

Introduction: This lesson begins with a discussion of sanctuaries and worship under the Old covenants. The Old Covenant applied to all Israel, but only those who believed reaped its benefits. The New Covenant is open to everyone in the world, but again only those who believe reap its benefits.

The Old Covenant Tabernacle details were specified by God in such detail that nothing was left to human preference. After discussing the Tabernacle, the author moves to advantages of the New Covenant which include (1.) continuous access to God through Christ as mediator and Heavenly High Priest, (2.) permanent atonement for sins through the blood of Christ, and (3.) being declared righteous before God (pardoned from the penalty of sin) on the basis of Christ's salvation work. God wrote the Old Covenant Law on stone. Under the New Covenant, God writes His laws in the minds and on the hearts of His people.

Hebrews 9:1-14: *“Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. ² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. ⁶ These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, ⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. ⁸ By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing ⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. ¹¹ 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) ¹² 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. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ 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.”

The Old Covenant Tabernacle: Israel’s Tabernacle was a portable tent-shrine carried with them on their journey through the desert after their escape from Egypt. Whenever they camped, the Tabernacle was set up in the geographical heart of Israel’s camp. The tribes were distributed around it in a specified order. Much later in the Promised Land, the Tabernacle was replaced by the Jerusalem Temple built by Solomon.

The Tabernacle was precisely positioned in a rectangular courtyard. The courtyard was a fenced area 150 feet deep by 75 feet wide. The courtyard was defined by a curtain 7 1/2 feet tall made of fine white linen fastened to 60 bronze supporting pillars surrounded the courtyard. There was only one point of entry which was 30 feet wide. The courtyard was positioned so that the entry faced east. The Tabernacle itself was located at the west end of the courtyard opposite the entrance. The Tabernacle was subdivided into two sections by a veil or hanging curtain, the larger outer section was called the “holy place” and the smaller inner section the “most holy place.”

Between the courtyard’s entry point and the entrance to the Tabernacle, there was an area in which Levites and priests served as they made sacrifices and carried out ceremonies. Levites were descendants of Levi but not descendants of Aaron. Only descendants of Aaron could be priests, but the Levites could assist.

Worshippers were permitted in the courtyard. There were no chairs or other forms of places to sit within the courtyard or inside the Tabernacle. Immediately, as one entered the courtyard, they encountered the altar of burnt offerings. It was 7 1/2 ft square by 4 1/2ft high. The altar was made of acacia wood sheathed in bronze with a bronze grate on its top. It had horns on each of the four corners. Animals to be

sacrificed were tethered to the horns. Behind the altar was the bronze laver of cleansing where priests washed their hands and feet. Beyond the laver was the Tabernacle. It was a tent with a flat roof. The dimensions were 45 feet deep, 15 feet wide and 15 feet high. The tent was of a 3-layered construction. The innermost layer was of woven tapestries of blue, purple and scarlet yarns and linen. This was overlaid with two layers of animal skins.

The outer two thirds of the Tabernacle was the Holy Place. Only priests could enter the Holy Place. The Holy Place contained the Table, Lampstand, and Altar of Incense. The inner room was the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and that only once a year on the Day of Atonement. It was a 15 foot per side perfect cube. The Most Holy Place contained the Ark of the Covenant. Objects closest to the Holy of Holies were constructed of precious metals and cloths woven with precious metals. Those farther from the Holy of Holies were made of bronze and ordinary woven materials.

The heavy veil which divided the inside of the Tabernacle into two sections was ornate and woven of the same colors as the inner layer of the tent but with the addition of gold threads and embroidered cherubim. The veil was thick enough to be opaque. The veil was supported by four golden columns set on silver bases.

The Altar of Incense: The text mentions the golden altar of incense as located in the Most Holy Place. That is not quite right. The altar of incense was actually positioned in the Holy Place just outside the curtain dividing it from the Most Holy Place. Its position was opposite the Ark of the Covenant located inside the Most Holy Place.

The Altar of Incense had a particularly vital liturgical function on the Day of Atonement directly related to the Most Holy Place. On that day, as the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place, he was required to have a Censor filled with coals from the bronze altar and with incense from the Altar of Incense. Thus, liturgically the Altar of Incense on the Day of Atonement is associated with the Most Holy Place. The High Priest went into the Most Holy Place shielded by a fog of incense. Because the Altar of Incense was used daily by other priests, it could not possibly have been in the Most Holy Place which only the High Priest could enter only once per year.

Forgiveness of Sins: Levitical priests ministered daily in the Holy Place but only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place and that only once per year on the Day of Atonement. When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, He did so on behalf of “all the assembly of Israel.” No Israelite was excluded. Access to God was thus limited to once per year by the High Priest as he represented all Israel. The High Priest sprinkled blood on the Mercy Seat in atonement for inadvertent sins committed by the people during the preceding year.

Prior to Christ’s self-sacrifice and atonement, forgiveness of sins was contingent. Jesus sacrificial death on the cross accomplished atonement of sins permanently and completely for all who believe and trust in Christ.

Premeditated, willful sins, are referred to in the Old Testament as defiant sins or sins of the “high hand.” Premeditated sins fell under the punishment section of the Old Covenant while un-premeditated sins fell under the blessings section for which sacrifices could be given to cover the sin. Confession and repentance for deliberate sins has always been available for those who confess and repent. But for “high-handed” deliberate sin for which no confession and repentance occurs, there is only punishment (Numbers 15: 28-31).

David’s sin with Bathsheba was clearly premeditated. David’s recognition of that truth is what Psalm 51 is about. For a year David did not confess and repent. Then came the prophet Nathan enlightening David to the character of his sin. David knew he had committed a willful sin for which sacrifices under the Law could not atone. There is only one thing he can do – go to God with a contrite heart, confess, repent, and throw himself on God’s mercy – and that is what he does. God forgave David based on David’s confession, repentance, and his faith in God and the coming Messiah. God has always offered mercy and forgiveness to those who confess their sin, truly repent, and are contrite of heart.

Advantages of the New Covenant: Beginning with verse 11 the author identifies key advantages of the New Covenant. When Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice, He took away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Yet, under both covenants only repentant believers actually receive the benefits of atonement. Under the Old Covenant, atonement was available to all Israel, but only repentant believers received

it. Under the New Covenant, atonement is available to everyone in the world, one at a time, but only repentant believers receive it.

In Christ, all believers of whatever origin have unlimited access to the Father and to the Most Holy Place in heaven. Christ is in that heavenly Most Holy Place which is in the presence of the Father. Christ is not there for a brief moment once a year while he sprinkles the blood of goats and calves on the mercy seat. He is there forever based on His sacrifice of Himself. It is His blood that sanctifies. He obtained eternal redemption for all sin for all who believe, not just a covering of sins of ignorance for a year. Furthermore, Christ makes consciences clean. When we confess and repent, He cleanses us of the taint of sin, both sins of ignorance and premeditated sins. There is a glorious forgiveness available to all believers, to all who trust and obey Christ.

Hebrews 9:15-17: *“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. ¹⁶ For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.”*

Christ’s New Covenant Applies to Both Old and New Testament Believers:

As mediator of the New Covenant in His blood, Christ arbitrates between holy God and sinful humanity. He provided the basis for the New Covenant with His once-for-all-time perfect sacrifice, shedding His own blood for the benefit of sinners. The efficacy of Christ’s blood was retroactive (applying to those under the Old Covenant). It is also proactive (applying to all who enter into the New Covenant now and in the future). Christ’s blood brings forgiveness for all sins confessed and repented (both sins of ignorance and premeditated sins). That is true for people under the Old Covenant as well as those under the New Covenant.

Christ is Both Testator and Mediator of the New Covenant: The old priesthood was a shadow – but Christ is the genuine substance. His self-sacrifice cleanses both sin and conscience. The word translated “covenant” can be used

religiously (as it is in verse 15) or legally (as it is in verse 16 and 17). When it is used religiously it is translated covenant. When it is used legally it is translated “will” or “testament.”

There is a “will” involved in the death of Christ. Christ is the testator of the will, the one who made the will. The unusual thing is that He is also the mediator of the terms of the will. This is possible because He not only died (making the will operative) but He was resurrected (making Him alive to mediate His will). Christ’s will is incredibly rich in benefits for believers. Because of His death believers have forgiveness, a clear conscience, peace through well-being and wholeness, purpose, and ultimately eternal life with Christ in heaven. All the terms of His will were activated at His death. Jesus died leaving believers the greatest inheritance ever conceived, but He lives to mediate His own will.

Hebrews 9:18-28: *“Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ 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.”*

Necessity of Blood for Purifying: Hebrews 9:18 – 28 deals with the necessity for blood in initiating a covenants, for the forgiveness of sins, for cleansing the inside of the sanctuary and for other sanctifying and cleansing acts. These features of the Law were discussed in chapters 7, 8 and the beginning of chapter 9. Under the Law blood, was necessary for cleansing and purifying almost everything that had been defiled by sin or by unclean things or practices. Verse 9:22, ***“Indeed, under the Law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”***

Christ’s Self-Sacrifice Cannot Be Repeated: Under the Old Covenant, High Priests sought temporary forgiveness for the sins of the people by year after year by briefly entering the holy of holies carrying blood of animals. Christ’s, once for all self-sacrifice, is totally different. The blood sacrificed is His own. After His resurrection, Christ ascended to heaven and entered the heavenly “Holy of Holies” where He remains forever.

The Levitical High Priest spent a few moments per year in the earthly shadow copy of the heavenly holy of holies. Christ’s salvation work was completed by His death on the cross. He was resurrected, assumed a resurrection body, and ascended to heaven. There, He sits at the right hand of the Father where He intercedes for believers. This is a metaphor. From what we know about the Trinity, it conveys truth but not the whole story. We know the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of entirely spiritual essence, three spiritual persons sharing one essence, who mutually indwell one another. Three persons, one essence. Their wills are always aligned.

Mortal Death was not the Final Appearance of Christ nor will it be of Man: Verses 9:27-28, ***“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ 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.”*** Every person, male or female, dies because of their own sins. Christ had no sin, but His human nature died to atone for the sins of all past, present, and future believers. He is alive today and will come again. When each believer dies, they

will be glorified (made free of all sin and their sin nature). When Christ comes again, believers will receive a resurrection body and live forever with Christ.

Hebrews 10:1-18: *“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me;⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”⁸ When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law),⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second.¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,”¹⁷ then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.”*

Shadows and Real Things: Mosaic Law and the sacrificial system were shadows and, as such, not a full and exact representation of things heavenly and future. They served the important function of constantly reminding people that sin

stood between them and God. Sacrifices offered again and again under Mosaic Law achieved only imperfect, temporary cleansing from sins, and were unable to make anyone perfect. Otherwise, the author argues, repeated sacrifices would not have been necessary. But because sacrificial cleansing was temporary and incomplete, sacrifices had to be made over and over again even for the same people.

The Law drew people's attention to their sins. Sacrifices under the Law provided temporary forgiveness for past sins, but new sacrifices were required as new sins accumulated. The blood of bulls and goats can temporarily cover but not take away sins. Under the Old Covenant, there was no "final fix" available for sins.

Christ came into the world to once for all fix the sin problem which the Law and sacrifices could not do. He sacrificed Himself becoming the perfect sacrifice to take away all sins (past, present, and future) rather than merely cover them over. His sacrifice made regeneration possible. Regeneration is a remaking of a person's spiritual heart, establishing new spiritual life. Regeneration leads to the process of sanctification, then to glorification which is the final removal of the "sin nature" in which the desire to sin ceases.

Christ made it possible for people to be forever "right" before God, able to stand before God with no condemnation. In the New Covenant in Christ's blood, God promised to write His Laws in the minds and on hearts of His people. After Christ's sacrifice, dietary and "how to worship" parts of the Law were no longer required, but the moral law continues in force. The moral law is to be obeyed because it is God's own decree for the right functioning of human life. Because of Christ's sacrifice, God promised to no longer remember a believers' sins and lawless deeds. This gracious cleansing of sins means there is no further need for blood sacrifices.

A Change in Emphasis: From verse 1:1 to 10:18, the author has carefully explained the Scriptural basis for the superiority and the vital importance of the work and person of Christ. Verse 10:18 closes the doctrinal exposition section of the letter. Practical application of the doctrine begin in verse 10:19.

What is Next? A summary of the doctrinal portion of the letter and begins the discussion of the practical applications section.