

## **S1: God's Holiness and Divine Inapproachability in the Old Testament**

The relationship between God's holiness and divine inapproachability is revealed throughout the Old Testament in a variety of ways: -

### **1) God's own character**

Leviticus 20:3, 22:32; 1 Chronicles 16:35; Psalms 103:1, 111:9; Isaiah 52:10; Hosea 11:9 & Amos 4:2

### **2) Explicit divine titles; one of these being 'the Holy One of Israel'**

2 Kings 19:22; Psalms 71:22, 78:41, 89:18; Isaiah 1:4, 5:19 & 24, 10:20, 37:23, 43:3 & 14 & 16 & 20, 45:11; Jeremiah 50:29, 51:5 & Ezekiel 39:7

### **3) Other divine attributes, including: -**

- Goodness – Isaiah 57:13; Ezekiel 20:9 & Hosea 11:9
- Majesty – Exodus 15:11; 1 Samuel 2:2, 6:20; Isaiah 6:3 & 10:7
- Wrath – Exodus 22:24, 32:10; 2 Chronicles 28:11; Ezra 10:14; Psalm 78:31; John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6; Revelation 14:10 & 19, 15:1, 7, 16:1 & 19:15

### **4) Explicit divine commands**

Leviticus 11:45

### **5) Specific divine works including: -**

- Answering prayer – Psalms 3:4, 20:6 & 28:2
- Deliverance – Psalms 22:2-4, 89:18, 103:1, 105:3, 142:21; Isaiah 6:3, 10:20, 29:23-24, 49:7, 52:10; Jeremiah 5:5; Ezekiel 36:23 & 39:7
- Purifying people – Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 16:32, 20:8, 21:8 & 15 & :22-23

### **6) True, God-given religious experiences**

Exodus 19:1f; Isaiah 6:1-5 & Ezekiel 1:1f

Exodus 19:21f will now be looked at in more depth. A simple commentary will accompany each relevant citation, followed by a closing sentence summing up the main theme. The setting is Mount Sinai where the Lord has appeared before all of the Israelite tribes. In obedience to the Lord's command, Moses has gone up the mountain to receive further instruction.

**21.** *"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord in order to gaze and many of them perish.'"*

This verse establishes the principle that no sinful person can look upon the Lord and live. Unless one's own moral pollution has been dealt with in some way, any meeting with God will have fatal consequences. Divine holiness produces a physical as well as a moral separation between God and humanity. The One who is totally perfect in his holiness cannot abide, for one instant, the least trace of sin in any of His creatures. The result of such imperfection is always an outbreak of divine wrath, (representing the active expression of outraged holiness.)

**22.** *"And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify [dedicate and purify] themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them [in His wrath]."*

Even the high priests themselves, (who were supposed to be close to God) had to take care not to offend the Lord's holiness. It was made clear to them that God, who is totally perfect, will never compromise His perfection by either reducing His lofty moral standards or by allowing anything tainted by sin to come into His presence. Indeed, if God allowed such things He would be sacrificing His own perfection – thereby immediately ceasing to be divine. It is essential to remember that, by definition, God is perfect. This means that He is complete in Himself and free from any fault or trace of sin in everything He thinks, says and does.

**23.** *“And Moses said unto the Lord, ‘the people cannot come up to Mount Sinai because you have warned us, saying ‘set boundaries around the Mount and sanctify it’.”*

Divine holiness firmly places a definite barrier between people and God. Furthermore, it is a barrier that can never be breached from the human side. Thus, any attempt to ascend to the Almighty through meditation, good works and other religious practices is a tragic waste of time. No person on earth has the capacity to ascend to God. Divine Holiness causes God to remain distant, hidden and inapproachable. Unless the Lord Himself intervenes, there remains not the slightest chance of any constructive relationship between Himself as Creator and His created works, including humanity itself.

**24.** *“And the Lord said to him [Moses], ‘Away, get down and you shall come up, you and Aaron with you. However, do not let the priests and people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He breaks forth in [holy wrath] upon them.’”*

Divine holiness places a definite barrier between all types of people and God. Like their fellow Israelites the priests had to keep their distance. This was the case even where the priesthood concerned was not steeped in the idolatrous practices of the other nations. Represented here is God’s resounding ‘no’ to all man-made ways of approaching Him. This ‘no’ applies even if the way concerned assumes an apparently Biblical form. Every such way provokes God’s anger because it is rooted in human pride, representing humanity’s attempt to *‘break through and come up to the Lord.’*

**25.** *“So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.”*

Only God can *‘break through’* the barrier between His holiness and human corruption. God’s way of breaking through this barrier (between Himself and the Israelites) was to send down a mediator who would speak to them. This mediator was, of course, Moses, who even at his best, was only a dim foreshadow of that far greater Mediator who would descend from Heaven (rather than from a mountain). This greater Mediator would bring mercy rather than Law; he would speak to all nations rather than to the tribes of Israel alone and He, unlike Moses, would never sin.

Overall, Exodus 19:21f demonstrates that the main effect of divine holiness is to create a terrible separation (or gulf) between God and sinful humanity. Unless the Lord personally cleanses us by His Holy Spirit, no person on earth could approach Him and live. He remains a condemning judge, ready to destroy us because of our iniquities. For their own sakes, many Christians need to recapture a sense of divine holiness otherwise they will become traumatised when they see God’s holiness beginning to express itself in a series of terrible judgements, inflicted on both a rebellious world and an apostate Church. It is high time for many believers in Christ to awaken and face up to such realities. In the Western World especially, there’s been far too much of what may be termed an *‘All you need is love’* religiosity. Such a pseudo-faith owes more to human wishful thinking than to Biblical revelation.

### Questions

- 1) Why does God not ‘soften’ His commandments to make it easier for people to approach Him?**
- 2) What implications does divine holiness have for every world religion?**
- 3) Briefly describe God’s way of ‘breaching the barrier’ between Himself and humanity.**
- 4) Give reasons suggesting why it is necessary to recapture a sense of divine holiness?**