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A GLIMPSE OF WORSHIP IN HEAVEN

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven [Matt. 6:10]

Believers are citizens of Heaven [Phil. 3:20; Ps. 119:19] and ambassadors of Christ on earth [2 Cor. 5:20]. An embassy is an extension of the territory of its home country. That is why diplomats enjoy “diplomatic immunity.” In other words, they cannot be arrested or charged to court by the host country without their permission. In the same vein, as Christ’s ambassadors on earth, believers are bound by the “laws of Heaven.” If they have to give up their diplomatic immunity, it has to be in circumstances that are compatible with their citizenship. That is why each time we say the Lord’s Prayer, we intone, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in Heaven.”

A major aspect of our relationship with God is worship [1 Chron. 16:29]. God alone is worthy of worship [Ps. 29:2; Rev. 4:11]. Such worship requires true reverence [Jn 4:24], and includes public expression [2 Chron. 5:6; Neh. 9:1-3]. It involves an entire life of obedience to God [Eccl. 12:13; Deut. 8:19]. Therefore, is there anything we can learn about how they worship God in Heaven, our “home country”, that can guide our worship here on earth? This question has become important because there is a growing tendency in many congregations to make worship more user-friendly.

In today’s lesson, we shall attempt to paint a glimpse of worship in Heaven, as revealed in the Word of God. As the Bible puts it, “the secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” [Deut. 29:29]. Such knowledge will guide us to instead make our worship more God-fearing.

1. A Rough Sketch

Using mainly the sources listed below, I have attempted a rough sketch of the Temple in Heaven:

- ◆ **Is. 6:1-5; Is. 11:1-2**
- ◆ **Ezek. 1:1-28**
- ◆ **Rev. 4:1-11**
- ◆ **Rev. 5: 1-14**
- ◆ **Rev. 7: 1-17**
- ◆ **Rev. 8: 2-4**

2. Worship in Heaven

The Layout of the Temple (see sketch)

(a) God Himself sits on the throne [**Is. 6:1; Rev. 4:2**]. In the midst of the throne is the “Lamb [Jesus Christ] as if it had been slain” with seven horns and seven eyes “which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth” [**Rev. 5:6**]. The 7 Spirits of God are also on the “Branch” from the “stem of Jesse” and they are [**Is.11:1-2**]:

- i. *The Spirit of the Lord*
- ii. *The Spirit of Wisdom*
- iii. *The Spirit of Understanding*
- iv. *The Spirit of Counsel*
- v. *The Spirit of Might*
- vi. *The Spirit of Knowledge*
- vii. *The Fear of the Lord*

(b) There is a golden altar before the throne [**Rev. 8:3**]. Seven lamps of fire are burning before the throne “which are the seven Spirits of God” [**Rev. 4:5**]. Since the 7 angels standing before the throne got the fire for the incense from the altar before the throne [**Rev. 8:5**], it can safely be assumed that the 7 lamps of fire are on the golden altar. Since they also are the seven Spirits of God, the seven lamps *signify the presence of Jesus Christ on the golden altar as well as on the throne.*

(c) Four Living Creatures, the Cherubim [**Ezek. 1:5-14**] and the Seraphim [**Is. 6:2; Rev. 4:8**], are in the midst of and round about the throne. They are the leading praise singers [**Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8**].

(d) There is a rainbow around the throne [**Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3**]. Could this be to remind God of His everlasting covenant with Noah not to again destroy mankind by flood [**Gen. 9:8-16**]?

(e) Round about the throne are 24 seats on which are sitting 24 elders clothed in *white robes* with crowns of gold on their heads [**Rev. 4:4**].

(f) The congregation consists of angels and an uncountable multitude of saints from every race and nationality *all arrayed in white robes and carrying palms in their hands* [**Rev. 7:1-9**].

The Worship ‘Service’

(a) The Cherubim and the Seraphim lead off the adoration and worship with “*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts*” [**Is. 6:3**] or “*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty*” [**Rev. 4:8**]. Other frequently heard words are “*Alleluia*”, “*Praise our God*”, and “*Amen*” [**Rev. 19:1-6**]. As soon as the Cherubim and the Seraphim raise their praise, the 24 elders fall *on their faces*, casting their crowns before the throne, and worship God [**Rev. 4:10; Rev. 19:4**], with songs in honour of God [**Rev. 4:11**] and Jesus Christ [**Rev. 5:12-13**].

- (b) Much *incense* is offered with the prayers of the saints *upon the golden altar* before the throne [**Rev. 5:8; Rev. 8: 8-9**]. Incense is also regarded as “the prayers of the saints” [**Rev. 5:8**]. I wonder what they are praying for? Certainly not for themselves because they are already spirit beings. Maybe they are praying for us on earth.
- (c) The worship goes on *interminably* [**Rev. 4:11; Rev. 7:15**]. It is so awesome a sight that Isaiah broke down spontaneously, confessing his sins [**Is. 6:5**] and John did not know when he knelt before an angel—twice! [**Rev. 19: 10; Rev. 22:8**].

3. Implications for Worship on Earth

The following remarkable pairings should be noted:

- ◆ The throne and the altar
- ◆ The Lamb and the 7 Lamp Stands
- ◆ Prayers and incense
- ◆ Cherubim/Seraphim and the choir
- ◆ Elders/saints and true worshippers

God Almighty and the Lamb are on the throne but the 7 lamp stands are on the altar. Remember that they also represent the 7 Spirits of God, which are on Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. *Therefore, the altar is a visible image of the throne* [**Ex. 20:24**] and Jesus Christ is present on the altar when the 7 lamp stands are burning.

The incense goes with the prayers of the saints [**Rev. 8:4**]. At the same time, incense is called the prayers of the saints [**Rev. 5:8**]. *Therefore, incense is a visible image of efficacious prayers* [**Ex. 30:7-10**].

All the worshippers that are saints (i.e., human beings who came from the earth) wear white garments. Believers who had survived great tribulation and are now washed in the blood of the Lamb [**Rev. 7:14**] wear the garment. *Therefore, the white garment is a visible image of redemption.*

The pattern of the temple and mode of worship given to Moses by God are in consonance with heavenly worship [**Ex. 25: 8; Heb. 9:1-10**]. The major differences since Christ’s earthly mission are as follows:

- ◆ Instead of animal sacrifices, the Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world” [**Rev. 13:8**] is on the throne. The New Covenant has substituted the Holy Communion, instituted by Christ Himself, in place of animal sacrifice [**Lk 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25**].
- ◆ The veil covering the Holy of Holies has been torn, with Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross. So, there is now a sea of glass (which is very transparent) between the throne and the rest of the temple.

If we were to move this church in Heaven down to earth *this moment*, here is what we would see, based on revealed knowledge:

- ◆ *The throne and the angels would be invisible to our naked eyes*
- ◆ *We would see the altar with the 7 lamp stands on it*
- ◆ *The whole church would be full of smoke from the incense*
- ◆ *The worshippers would all be in white garments*
- ◆ *When prayers were called, the worshippers would all fall on their faces bowing towards the altar on which would be the 7 lamp stands*

Interestingly, you can only see the above picture today in mainly spiritual and some orthodox churches and they are roundly condemned by Westernized congregations as “fetish” and “Old Testament” practices! While rituals don’t necessarily mean true worship, trivializing them is worse. If God wants it that way, who are we to question Him?

4. Conclusion

A major lesson that we have learnt from today’s discussion is that we should never condemn what we do not even understand. The synagogue leaders made the same mistake 2000 years ago when they ascribed the miracles of Jesus to the power of Beelzebub [Mk 3:22-29], **just because His approach was different from theirs.** That is why Jesus warned His disciples not to stop those casting out demons in His own name [even though they were not part of Him] because “he that is not against us is for us” [Lk 9:49:50].

Being representative of God’s throne, the altar can be considered sanctified (i.e., set apart as holy). Whatever touches a sanctified altar is considered sanctified [Ex. 29:37]. Under the Old Covenant, inanimate objects (such as the tabernacle and its decorations) were sanctified and in turn imparted sanctification to whoever touched them [Ex. 30:29; Matt. 23:17-22]. That was why God stayed the plague on the Israelites when Aaron burnt incense from the altar [Num. 17:42-48]. In the New Testament, handkerchiefs and aprons worn by Paul, a sanctified man of God who worshipped in the synagogue, were put on the sick who then became well [Acts 19:11-12]. **Any object can be so sanctified as the Holy Spirit wills.**

True worship is not hampered by the use (**but by the abuse**) of olive oil, handkerchiefs and aprons, candles and crosses, incense and water or white garments. After all, we routinely rely on our wristwatches (made by man) to know about time (which is invisible) and we hardly call that idol worship! May God open our understanding to His Word so that we can *indeed worship God on earth as it is in Heaven.*