

SESSION TWENTY-ONE

THE PERFECT SACRIFICE IN THE GREATER TABERNACLE

Heb 9:1-28

I. INTRODUCTION

Chapter eight introduced a new major section of the book of Hebrews, namely Heb 8:1–10:39. By demonstrating in chapters 1–7 that Messiah Jesus was indeed a High Priest and superior to those associated with the Old Covenant, the author established a strong case that the New Covenant is superior to the Old. Beginning in chapter 8:1, however, the author **shifts his focus to the sacrifice** of this new and superior High Priest. After all, if Jesus is a High Priest, He must have something to offer. What He offers is a far superior sacrifice, which **strengthens his argument** that the New Covenant is superior to the Old. It is not surprising, then, that even in the midst of the Old Testament, God revealed that a New Covenant was coming (Jer 31:31-34) . . . a covenant that could bring lasting forgiveness.

II. CHRIST'S PERFECT SACRIFICE OF HIMSELF IN THE GREATER TABERNACLE (9:1-28)

In Heb 8:3, the author had already hinted about the direction he was going when he said, "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer." Beginning in 9:1, he now proceeds to show what the High Priest Jesus has to offer. It is nothing less than the perfect sacrifice of Himself in the greater tabernacle of the very presence of God. Throughout this section, the author will draw comparison and contrast to the sacrifices of the earthly tabernacle offered by the Old Covenant high priests.

A. The Sacrificial Ministry of the Old Covenant at the Earthly Tabernacle (9:1-10)

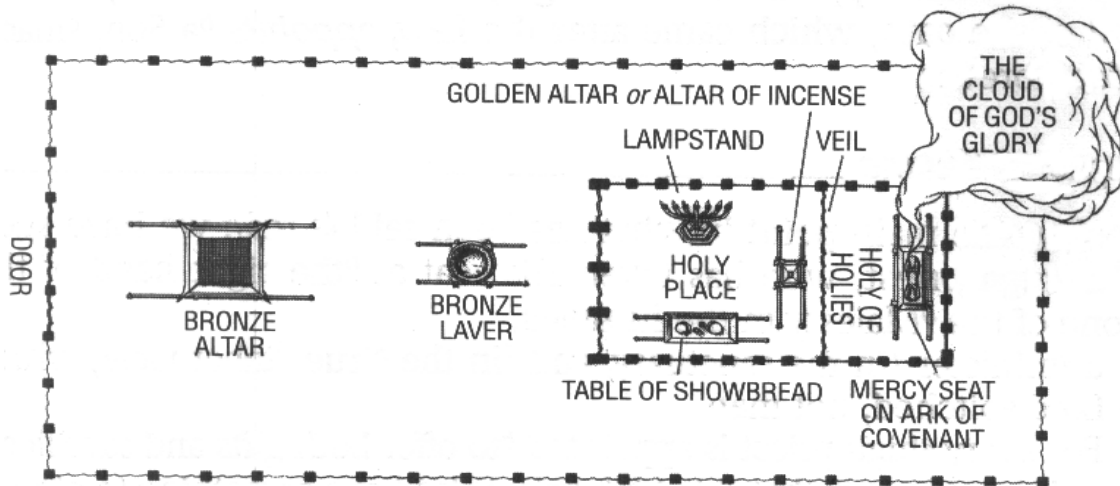
As a backdrop against which to speak about Messiah Jesus' sacrifice, the author first reminds his readers about the earthly tabernacle of the Old Covenant.

1. Old Covenant: regulations of worship and an earthly sanctuary (9:1)

The author mentions that the cultic system of the Old Covenant had two primary components: (1) regulations of divine worship and (2) an earthly sanctuary. The latter is briefly described in 9:2-5, and the former in 9:6-7.

2. A Brief Description of the Earthly Sanctuary (9:2-5)

The author mentions that the tabernacle had two rooms, the outer one called the Holy Place (Ἅγια) and the inner one called the Holy of Holies (Ἅγια Ἁγίων).



Verse four presents a problem, in that it suggests the "golden altar of incense" was in the Holy of Holies. But the "altar of incense" was clearly in the Holy Place, because on the Day of Atonement the high priest would take coals from the altar of incense and "bring it inside the veil" (Lev 16:12-13). Various solutions have been proposed to alleviate the difficulty. Take notice that the Greek expression for this is χρυσοῦν θυμιατήριον. Proposed solutions include:

- a. Montefiore: "In any case our author does not actually commit himself to the view that the altar of incense is situated in the sanctuary: he merely says that it belonged to the sanctuary" (commentary, 145).
- b. Hewitt: "On the great day of atonement the veil or curtain would be drawn, then 'the altar of incense' would in fact be before the mercy seat" (141).
- c. Luther - there was a second altar of incense in the Holy of Holies.
- d. Moffatt - the author, being a non-Palestinian, was misinformed (i.e., he erred).
- e. P. E. Hughes - the author was recognizing a special doctrinal association between the altar of incense and the Holy of Holies, in which the former symbolizes the prayers of God's people and the latter the heavenly sanctuary. [Thus, the author is intent on imparting a "distinctive Christian understanding."]

Hodges has pointed out (class notes) that in light of Rev 8:3, the θυμιατήριον may have symbolized prayer to the writer, an activity he thinks of as going on "within the veil."

- f. The text should not be translated "altar" but "censer"

Although the altar of incense was located in the outer room, there was a censer (with burning coals and incense) that was brought into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.

In Heb 9:4, the term θυμιατήριον is used, but in the LXX this term is never used of the altar of incense. Rather, the LXX uses the expression θυσιαστηριον τοῦ θυμιαματος for "altar of incense" (Ex 30:27; 2 Macc 2:5).¹ Furthermore, the term θυμιατήριον is used in the LXX, but it is clearly used for a censer (2 Chron 26:19; Ezek 8:10). In Colin Brown's *NIDNTT*, the point is made that "thymiatērion in the LXX always means censer" (II:293). In 2 Chron 26:19, both terms are used in the same sentence, θυσιαστηριον for the altar and θυμιατήριον for the censer (the latter is obvious since the man had it in his hand).

Elsewhere in the NT, we find a clear-cut reference to the altar of incense in Luke 1:11, but the Greek has τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τοῦ θυμιάματος, not θυμιατήριον as in Heb 9:4.

It seems, therefore, that Heb 9:4 is referring to the censer rather than the altar of incense. Objections have been made, however, to this suggestion. Why would the author leave out the larger item of the altar, and mention the smaller "censer"? In response, I might point out that the mention of the censer is quite logical in this context, since Heb 9 stresses the Day of Atonement, and the censer was a vital utensil to this ceremony. As only the High Priest could bring the golden censer into God's presence in the Holy of Holies (on the Day of Atonement), so only Christ by His atonement can bring our worship into the very presence of God.

3. The Ministry (divine regulations) of the Earthly Tabernacle (9:6-7)

Since the author is going to show the parallels between the work of Christ and what the earthly high priest did on the Day of Atonement, he calls our attention in these two verses to the fact that the Holy of Holies was restricted to the high priest himself. In fact, even he could only enter this special room once a year. When he did, he also brought sacrifices for his own sins.

4. The Significance of the "Restrictions" on the Day of Atonement (9:8-10)

⁸"The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, ⁹which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the

¹ Lane, however, points out that the term θυμιατήριον was used by others (e.g., Philo) for the altar of incense (2:215), even though the LXX did not do so.

worshiper perfect in conscience, ¹⁰since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation."

Two items need clarification in these verses. First, when the author says "the holy place," he does not mean the earthly Holy Place. The Greek expression in 9:8 is τὴν τῶν ἁγίων ὄδον, whereas the expression for the Holy Place (outer room) was Ἅγια (9:2). The genitive plural τῶν ἁγίων reflects the name for the Holy of Holies (i.e., Ἅγια Ἁγίων). However, the author is thinking of the heavenly Holy Place, i.e., the true Holy of Holies. This is confirmed by his use of τῶν ἁγίων in Heb 10:19, where the author is clearly thinking of the heavenly holy place.

The second item needing clarification is the expression "outer tabernacle." The Greek is τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς, which literally means "the first tabernacle." **Although this expression was used in 9:2 and 9:6 for the outer room of the earthly tabernacle in distinction from the inner room (the Holy of Holies), here in 9:8 the author is referring to the *earthly tabernacle* in general in contrast to the heavenly reality, i.e., the entire tabernacle of the Old Covenant (not merely the first room of it). [Thus in 9:8 the expression πρώτης σκηνῆς should be understood as a figure of speech known as a synecdoche, whereby a part is put for the whole].**

Under the Old Covenant, the "restrictiveness" of the Holy of Holies is meant to signify a point (vs 8), namely this: by the inaccessibility of the Holiest of all, the way to God is still waiting to be revealed. This is what the Holy Spirit was teaching during the period when the Old Covenant was operational. In contrast, the author is going to point out (in 10:19-20) that the way is plainly open and accessible, now that the New Covenant has replaced the Old.

The bottom line on the earthly tabernacle is this: the very arrangement and procedures of the earthly tabernacle showed their own inadequacy. The author calls this a "symbol" (παραβολή) for the present time, i.e., it has a parabolic message.²

Furthermore, the author points out a great deficiency in the Old Covenant system when he says, "Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience." The *NIV* has: "were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper."

The **issue** here is not on God's ability to forgive, but upon the worshiper's need for a cleansed conscience. The Old Covenant system could not achieve a decisive purgation of the worshiper with respect to his conscience. Lane (2:224) states,

²The phrase "present time" could be understood in reference to the Old Covenant, during *that* present time. The *KJV* implies this: "which *was* a figure for the time then present." The *NIV* on the other hand translates "This is an illustration for the present time," meaning *now*, even during the time of the New Covenant.

"The writer now specifies that this relationship cannot be perfected until the conscience is cleansed decisively from the defilement of sin. Defilement extends to the conscience as well as to the body and is inimical to the approach to the living God. 'Perfection in this case involves purgation. The fact that the most solemn ceremonies of the preceding covenant, those of the Day of Atonement, had to be repeated annually (9:7,25; 10:1-3) underscores the inability of the old cultus to effect a permanent purgation."

The point is that no one could have confidence that the blood of animals had adequately dealt with his sins (especially since the ceremony was repeated year after year). But as 9:14 will inform us, the conscience must be cleansed in order that one may serve God effectively.

B. The Better Accomplishment of Christ in the Heavenly Tabernacle (9:11-15)

Verse 15 is a pivot verse, and most commentators are apt to include it with the next section (16-22). There is some rationale for keeping it with 9:11-14, for it completes the contrast with the earthly tabernacle highlighted in 9:1-10. The author is going to point out in 9:11-15 the two primary contributions of the atoning work of Christ.

1. The Provision of Eternal Redemption (9:11-12)

What Christ has done is far superior to the priestly ministry of the Old Covenant. The superiority is shown in that:

- a. Christ has gone, not into an earthly tabernacle, but into the perfect tabernacle of heaven (the actual presence of God).
- b. Christ has brought His own blood (based on a sinless life), not that of animals.
- c. Christ has done this once for all (not yearly as with the Day of Atonement)

Hence, He has provided ETERNAL REDEMPTION.

Note: The word "redemption" (Gk λύτρωσις) has the idea of releasing from bondage or obligation by virtue of a payment. For example, this term was used to refer to the ransom money paid for the release of prisoners of war.

2. The Provision for a Cleansed Conscience to Serve the Living God (9:13-15)

v 13 - alludes back to v 10

v 14 - alludes back to v 9

Because Christ has provided eternal redemption, those of the New Covenant benefit also by a cleansed conscience. The author writes that Christ's blood will "cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve (λατρεύειν) the living God."³

³ There is some confusion about what the author means by "cleanse your conscience from dead works (νεκρῶν ἔργων)." The *NIV* translates, "cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death." Repentance from

Hence, there is a relationship between our "service" to God and our having a cleansed conscience. In some way, the New Covenant gives us a much greater advantage for serving God. But the word for *servicing* (λατρεύειν) suggests that this is not just mundane service. λατρεύω has overtones of worship and priestly service. In classical Greek, the term originally had the idea of working for wages and later came to mean honoring the gods through worship of them. In the NT, λατρεύω is always used of service in a religious sense (including worship of strange gods - Rom 2:25; Acts 7:42). In the LXX, however, the term was closely linked with the cultus and worship. K. Hess concludes,

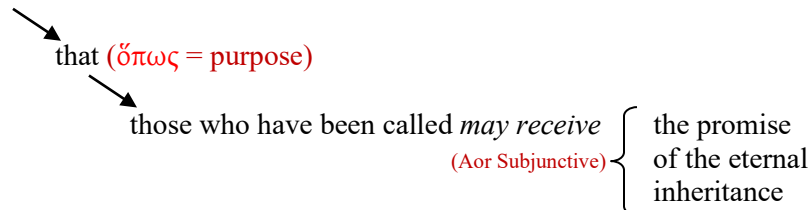
"Hence, in the LXX *latreuō* is very close to *leitourgeō* in meaning, but the latter is used exclusively for the service of the priests, while the former means the service of God by the whole people and by the individual, both outwardly in the cultus and inwardly in the heart."⁴

The choice of this word to describe "service" would suggest to the reader the responsibility for priestly service, and hence draws our attention back to ch 3 where the author was concerned that the readers be part of the worshipping community as the "Son's house." This is our *priestly service*.

Heb 9:15

The thought of priestly service once again reminds us of the need for faithfulness in this Christian pilgrimage, so that we might enter into God's REST and share in Christ's **dominion**. Not surprisingly, the author mentions "the promise of the eternal inheritance" in 9:15. To appreciate the verse, we need to understand the primary clauses and their relationship to one another. The word ὅπως plus the subjunctive verb λάβωσιν indicates a purpose clause.

He is the mediator of a New Covenant



This is not a blanket promise that all who partake of the New Covenant will inherit the promise. The purpose of His mediating a New Covenant by His death and the redemption of our transgressions is that we might be able to receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

"dead works" was mentioned in Heb 6:1. Lane seems to accept the *NIV*'s understanding of this phrase, but Hodges (802) and Ellingworth (458) offer alternative explanations.

⁴K. Hess, *NIDNTT*, ed. Colin Brown, III:550. Recall Heb 8:2 which used λειτουργός to describe Christ as a "priestly minister" in the heavenly Holy Place.

Along with the "eternal redemption" that all believers receive, there is an "eternal inheritance." The text does not say that all will automatically receive this, but the purpose of His perfect redemption is to make this possible for us. That the author is thinking in *conditional terms* seems likely:

- a. He had just mentioned "servicing the living God" in vs 14 (which looks at our priestly service now enhanced by a cleansed conscience). The idea of the tabernacle-house (suggesting priestly service) was expressed in ch 3:6 as a conditional matter.
- b. The word group related to κληρονομίας is used 8x in Hebrews (1:2,14; 6:12,17; 9:15; 11:7,8; and 12:17), which has suggested that inheritance is a conditional matter related to faithfulness. This is highlighted in 6:12 when the author tells his audience: "that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Faith and patience are prerequisites for inheriting.

Notice the relationship of the redemption to the inheritance:

ETERNAL → CLEANSED → PRIESTLY → ETERNAL
REDEMPTION CONSCIENCE SERVICE INHERITANCE

The point is that Christ has cleared the slate of our transgressions (and for Old Covenant saints as well), which puts us in position to receive the eternal inheritance (providing we have faith, we endure, and faithfully render our *priestly service*).

C. The Role of Blood To Inaugurate the Old Covenant (9:16-22)

1. The Role Death Plays in Inaugurating a New Arrangement (9:16-17)

The author prefaces what he will teach about the inauguration of the Old Covenant with a brief comment about the role death plays in covenant making. The Greek word he uses for "covenant" (*diathēkē*) can mean either a biblical covenant or a last will and testament, and scholars debate which of the two is in view here.⁵ Whether the author intends a human will or a divine covenant, the point remains the same. A death is necessary to activate it. [If a biblical covenant is in view, the death would be that of an animal as a substitute for the one ratifying the covenant].

A human will and a divine covenant (though two different things) have something in common: they determine an arrangement:

human will → a death activates it
divine covenant → a death sets it in motion

⁵ Moffatt (127) notes, "In ὅπου γάρ (*sc.* ἐστὶ) διαθήκη κτλ. he uses διαθήκη as equivalent to 'will' or testamentary disposition, playing effectively upon the double sense of the term, as Paul had already done in Gal. 3^{15f.} The point of the illustration depends upon this."

The following verses (18-22) will show this in regard to the Old Covenant

2. The Old Covenant Inaugurated by Blood (9:18-22)

In these verses, the author recalls that the Old Covenant was inaugurated by a ceremony involving animal blood. This is recorded in Ex 24:1-8. At that time, all the people were sprinkled with blood. This ceremony foreshadowed the blood of Christ inaugurating the New Covenant.

D. The Role of Blood To Inaugurate the New Covenant Presented in the Heavenly Tabernacle (9:23-28)

Just as blood inaugurated the Old Covenant, so blood inaugurates the New Covenant. However, this is a far superior accomplishment since:

1. it is in heaven (vs 24) - appearing in God's presence
2. it involves the sacrifice of Christ Himself (25a)
3. it is offered once, not yearly (25b-26)

Note how this parallels 9:11-12!! The last verses (9:27-28) then parallel 9:13-15.

Whereas the First Coming was to bear sins, the Second Coming of Christ will bring "salvation." This *salvation* needs to be seen in light of the context of Hebrews, an eschatological salvation wherein the faithful can enter God's rest and share in the dominion over creation with Christ. Lane (II:251) concurs,

"For those who are the heirs of salvation (1:14; cf. 2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9), it will mean full enjoyment of their inheritance. The parousia is thus the key event in the realization of salvation."

"Those who eagerly await Him" can look forward to this salvation. What does it mean to eagerly await Him? In Hebrews, this means (1) not abandoning one's confession; (2) holding fast; (3) faith and patient endurance; and (4) remaining a part of the worshiping community as loyal believer priests.

Lane (II:250-51) points out that the "reappearing" of Christ is cast against the background of the High Priest "reemerging" after his ministry on the Day of Atonement:

"The people waited anxiously outside the sanctuary until the high priest emerged from the Most Holy Place after he had fulfilled his office (cf. Lev 16:17). His reappearance provided assurance that the offering he had made had been accepted by God."

The reemergence of the high priest was met by joy of the worshipers.