



## Hebrews - Chapter Nine

### **II Hebrews 3:1-10:18 - Jesus Is Superior to the Mosaic Law (continues)**

#### **II.c Hebrews 4:14-10:18 - The high priesthood of Jesus (continues)**

##### **Summary of Chapter Nine**

The author gives an extensive summary of the first covenant, symbolised through the structure of the Mosaic tabernacle and perpetual nature of the sacrificial rituals that had to be performed in order for God's people to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

However, with the coming of Jesus and his once for all sacrifice on the Cross, the first covenant was revealed for what it was intended to be - a pointer towards God's original plan for salvation. This was the inauguration of the second and final covenant. What was truly surprising and never foreseen was that the Christ was both the true High Priest who would offer the sacrifice, and the sacrifice itself.

All of humankind is now free to return to God through Jesus and can eagerly await the final fulfilment of God's promises when Christ returns to restore all of creation to the way God had originally intended.

#### **II.c.vii Hebrews 9:1-22 - The Earthly and the Heavenly Sanctuaries**

This section describes the OT tabernacle, its furnishings and its worship practices. This depiction of the first covenant lays the groundwork for the discussion of the new covenant.

When compared to the Mosaic tabernacle worship (vv.1-10), the new covenant high priesthood of Jesus provides a single superior sacrifice, in a superior heavenly tabernacle, which stands for God's very presence, and thus it brings complete forgiveness of sins, eternal salvation, purified consciences and direct access to God for individual believers without the need for an earthly priest to act as intermediary; the role now performed in heaven by Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary.

### Hebrews 9:1

The first covenant had regulations for worship. The Mosaic covenant came with legislation governing how to worship God and where to approach God in holiness, i.e. within an earthly sanctuary, God's dwelling place on earth: *<<And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them>>* (Exodus 25:8).

<sup>2</sup> For a tent was constructed, the first one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the Presence; this is called the Holy Place. <sup>3</sup> Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of Holies. <sup>4</sup> In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod 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 speak now in detail.

### Hebrews 9:2-5

The tabernacle was an elaborate tent that was for worship: *<<In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it>>* (Exodus 25:9). Refer also to Exodus 26:1-37 for a fuller description of the tabernacle design and function.

The reference to the lampstand is a reminder to his readership that the inside of the tabernacle would be a very dark place if it were not for the artificial candlelight for there was no natural illumination. This can be readily applied to Jesus whose presence is light, for he is both the sun of righteousness: *<<But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall>>* (Malachi 4:2), and amazing pure light: *<<Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'>>* (John 8:12); about whom it is also written: *<<And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb>>* (Revelation 21:23). The Shechinah of God's presence would of course have produced light in the Most Holy Place behind the veil.

The bread of the Presence refers to 12 loaves of unleavened bread, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, which were baked fresh each week and placed in the Holy Place as an offering to God. The old bread was removed and was only to be eaten by the priests, although King David did famously and controversially request the bread in a time of special need, something Jesus taught as being appropriate: *<<And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath>>* (Mark 2:25-27), thus providing insight as to how the law was in fact a gracious gift of God and not a restrictive practice or rite.

The tent or tabernacle was divided into two separate sections, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, literally the Holy of Holies, indicating somewhere most holy. The items in each of these sections are mentioned in accordance with the OT, e.g. Exodus Chapters 25, 30 and 37.

The text describes the Most Holy Place as having the golden altar of incense. This altar however was not in the Most Holy Place but in the Holy Place, just in front of the veil: <<*You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy-seat that is over the covenant, where I will meet you*>> (Exodus 30:6), which separated it from the Most Holy Place. The altar was tended daily by the priests: <<*Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening he shall offer it, a regular incense-offering before the Lord throughout your generations*>> (Exodus 30:7-8). This was demonstrated in the account of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist: <<*Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense*>> (Luke 1:8-11). Had it been inside the Most Holy Place it would not have been tended daily but only once a year by the high priest, the only person allowed to enter that space. Refer to comments made on v.7.

It is unlikely that the author of Hebrews, familiar with the OT tabernacle and its sacrificial ordinances, would have mistakenly thought the altar was inside the Most Holy Place. A better solution is to understand the phrase in it, often translated as 'having', a participle of the Greek word *echo*, to mean that this altar of incense was closely tied to its function in the Most Holy Place, so that it belonged to the Most Holy Place, for as its incense burned the smoke drifted into the Most Holy Place.

The text: <<*Next he overlaid the whole house with gold, in order that the whole house might be perfect; even the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold*>> (1 Kings 6:22), speaks of this altar in a similar way. So also the following verses provide us with a similar impression: <<*I am now about to build a house for the name of the Lord my God and dedicate it to him for offering fragrant incense before him, and for the regular offering of the rows of bread, and for burnt-offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths and the new moons and the appointed festivals of the Lord our God, as ordained for ever for Israel*>> (2 Chronicles 2:4), <<*Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice*>> (Psalm 141:2), <<*When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*>> (Revelation 5:8), and: <<*Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel*>> (Revelation 8:3-4).

The text also says that a golden urn holding the manna and Aaron's staff or rod that budded were in the ark of the covenant. However, the OT states that the urn and the staff were placed in front of the ark and not in it: <<*Moses said, 'This is what the Lord has commanded: "Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, in order that they may see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt."*>> And Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations.' As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the covenant, for safe-keeping>> (Exodus 16:32-34), <<*And the Lord said to Moses, 'Put back the staff of Aaron before the covenant, to be kept as a warning to rebels, so that you may make an end of their complaints against me, or else they will die.'* Moses did so; just as the Lord commanded him, so he did>> (Numbers 17:10-11). It speaks only of the two tablets of stone as being within the ark: <<*You shall put the mercy-seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I shall give you*>> (Exodus 25:21), and: <<*At that time the Lord said to me, 'Carve out two tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood. I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you smashed, and you shall put them in the ark'*>> (Deuteronomy 10:1-2). However, it would not be improbable for the urn and the staff to be subsequently stored within the ark and the author of Hebrews may be depending on other information that is no longer available.

By the time of Solomon's temple it was noted that there was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone: <<*There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt*>> (1 Kings 8:9), and: <<*There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets that Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel after they came out of Egypt*>> (2 Chronicles 5:10), but this may suggest that other items had previously been kept in the ark.

The manna was preserved as a reminder of how God had graciously and miraculously provided for his people for 40 years in the wilderness. It was provided six days each week and would perish if kept overnight except on Fridays for it remained fresh throughout the Sabbath day, as collecting it would have been considered work, something prohibited on the Sabbath. It appears that it did not go mouldy when kept in the tabernacle as this was an ordinance from God. Refer to Exodus Chapter 16 for the account of God providing manna.

Aaron's rod that budded is a reference to his staff that was placed in the tabernacle along with the staffs of each leader of the other tribes after a challenge was made to the legitimacy of the Levitical priesthood by the other elders. God not only allowed this piece of dead wood to bud, but blossom and produce ripe almonds as a sign that Aaron, who was of the tribe of Levi, was the anointed high priest. Refer to Numbers Chapter 17 for the account of this challenge and the resulting sign from God.

Jesus, as the Christ, would be a sign too of a branch that miraculously budded and blossomed. This was symbolised many years before the birth of Jesus: <<*Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak; say to him: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Here is a*

man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord>> (Zechariah 6:11-12), Joshua being a Hebrew variant of the name Jesus.

The tablets of the covenant are the two stones on which were written the Ten Commandments: <<He was there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God>> (Exodus 34:28-29), and: <<At the end of forty days and forty nights the Lord gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant>> (Deuteronomy 9:11), combined with: <<So I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark that I had made; and there they are, as the Lord commanded me>> (Deuteronomy 10:5).

The mercy-seat was overshadowed by the cherubim of glory because this was the earthly throne of God, his dwelling place on earth, or indeed heaven come to earth. The presence of the Cherubim signify the angels who attended Jesus, such as those following his temptation: <<Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him>> (Matthew 4:11), his moment of trial in the Garden of Gethsemane: <<Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength>> (Luke 22:43), and at the tomb following his resurrection: <<But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet>> (John 20:11-12).

<sup>6</sup> Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties;

### Hebrews 9:6

Having described the tabernacle, such preparations having been made, the writer goes on to describe the worship duties that went on therein. Priests went regularly into the first section as a whole, only the Levitical priests were permitted access. They went into the Holy Place, i.e. the first section of the tent, to carry out their ritual duties, which included changing the lamp oil, the bread of the presence and the incense fire: <<And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always>> (Exodus 25:30), <<Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening he shall offer it, a regular incense-offering before the Lord throughout your generations>> (Exodus 30:7-8), and: <<He shall set up the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold before the Lord regularly>> (Leviticus 24:4). They also performed the daily offerings: <<And you shall say to them, This is the offering by fire that you shall offer to the Lord: two male lambs a year old without blemish, daily, as a regular offering>> (Numbers 28:3).

<sup>7</sup> but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people.

## Hebrews 9:7

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, the high priest alone was permitted to enter the second section; that is the Most Holy Place behind the veil. After the incense cloud had shielded him from viewing the mercy seat, he sprinkled it with the blood of a bull or goat as a sin offering. This sense of atonement lasted only for the one year and had to be repeated time and again. Atonement was required for the high priest himself and for all of the people. Not so for Jesus as the Christological High Priest. Unlike the human high priests he had no need to offer up sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people. This he did once for all when he offered himself: <<**Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever**>> (Hebrews 7:27-28).

The law distinguishes unintentional sins, see Leviticus Chapter 4, from deliberate sin, and early Judaism frequently debated the types of sin that the Day of Atonement covered. The full ritualistic requirements for the Day of Atonement are documented in Leviticus Chapter 16.

<sup>8</sup> By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing.

## Hebrews 9:8

By this, that is, by the system that restricted the right of access into the presence of God in the Holy Place, and especially the Most Holy Place, to the Levitical priests.

The Holy Spirit indicates. The Mosaic covenant was ordained by the commandments of God through the Holy Spirit, and it was by the Mosaic Law that God revealed both the spiritual separation of man from God due to sin and the pattern for Jesus' high priestly ministry.

The way into the sanctuary. Only the priests could enter the Holy Place, and only the high priest was permitted to go behind the veil into the Most Holy Place. Thus while the veil and the Most Holy Place were still standing the rest of God's people could not draw near to his throne of mercy, for it was situated in the Most Holy Place, since the way was not yet opened for them, i.e. the way has not yet been disclosed. Jesus clearly stated that he was the only way into God's presence: <<**Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'**>> (John 14:6).

<sup>9</sup> This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper,  
<sup>10</sup> but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right.

## Hebrews 9:9-10

Two ages, both signified by the Greek *kairos* or time, are here contrasted. The present time, referring either to the old covenant era or simply the present circumstances of the church, and the time of reformation referred to as until the time comes to set things right.

The latter age has been inaugurated by Christ (vv.11-12 and v.26). The present time is described as a time of impure conscience and of separation from direct access to God. Through the work of Jesus this present time was passing away and the new time of reformation, which has already been inaugurated, will later be fully consummated. Refer to comments made in vv.25-26, where Christ has appeared at the end of the age.

Cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper. The Mosaic sacrificial system brought neither sanctification of the soul nor the fullness of God's peace into the inner life of the worshipper: <<*There is, on the one hand, the abrogation of an earlier commandment because it was weak and ineffectual (for the law made nothing perfect); there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God*>> (Hebrews 7:18-19), and: <<*Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach. Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshippers, cleansed once for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?*>> (Hebrews 10:1-2). This is in contrast to the realities of the new covenant.

Food and drink and various baptisms refer to the OT teachings, later expanded in early Judaism about clean and unclean foods, sacrificial food and drink offerings, with the word translated as baptisms here referring to ritual purification washing. This may indirectly criticise those holding diverse and even strange teachings about foods: <<*Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them*>> (Hebrews 13:9). Paul wrote: <<*Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths*>> (Colossians 2:16).

Regulations for the body implies their ineffectiveness at reaching the consciences of the people (v.9), or indeed a way of absolving them from their guilt. In essence, what this section is saying is that God only ever had one plan for salvation, which he implemented through Jesus as his Christ.

This is what the writer refers to as the new covenant. So why did God bother with an old one? This is something that theologians and scholars have debated throughout the church age and perhaps something that ordinary disciples of Jesus take little heed of. It appears that, just as with any major project where life has to go on while something new and potentially disruptive to daily routine is being created, then something has to be in place to allow life to continue with minimum disruption. The old covenant did just that but provided much more in that it gave pointers to the meaning of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and his entry into the Holy of Holies.

The double structure in the tabernacle and then the temple showed that the majority of the work went on in the outer space, alluding to the old covenant but that, just once per year, the high priest could enter the inner sanctuary. The way that Tom Wright describes it is like the construction of a major new road into the city centre that, while it is being built, requires a number of side roads to be used as diversion routes to take traffic away from the construction work and on to intended destinations by an alternative and imperfect route. Once the new road is opened the diversionary routes are still in existence but do not need to be used by those wishing to drive directly into or out of the city centre.

In other words the author is warning them not to return to their Jewish roots but to accept the new way opened by Jesus, for in Jesus the High Priest God has put things into proper order at last. He has thus established a new covenant under which sin has been fully and finally dealt with.

<sup>11</sup> But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation),

#### Hebrews 9:11

The greater and perfect tent is the area that immediately surrounds God's very presence in heaven and is not a literal tabernacle at all: <<*Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up*>> (Hebrews 8:1-2), and: <<*We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat*>> (Hebrews 13:10). This tabernacle is superior to the Mosaic tabernacle since it is not made with mortal hands and is not of this creation, i.e. it is not earthly (v.1), but heavenly (v.3).

It was the greater and perfect tent, the body of Christ given as a perfect sacrificial offering: <<*But he was speaking of the temple of his body*>> (John 2:21), as is the body of each believer: <<*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?*>> (1 Corinthians 6:19), although Jesus' body is unique being formed by the Holy Spirit overshadowing the body of the young Virgin Mary.

<sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

#### Hebrews 9:12

He entered once for all. Jesus entered through the veil on the Cross with the earthly replica being simultaneously destroyed in symbolic gesture: <<*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split*>> (Matthew 27:51). This sacrifice does not need to be repeated annually or indeed ever again (v.25 and v.28), and now Christ continues his work in the Most Holy place, the throne room of God in heaven: <<*This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those*

*days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people>> (Hebrews 8:10), and: <<Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God>> (Hebrews 12:1-2).*

The blood of goats and calves. Calves can refer to young oxen or bulls in the Septuagint as noted in Exodus 29:1-14 and Leviticus 16:6-19.

The blood could be offered as a sacrifice or sprinkled on objects to cleanse them for the life force was in the blood. However, God did not allow the blood to be consumed by his people from long before the law was established: <<*Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood*>> (Genesis 9:4).

But with his own blood. Jesus' sacrificial death is the basis for eternal redemption, the payment for the release from the oppression of sin. This was acknowledged both before his death: <<*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them*>> (Luke 1:68), <<*At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem*>> (Luke 2:38), and: <<*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many*>> (Mark 10:45). And as a result of it: <<*He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds*>> (Titus 2:14), and: <<*You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish*>> (1 Peter 1:18-19), obtaining eternal redemption, not just for himself, but for all who would call upon his name and seek God through him.

<sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified,

### Hebrews 9:13

The blood of goats and bulls. Here, goats would also include sheep. These animals formed the bulk of the sacrifices on a daily basis as well as on Sabbaths and other festival days.

The sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled was part of the accepted procedures so regularly performed through OT sacrifices and purification rites.

The ashes of a heifer. In Numbers 19:1-22, especially v.9 and vv.17-19, these ashes were reserved outside of the camp, mixed in water and sprinkled upon people to remove impurity due to being in proximity or coming into contact with a corpse.

So that their flesh is purified shows that it was an outward cleansing as opposed to their inner conscience as referred to in v.14.

<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 worship the living God!

### Hebrews 9:14

How much more is an argument from the lesser to the greater, a technique used by the writer in Hebrews 2:1-4 and again in 10:28-29. It takes the form that if A is good then B is so much better, here comparing the blood of animals with that of the perfect man and God, Jesus.

The blood of Christ, alluded to in v.11, is here contrasted with the blood of goats, bulls and calves from vv.12-13 as noted in the lesser to greater argument.

Who through the eternal Spirit offered himself. Jesus was both the High Priest, who was required to make an offering as discussed in Hebrews 5:1-3 and 8:3, and to be the sacrifice himself, i.e. offered himself in vv.25-26. However, this verse specifies that the Holy Spirit in some way aided or empowered Jesus in making this offering.

Paul commented that it was for humankind that Jesus offered himself in death: <<*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*>> (Ephesians 5:1-2). This concept was never part of Jewish thinking. The idea of human sacrifice was abhorrent in the way they viewed things and indeed God had spoken out against it as it was a practice offered to pagan gods: <<*You shall not give any of your offspring to sacrifice them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 18:21).

There is, in all biblical and Jewish writings from the OT period, only one Messianic allusion to such a sacrifice - the prophecy of God's servant: <<*Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper*>> (Isaiah 53:10). Even God's command that Abraham should offer his son Isaac, recorded in Genesis Chapter 22, did not alert them to what would happen, for God provided an alternative sacrifice at the last moment, a ram with a crown of thorns no less, when it was clear that Abraham would have complied with God's will. Even with this the Jews had not foreseen the Messiah as being both the High Priest, who would offer the sacrifice, and the sacrifice itself.

The writer is here leading his readers closer and closer to the deep mystery that sacrifice involves. It seems to have at least two elements:

1. There is the sense of humans offering to God something valuable and pure as a sign of their grateful sacrifice of their whole lives to him and his service.
2. There is a sense of the life of the sacrificial animal, symbolised by the blood, being poured out in death that a sign that, although human lives

are forfeit because of their wickedness and impurity, God will rescue them by providing a once for all sacrifice.

There is a sense that through these two signs the present state of human uncleanness can be washed away so that they can start again, cleansed and fit for God's service.

OT sacrifices had to be without blemish: <<*Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats*>> (Exodus 12:5), and: <<*At the beginnings of your months you shall offer a burnt-offering to the Lord: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish*>> (Numbers 28:11). The author had earlier confirmed this would be the case with God's ultimate sacrifice for Jesus was unstained because he alone was without sin: <<*For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens*>> (Hebrews 7:26).

Purify our conscience. Mosaic sacrifices did not affect the conscience but were external offerings to God either requesting the forgiveness of transgressions or as thanksgiving to God simply for who he is. If they had purified the inner soul there would have been no need for repetition: <<*Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshippers, cleansed once for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?*>> (Hebrews 10:2). However, Jesus' sacrifice purifies the innermost being: <<*let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*>> (Hebrews 10:22). God had long ago promised his people such purification: <<*I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me*>> (Jeremiah 33:8).

From dead works refers to deeds that cannot save due to human sinfulness, a topic the author had written of earlier in the letter: <<*Therefore let us go on towards perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith towards God*>> (Hebrews 6:1). These refer to both pagan rituals and worldly desires, and the repetitive rituals performed year after year only serve as a reminder of sin and its deadly consequences.

To serve the living God. Salvation brings people into God's service: <<*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe*>> (Hebrews 12:28).

God is called living elsewhere: <<*Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God*>> (Hebrews 3:12), <<*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*>> (Hebrews 10:31), and: <<*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel*>> (Hebrews 12:22-24).

This is confirmed by other authors: <<Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’>> (Matthew 16:16), <<Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them>> (Acts 14:15), <<And in the very place where it was said to them, “You are not my people”, there they shall be called children of the living God>> (Romans 9:26), and: <<I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, saying, ‘Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads’>> (Revelation 7:2-3), indicating his eternity; here there is also a contrast with the dead works.

Now the living God, the God whom Israel had always worshipped but whose saving plan was still in the preliminary stage, had revealed once and for all the way into his presence, the way in consequence by which his people could serve him gladly and joyfully without the slightest shadow or stain on their consciences. Many Christian people, even today, forget that they are called to that kind of exuberant and joyful service, free from any motivation caused by guilt or fear.

<sup>15</sup> For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

### Matthew 9:15

He is the mediator. Christ mediates the covenant first by revealing it (Hebrews 1:2 and 2:2), and then by serving as its priest who offers himself in sacrifice, taking up his rightful place to continue his work: <<But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises>> (Hebrews 8:6), and: <<For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all – this was attested at the right time>> (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

The new covenant was fully discussed in comments made on Hebrews 8:6-13.

Those who are called is a reference to God’s electing call to salvation and is confirmed in: <<And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified>> (Romans 8:30), <<The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this>> (1 Thessalonians 5:24), <<Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began>> (2 Timothy 1:8-9), <<And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you>> (1 Peter 5:10), and:

<<*Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble*>> (2 Peter 1:10). There are differing opinions as to whether this refers to anyone in the whole of the human race who responds to God's offer of grace or to a few who were preselected to be saved by God.

Receive the promised eternal inheritance. All followers of Christ inherit everlasting salvation as discussed in: <<*Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*>> (Hebrews 1:14), and: <<*Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*>> (Hebrews 5:8-9). For more on promises refer to comments made on Hebrews 4:1 and 6:13-20.

A death has occurred. This is a clear reference to the Cross. Yet even at the time of initial sin and the realisation of their nakedness God sacrificed an animal in order to cover the shame of Adam and Eve: <<*And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them*>> (Genesis 3:21). This is the earliest pointer to the lengths God would go in order to cover the shame and guilt of his people.

Redeems them from the transgressions. The payment of sin's penalty (v.12) requires a death as commented on throughout vv.16-28.

The first covenant refers to the Mosaic covenant and implicitly to all promises made by God to his people as recorded throughout the entire OT. The Greek word for covenant can also be translated to mean a legal will.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

### Hebrews 9:16-17

The Greek *diathēkē* designates a will, the legally binding final directions of the deceased. Hence, there is an inheritance in v.15. Alternatively, it can indicate an ancient near eastern covenant, which required an animal sacrifice in order for it to be authenticated and come into existence. In either case a *diathēkē*, elsewhere translated covenant in Hebrews, takes effect only after a death has occurred. This implies that the institution of the new covenant actually took place at Christ's death.

The death of the one who made the covenant must be established. Jesus' death was witnessed on the Cross: <<*Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last*>> (Mark 15:37), and he was buried in the presence of witnesses: <<*When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb*>> (Matthew 27:57-61). This was attested to by one of his most devout apostles: <<*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the*

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Hebrews9-13

ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us>> (Romans 5:6-8), and confirmed by Jesus' own words: <<When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades'>> (Revelation 1:17-18).

Here, the Gospel becomes Jesus' last will and testament, a new covenant that will be in effect certainly until his Second Coming when final judgement will be made and rewards given to the faithful who have endured.

<sup>18</sup> Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.

<sup>19</sup> For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, <sup>20</sup> saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained 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.

### Hebrews 9:18-21

Hence. Since a covenant cannot begin until a death occurs the Mosaic covenant also began with blood. The Mosaic initiation covenant is described in Exodus 24:3-8 and is recalled in vv.19-20, although the NRSVA uses the word dashed for sprinkled in Exodus, portraying a much more dramatic image for the process of cleansing.

The author here adds some very specific details, which are not mentioned in Exodus 24:3-8, such as scarlet wool and hyssop and sprinkling of the scroll or book of the law itself. While the source of the author's information is unknown, these details are not improbable since these elements were used in other cleansing ceremonies.

This is the blood of the covenant is taken from the original covenantal ceremony: <<Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'>> (Exodus 24:8), and it was quoted by Jesus during the institution of the Lord's Supper: <<Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'>> (Matthew 26:27-28).

And in the same way. The purification of the tabernacle and its utensils is summarised in v.21, recalling the events of Exodus Chapter 40, as well as Exodus Chapter 29 and Leviticus Chapters 8-9, providing details of other rituals of atonement as recorded in Leviticus Chapter 16 and by Josephus in Jewish Antiquities 3.206. God had shown Moses a ritual that would look forward to the baptism into Christ's death for true cleansing from sin, which involved the use of blood and water, perhaps indicating that which came from Jesus' own body: <<But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not

*break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth)>> (John 19:33-35).*

The point of sacrifice within the OT system, where very detailed regulations were laid down for it, was a combination of at least three things:

1. Humans offering to God something which represented their own true selves.
2. The outpouring of life to signify dealing with sin.
3. The effects of both of these in the cleansing or purifying of the worshipper.

Here, the author goes a stage further, even more mysteriously, into the heart of the second of these. Somehow, it seems, the blood of the sacrificial animals was pointing forward to a deeper truth still - that at the heart of the sacrificial system there lies the self-giving love of God himself.

<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.

#### Hebrews 9:22

Purified with blood. In the Mosaic Law the initial purification of the people of God and his sanctuary required sacrificial blood (vv.18-21), and such sacrifices continued to be required of God's people under the law: <<*Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach. Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshippers, cleansed once for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*>> (Hebrews 10:1-4). This is because sin necessitates a blood sacrifice: <<*For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement*>> (Leviticus 17:11).

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. There have been many people throughout history who have been quick to condemn this statement and the ritual practices it speaks of. Yet the human race is guilty of far worse practices with the current generation practising genocide, using chemical and nuclear weapons to wage war and using abortion as a form of birth control!

The ordinances for the OT sacrifices were given by God so that the people could understand the greater sacrifice of Christ that was yet to come. Here, there is a great revelation for Jewish Christians and indeed Gentiles, even if they had never lived under the law.

The sacrificial system had been seen as the people offering up a life in substitution for their own as a way of acknowledging their own sin and seeking forgiveness. What the author shows here with the death of Christ is that all the

OT sacrifices were actually a gift of God himself, pointing towards a sacrifice yet to come that would truly free them from the guilt and shame of their iniquity.

No one in that world came near to drawing the conclusion that God himself would become human and would actually offer his own life, literally shedding his own blood, so that all these signs and symbols would become a reality. This is such a huge idea, so powerful in its impact that many, even many Christians, shrink away from it in horror and disgust.

This may be the reason why this letter has been marginalised in many churches today, yet Paul used the same concept in his exhortation to the Ephesian elders: <<*Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son*>> (Acts 20:28).

Tom Wright concludes:

That, then, is why the last sentence, striking as it is, is so important. It isn't trying to establish a general principle, as though whenever any pardoning needed doing there had to be some blood involved. It is stating how things were in the God-given regulations for the first tabernacle and the consecration of its furniture and vessels. Everything had to be purified with blood, signifying the purification and pardon that was needed for sinful human beings. There was to be no loophole, no point in the entire system at which anyone could suppose that their worship, their buildings, their liturgy or they themselves could do without the self-giving love of God. No room was left for human pride. Everything had to be dependent on the grace of God. And if that was true in the system of the old covenant, which pointed forwards as a signpost to the new one, how much more is it true now that Jesus has embodied in his own life and death, his own bloodshed, the loving pardon which God always longed to give.

## II.c.viii Hebrews 9:23-28 - Christ's Sacrifice Takes Away Sin

The chapter concludes as the author draws further comparison between copies portrayed in the OT and the final resolution of the problem of sin that came with the sacrificial offering of Jesus on the Cross.

Christ was the once for all fulfilment of all that God had promised or had required of his people through the ritual sacrifices. The shedding of his blood was the most gracious gift of God that has allowed humankind to return to his presence, here during life on earth as well as after the time of the Second Coming for which all true believers await with anticipation of what is yet to come.

<sup>23</sup> Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these.

### Hebrews 9:23

Covenantal structure, and the need of purification, requires an inaugurating sacrifice. Here the focus is on the purification of the place of holy worship. The

lesser copies or sketches of the heavenly things, i.e. the Mosaic tabernacle and vessels, are patterned after greater heavenly realities, which represent the very presence of God, and these heavenly realities require a greater purification sacrifice, that is, the blood of Jesus.

The heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these indicates that heaven itself was purified by Christ's death. This does not mean there was ever anything impure in heaven, the true dwelling place of God. It is a cleansing that allows former sinners to enter into the throne room of grace to be in God's presence. That is, in relationship with God through Jesus during life on earth and to be accepted into his presence after life on earth is over.

<sup>24</sup> For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

#### Hebrews 9:24

A sanctuary made by human hands refers to the earthly tabernacle made by mortal men (v.11).

A mere copy of the true one. The eternal heavens, because they are the abode of God, are the realities, truer than the earthly copies, Greek *antitypa*.

In the presence of God. Jesus entered as High Priest into the heavenly sanctuary and presented himself as an offering before God on our behalf. Thus he entered into the superior place by a superior sacrifice for the sake of believers (v.23 and v.25).

On our behalf is confirmation that Jesus' actions was not done for his own benefit or future reward but as the gracious and loving act of reconciliation for mankind.

<sup>25</sup> Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; <sup>26</sup> for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.

#### Hebrews 9:25-26

Since the foundation of the world alludes to the need for a sin offering ever since the fall of humanity that is recorded in Genesis Chapter 3 and further commented on by the author: <<*For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, 'As in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest"', though his works were finished at the foundation of the world*>> (Hebrews 4:3).

The author understands the present time to be an era when the end of the age has been inaugurated by Christ's sacrificial death, even though it still awaits its consummation at Christ's return (v.28).

Christ's sacrifice is superior because the single offering of himself is sufficient for all his followers and for all time.

<sup>27</sup> And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement, <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.

### Hebrews 9:27-28

Appointed for mortals to die once. Every person has but a single life before eternal judgment. This repudiates reincarnation and any idea that there will be a second chance to believe after death, since immediately after the reference to the fact of death comes the phrase and after that the judgment, with no hint of any intervening opportunity for change of status. The final judgment will take place when Christ comes again. He died once as an offering for the sins of many, and he will appear a second time in judgment, when he will save his followers.

To save those who are eagerly waiting for him. This clear anticipation of Christ's return calls all who hope for salvation to expectant perseverance. This has confirmation elsewhere, including: <<*And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching*>> (Hebrews 10:24-25), <<*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience*>> (Romans 8:19-25), <<*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind – just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you – so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (1 Corinthians 1:4-7), <<*For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness*>> (Galatians 5:5), and: <<*But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Philippians 3:20).