



Now we return to Revelation chapter 1 which opens by telling us that “This is the revelation of Jesus Christ... This is his report concerning the message from God and the truth revealed by Jesus Christ.” (1) Previously we listed the repeated use of this phrase “the truth revealed by Jesus” in the book of Revelation and that this ultimately refers to the truth about God’s character as seen in the Person of Jesus Christ. We also described that this truth about God’s character is the core belief of those who are God’s side in the cosmic conflict and that the entire “war in heaven” motif in chapter 12 revolves around the central question of God’s trustworthy character. Can God be trusted with infinite power? Is God someone to be afraid of (as Adam and Eve seemed to believe as they hid in the bushes) or is God someone to be a friend of? The entire book is an expansion of these issues in this cosmic conflict.

When I was about 12 or 13 I watched the original “Mission Impossible” series. I remember how intrigued I was when the agents were given their top secret missions, “Your mission, should you choose to accept it...” along with some of the coolest gadgets one could imagine – hidden weapons in their pens, glasses and shoes! The book of Revelation opens by assigning us with a very specific and high priority mission: “He loves us, and by his sacrificial death he has freed us from our sins and made us a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father.” (2) What does it mean to be a priest? This commission is repeated in chapter 5, “You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they shall rule on earth.” (3)

Sometimes we read over descriptions like this as merely poetic flowery language, but I think the meaning of being called to serve as a priest is very significant. This sanctuary symbolism runs through the entire book of Revelation: Jesus walks among the seven lampstands (4); the promise is made that “I will make those who are victorious pillars in the temple” (5); incense and fire is thrown from the golden altar in the holy place to the earth (6); after the seventh trumpet is blown “God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the Covenant Box was seen there” (7); and during the time of the plagues, “The temple was filled with smoke from the glory and power of God, and no one could go into the temple...” (8)

In a subsequent article we will expand on the symbolism of the sanctuary system, but for now let’s tackle one question, “What does it mean to be a priest?”

The book of Malachi opens with a remarkable exchange between God and his people, “The LORD says to his people, ‘I have always loved you.’ But they reply, ‘How have you shown your love for us?’” (9) In other words, God expresses the reality of things which is that he loves his people, but

their response is to essentially say, "It sure doesn't seem like it!"

Why had God's chosen people developed such a distorted view of reality? As we read on in this book, God turns his attention to the priests and very clearly outlines both their specific purpose as well as their failure which was directly responsible for the sad state of affairs: "It is the duty of priests to teach the true knowledge of God...But now you priests have turned away from the right path and you have caused many to stumble over my teachings." (10) The priests had misrepresented God and led the people to view God in a false light. As the description in Malachi continues, it is very significant that the result of this false knowledge about God disseminated by the priests was that "They have defiled the Temple which the LORD loves." (11)

What does it mean to "defile the Temple which the LORD loves?" Does God love a building that is made of wood, fabric and gold? No. God loves all of humanity, his children, and his bride. WE are the temple that God loves! The New Testament is redundant on this point:

"Come to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple...And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are God's holy priests, who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please him because of Jesus Christ." (12)

"You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself. He is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord. In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit." (13)

"Surely you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you! God will destroy anyone who destroys God's temple. For God's temple is holy, and you yourselves are his temple." (14)

"Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and who was given to you by God?" (15)

"For we are the temple of the living God! As God himself has said, 'I will make my home with my people and live among them; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'" (16)

"We are his house if we keep up our courage and our confidence in what we hope for" (17)

When I was younger these verses were explained to me this way: "You'd better watch your diet! Exercise is good. And be sure not to smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs because your body is the temple of the living God!"

Several years ago I saw a patient who had a very severe cervical spinal cord injury as a result of a rodeo accident. He could not move his arms or legs and had to be fed through a feeding tube that went directly into his stomach. His body had literally wasted away below the neck. In this patient there was absolutely no room for a discussion about diet or exercise, but would this mean that he is not a temple of the living God? Where is the temple located? If you had a heart transplant or lost

one of your fingers in an accident would you no longer be a temple? In either of those circumstances would your temple always be less adequate than the temple of someone who still had their own heart and all 10 fingers intact? I hope that this illustration makes it clear that the temple is the brain for this is where we intelligently decide for or against God. The brain is where we engage in relationship with God!

Of course there are lots of good reasons to eat right and to exercise. And, alcohol and drug abuse can damage the brain. The main point of these verses, however, is to say that our mind contains the unique person and personality that is minute by minute choosing how to respond to God and whether or not to be in relationship with him. When the book of Malachi then describes the priests as leading the people to a false understanding of God, the net result was that the temple (representing the minds of the people) became defiled because this false knowledge had separated God from relationship with his people.

What we see in the sanctuary service is an illustration for how God transforms “hearts” and minds and restores us back into a right relationship with him once again. The sanctuary system reveals how our mind or conscience is cleansed and purified as we come closer into this trusting relationship with God. Christ came to achieve what the Old Testament sanctuary system could not:

“Seeing that that first tabernacle was a parable (a visible symbol or type or picture of the present age). In it gifts and sacrifices are offered, and yet are incapable of perfecting the conscience or of cleansing and renewing the inner man of the worshiper.” (18)

We should not read verses about being “cleansed” or “purified” in the sense of a legal transaction or pronouncement on God’s part. Nor should we read these verses and turn into legalistic perfectionists as if we could work our way to this goal. The reality is that when we are in a trusting relationship with the living God and come to see with greater clarity what he is really like, there is unavoidable and natural change that occurs in us:

“Then Christ will make His home in your hearts (minds!) as you trust in Him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is. Yes, may you come to know his love---although it can never be fully known---and so be completely filled with the very nature (the very character!) of God.” (19)

Many times the Bible tells the story of this back and forth conflict as the temple of our minds is either cleansed or defiled by a true or false knowledge of God. The book of Daniel has a vivid description of a time when Satan was successful in defiling the temple:

“Out of one of these four horns grew a little horn, whose power extended toward the south and the east and toward the Promised Land. It grew strong enough to attack the army of heaven, the stars themselves, and it threw some of them to the ground and trampled on them. It even defied the Prince of the heavenly army, stopped the daily sacrifices offered to him, and ruined (or defiled) the Temple. People sinned there instead of offering the proper daily sacrifices, and true religion was thrown to the ground. The horn was successful in everything it did.” (20)

Is Satan strong enough to physically “attack the army of heaven” and “throw some of them to the ground?” He “even defied the Prince of the heavenly army” and wouldn’t that represent Jesus Christ? This passage goes on to clarify that what actually happened is that “true religion was thrown to the ground” or in the God’s Word translation, “It threw truth to the ground.” Once again, the result of allowing anything to distort our picture of God always results in a defiled or ruined temple. This is the same principle we described in Revelation 12, that when Satan and his angels were thrown out of heaven that this really signified being thrown out of the loyal angels minds and replaced by the reality of who God really is. This passage in Daniel sadly describes the truth about God as being thrown out and replaced by Satan’s lies and distortions about God. It seems wrong to put these words in print, but Satan defeated Jesus and the armies of heaven on this occasion.

Here is what’s incredible about this passage in Daniel! Two angels in conversation discuss how long the temple will be defiled, “Then I heard one angel ask another, ‘How long will these things that were seen in the vision continue? How long will an awful sin replace the daily sacrifices? How long will the army of heaven and the Temple be trampled on?’ I heard the other angel answer, ‘It will continue for 2,300 evenings and mornings, during which sacrifices will not be offered. Then the Temple will be restored (or cleansed).’” (21)

In other words, this sad situation won’t last forever and God will ultimately be victorious in restoring a true knowledge of his character.

It’s too bad that any discussion of a “cleansing of the temple” is negatively associated with date setting and fundamentalism. There is actually a beautiful promise in all of this that there will be a time when God’s character will be vindicated in the minds of his children – a time when a true knowledge of God will permeate hearts and minds. Just as there was a time when Satan was cast from heaven to earth (i.e. – out of the minds of the loyal angels), there will also be a time when he will be cast from earth and into the abyss (i.e. – out of the minds of humanity that is loyal to God).

We get a glimpse of this when Jesus sent out the seventy-two men to preach the gospel. They “came back in great joy. ‘Lord’, they said, ‘even the demons obeyed us when we gave them a command in your name!’ Jesus answered them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven’...At that time Jesus was filled with joy by the Holy Spirit...” (22) Jesus was filled with joy because the truth about God had just been convincingly revealed to others through these men. Jesus continued, “No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (23)

Jesus, in his own life and in this case through the witness of those seventy-two men, revealed a true knowledge of God’s loving character to others, which is how Satan is defeated and how the temple of the mind is cleansed.

This back and forth battle between Christ and Satan wages on and Paul would later anticipate a time in earth’s history when Satan’s false caricature of God will “sit down” in the minds of many and he will be worshiped as God: “Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For the Day will not come until the final Rebellion takes place and the Wicked One appears, who is destined to hell. He will oppose every so-called god or object of worship and will put himself above them all. He will

even go in and sit down in God's Temple and claim to be God." (24)

Turning back to the book of Malachi in which the priests presented a false knowledge of God and defiled the temple, the very next chapter gives us the hope that God will make things right again and we have a beautiful promise of Jesus' mission. Jesus came to purify the priests once again and to restore or cleanse the temple once and for all:

"He'll take his place as a refiner of silver, as a cleanser of dirty clothes. He'll scrub the Levite priests clean (or, "he will purify the priests"), refine them like gold and silver, until they're fit for God, fit to present offerings of righteousness." (25)

And this now brings us full circle back to the book of Revelation where we are called by Jesus to be priests which we now realize means that we have been commissioned with a very specific task of diffusing a true knowledge of God's character as revealed by Jesus to everyone around us. We are called to cleanse minds of any lies and distortions about God and to persuade people that God's love for them exceeds anything they could possibly imagine. Any description of God that is not in harmony with Jesus Christ is a defilement of the temple. When we represent God as precisely the same in character as Jesus we spread the healing remedy and are fulfilling our mission as priests in the world.

Since the purpose of the book of Revelation is to reveal to us the true character of God in the setting of a cosmic conflict in which his character has been slandered, it makes sense then that those who are on God's side in this conflict (i.e. – the priests) are called to join God in the work of revealing and vindicating his character. Now come on, isn't that a more exciting assignment than anything a secret agent in "Mission Impossible" was given? Would you rather have cool gadgets in your watch or the living God of the universe dwelling in you and actively engaged in your life? Our mission is to spread the Good News about the infinitely powerful God who has the heart of a humble servant. That is a mission worth giving everything for.

- Written by Dr. Brad Cole

Footnotes:

1. Revelation 1:1,2
2. Revelation 1:5,6
3. Revelation 5:10
4. Revelation 1:12,13
5. Revelation 3:12
6. Revelation 8:5
7. Revelation 11:19
8. Revelation 15:8
9. Malachi 1:2
10. Malachi 2:7,8
11. Malachi 2:11
12. 1 Peter 2:4-7

Revelation 1

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13. Ephesians 2:20-22
14. 1 Corinthians 3:17
15. 1 Corinthians 6:19
16. 2 Corinthians 6:16
17. Hebrews 3:6
18. Hebrews 9:9
19. Ephesians 3:17-19
20. Daniel 8:9-12
21. Daniel 8:13,14
22. Luke 10:17-21
23. Luke 10:22
24. Thessalonians 2:3,4
25. Malachi 3:3