

# ***“The New & Better Gets Better & Better”***

Hebrews 9:1-28

November 25, 2018

**INTRO:**      **VIDEO:** *“When Death Was Arrested”*

## **CONTEXT:**

- Book of Hebrews... ***“Hold On!”***
- 5 Warnings... *(Drift, Disconnect, Dily-Daley, Disobey, Deny)*
- Melchizedek... the king-priest
- Old vs. New Covenant... **focus of 8:1 – 10:18**

**BIG IDEA:**    *To understand Christ, Christianity, & what it means to “BE the Church” through the New Covenant’s costly truth-in-love, is to be a faithfully-obedient follower of the One & Only, crucified & resurrected, living-LORD & life-giving Savior, King Jesus – no matter what!*

## **PREVIEW:**

- **The BUILDING...** becomes the Body
- **The BLOOD...** becomes Beautiful
- **The BATTLE...** becomes a battle for Believers

**T/S:**      *The depth of the mystery of the sacrifice of Christ, we cannot dive into, the height we cannot comprehend. We cannot search out the greatness of it, or the wisdom, the love, or the grace that is in it. BUT in considering the sacrifice of Christ, faith finds life, food, and refreshment.*      - **Matthew Henry**

T/S: *The author is determined throughout Hebrews to show how Jesus's work in the heavenly temple is fundamentally superior to the work done by priests in the earthly tabernacle. His spiritual work is of far greater value than the work accomplished in the earthly tabernacle because it fully and finally satisfies God's wrath. - Mohler*

## I. The BUILDING (v.1-10)

- vv.1-5 = Better... Promise - Place - Presence
- vv.6-10 = Better Preparations – Performance - Perfections

*Only two chapters in the Bible are devoted to the creation story, whereas some fifty chapters focus on the Tabernacle... a giant portrait of Jesus Christ.*

### Hebrews 9:1-5

*<sup>1</sup> Now/BUT even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. **(Promise, Place, Presence...)***

## A. *Better Preparations, Performance, Perfections*

### **Hebrews 9:6-10**

<sup>6</sup> *These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties,*  
<sup>7</sup> *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.* <sup>8</sup> *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 standing* <sup>9</sup> *(which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,* <sup>10</sup> *but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.* (Preparations, Performance, Perfections)

*Under the new covenant, we no longer need to make the distinction between the holy place and the most holy place. When Christ cried, “It is finished,” and the veil separating the most holy place & the holy place tore from top to bottom, God was announcing to the world that people could indeed come into his presence through faith in the finished & final work of Jesus Christ. We don’t need a high priest to meet with God now. C.C.E.*

## II. **The BLOOD**

(v.11-22)

- vv.11-15 = Better... Power – Purification - Priest
- vv.16-22 = Better... Process & People

## **Hebrews 9:11-15**

<sup>11</sup> *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. <sup>15</sup> Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. (Power, Purification, & Priest)*

v.15 = *Mediator is a dangerous word for many of us because we think we know what it means. We assume that a mediator is someone who gets two opposing sides together and tries to effect a compromise or an agreement between them... But there is no common ground between a holy God and sinful humanity. Therefore, Christ, as mediator, doesn't find a compromise... because God's holiness cannot be compromised. Far from suggesting a compromise between two opposing positions, Christ agrees with the Father that we deserve the infinite outpouring of his wrath. He agrees with the Father about the ugliness of our sin. He agrees with the Father about the necessity of a sacrifice. And as our mediator, he agrees to be that sacrifice!*

## VIDEO: "In Christ"

### A. Better Process & People

#### Hebrews 9:16-22

<sup>16</sup> For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. <sup>17</sup> For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. <sup>18</sup> Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. <sup>19</sup> For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, **he took the blood of calves and goats**, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, **and sprinkled** both the book itself and **all the people**, <sup>20</sup> saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." <sup>21</sup> And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. <sup>22</sup> Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, **and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**

*The church today is often impoverished by truncated, reductionistic articulations of the gospel. We often talk about how someone can come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved from their sins, but we often have no idea what took place in order for that promise to be true. Hebrews demonstrates that it is the Father's will that his people understand not only what Christ has done for us **but how he did it**. The reason is because... **how Christ achieves our redemption more fully demonstrates the glory of God.** We can't honor, appreciate, and worship God for what he has done for us unless we understand what it cost (Him) to achieve **our** salvation. – C.C.E.*

**Verses 16-22 begin to unveil how Christ achieved our redemption.**

*It is hard for us today to understand how bloody and messy the old sacrificial system was. But among other things, the great amount of blood was a continual reminder of the penalty of sin, **death...** When He sat with the disciples on that last night before His death, Jesus picked up the cup and said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). He was to ratify the New Covenant through His own blood, just as the Old Covenant was ratified by Moses with the blood of animals.*

**VIDEO:** "Jesus Paid It ALL"

*The Sacrificer was the Sacrifice...*

**III. The BATTLE** (v.23-28)

- vv.23-26 = Better.... Places & Permanence
- vv.27-28 = Bigger & Better...  
Penalty – Promise - Perseverance

*Beware of trusting anything for your spiritual life that is "made with hands" (Heb. 9:24). It will not last. - **Wiersbe***

### **Hebrews 9:23-26**

*<sup>23</sup> Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. <sup>24</sup> For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. <sup>25</sup> Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, <sup>26</sup> for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

*Beware of trusting anything for your spiritual life that is "made with hands" (Heb. 9:24). It will not last. - Wiersbe*

### **A. Bigger & Better Penalty, Promise, Perseverance**

### **Hebrews 9:27-28**

*<sup>27</sup> And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

**VIDEO: "Astonishing Triumph"**

**The message found in verse 28 is that life comes after death for those who trust in Jesus until the end. (Acts 2:22-24).**

*Jesus is the only one who satisfies the Father, and therefore no one comes to Him except through Jesus... We are totally unpresentable as we are... When Jesus presents us to His Father, He presents us in Himself, as He is. When we enter into God's presence, God sees Jesus instead of us. He sees Jesus' righteousness instead of our unrighteousness. He sees Jesus' sacrifice instead of our sin, His payment for our sin instead of the penalty we deserve for our sin.*

## **SUMMARY:**

### **A. The BUILDING... is now the *BODY!***

*“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14, emphasis added). The epicenter of new covenant worship is not in a place, it’s in a person: Jesus Christ.*

### **B. The BLOOD... is now the *BEAUTY!***

**Forgiveness** is a costly, costly thing.

### **C. The BATTLE... is now for *BELIEVERS!***

*Practical man says, "Seeing is believing!" But the man of faith replies, "Believing is seeing!" - W.Wiersbe*

**CLOSE:** *See this promise & power throughout the Bible...*

- 2 Corinthians 3...
- 2 Corinthians 4...
- 2 Corinthians 5...

*God does not forgive sin by looking down & saying, "It's all right. Since I love you so much, I'll overlook your sin." God's righteousness and holiness will not allow Him to overlook sin. Sin demands payment by death. The only death great enough to pay for all of mankind's sins is the death of His Son. God's great love for us will not lead Him to overlook our sin, but it has led Him to provide the payment for our sin, as [John 3:16](#) so beautifully reminds us.*

**God cannot ignore our sin; but He will forgive our sin if we trust in the death of His Son for that forgiveness.**

## Let's PRAY!

*At the end of that eventful Passover week when Jesus was finishing His ministry, the Romans had prepared three crosses for three criminals. On two of the crosses, thieves were to hang. The third cross was for an insurrectionist named Barabbas, who had been found guilty of treason against the empire. But Barabbas never made it to the cross. He was guilty and condemned, but he was not executed—because someone took his place. On the middle cross that day hung not a violent, profane rebel, but the sinless Son of God. Barabbas went free not because he was innocent, but because Jesus took his place. Jesus was crucified not because He was guilty, but so that He could take Barabbas's place—and the place of every other sinner. - MacArthur*

**VIDEO: "Red Letters"**

# STUDY NOTES:

## Chapter 9

### *The Jewish Tabernacle and Its Utensils (9:1-5)*

The apostle shows to the Hebrews the typical reference of their ceremonies to Christ. The tabernacle was a movable temple, shadowing forth the unsettled state of the church upon earth, and the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. The typical meaning of these things has been shown in former remarks, and the ordinances and articles of the Mosaic covenant point out Christ as our Light, and as the Bread of life to our souls; and remind us of his Divine Person, his holy priesthood, perfect righteousness, and all-prevailing intercession. Thus was the Lord Jesus Christ, all and in all, from the beginning. And as interpreted by the gospel, these things are a glorious representation of the wisdom of God, and confirm faith in Him who was prefigured by them.

### *Their Use and Meaning (9:6-10)*

The apostle goes on to speak of the Old Testament services. Christ, having undertaken to be our High Priest, could not enter into heaven till he had shed his blood for us; and none of us can enter, either into God's gracious presence here, or his glorious presence hereafter, but by the blood of Jesus. Sins are errors, great errors, both in judgment and practice; and who can understand all his errors? They leave guilt upon the conscience, not to be washed away but by the blood of Christ. We must plead this blood on earth, while he is pleading it for us in heaven.

**A few believers, under the Divine teaching, saw something of the way of access to God, of communion with him, and of admission into heaven through the promised Redeemer, but the Israelites in general looked no further than the outward forms. These could not take away the defilement or dominion of sin. They could neither discharge the debts, nor resolve the doubts, of him who did the service. Gospel times are, and should be, times of reformation, of clearer light as to all things needful to be known, and of greater love, causing us to bear ill-will to none, but good-will to all. We have greater freedom, both of spirit and speech, in the gospel, and greater obligations to a more holy living.**

*These Fulfilled in Christ: Part 1 ([9:11-14](#))*

All good things past, present, and to come, were and are founded upon the priestly office of Christ, and come to us from thence. Our High Priest entered into heaven once for all, and has obtained eternal redemption. The Holy Ghost further signified and showed that the Old Testament sacrifices only freed the outward man from ceremonial uncleanness, and fitted him for some outward privileges. What gave such power to the blood of Christ? It was Christ's offering himself without any sinful stain in his nature or life. This cleanses the most guilty conscience from dead, or deadly, works to serve the living God; from sinful works, such as pollute the soul, as dead bodies did the persons of the Jews who touched them; while **the grace that seals pardon, new-creates the polluted soul.** Nothing more destroys the faith of the gospel, than by any means to weaken the direct power of the blood of Christ. **The depth of the mystery of the sacrifice of Christ, we cannot dive into, the height we cannot comprehend. We cannot search out the greatness of it, or the wisdom, the love, or the grace that is in it. But in considering the sacrifice of Christ, faith finds life, food, and refreshment.**

*These Fulfilled in Christ: Part 2 ([9:15-22](#))*

The solemn transactions between God and man, are sometimes called a covenant, here a testament, which is a willing deed of a person, bestowing legacies on such persons as are described, and it only takes effect upon his death. Thus Christ died, not only to obtain the blessings of salvation for us, but to give power to the disposal of them. **All, by sin, were become guilty before God, had forfeited every thing that is good; but God, willing to show the greatness of his mercy, proclaimed a covenant of grace.** Nothing could be clean to a sinner, not even his religious duties; except as his guilt was done away by the death of a sacrifice, of value sufficient for that end, and unless he continually depended upon it. May we ascribe all real good works to the same all-procuring cause, and offer our spiritual sacrifices as sprinkled with Christ's blood, and so purified from their defilement.

*The Necessity, Superior Dignity, and Power of His Priesthood and Sacrifice ([9:23-28](#))*

**It is evident that the sacrifices of Christ are infinitely better than those of the law, which could neither procure pardon for sin, nor impart power against it. Sin would still have been upon us, and have had dominion over us; but Jesus**

**Christ, by one sacrifice, has destroyed the works of the devil, that believers may be made righteous, holy, and happy.** As no wisdom, learning, virtue, wealth, or power, can keep one of the human race from death, so nothing can deliver a sinner from being condemned at the day of judgment, except the atoning sacrifice of Christ; nor will one be saved from eternal punishment who despises or neglects this great salvation. **The believer knows that his Redeemer liveth, and that he shall see him. Here is the faith and patience of the church, of all sincere believers.** Hence is their continual prayer as the fruit and expression of their faith, Even so come, Lord Jesus.

Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary.

## The Tabernacle and the New Covenant

### Hebrews 9:1-10

**Main Idea: The old covenant laid the foundation for the new covenant inaugurated by the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

The external acts of worship in the tabernacle foreshadowed the day Christ would purify the consciences of his people and dwell among them.

- I. **The New Covenant Worship of God Foreshadowed (9:1-5)**
  - A. Old regulations for worship
  - B. The tabernacle
- II. **The End of Mediated Access to God (9:6-10)**
  - A. The ministry of the priests
  - B. What the Holy Spirit was indicating
  - C. Imperfect offerings

**The author is determined throughout Hebrews to show how Jesus's work in the heavenly temple is fundamentally superior to the work done by priests in**

**the earthly tabernacle. His spiritual work is of far greater value than the work accomplished in the earthly tabernacle because it fully and finally satisfies God's wrath. In order to continue drawing out this contrast, the author turns his attention to the regulations for worship and for the earthly tabernacle. The imperfections of the earthly tabernacle and our tendency to trust things we can see and touch set the stage for [Hebrews 9:1-10](#).**

*The tabernacle stood as the epicenter of old covenant worship. This is why the author refers to it with the phrase "earthly sanctuary." The tabernacle was the place where Israel offered sacrifices and where the priests interceded on behalf of the people. Because the tabernacle was so central to the old covenant, Israel was intensely focused on what happened inside it. The new covenant, however, shifts our focus away from the tabernacle. Under the new covenant, a central location of worship required by God no longer exists. Since the Spirit unites us to Christ by faith, Christians now worship the Father "in Spirit and in truth," not in a tabernacle ([John 4:24](#)). Furthermore, Christ now dwells in the midst of his people ([Matt 18:20](#)).*

*John even describes Christ's incarnation in language similar to that applied to the tabernacle: "["The Word became flesh and dwelt among us"](#) ([John 1:14](#), emphasis added). The epicenter of new covenant worship is not in a place, it's in a person: [Jesus Christ](#).*

**What does the author mean by “the sins the people had committed in ignorance”? Christians tend to think of sin in two categories. First, we think of sin as deliberately wrong acts. We call these “sins of commission.” The Bible certainly teaches that disobedient acts—doing what we ought not to do—are sinful. Second, we think of sin as failing to do what we ought to do. We call these “sins of omission.” Failure to do what God commands us to do is no less sinful than doing what he has commanded us not to do.... Yet the author identifies a third category of sin Christians often miss: sins committed in ignorance or unintentionally. Unintentional sins are those we commit without realizing we are committing them. Due to the pervasive and insidious effects of sin on our entire beings, we can’t even recognize the times we’re unaware we’re sinning. It’s these unintentional sins of the people that precipitated the high priest’s ministry and made it necessary for him to offer a blood sacrifice.**

*As long as there was a curtain between the holy place and the most holy place, the people were not fully in the presence of God. They could not draw near to God with confidence. Thus, the veil between the most holy place and the holy place indicated incompleteness and an inability to approach God.... Under the new covenant, we no longer need to make the distinction between the holy place and the most holy place. When Christ cried, “It is finished,” and the veil separating the most holy place and the holy place tore from top to bottom, God was announcing to the world that people could indeed come into his presence through faith in the finished and final work of Jesus Christ. We don’t need a high priest to meet with God now. We now have direct access to his throne room through Christ.*

Imperfect Offerings

***The gifts and sacrifices that were offered to the Lord mattered. They were necessary for holding back the wrath of God. We learn from [verse 9](#), though, that they could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper. They could not plumb his depths and change his heart.***

# The Superiority of Redemption in Christ

## [Hebrews 9:11-22](#)

**Main Idea:** The blood of Christ, our great high priest, is superior to the animal sacrifices of the old covenant since his blood accomplishes a once-for-all-time redemption, secures an eternal inheritance for us, cleanses our consciences, and makes him the mediator of a new and better covenant.

- I. **The Superiority of Christ to the Levitical Priests** ([9:11-12](#))
- II. **The Superiority of Christ to the Levitical Sacrifices** ([9:13-14](#))
- III. **The Superiority of Christ as Mediator of the New Covenant** ([9:15](#))
- IV. **The Better Blood of the New Covenant** ([9:16-22](#))

Writing a short summary is one of the most effective ways to remember what I have read and to increase my comprehension. Given that we tend to forget more than we remember, we desperately need summaries.... This is one reason why Scripture employs so many summaries. Paul does this quite often. In [Romans 3:9-20](#); [5:1](#); [8:1](#); and [12:1](#) we see Paul concisely summarizing previous arguments. This is similar to the way in which the sermons of Moses in Deuteronomy summarize large portions of the Pentateuch. Likewise, we might say that [Hebrews 9–10](#) functions as a summary of all that has gone before. Thus, it is imperative that we understand [Hebrews 9:11-22](#) within the context of what the author has already said in his letter.

The beginning word *but* is very important. [Hebrews 9:1-10](#) discusses the old covenant and the Levitical priesthood, which were characterized by the temple and its regular practice of sacrifices that were unable to “perfect the worshiper’s conscience” ([v. 9](#)). “But” Christ’s priestly work starkly contrasts with these Levitical practices, since his priesthood actually accomplishes the salvation to which the old covenant could only point.

Christ secured an eternal redemption for us and demonstrated the sufficiency of his atonement for those who obey him. This eternal security and sufficiency grounds our confidence in Christ and the author’s exhortation to endure. Once we are redeemed, we cannot be lost. Jesus’s atonement was once for all time, accepted unconditionally by the Father, and presented in the heavenly sanctuary. Certainly we can see now how these verses so succinctly and spectacularly summarize the mission of Christ.

*Anyone under the old covenant who recognized the pervasiveness of his sin would know he would need another sacrifice as soon as the Day of Atonement was over. This is why they repeated the Day of Atonement every year. These are “dead works” because they amount to nothing, just as many of us through our own efforts have tried to earn God’s favor through “dead” moral and religious works. But Christ’s atonement fully cleanses our consciences such that we now no longer have the weight of our sin condemning us before God. Christ’s work on the cross fully removes our guilt, thereby rendering our consciences clean.*

*Hebrews remarkably captures the balance of the Christian life. Redeemed people serve God and find fulfillment and joy in doing the very things that we did out of obligation and frantic determination to try to justify ourselves before Christ came. The completed work of Christ rescues us from this foolish attempt and saves us from dead works.*

Hebrews 9:15

Because Christ is the high priest who has secured our redemption through offering himself, the author of Hebrews says Jesus is “the mediator of a new covenant.” Mediator is a dangerous word for many of us because we think we know what it means. We assume that a mediator is someone who gets two opposing sides together and tries to effect a compromise or an agreement between them. For example, if you have conflict in the Middle East, you’ll bring in diplomats and mediators to try and effect some kind of compromise—an arbitration in which two parties try to find some common ground by means of a mediator.

But there is no common ground between a holy God and sinful humanity. Therefore, Christ, as mediator, doesn’t find a compromise between the two because God’s holiness cannot be compromised. Far from suggesting a compromise between two opposing positions, Christ agrees with the Father that we deserve the infinite outpouring of his wrath. He agrees with the Father about the ugliness of our sin. He agrees with the Father about the necessity of a sacrifice. And as our mediator, he agrees to be that sacrifice

**(\*\*\* Great INTRO QUOTE for the sermon \*\*\*)**

*The church today is often impoverished by truncated, reductionistic articulations of the gospel. We often talk about how someone can come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved from their sins, but we often have no idea what took place in order for that promise to be true. Hebrews demonstrates that it is the Father's will that his people understand not only what Christ has done for us but how he did it. The reason is because... how Christ achieves our redemption more fully demonstrates the glory of God. We can't honor, appreciate, and worship God for what he has done for us unless we understand what it cost (Him) to achieve our salvation.*

**Verses 16-22 begin to unveil how Christ achieved our redemption.**

The author explains that the covenant is like a last will and testament. Just as a last will and testament bequeaths gifts to others after the death of the testator, so also the death of Christ results in the giving of gifts to members of the new covenant community. The account of the inauguration of the first covenant in [verse 18](#) draws the reader back to [Exodus 24:4-8](#). In this covenant-initiation ceremony the sprinkling of the people with the blood of animals signified that the punishment for covenant disobedience was death. However, the deaths of these animals also signified that God provided a substitute to stand in the place of covenant breakers. Covenant breakers could only be forgiven by the shedding of blood. Moreover, the shedding of blood was the inauguration sign of the covenants. **The shedding of blood—that is, the death of a substitute—inaugurated both the old and the new covenant.** This is what the author means in [Hebrews 9:18](#). Thus, the shedding of blood represented the beginning of a covenant and the forgiveness of sins. **This is the theological heart of [verse 22](#).** Just as the first covenant was inaugurated with the death of animals and the purification of the tabernacle by their blood, so Christ has inaugurated a new covenant with his blood and has thereby accomplished the forgiveness of sins.

Why blood atonement? In the Old Testament, God tells his people, *“The life . . . is in the blood”* ([Lev 17:11](#)). The Israelites would remember this every time they cut the throat of an ox or a lamb in sacrifice....

So if we think theologically about the sacrificial system, we can see the connection between blood, death, covenant, and atonement. The act of sin brings about the covenantal consequence of death. The demand for the transgressor’s death is essentially the same thing as the demand for the transgressor’s blood. **The substitutionary animal sacrifices in the old covenant were vivid reminders that transgressors deserved death. Yet, through these substitutionary blood sacrifices, God made a way to atone for sin. Therefore, blood is symbolic in the sacrificial system under the old covenant because it demonstrates the costliness of sin. It graphically illustrates that with sin comes death.**

*When he shed his own blood, he became the mediator of a new and better covenant. By that blood, and that blood alone, all who are called and endure receive a redemption and inheritance that lasts forever.*

# The Sufficient and Final Sacrifice of Christ

## Hebrews 9:23-28

**Main Idea:** Christ's sacrificial death was sufficient to end the need to make continual offerings and to put away sin forever.

Salvation in him will ultimately culminate in blessing when he returns.

- I. **The Superlative Sacrifice of Christ (9:23-26)**
- II. **Judgment and the Second Coming (9:27-28)**
- A. Man's appointed death
- B. Christ's imminent return

Hebrews 9 teaches that Christ is the great high priest who secures an eternal redemption for his people by shedding his own blood. As a result, Jesus is the mediator of a new and better covenant. As we saw in Hebrews 9:22, almost everything under the law is purified with blood; and *without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.* This blood of ceremonial animals ultimately foreshadowed the blood Jesus shed on the cross when he was crucified. As we will see in the chapter's final verses, Jesus's blood also purified the heavenly places, put aside sin forever, and guarantees final salvation for those who endure in him.

Christ's death as a singular event is central to the Christian faith. This is the reality Hebrews 9:25-26 expounds. Christ does not need to be sacrificed daily, which is one of the reasons Christians stress his resurrection.

*It's important to fully understand what the author means by saying Christ appeared "one time." This calls*

*to mind the phrase “once for all time” that occurs three times in Hebrews ([7:27](#); [9:12](#); [10:10](#); cf. [Rom 6:10](#)). Once again, the author is reinforcing the sufficiency, singularity, and effectiveness of Christ’s sacrifice.*

Christ’s incarnation is an unprecedented moment in time. He has appeared in history—“at the end of the ages” (cf. [Heb 1:2](#))—once for all time to put away sin.

**...the idea of the Messiah removing sin by sacrificing himself was truly revolutionary in the first century. Christ’s radical self-sacrifice is the means by which sin is finally overcome.**

#### Judgment and the Second Coming

#### [Hebrews 9:27-28](#)

In the final two verses of this passage, *the author brings new material into the conversation: man’s appointed judgment and Christ’s second coming. As the text makes clear, Christ comes a second time not for the sake of addressing sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

*The reason for our appointment with death and judgment takes us back to the garden of Eden. ...He “appointed” their death in the event of their disobedience. And in their moment of rebellion, mortality entered the human experience... and his experience of death became part of our experience.*

*Life is lived one time, and then there is death and judgment... Man will die and then God will judge him. This directly relates to the work of Christ. He too was appointed to die once. He died one time, and his death need never be repeated... he will not come again to act as a sacrifice.*

*Death is not just some natural process in the world. It is part of the divine judgment on sin. Death is a verdict. It's this hope to which the author turns in [verse 28](#).*

#### Christ's Imminent Return

**The message found in [verse 28](#) is that life comes after death for those who trust in Jesus until the end. ([Acts 2:22-24](#)).**

*And as we consider the future with the knowledge that Christ is coming back, we must remember he's not coming back to repeat his sacrifice. He's not coming back to forgive sin; he's coming back to save those who are eagerly expecting him. This is great news! Christ is returning to rescue those he's saved and to claim his church solely for himself. For those who eagerly await Jesus, sweet salvation is coming.*

*"Waiting" points to the fact that believers should be longing for Christ's return... consciously and readily anticipating his second coming.... Even though earthly struggles and toils still pervade our lives, Christians can and must hold to the hope that we are eternally secure in Christ right now. Again, this is part of the already/not yet tension the author has been highlighting throughout the letter.*

*Our salvation is a past, present, and future salvation.... So as long as we are living, we are waiting. We must do so eagerly.*

- Christ-Centered Exposition – Exalting Jesus in Hebrews.

## New American Standard Commentary:

(2) Limitations of the First Covenant ([9:1-14](#))

In Hebrews 8 the author emphasized the discontinuity between the old and new covenants. In Hebrews 9 the author moves to show that there yet remains some continuity between the two covenants, albeit in a typological fashion.

The chapter contains two discourse sections: [9:1-14](#) and [9:15-28](#) with the following paragraphs: [9:1-5,6-10,11-14,15-22, vv. 23-28](#).

Lincoln suggested an overall chiastic structure for [9:1-28](#).

**Hebrews 9:1-5** is a paragraph unit describing the tabernacle and its contents. Verse 1 announces two topics: the earthly sanctuary ([9:2-5](#)), and regulations concerning the offering of sacrifices by the high priest ([9:6-10](#)).

*[Hebrews 9:1-5](#) is notorious for its divergence from the Hebrew Old Testament and its number of textual variants. Space prohibits an in-depth analysis of the intricacies of this issue, but several general statements can be made which will hopefully clarify matters for the interpreter. The*

*three primary issues are the textual variants within the text of Hebrews itself, the differences in Exodus of the account of the tabernacle in the Hebrew and LXX versions, and the question of whether and how much the author's dependence upon the LXX might explain the anomalies of the passage.*

**9:1** In [v. 1](#), *kai* is omitted by Lane and not translated by the NIV. Dods noted that the *kai* refers to both old and new covenants and emphasizes that the old covenant had such regulations concerning worship. *Oun* is translated "now" by both Bruce and Lane. It has resumptive force and may reach back to [8:5](#) or [8:7](#). *Men oun* can be balanced by the *de* in [vv. 6, 7, or 11](#). The use of the imperfect indicative of *eimi*, "had," may imply that the first covenant was no longer in effect at the time of the author's writing. The author's use of "regulation" implies the "rightness" which stands behind the regulation. The phrase "regulations for worship" may indicate that which was regulated, namely, worship, or may indicate regulations governing or related to worship. The author probably includes not only the worship having to do with the tabernacle, but also later in the temple as well. **The author's reference to the "sanctuary" indicates the entire tabernacle and not just the inner sanctuary. The sanctuary is "earthly," that is, it belongs to this world, in contrast with the new covenant and the new sanctuary in heaven. "Sanctuary" is emphatic by its position at the end of the sentence.**

**9:2** "Was set up" refers to the construction and furnishing of the tabernacle. The "first room" refers to the "Holy Place" in the tabernacle. "First" can be construed with the preceding words or with the following words. It is emphatic by word order. The author's meaning in using "first" indicates one would have to enter this room first before entering the holy of holies. This verse further explains [v. 1](#). The anarthrous use of the noun "tabernacle" has been explained in one of four ways: (1) the following use of "first" makes it definite; (2) Dods takes it as indefinite; (3) it is equivalent to a proper name and thus does not need the article; (4) the absence of the article implies the author is introducing new information and that "tabernacle" in [v. 2](#) "does not have the same meaning as in [verse 1](#)." Either option one or three is most likely.

**The translation "lampstand" is better than KJV's "candlestick," which is anachronistic. The "consecrated bread" is (lit.) in Greek "the presentation [set-ting-forth] of the loaves of bread."** This entire phrase can be taken to be the third item listed, following "lampstand" and "table." It can be construed as a hendiadys with "table," indicating that it was bread which was on the table. **The repetition of the article with "lampstand," "table," and "consecrated bread" probably indicates the uniqueness of these items and that they were well known to the readers.**

The "Holy Place" is the room in the tabernacle anterior to the holy of holies. *Hētis*, translated "this," is taken in a qualitative way by Dods, emphasizing the nature of the tabernacle. Ellingworth rightly viewed it as synonymous with the simple relative pronoun in its function here.

**9:3 The author continues his description in v. 3 with his reference to a curtain or veil separating the holy place from the "Most Holy Place." "Second" distinguishes this curtain from that which hung at the entrance to the outside court.** In [Exod 26:31-37](#), two different Hebrew words are used to describe the curtain separating the holy place from the holy of holies

and the curtain or screen which functioned as the door of the tabernacle. The mention of a "second" curtain implies the existence of a first curtain. The same terminology can be found in rabbinic literature, Philo and Josephus. **"Most Holy Place" can be translated as "the holy of holies" where the repetition of the noun is the Hebrew idiom for expressing the superlative.** The NIV does not translate the conjunction *de* at the beginning of this verse. Alford took *de* to be indicative of a contrast, but Ellingworth is probably correct in taking it as continuing the previous thought by introducing additional information.

**9:4 Hebrews 9:4** raises two key questions which must be addressed. The first question concerns the identification of the "golden altar of incense." The Greek word used by the author of Hebrews, *thumiatērion*, occurs twice in the LXX ([2 Chr 26:19](#); [Ezek 8:11](#)), and there refers not to the altar of incense but to a "censer," an instrument where incense was placed. However, as Bruce rightly explained, this fact alone is not decisive for meaning since the word also carried the general meaning of "incense altar" in both Philo and Josephus. Since the entire pericope of [Exod 25-40](#) does not mention a "censer," since there was only one "golden altar of incense" but there were many "censers" used by the priests, and since even if this "censer" referenced the one used by Aaron on the Day of Atonement it would not likely be stored in the holy of holies, it is best not to translate *thumiatērion* as "censer." The reference is better taken to be to the "altar of incense" made of gold.

The second difficult question in [Heb 9:4](#) which has plagued interpreters is the author's description of the location of the "golden altar of incense." Upon first reading, the writer appears to locate the altar of incense inside the holy of holies, contrary to [Exod 30:6](#). Several solutions to this supposed contradiction have been offered which are amply summarized by Ellingworth. (1) The author is not interested in detail and is speaking "imprecisely." Several possible reasons for this are presented by Ellingworth. (2) The participle *echousa*, "had," does not refer to location, but rather to use and thus should be given the translation "associated with it." The strength of this view is that the altar of incense was closely associated with the holy of holies by virtue of its location immediately in front of the veil and because on the Day of Atonement the high priest brought incense from that altar into the holy of holies. (3) The possibility that the reference is not to the altar of incense but to a "censer" has already been addressed above. Ellingworth takes the first option, noting that the author's concern was not the details of the location of the furniture but with the distinction between the holy place and the holy of holies. Gheorghita favors the view "that the placement of the altar is at least a partial result of reading the LXX passage regarding the incense altar." Whatever the case, two things are apparent: (1) [Exod 30:6](#) and [Lev 16:12,18](#) locate the altar of incense in the holy place in front of the curtain that separates the holy place from the holy of holies; and (2) the author is less concerned about the physical location of the altar and more concerned with its functional correlation to the holy of holies. There are simply no grounds to charge the author with an error on this point.

**The "ark of the covenant" is described** in the Greek text with a perfect tense participle "covered around," an adverb meaning "on (from) all sides" and the dative "with gold." Lane and the NIV both translate this Greek phrase as "gold-covered," a descriptive phrase that gets at the meaning, but as Greenlee noted, such an attributive rendering violates Greek grammar. **Inside the ark are said to be three items: the gold jar**

of manna, Aaron's staff that budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant (the Ten Commandments). The location of the jar of manna and the staff "in" the ark is problematic when compared to both the Hebrew and LXX texts of [Exod 16:33](#) and Num 17:25 [Eng. [17:10](#)]. In the Hebrew text, the same preposition *lipnã*<sup>a</sup>, "in front of or "before" is used to describe the location of the jar as before "the Lord" and the rod as in front of "the testimony." The question is whether the jar of manna and Aaron's rod were placed *inside* the ark or *in front of* the ark. The linguistic ambiguity of the preposition *lipnã*<sup>a</sup> in the Old Testament texts above can be interpreted either way. Bruce is quite clear: "It is not to be doubted that our author represents the jar of manna and the rod as having been inside the ark along with the tables of the law."

9:5 The reference in v. 5 to the "cherubim of the Glory" refers to the two golden images of cherubim, one at each end of the ark, which overshadowed the "atonement cover," otherwise known as the "mercy seat."

*On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would sprinkle blood on this cover over the ark. It was thus the place where sins were forgiven by God because of the atoning blood. Cherubim represent God's presence and the manifestation of God's glory.*

Although there is no article before "cherubim" or "glory," the NIV's insertion of the article likely is an attempt to define the glory as belonging to God. The participle "overshadowing" is in a predicate relationship to "cherubim," with the present tense signaling a continuing state: "the cherubim, overshadowing the mercy-seat."

The author concludes v. 5 with the observation that he does not have the time to go into further detail concerning these things. The meaning is something akin to "this is not the time to go into detail"

**about this." Semantically, this statement functions to highlight the following paragraph beginning with v. 6.**

Aquinas's treatment of [Heb 9:1-5](#) highlights the extent to which he was willing to go to allegorize the Scripture. He likens the first tabernacle as a "figure" of the Old Testament and the second tabernacle as a figure of the New Testament. He then suggests "in another way" that the first tabernacle is the present church and the second is heavenly glory. Christ is compared to the table of the presence, the 12 loaves to the doctrine of the 12 apostles, and the two cherubim of the ark of the covenant as the Old and New testaments "looking upon Christ." The reformers Luther and Calvin were at pains to correct such hermeneutical nonsense, though they occasionally fell into similar traps themselves.

**9:6 Verse 6 begins a new discourse paragraph that concludes with v. 10.**

**The paragraph is divided into two sub-paragraphs, each introduced by a genitive absolute at the beginning of vv. 6,8 in the Greek text.**

*The topic shifts from the rooms and furniture in the tabernacle to the daily activity of the priests in the holy place contrasted with that of the high priest who entered only once a year into the holy of holies.*

This shift is introduced by the phrase "when everything had been arranged like this," which is the rendering of the Greek "now these things thus furnished."

As do some other translations, including the KJV, the NIV translates the Greek present tense with a past tense "entered regularly." No conclusion as to whether the temple worship was operative or not can be adduced from the present tense here. **The "ministry" which the priests perform daily in the holy place includes attending to the lampstand and the altar of incense. The bread of the Presence on the table was replaced weekly and was a part of the regular priestly duties. The author uses a present tense participle to speak of the priests "carrying on" their ministry.**

**9:7 Verse 7 contrasts the daily and weekly ministry of the priests with the annual work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement as outlined in [Leviticus 16](#).** The NIV translates the Greek "second" with "inner" to designate the holy of holies as distinct from the holy place (the outer

room). **Only the high priest entered the holy of holies, and then he only entered "once a year."** There is no verb in this clause in the Greek text, so a verb parallel to "entered" in [v. 6](#) must be supplied. Commentators and translators are about evenly divided in supplying a present ("enters") or a past tense verb ("entered"). Hughes considers the use of the present tense here to indicate a pre-A.D. 70 date for the epistle. The use of the Greek double negative translated "never without" semantically expresses a strongly emphasized positive statement.

The high priest offers the sacrifice for himself first ([Lev 16:11](#)) and afterward for the people ([Lev 16:15](#)). It is stated that the high priest entered "never without blood." The UBS<sup>4</sup> and the NA27 Greek text both place a comma before this phrase, indicating the phrase modifies the verb "offered." Cortez suggested the phrase modifies the implied verb "entered" in [v. 7](#), which was overtly stated in [v. 6](#). By this construal, the meaning would be the high priest cannot enter the holy of holies "without blood." Both meanings are possible grammatically and both are true with respect to the Day of Atonement. The issue turns on whether one views the author's focus here as the offering or the entrance. **The author makes clear the necessity of "blood" in the sacrificial offering made by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Sin is, among other things, defilement that creates ritual impurity which must be cleansed by blood.**

The author includes the fact that the high priest offers the sacrifice for "the sins the people had committed in ignorance." The word used here means "unintentional, inadvertent sin," and is emphatic by its final position in the clause at the end of [v. 7](#). This, however, poses a problem in that the Day of Atonement ritual in [Leviticus 16](#) nowhere specifies the atoning work was only for such unintentional sins. In fact, the terminology in [Leviticus 16](#) emphatically states that the sacrifice that day is for all sins. **In [Leviticus 4](#), deliberate high handed sin is distinguished from inadvertent sin in the case of the high priest and the people.** Ellingworth concluded concerning this apparent contradiction that "the author is concentrating in the Day of Atonement, as the lesser counterpart of Christ's sacrifice, all his thinking about sin and forgiveness under the old covenant." While this is no doubt true, more may be involved here. Here the author is capitalizing on the Old Testament categorization of sins as "sins of ignorance" and "high-handed sin" (see [Num 15:22-31](#)). This is not the first time the author alluded to this categorization, since in [Heb 5:2](#) the author refers to the Jewish high priests as being able to bear gently "with those who are ignorant and going astray." Yet in [Lev 16:16](#), the Day of Atonement ritual makes atonement for all the sins of the people. Gordon posited that the author, in his desire to show the limitations of the Levitical sacrificial system, emphasized in [9:15](#) that the death of Jesus atones for deliberate sins as well. In this fashion, the author of Hebrews highlights the superiority of Christ's sacrifice to that of the old covenant's sacrificial system. This construal assumes, however, that "high-handed sins" were not atoned for on the Day of Atonement, an assumption that cannot be made with any certainty based on the Old Testament text.

**[9:8 Verse 8](#) is chock full of interpretive difficulties. Does the reference to the "Holy Place" refer to the earthly or heavenly sanctuary; and does it refer to the sanctuary as a whole, only the outer part, or only the inner part? Does the "first tabernacle" refer to the outer**

**part of the earthly sanctuary, or the sanctuary as a whole in contrast to the "greater" in [v. 11](#)? Finally, does the verb "was [still] standing" connote existence or status?**

The author's use of "had not yet been disclosed" is viewed by Ellingworth as a stylistic variant for "was showing." "The Most Holy Place" (1) refers to the presence of God in heaven; or, as is more likely, (2) refers to the earthly holy of holies with the implication that access to God was not yet available. Two possible meanings can be attributed to the phrase "was [still] standing": (1) continues to exist, or (2) retaining its status. The latter appears to be the most likely. The phrase "by this" can refer to what follows or to what precedes. It seems best to understand it to refer to what precedes. The phrase "was showing" can be taken to indicate the purpose of the pattern stated in [9:7](#), or as expressing the Holy Spirit's interpretation of what was just mentioned. Again, the latter view is probably best. The "first tabernacle" can be taken as the tabernacle as a whole with "first" being temporal in nature or it can be construed as the holy place, the first room before the holy of holies. Ellingworth and Nida suggest the "most probable" translation of [v. 8](#): "The Holy Spirit shows us by this means that the way into the real tent had not yet been opened as long as the old tent still remained in use."

[9:9](#) The author sees all this as an "illustration" (Gk. *parabolē*) which is best interpreted here to mean "symbolic." Bruce's translation "parable" is too specific for the intended meaning, and "illustration" is too generic, although not inaccurate. The author appears to intend to show some comparison, hence "symbolic" is better than "illustration." This "illustration" is "for the present time," a phrase capable of referring to the time when Hebrews was written or to the time of the tabernacle. The former interpretation appears most likely contextually. Those who construe the meaning in the former manner offer varying suggestions as to the symbolism. Bruce thought the temple veil emphasized the contrast between the limited access to God under the old covenant and the full access now available through Christ. In a similar fashion, Alford supposed the outer tabernacle, as a symbol of the old covenant, represented an obstruction to entrance into the most holy place, which could be viewed as a figure of heavenly things to which access is now available through Christ's work. Kistemaker took the earthly sanctuary to be a symbol of the situation under the old covenant which still existed when the epistle was written. Some who construe the phrase "for the present time" as referring to the time of the tabernacle take the outer tent as a parable of the Old Testament dispensation, showing that access to God had not yet been opened. Hewitt considered the earthly tabernacle, as a symbol of the heavenly tabernacle, to be a symbol for the people under the old covenant in the Old Testament.

The relative pronoun translated "this" in [v. 9](#) has several possible antecedents. It has been taken by some to refer to the outer tabernacle and by others to refer to the earthly tabernacle as a whole as a type of the heavenly tabernacle. It may refer to "illustration" in the preceding clause, to the tabernacle, or to the outer tent of the tabernacle. The phrase "indicating that the gifts" explains how the outer tabernacle is the symbol mentioned in the preceding clause.

The NIV's "to clear the conscience" may be too mild for the Greek which uses the verb "perfect." Ellingworth found a negative and a positive aspect: "the fulfillment of the purpose of worship; negatively, the forgiveness of our purification from sin(s), and positively, the opening of access to God." Lane took the notion of perfection here as involving purgation. The parallel to this statement in [v. 9](#) is [v. 14](#), the conscience must be cleansed to serve God effectively. The author

does not necessarily view "conscience" as only a distinct aspect of human nature as he does in [Heb 9:9,14](#), but he also can use "conscience" to refer to the whole person as he does in [Heb 10:1,14](#). Hughes views the author's concept of conscience as "man's inner knowledge of himself, especially in the sense of his *answerability* for his motives and actions in view of the fact that he... stands before and must give an account of himself to his Creator."

[9:10 Verse 10](#) makes clear that the symbolic value of the Old Testament sacrifices is negative, not positive. "What the Old Testament says about worship under the old covenant is proof that something more effective was needed." In what way is the first part of [v. 10](#) related to the latter part of [v. 9](#)? Four options have been suggested, the first three of which are related. Hughes and Ellingworth considered [v. 10](#) to state what the offering of the gifts and sacrifices in [9:9](#) relate to, namely, matters of food, drink, and washings. Dods and Lane thought it stated the area in which the offerings mentioned in [9:9](#) are effective. Alford and Moffatt took it as appositional, telling what the gifts and sacrifices consist of: food, drink, and washings. Lünemann and Lenski considered the items to be in addition to the gifts and sacrifices of [v. 9](#). The "external regulations" may be regulations governing the physical area of life, or they may describe the ordinances (NIV) dealing with physical rather than spiritual matters. Both views are virtually semantic equivalents.

We are now in a position to understand why the author interjects [9:1-5](#) into the discussion. He concluded in [8:13](#) that the new covenant renders the old covenant obsolete. The question could be asked: if the old covenant is rendered obsolete, why mention the description of the old covenant's sanctuary furniture placement. There is a certain "logical suspense" in all this, as Cortez put it, which is not solved until one reads [9:6-10](#). "It is there that it becomes clear that this description is necessary to describe the two-phased ministry of the Israelite sanctuary, which in turn illustrates the transition between two ages represented by the old and new covenants." What appears to be a digression ([9:1-5](#)) is actually "the preparation of the elements that will illustrate the 'passing away' of the first covenant asserted in [vv. 6-10](#)." The same semantic theme is asserted in [8:13](#) and [9:10](#): the passing away of the old covenant. The participle translated "applying" is placed at the very end of [v. 10](#) in the Greek text. Thus "the author is using a hyperbaton to close the period; however, and more important, by placing the fundamental idea at the end, the author not only gives a circular structure to the logical flow of the whole sentence but reserves the rhetorical punch for the end."

Thus, Cortez argued, correctly in my view, that the periodic paragraph [Heb 9:6-10](#) serves as a "microcosm foreshadowing the argument that follows in chs. 9 and 10." He concluded that the author presents the Day of Atonement more as a parable of transition from the present to the future age and from the old covenant to the new covenant and not so much as a typology for Jesus' sacrifice. The key elements which will be developed by the author in [Heb 9:11-10:18](#) include the change from many priests in the old covenant to one high priest in the new covenant; from many sacrifices to one sacrifice by Christ; and from external cleansing of the flesh to internal cleansing of the conscience. The Old Testament sacrificial system actually erected a barrier between the people and God ([9:8](#)), and mandated gifts and sacrifices on the part of the worshipper, which although commanded by God, were incapable of inward cleansing from sin. All of this was, of course, by God's design in preparation for the new covenant.

[9:11-12](#) A new subparagraph begins in [v. 11](#) with the use of *de*, which is untranslated, contrasting the ineffectiveness of the Levitical system with the finished atoning work of Christ our high priest. Two sentences comprise the paragraph in the Greek text: [9:11-12](#) speaks of Christ's entry into the heavenly sanctuary, and [9:13-14](#) shows the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over the Levitical sacrifices. Many have asserted that [9:11](#) is the keystone or heart of the entire epistle, however, Westfall has shown semantically why this is not the case. [Verse 14](#) is more prominent than [v. 11](#) in the discourse. The use of "Christ" is emphatic by word order and is used by the author as a title. The aorist participle translated "came" can be construed temporally or as indicating a separate action in the sense "Christ came and he went through the... tabernacle." This particular participle, when used with the conjunction *de* at the beginning of a sentence as here, often indicates arrival at a destination. The participial phrase "high priest of the good things already here" indicates what it was the high priest accomplished, namely, "the good things." These "good things" consist of cleansing and access to God according to Lane and are all-inclusive of the blessings Christ has gained for believers according to Ellingworth. Hughes summarizes the meaning as the fulfillment of the new covenant promises here and hereafter.

The comparative adjective in Greek translated "more perfect" does not imply the possibility of another still more perfect tabernacle, but continues the author's theme that the new covenant is "better" than the old covenant. The use of "not man-made" intends to indicate semantically it was made by God. The phrase "not a part of this creation" refers to the present material created order. Grammatically, it is in apposition to "not hand-made" and serves to further describe it.

Most commentators connect the entire phrase "through the greater and more perfect tabernacle" with the main verb "enter" in [v. 12](#). Interpretations of *skēnē*, "tabernacle" in [v. 11](#) vary considerably. Some take the meaning to refer to Christ's incarnate body while others take it to mean Christ's resurrected body. A third view is that *skēnē* refers to the church. Swetnam takes the phrase "greater and more perfect tabernacle" to refer to the eucharistic body of Christ, with the reference in [Heb 9:10](#) to "food and drink and various ceremonial washings" as "OT foreshadowings of the NT Eucharistic elements and baptism." Some who see in Hebrews a Gnostic background take the reference to be to a cosmic passageway. Some see the reference to heaven itself. Delitzsch is an example of those who take the approach that a distinction must be made between "the greater and more perfect tabernacle" in [v. 11](#) and the "Most Holy Place" of [v. 12](#). Although this view has many supporters, S. Kubo has raised serious objections to it, noting "it goes against the leading motif of the theology of the epistle by proposing that the heavenly counterpart of the earthly sanctuary includes the holy place." Others take the *dia* in [v. 11](#) in a local sense but take *ta hagia* in [v. 12](#) to refer to the "greater and more perfect tabernacle" in v. II.

The key to the passage concerns the interpretation of *dia* as either local or instrumental in [vv. 11-12](#). If it is taken as instrumental in [v. 11](#), the meaning would be "Christ is the high priest by means of." The best approach is to take *dia* as local in [9:11](#) and as instrumental in [9:12](#). Jesus "passed through" in order to enter into the heavenly Most Holy Place. Lane concluded the way was through "the heavenly counterpart to the front compartment of the earthly tabernacle." See the parallel passage in [Heb 9:24-25](#). The Day of Atonement imagery from [Leviticus 16](#) undergirds the passage and should be seen as the backdrop for interpretation.

The "goats and calves" of [v. 12](#) are considered to be generic plurals. Dods noted the repeated annual offering on the Day of Atonement consisted of one of each animal. Strong contrast is introduced by *de*; it is not animal blood but Christ's own blood. The high priest entered the holy of holies annually on the Day of Atonement. However, in stark contrast, Christ entered "once for all." No repetition of this act is now necessary as a result of Christ's finished work. In addition, Lane said no repetition is even possible. In a figurative way, by his death on the cross, Christ entered the holy of holies in the temple and procured atonement once and for all. The rash of theories concerning how Christ entered heaven with his blood is ably treated by Hughes in his commentary and is not treated in detail here. It should also be observed that [9:12](#) is a *crux interpretum* for Seventh-Day Adventism and their theology concerning the Day of Atonement.

The result of this act is Christ's "having obtained" our redemption (aorist middle participle, implying Christ's full involvement in the action). The participle can be construed as indicating the results of Christ's entering, the grounds of his entering (based on his death on the cross, he entered), or temporally (he entered after he obtained redemption). Contextually, it is difficult to determine which of these three construals was intended by the author. This redemption is qualified as "eternal," indicating its complete and unrepeatable nature, and also indicating an eschatological meaning. The use of the word "redemption" semantically incorporates the price paid for it as well.

[9:13-14](#) The subparagraph concludes with [vv. 13-14](#). It is introduced with *gar* and gives the grounds for the statement in the previous verse that the blood of Christ has obtained eternal redemption. The conditional "if in [v. 13](#) expresses the grounds for the conclusion in [9:14](#)—the first part of an argument from the lesser to the greater. Some take "blood of bulls and goats" to refer only to the Day of Atonement offering. Others take it to refer to other sacrifices. It is difficult to say whether the "sprinkling" connects with only the ashes of the red heifer, or with all the preceding items. The participle can be attributive (ashes which sprinkle) or expressing means (by sprinkling). There is also some ambiguity as to what "those who are ceremonially unclean" refers to. It can be construed with "sprinkling" or with "sanctify." The result of this sprinkling is outward cleansing, which probably includes cleansing from ritual defilement. The reference to the "ashes of a heifer" recalls the ritual of cleansing in [Numbers 19](#). Bruce explained the ceremony well:

A perfect red heifer, which had never borne the yoke, was to be slaughtered outside the camp of Israel in the presence of Eleazar the priest... who was then to sprinkle its blood seven times in front of the tabernacle. The body of the heifer was then to be completely incinerated; Eleazar was to throw cedar wood, hyssop (marjoram), and scarlet thread into the burning fire. When all was consumed, the ashes were to be gathered up and stored outside the camp to be used as occasion required for the preparation of *mi niddāh* "water for (the removal of) impurity." Anyone who contracted ceremonial defilement through touching or approaching a dead body was to be cleansed by being sprinkled with water containing some of the ashes of the heifer. Hence the allusion here to "the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who have been denied" so as to "sanctify" them in respect of "bodily cleansing."... The ritual of the red heifer is appropriately mentioned by our author at this point because, like the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement, "it is a sin offering" ([Num 19:9](#)).

Bruce understood the "how much more" in [v. 14](#) as introducing a rhetorical question, but it seems better to see it as introducing an exclamation. The use of the phrase "the blood of Christ" connotes a death that was sacrificial. The author's use of the definite article with "Christ" may indicate a titular reference, or, as less likely, a personal name. An introductory relative pronoun has a causal sense giving the reason for the effectiveness of the sacrifice.

The "eternal Spirit" in [v. 14](#) may be a reference to the Holy Spirit, though many disagree. For those who take it other than as a reference to the Holy Spirit, possible options include Christ's eternal nature or the spiritual nature of the sacrifice. In the Greek text, the pronoun precedes the verb in the phrase "offered himself and is emphatic. The phrase *nekrōn ergōn*, (lit.) "dead works," has been taken to refer to works that cannot give eternal life, works that lead to death, or works that are dead because the person who does them is dead spiritually. The latter meaning is the least likely. The first option is perhaps the best. The phrase translated "the living God" has no definite article in Greek. Most commentators and translations consider it definite. Greenlee considers the qualitative possibility with a focus on God's nature as deity: "God as a living God."

The author concludes this entire section, [9:1-14](#), with an application to his hearers in his reference to cleansing "our" consciences so that "we" may serve God. Luther commented: "This means that a man is not bitten by the recollection of his sins and is not disquieted by the fear of future punishment." The use of *latreuein*, "to serve," recalls this same word or cognate used in [Heb 8:2,5,6](#). There the reference is to priestly service, and the author's statement in this verse "unexpectedly places the readers in the priestly role in the heavenly tabernacle." The author is linking the Old Testament priestly service to his readers. However, the term as it is used here may carry its broader, more general sense of one's entire life lived out in service to God. Nothing in the text or the entire epistle prohibits our understanding the word "to serve" here in this way. Luther correctly noted that without Christ one does not serve the living God.

The Pentateuch speaks of two categories of sin: inadvertent and high-handed ([Num 15:22-31](#)). This distinction was noted in [Heb 5:2](#) and occurs again in [10:26](#). This is why the translation "sins of ignorance" in [9:6](#) is preferred. Gordon rightly compares "acts that lead to death" in [9:14](#) with what the author of Hebrews previously said in [6:1,3](#). There we have already seen that some take the reference to indicate the works of the Jewish law, as did Westcott, and others see the reference to moral offences, such as Moffatt: "works that lead to death." But the point the author of Hebrews is making is well stated by Gordon: "The distinction [between inadvertent and high-handed sins] is there just so that it can be shown to have been dissolved through Christ's high priestly ministrations."

In summary, [Heb 9:1-14](#) makes clear that the way to God was not open to people under the old covenant ([9:1-11](#)), but now Jesus, the eternal high priest, has made atonement, cleansed the inner conscience of believers, and fitted them to serve God as spiritual priests themselves ([9:11-14](#)).

(3) Christ the Mediator of the New Covenant ([9:15-28](#))

<sup>15</sup>For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

<sup>16</sup>In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, <sup>17</sup>because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. <sup>18</sup>This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. <sup>19</sup>When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. <sup>20</sup>He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." <sup>21</sup>In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. <sup>22</sup>In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

<sup>23</sup>It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. <sup>24</sup>For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. <sup>25</sup>Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. <sup>26</sup>Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup>Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, <sup>28</sup>so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

**9:15** The author begins a new paragraph in [Heb 9:15](#) with the use of *oun*, untranslated in the NIV. The rhetorical question in [9:14](#) and the use of *kai* and *dia touto* in [9:15](#) further serve to mark the beginning of a new paragraph at [9:15](#). The conclusion of this paragraph at [v. 22](#) is signaled by the use of *oun*, "then," again at [9:23](#) which marks the inception of the final paragraph of [Hebrews 9](#). Some consider [9:16-22](#) to be a parenthesis in the argument. If so, [9:23-28](#) would be a restatement or development of [9:11-14](#). It is best not to take [9:16-22](#) as a parenthesis, as Westfall has shown.

[Hebrews 9:15](#) is the hinge verse in the entire chapter. It begins the second major paragraph ([9:15-28](#)) and is marked by the use of a compound conjunction in Greek. It draws a conclusion based on the preceding paragraph: the superiority of the shed blood of Christ with its atoning and cleansing effects. It is also semantically the theme of chap. 9. It has semantic parallels to [Heb 8:6](#), which is the most prominent verse in chap. 8: Christ as mediator of the new covenant and the reference to "promise." The NIV translators treat [v. 15](#) as a single paragraph, which further serves to denote its prominence. The internal structure of [9:15](#) contains three major propositions. The first is the statement "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant." This statement functions as a conclusion to [9:1-14](#). The second proposition provides the result of Christ's mediation of the new covenant: "those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance." The condition upon which this result is founded is stated in the third proposition: the necessity of Christ's death to provide atonement. As Westfall said: "The central sentence in [9:15](#) aptly summarizes the message of [Hebrews 9:15-28](#)." She identified three concepts stated in [9:15](#) which are then elaborated in [vv. 16-28](#): Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, the covenant is established through death, and the death of Jesus brings about the forgiveness of sins. [Hebrews 9:16-18](#) elaborates on the necessity of death for ratifying the covenant; [9:19-22](#) elaborates on the

necessity of death, sprinkling of blood, and the forgiveness of sins; and [9:23-28](#) elaborates on how the death of Jesus inaugurates the new covenant and provides forgiveness of sins.

Ellingworth is probably incorrect in his suggestion that *dia touto*, "for this reason," in [v. 15](#) points forward to *labōsin*, "may receive," rather than backward, as do most commentators. Jesus is the "mediator of a new covenant." Though the absence of the definite article with "mediator" stresses the noun's qualitative aspects, it is still considered to be definite by many commentators and is so rendered in most translations. The phrase *diathēkēs kainēs* is fronted in the clause for prominence. The point of [v. 15](#) is to stress Christ's mediation as essentially soteriological in nature. This is brought out by the author's use of *apolutrōsis*, wrongly translated "ransom" in the NIV, a compound form of *lutrōsis*, the standard word for "redemption" in the New Testament. There is little difference in meaning between the two forms of the word. The word does not necessarily imply a debt payment, as the NIV's "ransom" might suggest, but does convey deliverance or liberation and forgiveness. That from which believers are delivered is their *tōn... parabaseōn*, "sins." The entire clause translated "now that he has died as a ransom" indicates how Jesus' death frees us from the consequences of sin. The participial phrase rendered as "that he has died" is a reference back to the previous verses where Christ's death is spoken of. It can be taken as expressing (1) reason-"because a death has occurred"; (2) means-by means of death having occurred; (3) temporality-"now that a death has occurred." The use of *parabaseōn*, "sins," rather than the more common term for sin (*hamartia*) connotes "sin in its most aggravated form, as conscious transgression of that [God's] revealed will." The sins were committed "under" the first covenant, where the Greek preposition could be taken temporally in the sense of "while the first covenant was in effect," but it is better to translate it as "under." "Those who are called" likely refers in the context of this verse both to the author's recipients and those who lived under the old covenant. *Epangelia*, "promise," has reference to the content of the promise, and the singular form distinguishes the promise of eternal life from the promise made to Abraham of innumerable offspring. *Klēronomia* is better translated here as "possession" and not "inheritance." This "possession" is said to be "eternal" here and in [13:20](#). Hurst suggested the possibility that *aionios*, "eternal," could refer to heaven as the source of the inheritance and he suggested "everlasting" as a better translation. "The promised eternal inheritance" is literally "the promise of the everlasting inheritance," where "promise" can be viewed as that which is received and "inheritance" identifies the content of the promise. Better, however, is to view the "inheritance" as identifying both the "promise" and as that which is "received."

[9:16-17](#) [Verses 16-17](#) contain one of the thorniest interpretative issues in the epistle.

Considerable debate exists over whether the translation of *diathēkē* in [9:16-17](#) should be rendered as "will/testament" or "covenant." Like [Heb 6:4-6](#), there remains no consensus on this issue. Here is the lineup. Those who opt for the translation of "testament" include Vos, Vanhoye, Swetnam, Bruce, Hughes, Dunnill, Attridge, Ellingworth, Lindars, Stanley, DeSilva, and Koester. On the other side of the fence are Westcott, Nairne, Kilpatrick, Johnsson, J. J. Hughes, Lane, G. Guthrie, S. Hahn, and B. Joslin. Space does not permit a detailed discussion of this issue.

The primary use of the term *diathēkē*, "will," in first century A.D. Hellenistic Greek is that of "testament" in the sense of a last will or testament wherein one passed on possessions or property to another upon death. This fact is one of the strong arguments in favor of the translation

"testament." Furthermore, the author's use of "inheritance" in [v. 15](#) and the significance he gives to the term in [Heb 1:2](#) set the stage for a transition of meaning from "covenant" in [v. 15](#) to "will" in [v. 16](#). It is argued that in a will, the testator must die before the will is valid, but this is not the case with a covenant. In addition, Wiid argued there is a "universal quality" in [9:16-17](#) which supports the background of the Greek courts and not the temple cultus. In addition, Attridge noted the common legal technical terms found in this section. Campbell spoke of the unilateral nature of the new covenant and the contractual nature of a "will" stipulating a gift that is received by another as further evidence in favor of the translation "will" or "testament." The author's penchant for wordplay and rhetorical devices makes such a subtle meaning shift possible as well. Ellingworth stated the author's anarthrous use of *diathēkē* in [9:16](#) indicates a shift in meaning. More problematic is the suggestion that the second century A.D. Gnostic text Gospel of Truth relies upon Hebrews and speaks of Christ's death on the cross as a testament that bequeaths salvation to others. Nevertheless, Swetnam argued that the translation "testament" is "essential" for a proper understanding of the new covenant in Hebrews.

In favor of the translation "covenant" is the evidence from the LXX itself, where *diathēkē* is used to translate the Hebrew *berith* some 270 plus times. Furthermore, the word is used 33 times in the Greek New Testament, and this would be the only place it could be translated "will" or "testament." The syntactical evidence mitigates against the translation of "will." The author's use of conjunctions (*gar, epei, hothen*) in this context shows the tight connections within [vv. 15-18](#). That *klēronomia* probably should be translated as "possession" and not "inheritance" suggests the covenant view as well. That the articular participle *ho diathemenos* can be translated as "covenant-sacrifice" or "covenant-ratifier" rather than as "one who makes a will/covenant" would open the door for the meaning of a covenant being inaugurated by means of a sacrificial death. Behm and Quell said the Hebrew idiom "to cut a covenant" is translated in the LXX as *diatithesthai diathēkēn*, and thus *ho diathemenos* in [v. 17](#) can be translated as "covenant maker" as well as "testator." In fact, [Acts 3:25](#) is precisely an example of this meaning. Although some of the terms can be construed as having a Greek legal provenance, they fit better in the context of covenant and the temple cultus found in the paragraph immediately following: [Heb 9:18-22](#). Lane observed that *pherein* is never used in any extrabiblical context in connection to a "will" or "testament." In addition, the use of the plural *nekrois*, translated with the singular in the NIV as "somebody has died," is very difficult to explain with the translation of "will" since there can be only one testator who dies to bring the will into effect. One possible explanation is *nekroi* could refer to a plurality of sacrificial animals on the covenant view. Less effective are the arguments contending that Greek testamentary practice would be little known to the Jews and thus the audience would most likely miss the play on words, and the suggestion that Biblical covenants do not always involve sacrifice. The first is based on mere supposition and the latter is an argument from silence.

Those who argue for "covenant" and view the death of the one who makes the covenant as being symbolized in the use of *pherō*, "to prove," in the sense of animal sacrifices (plural use of *nekroi*) which usually accompanied the inauguration of a covenant, may be straining the author's language beyond the breaking point. It is questionable whether the author intended this much symbolism behind his words.

Recently, Hahn proffered a variation on this view that strengthens the case for translating *diathēkē* as "covenant." Hahn's thesis is contextually grounded in the broken first covenant in that [9:15](#) and [9:18-22](#) deal with the old covenant which has been broken. If *hopou*, "where," at the beginning of [v. 16](#) is taken causally, then in light of [v. 15](#) where Christ the mediator of the covenant "died," [v. 16](#) could be translated: "Since there is a covenant, it is necessary for the death of the covenant-maker to be borne," meaning it is necessary for someone (unspecified according to Hahn since the name "Jesus" or "Christ" is not used overtly by the author in [v. 15](#) and since "death" is used without the article) to bear the curse of death as the covenant-maker. [Verse 16](#) would then be semantically rephrasing [v. 15](#). Hahn compares *pherō*, "to prove," in [9:16](#) and [9:28](#) with [Isaiah 53](#). [Hebrews 9:28](#) is a reference to [Isa 53:12](#) LXX. Given this, perhaps the use of *pherō* in the sense of "bear on another's behalf in [Isa 53:3-4](#)" elucidates the use of *pherō* in [Heb 9:16](#)." This is a reasonable supposition. Less reasonable is his argument that the plural *nekrois*, "somebody has died," refers to covenant-makers who have become covenant-breakers who fall under the curse of death ([Deut 28:26](#) LXX). He argued the covenant curse of death is only finally visited upon Israel when Christ dies as their representative ([Heb 9:15](#)).

In sum, it may be that the author of Hebrews regards the divine oath to Abraham at the Aqedah as a foundational act for Israel, which is renewed in Christ. The divine oath of the Aqedah is an expression of God's providential mercy, inasmuch as it prevents the full enforcement of the curses of the first covenant ([Exod 32:13-14](#)) until the coming of the Christ, who can bear the curse-of-death on behalf of all ([Heb 2:9](#); [9:15](#)) and restore for Israel the Abrahamic blessing ([Heb 6:13-20](#); [Gen 2:15-18](#)). Christ's death is simultaneously the legal execution of the curses of the old covenant and the liturgical ritual of sacrifice which establishes the new.

Thus, there are three possible interpretations concerning the translation of *diathēkē* in [Heb 9:16-17](#) and throughout the epistle: (1) the word should be translated "covenant" throughout Hebrews; (2) the word should be translated "testament" throughout Hebrews; and (3) the author uses a double meaning for *diathēkē* in [9:16-17](#) as "testament."

When all the evidence is sifted and weighed, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, the translation "will" or "testament" is possible and the author may be engaging in word play. Second, it is certain that *diathēkē* means "covenant" in [v. 15](#) and again in [vv. 18-19](#). Third, the use of conjunctions tends to preclude the translation of "testament." Therefore, linguistically and contextually, it seems preferable to opt for "covenant" over against "will/testament" for *diathēkē* in [Heb 9:16-17](#).

[Hebrews 9:16-17](#) is one sentence in the Greek text. The introductory particle *hopou* functions temporally or circumstantially to the event idea encoded in the noun "covenant." "Death" is fronted in the clause. The meaning of the infinitive *pheresthai*, "to prove," can be interpreted in three different senses: (1) in the sense of "offering" within a sacrificial context; (2) "to be represented," or (3) in the sense of "bringing something forward." The word is never found extra-biblically in relation to "will" or "testament."

[Verse 17](#) provides the grounds for what was stated in [v. 16](#) as evidenced by the use of *gar*, "for." The Greek phrase *epi nekrois*, "when somebody has died," is difficult to interpret. Literally the entire clause reads: "for a covenant/ testament is confirmed upon dead [bodies]." The phrase *epi*

*nekrois* should not be translated "at death" as is often the case, since there is no evidence for this, according to Lane. The preposition means "on the basis of regardless of the meaning of *nekrois*. The translation "in force" renders the Greek word *bebaia*, an objective certainty that guarantees an effect. The temporal particle *hote*, "while," expresses a durative focus and is the condition for the previous clause.

Whether one chooses the translation of "covenant" or "testament" for *diathēkē*, the point of [Heb 9:16-17](#) is to show the necessity of the death of the covenant-maker/testator for the covenant/testament to be ratified. [Verse 15](#) stated Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, died to provide redemption from sins so that sinners would be set free. The covenant/testament is put in force because of his death.

[Hebrews 9:18-22](#) is a subparagraph functioning to provide an example from Exodus to illustrate the necessity of the death of a sacrifice argued in [vv. 16-17](#) which is summarized in [v. 22](#): "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." The unit is straightforward: [v. 18](#) states the old covenant was inaugurated with blood; [vv. 19-21](#) summarize the ratification of the covenant according to the ceremony by Moses in [Exod 24:1-8](#); and [v. 22](#) draws two conclusions: the law demands cleansing with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. "All/every" is used five times in [vv. 19-22](#), which stresses the necessity of cleansing by blood for the scroll, the tabernacle, the utensils of the tabernacle, and the people. "Blood" is also used five times, one of which is in the word *haimatekchusia*, "shedding of blood," which occurs only here in the New Testament.

[9:18](#) The conjunction *hothen*, "this is why," functions to signal a shift to a new but related subject. Friberg and Friberg give this conjunction a "hyperordinating" tag which identifies the shift from the generic principle of [9:16-17](#) to the specific example from the Exodus account and identifies what follows as semantically more important information. The use of *hothen*, "this is why," signals the author is making a deduction from the preceding material.

The author does not repeat but assumes the noun *diathēkē* in [v. 18](#), using only *hē prōtē*, "the first," referring to the "first covenant." This provides another reason why "covenant" and not "will" is the meaning of the term in [vv. 16-17](#). The use of the perfect tense emphasizes the perfective idea of "inauguration" ("was put into effect" in the NIV) for the Mosaic covenant.

[9:19](#) [Verse 19](#) begins with *gar*, untranslated in the NIV, which introduces the grounds for [v. 18](#). The reference is to [Exod 24](#). After reading the terms of the covenant, "every commandment of the Law," to the people, Moses took blood from the sacrificial animals (calves) and sprinkled the altar and the people with it. The sprinkling of the blood was for the purpose of consecration and purification. The author's description of this event differs from the Exodus account in the following ways: (1) goats as well as bulls were sacrificed; (2) the blood was mixed with water; (3) the instruments of sprinkling are named: scarlet wool and a hyssop branch; and (4) the scroll on which was written the law was sprinkled as well.

Bruce listed two options as explanations for the differences. (1) It is possible the author made use of a midrashic source no longer extant. (2) Another possibility is the author could be making use of a "triennial synagogue lectionary, in which [Exod 24](#) and [Num 19](#) would have been read

around the same season." A better option was suggested by Aquinas, who thought the problem could be solved by recognizing that all future consecrations, which did include these items, can be contained in the first as far as our author is concerned.

**9:20-21** The speech orienter *legōn*, "saying," in [v. 20](#) is not functioning here as an introduction to a quotation, but rather indicates the speaking of a character in the Old Testament narrative, namely, Moses. Although many suggest it, there is no reference here to the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. In [v. 21](#) the genitive *tes leitourgias*, "in its ceremonies," is descriptive and encodes a means-purpose relationship. *Tō haimati*, "with the blood," is instrumental in sense. The same event as described in [v. 19](#) is in view here as well, and the parallel aorist form of *erantisen*, "he sprinkled," is used as in [v. 19](#).

**9:22** The paragraph concludes with a twofold statement in [v. 22](#). The first statement, "nearly everything [must] be cleansed with blood," uses the present tense verb form *katharizetai*, "to cleanse." This present tense form is, according to Westfall, "a marked past-referring present tense form" that functions to summarize "what the author was highlighting in the repetition of *pas* in the inauguration scenario." The second statement is "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness."

In this latter phrase, two words in Greek deserve consideration: "shedding of blood" and "forgiveness." Regarding *haimatekchusia*, "shedding of blood," some view the author as having coined this word, while others disagree. It is routinely translated "shedding of blood." Lane argued in a cultic setting such as this passage the added nuance of the application of blood to an object or person is also present. The use of *aphesis* in [Leviticus 16](#) describes the scapegoat ritual from the LXX. Because of this it probably is to be read with *hamartiōn*, "sins," implied. Forgiveness involves both concepts of "release," as from debt, prison, slavery, and "cleansing." In [9:22](#), "cleansing" and "forgiveness" are virtually synonymous. The position of *aphesis* at the end of the sentence in the Greek text makes it emphatic, and its use in [v. 22](#) harks back to the statement of redemption from sins at the beginning of the paragraph in [v. 15](#). Ellingworth suggested that the verb *ginetai*, "is," "indicates, not merely a state of affairs: 'there is no forgiveness,' but an event: 'forgiveness does not take place,' implying 'God does not forgive.'" This is an important semantic point to make in that the author's overall argument is to say that this entire matter of a sacrificial death and the shedding of blood for atonement is God's way of dealing with the sin problem. Under the new covenant, without the cross of Christ, God does not forgive sins. Atonement is the basis of forgiveness and both are based on the work of Christ on the cross.

Given these linguistic factors, it is incorrect to suggest as some do that [v. 22](#) is parenthetical. In fact, it is the "destination" of the paragraph in that it semantically rephrases what was stated in [v. 15](#) and it provides a concluding summary.

One final question remains to be considered. How is the last part of [v. 22](#) to be construed with the first part of the verse? Lane argued that an adversative relationship exists with the statement "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" as adversative to "nearly everything [must] be cleansed with blood." Such a view contrasts "cleansing" with "forgiveness." However, this would seem to be ruled out by [v. 23](#). It is better to take [9:22b](#) as the second half of an

example of antithetical parallelism. [Hebrews 9:22b](#) restates [9:22a](#) in a negative fashion. Thus, the semantic relationship is one of condition-consequence.

Haber pointed out the author's treatment of the LXX account in [Exod 24:4-8](#) in [Heb 9:18-22](#) reveals he introduced two new elements not found in the Exodus account. First, the author "assumes a strong association between the covenant and the cult... by merging the covenant ceremony with the consecration of the tent found in [Num 7:1](#), so that the initiation of covenant and cult take place together on the altar." Second, the author associates the blood of the covenant with purification and atonement, "a connection that is entirely absent from the Exodus account." The author is conflating separate ceremonies with an eye toward a Christological interpretation to show that the covenant inaugurated by Jesus is *new* and not *old* and it is *second* and not *first* (in the sense that it is superior to the first. In [Heb 8:13](#) the "new" covenant is contrasted with the "first" covenant).

[9:23 Hebrews 9:23-28](#) is the final paragraph of the chapter. The paragraph begins a new topic and is built around three sentences in the Greek New Testament ([vv. 23,24-26,27-28](#)) with a pair of contrasting clauses in each sentence. [Verse 23](#) is introduced with the discourse marker of prominence, *oun*, "then," which could also be translated "consequently" to bring out the conclusion to [9:22](#). It is possible this connector reaches back to [9:11-12](#), but it certainly connects to [9:15-22](#). "It was necessary" is emphatic by word order, being placed at the front of the clause. The notion here is the necessity is grounded in God's purpose.

Three questions arise regarding the first half of the verse. What is the meaning of "copies," "heavenly things," and "these sacrifices"? The Greek word *hupodeigma*, "copies," by context must refer to the earthly tabernacle. I treat the meaning of "heavenly things" when considering the second half of this verse. "These sacrifices" can refer to the Old Testament tabernacle and its vessels, or to the purification rites of the tabernacle. The following contrastive clause does not contain an overt verb and thus "to be purified" must be supplied or at least understood. Ellingworth thinks the sense of the verb here is that of consecration and inauguration rather than removing impurity. The sacrifices which cleanse the heavenly things are "better," which can connote either "superior" or "greater."

Much disagreement centers over the meaning of "the heavenly things themselves." Nine different interpretations have been offered. Some assert this should not be taken literally, but see the reference to spiritual reality as the realm where atonement is accomplished. Others view the reference to people who are the temple of God and who need cleansing of conscience. A third option is that the reference is to the heavenly sanctuary itself as the pattern for the earthly sanctuary. A similar view takes the meaning to be to heaven itself and the things within which need cleansing because even believers can somehow bring defilement as they approach heaven to worship. Some who take this view mitigate it by suggesting the language here should not be taken literally such that heaven itself is somehow denied, but that the author is speaking "relationally" in the sense that the "sphere and all means of their relations to God... must be sanctified by the blood of the New Covenant." Another view takes the meaning to be the approach to heaven rather than heaven itself. Michel's view that the heavenly things refer to demonic forces of evil is highly unlikely.

Bruce cautions against failure to recognize the analogical use of language in this passage. "By the removal of the defilement of sin from the hearts and consciences of the worshippers, the heavenly sphere in which they approach God to worship him is itself cleansed from this defilement." The views with the least problems are option one and the mitigated version of option four. The phrase "better sacrifices" refers to the blood of Christ. The reason for the plural "sacrifices" is its connection to the plural *toutois* "these," which is a "generic" plural.

**9:24** This verse restates [Heb 9:11-12](#) and further states a negative reason for the necessity of better sacrifices. The adjective "man-made" is emphatic by word order in the clause. The author refers to the Old Testament sanctuary as a "copy," *antitupos*, which brings to mind the author's use of *tupos*, "copy," in [Heb 8:5](#). The point is that the earthly corresponds to the heavenly as a copy corresponds to the copied reality. This copy of the "true" means "the true sanctuary is copied by the earthly antitype." The second clause is introduced by the strong adversative conjunction *alla*, "but," which places focus on Christ's entrance into heaven. "Now" is emphatic by word order. Coupled with the infinitive of purpose "to appear," the reference is to Christ's continuing high priestly work in heaven. The phrase "heaven itself refers to the presence of God. "For us" is placed final in the clause for emphasis. According to [9:24](#), the author appears to be connecting the heavenly sanctuary with the promised land of rest and inheritance for believers ([4:9-11](#); [9:15](#)).

**9:25** This continues the Greek sentence with a *hina* clause, which if it expresses purpose, necessitates the supplying of the verb "to be." Otherwise, the verb "to enter" would be supplied as a carryover from the preceding verse. The phrase "to offer himself probably refers to Christ's death on the cross rather than his offering himself in heaven.

The statement that the high priest enters (present tense) is taken as timeless by Ellingworth, but is taken as referring to present action by Hughes, with the implication that the Levitical system was still in operation at the time of writing.

**9:26** The argument continues from the previous verse by drawing a conclusion. It shows the absurdity of the alternative if Christ's one sacrifice were not sufficient: Christ would have had to suffer and die over and over again. "But now," expressing logical contrast rather than temporality, Jesus has appeared "once for all." This adverb modifies the verb "appeared," which is placed last in the sentence to emphasize Christ's incarnation and death on the cross. The phrase "end of the ages" can mean the end of time or Christ's appearance on earth. Actually, both are theologically correct. The means by which Jesus does away with sin is "by the sacrifice of himself," where the subjective genitive *autou*, "of himself," is emphatic and can be read as a personal pronoun, translated "of him," telling who made the sacrifice. It can also be read as a reflexive pronoun telling who was sacrificed: himself.

**9:27** The final sentence of the chapter in the Greek text begins here. Both a comparison as well as the grounds for the following clause is introduced by "just as." The use of the article in Greek with "men" makes the noun generic. Men are "destined to die once," indicating finality, which is further emphasized by the statement that after death follows judgment. The purpose of the comparison of the similarity of the human situation with Jesus is to show there is one death for each person and thus Jesus would die only once. Another verb must be supplied in the phrase

"after this the judgment." Possibilities include "experienced," "to come," "to face," or the noun can be rendered as a verb: "to be judged."

**9:28** This completes the comparison with *houtōs*, "so." Christ "was sacrificed," aorist passive participle, indicating something appointed to him with God as the implied agent. The action in this verb either describes action that is parallel to the verb "appear" or the meaning is temporal: "after he was offered." The phrase "many people" is a qualitative reference meaning "all." It contrasts the many with Christ's one sacrifice. Calvin interprets the "many" here to mean "all": "'To bear the sins' means to free those who have sinned from their guilt by his satisfaction. He says many meaning all [*Multos dicit pro Omnibus*], as in [Rom 5:15](#). It is of course certain that not all enjoy the fruit of Christ's death..., but this happens because their unbelief hinders them." Here Calvin articulates universal atonement in his universalizing the term "many" to include all people, not just the elect.

The second coming of Jesus will not be for the purpose of having to atone for sin but rather will be for the purpose of bringing final salvation. "Forgiveness of sins" is mentioned three times as the purpose for the death of Christ ([9:26](#); twice in [v. 28](#)). That Jesus is said to "bear the sins of many" is a reference to [Isa 53:10-12](#). The same Greek verb, *anenenkein*, is found in [1 Pet 2:24](#), where Jesus is said to have borne the sins of many. The salvation which Jesus brings is said to be "to those who are waiting for him." The same verb is used by Paul in [Phil 3:20](#) to describe the eager awaiting of the second coming of Christ.

The two appearances of Jesus mentioned in [Heb 9:26,28](#) correspond to the appearances of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. His first appearance was in the outside courtyard to offer the sacrifice on the altar of burnt offering. From here, he entered the sanctuary, carrying the blood for atonement, and in so doing he passed out of sight of the people. The people anxiously awaited his return. Upon completion of his duties in the inner sanctuary, he emerged to the great joy of all the people. In a similar fashion, Jesus our high priest appeared the first time in his incarnation to make atonement for our sins on the cross ([9:26](#)). His ascension took him out of sight into the presence of God where he continually appears as our advocate ([7:25](#)). One day he will return to this earth and "appear again a second time" ([9:28](#)) to bring final salvation.

**THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS.** The central theme of [Hebrews 9](#) is to show how Jesus' death on the cross, as our high priest, inaugurated the new covenant and thus obtained eternal redemption for his people. What the priests of the Levitical sacrificial system could not accomplish, namely, the permanent internal cleansing from sin, Jesus has accomplished by his once for all offering of himself on the cross. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant because his death has liberated us from our sins. According to the Mosaic law, without the shedding of blood there could be no forgiveness of sins ([Heb 9:22](#)). Jesus has appeared once for all to take away sin permanently through his own sacrifice on the cross.

The Old Testament tabernacle and sacrificial system was but a copy and shadow of the true reality, which is Christ and his new covenant ratified in his own blood. [Hebrews 9](#) makes it clear why the old covenant had been rendered obsolete (see [Heb 8:13](#)). Under the old covenant, the sacrifice had to be re-enacted annually on the Day of Atonement. Under the new covenant,

inaugurated by the blood of Christ, once and for all sins were atoned for and the consciences of individual worshippers were cleansed. Now we may serve the living God ([Heb 9:15](#)).

The author of Hebrews has shown that the Mosaic covenant involved a priesthood, a sanctuary, and a sacrifice. Through careful theological analysis, he has shown how Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of each of these categories. He is a superior priest who is eternal; he serves in a heavenly sanctuary; and he has offered once for all a sacrifice which not only atones for sin but which cleanses the inward conscience of believers, something the old Levitical order could never accomplish.

The allusion to [Isaiah 53](#) in [Heb 9:28](#) that Christ has appeared to "bear the sins of many" affirms that the writer understands the death of Jesus on the cross to be a substitutionary atonement. [Hebrews 9](#) also affirms the necessity of death and the shedding of blood as the means of ratifying the new covenant and effecting redemption. All theologies that downplay or denigrate the necessity of a sacrificial and substitutionary death and the shedding of blood to procure atonement for sinful people fail to come to grips with the clear teaching of Hebrews, not to mention the New Testament as a whole.

During the Reformation, based on [Heb 9:16-17](#), Luther rejected the notion of the mass as a sacrifice offered to God and came to understand it as a testament offered by Christ to his people which is received by faith alone. He was joined in this understanding by Calvin and all other reformers. In response, the Council of Trent reaffirmed the mass as an unbloody propitiatory sacrifice offered by priests who were so designated by God.

In summary fashion, throughout [Hebrews 9](#), and in fact, throughout [Heb 7:1-10:18](#), the author describes Jesus as high priest who performs several acts associated with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement: (1) his victory over the forces of evil ([9:26](#)); (2) the atonement offering and the sprinkling of blood ([9:13,14,19,21,25](#)); (3) entrance into the heavenly holy of holies ([9:24](#)); and (4) intercession for the people ([9:24](#)). These acts are also overtly or implicitly mentioned in several other places throughout the epistle. The author of Hebrews approached the person and work of Christ in typological fashion, building his theology, especially in [7:1-10:18](#), around the high priest and Yom Kippur.

New American Commentary - The New American Commentary – Volume 35: Hebrews.

## The New Covenant--part 2 ([Hebrews 9:1-14](#))

Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called

the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant. And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship, but into the second only the high priest enters, once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. 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, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*  
([9:1-14](#))

*God never asks anyone to give up anything without His offering something far better in return.*

The chief obstacle in the way of the Hebrews' faith was their failure to see that everything connected with the ceremonial law (covenant, sacrifices, priesthood, and ritual) was preparatory and transient. So the writer painstakingly and definitively pursues a clear revelation of the better character of the New.

Consequently, **in [Hebrews 9:1-14](#) the Old and New Covenants are further contrasted.**

- The first part of the passage ([vv. 1-10](#)) outlines, or summarizes, the characteristics of the Old, whereas
- the second part ([vv. 11-14](#)) outlines the characteristics of the New.

## Characteristics of the Old Covenant

*Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. (9:1)*

**The first covenant** was not worthless or pointless. God gave it, and He does nothing that is worthless or pointless. **Through it He prescribed certain kinds of worship and a special place in which to worship. But it was temporary, signified by the earthly character of the sanctuary.** The sanctuary and its worship were divinely instituted, but they, like the earth, were temporary. **They were ordained of God and give a beautiful, meaningful, detailed picture of the eternal Messiah.**

*The writer of Hebrews makes many comparisons. He has compared the prophets, the angels, Joshua, and Aaron to Christ—always pointing out and proving Christ's superiority. But he never depreciates the persons or the things he compares with Christ or with Christ's work.*

In fact he exalts the prophets and the angels and Aaron and Moses and the Old Covenant. He does not compare Christ to persons or things that were insignificant or meaningless or worthless, but to ones that were God-ordained and faithful and purposeful. **He does not try to build Christ up by running these down. Quite to the contrary, he magnifies them and praises them. In doing so, he exalts Christ all the more.** The more the other persons and things are legitimately magnified, the more Jesus is magnified, the more superior He is shown to be.

The **regulations of divine worship**, the rites and ceremonies, were instituted by God to help show His Son, the Messiah, the true Savior. They were divine services, but they were also temporary services, performed in a temporary sanctuary.

**Verses 2-10 mention three things about the old worship: its sanctuary, its services, and its significance.**

## The Old Sanctuary

*For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant. And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. ([9:2-5](#))*

Here is a brief description of the old sanctuary—first the Tabernacle and then the Temple. The emphasis here, however, is on the **tabernacle**. It was the first sanctuary and also the most temporary and the most earthy. Thus it serves to illustrate best the writer's point. It was made largely of skins and was designed to be portable. Even from the human view, it was the essence of impermanence. It gave every impression of being transitory.

**Only two chapters in the Bible are devoted to the creation story, whereas some fifty chapters focus on the Tabernacle (see especially [Ex. 25-40](#)). The Tabernacle is important and demands attention in our study, because it is a giant portrait of Jesus Christ. Everywhere you look in the Tabernacle you can see Him.**

1. **The courtyard of the Tabernacle was one hundred fifty feet long and seventy-five feet wide. Its single gate, on the east side, was thirty feet wide and seven and a half feet high, allowing a large number of people to enter at the same time. It is a graphic picture of Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the way" and "I am the door." Just as there was only one entrance to the Tabernacle, there is only one way to God—the only Way and the only Door, Jesus Christ. Christianity is exclusive, not because Christians make it so but because God has made it so.** Throughout the centuries, of course, Christians have made the earthly church exclusive in many wrong ways. But God has intentionally made His spiritual, eternal church exclusive. It can be entered only through Jesus Christ.
2. **The first article of furniture in the outer court was the bronze altar.** It was made of acacia wood sheathed with bronze. It was seven and a half feet square, stood four and a half feet off the ground, and was topped with a bronze grate. The coals were placed underneath the grate and the sacrifice was placed on top. On the four corners of

the altar were horns, to which the animal was bound when it was being sacrificed. **The bronze altar is again a perfect picture of Jesus Christ, who Himself was a sacrifice for sin.**

- 3. The next piece of furniture in the court was the laver or basin, also made of bronze.** In it the priests would wash their hands, and even sometimes their feet, as they went about the bloody services of sacrifice. **Here is a picture of Jesus Christ as the cleanser of His people. Once we have received forgiveness for our sins through Christ's sacrifice of Himself, we still need His daily cleansing that restores fellowship and joy.**
- 4.** Still moving west across the courtyard, we come to the Tabernacle proper—forty-five feet long, fifteen feet wide, and fifteen feet high. The **holy place** took up two-thirds of this area, which means that the **holy of holies** was a perfect fifteen-foot cube. Only priests could go into the Holy Place, in which were three pieces of furniture. The writer of Hebrews mentions only two, because, as he says, he cannot **speak in detail** (9:5).

*The Holy Place.* On the left, as the priest entered, was a solid gold **lampstand** having seven branches, each filled with the purest olive oil. On the right was the **table** on which was the **sacred bread**, or show-bread. This table, like the base of the altar, was of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It was three feet long, one and a half feet wide, and two and a quarter feet high. Every Sabbath twelve loaves of fresh bread were set on it, one for each of the twelve tribes. At the end of the week, the priests, and only the priests, were allowed to eat the loaves.

Farther in and to the center of the Holy Place was the **altar of incense**. It, too, was of gold-overlaid acacia wood, one and one-half feet square and about three feet high. On this altar were placed the burning coals from the bronze altar in the courtyard, where sacrifice was made.

These three pieces of furniture also picture Christ. Everything in the outer courtyard was connected with salvation and the cleansing of sins. Jesus accomplished His sacrificial work on earth, outside God's heavenly presence. The outer court was accessible to all the people, just as Christ is accessible to all who will come to Him. But in His heavenly sanctuary He is shut off from the world, temporarily even from His own people. From **His heavenly place now, Jesus lights our path (pictured by the golden lampstand), He feeds us (pictured by the table of sacred bread), and He intercedes for us (pictured by the altar of incense).**

"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world," Jesus said (John 9:5). When He left the world, the world was left in darkness, and only for believers is He the light of life. He is the light that directs our paths, the One who, through the Spirit, illumines our minds to understand spiritual truth. He is the One who, by the indwelling Spirit, guides us through the world of darkness. He is our light.

Jesus is our sustenance. He is our table of sacred bread. He is the One who feeds us every day, who sustains us with the Word. The Word is not only our food but our light. And the oil is the Spirit of God, who lights the Word for us. The altar of incense pictures Jesus interceding for us, the perfect Sacrifice becoming the perfect Intercessor.

*The Holy of Holies.* Behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, into which only the high priest could enter, and that but once a year, on the Day of Atonement. In this holiest of earthly places was only one piece of furniture, the ark of the covenant. In it were three very precious articles: a golden jar holding manna, Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant. Made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, it was about three feet nine inches long, two feet three inches wide and two feet high. On the lid was the mercy seat, on which were the cherubim of glory, angelic figures made of solid gold. It was between the wings of those angels, on the mercy seat, that God met men. "And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel" (Ex. 25:22). If God and man were to meet it could only have been there.

*Unfortunately, under the Old Testament economy only one person could ever enter the Holy of Holies, and then only on an extremely limited basis. For all practical purposes, men had no access to God at all. The regular priests could not get nearer than the outer sanctuary, and the ordinary person no closer than the outer court.*

The central, in fact the only, thing in the Holy of Holies was the ark, which represents Jesus Christ, the true mercy seat.

**When we meet Jesus Christ as Savior, we are ushered into the presence of God, into the true Holy of Holies. God no longer communes with men between the wings of cherubim on a gold mercy seat. He communes with men in His Son, by whom the veil was torn in two. Jesus Christ is the mercy seat. Only on the basis of the blood of a goat would God have fellowship with Israel, and only on the basis of the blood of Christ will God have fellowship with men. John, in using the term "propitiation," in [1 John 2:2](#), relates Jesus to the mercy seat, since that very word hilastērion is used for mercy seat in the Septuagint translation of [Exodus 25:17](#).**

The Old Covenant had a sanctuary with divine pictures and symbols, but it was earthly and temporary and it never provided true access to God.

The Old Services

*Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship, but into the second only the high priest enters, once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. ([9:6-7](#))*

**In its sanctuary the Old Covenant had divine services. Every day the priests had to trim the wicks and add oil in the lampstand and put incense on the altar of incense. Every Sabbath they had to change the twelve loaves of bread. They were continually in and out of the Holy Place, ministering in behalf of the people. Theirs was a never-ceasing work. In this they picture Jesus Christ, who does not cease enlightening and feeding and interceding on our behalf.** This work of His is perpetual, continual, unceasing.

*How wonderful that our Lord never stops His priestly work for us. He is an ever-living High Priest.*

**Nothing, however, pictures Christ so perfectly as the work of the high priest in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), very briefly summarized in [v. 7](#).**

Whenever an Israelite sinned, his communion with God was broken. Consequently, the sacrifices for sin were never finished and the priests' work was never done. In spite of the continual sacrificing, however, many unknown or forgotten sins would accumulate, for which no sacrifice had been made. **The Day of Atonement was intended to make sacrifice for all those sins that had not yet been covered.**

**It was a great day for liberation of the conscience (see [Lev. 16](#)). The Israelite knew that whatever sins may have been missed in the daily sacrifices would now be taken care of. The slate would be completely clean, at least symbolically for a while.**

*Yom Kippur was a time of release and relief.*

The devout Jew longed for the Day of Atonement. He could not himself go into God's presence, but the high priest would go in for him and he would be delivered.

Very early on the Day of Atonement, the high priest cleansed himself ritually and put on his elaborate robes, with the breastplate (near the heart, signifying that he carried the people in his heart) and ephod (on the shoulder, signifying that he had power on their behalf) representing the twelve tribes. Then he began his daily sacrificing. Unlike Christ, he had to sacrifice for his own sin. Very likely he would have already slaughtered twenty-two different animals by the time he reached the event known as the atonement. It was an exceptionally busy and bloody thing that he did on this day. After finishing all these sacrifices, he took off the robes of glory and beauty and went and bathed himself again completely. He then put on a white linen garment, with no decoration or ornament at all, and performed the sacrifice of atonement.

*In this ritual, the high priest symbolized Jesus Christ, who, in His true and perfect work of atonement, stripped off all His glory and beauty and became the humblest of the humble. He dressed Himself in human flesh, pure but plain and unadorned. In all of His humility He never lost His holiness.*

When the high priest was done with the sacrifice of atonement, he put the robes of glory and beauty back on, picturing still further the work of our Lord. **In His high priestly prayer, anticipating what would happen after the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus said, "And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). He was saying in effect, "Give Me back My robes. I've done the job of atonement. My work of humility is over.**

In the garment of white linen, the high priest took coals off the bronze altar, where sacrifice was going to be made. He put them in a gold censer with incense and carried it into the Holy of Holies. Here again is a beautiful picture of Christ, interceding for His own before God's presence. Then the high priest went out and took a bullock purchased with his own money, because it was to be offered for his own sin. After slaughtering the bullock and offering the sacrifice, he had another priest assist him in catching the blood as it drained off. He swirled some of it in a small bowl and carried it into the Holy of Holies, where he sprinkled it on the mercy seat. The people could hear the bells on his robe as he moved about. He hurried out, and the people breathed a sigh of relief at seeing him. Had he entered the Holy of Holies ceremonially unclean, he would have been struck dead.

When he came out, two goats were waiting for him by the bronze altar. In a small urn were two lots to determine which goat would be used for which purpose. One lot was marked for the Lord and the other for Azazel, for the scapegoat. As each lot was drawn it was tied to the horn of one of the goats. The goat designated for Jehovah was then killed on the altar. Its blood was caught in the same way as that of the bullock and was swirled in the bowl as it was carried into the Holy of Holies. This blood, too, was sprinkled on the mercy seat, but this time for the sins of the people. Again he hurried back out.

He then placed his hands on the goat that remained, the scapegoat, symbolically placing the sins of the people on the goat's head. That goat was taken far out into the wilderness and turned loose, to be lost and never to return.

**The first goat represented satisfaction of God's justice, in that sin had been paid for. The second represented satisfaction of man's conscience, because he knew he was freed of the penalty of sin. Still again we see Christ. In His own death he paid for man's sin, thereby satisfying God's justice, and He also carried our sins far from us, giving us peace of conscience and mind. He satisfied both God and**

**man.** The two goats actually are two parts of one offering. "And he shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering" ([Lev. 16:5](#)). **They represented propitiation and pardon, two aspects of the one atoning sacrifice.**

The Old Significance

*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, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. ([9:8-10](#))*

In the illustration of the old sanctuary and its services, **the Holy Spirit** is teaching at least three things. First, the worship of God was limited in the Old Covenant. There was no access to God. The people, and even the high priest, could come only so close. Second, the Spirit wants to teach the imperfect cleansing accomplished through the **old sacrifices**. The Israelites never really knew that they were forgiven. The scapegoat was sent out to be lost in the wilderness, but there was always the chance of his finding his way back to the camp. There was no freedom of **conscience**, no assurance of cleansing. Third, the Spirit is teaching that the Old Covenant was temporary. Whether the scapegoat found his way back or not, the sacrifices—the daily and the yearly—all had to be repeated. **The Old Covenant was limited, imperfect, and temporary. The provision of the New Covenant had to sweep back over all the believers of the past to provide access, cleansing, and permanent salvation.**

*No Access (Limited Cleansing).*

**While the Tabernacle still stood, there was no way into God's presence. There was no access. The people could not even get into the holy place, much less into the Holy of Holies.**

*The whole thing was meant to prove that without a Redeemer, without a Messiah, without a Savior, there is no access to God. The Holy Spirit was teaching the impossibility of access to God without a perfect priest, a perfect sacrifice, and a perfect covenant. By allowing the people to go no farther than the outer court, He was illustrating that through Judaism there was no access to Him, only a symbol of access.*

Only when Jesus died and ascended to heaven did He lead "captivity captive" and provide believers access into God's presence. "'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.' (Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?)" ([Eph. 4:8-9](#)). That is the source of full access to God, and it was provided because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, perfect priesthood, and perfect covenant.

*Jesus alone can take us to God's presence in heaven. The way into the heavenly Holy Place could not be opened while the first Tabernacle was standing.*

*Imperfect Cleansing.* Even with all the ceremonies and rituals, perfect cleansing from sin could not be accomplished. The specific imperfection mentioned in this passage is that of **conscience**. The Old Covenant was imperfect in every way, but the writer selected only certain elements to make his point.

**Symbol** (*parabolē*) refers to setting side-by-side for the purpose of comparison. The old is being set beside the new and the two are compared. From this Greek

word we get *parable*. The old was only a parable, an object lesson, for Israel.

*The old sacrifices were never meant to cleanse from sin, but only to symbolize such cleansing. The conscience of the person sacrificing was never freed from the feeling of guilt because the guilt itself was never removed. The cleansing was entirely external. Consequently, he could never have a clear conscience, a deep, abiding sense of forgiveness.*

*Temporary Cleansing.* The cleansing, like the covenant as a whole, not only was limited and imperfect but temporary. It related **only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.** This system was never intended to last forever. It was not intended even to last through human history. It was instituted thousands of years after human history began and ended thousands of years before human history will end. As of now, it has been nearly two thousand years since the last sacrifice was made in the Temple.

**Reformation** is from *diorthōsis* (used only here), which means "to make straight," that is, to correct, to straighten out, to make right, to reform. Only the New Covenant in Christ set things right, and the old symbols, the old forms, were meant to serve only until this time, **the time of reformation.** The Old Covenant was never capable of setting things right between men and God. Its purpose was only to symbolize the setting of things right until the true, effective sacrifice was made—the sacrifice that "re-formed" man from the inside, not merely on the outside.

The old sanctuary and services and significance were meaningful and purposeful, very purposeful. But they were limited, imperfect, and temporary, and therefore ultimately unsatisfactory.

They pictured Christ, but they could not do the work of Christ. Part of their purpose, in fact, was to show Israel that they were only pictures of better things to come. They not only pictured Christ but also their own built-in inadequacies.

Characteristics of the New Covenant

*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with*

*hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*  
([9:11-14](#))

**Many characteristics of the New Covenant already have been mentioned or implied in the discussion of the Old. But the writer here focuses on several that are especially important in contrasting the two covenants.**

Following the pattern used in showing the inadequacies of the Old Covenant ([vv. 1-10](#)), **the new sanctuary, the new services, and the new significance are described briefly.** As always, the point is not to demean the old but to show its shadowy incompleteness. To condense and paraphrase [verses 13](#) and [14](#), the Holy Spirit is saying, "If these old things were so good as symbols, how much better are the real things they symbolize. If the external, physical, and temporary covenant accomplished its purpose so well, how much better will the internal, spiritual, and eternal covenant accomplish its purpose?"

The New Sanctuary

*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation. ([9:11](#))*

First of all, **Christ**, as heavenly **High Priest**, has an infinitely greater sanctuary in which to minister. The old Tabernacle was designed by God, but it was made by men, out of material from the present physical creation. For that time and for that purpose, it was impressive. And on the inside, where only the priests could go, it doubtlessly was also beautiful. But it was only a tent. It is not mentioned here, but the Temple in Jerusalem, though immeasurably more magnificent than the Tabernacle, was also made by men with materials from the present creation, and was subject to the deterioration and destruction to which everything of this creation is subject.

The new sanctuary, however, is not made by men or on earth or of earthly materials. It is made by God, in heaven, and of heavenly materials. The new sanctuary, in fact, *is* heaven. Earth belongs to God, but heaven is His dwelling place, His throne, and His sanctuary ([Acts 7:48-50; 17:24](#)). As the writer of Hebrews has pointed out several times, Jesus Christ, like Melchizedek, is a priest-king. And He rules and ministers from the same place. His sanctuary and His palace are the same. In this passage, of course, the emphasis is on His sanctuary. Heaven is the **perfect tabernacle, not made with hands**. Christ ministers for us in heaven, in the throne room of God at God's right hand.

*The former priests had to go into the Holy Place by themselves—for the people, but not with the people. The same was true of the high priest in regard to the Holy of Holies, where he could not even take other priests. But our heavenly Priest takes His people with Him all the way into the sanctuary. He takes us into the sanctuary of sanctuaries, into heaven itself—not into the symbolic presence of God, but into the real presence of God. Not only has He gone before us, but He takes us with Him.*

If we are believers, He *already has* taken us with Him. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ,...and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" ([Eph. 2:4-6](#)). When we were saved, Christ at that time took us into the Father's presence, where, spiritually speaking, we already live with Him and will forever live with Him. We live right now in heavenly places, in the presence of God—in His throne room and in His sanctuary. **"Our citizenship is in heaven"** ([Phil. 3:20](#)).

#### The New Services

*And not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ([9:12](#))*

How does Christ minister in His heavenly sanctuary? What does He do as our eternal High Priest? He does three things, primarily. First, His service is in **His own blood**, not that of sacrificial animals. **The Sacrificer was the Sacrifice.** Second, He made His sacrifice only **once**, and that once was sufficient for **all** people of all time. Third, He obtained permanent, **eternal redemption**. He cleansed past, present, and future sins all in one act of redemption.

#### The New Significance

*For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? ([9:13-14](#))*

If the Old Covenant, weak and imperfect as it was, served its purpose, how much better will Christ's New Covenant, powerful and perfect, serve its purpose. The new not only has a better purpose, but accomplishes its purpose in a better way, a perfect way. The purpose of the old sacrifice was to symbolize, externally, the **cleansing** of sin. It accomplished this purpose. The purpose of the new sacrifice, however, was to cleanse actually, internally (where sin really exists). It accomplished its superior purpose in a superior way.

Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain,

Could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain.

Christ the heavenly Lamb takes all our sins away,

A sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.

- Isaac Watts

Jesus did everything He did on earth in obedience to the Father through the Spirit. Even, in fact *especially*, in His supreme sacrifice He **through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God**. In doing so, He provided the cleansing of our consciences **from dead works to serve the living God**. **He frees our consciences from guilt, a joy and a blessing that no Old Testament saint ever had or could have had. In Christ we can "draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22).**

*The former priests cleaned up the outside, and even that only symbolically, imperfectly, and temporarily. But Christ cleanses from the inside, where the real problem is. He does more than cleanse the old man; He replaces it with a new man. He cleanses our conscience, but He recreates our person. In Christ, we are not cleaned-up old creatures but redeemed new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).*

An evangelist tells a story from the days when he held tent meetings many years ago. One day, after a series of meetings was over, he was pulling up tent stakes. A young man approached him and asked what he had to do to be saved. The evangelist answered, "Sorry, it's too late." "Oh no," was the response. "You mean it's too late because the services are over?" "No," the evangelist

said, "I mean it's too late because it's already been done. Everything that could be done for your salvation has already been done." After explaining Christ's finished work to the young man, he led him to saving faith.

Our salvation is based on the covenant whose redeeming work is finished—on a sacrifice that has been offered **once and for all**, that is complete and perfect and eternal.

## The New Covenant--part 3 ([Hebrews 9:15-28](#))

And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you." And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

*Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. ([9:15-28](#))*

**And for this reason** refers back to what has just been said—namely that Christ, because of His sacrificial death had become **the mediator of a new and better covenant**.

*By God's standard of righteousness and justice, the soul that sins must die ([Ezek. 18:4](#)). The only way a person could come to God was to have the penalty of his sin paid. This payment Jesus has provided for everyone who trusts in Him. In so doing He became the bridge, the mediator—the only mediator—between God and men. He accomplished in one act what the work of the old priests only symbolized in many repeated acts. Jesus' supreme act of mediation was His own death on the cross.*

People often wonder how Old Testament believers were saved, since salvation is only through Jesus Christ ([Acts 4:12](#)). They were saved on the same basis as believers today are saved—by the finished work of Christ. Part of Christ's work as mediator of the New Covenant was the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant. One of the first accomplishments of Jesus' death was to redeem all those who had believed in God under the Old Covenant. After Christ died, they saw what had only before been a promise. It was a certain promise, a guaranteed promise, but until the Messiah's atoning death, it was an unfulfilled promise.

**The point being made here to the writer's original readers—who were Jews, both saved and unsaved—is that Christ's atoning death was retroactive. Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) also pictured symbolically what Christ's atonement did actually. It, too, was retroactive.** When the high priest **sprinkled** the **blood** on the mercy seat, the unintentional sins of the people were covered for the previous year.

*Paul presents this same truth in Romans 3. He teaches that we are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed" (Rom. 3:24-25). God is satisfied when a man puts his faith in the shed blood of Christ. Because His blood was not shed until hundreds or even thousands of years after many Old Testament believers died, their salvation was, so to speak, on credit. By their obedient faith in God they were credited with what Jesus Christ, their promised Messiah, would one day do on their behalf and on the behalf of all sinners who have ever lived and who will ever live.*

**Knowing this, God was forbearing and patient, and, until the true sacrifice was made, when He saw a true heart of faith, He passed over their sins. In a deeper sense, the sacrifice had already been made in God's mind long before it was made in human history, because Christ's "works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:19-20; Rev. 13:8). From the human perspective, however, the Old Testament saints could only *look forward* to salvation.**

*So the Old Testament sacrifices were not means of salvation, but marks of faithful obedience and symbols of the one perfect sacrifice that would be the means of salvation.*

**The eternal inheritance that the Old Testament saints could not receive without Christ's death was salvation, the total forgiveness that alone could bring total access**

**to God. The New Covenant was ratified by the death of Jesus Christ and provided the full salvation that Israel had been hoping for since the very beginning.**

*This truth introduces the subject of the death of the Christ, the Messiah, the idea of which had always been a stumbling block to Jews ([1 Cor. 1:23](#)). Despite the predictions of His death in their own Scriptures (see [Ps. 22](#) and [Isa. 53](#)), it was a truth that they preferred to ignore, if not actually deny. They had constructed their own ideas about the Messiah.*

Many of the ideas were scriptural, some were partly scriptural, and some were unscriptural altogether. They could not be faulted, of course, for having a limited understanding of the Messiah, for God had only given limited revelation.

The problem was that they had ignored some messianic truth and had tried to "fill in the blanks" on their own, and a dying Messiah simply did not fit into their theology.

## Necessity of Messiah's Death

**Being very much aware of that theological blind spot, the writer of Hebrews proceeds to give three reasons it was necessary for the Messiah to die: a testament demands death, forgiveness demands blood, and judgment demands a substitute.**

## A Testament Demands Death

*For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. ([9:16-17](#))*

A testament, by its very nature, requires **the death** of the testator. Covenant, or testament, is from the Greek *diathēkē*, the basic meaning of which corresponds closely to that of our present-day will. A will does not take effect until the one who made it dies. Until that time, its benefits and provisions are only promises, and necessarily future.

The point being made in [verses 16-17](#) is simple and obvious.

Its relevance to the Old Covenant, however, was anything but obvious to the Jews being addressed here, so the writer briefly explains how it applies. **Building on [verse 15](#), he is saying that God gave a legacy, an eternal inheritance, to Israel in the form of a covenant, a will.** As with any will, it was only a type of promissory note until the provider of the will died. At this point, no mention is made of who the testator is or of how Christ fills that role in life and death.

## Forgiveness Demands Blood

*Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you." And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. ([9:18-22](#))*

**The second reason for the death of Christ was that forgiveness demands blood. This truth is directly in line with the previous point, but with a different shade of meaning. Blood is a symbol of death, and therefore follows closely the idea of a testator's having to die in order for a will to become effective.** But blood also suggests the animal sacrifices that were marks of the Old Covenant, even, in fact, of the Abrahamic covenant. In the Old Covenant, the death of animals was typical and prophetic, looking forward to the death of Christ that would ratify the second covenant. Even before the old priestly sacrifices were begun, the covenant itself was **inaugurated**, or ratified, with blood.

As explained in [verse 19](#), Moses sprinkled blood on the altar and on the people (see [Ex. 24:6-8](#)). "Look at your great Moses," the writer is saying, "He himself inaugurated the Old Covenant with blood."

*It is hard for us today to understand how bloody and messy the old sacrificial system was. But among other things, the great amount of blood was a continual reminder of the penalty of sin, death.*

*When He sat with the disciples on that last night before His death, Jesus picked up the cup and said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" ([Matt. 26:28](#)). He was to ratify the New Covenant through His own blood, just as the Old Covenant was ratified by Moses with the blood of animals.*

It is possible to become morbid about Christ's sacrificial death and preoccupied with His suffering and shedding of blood. It is especially possible to become unbiblically preoccupied with the physical aspects of His death. It was not Jesus' physical blood that saves us, but His dying on our behalf, which is symbolized by the shedding of His physical blood. If we could be saved by blood without death, the animals would have been bled, not killed, and it would have been the same with Jesus.

Since the Tabernacle was not yet built when Moses ratified the covenant, his sprinkling **the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood** is obviously meant to be anticipatory. The blood he sprinkled at the initiation of the covenant continued, in a sense, to be sprinkled by the priests in the Tabernacle and Temple as long as that covenant stood.

The purpose of the blood was to symbolize sacrifice for sin, which brought cleansing from sin. Therefore, *without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

Again, however, **we need to keep in mind that the blood was a symbol. If Christ's own physical blood, in itself, does not cleanse from sin, how much less did the physical blood of animals. It is not surprising, then, that the Old Covenant allowed a symbol for a symbol. A Jew who was too poor to bring even a small animal for a sacrifice was allowed to bring one-tenth of an ephah (about two quarts) of fine flour instead (Lev. 5:11). His sins were covered just as surely as those of the person who could afford to offer a lamb or goat or turtledove or pigeon (Lev. 5:6-7). This exception is clear proof that the old cleansing was symbolic.**

Just as the animal blood symbolized Christ's true atoning blood, so the ephah of flour symbolized and represented the animal blood.

*This nonblood offering for sin was acceptable because the old sacrifice was entirely symbolic anyway.*

Yet **this was the only exception. And even the exception represented a blood sacrifice. The basic symbol could not be changed because what it symbolized could not be changed.** *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement" (Lev. 17:11).*

*Since the penalty for sin is death, nothing but death, symbolized by shedding of blood, can atone for sin. We cannot enter into God's presence by self-effort to be righteous. If we, on our own, could be good, we would not need atonement. Nor can we enter His presence by being model citizens or even by being religious. We cannot enter His presence by reading the Bible, by going to church, by giving generously to the Lord's work, or even by praying. We cannot enter His presence by thinking good thoughts about Him. The only way we can enter into God's presence, the only way we can participate in the New Covenant, is through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, made effective for us when we trust in Him as saving Lord.*

**God has set the rules. The soul that sins will die. The soul that is saved will be saved through the sacrifice of God's Son. For this sacrifice there is no exception, no substitute, for this is the real thing.**

Because they were symbols, God provided a limited and strictly qualified exception (flour) to the old sacrifices. But there can be no exception for the real sacrifice, because it is the only way to God.

**Forgiveness is a costly, costly thing.** But I often think to myself how lightly we can take the forgiveness of God. I have come to the end of a day and put my head on the pillow to say, "God, I did this and this today," listing off the things I had done that I knew were not pleasing to Him. I know He knows about them, so there is no use trying to hide them. I also know He forgives them, because He has promised to forgive them, and I thank Him. I fall off to sleep in a few minutes, accepting but not fully appreciating the marvelous grace that made such assurance and peace so easily available to me.

At other times, as I study the Word of God, and look more closely at the great cost that was paid for my salvation, I am overwhelmed. When I meditate on the infinite cost to God to forgive my sins, I realize how often I abuse my loving Father's grace.

Paul tells us that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" ([Rom. 5:20](#)). Then, anticipating how some might distort this truth, he goes on to say, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" ([6:1](#)). **To realize and rejoice in God's boundless grace is one thing; to presume on it by willfully sinning is quite another. How can we, as forgiven sinners, take lightly or presumptuously, the price paid for our forgiveness? We become so used to grace that we abuse it. In fact, we are so accustomed to grace that when God brings down just punishment we may think it unjust.**

*God does not forgive sin by looking down & saying, "It's all right. Since I love you so much, I'll overlook your sin." God's righteousness and holiness will not allow Him to overlook sin. Sin demands payment by death. The only death great enough to pay for all of mankind's sins is the death of His Son. God's great love for us will not lead Him to overlook our sin, but it has led Him to provide the payment for our sin, as [John 3:16](#) so beautifully reminds us.*

**God cannot ignore our sin; but He will forgive our sin if we trust in the death of His Son for that forgiveness.**

*Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ([9:23](#))*

The **copies of the things in the heavens** were the things of the old economy. They were but sketches, or outlines, of the realities of heaven. It was necessary for these copies to have sacrifices. It was therefore necessary for the better covenant, the better economy, to have **better sacrifices**. **All the blood of the Old Covenant was just a copy, a faint picture, of the shed blood of Jesus.**

**God was so satisfied with what Jesus did that He "highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).**

God is immeasurably satisfied with Jesus.

*God is not satisfied with us, however. That is the very reason we have to come to Him through Jesus. Jesus is the only one who satisfies the Father, and therefore no one comes to Him except through Jesus. The idea that God accepts us as we are is utterly unbiblical. We come to Jesus just as we are, since there is nothing worthwhile we can bring. But He does not present us to the Father just as we are. We are totally unpresentable as we are. Otherwise we could present ourselves. When Jesus presents us to His Father, He presents us in Himself, as He is. When we enter into God's presence, God sees Jesus instead of us. He sees Jesus' righteousness instead of our*

*unrighteousness. He sees Jesus' sacrifice instead of our sin, His payment for our sin instead of the penalty we deserve for our sin.*

Jesus recognized the indebtedness of sinners. He recognized that God had to be satisfied, and He offered His own blood—His own self—on our behalf.

**Jesus told the story of two men who went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, a member of the most religious and orthodox group of Jews. The other was a tax collector, despised almost as a traitor by fellow Jews. The Pharisee gave thanks that he was not like other people, "swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer." Then he mentioned his faithfulness in fasting and tithing. But Jesus said this Pharisee was praying "to himself." In other words, he was not really praying at all, only congratulating himself in God's name. The tax collector, on the other hand, felt so unworthy that he would not even lift up his eyes toward heaven, as the prayer posture often was. He beat on his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" This man, Jesus said, "went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted"** ([Luke 18:10-14](#)).

When the tax collector said, "be merciful," he used the same word used of Christ in [Hebrews 2:17](#) ("to make

propitiation"). He was asking God to be propitious to him, to look favorably on him, though he did not deserve it. He was saying, "I confess my guilt. I have broken your law. I have sinned against you, and I am putting myself under the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat. God, please be satisfied. Let your attitude be toward me as it is toward those who are covered by the blood of the sacrifice. Be satisfied with me because of the sacrifice, and forgive me in your love and mercy."

*He did not deny his sin, as the Pharisee did in effect. He recognized his guilt and put it under the blood of the sacrifice. He offered God nothing of his own—no good works, no good habits, no good intentions, not even good excuses. He simply threw himself on God's mercy, God's propitiation. For this he was justified, counted righteous by God.*

*No person can be justified before God until he is placed into the death of Jesus Christ and says, "God, I am a sinner. I place myself into the death of your Son. Be satisfied with me for His sake."*

*For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ([9:24-26](#))*

Christ did not go into an earthly Holy of Holies. He went into the presence of God—the heavenly, real Holy of Holies. And He did it **for us**. How beautiful to realize that when He went in, *He took us with Him!* He has ushered us into the very **presence of God**. Nor did Christ have to **offer Himself often**, as did the earthly high priests, who had to make the offering of atonement every year.

*Jesus' sacrifice was better because He takes His people into the heavenly Holy of Holies with Him and because He had to make an offering only once.*

If Jesus' sacrifice had not been once and for all, He would have had to suffer from the **foundation of the world**, that is, from the beginning of humankind. He would have had to die continuously, as it were, since the time Adam first sinned. Like the work of the Levitical priesthood, His atoning work would never be finished. But, **praise God, His sacrifice does not have to be repeated—not even once. It is finished, completely finished.**

His one sacrifice of Himself was made at the ***consummation of the ages***. The epistles confirm this. "Children, it is the last hour" ([1 John 2:18](#)); "For the coming of the Lord is at hand" ([James 5:8](#)); "The end of all things is at hand" ([1 Pet. 4:7](#)). **The consummation of the ages was Christ at Calvary. It is no wonder the apostles expected Jesus to return at any moment and set up His kingdom**—to establish the final messianic age, "the age to come" ([Matt. 12:32](#)). Until that age, His promise is to be with us through the present age ([Matt. 28:20](#)). **He was the consummation of the ages because of His once and for all sacrifice. He put away sin. He did not simply cover sin, as the old sacrifices had done; He removed it.**

***The idea of the perpetual offering of Christ is a heretical doctrine that for many centuries has contradicted this and the many other clear biblical teachings about the finished work of Christ. It maintains that, inasmuch as the priesthood of Christ***

**is perpetual and sacrifice is an essential part of priesthood, therefore the sacrificial offering of Christ must also be perpetual.**

Ludwig Ott, **a Roman Catholic theologian, explains** this perpetual sacrifice dogma, which was made official by that church at the Council of Trent in the middle of the sixteenth century. "The holy Mass," he writes, "is a true and proper sacrifice. It is physical and propitiatory, removing sins and conferring the grace of repentance. Propitiated by the offering of this sacrifice, God, by granting the grace of the gift and the gift of Penance, remits trespasses and sins however grievous they may be." **In other words, God's satisfaction regarding sin depends upon the weekly mass. That is why attending mass is so important to Catholics.**

But **the theory of the perpetual offering of Jesus Christ is in absolute and direct opposition to Scripture. But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. No doubt some Catholics know Christ, but in holding to the doctrine of the perpetual offering of His sacrifice, they undermine the power and significance of Christ's one-time and only true sacrifice.**

**This false doctrine is plainly reflected in the crucifix, the ubiquitous symbol of Roman Catholicism. Whether in pictures, in statuary, or wherever, the cross is rarely empty in Catholic representations. To Catholics, Jesus is still being crucified.**

In Communion, or the Lord's Supper, we *remember* Christ's sacrificial death, as He commanded us to do. But He is not re-sacrificed. **The Lord commanded His disciples to remember His death, not to try to redo it.**

**Judgment Demands a Substitute**

*And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (9:27-28)*

All men have **to die**, and our death is by divine appointment. It is one appointment everyone will keep. After death comes **judgment**, which is also appointed by God. And since men are not able to atone for their own sins, God's judgment demands that they pay or have a substitute pay for them.

Like all men, Jesus Christ was divinely appointed to die once. But unlike all other men, He will never face judgment. Because He took our sins upon Himself, He took our judgment upon Himself. But the judgment was for *our* sins, not for His, for He had none. **God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Cor. 5:21). He died the one death that judgment demanded.

As mentioned several times, **the people always waited expectantly on the Day of Atonement for the high priest to come out from the Holy of Holies. If he did anything wrong, if he failed to follow God's precise instructions, he would die.** So there was always a sigh of relief, for their own sakes as well as for his, when he reappeared.

**That is the situation being alluded to in Hebrews 9:28.**

*If the people were so eager to see the former high priests reappear from the earthly Holy of Holies, how much more should Christians look eagerly for their great High Priest to reappear from the heavenly Holy of Holies?*

**This will occur at the Second Coming (Rev. 19:11-16).**

**When the high priest walked out of the old sanctuary, the people knew that his sacrifice had been accepted. He had done everything right.** Jesus Christ's reappearing will be one more confirmation that He did everything right, that His Father is satisfied with Him. And because the Father is satisfied with Him, He is satisfied with us, for we are in Him. When He comes back, our salvation will be full. When He appears a second time to those who expect Him, it will not be to deal with sin. Sin only needs to be dealt with once, and this He did on the cross. When He comes again, it will be **without reference to sin**.

**NOTE:** Three appearings of Christ are mentioned in this passage. Verse 26 speaks of His appearing, or being manifested, at the consummation of the ages, that is, when He came to be crucified. Verse 24 speaks of His appearing back in heaven, before the presence of God. Verse 28 speaks of His appearing on earth again. It is His third appearing, but only the second time on earth.

At the end of that eventful Passover week when Jesus was finishing His ministry, the Romans had prepared three crosses for three criminals. On two of the crosses, thieves were to hang. The third cross was for an insurrectionist named Barabbas, who had been found guilty of treason against the empire. But Barabbas never made it to the cross. He was guilty and condemned, but he was not executed—because someone took his place. On the middle cross that day hung not a violent, profane rebel, but the sinless Son of God. Barabbas went free not because he was innocent, but because Jesus took his place. Jesus was crucified not because He was guilty, but so that He could take Barabbas's place—and the place of every other sinner. - MacArthur New Testament Commentary

*The Christian is a citizen of two worlds, the earthly and the heavenly. He must render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21). Because he is a citizen of two worlds, he must learn how to walk by faith in a world that is governed by sight.* Like Moses, a believer must see the invisible if he is to overcome the pull of the world ([Heb. 11:24-27](#)).

*Practical man says, "Seeing is believing!" But the man of faith replies, "Believing is seeing!"*

This principle of faith must apply to our relationship to the heavenly sanctuary. We have never seen this sanctuary. Yet we believe what the Bible tells us about it. **We realize that God is not worshiped today in temples made with hands ([Acts 7:46-50](#)).** There is no special place on earth where God dwells (see [Isa. 57:15](#); [66:1-2](#); [John 4:19-24](#)). *We may call a local church building a "house of God," but we know that God does not live there.* The building is dedicated to God and His service, but it is not His dwelling place.

*Hebrews 9 presents a detailed contrast between the Old Covenant sanctuary (the tabernacle) and the New Covenant heavenly sanctuary where Jesus Christ now ministers.*

This contrast makes it clear that the New Covenant sanctuary is superior.

The Inferior Old Covenant Sanctuary ([Heb. 9:1-10](#))

Hebrews reminds readers that the regulations and practices in the tabernacle were ordained of God. If there was any inferiority in the tabernacle service, it was not because God had not established the ritual. **While the Old Covenant was in force, the ministry of the priests was ordained of God and perfectly proper.**

# What was it, then, that made the tabernacle inferior?

There are five **(5) answers** to that question.

***It was an earthly sanctuary*** ([v. 1](#)). This means it was made by man ([Heb. 9:11](#)) and pitched by man ([Heb. 8:2](#)). The Jewish people generously brought their gifts to Moses, and from these materials the tabernacle was constructed. Then God gave spiritual wisdom and skill to Bezalel and Oholiab to do the intricate work of making the various parts of the tabernacle and its furnishings (see [Ex. 35-36](#)). After the construction was completed, the sanctuary was put in place and dedicated to God ([Ex. 40](#)). Even though the glory of God moved into the sanctuary, it was still an earthly building, constructed by humans out of earthly materials.

Being an earthly building, it had several weaknesses. For one thing, it would need a certain amount of repair. Also, it was limited geographically: if it was pitched in one place, it could not be in another place. It had to be dismantled and the various parts carried from place to place. Furthermore, it belonged to the nation of Israel and not to the whole world.

***It was a type of something greater*** ([vv. 2-5](#)). The writer listed the various parts and furnishings of the tabernacle because each of these carried a spiritual meaning. They were "patterns of things in the heavens" ([Heb. 9:23](#)). The diagram gives a general picture of the tabernacle.

**The phrases "the first" ([Heb. 9:2](#)) and "the second" ([Heb. 9:7](#)) refer to the first and second divisions of the tabernacle. The first was called the holy place and the second the holy of holies. Each of these divisions had its own furnishings, and each piece of furniture had its own special meaning.**

In the holy place stood the seven-branched golden candlestick ([Ex. 25:31-40](#); [27:20-21](#); [37:17-24](#)). "Lampstand" would be a better term to use, because the light was produced by the burning of wicks in oil, not by the use of candles.

**Since there were no windows in the tabernacle, this lampstand provided the necessary light for the priests' ministry in the holy place. The nation of Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations ([Isa. 42:6](#); [49:6](#)). Jesus Christ is the "Light of the world" ([John 8:12](#)),**

**and believers are to shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:14-15).**

**There was also a table in the holy place with twelve loaves of bread on it. It was called the table of showbread (Ex. 25:23-30; 37:10-16; Lev. 24:5-9).** Each Sabbath, the priests would remove the old loaves and put fresh loaves on the table; and the old loaves would be eaten. These loaves were called "the bread of presence" and the table was called "the table of presence." Only the priests could eat this bread, and they were required to eat it in the sanctuary. **It reminded the twelve tribes of God's presence that sustained them. It also speaks to us today of Jesus Christ, the "Bread of Life" given to the whole world (John 6).**

**The golden altar stood in the holy place just in front of the veil that divided the two parts of the tabernacle.** The word translated "censer" (a device for burning incense) (Heb. 9:4) should be "altar." The golden altar did not stand in the holy of holies, but its ministry *pertained* to the holy of holies. In what way? **On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest used coals from this altar to burn incense before the mercy seat within the veil (Lev. 16:12-14).**

Moses (Ex. 40:5) relates the golden altar to the ark of the covenant, and so does the author of 1 Kings (1 Kings 6:22). **Each morning and evening, a priest burned incense on this altar. David suggests that it is a picture of prayer ascending to God (Ps. 141:2). It can be a reminder that Jesus Christ intercedes for us (Rom. 8:33-34).** For details about this incense altar, see Exodus 30:1-10; 37:25-29. The incense itself is described in Exodus 30:34-35.

**The holy of holies contained only the ark of the covenant,** a wooden chest three feet, nine inches long; two feet, three inches wide; and two feet, three inches high. **On the top of this chest was a beautiful "mercy seat" made of gold, with a cherub at each end. This was the throne of God in the tabernacle (Ex. 25:10-22; Pss. 80:1; 99:1).**

On the Day of Atonement, the blood was sprinkled on this mercy seat to cover the tables of Law within the ark. God did not look at the broken Law; He saw the blood.

***Christ is our "mercy seat" ("propitiation" in 1 John 2:2; Rom. 3:25). But His blood does not just cover sin; it takes away sin.***

*No doubt many spiritual truths are wrapped up in these pieces of furniture, and all of them are of value. But the most important truth is this: all of this was symbolism and not the spiritual reality. It was this fact that made the tabernacle of the Old Covenant inferior.*

***It was inaccessible to the people*** (vv. 6-7). We must not get the idea that the Jews assembled in the tabernacle for worship. The priests and Levites were permitted into the tabernacle precincts, but not the people from the other tribes. Furthermore, though the priests ministered in the holy place day after day, only the high priest entered the holy of holies, and that only once a year. When he did, he had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people. ***In contrast, the heavenly tabernacle is open to all of the people of God, and at all times!*** (Heb. 10:19-25)

***It was temporary*** (v. 8). The fact that the outer court ("first tabernacle," Heb. 9:6) was standing was proof that God's work of salvation for man had not yet been completed. The outer court stood between the people and the holy of holies! ***As long as the priests were ministering in the holy place, the way had not yet been opened into the presence of God. But when Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom*** (Matt. 27:50-51) ***and the way was opened into the holy of holies.***

*There was no longer any more need for either the holy place or the holy of holies, for now believing sinners could come into the presence of God.*

***Its ministry was external, not internal*** ([yy. 9-10](#)). The sacrifices offered and the blood applied to the mercy seat could never change the heart or the conscience of a worshiper. All of the ceremonies associated with the tabernacle had to do with ceremonial purity, not moral purity. They were "carnal ordinances" that pertained to the outer man but that could not change the inner man.

The Superior Heavenly Sanctuary (Heb. 9:11-28)

**The five deficiencies of the Old Covenant sanctuary are matched with the five superiorities of the New Covenant sanctuary.** In every way, the present sanctuary is superior.

***It is heavenly*** ([y. 11](#)). The writer has emphasized this fact before, because he has wanted his readers to focus their attention on the things of heaven and not on the things of earth. Some things on earth (including the beautiful Jewish temple) would soon be destroyed; but the heavenly realities would endure forever.

The Old Covenant tabernacle was made by the hands of men ([Ex. 35:30-35](#)). The New Covenant sanctuary was not made with hands. "Not of this building" ([Heb. 9:11](#)) means "not of this creation." The tabernacle of Moses was made with materials that belong to this creation. The heavenly tabernacle needed no such materials ([Heb. 9:24](#)). Since the heavenly tabernacle does not belong to this creation, it is free from the ravages of time.

The "good things to come" had already arrived! All that was foreshadowed by type in the tabernacle was now reality because of Christ's priestly ministry in heaven. The tabernacle was patterned after the sanctuary in heaven, but today we no longer need the pattern. We have the eternal reality!

***Its ministry is effective to deal with sin*** ([yy. 12-15](#)). We have here a series of contrasts that show again the superiority of the heavenly ministry.

***Animal sacrifices and Christ's sacrifice*** ([y. 12](#)). The writer will discuss the inferiority of animal sacrifices in [Hebrews 10](#), but here he begins to lay the foundation. We need no proof that the blood of Jesus Christ is far superior to that of animal sacrifices. How can the blood of *animals* ever solve the problem of *humans'* sins? Jesus Christ became a Man that He might be able to die for people's sins. His death was voluntary; it is doubtful that any Old Testament sacrifice volunteered for the job! **An animal's blood was carried by the high priest into the holy of holies, but Jesus Christ presented Himself in the presence of God as the final and complete sacrifice for sins.** Of course, the animal sacrifices were repeated, while Jesus Christ offered Himself but once. Finally, no animal sacrifices ever purchased "eternal redemption." **Their**

**blood could only "cover" sin until the time when Christ's blood would "take away sin" (John 1:29).** We have "eternal redemption." It is not conditioned on our merit or good works; it is secured once and for all by the finished work of Jesus Christ.

*Ceremonial cleansing and conscience cleansing (yv. 13-14).* The Old Covenant rituals could not change a person's heart. This is not to say that a worshiper did not have a spiritual experience if his heart trusted God, but it does mean that the emphasis was on the external ceremonial cleansing. So long as the worshiper obeyed the prescribed regulations, he was declared clean. It was "the purifying of the flesh" but not the cleansing of the conscience. (For "the ashes of an heifer," see [Num. 19](#).)

**We learned from Hebrews 8 that the ministry of the New Covenant is internal. "I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb. 8:10). This work is done by the Holy Spirit of God (2 Cor. 3:1-3). But the Spirit could not dwell within us if Jesus Christ had not paid for our sins. Cleansing our consciences cannot be done by some external ceremony; it demands an internal power. Because Jesus Christ is "without spot [blemish]" He was able to offer the perfect sacrifice.**

*Temporary blessings and eternal blessings (v. 15).* The blessings under the Old Covenant depended on the obedience of God's people. If they obeyed God, He blessed them; but if they disobeyed, He withheld His blessings. Not only were the blessings temporary, but they were primarily *temporal*—rain, bumper crops, protection from enemies and sickness, etc. Israel's Canaan inheritance involved material blessings.

*Our eternal inheritance is primarily spiritual in nature (Eph. 1:3). Note that the emphasis is on eternal—"eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12) and "eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15). A believer can have confidence because all that he has in Christ is eternal.*

This verse ([Heb. 9:15](#)) makes it clear that there was no final and complete redemption under the Old Covenant. Those transgressions were *covered* by the blood of the many sacrifices, but not *cleansed* until the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross ([Rom. 3:24-26](#)). Since Christ has accomplished an eternal redemption, we are able to share in an eternal inheritance.

As we review these three contrasts, we can easily see that the ministry of Christ is effective to deal with our sins. His finished work on earth and His unfinished work of intercession in heaven are sufficient and efficient.

*Its ministry is based on a costly sacrifice* ([vv. 16-23](#)). The word "covenant" not only means "an agreement," but it also carries the idea of "a last will and testament." If a man writes his will, that will is not in force until he dies.

*It was necessary for Jesus Christ to die so that the terms of the New Covenant might be enforced. "This cup is the new testament [covenant, will] in My blood, which is shed for you" ([Luke 22:20](#)).*

Even the Old Covenant was established on the basis of blood. [Hebrews 9:19-21](#) is taken from [Exodus 24:3-8](#), the account of the ratifying of the Old Covenant by Moses and the people of Israel. **The book of the Law was sprinkled with blood, and so were the people and the tabernacle and its furnishings. It must have been a solemn occasion.**

Not only was blood used at the *beginning* of the ministry of the Old Covenant, but it was used in the *regular* administration of the tabernacle service. Under the Old Covenant, people and objects were purified by blood, water, or fire ([Num. 31:21-24](#)). This was, of course, *ceremonial* purification; it meant that the persons and objects were now acceptable to God. The purification did not alter the nature of the person or object. God's principle is that blood must be shed before sin can be forgiven ([Lev. 17:11](#)).

Since God has ordained that remission of sins is through the *shedding* of blood, and since purification comes through the *sprinkling* of blood, it is necessary that blood be shed and applied if the New Covenant is to be in force. The "patterns" (the Old Covenant tabernacle) were purified by the sprinkling of the blood. But the "originals" were also purified! The blood of Jesus Christ

not only purifies the conscience of the believer ([Heb. 9:14](#)), but also purified the "heavenly things" ([Heb. 9:23](#), NASB).

How could the heavenly sanctuary ever become defiled? We can understand how the *earthly* sanctuary could be defiled since it was used by sinful men. Each year, on the great Day of Atonement, the tabernacle was purified through the sprinkling of blood ([Lev. 16:12-19](#)). But how could a heavenly sanctuary ever become defiled? Certainly nothing in heaven is defiled in a literal sense, for sin cannot pollute the sanctuary of God. But, for that matter, nothing in the earthly tabernacle was *literally* defiled by sin. It all had to do with people's relationships to God. The blood sprinkled on a piece of furniture did not change the nature of that piece, *but it changed God's relationship to it*. God could enter into communion with people because of the sprinkled blood.

Through Jesus Christ, we who are sinners can enter into the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary ([Heb. 10:19-22](#)). **Physically, of course, we are on earth; but spiritually, we are communing with God in the heavenly holy of holies. In order for God to receive us into this heavenly fellowship, the blood of Jesus Christ had to be applied. We enter into God's presence "by the blood of Jesus" ([Heb. 10:19](#)).**

Now we can summarize the writer's discussion. The Old Covenant was established by blood, and so was the New Covenant. But the New Covenant was established on the basis of a better sacrifice, applied in a better place! The patterns (types) were purified by the blood of animals, but the original sanctuary was purified by the blood of the Son of God. This was a far more costly sacrifice.

***Its ministry represents fulfillment*** (v. 24). The New Covenant Christian has *reality!* We are not depending on a high priest on earth who annually visits the holy of holies in a temporary sanctuary. We depend on the heavenly High Priest who has entered once and for all into the eternal sanctuary. There He represents us before God, *and He always will*.

**Beware of trusting anything for your spiritual life that is "made with hands" ([Heb. 9:24](#)). It will not last.** The

tabernacle was replaced by Solomon's temple, and that temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. When the Jews returned to their land after the Captivity, they rebuilt their temple; and King Herod, in later years, expanded and embellished it. But the Romans destroyed that temple, and it has never been rebuilt. Furthermore, since the genealogical records have been lost or destroyed, the Jews are not certain who can minister as priests. These things that are "made with hands" are perishable, but the things "not made with hands" are eternal.

***Its ministry is final and complete*** ([vv. 25-28](#)). There can be nothing incomplete or temporary about our Lord's ministry in heaven. The writer pointed out again the obvious contrasts between the Old Covenant ministry and the New Covenant ministry.

*Old Covenant*

*New Covenant*

Repeated sacrifices

One sacrifice

The blood of others Covering sin His own blood Putting away sin

For Israel only

For all sinners

Left the holy of holies

Entered heaven and remains there

Came out to bless the people

Will come to take His people to heaven

***In short, the work of Christ is a completed work,  
final and eternal.***

On the basis of His completed work, He is ministering now in heaven on our behalf.

**Did you notice that the word "appear" is used three times in Hebrews 9:24-28?**

*These three uses give us a summary of our Lord's work. He has appeared to put away sin by dying on the cross (Heb. 9:26). He is appearing now in heaven for us (Heb. 9:24). One day, He shall appear to take Christians home (Heb. 9:28). These "three tenses of salvation" are all based on His finished work.*

*After reading this chapter, the Hebrew Christians who received this letter had to realize that there is no middle ground. They had to make a choice between the earthly or the heavenly, the temporary or the eternal, the incomplete or the complete. Why not return to*

*the temple but also practice the Christian faith? Why not "the best of both worlds"? Because that would be compromising and refusing to go "without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13). So there is no middle way.*

*The believer's sanctuary is in heaven. His Father is in heaven and his Savior is in heaven. His citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and his treasures should be in heaven (Matt. 6:19ff). And his hope is in heaven. The true believer walks by faith, not by sight. No matter what may happen on earth, a believer can be confident because everything is settled in heaven.*