

# The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 23

November 18, 2018

## The Priesthood of the New Covenant

Hebrews 9 : 6 - 10

### Introduction

In chapter 9:1-5, the AH developed the appearance, functions and furnishings of the OT tabernacle, “*an earthly place of worship*” – see vv. 1-2. One of the key distinctions we pointed out was the fact that the coverings – the outer layer of skins which formed the actual tent, and the veils which created rooms inside the tabernacle were really restrictive walls to keep the general populace out, and confined them to the Outer Court while God’s appointed priests entered daily into the Holy Place, and where only the High Priest, once a year could enter the Holy of Holies. To do so safely, he had to perform an elaborate ritual of preparation & sacrifice before being allowed to enter. In other words, worship was strictly regulated by the letter of the law, and while God’s presence dwelt within, He could only be approached through a mediator – a priest – a high priest.

The AH is showing his readers the superiority of Christ in His high priesthood, in a “*greater and more perfect tent*” ( v. 11 ) by contrasting the dying ( 8:13 ) OT system to the NC system established by Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension. Now, the author will show us the work of the OT priesthood within the tabernacle – again – with the purpose of demonstrating the inferiority of that system now that Christ had come and fulfilled all – cf. 9:24-28.

Built into ( or designed into ) the OC system were purposeful limitations by God. The Holy Spirit had designed the Mosaic Law in order to teach God’s people they needed to deal with their sin, and they also needed to look past obviously temporary remedies – such as the blood of bulls and goats – cf. Heb. 10:4 ) – to something far greater; a perfect solution to deal with sin and offer real access to God. Those repetitive, temporary offerings and sacrifices begged for a permanent sacrifice that would not need to be repeatedly offered.

The OC / Mosaic Law could never deliver that sort of salvation or access – it was never designed to do so. This is in part what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. The people’s understanding of what constituted their sin under the Mosaic structure was faulty because it was too shallow. Note Matt. 5:21-22,27-30. Not only that, but he also told them that they could never produce within themselves the necessary goodness, virtue or righteousness to satisfy God’s legal standard for Israel – cf. Matt. 5:20. James, keying off of the Sermon on the Mount as an underlying theme of his letter, warns his readers that the OT Law was a unified system that must be followed to the letter with no omissions to be effectual – cf. Jas. 2:10-11.

Yet, the OT Law was no failure. It served God's purpose in His redemptive history, both as it was in effect, and now, as we look back on it from a NT perspective to observe the groundwork it was laying for us. It typologically and prophetically revealed our need (both theirs and ours) for a Saviour, for God's grace and mercy to reveal that only in Christ – to which the Law pointed – can hope for forgiveness and eternal home in heaven be found. He alone can deliver anyone from their sin and God's wrath. And God decided that this remedy, the only remedy would be found in faith in Jesus Christ crucified. That once-for-all sacrifice; God's final Word on the matter – cf. Heb. 1:1-4.<sup>1</sup>

## Duties of the Priests

vv. 6-7

*“These preparations having been made...”* – IOW, the tent, veils and furnishings were constructed, and once assembled, the place became a hotbed of activity for Israel. The priests of the Levitical order would go daily into the first section (the Holy Place) to do what they needed to do. Their daily, relatively mundane chores were 3 in number; (1) To ensure that the golden lampstand was filled with oil and were thus kept burning perpetually (cf. Ex. 27:20 ff); and (2) To burn incense on the altar of incense every morning and every evening when the lamps were dressed (Ex. 30:7 ff); and (3) this was a weekly duty – to replace every Sabbath day the loaves on the table of shewbread (Lev. 24:1-8 f). Leviticus contains a detailed list of the duties of the priests – functions and responsibilities within the Holy Place and out in the sacred precincts and a further summary is found in I Chronicles 23:24-32.<sup>2</sup>

In v. 6b, the AH makes a distinction between the order of Levitical priests and the high priest. Remember, all year long, day after day, every year, these regular priests did their work on the outside of the thick veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, knowing that just a few steps inside that curtain or veil was God's presence and certain death if they dared to enter the chamber.

But once per year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest, alone, could enter. This took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month on the Jewish calendar (Lev. 16:29) – Tishri (in the fall). Note how v. 7 reads, *“but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.”* So, even the high priest, with as high a position as he enjoyed, had no inherent right to enter this solemn chamber on the basis of his own holiness or position, because, like everyone else in the nation, he was a sinner in need of personal atonement, and hence, he must enter with blood as a sacrifice for sins, and it was not his own blood he carried behind that veil.

Philip Hughes comments;

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for the idea for these 3 paragraphs to: Trent Hunter & Stephen Wellum; Christ from Beginning to End, Zondervan, 2018, pp 142-143

<sup>2</sup> Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 319

“Thus the sanctity of this shrine was safeguarded by the most careful prescription which excluded not only the general populace but even the priests themselves and sanctioned the entry of the high priest on but a single day each year, while, as Westcott observes, ‘even he entered only in the power of another life.’”<sup>3</sup>

This elaborate network of ritual served to make it plain to Israel that the way into God’s presence was barred as a result of their sinfulness which separated them from their Creator and God, and only through the blood of sacrifice offered in their place could anyone of them hope to find the necessary forgiveness.<sup>4</sup> The fact that the ritual was repeated year after year was an immense clue that they were all in need perpetually of atonement. A further reminder was the daily and weekly duties of the priests, and the centralized location of the tabernacle wherever they went – always in the center of the camp, and always with the tribes in a certain order surrounding the tabernacle.

It must have become evident to some in Israel who thought about these things that, at some point, God would provide an ultimate substitute – as He had for Isaac on Mt. Moriah in Genesis 22 – that could eradicate their sins once for all. Romans 3:21-26 points to that from a NT perspective, especially v. 25, which mentions OT sins that God had ‘passed over’, in a sense, leaving people saved on credit for that time of redemption which finally came at Calvary on a March or April Friday in between 29-32 AD. The Messiah, promised, typified and prophesied was the anticipated answer.

The interplay between Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4 is an interesting 1<sup>st</sup> century view of what was believed about a specific place to worship ( a right way or a wrong way ), and the anticipated coming of this One ( even by Samaritans ) who would bring final truth to the complexity of human worship. Note JN 4:16-26. This, of course, took place prior to Jesus’ sacrifice, but His point was, “I am now here!” It was all unfolding before this woman’s eyes.

Back to Hebrews 9:7 – the author tells us ( condensing the details of Leviticus 16 ) that the high priest did not enter “*without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.*” Let’s read Lev. 16:1-34 so we can get a sense of actual ritual of the Day of Atonement. See also Lev. 10:1-3.

Hebrews 9:7 also says he offers this blood ‘for himself’ and ‘his people’. So the atonement here is specific – it is for the people of Israel only at that point. Although that certainly has some import for our understanding of Christ’s atonement and high priestly function, for now, we’ll avoid going down that path.

But look, too, at the phrase, ‘*unintentional sins of the people*’.

We see what the ESV says, but other versions:

“*errors*” – KJV

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<sup>3</sup> Hughes, p. 319-320

<sup>4</sup> IBID, p. 320

*“sins committed in ignorance”*– NKJV

*“sins of the people committed in ignorance”*– HCSB, NASB, NET

*“the people had committed in ignorance”*– NIV

*“the sins committed unintentionally by the people”*– NRSV

*“the people’s accumulated sins”*– Message

The Greek word ( a noun ) translated all these different ways means literally, “ignorance” and should be understood as a designation of those sins which are committed inadvertently or in ignorance.<sup>5</sup> It is the same word used in Hebrews 5:2. It is used here in 9:7 as distinct from those who sin deliberately in rebellious defiance of God and His law. Deliberate sin is made mention of in Heb. 10:26 – the first verse of our next Warning Passage in Hebrews. Pay special attention to v. 26!

In Hebrews 9:6-8, note the author’s use of the present tense. According to this, the Temple is still standing and Judaistic rituals were still taking place there as this was written and read. We see this throughout Hebrews actually, which helps us transition to verse 8.

## The Way is Not Opened

v. 8

While the tabernacle / temple still stood and was still viable, the Day of Atonement annually proclaimed that the way to God’s presence was still barred on any kind of regular, every-day Israelite basis. But, the promise of the Messiah, typologically inherent in the Day of Atonement, also said that it was only ‘not yet’ open – until Christ came and fulfilled it.

In Christ, the Holy Spirit making this plain this way, this access into the Most Holy Place could only take place once this first section is no longer standing. In Christ, we have fellowship with God, just as the priests had fellowship ( in a sense ) with God in and through the means of the tabernacle or temple.

Of course, the element mentioned in v. 3, *“the second curtain”*, with the Most Holy Place hidden behind it, the veil covering what was inside – God’s presence above the Ark of the Covenant was the thing blocking access to that chamber. This curtain symbolized the intentional “stay back” notion of Judaism.

But, when Christ died, as reported by Matthew 27:51, Richard Phillips points out: “The NT tells us that on the day that Jesus died, the curtain that barred the way was actually torn in two. How astonished must the priests have been! They were serving in the temple while the Son of God was dying, actually paying the debt of our sin, shedding the blood that he would present to God for our forgiveness. Matthew tells us that at the very moment Jesus died, “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” ( Matt. 27:51 ). By divine action, the inner sanctum was now wide open , showing that through faith in Christ believers might have direct fellowship with God. We are no longer consigned to outward forms without inward reality. In Christ Jesus, we now have direct access to the Father. We may

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<sup>5</sup> Hughes, p. 320 – or “through human frailty”

come before him without fear, for our guilt is removed, our debt paid in full. God's desire to call us into communion with himself and not merely into service, like ancient Israel, has been brought to fruition by the precious blood of Christ."<sup>6</sup>

What better clue could God have provided to show the connection between Christ's sacrifice and the divine opening up of the Holy of Holies at the exact moment Christ died, showing the sacrifice to be effective! Judaism was done at that point. The OC had been ended, but just like D-Day won the war for the Allies in WW II, it took quite a while for the victory to come to full fruition. It took until 70 AD and the destruction of the Temple to impress upon the Jews that God had rejected the OC, at least for now. Paul beautifully explains the temporary nature of that rejection for us in Roman 9-11.

According to the AH, it is the Holy Spirit who signifies that as long as these temporary holy places still stand, then this system described prior to v. 8 is saying that access to God is still restricted. IOW, the OC system is still in force. The point the AH is striving to make is that the imperfections of old system were no longer in force. When Christ came and His purpose was achieved at Calvary, the array of various sacrifices, offerings and oblations were superseded by Jesus' unique ( Melchizedekian ) one-time, all-sufficient sacrifice! That annulment was broadcasted when the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom ( by God's hand ), at the very moment that Jesus' death procured full atonement and ratified when Jesus ascended into God's sanctuary in heaven to present His own blood as the supreme sacrifice for sin.<sup>7</sup>

Richard Phillips points out, "Because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, our sins do not keep us from the holy God. It is true that sin still affects us. They will, for instance, keep us from enjoying our fellowship with God. But our access to God is secured forever through Jesus Christ because of His finished and sufficient work."<sup>8</sup> See also Hebrews 10:14.

## OT Regulations Were Fundamentally External vv. 9-10

Verse 9 starts off with an explanatory comment in parentheses, "*Which is symbolic for the present age.*" The word "symbolic" here is literally "parable" in the Greek, "*for the present age.*" By this, he means not that it is in force in the present age, but in relation to OT worshippers it was a parable. They were not aware that it was but we are – cf. I Cor. 10:1-11.

He goes on in v. 9 to point out that in this [ old ] arrangement or worship system, "*gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper.*" See Heb. 7:18,27; 10:1-3. This is an important point, although it doesn't really stand out in light of its surrounding context – because our conscience is an inner knowledge of who we are and what standard we live by. We know, even before we become

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<sup>6</sup> Richard D. Phillips, Hebrews, p. 292

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, p. 322

<sup>8</sup> Phillips, p. 293

believers, that we are accountable to God, though most suppress that truth ( cf. Rom. 1:18-20 ). And the gift associated with our ‘life choices’ affects us, though we can ( almost ) successfully hide it from others. We know we need cleansing and reconciliation, and as Christians, we have that in Christ. However, the author’s point is that, under the old system, the OC, this could not take place perfectly, as in, permanently.

As a parable, they functioned to look forward to the fulfillment of the Messianic promise, the promised reality of changed hearts, a longing for the perfect sacrifice God would ultimately provide for His people in His time. ( Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36 ).

The reality of Israel’s OT existence ( v. 10 ) was that their worship was symbolic, sacramental. They were not empty ceremonies – they had been established by God after all, but as Galatians 3:15-24 informs us, their ultimate purpose was to lead us to Christ.

Notice how verse 10 outlines the gifts and sacrifices – ‘food and drink’, ‘various washings’, and ‘regulations for the body’ – outward actions, yet they did carry the hope of promise for those faithful worshippers ( aka – ‘the Remnant’ ) who, as Abraham had, “rejoiced to see My [ Jesus ] day. He saw it and was glad.” ( JN 8:56 ).

These external provisions, coupled with the OT promises and prophecies, were understood ( but not by all – cf. Romans 10:1-4 ) as signs pointing to an everlasting spiritual reality. We’ll see a lot of examples of particular people ‘living this faith out’ in Hebrews 11. Hughes makes a sound comment when he says, “Their justification, like ours, was in Christ, grounded in the perfection of his atoning work; for, as in the mind and purpose of God, Christ is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world ( Rev. 13:8; I Pet. 1:19ff [ JN 1:29 ] ), so their justification in Christ is as sure as ours who live in the age of fulfillment. They looked forward in faith to the justifying sacrifice; we look back in faith to the same justifying sacrifice.”<sup>9</sup>

This ‘age of fulfillment’ that Hughes mentions here is described in v. 10 as “*until the time of reformation*”. That time had come before Hebrews was written, as we’ll see as we move to v. 11ff next time.

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<sup>9</sup> Hughes, p. 325