

Hebrews 9
May 1, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

[DEB] Q: When you went about finding a church home, what criteria did you use? What did you look for in a church? [Location? Ministry Programs? Preaching? Mission-Oriented? Sense the Spirit's presence? Friendliness of the People? Worship Experience?]

[DEB] Q: Now let me come at this question from a completely different vantage point. What do you think God is looking for in a church? [Is Jesus lifted up? Is the Gospel being spread? Is my Spirit allowed to lead? Are the people attending because they really want an encounter with me?]

Q: Why did God ask the Israelite people to build a tabernacle? [Under the Old Covenant, God designed a place to dwell among His people, so He gave Moses very specific instructions on how to build the tabernacle.]

Transition: The tabernacle was more than a structure with an outer court and inner court, but it was meant to be a place where a Holy God could dwell. If the Israelite people wanted to experience the presence of God, then He needed a place in the tabernacle where that could happen. The first part of the tabernacle was called the "holy place," while the second part was called the "Holy of Holies." And because a holy God cannot be in the presence of sin, we also see the requirement of blood for the cleansing of sin.

The writer is going to take these Hebrew Christians down "Memory Lane" and remind them of how inferior the earthly tabernacle and then go into detail as to why the heavenly sanctuary is so much more superior. He is going to compare the earthly sanctuary under the Old Covenant and compare it to the heavenly sanctuary under the New Covenant. The author is trying to help these Hebrew Christians make the obvious choice to serve Christ who is in the heavenly sanctuary!

So what does this have to do with us? Since we came after Christ's death and resurrection, we shouldn't be struggling with "going back to old ways of worship." But, we need to recognize that we serve a living God who dwells in a heavenly sanctuary. What I invite you to consider is that **All of us CAN enhance our worship experience with God BY noting the WAYS the heavenly sanctuary is far superior to the earthly sanctuary.** Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Heb 9:1-10] The Inferior Old Covenant Sanctuary

V.1:

- Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.

V.2:

- A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place.

V.3:

- Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place,

V.4:

- which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant.

V.5:

- Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

V.6:

- When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.

V.7:

- But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

V.8:

- The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.

V.9:

- This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.

V.10:

- They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: There are numerous WAYS that the tabernacle was inferior. Let’s start back at v.1 and see if we can find them:

- V.1 - It was an “*earthly sanctuary*.” If you had a choice between having an earthly sanctuary vs a heavenly sanctuary, why would you pick the heavenly sanctuary? [It’s permanent, you wouldn’t have to repair it, you wouldn’t have to move it around. Think about owning a home here on earth vs a mansion that has already been constructed for you! There would be no maintenance, no real estate taxes, homeowners insurance, etc. You get to exist in something that never deteriorates and needs upkeep.]
- V.2-5: I don’t want you to feel like you’re getting bogged down in all the details, but each furnishing in the tabernacle carried a spiritual meaning. They were *patterns of things to come*.
 - Lampstand – it 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).
 - Table of Showbread - Each Sabbath, the priests would remove the old loaves and put fresh loaves on the table; and the old loaves would be eaten. 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).
 - Golden Altar - The golden altar stood in the holy place just in front of the veil that divided the two parts of the tabernacle. 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). 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).

- Ark of the Covenant - 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.
- V.6-7: ***It was inaccessible to the people.*** Who got to enter the tabernacle? If you thought the Jews assembled in the tabernacle for worship, you would be wrong! Only 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!
- V.8-10: What was another shortcoming of the tabernacle? ***The priestly ministry was external, not internal.*** 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.

[Read Heb 9:11-28] The Superior Heavenly Sanctuary

V.11:

- When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.

V.12:

- He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

V.13:

- The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

V.14:

- How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

V.15:

- 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.

V.16:

- In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it,

V.17:

- because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living.

V.18:

- This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood.
- V.19:
- 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.
- V.20:
- He said, “This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.”
- V.21:
- In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies.
- V.22:
- In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.
- V.23:
- 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.
- V.24:
- 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.
- V.25:
- 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.
- V.26:
- 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.
- V.27:
- Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,
- V.28:
- 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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: There are numerous WAYS that the heavenly sanctuary was superior. Let’s start back at v.11 and see if we can find them:

- Q V.11: If the “perfect” tabernacle is not man-made, then what do we already know about it that makes it superior? ***It is heavenly.***
- Q V.12-15: What makes Christ’s sacrifice superior compared to the sacrifices given in the earthly tabernacle?
 - An animal’s blood was carried by the high priest into the holy of holies vs Christ ***presented Himself*** in the presence of God as the final and complete sacrifice of sins.
 - An animal’s blood could never cleanse the conscience of the worshiper.

- No animal sacrifice ever purchased “eternal redemption.” Their blood could only cover sin, not remove it. Christ’s blood would “take away the sins of the world.” (John 1:29)
- *Ceremonial cleansing and conscience cleansing (vv. 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.
- *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.
- V.16-23: ***The sacrificial death of Christ is superior to any animal sacrifice.***
 - 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. Like human wills, all the arrangements are secured by the testator and its beneficiaries need only accept its terms.
 - God ordained the remission of sins through the *shedding* of blood, and since purification comes through the *sprinkling* of blood, it is therefore necessary that blood be shed and applied if the New Covenant is to be in force.

As we think about how we can enhance our worship experience with God, it’s helpful to realize that 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.

V.25-28: ***What makes Christ’s ministry is final and complete?*** He died ONCE FOR ALL and not just for the Israelites, but for the world (all sinners).

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).

LOOK:

Q: I want to circle back to my opening proposition: All of us CAN enhance our worship experience with God BY noting the WAYS the heavenly sanctuary is far superior to the earthly sanctuary

Based on the content of today's lesson, what truths did you learn today that will enhance your worship experience with God?

Remember that the believer's sanctuary is in heaven. His Father is in heaven and his Saviour 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.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 308–312). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THE SUPERIOR SANCTUARY

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 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 (vv. 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 (v. 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 (vv. 12–15). We have here a series of contrasts that show again the superiority of the heavenly ministry.

Animal sacrifices and Christ’s sacrifice (v. 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 (vv. 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.

<i>Old Covenant</i>	<i>New Covenant</i>
Repeated sacrifices	One sacrifice
The blood of others	His own blood
Covering sin	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 Saviour 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.

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 801-803). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

9:1–5. With regard to the “aging” First Covenant, the writer wished to discuss that covenant’s **regulations for worship** and its **earthly sanctuary**. These he highlighted in order to contrast them with the superior features of the New-Covenant ministry. How “earthly” (*kosmikon*, v. 1), or mundane, that first sanctuary was, he emphasized by reviewing the material objects associated with it. All these had typological value, but the author could not **discuss these things in detail** at the time (v. 5). He confined himself to the chief features of the comparison he wished to make.

9:6–10. The “regulations for worship” mentioned in verse 1 were now dealt with so that they underlined the insufficiency of the Old-Covenant service. Whereas **the outer room** of the tabernacle could be **entered regularly** by the officiating **priests**, it was only on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16) that **the high priest entered the inner room** (i.e., the “holy of holies”) and then only with sacrificial **blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance**. This restricted access clearly demonstrated that a true entrance into God’s presence (symbolized by **the most holy place**) **had not yet been disclosed**. That at least was the message **the Holy Spirit** intended to communicate by this arrangement. The Levitical arrangements were designed to convey the idea that the true way to God did not lie in them. What this indicates **for the present time** is that the Old-Covenant sacrificial system did not meet human need at its deepest level. It could not **clear the conscience of the worshiper**. Hence the regulations which formed part of the observant worshiper’s adherence to this system were chiefly concerned with externals which were only meant to apply **until the time of the new order**.

The words of Hebrews 9:10 probably refer to sectarians for whom **food laws and ceremonial washings** retained great importance. The readers must remember the transitory nature of these things under the “aging” covenant and should not return to them.

9:11–12. The author then brought the discussion which began in 8:7 to a fitting conclusion. He had shown that the Old Testament anticipated a better New Covenant (8:7–13) and that the ritual of the Old Covenant, carried on in an “earthly sanctuary,” pointed to its own inadequacy

(9:1–10). Now he set forth the superiority of Christ’s service as Mediator of the New Covenant (vv. 11–15).

The NIV rendering of verse 11 is questionable. It is not likely the writer meant to say that **Christ ... went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle**, since this cannot be distinguished from “the most holy place” which He entered according to verse 12. It is probably better to take the original word translated “through” (*dia*) and connect it with **came as High Priest of the good things that are already here** (or, per most Gr. mss., “the good things which were to come”). In that case, instead of “through” the word can be translated “in connection with” and the total statement expresses the idea that Christ’s high-priesthood is linked with “the greater and more perfect tabernacle” rather than the “earthly” one previously described (vv. 1–5).

When Christ **entered the most holy place once for all by His own blood** (v. 12; cf. Christ’s blood in v. 14; 10:19, 29; 13:20) rather than by animal blood, He likewise demonstrated the superiority of His service because His blood had **obtained eternal redemption**. Thus the value of His sacrifice is immeasurably greater than the animal offerings of the Levitical arrangements. A perfect ransom price had been paid for human “redemption,” and because it need not be paid again (this sacrificial act was “once for all,” *ephapax*; cf. 7:27; 10:10) that redemption is an “eternal” one.

9:13–14. This “eternal redemption” through which the blessings of the New Covenant (cf. 8:10–12) have reached all believers, should affect the way believers serve God. Old-Covenant rituals served for the **ceremonially unclean** and only made them **outwardly clean**. But **the blood of Christ** can do much more. His was a sacrifice of infinite value because **through the eternal Spirit He offered Himself unblemished to God**. With this lovely assertion, the writer of Hebrews involved all three Persons of the Godhead in the sacrifice of Christ, which magnifies the greatness of His redemptive offering. “Unblemished” (*amōmon*) fittingly describes Christ’s perfection (cf. 4:15; 7:26) for it is also used of spotless animals brought for sacrifice.

Such a great accomplishment ought to **cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death**, but the expression “acts that lead to death” is literally “dead works” which in this context seems to refer to the Levitical rituals that, in contrast with the work of Christ, can never impart spiritual life. As also in 6:1, where such “acts that lead to death” are referred to, the writer wished his readers would give up all thoughts of returning to Old-Covenant rituals. Their consciences ought to be perfectly free from any need to engage in such things and, retaining their confidence in the perfect efficacy of the Cross, they should hold fast their profession and **serve the living God** within the New-Covenant arrangements.

9:15. To do so is to retain the hope of an **eternal inheritance** (cf. “eternal redemption” in v. 12 and “the eternal Spirit” in v. 14) which has been **promised** to recipients of New-Covenant life. **Christ is the Mediator** (cf. 8:6; 12:24) of that **covenant**, and the “inheritance” is available to **those who are called** since the death of the Mediator has freed them from all guilt derived **from the sins committed under the First Covenant**.

The author was here perhaps countering the appeal of the sectarians, or others, to the “guilt feelings” of those Jewish Christians who must often have been charged with deserting their ancestral faith. But the blood of Christ ought to quiet their consciences permanently and lead them to pursue the “eternal inheritance” which the New-Covenant relationship brought them. Of course the writer meant here as elsewhere that it is only “through faith and patience” that his readers could “inherit what has been promised” (6:12); but if they would rest their consciences at the Cross, they could pursue this heirship undistractedly.

c. *The superior sacrifice (9:16–28)*

The author has made it clear that Christ's death has instituted a better covenant (vv. 11–15) which is superior to animal offerings (vv. 12–14). But the need for such a sacrifice has yet to be explored. So a key word in this subunit is “necessary” (*anankē*, vv. 16, 23). In the process of exploring this point, the author clearly underscored the measureless superiority of the sacrificial death of Christ.

9:16–17. In opening the new unit of thought, the writer employed a swift semantic shift in which he treated the Greek word for “covenant” (*diathēkē*) in the sense of a **will**. While “covenants” and “wills” are not in all respects identical, the author meant that in the last analysis the New Covenant is really a testamentary disposition. Like human wills, all the arrangements are secured by the testator and its beneficiaries need only accept its terms.

Treating the New Covenant in this way, the author argued that its **force**—like that of all human wills—depends on **the death of the one who made it**. That is when it **takes effect**.

9:18–21. The Old **Covenant** was also **put into effect** with **blood**. Drawing on material that may have partly been derived from traditions known to the writer but not specified in the Old Testament, he described the inauguration of the Old Covenant through ceremonies involving the sprinkling of sacrificial **blood**.

9:22. This verse applies to the Old-Covenant institutions, and the words **nearly everything** leave room for the flour offering which a poor Israelite might bring for his sin (Lev. 5:11–13). But the writer was thinking of the system as a whole and the ritual of the Day of Atonement that pertained to the totality of the nation's sins, which showed that **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness**. These words also constitute a principle that is true in the New Covenant.

9:23. In connection with the New Covenant, the writer then enunciated his basic principle: the death of Christ **was necessary**. Mere **copies** (*hypodeigmata*; cf. 8:5; 9:24) **of the heavenly things** might be adequately hallowed by animal sacrifices, **but the heavenly things themselves** required more than that. The expression “heavenly things” referred quite generally to the new priestly arrangements, which have heaven as their focal point. These arrangements involve dealing with people's sin and must thus be inaugurated with a sacrifice adequate to “do away” with that sin (cf. v. 26). The death of Christ meets this requirement.

9:24–26. Christ was appointed as High Priest of the New Covenant to represent sinful people in **heaven itself**, that is, in the presence of God. So His sacrifice had to be greater than that which allowed entrance into a mere **man-made sanctuary that was only a copy** (*antitypa*) **of the true one**. Nor could Christ offer repeated sacrifices as in the Levitical institution, for that would have required Him to die **many times since the Creation of the world**. Instead, as is obvious, the heavenly ministry of Christ called for a thoroughly sufficient, one-time sacrifice. This is precisely why He **appeared once for all** (*hapax*, cf. v. 28; also cf. *ephapax* in 7:27; 9:12; 10:10) **at the end of the ages to do away with sin**, which the priests in the old arrangement could not do. By the phrase “end of the ages” the writer evidently meant the climax of the Old Testament eras as well as the imminency of the climax of all things. He will shortly refer to Christ's second advent.

9:27–28. With this observation, eschatological realities come into focus. Humans are sinful creatures **destined to die once, and after that to face judgment**. But this danger is turned aside by the fact that **Christ was sacrificed once** (*hapax*, cf. v. 26) **to take away the sins of many people**. The recurrence of “once” (9:26, 28) and of “once for all” (7:27; 9:12; 10:10) stresses the finality and the singleness of Christ's sacrificial work in contrast with the repeated Levite ministrations. In addition, the “once”-sacrifice of Christ (vv. 26, 28) compares with the “once”-

death of each person (v. 27). Now those **who are waiting** (*apekdechomenois*; used seven times in the NT of the return of Christ: Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28) **for Him** can look forward to His coming, not with a fearful expectation of judgment, but with the anticipation of **salvation**.

His first advent was to bear sins away—but His second will be **not to bear sin** (lit., “without [reference to] sins”).

Deftly the author implied that “those who are waiting for Him” constitute a smaller circle than those whom His death has benefited. They are, as all his previous exhortations reveal, the ones who “hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first” (3:14). The “salvation” He will bring them at His second coming will be the “eternal inheritance” of which they are heirs (cf. 9:15; 1:14).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1830 – 1831). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

9:4 Some see an inconsistency with this verse because it says that the ark contained the tablets of the covenant, a jar of manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, whereas the OT suggests that the latter two objects were placed in the most holy place in front of the ark (e.g., Ex 16:32–34; Nm 17:10–11). However, the writer of Heb seems to have followed a line of rabbinic tradition that presumes that items were subsequently placed in the ark with the tablets. We should also consider the author’s remarks in 9:5: “It is not possible to speak about these things in detail right now.” The author apparently did not want to divert his focus from the subject matter at hand (perhaps to spell out the matter). Rather, he wanted to explain the tabernacle and its background in relation to the ministry of the OT priests.

9:27 This verse clearly shows that belief in reincarnation is not an option for a Christian. Each individual is granted a single lifetime on earth and “after this, judgment.” Jesus told of a rich man who died and in hell lifted up his eyes in torment (Lk 16:23). There is no opportunity to return to earth. Some skeptics say that this verse teaches that it is appointed for all people to die and thus that it conflicts with verses such as 1 Th 4:16–17, which refer to living saints being taken directly into heaven, and Heb 11:5, which speaks of Enoch not seeing death. But Heb 9:27 does not say that everyone without exception has experienced and will experience death. This cannot be what the author of Heb meant because Enoch had already been taken up by the time Heb was written. Further, death is indeed the normal way one passes from this life to the next. However, if the Lord wants to take some people out of this earthly life and straight up to heaven, then He is certainly within His prerogative to do so, for He “is in heaven and does whatever He pleases” (Ps 115:3).