

HEBREWS

(Primary textbook: Holy Scriptures. Primary translation: NIV.)

VI. JESUS' SACRIFICE OF HIMSELF IS SUPERIOR TO THE SACRIFICES OF THE OLD COVENANT AND SETS US FREE FROM SIN (9:1-10:39)

- A. The Tabernacle and Its Tools (9:1-5)
- B. The Day of Atonement (9:6-10)
- C. Jesus' Sacrifice Cleanses Our Conscience (9:11-14)
- D. Jesus' Death Inaugurates the New Covenant (9:15-22)
- E. Jesus' Sacrifice Was Once for All (9:23-28)
- F. Old Covenant Sacrifices Could Not Take Away Sin (10:1-4)
- G. Christ Offered His Body to Make Us Holy (10:5-10)
- H. Our High Priest Now Reigns (10:11-14)
- I. Witness of the Holy Spirit through Jeremiah (10:15-18)
- J. Let Us Draw Near to God and Spur One Another On (10:19-25)
- K. The Judgment of God on Those Who Keep Sinning (10:26-31)
- L. Reminder of Earlier Suffering (10:32-34)
- M. The Need to Persevere (10:35-39)

(This lesson will cover Section B.)

B. The Day of Atonement (9:6-10)

1. When everything had been what? Who entered? How often did they enter? (v.6)
2. They entered where? They entered to do what? (v.6)

Now that our writer has described the tabernacle and its furnishings, our writer turns his attention to the second element of that first covenant mentioned in 9:1 – the “regulations for worship” in the tabernacle. Yet our writer is not particularly interested in the day to day rituals for he summarizes them in short order (v.6) and then devotes his attention to the central ceremony of tabernacle worship which also happens to form the heart of his description of Jesus' sacrifice: the annual Day of Atonement. The main activities of that ceremony are described in verse 7 and its significance in verses 8-10. Nevertheless, this is a tightly integrated section for it represents one very long and extremely complicated sentence in the Greek text.

3. But only the high priest entered what place? And only how often? (v.7)

The author focuses on those parts of the ceremony which are relevant for his argument, and many of the other related activities are not expounded upon in any New Testament description of the atoning work of Christ. The rituals of the Day of Atonement, however, are fully described in Leviticus 16.

4. And never without what? Which he offered for himself and for what else? (v.7)

RITUAL OF THE DAY ATONEMENT ACCORDING TO LEVITICUS 16

General Requirements

The high priest may only enter the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (v.2)

No one is to be in the Tent when the high priest enters the Most Holy Place (v.17)

On this day all Israelites must fast and do no work (vv.29-31)

Clothes

Remove ordinary priestly garb

Bathe (v.4)

Put on special attire for the Day of Atonement (v.4)

Linen, tunic, linen undergarments, linen sash, linen turban (v.4)

Present Offerings for the Day

Two goats for sin offering and ram for burnt offering (v.5)

Offer Bull as a Sin Offering for Himself (vv. 6, 11-14)

Slaughter it (and catch its blood; v.11)

Take censer with two handfuls of incense behind the curtain (vv. 12-13)

Sprinkle bull's blood on and in front of atonement cover (v.14)

Two Goat Ceremony (vv. 7-8)

Cast lots to choose: one for the Lord, one for a scapegoat (v.8)

Offer Goat as a Sin Offering for the People (v.15)

Slaughter it (and catch its blood; v.15)

Do as with bull's blood (take censer with incense, etc.; v.15)

Sprinkle goat's blood on and in front of the atonement cover (v.15)

(Explanation of the significance of these rituals – vv. 16-17)

Cleansing of the Sanctuary (vv. 16-19)

Cleanse the tent of meeting with blood (v.16)

Cleanse the main altar with blood (vv. 18-19)

Scapegoat Ceremony (vv. 20-22)

Lay hands on the goat and confess all Israel's sins (v.21)

Send the goat away into the desert (v.21)

The chosen man shall release the goat into the desert (v.22)

Clothes

Remove special attire for the Day of Atonement (v.23)

Bathe (v.24)

Put on the ordinary priestly garb (v.24)

Present Burnt Offering for Self and Then for People (vv. 24-25)

Hides, flesh, and offal are taken outside the camp and burned (v.27)

Finishing (vv. 26-28)

The man who released the scapegoat must wash clothes and self (v.26)

The man who burned hides, flesh, and offal must wash clothes and self (v.28)

5. How had they committed these sins? (v.7)

These two verses (Hebrews 9:6-7) are organized around a series of contrasts:

Day to Day Rituals

priests (plural)

regularly

outer room (lit., “first tent”)

Day of Atonement

the high priest only (singular)

once a year

inner room (lit., “second [tent]”)

Each of these contrasts can be seen as prefiguring the priestly ministry of Jesus: (1) He is unrivaled in His superiority, the one and only high priest of the believer (4:14; 7:26; 8:1), (2) His work is “once for all” (7:27; 9:12, 18), and (3) He takes us behind the curtain into the presence of God (4:14, 16; 6:20). Yet the final feature of our writer’s description, which has no counterpart in the series of contrasts, will become the most significant feature in the parallel with Christ – it was “never without blood” that the high priest entered the inner room. We now read for the third time in the letter that the high priest had to offer sacrifices “first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people” (5:3; 7:27; 9:7). We have also read that, unlike previous high priests, Jesus had no need to offer a sacrifice for Himself (7:27). However, this is the first explicit reference to “blood” (*haima*) in this connection.

Haima appears no less than eighteen times in this letter – eight times in 9:7-25 alone. The significant role of blood in both covenants will be described in subsequent verses and our writer’s choice of the word here anticipates the approaching discussion. Two important observations can be made here nonetheless.

First, we see that the shedding of blood is a condition for any human to enter into the presence of God. The phrase “never without blood” translates a double negative – a particularly strong expression – in the Geek text. It was between the two cherubim, above the cover of the ark, where God had promised to meet His people (Exodus 25:22).

Second, we see that the blood was shed for sin.

6. Who was showing by this the way? The way into what place? (v.8)

7. The way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been what? (v.8)

8. As long as which tabernacle? Was still what? (v.8)

What the Holy Spirit has shown us is that “the way into the Most Holy Place had not been disclosed.” Even after the rituals performed on the Day of Atonement, the curtain would remain, separating the inner and outer rooms. A year later, more sacrifices would be offered, yet the curtain would still remain. Nothing permanent was accomplished.

This was true “so long as the first tabernacle was still standing.” This is a sign argument: the need for and the continuation of the tabernacle (and later the temple) and its ritual are proof that these are not enough to enable us to approach God.

The significant point of this is expressed: there was no way for man to approach God. His sin had separated him, and the law, in a manner of speaking, kept him separate. The particular arrangement, the author says, was the work of God through the Holy Spirit.

9. This is what? For what time? (v.9)

“an illustration” – Another translation uses here the word “symbolic.” It was a parable of meaning. As the book of Hebrews has already shown in several places, Jesus as our high priest has passed through the veil, and opened the way to God. Therefore we, as Christians, may boldly go right into the throne of grace.

10. Indicating that what two? Being what? (v.9)

11. Were not able to do what? (v.9)

The “gifts and sacrifices” offered under the Old Covenant were “not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.”

Here we see that the real barrier to our access to God has never been “external” (v.10) but internal (“conscience,” v. 9).

The fact is that men realized that they were still conscious of sin, having perceived that it really was impossible for the blood of goats and bulls, etc., to cleanse them from sin. Whenever they worshiped, they went away as empty in regard to forgiveness as when they came. As a result, the Hebrew letter is a great letter of emancipation, assuring all who read that Jesus can ransom us from sin, cleansing us completely, and continually. It is a great reason to rejoice!

12. They are only a matter of what three? (v.10)

The tabernacle and its sacrificial arrangements actually constituted a barrier to the people’s access to God. While furnishing a constant reminder of their sins, it offered no means for them to enter God’s presence. Dealing with physical and ceremonial cleansings of the flesh, it offered no purifying of the conscience from dead works. After all, it was intended to provide the people only a limited access to God and temporary satisfaction of conscience until Christ would come.

13. External what? Until when? (v.10)

Our “justification,” made possible by the cross, can set us free from the burden of guilty feelings. But, as we will read, it is the change in our standing before God accomplished by Jesus’ sacrifice which enables us to draw near to God. This is the “new order” ushered in by the cross.

The implication is that the system built on Jesus was God’s means of putting things right, of bringing order out of chaos. How foolish, then, to even contemplate leaving such a glorious new order for that which is broken, weak, incapable. Clearly implied, too, is the fact that the old system was but a temporary thing at best.

“Making Disciples for the Master”