

DAY 7: THE OLD AND THE NEW COVENANTS

Hebrews 9

The writer has compared the priesthoods of Aaron and Jesus and the two covenants. Now, he contrasts the two tabernacles.

THE TEMPORARY LEVITICAL SACRIFICES The tabernacle's structure and pattern of service proclaimed its temporary character. It was "*earthly*" (9:1), literally, *manmade*. The Holy Place was the place of daily priestly work. This outermost room contained a golden "*lampstand*" and a wooden table overlaid with gold. The table was used for pouring out offerings, and, every Sabbath, 12 fresh cakes were placed on it. The innermost room, "*the Most Holy Place*," was set apart by a curtain.

The golden altar of incense is included in the Most Holy Place, although Exodus 30:6 and Leviticus 16:18 locate it in the Holy Place. Possibly, the writer is picturing the tent on the Day of Atonement. The gold-covered Ark of the Covenant, placed permanently in the Most Holy Place, contained a golden urn of manna, Aaron's staff, and the stone tablets inscribed with the Law. On the gold lid, or mercy seat, were the golden cherubim. Between their wings, God met with His people. On the Day of Atonement, blood was sprinkled there for the people's sin.

God established the Day of Atonement as a national day of repentance. Sins separate people from God; without a means of purification, they have no way to approach Him. Annually, following the prescribed ritual, a priest entered God's holy presence to make atonement for sin—but "*not without taking blood*." The Day of Atonement provided ceremonial cleansing and instruction. The Holy Spirit was showing that this tabernacle did not provide a direct way for all to come into God's presence.

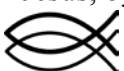
The old system has value because it illustrates what the faithful awaited. As God had planned, Levitical rituals held a nation together in His name, taught of His holiness and mercy, and foreshadowed the blood sacrifice of God's own Son. The illustration points to "*the present age*," during which Jesus' sacrifice brought pardon and renewal to all who believe. Jewish ritual was good and familiar, but temporary. Readers are reminded that Jesus brought a new and better way.

THINK ABOUT how, as a man, Jesus was approachable, and by His death, He made God approachable. Jesus' death on the Cross opened the way to God for anyone who accepts Him by faith. Instead of waiting outside while a priest goes in, we are encouraged to enter His presence boldly. Christians are made holy inwardly by the cleansing power of Jesus' blood. Then, through the Holy Spirit, we show the world what He is like. As the tabernacle and its furnishings symbolized the coming Savior, we represent the Savior who has come. "*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us*" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

CHRIST, THE ETERNAL, HEAVENLY SACRIFICE Verse 11 expands Jesus' title: "*high priest of the good things that have come*." The good things that can be experienced now are close fellowship with God and His people, the Law written on hearts and minds, the hope of the Lord's return for His people, and the remission of sin.

Christ's work as High Priest is immeasurably superior to the old system, first because it is accomplished in the heavenly tabernacle. Jesus said a temple "*not made with hands*" would replace the Jerusalem temple. It is a spiritual temple—the very dwelling place of God.

Second, Christ obtained redemption by accomplishing what Aaron and his successors *illustrated*. The high priests sacrificed repeatedly before God, but Christ's sacrifice was perfect and eternal. Christ's blood removes the defiling power of sin and its dead works—it makes things new: "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The phrase "*through the eternal Spirit offered Himself*" (Hebrews 9:14) portrays Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, yielding His life to God as a guilt offering.



THINK ABOUT how—through the physical experience of Christ's suffering and death—

spiritual benefits have come. Our new life in Christ is lived and expressed through our bodies—by spoken words and deeds. Whatever happens within us when we pray, read the Bible, or offer service to the Lord must be expressed through the movements of bones and muscles, or tongue and lips! That is why Paul wrote, *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies ... but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness”* (Romans 6:12-13).

CHRIST, MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT Jesus, as Mediator, is now connected to the new covenant by the shedding of His blood. The Lord expressed this when passing the cup at the Last Supper: *“This is My blood of the covenant”* (Mark 14:24). Where Christ serves and how He provides redemption are new, as is the result of this transaction. Those who respond to His call receive a new inheritance.

A will does not take effect until the one who made it dies. Once death occurs, the will cannot be changed. God gave to the Jews an eternal inheritance in the form of a covenant or will, but *“not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.”*

The Law represents all that God revealed to Moses. Shed blood and the sacrifice of innocent animals emphasized the seriousness of sin. Verse 19 describes how Moses sprinkled blood on the altar and on the people. Water increased the quantity of fluid. Hyssop, or wild marjoram stalk, was wound with scarlet wool to act as a sponge. The blood of animal sacrifices was central to the old covenant: *“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins,”* reminding offenders that their self-effort and remorse were not enough against sin.

CHRIST, THE SUFFICIENT OFFERING FOR SIN Christ has satisfied the requirement of the earthly *“copies”* and the higher demands of the *“originals”* in heaven. In verses 25-26, the high point of Hebrews has been reached: *“He has appeared once for all.”* No longer must multiple offerings for sin be made. When Christ sacrificed Himself, He did away with sin. If His offering had not been sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world, then it would have to be repeated. However, its effectiveness penetrated all time and completely satisfied all requirements. Christ presented Himself before God *“once for all at the end of the ages”* (9:26)—the climax of history.

In 9:27-28, the author states that people die once, and judgment follows. Christ, too, became a man and accepted the requirement of death. But death is not the final chapter. The Lord *“will appear a second time”*—not to deal with sin, for that has already been done—but *“to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him”* (9:28). All that Christ has achieved for His people by sacrificing Himself will be theirs to enjoy forever.

PERSONALIZE this lesson. *“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins”* (Hebrews 9:22). The blood of every animal sacrificed on the altar foreshadowed the blood of the supremely innocent sacrifice—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. *“Behold,”* John the Baptist said, *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29). God has provided the only acceptable offering for sin. Jesus paid sin’s penalty and freed us from its bondage. We are not just excused—we are forgiven.

REVIEW: THE OLD AND THE NEW COVENANTS

13. *“How much more will the blood of Christ ... purify our conscience ... to serve the living God”* (Hebrews 9:14). How has this lesson—questions, teaching, or Commentary—helped you understand this possibility?