

HEAVENLY HAGION

Hebrews—Chapter 9

Study 10

A Better Sanctuary

Hebrews 7-10 contain a fourfold emphasis on the New Covenant ministry of Christ as Priest and sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary. The primary focus of chapter 9 is the heavenly sanctuary. Paul begins by giving us a quick introduction to the sanctuary itself using imagery familiar to his Hebrew readers.

“Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly” (Hebrews 9:1-5, KJV).

Here we find a description of the Holy and Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary; a type of the heavenly sanctuary where Christ is the High Priest. Paul’s intent here, and throughout the remainder of this chapter, is to direct us, and especially the Hebrews, from the earthly type to the heavenly reality. Verses 3-5 focus on the Most Holy Place, or the second apartment of the sanctuary, described in the Greek as “hagion, hagian.” This Greek description is not used again in the entire book of Hebrews. Note the closing thought in verse 5, “of which we cannot now speak particularly” (KJV) or “in detail.” In other words, the rest of this chapter does not speak in detail of the Most Holy Place, but rather of the sanctuary as a whole. Paul’s point is to move the Hebrews from the earthly to the heavenly—to show that Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary. His concern is not to prove what part of the heavenly sanctuary Jesus ministers in, but rather to help them understand that the heavenly replaces the earthly.

Reality Replaces Type

“Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people. The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing” (Hebrews 9:6-8, KJV).

Again, Paul is transitioning his hearers from the earthly tabernacle to the heavenly rather than to a specific location in the sanctuary. The phrase “holiest of all” in verse 8 is rendered “sanctuary” in the NRSV and “hagion” in the Greek. It is not speaking of the second apartment of the sanctuary, but rather of the heavenly sanctuary itself, “the holiest of all,” or “sanctuary” of “all,” as compared to the earthly types. This is clearly indicated by his stating that the way into this “sanctuary” in heaven was not yet manifest while the first tabernacle, the earthly one, was standing or in use. All the earthly sanctuaries, the one Moses built in the wilderness, Solomon’s, and the final one standing when Jesus was on earth, were patterned after “the sanctuary” or “true tabernacle” in heaven (Hebrews 8:2). These earthly types were made holy by God’s presence, but the sanctuary in heaven is the Holiest of all for it is in the very dwelling place of God. Now that Jesus has made the one-time sacrifice for sins and is risen as the great High Priest of all humanity, the earthly sanctuary service has come to an end. It no longer stands as a needed type because the reality is made manifest. We now enter by faith into

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“God having provided something better for us.” —Hebrews 11:40

All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

the sanctuary (“Ta Hagion”) in heaven, the “holiest of all” the sanctuaries.

“Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:9-12, KJV).

Paul now explodes with meaning this one truth that is so vital to our salvation. The earthly sanctuary was just a figure, a symbol or a type. The gifts and sacrifices of animals could not do the job of saving us from sin. Paul’s earnest reasoning is calculated to convince his Hebrew brethren to make a complete transition from the earthly to the heavenly. Paul is calling for a “reformation” of thought and practice in regard to the sanctuary and its services (verse 10). Look to the greater and more perfect tabernacle in heaven. Look to the blood of Christ who has inaugurated the heavenly reality with His sacrifice. His point again is that the earthly sanctuary has come to an end and the heavenly sanctuary is now the reality.

A New Testament

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:13-15, KJV).

The essence and fabric of the New Testament is the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus Christ for our sins. It is this one-time sacrifice for all that marks the end of the Old and the beginning of the New. And as we see the proper meaning of the animal sacrifices, allowing them to connect us to the ultimate sacrifice, we are then enabled to receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

“For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth” (Hebrews 9:16-17, KJV).

The New Testament, according to this verse, requires the death of the “Testator,” and in this case that would be God (Hebrews 9:16, KJV). Paul is speaking in the terms of a will, as in the “last will and testament.” In other words, God is setting out a will, or testament, with promises of inheritance that come to force upon His death. This again points us to the reason why Jesus Christ, God the Son, became a man. The Bible is clear that God alone is “immortal” (1 Timothy 6:16). Therefore, God cannot die. Yet, God has made promises based on a testament that requires the death of the testator. Therefore God became a man in order for the terms of His testament to come into force and for the inheritance to be received. Jesus, God in human flesh, became mortal to put into force the New Testament of God’s will.

Inaugurating the New

“Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated [inaugurated] without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people. Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry” (Hebrews 9:18-21, KJV).

The word “dedicated” in verse 18 means “inaugurated” in the Greek and is translated as such in the NAS and NRS. The inauguration of the New Testament is founded upon the blood of Jesus Christ who said, “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28, KJV).

This New Testament inauguration includes the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus ministers for us now. This is the main idea of Hebrews 9. Paul now brings to center stage, in verses 18-21, the reality that the heavenly sanctuary has now replaced the earthly sanctuary. His reasoning has little to do with a specific compartment of the sanctuary, but focuses rather on the sanctuary as a whole. It is Paul's desire to set before his Hebrew kinsmen the reality that the heavenly sanctuary has been inaugurated in place of the earthly one.

Blood Atonement

“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission [pardon]” (Hebrews 9:22, KJV).

Hebrews 9:22 is one of the clearest statements covering one of the more controversial subjects facing the church today—blood atonement. A basic teaching of the Bible is that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Therefore, the life that we now have comes only because God, in His mercy, has left our sins unpunished. Yet, to demonstrate that God is just as well as merciful, God presented Himself in the person of God the Son “as a sacrifice of atonement” (Romans 3:25-26, NIV). This demonstration actually satisfies the justice of God while revealing His mercy, so that in the cross of Christ both God's justice and mercy meet together (Psalm 89:14; 85:10).

This verse also clarifies another significant section of Scripture found in the book of Leviticus concerning the Lord's goat and the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:15-16, 20-22). Some have thought that both goats represent Christ since both seem to bear the sin of God's people. However, there is a very important distinction as to how these sins are borne. Only one of the goats gives its life as a blood sacrifice for atonement, therefore, only the sacrificial goat can represent Christ who gave His life for the remission of our sins. The placing of sins upon the scapegoat was not done for sacrificial atonement as this goat does not spill its blood in sacrifice and, therefore, cannot represent Christ. The sins were symbolically placed upon the “scapegoat” as a representation of Satan as it was then led alive to perish in the wilderness, signifying the final judgment when sin, with its originator, will be forever banished and destroyed.

“It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (Hebrews 9:23, KJV). Here we find yet another potentially controversial statement from the pen of Paul. What in heaven, where God dwells and holiness prevails, could possibly need to be purified? The answer is simple—the record of our lives of sin. In heaven God has a detailed account of every sin ever committed by every individual (Matthew 12:36; Revelation 20:12; Ecclesiastes 12:14). This record can and must be cleansed by the blood of Jesus so that we stand before the throne without fault (Revelation 12:11; Jude 24). Thank God for the “better” sacrifice of Himself.

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places [sanctuary] made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24, KJV). Here again we find the contrast and intent of Paul's teaching about the sanctuary in this letter to the Hebrews. It is a contrast between the earthly tabernacle and the heavenly. His intent is to point us to the true sanctuary in heaven where Christ now ministers for us.

Once For All

“Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place [sanctuary] every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:25-28, KJV).

Hebrews 9 closes with a powerful statement of gospel truth, one that Paul

brings up again in the next chapter. Paul does in fact emphasize this one point no less than seven times in Hebrews 7, 9 and 10. This vital truth directs us to the one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. He does not offer Himself as a sacrifice week after week, month after month, or even year after year. Christ was offered once for all! He was once offered, and when He returns the second time it will be without sin; that is, He will no longer be in the position of a High Priest bearing our sins. At the Second Coming, the sanctuary in heaven has been cleansed of the record of our sins. All will have made their decisions for or against God. Jesus will then return to take us to the place He has prepared for us that we may be with Him forever (John 14:1-3).

Summary

Christ has made a one-time sacrifice for the sins of the world. His death on the cross demonstrates both the mercy and justice of God. Atonement has been achieved by the blood sacrifice of Jesus. His life and death for us is the only means whereby we are brought back into harmony, or unity, with God. The heavenly sanctuary replaces the earthly type as our High Priest replaces the earthly priesthood so we now look directly to Christ in heaven for forgiveness of all sins. As our High Priest, Christ now ministers in the heavenly sanctuary where He is cleansing the record of our sins from the books of judgment. When He comes again He will take all who have chosen Him to heaven, there they will have eternal life with Him.

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