

Hebrews, Part 8

The writer has been urging his readers to move forward because there is no “back” to return to. “Back,” meaning the Law, has been replaced by a superior system, the New Covenant made possible by the work of Christ on the Cross an event then some 30+ years in the past. Even though the Second Advent and Messiah setting up His Kingdom has not yet happened, the readers have no option but to advance. The writer then began demonstrating why this New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant, with his initial focus on the superiority of the priesthood and the High Priest of the New Covenant. Now he is going to present his evidence for the superiority of the New Covenant itself.

Concerning the First Covenant, the writer wished to discuss that covenant’s regulations for worship and its earthly sanctuary. He highlighted these to contrast them with the superior features of the New Covenant ministry.

Hebrews 9:1 Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary.

The Mosaic Covenant was “earthly” (*kosmikon*, sometimes translated as “worldly”) because its elements were all related to the Earth. It had an “earthly sanctuary,” a physical building in this case a tent, and with that, there were rules (“ordinances”) for divine service in that sanctuary which, of course, is a reference to the Tabernacle as noted in verse 2 below. It was patterned after the one in Heaven.

Heb 9:2 For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; 3 and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, 4 which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

All the elements had typological value, but the author could not discuss these things in detail at the time (v. 5), meaning he doesn't have time to dwell on the Tabernacle. However, I do.

The Tabernacle itself was thirty cubits long (about forty-five feet) by ten cubits wide (about fifteen feet) and ten cubits high. That is probably a lot smaller than most imagine. It was divided into two sections. The first was the "Holy Place" in which there were certain articles of furniture we will discuss shortly. The second part was called the Holy of Holies ("Holiest of All"). It was ten cubits by ten cubits by ten cubits, a perfect cube, and is separated from the Holy Place by a thick veil or curtain. Only the high priest and only once a year was allowed access to the Holy of Holies.

Verse 2 names the items of worship in the Holy Place. They included the golden lampstand (menorah) and the table of showbread. In the background near the curtain (veil) that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies would normally be the golden altar of incense, but notice here it is described as inside the Holy of Holies. That is because a change has taken place with the Cross. The veil between the two sections was made of fine Egyptian linen with cherubim woven into it. It represented the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He died on the Cross, it was rent in two (Mark 15:38), so the veil has been removed in this picture described by the author some 30+ years later. As a result, the golden altar is described as inside the Holy of Holies.

Inside the Holy of Holies was also the Ark of the Covenant, a box made of gopher wood and covered inside and out by pure gold. The wood represented the humanity of Christ and the gold His deity. It had a highly ornamented top called the mercy seat fashioned with two cherubim, made of pure gold, on top with their wings stretched over it. This is where the blood was placed and what made it a "mercy seat".

Contained in the Ark were three items: a pot containing mana from the Exodus, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets containing the Ten Commandments. The mana speaks of the ministry of Jesus Christ who feeds those who are His own. He feeds us with His Word, the Bread of Life. Aaron's rod that budded, the dead stick that came to life (Numbers 17),

speaks of the death and resurrection of Christ. The tablets containing the Ten Commandments speak of the fact that He fulfilled all of the Law.

“Of these things we cannot now speak” stated by the author of Hebrews means he wishes not to spend time going over these details of the Tabernacle because he had much more important points to make. He was concerned about what real worship is and how we are to worship. Besides, his readers should already be familiar with those Old Covenant elements of worship.

Heb 9:6 Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. 7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and the people’s sins committed in ignorance; 8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

The “ordinances for divine service” mentioned in verse 1 and how they were to worship, were now described. Whereas the outer room of the Tabernacle could be entered regularly by the officiating priests, it was only on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16) that the high priest entered the “Holiest of All” inner room (“Holy of Holies”) and then only with sacrificial blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

Under the Levitical system, this access to the Holy of Holies was severely limited. This was designed to convey the idea that access to God was severely limited. What this indicates for the present time is that the Old-Covenant sacrificial system did not meet human needs at its deepest level. It could not clear the conscience of the worshiper. The word translated “conscience” is sometimes translated as “soul” and refers to distinguishing between what is morally good and bad. “Both gifts and sacrifices ... cannot make him who performed the service “perfect in regard to the conscience”

(v. 9) because sin had not then yet been judged. At best it was only ritual or ceremonial purification. Furthermore, direct access to God was blocked and required an intermediary, the high priest. That changed under the New Covenant.

In verse 7, the writer is speaking of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) and the annual ceremony in which the high priest made sacrifices for his own sins and on behalf of the nation Israel. On that day only the high priest and him alone was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies which was into the very presence of God. Any others who entered the Holy of Holies were subject to death. Tradition has it that a rope was tied around the ankle of the high priest, that should he be struck dead for some infraction, his body could be retrieved.

Heb 9:24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us

Our Great High Priest has not entered an earthly Tabernacle but the true Tabernacle in Heaven. He has gone into the presence of God, and He will not come out as long as we are in this world. When He does come out, He is coming for His own – we are part of Him, the body of Christ.

The high priest of the Levitical system went into the Holy of Holies of an earthly Tabernacle only once a year with blood offerings for the sins of the people, a ritual that had to be repeated annually, year in and year out. But our High Priest, with His sacrifice being made once and forever, entered the Holy of Holies in Heaven into the very presence of God to sit at His right hand is far superior.

“It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience (v. 9) should probably read “could not make the worshiper perfect.” That word “worship” is from the Anglo-Saxon word for “worth”. To worship is to give someone something of which they are worthy. The Lord Jesus Christ is worthy to receive our praise and admiration. Real worship will always lead to service. Such worship is only possible through Jesus Christ. To worship and perform service requires that the worshiper

be “perfect in regard to the conscience”. That is to be free of sin through the use of 1 John 1:9. The Old Covenant could not do that but the New Covenant can.

“Concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation” (v. 10) probably refers to sectarians for whom food laws and ceremonial washings retained great importance. The readers were informed that these restrictions were only temporary and “imposed until the time of reformation”. “Reformation” is *diorthosis* which means restoring something to its natural and normal condition which in some way has gotten out of line. This refers to the fall of Adam and the restoration of fallen man to a relationship with God that is enabled by faith through what Christ did on the Cross.

What shall we say of the earthly Tabernacle?

- It was here on Earth. – It was made of earthly and material things and erected here on Earth.
- It was merely a shadow of things to come. – It never was the reality but only a picture of what was real in Heaven.
- It was inaccessible to the people. – The average man or woman could not just go inside, even if they were an Israelite. You could go as far as the entrance as long as you had a sacrifice, but no further – the priest served for you. But we are a priesthood of believers, and each of us has access to God because the veil was torn in two by the work of Christ on the Cross.
- It was temporary. – The reality in Heaven is real and permanent.
- It was ineffective to change the hearts of the people. – The earthly sanctuary had nothing to do with changing people’s lives. But today you can come to Christ and He will change your life. He alone can enable you to worship God in spirit and truth and make Him a reality in your life.

The Heavenly Sanctuary

Heb 9:11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but

with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

The author had shown that the Old Testament anticipated a better New Covenant (8:7-13) and that the ritual of the Old Covenant carried on in an “earthly sanctuary” pointed to its inadequacy (9:1-10). Now he set forth the superiority of Christ’s service as Mediator of the New Covenant (vv. 11-15). Christ’s high priesthood is linked with “the greater and more perfect tabernacle” rather than the “earthly” one previously described (vv. 1-5).

When Christ entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood (v. 12) rather than by animal blood, He demonstrated the superiority of His service because His blood had obtained “eternal redemption”. Thus the value of His sacrifice is immeasurably greater than the animal offerings of the Levitical arrangements which only produced a form of “blamelessness” or judicial righteousness (Phil 3:6). The blood of the sacrificial animals “covered” and “hid” the sins of the penitent Israelite from God’s sight and only for a year. In the work of Christ on the Cross, the perfect ransom price had been paid for human “redemption,” and because it was paid “once for all,” it was eternal with no need of repeating it.

Understand that the life of Christ never saved anyone. You can follow His teachings and think you are saved, but you are not. His teachings never saved anyone. It is the death of Christ and His blood that saves.

Heb 9:13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

This “eternal redemption” comes because Christ “offered Himself without spot to God” (v. 14). That “offering” is far superior to “the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer”. This is a reference to the ordinance of the red heifer in Numbers 19. A red heifer has a particular symbolism. A female (heifer) instead of a bull was used. According to 1 Peter 3:7, the female is the weaker vessel. Our defilement comes through our weakness. Christ came down and experienced for Himself our weakness.

Red speaks of the fact that Christ was made sin for us, not just in some academic way but He became sin for us. How do we know that red represents sin? Isaiah said, “Your sins are as scarlet but shall be white as snow” (Isa 1:18). The animal must be without blemish to represent Christ. It had to be an animal that had never been put to the yoke. Christ was never under the bondage of sin. The heifer was led outside the camp and there slain by the high priest, a picture of Christ as both the offering and the High Priest – He offered Himself.

The blood of the offering was then sprinkled before the Tabernacle seven times. Seven represents completeness. Christ’s sacrifice was a finished transaction. The carcass of the heifer was then burned to ashes in the sight of the high priest. The book of Numbers tells us cedar and hyssop were put with the sacrifice.

The ashes were kept in a “clean place”. When a man became ceremonially defiled such as having touched a dead body, the priest would take some ashes and mingle them with water, and then sprinkle the offender. This served to ceremonially cleanse him so he could be restored to fellowship.

If this was effective under the Old Covenant, “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Old-Covenant rituals served for the ceremonially unclean and only made them outwardly clean, but the blood of Christ can do much more. Note that this involved all three Persons of the Godhead (“blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God” v. 14). This magnifies the greatness of His redemptive offering. Such a great accomplishment ought to “cleanse our consciences from dead works” (v. 14). “Dead works” refer to the Levitical rituals that can never impart spiritual life. “Cleanse” is *katharotes* means to make clean or to cleanse by curing. It removes the defilement and the defiling power of “dead works,” works that are done apart from Him. Purity is not the end but the means of the new life. The end of the restored fellowship is energetic service to Him Who alone lives and gives life.

As also in 6:1, where “acts that lead to death” (dead works) are referred to. The writer wished his readers would give up all thoughts of returning to Old Covenant rituals. That is working for your salvation and is “dead” (useless) works. That is not a vitally alive spiritual life that is possible with the New Covenant. “Works” are never a cause of salvation, they are the result of salvation.

They should “cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” As believers, their consciences ought to be perfectly free from any need to engage in such things. They should hold fast to their profession and serve the living God within the New Covenant. To do so is to retain the hope of an eternal inheritance (“eternal redemption” in v. 12 and “the eternal Spirit” in v. 14) which has been promised to recipients of New Covenant life. Christ is the Mediator (cf. 8:6; 12:24) of that covenant, and the “inheritance” is available to those who are called since the death of the Mediator has freed them from all guilt derived from the sins committed under the First Covenant.

The author was perhaps countering the appeal of the sectarians, or others, to “cleanse your conscience” of those Jewish Christians who must often have been charged with deserting their ancestral faith. But the blood of Christ ought to quiet their consciences permanently and lead them to pursue the “eternal inheritance” that the New Covenant relationship brought them. Of course, the writer meant that it is only “through faith and patience” that his readers could “inherit what has been promised” (6:12); but if they would rest their consciences at the Cross, they could pursue this heirship without distraction.

Heb 9:15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

The Old Testament saints were saved because they were looking forward to His coming when they brought their sacrifices. The blood of bulls and goats never save them; their faith did. J. Vernon McGee says, “Before the Cross God saved on credit.”

The author has made it clear that Christ's death has instituted a better covenant (vv. 11-15) which is superior to animal offerings (vv. 12-14). But the need for such a sacrifice has yet to be explored, so a keyword in this subunit is "necessary" (*anankē*, vv. 16, 23). In the process of exploring this point, the author clearly underscored the measureless superiority of the sacrificial death of Christ.

The Mediator's Death Necessary

Heb 9:16 For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. 17 For a testament is in force after men are dead since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

With verse 16, the author made a semantic shift in which he treated the Greek word for "covenant" (*diathēkē*) in the sense of a will. He meant that like human wills, all the arrangements are secured by the testator and its beneficiaries need only accept its terms. Treating the New Covenant in this way, the author argued that its force depends on the death of the one who made it, and that is when it takes effect. His death enabled the terms of the New Covenant to become effective. The life of Christ didn't save you. It was the death of Christ which saves you.

Heb 9:18 Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you." 21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

23 Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The writer described the inauguration of the Old Covenant through ceremonies involving the sprinkling of sacrificial blood, traditions known to the writer but not specified in the Old Testament. "Blood" is mentioned six times in this section. In verse 9:22a the words "almost all things are purified

with blood” leave room for the flour offering which a poor Israelite might bring for his sin (Lev. 5:11-13). But the writer was thinking of the system as a whole and the ritual of the Day of Atonement which showed that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. Verse 23 reminds us that blood-shedding, the “better sacrifices than these,” is also true in the superior New Covenant.

Mere copies (*hypodeigmata*) might be adequately hallowed by animal sacrifices, but the “things in the heavens” themselves required more than that. The expression referred to the new priestly arrangements which have heaven as their focal point. Dealing with sin required a sacrifice adequate to accomplish the objective. The death of Christ meets this requirement. Why did Heaven need to be purified? Because sin originated in Heaven. That is where Lucifer led his rebellion. Christ’s sacrifice was adequate and complete, a finished transaction that covered all of God’s creation which was touched by sin.

Heb 9:24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

The Tabernacle on Earth was just a figure and was made with human effort. The reality, the true Tabernacle, is in Heaven. The author isn’t speaking of some building in Heaven. He is speaking of Christ Himself. Christ was appointed as High Priest of the New Covenant to represent sinful people in heaven itself, that is, in the “presence of God”. Thus, His sacrifice had to be greater than that which allowed entrance into a mere man-made sanctuary that was only a copy (*antitypa*) of the true one.

Heb 9:25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another— 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Under the Law the high priest had to make sacrifices each time he entered the Holy of Holies and into the presence of God. Instead, Christ made a

one-time sacrifice of Himself, once for all to do away with sin, which the priests in the old arrangement could not do.

The phrase “At the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” means He came at the end of the Law age and instituted a new age, the Age of Grace.

Heb 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him, He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

Humans are sinful creatures destined to die once, and after that to face judgment. But this danger is turned aside by the fact that Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. The use of “once” (9:26, 28) and “once for all” (7:27; 9:12; 10:10) emphasized the finality of Christ’s sacrificial work in contrast with the repeated Levite ministrations. If the death of Christ did not save you after death remains nothing ahead for you but judgment.

His first advent was to bear sins away—but His second will be “apart from sin” (lit., “without [reference to] sins”). Those who are waiting (*apekdechomenois*; used seven times in the NT of the return of Christ: Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28) for Him can look forward to His coming, not with a fearful expectation of judgment, but with the anticipation associated with their eternal salvation. They are the ones who “hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first” (3:14), the ones using the same faith that saved them to live a vitally alive spiritual life. The word “salvation” used here does not refer to the past tense of saved (delivered from the fires of hell) but rather their deliverance (saved) through the trials of life and receiving the “eternal inheritance” of which they are heirs (cf. 9:15; 1:14) at Christ’s return.

What do we have?

- The Tabernacle was merely a shadow of the true Temple in Heaven.
- It was entirely earthly in that it and its articles of worship were made by men to simulate and teach of the true Temple in Heaven.

- The blood of bulls and goats did not satisfy man's lack of perfect righteousness before God. They were imperfect sacrifices and only "hid" the view of man's sins from God and only for one year.
- However, Jesus Christ became the perfect sacrifice that satisfied God's perfect righteousness. Under the Law, the high priest, as a mediator for the people of Israel, entered the Holy of Holies only once a year with blood offerings, and this had to be repeated every year, indicating its inadequacy. With His blood offering, our High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies once and forever and sits on the right hand of God as our mediator.
- This establishes the superiority of the High Priest and the New Covenant over that of the Old Covenant. If the New Covenant is superior why would you consider a return to the Old Covenant?

