestirring trouble among the Jewish people in the wilderness) who were among them had greedy desires. And also the sons of Israel wept again and said, 'Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leaks, and the onions, and the garlic.'" slaves are slaves. These people still haven't learned to appreciate freedom. It's like the insanity of the elitists in our country today. The liberal elitists cannot wait to drag our nation into social programs, while all the rest of the world is fleeing socialism as the great disaster and the great destroyer of personal liberty, and the great agony upon the human race that has resulted in Soviet communism, and millions upon millions of their people being slaughtered in order to make everybody equal. Don't tell me that once a slave mentality takes hold of a person, that it doesn't have disastrous consequences.

These people are out from under the slave masters' whips. But are they happy? No. Instead of turning to God and saying, "God, we've got a problem. We've got a need. What's next? Instead of looking to the one who would solve it, they wanted to go back to their humanistic solutions. They wanted to go back under the government of Pharaoh to let him take care of them with the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. Is it any wonder that these people stunk? But now they say, "Our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna," which tasted like honey in the mouth. All you had to do was go out every morning and pick a new batch for the day. And you could buy at any one of the book stand tents that they had, 101 Ways to Prepare Manna. They had those all over the tribes, and they invented all kinds of ways, and it was delicious every meal.

Do you see what they were doing? God has provided for them. God has cared for them. It's like being back in the Garden of Eden. You don't have to get up and go to work. This is the closest thing to the ... experience where you get a line built, and you've got your income, and you don't have to get up and go to work for anybody. It's already working for you. Here they had this provided, but where they satisfied? No.

Please notice Numbers 11:18. If you strike at God, you'll get a deal. "So, God said to Moses, "And say to the people, 'Consecrate yourself, for tomorrow you shall eat meat. For you have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, 'O, that someone would give us meat to eat, for we were well-off in Egypt.' Therefore, the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat.'" You have insulted God. God said, "OK, meat? That's what you want? You didn't come and ask Me for it. You didn't ask Me if that's the thing you should have. And while you were confident you were right about this thing, you didn't say, 'God, I think I'm right about this, and this is what I'd like for You to do. This is what I believe should be the way it is. This is the way my actions should be. This is the course I should follow. Would you please confirm this? What do you think?'" No. That is not what is compatible with spiritual arrogance. There's confidence that the human brain knows what is the mind of God.

So, God says, "OK, I'm going to give you what you ask for." What grief has been brought into human experience by believers who finally got what they insisted that they wanted from God: "You shall eat not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils." You know how food comes out of your nostrils, don't you? First, it goes into your stomach, and then you bring it back up, and that's how it comes out of your nostrils. God says, "You're going to have so much, and you're going to be so sick of it, that you're going to be vomiting it all over the place. It's going to become loathsome to you because you have rejected the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, 'Why did we ever leave Egypt?' Why did you leave Egypt? For freedom, you ding-a-lings. Why do you think you left Egypt?" If there is one thing you can say about the Jews, it is that they knew how to insult God.

Verse 33: "So, God provided the quails. They came in great number as the wind brought them. And while the meat was still between their teeth (before it was chewed), the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague." And God said, "Now while the meat is in your mouth, since you wouldn't consult Me on this, whether this was the thing to do, you've got your meat, and now I'm going to put you to death." And they died all over the place, until the plague was stopped by the intervention of Aaron, or they've all been gone.

So, the pot of manna, is an example of the sinfulness of man within the ark of the covenant, because it demonstrated their lack of gratitude for His provision. The manna who was a symbol of the Word of God, which was to feed the mind of the Jews with divine viewpoint, and they did not appreciate what God had provided. That is a great sin. When God has provided you with something that is your access to great spiritual blessing and enlightenment, it is a great sin to turn your back upon it, and it will lead you to your destruction in time.

That's the principle which is enunciated in Romans 1:21-22, where God says of mankind: "For even though they knew God (as the Jews indeed did), they did not honor Him as God, nor give thanks. But they became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened." Once they went negative toward the Word of God, and once they went negative toward their source of enlightenment, and once they went negative from the blessings that God was bringing upon them, they proceeded, in verse 22: "Professing to be wise, they became fools." And I tell you, people, that there is no greater fool on the face of the earth than one who thinks he is enlightened in spiritual things, and can make pontifical declarations about what is right and what is wrong, and doesn't let God confirm, and lead out, and bring about His will in what is right and wrong.

The consequence is seen in verse 23: "And they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man, of birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures." They, who once knew God, because they rejected that symbol of His enlightenment in the manna, now became worshipers of animals.

**Aaron's Rod that Budded**

The third item which was in the ark of the covenant, which is what John sees in heaven, in the open holy of holies that he sees before himself in that tabernacle is the dead stick of Arron, which had budded into life. This was on the occasion when some of the Jews said, "Just who do you think you are, Moses and Aaron? Here you are, running the show, and calling the plays, as if you were some kind of super-human beings." Neither Aaron nor Moses ever pretended that. Moses and Aaron only said, "The job has been given to us by God. We have been the appointed spiritual leaders, and we're going to do our job. And we will not do it with perfection, but we will do it with integrity, and we will do it with all honesty, and we will do it to the best of our ability.

So, in Numbers 16:3, we have that incident referred to: "And they assembled together against Moses and Aaron, said to them, "You have gone far enough. For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst. So, why do you exalt yourself above the assembly of the Lord?" This is one of the first expressions that you have in ancient times of democracy. This is democracy. They said, "Who are you, Moses and Aaron, that you should exalt yourself above the congregation? God is in all of us here. He's in our midst. Now we're all going to vote and decide what we're going to do; where we're going to go; whether we're going to go to the Promised Land; or, whether we're going to take this route. You're not going to tell us anymore. We're going to all be the leaders."

This is why the men who wrote the Constitution hated democracy with a vengeance. It is a sign of great ignorance when you hear somebody say "our American democracy." That shows that they haven't even read some of the earliest paragraphs of the Constitution. The Constitution says, "We have a Republican form of government;" that is, we have a constitution that restrains the mob action of the democracy. You can't just take of a 51% vote against anybody, and deny that person of his constitutional protection, his civil rights, and the protection that he gets from God for his freedom. We are a constitutional republic. That is a great, great difference. We have a constitution with enumerated powers that restrains our representatives from not doing anything except what we want them to do.

Here's what these people were talking about. This is why God was against democracy. God was always in favor of restraint upon the sin nature of man, and to bind the evil nature of man down, as Thomas Jefferson said, "with the chains of the Constitution." We have come far afield, I need not tell you, from that kind of a structure in American life. Any politician can do anything he wants to do under the guise of the welfare of the people, and the Supreme Court will look the other way, as the courts have done now for quite a while in our country. But here was the problem. So, are these people right or are they wrong?

Well, here's the result. In chapter 17, God says, "Well, I'll make a decision about this." Remember that this is the rod – the dead stick of Aaron that's inside the ark of the covenant. Why is it a sign of man's sinfulness? Numbers 17: "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel, and get from them a rod for each father's household: 12 rods from all their leaders according to their fathers' household. You shall write each name on his rod." God says, "OK, let's get a rod from each of the 12 tribes, and let's decide who is God's chosen leader. Write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there is one rod for the head of each of the father's households. You shall then deposit them in the tent of meeting in front of the testimony where I meet with you. You'll deposit them in front of the holy of holies within the tabernacle. And it will come about that the rod of the man whom I choose will sprout. Thus I shall lessen from upon Myself the grumblings of the sons of Israel who are grumbling against you."

God said, "The owner of the dead stick that sprouts to life will be the man who is the leader that I have chosen." Boy, that was a beautiful system. You wish it were like that today. Don't you wish that we could just put three sticks up there; write "Bush" on one; write "Clinton" on one; write Perot on the third one parole; and, say, "Come the evening of election day, the one whose stick has sprouted to life is god's choice. But I'm afraid we find them all dead. Not a one of them would be sprouted come election eve.

However, in this case, God was making his choice: "Moses, therefore, spoke to the sons of Israel, and all their leaders, and gave them a rod of peace for each leader, according to their fathers' household: 12 rods, with the rod of Aaron among their rods. So, Moses deposited the rods before the Lord in the tent of the testimony. Now it came about on the next day that Moses went into the tent of the testimony." The tabernacle was a place of testimony. Why? Because of the ark of the covenant, and because of what's in this ark, testifying to the sinfulness of man. And in spite of that, the grace of God brings salvation. That's why it was the tent of the testimony.

"And, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted, and put forth buds, and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. Moses then brought out all the rods from the presence of the Lord to all the sons of Israel. And they looked, and each man took his rod, but the Lord said to Moses, 'Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to their grumblings against Me, so that they should not die.'" God told Moses to put Aaron's budded rod as the third object in the ark of the covenant: "Thus Moses did. Just as the Lord commanded him, so he did. God said, 'Do this so that you can pull it out once in a while and say, 'Those of you who want to go for democracy, you better look at this one more time. God chooses the leaders.''"

Of course, God does that today. I don't want to imply that God is not choosing leaders. He made it very clear to Daniel that when God is bringing a nation under judgment, he told Daniel, "I placed in authority over it the basest of man." That has always happened, and it will continue to happen. But to the people of Israel, God was so gracious. He spoke to them directly. He said, "Now let's settle this: I want you to follow Moses and Aaron." But that rod is a clear symbol of the sinfulness of the Jews in rejecting God's authority of His chosen leaders.

**The Tent of Testimony**

So, the items in the ark spoke of man's sinfulness in violating God's moral laws; of not appreciating God's daily care and provision; and of rebellion against His chosen spiritual leadership. For this reason, as you have seen repeatedly, this tent of worship was called the tabernacle of testimony. You had that in Exodus 38:21, Numbers 10:11, Numbers 17:7, and in Acts 7:44 in the New Testament. It is called the tent of testimony. Why? Because it is the place which testified to the innate sinfulness of man, and the saving grace of a holy God. Man the sinner, by his own efforts, could never qualify himself for life in heaven with a holy God.

In Israel, that was constantly being illustrated in the wilderness. It was summarized in this box called the ark of the covenant which contained these elements demonstrating the sinfulness of man. Here was a holy God dealing with a sinful people. How could He deal with them? He could only deal with them because, out of His love, as a God of grace, He was going to justify these people Himself. He was going to impute His own absolute righteousness, eventually, to them. He couldn't do it at the time in the wilderness wanderings, because Christ had not yet died, so the justice of God had not been satisfied.

That's why, in the book of Romans, as we learned, the apostle Paul says that God forgave sin in the past on credit. That's why the most important person to be served at the death of Christ was not you and me in our salvation. We like to think that. But the first thing that was served by the death of Christ was to vindicate the character of God and His holiness in having sent these people to heaven who were dying without their sins covered. God said, "I'm sending them because they are trusting, as Abraham did, in the Messiah to come. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to come, I can't say that you are justified, but I'm putting that on hold until Christ comes. Then I will take care of you. You have my promise on that."

So, God Himself dealt with these people in a way that they could never have dealt with themselves before God. God's holiness could someday send the sinless Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty of death for all these sinners. The mechanics, therefore, of being saved is simply to accept the gift of salvation from God by trusting in the payment of Jesus Christ on the cross, and in that alone, to save you. Thus, you come into eternal life, and thus you escape the lake of fire. The mechanics is so simple that most of the human race does not believe it. The mechanics of being saved is simply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Trusted in His substitution to cover your sin. It goes from Adam down to our day.

The Old Testament tabernacle, in structure and in ritual, portrayed the person and the work of Jesus Christ as Savior of the world.

Now John observes a very dramatic thing. After the choir sings, he looks, and a new thing is coming in. He sees the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle of testimony (of testimony because of the ark of the covenant). He sees it in heaven. He sees that room open, and there everybody is to see the ark. You cannot see the ark today. You cannot see it because you are not privileged to have access to it. In the next session, we're going to look a little more carefully into this holy of holies and the ark which John sees. We're going to tell you where the ark is today. Queen Elizabeth has seen it. Her husband Prince Philip has seen it. There it is: 3,000 years of security – the very ark that existed in Solomon's temple, but which suddenly disappears from the pages of Scripture.

Interestingly enough, Solomon had an Egyptian wife (pagan, of course), and she was living in the palace of David. He said, "This palace once was the residence of the ark of the covenant. You cannot live in this sacred house. So he built her a whole new palace, and he said, "Get out. I cannot let you be in the presence of this sacred object." How could God let that sacred object be lost? What could have happened to it? Would He have let it be destroyed? All we know is that we see it dramatically brought into Solomon's temple with all the glow and glory of God on the mercy seat, and all that happy day of dedication. Then suddenly, a curtain comes down on Scripture, and we never hear about the ark again. After Solomon's day, it's gone. What happened to it? Where did it go? Next time, we'll give you the rest of the story.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1992

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