
The Awful Presence of God

By David Wilkerson

The Hebrew word for "awful" means dreadful, fearsome, great — awesome! We normally give this word a negative connotation, but that is not at all the biblical meaning.

In the Old Testament, Jacob was touched by a holy dread. During his journey to Haran he lay down and slept, and in the middle of the night he awoke and saw a ladder of angels reaching into heaven. At the top of the ladder the Lord appeared, and He revealed Himself to Jacob, declaring, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac" (Genesis 28:12).

"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place!" (Genesis 28:16-17).

Daniel was another who was touched by the great dread of God's presence: "I prayed unto the Lord my God... the great and dreadful God" (Daniel 9:4).

God also said to all of Israel, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:13). Isaiah is saying, "Let God grip your heart with His holy dread!"

You may believe that this kind of fear and terror describes an Old Testament concept of God — that Jesus came to reveal to us a Father who is full of love. Yes, God is love (1 John 4:8) — He is mercy, kindness, patience, longsuffering and goodness. He is a perfect, loving heavenly Father.

But He is also a Spirit, high and holy! The problem is, we have become too "familiar" with God. We have made Him to be "like unto ourselves." That's why we don't recognize His holiness. The Bible says He is a consuming fire — a holy, dreadful-in-power Savior!

John, known as the "apostle of love," saw the Lord coming to the churches in all His New Testament glory. He described Him this way: "His eyes were as a flame of fire... and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead" (Revelation 1:14-17). If Christians today beheld but a fraction of God's holiness and dread, nobody would be able to stand in our church services!

In Times Square Church we are praying for a great and dreadful manifestation of the presence of God — in our services, our hearts and our homes. I personally have been crying out, "Lord, let us see Your glory! Pour out Your presence among us! Let Your glory be such that sinners are convicted of their sin and Christians of their sloth. Revive us!"

Yet as I weep and groan in my spirit, the Holy Spirit says, "Do you understand the consequences of praying for such a thing? Will you pay the price for such a manifestation? Let me show you what it will mean to follow through on this request...." You see, there is a cost, a price to be paid!

Beloved, right now something sovereign is going on! It is beyond us — we did not do anything to merit it! And it's happening because God's Word says the set time to bless Zion has come!

God Has An Appointed Time For Every Movement, Every Awakening, Every Restoration and Outpouring! When that designated time comes, God awakens and stirs, as if from a sleep. This stirring always occurs in man's darkest hour, when everything seems hopeless — a time when only a sovereign work of God can save the day!

No such event takes place without full preparation. Everything is in place when God speaks the word, "It's time!" And God always prepares vessels just prior to His outpouring. He shuts men up in His presence, and He places them in strategic places.

God has placed us on Broadway, the crossroads of the world, with a message for the end of time. Yet similar moves are happening in a number of places, here and overseas! Right now God is raising up pastors and lay people who have hearts that are broken for Him.

When the set time came for God to deliver Israel from Egypt, He already had a man placed in the wilderness, trained and ready — Moses! He already had a priest — Aaron! And He had a people who had come to the end of themselves, who were ready to hear a message of deliverance. They were in the middle of a fiery furnace, facing their darkest hour!

Their deliverance couldn't have come 15 years before, or 20 years before, or anytime before, for that matter - because God had a set time! He had said they would remain in captivity for 430 years — and He watched over that time to the very day!

But after those 430 years, nothing could stop His plan from going into motion. In that time, God had put everything in place, tending to every detail. When He called Moses, He was able to put all his fears to rest: "Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life" (Exodus 4:19). God had killed off every man who remembered Moses! He had prepared the way!

In the same way, when God's set time came to deliver Israel from Babylon, He had everything ready, everyone in place! He had said Israel's captivity would end after seventy years — and in that seventieth year, Daniel felt a stirring, an urgency in his heart. He shut himself in with God, travelling in prayer. That's when he read the book of Jeremiah and counted that the number of years since the prophecy had been seventy!

Ezra, the scribe, was filled with a new revelation of God's desires — because God was preparing him to bring forth to the people a holy word! Nehemiah was placed in the king's court as a preparation for God's rebuilding plan! Haggai and Zerubbabel both were stirred for the work God would unfold!

The prophet Haggai had warned that when God's time came, some would not believe it: "This people say, The time is not come" (Haggai 1:2). But when God's set time comes, nothing can stop it and nothing can hinder it! It is like a mighty Niagara overflowing, sweeping away all before it.

When it looks like all is lost — when it looks as though Satan will prevail — that's when God's set time comes! That's when God shows the church and society that only He can do what's needed because it will take a miracle! Jesus said that when we see everything spinning out of control, and men's hearts are failing them for fear — we should look up, because our redemption is near!

This is God's set time to awaken the remnant in the modern Babylon of New York City — to raise up a final testimony to this doomed city! He has been preparing us to be part of that!

Why have we been moved to intercede? Why have we been travelling? Why has the Spirit called us to set aside our own interests for His?

Because God has been setting all things in place, to pour out His Spirit! A battle is raging in the heavenlies, and Satan knows the hour is late!

Once the Lord has decided He's going to move, how do we know when the set time for God's deliverance comes? Three things occur:

I. When God's Set Time Arrives, He Builds a Holy Fire. When it was time to deliver Israel from bondage to Egypt, God had to get the attention of those who were called to lead the people out of darkness. How did He do this? He built a fire — He started a burning!

Here is the picture: Moses was alone on the mountain of God, and suddenly, sovereignly, a fire was set before him. A flame was sent to arrest a man of God! It was a type of the Holy Spirit — a fire that never goes out!

That fire was put into Moses' bosom, and from that point on his heart would be ablaze with God's message. He was now set apart to be a vessel of deliverance for his generation!

Is there a stirring in your heart? Do you feel a fire burning in your innermost being? God wants your attention — not because you are good or deserve it, but because He needs a people through whom His Spirit can work and flow, whose hearts are prepared for His presence!

Scripture says Moses "turned aside" when he saw the fire. He could have walked on, but he didn't. He put aside all his own interests. "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him" (Exodus 3:4).

God has been doing this same thing for centuries — but most Christians never "turn aside." God starts a fire in their heart, in their church — but they continue to go their own way, following after their own interests and not God's.

Beloved, this is the key! When this fire starts burning, God is trying to get your attention! He's saying, "You've been wrapped up in your own affairs, in your family's affairs, for so long — but now I'm going to start a fire!"

We're not going to hear from God until we turn aside from our own way and give Him our full attention! He waits until all else is put aside.

God told Moses, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

In the Old Testament, if someone wanted to redeem a piece of land he owned and you had an interest in it, you gave up your rights to that land by giving the owner your right shoe. Then you took off your left shoe and carried it, walking barefoot from that place.

Moses knew that God was saying to him, "Take off your shoes, Moses — give up all your rights. Your interests are now secondary. Mine come first!"

I tell you, God is going to have a people in these last days who turn aside from all that is wicked — even from the good things that eat up time! He is going to prepare a people who put aside career, hobbies, sports and everything else as secondary to Him!

When you see God's fire, how can you think about anything else? When you hear your name called, how can you say anything but, "I heard from God! I heard from heaven!"

God has put a fire in my soul and He's gotten my attention. I have turned aside and have heard Him call my name as He did Moses: "David, take off your shoes (your rights and pleasures, your own interests) and stand barefoot before Me. I have heard the cry of bondage to sin, drugs, alcohol, demonic powers — and I have come down to deliver."

"I have surely seen the affliction of my people... and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters" (Exodus 3:7). A taskmaster is a tyrant who drives forced laborers. We know who this tyrant is — it is Satan, who harasses and mocks!

You can't tell me the Lord hasn't heard the cries of 10,000 AIDS babies in New York City — or the cries of all the AIDS children, now 4 and 5 years old, who are about to enter our schools with only half a mind! God has heard the cries of ghetto mothers, of the poor, the homeless, the backslidden!

God says, "I have heard these cries from heaven! The devil has afflicted you and your family long enough! Now I've come to stop it!"

2. When This Happens, the Devil Gets Furious and Tries to Put Out the Fire. Moses came to the people with his heart ablaze — and what a great stirring there was among them! Everyone was talking about the great, new thing God was about to do, and hope filled their broken hearts!

Moses' message was, "God is going to visit you. He is going to bring you out of your afflictions. He is going to deliver you and your children, your livestock — everything!"

God backed up His message with signs and wonders! He was anxious to let His people know that the set time had come. So He gave Moses three signs: First, Moses' rod turned into a serpent, then back into a rod when he picked it up again. Second, Moses' hand became leprous when he placed it in his bosom, then it was healed when he removed it. Third, water from the river, when poured out of a cup, became blood.

Now consider this picture: Moses and Aaron are on fire! God is beginning to reveal Himself — His word of deliverance has come. A body of believers has been awakened, and God is visiting His people. But in the midst of the promises He issues a strong warning: "I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go [except under compulsion]" (Exodus 3: 19).

God warned Moses and all the people: "Yes, deliverance is coming. I will bring you out. All that I promised will happen — but the devil will be furious. You are in for a fight! It won't be easy because Satan will do all he can to stop this work!"

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, represents Satan, king of the abyss and god of this world! Beloved, don't think for a moment the devil will play dead when God's people are being stirred and the message of God's visitation on His people is being preached!

Moses and Aaron said to Pharaoh, "Let God's people go!" But Pharaoh answered, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" Exodus 5:2).

I want to ask you this: Have you considered that your family is in such a battle? God saved you and your house, and He called you to travail for them. But do you think Satan will let them go without a fight?

You see, the Bible tells us that things got worse for Israel instead of better (Exodus 5:6-14). Moses was preaching, "God is with us. The answer is here, and soon you will see great victory!"

But it was a different matter with the people! Satan was enraged by God's visitation, and the outbreak of vengeance that followed came straight from hell. Israel's leaders were beaten and their brick-making quotas were greatly increased: "Let there more work be laid upon the men... Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick" (Exodus 5:7,9). In essence: "Lay a heavier burden upon them — let them go scrounge for grass!"

The Israelite leaders met Moses and Aaron as they came out of Pharaoh's palace, and complained to them, "The Lord look on you, and judge; because ye have made our saviour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us" (Exodus 5:21).

They were saying, "Moses, all this praying on God's mountain, all your talk about a great visitation from God, all your preaching about restoration and healing — it's getting us nowhere! It's stirring things up too much, and we can't take any more of this fury from the enemy! We see no sign of God at work. We are rejected, not delivered!"

And Scripture says, "They hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage" (Exodus 6:9).

After this, even Moses lost heart! "God, why did You send me? Why did You stir me up? Why did You put this fire in my soul? Why aren't You keeping Your word?"

"Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all" (Exodus 5:23).

Moses forgot that God had warned him this would happen. God had said, "Pharaoh will not let you go unless he is forced!"

Dear saint, we also have been warned. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

From Pentecost to this very day, every outpouring of the Holy Ghost has brought forth the wrath of hell! After the outpouring of the Spirit in the Upper Room, multitudes were saved. The Lord came down and shook everything in sight. The poor heard the gospel and the lame leaped! Signs and miracles abounded!

But the devil quickly sent forth his henchmen to harass the work of God in the midst of the glory. "The priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people... and they laid hands on them, and put them in hold [prison] unto the next day" (Acts 4:1-3).

All through the New Testament, the moment God moved, Satan reacted. And if Satan is not reacting against you, maybe you haven't yet threatened his kingdom in your surroundings!

You see, God will test us before He moves into full-speed-ahead! We have a tendency to pray through, to get relief from our burden, and then to sit back and wait. But satanic harassment is a sign

we are touching God! Are you enduring hardship? Pray on. Is the answer beginning to unfold? Pray more! Is the rain beginning to fall? Pray still harder!

When God called Moses to the mount, He swept him up into a cloud of glory and for six days said nothing to him. All that time he was shut in with God in the fire of His holiness, where God was preparing him for the great word to come: "And the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud" (Exodus 24:16).

Are you willing to wait on the mount in the glory? I ask this because we so often want "quickie" blessings — no sweat, no tears, no waiting on God! We demand our rights and go our lazy way, simply "taking it all by faith."

If God speaks once again to this generation — if His glory comes — it will be to a man, woman and church shut in with Him until the fire of His awful presence burns out all self and sin. We can have no cloud of His presence, no desperate hunger to go to Him, until He speaks!

This is my final point — the last thing that occurs when God decides to move:

3. Many Will Remain Untouched When God's Awful Presence Is Revealed In Our Midst. What happens when the glory of the presence of Jesus manifests itself? Those who have repentant, righteous hearts fall before Him and worship! They purge themselves and cry out, "God, cleanse me!" And once they experience His glory they want more! They go from glory to glory!

Over and over these words are written, "And the Lord said unto Moses, come up unto the Lord...." Moses got one revelation of God's glory after another, until finally his face was aglow with the Lord's glory! Israel could not stand to look upon him!

Yet after all that, we hear Moses pleading with God in Exodus 33:18, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." God will have a people in these last days who will give Him no rest until He again reveals His awful glory!

At one point we see Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders going up the mount, to the presence of God! "And they saw the God of Israel" — they saw Him as clearly as the sky itself — and the sight of His glory was "like devouring fire on the top of the mount" (Exodus 24:10, 17).

They saw God, ate in His presence and visibly beheld His awesome holiness (verse 11). Yet just forty days later they backslid completely!

Aaron came down and apostatized, and the elders turned back to the ways of their flesh! The very moment God was laying out plans to deliver them and use them mightily so that all nations would dread them, they ran to embrace idols!

Beloved, here is the only definition of "idol" you'll ever need: It is anything that keeps God from working in your life! Anything at all that hinders the Holy Spirit from bringing you into the cloud!

I see something frightful, incomprehensible — that is, that God's people can experience such glory in the awful presence of God, and in just a few short weeks turn away totally to idolatry! "And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play" (Exodus 32:6). God said to Moses, "They have

turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them" (32:8).

You may say, 'I'm not like that. I could never turn to such idolatry!' But this tendency is in all of us! These were the same children of God who "answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8).

They had a full revelation of God's presence. They had been under the cloud, had heard God speak, had seen miracles and had pledged obedience. But it all came from their heads and lips, because their hearts were still divided!

The children of Israel told Moses, "Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say... unto us... and we will hear it, and do it... And the Lord said unto (Moses), I have heard the voice of the words of this people... they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always" (Deuteronomy 5:27-29).

I have often cried out in agony, "God, send Your awful presence — cleanse us!" Now, I see that we must lay everything down at His feet, and our hearts must be weaned totally from this world. For if we have a divided heart, the coming of His awful presence will only hasten the backsliding of many! Those set on mischief, stiff necked or stubborn will turn aside and go back!

In the New Testament the Lord says He will "remove their candlestick": "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent" (Revelation 2:5).

Their testimony will be taken from them, and they will have no part in what God is doing! Their lamp will flicker and die! They will be as the virgins who had no oil, no fire — no witness!

The Lord will say, "I am going to pour out my Spirit and do a new work — but you have no part in it. I wanted to use you and bless you, but you turned to your idols. You rose up to eat and drink and play!

"Now I'm going to remove your candlestick. I'm going to take away your witness. You have no part in witnessing of Me, because your heart has never been with Me!"

God has already done that with many believers and many churches — and all that's left are weak, frail, shallow, worthless "witnesses."

Praise God, He is preparing a people who are set on fire, consumed by Him and burning with love — for He is about to make His move against the devil's kingdom! "Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh... I am the Lord" (Exodus 6:1-2).

Satan cannot stop our prayers! He cannot hold back the work of Christ! The devil will be dealt with severely. And the power against him will be so great that, like Pharaoh, he will let God's people go!

"And (Pharaoh) called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people... go, serve the Lord" (Exodus 12:31).

Beloved, that's exactly what the Lord is doing to do for you! He's going to come down and overpower the work of the devil in your home and family. One day, perhaps even in the middle of the night, the devil will say, "I've been harassed enough by persistent prayers — go! Serve God!"

God has called us to bombard hell, to pull down strongholds, to battle against principalities and powers of darkness. It is because God is about to do a work, one that has never been seen before!

We're not on Broadway, at the crossroads of the world, by coincidence! And the stirring in your heart is no coincidence, either! A divine purpose and a plan are about to unfold — and in spite of all the harassment of the devil, you can say with certainty, "Oh, yes! That's a sure sign I'm touching God. The devil is mad!"

Thank God — He's at work!

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