

HEBREWS – LEVITICUS

“Most Holy Place”

Hebrews 9:1-10

August 6, 2023

Hebrews 9:1-10

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. ²For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron’s staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

⁶These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, ⁷but 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. ⁸By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing ⁹(which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. ¹

“This is the Word of God” – “Thanks be to God.”

The joy of taking an entire book, like the book of Hebrews with the Old Testament book of Leviticus as a foundation, is that we can see more fully how one section leads to another and how one statement unpacks a

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 9:1–10). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

truth previously given. To take verses out of context for a phrase match is not only poor study, but dangerous. For centuries cults have taken Bible verses out of context to use as foundational statements of newly created, theologically abhorrent beliefs, only to create confusion and guide many down paths that ultimately lead to destruction. We're not focusing on apologetics today but suffice to say that we value the fullness of God's Word, and see the need to read with as much understanding as possible of what the passage meant to the original hearers, grasping the timeless truths revealed and then rightly applying the timeless truths in our lives.

What's the alternative? Teaching and preaching centered on self and not on Christ. Teaching that follows cultural trends and popular thoughts that end up being developed more by the crisis of the moment rather than the steadfast foundation of God's inerrant, timeless, and immutable Word.

Thus, and this is the shift we have made over the years, you will be hard pressed to find us focusing on Sunday morning in a four-week series on how to manage your finances, how to be a better husband, how to raise children, how to live your best life now, or how to fight the giants in your life as you attempt to pretend that you're David and every struggle is Goliath.

Some of you are awakening now to what I am saying.

And while there are places for thematic studies, such as groups, Bible study classes, retreats, and camps for example. The gathering on the Lord's Day cannot be built around the struggle of the day. Otherwise, we find ourselves looking for the next hook, the next promotable topic, or the next popular trend...always.

I think many are getting tired of that. Once the lights come up and the concert dies down there remains a hunger. A hunger for truth, for life, for clear instructions of the way.

What does this have to do with today's portion of scripture? Much. Today we see the next portion of a chapters-long warning to a group of Christ-followers who were being driven by fear, longing to pull a "Lot's wife" and look backward to a previous life and struggling to stay true to the truth of the gospel embodied by Jesus Christ. These are not bad Christians, really, but they are teetering on the edge of despair and some would say apostasy as it relates to those who were not truly believers.

What was given by God to his people under the Old Covenant (which we spoke of last week) was good, but incomplete. In fact, the writer of Hebrews called it obsolete once the New Covenant, the New Testament, the fullness of the gospel was made known through Christ.

In Christ, there is the reminder to these Jewish Christians that Christ offers a:

1. BETTER PRIESTHOOD
2. BETTER COVENANT
3. BETTER SACRIFICE²

BETTER PRIESTHOOD

Some of you are thinking "Is he going to talk about that Melchizedek guy again?" Well, yes, but not for long. We have spent weeks on this and yet, it is viable today because as the writer was making clear, the priesthood of Christ is complete, is full, is better.

The priesthood of Christ is Melchizedekian as defined in chapter 7. It is a priesthood that has no beginning and no end. Jesus, not from the tribe of Levi, but of Judah, was not constrained by the priestly boundaries created by God for the Old Covenant era.

² Schriener, Thomas R. *Hebrews: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 256-7.

His priesthood is eternal and continually available. He is the perfect priest, the perfect king, the perfect way to the Father and his priesthood supersedes that of the old.

BETTER COVENANT

We talked of this last Sunday. The old was incomplete. The old was made obsolete. The old, as stated in chapter 8 was not “faultless” though that did not mean it was in error. It means that the old covenant given to Moses and expressed through the Mosaic law and the teachings of the law throughout the Old Testament books (the Old Covenant books) was good, godly, and right. As the ESV Study Bible notes state:

The Mosaic covenant was not wrong; rather, it was weak and ineffective (7:18–19) since it could not bring people to perfection. God’s purposes in the old covenant (among others) were to inform his people of the moral law, to convict them of sin (10:3), and (prominently featured in the book of Hebrews) to establish the pattern of sacrifice, priesthood, and promise of salvation that is fulfilled in Christ. Yet the inability of sinful humanity to achieve perfection under the old covenant required the promise of a **second** covenant, proving the ineffectiveness (i.e., the shortcomings) of the first.³

Therefore, the New Covenant was better. For this we are eternally grateful. I don’t wish to reproach last Sunday’s message, so go back and listen if you were not here, but know that the New fulfilled all the Old was preparing God’s people to receive.

Therefore, to abandon the new simply to turn back to a full embrace of the old would be like abandoning air conditioning and settling for a funeral home fan in 100-degree heat.

There is a better way.

³ Crossway Bibles. (2008). [The ESV Study Bible](#) (p. 2373). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

BETTER SACRIFICE

And this is what today's passage centers upon. Christ is not just a sacrifice, but is the ultimate, final, and as stated here better sacrifice.

The writer takes the Hebrews directly to their history books to the tabernacle. For 21st century Gentile Christians, this becomes little more than a sidebar of study where some build models and look at 3D imaging to imagine the tabernacle. For a group of you here who traveled to Israel with me a few years back, we stopped in the wilderness at the life-size replica of the tabernacle and it gave quite an image...though I doubt the original had air conditioning pumped into the tent.

Nevertheless, we have the writer giving a historical descriptor here.

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. ² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. ⁴

(This is taken from R. Kent Hughes commentary on Hebrews.)

The tabernacle...a tent that was portable and taken by the people of God throughout their forty-year journey toward the Promised Land was set up and taken down over and over again. Every campsite led to a reset of the tabernacle. There were detailed instructions regarding how the tent was to be built. It is not random, but gives insight into God's eternal kingdom set up. There is clarity shrouded in mystery throughout.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 9:1-5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

This portable shrine was always situated at the geographical center of Israel, where they camped by tribes. Each tribe had its designated spot. As you approach, you would see the white linen walls of the court of the tabernacle. This formed an enclosure that was 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. The whiteness broadcast the holiness of the function.

A worshiper could enter the courtyard that was built and immediately they would see an altar set up for burnt offerings. This was bronze and huge. Horns on each side at the corners where the offerings would be tied. This was the boundary – as far as a layman could go (Lev 1:4.)

Behind this altar and to the right was a bronze laver, a large washing bowl for the use of the priests only. If they didn't handle this correctly, their lives were in peril (Ex 30.)

Behind this was another tented area – the tabernacle. This was a flat-roofed, oblong tent that was 15 feet high and 45 feet long. This was covered with three layers of cloth – first was gorgeous woven tapestries of blue, purple, and scarlet. This was made of linen. Upon that were two layers of animal skins.

Inside the tabernacle there were two rooms created, divided by an ornate veil woven with the same colors and with gold and cherubim embroidered on it. The veil was supported by four golden columns set on silver bases.

The first room was called the HOLY PLACE.

The inner room was called the MOST HOLY PLACE or HOLY OF HOLIES.

The writer describes these briefly.

Room One:

Hebrews 9:2

² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place.⁵

Room Two:

Hebrews 9:3-5

³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. ⁶

There are details here that confuse some, especially regarding the placement of some items and the contents of the ark of God's covenant, but don't get caught in the weeds and miss the point God is making through his writer here. This is glorious!!!! This is an amazing reality.

God with us – Emmanuel. God's presence among his people. The glory of God revealed as “the cherubim of glory” perpetually looked down in wonder as they knelt at the mercy seat.⁷

Glory – God!!!

Everything says glory to Yahweh, the God of gods, King of kings, Lord of lords.

But...the sacrificial system, the good and godly sacrifices of the old covenant were inadequate.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 9:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 9:3–5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁷ Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 228.

The old system was incomplete and inadequate for two big reasons:

1. LIMITED ACCESS
2. LIMITED RESULTS

Limited Access – Only the hereditary priest from the tribe of Levi could enter fully, and even then, likely only once throughout their entire priestly term – and then for only a week.

If you were an Israelite from one of the other tribes, or not a priest, your access was even less – you could go to the front of the courtyard.

Hebrews 9:7-8

⁷ 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. ⁸ By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing⁸

I don't think we fully grasp this reality. In years closer to Jesus's time, the access was politicized. The fear was potent for the one entering. On the Day of Atonement, when the high priest took his censer in to burn the first incense in the Most Holy Place, it was stated he must not stay too long "lest he put Israel in terror."⁹

Limited Results – The blood sacrifice offered by the high priest only covered sins of ignorance.

TYPES OF SIN

As followers of Christ, we typically understand the concept of sin. Even our children can tell us that sin is something wrong. It is anything outside of God's desire and design. For us, it is anything we think, say, or do that is against God and his will.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Heb 9:7–8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁹ Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 229.

Since we are prone to categorize, the grading and sectioning of sin is often desired. It often allows us to justify some sin (you know, like little white lies) from others that are more heinous (like murder.)

The Roman Catholic Church has categorized sin as mortal and venial based on the state of being in original sin and the commission of actual sin. Mortal is defined as those sins which are of a grave matter, committed with full knowledge of the sinner, and with deliberate consent of the sinner.¹⁰ From the Roman Catholic anyone dying in a state of mortal sin would suffer eternal separation from God in Hell. Venial sins are lesser offenses that injure but do not destroy one's relationship with God.¹¹

But...we're not Roman Catholic and the Scripture does not reveal such a divide in sins. Not in that way at least. And...if there were a sin so heinous that Christ's blood could not cover it, as some would say the mortal sins are, then the entirety of the Gospel is fraudulent.

Yet, there does exist a categorization of sins. They're revealed in this passage. It is simple really and two of the types are most commonly known by evangelicals.

1. **Sins of commission** – that which we do in disobedience to God.
2. **Sins of omission** – that which we fail to do that God is leading us to do...and thus in disobedience to God.
3. **Sins of ignorance** – that is what the writer speaks of here. These are sins of unintentionality. Due to the pervasive and insidious effects of sin on who we are, we cannot even fathom or recognize the times when we are unaware of our sinning. Simply put, we do not know what we do not know...but we are held accountable for the truth regardless.¹²

¹⁰ Mary, Irin. *St. Mary of the Seven Dolors*, 8 Oct. 2017, <https://stmaryofthesevendolors.com/prayers-2/list-of-mortal-sins-every-catholic-should-know>.

¹¹ "Mortal and Venial Sin," Saint Boniface Catholic Church, <https://stboniface-lunenburg.org/mortal-and-venial-sin#:~:text=Mortal%20sins%20are%20grave%20offenses,destroy%20one's%20relationship%20with%20God>.

¹² Mohler, R. Albert. *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews: Christ-Centered Exposition* (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2017), 131.

While your initial reaction may be “Well...that doesn’t seem fair.”

What wouldn’t seem loving...or fair if you will...would be a God who never provides a way. A God who condemns us in our sin without revealing sin. Our loving, eternal, omniscient, ever-loving God, has provided a way.

- A better priesthood evident in Christ.
- A better covenant revealed in Christ.
- A better sacrifice complete in Christ.

A better way. You have access to the Father, the most holy of holy, through the Son, who is ever-present with him, interceding on your behalf. Praying for you. The Spirit of God fills this place and the holy room that is the temple of the Holy Spirit...you is made complete, full, and forgiven by the blood of the Lamb, the better sacrifice who is Christ.

Charles Simeon, who was one of the greatest preachers in the Church of England, shared of his coming to Christ like this:

As I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord’s supper, I met with an expression to this effect – “That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering.” The thought came into my mind, “What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer.” Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus.”¹³

¹³ Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 233.